

A Special Note...

<u>Memo</u>	<u>Q₂</u>	<u>Ward Count</u>	<u>Parap.</u>
40		<u>quater</u>	
52		5	
73		8	
77		1	
104		4/?	
107		7	
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114		5	
120		5	
129		4/61	
134-6		8/2?	
138		38	
148		3	
149		21/2	
150		3	
151		3	
155		14/92	

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Word Count
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Parap

(2)

158

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161

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A Special Note...

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Norman Mailer: A Double Life

By J. Michael Lennon

#2
10-28-12

"There are two sides to me, and the side that is the observer is paramount." Norman Mailer

MBM - Mills

CNM - Conner

MK - MKnot

LP - ~~Adela~~

MS - my ref to MS.PA

The Riptides of Fame: June 1948

In October 1947, after delivering the manuscript of his war novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, Norman Mailer sailed to Europe with his wife Beatrice. At that time, a pilgrimage to Paris was almost a necessity for World War II veterans with literary ambitions. Whether they had gone to college or not, they were invariably familiar with the works of Wolfe, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Fitzgerald and Henry Miller, and smitten by their descriptions of the delights of bohemian life amidst the monuments and ruins of a glorious past. Paris was the bulls-eye destination for these aspiring writers, including Stanley Karnow, a Harvard graduate and veteran who arrived there in 1947, a few months before Norman Mailer. His memoir, *Paris in the Fifties*, opens with the question: "*Porquoi Paris?* Its name alone was magic. The city, the legendary, *Ville Lumière*, promised something for everyone—beauty, sophistication, culture, cuisine, sex, escape and that indefinable called *ambiance*." Mailer relished all of these pleasures during his ten-month stay in Paris. He had read the American expatriates, and some French writers as well—André Malraux was his hero. He differed from most of his countrymen, however, in one respect: he *was* a writer when he arrived: besides *Naked*, he had written two unpublished novels in college. While enjoying himself in Paris and taking trips to other countries, he was trying to

get a new novel going. It was one of the happiest seasons of his life, shadowed only by his anxiety about success.

In the spring of 1948 he drove to Italy in a small Peugeot, accompanied by his wife, sister and mother—Beatrice, Barbara and Fanny. They left Paris on June 1, drove east to Switzerland and then south to Italy. It began to rain as they drove through the foothills of the Alps, and turned to snow when they reached higher elevations. Mailer had to keep downshifting on the hairpin turns because the Peugeot didn't have much horsepower. By the time they reached the St. Gotthard Pass, they were in a blizzard. At the peak they had to back up to let another car pass, coming perilously close to the edge. Mailer relished the experience. They spent a few days in the villages and resorts of the northern lake country, and then moved on to Florence and Venice. In mid-June they arrived in Rome where they hoped to pick up their mail, forwarded by Mailer's father Barney, an accountant working for a post-war relief organization in Paris.

Just before the Italian excursion, Mailer and Bea had completed several months of language courses at the Sorbonne. The courses were not demanding, and were mainly a pretext for a long European adventure. He and Bea were able to take ski trips, visit Chartres cathedral and the monastery at Mont St. Michel, and drive to Spain for a week. The money they had saved during the war, and stipends from the GI Bill—they were both veterans—enabled them to pay their tuition, eat amazing meals in student restaurants, and rent a small apartment. As children of the Depression and quondam Marxists, they were used to living frugally. "It was an extraordinary experience to be an American in Europe in 1948," Barbara wrote in her memoir of that time, "because it was possibly the only time in the history of the world when one could be both rich and loved (even if poor, any American who could get to Europe then was, by European

to meet him people had to meet me first." Then, as his fame waxed and waned over the next decade, he saw that "I could now write about the identity of people who had a certain amount of power." Mailer's entire career can be seen as a series of studies of how power is gained, lost, regained or dwindled away, and the divided, intricate psyches of those who exercise it.

His literary career had a significant foreground—in Brooklyn, at Harvard and in combat in the Philippines—but it began officially, one might say, on that hot day in Nice. Before they opened the mail and saw the magnitude of the novel's reception, Barbara said, "was the last time Norman could feel he was himself and not Norman Mailer." He said that he "felt kind of blue" after reading the mail in Nice. When they returned to Paris a few days later, he told her "I think the book may be better than I am." He had turned 25 only a few months earlier.

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⑤

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standards, rich).^{necessary?} (She recalled staying at the best hotel in Madrid, the Palace, for four dollars a night.) Americans abroad, she said, felt both entitled and guilty.

Rinehart and Co., Mailer's publisher, had mounted a major publicity campaign for *The Naked and the Dead*, and he and his family^{necessary?} (his mother and sister came over in April of 1948) were eager for more news of its reception. The mail in Rome contained several reviews, all positive, even glowing. After two or three days of sightseeing, Fan left them and took the train back to Paris to join Barney. Mailer, Bea and Barbara drove down to Naples. They considered taking a boat to Capri to see where the Emperor Tiberius had thrown his ravaged victims into the sea, but decided it was "too touristy a thing to do," as Barbara put it, and went instead to the island of Ischia, where they stayed a few days. In Pompeii, they paid a few lire and were shown an ancient painting of a priapic man. Bea burst out laughing, which shocked their guide, and amused Mailer.

On the morning of June 23, they began the long drive back to France, driving north from Rome along the Ligurian coast. Barbara and Bea wanted to see the Leaning Tower, and convinced a reluctant Mailer to detour to the enormous piazza in Pisa where it stands. No sooner had the car stopped than he said, "Okay, you've seen it, let's go." The two women got out for a minute to stretch, and then they were off again. Mailer was preoccupied, thinking about the reviews, the return trip to the U.S., and a cable he had just received from Lillian Hellman, who wanted to do a dramatic adaptation of his novel. He had seen her play, *The Little Foxes*, on Broadway when he was in college, and had "a lot of respect for her as a playwright," as he told his editor. In Paris, he had begun a new novel, but it was a fragment, and he didn't know if he wanted to continue with it. He had the feeling that he'd be busy when he got home in August.

They drove on, and after a long ride, arrived in the late afternoon at the American Express Office in Nice. Barney had forwarded the next batch of mail from the States.

A month earlier, Mailer recorded his anticipations in his journal. At that time, he had only seen a few early reviews—the novel came out on May 6—but enough to realize its prospects were excellent.

The thing I've got to get down here is my reactions to the book's success. The depression to start with—I feel trapped. My anonymity is lost, and the book I wrote to avoid having to expose my mediocre talents in harsher market places has ended in this psychological sense by betraying me; I dread the return to America where every word I say will have too much importance, too much misinterpretation. And of course I am sensitive to the hatreds my name is going to evoke.

But across from that is the other phenomenon. I feel myself more empty than I ever have, and to fill the vacuum, to prime the motor, I need praise. Each good review gives fuel, each warm letter, but as time goes by I need more and more for less and less effect. This kind of praise-opium could best be treated in fiction through the publicity mad actress who has to see her face and name more and more to believe in her reality, and of course loses the line between her own personality, and the one created for her by the papers.

Mailer's desire for fame, and his distaste for it, never abated over his long career. Nor did his ability to see how his current situation might be turned to use, embodied in his writing. It became a reflex.

Hot and dusty and sweaty from the ride to Nice, Barbara and Bea sat in the Peugeot while Mailer went in for the mail. He returned with an enormous packet of clippings, cables, reviews and letters. "The reviews were mostly marvelous," Barbara said. "Our friends were all excited and writing to us (I remember my Progressive Party lover wrote, 'What kind of book is this that both the *Times* and the *Daily Worker* praise?')"

The atmosphere in the car got "somewhat frenetic and hysterical."

I don't think we finished reading any letter or review because it was always interrupted by word of a comment on what someone else was reading. Finally Norman said, in a rather small voice which I will never forget the sound of because it so totally captured the feeling that none of this was quite real, 'Gee, I'm first on the best seller list.' We laughed. And laughed. And I thought of all this excitement going on 3,000 miles away, and Norman was the cause of it, but it didn't seem to have any relation to 'Us.'

Looking back on that day almost sixty years later, Mailer said, "It was a great shock." He had been hoping he would earn enough money from *Naked* to write his next book, and now the novel was number one on the *New York Times* best seller list, where it stayed for eleven consecutive weeks. All told, it remained on the list for 62 weeks. "I knew I'd be a celebrity when I came back to America and I felt very funny towards it, totally unprepared," he said. "I'd always seen myself as an observer. And now I knew, realized, that I was going to be an actor. An actor

on the American stage, so to speak. I don't mean I knew it all at once. But there were certainly intimations of that."

Shortly after leaving the army, Mailer had been told by a New York editor that no one was interested in war novels. Everyone was tired of the war. But by 1948, readers were eager to remember and explore the experience, and Mailer's novel, which looked at World War II from both the battlefields of the Pacific and the home front, was perfectly suited. "It was the luckiest timing of my career," he said later. Even so, he was concerned that the publicity surrounding the novel, and its huge sales, would alienate the readers of the leading literary journal in the U.S., the *Partisan Review*. Success as a writer, he said, was like getting "caught in a riptide. Two waves coming in from different directions. You get more attention in one place and less in the other. The ego is on a jumping jack." He and Bea believed *PR*'s readers were mainly snobs, but he still wanted to see his name on its front cover.

But the largest drawback of fame was that it cut him off from "real experience," as he called it, the kind he'd had in the army, experience that was thrust on you, as opposed to the kinds one sought. "I used to feel that I didn't know anything because I got rich too soon," he said. "I used to feel sorry for myself." But after some years of demeaning his fame, he started to enjoy it. It was "an acquired appetite." He credited the Marquis de Sade for pointing out that "there is no pleasure greater than that obtained from a conquered repugnance." When he reached that point he wanted more and more of it, recognizing that being famous at an early age was a genuine, if unusual, experience. If he was unable to enjoy normal life, he now had "a sense of how . . . not tenuous, not fragile . . . how delicate, perhaps, is identity." He had been through an identity crisis and survived. Earlier, "It was as if there was somebody named Norman Mailer, but

His literary career had a significant foreground—in Brooklyn, at Harvard and in combat in the Philippines—but it began officially, one might say, on that hot day in Nice. Before they opened the mail and saw the magnitude of the novel's reception, Barbara said, "was the last time Norman could feel he was himself and not Norman Mailer." He said that he "felt kind of blue" after reading the mail in Nice. When they returned to Paris a few days later, he told his sister, "I think the book may be better than I am." He had turned 25 only a few months earlier.

Chapter 1

Long Branch and Brooklyn

Norman Mailer knew his grandparents came from northern climates, but he knew little about their lives in Lithuania, then part of Russia. The Mailers and the Schneiders lived in three towns, not more than 60 miles apart, in central and northeastern Lithuania: Panevezys, Anykscia and Utena. Unknown to each other in Russia, the two families emigrated at the end of the nineteenth century to escape either economic hardship or persecution, or both, the Mailers settling in Johannesburg, South Africa, and the Schneiders in New Jersey.

Mailer's maternal grandfather, Hyman (Chaim) Jehuda Schneider, was a precocious child and studied the Torah and Talmud from a very early age. Mailer's mother Fan said that he was "sent at the age of seven to the yeshiva in Wolozin [Volozhin] Russia, which was comparable to Columbia [University] in the U.S." Commonly referred to as "the Mother of Yeshivas," the Volozhin Yeshiva was the home of the *Misnagdim*, the opponents of the Hasidism, the

rambunctious, anti-formalist movement which developed in the latter part of the eighteenth century. "My father," Fan wrote, "was a staunch follower of the *Misnagdim*. He felt the Hasidim were not so learned; they depended too much on the rabbi and his blessings." There is more than a slight irony in the fact that her son was fascinated by the mysticism of the Hasidim. In the early 1960s, Mailer wrote six columns for *Commentary*, reflections on a ^{folk} ~~collection~~ ^{collected} of stories by Martin Buber that centered on the Hasidim's dialectic, which, Mailer said, "placed madness next to practicality, illumination side by side with duty, and arrogance in bed with humility." Early and late, Mailer gravitated to incompatibles.

Born in 1859, Schneider was a rabbi by 16 and, at about the same age, married Ida Kamrass. They had six children, in order: Joseph, Rebecca (Beck), Jennie, a son who died at childbirth, Rose, and the youngest, Fanny or Fan. At the end of the century, the Jews in The Pale of Settlement (comprised of the bulk of Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus) were being driven abroad by double taxation and forced enlistments in the Czar's army. Parlous conditions from 1881 to 1914 forced over two million to emigrate. Sometime in early 1891, Schneider left for the U.S. with his half-sister Lena, his half-brother Morris, and his wife's youngest sister Minnie. Ida, pregnant with Fan, stayed behind. As Fan put it, her father wanted his children to "get an education and not worry about the Cossacks and muziks raiding a town and massacring the Jewish residents." The Schneiders were separated for three years. Ida, her 62-year old mother Leah Sacks and the five children arrived in New York in October 1894, sailing from Rotterdam on the S.S. Veendam.

When Hyman arrived in 1891, he was advised to set up a soda water and newspaper stand on the lower east side. He and Lena opened the stand at four a.m. and worked shifts until late at

night. Irish gangs, operating with impunity, dominated the area and took what they wanted. Sixty years later, Mailer had an apartment not far from where his grandfather had once sold cigarettes. During a party one night in the spring of 1951, some toughs busted in to his loft and during the ensuing fight, he was hit in the head with a hammer. Stubbornly, Mailer remained on the lower east side, but his grandfather moved on. After six months, Schneider left the city ^{MBM 133} peddler in rural New Jersey. He also taught Hebrew to Jewish families in Belm [REDACTED] settling in the resort town of Long Branch, where, according to Fan, he was "in [REDACTED] small local Jewish community to start a kosher grocery store. [REDACTED] OK

In *The Naked and the Dead*, Mailer drew on his earliest memories for a description of the store run by Joey Goldstein's grandfather, a learned Jew who quotes the medieval Jewish poet and scholar, Yehuda Halevi:

Inside there is a narrow marble counter and an aisle about two feet wide for the customers who stand on the eroded oil cloth. In the summer it is sticky, and the pitch comes off on one's shoes. On the counter are two glass jars with metal covers and a bent ladling spoon containing essence of cherry, essence of orange. (Coca-Cola is not yet in vogue.) Beside them is a tan moist cube of halvah on a block of wood. The flies are sluggish, and one has to prod them before they fly away.

The Schneider store catered to the Jewish population, which burgeoned each summer with the arrival of middle-class visitors and a few wealthy New Yorkers. Pre-occupied by his studies, Rabbi Schneider played a relatively small role in the store; the women and older girls did

most of the work with the two younger girls helping after school. Only Rose and Fan were able to graduate from high school, Beck, starting at the age of 12, went to Manhattan to order kosher beef at the abattoirs on First Avenue, which was then shipped by rail to Long Branch. The family was nine in number, but there were regular guests—poorer cousins and “greenhorns” from Russia who stayed with the family until they were established. The Schneider home, Fan wrote, “was a sort of Traveler’s Aid, ready to offer food and lodging to many a weary soul.”

Probably due to the fact that we had a grocery and meat market, there was always enough food in the house, but profits were small and my father was always sorry for the poor so in extending them credit, he actually ruined his own. He had much faith in human beings and felt they would pay. But they couldn’t pay out of empty pockets so when he finally would tell some of them that they would have to pay cash he decided to help them in other ways. If he waited on them, they were always sure of getting at least 5 ounces of butter for a $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. and 19 or 20 oz. of meat when they would ask for one pound. . . . his whole outlook on life was not based on a hard calculating plan in business whereby he could give his wife and children comfort and ease.

Along with recent arrivals from The Pale, itinerant rabbis, cantors and maggids were put up for days at a time at their home, often staying until enough money could be collected for them to move on to the next town. Hyman was their informal counselor, an independent scholar who was glad to learn and teach. Over tea and sweets, he regaled the household with stories from the Talmud or read accounts of the life of his herde, Baruch Spinoza, a freethinking Portuguese Jew who was excommunicated by the orthodox Jewish community of Amsterdam. According to

Mailer's younger sister Barbara Wasserman, Schneider was also a freethinker and "absolutely open about his apostasy." During "my atheistic teenage years," Barbara said, "my mother and I argued about religion. She really didn't have a religious bone in her body, but she had the habits of long years of ritual, and she didn't approve of atheism, since it denied Judaism. So I would say, 'Well, what is God?' And she would answer, 'I believe what my father always said, that God is all around us and in everything.' I would shout, 'That's pantheism, you're a pantheist, and Spinoza was excommunicated for that.' Her huffy answer was, 'You can call me anything you want—I'm still a Jew.'"

Rabbi Schneider's intellectual ability is an article of faith in the Mailer family. Fan's husband, Barney, said the source of his son's talent was "his maternal grandfather. A Talmudic scholar." Fan chimed in, saying, "three of his grandsons went to Harvard." Marjorie "Osie" Radin, the eldest of Mailer's American cousins, who was 19 when the Rabbi died, said, "[T]hat's where all the talent and brains came from." In her memoir, Barbara answers the question, "Who was Grandpa?"

brains and talent MLT 13

Certainly, in one view, the archetype of the timid Jew, the one who whispers in front of the firing squad, 'Don't make waves.' But also the saintly, kindly man, the revered intellectual, brave enough to come to a foreign land and work at menial entrepreneurship, too afraid of violence to stay in New York (a gang of thugs once overturned his peddler's cart), but too proud to be a rabbi who takes orders from others, orthodox in his rituals, but on the edge of apostasy in thought.

Almost from the beginning, the Schneiders worked in the Long Branch's chief industry, tourism. The town was first established as a resort in the early part of the nineteenth century. Mrs. Lincoln raised the resort's profile sharply when she spent ten days there in August of 1861. The presence of President Grant and his family for a few months every year from 1869 to 1884 made Long Branch more popular than Saratoga Springs or Newport. In the last half of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, Long Branch had two major attractions: a magnificent beachfront and gambling. When horseracing and wagering ^{were} introduced at Monmouth Park in 1870 ~~and~~ the seasonal population surged. Col. James "Jubilee Jim" Fiske and his friend Jay Gould were there as both gamblers and developers, joined by Diamond Jim Brady, Lillian Russell, Lili Langtry, Horace Greely, Henry Ward Beecher and a brace of Civil War generals, including Phil Sheridan. Representing the wealthy class were the Biddles, Drexels, Wideners and Lorillards; the Vanderbilts alternated between "The Branch" and Newport. Six presidents, in addition to Grant, came to escape the summer miasmas of the capital. On September 1, 1916, Woodrow Wilson accepted the Democratic nomination for President in Long Branch and addressed a crowd of supporters from the porch of the palatial summer White House, "Shadow Lawn." Fan remembered "walking quietly a distance behind" the President and "his beautiful wife" as they strolled on the Long Branch boardwalk in the summer of 1916, not a policeman in sight.

In 1913 the Schneiders established a boarding house with 60 rooms in three adjacent houses on Morris Avenue, naming it the Maple Hotel and Cottages. Beck and her husband, Louis Shapiro, partnered with her parents in the operation of the Maple for two years before it burned to the ground in the winter of 1915, one of many such fires in Long Branch. The family

X / remained in the hotel business, however, especially since it was easy to provide kosher food from the store to the guests. From 1916 to 1918, again with Beck and her husband, they leased the Scarboro Hotel on Ocean Avenue, built in 1882 and catering to an almost exclusively Jewish clientele. Beck and Louis later bought the hotel, expanded it and added a coat of white stucco; eventually it became the largest hotel (200 rooms) in Long Branch and was a source of family pride until it too burned down in 1941.

Although the Schneider girls worked 12-hour days in the family business, they had a passionate interest in culture. Rose took piano lessons from several teachers. Jennie, the prettiest of the daughters, was the finest pianist and entertained visitors with such stirring numbers as "The Charge of the Uhlans." The family, dressed in best clothes, also took Sunday strolls along Ocean Avenue and relished their father's readings and the Talmudic discussions that he led. At age 12 Fan read *Anna Karenina* (her son's favorite novel) and, later in high school, Dickens and George Eliot. On Saturday nights, they went to the movies and, in the summers, saw Broadway try-out plays and the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas at Riverside Park.

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By the summer of 1919, Fan was tired of working in the family store with Joe, as well as helping in the various summer hotels that the family leased. A family agreement was reached: Joe and his family would take over the store after the season and Fan would go full time into the hotel business with her parents. She and her father went to Lakewood, New Jersey in October of 1919 to lease a place as a winter resort. The 15- bedroom house was called Lakeview Lodge,

although Fan noted bluntly, "I assure you there was no view." New visitors were sought by placing ads in the New York Yiddish newspaper, the *Tageblatt*.

One of the ads was read by a 28-year old veteran of World War I, Isaac Barnett Mailer. Barney, as he was generally known, had studied accounting at Transvaal University in Johannesburg and then joined the South African Army. Stationed in London from 1917-1919, he was mustered out in the summer of 1919 and decided to travel to the U.S. rather than return home. His parents, Benjamin and Celia Mailer, had lived in Johannesburg since emigrating from Lithuania in 1900, when Barney, the second of eleven surviving children, was nine. The Mailers had established themselves solidly there, operating various businesses. One son, Louis, became wealthy in stock trading. Barney's older sister Ann married an entrepreneur, David Kessler, who had made a fortune early in life in various businesses, including theatrical production. The Kesslers came to the U.S. before the War and Dave soon created the Sphinx Candy Manufacturing Company. Its chief glory was the chocolate-covered cherry, which made Dave an even richer man. Barney arrived from Liverpool on the White Star liner, S.S. Baltic, in November 1919 and moved in with the Kesslers, who were then living in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn.

The favorite child of his mother, Barney was a compulsive gambler whose debts had caused his family considerable anguish. According to Barbara, the family finally gave her father "an ultimatum: go in the army or we will wash our hands of you." WWI forced Barney to give up or at least curtail his betting in London; the U.S. was to be where he redeemed himself. The plan was simple: live with Anne and Dave until a professional position and a wife were found, and then settle down. Shortly after Barney's arrival, Anne caught the flu at the tail end of the

pandemic of 1918-19. Reservations were made at Fairview Lodge for her recuperation and in January 1920, Barney and the Kesslers took the train to Lakewood. Fan recounts the various circumstances of their first meeting three separate times in her memoir, written at the request of her son.

← The rug was rolled back, so we could have dancing Saturday night. Sunday afternoon we all took a walk to the Lake, and Monday morning just before leaving, Dad and I found we were all alone in the living room. We were both shy, there was a pack of playing cards on the table and Dad said, "Let me show you some card tricks." I thought he was very nice, polite and really handsome.

Barney Mailer was also a fashion plate. His dress, if somewhat conservative, was tasteful. He wore pearl-grey spats, carried gloves, an umbrella or cane and wore a felt hat. In his photographs, he seems always to be dressed in a three-piece suit. His manners were refined, his accent intriguing and his handwriting spidery and graceful. Unlike his son, whose unruly hair became a trademark, Barney was always neatly coiffed. He had a strong, slightly cleft chin and good features, and looked a bit like Donald Rumsfeld, Mailer said. With his round spectacles, he appeared slightly owlsh. He did not look uneasy holding a martini, or a deck of cards. Women found him attractive and he reciprocated; he had a roving eye. Mailer used words like "dapper," "fussy" and "punctilious" to describe his father; he also called him "an elegant, impoverished" "figure out of Chekov," who "was very English as only a South African can be."

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Barney and Fan immediately struck up a correspondence. Barney wrote the first letter, as propriety dictated. His letters are courtly, self-conscious and somewhat reserved; Fan's are

warmer, bolder, her infatuation was obvious. In June 1920, she told him that she loved him and he replied that she was too young to make this sort of statement. Without revealing his gambling addiction, he warned her of it obliquely, writing that she didn't really know who he was. Fan was ready to take the next step and declared her love, but Barney was not ready. But in September he arranged for a visit to Long Branch. It was during this visit or shortly afterwards that Barney brought up his vice. Mailer recalled his mother telling him the story: "Before they were married, he said to her, 'I gamble.' 'Oh,' she said, 'well, you won't gamble after we're married, I'm sure' And he said, 'I guess not.'" When Barney met the extended family at the Phelando Hotel, they were quite impressed with him, although his Beau Brummell appearance and British accent puzzled them slightly. "I think it always pleased him," Barbara wrote, "that he wasn't readily taken for Jewish." He had long ceased using his Jewish name, Yitzhak Benjamin, and in New York gambling circles his code name was "I.B. from Brooklyn," as his son learned from his bookie decades later.

Before Barney left in October 1920 for Milwaukee and a new accounting job with a large firm, they were unofficially engaged. The following spring, he was back in New York and the engagement became official. Barney found a job in the city, commuting from Long Branch, where they lived temporarily with her parents. Decades later, after Barney had died, she said that he "seemed to pick up gambling friends in New York. I was so naïve about gambling, I couldn't understand why anyone would want to lose hard earned money, money that was needed for daily life, money that furnished freedom to give one hope and ambition to climb the ladder of success." But as a young woman (but not as young as she pretended), Fan was elated for having made "a very favorable match," as she described it, with a professional man. They were married

X ~~get~~ by two rabbis on February 14, 1922 in Manhattan, ~~hotel~~ with 100 guests in attendance. After a week in Atlantic City, they returned to Long Branch. Barbara noted in her memoir, "Dad once confided to Norman that of all the women he'd known, Mother was the best." By the beginning of May, Fan was pregnant.

Each had a secret: Barney gambled and Fan lied about her age. Sometime after they were out of school and looking for husbands, Fan and her sisters lowered their ages. Prompted by the desire, if not the necessity, to find a suitable husband, they availed themselves of the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity afforded to immigrants from faraway places. Fully aware that birth records in Russia were inaccessible, they felt secure in erasing a few years. Fan went so far as to claim in her memoir that she and Rose were born in this country. According to Barbara, Fan's likely birth date is December 1891. She told Barney that she had been born in 1901. He probably never knew her true age.

After Fan's death in 1985, Barbara spent countless days researching census, immigration records and ship arrival dates to establish Fan's age. She finally assembled a chain of fact and surmise that substantiated the true ages of the Schneider siblings. "They all lied," she concluded. When Fan was alive, Barbara attempted to trip Fan up by asking casual questions such as "How old were you when Beck got married?" Fan parried every probe. Mailer followed his sister's research with interest and was "delighted" with Fan's deception; he felt that Fan must be hiding "some awful secret." His method was to beguile the truth from her. Years later he enjoyed recreating his catechetical dialogues with Fan:

✓ "Mother, you know I love you greatly."

X
 "Yes, son, I know you do and I love you the same."

"And you know that I would do anything in the world for you."

"Of course, I know you would."

"And you would do the same for me?"

"Yes, son, anything."

"Good, what year you were born?"

"Just keep talking."

X ✓ Fan gave a number of birth years, but never relented on her fundamental story that she was several years younger than Barney (born January 1891), even long after he died. Born within months of him, she outlived him by almost 13 years. Her gravestone records the false dates. *and no family Bible*

Fan's deception was a *carpe diem* fib, one common in that era. On the other hand, Barney's secret compulsion, one he clung to his entire life, was deeply hurtful. His gambling destroyed Fan's blithe hopes for a carefree life, forced her to become the chief breadwinner, and caused severe tensions with the Kesslers. Mailer said that "the Kesslers felt guilty. They knew that they hadn't really leveled; they had not warned her off. They were happy to get him married to her." In retrospect, the only member of his family who was not completely appalled by Barney's gambling was his son. In 1944, while undergoing basic training, Mailer ended a letter to his father, as follows: "As time goes by, I feel more and more like you, more and more your

son. On outward things we are very different, but I think I understand and sympathize with you, better than any person I know."

Mailer concluded that he was "lucky that my parents are so different, that I have had such a range of personality to draw on." Shortly after his mother died, he described his parents. My mother, he said,

was, if you will, the motor in the family, and without her I don't know what would have happened to us. My mother had an iron heart. My mother was not unlike many other devoted, loving Jewish mothers. She had circles of loyalty. The first loyalty was her children. The second was her sisters, her family. The third loyalty was her husband. The fourth her cousins, the fifth, neighbors she'd known for 20 years. It was a nuclear family. And my mother was the center of it and my father was one of the electrons. I must say he was a most dapper electron. And women adored him because he had the gift of speaking to each woman as if she was the most important woman he'd ever spoken to. And he didn't fake it. He adored women.

In the early evening of January 30, Fan felt labor pains and was admitted to Monmouth Memorial Hospital. Dr. Slocum, the Schneider family physician, was summoned. A son was born at 7:04 a.m. on January 31, 1923 after Fan had been in labor for twelve hours. It was a difficult, breach birth. The baby's Hebrew name, Nachum Melech, came from his grandmother Mailer's brother, Nachum Melech Shapiro, who arrived in the U.S in 1900. Melech means king in Hebrew, but his birth certificate says "Norman Kingsley Mailer." Because Fan had lost her

American citizenship when she married Barney, and he had not yet applied for citizenship, their son was legally a British citizen at birth. Mailer chuckled when he learned of this circumstance many years later from his sister, joking that it might allow him to become "Sir Norman." His parents became citizens in 1926.

The Schneiders began to prosper in the hotel business during the boom year summers of 1920-23. They purchased three large "cottages" on Ocean Avenue. The complex, overlooking the beach, was named "Kingsley Court" in honor of Norman. This success encouraged Fan and Barney to try their hand at what was now a burgeoning family business. Barney was still working in an accounting position in New York, but in 1924 he and Fan rented Kingsley Court from her parents for \$4,000 and conducted it as a small hotel. They did the same the following summer and made a good profit.

Norman was the darling of the clan, catered to by his parents, grandparents, three aunts and three older female cousins, Osie, Adele and Sylvia, plus Dave and Anne Kessler, who visited often. One summer day in 1925 when Norman was two-and-a-half, Adele remembered, he locked himself in the bathroom and called out the third-floor window, "Goodbye forever." Fan went into hysterics and called the fire department, but he let himself out before the firemen came. During the summers of the mid-1920s, he often left home in a huff. Adele said, "He'd get angry; he'd leave a note for his mother, 'Goodbye forever,' and he'd walk around the block. His temper would abate and he'd come back." These tantrums are the first recorded instances of Mailer's life-long and pronounced impetuosity, and his impulse to dramatize.

Nearly every year, ~~therefore~~, one or another member of the family leased a new hotel, trying to find the right combination of variables for a windfall season. But profits were meager and Fan got discouraged. She got pregnant in the summer of 1926 and by the end of the season was drained. "I had no heart for the hotel business," she wrote, "It was just devouring all my strength for nothing." The birth of Barbara Jane on April 6, 1927 increased the load, as did her aging parents, whose health was declining rapidly. The stress of running a busy resort hotel and taking care of her small children made Fan "very, very upset," according to Barbara. "Her parents were dying, and she realized my father was a gambler; she went to her doctor and told him, 'I think I'm going to have a nervous breakdown.'" Dr. Slocum said, "Fanny, there's nothing I can do for you. You're going to have to pull yourself together." My mother said, "So I pulled myself together." Fan's mother died on May 29, 1928, at the age of 70. Shortly afterwards, when Barbara was 18 months old, and her brother five-and-a-half, the Mailers moved to Brooklyn, while rabbi Schneider moved in with his son Joe. In late November, the beloved patriarch died of heart disease and was eulogized at the synagogue he had helped to found.

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The Mailers settled on Cortelyou Road, a few blocks from Flatbush Avenue. Norman, not yet six, began school in September at P.S. 181, a few blocks from their four-room apartment. Barney left early for work in Manhattan and Fan walked Norman the half-mile through the lower middle-class Jewish neighborhood to school every day, leaving Barbara with the nurse, Agnes. As always, Fan was anxious about the *goyim*—many second-generation Irish and Italian lived nearby. Norman completed grades one through four at P.S. 181 and his grades were uniformly

excellent. Mailer's mother was the leader of a tribe of women who, throughout his childhood, coddled and praised him, catered to his whims and encouraged his individuality. His cousin Adele remembered that for Fan, "it was always Norman." Barbara quickly recognized his preeminence but never showed any animosity or jealousy. There were no gaps in the circle of female affection surrounding the young prince.

With the passing of her parents, Fan and Barney began living a different kind of life. They gave up observance of Jewish dietary laws requiring different sets of dishes and cutlery for meat and milk products. Mailer recalled that his mother was not deeply religious. "She was observant," he said. "There's a difference." Barney, he continued, "was pro-forma observant." Barbara remembers her mother lighting the candles on the eve of the Sabbath. "I still have the image of Mother, her back to me, lighting the candles that sat on the antique cabinet and whispering a prayer in Hebrew. It was one more element in that adult world which baffled but protected me." Her brother remembered Fan telling him that the Shekhinah, a divine female embodiment of the spiritual, passed over the candles when they were lit. Often, he said, Fan had tears in her eyes.

When Mailer was seven or eight, with Fan's encouragement, he began writing stories. One of the earliest surviving pieces, in six chapters of 300-400 words each, is "The Adventures of Bob and Paul." In each chapter, the twin brothers take a trip, always sanctioned by their father, a mine owner. The action consists of threats and attacks made by ghosts or invisible giants; in one episode they are swallowed by a whale. The attacks are often preceded by a voice that chants, "You shall die, you shall die." Plucky, sure-footed lads, they tend to land on their feet when, invariably, the floor gives way or they fall through a trap door. Another notable piece

among the early juvenilia is a three-page, how-to booklet, "Boxing Lessons." It consists of a series of tips and observations about Mailer's favorite sport, boxing. "When I land," it begins, "every ounce of my weight goes into the punch. The timing of it I get by humming a tune and crashing in when I see an opening." Boxing was a sport that Mailer engaged in and wrote about for several decades, producing what are, arguably, the finest boxing narratives ever written by an American.

The culmination, and the conclusion, of Mailer's early writing came early. During the winter of 1933-34, he finished reading the Princess of Mars books of Edgar Rice Burroughs and also became a devoted fan of the Buck Rogers Show on the radio. Encouraged by his mother, he wrote a 35,000-word novel, "The Martian Invasion, A Story in Two Parts," and dedicated it to "My mother, who always wanted me to write a good story." "This novel filled two and half paper notebooks," Mailer recalled. "You know the type, about 7 x 10. They had shiny blue covers, and they were, oh, only ten cents in those days, or a nickel. They ran to pages each and I used to write on both sides." ⁷⁷ The novel was written in a disciplined space the summer of 1934 at one of the family's hotels in Long Branch. His main characters, Capt. Bob Porter and Private Ben Stein, fly to Mars with a fleet of rocket ships. Their science officer, Dr. Hoor (a name borrowed from a Buck Rogers' sidekick, Dr. Huer), betrays them and they are imprisoned by sadistic Martians. The Martian leader, a gloating Jabba-the-Hut figure, who speaks with a French accent, promises them "a slow long drawn out death" by suffocation, which they adroitly evade, blasting to freedom with their electric pistols. The Martian warlord is the first personifications of power lust in a long line of such antagonists in his work. Mailer's

bottomless fascination with war, violence and suffering has its foundations in this adventure novel.

Mailer noted on his application to Harvard that as a boy, encouraged by Fan and his aunts and cousins, he "used to write stories at the 'drop-of-a-hat,'" but he also engaged in the usual activities of stickball, marbles and roller skating. In the late fall of 1932, the Mailers moved a couple of miles north to the mainly Jewish neighborhood of Crown Heights, where Norman finished fifth grade at P.S. 161. They lived in a four-story, ornamental brick apartment building at the corner of Albany and Crown Streets. Mailer described the neighborhood as "a quiet section of two-family houses and trees, a mile from Ebbets Field and Prospect Park." He recalled that "[i]n those days there was so little traffic we used to play touch football and roller hockey in the streets." The houses had "small lawns in front, so small that when you were playing roller hockey, if you bodychecked somebody hard they'd go flying across the sidewalk, and you had to go scrambling up a lawn that was banked. If that ever happened to you you'd come out with fire in your eyes and your skates full of dirt." CUM 308 meet p# cum

Roller hockey was as physical as the somewhat delicate young Mailer ever got. Late in life, he told Christopher Hitchens that Jews "had to make certain basic distinctions very early in life. Would you fight if someone called you a dirty Jew, or wouldn't you?" In the interview's context, Mailer's question is rhetorical and unanswered, but other statements make it clear that the young Mailer shied away from violence. "I was a physical coward as a child," he said in 1959, a statement supported by the recollections of childhood chums who said Mailer never got into fistfights and stayed close to home. One of them, Arnold Epstein, said, "He seemed to be on a shorter leash, more obedient, kind of quiet." Epstein added that Mailer's family "was very

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proper." More testimony comes from Aaron Goldman, a summer chum of Mailer's older cousin, Cy, Beck's son. He remembers Mailer during the summers of the early 1930s as a tearful, bookish momma's boy who watched Cy play baseball and tennis in the recreation area behind the Scarboro Hotel. While the Crown Heights neighborhood was not particularly rough, it was not without hazard, as Mailer explained in 1980. ⁶⁶ I grew up in a world where really I was cultivated. I was cultivated in the sense that my mother and father treated my sister and myself as very important people. We were the center of their universe and so it was the outside world that was difficult. You know, go out in the street and you know if you didn't have friends you get beaten up. It was as simple as that. And so I was always terribly alert to the outside world. I took the inside world for granted. And I was free to indulge myself too, to change from one personality to another. Barbara confirms the affirmation felt by the Mailer children: "Not only did we know that we were expected to be better and smarter than everyone else, we pretty much thought we were." Fan was insistent on her children's exceptionalism, but the unintended consequence was that he ^{had} felt, as he later explained, "an ego that was lopsided."

The Crown Street apartment was a bastion where Mailer was spoiled and protected. Fan kept out most of the neighborhood boys, but another kind of trouble came home regularly with Barney. On rare occasions he would win at cards or on horse races. But more often, he would run up a debt with the bookies and try to win it back. When this failed, he would write a string of bad checks or embezzle from his employer (General Motors, for example) in an effort to recoup his losses. The crises accelerated when Barney lost his job and the debts—five to ten thousand dollars, vast sums in The Depression—soared. The bookies would begin calling on the telephone and Fan would become frantic. Invariably, the Kesslers would be summoned. "I've got criminal

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 blood in me," Mailer said later, adding that his father "would have gone to jail if it hadn't been for my uncle, who would always bail him out and my father knew it." Mailer said he first became aware of Barney's gambling because of his parents' "terrible fights." A day or so after a bad one, "Dave would come over with Ann and Ann would be crying. Everybody was stiff and tense all through the meal. Barbara and myself would be packed off to bed after dinner. I'd lie awake for hours listening to them argue." Barney was cool in these clinches, Mailer said, and it was a bit of a comedy, but "a comedy on the edge of a cliff. Dave would get apoplectic. Dave died of asthma, finally, and I think my father was one of the people who gave it to him because Dave would blow gaskets in his brain to keep from strangling my father." When Dave would verbally assault his brother-in-law, Barney would reply in his clipped British accent, "'I don't know Dave how you can speak to me in that fashion.' At which point Dave's asthma would deepen."

After one particularly bad confrontation just before his Bar Mitzvah in February 1936, a distraught Fan contemplated leaving Barney and confided in her son. He said, "How can you do that to us, when we're kids?" Fan then gave him a blunt report of the extent of Barney's gambling. "I knew my father was an irresponsible gambler," Mailer said. "I always heard it from her side, never from his." But Fan never spoke again of a divorce because, Mailer said, it "went against every tradition in her. In those days, you got married and took what you got and didn't complain. To her, a divorced woman was a whore."

She had a great anger at my father—it was almost implacable—for not being a provider. But at the same time, she loved him in her way. After that one attempt, she gave it up. If the children didn't want it, then she was not about to do it

against our will. Years later, I used to think, 'Gee, maybe I did her a terrible injustice and cut off her life and her possibilities.' On the other hand, when I think of a stepfather and how it would have torn her. I didn't brood about it [. . .] except for those awful nights which went on until I went away to college; those dreadful nights when my uncle came to the door and I could see by his face: 'Uh-oh, one of those nights.'

At some point, Mailer told his sister that Barney was a gambler. She "resented it more ~~than I did~~". And so she was cool toward him; she stayed cool and angry towards him. Which broke his heart. He *adored* her." Barbara was "closer to my mother," he said. "It was that feminist business: my mother was working so hard and this man's not responsible." From the mid-1930s on, Fan ran a small oil service and delivery firm, the Sunlight Oil Corporation, which Dave Kessler had set up, partly to provide oil to his candy company and partly to help out the Mailers. Initially, Barney worked there, but after he began tipping the till, he was out and Fan took over entirely, working with one driver. "She really lived and breathed for that business," Mailer said, taking late night calls from customers with broken furnaces and empty tanks while earning a quarter of a cent per gallon profit.

Barbara explained that her mother's hard work and financial anxiety, combined with her loathing of Barney's addiction to games of chance "leached the complexities out of her and made her monolithic." No surprise that she referred to herself, as did her children, as the Rock of Gibraltar, "deep and large, and all there to see. The metaphor for Dad, on the other hand, could be a tidal pool—charming on the surface, and teeming with a secret life in the shallows beneath." Barney gambled when he could and worked when he could, but usually lost his bets and was

rarely employed. "One of my recollections in the depth of the Depression," Mailer recalled, "is my father coming home after looking for work all day and Barbara and myself running to the door and saying, 'Did you get a job today, Dad?' And he sadly shaking his head no. [. . .] How sad we all were about that. 'Brother, Can You Spare a Dime' is one of my favorite songs."

In addition to his parent's precarious financial situation and the possibility of a divorce, Mailer was buffeted by a cross-hatch of pressures. On the one hand, there was his mother's unshakable belief in his talents, buttressed by the approval of his tight-knit extended family, with Anne and Dave acting as a second set of parents. He was also enthralled by the gangster films of the 1930s (especially the brash energies of James Cagney), and the romantic novels of Raphael Sabatini and James Farnol, which he had begun to devour. On the other side of the ledger were his fear of the Irish toughs a few blocks outside the Jewish cocoon and a sharp sense of his puny physicality ("We also had a sense," he remarked decades later, "of not being as tough as the Irish"). Vying for primacy with Fan in defining his emerging ego was his father's double life," as he later described it, a life he pondered with awe. Nine months before he told a friend about Barney's influence: "Everything that is adventurous in me came from him." These opposed pressures opened a fissure in the adolescent Mailer's personality that widened as time passed until it became an adamant divide.

"Very intense" is how his sister remembers him as a boy; their older cousin Osie, she said, called him "Desperate Ambrose," after the comic strip character. His friend Robert F. Lucid compared the young Mailer to Alexander Portnoy, "the most fabulous kid who ever lived," but one who had been given a "tremendous sense of mission." Mailer put it this way: "I'd been frightened in the womb by my mother's dream of having a little Einstein in her belly." His sister

recalls that his family regularly referred to him as a genius from the time he took the Sanford-Benet IQ exam in third grade. He excelled in all his classes and even skipped the latter halves of grades seven and eight. Fan's hopes were confirmed when, according to Barbara's friend Rhoda Wolf, the principal announced at his eighth-grade graduation that Norman Mailer had an IQ of 170, the highest ever recorded at P.S. 161.

If on the lip of puberty his inner life was a narcissistic moil, his pursuits were ordinary. After school, he spent most of his time studying, attending Hebrew School (through eighth grade), reading, playing stickball and Monopoly, building model airplanes and fiddling with his chemistry set. He also went to movies at Loew's Kameo and the Savoy on Eastern Parkway, often bringing his sister along. His preference was for the films of tough guys—Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, John Garfield and Humphrey Bogart. He often said that he felt he knew Bogart as well as a favorite uncle. Summers, of course were spent in Long Branch, where he observed the feats of his cousin Cy, eight years his senior.

I worshipped him (with enormous funds of love and envy) because he was a hero. He was one of the few people I've ever known who had a happy look on his face when he came to bat in the late innings with men on base, his side behind, and the need for a homer prominent in everyone's head. Indeed he had his smile because it was slightly better than even money he was going to hit that homer. In fact, he would. This is not hyperbole. If I saw him in a hundred baseball games, there must have been fifty late inning spots of exactly the sort I describe: he probably hit thirty-six homers out of fifty. [. . .] These were Depression years. Much gloom abounded in everyone, but he was the bright spot.

Cy remained Mailer's hero (later becoming his lawyer) and one of his most important role models. His cousin's string of victories on the playing fields contrasted glaringly with his father's endless run of defeats at the poker table.

In a memoir written just before he died, Barbara described her brother as generous, encouraging and always interesting. "He loved to teach," she said, and often recommended books to her. She remembers that in high school he got a book that diagrammed the fox trot and they practiced together. "I learned to dance," she said. "I'm afraid he did not." Mailer recalled going with his father, who cared little for baseball, to see the Dodgers play when a doubleheader cost fifty-five cents. The Brooklyn home team was locked in the cellar in the mid and late 1930s. Mailer's sympathy for the underdog was reinforced by their poor showing before Leo Durocher took over as manager and led them to a pennant in 1941. Mailer was not a recluse, but as a friend recalled, he did not hang around much at the candy store on the corner of Crown Street and Kingston Avenue with the other boys. ^{MLT 30} By the time of his Bar Mitzvah in February 1936 at the Temple Shaari Zedek in Brooklyn, Fan had long since transferred her hopes from Barney to her brilliant son. She guarded him like a mother hawk.

Coached by his Hebrew teacher, who had Leftist sympathies, Mailer wrote, memorized and delivered a 500-word Bar Mitzvah speech that was, with two exceptions, conventional. He began by thanking his family, citing the commandments and stating his joy at becoming "a member of the people of Israel." He lauded some great Jews—Moses Maimonides, Albert Einstein and Baruch Spinoza and Karl Marx. Naming these two—a freethinking ex-communicant and an atheist radical—raised a few eyebrows and "the rabbi looked very pale" after his speech, Mailer remembered. The Spinoza reference is a reflection of Rabbi Schneider's

reverence for the philosopher; the salute to Marx came from Mailer's radical Hebrew teacher. Fan's fears are reflected in the second notable remark in his speech: "Yes, my friends! From now on I become a Jew, but not a MAYOFIS JEW, with a bent back to receive innocently the inhuman Nazis. I become a Jew to uphold the ideals and strengths of Judaism, and the rights of my country." In an interview he gave in connection with his final novel about Hitler's youth, *Castle in the Forest* (2007), Mailer remembered his mother's warnings about the Nazis from three-quarters of a century earlier:

✓ ← Hitler has been in my mind since I was nine years old. By 1932, my mother was already sensitive, and intensely so, to the dangers he presented. After Hitler came to power in 1933, everything that happened in Nazi Germany used to cause my mother pain. It was as if she knew in advance what was going to occur. She'd grown up with the knowledge of the anti-Semitism her father had had to face in Lithuania. Then, as a child going to school in Long Branch, New Jersey, kids on the street would call her "Christ killer"—no surprise, then, if Hitler was immensely real to her.

✗ / Mailing's bar mitzvah speech, including the reference to the Nazis, pleased the family, most of whom had come up from Long Branch despite a storm that left more than a foot of snow. Millionaire Uncle Louis in South Africa sent a \$500 gift, which enabled Fan to put out a fine buffet at 555 Crown Street after the ceremony. Thirty-five years later, she remembered everything purchased with this largesse: a sofa, chairs and end tables, new clothes for everyone, "gefilte fish, taglach, stuffed prunes and apricots, a turkey, corned beef, a big cake." But Barney's secret life again intruded. His bookie sent Norman the gift of a watch. Fan didn't

hesitate to reply: "I phoned his home, his wife answered. I did not spare either of them, I cursed him out of existence. She begged me not to say those things, that her husband had a weak heart, so I followed it up by saying he could drop dead that minute and I hung up." Fan took no prisoners.

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Less is known of Mailer's high school years than any other period of his life. He had stopped writing stories the year before he entered and wrote few letters before going away to college. We do know that like most of the Crown Heights boys, he took the Tomkins Avenue trolley to Boys High in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, or walked to save a nickel. We also know that because he had skipped a primary school grade, he was one of the youngest persons in his class, entering his freshman year five months before he was 13. He later recalled, "I felt straddled between my friends who were my age at home and were two years behind me at school. So I didn't feel I belonged particularly in one life or another." Mailer's interest in his chemistry set and sports waned, but his passion for model airplanes, some with engines, burgeoned during his high school years, 1935-39. He was a devoted member of the Aviation Club in high school and his first piece in print is "Model Airplanes," appearing in a mimeographed school publication, *Physical Scientist*, in December 1938, when he was a senior. Occasionally, on weekends, his parents would drive him out to the open fields in Canarsie where he could launch his fragile creations. The largest of these, which took him six months to build, had an amazing six-foot wingspread. "When launched," he recalled, "it soared briefly, but then its wings suddenly folded up—like an umbrella." The event is emblematic of Mailer's unsettled sensibility in adolescence.

CNM 309

Beginning
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Mailer never wrote about his childhood. In 2004, he said that he had avoided writing about Long Branch and Brooklyn because "too many crystals are there" and "you don't want to write about the material [. . .] Preserve it because it's endlessly fruitful." Crystals, as he explained several times, are memories of wrenching or exhilarating experiences, epiphanies in one's past that, properly considered, are illuminating. When a crystal is aligned just so, it casts an imaginative beam that clarifies a new experience, acting as a kind of emotional spectrometer. One of the few crystals that he ever discussed occurred in the early 1960s when he was breaking up with his third wife, Jeanne Campbell. After a night of solitary barhopping in Brooklyn, he went to an all-night diner and ordered coffee and a donut. When he finished a voice told him to leave without paying. "I think it's one of the very few times I felt God was speaking to me," although he concedes it might have been a malign influence. "I wanted to be a wild man, but I couldn't even steal a cup of coffee." The petty theft, God told him, would irrigate his priggishness. Mailer walked out without paying. We can only speculate on his childhood crystals, but given the instances of childhood fear and timidity already noted, it seems quite possible that he was referring to moments of ignominious humiliation. Late in life, he said, "I don't feel joy going back to the old streets in Brookly."

Mailer was an outstanding student at Boys High, graduating near the top of his 650-member class. His grades were nearly as high as of those of valedictorian Martin Lubin, a boy he knew slightly and later roomed with at Harvard. But Mailer's lack of involvement in athletics and student government—indeed, his lack of involvement in any school activity except for the Aviation Club—left him out of the running. Overall, his best grades were in math and science (a 99.5 in algebra and a 99 in Chemistry), but his English, French and history grades were only a

few points lower. His lowest academic grade was in drawing, an 80; his grades in physical training were dismal. Beatrice Silverman, his first wife, said he had trouble vaulting over the horse in gym class. His report cards gained plaudits at home, especially the math and science grades, but not in the neighborhood, where he was just another skinny kid. "In Brooklyn I was always a little ashamed of being smart," he said. "Somehow you weren't manly if you were smart." He did have some success with the opposite sex, however. Barbara's friend had a crush on him and his girlfriend, Phyllis Bradman, according to his sister, was the only girl in the neighborhood, although they never got beyond kissing and light petting. The summer before he died, he remembered his situation.

I was 13; it was 1936. The New Deal was on; a great deal was happening. But we, in Brooklyn, in my end of Brooklyn, weren't thinking about anything but sex. We wanted to get laid. We wanted to muzzle a girl as they called it, and put our hands on their breasts. We wanted to be able to neck with them. And none of us were. The girls were nice Jewish girls who were loathe and we were inhibited—the Jews were very inhibited about sex [. . .] And I remember that in all those years of adolescence, I was absolutely focused on girls and pornography. There used to be little magazines like *Spicy Detective* in those days, where the women had huge tits poking through gossamer scraps of torn blouse. And that was a huge turn-on.

One scheme dreamed up by Mailer and two other boys, Arnold Epstein and another friend, Harold Kiesel, was to form a musical trio and get a summer job at a Catskills resort where they might seduce some Jewish women. Mailer convinced his parents to buy him a clarinet; Kiesel played the trumpet and Epstein the drums. On afternoons after school, they practiced at

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the apartment of Epstein, who remembered their sessions: "I could keep beat with anything. But Kiesel and Norman had to get tunes out of their instruments, and I think they were equally bad. We'd laugh and giggle and fall on the floor." The project soon collapsed. Mailer never learned to play an instrument and had trouble carrying a tune. He remembered going to a few dances in high school, but was "a wallflower . . . a terrible dancer, very stiff-legged." At the Scarborough Hotel one summer there was a flirtation with a ~~very~~ pretty girl named Bunny Schwab, but nothing sexual came of it. Decades later, he told Norris that he still vividly remembered his humiliation when Bunny described his large, sunburned ears as "red sails in the sunset."

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"High school's that place, that country," Mailer reflected later, "where you get laid for the first time; you have marvelous memories and you go around with a girl, you go to the prom." But for him high school was studying and he was bitter because his social life was so dull. People who knew him in high school, he said, thought he was "quiet, studious and inconsequential." His work paid off, however. His grades got him accepted to both MIT and Harvard. He knew that he was more likely to realize his dream of becoming an aeronautical engineer at MIT, as it had a full-fledged program in this specialty, something Harvard lacked. But because of his age, MIT wanted him to go to prep school for a year. This circumstance led him to Cambridge. What clinched it, Mailer often said, was the reaction of girls on Crown Street. MIT's name didn't impress them, but "when I said I might go to Harvard, they lit up and they saw me with new eyes." Choosing Harvard, for reasons he could not have guessed at the time, was one of the luckiest things he ever did.

Chapter 2

Harvard

The distinguished historian and journalist, Theodore H. White, who graduated from Harvard in 1938, came up with a system of classifying pre-war Harvard students. They were divided, he wrote, into three groups, "white men, grey men, and meatballs." The first group was comprised of wealthy WASPs from New England who graduated from private prep schools. The grey men were middle-class boys from public schools, mainly from outside New England. The meatballs were non-Wasp students who commuted and/or were on scholarship. White, a Jew whose father was born in Russia, claimed meatball status. He didn't attend Harvard "to enjoy the games, the girls, the burlesque shows of the Old Howard, the companionship, the elms, the turning leaves of fall, the grassy banks of the Charles." He was there to gobble up cultural riches from learned professors, from the libraries, museums, poetry readings, tutorials—all of this under a dome of reverence for intellectual and scholarly pursuits. Mailer and his friend Marty Lubin, both of whom received scholarships, were classic meatballs, although such was the subtlety of condescension at Harvard that they probably never heard the term. Mailer was also there for the culture, although it took him the better part of a year to find it. Unlike White, he was profoundly interested in girls, although the kind he sought was just as difficult to find as were the right professors. In the meantime, there was Rose la Rose and her colleagues, strippers at the Old Howard burlesque house, which he visited shortly after he arrived.

He was assigned to Grays Hall, a five-story freshman dorm on Massachusetts Avenue accommodating about 60 men. They lived in comparative luxury in two-or three-person suites,

cleaned by "biddies," with a shared bathroom and a working fireplace. Like the Oxbridge house system which it mimicked, Harvard's houses and halls had a master living on the first floor who regularly invited students for tea and dinner. The administration more or less randomly assigned the approximately 800 resident members of Mailer's class (about 100 more commuted) to approximately 15 freshman dorms. Most nationalities, states and several foreign countries were represented. WASPS, German-Americans and Irish-American dominated, although over ten percent of the class was Jewish. There were only a few Hispanics and Italians and four African-Americans, only one of whom lived on campus. A scan of the names of the students assigned to Grays in *The Red Book*, the freshman yearbook, reveals no segregation in the building at large. The nationalities ran the gamut: Ames, Brauns, Lynch, Yohalem, Thomas. It should be added that Ames roomed with Knox, Brauns with Schorger, Lynch with Scanlon, Yohalem with Lampert and Thomas with Williamson, obvious ethnic pairings. Mailer shared his second suite with Richard Weinberg from Memphis and Maxwell Kaufer from Kingston, Pennsylvania. Looking back, he said that he noticed no discrimination. Harvard, he said, "had solved more social situations than any other institution [. . .] of the establishment." He estimated that during his first year four out of five of his friends were middle-class Jews and they socialized in the same way black students would a generation later. In his second semester, he would be friendly with several non-Jewish men, most of whom he later associated with on the college literary magazine, the *Advocate*, or the Signet Society, an intellectual luncheon club. But for his first semester, Mailer's group included three other Grays men, Seymour Breslow, Myron Kaufmann and Stanley Lampert. Marty Lubin, Harold Katz, Douglas Woolf, Peter Ruderman and Harold Marantz, who lived in other dorms, made it nine. All Jews, all meatballs.

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Mailer's and Lubin's parents had gotten to know each other a bit in Brooklyn and Mr. Lubin drove the boys up to Cambridge on September 16, 1939. Later, Fan Mailer and Eva Lubin would occasionally take Saturday night train trips to Cambridge bringing cookies and clean laundry to their sons, returning late Sunday and arriving in Brooklyn as the sun came up. For his college wardrobe, Mailer had purchased an outlandish set of clothes that could have been worn with Charles Bovary's infamous hat: green and blue vertical striped trousers, a gold jacket and saddle shoes. These garments were quickly discarded once Mailer observed the narrow-lapelled, tweed jackets and grey flannel trousers of the other students.

"Unformed" is the word Mailer used to describe himself as a first semester freshman. We can add unprepared; Harvard was a shock and at first Mailer drew inward. Kaufer told Manso that his new roommate was quiet, pleasant, "a smiler" who didn't venture out much during his first semester, unlike his gregarious roommates. ^{MLT 40} Shortly after arrival, Mailer wrote home to describe his routine. Classes ended at three and then he went to tryouts for the class crew team. In the evenings, there were two to three hours of homework and six more on Sunday. Saturday was his day off and he either went to a Harvard home football game or explored Cambridge. During first semester, he had no dates in Cambridge or Boston and gawking at the Old Howard burlesque dancers was as close as he came to the opposite sex. Meals were taken at the Harvard Union. ^{ate at} Later he also went to the Hayes-Bickford cafeteria on Massachusetts Avenue or at the Boylston Street hot dog shop across the river in Boston, usually taking notes on the local characters.

One thing that his classmates all seem to remember about Mailer as a freshman is the collage of pinups over his desk. We know that one of them was a George Petty centerfold from

Esquire, signed salaciously by his buddies, because Mailer wrote home to give his parents fair warning of its placement before their first visit. Betty Grable's legs were probably included and there was also a photograph of Amy Arnell, a vocalist in the Tommy Tucker big band; her big hit was "I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire." When the band had appeared in Long Branch in the summer of 1939, Mailer was much taken by a large, framed photo of Arnell in the lobby of the West End Hotel. Wearing a tool belt and work clothes, he brazenly unscrewed the entire frame containing Arnell's photo and walked out with it. A friend from Long Branch remembers seeing it in his Harvard room. There were bull sessions about sex, of course, and Mailer discovered that he had "a bunch of roommates who also hadn't been laid . . . We'd heard of working-class kids who got laid when they were 13 or 14. Here we were, good middle-class kids, and we weren't able to get laid. . . . you bore a standard of shame."

The required courses for his first semester were an engineering drafting course, physics and the first halves of math and English courses. His sole elective was French. The English course, English A, was a composition course, required of all students who did not turn in an outstanding performance on the English exam taken by new freshmen. In Mailer's time, students in English A had to write a variety of descriptive and argumentative themes, often in response to assigned readings in collections of essays and short stories and, later, novels. At first, Mailer did not like the course, writing home on October 25 that the course was "about the dullest." But when he read the contemporary novels assigned, his interest not only sharpened, he said, they changed his life.

Before I was seventeen I had formed the desire to be a major writer, and this desire came upon me rather suddenly in the last two months of my sixteenth year,

a time I remember well enough because it was my first semester at Harvard. All through December 1939 and January 1940 I was discovering modern American literature. In those sixty days I read and reread *Studs Lonigan, U.S.A.*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Later I would add Wolfe, Hemingway and Faulkner, and to a small measure, Fitzgerald; but Farrell, Dos Passos and Steinbeck were the novel for me in that sixty days before I turned seventeen.

Of the three books that Mailer names, James T. Farrell's *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, set on the south side of Chicago in the early part of the 20th century, was at first the most influential. For the rest of his life Mailer said that Farrell had awakened him to his vocation. What Farrell provided, ~~for him~~, was the recognition that the social atmosphere of Brooklyn was roughly the same as that enveloping the lower middle class Irish toughs that Farrell chronicled. It was liberating, Mailer said, to find a novelist who could write about "the monotony and the boredom, and the killing deadness of the average simple life among many people who were not well educated." Until he read Farrell, Dos Passos and Steinbeck, the novels he prized were stories of the romantic past or the imagined future; he had no sense that the stumblings and longings of his pals at the candy store and the burlesque house were the stuff of fiction. "Suddenly," he said, "I realized you could write about your own life."

Because he decided to take French as an elective, Mailer's first-semester load of five courses was heavier than at any other time at Harvard. The struggle to keep up with his courses and daily crew practice was wearing him down. Several weeks into the semester, he was cut from the 150-pound crew team. It was, he said, "the bitterest blow freshman year," salved only slightly when he learned from a friend that the coach never had the slightest

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because his arms were too short. The other disappointment was women: he had no dates until he returned home for the Christmas holiday and saw Phyllis Bradman, taking her to a New York Rangers hockey game. But on New Year's Eve he had no date, and went skating in the afternoon and to a burlesque show. Back at Harvard for semester exams in late January, it became apparent that physics was too much for him and he dropped it early in the second semester. He was maintaining A's and B's in his other courses, including English A, where the instructor had informed the class that short stories could be submitted in lieu of topical essays. Mailer, who once said, "I threw down my pen at 11," began writing fiction again.

The incitements to his ambition from Farrell, Steinbeck and Dos Passos that prompted him to reengage with fiction also led him to look into the possibility of getting on the Harvard *Lampoon*. But he was rejected by the *Lampoon*, which was dominated by those with prep school pedigrees. "I can't write humorously," he told his parents, and also noted the *Lampoon's* \$100 initiation fee. Then, on February 12, 1940, he attended an open house put on by the *Advocate*, the college's venerable literary magazine, founded in 1866, and counting among its contributors T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore and Henry Miller. At the meeting, he met Bruce "Pete" Barton, also a freshman and the son of prominent advertising executive and congressman from Manhattan's Silk Stocking district. Mailer was attracted to the quiet, well-mannered young Barton. "He was the first man I met who was the son of a very powerful man, a tycoon. And he was also very much a gentleman," Mailer said. Barton was drawn to Mailer not only for his literary interests but because he felt the Brooklynite could tell him about life outside his pampered existence, life in the raw. The next day, Mailer wrote to his parents to say he was trying out for the magazine and ask if they would pay the \$40 initiation fee. They gave their

enthusiastic assent in a telephone call and he began assembling the required three-piece application packet.

One of these, "The Lady Wears a Smile," was written a few days after the *Advocate* event; it concerns an aging burlesque queen named Meg LaRue, probably a play on Rose la Rose. The second story, "Pick 'Em Up and Lay 'Em Down," is set in Brooklyn, and focuses on an epileptic youth, Jerry Reimer, who the local girls mock. The character is based on Mailer's neighborhood friend and high school classmate of the same name. The story ends bleakly with Reimer's affliction causing him to drop out of City College his first semester. A few days after submitting the story in his English A class, Mailer learned that the real Reimer had indeed flunked out of college and was working in his father's candy store. Life was following art and Mailer, we can surmise, was both elated and saddened. He also wrote his first poem, "Allegory," which recapitulates Reimer's miseries and sexual frustration, and included it in the *Advocate* packet.

Also in February, Mailer took two additional steps in pursuit of his ambition: he accepted an invitation to join a weekly, extra-curricular, writing seminar, and he began keeping a notebook, the first of innumerable such records he kept for the rest of his life. Not much is known about the seminar, save an anecdote from Mailer's friend, Larry Weiss, a sophomore transfer student, who had considerable influence on him. Weiss recalls that the importance of writers describing every bodily function, including bowel movements, ⁴ MBM 47 said he had no problem with such descriptions, but it was wrong to call them obscene. Weiss responded by reading aloud, from the "Calypso" chapter of *Ulysses*, Joyce's account of Leopold Bloom in the outhouse.

The pocket-sized notebook of 30-odd pages contains one-sentence character sketches and two-sentence plot ideas, memorable people, places and moments, a list of his dates with girls in Brooklyn, with telephone numbers and a letter grade next to each (Phyllis Bradman got a B, the highest), snippets of conversation and quotations from several writers, including Hemingway ("Everybody was drunk") and Blake ("Brothels are built with the bricks of religion"). Some of the ideas are the usual freshman theme fodder: tearing down the goal posts after a football game—"make it raw"; "Homecoming—write story of coming home and how both self and fellows have changed." But others are more ambitious: a boy with a castration complex, based on a line from Havelock Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*; a young white man dancing with a black woman for "altruistic reasons" who gets sexually aroused; "fellow meeting mother long lost and finding she is a prostitute[;] you know that's crap have him lay her first then find out it's mother—don't give it away but have it sharp dialogue piece"; "a homosexual who has an otherwise fine character . . . have it from an accident." A significant number are pensées about the writing life: "It is only when an author reproduces some personal experiences of ours that we can fully understand his meaning."

The most impressive thing about the notebook is how nicely it actually functioned as a
 ✓ wellspring. The examples of his literary trinity, especially Farrell, Simpson's encouragement in
 ✓ English A, and the interaction with other aspiring writers in the seminar, generated the
 ✓ momentum for a spurt; he wrote fifteen stories based on the notebook jottings over the second
 semester of his freshman year and the following summer. His desire to write was also whet by
 the possibility of getting on the *Advocate*. When his Uncle Dave found out about his hopes for
 the magazine, he offered to speak to Bruce Barton senior, who he knew from New York business

circles, but Mailer nixed the idea, writing home on February 28 that Dave should not "use his drag with Barton senior to get me on the Advocate. There's no use making it, if I can't do it on my own." A week later, he wrote home with the bad news that the *Advocate* had rejected his application, saying the stories he submitted were deemed fluid but deficient in plot. The editors, he admitted, were probably right.

Mailer's first semester papers for English A are on garden variety topics, for example, freedom of speech, a discussion of Malthus' Law, and reviews of novels and plays, including the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy. But second semester he turned in six short stories, including the two he submitted to the *Advocate*. Never the minimalist, he wrote one that was almost 6,000 words. His grades ranged from C+ to B+. For the last paper of the year, Mailer asked if he could submit one more story and his instructor, after some discussion, agreed. Originally titled "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep," Mailer concluded that this too blatantly echoed a Hemingway story, so he settled on "Prelude to Sleep." Submitted on May 21, the story is a first-person psychological account of the loss of virginity by Mark, a Brooklyn youth, before he goes off to college, an event preceded by months of frustrated petting with his girlfriend Susan, punctuated by the presentation of his self-serving theories on free love, true love, the family and society. Accompanying the drama of seduction are observations on the various personae he takes on: ardent suitor, good buddy, suffering lover and departing swain. After Mark convinces Susan to have sex, he concludes that the "long, terrifying, childish period of sexual self-analysis and shame" was finally over only to find the consummation tainted. He discovers that "even at the height of coitus, his analytical mind was working and it annoyed him." The story received an A-,

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his highest grade of the year, and brought his final grade up to B. Harvard was stingy with grades, especially for freshman.

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As Mailer was forging his literary vocation in the smithy of English A, isolationists and interventionists were lining up against each other on campus. Poet Archibald MacLeish, in a welcoming address to Mailer's class, compared it with the class of 1918. The earlier generation saw World War I "as a finality," he said, but they were wrong. "The last war was not an end but a beginning." Mailer's class was not at all pleased with this news. The *Crimson* came out four-square against the war, saying in an editorial, "We are frankly determined to have peace at any price." But President Conant told the first chapel service of the year, "The forces of violence must be beaten by superior violence," and Harvard president A. Lawrence Lowell was writing letters urging Congress to repeal the embargo on arms sales to England. Mailer's first response to the war, made while MacLeish was giving his importuning speech, was to jot down a very brief story, titled, "It," which follows:

We were going through the barbed-wire when a machine gun started. I kept walking until I saw my head lying on the ground. 'My God, I'm dead,' my head said. And my body fell over.

If his mini-story demonstrates Mailer's awareness of the war, it should be said that it was impossible to ignore. The newspapers, newsreels and radio were saturated with reports of the pell-mell events in Europe—the German-Russian pact, the Germany-Italy alliance, the invasion of Poland, speeches by Hitler and Churchill and general mobilizations in England and France.

Harvard's 3,500 undergraduates knew that if the U.S. entered the war they would be among the first to be go and, compensatorily, they partied a lot. Swing bands were the rage and Glenn Miller's "Moonlight Serenade" was the big hit of the year, beating out Kate Smith's "God Bless America." A member of the class of 1942, one Lothrop Withington Jr., started a nationwide craze by swallowing a live goldfish, just months before Congress began discussing the first-ever peacetime draft. In his letters home Mailer made no mention of anything but grades, football games, laundry, allowance checks and, more and more as time went on, literary activities. In avoiding the topic of war, he was not much different from his fellow Harvard students. In a May 1940 poll, 91 percent of them opposed going to war. In 1939 and early 1940, Harvard wanted it to go away.

A good part of student reluctance to accept the inevitability of war came from the widespread sympathy for leftist ideas and principles. The leader of Harvard non-interventionism was the grave, revered F.O. Matthiessen, an avowed socialist and author of *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1940). Mailer heard him lecture more than once and was deeply impressed. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (Harvard '38) visited Matthiessen at a time when England was beleaguered. During their discussion of the war situation, Schlesinger said that Churchill was the only hope. "Matty said with great intensity, 'Winston Churchill is the epitome of everything I have hated all my life.'" But when Germany invaded Russia less than two years later, Matthiessen nimbly shifted allegiances and endorsed the war. He even wrote an essay for Mailer's 1943 yearbook, "The Humanities in a Time of War," in which he praised the engaged humanism of André Malraux, who would soon become one of Mailer's heroes.

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Mailer's sentiments changed in about the same time frame as Matthiessen's. John
 Crockett, with whom Mailer would later be associated with on the *Advocate*, remembers talking
 to him after MacLeish's welcoming address. Mailer, he said, called the speech "crap" and argued
 that there would be no war. Although Mailer did not remember meeting Crockett until February
 1940, he could very well have been anti-war in September 1939. In his "Harvard
 recalls that after reading Farrell, Dos Passos and Steinbeck, he became "a leftist
 of free love. The leftism came from the books; I can't remember that the problem bothered me
 before then." He adds that by his sophomore year, "I was violently leftist, & almost joined the Y
 [oung] C [ommunist] L [eague]." Support for U.S. involvement in the war began to grow with
 the fall of France in June 1940, but Mailer showed no real interest in world events until later. He
 had something else on his mind: sex.

During his sophomore year, Mailer went to the Treasure Room of the Widener Library
 and there read D.H. Lawrence's novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, unpublished in the U.S. at that
 time. It was one of the perks of the Harvard experience and deeply moving, he said. "It changed
 my sex life, or rather, accelerated it." He read Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* at about the same
 time and later paid homage to Lawrence and Miller in his work. From the very beginning of his
 writing career, Mailer wanted to jump into the ocean of sex and plumb its secrets. He admired
 the push-back against anti-obscenity laws and prudery in general by Lawrence, Joyce and Henry
 Miller, and was eager to explore sex from A to Z. From one perspective, Mailer's 60 years of
 writing can be seen as an untrammelled examination of all things sexual—a long list. He would
 grapple with everything from the funky odors of lovemaking to the inalienable joys of marriage
 and children, from promiscuity and free love to abortion, masturbation and orgies. The humor in

obscene speech and writing was examined, as well as the problems of contraception and the mysteries of conception and pregnancy. He wrote about homosexuality, bi-sexuality, sadism, masochism, pornography, AIDS and incandescent one-night stands. Sometimes he seemed ahead of the times, as when he was called the prophet-seer of the 1960s sexual revolution; sometimes he appeared to be deeply regressive, as in his views of contraception, but he was always a passionate responder to the conundrums of sexuality and identity. In Henry James' era, he would have expired of frustration. In 1941, when he read the unexpurgated *Lady Chatterley*, the Depression was ending, life was opening up and the Victorian ark of sexual repression was sinking. But it was going down too slowly. Mailer wanted to torpedo it.

One of the last stories he wrote his freshman year, "Life Is Where You Find It," concerns an 18-year old Harvard student, Hal Stewart, a would be-writer who wants to go hitch-hiking in the summer to find "some cheap tail." When he returns to school, Hal realizes that he will have to face his big dilemma: "whether he'd be a writer or an engineer." But Mailer was not ready to tell his family that he was approaching this same crossroad. That announcement would have to wait until such a time as he could produce some literary bona fides. As it stood, it was still understood by the family that he was preparing for a career designing airplanes, although shortly after he arrived at Harvard he must have recognized that his degree would be in a general engineering program (engineering sciences), as Harvard did not have an aeronautical engineering program, merely a few courses. Further complicating matters was the fact that he had not taken high school Latin, which was required for a bachelor of arts degree at Harvard, and so could not change his major to English, although he talked to his friends about doing so.

Another issue was money. He had entered Harvard with the understanding that his parents would, by whatever means (including help from Uncle Dave and Aunt Anne), find the money for his first year's college expenses, \$1200, a huge sum for a family with a sporadically employed father. On his application Mailer put down \$3,000 as total family income for the year, supplemented by the \$60 he claimed he would earn as a summer counselor at the Scarboro Hotel. For his part, he agreed to apply himself to his studies so as to be eligible for a scholarship in his sophomore year. This meant getting on the dean's list, which he accomplished by getting three B's and an A (in Mathematics, the subject in which he always scored highest). His family was happy with his performance but, apparently, these grades weren't high enough, for in July he was informed that his scholarship application had been turned down. Another disappointment was not getting into one of Harvard's residential houses for his sophomore year. He and Sy Breslow applied for a suite in Dunster House, with Adams as a backup, and were rejected for both. Marty Lubin was also turned down, and the three friends decided to share a suite in one of the dormitories, Claverly Hall.

Undeterred by these setbacks, Mailer went to Long Branch for the summer to write. Over the next ten weeks, holed up with his portable Remington in the Scarboro Hotel room provided by Aunt Beck, he wrote eight short stories, all of which he would submit the following year. This would be the pattern for three successive summers: write during the summer and bank the work for the fall, a routine which enabled him to tackle more and more ambitious writing projects. Mailer also wanted to branch out and gain experience, especially sexual experience, something that was hard to obtain in Long Branch where there were too many sharp-eyed cousins. In August he and a summer friend, Herb Zilber, decided to hitchhike 125 miles to Scranton where,

they had learned from college chums, there was an entire street of brothels. Mailer anticipated this experience in "Love Is Where You Find It," and captured it retrospectively in another short story, titled "Love-Buds," written his senior year but never submitted as class work. In a 2007 interview he told the story again, now referring to it as "the disaster of Scranton." The two versions, more than 60 years apart, tell essentially the same story, except for the boys' names, which are changed in the short story. Al is Zilber and Eppy is Mailer.

Al and Eppy set off with toothbrushes, clean underwear, chocolate bars and some apples, more like Huck and Tom than red-eyed Lotharios. Both are 17-year old virgins and "privately, they were each convinced they would die without having known a woman." They arrive in Scranton at four in the afternoon, rent a room and then saunter out in the early evening looking for the street of dreams, which they had been told was behind the newspaper office. They stumble into brothel row and "Woman seemed to appear in every ground floor window; calls were hissed at them and purred, and shrieked, and murmured." Mailer's later version of the event follows:

I stopped in front of one of the windows and there's a blonde there, a cold, rather good-looking blonde. And I say, in my toughest voice, 'What's the tariff?' And she says, 'What, honey?' I say, 'The tariff, the tariff.' And she says, 'Huh?' I say, 'The cost.' 'Oh,' she says, 'A buck, dearie.' I say, 'All right.' So we go in and I'm looking at the floor. I've picked her already, and I'm looking at the floor and my roommate, he's looking at the floor, and he picks one and we both go upstairs, follow them. The stairs are dirty, filthy – they hadn't been vacuumed in a year. And we get there and the beds upstairs – very bare little room – with a

blanket folded, that was the bed. And she says, 'Don't bother to take off your shoes; just drop your pants.' And so I say, 'Why?' She says, 'The blanket at the foot of the bed is dirty with shoes of the men who've come before.'

And I couldn't get it up. So humiliating, after all this time. And she says at a certain point, 'Do you speak French?' And I knew what she meant and I said, 'Nah.' I don't know why, but 'Nah.' I had a feeling I couldn't get it up that way either. And I go downstairs, pay her the dollar – oh, at a certain point she says, to me, 'Time's up, honey,' after I'd been there about five minutes. I said, 'Hey, wait a minute, wait a minute.' She said, 'Don't do that.' And I thought of all the hoods waiting in the woodwork to tear us apart, so, all right, I give her the buck. Walk downstairs, trying to look as debonair as I can. There's my buddy, Herbie was his first name, and he's debonair, so the two of us set out down the street.

The short story ends with:

'How was it?' Eppy asked tentatively.

'It was wonderful,' said Al.

'Yeah, just wonderful.'

'Were you able to do it?' Al squeaked.

'No. Were you?

'No.'

By the admission, each had somehow saved the honor of the other. Al let out a whoop of laughter, and Eppy pummeled him on the back. They laughed, they hugged one another, they jumped up and down on the city street beneath the light of a street lamp, and roared with laughter at themselves and each other.

Mailer concludes his remembrance by saying that "it was a huge relief that I had an honest buddy and we were not alone in our shame. And all that night we just kept talking and talking about what fools we were. All that way and couldn't get it up. And we agreed that we would never tell anyone. We had a mark on how many years the quarantine would be on, in any event."

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In the fall of 1940, Mailer signed up for required courses in engineering, math and physics and one full-year elective: English A-1, a creative writing course taught by Robert Gorham Davis. An active Communist and a member of Matthiessen's clique, the Waspish Davis later wrote short stories for the *New Yorker*. Armed with his cache of stories written over the summer, Mailer impressed Davis, who was exactly the mentor he needed at this stage of his life, although their relationship almost foundered at its start. Mailer submitted "He Was Her Man," a 1400-word story, and Davis selected it to read in part to the class of approximately 50 students. A businessman and his wife are staying at a resort hotel and when he leaves on a trip, she invites a bellboy to her room. The man returns unexpectedly and finds his wife in bed with him and shoots her in the back of her head. When another bellboy gets to the room, the first one having fled, he finds blood and brains splattered everywhere. The man had shot his wife and then

himself. Mailer said later that the description of the woman's corpse was influenced by Hemingway's "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," but *Spicy Detective* seems more likely. "I could make out where her eyes and mouth had been, but I wondered what had happened to her nose. I couldn't guess whether it was smashed into the carpet, or if it was still floating around. I hoped it was in the ground, because stepping on it was certainly better than breathing it in."

At this point, the class broke up. "I can't tell you how my back was scalded by the laughter," Mailer said. But the next day Davis apologized to him, and the relationship was repaired, strengthened. Mailer was invited to Davis' home where he met his wife Hope. She recalled the strong impression he made: "When his eyes looked at you, you just melted." He was the first student that they entertained at Harvard. Mailer got a C- on the story, which Davis said in his written comments was "just a mash of brains and nausea." Mailer remembered the grade to be an A-, but his error is clearly a tribute to the man who helped launch his writing career.

In his sophomore year Mailer read Thomas Wolfe and said that he "made the biggest dent," although his influence was not apparent until later. He also read Saroyan, Faulkner, Fitzgerald and Hemingway. Sy Breslow said that Mailer kept a gin bottle on his mantle because he read that Hemingway drank it. Papa's macho athleticism, and his adventures in the Civil War, were well known and Mailer tried to emulate him. Friends remembered him from Brooklyn shadow boxing and pretending to be Rocky Graziano. His shyness began to melt away. Along with his friend Larry Weiss, who also lived in Claverly Hall, he tried out for the house football team. Mailer, who had always been a fan of contact sports, but participant, made the team, while Weiss did not. The team wore pads and uni-

or 15 players showed up for any one game and, except for the running backs, everyone played both offense and defense for the full 48 minutes. Mailer said, "I weighed 135 pounds then and played the line: running guard on offense, cannon fodder on defense. And I had fun." Mailer talked proudly about playing house football at Harvard many times over the years; it was a significant milestone.

On the sexual front, his virginity weighed heavy, especially after the Scranton disaster. As he wrote later, he had "accepted Lawrence's thesis about untrammelled and illimitable rights and liberties and pleasures of sexual love," but alas, alack, no partner was to be found. Phyllis Bradman came up to Cambridge once each semester, but he never progressed beyond first or second base with her, in Brooklyn parlance. At the end of his freshman year Harold Marantz had introduced him to a young woman who might solve his problem, as she had solved Marantz's. Mailer began seeing her and resumed the seduction when he returned for sophomore year, traveling once a week to her home in Cambridge. "She was too plain to take out," he said, "I would have been embarrassed." After a few visits, he got to third base. "I remember I had not washed my hands, purposely. And I walked by one of my sleeping roommates, put my fingers under his nose and said, 'Whiff that.' That was exactly the level of our social discourse in those days."

The seduction went slowly. The woman's mother hovered in the kitchen, listening and breaking in on their petting. Finally, one evening after several hours on the couch, it happened. "And now I was a man. And I paid a hell of a price because I didn't like the girl. I felt for her, but I didn't like her." During the course of his visits, Mailer had mentioned his literary interests and she reciprocated by giving him a novel she had written. He read it and saw that she had

X / copied it, word for word, from a recent bestseller by Robert Nathan, *Portrait of Jennie* a treacly fantasy. Asked for his opinion of her manuscript at their next meeting, Mailer said, "Robert Nathan couldn't have done better." She replied, "Who's he," and said it so convincingly that he concluded she was a great actress. "That gave me a sense," he said, "then limited—much greater now—of the depth of that poor girl's need." Nor would he reveal her name when, 67 years later, he finally told the story of losing his virginity to a Cambridge "towny."

The second semester of his sophomore year began well. Mailer improved his grades, even in physics, continued his friendly relationship with Robert Gorham Davis, and was awarded a \$150 scholarship for the term beginning in January, which took some pressure off the family's finances. On the social front, he made new non-Jewish friends, and began dating girls from the local colleges. He was also producing longer and more sophisticated stories, most of them revealing the influence of Hemingway. Over the weekend of February 8-9, he wrote a 5000-word story, "The Greatest Thing in the World." Mailer later said it resembled the crude apprentice work of someone who would go on to write successful action films for Hollywood, and he is accurate. The story of Al Groot is briskly told and rife with tension; every rivulet of sweat is recorded. The protagonist is a young tramp, down to his last dollar, who is trying to hitch a ride to Chicago. Given a ride by three wisecracking goons who see a sucker, he agrees to a game of straight pool in a joint run by a fat Greek named Nick. After several games, he finds himself the winner and the ten dollars in his pocket seems like a fortune. When he refuses to continue playing, they drag him to the car and drive away, planning to beat the money out him, perhaps kill him. Groot is petrified yet manages to jump out on a turn and escape into the night. After a good meal, he goes to a flophouse where he methodically squashes the bedbugs—one of many

such gritty details—and then lies down and plans his next day. He will eat a big breakfast and have “a clean woman,” then another meal and another woman. “By God,” he says, “this is the happiest moment of my life.”

By the beginning of March, the *Advocate* had informed Mailer that the Groot story was a suitable submission for his application, but probably would not be published. Davis also liked the story, saying it was the best he had received all year. He relayed this information home with the announcement, “I simply can’t stand any of my engineering courses,” adding that he would discuss his dissatisfaction when he came home later in the month. But then his hopes dimmed. He wrote home to say that although the editors liked the story, especially its suspense, “they’re a bunch of snobs, and Brooklyn may go against me.” He had reason to believe this; not many Jews had ever been selected for the magazine. Ultimately, however, Mailer’s raw talent appealed to a majority of the *Advocate* Board, especially those who deplored the cape-and-walking stick crowd who had long dominated the magazine. Pete Barton led the new faction and John Crockett and Bowden Broadwater, a “supernova of eccentricity” who later married Mary McCarthy, were the leaders of the esthetes. A week later Mailer was invited to be a literary associate on the magazine. He went home for a long weekend on March 25 and took Phyllis Brae, a Disney sensation, *Fantasia*. With the story’s publication now assured, he double-checked with Fan and Barney his desire to move from the sciences to the arts.

As was customary, the new associates were told to write and present a sketch at the Advocate House initiation, where heavy drinking was *de rigueur*. Mailer and George Washington Goethals, one of his new Wasp friends, wrote a lewd parody of Hemingway’s latest novel, titled *For Whom the Balls Squall: Farewell to Qualms*, with a cast of four: Goethals as

Martha Gets-Horned, David Roberts as Ernie the Hernia Kid, Mailer as I. Ram Soreloins and John Elliott, Jr. as Ariscrofulus. The script is lost; only a playbill survives. It lists the players and notes that the play is "a little piece probing into copulation without population, or safety first." Goethals recalled that he was wearing high heels and a snood and got "horned" with a large sausage wielded by I. Ram Soreloins. MLT 52

A few days after the April 9 initiation Mailer wrote home with the news that his story would be in the lead position in the April magazine, "the first time in several years that a debut has led off in the *Advocate*"; Prof. Davis liked another of his stories, "Fair Harvard, Thy Sons," based on a racial incident Mailer had observed, well enough to recommend it be sent to the *New Yorker*; and he'd written 8000 words of a "novelette." The most important news was that "The Greatest Thing" was chosen to be submitted to the nationwide college contest sponsored by *Story*, a magazine of short fiction founded in 1931 by Whit Burnett and his wife Martha Foley. The magazine published the early work of a number of Mailer's contemporaries, including Salinger, Truman Capote, Carson McCullers, Richard Wright and Joseph Heller.

Maiier felt his chances of winning were slight, but was nevertheless happy that his was one of two stories selected out of 45 submitted. Davis, he learned, was one of the judges, along with two other professors, Mark Schorer and Howard Baker. A week after the April magazine's publication, an editorial appeared in the *Harvard Crimson*—Mailer's first review, in effect—praising the story for having "the emotional conviction of a nightmare." It ended with an endorsement of the *Advocate*'s new direction, realism replacing the "artificialities and the polished sophistications" of the old *Advocate*. Mailer sent a copy of the editorial home and Fan

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pasted it the scrapbook of Harvard memorabilia she proudly kept. "It's all happening too easy," he wrote to his parents.

X ✓ *a friend from Long Branch* P.59
Millie Brower read the editorial when she came up for a weekend in early May 1941.

Apparently she also read some of his writing because in a letter to her written after her visit, Mailer comments on several of his stories, telling her that he has submitted "Fair Harvard, Thy Sons" to the *New Yorker*. "The Greatest Thing in the World," which by then was in print, was passed on by Millie to a college friend, an editor at a college student newspaper. The friend, Bernice Scarr, criticized the story's grammar and Mailer did not take the criticism well. "Please tell your friend to go take a hot-running fuck," he wrote, and went on angrily for a full page, calling her "immature" and "a bore." Further on, he links Scarr with Bowden Broadwater, the Pegasus, or literary editor of the *Advocate*, whose picture had just appeared in a major story on Harvard in *Life* magazine. "Very cordially dislike him," he wrote. "He writes very well, and bores me so much I can't finish his stories. His grammar is perfect." Mailer's string of victories was stocking the medicine chest of his psyche with energy and frankness, as well as some angry defensiveness. "The nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn" who Mailer later found to be "absolutely insupportable" would never entirely fade out but, at this point, he was in decline.

X ✓ On May 7, Mailer was informed that he had been elected to the Signet Society, an ~~intellectual-literary-arts luncheon club~~, which unlike the *Advocate*, had its own building at 46 Dunster Street. The Society's members, now as then, are chosen on merit, unlike Harvard's "final clubs," which selected their members based on family ties and prep school affiliations. Jews and Blacks had little or no chance to "punch" for Fly, Owl, Delphic, Porcellian or Spee, where John F. Kennedy ('40) and Mailer's son Michael ('87) were members. For the Signet,

members of the college's various publications were often chosen for some of the 28 seats given to each class. Several other *Advocate* staff members were also in Signet: Broadwater, Goethals, Barton and Crockett. Mailer ate lunches regularly at the Society over the next two years and returned several times after graduation for reunions. For his initiation on May 20, Mailer produced a second sketch parodying Hemingway. For this one, he borrowed from a recent *Life* article on the novelist, accompanied by Robert Capa photographs of Papa in Sun Valley and Spain. The heavily illustrated, buttery piece notes that Hemingway ~~sometimes~~ rewrote some passages in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* 60-70 times "to achieve the precise feeling." Mailer's five-minute piece, which he delivered in a borrowed tuxedo, purports to contain excerpts from some of these rewrites, for example: "She was bare and nude and clear and cold and clear and tight and warm and hot, rich inside and richer insides . . . her breasts were square." Mailer always had great admiration for Hemingway as writer and man, and some reservations—his snobbery and his anti-intellectualism—but Papa, even after his 1961 suicide, was the measure ^{he} Mailer used to gauge himself for nearly 70 years.

Mailer's good news continued to pour in. As a new *Advocate* editor, he attended the magazine's 75th anniversary dinner on April 10 at the Harvard Club. That night he met Roy E. Larson, the executive editor of *Time*, who had read "The Greatest Thing in the World" and told Mailer he was very impressed. Larson then sent the story to a young editor at Farrar & Rinehart, Theodore Amussen, who immediately ^{sent} wrote to Mailer with his own congratulatory comments. He said he'd like to see more material from Mailer, especially a novel, and Mailer wrote back saying he'd have one soon. He was working hard on the novelette that would eventually be a full-length novel titled "No Percentage." Mailer and Amussen planned to meet in the summer

before Mailer left Brooklyn for the Scarboro and another binge of writing. Amussen seemed more than ordinarily impressed with Mailer's prose and joined his growing band of supporters and became, eventually, his first professional editor. Another of his champions, his cousin Osie, was reading the opening of the novel in early May and encouraged Mailer. During the summer she wrote to Fan to say that the long set piece in "No Percentage" describing a summer heat wave in Crown Heights was "one of the most exquisite and descriptive passages I have encountered."

All of this praise certainly encouraged Mailer but nothing fortified him more than the thunderbolts that arrived at the beginning of June. First, Professor Davis wrote to him to congratulate him for winning the national *Story* magazine contest. Then, a telegram from Whit Burnett arrived at the *Advocate* with the same news. It was followed a few days later by a formal letter from Burnett to Mailer at the *Advocate* offices, forwarded by a non-plussed John Crockett, stating that Mailer's story was the unanimous choice of the judges. It would be published by *Story* in the fall, Burnett told him, and added that the Story Press, affiliated with Lippincott's, would be eager to consider any novel Mailer might submit. "Probably nothing has happened in the years I've been writing which changed my life as much," Mailer wrote in 1959. "The far-away, all-powerful and fabulous world of New York publishing—which, of course, I saw through Thomas Wolfe's eyes—had said 'yes' to me." That summer the \$100 prize money from *Story* arrived, proof positive to Fan and Barney of the genius of their son. The airplane models that hung in the apartment on Crown Street were no longer seen as a preamble to his life's work. From then on, he was a writer.

By late June, with Hitler advancing into Russia and London reeling from heavy bombing, Mailer had set up shop at the Scarboro. Before he arrived, he had written 45,000 words of "No Percentage" and was no longer referring to it as a novelette. The Schneider clan, of course, was aware of all that had happened at Harvard and gave their prodigy even more deference. Fan and Barney came down on weekends and in between, she wrote encouraging notes: "How is the writing coming along, honey? Put all the feeling you possess into it and it has to be good. When you were a tiny infant every time I nursed you, I would whisper a little prayer in your ear, 'Please God, make him a great man some day.' This is a secret between you and me, sonny. Take care of yourself. Love, Mother." Word came to Long Branch a few weeks later that Fan had to go in the hospital in Brooklyn for an undisclosed operation, which turned out to be a hysterectomy. No details were mentioned in the flurry of notes and letters among the family, and when Mailer wrote to his mother at the end of July he merely said that he hoped she was feeling better (she recovered quickly). But this comes at the end of his letter; he leads off by announcing that he has written another 14,000 words of "No Percentage."

Mailer had also re-written the opening of the novel. Initially, he had intended it to be set entirely in Brooklyn and the Jersey shore. His plan was to focus on the romantic problems of Robert Branstein, a 21-year old arts graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. But after winning the *Story* contest, and with Amussen eager to see a full-length work, he decided to expand it by one-third and add an additional setting. As recast, the novel opens with Branstein back home in Crown Heights, ^{with} where his father Louis, a well-to-do lawyer, ^{his mother} and his wife Harriet ^{live with Robert} and a younger sister, Joyce. Branstein has a wealthy blonde girlfriend, Sheila Wexler, who lives with her parents in the penthouse of the tallest building in the neighborhood.

Her father, Sherman, a powerful and devious figure, has links to both organized crime and corrupt politicians, much like Barney Kelly, in Mailer's 1964 novel, *An American Dream*. The gorgeous, vacuous Shelia satisfies all of Branstein's sexual needs, but he yearns for involvement in some altruistic cause, and berates himself for not leaving college to fight in Spain with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

The second of the novel's three parts takes place on the Jersey Shore hotel, the Fiesta-Shore, easily recognizable as a copy of the Scarboro. Branstein goes there to brood and escape Shelia, who wants him to marry her. Her father follows him there in an attempt to blackmail him into the marriage, using some incriminating evidence he has on Branstein's father. There is some presentation of life in a resort hotel, which suggests Mailer borrowed from his own experience at the Scarboro. He also works in his story about the bellhop and the matron, "He Was Her Man," although the promiscuous woman is now Branstein's mother, a bored matron with more money than she needs. There is a good deal of violence, including the most striking scene in the entire novel, a bloody altercation between Sherman Wexler and Branstein's grandfather, Abram.

We first meet Abram near the opening of the novel, where there is a flashback of his escape in a hay wagon from Russia during a pogrom. When the grandfather, now old but still feisty, learns of the attempt to blackmail his grandson into marriage, he confronts Wexler, calling Shelia a "filthy hot-pants." Abram strikes him repeatedly with his cane, knocking out one of his teeth. The old man also takes a beating but fails to deter Wexler, whom he calls a "pascudnyak," the Yiddish word for a vile monster. "Ach," the grandfather wails, "I did not do any good at all. It is only left for me to be wishing I was dead." Robert, disgusted with these events, drinks a quart of gin and then wrecks a car while driving with Shelia, who has shown up at the hotel. At

this point, Mailer broke off, recognizing Robert had to get away again and undergo a testing. Around the beginning of August, he mailed off part one to Amussen at Farrar & Rinehart and then set off on a hitchhiking trip.

Going on the road was a crucial experience for Mailer, a leap from the family safety net. He said the idea came from Dos Passos, whose *U.S.A.* has many stories of bumming country. He also hoped his trip would give him the wherewithal to make his protagonist dynamic. In two weeks he hitchhiked over 1200 miles, slept almost every night outside and pushed himself to his limits. He got as far south as New Bern, North Carolina before turning back. Along the way he visited Washington, D.C., and explored the city's black ghetto, here seen by Branstein:

indext → All morning he rambled through one Negro slum section after another, peering through broken windows, or around the torn curtains, going into houses, on the pretext of drinking a glass of water, to examine the interiors as carefully as he knew how. The dominant color, he decided, was grey. Inside, the walls, the old scanty furniture, the dust everywhere coincided and blended into a grey of terrible poverty. All though the south he was to find that grey; dry, hot, poor, dusty, grey. The grey that has never seen a twenty dollar bill, the grey that has never known a coat of paint, the grey, finally, that absorbs all other colors into it as soon as contact is made.

Mailer hiked through numerous sleepy southern towns. In Danville, Virginia he went to a warehouse. This time he was up for the occasion, but found it unsatisfying. He told his friends how he lost his virginity to an old prostitute named Lila, thus protecting the identity of the

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Cambridge woman. Two days later he arrived home hungry, dirty and broke. After a few days of rest and Fan's cooking, he returned to the Scarboro to finish the novel.

Part three begins, somewhat unconvincingly, with Branstein agreeing to go to brothel row in Scranton with a Brooklyn friend. Branstein waits for his friend who fails miserably, the description of his humiliation matching that in Mailer's "Love-Buds." Then the two split and Branstein turns south to define himself in some unforeseen way. Finding it difficult to hitch a ride because of his filthy clothes, he is emboldened to try to hop a moving freight car, something he has never attempted. He tells himself that a successful attempt will be the equivalent of his grandfather's escape from Russia. But his timing is off and he misses the ladder. Much chastened, he hitches home where he learns that his grandfather has died from his beating by Wexler. His failure to leap onto the train presages another defeat, with which the novel concludes. Branstein crawls back to Shelia and his "past life of indecision and fear." Their marriage ceremony is seen through the eyes of ten participants, ~~including most of the principal~~ characters. The shifts are handled in a cinematic fashion. The novel ends with a gloomy coda describing their honeymoon in California. Shelia is pleased with her catch; he is beaten down and morose.

Bristling with adjectives, thin on motivation and clogged with dialogue, Mailer's first novel is nevertheless an amazing feat for a 19-year old. He was teaching himself how to write an extended narrative with a dozen or fifteen major characters, all seen from an omniscient point of view, a practice run that would help him in depicting the thoughts of as many G.I.s in *The Naked and the Dead*. With some gaps here and some repetitions there, he was still able to maintain a narrative line for 90,000 words, pacing it with various set pieces, some of them containing

sharply observed evocations of place. The novel also recycles, sometimes awkwardly, previously written short stories. Mailer was learning to marshal his resources.

While the novel shows promise, and some of his one-dimensional characters are sharply drawn, especially the grandfather and Sherman Wexler (the precursor to a long line of power-hungry amoral monsters in Mailer's work), the background of a world at war—save for a few references to the Civil War in Spain—is completely ignored. The novel is a revilement of hedonism and corruption. Robert sells out to the power nexus but is not entirely despicable because he has learned some lessons, the first being to dislike himself. Shortly after Mailer finished the novel, there was a fire at the Scarboro, a major tragedy for his Aunt Beck and Uncle Louis Shapiro. The Schneider clan was distressed; the retreat where Mailer had learned to write burned to the ground.

The completed novel went off to Amussen at about the same time that Mailer arrived at Harvard in mid-September 1941, driving up in a 1936 Chevy convertible given to him by Uncle Dave. He and Marty Lubin had been accepted the previous spring into Dunster House, home of the "Dunster Funsters" and had moved into a fifth-floor suite overlooking the Charles River. The Dunster suite, the car (equipped with a mattress in the trunk), not to mention his *Advocate* and Signet sinecures, gave Mailer for the first time the sense of being fully vested at Harvard. He was again playing house football and was co-captain for a time; he was also rooting for the Dodgers in their World Series matchup with the hated Yankees (who won). His family had let him keep the \$100 from *Story* and he had a student job drafting a schematic of Harvard's gas and water mains. The only fly in the ointment was his major, now that his avocation had become his vocation. He wrote home that he hated his sole engineering course. His other courses were

philosophy, sociology and English A-2, the second in Harvard's series of creative writing courses, taught by Professor Murray Kempton. As in his sophomore writing class, Mailer submitted portions of his summer's work—excerpts from "No Percentage"—as well as six new stories to Kempton (not be confused with the political columnist, who later became a friend).

He relied on his usual sources for material, but experimented with tone and point of view. One of the most sophisticated of the six stories is "The Schedule Breaker," written on December 5, 1941 and based on his Cambridge affair, which apparently was still on his mind. On the submitted copy, Mailer made a notation to the effect that it was based on an incident that happened to him at the end of his freshman year and while he had changed the character's names, he was certain it would be "recognizable to the girl." He relates only the first stages of the seduction, focusing on the exasperation felt by the young man on a particular evening when, after several interruptions, she pushes away her suitor. "Whoa Brooklyn, you're fast," she said, and then started crying.

'Oh, you bastards. All of you damn bastards. What did I ever do to you, that you toss dice for me? What the hell, I'm alive just like you. I can get hurt. You boys don't care; you wouldn't understand that maybe I'm kind of bored. Now get out of here. Get out. Damn you, get out. Just go way.'

'Maybe some other evening,' he tried, playing the percentages all the way.

Kempton said that while Mailer might have made the characters too tough, too much like Farrell, the story "hits the mark precisely." He gave it a straight A, the first Mailer had received for a story at Harvard.

X ✓ Amussen arranged to meet Mailer in Cambridge and ^{came} ~~did stop~~ by on October 4 to tell him
 that John Farrar liked "No Percentage" and was going to show it to his partner, Stanley Rinehart,
 who would publish *the Naked and the Dead* seven years later. Anne and Dave Kessler, whose
 support of their nephew seemed overly proprietary to Fan, visited twice during fall semester to
 congratulate him, both times going to football games and dinner with him. "The Greatest Thing
 in the World" came out in *Story* on October 15 and within days Mailer had received letters
 expressing interest in his work, one from a literary agent and another from an editor. They were
 followed by a letter from Burnett, who wrote to say he hoped Mailer would give him right of
 first refusal for future work. Simon and Schuster also made an overture. Two weeks later
 X ✓ Amussen wrote to say that he had given the novel to an agent, Monte Stein, for an outside
 opinion. Stein said it "shows brilliance," ^{and} Amussen agreed. Whit Burnett, who had been sent one
 of several copies of the typescript, came to the same conclusion, telling Mailer that "the writing
 and psychology are brilliant." *Esquire* and the *New Yorker*, however, turned down his stories.

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On December 7, while Mailer was sorting through the plaudits and rejections, the
 Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and the next day the U.S. declared war. President Conant called
 a mass meeting at Sanders Theater. Mailer probably attended, but if not he certainly heard the
 gist of Conant's message: the time of uncertainty about the U.S. war role is over and Harvard
 men will be called on to serve. The campus was transformed within weeks and graduation was
 accelerated for many students. Mailer's response was to begin a new journal of observations,
 plans and sketches. Sy Breslow said that Mailer felt the war would ^u ^p feed the novel he wanted to

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write afterward. He was desperately searching for experience," an observation confirmed by what Mailer later wrote about the moment his generation would never forget.

I may as well confess that by December 8th or 9th of 1941, in the forty-eight hours after Pearl Harbor, while worthy young men were wondering where they could be of aid to the war effort, and practical young men were deciding which branch of the service was the surest for landing a safe commission, I was worrying darkly whether it would be more likely that a great war novel would be written about Europe or the Pacific.

✓
X ✓
Mailer's journal was also used for a running commentary on his relationship with Beatrice Silverman, a Boston University student from nearby Chelsea who he met just after Pearl Harbor, and with whom he had his first mature sexual relationship. Larry Weiss, now one of his closest friends, introduced Mailer to Bea, as everyone called her. The plan was for two Harvard men to meet Bea and another B.U. woman at a Boston Symphony concert. While waiting to see if tickets were available, they talked and Bea saw that Mailer "didn't know his ass from his elbow about music." M B M 60 Mailer suggested that they return to his room at Dunster for a drink and when the others had left they went to bed. Bea was not a sexual novice helpful, put it that way," Mailer said, "and it worked."

X ✓
← And so we were off to the races for a year and a half. We were together all the time. But I had to be the best she'd ever had, which started a crazy theme in my head, which I didn't get rid of for many, many, many years, because I always had a fear that I wasn't the best lover with any woman I was with, that I was

serious about, and if it didn't take, that was the end of it. And if it did take, then I had to be the best. And if I couldn't be, that was probably the end of it, too. So, you know, you can get a woman to tell you anything.

Physically, they were an odd couple. Bea was 5' 2," and slightly broad-beamed, *zaftig*. She had long brown hair and an attractive heart-shaped face. Mailer was a few pounds lighter and six or seven inches taller. He described himself in his journal as having a "triangular face, oily, too much hair, glasses too big, chin too small." No matter, they were in love and were soon a well-known couple at Harvard, where Bea spent a lot of time. Women were not allowed in the houses in the evening, but she stayed overnight on many a weekend and their adventures in the sack became notorious; they were setting records, Mailer said, and were proud of it.

Bea used profanity regularly and this offended some of their friends, but Mailer admired Bea's use of crude language, which surpassed his own. He recalled walking along the street outside Harvard Yard one night with Bea and a friend who was ogling the pretty girls passing. She said, "If you want to get fucked, why don't you wave your stick at them?" She had a sharp tongue, and her favorite expression, meant to convey *tempus fugit*, was "Meanwhile, the foetus is growing." But she was also kind and maternal, Mailer said. They were both leftist in their politics but Bea was a step ahead, having read a lot of leftwing literature as well as Havelock Ellis and some Freud. In a psychological profile of her, written as a term paper his senior year, Mailer noted that "to her any concept of absolutes or static custom is absurd." She was a feminist 30 years ahead of the wave, he said later, and felt herself to be both intellectually honest and intellectually superior. Mailer believed that he was brighter than she was and liked that because it gave him a "comfort zone," but he admitted that she was more knowledgeable and was a better

student. A musicology major, she also took courses in social psychology. Lacking much financial support from her parents, she paid for her final two years of college by waitressing and giving lessons on the piano, an instrument she played from an early age. Her relations with her parents were sour and she looked forward to being out of the house and independent. Within a few months, they were talking about marriage.

At the start of the spring semester Barton invited Mailer for dinner at Lowell House, where they discussed Mailer's writing, specifically, "The Schedule Breaker," which Barton liked. As Mailer wrote in his journal, the story of the seduction led Barton, in a halting manner, to ask Mailer how many times he had had sex. Mailer told him everything and they went on to speak of Barton's fears of approaching girls at the Orpheum dance hall for fear of disease and pregnancy. The contrast between the reserved Barton and the uninhibited Mailer can be seen in another entry in Mailer's journal. At first titled "Exit Blues," but later known (by its chorus line) as "The Bodily Function Blues," it was to be sung to the tune of "St. Louis Blues." The fact that Mailer was classed as a "listener" or "monotone" in grade school music classes did not deter him from delivering it with gusto from his college days until well into his 80s. A sample:

Ah can't piss, Ah can't urinate

Ah can't bleed, Ah can't even menstruate

Ah can't talk, Ah can't elucidate

Ah can't shit, Ah can't defecate

Ah can't gargle, Ah can't salivate

But worst of all, the worst of all

Ah can't fuck, Ah just can't copulate

Ah got those bodily function blues.

In addition to the exaggerated carnality of the lyrics, the contrast between the Anglo-Saxon and Latinate synonyms is worth noting. The juxtaposition of the two lexical streams, which would become one of the hallmarks of Mailer's prose, came in great measure from what he termed a "triangle" of influence—Hemingway, Faulkner and Farrell. From Hemingway there was "the power of restraint" deriving from the sparing use of Latinate words; from Faulkner, "the power of excess" that came from the expansive use of multi-syllabic words; Farrell was powerful because he "gave you the sense that reality is what you had to obey more than anything. I think I learned more from those three writers than any other American writers."

The influence of the three was heightened because Mailer never took any courses in English or continental literature except for a drama course his senior year. Because of the courses required for his major, and the six writing courses he took, his program of study was tight. Besides a year of French, his only other electives were one course each in philosophy, psychology, sociology, fine arts, and, in the second semester of his junior year, "Modern American Literature," with Howard Mumford Jones. It was in this course, which Mailer later said meant a lot to him, that he first encountered the writing of Dreiser and Faulkner. Four years at Harvard, the only contact he had with European literature was when he took some of Harry Levin's course on Proust, Mann and Joyce. Mailer had scant interest in 18th century British poetry and this was another reason (the lack of high school Latin)

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he didn't change majors. Temperamentally, he was never much in sympathy with the British literary tradition, especially poetry, although he came to admire Milton. In later years he did favor continental writers, especially the French, an admiration that began when he read *Man's Fate* (1933) in his senior year. Shortly after graduation he told Edwin Seaver, "I'd like to be another Malraux."

At the same time as he was reading Faulkner, Mailer was enrolled in his fourth writing course, English 3A, with Theodore Morrison, a poet, novelist and Chaucer scholar, who said he was "struck at once by the unmistakable presence of talent in Mailer's undergraduate work." The story that impressed him was "Right Shoe on Left Foot," a taut 7,000 word story about racial injustice in the South in which Mailer attempted, with some success, to present the dialects of both southern blacks and whites. Pete Barton, Mailer wrote home, was crazy about the story and it was immediately accepted by the editors of the *Advocate*. The *Crimson* praised the new story, calling it a welcome departure from the "haunted degeneracy" of the esthetes who had earlier dominated the magazine. Crockett is singled out in the review as typifying the "over-plushed tradition" of the previous year. Mailer was turning out stories at a rapid rate now, and Fan and a co-worker at Sunlight Oil had some difficulty keeping up with his requests for clean, typed copies for his submissions and competitions. Another of his stories for Morrison, "Maybe Next Year," was also accepted by the *Advocate*. Mailer thought enough of it to reprint it in *Advertisements for Myself* with a prefatory note explaining that the inspiration was Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*

When Mailer learned that MGM was running a college contest to identify fledgling screenwriters, he bundled five of the stories he had written for Morrison, added "The Greatest

Thing," and submitted them to Professor Robert Hillyer, who was running the contest on campus. At the same time, he sent "Maybe Next Year" to Amussen (his unofficial agent) who sent them on to the *New Yorker*. He was also corresponding with Whit Burnett and planned to see him in New York. In his regular letters home, he often devoted a page to comments on the short stories of his sister, the beginning of his lifelong mentoring of other writers. As the reigning star of the *Advocate*, Mailer spent a great deal of time in the *Advocate* board room reading old copies of the magazine, although he found time to drop condoms filled with water out a third-story window. Goethals found Mailer to be "incredibly self-disciplined," but not at all starry-eyed about writing. "To him it was work. He used to say, 'George, this business of inspiration is shit.'"

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When Barton took over as president of the magazine, Crockett replaced Broadwater as Pegasus. Mailer was a senior editor. It was the job of Pegasus to gather up all the supervise the layout and get the magazine printed. The April '42 issue was the new team and each staff member had a story or poem in it. The issue was delayed, and delayed again. Crockett reported problems with the printers in Vermont and cautioned patience. Barton, Mailer wrote, "had suspended himself into a state of forbearance worthy of a Zen warrior considering the immense agitation the late appearance of the magazine had caused." When it finally appeared, the contributions of almost all the new editorial team were gone. Crockett had bodily replaced the planned magazine with an entirely new one, a 75th anniversary double issue containing essays, poems and stories from the likes of Wallace Stevens, Djuna Barnes, Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, Conrad Aiken and many others. Crockett told Hilary Mills that his motive was to publish material of high quality rather than the "smart-alecky undergraduate

juvenilia" that Barton and Mailer wanted to publish. Years later in a wickedly funny memoir, "Our Man at Harvard," Mailer described Crockett's coup as "a mammoth virtuoso literary crypto-CIA affair." Barton, who Mailer likened to Billy Budd, took the blame for the entire situation, which was not a total fiasco in that Crockett's assemblage, the last crack of the esthete's whip, was acclaimed in the Boston papers. To keep everyone happy, Barton decreed that the planned issue would come out in May, and would contain the material that Crockett (Claggert, to Mailer) had suppressed. As a result, the *Advocate* fell into a financial slough and remained there until well after World War II.

"Right Shoe on Left Foot" appeared in the May issue and "Maybe Next Year" in June, which lessened any pain to Mailer when he learned that the story Amussen submitted to the *New Yorker* were turned down. He was also disappointed to learn that he was not selected in the MGM competition for young screenwriters which, on the basis of his *Story* feat, he thought he had a chance to win. If selected, he would have received a seven-year contract, starting at \$50 a week and increasing to \$300 after seven years. MGM wanted to know about his military obligation, but Mailer didn't want to think about it, although he knew he would have to sign up for the draft. His parents were getting concerned as millions of young men were enlisting or being drafted. There were several family discussions toward the end of Mailer's junior year in which a graduate school deferment in engineering was considered. When classes ended, Mailer told his family he wanted to remain in Boston, ostensibly to work on his latest literary interest—writing plays—but Bea, of course, was the magnet. The family knew about her by now and wanted to meet her as much as Bea wanted to meet them. Mailer recorded a vignette in his journal that says a lot about their besotted state in early 1942.

Bea and I were eating at McBride's tonight. We were sitting next to each other, alone, sitting very close. When the waitress came for the desert & handed us two menus, Bea looked at them, smiling. "Two?" she said. "Two? Do we look like two people?"

One unhappy by-product of their romance was a drop in Mailer's grades. For the second semester, he had only one A (from Morrison), two Cs and a B. This slippage caused him to lose the scholarship he had had for two years and would crimp the family's finances.

Before final exams, Mailer nursed the Chevy back to Brooklyn to be junked. When he returned and the school year was over, he and Douglas Woolf, a Dunster friend, got jobs as attendants at the Boston State Hospital (formerly called the Lunatic Asylum) in near-by Mattapan. They were paid \$15 a week plus room and board. Mailer wrote home to say that the inmates were not dangerous and the grounds looked like a college campus. Fan was upset and Mailer tried to calm her down by telling her he was working mainly with shell-shocked veterans and that he was collecting material for his writing. ^{They were} Assigned to the violent ward, where there were 60 inmates. Woolf was exhausted by the workload—mainly herding the unruly inmates—and the 65-hour week and quit. Mailer hung on but after eight days left because of the pervasive ^{brutality.} violence. When a black inmate went berserk, swinging two table legs, the attendants moved in with mattresses and Mailer tackled him. Then, Mailer said, they beat him into unconsciousness. Mailer did not take part, but he sensed that he eventually might and, in revulsion, quit. He wrote home that the job had been "very hard, very horrible." The systematic and heartless use of violence as an instrument of control marked him deeply.

X His parents and Uncle Dave sent him money to stay afloat and he sought work at the Navy Shipyard, newspapers, theaters and at Harvard. He had written a one-act play, "The Darndest Thing Happened on Mars," and made friends with members of the Harvard Dramatic Society. Within three days of leaving the hospital, he landed a soda fountain job for \$18 a week and meals at a big department store, the C.F. Hovey Company in the Savin Hill ^{section} area of Boston, not far from where he was sharing a room with friends on Otis Place. He had nights and weekends off and of course spent as much time as possible with Bea, mainly at her home in Chelsea, as neither the Chevy nor the Dunster suite were available. This threw him into contact with Bea's mother Jenny, who was annoyed by the couple's ^{belting} smooching.

She used to wrinkle her nose and looked on the sex like it was smelly, which was a big thing among most of those middle-class women at that point, that sex was something you didn't talk about; it was kind of a smelly activity and let's not get into it. And of course, I was all for the smells. For me, that was the most positive thing about sex, precisely, that it was a smelly activity. So there we are, and we'd neck on the couch. And Jenny would come marching in, making enough noise so that we could disengage if it was getting that far. And she'd say, "Norman, I just wish you knew how many times I've come in here and seen Bea necking with one of you or another." And I'd say, "Just getting ready for me." I was very sassy with her.

Fan, unaccompanied by Barney, came up for a visit in mid-July at about the same time that Mailer quit his job making sandwiches and sundaes. It is likely that it was during this trip that she met Bea, although there is no record of it. Through his Dramatic Society friends, Mailer

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started work as a press agent for the Joy Street Playhouse, a carriage house theater on Beacon Hill. There was no pay, but he got some free meals. He wrote releases, distributed posters, performed in short walk-on roles, and schmoozed drama critics. "The work is congenial," he wrote home at the end of July, "everyone is poor." He was able to watch the ten-day runs of plays, such as *The Vinegar Tree* by Paul Osborn, who wrote the screenplay for *South Pacific*. In mid-August he went to a reception where he met the cast of *Othello*—Paul Robeson, Uta Hagen and José Ferrer—who were trying the play out in Boston before its two-year run on Broadway. This foray into the dramatic world sparked an interest that would last a lifetime. It also gave him a sufficient sense of stagecraft to recast his experience at the State Hospital in dramatic form.

To write the play, Mailer decided, quite naturally, to go to the Jersey Shore. The Scarborough was now a vacant lot so he went to Monmouth Beach, where Beck was running a hotel. It had been decided that it was time for Bea to meet the clan and she traveled, separately (and thus appropriately), to Monmouth Beach sometime during the last week of August. The round of visits with the aunts and cousins apparently went smoothly because Mailer sent his mother a postcard on the last day of August saying that aunt Beck, the senior sister, liked Bea very much. Bea returned to Chelsea and Mailer got to work on the play, using as the inciting incident the beating of the black inmate. He called the play *The Naked and the Dead*, a title that will always be linked with his name. Robert F. Lucid, in his commentary on the unpublished play, noted that "Fear, for Norman, had probably always been the most authentic emotion," and "the administration of fear as a public policy" that he encountered at the hospital "penetrated to the deepest center of his imagination." He would return again and again to the ways powerful regimes and administrations at all levels of American society created what he called in his first

published novel, a "fear ladder," whereby blandishments, threats, favors and physical harm were dialed up and down as necessary for the maintenance of control, much as the water temperature (euphemized as hydrotherapy) was modulated at the State Hospital to pacify unruly mental patients.

It took Mailer 15 days to complete the three-act, eight-scene play, all of which takes place in a mental institution. In more than one way, it seems to anticipate Ken Kesey's 1962 novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo Nest*. The combined and disorienting use of both harsh and sophisticated control methods by a despotic head nurse, the slow corruption of well-meaning staff members in an atmosphere of spying and informing, and the eventual revolt and escape of some of the tyrannized can be found in both works. Mailer's play has a number of redundant scenes and the line of action is sometimes difficult to follow, yet it has the force of its "fear ladder" thesis as well as the most believable dialogue he had yet written. After the rebellious black inmate is subdued and sent to hydrotherapy, the two young orderlies in the play, David Land and Ralph Hughson, realize they cannot change the institution's deeply embedded methods of control. They quit and go on a fishing trip to regain their equilibrium, much as Nick Adams does in Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River." But before they go, David has an epiphany, which he blurts out to Ralph during an argument: "This all happened on a bigger scale in Germany. Germany is like an attendant!" Shortly after finishing the play, Mailer returned to Cambridge where he submitted the play to the Harvard Dramatic Society and prepared for his senior year.

By the fall of 1942, Harvard had gone to year-round instruction and thousands of army and navy officer candidates were housed on campus. Everyone dined in shifts at the Union and the dormitories were filled to overflowing. Isolationist talk had subsided to the point that no one protested the appearance of Secretary of War Henry Stimson and Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox at the May 1942 graduation ceremonies. Mailer returned to Dunster, sharing a fourth-floor suite with Harold Katz, a mathematics and philosophy major from Indiana. Many of the class of '43 had gone into an accelerated program and graduated a year early. In late September, Mailer began talking with the Harvard draft advisor about joining the enlisted reserve. He also began checking on graduate school requirements in engineering, but was told that no course could keep him from being drafted.

Mailer started off the semester playing house football but dropped it after two weeks, telling his family that his course work, especially his psychology class, was too demanding. He didn't mention Bea or his social life, but they also took a large slice of his free time, especially two events that were planned for October. His sister Barbara, not yet 16, was coming for a visit at the end of the month and Mailer was arranging dates and activities for her, writing home notes on travel arrangements and the number of outfits to bring. The other event, which dwarfed all others that fall, was a mid-October party at the *Advocate* for W. Somerset Maugham. The always-enterprising Jack Crockett had learned that Maugham would be in town and invited him to a cocktail reception. Maugham accepted. Mailer described the excitement Crockett's announcement caused.

This piece of news ran around the ring of Cambridge like a particle in a cyclotron.

Nothing in four years at Harvard, not Dunkirk, Pearl Harbor or the blitz, not even

beating Yale and Princeton in the same season for the first time in years, could have lit up Harvard more. Not to be invited to that party was equal to signifying that one had mismanaged one's life.

Four hundred people were there, including all the faculty literary eminences—Matthiessen, Hillyer and Spencer—but not Maugham. Mailer wrote that Maugham had sent a telegram back to Crockett saying "Certainly not." Crockett said that there was no telegram and he had only learned at the last minute of the cancellation, but there was so much heady expectation that he decided not to reveal it.

For Barbara's visit on the weekend of October 31, Mailer had arranged three separate dates for her, and bought tickets to the Princeton football game. She stayed at Bea's home that weekend and met her sister, Phyllis, who would become a close friend when they both attended Radcliffe the following year. Barbara liked her second date, Jack Maher, another of Mailer's *Advocate* friends, well enough that the third one was cancelled. She and Jack spent most of their time at Bea's house, while Mailer and Bea continued their affair at Dunster. Her continuing relationship with Maher later created some serious difficulty with Fan, who was suspicious, to say the least, of anyone with an Irish name. A week later Mailer filled out a questionnaire for his Brooklyn draft board and was duly registered. Uncle Dave, who had contacts at the board, got involved and in early December he sent Mailer a telegram confirming that he was deferred until graduation.

Harvard had gone to war and Mailer was eager to engage war in his writing, not as background as in several of his previous year's stories, but head-on. He had been reading

Malraux and Hemingway and began planning a new narrative, to be set in the south Pacific, where American soldiers were fighting. Like everyone else, he was getting the dispiriting news from the warfront. In April 1942, shortly after Gen. MacArthur left the Philippines for Australia, the American-Philippine army surrendered to the Japanese on the Bataan peninsula, the worst American defeat since the Revolutionary War. The battle for Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands dragged on all through the last half of 1942, causing dismay. The reality began to strike home: the tide was *not* turning. This cheerless mood would be reflected in Mailer's writing. He was not taking a writing course, but worked on the novella with his usual focus. His courses that semester were two required engineering courses, a drama survey course with Prof. Theodore Spencer, a Shakespeare specialist, and Henry Murray's course in abnormal psychology. And, for the length of the fall semester, Mailer awaited word from the Harvard Dramatic Society on the fate of his play. Because of wartime limitations, the Society was only mounting plays that could be handled with small stage crews. A note in the *Crimson* said Mailer's play, now re-titled "Man Chasm," was "a dark horse among the plays considered." Ultimately, the play was turned down and Mailer focused on completing the war novella, which carried a title, "The Foundation," plucked from a passage in *Man's Fate*:

All that men are willing to die for, beyond self-interest, tends more or less obscurely to justify that fate by giving it a foundation in dignity: Christianity for the slave, the nation for the citizen, Communism for the worker.

There was one additional influence: the horrendous fire and pandemonium at the Coconut Grove supper club in Boston. On the night of November 28, 492 people, including many servicemen and their companions, were burned, asphyxiated or trampled to death when

flammable paper decorations caught fire. For identification purposes, the morgue where most of the bodies were sent, the Southern Mortuary, was opened to the public. Mailer wrote home to say he was safe in Dunster when the fire occurred, not mentioning that he and Bea had gone to view the bodies. Afterwards, he transposed his memory of one of the victims to the memory of the key figure in the novella, Capt. Bowen Hilliard, a Harvard graduate:

He remembered the burnt body of a man that he had looked at for quite a time. It had seemed a terrible degradation, as if the man in burning to death had reverted to a prehistoric type. He had been blackened all over, his flesh in shriveling had given the appearance of black fur, and his features, almost burned off, had been snubbed and shrunken, so that the man's face in death had only registered a black circle of mouth with the teeth grimacing whitely and out of place in the blackness of the ape.

The novella is a kind of prospective dirge in which five Americans inwardly grieve and ponder their all-but-certain deaths as a force of invading Japanese surround them on the fictional island of Tinde in April 1942. Besides Hilliard, there is an American Indian, Sgt. Thomas Rice, two privates, DaLucci and Swede "Jewboy" Wexler, and a chaplain, Fr. Timothy Meary. Mailer uses long flashbacks, in the mode of Dos Passos, to anchor the action and reflections of the G.I.s, and goes so far as to have Hilliard project, in a self-lacerating way, how his ex-wife Cova will react to news of his death. The novella contains only brief and tentative descriptions of combat; Mailer is much more at home in giving the texture of American life in capsule biographies of his characters. Like Mailer, Hilliard was an editor at Harvard's literary magazine and is the first in a long line of artist figures in Mailer's work. In the mid-1930s, Hilliard wrote a poorly received

autobiography, *The Artist in Transit Inglorious*, in which he comments angrily on Malraux's idea of the dignity of transcending self-interest, saying, "But in America, men work, live and die without even the rudest conception of a dignity." The other four men, if less reflective than Hilliard, are also uncertain what meaning their deaths will have. Hilliard believes that America covers up its sins in defensive flag waving, although he holds out hope that "something would come out of the country, and it wouldn't go hard and selfish as it always had before," a theme that would reverberate in Mailer's work.

The novella winds down quickly after the five realize they are completely cut off. Meary and DaLucci are machine gunned when they try to surrender; Wexler gets shot while demonstrating how he once threw a football pass. The Indian and the Captain are still firing as the sun rises on their final day, recalling Robert Jordan's final moments in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. It ends with a Hemingway flourish. As they smoke their final cigarettes, Hilliard notes that it going to be a sunny day. "Yes," the Indian answered slowly, "sometimes you want to look pretty carefully at it." The novella, later re-titled "A Calculus at Heaven," strongly prefigures *The Naked and the Dead*, especially in the use of a hovering, brooding, sympathetic narrative consciousness. He completed the novella over semester break in Brooklyn in preparation for submitting it in Professor Hillyer's English 5A course the upcoming semester, his last at Harvard. Mailer made mimeo copies of "Calculus," one of which he sent to Amussen, another to Burnett and a third to Bea. On her copy he wrote: "Bea—you sweated this out with me—saved it once from the end of a telephone wire—and were the first one to like it. Isn't that enough, sweet? Norm."

In the middle of his senior year, Mailer wrote in his journal that he wanted to do "a little philosophical accounting." What is most striking about this nine-page entry is his effort to tell the worst, to probe and pinch his weaknesses as if they were lice on his body. He starts by casting back to his arrival at Harvard, saying he came with little self-knowledge.

I lived completely (and my moods depended on) in the impressions of others. I would lie, boast, exaggerate so that they would think more of me, & so that I by some rather difficult rationalization might believe it too. This deception did not always work with me, & I went through periods of extreme realization & unhappiness. To myself I was no good.

He continues with a description of the stair steps of his growth as a reader, writer and lover, commenting on his failure in the Scranton brothel, his success in the one in Virginia and the seduction in Cambridge. He examines his political awakening and discusses hitting "the jackpot" with "The Greatest Thing." At the end of his sophomore year, he writes, "My egoism was extreme, & the fact of it bothered me." In his junior year, lacking any belief in God, he constructed a sensualist philosophy. Then he met Bea and "I've been loving—not loving her ever since. The sex-ego business is laid to rest. I'm a good lover without being as great as Bea thinks I am." He ends with a reflection that augured well for a writer who would later examine sympathetically the psyches of moral monsters such as Gary Gilmore, Lee Harvey Oswald and Adolf Hitler: "Every villain in a melodrama considers himself as the hero. That is one of the fundamental things to learn about life. It is one of the milestones of intelligence . . ."

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Amussen wrote to Mailer at the end of March 1943 to say that "Calculus" was the best piece of writing he had yet produced and began searching for a publisher for the 20,000-word novella. After Burnett turned it down, Mailer suggested that Amussen try *Redbook* and *American Magazine*. Mailer's friends, who he said were his toughest critics, agreed with Amussen's evaluation as Mailer reported to Millie Brower in an April letter. He also told her that he expected to be in the army by July 1, and that he'd like to see her in New York in June if she would be there. His relationship with Bea is still very much alive, he continued, but it had been through many evolutions. "It's been wonderful, & exciting, & maturing for me, (and her) but it won't survive the next five years of war, I fear. Nothing could."

He wrote to his parents the same day to discuss what was on everyone's mind as graduation approached—the army. He was both resigned to being drafted and eager to seize the experiential possibilities of life in the army melting pot.

You say, Mother (and I'll include you dad) that you will worry if I'm in the army, and that therefore, I should reconsider it. If you only knew how much I've thought about this, and how many my temptations have been. (Don't forget, I have much besides Harvard to keep me in Boston.) And yet, as a writer, and you must believe me since I can't explain it to you, I feel it necessary to enter a private, to get the feel of the nation, to know what the DaLuccis and Wexlers think about, rather than guessing.

Uncle Dave came up to Cambridge in April to discuss his nephew's plans—no family member came more often. As a graduation present, he offered to underwrite Mailer's

X participation in a trip to Mexico with several of his friends, and Mailer seemed eager to go. His friends planned to leave on May 20, a week before graduation but Mailer said he wanted to go through the ceremony with the family in the audience. "Lord knows you've waited long enough for it," he wrote to them. He had already told them that he was planning to start a new work, another novel, which he would base on his play about the insane asylum. He had a title: *A Transit to Narcissus*.

X ✓ For the remainder of the semester, Mailer worked on the novel and did sufficient work in his final, required engineering course to get a passing grade. He told his parents he might only get a C, which was not impressive, "but what importance do my masks have now anyway." He was also engaged in deep conversations about the future with Bea. Earlier in the semester, she had asked him if he wanted to get married and he replied that their commitment would persist without marriage, even if one or both of them were unfaithful. There was no sense, therefore, in getting married just "so we can participate in the great American custom," he wrote in his journal. "Bea loves me as a vase now, something valuable to her because it's clever and sensitive." The romance was obviously very much a work-in-progress because when the time came to make a decision about going to Mexico, Mailer opted out. He told his parents he'd prefer to take his vacation in a small town on the tip of Cape Cod, Provincetown, where he would be buried in 2007. He didn't tell them that Bea would be going too, or how serious their relationship had become.

He got a B in his engineering course and A's in his other three courses, which enabled him to graduate cum laude. With his parents, Barbara, and the Kesslers in the audience, he received his S.B. degree in Engineering Sciences, on May 27. Winston Churchill was to have

been the graduation speaker and receive an honorary degree, but his meetings in Washington with President Roosevelt forced him to cancel. Bea also did not attend—the number of tickets was limited—but Barbara stayed with her in Chelsea and Barney met her for the first time. After a reception at Dunster House, the family returned to Brooklyn to await greetings from the army.

Chapter 3

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The Army

Two weeks after his graduation, Mailer and Bea took the ferry from Boston to Provincetown. A fishing village on the tip of Cape Cod, P-Town, as it is often called, is encircled by ocean, tidal flats and sand dunes. During the week they vacationed there, the town had an “unearthly” beauty at night, Mailer said. A wartime blackout had been imposed on the East Coast a year earlier and when the couple walked along Commercial Street fronting the harbor, a gibbous moon gave the town’s colonial architecture an eerie quality. They stayed at an inn on Standish Street where their marital status went unquestioned by the landlady, or anyone else, and enjoyed an idyllic week in each other’s arms and at the beach. Provincetown has never been a starchy place and the two free love advocates promised that they would return if and when Mailer returned safely. He was certain that a draft notice awaited him at his parents’ new residence in Brooklyn Heights, an apartment at 102 Pierrepont Street. Bea had a final semester to complete in Boston and they went their separate ways after they left on June 15.

Ambivalence is the only word to describe Mailer's attitude about the army during that summer. Right after graduation, he told George Goethals that he planned to enlist and get it over with, but in July, he asked Amussen to request that Stanley Rinehart write a letter to his draft board seeking a deferment so he could finish *Transit*. Rinehart was interested in Mailer's writing but counseled that such a request would be unwise. "I was a little frightened of going to war, and a great deal ashamed of not going to war, and terrified of my audacity in writing so ambitious a novel," Mailer wrote in the introduction to *Transit* when it was finally published in 1978. Every day the draft notice was expected and every day it failed to appear. Mailer pushed on with the first draft of *Transit* and then began the second. Occasionally, he took the train to see Bea in Chelsea, or she visited Brooklyn. For both, it was an anxious period and Mailer's state of mind—"I was as lonely as I have ever been"—is reflected in the mood of the novel, a mix of the febrile and the lugubrious.

There was some cheer that summer. Amussen's efforts to find a publisher for "A Calculus at Heaven" were successful. Edwin Seaver wrote at the end of August to say that he was accepting the novella, with only minor changes, for publication the following spring in *Cross-Section: A Collection of New American Writing*, the first of a series of anthologies of new work by young writers. It would be Mailer's first appearance in a book. Published with him were several important young writers whose careers were also given a boost: Jane Bowles, Richard Wright, Shirley Jackson, Ralph Ellison and two others who Mailer came to know well in Brooklyn after the war, Arthur Miller and poet Norman Rosten.

Set in the summer of 1938 in an unnamed city, *Transit* focuses on a college senior, Paul Scarr, who works at what is called "the insane asylum," where he is a ward attendant charged

with keeping the inmates quiet and moving through their daily schedule. As in Mailer's own experience and his play, "The Naked and the Dead," a troublesome black inmate is punched and kicked into unconsciousness by the attendants. Scarr is distraught but also strangely exhilarated by the regular and condoned brutality. Another attendant, Joe Cap, becomes his closest friend. Recently in prison, Cap took the fall for a higher up in the Syndicate, a criminal cartel. An emotionally hardened nurse, Marion Gannon, is the third major character. A dozen inmates, along with their afflictions and symptoms—catatonia, schizophrenia, drooling, tremors—are described with clinical precision. Scarr and Cap both vie for Gannon's affections and Scarr wins and has an affair with her. The Syndicate controls the asylum's budget and siphons money off in crude ways: low pay, poor food, inflated supply contracts.

The overarching struggle is between the Syndicate and a crusading newspaper run by an idealistic publisher, Paul Cowles. The action moves back and forth—with little dexterity—from the asylum to the newspaper to the Syndicate. Cap pretends to like Scarr, but secretly attempts to get him fired so he can succeed him as Gannon's lover. When the other attendants learn Cap is a stool pigeon, they arrange for him to be attacked by an angry inmate. The attack takes place and Scarr helps rescue Cap, but during the fight a senile inmate, "Stinky" Stinovicz, gets in the way, and is kicked in the stomach by Scarr and Cap, dying a few days later of peritonitis. Scarr and Cap are arrested and charged with manslaughter. Because the syndicate controls the D.A.'s office, Scarr is offered a lighter sentence by the Syndicate's *consigliere*, a Mephistophelean lawyer named Riorden, if he does not reveal the horrors and graft at the asylum. He agrees but later reneges.

Scarr is clearly neurotic, "with the seed of the psychotic," as Mailer put it, and his altruism is regularly sideswiped by his sadomasochistic impulses. Before becoming an attendant, Scarr was an idealist who wanted to fight with the Loyalists in Spain, but did not because of his "almost mystic fear of bodily contact." As the novel proceeds, he becomes emotionally callused and finds that violence beguiles him more and more. The methods employed to cow the inmates eventually turn nearly all of the employees into little fascists. The hospital scenes and routines (including an elaborate, fiendish system of distributing discarded cigarette butts among the inmates), based on Mailer's experience, ring true. The depiction of the newspaper and its staff and the Syndicate and its thugs is thin. The sex scenes, written shortly after Mailer completed Henry A. Murray's abnormal psychology course, are ridiculously Freudian. Scarr's sexual problems with Nurse Gannon come to a head when he is out on bail, having brooded about her during his week in jail. Angry because sexually she is neither harlot nor mother, Scarr plans to kill her as she lies naked (an emblem of the title of his play), in the penultimate scene in the novel, but he pulls back the knife at the last instant. Now in a hallucinatory state in which he sees Stinovicz's corpse raddled with insects, he slashes at the bugs, cutting his own wrists, and dies. The novel ends, unconvincingly, here. Plot strings are left dangling, nothing is resolved. Scarr's muddled motives and apparently accidental death give every sign of authorial haste and confusion.

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The novel may have ground to such an abrupt ending because the size of Mailer's ambitions finally overpowered him. He was worn out by what he called the novel's "ponderosities" and the tensions between Marxist and Freudian themes. Bea was also a large

factor. He took the manuscript with him when he went on a ski trip with her to North Conway, New Hampshire for a week in late December. The real purpose of the trip was a serious discussion of their future, now that she was about to graduate and his army service was looming. Both of them were somewhat uncertain because they prized their freedom, but Bea's mother knew they were sleeping together and was nagging her to get married and not bring great shame on the family.

Yeah, and suddenly I felt very bad. Like: I do love her, she's so lovely, why am I so mean to her and so I said, "Let's get married." She smiled, looked a tiny bit, nodded her head. Years later, she told me she felt a moment of gloom when I asked her. (laughs). In any event, gloom, doom and happiness, whatever.

change p. 75 MBM 75 is Bea's version "anxious horse prod" ✓
 On January 7, 1944, he and Bea were secretly married in a civil ceremony suburb of New York. He gave her a twenty-five cent silver Mexican ring. There was a honeymoon, no guests, no reception; she returned shortly afterwards for graduation University.

note is MBM 73 change to 75 ✓

He was encouraged by a meeting at this time with a literary agent, Berta Kaslow of the William Morris Agency, who had written to him at the suggestion of Seaver. She became an enthusiastic admirer of *Transit* and while Mailer was in the service sent it to a dozen publishers, albeit unsuccessfully. Still ambivalent, Mailer again sought respite from his draft board. At his request, Seaver wrote a "To Whom It May Concern" letter, attesting to Mailer's talent and seeking an extension. He wrote to Seaver to thank him, adding that seeking a delay "occasions [in] me a great deal of soulsearching for I feel guilty when I think of some candy store owner

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 torn from his loving children." Sometime around the middle of the month, the draft notice arrived. Mailer responded on January 19, by submitting a formal request for a 30-40 day delay, arguing that he was trying to finish "an important literary work" that contained "an attempt on my part to analyze some of the fundamental differences between the Fascist and democratic minds" that had "some relevance to the war effort." His appeal was rejected and he was ordered to report for induction on March 27.

According to Bea, Fan wanted the first marriage annulled. "Fanny," she said, "just didn't want her little genius to be married." Mailer's mother said she was opposed because Bea "wasn't trustworthy" and was domineering. Jenny Silverman wasn't entirely happy either; she had hoped Bea would marry a doctor. The opinion of the two fathers is not recorded; Fan and their roosts. Ultimately, everyone came around when it was clear that Mailer and committed and on March 18, they were married again at her home in Chelsea. The families wanted, and got, a full Jewish service: a rabbi, a service under a *chuppa*, the reading of the *Sheva Brachot* (seven blessings) and the ceremonial breaking of the wine glass. Mailer despised the ritual. Writing to his mother months later to defend Barbara's continuing relationship with Jack Maher, he said:

[N]either Barbara nor I feel very strongly about being Jews—I am neither proud nor ashamed. But what I am ashamed of, and to this day my face flushes when I think of it, was that disgraceful exhibition—my marriage ceremony. Ughh. And you insisted on it, and were wrong, as I think you realized that night. Certainly, it was hardly an encouragement for Barbara to marry a Jew; she was as nauseated by it as I.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

After a week at Camp Upton where he took an army I.Q. test and scored 145, Mailer reported for basic training at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, arriving in early April. Before he departed, Berta Kaslow sent him a telegram informing him that Robert Linscott, the top editor at Random House, felt after reading *Transit* that he was a "potentially very important writer." His family, especially Fan, wrote to him weekly and he and Bea wrote to each other several times a week for the next two years. They had an extraordinary correspondence, over 400 letters, full of plans for the future, erotic and literary. Shortly after he had departed, she joined the Waves, went through officer training, was commissioned ensign and assigned to Norfolk, Virginia. When the men in Mailer's unit learned of her rank, he was asked over and over if he had to salute before they had sex. He grew weary of the joke.

As a Harvard graduate, Mailer could easily have obtained a commission perhaps in intelligence, but he decided that being in the enlisted ranks would give him a far greater chance to observe. Although Mailer told Steven Marcus in 1963 that he was burned out after the dispiriting effort of writing *Transit*, he quickly recovered and began pondering the shape of his next novel. Before he departed, he told Bea that he intended to write "THE war novel" and shortly after he arrived at Ft. Bragg on April 8, he wrote home to say that instead of keeping a journal, he would send home regular observations to Bea, a plan he kept to for the duration of his time in the army.

Because of his engineering degree he was assigned to training for an assignment in artillery fire control. He found the math to be elementary. Even with calisthenics, rifle practice

and marching on top of his artillery training, he found time to compile a lexicon of military slang for his parents. He provided detailed explanations for "goldbricker," "chow," "snafu" and his favorite, "t. s.," the army's blunt, unsympathetic response to G.I. complaints: "tough shit." The obscene humor of the army resonated happily in Mailer and was a staple in *The Naked and the Dead*. Twenty years later in *The Armies of the Night*, he recalled the humor he first discovered at Et. Bragg; *in the army*:

Mailer never felt more like an American than when he was naturally obscene—all the gifts of the American language came out in the happy play of obscenity upon concept, which enabled one to go back to concept again. What was magnificent about the word shit is that it enabled you to use the word noble: a skinny Southern cracker with a beatific smile on his face saying in the dawn in a Filipino rice paddy, 'Man, I just managed to take me a noble shit.' Yeah, that was Mailer's America.

Mailer's platoon sergeant, Donald Mann, was a southerner (and later his physical model for Sgt. Croft in *Naked*), but most of his friends in basic training were New York Jews. One of his closest friends was Clifford Maskovsky. He kept an eye on Mailer because, as Maskovsky recalled, "He wasn't good at physical things." Nor was he adept at inspections. A few weeks into basic, he was "gigged" for some infraction and his entire unit lost their weekend passes. "When it came to taking care of myself," Mailer said, "I had little to offer next to the practical sense of an illiterate sharecropper." One of his distractions was reading; another was taking notes on the sex lives of the other soldiers. Everyone knew he was a Harvard graduate, but he didn't reveal his literary aspirations. A copy of *Cross-Section* arrived in late May, along with reviews of it in

X the *New York Times Book Review* and the *New York Herald Weekly Book Review*, but he doesn't seem to have shown these around the barracks. Maskovsky said he never saw Mailer in an argument with an officer during basic and Mailer recalled that he got through the war "with my lip buttoned." There was one notable blow-up just before he was discharged, but for most of his 25 months of active duty, Mailer's reputation was that of a detached, quiet observer.

X In late May, Mailer sent Bea his first extended piece of writing for later use, a description of a fierce rainstorm that hit his unit when they were on the firing range. The most notable detail that he ~~borrowed from the letter for~~ ^{used later} *Naked* is a tableaux of sodden G.I.s huddled in the uncertainty of a truck singing "Buddy, Can you Spare A Dime." Every other letter to Bea contained some patch of observation—the rhythms of insect life on the square foot of ground before your face as you lay prone with your rifle, the "phaWhom" sound of dynamite exploding in the water, a comparison of the sound of a passing artillery shell with the slithering noise a snake makes in dry grass. His letters also contained comments on his reading. He praised Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940), calling its author "one of the best novelists living today"; and found John Hersey's *A Bell for Adano* (1944) to be a "stinker." Kaslow continued to pepper him with letters about *Transit*'s chances with various publishers and her enthusiasm deterred him from abandoning the novel. As late as April 1945, he wrote to Bea that he wanted to make a pile of money so that he could write "a twenty volume *Transit* that would out-Joyce James."

His letters also contained speculations about the nature of combat and, as the summer approached, eager anticipation of Bea's visit to Fayetteville July 29-30. Mailer scheduled the reunion to the minute. On the weekend before he inspected the room, and checked to see if her

train would be on time. All went according to plan. Bea arrived with a silver chain for his dog tags and they had a lusty 32 hours together.

Mailer did not yet have a plan for the war novel. All he knew was that it would be a combat novel. When he learned of the D-Day invasion in France, he wrote to Bea, "my first reaction was of disappointment—I wanted to be on the beach. Secretly and selfishly I had wanted the invasion to wait for me." Later on, he recognized that being sent to the Pacific was fortunate in that the American hunger for power was palpable in places like the Philippines, but not in Europe. More important, to write about the war in France and Germany, it was necessary to have "a feeling for the culture of Europe and the collision of American upon it." Irwin Shaw ~~attempted~~ ^{did} this in *The Young Lions* (1948), an ambitious novel that looked at the experience of both the German and American soldiers. Mailer wrote in 1959 that this novel's "considerable merits" were flawed by Shaw's lack of feeling for the continent's past, a comment that reflects Mailer's competitive nature in that period more than the lacks of Shaw's novel, which was based on his war experience. Shaw did land at Normandy and a few days later greeted a chagrined Ernest Hemingway as he waded ashore.

After completing his artillery training in early August, Mailer had a ten-day furlough. He divided it between Brooklyn and Norfolk, and then boarded a train at Penn Station with his friend Clifford Mascovsky for the five-day trip to the West Coast and his next assignment at Ft. Ord, California. The train took the northern route, via Chicago, which gave him the opportunity to feel insignificant in the great empty spaces of the prairie, the foothills and finally the mountains. Writing from the King George Hotel in San Francisco, he recalled a conversation

✓ with his sister about William James' observation that the fundamental human emotion comes from nature:

I can understand that—in the cities God is a reactionary, an anarchic & perverted symbol. In the west, in the heart of the prairie and the foothills and the sky God seems to be everywhere, he is the hills and the sky and the battle between light and darkness, he is all the thundering vast music ever written, and in the city he is nothing. He is the frenetic beat of tension, anxiety, city jazz. Nerves snapping all the time.

Mailer is often described as an urban writer. This is glib. From *Naked* and *Why Are We in Vietnam?* to *The Executioner's Song* and *Tough Guys Don't Dance* (not to mention his matchless renderings of the craters and pockmarks of the moonscape in *Of a Fire on the Moon*), his landscape descriptions crackle and pulse with energy and must be ranked among the best of postwar American writers. Diana Trilling observed, "The most dramatic moments in *The Naked and the Dead* are precipitated by intensities in nature," which is to say that Mailer's terrain is often an externalization of the thoughts, moods and sometimes the unconscious promptings of his characters. Later on, his responses to nature will be filled with heartache at the Faustian destruction of the American wilderness, "... that sad deep sweet beauteous mystery land of purple forests, and pink rock, and blue water, Indian haunts from Maine to the shore of Californ, all gutted, shit on, used and blasted..." Although he grew up in big cities, Mailer's sensitivity to nature's resonances must be counted as one of his most commanding skills.

After spending a few days in San Francisco at the end of August, Mailer and Maslovsky took the bus to Ft. Ord, some 90 miles south. He told his ever-anxious mother that his artillery assignment would keep him well behind the front lines. Knowing Fan's detestation of Hitler, he told her he was reading one of the first major biographies, Konrad Heide's *The Fuhrer: Hitler's Rise to Power* (1944), which he found to be difficult but exciting. Sixty years later, he re-read it when researching his novel of young Hitler, *The Castle in the Forest* (2007).

Shortly after finishing the Hitler book, he began reading Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1926) and right away wrote to his sister to say it would become one of the most important books of his life. Spengler's "immense thundering insight which takes all of history as its meat and re-chops it as no man has ever done" excited him, gave him a sense of historical scope and flux that he had not encountered before. Mailer was astonished by Spengler's ability to seize the relationships among developments in widely separated fields—warfare, astronomy, architecture, medicine, agriculture, the arts, statecraft—and align them to reveal a culture's tendencies, to show its movement in the inevitable cycle of development and decline, as well as to identify parallel cycles in other cultures. Always seeking the distinctive characteristics of a culture that were manifests of its deep structure, its morphology, he ranged with apparent ease through Egyptian, classical, Chinese, Hindu, Arabian and Western civilizations, commenting on, for example, the arcana of Egyptian breast plates, the nature of the tribunate in Rome, the advent of infinitesimal calculus and the discovery of the circulation of the blood.

Diana Trilling once observed that Mailer's "mind is peculiarly violable by idea, even by ideology." Spengler's study is perhaps the clearest instance of this susceptibility. In 1944, not yet having read Nietzsche, nor much Marx, he was ravished by Spengler's ideas about the Faustian

desire in the West to achieve the Godhead, to strive for the divine, even if it led to death. Spengler saw the past as an organism. Every culture moved through stages of flowering, decadence, ossification, death and rebirth. Mailer's pronounced preference for the organic over the analytic, for metaphor over measure, has its origin in *The Decline of the West*. An invincible dualist, Spengler based many of his arguments on the superiority of the second term in a set of paired opposites—causality-destiny, space-time, nature-history, thought-will. He distrusted the rational scientist (Darwin was his negative hero), while admiring the forceful, intuitive artist (Goethe was his positive hero). Whatever the roots of Mailer's own dichotomous thinking, Spengler deepened the cleft. Within two weeks of his letter to his sister, he was writing to Bea about a new idea for a novella with "a ridge or peak as symbol" of "the higher aspirations of man, the craving for the secret, the core of life, (or as Spengler might say—the Faustian need) for power and particularly for Godhead and the vanquishing of death."

Ψ Ψ Ψ

On November 7 Mailer cast his first vote, an absentee ballot for F.D.R. A week later he completed his fire control training and after three weeks at Camp Stoneham, the West Coast embarkation center, shipped out on the U.S.S. *Sea Barb*. He sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge on December 6, three years after Pearl Harbor. In October, the Japanese had experienced catastrophic naval losses in the Battle of Leyte Gulf and were about to be defeated on Leyte Island. Southern Europe had fallen to the Allies, France had been invaded and the Allies were pushing into Germany. The Battle of the Bulge was being fought as Mailer's ship crossed the Pacific, and planning was underway for the invasion of Luzon, the main island of the Philippine

archipelago, where the capital of Manila was located. MacArthur was returning. On all fronts, the tide was finally starting to turn, although the Axis Powers were offering ferocious resistance.

Mailer spent most of his time on deck writing letters and watching the water and sky. It was a quiet crossing. He wrote Bea that he was at peace with himself and believed that he would survive the war—a soothing lie he repeated many times—in part because of his artillery assignment. “Without you,” he wrote, “I should have been an insolent unhappy youth forever jousting with the dark shadows of my vanity.” As he sunned himself during the long transparent days, he went over the “ridge novella” in his mind and began to populate it with soldiers he had known, although except for Sgt. Mann, none of them would be used in *Naked*. Instead, he would draw on the men from a unit as yet unknown to him: the 112th Cavalry Regiment, a National Guard unit out of Ft. Bliss, Texas.

Created in 1921 mainly with men from north Texas, the 112th was federalized in November 1940 and served over five years on active duty, with 434 days of combat. After a hot, gloomy Christmas anchored in Hollandia Bay, New Guinea, on the *Sea Barb*, Mailer joined the unit on Leyte on December 29, 1944. It had received many replacements, but as Mailer remembered, “the aristocracy of the outfit were these old Texas boys, most of them privates who had been busted down a number of times.” He continued:

They’d been overseas for three years at this point; they’d been allowed to keep their own sidearms. They had handkerchiefs tied around their heads, and they all had jungle rot, these open ulcers on the skin the size of fingernails that they had been painting with iodine. They just stared at us and sharpened their knives. It

was like *Deliverance*. I didn't open my mouth for six months in that outfit. They were all crazy.

All the Texans could ride, as the unit had originally been a horse cavalry unit with a reconnaissance mission and roots going back to engagements against Pancho Villa. For its first overseas assignment on the French island of New Caledonia, the troopers still had their horses, making it the last U.S. Army unit to be deployed as a mounted force. A Texas historian described them as "a Texas regiment defending a French island from a Japanese aggressor while mounted on Australian horses." The horses were impractical for jungle fighting, however, and the 112th became an infantry unit after it left New Caledonia, but the reconnaissance mission continued. When Mailer and twenty other replacements arrived, they learned that the 112th Cavalry was now part of the 112th Regimental Combat Team (RCT), along with the 148th Field Artillery. Because of his advanced training, Mailer expected to be assigned to the 148th. But several weeks earlier, the 148th had received a group of infantrymen, trained them as artillerymen and weren't about to give them up. As Mailer put it, "So, the infantry replacements had been retrained as artilleryman, and we artillerymen found ourselves in the infantry. Typical Army SNAFU." Crestfallen at the time, Mailer recognized later how fortuitous his happenstance infantry assignment had been.

MacArthur's invasion of Luzon, began on January 9, 1945. The 112th arrived at Lingayen Gulf, Luzon, on the U.S.S. *Monrovia* (APA 31) and went ashore on January 27. The Sixth Army, under Gen. Krueger, was already on its way south to Manila, and the job of the 112th was to cover the left flank of the advance, which had bypassed many Japanese units, and guard supply lines from the beachhead. The 112th, Mailer said, was "a "trip-wire," assigned to slow down any Japanese forces that attempted to attack the Sixth Army from the rear. The 1,200 men of the

112th were stretched out to the east of a north-south highway 80 miles long, as well as in observation posts in the hills beyond. Other units were involved in fighting on the outskirts of Manila with the 1st Cavalry Division, which entered Manila in early February. The Luzon campaign was huge. The Americans and the Japanese committed more troops than in any previous campaign of the war, including North Africa and Italy. Each army had over a quarter-million troops stationed on Luzon. But the Japanese were ill equipped and by the end, sick and starving. After Manila fell in early March, the fighting diminished throughout the spring and by July was all but over. MacArthur's victory came relatively easy.

In his first letter to Bea after arriving on Luzon, Mailer told her not to fret about his safety as he would always be between two and twenty miles behind the front lines, a disingenuous assurance in that there was no discernible front line for the 112th. But regimental headquarters company, where ~~he had been offered~~ ^{he had assignment} a typing job in the Intelligence and Operations section of Headquarters Troop (the Harvard pedigree again), was of necessity removed from immediate danger, although the men assigned ~~to~~ kept their rifles next to their typewriters. His assignment was to type daily intelligence reports. Mailer said he was, for the moment, happy with the work because had an inside view of how the campaign was unfolding. He was also for the first time working closely with officers. At one point, he was present when the commanding general of the RCT, Julian W. Cunningham, was discussing operations with a colonel.

Mailer was a self-taught typist and his work was error filled. He took pains to improve, but to no avail, and he was reassigned to read manuals on interpreting aerial photographs with the possibility of getting a permanent assignment, but nothing came of it. He told Bea that it was "galling at times to be so utterly insignificant," but it deepened his novelistic commitment. Then,

he was given the lowly job of building a shower for officers. He was, apparently, of little value where he was and towards the end of March, he was transferred to a communications platoon unrolling and repairing wire between outlying units and HQ.

The advantage of the assignment was getting to observe small units of the 112th in villages, rice paddies and on hilltops. There were large tracts of uncontested territory—no-man's land—and he rode far afield in a jeep laying wire and repairing breaks. As junior man in the platoon, Mailer had to squat on the fender of a jeep with his carbine ready. The downside of the assignment was that occasionally the enemy would cut the wire and ambush the repair team. "Variety, darling," he wrote to Bea, "is the only spice in army life, so I cannot gripe. And look at the training I'm getting for being a general. I'll know my army." He took copious notes and sent them to Bea four or five times a week. Perhaps a third of his letters are love letters, filled with erotic fantasies and plans, but the rest are experiential logs. His unflagging belief in his future greatness as a writer compensated in his mind for his very serious lacks as a soldier.

While he was still in HQ Troop, the 112th engaged the Japanese in a small town on the highway to Manila. Mailer went with some staff officers to see the aftermath. "It had a little bit of the spirit of an outing," he wrote to Bea, "almost to the packing of sandwiches." After a half-hour ride, they neared the front and he noticed an odor that was "a good deal like faeces leavened with ripe garbage." When he saw the dead Japanese, he was immediately reminded of "the ape-like charred bodies" in the Boston morgue after the gruesome Coconut Grove fire. His description of one body, which follows, was used in Chapter 7 of Part Two of *Naked*, an account of the search for enemy souvenirs on a battlefield by soldiers in a reconnaissance platoon. These were the first war dead that Mailer encountered.

Another Japanese lay on his back a short distance away with a great hole in his intestines which bunched out in a thick white cluster like a coiled white garden hose. They were surrounded by the very red flesh of his belly, and it seemed curiously like the jettison of some excrement by a red flower. He had an anonymous pleasant face with small snubbed features, and he seemed quite rested in death. His legs had swollen and his buttocks so that they filled his pants tightly as if they were full stockings. Somehow he looked like a little ballet dancer with those curiously full perfect legs, but more like a doll whose stuffing had broken forth.

The army on Luzon could not always come up with hot chow, but books seem to have been available, even new titles. In his early months, Mailer read widely: Spengler in short bursts, each of which occasioned some reflection in a letter; Walter Benton's anthology of love poems, *This Is My Beloved* (1943), which Bea also read; Robert Graves' *I, Claudius* (1934); and Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918). Mailer savored Strachey's portrait of Cardinal Manning for its dissection of papal diplomacy and intrigue. The Catholic Church would continue to fascinate Mailer but, excepting Spengler, it was the work of Somerset Maugham that elicited the most commentary in his letters home.

He found Maugham's 1941 novella, *Up at the Villa*, to be "an unguent for the psyche." Set in Florence in the late 1930s, it is the story of Mary Panton, a young British widow juggling the attentions of three men. She has a one-night stand with one of them, a young Austrian fiddle player, who kills himself with her pistol when she rejects him. Complications ensue. One of the other suitors, a rich "waster" named Rowley Flint, is described as someone who is not "any

better than he should be," a remark that caused Mailer to reflect on the "perpetual oscillation" in himself between the kind of live-and-let-live attitude that would wink at Flint's conduct and a countervailing view which saw

man only as tragic and of large dimensions and universality; when all of his acts of love, so magnificent at the instant, do have permanence and dignity, an individuality as perfect as he believes. But curiously, somewhere in all the twisted crannies of my nature, the two have become mixed, for my good spirits come always from the cynical view, the abstention of judgment, and my depressions are deepest when I take the tragic view.

Maugham's tolerant cynicism made Mailer question his belief that everything was the product of inner drives and outer forces. Perhaps some people were demonstrably better and some obviously worse than they ought to be. Perhaps he could stretch himself. He referred to Maugham's line about Rowley in *The Deer Park* (1955), where Sergius O'Shaugnessy derides it as equivalent to a view of the universe as "an elaborate clock." Mailer's Spinozan determinism, buttressed by Spengler's sense of historic destiny, would persist, however, through the writing of *Naked*.

Barney was working in Washington D.C. at the Office of Price Administration and Mailer wrote to him occasionally. But he wrote his mother and sister about once a week, knowing that Fan would start calling her congressman if she didn't hear from him regularly. In one letter from Luzon, he told her that "there's a wonderful quality in you like that of an unspoiled young girl who's always looking eagerly and zestfully for what's going to happen

next." Barbara has the same quality, he added, but it is "a more timid rather breathless facsimile." When he had returned safely after the war and was sorting through his correspondence while writing *Naked*, he wrote a note on the letter: "At the time, I was in Luzon and probably believed my bullet was being made in some Japanese factory so thought I'd give the old girl something to keep." Men in the 112th were being killed. The unit had 192 casualties during the Luzon campaign, including 41 killed. Mailer was awarded the Combat Infantryman's Badge in early February and began receiving combat pay.

In early April, Mailer wrote Bea that he'd "been in a little combat, nothing very tremendous, but still one of the three or four 'first experiences' a man has." While searching for a wire break in no-man's land, Mailer's patrol of twenty soldiers ran into a Japanese patrol. Mailer stood guard with a few others at a creek crossing while the bulk of the patrol went ahead. Shots were fired in their direction and a Tommy Gun returned fire. Then the largest part of the American patrol returned and reported that ten Japanese had been killed. The American lieutenant in command brought back a shiny, bloody Samurai sword. Mailer reported that when the firing started what he felt was "not exactly fear—it was more, well, 'awareness.' But an awareness so acute that it approached pain and fear." He became adept at carefully unpacking and recording his emotions in every circumstance while in the Philippines, and was able to harvest the nuances when he did the same for a dozen soldiers in *Naked*.

During Mailer's time on Luzon, Barbara's romance with his college buddy, Jack Maher, was percolating. Jack had joined the army but kept writing to her at Radcliffe. Mailer wrote to his mother more than once about their romance, which Fan still ferociously opposed. In late April Mailer wrote to Bea, who was now asked her to intercede with Barney, who heretofore had

sided with Fan on the unhappiness that would ensue if the romance continued. "You must make him realize," he told Bea, "that he'll have no intimacy with his daughter" if he tries to block her life decisions. Fan's opposition to Barbara marrying a *goy* was granitic; she believed she was saving her love-struck daughter's life by her interference. The romance continued long distance and shortly after Mailer returned from the war, Fan overheard Barbara talking to him about Maher. With great bravura, Fan fell to the floor with a heart attack and would not get up to get help until Barbara agreed to break it off. Barbara caved in and except for a few meetings did not see Maher again for over 50 years. She remained angry with her mother—whose attack almost certainly was feigned—and their relations were strained for years to come. Fan's victory, which marked the high water mark of her control over the family, was more than a little Pyrrhic. Norman told Barbara that she acted nobly.



Uppermost in Mailer's mind during this period, however, now that he had seen some combat, were plans for the "ridge novella." Ideas for revising *Transit* still came up in his letters, but as the spring wore on, the new project moved to the fore. He had heard about the mythic eight-day patrol undertaken by a 112th platoon across the upper Angat River in Leyte and his imagination, exercised by the veterans' tales, began to see the novella structured around a long patrol. He thought about beginning it with soldiers on a boat watching a sunset, followed by a "birth allegory," with the patrol moving through thick jungle brush to "emerge into sentience and then fear" as they glimpse the mountain, "ineffable ridge beyond ridge." On April 24, a week after writing Bea of his plans for the novella, Mailer asked for a transfer to the Reconnaissance Platoon of HQ Troop.

The next day, he explained to Bea that he had felt humiliated in his previous assignments. His transfer decision might be seen as "quixotic," he said, but it was the only way to maintain his dignity. "You're doing something when you go out on a patrol that you don't do when you lay a mile of wire." To allay her fears he said that Recon was no more dangerous than the wire job because the platoon's job, some of it in enemy territory, was to gather information, not to fight. General Cunningham used Recon as his intelligence arm. Yes, he told Bea, the unit had lost men in previous campaigns, but on Luzon, it had so far experienced no casualties. He had already been on two patrols and the landscape, the heat and the sweat added up to a good feeling, he said.

Over the next three months, Mailer would make at least 25 patrols, ~~some of them covering 15 miles~~, mainly in the area around the town of Antipolo, 20 miles south of Manila.

Mailer had read John Hersey's Into the Valley (1943) and Harry Brown's A Walk in the Sun (1944) before he arrived in the Philippines, and ~~the germ~~ ^{with these books} of the idea for writing about a patrol originated there. But it was his time in Recon that solidified it. The patrols gave him time to think and plan. "A part of me," he told Steven Marcus in 1963, "was working on this long patrol. I even ended up in a reconnaissance outfit which I had asked to get into. A reconnaissance outfit, after all, tends to take long patrols. Art kept traducing life." It was clear that the Japanese were going to be defeated and "none of us had the slightest desire to be killed in an action which could not even give a good marble of fact to the ponderous idiots who directed our fate." Most platoon leaders, therefore, would not push into potentially dangerous areas unnecessarily. Mailer's sergeant asked his men if they saw any activity through field glasses and if the answer was no, he'd say, "Good, I don't see none either. Let's go back." The platoon enemy activity in the area and a red pin would go into the map. Mailer had al

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Peace and remembered Tolstoy's observation that every army moves on waves of ignorance and misinformation. Recon's troopers often walked miles with their heads down, Mailer said. They would traverse rice paddies, walk through streambeds, climb over hills and return at night "fifteen miles older in the feet, wet twice with rain and sweat." It was grueling, but the novelistic gleanings were rich. *RFM*

Sometimes patrols were accompanied by Communist partisans, the Hukbalahap or "Huks," who had fought the Japanese from the start. One day they found a dead Huk with a Japanese light machine gun in his arms. His Filipino comrades carried him away to their village and Recon platoon went along. Mailer volunteered to carry the 20-pound gun and, as he wrote *Bea*, immediately regretted it. He consulted his letter for the following, taken from a 1952 short story, "The Dead Gook."

[T]he gun had a detestable odor. There was the smell of Japanese fish oil, and the smell of Luiz who had acquired the gun, the smell of a Filipino peasant which to Brody meant carabao flop and Philippine dust and Filipino food, an amalgam not unlike stale soya sauce. Worst of all, there was the odor of Luiz' blood, a particularly sweet and intimate smell, fetid and suggesting to his nostrils that it was not completely dry. It was the smell of a man who had died, and it mingled with the fish oil and the soya sauce and the considerable stench of Brody's own body and Brody's own work-sweated clothes, until he thought he would gag.

His most memorable patrol took place in mid-May. Colonel Philip Hooper, the C.O. of the 112th Cavalry and one of the few officers Mailer admired, gave Recon an important

✓ assignment. According to an intelligence report ~~(later shown to be unreliable)~~, a unit of "crack Japanese marines," perhaps as many as 70, had infiltrated American lines. Recon, with its 30 men, was to find and destroy them. Most of the platoon carried a rifle, two bandoliers of ammunition, a cartridge belt of ammunition, two grenades, two canteens, C-rations and a helmet, about 40 pounds. Mailer, at 130 pounds, said he was in good shape at the time, although he was still recovering from jaundice. Other men carried the machine gun, ammunition boxes containing 250 rounds, and the radio.

X ✓ The platoon was dropped off by jeeps and began walking. Soon they had to climb a 500-foot hill. The footing was ^{miserable} preposterous; they ascended a steep, slimy staircase of waist-high rocks covered with vegetation and surrounded by bamboo thickets with vicious thorns. Quickly, everyone was exhausted. "The most intense ecstasy I could imagine," Mailer said, "would have been to stop climbing." The radio operator was gasping and nauseous. The machine gun crew fell behind. The remaining men, led by Lieutenant Horton, pushed on. Mailer discovered that "you can never plumb the last agony of exertion, there seems always a worse one beneath it." Pride kept him from quitting. The men at the front of the column had the worst of it because they anticipated an ambush at every turn of the trail. After an hour of climbing, at the edge of total collapse, they were attacked. Someone in the front of the column kicked over a nest of hornets and the enraged insects buzzed and stung the entire line. The thrashing, frenzied platoon was cut in half. Mailer and the men in the lead made it to the top; the rest, including those with the machine gun, stumbled down to the valley.

Mailer ended his description of the ordeal to Bea by saying that the hornet patrol was "the kind of experience I never want to become a connoisseur of." But, in fact, it is precisely what he

became: a discriminating observer of war's pains, pangs, fears and throes. As one commentator on *Naked* observed, "[N]o other writer on war has so devastatingly caught the depths of physical tiredness." The climactic chapter in which Sgt. Croft attempts to drive his platoon over Mt. Anaka becomes an odyssey of fear, exhaustion and death. Croft kicks the football-sized nest, derailing Recon's mission to determine if the Japanese could be attacked from the rear. Driven off the mountain, Croft's platoon, like Horton's, collapsed on the muddy ground, twitching. As they rested, it began raining, which brought some relief. Horton radioed back to HQ saying the platoon had hit a hornet's nest and was returning. The duty officer who got the message, said, "What the hell did Horton mean by all of that? Is he speaking of a literal or a metaphorical hornet's nest?" Like other great naturalistic writers—Zola, Crane, Steinbeck—Mailer in *Naked* presents a natural world that is uncaring, unyielding, implacable and, very occasionally, beautiful.

Mailer's erotic letters could be as long and elaborate as his descriptions of patrols. They often had dramatic elements—costumes, props, scene changes—and resemble Jacobean masques as much as pornography. In one letter he describes a small room, heavily curtained and lit by candles. He is dressed only in a robe and Bea has a "black halo, black stockings and shoes and flimsy-like short black panties with no seat, and of course some wisp across your paps." They drink wine and he places an olive in her navel and then lettuce leaves on her breasts which he nibbles. They eat off the same plate, taking bites between embraces.

We go back to finish the raspberry ice, and you straddle me in the chair and my hot hard pride slips into your lubricious embrace. We fuck very gently, and finish the ice, and light cigarettes, and drink more wine, until we glow and become

tumescent so that I must lay you out on the divan, and fuck the shit out of you. Do you like my French mind, darling? Do you love the thought of alternating food nibbles and love nibbles? Am I heating your snatch from 10,000 miles?

Bea's letters to Mailer, while ardent, were more restrained. They were long, supportive and full of plans for the future. Her duty was considerably easier than his and her belief in his potential as a writer was rock-steady. She told him about her friends, family news and sent him portions of the novel that she was writing about life in the Waves. Mailer sent back supportive critiques, but her novel was turned down after the war and she didn't have the desire to continue.

"I gave up writing," she said in 1948. "I found out how hard it was."

from?

m.p. 94. "wasn't bad"

When Bea wrote to him about being heartsick and confused by photographs of war atrocities, asking what it all meant, Mailer gave her two possibilities. Perhaps God was the supreme artist, he said, detached but curious about how the situations and opposition would play out. This deity would resemble "a very intense Somerset Maugham utterly without compassion. Another possibility was that everything was chaos, meaningless, and men killed each other in the same savage way that ants did. Years later, he said to an interviewer, "Remember that awful priest who said, 'There are no atheists in foxholes'? It was a remark to turn people into atheists for 25 years. I remember every time I got into a foxhole I said to myself, 'This is one man who's an atheist in a foxhole!'" He would remain one for another decade.

By late June, the 112th began to relax a bit. The invasion of Japan was at the back of everyone's mind, but it was many months away. Patrols continued, with only occasional contact with the dispirited enemy. Mailer was able to focus more on the novel, especially after he learned

that Seaver was turning down an excerpt from *Transit* for the 1945 *Cross-Section*. He knew the men in Recon well by now and had begun the culling process, choosing his models. He told Bea that this novel would differ from his earlier ones in two respects: he wanted it to grow out of the interaction of his characters with the natural environment, and he intended to pick his characters before he had the plot.

✓ ~~Also~~ ^I In June, Mailer met Francis Irby Gwaltney, or "Fig," a tall, red-haired soldier from Arkansas, who transferred into the 112th. He had not been to college but had literary interests and the night he met Mailer the two sat up all night in a foxhole talking about the novels of Thomas Wolfe. He admired Fig's nasal drawl and his irreverence. They soon became buddies and their friendship deepened when a soldier said something negative about Jews. Fig shouted, "You can't talk that way—I'm Jewish!" The soldier said Gwaltney was no Jew and Fig yelled back, "I am a fuckin' Jew." Fig, Mailer said later, was about as Jewish as George W. Bush. Assigned to Recon, Fig made patrols with Mailer, who he later described as "a brave soldier, but not a good one. He couldn't see worth a damn. Nearsighted." Mailer told Fig about his plans for the novel, but had not yet decided to use him as the model for Wilson, one of the key characters of *Naked*. Fig was the only member of the 112th who Mailer stayed in regular contact with after the war.

In addition to Fig, Sgt. Mann and Gen. Cunningham, Mailer selected four other soldiers as models: Red Matthiesen, Ysidro Martinez, Isadore Feldman and Roy Gallagher, four hyphenated Americans, a Swede, Mexican, Jew and Irishman. He sent Bea a few comments on Feldman, a Brooklyn welder who was the model for Joey Goldstein, but never mentioned Gallagher, the sullen Bostonian whose name he retained. Martinez (Julio in the novel) and Red (Valsen in the novel) were described at length because they were the principals in incidents that

would be plot turns in the novel. Martinez was one of a half dozen sergeants in Recon, and led Mailer's squad. The contradictions in his character attracted Mailer. He was "soft-spoken, sly, deceitful, like an animal in the brush, and demonstrated more courage than any man I've ever known." Terribly fearful and certain he was going to be killed, he nevertheless volunteered repeatedly to lead patrols. He had huge qualms about killing, yet slit the throat of a Japanese soldier in the dead of night, as his namesake ^{does} ~~does~~ in *Naked*.

Mailer had even more to say about Red, and borrowed more of his actual words than from any other soldier. An itinerant worker who rode the rails around the country from 1931 to 1937, Red was often only a few dollars away from hunger. He was in his late 30s when Mailer met him. Uneducated but intelligent, he impressed Mailer with his theology: "If there is a God, He sure must be a son of a bitch." They became friends and the reticent Red eventually told him his life story. He had no allegiances to any individual but huge sympathy for every underdog, including blacks. Fearless and ready to fight anyone who gave him any trouble, he recognized that his kidneys were going and he would soon have to compromise. In *Naked*, a weakened Red is forced to back down by the platoon sergeant who is based—physically, not psychologically—on Sgt. Mann. His name is Sam Croft.

In selecting a soldier as a character mold, Mailer looked for traits that would enable him to put that individual in dramatic situations with others. Obviously, he combined some characters and sculpted the personalities of others. But he began with real soldiers. Thus, the framework of the novel grew by accretion as he sorted through the hundreds of G.I.s he had known. Later, he constructed charts showing which soldiers had scenes with others to ensure that all characters had been used sufficiently and appropriately. "I studied engineering at Harvard, and I suppose it

was the book of a young engineer," he said. The last two major characters (who would not be delineated or given major roles until much later), were the commanding General, eventually called Edward Cummings, and a young second lieutenant, perhaps based in part on Horton, but definitely owing something to Lt. Hilliard in "A Calculus at Heaven." At first he was just called "the second looney" and then later, Robert Hearn. He is the novel's titular hero and he is murdered by Croft, the novel's secret hero.

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By mid-July, fighting on Luzon was effectively over and Mailer was in garrison learning for the umpteenth time the manual of arms, reading Spengler and discussing books with Fig. He was excited about the new G.I. Bill and the 52-20 Club, which would provide veterans with \$20 a week for 52 weeks or until they got a job. Mailer calculated that the two programs would give him and Bea a combined income of about \$300 a month, plus tuition money. In addition, they had already saved \$2,000. She was able to increase her savings rate because she was living with Fan, having transferred to New York. Barney was still in Washington and Barbara in Cambridge. Mailer and Bea discussed living in Boston and taking graduate courses at Harvard. Influenced by Spengler, he was interested in studying comparative religion and history.

There was but one obstacle, but it was stupendous, and studiously avoided in Mailer's letters: the pending invasion of Japan, which was to be the largest amphibious assault in history. Operation Olympic would land 14 divisions on the southern Japanese island of Kyūshū on November 1, 1945. Four months later, using Kyūshū as a base, Operation Coronet would land 25 divisions on the southern shore of the main Japanese island of Honshū and push north 100 miles

to Tokyo. Mailer's outfit, he learned later, was scheduled to land at Tateyama Naval Airdrome on Honshū, which was surrounded by gun emplacements embedded in cliffs surrounding the base on three sides. "We would have been massacred," he said.

The invasion plans became moot when atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki three days apart in early August. The Japanese surrendered on August 15. Approximately 125,000 Japanese died instantly in the two attacks, a figure that within a few months rose to a quarter of a million. Although the casualties were mainly civilians, 10,000 Japanese soldiers were also killed when the first bomb landed on its target, the parade grounds of the Japanese Second Army in Hiroshima. To keep these figures in perspective, one million Allied troops would certainly have died invading Japan, and at least as many Japanese. There was much cheering when news that the Enola Gay had dropped the bomb reached the American troops in the Pacific. On August 8 Mailer wrote to Bea that he approved of anything that got Americans home sooner, but he found the prospects for the future to be horrifying.

He goes on to condemn the sentimental adulation for machines that he had observed, especially among men in the air corps and the navy, and says he feels the same way about machines as his mother does about Jack Maher: "pathological." He ends on a Spenglerian note: "We have come to the age when we love machines and hate women." Mailer's suspicion of all things mechanical and electronic, which would become one of the hallmarks of his worldview, became deep seated and irreversible in August 1945. Twelve years later, he would begin his most famous essay, "The White Negro," by pointing to the ongoing, immeasurable "psychic havoc" created by the combination of the atomic bomb and the concentration camps. He was

perhaps the first writer to link these horrors in an integral way with the suffering and discrimination felt by blacks, the aftermath of slavery.

The invasion force was transformed into an occupation force. Mailer wrote that he was eager to see Japan and curious about the people, having only seen "starved, grinning, irritatingly polite and friendly prisoners." But his comments on Japan, indeed his comments on all topics, (save his novel) were outweighed for some time by speculation about and plans for his homecoming. Using the military's point system, he calculated that he would have sufficient credits to be discharged in about a year. He wrote Bea that he could now think of the months ahead as "milestones instead of a chasm." The knowledge that he was going to survive and that there would be no more campaigns made him think of all the dead, and of the "many summers that had gone by while they had hopes to go home. I could have wept for them."

At the end of August, the 112th sailed on the U.S.S. *Lavaca* (APA 180) for Japan. His ship was with the assembled fleet when the Japanese signed the surrender documents aboard the U.S.S. *Missouri* (BB 63) on September 2. There was a radio hook-up so that everyone could hear the words of Gen. MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz at the ceremony. The 112th was given a place of honor, the 50-yard line, as one trooper put it. All eyes were trained on the *Missouri*'s main deck. Mailer wrote to his parents, "The commentator said, 'Symbolically, the sun has come out and is shining on Tokyo Bay as the surrender is signed and peace is with us.'" This, he said, "was one of the largest, bare-assed lies I'd ever heard." The day was cloudy, with rain threatening. That afternoon the 112th landed at the Tateyama, across the bay from Yokohama.

✕ Mailer's unit was now a constabulary force charged with demobilizing Japanese combat units. Tateyama was on the lip of a mountainous peninsula honeycombed with caves and bunkers connected underground by roads wide enough to accommodate jeeps. For a month, the soldiers detonated munitions and destroyed weapons. As they did their work, they saw the big guns that rolled on rails through tunnels cut to the backside of the mountain. The Japanese ^{planned to} ~~could have~~ elevated the guns and fired over the mountains into the harbor, while remaining unseen and impervious. The troopers shook their heads when they realized how deadly Operation Coronet would have been.

✕ Boredom set in and ^{Mailer} ~~he~~ volunteered to be a cook. Now that fighting was over, he was unemployed as a rifleman, so to speak, and had little to do but stand inspections. He hated the arrogance of Army cooks, but liked the idea of learning to cook. The real incentive, however, was getting every other day off. He captured the raspy relationship between cooks and ~~the~~ soldiers they ~~eat~~ in "Chorus: The Chow Line," one of the comic interludes in *Naked*.

The troops file by in an irregular line As they go by they sniff at the main course which has been dumped in a big square pan. It is canned Meat and Vegetable Stew heated slightly. The second cook, a fat red-faced man with a bald spot and a perpetual scowl, slaps a large spoonful in each of their mess plates.

Red: What the fug is that swill?

Cook: It's owl shit. Wha'd you think it was?

Red: Okay, I just thought it was somethin' I couldn't eat. . . .

OK (17)

OK (18)

OK (16)

OK (20)

OK (15)

Wilson: Ah swear, don't you ration destroyers know another way to fug up this stew?

Cook: "When it's smokin', it's cookin'; when it's burinin', it's done." That's our motto.

Wilson: (chuckling). Ah figgered you all had a system.

Mailer was still a Pfc. (having been promoted a few months earlier), and the chances for further promotion in Recon Platoon were slim. As much as he disliked the army, the idea of a sergeant's stripes on his sleeve—which would come if he became a first cook—was attractive. The mess sergeant liked him, he told Bea, and that augured well.

Despite his exasperation at the delay in getting home, Mailer's time in Tateyama, and later in Choshi, 100 miles north of Tateyama on the Pacific coast, was his happiest time in the military. He quickly mastered the army cooking routine and took pride in his work. Off duty, he explored the cliffs overlooking the ocean and made many notes for what he now referred to as "the jungle novel." And he read widely. For the last half of 1945, a partial list includes Eric Ambler's spy novels, Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* (1944) and Koestler's collection of essays, *The Yogi and the Commissar* (1945). He praised Lillian Smith's novel about the lynching of blacks, *Strange Fruit* (1944), but said it would have been better if it also explored the poor whites who committed the lynching. Her novel ends, he says, with the old question, "Why evil, why, why, why?" His answer: "Evil is not hard to understand. It is difficult only when the explanation tries to establish that it is not fundamental to the nature of man." Charles Jackson's novel of alcoholic abandon, *The Lost Weekend* (1944) terrified him "because I have so much in

common with the hero." He said *Alice in Wonderland* (1866) "indirectly reveals so much of the child's mind, the perfect ease with which it can appreciate incongruity and horror and cruelty," and found French novelist Georges Simenon's *Home Town* (1937), to be magnificent. Over the years, Mailer read and reread hundreds of books by the prolific Simenon, praised his ability to construct tight, believable plots and gave copies of the Inspector Maigret novels to friends. But after Spengler, he had the most to say about Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

He tackled *The Brothers Karamazov* first, reading it at the same time as Bea. He wasn't at all impressed, he said, with the saintliness of Dostoevsky's Alyosha or by any of Tolstoy's peasants in *War and Peace*. The men he had liked in the army because of their goodness struck him even more because of their lack of force. "[T]heir goodness had no radiation," he said. For the "jungle novel," he planned to present each character in the manner of Tolstoy, that is, in "the self-beloved circle of his own mind." He rhapsodized about *Anna Karenina*, finding it to be much greater than *War and Peace*. Throughout his life, he remarked on Tolstoy's deep knowledge of humanity, his severe and unsentimental compassion, which he said later "reminds us that life is like a gladiator's arena for the soul and so we feel strengthened by those who endure, and feel awe and pity for those who do not."

Tolstoy's Kitty reminded him of Bea, and he pictured Anna with Bea's face and body. He recalled their meals at Petitpas, a table d'hôte restaurant on West 29th street where they engaged in "the language of knee against knee." While he aimed for Tolstoyan scope and severity in his writing, his letters to Bea, now that their reunion was certain and near, often gushed with tenderness: "I adore thee sweets. Ever. I miss you as hard and clearly now as I did ten months

ago. I shall never learn to live without you." He would, of course, but he could hardly have foreseen it at the time

Cooking for 160 men in Tateyama was hard physical work. He liked it, felt useful. He put on some weight and hiked on off days. He was now one of the senior men in the 112th, as most of the Texans had rotated home. The unit itself was due to return to Texas in January 1946 and be de-activated. Mailer was suspicious that he might be kept overseas because the military wanted to keep troops in the Far East to counter Russian expansionism. In the meantime, cooking increased his self-confidence. "I feel very strong," he told Bea. "I feel perfectly capable of telling a guy to blow it out his asshole if I don't like what he says." At the end of December 1945, he was transferred to the 649th Ordnance Ammunition Company in Choshi, and when the first cook was sent home, he was made acting first cook. A month later was promoted to sergeant, Tech-4. Although he told his parents that he felt like "a peon in a fascist organization," he had his photo taken in his dress uniform, with his three stripes and combat infantryman's badge, and sent it home to the family.

Around the time he was transferred, one of the key characters of the jungle novel, Sgt. Croft, began to emerge. Mailer called him the "vision sergeant," because of his deep yet inchoate desire to conquer the mountain which loomed over the jungle, and thus attain some communion with the Godhead. Like Moby Dick, the mountain is real and symbolic, and Mailer explicitly compares Croft to Ahab in the same letter in which he describes his sergeant as "an archetype of all the dark, bitter, inarticulate, capable and brooding men that America spawns." He had already told Bea the story he had heard about a sergeant and a private in the 112th who captured a starving Japanese soldier. They gave him water, a K-ration and a cigarette, and when he closed

his eyes, a bullet in the temple. "He died happy," the sergeant said. Mailer now decided that his vision sergeant would be the one to pull the trigger and Red Valsen would be the private. Life was again traducing art; the incident would become one of the episodes that define Croft in *Naked*. Except for a tense change, the description of Croft in the "Time Machine" chapter, given here, comes verbatim from Mailer's letter.

He was efficient and strong and usually empty and his main cast of mind was a superior contempt toward nearly all men. He hated weakness and he loved practically nothing. There was a crude unformed vision in his soul but he was rarely conscious of it.

Mailer's buddies had discovered geisha houses and learned the distinction between a geisha—a woman who entertained, poured sake and in some instances had sex with visitors—and a *joro*, or common whore, who lacked the social graces. Before he was transferred to Choshi, Mailer was taken by his friend Nat Ellis to a geisha house where he made what he called "the time-honored American purchase—a piece of ass." It was the first time he had sex since he last saw Bea in Monterey a year earlier. He went to geisha houses three more times, including once during one of his two visits to Tokyo the following March. He remembered his troubled feelings six decades later:

I had very mixed feelings about fidelity. I thought we should be faithful; I wanted her [Bea] to be faithful to me, I'd go crazy at the thought she might be having an affair. As it turned out later, I think she did have a few unhappy, little affairs—unhappy in the sense that they were to her in her mind not quite right—I

was having the same with the geisha girls. Just one or two, and it wasn't right and I didn't feel very virile because I was violating my own standards of, oaths of fidelity. And what I discovered is that an oath has a great influence upon a hard-on. You know, don't give an oath and think your hard-on can ignore it. It can't. That I learned early and never really learned it.

Mailer was unfaithful in each of his six marriages; he was a serial philanderer and his affairs caused him and his family much misery over the next fifty years. But that night in Tateyama, when he returned to the barracks, he felt guilty and empty, as he told Bea when he confessed the next day.

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From September of 1945 to February of 1946, Mailer's discharge date changed almost weekly. He ~~calculated and re-calculated his points~~; followed the changing promises of the War Department and watched the news as servicemen all over the world complained and demonstrated for early release. Mailer encouraged his mother and mother-in-law, two formidable Jewish matrons, to lobby on his behalf, and they did. By the beginning of March, Mailer was all but certain that he would be home sometime in April.

Planning the logistics for writing the novel was already underway. He wrote to Fan and gave her instructions on the kind of portable typewriter he wanted ^{and} she asked Bea to separate out all his letters dealing with the novel. Given the centrality of the mountain to his novel, he said it would be important to do some mountain climbing, perhaps in North Conway, where they had skied. Provincetown in the summer would be the perfect place to write, and Bea began to look

for a suitable place. All the while, plans for the novel spilled out in profusion. He sketched an outline of the events leading to the War and Roosevelt's brilliance in mobilizing the country. With the passing of the President—"a great humanist"—Mailer feared there would be "a fascist backwash" in America after the war, given America's victories and enormous power. He wanted this perspective to be the novel's geopolitical backdrop.

He wrote out the names of 161 soldiers he had known since he had been in the army. He had already selected eight of his principal characters, but needed more and wanted the largest possible pool from which to draw. He wanted his Recon platoon to have 30-40 soldiers in it, but got worried about the number he could include without confusion, and began counting the number of significant characters in novels at hand. When he found that there were only 16 in a novel he admired, Liam O'Flaherty's *The Informer* (1925), he concluded that he would ~~have to~~ limit his roster to 15. ~~In point of fact,~~ he ended up with a total of 14 enlisted men as significant characters in *Naked*'s Recon platoon. Only three officers—Gen. Cummings, Lt. Hearn and Major Dalleson—have important roles.

Looking back over his reading of the past year, he selected four books as models. He said he wanted to reread them before he started writing what he thought would be a novel of 90 to 100 thousand words, a huge underestimation. *Naked* is over 300,000 words long. The first book on his list is *The Informer*, a tightly written story of betrayal and animalistic fear in the aftermath of the Irish Civil War. He ~~wanted~~ ^{prized} it for its deft one or two-paragraph character portraits. Simenon's *Hometown* was next, ~~prized~~ ^{admired} for its "insights into the weakly Evil, the men who are small of soul & afraid rather than malign." Albert Maltz's 1944 novel, *The Cross and the Arrow*, set in wartime Germany, is the story of a factory worker, ~~Willi Wegler~~, who perseveres as the

✓ X
Nazi regime begins to devour its own. Mailer wanted to study Maltz's presentation of ~~the~~ stubborn nobility. Finally, he planned to read *Anna Karenina* again in order "to steep myself in a good humanistic mood."

✓ X
Mailer was sent to Onahama, another hundred miles up the Pacific coast, in late January on temporary assignment; ~~he was acting~~ ^{as} mess sergeant for 25 men. At the end of February, he returned to Choshi, where he reported to a more senior mess sergeant. He had excellent relations with his Japanese K.P.s in all of his cooking assignments. "I don't know if it's Harvard or Aunt Nan's instruction in table manners," he told Bea, "but I cannot treat a person as a servant." The K.P.s worked 12-hour days, seven days a week but they considered themselves fortunate because they ate well. Mailer was a kindly boss. The spokesman of one K.P. group said to him: "Sair, there are much joyiness in the hearts of the kitchen boys since you have come to be cook here." Mailer enjoyed joking with them in Japanese, which he had learned a bit of. He also enjoyed writing "Sgt." before his name on the return address of his letters. He kept thinking how nice his stripes would look when he returned to Brooklyn. Later on, after he lost them, he told Bea that he had gotten too proud of them.

✓ X
On the night of April 3, Mailer was awakened by the mess sergeant. The K.P.s had left the kitchen in a mess, and he ordered Mailer to clean it up. Mailer called him a chicken-shit son-of-a-bitch and the sergeant stomped out. Mailer was summoned to the captain's office. Drunk and angry, he ordered Mailer to apologize to the mess sergeant and threatened to court martial him when he argued back. Mailer apologized and, throbbing with self-loathing, walked out. "I hated him [the Captain] enough to kill him then," he said. After a sleepless night, Mailer decided he'd turn in his stripes, which made him feel better. But the next day when he told the captain he

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 was turning in his stripes, the captain replied with some heat, "You're not turning them in, I'm taking them." Later, the mess sergeant told him the captain had no intention of demoting him until Mailer opened his mouth. Mailer told Bea that his only solace was to feel the joy of complete renunciation. "Sweet Sarge is Poor Private again," he said. He left the army the way he came in, as a buck private.

The moment when the captain took away his sergeantcy, Mailer said later, "was when the keel was laid for *The Naked and the Dead*." He transformed the "crawfishing" incident into the pivotal confrontation between Gen. Cummings and Lt. Hearn, which leads indirectly to Hearn's death. But this came much later, in the final draft of *Naked*. Mailer's immediate response to the event was to write Bea a letter outlining an episode in which Red Valsen commits an offense similar to his own and is court martialed. Valsen's hatred of officers is so intense that it becomes a blind spot in his otherwise fair-minded outlook. Mailer was not much different in this regard. Even in his old age, he would snap at some slight by saying, "You sound like an officer!"

In this last letter home in April, he announced to Bea that he had received travel orders. A week after he was on his way to the 4th Replacement Depot in Yokohama. When he arrived there, he ran into his buddy from basic training and Ft. Ord, Clifford Mascovsky, who now was a master sergeant. When Mailer saw his rank, he said, "Whose ass did you kiss to get those stripes?" The two friends were both aboard the U. S. S. *U.S. Grant* (AP 29) when it left with a thousand-plus G.I.s for the U.S. on April 26, arriving at Ft. Lawton, near Seattle, a week later.

X ✓ Mascovsky was Sergeant of the Guard on the crossing and Mailer asked him for a good detail so he could avoid guard duty. Mascovsky generously put him in charge of candy distribution, a soft job. He read *Anna Karenina* for the third time on the voyage.

By the time they arrived, Mailer had given away all of his medals, even his combat infantryman's badge, ~~which he had prized~~. He was the only buck private on the train from Seattle to Ft. Dix. There was a final ignominy; everyone on the train was drinking and horsing around, and Mailer got into a fight with a much bigger G.I. who broke his nose. On May 2, having served two years, one month and six days, he was given an honorable discharge and mustering-out pay of \$117.91. He got on the train and "went home like a stripped duck."

Mailer often said that the army had been the worst experience of his life, and the most valuable. Trained as a fire control operator, he served consecutively as a clerk, aerial photography trainee, shower builder, wire lineman, rifleman, laundryman, cook, and mess sergeant. Shot at several times, he shot back but probably killed no one. He was demeaned, ignored, humiliated, busted and tested to a fare thee well. By his own admission, he was "the third lousiest guy in a platoon of 12." But he survived 25 reconnaissance patrols and grew as a man and an artist. He knew his army. He summed up his situation concisely in a letter to Bea halfway through his tour: "You know really my only decent function as a man is to be a lover and/or an author." Sustained by his wife, his family and a sturdy belief in his vocation, he was now prepared to become a full-time writer, the only line of work, besides soldiering, he ever followed for more than a couple of months. "Throughout most of the Great Wet Boot which was World War II for me," he wrote,

I kept a cold maniacal thing in my heart, sharp as a shiv. I would listen to other G.I.s beating their gums about how when they got out they were going to write a fugging book which would expose the fugging army, and I would think in my

fatigue-slowed brain that if they only knew what I was going to do, they would elect me sergeant on the spot.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

The night of his homecoming, Bea and ex-private Mailer went to a Brooklyn Heights hotel. The "unguent" of Bea's breasts, as he said in his letters, was all he needed to heal his ego bruises. The hotel was expensive, however, and after a week they moved into the family's apartment down the street. The Mailer clan lavished solicitude ~~for the favorite son~~ and Fan cooked pot roast for him. After a few weeks, he was eager to begin writing, but before they left for Provincetown, Mailer made an appointment with the senior editor at Random House, Robert N. Linscott, who had found merit in *Transit*. Mailer told the white-haired editor his idea for the novel, and the kindly Linscott said, "Oh, dear boy, don't, don't, write a war novel. We've over-published war novels and you won't be able to get a publisher." Mailer was unsettled by this advice, but knew he had no choice. "[I]t was the only book I had in me, and I had to write it." The other supportive person was Adeline Naiman.

Adeline was the former Radcliffe roommate of Bea's sister, Phyllis, and had become a good friend of Barbara Mailer. The Silverman sisters, Barbara, her friend Rhoda Wolf and Adeline had created what Mailer called "the Norman legend" during the War. After Adeline was hired as a junior editor at Little, Brown, she began corresponding with Mailer in Japan and asked if she could see *Transit*, adding that she believed he was going to be a great writer. By then, Mailer had decided it was a badly flawed work, and replied he would only consent to publication if no changes were requested and it appeared under a *nom de plume*. There the matter rested until

mid-June when Mailer, Bea and his mother went to visit the Silvermans in Chelsea, and a luncheon meeting with Adeline and her mother at the Oxford Grill in Cambridge was arranged. Adeline remembers being disappointed by a slight, short young man "who wasn't dashingely articulate." Mailer was knocked back by her cultivation; he estimated she had read three times as much as he had. "She was a real name dropper, culturally speaking . . . very sure of herself. Full of stuff, full of vitamins," he recalled. Although he was uncharacteristically reserved at the luncheon, he did tell her about the new novel and they agreed to stay in touch. ^{She} ~~Adeline~~ became a life-long friend.

After the luncheon, Mailer and Bea took the train to Provincetown. Bea had arranged to rent a cottage. The Mailers thought that the Crow's Nest Bungalows, as the double row of beachfront cottages were called, were in Provincetown, but they were actually a half mile over the line in North Truro. They had no car and pedaled bikes into Provincetown to go shopping. Mailer immediately fell into a routine, writing from eleven to six on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. Fan, Barney and Barbara came up for a week in July, and the Silvermans also visited, but the young couple didn't socialize much. ~~They came to work.~~ By the end of August, Mailer had a 184-page typescript.

It had always been a baseline assumption that there would be no hero in *Naked*. This is clear from the sheaf of letters Bea had pulled together, close to 100, from his overseas correspondence. There were as many comments on Martinez, Red and Wilson as on Croft, but fewer on Gen. Cummings and Lt. Hearn. Mailer was writing an ensemble novel, about an under-strength reconnaissance platoon. Each soldier would have his time in the spotlight and would interact, more or less, with every other soldier. Mailer also intended to write about officers,

drawing on his experience as a regimental clerk. By the time he reached Provincetown, he had a 4 x 6 card for each major character, the front side giving a baker's dozen of the soldier's traits and the backside outlining his history. For example, the front of General Cummings' card lists: "love of planning & chess, ambition, love of wife, weight of responsibility, love of ease and luxury, maintenance of manner (bonhomie), wise hard knowledge of men, fear (pressure from the top), love of army ethical system, snobbery." The back of Red's card gives his year of birth (1912) and his jobs: "coal miner 1927-1930; hobo, 1930-31—sporadic, 1931-41; short order cook, shingler, plumber, harvester, flop house keeper, painter, truck driver, tailor." All of these occupations are mentioned in Red's "Time Machine" episode; he doesn't change markedly from Mailer's first conception of him. Cummings, on the other hand, while retaining some of the traits listed, underwent a major transformation. He becomes more intellectual, Spartan, sadistic and, most important, more reactionary. And, by the final draft, he has no love for his wife. He tells Hearn, "The truth is, Robert, my wife is a bitch." Mailer makes Cummings a homosexual, as he later stated.

In addition to the cards, which contain the names of the men on whom they are based, Mailer drew up various charts detailing the interactions of the men in Croft's platoon. It is comprised largely of men from all around the country, lower and middle-class who have been beaten down, first by the Depression, and next by the army. Eight of the platoon (Croft, Valsen, Martinez, Gallagher, Wilson, Brown, Stanley and Toglio) are veterans of the disastrous preceding campaign at the (fictional) island of Motome, where the Japanese blasted them out of their rubber assault rafts with anti-aircraft guns. The other five members of the platoon are green replacements: Ridges, a dirt farmer from Arkansas; Roth, an unathletic Jew from New York who

falls to his death climbing Mt. Anaka, the peak that dominates the island; Goldstein, a welder from Brooklyn; Wyman, another Midwesterner; Minetta, a malingerer from New Jersey; and Czienwicz, a petty criminal from Chicago known to all as "Polack." Mailer was careful in how he allotted space to his characters. The backgrounds of eight of the fourteen enlisted men (Martinez, Croft, Valsen, Gallagher, Wilson, Goldstein, Brown and Polack), and two officers (Cummings and Hearn), are given in "Time Machine" flashbacks, a device adapted from the biographical chapters in John Dos Passos' *U. S. A.* The others are revealed in conversation or via Mailer's omniscient narrator, who presents the thoughts of nearly every named character in the novel, more than two dozen. Critics have argued, with some justice, that some of the profiles (Brown and Polack, in particular) are stereotypical, although Mailer has been praised for others, generally those that his own background enabled him to handle more surely (Roth, Goldstein, Gallagher and Hearn). On the other hand, most readers agree that the "Time Machine" device is helpful in understanding the actions of the men under duress. They are socio-sexual in nature, again revealing the influence of D.H. Lawrence. The soldiers carry their carnal fears and desires with them, another weight in their backpacks. Mailer saw the biographies as "bi-functional": they illumine motivation and provide pace. Mailer explained one of his guiding beliefs for *Naked*: "One was the product of one's milieu, one's parents, one's food, one's conversations, one's dearest and/or most odious human relations. One was the sum of one's own history as it was cradled in the larger history of one's time." So while there is justice in saying some of the characters are stock and predictable, it is not true of Cummings and Hearn; their heavily worked intellectual conversations "show something of the turn my later writing would take," Mailer said. The two officers and, arguably, Croft and Goldstein, are dynamic characters who change in unforeseen ways in the crucible of jungle warfare.

Roth's original name was Frankenheim. Mailer changed it to Rothberg and finally to Roth—a name, like Mailer, that has been anglicized. He is a graduate of City College of New York, and worked in the city's real estate tax office. The only enlisted man in his outfit with a college education, he is also the only character with a 4 x 6 card that has no "Time Machine" episode. Sensitive, lazy and depressed, Roth is the martyred Jew in the novel. Like Mailer, he is recently married. One reason, it can be surmised, why Mailer eschewed a "Time Machine" biography for Roth is to avoid having two New York Jews profiled. The other, perhaps, is so comparisons to his creator would not be as easy to make. There is no mention of a Roth, a Rothberg or a Frankenheim in Mailer's master list of soldiers, in his letters, or the recollections of others in the 112th. But Mailer was not drawing a self-portrait. As with characters in several of his later novels—Steven Rojack in *An American Dream*, most notably—Roth is a fictional first cousin at best.

A meeting with Adeline was arranged for early September, and Bea and Mailer took the morning ferry across the bay to Boston. He brought his first draft and Adeline sequestered herself to read it, finishing in the late afternoon. Her brief report, written that same day, stated boldly that the novel "is going to be the greatest novel to come out of World War II and we must publish it." Mailer remembers it as an "incredible document." She followed her spontaneous encomium about ten days later with a formal assessment, in which she outlined the novel's loose plot and lauded "the author's marvelous sense of spoken language rhythms and the colloquial idiom." In her conclusion she warns that if the novel is not accepted, "we are passing up the first really important novel to come out of the war and a potentially tremendous author." She predicted that the novel could sell as many as 7,300 hundred copies, a large number for a first

X ✓ but far below its actual
 novel, ~~She was in gross error on sales figures.~~ *Naked* sold 130,000 copies in hardback in its first eight months in print. She was the first professional to see the importance of *Naked*.

X ✓ When Angus Cameron, Little, Brown senior editor read it, he was impressed but troubled by the strong language. Raymond Everitt, executive vice president, had the same response. It went to the president, Alfred McIntyre, and he was insistent: a major expurgation would be required. At this point, it was decided to get an outside opinion. The nod went to Bernard DeVoto, a Pulitzer-Prize winning historian of the American West and a Mark Twain scholar. Adeline had heard that the literary guru had a foul mouth and she happily agreed to the choice.

Meanwhile, Mailer was getting irritated. He wrote a long letter to Adeline pointing the patrol's attempt to climb Mt. Anaka as the novel's spine, and stating that it would first and foremost be "a piece of realism." He made two more key points. First, the novel would be anti-war, although indirectly: "The terrible subtle evil of war on men is in every page." Second, it would be "a romantic novel concerned with the extraordinary." He continued:

There are going to be troubling terrifying glimpses of order in disorder, of a horror which may or may not lurk beneath the surface of things. Remember when Hennessey is killed, and Croft and Red and Martinez all have primitive glimpses of a structure behind things? That emotion will be recurrent although warped into the style of each man's perceptions. It's the old business of man constructing little tag-ends of a God for himself in his moral wilderness. In war, it's more direct, more impacting on the senses—there is always a familiar unreality to everything

you see and do, except for the occasional chilling moments when you feel as if you're on the edge of a deeper knowledge.

Mailer's comment about the structure behind the Anopopei campaign, his rough-hewn sense that there was intentionality behind the pasteboard masks of things, was ignored by everyone at the time, and not really noticed by readers or critics after it was published. He told Harvey Breit in 1951 that he was on "a mystic kick" when he wrote *Naked*; the primary influence on the novel was *Moby-Dick*, he said. But ~~the step-by-step determination of the~~ thick, textured realism, and the awesome power of nature, overwhelmed the subtle intimations felt by Croft and others. Mailer did not forget, however, the transcendentalism he first encountered in Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*. It would come to the fore a decade later.

DeVoto's six-page critique, which Mailer received at the end of October, echoed what everyone at Little, Brown, including Adeline, had said. DeVoto did not question verisimilitude of Mailer's obscenity; he questioned its effectiveness. He found it offensive and boring and said it would undercut any real consideration of the novel as a work of art. If published without severe pruning, he said, "it is certain to be prosecuted and suppressed in Massachusetts." He allowed that it would be a mistake not to make an investment in Mailer, but that was all the enthusiasm he could muster. DeVoto made one further criticism: the general and his aide, were the "least live characters" in the manuscript and needed to be reconceived, individualized.

In the face of these criticisms, all Little, Brown was willing to discuss was an option contract for a few hundred dollars. This meant that they could reject the book out of hand no

matter what changes were made. Mailer wasn't ready yet to break off negotiations, however, and told Adeline that he was definitely willing to write a second draft. In regard to Cummings and Hearn, he said, "DeVoto's criticism is essentially sound." He added that the option offered was a miserly hedging of the firm's bet. Although he felt "weak and battered" by the rain of negative comments, he ended by saying that "the best part of the book is to come. There's a chapter I've written since I've come home [from Massachusetts] which has about forty of the best pages ever written by an American. Sayonara, Norman."

Mailer was almost certainly referring to the longest, most vivid episode in the first third of the novel, the Japanese night attack at the river. Recon withstands a lengthy and intense assault, with Croft rallying his platoon each time it falters. Before the first wave attacks, the Japanese call, again and again, across the river:

'We you coming-to-get, Yank.'

He shivered terribly for a moment, and his hands seemed congealed on the machine gun. He could not bear the intense pressure in his head.

'We you coming-to-get Yank,' the voice screamed.

'COME AND GET ME YOU SONSOFBITCHES,' Croft roared. He shouted with every fiber of his body as though he plunged at an oaken door. There was no sound at all for perhaps ten seconds, nothing but the moonlight on the river and the taut rapt buzzing of the crickets. Then the voice spoke again. 'Oh, we come, Yank, we come.'

Croft pulled back the bolt on the machine gun, and rammed it home. His heart was still beating with frenzy. 'Recon . . . RECON, UP ON THE LINE,' he shouted with all his strength [. . .]

In the light of the flare the Japanese had the stark frozen quality of men revealed by a shaft of lightning. Croft no longer saw anything clearly; he could not have said at that moment where his hands ended and the machine gun began; he was lost in a vast moil of noise out of which individual screams and shouts etched in his mind for an instant. He could never have counted the Japanese who charged across the river; he knew only that his finger was rigid on the trigger bar. He could not have loosened it. In those few moments he felt no sense of danger. He just kept firing.

Mailer probed more deeply into the psyches of Sgt. Croft and Gen. Cummings than he did with any of his other characters. DeVoto's critique made him realize that his initial depiction of them was trammled by their pre-determined traits. They are the only two characters in the novel who believe that they can affect events, the only two who feel they have the inner sanction to act. Croft is best seen as Cummings' demonic underling—what Fedallah is to Ahab—although the two never interact, or even meet.

Mailer was educated by Croft, much as Shakespeare drew on Brutus for Hamlet. Marion Faye, Mailer's hipster hero for a post-Hiroshima world in *The Deer Park* derives from Croft, as do Rojack in *An American Dream* and Gary Gilmore in *The Executioner's Song*, among others. Mailer was profoundly fascinated by Croft because his Texas sergeant was trying to get to the

bottom of his own violent and divided nature. "I hate everything which is not in myself," Croft says at the end of his "Time Machine" episode. He despises everyone who is weak, phony, lazy or undisciplined. Close to psychotic, he is ~~not~~ the finest soldier in the outfit. Robert Ehrlich points out that Croft's portrait is in line with D.H. Lawrence's description of the American psyche: "hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer."

Intellectually, Mailer disapproved of Croft's violence but on another level found him to be the character for whom he had "the most secret admiration." Croft is a test case; Mailer wanted to see how he might channel his violence, and if he could plumb it or sate it or even transcend it. As Alfred Kazin noted of the novel, "[K]illing and being killed become forms of intoxication that get people out of their usual selves—always a prime motive in Mailer." Ostensibly, the assault on Mt. Anaka is to determine if there is a way to outflank the Japanese, but it soon becomes apparent that Croft's crazy attempt is a way of satisfying the "crude unformed vision in his soul." When he is driven off the mountain by the hornets, he is relieved to have found "a limit to his hunger," but nevertheless feels that he has "missed some tantalizing revelation of himself. Of himself and much more. Of life. Everything."

Except for "The Time Machine" episodes, the novel's action is confined to the island. This locus gave Mailer tremendous narrative concentration. The reader, ~~with hindsight~~, knows that the island will be eventually taken. It must, historically, because the Japanese were defeated on one island before the Americans jumped to the next and the next, moving inexorably up to the Philippine archipelago and then to Japan itself. This focus also imposes a constrained time scheme; we know that the Cummings' island campaign will not stretch on endlessly. As on Prospero's magical isle, the characters will arrive, be transformed, and depart.

Maj. General Edward Cummings invades Anopopei with a 6,000-man force. Shaped like an ocarina, the island is 150 miles long by 50 miles wide, tapering at the ends. The ocarina's mouthpiece, a peninsula where Cummings lands his troops after naval and air bombardment, juts out about 20 miles from the northwest quadrant of the island, as depicted on the line drawing in every edition of the novel. Following the book's title pages, this drawing is the first thing that readers encounter, which is Mailer's way of emphasizing landscape as a defining circumstance in the novel. When we have finished *Naked*, we know Mailer's island as intimately as Prospero's or Crusoe's

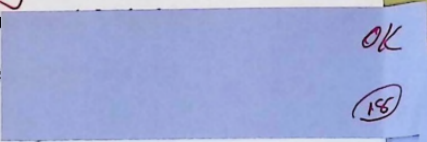
Anopopei, for Cummings, is a steppingstone to the apex of political power in the semi-fascistic state he envisions the U.S. becoming. Such a state was Mailer's worst nightmare; like many ex-GIs he worried that World War II would be followed by war with Russia. "General Cummings," Mailer said in an interview shortly after *Naked* was published, "articulates a kind of unconscious bent in the thinking of the Army brass and top rank politicians. He's an archetype of the new man, the coming man, the one who's really dangerous." Winston Churchill gave his "Iron Curtain" speech the month before Mailer left Japan, and during the 15 months he was writing the novel the Soviets were seizing power in Eastern Europe. The Cold War was underway. Mailer felt that "people in our government were leading us into war again. The last half [of *Naked*] was written on this nerve right in the pit of my stomach."

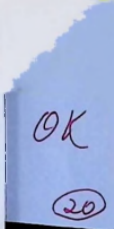
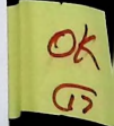


The Mailers returned to Brooklyn in September and rented an apartment at 49 Remsen Street, just around the corner from his parent's place on Pierrepont. During the negotiations with

Little, Brown, Bea mentioned a Brooklyn Heights poet she had met during the War; his name was Norman Rosten and she thought he might be able to help. Mailer met him on the street one day in October and they connected. Rosten had published two books with Rinehart Press, but didn't take on any airs. Mailer described what he learned from Rosten: "You could be a published writer and still be comfortable." It turned out that they both knew Ar
lived in the same brownstone as Fan and Barney, and was writing a new play—
Salesman. When Miller and Mailer would bump into each other, Mailer said, "We would talk and then we'd go away, and I know he was thinking what I was, which was, 'That other guy is never going to amount to anything.'" The paths of the three Brooklyn writers crossed many times in later years, and all three were involved with Marilyn Monroe. Miller married her; Rosten became a confidante; Mailer wrote her biography.

Rosten suggested that Mailer meet his editor at Rinehart, Ted Amussen. Mailer, of course, knew Amussen from before the War, but had lost contact. In early November, the two Normans took the subway to Rinehart's Manhattan offices, and Mailer gave Amussen his manuscript, now at least 100 pages longer and including the fire at the river. He also gave him a copy of Lub's ecstatic editorial report and told him, somewhat angrily, "If you give me a contract, you can have it." Amussen ran into some opposition, but got the contract. It was Stanley Rinehart, the president and co-founder (with John Farrar) of the firm who made the final decision, overriding his editor-in-chief, John Selby. Amussen told Rinehart that he'd be a "damn fool if you don't sign it up." A young editor named William Raney was supportive of Amussen, and ended up being the editor that Mailer worked with the most at the publishing house. The advance was \$1250, which was on the high side for a first novel.

Before Mailer's contract was signed, he had to attend a profanity conference. Amussen and Raney were there and the two Johns—as Mailer called them—Selby and Farrar. It is possible that Stanley Rinehart also attended. Mailer agreed to reduce the profanity to “the irreducible minimum,” which meant that an estimated one-fifth of the obscene language would be cut, and the remaining, unwritten part of the novel would use fug and shit and cock and pussy in the same proportions. This reduction was deemed sufficient to placate Rinehart's mother, the celebrated mystery writer, Mary Roberts Rinehart, who was on the firm's board. MB 11/43  OK 18 took over as NM's chief contact.

In the summer of 1947, Mailer rented Rosten's one-room garret studio at 20 Remsen Street. Bea was writing her novel in their apartment and he needed a quiet place to revise his, based in part on Raney's critique. Mailer also received feedback from family members—his sister, Cy and Ossie, Dave and Anne, his parents and, of course, Bea. Living at 20 Remsen was another literary man, Charles Devlin, who became the model for McLeod, one the chief characters of Mailer's second novel, *Barbary Shore*. “A saturnine Irishman,” as Mailer described him, Devlin had long, literary conversations with the younger man, who remembered him as “a dear friend.” Devlin read the manuscript of the novel when it was done and criticized it severely. “It's a better book than I thought it would be, but you have no gift for metaphor,” 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, and have lived no life.” Mailer never forgot Devlin's lecture, and worked hard on his tropes ever after.  OK 20  OK 17

An unpublished, impecunious writer of the James T. Farrell school, Devlin was a good editor. Mailer hired him for a month at \$50 a week to edit *Naked* because he was running up against a deadline. ^{MLT 107} The manuscript, originally due in August, now had to be turned in by the end of September to meet Rinehart's publication date of May 1948, and Mailer and Bea planned to go to Europe as soon as the manuscript was submitted. Devlin suggested many cuts and advised Mailer not to use the word "very" so much. "He could be abrupt, sometimes cruel in his criticism," Mailer said, "because he had a thoroughgoing, ongoing, viable philosophy that he wrapped about himself." ^{MLT 107} Yet, they got along. When Mailer was in the throes of writing *The Deer Park* in 1953, he wrote to Devlin and recalled their back-and-forth: "Oh, for the good old days of *Naked* when Bob Hope Devlin used to say to Mailer Colonna, 'You can't use that four hundred pages—they're no good,' and Norman Colonna would say cheerfully, 'I can't?' (Quick look at his watch.) 'I have three days before I go to Europe. Okay, boys, tear her down.' Thrommmp!" Mailer's confidence was such, he said, that if the novel needed "the Shah of Brat-mah-phur to make an entrance, I'd run to the library, read fifty pages on Hindu philosophy, and come back ready to enter the Shah's mind." Unlike his next two novels, *Naked* was easy to write.

Buttressed by his letters to Bea, his 4 x 6 cards, his charts, and vivid memories of Luzon, Mailer surged along, completing the first draft in spring of 1947 and starting on the second. This draft, which he said was "a bonus," was almost 100 pages longer and included the nuanced ideological debates between the general and his aide. His style shifted in these scenes, became "less forceful and more articulated." The last thing he wrote was the "crawfish" scene in which Lt. Hearn is ordered to pick up a crushed cigarette the General has thrown down. He does but is still reassigned to take over Recon platoon from Croft. Without these additions, Mailer said,

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Naked "would have been considered an interesting war novel, with some good scenes." He wrote four days a week, five hours a day, producing about 30 typed pages a week. In the mornings, he would usually read a few pages of *Anna Karenina* before starting; in the afternoons, he would prime himself with a can of beer.

Mailer's family was around the corner and he was able to take days off to go to the beach or to a baseball game. Jackie Robinson, the player who broke the color barrier in big league baseball, was playing his first season as a Dodger, and Mailer said it was the most exciting year Brooklyn fans could remember. Occasionally, he would meet with a group of writers at the Manhattan apartment of Millie Brower, his old friend from Long Branch, where works-in-progress were read aloud. Mailer hired Millie's husband, Harvey Anhalt, to produce a clean copy of the *Naked* manuscript, after the changes suggested by Devlin had been made, paying him \$150 to type the 900-plus page monster. On New Year's Eve, 1947, Barbara gave a party at her parent's apartment. Among those attending were Allison Laurie, her college classmate. She was amazed to see how jolly Mailer was; most of the writers she knew were anxious and unhappy. Barbara said that her brother's success seemed at the time "both miraculous and ^{totally} expected."

Sometime in the weeks before the party, Mailer took a break from writing to make a film. He had seen two of Fritz Lang's classic horror films, *M* (1931) and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933), before he was drafted, and after the war, he saw a number of surrealist films such as Jean Cocteau's *Blood of the Poet* (1930) at the Museum of Modern Art. Over the course of a week, Mailer and Harvey Anhalt made ^{an eleven-} ~~a nine-~~ minute, silent, experimental film, shot with a camera bought by Dave Kessler. According to film critic Michael Chaiken, who helped restore the untitled film, it is quite well done for an amateur effort. Chaiken says Mailer makes use of

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 "several in-camera tricks: lap dissolves, stop motion, iris-ing of the lens. Also, thematically, it's fairly bold for its time. A young, middle class girl, played by Millie Brower, is held in a trance state of dread over an unwanted pregnancy as she contemplates abortion. The repressive atmosphere of her domestic life is brought into relief by her inability to connect to her family who sit at the dinner table and eat robotically." It was the beginning of a filmmaking career that would resume in 1967, when Mailer made the first of three experimental films.

At some point in the writing of *Naked*, Mailer and Bea attended an adult education class in which the professor outlined all the major theories of history. He then said, "I think we Jews have a separate theory of history which I would call the catastrophic theory of history." It was a form of history, he said, "that the Jews knew all too well." While Mailer was long past the point of specifically applying the theory to *Naked*, it definitely resonated with him, as he wrote in a 1997 letter. The conclusion of *Naked* might be seen as a manifestation of this theory, although the endurance and sacrifice shown by the men on the platoon, especially ~~Ridges and Goldstein~~, qualifies the impact of the chain of suffering in the last quarter of the novel.

In response to criticism that that novel paints a bleak picture of humanity, Mailer offered the following, shortly after publication:

Actually, it offers a good deal of hope. I intended it to be a parable about the movement of man through history. I tried to explore the outrageous proportions of cause and effect, of effort and recompense, in a sick society. The book finds man corrupted, confused to the point of helplessness, but it also finds that

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limits beyond which he cannot be pushed, and it finds that even in his corruption and sickness there are yearnings for a better world.

At the end, the men move off to a new island campaign. Soon they will be in the Philippines and six months later the war will be over. The reader gets the sense that while the campaign and the novel have been conclusive, and the men tested in the harshest ways without succumbing, they will now face new challenges. The Japanese on Anopopei have been utterly vanquished, and American casualties have been comparatively light, but what lies ahead in the peacetime world is uncertain. The experience of being at war and writing about it led Mailer to develop a corollary to his anti-war belief, as Alfred Kazin has pointed out, one that would plague him ever after: "[W]ar may be the ultimate purpose of technological society." The corollary would become the chief premise of his next novel.

Mailer worked past the deadline, making changes to the novel right to the end of September when it was submitted to Bill Raney at Rinehart. Both novelist and editor would continue working on its final shape long distance, as Mailer and Bea were leaving for Paris. After an October 1 *bon voyage* party at 102 Pierrepont, they boarded the R.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth* for the crossing.

Chapter 4

Paris and Hollywood: Prominent and Empty

The Mailers shivered through their first few weeks in Paris. They were staying at the Hôtel de l'Avenir, at 65 Rue Madam, on the Left Bank of the Seine, not far from the Luxembourg Gardens. Their room, with a fold-up Murphy bed and a bathroom down the hall, cost one dollar a day. About the time that they began French classes at the Sorbonne, they moved a short distance to a three-room apartment at 11 Rue Bréa, a few blocks from the intersection of the Blvd. Montparnasse and the Blvd. Raspail—a part of Paris that Hemingway knew well. Mailer said the three-room apartment, for which they paid *less* than a dollar a day, had red wallpaper, an orange rug and a bathtub in the kitchen. It was small, but warmer than the hotel, and the Sorbonne, where they began classes in early November, was only a short walk. His most vivid memory of his early months in Paris was walking the streets conjugating subjunctive verbs.

Along with several hundred other ex-G.I.s, the Mailers were enrolled in *Le Cours de Civilisation Française*, concocted to garner American tuition dollars. It was essentially an introductory language course and attendance was not always taken. Nonetheless, the couple worked with moderate diligence on their French skills with the knowledge that the combined \$180 a month from the G.I. Bill they received would cease if they flunked. They also had the Rinehart advance and a remnant of their wartime savings and were well off, comparatively speaking, in a city still exhausted from the war. There were electricity shortages and strikes and everything was restrained and gloomy, as he wrote to Fig. "You get to longing pretty hard for America and its ballsy kind of noise and excitement," he said. Lonely at first, they soon met several Americans: Mitchell Goodman and his English wife, the poet Denise Levertov, and a friend from Dunster House and the *Advocate*, Mark Linenthal, and his wife Alice Adams, who later became a well-known *New Yorker* writer. Linenthal and Adams remained friends with

✓ Mailer over the years. They also met Stanley and Eileen Geist, ^{expatriates} ~~ex-patriots~~ who hosted an American salon. Geist graduated from Harvard the year Mailer entered, and had written a ~~brilliant~~ critical study of Melville while working as F. O. Matthiessen's research assistant on *American Renaissance*, which of course interested Mailer. Geist read Mailer's manuscript copy of *Naked* and told him it wasn't bad, perhaps the first comment he received on the novel from a professional critic. Mailer said he felt "ennobled" by this response.

There was no way for Mailer to share his manuscript with Fig Gwaltney, who was in Arkansas attending college and trying to write novels. But they wrote to each other regularly during the ten months the Mailers were in Europe. Mailer always needed correspondents with whom he could be frank about his projects and problems. Fig was the first of these. Writing to him from the ship on October 7, Mailer gave an unvarnished summary of his political views, which were exacerbated by his detestation of the Red-baiting that was going on in the U.S. Grossly inflated fears of Communist influence and infiltration had prompted President Truman, on March 21, 1947, to institute a Loyalty Program, one which required all federal employees to swear they had never advocated or approved "the commission of acts of force or violence" that would "alter the form of the United States government." Mailer wrote:

I've gone quite a bit to the Left since I've gotten out of the army. I'm a Jew Radical from New York now. And one of the areas of disagreement would be or perhaps would be—you may agree with me for all I know—that (1) we, that is, the leaders of the United States (I'm including the whole scurvy lot from the industrialists & state dept. to muff divers like Uncle Harry) want to go to war, and are doing everything in their power to bring us to war. And (2) I don't think

Russia is the villain it's made out to be. I don't know what the hell they're like but when I find the worst fucking scum in the country (American Legion, Hearst press, etc.) going all out against them, I begin to doubt the whole works.

A few months after he got to Paris, in early 1948, Mailer met someone who would up-end his convictions about Russia, Red-baiters and fellow travelers and school him in the refined quintessence of true revolutionary socialism. Through the Geists, he was introduced to Jean Malaquais, a Polish Jew from Warsaw (born Wladimir Malacki) whose parents had ^{MBM 95}perished in the Holocaust. Fifteen years older than Mailer, he had fought with the International Column of POUM, an anti-Stalinist Communist Party, against Franco in the Spanish Civil War, was almost captured by the Germans as a French soldier, escaped and fled to Mexico in 1943 where he participated in the political debates of the émigré circle there. A short, wiry man who Mailer said looked a bit like Picasso, Malaquais had left Warsaw in 1925 and after many travels found himself in France in the depths of the Depression. He was able to find work in the lead and silver mines of La Londe-les-Maures in Provence where a polyglot crew of Europeans and Russians fleeing from totalitarian oppression worked as day laborers. Malaquais' first book, *Men from Nowhere* (1939) described the workers' horrific working conditions and rough camaraderie. It won the Prix Renaudot. Like another Polish emigrant, Joseph Conrad, Malaquais taught himself to write with elegance in a non-native language. He moved to Paris in the mid-1930s and immersed himself in French literature at the Bibliothèque Saint-Geneviève while working nights unloading crates in the marketplace, Les Halles, the "belly of Paris."

"Morally and intellectually I was a tramp," Malaquais said, "a companion of the dispossessed." But he was also a sophisticated radical thinker who had been associated with

writers such as Andre Gide and with Leon Trotsky (who praised *Men from Nowhere*). Proud and severe as only a stateless, formidably cultured Marxist intellectual could be, he had worked for years as a manual laborer. In a preface to a reissue of Malaquais' 1954 novel, *The Joker*, Mailer summed up his acumen:

Malaquais loathed formula, propaganda, or any variety of thinking which deprived a situation of its nuance. So he was capable of advancing a new thesis, anticipating your objections, stating them with clarity (like Freud disarming his critics) and then would overtake his own verification of your position in the return swing of the dialectic. He would do this with such power that when he argued, the veins in his forehead would throb as though to demonstrate that the human head was obliged to be the natural site if not the very phallus of Mind.

Malaquais, Mailer said, "had more influence upon my mind than anyone I ever knew from the time we had gotten well acquainted while he was translating *The Naked and the Dead*." Mailer recommended Malaquais for the yearlong task—he had a good command of written English—and added \$1,000 to the paltry \$2,000 paid to Malaquais by Mailer's French publisher, Albin Michel. By the time that the translation was completed in late 1949, the two men had become fast friends. But their meetings the year before in Paris were sometimes testy. Mailer told Malaquais about his hopes for Henry Wallace's presidential campaign as the Progressive Party nominee. Malaquais said that Mailer's voluble comments resembled those of "a boy scout or a young Kibbutznik," and proceeded to deconstruct Mailer's notion that Wallace represented a legitimate peace movement, or "any kind of . . . incipient revolutionary starting point." Malaquais told him that the Communists would "exploit him and then they would drop him and

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cover him with dirt." Mailer "disliked me very strongly," according to Malaquais, especially when he told him that the Wallace campaign had been infiltrated by Stalinists. Unable to refute Malaquais, he was yet unwilling to desert Wallace. Mailer remembered that at first he thought Malaquais was "an arrogant bastard. He was a little guy, very, very well knit and very determined and very superior, very haughty." Things were cool between Mailer and Malaquais until they met again in Brooklyn in the fall of 1948.

Through the "long leaky French winter," as Mailer described it, he waited anxiously for reports on how *Naked* was faring at Rinehart. He was particularly concerned that Stanley Rinehart might want to cut the novel's profanity. Finally, near the end of 1947, he heard from Raney that Rinehart was in love with the novel. He relayed the good news to Barney in Warsaw, where he had a position with the American Joint Distribution Committee, a Jewish charity. "I have never heard such hosannas," he wrote. Rinehart intended to write a letter praising the novel to the book trade, a tactic he used only rarely. Much relieved, Mailer told his father that he planned to start a new novel immediately, and hoped to get a lot written "so that I won't be scared if *Naked* and *Dead* gets a big reception." At this point, he no inkling of the dimensions of the approaching triumph.

Before he began, he and Bea went on a skiing trip over the holidays in St. Cergue, Switzerland, and visited the cities of Ouchy, Geneva and Lausanne. He came back with two ideas: one a novel about a rich young California man who spends a year abroad, supporting himself by carrying money between France and Switzerland for black marketers; the second would be about Jews in Europe, focusing on an American Jewish couple, who work for the Marshall Plan. He also kicked around the possibility of writing what he called "a collective

✓ novel" about people he knew in New York. None of these ^{ideas} gambits gained traction. "Maybe I'm not scared," he wrote to Barney. His inability to decide on a new novel, one that could take several years to complete, is completely understandable given the choices before him. He summed up his choices: "If my past had become empty as a theme, was I to write about Brooklyn streets, or my mother and father, or another war novel (*The Naked and the Dead Go to Japan*), or was I to do the book of the returning veteran when I had lived like a mole writing and rewriting seven hundred pages in those fifteen months?" So, through the wet winter of 1947-48 he worked on his French verbs and waited to hear from Rinehart.

While waiting, he decided to read some non-American novels, although they jangled him as much as they inspired. Right after he had submitted *Naked*, he started reading F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels, and in Paris he tackled his 1924 novel, *Passage to India*. He also read an essay by Jean-Paul Sartre as well as Stendhal's classic, *The Red and the Black*, a novel that would have a large influence on him. He also read something by Evelyn Waugh, about which he wrote to Fig, grudgingly: "That English fairy can write, much as I hate to admit it." The book that affected him most was Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*, especially Sally Bowles, Isherwood's charming, decadent floozy, who is oblivious to the rise of the Nazis. She would become the model for Mailer's first memorable female character, Mrs. Guinevere, in his next novel.

✓ When he did hear from Raney, the letter was vague about possible cuts. He wrote back on January 23, 1948, and again the next day, saying he anticipated "emasculatation" and, worse, that he would have no recourse because changes would be expensive to make after the galley went to the printer. If that was the case, he would "have a shit hemorrhage." Most distressing to him

was his fear that Polack's reply to Wyman's question about whether there was a God ("If there is, he sure is a sonofabitch."), which he linked to Croft kicking over the hornet's nest as manifestations of divine meddling, had been cut. "Without that line, it is no longer my book as far as I am concerned," he said. He was willing to be overridden on the design of the book jacket, with its line drawing of a shell-shocked infantryman, and he was prepared to make other concessions, but he drew the line on Polack's line. He ended the second letter by noting that he wanted to rewrite a few passages and asked what revisions would cost, closing with "I remain suspended, Norman."

Apparently, his volley of "howls and sulks," as he called them, acted as a purge because over the next two weeks he wrote the first fifty pages of "Mrs. Guinevere," the beginning of which centered on an ex-burlesque queen of the same name who runs a boarding house in Brooklyn Heights. In her self-absorption and flirtatiousness, she resembles Sally Bowles. Bea was writing too, a novel about Russian immigrants, but she spent more time playing the piano in their apartment and enjoying Paris. The Mailers now had a fairly wide range of acquaintances, including some poor French artists. One was so destitute that both Mailer and Bea, and Barbara when she arrived, took painting lessons from him. In early February, Raney wrote again to say he was coming to Paris, but still not saying when the galleys would arrive. Mailer wrote him back a single-spaced, three-page, margin-less letter in which he deployed all his concerns. He makes his points reasonably, emphasizing that he is burning no bridges and hopes to maintain his friendship with Raney, and includes tips on things to see during Raney's upcoming visit. After recounting the history of the manuscript in regard to obscenity at both Little, Brown and

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Rinehart, he got to the heart of his argument about why profanity was integral to *Naked*, saying it was not merely for authenticity;

[I]t is a tone which creates a sub-stratum of mood for the whole thing, and there is a limit to how much can be cut out without altering its context completely, and making the dialogue cute and 'tough,' and placing the most disgusting kind of emphasis on it. I refer you to abortions like 'A Walk in the Sun,' or any number of unmentionable plays where a laugh is aroused because someone roars, 'Damn' or 'Hell' or 'Bastard.' There is a psychological process to reading where the reader's attention sinks to a second cruising level, and there profanity does not strike him directly providing attention is not called to it by its spacing. He will notice it in time no more than articles and prepositions, and it will affect him the way it should affect him, an element in war experience.

✓ Mailer also questions ~~about~~ the decision-making process at Rinehart, and asks for a full list of profanity changes. He also wants to know if any substitutions for fug have been made.

✓ Finally, there is a good deal of complaining about the infantryman drawing, which he says is a sentimental, Ernie-Pyle version of combat fatigue (Mailer missed entirely the appeal of the now-iconic G.I., whose line sketch by Joseph Karov is riddled with what appear to be bullet holes). Mailer's insistence on authentic speech—vocabulary and cadence—and the details of book design, both of which he belabors mightily to Raney, would become abiding concerns over the course of his career.

As his sister later pointed out, even as Mailer was agonizing over his next book and Rinehart's actions, he "always had an aura that projected a love of life." In all but the worst

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circumstances, "he had an ability to have a good time, and good times meshed with everything else. So while Norman was noodling over what to write next, he was also in a kind of limbo, waiting for *Naked* to come out." During the ski trips, she said, he was especially animated and full of play. "We took ourselves very seriously while we were there, but we were really playing." It is possible that the European sojourn was the longest vacation of Mailer's life.

On February 26 page proofs, not galleys, arrived. Mailer found to his great relief that there were no significant deletions or changes. He wrote back to Raney on March 1 that he had "no bitch" and apologized for all his complaining. The number of swear words dropped was not great and in one place at least, he said, the change, "crap" for "shit," was for the better. He included a list of over a hundred small corrections and a few changes and offered to pay for them. Considerably relieved, he and Bea left on March 6 for a week's skiing in the French Alps, near the town of Valloire. Upon their return to Paris, Mailer wrote letters on St. Patrick's Day to Barney in Poland and Fan and Barbara in Brooklyn about the family reunion planned for the end of April. Barney was to join Norman and Bea in Paris and they would drive to the port of Cherbourg to pick up Barbara and Fan. They would be driving a *six chevaux* Peugeot, purchased for \$1100 with a loan from Fan to be paid out of expected royalties. Both letters were as sunny as Paris, which had warmed up considerably. "Around dusk, with everyone in the outdoor cafes," he said, "you get some awful happy feelings." All was well at Rinehart, he informed them, and the first printing of *Naked* would be 25,000 copies, a big press run for a first novel. The date of publication was set for May 13 at a price of \$4.50 (changed later to May 6 and \$4, still considered high). He and Bea were planning to drive to Barcelona and Madrid in April, and later to Italy. The winter of discontent was over.

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In her memoir of her first visit to Europe, Mailer's sister explains that the trip to Spain came as a result of the contacts Mailer and Bea had made with a group of anti-Franco Spanish students and refugees. The Spaniards convinced the Mailers to assist them in extracting a couple of their friends from a prison work camp in Spain.

An American-owned car could prove a formidable weapon. Particularly persuasive was Paco Benet-Goitia. A bright twenty-one-year-old, very intellectual and passionately anti-Franco, he was the only one of the Spanish students who was not a refugee and could therefore travel back and forth. He also had a network of contacts in the small world of anti-Franco resistance that still simmered inside Spain. He would accompany Norman and Bea. They decided to go.

With a stash of anti-fascist leaflets hidden in the Peugeot, they drove with the Linenthals to Barcelona, where they passed them on to Paco's friends. Mailer was asked if he wanted to see the brothels in the Barrio Chino. As a young man, Picasso had been a customer. In *Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man* (1995), Mailer recalled his visit to the most famous whorehouse in the quarter, one which he surmised the painter had visited.

In a large bare room, along a dais some sixty or seventy feet in length, forty or more women in bras and panties were bellowing out the catalogue of their specialties before a near mob of a couple hundred men, just about all of these putative customers puffing away on cigarettes as if to raise a wall of smoke

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between themselves and the cacophony of sexual advertisement bombarding them. The density of smoke in that room cannot be exaggerated.

From Barcelona they drove to Madrid, but the situation had changed and they were unable to help Paco's friends. After a few days ~~there~~ and their first bullfight, they drove back to Paris. Later on, after the family arrived on April 21, Mailer learned that an escape was now possible. He was getting preoccupied with pre-publication activity and so asked his sister, who didn't know how to drive, if she wanted to go to Spain, to try again with Paco. Barbara, who had been having an affair with a Marxist in the U.S., was "thrilled" by the prospect of romantic venture to assist leftists. Mailer, never a proficient driver himself, gave her some driving lessons. A young woman named Barbara Probst (later married to Mailer's Harvard classmate, Howard Solomon), whom Fan and Barbara met on the boat from the U.S., was enlisted to go along. Probst, who had a driver's license, was eager to go. Mailer thought he should first test her driving skills, and his sister's, so they took a trip to Chartres. Solomon recalled:

What pleased me was that he treated me as an adult. He was awestruck by Chartres yet at the same time juggled with other thoughts, other ideas. He wondered—what would my Spanish experience be? How would it affect me?

There we were, two Americans suddenly stunned by the Rose Window.

Architecture, when it's amazing and has soul, affected Norman (he was enthralled by the visual) as profoundly as politics and literature, and in that magical golden spring afternoon, he talked and talked, telling me tons of stuff about Chartres.

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Mailer was in good spirits that spring, and enjoyed alternating between family gatherings and dealing with a wave of publishing correspondence. To Adelaide Scherer of the Sam Jaffe Agency in Hollywood, who contacted him, he said would consider having them represent him and was willing to work on a screen treatment of the novel. He also asked for Scherer's advice on hiring a literary agent. Since losing Berta Kaslow, his cousin Cy Rembar had been representing him, but professional help was now needed. He also agreed to hire a clipping service and asked that all reviews be sent to him at Rue Bréa. From Rinehart, a copy of a letter from John Dos Passos arrived. Mailer's literary hero had read an advance copy of *Naked* and written to Stan Rinehart to praise the book as "a courageous piece of publishing," calling the author "a first rate novelist." When asked years later what American novels affected him the most as a young man, Mailer said, "*U.S.A.* meant more than them all."

X ✓ In early May, around the time of publication, The Mailers drove with Barbara and the Linenthals to Mont St. Michel, built on a tidal island in the eighth century after St. Michael the Archangel, it is said, burned a hole with his finger in the skull of the dilatory local bishop who he had instructed to build a church there. They spent the night and the following day admiring the architecture of the church. "Norman was flush with success and was doing a southern accent," Linenthal recalled. They played a game called "The Naked and the Dead," with Bea as Wilson and Mailer as Croft, "running around yelling, bullying. It was all in jest, but it gave him a chance to be a southern son of a bitch." It was a role that he always relished, especially after a few drinks.

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✓ Gore Vidal and Tennessee Williams were in Paris in April 1948. Mailer did not meet them or Truman Capote, who visited Vidal and Williams at the Hôtel de l' Université. Over the

next four decades, he would have complex and often rocky relationships with all three. Vidal recalled that the publicity about Mailer's 721-page novel reached them in Paris. He wrote, "I remember thinking meanly: So somebody did it. Each previous war had had its big novel, yet so far there had been none for our war, though I knew that a dozen busy friends and acquaintances were grimly taking out tickets in the Great War Novel Lottery." Mailer was by no means certain that he had, indeed, *done it*, not so far, but the first reviews that crossed the Atlantic certainly augured well. In mid-May, before a month-long trip to Italy began, they began arriving. He was restrained when he wrote to Fig in late May, saying that while the reviews were good enough, only one in five understood the novel. "All they could do was choke over the profanity and while that gave me a bang in the beginning it ended by boring the shit out of me." Mailer was eager to leave the city with Bea, Barbara and his mother, even though he told Fig that he loved it as never before. It was too easy to do nothing in Paris and "drown in inertia."

The quartet spent a few days in Lucerne and Lugarno and then passed into Italy on June 4 via the San Gotthard Pass. ~~Bea drove for a while, but when she started stalling on the S-curves,~~ Mailer took over, double-clutching on the way up and keeping it in low gear on the steep descent. They moved through Turin, Milan and the lake country, staying one night at Desenzano on the Lago di Gardi on the way to Venice. When Fan called Barney in Paris, he told her that both Bill Raney and Lillian Hellman had cabled with an offer: Lillian Hellman wanted to adapt *Naked* into a play on Broadway to be produced by Kermit Bloomgarden, who the following year would present Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Mailer, excited by the prospect, wrote to Raney from Venice that he was empowering Rinehart, working with Dave Kessler (who had his power of attorney), and Cy Rembar, to make whatever financial arrangements they saw fit. "I have no

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worries that a flop hurting a movie sale because I don't see it selling to the movies anyway," he wrote. The chance to collaborate with one the country's most important playwrights clearly excited him.

After Venice, the Mailers drove on to Florence where they visited the major museums, and then moved on to Rome. The weather was perfect, and they went to the Coliseum, the Forum and walked around Trastevere. They had the serendipitous excitement of running into a friend ~~from Paris, and then~~ Barbara Probst and her mother. Fan took the train back to Paris from Rome and the remaining trio drove north and west, first to Nice where they picked up the huge packet of mail containing the news of *Naked*'s top spot on the best seller list. They left Nice and went a few miles further west to Villefranche-sur-Mer, where they stayed for two nights. They had a stunning view of the sea below, and Mailer reread the reviews and notices in a pensione "dripping with Bougainvillea." From there they traveled to Cap Camarat where they spent three days camping out in a bombed-out villa with their painter friend from Paris. Barbara recalled that her brother wanted to savor his last weeks. He had told Raney that they planned to return to the States in mid-August, but after they returned to Paris at the end of June, he decided to leave a few weeks earlier. Mailer wanted to meet with Hellman, see friends, and play a role in the Wallace presidential campaign. Most of all, he wanted to celebrate. He'd killed the lion and now he wanted to eat it. After signing over the car to his sister and substituting her photograph on his international driver's license, he and Bea flew back to the U.S., arriving on July 21st.

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 Mailer did not tell anyone at Rinehart that he had returned early; he wanted time to take Hellman's measure before being caught up in promoting *Naked*. He met with her within a few days of arrival and found her to be "a tough baby, but very pleasant and direct." He described her as being "what the French would call *joli-laide*, that is, she was not at all pretty or beautiful, but she was attractive, and there was a vitality . . . an intensity." Hellman liked him as well; he was young, handsome and energetic. When he went to her Manhattan apartment, she received him in her bedroom. She was in a sexy nightgown and showed him a "truly formidable bare breast." When someone called from downstairs, Hellman answered, "Come on up. What did you think we were doing? Fucking?" There was always a bit of sexual electricity between them.

Hellman knew next to nothing about army life and had a long list of questions: "What is a carbine?" "What is a squad tent?" "How do you dig a latrine?" Mailer drew sketches of weapons and tents and explained the rank structure and army organization from division to platoon. Hellman had done a 23-page outline of the novel before they met, and begun identifying scenes. He drew maps of Anopopei to show Gen. Cummings' tactical options. The Cummings-Hearn debates were inherently dramatic, but they saw no easy way to stage the ascent of Mt. Anaka.

X ✓ Hellman didn't want Hearn to die, and Mailer agreed to this not insignificant change. They
 X ✓ ~~agreed to meet later on Martha's Vineyard, where she was spending the summer.~~ Then he and Bea made arrangements to go to Maine for a week with the Linenthals, now returned from Paris. On August 5, the day before they left, Mailer went to visit with Sinclair Lewis in Williamstown, Massachusetts, at the elder novelist's invitation. The visit went well and two months later Lewis praised Mailer to an interviewer: "Speaking of newcomers in the field—one of the greatest writers today is young Norman Mailer—author of *The Naked and the Dead*—an amazing bit of

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writing. That boy has talent worth preserving. There's nothing petty about Mailer—he's the author of the hour—the greatest writer to come out of his generation." Mailer's books carried this last phrase for many years.

With *Naked* in first place on the *Times* best seller list, Rinehart wanted Mailer to meet with the press, and he submitted to interviews with the *Times*, *Cue*, *New York Star* and the *New Yorker's* Lillian Ross, with whom he remained friendly. But at Bea's urging, he had turned down a request from *Life* for a photo at the airport, saying, "Getting your mug in the papers is one of the shameful ways of making a living," a remark that drew chuckles in later years. It appears that *Life* wanted the photograph to accompany a full-page editorial on August 16 calling novelist to re-create American values instead of wallowing in the literary slums." The piece was unsigned but had Henry R. Luce's imprimatur. The core complaint is that

Both Anopopei and Mr. Mailer's stateside U.S. team with riotous, essentially meaningless life. But does Mr. Mailer really mean that life is meaningless? What he seems to tell us is that such purposes as marrying and procreating and raising a family or mastering an art or a profession or building a business or beating the Japs are without value to anybody now living.

The attack was the beginning of decades of predominantly negative reviews and commentary from the Time-Life organization. Three years later, *Life* referred to *Naked* as "insidious slime." Among national publications, only William F. Buckley's *National Review* had a better batting average in berating Mailer.

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In late August, the Mailers flew to Arkansas for a two-week visit with Fig and his new wife Ecey. The Gwaltneys liked Bea, who was her usual frank, earthy self. Fig remembered that when the Mailers were ready for bed, Bea would ask if she needed to install a birth control device, hollering out in a voice "both vulgar and innocent, 'Norm, do you want to fuck me tonight?'" The foursome went on picnics, swam and relaxed. It was a precious interlude before the presidential campaign. At the end of the month, they flew back to attend the wedding of Bea's youngest sister, Lorraine, in Chelsea.

Rinehart's extremely effective marketing campaign was aided by strong word-of-mouth support and generally superlative reviews. A postcard went to top editors and publicity staff at all the major publishers heralding the novel's publication and stating that "all but the tough-skinned" will turn from the book's "unrestrained accuracy of detail in speech and thought"—code for plenty of profanity and sex. Posters with Karov's drawing of the infantryman were set up in bookstores. Initially, they carried no information, just the face of the soldier with a thousand-yard stare and nine bullet holes. According to Adeline Lubell, "Everyone was startled and shocked," but the tactic worked and "by the time the book was published, the jacket had become famous." As reviews appeared, snippets from them were added to the poster: *Time*: "the best novel yet about World War II"; *New Yorker*: "closer to Tolstoy . . . than to *Cra* Remarque"; *New York Times*: "its total effect is overwhelming"; *Newsweek*: "power . . . astonishingly thoughtful"; *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*: "a prodigal and brilliant talent." Within two weeks of publication Rinehart had ordered two more printings, bringing the total to 65,000; the Book Find Club made it their July selection, and did a first run of 35,000. When reviewers found anything to complain about, it was usually the profanity. Orville Prescott,

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in his *Times* column, said it contained "more explicitly vile speech . . . than I have ever seen printed in a work of serious literature before." But the vast majority of reviewers believed Mailer's language was an accurate reflection of the way G.I.s in barracks and battles had actually spoken. The preponderant view was that Mailer was a pioneer of free speech, although the book was banned by many local libraries and in several foreign countries.

The negative reviews troubled Mailer. "I think I suffered more over the reviews of *The Naked and the Dead* even the good ones, than over the reviews for any other book. I wanted to sit down and write a letter to every critic—they had misinterpreted something I said even though they liked the book" But he had no time for rejoinders. He was busy making speeches for Wallace. In September and October, he made over thirty, mainly in the New York area, but also in Hollywood. Bea also worked on the campaign and both of them became associated with the Progressive Party's unofficial newspaper, the *National Guardian*. At the end of September, Mailer traveled to Evansville, Indiana on assignment from the *New York Post*, a liberal paper that gave extensive coverage to the Wallace campaign. A young instructor at Evansville College had recently been fired for heading up the local Wallace committee. Mailer spent four days there, interviewed about twenty people, and then wrote a 2,500-word feature article built around a devastating interview with the college's red-faced president. The strong feelings and occasional violence against the Wallace campaign is indicative of the depth of anti-Communism in the U.S. at this time. The *Post* story was Mailer's first piece of professional journalism.

In mid-October, Mailer flew to Hollywood to enlist movie stars as Wallace supporters. At a party at the home of Gene Kelly and his wife Betsy Blair, Mailer gave a speech to a large crowd, which included Montgomery Clift, Farley Granger, Edward G. Robinson and Shelley

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Winters, who said, "Everyone who was anyone was at this party, AND I MEAN EVERYONE, in Hollywood." Mailer, reflecting the influence of Malaquais, who he had been meeting with regularly, said that America's huge institutions—the government, corporations and labor unions—were commensurate with Russia's equally large and oppressive bureaucracies. The Progressive Party, he argued, was the only way to prevent the drift toward war with Russia. Mailer recalled that he was "unintentionally eloquent," although it was clear that many in attendance weren't going to endorse Wallace. At one point, Robinson stood up and said, "See here—who do you think you are, you little punk? You know, I'm known all over the world, I'm world famous, and you're telling me how to vote? I'll keep my vote to myself, if you don't mind."

A second purpose of the event was to raise money for the "Hollywood Ten," a group of current or former Communist producers, writers and directors who were convicted of refusing to tell a congressional committee whether they were or had been members of the party. All ten were eventually sent to prison. Mailer asked those present to sign an *amicus curiae* brief to be used when the convictions were appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. Many at the event responded by giving cash, but only two—Winters and Granger—signed the brief. They also gave Mailer checks for \$100. Granger recalled that Mailer, "unbeknownst to us [. . .] probably saved Shelley and me from bringing our careers to an early end." The Hollywood blacklist was now in force and Mailer, fearing that their checks could be traced, returned them. He also tore up the brief containing their signatures. A month earlier, Mailer had signed another such brief, along with 200 other writers and film industry figures, including Charles Chaplin, John Garfield, John

Huston, Dorothy Parker and Burt Lancaster. He would get to know all of them better when he returned to Hollywood the following year.

On October 17, Mailer was the keynote speaker at a fundraiser at the El Patio Theatre on Hollywood Blvd. His speech, titled, "Ballots vs. Book Burning," hammered on the point that the Progressive Party, he concluded, was the only way to oppose a third world war. He gave the same speech several more times after he returned east, and may have garnered some support in New York, where Wallace received almost half of his 1.1 million votes, slightly less than Strom Thurmond's Dixiecrat Party. Truman, against all expectations, soundly defeated Wallace, Thurmond and the G.O.P. candidate, Thomas E. Dewey. Wallace, who was mocked for allowing Communists to infiltrate his party's ranks, was quoted as saying that "Communists are the closest thing to the early Christian martyrs." He retired after the election, and Mailer became disenchanted with electoral politics as a way to save the world. He didn't vote again until 1960.

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The Mailers had rented a furnished apartment at 49 Remsen, the same address where they had lived when he was writing *Naked*. Malaquais had moved to New York and was lecturing at the New School for Social Research, where Dan Wolf was one of his students and also a friend of Mailer's. Later, with Edwin Fancher, Wolf and Mailer would found the *Village Voice*. Through Wolf Mailer re-connected with Malaquais, who lived around the corner on Montague Street. They met often and Mailer, who now found Malaquais' ideas more appealing, asked him to translate *Naked*. At Mailer's request, he drew up a reading list for him. "When I met Norman in Paris, he knew nothing about the history of the Russian Revolution, of the Russian movement

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