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Maule's second
version of Munich
interview (November 18-21, 1980)

edited in
London May 1981

Maule's cut and twice
edited version of Munich
interview (November 18-21, 1980)

Maule ~~but~~ worked from
an unedited copy of
my version of the
transcript ^(which was) in turn, based on Davis's original
version.

He made this revision
in May (probably April)
1981

Sound Track Transcript "The Longest Ball,"

Jeffrey Van Davis Filmproduktion, Munich

Roll 1, Take 2

L: To what do you attribute your ability to move from style to style and mode to mode?

M: I think when you get down to it, there are two kinds of writers.

The first ^{have} ~~has~~ a powerful sense of identity (and the attraction of their work comes from that) ^{best American} identity). I think the ^{greatest} ~~greatest~~ single example ^{of that} ~~of that~~ would be Henry Miller. Hemingway too.

Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe. ^{Then} ~~Now~~ you get to people like Steinbeck ^{who}

~~and you find the reverse.~~ Steinbeck kept changing his identity with every book he did. That is, ~~he~~ kept changing his

style. ^{-to} ~~So there is that second kind of writer.~~ I've named

Steinbeck. I could ^{add} name myself. ^{On} ~~1~~ Ed Doctorow is a good example.

^{We} ~~There~~ are writers who are perpetually in search of ^{our} ~~their~~ identity. ^I ~~suppose we feel our~~ ~~that's~~ ~~own personality~~ ~~is~~ a function of how the world changes, ~~and they do.~~ So the act of writing is different for ^{us,} ~~them,~~ than for ^{for} ~~people like~~ Hemingway or Miller.

L: Well, ^{he's} ~~he's~~ not a writer but I'm thinking of Picasso. Picasso went through ~~so~~ many styles and it's been attributed by some to his various marriages, ~~his relations with his families.~~ Is that true in your case to any extent? Have your ~~marriages, your~~ relations with your families, had a major impact in some underground fashion?

M: Picasso did work in a different vein for every wife, ~~and of~~

~~course it's true.~~ I could say the same ^{about} for myself up to a point. I've written a different book with every wife and had a different style. I think you ^{become} are a different man in each marriage. On the other hand, Miller was married many times, ~~that~~ but ^{did} did not change his identity.

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

M: ~~I think~~ some people are born with ~~very~~ clear roots. They know exactly where they came from and who they are and what they are, but the world is mysterious to them. I've always been the opposite. Like a poor man's Julien Sorel, I've always been sensitive to the world and forever in the course of discovering who I am and what I am. I remember I met John Erlichman after Watergate, and he had changed greatly from the days when he appeared before the Erwin committee. He was now very much like a rather gentle Westerner, a slightly wispy goatee, a little punched out, but very nice, very decent. What struck me was how different he was from the way he had been just two years before. And he said, "Well, I had an identity and thought it was my own identity, and then when my life changed so drastically I realized it was not mine but an identity they had given me. The Erlichman they were now talking ^{about} ~~to~~ was a different man in their eyes, and so I became different."

L: Well, I was going to say also you and Miller are both from Brooklyn and Miller has written ~~some~~ ^{there} about his early life in Brooklyn. You've said your childhood never interested you very

much. You didn't really want to write about it. Could it be that you had no sense of reacting against your childhood the way Miller did? ~~He was reacting against that German~~ ^{of his} ~~bourgeoise family, he was brought up in.~~ ^{roots,} What did he say, "my family were Nordic, which is to say idiots." Of course, you had close ties with your family, ~~in Brooklyn.~~ You still live there. But you never were reacting for or against Brooklyn. Maybe you were freer to move than Miller, in a sense?

M: Well, I was close to my ~~family~~ ^{parents,} I didn't have to break away. I never had a sense of fighting my way clear. In fact, the outside world was much tougher. Maybe there ~~is~~ the difference ^{is} right there. Someone like Miller had to establish his identity very early in life. If he didn't, a large part of him would have been ruined for any kind of serious effort later in life. I expect this is true for people who grow up in hostile families--they must establish their personalities early. So there is often a rock-hard quality to the personality. Hemingway may have had subtler problems in his family, but ~~nonetheless~~ he ^{9/50} had to establish his identity. Whereas ~~I grew up in a world where I was cultivated.~~ My mother and father treated my sister and myself as ~~very~~ important people. At home, we were the center of their universe. It was the outside world that was difficult. So I was always terribly alert to the street and I took the inside world for granted. I was free to indulge myself too, to change or grow from one personality to another.

L: You've compared many times the life of a writer to the life of a monk, the life of a boxer. You've used many metaphors to describe it. And I wondered, how would you describe the writer's life?

M: Well, one word that always comes to mind. . . is sanction. Because something in yourself has to give you the sanction to write. There's a moral judgment in writing. One is assigning values to the lives of others, no matter how, lifting them up or ~~they're~~ putting them down. That's a large act. Even if you're doing it in fiction, you're attempting to affect the reader's brain. We write to influence others. ~~To do that you have to be in command of yourself to a great extent,~~ You have to feel that you have the right to do this. ~~So it's not the good days that you have to worry about, but the bad days, if~~ you've done something dumb the day before, or if you're embarrassed by yourself, or profoundly depressed, or have been put down seriously by a friend or enemy the day before, or if you're having trouble with your mate, or any one of a thousand things that spoil your day, ~~and you go in next~~ morning, why, the thing that makes professional writers (and the reason there are finally so few compared to people of talent) is the ability to work on a bad day.

L: You've also said that you feel some of your best writing comes out of your worst periods and that you sometimes have to go through the bends to really accomplish what you want.

M: I'm always a little uneasy when writing comes too easily.

It's somehow better for me when I have to forge the will to write on ^aany given day. I find looking back on it, and I can't even tell you why, that on ^{the}~~these~~ days it was very hard ^{to write}, but I finally did succeed, and the same occurred ~~the~~ next day and the next and the next, that each day I ^{wrote} wrote against great resistance in myself and finished ⁱⁿ great depression, that those ^{became}~~were~~ the best things I wrote. ^{did}The Armies of the Night was done in a towering depression. I wrote it in two months and they were some of the worst weeks in my life. ^{I would comp}~~I'd come~~ home ^{each night} and think it was terrible every-day. ~~I've never under-~~ stood it, ~~I've always felt that perhaps.~~ One doesn't trust oneself. You see, if I'd known that I was writing The Armies of the Night, I would have gotten slightly manic about it. That's when I'm useless to myself as a writer.

L: You start feeling Napoleonic?

M: Yeah, I start telling other people how to live. Instead of doing it in the pages of the book, I do it in my personal life.

L: You said that when you were writing Armies, all of a sudden trying to get started on it, you finally tried the third person and it worked for you. Was that a release of some pressure?

M: No, it merely shifted the pressure. On the one hand, it seemed interesting, on the other it was a little odd. I remained uncomfortable with it for quite a period. I'd say I

was halfway into the book before I got used to it. It took me longer than any reader. You may remember how the style felt when you started reading the book.

L: It was a shock.

M: It's a very funny way to look at oneself.

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

M: Yes, by the time I was done, I missed it so much I kept going back in book after book. It never worked as well again.

L: I think you said in The Fight that you were getting tired of that style. Is that correct?

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

L: Like a Stendhal hero?

M: No, no. Nothing like. Nothing so large.

L: No, but still, ~~all proportions noted, as you say, "up one day, down the next."~~ You had a success and you had a failure, you were on top of it, you were sick of yourself. That's a little bit like Julien Sorel⁸, I think.

M: Except he had this vast project. He was going to become one of the mightiest men in France. All I wanted to do, if you remember, I wanted to ~~make~~ ^{was not to} make a dinner party that night.

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

M: There is no sex in it. In that sense, it is a nineteenth-century novel. It's courtly, it's deliberate, it's amused with its time and place. It entertains itself with the antics of its hero. ^{That} The notion of personality is ^{that} somewhat charming since ^{it takes} it is ~~taken~~ ^{characters} for granted that these are all very fine and substantial people. We know it's ~~all~~ going to turn out well in the end. I suppose it has ~~then~~ the restrained merriment of the early nineteenth-century picaresque novel.

L: Wilfred Sheed once said that as writers get older they continue to grow and take on new styles, but they may not necessarily keep up with what's going on around them. Have you felt any of that in the '70s?

M: Oh, a great deal. The '70s are a blank for me, I don't know what happened in those ten years, whereas I felt in close touch with the '60s. I thought I understood them fairly well. ^{Indeed} ~~fact~~, maybe I even did. But in the '70s, it was as if everything ^{got} ~~had gotten~~ away from me. I didn't feel at all close to young people any more. I remember I went out lecturing in the early '70s and didn't understand college audiences any longer. They seemed apathetic. And the history of the '70s was a blank. Nixon, Ford and Carter made up a series of particularly dull presidents for me. People Magazine became, I think, the greatest phenomenon of the '70s and took over the country. Television, too. I hated the '70s. I certainly had that feeling Sheed was talking about of getting older and in certain ways

getting better as a writer, but really knowing very little about the present. I can't say to this day whether it is my fault. I don't think the '70s are a decade that one can get attached to. They were like the '50s, worse than the '50s. An exciting time is when people are ready to die for an idea. Then you have a vital time which all of us can hark back to in our memories. Now we have a period when people are not ready to die for any idea around. I think that is an operative definition of the '70s. Not one idea that anybody would die for. Women's liberation was the most powerful set of ideas in the '70s but I have yet to meet a woman who's ready to die for her ideas with the exception of that lady who shot Andy Warhol. But other than that, none of those girls were dying on the barricades, were they? In the '50s, there were people who were willing ^{to put their bodies up} ~~to die for~~ their ideas, but they were patriots. They were willing to die in Korea, ~~wanted to die to fight Communism~~. They never knew just what Communism was, never ^{guessed} ~~knew~~ that Communism ^{might be} ~~was~~ just as benighted as American capitalism. They thought there was something wonderful about Communism ^{it, and therefore} ~~and that~~ it had to be fought, ^{because} ~~because~~ otherwise it was going to win everything in sight. They didn't understand ~~that~~ they were facing the same ^{that} messed-up bastards ^{the Communists} ~~that~~ we are. Except that they ^{had} ~~had~~ an even more oppressed system and were less able to do anything about it. But at least some people were willing to die in the '50s. In the '70s we didn't even have that.

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

M: Well, I think the '70s almost killed America. Nixon's great crime in my mind was not Watergate. I'm sure ^{under} every American president, ^{there were} ~~had~~ operations going on, with or without his covert knowledge, that would rival Watergate. When you have a powerful service like the CIA ^{or FBI} ~~^~~ you have a lot of highly principled, highly determined, highly motivated men, with all the tools, all the apparatus, all the paranoia to go out and pull real capers. I always felt Watergate was a set-up and Nixon fell into it. But Nixon's crime in my mind was that he didn't end the war in Vietnam when he could have, which was in '69, but protracted it all those years. That's one of the things that truly hurt this country. America, morally, had come to the recognition by '68 that the war in Vietnam had to end. When people go through such a moral revolution and decide they want to move from bad conscience to good conscience, nothing is more punishing and finally more likely to render that person apathetic than to make them wait many years to carry out ^{their} ~~that~~ act of good conscience. ~~Nixon did that to America because he wanted to make himself look good for '72.~~ His vast majority in '72 came in part because of the four years he spent getting out of Vietnam.

L: Do you think the election of Reagan might clarify the conflict between right and left?

M: Well, I've felt for a long time that liberalism is bankrupt. I think it was trying to do something, let's say from Roosevelt on, that was unique in human affairs. ~~All human~~ Society up to that point had been built more or less on the notion that everything ~~in the society~~ ought to contribute toward bringing the surplus to the top. If people were going to waste resources, let it be the people ^{on high} at the top. In other words, let the people ^{with the resources} at the top work less than their share. All societies, whether monarchies, or early bourgeois republics, were built on that. Then the Soviet Union came along and attempted for a little while to reverse ^{it} that. If there was ~~going to be anything wasted, it should~~ ^{let it} go to people who were ~~totally~~ underprivileged. The Russians ~~very~~ quickly went back to a system where once again the higher you rose in the society, the more you got of what Marx called surplus value but what ~~we~~ ^{might} call waste--that is, excessive ^{recompense} ~~emoluments~~ or outright emoluments.

Now when the New Deal liberalism of Roosevelt came along, it attempted to not only take care of the top, but also to lubricate the bottom, give a share of this surplus, this waste, to the bottom. ^{After} Since the Second World War, ~~after the Blacks~~ ~~began to achieve some of their liberties~~, out of the great guilt many Americans felt at what had been done to Black people for two hundred years or more, a decision was made to ameliorate the Black condition. A ~~fair~~ part of the surplus now began to go down to the Blacks. Of course, it was still not a tenth of

of the amount that was being wasted at the top. Nonetheless, America had become the first ^{super-society} society to attempt, on a major scale, to pay off the top and ~~the~~ bottom while allowing the middle to support ^{the ends,} it. Of course, the middle had no cause for complaint. They had chosen the middle ^{precisely} because security was there. All the same, the onus of paying was on them. So it created vast resentment, ~~toward the bottom.~~ ^(management of this country by) Given the nature of corporate capitalism, ~~most of the efforts in the communication~~ ^{the} media ^{generally} kept people from being able to recognize that the true waste was still at the top. Resentment was ^{kept} focused toward the bottom. Corporate capitalism succeeded, I believe, in convincing Americans that the Democratic Party was supporting people who didn't work, and in a sense, that was ~~very~~ true. There were a lot of people in black areas and poor white areas who were ~~not working,~~ who were ripping off welfare. But they didn't make up a tenth of that patch who were ^{feeding} ripping off American society at the top. ^{Just think of the} ~~Not when you consider~~ ~~the incredible waste in American society in terms of and~~ the needless expense that goes into products that don't need to be surrounded with romantic and sentimental appurtenances. You know we don't have to love our soap. Maybe we do have to love our automobile, but we certainly don't have to admire any number of basic products that have no distinguishing character to ^{distinguish} them. Money that could go into increasing their true competitive quality, goes instead into contests with other producers to ^{be the} have more public relations, ^{snapper} more advertising, ~~more communications,~~ more air in the product. All the while, there has been a tacit

agreement between Black power and liberal power: "You guys (you Blacks) keep the ghettos relatively quiet, and the money will keep coming in." Now the American voter has thrown that out. The resentment they've felt for the last ten years--it's been building all through the '70s--is that Blacks are getting away with murder, not working and getting too much. Reagan came in on that wave. He said, in effect, "Let's keep all the waste for ourselves."

When I was running for mayor in '69, a ^{number} lot of people took me aside and said, "Look, welfare is the biggest single problem in New York City. The Blacks are ripping it off. Why don't you go ~~up there and~~ talk to some of them? If you could ever work out ^{a plan} something that looks like it makes a little sense, it would be your best chance to show people that you are doing something the other candidates are not doing. Maybe you'll have a chance to get into real contention." So Breslin and I went up to Harlem and met some mothers who represented a ~~Harlem~~ welfare organization. One Black woman got up to speak: "Mrs. Richbucks over on Park Avenue, she says I'm taking my welfare check and ~~I'm~~ riding around in a Cadillac and you know what I say? ~~I say~~ 'Fuck her.' My Cadillac is five years old and I have a lot of trouble meeting the payments on it, and she's riding around in a brand new Cadillac. Mrs. Richbucks over on Fifth Avenue says I've been married three times and I got 18 children and I'm drawing welfare for each one of them and ripping

off the government and I say, 'fuck her.' I may be lying about five of those children, but I got the other 13 to take care of, and I have been married three times. Mrs. Richbucks over on Fifth Avenue, she don't have to get married because she's got lovers all over the place and furs and diamond rings." She went on and on, ~~like that~~ and finally glared at me and she said, "Look, we want our share of the waste." And I thought, "Madam, your argument is unanswerable." I walked ~~out of there and~~ came back to headquarters and said, "Fellows, we got no welfare program." Because I knew we weren't going to be able to ~~go in and~~ say to Black people, "please stop taking things you are not entitled to." They would look right back and ^{ask} say, "What about the rich people ~~at the top~~ ^{skimming} who are taking ten times as much?" I think this is the key problem ~~that~~ the Democratic Party has ~~got~~ to face. If, at least, they are truly interested in having a country ^{where} ~~in which~~ everybody has equal opportunity, or something roughly approaching that. To get there, we have to re-think every single aspect of American politics and American life, start thinking radically, but not in the old ~~radical~~ way of "Let's rally the workers." I mean that is crap beyond crap. By now, America is one vast middle-class consumer nation. Revolution failed in the '60s because what you had were middle-class troops, terrified of being put in jail, beaten up, killed. Four of them finally were at Kent State, and that ended it. Here in the '80s, we've got to get into absolutely new ways of

looking at politics.

So I think we are in a period where the left ought to look for new ways that haven't been tried. I think it would be marvelous if somebody came along and said they were running for President on a single tax program. Like the old Henry George business. Except not on land. No income tax, no state tax, just one tax. Tax just one thing. Plastics. Think of the happiness that would send through American life. Of course, my nightmare is that by now maybe 70 per cent of the American public love plastics, and would fight to the death for the right to use ~~them~~ ^{them}. The real point I'm making is: find out what it is that people detest the most. My guess is that if you really started asking Americans what they ^{can bear least} ~~detest most~~ in the life around them, you might find it's plastics. If you ^{so} ~~found that~~, you could ~~really~~ start a campaign to put a heavy tax on that. At a certain point, plastics ^{might} ~~would~~ begin to disappear. Which means that the real quality of life would begin to improve. Because there is no question in my mind that plastics debase ~~such quality~~ of life. You can be a wealthy man living in a wealthy house, but if everything in your home is made of ^{synthetic} plastic, you're living in a ^{chamber} cold tomb, ~~far more repellent even than living in a tomb~~. ^{occupying a great} ~~a tomb that's~~ that's made of marble. You're living in a tomb of artificial marble. At a certain point if you kept taxing plastics and nobody wanted them, ^{they} ~~plastics would~~ ^{(virtually drop} disappear out of human affairs. We would then be in another era. Now at that point you might say what would you draw the tax from next? Television, I say.

Focus
Tax television sets to the skies. The brunt of political campaigns ^{might then} would be engaged between parties that wished to tax land, ^{to tax oil} or corporations, or frozen foods, etc. If the people ^{can} have the ^{certain} instruments to vote against elements in the economy, as well as the ecology they consider onerous, such elements could be ~~taxed~~ ^{begin} most highly, and ~~begin to disappear without government inter-~~ ^{out} ~~vention.~~ Merely priced out of the market. You could have a purification process that might be able to flush ^{American} ~~through all of~~ American society. For instance, American society at this point is absolutely glutted with all kinds of wasteful products that depend for ^{their} existence on advertising. Wouldn't sell without it. Suppose ^{any} a product that advertises itself has to pay a higher ~~tax in proportion to its relative budget for advertising.~~ ^{to grow} ~~tax than a product that doesn't.~~ That might open up all sorts of opportunities for a good small business who ~~grows~~ by word of mouth. The left, instead of paying lip service to small business, and then opting immediately for every big government solution they can find, might recognize that big government is truly the enemy of the people and the secret and ultimate ally of the corporation. The Democratic left could begin to re-form around the concept that the economy ^{can't have more productivity until it flush} ~~has got to be flushed of its waste.~~

L: Reagan's going to increase the glut.

M: Oh, I think he is an open invitation to big business to take more of a grab. It staggers me how corporate capitalism, big business is endlessly greedy, even greedier than they need to be for their own good.

Roll 6, Take 1 Boat on Konigsee

L: That's the strangest thing. You've stopped drinking. You haven't really measured the impact of ~~not drinking~~ upon your writing habits yet?

M: ~~No.~~ ^{Silly} But ~~Not~~ drinking is peculiar. I've never been psycho-analyzed, but when you stop ~~drinking~~ after ~~drinking~~ for thirty years, as I have, it must be the next thing to ^{going into analysis.} ~~being psycho-~~ analyzed. Because my idea of myself keeps changing every day. It's as if I'm remaking my personality. I'm more adaptable in certain ways, and more resigned in others. Precisely what happens in psychoanalysis.

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

~~M: But~~ ^{at least then I had some touch with the old identity} ~~At least then I had some touch with the old identity. As if there were a roadmap in my mind. Now I feel as if a helicopter has picked me up and deposited me in a new place. The next day I travel in another direction. Instead of traveling, I'm now reconnoitering--if we're going to use a metaphor, on how I feel about the shift in identity. It's a most peculiar sensation.~~

L: What was your impetus to quit?

M: I don't know. I saw a four-day diet and started it. I lost seven pounds in those four days and not a drink for four days, and I felt fairly good. So I thought I won't go back right away. After about three weeks I realized I liked being without booze. It was probably the first time in thirty years

I hadn't been drinking. Life was interesting. Certain things were better than they had ever been. Now I'm calculating not to have a drink for a year. Then maybe get drunk once a week or something.

L: You've done some writing since you've stopped drinking?

M: I have the feeling I may be writing well. If this is true, ~~I may never~~
~~then maybe I'll never go back.~~

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

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

→ The thought of retirement from an active life of writing is not something you're considering?

M: I don't know if I can ever retire. I've got nine children. Unless one of them strikes it rich and proves tremendously generous as far as taking care not only of me and my wife, but

also starts taking care of the other kids, it seems to me I'm going to go on working for the next twenty years.

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

M: I think I'd like to have six months of ^{to lie} lying fallow, and ~~un-~~unwinding. ~~For~~ The one trouble with writing year after year after year is that ~~an awful lot that's dogged~~ ^{doggedness} gets into your nervous system. I feel more like a business executive, at this point, So far as my nerves go, than a writer. ~~The beauty of being a~~ ^{I can rarely} ~~writer is to~~ indulge long moods, soulful moods, ^{or} wander into the recesses of ~~yourself~~ ^{myself}. Now, everything is executive. I remember talking with Henry Kissinger ^{years ago,} and he said ~~something I didn't~~ ~~forget~~. "You know, Mailer, I haven't really had a new idea since I've been ~~working~~ in Washington. I worked ^{up} ~~on~~ all the ideas I had ~~until~~ ^{before} I came here. Now I'm ~~working too hard, and I~~ ^{too occupied to} ~~have new ones.~~" I thought, well, that's close to my life. I don't have new ideas, essentially. I'm still working on all the thoughts I mined for myself when I was in my thirties and forties. ~~Now~~ ^{It's just that now} I'm able to use them. I had no trouble with The Executioner's Song, for instance, because I had thought out most of those things. The ~~exploration~~ ^{philosophy} that Gilmore was ~~trying~~ ^{trying} ~~evolve in~~ ^{evolve in} (his life was one I had made in parallel in mine. I didn't have to stop and say, "Is this man right or wrong, crazy or sane?" ^{As I} came across his thoughts ^{in his letters}, I'd

say to myself, "I understand that. That's like my ^{thinking} thoughts a few years ago." So I ^{would} might like six months to wander around, sit in the sun, ~~think~~, and see if I can still think. I'm really a machine of production by now. That's the only thing I resent in my life. The rest of it, well, I rather like the way things have turned out. Providence, so called, has not been too unjust to me.

L: Would you say that your writing is less of an exploration than it used to be?

M: ~~Yes~~, less of an exploration and more of an occupation of territories I reconnoitered years ago. Twenty years ago my mind was so active, I couldn't keep up with it. I had perceptions of all ^{kind} ~~sorts~~ into all ^{sorts} ~~kind~~s of endeavor. I think, not to compare myself, but I believe the same thing occurred to Zola. He spoke about how when he was young his thoughts would come so quickly that his hand could not keep up with them as he wrote. As he grew older the thoughts slowed down, but that was all right, because his hand could ^{now} write as fast as ^{his} ~~he~~ thought. It was the perfect rate. Something of the same sort has happened to me. I now put leaves on the bare branches. It's ^{more} satisfying but not ~~quite~~ as heady as once it was. I'm not as interesting to myself as I used to be.

~~L: What about the need for new ideas, though? Do you still feel that thirst for new ideas?~~

M: No, I don't. Because I've had so many new ideas over the years. I don't speak vaingloriously here, it's just that I had that kind of head. Not that every new idea I had was good, but

I used to have the kind of head that if twenty-five new ideas ^{mind where} didn't pop into my head a day, it was an odd day. I was not up to myself. Now very often days will go by and I don't have a new idea. ~~I thought~~

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

M: Well, I live with the old ideas. Part of it is natural.

They were so startling when they first came to me that I had to inhabit them, had to grow up with them. Maybe I'm bragging, but I think I have a coherent philosophy. I believe we could start talking about ^{virtually} almost anything and before we were done I think I could connect ^{our subject} anything I'm talking about to almost anything in my universe, at least on a reasonable if superficial level.

L: Are your former books presences in your past that you can refer to? In this book you conquered this territory; in that book you reconnoitered. Sort of guideposts to look back on?

M: I must say I'm not satisfied with any of my books. I think they all could have been considerably better than they are. ~~I do feel I've written a number of good books, however, and maybe a few of them are very good. I don't think I've yet come anywhere near writing a great book. I'm not sure I'm going to be altogether satisfied unless I do so by my own lights.~~

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

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

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

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

M: With the Egyptian novel? I hope I ~~am off to a hell of a good start.~~ ^{I can,} Practically no one has seen the book, you know.

L: ~~No, but~~ I've heard a few people say it's an amazing ^{work,} ~~book.~~

M: Well, it's amazing. I mean, chapter for chapter there is ^{extraordinary} ~~amazing~~ stuff in it. ~~If you read a chapter here or there that I might pull out, you would say, "Wow."~~ The question is whether it will hold up. It's one thing to write wonderful chapters but ~~that's not enough.~~ ^C A great book finally has to live in other people's minds and change ~~them.~~ ^{their life.} ~~When I think of great books, I think of books that have changed my life.~~ ~~Now~~ This book is so ambitious, it's absolutely beyond my measure of anticipation. ~~I don't know if I'm going to be able ever to bring it off.~~

After I finish the Egyptian novel, I've then got a second book I want to do about a space ship in the future, maybe two or three centuries from now, and I'm appalled by the difficulties of the task. I'm going to have to become familiar with science fiction, which I've never read, and get up on the most advanced astro-physics that we have available now. It will be a difficult study for me. Then I'll have to throw that stuff away after I

absorb it. The only value it will have for my novel is that the narrator of my book will be able to say, "Yes, back in the 20th century they believed this was true about the universe. How wrong they were!" That book is going to be staggeringly difficult. Then, of course, the third book, which I look forward to, if I ever get to it, will be contemporary. ~~That will have all the demands of writing a major modern novel, which is no small task.~~ So we'll see. There is nothing automatic or routine about completing ^{this little project} ~~these three books, which will make one~~ ~~them into one enormous work.~~ mega-novel.

- L: Will your short story "The Last Night" have any influence on the second novel? That was such a fine short story.
- M: Yes, it's going to be in the second novel. But I'm not telling you how. I've got a couple of tricks up my sleeve that I can't talk about, of ways of tying together the Egyptian novel, the novel of the spaceship in the future, and the contemporary ^{book} ~~novel~~. So that they will all truly be three parts of the same novel, but in the way a tree might have three trunks growing out of a common root.

Roll 9, Take 1 "The Golden Bear" Berchtesgaden

- L: I saw you on Tom Snyder recently, the talk show. You said that you never questioned your instincts: writers, you suggested, are a little bit like athletes; they're spontaneous. I've got two questions. One, why do you have such great faith in your instincts and/or your unconscious? I'm assuming they're connected. Number two, aren't athletes a little less spontaneous than that?

I mean, they are really very disciplined people.

M: Well, I make remarks off the top of my head that have a kernel of truth. Then I have to think about it afterwards. I ^{believe} think what I actually said was that when it comes to decide which book I'm going to write next, I ^{generally} ~~always~~ follow my instincts. Not that I ~~follow them~~ in every last thing I do. ^{why, if} If I did, like everyone else, I would end up in jail. I think athletes go through ^{their own} a particular little drama. They tend to be people who can trust their instincts for a long time--at least the instincts of their body. ^{but} But when they can't, in other words when they ~~have followed~~ their deepest instinct and lose their game, they're in more trouble than us. I think athletes first come into contact with despair when their instincts ^{fail} ~~betray~~ them. So with all those amendments, I'll still support the remark.

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

M: You know the famous story of Shelley? He rushed up to a mother, seized a two-month-old infant out of her arms, held up the infant and said, "Babe, speak. Reveal your immortal truth!" He believed the infant was born knowing everything. Like Plato--he was a great Platonist at that point, was Shelley--he believed that the education you received when you're young obfuscates the instinctive knowledge with which you're born. Then you spend the rest of your life trying to unmake that education.

also
I believe we're born with a profound appreciation of the
universe and lose it in the first ^{few} ~~two~~ years of our life,
then spend the rest of our ^{time} ~~lives~~ trying to gain it back.
By the ^{age of} ~~time we're~~ six ~~years old~~, the school system makes
certain we lose it, ~~all over again~~. I don't think this is so
evil. It is rather in the nature of things. It was intended
that way. We're supposed to lose it and regain it. I think
it is impossible to conceive of any real achievement in knowledge
without that fall. Because if knowledge is something we re-
ceive merely by opening ourselves to it, well--in the West, we
can't conceive of that. Most of us find something repellent
about Hindu philosophy. It's the idea that you receive wisdom
without ~~making~~ a Faustian effort. The more you ~~relax, the more~~
~~you~~ give yourself to the universe, the more passive you ~~can~~ be-
come, the closer you will ^{be} ~~come~~ to the secrets of existence.
~~That~~ ^{This} is profoundly repellent to the Western mind. We feel you ^{get to}
~~crack~~ the kernel of real secrets by smashing the ^{shell,} ~~nut~~. That's
the way we want it. It's what we're built to do.

L: Like Melville peeling away the layers of the onion to ^{reach} ~~get to~~
the innermost center?

M: Well, if you're going to peel the layers of the onion, ^{I think we can} ~~we~~
secretly believe it helps if you cut off a finger or two while
peeling. But you say why do I trust my instincts? Because I
never had to think about earning a living until the last ten or
fifteen years. From the time I was twenty-five, I knew I was
probably going to be a writer the rest of my life, and so I

^{the precise}
started to form a habit of consulting my instincts. Of course, they hide. You have to know which stone to look under in the garden. I was fortunate to develop habits that most people don't have the leisure to develop. When you have a nine-to-five job, you can't ^{do that} develop much ^{with} in the way of your instincts because your work is a continuation of the very education that ^{buried} burying the instincts, ^{in the first place,}

L: If you had that advantage as a young man of ~~having enough~~ money coming in, at the same time you had some struggles with that ~~whole thing~~, didn't you? You were twenty-five and. . .

M: ~~Early success is obviously a mixed blessing.~~ I went through the bends. I find an analogy between my own experience and ^{boxers,} certain ~~prize-fighters~~. Occasionally you find a prize fighter like Leon Spinks, who before he knows whether he can really fight or not, is champ. ~~And he doesn't really know if he can fight.~~ That's terrifying. It happened to me with The Naked and The Dead. I can understand what Spinks went through afterward. I mean all that idiotic behavior after he beat Ali and won the championship came from the fact that he wasn't ready for it at all. He didn't know whether he was ^{just} still a main-event fighter in a small club, or champion of the world. So he lost all sense of who he was. If you don't have an identity, it's very important to have established elements you can refer to. ^{It's not enough to} ~~If you say to~~
say to yourself, "I'm heavyweight champion of the world," it helps more if you can also say, "Yes, and I beat Joe Frazier, George Foreman,

and twenty-two other good guys." Spinks could only say,
 "I beat Muhammad Ali, ~~and~~ I don't know if that's because I am
 very good, or he is very old." It has to create a double sense
 of identity. Every time you have a thought about yourself,
 you have to refer to two ^{it} ~~places~~. ^{separate identities, the Champ and the Fraud,} Your psychic economy is ~~working~~
~~double~~ ^{beginning to work twice as hard,}

L: After having so much success with The Naked and the Dead
 you felt you were a false champion?

M: Well, I felt two ways at once. On the one hand I believed
 my reviews, on the other I knew that The Naked and the Dead
 had been influenced by a great many writers ^{who were better than me,} By Hemingway,
 Farrell, Steinbeck, by Tolstoy, by Thomas Wolfe, by Dreiser, very
 much by Dos Passos. ~~And I knew~~ ^{And I knew} in a certain sense that it was
 not my own book, ~~that all these literary influences had flowed~~
 through me, ^{had to digest} and I had also ^{but to} the experience of being at war, so I
~~had written this book. To top it all,~~ I hadn't been a very good
 soldier. If you ^{took} pick a company, in my case a ^{short-handed} cavalry troop of
 one hundred men, maybe 75 or 80 soldiers ^{could put up a fight} were better than me.
 So ~~I felt~~ I was a bit of an impostor. On the other hand, I had
 all these wonderful reviews, ^{you could think} and there were times when ~~I thought~~
 it was the greatest book written since War and Peace. Given all
 that, I had to carry two views of myself. The ~~Same thing~~ with
 Spinks. ~~One, he was the best fighter in the world, and on~~
~~the other, he didn't really know how to fight. So when anyone~~
~~gave a compliment to Spinks, he~~ ^{every compliment,} needed two halves of his mind
 to receive it. One half said, "You're wonderful," and the

other, "These people are lying to you." That's the nature of obsession. ^{it's} ~~Obsession is~~ when we feel two ways about one question. We ~~say~~ ^A a young girl is obsessed with her love affair because she doesn't know if she loves ^{or not,} ~~or hates~~ the man, and ~~also doesn't know~~ ^{how} whether he loves ~~or hates~~ her. When we don't know ^{if} whether the answer is A or Z, we ~~can hardly live because~~ ^{have to} we must keep coming back to this terrible imponderable. ~~Do we go directly to the left or directly to the right? As a result, we can't move.~~ Obsessions tend to paralyze.

L: Norman, ~~you were talking about the nature of obsession.~~

Could it be that all the good reviews you received from Naked ~~also~~ got you started in some large psychic way?

M: It gave ^{me} one great advantage ~~to me~~ ^{over other young writers,} I began to realize that all the psychology texts had very little to offer. I was saved, I think, the anguish of ^{having to say,} ~~young writers who begin to write and then have to say,~~ "Oh, God, there's Sigmund Freud. What am I going to do with him?" That has been the curse of practically every Southern writer in America. They have too much secret respect for Freud. "There's New York where Sigmund Freud visited. These people are too smart for me." I knew at an early age they weren't that smart. ^{No book} ~~Nobody~~ had anything to say about experience remotely like mine.

L: You've compared yourself to Spinks. I've also heard you call yourself in an interview the "Ezzard Charles of Literature." I thought you were being enormously modest.

M: No, I'd still say that. Compare the true stature of Hemingway and Faulkner to writers like Bellow and Cheever and Updike and myself, name eight or ten writers who might be the best writer in America, ^{now} John Barth, Bernard Malamud, Pynchon, Algren, go through the list. Name after name. Out of twenty people, none begin to have, myself included, the stature of Hemingway and Faulkner. In that sense, I'd say to anyone who says I'm the most important writer in America today, well, if I am, I'm still the Ezzard Charles of the heavyweight division.

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

M: Well, I don't know. We're all vastly more complex in our preoccupations than Hemingway. But I ^{have} got to tell you that after I wrote The Executioner's Song, I went back and looked ^{at} Hemingway again. Cause now I was writing in a simple style. And his style is remarkable. ~~The older I get,~~ ^{The} more I know about writing, the more remarkable Hemingway's style ^{becomes} seems to me. I know his flaws inside out. I've loved and hated him as if he were my own father for years. There is so much he did for one, so much he didn't do. Truly the relationship you have to him is ^{as a} ~~one of a~~ father. But he is a remarkable writer. His sense of the English language, I'd say, is virtually primitive in its power to evoke

mood and stir the senses.

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

M: He'd ~~read it and~~ hate it and say "That is bad Hemingway!"
He'd loathe ^{the} ~~that~~ book. But you know, he was a prick, let's face it.

G: (Gebhard) Who would you compare Ali to as an author? ~~He worked his way up to be a good fighter.~~

M: Ali is very much like Hemingway if you're going to look for a parallel. First of all, he dominated his division entirely. Second of all, Hemingway ^(like Ali) put in a considerable apprenticeship. He didn't just become famous, he ^{spent} ~~put in~~ a number of years writing short stories and working on newspapers. He had not had a tremendous amount of experience before he became prominent, but ^{it was} more than people realize. Ali also had a number of ^{tough} ~~of~~ fights ~~but not that many~~ before he beat Liston. Then, like Hemingway, he remained champion for a long, long time and ~~he~~ kept dominating his division. Very much like Hemingway, very vain in the way Hemingway was vain. Couldn't bear competition, nor the idea that anyone around him might be remotely as good as he is. I think there is a wonderful study that ^{to} ~~could~~ be made about the similarities between Ernest Hemingway and Mohammad Ali. They come out of that same American urgency to be the only planet in existence. To be the sun. It goes right back to Egypt. A thousand gods but only one sun.

- L: Ali's later career isn't quite as brilliant as his early career. Isn't the same thing true of Hemingway?
- M: ~~That's~~ ^{roughly} true. But Ali did something Hemingway never quite did. After Ali got old, he still won a couple of great fights. He beat Foreman when he was already over the hill. Foreman was an awesome fighter at the point they met. It's one of the great fights of all time because the weaker man won through vast skill and guile and artistry.
- L: Hemingway, at the end, didn't make the big knock-out, to use that metaphor, in his later books.
- M: No, he did not.
- L: I think you said once that one of the best things Hemingway wrote in his later career was the Paris Review interview.
- M: Yes, that was ~~the best thing~~. That, and ~~maybe~~ ^e Movable Feast.
- L: Because The Old Man and the Sea?
- M: ~~The Old Man and the Sea~~ was not a good book, I think.
- D: I'd like to go back to The Naked and the Dead. I don't think anyone can deny the brilliance of Hemingway in terms of style. But Hemingway could never write a book like The Naked and the Dead in which you're talking about fascism coming to America, technology, and the kinds of themes that you have dealt with over the past thirty years.
- M: I didn't say Hemingway was brighter than I was. I just said ~~he writes~~ ^{he writes} his style is better.
- D: But that's not the same as saying his talent is better.

M: Well, I think it is. You can have marvelous character actors like Charles Laughton who ^{could} ~~can~~ play just about any ^{remotely-bodied} part on earth. Then you get someone like Monroe who, in the technical sense, has a small talent. But she can come out and hold a mandolin in her hand and play a little ditty and wonderful things happen ^{to people} ~~to people~~. Let's take an example we would argue about less. ~~I would guess,~~ ^{In} the technical sense, there were limitations ^{I suppose} to Charlie Chaplin. ~~I think there are probably~~ Any number of actors ~~who~~ can do a credible imitation of Charlie Chaplin, and, ⁱⁿ addition, ~~also~~ play fifty roles Chaplin could never go near. Yet we would never argue that they were greater actors than Chaplin. Even though they might achieve ninety-five per cent of ^{him,} ~~Chaplin~~ in an imitation, Chaplin plucked a nerve ^{in us} ~~in us~~ that very few artists could reach. What great artists do is so profound, you ^{can't} ~~can't~~ argue with it.

University Lecture Hall

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

M: I'll listen to any kind of question. I may not answer it.

I promise not to take offense at an offensive question. But

I may not reply. What's your question?

S: Are you Jewish?

M: Yes.

S: You are Jewish. Uh, what kind of role does the Jewish community play in the United States today? And what's ^{the in-} ~~the in-~~

fluence on American politics?

M: The Jewish community is no more a monolithic community than, let's say, the German community is ~~all~~ of one piece. ~~In America there are any number of powerful political groups and they form alliances.~~ Generally speaking, the Jewish people in America have been more associated with the Democratic Party than the Republican Party. However, in the last election, a great many of them supported Reagan. The Jews are not a simple force in American life that moves in one direction. But what is back of your question? What is your opinion?

S: I think the American Jews do have some influence not only in financial aspects but also cultural aspects.

M: It's true that politicians in America are notoriously fearful about insulting the Jews who are very sensitive about being insulted, and tend to organize around that principle. However, I don't think that anti-anti-Semitism is a political position. Among us ^{other} Jews, we often mock Jews who say "Is this good for the Jews?"

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

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

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

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

M: To begin with, when I wrote the book about Gilmore, I wasn't necessarily looking to criticize anyone. A book takes several years of your life. It will age you as you write it. It will drain you and ruin your disposition. So you don't decide to do a book for superficial reasons. Writing a book is like getting married--at least getting married for a few years. For that reason you had better have at best something that approaches a profound motive. If you start to do a book for no better reason than you wish to criticize something, you run out of your best energies very quickly. Then writing becomes a terrible chore. I thought ~~that~~ Gilmore was an exceptional character, and no man was remotely like him in the public eye. The fact that the subject had been in the newspapers didn't repel me, but attracted me. I felt there probably was some remarkable material back of the story. Indeed there was. He was not an ordinary man and it was not an ordinary situation.

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

M: I began to have more respect for the ways in which the wheels of justice grind slow and small. I came to realize there was an element in American life I never understood before. And that is, Americans are obsessed with the idea that they must be virtuous. Now, I'm not saying that we are any more virtuous than any other country, in fact there are many who would say we are less. But, in fact, if you want to understand Americans, I would suggest to you that no matter what an American does-- he can be a drug pusher ^{or} a judge--but it's terribly important to believe that he or she is virtuous. Americans go through bends to convince themselves that they are not being corrupt or wicked or evil or cynical. Very few Americans can honestly say "I don't give a damn." Which may be why Gone with the Wind had such a smash ending.

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

M: You're asking me a small question. (laughter) To begin with, if I understand ~~what you're asking me~~, you are saying do I believe that to be an existentialist, one must eschew

discipline, habit, and so forth. I would say no. But ^{one} ~~you~~ must ~~be~~ ^{remain} ~~very~~ aware of the negative powers of habit and discipline. ~~Very little that takes many months or years to accomplish can ever be done without habit or discipline. But~~ Because they are necessary to serious ^{or} and ambitious projects doesn't mean we can ignore the fact that ~~they are also very dangerous~~ ^{the} ~~medicine for us.~~ ^{which} These habits ~~that~~ enable us to be productive, are ~~at the same time~~ ^{They} dangerous to our psyche, ~~and~~ keep us from living existentially. Now, when I say existentially, I don't mean that every day we must jump from the roof of one building to the roof of another. Although this is certainly as existential an experience as one could look for. Especially if the jump is at the very limit of our ability to leap. ~~In other words,~~ If we do not know whether we're going to be able to make the jump successfully, that would be the pure definition of an existential experience. We're going to feel a great rush of adrenalin and happiness if we complete the ^{leap} ~~jump~~, or we're ~~going to know~~ ~~broken bones and~~ disaster and death if we don't. That's an existential experience. Obviously, if I speak of living existentially, ^{counter} ~~in relation to one's habits and one's discipline,~~ I don't mean jumping across the roof every day. However, it may be that one has to ^{leap} ~~jump~~ across that figurative roof once a month, or once a year, or whatever one's inner rhythm is. If one uses discipline in order to achieve certain serious projects in one's life, there comes a point ^{where} ~~when~~ one becomes a slave of the habit, ^{and} ~~That's the point precisely where~~ ^{then} one must look for an

existential encounter ~~with oneself~~. I'm trying to say, I suppose, that the horror is that there is no superhighway to happiness for the psyche. We achieve the smallest self-satisfaction or sense of personal integrity only through the boldest efforts.

S: Don't you feel that your habit of writing is just that, what you have become a slave to?

M: I often feel I have become a slave precisely to having to write too much. I've been in debt for ten years and I write more than I care to write in order to attempt to get out of debt. To that extent I find writing onerous, and a habit, and I'm not altogether happy with it.

S: How do you justify being a media personality with putting the media down and saying they're totalitarian? Your books are being publicized and you get free advertisement and, of course, scandals in your life are publicized by the media which helps sell the books.

M: I've often been attacked for flaunting my personal life ~~in order~~ to sell books. I can promise you that I may or may not be guilty of flaunting this personal life, but I have known for the last twenty years that that does not sell books. Quite the contrary. It's writers who keep a respectable persona before the public who sell best. There is a simple reason for that. When people ^{with no large means} go out to buy ~~hardcover~~ books, if ~~you have~~ ~~a young couple~~, they often have to choose--and I'm not being sentimental about this--between buying the baby a new pair of shoes, or purchasing a ~~hardcover~~ book. ^{the} ~~The book~~, if they choose ^{Choosing the second}

~~to buy it~~, is a small sacramental act, something terribly serious to them. They want to be able to respect the writer. Authors who have a great deal of notoriety about their lives are not respected. That's no help selling books. Whereas, writers like John Updike and Saul Bellow--you never hear anything about their personal lives and their books sell very well. James Michener sells extraordinarily well, and no one's ever had to talk about his personal life. I could point to author after author who sell very well indeed with no personal publicity.

As to why I use television when I consider it a totalitarian medium, I feel that there are two choices and neither of them is agreeable. Either one gives up the three-quarters of humankind that by now only watch television and say "Let's save the little culture we have left." Which seems to me a dangerous decision, or you go out and attempt to argue into the teeth of this gale of electronic homogenization, dare to lose the salts of your own personality by going on TV. In fact I compromise, I go on TV as seldom as I can, believe it or not. There are times when I don't go near for six months or a year at a time. I'm never so happy as when I'm not on TV. But there are times when I think, "My God, somebody has to get out there and say something." Being nothing if not modest, I nominate myself.

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} ~~Watterhorn~~ every Saturday. It may be that someone who is timid and gentle and reflective and ^{would} much rather spend ^{his or her} ~~their~~ life reading books can still have an existential life. They need only think seriously of climbing the Matterhorn once, and trying it once, and that's enough. For some people, one existential experience is enough ^{nourishment} ~~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 ~~think the~~ find that ~~anathema~~. ~~There's~~ now a world-wide tendency to get us all to live like ^{interchangeable} ~~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 doing it. We also live in the age of plastics--that is, without much sensation in our fingertips. Because if we have to go around touching plastic all the time, we soon go dead.

S: Touching what?

M: Plastic. A German and 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 about twelve years ago. Over a period of two years. The idea I had was that the physical apparatus necessary to make a professional film was so cumbersome and expensive and unwieldy that very little that was human could find its way through. Actors and directors had to be geniuses to get anything approaching

true esthetic quality in film. At that time I happened to meet some cinema verité photographers. They're photographers who work with limited means, sometimes with no more than two men-- the cameraman who supports the camera on his shoulder, and the soundman. And I thought why not use this technique for imaginary stories as well as documentaries? For example: if two people are speaking in a documentary, the cameraman does not have a script. So he's not able to set the camera angles in advance. He doesn't know who's going to be speaking next. Particularly if there are more than two ^{people} ~~people~~ there, the camera ^{begins} ~~began~~ to act the way ^{our eyes} ~~we~~ do 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, sometimes they don't. It occurred to me as I watched this cinema verité photography that the cameraman would often anticipate correctly who was going to speak next and the camera move to that person just a moment before they opened their mouth, which gave for some ~~odd~~ reason, an aesthetic satisfaction. Sometimes the cameraman would miss. He'd be on the wrong face. You'd hear a voice coming from somewhere else and then the camera would look around nervously to find who was actually speaking. I thought how wonderful if we could take this technique and carry it over to a feature film. Then I thought, you can't film with a script because once you do, you start ^{rehearsing} ~~moving~~ the actors through their paces and very quickly you have something that 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 such pictures. They were complete improvisations. There was no script. 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 45 hours of sound and film with five camera crews in five and a half days. Those 45 hours then took three years to cut into a film. It was Maidstone and in many ways it was a most interesting and extraordinary film, and in many ways it was unhappy and unsuccessful. The sound wasn't good enough. It was good enough so long as you could show it in small groups, to film students and museums. We showed it ^{at} in one museum in New York, the Whitney, and set an attendance record. More people came daily to see that film than had ever come to see any other film up to then 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 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 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 respect the fact that I spent my hard-earned money, ^{and} ~~and can't hear what he is saying.~~" I gave up making films at that point because ~~I felt I could not solve this technological problem.~~ There seemed no way to get sound good enough in cinema verité to meet the professional standards that were necessary if you were going to be

able to convince big league movie makers that you had a way of making films ~~that was~~ more interesting than their way. ~~The only way they could understand that your way~~ ^{it could be} more interesting ^{only could} is (if you could make more money than they do. Then you could create a revolution in film. Without that you're reduced to being an avant-garde filmmaker. At ~~this~~ ^{that} point I thought, "I'd rather be a notorious and somewhat unsavory literary personality, than an avant-garde filmmaker." ~~So~~ I went back to writing books. But with a tear in my heart, because I enjoyed making films ~~much~~ more than I enjoy writing.

S: How's Cagney?

M: You're referring to the picture I am now making, "Ragtime." In which I have a small part. James Cagney is now old. He's ^{VL} in his eighties. Most people who 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 distressing element in growing old. So Cagney is one man when he is walking. Then he's like any other eighty-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. Does very little and does it magnificently well.

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 always thought 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 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 one. I think that the average black knows more about life than the average white in America. I've never met--this is a remark that I've 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 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 as if it is, ~~true~~.

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, it's my impression--is that many mistakes were made ten years ago when the movement first came into prominence, great excesses, and then 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. They thought they were going to have a quick breakthrough and ~~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-- they've come to recognize the profound and serious problems that men who were trying to change the world also have. I think that out of all this we may yet arrive at a 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 notions 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 more lively. If people's senses were more lively--for instance if we were in a room with chandeliers instead of these goddamn fluorescent lights overhead--we might all have a little more communion with one another.

S: Yes, but that's exactly the problem. The women's question 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 question was such that television loved it. It made good television--the women having a revolution. But in fact, in America all the women revolutionaries stayed in New York where they were comfortable and safe and very few went down to Texas. It's one thing to be a revolutionary, it's another to be a brave revolutionary. I just say that they're not quite as good as they pretend to be.

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

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

S: What kind of feeling do you have being here in Germany now?

M: I find Germany a very interesting country. I've always felt in part, in some odd way, German. I often wondered, and finally realized why. I asked my mother once and it turned out, lo and behold, as an infant, I had a couple of 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"

- S: You mentioned that as an author you have sovereign control over your characters. 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 could Rusty in Why Are We in Vietnam? have reacted any differently in the bear hunt if you wanted him to?~~
- M: ^{I can't remember saying that I have sovereign control over my characters} Well, I think Fowles was saying it's a happy book when one's characters take on their own life. ^{they have been} If you didn't have that, there'd be very little, ^{in writing}. There's nothing terribly attractive about being alone in a room looking at an empty piece of paper and making scribbles. The pleasure of working at literature ^{devices} comes from that moment when your characters come alive ~~and take a form~~. You can exaggerate the pleasure, however. Once a character ^{comes} becomes alive, ^{he is} they are no more and no less remarkable than someone alive. ~~A friend or equally, a character in a book we're writing can be equally vivid for us.~~ But I wouldn't go beyond that. I would say: 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 a sign, ~~you've been anointed by the Lord to become an author~~ ^{and much more} because most young writers can see their characters. ~~They are~~ ¹⁶²⁶ very vivid to them. They just don't succeed in becoming ¹⁶²⁶ very vivid to the reader. ~~So that emotion,~~

while it is delightful, ^{In fact} is not the sine qua non of the professional writer, ~~who~~ often works with a great detachment. If his ^{people} ~~char~~acters come alive for him, that's nice. But ^{he} you can also write about characters who never ^{do, yet} come ~~alive~~ for you, but by way of the years of skill ^{he's} you've acquired, you know, they're living very well for the reader. Graham Greene once spoke of characters he had to work on hard. He was always pleased when he read a review afterward that said that the particular character was well-drawn. ^{Greene} Because ~~he~~ would think to himself, "well-dragged."

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 ^{believe} ~~think~~ you could do it with one book, and quickly, and apocalyptically. Now I know one has very little effect, ^{and you can't even} By now I know that you can never measure the results of your books. In fact, anyone who worries about whether they are going to hurt somebody's feelings when ^{by pulling out them in} they write a book is really not a writer. Surgeons are ruthless. 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 ^{could} ~~is going~~ to injure her love life for the next thirty years." They say, "Scalpel, nurse," and make the cut. They may be right or wrong in the need for the operation, but they keep a certain insensitivity to other parts of the context. Writers also have to have ^{their} ~~that kind of~~ insensitivity. They can't say to themselves, "I'm writing an obvious portrait of a good friend who's going to

be terribly injured by this." If they feel that, they can't write. Indeed, a great many young writers can't, ~~work for that~~ ~~reason~~. They think of all the people they're going to hurt, ^{or} ~~and~~ those they're going to make enemies of, and the retribution that will come ~~to them~~, and ~~they simply can't write~~. ^{it} It isn't worth it to them. There has to be something ^{a bit} slightly maniacal about a young man or woman who wants to write. They have to be willing to get that ^{book out} ~~book done~~ no matter how many psychic corpses are going to be left en route.

S: Do you believe that a movie has more possibilities to influence modern people than literature?

M: I think good movies are more likely to reach deep feelings in people.

S: Why? Because it's visual?

M: Because movies are more primitive, I would argue, than literature. Film, while a highly technological development, directs itself to more primitive states of consciousness, ~~than literature~~.

People who can't read ~~or write~~ still get profound reactions out of ~~movies~~. ^{I would also say that} ~~films~~. ~~In that sense film reaches more people, but to the degree~~ ^{film} ~~it reaches them~~ ^{us} in a precise way, ^{it's} ~~that's~~ no good. Film is best when ~~it reaches people in~~ ambiguous ways. A truly good film will affect two people profoundly, but they'll argue for hours over ~~the message~~, ~~its nature~~. One might say it is a satire, ~~and~~ the other, a tragedy. That's as it should be. Film should reach way inside ~~into~~ the psyche and prove truly disturbing. One person can go through

horror watching a film, another person can laugh their head off. That's good film, ~~when you have different reactions~~. Bad film is when everybody laughs on cue, ^{Then +} because they are being manipulated. ^{They have merely entered} ~~Then they merely enter~~ the engines of manipulation of the great institutions.

~~* p 53 (insert)~~
S: Who would you today consider to be major American authors from your personal ^(p)erspective? And why?

M: There are probably twenty American authors who if you asked "Who are the major American authors?" would name one writer first-- themselves. John Updike would say John Updike, Bellow would say Bellow.

S: What would Norman Mailer say?

M: Norman Mailer, you may depend upon it, would say Norman Mailer. I'm not being snide about myself ^{or} and my fellow racketeers. It's that we have a funny situation at present in American letters. There are no giants around. ^{Once} ~~There was a time when~~ we had Hemingway and Faulkner. But now, we're all like ~~the~~ spokes ⁱⁿ of a wheel. You cannot ask, "Who ^{is} ~~are~~ the major spokes?" ^{Each} The spokes will have to reply. "I am the only ^{one} spoke so far as I can feel it. I'm ~~the~~ ~~only one~~ connected between the axle and the ground."

S: But who, beside yourself?

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 good writer. John Updike is very good, 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's

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: Any authors who are overrated?

M: ~~No.~~ It's hard for an overrated writer to last ~~for~~ long. There are many more literary critics in America than ~~there are working~~ ^{men or women} 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. So it would be hard for someone who is ersatz to get through.

S: What about Pynchon?

M: ~~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. ~~Of course I could be missing the point.~~

S: ~~Is~~ Are there any Latin American writers you are familiar with?

M: Well, I think Borges and Marquez 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 like thinking of people by way of their anus. I ~~mean, look,~~ Borges has this magical ability to take plots and turn them inside out. I sometimes think 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 of~~ ~~Borges than I can get from reading monumentally long books~~ ~~including my own.~~

S: Márquez?

M: Márquez 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 Márquez 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 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.

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

M: I don't think that an author should be overly concerned with the political influence he has on his readers. 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 with work that is second rate.

S: Not necessarily political responsibility, but what sort of responsibility do you have?

M: I think the responsibility 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's not bright. One doesn't often feel clever while working~~ ~~on a book~~, You just feel a dull pressure from your instinct to go here or go there. You have to try to listen to ^{the} ~~that~~ faint voice 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 women. 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. (laughter)

S: You've talked a lot of the evils of big government. Would you say something on this?

M: If we learned anything over the last fifty years, it's that government breeds bureaucracy. It's why I call myself a left-conservative. I do not believe government can solve our problems, People who work in government want a kind of security that finally will destroy initiative in them. No one in

government will take a chance. When there is a problem, ~~officials~~ ^{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 more quickly than normal cells ~~because~~ ^{they're} not equipped to solve problems, ~~they're~~ ^{they're} only equipped to grow. When in doubt, ~~split~~ ^{divides}, that's cancer. Government proliferates all the time. It doesn't solve problems.

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

M: Just once let somebody say we don't have to stand up to the Russians. Let the Russians come here and die of indigestion. Let the Russians attempt to take over America and they will perish. Because Americans would love the idea of joining an underground. The greatest blow for liberty that's ever been struck would indeed be rung. The Russians would founder on the shores of America. That idea is never discussed in America. Let me suggest the real force of it by showing the opposite. What if the Russians invited us to occupy them? It would exhaust us as a nation.

S: What do you think of John Anderson?

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

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

M: I think Anderson created some ground for the possibility. He showed that people were interested in a third party in America, he did show that. To such extent we may honor his name someday. 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: That's always true of a third-party candidate. You ~~always~~ lose half your vote in the last week. As election day gets nearer, people want their vote to count. There is a fetishism to voting. One wants to be buried in the proper cemetery. 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; you're going to lose them anyway. But Anderson had nothing ^{new} to offer. ~~He was very slightly to the left of the other two.~~

S: You talk a lot about 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. That has elements of the game in it. One of us wins, ~~and~~ the other loses. But at least we're both doing it on relatively fair terms. When you have huge institutions manipulating us, it isn't fair. Fair play, that's all I ask for.

subtle
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11 p 46

Roll 20 & 21 Davis Apartment

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 excel^y in the art of becoming. I mean by this. . . 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 tctally distinct tasks, separate from each other? Like children?

M: The advantage ~~for~~ of being a writer for many years is that you can end up agreeing with everyone. What Forster said is true. On the other hand ^I agree with you. It's nice if your books can be looked at as indices of growth. I'm just not certain my books ^{work has} ~~have~~ developed that way. I know a great many people would say that The Executioner's Song is my best book. And maybe I'd even agree with them. That doesn't mean it shows the most growth. It might present the most digestion. In other words, I had assimilated my craft at that point, ~~and demonstrated I knew how to write that kind of novel.~~ 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 as I hope, will be considerably more ambitious ~~and 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 crucial to me.~~ What I really want to be able to do is keep working well for another ten or fifteen years. Partly because I must. Partly because there's much

I still want to say. Let me put it this way. Some writers become more and more polished artists. Others just become more effective, more able to produce their work. It used to take me four and five years to ^{write} ~~do~~ a book. Now I can ^{do} ~~write~~ it in a year or two. The books may not be better ^{than} ~~than the ones I was publishing twenty and thirty years ago~~, but I'm able to get more things said. I may have to settle for that. We'll find out.

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: I'm more drawn to writing about subjects that I feel ^{both} ~~most~~ comfortable with on the one hand and very uncertain of, on the other, ~~that is, when I have something special to say about the subject in one way and know almost next to nothing about it in another way.~~ For instance, with The Executioner's Song, I felt I understood Gilmore's desire to be executed. It seemed to me that if I were in such a situation, I would also want that. It's very real to me that your soul can die before your body. So I felt I can write about this man in a way other people can't. On the other hand, I knew very little about prison, knew nothing about Utah and absolutely nothing about the particular circumstances of Gilmore's life. That was a good balance for me, I think it's always interesting for a writer to move into a subject where he feels he has a special

advantage because he knows something other people don't know
 about the subject. Let me put it an altogether different way.
~~Years ago, I was considerably taken with how~~
~~I formed the idea years ago that Latin is probably the first~~
~~language that was truly a study in power. Because of the~~
~~grammar of Latin~~ ^{Save} (You never know the meaning of a Latin sentence
 until you hear the last syllable of the last word. After all,
~~you can put the words in any order whatsoever.~~ In Latin if
 you want to say, "I drink ^{poison} from the glass," you can put it
 "Poison from) drink I" or any ^{order} way you wish. The listener
^{who took poison} won't know what the meaning of the sentence is until the last
^{"drink I"} word is not only spoken, 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.~~ That means people had to be alert,
 when Latin was spoken. It was very easy to trick your ^{neighbor} friend
~~in that tongue.~~ Now the Romans were the first nation to think
 in terms of world conquest, and perhaps there was a certain
^{construct} Unconscious conspiracy to form the language that way. So
 that only the people who were the most alert, most unscrupulous,
 most tricky, and most concerned with getting their way would
 be adept in the language. ^{the tongue} ~~It was a tongue~~ ^{It was, yes, my hypothesis, it} language for people
^{and} seeking power who were ready to use all means to obtain it.
 With that as a key, assuming my key is correct, Latin might
 become ^{a habit} an invigorating and fascinating study, for me. Whereas,
 to approach Latin cold, without a key, would fill me with
 dismay. In novels I might write, I like that same possibility
 present--that I know something, or, at least, have an hypothesis
 other people don't have. Those are the books I'm drawn to.

attracted
I'm never drawn to a topic where I have no more to say than anyone else.

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?

M: Well, everybody in my college generation was scared by Henry James. We had F.O. Matthiessen at Harvard then, 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 catastrophes and adventures, at *Harvard*

during those early war years / turn of the century salon
Harvard (it was as if we were in a backwater ~~during those early~~

We were very concerned with the
~~war years. People talked more about the extraordinary im-~~
portance of James' ideas on point of view. So I used to pay

lip service to the dictum that one shouldn't write about one's present ideas. You weren't a literary gentleman if you put

your ideas *into* a work too quickly. But in fact, temperamentally, I always wanted to work with the idea I had picked up *(the night before)* that day.

~~And~~ *If* I have a vice above others, it's that I'm always putting my latest *thoughts* ~~ideas~~ into my work.

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. . . . Maybe it's my Jewish blood, ~~I~~ *but* ~~don't know~~ but I've always felt that the only way to proceed

in a given direction is to take one's first steps ^{on} in the opposite ^{path,} direction. To develop and exploit every contradictory tendency in oneself, and free oneself of such ballast, ^{before you} and then ^{you} move in the direction ~~one~~ really wanted to move.

I think ~~that~~ something of this sort applies here. Mass man has cut himself off from the past and so does not really live in the present, but rather in a state of perpetual discomfort, ~~and anomie,~~ bored because there's too little in the past to refer to. By that I mean, of course, such phenomena as the destruction of old buildings everywhere and their replacement not only by new buildings but essentially anonymous architecture-- those huge office skyscrapers that offer nothing to relate them to any time other than the present. A building that is interesting architecturally will have ~~subtle~~ elements to remind people of previous periods. ^{also} We have superhighways that obliterate any sense of the past. [^] When we travel ^{along} ~~through~~ them, we don't pass through towns. We don't see the old landscape, nor have to work our way through ~~towns and traffic, through~~ factory districts and over rough terrain. ^{Now,} ^J Given that mass man lives without a past, it makes it even more difficult for him to enjoy the present. Confusion, anomie, ~~boredom~~, irritability, and mild depression, are all precisely the conditions that destroy our sense of the present. Yet the present is the only state he can enjoy at all. The future is filled with anxiety because he's lost his roots. The past does not exist. So

we have all the stimulants of modern culture, the shock, the impact of drugs, ~~of booze~~ ^(drugs) ~~those~~ chemicals that induce changes in consciousness, ^{all} to break through this blur in which we ~~all~~ live. We have to explode ourselves out of our normal state to reach another state. I don't say this in 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 prevalent dull state in which I tended to find myself, ~~all other things being equal.~~

L: It's become a commonplace to note that your nonfiction is written novelistically, and you've always found it easy to talk about your nonfiction while writing it, but detailed discussion of the fiction has always been verboten. Why?

M: Well, ^{to me,} the art of fiction ~~to me~~ is the art of the story.

~~It's as simple~~ as that. One has to decide what one's characters are going to do next. Sometimes it comes instinctively, sometimes you have to ponder it. Ideally, you find ~~it~~ out as you're writing. The best turns in a novel come to your surprise, ^{as} you're ^{working} writing along, and lo and behold, your character ~~does something,~~ leaps ~~out~~ from your hand and takes a move on his own. So you wouldn't want to discuss a novel in the living room while working on it. In nonfiction, ^{it's nice to end with a book} ~~you can write so that the work~~

~~that~~ reads like a novel rather than ~~like~~ the digested contents of the ^{first} ~~second~~ stomach of the cow, ^(latter) which is what most nonfiction is to me. Someone spends a lot of time studying a body ~~of~~

of material, then they digest it, ~~come to their conclusions,~~
and write books around those conclusions. ^{They skip the conclusions,} That's not interesting.

We never know the living ^{originals} foundations of ^{the} these conclusions.

What is ^{fascinating} interesting to me in another writer is ~~to see~~ how his mind works. If I can obtain clues that way, then I can improve my own mind. But to suppose ~~that~~ an author can digest a subject so ~~thoroughly and so~~ well that there is no need for me to think about the subject independently ^{I am just supposed to} because I can accept what is given ~~entirely on faith,~~ ^{most} is disagreeable to me. So 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. I like the novel because it is evocative.~~

Uwe: ~~The novel obliges us to do our own thinking. It moves us in~~
~~directions we can't always control and changes our lives to~~
some extent. Marriages have broken up, for instance, because someone read a novel and decided that the life of the character in the ^{book} ~~novel~~ was more interesting than their own. Good novels are painful to read, ~~That's~~ why so few people do. In non-fiction, when ~~I'm~~ covering a political convention, for example, or writing about the March on the Pentagon, I know what happened. I don't have to decide on the plot. That saves me months, sometimes years. I can devote my arts, such as they are, to working on the mood, ^{I can} and even talk about it ^{the book while doing it!} ~~to~~ a certain extent.

L: Can nonfiction ever be existential in the sense that you've described it in regard to novels?

M: I think an historian could say, "I start this project with two opposed hypotheses. I'm not sure which is correct. As we explore the material, let me show you the arguments for one hypothesis and then for the other. In the course of it, maybe we'll arrive at more of an answer than I have now."

Although, ^{to bring that off} I can't think of a single historian who's done this ^{bringing that off} in real depth. To try that in truly sustained form is so

dangerous, and would so violate the canons of the profession of history, which insists that you ^{go for} take one stance, not two,

^{doesn't often happen. It would tend to agitate} that it is virtually never done. I think it would make for ^{what disturbs most people about history any more, which} fascinating work. Of course, what disturbs most people about

^{is that} history, what they find outrageous, is when they learn somewhere

between high school and college, or is it between graduate school and life, that history is not history, ^{but} That history

~~is merely~~ a series of immensely sober novels written by men

who often don't have large literary talents, ^{and, finally,} ~~and, finally,~~ ^{novelists,} ~~novelists,~~ ^{and often} ~~have no more~~ ^{less} to say about the real world than novels. That's

a disturbing discovery. That historians are not dealing with fact, ^{but with the hypothesis they've developed} ~~They are merely dealing with their stance in relation~~

in relation

^{isolated} to a series of data, ^{are} ~~that have been presented to them as fact,~~

~~which they're now presenting back in turn to the reader. But~~

~~the facts remained to be illuminated. Finally the necessity is~~

to make these facts ^{serve as} ~~facets~~ ^{mosaic} in a lens ^{will} ~~that enables us to perceive~~

the past, ^{is not often done} ~~Some historians do it better than others. Once~~

^{no historians} we come to realize that none of them do it any more closely

than a novelist; then all history becomes a novel. Just as all novels are the history of the workings of one man's imagination, and so are ^{an intimate form of (real)} true history, artifacts to illumine a period for us.

L: How have the metaphors you've used changed over the years?

M: ~~I can tell you a story on that.~~
~~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 was the model, considerably removed, for the character named McLeod in Barbary Shore. Charlie was a quiet saturnine Irishman who was living in a small rooming house where I took a cubicle to finish The Naked and the Dead. We used to have long literary conversations. At a certain point I showed him The Naked and the Dead, ~~and asked him to~~ ~~criticize it~~. He tore it apart. He was a severe critic. He said, "It's a better book than I thought it would be, but you have no gift for metaphor." Then he said, "Metaphor reveals a man's character, and his true grasp of life. To the degree that you have no metaphor, you are an impoverished writer."

I never forgot this lecture and began to work with might and main on my metaphors. ~~But I must say I haven't~~
~~studied them afterward and so can't tell you~~
~~mean, given those beginnings, I try not to be selfconscious~~
~~how they've changed. They've gotten more accurate~~
~~about them.~~ I hope. ~~As I always say: a metaphor is an equation.~~

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~~ negotiations

with evil

~~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. Of course, she can make a case. There are any number of prodigiously evil people who have, from the novelist's point of view, disappointing exteriors. Eichmann, superficially speaking, was a little man, an ordinary man in appearance and vulgar and dull, but to assume therefore that evil itself ^{is} ~~was~~ banal, strikes me as the exhibition of a prodigious poverty of imagination. You know, one of the paradoxes I always found in the liberal temperament is that ~~on the one hand~~ they are immensely worshipful of Freud--even though most of his ideas are antipathetic to the notion of liberalism itself. But they go to Freud. The reason ~~they do~~ is that he is tremendously reductive. Liberals don't want to believe in the vast power and properties of the unconscious, ^{or} ~~the~~ evil of a power and extent and a hideousness, a murderousness, that we can't begin to contemplate ^{as living} ~~can residing~~. ~~And~~ in the most ordinary people. ^{Say} ~~to~~ mistake the surface for the reality, is to perform the fundamental liberal error. In effect, ^{are} ~~the~~ liberals ^{saying,} always ~~saying~~ "I don't see God, so why do you assume God exists?" Out of that has come I think the present bankruptcy of liberalism. At this moment when Carter has been defeated by Reagan, liberalism truly seems to have failed. It ~~has~~ no exciting ideas to offer. I think this enervation comes

because liberalism has not been 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 ^{understanding} this incredible phenomenon that took over a country of the most decent, hardworking, and clean people in the world. You don't have a black problem in Germany, no worry about blacks ripping off welfare ^{there} ~~in Germany~~. ~~They never did~~. Not even in the worst years of the Weimar Republic did you have people who ~~were~~ not working ^{but} ~~and yet~~ getting too much of their share, which is the ~~view of the~~ American middle class ^{view} of the black. Yet you had this incredible phenomenon of a fascism that went far beyond the normal bounds of totalitarianism into the most extraordinary and despicable ~~adventures with the~~ extermination of vast numbers of peoples, not only the Jews, but the Poles and ~~the~~ Gypsies, go through the list. There were as many million of other people killed as Jews. And this, coming out of a ^{nation} ~~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 philosophy, were happy to welcome Hannah Arendt's phrase. But I think to speak of the banality of evil is precisely to point us further ⁱⁿ ~~into~~ the wrong direction.

L: You told William Buckley that The Executioner's Song 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 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. They can make 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 ~~arrested by~~ ^{in him} ~~one~~ phenomenon ~~in him which~~ ^{in a sense} relates to the banality of evil.

It seemed to me it's not the brutality of evil with which we have to contend, but ^{its} ~~the~~ complexity, ^{-that is,} ~~of evil,~~ and the similitude of evil in others to ourselves. As I got to know Gilmore, and I came to know him better than I know almost anyone in my life, I began to see that he was a man who was easily as complex as myself. Naturally, I've always thought of myself as being fairly ^{complicated,} ~~complex~~. Somewhere, in there, I realized that the fact he was a murderer was not the ^{final} ~~total~~ factor, and shouldn't stop all thought. Once we ~~allow~~ ^{allow} ourselves to see him in his contradictions, ~~and complexity,~~ 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 only one sixteenth or one sixty-fourth of our personality, but fundamentally he is still more like us than unlike us. That is why I wanted to write the book in this way, with its slow accumulation of detail. I felt that to make him ^{more like} ~~a~~ character

like ~~characters~~ in a novel, arresting, or interesting, or sinister but all of a piece, would be to deny the truths I'd learned ^{a brief} ~~by studying~~ him.

L: You didn't feel any obligation, at least provisionally, to let the readers know your judgments on Gilmore?

M: I started with many more ideas about Gilmore than I ended with. I may not be a good intellectual, but willy-nilly, I expect I am ^{one} ~~an~~ intellectual, and so my tendency is to create intellections. I put them on like adhesive plasters, ^{around} ~~a~~ subject. In this case I was pulling off the adhesive plasters.

↑ I decided that every concept I had about Gilmore proved ^{inadequate} ~~adequate~~. ^{As} I got deeper and deeper into what his nature might ^{be} ~~be~~, be. So I wanted the reader to confront the true complexity of human personality that comes from studying one man close enough. ^{But} ~~He didn't have to be a~~ murderer. The fact that he was a murderer made my task more easy because we're all fascinated with killers. But any person studied in that depth would ^{prove} ~~have to be~~ fascinating. It's Flaubert's old idea. You can take any soul alive, including that simple servant girl he wrote about, and make them ^{incredible} ~~fascinating~~ if you get to know them well enough.

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 be ^{more} ready to gamble when entering someone's mind. So long as you don't, the character retains a certain integrity, novelistically speaking. There is a mystery about them, a resonance, they're a little ambiguous. We can walk around such characters with the same respect we offer people who ^{have} a presence in a room. Part of the meaning of charisma is that we don't know the ^{intimate} ultimate nature of the ^{human being} person (we're dealing with. ^{So sometimes} They just radiate energy. Characters in novels can radiate more energy sometimes when we don't enter their mind. It is one of the techniques a novelist knows instinctively--don't enter a character's mind ^{until} unless you have something to say about the interior that's more interesting than the reader's suppositions. The fatal error is to jump too quickly into a mind and then offer banal material. *That's the worst of best-selling fiction. Second-rate readers enjoy the in-sights*

So I never go in unless I feel the reader will be surprised.

L: ^{try to} So it's not a matter of complexity?

M: No, ^{wasn't} It's just a question of feeling. I ~~was never~~ ready to enter Monroe's mind seven years ago when I wrote Marilyn. This time I did. Whether well or poorly is up to the reader to decide, but I felt ready. Maybe seven years from now, I may decide to write a short novel about Gilmore and enter his mind.

L: Bob Lucid, your friend and literary critic, once wrote that the magic of your writing was based on an implicit promise

4 of second-rate writers.

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 this as you were
in 1957?

M: ~~No.~~ I'm no longer particularly interested in Freud. I
don't say this disrespectfully. I think Freud had a great
deal to say about the nature of the psyche in the nineteenth
century. I ^{believe} think his final importance in intellectual history
will be that he gave us more insight into the late nineteenth
century than anyone but Marx. Freud is the key to understanding
how people put up with the particular kind of lives they led
in the 1830's, 1890's and early 1900's, very much locked up,
terribly overstuffed, terrible formal lives. And ^{those} yet ^{these} lives
^{had} with a considerable amount of power and energy, ~~and concertedness.~~
In those days the psyche was used like a plumbing system.
People were accustomed to living under high pressure. But
that's not what we have now. ^{to us} Now we know a world in which
people act out ~~many of~~ their anxieties and ~~tend to~~ look ~~some~~ ^{to}
explanations ~~for~~ their conduct 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
^(via Kropotkin, practically wrapped themselves around some of his ideas)
corporate capitalism adapted to Marx, ^{Marx} 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 interior world of individuals--hallucination, surrealism, dream? How about those two worlds? Haven't you, hasn't your writing always been trying to bridge the inner and outer, public and private?

M: Yes. Always trying. There is a bad ^{sentence} phrase I wrote, ~~once,~~
~~"Until every manifestation of human energy from ukase to~~
~~kiss," I say, ^{etc.} it's a bad sentence because it's a most unpleasant~~
~~sound, "ukase to kiss," I was trying too hard.~~ "Until every
 manifestation of human society from ukase to kiss is com-
 prehended, we will be nowhere," ~~I said.~~ Something of the sort.
 It was in "The White Negro" and I wrote it at a time when I ^{was}
^{coming} 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, might all ^{be seen} ~~be glimpsed~~ ^{their} ~~in their social~~ connections if
 one had the courage ~~and determination and the wit~~ to begin.
 In that sense, I'm still trying. But I've come to realize
 that the task is enormous. Of course, I grew up under the
 shadow of Mark and Freud. Both men ^{independently} ~~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 wanted to come up with a similar vision
 that would comprehend everything. By now I've come to realise

that it is not only enormously difficult but that I don't have the intellectual discipline to begin to do anything remotely of that sort. But one tries to do the best one ^{could} can with what one's got. So I'm still ^{attempting} trying to connect up what I can. Because I do think it is important. Until we understand the ways in which the authorities manipulate us, ^{that is,} the ways in which our ^{we} lives are obliged to be ^{to lead our lives} 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 recognize how much of that is not our lack of imagination but the product of vast institutional systems of greed and injustice that we are ^{schooled} scheduled to perceive as rather ^{benign} benign manifestations, we are nowhere. The only way I can tell that something terrible is going on is that I feel a little duller than I ought to. Very often that's the end of a very long chain, you might say, of socially intended processes that keeps us malleable, amenable, and short on such powerful emotions as outrage at injustice. In that 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 these two marvelous mountains-- Marx and Freud--any longer. I'm somewhere tracking around in the old lakebeds, kicking up a lot of dust.

Roll 25, Take 2 Nymphenburg

L: Norman, you've mentioned the Irish in passing many times. It's occurred to me that like the Irish you're somewhat sen-

timental about things, but fight it just like the Irish.

Is that accurate?

M: Well, I think the Irish are sentimental. I don't think I am particularly so. 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. When they get drunk, ^{too much for too little} 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 an hour before. ~~There's this instant trust among the Irish~~ That so often is very embarrassing to a colder people like the Protestant or the Jew. Of course, any friendship formed that quickly is based on a great potential for betrayal. ^{Once} Then the Irish get double-crossed, and they're full of anger and mad as hell. The stingy side of their nature comes out. I've noticed with the Irish that there is more sweet and sour 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 Brendan Behan was like that and other Irish writers?

M: By the time I met Behan he was ~~in overdrive~~. Going along by an act of will. He was a very unhealthy man already. ~~It~~ ^{He} was just about a ^{few} ~~year or two~~ away from his death and ~~he~~ was sick as hell and drinking like a fiend at times, and not ~~drinking~~ ^{boozing} at other times, but almost always very depressed and very iron, very strong ^{in personality}. 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 ^{so} ~~a great many~~ ^{of them,} ~~English people.~~ It was all there in him.

L: Why does politics lend itself so well to a ^{literary} treatment as manners? ~~in narrative?~~

M: Because politicians are always engaged in false presentations of themselves, ~~and~~ ^{that's} the nature of their occupation. Politics is the art of the possible. That means politicians have to be enormously practical, ^{and} ~~have to~~ get things done. Very early in life you learn that you can't, 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 or a little less optimistic than he is really. A politician is an ^{exaggerated} ~~exaggerated~~ case of the businessman. He's always pretending to huge funds of confidence that he can't possibly possess. ^{However, when} ~~But, whenever~~ people are phoney, they are ^{also} engaged in the practice of manners. Manners, after all, is a special ^{mode} ~~form~~ of acting. A ceremonious and ritual form, but nonetheless acting. Ergo, all politicians are actors. Truly the only way to treat them seriously is to take their very

falseness, which most people despise, and regard it seriously because indeed a politician is often a splendid practitioner of manners. Reagan is the first to come to mind.

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: With 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 housecleaning. 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 the ^{furniture} ~~furniture~~ out. I don't know when we're going to bring it back.

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

M: I don't care about Kipling.

L: Norman, many ^{people} ~~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: 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} ~~move~~ to Miami Beach?

M: Next question (laughter)

L: Do you continually have to 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: Andre 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 heavyweight champ?

M: Harry Crews.

L: Harry Crews, the Southern writer. Who would have been the best sneaky middleweight?

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 prizefighter?

M: A cutey with a sneak punch. (still bad 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.