

NM: It's true. ~~A hazard.~~ I won't ~~even~~ read a good novel while I'm working. ~~I assume,~~
~~for example, that The Corrections is a very good book but I'll have to wait to read it till~~
~~I'm done with what I'm working on now. Because there you are, writing a book, there~~ *It's equal*
~~to working on a car. There~~ *and*
~~you are with all the parts of your car out on the garage floor. You're trying to reassemble~~
~~the engine, and some bastard goes by in a Ferrari. And he's a competitor. Your reaction~~
~~is, "I don't want to look!" In the distance I can hear a little sound and that's the roar of his~~
~~motor!~~ *when you*
~~It's very distracting to read something good because then you want to write a~~
~~piece of criticism on where this author is terrific and where he or she is not. Let's say~~
~~people are blowing it up too high and your feeling is, "It's a good book but not that good"~~
~~--lets get into what's good what's not." It's can be immensely distracting to read~~ *that critically, so it can*
~~something good/ Stendahl, for instance, used to peruse the Code Napoleon on the loo~~ *there's a tendency to avoid reading*
~~every day before he'd start to write. Well, he didn't want his style affected by flights of,~~
~~fancy in one direction or another. Very sober. I don't know if that was for The Red and~~
~~the Black or the Charterhouse of Parma. But, while doing one of those books, he did~~
~~absolutely read the Code Napoleon every day. I read the New York Times.~~

Man: I read somewhere that you and Tolstoy had a close relationship when you wrote
The Naked and the Dear.

NM: That was different. That was different.

Man: Sorry about that.

~~Now, I didn't always follow that rule, when~~
 NM: No, that was perfect. If I say something is a rule, you can always break it. I used to
~~I was writing The Naked and the Dead, I used to~~
 read Thomas Wolfe and Tolstoy. I didn't read them every day but they were on my
 writing desk and they were ^{perfect} wonderful for what I was doing. Tolstoy ^{particularly,} was there because
 he's probably the best single guy I can think of for a writer who wants to do novels that
 work to penetrate into human emotions. Tolstoy is compassionate but severe. That's a
 wonderful combination. Not many people have it, which is why he's ^{is} such a great writer.
~~He truly understand what people can do at their worst and yet he can still be~~
~~compassionate about them to quite a degree so you feel for them. Yet he certainly doesn't~~
~~forgive them for too little. That tone was wonderful for The Naked and the Dead. It~~ ^{gave me}
~~me a sense of my characters. And then there was Thomas Wolfe to steam up the book,~~
~~when I needed a hot description. Wolfe probably did as much harm as good to the book.~~
~~But there it was. If I wanted to describe a tropical sunset or what the jungle smelled like,~~
 there was Wolfe. ~~And for the characters, Tolstoy,~~
~~So there, in a sense, I'm violating what I just said. Possibly it's when you get older~~
~~that you have to avoid other influences. But as Algren said first, you have to absorb a few~~
~~other influences. After all, I didn't really have a style, yet for The Naked and the Dead. I~~
 had a good, workmanlike prose and wonderful material. You don't always need a style.
 Just for certain kinds of books. Henry James without style is hopeless. But if The Naked
and the Dead had had more style, it might have been less of a novel in a funny way. It
 was so simple. It was there to read.

Man: You've been quite critical about it.

~~NM:~~ It's a book written by an amateur, and so it has all the virtues of such a book. It's daring; it hardly knows what it's getting into. If I were to write it today, it would take me three to five times as long because I'd suffer at the number of novelistic taboos I was violating. You can transgress any taboo but you have to know what you're doing. ~~It's best if you have some sense of the spirits out there that are going to punish you for violating the taboo. Like blurring the point of view.~~

Man: Could I just ask again about your relationship with your subconscious? I can picture it more like Epstein's Jacob and the Angel in the sculpture, than having a civilized conversation with yourself. Because this thing of anger--what I read, and maybe this is fanciful, what I read, and this is reflected in the energy of the prose--it's a real humdinger going on in there.

NM: The anger?

Man: Yes, and how much of that---

Writing in anger
~~NM:~~ Anger (without irony) is as bad as writing when you're horny. It's a species of pornography; you're just venting your rage. ~~It's pornography~~ ^{is empty} ~~because it does not have~~ ^{the people} ~~character involved with the people who are copulating and so is essentially empty.~~ ^{are without character.} It's manipulative, exploitive. Anger ^{void of} ~~written without~~ irony is of that ilk. But irony mixed

with anger--that's a heady combination. ~~I'm happy when I get that.~~ One of the best examples of controlled, sustained rage, full of irony, is Catch-22.

Man: When you get to the desk in the morning and you're engaging with your dreams, in your monastic cell, how do then process that material and deal with it ironically? I'm asking you the alchemical question, how do you get to the art?

NM: I think you're making the process more interesting than it really is. I'm not thinking all that much when I'm working. I've been doing it for so many years, that really, I'm like an old plumber who's carrying his lunch pail to the job. I'll go in, sense from years of habit that it's going to take me about 45 minutes to begin writing, so I usually try to keep yesterday's writing in hand. I'll edit it before I start. That warms me up.

But you are asking, how does the unconscious deal with it in sleep? Well, I don't pretend to understand this process. I know when I'm in touch with myself and when not. I take a peek at the handwriting and if it's not too manic nor too constipated and there are not too many corrections--something good was probably going on. But you generally try to keep your reactions at a fairly low level in relation to what's going on. Much better to be excited about what you've written on this day six months later.

As the years go by, my first drafts get less finished, but my editing gets sharper. So I can end up with a piece of prose that's as good as something written twenty years ago but the way I get to it now is different.

Man: ~~Do you think there's a reason for that?~~

Page 16 ~~→ deleted~~
+ page 17
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least 3, possibly 4, maybe 5 times I went through that book and in the course of it I learned an awful lot about writing.

It had become a matter of finding a voice that would hold the book together. The final style of The Deer Park grew out of that. But over the years I discovered that one style is not enough if you want to write about all sorts of things. So, Picasso became my model. Picasso changed his style every time he took a new approach to reality, usually when he had a new marriage. A new marriage for him was a new sense of reality.

Style is a reflection of identity, you see. ^{Given a firm sense of oneself} When you have a sense of your identity, you can end up with a style. But should your identity change, your style ^{will} can go through a serious shift. So illness, tragedy, huge frustration, age itself can alter your identity.

Accompanying that is often a change in style.

① And, of course, one's subject matter should affect your style.

Man: Can your subject matter shift your style?

→ ~~Man:~~ Journalism certainly gets into the style of a good many books that are topical. But then, you wouldn't necessarily have wanted Henry James to describe the life of Gary

Gilmore. There is such a thing as too much style. For what Henry James did, his ^{way of} style ^{writing} was ideal. What he learned before anyone else knew it, was that polite social life, despite

its ridiculous and/or exaggerated aspects, also has its almost ineluctable spectrum of small possibilities ^{that are} present at every moment. In social life, people ~~can~~ often choose

among three or four equally agreeable alternatives, even ^{to making the choice of being} make a choice down to being a

a little warmer or a little colder than you originally thought you might be ^{toward} with a given

person. James had an extraordinary sense of that, and ^{he} created a fictional world that rotated about these little momentary decisions.

NM: I was in a small Paris hotel room on a given night when I couldn't sleep. The room was tiny, the double bed took up almost all the floor, and you could break your toe walking around this raised mattress, the room was that tiny. At a given moment I woke up and thought, "Oh, hell, I don't want to go rummaging in my suitcase for a book," and there was ^{a Gideon bible} the New Testament by my bedside table. So I opened it and started reading. I hadn't looked at ^{the New Testament} it for 30 or 40 years and I thought, well, Fulton Oursler once ^{wrote} wrote a book ^{and} called it The Greatest Story Ever Told ^{he} sold a million copies, I think. I thought, well this ^{was, perhaps} the Gideon, I thought this ^{the} may be the greatest story ever told, but it's told abominably. You had sayings that were worthy of Shakespeare, but much of the stuff was baldly, badly and insufficiently described. A limp, often ungainly text with a number of absolute nuggets of language. I thought, well, there've got to be a hundred novelists in the world who can do a better job, and I'm one of them.

^{became} I ~~got~~ intrigued with the idea. When I thought of all the hypocrites and bastards, all the corruptibles and power-seekers who've been living with the Gospel for centuries, ^{for} and using it ^{for} for their own purposes, I thought, why not just tell the ^{decided} story? ^{It is a} It is a fascinating story. The notion is mind-boggling. We are dealing with a man who begins to realize through the evidence itself that he is the son of God. The difficulty of the book would be, and I saw this in advance, ^{that} I would have to write about a man who was nicer than myself. That's tough. To ^{do} write about someone who's meaner, ^{than yourself} that's easy. But to ^{a least} write with someone better? Well, parenthetically, quickly, Jean Malaquais once said you

can write about any character but one. I asked who ~~is the one~~, and he said, "You can't write about a novelist who's better than yourself."

I thought, this is the test--not that Jesus was a novelist, far from it. But he's got a nobler nature than I have. Still, I thought, OK, I'll take a whack at it.

And I decided he had to be a man, an existential man, dominated by the huge cloud that hangs over him, which is that he's the son of God. He doesn't feel worthy of it but he's doing his best every step of the way. Not in command of every situation, but doing his best all the way, and having some startling successes.

~~And the~~ style became the problem. In the beginning it was too Biblical.

Moreover, I had to decide whether to travel in first person or third ~~person~~. First person would have everyone saying: "There's Mailer, the egomaniac. Now he thinks he's Jesus Christ--what a pompous ass! What a totally unpleasant human being!" I thought that's the bad side of it, but at least I can avoid the ^{larger} ~~bigger~~ mistake of doing it in the third person.

Because that will get mixed up with the Gospels, and ^{the reader will be wondering,} ~~what part has been added?~~ ^{"what's original text, and what has been added?"} ~~It's~~ going to make for an impossible read. All right, then. First person. Damn the torpedoes, ~~and~~ first person.

It got interesting. If it was too Biblical in the beginning, I did have a very tough editor who's totally irreligious, Jason Epstein,. He was appalled that I was writing this book, hated the thought. We're friends, but he's one tough editor. And he's always either ^{absolutely/} ~~right~~ or ^{absolutely/} ~~wrong~~, which is rare for editors ^{but with him,} but with him you have to make a quick decision. ^{this time} ~~Is this time~~ he wrong or right, ^{this time?} I concluded on this occasion, ^{that} ~~yes~~, the style is too Biblical. ^{which relatively} After ~~that~~, it was ^{easy}. The book was short enough for me to go through seven variations of the style. Because I had to find the style.

Man: ~~You had never written anything like that before.~~

had to find the balance

NM: It was a matter of finding the tone between a Biblical rhythm and a contemporary one,

~~style.~~ Something that would not inflict a Biblical grip on you, yet keep the echo.

Before I was done, it took all of a year,

Man: It was still very biblical-like.

NM: I couldn't escape that. I didn't want to, but it did take me a year and seven versions to find a balance--the most I've worked on style ever--other than the re-write of The Deer Park.

Man: What would you say for younger writers like myself are the major things you've learned to write good fiction?

NM: I've been trying to answer that all afternoon. Obviously, there's something I didn't say that you're looking for, so could you point the question more?

Man: When you rewrote The Deer Park about ten times, what did you learn?

NM: OK, now we've got a purchase. To begin with, writing in first person or writing in third person, is a great divide. When you decide you're going to do a book--sometimes it just happens that way--you start writing and you're in the first person, or in the third

person. And it works. Sometimes, it's a true dilemma. ~~Because~~ ^{but insight} if you write in the first person you gain much in terms of immediacy and lose as much ^{Not} because you can't move into other peoples' heads without twisting the form into a pretzel.

The Deer Park underlined the difficulty. At one point, the man who ^{is} ~~was~~ telling the story states ^{at a given point} ~~that~~ he's going to go from first person to third. ^{He is now} ~~Because~~ ^{he claims} he's now old enough ^{to} understand people he didn't understand before. Now, ^{he can write} ~~he can write~~ about them in third person ^{now} ~~because~~ he has much more of an idea of how they think, ^{he can write} ~~he can write~~

In first person, the style has to be altogether tuned to the man who's telling the story ^{And that was} ~~and the man~~. (Only once did I try having a woman tell the story. ^{When your} ~~When your~~ Marilyn Monroe in "Of Women and Their Elegance.") ^{if when your} narrator is a man, the key choice is not how bright the guy is, because ^{you know} ~~you know~~, however

bright, he can't be smarter than you are. So, that's easy. You ^{can} ~~can~~ dumb him down to taste or bring him up to your level. ^{That's no problem} ~~That's no problem~~. The question is how tough is he? Can you write about a man who's ^{braver and tougher} ~~tougher~~ than yourself? The answer is yes. You can do that by using your imagination of how you might act if you were that much ^{more of a man} ~~tougher~~. But I don't know if I can answer the question for an author who's a woman. ^I ~~I~~ obviously don't have as keen a sense of the problems ^{they are in} ~~they are in~~. Can she, for example, write about a woman who's more sensitive than herself? Just guessing, ~~but~~ probably not. She can write about a woman who uses her sensitivity and sensibility more than the author, because the latter can use all the frustrated times in her life when ^{you couldn't use} ~~you couldn't use~~ the sensitivity and sensibility she possessed. ^{were not easily available} ~~were not easily available~~. Can a woman write about another woman more passionate than herself? Probably. Or a woman who's colder than herself? Without any trouble at all.

^{are} These (the sorts of questions you get into when writing in the first person.

In the third person, there's a different set of difficulties.

In third person you are God--well, of course, what you are is one of the minor *angels*
~~minions~~ of God. Nonetheless, there you are seeing into everyone's mind. Of course,
 there are two kinds of third person--point of view third person where you stay in one
 person's mind, but are still writing it from above.

Then there's the other kind of third person. You are God and enter everyone's
 head. That's very hard to do. Hard to get over the embarrassment of being able to enter
 certain people's ~~heads~~ *minds* with considerably more skill than others. That kind of Olympian
 person, that Tolstoyan third person, needs experience, confidence, irony, *he* needs *hardly*
detachment ~~distance~~ but if you can do it, well, hurrah. Most of the great novels *are written in that*
 tone.

↪ Just about all the great novels of the 19th century.

~~Woman: What I hear from my friends who haven't actually written a book yet--they feel~~
~~they haven't read enough to sit down and write~~

Some talented people feel they haven't read enough
~~MM: That is so dangerous! My great friend Malaquais had a terrible time writing~~
 because he read more than anyone I ever knew. Like many another self-educated man, ~~he~~
~~read omnivorously, and~~ he had complete opinions on everything, a powerful mind. But
 he couldn't write quickly because he could see everything that was wrong in what he did.
 He'd realize so-and-so had done it better. And this extended into the narrowest corners of
 writing--some small novelist who was known for one small ability but ~~really had it~~ he'd
 read him or her too. *Malaquais* ~~And he~~ despised himself that he couldn't write a book as large as his
 vision of society. So he was terribly constipated as a writer.

to get down and write

Man: ~~Most people who read a lot become critics.~~

NM: ~~Yeah. Very often good critics.~~

NM: ~~For that matter, I enjoy doing criticism. It's so relaxed compared to novel writing~~
~~with its huge responsibility—you're like a god and so you have treasure like a god and~~

You have to be very careful how you dispose of your characters. You have, let us say, a really interesting protagonist, some young, ambitious guy, say he's a fine athlete and he's got a chance to become a professional football player, but he's a warrior so he thinks maybe he should join Special Forces and see if he can get to Afghanistan. All right, either possibility is open to him—he's interesting, he can do either one. So what do you decide? If you send him off to Afghanistan, you've got to learn a lot before you can go near the subject—that sounds too difficult. But what do you know about professional football? Probably not enough—but maybe you can fake that ~~at least~~ to a good degree.

These are the sorts of strategic problems the unconscious has to deal with. *It explores down into the depths of what you know about potential subjects*
~~Writing a novel in the third person omnipotent demands more than the third person bound to a limited point of view. In the first person it's easier to fake things, because of the immediacy. On the other hand, the first person tends to be shallower. More immediate, more lively, but finally you can end up in a cul de sac. There are many dead ends lying in wait in a first person book.~~

Man: In terms of women novelists, have you found female novelists who have opened female characters, or aspects of female culture? Do you ever recognize that there's a difference?

NM: Wait--- is there a great difference between female writers and male writers?

Man: No. What I was asking: do you as a competitive novelist recognize that Toni Morrison brings to female characters other things?

NM: She certainly has a deep sense of black women, no question. But does she bring more to it than other writers? I don't know how good she is on black men. I felt less certain of her portraits of black men. But what she does with black women is an education and I respect her very much for that. I've only read one or two of her novels, by the way, so I may be speaking on too narrow a base.

Man: I know more of black women from Toni Morrison than I do from any of the black women I know.

NM: That's what novelists are there for, to tell you the things your friends won't tell you, and that you can't perceive.

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Man: But within the context of you being conscious of your competitors, do you get more from reading Toni Morrison because she is so radically different and her experience is so radically different than you would from another white, Jewish author?

NM: Roth...

Man: Yes.

To compare Toni Morrison and Philip Roth is not simple.

NM: It's ~~totally~~ different. The experience is altogether different. With Roth there's a certain intimacy. ~~I'll read it and~~ I know his characters, I grew up with people like that. And I'll say, "Well, I've got to hand it to Roth. He sees something in this guy, ~~for~~ instance, this guy who makes shoes, that I never would have bothered with." Roth had more of a human sense of this man than I had and I ~~have to~~ tip my hat to him--grudgingly. I have to tip my hat to him. Because he really did it right whereas I just ignored that possibility." But then it gets into a very complicated argument because the Jewish side of my brain ^{says} is, "Yes, I ignored that possibility, but surely there are other possibilities that ~~were~~ ^{are} more interesting. And, why, finally the real argument should be not who knows more about this man, he obviously does, but is it finally worth spending time with ~~this~~ ^{that} fellow?" ~~man?~~

With Toni Morrison, it's more on the order of: I ~~really~~ know so little of black ^{women} women, ~~particularly black women~~ who don't have a voice, who are not educated, and after all, I should know more. ^{→ INSERT A from p 25} ~~In American you often grow up with black women being the nicest people you know, they're working in the house, have tough lives, their children~~

ever seen. Writers don't usually go around giving blurbs to their equals--for one thing they're usually not approached.

Man: Looking at Roth, Bellow, Updike--they've gone beyond looking at America-- With you, they're the giants of American literature, really.

NM: Well, we're very unstable giants at this point. I think the younger writers are sick of Roth, Bellow, Updike and myself of us the way we were sick of Hemingway and Faulkner. We never talked about anyone

but then when I was a young writer and ^{that} ~~our~~ feeling grew into, "Let's get rid of these

^{no interest in us.}

^{regretments they had}
guys. Yeah, they're great--now get off the stage! We want to write!" What I noticed with the praise of Jonathan Franzen's "The Corrections" was that

Franzen which was fascinating, there was something like 20 writers gave their salute to

the book and they all were of his generation. Updike wasn't there, Bellow wasn't, I wasn't

there--who was there? ^{man on the blurb took the jacket} The oldest was Don De Lillo who gave the smallest praise. It was

just fascinating. And the others were ~~all~~ people like David Foster Wallace, Michael

Cunningham, some you would never have heard of, but they were all contemporary, and I

^{"The Corrections"}
I had the feeling this book is the book of a generation that really wants to wipe the slate clean and start over again. Have a new literary movement. .

Man: How much do you read?

^{possible end to the writing.}

^{He's}
NM: I don't. That's a sad confession. The reason is that Ferrari roaring by outside. I

can't read when I'm writing, and in recent years, for personal reasons, I'm writing all the

^{I like}
time. It's like I feel I haven't done enough, haven't done enough. So I've got to work. The

few times ~~that~~ ^{hardly} I take off a month or two, I ~~don't~~ know what to do with myself. ~~I've~~
~~become a typical example of the man who can't retire because he has no resources.~~ ^{I have} It's
true. I ~~have no~~ ^{are} athletic resources left; I can't ski any longer nor box, I can't even walk
half a mile without paying for it. I'm not feeling sorry for myself, it's kind of easy that I
can't box any more. And as an intellectual existence, what am I going to do? Play better
solitaire? Try to become a chess player again when half of my head for being a chess
player is not there? No, writing is the one thing I can do and I keep doing it. I enjoy it
more than I ever did which means the product is probably less good. It's ^{too hard} ~~asked~~ to enjoy
your ~~own~~ work ~~as you are working~~ while you are working.

GENRE

Genre runs
from page 1 to page 12

[World]

87.17 Time is your money in a film—literally, it's your money. If you don't ^{finish a scene} get done ~~with this scene~~ ^{as scheduled to be done} by lunch, then you're going to come back in a stupor after lunch, and you're ^{possibly} going to lose not half an hour or an hour, but two hours. So you're gambling. And that's ^{if you're not wholly satisfied with the result,} exiting. And not only are you gambling, you're getting immediate results. Because you ^{you've} learn in the next hour or two whether your gamble won or lost. And then, the next day in ^{your gamble was too costly,} the dailies you see if it really came out. (Making movies, you're absolutely in the world. ^{You're} an existentialist. ^{You're a gambler, you don't} in the existential sense. Whereas in literature, you withdraw from the world in order to ^{more directing and writing} perceive the world. So, they really use opposite sides of your self. I think you get closer ^{come nearer to the working} to your soul in a book, but you get closer to the functioning of your psyche with a movie. ^{this a bit} Let me see if I can amplify that a little. ^{In} I think when you are writing a book there are ^{exceptional} moments when you feel as if you're beaming a torch down into the abyss, and you see the ^{feel as if} lineaments of your soul down there. You don't travel down there in your soul, but you ^{do} perceive it. Because in the course of writing a book you get out to some ^{very} astonishing places, and you do have the light of your intuition, ^{and} it does ^{throw} through a long light. When you are making a film, particularly after you've shot it and you start editing it, you look at the same scene over and over to ^{clean out} take all the little dead spots out. Makes you feel like a surgeon. ^{also} What it also does is ^{the faculty of} it involves your taste, and your concentration. Seeing it over and over and over again, you have to keep your taste alive, you have to exercise your ability to concentrate upon the same material over and over and over. And I'm the guy

who wrote, "Repetition kills the soul," ^{that} ~~which~~ I thought of many times ^{while} ~~when~~ I was editing. ^{more editing}
 But ~~it~~ doesn't kill it in this case, because it's not absolute repetition; you're ~~chasing down~~ ^{altering the given a little each time}
~~repetition in order to alter it slightly.~~ (And as you do that you're tuning your psyche.

[World]

STYLE

81.16 ^{My} The journalist ^(c) ~~writing that I did~~ started with "Superman Goes to the Supermarket,"

a piece about Kennedy and the Democratic Convention in 1960. ^{Something developed} ~~If there was a style that~~
~~followed, it began there. I think what happened was I saw that I didn't know how to write~~
^{in my style}

about political conventions—at least not in conventional terms. I wasn't really interested

in politics; I thought they were boring. ^{I had suffered the dead repetitive language} ~~The politics were the same I had been suffering~~

^{of politics all} ~~through the fifties.~~ ^{however} ~~But what seemed fascinating to me was that Kennedy was a~~ ^{seemed to be more}

^{old} ~~protagonist rather~~ ^{so} ~~than a candidate and that he offered something new to American~~

lives—this daring and romantic and surrealistic and cockeyed idea that the president

could be a young man and have an attractive wife. The only thing I will take credit for is

that I had enough sense to see that this was more important than ~~at~~ the politics. Out of

this vague perception, I blundered into a way of writing ^{about} ~~but~~ ^{which worked,} ~~(that convention)~~

^{I wrote about the politicians I saw as if they were characters} ~~was writing about them as though they were a great novelistic event.~~

^{in a large novelistic event.}

[WR]

81.16 Until The Armies of the Night I was very much in the background of my non-

fiction narratives. You could feel that there was somebody ^{was observing} ~~looking in at~~ these events,

~~and~~ ^{and} presumably ~~it's~~ the author, but I wasn't a formal narrator as such. However, one of

^{elements I knew} ~~the things I began to feel~~ ^{about} ~~was wrong with journalism is that~~ ^{all} ~~immense events were~~ ^{had to be} ~~boiled~~

~~to 3000 words at the most. I thought the~~
~~down to 300 words. There's no way to write about an immense event in 300 words or,~~

~~3,000 words unless you're a poet. So the trick was not to boil it down but to expand it, to~~

~~blow it up, and to use 30,000 words or 20,000 words to write about events usually~~

~~described in 2,000 or 3,000 words. What I began to feel is that the character of the~~

~~narrator or the personality of the narrator was probably more important, or as important,~~

~~as the event. Not that the narrator is important in his own person; it was not that I~~

~~Norman Mailer, was equal to the Democratic Convention, but that I had a set of~~

~~prejudices. These prejudices were terribly important, and you as the reader couldn't~~

~~begin to understand this event unless you understood me enough to reflect upon my~~

~~perceptions. By being able to take account of me as a narrator, the reader could say, "Oh~~

~~well, Mailer is impossibly romantic," or "Mailer is outrageously nihilistic," or "Mailer is~~

~~a fool"—the reader could make his own interpretations of the events. It occurred to me~~

~~that that's the way we always read. When I read my contemporaries, I'll say to myself,~~

~~"Well, Vidal or Updike"—or whoever it is—"is good on this and not very good on that."~~

~~It brought me to the conclusion that the only objective~~
~~I thought that's the least we can do in journalism: let the reader be aware of the bent of~~

~~the writer. That is objective reporting,~~

[Work]

81.2 These days everyone is laying claim to having started the New Journalism. Tom

Wolfe has been writing manifestos for the last ten years. But I think if I started any

aspect of that New Journalism—and I did—it was an enormously personalized journalism,

where the character of the narrator was one of the elements not only in telling the story

but in the way the reader would assess the experience. I had some dim instinctive feeling

man or
woman
who was
pretending
to be
objective,
the journalist

that what was wrong with all journalism was that the reporter pretended to be objective, and that was one of the ^{biggest} great lies of all time. What this really was, was an all-out assault on New Yorker writing, and at the same time I had—as all of us did—a vast respect for the New Yorker. So I was a little scared at what I was doing. I thought I was either all right or all wrong. The stakes were high, but by now it's more comfortable to write that way. At the same time, I wasn't taking journalism that seriously. I never felt that I was doing something more important than the novel. Wolfe feels it's more important, but I've never laid that claim since it's so much easier. The thing that makes the novel so hellishly difficult is that you have to elucidate a story from the material. If you make a mistake then you may not discover it until the book is done and you are looking back on it ten years later. It's very much like chess in a funny way. Good chess players always speak of the best line of continuation. They can analyze a game afterward and really replay the points of no return and see whether a knight should have been moved to another box. In the novel, you're left wondering.

[Coll]

81.6 If a novelist can take someone who's a legendary figure and invent episodes for them that seem believable, then they've done something wonderful. There's that meeting between J. P. Morgan and Henry Ford in Doctorow's Ragtime—I think it's one of the best chapters in American literature. It told me an awful lot about Morgan and an awful lot about Henry Ford, and the fact that it obviously never took place made it ~~even~~ more delicious. When you know the kind of bias and warp with which historians write their history—they're dealing with 10,000 facts and they select 300 very careful ones to make

their case, and call that stuff history. ¹⁻⁴¹⁵ when we all know it's fiction. The mark of a great historian is that he's a great fiction writer. ~~Very few novels are ever true works of the~~

~~imagination. I mean, how many Kafkas have there been? I'm not trying to avoid the fact/fiction debate to protect myself. There's one thing that did worry me in my second book about Marilyn, Of Women and Their Elegance. I invented an episode for her that was possibly more extreme than anything in her life. And that gave me pause; I'm worried about it, I'm still worried about it, I think I'd feel less bad about it if I'd done it with a man. I start thinking, "Well, my God, what if after I'm dead somebody writes about me and they put me in a homosexual orgy, which I've never been in, I'd detest that, wherever I'd be." And I wrote it—this'll sound incredibly demented—but I wrote it with the idea that Marilyn, wherever she is, would accept this treatment of her. But it's a large assumption. So I do have a continuing uneasiness about that part of the book. On the other hand I do feel that there's not as good a portrait of her without it.~~

81.6 ~~I think~~ ^{to do} Journalism is easier than novel writing because you know the story. ~~I mean,~~ ^{put in order} Give me ~~the events~~ ^{the events} that history ~~created~~ ^{created} for me, and I'm content—all I've got to do then is write the story. The difficulty of bringing off a truly impressive novel is equal to asking a singer of the stature of Pavarotti to compose his own music. Journalism makes opera singers of novelists. We have the story, now all we need to do is go in and show off our vocal cords.

82.16 Movies are more likely than literature to reach deep feelings in people. Movies are more primitive, or so I would argue. Film reaches into more primitive states of

consciousness. People who can't read are quite able to get profound reactions ~~out of~~ ^{in the dark}

^{of a theatre /} ~~movies~~ I would also say that to the degree that film reaches us in a precise way, it's no

good. Film is best when ambiguous. A truly good film will affect two people

profoundly, but they'll argue for hours over the message. To one, it's a satire, to the

other, a tragedy. That's as it should be. Film should reach way inside the psyche until

one person will react in horror watching a film, another person ^{laughs} can laugh his head off.

That's good film. Bad film is when everybody laughs on cue. ^{for fun} Then, ~~they are usually~~

being manipulated. They have entered the engines of manipulation of the power-trip

institutions.

82.16 Ever since the late sixties I've wanted my nonfiction to read like a novel rather

than the digested contents of the first stomach of a cow. Which latter is what most

nonfiction is to me. Someone spends a lot of time studying a body of material, digests it,

then writes a book. There's a tendency to skip the confusions. That's not interesting.

^{often} What is most fascinating in a very good writer is how his or her mind works. Obtaining

clues that way, you can improve your own mind. But to suppose an author can digest a

subject so well that there is no need to think about how the writer got there ^{is vaguely} ~~can be~~

disagreeable. So I don't like the way most nonfiction is done. Whereas the novel at its

best changes our lives to some extent. Marriages have broken up, for instance, because

someone read a novel and decided the life of the character in the book was more

interesting than his own. Good novels are painful to read. I guess it is possible, however, for nonfiction to become somewhat existential. An historian could say, "I start this project with two opposed hypotheses. I'm not sure yet which one is correct. As we explore the material, let me show the arguments for one, then for the other. Maybe we'll arrive eventually at more of an answer than we have now." Although, to bring that off in

truly sustained form violates the canons of the profession of history, which insists that ~~you travel in one vehicle, not two. A double-vision agitates the~~ *you go for one stance, not two, that it doesn't often happen. It tends to agitate the*

element that disturbs most people about history in the first place. Somewhere between high school and college—or is it between graduate school and life?—they learn that history is not history, but a series of immensely sober fictions usually written by men who don't have large literary talents, and have less to say about the real world than novelists.

It's disturbing to discover that historians are not dealing with fact, but with the hypotheses they developed in relation to a series of isolated data. The desire to make these facts glow *go brightly* ~~as facts~~ *up be able* in a mosaic that will enable us to perceive the past is not often present. ~~Once we come to realize that historians do not do it as closely as novelists, then all history becomes a novel. Just as any novel is the history of the working of one man's imagination, and so is enough of a real historical artifact to illumine a period for us.~~

79.32 ~~I think of nonfiction as living on two stomachs, like the cow. In other words, the material is eaten, partially digested, then regurgitated, then digested again.~~ In a book of nonfiction, there is a tendency to present the author's conclusions to the reader as the purpose of the work. While this is not true for all works of nonfiction, the practise is

Ostensibly you are reading
 predominant in most of them. You read because you want to know what the author

thinks definitively about a subject. Occasionally, the author will ~~even~~ present his

thinking process to you, *(but usually)* ~~but~~ he feels impelled to digest the material, *think the reader* so when he does

~~present a scene, it's invariably illustrative material to make a difficult passage more~~
feels rewarded with
 simple. Nonfiction calls for understanding ~~a~~ clear understanding of what's being said.

It's hard to think of a good book of nonfiction whose waters are not clear. In The Executioner's Song I wanted to give the readers the feeling that they were participating in the life of the characters, and so wouldn't and shouldn't be able to understand everything that's going on any more than we do in life. The moment we understand everything in a book, it can't possibly be fiction, not the way I define it.

73.43 One of the vices of journalism is that it almost always gives a false impression of the event. That is because journalists have little interest in the mood of the occasions, particularly if it is a political meeting. Invariably, there is ^{an} ~~the~~ a priori decision that certain elements of experience must be recorded as carefully and literally as possible. If a man is giving a speech, his topic is of cardinal importance; the title of the lecture is indispensable; the name of the lecturer is crucial, and whatever quotations are taken from the speech had best be given accurately—although if you don't know the tone of the speaker you know ^{really very little.} ~~nothing.~~ ^{is} The assumption ^{this additional} goes that ~~the~~ ^{journalist's} other stuff, even if marvelous, is not as crucial as ^{the} these few tenets ^{he must} that these journalists cling to. The difficulty is that ^{the} these journalistic tenets ^{also} carry over to other fields of inquiry. History, for instance, can easily become an intolerable fact machine. To go back to the novel, one reason why it

would be dreadful if the novel died is that the novel is one of the more formidable attempts of Western civilization to deal with the notion of whole experience. A good novel is a whole experience.

75.13 I have trouble ^{putting together a} with the story when I write a novel. Characters come to me, ^{and} as do situations, ^{but} descriptions, but the story can ^{be} ~~use~~ me up. In a novel you've got to decide whether your character ^{gets out of the bed and turns left or right} ~~gets out of the bed and turns left or right~~. And you have to keep making those decisions through the book. One ~~wrong~~ ^{one wrong} major decision ^{can ruin your} novel. What ~~I love about journalism~~ ^{Journalism}, what makes ~~it~~ ^{it} easy for me, is that I am given the story. If I'd written The Fight as a novel, I'd have to decide does Foreman win or Ali. I'd lose six months deciding ^{who wins} ~~who wins~~. So, you know, there it is; Ali won.

75.13 Every good novel is a failure. Not mine but everyone's. Dostoevsky's career is a failure. He didn't write the ^(last) book he had in mind. He died with a sense of frustration. He had this absolutely great book in which he was going to ^{create} ~~write~~ about a saint. He did write about people who had visions of being saints but lived in evil, ^{Ivan Karamazov for one} Alyosha in The Brothers ~~Karamazov~~ ^{but he wanted more}, for example, is the least convincing of his characters. Dostoevsky ~~dies with a~~ profound sense of failure in his mission because he wanted to educate the Russian people to the nature of saintliness, which he felt was absolutely crucial to their survival as a nation.

68.1 ~~No, I don't agree with critics who say the novel is dead.~~ The novel has its own particular resource, which is close to magical. If you write purely enough and your style ^{is} good enough, you can establish a communion between yourself and the reader that can be found in no other art, ^{and} ~~because~~ this communion can continue not only for hours, but ^{for} weeks, ^{and} years. When the novel is dead, then the technological society will be ^{wholly} ~~totally~~ upon us.

82.16 Certain human relations are comparable to literary forms. For instance, the one-night stand is like a poem, good or bad. An affair of reasonable duration, a short story. By this logic, a marriage is a novel. In a short story we're interested in the point. In a novel we usually follow the way people move from drama to boredom back to drama again. And we often judge a novelist by his skill in moving people in and out of these high and low areas of existence. Of course, marriage is exactly like that. In marriage, our interest is not that a given point is made in a given night, but in the way that recognition is confirmed or eroded over the weeks or months to follow. The narrative line of all marriage, in that sense, is good days and bad days. And most people like to live in the form of a novel. Just as there are people who like to live in the form of a short story. Psychopaths have lives that consist of poems, mostly bummers.

Grobel/1983 ~~Why are good novels painful to read? Excellent question.~~ Name me any great novel you've ever read that didn't bore you in part ^{from} while reading it (the first time). A great novel has a consciousness that's ^{in the beginning is} new to us at first. ~~Any time we undergo that we grow bored.~~ We have to digest this new consciousness before we can go back to it. I've been bored in part ^{first time through} by Moby-Dick, The Red and the Black, Anna Karenina, The Scarlet Letter.

Lennon/1999 Back in 1967 when I wrote The Armies of the Night, I divided the book ^{two parts,} into fiction and nonfiction, ^{the novel and history,} I was saying, in effect, that they're equal. When you write history, you're ^{engaging in} writing a species of fiction. What one's doing, ultimately, is giving ^{one's} ~~one's~~ version of life. ^{And how} ~~And how~~ one arrives at ^{that} ~~one's~~ vision of life is somewhat different in a history than in a fiction, but they are much more alike than people recognize. ~~So~~ That's why I called the two subdivisions of The Armies of the Night, "History as a Novel," and "The Novel as History." I've always felt they're ~~very~~ much related. For example, there's something like 30 pages in my new collection, The Time of Our Time, on Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller taken from my biography of Monroe. It's as factual as my sources could permit, but to me it reads like fiction. That is, it's a narrative of a movie star and a talented playwright, who are having a very happy marriage, and if it appeared in the pages of a novel and you changed the names, it would still read. ~~And my 1970~~ book, The Executioner's Song, absolutely defies category, because I use the real names of the people. I gave it a terrible subtitle. I called it A True Life Novel. I regret that. I think those words are slightly better than Truman Capote's equally awful subtitle to In Cold Blood: A Nonfiction Novel. I could have made The Executioner's Song a novel by

changing all the names. Call Gary Gilmore, Harry Killmore, so forth. People would have said, "Oh, so-and-so is so-and-so in that book." But by keeping the same names I pushed the envelope forward on what a novel is and isn't. What makes a novel is not whether the facts occurred, so much as the way you present these facts. I would argue, then, that since I wrote it the book in the form of a novel, it was a novel. The form, the *The* medium, determines the message. And the message you receive from a novel is different from the impact ~~usually less interesting~~ that comes to you from nonfiction.

95.22 Most people think the line between fiction and nonfiction is a Berlin Wall. *I would say I think,* ~~on the contrary~~, that it's a barely marked boundary. I like working back and forth on that boundary, being a range rider *up and down the* ~~on that line~~.

95.7 I'm all for journalists using a literary style. I just wish they didn't have to write their stories the same day in the daily newspapers. If you can take a day or two or three to write a story, it will be a much better story, and better still if journalists have more space. You know, I was one of the people who founded the Village Voice. It has changed enormously, but what it does now is give a writer a lot of space. ~~The~~ daily news is a delusion. It's a dream. The idea that you're getting something as it's happening and you know what's happening is absurd. Analyze a news story. Do you really know what happened as you read it? If you got it two or three days later, you still won't be at the event, but you might have a richer picture of what *actually took place,* ~~happened if the reporter has more time.~~

CRAFT

[WR]

68.26 My moviemaking had ^{one large} absolutely no effect on my writing style, ^{It probably} except that it ^{entered} affected my decision to treat myself as the third person hero of The Armies of the Night.

When I sat down to write ^{the book} it, I had already edited my film, "Wild 90," in which I was the leading character. Since there was way too much of me, I had come to see myself as a piece of material, a piece of yard goods, and I'd say: "Where am I going to cut myself?"

It's a way of getting a psychoanalysis on the cheap, I think. ^{It also established} ^{a the habit of looking at myself as if I were} ^{someone other than myself - a character ready} ^{to be described in the third person,}
[Work]

~~71.24 There's no such thing as a real writer who doesn't employ the dialectic. [Joyce, in Finnegans Wake used the dialectic as an intellectual structure. Proust—Baron de Charlus is conceived dialectically in opposition to the narrator in Remembrance of Things Past.] Henry James never wrote a sentence that wasn't imbued with ^{the dialectic} it. He is always reacting to the sentence he wrote before. [That's what good writing is.] The beginning of bad writing is when a writer forgets what he's just written. That's what I'd tell kids if I ever had a writing class. I'd bang that home. The sentence you are writing next must come out of what has just gone before, whether as a continuation or as a reaction against it.~~

[Work]

~~75.11 In writing my nonfiction books of the late sixties and early seventies, the question was how to verify the observer. What are the reporter's passions, prejudices, and particularly, his infirmities? It's terribly important who the observer is. That's why I~~

~~always try to put myself into these works of journalism so the reader can have his sense of~~
 me. It's important to be able to decide whether I'm perceiving well or where I'm
 perceiving badly. Whereas, if I attempt to present to readers what I consider the end-
 product of objective truth, it's likely to be nothing more than the harshly digested
 conclusions I came up with in my somewhat unbalanced soul. (What else is most
 journalism?) I believe the fun in reading good non-fiction comes from observing the
 observer. After all I did have that happy streak with *The Armies of the Night*. An ideal
~~example of the technique. It doesn't always work that well. Still,~~ there's that lovely
 remark of Trotsky's I go back to over and over again. Sometimes, he said, the only way
 you can tell the truth is by a comparison of the lies. If you're listening to two liars, you
 may never be able to find out who is lying more. But you can come closer to a sense of
 reality by the relations between those two mysteries. You see, we may never know, for
 instance, what the truth of one human is, or another, but we can know a lot about the
 relations between them. We may be confused by two terribly complicated people but we
 are able to say with greater certainty, "They hate each other," or "Isn't it extraordinary
 how they love each other?" because we can feel the relation between mysteries, especially
~~where I am that relation as the writing voice. Something of the same may be said of the~~
~~relation between a good critic and a good novelist.~~

[Coll]

80.10 I think Capote's book and mine are formally similar, but vastly different.

Obviously, I'll be the first to state that if he hadn't done *In Cold Blood*, it's possible that I wouldn't have thought of taking on *The Executioner's Song*. It's also possible that

there's something about The Executioner's Song that called for doing it ~~this way~~. In any event, its flavor is considerably different from In Cold Blood. Truman retained his style there, not the pure style—he simplified it—but it was still very much a book written by Truman Capote. You felt it every step of the way. The difference, then is that he novelized ~~more~~, where I was determined to keep the factual narrative. I wanted my book to read like a novel, and it does, but I didn't want ever to sacrifice what literally happened in a scene for what I would like to see happen. Of course, I could afford to feel that way. I had advantages Truman didn't. His killers were not the most interesting guys in the world, so it took Truman's exquisite skills to make his work a classic. I was in the more promising position of dealing with a man who was quintessentially American yet worthy of Dostoevsky. If this were not enough, he was also in love with a girl who—I'll go so far as to say—is a bona fide American heroine. I didn't want, therefore, to novelize. Dedicated accuracy is not usually the first claim you wish to make for books like this, but here it became a matter of literary ^{value} self-preservation. I wanted ~~people to believe me~~. What I had was gold, if I had enough sense not to gild it.

[WR]

82.14 The insensitivity you have to build about yourself in relation to reviews doesn't do you much good as a writer. ~~So~~ ^{there are a} anyone who has kept working, has found ways ~~of~~ ^{the} renewing his desire to write. ~~What gets easier is~~ ^{because} one's been through ~~that~~ ^{the} literary mill ~~so~~ many times, the fears are less and one's professionalism increases ~~over the years~~. By professionalism, I mean the ability to work on a bad day. There's nothing glorious about being a professional, but you do become more dogged. You probably relinquish

the upper reaches of the mind to do your stint of work each day: being a professional means being able to endure a certain amount of drudgery and the higher reaches of the mind are ^{obviously} ~~not~~ enthralled by dull work.

[Aud]

82.14 My ambition would no longer be to try to reach Americans with a book the way Hemingway could ^{His} ~~reach them~~. [~~with a book, because I believe that's beyond my~~
~~powers~~] Hemingway's style affected whole generations of us, the way a roomful of men ^{are} ~~is~~ affected when a beautiful woman walks through—their night is turned for better or for worse. Hemingway's style had an ability to hit young writers in the gut, and they just weren't the same after that. ~~That would not be my ambition—I don't have that kind of talent. But to give up the ambition entirely is another matter.~~

[Coll]

^{You ask about major}
83.40 ~~Major~~ weaknesses in a major writer? I doubt that Hemingway was capable of writing a long complex sentence with a lot of ^{good} ~~architecture~~ in the syntax. So he turned that inability into the virtue of writing short declarative sentences and long run-on sentences connected by conjunctions. Faulkner was not capable of writing simply. He turned that into a virtue. As a result you get this extraordinary mood out of his writing. Henry Miller couldn't really tell a story with any pleasure. He preferred his excursions away from the story, and these excursions are what make him ^{exceptionally} ~~a great writer~~. Taking it down to my level, I'd say I have most of my problems with plot. The moment I think of a good one, I find that the book becomes almost impossible to write because I know I won't believe in it.

Life consists of people plotting all the time, ^{but} and the plots never developing ^{all the way,} completely.

^{decide:} We always say, I'll make this ^{move in} or that out of my life, ^{and that will result in the following} and then life confounds us. ^{I like a}

^{So I prefer a)} plot that develops ^{out of} during the writing. I don't like one that moves ahead of my characters,

because then my ^{people} characters don't live. You can do the same thing to characters when you

tie them to the plot that we do to our children if we carefully ^{select} pick out their colleges, their

spouses, ^{and then} install them in the proper job. ^{we just picked for them.} The same thing weighs on characters in a novel. ^{Learn perverse (that is surprising to the novelist)}

they never get to fulfill their capabilities; they never come alive. Development slowly

~~comes into focus as I work.~~ Bill Buckley is wonderful at plots—his mind works that

way—but nobody lives and breathes in his books with any more three-dimensionality

than some passing movie star who can't act.

[Coll]

81.16 The influence of Henry Adams on The Armies of the Night was ^a most peculiar.

~~one.~~ To the best of my recollection, I never read much Adams. ^{was essential} I did read ^{(one long}

chapter of The Education of Henry Adams in my freshman year at Harvard, and

remember thinking at the time what an odd thing to do, to write about yourself in the third

person. Who is this fellow, Henry Adams, talking about himself as Adams? ^{I remember} ~~and being~~

^{be my} struck with it in that mildly irritable way freshmen have of passing over extraordinary

works of literature. It's possible that I then read more of The Education of Henry Adams

sometime in my ~~freshman or~~ sophomore year, although I wouldn't claim that I have. ^{certainly,} ~~But~~

^I I never wrote about him, ^{and} never thought about him particularly, would never have

mentioned his name as one of the writers ^{who} that were important to me; ^{and} yet in The

Armies of the Night—~~one~~ starts reading it, and immediately ^{you} ~~one~~ says—even I said—"My

God, this is pure Henry Adams." What the hell is going on here? It's an absolute takeoff, as if I were the great-grandson. As if Adams ^{owned a large share} ~~was all~~ of my literary life. So look how ^{must have remained} peculiar is influence: Adams ~~was stuck~~ ^{influence} in my consciousness as a possibility, the way a painters might look at a particular Picasso, or Cezanne, and say to himself, "That's the way to do it." But the ~~work~~ ^{influence} might not pop out for 20 or 30 years. When it does, they say, "Oh, yes, that was a Picasso I saw at MOMA 25 years ago, and I've always wanted to try a palette of such and such, and I ~~decided~~ ^{influence} to use it here." In effect, that's what happened to me with Henry Adams.

[World or Coll]

18.16 It's hard to write well on a large ^{canvas. Such efforts, today, are usually} ~~subject~~. Most large subjects are handled by best-
^(left to best) selling novelists. They will have a cast of 40 or 50 characters. They'll have stories that go over 50 to 100 years. They'll have several world wars. They'll have startling changes in the lives of several families. ~~The reason they do all that in a hurry is to~~ ^{those novels usually} keep their book moving along. What characterizes ~~a best-selling novel~~ ^{those novels usually} is that there's nothing in ~~it~~ ^{them} that you haven't come across before. At least if you're a reader of some experience. Most good writers these days tend to expatiate on smaller and smaller canvases with more and more clarity. ^{then} ~~because~~ at least you have the confidence ~~then~~ that what you're doing is accurate. ~~And~~ ^{And} that's important. At least you're contributing to knowledge rather than adding to the general cultural sludge ~~that lies over nearly everything~~. So it's hard to take ^{on} a large topic. At the moment the only great writer I can think of who can handle what I've described, 40 or 50 characters and 100 years is Garcia Marquez. One Hundred Years of Solitude is an amazing work. He succeeds in doing it, but how, I don't know. In my

Egyptian novel [Ancient Evenings]—although it's very, very long—not that much happens in it. As I said before, it takes me ten pages to go around a bend in the Nile.

[Work]

81.2 The watershed book for me was Advertisements for Myself. That was the first ^{look at} ~~to be~~ ^{wrote} ~~written~~ in what became my style. I never felt as if I had one until that book, ^{but} ~~and~~ once I developed ^{it} ~~that style~~—for better or for worse—a lot of other forms opened ~~to it~~. It's an adaptable style, and of course ^{when} I finally discovered in The Armies of the Night that I could put myself into a book and thereby ^{reach ore} ~~paint~~ ^{various} all sorts of ~~splendid~~ effects, I began to enjoy going in ^{more than one} ~~many~~ directions.

[Work]

81.2 I'm not happy if I feel that what I've recently written is wrong or needs work. I tend to build my ^{novels} ~~books~~ on the basis of what I have already. I never have a master plan for the ^{rest of the} ~~entire~~ book. Every time I ^{do} ~~have~~—and when I was younger I used to sit down and write out a ^{such} ~~master plan~~ for a book—I never wrote the book. Even with The Executioner's Song where, after all, I knew the story in great detail, I was careful not to be too versed in too many details of the story ~~way~~ ahead. In other words, I tended to do my research ^{up to no more} ~~let's say~~ ^{than} 100 pages ahead of where I was because I wanted the feeling that I didn't know how it was all going to turn out. I ^{needed} ~~wanted~~ to have the illusion that I was inventing each little ^{detail} ~~detail~~, detail as if I were writing a conventional novel. [#] ~~I~~ ^{Notes?} might take a few notes, but usually if it's a powerful enough idea about the continuation of the book I don't need to ^{over} ~~take a note~~. If I can't remember it, then what kind of an idea could it have been? Once in a great

Craft pp 8-26 Economics 1-13
 while I'll put together a note on something that should happen 200 pages ahead, just a
 thought the character might have, and I sort of know the place where it will come in, but I
 like the idea of a book not being too carefully laid out. I find that ^{I get} some of the best ideas ~~to~~
~~get I receive~~ because I haven't fixed my ~~ideas~~ ^{novel's future} (in concrete and so have to work with them.
 Once you know your end, it's disastrous to get a ~~good~~ ^{new} idea which takes you away from
 that end, ~~yet~~ the good idea may be worth more than an end you planned in advance.

[Work]

83.30 I never know what the style of a book is until I get into it. Sometimes you aim ^{high} for
 a style and don't get it—you end ^{work} with a lower style. After all, ~~the~~ style you set in a novel
 is ~~very~~ much like the pace a serious jogger sets for himself ~~himself~~. You have to be able
 to maintain it. In that sense, style is ^{an off-shoot of} character. Character may be the wise or foolish
 estimate of one's resources. *Of course one's character is capable of modification.*

[Work]

97.26 I've got a little studio in Brooklyn a couple of blocks from my house—no
 telephone, nothing there. I go there, and ^{there} the only thing I ever do is work. It's ^{perfect} wonderful.
^{draft-house/ (I'm there to work)}
 I'm like a dog with a conditioned reflex. ~~No television, no telephone, nothing.~~ I don't
 want to be tempted. There's an old Jewish belief that you build a fence around an
 impulse. If that's not good enough, you build a fence around the fence. So, ^{amenities,} no telephone.
^(But for a refrigerator!)
 I write longhand with a pencil, and I've got ^{an excellent} a marvelous assistant named Judith McNally,
^{up for me and/}
 and she will type it next day, and I go over it. Since at my age you begin to forget things
~~very~~ easily, it's ~~marvelous~~ because I hardly remember what I wrote the day before. Now

it's typed as if someone else wrote it. I'll go through it, and I'll say, "Who is the idiot who wrote that stupid sentence." *Then I proceed to fix it.*

[Work]

82.16 ~~I can tell you a story about metaphors.~~ *?* I had a dear friend, Charlie Devlin, who helped me greatly with *The Naked and the Dead*, and in fact was the model, considerably removed, for the character named McLeod in *Barbary Shore*. Charlie was a quiet saturnine Irishman who was living in a small rooming house where I took a cubicle to finish *The Naked and the Dead*. We used to have long literary conversations. At a certain point I showed him *The Naked and the Dead*. He tore it apart. He could be a severe critic. He said, "It's a better book than I thought it would be, but you have no gift for metaphor." Then he said, "Metaphor reveals a man's ~~character~~ *character's*, and his true grasp of life. To the degree that you have no metaphor, you ~~are an impoverished writer, and~~ have lived no life." I never forgot this lecture and began to work with might and main on my *life and* metaphors. You know, they did improve with age.

[World]

82.16 A writer has to be ready ~~for more~~ *for a character's* when he enters ~~someone's~~ *someone's* mind. So long as you stay outside ~~your~~ *they* characters retain a certain integrity, novelistically speaking. There is a mystery about them, a resonance. We ~~can~~ walk around such characters with the same respect we offer people who have a presence in a room. Part of the meaning of charisma is that we don't know the intimate nature of the human force we're dealing with. Characters in novels sometimes radiate more energy when we don't enter their mind. It is

one of the techniques a novelist acquires instinctively—don't go into your protagonist's thoughts until you have something to say about ^{life in} the interior that's more interesting than the reader's suppositions. ^A ~~The~~ fatal error is to jump in and then offer banal material.

That's the worst of best-sellerdom. Second-rate readers enjoying the insights of second-rate writers. ~~That~~ [Attempts to A Man Half-Full]

[World]

73.14 I believe narrative exists in our everyday lives, but as a discrete phenomena—in other words, narrative stops and starts. We ~~all~~ live with ^{its life or its shadow} narrative every moment of our ^{existence} ~~lives~~ (but we're always cutting it off and picking it up again; ^{It is not} it isn't a continuation. ^{It's still; it is} almost impossible to ^{proceed} ~~move~~ without some hypothesis, and hypothesis is the spine of narrative, ^{however,} if you stop and think about it. What usually happens is that the hypothesis runs into evidence that confutes it, so then the narrative stops until it picks up again with a revised hypothesis. ^{can}

[Work]

61.12 In The Deer Park I was trying to find a style ^{but} and it was elusive. I went through four drafts. The first ^{had been} ~~was~~ Proustian in style—not first-rate Proust of course. ^{Attempted Proust, no} The second draft was located somewhere between the English novel of manners and ^{Scott} Fitzgerald—not as good, but in that ^{general} direction. The third draft was closer to Hemingway. Then I found my own style, which was ^{at not the others} ~~nothing~~ like these. The thing that always fascinated me about style ^{wishes to} ~~is the way in which~~ it literally repels certain kinds of experience. The style begins to

select the material. If a writer keeps ^{to} a certain style, it ^{even} determines the ^{kind of} experience that comes to him..

[WR]

71.6 You know, a good skier never worries about a route: he just goes, confident that he'll react to changes in the trail as they ^{come upon him,} happen. It's the same thing in writing; you have to have confidence in your technique. If you take on something you know you can do easily, your contempt for yourself will ^{soon} get into it ~~very quickly~~.

[World]

84.34 Some of my characters come from real people. One character might ^{emerge} come out of five people, another out of ^{just} one person but greatly altered. Still another from my imagination. There's an exciting moment when a character becomes, in a sense, independent of yourself. If the people in my books don't seem real to me, I'm in a lot of trouble. Graham Greene once said that there were certain characters who took care of ~~themselves, and others that he had a great deal of trouble with. He worked very hard on them.~~ ^{he never had to bother about them in the writing.} Later, when he'd read a review and it would mention one of ^{these} the resistant characters as well-drawn, ² he used to think ^{to himself} "Well-dragged."

[World]

75.13 The people in a novel become real in your mind as you write. You live with them, sleep with them, even talk to them ^{silently} at a certain point, for they exist within you. They take on the same kind of odd life ^{in our mind} that movie stars assume for us ~~when we think about them.~~

for example, might as well be
 To a lot of people, Humphrey Bogart ~~is~~ ^{the} psychic equivalent of an uncle, ~~in terms of the~~ ^{given}
~~the measure of~~ ^{the measure of} importance he exerts on their lives. ~~[alternate version in the double-space. There are a~~
~~lot of people for whom Humphrey Bogardm in terms of the psychic importance he~~
~~maintains in their unconscious mind, is the equivalent of an uncle.]~~

[Coll]

82.16 The more I know about writing, the more of an achievement Hemingways's style becomes to me. I know his flaws inside out. I've loved and hated him for years as if he were my own father. There is so much he did for ~~me~~ ^{me}, so much he didn't ~~do~~ ^{do}. Truly the relationship ~~you have to him~~ ^{to} is as a father. But he is a remarkable writer. His sense of the English language, I'd say, is virtually primitive in its power to evoke mood and stir the senses.

[World]

Schroeder/1992 ~~For every historian who writes well, there must be twenty novelists who~~
~~do better. And that's important.~~ Sometimes the only way you can perceive reality is through a good style; a bad style muddies reality.

[World]

Schroeder/1992 I don't ever think of my characters in terms of victims or victimizers, ^{because} ~~because~~ that sort of narrow classification tends to narrow them down. If someone is doing a novel and says, "I'm writing about a victim," that character ^{is} ~~is~~ not going to be interesting. In reality very few victims ever see themselves solely as victims, ^{and} ~~and~~ *when they do, their spirit turns stale.*

[Col1]

Lennon/1999 The first person point of view is an amazing tool. You can get to places

you don't arrive at any other way. Of course, you can also injure your writing hand, ~~so to~~

~~— speak. It's a double-edged instrument. Hemingway had a marvelous sense of the~~

limitations of the first person. It virtually created his style. If you are doing a book in the

first person, there are certain things you should not talk about because they're

embarrassing with the "I" going before it. So there's a tendency, most marked in

Hemingway, to keep most things at arm's length. As, for example, the last few sentences of "A Farewell to Arms."

[World]

Lennon/1999 When you're making stuff up, it's scary; the decisions you have to make

are frightening. So dread is always present when you do an imaginative narrative. If your

characters come alive, that's fine; they ^{carry} carry you a part of the way. But, finally, you have

to make what might be termed career decisions for your characters. Does your

protagonist want to go ^{abroad in} the foreign service, or does he want to ^{stay} work in New York with

protagonist want to go into the foreign service, or does he want to ~~work~~ in New York, the model he has just met? which are close
These are large decisions but they are also opportunities. Certain writers have the book

to find my book as I go along. My plot comes last. ~~What I look for are the characters. I~~

I want a conception of my characters that's deep enough so that they will get me to places

where I have to live by my wits. That means they have to keep on developing for me.

When ~~my~~ characters come alive, the plot, I feel, will take care of itself. I cannot write a

book where I ^{work} figure out the plot first. ^{that is 1/2 the spending} Do that and you spend the rest of your time filling holes in rotten teeth.

[WR]

83.35 Writing is wonderful when you talk about it. It's fun to contemplate. But writing as a daily physical activity is not ~~that~~ agreeable. You ^{put on weight} get fat, or you strain your gut; you get ~~the~~ gout and chilblains and writer's cramp. You're alone and every day ^{you have to} you've got to go in and face that piece of paper. ^{blend} That means you've got to reconstitute your soul ^{that is equal to seeing} and ^{face} give yourself a passing mark.

[WR]

86.31 It's as difficult to to become a professional writer as to grow into being a professional athlete. Stamina is the key, and the ability to keep faith in yourself. One must be willing to take risks and try again. It needs an enormous amount of practice to be good at it. Since you're affected by what you read as a child and adolescent, it takes a ^{all sorts of reading reflexes that lead you into bad} while to unlearn these things. ^{It can also be death to the soul if you're not good at it.} ^{prose,} Often writers say after completing a work, "This nearly killed me." ^{That's} ~~It's~~ true, and it gets more true with each work. Still, we're creating a world and the characters to go in it.

[Add the ~~unlearned~~ bit here, or attach this to Haystack's answer.]

[Work]

83.13 I never take Tom Wolfe seriously when he talks about the New Journalism as a higher form than the novel, because finally in the New Journalism your plot is handed to you, and you can concentrate on the writing.

[Coll]

83.57 Dwight Macdonald gave us no great body of books, and spent his talents in writing some of the better political and literary criticism of our time, but more important than his oeuvre was his influence. He was one of the best teachers of writing in the world. He gave no classes, but if one had learned a little about writing already, ~~well, then there was~~ ^{we've} ~~so many avenues~~ ^{to follow} all the world of self-expression to ~~pick up~~ ^{intellectual} in the felicities of his style. Dwight had something fabulous to teach. It was to look to the feel of the phenomenon. Describe what you see as it impinges on the sum of your passions and your intellectual attainments. Bring to the act of writing all of your craft, care, devotion, lack of humbug and honesty of sentiment. And then write without looking over your shoulder for the literary police. Write as if your life depended on saying what you felt as clearly as you could while never losing sight of the phenomenon to be described. If something feels bad to you, it is bad. Others received the same message from Hemingway, but it took Dwight Macdonald to give the hint to many a young writer and intellectual that the clue to new discovery rests not so much on the idea with which you begin as in the closeness of your attack on the problem, ^{and your readiness to depart from prearranged intentions by the insight provided in an unexpected and happy turn of phrase}

[World]

91.17 One of the things I learned from The Executioner's Song—there would be these ~~exceptional~~ ^{doing} extraordinary people we met while interviewing for the book, and I'd say, "Why the hell didn't God permit these two fascinating people to meet?" With all my novelist's training, ^{did} ~~I wanted~~ ^{men and/or women} certain people to meet. Well, when they sometimes ~~did meet~~, the get-together

~~would~~ be disappointing as hell. I ~~finally~~ ^{came to/} realized that this does not ^{necessarily/} diminish the drama. ~~It~~ ^{can} increase it. Most of our lives are spent getting ready for dramatic moments that don't take place, or if they do, are ~~disappointing as hell~~ ^{less than we expected. We get smaller to say,} Or we say, "Well, nothing really big ever happens to me." Then, bam, you get knocked down with something so much bigger than you expected. All the frustrations of all the other little narratives in your life that never had ^{an interesting/ can be} a denouement are present in the rare climax ^{that life also} ~~after once in a great while.~~

[World]

Random House Publicity Flyer/2/91 The worst kind of writing ^{often} results when ~~some-~~ extraordinary exciting things ~~have~~ happened to your friends and then you decide you're going to do a novel about them. Because even though your friends are very alive to you, they ^{won't necessarily/} don't appear so in the book. So I almost never write about anyone who's close to me. It's just too ^{hard to bring off/} dangerous. I prefer to write about people for whom I ^{(believe I have/} feel a special understanding, ^{yet} but who, on the other hand, ^{still/} I have to get to know. ^{then/} You tend to dream and fantasize an enormous amount about your characters, and you develop your sense of them as you go along. And you know a book is good when your characters begin to make moves that you hadn't foreseen for them.

[Coll]

91.3 I don't read other writers much because I'm writing all the time. It's too disturbing to read a writer with a good style when you're in the middle of putting your work together. I've used this image before: It's very much like taking your car apart and having all the pieces on the floor when somebody rides by in a Ferrari. Now you may hear a note in the

Ferrari that isn't good and say, "That motor needs a little tuning." But nonetheless the car *and its roar are still resounding in the distance, and*
~~is there, and~~ yours is on the floor. So while I'm working on a book I never read anything
 more than The New York Times--which ~~may~~ ^{could} have the long-term effect of flattening my
 style. *I'd rather blame the Times than old age.*

[Coll]

91.3 *L. Henry* This business of influence is curious in the extreme. I happened to pick up Moby
 Dick ~~and~~ ^{*read the*} I hadn't thought about Melville ten times in the last thirty years. ~~Picked up the~~
 first page of Moby Dick ~~and read it,~~ and realized my style was formed by Melville, ~~I'm~~
~~not saying I write as well as Melville,~~ but my style was absolutely shaped by his love of
 long, rolling sentences that contain inversions and reverses and paradoxes and ironies and
 exclamation points and dashes. *Of course to be as good as*
Melville—that's another matter.

[Coll]

97.24 Capote wrote the best sentences of anyone of our generation. He had a lovely
~~poetic~~ ear. He did not have a good mind. I don't know if ~~there was~~ ^{*there was*} a large idea ~~that~~ ^{*ever*}
 bothered him for one minute. While he wrote poetically, he did not think like a poet. ~~He~~
~~didn't have that concentrated sense of metaphor that a poet works toward.~~ ^{*He did have a*} But he had a
 sense of time and place. Breakfast at Tiffany's, for example, is on the one hand a slight
 book. Looking at it with a hard, Marxist eye, it's a charlotte russe. On the other hand, if *you are*
~~you want~~ ^{*(looking) particular (manhattan) may have*} to capture a period in New York, ~~(no other book has done it so well. So in that~~
^{*Capote is*} sense, ~~he's~~ ^{*both*} a bit like Fitzgerald. If I were to mount them ~~all up~~ ^{*both*} on one wall, I'd put
 Truman somewhat below Fitzgerald, ^{*Seeth*} but of that ilk. ~~He could capture period and place~~

like few others. I have a lot of respect for him as a writer and I was very competitive with him. I was competitive with all of them. The question, "Are then better than me?" was all I ever lived with in those days. But with Truman I had a different feeling--mainly because I felt that what we were interested in and the way we wrote were so different.

[World]

Lee/2001 I had one job for two years that felt like 15 years and it was the Army. It gave me ~~a hell of~~ a lot of real experience as opposed to ~~the~~ experience you search for. That's one of the problems for young writers. ^{when} they don't have enough life, they search for it in new situations. ^{of course, they can usually} But you can get out of those situations if need be. It's the ones you can't ^{escape} get out of that ^{really} give you the kind of knowledge you ^{need} want as a writer.

[WR]

Lee/2001 One thing worth saying again: What's not understood about good writers is that they're as competitive as athletes. When I read ^{good} a good book, ^{an interesting novel} I don't go at it the way other people do. I read it critically, the way one athlete will watch another's performance.

Not watch it with venom, quite the contrary. You might say to yourself, "His spiral is tighter than mine and he's got five more yards on me at least, but he's more lead-footed, ~~than I am~~. I scramble better." The thing when you're reading a good novel is to give ^{a good novel} ~~it~~

credit and not ~~try to~~ smudge over its good parts by deciding too quickly that the guy's

overrated. I ^{believe} think if I had my doubts, I could end up as a ^{good} critic because I know so much about novel writing by now. I can always tell when someone is working out of ^{his own} ~~their~~ best vein and when ~~they're faking it~~ ^{the needle missed}

[Aud]

Koval/2000 ^{In writing,} Third person and first person are at least as different ~~in writing~~ as major and minor keys in music; I won't attempt to say which is which. Before you decide, you have to have a sense of the event, of the reader, of yourself, and what will form the best triangulation. When I was doing The Gospel According to the Son, people said to me, "How did you have the nerve to write about Jesus in the first person?" I answered ^{that} ~~it~~ it was a practical decision. I wanted Jesus ^{the man} to be predominant in the book, not the Son of God. I have always felt that Jesus was the first example of a truly powerful divided personality, so though I'm not equipped to write about the Son of God, maybe I can do something ^{with} ~~about~~ the man. ^{For} ~~To~~ do that you need immediacy, ^{which} ~~and that~~ is the strength of first person. You can get bored with the "I," because it's constraining, but it does give easy access. In the beginning, at least. If I had put that book in the third person, it would have gotten mixed up with the Gospels, and people would be very irritated--what ^{had come} ~~was~~ from me and what ^{had been borrowed} ~~from the Gospels?~~ Whereas in the first person, readers ^{could} ~~can~~ accept ^{what was} ~~it~~ or ^{written on} ~~reject it.~~

[Coll]

95.12 There are two kinds of writers. There are those, very great, like Faulkner and Hemingway and Melville, who write ^{with} a style that is inimitable. There are other writers, usually less famous, who ^{go along} ~~write~~ in a variety of styles. I'm in the latter camp. The same is true of painters. Matisse painted in one recognizable style, while Picasso entered a hundred ^{styles} ~~styles~~ before he was done. It was ^{as} ~~style~~ was a cutting tool, through which he

delineated a reality. I've found that principle to be useful for myself. Style ~~for me~~ has to be close to the material I'm working with--so that I'll go with a fairly formal prose on one occasion and be more casual on another.

[Work]

92.12 In *An American Dream*, which was originally published in *Esquire* in 1964, and as a book in 1965, I had a scene where somebody was talking, a black man was talking, and he said "shit" about twenty times. Now, I didn't really need twenty. I knew approximately twelve would be fine, but I also knew that if I put in twelve, they'd take out some, so I put in twenty. And ~~they~~ ^{the folks there} screamed at my twenty and I ended up with twelve, ~~and~~ ^{and} they were happy and I was happy.

[World]

91.37 ^{In the way} the CIA works ^{it} is absolutely counter to the average spy novel, ^{The latter has} which has a perfect clock that ticks to its conclusion. In *Harlot's Ghost* ^{in Harlot's Ghost} several characters say at different times that they came into the CIA because they love spy novels. But once ^{they found} ~~they're~~ ^{themselves} inside, they see their work only in pieces. ^{could only perceive} If they work put them in the equivalent of a spy novel for a time, it was only for a novel, that is only in chapters five and six. They don't know the beginning of a case, ^{can't} ~~can't~~ ^{couldn't} see the whole picture, and then they're shifted to another assignment and never learn ^{Often they never} much of the denouement. It struck me that that's exactly what life is like: the most

interesting people really don't meet each other. There are few dramatic confrontations,

the gun over the mantelpiece in the first act doesn't get fired. ^{We live in and} out of ongoing plots every day of our lives, but nothing is so rare as ^{live and breathe} as a plot that accompanies us through a beginning, middle, and end.

[WR]

91.24 If you tell yourself you're going to write the next day, write the next day. No matter what comes up, write. I think what happens is that you set up a contract with your unconscious. Your unconscious prepares the words. When you don't do that, all the material sits around in your brain and starts to mold. We're the manager of the artist in ourselves.

[Work]

91.12 It takes considerable skill to come up with a fine plot, but once accomplished, your characters are stillborn. The moment they try to come to life, they disturb the clockwork. I prefer novels to be organic, to grow out of themselves.

[World]

84.14 City life produces--I believe it is a phenomenon of the modern city--caustic wit. It is one of the essences of a city. If you lived in the country, this kind of wit could get you killed. In New York and Chicago, it is a tonic. ~~The~~ wit serves as a bridge.

ECONOMICS

[Aud]

65.6A I think I suffered more over the reviews of *The Naked and the Dead* than for any other book. I wanted to sit down and write a letter to every critic ~~they had~~ ^{and tell them how they}

^{had} misinterpreted something I ^{wrote,} ^{had} said (even though they liked the book. It's only after 20 years ^{see and} ^{book reviewing} that you begin to appreciate it as a primitive rite. At its best, reading reviews (and this is as ^{What is true for unkind, much as (provided) that to read them} true for bad reviews as for good ones if they are well-written) is as nourishing as a wild-
^{a lot of fun at once is as nourishing as a wild-game} game dinner. I'd never dream of not reading reviews. It's like not looking at a naked woman if she happens to be standing in front of her open window.

[WR]

82.14 I think for anyone who's become an author early and has had a great deal of success, as Capote did and Vidal did and Styron did and I did, it's not automatic or easy afterwards to look upon other people with simple interest because generally speaking, they're more interested in us.

[Aud]

82.14 Buying a hardcover book is a sacramental act, and when people have to pay that much money, they want to have a certain respect, even a touch of awe, for the author. If you're unsavory in public life, you're not going to sell lots of hardcover books. The ^{good} authors who do ^{well} are usually not in the public eye—Saul Bellow, John Updike, John

Cheever—~~and~~ very few people can break that law. Capote's ^{done} broken it successfully. ^{So has Vidal.} (But I certainly haven't.

[Aud]

83.40 I treat bad reviews like a politician running for office treats a loss of support. A couple of friends called up after ^{a disastrous} ~~the bad~~ review of Ancient Evenings appeared in the Sunday New York Times and asked, "Are you all right?" I'd seen it a week before, ^{publication,} ~~so~~ any unhappiness I'd had about it was now digested. I told them that it was like realizing the county chairman in Schenectady is deciding against your candidacy. But to lose Schenectady doesn't mean that you stop running. It isn't my ego that's hurt, it's my damn pocketbook. Getting a bad review in the Times hurts you as much as any single review can. When I was younger I used to consider a bad review a personal insult and would consider the guy who wrote it evil. In fact, I have never actually punched out a reviewer, which I say with a certain amount of wistfulness. I once sat next to Philip Rahv after he had written an atrocious review of An American Dream. Philip Rahv had his virtues, bless him, but physical courage was not one of them. So I made a point of sitting next to him on a couch at a party, and while I smiled at him, I kept my body firmly pressed into his, leaning into him, while we had a long 30-minute conversation about something else altogether. I was perfectly pleasant the entire time and everything seemed all right except we were both titled alarmingly from my leaning into him. He was in an absolute panic, waiting for me to strike. It must have seemed an odd sight from the other side of the ^{room,} ~~table:~~ He was a ^{compulent} ~~heavy~~ man, and the two of us must have looked like two doughnuts crushed together in a box.

#

If I had no economic pressures on me I would have written books that were more literary, more well-rubbed. I would have polished them and would have sighed over them and I probably would have taken them more seriously than I take my books, although I do take them very seriously. But I would have been truly solemn. And I probably would not have gotten into journalism.

[Wr]

81.2 Early success changed my life. For a long time after the publication of *The Naked and the Dead*, I walked around saying nobody treats me as if I'm real; nobody wants me for myself, for my five-feet eight inches, everybody wants me for my celebrity. Therefore, my experience, I kept saying, wasn't real. All the habits I'd formed up to that point were as an observer on the sidelines. Suddenly, if I went into a room I was the center of the room, and so regardless of how I carried myself, everything I did was taken seriously and critically. I complained bitterly to myself about the unfairness of it until the day I realized that it was fair, that that was my experience. It's the simplest remark to make to yourself, but it took me ten years to get to that point. Then I began to realize the kind of writing I was going to do would be altogether different from the kind of writing I had thought I would do. After *The Naked and the Dead* I thought I would write huge collective novels about American life, something that required going out and getting experience, but my celebrity made it impossible. I then began to realize that there was something else that I was going to get which hopefully would be equally valuable, and that was that I was having a form of twentieth-century experience which would become more and more prevalent: It was that I had been ~~I was utterly~~ separated from my roots. I was successful and

alienated and that was a twentieth-century condition. This went into all my work after that in one way or another and will go on ~~forever~~ because by now ~~I suppose~~ I can say that kind of personality interests me more than someone who is rooted.

[Aud]

81.2 I used to have a much clearer idea of who I was writing for—certain friends, certain intellectuals, certain critics, a certain sense of the kind of audience I wanted ~~out there and who they might be~~. That was in the sixties. In the seventies there was a stretch where I really didn't know who I was writing for. You go in and out of fashion and your sense of who you're writing for also ~~goes~~ ^{comes) goes} in and out of focus. With my Egyptian book I've gotten to the point where I don't care who I'm writing for. I wouldn't have a clue who's going to like it.

[Aud]

73.14 Yes, it did help that I was paid a lot of money to write *Of a Fire on the Moon*.

That made it better. It would have been a harder book to write if I'd been paid less. I'm a frank and shameless professional. I enjoy my work more if I ^{am} ~~get~~ paid well for it.

It makes it somehow sexier. ~~It's awful to put it that way~~, but it's as simple as that. You take yourself just a little more seriously, and that's a great help ⁱⁿ ~~when~~ writing. ^{just as it is in sex} ~~Because~~ the hardest thing I've found is to be able to take on enough importance ^{for oneself} so that you dare finally to start defining some piece of that existence out there.

[Aud]

a story about me appears I am injured professionally.
 81.6 Every time I ~~appear~~ ^{in a newspaper}, I ~~injure myself professionally~~. But I don't think
 there's anything to do about it. One of the reasons I'm in the papers ^{so much} all the time is that
 they ~~just~~ keep using the same people, over and over again. It's a game, and there's
 something like ¹⁰⁰ ~~40~~ players on the board. If I were in a Tarot deck, I'd be the Fool. I used ~~to try~~
 to keep a stern separation between the public legend and myself, but you know, you get
 older, and after a while, you start to feel like ^{an} ~~some~~ old ^{gink} ~~shoe~~ in Miami, with slits in his
 sneakers so his feet won't hurt ^{as} ~~so~~ much. At that point it's hard to fight the legend. The
 legend becomes a lotion for your toes.

[World]

81.6 I'm a novelist and I want to know every world. And I would never close myself off
 to a world unless it's truly repulsive to me. I don't think it means anything if I go to
 certain kinds of ^{society page} parties, because society is nothing if not fashion. There've been a few
 homes that invite me for dinner from time to time. If it comes to the point where there's
 something to fight for and I'm not fighting for it because I don't want to lose my position
 in society, then ^{that's} ~~there's~~ something to be concerned about. ^{One can never take one's own} What's very important to me ~~to~~ ^{to know}
 knowing how the world works. ~~I think~~ What ruins most writers of talent is that they don't

get enough experience ~~to learn~~, so their novels ~~always~~ ^{that is almost never} tend to have a certain paranoid
 perfection which isn't ^(Franz Kafka immaculately executed!) as good as the rough edge of reality. If The Executioner's Song
 had ^{can} ~~a big~~ effect on people, it was because it wasn't a paranoid work. ^{But I think it} ~~It had all the rough~~
~~edges of reality~~. If I had conceived ^{it} that book in my imagination, it would have been
 much more perfect and much less good. ~~If there's a theme that obsesses me, it's how~~

Imperviousness to
 corruption for granted.
 All the same, it's still

81.6 ~~Q~~ If there's a theme that obsesses me, it's how much of the history that's made around us is conspiracy and how much of it is simple

stupid fuckups. And you have to know the world ^{well} to get some idea of that. You know, ^{because of their reputation?} how much does the Mafia control, how much do they luck into? How much does the

Jewish community affect the mentality of government, and how much are they ^{wrongly} accused of pulling the national strings?

On the other hand, it's ~~very dangerous~~ ^{not advisable for a novelist} to live in society too much, because it's a world of ~~very~~ rigid rules. You cannot be yourself completely. There's a marvelous game in

society, which is: If you are completely of society, then you're totally uninteresting. ^{not} ~~unless you have prodigious amounts of money.~~ ^(Not) If you have any entrée at all it's because society is always fascinated with mavericks. Till

the point where they'll become bored with me, and then, boom, I'm out. But on the other hand, even as a maverick, there are certain rules that I have to obey. If ^I start obeying

those rules past the point where ^{I choose} you want to go along with them as part of the game, then ^{I will be} you are ^{be} injuring yourself ^{or corrupting myself,}

[World]

73.43 Right now, the smart money would bet against the continuing life of the good novel,

as a viable form. The publishing houses are getting gloomier and gloomier about its future, and they ~~are the ones who~~ ^{that the survival} will, in a large sense, determine its future. It really

^{probably} comes down to the young editors. ~~When~~ ^{I mean} when a novel by an unknown writer gets published these days it's usually because some young editor has ^{made} decided that this is

finally good, and he makes an issue of it. And the publisher generally goes along. In

effect, it's the benevolent or charitable side of publishing. Now, this will continue so long as publishers have ^{a little} faith in the novel, until the day they conclude that novels can also be

written by computers. You know, there is a certain sort of obvious best-selling novel that

~~you can almost predict will be successful if you find the right writers. Just give them the~~
~~right theme. For example, I hear Leon Uris is writing a book about Ireland; we can name~~
~~the sales, can't we? We can name the reviews.~~ But back to the question: why is it harder
 and harder to write a good novel? The character of experience in the twentieth century is
 so fragmented that it is not easy to conceive of ~~one being written that would re-invigorating~~
 the good, big novel as a form. How do you move from one fragment of experience to
 another? That's the problem. Nothing is, for instance, now more difficult than ~~the~~ *a well-written*
 picaresque novel, ~~where you move from milieu to milieu.~~ Problems that could be solved
 on, ~~(let's say) the nineteenth-century level can't be in the twentieth.~~ *now.*
~~Underlying it all is the fact that the culture is fragmented, existence is fragmented. It's~~
 ~~gotten to the point that those of us who skip from fragment to fragment are the ones who~~
~~thrive, at least in a limited way. So all this makes for enormous difficulty in conceiving~~
 major novels. Whereas, in the thirties, you had any number of major ~~writers~~ *novelists* around. Dos
 Passos writing USA; Faulkner with a major novel just about every other year.
 Hemingway's books, Thomas Wolfe ~~writing~~ *in*, James T. Farrell. And there were any
 number of minor writers and half-major writers who were ~~awfully~~ *very* good. The novel was
 flourishing ~~then~~ *the*. Now it is up against ~~ferocious competition, television and the movies.~~ *of*
~~So I'm not at all sanguine about its future; it may disappear as a major form.~~

[WR]

Grobel/1983 If you have to earn your living from your pen; you discover that you can
 push yourself. It's analogous to what athletes do very often, where they'll ~~go through~~ *take*
~~ugly procedures, eat steroids in order to get more strength; go into all sorts of things that~~ *do*

are ultimately damaging, ~~not only to their bodies but to their souls.~~ ^{but} But they'll do it in order to set records. We do the same ~~thing as writers.~~ You can force yourself to write much more than you want to write. And ~~yet~~ the writing will not necessarily deteriorate. People think ~~you're going to end up a bad writer if you do that.~~ ^{Not} You won't necessarily,

^{But} you may end up with a bad liver, or ~~with~~ a shortened life. Of course, you can always ^{hope} ~~opt~~ for transcendence. Sometimes working much harder than ^{your mother raised you to work,} ~~one wants to work~~ (can liberate energy. Doesn't always defeat it.)

[Aud]

83.55 Almost everybody wants to write. The ~~writer's~~ life seems so free—no boss to face, no rush to work, and if you receive any renown for it, you have all the pleasures, the curious pleasures of celebrity. Writing, for many people, is the only way for them to tell the story of their lives. Experience, when it cannot be communicated to another, must wither within and be worst than lost. People believe that writers have this opportunity ^{plug} ~~and~~ all the other rewards, ~~but~~ all the same, another part of me is ready to laugh at their ^{they have no idea of} ~~naivete about~~ (how long it takes writers to learn the rudiments, ^{which} ~~which~~ is akin to the discipline and dull punishment ^{so,} ~~that~~ in boxing, go into the ability to throw a commanding punch at will. (I never encourage people to write for too little. It is a splendid life if you think only of the emoluments. But it is death to the soul if you are not good at it. And to have a durable career, you ^{must} ~~have to~~ build a personality that can withstand criticism. Published work is fair game; writers don't have to publish; they can leave their work in a desk drawer. ^{then} Why should it not be open season, then, when the work comes out?

[Aud]

83.20 Editing ^{tends to} ~~now~~ makes best sellers more and more like each other. ~~After all, editors~~
~~write well and very much like each other.~~ ^{often} So few bestsellers don't suffer from a spate of
 adjectives. When a writer can't ^{find} ~~present~~ the manifest of an experience, he often substitutes
 by ~~supplying~~ ^{has} adjectives. That tells the reader ~~what~~ ^{how} to think. There's a tendency in
 publishing houses to simplify books, gussy them up, ^{get the} ~~too much~~ emphasis on entertainment
 at all costs. My hope lies in one fact. A terrible weariness ^{maybe} ~~is~~ coming into us because of
 the rate at which we are being entertained.

[Aud]

95.22 Everywhere I go, booksellers ask me, 'Why don't you write a short book? Short
 books take up less space on our shelves.' Marketing has taken over writing ~~now~~ ^{The}
^{Short novels?} ~~hell with what the book is, can we market it?~~ Not for me; I was ^{seduced} ~~convinced~~ at an early age ^{when}
^{said} ~~by~~ Thomas Mann that only the exhaustive is truly interesting.

[Aud]

95.7 You always want to reach the maximum number of people, and you want to reach
 the young people. If I start thinking about it, it would be "Why don't they read me?" or
 "How wonderful that they are reading me," but it would have nothing to do with writing.

When you write you can't be thinking of how it's going to turn out. You can't say, "I'm
 going to put this in because ^{it will} ~~it's going to help~~ ^{doesn't} ~~it~~ sell copies." That never works. Even in

~~in~~ a bad bestseller there's a ^{any} certain sort of internal integrity that makes it a best seller--it is the best book that person is capable of writing at that time. The author believes in the book. That's why it's a best seller. ~~There's an aura of integrity.~~

[World]

91.3 I've written a lot of books. The number ~~is~~ depends on how you count, because a couple of ~~these books~~ ^{them like the books} are a reshuffling of the cards--but I could give you a list that runs up to 30. I wonder if I hadn't had to earn a living, I wonder if I could have written as many. There's something marvelous about having to meet your bills. The condition that is most disagreeable in your life becomes the most useful one. You know, I feel the same about the US. Army. It was absolutely the worst experience of my life, and it was probably the single most valuable experience. Without it, I wouldn't have known half of what I know today about Americans.

[WR]

Lee/2001 Ever since The Naked and the Dead came out, I've not had to ~~work for a~~ ^{flat} living. I've worked as a writer and not had to do other jobs over time. And jobs undercut your energy. Even the best of jobs has a lot of sludge ~~in it~~. I've never known a young writer who didn't ^{feel} have that bitterness that creeps in at the way they can't use their time properly. A lot of one's style can get chewed up going through the daily grind and stone of daily work.

[Aud]

Lee/2001 It doesn't matter if your book's good or bad, [✓] Within reason, you're going to get the same number of good and bad reviews. A dreadful book will probably get three good reviews in ten, and a very good book may get six good ones in ten. It's just amazing how ^{reviews everything} they ^{rise above} tend to push to the middle in reviewing. Until you know that, ^{and know it} in your bones, it's ^{very} hard to keep writing year after year, book after book, and ^{get over those} desires to ^{manly} kill a critic. You have to be able to adjust to ^{your impotence in that direction} ~~that~~ otherwise you'll walk around ~~tired~~ all the time ^{just full of fatigue}.

[Aud]

Hughes/2001 When I started, we were under the umbrella of Maxwell Perkins--so anyone who became an editor wanted to be ^{Young editors felt} great like him. There was a loyalty that they ^{still} ~~felt~~ toward their writers. They were spiritual marriages, if you will. It's ^{sustaining such loyalty} true to a degree today, but the odds against ^{being able to sustain} it are much higher. The situation in ^{Today's} publishing ^{which} today dictates that an editor has to bring in books that ^{enter the interstices} make money, and that ^{reaction} has ^{has} ~~got~~ to get into the intricacies of an editor's ^{thinking}. I imagine it would be very hard ^{for them} not to start pushing ^{their} certain authors ^{strains} just a little bit in the direction of being more popular. That, of course, ^{breaks} the bond.

[Aud]

842 Ancient Evenings is a very difficult book to understand. It's written out of the principles and canons of literature I picked up in my youth, when you were supposed to write difficult books, it was honorable to do that. Now it's considered obscene, like, "How dare you write a book I can't understand immediately?" Television, it seems, has

really hit deeper than anyone knows. The bad reviews Ancient Evening got irritated me, of course, they always do. But they didn't disturb me in the sense that I started thinking, "Well, I'm not the writer I thought I was." If the book is as good as I think it is, the bad reviews will eventually be to its credit. And if it's not as good as I think it is, they've saved me a lot of years walking around being a grand dame. There's no fate worse than to walk around immensely admired in your own time and then absolutely die as a literary figure two years after your own death.

[Aud]

84.2 There's a funny mechanism in the literary world, where to varying degrees we are all terribly jealous of one another. There's a certain glee when any of us comes up with a major book, and the first impression you get is one of great relief: "Oh, good, it isn't as good as I thought it was going to be." But then the second wave comes, and people start to say, "It's really a very good book." There's a feeling of guilt: "Are we murdering a child of promise?"

[Aud]

Vitka/1984 Everybody was waiting for the big war novel, so-called ~~to~~^{to} arrive, and mine happened to be first. The timing of The Naked and the Dead was extraordinary. If it had come out a year earlier or a year later, it wouldn't have done as well. In mid-1948, people were ready. You see, immediately after the war, nobody wanted a war novel. You would go to publishing houses and say you were working on a war novel and they would say, "Oh, God, don't write that. You'll never get it published." Of course, there had been a

all through
 spate of bad war novels published during the Second World War and publishers were
 tired, ^{now,} skittish. Publishers have fashions. They decide that certain books should or should
 not be written in a certain year. By the time The Naked and the Dead came out, everyone
 was ready. The war was three years ^{gone and} past, ^{ready} people were beginning to think about it again.

[Aud]

I84.24 I ~~get into bad situations and I've got to get out of them.~~ I was truly in debt in ~~the~~ the
 early '80s and I owed my publisher a great deal of money. And then ~~the~~ the day of reckoning
 came and I realized I damn well had to write a book. ~~It had been a book~~ I had been trying
 to start ^{one} all year but I hadn't been able to ^{I was tired.} get near it. Then suddenly my mind cleared. It
 was one of those joke situations where they give Popeye the can of spinach. ^{The first draft of} Tough Guys
 Don't Dance took 61 days. I've often felt that the only time you do anything with great
 energy is when you're ^{acting out of} doing it for your best and worst moments at once. My best motive
 was to create a little art, and my worst was to make some money. They don't always go
 together, but in this instance they did.

CRAFT

68.26 The making of my first underground movie probably had a good bit to do with the decision to treat myself as the third person protagonist of The Armies of the Night. When I sat down to write the book, I had already edited my film, "Wild 90," in which I was the leading character. Since there had been way too much of me in the rushes, I had come to see myself as a piece of yard goods about which one could ask, "Where can I cut this?" The habit of looking at myself as if I were someone other than myself--a character ready to be described in the third person, had already been established. Parenthetically, I think it's also a way of getting a psychoanalysis on the cheap. I think I've been more balanced since those three years.

75.11 Trotsky once made the incisive remark that the only way you can tell the truth is by a comparison of the lies. While you may never be able to find out who is lying more, you can come close to the relations between two liars. We may never know, for instance, what the truth of one human is, or another, but we can discern a lot about the relations between them. We may be able to say with some certainty, "They hate each other," or "Isn't it extraordinary how they love each other?" This is because we can feel the relation.

Too many Americans don't know that style refers to more than your clothing. I confess I had to learn the real meaning of the word. It took me up to the year I was writing Advertisements for Myself, when I began to recognize how truly curious it was to write in the first person. Now, many, many writers good and bad had been living in the first person for centuries before I came to this remarkable conclusion that the first person was not a routine nor automatic way to write. It's a very interesting and exciting mode of literary being, with huge, sometimes crippling, limitations and you really do have to understand it as such. Especially if you're dealing with your own presence. Nothing is more difficult than to become comfortable writing about yourself in the first person. It's highly unnatural. Because "I" is only about a third of any human being. "I" may be the ego, but you do get into all sorts of places where you want "one" to talk about other aspects of oneself. Or even second person, you, employed as if it is the first person: "You get up, you brush your teeth, you feel lousy this morning." (In the first period of awakening, you can feel like some vague entity slightly outside yourself.) And then there is the third person when used as a substitute for "I" as I—that is, Norman Mailer—did in The Armies of the Night. Using the third person for oneself may be a special condition, but it is legitimate because there is a part of us that is superior to ourselves, the person who observes us carefully even as we're doing things. That is the person who is always saying, "Oh, we're not doing too well right now, are we?" A wonderful voice. Because it enables you to treat yourself as one more character in a field of characters.

Style is a reflection of identity. Given a firm sense of oneself, you can create a consistent style. But should your identity change, so will the style go through a shift. Illness, tragedy, huge frustration, age itself are bound to alter your identity.

And, of course, one's subject matter will affect your style. A journalistic voice certainly can get into the style of a good many topical novels. But then, you wouldn't want Henry James to describe the life of Gary Gilmore. There is such a vice as too much style. For what Henry James wanted to do, his mode of writing was ideal. He had learned before anyone else knew, that polite social life, despite its ridiculous and/or its exaggerated aspects, also presented a spectrum of small options present at every moment. In social life, a person often chooses among three or four equally agreeable alternatives, even to making the choice of being a little warmer or a little cooler than he or she originally expected to be toward a given person. James had an extraordinary sense of that unforeseen vibration in the almost wholly expected, and he created a fictional world out of such insight, a world that depended altogether on his command of his style.

On a given night, I was in a small Paris hotel room when I couldn't sleep. The room was tiny, the double bed took up almost all the floor, and you could break your toe trying to walk around it, the room was that small. I didn't want to go rummaging in my suitcase for a book, so I picked up a Gideon Bible (in English!) on my bedside table and started reading. I hadn't looked at the New Testament for 30 or 40 years, but I remembered a man named Fulton Oursler who once did a book called The Greatest Story Ever Told. He sold a million-plus copies as I recall. Now, perusing the Gospels themselves, I thought, well, this may be the greatest story ever told, but it is certainly told abominably. Sayings popped out of the text that were worthy of Shakespeare, but much in the double columns was baldly, badly, insufficiently described. A limp, often ungainly prose pronged with a number of golden nuggets. I thought, there have got to be a hundred novelists in the world who can do a better job. I'm one of them.

I became intrigued with the notion. When I thought of all the hypocrites and corruptibles and power-seekers who had been living with the Gospel for centuries, using it for their own high-octane purposes, standing foursquare on any gnomic chunk of text they could use to abet their aims, I decided why not just tell the story? It is, in fact, a fascinating one. The narrative keel is mind-boggling. We are dealing with a man who is obliged to recognize through the evidence itself that he is the son of God. The difficulty of such a book would be to write about a man who was considerably nicer than myself. That is never easy. To fashion a character who is meaner than yourself—a piece of cake. But to do someone who is better? Well, Jean Malaquais once remarked that you can

write about any character but one. Who, I asked, and he said, "A novelist who's more talented than yourself."

I thought, this is the test. Not that Jesus was a novelist, far from it, but he certainly possessed a nobler nature than mine. Still, I thought, OK, I will try it. The problems are so interesting.

I decided he had to be more of a man than a god, an existential man, dominated by a huge cloud hanging over him. It is that he is the son of God. He doesn't feel worthy of that, but he is ready to do his best every step of the way. Not in command of every situation, but doing his best. And he does have some startling successes. And God does help him.

In the beginning, the style was too Biblical. Moreover, I had to decide whether to travel in first person or third. First person would have everyone saying: "There's Mailer, world class egomaniac. Does he now think he's Jesus Christ? What a pompous ass! What a totally unpleasant human being!" I thought that's the bad side of it, but at least I can avoid the larger mistake of doing it in the third person. Because that would have to get mixed up with the Gospels, and the reader would wonder, "Is this sentence from the New Testament or has it been added?" That's going to make for a disagreeable page-examining experience. All right, then. First person. Damn the torpedoes, first person.

It became interesting. If it was too Biblical in the beginning, I did have a very tough editor who was totally irreligious, Jason Epstein. A rationalist if ever there was one. He was appalled that I was writing this book. We're friends, but he's one tough editor. And he's always either absolutely right or absolutely wrong, which is rare for

editors. With him, you have to make a quick decision. Where is he today? I concluded on this occasion, that, yes, the style was too Biblical.

After which, it was relatively easy. The book was short enough for me to go through seven variations on style. I had to find the balance between a Biblical rhythm and a contemporary one. Something that would not inflict a Biblical grip on you, yet keep the echo. Before I was done, it took a year.

If you write in the first person, you gain much in terms of immediacy but lose insight because you can't move into other peoples' heads. Not without twisting the form.

The Deer Park underlined the difficulty. At one point, the man who was telling the story stated that he was shifting from first person to third. He was now old enough, went his claim, to understand people he had not understood before. Because he now had more of an idea of how they think, he would write about them in third person.

In first person, the style has to be altogether tuned to the man who's telling the story. (Only once did I try having a woman tell the story. And that was Marilyn Monroe in Of Women and their Elegance.)

When your narrator is a man, the key choice is not how bright he is, because however bright, he can't be smarter than you are. That's easy. You dumb him down to taste, or bring him up to your level. The real question is how tough is he? Do you have the inner sanction to create a man who's braver and tougher than yourself? The answer is yes. You can do that by exercising your imagination on how you might act if you were that much more of a man. I don't know, however, if I can answer the question for an author who's female. Can she, for example, write about a woman who is more sensitive than herself? Probably not. She could write about a woman who uses her sensitivity and sensibility more than herself, because she, the author, can then use all the frustrated times in her existence when the sensitivity and sensibility she possessed were not appropriate to a harsh occasion. Following question: Can a woman write about another woman more

passionate than herself? Probably. Of a woman who's colder than herself? Without doubt.

In the third person, there's a different set of difficulties.

2 In third person, you are God--well, of course, not God, but one of the angels or demi-urges. Nonetheless, there you are, ready to see into everyone's mind. While there are two kinds of third person--point-of-view third person where you remain in one character's mind, but are still writing from above, and the major vein of third person where you enter everyone's head. That's hard to do. Hard to get over the embarrassment of obviously being able to enter certain people's minds with more skill than others. That kind of Olympian third person, that Tolstoyan presence, needs experience, confidence, irony, and lordly detachment. When you can do it, however, hurrah. Most of the great novels achieve that tone. Just about all the great novels of the 19th century.

I won't read a good novel while I'm writing a book. It's equal to working on a car, with all the parts out on the garage floor, when some bastard goes by in a Ferrari. Besides, when I read something good, I want to write criticism. I want to tell where I think the author is terrific and where he or she is lacking. If readers are blowing it up too high, I may feel, "It's good but not that good---let's get into it." So it can be immensely distracting. Your mind settles on the book you read, rather than the one you're supposed to be working on. So your tendency is to protect yourself. Stendahl, for instance, used to peruse the Code Napoleon in the loo every day before he'd start to write. I read the New York Times.

Now I didn't always follow that rule. When I was doing The Naked and the Dead, I used to pick up Thomas Wolfe and Tolstoy. I didn't read them every day but they were on my writing desk and they were perfect for what I needed. Tolstoy, particularly. The tone of Anna Karenina was wonderful for The Naked and the Dead. And then there was Thomas Wolfe to steam up the descriptions. If I needed a tropical sunset or how the jungle smelled, I had Wolfe. For the characters, Tolstoy.

The Naked and the Dead offered a good, workmanlike prose and wonderful material. You don't always need a style. Just for certain books. Henry James, without his unique style, is hopeless. But if The Naked and the Dead had had a more developed style, it might have been less of a novel.

It's a book written by an amateur, and so it has all the virtues of such a book. It's daring; it hardly knows what it's getting into. If I were to write it today, it would take me

three to five times as long because I'd suffer at the number of novelistic taboos I was violating. You can transgress any taboo but you have to contemplate the possible price. You don't, for instance, violate point of view without pondering the loss of your novelistic integrity.

Finding one's own style is usually elusive in the beginning. While it certainly helps to develop a unique style, first you have to learn how to write. I remember one time when Nelson Algren was giving his writing class in Chicago, and invited me to sit in. He read a story by one of the kids while I was there. Pure third-rate Hemingway. The guy didn't have much talent to begin with, but after all, this was a writing class. So, afterward, I said to Nelson, "Why did you pay that much attention? He was just copying Hemingway." And Algren who was about ten years older than me and knew that much more about such things, said, "You know, these kids are better off if they attach themselves to a writer and start imitating him because they learn a lot doing that. If they're any good at all, sooner or later they'll get rid of the other style and begin to have their own. But first, they have to get attached to somebody." That was useful.

Over the years I found that, yes, how much I wanted have my own style. All the writers I respected had one, particularly Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald

On the other hand, it takes so long. Style is finally a set of decisions on which word is valuable and what is not in every sentence you write. That's an element. Another is the overall consistency of the style. You have writers who are exceptionally talented but are still what I would call amateurs. The most notable example would be a writer as highly gifted as Toni Morrison. Her style can shift from chapter to chapter--her strength is not there. She can write beautifully for pages, but by the next chapter dawdle along in pedestrian mode. It violates what she is at her best, her distinctive voice, her distinctive insights.

One example I always give to a writing class. A very young writer sits on a park bench with his girl. He kisses her. He's only seventeen. He's never had such a kiss before. That evening he writes, "'I love you,' he said, 'I love you,' she said." He stops, lays down his pen and says, "I'm a great writer!"

When you're in a good mood, your immediate experience can be too real, too alive, to be put directly into language. You have to wait. When you're in a bad mood, none of it can seem worth doing.

The art of good writing is you finally get to a place where you say what you wanted to say in a way that only you can. Because there's no good saying what you want to say in a way anyone else could. Needless to say, this has to happen by itself. You cannot force it.

LS: You used a wonderful phrase I want you to elaborate on: "the tensile strength of a sentence."

NM: Yes. That you can learn from a writing course.

LS: Tell me what you mean by the tensile strength.

NM: You can't change a single word. What is tensile strength? It is that all the components are working together, so you can't change a single word.

Good dialogue depends in a subtle bounce. Rules won't help you; you need an ear. There has to be something in the next speech that is like the previous one, yet subtly different. But I don't even want to talk about dialogue. Some people have marvelous dialogue, some don't, but it's only one aspect of writing, it's not the aspect . . .

I don't think you can teach it. Most kids who have some talent start off with good dialogue because that comes naturally, they have a good ear. It's there and they have fun. People hear their stories and they laugh and that's the beginning of being a writer. Those who are not gifted in that direction are, hopefully, endowed with more philosophy or good language.

Hemingway suffered from the honorable need to be the equal of his characters, particularly since he usually wrote in the first person. It's very hard to write in the first person about someone who's stronger or braver than yourself because it can get vainglorious. It's often uncomfortable. But you have to be able to do it. Because if you keep every character down to your own level, or lower, you do not take on large subjects. You need people more heroic than yourself, more enterprising, less timid, sexier, more romantic, more tragic. You've got to be able to make people greater than yourself and not be ashamed of the damnable fact that the "I" who is being promoted is giving a false picture of yourself to all those readers who predictably assume that the author is the man they are encountering in the first person.

Working on The Executioner's Song, I came to the realization that God is a better novelist than the novelists. I had encountered an incredible story. It had actually happened. If I had conceived it, the work would have been more dramatic but less true. I learned that the way things work in life is not the way they work in my novels. Which is, my novels up to then. It would have been obscene to me to have a novel with two really fascinating characters who didn't come together and have a fascinating scene. Whereas, what I discovered in The Executioner's Song was that the characters I was most interested in hardly ever came together and when they did, the results were often disappointing. But what would happen occasionally, after all the frustrations of all the putative dramatic events that were not eventful, was that something else would happen which was larger than anything I could conceive of. (Like Gary's letter to Nicole that makes her fall wholly in love with him again.)

And I thought, yes, that is what life is like. We go through years of living the rough small events that we hoped would be larger events and then—wham! Something big! It changes everything. Getting a sense of that, put a certain modesty into my aesthetic.

It might be useful to talk about the practical problems involved in writing a novel, by which I mean the set of psychological stances that you get into in the course of working on one book for a year or two. I remember when I was in college and writing a novel, the great problem I had was (I ran into a phrase by Henry James) "the keeping up." It's a problem you face when you're young. The novel tends to change too quickly, which is one of the reasons why people in college often tend to write short stories and stay away from longer fiction. Good short story writers often blow up when they start a novel. They'll have a good first chapter, but the second chapter just seems to go off, and they never get it back.

Speaking of The Naked and the Dead, I haven't thought of Hearn's death in years. Really, it is a shocking death. I must say, I stole it directly from E.M. Forster, in The Longest Journey. He created a character who was most alive for the reader, then destroyed him on the next page. Like a rifle shot. You get an idea what a gun is like at that point. In my book it may have been too big a price to pay, because the denouement of the novel was sacrificed. I don't think I was aware of the size of the problem. Today I'd be much more alert to that. If I did the book over again today, I might have kept Hearn alive until the very end, and it might have been a phonier book as a result. One of the things you always have trouble with when you talk about "true" or "not true," is, of course, the relative truth of the novel. In a way, if you get a fairly good novel going, then you have a small universe functioning, and this universe lives or does not live in relation to its own scheme of cause and effect. In Kafka's writing, he creates worlds that are absolutely true. You can say practically every sentence in a Kafka story is true to the story.

Looking back on it, I can give you a good and bad motive that I had for killing Hearn at that point. The good motive is that it was a powerful way to show what death is like in war. The shoddy motive was that I wasn't altogether sure in my heart that I knew what to do with him, or knew how to bring him off. I think that I truly work on impulse in all of my writing. That's why I don't like to plan too far ahead. It makes it almost impossible for one of your characters to go through a dramatic shift of heart because it's

going to violate your larger scheme. It's better if the larger scheme comes into focus at the very last moment.

A student once asked me, "When you were young, was there a mentor around to tell you that if it felt good, go with it; or did you have your doubts and just write your way through it? Didn't you sometimes get your head turned around by all the different forces working on you? Or were you aware, maybe instinctively, of what to do?"

As I recall, I said that I think I probably had a certain urgency about writing because it seemed to me that it was the only thing I could do well. There is a great tendency then to follow your own instincts, because that's all you've got. Let me amplify this. Your instinct could be dead wrong. In other words, you could write a book with a powerful sense of inner conviction. You could finish, and a year or two later, look at it and say, "How could I have so deluded myself? This is awful." This inner experience, this instinct can betray you, but you still have to go with it. Very often the instinct sees some light at the end of the tunnel, but that's because you've been trapped in a situation where your creative energies just can't get together. Now, at last, you've found a way to work. You may be writing out some very bad tendencies in yourself, but this can be good, too. You might be feeling happy because some you're going to be done with that stupid side of yourself. That's what the enthusiasm can be about.

Rewriting is where your experience comes in. The more you rewrite, the better you get at it. There comes a point where you may feel on the declining side of your powers. At this point, if you've become one of the best editors in town, then those declining powers may seem much less weak to others than to yourself. That's because you know how to get the maximum out of what you have done. The only way to do this when you're young is to go through your work in every mood. You have to have the courage to look at it when you're in a terrible mood, ready to destroy it. If at that point, something still comes through, then at least you have the assurance that it has to be pretty good, at least to you. And then, of course, it's very good to read things at the top of your feelings, way up, to see what the maximum is. If nothing else, all this gives you a tolerance for the extraordinary spectrum of reactions you get in the classroom. You realize that the people that hate your work aren't necessarily evil, and the people who love your stuff are not altogether illustrious.

There's an awful lot of research in doing an historical novel but the trick is to digest it. The most difficult thing is to avoid that awful stance where you say, "Hello, I'm Saint-Simon and I'm at the court of Louis XIV and Madame de Maintenon is very angry this morning." You have to get to that point of view in your writing where you say to yourself, "Madame de Maintenon does not quite know that she's the Madame de Maintenon that we know through Saint-Simon. She sees herself as someone other." That's what you're trying to get in an historical novel, and it's very difficult. Anachronisms come in with every page.

If you find some theme that keeps you working, don't question it. Let that theme be sufficient to fuel your work. If you start using the value judgments of others, you're never going to get much done. The thing to remember is that there's nobody anymore who can tell us how to live. Nobody knows the answer. If I find something is stimulating to me and arousing my energy, that's fine, I'll trust it. If you're a serious young writer and find that you're writing, my God, don't listen to what anyone else says, write your book. There probably is a deeper truth than you'll ever know in the fact that you're able to work so well. Of course, you could be writing in absolutely the wrong direction. You could be doing a dreadful book. You could be, let's take an extreme example, flirting with something that justifies Hitler and you say to yourself, "What am I doing? I'm a monster. Why am I writing this book?" Who knows? In the process of creating such a work you might reawaken civilization to the fact that they're getting kind of casual and complacent about Hitler. You see, you won't know the results of your action. The greatest vanity, the thing that has poisoned Marxist literature for decades, is that they assume writers can affect the population profoundly in ways that are foreseeable, and therefore writers should work like scientists.

But, no matter what you find yourself writing about, if it's giving you enough energy to continue, then the work bears a profound relationship to you at that point and so you don't question it.

If you can, I think it's a good thing to work as if you're a farmer as I would your
crops. If you write a novel, think of it as a field and you're really close to what
happened, then it's probably a good idea that your mind should be as close to the
field as you can get.

If you can, I think it's a good idea to work as if you're a farmer and rotate your crops. If you write a novel that's factual and realistic and big, awfully close to what happened, then it's probably a good idea that your next novel be as fanciful as possible. That way you're rotating the crops in your brain.

When I work on a novel, I don't like to know the end. I'm happier finding things out at the point of a pencil. I think if you solve the problem of how a chapter's going to end in the shower, then you're not as well off as if you get to it while writing. I felt this with *The Executioner's Song*. While I knew the story, I saw this as a hazard. I wanted the book to read as if we did not know the ending. I didn't want to be aware of too many future details, because this would tend to make me curve what was happening to my characters at the place where I had them. I would understand too well their relation to what was going to happen later.

I can't pretend I've never been asked when the idea of using a hornet's nest to thwart the climbers in *The Naked and the Dead* came to me. In truth, the idea was there before I wrote the first sentence of the book. The incident happened to my reconnaissance platoon on the most ambitious patrol I ever took with them. They sent out thirty of us to locate and destroy one hundred Japanese marines, but we did get stuck climbing one hell of an enormous hill with a mean slimy trail, and when we were almost up to the ridge, somebody kicked over a hornet's nest. Half the platoon went tearing up the hill, and the machine gun squad behind us went flying down to the valley. We never did find each other again that day. We just slunk back to our bivouac.

There are some who feel it was not a satisfactory device, but I think I'd do it the same way again. War is disproportions, and the hornet's nest seemed a perfect disproportion to me. We were ready to lose our lives but we weren't up to getting stung by a hornet.

Young writers are obsessed with finding a style. Yet, a really good style comes only when a man has become as good as he can be. Style is character. A good style cannot come from a bad, undisciplined character. Now, a man may be evil, but I believe that people can be evil in their essential natures and still have good characters. Good in the sense of being well-tuned. They can have characters which are flexible, supple, adaptable, principled in relation to their own good or evil—even an evil man can have principles—he can be true to his own evil, which is not so easy, either. I think good style is a matter of rendering out of oneself all the cupidities, all the crippings, all the velleities. And then I think one has to develop one's physical grace. Writers who are possessed of some physical grace may tend to write better than writers who are physically clumsy. It's my impression this is so. I don't know that I'd care to attempt to prove it.

I think formal problems exist in inverse proportion to one's honesty. You get to the problem of getting someone out of the room when there's something false about the scene.

Up to now, I've not liked writing about people who are close to me because they're too difficult to do. Their private reality obviously interferes with the reality one is trying to create. They become alive not as creatures in your imagination but as actors in your life. And so they seem real while you work but you're not working their reality into your book. For example, it's not a good idea to try to put your wife into your novel. Now your latest wife, anyway. In practice, I prefer to draw a character from someone I hardly know.

The question goes: how do you turn a real person into a fictional one? If I have an answer, it is that I try to put the model in situations which have very little to do with his real situations in life. Very quickly, the model disappears. His private reality can't hold up. For instance, I might take somebody who is a professional football player, a man, let's say, whom I know sort of slightly, and turn him into a movie star. In a transposition of this sort, everything which relates particularly to the professional football player quickly disappears, and what is left, curiously, is what is exportable in his character. But this process while interesting in the early stages is not as exciting as the more creative act of allowing your characters to grow once they're separated from the model. It's when they become almost as complex as one's own personality that the fine excitement begins. Because they're not really characters any longer—they're beings, which is a distinction I like to make. A character is someone you can grasp as a whole, you can have a clear idea of him, but a being is someone whose nature keeps shifting. Like a character of Forster's. In *The Deer Park*, Lulu Meyers is a being rather than a character. If you study her closely, you will see that she is a different person in every scene. Just a little different. I don't know whether initially I did this by accident or purposefully, but at a certain point I made the conscious decision not to try to straighten her out, she seemed right in her change-ability.

I am not sure it is possible to describe the experience of novel-writing authentically. It may be that it is not an experience. It may be more like a relation, if you will—a continuing relation between a man and his wife. You can't necessarily speak of that as an experience because it may consist of several experiences braided together; or it may consist of many experiences which are all more or less similar, or indeed it may consist of two kinds of experiences which are antagonistic to one another. Throughout all of this I've spoken of characters emerging. Quite often they don't emerge; they fail to emerge. And what one's left with is the dull compromise which derives from two kinds of experience warring with one another within oneself. A character who should have been brilliant is dull. Or even if a character does prove to be first-rate, it's possible you should have done twice as much with him, three times as much. A book takes on its own life in the writing. It has its laws; it becomes a creature to you after a while. One feels a bit like a master who's got a fine animal. Very often, I'll feel a certain shame for what I've done with a novel. I won't say it's the novel that's bad; I'll say it's I who was bad. Almost as if the novel did not really belong to me, as if it were something raised by me like a child. I know what's potentially beautiful in my novel, you see. Very often after I've done the novel I realize that the beauty I recognize in it is not going to be perceived by the reader. I didn't succeed in bringing it out. It's very odd—it's as though I had let the novel down, owed it a duty which I didn't fulfill.

By now, I'm a bit cynical about craft. I think there's a natural mystique in the novel which is more important than craft. One is trying, after all, to capture reality, and that is extraordinarily and exceptionally difficult. I think craft is merely a series of way-stations. I think of craft as being like a St. Bernard dog with that little bottle of brandy under his neck. Whenever you get into real trouble, the thing that can save you as a novelist is to have enough craft to be able to keep warm long enough to be rescued. Of course this is exactly what keeps good novelists from becoming great novelists. Robert Penn Warren might have written a major novel if he hadn't had just that extra little bit of craft to get him out of all the trouble in All the King's Men. If Penn Warren hadn't known anything about Elizabethan literature, the true Elizabethan in him might have emerged. I mean, he might have written a fantastic novel. As it was, he knew enough about craft to use it as an escape hatch. And his plot degenerated into a slambang of exits and entrances, confrontations, tragedies, quick wails and woe. But he was really forcing an escape from the problem which was the terror of confronting a reality that might open into more and more anxiety and so present a deeper and deeper view of the abyss. Craft protects one from facing those endless expanding realities of deterioration and responsibility. The terror, let us say, of being reborn as something much less noble or something much more ignoble. I think this sort of terror depresses us profoundly. Which may be why we throw up our enormous evasions—such a craft. Indeed, I think this adoration of craft, this specific respect for craft makes a church of literature for that

vast number of writers who are somewhere on the spectrum between mediocrity and talent.

I think it's important for a writer to keep in shape. But it's hard to talk about. Harry Greb, for example, was a fighter who used to keep in shape. He was completely a fighter, the way one might wish to be completely a writer. He always did the things which were necessary to him as a fighter. Now, some of these things were extremely irrational, that is, extremely irrational from a prize-fight manager's point of view. That is, before he had a fight he would go to a brothel, and he would have two prostitutes, not one, taking the two of them into the same bed. And this apparently left him feeling like a wild animal. Don't ask me why. Perhaps he picked the two meanest whores in the joint and so absorbed into his system all the small, nasty, concentrated evils that had accumulated from carloads of men. Greb was known as the dirtiest fighter of his time. He didn't have much of a punch but he could spoil other fighters and punish them, he knew more dirty tricks than anyone around. This was one of his training methods and he did it over and over again until he died at a relatively early age of a heart attack, on an operating table. I think he died before he was thirty-eight. They operated on him, and bang, he went. Nothing could be done.

But the point I make is that he stayed in training by the way he lived his life. The element which was paramount in it was to keep in shape. If he were drinking, you see, the point was to keep in shape while drinking. I'm being a touch imprecise. . . Put it this way: He would not drink just to release his tension. Rather, what went on was that there was tension in him which was insupportable so he had to drink. But reasoning as a professional, he felt that if he had to drink, he might as well use that too. In the sense that

the actor uses everything which happens to him, so Greb as a fighter used everything which happened to him. As he drank he would notice the way his body moved. One of the best reasons one drinks is to become aware of the way your mind and body move. Now let me apply this to craft.

It is a grab-bag of procedures, tricks, lore, formal gymnastics, symbolic superstructures, methodology in short. It's the compendium of what you've acquired from others. And since great writers communicate a vision of experience, one can't usually borrow their methods. Their method is married to the vision. Therefore, one acquires craft more from good writers and mediocre writers with a flair. Craft, after all, is what you can take out whole from their work. But keeping in shape is something else. For example, you can do journalism, and it can be terrible for your style. Or it can temper your style. . . in other words, you can become a better writer by doing a lot of different kinds of writing. Or you can deteriorate. There's a book came out a few years ago which was a sociological study of some Princeton men—I forget the name of it. One of them said something which I thought was extraordinary. He wanted to perform the sexual act under every variety of condition, emotion and mood available to him. I was struck with this not because I ever wanted necessarily to have that kind of sexual life, but because it seemed to me that was what I was trying to do with my writing. I try to go over my work in every conceivable mood. I edit on a spectrum which runs from the high clear manic impressions of a drunk which has made one electrically alert, all the way down to the soberest reaches of depression where I can hardly bear my words. By the time I'm done with writing I care about, I usually have worked on it through the full spectrum of my

consciousness. If you keep yourself in this peculiar kind of shape, the craft will take care of itself. Craft is very little finally. But if you're continually worrying about whether you're growing or deteriorating as a man, whether your integrity is turning soft or firming itself, why, then, it in that slow war, that slow rearguard battle you fight against diminishing talent that you stay in shape as a writer and have a consciousness. You develop a consciousness as you grow older which enables you to write about anything, in effect, and write about it well. That is, provided you keep your consciousness in shape and don't relax into the flabby styles of thought which surround one everywhere. The moment you borrow other writers' styles of thought, you need craft to shore up the walls. But if what you write is a reflection of your own consciousness, then even journalism can become interesting. One wouldn't want to spend one's life at it, and I wouldn't ever want to be caught justifying journalism as a major activity (it's obviously less interesting than to write a novel), but it's better, I think, to see journalism as a venture of one's ability to keep in shape than to see it as an essential betrayal of the chalice of your literary art.

Of course, it's virtually as if writers are there to be ruined. Look at the list: booze, pot, too much sex, too much failure in one's private life, too much attrition, too much recognition, too little recognition, frustration. Nearly everything in the scheme of things works to dull a first-rate talent. But the worst probably is cowardice—as one gets older, one becomes aware of one's cowardice, the desire to be bold which once was a joy gets heavy with caution and duty. And finally there's apathy. About the time it doesn't seem too important any more to be a great writer, you know you've slipped far enough now to be doing your work on the comeback trail.

The hardest thing for an older writer to decide is whether he's burned out or merely lying fallow. I was ready to think I was burned out before I even started The Naked and the Dead.