

Mark Lecture 1975

to
Patricia Espinoza
1.

Seton Hall in South Orange, New Jersey, and a young girl there, talking about something else altogether, said, "Mr. Mailer, would you please explain to me what a poem is?" And I said, "No, no, I won't. I won't even try. It is impossible to answer. It's too complicated." And then I started thinking about it as I kept talking about other things and it worked to the back of my mind and finally I said, "Well, I will try to tell you what I think a poem is not." I then began to get into some of the difficulties. There was a time a hundred years ago when you wouldn't have to ask a question like that because if you didn't know what a poem was, it meant that you couldn't read. Anyone who could knew exactly and precisely that a poem was a collection of words that had a great deal of meter, all carefully laid out in advance, and a

rhyme scheme and those lines had to rhyme in a certain way or it wasn't a poem. Slowly that idea loosened in preparation for Ezra Pound who came along and delivered his immortal judgement that the least we could expect of a good poem is that it be written as well as good prose. That was a revolutionary criticism. Pound was saying a poem is not meter and rhyme but a concentration of language, a concentration of energy. Of course, Pound still kept one limb of poetry attached to music. The musical element in a poem was still important to him. If a musical element, preferably of much invention, underlay the work, then any high concentration of purpose and energy in language deserved to be called a poem. From those ideas of Pound's, back around 1910, 1912, from that point just before World War I, poetry has advanced into a great deal of trouble. So it is very hard now

to even begin to talk about a poem. And it has become even more difficult to say what a poem is not. Let us dive, with some pleasure I hope, into a few examples. For instance let me read you one that is pretty clearly a poem, a modern poem, but obedient to Pound's dictums. It does not have a lot of meter, it has just a little bit of rhyme and perhaps a little music of its own. I don't think we will argue about whether or not it is a poem or not. It pretty clearly by post-Pound standards is virtually a conventional poem.

I know a town with sighs of sea smiled the white
 witch.
I know a town which sails the sun.
I know a town where light is dry and boats come home
 with silver in their hold.
Where boats come home with silver in their hold.
Do not grieve the death of little fish, they are lights
 which smell the deep.
I know a town with sighs of sea, white with the tides
 of me, white as the spine of the sea.

Well, whether or not you like it, the argument is hardly joined. It obviously is a poem. Given its title "The Harbors of the Moon" we may say it has something to do with our feelings about some of the more mysterious properties of the moon, about the oceans, about tides, about death. It is perhaps not alien to the sound of the sea.

But now let's go beyond Pound. Poetry quickly made Pound the Plekhanov of its ongoing Bolshevism. Music was removed from the canon of poetry, and concentration of essence, the short story short as a paragraph began to call itself poetry. Here is "Togetherness," a poem with considerably less music.

My flesh must smell like an old tire.
My sex is bitter and gone.
My days are leafless and all sleep said the Housewife
going to the specialist.
One knows what kind. But in the waiting room she was
racked by a plague from the pots of the American
miasma. Our magazines.

And the lady murmured too quietly even for her mind
 to hear, Reader's Digest please save your soul
 and leave mine free to contemplate eternity which
 must be more than I glimpse for myself now, an
 endless promenade across a field of baked old beans,
 a cataract of dishwater regurgitated by the memory
 of champagne I never drank, and kings I never kissed.

Of course we are still in the domain of poetry. A simple
 enough poem about a woman who feels ill and may be thinking
 of the possibility of death as she sits in the waiting room
 wondering if there are meanings to her life. Perfectly
 simple. Still a poem. Now we go over into trouble.

I was hysterical said the girl. I dropped my
 God-damned contact lens down the drain. Then
 this creep called at four A.M. Hello, kook, he
 said. Guess what. I just found your contact lens.

The question: is that a poem or a joke? Why does it
 qualify as a poem? It does have one only slightly strained
 rhyme: drain and four A.M. Of course it may be a poem
 because it gives an extraordinary intensity of meaning to

the word creep. This creep called at four A.M. Don't forget she has lost her contact lens down the drain, and the creep has found it. Something has obviously been going on in the drain system. Well, let's try another. Maybe it is even less a poem. "The Adventurer."

"I don't mind a party if it gets a little rough, but did you have to throw up in my foyer?" said the lady. "Despair never," said the drunk, "I'll pick it up. I'll really pick it up, because I don't believe in leaving my leavings at a lady's door when she is a lady like you, you crappy old unhappy bag of an armpit. Anyone ever say you're beautiful?" said the drunk as he fell on his nose, trying to kiss lady and her fortune.

Of course, if a poem is a concentration of language, we are here reduced to the fact to little more than a certain intensity of abuse, and something conventional but universal to say about the nature of drunkenness. Not too much of a poem. Maybe we have gone over into the terrain of the

joke. The poem and the joke do have after all one thing in common. Several things in common. Usually both are told in few words. Both usually have a surprise or two. If you are going to tell something in few words, and demand everybody's attention, then the least everyone is entitled to is a surprise. The fact that we laugh doesn't make a poem a joke, or disqualify it from being a poem. If we laugh when we hear a good joke or a great joke, it may be because we have come in contact with some truth so marvelous that it reaches us for a moment. Then we reject it. We are obliged--for whatever deep psychic or social reasons--to push it away. So we laugh. There is a whole theory of laughter that we laugh in order to reject the truth.

All right, perhaps we have circled the ground of this problem. I can only say that when the girl asked me

that question, and I said that you can answer best by saying what is not a poem, I felt obliged to write a poem for her that would absolutely not be a poem. Something so bad it could not be called a poem. So I said, suppose you have two roommates and they are taking a poetry course. One of them wakes up in the morning and writes the following:

I got up. / I went to the bathroom. / I brushed my teeth. /
Then I opened the door and went out.

His roommate says to him, "You call that a poem? That isn't even good journalism, that is nothing." The poet says, "That is a poem. I know what it feels like to write a poem, and that is a poem." They take it up with their teacher. The teacher is giving a very tough poetry course. Tough in the sense that nobody in this university has any interest in poetry so the teacher is trying. "Well," he

says, "I wouldn't say it is a good poem, but it has got something. There is a certain loneliness there. And, well, I kind of like the short line." The critical roommate says, "The only reason there is a short line there is that my friend writes these things in a narrow notebook." The teacher sighs, "Well, now, you can't be certain, maybe his unconscious selected the notebook to some degree." The critical roommate says, "All I know is that that's no poem."

Well, sure, it is no poem. It's dreadful. But, suppose we hear that Robert Lowell has written that poem. We're in trouble. Not only is he one of our greatest poets, but he is a man who doesn't go in that much for fun and games. If he is putting his name on such a poem he is saying that we might pay attention to it, it might not be a hoax. At that point, if I hear Lowell has written

the poem, I start looking at it. By the way, I can promise you that Lowell did not in fact write that poem. In case you were getting worried. I am willing to put you all on as an audience, but not so early in the evening. But let's assume he had, just to look at the difficulty of it. If Lowell has written this poem, what do we make of it? Well, it is now kind of interesting. It is a poem about going to the bathroom, and it has absolutely no fecal content. Maybe Lowell is saying that maybe the American wasp is getting over some of his anal retentiveness. Can that be what he means? Or is he saying something to us about the nature of contemporary language? This poem has words that are absolutely dull. If a kid wanted to write a poem like this, he might say I got up in the morning and went to the can. But here we get up and go to the bathroom. The sounds are no good.

An absolute deadness of sound. Someone who knows as much about sound as Lowell may be saying that poetry if it will remain the mirror of the age will have to use sounds that are not only without poetic content, but are fundamentally anti-poetic in their juxtaposition with one another. Like a jazz of honks and squawks. Oh, we must begin to get uneasy. Why are we working so hard to save what seems a very bad poem? What is going on? Where do the values in poetry remain?

We may be getting into something tricky. There is a famous story, that may or may not be true, about those two giants of the New York School, Wilhem DeKooning and Robert Rauschenberg, two, of course, of our best known painters. DeKooning, once, out of his affection for Rauchenberg gave him a pastel. A beautiful pastel full of pink and yellow and grey and green chalks. And

Rauschenberg, who is a very wicked man, took this painting and erased it. And then after he erased it, to a pink grey smudge, he showed it to DeKooning and signed it "Pastel by Wilhelm DeKooning erased with his permission And then they sold it. by Robert Rauschenberg." Now what were they doing but saying in effect money is nothing but authority imprinted upon emptiness. Why should a financier be the only citizen who has the power to write money into being? We are artists and we are going to write money as well. We do it by destroying this painting and putting our names on it. It may be our way of saying that art has come to a place where it did not exist before. Even recently, art was still a set of activities that depended upon more or less fixed values. There could be profound and bitter arguments about the virtue of a given painting, but there were fixed positions at least from which all the arguments began. Part of the code was that a painter's work was his

own work. We had traveled a great distance of course from the day when you could look at a painting and recognize what the painter was working on. We have divorced the painting from the object. But now DeKooning and Rauschenberg were taking a further step, were saying, why not divorce the painting from the painting? Why does there have to be anything there? What is happening in art is sufficiently absurd and fantastic that all you have to know is that there is a signature. Because if our signature is there, that means something happened. Not necessarily even an artistic process. Maybe just an intellectual process. Maybe what we did here has nothing to do with art, but a great deal to do with thinking. Once we sign the name and sell the painting, any of you who are at all serious have to start thinking about social process. What is going on here? What has happened? A

man can destroy a painting and still sell it. That has to mean something in the shape of culture is beginning to roll off the table.

Return us to that terrible poem Lowell may have written. We may be going through a revolution or a metamorphosis or a deterioration, if you wish to call it, of values so profound that none of us has the security all of us had ten years ago. Even five years ago. Which was that there was once a world in which we could pretty much project ahead. When you speak of culture, you imply something like such a world. You suggest that as you grow up you begin to get a clearer idea of the charts of the world. That you are steering your life, that you are navigating a course through life, that you are developing some idea of where your own personal reefs might be located, and how the world is constructed. What the real city of

the world might be like, where the power is located, and the risks for yourself. What it's all about. But if the ball rolling off the table then those charts in your unconscious have lost their value.

Now I may have said a little earlier that Robert Rauschenberg was a very wicked man, but of course the word "wicked" has meaning to me of a special sort. I had better take a parenthesis to explain it. So I say to you "Are there any of you out there right now who have a clear idea in your mind of the difference between wickedness and evil?" I have thought about these two words a long time. It seems to me you can't be evil unless you have an idea of good. Because evil consists of knowing the good and deciding for yourself that the good is by your logic evil or inadequate and so you work in the opposite direction. In other words, evil consists of

trying to destroy the good because you have a clear idea of it. Very few of us ever have that idea. Unless one has a profound religious faith, it is hard to work with a consistent clear notion of the good. The clearest notion of the good most of us get is a provisional notion that sometimes will last two or three days. Which is that the team is having a big game. The nature of the good will be if the team wins the game. People get together on that, they cooperate on that, they work toward that idea of the good. We are in that sense all gamesters. We play games. If our side wins, that's good. That's a part of the game. We are working for the team. But that if you stop and think, it is really a species of wickedness. Because it seems to me, wickedness is simply to up the ante. When you don't know how things are going to turn out, when you don't know whether they will turn for good or evil, in

fact you don't have the remotest notion of good or evil, when all you know is that you want to up the ante, then you're wicked. Rauschenberg couldn't possibly know, I would guess, what he was up to when he erased that painting, and signed his name to it. He was in effect, upping the ante. He was pushing art further. He was saying to the painters around him, you did something daring yesterday, I do something more daring right now. So wickedness is to up the ante when you don't know what the results are going to be, when you don't know who or what you are working for, nor why you are doing it. But you are at least following your instincts. Wickedness is therefore a natural activity for people who have no idea of the good. Sometimes by upping the ante, more happens, you find out more. Sometimes it helps to clarify your mind. It is why promiscuous people, for example, are

called profoundly wicked. It is because they are upping the ante. Their assumption is that they will find out more about the nature of sex if they are able to practice it in more arenas.

OK. Let's go back to that poem. That empty poem into which we were putting our intelligence. We were dealing with a problem of obsession. Obsession usually means that one's mind is attached to a particular subject or theme or event and one can't get over it. One can't get away from it. One is obliged to keep thinking about it. But it may help us to divide the notion into two words: obsession and resonance. There are certain events that are so beautiful, so agreeable, or nourish us so well everything time we think of them, that we receive a certain resonance from them. Our heart literally feels warm when we recollect this image from the past. The nature of very

good poetry, or of a fine painting, is that it has this kind of resonance. If you have a poem that you go back to again and again, then you have got, even in small compass, you've got a mighty work of art, because it is endlessly nourishing, it has resonance. It is a crystallization of an experience. It even functions in the same way crystals function in nature. That radio we use all the time was built originally upon a crystal that came out of the earth. That crystal scratched by a needle gave off a resonance which is to say it gave off a wave which was picked up miles away by a wire leading to another crystal. Radio in its primitive form was as simple as that. Indeed, everything in radio is merely an elaboration of that fundamental piece of startling and magical communication. That principle which is

simple enough as resonance when we think of a good poem, except for the fact that a crystal is not simple. Nor is a crystallization of experience simple. Not so long as the poem or the experience has resonance. But then we have ignored obsession. There are poems, and paintings, as there are people, as there are situations, relations, or memories, that demand more of us than we get back. Those are obsessions. As the years go on, they take more and more from us, we get less back. They become the equivalent of those black holes in space which absorb matter and never give it forth. That bad poem is a perfect example of obsession from the moment we have to offer it importance, that is from the moment we hear Lowell wrote it, and Lowell even said not only did I write it, but I think it is a good poem. Then it has to become obsessive to people who consider Lowell a great poet. Because they would feel obliged to keep putting

their intelligence and their imagination into that structure of words. Profound trouble. They'd feel drained. They would have to. (Pause) May I say that I have been trying to sketch an analogy to what has been happening in our history. This country has had a profoundly unhealthy and tragic history for the past ten years. All countries have histories that are occasionally good and very often bad. The disastrous events of this country have not necessarily been any more unpleasant than the disastrous events of any other country in the last ten years, although they may have been. But what has made this history, our history, God-awful, is that we don't have answers to it. Not even viable hypotheses. It was bad enough to have the assassinations that took place. It was bad enough to lose someone like John Fitzgerald Kennedy in the middle of his first term, bad enough to lose him because

whether one liked Kennedy or not he was at least an interesting President. People were attached to him in their minds, even if it was to hate him. He was interesting because there was never a President quite like him before, and the country was changing, the country was turning. If he had been hit by a lightning bolt, or had died of a simple disease, it would have been a tragedy because the mind of the country was at work on the phenomenon of JFK. SOAP OPERA. But to have him assassinated in such a way that no one could begin to comprehend how it happened, whether a lonely and demented assassin had done it, or whether it was part of a large and sinister plot, or whether this assassination had taken place as something altogether inbetween, a mixed-up horror of small and medium plots which so scared so many

people when it occurred, that evidence has been covered over. Whatever the reason for this assassination, it has left an obsession in the American mind. We have been left with an equal sense of obsession, about all the other assassinations. All those terrible murders, those unanswerables, those obsessions. The effect upon us as a nation is not without parallel to what individuals do when they have an obsession. If an individual has an obsession about their mate, if he or she don't trust their mate, or feel the mate is untrue and they don't know and can't find out, because the mate is either too innocent, or too sly; too devilish or too consumately perfect in style, if one doesn't know whether one is dealing with faithfulness or betrayal, after jealousy and the obsession of jealousy comes apathy. The nervous system of a man and woman can take just so much doubt, so

much intense doubt, so much obsession before it begins to wall it over, neutralize it, numb it, put it away. That I think is what we have been doing to our history. We have been numbing it because it has become a history too painful to interpret, too painful to try to begin to comprehend. If it is our nature and our need to try to comprehend the world we live in, and we have come to the conclusion deep within ourselves, that it is not knowable, then a profound depression sets in. It will set in over a country, just as it can set in over a person. Or upon an entire era of aesthetics. I suppose it is what I mean when I say the ball keeps rolling off the table. We live in the dread that we are coming closer to something more dreadful and less meaningful altogether and we don't even know what it is. We even begin to welcome the art of the absurd in politics. It is as if

the last pleasure that will be left to us in politics will be to see how quickly the scenario shifts.

Now it should come as no large surprise that I would be prone to suspect the CIA of being one of the forces in the scheme of American things which is rolling the ball off the table. And I have even said that the CIA is an incubus upon the nature of intelligence itself, a remark made for the press which no newspaper chose to put into print. Of course that was more than a year ago.

Of course a number of us in one way or another have been trying for years to comprehend the thing that some of us call the invisible government, that some call the CIA, that some call the intelligence establishment. And one fundamental question that all of us have is: what is the nature of this peculiar mysterious object out there in the political field, this object which nobody

has ever been able to chart, this thing about which we know so little, that invisible government which some call the CIA as a form of shorthand for the intelligence establishment. To what degree is it sinister? To what degree is our belief that it is sinister merely a reflection of our rootless paranoia? When we have no power, our paranoia has no roots, and makes us frantic without our ever finding answers to it. Paranoia is the acceleration that comes from not getting answers to questions. One's mind begins to work finally like a cyclotron.

When we try to contemplate the CIA, however, we get into a situation that is close to that jealous husband or wife. We don't know the nature of what we are looking at. The CIA began as an idea, after all, which had beauty to it. I don't mean it was an idea whose beauty everyone

in this country was ready to share. I don't think I shared the idea with which the CIA began. I think it was always too simple an idea and it failed to take account of the facts. Nonetheless, in America after the Second World War there was a conviction that a final battle was coming between the Left and the Right of the world, between America and the Soviet Union. This belief, particularly among the upper classes and natural establishment of America, that is, the natural, financial and social establishment of America was that this country was essentially too gentle and too unsophisticated to be able to cope with Communism unless it had a powerful and dedicated secret arm. The CIA was founded on the notion that any Americans who felt a profound patriotism should be able to find a profoundly interesting set of activities for themselves. The CIA was therefore an organization

founded in high idealism and dedicated to performing activities which would be some by their own lights highly immoral. Most of the people who started the CIA were good and devout Christians--so they were people who were going to dare to play with their immortal souls in the name of a higher good. That is not a moral activity at which one can ever sneer, because it is the most thoroughgoing and frightening single moral activity one can ever begin, a Faustian activity.

That was the nature of the CIA as it began. Because it was going to be, however, a huge and secret organization, it took on properties unlike any other government bureau or agency in our history. Since it was formed in a great hurry, it had to draw its people from all the other ranks of government. It had to fill its cadres at once, so it raided talent everywhere. Some of the best people in the armed forces came into the CIA, some of the best people in

the State Department, some of the very best people in Agriculture, because the CIA would also need people to go out as agricultural experts all over the world, and so through all the departments of government. Then take the natural extensions into fields of private life. Not only was every government agency raided, but some of the financial talent in the country was taken from the banks-- people came to the CIA as to a cause. The peculiarity of this huge raid, this implosion of talent, was that it quickly became an intolerable congestion of bureaucratic ambitions. You had a huge number of talented ambitious people all serving at the same grade in civil service. Quickly they began to recognize that there wasn't room for all to advance. It was like that German army back after the First World War in which all the privates had the skills of lieutenants. Since this was not Germany

defeated but America victorious, it was obviously an unstable condition.

People who were early in the CIA would often recognize after a year or two that there was no real room for advancement. So they would move out again. But because it was a secret organization, they kept tenuous relations as they moved out. And some relations were not so tenuous. A huge unofficial set of intelligence enclaves came back from the CIA to go again into the banks and the corporations and the army and the State Department. Some served in official form and some in unofficial, as agents. Sometimes they might perform a service once in ten years. It might be no more than a favor. And others, in contrast, deliberately left the CIA in order to take up cover in something else. There are people who left the CIA fifteen or twenty years ago, to go back to the State Department

let us say who have been good CIA men for twenty years in that State Department. So the CIA became a center of intelligence which may have known more about what was going on in America than any other group in this country. And, since this need for concealment is crucial in intelligence work, nobody who ever went into the CIA and came out can be regarded as having certainly quit. Once a man has been in the CIA there is a fair to better than even chance that he is still in the CIA. So there is one aspect of the CIA which immediately becomes obsessive to us. We are once more in the position of the jealous mate.

Then when you contemplate the private finances of the CIA, you get into situations which can excite the speculations of any novelist. Scenarios arise everywhere. By the nature of its work, the CIA has and had many many

operations where the funds could not be accounted for. Simply not accounted for because they had to be used for-- not necessarily even for illegal purposes--but because it would be dangerous to have names and lists, and since CIA men considered themselves highly honorable and highly motivated men, they very often were given sums because they could be trusted with them. Since they didn't have to account for the money, money was able to accumulate in certain places. Since it was also an organization that would not wish to be too subservient to Congress for its funding, particularly for the most adventurous and top-secret operations they'd be performing, since there was always a need for truly secret money in vast amounts, there had to come a point where some of the smarter people in the CIA must, we must assume, have said to themselves: We ought to start investing these extra funds. We know

more about what's going on all over the world than anyone in the American banking community. We know when the countries are propped and when they topple. And in America for the American economy we have our contacts in the American banking community who will help. We can make fortunes. There's a reasonable assumption they did. Disclosures are everywhere. We hear of secret ten-billion-dollar budgets in the Pike Report, and fabulous speculations open to us on the relation of Howard Hughes as a financial muse to some of the higher covens of espionage. Indeed, the real economy of the world may by now be fantastically other than we think it is. It is possible half the Swiss banks belong to the CIA. We just don't know. It is merely another aspect of our obsessive inability to find answers.

We then have a more frightening aspect of the CIA.

The question of assassinations. It is almost impossible for any man who is running a high level of the CIA to know what is going on at a lower level. If he did, he would have to perjure himself every time he appeared before a Congressional committee. What might have begun as a situation where he pretended not to know became very quickly a situation where he could not be certain anymore. If people in the middle levels of operations were not and could not be watched too closely, then very quickly the middle levels became autonomous levels. Since one never knew quite who was in the CIA and who wasn't, and what they did when they were in it -- Fletcher Prouty's example of office title -- and particularly since many funds were not accountable, it was possible for all sorts of murderous organizations to begin within the CIA which could even

engage in intense warfare upon one another. To wit, left and right enclaves within the CIA engaged in trickery and spookery of a degree we don't get near to comprehending. Enter the Mafia. Add the Mafia. Add that instinctive American symbiosis between the best prep schools and the best crime schools--what romance for each!--and now contemplate the terror of top levels of the CIA on the day Kennedy was assassinated. This man, Oswald, presumably had done it. This man who left the Marines to go to Russia, and then come back to America. In that simple description of his life they knew a number of things were probably true. He was probably to some small degree a Soviet agent, since the Soviets were not likely to let him go back without getting something from him, some vulnerability, some promise, some pinch upon him. To their establishment horror, there was even a greater

likelihood that he was one of their own agents, who'd gone over to the Soviet Union in the first place under thin cover. Would they let him sit out there in Texas without making use of him, without trying to learn what he had learned about Russia? At the very least they must have had intensive interviews with him. And then the role of the FBI, the CIA had to ask themselves, what had the FBI been doing with this man? They obviously could hardly have left him alone. What failure of duty. If this will hardly prove that Oswald was definitely a CIA agent, an FBI agent and a Russian agent, it can say that was the made, the perspective in the minds of the people at the top of the CIA who had to start thinking immediately on that dreadful November day--they had to think, my God, we don't know, but he may be one of us, he's probably one of us, some way or other. An absolute disaster if he's

on our lists. There had to be an instinctive attempt to get rid of him. You don't have to be a novelist to assume that somebody somewhere, in some secret intelligence of the world, turned to somebody else and said, isn't there some way to do something about this man? If we're to assume, just for the sake of this scenario, that it happened in an American office, maybe somebody said, I got to make a call. And after that call, another, and finally there's a voice that says, "Hey, Jack, Jack Ruby, I got good news for you. There's a little operation you're going to be able to get into which is going to relieve you of the vigorish you owe us." It's possible it happened something like that. It's also likely it didn't, and this is all speculation.

What is attractive and highly unattractive about all this is that we're not necessarily going to be able ever

to know in a hurry, and we may never be able to know. So we live in this obsessive relation to the roots of our own history. And it seems to me that as we live with these questions, we come to see how they proliferate, go deeper and deeper, and get to the point where we begin to wonder whether we're living in one history or two.

It is a fundamental question. Until we answer we do not come to grips with our history. Are we living in a history of the absurd? Do these surrealistic cut-off events occur because that is the way it is, and there are not plots, and not connections, but only stupid people, arrogant people, and odd bizarre people, and it is out of the mixture of all these things that our odd bizarre distorted hideous history occurs, and we have wholly disproportionate events, like Chappaquidick, and the death of RFK, and the disruption of the political chances of George Wallace, and the

absolute incomprehensible double-story of the SLA. And all these things come just out of the sheer madness of the times, and are only a reflection of the fact that we are living in a technological world which is driving people crazy, and so it's in the nature of things that behavior becomes plastic and brittle and things that seem to have real solidity snap like plastic. That is indeed one possibility. And the other possibility, completely opposed, is that we are living with a series of consecutive plots. That there is by now a cadre, a culture of conspiracy in this country, with highly skilled operatives, who have been moving in effect--this is the other extreme--who have been moving from one assassination to another. But we don't really begin to know whether we're over here on the question or over there. We're not even close.

So I think that it's as if the history of our time has become equal in difficulty to the poetry of our time, difficult to live with and difficult to deal with. It's as if there may be a real parallel now between the difficulty of finding a valid metaphor for our time, the difficulty of comprehending what the nature of espionage might be. So I think we are even coming to a period in our history when many of us will get into a new kind of politics, a politics that may take on more and more force in years to come, and there will be groups analogous to Nader's Raiders except they will deal with the question of the intelligence establishment. And it is possible that in five or ten years there are going to be groups on every campus in this country cooperating with one another who will be engaged in a species of participatory democracy, an attempt to come to grips with the nature of what our

history has been and what the nature of conspiracy has been in making that history. And these groups will be fed by the media and will feed the media back. An active dialogue may begin. We may even be able for the first time to begin to bring ourselves to grips with the central historical enigma of our lives, which is, it is one thing to be dominated by an external force, and it is another to know that one is being dominated by that external force. It is one thing to live in a democracy where one has power and it is another to live in a democracy where one has no power. But worst of all is to live in a democracy where one doesn't know if one has power or doesn't. So it may be that the central political question of the next ten or twenty years will come down to just this--are we or are we not going to find those means, and those activities which will bring us into more intimate comprehension of the nature of our history and our oncoming accelerating destiny?