

don't succeed in ^{becoming} making them very vivid to the reader.

So that emotion, ~~that inner experience in writing~~, while it is delightful, is not the sine qua non of the professional writer. ^{who} The professional writer ^{works} very often writes with a great detachment. If his characters come alive for him, that's nice. But you can ^{also} write about characters who never come alive for you, but you ^{by way of} know through the years of skill that you've acquired ^{you know} that they're 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 ^{particular} 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 from coming to Provo? Do you think if he wouldn't have come 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 he have moved differently or could he have changed? He sort of got tramped 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 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 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. 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 if a man and a woman are talking and either the man or the woman says it would be very romantic if we did this. That means something different to almost every one. You know what a romantic evening would be. It could be anything from watching a professional football game on Monday night in America on TV to going to the ballet or dining by 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..... *etcetera.*

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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 are a critical writer. Do you think that you can influence society in some way 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. *By now I know that*
~~I've always felt that~~

you can never ^{measure} know the results of your books. ^{In fact anyone who} Someone who
 worries about whether they are going to hurt ^{somebody's} 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 ^{they keep} 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 ^a so and so
 who's going to be terribly injured by this." If they feel
 that, then they can't write. ^{Indeed, a} A great many young writers can't
^{work} write for that reason. They think of all the people they're
 going to hurt, and ^{those} all the people they're going to make en-
 emies of and the retribution that's ^{will} 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 has more possibilities to influence ~~modern people than literature~~

M: ~~More and less.~~ I think ^{good} movies ^{are more likely} ~~have more possibility~~ to reach deep feelings in people, and ~~perhaps give life to~~ people.

S: Why? Because 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 development, ^{directs itself} ~~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.~~ People who can't read or write ^{still} ~~can~~ get profound reactions 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, ^{that's} it's no good. Film ^{is best} ~~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 ^{its} ~~the nature of the film.~~ One ^{might} ~~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 ^{can} ~~could~~ laugh 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 other ways all together which is that literature gives us an indispensable sense of the past. Particularly in a technological age in which the past is rapidly being destroyed for us, it may be that in years to come literature may have a resurgence. People may say, "That is the one thing I must have, I must have good books to read. I can't bear existence without those 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 consider to be major American authors, from your personal perspective? And why?

M: There are probably twenty American authors who if you *asked* ~~ask them that question~~, "Who ~~do you think~~ ^{one writer feels} are the major American authors?", they would name ~~an author~~ ^{my}--themselves. John Updike would say John Updike, ~~and 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. It's that we have a funny situation ^{at present} in American letters. It ~~isn't~~ as if, ^{and} 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 ^{reply} 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, ^{who} since you're self-critical, of course, you know beside yourself ~~different authors~~.

M: There are a lot of writers ^{for} of 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, 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 ^{but} 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 which you dislike who are overrated?~~

M: No. ~~I think in a funny way we've had such a...~~ ^{an overrated} It's very hard for a writer who's truly overrated to last for long, given the state of American criticism. 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 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: Are there any Latin American authors which you are familiar with?

M: Well I think there are two...

S: ^{and} Borges or Marquez

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...

*Spelling
of Pynchon?*

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 brio and Borges is absolutely fascinated with the problem of the novel. 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, he shows us the resources of the novel. He's a magician's magician. In that sense I love his work. I can get more from reading ten or twenty pages, Borges than I can get from reading mounmentally 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, ^{and} you know every one of the children, ^{and} 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 Borges has a history, so I admire him.~~

S: Political attitude you don't care?

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 underserving. You know people in America have been screaming for years 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.

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

M: There are any number of very good novelists including Gunther 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 that influence 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 end up with work that 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 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. To say ^{to oneself} (I have a prize cow, and the price of milk is high now, and I'm going to get every last bit of milk out of this cow. You have to be very careful of that. Writing is an instinctive process ^{but it is not bright} and a dull instinctive ^{clever} process. One often ^{can} doesn't feel bright while one's working on a book, you just feel a dull pressure from ^{your} the instinct to go here ^{or} to go there ~~as one's working~~. You have to try to listen to that ^{faint} voice 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

not a hundred percent chance. Some of us end up in that natural 80% that we were more or less destined to become and some of us don't--aminority. 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. *and of the evils of big government. Would you say something on this?* 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. It'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

P 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. *the responsibility.* 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 *proliferate* divide more quickly than normal cells because they're not equipped to solve problems, they're only equipped to grow. *When in doubt, split; that's cancer.* Government divides and grows and proliferates all the time. It doesn't solve problems. *Next ask* So you say how do you get rid of television? I think the answer is that we may come around a bend into 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 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 we were to succeed in that, plastics would disappear. Once that's gone, we'd 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 that is a way to start remaking our society. If ecology becomes the very center of political existence, 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.

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M: Reagan came into office because corporate greed insisted that it wasn't getting enough profit, it wanted even more. 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

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S: What would you like to hear somebody say
on American television that's new?

~~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 all manipulation. Just once let somebody get on
television and say we don't have to fight ^(stand up to) 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 rung. The Russians would founder on the
shores of America. As practical matter, that idea is not
often discussed in America. Let it begin to be talked about
^{we suggest the real force}
^{of it by showing the opposite. What if the Russians}
and who knows what will happen. It could be entertaining
^{invited us to occupy them, it would exhaust us as}
at the least. Communications cannot stop any process that
^{a nation}
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~~ ^{he has} no responsibility.

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

M: I think ~~that he~~ ^{Anderson} 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~~ ^{such} 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: Yea. That's always true of a third party candidate. You always lose half the vote ~~you think you're going to get~~ ^{you} in the last week. As it gets nearer ~~and nearer~~ ^{election day} 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~~ ^{So} 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.~~ ^{you're going to see them anyway.} He had nothing to offer, ~~he was like the other two.~~ ^(But Anderson) 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 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. Yea.

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. 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.

Roll 20 & 21 Davis Apartment (two cameras)

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 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 so many years ~~as I've 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.~~ ^{developed} I think ^{to now} a great many people would say that The Executioner's Song ^{is} was my best book. And maybe I'd even agree with them. But ^{present} 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 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 ^{a3} ~~the way~~ I hope, it ^{considerably} 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 ^{no longer} ~~not~~ crucial to me. ~~At this point~~ ^{well} ~~what~~ ^{really} I want to be able to do is keep working ^{well} for another ten or fifteen years. Partly because I must, ^P 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 way is...~~ 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 ~~may~~ become more effective, ~~more efficient,~~ more able to produce their work. It used to take me four and five years to ^{do} write a book. Now I can write one in a year or two. The books may not be better than the ones I was ^{Publishing} 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 ^{most} very comfortable with on the one hand and very uncertain of, on the other, ^{that is, when} ~~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 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 ^{Gilmore's}
 man's life. That was interesting to me, I think it's al- ^{a good balance for}
 ways interesting to people to move into a subject where they ^{for a writer}
 feel they have a special advantage, ^{he has} when they have an edge, ^{he}
 because they know something that other people don't know ^{he}
 about the subject. Then they are perfectly prepared to walk ^{That way, I'm}
 in absolutely ignorant of everything else in the subject.
 Let me put it an altogether different way,
 For instance, I formed the idea many years ago that Latin
^{is} was probably the first language that was truly a study in
 power. Because of the grammar of Latin, You never know the
 meaning of a Latin sentence until you hear the last syllable
 of the last word, ^{After a bit} in the sentence. Because you can put the
 words in Latin in any order whatsoever. ^{In Latin it's} If you want to say,
 "I drink from the glass," you can say, "A glass from the ^(put it "from the")
 drink I" or any ^{way} form you wish. ^{The listener} You won't know what the mean-
 ing of the sentence is until the last word is not only ^{spoken} men-
 tioned but you know in which ^{was} it is used, whether it's I
 who drinks from the glass, you who drinks from the glass and
 so forth. That means that people had to be alert to under-
 stand what was being said in Latin. ^{when Latin was spoken} It was very easy to
 trick people ^{your friend in that tongue} and betray them. ^{Now, the} I think unconsciously the
 Romans were the first nation to think in terms of world con-
 quest ^{and perhaps them} and empire. There was a certain unconscious conspiracy
 to form the language that way. So that only the people who
 were most alert, most unscrupulous, most tricky and most con-
 cerned with getting their way, would be most adept in speaking

the language. ~~It was not a language for poets.~~ It was a ^{tongue up} language for people seeking power ^{who} 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. ^{whereas,} But to approach Latin cold, without a key, would fill me with dismay. ^I ~~With~~ novels I ^{might write} like that same possibility always present--that I knew 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 toward ^{a topic where} writing a book that is ~~going to be topical or appealing~~ but I 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, 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 Har-
 vard who ^{flow} was one of the great James scholars, and for some
 reason, I don't know why, ^{although} the Second World War was on, and
 it was a time of huge drama and tremendous human ~~military~~
~~calamities~~ catastrophes and disasters and so forth, ~~it was an apocalyp-~~
~~tic time, and yet at Harvard it was as if we were in a back-~~
 water during those ^{early} war years. All people talked ^{more} about ~~was~~
 the extraordinary importance of James' ^{ideas on} sense of point of
 view. So I used to pay lip service to the ^{dictum} 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 ^{work with} put the idea I had
^{picked up} (that day ~~into the work.~~ And if I have a voice ^{above others}, 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 ^{is} ~~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, ^{such} and free oneself of ~~that~~ ballast, and then move into the direction one ^{really} wanted to move. 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 'cause we're very often bored if we have~~

^{too little} ~~nothing in the past to refer to.~~

Roll 21 & 22 (M cont.)

~~When people have no past to refer to, mass man has cut him-~~

~~self 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 architec-~~

~~turally will not only be a building of the 19th century, but~~

~~will have subtle elements in it that will remind people who~~

~~know a little bit about architecture of the 18th or the 17th~~

~~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 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
 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 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, ^{but} because when we travel through them, we
 don't pass through towns. We don't see the old landscape, ^{nor have}
~~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 ^{over}
 through rough terrain. Given this, that mass man lives with-
 out 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. ^{Yet} The catch is that the present is the only state he
 can enjoy at all. ^{The Future} Future is filled with anxiety ^{because} for him given
 this sense that he is deracinated, that he's lost his roots.
^{stimulants} 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 ^{those} of all the chemicals that
 induce changes in consciousness. It's because to break through

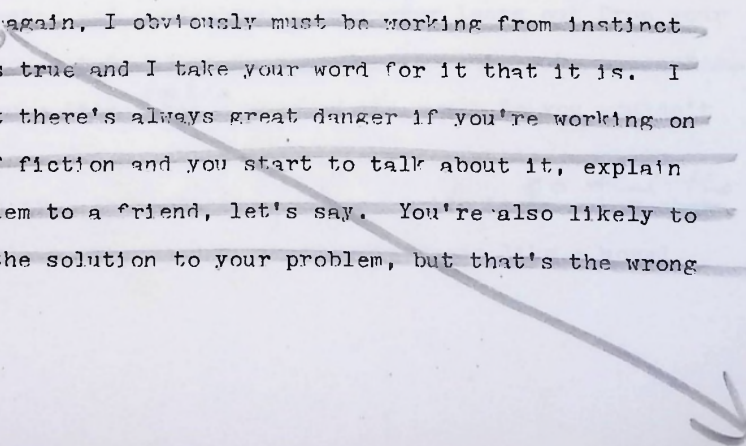
this blur in which we all live, ~~we have to project ourselves,~~
~~we~~ we have to explode ourselves out of our normal state ^{to reach} into
 another state. I don't say this in any condemnatory form, I
 mean I've had to do it myself. I've spent years of my life
 getting drunk or taking pot in order to get out of ^{the present} that dull
 state in which I tended to find myself, all other things being
 equal. ~~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, ^{and} ~~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.~~ ^{talk about} 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 verboten. 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 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 once said,
 he was complaining about how hard it was for him to work,
 it was terribly hard 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 intelli-
 gent, 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. 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 because it's ^{taken} taken a move on 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 it reads like a novel

So that the work

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, then they digest it, and come to their conclusions, ^{those} and they write the book around their conclusions. That's not interesting. We never know whether ^{the living} our conclusions have any foundation to them at all. What is only interesting to me in another writer is to see how ^{how} the other writer's mind works. If I can obtain something, if I obtain clues ^{that} the way his mind works, then I can improve my own mind. But to expect someone to have ^{suppose that an author can} 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, ^{the} because I can accept what they give me entirely on faith, ^{independently} is disagreeable to me. ^{is given} I don't like the way nonfiction is done. Except for the greatest works of nonfiction, ^{of} 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 ^{obliges us to do our} insists that you do your own thinking. When we read a novel, ^{it} 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 ^{that the} were unhappy in their marriage. The life of the character in the novel was more interesting than their own life. ^{Good novels} Novels

are painful to read, that's why so few people do, ~~read them~~.
 In nonfiction, when I ~~do a piece of nonfiction~~ on so-called,
 I'm covering a political convention, ^{for example} or writing about some-
^{march} 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, ^{some times} ~~and~~ years. It takes me longer
 to figure out what is going to happen next than it takes me
 to do the writing. I feel a great relaxation if I know 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
^{and every} can talk about it to a certain extent. 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.

L: Can nonfiction be ever/existential in that 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. In which they could say,
^{project} "I start this history with two opposed hypotheses. I'm not
 sure which is correct. I have been living with these two
 opposed hypotheses for many years and let us go through the
 material ^{the materials} as we explore it and let me show you the arguments
 for one hypothesis and then for the other. ^{maybe} ~~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, of a~~ ^{real} single historian who's done this in ^{depth}. Occasionally, ~~they may do it for an introduction to a chapter, but to~~ ^{to say that} do 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 ^{virtually} never done. I think it would make for a fascinating ~~his-~~ ^{work} tory and would give people who read it much more of a glimpse into history. ^{Of course, which} The thing that disturbs most people about history, ^{what} and that they find outrageous, is that when they begin to learn somewhere between high school and college ^{between} or college and graduate school, or ^{is it between} graduate school and life, somewhere along the way they begin to learn that history is not history. That history is merely a series of ^{immensely} rather sober novels written by men who often don't have large literary talents. ^{And} But ~~that~~ finally they have no more to say about the real world than novels. And that's a terribly disturbing discovery. That the historians are not dealing with ~~fact~~ ^{data}. ^{are merely} They're dealing merely with their stance in relation to a series of ^{data} historical milestones and ^{which} 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,~~ ^{make these} the facts remained to be illumined. Finally, the necessity is to ^{accepts in a lens that} put those facts into a pattern that makes sense and enables us to comprehend the past. Some historians do it ^{perceive} better than others. ^{Once we} We come to realize there for a while

that none of them do it any ^{more closely} better than a novelist does it, ^{then} ~~that~~ all history ^{becomes} is a novel. Just as all novels are the history of the workings of one man's imagination, and so are true history, ^{artifacts to illumine a period for us}

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, ^{and} in fact ~~he~~ ^{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 ^{cubicle} room to finish The Naked and the Dead. We used to have ^{long} literary conversations. At a certain point I showed him The Naked and the Dead and asked him to criticize it. ~~And 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 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~~ ^{then} began to work with might and main on my metaphors, ~~thereafter~~ ^{then afterward,} after. But I never study my metaphors. I mean, ~~I~~ ^I ~~try~~ ^{given} those ~~beginnings,~~ ^{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 always found that philosophy unpleasant. ^{Of course,} You know she can make a case. There are any number of people ^{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 ^{was} a little man, an ordinary man in appearance and vulgar and dull, ^{but to assume that} therefore evil itself was banal, strikes me as ^{the} 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 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, ^{mock} 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 certainly give it to us again more powerfully. 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, ^{they don't want to think that} And in this unconscious, evil of a power and an extent and a hideousness, murderousness that we can't begin to contemplate ^{can} resides in the most ordinary people. ^{And} Now ^{In effect} 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. ^{AK} I take this moment ~~in time~~ when Carter has been defeated by Reagan as a point to state this is that moment in history when liberalism truly seems to have failed, because the Democratic party was

~~not only defeated, but liberalism itself seemed bankrupt.~~
~~It had no exciting ideas to offer. Even the people who~~
~~wanted Carter to win weren't dismayed that much when Reagan won.~~
~~Because there 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 ^{because} ~~from~~
~~the fact that 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~~ ^{most} haunting question of the
 twentieth century, which is not communism, but fascism,
 nazism. It can't come near to this incredible phenomenon
~~that~~ which took over a country of the most decent, hardworking, ^{and}
clean people in the world. You don't have a black problem
 in Germany, they ~~don't have~~ ^{no} to worry about blacks ripping
 off welfare in Germany. They never did. Not even in the
 worst years of the Weimar Republic did they ^{even} have people who
~~were~~ ^{not} working and were getting too much of their share,
^{yet} which is the view of the American middle class of the black.
~~No, you had everybody working hard and yet you had this in-~~
 credible phenomenon of a fascism that went far beyond the ^{normal}
 bounds of totalitarianism into the most extraordinary and
 despicable adventures with the liquidation and extermination
 of vast numbers of peoples, not only ^{the} Jews, but the Poles and
 the Gypsies, ~~we can go through the list.~~ There were as many
 million ^{of} 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, suggested that the unconscious was truly a~~ hideous
 place to contemplate. ~~liberals, unable to weave that thought into their~~
~~hideous place and one did well not to speak of the banality~~
~~philosophy were happy to welcome Hannah Arendt's phrase. But~~
 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 to the~~
~~ideas 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 treat-~~
~~ment you gave it. Didn't it have other qualities that beg-~~
~~ged for interpretation?~~

M: Wait, I'm confused. Crime and Punishment would dis-
 appear 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,~~
~~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~~ ^{Gilmore} 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, ^{and} 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 ^{in others} to ourselves. Because ^{came} as I got to know Gilmore, and I ^{him} got to know Gilmore better than I've gotten to know almost anyone in my life, and ~~maybe there are 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~~ ^{Not a valley} ~~Somewhere, in there, I realized that~~

realized that the fact, ^{that} he was a murderer was not the ^{to be} pre-dominant factor, ^{and} 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 he ^{shouldn't} is a murderer stops all thought. We can't think about him because he's a murderer. But ^Q once we allow ourselves to think about him, to see him in his contradictions and in his complexity, we realize that the fact, ^{that} he is a murderer is significant, let's say it's ^{as much as} one-quarter of his personality where the potential murderer in each of us ^{might be} is only one sixteenth or one sixty-fourth of our personality, but ^{still} that fundamentally he is more like us than unlike us. That is why I wanted to write the book in this way, with ^{its} the slow accumulation of detail. I felt that 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 ^{but} or all of a piece, would be to deny the truths I'd learned 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 judgements 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.

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

a good intellectual, but ~~I expect~~ ^{and so} willy nilly I am an intellectual, ^{and so} 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 intellections 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 ^{an} hypothesis 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 human personality if we study ^{that comes from} one man close enough. He didn't have to be a murderer. The fact that he was a murderer made my task much more easy because we're all fascinated with ^{killers} murderers. I believe we contain that within us and therefore we're somewhat obsessed by the subject. ^{But am} 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 ^{servant girl} 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: 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. ^{A writer has to gamble when entering} 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 don't, ^{the character retains} ~~enter someone's mind, they possess a certain integrity, that's level, novelistically speaking.~~ There is a mystery about them, there is a resonance, they're a little ambiguous. ^{can such characters we often} 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 the person we're dealing with. They just radiate energy. And I think that can happen ^{in novels can more} with novelistic characters that they radiate energy sometimes when we don't enter their mind. In other words, it is truly one of the techniques that a novelist will know instinctively --don't 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 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 ^{material} ~~interpretations of that~~

mind. So I never go into a character's mind unless I feel ^{the reader will be surprised} 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 ^{a question} just a matter of feeling. I ^{was} never felt ready to enter ^{Monroe's} 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 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 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 ^{gave} ~~gives~~ us more insight into the late nineteenth century that ^{perhaps} ~~perhaps~~ anyone who ^{but Marx,} ~~lived.~~ Freud is the key to understand ^{now} ~~why~~ people ^{put up with} ~~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. Lives lived in vests like this all the time.~~

And yet lives with a considerable amount of power and energy and concertedness to it. Because ^{used} ~~In~~ those days the psyche was ^{accustomed to} ~~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 ^{know} ~~tend~~ to act out many of their anxieties and tend to look for explanations ^{their conduct} ~~for themselves~~ 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 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 we've had that marvelous experiment for the last thirty years of not only giving most of the waste to the 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 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 of them was particularly adequate any~~
 longer, ^{So} I don't try to create a bridge from one to the other ~~any more~~.
 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 in-
 terior 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. ^{It's} ~~It's~~ always been trying to do it. There was a
^{phrase} bad sentence I wrote once, "Until every manifestation of
 human energy from ukase to kiss," I say ~~a~~ bad sentence be-
^{cause} cause 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,"
^{and 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 mo-
 ments such as the onset of death, ^{might} could all be ^{slurped in their} connected so-

^{social connections} cially 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 enorm-
^{Of course} ous. Intellectually ~~sneaking~~, 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 ^{not only} enormously difficult ^{but that} and I don't
 have the intellectual discipline and the mental grandeur to
 begin to do anything remotely ^{of that sort,} 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 ^{what} as much as I can. Because I ~~do~~
 think it is terribly important. I think until we understand
^{Until we understand the} 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, 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
 cause of our own lack of imagination, but our lack of imagina-
 tion ^{but} is the product of vast institutional systems of greed
 and injustice that come forward toward us ^{we are schooled to perceive} as rather benign
 manifestations, ^{we are nowhere} 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 the end of a very long chain,
 you might say ^{of} socially intentional ^{intentional processes} process that keeps us mal-
 leable, amenable and short on such powerful emotions as out-
 rage at injustice. In ^{that} the sense, I'm still trying to find the
 roots, trace 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 ^{old lake beds} foothills kicking up a lot of dust.

Roll 25 Take 2 Nymphenburg

L: Norman, how much fun was it playing Stanford White in the movie?

M: There isn't much fun working in a professional movie. The only fun is that you're 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 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--like of chuckles, lot of laughs, lot of WASP accents. And the way that you described it the last few days, it sounds more like an instrument of torture.

M: Well, filmmaking is always an instrument of torture. 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

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 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 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 envy 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 about the place they ought to be in the scheme of things. It doesn't mean that one has to approve of everything that goes on, it's just that 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 my temperament, particularly when I was younger, I ^{left out} 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 written a lot about the Irish, mentioned ^{the Irish} 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 ^{new} friend in a bar, someone he has met a half hour or an hour before. There's this instant trust

among ~~that the Irish so often have which~~ *that so often* is very embarrassing to a colder people like the protestant or the Jew. Then, Of course, ~~what happens is any friendship that is formed that~~ quickly is based on a great potentiality for betrayal. Then the Irish get double-crossed, and they're full of anger and hatred and they are mad as hell. The stingy side of their nature comes out. I've noticed with the Irish that there is more sweet and sour ~~in them~~ than there seems to be in other people. They go from these heights of ebullience to this really bitter, sour, distaste for the very nature 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* ^{He was} just about a year or two away from his death and ~~sick~~ ^{he was} as hell and drinking like a fiend at times, and not drinking at other times, but almost always very depressed 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 powerful personality but at the same time overbearing and dull often. *On the other hand,* Behan could be funnier than anyone I knew. He had an overpowering wit. He also had an immense ^{street} 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, 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 politicians are always engaged in false presentations of themselves ^{and that's} by the nature of ^{their} the occupation.

Politics is the art of the possible. That means that politicians

have to be enormously practical, ~~they~~ ^{you learn} 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. ^{But} And whenever people are phoney,

they ^{are} engaged in the practice of manners. Manners ^{after all} is a

special form ^{of} acting. A ceremonious and ritual form ^{of} acting,

but nonetheless acting. ^{They all} All politicians are actors. Truly

the only way to treat them seriously is to take ^{their} the very

falseness of politicians, which most people despise, and ^{regard it}

~~treat that part of them very seriously~~ because indeed a

politician is often a splendid practitioner of manners. ^{Reagan}

L: Like in a Jane Austin novel?

M: Yes.

is the first to come to mind.

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: ^{with all} 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).
- 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 Stendhal 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.