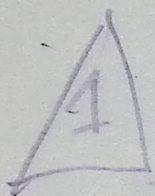


For Meche Lennon



JML's
original plan
for The Sparky
Art, corresponds
NM's holograph
1st draft of Preface

~~The Gospel~~ ~~According~~ ~~to the Son~~

E 501-508

501-508

Back of the book

January 25, 2002

Dear Norman,

I know that you might not be able to look over this stuff before I arrive but I send it in the hope that you may have an hour here and there. I will be in P-Town at your disposal on Thursday, the 31st of January. I'll get in about 10:30 on Wednesday. — P.M.

You will find the following: about 66 pages of excerpts from your interviews—about 220 excerpts—divided into five categories: CRAFT, GENRE, ECONOMICS, PHILOSOPHY and PSYCHOLOGY. These are **provisional** categories, so provisional that I have marked alternates to these categories next to each excerpt. This second set of categories are as follows: THE WRITER, THE WRITER'S WORK, THE WRITER'S WORLD, THE WRITER'S AUDIENCE, THE WRITER'S COLLEAGUES

You will also find three possible ways of organizing the material—three different orders for the book. The first is not particularly imaginative, but chronological. It separates the interview excerpts from the 21 essays. The other two are better, I think, but you will no doubt want to reorder them.

I have trimmed two of the essays: "10,000 Words," "A Course in Film-Making." Earlier, you edited down two of them: "Millett and D. H. Lawrence" and "Miller and Hemingway." The rest stand up well at full-length, even the three interviews that were not cut up and distributed into bins. These three—with Marcus, McElroy and Michael Schumacher—are largely or entirely devoted to writing.

What else: Following your suggestions, I dropped the review of Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*; added "Quick and Expensive Comments on the Talent in the Room," and the introduction to the 50th anniversary of *The Naked and the Dead*.

I am suggesting *The Mad Butler: Norman Mailer on Writing* as the title.

See you soon. Love to Norris.

Mike

THE MAD BUTLER: Norman Mailer on Writing
(DRAFT OUTLINE)

Edited by J. Michael Lennon

(Order of the Book, Version#1)

Part One: Advice and Comment (approximately 150 interview excerpts) distributed in Five Realms: Craft, Genre, Economics, Philosophy and Psychology; OR in the following categories: The Writer, The Writer's World, The Writer's Work, The Writer's Audience, The Writer's Colleagues 50 pp. (est.)

Part Two: Essays and Interviews

*= reprinted in TOOT; **= reprinted in soft-cover TOOT; # = never reprinted; + = out of print; *** = available in current edition

- + "Quick and Expensive Comments on the Talent in the Room" 1959 12 pp
- * "Ten Thousand Words a Minute" 1963 7 pp
- + "Some Children of the Goddess" 1963 27 pp
- + "The Case Against McCarthy: A Review of *The Group*" 1963 8 pp
- + "Norman Mailer: An Interview" Int. with Steven Marcus *Paris Review* 1964 23 pp
- + "The Argument Reinvigorated" (1965 MLA talk) 1966 9 pp
- + Preface to *The Short Fiction of Norman Mailer* 1967 5 pp
- + "Up the Family Tree: A Review of N. Podhoretz's *Making It*" 1968 27 pp
- + "A Course in Film-Making" 1971 12 pp
- * "Millett and D.H. Lawrence" (*The Prisoner of Sex*) 1971 15 pp
- # Preface to *A Fiction Writers' Handbook* 1975 5 pp
- # Preface to *Some Honorable Men: Political Conventions, 1960-72* 1976 6 pp
- + "Miller and Hemingway" 1976 8 pp
- # Preface to *A Transit to Narcissus* 1978 4 pp
- + "A Little on Novel-Writing" Int. with J. McElroy *Columbia Magazine* 1981 11 pp
- # "Modern Evenings: An Interview with N. Mailer" Int. with M. Schumacher *Writer's Digest* 1983 5 pp
- # "The Hazards and Sources of Writing" 1985 12 pp
- * "Huckleberry Finn at 100" 1984 6 pp

- ** "A Man Half Full: A Review of Tom Wolfe's *A Man in Full*" 1998 15 pp
- *** Intro. to 50th anniversary ed. of *The Naked and the Dead* 1998 2pp
- # "At the Point of My Pen" 1998 2 pp

Total estimated page count: 271 pp, plus preface (2 pp), plus introduction (6 pp) = 279 pp.

It is likely that some of the above pieces will be trimmed or eliminated, thus reducing the total page count to approximately 250.

Only five of the 21 pieces listed above are currently in print: four of these are found in either the first or the soft-cover edition of *The Time of Our Time*, (TOOT), which is a compilation of NM's sense of—to put it baldly—what happened in the world over the past 50 years. The fifth is the introduction to the 50th anniversary of *The Naked and the Dead*.

Conversely, this volume represents, to use a Jamesian phrase, "the story of the story," the "how," rather than the "what."

Excerpts from approximately 100 different interviews under several still-to-be determined rubrics comprise the full extent of Part I of the volume. The names, number, content and extent of these rubrics are still being developed. *Norman Mailer on Writing* is **not** the usual sort of writing handbook. First of all, it skips over the kind of basic tactical advice found in all such manuals: dialogue, description, scene and panorama, how to find an agent, margins and multiple submissions. Second, it includes several estimates of other writers chosen for the embedded counsel on good writing that they contain. The list runs from D.H. Lawrence to William Styron, Mark Twain to Norman Podhoretz, and includes many others: Mary McCarthy, J.D. Salinger, John Updike, James Baldwin, Joseph Heller, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Tom Wolfe, Kate Millett, Henry Miller, Jorge Borges and Ernest Hemingway, to give the most notable.

But the brunt of the book is Mailer's many insights garnered from his essays, prefaces, interviews and reviews—most of them uncollected, or from Mailer's out-of-print miscellanies--on what being a writer means, on the "sanction to write," insights from four decades of his writerly life. There is little of the elementary here; he jumps into the caldera of complex and

perilous issues that committed writers face, especially the psychological and epistemological pressures. Mailer studies himself as a literary phenomena under his own obligation to comment on how he has managed his career with its flops, successes, ruling ambitions and hard-won, professional conclusions. No major American writer of this century, it is safe to say, has reflected more or more thoughtfully on these matters than Norman Mailer.

Order of the Book (Version #2)

- Preface by Norman Mailer
- Introduction by J. Michael Lennon
- CRAFT excerpts
- Why I Write
- Preface to Fiction Writer's Handbook
- Introduction to A Transit to Narcissus
- Interview with Steven Marcus (Paris Review)
- PSYCHOLOGY excerpts
- Interview with Joseph McElroy (Columbia Magazine)
- GENRE excerpts
- 10,000 words a minute
- Introduction to The Short Fiction of Norman Mailer
- A Course in Film-Making (cut)
- Up the Family Tree
- Preface to Some Honorable Men
- ECONOMICS excerpts
- Interview with Michael Schumacher (Writer's Digest)
- The Hazards and Sources of Writing
- PHILOSOPHY excerpts
- The Argument Reinvigorated
- Colleagues:
- Quick and Expensive Comments on the Talent in the Room
- The Case Against McCarthy
- Some Children of the Goddess
- Millett and D.H. Lawrence
- Miller and Hemingway
- Huckleberry Finn—Alive at 100
- A Man Half Full
- Introduction to the 50th anniversary ed. of The Naked and the Dead

Order of the Book (Version #3)

- Preface by Norman Mailer
- Introduction by J. Michael Lennon
- THE WRITER excerpts
- At the Point of My Pen
- Preface to Fiction Writer's Handbook
- Interview with Steven Marcus (Paris Review)
- THE WRITER'S WORK excerpts
- Introduction to A Transit to Narcissus
- Introduction to The Short Fiction of Norman Mailer
- A Course in Film-Making
- Preface to Some Honorable Men
- Introduction to 50th anniversary ed. of The Naked and the Dead
- THE WRITER'S WORLD excerpts
- 10,000 Words a Minute
- The Argument Reinvigorated
- Interview with Joseph McElroy (Columbia Magazine)
- THE WRITER'S AUDIENCE excerpts
- Interview with Michael Schumacher (Writer's Digest)
- The Hazards and Sources of Writing
- Up the Family Tree
- THE WRITER'S COLLEAGUES excerpts
- Quick and Expensive comments on the Talent in the Room
- The Case against McCarthy
- Some Children of the Goddess
- Millett and D. H. Lawrence
- Miller and Hemingway
- Huckleberry Finn—Alive at 100
- A Man Half Full

March 4, 2002 New proposed outline for *The Story of the Story*

Dear Norm,

I have been pondering the shape of the book and, mindful of the rule of Occam's razor, I propose the following, somewhat streamlined organization. Note that I have added "The Last Draft of The Deer Park" and the section from *The Armies of the Night* you mentioned, the one about the tower, the telescope, point of view, the pons asinorium. I think the matter divides—roughly—into four parts. Overlap, I have concluded, cannot be avoided and is actually useful, valuable.

Preface by NM

Intro by JML

PART I Practical Matters: Style, Craft, Reviews, Editors and the Book Business

Why I Write (with pendant from p.8, Economics)

Craft and Economics Nuggets

Preface to A Fiction Writer's Handbook

Introduction to A Transit to Narcissus

Excerpt from *The Armies of the Night* on POV

Steven Marcus Interview

Charles Schumacher interview (perhaps truncated)

The Hazards and Sources of Writing (perhaps only half of it)

PART II Generic Matters: The Novel, Short Story, Journalism, History, Drama and Film

Genre Nuggets

10,000 Words a Minute

Preface to the Short Fiction of Norman Mailer

A Course in Film-Making (I reduced it again; may need new title)

Up the Family Tree

Preface to Some Honorable Men

PART III Philosophical and Psychological Matters: Risk, Reward, Reality, Stamina and the Unconscious

Philosophy and Psychology Nuggets

The Last Draft of the Deer Park

Opening of *Some Children of the Goddess* (the general comments)

The Argument Reinvigorated (MLA Talk)

The second half of *The Hazards and Sources of Writing*

McElroy Interview

Preface to the 50th Anniversary edition of *The Naked and the Dead*

PART IV Colleagues: Henry James, Henry Miller, Hemingway, Borges, Updike, Capote, Freud, Marx and Toni Morrison, among others

Colleagues Nuggets

Some Children of the Goddess (second half)

Review of Mary McCarthy's *The Group*

Millett and D.H. Lawrence

Miller and Hemingway

Huckleberry Finn at 100

A Man Half Full (with pendant nugget attached)

~~Handwritten~~
FAXED Psych ~~Excerpt~~ - psych.
3/2/02 File Psych first review

FAXED Phil. Lenny excerpt that
3/2/02 ✓ FAX Phil's first review 3-1

London Clark London 2-4
First review 2-22
✓ FAX → Second review was sent back
5-1

ML excerpt

Genre 2/27

✓ FAX → Genre First review 3/1

Craft - First review 2/27 VA

✓ FAX Craft - second review 3/1

Economics 2/25

✓ FAX Economics First review 3/1.

mm
mm
mm
mm

Please Accept the Invitation
of

Connie and Dominic Borde
Berna and Lee Huebner
and

Gil Donaldson

To attend a reception honoring the cast of
"Zelda, Scott and Ernest"
(a dramatic reading created by Tom Quinn and George Plimpton)

Norman Mailer
Norris Church Mailer
George Plimpton

To benefit the James Jones Literary Society
A non-profit organization

Reception following the reading at the home of
Connie and Dominic Borde
240 Bis Boulevard Saint Germain
Paris 75007
Sunday, June 23, 2002
10:30 p.m.

\$100 per person

For information, call _____

*Judith - to call
George Plimpton.*

9 years - long to me

For Random House John Carberry

In the course of forty years of doing interviews, Norman Mailer had returned over
and over to ^{pondering and} ~~talking~~ about such problems in ^{the} ~~novel~~ writing as plot, character, styles ³ third

person, first person, the psychology of the novelist, the philosophical implications of the

novel, the search for good habits of work, the changes ^{seen} over fifty years in publishing,

^{open} assessments of fellow novelists, alive and dead, the demands on one's stamina in doing a

novel, and its relation ^{the of stamina} to style, the differences between being a novelist and a movie

director, between fiction and non-fiction, fiction and journalism, the life of action and

the life of meditation as it concerns ^{one's work} ~~a writer~~, writing about women, the pitfalls of early

success, the book buyer, coping with disastrous reviews, the sense of one's audience,

memoir versus autobiography, the competitive spirit of the novelist and ^{envy} ~~of~~ identity and

identity crisis, the occult in relation to the novelist, renewing the desire to write, when to

enter a character's mind, and when and when not to make characters out of real people.

^{these many} ~~There may~~ (thoughts and subjects all ^{revolve} ~~revolving~~ around the act of writing fiction,

^{and} ~~are~~ taken from ^{several} ~~at~~ sources. Excerpts from interviews were reworked and rewritten until

they obtained a clarity of meaning that was not always present in the more casual back

and forth of ^{the} ~~an~~ interview, and to exemplify the thoughts, new material and insights ^{were}

1 with the type and return
page 1 A + B

collected. ^{illustrative material from criticism} The author also reprinted some of the prefaces and pieces of ~~criticism~~ ^{these subjects,} he has written over the years that bear directly on ~~his subject~~. The result is a volume that will

appeal to ~~all~~ serious writers and people who wish to write, to students, to critics, to men

and women who love to read and so will be ready to ^{enjoy this book,} ~~for~~ for Mailer is ~~behind the~~

~~scenes~~ at his most candid in these observations and evaluations. Most of all perhaps, this

is a book for growing novelists who wish to improve their skills and their commitment to

the difficulties and mysteries of serious novel writing itself. Among the ^{authors} ~~authors~~

discussed seriously or in passing are, among others, Hemingway, Faulkner, Capote,

Vidal, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Updike, Cheever, Roth, Doctorow, Bellow, Heller, James

Jones, Styron, Cheever, Tom Wolfe, James T. Farrell, ^{and a host of} ~~others.~~ ^(More names to come if desired.)

In the course of forty years of doing
Over the last forty years
interviews, Norman Mailer has returned
back and forth to talking
about such problems in novel
writing as ~~the~~ plot, character, ^{style}, third
person, first person, the psychology
of the novelist, the philosophical
implications ~~in the~~ ^{of} the novel,
the search for ^{good} ~~the~~ ^{habits} of work, ~~the~~ ^{changes} ~~development~~ ^{over fifty years},
~~the changes in publishing~~, ~~the~~ ^{the}
assessments of fellow novelists,
~~and the~~ ^{and the} ~~demands~~ ^{demands} ~~on~~ ^{on} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~novelist~~ ^{novelist} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~doing~~ ^{doing}
~~a novel~~ ^{a novel}, ~~and its relation to style~~ ^{and its relation to style}, ~~and the~~ ^{and the} ~~importance~~ ^{importance}
~~of writing~~ ^{of writing}, the differences between
being a novelist and a novel
director, the differences between
fiction and non-fiction, fiction
and history, fiction and journalism,
the life of action and the life of
meditation as it concerns a writer,
writing about women, reacting to reviews,
the pitfalls of early success, the book buyer,
coping with disastrous reviews, the search
of one's audience, memoir versus autobiography,
the competitive spirit of the novelist and ~~novelist~~ ^{novelist},
a ~~struggle to dig into and reveal~~ ^{struggle to dig into and reveal} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~novelist's~~ ^{novelist's} ~~life~~ ^{life},
~~identity and identity crisis~~ ^{identity and identity crisis}, the occult
~~and the~~ ^{and the} ~~novelist's~~ ^{novelist's} ~~relation to the~~ ^{relation to the} ~~novelist's~~ ^{novelist's} ~~desire to write~~ ^{desire to write}, when to write
a character, mind, and when and when not to.

make characters
out of real people.

Of course, all of this leads to my reason for mailing you. While meeting with various faculty members recently regarding upcoming department events, I suggested the possibility of inviting you to be Eta Upsilon's honored initiate this year (an honor which has been bestowed upon Edward Albee and Prof. Christopher Ricks ((who will be returning to Suffolk this spring to deliver a lecture on *The Executioner's Song*)) by our chapter, and upon Saul Bellow and James Dickey by other chapters). The faculty advisor, Dr. Marlene McKinley, and the department chairman, Dr. Anthony Merzlak, were both greatly enthused by the idea and offered their full support.

At present, if you accept this offer, we are prepared to cover your full travel expenses to and from the ceremony (to be held on the 9th of April at 1:00pm on our campus) and offer you a small honorarium. All of this, of course, can be negotiated within reason. And if this date isn't possible for you, consider the offer open for next April.

If you are unable to accept this offer, I would fully understand. I'm aware that you're quite busy. No matter your decision, my respect for both you and your work remains firmly and forever intact. As you can see, you've had a great influence upon me and bestowing any kind of honor or award upon you would be an honor to me. If you could possibly attend our ceremony this April, please contact me (either by phone, through my home address on the Cape, or care of Dr. Thomas F. Connolly through the English Department. at Suffolk University.) Regardless of your decision, I offer my warmest regards and sincere thanks for over a decade of influence. I hope to play some role in maintaining and furthering your literary legacy.

I hope this letter finds you in good health and even better spirits.

I thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

James R. Fleming

35 Old Castle Rd.
Yarmouthport, MA 02675
508-360-5658
JamesRFleming@Hotmail.com

Christabel, Byron's *Don Juan*, and Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* (and, of course, *Harlot's Ghost*) as among the greatest unfinished pieces of world literature. I find it to be a bold, poetic, complex, and elusive creation, a novel that seems, nearly, to go beyond actually being a novel. Your essays and journalism pieces have also had a profound influence on my own writing. In the early years of my writing life, "The White Negro" and "Superman Comes To The Supermarket" were among my favorite of your works, compositions which I still turn back to, not only to further consider and explore your ideas and political, cultural, and social insights (many of which I find to be pertinent to this very day. In fact, during a recent philosophy seminar entitled "philosophy of life," both the instructor and I referred to some of your notions from *The Prisoner Of Sex* on more than one occasion) but also for your style and distinct literary voice, a voice which in my early years of literary composition I found myself imitating. Though I have certainly developed my own unique style by now, I still find myself deeply indebted to yours, noticing echoes of you throughout my own works.

Currently, I'm planning on pursuing graduate study in literature. I'll be applying to several major research universities (Harvard, Columbia, NYU, UChicago, USC, UVirginia) next year with hopes of focusing my M.A. thesis, and perhaps even my doctoral dissertation, on some aspects of your work. I've already outlined a Jungian examination of your various writings on Marilyn Monroe and Muhammad Ali, a project which might very well become a topic for my MA thesis.

Interestingly, you and I have a few connections to each other. My father, Rick Fleming, owns and operates Anchor Auto Body in Hyannis. A few years ago he repaired your automobile and had the pleasure of spending a couple of hours with you and your wife at your home in Provincetown, an occasion which he still speaks warmly of. Also, the head of our creative writing department at Suffolk, Dr. Fred Marchant, tutored your son Michael at Harvard and tells me that you and he have corresponded with him in the past.

I also had the pleasure of attending your interview at the *New Yorker* Festival last summer and your performance in *Zelda*, *Scott*, and *Ernest* in Provincetown last fall, both of which I enjoyed tremendously.

(1985) The Beard
by Michael McClure
cut FOREWORD

Michael McClure's *The Beard* is a mysterious piece of work, for while its surface seems simple, repetitive and obscene, there is an action working which is dramatic and comic at once, and the play emits an odd but intense field of attention, almost like a magnetic field, almost as if ghosts from two periods of the American past were speaking across decades to each other, and yet at the same time are present in our living room undressing themselves or speaking to us of the nature of seduction, the nature of attraction, and particularly, the nature of perverse temper between a man and a woman. Obstinacy face to face with the sly feint and parry all in one, the repetition serves almost as subway stops on that electric trip a man and a woman make if they move from the mind to the flesh. That mysterious trip, whose mystery often resides in the dilemma of whether the action is extraordinarily serious or meaningless. It is with these ambiguities, these effervescences, that *The Beard* plays, masterfully, be it said, like a juggler.

—Norman Mailer

?

jmlennon1

From: jmlennon1 <jmlennon1@mediaone.net>
To: Norris <nmncm@attbi.com>
Sent: Sunday, March 03, 2002 3:43 PM
Subject: for NM

Dear Norman,

Here are the names you left off the list for the Random House sales conference:

Henry Adams, Jorge Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Graham Greene, Herman Melville, Marcel Proust, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Kurt Vonnegut, Dwight Macdonald, E. L. Doctorow, Nelson Algren, Toni Morrison, Thomas Wolfe, Jean Malaquais, Don DiLillo, Henry Miller, John Steinbeck, Christopher Isherwood, Mary McCarthy, J. D. Salinger, William Kennedy, Kate Millet (in the Lawrence piece), Ralph Ellison, Freud and Marx, and, most important, John Dos Passos. There was one on Iris Murdoch, no? Or was it cut? Comment on G. Greer can be found, I think. Need a few women...

Another thought: Recommend that you make note of the fact that the essays, reviews, and nuggets collected in this volume are, with a few exceptions, not collected in TOOT. Indeed, TOOT's emphasis is on the great events of the past 50 years, the ruling ideas and disasters, with a good deal of political and geopolitical comment, the WHAT. This collection focuses on the HOW of writing: craft, genre, point of view, many a practical consideration, as well as a bundle of philosophical reflections. The two collections are bookends, the twin foci, the double yolk of NM's long, diverse and distinguished career. I would think this point is exactly what the sales reps. need when peddling the new book, i.e., emphasize that most of the material is either uncollected or long out of print. The big exceptions are Huck Finn, the Lawrence piece and the Tom Wolfe interview, or about 10% of the collection. Ninety percent of the book cannot be obtained without grubbing through old magazines and out-of-print book catalogues.

I know you will say something like this in your preface, but thought you might want to advise the sales force of it.

I'll begin the grid right away.

Emailed Barry and will talk to him on phone: I will build a fence around his tendency and then enclose it with another. Three, if need be.

Can we take you and Norris out to dinner tomorrow night? Donna leaves Tuesday.

Mike

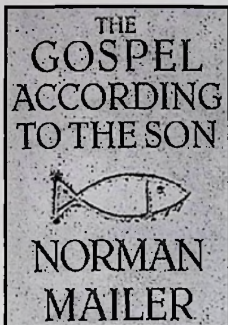
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< <http://www.randomhouse.com/atrandom/norman-mailer/gospel.html> > | at random magazine

Mailer goes to the mountain

The boldest risk-taker in American letters takes on the greatest story ever told



May 1997 publication

Other interviews with Norman Mailer:

[Oswald's Tale](#)

[The Time of Our Time](#)

An interview by Sean Abbott

05|98 (first published 03/97)

What a lousy century it's been for the Lord. A complete insult. Now that it's almost over, we may wonder whom God resents more - the psychopaths, or the intellectuals? Clearly, the age was off to a bad start even before Hitler and Stalin showed up - in 1900 Henry Adams was meditating upon the dynamo "as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross.... One began to pray to it." The slightest shift in sensibility from Adams's *Education* brings us to Dalton Trumbo and *Johnny Got His Gun* (novel, 1939; film, 1971), and to Donald Sutherland's creepy Christ of card tricks and water-into-whiskey. This Jesus tires of trying to comfort the faceless head and torso that had been a soldier of the Great War: "Perhaps it would be better for you to go away now. You're a very unlucky young man and sometimes it rubs off."

Yes, a stone's throw from Adams to Dalton and Donald, and a vast remove from the boosterish exultations of the Council of Nicaea, who in A.D. 325 voted Jesus "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, Not Made, Being of One Substance with the Father By Whom all things were made."

Now comes Norman Mailer with *The Gospel According to the Son* (Random House, May 1997). And what is he up to? The novel begins: "In those days, I was the one who came down from Nazareth to be baptized by John in the River Jordan." Mailer decided that writing in the first person was the best way to tell the story clearly, "despite the hazards." And so, Jesus is not loath to express his reservations concerning his fellow gospel writers: "While I would not say that Mark's gospel is false, it has much exaggeration. And I would offer less for Matthew, and for Luke and John, who gave me words I never uttered and described me as gentle when I was pale with rage."

The Gospel According to the Son is Mailer's second foray into the distant past. *Ancient Evenings*, his sublime 1983 novel (and a Secret Sharer with this book), begins with its dead narrator awakening inside a tomb. The location of Mailer's Jesus in space and time has to be taken on faith: "For those who would ask how my words have come to this page, I would tell them to look upon it as a small miracle." Miracle or not, the author of such a book must be prepared to answer a few questions.

Mailer gave this interview a few days before Christmas 1996, scheduling it between a shopping expedition ("unsuccessful") and a dinner party. He arrives overheated on this balmy day, throws off the jacket and vest of his well-cut, pin-striped suit (an especially cunning disguise: Mailer of Chase Manhattan), loosens his tie, rolls up his sleeves, selects a hard chair at the end of a long table, and settles in for a good talk.

At Random: Where did this book come from?

Norman Mailer: I've been trying to answer that question for myself. I like to work from instinct, so I'm not inclined to chart what I'm going to do before I begin. By now, this method works most of the time for me, because the instinct's gotten fairly experienced. I think it's been close to thirty years since I started a book and didn't finish it. I expect it's almost animal-like - the way an animal knows it's time to come out of hibernation, so it digs its way up to the surface whether or not it has a clear take on what the weather might be.

At Random: You've mentioned that there are personal matters behind *The Gospel According to the Son*. What are they?

Norman Mailer: I would say this book was written to fill an empty space in my mind. What's almost never discussed, because it's too touchy a subject, is how it feels to be Jewish growing up in a benign Christian country. Certainly in this respect America is now relatively benign. Jews do not face intense problems of anti-Semitism here today. My mother did. She grew up in a small town in New Jersey, and the kids used to call her sheeny or Christ-killer. She kept hearing these epithets on the way to school. Or so she remembered it. She hated the Irish for years because they used to do that to her. Later, when I had a great many Irish friends, because I always felt some kind of instinctive link with them, she never could comprehend it. How could her

son like the Irish? [Laughs]

In any event, things have changed drastically since my mother was a girl. During my childhood, anti-Semitism was obvious to us, but it was across the ocean, there with Hitler. So one grew up with this intense notion of what it was to be a Jew: It meant you were at the mercy of forces much larger than the deterioration of your own body. But the Holocaust also gave a profound shock to the majority of Christians in America and aroused a detestation of anti-Semitism that was far more intense than the American anti-Semitism that existed at the time. So any anti-Semitism I encountered was essentially benign. Still, you feel subtly excluded. Christmas is not for you, and you don't know anything about Jesus Christ. You haven't grown up with him. When I was a kid, it was almost as if Christ was the enemy, the renegade Jew, the one who brought all the trouble down on the Jews. At least that was the mentality of the immigrant first-generation and second-generation Jews I grew up with. And then, of course, later in life one became sophisticated about it; Christ was certainly not the enemy, but he was still very much a stranger.

At Random: In what sense? You were living among Christians? Reading the Bible?

Norman Mailer: Yes, once in a while I'd take a look at the New Testament, and I couldn't make head or tail of it. I used to wonder why Christians felt so intensely about it, because it simply didn't do a great deal for me. When you read a book, it either changes you a little or it doesn't. I didn't have any kind of reaction to it. I just felt a void. I live in a country, I love the country, I hate it. I'm dealing with America all the time in my writing - I write about Christians; I try to write about them well. I even understand them, in the technical sense, well enough to write about them. But always, at the core, I feel I'm a stranger in this country, and I'm certainly a stranger to Christianity.

It wasn't as if I said to myself, "Now I have to fill that void," since things don't work that way. But about three years ago Pope John Paul II published a set of interviews in depth, and I read the book out of curiosity. I'd been interested in the pope for quite a while, because he had written an encyclical about eight or nine years ago that was so good I wanted pen to make him an honorary member, which got the pen members feeling ... I've never seen them so agitated [laughs]. But

in fact it was a remarkable encyclical. It's disappeared, just about; nobody ever refers to it anymore. The Cold War was still on, so maybe this was ten years ago. He said that there were two superpowers, America and Russia, and one represented the forces of greed and the other the forces of oppression, and then there was the Third World, which was terribly underprivileged because of these two superpowers. He added that there was a *fourth world*, which included all the underprivileged who lived among the two superpowers, particularly in America with our homeless. He made a point of that. I thought it was a remarkable document. He said he'd looked through the various possibilities and ended up with a feeling that if it came to it, the Vatican would have to sell its treasures. As I read this book, it became obvious that of the four gospels, John meant the most to him. He kept referring to it. So I picked up the Gospel of John and again I didn't feel close. But I was curious now.

Concurrently with this, there was another force working, which was that my wife, Norris, with whom I've been together now for twenty-two years, comes from a small town in Arkansas, and she was brought up an observant Baptist. Her parents are intensely religious. They go to church every Sunday and a couple of times in the middle of the week. Her father's a deacon in a Free-Will Baptist church, and when we go to visit them, if I'm there on a Sunday, he invites me to Sunday School, to Bible class.

At Random: A children's Sunday School?

Norman Mailer: It's an adult Sunday School class, separate from the sermon and separate from the children. I remember, the first time I went, how amazed they were to see me. They were welcoming a most extraordinary creature - a Jew!

At Random: For the first time?

Norman Mailer: To my knowledge, no other Jew had ever come to that Sunday School class. It's a small town in Arkansas. I don't know if there's a single Jew living in Atkins. My wife says I was the first one she ever met.

At Random: Did they know who you are in the scheme of things?

Norman Mailer: Sort of. They know that I'm some

well-known writer from New York. "He writes a lot of books, we hear," stuff like that. "And he's Jewish." They hear that [interviewer laughs]. It was very interesting to them that one of their local girls had married a Jew. They were so excited that I was visiting their Sunday School class, because they'd been reading about Jesus the Jew for thirty, forty, fifty years. They'd been living with it. And they'd never seen a Jew. And now there was one among them. So they approached me with the most curious kind of respect. They asked me to read certain passages, because they had a lot of difficulty with some of the lines. They found them mysterious. They assumed that because I was Jewish, I'd have a better idea. It left me with the thought that devout Christians might also feel a little out of it. So that was the other source of this book. I decided to take a look at the New Testament after reading John Paul's book, and did, and found it curious in the extreme. I thought, This may well be, as Fulton Oursler once said - ever hear of him? He wrote a book called *The Greatest Story Ever Told*; very popular thirty, forty years ago. And I thought, this is the greatest story ever told, and it was written by a committee.

At Random: All four gospels?

Norman Mailer: With the possible exception of John - that could have been written by one man. But with Mark, Matthew, and Luke - the Synoptic Gospels - you can just see each committee arguing over what should go into the text. Each member wanted to get his specific tenets into it, even if they contradicted the other tenets. The gospels do contain incredible sentences that good Christians live with, sentences that stir the heart, but whenever you don't have a wonderful sentence, what you get is some pretty dull prose and a contradictory, almost hopeless way of telling the story. So I thought this account, this wonderful narrative, ought to be properly told.

Most readers don't live with the entire story. People are either so pious that they can't enjoy it as a narrative - rather, they live with specific passages - or they're angry angry at it because they feel the New Testament is part of the oppression of society. If they're coming from the left, they have a tendency to satirize it. Not too many people ever approach the New Testament and say, "Look, this is the myth that has been at the center of Western civilization for two thousand years, and myths ought to be told well." So I thought: If I can write about Isis and Osiris and Ra, then certainly the New

Testament is not going to be that difficult to do. And in a sense it wasn't. In contrast to the complexity of the ancient Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris, this is simpler and more beautiful. And far more cohesive. It was perfectly conceivable to me that one could have a character in a novel who's the Son of God. Novelists are supposed to look into the eye of the tiger.

At Random: Let's not miss something important here. You've taken an extraordinary leap to go from realizing that the story needs to be told better to deciding that the teller ought to be Christ himself.

Norman Mailer: There again was my instinct: If I'm going to tell the story freshly, then I've got to avoid the third person.

Otherwise, I would have an ersatz gospel. I would go so far as to say that, paradoxically, the presence of the author, Norman Mailer, would be intrusive in the third person. In the first person, there might be a vibrancy to it. Jesus could come alive as a character. I also felt - there's the real dare. What's the use of being a writer as old as I am if you can't still take a dare? And I thought this one was fine because I have a slight understanding of what it's like to be half a man and half something else, something larger. Believe it if you will, but I mean this modestly. Every man has a different kind of life, and mine had a peculiar turn. It changed completely at twenty-five when *The Naked and the Dead* came out. Obviously, a celebrity is a long, long, long, long way from the celestial, but nonetheless it does mean that you have two personalities you live with all the time. One is your simple self, so to speak, which is to some degree still like other people's, and then there's the opposite one, the media entity, which gives you power that you usually don't know how to use well. So the parallel was stronger than I realized. At any rate, I thought it would be agreeable to plunge in.

At Random: Did you get any resistance to the project at home?

Norman Mailer: My wife, with her background, was appalled. Actually, this was a great help to the book because I began to understand that if I was handling dynamite, then let me learn how to handle it. In the beginning I had this idea that I wanted to write the book in the language of the gospels, and Norris said "Why?" I said, "Because I want your father to be able to read this book." She said, "He will never be able to read this

book! You don't know what you're doing!" [laughs] And about that time, Jason Epstein [Mailer's Random House editor] came in and said, "I hate this style; it's wrong for this." And I thought about it and thought about it and concluded that maybe they were right - to a degree, at any rate. So I simplified the style to make it less like the gospels' - just reminiscent of them, rather than in their syntax. Sentences like "So did I now think that the time was upon me" began to come out. I must have edited the book six or seven times before the style felt right to me.

At Random: I was surprised by this Jesus, by the violence and lust evident within him, by the savagery. Where did it come from?

Norman Mailer: I don't see him as full of violence and lust - certainly not next to other men of his time. He does have strong feelings, but most of the savagery in his language comes when he quotes the Old Testament to himself. You may be certain I reread the Old Testament a few times in the course of writing this, and the violence there is immense; the punishments that people undergo are incredible. Don't forget these books were written by men, and their understanding of God was that anyone who could be that powerful had to be brutal. Obviously, Jehovah is the mirror of a savage time. So how could you not have Jesus experiencing some turbulent and extreme moments? I thought the idea of Jesus as our sweet, gentle fellow just doesn't accomplish anything. And then, when you add in the New Testament, you have the contradictions. He's gentle one moment, angry in another. He's for the poor; he complains about the poor. He speaks of taking care of one's mother, then tells people to forsake their families. All right, why? Because he's a man. He may be the Son of God, but he's very much a man.

At Random: He has "onslaughts of unclean feeling, much at odds with [his] beliefs," when he thinks of the "lewd acts" of the Emperor and Empress in Rome.

Norman Mailer: What I wanted to do with the book ... really I had one thought above all, which was that I have spent my life writing about characters who have a mixed nature - somewhat good, somewhat bad. I was always struck with the way Dostoyevsky wanted to write about the life of a saint and died before he could do it. Now, it isn't that I see myself wearing the mantle of Dostoyevsky, but it occurred to me that there's probably nothing more difficult than to write about a

good man. And whatever else Jesus was, he was that. Yes, he would lose his temper; yes, once in a while he would have thoughts that were all but lascivious - at least in my version. But whatever he was, he was a good man. I became very fond of him. As I was writing the book, I thought, Finally, with the great aid of an awful lot of writing I've done before this, I'm getting some sense of what a good man is, and it doesn't mean that he is good all the time - it means that he is trying to be a lot better than he ought to be. Given his early life, what was he expected to become but another devout, pious, somewhat stricken Essene? That may seem like an odd remark, but a novelist usually ends up reacting to his characters as if they were real.

At Random: Did you have any difficulty with some of the elements of the story? I notice that Jesus prefers metaphor to miracle in certain instances. Of the miracle of the loaves and fishes, he says: "And I took those five loaves and divided them exceedingly small. Yet when each person had tasted these fragments, so do I believe that each morsel became enlarged within his thoughts. And this was a triumph of the Spirit rather than an enlargement of matter."

Norman Mailer: My instinct was that this miracle couldn't be written about in any really interesting way if you started to have loaves of bread pouring forth out of a hole in the earth or coming down from the sky. It satisfied the miracles equally well to take a smaller approach.

At Random: I'm interested because metaphor, the stripping out of the supernatural, actually places us closer to a historical Jesus. There's been a great flood of books recently on this real man. The revisionist Jesus Seminar has been in the news, as has "Q," the theoretical ur-text out of which the Synoptic Gospels are said to have grown (or to have been buried under). Did you look to any of this material while writing the novel?

Norman Mailer: I'd read two of Elaine Pagels's books, *The Gnostic Gospels* and *The Origin of Satan*, and I found them very interesting and to a good degree useful, but I knew I didn't want to get into trying to search out the real story. In fact, after I'd gone through the first couple of drafts, I thought, Well, I really have to do a lot of reading now, so I did and read some most interesting books. I read John Meyer, Pagels, John Dominic Crossan. But at a certain point I decided that I

wasn't trying to write a definitive work about the period. I wanted to do what I started to do - that is, bring this myth to life using the means of a good novelist. And that made me start thinking about my profession. Because it seemed to me that I work in a valuable and honorable profession that is, most unhappily, on the way out - as much on the way out, I fear, as coachmen on Central Park South. In a hundred years novelists may bear the same relation to world culture that those coachmen do now, the ones who sit outside the Plaza and occasionally drive a couple around in a carriage behind one old horse. That's the gloomy scenario I see for novelists - a future when best-selling novels will be written by computers. We're halfway there already. Yet there is something that good novelists can do. They are able to approach certain aspects of reality in a way that no one else can. And that's what we're supposed to do. It just seemed to me that we can have a kind of understanding if we're pure novelists - by pure novelists I mean that we spend our lives working at being novelists: Saul Bellow, John Updike, Joyce Carol Oates, Kurt Vonnegut, Bill Styron come first to mind, but I could name ten more. You spend your life being a novelist, and you end up having an understanding of existence that's quite the equal of a psychoanalyst's or a physicist's or a rocket engineer's or a brilliant economist's. It is just that we see the world in a different way. We try to view it in whole, try to puzzle out the way everything fits together or doesn't. So I thought, Yes, it doesn't have to be me, but I'm one of the fifty or one hundred novelists in the world who could rewrite the New Testament. And I'm going to do it.

At Random: Recalling what you said earlier about reading for the Baptists, who were turning to a Jew for some new insight - does being a Jew offer any insight?

Norman Mailer: Being Jewish is an inestimable advantage, because I tend to believe there is virtually a Jewish psychology, a Jewish way of looking at things. I found Christ very Jewish. So I proceeded to write about him as profoundly Jewish, even though he was a rebel. Probably one third of all Jews are powerful rebels. So there was that. There was also the sense, always, that you never get something for nothing. That conviction is at the very center of Jewish belief, as opposed to Christian belief, where God takes mercy on you, gives you grace, and you're lifted and you're saved. The Jews tend to believe that you never get it without paying something in return. So it is delightful to contemplate

these miracles once you recognize that you can use yourself up by performing too many of them in a day - indeed, the angels whisper to Jesus at a certain point and say in effect, "Don't overdo it."

At Random: We're still dealing with limitations here, a major theological problem. Why did God send a Son who is also a man? Why go to all that trouble to send down an imperfect creature? Unless it's precisely imperfection that's wanted, in which case you can go to the opposite extreme. I'm reminded of Borges's notion that Jesus wasn't the Son of God - Judas was. Because Judas, in betraying Jesus and earning damnation, made the ultimate sacrifice. Jesus gave his life, but Judas gave his soul. A thrilling idea, but whether it's one or the other of them, we still have to return to the problem of sending a man to do the Lord's work.

Norman Mailer: Borges may have been inspired by Kierkegaard. But I'm looking for something else. I'm trying to get people to come to grips with the idea that God is not all-powerful. The comprehension I have of God is anthropomorphic. God is doing the best that He or She can do - or They can do. Maybe it's a marriage, I don't know. The idea we receive from the Bible that God is all-powerful creates a philosophical impasse. I think one of the reasons philosophy has not produced anything truly interesting since the Second World War - anything truly interesting in the way that seventeenth-, eighteenth-, even nineteenth-century philosophy dealt with huge and/or universal themes - is because philosophy can't digest the Holocaust. If God is all good and all-powerful, then how do you explain that catastrophe to our understanding of human nature and divinity? The one thing we know is that it was godawful. Look at the expression! "Godawful." Where was God while the Holocaust was going on? People are paralyzed intellectually by that conundrum. Yet I think the answer is simple once you decide that God is not all-powerful but merely doing His best, because then the Holocaust becomes one of the greatest defeats God ever experienced. Another, I believe, was the death of the Son.

At Random: Really, a defeat?

Norman Mailer: It wasn't a victory. I don't believe God sent his Son to be killed. Look at what's involved here. What would you think of a movie director sending his son out to shoot a scene that's going to be so incredibly dangerous that the son is likely to get killed?

What would we say of such a director?

At Random: He's out of business.

Norman Mailer: Yes, he's out of business in our hearts. We don't revere him. We are appalled by him. We may never stop thinking about him, but we don't revere him. No, if I'm going to try to understand God at all, I believe that God's had great victories and great defeats, and the death of Jesus is one of those defeats and the Holocaust is another.

At Random: Well, the Christians will say that without the greatest defeat you cannot have the greatest triumph, which is the Resurrection. But you're saying the triumph is nothing against the magnitude of the failure - the failures.

Norman Mailer: Now, that's probably the most shocking single element in *The Gospel According to the Son* - that God is not all-powerful. For me, the concept that God is doing the best that He can do is a more beautiful and troubling concept than that He is all-powerful. If you live with this idea, you have to start thinking of yourself as, yes, a servant of God, but in a true sense, as a soldier. We are not here on earth to abase ourselves, and to abase ourselves in order to have our ticket stamped for Heaven. We are here to work at God's ongoing intentions. If the notion that we do the best we can is extended to God doing the best He or She can, well, that suggests there are other forces at work in the universe, forces opposed to God. It's no longer a stage show, where the universe is presenting an immense drama, all for God's edification, and at the end of it He will reward or punish the actors. No, that's not it at all. The universe is unfinished, and God is trying to improve it. God's a general; God's an admiral. God's sailing across the universe, and we are his troops - some of us, at any rate.

At Random: Since you mention "other forces," let's talk of the Devil. To return to an old notion of yours: You do some small deals with the Devil to do larger good for God.

Norman Mailer: You hope that's what you're doing. I go back to Kierkegaard, who once said, in effect, that the moment we think we are being most holy and feel closest to God, we could be working for the Devil - and vice versa: When we think we're being debased and evil and serving Satan, we could be fulfilling God's

intentions and not know it. So you have to have a fundamental modesty about your own moral state. If someone says to me, "Well, do you think you're working for God or the Devil on this book?" I'd say, "Well, I hope I know I'm working for Him (or Her!), but I can't be certain." Just as a novelist can create any character except one - a novelist better than himself - so you can set yourself up as a moralist able to judge the good or bad morals of everybody except for one person - yourself.

At Random: I still feel unsatisfied on one point. To be brusque about it, do you believe that Jesus was the Son of God, or don't you?

Norman Mailer: As a novelist, I do. I believe Jesus was the Son of God. You can't be a serious writer of fiction unless you believe the story you are telling. In that sense, you are like an actor who can't give a truly good performance unless he becomes the person he is playing (at least while he is in the role). So, yes, intrigued by the myth, and more than a little intrigued, I certainly believed in it as I was writing it. Believed in the miracles, believed in the successes and failures of the ministry, believed that Jesus was the Son of God.

At Random: But as the man - not the novelist - what do you believe in?

Norman Mailer: Ah, there my mind is open. When I step away from the novel, the myth is still there - at the least, it is still the most powerful myth of the last two thousand years. So my feeling is that something certainly happened. Intellectually, I don't feel that miracles are impossible - if I did, I could never have entered the imaginative framework in which the book is written, no more than Woody Allen, I expect, would choose to play a character modeled after Mike Tyson. But as I say, I think something did happen in that period, or the myth could not have taken on its first intensity. And, of course, I believe that the greatest myths are never divorced from our deepest sense of reality - the primitive knowledge with which we are born. That kind of knowledge we are able to sense despite all the barriers of our modern development, and we can even sense how it motivates us without our conscious understanding or control - this primitive knowledge we can never quite name. Or tame.

In answer to your question, therefore, I was able, as a novelist, to believe that the events in the New



Testament occurred. So I could write about them as if they were real. But when I step away from the book, it also seems fair to me to apply my own judgments to the story. Those conclusions do not have to agree with the declarations and pieties of the New Testament. For that reason, I don't feel any confusion in creating my notion of Jesus, that Son of a God who is not all-powerful.

Sean Abbott is editor of *At Random*.

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1998

Monday 4/6

To: Sean Abbott

From: Judith McNally

There are changes on almost every
page so here's the whole thing.

Title TK

An Interview by Sean Abbott

Introduction TK

"

→ "Mailer Opus"

http://www.randomhouse.com/

atrandom/norman mailer/index/htm)

At Random: Given the immensity of the task before us -- talking about your career of half a century -- I think rather than try to follow any particular agenda we ought to just have a conversation that, to borrow one of your phrases, "veers off like a water bug."

Norman Mailer: [laughs] Okay.

AR: But I do want to start with instinct.

NM: Well, animal, human, or writer's instinct?

AR: Your instinct, to start.

NM: I think a writer's instinct is not quite the same as what we think of as instinct. And of course there is a male and a female instinct.

AR: Yes, but how do they play into each other? Because

instinct is there in the first pages of your first book. *The Naked and the Dead* [1948] opens with a card game, a scene that's all about instinct. This is the constant theme in your work, it seems to me: the play of instinct, of intuition. And when you get to a book like *Ancient Evenings* [1983], well, it's absolutely saturated with it. A computer could confirm this, I guess -- pass all your books through the scanner and up pops instinct in the number-one position.

prefer NM: By the way, I get tired of using "instinct." I ~~use~~ ^{usually} collateral words like resonance and imminence, a great deal. But "instinct": I'm dividing the word ^{even} as we're speaking into two halves. One half is ~~just~~ my ~~passionate~~ working literary instinct, ~~which is one~~ matter. And ~~the~~ other is my notion of instinct as a phenomenon that's ~~being~~ ^{'s being} slowly extinguished in ~~the~~ ^{this} twentieth century. (And heaven help instinct in the twenty-first ~~century~~.)

So we're talking about two different matters ^{and the first} really, ~~one~~ ^{is} that pagan sense of forces larger than oneself. I think the average pagan, the average primitive -- not to say that they're the same -- but in any event let's say the average primitive, let's start with that; ~~the~~ the average primitive saw himself or herself

surrounded by a circle of forces -- demons, gods,
friendly forces, apathetic forces. If there could ever
be a movie of a primitive walking through a forest it
might be quite different from the way we think of it.
~~Where~~ ^{When} we go to a forest, if it's an easy trail we walk,
and if it's bad business, we bushwhack. But the
primitive may have stopped before a certain tree and
bowed. Before another tree he may have fallen [bangs
tabletop] flat on the ground and waved his hand
overhead as if a swarm of gnats were attacking him.
Where there was familiarity, just a nod of the head as
he passed by ~~the~~ ^{that particular} divine force was all that was
necessary -- ~~it has not struck for a year and~~ ^{but he had him} every day
he'd pass this tree, so it's getting a little more
casual.

But ~~always~~ ^{this sort of} I think instinct means that you are not
living alone, ^W which is why consciousness had to be so
tremendously different for the primitive. You were a
protagonist; your day was heroic. What does it mean to
be a hero? It means you're willing to deal with, you're ^{even}
capable of dealing with forces ~~that may be~~ larger than
yourself.

AR: This is the average man or woman?

Then! Yes, the!

NM: ~~The~~ average man or woman. Of course, there were far fewer people on earth in those days. People ~~but~~ wilted and died at an early age. "You know, this is not for me," they said. [laughs] Well, when you get up to pagan times, of course, by then you have societies, ~~and~~ *A* powerful society like the Romans, ^{*1*} for instance, is going to ~~begin to~~ manage all sort of rituals and relations to these gods. Because, in trying to form a society you can't have people going off ~~on their own~~ at every moment to propitiate forces on their own. You let them believe that there's a central force, society ^{*the best*} itself, that takes ^{*(care of this propitiation,*} and so that's another kind of instinct. Now, if we get over to what literary instinct is, it's a ~~totally~~ different matter, *totally different.*

AR: Has it been your job as a writer to propitiate or conjure invisible forces for the rest of us?

NM: Well, I think I'm not alone, obviously, and there are a great many writers who are at it one way or another. I suppose I've been, as active as any of them in this. ^{*Of course, really*} ~~Although, I'm not sure that~~ ^{*still*} I can begin to say that. ~~Take~~ someone like Joyce. What was Joyce trying to show us from the beginning? We haven't caught up with

There is a buried element in many talented writers that may brood more or less unconsciously on how their work could serve, wittingly or unwittingly, for acts of conjuration or propitiation

^{him} Joyce yet. Maybe Joyce is ^{for} from the twenty-first or
twenty-second century. It's a perilous thought, ^{however.} as to
~~your computer.~~ Maybe ~~some bored computer nerds who~~ ^{Project might} want
something absolutely brand new ~~to do~~ will think of
analyzing *Finnegans Wake*. They'll have work for the
rest of their lives, even with the computer.

AR: This is something you'd approve of?

NM: I neither approve of it nor disapprove. If you want
to use a computer you might as well use it for
something extraordinary. No, I don't think it's good
for literature that the computer may finally engorge
Finnegans Wake, not at all. But I don't think much is
good for literature these days anyway.

AR: Right. On that note, let's have something from *The
Time of Our Time*. Is it okay if I read a few items back
to you?

NM: You'll know it's not okay if I rip the page out of
your hand. [Laughs]

AR: Well then, here goes: "I feel that the final
purpose of art is to intensify, even, if necessary, to

exacerbate the moral consciousness of people. In particular, I think the novel is at its best the most moral of the art forms, because it's the most immediate, the most overbearing, if you will. It is the most inescapable." Do you still believe that to be the truth?

NM: No, not really. It may be the most moral of the art forms still. I should have said it's the most subtle of all the art forms, with regard to morality. It's impossible to read a good novel without having one's sense of morality altered a bit, but I wouldn't call it the most overbearing of the art forms. I think movies are the most overbearing. I wrote this a long time ago.

AR: This was 1958.

NM: Yeah, yeah. In the sixties we started taking movies seriously. I mean, there's no need for me to ever repudiate anything I've said because I've always been so much a -- I wouldn't even say a man of our time. I could say "a creature of our time," "a victim of our time," [interviewer laughs] "an activist of our time," "a respondent to our time." I could use any one of those terms, they'd all be roughly about as accurate.

None of them are accurate. I mean, I lived in my time and I was always keenly aware of it. So I made remarks that were appropriate to me at the time, and I was always trying to affect the time, and now I look at ~~some of them~~ *old statements* and some of them hold up and some don't. But that doesn't bother me. You know, if you're not ready to make a fool of yourself, you're never going to get anything done.

AR: Now, about getting something done. Also from 1958. The real zinger: "I am imprisoned with a perception that will settle for nothing less than making a revolution in the consciousness of our time."

NM: Yeah.

AR: How do you reflect upon that in 1998?

NM: ~~well~~ I failed, didn't I?

AR: [laughs] How so?

NM: At the time I thought I had something to say that no one else had to say and I thought that once I said it (which, of course, I never quite did) everything

would be altered, the society would be altered. I had grandiose ideas in those days. But finally, you might say that the things I've stood for have been roundly defeated. ~~But~~ I think most serious writers might be willing to give their accord to that. Literature has been defeated in the twentieth century. It's a gloomy remark but the fact is that among the forces that shaped society ^{in the nineteenth century,} literature was certainly one of them, and most powerfully ~~in the nineteenth century.~~

Now, literature's going, being plowed under. My fear is that in another hundred years the serious novel will bear the same relation to serious people that the five-act verse play does to us today. In other words, it ^{will become} a curiosity. ~~And if you want to be a scholar and study it go ahead. But you, you novelist, don't assume you're going to be taken too seriously by the rest of the world.~~

AR: It's funny, I never think of any writer as having affected his time so profoundly. I always assumed that the average shopkeeper didn't know he was living through the Age of Johnson. And he preferred it that way.

NM: Well, how can you prove a remark like that? ~~But~~ I think Dickens had an immense affect upon the mores of

the English. Where would England be without Shakespeare? Where would Ireland be without James Joyce? They were mighty men, mighty artists, and they absolutely affected the way people behaved.

AR: Who has that kind of influence today?

NM: This is not to be pejorative about it -- after all, I wrote about her with some admiration -- but today I'd say the average young girl (maybe not now, but five years ago certainly) was completely influenced by someone like Madonna. She affected the way girls dressed, acted, behaved. So far, she's had more to do with women's liberation than Women's Liberation. I mean, for every girl who was affected by ~~Women's~~ *feminist ideology,* ~~Liberation and who joined their ranks,~~ there must have been five girls who started to live the way they thought Madonna lived and who had their own women's revolution without necessarily passing through the top garden.

AR: I don't know about that. The thing that always struck me about her is that she seemed to be a creature of the corporation, some record mogul's concoction. I never believed in Madonna, anymore than I believed that

lip synching is equivalent to performance. You write of Madonna in *The Time of Our Time*: "She was the premier artist of music video, and it might be the only new popular art form in American life." And I thought this to be the saddest commentary on our time -- my time, let's say, speaking as someone who can't remember a time before the Age of Video. But then again I'm hardly the "demographic," to employ the record executive's parlance.

NM: Let's say that there was a collaboration there, if you will. I don't think ~~she was~~ ^{Madonna} a creature of the corporation because I don't know of anyone who's ever controlled ~~Madonna~~ ^{her}. I think what the corporation does is they cross themselves every time they do business with ~~her~~ ^{the lady}. They never know how it's going to turn out. She terrifies them. It's true of all popular entertainers that they're creatures of the corporation. What I find much sadder is Michael Jordan becoming such a creature. He's got the corporate mentality down, and he's proud of the fact that he's selling those damn Nike's for a hundred and fifty bucks ^{/a pair.}

AR: Still, I can separate his athletic performance from that more than I can separate anything out of Madonna's

persona.

NM: Well, it's not a bad thing as far as his own art goes. Obviously he's one of the greatest athletes that America's ever had; maybe there are four or five athletes you can name in the same breath with Michael Jordan. But how I wish that he had some social ideas or ~~a sense~~ ^{sense} a little more elevated than, "Hey, it's a great way to make a lot of money, man, and I'm making my billions and maybe you can too. (Yeah, maybe you cannot.) [laughs]

AR: Heroes like that reduce our own chance at heroics -
- speaking of your average primitive man or woman. We who pay attention to these people and put our stock in them -- buy the shoes, be the hero -- are being lessened. Would you agree with that?

NM: Couldn't agree with it more, in fact. I've said this more than once in different ways. You know, when I first went over to the Soviet Union in '84 I was struck with how crude their propaganda was for the young. I thought, They've had all these years since 1917, sixty-seven years, and they haven't learned a thing about propaganda. The young in the Soviet Union hated

all that obvious
~~it, this transparent~~ oppression and bullying. Compare *the Soviet*
style ~~this~~ to the American corporation when it comes *to*
brainwashing the young. The subtle bullying that goes
on in American life makes me as close to despair as
anything I can think of. You know ^W what a job of
brainwashing the corporation's done [!] ~~when~~ ^Y you have kids
walking around ~~proudly~~ bearing the logo of a company
from whom they bought their t-shirt. It's shattering
~~concentration.~~ *They're paying for the T-shirt twice.*

AR: Along these lines, I suppose -- and I think that
there's a connection here, I just haven't been able to
find it yet -- I was knocked over in re-reading this
passage in your account of the second Clinton campaign,
in which you describe him as "part rogue, part god":
"To the crowd he was all but luminous, one had to go
back to the pharaohs to comprehend such worship. The
dean [Mailer's tag for himself in the reporters' pool]
recollected a story of how Ramses II, at the climax of
the year's largest religious festival in Thebes circa
1250 B.C., lifted his short white robe to reveal to
300,000 Egyptians a mighty phallus. It was erect.
Ramses II is probably the star of all time. Those
300,000 souls cheered. Their pharaoh was mighty; Egypt
would prosper.

"We are civilized, even corporatized but our enthusiasm may still go back to that root."

Recently we've had, in fact, President Ramses' phallus revealed to us.

NM: Warts and all. [laughs]

AR: Well that's just the problem, isn't it? Warts and all. "Egypt will not prosper" is what this warty exposure is saying to me. This is not a viable seduction, this groping of Mrs. Willey. The pathetic nature of this exposure speaks to famine and pestilence. And yet the public's reaction speaks to quite the contrary.

NM: They're happy that they've got this stud. I think that under everything in all of this is the idea that a lot of people are secretly pleased and wouldn't even admit it, ^{and} this could be true of a lot of starchy little old ladies, even. They think, "Well, you know, he is a randy old goat, that's good, that's good -- I've lived too long with people who weren't randy enough." There's a certain rebellion in American life against the absolute corporatization of everything. Because one of the things about the corporation that's totally

unpleasant is that they've thought of it before you have. You see, in the course of making your life so comfortable they've analyzed your life and now they're doing it all for you.

AR: So Clinton's randiness is a way of resisting the corporation, of living an independent life?

NM: [laughs] Resisting! I'll get obscene about where his tongue is in relation to the corporation.

[laughter] No, it's his way of resisting cancer.

AR: Good, I'm glad you brought this up, because this is another notion of yours that runs through *The Time of Our Time*: How one may sense a cancer coming on and kill it through promiscuity, aggression, acting on a crazy dare. Honestly, it's an idea that's always bothered me. For one thing, it places an undue burden on the cancer sufferer, doesn't it? A strange kind of moral burden. Had I but taken the crazy dare...

NM: It's not a happy idea for someone who's suffering from cancer, no. But, you know, listen, I wrote it with the full knowledge that if I write about these things, ~~all the time~~, I must have intimations in myself that

possibly I can -- that could hit me. And I began to feel that that's one of the gambles ⁱⁿ ~~of~~ how we live our lives. I think almost every time that we don't take some dare that our deep instinct, call it instinct, feels we must take, and we don't do it and we feel shame and humiliation afterward, I think we're deepening the potentiality for cancer. I work on the assumption that everyone has cancer within him, just as we have everything within us, but that we have cancer cells that just don't get anywhere. They're like little malcontents that get nowhere in society. It's the way in which we lead our life that enables us to avoid cancer.

AR: So, this is a literal cancer, not just a metaphorical cancer. But what a strange way to combat it -- promiscuity, aggression, a crazy dare. Why are these the solutions? Why not piety (I mean genuine piety, if there can be any), virtue, virtue, the cultivation of tranquility, Zen, that sort of thing?

NM: These were ideas that obsessed me all through the fifties and the sixties. I spoke as an amateur, totally, ~~I spoke~~ with no medical knowledge as such, ^{but} ~~because~~, one of the things I've learned about experts

is that they tend to blind themselves to interesting possibilities. They live in their own marketplace ^{and tend to} ~~one~~ *talk only to each other. One* of the reasons that I think I became a *reasonably* ~~halfway~~ interesting journalist is because I noticed when I started covering events that reporters would get together and exchange stories and arrive at a consensus of opinion. When I was ~~covering~~ *covering* the Kennedy campaign in '60 in Los Angeles, ~~I noticed~~ *it was obvious* that they didn't understand Kennedy at all. I knew more about him than they did, I realized. So after that I felt like a triumphant amateur. ~~I thought that~~ *Situation or an event* ~~I~~ if you come into a ~~something~~ as an amateur and your senses are open, you *on that day* can learn ~~much~~ more than professionals and experts. ~~So~~ I had the confidence, which I've had before ~~this~~ ~~even~~, that I didn't have to pay attention to what doctors were saying about cancer; they obviously didn't know the cause of it. *So*, I was entitled to speculate. And it seemed to me that cancer came from the tyranny of habit, and that its strength was the deepening of the self into more and more habits that were essentially not agreeable. That cancer was a disease of the soul, if you will. The soul began to say: "It's not worth continuing, I've lost the right to continue as a soul." Therefore, crazy activities very often shook up the system so much that my notion behind it, if you want to

physiological)
talk in ~~medical~~ (terms, was that more cancer cells were
killed than healthy cells via these crazy acts.

And I still think it's the best explanation for
what Clinton's doing. My God, to be president ~~with that~~ *and have to support*
the immense phoniness of being a president. Always having
to say things to please people all the time; think of
that immense hypocrisy. Of course ~~a man like that~~ *such*
has to be in danger of cancer, more in danger than the
average person. ~~That is, if he'd never been president,~~
~~never been governor, the danger would have been less.~~
He's drowning in putrid habits of hypocrisy. And it's a
more dangerous job now, being president, than it ever
was.

AR: How so?

NM: Because of the media, those village elders pissing
all over ~~him~~ *the leader* all of the time. I mean, they really are a
bunch of vinegary little pussies. Look, I was one of
the people who worked for years to reduce ~~this concept~~ *the*
of the presidency. *I wanted people to say "Fine,"*
~~fine, he's just a man.~~ But now the
media are running the large part of the show, and
they're furious that they can't knock him out. Well,
the point is that people are responding to something in
Clinton. You look at him, this big handsome man who has

a certain love of life and who has a certain warmth and
a certain decency. This is what ~~appears to be there~~ ^{appears to be there}; how much of
~~that~~ ^{that} ~~is there~~ ^{real}, who knows? But certainly a president is
~~entitled to his swindle if you will~~ ^{a 9 minute concerning} ~~his~~ ^{to} personality.
Every president's evolved a personality that will work
for him. Ronald Reagan is the arch example of that.
Ronald Reagan, who never had an idea in his life and
who [pause] came home to [pause] -- I'm going ^{to} say
something terribly cruel ~~but~~ I think ~~it's just this~~ ^{to} ~~he~~
came home to Alzheimer's as quietly as a ship slips
into port on a calm sea in evening.

AR: A beautiful sentence.

NM: Well, believe it or not I ~~had~~ ^{uttered} never ~~made up~~ that
sentence before. [laughter]

AR: Well, I guess all that makes sense, but it also
makes me more depressed. Because it seems to me that
Clinton's attempts to kill his cancer deepens our risk.
Rather, our knowledge of his attempts deepens our risk
-- to contract something vile. Whether what happened
with these women is true or not, the fact is that it
lives in public consciousness and it seems to me that
an inappropriate response, shrugging it off, or

disingenuously waxing philosophical about Truth, what is Truth?, how can we know Truth?, propels us deeper into the maw of the corporation. Because we are willing now to dispense with notions that we once held dear, we are losing ourselves a little more.

Are you saying that the presidency should be

NM: Oh right, the presidency being more powerful and more ~~to be~~ esteemed [?] than anything.

AR: Well that the presidency is not a place for ... for this kind of activity, if I may assume the voice of Miss Watson for one second. Whatever moral position you want to take on it, the fact that we know about this event may be even more troubling than the event itself.

NM: I wouldn't argue with that.

AR: Forget about whether it's true or not. But each time something like this happens we are sent stumbling deeper into what you call the smog, into inattention and smug apathy, into an insensitivity to the heroic, let alone a yearning for it in ourselves. And I think there's a correlation between the reduction of the presidency and the troubles we've been having trying to figure out what's culturally valid and what isn't,

beginning with whether or not Shakespeare should be part of a standard English curriculum. I'm not for an imperial presidency, but my entire 401K is in Shakespeare.

NM: You know, there are always those periods in one's life when one has more answers than at other times, and at this point I have more questions. In my darkest moods I begin to think that what we're seeing is the reduction of the human soul on a mass collective basis. Everything is being reduced. ~~People are losing their fundamental common sense, a common sense that created so much.~~ Shakespeare came out of a vast process of civilization. If you have countries in Africa that don't have a literature equal to Shakespeare, fine, their turn may yet come, but let's not try to have equality at all costs in every situation ~~from~~ right now.

Then sometimes I think, Well, you know, you're getting old, ^{Mark} and you're beginning to cut slits in your sneakers [laughs], ^{yes} you're that old. And you'd better recognize something -- that there may be a process going on that's much larger than anything you ever dreamed of, ~~that yes,~~ ^{can} maybe everything has to fall into the middle, and mediocrity must prevail for a period in order that equality ~~may~~ be built, the necessary

equality upon which you've ^{constructed} ~~built~~ ^{hopes} your ~~idea~~ ^{your belief} for so long: (that humankind was worthy of equality and that great things would come once ~~equality~~ ^{it} was achieved. Because I've always felt that when you have too much injustice, then you have too much rage for society to function well. There's a ~~certain~~ ^{our} vitiation of that collective pool of human souls ~~hindrance~~ ^{with too much injustice.} ~~our values~~ ^{genius}. Marx was not much of a ~~genius~~ ^{his} (for predicting the future, but if ~~Marx's~~ ^{is} criticism of capitalism is profound, it's ~~profound~~ ^{is} because what Marx was saying is that money finally becomes a force ~~that~~ ^{to} vitiates, ~~and~~ eats out, and leeches out all other values. Jesus was saying the same thing, which is, parenthetically, one of the reasons ~~I think~~ I probably got into writing that book about him. My feeling is that a real dynamic hope for the future will come only out of some form of Judeo-Christian socialism. Stalinism failed utterly because it did not have a religious core, you can't ask people to ~~be nobler~~ ^{continue to} than they essentially ~~are~~ ⁼, unless there's a certain fear of God and a certain love of God in their motivation.

~~Now, this~~ ^{What we are witnessing now} (is either part of the breakdown of American values or ~~it's~~ ^{we have been} the beginning of a new sense that ~~finally we're~~ depending too much upon presidents and the people who lead us -- to return to your point -

- and finally we have to do our own work. ^W We have to have our own society. If you want to have a good society you have got to work for that society, you have to be a part of it. Most people don't ^{look for} want that. What they want is something ^{or somebody who'll} that'll take care of things, ~~generally speaking~~ and not get in their way too much. ~~and~~ That's selfish, that's greedy, and if that's where we really are now (and that may be exactly where we are now), then we can't complain.

But of course the presidency ^{after Clinton,} will be reduced, and ^{probably} by the way, it will be reduced even more if you get someone in there who's ~~essentially~~ pretty clean and ^{Clinton, well,} ~~understanding like Al Gore. You know, Al Gore may even be~~ ^{be saying, some years from now was} ~~interesting at least.~~ ^{interesting at least.} ~~What does it take to be president? What are the~~ ~~qualifications? First, he has to be the most boring~~ ~~person in the United States. That's not fair to Gore,~~ ~~but it's likely that'll be what happens.~~

AR: At the moment we don't seem to want a bore in office, but what does it take today to incite a response to anything? Forget about Bob Dole's call for outrage. Can we even manage a little anger?

NM: There's an anger in people now that comes out of

this huge anxiety that they have more money than they feel they have properly earned.

AR: Interesting.

NM: And that creates a free-floating anxiety and ~~that~~, in turn, creates ~~an~~ anger, ~~because~~ whenever we feel dislocated, we're as angry as we dare to be.

AR: A kind of perversion of the "revolution of rising expectations."

NM: But it's not a revolution.

AR: Well, the term as I understand it is usually applied to Third World dictatorships -- that if you keep people oppressed and mired in poverty, absolutely under the boot, you have no problem controlling them. But if their circumstances improve a little, that's when all hell breaks loose. It's not when they're at the bottom, it's when they're moving toward the middle.

NM: I first heard this in high school [laughs], back in Boy's High in Brooklyn. I had a very bright history teacher who brought that up.

Sean:
look over
23 & 24.

?

I think
we lose
the
edge
here.

?
AR: I heard it from a very theory-encrusted sociology professor, and I thought it was one of his newfangled concepts, so perhaps I have it wrong.

NM: Well it may be a recent concept that's been revitalized but no, I wouldn't disagree with it

NM: Absolutely -- rising expectations do create a revolution, ^{in expectations} but the point is, has the rise been earned or not? When you have a small peasant revolt and they get more power, then they begin to look for more and more power because they've earned it. But I think people are now looking for more and more of what I call passive power, which is one reason for the huge excitement about the computer. The computer gives you passive power. You never have to leave your house, but if you're bright enough maybe you'll end up running the world, or destroying the world. When you get up to those giddy heights it hardly matters whether you plant a flag on the mountain or jump off into empyrean ^{Cyber-} space.

AR: On that note, let's return to the large matter of this book, which is some book I'm carrying around -- almost 1300 pages [Mailer laughs]. This is quite a statement. Despite all that we've just said about being

buried alive by corporate creature comforts, this is quite a hopeful object, isn't it? I mean, hopeful for literature. That you, and we, would publish such a book. It's iconic. And you have to admit that the Dark Ages aren't going to start on Tuesday if it's still possible for a writer like Norman Mailer to collect his life's work in this way.

NM: Well, I don't want to characterize it as a collection of my life's work.

AR: Right, I understand that.

NM: Because after all, I don't feel this is my best writing, ~~simply there~~ ^{now} and you don't have to read ~~anything else~~ ^{of mine,} ~~And also you know~~ ^(After all) I could put out two more ~~books just like~~ ^{collections equal to} this -- I won't, my publishers wouldn't let me. [laughs] But if you've written as much as I have over the years then obviously you have thousands of pages that are worth reproducing -- you hope so, certainly. No, I wanted this to be a new kind of book a little bit. I wanted it to be, ideally, a novel -- *U.S.A.* by John Dos Passos was my model while I was putting it together. *U.S.A.* is a wonderful collective novel. Very few people, unfortunately, still

read it, but if there's anything that ever came close to being the great American novel it was *U.S.A.* by John Dos Passos.

AR: Well, how did you go about selecting for *The Time of Our Time*?

NM: I began to see all sorts of ~~strains~~ ^{the mes and notes} in my writing that were curious -- for instance, certain people reappeared almost like characters in a novel. If you think of Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time*, ^{which was} ~~a work of twelve more or less connected novels~~, he'd have certain characters who would appear and ~~disappear~~ ^{then only} in book three and they'd reappear in the seventh book. I felt that there was an element of that in my work, that certain people did reappear. Sometimes they were ~~alive~~ ^{real people} and sometimes they were fictional characters, but you could use them to ^{put together} ~~tell~~ a sort of narrative, ~~in a way~~. I've always been fascinated with form, and I wanted to find something slightly new, ~~not radically new but slightly new~~ in the form of the anthology. I didn't want this just to be an anthology, ~~because to me~~, anthologies are like a bed of clams. [interviewer laughs] ~~Originally I was going to take all the pieces I've written about place, because I've written a lot -- there are a great many landscapes~~

~~scattered through my work.~~

AR: It's -- I guess I should say oddly, or unexpectedly chronological. Can you explain that choice?

NM: The book is chronological not in the order in which I wrote things but in historical order. For example, *Harlot's Ghost*, which came out in 1991, is featured prominently in the early part of ~~the book.~~ *The Times of Our Time* structure is ~~the~~ *understanding* (the notion that it's interesting to look at what *authors* write about a given year, *is* sometimes when they write it in that year *about the same* ~~and~~ sometimes when they *write them* ~~write about it~~ *or* twenty years later.

AR: But how were the selections actually made? ~~Beyond~~ *W* ~~the structure,~~ what determined the individual choices?

NM: You know, finally this is a show-off book, let's not pretend. I'm trying to say to people, "Look, a lot of you have a bad opinion of me and you don't realize how good I am. I'm now going to show you I'm pretty good and I dare you to read this." One of the things I've believed for years is that no one ever accomplishes anything large at all unless their best motive and their worst motive are both having an

interest in what you're doing. Basic capitalism. So if you're producing goods and making a profit from it, your worst motive is you're greedy and you want to make a lot of money, and your best motive better be that you make the best product possible and not a ~~piece~~ ^{deluge} of schlock. All right, by the same token my worst motive in this is that I wanted people to realize how good I am. My best motive: I want to do something a little new in the nature of anthologies; I wanted to take my own work and shake it up a little and see if I could still make it fresh for myself. So, for example, one of the pieces that a lot of people think is one of the best things I ever wrote in terms of magazines articles is "Superman Comes to the Supermarket" [a long essay about President Kennedy]. But I read through it and I thought, You know, it's really sort of long-winded. There are places it just doesn't hold up. It bores me here; I find it interesting there; it's very good here; disappointing in this couple of pages. I thought, I'm going to take out what I don't like in "Superman Comes to the Supermarket" and I'm going to put in pages from *Harlot's Ghost*, where one of the characters in it, a girl named Modine, is having an affair with Jack Kennedy, and I'm going to put them into the middle of "Superman Comes to the Supermarket," and sort of

interpolate the passages and ^{see if that} ~~that'll~~ freshen both pieces up and bring a new vitality to old images of mine.

AR: Wonderful. Now, then, on the point about wanting people to know how good you are, let me highlight a few things I'm surprised to find here, if that's really your motive. But let me preface this by saying that I've always had good relations with women. I feel it necessary to make that declaration. I've rarely chalked up a misunderstanding to some sexual difference, but when the subject comes around to literature and when I say I like, among the Americans, Roth, Updike, and Mailer, the long knives are out in a flash -- and especially on Mailer. So here's one sentence from *An American Dream* [1964] that, you know, is just one of those sentences of your many sentences that send women, whether they call themselves feminists or not, around the bend: "Ruta was crying not for Deborah, not even quite for herself, but rather for the unmitigatable fact that women who have discovered the power of sex are never far from suicide."

NM: I find it interesting.

AR: I have to say, I don't get it.

NM: I mean, I wrote it at the peak of certain dangerous insights and what I thought of immediately when you read that ^{now is that} ~~is~~ (I would counter ~~it~~ ^{that} by saying that men who climb rock faces without a rope are always in danger of a mortal accident. When women have discovered the power of sex, if they're bold, they adventure upward to get the best man they can possibly get with that extraordinary power. And if ~~it~~ ^{that} fails, and it often does, yes, they're very close to suicide. It's not only battered women who commit suicide, it's very often beautiful women, and there are astonishing, startling, frightening suicides among beautiful women. Or the attempt -- very often it's more the attempt than the act.

AR: Because sex has failed them?

^{Because then}
NM: Yeah. ~~They~~ were very much in love with someone who betrayed them, in effect. How many beautiful women are there who have tried at least once to slash their wrist, which is usually the form it takes?

AR: Actually, truth be told, now that you mention it, I

can think of one woman of my acquaintance who at least picked up the knife. (My declaration before still applies.)

NM: They may make an attempt to slash their wrist, not necessarily wholly seriously, and they may have a faint scar on their wrist and they may call a friend after they ~~slash~~ ^{nick} the wrist and so forth and so on. I'm not being merely mean and snide here but I'm saying that, yes, I would subscribe to that remark still. It's equal to saying to a professional football player, or to any young athlete, "You know, you have a wonderful talent and you're going to go very far with this talent, and you have to recognize that the price you may pay is to have a broken body by the time you're thirty-five." Now, that's a fair remark, isn't it? Well, I think the other is equally fair. Women don't like individual insights. I don't want to make a huge generalization. Most women do not like individual insights because it leaves them too exposed. Women do have that tribal power, which the scientists have lately discovered I gather.

AR: How so?

NM: Through pheromones -- you've heard about the pheromones?

AR: Oh, yes.

NM: Where women who live together tend to have their periods together. Marvelous, marvelous -- one's known that always instinctively, hasn't one? I don't mean about periods, I mean about women: that they have a tribal accord and they don't like being separated from the tribe. Certain men ^{on the contrary} pride themselves ^{by saying in effect:} "if I can't be ~~the~~ chief of the tribe then I'm going to separate myself from the tribe." I think that's much less true of women. Look, one of the things I want to say is one has the right to generalize about the other sex; they don't have a lock on understanding their own gender. Some of the most interesting things we can learn about ourselves we learn by the perceptions of women about us. How would we ever know how crude and stupid and ugly and piggish we can be unless we have ~~some~~ women writing about it rather well? And we have the same right to do that ^{to} ~~about~~ women if they'll only recognize it, but they won't, they won't.

AR: You've said that you do interviews in part to

clarify your positions on such matters.

NM: It was a great shock to me that women were actually able to affect how people read me, and ~~that~~ ^{therefore} a lot of people were not reading me. Probably two-thirds to ^{are reading novels these days,} three-quarters of women who ~~read~~ ^{won't read me, because} I'm anathema, and that means ^{either} that maybe a third of the men won't read me ^{because it just gets} too much of a hassle. The wife ^{might} ~~would~~ say, "What are you reading him for?" And most husbands and wives don't need one more fight. So I thought, All right, let me ~~go~~ out and do ~~these~~ ^{I can't} interviews. Maybe I can straighten out the issue, ^{maybe} ~~while I have it~~ ^{my literary reputation is}. But if I'm buried prematurely, I'll tip my hat to the women. They've done it again.
[laughs]

AR: I want to talk about *The Naked and The Dead*, published on May 6, 1948. Someplace, I think you said that your books are like your children, and on a given day you love one more than the other.

NM: The way I answer ~~it~~ usually is, I wouldn't choose a favorite because I might change my mind the next day.

AR: I see, right. Okay, ~~so~~ I won't ask you if you love

The Naked and The Dead more, given this grand anniversary, but let me ask you then about how you found your voice. I can hear the Mailerian voice in this first novel -- at least, I think I can -- and, as I said earlier, instinct, that great theme, is there in the card game among Wilson, Croft, and Gallagher. So how did your writer's instinct lead you to your voice?

NM: The idea that we have of ourselves is not necessarily always accurate. But it's operative, ~~so~~ ^{that} when I wrote *The Naked and The Dead*, I thought, Oh, I owe so much to James T. Farrell and John Dos Passos, to Tolstoy, perhaps to Dostoevsky, ~~and so forth~~, ~~and so~~ on. One of the themes I had, the fear I had, is that I ^{was} ~~am~~ still writing absolutely in their shadow. I didn't mean that I was as good as they were, or would ever be as good as they were, but ^{that} I was writing ~~with~~ ^{under} the influences. *Barbary Shore* [19TK] was a book that was much influenced by latter-day reading after *The Naked and The Dead*. I was interested in the French novel at that point, I was interested in ^{Gide} ~~[unimpaired]~~, I wanted to write a novel that was full of surprises and relatively formal. In *The Deer Park*, I began to find a voice because I had to rewrite it, and in the course of ^{doing that} ~~rewriting~~ I began to learn ^{not only} ~~what~~ style was, ^{but} ~~that~~ style

was more important, almost, than what you had for material in the book. ~~That~~ ^{It} was the style that reached the reader and not the material. On the one hand that seems self-evident, on the other hand, most bestseller writers never discover this. They figure you get the good, hot material and that's all you need. And in fact that's what most publishers believe right now. ~~Give~~ ^{Just} Give me the hot material and I don't care how it's written.

AR: We'll build the book around it.

NM: Yeah. We'll bring in a couple of people if necessary. [laughs] Just bring us the facts. [laughs] Publishing has gotten down to the level of Jack Webb in *Dragnet*. [laughs] Most people don't even know about ^{style.} ~~this~~. ^{have a feeling for} Other people know it from the day they begin reading. Serious readers know ~~it~~ intuitively. I ^{had to} discovered ~~it~~ it for myself, the real impact of the meaning of style. So by the time I was writing *Advertisements for Myself*, I began to recognize how curious it was to write in the first person. In other words, I approached it as someone who might say, "Gee, the terrain on Mars is very different from ~~the~~ Earth. I'm happy to be the first explorer here." Now, many,

many, many writers good and bad ^{had} ~~have~~ been ^{living in} exploring the first person for centuries before I came to this ^{remarkable} discovery ^{that} ~~but~~ the first person is not a routine ~~or~~ ^{now} automatic way to write. It's a very interesting and exciting ^{mode of literary being,} way to write, ^{and} ~~with huge limitations,~~ ^{do} ~~but~~ you really have to begin to understand it as such.

Especially if you're writing about yourself. Nothing is more difficult than to write about ^{oneself} ~~yourself~~ in the first person. It's highly unnatural. ^{Because} "I" is only about a third of us. "I" is the ego, if you will.

~~speaking broadly and crudely.~~ And so you get into all sorts of places where you want to use "one" to talk about the other aspects of one's self. Or you get

pushed over in later years into the third person, as I did in *The Armies of the Night* [19TK]. ^{Using the third person} ~~where one's~~

^{for oneself may be a special condition, but it's legitimate} ~~sense of oneself echoes in a part of us that's always~~ ^{because there is} ~~superior to ourselves, which is the person that~~ ^{Post}

observes us even as we're doing things. And that person

is always saying: "Oh, not too good again today, are we?"

^{enables you to} ~~That person is a wonderful voice. Because then~~ ^{it} ~~you can really treat yourself as one more character in a field or~~ ^{did keep} ~~a nest of characters. And that produces lively effects. So I kept looking to discover my voice. What I didn't realize, perhaps, is all the while, as you're saying, I had a voice. Yes, I had a voice. But that wasn't what I~~

was aware of. What I was aware of was how much I didn't have ^{one, that still} a voice and how much I was looking for one. So we

don't have to know ourselves entirely as we go along.

~~You could certainly be right in declaring that~~
~~We can look back on it, and indeed the stuff that I~~

wrote in later years fits very comfortably into stuff I wrote in early years. With the notable exception of The

Naked and The Dead, which is the only book I've

written, I'd say, that is ^{abominable written.} I'm obviously fond of it,

and, indeed, many people say it's my best book, but it is ^{still} ~~not well-written~~ ^{has} written abominably. It's a bad style. ~~It's~~ ^{has} a real

bestseller style. It's a good book with a bad style.

~~major writers~~ There are books like that -- Solzhenitsyn's, for

example, at least in translation: Solzhenitsyn ^{has} is a

~~writer who's got many powerful things to write about~~ ^{and certainly}
~~carries his major load, but he often~~
~~and writes in a bad style.~~

AR: What kind of work habits have made this all possible, finding a style, writing thirty-one books?

NM: A lot is genetic. My mother was capable of a great deal of very hard work. And she was a marvelously disciplined woman. I say marvelously disciplined because it wasn't one of those cold disciplines that chilled everyone around her. She was a warm woman and, you know, we were just two children, my younger sister

and myself. And we felt beloved, if you will. We didn't have an unhappy family life. My father was a sport. His work habits were decent at best. People think of me as being a wild man, but finally, what was that? Five or ten percent of my nature. The other half was all work, ~~work, work~~. I like work. I remember Elia Kazan one day at the Actor's Studio saying, "Here at the Studio we're always talking about the work, the work. We talk about it so piously. We talk about it we say, the work, the work. Well, we do work here, and let's get it straight: ~~Work~~ is a blessing." He said this, glaring at every one of us. And I thought, He's so right, that's what it is.

Work is a blessing. Yes. If I tell myself I'm going to ~~work the next day~~ ^{my desk tomorrow}, then I consider it a point of honor with myself to ~~work~~ ^{go to} in the morning. Whatever my mood is. Because I've found that you can go from a bad mood to a good mood if you force yourself to sit down at the desk and write. And whenever I give advice to a writing class -- I'll talk to them once every couple of years -- I'll say that the only rule that I think applies to all young writers and all older writers as well, the one rule that is not individual, is that you have a relation to your unconscious as a writer. The unconscious has to trust you, and if you tell yourself that you're going to write the next day, then you ~~write the next day~~ ^{better do so.}

Because if you don't, you're leaving all those troops out in the rain. [laughs]

AR: Speaking of the wild man, people say to me, "Oh, you're going to interview Mailer!" As if, we may never see you again. And I say, "Actually, folks, he's the last gentleman." And I have a very simple test for the gentleman, which most men fail: does he help you on with your coat? But the wild man, what happened to him?

NM: Well, he finally ran into a woman who was exactly his equal, which I think is very important. People only get domesticated when they meet their equal. Someone who's as good and as bad as they are.

AR: Are you going to write your memoir? Do you feel any need?

NM: I'm not sure there's a need. I'm not sure I want to. I'm not sure I will. If I have a choice between writing a good novel and writing a memoir, I'd ~~write~~ ^{do} the novel. ^{For} I don't know how many books I have left, you know.

AR: The time is better spent with a novel.

NM: Well, it's more exciting. I'm a little bored with myself right now. I've written about ~~myself~~ ^{my inner condition} so much over the years that really, I have a feeling, enough of him. Let the work be separated from the man, ^{That's} probably my wish right now. And that, by the way, is one of the motives here -- you notice I'm not in the book ^{Time of Our Time} except where I'm ^{there} ~~in it~~ because of the ^{subject matters} ~~writing~~ itself. But it isn't like Advertisements for Myself, where I discuss each piece and ^{my state at the time of writing it} ~~what I was feeling~~. The main motive, the main good motive behind this book was ^{my desire to} ~~let people~~ separate my work from myself. Let them see the ^{job I've done.} ~~work~~. My hope is that ^{they will be reading me} ~~if the work lasts, it's the work that~~ ^{rather than talking} ~~people will be reading in fifty years, and not my life.~~ about my life and my person.

Sean —

NM wrote " . . . that it will be reading my work . . . "
+ I changed it to They — which is obviously
what NM meant. OK?

ym



Mailer opus

Norman Mailer on literary instincts and ambitions, Bill Clinton's cure for cancer, Madonna's influence, Michael Jordan's greed, the corporation triumphant, the amateur triumphant, Mailer-knocking feminism triumphant, James Joyce computerized, the blessings of work, and other essential matters on the occasion of the publication of *The Time of Our Time*, a novel in the form of an anthology / an anthology in the form of a novel, and of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of his "abominably written" first book, *The Naked and the Dead*



"I look at old statements and some of them hold up and some don't. But that doesn't bother me. If you're not ready to make a fool of yourself, you're never going to get anything done."

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Other interviews with Norman
Mailer:

Oswald's Tale

*The Gospel According to the
Son*

An interview by Sean Abbott

05/98

This conversation took place at Norman Mailer's home
in Brooklyn Heights on March 25, 1998.

At Random: Given the immensity of the task before us
- talking about your career of half a century - I think
rather than try to follow any particular agenda we ought
to simply have a conversation that, to borrow one of
your phrases, "veers off like a water bug."

Norman Mailer: [laughs] Okay.

At Random: But I do want to start with instinct, a
subject we've discussed before.

Norman Mailer: Well, animal, human, or writer's
instinct?

At Random: Your instinct, to start.

Norman Mailer: I think a writer's instinct is not quite
the same as what we think of as instinct. And of course
there is a male and a female instinct.

At Random: Yes, but how do they play off each other?
Because instinct is there in the first pages of your first
book. *The Naked and the Dead* [1948] opens with a
card game, a scene that's all about instinct. This is a
constant theme in your work, it seems to me: the play of
instinct, of intuition. And when you get to a book like
Ancient Evenings [1983], well, it's absolutely saturated
with it.

I thought I had something to say that no one else had to say and that once I said it everything would be altered. I had grandiose ideas in those days. But finally, you might say that the things I've stood for have been roundly defeated. Literature has been defeated in the twentieth century.



May 1998 publication

Norman Mailer: By the way, I get tired of using *instinct*. I usually prefer collateral words like *resonance* and *imminence*. But *instinct*: Even as we're speaking I'm dividing the word into two halves. One half is my passionate working literary instinct. The other is my notion of instinct as a phenomenon that slowly is being extinguished in this century - and heaven help instinct in the next.

So we're talking about two different matters really, and the first is that pagan sense of forces larger than oneself. I think the average pagan, the average primitive - not to say that they're the same - but in any event let's say the average primitive, let's start with that: The average primitive saw himself or herself surrounded by a circle of forces - demons, gods, friendly forces, apathetic forces. If there could ever be a movie of a primitive walking through a forest, it might be quite different from the way we think of it. When we go to a forest, if it's an easy trail, we walk; and if it's bad business, we bushwhack. But the primitive may have stopped before a certain tree and bowed. Before another tree he may have fallen [bangs tabletop] flat on the ground and waved his hand overhead as if a swarm of gnats were attacking him. Where there was familiarity, just a nod of the head as he passed by that particular divine force was all that was necessary - every day he'd pass this tree, so it's getting a little more casual.

But I think this sort of instinct means that you are not living alone. Which is why consciousness had to be so tremendously different for the primitive. You were a protagonist; your day was heroic. What does it mean to be a hero? It means you're willing to deal with - you're even capable of dealing with - forces larger than yourself.

At Random: This is the average primitive?

Norman Mailer: Yes, the average primitive man or woman. Of course, there were far fewer people on earth in those days. People wilted and died at an early age. "You know, this is not for me," they said [laughs]. Well, when you get up to pagan times, of course, by then you have societies. A powerful society like the Romans', for instance, is going to manage all sorts of rituals and relations to these gods. Because in trying to form a society, you can't have people going off at every moment to propitiate forces on their own. You let them believe that there's a central force, society itself, that takes the best care of this propitiation, and so that's

On the public's reaction to Bill Clinton's travails: They're happy that they've got this stud. A lot of people are secretly pleased, and this could be true of a lot of starchy little old ladies, even. They think, Well, you know, he is a randy old goat, that's good, that's good - I've lived too long with people who weren't randy enough.

another kind of instinct. Now, if we get over to what literary instinct is, it's a different matter, totally different.

At Random: Has it been your job as a writer to propitiate or conjure invisible forces for the rest of us?

Norman Mailer: Well, I think I'm not alone, obviously, and there are a great many writers who are at it one way or another. I suppose I've been as active as any of them in this. There is a buried element in many talented writers that may brood more or less unconsciously on how their work could serve, wittingly or unwittingly, for acts of conjuration or propitiation. Of course, I'm really not sure I can begin to say that. Still, take someone like Joyce. What was Joyce trying to show us from the beginning? We haven't caught up with him yet. Maybe Joyce is for the twenty-first or twenty-second century. It's a perilous thought, however. Some bored computer nerds who want some absolutely brand-new project might think of analyzing *Finnegans Wake*. They'll have work for the rest of their lives, even with the computer.

At Random: This is something you'd approve of?

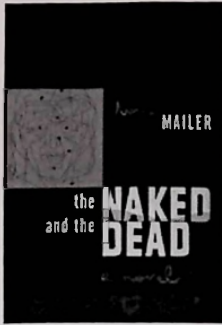
Norman Mailer: I neither approve of it nor disapprove. If you want to use a computer you might as well use it for something extraordinary. No, I don't think it's good for literature that the computer may finally engorge *Finnegans Wake*, not at all. But I don't think much is good for literature these days anyway.

At Random: Right. On that note, let's have something from *The Time of Our Time* [Random House, May 1998]. Is it okay if I read a few items back to you?

Norman Mailer: You'll know it's not okay if I rip the page out of your hand [laughs].

At Random: Well then, here goes: "I feel that the final purpose of art is to intensify, even, if necessary, to exacerbate the moral consciousness of people. In particular, I think the novel is at its best the most moral of the art forms, because it's the most immediate, the most overbearing, if you will. It is the most inescapable." Do you still believe that to be the truth?

Norman Mailer: No, not really. It may be the most moral of the art forms still. I should have said it's the



1948: *The Naked and the Dead*

Almost every time that we don't take some dare that our deep instinct feels we must take, and we feel shame and humiliation afterward, I think we're deepening the potentiality for cancer. Cancer is a disease of the soul. The soul begins to say: "I've lost the right to continue as a soul."

most subtle of all the art forms with regard to morality. It's impossible to read a good novel without having one's sense of morality altered a bit, but I wouldn't call it the most overbearing of the art forms. I think movies are the most overbearing. I wrote that a long time ago.

At Random: 1958.

Norman Mailer: Yeah, yeah. In the sixties we started taking movies seriously. I mean, there's no need for me ever to repudiate anything I've said, because I've always been so much a - I wouldn't even say a man of our time. I could say "a creature of our time," "a victim of our time," [interviewer laughs] "an activist of our time," "a respondent to our time." I could use any one of those terms - they'd all be roughly about as accurate. None of them are accurate. I mean, I lived in my time and I was always keenly aware of it. So I made remarks that were appropriate to me at the time, and I was always trying to affect the time, and now I look at old statements and some of them hold up and some don't. But that doesn't bother me. You know, if you're not ready to make a fool of yourself, you're never going to get anything done.

At Random: Now, about getting something done. Also from 1958. A real zinger: "I am imprisoned with a perception that will settle for nothing less than making a revolution in the consciousness of our time."

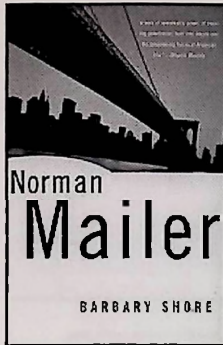
Norman Mailer: Yeah.

At Random: How do you reflect upon that in 1998?

Norman Mailer: I failed, didn't I?

At Random: [laughs] How so?

Norman Mailer: At the time I thought I had something to say that no one else had to say and I thought that once I said it (which, of course, I never quite did) everything would be altered, that society would be altered. I had grandiose ideas in those days. But finally, you might say that the things I've stood for have been roundly defeated. I think most serious writers might be willing to give their accord to that. Literature has been defeated in the twentieth century. It's a gloomy remark, but the fact is that among the forces that shaped society in the nineteenth century, literature was certainly one of them, and most powerfully. Now, literature's going, being plowed under. My fear is that in another hundred



1951: *Barbary Shore*

In my darkest moods I begin to think that what we're seeing is the reduction of the human soul on a mass collective basis. Then sometimes I think, Well, you know, you're getting old, Mailer. And you'd better recognize

years the serious novel will bear the same relation to serious people that the five-act verse play does to us today. In other words, it will become a curiosity.

At Random: It's funny, I never think of any writer as having affected his time so profoundly. I always assumed that the average shopkeeper didn't know he was living through the Age of Johnson. And he, the shopkeeper, preferred it that way.

Norman Mailer: Well, how can you prove a remark like that? I think Dickens had an immense effect upon the mores of the English. Where would England be without Shakespeare? Where would Ireland be without James Joyce? They were mighty men, mighty artists, and they absolutely affected the way people behaved.

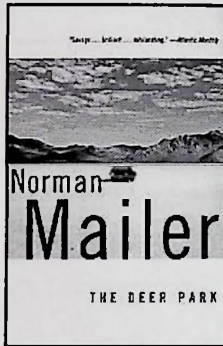
At Random: Who has that kind of influence today?

Norman Mailer: This is not to be pejorative about it - after all, I wrote about her with some admiration [1994] - but today I'd say the average young girl (maybe not now, but five years ago certainly) was completely influenced by someone like Madonna. She affected the way girls dressed, acted, behaved. So far, she's had more to do with women's liberation than Women's Liberation. I mean, for every girl who was affected by feminist ideology, there must have been five girls who started to live the way they thought Madonna lived and who had their own women's revolution without necessarily passing through the top garden.

At Random: I don't know about that. The thing that always struck me about her is that she seemed to be a creature of the corporation, some record mogul's concoction. I never believed in Madonna, any more than I believed that lip-synching is equivalent to performance. You write of Madonna in *The Time of Our Time*: "She was the premier artist of music video, and it might be the only new popular art form in American life." And I thought this to be the saddest commentary on our time - my time, let's say, speaking as someone who can barely remember a time before the Age of Video. But then again I'm hardly the demographic, to employ the record executive's parlance. parlance.

Norman Mailer: Let's say that there was a collaboration there, if you will. I don't think Madonna was a creature of the corporation, because I don't know of anyone who's ever controlled her. I think what the

something - that there may be a process going on that's much larger than anything you ever dreamed of.



1955: *The Deer Park*

What we are witnessing now is either part of the breakdown of American values or the beginning of a new sense

corporation does is they cross themselves every time they do business with this lady. They never know how it's going to turn out. She terrifies them. It's true of all popular entertainers that they're creatures of the corporation. What I find much sadder is Michael Jordan becoming such a creature. He's got the corporate mentality down, and he's proud of the fact that he's selling those damn Nikes for 150 bucks a pair.

At Random: Still, I can separate his athletic performance from that more than I can separate anything out of Madonna's persona.

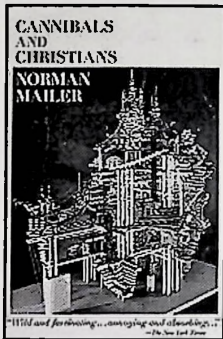
Norman Mailer: Well, it's not a bad thing as far as his own art goes. Obviously he's one of the greatest athletes that America's ever had; maybe there are four or five athletes you can name in the same breath with Michael Jordan. But how I wish that he had some social ideas or a little more elevated sense than "Hey, it's a great way to make a lot of money, man, and I'm making my billions and maybe you can too. (Yeah, maybe you cannot.)" [laughs]

At Random: Heroes like that reduce our own chance at heroics - speaking of your average primitive man or woman. We who pay attention to these people and put our stock in them - buy the shoes, be the hero - are being lessened. Would you agree with that?

Norman Mailer: Couldn't agree with it more, in fact. I've said this more than once in different ways. You know, when I first went over to the Soviet Union in '84 I was struck with how crude their propaganda was for the young. I thought, They've had all these years since 1917, sixty-seven years, and they haven't learned a thing about propaganda. The young in the Soviet Union hated it, all that obvious oppression and bullying. Compare the Soviet style to the American corporation when it comes to brainwashing the young. The subtle bullying that goes on in American life makes me as close to despair as anything I can think of. What a job of brainwashing the corporation's done! You have kids walking around bearing the logo of a company from whom they bought their T-shirt. It's shattering. They're paying for the T-shirt twice.

At Random: Along these lines, I suppose - and I think that there's a connection here, I just haven't been able to find it yet - I was knocked over in re-reading this passage in your account of the second Clinton campaign [1996], in which you describe him as "part rogue, part

**that we have
been depending
too much upon
presidents and
the people who
lead us, and
finally we have to
do our own work.**



1966: *Cannibals and Christians*

**There's an anger
in people now
that comes out of
this huge anxiety
that they have**

god": "To the crowd he was all but luminous, one had to go back to the pharaohs to comprehend such worship. The dean [Mailer's moniker for himself in the reporters' pool] recollected a story of how Ramses II, at the climax of the year's largest religious festival in Thebes circa 1250 B.C., lifted his short white robe to reveal to 300,000 Egyptians a mighty phallus. It was erect. Ramses II is probably the star of all time. Those 300,000 souls cheered. Their pharaoh was mighty; Egypt would prosper.

"We are civilized, even corporatized, but our enthusiasm may still go back to that root."

Recently we've had, in fact, President Ramses's phallus revealed to us.

Norman Mailer: Warts and all [laughs].

At Random: Well that's just the problem, isn't it? Warts and all. "Egypt will not prosper" is what this warty exposure is saying to me. This is not a viable seduction, for one, this groping of Mrs. Willey. The pathetic nature of this revelation speaks to famine and pestilence. And yet the public's reaction, at the moment, speaks to quite the contrary.

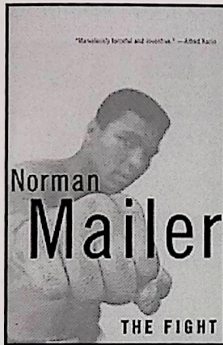
Norman Mailer: They're happy that they've got this stud. I think that under everything in all of this is the idea that a lot of people are secretly pleased and wouldn't even admit it, and this could be true of a lot of starchy little old ladies, even. They think, Well, you know, he is a randy old goat, that's good, that's good - I've lived too long with people who weren't randy enough. There's a certain rebellion in American life against the absolute corporatization of everything. Because one of the things about the corporation that's totally unpleasant is that they've thought of it before you have. You see, in the course of making your life so comfortable, they've analyzed your life and now they're doing it all for you.

At Random: So Clinton's randiness is a way of resisting the corporation, of living an independent life?

Norman Mailer: [laughs] Resisting! I'll get obscene about where his tongue is in relation to the corporation. [laughter] No, it's his way of resisting cancer.

At Random: Good, I'm glad you brought this up,

more money than they feel they have properly earned.



1975: *The Fight*

***The Time of Our Time* is a show-off book, let's not pretend. I'm trying to say to people, "Look, a lot of you have a bad opinion of me and you don't realize how good**

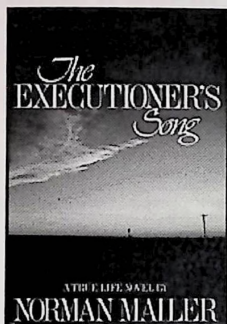
because this is another notion of yours that runs through *The Time of Our Time*: How one may sense a cancer coming on and kill it through promiscuity, aggression, by acting on a crazy dare. Honestly, it's an idea that's always bothered me. For one thing, it places an undue burden on the cancer sufferer, doesn't it? A strange kind of moral burden. "Had I but taken the crazy dare. . ."

Norman Mailer: It's not a happy idea for someone who's suffering from cancer, no. But, you know, listen, I wrote it with the full knowledge that if I write about these things, I must have intimations in myself that possibly I can - that could hit me. And I began to feel that that's one of the gambles in how we live our lives. I think almost every time we don't take some dare that our deep instinct, call it instinct, feels we must take, and we don't do it and we feel shame and humiliation afterward, I think we're deepening the potentiality for cancer. I work on the assumption that everyone has cancer within him, just as we have everything within us, but that we have cancer cells that just don't get anywhere. They're like little malcontents that get nowhere in society. It's the way in which we lead our life that enables us to avoid cancer.

At Random: So this is a literal cancer, not just a metaphorical cancer. But what a strange way to combat it - promiscuity, aggression, a crazy dare. Why are these the cures? Why not piety (I mean genuine piety, if there can be any), virtue, virtu, the cultivation of tranquility, Zen, that sort of thing?

Norman Mailer: These were ideas that obsessed me all through the fifties and the sixties. I spoke as an amateur, totally, with no medical knowledge as such, but one of the things I've learned about experts is that they tend to blind themselves to interesting possibilities. They live in their own marketplace and tend to talk only to each other. Perhaps one of the reasons that I became a reasonably interesting journalist is because I noticed when I started covering events that reporters would get together and exchange stories and arrive at a consensus. When I covered the Kennedy campaign in '60 in Los Angeles, it was obvious that they didn't understand Kennedy. I knew more about him than they did, I realized. So after that I felt like a triumphant amateur. If you come into a situation or event as an amateur and your senses are open, you can learn more than professionals and experts on that day. So I had the confidence, which I've had before, that I didn't have to pay attention to what doctors were saying about cancer;

I am. I'm now going to show you I'm pretty good and I dare you to read this."



1979: *The Executioner's Song*

It was a great shock to me that women were actually able to affect how people read me. So I thought, All right, let me do interviews.

they obviously didn't know the cause of it. So I was entitled to speculate. And it seemed to me that cancer came from the tyranny of habit, and that its strength was the deepening of the self into more and more habits that were essentially not agreeable. That cancer was a disease of the soul, if you will. The soul began to say: "It's not worth continuing; I've lost the right to continue as a soul." Therefore, crazy activities very often shook up the system so much that my notion behind it, if you want to talk in physiological terms, was that more cancer cells were killed than healthy cells via these crazy acts.

And I still think it's the best explanation for what Clinton's doing. My God, to be president and have to support the immense phoniness of being a president. Always having to say things to please people all the time - think of that immense hypocrisy. Of course such a man has to be in danger of cancer, more in danger than the average person. He's drowning in putrid habits of hypocrisy. And it's a more dangerous job now, being president, than it ever was.

At Random: How so?

Norman Mailer: Because of the media, those village elders pissing all over the chief all the time. I mean, they really are a bunch of vinegary little pussies. Look, I was one of the people who worked for years to reduce the concept of the presidency. I wanted people to say, "Fine, he's just a man." But now the media are running the large part of the show, and they're furious that they can't knock him out. Well, the point is that people are responding to something in Clinton. You look at him, this big handsome man who has a certain love of life and who has a certain warmth and a certain decency. This is what appears to be there. How much of that is real, who knows? But certainly a president is entitled to a swindle concerning his own personality. Every president's evolved a personality that will work for him. Ronald Reagan is the arch example of that. Ronald Reagan, who never had an idea in his life and who [pause] came home to [pause] - I'm going to say something terribly cruel - I think Reagan came home to Alzheimer's as quietly as a ship slips into port on a calm sea in evening.

At Random: A beautiful sentence.

Norman Mailer: Well, believe it or not, I never uttered that sentence before [laughter].

Maybe I can straighten out the issue, maybe I can't. But if my literary reputation is buried prematurely, I'll tip my hat to the women. They've done it again.



1980: *Of Women and Their Elegance*

I had to discover it for myself, the real impact of the meaning of style.

At Random: Well, I guess all that makes sense, but it also makes me more depressed. Because it seems to me that Clinton's attempts to kill his cancer deepen our risk of contracting something vile. Rather, our knowledge of his attempts deepens our risk. Whether what happened with these women is true or not, the fact is that it lives in public consciousness and it seems to me that an inappropriate response - shrugging it off, or disingenuously waxing philosophical about the truth, what is the truth? how can we know the truth? - propels us deeper into the maw of the corporation. Because we are willing now to dispense with notions that we once held dear, we are losing ourselves a little more.

Norman Mailer: Are you saying that the presidency should be more esteemed?

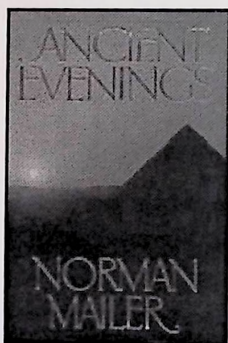
At Random: Well, I'm saying that the presidency is not a place for ... *for this kind of activity*, if I may assume the voice of Miss Watson for one second. Whatever moral position you want to take on it, the fact that we know about this event may be even more troubling than the event itself.

Norman Mailer: I wouldn't argue with that.

At Random: Forget about whether it's true or not. But each time something like this is even implied we are sent stumbling deeper into what you call the smog, into inattention and smug apathy, into an insensitivity to the heroic, let alone a yearning for it in ourselves. And I think there's a correlation between the reduction of the presidency and the troubles we've been having trying to figure out what's culturally valid and what isn't, beginning with whether or not Shakespeare should be part of a standard English curriculum. I'm not for an imperial presidency, but my entire 401k is in Shakespeare.

Norman Mailer: You know, there are always those periods in one's life when one has more answers than at other times, and at this point I have more questions. In my darkest moods I begin to think that what we're seeing is the reduction of the human soul on a mass collective basis. Everything is being reduced. Shakespeare came out of a vast process of civilization. If you have countries in Africa that don't have a literature equal to Shakespeare, fine, their turn may yet come, but let's not try to have equality at all costs in every situation right now.

I began to recognize how curious it was to write in the first person. In other words, I approached it as someone who might say, "Gee, the terrain on Mars is very different from Earth. I'm happy to be the first explorer here."



1983: *Ancient Evenings*

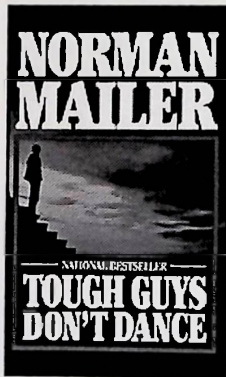
Then sometimes I think, Well, you know, you're getting old, Mailer, and you're beginning to cut slits in your sneakers [laughs]. Yes, you're that old. And you'd better recognize something - that there may be a process going on that's much larger than anything you ever dreamed of. Maybe everything has to fall into the middle, and mediocrity must prevail for a period in order that equality can be built, the necessary equality upon which you've constructed your hopes for so long: your belief that humankind was worthy of equality and that great things would come once it was achieved. Because I've always felt that when you have too much injustice, then you have too much rage for society to function well. There's a vitiation of our collective pool of human souls with too much injustice. Marx was not much of a genius for predicting the future, but if his criticism of capitalism is profound, it is because what Marx was saying is that money finally becomes a force to vitiate, eat out, and leech out all other values. Jesus was saying the same thing. Which is, parenthetically, one of the reasons I may have written that book about him [*The Gospel According to the Son*, 1997]. My feeling is that a real dynamic hope for the future will come only out of some form of Judeo-Christian socialism. Stalinism failed utterly, because it did not have a religious core. You can't ask people to continue to be nobler than they essentially are unless there's a certain fear of God and a certain love of God in their motivation.

What we are witnessing now is either part of the breakdown of American values or the beginning of a new sense that we have been depending too much upon presidents and the people who lead us - to return to your point - and finally we have to do our own work. We have to have our own society. If you want to have a good society, you have got to work for that society, you have to be a part of it. Most people don't look for that. What they want is something or somebody who'll take care of things, and not get in their way too much. That's selfish, that's greedy, and if that's where we really are now (and that may be exactly where we are now), then we can't complain.

But of course the presidency after Clinton will be reduced, and probably reduced even more if you get someone in there who's pretty clean, like Al Gore. "Clinton," we'll be saying some years from now, "was interesting at least."

At Random: What does it take today to incite a response to anything, though? Forget about Bob Dole's

***The Naked and the Dead* is the only book I've written, I'd say, that is abominably written - I'm obviously fond of it, but it is not well-written. It has a bad style. A real bestseller style. It's a good book with a bad style.**



1984: *Tough Guys Don't Dance*

call for outrage. Can we even manage a little anger?

Norman Mailer: There's an anger in people now that comes out of this huge anxiety that they have more money than they feel they have properly earned.

At Random: Interesting.

Norman Mailer: That creates a free-floating anxiety and that, in turn, creates anger. Whenever we feel dislocated, we're as angry as we dare to be.

At Random: A kind of perversion of what the sociologists and the political scientists call "the revolution of rising expectations," whereby, if an oppressed people's circumstances improve a little, that's when all hell breaks loose.

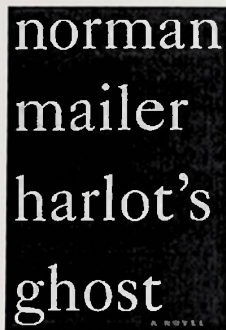
Norman Mailer: Absolutely - rising expectations do create a revolution, but the point is, has the rise been earned or not? When you have a small peasant revolt and they get more power, then they begin to look for more and more power, because they've earned it. But I think people are now looking for more and more of what I call passive power, which is one reason for the huge excitement about the computer. The computer gives you passive power. You never have to leave your house, but if you're bright enough, maybe you'll end up running the world, or destroying the world. When you get up to those giddy heights, it hardly matters whether you plant a flag on the mountain or jump off into empyrean cyber-space.

At Random: On that note, let's return to the large matter of this book, which is some book I'm carrying around - almost 1,300 pages [Mailer laughs]. This is quite a statement. Despite all that we've just said about being buried alive by corporate creature comforts, this is quite a hopeful object, isn't it? I mean, hopeful for literature. That you, and we, would publish such a book. It's iconic. And you have to admit that the Dark Ages aren't going to start on Tuesday if it's still possible for a writer like Norman Mailer to collect his life's work in this way.

Norman Mailer: Well, I don't want to characterize it as a collection of my life's work.

At Random: Right, I understand that.

People think of me as being a wild man, but finally, what was that? Five or ten percent of my nature. The rest was all work. I like work.



1991: *Harlot's Ghost*

The only rule that I think applies to all writers is that the unconscious

Norman Mailer: Because, after all, I don't feel that this is my best writing and that now you don't have to read anything else of mine. After all, I could put out two more collections equal to this - I won't, my publishers wouldn't let me [laughs]. But if you've written as much as I have over the years, then obviously you have thousands of pages that are worth reproducing - you hope so, certainly. No, I wanted this to be a new kind of book, a little bit. I wanted it to be, ideally, a novel - *U.S.A.* by John Dos Passos was my model while I was putting it together. *U.S.A.* is a wonderful collective novel. Very few people, unfortunately, still read it, but if there's anything that ever came close to being the great American novel, it was *U.S.A.* by John Dos Passos.

At Random: Well, how did you go about selecting for *The Time of Our Time*?

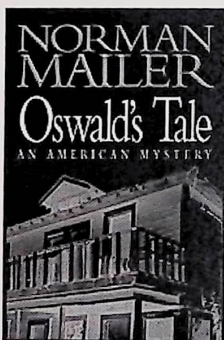
Norman Mailer: I began to see all sorts of themes and notes in my writing that were curious - for instance, certain people reappeared almost like characters in a novel. If you think of Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time*, which was a work of twelve more or less connected novels, he'd have certain characters who would appear in book three and then only reappear in the seventh book. I felt that there was an element of that in my work, that certain people did reappear. Sometimes they were real people and sometimes they were fictional characters, but you could use them to put together a sort of narrative. I've always been fascinated with form, and I wanted to find something slightly new in the form of the anthology. I didn't want this just to be an anthology. To me, anthologies are like a bed of clams [interviewer laughs].

At Random: It's oddly - I guess I should say unexpectedly - chronological. Can you explain that choice?

Norman Mailer: The book is chronological not in the order in which I wrote things but in historical order. For example, *Harlot's Ghost*, which came out in 1991, is featured prominently in the early part of *The Time of Our Time*. The underlying notion is that it's interesting to look at what authors write about a given year, whether they write about it in the same year or twenty years later.

At Random: But given that, how were the selections actually made? What determined the individual

**has to trust you,
and if you tell
yourself that
you're going to
write the next
day, then you'd
better do so.
Because if you
don't, you're
leaving all those
troops out in the
rain.**



1995: *Oswald's Tale: An American Mystery*

Read for an interview with Norman Mailer about this book.

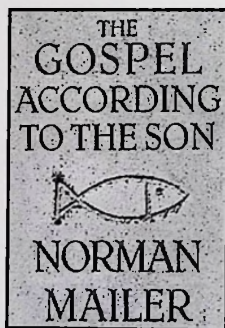
choices?

Norman Mailer: You know, finally this is a show-off book, let's not pretend. I'm trying to say to people, "Look, a lot of you have a bad opinion of me and you don't realize how good I am. I'm now going to show you I'm pretty good and I dare you to read this." One of the things I've believed for years is that no one ever accomplishes anything large at all unless their best motive and their worst motive are both having an interest in what you're doing. Basic capitalism. So if you're producing goods and making a profit from it, your worst motive is you're greedy and you want to make a lot of money, and your best motive better be that you make the best products possible and not a deluge of schlock.

All right, by the same token my worst motive in this is that I wanted people to realize how good I am. My best motive: I want to do something a little new in the nature of anthologies; I wanted to take my own work and shake it up a little and see if I could still make it fresh for myself. So, for example, one of the pieces that a lot of people think is one of the best things I ever wrote in terms of magazines articles is "Superman Comes to the Supermarket" [a long essay about John F. Kennedy, 1960]. But I read through it and I thought, You know, it's really sort of long-winded. There are places it just doesn't hold up. It bores me here; I find it interesting there; it's very good here; disappointing in this couple of pages. I thought, I'm going to take out what I don't like in "Superman Comes to the Supermarket" and I'm going to put in pages from *Harlot's Ghost*, where one of the characters in it, a girl named Modene, is having an affair with Jack Kennedy, and I'm going to put them into the middle of "Superman Comes to the Supermarket," and sort of interpolate the passages and see if that freshens both pieces up and brings a new vitality to old images of mine.

At Random: Wonderful. Now then, on the point about wanting people to know how good you are, let me highlight a few things I'm surprised to find here, if that's really your motive. But let me preface this by saying that I've always had good relations with women. I feel it necessary to make that declaration. I've rarely chalked up a misunderstanding to some sexual difference, but when the subject comes around to literature and when I say I like, among the Americans, Roth, Updike, and Mailer, the long knives are out in a flash - and especially on Mailer. So here's one randomly selected

I'm a little bored with myself right now. I've written about my inner condition so much over the years that really, I have a feeling, enough of him. Let the work be separated from the man. That's probably my wish right now.



1997: *The Gospel According to the Son*

Read an interview with Norman Mailer about this book.

sentence from *An American Dream* [1964] that, you know, is just one of those sentences of your many sentences that send women, whether they call themselves feminists or not, around the bend: "Ruta was crying not for Deborah, not even quite for herself, but rather for the unmitigatable fact that women who have discovered the power of sex are never far from suicide."

Norman Mailer: I find it interesting.

At Random: I have to say, I don't get it.

Norman Mailer: I mean, I wrote it at the peak of certain dangerous insights, and what I thought of immediately when you read that now is that I would counter by saying that men who climb rock faces without a rope are always in danger of a mortal accident. When women have discovered the power of sex, if they're bold, they adventure upward to get the best man they can possibly get with that extraordinary power. And if that fails, and it often does, yes, they're very close to suicide. It's not only battered women who commit suicide, it's very often beautiful women, and there are astonishing, startling, frightening suicides among beautiful women. Or the attempt - very often it's more the attempt than the act.

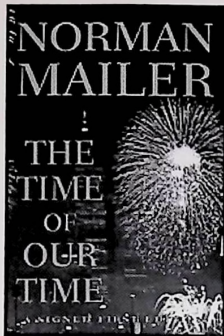
At Random: Because sex has failed them?

Norman Mailer: Yeah. Because they were very much in love with someone who betrayed them, in effect. How many beautiful women are there who have tried at least once to slash their wrist, which is usually the form it takes? They may make an attempt to slash their wrist, not necessarily wholly seriously, and they may have a faint nick on their wrist and they may call a friend after they slash the wrist and so forth and so on. I'm not being merely mean and snide here, but I'm saying that, yes, I would subscribe to that remark still. It's equal to saying to a professional football player, or to any young athlete, "You know, you have a wonderful talent and you're going to go very far with this talent and you have to recognize that the price you may pay is to have a broken body by the time you're thirty-five." Now, that's a fair remark, isn't it? Well, I think the other is equally fair. Women don't like individual insights. I don't want to make a huge generalization. Most women do not like individual insights, because it leaves them too exposed. Women do have that tribal power, which the scientists have lately discovered, I gather.

At Random: How so?

Norman Mailer: Through pheromones - you've heard about the pheromones?

At Random: Oh yes.



1998: *The Time of Our Time*

Norman Mailer: Where women who live together tend to have their periods together. Marvelous, marvelous - one's known that always instinctively, hasn't one? I don't mean about periods - I mean about women: that they have a tribal accord and they don't like being separated from the tribe. Certain men, on the contrary, pride themselves by saying in effect: "If I can't be the chief of the tribe, then I'm going to separate myself from the tribe." I think that's much less true of women. Look, one of the things I want to say is that one has the right to generalize about the other sex; we don't have a lock on understanding our own gender. Some of the most interesting things we can learn about ourselves we learn by the perceptions of women about us. How would we ever know how crude and stupid and ugly and piggish we can be unless we have women writing about it rather well? And we have the same right to do that to women if they'll only recognize it, but they won't; they won't.

At Random: You've said that you do interviews in part to clarify your positions on such matters.

Norman Mailer: It was a great shock to me that women were actually able to affect how people read me, and therefore a lot of people were not reading me. Probably two thirds to three quarters of women who are reading novels these days won't read me, and that means that maybe a third of the men won't read me either, because it gets to be too much of a hassle. The wife might say, "What are you reading him for?" And most husbands and wives don't need one more fight. So I thought, All right, let me do interviews. Maybe I can straighten out the issue, maybe I can't. But if my literary reputation is buried prematurely, I'll tip my hat to the women. They've done it again [laughs].

At Random: I want to talk about *The Naked and the Dead*, published on May 6, 1948, and considered pretty much universally to be the greatest novel of World War II, and among the greatest war novels ever written. I think you said once that your books are like your children, and on a given day you love one more than the other.

Norman Mailer: The way I answer usually is, I wouldn't choose a favorite because I might change my mind the next day.

At Random: I see, right. Okay, I won't ask you if you love *The Naked and the Dead* more, given this grand anniversary, but let me ask you then about how you found your voice. I can hear the Mailerian voice in this first book of yours - at least, I think I can - and, as I said earlier, instinct, that great theme, is there in the card game among Wilson, Croft, and Gallagher. So how did your writer's instinct lead you to your voice?

Norman Mailer: The idea that we have of ourselves is not necessarily always accurate. But it's operative. When I wrote *The Naked and the Dead*, I thought, I owe so much to James T. Farrell and John Dos Passos, to Tolstoy, perhaps to Dostoyevsky, so forth, so on. One of the themes I had, the fear I had, is that I was still writing absolutely in their shadow. I didn't mean that I was as good as they were, or would ever be as good as they were, but that I was writing under the influence. *Barbary Shore* [1951] was a book that was much influenced by latter-day reading after *The Naked and the Dead*. I was interested in the French novel at that point, I was interested in Gide, I wanted to write a novel that was full of surprises and relatively formal. In *The Deer Park* [1955], I began to find a voice because I had to rewrite it, and in the course of doing that, I began to learn not only what style was, but that style was more important, almost, than what you had for material in the book. It was the style that reached the reader and not the material. On the one hand that seems self-evident; on the other hand, most best-seller writers never discover this. They figure you get the good, hot material and that's all you need. And in fact that's what most publishers believe right now: "Author, just give me the hot material and I don't care how it's written."

At Random: "We'll build the book around it."

Norman Mailer: Yeah. "We'll bring in a couple of people if necessary [laughs]." "Just bring us the facts [laughs]." Publishing has gotten down to the level of Jack Webb in *Dragnet* [laughs]. Most people don't even know about style. Other people have a feeling for it from the day they begin reading. Serious readers know intuitively. I had to discover it for myself, the real impact of the meaning of style. So by the time I was writing *Advertisements for Myself* [1959], I began to recognize how curious it was to write in the first person.

In other words, I approached it as someone who might say, "Gee, the terrain on Mars is very different from Earth. I'm happy to be the first explorer here" [interviewer laughs].

Now, many, many, many writers, good and bad, had been living in the first person for centuries before I came to this remarkable discovery that the first person is not a routine or automatic way to write. It's a very interesting and exciting mode of literary being, with huge limitations, and you really do have to begin to understand it as such. Especially if you're writing about yourself. Nothing is more difficult than to write about oneself in the first person. It's highly unnatural. Because "I" is only about a third of us. "I" is the ego, if you will. And so you get into all sorts of places where you want to use "one" to talk about the other aspects of one's self. Or you get pushed over in later years into the third person, as I did in *The Armies of the Night* [1968]. Using the third person for oneself may be a special condition, but it's legitimate, because there is a part of us that feels superior to ourselves, the person who observes us even as we're doing things. And that person is always saying: "Oh, not too good again today, are we?" That person is a wonderful voice. Because it enables you to treat yourself as one more character in a field or a nest of characters. And that produces lively effects.

So I did keep looking to discover my voice. What I didn't realize, perhaps, is that all the while, as you're saying, I had a voice. Yes, I had a voice. But that wasn't what I was aware of. What I was aware of was how much I didn't have one and that I was still looking. So we don't have to know ourselves entirely as we go along. You could certainly be right in declaring that the stuff I wrote in later years fits very comfortably into books I wrote in early years. With the notable exception of *The Naked and the Dead*, which is the only book I've written, I'd say, that is abominably written - I'm obviously fond of it, and, indeed, many people still say it's my best book, but it is not well written. It has a bad style. A real best-seller style. It's a good book with a bad style. There are major writers like that - Solzhenitsyn, for example, at least in translation: Solzhenitsyn has many powerful things to write about and certainly carries his major load, but he often writes in a bad style.

At Random: What kind of work habits have made all this possible, finding a style, writing thirty-one books?

Norman Mailer: A lot is genetic. My mother was capable of a great deal of very hard work. And she was a marvelously disciplined woman. I say marvelously disciplined because it wasn't one of those cold disciplines that chilled everyone around her. She was a warm woman and, you know, we were just two children, my younger sister and myself. And we felt beloved, if you will. We didn't have an unhappy family life. My father was a sport. His work habits were decent at best. People think of me as being a wild man, but finally, what was that? Five or ten percent of my nature. The rest was all work. I like work. I remember Elia Kazan one day at the Actors Studio saying, "Here at the Studio we're always talking about the work, the work. We talk about it so piously. We talk about it; we say, 'The work, the work.' Well, we do work here, and let's get it straight: Work is a blessing." He said this, glaring at every one of us. And I thought, He's so right; that's what it is. Work is a blessing. Yes. If I tell myself I'm going to my desk tomorrow, then I consider it a point of honor with myself to go to work in the morning. Whatever my mood is. Because I've found that you can go from a bad mood to a good mood if you force yourself to sit down at the desk and write. And whenever I give advice to a writing class - I'll talk to them once every couple of years - I'll say that the only rule that I think applies to all young writers and all older writers as well, the one rule that is not individual, is that you have a relation to your unconscious as a writer. The unconscious has to trust you, and if you tell yourself that you're going to write the next day, then you'd better do so. Because if you don't, you're leaving all those troops out in the rain [laughs].

At Random: Speaking of the wild man, people say to me, "Oh, you're going to interview Mailer!" As if they may never see me again. And I say, "Actually, folks, he's the last gentleman." And I have a very simple test for a gentleman, which most men fail: Does he help you, another man, on with your coat? But the wild man, what happened to him?

Norman Mailer: Well, he finally ran into a woman who was exactly his equal, which I think is very important. People only get domesticated when they meet their equal, someone who's as good and as bad as they are.

At Random: Do you feel any need to write your memoir?



Norman Mailer: I'm not sure there's a need. I'm not sure I want to. I'm not sure I will. If I had a choice between writing a good novel and writing a memoir, I'd do the novel. For I don't know how many books I have left, you know.

At Random: The time is better spent with a novel.

Norman Mailer: Well, it's more exciting. I'm a little bored with myself right now. I've written about my inner condition so much over the years that really, I have a feeling, enough of him. Let the work be separated from the man. That's probably my wish right now. And that, by the way, is one of the motives here - you notice I'm not in *The Time of Our Time* except where I'm there because of the subject matter. It isn't like *Advertisements for Myself*, where I discuss each piece and my state at the time I was writing it. The main motive, the main good motive behind this book, was my desire to let people separate my work from me. Let them see the job I've done. My hope is that they will be reading my work in fifty years, rather than talking about my life and my person.

Sean Abbott is editor of *@random*.

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- Norman Mailer
- Random House, May 1998
- \$39.50, 1,286 pages
- ISBN 0-375-50097-9
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jmlennon1

From: jm wordcraft <jmwordcraft@yahoo.com>
To: Norris Mailer <nmncm@attbi.com>; Mike Lennon <lennon@wilkes.edu>; Mike Lennon <jmlennon1@attbi.com>
Sent: Sunday, June 02, 2002 11:55 PM
Attach: title.doc; epigraphs.doc; Introfinal4.doc
Subject: Assembling the beast, msg 1

Whew--it's done!

Here is a list of files, the page #s they cover, and the Xeroxed pages that get inserted. I will append the computer-generated files to a series of messages--first three on to this one, 3 more on message #2, etc., till all are sent to you two.

Norris, please print out the files for NM. He already HAS a full set of the Xeroxed pages, but print out this guide for his convenience in putting it together.

Mike, I have copied a set of Xeroxed pages for you and will courier them to you--drop me an email tomorrow and let me know if they should go to home or office.

Now--the master plan for The Spooky Art

title.doc
 epigraph.doc
 introfinal4.doc pp. 1-7

Part1page.doc
 LitBizreallyfinal1.doc pp. 8-37
 Xoxed pages--Last Draft of Deer Park, pp. 38-59
 LitBizreallyfinal2.doc pp. 60-92

Craftreallyfinal.doc pp.93-139
 Xoxed pages--Man Half Full pp. 140-157
 Psychreallyfinal.doc pp. 155-201
 Philreallyfinal.doc pp.202-236

Part2page.doc
 Genrreallyfinal1.doc pp. 237-260
 Xoxed pages--Small and Modest Malignancy pp. 261-263
 Genrreallyfinal2.doc pp. 264-267
 Xoxed pages--Maidstone pp. 268-281

Genrreallyfinal3.doc pp. 282-283
 Xoxed pages--Tango pp. 284-301

6/14/02

Genrereallyfinal4.doc pp. 302-320
Xoxed pages--Graffiti pp. 321-326
Colleaguesreallyfinal1.doc pp. 327-332
Xoxed pages--Huck Finn pp. 333-337

Colleaguesreallyfinal2.doc pp. 338-339
Xoxed pages--Papa, Turd Test, Hem. and Miller pp. 340-349
Xoxed pages--D.H. Lawrence pp. 350-376
colleaguesreallyfinal3. pp. 377-383
Xoxed pages--The Group pp. 384-388
Xoxed pages-- The Argument Reinvigorated--pp. 389-396
Colleaguesreallyfinal4.doc p. 397
Xoxed pages--Children of the Goddess--pp. 398-424

And that's it! Mike, let me know where you want your pages sent.

Closing up shop after I deliver the mss to thr Wylie Agency tomorrow,
but will check my email.

Judith

Do You Yahoo!?

Yahoo! - Official partner of 2002 FIFA World Cup

<http://fifaworldcup.yahoo.com>

Dr. J Michael Lennon

From: "Abbott, Sean"
 To: "Dr. J Michael Lennon" <lennon@wilkes.edu>
 Sent: Monday, June 17, 2002 1:23 PM
 Subject: Mailer: Gospel
 Hi Mike,

As follows:

<http://www.randomhouse.com/atrandom/normanmailer/gospel.html>

Cheers,

Sean

-----Original Message-----

From: Dr. J Michael Lennon [mailto:lennon@wilkes.edu]
 Sent: Monday, June 17, 2002 11:53 PM
 To: Abbott, Sean
 Subject: Re: Mailer: Ancient Evenings

Sean,

We are using some chunks from your interview on "Gospel according to Son" in NM's new book, which has gone to random house. can you provide the on-line citation? I'm working on back matter right now. I'd appreciate it.
 Did you ever get back to Capelotti's ms.?

Best, Mike

----- Original Message -----

From: "Abbott, Sean" <Sean.Abbott@harpercollins.com>
 To: <lennon@wilkes.edu>
 Sent: Friday, May 03, 2002 2:57 PM
 Subject: Mailer: Ancient Evenings

> Mike,

>

> I think this is outrageous, given that 2003 will be the 20th anniversary of

> AE. I haven't spoken with that Norton editor yet, not for lack of trying --

> actually, I had to take a hiatus from dialing when we moved offices. Will resume Monday. By the way, I've started reading a thrilling thriller called

> Oceans of Time. I won't be able to make the May 6 event, alas, but please give the Mailers my very warm regards.

>

> Cheers,

>

> Sean

u
 → Mark's Gospel to the Mountain h
 3/97

Dr. J Michael Lennon

From: "jm wordcraft" <jmwordcraft@yahoo.com>
To: "Dr. J Michael Lennon"
Sent: Friday, October 04, 2002 1:50 PM
Subject: Re: Poets and Writers
 Mike,

I told this to NM when he called in from the road--just so you'll know too:

their Nov/Dec issue closed last week
 Jan/Feb closing end of Nov.

This from Kevin Larimer, assoc. editor. Their # is 212-226-3586. he asked, of course, what we had in mind but I said I didn't know. Figured what I did know was so ephemeral it was foolish not to pretend total ignorance.

--- "Dr. J Michael Lennon" <lennon@wilkes.edu> wrote:

- > Dear Judith,
- > I had a long talk with NM a couple of days ago, mainly about SPOOKY.
- > He asked me to get and touch with you and ask you to determine the
- > publication schedule/submission dates for something in POETS AND
- > WRITERS. I have sent him an excerpt from "Craft" to run
- > there--although I'm sure he will change it. I avoided everything that
- > might appear in The New Yorker.
- > He won't need the dates until he returns in October, but I thought I
- > should get it to you sooner rather than later.
- > Veronica is sending me second pass galley.
- >
- > All Best,,
- > mike
- > p.s. just got a copy of Levenda's book and am enjoying it. I also
- > have a copy of the London Times with the Dotson Rader interview, if
- > you need a copy for anything.
- >

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Dr. J Michael Lennon

From: "Windholz, Veronica" <VWindholz@randomhouse.com>
To: "Dr. J Michael Lennon" <lennon@wilkes.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, October 22, 2002 9:52 AM
Subject: RE: page proofs/Spooky Art

Hi, Mike

I got back the proofreaders' sets yesterday and have been going through them--they're pretty clean: a few typos here and there, but not many, considering what the corrected 1st pass looked like. I'll finish later today and will also send Norman some minor queries today or tomorrow. Both readers made an attempt to figure out the situation with the notes, but as you can imagine, they came up with some strays and some gaps; I'll wait for your expert rendering. If I could have your set back by next Monday, it would be perfect.

Hope all's well with you, and will look forward to hearing about your stage debut.

best,
Veronica

10/22/02