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every page
through
this issue.

INTERVIEW VI

~~Ritual and Related Matters~~ *Rite, and Telepathy*

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: I've thought about it a ^{good} ~~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 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 ^{fine} ~~good~~ novel does not keep repeating itself. That is exactly the hallmark of a ^{de 11 work.} ~~bad novel~~. So, most good novelists are wary of repetition. Moreover, most people I don't like ^{or approve of} (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 was in 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 ^{a little} 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 allow ^{much} 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 been practicing Transcendental Meditation willy-nilly.

Now, ^{during my} ~~in the~~ initiatory ritual, they said a few words in an Asian language, and then gave me a mnemonic to repeat. I forget ^{what it was.} ~~mine. It was~~ something like ^{Allen} ~~Alan~~ Ginsberg's OM. ^{Allen} ~~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 ^{brain} ~~head~~, I had to be ready to use the mnemonic to wash the thought away. It was a 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 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. God, recognizing its efficacy, and determined not to lose any soul unnecessarily, entered ritual as well. I think ritual is composed then 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 a sense that powers are present. Anyone who reads Homer will find nothing strange about this. So, I think my answer would be that I don't scoff at ritual, but I don't trust it. I would be happier if we lived without it yet. I have to recognize that my upbringing, my tastes, my life has had little to do with rituals. Nonetheless, they are 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. 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~~^{performed} 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~~^a parapets. They varied between eight inches in width to so much as a foot and a half, 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 other words, express a superstitious fear by going in 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. ^{I think} ~~One~~ ~~they do many~~ ^{engaged with} 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." After all, you have 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 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 ^{same} thing, we don't know, we can't be certain. ^{Yet} And from ^{most} 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 ^{divine protagonist} warrior engaged in trying to shape some very large part of existence. How large is a question beyond our ^{means,} ~~consciousness~~ ^{Of course!}. I have no notion at all whether our God is a ^{master of} God for the solar system or includes ~~some of~~ ^{to control} 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 created us is not the

emperor, but the artist. This is my most basic notion: God—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~~ ^{she can project a new} notion of existence into the cosmos. There may be other notions out there as well—other concepts ^{concerning which} 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~~ ^{as} yet ~~determined.~~ ^{undetermined.}

When I say that I am an existentialist, I mean it in the absolute sense of that word. ^{It is the presence of life not the} The purpose of existence is not known. ^{often} God ~~must~~ ^{may often} dwell in intolerable states of ^{helplessness} 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 over and over. The end is open. Existence is open. ^{The} 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, no more than a personification of God as the director of an immense

opera. There He stands, holding a full libretto in hand. But I am saying it is more complex, more difficult, more ennobling. ^{(And the libretto is not done. It is still} We are not just serfs, ^{being} ~~not~~ ^{written}

~~nor the~~ ^{just} children drawn in from the street to sing a note in the children's chorus.

We are the base of ^{this} ~~such an~~ opera. So to demand a philosophical presentation where I must say where we are going, is, given my point of view, ^{not} ~~an~~ answerable 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 alive? I don't know. If I should remain alive for twenty years, can I have any notion of ^{how} ~~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 ^{what} ~~all~~ we are given. We do have instincts and they can be ^{far-reaching.} ~~powerful~~. I would go so far as to say ^{that} I would go along with Goethe's *Gedicht* 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. ~~and this essentially, however, Edge Card's vision of the future was long~~ 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

~~the future~~
 * ~~the world is not yet written.~~
 * ~~of our lives as if the devil after all,~~
~~the devil already comes a step~~
~~before human activity.~~

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Here, I wish to enter a relevant note.

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.

NM: To begin with, the answer may lie in the famous Catholic dictum with which Graham Greene was obsessed: There is always time to repent!

Between the stirrup and the ground! Time, after all, to anyone who has had experience with minor drugs like marijuana will know that time can extend or compress. A tenth of a second in a dream we are told, can feel like five minutes. But apart from that, even if you have no time at the moment before your death, I would say that death takes place within us as we live our lives.

~~Death~~ ^{present} is always at the point where morality enters into 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 ^{grow} older and commence

~~to think more about death,~~ so you ^{may} also think more about judgment. Of course, not everyone believes ~~in judgment.~~ that such a process exists. 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

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suggests there has been too punishing an existence, too deep a sense of defeat.

ML: 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 time to prepare yourself. You used the example of 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 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 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 wholly complete ^{once it looks to} ~~it~~ engages the meaning of life. ^{that is another for detesting} ~~It's one of the reasons I do detest~~ fundamentalism. It insists on one hundred percent. What I have to say may only be valid for some people, 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.

Close-up

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 admittedly caused, there is still enough good in them to want another chance. I believe God is ready to give that chance to the most impossible cases. I go back to my basic notion: God is our artist. A fine artist is never satisfied with what has been created, but looks for another attempt to do better. I even believe that the dullest human is still an intrinsic work of art. It is just that ^{virtually} none of the potential was realized. Still, there may be some reason for the Creator to ^{wish} ~~want~~ to see if this human can improve.

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

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 mountain climbers. So as a child in this new existence, you may go through horrors. But now you have guides to carry you up to an aerie you could not reach in your previous life.

So, I would venture to say that at the moment of one's death, one may have a better sense of what one did or didn't do in one's life and what one might like for the next life. Can that not give a coloration to the soul even 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?

NM: I don't think so. 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. God learns *Continue to think* 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 not show a clear improvement?

NM: Who knows? ~~Who knows whether it is God who makes every single decision. 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~~ *incalculable* damage. Karma may not ~~be~~ *have been* equipped to deal with ~~so many~~ *such a number of* deaths in one instant. Might this not be one

of the Devil's most profound urges? To maim Karma irreparably? 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 my philosophy 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 exist not just in sugar land or Club Med, but exist in pure intellectual bliss having been completely purged of all weaknesses and corruptions and so forth. Many religions hold this belief. The Hindus, for example.

NM: That assumes we're all here ideally to get to a certain place. If we keep our lives ^{pure} clean enough, we will reach such bliss. But I am saying that heavenly bliss is ^{hardly to be} not guaranteed. Everything we know about the nature of existence ^{can be} also shows us that it's cruel, paradoxical, glorious, disappointing, tremendous, and often more modest than 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 ^{or ought to know} ~~ought to know~~ that we are ^{no more than} ~~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 ^{on occasion} ~~later~~. The quagmire in Iraq can be blamed on American Exceptionalism. I would say that all of us, all humans, belong to exceptionalism. Not just Americans. All of the globe is part of God's exceptionalism. No particular country represents God's 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 may have been certain divine hopes for America. But I don't think He has had much of that since the Second World War. In the last five decades, we've not only ^{roiled} ~~rolled~~ the depths but cheapened the ~~very~~ surface of life. We've ruined the freshness of the air, ^{the integrity of the earth.} the cleanliness of the rivers. At this point I would say that America is not a country whose spiritual goodness is guaranteed to hold 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 ^{*exactly such*} 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 Woolf.

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 heroes. 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 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 ^{novelists} 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 from ^{our notion of ourselves} one's self. The best novelists can do that. All the
 same, telepathy is ^{but} only a small part of it now. I do believe, however, ^{that} God
 did want us to be telepathic. ^{The Lord} 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 ears or ours. 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, ^{as well as with us.} 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. *Unless it is we
 humans who outstripped the Devil.*

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 development, certainly in 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?

the kind of mess that comes from over-reliance
 NM: I see it as a mess. *In the past, it was* 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. *made of the* We *are* stimulated by the hunt. The difficulty becomes a vital part of the *we gathered* intellectual process. Today, *we* 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 ^{were required} had to be ready to suffer a series of hits ^(interruptions) 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 ^{be 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 your ^{physical perceptions} senses. Whereas, language does come 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 ^{but} ~~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~~ ^{could say}

^{that in English} ("r" almost always has to do with anger, rage, ire, fury, redness, roar. "L"

^{may be related to} has to do with love—lassitude, leisure, likelihood, languor, libido, ^(luxury) "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 ~~far~~ beyond me. But, 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 know? In any event, this dog was extraordinary. He made 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~~. *clients.* I suspect he's *been infiltrated by* ~~drenched with~~ the Devil. And every time he feels *count on it* that Jesus is talking to him, Satan is in his ear. 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 ^{yes} sense ^{maybe} I think the Devil ^{is} winning right now in
America. ^{yes.} But. ^{it's still coming}
^{down to the wire.}
