

approximately : 15,000 words

(1)

# AN INTERVIEW WITH NORMAN MAILER

PLAYBOY: How do you feel about being interviewed?

MAILER: I start with a general sense of woe.

PLAYBOY: Why?

MAILER: The interviewer serves up 1/3 of himself in the questions and the man who answers has to give back 99%. I feel exploited the moment I step into an interview. Of course, once in a great while there is such a thing as a good interview. That has some life. The only trouble is the tape recorder: it eats up half the mood. A mood is something which lives between two people or more; it's a psychic creation, a spirit with character and edges, it's something you can think of as recognizable: you can say, "We're in the same mood again," or, "We're back to that mood again." A mood is a presence. It's like something living. It isn't ~~really~~ the interview I really dislike so much as the tape recorder.

PLAYBOY: What's the best way to capture this mood? ~~in an~~  
~~interview that's limited by a tape recorder?~~

MAILER: There's no good way. It's just a matter of hard, professional technique. In professional football, a quarterback has to contemplate the problem that every third or fourth play he's probably got to gain some yards through the center of the line; and when he's got four very tough linemen opposing him there's not much he can do that's suprising, so it's just a matter of grinding through--that's all.

PLAYBOY: If you feel so lousy about being interviewed, then why did you consent to this one? Do you feel you learn anything from INTERVIEWS? them?

MAILER: ~~First of all, because you're conducting the interview and I have a personal respect for you. Also,~~ About every two or three years I feel I have to have a psychic housecleaning, go through my ideas in general, even brutal form--the brutal form of the interview--just to see about where I stand. Because most of the time I spend my time thinking privately. Without this general psychic housecleaning I might get too infatuated with some ideas. It's a way, I suppose, of exposing ideas which are weak. After that, you can either discard them or think about them a little harder. An interview is like an examination.

PLAYBOY: As you talk about housecleaning your ideas--disregarding, changing or improving them--we're reminded of your sentence in The Deer Park about growth: "There was that law of life, so cruel and so just, that one must grow or else pay more for remaining the same." Would you comment on your feelings about growth--particularly in the light of the charge levelled against you by many critics who claim that you've dissipated and continue to dissipate a potentially major talent in American fiction by wearing so many other hats. (They point out that) there's Mailer the politician who once seriously considered running for Mayor of New York City; there's Mailer the journalist who writes about the maladies in American life and about the political brutalities; there's Mailer the celebrity who grabs headlines by booze brawls and other acts of public violence. These critics IMPLY claim you do not grow as a Novelist. Now do you feel about this--your several hats and your the sense of growth of you as a novelist and a man?



MAILER: I once had a wife--a couple of wives back--who said that she was going to be a great actress and a great painter, a great mother and a great wife. Whether she succeeded is moot. At the time, however, I remember thinking: "Yeah, that's the way to be." If you're really an artist then you can do three, four, six <sup>(maybe)</sup> different things and do them all equally well--not equally well in the sense that you get the same marks as a writer, a journalist, <sup>(at least)</sup> <sup>(something)</sup> [so forth] but <sup>(maybe)</sup> that you get <sup>(knows when to)</sup> as much back from each activity, and therefore you do not exhaust yourself <sup>(out)</sup> <sup>(or if you do, exhaust yourself, then your sense of timing sends you off to something else. Maybe the only way for a man living in an <sup>(his own private)</sup> highly over-developed technological world is to know a <sup>(sweet)</sup> little bit about a great many things.</sup>

PLAYBOY: Are you suggesting that a writer must have a broad experience--not simply as a novelist but as a man in life?

MAILER: Moving from one activity to another, ~~from novel-writing to journalism to theatre~~ <sup>(kind)</sup> to any kind of omnibus career makes sense if you do it with a <sup>(kind)</sup> bit of wit or a touch of grace--which I don't say I've always done: far from it--but I think you can get momentum <sup>(from the turn)</sup> <sup>(from the very fact you are)</sup> moving from one activity to another <sup>(or if you do it well you can increase the energy you bring to the next piece of work. Growth in some curious way, I think, depends on being always in motion just a little bit, one way or another. Even a statue can grow before one's eye if it offers the suggestion it <sup>(conceivably)</sup> could fall in a high wind. I expect I'll have to back off that remark. Growth in this case</sup>

\* Although in youth I don't feel like the prisoner in the dock I'm not altogether happy with what I've done up to now, but on the other hand I suppose I'd stick with it if I were an American. I'd keep it for myself and keep it for myself.

will consist in backing away from a bad metaphor rather than seeking to defend it. Growth is not simply just going forward: it's going forward until you have to make a delicate decision either to continue in a difficult situation or retreat and look for another way to go forward. (4)

The pattern that this creates--no, pattern is a poor word--the line of the movement reveals the nature of form. A breast is beautiful because it decides to go down until that point where it decides to go up, and after it decides to go up, it decides to go down again, and then decides to go up again: and you have the beginning of the nipple. The nipple goes through its own particular curve which consists of going out to the heavens as far as it can, then dropping down toward hell, and then returning to the body--all within the space of a quarter of an inch. But there's an extraordinary difference between a beautiful nipple and a dull one.

PLAYBOY: Do you have anything more to say about growth? In relation to yourself? There to the point.

MAILER: I've been accused of having frittered many talents away, of having taken on too many activities, too many things--of having been too self-conscious a celebrity, of having worked at the edges and indeed at the center of my own public legend: and of course like any criminal in the dock, I can sing a pretty tune; I can defend myself, I'm my own best lawyer--the day when I'm not, will be a sad day (laughs). The defense I'll enter today depends on a notion with which many readers of PLAYBOY may not be acquainted, my favorite notion: that an expert, by definition, is opposed to growth. Why? Because --let's be altogether abstract-- an expert is a man who works forward in one direction until he

delite?



reaches that point where he has to use all his energy to maintain his advance--he cannot allow himself to look in other directions. In other words, he's become near-sighted. Now, I, as a man who's been near-sighted almost all of his life, know that anyone who's born near-sighted or becomes near-sighted early is a man become an expert prematurely. That's why kids with glasses are ~~always~~ <sup>usually</sup> ~~disliked~~ <sup>(disliked)</sup> ~~hated~~ by kids who don't wear glasses. The kids with good eyesight sense that the boy with glasses is an expert who's going to run the world ~~even on the level of a seven or eight or ten year old boy, he's no good.~~ The first chronic personal shame I suppose I ever felt was having to wear glasses ~~when I was a kid~~. And I don't wear them today even though I'm so near-sighted I don't recognize old friends from ten feet away. Having been a premature expert myself, I think I may have reacted against it with a sense that expertise was the trap for me: that to get particularly good at any one thing would leave me a top-heavy expert.

PLAYBOY Are you referring to The Naked and The Dead and the celebrity success which followed on its heels?

MAILER <sup>(sure)</sup> <sup>(well-known)</sup> Being <sup>at 25</sup>, <sup>everything I did</sup> created a chain of legend <sup>for everything I did</sup> ~~which had little to do with my natural ability.~~ It had to do with the fact that America is a country which is hungrier for legends than any <sup>PLAYBOY, why?</sup> ~~other~~ country I know, because it does not begin to have a proliferation of natural legends of the sort you have in Europe or in Asia, that wealth of primitive lore and peasant custom and aristocratic tradition which is so pervasive that most intellectuals in Europe or Asia feel the only way to keep from stifling is to cut through <sup>their</sup> ~~those~~ legends and destroy them. Parenthetically, most of the modern <sup>modernity</sup> ~~surrealism~~, atonal

PLAYBOY  
Could you  
be  
more  
explicit?

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music, modern architecture, the theatre of the absurd, etc. began in Europe, not in America. It's only America with its relative paucity of legends that was able to exploit these movements.

There was all our empty space--not only geographical, but psychological--so modern movements could grow here like--yeah, yeah--weeds. It's <sup>(L.N.)</sup> America where modern architecture triumphed, the automobile triumphed, the highway triumphed--the whole modern, square, faceless world of modern services triumphed <sup>(S)</sup> here there were fewer legends to cut through, so the movements went faster.

At any rate, because there are fewer legends here, there is, I think, great hunger in Americans to make legends: and I, willy-nilly, became a small focus for a little legend-making: if I left a party early, it wasn't because I might have been sleepy, it was because I had put down the party. This immediately created champions for me: "That Norman Mailer's <sup>too much</sup> ~~great~~ guy--put down ~~careful~~ host and hostess when leaving the party." Other people would say: "Dreadful; no manners; a barbarian." Every little thing I did was exaggerated. That worked against my natural impulse, which was to find my way by moving from one activity to another at my own rate. Lo! There was a feedback which had little to do with me. It was as if--if you will--every one of my actions was tuned to an amplifier. <sup>Remark</sup> ~~(once again)~~

PLAYBOY: Is this what you meant when you <sup>(n)</sup> said that your success at 25 was "like a lobotomy?"

MAILER: It cut me off from my past. I felt like someone who had been dropped onto Mars.

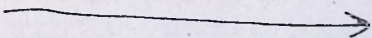
PLAYBOY: Did you dig your sudden fame?



MAILER: Of course I dug it. I had to dig it. I mean, to be brutally frank, ~~for all our swell PLAYBOY readers out there~~ it enabled me to get girls I would not otherwise have gotten.

PLAYBOY: ~~(Hearty, loud laugh)~~ You make a distinction between the legendary Mailer <sup>in the SPOTLIGHT</sup> whose acts were scrutinized and gossiped about and the Mailer who wanted to grow in his own sweet time. Could you contrast the two Mailers a bit more?

MAILER: Well, contrasting two Mailers might have value in a novel but to talk about it would end up being tiresome. This is the point I want to make: I had some instinctive sense--  
~~R~~ight or wrong--that the best way to grow was not to write one novel after another but to move from activity to activity, a notion which began with Renaissance Man: it's not my idea, after all. My personal celebrity was an obstacle, however, to any natural ability to move quickly and easily. For years, it was a tremendous obstacle; and I ended up having a very dull, dogged personality which sought to wrestle with the legend, and which tried to say, "Look, fellows, I'm really simple, honest, hard-working: I'm as close to Abe Lincoln as Arthur Miller." Now, the hoarseness of this confession is not to enlist sympathy but to prepare the ground for my boast: I learned *how* ~~(accept and)~~ to live with my legend. The legend becomes your friend, the board, a front man, a pimp, a procurer of new situations. You live with a ghost who is more real to people



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than yourself; every single action you now take in life with another person is part of a triangle. Every girl you talk to is not only in love with you or disappointed in you, but also is in love <sup>(with)</sup> or hating your legend. <sup>(incidentally)</sup> Who is more real to her than you. There are times, therefore, when you beef up your legend, perform some action to support it, times when you draw credit back from your legend, like cashing in the desire of somebody else to do something nice for you. Either way, you don't pretend--as I did for years--that the legend ain't there: he is. By the same token, when you're dealing with a man, there are now two of you against him--you're two linemen having to take out one other guy, while it's disadvantageous on the one hand because the amplifier dependably is always working, and the amplifier, being the other guy, always goes off and exaggerates what you said or did. On the other hand, you might just as well take advantage of that. If you got an amplifier working for you, blast the other guy's cardrums, burn him out.

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

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

PLAYBOY: One of your fairly celebrated <sup>experiences</sup> experiences with growth was your experience with drugs--you were on marijuana, bennies and sleeping pills for a few years and were addicted to seconal.



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Later, you said that a man on drugs will pay for it by a <sup>guttled and</sup> burnt-out ~~guttled~~ nervous system." How do you feel about drugs today? ~~particularly about the LSD psychedelic movement led by Timothy Leary?~~ Do you see <sup>them</sup> drugs as an example of potential or of false growth?

MAILER: Drugs ~~are exactly equivalent~~, I think, ~~to gambling~~. <sup>core</sup> they're a spiritual way of gambling. This is a poetic equation 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 probably something like 30% or 40%.

PLAYBOY: Would you expand the metaphor?

MAILER: Marijuana does something with the sense of time: it accelerates <sup>you</sup> ~~one~~, it opens <sup>(you)</sup> ~~one~~ to <sup>(you)</sup> ~~one's~~ unconscious. To be practical about it, ~~(very American)~~ <sup>(But)</sup> it's as if you're calling on the reserves of the next three days. And ~~all~~ the sweets, all the crystals, all the little decisions, all the unconscious work of the next three days--or <sup>if the experience is deep</sup> ~~in a more extended sense~~, part of the next thirty days, or the next thirty years--is called forward. Particularly you draw on the reserves of the next two or three days. For a half hour or two hours--whatever <sup>(US)</sup> the high of the pot is--you're better than you are normally, and you get into situations you wouldn't get into normally, and generally more happens to you: you make love better, you talk better, you think better, you dig people better. The point is: you've got to get in pretty far because you're using up three days in an hour--or whatever the particular <sup>(ratio)</sup> ~~mathematics~~ is for any particular <sup>person</sup> ~~man or~~

women. So unless you come back with--let us say--72 hours in one hour, you lose. Because you have to recover for the next three or four days. You might ask: What happens to the guy who is smoking pot all the time? I don't know. I do know something is being mortgaged, something is being drawn out of the future. If his own future has already been used up in one or another mysterious or sinister sense, then maybe the pot is drawing it out of the very substance of what I may as well confess I call God. (~~I've talked about this some in "The White Negro."~~) I suspect God feeds drug addicts the way a healthy body feeds parasites.

PLAYBOY: How do you mean God feeds addicts?

MAILER: Well, if God has great compassion, He may not be willing to cut the drug addict off from Him. During the time the addict has some of his most intense and divine experiences it is because he is literally imbibing the very marrow and nutrient of existence. But since I do not believe that any god is necessarily inexhaustible, the drug addict may end by bleeding Him.

PLAYBOY: Do you think this happens in the LSD experience? TRIPS?

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--it's drawing on sweets you have not earned. (Please do not say that ~~J~~ LBJ is the only cornball in America--with the above, I have just presented my credentials.)



PLAYBOY: How does one earn the right to participate in the divine under LSD? <sup>You seem to imply that!</sup> ~~Do you think the LSD experience can be a shortcut?~~ (C)

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 ~~in the end~~. A confirmed gambler ends up losing all his friends because he blows their money and blows their trust. ~~It's like being a heroin junkie--finally you'll kill your mother to get the next fix!~~ 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, <sup>(You have a)</sup> ~~then you're a creature of~~ habit, you're a victim, you're--to anticipate something--you're a totalitarian.

Let me put it this way: LSD is marvelous for experts to take <sup>when</sup> when they get too frozen in their expertise. Let's suppose they're driven deep into something impenetrable, some obstacle which was bound to trap them because of the short-sighted nature of their expertise. Although they work and work manfully as experts, they're at this point similar to soldiers who have pushed far into enemy territory but now are up against a resistance they cannot get through. Their only action is to retreat but they don't know how to because they have no habits of retreat; they're experts, they only know how to move forward to amass more knowledge and more concentration upon a point. When this point does not succeed in penetrating the resistance of the problem, the expert is <sup>(PSYCHICALLY)</sup> ~~in great trouble, psychically~~. He begins to live in increasing depression. He has to retreat and doesn't know how ~~to retreat~~ he wasn't built to retreat.

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My guess is: on LSD you begin to die a little. That's why you get this extraordinary, even divine sense of revelation. Perhaps you taste the odor and essence of your own death in the trip. (In excess, it's a deadly poison, after all.) Therefore, what's given to the expert is a broader vision; in ~~the~~ dying a little, he begins to retreat from his expertise and begins to rejoin his backward brothers. Hallelujah. 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 which means he will be ignorant of the critical point.

PLAYBOY: What do you think about Timothy Leary?

MAILER: Well, I wondered who <sup>we</sup> 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 do. But I have heard him <sup>e</sup> 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." Could you expand a bit <sup>on</sup> that?

MAILER: I'm going to offer the hardworking magazine readers of America one fundamental equation: A man <sup>(who)</sup> drinks is attempting to dissolve an obsession.

PLAYBOY: What's the obsession?

MAILER: Talk first about what an obsession is. I've thought about obsession a great deal but I don't know if I know the answer.



Everybody talks about obsessions; nobody's ever really explained ~~them~~ <sup>(them)</sup> ~~it~~--we can define ~~it~~ <sup>(them)</sup> but we don't really know what we're talking about. An obsession <sup>(OK suggest)</sup> is a pole of magnetism, ~~a point toward which everything turns.~~ An obsession ~~is~~ a psychic field of force, ~~isn't it?~~ An obsession is created, I think, when some event has occurred which has altered our life profoundly or we have passed through some relation with someone else which has altered our life profoundly, yet we don't know whether we were changed for good or for bad; it's the most fundamental sort of event or relation; ~~it has~~ <sup>marked us; yet</sup> it's morally ambiguous.

PLAYBOY: Would you give an example <sup>e</sup> here?

MAILER: Well, ~~let's~~ Suppose a marriage breaks up. You don't know if it was finally your fault or your wife's fault or God's fault or the Devil's fault: four uncertainties. Let's reduce them to two: a man, or his wife.

~~PLAYBOY: You sound blasé.~~

~~MAILER:~~ Let me <sup>let</sup> put it this way: people move forward into the future out of the way they comprehend the past. When we don't <sup>(UNDERSTAND)</sup> comprehend something in <sup>(our)</sup> the past we are therefore crippled.

Use the metaphor of the army here. If you move forward to attack a town, and the center of this attack depends upon a road which will feed your attack, and this road passes through a town, yet you don't know if your people hold that town or someone else holds it, <sup>(then)</sup> obviously, if you are a general you'd be pretty obsessive about that town. You'd keep asking, "Will <sup>you</sup> somebody please find out who owns that town?" You'd send out Reconnaissance parties to locate the town, enter it, patrol ~~through it~~ <sup>through it</sup>

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if all sorts of mysterious things occurred--if, for example,  
 your Reconnaissance <sup>(platoon)</sup> ~~platoon~~ didn't return--~~finally~~ you'd <sup>feel</sup> ~~get~~ so *uncertaining*  
 paralyzed you <sup>(might not)</sup> ~~couldn't~~ move forward to attack. The obsession  
 is a search for <sup>(a useful)</sup> ~~the~~ ultimate reality. What finally did occur?  
 What is real?

PLAYBOY: How does a man explore his obsessions through drink?

MAILER: Well, if his drink takes him back to an earlier state  
 of sensitivity, it is then taking him to a <sup>(back place)</sup> ~~point~~ behind the <sup>(place)</sup> ~~point~~  
 where he originally got into the impasse which created the  
 obsession. If you can return to a state <sup>(just preceding)</sup> ~~just~~ the one you were  
 in when these various events occurred, you can say to yourself,  
 "Now, I'm approaching the event again. What really did happen?  
 Who was right? Who was wrong? Let me not miss it this time."  
 A man must drink until he locates the truth. I think that's  
 why it's so hard for people to give up booze. There's an art  
 work going on with most serious drinkers. Usually, it's <sup>(a)</sup> ~~failed~~  
 art work. Once again, one's playing against the house percentage:  
 one drinks, one wrecks one's liver, <sup>(one's)</sup> ~~dims~~ vision, <sup>(one's)</sup> ~~burns out~~ memory.  
 Drinking is a serious activity--a serious moral and spiritual  
<sup>(We consume ourselves in order to search for a truth.)</sup> activity. It's no accident that a part of small town common sense  
 insists: "I don't trust a man who never takes a drink," because  
 that man either has no obsessions and so has never dared a thing,  
 or has obsessions so prevalent that he has buried them and live  
 bodies are screaming under the ground.

PLAYBOY: When drink takes you back to the point before the  
 obsession began, how can a man understand the truth of that  
 point?

MAILER: ~~Now we~~ get into something mysterious. I'd like to

quit the field because this don't lend itself to neat formulas. But everyone who's a serious drinker has had ~~those moments, has~~ had revelations on drink. Drink is the active man's drug addiction. Madison Avenue, please copy. But note: you take a drug lying on your back, whereas the way to drink is standing up.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel that you've got 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 was that truth?

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. All I'm getting at is that sense of certainty: 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 ~~suddenly becomes not morass but a crystal.~~ resolves in one's memory from a morass to a crystal of recollection.

PLAYBOY: In terms of your concept of growth, you've made in An American Dream and other writings a brilliant, dazzling, and rather puzzling remark concerning the possibility that God himself may be involved in a process of growth. You've said that <sup>He</sup> ~~He~~ may be an <sup>2</sup> ~~omnipotent~~ God whose final nature is not yet comprehended, even by <sup>3</sup> ~~himself~~. Could you comment on this?

You have an "obsession with how God exists," and you've suggested argued for the possibility that



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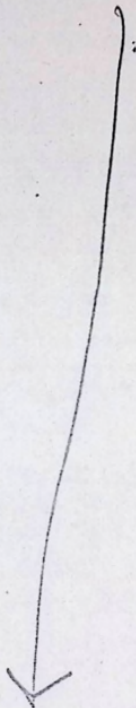
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MAILER: Sometimes I think metaphysics is a matter of approaching from the outside large subjects about which you know nothing. The logical positivists detest this kind of intellectual activity<sup>②</sup> but I'm fond of it; it's one of the most valid ways to think, and also one of the most instinctive. Animals think that way. If you're confronted with a mystery and then with another mystery, you may never be able to tell anything about the mysteries: you can only see them from the outside; but you can tell a lot about the relationships between the mysteries. We don't know the nature of God nor the nature of man but we may be able to divine something of the relation between man and God by such complexities of form and record as history or indeed from the secret histories of our own lives.

Going after the relation between these mysteries in that fashion, I think I decided some time ago that if there is a God and He's all-powerful, then it's not a very agreeable relationship. It's even possible this all-powerful God is somewhat absurd or at least His relation to us is absurd. All we can see in our human condition is thundering, monumental disproportions, injustices of such dimension that even the conservative notion of existence--which might postulate man is here on earth not to complain but to receive his deserts and that the man who acts piggishly on earth will be repaid in heaven or hell, regardless of whether he was rich or poor--<sup>S</sup> yes, even this conservative vision depends upon a divine economy,



depends exactly on a God who is able to run a world of reasonable proportions. If the world we have is one of abysmal, idiotic disproportions, then it becomes impossible to conceive of an all-powerful God



who is all good. It is far easier to conceive of a God who died or who is dying or who is an imperfect God. ~~Now~~ When I think of an imperfect God, I think indeed of a Being greater than ourselves, but a Being who nevertheless shares ~~his~~ <sup>each</sup> logic with us: we as men seek to grow, so He seeks to grow; even as we ~~as men~~ <sup>each</sup> have a conception of being--my conception of being <sup>(my idea of we should live)</sup> may triumph over

yours, or yours over mine--so this God may be engaged in a similar war in the universe with other gods: we <sup>(may even be the embodiment)</sup> ~~are the embodiment of~~ <sup>the partial</sup>

<sup>expression of</sup> this vision. If we fail, He fails too. He is imperfect in the way we are imperfect. He is not always as brave or extraordinary

or as graceful as He might care to be. This is my notion of God and growth. The thing about it which gives me sustenance is

that it enables me to love God, if you will, <sup>(hear these words)</sup> rather than to hate Him because I can see Him as someone who is like other men and

myself except ~~less~~ <sup>more</sup> noble, ~~less~~ <sup>more</sup> tortured, more desirous of a good which He wishes to receive and give to others--a torturous ethical activity at which He may fail.) <sup>one fails</sup> ~~if He fails, it will be~~

<sup>for</sup> ~~Man's condition is then by this logic epic or tragic--~~  
~~the outcome is unknown, not written.~~

PLAYBOY: Could you talk a bit more about the relationship between a man and this ~~existential~~ God who is still involved in discovering his own nature?

MAILER: The relationship may be the one you find between brothers. Instead of being our father, God is perhaps our older brother.

There are times when He has to exploit us; there are times when we have to exploit Him; there are times when He has to drive us beyond our own natural <sup>depth</sup> ~~breadth~~ because He needs us--those of us at least who are working for him: we have yet to talk of the Devil.

On the other hand, there are times when we call on Him. The image



I used earlier of the drug addict would apply: a man who is on drugs may very often be draining God's substance. God is not one to desert the addict because He may love him much more than a mediocre man. The drug addict in his particular greed ~~##~~ might illumine some dead ambition of the Lord Himself--who knows this is not so? Still, the point must come when God cuts him off. This is usually the point when the junkie decides to kick his habit.

PLAYBOY: What is the relationship between a writer and this ~~existential~~ God?

MAILER: The relation of any artist, I suppose. I don't really know: I've never been able to decide how much creativity comes from something other than yourself, and how much comes from keeping your nose clean. But a man who talks about his own private religion is not necessarily to be trusted. Maybe one of the reasons people don't trust me too much--maybe for good cause--is that I shouldn't talk about these things. Who knows?-- I may be working for the Devil.

PALMBOY: <sup>when you say that</sup> ~~A~~ a writer may be working for the Devil, you seem to agree with Blake's famous remark: "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it."

MAILER: I suspect every artist is a devil's helper, engaged in a perverted activity because there is first his heart, upon which emotions are engraved, and then there is the eye which observes its own heart. The ability to put an eye on your own heart is icy.

PLAYBOY: Over the years you've written more and more about the Devil and you ~~even~~ <sup>(recently)</sup> said that maybe the Devil is ~~really~~ God in exile. What did you mean?

MAILER: I don't know. What I mean: I don't know if the Devil is finally an evil principle of God--a fallen angel, a prince of darkness, Lucifer--a creature of the first dimension engaged in a tragic, monumental war with God, or whether the Devil is a species of non-existence. Like plastic. By which I mean every single pervasive substance in the technological world which comes from artificial synthesis rather than from nature. Plastic surfaces have no resonance--no echo of nature. I don't know if plastic, if ~~it~~ you will, is a second principle of evil just as much opposed to the Devil as it is opposed to God. I don't know if this technological society now so subtly strangling us is the work of the Devil or the work of some principle alien to both God and the Devil--a visitor from a small planet, if you will. So when I talk about the Devil these days I don't really know whether I'm talking about a →



corrupter of the soul or a deadening influence. I don't know who or where the enemy is. In fact, I don't have the remotest notion of who or what I'm working for. ~~I tell you that!~~

Sometimes I think I'm unemployed. That's despair, son.

PLAYBOY: Speaking of good and evil in a political context, you've written extensively about John F. Kennedy and his impact on our times. What do you think of the current myth of Kennedy as it has developed since you published The Presidential Papers a few weeks after he was assassinated? *before* *has* *P28*

MAILER: I don't know if it's a myth. I think Kennedy was

~~a great guy, maybe even~~ *luckily* a great man. Now that he's gone. *I think more of him than I did when he was alive - naturally*  
~~I think more of him than I did when he was alive - naturally~~  
 inoitably. But the man was ~~more than a myth~~. He was an

extraordinary man. He ~~really~~ did heroic things in World War II. Not just swimming three miles with a back ~~that~~ *(which)* was half-broken, carrying another man along, and then going out

the next day trying to swim to another island, almost *(from exhaustion) (because of that bad back)* drowning half-way across and being rescued by head hunters.

Guys like you and me--sure, we could have gotten it up that one time--~~maybe~~ and then we would have retired and gone

home and lived in ease for quite a few years. Instead, ~~this~~ *(Kennedy)* ~~guy~~ went out after saving that sailor's life and being himself rescued by head hunters and started running the most insane

PT boat in the Solomons, going up the neck of creeks and bayous and still waters that no one had ever dared explore--

which may have stood him in good stead in later years. *(You know!)* Definition of a hero--he thrives in dikes. *(you know)*

PLAYBOY: In your celebrated essay, "Superman Comes to the Supermarket," written during ~~John~~ Kennedy's <sup>1960</sup> presidential campaign, ~~in 1960~~, you suggested that he was an "existential" politician. Existential is a term which crops up frequently in your writing. Exactly what do you mean by it?

MAILER: Existential: no precedents, no traditions, no disciplines, no books. No guides sufficiently familiar with the situation to take you through.

PLAYBOY: Could you elaborate, then, how in your view John Kennedy was 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 disproportions 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 ~~you~~ <sup>he has</sup> have a huge ambition and <sup>WISH</sup> ~~wish~~ to act it out, that means you ~~have~~ <sup>he also has</sup> 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 psyche in a vault and probably would have died young and schizophrenic. Some people are born--they are getting fewer and fewer--in such magnificent psychic vaults that they spend their lives moving around inside the vault, not having to change a bit. The archetype of the 19th century Boston banker comes to mind instantly.]

WE WEREN'T

23

(Speaking of the assassination)

PLAYBOY: ~~You~~ wrote an enthusiastic review of Mark Lane's Rush to Judgment, which severely criticized the Warren Commission Report, when ~~Lane's~~ <sup>(The)</sup> 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 1/10th 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. I'm  
~~lazy, but I did check up on his evidence here and there;~~  
~~the checking up seemed to bear him out;~~ <sup>(and)</sup> wherever he'd claim  
the Commission was weak, indeed the Commission was weak.  
For instance: a couple of people in Dallas connected one  
way or another with Jack Ruby were killed <sup>or found dead</sup> under extraordinary,  
exceptional circumstances. There <sup>(is no record of)</sup> ~~was~~ no work done by the  
Warren Commission to trace these killings. The meanest  
little Sherlock Holmes around would have his nose in those  
crimes.

PLAYBOY: When you <sup>CLAIM</sup> say that the Warren <sup>e</sup> Commission Report  
might be a bigger scandal than Teapot Dome, what exactly do  
~~you~~ you mean?

MAILER: A disgraceful, shoddy, incompetent, self-indulgent,  
complacent work by august people on a matter of transcendent  
~~(importance)~~ ~~important~~ that's a scandal. It means you can't believe  
in important people any more--or at least people of that ilk.

PLAYBOY: You've <sup>suggested</sup> ~~said~~ that the next investigation of the  
Kennedy assassination should be undertaken by a panel of  
novelists, intellectuals, writers and poets. Name a panel  
you'd like to see do the job.

MAILER: ~~I was thinking more of literary men. First of all,~~  
~~it~~ it would have to be a panel of people who'd be willing to  
devote a year or two to the job. If you start naming men,  
the first I'd cross off the list is myself, because I wouldn't  
want to, nor could I afford to spend two or three years on it,  
which is what it would take. <sup>(Please don't use who would be in the first place.)</sup> But some literary men might  
<sup>(assume)</sup> be able to ~~take on~~ such a chore: ~~I think~~ Dwight MacDonald  
might be first-rate to head up ~~such~~ a commission because

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he has the guts to pursue any line of questioning if he's interested in it, and at times he has an extraordinary nose for fraud and artifice. He's also incorruptible. McDonald could be a good cross-examiner and he doesn't put up with sly, sloppy stories. (Besides, his position is midway between the Warren Commission and Mark Lane.) Edmund Wilson might be another member of the commission, although I suspect he wouldn't be interested: at his age he might not wish to concentrate on this. After these gentlemen, any number of people come to mind: Lionel Trilling, Fred Dupee, Norman Podhoretz, Alfred Kazin. Among the novelists: Vance Bourjaily perhaps, an intelligent man with a fine sense of proportion and good sense of what's credible and what's not. Gore Vidal might be eminently suitable because he might enjoy being able to work on witnesses. Jim Jones could be good: he's got a small-town sense of who's up to what. The point about literary people is that they wouldn't be stuffed shirts-- I mean, they're stuffed shirts all right, but they don't begin to compare with Washington stuffed shirts.

PLAYBOY: Do you have any idea who killed Kennedy?

MAILER: I don't think there was any tremendous effort made to find out. For all I know, Oswald may have done it. But I do have one idea: assuming for the moment that Oswald shot him, it is also possible that someone else was doing some shooting quite independently of Oswald. Two assassins quite separate from one another

(MIGHT)



have come to the scene. Huge events produce huge coincidences,  
~~(An American Dream is composed of that notion.)~~

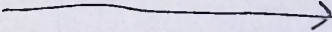
Where I'm more ready to speculate, however, is on the events after the assassination. There must have been one incredible ~~fearful~~ moment for every secret police <sup>(agency)</sup> in the world when they first heard that Oswald had been in the Soviet Union and had come back here to America. Every <sup>intelligence</sup> ~~operation~~ ~~secret service~~ everywhere must have known the odds were great that Oswald was an agent for several quite separate <sup>espionage</sup> ~~services~~ because you don't let men and boys like Oswald in and out of countries without making them pay a little price--the price is that they've got to become a little agent--thank you very much--not a big agent, just a little agent, a pawn. Most of these guys in secret services are--I won't say they're clowns--some are able ~~men~~ but they don't have a great deal of personnel to work with when you get down to it. Their best material is found in each other's agents. <sup>Levery</sup> ~~For an~~ agent has to know a little bit. About his own people anyway. So, they play games with each other's agents. They develop the same attraction to each other's agents that buddies work up for the same girl. Two guys in love with the same girl get great play back and forth. Calder Willingham once immortalized this situation in Geraldine Bradshaw. So, yes, once in awhile, a poor guy like Oswald gets caught in a situation--becomes an agent for two countries, and two or three other secret services or espionage services will get in on it. It's possible Oswald may have been an agent or on the working list of a dozen different secret services in the world. When the assassination occurred, I think a tremendous

panic erupted. An enormous effort was made to begin destroying all evidence in sight. Every possible way. To top that, you had a big city police department. I don't know anything about the Dallas police department but give or take a few points it has to be as corrupt as the next big city police force. Moreover, a cop under a searchlight is not the most resourceful of creatures: he tends to stampede. Cops are well named: a bull stampedes everything under foot. According to Lane, the Dallas police force destroyed evidence all over, heaped up false evidence by the pitchfork, terrorized witnesses.

PLAYBOY: Why?

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 <sup>ANYTHING</sup> ~~anything~~ to do with this?"

PLAYBOY: How did you feel when you heard Kennedy had been <sup>[shot?]</sup> ~~assassinated~~?

MAILER: Horrible. Horrible. At first, in some cock-eyed 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 <sup>a</sup> of events was not always incisive, tasty, or superb.

PLAYBOY: ~~TALENTED/DEVELOPED/PROFICIENT/EXCELLENT/~~

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? A great deal of what you've written <sup>(about Politics)</sup> has had considerable influence in the political climate, and you actually addressed The Presidential Papers to John F. Kennedy. Did you expect him to answer?

MAILER: If you remember, that book came out something like three weeks before the assassination. If Kennedy had lived, I doubt if he'd necessarily have read it--after all, how much time does a president have to read? But I know that some of the people around him would have read the essays sooner or later; there would have been some discussion; and there might have been some interest in the ideas in my book. Of course, the Liberal establishment was at that time extraordinarily snug: Ivy-League Brain Trusters terribly pleased with themselves, holding hands in a ~~the~~ closed circle, where Schlesinger spoke only to Galbraith and Galbraith only to God. Certainly at that time there was no dialogue with them. Mention of my name was good for the first round of laughs at a cocktail party in Washington.

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FLANBOY: ~~had~~ Kennedy only been wounded and then <sup>had</sup> recovered,  
what do you think America would be like today?

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 an 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.

FLANBOY: Isn't that one of the reasons you gave why we should get out of Vietnam--in the controversial talk you delivered in May, 1965 during Peace Day at the University of California at Berkeley?

MAILER: Yes. Except it's next to <sup>im</sup>possible for us to get out of Vietnam. Psychologically impossible. (Militarily, of course,



the war is next to meaningless.) But America, more than any other country on earth, has an image of itself as a fighting nation. Americans are fighters; a lot of good, strong, healthy Americans really want to fight, they really want a war. It's good for them, healthy for them. Fine, let's have war games every year. I offered this suggestion first in a satirical piece, but I've become ~~and~~ serious about it. Yes, the more I think about it. Buy some place--some desert or jungle--and invite any countries we ~~want~~ <sup>(have eyes for)</sup> to come to fight. If they don't accept, well, then they're conceivably too yellow to show up. <sup>(Or at least so we can tell the world)</sup> But ~~fight them~~ if they do, show: they have 50,000 men, we have 50,000 men; we get 200 or 400 airplanes--name it--they get the same; all ordnance similar in category, the same count of weapons. Then you have the biggest professional war game in the history of the world. Let it go on for two or three months, or to conclusion, covered by color television and radio, interviews with some of the stars who come out of this <sup>(engagement.)</sup> ~~particular~~ match. Some will call it musical comedy, ~~or degrading,~~ or barbaric, but, in matter of fact, the one difference between this war game and Vietnam is that ~~at least~~ we won't be burning kids in any number or smashing property which belongs to others. ~~people~~ Americans will just be doing what they want to be doing: ~~being~~ some shooting, ~~having~~ some war. ~~There are~~ <sup>(1/1)</sup> many men ~~who~~ love to be in battle. They want to take a chance, ~~on being killed and learning how to kill~~ they are better men at the end of it if they are engaged in a war which has some modicum of purpose. If you're engaged in a purposeless war, you can end up ~~very~~ healthy, but you're <sup>57/11</sup> a pig with a distorted mentality because you have to justify the act of

killing as being a patriotic act, when in fact all you want to do is to kill. If I wish to blast somebody and say, "Yeah, that's what I want to do," then I'm existentially tuned: I know what I am. I am obeying the first dictate of ethics: "Know thyself." But if I want to kill somebody and say, "I'm doing it for my country and for freedom," then I'm a bad piece of work. I'm psychically disoriented.

PLAYBOY: In the Berkeley talk, you also argued that the reasons given by the Johnson administration explaining why we are fighting in Vietnam are patently phony. In particular, you pointed to the explanation claiming we're there because we're battling communism. ~~(And you went on to suggest very strongly that the real reason we were escalated in Vietnam was to manipulate the American people subtly but persuasively for the possibility of World War III with Red China.)~~ Do you still hold these views?



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MAILER: It would depend ~~completely~~ on what kind of country he might inherit in 1968 or '72 or ~~176~~ or whenever. It might be a country damaged irreparably by the horrors, pusillanimities, and hypocrisies of the Johnson administration and the <sup>war in</sup> Vietnam, ~~was~~ This war may have done more damage to America than anything in our history.

PLAYBOY: Then do you still feel the same way about the Vietnam war as you did when you delivered your controversial address during Peace Day last May at the University of California at Berkeley when you said that the reasons given by the Johnson administration explaining why we are fighting in Vietnam are patently phony--the explanation that claims we are there because we are fighting communism--and you suggested very strongly that the reason Johnson escalated in Vietnam was to prepare the American people subtly but very strongly for the possibility of a third World War with Red China?

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MAILER: I think we went to war in Vietnam 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, an enormous reason which is more or less mystical: 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

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opinion, to apply leverage to the economy, to stand up against the Civil Rights movement. I think he saw Vietnam that way: 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. ~~It was the error of his life:~~ 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 lead the American people on an ideological leash.

PLAYBOY: In the Vietnam speech at Berkeley, you said that Johnson is the smartest politician America has ever seen but that "nobody in this country believes that he's good, and if he's evil, God help us all, because he's insufferably vain." Do you still feel this? Has anything happened to alter or strengthen your opinion?

MAILER: No.

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

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

PLAYBOY: Of all the major political figures about whom you've written extensively, you've ~~never~~ <sup>(hardly)</sup> written about Nixon. Why?

MAILER: One reason is that Nixon was written about very well all through the Fifties. This is a while before I came along as a political writer. He was the one guy who on the left became a natural target for every good political writer, so it felt like kicking the cat to go to work on Nixon. I'm not fond of the man, but I didn't see any reason to duplicate



a job <sup>(done)</sup> so many times. If he gives signs of becoming powerful again, that'll be another matter. That will be serious. I don't know anyone who has ever heard Richard Nixon say anything interesting in all the years he's invaded our life. Nixon is resolute in his refusal to become more interesting. It's a remarkable power--this passionate embrace of monotony.

and mediocrity?

(35)  
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PLAYBOY: Do you see any politician on the scene today who might be an existential politician in the sense in which you've just talked about JFK?

MAILER: I think Bobby Kennedy might be. You can't begin to know what direction the man will take. I don't mean his directions 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, replete with all his vices and virtues, is certainly an existential politician.*

PLAYBOY: In Cannibals and Christians you said that Bobby Kennedy has taken "a pilgrim's progress" since the murder of his brother. Could you say something more about that phrase?

MAILER: He's become more 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 opinion here is worth-~~  
*also*  
~~less.~~ My approach to politics is from the outside.

~~Deliberately,~~ 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 ~~that~~ they know nothing. For *(instance)* ~~example~~, they knew in 1963 that Bill Scranton was going to be the Republican candidate in 1964.

PLAYBOY: In terms of Bobby Kennedy, you wrote in The Presidential Papers extensively about the tone or "climate" or style of the country under John Kennedy's administration. What would you predict the nation would be like under a Bobby Kennedy administration?

How  
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FEEL ABOUT  
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PAST  
McCarthyism,  
RUTHLESSNESS,  
HOUNDING OF  
HOPEA, ETC.



PLAMBOY: A few minutes ago, you praised John Kennedy for changing the style of American life by opening it up and making it more "salty." What would you predict the nation would be like under a Robert Kennedy administration?

MAILER: It would depend on what kind of country he might inherit in 1968 or '72 or whenever. It might be a country damaged irreparably by the horrors, pusillanimities, and hypocrisies of the Johnson administration, the Vietnam war-- which may have done more damage to America than anything in our history-- and the "Great Society."

PLAMBOY: What are your thoughts about Johnson's Great Society? Do you think it exists?

MAILER: It's a comedy. The Great Society is not only not going to come into being, but it shouldn't. It's artificial. The only growth to have meaning is organic growth which does not become separated from the root of its origin. Any time you find a great society developed from the top, what you've got, in effect, is a test-tube baby--artificial insemination of the worst sort. ~~I believe in the exact opposite of the Great Society: I believe in concepts like Black Power.~~

~~Let's~~  
~~You might~~ say the Great Society is drug addiction on a huge political scale. It's similar to shooting <sup>B-12 Complex</sup> ~~vitamins~~ into your ~~butto~~ veins. ~~The vitamins may produce an immediate result, the~~

The patient may feel healthier for awhile, but the fact of the matter is that a part of his <sup>mass</sup> ~~arm~~ has been vided in a way which bears no relation to his life, <sup>(at least not)</sup> as his own flesh can feel it. In other words, <sup>(your)</sup> flesh is visited <sup>(abruptly)</sup> ~~suddenly~~ by a <sup>(turbulent)</sup> ~~epileptic~~ needle which punctures skin, rips delicate strands of muscle and cuts holes in a vein wall. To what end? The <sup>body</sup> ~~boy~~ doesn't understand. If you're in a fight and get hit, your <sup>(usually)</sup> ~~body~~ can understand that: it was <sup>(probably)</sup> ~~mobilized~~ for ~~an~~ 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: You mean he has to find it himself?

MAILER: I don't mean we have to <sup>all the way</sup> go ~~back~~ to 19th century conservatism. Instead, take Black Power as an example of what I <sup>(talk about)</sup> ~~mean~~. Take Harlem. Let's be <sup>very</sup> ~~specific~~. Right now, part of <sup>(the)</sup> ~~New York City~~ police force works in Harlem. It's a hopeless job for any white policeman. He doesn't have a prayer <sup>(of a chance)</sup> ~~of~~ being a good cop because he's too hated 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, ~~it will survive best as such a~~

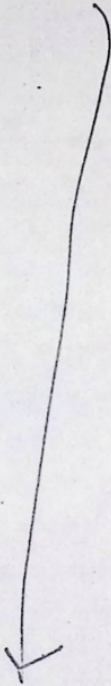
HE DOESN'T  
GIVE HIS  
OPINION OF  
BLACK POWER,  
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WHAT IS  
IT?



Suppose, then, that Harlem had its own police force and used their 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 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 man who's 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 everytime something ugly happened, the Negroes would have 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 behind the face; I have met stupid whites. 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 that 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<sup>S</sup> in ~~the~~ Harlem schools now? Why should Negroes be forced to learn to read by methods ~~which were~~ devised by Midwestern Protestants? Totally different kinds of people. As different as Japanese and Texans.

~~Concerning~~  
As far as housing projects, ~~for~~ I see no reason to come in with these tremendous urban renewal ~~projects~~ <sup>(obs)</sup> which are unspeakably ugly and ~~tear~~ <sup>(tear)</sup> up neighborhoods: they are like metal plates put in your head, or plastic tubes stuck in your gut. These projects disrupt a neighborhood. Instead, some of these tenements could be saved. You could have a ~~scheme~~ <sup>(scheme)</sup> where a man could start by being given \$100 worth of materials and a little ~~labor~~ <sup>(profession)</sup>--I use the figure arbitrarily--and he could set out to improve his apartment--plaster a wall, this or that, <sup>say</sup> his wife will be in on it. He's working for his own apartment. If he goes out and drinks up the money, alright, he drank it up and presumably he won't get anymore. <sup>(His neighbors might lean on him)</sup> Not lean on him hard probably, because if he's the guy who drank it up, he's ~~possibly~~ <sup>(probably)</sup> the meanest guy in the house. ~~For~~ Still, what you get this way is a house interested in itself; whereas the other way, housing projects, poverty programs, Great Society, any negro who doesn't set out to exploit ~~that~~ <sup>the</sup> white man who is giving him money ~~from above~~ is nothing but a fool. <sup>(handouts, honor for the Negro)</sup> ~~With such~~ <sup>(handouts)</sup> ~~only honest~~ becomes his ability to lie, cheat, and exploit the white man. ~~Five thousand~~ Whereas a few thousand dollars given bit by bit to a man working very hard on his apartment over a few years would obviously do much more for that apartment than \$20,000 spent to renovate it by outside methods.

PLAYBOY: Recently you said that Civil War will erupt soon in this country. Do you see it as happening between Negroes and whites? How violent will it be?

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PLAYBOY: Recently you said that Civil War will erupt soon in this country. Do you see it as happening between Negroes and whites? How violent will it be?



~~and white? How violent will it be?~~

MAILER: Black against white will be one of the polarizing forces. City against country, police vs. kids are some of the others. I have a hunch Black Power will begin to come into its own. Most people, when they think of Black Power, think of violence--the Negro violent in the streets. Actually, what Black Power means is Black Responsibility. The story of most violent men who get responsibility is that they then become less violent. Occasionally, they become more violent--a violent man carrying responsibility can flip, sure, but the general tendency when you give a man responsibility is to make him more stable.

PLAYBOY: Do you think the situation will get more violent?

MAILER: I don't know the answer. Yes, I think it will. I think the whole thing will get more violent. Take the Vietnam war: when these guys start coming back to say, "Hey beatnik, hey, peace marcher. Come here. We got the light in our eye."

MAILER: I think there's a tendency toward civil war--not a war in the sense of people shooting it out over the hills and on battle lines. But certain kinds of functions might cease to exist in this society--technological functions. It may be people will lose the habit of depending on the subway to get to work, or people might lose the real <sup>(possibility)</sup> responsibility of driving into certain cities at certain hours of the day. What might happen <sup>a</sup> ~~often~~ would be scattered outbreaks of violence: people, for example, who've gotten fed up with the Long Island Expressway and <sup>(so start)</sup> overturning cars in traffic jams. All sorts

of things: products getting worse and worse; shoddiness at the center of production; breakdowns, fissures.

PLAMBOY: How much of this will be the result of what you've often and passionately condemned as our technological society?

MAILER: Oh, much of it. Most of it perhaps. ~~I'll talk about the technological society a bit later.~~ Another great part of the tendency toward violence <sup>(MIGHT)</sup> ~~which~~ derive from our guilt of the past: we've never paid for the crimes of the past; now we're trying to bury them. That's one reason the technological society advances at such a great rate: it frees people from having to look back into the horrors of the past. Western man has never faced up to the slave trade, the concentration camps, the colonization of the world, the imperialization of the world--the list could go on as long as one's knowledge of history.

PLAMBOY: In what sense <sup>(should be)</sup> could we face up to the crimes of the past?

MAILER: I don't believe in getting rid of guilt. Guilt is real.





~~guilt, like through analysis~~ Guilt is real. When we feel guilt, we <sup>(may)</sup> feel it for reasons deeper, ~~deeper~~ and more pervasive, than we can ever begin to know. ~~for instance,~~ Suppose ~~to have had more than one life~~ <sup>(meta morphosis in)</sup> our present life is the latest ~~manifest of~~ <sup>(meta morphosis in)</sup> a continuing migration of our ~~own personal~~ soul, ~~then~~ who knows what guilts we may be expiating in this particular embodiment? Severing ourselves collectively from the guilt of the past may separate mankind from the web of his real and continuing <sup>(meta morphosis in)</sup> ~~existence~~.

PLAYBOY: In Cannibals and Christians, you said we should stop the Cold War, which <sup>you claim</sup> is a useless <sup>brutal, enslaving</sup> thing, and get on with the destiny of Western Man. What exactly did you mean by "The destiny of Western Man?"

MAILER: ~~That's~~ <sup>(suppose I)</sup> A huge phrase--the "destiny of Western Man." ~~What I meant~~ <sup>that</sup> that the West is built ultimately on one final ~~underlying~~ <sup>(suppose I)</sup> assumption: ~~life is heroic~~ <sup>that</sup>. It's a Faustian notion. Of course, one immediately rushes to say that the West is also Christian, but there's always been a contradiction at the heart ~~of Christianity~~ <sup>(Christianity)</sup>. Christianity, the gentlest of religious professions, is ~~also~~ <sup>that</sup> the most militant and warlike of religions, indeed the most successful and Faustian of religions. Indeed, it conquered the world. In that certain sense, ~~it~~ <sup>(Christianity)</sup> is the most heroic. ~~More militant heroes have existed among the religious leaders of Christianity~~ <sup>that</sup> I would suppose than among any other religion. The alternative to this heroic notion of man is ~~the~~ <sup>ce</sup> passive acceptance of the universe which characterizes ~~say~~ <sup>that</sup> Hindu or Oriental philosophy and religion. ~~I naturally feel that an heroic notion of man is more intriguing and philosophically more exciting~~

Yet, one of the ironies of our century is that the technological society creates an atmosphere of such passivity ~~that~~ <sup>(in)</sup> people that they are now prepared to entertain Oriental notions precisely because they have lost much of the real power to shape their own lives. The citizens of a technological society are as existentially powerless as an Oriental peasant. Their living standard may be vastly superior but their essential social impotence is similar: they command less and less; they are manipulated more and more. For that reason, the<sup>1</sup> the real mission of the West--if we are to speak in these by now vintage Spenglerian terms--must be to call to everything in man which is most extraordinary. (Here, let's take a long parenthesis.) I believe what is most extraordinary in us is certainly not our ability to fight communism. The more we wage a religious war against communism, the more we create the real social equivalent of communism in America which will be the total technological society. You can look forward into a future where communism's technological society grows near to identical with ours; the differences will be of the mildest local color. For the natural tendency of the technological society is to try to clean up all sorts of social excesses and root out random oppression because these activities are illogical--they interfere with the smooth working of the machine. You never want a piston to drive with more force than is necessary to direct the action of the machine; you never put a part <sup>IN</sup> ~~A~~ the machine that is heavier than it needs<sup>cal</sup> to be. So the natural desire of the technological ~~cal~~ society is to —————→



create a smooth totalitarian society free from the ranker forms of injustice. Its long-term tendency in Russia is to make a totalitarian environment which is<sup>S</sup> relatively civilized and pleasant. Both countries may well end up by serving <sup>1</sup> up a life to their citizens about as anonymous and vitiated and pill-ridden and dull as some of our new office buildings. That is, they will, if I'm wrong in the first prediction of plague and civil war. (End of long parenthesis.)

report  
America fights communism because we're Faustian. We believe we have to grapple with the universe; we have the secret faith that we are inspired by a national genius which enables us to take on anything and do anything. The tragic irony is that in fighting communism we are creating the absolute equivalent of communism in this country. And we will destroy our own Faustian dream in the act of fighting communism, for the technological society looks to destroy ideas of the heroic because such ideas seem irrational and unscientific to the technician.

Each time communism has captured some small part of the West, for example, it has been shaken by Western complexities [which open huge rents in the Russian communist ideology. A barbaric country like Yugoslavia did more to halt Stalinism than 50 military projects designed by John Foster Dulles. ~~because~~ Yugoslavia introduced a complex notion into the center of

of communism: the idea that there could be two kinds of communism, ~~two~~ each equally devout and heroic to itself, each equally oppressive. This made the communist bureaucrat begin to contemplate the nature of his own system and therefore to doubt his faith, and so look for ways to ameliorate the oppressiveness of it. [Communism is cannibalistic, as I said earlier. Any ideology which attempts to dominate all of existence has to split into sects and segments because the moment of disagreement exists between members it cannot be adjudicated or compromised without losing the primitive force of the ideology. Compromise impossible, splits occur. What you get then is two ideologies equally monotonous, ~~two~~ equally total, soon equally at war on each other.

PLAY ON: Opposed to this, then, is what ~~you've called~~ you call the heroic destiny of the West?

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

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



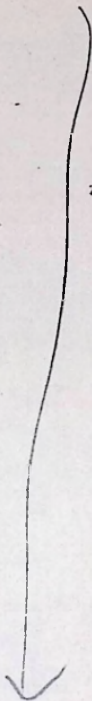
PLAYBOY: By existential politics, which you seem to imply is another exploration into the heroic, do you mean a politics which has no prior definitions or formulas?

MAILER: ~~It's complicated.~~ Existential politics can only be understood by talking practically, and specifically, about what you <sup>(are going to)</sup> do here in this particular place and time. After you talk about, say, twenty such situations, you get some notion of existential politics. The basic <sup>(principle)</sup> ~~notion in~~ existential politics is that you do not separate the act from the receiver. Existential politics depends on a certain intimacy between the law and the people upon whom the law is enacted. For example, the most paradoxical notion of existential politics is not that <sup>a</sup> there should be no capital punishment, for example, but that if someone is going to get killed by the state, then make a spectacle of the event. Let people watch while a professional executioner and the condemned man fight hand to hand in an arena. Since the executioner is professional, he wins practically every time; but he doesn't win to a certainty; ~~and~~ that gives the prisoner some last chance to fight for his own existence. It gives him the right of any man to fight for existence under extraordinary circumstances.

Such a spectacle also opens the public to the real nature of execution. Let them see that blood on the sand. Then they may <sup>(then)</sup> decide if they still want capital punishment. If they do, more power to them. <sup>(they like blood.)</sup> But at least, <sup>(one profound)</sup> ~~this terrible~~ hypocrisy--<sup>(our guarantee)</sup> ~~this separation of the execution from the public~~ <sup>(the eyes of)</sup> which decrees the act--won't be able to exist anymore.

HOW DOES  
HE FEEL  
ABOUT  
CAPITAL  
PUNISHMENT?  
SHOULD IT  
BE  
RETAINED?

PLAMBOZ: In terms of the possibility of you becoming  
an existential political figure yourself,





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you once planned to run for Mayor of New York City, although recently you <sup>said</sup> ~~wrote~~ that you've decided to devote your time to writing instead of direct political activities. Do you still feel that way?

MAILER: I disqualified myself from being in political office: you can't stab your wife and get away with it. It's as simple as that.

PLAYBOY: That happened right around the time you announced your candidacy, didn't it?

MAILER: Three weeks after.

PLAYBOY: In terms of the American political scene in general, do you feel, really way down, that we are going to make it?

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

MAILER: I'm gloomy. I won't say I don't think we're going to make it; but I am gloomy because quite <sup>unrelated</sup> ~~above~~ politics and <sup>any</sup> ~~these~~ related discussions of courage, honor, love, beauty, so forth, rests this technological society which sits upon ~~all of~~ us like an incubus. It's impossible, for instance, to have any contact with anything in your existence which is not encapsulized by this technological society. I can't take a pat of butter ~~in the morning~~ at breakfast which doesn't have some chemical additive to deaden the taste of the butter a bit, <sup>just (and therefore)</sup> deaden my taste buds, and therefore deaden me. As well as line my stomach cells with a <sup>little</sup> ~~further~~ miniscule addition of chemical. If you could eat a ~~small~~ fresh piece of butter for breakfast, ~~then~~ certain messages might be able to reach down deep into the secret needs of <sup>your</sup> ~~one's~~ nerves. Enough to enrich you. ~~Then~~ You might live a hint better. The

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technological society gets between us and existence in everything we do, the air we breathe, the synthetic fibers we wear--ever notice how a rash from a synthetic fiber is more disagreeable than from cotton or wool--the buildings we live in with their abstract monotonous forms. The list is endless. I've written about little else for years.

PLAYBOY: What could be done about it?

MAILER: Well, I don't know. My feeling is that there is going to be some extraordinary holocaust. Whoknows? We may all dies off in some ~~extraordinary~~ mysterious fashion.

About the time we discover some cure for cancer, For instance, <sup>a</sup> ~~some~~ new disease ~~which is~~ even worse will probably be spawned by the cure (just as new viruses were spawned in relation to penicillin). Modern diseases and modern technology are inseparably connected.

PLAYBOY: You've often connected what you call "the plague" with the modern technological society. How did the plague begin?

FIRST OF ALL, WHAT IS IT?

MAILER: I think it began somewhere back <sup>(with)</sup> in primitive man when the first mediocrity discovered he could get power over men stronger than himself by employing magic for control over others rather than <sup>(for)</sup> communion with <sup>(his)</sup> existence. <sup>(Jacques)</sup> Ellul in his book The Technological Society suggests that the beginning of all scientific technique was <sup>Come from a</sup> the perversion of <sup>primitive</sup> magic. At the very inception of magic there was a sense of communion--a spirit that permeated every moment of one's life, a spirit against which one could be rebellious, <sup>Or</sup> animate, sardonic, terrified, <sup>or</sup> whatever--but ~~it~~ was essentially a relation of love ~~between man and his sense of the presence of a love which~~ love in the sense of sensuous love: love that is rosy



or terrified, 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.

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PLANNON: About love, you've written that one aspect of totalitarianism is fear of orgasm, particularly by the liberal mentality because the orgasm, you claim, is "the existential moment . Every lie we have told, every fear we have indulged, every aggression we have tamed, <sup>you says</sup> ~~tries again~~ "you've written, "at that instant to constrict the turns and possibilities of our becoming." Would you tell us more about that?

MAILER: Orgasm is the moment when you can't cheat life. If the orgasm was no good, something in you was no good. In an existential moment, something bad can happen to you because you can't control it--you don't know how it's going to turn out. Anybody who's ever been in an automobile accident experiences such a moment--three or four or five seconds which seem endless--and you're into something which is brand new.

But the American liberal is programmatic about sex. Yesterday he believed in sex hygiene. Today he believes in promiscuity. He thinks it's good. I think that's innocent. Promiscuity is good at given times. Other times, dreadful. When sex becomes programmatic, it walks the totalitarian. Because a program does not permit of surprises;

sometimes, existence can only reveal itself by its surprises. If you're programmatically promiscuous, then the very impulse to <sup>b</sup>be wild is denied. It's like an awkward kid forcing himself to go out for sports.

PLAYBOY: Is that what you meant when you wrote that most Americans "sink sooner or later into a depression about sex"--because sex becomes programmatic?

MAILER: I guess so.

PLAYBOY: What do you think in this context about the flood of sex manuals--the "do-it-yourself" texts which claim to teach you how to enjoy intercourse?

MAILER: Taking them at their best, the psychological sex manuals, I'd still say I'm not a champion of Albert Ellis' opinions. Although there's one thing in Ellis' ideas which isn't so bad: the notion ~~of~~ he has of sex as will. For instance, I remember he once told me a story about one of his patients who was terribly timid and nervous about women. →



S3  
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After they'd worked for awhile in the analytical relationship, Ellis finally said one day: "Look, ~~is~~ you like this girl, you find her attractive: neck with her tonight; take her to the movies and neck with her." Ellis said the patient went to the movies with the girl and suffered and sweat <sup>ed</sup> and died but finally he made a pass, <sup>(LAC)</sup> ~~and~~ did neck with her.

~~But~~ Ellis said the real reason was that the patient was more afraid of Ellis than he was of the girl. There's something in that. A healthier <sup>(LAC)</sup> ~~reflect~~ can sometimes be initiated by an act of will. The same thing happened after all to Julien Sorel in Stendhal's The Red and the Black.

Remember when Sorel says to himself, "If I do not seize Madame de Renal's hand at the count of three, I will never have respect for myself again." He was trembling with terror because he was a servant and the lady was a <sup>(Mayer's wife's)</sup> ~~noblewoman~~ but he seized her hand ~~and kissed her~~ <sup>and</sup> It's one of the ~~great~~ <sup>great</sup>

(Great Moments)  
^ Moments of the novel.

PLAYBOY: Is that kind of moment an example of existential sex?

MAILER: Yes: <sup>(1415)</sup> ~~you're~~ <sup>leaving</sup> a gap. But, you know, I distrust this talk. The older I get and the more I learn about sex, the more I know I don't know anything at all. Sex is more mysterious today than it was the day I started.

PLAYBOY: In what sense?

MAILER: I find it harder to come up with value judgments which can be used from one day into the next. I prefer it this way--having fewer and fewer answers about sex as the years go by.

(S4)  
28 50

PLAYBOY: One of your ideas about sex which has outraged many liberals <sup>is</sup> that you claim that birth control is evil-- you argue that birth control is a kind of murder of what may have been a man's best son. Do you still feel that way?

MAILER: Yes. In fact, not too long <sup>(ago)</sup> ago I was reading a very generous review of Cannibals and Christians in a Catholic magazine called The Critic, and at one point the critic said, "Of course, Mailer's ideas are almost absurdly sentimental about birth control." I am now to the right of the Catholic Church. (Laughs.)

PLAYBOY: One of the attacks levelled against your ideas on birth control argues: <sup>Doesn't</sup> ~~Isn't~~ Mailer <sup>know about</sup> ~~significant~~ of the fact ~~of~~ the world population explosion? And there's also the liberal moral charge: what about the morality of bringing another child into a family which hasn't enough food and clothes for the children they already have?

MAILER: The problem of birth control is the same as all of the other problems in our technological society. They're all part of the same damn problem: something is insulating us <sup>(away)</sup> from our existence. My guess is that in primitive times it was much more difficult to conceive and-- <sup>(In a just existence the best things are always the most difficult)</sup> as a result-- ~~more~~ <sup>more</sup> natural. Since man lived in a relation to his life which was more biological--which is to say, he felt everything around him with his own body; he was therefore more intelligent physically than he is today, even though he might have been <sup>(smaller)</sup> ~~smaller~~ or ~~what~~ have you--each man was more an animal, his senses told him more. We notice that animals don't conceive

THIS  
SHOULD  
BE  
CHALLENGED



(SS) 203X  
all that easily, ~~they conceive when they can conceive; they~~  
~~don't just conceive mechanically as humans seem to.~~ The  
problems of breeding are <sup>(of course considerable)</sup> enormous with animals because  
they don't conceive unless they really want it to take.

1 In our modern life, on the other hand, the body is so  
<sup>(at its sexual center)</sup> deadened by contraceptives, <sup>(and pills)</sup> jellies, chemicals; ~~at its~~  
sexual center--at the live it of all things-- that we no  
longer can afford to be as <sup>e</sup>selective as we used to be.  
This adds ~~a little more~~ 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 callings 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. You say:  
What would happen if there were no birth control? It's  
possible that ~~what would happen is that~~ it might then  
become much more difficult to conceive because there  
would be more real terror of conceiving for too little.  
1 One thing you can be sure of: people would start making  
love a lot less; they'd only make it when they really  
wanted to make it: they'd have to be carried away more.  
On a flood of passion, yeah. How many people ride on a  
flood today? One thing I've learned in all these years  
is not to make love when you really don't feel it, there's  
probably nothing worse you can do to yourself than that.

(56) ~~40 32~~

PLAYBOY: Why?

MAILER: Well, it's like taking your vitals, putting them on a stone block, and pounding away ~~on them~~ with a hammer. It's bad for the back--that I know. (Laughs)

PLAYBOY: You're been married four times--

MAILER: Heroines, every one...

PLAYBOY: (Laughter) How do you feel about marriage?

MAILER: I love marriage, but I don't think I'd love it unless I were a novelist. I love it because it's a curious relationship. It's ~~very~~ <sup>now</sup> artificial, and yet, on the other hand, it has such primitive roots and territorial rights. <sup>A</sup> ~~The~~ novelist can become absolutely obsessed with marriage. I've never ~~really~~ <sup>much</sup> written about marriage ~~much~~ but I think it's a goldmine: To write about marriage, to really write about marriage and what really goes on between a man and a woman--the way they kill each other and keep each other alive.

PLAYBOY: Do you think you will write about marriage?

MAILER: I don't know; I don't know. It's <sup>(difficult)</sup> ~~too deep~~. After all, the ~~only~~ <sup>(in my life)</sup> marriage you're thinking about at the ~~present~~ moment is your present marriage and you can't start writing about that. I guess I have written about some marriage--in An American Dream and The Deer Park.

PLAYBOY: A lot of the critics accuse you of a real hostility against women. They point to the classic scene in your story "The Time of Her Time" when the protagonist Sergius O'Shaughnessy calls his ~~spick~~ <sup>(penis)</sup> the "Avenger" and finally brings on an orgasm in the shrewd, stubborn Jewish girl Denise by



(57) ~~43~~

anally  
raping her in the ass--

MAILER: --You got to change the language (Laughs)...

PLAYBOY: Anal intercourse is the fancy word for it, isn't it?

MAILER: Let's get something ~~really~~ <sup>(carnal)</sup> hotsy-totsy. Let's say:  
By taking possession ~~anally~~ <sup>(of her posterior territories)</sup> of her posterior territories.

PLAYBOY: Critics also point to the well-known scene in

An American Dream when Rojack deprives the ~~Wily~~ <sup>(at the last second)</sup> German maid  
of her orgasm by insisting on having his orgasm in her anal  
(instead of inside her vagina) tract. Critics say that here again is an example of Mailer's

deep hostility, distrust and anger against women. What 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~~ <sup>(writers)</sup> twice deliberately was  
~~this--it's something you and a lot of people will understand~~  
but no critic will ever understand--it was just to say to  
the critic: "Fuck you. I wrote about it once; I'll

write about it again. ~~And~~ <sup>(what are you going to do about</sup>  
it? Say ~~that~~ I'm anally oriented? O.K. Say I'm anally  
oriented. I'll say I'm Cassius Clay. Fuck you."

PLAYBOY: Some of the same critics claim your knife poem in  
Death to the Ladies and Other Disasters:

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

SEE  
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uses shamelessly the episode when you stabbed your second wife back in 1961. How do you feel about this charge?

MAILER: I answered the question once in an interview with Paul Krassner: I said I was trying to crystallize a paradox--the paradox contained in the poem; so long as you use a knife, there's some left love. My feeling about writing such things is simple: if you're not ruthless about your work, you can't be an artist of interest. Once something crystallizes, you have to be ruthless about presenting it; it don't matter who gets hurt. Your message in the ear of the reader is going to be worth the damage that's done. You've got to be impersonal, you can't look back. If, on the other hand, you go in the other direction, and start thinking, Will writing about this experience hurt me?--well, then you're a bad writer--the kind who spends his life humping for The New Yorker. You spend your life hurting other people--not yourself.

PLAUDY: Why?

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

MAILER: In other words, are you saying that if the experience and feelings that went into the stabbing is in that poem, then so they are--that's the way it has to be?

MAILER: I don't want to talk about the stabbing any more. Not any more. Say the word 10 times and it loses its force.



I'll just finish by saying--this could be hard to believe-- that I was not really thinking about the act or myself at that moment I wrote the poem: I was really thinking about a long conversation I had with a man who stabbed his brother. He had been telling me about it and he had such complacency of feeling for his brother that the poem came: "So long as you use a <sup>N</sup>knife..."

PLAYBOY: You've also admitted that you get irritated when some critic comments on the anal intercourse scene in "The Time of Her Time": "Is that the way Mailer likes his sex? Does such analysis still grate you?"

MAILER: Well, if critics want to manipulate their brains for long hours pondering such problems, they are welcome to exercise their efforts.

PLAYBOY: How would you <sup>S</sup>describe a good, swinging sexual relationship between a man and a woman?

MAILER: Something to fall back on. Even after you've been married awhile, it can still be the thing you wait for.

PLAYBOY: Do you believe, then, in the old cliché that the early days of marriage are the great times and 1 after that the sexual scene gets less interesting and more boring?

HE'S  
ALREADY  
ANTICIPATED  
THIS  
QUESTION  
SEE PAGE  
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(60) 36  
MAILER: I think a marriage

~~Whatever--their sexual scene--as you put it--~~ should get better all the time. By the time they're 80, ~~it should be~~ <sup>10 COUPLES</sup> absolutely fantastic. ~~They~~ <sup>they</sup> should die fucking. But I don't think that ~~ever~~ happens, because none of us has the guts for that; none of us are clean enough; all of us are a little bit yellower than we ought to be. Cowardice ~~is~~ <sup>what</sup> kills love.

EXPLAIN

PLAYBOY: What do you think accounts for our cowardice in sexual relations?

MAILER: ~~It~~ <sup>It</sup> centers around possession. ~~It's~~ <sup>It's</sup> A curious thing: if you gamble with your possession and ~~you~~ gamble foolishly and you're not possessive enough, that's fatal. There's something in a woman which is profoundly outraged if you don't want to make her all your own: women will never forgive you for that. Permissiveness to a woman is permissive shit. They hate it. Everything primitive in a woman ~~rebels~~ <sup>(REBELS)</sup> if a man does not want her ~~totally and~~ absolutely for himself. At the same time, once you ~~do claim~~ <sup>claim</sup> ~~that to~~ a woman, you start killing everything in her, ~~that's~~ <sup>that's</sup> wild. Nothing in ~~Love or~~ sex is ever simple because you're always walking between two paradoxes. Love ~~is walking up~~ <sup>is walking up</sup> a narrow trail in a jungle ~~pulling with ambush~~ <sup>stepped</sup>.

PLAY: What are the two paradoxes?

MAILER: They go by many names: possession vs. liberty; protection vs. spontaneity; novelty vs. tradition.

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

~~(It's just that you're not in new relations)~~



(61) 17  
MAILER: The gist of what I said is that women are getting more power because men want them to. Today, a man wants a wife who is a military assistant, a woman who can go out into the world with her husband and help him climb those hills of status.

2  
PLAYBOY: Are you saying that a woman's place is in the ~~home~~, ~~home~~ home?

MAILER: That takes us right back into the technological society. When a woman<sup>is</sup> in the home today she's miserable, because 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 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 ~~very~~ 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 a foam rubber cunt.

REPETITIOUS  
PLAYBOY: Speaking of sex in America today, do you agree with the commonplace that the lower classes enjoy a more swinging sexual scene than the upper or middle classes?

MAILER: I think the lower classes might have more sexual vitality than the upper classes. They have fewer outlets in life. Dig. Another reason: they tend to work more with their bodies than their minds.

(62) ~~38~~

PLAYBOY: According to the Kinsey Report, the lower classes tend to have more sexual rigidity and perhaps repression and certainly less sexual experimentation than the upper or middle classes. How do you feel about this? ~~Why do you think this is so?~~

MAILER: <sup>(such)</sup> All statistics show is the attitude to which people are ready to confess. <sup>SS.</sup> 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 weakness: they see it in its other aspect. Perversion has two aspects: it is an adornment, it is also a need; the lower classes always see a perversion as a need and so they see it as a weakness and they despise it. To the lower classes, need is weakness.

WHY?

PLAYBOY: By perversion, do you mean sexual acts like fellatio and anal intercourse?

MAILER: ~~Now~~ Whatever it might be--fellatio, cunnilingus, you name it. Lower class people see it as a <sup>a</sup> 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. <sup>So what?</sup> Giving head to your woman is a weakness-- it's also a ~~marvelous~~ way to pass on some of your weakness. It's also dangerous because it <sup>(gives)</sup> introduces the Devil into the vagina. <sup>(introduction)</sup>

WHAT'S THE MIND GOT TO DO WITH BUNT-LICKING?

PLAYBOY: The Devil? How so?

MAILER: Oh, the mind's a devil. Didn't you know?



PLAYBOY: Speaking of sex in novels, you've said that D. H. Lawrence was the first novelist who gave you the idea "that sex could have beauty," <sup>DO YOU CONTINUE TO ADMIRE LAWRENCE?</sup> whereas ~~Henry Miller was the first to describe the sweat and smell and itch of sex, and that you wanted to write a novel in between these two poles. Could you explain this more?~~

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

WHO'S TALKING ABOUT FICTION?

PLAYBOY: About the art of fiction in general, would you agree in any sense with critics like Norman Podhoretz who claim the novel is dead because of the recent incorporation of reportage techniques into fiction? <sup>(as an IMAGINATIVE ART)</sup>

MAILER: Obviously I don't agree with them. I believe the novel has its own particular resource which is almost magical. Fiction isn't dead in the same way that poetry will never be dead. If you write purely and your style's good enough, you can <sup>e</sup> establish a communion between yourself and the reader which can be found in no other art: as sensitive as the emotions one feels looking at fine painting or having one's ear on the edge of good music. Yet <sup>S</sup> This communion can continue for hours, week<sup>S</sup>, years. When the novel is dead, then the technological society will probably be total upon us. You'll need a scorecard to be able to tell a communist from a Texan.

REDUNDANT

(FICTION?)

PLAYBOY: About your own ~~work~~ critic Leslie Fiedler told us that he wonders if in An American Dream you try to create a Pop novel. Some of your major characters seem to be modelled on or are cartoons of living celebrities: the millionaire financier Barney Oswald has been identified by some critics with Daddy Warbucks or Joseph P. Kennedy or Grace Kelly's father; or Shago the Negro singer might have been a cartoon of Sammy Davis, Jr.; or the tragic singer, Cherry, according to some literary gossip, might have been Marilyn Monroe. Did you intend any of this?

MAILER: No, I ~~didn't intend~~ <sup>was</sup> a Pop novel. Not all rich men are Daddy Warbucks, who's incidentally not the worst creation in the world. And I certainly wasn't thinking of Joe Kennedy for the model of Barney Kelly--no two men could be more different. What I wanted to create was a tycoon. If you have any luck as a novelist, you encounter a tycoon or two before you're through. Tycoons are extraordinary people. They live with magic rather than money.

PLAYBOY: Did you intend a parody of the Horatio Alger myth in An American Dream? ~~in the sense that~~ Stephen Rojack, your hero, commits violence--he strangles his bitchy wife--and the murder liberates him; and he does everything wrong in terms of the Horatio Alger myth, but he does succeed in the end by reaching through his liberation a kind of existential sense of himself.

MAILER: I took the parody for granted. ~~There is such a thing as presentation. I thought. If I call my novel An American Dream, the title itself is sardonic, and so I'm~~

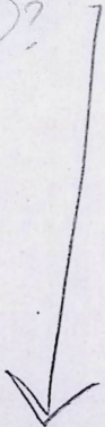


If I had wanted to be sardonic, I'd have looked for a better title.

I called the book An American Dream because something like 35 or 40 years have gone by since Dreiser's An American Tragedy was written, and we have moved from an American tragedy to an American dream: the inner landscape of America has altered. In Dreiser's time there was still a formal, practical, worldly logic in trying to marry an heiress and killing to maintain that possibility.

By the time you get to An American Dream it's as if the world of death (symbolically, the world of the dream) has begun to invade the world of the present. It's as if Americans now live in the land of the dream. In other words, our sense of reality is no longer clear or single in purpose. No one can go through An American Dream <sup>FOR EXAMPLE,</sup> and tell you what really happened; you can't read it through and give a legal summary of events, all certified. The sequence of events can't be made with full assurance. —————>

or logical?



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At any number of points, you have to decide whether Rojack is sane or insane: the center of perception is in doubt; Rojack is travelling in a no-man's land between sanity and insanity throughout the book. If an event really did happen, then one consequence is true; if it didn't, another consequence is possible. To devil the difficulties, there are coincidences which are either dramatic events or accidents. There is a plot which is either a plot or not a plot--I speak of the hints and allusions to the machinery of various secret services, and so on. Most of the novel was written, don't forget, in the aftermath of ~~the~~ Kennedy's assassination. I was trying to show how extraordinary the nature of modern reality is: the closer you come to penetrating reality in extraordinary events, the closer you





~~existential events the close~~ you are to the life of the dream. Obviously, I was thinking <sup>about</sup> of a lot more than making a sardonic <sup>(comment on)</sup> ~~remark about~~ contemporary America and how it uses us. I'm tired of that way of thinking. America does use us <sup>up</sup> ~~but~~ it also gives us incredible stimulation. After all <sup>is said</sup> ~~this~~ is not the meanest country which ever existed.

PLAYBOY: The <sup>Recent</sup> movie version of An American Dream drew almost total scorn from the critics. What did you think of the movie?

Insert  
(A) PP  
FF

MAILER: I haven't seen it. From what I've heard, it's unbelievably bad. ~~If I were paranoid I'd say the CIA must have made its disgrace to have two of the worst movies ever made. The~~ ~~It's good I'm not paranoid or I'd begin to think~~ ~~about the Dead and An American Dream. No other American~~ ~~the CIA~~ ~~writer can point to two movies so bad as mine. That means~~ ~~some of the kids in Hollywood as well~~ ~~there's something either very good or very poor about me.~~  
(Laughs)

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

MAILER: Let's assume they're right.

PLAYBOY: What kind of novels do you plan to write in the future?

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

PLAYBOY: Several times you've compared your generation of writers to the generation of the 1920s--Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and so on--and you argued that the older writers were far superior. Do you still believe this?

WHY DO  
YOU  
THINK  
SO?

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WHY DO  
YOU  
THINK  
SO?



Insert (A)

(676)

MAILER: I haven't seen it. From what I've heard, it's unbelievably bad. It's good I'm not paranoid or I'd begin to think the CIA was bankrolling some of the kids in Hollywood as well.

MAILER: They're doubtless greater; they're certainly more fascinating as men. Hemingway is much more fascinating than myself; so are Fitzgerald and Faulkner. they're greater writers, is probably the reason.

PLAYBOY: You say that if Hemingway had been a pimply faced kid instead of the man he was, his books wouldn't have had the audience they commanded. Some critics claim about you that if you were a middleclass, conservative man who wrote your novels instead of the public image you cultivate-- the brawling, pugnacious, hard-drinking hipster--your books would never have sold as well as they have. What do you feel about your relation to your public image?

MAILER: My relation to my public personality is more surrealist than that. Hemingway had a clear image, if you will: the work and the man bore a certain resemblance to each other. People are in an incredible state of confusion about me. At a party, people expect me to grab the hostess, sound her, yank her, pump her, and if I don't like her, throw her out the window; then turn to my host, say, "Up your buns, guns," and walk over to sock the nearest guy in the eye. So when I come in a place and don't behave like that, the other guests say: "Why, he is so nice." He has such charming manners."

PLAYBOY: Then where do these stories of your hostility, lechery and pugnacity start?

MAILER: Once or twice a year I get into a fight--four times a year I get into a fight. Well, so what? It's not the most extraordinary thing after all. But if I get into a fight--my God! I lost a fight in a Village party a couple

BUT FEW  
PEOPLE DO.  
WHY DO  
YOU?



WHY DID HE PICK A FIGHT WITH LISTON?

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of years ago and happened to go back to the same place the other day, and ~~was~~ the host, whom I hadn't seen in two years, said something on the order of: "I hope you'll be good tonight." All he remembers about me is that I'd gotten into a fight two years ago.

PLAYBOY: In addition to your reputation for getting into fights, you've been seriously interested in boxing for a number of years.

You count Jose Torres and Roger Donoghue among your good friends.

~~What is it about boxers that interests you?~~

Do you see boxing as a kind of existential action, particularly in the sense that boxers take a terrific chance: they could get killed?

MAILER: If you take a man who's filled with a mindless destroying violence and slowly he begins to shape himself in a profound, serious, solemn, and esthetic discipline, well, he might end by making himself into a man more extraordinary than he ever could have been any other way. Good fighters are extraordinary men.

A good fighter going into the ring and not knowing whether he's going to win or lose is in one of the most intense existential situations there is, because, as you say, he can get killed or hurt pretty badly. He is also psychically naked in public.

BAD TRANSITION

THIS SHOULD BE  
RELOCATED

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PLAYBOY: Going back to a statement you made recently about the art of writing, you said that a serious writer communicates "a vision of existence." Could you tell us more about this vision? ~~in that context?~~

MAILER: ~~What's a vision of existence?~~ What's a vision of existence? A picture. Take a Larry Rivers which has all sorts of holes and empty spaces in it--at least the pictures he was painting ten or fifteen years ago. They had a partial vision--I mean literally a partial vision--it was as if Rivers were saying: "This much of reality I perceive; this much I can paint because I perceive it in my own way. Things I have left out are the places where I really don't know how to do it differently from other artists, so I would just be doing it their way--their way of seeing, not my own." Or perhaps Rivers was saying: "My way of drawing has not yet reached my hand, so I leave it blank." Well, when a writer has a vision, he's painting something in his mind which is like a Larry Rivers picture. He's facing a wall and he fills in portions of it; he often feels exactly the sense of happiness I am sure Rivers felt when he was able to fill in one of those holes in his paintings. Rivers used to pretend that the holes were the best thing in the painting but he can't fool me.

PLAYBOY: ~~Looking at another aspect of a writer's~~ vision of existence, you once shocked a lot of people when you recommended in The Presidential Papers that JFK examine or pay more attention to scatological visions in art. What exactly did you mean?



step page

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MAILER: I didn't say he should examine it; I just said that a really good president must be prepared--like a good artist--to be acquainted with everything; he must be interested in all investigations, including an investigation of the scatological, which could give him a useful insight into the nature of economic waste. A president should be as much concerned with economic waste as he is with economic growth.

PLAYBOY: In what sense?

MAILER: I work on a very simple rule of thumb: on every given day, somewhere between 49% and 51% of the people on earth are winners as they go to sleep that night, and 49% or 51% are losers. Growth is winning. Losing is waste. This is unbelievably barbaric and crude--I'm not called a barbarian for nothing--but, nonetheless, I, like President Johnson, am not wholly beyond considering the notion of a consensus. All I am getting at is that waste is equally as interesting as growth because half the people in the world are losers. That's a metaphorical equation.

PLAYBOY: What makes a man a loser?

MAILER: He can be a loser because he's a coward. Or because he's got an extraordinary personal honor which did not enable him to use cheap advantages. A loser is--this is the most Christian notion I've come up with today--as interesting and valuable finally as a winner, though I really like to see the people who win: I am a Faustian.

~~so for them.~~

PLAYBOY: What's a winner?

MAILER: A <sup>man</sup> ~~guy~~ who feels good when he's done.

PLAYBOY: Speaking of the art of our century, you've described it as an art which documents "the doom of the species." What did you mean exactly?

MAILER: I think I said it documents intimations of the doom of the species. Take ~~The~~ Theatre of the Absurd. What they're dealing with is surgical cuts in the unconscious. In the technological society, every man is having his unconscious operated upon surgically every minute. For instance, we turn on the television set and we see people who are not in the room with us, but we're seeing them as if they are in the room with us. In other words, we're ~~seeing~~ ~~then and~~ looking in ~~on~~ them without having taken the trip to get to them. The same applies if you take a jet plane trip: we cross the continent in six hours--or four hours, or whatever--but we have not passed through many of the moods involved in taking a trip of that distance. As a result, we are psychologically amputated a little bit every moment of our existence. The art of ~~The~~ Absurd is trying to deal, I think, with this extraordinary condition. Remember all those Absurd plays filled with all those absurd interruptions? Remember what pleasure those interruptions gave? They were a restorative. We were all sick of those other ~~down~~ plays which were so well-made. We needed something to show us how to deal with interruption, <sup>with</sup> ~~which~~ is psychic amputation.

PLAYBOY: Where do you think American fiction will go in the future?

MAILER: I don't ~~know~~. <sup>(want to predict. I can't often predict)</sup> ~~I know only~~ my own work--



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

WHY?  
MAILER: ~~Depends on the day you get me~~ Probably The Deer Park and An American Dream. One day a month, I really like Barbary Shore. Whenever I'm 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.

WHY ELSE?  
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 ~~you can say~~ I've been working on one book most of my writing life. <sup>probably</sup> since I started with Barbary Shore <sup>5</sup> and certainly with The Deer Park, I've been working on one book <sup>land since</sup> ~~ever since~~.

PLAYBOY: Including the books of essays--Advertisements For Myself, ~~and~~ Presidential Papers and Cannibals and Christians?

MAILER: Yes.

PLAYBOY: What's the book about?

(That is to say:)  
MAILER: Existentialism. 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*

PLAYBOY: At the beginning of our talk, you said you like interviews because they sometimes serve as a housecleaning for your current ideas. Do you feel you've accomplished that in this interview?

MAILER: I hope we haven't had a curettage.

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PLAYBOY: Is there any final thing you want to say?

MAILER: <sup>Yes</sup>~~No~~. Up the Irish/Down the Feds/Say we sad Irish/  
Anarchists and Reds.