

you weren't afraid to talk back to Mailer. Oh, he's not so hard to talk to, I would tell them, he's really rather reasonable.

MAILER

So you have a vested interest in continuing to talk back to me.

INTERVIEWER

Let's say I was innocent in the first interview, and didn't realize I was being that effective. Now I look at you professionally. I can't afford to have you drop my standards by making facetious remarks that Picasso is good for your eyesight.

MAILER

I was telling the simple truth. My eyes have been bad lately. I read a book for an hour and suffer eyestrain the rest of the day. Eye specialists have done their best. So have all sorts of eyeglasses. Even Mr. Huxley was no use. I tried the exercises in *The Art of Seeing*. They only strained my eyes somewhat further. But looking at Picassos does not tire them. In fact I've started work for the day with severe eyestrain, having awakened from a sleep which has been more or less satisfactory for every part of my body but my eyes, and after a morning of studying twenty, fifty, or a hundred reproductions of Picassos, my eyes have felt a bit relaxed for the first time in months.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any idea why this is so?

MAILER

The idea is too complex to be introduced so quickly. I would be obliged to compress it, and so seem facetious all over again.

INTERVIEWER

Give me a hint.

MAILER

We see with the mind as well as the eye. Since the eye leads through the retina back to the mind, we can say that we see objects with two halves of the mind, with a physiological apparatus, and with a part of the psyche. If these two halves of the mind are critically different, one is seeing in two ways at once. Strain develops.

INTERVIEWER

Sounds like schizophrenia.

MAILER

Nothing so royal. Look. If I read a line of prose, its immediate meaning is clear to my physical vision, to that part of my mind which is literal and therefore moves quickly. "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party" I read. "Perfectly clear" says the muscle of my eye, and moves on to the next sentence. But my conceptual faculty holds onto the sentence. It makes associations with the words. "Now" signifies the present, which is an enormous word to me. I write often of the enormous present, of psychopathy, of how mass man has no sense of past or future, just Now. So that word halts me conceptually. I cannot afford to ignore the way it is used in a sentence. And then there's "time," which is the most remarkable and mysterious of words. It's even more mysterious than "God." We can have an idea of God, most of us do sooner or later, but who has any concept of what time might be? And the construction "Now is the time," which makes a subject and noun of "Now," is particularly interesting if one believes, as I sometimes do, that the secrets of existence, or some of them anyway, are to be found in the constructions of language which have come down to us. "Now is the time" is an odd way of putting things, as if "Now" is palpable and "time" is some sort of appurtenance which is attached to one place or to another, to Before, or to Now. I won't go into discussing "good men" or "party" but they are obviously capable of stirring a number of unconscious thoughts and dim associations which must be ignored if I'm to keep on reading at a reasonable rate. The result is that one part of my mind works against the other. My eyes begin to feel like an automobile driven by a man who has one foot on the accelerator, and the other on the brake.

INTERVIEWER

Shouldn't this be true for all of us?

MAILER

No. Most people keep concepts firmly in category. "Now" is the flat quiet moment of the present, "time" is a few simple numbers one reads from a watch.

INTERVIEWER

But not in their unconscious, I presume.

MAILER

Their unconscious doesn't erupt into the conscious routine acts of their daily life, as does mine. They save all larger thoughts for sleep, which is the tidy way to do it.

INTERVIEWER

Whereas your ambition drove your unconscious out of the water, so so speak, and into the light.

MAILER

So to speak.

INTERVIEWER

One of the ground rules is not to mock each other's metaphors.

MAILER

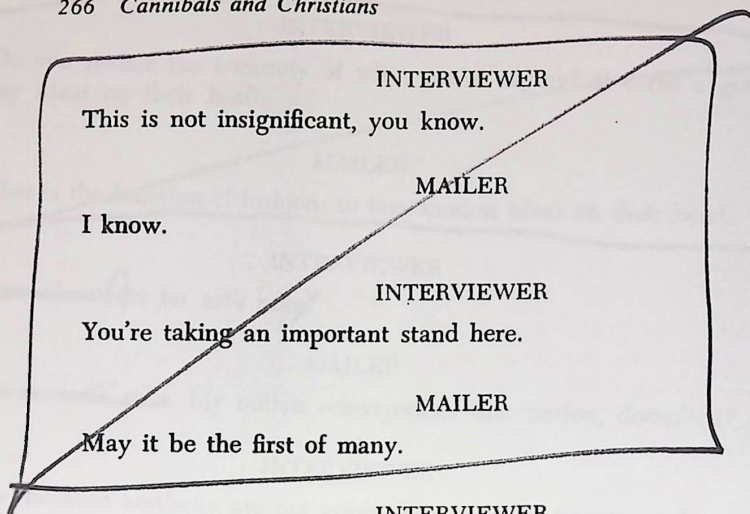
Certain artists, those who see associations and connections everywhere, tend to live in a psychic medium which is heavier, more dense, than the average man's. It is harder for them to move because there is more conscious mind for them to move. Joyce is the first example. And he went blind. Which does no harm to my thesis. If the mind reacts too powerfully to the stimuli before it, then the eye must see less in order to keep one's inner pressure at a bearable level. One goes blind not from seeing too little but from the overlaid possibilities of seeing too much.

INTERVIEWER

Almost as if there's a biological law.

MAILER

But I'm sure there is. Beauty, as the Greeks kept nagging, was harmony. Well, it has other qualities as well I hope, danger, ecstasy, promise, the transcendence of terror—all the emotions which give life to us in the West—but harmony, I fear, is what beauty is first. It means that separate parts function in a lively set of rhythms with one another. No organ is too fast or too slow vis-à-vis another organ. The pleasant relation inspires proportions in the outer forms which are healthy, harmonious, and beautiful.



INTERVIEWER

Hold on. You're saying that aesthetics is not abstract, that our concepts of beauty are not arbitrary but a function of nature.

MAILER

It's obviously more complicated than that. Upon occasion we can see beauty in disease, or beauty in the sinister, beauty even in the ugly. But that is because we have traveled a private road whose events have reinforced a few of our faculties. Compassion, for example, illumines the ugly, makes it beautiful. As we look upon an ugly face—provided it is *our* kind of ugly face—we see how it could have been beautiful, we see the loss implicit in it, we feel tender toward the disproportionate or even anomalous development of features in it. Their inversion of beauty stimulates some inner sense in us of a beauty which failed to be, at least until that moment when we conceived that this ugly sight could have been beautiful. So at that instant, looking at a plain face we can feel intimations of beauty. Beauty—so runs this argument—has its root in any being which is harmonious, imaginative, adaptable, brave, artful, daring, good for life, good for the continuation of life.

INTERVIEWER

Fantastic!

MAILER

Why?

INTERVIEWER

Do you realize the enormity of what you're saying? It turns a good many ideas on their head.

MAILER

That is the function of fashion: to turn modest ideas on their head.

INTERVIEWER

~~How about~~ art for art's sake?

MAILER

~~Art for art's sake.~~ My notion reinvigorates that notion, doesn't it?

INTERVIEWER

Yes, because aesthetes are not going into an ivory tower any longer, not by your logic. If they devote themselves to a search for beauty, they are engaged in a most valuable act—at least, according to you—to discover those secrets of life which give life.

MAILER

Well, I don't know. Only noble artists discover noble secrets and manage to give them back as art. Most of the artists who believe in art for art's sake are overelegant greedy sorts. ~~The debate still continues, you see. One can argue which kind of life is harmonious and what is not. The leaves and vines of the Beardsley adored so completely grew only in a bathhouse, a conservatory, or a tropical garden. There was no toughness in such beauty.~~

INTERVIEWER

But if a great artist believed in art for art's sake . . .

MAILER

He would be closer to life, I think, than a great politician who believed in politics for politics' sake.

INTERVIEWER

I understand what you're saying about beauty, and I don't even know that I disagree with it, ~~I mean I can see its relation to your sexual theories~~



~~MAILER~~

~~Please don't anticipate the argument.~~

INTERVIEWER

But ~~in any~~ case I don't see how you can apply your yardstick to the present. Look at the particular aesthetic experiences which give beauty to people today. In music, John Cage's *One Minute and Thirty-Six Seconds of Silence* or whatever the title is; on the stage, *The Connection*, or Albee's work, or Tennessee Williams and his deep mahogany scatology; the novel, well leave it with William Burroughs whom you admire and his violent jangled shattering sense of obscenity; and then the Abstract Expressionists and their messes—talk of scatology. I still don't understand *their* painting—and the Surrealists, full of abortions, Picasso and his mistresses whom he chooses to make look like monstrosities. Well, I could fulminate, I could say, "Call me Square and give me Velasquez," but to tell the truth I do get a sense of beauty from all these artists, or at least a sense of very private excitement like meeting a woman at a dinner party and knowing you were meant to go off with each other if you each had enough courage. . . . Whereas Greek sculpture, natural function, that leaves me gasping up the Muse on a dead dead beach.

MAILER

It bores me as well. But it was the beginning of beauty. It stated the basic condition. Perhaps Greek sculpture is no longer so beautiful to us because it lacks the sense of danger with which we live.

INTERVIEWER

Modern art has that sense of danger?

MAILER

It has a sense of doom.

INTERVIEWER

Doom of what?

MAILER

The species. Take the artists you mentioned. Suppose the condition of our existence is now so plague-ridden that we have sunk beneath the level of scatology.

INTERVIEWER

I don't follow. You mean we've sunk so low that scatological thoughts give life?

MAILER

For a good many people they do.

INTERVIEWER

Life may not be so bad as that.

MAILER

There are horrors beneath the surface, cannibals in all of us, mad animals. And for a reason. It's as if we're stifling, as if the air we breathe is no longer air but some inert gas. (*Holds up a hand*) Look, I've gotten into serious matters much too soon. I think a discussion of beauty is premature, I think it would need all of this book to explain anything at all. Let me say just that the modern condition may be psychically so bleak ~~so over extended, so artificial, so plastic plastic like it, none?~~ that studies of loneliness, silence, corruption, scatology, abortion, monstrosity, decadence, orgy, and death can give life, can give a sentiment of beauty.

INTERVIEWER

You cannot desert the argument until you give some indication of how this is possible.

MAILER

May I use the word soul instead of psyche?

INTERVIEWER

If it encourages the expression of ideas, yes.

MAILER

Postulate a modern soul marooned in constipation, emptiness, boredom and a flat dull terror of death. A soul which takes antibiotics when ill, smokes filter cigarettes, drinks proteins, minerals, and vitamins in a liquid diet, takes seconal to go to sleep, benzedrine to awake, and tranquilizers for poise. It is a deadened existence, afraid precisely of violence, canni-

balism, loneliness, insanity, libidinousness, hell, perversion, and mess, because these are the states which must in some way be passed through, digested, transcended, if one is to make one's way back to life.

INTERVIEWER

Why must they be passed through, transcended?

MAILER

Because the scatology is within and not without. The urge to eat another does not exist in some cannibal we watch in the jungle, but in the hinge of our own jaws. The love of death is not a mass phenomenon; it exists for each of us alone, our own private love of death. Just as our fear of death is also ours all alone. These states, these morbid states, as the old-fashioned psychologists used to say, can obtain relief only by coming to life in the psyche. But they can come to life only if they are ignited by an experience outside themselves. If I am secretly in love with death and terrified of it, then the effort to restrain and domesticate these emotions and impulses (which are no less than the cross-impulses of suicidal bravery and shame-ridden cowardice) exhaust so much of my will that my existence turns bleak. A dramatic encounter with death, an automobile accident from which I escape, a violent fight I win or lose decently, these all call forth my crossed impulses which love death and fear it. They give air to it. So these internal and deadly emotions are given life. In some cases, satisfied by the experience, they will subside a bit, give room to easier and more sensuous desires.

INTERVIEWER

Not always?

MAILER

Not always. Hemingway, it seems, was never able to tame his dirty ape.

INTERVIEWER

Dirty ape?

MAILER

It's a better word than id or antisocial impulse.

INTERVIEWER

I think it is.

MAILER

Once we may have had a fine clean brave upstanding ape inside ourselves. It's just gotten dirty over the years.

INTERVIEWER

Why couldn't Hemingway tame his ape?

MAILER

Because he may have had too wild a one inside him. The grandeur of one's work is a measure of how outrageous is the ape. People were always criticizing Hemingway for being self-destructive, obsessed with death, immersed too deeply in a cult of violence, perpetually trying his manhood, and so forth. Well, as I'll try to argue a little later, the first art work in an artist is the shaping of his own personality. An artist is usually such an incredible balance of opposites and incompatibles that the wonder is he can even remain alive. Hemingway was on the one hand a man of magnificent senses. There was a quick lithe animal in him. He was also shackled to a stunted ape, a cripple, a particularly wild dirty little dwarf within himself who wanted only to kill Hemingway. Life as a compromise was impossible. So long as Hemingway did not test himself, push himself beyond his own dares, flirt with, engage, and finally embrace death, in other words so long as he did not propitiate the dwarf, give the dwarf its chance to live and feel emotion, an emotion which could come to life only when one was close to death, Hemingway and the dwarf were doomed to dull and deaden one another in the dungeons of the psyche. Everyday life in such circumstances is a plague. The proper comment on Hemingway's style of life may be not that he dared death too much, but too little, that brave as he was, he was not brave enough, and the dwarf finally won. One does not judge Hemingway, but one can say that the sickness in him was not his love of violence but his inability to live as close to it as he had to. His proportions were tragic, he was all but doomed, it is possible he would have had to have been the bravest man who ever lived in order to propitiate his particular dwarf.

INTERVIEWER

But at any rate, if I follow you, encounters with danger were not self-destructive but healthy for Hemingway.

MAILER

He could feel good next day. His psyche was out of the dungeon. He could work. His insides were not tense and empty.

INTERVIEWER

Because—I'm trying to think in your way now—the death within him had met a death without, and so a temporary peace was found?

MAILER

Let's say he was going out to shoot a lion and felt marvelous. Well, there is a kind of mind which would say, "He's self-destructive. He feels good because he's going to kill himself." What I'm trying to argue is that he felt good because encountering death would give him more chance to live. From a very early age he must have felt his ordinary death within him (his routine sickbed death that is) as a kind of slow oncoming plague of washed-out memories and burned-up talents. So he was brave enough, as not many of us are, to go looking for death (since if he survived, his life would be better) but he was finally not brave enough to triumph at this kind of life. It was a desperate imbalance. What made him great as a writer was that he could ride it so long.

INTERVIEWER

Talk of death always makes me contemplate loneliness. You've stimulated me. I think I could guess now what you might say about John Cage and his silent musical compositions.

MAILER

What would I say?

INTERVIEWER

Well, roughly, that there is a frightening detachment in each of us, an inner silence, neither divine nor doomed, just lost in endless orbit. Nothing seems able to reach it. It is as if our souls are stricken. An arbitrary period of silence in a concert hall might encounter that anguish. There, could you have said it better?

MAILER

I would have tried to find one turn of wit.

INTERVIEWER

Well, I'm new at this.

MAILER

You're doing all right.

INTERVIEWER

I must say your ideas are not unathletic. I feel more or less vigorous now.

MAILER

Still, you were leading up to a point. And you seem to have lost it.

INTERVIEWER

Oh! Wait! What was I talking about?

MAILER

Many things. Were you leading up to the mess?

INTERVIEWER

Scatology. Of course. Death may be noble, and loneliness also, but how does a scatological art work raise the reader or the audience to catharsis? Why is such an aesthetic experience good for life?

MAILER

I don't want to discuss scatology now. It's too complex. It may be more complex than death. So I'm going to stay away from this now. I prefer to steal back to it from time to time.

INTERVIEWER

You have to give a hint, however.

MAILER

Why must I?

INTERVIEWER

I hoped I could avoid having to say this, but your name does not inspire the sort of confidence which keeps people waiting. You are not Lord Russell after all, or Wittgenstein, or Heidegger, or Sartre.

MAILER

Not yet.

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps not ever.

MAILER

No doubt never.

INTERVIEWER

A hint.

MAILER

Feces are seen as the most distasteful and despised condition of being. They are precisely that part of the alimentation in the universe which we have rejected, and, mind you, rejected not morally, not emotionally, not passionately—

INTERVIEWER

In the sense that vomit is passionate?

MAILER

In the sense that vomit is passionate. No, feces have been rejected viscerally. It is our being, our organism, which rejects them. They are a total statement of our nature. This cannot be used, says our nature, this is not to be absorbed but to be cast away, this is to be: not chosen. From deep within ourselves, our cells have chosen what can be used and what can not. Nothing is more despised than what we have chosen not to want.

INTERVIEWER

I've heard the Arabs feel so strongly about this that they institutionalize their hands. With their right hand they eat and wash their faces. With their left hand they wipe themselves. The left hand is never allowed to touch food.

MAILER

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

One hand for life, the other for death.

MAILER

You set up your opposites much too neatly. An attractive opposite, tersely worded, can bury more thought than it uncovers. One hand for life, the other for death.

INTERVIEWER

What does that bury?

MAILER

Why, it buries one's understanding that feces are not equivalent to death, and that all of us have a very bad conscience about shit, which is exactly why it is so obsessive to us.

INTERVIEWER

Would a healthy man have a bad conscience?

MAILER

No. But few of us qualify for the word. Our characters are usually not as rich as the food we eat.

INTERVIEWER

So we excrete not only what we despise but what is too good for us as well?

MAILER

Or too special. The act of elimination is excruciating to some part of the psyche. I expect it is the part which governs the digestive processes of the body. Because we eat, I imagine, not what our cells need, so much as what our habits demand.

INTERVIEWER

Suddenly, you're too abstract for me.

MAILER

I'm saying that a cell is like a little animal. It knows exactly what it wants to eat, what is good for it. But a cell is not a psychic structure. It may be a part of the machine which makes up a habit, it may work for a habit, but it has no powers of command. It cannot choose what it wants, it can only receive it.

INTERVIEWER

Please carry this further.

MAILER

A habit is a psychic structure. What it's composed of literally need not concern us, but since it is a construction of mind which sits in authority upon the body, we can think of it as a law which is intangible but more or less absolute in its effect upon citizens.

INTERVIEWER

Make this concrete. You're still too metaphorical.

MAILER

A man goes into a store to choose some food. His cells, a good many of them, let us say, need calves' liver that evening, but his habit is to please his dinner guests and liver seems insufficiently festive, so frogs' legs are ordered. Later that night, the cells make do with frogs' legs, but liver was their need.

INTERVIEWER

You're speaking of a decision; of a choice, not a habit.

MAILER

The habit is at several removes from the cells. The habit is to please one's guests. If liver is out of fashion, it will not please the guests. The habit which dominates the cells is that they must conform to fashion. What is significant here is that the part in a civilized man which makes the decision to choose his food has little to do with his need.

INTERVIEWER

You would argue that he can't feel his need as clearly as a savage would.

MAILER

Of course not. Habits usually are anti-sensuous structures. They are built up and they are maintained precisely by insulating our senses from most stimuli.

INTERVIEWER

I don't see how you have anchored this thesis. Your man wanted liver, he got frogs' legs, but what's there to keep him from making the best of

it, from extracting the good juices out of the meat in old Froggie's thigh, and getting rid of the gristle? Where does bad conscience come in?

MAILER

You have the instinctive vice of American thought.

INTERVIEWER

You're just annoyed because I blew a hole in your thesis.

MAILER

But you didn't. You took my example, assumed it was all of the reality, and proceeded to draw a moral to your own satisfaction. But I gave you just a few of the facts, not all of them. Reality is always more complex than the example. That's why I hate to get into explanation too soon.

INTERVIEWER

Defend your thesis.

MAILER

My man ordered frogs' legs. But the urgency of his cells, their cry for liver, registered as a dull lust in his mind. So as he stared about the gourmet shop, he bought a little tin of foie gras.

INTERVIEWER

You didn't mention this before.

MAILER

An example is not a logical universe. I can do with an example whatever I wish, because its purpose is to explain, not to prove.

INTERVIEWER

I concede, but I still think it's unfair.

MAILER

He eats the foie gras with his drinks, eats it with relish. Ceremoniously it enters his stomach, which receives it in the way a High Church serves a rich wedding. But there is so little foie gras! And he cannot gorge. He must serve his guests first. Which involves other habits. Habit-life pre-

278 *Cannibals and Christians*

cedes cell-life in civilized man. Just a little foie gras and his cells need a lot of liver. Upon this cruel disproportion follows another—the frogs' legs. The part of the psyche which oversees digestion, let us call it The Eater, has to make a new decision, because its powers of digestion cannot do an equally good job on liver and frogs' legs both.

INTERVIEWER

Why not?

MAILER

Because the chemicals necessary for each would adulterate one another.

INTERVIEWER

Is there scientific proof of this?

MAILER

I'm sure there's not. I invoke a simpler principle. One can't do two good and difficult things at once and do them both very well. I can't write a book with my right hand and paint a picture with my left. ~~At the same instant, I can't make love and sing high opera.~~ Nor can I digest foie gras and frogs' legs equally well. One or the other must suffer.

INTERVIEWER

Your stomach may not work the way you do.

MAILER

It's bound to. ~~There would be very few problems in life if our organs could perform two or more complex highly differentiated functions equally well at once.~~

INTERVIEWER

For the sake of the argument I concede again. I want to know where you're heading. I think I see it.

MAILER

If you do, take over yourself.

INTERVIEWER

Go one more step.

The Eater chooses ~~the frogs' legs~~ ^{to digest} MAILER ^{properly.} ~~Reluctantly.~~ He would prefer the foie gras, but there is simply not enough and the intestines would have too much work evacuating half-digested frog flesh—I exaggerate the imperfection of the process, of course. Therefore, the arts of digestion are applied to the frogs' legs. The best sweets in the foie gras, ~~digested as formal second choice~~, are lost. The inner savory of their wealth is not reached.

INTERVIEWER

Why not?

MAILER

Because life in its need to protect itself tends to make what is best in itself most inaccessible.

INTERVIEWER

Whereas civilization tries to make the best in itself most available.

MAILER

Well, it would claim to.

INTERVIEWER

I think that's the first ideal of democracy. To make the best most available. What a logical impasse! In your terms democracy is then opposed to life.

MAILER

It endangers life in the name of a noble ideal.

INTERVIEWER

We'll never get to Picasso, thank God.

MAILER

We're getting there. Once we look at the pictures I won't want to stop in order to discuss these matters. But now I must ask you: I know where we are, but where *were* we?

INTERVIEWER

Yes. I know. The foie gras. The best of it was lost. The richest parts.

MAILER

The Eater took a middle course. What was useless, ~~despised~~, or uninteresting in the frogs' legs and in the foie gras was eliminated. But what was superior in the foie gras was also lost.

INTERVIEWER

So in despising his waste, the man is partially dishonest.

MAILER

Since his cells cannot inform him of the ^{frustration} ~~small tragedy~~ they underwent last night, he has only an imperfect sense that there was something wrong with the foie gras. "It disagrees with me," he says, "I won't order it any more." Three days later he buys three cans, gorges on it at lunch, and then upbraids himself for lacking discipline and eating the things which are bad for him. Except for this sense of guilt at his poor character, it would have been a marvelous lunch.

INTERVIEWER

You're saying that civilization hurts the inner communication of mind to body and body to mind.

MAILER

Go further. Say the obsession of many ^{concerning} ~~of us for~~ scatology is attached to the disrupted communication within us, ~~within our bodies~~.

INTERVIEWER

I had the impression for just an instant that there's a theory of disease possible in this somewhere.

MAILER

There is the possibility of illness every time opposites do not meet or meet poorly, just as there is the air to gain life ^{when} ~~every time~~ opposites meet each other nicely.

INTERVIEWER

Dilate a bit on this.

MAILER

They can be opposites within us—the part of my eye which sees physiologically as opposed to that part which views conceptually. But one can

speaking of opposites between man and nature, or man and man: the water I drink, the block of marble worked by the sculptor, the audience and the play, a mood and its occasion, the good rider and his good horse, the blocking back and the linebacker, the skier on the snow, the style of sex, a sail into the wind. I become conventionally rhapsodic; the point is that life seems to come out of the meeting of opposites. Communication is a poor word, because life does not come from communication but from meetings and confrontations, from opposites coming together.

INTERVIEWER

Communications has a technological connotation to me.

MAILER

It involves machines and electronic apparatus and services of distribution. It invariably implies the injection of information into a passive being. But one can use it in speaking of the body, one can say that a particular part of the body communicates poorly with another part because we are by now not only biological but mechanical. There are habits in all of us which function with the precision of a machine. And when certain functions in our body are unable to meet other functions at the necessary instant, one can speak of a failure of communication. One may even well suspect that the basis of chronic disease and the excessive virulence of much infectious disease, particularly the viruses, comes precisely from an inner field of communications which is poorly designed or badly abused. The message which did not get from Ghent to Aix is the metaphor for a drama which goes on constantly within us. My man who wanted liver and got frogs' legs would, if his stomach had been able to speak to him with the clear simple chords of an animal's belly, have escaped bad conscience and a touch of indigestion.

INTERVIEWER

But if bad communication is virtually the sole basis of disease—a fascinating concept, by the way—why do you equate it to scatology or at least make the connection there?

MAILER

Because feces are the material evidence of the processes of communication within us. Life comes from the meeting of opposites. Conceive of man as a tube, mouth at one end, anus at the other. In that sense man is like a worm, a pipe, a tunnel, a drill which bores through a bed of nutrition, disgorging it behind. We cannot see the air we exhale, not normally, not unless we have tobacco smoke with which to shape it, but we can

282 *Cannibals and Christians*

study our urine and feces. In one way or another, most of us do. They are the expression of what we have done well and what we have done badly to that medium of food through which we passed. When we have communicated nicely within ourselves, the stool reflects a simple reasonable operation (cowflop is, for example, modest in its odor) but where we have failed, as with the foie gras, the odors and shapes are tortured, corrupt, rich, fascinating (that is attractive and repulsive at the same time) theatrical, even tragic. There are odors not alien to beauty in the dung. The sense of life they give has tragic beauty which tells us something rare and very good for us has been lost again, something fine is just beginning to rot. The history of the life we never see within us, its triumphs, tragedies, states of calm and states of inanition are returned to us in the color, the shape, the odor and the movement of our stool. For those qualities are the curious stricken record of our near past. We despise what we had once and now can possess no longer, especially if we fear having used it badly. Yet we cannot forsake it altogether. Obsessively we return to the study because hope for how to turn our life into more life is contained in that history.

INTERVIEWER

Eloquent. I must observe that it is rash for you to be too eloquent on this subject.

MAILER

I wished to avoid it earlier.

INTERVIEWER

True enough. But since we now find ourselves here, let me say I still don't understand, not really, the intense virulence of people's reactions to scatology.

MAILER

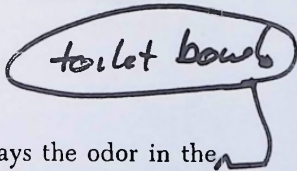
Perhaps the prophetic aspects create the rage.

INTERVIEWER

I don't follow you.

MAILER

The food you ate yesterday was too rich for you, says the odor in the ~~water closet~~. Eat as improperly today and you will be ill. But this is much too simple. Say rather that the senses bring deep messages to the unconscious, quick deep messages. And they are measured carefully by the



toilet bowl

scale of past experience. A carpenter makes a hundred measurements a day. If you ask him to mark off five inches without a tape, he is bound to be able to do it within an eighth of an inch. So it is with our stool. Our senses know what it says to us. But so often the messages are intolerable. You are sickening slowly, remarks the wad, your life as you lead it now is hopeless. You must engage death, perversion, promiscuity, and the fear of hell before you will be better. Your health is to eat the body of your mate, your secret desire is to be trampled in an orgy. This is what the oracle of the unconscious may divine from the feces. No wonder shit is despised. Its message is too terrible.

INTERVIEWER

Isn't this a little too much to discover from the inner history of a meal?

MAILER

Food possesses character. We consume character when we eat.

INTERVIEWER

I'm not so certain. Food may be no more than food. How do we know is isn't?

MAILER

I don't. I guess. It seems more reasonable to me that food possess character than that it doesn't. One man leads a sedentary life, and another works hard, wouldn't the bicep of one be different in character from the other? Why, if we were to eat both biceps—

INTERVIEWER

You take the plunge into cannibalism?

MAILER

Only for the sake of the argument that one bicep would communicate qualities of strength, fortitude, and discipline, whereas the other would tend to make one lazy, slack, and unregenerate.

INTERVIEWER

But which is which?

MAILER

I assume the worker's bicep communicates fortitude and power.

INTERVIEWER

It might be just the reverse. The worker's arm might be disgusted, used up. All that's left in his cells which can feed you is the desire to be lazy. Whereas the lazy arm is bursting with unused energy.

MAILER

Three cheers for overtaking me. But will you now agree that food may possess character?

INTERVIEWER

We don't know what character it possesses.

MAILER

I suspect our unconscious does.

INTERVIEWER

How convenient is this unconscious.

MAILER

The hand is plucked instinctively from the flame before the mind realizes the finger is in the fire. Let's save time. Of course the unconscious is close to the senses, it is the animal part of oneself. And it studies what it eats, it knows the inner life of the body's organs, it hears what has happened to the food, what qualities it possessed, what reactions it aroused. Take steak, assume it provides strength for the muscles. ~~if not steak there must be obviously another particular food to provide such strength. Whatever the food may be which gives strength, we can be sure it is good for a man doing heavy work, and that it is probably poor for a lady whose strength may depend upon the excellent demands of her weakness. For~~ an intellectual beginning a program of conditioning exercises, steak may be just a little too full of strength, it may fire his muscles into doing too much too soon. So The Eater might decide to digest the steak cursorily, ~~might decide to~~ pass by the molecules containing the kernel of the strength. The stool, bursting next day with the most vital elements of the steak, might give back in its form and odor the dispiriting news that The Eater in the intellectual had indeed decided he was not yet strong enough for steak.

INTERVIEWER

But if The Eater knows this already and so makes a decision to eschew the qualities of finest strength in the steak, why does the unconscious have

to discover it in the stool? I thought The Eater was part of the unconscious.

MAILER

Not all parts of the unconscious communicate perfectly well with one another. That is part of the theory of disease we postulated. There are ways for the unconscious to speak from one part of itself to another, but we are not always able to use them.

INTERVIEWER

Being receptive to the message of the bowels is one way?

MAILER

Children are always asking you to look at their stool, and are disappointed when we say, "That's nice, dear," and turn away.

INTERVIEWER

You're saying that our prevailing social habit is to lay a foundation in the child for a future failure of communication?

MAILER

In certain people this particular tension is sufficient to find not only the sight but the subject of feces quite sickening. It is for example particularly abhorrent to the English. Their intellectual categories offer no course in the archaeology of the Self. The French on the other hand know that *merde* has a purchase on fortune.

INTERVIEWER

I don't want to be grisly, but if old scata has so much to do with fortune and telling the future, why aren't there cults? Why isn't divination from the stool some small but worthy competitor to the horoscope or numerology?

MAILER

People who go to hear their fortune are not existentialists, but essentialists. Full of self-pity, they wish to believe that their fortune is already written, and to their advantage of course. They do not want to discover that they are still responsible for what they do with themselves. So what kind of interest could they have in any testament of the bowels which might speak of the history within themselves? Such study reveals character—informs them of their moral fortune.

INTERVIEWER

What is moral fortune? I never heard that expression before.

MAILER

If there is Heaven and if Hell exists, one's moral fortune indicates where one is likely to go. I suppose it is not unlikely that a man bound for Hell could sniff out the fact this was his destination. Such a man might detest all thought of shit.

INTERVIEWER

Herr Doktor, you've been talking about the bowels much too long, and it's getting on my nerves.

MAILER

The trouble is that I have to present one more large annoying idea before we can go on.

INTERVIEWER

Certain large ideas can be expressed briefly.

MAILER

You'll agree that a society is best judged by the way it treats the citizens, the slaves, the subjects, the masses who compose it.

INTERVIEWER

What do you want to say?

MAILER

That food be considered capable of possessing a soul.

INTERVIEWER

You mean that as we eat we are like a society acting upon its citizens, that food clanks from its cradle to the tomb as through us it moves, that noble souls in the food are not sufficiently appreciated by us and so die tragically, just as societies sometimes lose the gifts of some of their best men? Presenting this enormous metaphor merely to say that food has a soul! Why should it, why indeed should food have a soul?

I have heard

MAILER

Because it is a being.

to be continued.

INTERVIEWER

A being. It's a good existential word, I know, but you've got to do something for it. What is a being? Please don't tell me a being is something which is alive.

MAILER

I won't. Especially since certain organisms which are alive cannot be called beings.

INTERVIEWER

Then a being is not all of life?

MAILER

A being is anything which lives and still has the potentiality to change, to change physically and to change morally. A person who has lost all capacity for fundamental change is no longer a being.

INTERVIEWER

Being is used then as synonymous to soul?

MAILER

Soul is eternal. At least that is the general agreement on its meaning. Soul is what continues to live after we are dead. It is possible, I should think, that if the soul does exist, that if there is such an entity, that if there is indeed a part of us which is eternal, or which can under certain conditions remain eternal, that the soul could well have the property of being able to migrate from body to body, from existence to existence, sometimes rising, sometimes falling, sometimes getting lost forever.

INTERVIEWER

Whereas being is corporeal, is there before the eyes?

MAILER

I think so. I would assume that when the soul enters a particular tangible existence, it weds itself to that existence. So long as the soul is part of a creature it is not free of it, not free to leave when it chooses, not

unless sudden death is chosen. So long as the soul resides in a body or is trapped in a body or at war in a body or indeed even enamored of the body in which it finds itself, the soul must exist in a relation with that body which is not unlike marriage. The soul affects the body, the body is able to affect the soul, they grow together or apart, they are good for one another or they may be bad, they can be tragic for one another or merely cool and efficient, tolerating one another because they would be savage and wasteful if apart. A panoply of possibilities exists in every being, because a being is a creature ^{who} lives in the world, ^{who} has shape, color, form, ^{who} has life and a soul within it, a soul which will be changed by its existence in the world. ~~Or at least that is how I would postulate a being.~~

~~Being is the ^{corp} presence of soul in the world?~~

~~MAILER~~

~~Being is first the body we see before us. That body we see before us is that moment of the present for a soul, a soul which must inevitably be altered for better, for worse, or for better and worse by its presence in a body.~~

^{also} INTERVIEWER
And individual cells have souls, individual souls?

MAILER

I think they do. I think everything which lives had a soul at its birth, or it could not otherwise have been born.

INTERVIEWER

Fresh food has a soul?

MAILER

Yes, usually.

INTERVIEWER

But canned food. What about that?

MAILER

Less soul.

INTERVIEWER

It's dead.

MAILER

Not altogether. Let's say for the present it's in a kind of limbo. What characterizes food, I would speculate, is that the soul tries to cling to it as long as it can. A tin of sardines is still a being of sorts, a being of a lesser category. It may not be alive as an organism, but its flesh retains life, the cells have not rotted, the protein molecules are intact, if you will, and the oils and the carbohydrates still retain in their structure the character of the sardine.

INTERVIEWER

Let me recapitulate. Character in this case is the still-standing structure ~~of the carbon molecule given the cellular the previous history~~ within one little sardine of its soul at war with and/or loving its body? *gms*

MAILER

Let's say the soul left a taste. Some sardines taste better than others.

INTERVIEWER

It's one thing to have a taste. It's another to have a soul.

MAILER

Why does one sardine taste better than another?

INTERVIEWER

Because its meat is better.

MAILER

What does that mean?

INTERVIEWER

The meat is healthier, that's all.

MAILER

And health? What is that?

INTERVIEWER

A harmonious condition of body.

MAILER

How does that come about?

INTERVIEWER

In the case of the sardine?

MAILER

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

From being a better swimmer than the average sardine. Naturally good constitution inherited from its mother.

MAILER

Who was also a superior swimmer?

INTERVIEWER

Yes.

MAILER

Why was she so good?

INTERVIEWER

You're tireless.

MAILER

Humorless.

INTERVIEWER

You're going to insist the mother's soul was superior to the soul of other sardines and so left a superior taste?

MAILER

I think I will.

INTERVIEWER

Why this passion to put the soul into the sardine?

MAILER

Because the act of eating is always a small execution.

INTERVIEWER

And you find it less hideous if a soul is released, as a cell is devoured?

MAILER

If I believed a calf had one single chance to live, no more, I could not in good conscience eat it. I might eat it anyway but logic would say I should be a vegetarian.

INTERVIEWER

Whereas now, the soul of the calf passes into you, becomes a part of your being.

MAILER

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

I see now why Mexicans eat bull's balls.

MAILER

A delicacy.

INTERVIEWER

Why don't all men eat bull's balls? Why aren't they worth twice their weight in platinum?

MAILER

Because very few people are ready to receive them.

INTERVIEWER

You mean your soul has to be the equal of the souls you ingest?

MAILER

There has to be a meeting of opposites.

INTERVIEWER

A feminine man would enjoy bull's balls?

MAILER

Or a masculine man. You mustn't puzzle too hard at these celestial mechanics.

INTERVIEWER

Oh, I think they're first-rate, I just don't navigate among them too well as yet.

MAILER

Allow me then to signify the bull's balls as equal to virility. For the sake of my demonstration let it be that whoever eats them gains virility. The meeting of opposites takes place therefore between a male principle, the bull's balls, and something female in the soul of the man who eats.

INTERVIEWER

Or the woman.

MAILER

Or the woman. It doesn't matter, you see, whether you have a masculine man, a feminine man, a masculine woman, or a feminine woman. What characterizes all of them is that in partaking of the bull's balls each of them wishes to gain virility.

INTERVIEWER

To simplify it, let's speak just of men. Why, in the first place, wouldn't all men wish to gain virility?

MAILER

Virility implies more than the stamina of a stud. It offers power, strength, the ability to command, the desire to alter life. So its consequences in life are often to increase responsibility or danger. A virile man can be afraid of more virility. If he's driving his car too fast already, he may look for cream of chicken or malted milk. So with the feminine man. He may not want more virility because he has no habits for it. What's the use of commanding women he could not command before, if he does not know how to fight off other men, and is not ready to learn. What freezes

the homosexual in his homosexuality is not fear of women so much as fear of the masculine world with which he must war if he wishes to keep the woman.

INTERVIEWER

What you're saying then might be put this way: in choosing bull's balls, the man whether strong or weak must be ready to offer up something feminine in himself. So as to leave himself less feminine afterward?

MAILER

Perfect.

INTERVIEWER

Which is to say that we cannot select effectively unless the action we choose exists in a real and close correspondence to the new proportions our soul desires for itself.

MAILER

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

If we wish to be more masculine we must first satisfy something feminine in ourselves.

MAILER

The reverse is also true. If we eat a bland food, a food we can dominate completely, that is to say a food whose character, whose—permit me—whose echo of the soul, is compliant, tender, passive to our seizure of it, we satisfy something masculine in ourselves. A man with ulcers is burning with the masculine need to dominate details in his life he simply cannot dominate. So in drinking milk, a bland food, a food more feminine than himself, he can discharge this backed-up masculinity. But of course he uses up masculinity in eating bland food, he alters his proportions.

INTERVIEWER

You imply he has no choice?

MAILER

Not if he's sick with an ulcer. Bull's balls and tequila would have him run amok or fall into a hospital bed.

INTERVIEWER

Since the proportion of masculinity and femininity in oneself would tend I think to remain more or less stable, what it comes down to is that people choose bull's balls only when they want to change.

MAILER

Yes. Only a few people want bull's balls at any one time. The existential gamble is too fine, it leads to greater seriousness, greater commitment in one's life, or to greater danger. One might think one wanted such change, but at the moment of digesting it, at the moment of choosing to open those reservoirs of enzymes, those ductless glands which are able to reach the finest molecules, The Eater might to his surprise feel panic, might be too cowardly to take on the consequences implicit in the essence of true bull's balls. So an imperfect cowardly digestion would take place. And its odor, the odor of fear, would be revealed next day in the stool, revealed to that part of the unconscious we may just as well begin to call The Critic. The Critic having a fine edge for form would also detect that the shape of the stool was slack.

INTERVIEWER

If The Eater accepted the challenge, the stool would be different?

MAILER

The smell of a decent death would be present, the soul in the balls of the bull would have entered the body of the man who ate it. That particular soul would have risen to a higher existence. So the stool would have an aroma of content. As indeed it often does. What is so particularly hideous in a really bad smell is that one breathes the odor of a partial death, a soul has been torn on a rack. Part of it was seized by The Eater, part was refused, and so is dying in the stool.

INTERVIEWER

Is it the fault of The Eater? What if the food is bad?

MAILER

Then the choice is more complex, as for fact it always is in life. For no food is altogether perfect, and if it is almost perfect, it is still bound to have a most particular character which may not correspond too closely

to the specific need of The Eater. Sometimes good food cannot be digested well because the requirements of The Eater were too narrow. So the partial death of the food might smell bitter, it would know the bitterness of being rejected by a larger being which was too stingy. Or conversely it might be digested too greedily, too avariciously, by The Eater, and so suggest it was bruised. Such a death might smell of wine. The corruption of The Eater would be present within it.

INTERVIEWER

And bad food. What of bad food?

MAILER

Its death would almost always be partial I should think, and it would be drowned in bile, the body of The Eater would express his contempt at how bad the life had been, at how little the death had to offer. But if the best were extracted from the bad food, its odor might also prove decent or half decent. It might have died well.

INTERVIEWER

How could that be?

MAILER

Something good in the bad food might have taken a brave leap and met The Eater. ~~So~~ There might be some trace of dignity in the death of ~~those~~ ^{such} souls. They might be complete, not partial. ~~There might be the~~ ^{Think of the} decent smell of a hay field. Grass and weeds are mediocre after all, but their death is complete when they're reaped, and if the weather is good they die well. There are arts to digesting bad food. The poor know them better than the rich. Most of the people on earth would get indigestion from good food.

INTERVIEWER

What about the man with ulcers? *The one who has to drink milk.*

(That is a different situation.) MAILER

The greater part of milk becomes urine and urine is another discussion.

INTERVIEWER

No soul in it?

MAILER

Just spirit.

INTERVIEWER

To think I asked a simple question about a man with an ulcer who takes a glass of milk.

MAILER

I wish you hadn't.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel ready to discuss the meaning of urine and its link to the Spirit?

MAILER

I don't. I fear I don't. It is a day's journey.

INTERVIEWER

Later perhaps.

MAILER

Later. We must discuss it later.

INTERVIEWER

Let's go back to where we were.

MAILER

(*Gloomily*) I distrust all talk of Soul and Spirit. I dislike styles which use such words.

INTERVIEWER

I want to know what happens with food which is the reverse of bull's balls, with food which is weaker than The Eater, calming, sedative, gentle, feminine, creamed chicken and so on.

MAILER

A brave man who wishes to become less brave is eating it?

INTERVIEWER

If you wish.

MAILER

At the critical moment, at the meeting of the opposites, he might give up his courage with grace, he might absorb the gentler qualities his being requested for that meal with good spirit and deep relaxation. His stool would have a happy smell. A gentle soul would have been received completely. But if, at the critical moment, The Eater rebelled, was horrified at the amount of manliness which must be devoted to the chicken, if The Eater felt shame at deserting danger and looking for calm, then indeed the chicken would be poorly used, the death of its souls would be most incomplete, and the odor would be sour. Gentleness refused turns sour. It curdles.

INTERVIEWER

You're saying that the secret emotions of one's being, the basic emotions, courage and cowardice, betray their presence in the odor.

MAILER

And greed as well, or cupidity, ambition, compassion, love, trust, tenderness, savagery. The way in which we take souls from the food is the mirror of the dirty ape inside. If most of us abhor shit, it is because most of us are a little hideous inside.

INTERVIEWER

Tyrants to the weak?

MAILER

Tyrants to the souls in the food who at that moment are more helpless than ourselves. Beyond a doubt. *For example,*

~~INTERVIEWER~~

~~Of course there's always ptomaine.~~

~~MAILER~~

(Ignoring this) Ambitious people pass bad shit. Because they use people around them. They certainly use people who are under them. I once met a very wealthy man whose mistress could talk about nothing

1041

but food. She was obsessed with what everyone around her had had to eat that day. It's taken me until now to realize that she saw herself as food for the tycoon, his family, and friends. Everyone at her dinner table was a potential cannibal to her person. So she had to know what you ate the night before because that to her was a clue which showed whether you had designs on her precise flesh.

INTERVIEWER

You mean she saw herself as a certain kind of food?

MAILER

Rock hen, no doubt.

INTERVIEWER

~~You're beginning to enjoy yourself too much.~~ I think it's time we closed for the day.

MAILER

What a long day.

INTERVIEWER

Would you round off our inquiry with a remark? *with a capsule? of thought.*

~~MAILER~~

~~A commercial remark?~~

~~MAILER~~

~~Let us say a capsule.~~

MAILER

Ambitious societies loathe scatological themes and are obsessed with them.

INTERVIEWER

Disappointing.

MAILER

Not at all. One could study the past with such a thesis as the tool. If indications in Mayan culture show much scatology, one can assume that

civil
too

fo
su
t
t

civilization died from an excess of ambition which throttled the Being of too many.

INTERVIEWER

And if there is no trace of scatology?

MAILER

If by the internal logic of the findings, the art, the fecal or non-fecal forms of the pottery, the wall painting, the architecture, there seems little scatology, one may assume there was not enough ambition, that the culture was calm, well-regulated, and was probably destroyed by a catastrophe which left it too passive to find the power to rise again.

INTERVIEWER

No, you're

~~You're~~ enjoying yourself much too much. Tomorrow you must speak more of form.

MAILER

I will not enjoy myself much tomorrow.

INTERVIEWER

You know you never came back to Picasso and why he is good for your eyes.

MAILER

Now I fear we will never get back.

INTERVIEWER

Of course we will. Why not?

MAILER

Beyond form is soul, spirit, madness, eternity, and the void.

INTERVIEWER

I will try to sleep on that.

1043

~~Followed by~~
~~Some children~~
~~of the children~~

Gourmandise

I.

If Camembert is the King of cheeses
foul, corrupt, redolent of old uses, dirty royal feet
and wealth beneath the ground
then Brie is my Prince
said the young fresh air of morning to her appetite.
Still, said Camembert, monarchies produce architecture,
princes bastards
and morning speaking to her appetite is mud
to those who drink with Faust at night
Yes, adventurers gargle the sour blood of dukes
and eat me says Camembert
Power is nothing without the smell
of a royal crevice at your finger.
Oh, says Brie, nothing is so lovely
as the milk of morning on my mouth.
Do not let the world sodden us with its liver,
its poor colon and a smell of the hoarded past
Good architecture comes from young men
stealing the better half of form
from the royal round rump of some majestic lady
who smuggles jewels to the prince
and embezzles deeds from the king.

II

✓

If poetry is the food of the soul
then some poems are like pot roast
lots of meat, pannikins of gravy and
a great deal of taste all very
much the same.

Other poems are fishy
tang, pepper, weed, and green like the
sea. I know a few which stick to the
fingers. Poetaster in patis-
serie. But my poems—

I want my poems
to be like bones. Bones make it possible
to stay in good form.

And there are
poems which taste of grass, air, earth,
rock salt and old lady granite in the
minerals (not to mention all
the dairy products, milky poems,
vegetables and gourds.)

But I want
my poems to be like bones and shine
silver in the sun.

For poems which
are like bones crackle in my teeth.
Look for the death within the death.

A Balance of Power ✓

The prime minister said:

everything

which tastes good

betrays me

and everything

which makes

me warm

tastes foul.

IV

✓

Fiddler's Fluck

FOR A SQUARE DANCE

On the meat of the rich
And the urge of the poor
The purge of the ore
And the grease of the bitch
A lady was burning
A whore was a-scorch
Gorge was the cheese
And ass the itch
Of Pussy and Pick-nose
And swish out the twitch
Deep hurted the liver
Raw buried the sauce
Hotshit the hurricane
Herded the gourd
Howligan, hooligan
Hurry up all
Tonight is the night
Of the Hip Hole Ball

Perfume and fart
Snatch squinch and squeeze
Ear-wax and dingle
Fuck tit and dong
Fling a hole on your point
And sweeten the joint
Tonight is the night
Of the Hip Howl Ball.

Why Are We ✓ Vietnam? - II

The bright in mind are often flatulent
They breathe the gas of the dead within them
searching like harpies for a whiff of the treasure
some dead departed failure chose to take away.

One cannot give a funeral service to the fart
and yet there are broken winds which walk the plank in pride.

1966

Why Are We in Vietnam? - II

Now Rusk was supposed to go originally on Alaska
about with his opposite number Al Percy Cunningham
him, the managing director of Tootsies, which is 42
and he never to Hingham. Rusk and Al Percy C.
had received an Alaska guide eleven months in ad-
vance, you know the type that is a guide for Charles
Wilson or Roger Blough or J. Edgar Hoover, that's
who you got to be if you want to get this guide right
away, like he wouldn't even take Senators, and you
were a Congressman and you wanted Big Lake Falls

~~1964~~

1048

1964

★

PP 45-52

59-71

77-90

93-105

~~CHAP THREE~~

★

~~1048~~

Now Rusty was supposed to go originally on Alaska safari with his opposite number Al Percy Cunningham, the managing director of Tendonex, which is 4C and P's answer to Fiberglas. Rusty and Al Percy C. had reserved an Alaska guide eighteen months in advance, you know the type that is a guide for Charley Wilson or Roger Blough or J. Edgar—I mean, that's who you got to be if you want to get this guide right away, like he wouldn't even take Senators, and you was a Congressman and you wanted Big Luke Fellinka

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

and his assistant Ollie the Indian Water Beaver, forget it, you could lie down on your back and say Big Luke if you consent to be my guide you or Ollie can take one big crap in my mouth just for openers, and Big Luke would yawn. D.J. and Tex read right away the #1 reason all the minions of the Great Plastic Asshole were slobbering over the bear grease on Big Luke's boots. It wasn't just because among Alaska guides he was primus inter pares (you have just had the first and last of D.J.'s Latin) it wasn't cause he got eight clients out of the Brooks Mountains once in a record September blizzard, or fought a grizzly or two bare hand to a kind of draw and had the scars to show it (looked like vines and thorns had grown over an old seam of welding on his back) it wasn't even his rifle work which in offhand shooting could put in 25 one-inch five-shot clusters at 100 yards, and at two hundred yards in a half-ass clearing of woods could now and then drop a bullet into the eye of an Alaska wolf as directly as you could drop your finger in your own eye—no, what made Big Luke The Man was that he was like the President of General Motors or General Electric, pick one, I don't give a fuck, he had like the same *bottom*, man, I mean D.J.'s here to tell you that if you even a high-grade asshole and had naught but a smidgeon of flunky in you it would still start—you may purchase this in full confidence—it would still start in Big Luke's presence to blow sulfur water, steam, and specks of hopeless diarrhetic matter in your runny little gut,

caus
weig
heac
of d
ing
hors
his c
of a
alias
up t
to li
Cun
Prog
dow
glas
cont
bott
toile
whic
in v
altho
is F
astro
proc
eh M
done
get
besic
tic in

CHAP THREE

cause he was a *man*! You could hang him, and he'd weigh just as much as Charley Wilson or Robert Bonehead McNamara, I mean you'd get the same intensity of death ray off his dying as you'd get from some fucking Arab sheik who had ten thousand howlers on horses to whoop and scream for the holy hot hour of his departure to Allah. So you can see what a hoedown of a hunting trip it would have been if Al Percy C. alias Kid Tendonex and Rusty had each been burning up that Alaska Brooks Mountain Range brush trying to light a light of love in Big Luke's eye, but Al Percy Cunningham was called off at the last by the Astronaut Program hotline into 4C and P because the real hoe-down just that week of departure was between Fiberglas and Tendonex to see who was going to get the contract to put a plastic Univar valve and plug into the bottom of the collapsible built-in space suit chemical toilet in the Gemini (Roman Numeral Unstated) which contract is no superhuge kettle of lobster shit in volume dollars, but just a reasonable 58 million, although Tex and D.J. agree that little Univar plug is First Priority, cause let it malfunction and those astronauts will be swimming in orbits of dehydrated processed food shit (their own—a gritty performance, eh Maurice?). However, it's edge. Does 4C and P, Tendonex Division, or FCA (Fiberglas Corp. of America) get to be the first to fling their product into space; besides there's rumors, Rusty tells us, that smooth plastic in outer space tends to exhibit Independent, Auton-

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

omous, Non-pattern-directed Ductile-type Magnification and Expansion Assertions in Non-Operational Gravitational Ultra-Multi-Mach Ellipsoid Program-Oriented Satellite Capsule Negotiations, which is to say that smooth plastic is growing plastic hairs on its palm while in such jerk off orbit. A big sweat is on. Whose research program has anticipated any of this? "Cunny's sweating this week," Rusty tells the boys. "I told him to load up with Pure Pores once his balls started to get wet, and he just gave me a sick little hunky hunk heh-heh. Probably wanted to haul off and split your dad with an axe."

But Rusty, au fond, is deeply in disappointment, not cause A. P. Cunningham ain't with him, but because the hunting trip is now downgraded. D.J.'s here to tell you that in secret Rusty feels like a movie star who's going out to pump for a weekend with the best new Pumper-head Penis in Cinemaville, and then hears she's missing the opportunity to have a commissary lunch with Prince Philip or Baldy Khrushchev, before Baldy was an ex. Well, you know a movie star, she'd rather have Big K stomp his big shoe jes once in the crack of her ass while he's still Mr. Big than have her cunt stick-tickled into heaven for three days with no one up there in the redwoods to see it except, those guests invited to the exhibition like her mother, her father and her dramatic coach. "Hit high C next time you come, Chérie, we got to get through those vocal locks," says the dramatic coach.

CHAP THREE

Now D.J. suffers from one great American virtue, or maybe it's a disease or ocular dysfunction—D.J. sees right through shit. There's not a colon in captivity which manufactures a home product that is transparency proof to Dr. Jekyll's X-ray insight. He sees right into the claypots below the duodenum of his father, and any son does that is fit candidate for a maniac, right, T.S.? the point here, Eliot, is that D.J. will never know if Rusty dropped points in the early stages of his contest with Luke because he was dying inside for not being down at the Canaveral table where big power space decisions were being made by his opposite number, Wise-Ass Cunningham, or whether Rusty would have lost in the early stages to Big Luke on the best week he ever had, which is an ambiguity right at the center of D.J.'s message center. But proceed to study the scene.

Give Rusty his straight shot. If Big Al Percy Wise-Ass Cunningham had been there, the set of events would have had to be different. Take away A. P. Cun and what you got—ego status embroilments between numbers, guides and executives. All right—look into it. You may never get out.

First, Rusty spends no time trying to be the equal of Big Luke head on! He takes Luke's suggestions, is friendly but aloof. When Luke addresses him as Sir, Sir Rutherford Jet-Throne does not say call me Rusty. When Big Luke speaks to Rusty's two accompanying flunkies, Luke naturally picks them up by the handle

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

of their first name, and Rusty, listening, chuckles like poor Clark Gable used to when he was near the end, that is indulgently and wisely, could be worse, man, cause the two flunkies—call them Medium Asshole Pete and Medium Asshole Bill—M.A. Pete (Assistant to Procurement Manager, Pure Pores Filters Company Office of 4C and P) and M.A. Bill (Personnel Director for Production Manager, Pure Pores et cetera Company Office of 4C and P) laugh each of them separately and respectively like Henry Fonda and Jimmy Stewart. Maybe it should be said that they are Medium Assholes with a passing grade of C. Rusty could have done better, but kid you not, it ain't so easy. Talent ain't hanging on meathooks in corporation land, especially when you change plans and invitations at the last minute. Some Americans giving up a lot for the astronauts.

Now, with such for background on personnel, ask yourself Sherlock Onanist Holmes what were Rusty's expectations from this trip, I mean Rusty is corporation, right, that means he's a voice, man, he's a voice, got nothing unexpected ever to say, but he got to say it with quality. These corporation pricks are not there for nothing. They may be dumb and benighted, yeah, and D.J. has wasted his adolescence in their purloins and company mansions and has eaten off their expense accounts all his days, D.J. knows them asshole to appetite, and can tell you, Horace, they are not all that dumb. Being medium-grade and high-grade asshole,

CHAP THREE

they have high competence in tunnels and channels. They can all swim uphill through shit face first although in fact corporate faces are never seen to move, for they know enough not to try to read each other's corporate fish features when they can read each other's corporate ass voices. Man, they pick up what you're trying to slip by them, they buy nothing that's not tested, not voice-tested. So look at Rusty's problem. He goes on a Class A hunting trip—a Charley Wilson, John Glenn, Arnold Palmer, Gary Cooper kind of trip, next thing in top category you might say to a Jackie Kennedy Bobby Kennedy Ethel and the kids trip—Rusty's stepping up out of category, reaching just a bit, but if he makes out, if he comes back and is able to say, "Well, it was not a record honey-grizzly by any means, it didn't weigh out at more than twelve hundred, but Big Luke thought I got off a fair shot, and was, truth to tell, impressed with the coincidence that George Humphrey dropped one in the same glen just five years ago."

Now, pick up on the potential pitfalls. If Rusty is bird-turding he's got a lot of cabbage verbiage for which he can be faulted on. Take: fair shot. That could mean great shot; could mean piss-ass shot. George Humphrey's name equal to Pope Pius in certain executive Dallas ass chambers; therefore it's got to be dropped like a feather on velvet. Honey-grizzly has to be enunciated as if you was up tight enough with that variety of bear to tweak his nuts. So on. Mark

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

this, fellow Americans, and file it 2R—Ready Reference—each time Rusty runs into mood-gearings of attention back home in the office, he is going to have to turn to M.A. Pete or M.A. Bill and say, “Isn’t that so, Pete? isn’t that so, Bill?” and they’re going to have to say, “It sure is, Rusty,” and say it without a trace of strain, they’re yes-men, it is expected of them to be dauntless in their gut yes as they go through the yes ass gears, but perfection breeds perfection, the critical ear gets as sharp as a mad-dragster maniac-type genius listening to two 427 cubic inchers put in tandem—their yes has to have perfection precisioned. Well, even with professional bullshit, and that’s the secret of the corporation—it is filled with men who are professional bullshit packers—there is a limit. A yes-man will strain his gut to produce—they are the unsung heroes of America (reason they’re unsung is they can’t get their tongue out of the boss’ ass long enough to sing) but strain a gut as they may they cannot strain it past its own true natural elasticity. Something bona fide has got to happen, they can’t just go up to Alaska woods, get drunk for a week, buy a bear skin in Fairbanks or McGrath, take pictures, and slip a suppository up the folks back home, those Texas ears too sharp. There’d be a soupçon of caviar shit in the voice and that would put a rick-tick-tick in the narrator’s disc. So Rusty’s got to produce something big enough for his boys, M.A. 1 and M.A. 2, to say you’re right, Rusty, with an easy harmonious concordium of voice, a choir of Texas ass-

CHAP THREE

purring where the yeah boss you go right ahead and kick my Nigger ass gets a Texas hum. For then corporate power is cooking in Rusty's veins.

So Rusty's problem is simple. He can't begin to consider how to go back without a bear. He got a corporation mind. He don't believe in nature; he puts his trust and distrust in man. 5% trust, 295% distrust. He figures if Big Luke wants him to tag a bear, that's the ball game—if Big Luke don't want him to, then Rusty is left close to being a dead ass this season. He'll be caught stalking around in the brush with a guide who's holding such a rep he can afford to save himself for his major clients and make the minor executives like Rusty do a little work for him. Rusty has taken a full estimate of Big Luke and has this to decide: man to man, if you put each in the other's job from birth, Rusty could have done everything Luke did except those twenty-five five-shot one-inch offhand clusters, cause that ain't practice, that's magic, and Rusty is modest about magic, but Big Luke in Rusty's shoes would not have gone as far because he might be, bend your head (in secret) too fucking lazy. First thing, smack off, Luke tells Rusty that it's not the best season this year for bear, and when Rusty, all modesty and politeness, allows as how he'd like to make a push against these poor possibilities, Big Luke, who's coming on one hundred out of one hundred relaxed, kind of smiles, crinkly introductory humor humoring, and says, "They're scarce now. When bear

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

get lonesome they can smell far." Well, Big Luke got a presence, not much of a face, just a big sunburned mug of a face like a pie with a lot of scars in it, he looks just like Big Ollie Water Beaver except paler, for Big Ollie is as dark as an old leather jacket, but Big Luke sends out a wave every time he has a thought, you can feel it, and around him you can get messages back, you can feel that one bear out in those woods sending out its message—don't come near, motherfuck—that message transmitted from the bear to Big Luke and relayed to us, you can tune in on the madness in the air, you now know where a pine tree is rotting and festering somewhere out there, and red ants are having a war in its muck, and the bear is listening to those little ant screams and smelling that rotten old pine, and whoong goes his nose into the rot, and he bites and swallows red ants, slap, bap, pepper on his tongue, he picking up the bite of death in each ant and the taste of fruit in the pulp, digging that old rotten tree whose roots tell him where we are, capisce, Luigi? There's a fucking nervous system running through the earth and air of this whole State of Alaska, and the bear is tuned in, and Big Luke, and Ollie and the assistant guide packers, and the ants, and Tex and D.J., and the air, man, the air is the medium and the medium is the message, that Alaska air is real message—it says don't bullshit, buster. And Rusty of course reads this not, cause Big Luke is pouring salt in his ass. Big Luke is *mean*. "Lot of caribou," Big Luke says. "Think about starting the

CHAP THREE

week with caribou." Well, Rusty would as soon start the week with rabbits as caribou deer. D.J. reads this easy—let Rusty presume to come back from the Brooks Mountain Range of Alaska to Big D, Texas, air distance 3,247 miles (check not on this detail, for D.J. has just estimated it—who the mother-butter is going to make such a small-ass measurement of distance but a hotel lobby type tourist?) let Rusty travel all that round trip 6,000 plus miles, spending 6,000 plus dollars on D.J. and himself—not all tax-deductible either, you fuck, and present himself at 4C and P with a deer's head and no bear. Rusty and his status (who are as up tight with each other as two plump yoni—that's Hindu for cunt, son!—doing sixty-nine in the long Hindu night) can now take a double pine box funeral—they'll never got off his ass at Combined Consolidated, no, no, the office staff will wet their little pants waiting for Christmas so they can send him an anonymous set of antlers off some poor ass spavined Texas buck twice the antlers in width of measurement and holding four more points than the one he air-freighted back from Alaska—you know they'll do that at the office if they got to dig up an old ranch hand's bones and glue them together for antlers, Rusty knows a piss cutter when it scratches his scrotum—thank you very much, Mr. Luke Fellinka, but no thanks on that deer.

"Say, Luke," says Rusty, "I sure hope you put the hair on a bear for us cause I'm feeling like the poorest

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

safari victim you've had all year," and Big Luke says, "We, sir, have no safari victims, just happy clients and disappointed clients, and sometimes you can't tell by looking at their face, not by the time they get home."

1965

1060

Wing A/E call
on Vietnam
59-71



CHAP FOUR



Well, by the light of the twilight D.J. does a little estimating. There's guides and guides in Alaska, some for scratch-ass hunters, and some for poobahs where the idea is to bring the trophy to the man so that John Foster Dulles types can make the record book without ever getting their cheese wet crossing a brook. By the end of the first night in Fairbanks, while they lolling around getting acquainted in a super deluxe motel bar of a dark chocolate-red velvet interior looks like it was flown up from Seattle (which it was, en route

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

from Hawaii where they imitating the English Pump Room in Threadnello Gate, London W. 1) D.J. and Tex analyze it out—Big Luke used to be a big hunter, but those grizzly scratches have weakened his Arnold Toynbee coefficient—he interested less in challenge than response—if he caught his share of the three grand a head without having to lead various grades of assholes and tough but untrained adolescents into the brush to look for Mr. Wounded Honey Grizzly holding the head of a magnum in his bear gut and a last dream of murder in his bear eye, well, Big Luke, despite the big man death-guts charisma, may have had his day. Who's to say there is no actors in Alaska?

Listen to the dialogue: "Luke, I'm a stubborn Texas son of a bitch," says Rusty, lifting his bourbon in the Fairbanks, Alaska, motel bar (empty near but for three old couples from Kansas on an airline tour of Anchorage, Fairbanks, Barrow, Nome, and Juneau, with dips into Kotzebue, Unalakleet, and Homer, and a brother and sister at University of Alaska entertaining their ma and pa up to visit from Portland) —this lack of activity may be given total attributability to the vacation-directed personal vector imperatives of the American mind which shuts up action after Labor Day. This is after Labor Day, early September in Alaska, two years (to remind you) before the period of D.J.'s consciousness running through his head, hence form is more narrative, memory being always more narrative than the tohu-bohu of the present, which is Old Testament

CHAP FOUR

Hebrew, cock-sucker, for chaos and void, "Yeah, I'm stubborn," sighs Rusty tenderly, sipping his bourbon like his mother had brought him up on mother's milk and moonshine, "I don't want to carry on about where I've hunted, because I could tell you about going for wild boar in Bavaria, and for elephant in Africa—although I never got the elephant, my gun-buddy Ram Fedderstone got it, I just got a kudu, a snake, an African antelope, and a zebra. I always say I paid five thousand—you count them—bucks for a goddam convict suit."

"How about that, Pete?" said M.A. Bill, getting in the big chuckle first.

"Shee-it, Rusty," said M.A. Pete, "that's a beautiful set of head and shoulder zebra stripes in the Bomb Shop," (which is what Rusty calls the Jethroe den, the Bomb Shop).

Rusty turns his head, like a maidenhead being told she's pretty, sort of a "It's not for me to say," and then he turns his keen shit hue executive eyes on Big Luke and says, "I even got in on a tiger hunt with the Maharajah of Pandrasore, but that I don't count because I was present in 'semiofficial function'," a big wink, man, whatever the fuck semiofficial function is CIA supposed to convey, professor, "and we didn't even carry rifles. There was an array of Hindu peons up ahead each with a kris on a bamboo stick, and they did the sticking. The Maharajah's function, it turns out, is to be some variety of the Great White Hunter.

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

The majesty of his attendance on the hunt brings tigers up where there were none before. If there's a tiger this side of Tibet the Maharajah's magnetism will draw him. Sure as bird shit on a parasol, damn if we didn't attract three tigers."

"Maybe I get to learn a couple of new things about hunting from you," says Big Luke F.

"Say, Mr. Fellinka, I may look like a variety of Texas bull, but not that big, I swear. No, no, no. I'm not here to instruct, I'm here to imbibe. At the foot of a master. I just want to make a point, teacher. I want to cut the fiercest mustard you ever tasted with a piece of bear steak, I want to behold Bruin right in his pig red eye so I'll never have to be so scared again, not until I got to face The Big Man. Listen, Luke, here's what I suspect is true—it is that you are the Maharajah of this woods and this range of earth, and so I'm expecting you to make the impossible become directly possible and we're going to carry our stretch of hunting to what I would call a successful termination."

"Was a berry blight in August," says Big Luke, "Now the bear are out digging roots in the brush. That's a little thick there. A little too thick to bring a party in. Get a thorn in your eye, gun gets tangled, you can be looking at the ground about the time Friend Bear is putting an arm over your neck."

"Say, now," says Rusty, "this is a guaranteed bear trophy hunt, now isn't it?"

"Well, sir," says Big Luke's Tour Guide Coordi-

CHAP FOUR

nator, Mr. Kenneth Easterly, who has met the group at the airport, and brought them along Airport Way to the motel, name now forgotten, Alaska Cavalier maybe, or Fairbanks Frontier Arms, some such (Fairbanks being near as flat-ass a city as Dallas has naturally lots of humper-dick in the names) "well, sir," says Kenneth E who's the olive oil in this operation, "you have a guaranteed bear trophy in the specifications of the safari contract—that's for shit-and-sure," says Easterly, cause people he's addressing are Texans; if they was New York Jew ass Banker sportsmen, he'd say "certified." Nods his head, as if he's shaking his hand, "Yes-sir, there's a rebate of five hundred per head if we neglect to get you in proper range for a shot at a visible grizzly, although I want to tell you, we've never had to rebate it."

"Everybody who's taken your safari has gotten Mr. Grizzer," asks Rusty, "or had a fair shot?"

"No, sir. Not everybody. Some few do not have that peculiar good fortune. But they don't want the rebate. After they see the way Big Luke and Big Ollie take them around through the Brooks Range—that's *wilderness*, Mr. Jethroe—way they cook for 'em, tote for 'em, skin and pack, they're feeling sufficiently good, they've had the kind of hunting experience the desire for which brought them out here in the first place."

Rusty just shakes his head. "I don't believe I follow you, boy."

"Mr. Jethroe," says Kenny E., "we have the best

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

guide in Alaska, and the finest clientele. We're here to take you around and give you *proper* hunting. We're not in competition with the counters. There are counters out in that wilderness, hunters of medium income (and medium ability to stick the muzzles of their rifles into a muddy piece of ground) who have nonetheless saved their pennies to come here—it's the experience of a lifetime for them, and as you know, sir, the experience of a lifetime excites *greed* in the common man and a terror of being cheated. So they are out to get everything they can. They count every last pelt, they'll twist the tape measuring a Dall's horn to get an extra quarter of an inch on the length of it, they'll use handload cartridges make you gasp—it's a wonder simple steel can stand it—they hunt from four in the morning to midnight before they get back to camp, up at four again, they bring out every last piece of meat they can tote, or they don't even cut themselves a steak, just take the head and leave the flesh, imagine! and they maim, Mr. Jethroe, they maim game all over the damn place and then let them suffer. We ain't like that. We have the finest people in America come to us, we wouldn't even know how to advertise—we just hope too many people don't hear about us or the simple fine standard of clientele we possess might be adulterated. Because we offer hunting which is reasonable, decent in its risk, fair to the game, and not utterly deprived of comfort. We do not consider it decadent to have a book or two in the bunkhouse, and if Big Luke

CHAP FOUR

knows how to make a mixed drink, well, whiskey sours sweeten the heart after a long day of hunting, I like to claim."

"That's A-OK," says Rusty, "but the bear is the integral part of this expedition."

"Yessir, it is," says Easterly, "provided the bear is in a reasonable state."

"The bear are bad now," says Big Luke.

"What do you mean bad?"

"Changing their habits," Big Luke says. It comes out. All the good news. It seems there's been too much hunting in the Brooks Range. That's the confession of Kenny Easterly. The Moe Henry and Obungekat Safari Group (which is the exclusive George Humphrey special they are on right now) is no longer so alone in bringing its fine people up into that Arctic Circle, all the counter-type safari groups like Hunting, Ltd., and the Sam Sting Safari are pouring in too. The wild game is changing its psychology.

Big Ollie speaks up—his first speech. He talks like a cannibal in a jungle bunny movie. "Brooks Range no wilderness now. Airplane go over the head, animal no wild no more, now crazy."

"Say, friends," says Rusty, "I didn't come to Alaska to debate the merits and vices of technological infiltration."

Big Luke presents the case: "In August, three grizzly been wounded by other safaris in our hunting range. They get told not to move in but they move in. They,

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

like you, sir, thought I'm the one to call the tiger so they hunt near me. They wounded and they neglected to follow up, and they left us three very mean grizzly, right in our own hills and lands up there. Now consider. A mean grizzly has only to smell a man and he is half-crazy. He does not come forward half-nice, half-mean, to take his look, nor does he go the other way—he thinks of how to kill. He circles, he stays downwind from the hunter. He remembers the bullet, that bullet maybe tore his intestine, that is a terrible pain. A bear feeling such pain, sir, is in my opinion, struck as if by lightning and so picking up in certain ways the intelligence of man."

"I see," says Rusty, "you're going to keep us well up above timber so no bear can sneak near on us. We'll have to spend our week climbing rocks just to get a shot at five hundred yards down on some mountain goat across a canyon."

"I'll give the best hunting for conditions," says Luke.

"Let's specify," says Rusty.

A sad-ass show. It flickers off, on, off, for ninety minutes, a muted hot shit hurricane. Finally, Big Luke hints that Rusty can have his rebate now, his deposit, his contract and his week, and that is the end of the first contest, for if there is one thing worse than coming back with no bear, it is coming back a rejectee and rebatee from the Moe Henry and Obungekat Safari Group. If they could satisfy Old General George C.

CHAP FOUR

Marshall in his hunting days, who is Sir Jet-Throne to complain? Now he saves face. He compromises, he agrees Luke will give the word on when they go for grizzer. Say. They all go to bed in rooms with a foam-rubber mattress, pink-tile bathrooms, and Venetian blinds, and in the morning, load gear and all ten men into three Piper Apaches with amphibian floats and take off for the Brooks Range where each plane makes a tasty light water-slap of a landing in a lake, Dolly Ding Bat Lake, where there's an M.H.O.S.G. (for Moe Henry, et cetera) bunkhouse on the shore which is a pine forest so full of boon in the smell it could make you a religious nut, except D.J. does not dig pine resin out of sight—he likes something a hint more funky if he is entering concupiscent relations with the penumbra of the Lord, ho, ho, but this bunkhouse which is a pâté foie of an Alaska bunkhouse is not theirs for long—they unload the planes, then load up on packhorse, and work up a trail all afternoon, a dog ass trail which gets dull and then monotonous dull cause it's pine forest and dwarf birch and not spectacular for being up above the Arctic Circle, Rusty is commenting it's just as dull as all of Canada, and then colors start to dim which gives a hint of some kind of North, cause the rocks have a thin gray, and the bark is gray on the trees and there's a pinched look beginning to appear in the turf, a mossy mean turf like dry bog crusts, the trees get more individual, they have a continuing life story now with the wind. Then timberline. Final timberline,

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

sharp and clean, a little park of grass. They're up high on gray domes looking across to other gray domes, and rising further until even the fold of the canyon is dry of moss, and the packhorses are hawking their breath, and Big Luke finally picks on a shielded-in kind of square saddle between some hunched-up bare knolls, Big Luke calls it a basin, near to a black-ass basin by the time they get there, and put up the tents, Ollie makes the fire, et cetera, roast beef hash with dehydrated pears, good by God! on a white gasoline cookstove. D.J. and Tex exhausted by the dialectic of the night before fall out into dead-ass air mattress sleep with the smell of the North on a September night, a tricky clean smell, like a fine nerve washed in alcohol and lightly powdered to get the rut of flesh off.

Next morning, on a light windless dawn, Tex and D.J. get out of bed, start to brush their teeth in a rill of a stream coming up out of a mountain spring, that water presenting itself to the teeth like sunlight on snow, and Tex saw, just then, a wolf standing and pointing a half mile above the timber, just standing there and studying the dawn in a wolf silence like he had come to some conclusion about the problems of life and occupation, near-relatives, in-laws, phratries, associates, herbs, roots, and grubs. Tex took him down with a shot into the gut and at first he could have been there dead, the animal fell and for an instant the hills clapped together. Down at timberline trees shifted, air moved in the wave which follows a breaking of glass,

and then the wolf was up and running, but with a sick ass lunge like a broken fly, and then slowed, stood still, bore off at a bleeding ass walk back to the woods, and Tex run after him and got him at two hundred yards; one miss, one hit into the back of the shoulder and the lungs. The look on Big Luke's face was amiable like any boy who could hit a wolf at four hundred yards was not totally undeserving of guided service. Well, he got down and gave us each a cup of blood to drink and that was a taste of fish, odd enough, and salt, near to oyster sauce and then the taste of wild meat like an eye looking at you in the center of a midnight fire, and D.J. was on with the blood, he was half-sick having watched what Tex had done, like his own girl had been fucked in front of him and better, since he had had private plans to show Tex what real shooting might be, and here was Tex, King Front Sight Indian Hunter, Killer of Wolves. D.J. next thing was on his hands and knees, looking into that upper Yukon wolf mouth, those big teeth curved like tusk, and put his nose up close to that mouth, and thought he was looking up the belly of a whale, D.J. was breathing wolf breath, the just dead air from the dead interior, but raucous breath, all the fatigue of the wolf running broken ass to the woods and the life running the other way from him, a crazy breath, wild ass odor, something rotten from the bottom of the barrel like the stink of that which is unloved, whelp shit smell, wild as wild garlic, bad, but going all the way right back into the

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

guts of things, you could smell the anger in that wolf's heart (fucked again! I'll kill them!) burnt electric wire kind of anger like he'd lived to rip one piece of flesh from another piece, and was going to miss it now, going to miss going deep into that feeling of *release* when the flesh pulls loose from the flesh, and there D.J. was sweating, cause he was ready to get down and wrestle with the wolf, and get his teeth to its throat, his teeth had a glinty little ache where they could think to feel the cord of the jugular, it was all that blood he'd drunk, it was a black shit fuel, D.J. was up tight with the essential animal insanity of things.

That, friends, was the beginning of the hunt. Not so bad. Big Ollie came up, asked Tex if he wanted the wolf for a trophy. Tex gave a blow of breath to his front sight. That's all the tension he was going to show. "I don't want no wolf for a trophy," he said. Ollie then studied the animal, nodded, suddenly dipped his finger in the blood, sucked it with a quick-popping sound of his cheek like a cook testing a cake batter, then took out a knife and cut the wolf's head off, one twisting cut of the knife for the vertebra at the neck, one long sawing swinging cut for the rest. Then he gave the head to the boys for a look. There were two eyes open on El Lobo, both yellow coals of light, but one eye was Signor Lupo, the crazy magician in the wolf, and his eye had the pain of the madman who knows there's a better world but he is excluded, and then the other eye, Willie Wolf, like a fox's eye, full of sunlight and

peace, a harvest sun on late afternoon field, shit! it was just an animal eye like the glass they use for an eye in a trophy, no expression, hollow peace maybe, and Big Ollie dug a shallow pan of a hole with his knife in the crust bog tundra, whatever that dry shit moss was, and set the wolf's head in it, muzzle pointing to the north, and covered it over. Then he took a broken twig and laid it in a line with the end of the muzzle, but pointing further North, then got down on his hands and knees and touched his nose to the stick and said nothing for a moment.

"Always remember, boys," said Rusty, who had come up at the end to be part of our blood drinkers' breakfast group and coffeecutch, "you don't get your proper paganism until you pay these dee-luxe prices."

"What he up to, Mr. J.?" said Tex.

"Well, you're looking at him, Indian to Indian, Tex, and don't forget ah got a drop of the fucking redskin elixir too, he's telling that wolf he respects him and not to spread the word, not to get grizzler turned on. I bet Ollie's telling him not to forget that when he was alive, he and Big Grizzler were not rushing to be asshole buddies, so please don't start a union now."

1965

pp 77-90

1073



CHAP FIVE



Well, now here, let's give a rundown on the guns for those good Americans who care. And those who don't, shit, they still get the chance to encounter a lot of meaningless names and numbers which they can then duly repeat at cocktail parties for new name grabbers.

Rusty, well now he's got, well you be sure Rusty is holding, in fact D.J. is now canny to save him for later. So here's Luke and Ollie. Luke got a Model 70 Winchester .375 Magnum restocked (with maple Japa-

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

nese Shigui finish) and remodeled by Griffin & Howe with a Unertl $2\frac{1}{2}\times$ scope, and that little rifle and cartridge could knock down anything but an elephant, and if the elephant had just gotten fucked, it would knock him down too. Luke don't need that gun, he could hit and take and flatten anything he wanted in Alaska with his second gun, old Swedish Husqvarna .30-06, restocked and remodeled, also Unertl $2\frac{1}{2}\times$ scope (Luke was agent for Unertl for a while) which handles a 180-grain bullet on a very flat trajectory, a real 300-400 yard bap of an ice picker, extra high up over 3 thou in velocity delivered at the muzzle. Whereas Ollie has the same gun D.J. has, a factory-bought Remington 721, and both he and D.J. have worked the stock themselves. Ollie has all kinds of ivory totems and taboos inset in his grip and comb, including a profile of wolf head (hot shit and coincidence, Claudia!) and he got a nice Lyman Alaska $2\frac{1}{2}\times$ scope. D.J. on his side has just done a little stupid ass inconclusive whittling into his Rem 721 stock—in truth it's a mess—forget it! Scope? He got a nice Stith Bear Cub $2\frac{1}{2}\times$ scope with Stith mounts.

Tex has a factory-bought Winchester .270 Model 70 with a Weaver K-3 Tilden mount, neat as that. If he was a fink, D.J. would whisper that the first 400 yard shot which hit the wolf, considering it was done with a good .270 like the Winchester 70, was nothing truly spectacular, for Tex had set his Weaver K-3 for 250 yards the day before when they crossed timberline.

CHAP FIVE

So, at 400 yards, even with a big 180-grain bullet (and the corresponding big-ass load of powder) he knew he wouldn't drop twenty inches below the cross hair, never, at four hundred yards, so it wasn't that hard to put the dot a bit above wolf's back and hit in eight inches or ten inches below his spine. Anyway the whole fucking kill was unaesthetic, cause a 180-grain bullet which lets a wolf walk away after hitting him must hit no closer than a red-hot poker along his ass. Fact, that's what on examination the first shot proved itself to be, for the weight and hard nose of the bullet (bought to penetrate a grizzly hide) went right through the wolf's two legs, breaking only one. Well this fine critique ain't just piss grapes from D.J., because proof is that he is now repeating Tex Hyde's very own critique of his own shot. "If I hadn't been fever ass," says Tex, "I'd have taken the time and got the 100-grain soft nose magazine into Winnie, and I could have torn a hunk of old Wolf right out of his heart so he didn't have to suffer and we didn't have to chase. I can hit *anything* with the hundred grain. That was a fink and fuckup kill, D.J."

Which brings up Rusty, who travels like a big-ass hunter. That Apache looked like it was vomiting big equipment out of its guts, yeah, he got for instance a .404 Jeffrey on a Mauser Magnum action with a Circassian walnut stock, one love of a custom job by Biesen with Zeiss Zielklein $2\frac{1}{2}\times$ on Griffin & Howe side mount for Gun #1. Gun #2 is Model 70 Win-

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

chester rechambered to .300 Weatherly Magnum, Stith Bear Cub scope, birds'-eye maple stock, et cetera, et cetera. Gun #3 is Winslow Regimental Grade 7 mm. Remington Magnum with FN Supreme 400 action and Premium Grade Douglas barrel, ivory and ebony inlays in the stock, basket weave carving on both sides of the forearm and pistol grip, Redfield Jr. mounts, Redfield 2×-7× variable scope.

Gun #4 is Ruger . . .

Gun #5 . . .

Forget it. This account has now come right down to the gnat in the navel of the whole week of hunting which is Sweet Medium Sweet Asshole Pete who don't know about hunting enough to go out and shoot at Texas cactus (which, if you know how to plug it proper, dies with a scream of Pulque blood gushing up and out and an absolutely foul breakwind of Peyote gas) no, Pete has grown up with a nice Savage 99 lever action .250 deer gun, and he runs and freezes his own scared hot shit in a suburban rental frozen food locker when he gets the invitation to Alaska from Rusty, for that means a two- to five-year expediting of his dangerously dull slick as owl shit ascent of the corporation ladder provided he can make it on this Yukon expedition. So he runs out and he borrows a Savage 110 bolt action with Weaver K-4 scope from his deadly daddy (who years ago never thought enough of Pete's shooting to give him the 110, but laid, instead, the 99 lever action on him for Christmas). Well, that takes one

CHAP FIVE

nightmare out of Pete's head which is cocking that 99 fuck-your-finger lever while a grizzly, perfectly capable of eating whatever the Savage 99 .250 will throw, ambles and slides and tears across the brush at him. And it warms his heart cockles, cause it's the first treasured thing his daddy ever loaned him. (His daddy's beginning to breathe thin.) Well, Pete now starts hearing about the bolt action 110. It will stop any game, yeah, if the shot is *well placed*. Strangle that little news. Pete ain't looking to make a career of placing his supershots in superb array anywhere but in the office jungle. Don't tell him about 180-grain Core-Lokt or Silver Tipt, he wants a grenade and bullet all in one sweet cartridge package—he wants a bomb which will drop a grizzly if it hits him in the toe. So he what? Better believe! Comedy is the study of the unsound actions of the cowardly under stress, just as tragedy is equal study time of the brave under heroic but enigmatic, reverberating, resonant conditions of loss—yes, professor, you may keep the change, for D.J. is, mean to say, *has* got more than a finger into the cunt of genius, Madame Muse. He has now to tell you that poor Very Low-Grade Medium Asshole Pete is so squash-breathed at the ups and downs of careerman-ship and sudden death which now confront him that he buys—get in line to look at it—from a white-haired riverboat string-tie type of an ex oil well promoter, some friend of his wife's shiftless uncle's boss, a third-string Dallas Mafia type (don't even look how that gun

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

got around to there or the Ford Foundation will be up and along for gropes) this gun being a used, indeed banged-up, African rhinoceros-hippo-elephant-soften-the-bullet-for-the-lion double-barreled .600-.577 custom, only-one-of-its-kind-ever-built Jeffrey Nitro Express carrying a 900-grain bullet for Shot #1, a 750-grain for Shot #2, and a recoil guaranteed to knock a grand piano on its ass. Forget about the French walnut and the Jeffrey action, the Hensoldt Zielklein $2\frac{3}{4}\times$ scope interchangeable with the Redfield $2\times-7\times$ blunt picket post with cross wire variable scope on the Pachmayr Lo-Swing mount or the addition of the Lyman aperture in the 17A front sight on the .577 barrel to be used when the rhinoceros is so close, friends, that the use of a telescopic sight is not indicated (which means, Herbert, that you better put the muzzle in your mouth and blast that rhino horn right back out of your ass). Yeah! This was the gun F. Lap-Ass Medium Asshole Pete brought to Alaska for grizzly. When he saw it, Rusty had a pure shit fit. If it hadn't been a Jeffrey he'd have laughed his nuts off. But, fix on this, Rusty thought he had the only big bore Jeffrey in the State of Texas, and here was his flunky with a bigger, and *double!* . . .

"How'd you get this mother-fuck?" he asked Pete. "I haven't heard of a double Jeff Nite Express since they used it to kill a Swiss dragon who was terrorizing some Tyrolean village in 1921."

"Somebody sold it to me," Pete confesses.

CHAP FIVE

"Well, I hope you didn't pay too much, because the fellow must have stolen it."

In fact, Pete has bought it for \$1,000 heart-hurting bucks. A swindle and a crime. The two barrels are thus crooked they could shoot each other. Pore Pete, Be Your Boss Pete, has had already to lay out near to \$4,200 bucks for this Brooks Range safari-and-gun and has thus had to sell his #2 car, a somewhat used Jag XKE for three big ones plus another thou by converting some Dreyfus Fund into straight cash. He wouldn't dare sell his Pure Pores debentures, no, nor go further into installment debt.

Well, Rusty is in a marching state of perturbation. The very presence of that gun seems enough to shatter the tissue or texture of the spell which hangs over every happy hunter. Up in the basin, by the fire, night before the morning Tex killed the wolf, Big Luke has taken one look at Pete's possession and Rusty knows what he is thinking: this is one extrafine gaggle of goose fat and asshole to contend with for a week. So Rusty attacks. He knows enough to get attention off that Nitro Express! He inquires after Big Ollie's second gun, knowing pure well there is only the Remington 721, Big Ollie is a man for an all-purpose rifle, and when Big Luke says, "Ollie take care of everything with one gun," Rusty says, "Yeah, well why're you carrying a .375?"

"Ollie can back you up just as well with that .30-06."

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

"You know a .30-06 isn't going to do the job of a .375 Magnum. It wasn't *designed to*," says Rusty, getting a good old Texas range whine like the ricochet of a bullet off a stupid-ass Texas desert rock. He is obviously thinking of Mr. Grizzer. What Big Luke is thinking is not so far from conjecture. He is either (a) carrying a .375 to make his clients happy, since he shoots good enough to stop anything with a .30-06, a #.270, even a .245 if he got to, or (b) he has lost more nerve than Ollie, so he has more power in his fire stick. Either way, he got to protect Ollie and his one gun, he ain't getting in a situation where he might have to tell #2 man what sort of gun said #2 is supposed to sling in order to keep Sir Jet-Throne happy.

Rusty knows all this too, but he hasn't put in the years being a first-line Ranger Commando in 4C and P for zero return, he knows how to keep an expert on the defensive (and remind him of a nightmare or two) by poking in just hard enough to the mysteries between the facts. "Listen," says Rusty, "nobody knows finally what's going to kill big game. Some seem to go over if you put a pin in their butt, others you take right through the heart—they keep running. Running right at you if need be."

"Shoot for the shoulder, not the heart," says Big Luke in a voice like a piece of old oiled gunstock, a voice with a patina—he has said this two thousand times over the years.

"Right," says Rusty, "the shoulder. Break the shoul-

CHAP FIVE

der bone, and they can't run. Sure. That's where I want my power. Right there. Right then. Maybe a professional hunter takes pride in dropping an animal by picking him off in a vital spot—but I like the feeling that if I miss a vital area I still can count on the big impact knocking them down, killing them by the total impact, shock! it's like aerial bombardment in the last Big War," he said, turning to Tex, D.J., and the Medium Assholes, and dropping his voice as if he were now imparting the flavor of the secret jellies and jams used in black mass of real military lore, "why, face up, gentlemen, the British were right, hear, hear, they were right for once, you don't pinpoint vital areas in a city, you blot it all out, you bury it deep in fire, shit, and fury. Then when the war's over they're glad to see you come in. It's just like if you get in a fight with a fellow, you're well advised to destroy him half to death. If y'get him down, use your shoe on his face, employ your imagination, give him a working-over, hard to believe, but often enough that man is your friend afterward, you've made him sane—maybe he thought before he had the fight with you he could lick whatever was in sight so he was half-crazy, now he knows that is not exactly so. Whereas if you give him a nice clean whipping, you've stimulated him to give you a nice clean whipping back. Of course, the analogy is not perfect, Luke, but I am forced to wonder about the fine difference in ethics between using Ollie's .30-06, and my Special .404, or your .375. Yes, it may be our

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

animals will die a degree more from shock and a hint less from vital execution. But of what final ethical consequence is that, where is the fine difference?"

"Your meat tastes better when you're executed," said Tex.

Big Luke gave a laugh, Rusty gave a look at the undertaker's son. "Let me just tell you," he said into the fire, "I hope I don't have to stand on tiptoe too long waiting for you, Tex, to squeeze a needle out of your .270."

"You won't," said Tex.

Well, M.A. Pete heard all of this and more, he heard from his tentmate M.A. Bill a little later that night, for Bill was a ballistics nut and had spent one full vacation in the ballistics department of the FBI in the Department of Justice building in D.C. (having used the influence of his boss Death-row Jelly-Go Jet-Throne and the friendship of some of the local FBI to be accepted as a guest-visitor and temporary student on the comparative rank basis of police captain so that M.A. Bill got his studying in with visiting foreigners like the head of the Ghana Police Department, and the Mozambique Police Department, and native fuzz from Spokane, Walla Walla, Greensboro—they were all taking the full invitation and orientation course in updated police detection methods, but M.A. Bill was no investigator manqué, rather he was a ballistics nut, and that's where he stayed for two hot blazing summer weeks in the air-conditioned laboratories of the bal-

CHAP FIVE

listics boys). He'd always gone in for handloading his cartridges, but when he got back, he was abruptly become the cartridge expert in his rifle club cause he could advise you on the FBI selection and use of bullets, primer, case, shot, and powder, he was up on the latest Department of Justice methods of determining chamber pressure, mean effective pressure, hunting loads, reasonable uses for black powder, new powders, flash holes, bullet castings, bullet swaging, etc., he had a spread of loading tools, dies, accessories, components, lathes, and was therefore all equipped to wildcat his own. Some of them were pretty hot. M.A. Bill had been known to come into the office with gunpowder injected in his pores, but a breech had never blown up in his face. Of course, no dentist has love for a doctor, and no wildcatter has a good word for a factory cartridge. M.A. Pete had been ready after Rusty's contumely to bury his Jeffrey Nitro Express and make the trip with the Savage 110 .30-06, but M.A. Bill squared him off on that. He let him in on the secret—factory ammunition was the unspoken scandal of American life, and .30-06, well in M.A. Bill's opinion, they were the worst offenders. The f.p.s. (foot per second, knothead!) variations had been known to go up to 5 percent, and one box in not that very many you'd be surprised had such variations and fluctuations in their max. vel., as tested on the chronograph that trajectories could even be affected. Which meant? Pete wanted to know. Errors in shooting, said M.A. Bill.

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

D.J. is here to tell you that M.A. Pete wished to hear no more, which was error indeed, cause a little cross-examination would have revealed that M.A. Bill was talking about a difference which was not an inch at one hundred yards, not by half. You see, fellow Americans, statistics perverts, and number addicts, the greatest effect of variation in powder loadings speaks up after you go by the sign which says, "You are a rifle bullet passing the three-hundred-yard mark and are bound soon to dip. Keep your nose up!" In fact, M.A. Bill like most ballistics nuts was as nearsighted as an old hound with silver rim lenses so his critique is academic for himself. He's not interested in where the bullet goes, he just wants to stuff it full of the right sort of smokeless. Love, love, the Good Lord may have had no idea how far he cast his seed.

"But your gun is a .30-06," says M.A. Pete.

"Yes, but I've had it rechambered and with a custom barrel. I make my own shell for it. A .311. I wouldn't ever use a .30-06."

"Oh," said Pete, "that .311 must really do the job."

"You can go to sleep on that," said M.A. Bill.

M.A. Pete did not sleep too well. He had visions of a grizzly bearing down on him with a wild cry like a Nigger washerwoman gone ape with a butcher knife, and he had seen himself forced to face such music with the slim pencil of a .30-06. He had had dreams of bringing it off with a .30-06 but that buried scandal of American sporting rifle cartridge ammo f.p.s. discrep-

CHAP FIVE

ancies recounted to him by M.A. Bill had the front sight of his Savage 110 wavering like a fly wing in his mind's eye. If the aim of the bullet could not be trusted, then of what purport the gun? So, fuck if he didn't have his hand on the double Jeffrey all night long and kiss your own ass deep in the heart of Texas if the elephant gun wasn't the tool that M.A. Pete brought with him when he went running down into the valley and the green park of lawn below the black-ass gray basin, down in the sweet green grass right after Tex shot his wolf, that grass green as an English lawn, just where the trees ended and the mountain went up in a gray dome. And standing around, looking at the dead wolf, he looked up, and he, the medium asshole, was the first to see a caribou two hundred yards away through the thin trees, and in the accurate fevered inaccuracy of being awake a night without sleep, he took a sight and the cross hairs on the scope ran a figure eight around the horns, which then plummeted down around the hooves, flew up past the tail into the air, about, and back over the caribou's flanks to a view, all abrupt, honest, naked, and hairy of the buck's testicles magnified 4X, which to M.A. Pete's unprotected eye was equal in force and simple animal revelation to the first sight provided an innocent maiden of a working-man's balls, and then past caribou's deer nuts in a blur as if M.A. Pete was in a movie traveling the curves so it was all a blur, and around came the sights again to the back of the hocks and up and RUMBA! went the Jeffrey

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

and the .600 Nitro Express shot on its way and M.A. Pete took a blow to the shoulder on recoil which canted his vertebrae 3 degrees 21 minutes right then and there, and Wow! came a sound next to him, for the caribou leaped in the air, did a crazy dance, and was off in the woods.

CHAPTER IX

your presumptive philosophy, has not made
grand connection yet between the tails of the evil
though he would claim there are related—more of this
or maybe—but the eyes are all motion attached to the
tail as beginning it to exist; the tail is pulling some-
ing out—the beginning of it—what you are going to
be in this out, and that right here in the King's
to know because it will be the recollection of the
ed on the screen while not of that on then just him by
A Fox. A devastating night. Carter, the lips

1966

1087

93-105



CHAP SIX



D.J., your presumptive philosopher, has not made the grand connection yet between the balls and the ears although he would claim they are related—more of this later, maybe—but the eyes are of course attached to the asshole as begining is to end: the end is putting something out—the beginning is to see what you are going to have to shit out, and that right here in Brooks Range is easy to know because it will be the recollection of the blood on the cotton white ass of that caribou just hit by M.A. Pete. A liver-vitiating sight, Carter, for the liver

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

goes flat, D.J. would assure you, whenever some scent meets its deodorant, or an herb is fed with aspirin. Pretty literary for adolescent out hunting with Paw? Go fuck, D.J.'s got his purchase on the big thing—genius—and he know this: you deaden a mystery and your liver goes to shit. This chase for a torn-ass caribou revolves around a simple mystery, to wit the ass of the caribou is white, its stumpy tail is white, soft as a white ruffle at Milady Hightits throat, so D.J. ask you why? Why is the rear view of a thousand head of caribou passing on the tundra like a thousand pops of cotton on the boll? That's a dead-ass question—the ass of your mind go dead trying to answer, yeah, and here was just one caribou, off on a split through the woods. But we all had one look, one crack of a look at something red and hanging bad and loose like a wattle from the white fur. Then we were all walking and jogging down an open aisle of moss-green grass to the spot in the timber two hundred fifty yards below where the deer had plunged in.

Blood for his trail, drops the size of every kind of coin, silver dollars up to florins, even—one the size of a small plate—brown blood already corrupted by a hive of near invisible devourers, insect shitters, chiggers and flies, one big Alaska bumblebee still alive on this cold early September morning, and the sun shining right in the blood with a thousand lights, or so it would look if you had your nose right there on the bloodied leaves close enough to that wet to think you were looking at

CHAP SIX

neon signs, the woods were full of awe, nothing other, the trees standing numb, cowardly spectators, man, watching one of their own take a wasting.

Then the trail of the blood took a bend, beat through dwarf alder, and some nasty kind of brush with too much in the way of catbriers. That took quite a few minutes, then a pine grove, then another aisle between trees, parallel to the one we had come down, but now the caribou trail was rising up to timberline again, and in the distance, up along a thousand yards, was what looked to be the caribou, yes, it was, and through the field glasses Big Luke, watching, shook his head. "You hit him an outside rump shot, Pete."

"Then he'll be all right?"

"No, impact seems to have broke his leg or maybe shocked his spine. He's using only one hind leg. Walking not much faster than us. That's bad. We can't leave him."

"Say," said Pete, trying to shift the rump of the subject, "why'd that buck leave timber?"

"Didn't want to die in those woods. Sometimes you get a buck will cross three open ridgelines to get into the particular woods where he wants to hide or give it up."

"Then he ain't too bad if he can move that much."

"He," said Big Luke, "is bad enough that we got to get him."

It was going to take all day. We were going to spend our first day walking and jogging to chase a wounded

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

caribou, when there were ten thousand head of them in the Brooks Range. All honors due to M.A. Pete's Jeffrey Nitro Express. Well, Luke got the helicopter up. It had been down in Fairbanks for repair the day before, he had not mentioned how near it was to reach, oh no, he did not want to have Rusty on his ear all those hours of the packtrain up the mountain from Dolly Ding Bat Lake, but now he took us up the aisle through the trees till we were above timber again and led us along a shallow canyon and over a saddle into our basin, and there while breakfast was made by one of the flunky packer guide cooks, Ed Smith, an Indian, Big Luke got a big-ass walkie-talkie 3200 RC-1A 16 mile range, and rang down to camp at the lake telling them to come on in, and when they did with a smack of static, he told them to bring the helicopter on up.

That's how they got Kid Caribou. Helicopter pilot was there in five minutes with Buster Bubbletop, a real wasp of a Bell helicopter, and Big Luke got in with M.A. Pete and M.A. Pete's cannon, and they zipped up and over the ridge, and Rusty, and Tex, and D.J. went to the top of a knoll and followed them with Rusty's Hurdle & Reuss 7 $\times$ 35 and Tex and D.J.'s own Jap Titan 8 $\times$ 35 and Binolux 7 $\times$ 35. And, man, this is what they see—half dead ass caribou climbing up those rocks, nice head of antlers (look to be fourteen points through the glass) and a bleeding jagged gored red ass, flap of flesh now wide open, and the caribou makes

CHAP SIX

those rocks with lunge and grunt and like then a whimper you could hear almost through the binocs when the sound of the helicopter began to beat on caribou ear with rings of ether just as when you going out on the operating table. Man, that caribou looks as dogged and frantic as a prospector climbing a mountain to get a hill of gold, and then the helicopter is on top of him and hovering and holding him frozen, and it lands not fifty feet away, and the caribou turns his ass and starts to climb up a cliff with a set of deliberate steps like (1) fuck you, (2) go kill, (3) shit on you, each step a pure phrase of the blues—take me away, Mr. Dixieland—and there is M.A. Pete stepping out gingerly from the copter, like, man, he's *close* to the caribou, and got his cannon with him, and just as Old Buck Broken Ass gets to the top of his little cliff, hopping slow on three legs, M.A. Pete sends a Nitro Express up into his gut from the rear, right into the red mask of the old wound and that animal does a Geländesprung right into the air as if his spine is illumined in incandescence, and somersaults in the air, and falls twenty feet from the cliff, smashing one set of antlers off his head (to be wired on later, nothing other) and the .600 900-grain blasted through his intestines, stomach, pancreas, gallbladder, liver and lungs, and left a hole to put your arm in, all your arm, up to the shoulder if you are not squeamish, entrail swimmer, and then bullet breaking, some of the fragments ripped into the brain and out the head, leaving

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

it scarred to the point where M.A. Pete could claim (and believe) two years later that the scars on the mouth and face of his deer trophy were the fighting marks of a big buck caribou fighter; other fragments sawed through the ribs of the lungs, and deteriorated like buckshot in the forequarter. Big Luke brought that animal back to feed us. Its guts, belly and lungs were one old jelly flung together by the bullets, one blood pudding of a cocktail vibrated into total promiscuity by the twenty-foot fall down the rocks. Yes, prince, yes, Big Luke got the head off, and rescued the loose antler, and gutted the entrails, dressed the meat to clean fragments, left the hide which was a mess—clear surprise, yes!—but we had the meat for lunch, and it wasn't exactly gamy, it tasted loud and clear of nothing but fresh venison steeped in bile, shit, and the half-digested contents of a caribou's stomach—it was so bad you were living on the other side of existence, down in poverty and stink wallow with your nose beneath the fever—that was Luke's message to us.

The helicopter was new to him, you read, and for some parties in the last year or so he'd begun to use it, for some not, but he was an American, what the fuck, he had spent his life living up tight with wilderness and that had eaten at him, wilderness was tasty but boredom was his corruption, he had wanted a jolt, so sees it D.J., Big Luke now got his kicks with the helicopter. He was forever enough of a pro not to use it with real hunters, no, man, but he had us, gaggle of

CHAP SIX

goose fat and asshole, killers of bile-soaked venison, so the rest of the hunt, all next seven days he gave what was secretly wanted, which was helicopter heaven, and it was curious shit, all rules and regulations, for of course we did not hunt from the air, no freakmen from TV land us, but rather noble Dallasassians, so we broke open a war between us and the animals, and the hunt hills of the Moe Henry and Obungekat Safari patch rang with ball's ass shooting, the real breeze, hopping to the top of a mountain on copter wings to shoot down on goats, nothing so great as the Alaska mountain goat, yeah, you get up at three A.M. in tent camp up high above timber, and you climb, man, on foot above timber, for three hours till dawn, and then climb higher still crabbing up sixty-degree rock slopes, and walking with all heart shit up in your throat along a ledge twelve inches or less, yeah, ooh, making it up, and higher still, *quietly*, and then if you good, you're up there, up above Master Mountain Goat, and when you start to shoot on him, he does a step dance like an old Negro heel-and-toe tap man falling down stairs or flying up them, and the first animal D.J. got in Alaska was a mountain goat at two hundred and fifty yards, and with one shot, animal stood on its nose for one long beast of a second, and then did a running dying dance for fifty yards down the rocks like a fakir sprinting through flaming coals, and when he died, *Wham!* the pain of his exploding heart shot like an arrow into D.J.'s heart, and the animals had gotten him, they were

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

talking all around him now, communicating the unspoken unseen unmeasurable electromagnetism and wave of all the psychic circuits of all the wild of Alaska, and he was only part of them, and part he was of gasoline of Texas, the asshole sulfur smell of money-oil clinging to the helicopter, cause he had not gotten that goat by getting up in the three A.M. of morning and climbing the mountain, no cream not your dear private lace, dear Celia, D.J. had gotten up at seven back in the bunkhouse at Dolly Ding Bat Lake, for once Big Luke had decided this was Helicopter Week for Goose Fat Gaggle, he bundled all souls and A-holes back to the bunkhouse since good old Hail the Cop Turd could take you a day's walk in ten minutes, and he would drop us on spots, top of a mountain, edge of a bull moose pond, across a canyon from Dall ram, near a feeding ground for the grizzer, that copter was dividing us up, carrying us here, there, every which spot, shooting in parties of two and four, guide and guest, or two guides, two guests, and it was a haul of big-ass game getting, for among the five of us safari payers we had a limit of twenty-five assorted grizzly, moose, ram, goat and caribou, and there was animal steaks being cut and packed all over the place, and trundled out by copter back to Dolly Ding Bat and up again in Super Cub to Fairbanks and freezers, all that hot supersensitive game meat now locked in brown paper and stone ice, paralyzed stiff in a freezer, about to suffer for sins it could not locate, yes, that was how D.J. got his moun-

CHAP SIX

tain goat, he was flown at seven in the morning up to the top of a spiky ridge not too unlike the moon, set down in a bowl with Tex, Ollie, and Kenny Easterly, and waited, and in two hours had his shot, had his action, climbing down a ravine, and up the other side, a walk of four hundred yards, had his work helping Big Ollie skin, butcher, gut and package Mr. Goat (being shown by Ollie how to keep the fur away from the meat so the taste would not be tainted—touch of goat skin on raw goat meat smelling as stale and raunchy as overworked whore) and then Big Ollie having radioed the copter, in came the Hail the Cop and let down a line all hovering and they slung the meat packages, and the horns and head onto the lift line, which pulled it up and then pulled them up—that was the kick of the morning, foot in the stirrup, lifting one hundred feet to the Cop Turd which vibrated above like one giant overgrown Hog! its carburetor farting, its motor giving out that family sputter of gasoline being piston-cooked at medium speed, but D.J. never looked at the head of the goat except once, for the goat had a clown's expression in his little-ass red dying eyes, the fires of the heart working to keep custard on the clown's face, it wasn't until that night when he was in the bunkhouse back at Dolly Ding Bat that D.J. relaxed enough to remember that goat picking his way up and down rocks like a slow motion of a skier through slalom, his legs and ass swinging opposite ways, carefree, like take one leg away, I'll do it on the other, and it hit D.J. with a second blow on

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

his heart from the exploding heart of the goat and he sat up in bed, in the bunk, listening to the snores, stole out to the night, got one breath of the sense of that *force* up in the North, of land North North above him and dived back to the bed, his sixteen-year-old heart racing through the first spooks of an encounter with Herr Dread.

What more you want to hear? They got them all, crazy caribou trophy heads, eighteen-point buck for M.A. Bill, M.A. Bill! his handload .311 cartridge did the job, and tore off the ass—D.J. will not dwell on why an asshole is bound to hit the ass, for that is homeopathic magic, man—we got it all, that helicopter made us like a bee pulling honey from flower after flower, moose and goose if there'd been goose, and Dall ram, horns and horns of Dall ram, all five of us in three teams got to blast our own set of horn before one day was done on a herd up in a sink near a pinnacle, and Big Luke's Cop Turd pilot was pushing the rules and regs of Hail Cop hunting, for after he lower us out on the line which had even Rusty close to involuntary defecation (and was the most heroic thing corporation execs have done in many a year), why, we got left set up two hundred yards from old herd of Dall ram, Mr. and Mrs. Beautiful Ibex horn (that's Jew horn, I Beck'n Son, hih, hih) ain't got the curl and spiral of the universe curving out of their brain for nothing, they took up and off, and Mr. Cop Turd went swinging after them like a darning needle after ladybugs and

heade
towar
crossi
hump
Copt.
at wl
conft
Cop
fixed
cause
throu
and
havin
ridge
the r
each
a lit
relea
of ai
whir
more
nuzz
they
I
moss
all f
was
on c
and

CHAP SIX

headed the Dall ram off till they started to run back toward us, at which point he cut them off again (by crossing in front of them only thirty feet above—kick hump in this hunting is: be Cop pilot) since unwritten Copt. rules and regs forbid chasing of game into gun, at which point Dall ram leader was like to be very confused and hit out this way and that way, and the Cop just went circling around until the sheep were fixed, shit they were hypnotized, it was pretty to watch, cause Hail Cop was like a bullfighter twisting a bull through the limits of his neck until he just got to stand and wait and let his neck recover, and the copter having the herd of Dall ram finally fixed on a cleft in a ridge across a bare modest draw from us, us hiding in the rocks on the lip of the sink, he pulled up and out, each circle a little bigger than the one before, and now a little higher until the animals shivering from the release of anxiety, in fact all strung out from the sound of air boiling, breaking, roaring and tearing and the whine—what cry of what beast?—were able to do no more than walk around, hocks trembling, muzzles nuzzling assholes—like get back to that flesh, man! they must have felt they were being born out again.

I got the first shot. Kneeling behind a rock with a moss hummock not larger than the hand for a rest, it all felt good, I had gotten so hypnotized myself, there was no fever looking through the scope, the eye picked on one ram standing on one rock all four legs together and head silhouetted out against a sawtooth ridge

WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

maybe five miles behind him, and in the scope I had one look at the prettiest face D.J. has ever seen, almond oval and butter love for eyes, a little black sweet pursed mouth, all quivering now, two nostrils cunning as an old Negro witch smelling gypsy money on a mark, whoo-ee—I got the dot above my reticule in the center of the curl of the horn—those horns went three hundred and sixty degrees around the ear, like holding the mountain in the palm of your hand, they were receptors to hear the curve of the wind in the private cave of the mountains about, they were a coil of horn around the nerve which tunes the herb, and D. Ramses was all horned in on me, hair to the left, hair to the right went his head, we could just as well have been pulling opposite ends. I could not help it, wanting to keep that head intact for a trophy, the scope still would not leave the horn, the dot stayed on the ram brain, one inch above the eye, and feeling like the instant before the jump first time off a garage roof, D.J. pulls his trigger finger, perfect pull, perfect shot, as if all spiral of horn was funnel to pull all of the aim in and the shot went in one inch above the eye and the animal went down like a wall had fallen, best shot D.J. ever made, and Rusty rushed in his shot, cause his sheep took off at D.J.'s shot, Rusty only wounded his beast, got a second blast away too high in the shoulder, off with a third in the hoof—believe it if you want—the hoof later as splattered from the .404 as a wad of tar beaten with a hammer, and finally got him in the

CHAP SIX

shoulder near the heart, the animal not moving hardly now, was Rusty mad. Four .404s for a Dall ram (he not carrying #2 gun or #3, cause who knows where grizzly might be?). If he needed four for the ram, maybe four times four for the bear.

More skinning, more packing, two great trophy heads, and a wait for the helicopter out servicing Tex and M.A.s Pete-Bill. They all had Dall ram that day. Five sets of horns held in the arms of five shit-eating grins standing in semicircle on the banks of Dolly Ding Bat Lake as the pictures were taken, and long careful discussions with Big Luke on taxidermy and where the Moe Henry and Obungekat Safari Group recommended the preservation of the head—any fifty-year guarantee outfits around, or century mounters? "There's no real craftsmen left," says M.A. Pete. "Just embalmers," said Tex. *and*

~~Going for the grizzer wasn't nearly so good. Mr. Cop Tard, carrying Rusty, M.A. Bill, and Ollie, went flying by one pure grizzly standing out in an alpine meadow out on a flank of mountain where the spruce grew up in columns like the teeth of a comb and they had been swinging so good knocking down trophies that Rusty got Napoleonic, rode his luck all the way to Veneria and back, and made the pilot set them down two hundred meager yards away, which is to say he put Rusty out first at Rusty's demand, Rusty going down the winch, that two hundred yards' separation from the bear not very much when you're waiting for the guide.~~

1966 ✓
1966 X

(Blot)

Cannibals and Christians

~~95-130~~
95-103

(1099)

~~Public Relations, American~~
~~A Talk to the Modern Language Association~~

~~Shakespeare~~
~~S...~~
~~...~~

~~Calla~~
~~and~~

Reader, a telegram. SHIP McNAMARA LAMBS FROM WARS OF

Start

~~Everything in this book is attached to everything else. Trust me for a~~
~~little indulgence me.~~

Assume I am a lecturer in the fields of Fellowship surrounding Literature (American) and am trying to draw some grand design in twenty minutes on a talk devoted to "The Dynamic of American Letters." Knowing attention is iron for the blood of a Fellow, I will not be so foolish as to perish without a look at the topical and the interesting. No, I will use "The Dynamic of American Letters" as preparation for a lightning discussion of Herzog and Terry Southern, with a coda on the art of the absurd. Let me then have my first sentence as lecturer: "There has been a war at the center of American letters for a long time." That is not so poor. The look of absolute comprehension on the face of the audience encourages the lecturer to go on.

The war began as a class war; an upper-middle class looked for a development of its taste, a definition of its manners, a refinement of itself to prepare a shift to the aristocratic; that was its private demand upon culture. That demand is still being made by a magazine called The New Yorker. This upper-class development of literature was invaded a long time ago, however, back at the cusp of the century, by a counter-literature whose roots were found in poverty, industrial society, and the emergence of new class. It was a literature ^{that} ~~which~~ grappled with a peculiarly American phenomenon—a tendency of American society to alter more rapidly than the ability of its artists to record that change. Now, of course, one might go back two

thousand years into China to find a society which did not alter more rapidly than its culture, but the American phenomenon had to do with the very rate of acceleration. The order of magnitude in this rate had shifted. It was as if everything changed ten times as fast in America, and this made for extraordinary difficulty in ~~creating~~ a literature. The sound, sensible, morally stout delineation of society ~~which~~ one found in Tolstoy and Balzac and Zola, in Thackeray and in Trollope, had become impossible. The American novelist of manners had to content himself with manners—he could not put a convincing servant into his work, and certainly not a workingman, because they were moving themselves in one generation out from the pantry into the morning dress of the lady in the parlor and up from the foundry to the master of the factory. The novelist of manners could not go near these matters—they promised to take over all of his book. So the job was left to Howells, Stephen Crane, to Dreiser, and in lesser degree to such writers as Norris, Jack London, Upton Sinclair—let us say it was left to Dreiser. A fundamental irony of American letters had now presented itself. For in opposition to Dreiser was the imperfectly developed countertradition of the genteel. The class ~~which~~ ^{that} wielded the power which ran America, and the class which most admired ~~that~~ ^{that} class, banded instinctively together to approve a genteel literature ~~which~~ ^{that} had little to do with power or the secrets of power. They encouraged a literature about courtship and marriage and love and play and devotion and piety and style, a literature which had to do finally with the excellence of belonging to their own genteel tradition. Thus it was a literature which borrowed the forms of its conduct from European models. The people who were most American by birth, and who had the most to do with managing America, gave themselves a literature ~~which~~ ^{that} had the least to say about the real phenomena of American life, most particularly the accelerated rate, the awful rate, of growth and anomaly through all of society. That sort of literature and that kind of attempt to explain America was left to the sons of immigrants who, if they were vigorous enough, and fortunate enough to be educated, now had the opportunity to see that America was a phenomenon never before described, indeed never before visible in the record of history. There was something going on in American life which was either grand or horrible or both, but it was going on—at a dizzy rate—and the future glory or doom of the world was not necessarily divorced from it. Dreiser labored like a titan to capture the phenomenon; he became a titan; Thomas Wolfe, his only peer as giant (as the novelist-as-giant), labored also like a titan, but for half as long and died in terror of the gargantuan proportions of the task. Yet each failed in one part of

the job. They were able to describe society—Wolfe like the greatest five-year-old who ever lived,* an invaluable achievement, and Dreiser like some heroic tragic entrepreneur who has reasoned out through his own fatigue and travail very much how everything works in the iron mills of life, but is damned because he cannot pass on the knowledge to his children. Dreiser and Wolfe were up from the people, and Dreiser particularly came closer to understanding the social machine than any American writer who ever lived, but he paid an unendurable price—he was forced to alienate himself from manner in order to learn the vast amount he learned. Manner insists one learn at a modest rate, that one ^{acquire new} learn each step with grace before going on to the next. Dreiser was in a huge hurry, he had to learn everything—that was the way he must have felt his mission, ^{So} there is nothing of manner in his work; which is to say, nothing of tactics.

If the upper-class quite naturally likes a literature ~~which~~ ^{that} is good for them, a literature at the surface perhaps trivial, but underneath amusing, elucidative, fortifying, it is because this kind of literature elaborates and clarifies the details of their life, and thus adjusts their sense of power, their upper-class sense of power, which is invariably lubricated by a sense of detail. So too does that other class of readers in American literature, that huge, loose, all but unassociated congregation of readers—immigrant, proletarian, entrepreneur—wish in turn for a literature which is equally good for them. That is where Dreiser had to fail. He was only half-good for such readers. He taught them strategy as Americans had never gotten it before in a novel. If they were adventurers, he was almost as useful to them as Stendhal was exceptionally useful to a century of French intellectuals who had come to Paris from the provinces. But not quite. Dreiser, finally, is not quite as useful, and the difference is crucial. Because a young adventurer reads a great novel in the unvoiced hope it is a grindstone which sharpens his axe sufficiently to smash down doors now locked to him. Dreiser merely located the doors and gave warnings about the secret padlocks and the traps. But he had no grindstone, no manner, no eye for the deadly important manners of the rich, he was obliged to call a rich girl “charming”; he could not make her charming when she spoke, as Fitzgerald could, and so he did not really prepare the army of his readers for what was ahead. His task was doubly difficult—it was required of him to

* This Argument was delivered, originally, as a talk to The American Studies Association and the M.L.A. This remark brought laughter from the audience. Since I did not wish to insult the memory of Wolfe, it would have been happier and perhaps more accurate to have said: like the greatest fifteen-year-old alive.

98 *Cannibals and Christians*

give every upstart fresh strategy and tactics. No less than the secret sociology of society is what is needed by the upstart and that strategy Dreiser gave him. But tactics—the manners of the drawing room, the deaths and lives of the drawing room, the cocktail party, the glorious tactics of the individual kill—that was all beyond him. Dreiser went blind climbing the mountains of society, so he could not help anyone to see what was directly before him—only what had happened and what was likely to come next.

That was the initial shape of the war, Naturalism versus the Genteel Tradition it has been called, and one might pose Henry James against Dreiser, but James is sufficiently great a writer to violate the generalizations one must make about the novel of manners which must always—precisely because it deals with manners—eschew the overambitious, plus extremes of plot—which James of course did not. So let us say the war was between Dreiser and Edith Wharton, Dreiser all strategy, no tactics; and Wharton all tactics. Marvelous tactics they were—a jewel of a writer and stingy as a parson—she needed no strategy. The upper-class writer had all strategy provided him by the logic of his class. Maybe that is why the war never came to decision, or even to conclusion. No upper-class writer went down into the pits to bring back the manner alive of the change going on down there, certainly not Edith Wharton, not James Branch Cabell, of course not, nor Hergesheimer nor even Cather or Glasgow, not Elinor Wylie, no, nor Carl Van Vechten, and no diamond in the rough was ever reshaped by the cutters of Newport. The gap in American letters continued. Upper-class writers like John Dos Passos made brave efforts to go down and get the stuff and never quite got it, mainly in Dos Passos's case because they lacked strategy for the depths—manners may be sufficient to delineate the rich but one needs a vision of society to comprehend the poor, and Dos Passos had only revulsion at injustice, which is ultimately a manner. Some upper-class writers like Fitzgerald turned delicately upon the suppositions of their class, lost all borrowed strategy and were rudderless, were forced therefore to become superb in tactics, but for this reason perhaps a kind of hysteria lived at the center of their work; lower-class writers like Farrell and Steinbeck described whole seas of the uncharted ocean but their characters did not push from one milieu into another, and so the results were more taxonomic than apocalyptic.

Since then the war has shifted. No writer succeeded in doing the single great work which would clarify a nation's vision of itself as Tolstoy had done perhaps with *War and Peace* or *Anna Karenina*, and *Stendhal* with *The Red*

and the Black, no one novel came along which was grand and daring and comprehensive and detailed, able to give sustenance to the adventurer and merriment to the rich, leave compassion in the icechambers of the upper class and energy as alms for the poor. (Not unless it was *Tropic of Cancer*.) Dreiser came as close as any, and never got close at all, for he could not capture the moment, and no country in history has lived perhaps so much for the moment as America. After his heroic failure, American literature was isolated—it was necessary to give courses in American literature to Americans, either because they would not otherwise read it, or because reading it, they could not understand it. It was not quite vital to them. It did not save their lives, make them more ambitious, more moral, more tormented, more audacious, more ready for love, more ready for war, for charity and for invention. No, it tended to puzzle them. The realistic literature had never caught up with the rate of change in American life, indeed it had fallen further and further behind, and the novel gave up any desire to be a creation equal to the phenomenon of the country itself; it settled for being a metaphor. Which is to say that each separate author made a separate peace. He would no longer try to capture America, he would merely try to give life to some microcosm in American life, some metaphor—in the sense that a drop of water is a metaphor of the seas, or a hair of the beast is for some a metaphor of the beast—and in that metaphor he might—if he were very lucky—have it all, rich and poor, strategy and tactics, insight and manner, detail, authority, the works. He would have it all for a particular few. It was just that he was no longer writing about the beast but, as in the case of Hemingway (if we are to take the best of this), about the paw of the beast, or in Faulkner about the dreams of the beast. What a paw and what dreams! Perhaps they are the two greatest writers America ever had, but they had given up on trying to do it all. Their vision was partial, determinedly so, they saw that as the first condition for trying to be great—that one must not try to save. Not souls, and not the nation. The desire for majesty was the bitch ^{that} ~~which~~ licked at the literary loins of Hemingway and Faulkner: the country could be damned. Let it take care of itself.

And of course the country did. Just that. It grew by itself. Like a weed and a monster and a beauty and a pig. And the task of explaining America was taken over by Luce magazines. Those few aristocratic novelistic sensibilities which had never seen the task of defining the country as one for them—it was finally most unamusing as a task—grew smaller and smaller and more and more superb. Edith Wharton reappeared as Truman

Capote, even more of a jewel, even stingier. Of writers up from the bottom there were numbers: Dreiser's nephews were as far apart as Saul Bellow and James Jones. But the difference between the two kinds of writers had shifted. It had begun to shift somewhere after the Second World War, and the shift had gone a distance. One could not speak at all now of aristocratic writers and novelists whose work was itself the protagonist to carry the writer and his readers through the locks of society; no, the work had long since retreated, the great ambition was gone, and then it was worse, even the metaphor was gone, the paw of the beast and the dreams of the beast, no, literature was down to the earnest novel and the perfect novel, to moral seriousness and Camp. Herzog and Candy had become the protagonists.

Frank Cowperwood once amassed an empire. Herzog, his bastard great-nephew, diddled in the ruins of an intellectual warehouse. Where once the realistic novel cut a swath across the face of society, now its reality was concentrated into moral seriousness. Where the original heroes of naturalism had been active, bold, self-centered, close to tragic, and up to their nostrils in their exertions to advance their own life and force the webs of society, so the hero of moral earnestness, the hero Herzog and the hero Levin in Malamud's *A New Life*, are men who represent the contrary—passive, timid, other-directed, pathetic, up to the nostrils in anguish: the world is stronger than they are; suicide calls.

Malamud's hero is more active than Herzog, he is also more likeable, but these positive qualities keep the case from being so pure. There is a mystery about the reception of Herzog. For beneath its richness of texture and its wealth of detail, the fact remains: never has a novel been so successful when its hero was so dim. Not one of the critics who adored the book would ever have permitted Herzog to remain an hour in his house. For Herzog was defeated, Herzog was an unoriginal man, Herzog was a fool—not an attractive God-anointed fool like Gimpel the Fool, his direct progenitor, but a sodden fool, over-educated and inept, unable to fight, able to love only when love presented itself as a gift. Herzog was intellectual but not bright, his ideas not original, his style as it appeared in his letters unendurable—it had exactly the leaden-footed sense of phrase which men laden with anxiety and near to going mad put into their communications. Herzog was hopeless. We learned nothing about society from him, not even anything about his life. And he is the only figure in the book. His wives, his mistress, his family, his children, his friends, even the man who cuckolds him are seen on the periphery of a dimming vision. Like

all men near to being mad, his attention is within, but the inner attention is without genius. Herzog is dull, he is unendurably dull—he is like all those bright pedagogical types who have a cavity at the center of their brain.

Yet the novel succeeds. There is its mystery. One reads it with compassion. With rare compassion. Bored by Herzog, still there is a secret burning of the heart. One's heart turns over and produces a sorrow. Hardly any books are left to do that.

Of course, Herzog is alive on sufferance. He is a beggar, an extraordinary beggar who fixes you with his eye, his breath, his clothing, his dank near-corrupt presence; he haunts. Something goes on in Herzog's eye. It says: I am debased, I am failed, I am near to rotten, and yet something just as good and loving resides in me as the tenderest part of your childhood. If the prophet Elijah sent me, it is not to make you feel guilt but to weep. Suddenly, Herzog inspires sorrow—touch of alchemy to the book—Herzog is at the center of the modern dilemma. If we do not feel compassion for him, a forceful compassion which sends blood to warm the limbs and the heart, then we are going to be forced to shoot him. Because if Herzog does not arouse your compassion there is no other choice—he is too intolerable a luxury to keep alive in his mediocrity unless he arouses your love. The literary world chose to love him. We were not ready to shoot Herzog. It all seemed too final if we did. Because then there would be nothing left but Camp, and Camp is the art of the cannibal, Camp is the art which evolved out of the bankruptcy of the novel of manners. It is the ~~partial thesis of these twenty minutes~~ ^{here} that the pure novel of manners had watered down from The House of Mirth to the maudlin middle reaches of The Rector of Justin; had in fact gone all the way down the pike from The Ambassadors to By Love Possessed. So, one does not speak of the novel of manners any longer—one is obliged to look at the documentary, In Cold Blood—or one is obliged to look at satire. The aristocratic impulse turned upon itself produced one classic—Terry Southern's The Magic Christian. Never had distaste for the habits of a mass mob reached such precision, never did wit falter in its natural assumption that the idiocies of the mass were attached breath and kiss to the hypocrisies, the weltering grandeurs, and the low stupidities of the rich, the American rich. The aristocratic impulse to define society by evocations of manner now survived only in the grace of any cannibal sufficiently aristocratic to sup upon his own family. The Magic Christian was a classic of Camp.

Note then: The two impulses in American letters had failed, the realistic impulse never delivered the novel which would ignite a nation's conscious-

102 Cannibals and Christians

ness of itself, and the aristocratic impulse clawed at the remaining fabric of a wealthy society it despised and no longer wished to sustain. Like a Tinguely machine which destroys itself, Camp amused by the very act of its destruction. ~~Since it was also sentimental, the artifacts were necrophiliae.~~

Literature then had failed. The work was done by the movies, by television. The consciousness of the masses and the culture of the land trudged through endless mud.

The American consciousness in the absence of a great tradition in the novel ended by being developed by the bootlicking pieties of small-town newspaper editors and small-town educators, by the worst of organized religion, a formless force filled with the terrors of all the Christians left to fill the spaces left by the initial bravery of the frontiersman, and these latterday Christians were simply not as brave. That was one component of the mud. The other was the sons of the immigrants. Many of them hated America, hated it for what it offered and did not provide, what it revealed of opportunity and what it excluded from real opportunity. The sons of these immigrants and the sons' sons took over the cities and began to run them, high up in the air and right down into the ground, they plucked and they plundered and there was not an American city which did not grow more hideous in the last fifty years. Then they spread out—they put suburbs like blight on the land—and piped mass communications into every home. They were cannibals selling Christianity to Christians, and because they despised the message and mocked at it in their own heart, they succeeded in selling something else, a virus perhaps, an electronic nihilism went through the mass media of America and entered the Christians and they were like to being cannibals, they were a tense and livid people, swallowing their own hate with the tranquilizers and the sex in the commercials, whereas all the early cannibals at the knobs of the mass-media made the mistake of passing on their bleak disease and were left now too gentle, too liberal, too programmatic, filled with plans for social welfare, and they looked and talked in Show Biz styles which possessed no style and were generally as unhealthy as Christians who lived in cellars and caves.

Yes, the cannibal sons of the immigrants had become Christians, and the formless form they had evolved for their mass-media, the hypocritical empty and tasteless taste of the television arts they beamed across the land encountered the formless form and the all but tasteless taste of the small-town tit-eating cannibal mind at its worst, and the collision produced

schizophrenia in the land. Half of America went insane with head colds and medicaments and asthmas and allergies, hospitals and famous surgeons with knives to cut into the plague, welfares and plans and committees and cooperations and boredom, boredom plague deep upon the land; and the other part of America went ape, and the motorcycles began to roar like lions across the land and all the beasts of all the buried history of America turned in their circuit and prepared to slink toward the market place, there to burn the mother's hair and bite the baby to the heart. One thought of America and one thought of aspirin, kitchen-commercials, and blood. One thought of Vietnam. And the important art in America became the art of the absurd.

~~There will be talk before this book is done of the nature of the art of the absurd, there will be perhaps even an attempt to explain it, but for now we have come to another explanation. For a good deal follows about the writing of contemporaries, there is criticism, some of it very critical.~~
~~But then,~~ good writing is not an act to excite tolerance because it is good, but anguish because it is not better. Who can swear there has not been something catastrophic to America in the failure of her novelists? Maybe we are the last liberators in the land, and if we continue to thrive on much less than our best, then the being of all of us may be deadened before we are done.

That is a statement which sups on the essence of extravagance, and yet it is the distance of the bridge to be built. It may be necessary that a communication of human experience, of the deepest and most unrecoverable human experience, must yet take place if we are to survive. ~~Such at least is the covert opinion beneath the criticism which now follows.~~

From The New York Review
of Books

1108

April 28, 1966

P 26

A Letter of Speculative Correction

PEARL OR JEW?

To the Editors:

In Richard G. Stern's picaresquely written "Report from the MLA," which included an account of the Cheever-Ellison-Mailer festivities (February 17) he also reported the following sentence about me—

In the carful of giggling professors, sloshing his drink, he [Mailer] called out "Nine" as the elevator hurtled from Ten, and when released at Seven, he fired genially

at the uniformed auntie from his fortress of licensed clownings: "You Jew," and rollicked like a sailor down the mirrored corridor, leaving behind a small carnage of titillated shock.

Note: James Yucenger giving an account of the same event in the *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, February 6, 1966—

As the 12th floor flashed by, Mailer suddenly said, "Stop — right here." It was on 10 already, and stopped at 7, and Mailer said: "O, boy: you're a real pearl."

A man I have never met happened to read these two somewhat separate versions, then told my friend, Robert

Lucid, that as between pearl and Jew, I must have said to the elevator operator, "Oh, boy, you're a jewel." In fact, it is also my conclusion. I think Stern is wrong. I think I said, "Sweet heart, you're a real jewel." But I had a bit to drink (not a slosh—Stern writes like a man who has never held a glass), yes, a bit to drink in celebration, having read my paper to the ASA of the MIA, so I cannot be certain finally what I said. The elevator operator was, I recollect, one Wasp Lady who could play tackle for the John Birch Society if and when they field a team, sallah! so I could indeed have said, "You pearl, you Jew," much as once I said, "You Communist," to a redneck Miami sheriff who was making us fight writers show our fight credentials in our hand as he passed us through. Which tradition encourages me to say now, "Stern, how could you, a Jew, do this to me, a fellow son of Samuel—you Ginzor, you Mafia, you Wop."

Norman Mailer

Brooklyn, New York

1110

after Stern

Epitaph for a man of parts

I do not think there was an occasion
in my life
which did not have
me
fatally
misquoted

The Dear Park - a play

(Second Act)

1967 - Opening night Jan 31, 1967

pr 136-189

THE DEER PARK - a play
(Second Act)

1111

pp 135-189

CHANGE THIRTY-FOUR

(Lights up on Teppis. Teddy Pope has just entered.)

TEDDY

Sorry to get here so late, Mr. Teppis, but I just found your message ten minutes ago, when I arrived at my hotel after a quiet evening with some friends.

TEPPIS

Quiet. I'm glad it was quiet. I know a young fellow like you with the world at his feet . . . there's a lot of times he don't want to get married. "Why should I get married?" he says to himself. "What's in it for me?" Teddy, I'll tell you, there's a lot in it for you. Just think. The whole world is in a straitjacket so it says, "You over there, you get in a straitjacket, too." Know why? The world hates a bachelor, he's not popular. The stories you hear, ninety-nine percent of the time unfounded, but I'd be ashamed, I couldn't look you in the eye to tell you the kind of stories

I have to listen to. I hear a story like that, I let them have it. "Don't tell me that kind of filth about Teddy," I say. "I don't want to hear it. If the boy don't want to get married, it got nothing to do with all those dirty stories you tell me. Period!" That's confidence. Teddy, should I put that confidence in you? Don't answer. I've had my confidence rewarded already. That picture of you and Lulu holding hands in Desert D'Or. It's one of the most beautiful, impressive, touching things I've ever seen. Lulu's wearing her heart on her sleeve. She's a fine American-type girl of real American stock. Such a woman is a gift of God.

TEDDY

Mr. Teppis—that's a publicity picture.

TEPPIS

Stop! You're a stubborn boy. I don't want to hear your ideas. Why do you act so cockeyed when you know you want a man like myself to set you straight?

TEDDY

(In a quiet voice)

You know very well I'm a homosexual.

TEPPIS

(Screams)

I didn't hear it. I didn't hear it.

TEDDY

That's the way I am . . .

(Mutters)

What is, is.

TEPPIS

Philosophy?

(Shouts)

If a man sits in shit, he don't know enough to get out of it?

TEDDY

Mr. Teppis, don't you have a big enough heart to understand my feelings?

TEPPIS

You're the most ungrateful boy I ever knew. What do you think, sex, it's the whole world?

TEDDY

Let me try to say . . .

TEPPIS

Lulu, that's what you got to say. You're a coward. You got a chip against society. You should love society, with all it's done for you. I love society. I respect it. Teddy, you're a sick boy, but you and me can lick this thing together.

→ P140

(Holds up his fist for our delectation as the BLACKOUT hits)

CHANGE THIRTY-THREE

(Back to the patio. Elena discovers herself not quite alone. Marion at one end, a strange and attractive couple at the other)

ELENA

You're Don Beda, aren't you?

BEDA

You know my name?

ELENA

Charley told me about you once.

ZENLIA

(In a beautiful English accent)

Oh yes? What did he say about my husband?

ELENA

(Half uncomfortably, half boldly)

He didn't say it, but I got the feeling you like animals as much as women.

CHANGE THIRTY

TEDDY

Mr. Teppis, I'd like to have children and a wife, but it's still a psychological impossibility.

TEPPIS

Teddy, don't make up your mind ahead of time that you personally aren't able to boff a beautiful sexy girl like Lulu. Do I have to be there to help you? I'm telling you, you can.

(Makes a move to signify the interview is over)

Now, Teddy, nobody is forcing you into anything. If you said yes this very minute, I would still say, "Teddy, sleep on it." Could anybody claim I was trying to push you into a single thing?

TEDDY

Who would dare?

TEPPIS

You're right. I don't force people. Never. I talk things over with them.

CHANGE TWENTY-NINE

(On the stairs which lead from the maison de joie to the patio)

TEDDY

What I would like is for something to happen where I could be true to myself.

CHANGE TWENTY-EIGHT

(Nobody gets away from Teppis this easily)

TEPPIS

Some day, Teddy, you're going to say, "God bless you, H.T."

(On the wake of Teddy's exit)

Fagela momser!

CHANGE TWENTY-SEVEN

(The patio.

Lulu and Eitel enter separately)

LULU

Charley, are you in the mood to listen? I have the feeling that you're the only one alive who can understand me, right now.

EITEL

Why me?

LULU

Because, Charles, you hurt me and I've always thought it's the people who can hurt you the most who understand you the best.

EITEL

Lulu, I just might know what you mean.

LULU

I'm in love again.

EITEL

Not with Tony Tanner?

LULU

I'm the only one who understands a certain side of Tony.

EITEL

Yes, you are in love.

LULU

I'm practically positive.

EITEL

You must want me to kill it for you.

LULU

You're drunk. The weird thing is I don't think Tony is in love with me.

(They are, however, talking in reality of other things.) of . . . of animal magnetism)

What are you thinking?

EITEL

I was just deciding it's impossible to remember what an ex-wife's body looks like.

LULU

Don't you remember?

EITEL

Certain visions are engraved.

LULU

Charles, I think you're very attractive tonight but I want to remain faithful to Tony.

(Elena enters. They do not see her just yet.)

EITEL

Balls.

LULU

You're mean.

CHANGE TWENTY-SIX

ELENA

I want to go home now . . . you don't have to come.

LULU

Why don't you stay, Charley? You have permission.

EITEL

Let's all have a drink.

LULU

Uh-uh.

EITEL

Goodnight, Lulu.

(Lulu exits)

CHANGE TWENTY-FIVE

ELENA

You're a coward . . . you wanted to go away with Lulu and I ruined it.

(In triumph)

I ruined it.

EITEL

You didn't ruin anything.

ELENA

(Her face is furious with the effort not to cry)

Why do you lie to me this way?

EITEL

It's absurd, Elena . . . what if I did feel a minute's something-or-other for Lulu? I didn't mean it. We're here . . . together, aren't we?

ELENA

I'll tell you something. That friend of yours, that disgusting man, Don Beda, asked me to go home with him and his wife. And he said things to me . . . he thinks I'm dirt. Well, maybe I am dirt. I wanted to go with him . . . So, if you want to have your fun, don't think I'm the one who's stopping you, because I can have my fun, too. Want to go to an orgy, Charley?

EITEL

My poor baby.

(It is not really as bad as it sounds. He is not disapproving of her suggestion because it offends his morals—rather it offends his sense of how far away they are from each other the moment they are not close together. Besides, he believes she must be in deep pain to say this.)

ELENA

(Shouts)

I hate you!

CHANGE TWENTY-FOUR

(Eitel approaches her)

ELENA

Go away.

EITEL

I want us to be married. I've ruined everything I've touched. But you must know that I care about you. I can't stand

the thought of hurting you . . . I know how much you want to be married, because you feel nobody cares about you. I want to show you that I do.

ELENA

You have no respect for me.

EITEL

But I have so much respect, can't you see?

ELENA

Don't you understand? You asked me in such a way I'd have to spit on myself to say yes. You want me to say no and set you free.

(He looks away—he is surprisingly close to the need to weep)

Cheer up, Charley, it's really not so bad—

(A sad little wisdom appears)

I can always find another man.

(Beda, Marion and Zenlia enter)

CHANGE TWENTY-THREE

(Beda comes out in search of Eitel and Elena. Seeing them, he begins to hum an operatic air. They separate slowly.)

BEDA

Charley, Zenlia and I are going over to Marion's place and, *sans façons*, we'd like you to come too.

ELENA

(Recovering her composure first—a little warily)

What are we all supposed to do?

BEDA

You're not signing a contract to do anything, my dear. Get into your car. We'll be waiting for you at the turn of the road.

ELENA

(Obliquely)

Don, is it true Zenlia used to be friends with that oily king?

BEDA

Not oily, my dear. He owns oil. Why, the king is charming.

(Beda, Marion and Zenlia exit—it is the most suggestive exit of the night)

CHANGE TWENTY-TWO

ELENA

I think we're out of our class.

EITEL

But you're willing to go . . .

ELENA

Well, we know where we stand, champ.

EITEL

I don't want to go.

ELENA

I do.

EITEL

You may have to go alone.

ELENA

You're afraid to go.

EITEL

Afraid! I took a wife away from Don Beda once.

ELENA

Bravo! Whatever did happen to her?

(Beda—all antennae out—the director need not take this literally—returns for Elena. She exits with Beda.)

CHANGE TWENTY-ONE

(Lulu passes Eitel on the patio. He seizes her and embraces her.)

LULU

You're out of control.

EITEL

I want you. I want to go away with you. I stayed at this party to go away with you.

LULU

You're starting to press, Charley, and it's dull. Do you really think I want your bulk back again on me when all I can think of is a stud, Charley, as young and marvelous as Tony. Sit down for awhile Daddy-O. Get your second wind.

(Exits.)

Dorothea enters)

DOROTHEA

You're too old, Charley, and much too sweet for all of this.

(Eitel exits in the direction Elena has taken)

CHANGE TWENTY

(Tony and Lulu enter)

LULU

What are they getting ready to do?

DOROTHEA

The orgy bit.

(Exits)

LULU

Would you like to?

TONY

Are you out of your snake skin? I don't put you up for nobody's grabs.

LULU

Oh well, I wouldn't go. I wouldn't dare. I think of things like raids.

TEPPIS

(From upstairs)

LooooooooLooooo!

(Lulu and Tony exit at a great rate)

CHANGE NINETEEN

(Sergius has witnessed the last of this)

SERGIUS

Do you know, there are times when I miss the Air Force. It has finally gotten through that hard head of mine that

Lulu has given me the brush. Call me Cannonball. Look, two weeks ago I told Lulu a little too much about me and I could see her take a chill. ~~She said, "It's hard enough to make a movie without you telling me stories like that."~~

(Lulu returns with Tony and runs into Sergius)

TEPPIS

(From upstairs)

LOOOOLOOO!

(Lulu attempts to leave but is held by)

LOOOOOLOOOOO!

(She goes upstairs)

CHANGE EIGHTEEN

TEPPIS

I love a girl like you. You bring sunshine into this room.

LULU

I love you too, Mr. T.

(Teppis guides her to the chair in which Teddy had been sitting, and from a drawer in a vanity table takes out a bottle of whiskey and drops some ice cubes into a glass)

I'm not drinking tonight.

TEPPIS

Nonsense. I know you, sweetie. I don't want you thinking you got to take a drink behind my back.

LULU

You're the only man who understands me, H.T.

TEPPIS

Nobody can understand you. Know why? You're a great woman. Fire, spirit, charm! Those are the sort of things you have. Take a drink. You've earned the right to do anything you want.

LULU

Except to disagree with you, H.T.

TEPPIS

I love you. You got impetuosity. Know my personal opinion of Lulu Meyers? Lulu Meyers is the greatest actress in this country, and this country's got the greatest actors in the whole world.

LULU

You're the greatest actor in the world, H.T.

TEPPIS

I take it as a compliment. But you're wrong, Lulu, I can't act. I'm too sincere. You know what eats my heart out? It's that I'm not the American public. If I was the American public, I'd make you Number One on the Bimmeler Ratings. Know what you are now?

LULU

Seventeen, isn't it, Mr. T.?

TEPPIS

Seventeen. Can you believe it? There are sixteen actors in this country the American public buys ahead of you. Last year you were six. Number Six.

LULU

Maybe I'm a has-been.

TEPPIS

Lulu, for a remark like that, I ought to take you up over my knee and spank you. Lulu, listen to me; the trouble is you're weak publicity-wise.

LULU

I've got the best press agent in the country.

nobody he is. I got somebody better. Don't say a word; sleep on it . . . Teddy Pope, what do you say?

LULU

H.T., I feel as if things can never be the same between us.

TEPPIS

Sit down, I'll tell you something. I got no desire to hide it from you. Teddy Pope is a homosexual. It makes you wonder. Could H.T. be the kind of man who gets down on his hands and knees to beg a beautiful girl like you to marry a faggola?

LULU

You couldn't. You're too respectable.

TEPPIS

Let's not get off the sidetrack. Answer me one question as honest as you can. Do you admit that to be married to Teddy Pope wouldn't that be the biggest benefit you could bestow on yourself publicity-wise? The Number One couple of America. Say I'm right.

LULU

I don't like Teddy.

TEPPIS

Teddy Pope is the man for you. He's delicate and sensitive. There's a lot for an actress to learn from him about the subtleties of human nature. Lulu, you're the woman who could straighten him out, and then he'd worship the ground you walk on.

LULU

I hate you, H.T.

TEPPIS

Hate me! You love me! That's why you hate to listen to me. Think of the respect people would have if you could make a man out of Teddy Pope.

LULU

H.T., I want to get married . . . I want to love just one

man and have a beautiful relationship and be a credit to the industry.

TEPPIS

That's the ticket, Lulu.

LULU

But if I marry Teddy, I'll become promiscuous.

TEPPIS

Lulu, you could never be promiscuous. You're too fine. Suppose at the very worst that when you're married to Teddy, there should be a fellow or two that you would like and admire and diddle around with. I don't advise it, but it happens, and you know what? The world don't stop moving.

LULU

Diddle around with. H.T., that's an immoral proposal . . . I'm ashamed of you.

TEPPIS

Ashamed of me? You said the wrong thing then. There are a lot of high executives in this studio who are fed up with you. Believe me, Lulu, as God is looking into this room, you've made enemies, hundreds of enemies.

LULU

I'm amazed you should stoop to intimidate me.

TEPPIS

Don't fool me . . . You're scared stiff! Lulu, be my witness, don't even answer me right away. Would you turn H.T. down on the only favor he ever asked of you?

LULU

Oh, Mr. Teppis, I love you.

TEPPIS

Would you marry Teddy Pope?

LULU

I want to marry Teddy Pope after the way you explained it, Mr. Teppis.

TEPPIS

I don't want to talk you into it.

LULU

I'd marry Teddy in a minute now . . . But I can't.

TEPPIS

Of course you can . . . Why not?

LULU

'Cause I married Tony Tanner this morning.

*(The lights go out. In the darkness
Teppis roars like a bull.)*

TEPPIS

God, how could *You* do this to *Me*?

LULU

(Still in the dark)

Mr. Teppis, would you like a glass of water?

TEPPIS

Drop dead. I wouldn't even look at your grave.

*(A trembling fit of lights. Full lights.
Munshin enters)*

MUNSHIN

When are the wedding bells?

*(Teppis cannot speak to Munshin.
He waves one maddened limb [his
finger] at Lulu)*

TEPPIS

Out of here. You're a common whoor.

LULU

Ohh.

(She runs)

MUNSHIN

Oy, Jesus.

TEPPIS
(After Lulu)

Come back here.

MUNSHIN

Come back here.

(Lulu is gone)

TEPPIS
(To Munshin)

Shut up.

MUNSHIN
(After a nonexistent Lulu)

Shut up.

(Night falls mercifully on the scene.
A quick Blackout)

CHANGE SEVENTEEN

SERGIUS

Did you know I was in a mental bin? Yeah. I came here, better believe it, because these people who manufacture images fascinated me. I mean, imagination can be more real than reality. I had the feeling I could find my brain right here.

CHANGE SIXTEEN

(Lights up again on Munshin and Teppis)

TEPPIS

That Teddy Pope. A degraded homosexual. I had him twisted into a pretzel.

MUNSHIN

You're right, H.T.

TEPPIS

I'm nauseous. A dime-a-dozen comedian, a coarse person like Tony Tanner. I hate coarse people. Isn't there any class left in the world?

MUNSHIN

You're the class, H.T.

TEPPIS

Shut up! I let you marry my only daughter. I made you my executive assistant. I know you, Collie, you'll cut my throat someday. Do you hear me? I know your tricks!

MUNSHIN

H.T., a genius like you will turn this catastrophe into something catatonic.

TEPPIS

My indigestion is upset.

MUNSHIN

I've learned everything from you, H.T. Teddy is through. You'll pick up the newspaper someday and Teddy will be on the front page for hanging roses in the men's room at the Y.

TEPPIS

You got a disgusting imagination.