

were a powerful phenomenon in American life. If it's an occasional phenomenon, then I think it has to be treated on its own terms. ~~Since~~ Gilmore definitely wanted to be executed, ~~since~~ ^{he} did not wish to spend the rest of his life in jail; ~~since~~ he did not wish to commit suicide, because in his mind it was more noble to be executed and have to stand up to the people who were going to execute him, ^{Capital punishment} than to commit suicide in the loneliness of his own cell, ~~I felt that~~ ^{that} wasn't really the question in the book.

S: Can you envision a society where all members would be living a so-called existential life?

M: ~~Again~~, I think the idea of the existential life is not that we all go out and climb the Matterhorn every Saturday.

It may be that someone who is timid ~~and gentle~~ and reflective ^{and} would much rather spend their life reading books could still have an existential life. They need only think seriously of climbing the Matterhorn once and trying ~~it~~ it once and that's enough. For some people one existential experience is enough to nourish them for ten, twenty, thirty years. Other people, like U.S. Marines, need existential experience three times a night. I'm not a bigot about these matters. I don't insist that everybody live the same way. In fact, ~~I find that anathema~~, I think that's the trouble. There's a tendency ^{to try to} to get everybody to live the same way. ^{Right} ~~There's~~ ^{now} a tendency to get us all to live like rather pleasureless hedonists. We're all supposed to have a good time, but we're also supposed to wear

more or less the same clothing while we're doing it. We live in the age of plastic. ~~That's the attempt to make us all live the same way. That is, without much sensation in our fingertips.~~ ^{And} Because if we have to go around touching plastic all the time, we ^{will} soon ^{be} dead.

S: Touching what?

M: Plastic. A German and a Jewish invention.

S: Can you speak to trying to express yourself through film as compared to writing?

M: I'm sure most of you don't know much about my films. I made three films about twelve years ago. Over a period of about two years. The idea I had at the time was that the physical apparatus that was necessary to make a professional film was so cumbersome and so expensive and so unwieldy that very little that was human could find its way through. Actors and directors had to be geniuses to get anything approaching ~~true quality~~, true esthetic quality in film. At that time I happen to meet some cinema verite photographers. ~~They're~~ ^{were making documentaries} photographers who work with very limited means, sometimes with no more than two men--the cameraman ~~who supports the camera on his shoulder~~ and the soundman, ~~who would go out and make documentaries.~~ ^{And I thought, why not take this technique which I found fascinating when I'd see the documentaries.} ~~Because, what you find is~~ ^{these} If two people are speaking in a documentary, the cameraman did not have a script. So he was not able to set the camera angles in advance. He didn't know who

was going to be speaking next, ^{particularly if there were}
 more than two people ^{being filmed} there. So very often the camera began
 to act the way we act in real life. If we're in a room and
 three or four of us are having a conversation, we tend to
 look at the person we expect to speak next. Sometimes they
 do and sometimes they don't. It occurred to me as I watched
 the cinema verite photography where the cameraman very often
 would anticipate correctly who was going to speak next and
 the camera would move to that person just a moment before ^{they}
 spoke, which ~~gave~~ ^{gave} for some odd reason ~~a~~ ^{an} aesthetic satisfac-
 tion, ~~and~~ sometimes the cameraman would ~~miss~~ ^{be} on the
 wrong face. You'd hear a voice coming from somewhere else
 and the camera would look around ^d nervously to find who
 was actually speaking. I thought ^{it would be} ~~what a wonderful way it'd~~
~~be~~ if we could take this technique and carry it over to fic-
 tional work. ~~Then I thought, that you can't have a script~~ ^{I know I couldn't use}
 because once you have a script you start moving the actors
 through their paces and you have something that very quickly
 begins to call for more and more equipment and technique. So
 then I thought, "all right, we'll have improvised films." I then
 proceeded over the next couple of years to make three improvised
 films. ~~They were complete improvisations, to wit, there was~~
~~no script.~~ The movie was not written, you might say, until
 after it was filmed. ~~After it was filmed I had many hours of~~
~~film in each case and I then sat down with the editor.~~ In the
 case of the last film we filmed forty-five hours of sound and

film with five camera crews in five-and-a-half days. Those
 forty-five hours then took three years to cut into a film.
 It was ~~a film~~ called "Maidstone" and in many ways it was the
 most interesting and extraordinary film and in many ways it
 was an unhappy and unsuccessful film because the sound wasn't
 good enough. The sound was ~~good enough~~ ^{all right as} long as you ~~could~~
 show it in small groups, to film students and ^{at} museums. We
 showed it in one museum in New York, the Whitney, and we set
 an attendance record. More people came to see that film than
 had ever come to see any other film in the history of the
 Whitney. At that point, encouraged, I said "Let's get some
 money together and distribute it ourselves." So ~~we did~~. And
 we put it into a commercial theatre and we then set a record
 in reverse. Fewer people came to see that movie than anyone in
 the history of that theatre. The reason was simple: People
 are not going to spend money and then sit there and strain
 to hear what's being said. It makes them furious. Their
 feeling is, "Either I'm going deaf or this guy doesn't re-
 spect the fact that ~~I'm here and~~ I spent my hard-earned money
 and I can't hear what he is saying." I gave up making ^{films} at that
 point, because I felt that I ~~could not~~ ^{could not} solve this technological
~~problem.~~ There seemed no way to get sound that was good
 enough in cinema verite ~~to meet the professional standards~~
~~that were necessary if you were going~~ to be able to convince
 the big-league movie makers that you had a way of making films
 that was more interesting than their way. The only way that

they understand if your way is more interesting ~~than their~~
~~way~~ is if you could make more money than ~~they make.~~ ^{them.} Then
 they would say, "Yes, this fellow has something." You could
 create a revolution in film. Without that you're reduced
 to being an avant-garde filmmaker. ^{I decided then that} At that point I thought,
 "I'd rather be a notorious and somewhat unsavory literary per-
 sonality than an avant-garde filmmaker." So I went back to
 writing books. But with a tear in my heart, because I en-
 joyed making films much more than I enjoy writing.

S: How's Cagney?

M: Your referring to the picture I am now making: "Ragtime."
 In which I have a small part. James Cagney is now old. He's
^{near eighty} ~~in his eighties~~. Most people who ^{approach} ~~turn~~ eighty, I've observed,
 become interested in only one thing. And that is where do
 they put their feet. It's the one truly depressing element
 in growing old. So Cagney is one man when he is walking.
 When he's walking, he's like any other eight^y-year-old. He
~~thinks a great deal about where the next foot is going to fall,~~
~~will he keep his balance and so on.~~ Once he sits down, he's
 the old Cagney. He's still a marvelous actor. He does very
 little and he does it magnificently well. I realize that
 what a movie star does is ~~they~~ take everything that's been
 going on in the movie until that point and ~~they~~ funnel it into
 their silences. We actors speak and Cagney just looks at us
 like this ^(demonstrates) And as he looks you can feel all the movie revolv-
 ing around him and you ~~just~~ know the critics are going to say

that he's giving a splendid performance, and In fact he is.
~~He knows the nature of film.~~ The nature of film is that you
 frighten the camera slightly.

S: You said that the women's movement tends to become
 totalitarian and that you don't like that. Don't you think
 that the male system as it is in America is totalitarian?

M: Yes, but I ^{we} always thought that women had more sense than
 men.

S: Why is that? Why should women be better than men?

M: Because they have been forced to suffer our brutalities
 and our stupidities and our dominance and people ^{who} ~~that~~ are on
 the bottom should always be smarter than people that are on
 top or there is no hope for humanity.

S: But you don't get better by suffering.

M: You don't get a better person, but you should get a
 smarter person. I think that the average black knows more
 about life than the average white in America. I've never
 met--this is a remark I made before and people think that I'm
 blowing smoke--I've never met a stupid black man. I've met
 any number of black men I couldn't speak to, who wouldn't
 talk to me or I couldn't talk to them, but I ^{have} ~~never~~ met a black
 who I felt was stupid. Because stupidity is a choice. It's
 not a choice that black people can afford.

S: But you can't compare blacks in every respect to women.

M: Well, but the women in America do. They say ["] ~~we~~ are
 your blacks. ["]

S: This isn't true in all respects.

M: No, of course not. That's one of the troubles with the women's movement. They say a great many things that are not true in all respects but they say ~~it~~^{them} as if ~~it~~^{they were} true in all respects.

S: But why can't you answer my question in respect to women? Why should women be smarter than men and do everything better than they and be more clever than they are?

M: There's no reason why they should be better. On the other hand they should not be worse. Men over the centuries have acquired, willy nilly, a ~~certain~~ small rudimentary sense of fair play. The women have yet to learn it. I think they may well learn it. ~~I'm not saying that it is impossible for them to learn it.~~ But the women's movement has not gained respect among those men who are willing to give it respect over the last ten years. The general attitude among the women in America by now--I do not pretend to speak for them,

~~but~~ it's my impression--is that many mistakes were made seven or ~~and~~ ten years ago when the movement first came into prominence. ~~There were great excesses and that the problem is much more difficult than they ever realized.~~ I think there was a certain optimism, almost a manic optimism, among the women back in the early seventies. Because ~~they~~^{they} thought they were going to have a quick breakthrough and they were going to change the world very quickly, ~~and~~ I think ~~that~~ what they've come to recognize is--and I think this is all to the good--~~that~~ they've

come to recognize the profound and serious problems ^{of} that men
 who ~~were trying~~ ^{have tried} to change the world, also have. I think that out of all
 this we may yet arrive at certain community of agreement
 that changing the world is a problem that goes far beyond
 sexual gender.

S: But you could start with that.

M: You could start with that, but you could start with other
 things as well. You could start with the idea that the most
 evil substance on earth today is plastic and that the way to
 improve society is to tax plastic heavily and reduce all other
 taxes. If you could remove plastic from human existence,
 things might be better because people's senses might be little
 more lively. If people's senses were more lively--for instance
 if we were in a room with chandeliers instead of these goddamn
 florescent lights overhead--we might all have a little more
 communion with one another.

S: Yes, but that's exactly the problem. The women's ques-
 tion is postponed to all other questions.

M: Well, that's your point of view and I respect it. ~~That~~
~~the women's question does not have enough prominence.~~ My
 feeling is that the women have had a huge amount of prominence
 because the nature of their ^{movement} ~~question~~ was such that television
 loved it: ~~It made good television~~ the women having a revolu-
 tion. But in fact, in America all the women revolutionaries
 stayed in New York where they were comfortable and safe and
 went
 very few/down to Texas. It's one thing to be a revolutionary.

it's another to be a brave revolutionary. I don't mock the women. I just say that they're not quite as good as they pretended to be.

S: Might the fact that you are Jewish be important for your writing about Concentration camps?

M: It would certainly be a factor in it, sir.

S: Why do you write about concentration camps and what kind of feeling do you have being here in Germany now?

M: When you say what kind of feeling do I have writing about concentration camps, I can see that you know little of my work. Because ~~that's~~ one of the few references I ^{have} ~~ever~~ made to concentration camps is in that passage that Mr. Van Davis quoted. As to what feeling I have being here? I've always been interested to come to Germany. I find Germany a very interesting country. Believe it or not, I've always felt I'm in part, in some odd way, German. And I often wondered why and I finally realized why. I asked my mother once and it turned out ~~to and behold~~ ^{that} I was brought up to some extent by two or three German nurses. I can only say that I find Germany the oddest country for me because I feel comfortable here.

Roll 15 & 16 Gasthaus "Max" (Nov 20)

S: Can you compare editing or shooting a movie with editing a book? You did both; you shot three movies and you wrote ~~twenty-two books.~~

M: The editing of a movie is much more of an art than cutting a book. You edit a book out of experience and out of taste and essentially it's the same kind of activity all the time. That is, you have one consideration which is the quality of the work that's going to result. When you cut, particularly if you have a lot of film to work with—let me say I think

there are two kinds of cutting. In the average conventional film, the film that's made with a big crew and a script, ~~there's a tendency to have cutting, I think,~~ is much less important there than in the cinema verite films, for a reason. Which is that in the scripted film the actors know that the scene is coming to an end because they all have the same script.

If I may borrow your glass for a moment. ^{When} There an actor knows that ~~this is the last~~ ^{his next} line in the scene ~~and he says his line, he~~ ^{is his last} takes a sip of his drink and he puts his glass down. Because, unconsciously, he knows it's the end of the scene and he wishes to characterize it as the end of the scene. ^{So down goes the glass.} ~~and~~ so there

are a great many scenes in scripted films that end with ~~something coming to the end of~~ a slow movement. That means that the next cut, almost obligatorily, has to be a slow opening upward. You have that leisurely kind of ~~almost~~ what I call funereal cutting in most professional films. In cinema verite, ~~because~~ the actors don't know when a scene is coming to an

^{be}end ^{cause} there is no scripted scene as such. They're talk-
 ing and they may talk for ten minutes and ^{out} fifteen seconds
 may be used ^{in the final product.} Or three minutes may be used. ~~Given the fact~~
~~that there is no particular end to the scene, that is you~~
~~when you are editing~~ go through the scene and you say, "Well I can either use
 three minutes of this or I can use ten seconds of ^{this} ~~this~~. De-
 pending how I'm going to use it." You may decide that the
 ten seconds are more interesting because there is a marvelous
 movement of one actor's hand. As they're talking if someone
 says this and the movement is more interesting than anything
 that's being said. Because film really lives in two worlds
 at once--part of it is movement and the other part is of course
 the particular narrative element in what's present. So as I
 say, if the hand goes up like this, the cutter may choose
 that. Then there are any number of movements that can come
 out of it. It's much more musical. This goes up like this.
 And you can have something come up like that slowly or you
 can have something come slamming back. As a result, cutting
 in cinema verite films becomes more of a high art. Editing
 has endless permutations and possibilities. I said earlier
 that in "Maidstone" ~~we spent in five days~~, I had five camera
 crews ^{and} ~~we~~ shot forty-five hours of sound and film ^{in five days.} We then
 cut it down to seven hours very quickly. There were seven
 usable hours out of the forty-five. But it took us something
 like three years to cut it from seven hours to ninety minutes.
~~Because~~ we had so many movies within the seven hours that we
 just couldn't decide. We had too many choices and it was

monumentally interesting despite the final result which was less interesting than all the interesting moments en route. Mainly because the sound was not good enough to make a satisfying film. But the cutting in it, I think, was far superior to the average film. Not because we were great editors, but because we had much more interesting material to work with. In a certain sense, we weren't cutting so much as writing the film with film. The average professional Hollywood film is written with a script. It's first written by a script writer, the director works with him, the producer works with him, the cost people work with it, it's a blueprint. You might say it's written at that point and the cutting is merely the final application of the plaster and the paint to what's been done. When you are making a cinema verite film, ~~because you're working with improvisation~~^{ing} and you don't know quite where your story is going to lead and very often you don't have a story in the normal sense, you have a set of attitudes and collisions, a set of possibilities that you can write with. It's as if you have the material in a large bag. It's as if someone has handed you a vocabulary, but it's not a vocabulary of words, it's a vocabulary of film strips. You might have five thousand such film strips because the same scene could be cut in many different ways. You might use three minutes of a scene. In which case it would be the keel for a narrative section of your film. Or you might just use little snippets from it because the movements are so wonderful. And you might use it in a montage

where you wanted another effect entirely. You sit down with the film and you start writing your picture. Cutting as such becomes vastly interesting.

S: What do you think, as far as your own potential for self-expression is concerned, the advantages are using solely the written word and then also using film? And I'd like to follow it up with another question. Earlier you talked about a sort of technological homogenization that's happening in the Western world. Do you feel that there is also a certain amount of alienation that's almost inherent in filmmaking because you have to use machines to express yourself?

M: I think particularly in professional filmmaking there is an immense amount of alienation present. I had the experience last week of working in a professional film for the first time as an actor. I was playing the part of Stanford White in "Ragtime." A fine director, Milos Forman, is making the film. I had two days of work, my first two days in a professional film as an actor, and I was overcome with what ^{how} a difficult ~~art~~ it is to be a professional film actor. The conditions are even more difficult than working on stage. ~~Because you don't act in the normal way. In half the scenes I was playing, I would be lucky if I could see the eye of the actor I was playing with. The emphasis is enormously on the camera position. You have these immense cameras as opposed to the small stuff we use here. Given these immense cameras, the actors become almost like marionettes that are moved and shifted around the cameras. So very often you'd be playing~~

a scene and if the camera was on you ~~in the scene~~, the actor you were playing with might be ~~hiding~~ behind one of the cameras. And you would see his eye back of the cameraman and you would hold on this eye. It would be like a lighthouse beacon ^{that} and you were steering your ship toward ~~that eye because~~ That's all you have to work with. Otherwise ~~you're just emoting, you're talking by yourself, you have no face that's reacting to you.~~ In that sense I was filled with a certain sense of wonder, which is how do they ever get wonderful moments in these professional films? ^{because} There are professional films finally where this extraordinary stuff comes through. In the "Tin Drum"--which is the best movie I've seen in quite a while, that and ^{the} "Marriage of Maria Braun" ^{by a} in those two films ~~there~~ were extraordinary moments ~~that the actors got.~~ I don't know how they ^{did} it. Given the absolute alienation of the conditions ~~in which one works.~~ I've been interested in cinema verite methods because ~~if you could ever get actors who got comfortable enough with the idea that they didn't have a script to fall back on, but on the contrary, they would have to use their wits because they proceeded through scenes. And if you had a school of such actors who were skilled, you could always use people off the street in cinema verite because everyone alive is an actor. We all spend our lives acting. We're always pretending to be a little happier or a little more miserable than we really are. That's acting. It's nothing to be an actor if you don't have to rely on a script. The moment you have to say a line like, "I would be in love~~

with you, but I must catch the five o'clock train," And you have to ~~keep repeating it, you have to say it a hundred times, then you have to be a professional actor. That's where the difficulty comes in. So long as you're just in a scene and you're talking back and forth and the scene is more intense to you than the presence of the cameraman, then it's very easy to be an actor. There's no problem at all.~~ There are means to make films this way. But it would mean a radically different approach to filmmaking because ~~(the fundamental assumption would be that so long as film attempts to tell a story, it alienates the actors from any true possibility of relatively natural expression because the machine has to predominate. The machine has to predominate because the sound has to be perfect, the placement of the actors has to be perfect, the camera has to know where the actors will move so the camera can move in harmony with them, and all that violates any possibility of Stanislavsky methods in filmmaking.)~~ ^{Using a script} ~~any attempt of the actor to truly have a deep experience.~~ ^{An actor} You can't have a deep experience if ^{he's} ~~it's~~ going to be interrupted twenty times in five minutes, which is the condition of filmmaking.

S: What advantages do you see ^{in film} ~~personally~~ over literature for your own personal self-expression?

M: I loved making films this way without a script. ~~Because I never had great interest in writing a film script. When you write a novel, you have absolute control up to a point. If you are a young writer, you may run into an editor who says~~

your book is good, but it's not good enough and you've got
 to rewrite it to my specifications. No matter how polite
 he may be, that is what he is saying and ^{if you want to get published,} you end up having
 a book that is not quite your own ^{if you want to get it}
~~published. That happens to authors.~~ If you are an estab-
 lished author, generally speaking, your book is yours. Its
 virtues are yours and its vices can be laid upon your head.
 In effect you have absolute control over your own work or
 relatively absolute control. It's a satisfying experience ^{but at}
~~in that sense that you're truly expressing yourself and at~~
 the same time it's a lonely occupation. ~~It has all the faults~~
~~of being a writer. Which is~~ You have to be alone with your-
 self the most of every day and you have to find the sanction
 every day to decide that you are worthy to sit in God-like
 judgment upon the activities of other people. That's being
 a writer. In film, I moved toward cinema verite where there
 is no script because I felt the scenario writer has very
 little control over the final product. ~~When you write a movie~~
~~script, you're lucky if the movie bears some relation to~~
~~what you wrote. That's the most you can hope for.~~ People
 who write movie scripts are almost always secretly interested
 in going on to become directors. To spend one's life as a
 writer of movie scripts is a miserable occupation for all
 but maybe two or three script writers in the world. Since
~~It's not~~ ^{not} a profession that's ^{that of} necessarily nearly as honored
 as being ~~an~~ actor or director or even for that matter a pro-
 ducer. ~~The glamour of film is not present in script writing.~~

~~Nor is there control.~~ So I was interested in going ⁱⁿ the other direction, ~~entirely to make~~ ^{my} movies without scripts. ~~I felt that's what I did do.~~ ^{My films} They were written on the editing table.

S: You said the best movies you've seen lately come from Germany. You've seen "The Tin Drum" and "Maria Braun" and ~~yet~~ they are highly professional. Have changed from cinema verite when you say you like the German films now? I mean they are not typically German films. One major point is that the Americans control them in their cinemas because they're highly professional, they're nearly American movies.

M: That isn't why I like them. I respect them for being highly professional films, but that isn't why I like them. I like them because I felt they were entering areas of experience that ~~were more appropriate to film than the~~ ^{are very different in} average film. You see, I think that film bears a profound relation to the dream. I think that film is all together different from literature. One might just as well be talking about the state of Kansas in America and Mars as to talk about literature and film in the same breath. Literature, I believe, is closer to theater than it is to film. I mean theater is closer to literature than it is to film. ~~Because~~ Film occupies the most peculiar place in the mind. If I say to you, "Think of a favorite uncle of yours," you'll have a mental image in your mind for a moment. If I say to you, ^{"I think} of Humphry Bogart, you'll have a ^{similar} mental image in your mind, ~~and~~ ^{and} the two are not that different. Film inhabits an area of the mind that's somewhat mysterious. It's that area

somewhere between sex and sleep, ^S somewhere between sex and the dream. ~~It's always~~ ^{could} as if you ~~can~~ establish a hierarchy of existential states that are less and less definable and more and more mystical, ~~You could almost say that~~ it would be: memory, sex, dream, death. And perhaps between sex and dream, you can put film. Film always has something slightly sinister about it when it's good. The trouble with most professional films is that they are photographed stage plays. The emphasis is upon story and upon all the values of the theatre. And so the average film has an artificial unpleasant quality, a certain aesthetic emptiness to it no matter how well made it is. What I loved about those two films is, ~~exactly that they had this quality.~~ ^{But} They were sinister in a lovely way. They were not films ~~in which~~ ¹⁶² you could ~~afterward~~ describe the plot ~~in such a way that the plot was coherent.~~ ^{if you'd seen it} It's almost a vice if you can tell the story of a film clearly. ~~It's a bad film at the highest level.~~ Film should be evocative. The best films are like personal experiences that you keep returning to because the experience was so particular, ^{and} at the same time so mysterious that you cannot define it, you cannot circumscribe it with words. And to the degree that film inhabits a region of the mind or the psyche that's beyond words, it's ^A successful film. And to the degree it does not, it is merely a debased form of literature or theater.

S: Am I correct in assuming that you ~~wanted to be~~ ^{moved} moving toward the cinematic because it's ~~the sort of language which~~

transcends words or it's a medium which transcends language?
 M: No, I'm not moving toward it. I've always had ^a this profound admiration for film at its best. I ~~think you see what~~ I'm talking about ^{Take} in Chaplin, for instance. Chaplin always transcends story. ~~You can't tell the story of a Chaplin movie and have it make any sense. You can tell the story of a Chaplin movie but no one who had not seen the movie would ever know why you say it's a great movie.~~ Tell the story of "City Lights" and it's a little sentimental legend. See it and you have an experience that goes into the very extensions of yourself. I have vast respect for film for that reason. But I don't necessarily think that I am all that talented at film. I grew up writing books and writing books is probably what I'll end up doing for the rest of my life. If I were young, I might be more interested in a life in film than a life in literature. But I'm not young. So, ~~vollal~~ ^{And} Making

a film takes certain athletic abilities. You have to have immense stamina ^{you} ~~you have to be...~~ I mean ^A great film director has the same stamina that an olympic athlete has.

S: Does ^{it} a writer ^{need} not have that stamina?

M: He doesn't need it physically quite so much. I know any number of writers that are all but dead, but they continue to write because all they need is a little bit left alive here and a little bit left alive there and they can still do it. Like my good friend Truman Capote, for instance.

S: You mentioned too that as an author you have sovereign

control over your characters, ~~and~~ I think it was John Fowles who said ~~at a certain point~~ in The French Lieutenant's Woman, "I don't have any control over my characters at all anymore." I'd like to ask you ~~for instance~~ ^{if} could Rusty in Why Are We In Vietnam? ^{could} have reacted any differently in the bear hunt if you had wanted him to?

M: ~~Well~~ I think Fowles was saying it's a happy book when one's characters take on their own life. ~~To that extent,~~ ^{there would} If you didn't have that in writing, there'd be very little ~~left~~ ^{left} in writing. There's nothing terribly attractive about being alone in a room looking at an empty piece of paper and making little scribbles on ~~that piece of paper~~ ^{it all along}. The pleasure of making literature comes from that moment when your characters come alive and they take a form. You can exaggerate it, however. ~~Once a character becomes alive they are no more and no less remarkable than thinking about someone who is alive.~~ We can think of a friend and the regular things a friend does and they can be very vivid for us. We can think of a character in a book we're writing and they can be vivid for us ^{no sure} in that way. But I wouldn't go beyond that. I would say this: If you are a young writer and your characters never come alive for you as you are writing them, you might think seriously about whether you really want to be a writer ~~or a~~ ~~novelist~~. On the other hand, it is very dangerous to use that as the sign that you've been anointed by the Lord, ~~to become a writer~~, because most young writers can think of their characters. They are very vivid to them. They just

don't succeed in making them very vivid to the reader.

That emotion, that inner experience in writing, while it is delightful, is not the sine qua non of the professional writer.

The professional writer very often writes with a great detachment. If his characters come alive for him, that's nice.

But you can write about characters who never come alive for you, ^{and because of} ~~but you know through~~ the years of skill that you've

acquired ^{you know} ~~that~~ they're ^{alive} ~~living very well~~ for the reader. Graham

Greene once spoke of characters he had to work on very, very

hard. He was always pleased when he read a review afterward

that said that the character was well-drawn. Because he would

think to himself, "well-dragged."

S: If we could get to Executioner's Song, which is "faction."

M: "Faction," now that is a terrible word. That's a media word--"faction." The media can't live with a phenomenon they can't classify. So they immediately look for any word, any word at all. They're like a ship that'll throw anchor on any rock. "Faction." It's a horrible word.

S: Ok, let's forget the word. Let's get to Gary Gilmore.

Did you shape this figure, Gary Gilmore, or was he more shaped

^{by} ~~from~~ coming to Provo? Do you think if he ^{didn't go} ~~wouldn't have come~~

^{let's say} ~~to~~ Provo, let's say, ~~to~~ San Francisco or Los Angeles, just

somewhere else, not around the Mormons, do you think ~~you could~~

have shaped the character differently or ^{would} ~~would he~~ have moved

differently? ~~or could he have changed?~~ He sort of got trapped

in Provo.

M: Yes, he did, he did.

S: Do you think he would have been another person if he would have come to another city or to another state?

M: Well, I can speculate. I think it may be that coming to Provo, Utah, which is the Mormon stronghold, may have been the worst place in the world for him to come. ~~to~~. He came out of prison with many appetites and great restlessness. Provo is a city where they don't pull the sidewalks in at eleven o'clock at night, they pull them in at eight o'clock at night. You cannot have any kind of night life at all in a town like Provo. If you come to a town like Provincetown, ~~Massachusetts, where I lived for many years,~~ one of the things that struck me about Gilmore is that he was like so many of the people that I used to drink with every night in Provincetown. There are a great many people in Provincetown who'd be criminals if they lived in Provo and are perfectly happy to get drunk every night in Provincetown. They get into a few fights and get into some trouble with the police once and a while, but nothing serious. To that extent ^{Provo} ~~it~~ contributed very much to Gilmore's crime. But this is sheer speculation. I don't have the right to make this speculation finally.

S: You didn't put anything else ⁱⁿ ~~on~~ to Gilmore, you tried to portray him as he really was, as you thought he was, as he himself thought he would be. So there is nothing added to him. ^{was} ~~He's just a pure person which is different to other books.~~

M: This will sound like a paradox, but I felt it would be

very novelistic not to add anything to him. When I say novelistic, I want you to think of the word as if I were to say ^{that} ~~if~~ a man and a woman are talking and ^{one of them} ~~either the man or the woman~~ says it would be very romantic if we did this ~~or that~~. That means something different to almost every one. ~~You know what a~~ a romantic evening would be. It could be anything from watching a professional football game on Monday night TV ~~in America on TV~~ to going to the ballet or dining ~~by~~ ^{at} candle light. But the word nonetheless has a certain common denominator. Romantic is romantic. We all think we're talking of the same thing. When you use the word novelistic, it's not as common. Generally, writers know what they mean when one says to another "didn't you think that was pretty novelistic?" I felt in this case that because of the special circumstances of the book, it would be most novelistic if.....

Roll 17

M: In filmmaking the only thing you can count on to a certainty is that if a picture is suddenly very successful, there will be three or four pictures much like it in the next year.

S: ~~You~~ ^{you} are ^a critical writer. Do you think that you can influence society in some way ~~by~~ ^{by} writing? Or change society?

M: When I was young, I used to think you could do it with one book ~~and~~ quickly and apocalyptically. Now I know that one probably has very little effect. I've always felt that

you can never know the results of your books. ^K But you also ~~Someone who~~
^{can't worry} worries about whether ^{Your book is} ~~they are~~ going to hurt so and so's
 feelings, ~~when they write a book, is not really a writer.~~
 Surgeons are ruthless. That is, when they go in they don't
 say to themselves, "In making this incision I'm going to
 give this young woman a scar on her belly that's going to
 injure her love life for the next thirty years." ~~They do~~
~~not say that to themselves.~~ They say, "Scalpel, nurse," and
 they make the cut. They may be right or wrong in the need
 for the operation, but there is a certain insensitivity to
 other parts of the context. Writers also have to have that
 kind of insensitivity, ~~very often.~~ That can't say to themselves,
 "I'm writing an obvious portrait of my good friend so and so
 who's going to be terribly injured by this." ~~If they feel~~
~~that, then they can't write.~~ A great many young writers can't
 write for that reason. They think of all the people they're
 going to hurt, ~~and all the people they're going to make en-~~
~~emies of and the retribution that's going to come to them~~
 and they simply can't write. It isn't worth it to them.
 There has to be something slightly maniacal about a young
 man or woman who wants to write, ~~It has to be more important~~
~~to them.~~ Something Napoleonic, if you will. They have to be
 willing to get that book done no matter how many psychic
 corpses are going to be left en route, ~~how many psychic~~
~~wounds are going to be caused~~ and how much counterattack
 there is going to be, ~~in various ways.~~

S: Do you believe that movie ^{have} ~~has~~ more possibilities to influence?

M: More and less. I think movies have more possibility to reach deep feelings in people and perhaps give life to people.

S: Why? Because ^{they're} ~~it's~~ visual?

M: Because movies are more primitive, I would argue, than literature. Literature is a civilized development. Film, while it is a highly technological ^{enterprise,} ~~development,~~ ^{ically,} ~~has the~~ paradox ~~that it~~ goes back to more primitive states of consciousness than literature. I mean, people have to have an education to enjoy literature, ^{but not to} ~~people who can't read or write~~ ^{can't} ~~can get~~ profound reactions ^{to} ~~out of~~ films. So in that sense film reaches more people, ~~but it reaches them~~. To the degree it reaches them in a precise way, it's no good. Film has to reach people in ambiguous ways. A truly good film will affect two people profoundly, but when they go out, they'll argue for hours over the nature of the film. One will say it is a satire and the other will say it is a tragedy and that's as it should be. ~~Film should reach way inside into the psyche and prove truly disturbing and at the same time it could prove truly amusing.~~ One person can go through horror watching a film and another person could laugh ^{his} ~~their~~ head off. That's good film when you have different reactions. Bad film is when everybody laughs on cue, because they are being manipulated. Then they merely enter the engines of manipulation of the great institutions.

S: Can a good book be the same way--that one person could read it as a satire, the other as a tragedy?

M: Yes, yes. But it involves more culture to begin with. Which is the trouble with literature. However, the finest aspect of literature--I don't want to be too critical of literature--is that if it is good enough, it goes on and on and on and it not only affects its own time, but it affects times to come, ~~in the future~~. Whereas movies, I think, have a shorter life. I don't know quite why, it is just an opinion. Also, literature may finally prove to be nourishing in ^{an} other ways ~~all~~ together, which is that literature ^{it} gives us an indispensable sense of the past. ~~Particularly in a~~ technological age ~~in which~~ the past is rapidly being destroyed for us, ^{and} it may be that in years to come literature may have a resurgence. People may say, "^{Books are} ~~that is~~ the one thing I must have." ~~I must have good books to read.~~ I can't bear existence without these good books." It's all open as far as I'm concerned. It isn't as if literature is dead and welcome to film.

S: Who would you ~~today~~ ^{today's} consider to be major American authors? ~~from your personal perspective?~~ And why?

M: There are probably twenty American authors, who if you ask, ~~them that question~~. "Who do you think are the major American authors?", ~~they~~ would ^{name} ~~name an author~~ themselves. John Updike would say John Updike and ^{their} ~~he~~ might say ^{my} friend, John Cheever. Saul Bellow would say Saul Bellow.

S: What would Norman Mailer say?

M: Norman Mailer, you may depend upon it, would say Norman Mailer. I'm not just being snide about myself and my fellow racketeers. ^{But at present} ~~It's that~~ we have a funny situation in American letters. ~~It isn't as if~~ there are no giants around.

There was a time when we had Hemingway, we had Faulkner.

~~Then you could name a few others that were in the second rank and so on.~~ But now, we're ~~all moving~~ we're like the spokes of a wheel. You cannot ask a spoke of a wheel, "Who are the major spokes?" The spoke will have to say, "I am the only spoke as far as I can feel it. I'm the only one connected between the axle and the ground."

S: But since you're self-critical, of course, you know beside yourself different authors.

M: There are a lot of writers ^{for} whom I have regard, who I think are very good writers. I think Saul Bellow is a very, very good writer. I think John Updike is a very good writer, John Cheever...

S: What about Gore Vidal?

M: Vidal, I think, is a wit and he is a good essayist. Not a great essayist. If you compare Vidal's essays to Jimmy Baldwin^{is}, there's no argument. Baldwin has power in his essays and Vidal has wit. He's a bad novelist, Vidal.

S: What about Truman Capote?

M: Capote is a stylist and he was a very good writer. ^{He's} not done anything memorable lately. Of course, he's been working on a novel for years called Answered Prayers which may be very good indeed. We'll have to wait and see. ~~It~~

S: Are there any authors ^{whom} ~~which~~ you dislike ^{and} ~~who~~ who are overrated?

M: No. ~~I think in a funny way we've had such a...~~ It's very hard for a writer who's truly overrated to last for long given the state of American criticism. ^{We have} ~~There are~~ many more literary critics in America than there are working novelists who can make a living writing novels. We've all been examined and re-examined and we've all passed twenty, thirty examinations by now. And so it would be hard for someone who is really ersatz to get through.

S: What about Pynchon?

M: ~~Pynchon~~ I'm not familiar with ^{all} his work. It is possible that if there is one hoax in American literature, it would be Pynchon. Pynchon is either a genius or he is vastly overrated. I think it would be safe to say that. I've never been able to read him. But that doesn't mean that he therefore is a hoax. I've just never been able to get through the bananas in Gravity's Rainbow.

S: ^{What} ~~Are there any~~ Latin American authors ~~which you~~ are familiar with?

M: Well I think there are two...

S: Borges or Márquez?

M: I think those are the two most important writers in the world today.

S: Why Borges? In political terms he is a reactionary is he not?

M: Yes, he is a reactionary but...

S: How come you like him?

M: Why do I care if he is a reactionary?

S: You don't care?

M: I detest having to think of a writer by his politics first. It's a little bit like thinking of people first by way of their anus. I mean, ~~look~~, if we were all to regard one another that way, it would be intolerable, ~~we couldn't do it.~~ To me a writer's face is his style, ~~It's his themes,~~ his literary ^{br} and Borges is absolutely fascinated with the problem of the novel. ^{He} Borges has this magical ability to take plots and turn them inside out. I sometimes think that Borges may do in five pages what Pynchon does in five hundred. Which is ^{to} ~~he~~ shows us the resources of the novel. He's a magician's magician. ^{So} In that sense, I love his work. I can get more from reading ten or twenty pages ^{of} Borges than I can get from reading monumentally long books, including my own.

S: Marquez?

M: Marquez is wonderful in the same way. In One Hundred Years of Solitude he created not one world but five hundred. I don't know how Marquez does it. ~~People come into his books...~~ In ten pages he'll create a family that has eighteen children and they go through ten years, you know every one of the children, you know all the events that occur in their life. ~~In ten pages I have all I can do to get around one bend in the Nile.~~ I'm writing a novel about Egypt in 1130 B.C. and I find I've

written ten pages and what's happened? My boat has gone around one turn in the Nile. In the meantime, ^{Marquez} ~~Borges~~ has a history, ^{so} I admire him.

S: ~~Political attitude~~ You don't care ^{about} ~~about~~ Borges' political attitude.

M: I don't even know about it. What do I care about South American politics?

S: Not at all?

M: I'm an American. I think we're the center of everything.
(laughter)

S: If you were to write a book something on the line of Presidential Papers and address it to Mr. Reagan, what would you have to say to him?

M: ~~What I said earlier today~~ I'd say that America has now decided that it's only going to allow the waste to go to the top. That for thirty years most of the waste was going to the top and a little was going to the bottom. ~~That is, we're talking about the undeserving.~~ ^{I'm} You know people in America have been screaming for years ^{about} ~~that there's~~ all that money going to undeserving welfare people. Of course, all the time ^{ten} times as much has been going to the top, the undeserving rich. Now Reagan has gotten in and that's a sign that the people in the middle in America no longer wish to pay the bottom, they only wish to pay tribute to the top. So I'm going to say, "All right, sir, now that you're cutting off the bottom, what are you going to do about that? You're going to increase your armaments, you're going to have prosperity for

a period, but you are not going to be able to lower taxes. If you lower taxes, you will have inflation which will be beyond measure. What do you do when the slums erupt? When the ghettos put up barricades? Are you going to bring in the police? Are you a true conservative? You can't speak seriously. What do you really plan to do?" That is the way I would talk to him. Parenthetically, he would not listen.

S: You said, "What should I care about the political situation in South America? I'm an American."

M: I was being facetious. I care tremendously about the political situation in South America.

S: ~~I know~~ What kind of responsibility do you feel toward your audience?

M: There are any number of very good novelists including ~~Gunther~~ ^{Gunter} Grass who probably would disagree with me profoundly, but I don't think that an author should be overly concerned with the political influence he has on his readers. Because I think that ^{literary} ~~that~~ influence ^{can be} ~~is~~ deeper than politics. Politics finally is the art of the possible and literature is the art of the impossible and when you start to mix the two, you ^{usually} end up with work that's ~~is~~ second rate.

S: Not necessarily political responsibility but what sort of responsibility, as such, do you feel that you have toward your audience?

M: I think ^K the responsibility you have to your audience is never to take the immediate advantage. Never ~~to~~ cash those easy checks. ~~It's very dangerous when you are writing to~~

when you have something that's good in a work, it's very easy to milk it. ^{If you} ~~To say~~ have a prize cow and the price of milk is high now, ^{you may be tempted} ~~and I'm going to~~ get every last bit of milk out of ^{you} ~~this~~ cow. You have to be very careful of that. Writing is an instinctive process and a dull instinctive process. ^{You} ~~One~~ often ^{doesn't} ~~doesn't~~ feel bright while ~~one's~~ working on a book, you just feel a dull pressure from ^{telling you} ~~the instinct~~ to go here, to go there, ~~as one's working~~. You have to try to listen to that voice ^{faint} ~~that's faint~~, that says, "Stay true to the work." Very hard to do. A writer's open to every pressure to take the immediate advantage, whatever it is. We all do in various ways.

S: I think Faulkner said at one point, "A good book is worth a thousand ~~old~~ grandmothers, a thousand old woman. And if it were necessary to get rid of the old grandmothers to write a good book, then it would be well worth it." Do you agree with that?

M: No, a thousand is too many. Three or four, maybe.

S: You are very fascinated with the movies. But your expression is writing. Do you believe it has to do with destiny that someone becomes a writer, another a painter and so on?

M: I believe we are more likely to become certain things than other things. ~~Let me give an example of what I'm talking about which is all together different.~~ Let's say there was an 80% chance that I was going to end up a writer but

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not a hundred percent chance. Some of us end up in that natural 80% ^{where} that we were more or less destined, ~~to become~~ and some of us don't--a minority. There are some of us that just don't end up with what was calculated for us by destiny. Destiny is provisional not absolute, would by my reply.

S: You've talked a lot of the corrupting influence of totalitarian American TV. Is your position to criticize ~~this~~ and bring it out to the people or do you have a solution in mind? Shall we throw out the American broadcasting system?

M: You can't throw it out. The problem that we face--and it's a tremendous problem--is that you can't do anything with government anymore. ~~Because~~ If we learned anything over the last fifty years, it's that government breeds bureaucracy.

~~That's~~ ^{That's} why I call myself a left-conservative. Because I do not believe that government can solve our problems. To that extent I'm a conservative. The one thing we know is that people who work in government are people who want a kind of security that finally will destroy initiative in them. So no one in government will take a chance. When there is a problem, they look to divide. Government bears a resemblance to cell fission, but of a cancerous sort. When a cancer cell can't solve a problem, it divides. ~~That's why~~ They divide more quickly than normal cells because they're not equipped to solve problems, they're only equipped to grow. Government divides and grows and proliferates all the time. It doesn't solve problems. So you say how do you get rid of television? I think the answer is ~~that we may come around a bend into a~~

be a new kind of politics. At present all politics is based on the idea that there are governments that tax the people and in return for these taxes they provide services. You can say that to the extent that government serves, we can still have government, yes. But the ways in which taxes are paid can be changed radically and comfortably. It seems to me that people have a right to decide ^{what} ~~which~~ should be taxed the most. It doesn't have to be decided on a national scale either. Individual states, individual cities, ~~individual places~~ could decide what they want to tax. You can question people, "What is the most offensive to you in your environment?" If they were to ask me, I'd say plastics are most offensive, I'd say tax plastics. Now if I could convince people politically, if I could make plastics the political issue, then I could say, "Let's vote in the idea that plastics will be taxed at a very high rate." That would get rid of plastics sooner or later. How many of you people would ever buy something that was plastic and it cost five times as much as something that was made of wood? Very few people really are plastic freaks. We put up with it, because we think there is nothing better. As I say, ~~these~~ plastics keep killing our senses and alienating us from existence. All right. Very quickly plastics disappear. Now I can promise you that long before that would ever happen the oil industries would all go to war against us. Because they make a large part of their already immense profits from plastics. Plastics are

nothing but the excrement that comes from oil. The waste product in oil is what makes the most plastics. Which is why we have them. The oil companies discovered that they weren't wealthy enough, they could make even more money by taking this awful stuff, this awful crappy, unspeakable stuff that comes out of oil in refining it, that they could turn it into various flat, smooth, somewhat repellent objects that ~~can~~ inhabit our homes. They become counter tops, bathroom fixtures, ~~and they could~~ put it into Porsche automobiles. ~~they could get away with it, they could put it everywhere,~~ they could adulterate everything and make more profit. The moment we start saying, "Let's tax that ridiculous excessive profit," and ~~if~~ ^{in taxing} we were ~~to~~ ^{they} succeed ~~in that~~, plastics would disappear. Once ~~that's~~ ^{they are} gone, we'd ^{can} say "What do we tax next?" I say let's tax television sets. Let those people who really want television pay for it. It used to be people would say drinking whiskey was evil so we taxed whiskey. Now I would say, "No, tax the television set." You don't have to destroy the television sets. I'm a democrat. If people want television, fine, let them pay for it.

S: Do you think that would give us better television because we'd have to pay for it?

M: I don't care, it might or it might not. It might be that people would say, "Mailer, you're mad. We don't want to tax television, we love it. Go to the rear of the room." ~~We're not going to tax television.~~ I'm not a dictator. If my

ideas didn't prevail, then they'd fail. I've failed before, I'll fail again. But I would argue that ^{this} ~~that~~ is a way to start remaking our society. ~~If ecology becomes the very center of political existence,~~ ^{It is perhaps a better way than being in the} ~~instead of being in this~~ peculiar, contradictory, anomalous position of ~~being out on the flank~~ and having to appeal to government to solve our ecological problems--which means that government ~~in effect~~ grows and proliferates and does nothing except ~~to~~ give ecology a bad name, ~~that's a terrible position that ecology is in.~~ But if ecology gets to the point where it can animate people and excite people to vote on the idea that any product that is injurious to nature, is ultimately profoundly injurious to us, then ^{we} got a kind of politics ~~going~~ that's intimate and in the vein.

Roll 18

M: Reagan came into office because corporate greed insisted that it wasn't getting enough profit, it wanted even more. ^{it was decided to stop} So ~~stop~~ giving ~~any~~ money to the bottom. ~~This has gone on long enough.~~ Take all the money and let it go to the top. But they didn't say that. What they said is America must be strong in relation to Russia. America must cut its taxes. Which politically speaking, is an oxymoron. You can't build tanks and cut taxes. Everybody knows that, even Reagan knows that. But they're not serious about that. That's what they use to manipulate us. In American politics it's known that if you want to manipulate people, what you do is tell them what they want to hear. And you excite their hatred toward what they detest. Americans detest large government so you

speak against large government and everybody says, "Hear,
 hear, right." Americans hate taxes so you speak against
 taxes and Americans love the idea that we're just as strong
 as the Russians and just as macho. You speak for armaments,
 and ~~that's~~ ^{it's} all manipulation. Just once let somebody get on
 television and say we don't have to fight the Russians. Let's
 throw away all our armaments. Let the Russians come here
 and they'll die of indigestion. Let the Russians attempt
 to take over America and they will perish. Because Americans
 are more resourceful than Russians, ~~which I believe is true.~~
 Americans have a frontier tradition, they would love the idea
 of joining an underground. Let the Russians come over here.
 They never will. ~~I finished my remarks in the other room by~~
~~saying the Russians won't.~~ They're too smart. But if they
 did, the greatest blow for liberty that's ever been struck
 would indeed be ~~struck~~ ^{struck}. The Russians would founder on the
 shores of America. As ^a practical matter, that idea is not
 often discussed in America. Let it begin to be talked about
 and who knows what will happen. It could be entertaining
 at the least. Communications cannot stop any process that
 is entertaining. They are at the mercy of it. They are at
 the mercy of it the way a pervert is at the mercy of any sexual
 activity that excites his or her libidinous urges.

S: That would be, has to be the first step to move anything
 in this society. But who could change anything in the com-
 munications industry, system? The students? The younger
 generation? Or a man like you?

M: It takes time. Ideas like this if they catch on....Look, it'll take ten years, twenty years, but it could happen.

You know when I was your age I wanted it tomorrow. That doesn't mean you're wrong, it just means if you ask me what I think, I think it's going to take ten, twenty years.

S: What do you think of John Anderson?

M: I thought he was boring. A third-party candidate should be interesting, because they have no responsibility.

S: Do you think there is a chance for a third major party in the United States?

M: I think that he created some ground for the possibility. He showed that people were interested in a third party in America, he did show that. To that extent we may all honor his name some day. But I thought he was awfully boring.

S: Do you think a lot of people didn't vote for John Anderson because they thought he didn't have a chance?

M: Yeah. That's always true of a third-party candidate. You always lose half the vote you think you're going to get in the last week. As it gets nearer and nearer people decide more and more that they want their vote to count. There is a fetishism to voting. One wants to be buried in the proper cemetery. It's just that if you're the third-party candidate, you should be interesting. You have no responsibilities, you don't have to worry about losing millions of votes for the wrong remark. So you can take chances. He had nothing to offer, he was like the other two. He was very slightly to the left of the other two, but they were all three very much in center.

S: Do you think if there ever was an interesting third-party candidate, there is a chance for ^{him?} ~~it~~?

M: If somebody interesting comes along who can do it.

S: In the near future?

M: I think there will be a few people coming along. Yeah.

S: How long have you been running now?

M: Oh, for president? Since 1959.

S: After twenty years maybe you're the one to start the third party.

M: No, simply because I'm too selfish. The work is hard, onerous, unpleasant. ^{T.d} You'd burn yourself out as a writer. I don't think I'd be that good at it. I hate television, believe it or not, ~~I don't enjoy making~~. The living conditions are not agreeable. It's too hot. You have to repeat yourself. The one time I ran for office I didn't like it at all. I'd love to find somebody who's running and who I could talk to. That would be interesting.

S: You're going to publish a second Marilyn Monroe book. Why, and what's the difference between the first and the second?

M: The first one was written from the outside, the second one was written from the inside.

S: You talked a lot about manipulation. Is there anything that is not manipulation? Is there anything in life that is not in some sense manipulation?

M: Yes, an existential situation.

S: Doesn't everybody manipulate somebody else?

M: Yes, if I'm manipulating you and you're manipulating me, that 's interesting. Because that truly has elements of the game in it. One of us wins and the other loses and the one that loses hates it because they were manipulated. But at least we were both doing it to one another on relatively fair terms. But when you have huge institutions manipulating us, it isn't fair. Fair play, that's all I ask for.

(4,467 words)

Roll 20 & 21 Davis Apartment (two cameras) (Nov 20)

L: Norman, once or twice when you were asked which of your books you liked the most, you said, "Oh, I don't know, they're like my children. One day I like one more than the other." But the analogy breaks down if you believe that a writer must excell^o in the art of becoming. I mean, ~~by this that~~, don't you see your books as indices of your growth? Or, do you agree with what E.M. Forster said, that a writer's works are totally distinct tasks, separate from each other, Like children?

M: The advantage of being a writer for ^{as} many years as ^{I have} ~~been~~ ~~a writer~~ is that you can end up agreeing with everyone. What Forster said is true. They are separate tasks. On the other hand ~~I agree with you~~. It's nice if your books can be looked at as indices of growth. But I'm ~~just~~ not certain my books have grown that way. I think a great many people would say that The Executioner's Song was my best book. And maybe I'd even agree with them. But that doesn't mean that it shows the most growth. It might show the most digestion. In other words, I had assimilated my craft at that point and demonstrated that I knew how to write that kind of novel. ~~And since there was less commitment on my part, and since the writing of it~~ ^{is} was less desperate than the writing of some of my other books; ~~that~~ it may have been a cooler and more artful work for that reason. But I wouldn't take it necessarily as a great indication of growth. I really don't care. You know, the

Egyptian novel I'm doing, if it turns out the way I hope it will, will be much more ambitious and much more interesting in its literary techniques than anything I've done up to now. ~~But again, I don't care...~~ It's nice to grow, it's not crucial to me. At this point what I want to be able to do is keep working for another ten or fifteen years. Partly because I must and partly because I just simply don't feel ready to stop writing. ^{There's too much I still want to say.} ~~It may be that the ways in...~~ Let me put it this way. ~~A writer can grow in different ways.~~ Some writers become more and more and more polished artists. Other writers just ~~maybe~~ become more effective, more efficient, more able to produce their work. It used to take me four and five years to write a book. Now I can write one in a year or two. The books may not be better than the ones I was writing twenty and thirty years ago, but ~~it's just there are more of them~~ and I'm able to get more things said. I may have to settle for that. We'll find out.

L: Your friend, Bob Lucid, once wrote that the magic of your writing was based on an implicit promise to connect the world of Freud with the world of Marx--the public world of politics and the private world of dreams and hallucinations. Are you still committed to working on this bridge, as committed as you were in 1957 when you talked about the radical bridge?

M: No, in fact I probably have no real interest in it at all. 'Cause I'm certainly not a Freudian and I'm still a Marxist

to the extent that I just do think that the rich when all is said get much more than they deserve and that the beginning of all our problems are there. But I am not really truly a Marxist in that I'm certainly not a programmatic Marxist and I have no real interest in it. No, I don't know really what I'm working on there. I think I'll pass by that question.

L: The best books of George Orwell were usually about things he despised. Are you like Orwell in this respect? In general subject matter?

M: No. I won't speak about Orwell because I ~~just~~ have too much respect for him and I wouldn't know how to characterize him quickly, ~~but I don't~~. I'm much more drawn to writing about subjects that I feel very comfortable with on the one hand and very uncertain of on the other. ~~What I mean by that is that I feel as if I have something terrible special to say about the subject in one way and I know almost next to nothing about it in another way.~~ For instance, with The Executioner's Song, I felt that I understood Gilmore very well in the beginning; I understood his desire to be executed. It seemed to me that if I were in such a situation, I might also want that. It's very real to me that your soul can die before its time, before the time of your body. And so I felt that I had special knowledge and I ^{could} ~~can~~ write about this man in a way other people can't. On the other hand, I knew very little about prison; I knew nothing about Utah and I knew

absolutely nothing about the particular circumstances of the man's life. ~~That was interesting to me~~, I think it's always interesting ~~to people~~ to move into a subject where ^{you} ~~they~~ feel ^{you} they have a special advantage, when ~~they have~~ an edge, because ^{you} ~~they~~ know something that other people don't know about the subject. Then ^{you} ~~they~~ are perfectly prepared to walk in absolutely ignorant of everything else ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ the subject. For instance, I formed the idea many years ago that Latin was probably the first language that was truly a study in power. Because of the grammar of Latin, ^{you} You never know the meaning of a Latin sentence until you hear the last syllable of the last word in the sentence. Because ^{you} you can put the words ^{in almost} ~~in Latin~~ ^{in almost} in any order, whatsoever. If ^{can} ~~you want to~~ say, "I drink from the glass," ^{you can say} ~~you can say~~, "A glass from the drink I," or any form you wish. You ~~won't know what the meaning of the sentence is until the last word is not only mentioned but you know in which way it is used, whether it's I who drinks from the glass, you who drinks from the glass and so forth.~~ ^{Consequently} That means that ^{Consequently} people had to be alert to understand what was being said in Latin. It was very easy to trick people and betray them. I think unconsciously the Romans were the first nation to think in terms of world conquest and empire. There was a certain unconscious conspiracy to form the language that way. So ~~that only~~ ^T The people who were most alert, most unscrupulous, ~~most tricky~~ and most concerned with getting their way, would be most adept in speaking

the language. It was not a language for poets, it was a language for people ^{with sought} ~~seeing~~ power and were ready to use all means to obtain it. Now with that as a key, assuming my key is correct, Latin might become an invigorating and fascinating study for me. But to approach Latin cold without a key would fill me with dismay. With novels I like that same possibility ^{to be} ~~always~~ present, ^{that I know something} ~~or at least I have~~ an hypothesis that other people don't have which I think is going to be terribly interesting. And those are the ~~books I'm drawn to~~. I'm never drawn to ^{a subject merely because it} ~~ward writing a book that is going to be~~ topical or appealing, but I ^{must} ~~feel that I have no more to say than anyone else~~.

L: What drew this question from me was something you said in Cannibals and Christians years ago, ^{you said} ~~that you felt it was~~ problematic that you ~~were~~ always seemed to be cursed to be writing about diseases instead of cures, although you've done that as well.

M: Yes, but that was a remark I made then and I never stand by old remarks completely. I'll say no more about an old remark than that I'm sure I was sincere when I said it. But very often a remark oversimplifies things terribly. So I wouldn't hold to it.

L: When you began writing, how affected were you by the then-current literary idea, the Jamesian idea, that a writer should not use his ideas of the moment in a work in progress, I'm talking about the idea of authorial detachment. How affected were you by that?

M: Well everybody in my college generation who was writing was scared by Henry James. We had F.O. Matthiessen at Harvard, who was one of the great James scholars, and for some reason, I don't know why, the Second World War was on and it was a time of huge drama and tremendous human military catastrophes and disasters and so forth, it was an apocalyptic time, and yet at Harvard it was as if we were in a backwater during those war years. All people talked about was the extraordinary importance of James' sense of point of view. So I used to pay lip service to the idea that one shouldn't write about one's present ideas, because that was considered very unliterary. You weren't a literary gentleman if you put your own ideas into a work too quickly. But in fact, temperamentally, I always wanted to put the idea I had that day into the work. And if I have a vice, it's that I'm always putting my latest ideas into my work.

L: But in your early work you didn't?

M: Oh, but I certainly did. In The Naked and the Dead I did. The works I did before The Naked and the Dead were filled with whatever few ideas I had at the time.

L: I've always felt some confusion about your ideas of time and history. You celebrate the existential now, but you castigate mass man for cutting himself off from the past. Can these two things be reconciled?

M: Yes, dialectically. ~~There is~~. Maybe it's my Jewish blood, I don't know, but I've always felt that the only way

to proceed in a given direction was to take one's first steps in the opposite direction. In other words, to develop and state and exploit every perverse and contradictory tendency in oneself and free oneself of that ballast and then move into the direction one wanted to move. ^{go in the first place.} And

I think that something of this sort applies here. That mass man has cut himself off from the past and because he's cut himself off from the past, he really does not live in the present. I think we're tending to be too logical in these matters. Cutting oneself off from the past means that one lives in a state of perpetual confusion and discomfort and anomie. ^{while} ^{because} ~~because~~ we're very often bored ^{if} we have nothing in the past to refer to.

Roll 21 & 22 (M cont.)

When ~~people have no past to refer to~~, mass man has cut himself off from the past, and I mean by that, of course, such phenomena as the destruction of old buildings ~~everywhere~~ and their replacement not only by ~~new~~ buildings but by essentially anonymous architecture--~~these~~ huge office skyscrapers that ~~are put up~~ have nothing to relate them to any time other than the present. A building that is interesting architecturally will not only be a building of the ^{nineteenth} ~~19th~~ century, but will have subtle elements in it that will remind people who know a little bit about architecture of the ^{eighteenth} ~~18th~~ or the ^{seventeenth} ~~17th~~ ^{sixteenth} ~~or 16th~~ century. Therefore, there is a sense of curving back into the past. In our modern environment ~~which~~ is filled

with plastic, which ~~is~~^{it} filled with television; which has no past. I mean there are not even classics of television. ~~The television studios don't even save their old television~~^{shows.} particularly. There are any number of famous televisions shows that no longer exist because they didn't save the tapes; they used them to make new tapes, new shows. So television has no past. It certainly doesn't ^{We don't} have sentimental favorites who truly live in people's minds and hearts the way old movie stars do. We have superhighways which obliterate any sense of the past because when we travel through them ^{we} don't pass through towns; We don't see the old landscape; We don't have that intimate contact ~~with railroads~~ that you used to have on old dinky highways where you had to work your way through towns and traffic, through factory districts and through rough terrain. Given ^{the fact} ~~this~~, that mass man lives without a past, it makes it even more difficult for him to enjoy the present. Because he is generally in a state of confusion, anomie, boredom, irritability and mild depression. Those are all precisely the conditions that destroy our sense of the present. The catch is that the present is the only state he can enjoy at all. ^{the} Future is filled with anxiety for him ^{because} ~~given~~ ~~this sense that~~ he is deracinated; ^{he's} that he's lost his roots, ~~the past does not exist.~~ So we have all the phenomena of modern culture. We have the shock, we have the impact of drugs, of booze, and the stimulants of all the chemicals that induce changes in consciousness. ^{We need these} ~~It's because~~ to break through

~~this~~ ^{the} blur in which we all live. We have to project ourselves, we have to explode ourselves out of our normal state into another state. I don't say this in any condemnatory form; ~~I~~ ^{mean} I've had to do it myself. I've spent years of my life getting drunk or taking pot in order to get out of that dull state in which I tended to find myself, all other things being equal. ^{So} To me there is not a contradiction there. ~~I can rail~~ ~~against both at the same time.~~

L: It's become a commonplace to note that your nonfiction is written novelistically. You yourself have said that the biggest difference between your fiction and your nonfiction is that you are bound by and sometimes even aided by the "givens" in the nonfiction stories. That's what you've called them, you've called them the "givens." But there is a difference...

M: The "given." I would call it the "given."

L: ~~But there is another difference.~~ You've always found it easy to discuss your nonfiction while you're writing it, even while you're conceiving it. But detailed discussion of the fiction has always been verboden. Why?

M: Well again, I obviously must be working from instinct, if that is true, and I take your word for it that it is. I think that there's always great danger if you're working on a piece of fiction and you start to talk about it, explain your problem to a friend, let's say. You're ^{may} ~~also likely to~~ discover the solution to your problem, but ~~that's~~ the wrong

place to discover it is in the living room chatting with someone. When you are working at fiction, the only way and the only time to discover what you're up to is at the point of your pencil. My dear friend Jean Malaquais ^{who} once ~~said~~, ~~he was~~ complaining about how ~~hard it was for him to work,~~ ~~it was~~ terribly hard ^{it was} ^{unlike} for him to work. I finally said to him, "Why do you bother to be a writer? You work for twelve, fourteen hours and you get two, three hundred words done in a day. That's terrible, that's torture. You're so intelligent, why don't you do other things?" And he looked at me in astonishment, he said, "Oh, no, no, no, ~~that's~~ the only way we ever discover anything is when we're writing." ~~There-fore-in-fiction, because-in-fiction~~ ^{the} art of fiction ~~to me~~ is the art of the story. It's as simple as that. One has to find out, one has to decide what one's characters are going to do next. Sometimes it comes instinctively, sometimes you have to truly work and ponder it. But ~~ideally you find it out as you're writing.~~ ^{put} The best turns in a novel come to your surprise. You're writing along and lo and behold your character does something. It's as if you got your hand on your character and suddenly the character leaps out from your hand and you got to bring your hand up to catch the character ~~again~~ ^{he's} because ~~it's~~ taken a move on ^{his} its own. So you wouldn't want to discuss a novel in the living room while you are working on it. In nonfiction you can write it in a way that is agreeable to the reader, so that ^t ~~it~~ reads like a novel

rather than like the digested contents of the second stomach of the cow, which is what most nonfiction is to me. Most conventional nonfiction is anathema to me because it's pre-digested material. Someone spends a lot of time reading and studying a body of material, ^{and} then they digest it and come to their conclusions and they write the book around their conclusions. That's not interesting. ~~We never know whether our conclusions have any foundation to them at all.~~ ^{What} is only interesting to me in another writer is to see how the other writer's mind works. If I can obtain something, ~~if I obtain clues~~ ^{to} the way his mind works, then I can improve my own mind. But ^{it is disagreeable to me} ~~to~~ expect someone to have digested a subject so thoroughly and so powerfully and so well, that there is no need for me to have to think about that subject again, because I can accept what they give me entirely on faith, is disagreeable to me. I don't like the way ^{most} nonfiction is done. Except for the greatest works of nonfiction, which I could possibly name a few, I don't like it as a form at all. I like the novel because the novel is evocative. The novel insists that you do your own thinking. ~~When we read a novel, it stirs us.~~ It doesn't give us hard answers. It moves us in directions we can't always control and it changes our lives to some extent. Many marriages have been broken up, for instance, because someone read a novel and they decided they were unhappy in their marriage. The life of the character in the novel was more interesting than their own life. Novels

are painful to read, that's why so few people do read them.
~~In nonfiction,~~ when I do a piece of ~~(nonfiction so-called)~~
~~it's covering~~ a political convention, or writing about some-
 thing like the March on the Pentagon, it's easier for me be-
 cause I know what happened. I don't have to decide on the
 plot. That saves me months and years. ^{With fiction it} It takes me longer
 to figure out what is going to happen next than it takes me
 to do the writing. ^{So} I feel a great relaxation if I know ^{exactly} what
 is going to happen. I can therefore devote my arts, such
 as they are, to working on the mood and the various literary
 emoluments the book is going to have. So in that sense I
 can talk about ~~it to a certain extent~~ ^{nonfiction.} I'm never aware of
 talking about my books but I would know and would have to
 agree with you that if I do talk about them, it would be
 about the ~~books that are nonfiction books.~~ ^{nonfiction}

L: Can nonfiction ~~(be ever)~~ existential in ~~this sense, in~~
 the sense that you've just described it in regard to novels?

M: I think to the degree that someone could write a work
 of ~~nonfiction, that is a factual work,~~ maybe an historian
 could write an existential work. ^{= he would} In which they could say,
 "I start this history with two opposed hypothesis. I'm not
 sure which is correct. I have been living with these two
 opposed hypothesis^es for many years and let us go through the
 material as we explore it and let me show you the arguments
 for one hypothesis and then for the other. Maybe in the
 course of it we'll arrive at more of an answer than I have

now." Although I can't think of ~~anybody offhand~~ ^{off (h.v.)} of a single historian ^{off (h.v.)} who's done this ~~in depth~~. Occasionally, ^{one} they may do it ~~for~~ ^{in the} introduction to a chapter, but to ~~do it~~ ^{it} in truly sustained form is so dangerous and ~~it would~~ so violate the canons of the profession of history, ~~which~~ insist that you take ~~one stance not two~~, that it almost is never done. I think it would make for a fascinating history and would give people who read it much more of a glimpse into history. The thing that disturbs most people about history and that they find outrageous is that ~~when~~ they begin to learn somewhere between high school and college or college and graduate school or graduate school and life, ~~somewhere along the way they begin to learn~~ that history is not history. That history is merely a series of rather sober novels written by men who often don't have large literary talents, ~~But~~ that finally they have no more to say about the real world than novels ^{is}. And ~~that's~~ ^{it's} a terribly disturbing ^{to} discovery. ² That the historians are not dealing with fact. They're dealing merely with their stance in relation to a series of historical milestones and data that have been presented to them as fact and they're now presenting it back in turn to the reader. But the facts remained to be certified, the facts remained to be illumined. Finally, the necessity is to put those facts into a pattern that makes sense and enables us to comprehend the past. Some historians do it better than others. We come to realize ~~there for a while~~

that none of them do it any better than a novelist does it, that all history is a novel. Just as all novels are the history of the workings of one man's imagination and so are true history.

L: How have the metaphors you've used changed over the years? ~~Have they changed that much, the tenor of them, the kind of metaphors you've used?~~

M: ~~I'm not aware of my metaphors.~~ I remember I had a dear friend, Charlie Devlin, who helped me greatly with The Naked and the Dead, in fact he was the model, considerably removed, for the character named McLeod in Barbary Shore. Charlie was a quiet, saturnine Irishman who was living in a small rooming house where I took a room to finish The Naked and the Dead. We used to have literary conversations. At a certain point I showed him The Naked and the Dead and asked him to criticize it. And ~~He~~ he tore it apart. He was a terribly severe critic. He said, "You have a certain talent and it's not a bad book. It's a better book than I thought it would be." I was very young at the time; he was much older than me. ~~He~~ He said, "But you have no gift for metaphor." Then he went on and said, "Metaphor reveals a man's character and reveals his true grasp of life. To the degree that you have no metaphor, you're an impoverished writer." I never forgot this lecture and I began to work with might and main on my metaphors thereafter. But I never study my metaphors. I mean, I try not to be selfconscious about them.

Roll 23 & 24

L: In an essay on Hemingway Edmund Wilson wrote "The sophisticated techniques of the fiction writer come to look artificial when applied to a series of real happenings." In a way, you've spent most of the years since the Deer Park in 1955 disproving this contention. But given your belief in the novel's magical qualities, I'd guess that you'd have a fair amount of sympathy with Wilson's position.

M: I think of the time that Wilson made that remark. There was a... I drew a blank on this one, I think we'll pass.

L: In your recent self-interview in New York magazine you discuss Marilyn Monroe's "inner negotiations with evil." Many of your characters over the years have carried on the same sort of negotiations--Marion Faye, D.J., Rojack--I take it that you would not agree with Hannah Arendt on the essential banality of evil?

M: No, I wouldn't agree with Hannah Arendt at all, not at all. ~~I always felt that,~~ ^{I've} I always found that philosophy unpleasant. You know she can make a case. There are any number of people who are prodigiously evil who have terribly ordinary and from the novelist's point of view disappointing exteriors. But to assume because Eichmann was, superficially speaking, a little man, an ordinary man in appearance, ~~and~~ vulgar and dull, ^{for} therefore evil itself was banal, strikes me as an exhibition of a prodigious poverty of imagination. You know one of the paradoxes I always found ⁱⁿ of the liberal

temperament is that on the one hand they are immensely worshipful of Freud--Freud is their psychoanalyst--the one ^{point} equation you can make with great certainty about the liberal temperament is that they will not go to Jung and they won't go to Reich and they certainly won't go to many other analysts. They'll go to Freud even though Freud is essentially a conservative. ~~And~~ ^A lot of his ideas, if you analyze them, are ~~so~~ antipathetic to the notion of liberalism itself, including his profound pessimism. But they go to Freud.

The reason they do is that Freud is tremendously reductive. ~~Still analysts have given it to us more and novelists cer-~~ ^{vision of what the unconscious} ~~tainly give it to us again more powerfully.~~ ^{is capable of.} ^{But} Dostoevsky's vision of the unconscious is vastly more overwhelming than Freud's. It was Dostoevsky who wrote the chapter on the Grand Inquisitor, not Freud. But ~~the~~ liberals don't truly want to believe in the ~~vast power and properties of this~~ unconscious. ~~And in this~~ unconscious evil of a power and an extent and a hideousness, ~~murderousness~~ ^{ing} that we can't begin to contemplate resides in the most ordinary people. Now to mistake the surface for the reality is ~~to perform~~ the fundamental liberal error. The liberals always say in effect, "I don't see God anywhere, so why do you assume God exists?" Out of that I think has come the present bankruptcy of liberalism. Liberalism, I think, has failed. I take this moment in time when Carter has been defeated by Reagan ~~as a~~ ^{that} ^{the} point to state ^{but} this is ~~that~~ the moment in history when liberalism truly ~~seems to have failed~~ ^{Not only has} ^{been} ~~become~~ the Democratic party ~~was~~

~~not only~~ defeated, but liberalism itself seemed^S bankrupt.
 It ~~had~~ ^{has} no exciting ideas to offer. Even the people who
 wanted Carter to win weren't dismayed that much when Reagan
 won. Because ~~There~~ ^T was a deep feeling of exhaustion and
 apathy, a feeling that finally liberalism had to begin to
~~rethink its positions, that it had nothing to offer people~~
~~any longer.~~ I think this enervation of new ideas comes from
~~the fact that~~ ^{the} liberalism simply has not been able to provide
 answers to confusing and complex questions. And it hasn't
 begun to be able to deal with the haunting question of the
 twentieth century, which is not communism but fascism,
 nazism. It can't come near ~~to~~ this incredible phenomenon
 which took over a country of the most decent, hardworking,
~~clean~~ people in the world. ~~You don't have a black problem~~
~~in Germany.~~ ^T They don't have to worry about blacks ripping
 off welfare in Germany. They never did. Not even in the
 worst years of the Weimar Republic ^{were there} ~~did they have~~ people who
~~were not working and were getting too much of their share,~~ ^{more than}
 which is the view of the American middle class of the black.^S
 No, you had everybody working hard and yet you had this in-
 credible phenomenon of a fascism that went far beyond the
 bounds of totalitarianism into the most extraordinary and
 despicable adventures ~~with the~~ liquidation and extermination
 of vast numbers of peoples, ^{the} not only Jews, but the Poles and
 the Gypsies, we can go through the list. There were as many
 million other people killed as there were Jews killed. ~~There~~

~~was an extraordinary extermination of humanity.~~ And this coming out of a people who had always been tremendously law-abiding, ^Ssuggested that the unconscious ^{IS}was truly a hideous place, ~~and one did well not to speak of the banality of evil.~~ I think to speak of the banality of evil is precisely to point us further into the wrong direction. So I'm very much opposed ~~just by my natural stance~~ ^{this}to the idea of Hannah Arendt.

L: You told William Buckley that Crime and Punishment would disappear if it were written like The Executioner's Song.

You said it had certain qualities that begged for the treatment you gave it. Didn't it have other qualities that begged for interpretation?

M: Wait, I'm confused. Crime and Punishment would disappear if...

L: You said Crime and Punishment would disappear if Dostoevsky wrote it the way ^{you}wrote Executioner's Song.

M: In other words if he had written....

L: In the same mode, the same factual mode.

M: It wouldn't be a good book any longer?

L: It would disappear. It wouldn't even be there. There would be no texture to it at all. And you said the reason you wrote it this way was that ~~there were certain features,~~ ^{Gilmore's story} wrote Executioner's Song ~~this way, was that it had certain~~ features that begged, I believe you used that term, for the treatment you gave it. You were almost compelled to tell

the story the way you did it. My question is: Didn't the Gilmore story have other features, ~~other characteristics~~, that begged for interpretation, for commentary, for extrapolation?

M: Probably. I'm perfectly prepared to see a number of writers come along in years to come and re-write ~~that novel~~, that story. Gilmore will perhaps become a legend, I don't know. I discovered ~~at a certain point...~~ And if ~~he~~ does become a legend and they write about it in terms of the legend, they can do anything they want with him. They can make him heroic, they can make him evil, they can make him ~~finally~~ all the things I chose not to make him. I was captured by how complex he was. I was arrested by one phenomenon in him which in a sense relates to the banality of evil. ~~And it~~ seemed to me it's not the banality of evil with which we have to contend but the complexity of evil and the similitude of evil to ourselves. ~~Because as I got to know Gilmore, and I got to know Gilmore better than I've gotten to know almost anyone in my life, and maybe there are~~ ^{only} three or four human beings that I know better than Gilmore by now, because I spent so much time not only thinking about him, studying him, but because there were hundreds of witnesses who were interviewed who had known him. They all gave slightly different portraits of him. I began to see after awhile that he was a man who was easily as complex as myself. ~~And I've always thought of myself as being fairly complex.~~ At that moment I

realized that the fact he was a murderer was not the pre-dominant factor about him. When you thought of him as a man, ~~as a human being, that wasn't necessarily what you wanted to walk away with although here was this murderer.~~ ^{The fact that he was a murderer was not} ~~The fact he~~ ^{Of course, he} is a murderer stops all thought ^{at first}. We can't think about him ^{if} because he's a murderer. But once we allow ourselves to think about him, to see him in his contradictions and in his complexity, we realize that the fact he is a murderer is significant, ^{only} let's say it's one quarter of his personality, ^{perhaps} where the potential murderer in each of us is only one sixteenth or one sixty-fourth of our personality, but that fundamentally he is more like us than unlike us. That is why I wanted to write the book in this way, with the slow accumulation of detail. I felt that ^{his complexity, himself, etc.} to treat him in more interesting ways, to make him a character who was like characters in a novel, ^{To make him} ~~arresting or interesting or sinister or all of a piece,~~ would be to deny the truths I'd learned ^{about} by studying him.

L: You didn't feel any obligation, at least provisionally, to let the readers know how things sifted out and settled down in your mind in your judgments on Gilmore? I mean you don't spend two years and sift through six thousand pages of manuscript without some sort of intellectual accretion taking place. You had some interpretation, you some views on what made him tick.

E: I had less and less as I went on. I started with many more ideas about Gilmore than I ended with. ^{It} That was an interesting process for me, because usually, ~~since I may not be~~

~~a good intellectual; but I expect willy-nilly I am an in-~~
 tellectual, my tendency is to create intellections. I put
 them on like adhesive plasters around a subject. ~~In other~~
 words, if the subject is my leg, my leg ends up being covered
 with adhesive plasters ~~because~~ I'm always taking these intel-
 lections and applying them to the nature of my leg. In this
 case I was pulling off the adhesive plasters. I decided
 that every concept that I had about Gilmore proved to be
 somewhat inadequate as I got deeper and deeper into ~~what~~ his
 nature ~~might be~~. I did have hypothesis^s about him in the end,
 but I didn't even feel sure enough of them to present them in
 the book. ~~That~~ book is not a shell game. It isn't as if I
 concealed notions about Gilmore that I wanted to bring the
 reader to. ~~What I wanted to do was~~ I wanted the reader to
 confront, I felt perhaps and I don't say this vaingloriously,
 because I don't think it's ever done, I wanted the reader to
 confront the true complexity of ^{our} human personality ~~if we study~~
~~one man close enough. He didn't have to be a murderer.~~ The
 fact that he was a murderer made my task much ^{easier} ~~more easy~~ be-
 cause we're all fascinated with murderers. I believe we ^{all} con-
 tain ^{murder} ~~that~~ within us and therefore we're somewhat obsessed by
 the subject. ^{but} Any person studied in that depth would have to
 be fascinating. It was Flaubert's old idea that you can take
 any soul alive, including that simple soul he wrote about,
 that servant girl, and make them fascinating if ^{you} ~~we~~ get to
 know them well enough.

Roll 24 & 25 (rest of roll 15)

L: ^{But} Norman, what you have done in your new book on Marilyn Monroe, called Of Women and Their Elegance, that is, explore Marilyn Monroe's mind, speculate on her ideas, character, obsessions, desires and so on, is precisely what you chose not to do ^{for} Gilmore. Is Marilyn less complex than Gilmore?

M: No. ^{But} You have to be ready to enter someone's mind. That is, you have to feel, let me put it another way. So long as you ^{remain outside} ~~don't enter~~ someone's mind, they possess a certain integrity that's lovely, novelistically speaking. There is a mystery about them, there is a resonance, they're a little ambiguous. ~~We walk around them with the same respect that we walk around other people who have a certain presence in a room.~~ People who are very much before us whom we don't quite understand are always more impressive to us than people we do understand. Part of the meaning of charisma is that we don't know the ultimate nature of ^{people who have it} ~~the person we're dealing~~ with. ~~They just radiate energy.~~ And I think that can happen ^{some} with ^{can} novelistic characters that ~~they~~ radiate energy sometimes when we don't enter their mind. ^S In other words, it is truly ~~one of the techniques that a novelist will know instinctively not~~ ^{to} ~~don't~~ ^{they} enter a character's mind unless ~~you~~ have something to say about the interior of that mind that's more interesting than the reader's suppositions about ^L ~~the interior of that mind.~~ The fatal error that a novelist can make is to jump too quickly into a mind and then offer you banal interpretations ~~of that~~

~~mind~~. So I never go into a character's mind unless I feel ~~as if~~^{that it} like I truly understand that mind and that mind is considerably different from what one might think from looking in from the outside.

L: So it's not a matter of complexity?

M: No, it's just a matter of feeling. I never felt ready to enter Marilyn's mind seven years ago when I wrote the book, Marilyn. This time I did. Whether I did it well or poorly is up to the reader to decide, but I felt ready to do it. Maybe seven years from now, ten years from now, I may decide to write a short novel about Gilmore ~~and~~^{in which} I'll enter his mind. I didn't have the feeling when I was doing The Executioner's Song ~~at any point along the way~~ that I had something to say about the inside of his mind that was ~~going to be~~^{all the outside views} more interesting than the way I was presenting him. ~~If I had, I might have changed the way in which the book was written.~~

L: Bob Lucid, your friend and literary critic, once wrote that the magic of your writing was based on an implicit promise to connect the world of Freud with the world of Marx--the public world of politics with the private world of dreams and hallucinations. You once called this a "radical bridge." Are you still as committed to working on this bridge as you were in 1957?

M: No, because I'm no longer particularly interested in Freud, ~~and~~ I don't say this disrespectfully. I think Freud had a great deal to say about the nature of psyche in the nineteenth

century. I think his final importance in intellectual history will be that he gives us more insight into the late nineteenth century that perhaps anyone who lived. Freud is the key to understand^{ing} why people lived the particular kind of lives they led in the 1880's, 1890's and early 1900's, where their lives were on the one hand very much locked up and on the other hand terribly overstuffed lives, terrible formal lives, ^{They lived their} lives lived in vests like this ^(points) all the time. And yet ^{they} lived lives with a considerable amount of power and energy and concertedness, ~~to it~~. Because in those days the psyche was treated like a plumbing system. People were used to living under high pressure. But that's not what we have now. ~~Now what we have~~ is a world in which people tend to act out many of their anxieties and ~~tend to~~ look for explanations for ~~themselves~~ ^{these anxieties} all the time. So Freud is really not adequate any longer. Marx, for vastly more complex reasons, is also not adequate any longer, not wholly adequate, because capitalism absorbed what Marx ^{said about} ~~had to tell~~ the working classes. Capitalism adapted to Marx; ~~One of the ways in which they adapted for many years was~~ they began to pay off the bottom of society. In America, ^{for us but their clients} we've had that marvelous experiment ~~for the last thirty years~~ of not only giving most of the waste to the ^{wealthy} people at the top, who are wealthy, but giving a little of that waste to the people at the bottom as well, by way of welfare and poverty programs. Allowing ripoffs to which we ~~have~~ winked an eye. That was an attempt of capitalism to solve

some of its problems, ~~some of its contradictions~~. So given the fact that neither ^{Freud nor Marx} of them ^{is} was particularly adequate any longer, I don't try to create a bridge from one to the other. I'm not certain I ever could ~~have~~.

L: How about their worlds though? How about the public world of politics and economics, history and the private interior world of individuals--hallucinations, surrealism, dream? ~~How about those two worlds?~~ Haven't you ~~hasn't your~~ ~~writing~~ always been trying to bridge inner and outer, public and private?

M: Yes. ^{I've} It's always been trying to do it. There was a bad sentence I wrote once ^{in "The White Negro,"} "Until every manifestation of human energy from ukase to kiss ^{is comprehended, we will be nowhere."} ^{Something of this} I say a bad sentence because it's a very unpleasant sound, "Ukase to kiss." I was trying too hard. ~~"Until every manifestation of human society from Ukase to kiss is comprehended, we will be nowhere,"~~ I said. ~~Something of the sort.~~ ~~It was in "The White Negro."~~ ^{I wrote it} ~~It was~~ at a time when I began to realize that everything in society from the largest social institutions to those private and intimate personal moments and the deepest mystical moments such as the onset of death, could all be connected ~~socially~~ if one had the courage and the determination and the wit to begin to connect them. In that sense, I'm still trying to do that. But I've come to realize that the task is enormous. Intellectually speaking, I grew up under the shadow of Marx and Freud. They were ~~both~~ men who ~~created an entire~~

~~world-system.~~ They had a vision of all existence. That
 impressed me immensely. I was nothing if not intellectually
 ambitious when I was young and I wanted to come up with a
 similar vision that would comprehend everything. By now I've
 come to realize that ~~it is enormously difficult~~ and I don't
 have the intellectual discipline and the mental grandeur ~~to~~
~~begin~~ to do anything remotely ^{similar} ~~like what they did.~~ But one
 tries to do the best one can with with what one's got. So
 I'm still trying to connect up as much as I can. Because I
 think it is terribly important. I think ~~until we understand~~
~~the ways in which the authorities manipulates us, until we~~
~~understand the ways in which our lives are obliged to be led~~
~~in ways we don't particularly enjoy,~~ ^{I think} until we understand all
 those reasons why so many of us feel dead inside so much of
 the time and come to recognize how much of that is not the
~~not cause of our own lack of imagination, but~~ ^{that} our lack of imagina-
 tion is the product of vast institutional systems of greed
 and injustice that ^{we feel} ~~come forward toward us~~ as rather benign
 manifestations, ^{until then, we are numb}. The only way we can tell that something
 terrible is going on is that we all feel a little duller than
 we ought to feel. And we wonder what's wrong. Why do I feel
 so dull inside? Very often that's ^{this feeling is} the end of a very long chain,
 you might ^{call it a} ~~say~~ socially intentional process that keeps us mal-
 leable, amenable and short on such powerful emotions as out-
 rage at injustice. In the ^{at} sense, I'm still trying to find the
 roots, trace ^{them} ~~it~~ out, bring in the ultimate indictment against
 all that's awful and evil in society.

L: That is still a radical bridge, isn't it?

M: Yes, it's just that I don't have those two marvelous mountains--Marx and Freud--any longer. I'm somewhere tracking around in the foothills kicking up a lot of dust.

Roll 25 Take 2 Nymphenburg (Nov 21)

L: Norman, how much fun was it playing Stanford White in the ^{"Rapture"} movie?

M: There isn't much fun working in a professional movie. The only fun ^{satisfaction} is that ~~you're~~ ^{to be} a professional about it. You don't complain, you don't wear out, you're patient and you're a good instrument for the director. You get a certain satisfaction from working in a professional movie, but I would never call it fun. In fact, I was amazed at how hard the work is.

L: There were no real chuckles?

M: No, don't forget I was just there for two days and it so happened that the days that I was working, the extras ~~that were there~~ were there for the first time. So ~~they weren't really~~ Nobody knew anyone else. We all were just working hard to pretend that we knew each other very well. That's what the scene called for.

L: Well, I kind of ^{had the picture of} ~~got the idea~~ you and Pat O'Brian and Jimmy Cagney ~~around~~ on a movie set with Milos Forman in a London roof-garden restaurant--^{lots} ~~lots~~ of chuckles, lots of laughs, lots of WASP accents. ^{But} And the way that you ^{vo} described it the last few days, ^{the process} ~~it~~ sounds more like an instrument of torture.

M: Well, ^{consequently} filmmaking is always an instrument of torture. ~~It was~~ Nothing to do with the people. You can make a movie with any one of fifty well-known directors and some of them might be charming and gemütlich like Milos Forman and some of them

^{might} could be sadists and tyrants. But that would be a small factor, that would be five percent of the whole. The fundamental oppression of being in a film is that it's ~~just such hard work and it's~~ so unnatural. You feel like a flower ~~that's being~~, whose stem is being twisted around a wire in order to grow in a certain direction. You're forcing your personality into many special directions and ^{it's awful} if you are not a professional actor, ~~who loves that~~, you know, we all have ~~I suppose~~ a species of torture that we like for ourselves, ~~I mean mine happens to be writing, but unless you happen to like movie acting, it's not necessarily the most agreeable way to work for a day.~~

L: Cagney wasn't full of one-liners or anything like that. He was pretty silent?

Roll 26 Take 1

L: Do you think there is too much envy among writers?

M: I think it's endemic to the occupation. Writers are lonely and ~~I would just guess~~ ^{that} lonely people tend to be more envious than people who are gregarious, ~~and out in the thick of things~~. Not that ^{it's} ~~that's~~ necessarily honorable or virtuous to be in the thick of things. People who are always rubbing off against other people, people who are ~~gregarious~~ ~~and~~ extroverted, very often do get a better rough sense of their own reality. They're always meeting people who are

stronger or weaker than themselves. It's like a pecking order, they tend to know just what roost they occupy in the barnyard. That tends to diminish envy a little, because I think ^uenvy is a somewhat slightly psychopathic emotion. It's not geared to the proportion of things. Envy comes from feeling that one is not in one's proper place in the universe. Most people, willy-nilly, end up ~~in~~ ^{where} about the place they ought to be ~~in the scheme of things.~~ ^{This} ~~it~~ doesn't mean that one has to approve of ^{all placements,} ~~everything that~~ goes on, ~~it's just that~~ ^{but} given our strength, our courage, our weakness, our resourcefulness, what have you, ~~our lack of ingenuity,~~ we end up more or less ~~about~~ in the place where forces push us. Lonely people don't rub up as much against other people and as a result they tend to be ~~by themselves, they tend to brood over their position in life~~ and ~~they~~ get very envious. I sometimes think that one reason why I've had such an odd life, have been so much in the public eye, is ~~that~~ ^{because of} my temperament, ~~particularly~~ ^{when} I was younger, I was a very lonely and envious young man and I found it a terribly incongenial way to live. ~~It was~~ ~~as if~~ some instinct in me said, "Get out there and get roughed up a little, because it's crucial ^{to} you." I know going into the Army was certainly the most profound experience of my life, for just that reason.

L: You always said that the writer's life is lonely. You compared it to a monk, to a boxer in training. To me a

writer's life has always seemed glamorous, varied, interesting, gregarious, the White Horse Tavern and Jimmy Baldwin and a lot of interesting people and so forth. It always struck me that the writer's life was much more gregarious than it was lonely. But you don't see it that way at all?

M: No, you have a lot of fun when you are a writer from time to time, there's no question of that. After all I am the guy that made the remark that the one thing that can be said for literary fame is that it enables you to get in bed with women who might not otherwise take you too seriously.

Roll 26 Take 2

L: Norman, you've ^{referred to} ~~written a lot about~~ the Irish, mentioned them in passing many times. I've thought about it and it's occurred to me that like the Irish you're somewhat sentimental about things, but you fight the sentimentality just like the Irish. Is that accurate?

M: Well, I think the Irish are sentimental. I don't think I am particularly so. ~~I expect that the Irish are sentimental to a great extent and they distrust it because... You know~~
The Irish have always struck me as being a people who are more generous on the one hand and more stingy on the other than most people. So when they get drunk and sentimental, they tend to give away their patrimony. It's common for an Irishman to give all to a friend in a bar, someone he has met a half hour or an hour before. There's this instant trust

that the Irish so often have which is very embarrassing to
 a colder people^s like the protestant^s or the Jew^s. Then, of
 course, what happens is ^{that} any friendship that is formed ^{so} ~~that~~
 quickly ~~is based on~~ ^{has} a great potentiality for betrayal.
^{So when} Then the Irish get double-crossed, ~~and~~ they're full of anger
 and hatred, ~~and~~ they are mad as hell, ^{and} the stingy side of
 their nature comes out. I've noticed ~~with the Irish~~ that
 there is more sweet and sour in ^{the Irish} ~~them~~ than there seems to
 be in other people. They go from these heights of ebulli-
 ence to this really bitter, sour, distaste for the very na-
 ture of things.

L: I suppose Brenden Behan was like that, ~~and other Irish~~
 writers?

M: By the time I met Behan he was really in overdrive. He
 was going along by an act of will. He was a very unhealthy
 man already. He was just about a year or two away from his
 death and sick as hell and drinking like a fiend ~~at times~~
~~and not drinking at other times~~ but almost always very de-
 pressed, ^{but} ~~and very~~ iron, very strong. Strong in the sense
 that Mohammad Ali is strong. Once he started talking you
 wouldn't dream of trying to interrupt him. A terribly power-
 ful personality but at the same time overbearing and dull ^{often} ~~often~~
 Behan could be funnier than anyone I knew. He had
 an overpowering wit. He also had an immense culture. The
 culture of the revolutionary Irish and the prison Irish plus

a good deal of the English, since he rubbed up against a great many of ~~the~~ English people. It was all there in him.

Roll 26 Take 3

L: Norman, why do you think your books are more popular in Germany than in any other country in Europe?

M: Because I was raised by German nurses.

L: You mean you have a feeling for the language? Are they...

M: No, (laughter) no deeper explanation than that.

L: ~~No deeper explanation than that. Let me ask you something else.~~ Wilfred Sheed has said that the real thing Americans are interested in, especially American novelists, isn't American politics but American manners. Would you agree with that?

M: Yes, I'm much more interested in American manners than American politics. American politics are studies in manners. In fact looking back on it, that's probably the way I've written about ~~it~~^{politics} as studies in manners. I never take what politicians say very seriously. There is a famous remark by some politician that no man could ever be elected if he told the electorate what he could truly do.

L: So politics as manners?

M: Yes.

L: There's that other statement you made years ago that you were more interested in politics as part of everything else than politics as politics.

Roll 26 Take 4

L: Why does politics lend itself so well to a treatment as manners. ~~in narrative?~~

M: Because, ^{by the nature of their occupation,} politicians are always engaged in false presentations of themselves. ~~by the nature of the occupation.~~ Politics is the art of the possible. That means that politicians have to be enormously practical, they have to get things done. You learn very early in life that you can't get things done unless you pretend to be something that you are not quite. I mean, when does a businessman ever truly tell the truth? He always pretends to be a little more optimistic or a little less optimistic than he is really. A politician is an exaggerated case of the businessman and he's always pretending to have funds of confidence that he can't possibly possess. And whenever people are phoney, they're engaged in the practice of manners. Manners is a special form ^{of} acting. A ceremonious and ritual form of acting, but nonetheless acting. All politicians are actors. Truly the only way to treat them seriously is to take the very falseness of politicians, which most people despise, and treat that part of them very seriously. ~~because~~ Indeed, a politician is often a splendid practitioner of manners.

L: Like in a Jane Austin novel?

M: Yes.

Roll 17 Take 3

L: What's your most misunderstood book?

M: Try another.

L: Any new emotions with a grandchild coming?

M: Another.

L: Would you agree with D.H. Lawrence, "If it isn't fun don't do it?"

M: Yes, but I've spent my life breaking that commandment.

L: What was Hemingway's legacy?

M: Suicide.

L: Are you ever going to bring back Rojack from Guatamala?

M: Yucatan. You got the place wrong. Why should I bring him back?

L: Do you think The Deer Park would make a good movie?

M: I think it would make a great movie, but it would be a very difficult movie.

L: All the interviews you've done over the years. Is there any question that you hoped someone would ask and no one did?

M: Mike, I'm just glad to get off the air.

L: You've said that you like an interview periodically.

It's like a psychic house cleaning. Have we tested the muscle tone of any of your ideas in the last four days?

M: I have to tell you that the house is empty. Not only did they clean it, but they took all the furniture out. I don't know when we're going to bring it back.

L: Kipling said you should, when you finish one task, you should immediately turn to another completely different. Would you agree with that?

M: I don't care about Kipling.

L: Your writing sometimes makes people believe that you'd be less genial and relaxed than you are in person. Other people noted that?

M: Writers are never like their literary personality. Some of the nicest guys in the world were the most savage in their writing. Henry Miller for one. Some of the most unpleasant writers around ~~as far as the way they treated people went.~~ were sweet, sentimental and tender in their prose. Robert Nathan, who wrote Portrait of Jenny, was supposed to be an ogre and a curmudgeon, but Portrait of Jenny is the sweetest most sentimental book ever written.

L: Is it still easy to find favor with you when the absurd and the apocalyptic are mated?

M: I pass.

Roll 2^o Take 2

L: Norman, many people say you have a prurient interest in sex. Is that true?

M: Yes.

L: Why are you so obsessed with sex?

M: Just lucky I guess.

L: How about all the wives and children, doesn't it get confusing?

M: Very. I put them in T-shirts that are numbered.

L: Why do you always want to get your mug in the papers?

M: I think if it appears in print often enough, the features will improve. (spoken in a very bad German accent).

L: Do you fear growing old?

M: No, because... Next question.

L: Do you think anybody reads your books besides hippies and drug freaks?

M: No, but I write big books and so they use them in out-houses. (bad German accent).

L: What's your secret burning ambition?

M: To be a great fucker.

L: Which one of your books do you love the most?

M: The one I am working on now.

L: Would you like to have a house like this and a view like this?

M: Yes. I would put a golf course on it. Oh, Jesus, this is dreadful. (laughter)

L: That's all right, keep going. How old will you be before you move to Miami Beach?

M: Next question (laughter).

L: Do you have to continually prove yourself as a boxer?

M: Yes.

L: Why, is it ersatz Hemingway?

M: Yes.

- L: Isn't Saul Bellow the man you secretly admire most?
- M: Next question.
- L: Or is it Gore Vidal?
- M: Next question. Ask me again.
- L: Isn't Saul Bellow the man you secretly admire most?
- M: Next question.
- L: Or Gore Vidal?
- M: Get me a telephone book.
- L: Why do you want a telephone book?
- M: I want to hear some new names.
- L: What European writer do you love the most?
- M: André Malraux. But he is dead.
- L: Did he influence you greatly?
- M: Yes.
- L: You wanted to be a hero like him?
- M: This is not funny, Mr. Lennon. (laughter).
- L: I'm trying, I'm trying. Of all the American writers which one would be the best heavy-weight champ?
- M: Harry Crews.
- L: Harry Crews, the Southern writer. Who would have been the best sneaky middle-weight?
- M: Me. ~~(after a~~ (long pause) Me.
- L: ~~How about~~ In a boxing match between Dostoevsky and Tolstoi, who would win?
- M: Dostoevsky.
- L: In the late rounds?
- M: Whenever, he fought like a Polack.

L: How about Stendahl as a boxer? A good hook?

M: Hemingway would doubtless have said, "He goes the distance."

L: Has Mark Twain influenced you as much as Hemingway?

M: No, he has influenced Kurt Vonnegut as much as Hemingway.

L: Do you think Kurt Vonnegut would be a good prize-fighter?

M: A cutey with a sneak punch. (still had German accent)

Why don't you say something nice about my German accent?

L: Your German accent is very fine. No doubt it comes from your childhood.

M: (laughter) My German nurses.

L: Did you really have German nurses?

M: Oh, yes, yes. My introduction to the triangularity of sex came when once I went to the beach with my German nurse. I was two years old and instead of paying full and undivided attention to me, she had a boyfriend who came around. And I kept tapping her on the shoulder wanting to get her attention, but she had eyes only for the boyfriend. At that moment I knew the tragedy of sex.