

INTERVIEW V

Ritual and related matters.

ML: We have not spoken of ritual as part of religion. Recently my wife

and I went to the ordination of a priest. It was an extraordinary event.

Thirty or forty priests and bishops and deacons stood over the kneeling

aspirant, touching a shoulder or back or, if they could not reach the person,

they touched the shoulder of someone who could. All the while, a chorus in

the background was chanting "Veni, Sancte Spiritu, Veni, Sancte Spiritu."

(Come, Holy Ghost). While another singer, the lead singer, was singing

a capella verses about the glories of being a priest, of the holy

responsibilities and obligations, the special status that they had among

believers ending with the ancient pronouncement from the ordaining bishop,

"Thou art a priest forever." It was a very moving, a very powerful

experience. It made me think of one of our earlier conversations in which

you noted that fundamentalists believe that if they keep their nose clean and

observe ritual, they had a ticket to heaven. Does ritual have any significant

merit for you or do you reject it completely?

NM: ~~Neither~~. I've thought about it a great deal. Put it this way: I have

high suspicions about ritual. It seems to me that at best, it's a mixed

blessing. You know one of my favorite remarks is that repetition kills the

soul. Well, obviously that remark has to be explored before we go further.

Any number of kinds of repetition are, I will admit, crucial to the human venture. It is, after all, one of the ways by which we learn. And there is such a thing as creative repetition. Nonetheless, I'm suspicious of ritual.

Where, after all, does my theology start? What occasions it? What stimulates it? I would answer (as I did in the preface) that it is because I have worked as a novelist

all my life. I don't want this to be misunderstood, but in a certain sense, ^{novelists} you

are dealing with a few of God's problems. Judgment, particularly. If you're any good at your work, you've spent your life thinking about human nature.

Since few good novels can do without a villain, you are, of course, soon living with the notion of Evil.

Now where in all this is the relation to ritual? Ritual is repetition and in writing a novel, you look to do the opposite. A good novel does not

keep repeating itself. That is exactly the hallmark of a bad novel. So, most good novelists are wary of repetition. Moreover, most people I don't like tend to be masters or monsters of mediocre repetition. The politicians we despise are one example. So one develops an understanding that repetition can be dangerous when used as a tool by mediocre people. Adjurations that are endlessly repetitive. Unimaginative parents often know nothing better than to repeat what they say over and over. I confess that worries me about the nature of ritual. I think it looks to set human nature into a form. TV evangelists seem diabolically inspired to me when they cleave and cling to repetition. Earlier, as a child, synagogue services left me bored. Most of it washed over me. I might just as well have been a shell on the surf's edge. But for a little wear and tear, I was the same shell at the end of the service as at the beginning, and this was true year after year.

I did experience one ritual that was interesting to me. It was my induction into Transcendental Meditation, ^{which I did} ~~That was~~ in a fashion thirty five years ago. I remember that for my initiation ceremony, I was told to bring a flower to the initiator. He happened to be a gawky kid who was absolutely wild about Transcendental Meditation which I had found no more than odd and boring. At the commencement of the practice each day, You were just supposed to empty your head for twenty minutes. You did your best not to ~~not~~ allow thoughts to come through. I said to myself, "I've been doing this for years as a writer. [✓] Every time one goes to work in the morning, the first thing to do is empty your head. ^{I've} ~~So I've~~ been practicing Transcendental Meditation willy-nilly.

Now, in the initiatory ritual, they said a few words in an Asian language, and then gave me a mnemonic to repeat. I forget mine. It was something like Allan Ginsberg's OM. Alan Ginsberg's old OMMMMM. I

kept repeating whatever the sound was in my head for twenty minutes.

Whenever an errant thought came into ^{my} your head, ^{I had to be ready} ~~you were supposed to~~ use

the mnemonic to wash the thought away. It was a ~~very~~ small ritual, but I

did feel an effect. Something did take place. Obviously, then, in a deep and

powerful ritual, a great deal happens. Let me move forward to make ^{the} ~~my~~

~~next~~ point. Given my fundamental notion that God and the Devil are at war

all the time, I would go so far as to suggest that ritual may well have been

first created by the Devil ~~and~~ God, recognizing its efficacy, and determined

not to lose any soul unnecessarily, entered ritual as well. I think ritual

^{is composed then} ~~becomes an enmeshment~~ of the presence of God and the Devil. It does ^{tend to} ~~have~~

the demons and the saints marching in. There is a power to the repetitions;

the music, the chanting, the ceremony, the concentration of the principals.

So it may indeed be an important moment. One of my favorite notions is

that the Lord and Satan are there when major events occur. A general, on the eve of a great battle, gets out of bed and finds it very important to him whether or not he stretches out his left foot first or his right.

ML: A ritual?

NM: No, but ^{he has} ~~that~~ is a sense that powers are present. Anyone who reads

Homer will find nothing strange about this. So, ~~that~~ I think ~~would be~~ my

^{would be that} ^{but} answer, I don't scoff at ritual, ~~and~~ I don't trust it. I would be happier if we

^{Yet} lived without it, ~~but~~ I have to recognize that my upbringing, my tastes, my

life has had little to do with rituals. Nonetheless, ^{they are} ~~I can find it~~ fascinating.

Because there They are—cooperating! Keep in mind that there may be any

number of occasions when God and the Devil have to cooperate—exactly

because they each are trying to outwit the other. For that, they have, at

times, to engage in formal contact. ^{Wrestlers do have}
^{to grasp each other.}

ML: What about rituals concerning athletes? I'm sure professional boxers decide which glove is going to be laced on first and how many minutes they want to be alone before the fight and which jock strap they wear. I know professional baseball players have certain things they have to do. The center fielder has to step on second base when he runs in or you know, the forces will be against him. So athletes are particularly superstitious and they go through various rituals and preparations before and during the game. ~~I knew~~ 2 soldiers do the same thing. When I was in the Navy, I knew sailors who were tremendously ritualistic about how they tied a knot. It was a bad omen if you tied a knot the wrong way, or did something on the ship that was not done exactly in the right way. You felt like you were calling down evil things upon you. These are not religious rituals but they are often done with the knowledge that there is something in the air.

NM: Yes. I used to be very susceptible to that when I was younger. I do know what you are talking about. Back in San Francisco in 1963, I used to walk parapets which had sheer drops to the street below. I used to be full of dread every morning because I knew that before the day was done, I'd be walking the parapets. They varied ~~in width~~ ^{in width} between eight inches to so much as a foot and a half ~~in width~~ so there was no great risk unless you lost your head. But I would suspect that the spirit world if you will, does pay close attention to people engaged in unusual events. We started by talking about ritual. Now, we are involved with rote. Whenever people engage in rote, ⁱⁿ in other words, express a superstitious fear by going for repetitive moves when a good deal is at stake, that can draw the attention of the gods. So athletes who are going to be playing in games that will have a large emotional effect on many people, are going to attract such attention. One

does have the feeling that one is not alone, but is among accompanying spirits. At the least!

ML: I never told you this story, but when I was writing my Doctoral thesis on you, I had a chapter on your cosmology. I had to face two or three English professors plus a Philosophy professor on the Ph.D. committee. He argued with me about it. Wrote me long letters.

NM: Let me get this straight. While you were formulating the thesis, this happened?

ML: Yes, he was reading drafts. He said that your system, as far as he could understand it, was terribly incomplete.

NM: (laughs)

ML: He said he could not find in it either a beginning, how the universe came into being, or how it ends. How the cosmic war would end at the end of time or even if there would be an end of time.

NM: He sounds like a major league ass.

ML: Well, no, he was gentle with me. But he thought anybody who had a philosophical system, ought to have—let me finish—

NM: Let me just stress one point: I never heard of this before, that you have to have a beginning and an end to your philosophy. What about Logical Positivists? Do they have a beginning and an end?

ML: Well, he was an Aristotelian. That probably explains a lot. But he also felt that you had no clear definition of Being. What he believed and what a lot of philosophers believe, is the central question of philosophy: Being. What is being? What is the ultimate nature of Man what is the

ultimate nature of God? What is being? When he confronted me I kept saying, existentialism, existentialism. As much as I knew about it and I knew a little but not a great deal. One of my English professors on the committee said, "Look, Mailer is a literary man. He's not a systematic philosopher. He has ideas, he has feelings, but he isn't out to create a philosophical system." And that's what finally got the philosopher to back down. He goes, "You're right. This is a literature Ph.D., not a philosophy Ph.D." But I've thought about it for many, many years, this debate that we had. It kind of slowed things down although it didn't hurt me in the end, and everybody: After all, you ^{have} had written about Marx, Freud, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Schopenhauer—it wasn't that you weren't familiar with some philosophy, you were clearly interested in philosophical questions—but finally, I guess, that any philosopher who won't propose any ultimates is a

very unusual philosopher. As I read it, ^{you present} ~~there is no~~ ultimate nature of God,
no ultimate answer to any of these questions. And so, reading over
everything that we have done so far, I keep coming to the thing, we don't
know, we can't be certain. And from a philosophical point of view, there's
usually one rock somewhere.

NM: What if the rock is in transit? In other words when we say rock we
mean something that is eternal. What if eternity is in passage itself? The
simplest response I could give is that no philosopher has ever come up with
an answer to these questions that is satisfactory to us. No human, and I
won't be the first either. What I will say is this. I have basic beliefs. I
don't know what we've been talking about through these interviews. I
thought I'd said it. God is not All Powerful and not All Good. God is
comparable to a Greek god if you will. Zeus, if we need some model. I

don't need one. In other words, God is a warrior engaged in trying to shape some very large part of existence. How large is a question beyond our consciousness. I have no notion at all whether our God is a God for the solar system or includes some of the galaxies, or does not go beyond the earth and the moon. I have no notion whether God is in command of black holes in space or is terrified of them. My fundamental idea is that the cosmos is at war within itself and the God ^{who} ~~that has~~ created us, ~~the artist who~~ ~~created us,~~ is not the emperor, but the artist. This is my most basic notion of God—~~of~~ Being, if you will—is not a law-giver, but an artist. Being is doing the best that He or She can do to introduce ^a ~~their~~ notion of existence into the cosmos. There may be other notions out there as well—other concepts of what turn the cosmos should take. We humans are part of God's venture into the unknown. We humans are God's soldiers, God's ability to change

the given in the cosmos. To ask, then, that the end be posited is philosophically misleading, since we commence with the notion that the end is not yet determined.

When I say that I am an existentialist, I mean it in the absolute sense
} set
of that word. The purpose of existence is not known. ~~It is open. God has a~~

~~vision of existence, and we look to fulfill that notion even as we often~~

~~proceed to deny it. In addition, given His war with the Devil, God cannot~~

~~always affect His or Her notion of how things should be.~~ Often, God must

dwell in intolerable states of frustration. That makes more sense to me than

that God knows clearly what He or She is doing and tells us how to do it. If

that is the case, we are no more than extras in a huge opera. I've said this

~~I don't know~~
over and over. The end is open. Existence is open. This notion that there is

a predetermined place that we all will reach, that there is a single point to

existence which we will achieve by fulfilling God's notion, is, if you stop to

think of it, no more than a personification of God as the director of ^{an} ~~this~~

There He stands
immense opera, where he is holding a full libretto in hand. But I am saying it

is more complex ~~than that~~, more difficult, ~~More~~ ^{are} ennobling. We ~~are~~ not just

serfs, not just children drawn in from the street to ^{Sing a note} ~~play a part~~ in the

children's chorus, ~~but will not be allowed to sing.~~ We are the base of such

an opera. So to demand a philosophical presentation where I must say

where we are going, is, given my point of view, an unanswerable demand.

All we can know at best is where we might be at the present. Everything in

existence fortifies this concept for me. I know where I am at this moment.

Within reason. But do I know where I will be in a year? Will I still be

I don't know.
alive? ~~No~~ If I should remain alive for twenty years, can I have any notion

of where I will be then? Can I have a concept of where society will be in a

hundred years? Hardly. We live in the present. That is all we are given.

We do have instincts and they can be powerful. I would go so far as to say I

would go along with Goethe on this: These powerful instincts are God-

given. We are embodying God's plans, but such plans are subject to change

because the storms of the cosmos are not all prerecorded.

ML: The moment of death carries more weight in your theological thinking

than in any other I know of, but I don't see any consideration of what

happens to, I believe it's 20%, of all people who die of strokes, heart

attacks, aneurisms. I have a friend who died, so the doctor said, before he

hit the ground—you know, there is no time for them to prepare themselves,

there is no time to reflect, project, anything. Are they just unlucky, is this

just a flaw in the way God did things given the importance of our state of

mind when we go into eternity? These people have no chance.

compare pp. 17-21

to discussion

in II, pp. 6-16.

I think

earlier

discussion

is

superior

NM: To begin with, the answer ^{mar(ie)n dictum} ~~here is~~ the famous Catholic ~~notion~~ with

(There is always time to repent!)
which Graham Greene was obsessed. Between the stirrup and the ground!

Time, after all, to anyone who has had experience with ~~even~~ minor drugs

like marijuana will know that time can extend or compress. A tenth of a

we are told,
second in a dream ~~can~~ feel like five minutes. ~~So they tell me. In that sense,~~

~~the notion that you die without warning, no.~~ But apart from that, even if

no
you have ~~very little~~ time at the moment before your death, *I would say* ~~that's not where~~

that
(death takes place. ~~It takes place~~ within us as we live our lives. *It is always* ~~That is~~

at the point
exactly where morality enters into ~~everyone's~~ consciousness. The question,

"Am I a good man, or a bad man?" accompanies us from an early age. "Am

I a good child or a bad child?" As you get older and commence to think

more about death, so you also think more about judgment. Of course, not

everyone believes in judgment. It is disheartening that so often you will

hear fine people say "Oh, there is nothing after this. All I want is a little peace." It is a sad remark, particularly sad to me because, given my notion that many of us look to the promise of being reborn, it is sad if life has been

so corrosive that one does not care to be reincarnated. That suggests ^{there has} ~~so~~
 ~~been too punishing an existence, too~~
 ~~deep a sense of defeat. If, as I presume, our human purposes look to align~~
 ~~with God's purpose, we are then turning against God as well.~~
 ~~also disorient~~

ML: ~~I guess~~ I'm not making myself sufficiently clear. We had a long

discussion in which you emphasized how critical the final moments of one's

life were. They were, according to you, extraordinarily important because

that was ^{the} ~~the~~ time ^{to} ~~you could really~~ prepare yourself. You used the example

of ~~the~~ people in the gas chambers who were cheated out of that moment and

how terrible it was for them. But, you know, if you have a brain aneurism,

you don't have a tenth of a second. You have nothing. Your brain stops.

There's no thought.

NM: Let's say ~~that~~ 99% of the people who are alive have a reasonable amount of time to think before they die.

ML: They do.

NM: All right. You are talking ~~then~~ about the one percent. And if I can't

account for that one percent, then I can't. Everything I attempt here, if I

may honor it with the assumption that it is philosophical, suggests that we

don't look for one hundred percent in anything. I'm opposed to the notion

that any kind of thought can be ~~all that~~ complete. ^(life) wholly if it engages the meaning of It's one of the reasons I

so detest fundamentalism. It insists on one hundred percent. What I have to

say may ^{rules} be valid for ^{some} 9/10ths of the people, ~~or 99%, or 80%~~, but I do believe

that, yes, our preparation for death is important. If you have just a few

minutes at the end, it isn't as if you are facing death for the first time; you have been facing it all your life. Let us say you are handing in the final submission.

Now, let me go back a moment. As I've indicated, I think reincarnation is a species of reward. To repeat, that's why I get depressed when people say, "Oh, I just want some peace." And mean it. Whereas others can feel ^{that} with all the ill they've ^{admitted} caused, ~~that~~ there is still enough good in them to want another chance. I believe ~~that~~ God is ~~sometimes~~ ready to give that chance to the most impossible cases. I go back to my basic notion:

God is ^{our} ~~the~~ artist. A fine artist is never satisfied with what has been created, ^{but looks} ~~The artist can look~~ for another attempt to do it better. I even believe that the

dullest human is still an intrinsic work of art ~~beyond our measure~~. So, there.

It is just that none of the potential was realized. Still, there may be some reason.

~~may be every reason~~ for the Creator to want to see if this human can improve.

~~We are fascinated by the nature of God, but God, in His turn, may want to know more about many of us. God may want many of us to come, back.~~ God needs us. To repeat: He wishes to take His notion of existence

and carry it across the stars. And for that, God needs humans to become more extraordinary. But you don't create people who are wonderful by an

act of will. Often, such development can come only from rebirth. ^{and} If you are

endless small steps of development. If you
are put in situations where you failed in one life, but ^{manage to} succeed in the next,

then, yes, to that degree, you have strengthened God.

Let me offer a crude scenario. If, in one existence, you were terrified of heights, well, then possibly for the next, you are placed in a family of

25 a) in this new existence, you
 mountain climbers. So ~~the~~ child may go through horrors. But now ~~this~~

you have *you up to* *you*
~~child has~~ guides to carry him or her into an aerie ~~they~~ could not reach in
your
~~their~~ previous life.

So venture to
~~To go back to your first question,~~ I would say that ~~maybe~~ at the
may have
moment of one's death, one ~~has~~ a better sense of what one did or didn't do
for the
in one's life and what one might like to be ~~in one's~~ next life. Can that not
even
give a coloration to the soul ~~at~~ the last moment?

ML: All right. Let us say that such a person does become a successful
mountain climber. If you have a succession of such good reincarnations,
what happens then? Does a person ever get to be as good as it is possible
to become?

I don't think so.
NM: ~~No, no. We are so far from being anywhere near any kind of~~
~~perfection.~~ Most of us are so highly imperfect, so underdeveloped, so

frustrated, so small in relation to what we could have been, every one of us,

even those of us who are relatively successful, that the question also becomes how much has God learned from us. It isn't that God understands us so well that all we need is a little tweaking. ~~It's not like that.~~ God learns along with us. Think of God as a protagonist in the cosmos. So, some of His divine decisions on reincarnation will work; others not. God's hope is that His works succeed more often than they fail.

ML: So most reincarnations ^{might} ~~would~~ not show a clear improvement [?] ~~or a~~
~~decline?~~

NM: Who knows? Who knows whether it is God who makes every single decision, ~~or if there are a myriad of monitoring angels.~~ For that matter, karma itself may be embattled. When too many people die at once, when a hundred thousand souls ^{living in Hiroshima} ~~are incinerated~~ in one second, that may create great damage. Karma may not be equipped to deal with so many deaths in ^{one} ~~an~~

instant. Might this not be one of the Devil's most profound urges? To

maim Karma ^{irreparably?} ~~grievously~~ Destroy reincarnation, ^{which is to say,} destroy God's way of
adjusting the balance.

ML: I don't see any reason why reincarnations can't go on for a couple of
million years. Why not? No problem.

NM: The question here is how much time does God have. Are eons more
of time available, or is it a cosmic race? There may be other visions of
existence seeking to overtake us in the universe, or worse, speed far away
from us. So, God may be in a great hurry. God may have less patience now
than He possessed hundreds of thousands of years ago.

ML: Well, to go back to the ^{my philosophy} ~~Ph.D.~~ professor, there is usually some
teleological sense among philosophers about how it's going to turn out in
the end.

NM: I would say that God has a vision of existence which He sees as more creative, and more useful to the future than other competing visions in the cosmos.

ML: What is that vision?

NM: That life can become more and more creative, diverse, splendid and incredible.

ML: OK

NM: Now give me another vision of existence. That we all are to sit in the heavenly fold and listen to hymns which are beautiful because God has put us in heaven? What the hell is more final about that?

ML: There is the vision in many religions that you merge with the universal mind. You merge with the mind of God, you become part and parcel of God.

And you ^{just} exist not in just sugar land, ~~amusement park~~ or Club Med, but

exist in pure intellectual bliss having been completely purged of all weaknesses and corruptions and so forth. ~~In~~ ^{hold this belief} many religions, [^] The Hindus, for example.

NM: That assumes we're all here ideally to get to a certain place. If we keep our lives clean enough, we will reach such bliss. But I am saying that heavenly bliss is not guaranteed. Everything we know about the nature of existence also shows us that it's cruel, paradoxical, glorious, disappointing, tremendous, and often more modest than ~~we~~ expected. And so I believe we are part of a vast creative process that is attempting to go somewhere without being able to guarantee what the end is. In our lives, we certainly work without knowing the end. The only certainty we possess is that we are going to die. We don't know what will follow that. We can assume certain

answers, but we ought to know that we are only making an assumption. Let me add that if every one of our understandings comes down to uncertainty, why assume that God knows what the end is? That is also a large assumption.

ML: Does it fit or not fit in your theology that America has a special place in God's vision?

NM: I've written about that lately. The quagmire in Iraq can be blamed on American Exceptionalism. I would say that all of us, all humans, belong to exceptionallism. Not just Americans. All of the globe is part of God's exceptionalism. No particular country represents Gods basic sense of how to do it. It's vainglory to think we Americans have a purchase on exceptionalism. How, for god's sakes, could God put up with suburbs and malls and superhighways and plastics?

ML: Well, maybe we've blown it. You know, in the beginning, the idea of American Exceptionalism came from the idea that they blew it in Europe.

There were endless wars and corruption. And we were a new start.

NM: I won't argue ~~that there has been divine~~ ^{of that} God may have had certain hopes for America. But I don't think He has had much ~~hope~~ since the Second World War. In the last five decades, we've ~~cheapened the very~~ ^{not only roiled the depths but} surface of life. We've ruined the

freshness of the air, the cleanliness of the rivers. At this point I would say

that America is not a country whose spiritual goodness ^{is guaranteed to} holds up under examination.

ML: I know when Kennedy was assassinated somebody said, and you

quoted it, that God may have withdrawn his blessing from America.

NM: It was John Updike.

ML: And that remark moved you. You thought he might be on to something there.

NM: Yes.

ML: Several times in this and other conversations I've had with you, you've mentioned the possibility that God might have intended human beings to develop their telepathic powers. In your novel, Ancient Evenings, some of the characters do employ telepathic powers. And modern novelists can, in a sense, read minds. Because they're exploring what people are thinking. One of the great advances is when the novel moved into the human mind.

NM: In which century would you say that was?

ML: Well, it really only started around a hundred years ago.

NM: Dickens enters people's minds.

ML: Not much. Not like Joyce. Or Virginia Wolfe.

NM: All right.

ML: Do your speculations about telepathy have anything to do with using this novelistic tool? I mean you certainly explore the consciousness of virtually all of your heros. You rarely see characters from just the outside.

NM: Yes, but I don't think that I would lay claim to any more telepathy than is average. We all have the experience of thinking of a song and someone in the room starts humming it. People who are married for a while often find they're thinking of something at the same time. We phone someone just as they are about to call us. But in terms of ^{daily} practical novel writing, I think we study everybody from the outside. Once in a while, through love, we do enter literally the inner presence of someone else. But, generally speaking, we observe. We study society. We try to understand

how the social machine works. We try to understand characters ^{who are} different

from ourselves. We work with the notion that there is a little bit of

ourselves in the stranger. Certain characters do come alive even though

they are ^{far apart} ~~vastly different~~ from one's self. The best novelists can do that. All

the same, telepathy is ^{only a} ~~a very~~ small part of it now. I do believe, however,

God did want us to be telepathic. God did not necessarily envision

electronics. Electronics, I suspect, are the Devil's contribution. God just

assumed we would become more and more telepathic and in the course of

that, there would be less need for technology. Technology stifles God's

creation. Smog is not good for God's air. Static is not good for ^{his} ~~our~~ ears ^{for ours}

~~Or, our souls~~. I don't want to go through the old litany of all that is wrong

with modern civilization. I will add one notion, however, which is that

technology being now with us, we have to look upon human history as

God's attempt to deal with the Devil. If the Devil succeeds in establishing technological shoots and outbursts and venues and avenues throughout all of society, God must engage technology as well. But He comes in second. The Devil is the pioneer in technology. So I would assert.

ML: Right. But one of the new phenomena of technology that is sweeping not just the US but the world—in fact, the united States, I understand, is behind great portions of the world, ^{development in} ~~certainly~~ Europe and Asia—is cell phones. Only half the people in the States use cell phones, but in Asia and in Europe it's much higher than that. It's sixty, seventy percent. Is this opportunity to call up people all the time, anywhere in the world, not creating a whole new set of communications in the world that never existed before?

NM: I see it as a mess. I'm not at all sure that instant communication with everyone alive is ideal. Not at all. Very often it is the hunt for information that shapes the development that we make of such information. We are stimulated by the hunt. The difficulty becomes a vital part of the intellectual process. Today, so many are talking about gluts of information. We are all being buried under mountain ranges of data.

ML: I remember, you were there at the birth of television and you had many theories about it and have written about it. It seems to me that the cell phone in many ways is almost equal in its power.

NM: With television, back in the early days, everybody who felt positive about it was leaving the full effects of commercials out of the equation. TV commercials did a terrible thing to the American people. They introduced

the expectation that your powers of concentration ^{*had to be ready*} ~~were obliged~~ to suffer a

series of hits through every hour that you watched.

ML: You've made it clear that, to your mind, ideation may be closer to the Devil than the Lord. Which made me think, what about language which is perhaps the most complex and subtle creation of intellect. Where does language fit into this discussion?

NM: Language does not come only from intellect. Language is the marriage of intellect and the senses. Whereas, technology is often divorced from the senses. Plastic, for example. Most electronic machines are not agreeable to employ. Think of the cast-iron vise in an old-fashioned cellar workshop. It makes cranking sounds as you use it, and you do get a feeling as you tighten the screw whether the piece in the vise is being held properly. Not being crushed and not too loose. You obtain very little of that with

technological machines. At best you're reading dials, and your eyes might

even find a little play in the subtlety of the dials. But you can't ask

technology to ^{enrich} ~~do any large enriching of~~ your senses. Whereas, language ^{does}

comes out of the senses. Half of language is onomatopoeia. We are drawn

to different languages by their qualities. I love German for its guttural

vibrations on one's larynx, and French for the emphasis upon the nose, the

centrality of the nose. I love English for the mannered postures available to

your voice, and Spanish for the fire you can feel within it. Ditto for Italian

with its sense of bravura. Hebrew for its primitive roots. All such reactions

come from our senses. So I separate technology and language—they exist

at opposite poles of the intellect.

ML: I've never heard you speak philosophically about language.

NM: Well, I had all sorts of theories years ago which I tried to pursue in superficial fashion. I never got down to grips with it. I do have these notions still. I think certain consonants have associative qualities. I think "r" almost always has to do with anger, rage, ire, fury, redness, roar. "L" has to do with love—lassitude, leisure, likelihood, languor, libido. "S's" are sibilant. They suggest displeasure, sinuosity. I tried to make up a rule for all the consonants, but R, L and S are the easiest. "B" is almost always impact. "B," "K," you know. Break. Sounds that implode upon your ear tend to have relations to B, K. F....

ML: Well what is the relationship between God and the Devil to language?

NM: That's ~~pretty far~~ beyond me, ^{Bats} ~~I would say~~. ¹ ~~Look,~~ animals come close to speaking. I had a dog fifty years ago, a standard poodle. Immensely bright. I always felt that his greatest pain, his soul suffering—because dogs

in my opinion do have souls—and in fact parenthetically there is one very large but unascertainable notion that in Karma we may go back into the animal chain again. Who ^{can} knows? In any event, this dog was extraordinary.

He made ~~sounds~~ searching sounds in his throat trying to speak to me.

Sounds you couldn't begin to spell out. I could make them for the tape recorder but no one could transcribe them. And that dog wanted to speak.

So I think in a certain sense, God was discovering language through the eons of evolution and the sounds of His animals.

ML: All right, here's my last question. Have recent geopolitical events reaffirmed or undercut your theological beliefs? I mean, has the reelection of George Bush confirmed your belief system?

NM: I've felt from the word go that George Bush is one of the Devil's creatures. I suspect he's drenched with the Devil. And every time he feels

that Jesus is talking to him, Satan is ^{in his ear,} ~~speaking~~. One of the Devil's greatest talents may be to speak like Jesus. The war in Iraq has been steroidal for America. So in that sense—I think the Devil is winning right now in America, yes.
