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Sound Track Transcript "The Longest Ball,"
Jeffrey Van Davis Filmproduktion, Munich

Roll 1 Take 2 - Davis apartment (Nov 18)

4367 words
L: Norm^{an}, one critic of American literature, ~~and a friend of~~ ^{Bob Lucid,}
~~once~~ once described you as the Lon Chaney of American letters.

I've always thought it was a good line. ~~How over the years~~
~~have you managed to keep out of the groove of one style, one~~
~~mode?~~ ^{To} What do you attribute your ability to move from style ^{to style}
and mode to mode? ^{to?}

M: Well, I don't know if I can attribute it. You know I found
that I was moving from one style to another. And writers are
notorious guardhouse lawyers. They can re-write their case
after it's been brought in. In other words, a writer can al-
ways give you an explanation of why they are doing something
after they have done it. They are splendid. So I ^{could} give
you a lot of wonderful ^{explanations of how} ~~reasons why, the way~~ I have developed
my aesthetic by searching for new styles and new modes of ex-
pression and so forth, ~~but~~ I expect I could probably do that
about as well as the next writer. ~~But I really don't know.~~
I've ^{at} pondered this, why I keep changing my style. ~~And I think,~~
| finally, when you get down to it, there are two kinds of writers.
There are writers who have a powerful sense of identity and
the attraction of their work comes from that identity, ~~coming~~
~~into collision~~ ^{into} with a world which maybe moving in ^{other} directions,
away from them. I think the greatest single example of that ^{this}
would be Henry Miller. ^{for me} All of Miller's work ~~for me~~ consists
of the world banging on Henry Miller and Henry Miller banging
on the world. Hemingway too. Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe. Now

^{with writers}
 you ~~get to people~~ like Steinbeck, and you get the reverse.
 Steinbeck ~~kept changing~~ ^{changed} his identity for every book he did.
 When I say ~~changing~~ ^{at} his identity, ~~he kept~~ ^{he didn't} changing ^{ed} his style.

~~If you change your style you are changing your identity. I~~
~~think there is that other kind of writer. I've named Steinbeck~~
~~I've done it myself. We can figure a few more as we go along.~~
 Ed Doctorow, who I think is a pretty good writer, is a perfect
 example of that. ~~And I think there are writers who find that~~
~~as the world changes and as they change they are perpetually changing~~ ^{Such writers}
~~in search of their identity~~ because their identity is a function
 of the changes in the world and the ^{corresponding} changes in themselves. And
~~it is almost as if the act of writing is a different sort of~~
~~act for them. There is a different~~ ^{how to put it} ~~the solu-~~
~~tion they find in writing, the attraction of writing, the~~
~~benefits of writing, are different for them than they are for~~
 people like Hemingway or Miller.

L: Well how about ^{a different} ~~an~~ example sort of like, he's not a writer,
 but I'm think ^{ing} of Picasso, ^{whose} Picasso went through so many styles
 and it's been attributed ^{have} by some, because of the new Picasso
 show in New York, ^{to} they talk about his various marriages, his
 relations with his families, is that true in your case to any
 extent? Have your marriages, your relations with your families,
 has that had a major impact, in some underground fashion, ^{on your style} ~~some~~
~~shift in style or mode?~~

M: I remember reading some writer on Picasso, I forget who,
 It doesn't matter. May be it will occur to me later. Anyway,
^{who} he made that point, that Picasso worked in a different vein

for every wife and of course it's true. And reading that I thought, well, I could say the same for myself up to a point. I've written a different kind of book with every wife, and had a different style. And I think ~~if you had been married~~ as many times as I have you are a different man in each marriage. But on the other hand, the same is ^{not} true of Miller. Miller was married many times but he did not change his identity.

L: So what is the crucial difference between you and Miller?

M: I think some people are born with a very firm sense of identity, very clear roots. They know exactly where they came from and who they are, ~~and what they are~~ and it is the world that is mysterious to them. And I've always been one of those people who is very sensitive to the world and forever in the course of discovering myself, ~~and who I am and what I am~~. I remember I met John ^h Erlichman after Watergate, and wrote something about it, ^{he had} because Erlichman changed greatly from the days when he appeared before the Erwin committee. He was now very much like a rather gentle midwesterner, far westerner. I think he came from Montana or some place like that. He was teaching at ^{some place like} Montana State and he had the air of a gentle, sort of radical college professor. You know, a slightly wispy goatee and he was a little punched out but very nice, very decent. And the thing that struck me was how different ^{much he had changed} he was than the way he had been ^{from} just two years before. And he said, "Well I had an identity and I thought it was my own identity, and then when my life changed so drastically I realized it was not my identity but one that they had given me. They were no longer

referring to me as the same man, ~~they had been before~~. The
^hErlichman they were now ^{deceiving} ~~talking to~~ was a different man in
 their eyes, ^{and} ^{so} I became different."

L: And he was ^{now} cut off from ^{his} the public identity? [?] as I
 remember.

M: Yes, he was cut off from his public identity and he could
 never go back to it. And because he could never go back to
 it, his identity was changed, ~~force majeure~~, willy nilly. He
 had no choice. He had a new identity.

L: Well, ~~I was going to say also~~ you and Miller are both
 from Brooklyn and Miller has written some about his early
 life in Brooklyn. ^{But} You've said your childhood never interested
 you very much. You ~~didn't really want to write about it.~~
^{It seems that} ~~Could it be that~~ you had no sense of reacting against your
 childhood the way Miller ^{had} did? He was reacting against ^{his} that
^{upbringing?} German, bourgeoisie family, ~~he was brought up in.~~ He thought
 it was idiocy. What did he say, "my family were Nordic, which
 is to say idiots." ~~Of course, you have had close ties with your~~
~~family, always in Brooklyn.~~ You still live there. But you
 never were reacting for Brooklyn, against Brooklyn or anything
 like that. So maybe you were ^{more free} ~~freer~~ to move than Miller, [?] ~~in~~
 a sense?

M: Well I was close to my family. I ~~didn't have to break~~
~~away from my family.~~ I never had ^{the} a sense of fighting my way
 clear. In fact, ~~if there was anything with the outside world~~
~~it~~ was much tougher than the inside world. Maybe ^{that} there is the
 major difference right there. ~~That is, the first major difference,~~

is ~~someone like~~ Miller, I think, had to establish his identity
 very early in life. Because if he ^{hadn't} ~~didn't~~ he would have been
 destroyed, more or less, or a larger part of him would have
 been ruined for any kind of a serious effort later in life.
~~I know this is probably true for~~ people who grow up in hostile
 families ~~that they~~ ^{have to} establish their personalities very early, ^{established}
 There is a rock-hard quality to the personality ^{ies} that ~~does~~ ^{do} not
 shift. Hemingway's family life was subtler and would take
 much more penetration. And ~~we~~ ^{we} have to assume that what Miller
~~is saying~~ ^{said} about his family is true, ^{although} too. His mother might
 have been ^{a bit} more loving than he ^{says} presents her. A lot of
 women have complained over the years that Miller was pretty
 harsh about, ~~you know~~, their relationship ^{Miller were} with him ~~had been~~
 a lot nicer than the way he ~~had~~ ^{them} wrote about ~~it~~. Miller tended
 to be cruel "after the fact." ^{But I still} ~~But all right, let's take it at~~
 its face value and see, ^{his childhood} assume, ~~if it~~ ^{it} was like that and that
~~would have given him a rock-hard identity. Hemingway had~~
~~subtler problems, but nonetheless he had to establish his identity.~~

I grew up in a world where really I was cultivated. I was
 cultivated in the sense that my mother and father treated my
 sister and myself as very important people. We were the center
 of their universe and so it was the outside world that was
 difficult. You know, go out in the street and ~~you know~~ if
 you didn't have friends you ^{get} ~~get~~ beaten up. It was as simple
 as that. And so I was always terribly alert to the outside
 world. I took the inside world for granted. ^{So} ~~And~~ I was free
 to indulge myself, too, to change from one personality to another.

L: The way you describe it, if you look at the production, that's a crude way to put it, but look at the amount of work you have produced, this flexibility that you talk about, your production is as great as any American writer I think. The number of important major works you've written, serious works that were not just done offhand, casual stuff, it's probably up to Twain. It may be close to Faulkner. I don't know who is a head in literary production, who's counting. But nevertheless you passed Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Wolfe, Steinbeck....

M: Isn't Joyce Carol Oates ahead of all of us?

L: Joyce Carol Oates is ahead of everyone. That's true. And she will always be ahead if she keeps writing at this pace. But she puts out those books pretty quickly. I don't know how many of them are going to last as long as yours. Nevertheless, something in your career has allowed you to continue to...

has the change itself, the shift in change, has that been a function? ^{LI:} Is ~~that~~ one of the reasons why you ^{have written so much} produced so much over the years, that you never have got locked in ^{to} any one mode? Jeff and I ^{are} ~~were~~ counting up and we came to ^{You've published!} something like 27 books, ~~a couple of them are re-cycles but there is pretty close to that.~~

M: Isn't it really more like 21 or 22?

L: Well not if you count ^{the novels:} The Idol and The Octopus, The Bullfight, The Short Fiction, ^{etc.} If you knock off about ^{four or five,} ~~5~~, it's about 22, 23 books ^o. ~~And still.~~ That is a tremendous production in thirty years.

M: ~~It's more than thirty years, thirty-two years.~~ Well, if you are making your living as a writer there is nothing

remarkable about that. You've almost ^{have} got to put out a book every year-and-a-half if you're going to stay alive.

L: Well ^{add} If you consider though that the ^{big} novel you've been working on for so many years, ~~a mammoth work~~, ^{which will} is going to be appearing ^{over the next} in the next 5 to 6 years, over a period of time, you've ^{to} got to be talking about a tremendous expansion, ^{of your} a production right there. I mean, ^{its big novel} that book alone will equal what Thomas Wolfe wrote in a life time.

M: ~~No, Well, that book is a long way from being done.~~ I mean ^{Well,} I've got about two-thirds of the first book written. And the first book will be almost as long as The Executioner's Song. Now if the other two are equally long, ^{-- and} ~~which~~ they may not be, then we're talking about an awfully long piece of work. But that may be fifteen years off too because those long books take forever to write. ~~They do because you get into~~ they have to grow, ^{and} you have to grow with them. ~~It's the oddest,~~ you know, I have the oddest relation to this book I've been doing about Egypt. For the sake of those who don't know about it, I've been writing a book about Egypt, ~~as you know well, that's~~ Egypt in the Twentieth Dynasty, the reign of King Ramses ^{IX} ~~the~~ ^{I started it in 1971 and now have} ~~ninth, about 1130 BC. This book now has~~ eleven hundred pages of manuscript. ~~And I started in 1971.~~ ^{work on} And I keep writing it and then I leave it to do another book and then I go back to it. And it's become ~~really~~ like...my dearest wife. I mean this is the wife I can leave for two years at a time and ~~I~~ come back and all ^{she} ~~it~~ says is, "Oh hello, good to see you again."

L: What's it like coming back to it after something as major as The Executioner's Song?

M: Well I didn't go back to it. I did another book in between.

L: You did the Marilyn book, the "Elegance" book. Well, those two books ought to give some kind of a turn to your perception. Are you expecting that in coming back to it you're going to have a completely different relationship because you've grown and changed in those years?

M: Well no, but since then I did go back to it. I wrote Of Women And Their Elegance then I went back to the Egyptian book and I've written a good bit on it, maybe another 75,000 words since I've gone back to it. I'm about a year away, a year of hard work away from finishing it.

L: You've compared many times the life of a writer to the life of a monk, the life of a boxer. You've used many metaphors to describe it. And I came across Samuel Johnson's description of a writer the other day and it was, when asked to describe a writer, he said, "toil, envy, want, the patron and the jail." And I wondered, how would you describe the writer's life? What metaphor, boxing, monkish labors, the existential feat of looking at that blank piece of paper every day... How do you think about writing when you think of it abstractly, when you look back on ^{it?} the craft of writing?

M: Well there is ^{the} one word that always comes to mind is sanction. ^{continue writing} Because ~~to write~~ you have to be able to give yourself the sanction ~~to write~~. Or something in yourself has to

~~give you the sanction to write.~~ There's ^{always} a moral judgment
 always in writing. One is assigning values to the lives of
 others, no matter how. When you take the meanest piece of
 small criticism in a weekly magazine, ~~or something like the~~
~~Village Voice~~, let's say, ^{plus} somebody is writing about someone
 else. They're lifting them up or they're putting them down.
 That's a large act. ^{The same is true} And ~~even if you're doing it~~ in fiction;
 you're attempting to ^a affect your reader's brain. We write
 to influence others. And so, ^{to a great extent,} ~~to do that~~ you have to be in
 command of yourself; ~~to a great extent.~~ You have to feel that
 you have the right to do this. Now on the average day most
 writers don't even think about it; they feel they ^{don't question their} have the
 right, ^{and} they're ^{got} full ^{full} of a head of steam ^{up} and they're working.
 It's ~~not the good days~~ that you have to worry about ^{although}
 on the bad days, ^{you've got to worry about} if you've been, if you've done something
 dumb the day before, or if you're embarrassed ^{or depressed,} ~~by yourself,~~
~~or if you're profoundly depressed about yourself,~~ or if you've
 been put down seriously by friend or enemy the day before, or ~~if~~
 you're ^{had} having trouble with your mate or any one of a thousand.
^{if you're a professional,} ~~you still sit down and write~~
~~things that can spell your day, and you go in~~ the next morning
 when you're a professional, the thing that ^{characterizes} makes professional
 writers and the reason there are finally so few, ^{-- as opposed --} compared to
^{to the great number who merely have talent --}
 how many people there are of, talent and write is the ability
 to work on a bad day ~~is what characterizes the professional.~~
 L: You've always said that you feel that some of your best
 writing comes out of your worse periods and that you sometimes
 have to go through the bends to really accomplish what you want.
 Aren't you suspicious of writing that comes out of...

M: I'm always a little uneasy when the writing comes too easily because there isn't that feeling of true grit--apologies to John Wayne. There isn't that feeling when it's very hard to write and ^{sometimes} you literally have to ^{force} yourself into that noodle of writing. You have to forge the will to write on a given day, and you find if you do that day after day and I just find looking back on it, and I can't even tell you why, but on those days when I felt that it was going to be very hard to write and I had a hell of a time writing ^{but} and finally did, succeed in writing, and the same happened the next day and the next and the next, ~~each day~~ I wrote against great resistance in myself, and ^{with} great depression ~~after I finished writing~~, those had to be the best things I wrote. The Armies of The Night was written in a towering depression. I wrote it in 8 weeks, 7 weeks, and they were some of the worst ^t weeks of my life. And I'd come home and think ^{what I had done} ~~it~~ was terrible ~~every day and I think that there's some... I've never understood it, I've always felt that perhaps there's some, there's some.~~ It's as if one doesn't trust oneself. You see, if I'd known that I was writing something that I now would say is as good as The Armies of The Night, if I had known that each day was that good, I would have gotten slightly manic about it. And when I get manic I'm useless to myself as a writer.

L: Then you start felling Napoleonic?

M: Yeah, and I start telling other people how to live. Instead of doing it in the pages of the book I'd be doing it in my personal life. ^{And} They'd be fighting back. There would be

explosions all over the place. You have to, I think one reason writers get depressed is that if the central or if the next-to-^{man or woman} central figure in the family is depressed or powerfully depressed, put it more simply if the man or woman in the house is profoundly depressed, at a given point, everything in the house tends to slow down, and move on a steady keel.

^{once told me}
 L: You said that when you were ~~writing Armies~~ you had this terrible depression, you were feeling terrible, was this before or after? I mean what happened? You've explained this to me before. You've said all of a sudden in fooling around, trying to get started on ^{Armies} ~~it~~, you finally tried the third person and it worked ~~for you~~. Didn't that ~~was that~~ a release of some pressure?

M: No, it merely shifted the pressure. Of course, then I began to worry. It seemed to me it worked, maybe it worked. On the one hand it seemed interesting, on the other hand it seemed a little odd. I remained uncomfortable with it for quite a period. I'd say I was half way into the book before I ^{was} ~~had~~ ~~getten~~ use to it. It took me longer to get used to it than any reader. And you may remember when you started reading the book ^{that} it was a little funny in the beginning.

L: It was a shock.

M: And it was not all together agreeable for a while, that is, until the benefits ~~of it~~ began to be visible. It's a very funny way to look at oneself ^{get} and we all do it.

L: Nevertheless, it was like an old shoe by the time you got rid of it.

M: Yes, by the time ~~we were~~ ^{I was} done with it ~~one~~ ^{in Armies I} missed it. In fact, I missed it so much I kept going back to ~~that~~ ^{it} in book after book, thereafter. And it never worked as well again.

L: I ~~think~~ ^{you} said in The Fight that you were getting tired of that style, your wheels were starting to spin, tired of your own pronouncements and commentary, and you wanted to be a little... ~~well~~. I think you got more and more detached ~~as you follow those books~~ from Armies all the way through to The Fight. Is that correct?

M: I got less and less interested in myself as a protagonist. In The Armies of the Night I was a true protagonist of the best sort, which is half heroic and three-quarters comic. That makes for a marvelous protagonist.

L: Like a Stendhal hero?

M: No, no. Nothing like ~~it~~ ^{that's}. Nothing so large.

L: No, but still, all ^{his} proportions noted. ^{there are similes.} ~~as you say, "in~~

^{up} You were ~~one~~ day, down the next. You had a success and you had a failure, you were on top of it, you were sick of yourself. That's a little bit like Julien Sorel, I think.

M: Except he had this vast project which ~~is that he was going~~ ^{was} to become one of the mightiest men in France. All I wanted to do, if you remember, ~~I wanted to~~ ^{was} make a dinner party ^{in New York} that night.

L: But ~~still~~, you did say to yourself, "This could be the beginning of a guerrilla warfare in America." And if the war in Vietnam had not ended, it might indeed have ~~been somewhat~~ ^{happened.} like it. You were prepared for that.

M: I was prepared to go to jail eventually. I had the feeling, ^{but} if things got worse and worse, and the war didn't end, at a certain point in time a lot of us who were marching on the Pentagon might end up spending a year or two in jail, at the least. And so we were all somewhat heavy-hearted marching on that Pentagon. Because it was a way of putting ourselves on record. But I still wouldn't ^{myself} compare that to Julien Sorel.

L: I always think of Armies of the Night as a nineteenth-century novel.

M: There is no sex in it. But it is a nineteenth-century novel. It's courtly, it's deliberate, it's amused with its time and its place. It entertains itself with the antics of its hero. The notion of personality is somewhat charming because it is taken for granted that these are all very fine and substantial people. When all is said they may be up to their shenanigans, but finally we know that it's all going to turn out well in the end. It has that restrained merriment of the early nineteenth-century picaresque novel.

L: And you have ^{a narrator} ~~an author~~ who is commenting, who intrudes occasionally and sums-up ^{hints} what's going to happen to our hero tomorrow. "Little did he know," little Thackeray touches.

M: And he virtually puts capitals on his nouns.

L: If Armies of the Night is ^{the} a nineteenth-century novel, how would you describe Executioner's Song? What kind of novel is that? I mean, it's a novel.

M: I think Executioner's Song is a very conventional novel. Its fault is not that it is not a novel but that it is a very

conventional novel. There are people who would say, "there are other ways to have done the life of Gary Gilmore. You chose the most pedestrian ~~way of doing it.~~"

Roll 3-Take 2

L: Wilfred Sheed once said, it might have been in an essay on you, that as writers get older, especially good writers, they continue to grow, change, take on new styles, but they may not necessarily keep up with what's going on around them. Have you felt any of that? Especially in the 70's?

M: Oh, I felt a great deal of it. The 70's are a blank for me. ~~I don't know what happened in the 70's. I felt in close touch with the 60's.~~ I thought I understood the 60's fairly well. Maybe in fact I even did. But in the 70's I ~~just~~ felt as if everything had gotten away from me. I didn't feel at all close to young people anymore. I remember I'd go out lecturing in the early 70's and ~~didn't understand~~ college audiences ~~any longer. They seemed apathetic,~~ where ~~in the past~~ audiences in the 60's would ~~be reacting~~ to what I ~~was saying~~. ^{said} The history of ~~The 70's~~ ^{was} a blank. ~~Nixon, Ford and Carter made up a series of particularly dull presidents for me.~~ People magazine, I think, was the greatest phenomenon of the 70's. ^{it} began to take over the country. Television certainly took over the country. I hated the 70's. ~~I literally don't know~~ whether my lack of touch with the 70's, ... I mean I certainly ^{had} the feeling ^{that} ~~what~~ Sheed was talking about, ~~that~~ I'm getting older and in certain ways I'm getting better as a writer, but

I really know very little about the present. ~~I don't know~~
~~to this day whether it is my fault or the fault of the 70's.~~
 I don't think ^{the 70's are} it's ^a decade that one can get tremendously
 attached to. ~~It was like the 50's. If you fall in love with~~
~~someone in the 70's, you might have sentimental memories that~~
~~way, but~~ ⁱⁿ ~~certainly not~~ ^{sentimental about} ~~for~~ the period. On the other hand,
The Executioner's Song ^{is} ~~I felt was~~ very much a book of the 70's.
 But, of course, ^{if it is} ~~that was~~ not a book that came out of my own
 imagination so much as from found material. In ^{one} ~~a certain~~ sense,
 it is a collage of found material.

L: You've ^{been} ~~also talked about~~ in The Deer Park, ^{about} ~~and in other~~
 places, ⁱⁿ ~~about~~ "time dynamic and time potential." ⁱⁿ ~~I~~ try to connect
 that with some of things you've said about the 70's. ~~The 70's~~
^{Maybe} ~~were sort of a dead time.~~ ^{in the 70's.} Time wasn't really happening. ^{There}
 was no movement in the country. Would you compare ^{them} ~~it~~ to the
 50's in that respect?

M: ~~Except, yes, except~~ it was worse than the 50's. My idea
 of an exciting time is when you ~~have a time when~~ people are
 ready to die for an idea. Then you have a vital time, ^a
~~lively time,~~ a dangerous time, ~~a memorable time,~~ a time that
 people hark back to in their memories. Then you have ^{other} ~~periods~~
 when people are not ready to die for any idea around. I think
 that is the operative definition of the 70's. There wasn't
 one idea that anybody would die for. Women's liberation was
 the most powerful set of ideas in the 70's and I have yet to
 meet the woman who is ready to die for her ideas, with the
 possible exception of that woman who shot Andy Warhol. But

other than that, you know, those girls were really tough, but none of them were dying on the barricades were they? In the 50's there were people who were willing to die for their ideas, but they were all patriots. They wanted to die in Korea, they wanted to die to fight ^{ing} Communism. They never knew ~~what~~ ~~Communism was, never knew~~ that Communism was just as benighted as American capitalism. They thought there was something wonderful about Communism and that it had to be fought because otherwise it was going to win ^{take over} everything in sight. They didn't understand that they were same messed-up bastards that we are. Except that they had an even more oppressed ^{11/2} system and were less able to do anything about it. But, I mean, people were ready to die to fight Communism in the 50's. In the 70's we didn't even have that.

L: You said if any decade could ~~ever~~ kill a writer, the 50's almost killed ^{you} me. Now you're saying the 70's may have been worse.

M: Well I think the 70's almost killed America. Nixon's great crime in my mind was not Watergate. ~~Watergate was the kind of crooked thing that any number~~ I'm certain when we learn the true history of our period, ^{well find that} I'm sure every American president had operations going on under his nose, to some degree under his covert knowledge, with or without his covert knowledge, that would rival Watergate. When you have a powerful ^{espionage} secret service like the CIA, as a powerful espionage agency, they are not going to sit around. You've got a lot of highly principled, highly determined, highly motivated men,

~~who are~~
~~they're not going to sit around and do nothing.~~ ^{who} They have
~~all the tools, all the apparatus, they~~ ^{and} have all the paranoia
 they need to go out and pull real capers. So of course that
 was being done under every president. I always felt the fact
 that Nixon was taken ⁱⁿ by Watergate, in other words, that it
 was a set-up and he fell into it. A trap was laid for him
 and he fell for it. But Nixon's crime in my mind was that
 he didn't end the war in Vietnam when he could have, ~~which was~~
 in '68 or '69. He protracted it, ~~all those years.~~
 And that's one of the things that truly ~~killed~~ ^{hurt} the country. ^{By 1968} The country
 morally had come to the ^{moral} recognition by '68 that the war in
 Vietnam had to end. ^{And} When people go through a moral revolution
 and they decide that they want to move from bad conscience to
 good conscience, nothing is more punishing, more cruel and
 finally more likely to render ~~that person~~ ^{basic} apathetic than to
 have to make them wait for four years or for many years or a
^{wait a} long period to carry out that act of good conscience. And
 that's what Nixon did to America. ~~Merely to build his own~~
~~fortunes. That was a lost cause.~~ No matter when we pulled
 out of Vietnam, it was going to be a disaster. Everybody
 knew that. But he protracted it and protracted it and pro-
 tracted it because he wanted to make himself look good for '72.
 His vast majority in '72 came in part because of the four
 years he spent getting out of Vietnam.

L: Do you think then that the 80's, after the dead time of
 the 70's, do you think we are going to have the same kind of
 counter-culture, ^{in the 80's} reaction against the establishment, that was

we had
 there, although it never really got anywhere, in the 50's? *60's*

M: Well I hope not. I mean I hope we get into something much more profound and serious. The time to ~~cut up~~ *make a cute* our little moves and have our fun with the establishment. "Look at that establishment, isn't it funny, ha, ha" is long gone. ~~What the establishment has done,~~ *because* With the exception of a few years in the 60's, *the Establishment has* they've really been unchallenged.

possibly
 I'm talking now about the corporate establishment of America. We suffer from it in a thousand ways. We suffer from it with the most hideous architecture in the history of the world. This architecture has been exported. It doesn't matter which major European city you go to. For that matter you can go to New Delhi or Moscow, *very soon* I'm sure you *will be able to* go to Peking very soon and you'll find the same hideous buildings. They speak of the very emptiness of emotional, human and spiritual content *in* of the 20th century, those buildings. They speak of the fact that we don't have craftsmen any longer the way we used to, that we don't have people who are serious about the environment that provide for the people who are living among them. They speak of the adulteration in aesthetics.

L: So ~~all~~ the counter-culture of the 60's didn't really make a dent in that?

M: It certainly didn't make any effective dent in the onward movement of the corporation. The corporation has become more and more powerful, more and more prevalent. ~~It controls more and more.~~ It fills our life with... it adulterates and lowers the standard of living. We used to have roads where people

could travel down ~~those roads~~, first on foot and by horse, then by carriage and finally by car. They could have an interesting trip. Now we ~~still move down superhighways~~, but we're virtually carried down these ^{auto}superhighways. They're monotonous. Even the most beautiful landscape is rendered monotonous by a superhighway. We build these buildings that are absolutely faceless, without decoration, without character, ^{and} with flat roofs. We adulterate our food. The average food, not only in America, ~~by now~~, because we export this crap, the average food all over the world is becoming more and more tasteless, more tortured.

L: TV.

M: TV adulterates human relations. TV does the same thing to human relations that frozen food does to real food. All of this is the blight of corporate capitalism. Corporate capitalism is a blight on the world, a blight quite equal to Soviet Communism.

L: So when you said back sometime in the 50's, "There's a shit storm coming." The shit storm hasn't really...

M: There wasn't enough of a shit storm. ~~Finally the storm never reached the working class.~~ The Marxists talked all ^{the} time about ^{reaching} the working class, ^{but they never did} ~~being reached.~~ The working class was never reached. And of the reasons they were never reached is something that nobody ever talks about much. ^{the reason is} But, in fact, ^{that} the working class ^{now} has worked ^S for the corporation and the corporation ^{has} proved more adaptable than anyone expected. The corporation realized, ^{and understood a part of it} because of Marx, because of Marx's message.

The corporation could also read and they decided ~~that the real danger was in the working class and the one thing they were going to be certain of is~~ that the working class ^{had to be} ~~was~~ made part of corporate life. And they were. They were coopted.

L: Jerry Rubin is now working for them.

M: Well he's working on Wall Street, ~~he's~~ still an individual entrepreneur, heht

L: I lost a little respect for him when I found out he was an investment banker. But the unions certainly have been tied in for a long time. They're wired right in, the UAW's wired right in to the corporation. I can see what you mean, ~~by that.~~

M: No, They all are. They were coopted.

Roll 4 Take 1

L: ~~Norman,~~ In 1964 you suggested the election of Barry Goldwater might sharpen and clarify the conflict between right and left. Do you think the election of Reagan might have the same effect?

M: ~~I think it's going to have a lot of effect on the left.~~ I hope it will, it should. ~~When we talk of the left,~~ I'm not talking of the extreme or ultra left, I'm talking ~~really~~ about the liberal left, ~~that is~~ the left wing of the Democratic party. I've felt for a long time that liberalism is absolutely bankrupt in America. I think it was trying to do something, let's ^{In} ~~say from~~ Roosevelt ^{that liberalism was trying to do something} on, that was unique in human affairs.

Up to that point ^{which is} all human society up to that point had been built more or less on the idea that everything in the society contributed toward bringing ^{push} the surplus to the top. So that if ^{resources} people were going to ^{be} waste resources, it would be the people at the top who would waste ^{them} the resources. In other words, the people at the top would work less than their share. All recent societies were built on that ^{this principle, however} whether they were monarchies, ^{whatever} whether they were early bourgeois republics, ^{that was the way it was done.} Then the Soviet Union came along and there was an attempt to ^{this principle} do the reverse of that. If there was going to be anything ^{was to be} wasted, it would be wasted ^{at the bottom} ideally in giving a great deal to people who were ^{by} totally underprivileged. That lasted ^{only} for a year or two and then they ^{the Soviets reverted} very quickly went ^{the old} into a system where again the higher you rose in the society, the more you got of what Marx called "surplus value" but what I would call waste, you know, excessive emoluments.

Now when liberalism came along, that is, the New Deal liberalism of Roosevelt, ^{could bring} what it attempted to do was to not only take care of the top, ^{wasn't a priority} which they didn't really try to do too much to, but also to pay off the bottom, to lubricate the bottom, to give a share of ^{the} surplus, ~~this waste~~ to the bottom. ^{After} Let's say since the Second World War, and particularly since, ^{gain some of this surplus and} the blacks began to achieve some of their liberties ^{as well} out of the great guilt many Americans felt ^{about} from what had been done to black people for two hundred years or more, a decision was made to ameliorate the black condition. ^{partisan} A large part of the surplus began to go down to the blacks

~~Still, too~~ ^{what} ~~and this surplus that~~ went down to the blacks was not a tenth
~~of the amount that is~~ ^{of what was} being wasted ~~still~~ at the top. But

America had become the first society on a major scale that ~~was~~ ^{ing} attempted to pay off ^{both} the top and the bottom ^{out of} ~~allowing~~ ^{wealth of the} the middle ^{to} to support this. Now the middle had no ^{great} cause for complaint,

~~Because they had chosen the middle, they had chosen the middle~~
~~because the security was there.~~ ^{was nevertheless} But in fact the onus of paying

~~for this was~~ ^{and} on them, so it created vast resentment toward the

bottom. Given the nature of corporate capitalism, ^{and its} ~~most of~~ the efforts in the communication media ^{allies, (its greatest work)} kept people from being ^{did not} able to recognize at all that the true enemy was still at the

top. ~~All the resentment was focused down toward the bottom.~~

Corporate capitalism ^{has} succeeded, I believe, in convincing

Americans that the Democratic Party was wasteful, that they
 were supporting people who didn't work, and ^{of course, this was much} ~~that was very true.~~
^{truth to this}

There were a lot of people in black areas who were not working,
 who were ripping off welfare. But they weren't a tenth of

the patch of people who were ripping off American society at
 the top. When you take ~~the incredible waste in American society~~
^{is incredible.}

~~from the top right down to the middle, in terms of all the~~
 needless work and waste and spending that goes into all our
 products that don't need it, like soap. Like automobiles that
 are interchangeable. When we think of the costs of products

today, ^{consider} ~~do we realize~~ how much ^{wealth} ~~that just~~ goes into the waste of
^{soap and automobiles}

^{to} surround ~~these products~~ with romantic and sentimental
 appurtenances that they're not entitled to. You know/^{we} don't
 have to love our soap. ~~Maybe we have to love our automobile.~~

but we certainly don't have to love any number of basic products that have no quality to them because the money that could go into increasing the quality, goes instead into competing with other producers to have more public relations, more advertising, more communications, more air in the product.

Given all this, what I'm trying to get toward is that the left, the Democratic left, ^{has to take a long look at what the nature of} their programs ^{They have to understand that} have been. Because historically what is true is that the blacks were getting payoffs; in effect, there has been ^{was} no real attempt to administer welfare in any serious fashion. But that on the contrary, ^{Quite the} there was a tacit agreement between Black Power and liberal power: Which is, "You guys keep the ghettos relatively quiet and the money will keep coming in." ^{For Blacks use things payoffs. Finally, got sick of that arrangement.} And the American public ~~threw that out.~~ The largest resentment they felt for the last ten years, it's been ~~the segregation -- a false one -- was that~~ ^{that} ~~building all through the 70's, is those blacks are getting~~ ^{the blacks were} away with murder. ~~They are not working and they're getting~~ ^{too much of what we do.} Reagan came in on that wave. What the Democratic left ~~now~~ ^{has to do} is to start looking at the ^{how} ^{comprehend} nature of ~~the~~ ^{this} problem ^{And then} and how to solve it.

Roll 4 Take 2

Me - You know when I was running for mayor in '69, a lot of people took us aside and said, "Look, welfare is the biggest single problem in New York. The blacks are ripping off welfare. Why don't you go up there and talk to some of them because if you can work out something with them that looks like it

makes a little sense, ~~that's your best chance to show people~~
^{will get} 1 you're serious, ~~that you are doing something the other candi-~~
~~dates are not doing.~~ Maybe you'll have a chance to draw a
 lot of votes and get into real contention." So Breslin and I
 went up to Harlem and met some mothers who represented a
 Harlem welfare organization. I remember one black woman got
^{up} ~~on~~ and she said, "Mrs. Richbucks over on Park Avenue, she
 says I'm taking my welfare check and I'm riding around in a
 Cadillac and you know what I say, I say 'fuck her.' My Cadillac
 is five years old and I have a lot of trouble meeting the pay-
 ments on it and she's riding around in a brand new Cadillac."
 She went on with this ~~thing~~ and said, "Mrs. Richbucks over
 on Fifth Avenue says I've been married three times and I got
 18 children and I'm drawing welfare for each one of them, ^{well,} ~~and~~
 I only got 13 children and I'm ~~ripping off the government~~ and
 I say, 'fuck her.' I may be lying about that five children,
 but I got the other 13 to take care of and I have been married
 three times. Mrs. Richbucks over on Fifth Avenue she don't
 have to get married because she's got lovers all over the
 place and furs and diamond rings." She went on and on like
 that and finally she glared at me and she said, "Look, we
 want our share of the waste." And I thought, "Madam, your
 argument is unanswerable." I walked out of there and I came
 back to headquarters and I said, "Fellows, we got no welfare
 program." Because ~~I knew it was absolutely true. We weren't~~
~~going to have a welfare program.~~ ^{cf} We weren't going to be able
 to go in there and say to the black people, "Please stop

taking things that you are not entitled to." ~~And~~ They would look at us ~~right back~~ and say, "We're taking what we're not entitled to ^{but} ~~and~~ what about the rich people at the top who are taking ten times as much?" I think that this is the key problem that ^{the} Democratic party has got to face. ~~Which is that~~ they are truly interested in having a country in which everybody has equal opportunity or something roughly approaching ~~equal~~ ^{I may mean that} that. To get to that point, we've got to rethink every single aspect of American politics and American life. We ^{we} got to start thinking radically, but not in the old radical way of "Let's rally the workers." I mean that is crap beyond crap by now. It's as if America is one vast, middle-class consumer nation. ~~[Things failed in the 60's because finally what you had were middle-class troops. So the revolution wasn't large enough, it wasn't thought out and was hysterical because these middle-class troops were terrified of being put in jail, beaten up, killed. Four of them finally were at Kent State. Here, in the 60's, what we've got to do is truly try to get into some absolutely new ways of looking at politics.]~~

L: Do you think Reagan might be a trigger?

M: ~~I think... Let's leave Reagan to the side for the moment.~~ Apart from whether Reagan is a good president or a bad one, I can see where Reagan ^{could} conceivably end up being not that bad a president, ~~in the sense that~~ ^{is, if} the American economy, which is most mysterious, doesn't keep getting worse and worse, ~~as I think it will, but~~ ^{it may} start taking some ~~real~~ ^{temporary upturns} turns ~~for the~~ better, and certainly if Reagan goes into heavy armament

spending, we're going to have a false prosperity for a period, although with a lot of inflation. ~~but~~ Nonetheless, I can see where Reagan might seem no worse than Eisenhower. ~~There~~ ^{We} ^{have} might be a relatively benign administration for four years. I suspect it's going to be much worse than that, ^{though,} because I don't think he can do it. I think the economy is going to get worse and worse. At that point, to fight the inflation he is going to start cutting off aid to the cities.

L: Something has got to mobilize the left of the Democratic Party.

M: I think there is a period of a year or two where the left really ought to look at what's going on in American life. I think there are new ways to go at it that haven't even been tried. For instance, I think it would be marvelous if somebody came along and said they were running for the President on a single tax program like the old Henry George program. Except it wouldn't be on land. ~~They would say there would be no~~ income tax, no state tax; ~~there would be just one tax.~~ We'll tax just one thing: Plastics. The happiness that would send through American life.

Roll 5 Take 1

M: ~~You'd have people who would come around and say, "I love plastics."~~ ^{maybe} My nightmare is that ~~maybe~~ by now 70 percent of the American public love plastics; ^{will} ~~that~~ they would fight to the death for the right to use plastics. ~~So the next point that I'm making is that you would have to have~~ ^a referendum ^{on this.}

Why not ^{let} ~~have~~ people vote on what they want ^{ed?} their taxation ~~to consist of~~

L: What would the options be?

M: I don't know. In ~~other words,~~ you might have to do a great deal of exploration to find out what it is that people detest the most. My guess is that if you really started asking Americans what things they detest most, ~~in the life~~ ^{this is the} around them, you would find that it's plastics. Now if ~~you found~~ ^{case,} that, ~~then~~ you could really start a large campaign to put a heavy tax upon plastics. ~~So that~~ ^{And so} at a certain point plastics would begin to disappear. Which means that the quality of life would begin to improve. ~~Because there is no question in my mind that plastics debase the quality of life.~~ You can be a wealthy man living in a wealthy house, but if everything in your house is made of plastic, you're living in a cold, ~~repellent~~ ^{repellant} tomb. ~~It's a repellent tomb. It's far more repellent than living in a tomb that's made of marble. You're living in a~~ ^a tomb of artificial marble. ~~At a certain point if you kept~~ ^{eventually} ~~taxing plastics, and nobody wanted them, plastics would dis-~~ ^{should be} ~~appear out of human affairs. We would be in another era.~~ Now ~~at that point~~ you might say what ~~would you get the taxed~~ ^{from next?} Television. Tax television sets to the skies. ~~At this point~~ ^{that} obviously, what I'm getting at is, you'd have to start voting. The nature of political campaigns would be ~~that you would have the party that wished to put the brunt~~ ^{3. fought over whether} of taxation on ~~land,~~ ^{television sets,} or on corporations, or on frozen foods. ~~The ecologists at that point,~~ ^{would then become powerful} instead of being people who are

essentially hamstrung and ~~effectively politically wiped out~~
~~because they are dependent upon something that ecologically~~
~~is odious which is large powerful government.~~ Large, power-
 ful government is by its nature antithetical to real ecological
 needs. But ~~yet~~ the ecologists are caught in the ^{dilemma} ~~paradox~~ of
 having to appeal to government always to enforce actions
 against the corporations. If ~~instead of depending upon gov-~~
~~ernment,~~ If the people have ^{an} the instruments with which to ^{tax} vote
 against those elements in the ecology they consider ^{horrible} ~~onerous~~,
 and have those be the elements that are taxed most highly.

~~Those elements~~ Those elements would begin to disappear without government
 intervention. ~~Merely because~~ They would be priced out of the
 market. What you could have then ^{such} is a purification process
 that might be able to run through all of American society ^{and}
^{render out all kind of wastes}
 I think American society at this point is absolutely glutted

with all kinds of wasteful actions. In other words there is
~~a certain point what could you put the taxes on?~~ Any product
 that advertises itself would have to pay a higher tax than a
 product that doesn't advertise itself. Which would open up
 all sorts of opportunities for small business. What I'm
 getting at finally is that ~~the left would do well to look into~~
~~is that instead of paying lip service to small business, which~~
~~the Democratic left has been doing, and then~~ ^{Δ instead of} ~~opting immediately~~
^{the Democratic left might begin to} ~~for every big government solution they can find, if they re-~~
 recognize that big government is truly the enemy ^{that} just be-
^{it is} cause ^{that says} corporate capitalism is saying that big government is
 the enemy, doesn't mean that corporate capitalism is wrong.

^{Corporations}
 They can be right about something too. And ~~the~~ one thing ^{Just as}
 they're right about is that big government is the enemy. ^{So}
^{much as} is corporate capitalism. But the Democratic left could ~~be~~
^{rebuild itself} begin to form around the concept that the economy and the
 country has got to be flushed ~~out~~ of its waste.

L: Reagan's going to increase the glut. He's going to
 give big business their way.

M: Oh, I think he is an open invitation to big business to
 take more of a grab. He didn't get in because he's a true
 conservative. He got in because big business saw him as the
 best boy to give them even more, ^{a larger} a richer part of the pie.
 It staggers me how corporate capitalism, big business, is
 endlessly greedy. They're even greedier than they need to be
 for their own good.

L: Well, ~~he had big business behind him.~~ ^{Reagan} He also had a lot
 of fundamentalists, the Moral Majority, ^{behind him} ~~that's another strain.~~
 He doesn't know how greedy they are compared to big business.

M: I don't think they are greedy. ~~I think what they feel...~~
^{They represent} There's the strain of right and proper living on the one hand
 and individualism on the other. The Bible in your left hand
 and ^a your gun in the right hand. ~~That we don't have to get~~
~~into.~~ ^{this} I think that finally is going to be a strain in American
 life right down to the end. I think America could go through
 fifty-eight changes and yet at the end of it you would still
 have a powerful trenchant minority who held to the Bible and
 held to the gun.

L: Teddy Kennedy is the ~~one that's~~ going to be the titular ruler now of the Democratic Party.

M: I think there is some possibility that he will be open -- not necessarily to these ideas I just expressed, ~~but that he will be open~~ to new solutions. Because liberalism as such is dead. I think ~~it's true~~ that if Teddy Kennedy had gotten elected ^{and attempted to carry out} ~~with the~~ program that he was arguing for, ~~and had attempted to carry it out~~, he would have had to increase inflation at a great rate. He had to be aware of the problem, ~~and~~ I think he felt if he could get elected he could deal with it because he could bring good people in. Nobody should ever expect a politician to be held accountable ^{to} ~~for~~ the ^{platform} ~~ideas~~ he runs on. Some marvelous politician once said that if politicians only offered the electorate those programs they could carry out, nobody would ever get elected.

L: Do you think Kennedy is flexible enough to really listen to new solutions? The Democratic Party has always been feuding. I have no faith in the Democratic Party to get together and forget the New Deal.

M: Well it's the only party we've got.

Roll 6 Take 1 Boat on Königsee (Nov 19)

2630 words

L: Gilmore wasn't probably as aware of the inner negotiations of evil as ^{Marion} Faye was. I mean, Faye knew what he was doing.

M: Yes, well, Gilmore in a certain sense is a simple fellow. ^{one word. Just} ~~The French are so impressed at how complex he is, and now~~ ^{the French find him to be so complex; they} ~~are so impressed with his intelligence. Usually they have~~ ^{intelligent he is. It's interesting, they've got even a low} view of criminals, ^{that it is interesting} even despite Genet, ^{that} they are truly impressed with Gilmore. I mean, if you compare Gilmore to Genet, Gilmore is a clod.

L: But ^{for marginal characters.} The French have a great love of ~~criminals too.~~ ^{outside's} They love Poe, Baudelaire, anybody with an ~~criminal~~ ^{outside's} mentality.

M: ^{Because} Yes, well it's such a regularized society. I mean Paris is so safe I can't tell you. I can't remember being in a city where the feeling of being secure ^{was} ~~is~~ so great. ~~that~~ It's boring.

L: Like Munich?

M: Yes, but Munich is not a big city the way Paris is. Paris is congested. There's an opportunity for rising tempers in Paris. Everybody is so pressed together and yet it is so relaxed.

L: Not like ~~in~~ New York?

M: ~~I mean~~ ^{more} New York has such an impact. ~~And~~ ^{more} people are always sliding off people. You walk down the street and you can have ten eye encounters a day that pushed to their limit could get bad.

L: But that sense of dread and excitement that you get in New York ~~city~~, you don't have that in Paris?

M: No.

L: The feeling that you don't know what's going to happen in the next bar or around the next corner, that's not there in Paris at all?

M: I never felt it. But then, of course, I'm not a bar hopper in Paris. Who ^{can} ~~could~~ afford to be a bar hopper at six bucks a throw? I guess it's not that bad. It's cool if you're buying your own drinks. But what if you're buying ^{drinks for} two other people's [?] drinks? Or pick ^{up} the tab for a party of four?

L: Aren't there any local bistros?

M: You have to drink the local juice. Cognac is awful tough to take for a night.

L: Vin ordinaire?

M: It can be good, but I'm not a wine drinker. Anyway I am not a drinker any longer. I have to keep reminding myself.

L: ^{What about you} That's the strangest thing that you've stopped drinking. ~~You haven't~~ really measured the impact of not drinking upon your writing habits yet?

M: No. ~~I've said this to a few people. But not drinking is~~ ^{It's} peculiar ^{because} I've never been psychoanalyzed, But I have a feeling that when you stop drinking after ~~drinking for~~ thirty years as I have, it's the next thing to being psychoanalyzed. ~~Because my~~ ^I idea of myself keeps changing everyday ~~and~~ I'm relocating my personality. ~~It's as if I'm remaking my personality. So that I'm~~ ^{I feel} much more adaptable in certain ways and I'm more resigned in other ways. Precisely what happens in psychoanalysis.

L: But you've been remaking your personality for years.

Yeah, but I've always been in
 M: ~~Yes, but at least I have some~~ touch with the old identity.

As if there were a roadmap in my mind. Now I feel as if a helicopter picked^s me up and has deposited^s me in a new place *every day*

~~Now everyday when I travel, all I'm doing is leaving this new point of departure and going back to it. The next day~~

~~I travel in another direction. So~~ *It's as if* ~~Instead of traveling I'm now reconnoitering, if we're going to use a metaphor on how I feel about the shift in identity. It's a most peculiar sensation.~~

L: Can you compare it to when you were fasting? ~~When you were fasting, you told me that you were getting new ideas~~ *fasting gave you new ideas also.*
~~about yourself all the time. Your body was changing, being flushed out.~~

M: Yes, but fasting was boring. I never really had anything remotely resembling a spiritual experience when I fasted. When I fasted for twenty days, the most salient event was a terrible attack of the gout.

L: You need forty days.

M: ~~No, that was twenty. Oh, you need forty days?~~ They say
~~something like thirty is the...~~ Twenty miles into a twenty-six mile marathon you hit the wall, ~~they say.~~ *In fasting* ~~So,~~ somewhere about day thirty you go through a set of spiritual changes, but I ~~wasn't interested in that.~~ *oh* I was interested in losing weight. *It worked,* ~~and that worked.~~ But it was boring. ~~Letting my head idle,~~ it was a great rest for my brain. I didn't have a thought for twenty days, except occasionally I ~~think~~ *thought* of food.

L: What was your impetus to quit drinking?

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M: ~~I don't know.~~ I wanted to lose some weight and I saw a four-day diet and I started it. The diet worked. I lost seven pounds in four days and I hadn't had a drink for four days and I felt fairly good. So I thought I won't go back to drink because I'll put the pounds right back on. After about three weeks I realized I liked being without booze. It was probably the first time in thirty years I hadn't been drinking and life was interesting. Certain things were better than they had ever been. Things that were important to me were better than they had ever been. My personal life felt smoother and nicer and richer, oddly enough, to use that awful word. ~~That word that covers a multitude of sins.~~ I kept not drinking and after awhile it got to be truly interesting in terms of ^{durations} ~~numbers~~. I hadn't had a drink for three months, I hadn't had a drink for four months. Now I think I'm probably calculating not to have a drink for a year. And then maybe go back and get drunk once a week or something.

L: I'm interested in ^{how it has affected you} ~~the relationship to~~ writing. You've done some writing since you've stopped drinking.

M: Yes, but mostly editing. Not the kind of writing where you are in it day after day, ^{But I do} ~~slogging away~~. ^{I have} ~~I have~~ the feeling ^{that} I may be writing better than I ever have. I hope I ^{am} ~~am~~. And ^{I am} ~~if this is true~~, if I'm writing better than I ever have before, ^{and have} ~~more energy than I've ever had before~~, then ^{maybe I'm never going} ~~I'm going to~~ maybe ^{to} ~~never~~ go back to drinking.

L: Is there a chance though when you're not drinking and you're writing that you're just going to be on a plateau?

M: It is boring if it is a plateau. You're usually best off when your inner state is the opposite of what you're writing about. If you're writing about events of great violence and soul suffering, you don't have to do it the way Dostoevsky did. You're ^{almost} better off ~~almost~~ if you're writing in a great calm. ~~I've found that. You get psyched up to a certain intensity while you're writing. It comes out of the nature of working when you are writing. Writing is always intense because you're living in the panic that you're going to forget the next thought. That's intense enough.~~ *Of course, there is always a certain intensity while you're writing because*

L: ~~So it's a certain kind of calm because~~ You've also said earlier that when you're depressed you do a lot of good writing.

M: Yes, I like to work in a mild depression and lift out of it just long enough to get the writing done ^{and} Then sink back into that depression. I find that if I have to write for a month or two on a long stretch of a novel ^{and} that I get more done that way ~~than any other way.~~

L: You've written when you've had hangovers, no doubt?

M: No, I can't if the hangover is too bad. I ^{have} never ^{written} wrote on booze. ^{but} ~~I knew when I finish writing, I'd have the reward.~~ ^{that was} The reason I might not be able to do serious writing without drink is that there would be no reward at the end of the day. That's the trickiest part of not drinking. ~~It's~~ fascinating.

L: You did do that famous last sentence of The Deer Park.

M: That was on mescaline.

L: And that was a gift?

M: The sentence? Yes, I have the feeling that it wouldn't have come without having taken the mescaline. Of course it didn't do the book any good. Generations of readers by now have said, "What the hell does he mean by that idiotic last line: 'Sex is time and time is the connection of new circuits?'"

L: It's a line to be pondered. I've pondered that line for years.

M: I suspect it's ~~my heritage~~ ^{physicists} that two hundred years from now, ~~that the equivalent of electronic engineers~~ will discover the nature of time and ~~behold~~ ^{and that} it's the connection of new circuits, ~~and~~ ^{and} At that point they'll take my old moldy grave and levitate it three feet above the ground, shine the equivalent of a few laser beams on it, and everybody will look at their television sets and say, "Oh, yes, that was a very wise old man two hundred years ago."

L: What's mescaline like? I hear that it puts you in a sort of primeval state? People ~~have told me~~ ^{True bliss} I ~~have never had it~~.

M: Primeval is the word. I felt ~~blissful~~ ^{True bliss} for about a half hour. I ~~felt true bliss~~ ^{was} I know what true bliss is. I ~~felt~~ absolutely relaxed, ~~and~~ ^{and} my spirit was rosy ~~and~~ I felt washed in the tenderest waters of sex, Although I wasn't in any kind of sexual act at the time. I felt ~~that~~ ^a wonderful tenderness. ~~It was a nice feeling like after lovemaking has been~~ truly happy. It was of that order but far beyond it. You could hear a chorus of angels' voices, as Collie Munshin says. I love that line of Munshin's: "I hear a chorus of angels' voices, only not full of shit."

L: He was one of your great comic characters.

M: Well, Collie to the side, the thing is ^{that} on mescaline ^{to} ~~that~~ ^{bliss lasted only} ~~was the feeling~~ for a half hour. And then it went away. The worst hangover I've ever had in my life followed. It was so bad I'll never ^{use} ~~go to~~ mescaline again. I don't want that bliss if I have to pay for it with a three-day hangover. I felt as if my liver had been kicked around by a platoon of marines. ~~As if my liver had become a football.~~

L: ^{was in 1955} Is that ^{when} you went to Mexico? ~~and your liver was~~ ~~bothering you badly?~~

M: ~~It was in that period.~~ It was after I came back from Mexico and my liver had been recovering and I guess that ~~the~~ mescaline wiped it out again for a three-day period. ~~It was just the most awful.~~ ^{reprehensible,} Now I hadn't done anything ^{you} understand, but I felt like dirt. I felt the way somebody who's respectable would feel if they had been in a truly sordid orgy and woke up with flashes and images of all the ^{worst} things that ~~had~~ happened. Except in this case, it was soulful in the worst sense of the word. I was full of the damage I had done my soul. ~~I was very aware,~~ I'm not often aware that I have a soul as such, ^{but} ^{of it} I was very aware ^{the} ~~that I did~~ during these three days of ~~the~~ hangover that followed the mescaline. I felt as if I outraged eternal things in myself. ~~I was profoundly depressed.~~ ~~I've never been as depressed in my life.~~

L: When did the line come? ~~The one in The Deep Park?~~

M: Oh, in the beautiful half hour.

L: You were thinking about the book?

M: No, ~~I wasn't thinking about the book.~~ The book had been on my mind and I felt a last line somewhere in the offing and didn't have it. I remember I used the line, something about "the tree of a pencil and the bed of a notebook." I remember reaching over as if ~~I were reaching~~ a great distance and picked up a pencil. That was very difficult. It was very unbeautiful to pick up this pencil. And I picked it up and brought it over. My notebook seemed, to be vulgar about it, like a kingsized bed. And this great tree of a pencil came down. And I wrote each word as if I were discovering how to write. It was so marvelously portentous.

(move to p. 40)

Roll 7 Take 4

L: The architecture looks a little strangely Russian, doesn't it?

M: Actually, if you had mescaline in you, that marvelous church with those two onion balls probably would look like a suburban ranch house in Scarsdale. Or the Taj Mahal?

L: Like the Taj Mahal more likely. I'm assuming that mescaline always improves things.

M: Always improves.

L: Well, it's a scene that Emerson could appreciate, or Thoreau.

Roll 7 Take 5

L: You know Aristotle said that the only sure sign of genius ^{is} ~~was~~ the ability to create great metaphor.

M: ~~I'd say the ability to create great metaphor indicates a~~

~~sound talent, a large talent, but not genius.~~ Although, I ~~don't know.~~ Metaphor is an equation. When you say I see God in the yellow, you're saying God is equal to the yellow in this painting. ~~That's an equation.~~ Maybe great metaphors show the ability to see extraordinary relations in nature. At least they give evidence of a penetration of genius into the mystery. I think a good way to approach the idea of genius is how far into the mystery of things do you penetrate? Certainly one measure of genius is always the difficulty of the achievement. I don't think you can point to a genius who had an easy achievement.

L: Freud might appreciate that thought. A penetration into the unconscious.

M: I haven't thought of Freud today, but you know we are virtually in his bailiwick, aren't we? Just a mile or two from Austria?

Roll 9 Take 1

L: ~~Norman~~, Alfred Kazin has that marvelous metaphor about your style. He said you're as fond of your style as an Italian tenor is of his vocal chords. But if he were talking about a book like ^{the} Executioner's Song, the metaphor wouldn't ^{apply.} ~~work~~ because ~~your style has changed so much~~. You've moved from mode to mode and nobody can seem to find a metaphor to match it.

M: I think on The Executioner's Song ^{he} they could have said, "Mallor is as fond of his style as a marathoner is of his legs."

Roll 8 Take 2

L: Can you think of a metaphor that would somehow capture the enormous number of shifts and changes in your style over thirty years of writing?

M: No.

L: There isn't one to capture it?

M: I don't have one at my finger tips.

L: I don't think any of the critics do either. A great difficulty trying to capture you. As soon as they think they've got you in a metaphor, you're off on something new. Has this got anything to do with your personal life? The changes in your own life? I'm thinking of Picasso's life.

Roll 8 Take 3

L: Norman, you have said many times that you are looking forward to the age of 60. What kind of threshold is that for you?

M: I don't think it is the threshold that appeals to me so much as ^{the fact that} ~~that~~ I hate the sound of 50. I've always had this funny attachment to even numbers and this uneasiness if not detestation of odd numbers. I was happy in my twenties, in my forties, and I look forward being happy in my sixties. I was miserable in my thirties and my fifties have been not quite so exciting as my forties. Probably because I was ~~forty~~ ~~in the sixties and I was fifty in the seventies and the seventies~~ ~~were~~ ^{not} ~~not as~~ exciting or attractive, ~~decade, to me anyway,~~ ^{not} politically sneaking. I look forward to the eighties. ~~I think that may be when I'm in my sixties.~~

Roll 8 Take 3

L: That will be the time when ^{will see} some of the large work you've been working on for years ~~we'll see portions of that in the eighties.~~

M: ~~I don't think~~ I'm ^{not} thinking practically. It's more just a matter of numbers. Haven't you ever noticed how ~~people~~... you hear a telephone number and it's an attractive telephone number or it is a disagreeable telephone number? I've actually said to people once in a great while, "My, you have a nice telephone number." I'm not at all a numerologist or anything of that sort; I tend to distrust numerologists much more than astrologists.

L: ^{Does} The idea of being 62 ~~whenever it will be~~ ^{have} some appeal?

M: Certain numbers appeal to me more than others. 64 is a better number to me than 62. I think it comes from childhood when you're learning the multiplication table and certain combinations had a certain beauty to them. 8 times 8 is 64; that's rather nice. 2 times 2 times 2 makes 8. Children, long before they realize such functions as exponentiality, have a sense of it already. The sense there is something mysterious about the number 2. 2 times 2 is 4 times 2 is 8 times 2 is 16 and so forth. They sense that evens are built on 2. You can go into it more and more and more. I never cared to. I always felt, leave numbers alone. But they do have their attractions and their miseries for me. I look forward to being sixty. I detested becoming fifty.

L: The thought of retirement from ^{an} active life of writing is not something you're considering?

M: I don't know if I can ever retire. I've got nine children and unless one of them strikes it rich and proves tremendously generous as far as taking care not only of me and my wife, but also ~~starts taking care of~~ all the other kids, it seems to me I'm going to go on working for the next twenty years.

L: There's no particular thing you want to do when you are sixty? Take a trip around the world? Go to three world series in three years or something like that?

M: I think I'd like to have six months of lying fallow and unwinding at some point ~~a long the way~~. ~~Because the one~~ trouble with writing year after year after year ~~is you try~~ ~~to keep anything dogged from getting into your style. Maybe~~ ~~you succeed and maybe you don't, but an awful lot that's~~ dogged gets into your nervous system. ~~So I feel much more~~ ~~like a business executive at this point, so far as my nerves~~ ~~go, than a writer. When I was younger~~ The beauty of being a *Young* ~~writer is~~ ^{that} ~~you can indulge~~ ^{yourself} ~~long moods, soulful moods.~~ You can wander into the recesses of yourself. You can search out the corners of your heart, to be protund about it. Now, everything is executive. It's as if I've done my exploring and *now* all I want to do is get the work out now. I remember talking with Henry Kissinger and he said ~~something I didn't forget~~. "You know, Mailer, I haven't really had a new idea since I've been working in Washington. I worked on all the ideas I had until I came here. Now I'm working too hard and I have no ideas." I thought, well that's close to my life. ~~I don't~~ ^{maybe} ~~have new ideas, essentially.~~ I'm still working on all the

ideas I mined ~~for myself~~ when I was in my thirties and ~~in~~
~~my~~ forties. Now I can use them. I had no trouble with The
Executioner's Song, for instance, because I thought out all
 those things. The exploration that Gilmore was making in
 his life was ^{Similar to the} ~~one~~ ^{that} I had made ~~in parallel~~ in mine. So I didn't
 have to stop and say, "Is this man right or wrong?" As I
 came across his thoughts in his letters, I'd say to myself,
 "yes, I understand that. I had thoughts much like that a
 few years ago." ^{The same is how I} ~~When I work on~~ my novel about Egypt, ~~it isn't~~
~~as if I have to discover a great deal for myself. It's more~~
~~a matter of~~ ^{Q said,} when I started reading about Egypt, [^] "My Lord, there
 are so many ways in which those people think the way I ~~think~~ ^{do}
 I've got to go back ~~to them~~ and write about them." In ~~that~~
~~sense~~ ^{So} [^] I would like six months to just wander around, to sit
 in the sun, to think, to see if I can still think. I'm really
 a machine of production ~~by~~ now. ~~And~~ ^{That's} the only thing
 I resent in my life. The rest of it, well, I rather like the
 way things have turned out. Providence, so-called, has not
 been too unjust to me.

L: Would you say that your writing is less of an explora-
 tion then it used to be?

M: Yes, it's less of an exploration. It is more of an
 occupation of territories I reconnoitered years ago. Twenty
 years ago my mind was so active, I couldn't keep up with it.
 I had perceptions of all sorts, of all kinds of endeavor. I
 think, not to compare myself, but I think ^{that the same thing} ~~with Zola the same~~
~~happened to Zola.~~ ^{said that} ~~occurred to him.~~ He spoke about when he was young his thoughts
 would come so quickly that his hand could not keep up with

them ~~as he wrote~~. As he grew older the thoughts slowed down, but that was all right, ^{because} ~~now his hand could~~ ^{match their speed} ~~write as~~ fast as he thought and it was the perfect rate. Something of the same sort has happened to me. ~~Because I did~~ ^{had} a lot of ~~ideas~~ ^{ideas} thinking when I was younger, ~~I now take many of these ideas~~ ^{and now I'm} and develop ^{ing} them, but ^{ing} leaves on the bare branches. It's satisfying, but it is not quite as heady and thrilling as ^{it} once ~~it~~ was. I'm not as interesting to myself as I used to be.

L: What about the need for new ideas, ^{thought?} ~~thought?~~ Do you still feel ~~that~~ ^a thirst for ~~new ideas?~~ ^{ideas?}

M: No, I don't. Because I've had so many new ideas over the years. I don't speak vaingloriously here, it's just that I had that kind of head. Not that every new idea I had was good, but I used to have the kind of head that if twenty-five new ideas didn't pop into my head a day, it was an odd day. I was not up to myself. Now very often days will go by ^{before} ~~and~~ I ~~come~~ have a new idea.

L: But you've got the card file of all the old ideas to go back to.

M: Well, I live with all the old ideas. Part of it is natural, I mean I don't brood about it because I think that in a way those ideas were so startling when they first came to me that I had to inhabit them. ~~I had to live with them.~~ I had to grow up with them. Maybe I'm bragging, but I think I have a coherent philosophy. I think we could start talking about almost anything and before we were done, ~~I think, sometimes superficially,~~ ^{the subject at hand, something} but nonetheless, I think I could connect ~~anything I'm talking~~ ^{with} ~~superficially about to~~ almost anything else in my universe.

L: It almost sounds like the history of an institution.

M: Well, that was an unkind cut, Mike. No, I think anyone who tries to build a coherent philosophy ~~for themselves~~ goes through that sort of intellectual, I won't say intellectual journey, but that sort of construction, ~~let's say~~ of an institutional edifice.

L: Are your former books presences in your past that you ~~can~~ refer back to? In this book you conquered this territory; ^{that} in ^{new ground!} this book you reconnoitered here, and they ~~are~~ sort of guideposts to look back on, to refer to?

M: I must say that I never think a territory is something that I conquered. ~~I think rather that that's the place where I did my best on that theme.~~ I'm not satisfied with any of my books. I think they all could have been considerably better ^{than they are.} ~~That goes for every last one of them. I look back with a certain satisfaction.~~ I feel that I've written a number of good books and that maybe a few of them are very good. ^{But} I don't think I've yet come anywhere near writing a great book. I'm not ~~sure I'm~~ going to be altogether satisfied ~~unless I do so by my own lights.~~ ^{That} unless I'm able to say at the end of my career, "Oh, yes, you finally did bring one off to your own satisfaction."

L: The great book that you hope to write, will that require some new ideas or are you going to be able to use the old ones, the old system, the old philosophy?

M: If I can bring off this three-part novel I'm talking about, I will have to get into places I've never been before. And I'll

have to come up with new ideas. I'll have to be bigger and better than I've ever been before. So it is not at all certain to me that I can bring ^{it} off ~~this three-part novel~~. I think I'll be able to, but I'm not laying odds ^{yet?} ~~on it~~. It's ^{still} an even money bet.

L: You're off to a hell of a good start.

M: With the Egyptian novel? I hope I'm off to a hell of a good start. Practically no one has seen the book, you know.

L: No, but I've heard Bob Lucid ^{spoke of it} and I've heard about ^{two readings} ~~your~~ ~~book~~ ~~given and it seems that~~ ~~reading and everybody says~~ it's an amazing book.

M: Well, ~~it's amazing, I mean~~ chapter for chapter there is amazing stuff in it. If you read a chapter here or a chapter there, ~~that I would pull out~~, you would say, "Wow." But the question is whether it will hold up. It's one thing to write wonderful chapters but ~~with~~ the book as a whole ^{is} ~~as~~ something ^{else} ~~and will it also be~~. It's not enough for a great book to have great writing. A great book finally has to live in other people's flesh ~~and minds and~~ it has to change them. When I think of great books, I think of books that have changed my life.)

L: You're experienced enough and professional enough as a writer to know the difference between the good emotion you feel when you finish writing something and the emotion of satisfaction you're going to feel five years later when you look back ~~on it~~.

M: This book is absolutely beyond my measure of anticipation. One, I don't know if I'm going to be able ~~ever~~ to bring it off.

I think I'll finish the Egyptian novel because I'm two-thirds through it. I've then got a novel I want to do about a space ship in the future, maybe a century or two from now, three centuries from now, and I'm appalled at the difficulties of the task. I'm going to have to sit down and become somewhat familiar with science fiction, which I've never read, ^{and} I'm going to have to get up on the most advanced ³⁰astrophysics, ~~that we have available now.~~ ~~I know~~ It will be ~~a~~ difficult study for me because I'm not smart that way at all any longer, even though I did study engineering ~~ones~~ in college. ~~But~~ then I'm going to have to get up on all that stuff, knowing ~~that I is will going to be,~~ that I'll have to throw it away after I absorb it. The ~~the~~ only value it ~~had~~ ^{will have} for my novel is that the narrator ~~of that novel would have to~~ ^{will} say at ~~a certain~~ ^{some} point, "Yes, back in the 20th century they believed this and ~~that~~ ^{were} this ~~was~~ true about the universe. How wrong they were!" So ~~that book is~~ ^{It's} going to ^{be} staggeringly difficult to write something that will be serious ~~in that book~~ and at the same time won't be just absurd to our modern mind. ^{The presumptuousness of trying to write such a} ~~It's going to be in my~~ ~~mind as the writer.~~ Then, ~~of course,~~ The third book, which I look forward to, ~~if I ever get to it,~~ will be contemporary. ~~That will have all the demands of writing a modern novel, which is no small task.~~ So we'll see. There is nothing automatic or routine about these books.

L: Will your short story "The Last Night" have any influence on the later novel? ~~That was such a fine short story.~~ ^{That's shrewd of you.}
 M: ^A Yes, it's going to be in the second novel. But I'm not

telling you how. ^{It's} That's not going to be the story of the second novel, it's just going to be in the second novel. I've got a couple of tricks up my sleeve that I can't talk about, ~~or~~ ways of tying together the Egyptian novel, the novel of the spaceship in the future and the contemporary novel. ~~So~~ They will ~~all truly~~ ^{be} be three parts of the same novel, But in the way a tree might grow and have three trunks growing out of a common root.

L: Wilfred Sheed said you were a child prodigy of mathematics and I know you have a degree in Aeronautical Engineering. It shouldn't be too great a leap for you to...

M: When did Sheed say I was a child prodigy in mathematics?

L: When he wrote to you to ask you what you would like to be if you weren't a writer.

M: And what did I say?

L: You said you wanted to be a lazy lover with a lot of women at your command.

M: And he said then that I was a mathematical ...?

L: He said you were a child prodigy of mathematics.

M: Well, I'm not all together impressed with Sheed's accuracy. And if that is an example of it, his remark is not well-founded. I used to get "A's" in mathematics, but that doesn't make ^{me} ~~you~~ a child prodigy. In fact, in any math class of thirty men, there were always three or four who were better than me. He said sadly.

L: Nevertheless, ~~I think~~ you were able to master the mechanics of the space flight. I think your explanation of how the

moon shot worked is as good as anything I've ever read on the subject.
Better than the astronauts' explanation.

M: Yes, but that doesn't make me a mathematical prodigy.
It just means that for one month in my life I was good at
exposition.

(2066 winds)

Roll 9 Take 1 "The Golden Bear"--Berchtoldsgaden (Nov 19)

L: I ~~saw you on~~ Tom Synder^{show} recently ~~this talk show~~. You said that you never questioned your instincts, ^{and that} writers are a little bit like athletes; they're spontaneous. I've got two questions. One, why do you have such great faith in your instincts and your unconscious? I'm ~~assuming they're~~ ~~connected~~. And number two, aren't athletes a little less spontaneous than that? I mean, they are really very disciplined people.

M: Well, I make remarks off the top of my head that have a kernel of truth in them. And then I have to think about them afterwards. So, if I said I always followed my instincts, what I meant was, ^{me,} that I usually follow my instincts; ~~for one,~~ and two, I was talking about a certain kind of instinct. I was talking about the instinct I have while writing a book.

I think what I said was ^{that} when it comes to decide which book I'm going to write, I always follow my instincts. Not that I always follow my instincts in every last thing I ever do, because ~~like everyone else~~, if I did ~~that~~ I would end up in jail. ~~I think with athletes what you have is~~ ~~you have a~~ ^{a small} little drama, ~~which is~~ ^{that} athletes tend to be people who can trust their instincts for a long time--at least the instincts of their body. ^{When} ~~And the moment~~ they get to the point where they can't thrust their instincts, ~~in other words when they have~~ followed their deepest instinct and they lose the game, they're in a lot of trouble. I think athletes first come into contact with despair when their instincts betray them. So with all those amendments, I'll still support the remark.

L: I'm assuming again that your instincts are connected to your unconscious in some way. Why can't the unconscious be as error prone as the conscious?

M: Oh, well it is probably part of my philosophy, ~~such as~~
~~it is. Which is that I think that the ...~~ You know the famous story of Shelley. He rushed up to a mother and he seized a two-month old infant out of her arms and he held up the infant and he said, "Babe, speak. Reveal your immortal truths!" In other words, he believed that the infant was born knowing everything, and like Plato--^{Shelley} he was a great Platonist at that point, ~~was Shelley~~ he believed that the education you received when you are young obfuscates the instinctive knowledge with which you are born. And that you then spend the rest of your life trying to unmake that education. I think I subscribe to that generally. I think we're born with a profound appreciation of the universe and we lose it in ~~our early~~ the first two weeks, the first two months, or the first two years of our life ~~we lose it~~. Then we spend the rest of our lives trying to gain it back. To the degree ~~we've lost it by the time we're six years old, the school system makes certain that we lose it all over again. And I don't think this is so evil. It is rather in the nature of things. It was intended that way. We're supposed to lose it and regain it. Every religious tale that you have sooner or later has the theme of the fall and the redemption. I think it is impossible to conceive of any achievement of knowledge without that fall. Because if knowledge is something~~
~~And they when~~
~~we've lost it by the time we're six years old, the school system makes certain that we lose it all over again. And I don't think this is so evil. It is rather in the nature of things. It was intended that way. We're supposed to lose it and regain it. Every religious tale that you have sooner or later has the theme of the fall and the redemption. I think it is impossible to conceive of any achievement of knowledge without that fall. Because if knowledge is something~~
~~we can't conceive of~~

that we ~~merely receive~~ by opening ourselves to it, at least in the West. ~~Let's say, we can't conceive of that. And we all find there is, or most of us find~~ ^{Westerners} something repellent about Hindu philosophy. ~~And what is repellent about it is~~ the idea that you receive wisdom without making a Faustian effort. The idea that the more you relax, the more you ^{get} give yourself ^{in tune with} ~~into~~ the universe, the more passive you ~~can~~ become, the closer you will come to the secrets of existence, is profoundly repellent to the Western mind. We feel that you crack the kernel of real secrets by smashing the nut, you know. That's the way we want it. ~~It's what we're built to do.~~

L: Like Melville peeling away the layers of the onion to get the ~~inner~~ ⁱⁿ most center, or Ahab trying to strike ^{through the mask,} ~~at the center.~~

M: Well, if you're going to peel the layers of the onion, we secretly believe that it helps if you cut off a finger or two ~~while peeling the onion.~~ But you say why do I trust my instincts? Because I think I've had a charmed life in one respect. ~~Which is~~ I never had to think about earning a living until the last ten or fifteen years. From the time I was twenty-five, ^{for} I knew I was going to be a writer ~~or thought I was probably going to be a writer~~ the rest of my life, and so I started to form a habit of consulting my instincts all the time. Looking for them, they hide. ~~The instinct is often~~ like a toad ~~hiding~~ under a stone. You have to know which stone to look for in the garden. I was fortunate to develop habits that most people don't have the leisure to develop. I mean, one thing you can count on is that when you have a

nine-to-five job, you can't develop much in the way of your instincts because ~~that's~~ ^{a job is a} continuation of that education that's burying the instincts.

L: If you had that advantage as a young man of having enough money coming in, at the same time you had what some people call "the curse of being labeled with early promise." Cyril Connolly once said that telling a young writer he's got promise is like a medieval hangman who puts the noose around your neck, pushes you off the trestle and then jumps on your back. You had some struggles with that whole thing, didn't you? You were twenty-five and ...

M: To have early success is obviously a mixed blessing. I went through the bends. I think one reason I've always been interested in prize fighters is that, ~~if I were to take a prize fighter~~ ^{their experience and} I find an analogy between ~~my own experience~~ ^{and the experience of certain kinds of prize fighters}. Occasionally you find a prize fighter--Leon Spinks--a young prize fighter who ^{wins a lucky fight} before he knows whether he can really fight ~~or not~~, ~~wins a lucky fight or two and, lo and behold~~ He's champ. And he doesn't really know if he can fight. That's terrifying. That happened to me ^{after} ~~with~~ The Naked and the Dead. I can understand what Spinks went through ^{afterward}. I mean all that idiotic behavior after he won the championship and beat Ali came from the fact that he wasn't ready for it ~~at all~~ and he didn't know whether he was still ~~a gym fighter or~~ a main-event fighter in a small club or champion of the world. And so he lost all sense of who he was ~~and~~ ^{It's very important if}

~~If~~
 If you don't have an identity, it's very important to have sound and established elements that you can refer to. ~~You know,~~
 If you say to yourself, "I'm heavyweight champion of the world," it helps if you ^{can} say to yourself "Yes, and I also beat Joe Frazier, George Foreman and twenty-two other guys." Spinks couldn't say that. ^{All} He could say ^{is} "I beat ^U Muhammad Ali because I am very good," or "I beat ^U Muhammad Ali because he is very old." That creates a double sense of identity. ~~That means that every~~
 time you ^{he had} have a thought ~~you gotta~~ ^{he had to} refer ^{it} to two places. ~~And~~
 Spinks as champion had to say to himself, "They say ~~that to~~ ^{me} ~~me~~ because I'm magnificent; ^{or} they ~~say that to~~ ^{praise} me because they're laughing at me and I'm not magnificent, I'm a false champion."
~~Such uncertainty~~
~~So that~~ ^{Such uncertainty} creates great disturbance, ~~because you might as that~~
 your psychic economy is not working properly.

D: Are you saying then that you felt after writing The Naked and the Dead, and the success that that brought, that you were a false champion?

M: Yea, oh sure. I mean I walked around saying to myself do I really have as much talent as they say I do or was it a fluke and that I do not really have that talent at all? The Naked and the Dead, after all, was a book that was tremendously influenced by other writers, by Hemingway, by Farrell, by Dos Passos. Without those three writers I never could have written The Naked and the Dead. And Dreiser, I could name eight writers it was influenced by. It was written in all their styles and I knew it. I felt very uncomfortable with the book. I felt fame has been handed to me, I don't deserve it. I felt terrible

about it in other ways because I was not a particularly good soldier. If you took a hundred guys in an outfit, you'd probably list me as the 70th or 80th from the best soldier.

Roll 9 Take 2

D: ~~Going back to the comparison you made with Spinks being a champion without having fought a lot of fights—a false~~
~~champion.~~ You mean that after having so much success with The Naked and the Dead, ~~23 years old writing the novel, becoming so successful,~~ that you felt you were a false champion?

M: Well I felt two ways at once. On the one hand I believed my reviews, on the other hand I felt that they weren't accurate at all. I knew that The Naked and the Dead had been influenced by a great many writers. By Hemingway, by Farrell, by Steinbeck, by Tolstoy, by Thomas Wolfe, by Dreiser, very much by Dos Passos. And I knew ^{that} in a certain sense that it was not my own book, that all these literary influences had flowed through me and that I had had the experience of being at war and I had written this book. And to top it all, I hadn't been a very good soldier. If you pick a company, in my case a ^{Cavalry} ~~calvary~~ troop, of a hundred men, maybe there were 75 or 80 soldiers who were better than me, ~~before you got to me in terms of~~ ability ^{as a soldier}. So I felt I was a bit of an imposter. On the other hand, I had all these wonderful reviews and also had the experience of writing the book and there were times when I thought it was the greatest book written since War and Peace. Given all that, I carried two views of myself. The

same thing happened to Spinks. Spinks had two views of himself. One, he was the best fighter in the world, and the other, he didn't really know how to fight. ~~It was all a fluke. Either he beat Mohammad Ali the great champion or Mohammad Ali the old man.~~ And so when anyone gave a compliment to Spinks, when anyone said "You're a great fighter," he had to have two halves of his mind to receive it. One half said to himself "You're wonderful," and the other half said "These people are lying to you." Now that's the nature of obsession. Obsession is when we feel two ways about one question. ^{For instance,} ~~We speak of a young girl and say she is obsessed with her love affair because~~ ^{when} ~~she doesn't know if she loves or hates the man or she doesn't know whether the man loves or hates her.~~ When we don't know if the answer to a question is either A or Z, we become obsessed, particularly if the question is important to us. We can hardly live because we keep coming back to this terrible imponderable. Do we go directly to the left or do we go directly to the right? As a result, we can't move. Obsessions tend to paralyze people.

Roll 10 Take 1

L: Norman, you were talking about the nature of obsession, the difficulties of being a young writer. You were not sure whether to listen to your critics or to that harsh inner voice that says maybe you were over-praised. Could it be that all that good criticism ^{in praise} you received ^{for} ~~from~~ ^ψ ~~Naked~~ ~~that got you~~ started in some large psychic, in some large cosmic way, is

compensation for some of the ~~bad~~ cheap shots that people took at you in later years? Some kind of balance there?

M: ~~Yeah, but I don't...~~ Really If I have one virtue that I claim, ~~to-by-now~~, it's that I don't feel sorry for myself. There were years when I did. But I think on balance I think I had it fairly good. You know that early success was not one of the things I would say was good. But it was interesting. ~~And it~~ forced me to grow and change in ways I never would if I hadn't had it. ~~So that~~ my life in those years consisted of a series of forced marches. I had to take my personality and move it, not from A to B as most of us do when we're twenty-five, I had to move from A to, let's say, E or F in a year, and in the following year I had to be at L, let's say.

L: But it seemed like a curse at the time.

M: At the time it seemed like a curse. I don't think there were any years in which my loins felt emptier or [#]older than during those years from twenty-five to thirty. I felt like an old man during that period, ~~because I was traveling on these~~. I couldn't make a move without clashing my gears. I couldn't begin to roll without moving on clouds of anxiety.

L: Barbary Shore is . . .

M: Barbary Shore is a reflection of the intense anxiety and paranoia I felt in those years. To go back to Spinks. You see the reason he was so crazy and did all the things he did was because he was working off two systems. To go back again to the young girl who doesn't know whether she loves or hates

her man. It's terribly exhausting. Every woman understands that ~~feeling to be~~ going in two directions at once is intolerable, ^I and wears one out. ~~The advantage of it,~~ The reason why I say it was terrible at the ^{same} time ~~and~~ ^{was} gave ^{from} a great advantage to ~~me~~, is that I began to realize that all the psychology texts had very little to offer. I was saved, I think, ^{from} the anguish of those young writers who begin to write and then they say, "Oh God, there's Sigmund Freud. What am I going to do with Sigmund Freud? I can't get through Sigmund Freud." You know, the thing that has been the curse of practically every southern writer in America is that they have too much respect for Freud. "There's that New York where Sigmund Freud visited and lived. There's that great big wall of the impenetrable. Those people are too smart for me." You see, what I knew at an early age ^{was psychology} was that they weren't that smart. Nobody knew what it was all about ^{because} nobody had an experience remotely like mine.

L: You've compared yourself to Spinks. I've ~~also heard~~ you say in an interview, you compared yourself to ~~you~~ ^{have} ~~also~~ ^{also} called yourself the "Ezzard Charles of literature" which I thought you ~~were being~~ ^{was} enormously modest, ~~as a later writer...~~

M: No, I'd still say that. You know, when you ^{consider} ~~compare~~ the size, the true stature of Hemingway and Faulkner ^{and} you take writers like Bellow and Cheever and Undike and myself and... ~~writers let's say, you know~~ I can name eight or ten writers today ^{who} you certain people would say is the best writer in America. John Barth, Bernard Malamud, ~~a lot of people you could name~~, Pynchon, Nelson Algren, you can go through the list. Name

after name. You find that out of ~~twenty~~ ^{all of} people, ~~none of~~ them, myself
~~included, I don't~~ begin to have, ~~myself included~~, the stature of Hemingway or
 Faulkner. So in that sense, I'd say ~~that~~ ^{to} anyone who says I'm
 the most important writer in America today, I'd say, if I am,
 I'm still the Ezzard Charles of the heavy-weight division.

L: You don't think that Hemingway's reputation has slipped
 in the last ten years? ^{What do you} People ^{begin} to take a close look at
 his writing and yours and Iynchon's and Bellow? You, Pynchon
and Bellow are the three I hear. I don't hear Nelson Algren
 named as one of the best American writers. I hear you, Iynchon
 and Bellow. ~~Those are the names I hear.~~

M: Well, I don't know. We're all vastly more complex than
 Hemingway. But I ^{have to} ~~got to~~ tell you that after I wrote The Ex-
ecutioner's Song, I went back and ~~I~~ looked at Hemingway again.
^{Be} Cause now I was writing in a simple style. ~~And that style is~~
~~remarkable.~~ And the older I get, the more I know about writ-
 ing, the more remarkable Hemingway's style seems to me. I
 mean I know his flaws inside out. I've loved and hated him
 as if he were my own father for years. There is so much
 he did for one and there was so much he didn't do. Truly, the
 relationship you have to him is one of a father. "Ernest,
 how could you do what you did to us? How could you leave
 us in the lurch?" is the feeling that ^{I and} ~~not only I had but~~ so
 many writers had towards him. But he is a remarkable writer.
 His sense of the English language, ~~I'd say~~ is virtually primi-
 tive in its power to evoke scenes and mood and to stir the
 senses.

L: What do you think he would think of Executioner's Song?

M: What would he think? He'd read it and hate it and say "That is bad Hemingway!" He'd loathe that book. But you know he was a prick, let's face it.

G (Gebhard): If we were to compare Ali ~~as a fighter~~ with an author, Ali's an exception because he ~~started out fighting~~ and worked his way up to be a good fighter. ^{He's} That's an exception if ~~you compare it to a writer~~ because most of ~~the~~ writers start off with a very good novel, ~~they get well known,~~ for instance Canote writing In Cold Blood. Then they ~~get bad~~ ^{of} ~~get worse~~ and have difficulties. So Ali wouldn't be a comparison to authors, I think. Ali always worked up step ^{by} step to step until he got old. I ~~don't know, did he have~~ trouble losing his fights because he got old or because he got foolish?

M: No, actually I don't agree with your ~~example at all~~ ^(S) Gebhard, ~~because Ali actually~~ is very much like Hemingway. ~~if you're going to look for a parallel~~ First of all, ^{they} he ^{both} ~~dominated his division entirely~~ ^{their}. Second, ~~of all~~, Hemingway ^{also} ~~put in~~ ^{had} a considerable apprenticeship. He didn't just become famous. He ~~did~~ put in a number of years writing short stories and working on newspapers. ^{He didn't have} ~~So he had to get~~ a tremendous amount of experience as a writer before he became prominent, ^{And} but more than people realize. Ali had a number of fights ^{although he} ~~but not that many~~ before he was champion, ^{Ali} was a young

champion. I think he was something like twenty or twenty-one when he became champion. He hadn't really beaten that many good people when he beat Sonny Liston. He went into that fight as a seven or eight-to-one underdog. And then, like

Hemingway, he remained champion for a long, long time, and he kept dominating his division. Very much like Hemingway,

very vain ^{the way} ~~like~~ Hemingway was vain. Cannot bear competition,

Ali ^{could not} ~~could not~~ bear ^C the idea that anyone around could be remotely as good as he is. No, I think there is a wonderful study that could be made about the similarities between Ernest Hemingway and Mohammad Ali. They come out of that same American urgency to be the only planet in existence. To be the sun. It goes right back to Egypt. You know in Egypt life ^{was} ~~is~~ very simple finally. There were a thousand gods but there was only one sun.

G: There are exceptions then. Hemingway on one side and Ali on the other. If you go back to Spinks, ~~now~~ ^{then} he won a very important fight at the beginning and ~~had these~~ ^{had} difficulties. Ali came up gradually. ~~is~~ ^{is} that incorrect?

M: Ali came up quickly, like Hemingway, ~~not that quickly~~ ^{but} ~~not as quickly as Spinks, at all.~~ Ali was prepared to be champion when he became champion. He was the best fighter around when he became champion.

L: So was Hemingway.

M: Hemingway ~~was the best writer around when he had that~~ ^{gained} tremendous reknown. They were alike in other ways. They hated anyone that was near them. Hemingway's love for Scott Fitzgerald diminished rapidly once he became the number one man. Because Fitzgerald was too good.

L: What about the later career? I mean, Ali's later career isn't quite as brilliant as his early career. Isn't the something true of Hemingway?

M: That's ~~Roughly~~ true. Ali's later career was ^{a bit} more brilliant, ~~you might say~~, than Hemingway's. Because Ali did something which Hemingway never quite did. When Ali got old he still won a couple of great fights. Ali beat Foreman when he was already over the hill. Foreman was ~~potentially~~ a more frightening and awesome fighter than Ali ~~was at the point~~ ^{when} they met. But Ali used such artistry that ~~finally~~ he knocked Foreman out. It's one of the great fights of all time because the weaker man won. He won through vast skill and guile and artistry.

L: Hemingway had a lot of skill and guile at the end, but he didn't make the big knock-out, to use that metaphor, in his later books.

M: No, he did not.

L: I think you said once that one of the best things Hemingway wrote in his later career was the Paris Review interview.

M: Yes, that was the best thing. That and maybe Moveable Feast.

L: Because The Old Man and the Sea

M: The Old Man and the Sea was not a good book. ~~I don't think.~~

D: I'd like to go back to The Naked and the Dead. ~~We talked about being a false champion. I remember in an interview once you were twenty-three years old when you started that book, you were twenty-five when it was published and it was a~~

best seller, ~~and~~ ^{once} you ~~had~~ said something ^{about Naked that} I thought was quite interesting, and that is that you ~~had never realized how much~~ you knew. After looking at that book and reading it again, you were surprised at how much you knew. For me I don't think anyone can deny ~~in terms of style~~ the brilliance of Hemingway's style. But Hemingway ~~could~~ never ^{write} a book like ^{the} Naked and the Dead in which you ~~were~~ talking about fascism coming to America, technology and the ^{other large} kinds of themes ~~that you have dealt with later.~~ ^{in the past twenty-five, thirty years.}

M: I didn't say Hemingway was brighter than I was. I just said his style is better. That he has a greater style.

D: But that's not the same as saying his talent is ^{greater?} ~~better?~~

M: Well, I think it is. You know you can have actors who can do wonderful things. They can be marvelous character actors like Paul Muni who can play just about any part on earth. Then you get someone like Monroe who in the technical sense has a very small talent. But she can come out and hold a little mandolin in her hand and play a little ditty and wonderful things happen to people. Let's take an example that people would argue about less. I would guess that in the technical sense ~~there were limitations to Charley Chaplin~~ ^{some limitations} ~~had~~ I think ^{probably} that there are any number of actors who can do a creditable imitation of Chaplin and also play fifty roles that Chaplin could never go near. And yet we would never argue that they were greater actors than Chaplin. Even though they might give you ninety-five percent of Chaplin. Chaplin plucked a nerve in us that very few artists could reach.

There's almost never any argument about who the great artists are, ~~Because~~ ⁵ what they do is so profound you can't argue with it.

L: Dwight Macdonald says that Charlin couldn't do the long film, but he was great with those shorter films.

M: Well, I think Monsieur Verdoux is quite a film.

L: That's the only exception.

M: That's quite an exception.

(3/23 words)

Roll 11, 12, 13 & 14 University Lecture Hall (Nov 20)

Introduction by Davis (Quote from Mailer's "The White Negro")

D: "Probably, we will never be able to determine the psychic havoc of the concentration camps and the atom bomb upon the unconscious mind of almost everyone alive in these years. For the first time in civilized history, perhaps for the first time in all of history, we have been forced to live with the suppressed knowledge that the smallest facets of our personality or the most minor projection of our ideas, or indeed the absence of ideas and the absence of personality could mean equally well that we might still be doomed to die as a cipher in some vast statistical operation in which our teeth would be counted, and our hair would be saved, but our death itself would be unknown, unhonored, and unremarked, a death which could not follow with dignity as a possible consequence to serious actions we had chosen, but rather a death by deus ex machina in a gas chamber or a radioactive city;...

The Second World War presented a mirror to the human condition which blinded anyone who looked into it. For if tens of millions were killed in concentration camps out of the inexorable agonies and contractions of super-states founded upon the always insoluble contradictions of injustice, one was then obliged also to see that no matter how crippled and perverted an image of man was the society he had created, it was nonetheless his creation, his collective creation (at least his collective creation from the past), and if society was so murderous, then who could ignore the most hideous of

(starts next page)

questions about his own nature?"

And George Steiner has written: "Either a literature is about these things or it is about nothing. Literature to be taken seriously must recognize the hideous enlargement in the range of possible experience. Very few writers have had the nerve or insight to look at the new manner of man. Norman Mailer is among the honest men. He strives to know at the peril of moral chaos what it is that has been loosed upon the world and whether art can cope with it." With that I would like to introduce Norman Mailer and ask him if he'd care to make a few comments about what I just said. Thank you.

M: I'm not sure I'm ready to comment on those two passages, because it's been so long since I wrote one and I never encountered the other by George Steiner. And they're each sufficiently knotty to give me much pause for thought. Maybe by the end of the hour, I'll comment on them after I'm feeling a little more as if I've come out of the cold.

S (~~Student~~): Will you answer any kind of question?

M: I'll listen to any kind of question. I may not answer it. I promise not to take offense at an offensive question. But I may not reply. I may say, "Next Question." What's your question?

S: Are you Jewish?

M: Yes.

S: You are Jewish. ~~Cause interestingly enough...~~ ^{politician} ~~the~~ what kind of role does the Jewish community play in the United States? today? ~~And what's the influence on American politics?~~

M: The Jewish community is no more a monolithic community than, let's say, the German community is all of one piece.

There is a powerful Jewish political group in America just as there is a powerful Irish political group, powerful Italian political group, & powerful Protestant political group in America. In American there ^{are} any number of powerful political groups and they form alliances and they go to war with one another. Generally speaking, the Jewish people in America have been more associated with the Democratic Party than the Republican Party. However, in the last election a great many of them supported Reagan. The Jews are simply not a simple force in American life that moves in on^e direction. But what is back of your question? What is your opinion?

S: I think after the election of Reagan that Israel's military forces might be strengthened by the election of Reagan.

And a new movement might come in American politics because I think that the American Jews do have some influence not only in financial aspects but also cultural aspects.

M: The Jews have a great deal of influence on American policy, ~~in many ways~~. Politicians in America are notoriously fearful about insulting the Jews. Because the Jews are very sensitive about being insulted, ~~and~~ they tend to organize around that principle. However, I don't find myself all together sympathetic to that. ~~Because~~ I don't think that anti- anti-Semitism is a political position. ~~In other words~~, among ~~the~~ Jews we often mock Jews who are too patriotic as Jews. We say that *their* the only idea ^{is} ~~that they have in their minds is to say~~, "Is this

good for the Jews?" Now, I'm never interested in anyone who is too self-consciously ethnic. I think that any people who become too proud, too self-centered, too concerned with own special qualities also tend to destroy their ability to reason subtly. That happened to the German people at a period we all know about. It's in danger of happening to the Jewish people. It is happening to the black people. ~~There is a tendency in the twentieth century because of the~~ you might say ~~The overall tendency of the twentieth century is to homogenize every-~~ thing, to make everyone like everyone else, to make men and women like each other, to make countries like each other ~~because of the vast need of the technological society.~~ The technological society works best if every human alive is not a separate nationality and separate sex, but instead is a human unit, you see, which could fit into the computer. The computer much prefers single units rather than double units ~~if I may speak in that fashion.~~ In other words, if the computer has to deal with men and women, that is twice as difficult as if the computer has to deal with human units. ~~So there is an overall tendency in the twentieth century for everything to fit into the same mold.~~ For instance, all the new buildings in Munich look like all the new buildings in Dallas. Every airport in the world looks like every other airport in the world and they all look atrocious. ~~counter to~~ ^{this} ~~that is this~~ ^{+ to} other tendency ^{of} in people to become very ethnic, to insist on their own individuality, their own specialty. That's fine as an antidote to the world-wide spread of technology, but in turn the risk is, as I say, to destroy the

ability to think subtly. Because one is always too concerned:
~~"Is this good for the blacks?" say the blacks to themselves,~~
 "Is this good for the Jews?" say the Jews to themselves. "Is
 this good for the Germans?" say the Germans to themselves.
 And I think it is a false way of thinking.

S: (female): Why do you write? Why did you start to write?

M: Why do I write? Why did I start to write? It was the
 only thing I was good at. And I wanted to become more attrac-
 tive to girls. Generally, you do something because you are good
 at it. All through my adolescence I kept looking for some-
 thing I might be good at. I used to cry piteously to any girl
 that would listen. I would say, "I'm just not good at anything.
 I'm average," I'd say. ~~"I want to be good at something."~~
 And then, lo and behold, in my first year at college, I dis-
 covered that writing was an exciting pursuit ~~for me~~. It was
~~an engaging activity~~. It seemed to me that I might even be
 good at it. So I went at it. The conclusion to the story is
 not without some happiness.

S (female): What is your attitude towards women's lib?

M: I am half in agreement with women's lib and half in
 opposition. I agree with all the arguments ^{of} ~~in~~ women's lib
 that state that schematically, institutionally, woman have
 been encouraged to be cowards for centuries. And that it
 is very important for woman to become more brave. In that
 sense, I am completely in agreement with woman's lib. I think,
 however, that like all young revolutionary organizations,
~~women's lib has a~~
 they have a lust to become totalitarian. And they want to

destroy their enemies before they can even see them. So I think they did me, ~~the~~, personally, the small disservice of deciding that I was the greatest sexist in America. To which I always use^d to reply, ~~to them~~, "Ladies, you have not been to Texas."

S: Why did you write a book on a subject like Garv Gilmore? Why didn't you leave that to the boulevard newspapers? Who did you want to aim your criticism at?

M: To begin with, when I wrote the book about Gilmore, I wasn't necessarily looking to criticize anyone or anything. ~~If you are starting a book,~~ ^{often} A book will take several years of your life. ^{and} ~~A book will age you as you write it.~~ It will drain you and it will ruin your disposition. So you don't decide to do a book for superficial reasons. Writing a book is a little bit like getting married--at least getting married for a few years. And for that reason, ~~you generally have at best something that approaches, for yourself, a profound motive, when you start to do a book.~~ ^{So} If you start to ~~do~~ a book for no better reason than that you wish to criticize something, you run out of the best energies very quickly. And then writing it becomes a terrible chore. ~~I was fascinated with that book and~~ ^{Gilmore} I wished to write about ~~it~~ because I thought ~~that Gilmore~~ ^{he} was an exceptional character, that there was no man remotely like him in the public eye. The fact that the subject had been in the newspapers didn't repel me, but ~~it~~ attracted me because I'd been carrying on my own small ~~personal~~ war with the newspapers for many years. I detest

the way they write about experience. I think we'd all be better off if we didn't have newspapers. If once a week a page came out and told us what some of the major events were in the world, we'd absolutely know as much as we know by studying the newspapers everyday. The newspapers have become vast machines for misinformation and disinformation. ^{By} ~~a~~ ^{misinformation} ~~tion~~, ~~tion by which~~ I mean simple error. Most newspaper stories are half wrong, ~~in the facts, and~~ ^{disinformation} means that many people use ~~the~~ newspapers skillfully in order to spread calculated misinformation. In other words, they tell lies to ~~the~~ newspaper reporters which are then printed. So we ~~used~~ ^{have good cause} to hate stories that are in the papers ~~for good cause, which is because~~ ^{often} they occupy our attention and ~~we read about them a great deal~~ and we don't know much more than when we started. For that reason I love a good newspaper story because if you can penetrate behind it, there's always a great deal there, or usually a great deal there. I felt that with Gilmore there probably ^{I had read in the papers} was some remarkable material back of the stories. I discovered indeed there was. You know, he was not an ordinary man and it was not an ordinary situation.

S: Did it change your view of the American judicial system at all?

M: Yes it did. I began to have more ~~of a~~ respect for the ways in which the wheels of justice grind slow and small. ~~What happened was that~~ In a certain sense I found it comic, even pathetic, but at the same time heartwarming. Before my book was ^{done} over I had a book in which there were something like

thirteen lawyers who were all characters. Most of these lawyers were representing different points of view. Among the thirteen lawyers ^{p214/23} perhaps there were [^] eight separate points of view, ~~that you could separate. Everyone of these separate points of view were argued by these various lawyers and believed in and worked hard for.~~ There was something amusing and at the same time touching about the way each one of these lawyers was doing his best. Some of them were doing their best to save Gilmore's life, some of them were doing their best ^{to} hasten Gilmore's execution, ~~some were working for the state, some were working for Gilmore, some were working for the American Civil Liberties Union,~~ all of them were absolutely working at their best. I came to realize ~~that~~ ^{writing the book} in the course of ~~it~~ [^] that ~~along with American justice~~ there was an element in American life that I ^{had} never understood before. And that is that Americans are obsessed with the idea that they must be virtuous. Now, I'm not saying that we are any more virtuous than any other country, in fact there are many who would say that we are less virtuous than many another country. ~~But,~~ ~~in fact, if you want to understand Americans, I would suggest to you that no matter what~~ [^] an American ~~does,~~ he can be a drug pusher, ^{or} he can be a judge, but it's terribly important ^{for} to ~~the average American~~ ^{him} to believe that he ~~or she~~ is virtuous in ^{his} their actions. Americans go through bends in order to convince themselves that they are not being corrupt or wicked ~~or evil~~ or cynical or this or that. There are very few Americans ^{who} that can honestly say, "I don't give a damn." Which may be why "Gone With the Wind" ^{had} such a smash ending.

S: ~~You called yourself~~ ^{you called yourself} ~~In Advertisements For Myself~~ ^{an} ~~an~~ ^{And} American existentialist. ^{And} ~~In American Dream~~ ^{for instance} there is a passage in which, after ^{Kojak} ~~you~~ ^{his} killed ~~your~~ ^{his} wife, in the book, when things like habit, discipline, and pretence and compromise as sort of civilized as bad qualities disappear from ~~you~~ ^{and to} and you becomes ^{his} your instinctual self. That's how I understood the passage. I'd like to know if you still believe that you are an existentialist and how ~~the~~ modern man has to live in that way?

Mr: You're asking me a small question. (laughter) Let's break it down. ~~It will be easier to reply if...~~ To begin with, as I understand what ^{you're} ~~you're asking me~~, you are ^{asking} ~~saying in effect~~ do I believe that to be an existentialist one must eschew discipline, habit, and so forth. I would say no. But you must be very aware of the negative powers of habit and discipline. There is very little that could ever be accomplished that's purposeful and that takes many months or years to accomplish that can be done without habit or discipline. But because they are necessary to serious and ambitious projects doesn't mean that we can ever ignore the fact that they are very dangerous medicine for us. We have to live with the fact that these habits that ~~are~~ ^{enable} enabling us to be productive are at the same time dangerous to our psyche, and perhaps even to our soul, and be aware of that and ~~in that sense~~ ^{so} live existentially. When I say live existentially, I don't mean that every day we ^{must} ~~jump~~ jump from the roof of one building to the

roof of another. Although that is certainly as existential an experience as one could look for, Especially if the jump is just at the very limit of our ability to leap. In other words, if we do not know if we're going to be able to make the jump successfully, That would be the pure definition of an existential experience. We're either going to feel a great rush of adrenalin and happiness if we complete the jump, or we're going to know broken bones, or disaster ^{or} and death if we don't. ~~That's an existential experience.~~ Now obviously if I speak of living existentially in relation to one's habits and one's discipline, I don't mean jumping across the roof every day. However, it may be that one has to jump across that roof once a month (I speak ^{now} figuratively) or once a year or whatever one's inner rhythm is. ~~And there comes a point when if one lives,~~ If one uses these habits in order to achieve certain serious projects in one's life, ~~one uses one's discipline,~~ there comes a point when one becomes a slave of the discipline and the habits. That's the point precisely when one must look for an existential encounter with oneself. What I'm trying to say, I suppose, is that the horror is that there is no royal road to happiness for the psyche. We achieve the smallest amount of self-satisfaction or a sense of personal integrity only through the greatest efforts and through the greatest awareness of the opposites between which we must navigate our course.

S: You spoke about habit and existential living. Don't

you feel that your habit of writing is just that what you have become a slave to?

M: ~~My habit of writing is what I have become a slave to?~~ I often feel that I have become a slave precisely to having to write too much. I have come to the point in my life where I now have to write in order to make a living. I've been in debt for ten years and I write more than I care to write in order to attempt to get out of this debt. To that extent, I find writing onerous and a habit and I'm not all together happy with it.

S: How do you justify ~~your~~ ^{you} being a media personality ~~with~~ ^{and still} putting the media down ~~by~~ ^{saying} they're totalitarian and on the other hand you use them. ~~Let's say it's a consequence that your books are being publicized and you get free advertisement and, of course, scandals in your life are being sort of publicized by the media which helps sell the books.~~

I'm talking about this odd commerce spiral in which you are in ~~but at the same time you're criticizing the media for sort of penetrating into everybody's personal life.~~

M: I'll leave the last part to come back to about the media penetrating into everybody's personal life. ~~I'd say that to~~ ^T begin with, I've often been attacked for flaunting my personal life in order to sell my books. I can promise you that I may or may not be guilty of flaunting my personal life, but that I have known for the last twenty years that ~~that~~ ^{it} does not sell books. Quite the contrary, you do not sell books nearly so

well as writers who keep a respectable persona before the public. There is a simple reason for that. When people go out to buy books, particularly hardcover books, they often have a choice, books are expensive. ~~If you have~~ ^{has} ~~A~~ young couple, ~~they~~ ^{has} often ~~have~~ to choose--and I'm not being sentimental or treacly about this--between buying the baby a new pair of shoes or buying a hardcover book. So ~~buying the book~~, if they choose to buy the book, ^{it} ~~is~~ a small sacramental act. They are doing something that is terribly serious to them and they want to be able to respect the writer. So writers that have a great deal of notoriety in their lives are not respected. ~~They're less respected, let us say, than the quality of their work.~~ That's no help ⁱⁿ ~~to~~ selling books. Writers like John Updike and Saul Bellow--you never hear anything about their personal lives to speak of and their books sell very, very well. James Michener sells extraordinarily well in America and no one's ever heard anything about his personal life. I could point to author after author in America who sells very well indeed with no personal publicity. In fact, ~~the only reason one does personal publicity for one's books, why one goes out on tours,~~ is that you are part of a commercial process that you confront at your peril. If want to be able to sell your books, if you want to be able, let's say, to get good advances from publishers, which, I'll be frank, I ^{ve} ~~ll~~ always want to ^{ed} ~~get~~ because I need the money, then I have to have a reputation as someone who's reasonably amenable to

~~publicity tours.~~ ^{But} It's my personal opinion that publicity tours do not sell books because people who watch television have lost the ability to read. However, there is an apparatus there. The publisher is able to sell more books to the booksellers in advance because they say to the bookseller that there's going to be a national television tour. At that point the bookseller says, "Oh, is there? Well then I'll take a few more copies." These are the facts of the economic life. ~~That, for the first part of your question.~~ As to why

I use television when I consider it a totalitarian medium, I use it with a certain desperation. I feel that there are two choices and neither of them is agreeable. Either one gives up the three-quarters ~~of mankind~~ of humankind, that by now only watch television and say, "To hell with them, they're lost. Let's save the little culture we have left." ~~Which seems to me is a dangerous offering to make~~ (or you go out and ~~you~~ attempt to argue into the teeth of this gale of electronic homogenization. You dare to loose the salts of your own personality by going on TV. In fact, I compromise on that as I do on many elements in my life. I go on TV as seldom as I can, believe it or not. There are times when I don't go on TV for six months, nine months, or a year at a time. ~~I'm never so happy as when I don't go on TV.~~ But there come times when I think, "My God, there's nothing left in America but TV-idiots. ~~TV-idiots talking to TV-idiot audiences.~~ And somebody has to get out there and say something." And being nothing if not modest, I nominate myself.

S: How do you get these TV-idiots to read when you know at the same time that they are TV-idiots?

M: Well I'm not optimistic about it. It was my hope that ~~this book~~, The Executioner's Song, would be read by millions. Before it's done, maybe it will, ~~be~~. One of the reasons I wrote it in the style I did, which is a tremendously simple style, is ^{that I think} ~~I thought~~ people have lost the ability to read in the old way. They don't like sentences that they have to work on. All right, I'm going to write a book in the simplest prose I can manage. I'm going to try to reach people who have never read a book before. Maybe they'll see that there's an experience in literature that they don't get in other places. ~~That was the attempt that I had made in this book.~~ Whether I succeeded ~~in it~~ or not is something we'll find out in the years to come. But I was hoping just once to write a book that would have ^{this kind of} ~~certain~~ subterranean affect.

S: In the book on Gary Gilmore, didn't you try to take a stand on the death penalty in the United States?

M: No, this may sound odd to you, but capital punishment is not one of the questions that occupies me a great deal. ~~I think that~~ ^{If} a thousand people a year were being executed in America, I'd be concerned with it. Because Engels once said, "Quantity changes quality." If you have a thousand people being executed, you're very close to having ~~ten thousand people being executed or a hundred thousand being executed and you're in danger of having~~ a state that starts to execute its people in

large numbers. But you know we ^{hadn't} ~~haven't~~ had an execution in America for ten years. ~~It may be that, ---~~ It's a very complicated question, I hesitate to break into it because it's so difficult to talk about. But it may be that an occasional execution is not the worst single element in a society's life. It may be that it still gives us some connection back to the primitive. I feel that the great danger with a liberal-totalitarian-technological society, ~~(I say liberal, totalitarian and technological and~~ put the three words together because it seems to me that we are moving into some regular benevolent form of technological totalitarianism) in which everyone will be more or less taken care of and there may not be terrible ~~excesses in the form of the earlier totalitarianisms--~~ is that there will be manipulation of the populace from above. There still remains the need to find again our primitive roots. One of the most powerful and primitive experiences that a society can have is to execute one of its members. To me there is an enormous difference between executing someone once and a while and ~~the state~~ arbitrarily proceeding to execute people at the rate of five, ten, twenty a week. The difference being that one execution in a great while--quantity changes quality--^{releases} ~~loses~~ a tremendous amount of energy and concern and anxiety and soul-searching in people. Whereas many executions merely contributes to enhancing the smugness and complacency of the authority that runs our lives. To answer your question, I would be against capital punishment if it