

file

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Gentlemen:

This letter constitutes approval of the galleys of the PLAYBOY interview of which I was the principal, and initialed by me and corrected by any changes I may have indicated thereon; and confirmation of the understanding which was the basis of my participation in the interview: that you may publish the material as an interview obtained by PLAYBOY in any media that you, as sole owner of world-wide rights to the interview, should determine, in consideration of a payment of \$1,000.00 to be made to me.

_____(SEAL)
Norman Mailer

Date: _____

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 3

— journalist, debater,
part-time politician,
professional celebrity.
How do you answer
that criticism?

Start here - 1 American fiction by wearing so many other
Total Pages 2 hats. They point out that there's Mailer
3 the politician who once seriously con-
Total Lines 4 sidered running for Mayor of New York
5 City; there's Mailer the journalist who
6 writes about the maladies in American
7 life and about the political brutalities,
8 there's Mailer the celebrity who grabs
9 headlines by booze brawls and other acts
10 of public violence.

11 MAILER: Moving from one activity to
12 another makes sense if you do it with a
13 hint of wit or a touch of grace--which I
14 don't say I've always done; far from it--
15 but I think you can get momentum from
16 the turn when moving from one activity
17 to another. If you do it well, you can
18 increase the energy you bring to the next
19 piece of work. Growth, in some curious
20 way, I think, depends on being always in
21 motion just a little bit, one way or an-
22 other. Growth is not simply ~~just~~ going
23 forward; it's going forward until you
24 have to make a delicate decision either
25 to continue in a difficult situation or
26 retreat and look for another way to go
27 forward. The pattern that this creates--
28 no, pattern is a poor word--the line of
29 the movement reveals the nature of form.
End here 30 A breast is beautiful because it decides

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 4

End here

1 to go down until that point where it de-
 2 cides to go up, and after it decides to
 3 go up, it decides to go down again, and
 4 then decides to go up again, and you have
 5 the beginning of the nipple. The nipple
 6 goes through its own particular curve,
 7 which consists of going out to the hea-
 8 vens as far as it can, then dropping down
 9 toward hell, and then returning to the
 10 body--all within the space of a quarter
 11 of an inch. But there's an extraordinary
 12 difference between a beautiful nipple and
 13 a dull one. More to the point, I've been
 14 accused of having frittered many talents
 15 away, of having taken on too many activi-
 16 ties, of having been too self-consciously
 17 a celebrity, of having worked at the edges
 18 and indeed at the center of my own pub-
 19 lic legend; and, of course, like any criminal
 20 in the dock, I can sing a pretty tune; I
 21 can defend myself; I'm my own best lawyer
 22 the day when I'm not will be a sad day.
 23 The defense I'll enter today depends on
 24 my favorite notion: that an expert, by
 25 definition, is opposed to growth. Why?
 26 Because an expert is a man who works for-
 27 ward in one direction until he reaches
 28 that point where he has to use all his
 29 energy to maintain his advance. he cannot
 30 allow himself to look in other directions.

More

Start here
Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 5

End here

More

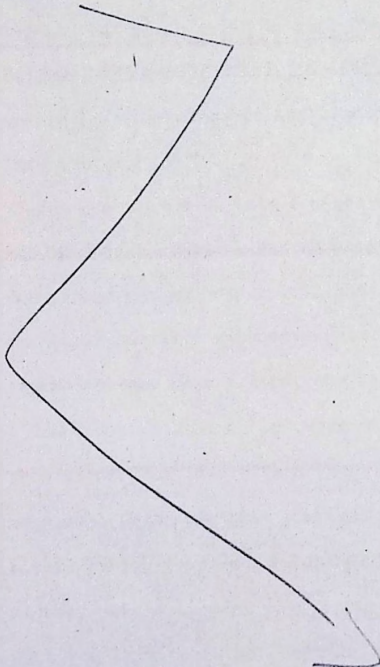
1 In other words, he's become nearsighted.
2 Now, I, as a man who's been nearsighted
3 almost all of his life, know that any-
4 one who's born nearsighted or becomes
5 nearsighted early is a man become an ex-
6 pert prematurely. That's why kids with
7 glasses are usually disliked by kids who
8 don't wear glasses. The kids with good
9 eyesight sense that the boy with glasses
10 is an expert who's going to run the world.
11 The first chronic personal shame I suppose
12 I ever felt was having to wear glasses.
13 And I don't wear them today even though
14 I'm so nearsighted I don't recognize old
15 friends from ten feet away. Having been a
16 premature expert myself, I think I may
17 have reacted against it with a sense that
18 expertise was the trap for me, that to get
19 particularly good at any one thing would
20 leave me a top-heavy expert.
21 PLAYBOY: Is all this related to The Naked
22 and The Dead and the celebrity that fol-
23 lowed in its wake?
24 MAILER: Yes. Being well-known at 25 cre-
25 ated a chain of legend for everything I
26 did. If I left a party early it wasn't be-
27 cause I might have been sleepy; it was be-
28 cause I had put down the party. This im-
29 mediately created champions for me: "That
30 Mailer's too much--put down the hostess

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 when he left the party. Others would say;
2 "Dreadful--no manners; a barbarian."
3 People expected me to ^(b)grab the hostess of
4 a party, sound her, yank her, pump her,
5 ^{Candy} if I didn't like her, throw her out the
6 window; then turn to my host, say, "Up
7 your buns, guns," and walk over to sock
8 the nearest guy in the eye. So when I come
9 in a place and don't behave like that, the
10 other guests say: "Why, he has such nice
11 manners." Every little thing I did was
12 exaggerated. That worked against my natural
13 impulse, which was to find my way by mov-
14 ing from one activity to another at my
15 own rate.



End here

30

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: M INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 5A

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 6

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 Lo! There was a feedback which had little
2 to do with me. It was as if--if you will--
3 every one of my actions was tuned to an
4 amplifier.

5 *Not* ~~There~~ I had some instinctive sense--
6 right or wrong--that the best way to grow
7 was not to write one novel after another
8 but to move from activity to activity, a
9 notion which began with Renaissance Man^e
10 it's not my idea, after all. My personal
11 celebrity[^] was an obstacle to any natural
12 ability to move quickly and easily. For
13 years, it was a tremendous obstacle; and
14 I ended up having a very dull, dogged per-
15 sonality which sought to wrestle with the
16 legend, and which tried to say, "Look,
17 fellows, I'm really simple, honest, hard-
18 working; I'm as close to Abe Lincoln as
19 Arthur Miller is."

20 The hoarseness of this confession is
21 not to enlist sympathy but to prepare
22 the ground for my boast: I learned how
23 to accept and live with my legend. The
24 legend becomes your friend, the beard,
25 a front man, a pimp, a procurer of new
26 situations. You live with a ghost who is
27 more real to people than yourself; every
28 single action you ~~now~~ ^g take ~~in life~~ with
29 another person is part of a triangle. Every
30 girl you talk to is not only in love with

*may have enabled me
to get girls I would
not otherwise have
gotten, but it*

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 7

Start here

- Total Pages

Total Lines

1 you or disappointed in you, but also is
 2 in love with or hating your legend ^(S)who,
 3 incidentally, is more real to her than
 4 you. There are times, therefore, when
 5 you beef up your legend, perform some ac-
 6 tion to support it, times when you draw
 7 credit back from your legend, like cash-
 8 ing in the desire of somebody else to do
 9 something nice for you. Either way, you
 10 don't pretend--as I did for years--that
 11 the legend ain't there; he is. By the
 12 same token, when you're dealing with a
 13 man, there are now two of you against him ^(S)
 14 you're two linemen having to take out one
 15 other guy.

16 PLAYBOY: In other words, if you got drunk
 17 and got into a scrap at a party, there'd
 18 be three men fighting instead of two?

19 MAILER: Yeah. Of course, that doesn't
 20 always work to your advantage, because
 21 sometimes a guy who is fighting two guys
 22 is braver than when he's fighting one.
 23 I've gotten licked by guys who I think
 24 might not have licked me if I hadn't had
 25 my twin, the legend, on my side, too.

26 PLAYBOY: One of your ⁹fairly celebrated
 27 experiments with growth was your experi-
 28 ence with drugs. ^{1/1}you were on marijuana,
 29 ^{benedictine}benzedrine and sleeping pills for a few years,
 30 and were addicted to seconal. Later, you

still

End here

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

8

Page:

said that a man on drugs will pay for it
by "a gutted and burnt-out nervous sys-
tem." How do you feel about drugs today?

Do you see them as an example of poten-
tial or of false growth?

MAILER: Drugs, I think, are a spiritual
way of gambling. This is a poetic equa-
tion which can be carried right down to
the end of its metaphor, because on drugs
you're even bucking the house percentage,
which for a drug like marijuana is prob-
ably something like 30 percent or 40 per-
cent.

PLAYBOY: Would you expand the metaphor?

MAILER: Marijuana does something with
the sense of time: it accelerates you;
it opens you to your unconscious. But
it's as if you're calling on the reserves
of the next three days. All the sweets,
all the crystals, all the little decisions,
all the unconscious work of the next
three days--or if the experience is deep,
part of the next thirty days, or the next
thirty years--is called forward. For a
half hour or two hours--whatever is the
high of the pot--you're better than you
are normally, and you get into situations
you wouldn't get into normally, and gener-
ally more happens to you. you make love
better, you talk better, you think better,

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 9

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 you dig people better. The point is, you've
 2 got to get in pretty far because you're
 3 using up three days in an hour--or what--
 4 ever the particular ratio is for any par-
 5 ticular person. So unless you come back
 6 with--let us say--72 hours in one hour,
 7 you lose. Because you have to ~~recover~~ ^{spend} ~~recovering.~~
 8 for the next three or four days. You
 9 might ask: What happens to the guy who
 10 ~~is smoking~~ ^{smokes} pot all the time? I don't know.
 11 ~~But~~ I do know something is being mortgaged;
 12 something is being drawn out of the fu-
 13 ture. If his own future has already been
 14 used up in one or another mysterious or
 15 sinister sense, then maybe the pot is draw-
 16 ing it out of the very substance of what
 17 I may as well confess I call God. (I've
 18 talked about this some in "The White
 19 Negro.") I suspect God feeds drug addicts
 20 the way a healthy body feeds parasites.
 21 PLAYBOY: How do you mean?
 22 MAILER: Well, if God has great compassion,
 23 He may not be willing to cut the drug ad-
 24 dict off from Him. During the time the
 25 addict has some of his most intense and
 26 divine experiences, it is because he is
 27 literally imbibing the very marrow and nu-
 28 trient of existence. But since I do not
 29 believe that any god is necessarily in-
 30 exhaustible, the drug addict may end up

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 10

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

End here

1 by bleeding Him.

2 PLAYBOY: Do you think this happens on

3 LSD?

4 MAILER: I don't think you have a mystical

5 experience on chemicals without taking

6 the risk of exploiting something in the

7 creation. If you haven't paid the real

8 wages of love or courage or abstention or

9 discipline or sacrifice or wit in the

10 eye of danger, then taking a psychedelic

11 drug is living the life of a parasite ^{15/}

12 it's drawing on sweets you have not earned.

13 ^(by the way) (Please do not say that LBJ is the biggest

14 cornball in America ^{15/} with the above, I

15 have just presented my credentials.)

16 PLAYBOY: What is the danger of this para-

17 ^(self-) sitical exploitation ⁹ on LSD?

18 MAILER: I'm not going to say that LSD is

19 bad in every way for everyone, but I'm

20 convinced it's bad if you keep taking it.

21 Any drug is bad finally in the same way

22 that being a confirmed gambler is bad. A

23 confirmed gambler ends up losing all his

24 friends because he blows their money and

25 blows their trust. A gambler will tell

26 any lie to get back into the action. By

27 the same token, if you stay on any drug

28 for too long, then you have a habit; you're

29 a victim; you're--to anticipate something

30 ^{you're} you're a totalitarian. ^{stet}

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 11

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 Let me put it this way: LSD is marvel-
 2 ous for experts to take when they get too
 3 frozen in their expertise. Let's suppose
 4 they've driven deep into something impene-
 5 trable, some obstacle which was bound to
 6 trap them because of the shortsighted na-
 7 ture of their expertise. Although they
 8 work and work manfully as experts, they're
 9 at this point similar to soldiers who
 10 have pushed far into enemy territory but
 11 are now up against a resistance they can-
 12 not get through. Their only action is to
 13 retreat, but they don't know how to because
 14 they have no habits of retreat; ^gthey're
 15 experts; they only know how to move for-
 16 ward to amass more knowledge and more
 17 concentration upon a point. When this con-
 18 centration does not succeed in penetrat-
 19 ing the resistance of the problem, the
 20 expert is psychically in great trouble.
 21 He begins to live in increasing depression;
 22 He has to retreat and doesn't know how:
 23 he wasn't built to retreat.

24 My guess is: on LSD you begin to die
 25 a little. That's why you get this extra-
 26 ordinary, even divine sense of revelation.
 27 Perhaps you taste the odor and essence
 28 of your own death in the trip; ⁱⁿ excess,
 29 it's a deadly poison, after all.) There-
 30 fore, what's given to the expert is a

stet

End here

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 12

broader vision, ^(;) dying a little, he begins
to retreat from his expertise and begins
to rejoin his backward brothers. Halle-
lujah! So that LSD taken a few times
could be very good, I would imagine. But
before very long, if the expert keeps
taking LSD, he can become nothing but an
expert on LSD.

PLAYBOY: What do you think ^{(N) of} about Timothy
Leary?

MAILER: Well, I wondered who we ^{WPR} ~~are~~ just
talking about.

PLAYBOY: More of an answer, please.

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

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

MAILER: I'm going to offer the hardwork-
ing magazine readers of America one funda-
mental equation: A man who drinks is at-
tempting to dissolve an obsession.

PLAYBOY: What's the obsession?

MAILER: Talk first about what an

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 13

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 obsession is. I've thought about obsession
 2 a great deal, but ^{I'm not sure} ~~I don't know~~ if I know
 3 the answer. Everybody talks about obses-
 4 sions; nobody's ever ^o really explained
 5 them ^{we} we can define them, but we don't
 6 really know what we're ^(K) talking about. An
 7 obsession, I'd suggest, is a pole of mag-
 8 netism, a psychic field of force. An
 9 obsession is created, I think, when some
 10 event has occurred which has altered our
 11 life profoundly or we have passed through
 12 some relation with someone else which has
 13 altered our life profoundly, yet we don't
 14 know whether we were changed for good or
 15 for bad: ^{it's} it's the most fundamental sort
 16 of event or relation ^{it} it has marked us;
 17 yet it's morally ambiguous.
 18 PLAYBOY: What kind of event?
 19 MAILER: Suppose a marriage breaks up.
 20 You don't know if it was finally your
 21 fault or your wife's fault or God's fault
 22 or the Devil's fault ^(G) four uncertainties.
 23 Let's reduce them to two: a man, or his
 24 wife.
 25 ^{NAK} Put it this way: ^{people} people move forward
 26 into the future out of the way they com-
 27 prehend the past. When we don't understand
 28 something in our past, we are therefore
 29 crippled. Use the metaphor of the army
 30 here: If you move forward to attack a

End here

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 14

1 town, and the center of this attack de-
 2 pends upon a road which will feed your
 3 attack, and this road passes through a
 4 town, yet you don't know if your people
 5 hold that town or someone else holds it,
 6 then, obviously, if you are a general
 7 you'd be pretty obsessive about that town.
 8 You'd keep asking, "Will you please find
 9 out who owns that town?" You'd send out
 10 reconnaissance parties to locate the
 11 town, enter it, patrol through it if all
 12 sorts of mysterious things occurred--if,
 13 for example, your reconnaissance platoon
 14 didn't return--you'd feel so uncertain
 15 you might not move forward to attack. The
 16 obsession is a search for a useful reality.
 17 What finally did occur? What is real?
 18 PLAYBOY: ~~and drink helps someone go back~~
 19 ~~and take another look?~~
 20 MAILER: Well, if his drink takes him
 21 back to an earlier state of sensitivity,
 22 it is then taking him back to a place be-
 23 ^(d)hind the place where he originally got
 24 into the impasse which created the obses-
 25 sion. If you can return to a state just
 26 preceding the one you were in when these
 27 various events occurred, you can say to
 28 yourself, "Now, I'm approaching the event
 29 again. What really did happen? Who was
 30 right? Who was wrong? Let me not miss it

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

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 15

Start here

- Total Pages

Total Lines

1 this time." A man must drink until he
 2 locates the truth. I think that's why
 3 it's so hard for people to give up booze.
 4 There's an art work going on with most
 5 serious drinkers. Usually, it's a failed
 6 art work. Once again, one's playing against
 7 the house percentage: one drinks, one
 8 wrecks one's liver, dims one's vision,
 9 burns out one's memory. Drinking is a
 10 serious activity--a serious moral and
 11 spiritual activity. We consume ourselves
 12 in order to search for a truth. It's no
 13 accident that a part of small-town common
 14 sense insists: "I don't trust a man who
 15 never takes a drink," because that man
 16 either has no obsessions and so has never
 17 dared a thing, or has obsessions so pre-
 18 valent that he has buried them, and live
 19 bodies are screaming under the ground.
 20 PLAYBOY: When drink takes you back to
 21 the point before the obsession began, how
 22 can a man understand the truth of that
 23 point?
 24 MAILER: We get into something mysterious.
 25 I'd like to quit the field because this
 26 doesn't ⁽ⁿ⁾ lead itself to neat formulas. But *How,*
 27 everyone who's a serious drinker has had
 28 revelations on drink. Drink is the ac-
 29 tive man's drug addition. Madison Avenue,
 30 please copy. But note: you take a drug

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 16

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

End here

1 lying on your back, ^Wwhereas the way to
2 drink is standing up.

3 PLAYBOY: Do you feel that you've ^{Experienced} ~~gotten~~ to
4 moments of truth through drink?

5 MAILER: Extraordinary moments of truth.

6 The thing that had me ready to weep was
7 that I was very close to the truth but
8 too drunk to do anything about it.

9 PLAYBOY: What sort of thing did you dis-
10 cover?

11 MAILER: Whatever the truth was. The kind
12 of truths you find in moments like that.

13 Discovering that somebody you thought
14 loved you, hated you; or vice and versa. ^(a)

15 All I'm getting at is that sense of cer-
16 tainty; past moments of ambiguity are

17 resolved. The ambiguity sinks into the
18 earth; a crystal remains; you say: "Yes,

19 there's the truth. Yes, this is what did
20 happen." A relationship evolves in one's

21 memory from a morass to a crystal of
22 recollection.

23 PLAYBOY: Let's change the subject by
24 recollecting some of your previously
25 published truths. You've written exten-
26 sively about John F. Kennedy and his
27 impact on our times. ~~Particularly in The~~
28 Presidential Papers. Do you think that
29 since the assassination, the truth about
30 Kennedy has given way to ^a ~~some~~ kind of

Let's discuss
another kind
of truth.

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 17

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 myth?

2 MAILER: I don't know if it's a myth. I

3 think Kennedy was a great man. He did

4 heroic things in World War Two. Not just

5 swimming three miles with a back which

6 was half-broken, carrying another man along,

7 and then going out the next day trying

8 to swim to another island. Guys like you

9 and me--sure, we could have gotten it up

10 that one time--maybe--and then we would

11 have retired and gone home and lived in

12 ease for quite a few years. Instead, Ken-

13 nedy went out after saving that sailor's

14 life and being himself rescued by head

15 hunters, and started running the most

16 insane PT boat in the Solomons, going up

17 the neck of creeks and bayous and still

18 waters that no one had ever dared explore--

19 which may have stood him in good stead in

20 later years.

21 PLAYBOY: You addressed The Presidential22 Papers directly to Kennedy. Did you expect

23 him to answer?

24 MAILER: If you remember, that collection

25 of essays was published in book form some-

26 thing like three weeks before the assas-

27 sination. If Kennedy had lived, I doubt

28 if he'd necessarily have read it; after

29 all, how much time does a President have to

End here

30 read? But I know that some of the people

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 around him would have read the essays
 2 sooner or later; there would have been
 3 some discussion; and there might have been
 4 some interest in the ideas in my book. Of
 5 course, the Liberal establishment was at
 6 that time extraordinarily smug: Ivy-League
 7 brain trusters terribly pleased with them-
 8 selves, holding hands in a closed circle,
 9 where Schlesinger spoke only to Galbraith
 10 and Galbraith only to God. Certainly at
 11 that time there was no dialog with them.
 12 Mention of my name was good for the first
 13 round of laughs at a cocktail party in
 14 Washington.

15 PLAYBOY: In your essay "Superman Comes to
 16 the Supermarket," written during the 1960
 17 Presidential campaign, you suggested that
 18 Kennedy was an "existential politician."
 19 Existential is a term that crops up fre-
 20 quently in your writing. Exactly what do
 21 you mean by it?

22 MAILER: Existential--no precedents, no
 23 traditions, no disciplines, no books, no
 24 guides sufficiently familiar with the

End here

30

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 17A

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 18

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

situation to take you through.

PLAYBOY: ^{In what way} ~~How in your view~~ was John Kennedy an existential politician?

MAILER: Kennedy was a man who could define himself--or, in other words, comprehend himself--only by his actions. He had such extraordinary ambition that if he had not succeeded in being President, he might have ended up a bad piece of work.

There is such a thing as a man starting as a bad piece of work because he has a nature which is extraordinarily disharmonious--he lives with unendurable proportions and ambitions. If he succeeds in what the psychoanalysts call "acting it out" (with some scorn they say "acting out"), the fact remains that, if he has a huge ambition and wishes to act it out, that means he also has to have huge courage, high wit, and vast imagination.

Kennedy succeeded in getting to play the one role which could allow him to realize himself: the President of the United States.

When I call him an existential politician, I mean that Kennedy had no nature other than the particular nature he discovered in himself by the act of living. If he had tried to live a more conventional life, he would have sealed his

End here

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 19

psyche in a vault and probably would have died young and schizophrenic.

PLAYBOY: Speaking of his death, you wrote an enthusiastic review of Mark Lane's Rush to Judgment, which severely criticized the Warren Commission Report, when the book appeared in August of 1966. In

your review, you stated: "Lane's book proves once and forever that the assassination of President Kennedy is more of a mystery today than when it occurred." Do you still feel that way about Lane's argument?

MAILER: Well, I'm not an authority on it. When I reviewed Rush to Judgment I wrote that if one-tenth of the things Lane said were true, then the work of the Warren Commission is a scandal greater than Teapot Dome. Here and there I did check up later on a few points Lane made (like every other amateur detective in America, I have the volumes of the Warren Commission Report and wherever he'd claim the Commission was weak, indeed the Commission was weak.

PLAYBOY: When you claim that the Warren Commission Report might be a bigger scandal than Teapot Dome, what exactly do you mean?

MAILER: A disgraceful, shoddy,

"you wrote"

More

End here

Start here
Total Pages

Total Lines

End here

1 incompetent, self-indulgent, complacent
2 work by august people on a matter of
3 transcendent importance--that's a scandal.
4 It means you can't believe in important
5 people any more--or at least ⁽ⁱⁿ⁾ people of
6 that ilk.
7 ~~PLAYBOY~~: Do you have any theory about
8 who killed Kennedy?
9 MAILER: I have no special insight into
10 that. Where I'm more ready to speculate
11 ~~however~~, is on the events after the assas-
12 sination. There must have been one incre-
13 dible moment for every secret police
14 agency in the world when they first heard
15 that Oswald had been in the Soviet Union
16 and had come back here to America. Every
17 intelligence operation everywhere must
18 have known the odds were great that Os-
19 wald was an agent for several quite separ-
20 ate espionage services, because you don't
21 let men and boys like Oswald in and out
22 of gold war countries without making them
23 pay a little price--they've got to be-
24 come a little agent--not a big agent,
25 just a little agent, a pawn. Most of
26 these guys in secret services are--I
27 won't say they're clowns ^{is} some are able
28 but they don't have a great deal of per-
29 sonnel to work with when you get down to
30 it. Their best material is found in each

PLAYBOY MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 20

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 21

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 other's agents. So, they play games
 2 with each other's agents. They develop
 3 the same attraction to each other's agents
 4 that buddies work up for the same girl.
 5 Two guys in love with the same girl get
 6 great play back and forth. So, yes, once
 7 in awhile, a poor guy like Oswald gets
 8 caught in a situation--becomes an agent
 9 for two countries, and two or three other
 10 secret services or ^(s)espionage services
 11 will get in on it. It's possible Oswald
 12 may have been an agent or on the working
 13 list of a dozen different secret services
 14 ^(throughout) in the world.

15 When the ^(a)assassination occurred, I
 16 think a tremendous panic erupted. An
 17 enormous effort was made to begin des-
 18 troying all evidence in sight. Every
 19 possible way. To top that, you had the
 20 Dallas police department--which I don't
 21 know anything about--but give or take a
 22 few points, it has to be as corrupt as the
 23 next big-city police force. Moreover, a
 24 cop under a searchlight is not the most
 25 resourceful of creatures; he tends to
 26 stampede. According to Lane, the Dallas
 27 police force destroyed evidence all over,
 28 heaped up false evidence by the pitch-
 29 fork, terrorized witnesses.

End here

PLAYBOY: Why?

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 22

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

End here

MAILER: Everybody concerned must have thought that there was a conspiracy to kill Kennedy. Whether there actually was a plot or not, they all thought there must be one during those early days; and they did their best to cover up evidence connecting anybody or anything with some possible conspiracy. Texans like to talk; a lot of people down there had strained poker faces when they heard the news because their first thought was, "Did my boys have anything to do with this?"

PLAYBOY: How did you feel when you heard Kennedy had been shot?

MAILER: Horrible. Horrible. At first, in some cockeyed way, I thought it was a gag--like, he wasn't really hurt that bad. For some reason or other I was bitter about him in those days and I made a sardonic remark I've been ashamed of after: I said, "That son-of-a-bitch, he's got hard Irish smarts; he's probably lying there with that flesh wound in his arm, saying, 'Let America sweat for an hour thinking I'm about to die. They'll realize how much they need me.'" Of course, when I realized he was indeed dead, I came to the conclusion that my on-the-spot divination of events was not

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 23

1 incisive, tasty or superb.

2 PLAYBOY: If Kennedy had only been

3 wounded and then had recovered and re-

4 sumed his responsibilities as President,

5 what do you think America would be like

6 today?

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More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 24

Start here
Total Pages

Total Lines

MAILER: It might still be in serious trouble. Kennedy was a fine man, maybe even a magical man, and he changed the style of America; he opened it up. Something racy came back into American life. The country was saltier; it swung more. Still, you would have had technological society eroding most of his efforts; in addition, terrible problems with Congress and Civil Rights. I have a hunch, however, that Kennedy wouldn't have been such a fool as to get us into Vietnam the way Lyndon Johnson got us in; I think Kennedy would have kept the war going about the way it was going, and he might have looked for a way to write it off. Kennedy might even have come to pay attention to the idea which doesn't have enough attention paid to it, that the way to fight communism is not by warring against it, but by letting communists fight each other. There's something in the nature of communism which makes it attack itself. Communism is profoundly cannibalistic.

PLAYBOY: Isn't that one of the reasons you gave why we should get out of Vietnam-- in the controversial talk you delivered in ~~the May, 1968~~ during Peace Day at the University of California at Berkeley?

MAILER: Yes. Except it's next to

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 24Start here
Total Pages

Total Lines

MAILER: It might still be in serious trouble. Kennedy was a fine man, maybe even a magical man, and he changed the style of America; he opened it up. Something racy came back into American life. The country was saltier; it swung more. Still, you would have had technological society eroding most of his efforts; in addition, terrible problems with Congress and Civil Rights. I have a hunch, however, that Kennedy wouldn't have been such a fool as to get us into Vietnam the way Lyndon Johnson got us in; I think Kennedy would have kept the war going about the way it was going, and he might have looked for a way to write it off. Kennedy might even have come to pay attention to the idea which doesn't have enough attention paid to it, that the way to fight communism is not by warring against it, but by letting communists fight each other. There's something in the nature of communism which makes it attack itself. Communism is profoundly ^(a) cannibalistic.

PLAYBOY: Isn't that one of the reasons you gave why we should get out of Vietnam-- in the controversial talk you delivered ~~in 1965~~ ^{in 1967} during Peace Day at the University of California at Berkeley ^(two years ago?)

MAILER: Yes. Except it's next to

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 25

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

End here

impossible for us to get out of Vietnam,
 Psychologically impossible. (Militarily)
 of course, the war is next to meaning-
 less.) But America, more than any other
 country on earth, has an image of itself
 as a fighting nation. Americans really
 want to fight; they really want a war.
 It's good for them, healthy for them.
 Fine. Have war games every year. I offered
 this suggestion in a satirical piece, but
 I've become serious about it. Buy some
 place--some desert or jungle--^(and) invite any
 countries we have eyes for to come to
 fight. If they don't accept, they're
 conceivably too yellow to show up. Or at
 least ^(so) we can tell the world. But if they
 do, ^g They have 50,000 men, we have 50,000
 men; we get 200 or 400 airplanes--name.
 it--they get the same; all ordnance simi-
 lar in category, the same count of wea-
 pons. Then you have the biggest profes-
 sional war game in the history of the
 world. Let it go on for two or three
 months, or to ^a conclusion, ^(c) covered by color
 television, radio, interviews with some
 of the stars who come out of this engage-
 ment. Some will call it musical comedy,
 barbaric, but, in ^{point} ~~matter~~ of fact, the
 one difference between this war game and
 Vietnam is that we won't be burning kids

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 26

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 in any number or smashing property which
2 belongs to others. Americans will just be
3 doing what ^(t) they want to be doing: some
4 shooting, some war.

5 Many men love to be in battle. They
6 are better men at the end of it if they
7 are engaged in a war which has some mod-
8 cum of purpose. If you're engaged in a
9 purposeless war, you can end up healthy,
10 but you're still a pig with a distorted
11 mentality because you have to justify the
12 act of killing as being a patriotic act,
13 when in fact all you want to do is to
14 kill. If I wish to blast somebody and say,
15 "Yeah, that's what I want to do," then
16 I'm existentially tuned; I know what I
17 am. I am obeying the first dictate of
18 ethics: know thyself. But if I want to
19 kill somebody and say, "I'm doing it for
20 my country and for freedom," then I'm a
21 bad piece of work. I'm psychically dis-
22 oriented.

23 PLAYBOY: In the Berkeley talk, you also
24 argued that the reasons given by the John-
25 son administration ^(for America's involvement) explaining why we are
26 fighting in Vietnam are patently phony.

27 In particular, you rejected the explana-
28 tion claiming ^(that) we're there because we're
29 battling COMMUNISM. Why do you think we
30 entered the war?

End here

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

MAILER: Because we had to. America was profoundly afraid of the Negro Revolution. In the secret councils of our sleep we were ready to do anything to stop it. War in Vietnam was the quickest way to slow it down. Another reason: the potential for violence in American life was accelerating every year, the social fabric was beginning to break down. I think in some deep instinctive way Johnson reasoned that a war would enable him to control the country better. America was getting out of his control; nothing inspires profound anxiety in a man like Johnson more than losing control over every last little button. Vietnam was an instrument Johnson could use to manipulate public opinion, to apply leverage to the economy, to stand up against the Civil Rights movement. I think he saw Vietnam that way. ⁽ⁱⁿ⁾ it was the fatal error of his life. This talented, wily, seasoned politician made an error of Shakespearean proportions when he decided to embark on that war in Vietnam. The smartest President in America's history had just become the stupidest. Because Vietnam will yet prove to be the war ⁽ⁱⁿ⁾ which America lost control of its ability to control a large part of the world, and Johnson lost his power to

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 27

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 28

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 lead the American people on an ideologi-
2 cal leash.

3 PLAYBOY: Do you think Johnson stands a
4 chance for reelection in 1968?

5 MAILER: If Richard Nixon runs, Johnson
6 has a chance.

7 PLAYBOY: Of all the major political fig-
8 ures about whom you've written extensively,
9 you've hardly ever paid serious attention
10 to Nixon. Why?

11 MAILER: One reason is that Nixon was
12 written about very well all through the
13 Fifties. He became a natural target for
14 every good political writer on the left,
15 so it felt like kicking the cat to go to
16 work on Nixon. I'm not fond of the man,
17 but I didn't see any reason to duplicate
18 a job done so many times. If he gives
19 signs of becoming powerful again, that'll
20 be another matter. That will be serious.
21 I don't know anyone who has ever heard
22 Richard Nixon say anything interesting
23 in all the years he's invaded our life.
24 Nixon is resolute in his refusal to be-
25 come more interesting. It's a remarkable
26 power--this passionate embrace of monotony.
27 PLAYBOY: Do you see any politician on
28 the scene today who might be an existen-
29 tial politician in the ^(Kennedy) sense in which
30 you've just talked about JFK?

End here

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

MAILER: I think Bobby Kennedy might be.

You can't begin to know what direction

the man will take. I don't mean his direc-

tions are cheap or contradictory, but he

has a nature which finally is resistant

to analysis--so at least he gives you

a ride for your money. Bill Buckley, re-

plete with all his vices and virtues,

is certainly an existential politician.

PLAYBOY: In Cannibals and Christiansyou said that Bobby Kennedy has ^{made} taken

"a pilgrim's progress" since the murder

of his brother. What did you mean?

MAILER: He's become more interesting ^(s)

than he used to be; that's a pilgrim's

progress. How many people can that be

said about?

PLAYBOY: What do you think his chances

are in 1968?

MAILER: I don't have any idea. My approach

to politics ^{is} ~~is~~ from outside.

I don't like being filled with inside

stories. There was a period in my life

when I knew people who knew every inside

story. It took me awhile to find out

they know nothing. For instance, they

knew in 1963 that Bill Scranton was go-

ing to be the Republican candidate in

1964.

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 29

*stet**Romney?
Percy?
Reagan?
Rockefeller?
Humphrey?*

End here

PLAYBOY: A few minutes ago, you praised

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 30

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

End here

1 John Kennedy for changing the style of
 2 American life by opening it up and making
 3 it "saltier." What would you predict the
 4 nation would be like under a Robert
 5 Kennedy administration?
 6 MAILER: It would depend on what kind
 7 of country he might inherit in 1968 or
 8 '72 or whenever. It might be a country
 9 damaged irreparably by the horrors, pusil-
 10 lanimities, and hypocrisies of the John-
 11 son administration, the Vietnam war--
 12 which may have done more damage to America
 13 than anything in our history--and the
 14 "Great Society."
 15 PLAYBOY: *How do you feel* What are your thoughts about
 16 Johnson's Great Society? ~~Do you think it~~
 17 ~~exists?~~
 18 MAILER: It's a comedy. The Great Society
 19 is not only not going to come into being,
 20 but it shouldn't. It's artificial. The
 21 only growth *with* ~~to have~~ meaning is organic
 22 growth which does not become separated
 23 from the root of its origin. Any time
 24 you find a great society developed from
 25 the top, what you've got, in effect, is
 26 a test-tube baby--artificial insemination
 27 of the worst sort. Let's say the Great
 28 Society is drug addiction on a huge poli-
 29 tical scale. It's similar to shooting
 30 B-12 Complex into your butt. The patient

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 31

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

#

may feel healthier for awhile, but the fact of the matter is that a part of his ass has been ^(col)vigated in a way which bears no ^(a)real~~tion~~ to his life at least not as his own flesh can feel it. In other words, your flesh is visited abruptly by ^(a)tubular needle which punctures skin, rips delicate strands of muscle, and cuts holes in a vein wall. To what end? The body doesn't understand. If you're in a fight and get hit, your body can usually understand that: it was probably mobilized for action. But what action are you mobilized for when a needle goes into your arm? The same thing happens, I think, with economic growth. Take the first idea of the poverty program--making jobs. What pleasure can a man take in a job which has been made for him?

PLAYBOY: Doesn't that statement place you in league with the right wing?

MAILER: I don't mean we have to go all the way back to 19th century conservatism. Instead, take Harlem as an example of what I'm talking about. Right now, part of the New York City police force works in Harlem. It's a hopeless job for any white policeman. He doesn't have a prayer of being a good cop; he's too hated

End here

More

~~I should have said~~
~~I'm not talking~~
~~that~~

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 32

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

End here

because of all the bad white cops who've been there, and also because of all the bad Negro cops who've worked in Harlem. He's hated because he comes from outside and is a symbol of oppression. Suppose the existential fact were recognized that Harlem is more separated from New York City than East Berlin from West Berlin; it is a separate principality, a kingdom in and of itself.

Suppose, then, that Harlem had its own police force and used its fair share of the funds which run the New York police department. Suppose they even used part of that money for other purposes, and had a volunteer police force ~~in-part~~ just like the Hasidic Jews in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, a couple of years ago who started their own police force which worked well. Anything ~~which~~ ^{that} functions on the basis of volunteer effort by people who have come to feel they have to do this particular job in order to feel respect for themselves, will work better than obliging a professional to do a job in some place where he's miserable professionally. The advantage of having an all-Negro professional and volunteer police force in Harlem is that every time something ugly happened, the Negroes would have

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 33

Start here

- Total Pages

Total Lines

to recognize one particular complexity
in life, which is that not only can
their own people be bad but that police
brutality might be something which comes
out of being a policeman. And they ^(d)
have to face the fact that Whitey ain't
the only devil in town. That might be
good.

Take schooling in Harlem. All these
educational programs which come from
the outside are absurd. I've never met
a stupid Negro in my life; I've met many
Negroes I couldn't talk to, but I never
had the feeling of a stupid man ^(h) behind the
face. I have met stupid whites.

PLAYBOY: Are you serious?

MAILER: Yes. The point is: the Negro
has a life-experience which prevents him
from being stupid. As a result, he has
a culture which is thus different from
our own, and his school education should
begin with his culture before it is asked
to move over to ours. So, again, let the
city allocate Board of Education funds
to let the Negro administer his own
schools and evolve his own curriculum.
There might be chaos for a time. Could
it be any worse than the daily chaos in
Harlem schools now? Why should Negroes
be forced to learn to read by methods

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 33

Start here

- Total Pages

Total Lines

End here

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More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 33

Start here

- Total Pages

Total Lines

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End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: AN INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 34

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 devised by Midwestern Protestants? To-
2 tally different kinds of people. As dif-
3 ferent as Japanese and Texans.

4 Concerning housing projects, I see no
5 reason to come in with these tremendous
6 urban renewal jobs which are unspeakably
7 ugly and tear up neighborhoods; they are
8 like metal plates put in your head, or
9 plastic tubes stuck in your gut. These
10 projects disrupt a neighborhood. Instead,
11 some of these tenements could be saved.

12 You could have a scheme where a man could
13 start by being given \$100 worth of ma-
14 terials and a little professional labor

15 - I use the figure arbitrarily--and he
16 could set out to improve his apartment
17 plaster a wall, this or that; say his
18 wife will be in on it. He's working for
19 his own apartment. If he goes out and
20 drinks up the money, all right, he drank
21 it up and presumably he won't get any
22 more. His neighbors might lean on him.
23 Not lean on him hard, probably, because
24 if he's the guy who drank it up, he's
25 possibly the meanest guy in the house.
26 Still, what you get this way is a house
27 interested in itself; whereas the other
28 way, housing projects, poverty programs,
29 Great Society, any Negro who doesn't set
30 out to exploit the white man who is giving

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 35

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 him money is nothing but a fool. With such
 2 handouts, honor for the Negro becomes
 3 his ability to lie, cheat, and exploit
 4 the white man. Whereas a few thousand
 5 dollars given bit by bit to a man working
 6 very hard on his ^(own) apartment over a few
 7 years would obviously do much more for
 8 that apartment than \$20,000 spent to reno-
 9 vate it by outside methods.

10 PLAYBOY: Recently you said that civil
 11 war will erupt soon in this country. Do
 12 you see it as happening between Negroes
 13 and whites?

14 MAILER: I think there's a tendency toward
 15 civil war--not a war in the sense of
 16 people shooting it out over the hills and
 17 on battle lines; but certain kinds of
 18 functions might cease to exist in this
 19 society--technological functions. It may
 20 ^(that) be people will lose the habit of depend-
 21 ing on the subway to get to work, or people
 22 might lose the real possibility of driving
 23 into certain cities at certain hours of
 24 the day ^(or night.) What might happen would be
 25 scattered outbreaks of violence; people,
 26 for example, who've gotten fed up with
 27 the Long Island Expressway and so start
 28 overturning cars in traffic jams. All
 29 sorts of things, products getting worse and
 30 worse; shoddiness at the center of

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 36

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 production; breakdowns, fissures.

2 PLAYBOY: A kind of domestic cold war.

3 Broadening the subject, you've described

4 the international Cold War as ~~useless~~,5 ^(and) brutally ~~energating~~ thing. You've said we

6 should stop it and get on with the des-

7 tiny of Western Man. ^{What exactly is} ~~What did you mean by~~8 that ~~destiny~~?9 MAILER: A huge phrase--the "destiny" ^(y) of

10 Western Man." I suppose I meant that the

11 West is built ultimately on one final assump-

12 ^(y) tion that life is heroic. It's a Faustian

13 notion.

14 PLAYBOY: You mean that we are selling some-

15 thing dear in exchange for this heroism?

16 MAILER: Yes. Of course, one immediately

17 rushes to say that the West is also Chris-

18 tian, but there's always been a contradic-

19 tion at the heart; Christianity, the gentlest

20 of religious professions, is the most mili-

21 tant and warlike of religions, indeed the

22 most successful and Faustian of religions.

23 Indeed, it conquered the world. In that

24 certain sense, Christianity is the most

25 heroic. The alternative to this heroic

26 notion of man is that passive acceptance

27 of the universe which characterizes Hindu

28 or Oriental philosophy and religion.

29 ^(y) (Here, let's take a long parenthesis.)

30 I believe what is most extraordinary in

End here

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 37

End here

1 us is certainly not ^(t)our ability to fight
 2 Communism. The more we wage a religious
 3 war against Communism, the more we create
 4 the real social equivalent of Communism
 5 in America ^(S)which will be the total tech-
 6 nological society. You can look forward
 7 into a future where Communism's techno-
 8 logical society grows near to identical
 9 with ours; the differences will be of the
 10 mildest local color. For the natural ten-
 11 dency of the technological society is to
 12 try to clean up all sorts of social ex-
 13 cesses and ^(to)root out random oppression be-
 14 cause these activities are illogical ^(S)/
 15 they interfere with the smooth working
 16 of the machine. You never want a piston
 17 to drive with more force than is necessary
 18 to direct the action of the machine; you
 19 never put a part in the machine that is
 20 heavier than it needs to be. So the natur-
 21 al desire of the technological society
 22 is to create a smooth totalitarian society
 23 free from the ranker forms of injustice.
 24 Its long-term tendency in Russia is to
 25 make a totalitarian environment which is
 26 relatively civilized and pleasant. Both
 27 countries may well end up by ^{giving} ~~serving up~~
 28 a life to their citizens about ^(a)an anony-
 29 mous and vitiated and pill-ridden and dull
 30 as some of our new office buildings.

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 PLAYBOY: Is the parenthesis concluded?

2 MAILER: Yes. America fights Communism

3 because we're Faustian. We believe we

4 have to grapple with the universe; we

5 have the secret faith that we are inspired

6 by a national genius which enables us to

7 take on anything and do anything. The tra-

8 gic irony is that in fighting Communism

9 we are creating the absolute equivalent

10 of Communism in this country. And we will

11 destroy our own Faustian dream in the act

12 of fighting Communism, for the technolo-

13 gical society looks to destroy ideas of

14 the heroic because such ideas seem irra-

15 tional and unscientific to the technician.

16 Each time Communism has captured some

17 small part of the West, for example, it

18 has been shaken by Western complexities

19 which open huge rents in the Russian Com-

20 munist ideology. A barbaric country like

21 Yugoslavia did more to halt Stalinism

22 than 50 military projects designed by John

23 Foster Dulles. Yugoslavia introduced a com-

24 plex notion into the center of Communism:

25 the idea that there could be two kinds of

26 Communism, each equally devout and heroic

27 in itself, each equally oppressive. This

28 made the Communist bureaucrat begin to con-

29 template the nature of his own system

30 and therefore to doubt his faith, and so

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 38

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 39

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

End here

1 look for ways to ameliorate the oppressive-
2 ness of it.

3 Communism is cannibalistic, as I said
4 earlier. Any ideology which attempts to
5 dominate all of existence has to split
6 into sects and segments because the mom-
7 ent disagreement exists between members,
8 it cannot be adjudicated or compromised
9 without losing the primitive force of the
10 ideology. Compromise impossible, splits
11 occur. What you get then is two ideolo-
12 gies equally monotonous, equally total,
13 soon equally at war with each other.

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

16 MAILER: Let's say, an exploration into
17 the heroic. As an example, take the astro-
18 naut program. It's absurd to send only
19 those guys up there ²¹ why don't they send
20 a professional poet up as well?

21 Or take existential politics. Like
22 having juvenile delinquents put on armor
23 and have jousting matches and tournaments
24 and learn how to curry a horse.

25 PLAYBOY: Is existential politics an ex-
26 ploration into the heroic?

27 MAILER: To a degree. Existential politics
28 can only be understood by talking practi-
29 cally, specifically, about what you are
30 going to do here in this particular place

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 40

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 and time. After you talk about, say,
2 twenty such situations, you get some notion
3 of existential politics. The basic prin-
4 ciple is that you do not separate the
5 act from the receiver, Existential politics
6 depends on a certain intimacy between the
7 law and the people upon whom the law is
8 enacted. For example, the most paradoxical
9 notion of existential politics is not
10 that there should be no capital punishment,
11 but that if someone is going to get killed
12 by the state, then make a spectacle of the
13 event. Let people watch while a professional
14 executioner and the condemned man fight
15 hand to hand in an arena. Since the exe-
16 cutioner is professional, he wins practi-
17 cally every time; but he doesn't win to
18 a certainty; that gives the prisoner some
19 last chance to fight for his own existence.
20 It gives him the right of any man to fight
21 for existence under extraordinary circum-
22 stances.

23 Not Such a spectacle also opens the public
24 to the real nature of execution. Let them
25 see that blood on the sand. They may then
26 decide if they still want capital punish-
27 ment. If they do, more power to them. They
28 like blood. But at least one profound
29 hypocrisy--our quarantine of the execution
30 from the eyes of the public which decrees

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 41

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 the act--won't be able to exist anymore,
 2 PLAYBOY: In terms of the possibility of
 3 you becoming an existential political
 4 figure yourself, you once planned to run
 5 for Mayor of New York City, although
 6 recently you said that you've decided to
 7 devote your time to writing instead of
 8 ~~about~~ political activities. Do you still
 9 feel that way?
 10 MAILER: I disqualified myself from being
 11 in political office; you can't stab your
 12 wife and get away with it. It's as simple
 13 as that.
 14 PLAYBOY: That happened ~~just~~ around the
 15 time you announced your candidacy, didn't
 16 it?
 17 MAILER: Three weeks after.
 18 PLAYBOY: Do you have any prognostica-
 19 tions about the American political and
 20 social scene in general?
 21 MAILER: I'm gloomy. I won't say I don't
 22 think we're going to make it; but I am
 23 gloomy because quite beyond politics
 24 and any related or unrelated discussions
 25 of courage, honor, love, beauty, ^(and) so
 26 forth, rests this technological society
 27 which sits upon us like an incubus. It's
 28 impossible, for instance, to have any
 29 contact with anything in your existence
 30 which is not encapsulized by this

End here

More

*Yourselves
apart,*

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 42

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 technological society. I can't take a
 2 pat of butter at breakfast which doesn't
 3 have some chemical additive to deaden the
 4 taste of the butter just a bit, and there-
 5 fore my taste buds, and therefore deaden
 6 me. As well as line my stomach cells with
 7 a new if minuscule addition of the chemi-
 8 cal. If you could eat a fresh piece of
 9 butter for breakfast, certain messages
 10 might be able to reach down deep into the
 11 secret needs of your nerves. Enough to
 12 enrich you. You might live a hint better.
 13 The technological society gets between
 14 us and existence in everything we do,
 15 the air we breathe, the synthetic fibers
 16 we wear--ever notice how a rash from a
 17 synthetic fiber is more disagreeable than
 18 from cotton or wool. The buildings we
 19 live in with their abstract monotonous
 20 forms. The list is endless. I've written
 21 about little else for years.
 22 PLAYBOY: What ^{can} could be done about it?
 23 MAILER: ~~What~~ I don't know. My feeling
 24 is that there is going to be some extra-
 25 ordinary holocaust. Who knows? We may all
 26 die off in mysterious fashion. For in-
 27 stance, about the time we discover some
 28 cure for cancer, a new disease even
 29 worse will probably be spawned by the
 30 cure just as new viruses were spawned

skt

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 43

Start here
Total Pages

Total Lines

in reaction to penicillin. Modern disease
and modern technology are inseparably con-
nected.

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

MAILER: I think it began somewhere back
with primitive man when the first medio-
crity discovered he could get power over
men stronger than himself by employing
magic for control over others rather than
for communion with his existence. Jacques
Ellul in his book The Technological So-
ciety suggests that the beginning of all
scientific technique came from a pervers-
sion of primitive magic. At the very incep-
tion of magic there was a sense of commun-
ion--a spirit that permeated every moment
of one's life, a spirit against which one
could be rebellious or sardonic or terri-
fied, or whatever--but this communion was
essentially a relation of love between man
and his sense of the presence of nature, a
love which is tender, fearful, full of
dread, tasty.

PLAYBOY: You've written that one aspect
of totalitarianism is fear of orgasm, par-
ticularly by the liberal mentality, because
the orgasm, you claim, is "the existential

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 43A

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 moment. Every lie we have told, every fear
2 we have indulged, every aggression we have
3 tamed," you say, "arises again at that in-
4 stant to constrict the turns and possibil-
5 ities of our becoming." Would you tell
6 us more about that?

7 MAILER: Orgasm is the moment when you
8 can't cheat life. If the orgasm was no
9 good, something in you was no good. In an
10 existential moment, something bad can hap-
11 pen to you because you can't control it;
12 you don't know how it's going to turn out.
13 Anybody who's ever been in an automobile
14 accident experiences such a moment--three
15 or four or five seconds which seem end-
16 less--and you're into something which is
17 brand new.

18 But the American liberal is programme-
19 tic about sex. Yesterday he believed in
20 sex hygiene. Today he believes in promis-
21 cuity. He thinks it's good. I think that's
22 innocent. Promiscuity is

End here

30

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: X 44

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 good at given times. Other times, dread-
 2 ful. When sex becomes programmatic, in
 3 walks the totalitarian. Because a pro-
 4 gram does not permit of surprises. some
 5 times, existence can only reveal itself.
 6 by its surprises.

7 PLAYBOY: Do you think the abundance of
 8 sex manuals available today contributes
 9 to the programming of sex?

10 MAILER: Taking them at their best, the
 11 psychological sex manuals, I'd still say
 12 I'm not a champion of Albert Ellis' opin-
 13 ions. Although there's one thing in Ellis'
 14 ideas which isn't so bad: the notion he
 15 has of sex as will. For instance, I remem-
 16 ber he once told me a story about one of
 17 his patients who was terribly timid and
 18 nervous about women. After they'd worked
 19 for awhile in the analytical relationship,
 20 Ellis finally said one day: "Look, you
 21 like this girl; you find her attractive.
 22 neck with her tonight; take her to the
 23 movies and neck with her." Ellis said the
 24 patient went to the movies with the
 25 girl and suffered and sweated and died
 26 but finally made a pass; he did neck
 27 with her. Ellis said the real reason was
 28 that the patient was more afraid of Ellis
 29 than he was of the girl. There's some-
 30 thing in that. A healthier reflex can

End here

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 10

by bleeding Him.

PLAYBOY: Do you think this happens on

LSD?

MAILER: I don't think you have a mystical

experience on chemicals without taking

the risk of exploiting something in the

creation. If you haven't paid the real

wages of love or courage or abstention or

discipline or sacrifice or wit in the

eye of danger, then taking a psychedelic

drug is living the life of a parasite. ^{15/}

it's drawing on sweets you have not earned.

(Please do not say ^(by the way) that LBJ is the biggestcornball in America. ^{15/} with the above, I

have just presented my credentials.)

PLAYBOY: What is the danger of this para-

sitical ^(self-) exploitation ^{on LSD?}?

MAILER: I'm not going to say that LSD is

bad in every way for everyone; but I'm

convinced it's bad if you keep taking it.

Any drug is bad finally in the same way

that being a confirmed gambler is bad. A

confirmed gambler ends up losing all his

friends because he blows their money and

blows their trust. A gambler will tell

any lie to get back into the action. By

the same token, if you stay on any drug

for too long, then you have a habit; you're

a victim; you're--to anticipate something

you're a totalitarian. ^{stet}

End here

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 11

1 Let me put it this way: LSD is marvel-
 2 ous for experts to take when they get too
 3 frozen in their expertise. Let's suppose
 4 they've driven deep into something impene-
 5 trable, some obstacle which was bound to
 6 trap them because of the shortsighted na-
 7 ture of their expertise. Although they
 8 work and work manfully as experts, they're
 9 at this point similar to soldiers who
 10 have pushed far into enemy territory but
 11 are now up against a resistance they can-
 12 not get through. Their only action is to
 13 retreat, but they don't know how to because
 14 they have no habits of retreat; ^gthey're
 15 experts; they only know how to move for-
 16 ward to amass more knowledge and more
 17 concentration upon a point. When this con-
 18 centration does not succeed in penetrat-
 19 ing the resistance of the problem, the
 20 expert is psychically in great trouble.
 21 He begins to live in increasing depression;
 22 He has to retreat and doesn't know how:
 23 he wasn't built to retreat.
 24 My guess is: on LSD you begin to die
 25 a little. That's why you get this extra-
 26 ordinary, even divine sense of revelation.
 27 Perhaps you taste the odor and essence
 28 of your own death in the trip; ⁱⁿ excess,
 29 it's a deadly poison, after all. ^T There-
 30 fore, what's given to the expert is a

End here

More

stet

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 12

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

broader vision^(c) dying a little, he begins
to retreat from his expertise and begins
to rejoin his backward brothers. Halle-
lujah! So that LSD taken a few times
could be very good, I would imagine. But
before very long, if the expert keeps
taking LSD, he can become nothing but an
expert on LSD.

PLAYBOY: What do you think ^{(k) of} about Timothy
Leary?

MAILER: Well, I wondered who we ^{were} just
talking about.

PLAYBOY: More of an answer, please.

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

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

MAILER: I'm going to offer the hardwork-
ing magazine readers of America one funda-
mental equation: A man who drinks is at-
tempting to dissolve an obsession.

PLAYBOY: What's the obsession?

MAILER: Talk first about what an

More

End here

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 13

1 obsession is. I've thought about obsession
 2 a great deal, but ^{I'm not sure} ~~I don't know~~ if I know
 3 the answer. Everybody talks about obses-
 4 sions; nobody's ever ^{really} explained
 5 them ~~we~~ can define them, but we don't
 6 really know what we're talking about. An
 7 obsession, I'd suggest, is a pole of mag-
 8 netism, a psychic field of force. An
 9 obsession is created, I think, when some
 10 event has occurred which has altered our
 11 life profoundly or we have passed through
 12 some relation with someone else which has
 13 altered our life profoundly, yet we don't
 14 know whether we were changed for good or
 15 for bad: it's the most fundamental sort
 16 of event or relation it has marked us;
 17 yet it's morally ambiguous.

PLAYBOY: What kind of event?

19 MAILER: Suppose a marriage breaks up.
 20 You don't know if it was finally your
 21 fault or your wife's fault or God's fault
 22 or the Devil's fault ^{four} ~~four~~ uncertainties
 23 Let's reduce them to two: a man, or his
 24 wife.

25 ^{Put} ~~Put~~ it this way: people move forward
 26 into the future out of the way they com-
 27 prehend the past. When we don't understand
 28 something in our past, we are therefore
 29 crippled. Use the metaphor of the army
 30 here: If you move forward to attack a

More

End here

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

INTERVIEW

Title: MAILER

Page: 45

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 sometimes be initiated by an act of will.

2 PLAYBOY: Is that an example of existen-
3 tial sex?

4 MAILER: Yes: it's leaping a gap. But,

5 you know, I distrust this talk. The older

6 I get and the more I learn about sex, the

7 more I know I don't know anything at all.

8 Sex is more mysterious today than it

9 was the day I started.

10 PLAYBOY: In what sense?

11 MAILER: I find it harder to come up

12 with value judgments which can be used

13 from one day into the next. I prefer it

14 this way--having fewer and fewer answers

15 about sex as the years go by.

16 PLAYBOY: In that case, do you still be-

17 lieve that birth control is evil--that it's
as you wrote several years ago

18 a kind of murder of what may have been

19 a man's best son?

20 MAILER: Yes. In fact, not too long ago

21 I was reading a very generous review of

22 Cannibals and Christians in a Catholic23 magazine called The Critic, and at one

24 point the critic said, "Of course, Mail-

25 er's ideas are almost absurdly sentimental

26 about birth control." I am now to the

27 right of the Catholic Church.

28 PLAYBOY: Indeed, the Catholic Church

29 is presently struggling with its birth

30 control position, in order to square it

End here

More

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 46

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 with the problems of the world population
 2 explosion and the individual moral prob-
 3 lems raised by families that are too
 4 large.
 5 MAILER: Regardless of what the Church
 6 finally decides, the problem of birth
 7 control is the same as all of the other
 8 problems in our technological society.
 9 They're all part of the same damn prob-
 10 lem; something is insulting us away from
 11 our existence. My guess is that in pri-
 12 mitive times it was much more difficult
 13 to conceive and--as a result--more
 14 natural. In a just existence, the best
 15 things are always the most difficult.
 16 Since man lived in a relation to ^a life
 17 which was more biological--which is to
 18 say, he felt everything around him with
 19 his own body, he was therefore more in-
 20 telligent physically than he is today,
 21 even though he might have been smaller.
 22 Each man was more an animal; his senses
 23 told him more. We notice that animals
 24 don't conceive all that easily. The prob-
 25 lems of breeding are of course consider-
 26 able with animals because they don't
 27 conceive unless they really want it to
 28 take.

End here

29 In our modern life, on the other
 30 hand, the body is so deadened at its

More

- again I'm
guessing -

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 47

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

sexual center by contraceptives and pills
that we no longer can afford to be as
selective as we used to be. This adds
desperation. Because people are less
sensitive to conceiving, they have to make
damn sure they conceive. So men put a
child into many a woman they would not
choose in the real calling of their
blood; and many a woman accepts the seed
of a man she would normally despise or
half despise. There's an adulteration of
distinctions, a losing of the intimacies
of form, in the sense that a fine key for
a fine lock is intimate. I repeat: people
now conceive too easily because they're
afraid if they don't they won't conceive
at all.

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

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

PLAYBOY: *Isn't it* also possible that the
social consequences would be calamitous--
if your theory didn't work? *What do you*
foresee as the personal consequences of
no birth control?

(Perhaps-but)
MAILER: One thing you can be sure of:

people would start making love a lot less;

More

End here

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 48

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 they'd only make it when they really
 2 wanted to make it; they'd have to be
 3 carried away more. On a flood of passion,
 4 yeah. How many people ride on a flood to-
 5 day? One thing I've learned in all these
 6 years is not to make love when you really
 7 don't feel it; there's probably nothing
 8 worse you can do to yourself than that.
 9 PLAYBOY: Why?
 10 MAILER: Well, it's like taking your vi-
 11 tals, putting them on a stone block, and
 12 pounding away with a hammer. It's bad for
 13 the back--that I know.
 14 PLAYBOY: Do you think it's possible for a
 15 couple to have an enduring sexual relation-
 16 ship?
 17 MAILER: Yes, I do. Even after you've been
 18 married awhile, it can still be the thing
 19 you wait for.
 20 PLAYBOY: You don't ⁽²⁾believe, then, in the ⁽²⁾
 21 old cliché that the early days of marriage
 22 are the great times and after that the
 23 sexual scene gets less interesting?
 24 MAILER: I think a marriage should get
 25 better all the time. By the time they're
 26 80, a couple should die fucking. But I
 27 don't think that happens, because none of
 28 us has the guts for that; none of us are
 29 clean enough; all of us are yellower than
 30 we ought to be. Cowardice kills love.

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 49

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 PLAYBOY: Cowardice in what sense?

2 MAILER: It centers around possession. A

3 curious thing: If you gamble with your

4 possession and gamble foolishly and you're

5 not possessive enough, that's fatal. There's

6 something in a woman which is profoundly

7 outraged if you don't want to make her all

8 your own; women will never forgive you

9 for that. Permissiveness to a woman is per-

10 missive shit. They hate it. Everything

11 primitive rebels in a woman if a man does

12 not want her absolutely for himself. At

13 the same time, once you claim a woman,

14 you start killing everything in her. Nothing

15 in love or sex is ever simple because you're

16 always walking between two paradoxes.

17 PLAYBOY: What are they?

18 MAILER: They go by many names; possession

19 vs. liberty; protection vs. spontaneity;

20 novelty vs. tradition.

21 PLAYBOY: You've been married four times...

22 MAILER: Heroines, every one.

23 PLAYBOY: How do you feel about marriage?

24 MAILER: I love marriage, but I don't think

25 I'd love it unless I were a novelist. I

26 love it because it's a curious relation-

27 ship. It's artificial, and yet, on the

28 other hand, it has such primitive roots

29 and territorial rights. A novelist can be-

30 come absolutely obsessed with marriage.

End here

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 50

End here

1 I've never written much about it, but I
 2 think it's a goldmine: To write about marri-
 3 age, to really write about marriage and
 4 what really goes on between a man and a
 5 woman--the way they kill each other and
 6 keep each other alive.
 7 PLAYBOY: Do you think you may write about
 8 it someday?
 9 MAILER: I don't know; I don't know. It's
 10 difficult. After all, the marriage you're
 11 usually thinking about at the moment is
 12 your present marriage, and you can't
 13 start writing about that.
 14 PLAYBOY: ^{Let} May of your critics accuse you
 15 of harboring a good deal of hostility
 16 against women. They point to the classic
 17 scene in your story "The Time of Her Time"
 18 when the protagonist calls ^{is} he penis the
 19 "Avenger" and rapes a girl anally.
 20 MAILER: Let's get something hotsy-totsy.
 21 Let's say: takes carnal possession of her
 22 posterior territories.
 23 PLAYBOY: All right. Critics also point to
 24 the well-known scene in An American Dream
 25 when Rojack deprives a German maid of her
 26 orgasm by insisting at the last second on
 27 having his orgasm in her rectum instead
 28 of her vagina. Critics say that here
 29 again is an example of Mailer's deep hos-
 30 tility toward and distrust of women. What

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 51

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

do you say about this charge?

MAILER: I think I've got as much anger against women as anyone I know, but I'm perfectly willing to let the defense rest right here--I don't give a damn--and, you know, I sometimes have as much hostility against women as I've got against men. The reason I wrote about those things twice deliberately was something writers will understand but no critic ever will; it was just to say to the critic: "Fuck you. I wrote about it once; I'll write about it again. What are you going to do about it? Say I'm anally oriented? OK. Say I'm anally oriented. I'll say I'm Cassius Clay. Fuck you."

PLAYBOY: Some of the same critics have taken you to task for a poem in your Death to the Ladies and Other Disasters:

So long
as
you
use
a knife,
there's
some
love
left.

They say this boastfully exploits the episode when you stabbed your second wife.

End here

More

Start here
Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Pages: 52

1 How do you feel about this charge?
2 MAILER: I don't want to talk about the
3 stabbing any more. Not any more. Say the
4 word 18 times and it loses its force.
5 I'll just say--this could be hard to be-
6 lieve--that I was not really thinking about
7 the act or myself at that moment I wrote
8 the poem; I was really thinking about a
9 long conversation I had with a man who
10 stabbed his brother. He had been telling
11 me about it and he had such complexity of
12 feeling for his brother that the poem came:
13 "So long as you use a knife..." My
14 feeling about writing such things is simple:
15 If you're not ruthless about your work,
16 you can't be an artist of interest. Once ~~something~~
17 something crystallizes, you have to be
18 ruthless about presenting it; it doesn't
19 matter who gets hurt. Your message in the
20 ear of the reader is going to be worth
21 the damage that's done. You've got to be
22 impersonal; you can't look back. If, on
23 the other hand, you go in the other direc-
24 tion and start thinking, "Will writing
25 about this experience hurt me?"--well,
26 then, you're a bad writer--the kind who
27 spends his life humping for The New Yorker.
28 You spend your life hurting other people--
29 not yourself.
30 PLAYBOY: Why?

End here

More

Start here

Total Pages

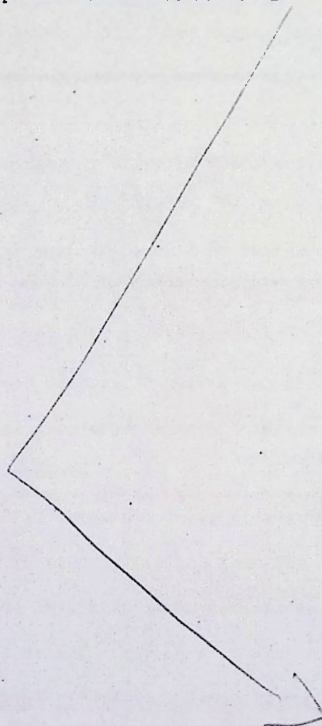
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PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 53

1 MAILER: A sadist can't bear pain, self-
2 examination, anything injurious to the
3 ego. His ego, after all, has to give him
4 sanction to do harm to others.

5 PLAYBOY: In Cannibals and Christians, you
6 spoke of the dangers of the womanization
7 of America. Could you expand on that
8 point?

9 MAILER: The gist of what I said is that
10 women are getting more power because men
11 want them to. Today, a man wants a wife who
12 is a military assistant, a woman who can
13 go out into the world with her husband
14 and help him climb those hills of



End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 54

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

status.

PLAYBOY: ~~Do~~ ^{Feel} and you ~~saying~~ that a woman's
place ^(s) in the home?

MAILER: That takes us right back into
the technological society. When a woman
is in the home today she's miserable. Our
technological society has transformed her
home into a minor-league factory with
all sorts of plastic and electric services
and appliances which keep breaking down
constantly. ~~At~~ ^(s) a far greater rate, be it
said, than the clumsiest machines of the
19th century. That's part of the mystery
of our technological society: nothing
really works well. I, of course, put the
blame on plastic. The machine bears
some umbilical relation to metal, just as
a house does to stone or wood, and red
wine to meat. Plastic in a machine makes
about as much sense as foam rubber cunt.

PLAYBOY: ~~Does~~ ^(s) the "technological so-
ciety" more directly affects the middle
and upper classes. ~~Does~~ ^(s) the
lower classes enjoy a more swinging
sexual ^{life} scene?

MAILER: ~~I~~ ^(s) think the lower classes ~~might~~ ^{probably}
have more sexual vitality than the upper
classes. They have fewer outlets in life.
Another reason: they tend to work more
with their bodies than their minds.

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 55

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY: But according to Kinsey, the ~~lower classes~~ ^(economic groups) ~~tend to have~~ ^{suffer from} more sexual rigidity, and ~~perhaps repression~~ ^{engage in} and ~~more~~ ^{certainly} do less sexual experimenting than the upper ~~or~~ ^{and} middle classes.

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

PLAYBOY: What do you mean by perversion?

MAILER: Whatever it might be--^(e) fallatio, cunnilingus, you name it. Lower class people see it as a weakness in themselves if they desire it. Envision a strong guy who wants to give head to his girl. He thinks he's weak. Of course he's weak. Giving ~~your~~ ^{his} head to your woman is

End here

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Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 weakness ^{13/} it's also a way to pass on some
2 of your weakness.

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

7 MAILER: My objection to Lawrence is that
8 he's sentimental about sex. Sex is not
9 only a divine and beautiful activity; it's
10 also a murderous activity. People kill
11 each other in bed. Some of the greatest
12 crimes ever committed have been committed
13 in bed. And no weapons were used.

14 PLAYBOY: About the art of fiction in
15 general, do you agree with critics like
16 Norman Podhoretz who claim the novel as
17 an imaginative art is dead because of the
18 recent incorporation of reportage tech-
19 niques into fiction?

20 MAILER: Obviously I don't agree with them.
21 I believe the novel has its own particular
22 resource, which is almost magical. Fiction
23 isn't dead in the same way that poetry
24 will never be dead. If you write purely
25 and your style's good enough, you can es-
26 tablish a communion between yourself and
27 the reader which can be found in no other
28 art, as sensitive as the emotions one
29 feels looking at fine painting or having
30 one's ear on the edge of good music. This

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Now 50? Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 56

More

End here

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Pages: 57

1 communion can continue for hours, weeks,
 2 years. When the novel is dead, then the
 3 technological society will probably be
 4 totally upon us.

5 PLAYBOY: Many critics have said that of
 6 all the writers of your generation, you
 7 seem best equipped to write the fabled
 8 Great American Novel. How do you feel
 9 about that?

10 MAILER: Let's assume they're right.

11 PLAYBOY: What would it be about?

12 MAILER: That's something I want to keep
 13 to myself.

14 PLAYBOY: Several times you've compared
 15 your generation of writers to the genera-
 16 tion of the 1920s--Hemingway, Fitzgerald,
 17 Faulkner, and the rest--and you argued
 18 that the older writers were far superior.
 19 Do you still believe this?

20 MAILER: They're doubtless greater; and
 21 they're certainly more fascinating as men.

22 PLAYBOY: Do you feel good about the fu-
 23 ture of American fiction?

24 MAILER: I don't want to predict. I can't
 25 often predict my own work.

26 PLAYBOY: Which of your own works do you
 27 feel closest to?

28 MAILER: Probably The Deer Park and An
 29 American Dream. And one day a month, I
 30 really like Barbary Shore. Whenever I'm

End here

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 58

depressed, I'm always pleased The Naked
 and The Dead is around.

PLAYBOY: Why do you write?

MAILER: Why do I write? You can't beat
 the hours.

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

Some of your critics complain that in An
American Dream, for instance, you rehash
 ideas already expressed in your essays
 and book reviews and columns. How do you
 feel about that?

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. Pro-
 bably since I started with Barbaric Shore,
 certainly with and since The Deer Park,
 I've been working on one book.

PLAYBOY: Including the books of essays--
Advertisements For Myself, 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. Of course,
 it takes no mean artistry to get the
 feel.

End here

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPages: 59

1 PLAYBOY: At the beginning of our talk, you
 2 said you like interviews because they some-
 3 times serve as a housecleaning for your
 4 current ideas. Do you feel you've accom-
 5 plished that in this interview?
 6 MAILER: I hope we haven't had a curet-
 7 tage.
 8 PLAYBOY: Is there any final statment
 9 you'd like to make?
 10 MAILER: Yes. Up the Irish/Down the Feds/
 11 Say we sad Irish/Anarchists and Reds.
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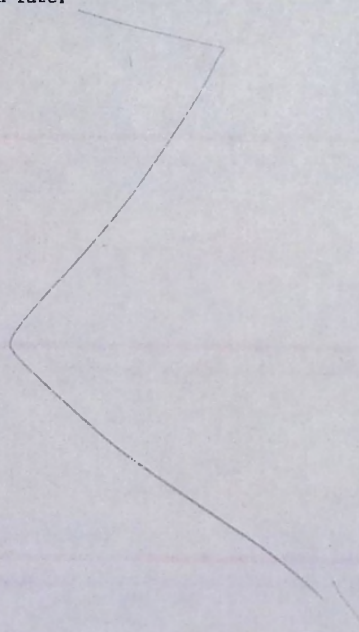
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ELITE PICA

Start here
Total Pages

Total Lines

1 when he left the party. Others would say;
 2 "Dreadful--no manners; a barbarian."
 3 People expected me to grab the hostess of
 4 a party, sound her, yank her, pump her,
 5 and if I didn't like her, throw her out the
 6 window; then turn to my host, say, "Up
 7 your buns, guns," and walk over to sock
 8 the nearest guy in the eye. So when I come
 9 in a place and don't behave like that, the
 10 other guests say: "Why, he has such nice
 11 manners." Every little thing I did was
 12 exaggerated. That worked against my natural
 13 impulse, which was to find my way by mov-
 14 ing from one activity to another at my
 15 own rate.



End here

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: M INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 5A

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 6

1 Lo! There was a feedback which had little
2 to do with me. It was as if--if you will--
3 every one of my actions was tuned to an
4 amplifier.

5 Not ~~that~~ I had some instinctive sense--
6 right or wrong--that the best way to grow
7 was not to write one novel after another
8 but to move from activity to activity, a
9 notion which began with Renaissance Man;
10 it's not my idea, after all. My personal
11 celebrity was an obstacle to any natural
12 ability to move quickly and easily. For
13 years, it was a tremendous obstacle; and
14 I ended up having a very dull, dogged per-
15 sonality which sought to wrestle with the
16 legend, and which tried to say, "Look,
17 fellows, I'm really simple, honest, hard-
18 working; I'm as close to Abe Lincoln as
19 Arthur Miller is."

20 The hoarseness of this confession is
21 not to enlist sympathy but to prepare
22 the ground for my boast: I learned how
23 to accept and live with my legend. The
24 legend becomes your friend, the beard,
25 a front man, a pimp, a procurer of new
26 situations. You live with a ghost who is
27 more real to people than yourself; every
28 single action you ~~now~~ take ~~in life~~ with
29 another person is part of a triangle. Every
30 girl you talk to is not only in love with

may have enabled me
to get girls I would
not otherwise have
gotten, but it

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 15

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 this time." A man must drink until he
 2 locates the truth. I think that's why
 3 it's so hard for people to give up booze.
 4 There's an art work going on with most
 5 serious drinkers. Usually, it's a failed
 6 art work. Once again, one's playing against
 7 the house percentage: one drinks, one
 8 wrecks one's liver, dims one's vision,
 9 burns out one's memory. Drinking is a
 10 serious activity--a serious moral and
 11 spiritual activity. We consume ourselves
 12 in order to search for a truth. It's no
 13 accident that a part of small-town common
 14 sense insists: "I don't trust a man who
 15 never takes a drink," because that man
 16 either has no obsessions and so has never
 17 lived through a bad and tricky time
 18 dared a thing, or has obsessions so pre-
 19 valent that he has buried them and live
 20 bodies are screaming under the ground.
 21 PLAYBOY: When drink takes you back to
 22 the point before the obsession began, how
 23 can a man understand the truth of that
 24 point?
 25 MAILER: We get into something mysterious.
 26 I'd like to quit the field because this
 27 doesn't lead itself to neat formulas. But
 28 everyone who's a serious drinker has had
 29 revelations on drink. Drink is the ac-
 30 tive man's drug addiction. Madison Avenue,
 please copy. But note: you take a drug

End here

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 16

lying on your back, ~~whereas~~ ^{experienced} the way to

drink is standing up.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel that you've ~~gotten~~ ^{gotten} to

moments of truth through drink?

MAILER: Extraordinary moments of truth.

The thing that had me ready to weep was

that I was very close to the truth but

too drunk to do anything about it.

PLAYBOY: What sort of thing did you dis-

cover?

MAILER: Whatever the truth was. The kind

of truths you find in moments like that.

Discovering that somebody you thought

loved you, hated you; or vice and versa ^(a)

All I'm getting at is that sense of cer-

tainty; past moments of ambiguity are

resolved. The ambiguity sinks into the

earth; a crystal remains; you say: "Yes,

there's the truth. Yes, this is what did

happen." A relationship evolves in one's

memory from a morass to a crystal of

recollection.

PLAYBOY: Let's change the subject by

recollecting some of your previously

published truths. You've written exten-

sively about John F. Kennedy and his

impact on our times. Particularly in The

Presidential Papers. Do you think that

since the assassination, the truth about

Kennedy has given way to ^a ~~some~~ kind of

Let's discuss
another kind
of truth.

More

End here

ELITE PICA

Start here
Total Pages

Total Lines

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1 myth?

2 MAILER: I don't know if it's a myth. I

3 think Kennedy was a great man. He did

4 heroic things in World War Two. Not just

5 swimming three miles with a back which

6 was half-broken, carrying another man along,

7 and then going out the next day trying

8 to swim to another island. Guys like you

9 and me--sure, we could have gotten it up

10 that one time--maybe--and then we would

11 have retired and gone home and lived in

12 ease for quite a few years. Instead, Ken-

13 nedy went out after saving that sailor's

14 life and being himself rescued by head

15 hunters, and started running the most

16 insane PT boat in the Solomons, going up

17 the neck of creeks and bayous and still

18 waters that no one had ever dared explore--

19 which may have stood him in good stead in

20 later years.

21 PLAYBOY: You addressed The Presidential

22 Papers directly to Kennedy. did you expect

23 him to answer?

24 MAILER: If you remember, that collection

25 of essays was published in book form some-

26 thing like three weeks before the assas-

27 sination. If Kennedy had lived, I doubt

28 if he'd necessarily have read it; after

29 all, how much time does a President have to

30 read? But I know that some of the people

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 17

More

ELITE PICA

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 17A

1 around him would have read the essays
2 sooner or later; there would have been
3 some discussion; and there might have been
4 some interest in the ideas in my book. Of
5 course, the Liberal establishment was at
6 that time extraordinarily smug: Ivy-League
7 brain trusters terribly pleased with them-
8 selves, holding hands in a closed circle,
9 where Schlesinger spoke only to Galbraith
10 and Galbraith only to God. Certainly at
11 that time there was no dialog with them.
12 Mention of my name was good for the first
13 round of laughs at a cocktail party in
14 Washington.

15 PLAYBOY: In your essay "Superman Comes to
16 the Supermarket," written during the 1960
17 Presidential campaign, you suggested that
18 Kennedy was an "existential politician."
19 Existential is a term that crops up fre-
20 quently in your writing. Exactly what do
21 you mean by it?

22 MAILER: Existential--no precedents, no
23 traditions, no disciplines, no books, no
24 guides sufficiently familiar with the

End here

30

More

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

MAILER: I think Bobby Kennedy might be
 You can't begin to know what direction
 the man will take. I don't mean his direc-
 tions are cheap or contradictory, but he
 has a nature which finally is resistant
 to analysis--so at least he gives you
 a ride for your money. Bill Buckley, re-
 plete with all his vices and virtues,
 is certainly an existential politician.

PLAYBOY: In Cannibals and Christians
 you said that Bobby Kennedy has ^{made} ~~taken~~
 "a pilgrim's progress" since the murder
 of his brother. What did you mean?

MAILER: He's become more ^(s) interesting
 than he used to be; that's a pilgrim's
 progress. How many people can that be
 said about?

PLAYBOY: What do you think his chances
 are in 1968?

MAILER: I don't have any idea. My approach
 to politics ~~is also~~ ^{is} from outside.

I don't like being filled with inside
 stories. There was a period in my life
 when I knew people who knew every inside
 story. It took me ~~a while~~ ^a to find out
 they know nothing. For instance, they
 knew in 1963 that Bill Scranton was go-
 ing to be the Republican candidate in
 1964.

PLAYBOY: A few minutes ago, you praised

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 29

stet

Romney?
 Percy?
 Reagan?
 Rockefeller?
 Humphrey?

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINEIssue: SEPTEMBERTitle: INTERVIEWMAILERPage: 36

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 production; breakdowns, fissures.

2 PLAYBOY:

3 *(In Cannibals and)*
4 *(Christians you've described)*
5 *(and)*
6 *(What exactly is)*
7 *(destiny?)*
8 the international Cold War as a useless,
9 brutal, enervating thing. You've said we
10 should stop it and get on with the des-
11 tiny of Western Man. What did you mean by
12 that? *(destiny?)*
13 MAILER: A huge phrase--the "destiny" of
14 Western Man." I suppose I meant that the
15 West is built ultimately on one final assump-
16 tion that life is heroic. It's a Faustian
17 notion.
18 PLAYBOY: You mean that we are selling some-
19 thing dear in exchange for this heroism?
20 MAILER: Yes. Of course, one immediately
21 rushes to say that the West is also Chris-
22 tian, but there's always been a contradic-
23 tion at the heart; Christianity, the gentlest
24 of religious professions, is the most mili-
25 tant and warlike of religions, indeed the
26 most successful and Faustian of religions.
27 Indeed, it conquered the world. In that
28 certain sense, Christianity is the most
29 heroic. The alternative to this heroic
30 notion of man is that passive acceptance
of the universe which characterizes Hindu
or Oriental philosophy and religion.
(Here, let's take a long parenthesis.)
I believe what is most extraordinary in

End here

More

PLAYBOY
MAGAZINE

Now 50? Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Page: 56

Start here

Total Pages

Total Lines

1 weakness—it's also a way to pass on some
 2 of your weakness.
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 4 was the first novelist who gave you the
 5 idea "that sex could have beauty." Do
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 26 tablish a communion between yourself and
 27 the reader which can be found in no other
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More

ELITE PICA

Start here
Total Pages

Total Lines

PLAYBOY MAGAZINE

Issue: SEPTEMBER

Title: INTERVIEW

MAILER

Pages: 57

End here

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More