

In writing on Mailer the question is not what one can write about, but rather what five page sliver to slice from the enormous body of work he has written. More than any American writer of the 20th century Mailer assaults the intellect, conscience and imagination of the reader. If you do not agree with him you have twenty volumes of art and ideology to disagree with -- certainly a remarkable opportunity to get the sense of your own ideas and values. To generally place him we might describe him as a Romantic rebel and critic of the American dream, that is, one who, as a Romantic affirms the value of life ("finally not everyone is impotent, nor is our final fate, our human condition, necessarily doomed to impotence" -- Column Seventeen; Advertisements for Myself -- AND "You have to assume, just as a working stance, that life is probably good -- if it isn't good, then our existence is such an absurdity that any action immediately becomes absurd -- but if you assume that life is good, then you have to assume that those things which keep life from happening -- which tend to make complex without becoming more useful, more stimulating -- are bad"--p. 139, The Presidential Papers), but as a critic cannot avoid or sidestep the dark truths about the American experience. It is better to know than not know, no matter how painful the knowledge is ("Acute disease is cure"--p. 7, The Presidential Papers AND "Every moment of one's existence one is growing into more or dying a little bit. That the choice is not to live a little more or to not live a little more; it is to live a little more or die a little more"--"Hip, Hell and the Navigator" in Advertisements for Myself).

At the heart of Mailer's criticism of America is his belief that the whole thrust of our civilization has been to eliminate the unpredictable, to homogenize, behead and smother individualism in the name of morality ("For all too many, security was the only bulwark against emptiness, eternity and death"--p. 91, The Presidential Papers). Anything which helps us express what is inside of us is to be valued. If we cannot open the pores of our unconscious we have no range of action and thought to evaluate ("The logic in searching for extreme situations, in searching for one's authenticity, is that one burns out the filament of old dull habit and turns the conscious mind back upon its natural subservience to the instinct... For consciousness, once it is alienated from instinct, begins to construct its intellectual formulations over a void."--p. 198, The Presidential Papers).

So papers might be written on the following broad themes:

Does Mailer stress the intuitive and ~~rational~~ ^{instinctual} to the exclusion of the rational?

Does a character like Marion Faye, in continually striving to be true to his unconscious, to exercise his free will, does he run the danger of locking himself in a barbarism, a cruelty from which there is no escape?

Does a hero like Eitel represent the struggle and failure of the individual against the demeaning structures of society?

Does America "behead individuality, variety, dissent, extreme possibility, romantic faith" as Mailer claims?

How justified is Mailer's belief J.F.K. was an existential politician?

Is America schizophrenic, leading a double life, the two poles being "the history of politics which is concrete, factual, practical and dull" and "a subterranean river of untapped, ferocious, lovely and ro-

personifications of America
p. 173

ROBUST ART 1161

... which is ^{the} dream life of a nation"? (Richard Nixon and Marilyn Monroe) ^{from P.P.}

Who knows best what is best for Americans: her institutions or her writers?

Is Mailer more in the tradition of a misanthropic satirist like Swift or a life-loving poet like Whitman? Or what?

Here are some thoughts and snippets of quotations which might serve as themes or thought-joggers:

"the American habit of testing truth simultaneously by intuition and action."

The Literary History of the U. S.,
ed. R. Spiller, p. 371

All Mailer's work proceeds from his Manichean cosmogony; an a priori assertion

Do Americans have the 18th century dislike of confessional writing? Why?

✓ "The true work of genius should proceed out of the wants and needs of the age as well as the writer." R. W. Emerson quoted in American Renaissance by F. O. Matthiessen, p. 16. Applicability to Mailer?

X "How can a man best spend his life? By converting as wide a range of experience as possible into conscious thought." A. Malraux quoted in American Renaissance by F. O. Matthiessen, p. 21.

Could Mailer be an Emersonian who has not deviated from the actual world--a non-romance Romantic?

The distinction between fiction and non-fiction is as difficult to determine as the one between poetry and prose.

✓ "The only indecency known to literature is the exhibition of the author's naked ego". N. Frye in A Natural Perspective, p. 43.

✓ Mailer has no real predecessors and no important disciples; he stands out of the steamy historical process, an unmistakable individual, a man we have met.

X "To rebuke magnificently is one of the duties of a great polemical writer." English Lit. in the 16th Century by C. S. Lewis, p. 175.

"In the last resort language is rather the symptom of expression rather than the substance." J.E.V. Crofts in John Donne: A Collection of Essays edited by H. Gardner, p. 83.

"In fiction vice is always more fertile of incident and imagery than virtue." G. Hough, A Preface to the Fairie Queene, p. 41.

Mailer's progress: naturalism to Marxism to anarchy to existentialism.

Mailer has described his single theme in all his works as "Existentialism. That is to say, the feel of our human condition, which by the logic of existentialism, is the truth of the human condition." Playboy Interview, January, 1968, p. 84.

Mailer says he writes for "that audience which has no tradition by which to measure their experience but the intensity and clarity of their inner lives." *Paris Review Interview, Winter 1968-69, p. 277*

Mailer: "Technological society sits upon us like an incubus." Playboy Interview, January, 1968, p. 80.

used "If mankind had to choose between a universe that ignored him and one that noticed him to do him harm, it might well choose the second. Our own age need not begin congratulating itself on its freedom from superstition till it defeats a more dangerous temptation to despair." E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, p. 53-54. Mailer believes that we have denied the Devil at our own peril. Evil to 20th century man is a technical problem: flouridation, the mindturization of circuits, sewage plants and polio vaccine.

"The Elizabethans were interested in the nature of man with a fierceness rarely paralleled in other ages; and that fierceness delighted in exposing all the contrarieties in man's composition. By picturing man's position between beast and angel with all possible emphasis they gave a new intensity to the old conflict." Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, p. 76.

"to the Elizabethans the truth was not a thing to be arrived at by the weighing of evidence, but an absolute whose discovery depended on argument. Argument in turn rested on expression." Hardin Craig, The Lit. of the English Renaissance, p. 64.

"Our reasonings start from an intuition, a total feeling of the nature of the world or the nature of a person; they return constantly to check themselves by that intuition; and it is an intuition upon which finally, we act." Austin Warren in Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by Leon Edel, p. 127.

used "The sophisticated technique of the fiction writer comes to look artificial when it is applied to a series of real happenings." Edmund Wilson, E. Hemingway: The Man and His Work, edited by M. McCaffery, p. 221.

"To be positive one must have something to say; to be positive requires reason, labor, and art; and art, requires, above all things, a suppression of one's self, a subordination of one's self to an idea. This will never do for you (Whitman), whose plan is to adapt the scheme of the universe to your own limitations." Henry James on W. Whitman, Walt Whitman, edited by F. Murphy, p. 84.

"The evil of the world filled Melville with horror, and there is little doubt that because of that horror a Manichean element colours his sensibility." *M. J. Bewley*, Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays edited by R. Chase, p. 100.

used
"In Zoroasterianism, with which Melville, to some extent at least, was familiar, the world is divided between a good and an evil principle, and they are twin brothers. In the end the good will triumph, but their conflict is for the length of time." M. Bewley, Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays edited by R. Chase, p. 101.

used
"In our own hearts, we mould the whole world's hereafters; and in our own hearts we fashion our own gods. Each mortal casts his vote for whom he will to rule the worlds; I have a voice that helps to shape eternity; and my volitions stir the orbits of the furthest suns. In two senses we are what we worship. Ourselves are Fate." H. Melville, White Jacket (Grove Press edition) p. 305.

"But it is better to fail in originality, than to succeed in imitation. He who has never failed somewhere, that man can not be great. Failure is the true test of greatness." H. Melville "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Norton edition of Moby-Dick, p. 545.

"To scale great heights, we must come out of lowermost depths. The way to heaven is through hell." Melville in Mardi.

"The sun hides not Virginia's Dismal Swamp, nor Rome's accursed Campagna, nor wide Sahara, nor all the millions of miles of deserts and of griefs beneath the moon. The sun hides not the ocean, which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two-thirds of this earth. So, therefore, that mortal man who hath more joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true--not true, or undeveloped. With books the same." Melville, Moby-Dick (Norton edition), p. 355.

"All have doubts; many deny; but doubts or denials, few along with them, have intuitions. Doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly; this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who regards them both with equal eye." Melville, Moby-Dick (Norton edition), p. 314.

"A culture is not a flow, nor even a confluence; the form of its existence is struggle, or at least debate--it is nothing if not a dialectic. And in any culture there are likely to be certain artists who contain a large part of the dialectic within themselves, their meaning and power lying in their contradictions; they contain within themselves, it may be said, the very essence of the culture, and the sign of this is that they do not submit to serve the ends of any one ideological group or tendency." Lionel Trilling, Interpretations of American Literature, edited by Charles Feidelson, Jr., p. 285.

X
used
"I will trust my instincts. For always a reason halts after an instinct, and when I have deviated from the instinct, comes somebody with a profound theory teaching that I ought to have followed it: Some Goethe, Swendenborg, or Carlyle." R. W. Emerson The Heart of E's Journals edited by Bliss Perry, p. 84.

"The world can never be learned by learning all its details." R. W. Emerson The Heart of E's Journals edited by Bliss Perry, p. 148.

used ✓

"These novels will give way, by and by, to diaries or autobiographies; --captivating books, if only a man knew how to choose among what he calls his experiences that which is really his experience, and how to record truth truly!" R. W. Emerson, The Heart of E's Journals, edited by Bliss Perry, p. 159.

use as
epigraph
to subtitle
Henry-chapter
How M's words
some way to
un- fiction
Used by
H. Miller
as epigraph
to Tropic
of Cancer

X

"Pure Intellect is the pure devil when you have got off all the masks of Mephistophles." R. W. Emerson, The Heart of E's Journals edited by Bliss Perry, p. 207.

"Woe to him who seeks to please rather than appall!" Father Mapple in Moby-Dick.

"Only Connect!" epigraph to Howard's End by E. M. Forster.

Mailer refuses to accept sex as pleasure alone. To do so is to control it, measure it, gauge its titillation quotient, finally to rationalize it. Once that door is open, once the concession is made that sex at any given time is largely simple pleasure, an itch to be scratched, a physical need to be gratified, then the road to institutionalization of sexual pleasure is ready to be traveled. Theoretically for Mailer there are neutral activities, but determination of such activities, or the desire to come to that conclusion is what he damns. Mailer does not wish to deny logic but merely to let it be informed by intuition. The fundamental gripe he has against rational activity is its assumption that logic can get behind or around or beneath any problem or event. Once that assumption is granted then the tendency will always be to come to a conclusion in rational terms. Once it is granted that some sexual activity is merely pleasure the tendency will be to delineate the situations where such activity will occur. Mailer like Emerson, Melville and Thoreau, seeks unity in life. Free from their timidity about sexual matters, Mailer can explore the interrelatedness of life through each dark corner. Mailer is not willing to admit that any one type of sexual experience cannot open vistas of knowledge about life. Emerson wanted to proclaim man's interrelatedness with the universe; the tendrils of all life are interwoven--the Victorian proprieties kept him from examining the roots to the gonads. Same with Thoreau. Categorization implies stasis to Mailer and stasis is death because it does not admit of change. Yet unlike Emerson, Mailer wishes to inject the heroic into the dynamism of the universe. Emerson would claim evil to be an absence of good, Mailer would allow that man's darkest impulses, his de Sadean impulses, are capable of shifting any balance in the universe. The heart of Emerson's belief is that good was in charge, the ripples of misfortune and inhumanity were just that and would ultimately be compensated for. Mailer does not accept that all acts of man, active or passive, are already accountable, accounted for by a synthesis larger than he can always comprehend. Mailer, like every major American writer before him, with the possible exception of Hemingway, avails himself of the transcendental mode of perception. Significance may not be in all the events of man's experience, but he is unwilling to exclude the possibility of such significance before the act. Because one area of experience is one time devoid of significance provides no guarantee it will always be so. Yet rationalism would draw such a conclusion. So Mailer will look to the quality and hue of his own stools for what they can tell him about the state of his psyche. And any act which can produce children must be one in which man reveals most about himself. As with Lawrence, so with Mailer: sex is knowledge.

Mailer would discard the Fates that control tragic drama while retaining the tragic hero. Mailer would agree with Emerson that each thing has resonating significances, yet reject the Emersonian rider that no thing could be purely evil and cancel a good. Mailer would agree with Sartre that man is responsible for his own fate, that he is condemned to freedom, yet still accept a God who hopes for good through the universe.

In the Emersonian universe each event and fact, reasonable and unreasonable, resonates with universal significance, man more than any other because he duplicates the structure of the universe. The universe mirrors man who stands at its center. For Mailer man is both more and less important. More, because man's acts are free and their merit or lack of it affect the direction of man's destiny. The final salvation or destruction of human kind throughout eternity lies in the hands of man himself, especially in the hands of the leaders, writers, Presidents and Saints. Lesser because God is more than the impersonal spirit of the oversoul, the collec-

quote from
Seligman
interview
on
domination
events
with
man's
mind

used

used

cf
pp
p. 142

used

authentic
perception
of vol ix
p. 67-68

used
 tive vitality of all living things. God is an active embattled being formed in man's corrupted image. Not prelapsarian man in his innocence is God the reflector of, but man who has learned from his sin and corruption, who has sinned and been weak, yet drawn strength from the knowledge gained in the experience. So Mailer's God resembles man, but in stature, in the largeness of his nobility and grief, strength and folly, he is greater.

cf p 99 p 175 VIII. 57
 Mailer, like Melville, was plagued by the problem of evil and while Melville's only consolation lay in the continuing search for the bare truth which could make evil palatable, Mailer has created a God whose deficiencies explain evil. Indeed, it was a solution Melville pondered. And Hardy. If God was limited then the inequities of experience were comprehensible. There was cause for evil. Mailer has never explained his cosmogony in detail-- nor how he arrived at it. It seems, however, that the process was akin to the way aesthetes arrive at their position. Voltaire became an atheist after considering the earthquakes in Lisbon in 1711. No particular event triggered Mailer's belief--unless it was WWII or his own rejection by his readership after Barbary Shore. As a Marxist who believed that radical political action could better man's cause, Mailer could not cancel his belief in free will, whatever the idiocies of history. Mailer wished to be another Malraux, a mover and a shaker; he knew that proper action could bring about change, yet he had to concede that history was largely a muddle, a botch, and felt the blame must be laid at the feet of a God who lent and depended on man for aid. Some grievous greed, some lust, a desire to control nature and time and perpetuate his omnipotence had led man and his ally God to produce both glorious works and heritages of wisdom and might, and cruel and disproportionate consequences. "Ourselves", Melville said, "are fate."

used
 So while liberating the energies of a multitude of seemingly contradicting positions and yet ~~maintaining~~ the cutting edge of a sharply personal, even idiosyncratic style, Mailer achieves a unity larger than Emerson's while diving as deep as Melville.

cf p 99 p 101
 Like Emerson

He sees significance in the most casual corners, finds zones of energy in the quietest scene. Everything interpenetrates. used

cf p 99 p 101
 Like Melville

He sees man moved by forces larger than himself, yet finds man still has a main hand in his own fate. Yet man can damn himself if he fails to keep his instincts balanced with his common sense. Melville sees man's best hope in a unified sensibility but bent over towards the exigencies of life to avoid the shallows of transcendentalism. Mailer has the same respect for balance as Melville, but needs to move to instinctual solutions to escape the signs of scientific rationalism. used

Like Sartre

He believes that the key to meaning in an event is what man finds in himself, not only because he creates a measure of that meaning of his own volition, but also because he reflects the larger concerns of the Lord. He does not believe man is alone or history is irrelevant or life ends in death. He shares Sartre's radical humanism. Both would agree with Melville that it's a "joint stock world in all meridians." used

Like Shakespeare and
Eliot, Pound and
Yeats

cf
p103-04

He has ultimate faith in language, its salvific and redemptive qualities, its ability to stretch around the world, a great skin of words.

What ever way one comes at Mailer, whatever books after Barbary Shore are read, his Manichean struggle between God and the Devil stands to inform the way. Granting the Devil equal strength and hope of victory makes a knowledge of his ways and an appreciation of his evils more necessary and understandable. Evil is not banal for Mailer. Mailer respects it for its power. Anyone who can wield power is appreciated by Mailer. Mailer is almost too anxious to pay homage to the Devil, to exercise his own and his character's weaknesses. Which is his way of showing us the dangers of interpretations of good and evil. The only clue is to choose the difficult thing--it is usually the way of the Lord. But a foray into the Devil's fields has experiential merit. One won't soon go back--which is a Fortunate Fall spinoff--without knowledge of evil we will not escape it. Mailer in this regard is as orthodox as Hawthorne. The difference is one can never be sure how large the Devil's game is. Taking the hard way means it is always hard work, when the choices become predictable the Devil gains. Still it is the road Pilgrim walked. The Devil is wily. The game is tougher because the Devil has more power, but if the equation still holds good a knowledge of his ways through a fall will bring more goods back by way of experience of evil to the Lord. The game is tighter, the raids become more meaningful. The deck is stacked in Pilgrim's Progress and Everyman. Not so in Faustus or an American Dream. Damning Faustus-Everyman indicates a despair in the powers of the Lord that cannot be ~~sustained~~ ^{grounded} by a Christian. Similarly, gaining redemption and a new purchase on life through the darkest crime a man may commit is a twist to the situation-ethics game that makes it more than an exercise in relativity. Marlowe would understand, perhaps Melville.

"One can speak best from one's own taste, and I may therefore venture to say that the air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel." Henry Jones, "The Art of Fiction," The Future of the Novel edited by Leon Edel, p. 14. (cf Vol IX: 29 (EE))

"the only classification of the novel that I understand is into that which has life and that which has it not." Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 16.

X "We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his donnee: our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it." Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 117.

"the province of art is all life, all feeling, all observation, all vision. As Mr. Besant so justly intimates, it is all experience" Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 20.

used headnote
X "the perpetual tendency of the novel to capture the advantage which it appears to forgo." Percy Lubbock, "The Point of View," Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 44. (X)

X "He [Ben Jonson] is, if you like, intellectually arrogant, and he has a fundamental contempt for what he calls 'the green and soggy multitude.'" F. P. Wilson, "Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama," Elizabethan Drama, edited by Ralph J. Kaufman, p. 12. (compare to Marlowe's characterization of the "subtle majority" as the "mad," in St George and St Godfather)

"But to an Elizabethan the old Platonic and consistently orthodox opposition between the bestial and the rational in man, between instinct and understanding, between appetite and will was starkly real." E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, p. 75.

"A Groatworth of Wit and The Repentance of Robert Greene, were published after his death, both in 1592. Greene's general position as regards fact and fiction is not unlike that of Defoe, and Greene introduced the fictional element of self-revelation." The Lit. of the English Renaissance, by Hardin Craig, p. 138.

X "In Jonson, the creativeness appears in figures like Mosca, Volpone, Subtle, and Truewit, who can within limits control their own personality, command their own metamorphoses. The butts in the plays are those who try to live within an alien persona, adopting the kind of mask that flatters their ambitions but exceeds their capacities, and so failing to realize either." Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy by Jonas Barish, p. 92.

cf p. 57

X "The second impersonality is that of the poet who, out of intense and personal experience, is able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make it a general symbol." T. S. Eliot, "Yeats," On Poetry and Poets, p. 209.

used ✓ "Few things that can happen to a nation are more important than the invention of a new form of verse." T. S. Eliot, "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation," Essays on Elizabethan Drama, p. 50.

cf p 79 of *Essays on Transference of Culture into Art*

"I shall take the liberty of making but a single criticism of Mr. Besant, whose tone is so full of the love of his art, I may as well have done with it at once. He seems to me to mistake in attempting to say so definitely beforehand what sort of an affair the good novel will be. To indicate the danger of such an error as that has been the purpose of these few pages; to suggest that certain traditions on the subject, applied a priori, have already had much to answer for, and that the good health of an art which undertakes so immediately to reproduce life must demand that it be perfectly free. It lives upon exercise, and the very meaning of exercise is freedom. The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel, without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting. That general responsibility rests upon it, but it is the only one I can think of. The ways in which it is at liberty to accomplish this result (of interesting us) strike me as innumerable, and such as can only suffer from being marked out or fenced in by prescription. They are as various as the temperament of man, and they are successful in proportion as they reveal a particular mind, different from others. A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression. But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say. The tracing of a line to be followed, of a tone to be taken, of a form to be filled out, is a limitation of that freedom and a suppression of the very thing that we are most curious about. The form, it seems to me, is to be appreciated after the fact: then the author's choice has been made, his standard has been indicated; then we can follow lines and directions and compare tones and resemblances. Then in a word we estimate quality, we can apply the test of execution. The execution belongs to the author alone; it is what is most personal to him, and we measure him by that. The advantage, the luxury, as well as the torment and responsibility of the novelist, is that there is no limit to what he may attempt as an executant--no limit to his possible experiments, efforts, discoveries, successes. Here it is especially that he works, step by step, like his brother of the brush, of whom we may always say that he has painted his picture in a manner best known to himself. His manner is his secret, not necessarily a jealous one. He cannot disclose it as a general thing if he would; he would be at a loss to teach it to others." Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," The Future of the Novel edited by Leon Edel, p. 14.

✓ "The awareness of social disintegration, the dread of violence and brutality that had grown so deeply into the European consciousness at the end of the first World War, inevitably broke through the surfaces of the realistic tradition and demanded a mode that could again give fuller expression to inner struggle." American Renaissance, p. 313.

✕ Whitman -- "his distrust of mere mental processes." American Renaissance, p. 539.

"In another fragmentary note, which follows his frequent custom of generalizing his intention by putting it in the third person." American Renaissance, p. 544.

"Coleridge's principle that the reconciliation of opposites is essential for the creation of any great art lies behind Melville's belief that beauty must be united with strength." American Renaissance, p. 566.

✓ "The transcendentalists' destruction of the divisions between poetry and prose came out of their robust assurance that all divisions were out of date." American Renaissance, p. 584.

✓ Emerson -- "There is properly no history, only biography."
Thoreau -- "Biography, too, is liable to the same objection; it should be autobiography." American Renaissance, p. 631.

"He [Thoreau] held that scent was 'a more primitive inquisition,' 'more oracular and trustworthy.' It showed what was concealed from the other senses: by it he detected earthiness." American Renaissance by F. O. Matthiessen, p. 88. (cf p101)

"the scholar, who, if he is wise, 'will confine the observations of his mind as closely as possible to the experience or life of his senses. His thought must live with and be inspired with the life of his body.'" Thoreau quoted by Matthiessen in American Renaissance, p. 96.

"In desiring to push as near as possible to the boundaries between the visible and the invisible, to reassert the primitive quality of wonder, Thoreau again approached Browne, though by a different route." American Renaissance, p. 117.

✓ "You can't read any genuine history--as that of Herodotus or the Venerable Bede--without perceiving that our interest depends not on the subject but on the man,--on the manner in which he treats the subject and the importance he gives it. A feeble writer... must have what he thinks a great theme, which we are already interested in through the accounts of others, but a genius--a Shakespeare, for instance--would make the history of his parish more interesting than another's history of the world." Thoreau, quoted in American Renaissance, p. 166.

used
"The writer has attempted to write an absolutely true book to see whether the shape of a country and the pattern of a month's action can, if truly presented, compete with a work of the imagination." Forward to The Green Hills of Africa by Ernest Hemingway.

used
"All faults may be forgiven of him who has perfect candor." "Preface, 1855," Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (Random House), p. 453.

cf
M. Fugate on
"molded eggs"
p. 2

used
"The cleanest expression is that which finds no sphere worthy of itself and makes one." "Preface, 1855," Walt Whitman, p. 449.

⊗
"Whatever would put God in a poem or system of philosophy as contending against some being or influence is also of no account." "Preface, 1855," Walt Whitman, p. 451.

used
The poet must be "the age transfigured." "Preface, 1855," Walt Whitman, p. 456.

used
"Melville was less conscious of the divisions between the forms he employed than were other writers of his century. Whether he was writing novels or narratives, lyrics or letters, it was the whole development of his mind and all his capacities that moved rhythmically onto the page, and the development was limited or enlarged by financial or psychological urgencies rather than by the 'proprieties' of a particular category of literature." "Introduction" to The Portable Melville edited by Jay Leyda, pp. xiii-xiv.

"Balancing Thoreau's belief that history must be written as though it had happened to the writer was his equally strong conviction that if so written it would not be the history of reigns but of peoples." American Renaissance, p. 632.

"As soon as Hemingway begins speaking in the first person, he seems to lose his bearings, not merely as a critic of life, but even as a craftsman." E. Wilson in E. Hemingway: The Man and His Work, p. 221.

"One of the conflicts of which the book Light in August is made--between life and anti-life, between the spirit of birth and the murderous abstractions and obsessions which drive most of the characters--is in Faulkner himself." "The Stillness of Light in August," by Alfred Kazin, Interpretations of American Literature, edited by Charles Feidelson, Jr., p. 351.

[for Faulkner] "Man never thinks of changing the world; it is all he can do to get a grip on it, to understand some part of what has happened to him and to endure all of it." "The Stillness of Light in August," Kazin, p. 360.

"Biography is the only true historical record of human nature, for this is the history of spiritual causes, of which physical changes--all the vicissitudes of external life--are but the consequences. Events in the external world are so complex, so inflected as it were by the interventions of Providence, so far removed from the simple powers on which they depend, that they become perplexing and of dubious meaning unless seen in the light of a spiritual sense, and then they are of small value because they are seen in their insignificance." Bronson Alcott, Journals: 1826-1838, Selected Writings of the American Transcendentalists, edited by George Hochfield, p. 95. (*How Amos. Secretary*)

X "Take egotism out, and you would castrate the benefactors. Luther, Mirabeau, Napoleon, John Adams, Andrew Jackson; and our nearest eminent public servants,--Greely, Theodore Parker, Ward Beecher, Horace Mann, Garrison would lose their vigour." Emerson, Journals, p. 298.

X "Henry Thoreau is military. He seemed stubborn and implacable; always manly and wise, but rarely sweet. One would say that, as Webster could never speak without an antagonist, so Henry does not feel himself except in opposition. He wants a fallacy to expose, a blunder to pillory, requires a little sense of victory, a roll of the drums, to call his powers into full exercise." *Enorm*

"I never feel that I am inspired unless my body is also." Thoreau, Journals, p. 14.

"trust the remotest and finest, as the divinest, instinct." Thoreau, Journals, p. 20.

X "In our holiest moment our devil with a leer stands close at hand---I never was so rapid in my virtue but ~~my~~ vice kept up with me---We are double-edged blades, and every time we whet our virtue the return stroke straps our vice." Thoreau, Journals, p. 22.

21

"Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman." Margaret Fuller, American Transcendentalism, p. 363.

"The taunts and cries of hatred and anger, [from his reading public] the very epithets you bestow on me, are so familiar long ago in my reading that they sound to me ridiculously old and stale. The same thing has happened so many times over (that is, with the appearance of every original observer) that, if people were not very ignorant of literary history, they would be struck with the exact coincidence." R. W. Emerson, The Heart of Emerson's Journals edited by Bliss Perry, p. 137.

used ✓ "These novels will give way, by and by, to diaries or autobiographies; -- captivating books, if only a man knew how to choose among what he calls his experience/that which is really his experience, and how to record truth truly!" Emerson, Journals, pp. 158-59.

"Advantages of old age." I reached the other day the end of my fifty-seventh year, and am easier in my mind than hitherto. I could never give much reality to evil and pain. But now when my wife says perhaps this tumor on your shoulder is a cancer, I say, what if it is? Emerson, Journals, p. 285.

used ✓ "Physiology is none other than the study of Spirit incarnate." Bronson Alcott, American Transcendentalists, p. 99.

"the outward universe is to a great degree dependent upon our soul for its character and influence, and that by changes in our inward condition a corresponding change is produced in the objects with which we are surrounded. It is from the cast and disposition of our souls that external nature derives its hues and confirmation." (MORE) George Ripley, American Transcendentalists, p. 182.

X "He [the critic] must be inspired by the philosopher's spirit of inquiry and need of generalization, but he must not be constrained by the hard cemented masonry of method to which philosophers are prone." Margaret Fuller, American Transcendentalists, p. 299-300.

X "Choice implies apostasy. The pure unfallen soul is above choice.... Sinners choose; saints act from instinct and intuition: there is no parley of alien forces in their being." Bronson Alcott, American Transcendentalists, p. 310.

"Thought disintegrates and breaks this unity of soul; action alone restores it. Action is composition; thought decomposition." Bronson Alcott, American Transcendentalism, p. 317.

used ✓ "'with Emerson we never lose the sense that he is still seeking [his form] and Emerson's own alleged admission that his work lacks structure." H. James, quoted by Stephen E. Whicher, "Preface," Emerson: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Whicher, p. vi.

23
"Sherman Paul's Emerson's Angle of Vision (1952) reviewed the matter in a compelling defense of Emerson as a 'reconciler,' one of those who would heal the widening breach between man's rational self and his total self, the breach between knowledge and action, subject and object, thought and feeling, truth and poetry, man and nature." Whicher, "Preface," p. vii. (cf p107)

Emerson's "stress on action as the completion of thought." Whicher, "Preface," p. vii.

"A pioneer in the reintegration of vision which is and must be a major endeavor of modern thought." Whicher, "Preface," p. vii.

"The inescapable central question for Emerson always was: 'What is he?' -- 'What is man?'" Milton R. Konvitz "Introduction," Emerson: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 3.

"Emerson's eye was on man as he could be or become rather than on man as he was or is." Konvitz, p. 4.

"Nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part for part. One is seal and one is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind." Emerson, quoted by Konvitz, p. 5.

"Man determines his own existence. He makes himself by making his world. He makes the world by making himself!" Emerson, quoted by Konvitz, p. 6.

✓ "For Emerson, then, there is no antithesis between the practical and theoretical, between the humanistic and the scientific, between religion and science, between value and fact--as there is none between inner and outer, between man and nature, between character and event." Konvitz, p. 7.

[Like Eliot and Emerson, Mailer believes the past depends on the present for its existence and interpretation].

✓ Emerson "the principle of the centrality of man." Konvitz, p. 9.

"You are trying to make that man another you. One's enough." Emerson, quoted by Konvitz, p. 10.

"The world, he said, 'becomes at last only a realized well--the double of the man.'" Emerson, quoted by Konvitz, p. 11.

"Yeats has said somewhere that we begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy. The opposite was true of Emerson. Only as he refused to conceive life as tragedy could he find the courage to live." Whicher, p. 40.

"The Power within, from which all capacity stemmed, was itself wayward. The individual relying on it was a mere pipe for a divine energy that came and went as it would." Whicher, p. 42.

Emerson "a vision that claims all power now, and an experience that finds none." Whicher, p. 43.

"Like all puritans, Emerson was an extremist: he had to have entire assurance, or he had none at all." Whicher, p. 44.

Here Mailer almost catches up with himself--

Notes on Mailer

27

#4

The Amuses of the Night
Book Two: The Novel as History: The Battle of the Pentagon

"he has come to decide that if you would see the horizon from a forest, you must build a tower. If the horizon will reveal most of what is significant, an hour of examination can yet do the job -- it is the tower which takes months to build.... Of course, the tower is crooked, and the ~~telescopes~~ *telescopes* warped, but the instruments of all sciences -- history so much as physics -- are always constructed in small or large error; what supports the use of them now is our intimacy with the master builder of the tower, and the lens grinder of the telescopes (yes, even the machinist of the barrels) has given some advantage for correcting the error of the instruments and the imbalance of his tower."

MORE

Of great importance -- Mailer is justifying the first half of the book.

He is the lens and he is explaining the quality of the glass.

"the personification of a vision which will enable one to comprehend other visions better.

Any study of Mailer's non-fiction must have its root in his earlier work, the 5 novels and 3 books of earlier essays. For to understand the greatness of any fully developed organism one must be aware of the tendencies of its earlier growth. While surprising elements there will always be (Mailer's deep involvement in the events of the Pentagon march), still much of the strength of the main bole of any tree can only be understood by a look at the original cutting, stuck in the soil. Mailer's non-fiction, given his skills and philosophy was nearly inevitable, if still surprising. Hindsight provides the principal of growth. The tree metaphor breaks down insofar as the early growth of the tree is hidden by later additions of girth and limb

Chapter
on
theories
of
non-fiction
typed from
Vol 2
VIII:25-
28

but we have the early books, separate and apart, available for dissection. So if the tree metaphor is to prove valuable it must avail itself of a special kind of tree, a many-boled tree, with new growth always possible.

Some basic premises:

- X
1. That Mailer's works since Armies represents a reaction against the finely crafted novel of the sensibility. Like Ulysses and Moby-Dick Mailer provides us with ballast to counterpoise the subtle explorations of the modern sensibility. Mailer is also reacting against the novelist as craftsman. It is false and destructive to separate the artist from the man. Mailer's artistic stance is like Emerson's, he espouses unity. The novelist who sits at the desk is the same public loud or speaker or hot shit who roars in public. The whole self sits down to write and the whole self will be revealed in the writing, not just the trained, articulate self. There are for Mailer, as with Emerson, no neutral activities, no frivolous ones. Life and writing require total engagement, ~~To~~ report on the March on the Pentagon without informing us of the nature of the sensibility who describes it is a cop-out, half a job. James pointed out the value of point of view and showed how the stance of professional author could be shrouded so as to highlight the figures described. Since Mailer is describing himself, the shroud, of necessity, must be removed. Yet the lessons of James are still remembered, are still invaluable. What James does for Strether, the way he reveals the growth of consciousness, the mutations of reality principles, Mailer does for himself. Because he is intimately acquainted with himself, Mailer can best know what angle to point the mirror which reflects his past. James knew Strether because he created him--Mailer has even better credentials. For we can never check on Strether with anyone but James--Mailer can provide the same measure of intimacy as
- V
S
e
d
- Hawthorne's mirror story

used

James, yet we have ways to check on Mailer.

One question we might ask is what extras do we get in this form missing from autobiography. It is simply this: Mailer, by using the third person, has said to the reader, I am going to try and look at myself objectively; I will not be more humble in my evaluations of myself than I should, nor will I spare myself by hiding my follies, vanities, weaknesses or lusts. I understand that attempting to see oneself clearly is difficult because of the built-in myopia of self-justification--but these will be apparent.

intention: All faults may be forgiven. I am who has perfect command "Preface 1955" Random House 1945

Poe's comments on autobiography

The spots you see on the character will be more revealing of him because they won't be just humble admissions; they will be glaring or trivial growths or malformations in the structure of the eye itself. I will not be able to chalk up humility points as easily with my readers since I have already told them I have committed myself to their expurgation. I will get out of myself, or look back in myself as I stood at a certain point in history. Undoubtedly, there will be self-justifications despite all attempts for pure objectivity, but they will be more obvious since by my stance I have vowed to eliminate them.

(cf. Vol IX: 30 EE) remarks on objectivity in Poe's Maling St

2. Mailer is more of a transcendentalist than an existentialist, a transcendentalist by methodology, However, like Melville, for Mailer believes in evil. He is existential only insofar as he believes in the extent man's will can create a different existence. He does not believe man is alone, like Sartre or Camus. This is the crucial difference. Melville could neither believe nor disbelieve and was too honorable not to try to do one or the other. Mailer, out of his doubt, has created a tentative metaphysics as a buttress against the void. Far from being illusionary or precarious, it has carried him through a dozen books. It cannot be disproved, but it satisfies be-

used

X

used
lief without sidestepping the question of evil, Melville's transcendentalism was ruined by the problem of evil. Mailer dreamed of a God lesser than the traditional one who would not contradict the obvious inequities of the world.

- X
3. Journalism: Mailer saw that journalists failed because they did not consult their own deepest feelings about the events they reported, or if they consulted them, they suppressed them, which was worst. So Mailer hurls the Jamesian artist into the maw of events, giving that artist who was growing more and more sheltered ^{consider} (~~consider~~ Herzog) a taste of the hot lusts and greed of power politics, and forcing the fact-oriented journalist to enumerate the quivers of sensibility he had so long tied up.

NOTES ON MAILER

#5

31

X "Though his villains are usually active, evil to James is a negation. In this respect James, more in the tradition of Aquinas and Emerson than of Hawthorne and Melville, deviates from the modified Manicheanism prevalent in much of American literature. In James's fiction evil is not an active principle in the universe; there is no 'evil according to nature' and no devotion to evil for its own sake." J. A. Ward, "Henry James and the Nature of Evil," Critical Approaches to American Literature ed. Ray B. Brown and Martin Light, p. 123.

"It seems not unlikely, for instance, that the current preoccupation with matters of form is bound up with a tendency, by no means confined to literary quarters, to shy away from painful answers to complex questions of political morality." Leo Marx "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling and Huckleberry Finn," Critical Approaches to American Literature, p. 97.

X "When you organize one of the contradictory elements out of your work of art, you are getting rid not just of it, but of the contradiction of which it was apart; and it is the contradictions in works of art which make them able to represent to us--as logical and methodological generalizations cannot--our world and/or selves, which are also full of contradictions." Randall Jarrell, "Some Lines From Whitman," Critical Approaches to American Literature, pp. 24-25.

As Mark shows, Foster disagrees
"One cannot write stories in which, just as the crisis is approaching, the villain is killed by a falling meteor. Such things may occur in life, but they cannot in novels, which in their design and organization depict a truth that is free from the outrageous accidents of actuality." "Theodor Dreiser and the Divided Stream," Charles Child Walcutt, Critical Approaches to American Literature, p. 187.

"The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness; only power, pure power.... Power is not a means; it is an end." O'Brien in Orwell's 1984 ("Ministry of Love" chapter).

"The unique, nameless, humdrum, 'sinful' events that occur in profane time, the succession of which constitutes 'history' in the modern sense, were annually destroyed in ritual death, purification and rebirth. The actual and historical world were destroyed and reborn anew each year."

X "The present-day concept of a single, linear, non-sacred, evolutionary history, co-extensive with that of the physical cosmos, was unavailable to medieval pagans and Christians alike."

X Inevitably, a culture's concepts of history and of reality will be closely allied. Without a sacred time, eternal and beyond the power of history, there can be no reality beyond the actual. The function of ritual is to interrupt historical time and to synchronize it with sacred time. It is related to empirical actuality

X and to historical time insofar as it is the vehicle through which human actions are to acquire significance, transcending history by identification of the human and actual with the divine and mythical. Man's strongest impulse is not to destroy the empirical world; rather it is to transform it into the mythical world, to regain Eden in this life, and to synchronize once and for all, mythical and empirical reality." The Nature of Narrative by R. Scholes and R. Kellogg, pp. 134-35. (cf p 35*)

"Specifically, twentieth century narrative has begun to break away from the aims, attitudes, and techniques of realism." Nature of Narrative, p. 5.

assist "The novel-centered view of literature is an unfortunate one for two important reasons. First, it cuts us off from the narrative literature of the past and the culture of the past. Second, it cuts us off from the literature of the future and even the advance guard of our own day." Nature of Narrative, p. 8.

"The epic poem is as dead as the dinosaur. We can put together a synthetic epic with a superficial resemblance to the originals, just as we can fabricate a museum dinosaur; but the conditions which produced the originals have passed." Nature of Narrative, p. 11.

X "Literary evolution is in some ways more complex than biological evolution. It is a kind of cross between a biological and a dialectical process, in which different species combine to produce new hybrids, which can in turn combine with other old or new forms; and in which one type will beget its anti-type, which in turn may combine with other forms or synthesize with its antitypical originator." Nature of Narrative, p. 111.

see not in p 35
Dunder
X "Realistic fiction habitually invents an 'unhistorical' personage and then seeks to actualize the substance of the character's experience so as to convey a sense of reality, a representation of life." Nature of Narrative, p. 66. Mailer "invents," or uses, an historical character and then seeks to mythologize him. As did Whitman. Just opposite the method of the novelist but with approximately the same result. The character "Norman Mailer" partakes of the same reality as Lambert Strether or Robert E. Lee Prewitt. (cf p 35*)

X "The device of the intelligent but sympathetic observer situated at the center of the tale, as James never ceases to demonstrate in the Prefaces, makes for some of the most priceless values in fiction--economy, suspense, intensity." William Troy "Scott Fitzgerald--the Authority of Failure," Modern American Fiction, edited by A. Walton Litz, p. 134.

"The never resolved attitude toward money and social position in relation to individual worth." Troy, p. 136.

V
S
E
F
Fitzgerald was perhaps the last notable writer to affirm the Romantic fantasy, descended from the Renaissance, of personal ambition and heroism, of life committed to, or thrown away for, some ideal of self." L. Trilling, "F. Scott Fitzgerald," F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Man and His Work, edited by Alfred Kazin, p. 201.

"It is by a man's estimate of himself that we must begin to estimate him." Trilling, p. 201.

U
S
E
X
"Mythic' characters are impersonal. There is no distinction between their public and their private lives. Because they share their meaning with everyone, they have no secrets and no hidden corners into which they can retire for a moment, unobserved." Marcus Bewley speaking of Gatsby, "Scott Fitzgerald's Criticism of America," F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by Arthur Mizner, p. 131.

X
"Form is not tradition. It alters from generation to generation. Artists always seek a new technique, and will continue to do so as long as their work excites them. But form of some kind is an imperative." E. M. Forster, quoted by J. K. Johnstone in The Bloomsbury Group, p. 94.

*
U
S
E
Mailer began with the empirical personage (himself) and mythologizes it - just the opposite of the usual fictional method. It is his way to unite the mythical & empirical

37

NOTES ON MAILER

X "Huxley, unlike several of his Victorian predecessors who turned to medievalism for comfort, looked to ways of reforming the individual rather than society. Change the individual and you change society, he replied to the Marxist claim of first society and then the individual." A Reader's Guide to Great Twentieth Century English Novels by Fredrick Karl and Marvin Magalaner, p. 278.

Malcom X, in his Autobiography, describes how the old hustlers had gone over the edge, p. 216.

Malcolm X on the morality of the hustler, p. 311.

"You show me a black man who isn't an extremist and I'll show you one who needs psychiatric attention." Malcom X, Autobiography, p. 394.

X "There are, perhaps, only two ways in which a writer can acquire the understanding of environment which he can later turn to account: by having spent his childhood in that environment--that is, living in it at a period of life in which one experiences much more than one is aware of; and by having had to struggle for a livelihood in that environment--a livelihood bearing no direct relation to any intention of writing about it, of using it as literary material." T. S. Eliot, Introduction to Huck Finn, reprinted in Harcourt, Brace, World edition, p. 201. *
cf
p49

X Quote from Advertisements for Myself "It was a new dull load to lift and to bear [the middling success" of Deer Park, this knowledge that I had no magic so great as to hasten the time of apocalypse." (p.231) [Mailer does not believe that history is merely the working out of God's scheme, nor a random erratic collision of events, rather he is certain that it is unwritten (although moving along certain lines of force) and can be directed and redirected by the action of men. Men must do more than suffer and bear their fate, they must be movers and shakers who impose their vision on history, however recalcitrant it may be. So if Mailer did not bring about the time of apocalypse it was his own fault, he will not lodge the blame on fate or the perversities of other men.]

X Kierkegaard: "a crowd is untruth." [Here again Mailer's existentialism diverges from the European tradition, for Mailer, despite his emphasis on individuality and the imperatives of the self, still ponders the collective spiritual destiny of the U. S.; he talks about the dream life of the nation, and can create representative characters like "Red," the mechanic in Of A Fire on the Moon. In fact he sees himself as a micro-cosm of America, laden with all her ambiguities and complexities or as Norman Podhoretz calls him, "a battleground of history." The classic existentialist cannot and will not make connections between the individual and society--man, for Sartre, is alone. Mailer feels it's a Melvillian "joint stock world" and bridges and connections can and must be made between classes and ideological opposites in America. Like Emerson, Mailer espouses unity. His position in the N. Y. mayoralty race was that he was "to the right and left" of everybody else, a "Left-Conservative." Isolation and alienation are only steps in a dialectical process for Mailer. As he says (in Advertisements, p. 286) "not everyone is impotent, nor is our final fate, our human condition, necessarily doomed to impotence."]

V: 74 (MS) "Those endless ledgers he kept of the balance between horror and shame." While Mailer is always among the first to recognize his own weakness and penury of spirit, his belief that good can only be defined and recognized and valued by evil allows him to chalk up his failures to moral experience. So, he sees himself like a handball which travels faster as it heats up and heats up the more as it accelerates. Each carom off opposite walls gives it a greater velocity. It becomes more resilient and dynamic as it bounces off the front and back walls of good and evil or angles through complex caroms from the side walls of passion and fear or the overhead of transcendence. Coming to rest it cools and hardens, becomes increasingly impervious to outside force until served and smashed again. The danger with this metaphor (beside the obvious follies of a conceit more ingenious than just) is that it contends that movement is always to be preferred to inaction--a belief which Mailer proclaimed in "The White Negro." The values of contemplation, detachment and reflection, the values of rest, are shortchanged. And Mailer has consistently ignored and castigated them.]

used ✓

cf. Reuben notes

Mailer's dilemma: he does not feel one can write about the world from an omniscient point of view, the third person troubles him, yet writing in the first person he tends to create heroes who resemble himself (V: 99AD), another position he found intolerable because (AD p. 221) it was shameful to write about oneself so openly "it was a psychological violation" he says. The answer is to write about oneself in the third person, thereby avoiding the Jamesian pretence of understanding the world that such a view implies and yet avoiding the "psychological violation" of using the 1st person.] C.F. IX:93

X

VI: 21 (AD) "To be an existentialist, one must be able to feel oneself--one must know one's desires, one's rages, one's anguish, one must be aware of the character of one's frustration, and know what would satisfy it." "The White Negro"

Finally Mailer believes that man is more creative than destructive, that life is worth living, yet the sine qua non of life is the ability to feel, move and grow. If society stifles an individual, smothers him in conformity, then he cannot act in any moral way. Bound by the homogenization of technological society, man's first impulse is to escape--escape first, assertion of self first, change first--then morality, then creativity, then harmony, community, love.

used

VI: 22 (AD) "The psychopath murders--if he has the courage--out of the necessity to purge his violence, for if he cannot empty his hatred then he cannot love." This bears out my comments above. Violence, escape, action by which we open ourselves up to the murderous impulses society has created in us must precede any creative activity, i.e., love. Movement and action provides definition, which in turn allows response or reaction to the thing defined. This leads to greater consciousness, greater self-knowledge.]

Dream

April 22, p26

There are two classes of authors: the one write the history of their times, the other their biography.

NOTES
ON
MAILER

6

Aug. 28

p27

The art which only gilds the surface and demands merely a superficial polish, without reaching to the core, is but varnish and filigree. But the work of genius is rough-hewn from the first, because it anticipates the lapse of time and has an ingrained polish, which still appears when fragments are broken off, an essential quality of its substance. Its beauty is its strength. It breaks with a lustre, and splits in cubes and diamonds. Like the diamond, it has only to be cut to be polished, and its surface is a window to its interior splendors.

The Heart of
Thoreau's Journals
Dover Publications, Inc.
N.Y.: 1961

edited by
Odell Shepard

March 22

p30

We cannot well do without our sins; they are the highway of our virtue.

All a man's

p127

strength and all his weakness go to make up the authority of any particular opinion which he may utter. He is strong or weak with all his strength and weakness combined.

July 10 p.46

I am always struck by the centrality of the observer's position. He always stands fronting the middle of the arch, and does not suspect at first that a thousand observers on a thousand hills behold the sunset sky from equally favorable positions.

Do not tread on the heels

p51

of your experience. Be impressed without making a minute of it. Poetry puts an interval between the impression and the expression—waits till the seed germinates naturally.

distinction between journalism and creative non-fiction

Sept. 1

p56

Is not disease the rule of existence? There is not a lily pad floating on the river but has been riddled by insects. Almost every shrub and tree has its gall, oftentimes esteemed its chief ornament and hardly to be distinguished from the fruit. If misery loves company, misery has company enough. Now, at midsummer, find me a perfect leaf or fruit.

Sept. 5

p57

All perception of truth is the detection of an analogy; we reason from our hands to our head.

Feb. 18

p60

I have a commonplace-book for facts and another for poetry, but I find it difficult always to preserve the vague distinction which I had in my mind, for the most interesting and beautiful facts are so much the more poetry and that is their success. They are translated from earth to heaven. I see that if my facts were sufficiently vital and significant—perhaps transmuted more into the substance of the human mind—I should need but one book of poetry to contain them all.

I only know myself as a human entity, the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections, and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no

next page

194

Stepping-stones Age 40

March 18

Each new year is a surprise to us. We find that we had virtually forgotten the note of each bird, and when we hear it again it is remembered like a dream, reminding us of a previous state of existence. How happens it that the associations it awakens are always pleasing, never saddening; reminiscences of our sanest hours? The voice of nature is always encouraging.

I sit on the Cliff, and look toward Sudbury. I see its meeting-houses and its common, and its fields lie but little beyond my ordinary walk, but I never played on its common nor read the epitaphs in its graveyard, and many strangers to me dwell there. How distant in all important senses may be the town which yet is within sight! We see beyond our ordinary walks and thoughts. With a glass I might perchance read the time on its clock. How circumscribed are our walks, after all! With the utmost industry we cannot expect to know well an area more than six miles square, and yet we pretend to be travellers, to be acquainted with Siberia and Africa!

March 19

It is pardonable when we spurn the proprieties, even the sanctities, making them stepping-stones to something higher.

March 20

The fishes are going up the brooks as they open. They are dispersing themselves through the fields and woods, imparting new life into them. They are taking their places under the shivering banks and in the dark swamps. The water running down meets the fishes running up. They hear the latest news. Spring-aroused fishes are running up our veins too. Little fishes are seeking the sources of the brooks, seeking to disseminate their principles. Talk about a revival of religion! and business men's prayer-meetings! with which all the country goes mad now! What if it were as true and wholesome a *revival* as the little fishes feel which come out of the sluggish waters and run up the brooks toward their sources?

In order that a house and grounds may be picturesque and interesting in the highest degree, they must suggest the idea of necessity, proving the devotion of the builder, not of luxury. We need to see the honest and naked life here and there protruding. What is a fort without any foe before it, that is not now sustaining and never has sustained a siege? The gentleman whose purse is always full, who can meet all

1858 The Crowd and the Individual

demands, though he employs the most famous artists, can never make a very interesting seat. He does not carve from near enough to the bone. No man is rich enough to keep a poet in his pay.

April 3

The gregariousness of men is their most contemptible and discouraging aspect. See how they follow each other like sheep, not knowing why. Day & Martin's blacking was preferred by the last generation, and also is by this. They have not so good a reason for preferring this or that religion as in this case even. Apparently in ancient times several parties were nearly equally matched. They appointed a committee and made a compromise, agreeing to vote or believe so and so, and they still helplessly abide by that. Men are the inveterate foes of all improvement. Generally speaking, they think more of their hen-houses than of any desirable heaven. If you aspire to anything better than politics, expect no coöperation from men. They will not further anything good. You must prevail of your own force, as a plant springs and grows by its own vitality.

May 1

When I am behind Cheney's this warm and still afternoon, I hear a voice calling to oxen three quarters of a mile distant, and I know it to be Elijah Wood's. It is wonderful how far the *individual* proclaims himself. Out of the thousand millions of human beings on this globe, I know that this sound was made by the lungs and larynx and lips of E. Wood, am as sure of it as if he nudged me with his elbow and shouted in my ear. He can impress himself on the very atmosphere, then, can launch himself a mile on the wind, through trees and rustling sedge and over rippling water, associating with a myriad sounds, and yet arrive distinct at my ear; and yet this creature that is felt so far, that was so noticeable, lives but a short time, quietly dies and makes no more noise that I know of. I can tell him, too, with my eyes by the very gait and motion of him half a mile distant. Far more wonderful his purely spiritual influence—that after the lapse of thousands of years you may still detect the individual in the turn of a sentence or the tone of a thought!

May 6

The thinker, he who is serene and self-possessed, is the brave, not the desperate soldier. He who can deal with his thoughts as a material,

The Heart of Thoreau's Journals

edited by Idell Shepard N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1961. (45)

April 19

A man came to me yesterday to offer me as a naturalist a two-headed calf which his cow had brought forth, but I felt nothing but

1854 *A Huc of My Inmost Thought*

129

disgust at the idea and began to ask myself what enormity I had committed to have such an offer made to me. I am not interested in mere phenomena, though it were the explosion of a planet, only as it may have lain in the experience of a human being.

April 21

cf-134+166
top of page

Oct. 21

185

Is not the poet bound to write his own biography? Is there any other work for him but a good journal? We do not wish to know how his imaginary hero, but how he, the actual hero, lived from day to day.

1858 *The Crowd and the Individual*

135

demands, though he employs the most famous artists, can never make a very interesting scene. He does not care how near enough to the bone. No man is rich enough to keep a poet in his pay.

April 19

A man came to me yesterday to offer me as a naturalist a two-headed calf which his cow had brought forth, but I felt nothing but

disgust at the idea and began to ask myself what enormity I had committed to have such an offer made to me. I am not interested in mere phenomena, though it were the explosion of a planet, only as it may have lain in the experience of a human being.

April 21

cf-134+166
top of page

I only know myself as a human entity, the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections, and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it, and that is no more I than it is you. When the play—it may be the tragedy of life—is over, the spectator goes his way. It was a kind of fiction, a work of the imagination only, so far as he was concerned.

IX: 3-4 (EE) "If they [heavyweights] become champions they begin to have inner lives like Hemingway or Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy or Faulkner, Joyce or Melville or Conrad or Lawrence or Proust. Hemingway is the example above all. Because he wished to be the greatest writer in the history of literature and still be a hero with all the body arts age would yet grant him, he was alone and he knew it." [Another clue to Mailer's obsession with Hemingway. Both need to excell in arts other than literary, both were craftsmen who eschewed the sanctification of craft because they decided being men was finally more important and to be a man, a heroic man, meant that one could not live with a single excellence. A hero to their conception is one whose total person is compounded of sufficient greatness to excell at whatever ^{one} put ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ one's hand to. Of course this wears off with age; assaulting every challenge in the myriad arenas of life tends to make the hero wary. So Mailer speaking to a college professor in an Illinois bar, said he no longer worried about the things he could not do in answer to a question about why he could not finally become a hero to blacks, why he was finally rejected by them. Mailer is mellowing, as he must, as Hemingway did. Both, however, resisted every loss and shrinkage of ability and recognition of weakness, age and experience exposed to them.]

IX: 12-14 (EE) "Keep the act of writing simple. If you write a thousand words on a morning and they proved later to be a good thousand words, and not a single formal thought entered your conscious mind while you were writing them, well all the formal thought in you had gone into the writing--none of it had been fed back into the ego-pool thinking box, there to be wasted."

✓ used
✗
Mailer told me that his "journalism" came easier than his novels. Could it be that he did not trouble himself with formal thoughts, strategy sessions of novelistic intent and program, and just opened up the deep well without even realizing he did. Perhaps he wrote the creative-non-fiction the way Coleridge wrote "Kubla Khan" (minus the drugs, which he did use in Deer Park). It flowed majestically, that sense of strain was absent that permeated Barbary Shore and Deer Park, and as he got closer to Armies his work appeared (was) more organic, natural, and free from all literary pedantries, sweats about the nature of characters as well as from the charts he used for the structure of Naked. Yet Mailer has been unable to see the ease with which his non-fiction was written as an indication of merit. In fact, he suspects these works of being transient, ephemera (as in Preface to this book). He has been unable to shake the idea, pumped up so much by Hemingway, of the Novelist as the grandest thing a man can be in western civilization. The Novelist is the hero par excellence. He is a slave to the old distinction between noble novelist and meretricious journalist. Finally, because Mailer believes that quality, depth, greatness can never result from mere craft (that bag of tricks), but only from the depths of character which cannot be cheated or gained fraudulently, we must conclude that Armies, which is written out with less apparent structure or plan than any of his other books, is indeed his greatest book. To write Armies Mailer had some few examples before him: Walden, Education of H. Adams, perhaps some of the great autobiographies and confessions, but no established genre to operate within. For Naked he had Dos Passos and Farrell (and Moby-Dick), for Barbary Shore he had Orwell and Malraux, for Deer Park nothing except Dostoyevsky and Fitzgerald and West. What I am getting at is that Armies is an existential effort, new ground was to be explored. It is as if Mailer extruded the book out of the demands of the time.

use it
friends

For it was a book which drew on the 19th century social novel as well as the Jamesian novel of sensibility, the Marxist-Leftist works of the 30's and the best of modern journalism. It was written, in a sense, out of America's crying need to comprehend herself. None of the other forms worked. Only Henry Adams stood in a comparable position and, indeed, it was a much different coign of vantage.

IX: 14-15 (EE) A Hollywood movie: "It's art by act of war, however, and the actors get ground between them." [producer and director] On the previous page Mailer compares the act of writing to the act of love where as a Hollywood movie = an Army Medical exam. So Poirier is wrong about Mailer seeing art as a war. Yes there is a tension of sorts the writer wrestling with his unconscious but we need not call it a war--call it creative interplay--like sex, like the act of love. There can be murder in it as one stifles one's unconscious impulse, but love too, as one opens one's conscious mind to receive seeds from the deep. What I am getting at is this; Poirier says Mailer is obsessed by war, that he sees his work as a war effort--I say no, Mailer is interested in RELATION, an idea larger than war for it includes, subsumes war under its larger rubric. It is the transcendental, romantic way of seeing the world.

cf p. 41 Thoreau on analogy
cf p. 159 on relation

IX: 17-18 (EE) "The merit of the documentary still depends upon the importance of the situation, and not its subtlety or nuance."

"Heisenberg's Principle of Uncertainty probably applies. Do you remember? The particle of the atom being observed by the recording apparatus is directly (unhappily for science) affected in its movement by the presence of the apparatus. So with the documentary. There is its flaw--right in the germ plasm of the documentary. The camera, recording a real man, creates a relative unreality. If I know the camera is recording me, the real Norman Mailer, playing Norman Mailer, than I am in the unhappy position of working directly for my own product, me."

USED

"The fact that everybody knows what he [any person in a documentary] will say, before he says it, produces that characteristic woodenness which besets the documentary, the television interview, and any photographic situation where the protagonist is there in his real name. The consequences are too numerous, the traps too consequential for the man who bears his own name to reveal a real theme to the camera."

[All the matter on p. 108 is enormously crucial to my thesis. This is as close as Mailer gets to explaining the switch to third person-personal in Armies. First, the matter of a documentary's importance being dependent on the situation it records. Certainly the March on the Pentagon was of proportions large enough to merit recording. And yet unlike documentaries, Mailer does it with "subtlety and "nuance." He adds these, borrowing from his Jamesian tools. The Heisenberg principle is inoperative in this case because Mailer almost certainly had no more than a general idea of how he would write of his own experience and involvement. In other words, he did not know he was being watched (by himself). So he was not, during the living (or acting) of the March "in the unhappy position of working directly for my own product, me." But this is not the case with the books that follow Armies, for in those he knows he will comprehend himself, write of himself in the approximate way he has in Armies, and so acts differently. Armies was a one-time effort. There is a freshness of approach, a feeling of virgin perception that is not there in Miami or A Fire on the Moon (they have a course, their particular excellence, but this point of view thing is not there. All this bears out T. S. Eliot's observation (in his essay on Huck Finn) that only experiences the writer undergoes before he is a writer or experiences of great stress where the sense of "otherness" is absent can ever be used in a novel.]

cf p. 37

on the critic's method

USED

IX: 24-25 (EE) [A] mouthful. What this statement reveals is that Mailer is essentially an a priori thinker. His hypotheses are large but so well constructed and formulated they can illuminate almost any problem. These a priori theses are in a state of constant qualification and transmutation as sense information, fact, unconscious impulse, pump in new information. The hypothesis, however, may be larger than the information, more than the sum of its details, which makes it antithetical to inductive thinking. It cannot ignore fresh information but it cannot be slave to it. It is comprehensive, able to assimilate, and this is its weakness and its strength. For inductive thinkers are like masons, mortaring courses of fact upon detail and able to alter the forms of their walls only after great misgiving and grief, whereas deductive thinkers are like architects who can eliminate a wall or a garret or a facade from their structures easily, whenever good reasons are given. But, of course, they will never surrender the hill upon which their castle is built, whereas the brick masons of a posteriori thinking, the technocrats, slide their monotonous forms all over the countryside, here building a watch tower, there a dungeon. Doom awaits the lord of induction if he loses his fortress but as long as the essential pillars, arches, and drawbridges of his castle are firm he can tolerate the loss of any particular outbuilding. Since there is no central court, no indispensable atrium which the mason constructs, his city has no vital spot which can be violated. But before this metaphor escapes its referrent, we might note that Mailer, in lauding Podhoretz's critical method, is attacking the detail-mongering New Criticism. Implicit in his statement is the idea that the best of critics do not come to works of literature like a lab assistant comes to his Petri dishes, empty of expectation, free from bias or theory but just the opposite. The best critics have developed, if flexible, world views, literary views, in short, they have all the values a good architect has and a brick mason does not.] (cf p 165)

cf IX: 25-27 (the book form)

XX

JS

IX: 27-28 (EE) [Here we have the theoretical formulations behind the 5 books (Armies, Miami, Fire on the Moon, Prisoner, St. George) that Mailer will write after this essay. He specifically states the difference between autobiography and a mid-career self-estimate such as Making It and Armies, and equates as well the writing of such a work with the complexities of creating a fictional character like Lambert Strether. Such a work is truly existential (as Mailer mentions in his letter to me) because it considers an ongoing process, a human life that is still being lived, a life whose end or achievements are not known. Crucial is the idea that the hero of such a self-estimate will be a subjective--or literary--construct, not an examination of self such as Ben Franklin's over the shoulder look. Mailer (and Podhoretz) must look simultaneously forward and back--the hero is (in Whitman's terms), an acme of all that has been and an encloser of all that will be. Although he mentions the difficulties of discussing and reporting real people and events he does not, because Podhoretz is his subject and because Mailer never reveals all (despite what Poirier says), discuss his own use of third-person personal as a literary device. As Mailer has said, "point-of-view is the strongest lever an artist has." And indeed this decision to resurrect a point of view not used since Henry Adams is perhaps the most momentous of his career (Gertrude Stein, writing through the persona of Alice B. Toklas is another turn on the screw but no amount of detachment could force her to explore, rather than propagandize herself.) It is such a momentous decision because it is the technical masterstroke which fulfills the theoretics of the Podhoretz essay. Mailer is just as willing and fearsome about undertaking the journey into self as Podhoretz, but he has the tools to do so. Podhoretz must always be caught in the puffery of the 1st person. To my knowledge, Mailer has never discussed this switch, except in very general terms, perhaps because it is so all-fired simple. The point, it seems to me, aches to be made.]

IX: 29 (EE) "Let us take up an existential hypothesis: The Norman Podhoretz in the book called Making It is, we will assume, a fictional character, an editor of a well-established magazine."

Then so must Norman Mailer, writer and brawler be a fictional character. But what then is his relation to the real Mailer? Perhaps the relation of a film of a person playing himself to the man in the flesh? No, because someone other than the person is doing the filming. The relation must be closer than, say, between Prufrock and Eliot, Jake Barnes and Hemingway (Philip Young deserves a nod here) or Rojack and Mailer. Mailer has said (in Advertisements) that he had been writing long enough to avoid the mistake of creating absolute surrogates in his novels. I think what Mailer is getting at in calling Podhoretz a fictional character is two fold: (1) Podhoretz in writing about himself in the motions of mid-career is necessarily encountering a dynamic character, a character whose relation to his author is necessarily like that between, say, James and Strether and so (2) Podhoretz must apprehend his dynamic self with the tools of a novelist. Podhoretz, the fictional character, is fictional because he is seen through the lens of the novelist. The Heisenberg principle all over again. The difference between Mailer and Podhoretz is that Mailer has better tools, better lenses--he has the device of 3rd person personal.

U
S
g
d

repeated p. 163
IX: 35-37 (EE) "The saint and the psychopath were united to one another, and different from the mass of men. They were closer to existence. They shared a sense of the present so powerful that memory, caution, precedent, tradition, commonplace, project and future enterprise were nerveless before their sense of the present in their mind and body." A writer with an acutely developed, almost over-active historical imagination, Mailer cannot fit into either category. It seems to me more and more the grossest contradiction in Mailer's thought. For on the one hand he bewails the separation of men from tradition, castigates their technology which would control nature, and therefore time and space, forgetting the agony and ecstasy of the past, yet on the other ^{hand} sets up as a hero a mindless hipster who neither knows or cares about the past. It is an unusable item. ^{to his hipster} Finally, I think that this inconsistency must be explained by Mailer. For what he has are two fine assertive insights (1) that technological society with its rationalistic, scientific, inductive, a posteriori assumptions is in grave danger of becoming barbaric, isolated, cut off from the humanism and values of its past on the run of its lock-step thinking which began when people like Francis Bacon wanted a way to measure its metaphors (see "The Argument Delivered" in Cannibals and Christians). Mailer sees that our sensibility is getting more and more dissociated and yearns for the time of the Shakespearean moment when men exercised their rationality and intuition, their inductive and deductive modes of perception in harmony, and so (2) he posits a hero who lives on his nerve endings, operates on the impulses of his unconscious, "Romantic rebel who ignores rather than hates the past. The hipster, the saint or psychopath, the existentialist, is Mailer's answer to the technician, but, of course, he is just as much in danger of being a totalitarian of the intuition as the technocrat of the 20th century is in danger of becoming a totalitarian of the rationalistic. Where is the harmony? Well, Diana Trilling saw this paradox in 1962 and perhaps would have been pleased if she had fathomed Mailer's new hero (Mailer, himself) and guessed, as Mailer did, that Aquarius was the hero with the unified sensibility. It is as if it took Mailer 20 years of venomous attack on the technocrat to finally get to the point where he could create a hero who did more than just oppose the excesses of the technocrat. The hipster hero was not the answer to the excesses of the technocrat, the scientist, the military-industrial magnate; the hipster was a reaction to him. Mailer was ^{unwieldy} ~~enmeshed~~ in a dialectic for 20 years. Technocrat = thesis, Marlon Faye = antithesis, Aquarius

cf. Mailer's critique of the hipster in Advertisements

U
S
E
D

cf. p. 167

cf. 57

= synthesis. The truth of the hipster is the truth of opposition. Mailer needed to create him in order to fathom the horrors of his opposite. Still Mailer in a third theoretical position knew all along that the value of the hipster lay in his ability to promote the dialectical process. Change, Mailer recited endlessly, must come before creation. Faye was a wrecking ball who clunked through the brick walls of uniformity and conformity; he smashed a hole in the walls so Aquarius could walk through.

U
E
O

More, the hipster must be criminal because it was the last way to be creative in a stifling civilization which burned and bathed modern man in oppressive security. In the gloom of the Eisenhower years no one but the most loud, blatant and destructive personality could get any notice. An Aquarius would never get a hearing. Hip, Mailer says, "has almost no interest in viewing human nature, or better, in judging human nature, from a set of standards conceived a priori to the experience, standards inherited from the past." "The White Negro," Advertisements, p. 317 (VI: 23) (cf p173)

U
3
E
D

used

IX: 43 (EE) [For the liberal attempting to make amends to the Blacks.] "Progress depends on anesthetizing the past." [Progress has no stomach for guilt or memory (unless it be nostalgia); progress has no use for superstition or taboo; progress wants results--NOW. Ascertaining the dynamic position a man might hold in the great chain of being, determining his rung on the ladder from lifeless form to angel is not a fit concern for the rational "humanist." What is needed is a better garbage compacter, more bowling allies and plenty of reruns of "Laugh-In." The obsession with the cosmic scheme of the Lord died when Faust tried to apply Baconian reason to eschatology. Marlowe knew it, even if he was awed by the possibilities of such power. The past, for the liberal, for the technocrat, was ignorance. It was the Age of Enlightenment which dreamed up the name "Dark Ages."]

used

IX: 47 (EE) "there is no need to assume that the black man will prove morally superior to the white man." [No, but he has a chance to make a choice between good and evil, because he is alive to possibility, he has potential, he has not been tracked. Change must precede choice, individuality comes before morality. Neutrality of the psyche admits no chance of moral dilemma and so no opportunity to choose the right and good. Because America has linked morality with social and economic success it has constricted human possibility. One cannot choose any more. The defining characteristic of western man for 1600 years was his ambivalence when confronted with moral choice, Faust is the prime example, of course, yet he changed the rules of the game for he wished to make the choice one between knowledge and power on the one hand and subservience and humility on the other, rather than between good and evil. Medieval man sinned with full knowledge of what he did; Faustus could not recognize evil as such. And western man adopted, essentially, this Faustian view. Evil was no longer a temporary pact with the devil but, rather a refusal to believe he existed. Faustus saw and conversed with Mephistopheles but could not believe he was damned. So too with modern man. Evil is merely ignorance, poverty or lack of power. Time magazine serves as a PR agent for the devil without knowing it.]

Because Blacks are still alive to the moral spectrum (through their senses Mailer would say) they are not dead-ended on the technological highway. They may damn themselves but it will be out of hate and anger rather than ignorance.]

X

IX: 51-52 (PS) "Since PW could also stand for Prisoner of War (which he could amend to Prisoner of Wedlock, for he had never been able to live without a woman) he had another name for himself, the PW, Prisoner of Prizewinner?" [Mailer here reveals his continuing fascination with ways of seeing himself--searching always for an uncluttered, informing point of view. Indeed, writing for Mailer (as he says in his essay on Podhoretz)

*cf p. 11

is an exercise in self-exporation, finding truth at the end of a pencil. So he is never from a new metaphor for himself--Listen to the list--the brute, the prisoner (of war, of wedlock), the director, the Advocate, the script writer, the novelist, Aquarius, the Reporter, the prisoner of sex, the Acolyte and many others. These are in fact simulations, roles, alternate selves Mailer puts on to get the feel of a new psyche. His obsession with his public response can be explained to a certain extent by this obsession with point of view. For the feedback from the public is a partial measure of the efficacy of the role. The world role should not imply that these projections are spurious--but rather that they are just that--projections. Mailer has often said he aspired to be a Renaissance man, a man of many skills and parts and so each projection is a true revelation (on the screen of the reading public mainly) of some facet of his character. These projections, as I have called them, are not merely revelations of unlit facets for Mailer does not accept the classical substantialist theory of character which holds in effect that man's character is graven on a stone from his birth. Rather, Mailer feels the future is unwritten, that personality and character grows and changes and perhaps withers or atrophies. So these projections are sometimes merely simulations of new character possibility, simulation, which if they fit well enough, become real.]

IX: 53-54 (PS) "A defendant could serve as his own lawyer, but not as his own judge. By his presence in the discussion he would be forced to occupy all the seats." [Mailer reveals that his stance vis a vis himself in the book is objective. He is mandated to objectively. Of course the fact that one person advocates and wields the gavel simultaneously puts the proceedings in such a court as does not exist in any other literary ^{venue} court. The only thing that guarantees due process (to continue the metaphor) is Mailer's own commitment to judicial integrity. A subjective integrity at that--but according to Mailer's lights--and my own--this is the best kind. One's own commitment to literature as the deepest, most profound voice of man necessitates an acceptance and belief in this kind of integrity. Shakespeare was no ideologue; it is certainly a mistake to attribute certainly any political position to him. He speaks as an artist not a philosopher, yet we believe he may have spoken more wisely than any man who ever lived. My point is that those who believe that literature tells us more of the human condition than any other discipline would be guilty of a grave inconsistency were they to say that Mailer's claim to be able to judge himself in a literary work is an untenable one.]

IX: 54-55 (PS) "The Acolyte" p. 34. "Damn Smog! Damn filthy polluted anomalous greed choked monster-breeding machine of an inchoate land--it forced one daily back to the all but used-up revolutionary of the spirt." [There is the fundamental opposition. Mailer, for all his admiration of America, will not acquiesce into patriotism or unqualified admiration--he must be revolutionary, must oppose the idiocies of technology and rationalism. To oppose such forces one needs be a revolutionary. Put it this way, Mailer is a revolutionary of the intuition because that's where ^{used} the work is needed. Leave the celebration of the country to the VFW and Amvets. Somebody must get out and scream about the horrors of the land. In a romantic time Mailer might be a reactionary, so concerned is he to keep a balance, purity between the rational and instinctual. Shelley might be perceived as an ineffectual cream-puff who had lost his footing on his masthead perch. This awareness of Mailer's underlying concern with the unified sensibility is most crucial to any deep understanding of Mailer.]

cf 53

IX: 56 (PS) "Whether the revolution was the most beautiful or diabolical idea of man." (what precedes this is crucial to understanding this)

X [Like many another passage the above has the seeds of all of Mailer's themes, obsessions and theories: his anger at the establishment, his waning belief in his power to change the establishment, his own desire to write the great novel and his fear that he can't, his belief that he can judge himself (indeed this book and the others of creative non-fiction are part of that process) and finally the underlying theme and belief of his whole canon, that reason is killing instinct and the process, which began in the Renaissance, appeared irreversible.]

cf C+C pp 307-11, p103 Notebook

X IX: 58-9 (PS) "the Renaissance was a period in which men dared, as perhaps never before in history, to allow themselves to pursue the line of their thought and embark on exploration with the idea that such activities were good and valid in themselves and so did not have to be initiated with external blessing or faced to scurry under the shadow of inviolable taboo, but rather that the world was a theater, and nature a laboratory open to the adventurer with an inquiring mind." [From this one would think Mailer would be on the side of Francis Bacon, that trumpeter of a new age, as he called himself, but that is not the case. Rather, it is sure proof that Mailer does not deny the value and glory of adventures of the mind; it shows that he understands the merit of reason's struggle with reality, yet cannot believe that all of man's worth and greatness can be found in the activity alone. Somewhere during the cleaving of reality with the sharp knife of reason, the act must seek and receive, remain open to the deep pulses from the unconscious, must bend them to his mind's life with metaphor, else reason becomes sanctified and instinct shrivels.]

IX: 59-60 (PS) [Millet] "She is also one of those minds, totalitarian to the core, which go over to hysteria, abuse (and liquidation at the end of the road) whenever they are forced to build their mind on anything more than a single premise."

[There is no single premise at the base of Mailer's writing, unless one can call his idea of an embattled God, a premise and that partakes ^{more} of the nature of paradox. For Mailer is first of all uncertain as to whether his notion is correct, and, second, unsure as to who is winning or why. Is it the Lord or the Devil who was behind the genius of the Renaissance or the flight to the moon? If the Renaissance was the time when reason got a fingerhold on man's psyche, it was also the time of Shakespeare, Marlowe and Donne. So he defines his world with rings of paradox (you'll never catch him using "parameter") and describes himself as a "Left-Conservative." He is a former drug addict who feels drugs are the devil's tool yet still prescribes them for experts, a non-smoker who used to smoke three packs a day, a drinker who calls bourbon, "his blood," yet says one of the most defeating things he can conceive of is losing control of himself via alcoholism. He believes in work and has written twenty books yet flounders about in the most non-productive activities. Hating the media, he has appeared on every talk show in existence. A firm believer in monogamy he has been married ^{five} four times and has 8 or 9 children. The paradoxes are endless yet the core to all is that Mailer is a transcendentalist who must view the world as a set of relations. The world to him is a set of "linked analogies" and he cannot accept any view less simple. And so his relationship with his own self, artist to historical figure, novelist to persona is most crucial.]

USED

IX: 61 (PS) [medical advances made childbirth an easy thing] "then women began to be insulated from the dramatic possibility of a fatal end. If that had once been a possibility real enough for them to look at their mate with eyes of love or eyes of

IX: 32 (EE)

hate but know their man might yet be the agent of their death, conceive them of the lost gravity of the act."

[Followed to its end Mailer's logic would put us back in the caves. This is another indication of his desire for the informing value of extreme situations. Well, I'd call it totalitarian desire for dramatics. Against all costs Mailer would keep each and every act of man fully charged with good and ill. It denies the logic of civilization. Mailer would reject all the fruits of reason--even if these fruits would save lives--he is not discriminating enough about the virtues of rationality and science. Although he does say "It is like all argument, an exaggeration." cf 161

IX: 61

IX: 63 (PS) "What is a novelist but a general who sends his troops across fields of paper?" [Here Poirier could quote with an eye to underlining his thesis that Mailer, sees life as a struggle, War, Poirier feels, is Mailer's omnibus metaphor, and it no doubt gets heavy use. But Mailer believes in other forms of contact than war. The lines quoted above on Lawrence show that Mailer also believes in and seeks communion, the commingling of forces and all the magnetism and powers of confluence which drive objects together. It is relation which Mailer looks for, be it war, intercourse, boxing, politicking, cops and crooks, connecting with a reader, parties, literary fueds, celebrative event and enterprise, like the filming of a movie. He seeks the interrelatedness of all things. Call it transcendentalism.]

IX: 64-65 (PS) "It was possible to assume the Nazis may have been a vanguard of the plague who came close to achieving a total technologizing of a state. The confusion was that they had called for a return to traditional, even primitive roots of existence and had indicted the Jews as the whippets of the unisexual, classless future. If Hitler had done more to accelerate such a future than any Jew ever born (since the Second World War had been a centrifuge to drive technology into every reach of social life), his political genius had been to do it in the name of its opposite. Blood had more to tell us than the machine, he was forever telling us as he built the machine."

[These remarks cast light on Gen. Cummings of The Naked and the Dead and a precise understanding of the nature of fascism.]

(PS) pp 130-33

(PS) p 166

X

[Mailer, sounding like a hopped-up Henry Adams, explores the relationship between technology, Christianity, Nazism and Judiasm, coming up with the somewhat fantastic conclusion that "in the seed of Christianity was an origin of technology, and even conceivably an orgin of human mediocrity." Because the primitive is opposed to technology and Christ struck a mighty blow against primitive tradition by forgiving the sons of the father, therefore Christianity is the creator of technology. Chop-logic. Here Mailer shows his anti-rationalist tendencies, his unmitigated belief in the primitive, a belief admitting of no qualification whatsoever. Was there no good to be gained by this act of forgiveness? Were the centuries when man labored and suffered before Christian civilization, a happy and better time than, say, England from 1500-1640? Only a fierce anger at the modern world, a loathing of all the gifts and fruits of reason could make anyone wish to return to the caves. If Mailer lived in the world of Huxley's Brave New World he would have chosen to live on the reservation with the Savage. Myopic, one way thinking.] cf 161

cf (P.P.) p. 148 M. says he lives in
a no man's land between
rationality and
mysticism

U
S
E
D

cf p. 35
M. in Melville's
novel / points out that
Melville's existentialism
is a mixture of
mysticism + nihilism

p. 7-8
cf p. 95
p. 97-98
p. 101

U
S
E
D

Conversely, the technocrat believes
all can be known once his
measuring devices are refined.
So Melville neither pretends that
all can be known through
reason nor that nothing can
be known but subjective
reality. The universe is in
PROCESS; it is neither
an immutable unchanging
machine nor a wilderness
of phenomena. It is dynamic
and man can sense the
proportions of its tensions
and interactions. The Deist
can know what reason cannot
understand, but it can
know something. All this
is a product of Melville's
idea of a struggling limited
God. Melville should have
had Melville to talk with
instead of Hawthorne on these
matters when they drank
brandy and discussed the
affairs of the universe.

Existential

(PASCAL)

Epitaph

U
S
E
D

Regarding the mass understanding of the
universe Melville stands in between the
existential absurdist and the rational positivist
technocrat. To the one phenomena are disconnected,
non-contingent and appalling - they wait
for a God who never arrives, yet they
yearn for him. The technocrat is functionally
an agnostic. Like Ben Franklin (their historical
prototypes) God is not important, only those
things which can be weighed and measured
and described are of interest. Unlike the
technocrat Melville lacks this absolute
confidence that all of the significance
of the universe can be hammered out in
the laboratory. The deepest messages
from the Overworld cannot be picked up
with scientific instruments. ~~They~~
~~But~~ Rather they ~~can~~ only be
mediated through human sensibility as
it moves through the world. Man
himself is a measure of the universe's
significance (in the Emersonian sense)
But there is no pretense to finality to with
the technocrat. The absurdist finds no
meaning outside himself; he is adrift on
a world of chaos and non-meaning.

U
S
E
D

63
used

IX: 65-66 (PS) "Yet try to decide there is design in the universe, that humans embody a particular Intent, assume just once there is some kind of destiny intended--at the least!--intended for us, and therefore human beings are not absurd, not totally absurd, assume some idea (or at least some clash of Idea versus ideas) is in operation--and then sex cannot comfortably prove absurd. For it is obviously difficult to live with a metaphysics where humans are endowed with design yet the act which makes them is empty of it, more difficult than to assume the design has been given some first sense of what it can become by the character of the presence in which it was made. What a long way of saying good fucks make good babies."

The design Mailer sees in the Universe seems much like that Emerson sees, all things interlocked, all acts significant, all life in a grand dynamic tension, all this embodying a conception complex and unknown in the final reasons but THERE, visible sometimes. As Eliot said once, "One is either a naturalist or a supernaturalist." There is no middle ground. Finally, the acts of man have significance or not. Mailer, like Emerson, endows human venture with an enormous potential. To Emerson it is half the universe--if Mailer cannot ~~accept~~ ^{accept} this he still is willing to find more significance and value in human action than any American has since Emerson published "Nathaniel" in 1836.]

(cf p 167) IX: 67-69 (PS) In arguing that women unconsciously choose when intercourse will be fruitful out of some dark knowledge of their body Mailer appears to deny chance. Sensing the linked analogies of the universe, Mailer pushes for correspondences which may not exist. No phenomena is without significance Mailer would say, no act is random or without meaning, each movement in the physical world is the working out of some cosmic conception. Perhaps, but the amount of significance one assigns to any particular event must vary. I prefer to think God has allowed chance as a wild card to keep men from turning the universe into a machine. The chain of causality is longer than Mailer would like to believe. Like the Puritans he would find significance, great significance, in every sick cow and capsized dory, every rumble of the bowels and random fornication. Any person who is not an atheist would agree that the procreative act is significant but to subscribe to a theory that each woman would gestate a Napoleon seems exorbitant. God may intend that some mediocrity be produced in the world. Still Mailer's desire to seek meaning in the welter of circumstance and phenomena of the world is praiseworthy and alien to the scientific rationalism which denies meaning to the context of an event. Produce babies in bottles and jars and some eerie race of unspeakable blandness will occur--depend on it. So finally it is a matter of focus--where and how much emphasis to put on the importance of phenomena. The remarkable and precious are shunted to statistics by our technological society and Mailer opposes this. That has to be good. Perhaps it is part of the divine scheme that man should pass through a period of technological atrophy and then in a hundred, a thousand years, react to it. But if you believe as Mailer does, that the future is not written, then it becomes incumbent upon you to oppose such a development. Everything becomes important, everything a sign of the fortunes of the Lord's struggle with the Devil, if one believes in such a struggle. Mailer's vision of an embattled God forces him to be continuously anxious about manifestations of how the struggle of the Lord is going. He cannot resign himself to the cosmic scheme of the Lord if that scheme is endangered. The devil is wily, one must be wary and alert for signs of weakness in the lines of battle. As Melville said, "Ourselves are Fate." Mailer believes this and therefore cannot ~~see~~ ^{accept} any act as part of the Lord's scheme. Mailer, like Hemingway's major in the story "In Another Country," cannot reconcile himself to the brutalities and inanities of life. Disbelieving in a Deity who measures men solely by their ability to strain against certainty, who judges them by how well

they bear the burden of his fate, Mailer must resist every thrust he judges to emanate from the devil. Of course this gives him carte blanche to oppose or support whatever he will because there are no guides--none but the equilibrium of the inner self, the Navigator of the unconscious. For the unconscious is our link to the primal, our alleyway to the cosmic. We can trust it Mailer feels. But rationality has repressed and stifled and confused the messages we receive from the vasty deeps of self. Mailer believes, I'd say, that since 1600 the devil has been in ascendancy and his game plan is to buy man's best instincts in technology, static, statistics and plastic. The messages from the Lord via the instincts are muffled and confused. *of p 97*

used

Aquarius "was forever ready to look for the devil in ~~may~~ a plain case: the nature of the undramatic Satan, true evil one, was to conceal himself, after all." (p. 23 *(SE)*) (Vol. VI: 44)

IX: 70(PS) "It was easier to conceive of that microscopic existence (with its precious cargo of chromosomes) as the heart of some profound emotion, even as the limb of a soul seeking to be born, than to try to believe that *this one* effort which would succeed out of the myriad of lost efforts was neither rapt nor soulful nor even sensate--just an automatic transfer of cargo. No, one did not want to believe that."

[More clues. Mailer wants to believe man can make his will felt, his actions and desires felt. Sex must mean a *ceating* of one's best rather than a discharge elicited by friction. Free will, man's ability to move and change the universe, is what Mailer is finally pushing for. So he would not "want to believe" that the start of a new life was only the push and pull of an organ. No beauty or purpose there. So he does believe in chance, but purposeful chance. The sperm has only a chance to survive, but it must be good to make it.]

(17)

Some Issues:

- Can the artist effect change in society or only reflect it?
- What effect does the participation of the critic in events have on his recreation of them and his credibility?
- What is the method and value of the novel as social criticism vis a vis the method and value of journalism?
- Is creative non-fiction (such as Mailer ~~claims~~ ^{seems} to write) a legitimate genre or a bastard form and what special merit does it have?
- Is the artist merely a barometer of social change or an effector of it?
- What, precisely, are the kinds of social change effected by the artist?
- Is Mailer a stunt man of the arts or a serious dedicated thinker and mover regarding society?
- Would the world be different without the social criticism of art?
- Getting the "feel" of events (the artist) and getting the facts of events (the reporter).
- How much does Mailer's ego get in the way of his interpretation and criticism of events?
- Why is Mailer the first author since Hemingway who has achieved both ^{large} popular and critical successes?
- Subjective (intuitive, supernatural, transcendental, a priori, emotional, Karmic, Romantic, Platonic) approaches to experience, life, the national experience versus objective (rational, classical, deterministic, mechanistic, Aristotelian, a posteriori) approaches to same.
- Is America a schizophrenic nation? Will it develop into a "benign totalitarian" state? Are we moving into a period of organic decline? Has American actuality outrun expectation? Will America be a victim of her own Faustian enterprises? Has there been a failure of nerve? Mailer is fearful all the above are happening or have happened. Is he right?
- The value and necessity of metaphoric language?
- Is America existential or deterministic?

Sangamon State University



Shepherd Road

Springfield, Illinois 62703

Office of Academic Affairs
217/786/6600

September 28, 1972

Dear Dr. Peterson,

Thank you for your long letter. You are right, I obviously need to define the scope and purpose of my dissertation. The five page statement I passed out for my oral exam was misleading. My intention was to provide the examining committee with a nutty, concentrated issue, which I could explain and defend. The subject-object dilemma is important to my dissertation but it is only one focal point. Essentially, I hope to examine the development of Mailer's art through all seventeen of his books, with emphasis on his last four, which are, critically speaking, virgin territory. When a man who has continually described himself as a novelist for twenty years turns from the novel to autobiographical journalism, or "creative" non-fiction, and produces four works of undeniable merit in a three year period, it seems valid to try to explain why he has swerved from his previous stance and if the seeds of his new effort can be found in his previous work. After all, if Mailer never wrote another word, or had never produced his latest non-fiction, his reputation as a first-rank novelist would be secure.

My cardinal assumption is that a careful examination of the organic growth and change in an author's canon is the best way to comprehend the quintessence of his art. Like most great art works, Mailer's last four books took the literary world by surprise. The critics were literally aghast that Mailer was able to capitalize on his self-preoccupation in such a way that his ego was an aesthetic asset and not a narcissistic stumbling block as many had previously complained. My contention is that a close study of his previous work will produce the evidence to show that his direction in The Armies of the Night was not a departure but merely the sure growth of an artistic predilection. Mailer has always claimed, with some pride, to be a novelist and his abilities in this line are nowhere more apparent than in Armies, even if the occasion is historical rather than imaginative.

A goodly portion of my study will be given to demonstrating the value of the novelist turning his hand to journalism or history. There are several major writers who have turned from the pure novel

Dr. Peterson

-2-

September 28, 1972

of imagination (the Jamesian novel) to a "real" event. William Styron and Truman Capote are the two most prominent. I intend to propose some reasons why this shift in narrative prose has occurred on both aesthetic and historical grounds.

The novelist is concerned with ferreting out the "truth," of the reality in which he partakes, and the claims of the self (subjective) and the claims of the world (objective) are felt with some urgency. Mailer did not set out to resolve the subjective-objective dilemma when he wrote Armies, he set out to tell the truth in the most consummate and profound way he could. He was not intending to solve an aesthetic, or psychological, or philosophical problem, but to be both a mirror for the present and a lamp to the past and future, both mimetic and prophetic. A creative artist thinks in wholes; he does not segment reality into disciplines. Mailer's achievement has philosophical, psychological and aesthetic ramifications which cannot be separated. Literature has been described as the discipline which takes the broadest field into its ken and its strength lies in the fact that it does not confine itself to mere aesthetic problems. If literature is only aesthetics then it becomes superior amusement, a mere diversion, as Plato would have it. Someone should have told Plato that literature does not aim to do what philosophy does better but does intend to look at reality in the largest possible way, providing both the substance and "feel" of life, or "being." What I am getting at is that literature cannot be judged by the standards of psychology or sociology or whatever, because these are only segments of its whole. When we judge a work of literature we bring what we know of all disciplines to bear on it. Sometimes one or the other takes precedence, but never can the merits of a literary work be judged by the claims of only one. I realize these are large claims for literature but I feel they can be justified. Who would claim that Shakespeare was only an aesthetician and did not make profound assaults on the largest philosophical questions, or illuminate areas that would be dark again until Freud.

I guess what I am saying is that I feel it is impossible to talk about Mailer only in an aesthetic way. Any of my scanty knowledge of the other disciplines that I can bring to bear will be of some illuminative value, I feel. And, as I have said before, I value your knowledge of philosophy (not existentialism) to keep my forays from plunging into the inane. Mailer has large ideas about man's life and they are reflected and manifested in his aesthetics, so I cannot avoid the task of attempting to define his philosophical stance, even if I wish to avoid the formal philosophical approaches of which I am so ignorant.

Again, however, I intend the study to explain the consistency and brilliance of his move into creative non-fiction. Why did it happen? / *well*

Dr. Peterson

-3-

September 28, 1972

Was it predictable? Does it reflect a general reaction against the world of refined psychological novels of James, Woolf, and Joyce, the acknowledged masters of the modern novel? What are the realities of the modern world that prompted this departure? Is the novel, as we have known it, dead? Is this movement an aberration or a true organic growth? What are valid estimates of Mailer's contribution to this movement? What are the characteristics of "creative" non-fiction and the varieties of it? Does Mailer have any forbears whose works foreshadow his? If his last four works are strokes of genius, why are they?

I hope that a close examination of Mailer's individual talent and achievement will help illuminate the tradition he stands in and provide some answers, or beginnings of answers, or help at least to further define the questions which should be asked. Although it is but a fragment, the twenty pages on Mailer's first two novels which you have provided an inkling, at least, of what I intend. I will get both critical feet wet on almost all his books.

Well, you have me going. I hope I have not clouded things, and have defined my intentions somewhat. Believe me, your letter was most helpful and got me thinking about a variety of problems. I'd like to know what you think of the twenty pages you have (if you have them?). They should be readable without going to the novels.

Thank you again for your letter. I hope your next one stimulates me as much.

Sincerely,

Mike Lennon

NOTES FOR A DISSERTATION ON
THE CREATIVE NON-FICTION OF NORMAN MAILER

JOHN M. LENNON

MAY 29, 1972

PERMANENT RECORD

SOUTHWORTH CO. U.S.

75% COTTON FIBER CONTENT

X

Norman Mailer's four works of "creative non-fiction"¹ The Armies of the Night (1968), Miami and the Siege of Chicago (1968), Of a Fire on the Moon (1970), and The Prisoner of Sex (1971) are successive attempts to resolve the subject-object dilemma that has bedeviled writers since Coleridge. Using Henry Adams' method of describing himself in the third person, Mailer describes the near-apocalyptic events of the last five years as discovered by a man the poet Robert Lowell has called America's "finest journalist"--Mailer himself. Adams choose to describe himself in the third person for the same reasons Gov. Bradford did--to subsume the self to the larger significances of historical revelation. Paradoxically, it is this disportation of the persona in Mont St. Michel (1905) and the Education (1907), this exploration of the self in the swirl of larger forces, that is the principal guarantor of Adams' immortality. If Adams revealed himself almost in spite of himself, Mailer bends to the task of baring his sensibility with a candor unmatched in American literature.

To bridge the gap that lies between a man and the world Mailer shuttles between the two awarenesses posited by some of the existential philosophers: awareness of external reality and awareness of the self in the act of apprehending this external reality:

¹ The word "creative" is here used to provide a distinction between Mailer's earlier personal essays and journalism like Advertisements For Myself (1959) and Cannibals and Christians (1966) and his later, more ambitious, works in which he himself is the dramatic persona.

(79)

...a conscious being is aware...of the difference between himself and his world; and thus a percipient human being will always be aware, in however vestigial a way, of himself as perceiving. Whether the object of his perception is the external world or some aspect of himself, still, going along with the first-order awareness, there will be a second-order awareness of himself being aware. This is, according to Sartre, an essential and defining characteristic of consciousness itself.²

Mailer has for many years described himself as an existentialist, and, his borrowings from this "school" include not only the notion of man's dual awareness described above, but also the concept of dread, appropriated from Heidegger, Nietzsche's idea of the hero, and, a view shared by both Sartre and Heidegger, that mood and emotion are distinctive and valuable kinds of perception. In a formal sense, however, it would be a waste of time to delineate Mailer's filiations with a "philosophy" so non-systematized that it has been called a non-philosophy. As a commentary on Mailer's novels, that body of contradictory beliefs known as existentialism is of some value, but its chief importance lies in Mailer's adaptation of the concretism and subjectivity of existentialism as the guiding principles of his novelistic strategy in his four books of "creative non-fiction."

In these, the last of Mailer's published works (excluding a movie script), Mailer-in-the-present is the conscious shaping intelligence reflecting on Mailer-in-the-past. The

² Mary Warnock, Existentialism (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 93.

X

narrator-Mailer, as opposed to the narrative-Mailer, remains, like the Jamesian narrator, invisible, refined out of existence, paring his fingernails. Yet the reader is always aware of the fact that the narrator-Mailer and the narrative-Mailer are the same historical figure, that the subject and object are separated only by that slice of time and experiences between the action of the narrative and its recreation. By opting for a third person point of view Mailer avails himself of all the novelistic devices of Jamesian narration (detachment, irony, selection of incident, close-in description, time shifts, etc.), while yet providing us with the intimate revelations of character, the refinements of sensibility of the type that a diary or letters would provide, and which James and Virginia Woolf could only approximate. What would not literary critics give for such an excursion into the subtle recesses of the psyche of Henry James!

used

The history of the modern novel is one successive, cumulative, effort⁵ to achieve a greater psychological realism. From James to Conrad to Virginia Woolf and James Joyce the novel has been moving in. What has suffered in this attempt to grasp the quintessence of refined sensibility is the corresponding diminishment of objective reality. E.M. Forster complains that James is brilliant but that he eliminated ninety percent of reality. Obviously the same is true of Virginia Woolf. Totally discriminating psychological portraits but

used
X

refined to the thinness of a hummingbird's wing. The belch and bite of reality, the maw of violence, corruption, and sentiment that we read of in the Daily News, or that we know exists from daily life, is stricken from the record in the novels of James and Virginia Woolf. Finnegans Wake is the last straw, the ultimate penetration, a reconstruction of the mythic dream visions of an Irish Everyman, Henry C. Earwicker. Joyce's final novel may be a presentation of the collective Irish unconscious, but it is alien to most of us. With Mailer the events are never foreign, always familiar. The march on the Pentagon in 1967, the riots at the Chicago conventions in 1968, the first moon shoot in 1969, the phenomenon of the Woman's Liberation Movement which gained prominence at the end of the decade, events which dislocated the American consciousness--these are Mailer's fare. Journalists like Tom Wicker have written brilliantly of these events yet Mailer's achievement is greater because in his books the event is made incandescent by the individual, the event is both illuminated and reflected through the prism of Mailer's gargantuan ego. Inheritor of a fictional technique whose finest virtues encouraged the existing of actualities of the type the media daily bombs us with, Mailer's achievement was to apply those techniques as the cutting edge of entry to current events. Jamesian journalism may be not too glib a way of describing it.

The act of composition always pins life to the wall,

from
V. 14

x

freezes it. Art, insofar as it is mimetic, can only give the illusion of flux. It seems possible, however, that by considering the self (himself) in a detached way, Mailer pares away a bit of the artifice between art and life, for he both retains the detachment of Jamesian character presentation while eliminating the excesses and excuses and self-justification of autobiography. With time on his hands and considering a self who no longer exists, Mailer forces himself to be objective; the third person voice condemns him to objectivity. Puffery will be all the more obvious if it occurs. Mailer's technique seems the last conceivable (but not the last possible) step the writer can take toward the elimination of the subjective-objective dilemma.

INTRODUCTION: Historical summary (the peaks) of ⁽⁸⁷⁾ development of non-fiction - death of the novel (?) Parallel forms (confession, documentary, autobiography, personal testament) Mailer's melding of Jamesian - Joycean - Woolfian psychological introspective techniques and Journalism, Joycean or Jamesian Journalism. Mailer trying to cut a swath across the escarpments of American prose with a new form, drawing on social strategies of Zola, Dreiser, Psychological techniques of the Understudy, social novels of Thirties, investigative subjective Journalism of 60's. History with a point of view, Journalism with a heart, new territory on the subjective-objective battleground. H. Adams, Whitman, Thoreau, Melville as predecessors (and others).

CHAP 1: THE NOVELS: Links to Dos Passos, Farrell, Thomas Wolfe, Steinbeck and the naturalists as well, as to the psychological novelists. In the American grain (which is to go against the grain - F. R. Chase's book) Point of view problems (Mailer says point of view is the most powerful ~~over~~ a writer has). Weakness of Mailer's Heroes. Fascination with evil. Manicheism (à la Yeats, Melville, Eliot, Hawthorne) ~~and~~ Movement from hard dogmatism (Marxist) of Naked to problems of the self in Amer. Dream. Suspicious of flat rhetoric of Old Left and narcissism of a Virginia Woolf. Building "a ^{radical} bridge", as Mailer puts it, "between Marx and Freud". Rejection of rationalism, determinism. Move inward but always with a view of the world. Never

X the exploration of the sensibility in isolation. First, Mailer "saw" the world in Naked, then criticized it in Barbaric Scenes and parts of Deer Park, then the creation of a suitable Hero to live in a disorder and wrong - even rationalistic civilization in Amer. Dream. He must turn inward but has been radicalized by Dos Passos, Malraux, Farrell and Marx. Mailer's theology

of p. 6
"Novels"
chapter
and p. 83
Advertisements
AND
Podiatry
↑
USED

CHAPTER 2: THE ESSAYS (Advertisements for Myself, Presidential Papers, Cannibals and Christians, Existential Essays) Mailer's need to clean up the world (as Elton said of Arnold) Beginnings (in Advertisements) of a shift in point of view. Dislike of journalism. Obsession with "totalitarianism" in all its forms. Discussion of his Marxism, his social criticism, his politics. He begins in early 60's to emerge as his own Hero. This is accelerated when J.F.K is killed (Amer. Dream written before the assassination). His personal essays begin to transmute, metamorphose into a new form.

use
George
Forte
(as epigraph?)

CHAPTER 3: ~~Two~~ Two "creatures" non-fiction (Runes, Miami, Siege of Chicago, Of a Fox on the Moon, Runes of Sex, St George and the Godfather) Merging of the 2 streams. Fictional

X techniques married to social criticism Mailer's existentialism, the aesthetic corollaries of his philosophy (Sartre). Existentialism with ^{some of the} a first. Harnessing 2 traditions to produce a view of the artist looking at himself through the dual lenses of fiction + fiction. A theory of non-fiction

Its methodology - Sartre's existentialism applied. Compared to Explot's "objective" non-fiction. Looking at an object turns to speculation which leads to evaluation. Mailer makes his own life the occasion of art, spinning filaments out of himself, filaments trailing back to Adams, Thoreau, Whitman.

CHAPTER 4 Close look at the creative non-fiction (esp. Omoo) how it represents the culmination of all previous tendencies (his social conscience, increased width of view, sense of the past, man-centered cosmos) Why Omoo is the greatest of the 5. The theory of chapter 3 borne out by rigorous examination, + explanation + example.

CONCLUSION: Mailer's progress: Look at the world ~~(outward)~~ turn inward to explore the self, put the self in the world, or more specifically: Present the world naturalistically in Naked and parts of Barbury Shore, escape or movement from ideology to sensibility in Deer Park, Amer. Dream, Why Are We in Vietnam?, while the movement inward progresses, forays into "real" world in essays, attempt (and partial failure) to create new hero in Ragack finally creation of "ideal" in Mailer himself (an ambiguous hero to be sure, but a real one) in the creative non-fiction. The aesthetic linchpin is point-of-view experimentation, the philosophic underpinning is his idea of a Manichean struggle in the cosmos, an embattled God

PROBLEMS: Should I focus on form mainly, leaving
the other 4 works of creative non-fiction out (the
novels + essays are not to be studied in depth, of
course)?

What should be done with other criticism?

What are the best historical parallels? (Adams
and Capote are musts)

Should I attempt to interview Mark this summer?
(He has ~~said~~ said I should call and arrange
a visit)

VIII: 18 (AN) [More of Mailer's belief that he is the most important man alive in America. His premise: except for an existential politician, no one has the power to shift the consciousness of the masses as the novelist. Could it be that the writers of genius, their work filtering down to the masses through books and H.S. class, college class have kept America from going over the edge long ago? If Whitman failed how can Mailer succeed? How much frustration is necessary to keep the novelists from crawling back into the womb?]

VIII: 22 (AN) "It was only in the twentieth century, in the upper chambers of technology land (both Capitalist and Communist) that men began to believe there must be concrete answers to every large question." [Mailer, in P.P. says than anyone who believes in a simple answer to a complex question is a totalitarian. Like Francis Bacon did, that arch demon of the quantifiable. Blake knew what the score was when he wrote on his copy of Bacon: "Good advice from the Devil's kingdom."]

cf L.S. Kumpf's Explanations

VII: 29-30 (AN) "an explanation of the mystery of the events at the Pentagon cannot be developed by the methods of history--only by the instincts of the novelist. The reasons are several, but reduce to one. Forget that the journalistic information available from both sides is so incoherent, inaccurate, contradictory, malicious, even based on error that no accurate history is conceivable. More than one historian has found a way through chains of false fact. No the difficulty is that the history is interior--no documents can give sufficient intimation: the novel must replace history at precisely that point where experience is sufficiently emotional, spiritual, psychical, moral, existential, or supernatural to expose the fact that the historian in pursuing the experience would be obligated to quit the clearly demarcated limits of historical inquiry. So these limits are now relinquished. The collective novel which follows, while still written in the cloak of an historic style, and, therefore, continuously attempting to be scrupulous to the welter of a hundred confusing and opposed facts, will now unashamedly enter that world of strange lights and insuitive speculation which is the novel." [Mailer calls this an "advertisement of intentions."]

world

a preface to the last section of the book

[This is comprehensive. It reduces to the fact that Mailer believes the feel of an event is more revealing of the essence or truth of an event than the facts surrounding it.]

VIII: 36 (AN) [Mailer--the Emersonian method and the Melville can moral scheme and awareness of evil. Mailer similar to Melville except he reduces the power of Fate to nil. Disbelieves in Fate like Sartre but not in History. His sense of past is as great as Hawthorne's, his sense of moral complexity as great as James and Hawthorne.] (cf. p. 3)

VIII: 43 (FM) "Who could begin to measure the secret appeal of the Nazis by now?" [Mailer, by the device of metaphorical questions reveals his transcendental methodology. For the appeal of the Nazis is but a sign, symptom or portent of some deeper lust or ache in man. Each thing stands into some relation to some larger and smaller thing in the oversoul. Vistas of expectation, anticipation and dread are opened by hints of larger and more ponderous visions beneath the first facade. Always the little lower layer.]

VIII: 44-45 (FM) "Man was voyaging to the planets in order to look for God. Or was it to destroy him?"

"God, he had presumed to suggest, was an embattled vision: God, had created man in order that man might fulfill God's vision, but His vision of the future was at war with other visions of existence in the universe. Some of those other visions were not only in the stars' and in the galaxies, but were right here, intimate, on earth. God was, for instance, at war with the Devil. Certainly the Devil had a most detailed vision of existence very much opposed to His own. In any case the war had gone on for so long that nearly everything human was inextricably tangled. *Human cohabited with technology.* Was the Space Program admirable or *abominable*? Did God *evangelize* out for NASA, or was the Devil our line of *sight* for the stars?" *[cf p65]*

Melville - White Jacket

[Faced with the "fusion indistinguishable" of good and evil, the moral complexities that all but paralyze right reason and action for the good, Mailer constructs an eschatology that reflects his inability to distinguish between good and evil. Perhaps. Hardy had the same problem. And Melville. All such a vision tells us is the immense difficulties of moral decisions. But does it induce moral paralyses and buttress every weak or greedy impulse?]

VIII: 45 (FM) "the light from the floodlamps reflected from the white icy skin of the wall. Sainted Leviathan, ship of space, she was a planetary traveler." [Echos of Melville's rummaging through the ballast of whalelore resound, resonate with the mystic color of Saturn V and Moby Dick.]

VIII: 46 (FM) "He told himself that when the time came, we would have material enough-- what kind of detective was he, if he could not divine the depths of their character by the depths of his own experience and the few clues the astronauts had already provided in their shielded public interviews?"

VIII: 47 (FM) Two mighty torches of flame like the wings of a yellow bird of fire flew over a field, covered a field with brilliant yellow bloomings of flame, and in the midst of it, white as a ghost, white as the white of Melville's Moby-Dick, white as the shine of the Madonna in half the churches of the world, this slim angelic mysterious ship of stages rose without sound out of its incarnation of flame and began to ascend slowly into the sky slow as Melville's Leviathan might swim, slowly as we might swim upward in a dream looking for the air."

[More--the sound. Ponderous, rolling, pulsing rhythms. Mailer shows his transcendental affinities? The ability to read the deepest significances from the signs of the world-- to assume that all events and movements and objects and relations shadow forth deeper, larger, variously hidden significances. It is a belief in unity, or rather, the belief that things are related not necessarily in fruitful and happy and inevitable coherence and order, but in tension and conflict as well. It is a protest against the neutrality of any action or thing, a belief that ^{one} can read the movement of the affairs of the universe.] *(cf p62-63) (cf 8, 101) (cf VII: 34 on Picasso + relation) (cf VIII: 56 relation)*

VIII: 48 (AN) "But the astronauts, brave men, proceeded on the paradoxical principal that fear once deposed by the knowledge would make bravery redundant. It was in the complacent assumption, that the universe was no majestic mansion of architectonics out there between evil and nobility or strife on a darkling plain, but rather an ultimately benign field of investigation which left Aquarius in the worst of his temper." *(cf p62-63)*

[Massively crucial to my transcendental theory.]

X

Propress = belief of technocratic society

God. = belief of medieval, static, hierarchical society

Propress
↓
God. = Mailer (cf (FN) 126-39)

X [Mailer's ego is a burning glass for his view of reality; he sees, then, this is a correspondence between his own experience and the nation's. He has tendrils of awareness attuned to every cranny of the national psyche. Through knowledge of himself he will understand the world.]

↓
cf 193 Arms

99

VIII: 52 (FM) "To believe in progress and believe in God as well might make it necessary to conceive our Lord as a vision of existence who conceivably was obliged to compete with other visions of existence in the universe, other conceptions of how life should be." (cf p 42+63)

[Assuming life can be more than one way, assuming it has not always been the same, assuming that the Eastern and Western perceptions of life do not already cover every possibility. Mailer prefers the Renaissance, the struggling mode it manifested. This I take it, is when Mailer saw the Lord ahead in the struggle with the Devil, now he is behind. So true progress must be connected to God winning, or at least holding his own.] VIII;

134-139
P/L (FM)

VIII: 52-53 (FM) [the heart of the eschatology--irreplaceably important]

used [Mailer's passion to understand, like Ishmael's, removes him from the existential arena. For Mailer would see the intent of history, the Lord's game plan. He begins just opposite Sartre's Roquentin who sees no meaning in history or nature. Mailer sees pattern, order, tension but always meaning. His ties to existentialism consists of his Hardy--like insistence that God may lose his struggle, or that God has perverted it. God may be mad, he believes, because it seems the scientist is more important to his venture than the poet. If Apollo II is God's scheme for moving his vision off the earth then God favors numbers, not words. Which Mailer does not like. Also he assumes that God's struggle must be heartless, courageous, callous and uncharitable. This is the only way Mailer can conceive of a struggle.

cf 4.173 God, he says, is "obliged to prevail or would certainly cease to exist" and "the ardors of His embattled voyage could have driven Him mad." I'd say then who needs Him? A God that is not all good and all powerful may be no more than the product of the inability to accept evil, chaos and waste in the universe. Like the God in Typee produced by the natives, then mistreated by them, Mailer's God is limited, and reveals all of Mailer's courage and lapses and, perhaps, his own lack of charity.

The God that is responsible for NASA, Mailer says, is either mad or in big trouble to put such faith in science. The other possibility is that man's step to the moon was but part of his Faustian greed "like a beast enraged with the passion of gorging nature, we look now to make incisions into the platinum satellite of our lunacy, our love and our dreams."

cf p. 8
cf p. 175
VIII: 57
p. 106 Mailer's limited, embattled, and possibly insane God is one created not out of his profoundest intuitions but more in reaction to the disproportions, the waste and sterility of modern life. The God came after the view, came in response to the view. Medieval man's conception of God was the way he explained the world, an a priori God. Of course, the essential question is not which comes first, God or world-view, but, rather, whether they mesh. For undoubtedly Mailer believes an embattled God is consonant with his deepest instincts--which are as Faustian as can be. The fact yet seems to be that Mailer's God was suggested to him by the world's condition and by history. Instead of explaining history through God, Mailer explains God through history. He gathers his evidence and makes his conclusion, a distinctly rational process.

Mailer is unsure himself.]

101

VIII: 54 (FM) "In effect the Novelist was forever drawing up new social charts upon which the Navigator could make his calculation."

"There had to be more to the dream than Freud had ever given it--the dream was like the third eye of the Navigator, it looked into many a situation the eyes of reality could hardly assess."

"A crack in a man's voice might give a clue to an oncoming disease, an odd laugh in a friend could leave its echo of possible treacherous and deceptions. . . A thousand such intimations of a reality subtly beneath reality, yet ready--it was possible--to become outer reality before very long, was apparent in everyone's waking day."

[Of course all these things could mean nothing--unless one is obsessed with finding meaning--Mailer wants no neutral events, actions, gestures. He is a super-Emersonian, finding a web of correspondence in every phenomena.] *cf p 8*

cf p 15

VIII: 56 (FM) "If smell, Aquarius long had thought, was related to time, then sound was some current in space." [Correspondences, larger than the Emersonian mind could articulate, but still within the swing of the Oversoul, are what Mailer ferrets and feels out. The larger the better. Mysterious correspondences, but still informed by the logic of intuition in their described arcs of relation. It all fits, somehow, Mailer feels. Like his own Gen Cummings who saw the dynamic of sex in the trajectory of a howitzer shell, Mailer would find the pinions and forces, the uttermost bones and tensions of the universe.]

VIII: 59 (FM) "the moon, properly read, could betray as much of the real character of the heavens as the lines on a man's hand could enrich an eye which understood a world where histories might lie written in the hieroglyphics of some universal form neatly concealed in the crack of the palm."

[Some Emersonian-Melvillian-Romantic notion that nature, the universe, is bursting with significances, brimming with ambiguous meanings--here Mailer is closer to Melville than Emerson, for he sees the ambiguity more than Emerson.] *(cf p 8) (cf 62-63, 97-98)*

VIII: 61 (FM) "the real function of the Wasp had not been to create Protestantism, capitalism, the corporation, or a bastion against Communism, but that the Wasp had emerged from human history in order to take us to the stars. How else to account for that strong severe, Christian missionary, hell-raising, hypocritical, ideologically simple, patriotic, stingy, greedy, God-fearing, nature-despoiling, sense-destroying, logic-making, technology-deploying, brave human machine of a Wasp."

[Mailer aches for, craves, interrelatedness, meaning in events. Just opposite the existentialist who sees the extramental world as neutral, vapid, mindless or antagonistic, like the forehead of the whale. Here he leaves Melville, for he cannot even for the sake of argument believe the whole show is without meaning. He wants no blanks.] *(cf p 62)*

VIII: 67-68 (FM) "that simple conception of God as an embattled vision which had terrified him from the hour he first encountered the thought around one of the bends of marijuana fifteen years ago. Every other one of his notions had followed from that, for if God were a vision of existence at war with other visions in the universe,

About P 56

103

unread

and we are the instruments of His endeavor just so much as the conflicting cells of our body were the imperfect instrument of our own will, then what now was the condition of God. Was He trapped in the wound of nature, severed from our existence as completely as the once exquisite balances of shattered ecology? ~~had~~ ^{that} vision He wished to carry across the universe depended altogether upon human mind and flesh in sensuous communication with nature? had radio-by-machine been the cancer of communication? had the savage lived in a set of communications with the invisible messages of nature which we had pulverized with our amplifiers? These days Aquarius carried Frazer's Golden Bough on long trips by plane."

[A culminating statement of Mailer's organic, anthropomorphic ^{theology} eschatology. All events, phenomena, history itself is subsumed to this vision. Mailer sees the dynamism of the universe on an Emersonian scale, but the dynamics reside in a cosmic tension, not a unity. It is a position Melville half-espoused and might have subscribed to fully had he not wearied and anguished himself among moral ambiguities. Mailer's problem in the book is that he cannot reconcile the energy, will, discipline of the astronauts and NASA generally with his intuitive feeling about their ultimate value. He sees NASA as a species of NAZIism, American brand, and fears the computerization of our culture. He wants strife, contention, movement in a culture and sees only a leveling and smoothing over of all individual difference. He would have been happier in the Renaissance.]

cf p 59

VIII: 68-69 (FM) "the Devil was reconstructing nature with every electronic, plastic, surgery, and computer and so had forced the Lord in desperation to descend into the earth and come back with His life in the grass of that most mysterious marijuana, a drug which made one aware of life in the ~~being~~ ^{being} at what severe price was not yet known?"

[Essentially, what you have here is a theological or eschatological overlay on the old Eliotian "dissociation of sensibility" theory. Mailer is saying that today's drug culture, like Eliot's Romantics are dissociated from will, drive, discipline and WASPS are equivalent in the equation to what Eliot saw happening to the Enlightenment mind.]

cf p 9
[Mailer like Eliot, is laboring in the throes of Wasteland theology. Both are attached to the mystical qualities of Anglo-Catholicism, to the need for purging, struggle and redefinition in Western life. Only when rationalism and intuition are linked in a dynamic interpenetrative relationship is man truly alive to all his possibilities. Both are drawn to the Renaissance as that poised moment when both forces were in balance. Eliot of course, believed that structured institutionalized Christianity with its emphasis on ordered salvation could bring such salvation, and Mailer puts excessive emphasis on sexuality as the mystical key, yet both oppose the technological and industrial modes of the twentieth century and long for a return to the simpler tensions of an ~~afarian~~ ^{afarian} existence. Both view suffering as ennobling, the need to die from the old life and enter into a new relationship with the universe. Both seek the roots of man in his connections with the cycles of nature. Mailer admires Catholic mysticism, the liturgy of Christ's blood, but unlike Eliot, fears the institutionalization of such ~~institutionalization~~ ^{institutionalization}. Possessed of a larger social conscience than Eliot, Mailer sees merit in the pure Marxist program yet decries its programmatic nature, its totalitarian tendency. Mailer has the same hopes for "pure" Marxism as Eliot does for "pure" Christianity. But both begin from a central awareness that western civilization has dechotomized man by emphasizing first his rationalism

105

and next his intuition. Both believe language, or "man saying," can strike the proper accord between the two poles.]

[Mailer admires the will, discipline and drive of the WASPS and the courage of the hippies to turn from the rational mode and so cannot agree with either group. Essentially, Mailer adjusts his vision of God to History, and so in one sense, is more of an a posteriori thinker than Francis Bacon.] "Thus such thoughts were an agony of pain if one held them truly, for responsibility was then like a burning of blood, and the time of apocalypse was certainly near. A war of the millenia might yet rest on the shoulders of the young. What an abattoir of brain-splattered substance if they consumed their smack and left the world dirtier than when they began."]

VIII: 70 (FM) "we might have to go out into space until the mystery of new discovery would force ^{us} to regard the world once again as poets, behold it as savages who knew that if the universe was a lock, its key was metaphor rather than measure." *used*

[Very important statement--he aligns himself here with the Blakean forces who oppose Francis Bacon.]

VIII: 74 (Kartiganer) Just opposite to Whitman, Eliot sees man "as the creative ^{ure} not the creator of his world." [Mailer stands between the two, accepting the myths Eliot sees as central yet believing man has the power to change all. Finally he is closer to Eliot than Whitman. His exact place is difficult to determine yet crucial.] *used*

[Mailer's existentialism (ostensible) is at odds with his vision of man's cosmic destiny. A Belief in myth undercuts a belief in the autonomous self. Yet Mailer opposes Eliot insofar as he wishes to create a new mythos, but one which still has an umbilical relation to the past.]

X [The question is, finally, whether Mailer believes in a transcendent reality or not. He does, but his vision, while as large as the Emersonian view, is not unitary like Emerson's but dualistic. Mailer wants it all.]

X* [quotes R. H. Pierce on Wallace Stevens "'if there is a transcendent reality, he can conceive of it only in his own image and know it only as his own creation.'"]

VIII: 77 ⁴⁰ (CHASE) "The fact is that many of the best American novels achieve their very being, thus energy and thus form, from the perception and acceptance not of unities but of radical disunities." *used*

7 [Like many readers of American literature, Bewley makes the mistake of assuming both that our writers have wanted to reconcile disunities by their art and their intelligence and that this is what they should have wanted to do."

[Some difficult questions here. Bewley might be making a false assumption in believing American writers have tried to reconcile disunities--perhaps not. But I would tend to agree with Bewley. They have desired and should desire some kind of rapprochement, aesthetic, moral, political, or otherwise. "Grief brought to numbers cannot be so fierce, for he tames it who fetters it in verse." It is not so much a question of preferring order to disorder or Chaos, although that enters into it, but more a question of finding "relatedness"--either man relates somehow or he doesn't. As T. S. Eliot once said, "Man is either a naturalist or a supernaturalist." There is no other option. Melville

cf
p 8, 176,
57
VIII 57

Insofar as Mailer's theology is the result of his experience and not inherited it seems unwise to use it as ~~the~~ key to his work. The idea of an embattled God came to Mailer after he was an established novelist and was partly the result of his first novels. It is sort of a working philosophy. How it grew, was shaped and then influenced is work well be one of the threads I will unravel out in this study. (cf notes on Raban)

Remembering Mailer's theology and his aesthetics, his heroes and his techniques is the largest problem of this study. An Emersonian statement is needed.
(cf pp 180-83)

↓
technique +
philosophy
combined

107

wasn't sure. Mailer's eschatology, cosmogony, might have intrigued him. It is becoming increasingly difficult to be a supernaturalist--at least there have been greater and more incisive assaults in supernaturalism. Mailer poses a radical solution. I hold with Bewley. Americans want a reconciliation, their national experience just makes it more difficult.]

D. H. Lawrence saw in classic American lit. "an inherent conflict between 'genteel' spirituality and pragmatic experientialism which in its lower depths was sheer Dionysian or 'Indian' energy and violence."

[Mailer tries to reconcile these opposites--tries to retain the spirituality and yet stay in touch with the depths.]

[Chase wants to avoid the middlebrow, doesn't want to see the tensions smoothed over by writers who espouse the solutions Howells did. Well Mailer likes order as much as Howells--but of a more dynamic kind, an order that is not an averaging but a web, a cable the strength of which depends on the greatness of the positions it connects. Like Charles Atlas's system, a dynamic tension, the writer alive in the tensions of the argument.]

"Wherever American literature had pursued the middle way it has tended by a kind of native fatality not to reconcile, but merely to deny or ignore the polarities of our culture. Our middle brow literature--for example, the novels of Howells--has generally been dull and mediocre. In the face of Brook's desire to unite the highbrow and the lowbrow on a middle ground, there remains the fact that our best novelists have been, not middlebrows, but either highbrows like James, lowbrows like Mark Twain, Frank Norris, Dreiser, and Sherwood Anderson, a combination highbrow-lowbrows like Melville, Faulkner, and Hemingway."

[Thematically and aesthetically Mailer has been seeking some kind of reconciliation, of a dynamic sort, between the polarities of American experience. He has called An American Dream "a tea party on the edge of a precipice," indicating his sympathies for the refined Jamesian sensibility and the pit that Dreiser and Norris labored in. He would connect the spirituality of the American experience with the depths of its darkest desires, create a hero, who like Melville's Catskill eagle, would swoop down into the gorges and up into the light. Mailer has said he has "a fondness for order," a remark that has not been noticed or, if it was, misunderstood by his critics. The cosmology he has created, the vision of an embattled God, is an effort to reconcile the bitterness of the fruits of the American experience with the idealism which the founding fathers held. Expectation and reality meet. Mailer's God errs but fights on--whether he is an anthropomorphic creation or not is irrelevant, he is still the first important addition to American mythic lore since the White Whale. Mailer is a supernaturalist, he sees meaning in the universe, but it is not cancelled out by the sorry historical reality of the last 75 years. It is a new wrinkle in the debate surrounding the problem of evil.

Mailer stands in the Emersonian tradition as the first unifier since Emerson--the man who has attempted to answer the questions Melville asked and fulfilled the role envisaged by Emerson for the American poet while yet being blood brothers with D. H. Lawrence.

And this philosophical achievement cannot be separated from his technical one. Working within the tensions of the subjective-objective dilemma, Mailer, availing himself of all the resources of the modern novelists of sensibility, James, Woolf, Conrad, Joyce, has applied their expertise to the maw of raw problems and events which we are blasted with by the N. Y. Daily News and the 6 o'clock news. Mailer has no shit together.]

NOT
REALLY

Letter to Whit Burnett

Paraphrase
intention

Both

(cf p 23)

VIII: 82 [Mailer may have had to create a God whose essence was ungraspable so that Mailer's own sense of mystery could be satisfied. The cosmos of the Enlightenment is a timepiece whose steady motion and ~~burn~~ leave no room for heroism or growth. Better a God who can lose to the Devil than one who has it wrapped up. Mailer needed an existential God to satisfy his own lust for the chance for greatness.]

X VIII: 90 (MD) "he tried to end with a film which would be in itself the nature of film, a metaphysical dumpling of a remark which is close to indigestible."

[As Blackmur said of James: "he was, trying to tell the story of the story"--how far Mailer is from his distaste for craft in the Paris Review Essay. Still, he abhors the programmatic and unspontaneous in art. His movie proves that. Yet this is what James was trying for. He wanted his writing to resemble the most sensitive, intelligent discourse about human relations, wanted to be the equivalent of the most cultured and educated gentlemen's notions and speculations of the relations between other human beings of his type. So finally Mailer like James believes the greatness, the breath of art, to be its EXECUTION. He is just perhaps a bit more unwilling to talk about it than James was. That he does speculate on the art of filmmaking is merely proof that he is fascinated with his new venture rather than moving into the world of discussions of craft.]

X [So the great paradox is that Mailer, like James, dislikes discussions of craft but is addicted to making statements, via his art, about the nature of art.]

X VIII: 91 (MD) "Improvisation obviously gave more freedom to the cutter, so much in fact that the logic by which one began to connect pieces of film to each other seemed at times to arise out of the very logic of film--even if the logic of film was a concept as deeply buried as the logic of language and so might have to wait for its first tentative elucidation by a semantics of film."

[~~Hardy~~ claim, but again reinforcing Mailer's belief that there is a reality to be revealed. Not a static one but a dynamic one, a reality of relations which could best be understood by other relations. The quote shows how Mailer sees the world.]

real VIII: 94 (MD) "We are, a Faustian age determined to meet the Lord or the Devil before we are done, and ~~that~~ ^{the} ineluctable ore of the authentic is our only key to the lock."

[So, there is a real, an authentic, a substratum beneath the shimmer of reality--we must get behind the mask Mailer says. Emerson thought so too but unlike Mailer and Melville he felt no fear or loathing for the face beneath.]

July 1973 (11)

Put yourself in two of the following situations and respond for about 45 minutes on each one.

1. You are a reporter and do not agree with the premises of the new journalism. Respond to the following statement of journalist Dan Wakefield:

"We journalists are trained by the custom and conventions of our craft to remain out of sight, pretending not to be there but simply to know. This technique is called 'objectivity,' and is generally held to be sacred. I was trained in that faith myself, but I have grown increasingly skeptical of its claim to be the only--or even the best--path to what we arrogantly refer to as 'the truth'. . . I am writing now for those readers--including myself--who have grown increasingly mistrustful of and bored with anonymous reports about the world, whether signed or unsigned, for those who have begun to suspect what we reporters of current events and problems so often try to conceal: that we are really individuals after all, not all-knowing, all-seeing Eyes, but separate, complex, limited particular 'I's.'"

reprinted from "Journalism versus Art" Current June 1972 No 141

2. You are Truman Capote and a horde of critics have attacked your book, In Cold Blood, leveling the following criticisms:

- A. Capote lacks serious moral imagination.
- B. Capote attempts to separate himself from the events passing before him. He refuses to be implicated.
- C. Capote's "objectivity" is impossible because continued observation of any event or phenomena inevitably merges into contemplation, contemplation into thinking, and thinking into theorising.
- D. Capote employs objectivity as a shield for evasion.
- E. Capote is unfair to Hickock and partial to Perry Smith.

Respond to their criticisms.

3. You are Frank Conroy and you have been accused of violating every rule of the autobiography, specifically you have:
 - A. Written about yourself while in the motions of mid-career when your own life pattern and progress is undetermined and unsure.
 - B. Your book isn't really an autobiography because you have changed all the names and addresses and who knows what else.

- C. Your chronology is haphazard and irregular making it difficult to determine what emotions the hero was experiencing and what reflections he was making at particular ages. It is not a book but a movie script.
 - D. The book has no center, no overriding obsession or theme. It should be called "Notes for a Future Autobiography."
 - E. The hero is not representative.
4. You are Joan Didion and your cultural and historical assumptions in Slouching Toward Bethlehem are under fire. Your critics say that you are:
- A. Attacking the most viable and valuable romantic revolt mounted against Western rationalistic civilization since Byron, Shelley and Keats.
 - B. You are a snob.
 - C. You hate the Southern California life-style, yet more Americans have migrated there than to any other state in the twentieth century.
 - D. Hippies are a lot smarter than you make them.

Respond to their criticisms.

5. You are an Englishman and feel that socialism will be the end of all that is great about Western civilization. Orwell's book The Road to Wigan Pier symbolizes all that you are against. You feel that socialism will undermine personal accomplishment, undercut competition and Orwell has praised those who would do so. Present your argument against his book.
6. You are the editor of "The Purple Patch," an underground newspaper. You feel that the establishment press is in sad shape largely because of its ties to government and big business. Present a critique of the old journalism and an apology for your own journalistic beliefs.
7. You are Eldridge Cleaver and have decided to return to the U.S. Once you get out of jail you intend to revivify Malcolm X's old "Organization for Afro-American Unity." You are prepared, naturally, to take extreme measures in insuring black equality in the U.S. What will be your major problems, your strategy, your personal role, and your chances of success?
8. You believe/disbelieve there are important connections between art, politics and history. Explain your position explaining how these connections are real or impossible.

#68 - "Creative Non-Fiction and The New Journalism" - Lennon

Capote--

lacks: "serious moral imagination"

quotes from
"The Cold Blood"
A.H. Smallbrook
ed. Jimmy Malin

X | "a voice that never feigns; innocence, that refuses to separate itself from the events passing before us, that openly acknowledges its own stake in the issues under scrutiny. And to the extent that the writer feels himself implicated, not as a mere observer but as a moral agent, so the reader too feels himself drawn into the moral vortex of the experience being portrayed."

X | Capote strives for an objectivity that cannot exist: As Goethe said, there is no such thing as a pure objectivity. "Looking at a thing gradually merges into contemplation, contemplation into thinking, thinking into establishing connections and thus it is possible to say that every attentive glance which we cast on the work is an act of theorising."

"It is almost as though everything were seen through the eyes of the mythic American: the fabled kind and strong man of the midland who knows nothing and understands everything."

In conceiving the killers "Capote almost achieves the true novelist's lack of objectivity."

Capote lacks "the interplay between actuality and his own sensibility." Capote refuses to "license his conscious to prevail over external fact." Capote "employs objectivity as a shield for evasion."

The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays

Jorge Joaquin Ortega y Gasset

Princeton Univ. Press 1948 (1st published in 1925)

X | "It is a humble and hackneyed truth that in order to see one must look and in order to look one must pay attention. Attention is a preference subjectively bestowed upon some things at the cost of others. I cannot focus on two first without losing sight of the second. Attention is like a ray of light which illuminates a zone of objects and creates a penumbra around it." (pp 83-84)

115

Words can be effective only if they have a definite meaning. And what defines the meaning of a word is its undeniable correspondence with certain things, certain feelings, the fact that it necessarily pledges acts. Now this correspondence ceases to be arbitrary only by virtue of a unanimous agreement, which is to say that it can be brought about only in the midst of a living group or community. A common tradition, law, faith and authority alone are capable of defining the meaning of what we call current words. But all these things have disappeared in our century. Then the words that circulate everywhere lead nowhere. Our language is out of gear. The more we speak the less we understand one another. Death alone can put everyone into agreement.

The twentieth century will appear in the future as a kind of verbal nightmare, or delirious cacophony: people spoke more often than they had ever spoken (imagine those radio stations which can no longer be silent day or night, where words are delivered at so much per minute, whether or not there are listeners, whether or not there are things to say), a time when words wore out faster than in any century of History, a time of prostitution of language, which was to be the measure of the true, and of which the Gospel says that at its source it is "the life and the light of men!"

Alas, what have we done with language! No longer able even to lie in certain mouths, language has fallen lower than the lie, I mean into insignificance. How the Devil rejoices over the pleasant or excited chatter of the radio-speakers! He, the great confusionist, who likes nothing better than flattering equivocation, the drone of official style, the senile incontinence of after-dinner verbiage. He, the romantic, who, when we are stupefied by speeches, suggests to us that the inexpressible is perhaps truer than clear, sharp speech! . . . He knows that . . . by . . . debasing the meaning of words he destroys the very basis of our loyalties. He knows that wherever a spade is called a spade, evil recedes and loses something of its prestige; this is why he has invented the language of diplomats and its insane coyness. He knows that nothing in the world can make us be silent, now that we have the radio, and he takes up his post in all the microphones. He finally organizes that verbal inflation, words no longer being "covered" by acts, which he hopes, not without reason, will complete, more effectively than the worst tyrannies, the utter confusion of our moral sense. . . .

I was about to write that the only remedy would be to combat him with semantics, which is the science of meanings, of precise and shaded language, guaranteed by a long tradition and by etymologies. A Ministry of the Meaning of Words, endowed with discretionary powers--this is what a Democracy needs--since after all it is a regime entirely founded on words. (This ministry was formerly the Church. An analysis of our vocabularies would show that the little common sense which they preserve comes from biblical and liturgical reminiscences.)

--Denis de Rougemont, The Devil's Share, trans. Haakon Chevalier (Pantheon Books, 1944), Chapter 64, "The Meaning of Words," pp. 211-13, by permission of the publishers, Patheon Books, Inc.

116
Despairing of abstract thought and doctrine, he turns toward dramatizing the human condition in all its multiplicity and inexplicability; and in this respect, the full title of his earlier novel Pierre; or, the Ambiguities--becomes especially meaningful.

The world of the Confidence-Man is comic in its very absurdity: here there are no answers which can be suggested for the fundamental questions of existence, so that the universe is stripped of all tragic potential and can be viewed only as a vast, insoluble puzzle. Clearly man is defeated from the start. He can never know what he longs to know, since he cannot be "coextensive with what is." Even the profound considerations about true and false depiction of character which Melville ponders over in this digression are treated in a comic tone, for since all of man's reason and experience is at a loss to derive from many individual truths the one essential truth about something, such questions admit of no solution anyhow.

--Seltzer Leon, "Camus's Absurd and the World of Melville's Confidence Man," PMLA, Vol. 82 (March, 1966), pp. 14-27.

It seems that, for Melville, reality is ultimately inscrutable; the things man experiences are only a glittering surface over impenetrably dark depths. Yet, at certain times a hint of the depths comes boiling up to the surface, like a great fish, breaking the water, shattering the calm and scattering men and boats. The representation of such a moment is, for him, the ultimate goal of art. Roberts's sudden outburst is such a moment, though, like everything in The Confidence-Man, in a minor key. To be presented with its full shock, it must be wholly inconsistent with everything that has been and will be. It must be a reversal, sudden and startling, of character, action, and tone, for only in this way can it represent the moment at which the mask gives way to the face behind.

And yet it leads to nothing definite. The insightful, slightly bewildered character, the glittering surface action, the inanely jocular tone, are immediately resumed. So, with Melville, it must always be, for reality remains unattainable; the moment of seeming truth may be only another mask, the sudden inconsistency only another delusion. We are left with ambiguity at the heart of things.

The Confidence-Man, then, is not a random collection of episodes; it is not the bitter polemic of a despairing man; it is not merely a philosophical leg-pull, but a serious, carefully planned attempt to present one man's vision of reality. As the vision sees ambiguity at the heart of things, so the basic structural principle is one that leaves the reader alone with an enigma. One cannot deny, I think, that Melville prepared for this result painstakingly and skilfully.

--John G. Cawelti, "Some Notes on the Structure of The Confidence-Man," American Literature, Vol. 29 No. 3 (November 1957)

--Norton Critical Edition of The Confidence-Man, pp. 262-63

1862

New York March 22. M acquires two volumes by Ralph Waldo Emerson:
Essays First Series (Boston, 1847), Essays: Second Series (Boston, 1844).

on p. 133:

The good, compared to the evil which he sees, is as his own good
to his own evil. x

M's comment: x A Perfectly good being, therefore, would see no evil.
--But what did Christ see?--He ~~was~~ what made him weep.--
However, too, the "Philanthropist" must have been a very
bad man--he saw, in jails, so much evil.

In Essay VII, "Prudence," M marks on p. 215:

Trust men, and they will be true to you; treat them greatly, and
they will show themselves great, though they make an exception in your
favor to all their rules of trade. x

M's comment: x God help the poor fellow who squares his life accor-
ding to this.

on p. 216:

The drover, the sailor, buffets it (the storm) all day, and his
health renews itself as vigorous a pulse under the sleet, as under the
sun of June. x

M's comment: x To one who has weathered Cape Horn as a common sailor
what stuff all this is.

In the Second Series (Mistakenly inscribed "March 22, 1861") M marks
in Essay I, "The Poet," p. 20:

Also, we use defects and deformities to a sacred purpose, so expres-
sing our sense that the evils of the world are such only to the evil eye. x

M's comment: x What does the man mean? If Mr. Emerson traveling in
Egypt should find the plague-spot come out on him--would
he consider that an evil sight or not? And if evil, would
his eye be evil because it seemed evil to his eye, or rather
to his sense using the eye for instrument?

Whether Mailer realizes it or not his switch from fiction to non-fiction is the logical result on a creative level of his belief in existentialism. For the non-existential writer the world exists thus and so and his job is to record it in all its complexity. If he is good he is Henry James; if he is pedestrian he is Steinbeck or James T. Farrell. The existentialist, as Sartre notes, is aware not only of the world about him but on a deeper level he is aware of himself as well. This is Mailer's role in the his later work. The ultimate distinguishing characteristics of the existentialist point of view are its concretism, subjectivism and its ephemeral quality. The traditional novelist operates in a world of Platonic verities -- "this is the way the world has always been," he says, "despite the troubling apparent differences we see." The existential novelist sees the world as it was then and only for him and always with the qualification that it is no longer like that now. He records the truth of the mood, he catches ^{nuance} ~~nuance~~ and dynamic. His world is more concrete and subjective and ephemeral because he is not reading universal symbols which have unvarying meaning.

There is an unspoken belief that the present is too complex and chaotic to be written about now. Instead most novelists turn to the past, immediate or distant, and present a supposedly unclouded view of "how it was." Implicit is the belief that now we shall be able to see how things really are, that the emotions and passions of the moment which clouded the view then are gone or merely smoldering and that reality can now be grasped. Mailer's method is to seize upon the passions and emotions of the now in his remembered self so that we get the chaos and complexity of the event and not a view from a distant peak where all precision is lost (as well as complexity) with distance.

It is the opposite of the Hawthornean view which saw distancing as crucial. If reality is *inchoate* and jumbled, hot and ~~und~~iscriminate, then only by immersing oneself in the element (to paraphrase Conrad's Marlowe) only by putting the novelist smack dab into the *welter* of actuality, the heart of the now, can ~~the~~ recreation of the mood of the time occur.

He does not describe events in the first person because he recognizes that he has undergone some change. Experiencing the event and writing about it are two enormously different experiences. It is his tribute to the existential awareness of the self of itself. It also unlocks all the resources of the Jamesian novel for his use.

When the novelist assumes (as Hawthorne did) that the blurring effects of time's passage will allow the essential to come forth he is ultimately going to fall back on some a priori conception of how the world should be. It is no accident that we are more sure of the whys and wherefores of the past than of the present. We are lulled into believing the past was thus and so when our experience of the presence should tell us it was false.

Capote's unspoken assumption is that the Clutter murders are a completely interpretable event (that reality can be dissected like the innards of a frog). During his perigrinations in Kansas he was merely sifting, observing, waiting for the pieces to fall into place. Mailer never assumes they will and so never supports a final interpretation of how things were.

Mood or emotion as an index to reality, cf pp. 41 + 57 Vol III and pp.

✓ 194 + 197 C & C

123

Mailer, like T. S. Eliot, is a borrower. He takes his idea of "Faustian" western man from Spengler, his concept of dread from Heidegger, his idea of emotion as an index of reality from Satre, his sexual theories are drawn from Reich and Lawrence, etc.

August 25, 1971

Sartre insists (p. 60, Vol III) that to believe that our characters are formed from birth or by the circumstances of childhood is completely fallacious. Mailer, an avowed existentialist, seems to *violate* his own philosophical beliefs by attempting to bring about architectural, political and social and media reform. The change must come from within and not from the institutions. This is a deep inconsistency at the heart of his working philosophy. Does he believe, like Time magazine that adjustments on the environmental controls will solve man's problems? I cannot believe that these reforms if effected would satisfy Mailer. For ultimately he believes, as did Faulkner (Nobel Prize Speech) and Hemingway that being brave is the only answer. Let us say that the present state of affairs is not conducive to authentic existence and so he cannot ~~reform~~ *refrain* from speaking out.

September 25, 1971

X / A primary cause for the turn by the literary readership to non-fiction is perhaps, a growing inability to "suspend our disbelief." Without making the effort we are as stunned, warmed, purgated, etc. by incandescent fact and we do not have to say at the end -- "But it's only a story." The world is getting to be a more remarkable place, perhaps it always was and we just hadn't noticed it.

used ✓

We still labor under the pretentious Johnsonian yoke of "kinds" of literature. In our lust for order we separate an author's poems and plays, his letters, essays, and novels. The genres are redivided into various phylems and orders and the prejudices, especially in the academic community, against non-fiction or non-creative literature are enormous. In discussing the work of an author like Norman Mailer the usual tendency is to divide his fiction from his non-fiction, and to assume that whatever permanent worth his work possesses resides in the fiction, whereas the non-fiction is merely a menagerie of egotistical rantings, publicity ploys, and tedious confessional harrangues. Germaine Greer makes this implicit criticism of Mailer when she calls Mailer "Superhack," and Robert Lowell's compliment to Mailer as the country's best journalist is a left-handed compliment. Of course the long tradition of non-excellence in American journalism, the ability to convey only notions which are "conformistically simple, simple like plastic is simple," as Mailer puts it (The Presidential Papers, p.218), is largely responsible for the general disrepute with which the literary-academic world holds the journalistic world. Still it is too easy to condemn the journalistic in toto. Distinctions must be made. Mailer's reportage has little in common with the worn scaffolding of most American journalism, and much in common with the artifices of creative literature. His reportage proceeds from his novels, there is no ~~caesura~~ ^{caesura} of methodology; his novelistic expertise informs his journalism. The efficacy of his suggestions to

send James Jones or Saul Bellow to report on the Cuban revolution or himself to the moon is here apparent.

So the method of this study will be to focus on the links between Mailer's novels and journalism and hopefully by engaging the mysteries of this switch-off to a parallel track (rather than, say, a move from the subways of the novel to the barrenⁿess of the journalistic superhighway) to understand the enormous movement in our literature from fiction to non-fiction. Thus an understanding of the sinews of Mailer's novels is essential to a grasp of the new appendages which have grown off the novelistic body.

"Mailer: Everything I write is a card out of the same deck. You can reshuffle them; but in a way, I've been working on one book most of my writing life. Probably since I started with Barbary Shore, certainly with and since The Deer Park, I've been working on one book.

Playboy: Including the books of essays--Advertisements for Myself, The Presidential Papers and Cannibals and Christians?

Mailer: Yes.

Playboy: What's the book about?

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

Playboy XV (Jan., 1968), 84.

"Playboy:Existential is a term that crops up frequently in your writing: existential God, existential politician. Exactly who do you mean by it?

Mailer: Existential--no precedents, no traditions, no disciplines, no books, no guides sufficiently familiar with the situation to take you through."

Playboy XV (Jan., 1968), 74.

"Not everyone can discharge their furies on an analyst's couch, for some angers can be relaxed only by winning power, some rages are sufficiently monumental to demand that one try to become a hero or else fall back into that death which is already in the cells."

The Presidential Papers, p.49.

used ✓

"If we are ill and yet want to go on, we must put up the ante. If we lose it does not mean we wished to die."
The Presidential Papers, p.105.

Totalitarianism - "an attempt to destroy that part of eternity which is death."
The Presidential Papers, p.176.

America has moved from "a nation of venture, exploitation, bigotry, initiative, strife, social justice and social injustice, into a vast central swamp of tasteless, toneless authority."
The Presidential Papers, p.183.

used

"The essence of totalitarianism is that it beheads. It beheads individuality, variety, dissent, extreme possibility, romantic faith; it blinds vision, deadens instinct, it obliterates the past. There is no trace of the forms which lived in the centuries before us, none of their arrogance, their privilege, their aspiration, their canniness, their creations, their vulgarities."
The Presidential Papers, pp.184-85.

132

Missing pages
133-138

are copies of
my correspondence
with Mark and
are found
in other file

IX: 15-16 (EE) "The tyrannical insistence of the script [Hollywood script] that all characters and events be funneled through the narrow orifice of committee solutions to aesthetic problems."

[Mailer the romantic loathes and abominates committee solution to anything. It is the corporateness of committee solution which he despises. Which makes one wonder how he would fare in the art world of Renaissance Italy or Elizabethan theater which were corporate efforts. The cult of personality did not begin until Byron's time. The answer may be that the joint efforts of quattrocento mural painters or Elizabethan repertory companies was not formulaic and did allow free play to individuality without enshrining it. The division between artist and state simply did not exist until Byron was born.]

used "So the exceptional tools of the exceptional actor, his ten hundred antennae, his blades and springs, fine nerves and subtle heart, go all shuddering through the anesthetized fields of a commercial script: he must violate all he has learned about relationship and its thousand-footed sensitivity."

["Relationship"--that is the crucial interest of Mailer--not war. War is a relationship but relationship is not necessarily a war. And Mailer, as he said in the Paris Review interview, has "a fondness for order."] (cf p 49)

X IX: EE 19-20 (Wild 90): "It is not social reality, nor documentary reality, certainly not historical reality, nor even reality of the Hollywood myth, no it is a kind of psychological reality--it is our obviously not altogether perfect idea of what this movie should be like--and that proves to be very real, for it is at least evidence on the road to reality." [Could be applied, with some qualification to Armies, which is just this kind of reality--perhaps the book, like Leaves of Grass, is in one sense "just a language experiment."]

"The picture took on that intricacy of detail and personality which is reserved usually to the novel or the extraordinary foreign film. It did not happen because the prime players were necessarily so talented, so improvisational, nor so deep, but because they were engaged in a way of making a movie which--considerably more than the average movie--had something to do with the way people acted in life. Yet the way people act in life is so general a notion for purposes of discussion that it may provide a superior means of focus to consider instead how people live in a dream."

[More parallels to Armies here, perhaps Armies is closer in its detachment--involvement to the way we look at our own careers. Few committed students, of literature, for example, do not see their own experience in a novelistic way, or a dramatic way--see an incident of their life in terms of a short story perhaps. Behind this somewhat dubious surface parallel, however, lies a deeper more profound parallel, namely the obsession with Mailer on how we see, how we see ourselves and the world, what specifically is the quality of the lenses we view reality with, in short, point of view. To see yourself as a mobster is to create a new angle of vision on yourself, to do it before a camera is a further qualification, refinement, turn of the screw. Mailer is obsessed with point of view.]

"A further expedition remains to us: the director's most revolutionary notion about the meaning of the dream and -- its country cousin -- the act of the novel." [Mailer

161

sees them linked, the novel like the dream are simulations (cf. Of A Fire on the Moon where this is discussed) (also see G. Hough A Preface to the Fairie Queene)

IX: 21 (EE) "For we are not only novelists all, but we are actors all. Having a detailed conception of the world, accurate here, inaccurate there, we attempt not only to deal with the world on the basis of this conception or novel, but we push and press ourselves into styles of personality (like elegance or humility or graciousness or candor) which are not quite ourselves but well provide, or so believes our Navigator, a more effective mode for handling the effects of the day." [Doesn't sound particularly existential. Sounds like the unconscious of us all, in the way it gathers data, draws conclusions, experiments, is merely using the Baconian scientific method.]

IX: 22 (EE) "The aim of a robust art still remains: that it be hearty, that it be savage, that it serve to feed audiences with the marrow of its honest presence. In the end, robust art pays cash because in return for soiling the delicacies of more than one fine and valuable nervous system, it gives in return light and definition and blasts of fresh air to the corners of the world, it is a firm presence in the world, and so helps to protect the world from its dissolution in compromise, lack of focus, and entropy, that disease of progressive formlessness, that smog, last and most poisonous exhaust of the devil's foul mouth." [recalls The Confidence-Man and the quote from Wimsatt's book.] (cf. NOTEBOOK p. 115)

X // IX: 30 (EE) (Podhoretz fails) "we are projected right out of that rare aesthetic vineyard where autobiography dares to become that special and most daring category of fiction which is its inner necessity, and instead we are now forced to jog along on the washboard road of a memoir." 10/3/9

[Mailer's esteem for the possibilities of this form are apparent.]

IX: 32-33 (EE) *Preface to Death For the Ladies* "My pride, my substance, my capital, were to be found in my clarity of mind or--since my mind is never so very clear--let us say found in the professional cool with which the brain was able to contend with the temptations and opportunities each leap of intuition offered. It was criminal to take these leaps like an amateur, steeped in drink, wasteful, wanton. To be hearing the inspirations of the angel when one is kissing the flames is a condition so implicit with agony that it took eighteen centuries of Christendom before Kierkegaard could come back alive with the knowledge that such moments not only existed but indeed were the characteristic way modern man found a knowledge of his soul--which is to say he found it by the act of perceiving that he was almost certainly losing it." [Excellent statement on Mailer's inordinately strong belief in the value of extreme situations (c.f., the interviews in Advertisements). Confirms my idea that he is in the Hawthorne-Melville-James-Eliot-Yeats line regarding evil. Melville would be better to invoke than Kierkegaard. And Shakespeare most certainly had this kind of moral vision. Alcoholism is only with difficulty equated with the powers of the demonic.]

IX: 33-34 (EE) "The review in Time put iron into my heart again, and rage, and the feeling that the enemy was more alive than ever, and dirtier in the alley, and so one had to mend, and put on the armor, and go to war, go out to war again, and try to ~~make~~ huge strokes with the only broadsword God ever gave you, a glimpse of something like Almighty prose." [Mailer has the same obsession for projecting and shaping his image of himself as a heroic rebel-artist as Fitzgerald did regarding his social image. So consistently, if one reads all of Mailer (and he has reprinted every scrap (almost) he has ever written, every justification, qualification, ^{3rd} of background information and rejoinder to criticism) one can easily be lulled into a massive admiration of Mailer in all of his phases. The critical intelligence has to real all of Mailer but it must guard against excessive adulation, acceptance in toto and nail him when necessary.]

Repeat - of p. 53

IX: 35-37 (EE) "the saint and the psychopath were united to one another, and different from the mass of men. They were closer to existence. They shared a sense of the present so powerful that memory, caution, precedent, tradition, commonplace, project and future enterprise were ~~never~~less before their sense of the present in their mind and body." [A writer with an acutely developed, almost over-active historical imagination, Mailer cannot fit into either category. It seems to me more and more the grossest contradiction in Mailer's thought. For on the one hand he bewails the separation of men from tradition, castigates their technology which would control nature, and therefore time and space, forgetting the agony and ecstasy of the past, yet on the other, sets up as a hero a mindless hipster who neither knows or cares about the past. It is an unusable item! Finally, I think that this inconsistency must be explained by Mailer. For what he has are two fine assertive insights: (1) that technological society with its rationalistic, scientific, inductive, a posteriori assumptions is in grave danger of becoming barbaric, isolated, cut off from the humanism and values of its past on the run of its lock-step thinking which began when people like Francis Bacon wanted a way to measure ^{to culture's} metaphors (see "The Argument Delivered" in Cannibals and Christians). Mailer sees that our sensibility is getting more and more dissociated and yearns for the time of the Shakespearian moment when men exercised their rationality and intuition, their inductive and deductive modes of perception in harmony, and so (2) he posits a hero who lives on his nerve endings, operates on the impulses of his unconscious, a Romantic rebel who ignores rather than hates the past. The hipster, the saint or psychopath, the existentialist, is Mailer's answer to the technician, but, of course, he is just as much in danger of being a totalitarian of the intuition as the technocrat of the 20th century is in danger of becoming a totalitarian of the rationalistic. Where is the harmony? Well, Diana Trilling saw this paradox in 1962 and perhaps would have been pleased if she had fathomed Mailer's new hero (Mailer, himself) and guessed, as Mailer did, that Aquarius was the hero with the unified sensibility. It is as if it took Mailer 20 years of venomous attack on the technocrat to finally get to the point where he could create a hero who did more than just oppose the excesses of the technocrat. The hipster hero was not the answer to the excesses of the technocrat, the scientist, the military-industrial magnate; the hipster was a reaction to him. Mailer was emeshed in a dialectic for 20 years. Technocrat=Thesis, Marlon Faye=antithesis, Aquarius=synthesis. The truth of the hipster is the truth of opposition. Mailer needed to create him in order to fathom the horrors of his opposite. Still Mailer in a third, theoretical position knew all along that the value of the hipster lay in his ability to promote the dialectical process. Change, Mailer recited endlessly, must come before creation. Faye was a wrecking ball who clunked through the brick walls of uniformity and conformity; he smashed a hole in the walls so Aquarius could walk through.]

More, the hipster must be criminal because it was the last way to be creative in

✓ c f 167

a stifling civilization which ^{burned} and bathed modern man in oppressive security. In the gloom of the Eisenhower years no one but the most loud, blatant and destructive personality could get any notice. An Aquarius would never get a hearing. Hip, Mailer says, "has almost no interest in viewing human nature, or better, in judging human nature, from a set of standards conceived a priori to the experience, standards interested from the past." "The White Negro," Advertisements, p. 317 (VI: 23) (cf p173)

IX: 37 (EE) "The psychopath is insulated from history--how can he not be? He assumes in the intensity of his moment that all history is his lungs and loins, breath and sex, all is contained in that mysterious sensuous dread quite ready to disclose itself whenever we adventure nearest to life." [which bears out what I say above. The psychopath is insulated from history but yet he is in reaction to it--that is, to the history of the twentieth century, that fearful apocalyptic time of mass destruction which Mailer discusses at the beginning of "The White Negro."]

IX: 41 (EE) "the last five centuries of 'guilt'." [Mailer puts the 16th century at the pivot of change in western civilization. Modern science was born with Francis Bacon and the scientific method. From that point, say 1580, western man has been moving further and further from instinct and impulse to rationality and Faustian ambition.]

IX: 41 (EE) "the expert has a psychic structure which is umbilically opposed to finding the truth until the expert finds out first if the truth is good for his side" [we have to assume that the truth which experts which to find will strengthen his conception of a rational orderly society, not that experts are a priori thinkers as Mailer is. A priori thinkers have hypotheses, but they are flexible, dynamic, easily adaptable to the truth, whereas a posteriori thinkers have unspoken implicit beliefs in the value of reason, of a rational society, and will never admit of any evidence which can do harm to that theory.] (cf p51)

IX: 45 (EE) [the left wing believe in] "the wisdom of the blood and blood-wisdom went out for the splendid American after reading Lady Chatterly's Lover in sophomore year. Life is hard enough to see straight without founding your philosophy on a metaphor" [the idea of metaphor or relation, seems more important to Mailer than any particular metaphor. See life as a series of relations, linked analogies, and you'll see straight. It is the way of seeing which seems more important than the exactness of what you see.]

IX: 46 (EE) "The Negro's relatively low rate of literary seems to be an inverse relation to his philosophical capacity to have a comprehensive vision of his life, a large remark whose only support is existential." [Mailer also prides himself on having a comprehensive, if troubled, view of life. His vision of an embattled God cannot be easily gotten around--critics can only complain it is Manichean.]

IX: 49 (EE) "everybody in this city suffers from the same disease that everyone in America suffers from--that we suffer from it doubly, triply, and in exaggerated form, which is, we do not have a proper sense of our own identity." [Because America tends more and towards homogenization yearly, the social grooves become smoother and more solid and more difficult to escape, people cannot act, and thus have no sense of themselves, and thus are less able to act. This situation has to be changed before people are put in a position to do, to choose. Change of any kind which will blow up the

grooves our lives are fitted in will then free us to act in the moral sphere. This theory is borne out by the example on p. 361 concerning Blacks.]

X IX: 62 (PS) Mailer speaks of "the dialectic by which writers deliver their themes to themselves." [What is Mailer's dialectic? Is it the movement from his intense social and political concerns to his exploration of the self, the final synthesis being his placement of the troubled ego in the world of politics? Yes.] *cf p 53, 163*

IX: 67 (PS) "a woman of other centuries could have gone through hundreds of menstruations and thousands of fornications without any great concern that she would conceive with any man whose sperm was not superbly suited to the ovum on which she built her view of how life should be if she were to create it." [Mailer, as always, is consistent here with his belief that natural processes of man have a wisdom which reason is sometimes at odd with. Mailer doesn't worry about the unreasonableness of this claim which is that children produced in primitive times were more fit and superior than those now produced. He delights in the barbarism and crude physical facts of the past. Lister and Salk and Pasteur hold no glory for him. He denies all the fruits of reason, refuses to accept them, obsessively attacks every advance promoted by man's mind. This is his greatest weakness. In arguing for a reassertion of balance in man's sensibility between reason and instinct he is too hard on reason, blind to its great achievements.] *cf p. 61*

IX: 69 (PS) [Because of birth control, women, when they decided to have a baby jumped (unconsciously) to accept the union of any sperm and egg.] "What a feverish acceptance of sperm, if any sperm, what legions of the mediocre and the anomalous might yet appear as company for the gorged streams, caked fields, and stricken air of the terminal years."

[Mailer just does not believe nature can be improved on, harnessed, or redirected in any but the simplest ways. He believes in sailboats, water wheels, windmills but somewhere after the inclined plane or the clipper ship he draws the line.] [a crucial admission] "He sometimes wondered if his vision, for lack of some cultivation in the middle, was not too compulsively ready for the apocalyptic" [Some balance between the claims of reason and those of instinct. Not just an averaging-out but an understanding of the values and limitations of the extremes. Call it interpenetration, a melding, a commingling of the two.] *used*

July 22, 1973

(169)

Dear John Michael,

I'm at a friend's electric, a strange one, older than most electricians. Somehow I didn't feel like writing by hand in my semi-legible scrawl. I'm an excellent two-finger typist, but that doesn't work too well with electricians, so be tolerant. I'm pleased to hear that your dissertation work is going so well. Envious, too, since mine has gone nowhere at all, so far. I am a victim in a touching spectacle. I have oversold myself so that everyone, from Prof. down to grad. student - friend, is convinced that I am full of ideas for a great dissertation, while I myself feel thought-out. Perhaps France, Scholes and Arnold Weinstein (my other prof. and second reader, a very bright man whose first book was just accepted by the first press to read it, Cornell U., for publication.) -- as I was saying, perhaps their presence will goad me. So, incidentally, does your paragraph about Mailer and creative non-fiction. I was at dinner yesterday with two friends, husband-and-wife, both Ph.D. candidates (at different universities) in English, and I mentioned something of your notion about the double-spined or-keeled nature of American literature. The husband, who tends to refuse to show surprise at any notion (and thus seem uncool), said he had thought so, too, and added that Americans always like to feel they are reading information. His wife was quite impressed, saying that once someone mentioned it, the idea seemed perfectly convincing and true and obvious; ~~despite the~~ tight. The husband talked about Washington Irving, said he wrote about twenty volumes, two of which include the fiction he is known for, the rest being non-fictional journalistic reportage. It struck me then how many Americans, like Twain and Harte Bret, Bret Harte, I mean, were journalists, as was Crane, S., and of course Norris and Sinclair are political journalists at least as much as they are novelists, and ditto Hemingway et al. The argument that this journalism might well be the way in which most men of letters of the (American) period had to make their living may hold some water, but not enough, not compared with the frequency, or comparative infrequency, really, of the same thing among contemporaneous French and English writers.

What interests me here is also the question of information. When the novel was being conceived, and conception and labour took a century of struggle (to shift metaphors in mid-stream) between it and other narrative forms, during the 1500-1605 period which culminated with the publication of the Quijote, a lot of the critics of the time, (most of whom were very Aristotelian in a misinterpreting sort of way,) argued about truth in fiction, fact in fiction, history. (Origins, etymological, of fact and fiction interesting here.) They tended to agree, and the literary-critical arguments in the work of Cervantes, including the Quijote, show this agreement, that it was better to have a lie, (read: a fiction) that seemed true than a truth which was so statistically unlikely as to seem a lie. For dogmatic-moral-religious reasons, truth was a prime, whether driven home by fact or fiction, truth or lie-dressed-up-to-look-like-truth, ~~expensive~~. It's interesting that truth and fact were then divorced from each other. The empirical centuries, the eighteenth and the nineteenth, sometimes forgot this distinction, hence Dickens's HARD TIMES; not that Dickens, or most of the great creative writers forgot the distinction between fact and truth -- no, I don't think that even the fact-collecting-pseudo-journalist Zola forgot it; but the critics of the all-powerful popular press did forget, as did most of the budding academics. Though one must admit that the academics were mostly critics of the classics, the notion of criticism for contemporary work being unthinkable to most of them. Don't I type wonderfully? I'm thinking, which adds to the problem, because I tend to try and type faster as I think. Now this blurring of the boundary between fact and truth, no matter how truth is conceived (true to life? What does that mean? A deeper truth? Problems galore and ultimately unsolvable, there, I think) this blurring, I was saying, is revived in the twentieth century. Joyce is the maker of fiction through cumulative fact in much of Ulysses, the minutiae from advertisements and genuine newspapers

muchlike things being the raw material of his art there. Now, and here I am more and more confused, what of the roles of fact and truth in Mailer's work? Is there, in his work, as some intuition tells me there is, a redefinition of these terms? Creative non-fiction, is that truthful fact, fact that is of the world but also indicative of the truths facts conceal as often as they reveal? You look at watergate and you know, if you didn't know before, how manufactured a thing fact is -- ~~faccere~~ -- done -- but no, now that facts can be made -- and they always could be, where does that leave you?

(fiction-based fiction)

I see that this is hardly lucid and cannot make claims on your time. Nevertheless it intrigues me. Do people read Mailer for info and the inside scoop on Republicans? I entirely agree with Sheed in that article which I sent you and which I trust you have received, that Mailer is tremendously good at observation, but the observations that I find so much to my taste and liking and so devastatingly accurate are not full of the sort of facts that the sociologists and columnists accept and choose to explore. They are facts of the order of truth, facts that cannot be measured, and you know how this culture's official bodies feel about facts that cannot be measured... A definition of truth there, may be? Or do people read Mailer because they are looking for an insight into Mailer, the man? Personally, I don't, except in so far that Mailer as man is part of truth. You dig inside the way he can, honestly sometimes, -- I think he is more honest, even when making his image, than most people are when they say they are not making images, hence the excellence of parts of the prisoner of sex-- and when you dig so honestly you emerge with something else that is truth, and every bit as problematic of definition as the other kinds of truth.

Well, this goes on rather like the raves of ^{maniac} ~~amateur~~, no? I am thinking along analogous lines, if not similar ones, concerning a book called Cien Años de Soledad by Gabriel García Márquez, a book which is likely to be part of my dissertation, and in which the supernatural plays a large and confusing part. People see ghosts, have premonitions which work out, etcetera. The characters in the book, being fairly primitive types in South America, certainly accept these as facts without question. So does the author, who is writing a generational history over a hundred year period, hence the title, a hundred years of solitude. It is a powerful book which reads like a folktale, and the role of the supernatural here, unlike the ghost's, say, in Hamlet, is totally problematic. I don't yet know what to do with fiction-supernatural, fictio-natural, historical-fact, all in the same novel.

I trust this will be legible after I have gone through and made corrections, of which there may be more than a normal ~~type~~. Be well, write me in France should you have the time or the inclination...

Regards

Khashig

The Stubborn Structure: Essays on Criticism and Society
by Northrup Frye, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1970

"There is a natural impetus of religion towards idolatry: the instinct that created gods out of nature in primitive life still keeps trying to project God from human concerns into the order of nature." The necessity Mailer feels to account for the evil, waste and chaos of modern life is strong indeed, just as strong as the impulse the Typees displayed in flailing their wooden god for any number of unpleasing circumstances in their life. Yet if such a god helps Mailer endure and create, who can argue-- indeed who can say the impulse is wrong. If you believe man's deepest impulses to be innate and not elected as Mailer does, then the impulse could be God-given.

cf p99

Two quotes: [c.f., Vol. IX, pp. 35-37]

"The underlying assumption of existentialism is that nothing in one's metaphysical scheme is as important as one's sense of the present." (Cannibals and Christians, p. 252)

"I write often of the enormous present, of psychopathy, of how mass man has no sense of the past or future, just Now." (Cannibals and Christians, p. 264)

[The question is how can Mailer denigrate mass man for living in a womb of security in the present with little or no sense of the past or future and yet espouse a philosophy, which is based on one's sense of the present. First of all, Mailer reverses the emphasis in stating that the present is more important to the existential mind than the future. But I think he knows this. The resolution is this: the existentialist, the hipster lives in the enormous present because the ducts to his unconscious are flooding him with impulses which he religiously follows --because they feel right. Mass man is closed to the past and future but closed also to the instinctual in himself. If both hipster and square are isolated in the present the hipster has his pores open at least, he will be simpatico to whatever is noble and good in the past and so gain on historical imagination and perhaps be ready for the future. Mass man, in his cacon of security has no chance.]

(cf p53)(cf 163+65)

Mailer has personified America in at least ~~three~~ ²¹ ways that I know of:

1. the last page of Armies where she is seen as a pregnant woman
2. in his self interview in the New York Times (Vol. IX: 39-40 (EE)) where he compares America to a demented, bleeding giant suffering from a Faustian disease.
3. in the Fallacy interview where he says America is like a sick fat man.

4. EE p176 "America - that bowl of the great undefined soup"

5. Five p. 76 "a lazy beast in the hot dark"

6. Five p 75 "America - no country. An empty country filled with wonders"

used
... inhuman dangers...
"America is a person" and the only one who does not hear the cry of two nations"
would be the prototype of the
7. Armies p133 "A wolf denoting, programmed inhuman dangers... tender, mysterious bitch"
8. Ad. p. 357 "America is a person" and the only one who does not hear the cry of two nations"

REISO

174

used 12. St., p.66 "growing more wild even as it grew more stable..."

13. C+C pp.71-72 ~~recessive~~ "One's country lives like a woman in some part of the unconscious dream life of each of us... optimistic love affair with the secret potentialities of this nation."

14. P.P. p.38 The two rivers of Am. life

15. Cannibals pp.78-79 "The country is in disarray" - "our country was fearful, half-mad, prehistoric" also p.42-43

16. Cannibals p.6 "whether the country would go mad or not"

17. " p.28 From Hawthorne to the fug

18. " p.71 "one's country lives like a woman in some part of the unconscious dream life"

19. " p.99 the country grew "like a weed and a woman and a beauty and a pig"

20. " p.102-03 "America went ape"

21. " p.170 "A Kierkegaardian nation"

22. St George p.4 ^{the nation:} "like a person who wakes up in the middle of the night" with a fear of atrophy

9. Fire p.67 "America like a newborn lover gangling into middle age and still seeking its mission"

10. Miami pp.140-41 "a modest ranch house life with Discorian military adventures; a land of equal opportunity where a white culture sits upon a black; a horizontal community of Christian love and a vertical hierarchy of churches..."

11. E.E. p.177 "We are a covered land. We have grown too fast and never measured our wastes..."

[Emerson rejected the notion of personal God in favor of a deific process, the oversoul. Believing that evil had little impact and that it would be ultimately compensated for he needed no one to blame for it. Things were working out O.K. he believed.]

Mailer, living in the 20th century and familiar with Hitler, Hiroshima and Vietnam, needs some explanations for these disproportions that will enable him to still believe in transcendence and ^{yet} accommodate the realities of our time. God for Mailer becomes a great flawed general, simultaneously noble and corrupt but endowed with a great and good conception of existence. In short, God is an anthropomorphic creation of Mailerian heroes. Mailer sees man as a reflection of God and reasons that if man is created in God's image God himself must be compounded of mixed proportions. Mailer's theology is more organic than Emerson's who shied away from the inconsistencies of an omnipotent and omniscient God of love and a world where evil seemed to be winning.]

used
= f
p 8 99
VIII: 57

Vol. IX: 15 (EE)

and in E.E. (10.14) he says he has acted every day of his life

X [Mailer contrasts acting and living through an existential situation, calls them polar. He says that acting is ceremony and ritual and therefore stylized and predictable. The actor works from a script, the existentialist has none. Considering Mailer's belief in the existential mode, acting as its polar opposite would seem to be anathema to him. Yet it is not, and in Armies (?) he says he may have missed his career when he became a writer. A paradox. Could it be that acting is a repetition of mystery where the outcome is known and yet, in the largest sense unknown? The actor traverses the terrain of Hamlet, covers the ground, but does he understand the nature of the land, does he grasp the heart of the mysteries that he speaks? Does not each foray through the wilderness of Hamlet (each thespian trip using a different route by virtue of the actor's modulations of pause, phrasing, gesture and emphasis) bring a new knowledge of the mysteries of the Prince's situation? And does not the existentialist draw on models like Hamlet (unconsciously perhaps) as he moves through the existentialist situation? If the script is not written by someone of the ilk of Collie Munshin it seems the experience may be just as existential as a knife fight in Harlem or a love affair with Lulu Meyers or whatever. We know the end of Hamlet but the play offers no codified knowledge of life at all. It is life.]

X ["Without an ego, one simply looks. The image of the cat, entirely whole and static, is a signal to the mind to come to rest. There is no immediate sense of beauty, only the act of seeing. A scanning mechanism in the brain locks in a cycle of cat. Without an ego to break the equipoise one's mind is like an electric motor with the poles perfectly balanced at positive and negative. Flip the switch, the apparatus hums with power, but there is no movement." Stop-Time by Frank Conroy, p. 144.]

(11)

November 27, 1972

Dear Ralph,

Excuse my long silence; I am at least a month behind in my correspondence and longer with you. I kept putting off my reply because I wanted to be able to give it some time, something I have had precious little of lately.

We are on a quarter system here and the load is two courses per; actual contact time is about eight hours a week. Which is fine, except that one must teach six different courses in an academic year. All this means a ponderous amount of preparation. There are other groodies as well -- the Applied Study Quarter which each undergraduate must perform. We have only juniors, seniors (and grad. students) here and they must spend one quarter out of six "in the field." It sounds hoaky but it works well. We place our lit. majors in newspapers, advertising, public agencies and a few in teaching. They work for no pay but keep journals and work their way through a bibliography. Its not simple. Instructors must visit them and discuss their progress with them very often. If they perform to the satisfaction of their work supervisor and academic advisor they get one quarter's credit.

So, I've been adjusting. SSU is in its third year of operation and there are many committee labors. I'm on six. My Mailer obsession, necessarily, has been shunted to an intellectual limbo where it is gestating nicely. On November 2 I hurriedly removed it from its ex-celsior when Mailer spoke at Western Illinois University some sixty miles from here. I know the tenor of your appreciation of Mailer and take pleasure in saying you would have enjoyed him up close. He is positively genteel, charming. I spent five hours with him, two of which we were leaning on a bar, and was frankly awed by the intensity of his attention, the absence of bluster and bombast. He is less craggy and hoary, by far, than I thought possible. He remembered my letters and even invited me to visit him and his new wife-to-be in Stockbridge, Mass.

The record of all this is in the enclosed magazine. It is not good, I rushed it and looked for a narrative spine in the evening that did not exist. Life, as someone said, is plotless (Ivy Compton-Burnett?). But the event was personally of great importance to me.

179

I also enclose a short summary of one aspect of my dissertation which might place my ideas in a historical perspective for you. I am convinced that the old novel (the novel of Leavis' "Great Tradition") is dying, and that its mutations are two-fold. First the fabulists (Robert Scholes term): Børth, Southern, Brahtigan, Heller, Bartholme (?), even Bellow, and second, the practioners of "Creative non-fiction": including Mailer, Capote, Hersey, Talese, Tom Wolfe, Oscar Lewis, etc. Neither group has but its stride yet and both may wither away if more major works are not soon produced.

Styron, Updike, and Malamud are carrying the old torch of realism. Let's face it, we have not had more than half a dozen major novels in the old mode since W W II. Which is not to say we won't. This just may be a fallow period. But art forms normally undergo mutations, sometimes they have a cerebral hemorrhage and die outright. Who writes verse drama, narrative poetry; where are our social realists of the stature of Thomas Wolfe, Farrell, and Dos Passos? The cause of the shifts in our perception are largely historical and difficult to pinpoint. We might note historically, however, that the drug consumers who once took LSD to expand their consciousness have opted for a lesser awareness. Downers came in (as Hunter Thompson notes) with Nixon. Romance is up, realism is down. Reality is too hideous. So art adjusts the perspective. Whether the new romancers are merely escapists remains to be seen. But the news (that old function of the novel) of what our culture is doing, where it is moving, is coming from Mailer et al.

How's that for openers? I would very much appreciate a correspondence on Mailer, tradition and the individual talent. I'll have to do some homework on Styron, but I will. Your idea for a book on the contemporary ego is surely needed.

As you can see, my formulations are inco^hhate. Much refinement is needed. But we have to begin somewhere. So I will await your response and promise never to be as tardy in my replies again.

Regards to your wife, Oliver, and the English Department generally.

Cheers,

Mike Lennon

P.S. ^{POIRIER'S} ~~Power~~'s book on Mailer is out (Viking). I wish he'd simplify his style too. Too Blackmurish.

with Satre's statement that a writer's personal techniques are a result of his metaphysics

VI: 12-15 (NT) Like Henry Adams, Mailer has searched for some generalization that would explain the chaos of the 20th century. Adams, a confirmed determinist, would say that history was inevitable, that man could only try to attune himself to the forces that moved history. Mailer rails against history believing it could have been different, is not immutable. The linch pin of Mailer's thought is twofold (1) that the universe is more coherent if a God is accepted and (2) that it is twice coherent if the God is like us, that is, that he is neither all powerful or all good but striving to attain both. Since God is like us we can best understand him by probing ourselves, our limits, potentialities. Thus the logic of Mailer's choice of himself is inevitable. A fictional construct could never make the finer insights about man and the universe available in the same way as an exploration of the self could. If we assume an all-powerful, all-benificent, creator then the universe becomes just, if not always comprehensible. Unity is there but just out of man's grasp. Likewise, if the artist creates a fictional construct there is no reason for ambiguities. Final synthesis and unity must be obtainable. The work of art must correspond to the universe of a benevolent and all-powerful God. But if this God is of lesser proportions then the artist-creator who is his lesser image must be ambiguous as well. My point is that Mailer's belief in an imperfect but striving God called for a hero of the same proportions. Fictional heroes are immutable, Lambert Strether or Stephen Dedalus must contain the reflection of an ordered universe, unchangeable truths. To reflect an ambiguous, imperfect God Mailer needed to create a hero that was like him. Who better than the imperfect, striving artist, Mailer himself? An existential hero is the only creation possible for an artist who believes in an existential God.

Mailer views the switch from a priori to a posteriori thinking ushered in by Bacon as a disaster for Western man, cutting him off from instinct, emotion, and feeling, and moving him in a Faustian direction. This, Mailer feels, was the beginning of "progress," that root-destroying movement that still continues.

Adams agrees that this happened but sees it as inevitable. Unity was a construct, he feels, and the movement to multiplicity was certain. He feels a great affinity for the year 1200 and the unified sensibility that built Chartres, and gunpowder had to change all this. Mailer feels a balance was struck during Shakespeare's day when metaphor and reason hung in equilibrium. Then reason, statistics, took over and brought civilization to its present pass.

Adams feels then men hung on to unity precariously until 1900 when the new science, the dynamo, radium, destroyed it forever. The liberation of force became too great.

So essentially Mailer and Adams read history the same way, both admire the unity of the middle ages, the unified sensibility, both chart the change that occurred around 1500 but Mailer feels this change was not inevitable but some mistake on God's part, some reach for power that gave growth to the devil who resides at extremes. Adams sees the whole thing as inevitable, Mailer says no, the outcome is still in doubt, we can still resurrect feeling, tap the reservoirs of emotion and instinct and reassert some kind of balance. Mailer is interested in change, reform, Adams in charting the disintegration of the universe.

Mailer feels man made a great error in looking at the world the way he did, that the devil convinced man to distrust feeling and embrace reason, Adams feels that the course was necessary, that man was merely a conductor for the forces of nature, that once the dynamo and the atom proved more potent than the Virgin, man had no choice but to serve as a channel for the new and larger forces.

10
3
2

Both Adams and Mailer sense the unleashing of forces in the 20th century, but while Adams consels "silence and submission" (p. 500) Mailer tries to turn the tide, the last (perhaps) "reactionary".

Mailer, like Adams, is obsessed by unity and multiplicity although he never uses the terms. Multiplicity is obvious in the modern world and Mailer like Adams yearns for the kind of world which was governed by the Virgin of Chartres, the world of the year 1200. Correction, Mailer probably would have found the world of that was the Renaissance, where there was a balance between reason and emotion, instinct and thought. The new forces that Adams predicted would erupt are forces which have shackled modern man, Mailer believes. The bomb, the computer, plastic, the rocket have made modern man fearful, induced in him a paralyzing dread. Mailer feels, in effect, that modern society has become enslaved to these new forces and the bureaucracies that control them. So before man can return to the 12th century he must assert his manhood against totalitarianism and all the forces that behead his individuality.



1200 stifling. He seems to prefer the world of flux

INTRODUCTION:

Historical form is usually based on an event, its causes and consequences, and does not encounter the difficulty of the autobiographical form which cannot be resolved with the death of the protagonist and has difficulty finding an appropriate symbolic point to end. "Most autobiographies continue beyond their natural concluding points, aiming toward that unobtainable stasis of the narrator's death." (Nature of Narrative, p. 215)

X Since the occasion of Mailer's works of non-fiction are historical events or movements (The March on the Pentagon, the Moon Shoot, or the Woman's Liberation movement), he solves the difficulty of autobiographers of where to end their narrative, yet since the meaning of the event is inextricably bound to the ambiguities of Mailer himself, the extended exploration of the persona, Mailer, is not only not out of place but crucial to the interpretation of the event. The created persona, Aquarius, or the Prisoner, or the ^{Reporter} ~~Prisoner~~ is the lens through which we view the event as well as an objective correlative of the event itself so it is perfectly acceptable that Mailer-now tell us about Mailer-then.

INTRODUCTION:

In one sense, the whole development of the novel in the last 80 years, since James, say, has been tied to a greater and deeper exploration and projection of the self in narrative form. The movement has been from the rhetorical, which projected values and types to the psychological which projects individuality and autobiography. In its earlier stages the novel was still concerned with understanding society and how it reflected universal values. But as society became more diverse and fragmented the novel turned inward again. Two representative points to display this shift are the novels of Zola and the novels of Joyce. Mailer, heir to the techniques of exploring the self developed by Conrad, James, and Joyce, capitalizes fully on them yet exhibits the same concern for the shape and destiny of society that, say, George Eliot does. Mailer is moving forward by turning back and concerning himself with society the way Zola and Balzac did.

INTRODUCTION:

X In terms of its relation to the world the modern novel has moved further and further away from romance and an exploration of ideal worlds and closer and closer to the representational, until in the novels of Joyce and Virginia Woolf, Proust and James the artistic imperative seems to be an exact delineation of the mental processes, conscious or unconscious (Finnegans Wake). In Don Quixote a balance is struck between the real and ideal but by the time of George Eliot the ideal world is less important than a dissection of society. [After society has been taken apart by the likes of Balzac, Dickens and Dreiser the sensibility of individuals is anatomized just as surely.] This move from the fictional or ideal to the mimetic has been the basic movement of the novel in the twentieth century.

What has been lost in this movement inward is the social realities we find in Balzac and Zola. E. M. Forster complained that James' novels were brilliant but that 90% of reality had been eliminated. Mailer, a student of the novel whose awareness of its types and modes is apparent in the five vastly different novels he has written, has in his non-fiction explored the nuances of sensibility with all the resources of a James, presenting such explorations as a countervailing to the documentary, mimetic portions of works like Armies and St. George.

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Rise of realism -- people around 1700 began to see the world without the benefit of myth and religion. They decided they wanted to look at the facts and then draw their conclusions. Drop superstition and myth. A priori to a posteriori. Yet until middle of 19th century many old ideas remained. Under aegis of rationalism however myth after sustaining myth was chucked. Darwin did away with uniqueness of man. Freud did away with idea that man could choose good and evil. Marx did away with the idea of mobility of classes showed it was just money that made them different.

All of these rational excursions undermined what remained of religious faith.

X Art, skeptical of finding order in a disintegrating social world turned in to examine the world of self. The novel was objective but narrow in the scope of its investigations. This was the psychological novel. Under the spur of Einstein's theory of relativity the novel began to study relation--how one refined person related to another--novels focused not on the whole web of society but the relation of two or three people--who had to stand for the world. These novelists--James, Conrad, Joyce, Woolf did this better than anyone ever had. After them the novel became political, then sociological, then sexual, homosexual until every corner of society had been examined. But always the novel reflected how society saw the world. Finally the novel, having gone to the psychological roots of man, could go no further. At the same time the press was taking over the role of giving the big picture, then TV.

But in doing its reporting media kept out of the individual mind and instead reported wars, politics, murders, business, plagues. If they told a human interest story it was sentimental or shocking--one can't be Jamesian in 3 columns.

The new journalists responded to the demands of the time for reporting of events through the eyes of a gifted, careful, subjective reporter, giving us both the inside and the outside.

(193

Introduction:

X

There is a curve in the progress of Mailer's career--first to see the world, as in Naked, then to criticize ⁱⁿ ~~of~~ Naked, Barbary Shore and large parts of Deer Park. But the shift in Deer Park from ideological criticism to exploration of aspects of the self (for Eitel, Sergius and Faye are all components of the Mailerian self) is a crucial one. Mailer has begun to understand, perhaps unconsciously, that rational dissection and detachment will not permit one to get ot the heart of experience as well as subjective exploration of the microcosmic self. Reacting to the literary mode of naturalism he was suckled at, Mailer, like the Bloomsbury group at the turn of the century, ^{saw} ~~sees~~ the need to turn inward--but Dos Passos, Farrell and Marx have politicized him. He cannot contemplate his nqvel alone. This is what Mailer means when he talks about building "a radical bridge between Marx and Freud." Oppressed by the bōld dogmatism of the Old left, suspicious of the narcissism of a Virginia Woolf--Mailer, after treading both these paths, finds a new way in Armies: Look at man in the world--the self in the world. Neither catalogue and dissect the outside world, nor savor and suck on the self but combine ^{both approaches} ~~them~~. Masterstroke.

Conclusion: Mailer has been ignored or attacked by serious critics for years. His novels after The Naked and the Dead (and this was derivative they said) were too full of sex and politics, obsessions with existentialism, murder, suicide and orgy, drugs and booze to be of any lasting value.

[Rubin says B.S. is weak Dos Passos and Deer Park poor Fitzgerald or N. West]

And his public antics, his stabbling of his wife, his drunkenness, brawls and drug addiction only prove he has no real artistic responsibility. In truth they have a point, his novels are derivative--but what a diverse pack of influences! Hemingway, Dos Passos, ^{wife,} Malraux, Fitzgerald, West, Dos-toyevsky, Farrell, Steinbeck, Orwell. What they missed was that Mailer was trying everything, changing styles and politics with each work--an existential artistic encounter with reality. Only Podhoretz, Kazin, Aldridge, D. Trilling, and a few others saw that Mailer had abilities large enough to be original--the fact that he could claim influences as diverse as Melville, Malraux, Farrell and Hemingway was the clue. So when Armies burst on the scene, following the linguistic tour de force, Vietnam, they were too disgusted to see that Mailer had arrived [quote Sunrise]. The trick for critics now is to judge if he can go farther. Mailer thinks so. Can he top Armies? He has never been so stuck in one style so long--seven full books written in the third person (or ~~sex~~ of E.E. Cummings is not counted). I suspect Mailer is having the battle of his artistic life now--and it will be all the harder for him to break because he has been successful without being derivative. He may write the big novel he has promised for years, or he may continue to try and position himself so as to be face to face with history (Wain). Hard to say. But not long after he told me he wanted to get to work on the big one I saw him at ^(the Senate) Watergate. ^(Cummings) My bet is that he can't do it but its a bad bet; he has outfaced the literary world for twenty years and the consciousness that he is grooved in a mode will only make him wish to get out all the more. He has always been a counterpuncher and there is always a

X

chance he will give up the "action" he loves so much and retire to a cork-lined room somewhere. Either way there will be more good Mailer coming for many years.

Conclusion: Mailer's non-fiction, especially Armies, will appeal to, excite and bother in the happiest way, two groups of people, namely those who are literate but not academic or scholarly, readers who measure literature by internal barometric [see notes on Mailer p. 3 (1st series)] pressure, and two, a much smaller group, scholars and academics who have a feel for the continuum of literature, who see it steadily and see it whole and so can recognize when a writer has the force and brilliance to draw on the currents of narrative which have their source in the ancients, Augustine, Dante, Shakespeare, Melville and Whitman. There is another group--those who oppose and villify "experimentalism" in literature without understanding what Whitman knew, that "the cleanest expression is that which finds no sphere worthy of itself and makes one." ("Preface, 1855," Random House ed., p. 449). John Simon, writes in the Hudson Review on Armies that "people who can write novels as novels don't need to write them as history." Simon misses the point. Previously, he sees himself as a protector of the great tradition, the only difficulty being he cannot see back past Middlemarch or The Grapes of Wrath. No one can keep an art from ^{being} alive. Like the stream of language it will have its way, swelling and shrinking and even flooding the banks of experience upon occasion. People do not kill art forms--they wither away when they do not meet the demands of an age. (More on Simon - e.f., notes on Simon).

201
AMERICAN LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE

feelings which we all share. And, though it is only too easy for a writer to be local without being universal, I doubt whether a poet or novelist can be universal without being local too. Who could be more Greek than Odysseus? Or more German than Faust? Or more Spanish than Don Quixote? Or more American than Huck Finn? Yet each one of them is a kind of archetype in the mythology of all men everywhere.

Having got to this point, let me now suggest that a national literature comes to consciousness at the stage at which any young writer must be aware of several generations of writers behind him, in his own country and language, and amongst these generations several writers generally acknowledged to be of the great. The importance of this background for the young writer is incalculable. It is not necessary that this background should provide him with models for imitation. The young writer, certainly, should not be consciously bending his talent to conform to any supposed American or other tradition. The writers of the past, especially of the immediate past, in one's own place and language may be valuable to the young writer simply as something definite to rebel against. He will recognize the common ancestry: but he needn't necessarily *like* his relatives. For models to imitate, or for styles from which to learn, he may often more profitably go to writers of another country and another language, or of a remoter age. Some of my strongest impulse to original development, in early years, has come from thinking: 'here is a man who has said something, long ago or in another language, which somehow corresponds to what I want to say now; let me see if I can't do what he has done, in my own language—in the language of my own place and time.'

Such considerations should put us all on guard against an attitude of narrow national pride in our literature. Especially against asking questions such as 'is this new writer truly American or not? Does his work conform to the standards of America, to our definitions of what constitutes Americanism in literature?' It is obvious that such a critical censorship could only stifle originality. The cry has so often been raised about new writers: 'This isn't English!' or 'this isn't French!' or whatever the language

To Critique the Critic by T. S. Eliot
Farmer Strauss & Gurney New York, 1965
"AMERICAN LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE"

may be. Also, there is always the danger of overvaluing the local product just because it is local; and of unconsciously judging our own writers by less exacting standards than those we apply to writers of other nations. We are, in every country, always exposed to that danger. And to narrow your admission to subject matter or to style already accepted, would be to affirm that what is American has been settled once for all. A living literature is always in process of change; contemporaneous living literatures are always, through one or more authors, changing each other; and the literature written in America in future generations will, you may be sure, render obsolete any formulations of 'what is American' based on the work of writers up to and including those now writing.

From time to time there occurs some revolution, or sudden mutation of form and content in literature. Then, some way of writing which has been practised for a generation or more, is found by a few people to be out of date, and no longer to respond to contemporary modes of thought, feeling and speech. A new kind of writing appears, to be greeted at first with disdain and derision; we hear that the tradition has been flouted, and that chaos has come. After a time it appears that the new way of writing is not destructive but re-creative. It is not that we have repudiated the past, as the obstinate enemies—and also the stupidest supporters—of any new movement like to believe; but that we have enlarged our conception of the past; and that in the light of what is new we see the past in a new pattern. We might now consider such a revolution as that which has taken place in poetry, both in England and in America, during the last forty years.

In talking about such an event, one must mention names. So, in order to be quite fair, I explain that I choose names as typical illustrations, that the poets mentioned are not necessarily valued in the order in which their names will occur, and that they are not all necessarily superior to all of the poets who are not mentioned. Furthermore, in any such literary revolution there is an overlap: some of the poets who continue to write in what is usually called a 'more traditional' manner are first-rate in their kind, and by the

Musts for final chapter:

p. 11, 17, 19, 23, 27-30, 33-35, 37

39, 41, 43, 45, 47, 49, 51, 53

55, 57, 61, 98, 103, 109, 111+113+115, 121, 123

137, 141, 145+47, 159+61, 175, 181, 185, 187

191, 193, 195+97, 199, 203-231 (209*)

Mobile

Petersen

p 21, 29, 31, ~~41~~ 59

62, 67, 71, 73, 101, 105, 151, 53, 165, 259, 281+283, 299

use 1Xp89, 1X66