



old
pages
from
"Setting Coffin"

Set July 25
1890



TO: J. Michael Lennon

FROM: Veronica Windholz

DATE: August 12, 2002

RE: Mailer/*The Spooky Art*

Mike,

As promised, I'm sending you the manuscript pages on which there have been revisions since late last week. Once you substitute them for the pages that are presently in the Xerox copy of the setting manuscript I gave you on Thursday, you'll have a complete, up-to-date copy of the manuscript that's going to the compositor--unless Norman has any other changes in mind.

Thanks also for the splendid job you did on the endnotes. I am very grateful to you for taking this on and seeing it through.

Best,

Veronica

35 pages plus this
cover sheet.

notions. You may have to live with a dreary given as a discipline but you do not accept ~~that~~ ^{your} condition as eternal, as the meaning of life. He could not permit that. Could not accept how Chekhov made so much of the essential inanity of the Russian middle class.

But there, very much in the way, was Shakespeare, the first great movie writer who ever existed ^L_M yes, existed long before movies were ever conceived. For

Shakespeare was not interested in making careful connections with his people.

Shakespeare was looking to get his most dynamic characters together under any remote circumstances available, no matter how ~~weak~~ or contrived (King Lear can be the first

example). He was looking for superb exchanges of dialogue and fantastic moments ^{for}

~~Shakespeare searches for~~ vertiginous possibilities ^{for} in the English language. Tolstoy lived

for sobriety of moral judgment. So he considered Shakespeare a monster who paid no

attention to causality except when it was useful to him. His people did incredible things,

fell in love and/or murdered, usually with a minimum of preparation ^L_M Hamlet ^L_M and then

had exceptional speeches that seared an audience's consciousness. To Tolstoy, this was monstrous, and must have been equal to the way some of us look these days ^{upon} ~~or~~

advertising campaigns that are stuffed with manipulation and little else. Filled with catchy ingredients for the sole purpose of leading people astray.

But why Tolstoy would compare Chekhov to Shakespeare is another question. I don't know that anyone is prepared to answer that one.

^{OK} If there is a reason, I suspect it was for a different set of faults. Tolstoy may have felt that Chekhov was a prelude to someone yet to arrive, someone like Beckett. Chekhov's people were simply not doing what they ought to be doing. What had to irritate Tolstoy immensely was that they ^{Anton's play = actors} sat in their own spiritual excrement and made ~~vapid~~ sweet speeches and moaned a little and sighed and groaned and never got out of their situation. To Tolstoy, ^{this} ~~that~~ was a cardinal sin. One should not live with the given when it is vapid and vaguely immoral. ^{That} ~~This~~ was one of Tolstoy's most basic

Act
Slash.

In John Ford Noonan's very funny play Talking Things Over with Tolstoy a story is told. It lived with me with such intensity that I came to decide it was true. Whether or not it actually happened was beside the point. It was just too good a story not to believe it took place one way or another.

TOLSTOY

Somewhere around the turn of the century, we have Chekhov visiting Tolstoy. He takes the train to the nearest station, in range of Yasnaya Polyana. I don't know if it was ~~one or two miles~~ ^{about 10 miles}. Let's say it was about 10 miles. And it's winter time. He rents two horses and a sled and drives out through the snow to Yasnaya Polyana. Tolstoy's pretty old by now, big, strong, severe, of course, and sits him right down and they talk. They drink tea and they talk. Tolstoy says: "Chekhov, you are a very good writer. You are excellent. Some of your short stories are so good I would have been pleased to have written them myself. But, Chekhov, I must tell you: You are a terrible playwright! You are awful! You are even worse than Shakespeare!"

Afterward, Chekhov ~~drives~~ ^{drives} back to the railroad station through the snow. In his journal he ~~would~~ ^{will} write: "I whipped the horses. To the moon I shouted, 'I am even worse than Shakespeare!'"

It's a fine story but ~~I wondered~~ ^{if it's true} why did Tolstoy dislike Shakespeare so? I expect the answer is that Tolstoy was always searching for subtle but precise moral judgment. That required a detailed sense of any sequence of events which ^{had} produced a dramatic or tragic event. You had to know how to assess the blame ^{for that}, you needed to know exactly when and why things happened.

reaction of the KGB had been that President Kennedy was probably assassinated by American powers on high, and ^{that} Oswald had been framed because the U.S. wanted to start a war with Russia. Oswald was, indeed, the perfect ^{choice for such a purpose} ~~patsy~~. He had been in the Soviet Union from 1959 to 1962, and had gone over as a self-declared Communist. So the KGB spread the word to ^{anyone} ~~people~~ in Minsk who had known him: Don't say a word about Oswald. And for thirty years, no one had spoken. Schiller and I, there in '92, ^{1992 and 1993} ~~98~~, discovered that the Russians who had ^{spent time with} ~~known~~ him in 1960, '61 and '62 made wonderful witnesses to what Oswald had been like. ^{They hadn't} ~~Not having~~ opened their mouths ^{since then} ~~at that time~~ he was minted in their memory.

The point I'm working toward, however, is that Schiller would sometimes, for a variety of reasons, ^I ~~mostly old reflexes of fear~~ have trouble obtaining an interview. Then he would pull out all the stops. He would say to ^{the person} ~~someone~~ who did not wish to meet with us, "You must be interviewed by Norman Mailer! He is our American Tolstoy!" ^{And} ~~And~~, astonishingly, that worked. When all else failed, ^{that would get them} ~~that would get them~~. As a good Russian, one cannot refuse to speak to Tolstoy ^I ~~even~~ when he is a pale American reflection.

One time, a very nice middle-class woman, a teacher, was being interviewed by us. But when two interrogators are doing an interview, and each has a strong and impatient mind, then each gets infuriated with the other. The fool is taking the interview in the wrong direction. We'd interrupt each other at critical moments, ^{even come close to} ~~blows~~. While this woman was there, we started arguing ^{and} ~~and~~ before long, ^{we} ~~were~~ roaring at

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Example:

"The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts." ^T_M Bertrand Russell

This is because stupidity is not a liability but an asset if all you care about is getting your own way. Before obstinate fools, we are all weak.



"Rudeness is the weak man's imitation of strength."

^T_M Eric Hoffer

Half-true, no more. Rudeness can lead to a fight one would be wise not to get into. So, for some, harsh discourtesy *has sense already* ~~perceives~~ who is weaker at the moment than themselves. Like many another foul art, it has gifted practitioners.

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reason for the fisherman to say, "~~I won't cut it~~ I'll hold on." Not enough of a character had been created to answer such a question.

I think the same fault in considerably more elaborated form is present with Beckett. He never enters a situation where any of his people might try to break out of whatever trap they are in. They can be ensconced in garbage cans, ^{or} talking to a tape recorder, which, speaking of traps, is no mean example. But there is never an arduous attempt to escape whatever trap they are in. Of course, one ^{can} argue that Beckett dared ^{to try} something no one else had ever attempted and so was reaffirming being. Daring is, after all, a vital element in being. But we are not able to enjoy this daring nearly so much as ^{are obliged to feel} we ~~have to dwell on~~ the ongoing possibilities of more and more nothingness. ~~He won't let~~ ^{go of that} and so the final impact of his plays is obsessive rather than haunting.



It could be argued that the essence of the corporate mentality is that it will not tolerate nothingness. It is always pouring its choice of form into our minds. There is, after all, no silence on television. To which I would reply that filling essentially empty forms like commercials is a direct species of nothingness. Whenever you do not fill the aesthetic you set yourself, you are purveying just that. By now, many ^{if} ~~of~~ not most television commercials, no matter how ^{loaded} ~~filled~~ with clash and color, pay, nonetheless, almost no attention to the item they are there to sell. The intent of the advertisers comes down to the premise that if you entertain your audience, if you pay them, in effect, for the interruption by getting them to laugh during the commercial, it's not inconceivable that a

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You cannot have a great democracy without great writers. I believe that if great novels disappear, as they are in danger of doing, and our storytelling culture becomes ^{is co-opted by} and journalism ^{farther away from a free society} television, then I think we will be that much nearer to fascism, benign, of course, at the moment. ~~One of the remaining correctives in a democracy~~ is novels, not just great novels, but novels that at least reinvigorate our view of the subtlety of moral judgments. ^{are essential corrections in a democracy} Americans were affected for decades by The Grapes of Wrath.

I don't like to say to myself, "I want to get this idea across to readers." Rather, I try to arouse a state of consciousness in the reader that will accommodate the material I am presenting. My hope is that my work will change their minds. Be it understood! I don't want to change everybody's mind in one direction ^{equal to} that's propaganda. Rather than move all my readers ten degrees to the left; I would be happier if I nudged some ^{there} to the left, while others were swinging to the right. My fundamental belief about a good society is that the cops get better and so do the crooks.

I feel that the final purpose of art is to intensify ^{even}, if necessary, to exacerbate ^{the} the moral consciousness of people. In particular, I think the novel at its best is the most moral of the art forms. Words are the gravamen of the Commandments, after all, and of

and the historian, ^{is} ~~are~~ making an attack on the possible nature of reality. Such attacks are the fundamental element in good fiction whether the form chosen is history or the novel.



Yes, Borges is a conservative but I detest having to think of a writer by his politics first. It's like studying people by way of their anus. Borges has a magical ability to turn plots inside out. A magician's magician. I sometimes think he does in five pages what Pynchon does in ~~500~~ ^{five hundred}. By his literary deeds, Borges poses the difficulty of comprehending reality. He shows us that every time we think our mind is approaching reality, we have only been writing a scenario to comprehend it. The scenario is the equivalent of an hypothesis ^{that} ~~which~~ seems correct until new evidence subverts it. In the course of this subversion, however, we learn a good deal. The revised hypothesis, ideally, should be superior. Reading Borges, you live in this highly diverting and not always agreeable business of seeing elaborate hypotheses destroyed by the one event that is able to turn ^{them} ~~the hypothesis~~ inside out. Borges is always teaching us that it is not enough to live with Aquinas' dictum. Trust the evidence of your senses. Rather, trust them until they are dramatically revealed as inadequate, tricked or downright betrayed ^{then} ~~then~~ develop new senses. Borges is not the least bit easy.



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ATTACKS ON REALITY

Readers often have a problem when an author mixes real and fictional characters.

I've never been bothered by that. As far as I'm concerned, it's all fiction. I can't conceive

of a history that ^{can present itself as a /} is not finally a creative and not wholly factual narrative. Let's say for the purpose of argument there are ^{a thousand} ~~1000~~ large and small ^{dr} details necessary for a particular

historian to capture a given moment in time ¹/_M Napoleon's return from Elba, the death of

Robespierre, or John F. Kennedy on the night before he was assassinated ^{of those details} whatever is chosen, the historian has to decide which ^{of a large number of facts} are most relevant.

He can't use them all. More important, he can't obtain them all. Let's say he chooses a

^{a few hundred} ~~thousand~~ pieces of information ^{that} which adhere in varying degree to various bodies of ^{information} assumption on what actually happened. These pieces of detail ^{are} are usually called facts.

Should the novelist come in, also ready to write about Kennedy's last night, he or she is not nearly as good, doubtless, at research and comes up with only ^{forty} ~~40~~ or ^{fifty} ~~50~~ details

that seem vital. Nonetheless, I would argue that the historian and the novelist are both engaged in writing fiction. The difference is that the historian uses more facts, although they can never be numerous enough to enclose the reality. Moreover, the historian usually writes in a style that's more pedestrian. But ^{there} they are ^{both} doing fiction.

One is sometimes sprightly; the other, often dull. The real point is that each, the novelist

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maintain decent relations ¹_M if you can see yourself as some sort of ^{Careless}~~scruffy~~ general (of the old aristocratic and ~~careless~~ school) and picture the unconscious as your often unruly cohort of troops ¹_M then obviously, you wouldn't dare to keep those troops out in the rain too long ³_M certainly not at the commencement of any serious campaign. On the contrary, you make a pact: "Work for me, fight for me, and I will honor and respect you."

To repeat, therefore: The rule is that if you say to yourself you are going to write tomorrow, then it doesn't matter how badly you're hung ¹_M over or how promising is a sudden invitation in the morning to do something more enjoyable. No, you go in dutifully, slavishly, and you work. This injunction is wholly anti-romantic in spirit. But if you subject yourself to this impost upon yourself, this diktat to be dependable, then after a period of time ¹_M it can take weeks, or more ¹_M the unconscious, nursing its disappointments, may begin to trust you again.

This is a burden on young writers who are not only ambitious but wild enough to feel that their wildness is part of their talent. They hate to submit to the heavy hand (that awful, severe, unbending demand for moderation) and obey the rule that you have to show up.

On the other hand, you can sometimes say to yourself, "I'm not going to work tomorrow," and the unconscious may even by now be close enough in accord not to flood your mind with brilliant and all-too-perishable material. That is also important. Because ^{lively}~~decent~~ in the course of going out and having the ~~decent~~ day and night you're entitled to, you don't want to keep having ideas about the book you're on. Indeed, if you are able on your day off to avoid the unpleasant condition of being swarmed with ^{lively}~~lively~~ thoughts about a

Over the years, I've found one rule. ^{It is} ~~It's~~ the only one I give on those occasions when I talk about writing. ~~I've probably given this piece of advice twenty times~~ ^{it's the} ~~only rule of thumb that works for nearly everyone who is trying to do a novel. It is a~~

simple rule. If you tell yourself you are going to write tomorrow, you are by that act also ^{asking} telling your unconscious to prepare the material. ^{productive} You are, in effect, contracting to pick up ^{those forces below} such goods tomorrow. Count on me, you are saying to ~~your unconscious~~ ^{your unconscious}, I will be there to write it. The point is that you have to maintain trustworthy relations. If you wake up in the morning with a hangover and cannot get to literary work, your unconscious after a few such failures to appear will withdraw from you.

It is likely that ^{your} ~~one's~~ unconscious is never all that much in love with ^{you} ~~one~~. The battle between the ego and the unconscious is, I think, a real war. In many people it's equal to an unhappy marriage, and marriages depend, after all, upon trust. Unhappy marriages depend immensely on what little mutual trust there is. So, ~~I repeat~~ ^{you have} to establish decent relations with your unconscious, and you might as well ^{recognize that} ~~see this~~ procedure ^{is} ~~be~~ possibly as complicated as any far-reaching ^{union} ~~reality~~ with someone outside your skin. ^{AK} The unconscious presence within may have as many interests, aspects, principalities, chasms, terrors, underworlds, other-worlds, and ambitions as yourself. Your unconscious may even have ambitions that are not your own ^{for} ~~for~~ practical purposes, it may be worth thinking of it as a separate creature. If you are ready to look upon it as this curious and semi-alienated presence in yourself with whom you have to

temptation to ^{drive in} go at it head-on, is, of course, immense ^M the event was traumatic to so many. Unhappily, a large part of writing ^{serves} is this eliminatory process. The worst thing that can be said about literary work is that it can reduce itself ^{here we go again!} all too easily to therapy. ^{when ↑} ~~That, as I have indicated before, is opposed to the noblest objective of writing.~~ Ideally, you are there to bring wealth to others: Wealth of experience, wealth of observation, wealth of perception, the riches of a philosophical attitude that's to a degree new, insights into psychology the reader hasn't had before ^M all these are on the selfless side of writing. On the other hand, there is also the extraordinary interplay of ego, vanity and need ^M the desire, finally, to advance oneself as a writer. People don't become authors solely to benefit humanity. They're in the same position as priests. Part of them wants to be good to others; the other part wants, one way or the other, to have some sort of acquaintance with power. Which is often hugely at odds with the first notion. Generosity vies with acquisition; [^] compassion is besieged with greed. Not surprising then, if such tension pushes one toward accomplishing neither, but converting it all into reduction of stress, therapy through the act of writing and writing until such logorrhea ^{more} exhausts ^{one's} ~~the~~ contradictions to ^{same} a degree.



I've found that I can't do serious writing without getting into a mild depression. (Note! I am not speaking of a clinical depression.) An ongoing bad mood can be, however, a vital part of the process ^{because} to begin with, it's perilous to fall in love with what you're doing. You lose your judgment. And for the simplest reason ^M the

live so much of the day with nothingness. It is why ~~so~~ many talented men and women do a good book or two, then stop. ^{To deal on a daily basis} ~~Because dealing daily with nothingness~~ ^{is vitiating} ~~vitiates you,~~

Writers who have been working for a long time usually do not have that ^{vital} ~~exciting~~ inner life any longer. They remain professional enough to take what is potentially exciting in ^{concept} ~~their scope~~ and put it on paper. But the inner life has ~~flattened out~~ ^{is flat} ~~That may be because~~

^{of} ~~our~~ violation of the frustrated desire of the unconscious to be left alone on those

occasions when we nonetheless insist on working it. Perversely, our ambition ends by

contributing to the nothingness that besets us ^{that fear of the void} ~~which makes us ambitious in the first place~~

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Part of the art of being a novelist is to play that very delicate game of obtaining experience without falsifying it by the act of observation. Generally speaking, it's easier

to take in such knowledge when you are part of an event that is much larger than

yourself ^{like the fall of the Twin Towers}. There must be ^{five hundred} ~~500~~ young writers in New

York who had a day of experience that was incomparable—nothing remotely like that

had ever happened before in their lives. And it's likely ^{that} some extraordinary work will come out of it. Hopefully, not all about 9/11. A few may keep it as a crystal. If you

never write about 9/11, but were in the vicinity that day, you could ^{conceivably} ~~in time to come~~

^{conceivably} describe a battle in a medieval war and provide a real sense of such a lost

event. You could do a horror tale. Or write about the sudden death of a beloved. ^{Or a march of refugees} ~~All~~

^{scenes and situations} ~~of good writing~~ can derive ultimately from 9/11. What won't always work is to

^{go at} ~~write about~~ it directly. That kind of good writing can be exhausted quickly. And the

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that most elusive presence in the conscious mind ^{in our souls} If that is the case, the unconscious

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very close, even familial, terms with the soul. If that is the case, it can feel exploited by the push of the novelist to extract so much of his product from its separate resources.

Suppose the relation of the unconscious to the conscious is analogous to that of a cultivated Greek slave in service to an overbearing Roman master. I think if we use that as a working analogy, we can assume that our unconscious is full of the trickiest kinds of resistance. ~~It can emit a sullenness, a flatness of affect.~~ All the writer receives is a sense of dull, edgy resentment. Perhaps the unconscious is not ready to plumb into the material requested on this occasion. The acute form of this is writer's block. ^{But for that matter, in this sense,}

However, there is a touch of writer's block in almost every working day. It is part of the experience of writing. At a certain point we are going well for a page or two perhaps, even as many as four or five. On happy days, ^{one is} you're writing as if it's ^{all there} being given to you as a gift. You don't even have ^{to have too} much to do with it. You're only ^{around} there to transcribe what's coming up. Then comes the moment when our ambition orders us to keep going: "You're three pages away from the end of the chapter, ^{You can't} so don't stop now, not with this marvelous streak." Then, ^{we've} you can feel the sentences becoming less good and you feel, no, ^{one's got to stop} dammit, dammit, ^{now you'll lose} all of tomorrow morning getting to the end of this ^{bit of stuff} chapter, but, no, don't try to finish it now, you're going to wreck it. That's what you learn over the years. Because in the early days of writing, you do force it, and what happens, of course, is equal to blowback. ^{As it sees it,} The unconscious has done its job ^{as it sees it}. It's damned if it's going to give you any more right now. If you insist, flatness of affect will be your reward. ^{nothingness} the dread antagonist of ^{being} being. It's true, it's there. One of the most painful elements in the act of writing is that you do

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THE UNCONSCIOUS

In the course of fashioning a character, as you dig into what you have perceived of his or her existence, there ~~often (soon)~~ ^{invariably} comes a point where you recognize that you don't know enough about the person you are trying to create. At such times, I take it for granted that my unconscious knows more than I do. As we go through life, we do, after all, observe everyone, wittingly and unwittingly. Perhaps, out of the corner of your eye, you glimpse someone in a restaurant who represents a particular inspiration or menace or possibility, potentially a friend or foe ^I_M and the unconscious goes to work on that. It needs very little evidence to put together a comprehensive portrait because, presumably, the unconscious is working most of the time. To use an unhappy analogy, it's as if the unconscious is a powerful computer ^{that} ~~which~~ doesn't often need new material to fashion a portrait considering how much ~~material~~ ^{knowledge} has already been stored away.

On the other hand, the unconscious can often feel violated by what we demand, by what, indeed, we manage to extract from it. Perhaps a great deal of the material it is now supplying [✓] was originally filed away for its own purposes. Suppose the unconscious has a root in the hereafter that our conscious mind does not. If so, it will have deeper notions about death than we do. Let us then dare to surmise that the unconscious is on

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How can they come near the array of details of that balance between proportion and disproportion which is at the heart of war? 184

men have at war? On the other hand, if we ask whether men and women can write equally well about bravery, I would say yes. How are we to define bravery, after all? Take a woman who is awfully timid ¹_M let's say she was terrorized through her childhood. When she's an old lady and every bone in her body is aching, it may be an act of courage for her to cross a busy street all by herself. She doesn't know if she can make it across before the lights change, yet she has to do it for her own honor, if you will. And she does it. That may be more brave, given the relative situation, than the bold act of a soldier who's been trained to be courageous, who is bonded to the soldiers he is with, who lives with the idea that there's no disgrace in life worse than not being up to the military occasion. You can't speak of true bravery in combat until a good soldier has exhausted his code to that point where he feels, yes, I may lose ¹_M I may lose my heart, my dignity, my honor, I'm scared shitless. ^{Scared} If ¹_M at this point he still proceeds to push himself past the point where he was about to break down, then his ~~existential situation underlines the verdict~~ that his behavior is courageous.

In a certain sense, we all know this ¹_M we know what constitutes brave action. So a woman can certainly write about brave soldiers, ~~brave male and brave female soldiers~~, even though she's not the least bit brave, not at that level. Of course, she has to have an immense talent. I've often thought that Joyce Carol Oates, who is not necessarily one of my favorite writers but nonetheless is a very talented woman, will often, on the basis of a ~~small~~ ^{small} bit of experience, write a ~~600~~ ^{six-hundred} page novel. I think she's an arch example of someone who does almost all of it through talent. ~~Very often her judgments seem un sound, but she will try; she tries. I'd say she's a brave writer in that sense because she's pushing far~~

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GENDER, NARCISSISM, MASTURBATION

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If you believe in fiction, if you believe in the power of the novelist, then all subjects are possible. Of course, certain choices present more obstructions than others. It would be harder, as an example, for a male novelist to learn about the small irritations of a woman's day^T than to imagine what her sex would be like. A novelistic element^F in sex, after all, is the feeling of nearness to the Other. It's one of the compelling reasons for sex precisely because such sentiments live almost entirely outside formal sacraments and private codes. It may be indeed why pious people so often feel driven to break their own deepest sexual prohibitions. It's because the experience of meeting the Other is ^{incomparable} ~~incomparable~~ ~~incomparable~~. Which is why I say it's easier ^T_M if you are going to write about ^{those} ~~someone~~ of the opposite gender ^T_M—to limn them sexually, to portray them from that point of view, than attempt to get into the intimate ^T_M nitty-gritty of ^{their} ~~a woman's~~ daily life.

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Another word on gender. Women certainly have every right to create men at war, but I think it might be recognized that it's likely to be less comfortable for them. War, after all, is essentially a male invention. How often have women ^{shown} ~~showed~~ the same warlike capacity and determination and excess and inventiveness and hellishness that

Angleton. Harlot feels Angleton not only has too much of a hegemony in the CIA, but is also on the inside track with the Mossad. So Harlot decides to send over his subaltern. Perhaps the young man will be able to submarine Angleton just a bit. That appealed to me. And I thought: do I dare? Then realized: Can't be done. The research will take a year. I'll ~~probably~~ have to go over to Israel. Never having been in Israel before, that'll be another book, obviously, and I'll have to find out about the Mossad. My chart was no help there. All I had was a blank area that said, "Truly major intelligence organization." Learning about the Mossad would be even more difficult than picking up on the CIA. I deliberated for ~~a good~~ ^{all of a} restless week before I was ready to tell myself, "~~I~~ ^{you} could wreck this book ~~if I send~~ ^{by sending} Harry Hubbard to Israel. At best, ~~I'll~~ ^{you'll} lose much too much time."

Instead, I had him do something less bold. But that is the way we make such decisions. Not only when we write our novels, but in life.

ptr Act slow

The above, you might say, is a private chart of reality. We also keep world-sized charts. A huge geographical and/or philosophical map. The West is in decline. ^TThat's a large hypothesis. Depending on the character of one's mind, one can have an immensely complicated worldview or a narrower and most restricted map where all you can say is, "I know this region well. Let the rest remain uncharted." Very few of us have a reasonably filled-in vision of the world. We tend to develop only those areas we are interested in.

As a perfect example, how many Americans had Afghanistan anywhere on their charts until September 11th? Now, we are picking up bits and tidbits about Islam in a flurry. A superficial but lively work-in-progress is proceeding on one's charts.

To dignify this notion, let me propose that ^{indeed we do try to} we use these charts, whether good or superficial, to serious purpose. For we are all navigating through life. That is one reason ^{good} why novels have this ^a special quality that other forms of communication do not offer.

It's very hard to think of ^{an interesting} a good protagonist who is not always moving between choices.

And you, as the writer, have to monitor these ^{choices} choices. When your characters come alive for you, which is one of the more agreeable if undeniably eerie aspects of serious novel-

writing ¹_M when you find yourself having dialogues with them or at the least thinking about how they might react in certain situations that have nothing to do with your novel ¹_M then they do bear comparison to a ^{prominent and} dear but troublesome friend.

A specific example: At one point in the middle of Harlot's Ghost, I thought it would be interesting to send my protagonist ¹_M who was a young man in the CIA (and very much under the tutelage of a very high CIA official called Harlot) ¹_M to Israel. Why? Because Harlot is in competition with the Gray Eminence of the CIA, James Jesus

meant ~~to~~ there are just so many new thoughts you can have. There comes a time in your life when you have no choice but to implement them. To quote from The Deer Park:
 "||| for experience when it is not communicated to another must wither within and be worse than lost." One owes the reader a fee when quoting oneself, but here the tariff feels acceptable.



I can sit with an empty mind. I don't try to void my thoughts forcibly. If I do think of something, then all right, I think of it. But a tired brain is happy to contemplate nothing. ~~like a hardworking athlete who uses lying down~~ ~~can use thought~~

On the other hand, our continuing existence as novelists ~~can~~ ^{often} depend on lively hypotheses. They fructify one's fiction. For example, it is likely that one of the covert motives of jealousy is that it always offers a powerful hypothesis. The moment a husband or wife does not trust the mate, his or her life may become painful but it is undeniably interesting. Let's say the husband comes in after work and by the way he puts his hat and coat away, the wife can think, "Yes, yes, he's feeling guilty." So she can maintain the hypothesis; Yes, he's cheating on me, and she can keep it going ^{at least} so long as the evidence does not absolutely confute the premise. Then something happens ^{perhaps} she finds out that the woman she is convinced he is having an affair with has been teaching in China for the last half-year. All right, thereby ends this recent hypothesis. Now the wife ^{either} has to find a new mistress out there, or reassess her acumen.

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LIVING IN THE WORLD

Since good novelists have to be brave on the one hand, but prudent on the other, we make up a delicate species. More sensitive than others in the beginning, we have to develop the will, the stamina, the determination, and the insensitivity to take critical abuse. A good writer, therefore, ~~is an oxymoron~~ ^{does well to see himself as} a strong, weak person, full of brave timidity, sensitive and insensitive. In effect, we have to learn how to live in the world with all its bumps and falls and occasionally startling rewards while protecting the core of what once seemed a frightfully perishable sensitivity.

#

~~I've virtually said as much before, but it is so worth repeating~~
 As one aspect of this, I tend to look at my contemporaries in the way an athlete looks at rival athletes. You try to have a state of mind where you see everything they do that's better than you can bring off, yet you're able to retain the confidence ^{what} ^{of your} that you remain aware of those skills that are superior to theirs. Good athletes look at their peers in that manner. After all, they have to face each other.

Of course, this is not true for authors. But we act as if it is. That's because, if we are good enough, our games can have their conclusions a hundred years after we are gone.

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 P. 113

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 p. 82

A young writer, if he is unknown, can be at a party and watch what everyone is doing. If he has a marvelous ear for dialogue, he can wake up the next morning and remember all that was said and how it was said. He is a bird on a branch. Sees like a bird and writes books that can be extraordinarily well^oobserved. But once you are successful, especially if it happens quickly, it's as if the bird is now an emu, and wingless. It's big and grows haunches and fore^oshoulders and a mane: Lo and behold, it is a lion. And everyone is looking at the lion, including the birds. But it is a lion with the heart of a bird and the mind of a bird. So there is a terrible period when the metamorphosed emu is trying to live like a lion and has small gifts for it. Then the beast begins to experiment^o when it runs, it now sees other animals scamper. It takes a while¹/_M often years¹/_M to get to appreciate your effect on others^o and even longer to begin to understand all over again what makes people tick. In the old days, you could understand friends, enemies^o and strangers by induction; now, by deduction. Of course, you do have more material on which to work your deductions.



When people suffer an identity crisis, they generally have to take all sorts of curious steps to locate who they are. They succeed here, they fail there^o and the process gives them points of reference. So I began to have a public life even though I was

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 seventeen. He's never had such a kiss before. ^{The following} ~~That evening~~ he writes, "I love you," he said, "I love you," she said. He stops, throws down his pen and says, "I'm a great writer!"

~~Your immediate experience can be too alive to be put directly into language.~~

Sometimes you have to wait.



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 conceivable that I wouldn't have thought of taking on The Executioner's Song. Nonetheless, it's also possible that something about The Executioner's Song called for doing it in the way I chose. In any event, its flavor is different from In Cold Blood. Truman retained his style, not the pure style [↑]_M he simplified it [↑]_M but it was still very much a book written by Truman Capote. You felt it every step of the way. The difference is that he tweaked it 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 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

one wishes to walk away from, and they can be even worse in a book. (Unless one is Dickens. Scrooge, Scrooge, Scrooge.)



Hemingway suffered from the honorable need to be the equal of his male characters, particularly since he used the first person so much. It's not easy then to write about a man who's stronger or braver than yourself because it's ~~too~~ close to ~~the~~ self = serving. All the same, you have to be able to do it. Because if every one of your characters is kept down to your own level, 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 create people greater than yourself and not be ashamed of the damnable fact that the "I" who is being promoted is offering a false picture of ^{himself} ~~yourself~~ to all those readers who will predictably assume that the author is the man they are now encountering in the first person.

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If you ask about major weaknesses in a major writer, I would say that Hemingway was not capable of writing a long complex sentence with good architecture in the syntax. But he turned that inability into his personal skill at writing short declarative sentences or long run-on sentences connected by conjunctions. Faulkner, to the contrary, was not capable of writing simply, but his over-rich, congested sentences produced an extraordinary mood. In turn, Henry Miller could rarely tell a full story well.

might kick up the traces/and feel young and happy again at being so mean, even feel a
 sparkⁿ dare I say Muriel Spark?^M because ^{he is} they are going to hurt so many people.

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The point is that one is facing a true problem in writing about ^{one's} nearest and
 dearest. Either you produce a book that doesn't approach what really interests you, or, if
 you go to the root with all you've got, there is no way you won't injure your family.
 Hardly anyone is happy with the portrait of ^{himself} themselves in a good novel.

#

Some of my characters do come from real people. One might emerge out of five
 individuals, another from one person, greatly altered. Still another is imagined. No
 matter by which route, there's pleasure when a character becomes, in a sense,
 independent of yourself.

+

Graham Greene once said that there were certain characters who took care of
 themselves. He never had to bother about them in the writing. Others he had to go to
 great pains with. He would work very hard on them. Later, when he'd read a review and
 it would mention one of his resistant characters as "well[↑]drawn," he used to think, "Well,
 dragged."

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I've always stayed away from such close material, ^{have} never written directly about my parents or my sister. Those experiences are so basic that I encircle them with a favorite word [^] I characterize these fundamental and primary experiences as crystals. The crystals can be simple, ^{or} extraordinarily developed. But provided you don't use them directly, you can sometimes send a ray of your imagination through the latticework in one direction or another and find altogether different scenarios. If you've got a fellow in mind who's, let's say, a pretty tough kid, you can, if you don't write about him head-on, make the boy a bullfighter, ^{or} put him in Special Forces, even turn him into a bank robber or an honest cop. So long as you don't use the core of your experience, you will be in command of many possibilities. But if you are ^{determined} bound to get it all accurately on paper, then at a given moment, you will have to face the fact that you are going to hurt people who are close to you.

I've used this example before. When a surgeon operates on a young girl, he isn't saying, "I'm going to make an incision on this young lady's stomach that is not only going to scar her but will affect her future sex life ^{to some degree} for the next ^{thirty} 30 years." He just says, "Scalpel, nurse," and does it. The reason is that the surgeon is focused on the act, not its reverberations.

~~Novelists are~~

~~As a novelist, one is engaged in something analogous. Novelists are oxymoronic.~~

~~They are sensitive and most insensitive. Full of heart and heartless. You have to be full of heart to feel what many people are feeling. On the other hand, a novelist has to be relatively cold. If he or she starts thinking of all the damage they are going to do, they can't write the book—not if they're reasonably decent. Of course, a malicious person~~

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nonetheless to do his best every step of the way. Not in command of every situation, but will do his best. And he does have his startling successes. And God does help him.

In the beginning, the style was too ~~B~~iblical. 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, 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. Play the Ace.

It became interesting. If it was too ~~B~~iblical in the beginning, I did have ^{an} a very tough editor who is totally irreligious, Jason Epstein. A rationalist if ever there was one. As a secularist 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. With him, you have to make a quick decision. Yes, the style was too ~~B~~iblical.

After which, it was relatively easy. The book was short enough for me to go through seven variations on the style. I had to find the balance between a ~~B~~iblical rhythm and a contemporary one. ^{MI} Something that would not inflict a ~~B~~iblical grip on you, yet ^{would} keep the echo. Before I was done, it all took a year from that night in that much-too-small hotel room on the Ile St. Louis.

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reading. I hadn't looked at the New Testament for thirty or forty years, but I ^{recalled} ~~remembered~~ that 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, ^{with} ~~perusing~~ the Gospels, ^{in my hand} I thought, well, this may be the greatest story, but it is certainly told abominably. Sayings popped out of the ^{New Testament} ~~text~~ that were worthy of Shakespeare, but much in the double columns was badly, insufficiently, and baldly described. An ungainly prose pronged with 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.

The notion was intriguing. 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 ¹/_M a piece of cake. But to do someone who is better? Jean Malaquais once remarked that you can write about any character but one ^u/_o [?]/_o ²/_o ³/_o ⁴/_o ⁵/_o ⁶/_o ⁷/_o ⁸/_o ⁹/_o ¹⁰/_o ¹¹/_o ¹²/_o ¹³/_o ¹⁴/_o ¹⁵/_o ¹⁶/_o ¹⁷/_o ¹⁸/_o ¹⁹/_o ²⁰/_o ²¹/_o ²²/_o ²³/_o ²⁴/_o ²⁵/_o ²⁶/_o ²⁷/_o ²⁸/_o ²⁹/_o ³⁰/_o ³¹/_o ³²/_o ³³/_o ³⁴/_o ³⁵/_o ³⁶/_o ³⁷/_o ³⁸/_o ³⁹/_o ⁴⁰/_o ⁴¹/_o ⁴²/_o ⁴³/_o ⁴⁴/_o ⁴⁵/_o ⁴⁶/_o ⁴⁷/_o ⁴⁸/_o ⁴⁹/_o ⁵⁰/_o ⁵¹/_o ⁵²/_o ⁵³/_o ⁵⁴/_o ⁵⁵/_o ⁵⁶/_o ⁵⁷/_o ⁵⁸/_o ⁵⁹/_o ⁶⁰/_o ⁶¹/_o ⁶²/_o ⁶³/_o ⁶⁴/_o ⁶⁵/_o ⁶⁶/_o ⁶⁷/_o ⁶⁸/_o ⁶⁹/_o ⁷⁰/_o ⁷¹/_o ⁷²/_o ⁷³/_o ⁷⁴/_o ⁷⁵/_o ⁷⁶/_o ⁷⁷/_o ⁷⁸/_o ⁷⁹/_o ⁸⁰/_o ⁸¹/_o ⁸²/_o ⁸³/_o ⁸⁴/_o ⁸⁵/_o ⁸⁶/_o ⁸⁷/_o ⁸⁸/_o ⁸⁹/_o ⁹⁰/_o ⁹¹/_o ⁹²/_o ⁹³/_o ⁹⁴/_o ⁹⁵/_o ⁹⁶/_o ⁹⁷/_o ⁹⁸/_o ⁹⁹/_o ¹⁰⁰/_o ¹⁰¹/_o ¹⁰²/_o ¹⁰³/_o ¹⁰⁴/_o ¹⁰⁵/_o ¹⁰⁶/_o ¹⁰⁷/_o ¹⁰⁸/_o ¹⁰⁹/_o ¹¹⁰/_o ¹¹¹/_o ¹¹²/_o ¹¹³/_o ¹¹⁴/_o ¹¹⁵/_o ¹¹⁶/_o ¹¹⁷/_o ¹¹⁸/_o ¹¹⁹/_o ¹²⁰/_o ¹²¹/_o ¹²²/_o ¹²³/_o ¹²⁴/_o ¹²⁵/_o ¹²⁶/_o ¹²⁷/_o ¹²⁸/_o ¹²⁹/_o ¹³⁰/_o ¹³¹/_o ¹³²/_o ¹³³/_o ¹³⁴/_o ¹³⁵/_o ¹³⁶/_o ¹³⁷/_o ¹³⁸/_o ¹³⁹/_o ¹⁴⁰/_o ¹⁴¹/_o ¹⁴²/_o ¹⁴³/_o ¹⁴⁴/_o ¹⁴⁵/_o ¹⁴⁶/_o 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hurrah. Most of the great novels achieve that tone. Just about all the great novels of the nineteenth century.

#

remains

First person point of view, however, is a fine tool. You can get to places you don't arrive at any other way. Of course, you can also injure your writing hand. As an instrument, it's double-edged. Hemingway had a marvelous sense of its limitations and used it like no one else to create his style. He dramatized its first edict: Do not talk about things ^{that} which could prove embarrassing. They don't feel right in the telling, not when the "I" stands at the head of the sentence. So there's a tendency, most marked in Hemingway, to keep most of his revelations at arm's length. As, for example, the last ^{famous} few sentences of A Farewell to Arms.

We live in a time that is astonishingly more open, but the edict, now adjusted, still remains. First person cannot be as free as the separation between author and protagonist offered by the third person.

#

It was not until I struggled with Advertisements for Myself that I began to recognize how curious it was to write in the first person. Now, many writers good and bad have been ^{be working} ~~employing that mode~~ ^{working in the first person} for centuries but I had to come to this remarkable conclusion on my own. The first person was not ^{all that available} ~~a routine or automatic~~ way to write. ^{It proved to be} ~~It's~~ a very interesting and exciting mode of literary being, with large limitations

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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. ^{Contra Hemingway to yes!} You can do that by exercising your critical imagination ⁽¹⁾ it must not be wishful fulfillment ⁽¹⁾ on how you might act if you were that much more of a hero.

I don't know, however, how to pose 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. Or a woman who's colder than herself? Without doubt.

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

The upper case of

In third person, you are God—well, of course, not God, but at least, a demiurge. ^(the species of)

One way or another, you are ready to see into everyone's mind. ^{That is never routine!} Of course, it's not.

There is, however, a lower case.

There are two kinds of third person. There is point-of-view third person where

you remain in one character's mind, but are still seeing your protagonist from above, and

In then there is the classic vein of third person where you enter each and everyone's

consciousness. ^{it is not recommended too quickly} That's hard. Hard to get over the embarrassment that you are able to

enter some certain character's minds with considerably more skill than you can with

others. This kind of pervasive and Olympian third person, this Tolstoyan presence, needs

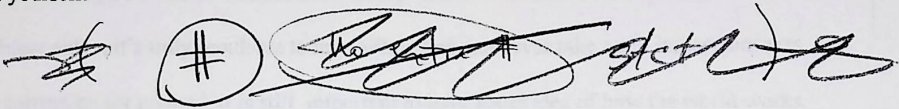
experience, confidence, irony, and lordly detachment. When it can be done, however,

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FIRST PERSON VERSUS THIRD PERSON

Third person and first person are at least as different as major and minor keys in music. Before you decide which to employ, you do well to have a sense of the event and of yourself.



If you write in the first person, you gain much in terms of immediacy but lose insight because you can't move into other people's heads. Not without twisting the form. ^{young}
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. I believe it worked, but I would not swear to it.

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

When your prime character 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

saints, monsters, maniacs, mystics and rock performers are being written about these

days, however, by practitioners of journalism whose inner vision could be laid out by

Conventional rational maxims (like: ~~Wink for the balanced portrait, any wholeness~~ sufficiently constant to

be fed into a computer. Our continuing inability to comprehend the world ~~makes certain~~ *is likely*

to continue.

Being a novelist, I want to know every world. I would never close myself off to a subject unless it's truly repulsive to me. While one can never take one's imperviousness to corruption for granted, it is still important to have some idea of how the world works. What ruins most writers of talent is that they don't get enough experience, so their novels tend to develop a certain paranoid perfection. That is almost never as good as the rough edge of reality. (Franz Kafka immaculately excepted!)

For example, how much of the history that's made around us is conspiracy, how much is simple fuckups? You have to know the world to get some idea of that. How much does the Mafia control; how much do they luck into because of their reputation? How much do Jews control the mentality of the media and Hollywood; how much are they wrongly accused of?

It's not advisable for a novelist, once he is successful!, to live in an upperclass social milieu for too long. Since it is a world of rigid rules, you cannot be yourself.

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authors and the social activities of their friends. Writers tend to live with writers just as automotive engineers congregate in the same country clubs of the same suburbs around Detroit.

But even as we pay for the social insularity of Detroit engineers by having to look at the repetitive hump of their design until finally what is most amazing about the automobile is how little it has been improved, so literature suffers from its own endemic hollow: we are overfamiliar with the sensitivity of the sensitive and relatively ignorant of the cunning of the strong and the stupid, one—it may be fatal—step removed from good and intimate perception of the inside procedures of the corporate, financial, governmental, Mafia and working-class establishment. Investigative journalism has taken us into the guts of the machine, only not really, not enough we still do not have much idea of the soul of any inside operator we do not, for instance, yet have a clue to what makes a quarterback ready for a good day or a bad one. In addition, the best investigative reporting of new journalism tends to rest on too narrow an ideological base—the rational, ironic, fact-oriented world of the media liberal so we have a situation, call it a cultural malady, of the most basic sort—a failure of sufficient real literary information (that is, good literary information) to put into those centers of our mind we use for assessment. No matter how much we read, we tend to know too little of how the world works. The men who do the real work offer us no real writing, and the writers who explore the minds of such men approach from an intellectual stance that distorts their vision. You would not necessarily want a saint to try to write about a computer engineer, but you certainly would not search for the reverse. All too many

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LITERARY ETIQUETTE, LITERARY DESIRES, LITERARY CORRUPTION

One of the cruelest remarks in the language is: [^]Those who can, do; those who _∇ can't, teach. The parallel must be: Those who meet experience, learn to live; those who don't, write.

The second remark has as much truth as the first ¹/_M which is to say, some truth. Of course, many a young man has put himself in danger in order to pick up material for his writing, but as a matter to make one wistful, not (since the Second World War) has even one major American athlete, politician, engineer, trade union official, surgeon, airline pilot, chess master, call girl, sea captain, teacher, bureaucrat, mafioso, pimp, recidivist, physicist, rabbi, clergyman or priest ^{has} ~~seems to have~~ also emerged as a ^{major} ~~good~~ novelist.

What with ^{ghost} ~~writers~~, collaborators, and editors hand-cranking the tongues of the famous long enough to get their memoirs into tape recorders, it could be said that some dim reflection can be found in literature of the long aisles and huge machines of that social mill which is the world of endeavor ¹/_M yes, just about as much as comes back to us from a very old piece of film insufficiently exposed in the picture-taking. A ghost image with the faintest coating of silver crystals has been substituted for the original lights and deep shadows of the object. So, for every good novel about a trade union that has been written from the inside, we have ten thousand better novels to read about

1

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If you write in the first person, you gain much in terms of immediacy but lose insight because you ~~can~~ ^{can hardly} move into other people's heads. Not without twisting the form.

The Deer Park underlined the difficulty. At one point, ^{young} 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. I believe it worked, but I would not swear to it.

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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. ^{Contra Hemingway to yes!} You can do that by exercising your critical imagination ^{it} it must not be wishful fulfillment ^{you are however entitled to guess!} on how you might act if you were that much more of a hero.

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One way or another, you are ready to see into everyone's mind. Of course, it's not ^{That is never routine}

^{There is, however, a lower case.}

^{There are two kinds of third person.} There is point-of-view third person where you remain in one character's mind ^{viewing} but are still seeing your protagonist from above ^{outside and usually from} and

^{In} then there is the classic vein of third person where you enter each and everyone's consciousness. ^{It is not recommended too fully} That's hard. Hard to get over the embarrassment that you are able to accommodate ^{enter} enter some certain characters' minds with considerably more skill than you can with

^{others} others. This kind of ^{pervasive} pervasive and Olympian third person, this Tolstoyan presence, needs experience, confidence, irony, and lordly detachment. When it can be done, however,

reading. I hadn't looked at the New Testament for thirty or forty years, but I ~~remembered~~ ^{recalled that} a man named Fulton Oursler ~~who once wrote a book called~~ ^{sold over a million copies of} The Greatest Story Ever Told. ~~He sold a million plus copies as I recall.~~ ^{with tons in my hand} Now, ~~perusing the Gospels,~~ ^{being} I thought, well, this may be the greatest story, but it is certainly ~~told~~ ^{being} abominably. Sayings popped out of the New Testament ~~that~~ ^{poorly} that were worthy of Shakespeare, but much in the double columns was ~~badly~~ ^{poorly} ~~insufficiently, and badly~~ described. An ungainly prose pronged with 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.

The notion was intriguing. 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} 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 ^M is a piece of cake. But to do someone who is better? Jean Malaquais once remarked that you can write about any character but one, ~~who, I think,~~ ^{Whom?} "A novelist ~~who is~~ more talented than yourself."

I thought, this is analogous. ~~Jesus certainly possessed a nobler nature than mine!~~ ^{Yes,} the problems were interesting.

I decided he had to be more of a man than a god, an existential man, dominated by the huge cloud that he is the son of God. He doesn't feel worthy, but he is ready

nonetheless to do his best every step of the way. Not in command of every situation, but will do his best. And he does have his 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: "That ^{Mailer} world-class egomaniac. Does he now think he's Jesus Christ? What ^{an} ~~a pompous ass!~~ ^{intolerable vanity} What a totally unpleasant ~~human being!~~" (I thought that's the bad side, but at least I can avoid the larger mistake of doing it in the third person. Because that would have to get ^{directly} mixed up with ^{text of the} the Gospels, and the reader would wonder, "Is this sentence from the New Testament or has it been added?" That ^{can only} ~~is going to~~ ^{squirm} make for a ~~disagreeable~~ ^{as one reads} ~~examining~~ experience. All right, then. First person. Damn the torpedoes, first person. Play the Ace.

It became interesting. If it was too ~~Biblical~~ ^{an} in the beginning, I did have a ~~very~~ ^{very} tough editor who is 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. ~~most often all too right or altogether~~ ^{So} And he's ~~always either absolutely right or absolutely~~ ^{you} wrong. With ^{you} you have to make a quick decision. Yes, the style was too Biblical.

After which, it was relatively easy. The book was short enough for me to ^{work} ~~up~~ through seven variations on the style. I had to find the balance between a Biblical rhythm and a contemporary one. ^{one's mind} Something that would not inflict a Biblical grip on ~~you~~ yet ^{would} keep the echo. Before I was done, it all took a year from that night in that much-too-small hotel room on the Ile St. Louis.

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A young writer, if he is unknown, can be at a party and watch what everyone is doing. If he has a marvelous ear for dialogue, he can wake up the next morning and remember all that was said and how it was said. He is a bird on a branch. Sees like a bird and writes books that can be extraordinarily well observed. But once you are successful, especially if it happens quickly, it's as if the bird is now an emu, and ^{It cannot fly} ~~and~~ ~~wingless~~. It's big and grows haunches and fore shoulders and a mane: Lo and behold, it is a lion. And everyone is looking at the lion, including the birds. But it is a lion with the heart of a bird and the mind of a bird. So there is a terrible period when the metamorphosed emu is trying to live like a lion and has small gifts for it. Then the beast begins to experiment ^{when it runs}, it now sees other animals scamper. It takes a while ^{$\frac{T}{M}$} often years ^{$\frac{T}{M}$} to get to appreciate your effect on others, and even longer to begin to understand ^{human beings again} ~~again what makes people tick~~. In the old days, you could ^{write about} ~~understand~~ friends, enemies and strangers by induction; now, by deduction. Of course, you do have more material on which to work your deductions.



When people suffer an identity crisis, they generally have to take all sorts of curious steps to locate who they are. They succeed here, they fail there and the process gives them points of reference. So I began to have a public life even though I was

(a) LIVING IN THE WORLD

Since good novelists have to be brave on the one hand, but prudent on the other, we make up a delicate species. More sensitive than others in the beginning, we have to develop the will, the stamina, the determination, and the insensitivity to take critical abuse. A good writer, therefore, ~~is a strong, weak person, full of brave timidity, sensitive and insensitive.~~ ^{does well to see himself as} In effect, we have to learn how to live in the world with all its bumps and falls and occasionally startling rewards while protecting the core of what once seemed a frightfully perishable sensitivity.

I've virtually said as much before, but it is so worth repeating. As one aspect of this, I tend to look at my contemporaries in the way an athlete looks at rival athletes. You try to have a state of mind where you see everything they do that's better than you can bring off, yet you're able to ^{what} ~~retain the confidence that you~~ ^{certainly look to remain} ~~remain~~ ^{of your} aware of those skills that are superior to theirs. Good athletes look at their peers in that manner. After all, they have to ^{contest} ~~face~~ each other.

Of course, this is not true for authors. But we act as if it is. That's because, ^{often} if we are good enough, our games can have their conclusions a hundred years after we are gone.

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How can they approach that near-psychotic mix of proportion and disproportion which is at the heart of mortal combat? 184

men have at war? On the other hand, if we ask whether men and women can write equally well about bravery, I would say yes. How are we to define bravery, after all?

Take a woman who is awfully timid. ^MLet's say she was terrorized through her childhood.

When she's an old lady and every bone in her body is aching, it may be an act of courage for her to cross a busy street all by herself. She doesn't know if she can make it across

before the lights change, yet she has to do it for her own honor, if you will. And she does

it. That may be more brave, given the relative situation, than the bold act of a soldier

who's been trained to be courageous, who is bonded to the soldiers he is with, who lives

with the idea that there's no disgrace in life worse than not being up to the military

occasion. You can't speak of true bravery in combat ^{for such} until a good soldier ^{until he} has exhausted

his code to that point where he feels, yes, I may lose. ^MI may lose my heart, my dignity, my

honor. ^{I'm terrified} I can't move. ^{press forward} If, at this point, he still proceeds to push himself past the point

where he was about to break down, then his existential situation underlines the verdict

that his behavior is courageous.

In a certain sense, we all know this. ^MWe know what constitutes brave action. So a

woman can certainly write about brave soldiers, ~~brave male and brave female soldiers~~,

even though she's not the least bit brave, not at that level. Of course, she has to have an

immense talent. I've often thought that Joyce Carol Oates, who is not necessarily one of

my favorite writers but nonetheless is a very talented woman, will often, on the basis of a

^{small} ~~tiny~~ bit of experience, write a ^{Six-hundred} 600-page novel. I think she's an arch example of someone

who does almost all of it through talent. ~~Very often her judgments seem unsound, but~~

~~she will try; she tries. I'd say she's a brave writer in that sense because she's pushing for~~

(C)

THE UNCONSCIOUS

In the course of fashioning a character, as you ^{search} dig into what you have perceived ~~of his or her existence~~, there ^{invariably} ~~often (soon)~~ comes a point where you recognize that you don't know enough about the person you are trying to create. At such times, I take it for granted that my unconscious knows more than I do. As we go through life, we do, after all, observe everyone, wittingly and unwittingly. Perhaps, out of the corner of your eye, you glimpse someone in a restaurant who represents a particular inspiration or menace or possibility, potentially a friend or foe ¹/_M and the unconscious goes to work on that. It needs very little evidence to put together a comprehensive portrait because, presumably, ^{it has already done most of that labor} ~~the unconscious is working most of the time~~. To use an unhappy analogy, it's as if the unconscious is a powerful computer ^{that} ~~which~~ ^{not} ~~does~~ often need new material to fashion a portrait ^{knowledge} ~~considering~~ how much ~~material~~ has already been stored away.

On the other hand, the unconscious can often feel violated by what we demand, by what, indeed, we manage to extract from it. Perhaps a great deal of the material it is now supplying ^{was} ~~is~~ originally filed away for its own purposes. Suppose the unconscious has a root in the hereafter that our conscious mind does not. If so, it will have deeper notions about death than we do. Let us then dare to surmise that the unconscious is on

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nothing but that

live so much of the day with nothingness. It is why so many talented men and women

do a good book or two, then stop. ^{To deal on a daily basis} Because dealing daily with nothingness ^{is vitiating}

Writers who have been ^{at it for decades often} working for a long time ^{Keep a vital} usually do not have that ~~energy~~ an inner

life any longer. They remain professional enough to take what is potentially exciting in

concept ^{landscape shows its flatness} their scope and put it on paper. But the inner ~~life~~ has flattened out. That may be because

of our violation of the frustrated desire of the unconscious to be left alone on those

occasions when we nonetheless insist on working ^{harder its veins} it. Perversely, our ambition ends by

contributing to the nothingness that besets us. ^{that fear of the void} which makes us ambitious in the first place.

#

Part of the art of being a novelist is to play that ~~very~~ delicate game of obtaining

experience without falsifying it by the act of observation. Generally speaking, it's easier

to take in such knowledge when you are part of an event that is much larger than

yourself ^{like the fall of the Twin Towers}. There must be ^{five hundred} 500 young writers in New

York who had a day of experience that was incomparable—nothing remotely like that

had ever happened before in their lives. And it's likely ^{that} some extraordinary work will

come out of it. Hopefully, not ^{of it} all about 9/11. ^{A few may keep it as a crystal} If you

never write about 9/11, but were in the vicinity that day, you could ^{conceivably} in time to come

conceivably describe a battle in a medieval war and provide a real sense of such a lost

event. You could do a horror tale. Or write about the sudden death of a beloved. ^{Or a march of refugees} (All

scenes and situations ^{go at} kinds of good writing can derive ultimately from 9/11. What won't always work is to

write about it directly. That kind of good writing can be exhausted quickly. And the

temptation to ^{drive in} go at ~~it~~ head-on, is, of course, immense ^{the} the event was traumatic to so many. ^{Unhappily,} a large part of writing ^{serves} is this eliminatory process. The worst thing that can be said about literary work is that it can reduce itself ^{here we go again} all too easily to therapy. ^{when?} That, as I have indicated before, is opposed to the noblest objective of writing. Ideally, you are there to bring wealth to others: Wealth of experience, wealth of observation, ^{wealth} wealth of perception, the riches of a philosophical attitude that ^{is} to a degree new, insights into psychology the reader hasn't had before ^{all these are on the selfless} side of writing. On the other hand, there is also the extraordinary interplay of ego, vanity, and need ^{the} the desire, finally, to advance oneself as a writer. People don't become authors solely to benefit humanity. They're in the same position as priests. Part of them wants to be good to others; the other ^{side} ~~part~~ wants, one way or the other, to have some sort of acquaintance with power. Which is often hugely at odds with the first notion. Generosity vies with acquisition; compassion is besieged with greed. Not surprising then, if such tension pushes one toward accomplishing neither, but converting it all into reduction of stress, therapy through the act of writing ^{more} and writing until such logorrhea exhausts ^{one's unrest to some} the contradictions ^{to degree} degree. In such cases, it is the writing that pays for the curio

(A)

I've found that I can't do serious writing without getting into a mild depression.

(Note! I am not speaking of a clinical depression.) An ongoing bad mood can be, however, a vital part of the process because ^{to} to begin with, it's perilous to fall in love with what you're doing. You lose your judgment. And for the simplest reason ^{the} the

(a) ATTACKS ON REALITY

Readers often have a problem when an author mixes real and fictional characters.

I've never been bothered by that. As far as I'm concerned, it's all fiction. ~~I can't conceive~~
~~of a history that is so much creative and not wholly factual narrative.~~ Let's say for the
 purpose of argument there are ^{a thousand} ~~1000~~ large and small details necessary for a particular

historian to capture a given moment in time. ^{or rise} ~~the~~ Napoleon's return from Elba, the death of
 Robespierre, or John F. Kennedy on the night before he was assassinated, whatever is
 chosen, the historian has to decide which of a large number of facts are most relevant.

He can't use them all. More important, he can't obtain them all. Let's say he ^{selects} ~~chooses~~ a
^{a few hundred} ~~thousand~~ pieces of information which adhere in ^{that} ~~in~~ varying degree to various bodies of
 assumption on what actually happened. These pieces of ^{information} ~~detail~~ are usually called facts.

Should the novelist come in, also ready to write about ^{the same events} ~~Kennedy's last night~~, he or
 she is not nearly as good, doubtless, at research and comes up with only ^{forty fifty} ~~40 or 50~~ details
 that seem vital. Nonetheless, I would argue that the historian and the novelist are both
 engaged in writing fiction. The difference is that the historian uses more facts, although
 they can never be numerous enough to enclose the reality. Moreover, the historian
 usually writes in a style that's more pedestrian. But there they are, both doing fiction.

~~One is sometimes sprightly, the other, often dull.~~ The real point is that each, the novelist

reason for the fisherman to say, "I ^{won't} ~~eat it~~, I'll hold on." Not enough of a character had been created to answer such a question.

I think the same fault in considerably more elaborated form is present with Beckett. He never enters a situation where any of his people might try to break out of whatever trap they are in. They can be ensconced in garbage cans ^{or} talking to a tape recorder, which, speaking of traps, is no mean example. But there is never an arduous attempt to escape whatever trap they are in. Of course, ^{can} one argues that Beckett dared ^{to try} something no one else had ever attempted and so was reaffirming being. Daring is, after all, a vital element in being. But we are not able to enjoy this daring nearly so much as ^{are obliged to feel} we ~~have to dwell~~ on the ongoing possibilities of more and more nothingness. ~~He won't let~~ ^{go of that} and so the final impact of his plays is obsessive rather than haunting.



It could be argued that the essence of the corporate mentality is that it will not tolerate nothingness. It is always pouring its choice of form into our minds. There is, after all, no silence on television. To which I would reply that ^{such} filling essentially empty forms ^{as} like commercials is a direct species of nothingness. Whenever you do not fill the aesthetic you set yourself, you are purveying just that. By now, ^{if} many of not most television commercials, no matter how ^{spiked} filled with clash and color, ^{give} pay, nonetheless, ^{little} almost no attention to the item they are there to sell. The intent of the advertisers comes down to the premise that if you entertain your audience, if you pay them, in effect, for the interruption by getting them to laugh during the commercial, it's not inconceivable that a

13 pg plus this cover sheet

Veronica

last,

This is (I hope) the
last round of changes from
NM. With this set, you
have an up-to-date copy
of the setting manuscript.

Mike-

August 13

round 4



Dup—
These added
to
"Setting copy" //

TO: J. Michael Lennon

FROM: Veronica Windholz

DATE: August 12, 2002

RE: Mailer/The Spooky Art

Mike,

As promised. I'm sending you the manuscript pages on which there have been revisions since late last week. Once you substitute them for the pages that are presently in the Xerox copy of the setting manuscript I gave you on Thursday, you'll have a complete, up-to-date copy of the manuscript that's going to the composer unless Norman has any other changes in mind.

Thanks also for the splendid job you did on the endnotes. I am very grateful to you for taking this on and seeing it through.

Best,

Veronica

33 pages plus four
cover sheet

9.

LITERARY ETIQUETTE, LITERARY DESIRES, LITERARY CORRUPTION

One of the cruelest remarks in the language is: Those who can, do; those who can't, teach. The parallel must be: Those who meet experience, learn to live; those who don't, write.

The second remark has as much truth as the first ¹/₁ which is to say, some truth. Of course, many a young man has put himself in danger in order to pick up material for his writing, but as a matter to make one wistful, not since the Second World War has even one major American athlete, politician, engineer, trade union official, surgeon, airline pilot, chess master, call girl, sea captain, teacher, bureaucrat, mafioso, pimp, recidivist, movie star or nun, has ¹/₁ major physicist, rabbi, clergyman or priest ¹/₁ seems to have also emerged as a good novelist.

What with ghostwriters, collaborators, and editors hand oranking the tongues of the famous long enough to get their memoirs into tape recorders, it could be said that some dim reflection can be found in literature of the long aisles and huge machines of that social mill which is the world of endeavor. ¹/₁ yes, just about as much as comes back to us from a photograph ¹/₁ ~~celebrity~~ ¹/₁ is mostly expressed in the picturing taking, ¹/₁ ghost image with the faintest coating of silver crystals has been substituted for the original lights and deep shadows of the object. So, for every good novel about a trade union that has been written from the inside, we have ten thousand better novels to read about

the cunning or the strong and the stupid, one—it may be added—step removed from good and intimate perception of the inside procedures of the corporate, financial, governmental, Mafia and working-class establishment. Investigative journalism has taken us into the guts of the machine, only not really, not enough—we still do not have much idea of the soul of any inside operator. We do not, for instance, yet have a clue to what makes a quarterback ready for a good day or a bad one. In addition, the best investigative reporting of new journalism tends to rest on too narrow an ideological base—the rational, ironic, fact-oriented world of the media liberal, so we have a situation, call it a cultural malady, of the most basic sort—a failure of sufficient real literary information (that is, good literary information) to put into those centers of our mind we use for assessment. No matter how much we read, we tend to know too little of how the world works. The men who do the real work offer us no real writing, and the writers who explore the minds of such men approach from an intellectual stance that distorts their vision. You would not necessarily want a saint to try to write about a computer engineer, but you certainly would not search for the reverse. All too many

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THE UNCONSCIOUS

In the course of fashioning a character, as you ^{search} dig into what you have perceived of his or her existence, there ^{invariably} often (soon) comes a point where you recognize that you don't know enough about the person you are trying to create. At such times, I take it for granted that my unconscious knows more than I do. As we go through life, we do, after all, observe everyone, wittingly and unwittingly. Perhaps, out of the corner of your eye, you glimpse someone in a restaurant who represents a particular inspiration or menace or possibility, potentially a friend or foe ^{and} and the unconscious goes to work on that. It needs very little evidence to put together a comprehensive portrait because, presumably, ^{it has already done most of that labor} the unconscious is working most of the time. To use an unhappy analogy, it's as if the unconscious is a powerful computer which ^{that not} does not often need new material to fashion a portrait considering how much ^{knowledge} material has already been stored away.

On the other hand, the unconscious can often feel violated by what we demand, by what, indeed, we manage to extract from it. Perhaps a great deal of the material it is now supplying was originally filed away for its own purposes. Suppose the unconscious has a root in the hereafter that our conscious mind does not. If so, it will have deeper notions about death than we do. Let us then dare to surmise that the unconscious is on

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that most elusive presence in the conscious mind. ^{our souls} If that is the case, the unconscious

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very close, even familial, terms with the soul. If that is the case, it can feel exploited by the push of the novelist to extract so much of his product from its separate resources.

Suppose the relation of the unconscious to the conscious is analogous to that of a cultivated Greek slave in service to an overbearing Roman master. ^{this notion} I think if we use that

as a working ^{premise} analogy, we can assume that our unconscious is full of the trickiest kinds of resistance. ~~It can emit a fullness, a richness of affect.~~ All the writer receives is a sense

of dull, edgy resentment. Perhaps the unconscious is not ready to plumb into the material requested on this occasion. The acute form of this is writer's block. ^{But for that matter,} In this sense,

However, there is a touch of writer's block in almost every working day. It is part of the

experience of writing. At a certain point we are going well for a page or two perhaps,

even as many as four or five. On happy days, ^{one is} you're writing as if it's ^{all these} being given to you as a gift. You don't even have to ^{have too} much to do with it. You're only there to

transcribe what's coming up. Then comes the moment when our ambition orders us to

keep going: "You're three pages away from the end of the chapter, ^{You can't} so don't stop now, not with this marvelous streak." ^{so often} Then, ^{begin to strain} you can feel the sentences becoming less good and

you feel, no, ^{we've packed it in for now} one's got to stop. ^{dammit, dammit} now you'll ^{will be lost} lose all of tomorrow morning ^{getting to the end of this chapter} getting to the end of this chapter, but, no, don't try to finish it now, you're going

to wreck it. That's what you learn over the ^{time} years. Because in the early days of writing,

you do force it, and what happens, of course, is equal to blowback. ^{From its point of view} The unconscious has

done its job as it sees it. It's damned if it's going to give you any more right now. If you

insist, flatness of affect will be your reward. ^{nothingness} the dread antagonist of being.

It's true, it's there. One of the most painful elements in the act of writing is that ^{to}

(a)

GENDER, NARCISSISM, MASTURBATION

If you believe in fiction, if you believe in the power of the novelist, then all subjects are possible. Of course, certain choices present more obstructions than others. It would be harder, as an example, for a male novelist to learn about the small irritations of a woman's day ^{than} to imagine what her sex would be like. A novelistic element in sex, after all, is the feeling of nearness to the Other. It's one of the compelling reasons for sex precisely because such sentiments live almost entirely outside formal sacraments and private codes. It may be indeed why pious people so often feel driven to break their own deepest sexual prohibitions. It's because the experience of meeting the Other is ^{incomparable} ~~incredible~~. Which is why I say it's easier ^{if} you are going to write about ^{those} ~~someone~~ of the opposite gender ^{to} ~~to~~ limn them sexually, to portray them from that point of view, than attempt to get into the ^{intimate} ~~intimate~~ nitty-gritty of ^{their} ~~a woman's~~ daily life.

Spec

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Another word on gender. Women certainly have every right to create men at war, but I think it might be recognized that it's likely to be less comfortable for them. War, after all, is essentially a male invention. How often have women ^{shown} ~~showed~~ the same warlike capacity and determination and excess and inventiveness and hellishness that

How can they approach that near-psychotic mix of proportion and disproportion which is at the heart of mortal combat? 184

men have at war? On the other hand, if we ask whether men and women can write equally well about bravery, I would say yes. How are we to define bravery, after all? Take a woman who is awfully timid. ^MLet's say she was terrorized through her childhood. When she's an old lady and every bone in her body is aching, it may be an act of courage for her to cross a busy street all by herself. She doesn't know if she can make it across before the lights change, yet she has to do it for her own honor, if you will. And she does it. That may be more brave, given the relative situation, than the bold act of a soldier who's been trained to be courageous, who is bonded to the soldiers he is with, who lives with the idea that there's no disgrace in life worse than not being up to the military occasion. You can't speak of true bravery in combat ^{for such} until he ^{until he} has exhausted his code to that point where he feels, yes, I may lose—I may lose my heart, my dignity, my honor. ^{I'm terrified I can't move} If, at this point, he still proceeds to push himself past the point where he was about to break down, then his existential situation underlines the verdict that his behavior is courageous.

In a certain sense, we all know this. ^MWe know what constitutes brave action. So a woman can certainly write about brave soldiers, ~~brave male and brave female soldiers,~~ even though she's not the least bit brave, not at that level. Of course, she has to have an immense talent. I've often thought that Joyce Carol Oates, who is not necessarily one of my favorite writers but nonetheless is a very talented woman, will often, on the basis of a ^{small} ~~tiny~~ bit of experience, write a ^{six-hundred} ~~600~~-page novel. I think she's an arch example of someone who does almost all of it through talent. ~~Very often her judgments seem unsound, but she will try, she tries. I'd say she's a brave writer in that sense because she's pushing far~~

Angleton. Harlot feels Angleton not only has too much of a hegemony in the CIA, but is
 also on the inside track with the Mossad. So Harlot decides to send over his subaltern.
 Perhaps the young man will be able to submarine Angleton just a bit. That appealed to
 me. And I thought: do I dare? Then realized: Can't be done. The research will take a
 year. I'll ~~probably~~ have to go over to Israel. Never having been in Israel before, that'll be
 another book, ~~obviously~~ ^{probably}, and I'll have to find out about the Mossad. My chart was no
 help there. All I had was a blank area that said, "Truly major intelligence organization."
 Learning about the Mossad would be even more difficult than picking up on the CIA. I
 deliberated for ~~a good~~ ^{all of a} restless week before I was ready to tell myself, "I ~~could~~ ^{you} wreck
 this book if I send Harry Hubbard to Israel. At best, I'll ~~lose~~ ^{you'll} much too much time."
 Instead, I had him do something less bold. But that is the way we make such ^{novelistic} decisions.
^{Very much as we do}
 Not only when we write our novels, but in life.

The above, you might say, is a private chart of reality. We also keep world-sized charts. A huge geographical and/or philosophical map. The West is in decline. ^{that's a} large hypothesis. Depending on the character of one's mind, one can have an immensely complicated worldview or a narrower and most restricted map where all you can say is, "I know this region well. Let the rest remain uncharted." Very few of us have a reasonably filled-in vision of the world. We tend to develop only those areas we are interested in.

As a perfect example, how many Americans had Afghanistan anywhere on their charts until September 11th? Now, we are picking up bits and tidbits about Islam ^A in a hurry. A superficial but lively work-in-progress is proceeding ^{on one's charts}.

To dignify this notion, let me propose that ^{indeed we do try to} we use these charts, whether good or superficial, to serious purpose. For we are all navigating through life. That is one reason ^{good} why novels have this special quality that other forms of communication do not offer. It's very hard to think of ^{an interesting} a good protagonist who is not always moving between choices. And you, as the writer, have to monitor these ^{decisions} choices. When your characters come alive for you, which is one of the more agreeable if undeniably eerie aspects of serious novel-writing ¹/_M when you find yourself having dialogues with them or at the least thinking about how they might react in certain situations that have nothing to do with your novel ¹/_M then they do bear comparison to a ^{prominent and} dear but troublesome friend.

A specific example: At one point in the middle of Harlot's Ghost, I thought it would be interesting to send my protagonist ¹/_M who was a young man in the CIA (and very much under the tutelage of a very high CIA official called Harlot) ¹/_M to Israel. Why? Because Harlot is in competition with the ¹/_M Gray Eminence of the CIA, James Jesus

meant ~~there~~ there are just so many new thoughts you can have. There comes a time in your life when you have no choice but to implement them. To quote from The Deer Park:
 "for experience when it is not communicated to another must wither within and be worse than lost." One owes the reader a fee when quoting oneself, but here the tariff feels acceptable.



I can sit with an empty mind. I don't try to void my thoughts forcibly. If I do think of something, then, all right, I think of it. But a tired brain is happy to contemplate nothing. ~~It's like a hard working child who likes being told~~

On the other hand, our continuing existence as novelists ~~can~~ ^{often} depend on lively hypotheses. They fructify one's fiction. For example, it is likely that one of the covert motives of jealousy is that it always offers a powerful hypothesis. The moment a husband or wife does not trust the mate, his or her life may become painful but it is undeniably interesting. Let's say the husband comes in after work and by the way he puts his hat and coat away, the wife can think, "Yes, yes, he's feeling guilty." So she can ^{keep} maintain the hypothesis. ^{going} Yes, he's cheating on me, and she can keep it going at least so long as ^{new} the evidence does not absolutely ^{re-} ~~confute~~ ^{confute} the premise. Then something happens — perhaps she finds out that the woman she is convinced he is having an affair with has been teaching in China for the last half-year. All right, thereby ends this recent hypothesis. Now the wife has to find a new mistress out there, or reassess her acumen.

NH.
 cut?
 too many
 comparisons
 to athletes

(a)

LIVING IN THE WORLD

Since good novelists have to be brave on the one hand, but prudent on the other, we make up a delicate species. More sensitive than others in the beginning, we have to develop the will, the stamina, the determination, and the insensitivity to take critical abuse. A good writer, therefore, ~~is not~~ ^{does well to see himself as} a strong, weak person, full of bravado, timidity, sensitive and insensitive. In effect, we have to learn how to live in the world with all its bumps and falls and occasionally startling rewards while protecting the core of what once seemed a frightfully perishable sensitivity.

#

~~I've virtually sold as much before, but it is so worth repeating.~~
 As one aspect of this, I tend to look at my contemporaries in the way an athlete looks at rival athletes. You try to have a state of mind where you see everything they do that's better than you can bring off, yet you ^{what} ~~are~~ ^{certainly look to remain} able to retain the confidence that you ~~remain~~ ^{of your} aware of those skills that are superior to theirs. Good athletes look at their peers in that manner. After all, they have to ^{contest} ~~face~~ each other.

Of course, this is not true for authors. But we act as if it is. That's because, if we are good enough, our games can have their conclusions a hundred years after we are gone.

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 more or
 less
 p. 82

A young writer, if he is unknown, can be at a party and watch what everyone is doing. If he has a marvelous ear for dialogue, he can wake up the next morning and remember all that was said and how it was said. He is a bird on a branch. Sees like a bird and writes books that can be extraordinarily well observed. But once you are successful, especially if it happens quickly, it's as if the bird is now an emu ^{It cannot fly} and ~~wingless~~. It's big and grows haunches and fore shoulders and a mane: Lo and behold, it is a lion. And everyone is looking at the lion, including the birds. But it is a lion with the heart of a bird and the mind of a bird. So there is a terrible period when the metamorphosed emu is trying to live like a lion and has small gifts for it. Then the beast begins to experiment ^{when it runs}, it now sees other animals scamper. It takes a while ^{often years} to get to appreciate your effect on others, and even longer to begin to understand ^{human beings again} ~~all over again what makes people tick~~. In the old days, you could ^{write about} ~~understand~~ friends, enemies and strangers by induction; now, by deduction. Of course, you do have more material on which to work your deductions.



When people suffer an identity crisis, they generally have to take all sorts of curious steps to locate who they are. They succeed here, they fail there ^{and} the process gives them points of reference. So I began to have a public life even though I was

nothing but that

live so much of the day with ~~nothingness~~. It is why so many talented men and women

do a good book or two, then stop. ~~To deal on a daily basis~~ ^{is vitiating} ~~Because dealing daily with nothingness~~ ^{vitiates you}

Writers who have been ~~working for a long time usually~~ ^{at it for decades often} do not have that exciting an inner

life ~~any longer~~. They remain professional enough to take what is potentially exciting in

their ~~scope~~ ^{concept} and put it on paper. But the inner ~~life has flattened out~~ ^{landscape shows its flatness}. That may be because

of our violation of the frustrated desire of the unconscious to be left alone on those

occasions when we nonetheless insist on ~~working it~~ ^{harder its veins}. Perversely, our ambition ends by

contributing to the ~~nothingness~~ that besets us ^{that fear of the void}

which makes us ambitious in the first place

#

Part of the art of being a novelist is to play that ~~very~~ delicate game of obtaining experience without falsifying it by the act of observation. Generally speaking, it's easier

to take in such knowledge when you are part of an event that is much larger than

yourself ^{like the fall of the Twin Towers}. There must be ^{five hundred} 500 young writers in New

York who had a day of experience that was incomparable—nothing remotely like that

had ever happened before in their lives. And it's likely some extraordinary work will

come out of it. Hopefully, not all about 9/11. ^{of it} ~~A few may keep it as a crystal~~ If you

never write about 9/11, but were in the vicinity that day, you could ^{conceivably} in time to come

conceivably describe a battle in a medieval war and provide a real sense of such a lost

event. You could do a horror tale. Or write about the sudden death of a beloved. ^{Or a march of refugees} All

kinds of ~~good writing~~ ^{scenes and situations} can derive ultimately from 9/11. What won't always work is to

~~go at~~ ^{write about} it directly. That kind of ~~good writing~~ can be exhausted quickly. And the

temptation to ^{drive in} go at it head-on, is, of course, immense. ^M The event was traumatic to so many. ^{Serves} Unhappily, a large part of writing is this eliminatory process. The worst thing that can be said about literary work is that it can reduce itself ^{here we go again} all too easily to therapy. ^{when I} That, as I have indicated before, is opposed to the noblest objective of writing. Ideally, you are there to bring wealth to others. Wealth of experience, wealth of observation, wealth of perception, the riches of a philosophical attitude that ^{is} to a degree new, insights into psychology the reader hasn't had before. All these are on the selfless side of writing. On the other hand, there is also the extraordinary interplay of ego, vanity, and need. ^M The desire, finally, to advance oneself as a writer. People don't become authors solely to benefit humanity. They're in the same position as priests. Part of them wants to be good to others; the other ^{side} part wants, one way or the other, to have some sort of acquaintance with power. Which is often hugely at odds with the first notion. Generosity vies with acquisition; compassion is besieged with greed. Not surprising then, if such tension pushes one toward accomplishing neither, but converting it all into reduction of stress, therapy through the act of writing ^{more} and writing until such logorrhea exhausts ^{one's unrest to some} the contradictions to a degree. ^{In such cases, it is the writing that pays for the cure.}

I've found that I can't do serious writing without getting into a mild depression.

(Note! I am not speaking of a clinical depression.) An ongoing bad mood can be, however, a vital part of the process ^{because} to begin with, it's perilous to fall in love with what you're doing. You lose your judgment. And for the simplest reason ^M the

Over the years, I've found one rule. ^{It is} It's the only one I give on those occasions

when I talk about writing. ~~I've probably given this piece of advice twenty times~~ ^{It's the} ~~only rule of thumb that works for nearly everyone who is trying to do a novel. It is a~~

simple rule. If you tell yourself you are going to ~~write~~ ^{be at your desk} tomorrow, you are by that act ~~also~~ ^{declaration}

^{asking} telling your unconscious to prepare the material. You are, in effect, contracting to pick up

^{valuable at a given time} such ~~good~~ ^{a few lines below?} tomorrow. Count on me, you are saying to your unconscious, I will be there

to write it. ⁹ The point is that you have to maintain trustworthy relations. If you wake up

in the morning with a hangover and cannot get to literary work, your unconscious after a

few such failures to appear will withdraw ~~from you~~ ⁹

It is likely that ~~one's~~ ^{your} unconscious is never all that much in love with ~~one~~ ^{you}. The

battle between the ego and the unconscious is, I think, ~~a real war~~ ^{of some dimension}. In many people it's

equal to an unhappy marriage, and marriages depend, after all, upon trust. Unhappy

marriages depend immensely on what little mutual trust there is. So, ~~I repeat~~ ^{you have} you have

to establish decent relations with your ~~unconscious~~ ^{working depths}, and you might as well ~~see~~ ^{recognize that} this

procedure ^{is} to be possibly as ~~complicated~~ ^{difficult to achieve} as any far-reaching ~~reality~~ ^{union} with someone outside

your skin. ¹¹ The unconscious presence within may have as many interests, aspects,

principalities, chasms, terrors, underworlds, ~~other-worlds~~, and ambitions as yourself.

Your unconscious may even have ambitions that are not your own. ⁹ ~~for~~ ^{for} practical

purposes, it may be worth thinking of it as a separate creature. If you are ready to look

upon it as ^a ~~the~~ curious and semi-alienated presence in yourself with whom you have to

If practice you are able to
 maintain decent relations ^M—if you can see yourself as some sort of ^{Careless} ~~senior~~ general (of the old aristocratic and ~~careless~~ school) and picture the unconscious as your often unruly cohort of troops, then obviously, you wouldn't dare to keep those troops out in the rain too long ^M—certainly not at the commencement of any serious campaign. On the contrary, you make a pact: "Work for me, fight for me, and I will honor and respect you."

To repeat, therefore: The rule is that if you say to yourself you are going to write tomorrow, then it doesn't matter how badly you're hung over or how promising is a sudden invitation in the morning to do something more enjoyable. No, you go in dutifully, slavishly, and you work. This injunction is wholly anti-romantic in spirit. But if you subject yourself to this impost upon yourself, this diktat to be dependable, then after a period of time ^M—it can take weeks, or more ^M—the unconscious, nursing its disappointments, may begin to trust you again.

This is a burden on young writers who are not only ambitious but wild enough to feel that their wildness is part of their talent. They hate to submit to the heavy hand (that awful, severe, unbending demand for moderation) and obey the rule that you have to show up.

On the other hand, you can sometimes say to yourself, "I'm not going to work tomorrow," and the unconscious may even by now be close enough in accord not to flood your mind with brilliant and all-too-perishable material. That is also important. Because in the course of going out and having the ^{lively} ~~decent~~ day and night you're entitled to, you don't want to keep having ideas about the book you're on. Indeed, if you are able on your day off to avoid the unpleasant condition of being swarmed with ^{lively} thoughts about a

pen in
 work-in-progress when there is no ~~piece of paper under your hand and no pen or pencil in~~
 your fingers, then you've arrived at one of the disciplines of a real writer.

(1/2 L.H.)

The rule in capsule: If you fail to show up in the morning after ~~your~~ ^{you never}
 that ~~yourself~~ you would just before you went to sleep last night, then you will walk around
 with ants in your brain. Rule of thumb? Restlessness
 of mind can be measured by the number
 of promises that remain unkept. (M.D.)

end of chap

~~can present a false~~
of a history that is ~~finally a creative and not wholly factual narrative~~. Let's say for the
purpose of argument there are ~~1000~~ ^{a thousand} large and small ~~details~~ ^{dr} necessary for a particular
historian to capture a given moment in time. ~~Napoleon's return from Elba, the death of~~ ^{or rise}
~~Robespierre, or John F. Kennedy on the night before he was assassinated~~ whatever is
chosen, the historian has to decide which ~~of those details~~ ^{of those details} of a large number of facts are most relevant.

He can't use them all. More important, he can't obtain them all. Let's say he ~~chooses~~ ^{selects} a
~~few hundred~~ ^{a few hundred} pieces of information ~~that~~ ^{that} ~~adhere in varying degrees to various bodies of~~ ^{to his}
information ~~assumption~~ ^{information} on what actually happened. These pieces of detail are usually called facts.

Should the novelist come in, also ready to write about ~~the same events~~ ^{the same events} ~~the last night~~ ^{forty fifty} he or
she is not nearly as good, doubtless, at research and comes up with only ~~40~~ ^{forty} or ~~50~~ ^{fifty} details
that seem vital. Nonetheless, I would argue that the historian and the novelist are both
engaged in writing fiction. The difference is that the historian uses more facts, although
they can never be numerous enough to enclose the reality. Moreover, the historian
usually writes in a style ~~that's more pedestrian~~ ^{that's more pedestrian}. But there they are, both doing fiction.

~~One is sometimes sprightly, the other, often dull.~~ The real point is that each, the novelist



TO: J. Michael Lennon

FROM: Veronica Windholz

DATE: August 12, 2002

RE: Mailer/The Spooky Art

Mike,

As promised, I'm sending you the manuscript pages on which there have been revisions since late last week. Once you substitute them for the pages that are presently in the Xerox copy of the setting manuscript I gave you on Thursday, you'll have a complete, up-to-date copy of the manuscript that's going to the compositor--unless Norman has any other changes in mind.

Thanks also for the splendid job you did on the endnotes. I am very grateful to you for taking this on and seeing it through.

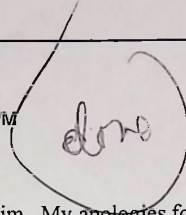
Best,

Veronica

35 pages plus this
cover sheet

Dr. J Michael Lennon

From: "James Richard Fleming"
To: <Lennon@Wilkes.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, August 14, 2002 5:27 PM
Subject: Mailer class
 Dr. Lennon:



Tony Merzлак gave me the e-mail you sent him. My apologies for not getting back to you yesterday, but my internet connection was down last night.

One name has been omitted - George Kalogeris, who was added to the panel that afternoon, though he didn't issue any comments during our meeting. Do you want the names of everybody who was actually there, for there were a few other people who attended but weren't on the panel itself or participants either ...

All the names are spelled correctly.

I'll be sure to send you regards to Peter Caputo (who enjoyed conversing with you as well, he told me), who I'll probably speak to sometime later this week.

My apologies for not being in touch with you or Mr. Mailer since March. Shortly after our meeting I fractured my back in a fall - cracking four vertebrae in my back. My recovery set me back a few months ... when I received your e-mail yesterday I had come in to turn in my thesis, my last project of my undergraduate career. Now I have to begin preparing for graduate school, which I begin applying to later this year. Please convey my respect and apologies to Mr. Mailer (he'd invited me to dinner in p-town this summer, asking that I contact him by mail earlier in the summer) and tell him I'll be writing him soon.

How have you been, Dr. Lennon?

I'm looking forward to reading The Spooky Art (a terrific title; I couldn't help wondering if it was a possible rejected title for Harlot's Ghost). It looks like some pieces from some of my favorite Mailer writings and notions will be included in the book and a few pieces I'm not familiar with.

Please let me know if you receive this e-mail. If there's anything else I can do for you or Mr. Mailer, feel free to e-mail me, call me (508-360-5658), or reach me through Tony.

I hope this finds you well.

My very best,
 James Fleming

"I've studied this, I tell you."

- Norman Mailer, Tough Guys Don't Dance

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