

No 985
on
DREAD

Lecture material
short writings on dread

References to Dread
in NM's works

Jim

W

I Order
 II { ① Rojak on nuclear sword } 4 min
 { ② Rojak on dress }

III Hailu + the door knob 6 min

IV David Yang in cinema 12 min

Film	Dread
Loss of ego	Loss of soul consciousness
Injury to ego	Corruption or investment of soul
Habit made	Process of soul
Fear	Investment of soul
High focus	of soul
then states one	from without great involvement
	Damnation
Exhaustion + depression	Dread and depression
Facing up to a moral or physical responsibility	a ferment from the above

Jung - the neurotic arrives at a time about the time he or she develops a private theology

Chinese cookie story

Tibo + thought on his end. His reaction

Bergmann to lead

Mailer

Every stage of it. One even knows what kind of sex it is by the odor. One knows one's own spiritual condition by one's scent. One knows the happiness or the misery of the house by the odor as one walks in. The sense of smell is therefore unendurable at times, because you can walk in on old friends and realize that something's going to go bust with them, not yet, maybe, but it's there, maybe a month or two away.

Interviewer

Why particularly the Wasps? Did the melting pot turn them into plastic people?

Mailer

The Ravages of Dread

I believe in races. One of the endless damages Hitler left is that we lost anywhere from 20 to 60 years of thinking about races intelligently and sensitively. There's something lovely and extravagant in the divine design of races—how better to have a world of wonder and splendor than by these extraordinary races. With precisely their separate qualities.

So if we're talking about Wasps, if we start with the Scotch, Irish and English, we must even take our instant overview of English history. (Of course, I can hardly take any other view since I know so little about the subject.) Still, one characteristic I would assume is particular to the English is their belief in the power of occult forces, ghosts, spirits, a belief which goes back to the Druids. The myth of primeval propitiation is incredibly powerful for them. It may even be geographical. They lived in one of those isobars of culture, up in the cold, frozen, ugly psychic North where spookery hit hard, hit at their core. So I think they had an absolute horror of the ravages of dread. For I would suggest that there's less human insulation in the North against dread. And so they tried to create an ideal rational universe. It's no accident that British philosophers are rationalists. There isn't a good English philosopher I can think of who was a metaphysician, can you? A symbolist, a romantic philosopher?

*reprinted from an interview with Frank Crowther,
"Chasing the White Whale," Changes magazine,
December 1973*

*no NM's
file*

Mailer...8

Interviewer

They produced the Logical Positivists for us.

Mailer

Over and over, from Hume down their emphasis was on the refinement of reason. Even Wittgenstein devoted the poetic and metaphysical acrobatics of the brain to correcting logical positivists, making them more sensitive to the traps they might be digging into the language if they weren't very careful. I think he was building these logical structures to keep dread away. When we feel dread, we put it in a cage.

I suppose what I'm getting at is that the Wasp, coming from the Scotch and British, began as a strong people who were spooked and determined to dominate that condition of being spooked by creating a more powerful net of reason and logic than any people who had ever come before. And, of course, technology, as it emerged through Western Europe and America, met this habit of mind and was wed to it. It's no accident that the Wasp is at the very center of technology.

Interviewer

In Armies of the Night you wrote of extracting a promise from your daughter not to take drugs until she had finished college. Are you anti-drugs?

Mailer

No, I still smoke pot, I love pot. I just hate it when kids think they're going to enjoy it for nothing. Any man's entitled to any vice he wants, but he should have the umbilical sense that anything you get you're going to pay for. If there's not a divine economy, then there's nothing but an absurd world, an absurd society. And, of course, one of the things we have to notice is a compulsiveness toward absurd behavior. There's a powerful passion loose toward absurd behavior, to the desire to be absurd. Ever notice the approbation people get from friends when they act absurdly? It's because it's too horrible to contemplate that there might be a huge payment of dues coming up.

Future fear of the end when it fails
to be predictive, can end by
strengthening one ~~when~~ after the
fear ebbs. Dead before the.

In Bob's talk, smaller ends & new
beginnings kick off the annihilation of
habit description which can prove
too expensive for the present state of
the system.

Habit is the capital of the people,
the equivalent of factories, predictable
receiving new suppliers & the
production and presentation of
end results.

Depression has a function - it is
to make the end supportable
even as an analgesic: carries on
through pain.

~~Domination & dread~~

~~Comus: A man who doesn't know everything
cannot kill everyone. (D.T. + A.H.)
(Hillman says about knowing something.)~~

~~Suicide & dread~~

within Christianity to liberate or to destroy the vision of man. Faced with our failure (for it would seem the war has gone against us) the investigators of the intellect have taken to intellectual tranquilizers. It is logical positivism, logicians, and language analysts who dominate Anglo-American philosophy rather than existentialists; it is Freudians instead of Reichians or Jungians who rule psychoanalysis; and it is journalism rather than art which forges the apathetic conscience of our time. But then politics, like journalism, is intended to hide from us the existential abyss of dread, the terror which lies beneath our sedation. Today, a successful politician is not a man who wrestles with the art of the possible in order to enrich life, alleviate hardship, or correct injustice—he is, on the contrary, a doctor of mass communications who may measure his success by the practice of a political ritual and vocabulary which diverts us temporarily from dread, from anxiety, from the mirror of the dream. Here follow two specimens of those particular emotional states which politics is designed to conceal.

Responses and Reactions II

On p. 293 of *The Early Masters** is a short story.

The Test

It is told:

When Prince Adam Czartoryski, the friend and counselor of Czar Alexander, had been married for many years and still had no children, he went to the maggid of Koznitz and asked him to pray for him and because of his prayer the princess bore a son. At the baptism, the father told of the maggid's intercession with God. His brother who, with his young son, was among the guests, made fun of what he called the prince's superstition. "Let us go to your wonder-worker together," he said, "and I shall show you that he can't tell the difference between left and right."

Together they journeyed to Koznitz, which was close to where they lived. "I beg of you," Adam's brother said to the maggid, "to pray for my sick son."

The maggid bowed his head in silence. "Will you do this for me?" the other urged.

The maggid raised his head. "Go," he said, and Adam saw that he only managed to speak with a great effort. "Go quickly, and perhaps you will still see him alive."

"Well, what did I tell you?" Adam's brother said laughingly as they got into their carriage. Adam was silent during the ride. When they drove into the court of his house, they found the boy dead.

What is suggested by the story is an underworld of real events whose connection is never absurd. Consider, in parallel, this Haiku:

So soon to die
and no sign of it is showing—
locust cry.

The sense of stillness and approaching death is occupied by the cry of the locust. Its metallic note becomes the exact equal of an oncoming death. Much of Haiku can best be understood as a set of equations in mood. Man inserting himself into a mood extracts an answer from nature which is not only the reaction of the man upon the mood, but is a supernatural equivalent to the quality of the experience, almost as if a key is given up from the underworld to unlock the surface of reality.

Here for example is an intimation of the architecture concealed beneath:

Buber Early Master
Upsetting the Bowl †

It is told:

Once Rabbi Elimelekh was eating the Sabbath meal with his disciples. The servant set the soup bowl down before him. Rabbi Elimelekh raised it and upset it, so that the soup poured over the table. All at once young Mendel, later the rabbi of Rymanov, cried out: "Rabbi what are you doing? They will put us all in jail!" The other disciples smiled at these foolish words. They would have laughed out loud, had not the presence of their teacher restrained them. He, however, did not smile. He nodded to young Mendel and said: "Do not be afraid, my son!"

* An Introduction to Haiku by Harold G. Henderson, p. 43. The poem is by Matsuo Basho, translated by Henderson.

Yagata shinu
keshiki wa mei-20
semi-no koe

† The Early Masters, p. 259.

* From Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*. Published by Schocken Books. Volume I: *The Early Masters*, Volume II: *The Later Masters*.

Some time after this, it became known that on that day an edict directed against the Jews of the whole country had been presented to the emperor for his signature. Time after time he took up his pen, but something always happened to interrupt him. Finally he signed the paper. Then he reached for the sand-container but took the inkwell instead and upset it on the document. Hereupon he tore it up and forbade them to put the edict before him again.

A magical action in one part of the world creates its historical action in another—we are dealing with no less than totem and taboo. Psychoanalysis intrudes itself. One of the last, may it be one of the best approaches to modern neurosis is by way of the phenomenological apparatus of anxiety. As we sink into the apathetic bog of our possible extinction, so a breath of the Satanic seems to rise from the swamp. The magic of materials lifts into consciousness, proceeds to dominate us, is even enthroned into a usurpation of consciousness. The protagonists of *Last Year at Marienbad* are not so much people as halls and chandeliers, gaming tables, cigarettes in their pyramid of 1, 3, 5, and 7. The human characters are ghosts, disembodied servants, attendants who cast their shadows on the material. It is no longer significant that a man carries a silver cigarette case; rather it is the cigarette case which is significant. The man becomes an instrument to transport the case from the breast pocket of a suit into the air; like a building crane, a hand conducts the cigarette case to an angle with the light, fingers open the catch and thus elicit a muted sound of boredom, a silver groan from the throat of the case, which now offers up a cigarette, snaps its satisfaction at being shut, and seems to guide the hand back to the breast pocket. The man, on leave until he is called again, goes through a pantomime of small empty activities—without the illumination of his case he is like all dull servants who cannot use their liberty.

That, one may suppose, is a proper portrait of Hell. It is certainly the air of the phenomenological novel. It is as well the neurotic in slavery to the material objects which make up the locks and keys of his compulsion.

But allow me a quick portrait of a neurotic. He is a sociologist, let us say, working for a progressive foundation, a disenchanting atheist ("Who knows—God may exist as some kind of thwarted benevolence"), a liberal, a social planner, a member of SANE, a logical positivist, collector

~~of jokes about fags and beatniks,~~ a lover of that large suburban land between art and the documentary. He smokes two packs of cigarettes a day: he drinks—~~when he drinks—eight or ten tot of blended whiskey in a night.~~ ^{but} He does not get drunk, merely cerebral, amusing, and happy. Once when he came home thus drunk, he bowed to his door and then touched his doorknob three times. After this, he went to bed and slept like a thief.

Two years later he is in slavery to the doorknob. He must wipe it with his fingertips three times each morning before he goes out. If he forgets to do this and only remembers later at work, his day is shattered. Anxiety bursts his concentration. His psyche has the air of a bombed city. In an extreme case, he may even have to return to his home. His first question to himself is whether someone has touched the knob since he left. He makes inquiries. To his horror he discovers the servant has gone out shopping already. She has therefore touched the knob and it has lost its magical property. Stratagems are now necessary. He must devote the rest of the day to encouraging the servant to go out in such a manner that he can open the door for her, and thus remove the prior touch of her hand.

Is he mad? the man asks himself. Later he will ask his analyst the same question. But he is too aware of the absurdity of his activities. He suffers at the thought of the work he is not accomplishing, he hates himself for being attached to the doorknob, he tries to extirpate its dominance. One morning he makes an effort to move out briskly. He does not touch the brass a second and third time. But his feet come to a halt, his body turns around as if a gyroscope were revolving him, his arm turns to the knob and pats it twice. He no longer feels his psyche is to be torn in two. Consummate relief.

Of course his analysis discloses wonders. He has been an only son. His mother, his father, and himself make three. He and his wife (a ~~naturally~~ not very happy marriage) have one child. The value of the trinities is considered dubious by the analyst but is insisted upon by the patient. He has found that he need touch the doorknob only once if he repeats to himself, "I was born, I live, and I die." After a time he finds that he does not have to touch the knob at all, or upon occasion, can use his left hand for the purpose. There is a penalty, however. He is obliged to be concerned with the number nine for the rest of the day. Nine sips

of water from a glass. A porterhouse steak consumed in nine bites. His wife to be kissed nine times between supper and bed. "I've kicked over an ant hill," he confesses to his analyst. "I'm going bugs."

They work in his cause. Two testes and one penis makes three. Two eyes and one nose; two nostrils and one mouth; the throat, the tongue, and the teeth. His job, his family, and himself. The door, the doorknob, and the act of opening it.

Then he has a revelation. He wakes up one morning and does not reach for a cigarette. There is a tension in him to wait. He suffers agonies—the brightest and most impatient of his cells seem to be expiring without nicotine—still he has intimations of later morning bliss, he hangs on. Like an infantryman coming up alive from a forty-eight hour shelling, he gets to his hat, his attaché case, and the doorknob. As he touches it, a current flows into his hand. "Stick with me, pal," says the message. "One and two keep you from three."

Traveling to the office in the last half hour of the subway rush, he is happy for the first time in years. As he holds to the baked enamel loop of the subway strap, his fingers curl up a little higher and touch the green painted metal above the loop. A current returns to him again. Through his fingertips he feels a psychic topography which has dimensions, avenues, signals, buildings. From the metal of the subway strap through the metal of the subway car, down along the rails, into the tunnels of the city, back to the sewer pipes and electric cables which surround the subway station from which he left, back to his house, and up the plumbing, up the steam pipe, up the hall, a leap through the air, and he has come back to the doorknob again. He pats the subway strap three times. The ship of his body will sink no further. "Today," thinks the sociologist, "I signed my armistice. The flag of Faust has been planted here."

But in his office he has palpitations. He believes he will have a heart attack. He needs air. He opens the window, leans out from the waist. By God, he almost jumped!

The force which drew him to touch the knob now seems to want to pull his chest through the window. Or is it a force opposed to the force which made him touch the doorknob? He does not know. He thinks God may be telling him to jump. That thwarted benevolent God. "You are swear-

ing allegiance to materials," says a voice. "Come back, son. It is better to be dead."

Poor man. He is not bold enough to be Faust. He calls his analyst.

"Now, for God's sake, don't do anything," says the analyst. "This is not uncommon. Blocked material is rising to the surface. It's premature, but since we've gotten into it, repetition compulsions have to do with omnipotence fantasies which of course always involve Almighty figures and totemic Satanistic contracts. The urge to suicide is not bona fide in your case—it's merely a symbolic contraction of the anxiety."

"But I tell you I almost went through the window. I felt my feet start to leave the floor."

"Well, come by my office then. I can't see you right now—trust me on this—I've got a girl who will feel I've denied her her real chance to bear children if I cut into her hour, she's had too many abortions. You know, she's touchy"—rare is the analyst who won't gossip a *little* about his patients, it seems to calm the other patients—"but I'll leave an envelope of tranquilizers for you on the desk. They're a new formula. They're good. Take two right away. Then two more this afternoon. Forget the nausea if it comes. Just side-effect. We'll get together this evening."

"Mind if I touch your doorknob three times?"

"Great. You've got your sense of humor back. Yes, by all means, touch it."

So soon to die
and no sign of it is showing—
locust cry.

*I stonier - Christine Carter
Tibo.*

The Big Bite—April, 1963

The rite of spring is in the odor of the air. The nerve of winter which enters one's nose comes a long far way like a scythe from the peak of mountains. To the aged it can feel like a miasma up from the midnight corridors of a

resolutely non-scientific. *W. J. Munro*

49 • On Science and Art

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

was intense as a
magnetic field → P5T

Artist
Scientist

labored
to
create

P5T

P5T

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

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

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

JUNG: Like an induction coil.

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

p57

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

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

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

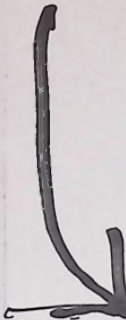
communicating to a bee, literally. Some of the messages we don't begin to perceive. And so, as I say, primitive man, moving through these fields, still able to communicate with these oaks, would have intimations beneath the level of language. At a certain point he knew in the way a plant knows or a tree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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

YOUNG: Waiting for the freeze bags.

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

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

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

Since
theology
looking
to
overcome
the
primitive
dividual
had
to
create
theology
ical
dividual
so

S
T
E
T

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

YOUNG: Choosing perhaps to be more alive.

MAILER: More alive and more bugged. More reduced. I mean, think of people you've known who lived in depression for ten years at a time — you think quickly of artists . . . Because of their sensitivity, their paranoia, because of their relation to magic . . . their exquisite sensitivity to the possibilities of magic, to that communication between subterranean events which everything paranoid in one (for paranoia has to be a disturbed function of the magical sense) would believe is having a powerful effect upon superficial everyday events. So when things are not breaking well, such an artist will never get free of anxiety. His sense of magic will keep producing more exotic conclusions. I mean, there's a reason why man deserted magic and went into technology. Men led lives of exacerbated uneasiness when they lived in the time of primitive man and his magic. They sought, after all, to escape primitive existence and existential life, in order to gain technological life. For precisely the reason that they thought it would be easier. Now we've found that it isn't easier. It may even be deadly. So now we've got to go back. — 57

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

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

~~people are still yet to be made. The clothes ever worn on
Earth. I do, suppose we have got to go back to that universal dread
we tried to escape five, ten, fifteen, twenty-five thousand years
ago. Suppose it's now become the underlying trip of the world.~~

1970

Down Mailer's Way

steered us up the hill therefore to get pinned down in a long bad line, one hundred feet from the summit, a modest twin dome, a double hill with a German machine gun on one knoll and a German machine gun on the other, I was so ready to die in atonement I was not even scared.

It was Rojack's ignorance of the theological which helped him to free as much of the white magic of the unconscious as he did. His having been excessively bright but a humdrum athlete neatly suggests that over-dependence upon the intellectual and neglect of the instinctual brought him to such a desperate situation that he was ready to embark upon radically different, authentic action. And since Rojack had no theological sense, no perception of how one can gain or lose the chance for eternal life, he was able to experience the peculiar relief of having nothing to lose by dying. As Rojack entered into the realm of authentic action by preparing to do what quite simply must be done, he felt "danger withdraw . . . like an angel, withdraw like a retreating wave over a quiet sea, sinking quietly into the sand." He then ran up the hill toward the guns that were firing at him. His freedom from fear and his willingness to do what must be done opened him to the blessings of the Navigator at the seat of his unconscious, instinctual self—referred to as it by Rojack—that donor of white magic who guided each of his two simultaneously thrown grenades to within a few yards of each emplacement. Rojack's flow of talent continued as, with a kind of mystical ease, he then shot three of the four surviving Germans. But it deserted Rojack as he confronted the last surviving German, dying but still holding his bayonet, with eyes that contained

all of it, the two grenades, the blood on my thigh, the fat faggot, the ghost with the pistol, the hunchback, the blood, those bloody screams that never sounded, it was all in his eyes, he had eyes I was to see once later on an autopsy table in a small town in Missouri . . . eyes of blue, so perfectly blue and mad they go all the way in deep into celestial vaults of sky, eyes which go back all the way to God is the way I think I heard it said once in the South, and I faltered before that stare, clear as ice in the moonlight, and hung on one knee, not knowing if I could push my wound, and suddenly it was gone, the clean presence of it, the grace, it had deserted me in the moment I hesitated, and now I had no stomach to go. . . . I fired. And missed. And fired again. And missed.

In the last chapter of the novel, we learn that the eyes on the autopsy table belonged to an old man who was dying of cancer when he suddenly perished from peritonitis. For Mailer, cancer is

Robert Solotaroff

entropic growth—that leap of the cells into the creation of nonbeing, the unspoken intimation that our purchase on eternity has been lost, that we have ceased to exist in the continuum of nature. What was in the eyes of both the dying German and the dead Missourian was the perception that their being had died before their lives had ended; they knew there would be no more life for them.

Before the confrontation with the German's eyes, Rojack presumably believed that all death was nothingness. Consequently, he was able, at least once, to overcome his fear of dying. But Mailer-esque religion passed from the German's eyes to Rojack's, and with it, dread.* The talent which partially authentic action had freed in Rojack retreated before the demand for a still more authentic act, for there are levels to the authentic, and Rojack had just touched bottom. In civilian life, the most difficult authentic action would be the one which is most foreign to our normal sense of "the good" but which is ordered by the most fundamental demand of one's being—it must survive. Thus, the command to kill might be ordered not by "that religion which is called Judeo-Christian" but, to turn again to "Ten Thousand Words A Minute," by

an older religion, a more primitive one—a religion of blood, a murderous and sensitive religion which mocks the effort of the understanding to approach it, and scores the lungs of men like D. H. Lawrence, and burns the brain of men like Ernest Hemingway when they explore out into the mystery, searching to discover some part of the

* Although Mailer has dropped Kierkegaard's name a number of times and even referred to *The Concept of Dread* in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, his use of the term markedly differs from the Danish philosopher's. For the latter, dread was "the dizziness of freedom which occurs when the spirit would posit the synthesis, and freedom then grazes down into its own possibility, grasping at finiteness to sustain itself. In this dizziness freedom succumbs" (*The Concept of Dread*, tr. by Walter Lowrie [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946], p. 53). Perhaps the term is more clearly expressed in his *Journals*:

. . . dread is a desire for what one fears, a sympathetic antipathy; dread is an alien power which takes hold of the individual, and yet one cannot extricate oneself from it, does not wish to, because one is afraid, but what one fears attracts one. Dread renders the individual powerless and the first sin always happens in a moment of weakness." [*The Journals of Kierkegaard*, tr. and ed. by Alexander Dru (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 402.]

Mailer's emphasis is not on the dizziness of freedom (which might occur to someone who has no consciousness of the supernatural) but on dread as the response to the awareness of the presence of God and/or the Devil, which might or might not leave one powerless.

"No," I said, "you may as well lock me up."

His phone buzzed once.

"Why not sign a confession?" he asked.

"No."

Roberts picked up the phone. "No . . . no. He won't give it. He needs seventy-two hours. . . . What? Son of a bitch, no." He swore for the next twenty seconds, his eyes so full of blood I thought he was going to beat on the side of my head with the receiver. Then he put his hand to his jaw and held his chin in a grip which must have been equal to pressing a button in the machinery of himself for it served to return his control. "Wait here," he said. "I'll be back in a couple of minutes." He was not a big man, but he padded out like an overstuffed cat at the end of a chain.

Roberts had left his file on the desk. I took a quick look. He did not have a report of the autopsy, he had notes on the autopsy, and while I did not understand much of the terminology, I could see he had not been telling me the truth: the medical report was qualified—so far as I could understand his notes, the suicide was in doubt, but so was any certainty that Deborah had been dead before the fall. Only the traces on the carpet stood out—someone had used red ink to underline.

And there were tear sheets from an article by me which he had taken from a professional journal, the text of a Prize Lecture I had given at the university my first year there, the first year I had been married to Deborah. Now like an old maid's faded flower in a Bible were the faded words of this lecture. Reading them in this room with the radiator hissing irritably at my back, looking at the walls, that dirty weathered color of a bleached cigar, I had a quick grasp of the secret to sanity—it had become the ability to hold the maximum of impossible combinations in one's mind, Roberts' red pins on the precinct map and a paragraph from the middle of the Clark Reed Powell Prize Lecture: *On the Primitive View of Mystery*.

In contrast to the civilized view which elevates man above the animals, the primitive had an instinctive belief that he was subservient to the primal pact between the beasts of the jungle and the beast of mystery.

To the savage, dread was the natural result of any invasion of the supernatural: if man wished to steal the secrets of the gods, it was only to be supposed that the gods would defend themselves and destroy whichever man came too close. By this logic, civilization is the successful if imperfect theft of some cluster of these secrets, and the price we have paid is to accelerate our private sense of some enormous if not quite definable disaster which awaits us.

It was a lecture which proved agreeable and had been reprinted in a monthly magazine—revised, enlarged, and in two parts—there had been I suppose something pleasantly meretricious in the sonority of the style. Now, reading it back to myself, it revolved into my ear with the force of a real idea and I had a sudden anxiety for Roberts to be back as if some determination to resist him might be lost if I remained alone too long in the stale air of this room. So, forcing myself to concentrate on the file, I saw it was almost by chance this lecture had been deposited here, for the portfolio held a scattering of a few of the things I had written, plus gossip columns in which my name appeared, even a criticism or two of the television show, a loose collection which Roberts must have looked over with half an eye. Then I could hear his step in the hall, and got back to my seat.

He came in whistling. It was the cool controlled whistling of a man who has a boil on his neck. "Well, Rojack," he said, showing his upper teeth in a smile, "you're free of suspicion. Let's go out and have a beer." His eyes were a void. "I knew," he said, "I knew there was something wrong with this one from the beginning."

"What are you telling me?"

"The official medical report came in. Suicide. Yes." He nodded. "You have a big brother somewhere."

gone up, and I had certainly gone down, and I had gone up and down. I was now at a university in New York, a professor of existential psychology with the not inconsiderable thesis that magic, dread, and the perception of death were the roots of motivation; I was a personality on television and an author of sorts: I had had one popular book published, *The Psychology of the Hangman*, a psychological study of the styles of execution in different states and nations—death by guillotine, firing squad, by rope, by electric chair, by gas pellets—an interesting book. I had also—as I indicated—become the husband of an heiress, and I had been most unsuccessful at that. In fact I had come to the end of a very long street. Call it an avenue. For I had come to decide I was finally a failure.

I had had a bad year this last year, and for a while it got very bad; I may as well admit that for the first time in my life I had come to understand there was suicide in me. (Murder I had known was there for a long time.) It was the worst of discoveries, this suicide. Murder, after all, has exhilaration within it. I do not mean it is a state to entertain; the tension which develops in your body makes you sicken over a period, and I had my fill of walking about with a chest full of hatred and a brain jammed to burst, but there is something manly about containing your rage, it is so difficult, it is like carrying a two-hundred-pound safe up a cast-iron hill. The exhilaration comes I suppose from possessing such strength. Besides, murder offers the promise of vast relief. It is never unsexual.

But there is little which is sexual about suicide. It is a lonely landscape with the pale light of a dream and something is calling to you, a voice on the wind. Certain nights I would go leaden with dread because I could hear the chamber music tuning up, tuning up and near to pitch. (Yes, murder sounds like a symphony in your head, and suicide is a pure quartet.) I was approaching my forty-fourth year, but for the first time I knew why some of my friends,

and so many of the women I had thought I understood, could not bear to be alone at night. ^{and}

I had spent the last year parting company with my wife. We had been married most intimately and often most unhappily for eight years, and for the last five I had been trying to evacuate my expeditionary army, that force of hopes, all-out need, plain virile desire and commitment which I had spent on her. It was a losing war, and I wanted to withdraw, count my dead, and look for love in another land, but she was a great bitch, Deborah, a lioness of the species: unconditional surrender was her only raw meat. A Great Bitch has losses to calculate after all if the gent gets away. For ideally a Great Bitch delivers extermination to any bucko brave enough to take carnal knowledge of her. She somehow *fails in her role* (as psychoanalysts, those frustrated stage directors, might say) if the lover escapes without being maimed to the nines or nailed to the mast. And Deborah had gotten her hooks into me, eight years ago she had clinched the hooks and they had given birth to other hooks. Living with her I was murderous; attempting to separate, suicide came into me. Some psychic bombardment of the will to live had begun, a new particle of love's mysterious atom had been discovered—the itch to jump. I had been on a balcony ten stories high talking to my host, the cocktail party was done, and we stood looking down on Sutton Place, not talking about Deborah—what else was there not to talk about this last long year?—and I was wondering, as indeed often I did, whether this old buddy, comfortably drunk with me, a pleasant-looking stud of forty-six, with a waist kept trim by squash at the New York A.C. and a rogue's look in the eye kept alive by corners he cut making his little brokerage prosper (not to speak of the women he met for lunch—he had a flair, this buddy), well, wondering whether his concern was so true for me as the timbre of his voice, now sincere, now so place-your-bets sincere, or if he'd been banging my blessed Deborah five times a year, five times each of the last eight years,

3 min