

Drawing upon hash, lush, Harlem, Spanish wife, Marxist culture, three novels, victory, defeat, and draw, the General looked over his terrain and found it a fair one, the Village a seed-ground for the opinions of America, a cross-roads between the small town and the mass-media. Since the General was nothing if not Hip (in the self-estimation of his brain) he was of course aware that the mind of the Village was a tight sphincter, ringed with snobbery, failure, hatred and spleen.

He made many suggestions about how the paper should develop, but Fancher and Wolf rejected them. In a late interview, Mailer drew quick portraits of his partners. He had met Wolf first, through Malaquais, in 1948.

He was everybody's guru. We'd all go to him with our problems, our thoughts and so forth. One of his best friends [Ed Fancher] was a psychoanalyst, and I had a hunch that the psychoanalyst even listened to Dan because he had a huge knowledge of psychoanalysis, and a huge sense of people and could have been a psychoanalyst, but hated the profession and considered himself in a funny way superior to it. . . . he was very private; he was very dissatisfied with his life. He wanted power; he had none. He was this quiet man with this wise sad smile, who was an absolute intensity of unsatisfied desires within. It had to do with prominence and prestige. He knew that he was brighter than anyone around and he wasn't getting enough for it.

Fancher, who Mailer met through Wolf, had one quality that was "extraordinary."

He was like a lineman in football who could take fifty hits in a game and still be standing at the end of the game, still ready to tackle anybody who was trying to come through his hole. And so he had that kind of strength. Dan had the williness of a great quarterback who never wanted to be intercepted, never wanted to hand the ball off to anyone wrong, who never wanted to call a play that wasn't going to work. Very cautious, but occasionally daring. So the two of them had skills that ✓ complemented one ^{an} other.

Wolf and Fancher had much to learn about running a newspaper, although they recognized that for it to succeed they needed advertising, and to get that, the paper had to appeal to several publics. For the old-time Irish and Italian residents of the Village, there had to be copy about church, social and political organizations. For the younger crowd, stories were needed about the cultural scene—poetry readings, foreign films, jazz and folk music. And there had to be some hard news. The headline of the lead story of the first issue on October 26 was “Village Trucker Sues Columbia;” there was little in the early issues to distinguish the *Voice* from its competitor, the *Villager*. In its first four months, the paper was quite bland. It was also hemorrhaging money, \$1,000 a week. At the end of the year, Mailer loaned the paper \$10,000.

Fancher and Wolf could hardly refuse Mailer when he proposed himself as a weekly columnist. They expected his column, “Quickly: A Column for Slow Readers,” to be “radical and abrasive,” Fancher said, and generate a bit of controversy. They had no inkling deliberately abusive it would be. Writing to Chester Aaron shortly after starting the Mailer said that he should have lived in the previous century, “what with épater le bourgeois being the dominant passion of my life.” In his notes for *Advertisements*, written in 1958, he

recalled his motives for the column: "I really had the notion that the Village was going to dig what I did—that the results would be apocalyptic—we would see that a hero had appeared in the breach, any one of us (myself of course), but that the swindle was finally to be made apparent." The first column, written in the second person plural, and containing his photograph in the kind of lumberjack shirt that Kerouac would later wear in public, with tousled hair and a surly look, appeared on January 11, 1956.

He begins by stating baldly that the column will not be well written. To do so would require the expenditure of too much effort on a lost cause: trying to please the snobs and critics that abound in the Village, ambitious people whose lack of fulfillment only makes them "more venomous. Quite rightly. If I found myself in your position, I would not be charitable either. Nevertheless, given your general animus to those more talented than yourselves, the only way I see myself becoming one of the more cherished positions of the Village is to be actively disliked each week." The column, he notes, took him an "unprofitable fifty-two minutes" to write.

His maiden effort brought a handful of irritated letters, including a sarcastic one from Joe Jensen of Banks Street stating his hope that "Quickly" would keep Mailer from writing another novel. *now recognized his task* Mailer's task now, he saw, was to divert the anger onto "more deserving subjects." In the next column, he attacked the hypocrisy of the mass media. Much of the column was a redaction of reflections in "Lipton's" on these topics. He called himself a "dialectical idealist," one who sought to improve society by attacking shibboleths like the abhorrence of obscenity. "For what are obscenities finally," he asked, "but our poor debased gutturals for the magical parts of the human body." The column might have gone down fairly smoothly, but Mailer undercut it by adding a preface telling slow readers to skip the column and urging those who did read it to

"have the courtesy to concentrate. The art of careful writing is beginning to disappear before the mental impotence of such lazy audiences as the present one."

After this column, the number of angry and dismissive letters from readers increased. Jensen attacked Mailer for imitating Dos Passos in "your ONE & ONLY BOOK," and comparing the column to "the very overworked, tired, boring, creaky, mimeographed Henry Miller." The tone of the rest of the letters is captured in one from Phyllis Lind: "This guy Mailer. He's a hostile, narcissistic pest. Lose him." He's the kind of character, she said, "who moves into a nice neighborhood and can't stand the warmth and harmony, so he does all in his power to disrupt it." Reading this, Mailer must have said, "Exactly!" It was, as he said later in *Advertisements*, "blitzkrieg."

The column went on for 17 weeks. Mailer tried everything. He parodied the major gossip columnists and turned the column over to a Village wag for a parody of "Quickly" titled "Burp: A Column for People Who Can Read by Normal Failure." He celebrated three iconoclastic comedians—Steve Allen, George Gobel and Ernie Kovacs—and debated the merits of psychoanalysis with a practitioner. About halfway through the run, Mailer began including letters from readers and his responses. When someone complained about his egotism, he replied: "Let others profit by my unseemly absorption, and so look to improve their own characters." He ran a contest, offering \$20 to anyone who could guess his candidate—Hemingway—for President in the 1956 election (one reader did). In his next column, he elaborated on Hemingway's credentials: physical courage, a good war record and the charm of appearing to have had "a good time now and again." He also replied at length to another nasty letter from his Village *bête noir*, Jensen, who had complained about his "congenital or rigged up ostentation."



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needed. And I didn't believe he was going to die. And then, some weeks later, he died. And that was one of the great blows of my life because I couldn't believe it. And then I felt woe, and then I felt contrition. And then I remember at his funeral, his memorial service, I remember speaking and talking about him, and creating a sensation at the memorial service because I was talking about all his many wonderful qualities, and I said, 'And on top of all that, he was a rogue.' 'Whohooooo' went through the audience at the memorial service. There's his wife, his widow and all. But it was true.

A line from "The White Negro" may help us to understand what prompted Mailer to blurt out what he did at the memorial: "[T]he psychopath knows instinctively that to express a hidden impulse actively is far more beneficial to him than to confess the desire in the safety of a doctor's room." Truth telling would always be paramount for Mailer, whatever the cost. By his logic, he was honoring Lindner with his candor.

He changed the title of his column to "The Hip and the Square" not long after Lindner's death. The passing of his friend drove him back to his journal where he found the materials to begin creating a philosophy of Hip. Mailer was also seriously reading Sartre for the first time, and exploring in his column what he felt were the profound difference between European and American existentialism. Both were the products of alienation from the conditions of twentieth century existence. Both were premised on the inalienable freedom of the self and rejected tradition and authority. Both had leftist inclinations. Both were concerned with decoding the involutions of consciousness—sensory perceptions, intuitions, motives and *frissons*. As Mailer put it a few years later, Sartre "had a dialectical mind good as a machine for cybernetics,

immense in its way, he could peel a nuance like an onion." But Sartre and his followers were "alienated beyond alienation from their unconscious" and "its enormous teleological sense." Hip, Mailer wrote in his penultimate "Quickly" column, "is based on a mysticism of the flesh." According to Mailer, Hip had faith in the possibility of personal spiritual transcendence, as yet undefined; most continental existentialists dismissed the idea of an afterlife.

Throughout his entire tenure as a columnist, Mailer's relations with the staff were tense at best. He berated them for a lack of boldness and for missing opportunities. For example, he wanted to run interviews with criminals, a murderer, perhaps. He was particularly incensed at proofreading and typesetting errors in his column, and when Tallmer substituted "nuisance" for "nuance" in a column that Mailer, as usual, had turned in late, Mailer screamed at him over the telephone: "WHY DON'T YOU GET YOUR FINGER OUT OF YOUR ASS?" At one point, Wolf, who was usually quiet and detached, yelled back at him: "For a socialist, you're acting like the worst capitalist in the world." Tallmer agreed saying, "He was like a cartoon boss, beating the slaves."

The shouting matches intensified and Mailer resigned. The final straw, he said in his farewell, were the typos in all but two of his columns. But the deeper cause, he argued, was that Wolf and Fancher wanted the *Voice* to be "more conservative, more Square," and he wanted it to be more Hip. Wolf and Fancher were working long days just to get the paper out, and had no inclination to revamp it. Mailer thought the *Voice* should be very radical, full of sex and drugs. Wolf recalled, "He didn't think the paper would make it, Wolf said, 'so it should go out in a blaze of glory like a firecracker.'" Wolf and Fancher believed that there was room for community newspapers in the Village, while Mailer scorned the idea. He thought

should distinguish itself from the *Villager* by publishing sharp critiques of a society that was smothering creativity, instead of civilized commentary on New York politics, cheery neighborhood vignettes and listings for French films. He noted, however, that his column had never been edited or censored. Mailer retained a minority shareholder stake in the *Voice* for over a decade, and after a three-year hiatus, began writing occasional pieces for it.

Letters of regret poured in. The *Voice* printed eight of them. Seven were positive. The negative letter said the *Voice* was "richer for the loss of the castrated bellow of N. Mailer." The final letter was from a reader who had changed his mind:

To Mr. Mailer:

Let me say that I am extremely sorry your May 2 column is your final one. In all your columns, while some were damned aggravating (and why shouldn't they have been), what you did say, in essence, when the decorations were dismissed, and when the chips were down, was true and truly strong and original to read.

Sincerely,

Joe Jensen, Banks Street

A half century later, reflecting on his first stint as a columnist, Mailer said that once Wolf realized that the Village was on the edge of social change,

that it was open and angry and wanted stuff, once he saw that my notion of it had not been incorrect, he went with it, and probably proceeded with vastly more wisdom that I would have. I would have wrecked it all over again in a few months

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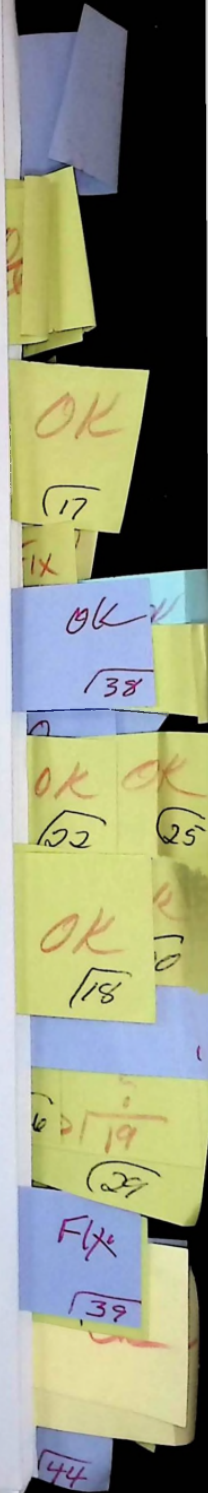
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because I was a wild man. I wanted the revolution to come; I wanted blood in the streets; I wanted the whole thing to start, and of course Dan would have been opposed and we would have been fighting all over again.

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As his active involvement with the *Voice* began to wind down, Mailer took the advice he had given himself in his journal, and cast about for new projects. "I had mad ideas," he said later, and became "very curious" about the next stage of his own development. "You start making all sorts of experiments. I put myself in a laboratory." There are times, he wrote to Knox, "when I have to crack up a little or else I'll crack up big." He and Adele had discussed a trip to Europe for some time, and he wrote to Malaquais to make arrangements for what would be a ten-week trip that summer.

Although he was dismayed by the idea of starting a novel before he had recovered from the strains of *The Deer Park*, Mailer began thinking about a short story that would eventually become part of "the big novel," as he would soon refer to it. Sergius O'Shaugnessy was by now a comfortable avatar, and "The Time of Her Time" is an account of his orgasmic struggles with a young woman, Denise Gondleman, set in the Village loft where he runs a bullfighting school by day and offers sexual therapy by night. He planned to include the story in a paperback collection consisting of his *Dissent* essays, *Voice* columns plus some new material. His most momentous idea is first noted in a letter to Irving Howe. He asked if *Dissent* might be interested in an essay "on the philosophy of the hipster, because I think there are certain things in the ambiance of hipsters which should be interesting to radicals since the hipster, after all, is a new kind of



underground proletariat and one which does cut across classes." He said that the idea was "most provisional," but given the conscientious probing of his psyche over the previous 18 months, his heroic aspirations, and the coalescing of his new theology, writing "The White Negro" in this season of his life now seems to have been inevitable.

Just before they left for Paris on May 15, he and Adele went to see the acclaimed Broadway production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. In his May 2 column where he announced he was leaving the paper, he had dismissed the play, while admitting that he had neither read nor seen it. The reviews of *Godot* had led him to conclude that Beckett, unlike his friend and countryman, James Joyce, saw humanity as hapless, powerless. "So I doubt if I will like it," Mailer had written, "because finally not everyone is impotent, nor is our final fate, our human condition, necessarily doomed to impotence, as old Joyce knew, and Beckett I suspect does not." Then he read the play, and then he and Adele went to see it. The power of Beckett's vision was clear. On the ride home from the theater, he was depressed and made more so when Adele said, "Baby, you fucked up." He got up the next morning, and "finally putting together what he had learned in seventeen weeks," wrote a three-thousand-word *mea culpa*, and paid the *Voice* to publish it.

His essay, "A Public Notice on Waiting for Godot," printed partially in tiny agate font, and taking up one full page of the *Voice*'s May 9 issue, is more than just an apology, however. Mailer gives a very competent summary and analysis of the play, and then, toward the end, amplifies the theological ideas he had been mulling since encountering them "in the bends of marijuana" ^{a year} ~~two months~~ earlier. Either "consciously or unconsciously," Mailer says, Beckett is saying that "God's destiny is flesh and blood with ours," that the Deity is not a distant, all-

powerful Jehovah, but a God who is "determined by man's efforts, man who has free will and can no longer exercise it and God therefore in bondage to the result of man's efforts." Mailer wished to recruit and lead an army that would storm the redoubts of liberal caution and bourgeois prudishness to free God.

From the time Mailer began "Lipton's," he had been dipping into Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim* (1947), reading snippets as he was "riding the electric rail of long nights on marijuana." In the two-volume collection, Buber (1878-1965), an internationally known philosopher, scholar and religious existentialist, clarified and organized the oral teachings of the Hasidic movement, beginning with the founder Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (1700-60). The Hasidim, it will be remembered, were opposed by a more scholarly sect, the *Misnagdim*, children of the *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment, favored by Mailer's grandfather. Buber "hulled" the most telling anecdotes of the Hasidic masters "from the mass of the irrelevant" for his collection. The Rabbi ben Eliezer, known as the Baal Shem Tov, or Master of the Good Name (for his knowledge of how to employ the secret names of God), and his followers over several generations were revered as charismatic teachers, or *zaddikim*. These spiritual masters claimed to the power to discern, intermittently, the divine emanations surrounding humanity and, in indirect ways, to communicate with God. The *zaddikim* taught with parables and metaphors of the homeliest sort, but leavened with humor, as in the following, which Mailer quoted:

The Fear of God: Once Zusya prayed to God: 'Lord, I love you so much, but I do not fear you enough! Lord, I love you so much, but I do not fear you enough! Let me stand in awe of you like your angels, who are penetrated by your awe-inspiring name.' And God heard his prayer, and his name penetrated the hidden

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heart of Zusya as it does those of the angels. But Zusya crawled under the bed like a little dog, and animal fear shook him until he howled: 'Lord, let me love you like Zusya again!' and God heard him this time also.

Mailer did not write about Buber's collection until 1962, but its influence is apparent in the Beckett essay. The *Tales*, he said, became his vehicle in the mid-1950s "for a small intellectual raid into the corporate aisles of modern theology," and a point of departure for his opposition to Sartrean existentialism. Henceforth, Mailer's apprehension of the invisible universe would be a subtle, but steady presence in his thinking and writing, although it was rarely taken seriously by his readers, or barely noticed, for several years.

Mailer ended his essay, "A Public Notice on Waiting for Godot," by arguing that Beckett's work could mark the end of ten years of "angry impotence," referring to the anxieties of the postwar period. While he was not a great admirer of the likely Democratic presidential candidate, Adlai Stevenson, he had significantly less regard for President Eisenhower, who he thought, incorrectly, might not be re-elected. His guarded optimism in the summer of 1956 led him to hear "the whispers of a new time coming. There is a universal rebellion in the air, and the power of the two colossal super-states may be, yes, may be ebbing." If that proved true, then "the creative nihilism of the Hip" might usher in a revolution, "the sexual revolution one senses everywhere"—from the suggestive jokes of TV comedians to the "growing power of the Negro." Thus, in his final piece in the *Voice*, he links Black power with sexual emancipation at a time when both were only dimly perceived—and not in tandem—on the cultural horizon. Mailer's essay on *Waiting for Godot* is the prologue to "The White Negro," and his advertisement for himself as the philosopher-general of Hipsterism.

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According to Adele, Mailer was somewhat relaxed on the crossing on the S.S. United States of America. They drank and fought less than they had during the previous trip. Once in Paris, they regularly visited the Montparnasse apartment of Jean Malraux. That Mailer met James Baldwin, a writer who would influence and later challenge Mailer's views on Black sexuality. The Harlem native was already an acclaimed writer and, with Ralph Ellison, was considered to be one of the most talented and promising postwar African-American writers. In 1953, he published a novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, about the role of religion in Black America, based on his own experience as a teenage preacher in a revivalist church in Harlem. He followed this with a collection of autobiographical essays, *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), that solidified his reputation as a leading commentator on racial issues. One of the essays sharply criticizes *Native Son* (1940), the masterwork of another African-American Paris expatriate, Richard Wright. Baldwin was seen to be clearing a place for himself.

Meeting Mailer gave Baldwin the opportunity to measure himself against a writer whose ambition matched his own. "Jimmy had an absolutely wonderful personality in those years," Mailer told James Campbell, Baldwin's biographer. "I don't think there was anyone in the literary world who was more beloved than Jimmy. He had the loveliest manners." Baldwin remembered it this way: "[T]wo lean cats, one white and one black, met in a French living room. I had heard of him, he had heard of me. And here we were, suddenly, circling around each other. We liked each other at once, but each was frightened that the other would pull rank." They were about the same age, both were New Yorkers, both had published three books. Mailer was somewhat more famous and considerably wealthier. Baldwin said his chief credentials were

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being Black and knowing more about the “periphery,” the mean streets of Harlem. He didn’t know that Mailer was already thinking about an essay premised, in part, on the superior sexual prowess of Blacks, but he did know that “to be an American Negro male is also to be a kind of walking phallic symbol.”

Baldwin had come to Paris to escape prejudice against Blacks and homosexuality. Mailer, deeply curious as usual, wanted to discuss both, as well as jazz, Harlem, criminals, books, everything. When they met, Baldwin had just concluded an unhappy affair with a Swiss man, and was in no mood to discuss matters that verged on his intimate relations. He also saw that Mailer accepted the “myth of the sexuality of Negroes,” and so he “chickened out” of what he thought would be an excruciating attempt to challenge Mailer’s ideas. Instead, he socialized with the Mailers—he could drink as much as Mailer—and after a few weeks left for Corsica. He had no inkling of his new friend’s roiled state, his addictions and career anxieties. Mailer’s public visage prevailed, and Baldwin’s chief memory of that time in Paris was of “Norman—confident, boastful, exuberant, and loving, striding through the soft Paris nights like a gladiator.”

Baldwin hid his despair over his failed affair from the Mailers. He was working on a novel, *Giovanni’s Room* (1956), a bold study of violence and homosexuality set in Paris, but was having difficulty finishing it. Nights after leaving the Mailers at the Hôtel Palais Royal, he “wandered through Paris, the underside of Paris, drinking, screwing, fighting—it’s a wonder I wasn’t killed,” he said. Mailer had insomnia and left the hotel in the early morning hours. It would not have been surprising if they had bumped into each other. In a poem about that summer, “A Wandering in Prose: For Hemingway,” he begins with the memory of Adele’s face “powder which smells like Paris when / I was kicking seconal and used to / get up at four in the

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morning and / walk the streets into the long wait / for dawn." He would find himself "at five in an Algerian / bar watching the workers take a / swallow of wine for breakfast, the / city tender in its light even to me / and I sicker than I'd ever been, / weak with loathing at all I had not done." He then recalls her "detestation" of him for not being "nearly brave enough for you." Adele's memory is that Mailer, in withdrawal and "still reeling from *The Deer Park* disaster," was both angry and scared and often took it out on her. "In my own way," she said, "I could shit right back at his face." Mailer, however, put on a good face for Baldwin, Jean they didn't grasp the tense situation.

They rented a car and drove to Munich to meet his German publisher. As they approached the German border, she told her husband that her heart was pounding. "Norman laughed, 'Baby, mine is pounding harder. I'm a Jew, you aren't.'" The men in Munich "made much of my dark good looks," she said. "I would overhear words like 'schoene mädchen' in restaurants and elevators. Norman looked pleased." They went from Munich to Buchenwald, which Mailer said he felt obliged to visit. They saw all the horrors. The small oven for children, Adele said, was "most graphic and heartbreaking." Mailer never recorded his immediate response to viewing the camp, but his memories of the visit, deeply lodged, surfaced when he wrote "The White Negro." Back in Paris, Adele found she was pregnant. Mailer told her he knew what night the baby was conceived. They were very happy. Adele said that she "never learned to disentangle myself from his moods," but the pregnancy necessarily changed her focus. She found that the odor of alcohol made her ill. The distaste would continue for the length of her pregnancy and through the period that she nursed the baby. "[H]ow I wish it had stayed that way for the rest of my life," she wrote, referring to her later alcoholism. They left a few weeks later, again on the

United States. Mailer, sometimes unfeeling about the illnesses of others, was thoughtful and tended her as the morning sickness continued during the crossing.

He had promised Baldwin that he would do all he could to aid the reception of *Giovanni's Room*, which he had read in manuscript. He sent a blurb for the novel to Baldwin's publisher, and on August 16, before heading to Provincetown, he wrote a letter to Francis Brown, editor of the *Times Book Review* offering to review the novel. Brown politely turned him down. Mailer mailed a carbon of his letter to Brown to Baldwin with a note asking him to let them know when he would be back in New York, and Baldwin wrote a very warm note from Corsica thanking Mailer for the "very sweet thing" he'd done. His personal life, he said, "has gone all to pieces. But I imagine I'll recover this winter, if I work hard." They did not see each other for six months, but then their paths crossed often in New York.

Recalling his first meeting with Mailer, Baldwin said he was "aware of a new and warm presence in my life." His biographer *James Campbell* believes that he saw Mailer as "a partner, an equal, and therefore a lover," and this seems quite possible. Baldwin's preference for sexual relationships with bi-sexual and straight males is well known. He would not be the only gay man who was attracted to Mailer. Their relationship was complex. Campbell summed it up:

What did exist, on both sides and in plentiful supply, was petulance, ego, vanity, impatience with the other's direction and aspirations. There was a considerable amount of mutual respect, but also a feeling on Mailer's side that Baldwin had wasted his substance in Europe, and on Baldwin's that Mailer's much-vaunted theories about Negroes' superior sexuality and elegance amounted to nothing

more than a portrait of the noble savage re-drawn. They mirrored, after all, the kind of stereotypes he had been fighting for years. 'Next thing you'll be telling me is that all coloured folks have rhythm!' was one of his favorite rebuffs, borrowed from Richard Wright.

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In September the Mailers visited their friends from Mexico, Lew and Jay Allen in rural Connecticut, where they had recently moved. They liked the area—rolling hills, horse farms, rambling colonial houses and lots of green. With a new baby on the way, the 55th Street apartment seemed small and they decided to move to the country. The presence of the Styrons and John Aldridge and his wife Leslie was another factor. George Plimpton, the editor of *Paris Review* and a good friend of both men, said "Norman moved up to Connecticut really because of Bill Styron. They became very close. They're both great conversationalists, great storytellers . . . the kind who sit around the kitchen table until four a.m." The Mailers bought a large house and barn on fifty acres of woods and meadow in Bridgewater, about four miles from the Styrons, and not far from the New York State border. "The house is old," he wrote to Malaquais, "and it smells good as a house, the cellar has the odor of a warm bird's wing." It was bracketed by ancient elms.

One night two weeks before they moved, Mailer took Tibo and Zsa Zsa for a walk. ^{at one a.m.} ~~It was~~ ~~one a.m., he remembered.~~ When he paused near some doorsteps where three young men—"hoodlums" Mailer called them—were sitting, one of them made a crack about the dogs being queer. Mailer said something back and the man called him queer, which led to a fight. Mailer

thought he would win, as he was older and heavier, but the hoodlum gouged his eye in a clinch, "very professionally, I may say," Mailer wrote to Malaquais. They clinched again and he gouged Mailer's other eye.

At that point a whole crowd of people—a gang—poured out of a house (we were fighting on the sidewalk) and some tremendous brute of a character clouted me, and said 'Have you had it?' Well I had had it. I could hardly see, my eyes were bleeding, and I could see myself being beaten to death. So I nodded hopelessly, muttered several times over, 'Yes, I've had it, I've had it,' picked up the dogs from another hoodlum who ironically enough had been holding them during the fight and shambled off.

For a week, he had to stay in a darkened room because of a blind spot in one eye. He told his family that he had an infection. He was pleased with himself for not backing down, and happy that they had bought the Connecticut house before the fight, "or else I would always have felt that I was fleeing New York in a panic." He gave a briefer version of the story to Baldwin, adding that what was worse than the injury was working up the nerve to walk that street again, which he did.

In his letter to Malaquais, Mailer said he was losing many friends in New York because of his radicalism. "Phone calls don't come in any longer from one's elevated social friends." Mailer, of course, was obstreperous when he drank, and he was drinking a lot, bourbon mainly. The booze sanctioned crazy behavior. He took on accents—an Irish brogue, a British one that resembled Barney's, and the Texas drawl he had learned in the army, his favorite. When Dwight

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the new house in early November, he dropped a note to Styron asking him to remember him to Jones.

Mailer had also had a serious argument with Adeline, and got "boiling mad" at her. At a party at the 55th Street apartment, he accused her of believing Adele to be "intellectually shallow and inferior." Perhaps because Mailer saw Adeline as a "brilliant intellectual," as she speculated, he projected his own views about Adele on her. Her insight was on the mark. The truth, Adeline said, was that she had little in common with Adele but had no ill feelings toward her, just the opposite. Mailer's harsh words drove her from the party, and they did not speak for some time. He also fought with Fig about Adele. Undoubtedly entwined with Mailer's intuitions about how his friends felt about Adele was their response to *The Deer Park*. Adeline, Aldridge, Malaquais, Fig and Jones all disliked it. The novel's admirers were the ever-loyal Knox, Dan Wolf (from whom he was estranged because of the *Voice*), and Lindner, who was dead. Mailer's friendship with Styron was still intact, however, perhaps because Styron had sugared his dislike of the novel.

Fifty years after the sexual revolution, court cases overturning anti-obscenity laws, and the fading of facades erected before Hollywood's workaday exploitation and sordidness, the merits of *The Deer Park* are more obvious. It was published at a time of knee-jerk prudishness when even metaphoric descriptions of sexual acts were considered bad taste. As Gay Talese noted in his memoir, *A Writer's Life* (2006), a *New York Times* picture editor lost his job in 1954 "because he permitted the publication of a wedding-day photograph showing Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio revealing their physical attraction to each other while standing in front of City Hall in San Francisco—she with her head back and her mouth slightly open, and he with his lips

puckered and his eyes closed." When Dan Wakefield, speaking with Mailer many years later, noted that *The Deer Park* was the most controversial novel of 1955, he replied, "Anything that dealt openly with sex back then was controversial. The issue of sex was the cutting edge of the new novel of exploration in the fifties. It was the way of going beyond the frontier." Looking at the novel sixty years later, Minton's estimate seems on the mark: there is no better novel of Hollywood in the postwar period, or perhaps any period since. Mailer was ahead of the wave.

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Once settled in Bridgewater, Mailer set up a gym of sorts in the barn, including a boxing ring. He also had a workshop there. He created a studio with a picture window for Adele in the house's attic, among other projects. In New York he had built a version of Wilhelm Korgone box, a place where he could "scream and snort and bellow and growl and even pipsqueak." In Connecticut, he constructed a variation: a large, polished wooden egg large enough to hold a person in the fetal position. The idea, Adele explained, was to get inside, curl up and be rocked by someone outside. A bongo board was another project, a fat w with a board on top on which he could balance, roll and swivel. One day when Lev visiting and Mailer was demonstrating his agility on his customized version, he fell bloody nose. He convinced Allen to go along with the story that the blood came from a punch as they boxed. "Norman was ready to take offense at anything," Allen recalled. His whole nervous system was exposed, and his nerve ends were out on stalks. He was on pot all the time and primed."

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Adele's parents visited them in Connecticut. Her father, Al, a printer at the *New York Daily News*, in his earlier years had been an amateur fighter. He turned professional briefly and lost half of his 20 matches before retiring. The majority of his fights ended in knockouts. After he gave up boxing, he turned to handball, and played well into his 80s. When Al and Consuela arrived, Mailer greeted Al with, "Hiya champ," and they would trade fake punches like old sparring partners. Mailer had again quit smoking and was feeling healthy, although he had ballooned up to 175 pounds. He and Al often put on the gloves and boxed a few rounds. Mailer was twenty years younger, so it is not too surprising that in one of their first matches, he knocked him down twice. The next time they visited, Al was "very edgy," Mailer remembered, and wanted to box right away. Al landed one on Mailer's chin and knocked him out. As Adele remembers it,

Norman sat up almost immediately shaking his head, rubbing his jaw. He was still groggy as my father helped him up.

'Jesus, young feller, sorry about that.'

Norman was a good sport about the whole thing, and instead of angry, he admired my father. 'Not bad, Al, for a fifty-four-year old.' He touched his chin. 'That was some punch you landed.'

'Well, Norm,' Daddy said, 'you've got to be on your toes. You should've seen it coming. But that's the way ya learn.'

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Mailer did learn and became noticeably better as a boxer over the years. He continued sparring until he was over 60, and was quietly proud of the bruises he gave and took in his grandfatherly years.

Mailer probably had not heard of club fighters before he got to know his father-in-law. In any case, the club fighter's attributes—a consistent level of performance, the capacity to absorb punishment, and the ability to learn from mistakes—coalesced into a touchstone metaphor for him. Those who got to know him fairly well, or read his interviews, became accustomed to what he called his “all-purpose expression”: “I’m an old club fighter; I get mad when you miss.” The compensation for being a club fighter, that is, a fighter whose duty and pride, is to spar with superior fighters is that you not only enable your opponents to sharpen their skills, you might also learn how to slip a punch by taking one on the chin. Also, by taking certain blows, a boxer (now feeling more combative) can counterpunch, something that Mailer learned to do very well inside and outside the ring. Everyone gains, and sometimes the loser learns the most. Two years later, in the opening essay of *Advertisements for Myself*, Mailer used the trope in a capsule autobiography, one he never relinquished: “I started as a generous but very spoiled boy, and I seem to have turned into a slightly punch-drunk and ugly club fighter, who can fight clean and fight dirty, but likes to fight.” The literary world, as Mailer defined it, was a place of fierce struggle. Painful experience was the soundest guide.

Mailer was now in a fever to fight. Perhaps it was the memory of his eye-gouging in New York, or Al Morales' instruction, or the emerging ideas of “The White Negro”—all of these, no doubt, played a role—but what is clear is that in 1957, Mailer was itching for fisticuffs, with or without gloves. One night at the Styrons, Mailer told Random House publisher Bennett Cerf,

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who had turned down *The Deer Park*, "You're not a publisher, you're a dentist." They took some swings at each other outside until Styron broke it up. When novelist Chandler Brossard, who M.B.M. 181 Mailer had met in Mexico, visited, he wanted to box with him. Brossard, who had fought semi-professionally and been trained by the same man who trained Hemingway—and for Mailer—wisely declined, saying someone (meaning Mailer) could get serious. "Violence and pain are a form of engagement to Norman, of reality," Brossard said. In 1952, M.B.M. 180 Brossard had published one of the first novels about hipsters, *Who Walks in Darkness*, set in Greenwich Village. On the dust jacket, a question is asked: "What is a hipster? The name derives from the jazz term 'hip' and denotes a person who possesses 'superior awareness.'" The lead character is a Negro who passes for white. Mailer read the novel and liked it; it most certainly enriched the essay that was percolating in him.

The memories of Mailer fighting and acting out are what many friends and acquaintances of the period remember, but it wasn't all fireworks. For one thing, Susan had joined them for her annual visit shortly before they moved, and Mailer spent a lot of time with her. She was very fond of Adele and, like any six-year old, deeply interested in the pregnancy. Mailer wrote to a friend that he was "beginning to see himself as the patriarch of a vast family," a premonitory remark. As the birth approached, Mailer started writing. He began taking notes for "The White Negro" and also working on a dramatic version of *The Deer Park*. The growing extent of his literary operation can be gauged by the fact that he now had an answering service in New York. Further help came from the Miss Baltimore Agency, a domestic help service that Fan had taken over from her sister Beck in the early 1950s. She supplied maids to her son and his wives for years to come.



Two weeks before Adele was due, Mailer appeared on a local late-night television program, *Night Beat*, hosted by Mike Wallace. Adele accompanied him in a low-cut black velvet dress. "[S]he looked splendid," Mailer recalled, "and sent out the beauty of her pregnancy like a promulgation of status." He was excited to be on live, "the virgin air," he called it, and believed he might be able to move the million or more people who would watch the show by saying the unsayable with "wit, passion and conviction." His ideas about the repression in American life might catch fire, "buried sentiments could take life." But to do this he had to hold his ground against Wallace, whose "straight black hair and craggy face gave off a presence as formidable as an Indian in a gray flannel suit." And given his own "massive incapacity to stay cool," this would not be easy. Just before airtime, Mailer took out a flask of gin and poured it into his glass, clearly annoying Wallace.

Wallace asked if he was obsessed with sex in his novels and Mailer answered, yes, most definitely. I see myself, he continued, continuing the work of pioneering novelists such as Henry Miller. When Wallace quoted *Life* magazine's attack on *The Deer Park* for "immorality, alcoholism, perversion, and political terror," Mailer replied that "only hypocrisy and insincerity are dirty. *Life* magazine is a dirty magazine." He decided to raise the ante. When Wallace quoted a line from one of Mailer's columns about the country being run "by men who were essentially women, which indeed is good for neither men nor women," and then pressed for an example, Mailer replied, "Well, I think President Eisenhower is a bit of a woman." He was certain he had scored and "the heart of a million TV sets missed a beat." Wallace's eyes, he recalled, "grew as

flat as the eyes of an Apache who has just taken a rifle bullet to the stomach." Mailer recalled the moment, writing about himself in the third person.

In the elevator, going down to the street, his wife said, 'Maybe we'll be dead tomorrow, but it was worth it.' It is possible they never had a better moment together. They had been with each other for years, yet always fought in the animal rage of never comprehending one another. On this night, however, with the baby two weeks away, they were ready for one hour, at least, to die together. For once Mailer felt like a hero. In those days saying something bad about Dwight D. Eisenhower was not a great deal less atrocious than deciding Jesus Christ has something wrong with Him.

In 1957, linking timidity with the female gender was a commonplace, and didn't elicit the opprobrium it would a dozen years later, as Mailer would learn. The aftermath came several weeks later when he learned that the Eisenhower's press secretary, James Haggerty, called Wallace's office to request a transcript of the program. For the first but not the last time, Mailer had gained the attention of a sitting president.

The baby was born in New York on the evening of March 16. Attesting to their continued friendship, the Mailers asked Jean and Galy to be the godparents. Mailer was certain it would be a boy, but was wrong. Susan suggested the name Danielle, and the middle name, Leslie, according to Danielle, came from the French actress and dancer Leslie Caron. Mailer made a fuss in the delivery room when the nurse began shaving Adele's pubic hair, saying it was unnatural, but relented when her contractions got strong. He also tried, and succeeded in convincing the obstetrician to allow him to stay in the delivery room, something

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considered bizarre in that era. He wrote to Knox to say that he had remained until fifteen minutes before the end, and had "a fantastic experience." The baby had a full head of black hair, he said, and resembled him a bit.

After the birth, around midnight, Mailer showed up at the apartment of his former sister-in-law, Phyllis Silverman Ott, who remained in contact with him after he had divorced Bea. In her 2006 memoir, she says that "Norman always loomed like the North Star over me." He was off-center when he arrived, she recalled, because of his "awe at the power of a woman to endure and create, a glorious humiliation that left him feeling unloved." She had told him earlier that she loved him, and Mailer spent the night in her bed. For her, she wrote, it was the fulfillment of her dream to be the lover of a famous man. Being Mailer's lover, she said, made me feel "like I was walking on stilts." A few days later, the Mailers drove back to Connecticut "to begin" as Adele put it, "what I thought would be a new life."

In his letter to Knox about Danielle's birth, Mailer gives a clear sense of heightened feelings about personal violence in the wake of the eye-gouging incident. He had been threatened by a man in Rome, a rival for a woman's affection, and asked Mailer for advice. Mailer told him he had to make a stand, even if "he smashes the living shit out of you":

[H]it him where his hair meets the neck, kick him in the balls, kick his shins, stick your fingers in his eyes, jab your fingers against the base of his nose, but don't run, and don't just take it. Now I know this sounds easy to say, but I'm talking from experience because I've had a couple of ugly fights as you know in the last year and I know the difference it makes between fighting and quitting. If you

fight, even if you take a bad beating it 1) does not hurt that fucking much while it's going on, and 2) you're left with some fucking dignity—you can actually feel good after a bad losing fight.

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Violence was much on his mind when he sat down at the beginning of April to write "The White Negro." What is sometimes overlooked is the distinction Mailer makes in the essay between the kind of personal violence he describes in his letter to Knox, and collective violence, the violence of the state, which at its most malign leads to concentration camps and the elimination by hideous means of millions of human beings. In Mailer's mind—Reich's influence is apparent—the hipster stands opposed to the repression of instinctual urges that are noble and natural, a suppression that seems likely to lead, under the threat of nuclear warfare, to a new epoch of Faustian regimes that will wield technology to eliminate opponents, regimes so efficient that Hitler and Stalin will resemble crude bully boys in comparison. Against the emergence of such regimes stands the hipster. This Adamic figure is patterned, in part, after the Negro who must often choose between subservience and rebellion; the psychopath, who is in more direct contact with his unconscious than ordinary neurotics; the drug addict who seeks ecstasy in the absence of community; the jazz musician whose riffs and glides mimic the rhythms of sex; and the mystic who lives in "the enormous present." Transcendental spontaneity is the quality they all share. One commentator on Mailer's writing, Joseph Wenke, describes how the hipster's sense of time differs from ordinary clock time.

Each moment fills, becomes more resonant and complex. Correspondingly, one's experience of time slows down. Such an alteration in one's sense of time is a key element of the Hip quest for freedom. It means that one is now able to control the rhythms of one's own experience and live out of what is really a transcendentalist sense that one can recreate one's own identity out of the eternity of the present moment and so escape temporarily from the limits of history. From this subjective standpoint, the future exists only as a vision of ever-expanding possibilities merging with one's experience of the present.

Because the essay soars and swoops through such imponderables as time, sex, love, God, courage, extermination and revolution, and is rife with qualifications, extended appositions and restrictive clauses, it is not an easy read. Mailer later admitted that it was "too elliptic." As Morris Dickstein has pointed out, Mailer "rarely bothers to distinguish lurid metaphor from literal prescription," and writes a prose that "mingles fact and fiction, social criticism and confession, cultural prophecy and personal therapy." Nevertheless, one cannot help but feel, the seductive energy of the essay—energy, in fact, is its pith and marrow. "The White Negro" is a dithyrambic hymn to energy which pulses in a universe that is not a fact, but "a changing reality whose laws are remade each instant by everything living, but most particularly man." "God," Mailer says, is "energy, life, sex, force, the Yoga's *prana*, the Reichian's orgone, Lawrence's 'blood,' Hemingway's 'good,' the Shavian life-force." This is not the God of organized religion, but the God within "the paradise of limitless energy and perception just beyond the next wave of the next orgasm." How to achieve it? First, one has to be "ready to go, ready to gamble." "Movement is always to be preferred to inaction. In motion a man has a chance, his body is

warm, his instincts are quick, and when the crisis comes, whether of love or violence, he can make it, he can win, he can release a little more energy for himself since he hates himself a little less, he can make a little better nervous system, make it a little more possible to go again, to go faster next time.

The essay's promise of escape from Eisenhower's wet blanket helped make it the most discussed American essay in the quarter of a century after WWII. Maligned as much for its obscurity—Baldwin said it was “downright impenetrable”—as it was celebrated for its orphic verve, it is also the most reprinted essay of the era. A generation of young people proudly carried their copies of the City Lights edition of the essay, a pamphlet whose cover depicts a reverse negative head shot of an archetypal hipster (rumored, ^{at the time} without a shred of evidence, to be Paul Newman) with them when they migrated to the awakening cities of the nation. Bored with the timidities of the middle class, the new generation saw the essay as a blast on the trumpet of defiance, a call to radical self-assertion and the fullest sexual experience, even though the hipster milieu that it celebrated was not yet real. As Alfred Kazin astutely pointed out, “The White Negro” “is an attempt to impose a dramatic and even noble significance on events that have not genuinely brought it forth.” Mailer was trying to imaginatively will into being an army of hip revolutionaries who could bring about an urban utopia.

From its initial publication in *Dissent* in the summer of 1957, through its reprinting in 1959 by City Lights and the same year in *Advertisements*, the essay's most controversial passage drew vigorous rejoinders. It comes after a long peroration on the therapeutic benefits of expressing forbidden impulses, even violent ones, a necessary prelude to self-discipline, community and love. Mailer gives the example of “two strong eighteen-year-old hoodlums” who

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assault and kill a candy-store keeper. Not much gain here, he says, because the victim is not a physical equal. But, he counter-argues, "courage of a sort is necessary" because the hoodlums are "daring the unknown, and so no matter how brutal the act, it is not altogether cowardly." Numerous commentators on the passage have expressed revulsion for the notion that even a smidgen of approval is given for such a vicious act, cowardly even though it was hypothetical. Mailer was never able to satisfactorily answer such vehement objections, yet he never relinquished his belief that there were morsels of redemptive gain in all risk-taking acts, even when they were criminal. "[I]f one wants a better world," the essay warns, "one does well to hold one's breath, for a worse world is bound to come first." Barbarism, he argued, was preferable to "the cold murderous liquidations of the totalitarian state." He would continue to find things to admire in unsavory individuals, even one who assassinated a president. The essay is a turning point for Mailer, and also, as Dickstein says, "a momentous shift in American literary culture, a turn toward the dark side, the rebellious and the demonic." The sixties were coming.

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Mailer discussed the essay with several friends in Connecticut in early 1957. These included Lew and Jay Allen and Aldridge, who had rented the nearby home of Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe, who were in England making a film. Aldridge's wife, Leslie, recently divorced from a young *Esquire* editor, Clay Felker, had known Styron at Duke. So that set up what Mailer called "an odd three-way community." Aldridge lived halfway between the two writers and, initially, got along well with both. Aldridge, Mailer recalled, wanted to start "a new Athens in America. It was his idea to get a bunch of intellectuals living out there about 70 miles from New

York." Adele remembers thinking that New York was a hard-drinking town, but it was "a kindergarten," she said, compared to the Connecticut scene.

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 Mailer later recalled the social situation. Styron, he said, was considered the most talented writer in America. "You can imagine how that hit me." Aldrich was friendly with Styron, but wanted to get even closer. But Styron "was sort of unhappy about sharing. You know, he was a true southerner—'What I've earned, I've earned, and I'm not eager to deal it out to other people.'" Styron commanded the social scene, Mailer said, "and I began to realize what it is to be a social inferior." Leslie "was not a social gift altogether, certainly not in the eyes of Styron." "She was on the make, and obvious. She was never a lady the way Rose was, naturally. But compared to Adele, she was pretty slick." Rose, on the other hand,

had great social gifts. She could make anyone feel good in a hurry who came to her house, that kind of thing. Adele was still awkward, doing her best, but rough at the edges whereas Rose just could move and negotiate. All girl, pick up things, pick up the mood here, quiet the mood there. They had a very good social life, a lot of big literary parties. Well scripted. So there was Styron and I, very competitive as literary men, but he was having a big social life and I was having a small one.

Adele said that for the first year, her husband and Styron got on well, "swapping stories, talking about writing, each being as charming as the other and as drunk as the other. I never saw Bill without a drink in his hand." Adele thought he projected "an air of smug superiority," and that Rose's manner "had a hint of condescension—that is, when she could tear her attention

away from my husband." Aldridge's biographer, James L. W. West III, writes that the evenings the three couples got together "were intense and stimulating, but not especially pleasant." Aldridge spoke with "a ponderous authority" that irritated the others; Styron had "a tendency to stick to superficialities in conversation"; Mailer "was raffish, funny and charming, but he could also be belligerent and confrontational." The men were "ambitious and competitive, all three women were good-looking and sexy." Aldridge's memory is that that while Styron "was originally king of the roost," Mailer "quite quickly became the center of energy."

One evening, Adele recalled, Styron was "going on and on about the colored people this and the colored people that" in a smug manner. She called out to him, banged

table and said, "I happen to be passing for white, so keep your fucking comm"

After a pause, "someone snickered, and my remark was ignored as the conversation

My husband just grinned at me, raising his glass in a half toast." Aldridge remarked on the Mailers' closeness and their "very strange, combative relationship," and Styron noticed it as well. Mailer said this about it: "I had a situation where I was Pygmalion; I was someone who could develop someone, and I certainly could develop her, develop her into someone quite special. I had a romance with the idea that she was a member, finally, of the working class and here was I, this leftist intellectual (via Jean Malaquais), and now finally I had someone from the working class that I, as a middle-class, guarded, sheltered, spoiled individual, could work for and develop." It was a complex marriage: they drank, they experimented sexually, they became parents, they struggled with their art, they had fierce battles, and maintained a tenuous solidarity through all the difficulties of the next year.

"The White Negro" was by far the most extraordinary piece that had appeared in *Dissent*, and brought the journal needed attention, although the editors had problems with parts of it. Howe said he was excited to have the piece, but regretted not asking Mailer to cut out the hoodlum-storekeeper passage. Mailer said that the essay "made me one of the spokesmen for the Beat Generation," even if the more pacific Beats had their reservations. The *Partisan Review* crowd—William Phillips, Dwight Macdonald, Lionel and Diana Trilling—especially Macdonald—didn't like the antinomian emphasis of the essay, but as Phillips explained, it was nevertheless "acceptable," "as with D.H. Lawrence," because "the thinking of a man who's wild was interesting." Jones had no use for the essay, telling Mailer it was "a good illustration of a swiftly accelerating decadence." Mailer read the essay aloud to Styron, and told him writing it was like coughing up blood." Styron, always the formalist, didn't admire its rhetoric or agree with its conclusions, yet was "fascinated by it nevertheless." The division of opinion on the essay continues; it is regularly used as a club in the continuing race-gender-power debates of academics. It rasps, it confuses, it elates, but it is unforgettable.

Mailer told Knox the 9,000-word essay was the best thing he had ever written. It will be important over the years, he said, because it points to "a new way to think." In addition to the essay's long-term influence, he saw two immediate results: "I was now the intermediary," he said, between the Beats and the intellectuals, between, say, William Burroughs and Dwight Macdonald, and this satisfied his two psyches. It also "emboldened" him later, he said, to write *Advertisements for Myself*, where he planned to take on issues that no one else would. The first new piece he wrote for inclusion in this planned collection was a fragment from the dramatic version of *The Deer Park*. He expected to have a first draft completed soon, as he said

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to Brossard in which he also turned down his request for an interview in a girlie magazine, *Nugget*. He liked the magazine, he said, but felt that appearing in it would show his literary enemies "that my writing about sex is not the act of a serious writer but one who is looking for notoriety."

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He finished a draft of the four-act play, in early August. It was over three hours long. He wrote to Bea, Knox and Malaquais on the same day to announce its completion. He told Knox that it was "one of the four or five best plays that have been written since the war," and said to Bea that "it's better than *Death of a Salesman* and *Streetcar Named Desire* put together." Mailer had seen both plays on Broadway and admired them extravagantly, so he may have swallowed hard when making when making this claim. Getting it produced, he told Malaquais, would be difficult because it was "so bold that it could really cause an explosion." Knox wanted to direct it, and Mailer told him choosing a director was the prerogative of the producer. If he ever produced it off-Broadway with his own money, however, Knox would certainly get a role. Ten years later, this is exactly what happened. Knox was the star of the production, playing the comic role of Collie Munshin, Herman Teppis' opportunistic son-in-law, who introduces Eitel and Elena.

Mailer had lunch in New York with a well-known agent, Monica McCall, and got her interested in the play, sight unseen. He mailed her a copy with a cover note saying the play was a bit shorter than Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, which Mailer had also seen. He appended a note with his "dream cast":

Eitel	Charles Boyer or Laurence Olivier
Elena	Marilyn Monroe (if her voice is loud enough)
Marion Fay	Marlon Brando or Ben Gazzara or Monty Clift
Collie Munshin	Jackie Gleason or Jules Munshin
Lulu Meyers	Elizabeth Taylor

It is notable that Mailer doesn't mention Sergius O'Shaugnessy. In the dramatic version, his presence is diminished; he is a sort of impresario, a hip version of the stage manager in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. The play, Mailer suggests, is a product of O'Shaugnessy's memory; one that takes place in "a rather incredible hell," a metaphysical perdition. Marion Faye becomes a more important figure, and some of the action occurs after he and Eitel have both served time in prison. The Elena-Eitel affair and Eitel's subtle corruption remain the central actions. McCall began showing the play around to producers.

Almost three years had passed since the completion of the novel version of *The Deer Park*, and Mailer wanted to begin the leviathan novel about "the mysteries of murder, suicide, incest, orgy, orgasm, and Time," as he later described it. He had no real excuse not to begin. His play was being considered, but he conceded to Malaquais that it might be "a bad play—enough people are turning it down." A retrospective collection of his work was still on his mind, but he wasn't sure how to proceed with it, especially since Minton was eager to have another novel from him. He wrote to Knox that he was going to put off "side work" and finally, after Thanksgiving 1957, he started on the novel. Over the next month "with a medium gruesome

effort," he wrote 27 pages. Then he stalled again. He told Malaquais that with the exception of "The White Negro" and his *Voice* columns, nothing he had done for years had been successful and the thought of "this enormous novel I'm now starting which could well take ten years" was simply too daunting. He read Baudelaire's *Intimate Journals*, an excruciatingly bitter account of his drug and alcohol-soaked final years, and thought, "Now there's a man who's exactly like me." By the end of the year, he had reached an impasse. He told Malaquais what he needed to write again: "[I]f I had twice the youthful energy which wrote *The Naked and the Dead*, and had your powers of reasoning, and Meyer Shapiro's retention and culture, and five good friends who supported me, took care of me, even wiped my ass—why then, by God, I could write the book which would create a new radical movement."

In early 1958, Knox suggested that M^{ail}er bring the play to Actors Studio, a New York City theatrical organization founded by Elia Kazan and a few others in 1947, and then run for over thirty years by Lee Strasberg, the guru of Method acting. The organization's guiding principle is that actors, playwrights and directors be allowed to develop their skills without commercial pressure; the productions are read or staged on simple sets. Many talented actors have been affiliated over the years, and it was there that M^{ail}er met Rip Torn, Anne Bancroft, Kevin McCarthy and several others. The camaraderie revived M^{ail}er somewhat. He maintained a membership in the organization for the rest of his life. A friend of Knox's, the director Frank Corsaro, staged some readings of M^{ail}er's script, with M^{ail}er kibitzing. Knox played Munshin, Torn was Faye, McCarthy was Eitel and Elena was played by Bancroft. But she and M^{ail}er had disagreements and, after following life, Adele took over the role, performing well after some instruction from Corsaro. M^{ail}er had gifts for characterization, but the play in its initial version

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lacked a dramatic arc, and he withdrew it after several months. He would return with a new version in the fall of 1960, and then tinker with it for several years before its off-Broadway run in 1967. At the time of his death, he was working on still another revision. The Actors Studio involvement heightened his interest in theater, and he later attempted to recast several of his novels into plays or films.

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While in Connecticut, Mailer spent a lot of time in his carpentry shop. Adele remembers hearing "Norman's anger in the piercing whine of the buzz saw." He was "becoming more detached and more depressed," she said. But he spent a lot time with Daniele, who they called Dandy. Every few weeks they would drive into a party in New York, returning drunk after harrowing drives in winter weather. One night they got into a mean fight on the way home about flirtations at the party. "I handled it in my predictably alcoholic, out-of-control way, hating him, wanting to pull his curly hair out by the roots," Adele recalled. Her mother was visiting them, but they continued to scream at each other and then, in the early hours, took swipes at each other. In the morning, her mother asked her what happened and Adele mentioned divorce. But later they thrashed it out. "Believe it or not," she told her mother, "we love each other, and he loves the baby. Don't worry, we'll work it out."

On one of their trips to New York in early 1958, at Lillian Hellman's party, Mailer met Norman Podhoretz and his wife, Midge Decter, both of whom would aid Mailer's career. Just before they met, Podhoretz had published an essay, "The Know-Nothing Barbarians," attacking the Beats, especially Ginsberg and Kerouac, in *Partisan Review*. A

Columbia protégé of Lionel Trilling who had also studied under F. R. Leavis at Cambridge, Podhoretz made some sharp remarks in the piece about Mailer's views on violence in "The White Negro." Like many others, Podhoretz was appalled by what he saw as the hipster's "psychopathic personality." Nevertheless, he was taken with the essay's "sheer intellectual and moral brazenness." Mailer, down in the boxer's crouch he adopted for such occasions, confronted Podhoretz, telling him he had misunderstood "The White Negro." "Like me, and practically every Brooklyn boy I had even known, he was direct and pugnacious and immensely preoccupied with the issue of manly courage," Podhoretz said. He parried Mailer's attack by telling him that he should withhold criticism until he had seen a long essay he was writing about him for *Partisan Review*. Within a short time, Podhoretz showed Mailer the galleys of the essay, titled "Norman Mailer: The Embattled Vision." It is the first major examination of all of Mailer's work, and contains a summary of his strengths and aspirations. Podhoretz doesn't say if their conversations are reflected in the 25-page essay, but it is a warm, generous estimate, and the opening accurately captures Mailer's self-estimate. Mailer, he says, is one of the few postwar writers whose qualities "suggest a major novelist in the making." What is most remarkable, he continues, is that

his work has responded to the largest problems of this period with a directness and an assurance that we rarely find in the novels of his contemporaries. Mailer is very much an American, but he appears to be endowed with the capacity for seeing himself as a battleground of history—a capacity that is usually associated with the French and that American writers are thought never to have. He is a man

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given to ideologies, a holder of extreme positions, and in this too he differs from the general run of his literary contemporaries. . . .]

Mailer had to be pleased with his new friend's endorsement of his desire to tackle large, hairy questions, especially since he did so in the *Partisan Review*, the flagship publication of the mandarin New York literary world. Their friendship was cemented.

Mailer met another couple at the Hellman party who would also play a major role in his acceptance by "The Family," as the political columnist Murray Kempton called the *Partisan Review-Commentary*-Columbia University intellectuals and critics who dominated high culture in New York from the 1940s to the 1960s. Lionel and Diana Trilling were key members, and their approval meant a good deal to Mailer during the next decade. Mailer was seated next to Diana at the table and turned to her with a comment not recommended for establishing a friendship: "And how about you, smart cunt." In her memoir, Trilling said, "I am usually addressed with appalling respect: he got my attention. We became good friends." She would also write a major essay about Mailer, and engage in an important correspondence with him. Steven Marcus, another Columbia professor, also met Mailer at the dinner party. Marcus' 1963 *Paris Review* interview with him became a major document in establishing Mailer as a serious practitioner of literary art. It was an important dinner party, and helped confirm Mailer's long-held belief that the right mixture of liquor and daring at parties could sometimes dramatically change people's lives.

Mailer had written a number of pieces for *Dissent*, and had done his *Voice* column, but beginning in the late 1950s, he began to move adroitly between highbrow, popular and Beat

publications. He had decided to plow more than one field, and *Partisan Review*, *Esquire*, and *Big Table*, a Beat publication out of Chicago, demonstrate the spread. In the 1960s, he would add *Paris Review*, *Commentary* and *Playboy*, continue with the *Voice*, appear occasionally in girlie magazines such as *Rogue*, *Stag* and *Nugget*, as well as in oddball publications such as *Way Out* and *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*. "The White Negro" opened doors. Not only was he invited to the homes of The Family, and asked to speak on college campuses and appear on TV, he began being noticed by important literary critics. Podhoretz was the first, but then came a clutch of essays, some of praise, some of dismay, but all recognizing that Mailer was one of the most important postwar writers. Charles Fenton, writing in *Saturday Review*, said Mailer was a "conspicuous success." Edmund Fuller, who would review Mailer's work for decades, wrote in *American Scholar* that "the promising talent of Norman Mailer has collapsed utterly" in his second and third novels. Bridging the gap between Fenton and Fuller was Dwight Macdonald, who had become quite friendly with Mailer. Macdonald named him and Baldwin as the best young novelists. He praised Baldwin for writing successfully about the "homosexual dilemma" in *Giovanni's Room*, but was more expansive about Mailer: "I value Mailer because he is 'a born writer,' whose failures (of which there are plenty) are more interesting than the successes of less-talented writers, but chiefly because he is always experimenting, changing, developing, and, naturally, making a fool of himself." Macdonald also praised Mailer's enthusiasm for ideas, saying that if he could bring his intellectual qualities together with his literary skills, "the result may be a masterpiece."

In mid-March, relations with the Styrons, and with James Jones and his wife, Gloria (née Mosolino, who he had married a year earlier), took a turn. Mailer wrote to Aaron to tell him they

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were returning to New York, as their social life in Connecticut had dissolved. "Lousy people these country gentry," he wrote. "Beneath the manners they don't even have the humanity of slum hoods," thus lowering the Styrons beneath the New Yorker who had gouged his eye. Mailer's hand-written, two-page list of 24 grievances, titled "Styron's Style," explain some of the circumstances of the breakup. The first complaint, "Hiram Haydn and The Deer Park," indicates Mailer's vexation about the lack of Styron's support for his novel. There are three other literary complaints: that Styron would not freely comment on Mailer's work; that he had suggested that Howard Fertig was the real author of Mailer's play; and the "bitchery" with Jones. One notation states that Styron had told him that Jones' 1957 novel, *Some Came Running*, which had been badly hammered by reviewers, "wouldn't be written by a 15-year old." Mailer wrote later that when Styron would read aloud the worst passages of Jones' novel, he "would laugh along with the rest, but I was a touch sick with myself for doing so."

The majority of the items on the list concern what the Mailers perceived as Styron's high handedness—cutting the Mailers off from Lew and Jay Allen, dismissing Aldridge's idea for a literary conference, calling Leslie Aldridge "the slut"; and, most irritating, inviting Adele's parents to visit them after Adele had "obviously demurred." When the Styrons visited, Bill would "snoop" and "poke around" on detours from trips to the bathroom. One night he found some of Mailer's pornography and told all the dinner guests about his discovery. Some slights seem minor or misinterpreted: The Styrons gave them expensive Christmas gifts; always left some of Adele's food on their plates, "including dessert."

The core of the ill feelings centered, however, on the Mailers' perception of how the Styrons were treating Adele. She was upset because Styron gave her "clumsily patronizing pats

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on the shoulder" and called her "sweetie," and that they refused to look seriously at any of her paintings. The Mailers also noted Styron's "Adele-go-back-to-Brooklyn remark." But there is no mention of the comment Styron reputedly made, the one that resulted in an angry letter from Mailer, suggesting that the list was drawn up before it was made. The Mailers had engaged in various intimacies with another woman on several occasions, and a few times with another couple. His marriage to Adele, Mailer said, was "very free."

We had a lot of orgies. Mostly with women because Adele was very attracted to other women. And she was attractive to women, so we'd pair her up with another girl and then we had a lot of—and very occasionally, we'd have a four-way orgy but I couldn't stand it, I couldn't stand a man making love to her. That would wipe me out. It was very painful, so those were fewer, but there were a lot of orgies on the other side. Very selfish from my point of view; those were the years I was having two women and that gave me a feeling of great superiority. I'd feel, "Oh well, these other literary lights, they had their social superiority, but I had my sexual superiority," and that was what was feeding me.

Someone told Mailer that Styron was making remarks about Adele being a lesbian. On March 12, he wrote to Styron.

Bill,

I've been told by a reliable source — closer to you than one might expect — that you have been passing a few atrocious remarks about Adele. Normally, I would hesitate to believe the story, but my memory of slanderous remarks you've

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made about other women leaves me not at all in doubt. So I tell you this, Billy-boy. You have got to learn to keep your mouth shut about my wife, for if you do not, and I hear of it again, I will invite you to a fight in which I expect to stomp out of you a fat amount of your yellow and treacherous shit.

What you choose to do about this letter is of course your own affair, but I suggest you do no more than button your lip. The majority of things you do come back to me, and my patience with your cowardly and infantile viciousness—so demeaning and disgraceful to your talent—is at an end.

Norman

According to his biographer, Styron was “astonished” by Mailer’s letter. Lew Allen, who Styron showed it to, said, “Bill was scared, really scared.” He immediately wrote a pointed refutation, one of which accused Mailer’s source of having a “warped and perverted imagination.” He denied making any remarks about Adele. But he did not mail the letter the next day when visiting his wife in the hospital where she had just given birth to their second child, he met Jim and Gloria Jones and informed them of the situation. They concluded that something other than the alleged remarks must be bothering Mailer.

Years Later, Styron told Carl Rollyson that the letters from Mailer were “profoundly upsetting and depressing.” He called the first one “a lightning bolt.” But he went on to say the following:

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A lot of people didn't like Adele. She was aggressive. She was out of her—you know—I think a lot of people thought she wasn't a lady. I liked her, but she'd get drunk. I think a lot of people regarded her as common—or whatever the word is, and she just didn't fit in, a big aggressive broad . . . and people were put off by her. It may have been indeed—I suspect it was true—that I probably uttered something about her like a lot of other people did and it got back to Norman.

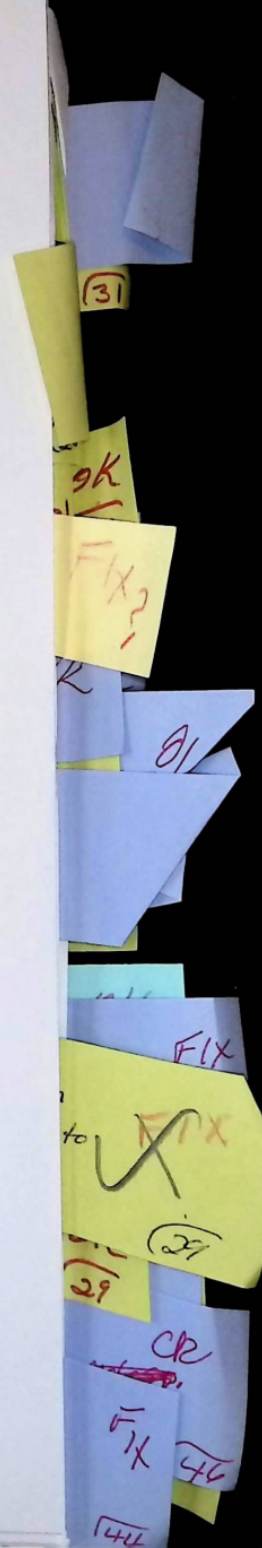
Adele's version divided the blame between the two men. Norman, she speculates, "probably bragged about the few times we'd indulged in a three-way." ^{comes} Styron, "employing one of his sneaky tactics" out of his envy of Mailer's status, "seized on the stories as an excuse to get Norman." In Mailer's recollection, he was partly to blame:

Yeah, I wrote him a letter and told him to stop bad-mouthing stuff had come back to me and I think looking back on it, I provoked the fight. I didn't have hard evidence of what he'd been bad-mouthing — I was certain he had been bad-mouthing Adele. You could tell almost by the way he looked at her. And of course, Adele in turn, what she had in relation to all these people — most of them WASPS — was she had her sexual intensity and she was letting them know it, so there was a certain hostility basic to the whole thing. And that was very much there in these relationships. You know, her attitude was well, 'Styron may be superior in this way, this way, this way, but I have the best sexuality and as a result, Norman does too, and you, poor Bill Styron will never know.'

A few weeks earlier, Mailer had written to Jones giving him a critique of his recently published novella, *The Pistol* which he said, "contains a perfect short novel buried within what was for me, very frankly, a slipshod presentation." He felt it was too didactic, and it needed a "touch of mystery." He ended by saying, "Let's get together soon, you clunkhead. You're the only man I know who has an outside chance of ever understanding me." They did get together more than once in New York, and the Joneses also visited them once in Connecticut. At one of their nights out in New York, Adele got into an argument with Gloria and, distressed at what her husband called "emotional sword-twirling," they left early in the evening. In a March 18 letter, which begins with Jones' response to Mailer's comments on *The Pistol*, Jones said he was sorry about their departure, but still felt that Adele "was pretty much out of line" with both him and Gloria. She tried "to get my goat," he said, "telling me about a conversation (unflattering in the extreme) which she had heard in the hall about me, and did I want to know what people really thought about me?" She went on in this vein, Jones said, and so they departed. Apparently, the possibility of a fistfight came up, because Jones said he didn't intend to engage in one with Mailer because "it would give Adele too much happiness." He and Gloria liked Adele and thought she was "a remarkably sweet gal when she's sober," but they didn't like to be around her when she wasn't. Jones left it up to Mailer about getting together again, but said he was getting too old for "perpetual hassling. If that's what you call living out at the furthest edges of danger, then I'm not for it, and will never make a hipster." Mailer found Jones' letter in his mail when he returned from a trip to Florida.

A letter from Styron was also there when he returned.

Norman:



I don't know who your sick and pitiable 'reliable source' is (how much he must hate and envy me, or maybe you, but above all hate himself), but you might have him or her get in touch with me some day and repeat his allegations to my face. Your letter was so mean and contemptible, so revealing of some other attitude toward me aside from my alleged slander, but more importantly so utterly false, that it does not deserve even this much of a reply.

B.S.

Mailer replied first to Jones, painfully. "Parasites," he said, seem to have undermined Jones' ability to "trust the notion that somebody just wants to see you to make friends."

Well, I'm an old enough clubfighter in New York's social eliminations to have known, even as I was doing it, that it was a big mistake to make it so obvious that I wanted to get together with you, but I kept telling myself to drop the guard just once, that you weren't a shithead snob like all the others I know, and so Mailer takes a chance, you're going to be dead one of these days. Well, buddy, you proved that my sour instincts were more reliable than my few remaining generous ones, and so you did me a damage and I don't like you a hell of a lot for it.

Nor do I like this business of giving Adele the rap. I don't know what the hell she said to Mos [Gloria], but it couldn't have been so godawful because 1) she liked Mos, and 2) she wanted to make friends—she was damn bewildered when the two of you took your powder. My guess—from the kind of stuff you reported as flipping you—was that she went in for some heavy kidding which she

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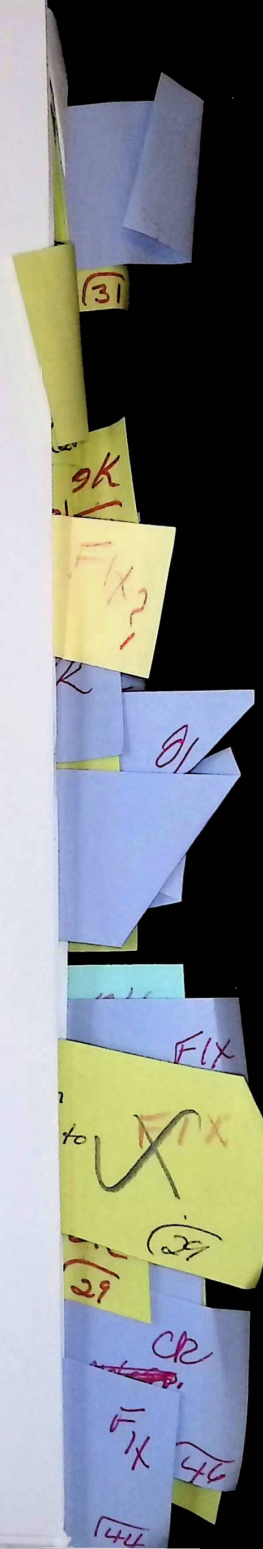
saw as teasing, and both of you chose to see as deliberate insult. Well, stow that bullshit. If Adele had come to me doing a burn because Gloria had said this or that unforgivable thing to her, I would have told her to stick it up her ass, she was a big enough girl to take a little crap rather than jam up a possible friendship. It just isn't nice of you, Jim, and it isn't of Gloria, either, because you don't tear an evening over a couple of remarks unless you really want to—which is the way I read it, that both of you were not interested in doing much else but tearing the evening. If you saw a fight in the air, I didn't. I wouldn't get into a fight with you unless I were ready to kill you, and I always instinctively assumed that was true for you.

Jones had ended his letter by saying if Mailer wanted to see him, he could come to New York. Mailer ended his by saying he'd meet only in Connecticut, and if Jones didn't want to do that, there was no need "starting a farce of letters back and forth." Jones agreed, apparently, and they did not see each other for several years. Their friendship was all but destroyed. The Joneses left for Paris near the end of March and lived there for the next 16 years.

A week after writing to Jones, Mailer wrote to Styron:

I just got back from a few days in Florida, and found this billet-doux. So I invite you to get together with me face-to-face and repeat that my letter is mean, contemptible, and false—if you feel up to it. If you don't, recognize your reply for what it is—a crock of shit.

Mailer



Styron did not reply, and he and Mailer did not communicate for over twenty years. Styron and the Joneses drew closer after their split with Mailer, and would become even better friends after he published a searing appraisal of their work eighteen months later. Within a few days, Mailer had lost two of his best friends. He believed them to be the only two of his contemporaries, save Baldwin, whose ambition and talent matched his own.

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The same day that he wrote his last letter to Jones, he wrote to Baldwin. Almost reflexively, it seems, he tried to build a bridge to replace the two that had collapsed. Baldwin was also moving back to New York, and Mailer promised him a big party after the Bridgewater house was sold and they found a place in New York. He said he had just read *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), Baldwin's second book, the one that established his reputation as an essayist of the first rank and on which his continuing reputation rests. Mailer said that he thought it to be "beautifully written and intellectually alive. Of how many other things can I say that?" Another letter written that day went to Knox, who along with Malaquais, invariably received frank letters about his inner states. He said he was exhausted and had only written sixty pages of his new work in four months. "Writing ties me into knots which only liquor releases at the expense of my fucked up brains." He was feeling middle-aged, he said, and had grown a moustache and beard.

The new work he referred to consisted of two long stories, one about Marion Faye, "Advertisements for Myself on the Way Out: The Prologue to a Long Novel," and "The Time of Her Time," about O'Shaugnessy cutting a sexual swath through the Village. There was also a fragment about Faye being raped in prison, and after his release showing up at O'Shaugnessy's

loft, but it was clearly unfinished and remains unpublished. A few weeks earlier, Mailer had written to Philip Rahv at *Partisan Review* to see if he was interested in either of the stories, which he said were "on the edge between the serious and the pornographic." Rahv wrote back saying that while publishing anything too raw might endanger the magazine's non-profit status, he nevertheless felt that *PR*'s readers "need to be shocked out of their complacent regard for us," and that he would be glad to look at anything Mailer would send. Mailer replied by saying that he liked this "damn-the-torpedoes invitation," and sent him the two stories. He was also planning to include both pieces in his new collection, which he hoped would generate interest, and give him the prod he needed to proceed. In the end, Rahv selected "Way Out."

Described as "awkward," "muddled," and "cloying" by critics, the story has received little comment. It is all of these things, but it is also a tale, like some of Poe's, which emphasizes the perilous or mutable condition of its teller. From this point on in his career, Mailer's narrators will inevitably point to the harrowing difficulties of telling their stories, a circumstance which becomes as important as the story itself. Like the narrator of "The Man Who Studied Yoga," whose name changes from day to day, the narrator of "Way Out" is a disembodied figure who says, Ishmael-like, "my name eludes me." He admits to being one or more of the following: "ghost, *geist*, demiurge, dog, bud, flower, tree, house, or some lost way-station of the divine," perhaps a participant in the "fluid conscious of a God." Humans, he says, partake in the deity's struggle to forge an extraordinary destiny, "yes, God is like me, only more so."

He hints that he may even be an old house in Provincetown, one similar to the one on Miller Hill Road where Mailer spent the summer of 1950 with Bea. A "climactic party" of several days duration took place there during a gloomy stretch of fall weather. The narrator says

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that "in the history of our republic there has never been a party equal in montage." Marion Faye, the ex-con host, is now a fabulously wealthy "master pimp." He has chartered two planes to fly in 30 powerful, prestigious and/or infamous figures, one each of the following: prostitute, boxer, psychoanalyst, athlete, jazz musician, actor, cop, spy, queer, trans-sexual, grande dame, crook, mother, taxi driver, TV entertainer, physicist, war hero, bullfighter, etc., etc.—pilgrims all. The *Canterbury Tales* could have served as a model. The party's program: first an orgy, followed by a suicide and a murder. Faye intends to kill someone—a "Brave murder"—and so reverse the process of his corruption. The act will, reciprocally, advance God's program by getting the dialectic working again, helping to blast the twentieth century out of the caution and propriety that is smothering everything artful, brave and good in life. The 1,000- page novel which is to follow would then explore the trajectories of the guests and their interactions after this very hip, potentially history-altering party. Mailer was setting a high bar.

At the very end, the narrator admits that he is the spirit of the dead man—perhaps Faye himself—and the list of potential identities given at the outset are possible stages in his reincarnation, should the embattled God who makes karmic decisions determine that the murder was justified and has aided His cause. On a functional level, Mailer was trying to surmount the point of view difficulties of *The Deer Park*. He was fumbling for a way to retain a first-person voice, while remaining free to explore the minds and hearts of a huge cast of characters in a novel of Proustian scope and ambition—a balancing act he worked to perfect all of his writing life. If the murdered man is judged to have been a true warrior of God, he will be reincarnated after he has told the story. The entire mammoth novel will be told in the instant "between the stirrup and the ground." The project was so vast that he never found a way to move forward from

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the prologue. The victim would have to have been as historically pivotal as Rasputin—someone Mailer planned to write about in his final years—and therein was his problem: he needed a half-heroic, half-malign figure and at the time couldn't conceive one. We have, therefore, only the assurance of a nameless, irritatingly evanescent narrator that the party is of epochal dimensions. Mailer was unable to come up with a good plot, his inveterate weakness. There was another reason: he was about to be distracted by invitations too alluring to be ignored. The story, therefore, is a curiosity, but one which contains the germ of much of his future fiction.

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✓ The English department of the University of Chicago invited him to speak, ~~in May 1958~~, and he accepted. He was to meet formally and informally with creative writing students. His host ~~for the week~~ ^{a week in May 1958} was novelist Richard G. Stern, who would remain friendly with Mailer. Assisting ✓ him was Robert F. Lucid, a graduate student, whose job was to show Mailer around town. Lucid ✓ became one of Mailer's closest friends and vies with Aldridge for the informal title, Dean of Mailer Studies.

Mailer spoke in two of Stern's classes and "enjoyed the sheer hell out of it." He liked the give-and-take with students and told Knox that he could make a living teaching if necessary. In his letter accepting the invitation, he said that he would like to explore a "series of questions on the relations between one's own experience and the experience one writes about." In the event, these questions turned into a recitation of "horror tales" about *The Deer Park*, which no doubt cranked him up to write his essay about its composition, "The Mind of an Outlaw." When he thanked Stern upon his return to Connecticut, he emphasized that his tales had not been

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exaggerated. The serial rejections of the novel still burned. Mailer enjoyed Chicago immensely. Stern and his wife took him to a nightclub to hear Lenny Bruce, and he did some late-night carousing with ~~Robert~~ Lucid and a young poet, Paul Carroll. After the visit, he said Chicago was "the only big city I ever felt comfortable in," largely because it reminded him of Brooklyn, that is, "if Brooklyn ever made it." But the major outcome of the visit—apart from meeting Stern, Lucid and Carroll—was the interview he did with Stern.

Mailer had not had much sleep for several days, and in the interview found himself "rushing into a confession of ideas I had never really talked about with anyone before." In his brief preface to the published interview, Stern says that Mailer's speech rose to "a pitch of excited engagement" as the interview progressed, the words tumbling out with "urgency" and "authenticity." The discussion takes off from "The White Negro," which Stern puts down as a product of "anti-expressionism." Mailer patiently explains that when he was younger, he might have agreed, but "I started as one kind of a writer, and I've been evolving into another kind of writer," moving from Marxist rationalism to mysticism. It has been a hard journey, he says, and "consists of losing all the friends that one's found in the past." Then Mailer made what Stern called "a fantastic assertion":

I think there is one single burning pinpoint of the vision in Hip: it's that God is in danger of dying. In my very limited knowledge of theology, this has never really been expressed before. I believe Hip conceives of Man's fate being tied up with God's fate. God is no longer all-powerful. (Here a phrase was lost to static on the tape.) The moral consequences of this are not only staggering, but they're thrilling; because moral experience is intensified rather than diminished.

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Human beings, Mailer continues, "are the seed-carriers, the voyagers, the explorers, the embodiment of that embattled vision; maybe we are engaged in a heroic activity and not a mean one."

Stern: This is really something.

Mailer: Well, I would say it is far more noble in its conception, far more arduous as a religious conception than the notion of the all-powerful God who takes care of us.

Stern: And do you take to this conception for its perilous nobility, or do you take to it because you believe in it?

Mailer: I believe in it.

Stern: You believe in it.

Mailer: It's the only thing that makes any sense to me.

Mailer's reply, echoes the one that Jones had given him about Karma in Illinois five years earlier, before Mailer had begun his evolution, or his transmogrification, into another kind of writer.

Toward the end of the interview Lucid breaks in to say that what bothers him about Mailer's comments is that while the novelist "consciously makes decisions and accepts the moral consequences," the hipster is "unconscious of risks of this kind." Mailer responds by saying that tacit in his comments is the belief that the unconscious "has an enormous teleological sense," that it is always measuring to what degree the actions of individuals are conducive or destructive

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to growth. Hour by hour, minute by minute, it asks, am I growing or shrinking? "It is with this thing that they move, that they grope forward—this navigator at the seat of their being," Mailer said. He had discovered someone new in the cockpit of his psyche. The "anxious boyish Jewish intellectual" who had been the link between the saint and the psychopath has given up his place to a helmsman from the lower depths, a guide and connection to the mysteries of Being and becoming.

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After Rahv had formally accepted "Way Out" for the fall 1958 issue of *PR*, Mailer wrote to his mother, who was visiting Susan in Mexico, with the news. "*Partisan* is the most important (by far) literary magazine in this country," he said, "and to print a long piece by me will do an awful lot of subtle good. I'm really pleased." He was also happy, as he told Yamanishi, that "The White Negro" was "much discussed," and that he was being touted as "one of the very few reliable guides to the mysteries of the American nihilism which is coming into being." To be accepted by the opposed wings of America's literary culture put Mailer in the catbird seat he had aspired to since falling from the heights with *Barbary Shore*. His timing couldn't have been better. *On the Road* was published in September 1957, three months after the "The White Negro." Kerouac's novel had produced a hunger for insights into the movement's origins and meaning, and Mailer's essay was often seen as its intellectual manifesto. There were condemnations and celebrations of Beatniks in all the major publications, and *Life* did a photo essay.

The first chronicler of the Beat generation, John Clellon Holmes, said that Mailer brought to an understanding of Beatness "the most venturesome intellect (not to mention nerves) currently at work in American literature." He called "The White Negro" a document "fully as important to the secret history of this age as *Notes from the Underground* was to the Europe of its time." The movement wanted intellectual approbation from a celebrated writer, and Mailer wanted attention and the circulation of his ideas. His essay, considered notorious by some, gave him "street cred." By late 1958, he was at least an associate member of The Family, and the only one to rise above a condescending or angry dismissal of the Beats. While he did not care for the Beats' beatific passivity, or for Kerouac's characterization of the Beats as "solitary Bartlebies staring out at the dead wall window of our civilization," he admired the "ecstatic flux" of his language. Mailer was angry not passive, engaged not withdrawn, and much preferred "American nihilism" to the "Beat Generation." He said that the difference between Beat and Hip was the same as that between rebellion and revolution. "Beat still has no center to its rage, and so is sentimental enough to assume that the world can be saved with words. It is going to take more than that." He never changed his mind on this distinction.

At a party in August, Mailer told Dawn Powell that he wanted to move to New York. "All that green makes him sick," she recorded in her diary, a remark that brings to mind Woody Allen's line about living in Connecticut: "I am at two with nature." That same month, he saw the film version of *Naked* with Adele and his sister during one of their regular trips to the city. Barbara said her brother was appalled by the production, and she just sank lower and lower in her seat. Mailer wrote up a response a short time later, detailing "the disembowelling naked greed which gutted this movie of its promise." Director Raoul Walsh's casting bothered him the

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most. Aldo Ray, "a big fattish bull of a man with a gravel voice," played Sgt. Croft, "a small, lean man" with "a soft murderous Texas voice." In the novel, Mailer said, "Croft was the hunter, the killer, the horn of the platoon, an icy will-driven phallus of a man, a mountain-climber—one cannot substitute a raw-voiced weightlifter." Added to the casting problems was the inclusion of a big scene in a Hawaii nightclub—no one in the novel version of *Naked* ever sets foot in Hawaii—where a stripper, played by a genuine ecdysiast, Lili St. Cyr, is pawed by drunken soldiers. Mailer ends the diatribe by saying that if it seems he has been hard on the producer and director, "I can tell you, friends and foes, dear family, there is no one I feel harder on at the moment than the real villain, that stupid idiot—Norman Mailer." Mailer later called the film "the worst movie I've ever seen," but he did not publish his angry comments on it in *Advertisements*, as he had originally planned.

There was one more disappointment before the Mailers left Connecticut. He had been hoping that Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe, now back from England would invite them for dinner. They lived only five miles apart, and while not notably friendly, they were both Brooklyn boys who had begun their careers high on the mountain. But Mailer said that the invitation never came, as he remembered in his biography of Monroe (referring to himself as the "novelist"):

Nor could the novelist in conscience condemn the playwright for such avoidance of drama. The secret ambition, after all, had been to steal Marilyn; in all his vanity he thought no one was so well suited to bring out the best in her as himself, a conceit which fifty million other men may also have held—he was still too untested to recognize that the foundation of her art might be to speak to each man as if he were all of male existence available to her. It was only a few marriages

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(which is to say a few failures) later that he could recognize how he would have done no better than Miller and probably been damaged further in the process.

Adele's memory is that Miller did invite them for drinks, and then mentioned casually that Marilyn was not at home, that she had gone to Hollywood on business. Mailer was angry on the drive home. "The bastard waited till she was away to invite us over," he said. M. on his account 15 years after the event; Adele's was written nearly 40 years later and is misremembered. Miller's memory, however, supports Mailer's. In his autobiography, he says that Mailer "might make good company for an evening," but Monroe "rejected the idea," saying she "'knew these types,'" that is, "people obsessed with images." Miller wrote his account while still angry about what he felt was an unfair portrait of his marriage in *Marilyn*. He speculated that Mailer might have treated Monroe and him differently "had we fed him one evening and allowed him time to confront her humanity, not merely her publicity." Monroe was aware of Mailer's writing, according to her friend, W. J. Weatherby. At some point, she read his copy *The Deer Park*. Her response: Mailer was "too impressed by power." While this may seem to be a simplistic response to Mailer's hard-won insights into the complexities of how power is wielded in Hollywood, her intuition wasn't all wrong. In a later interview, Mailer said that his plan during his time in Connecticut had been to write a play in which she would star but in hindsight, it would have been a "terrible tragedy" to play Pygmalion with Monroe, admitting that he was just another of the many men who wanted to make the most of this "sweet child of life," but in his own way, not hers.

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The Mailers moved back to New York in December and rented an apartment at 73 Perry Street in the Village. Mailer had known Ginsberg since the days of his loft parties, but had only met Kerouac in passing. Sometime after they returned, Kerouac and Ginsberg went to see Mailer. Ginsberg told Peter Manso that the meeting was friendly, and that the two writers weren't competitive even though each considered himself the best writer in the country. Mailer liked Kerouac "more than I would have thought," but found him to be tired. They talked about the *Village Voice* and writing. Ginsberg's summation was that Mailer "was just beginning to try and seize the world," while Kerouac was disengaging. "In Buddhist terms," Ginsb "was already sick of the world," while Mailer was engaged in what Jews called *tikkun* repairing the world. There may not have been any discussion of "The White Negro," as both Ginsberg and Kerouac had reservations about its positions on violence. On the other hand, Ginsberg said that he felt "a sense of brotherhood" with Mailer, because they were both trying to undermine the nation's pervasive social conformity. For Ginsberg, Mailer's essay was "the most intelligent statement I'd ever seen by any literary-critical person, anyone acquainted with the great world of literature." Over the years, Mailer would have many contacts with Ginsberg, especially in the 1960s when they were involved in a number of anti-war protests. But he may have seen Kerouac once more, at a party the Mailers gave in mid-1958.

All through the fall and winter of 1958 and into the spring of the next year, Mailer labored on the collection, still unnamed. Heretofore, he had never worried a great deal at nonfiction prose style. His forte, he felt, was to deliver unsettling hypotheses and blockbuster theories that would "influence the history of my time," and not engage in the kind of fancy-pants writing he despised when he was writing for the *Advocate*. With "Lipton's" and "The White

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Negro," his style had become less clunky and more colloquial, and the prefaces reflected this shift. The problem he faced was that to accurately contextualize the pieces in the collection, he had to talk more about himself more than he cared to. He had always implicitly accepted Flaubert's dictum that "the artist should be in his work, like God's creation, invisible and all-powerful; he should be felt everywhere and seen nowhere," a view he was parroting when he told Lillian Ross in 1948 that it was "much better when people who have read your book don't know anything about you, even what you look like." Writing the prefaces in the face of a growing awareness of the difficulty and doubtful wisdom of separating his personal worlds, had made him "a little desperate," especially since he had quit smoking, again. Yet, he still felt that the prefaces, as he told his Chicago friend, George Lea, to be "shit work."

I got sick of myself, sick of saying I felt this, I knew that, I wondered whether, I induced, and I and one and almost a he or two. It's weird, it's a little like self-analysis before you realize it, and your style dips into your own shitbag so fast it's staggering. So now I'm facing whether to throw all this crap away, and put the book out without the prefaces, three months of work shot, and a less readable book or maybe keep on with the gamble and waste another three months on what may not be writable for me.

But he continued, encouraged by the reception of "Way Out." He told William Phillips, Rahv's co-editor at *PR*, that he had received all good comments on the story, except from Macdonald, who "detested" it. By the end of 1958, he had a provisional plan for the collection, which he sent it to Minton, promising he would have everything to Putnam's by February 1. He had already completed some of the prefaces, the brief ones that introduced his short stories, The

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longer ones—introducing “The White Negro,” the *Voice* columns, excerpts from *The Deer Park* and the big novel—remained to be written. He was considering a three-part, chronological division of the material: “Square,” “Transitional” and “Hip,” with an appendix for his college stories and early journalism. The final shape of the collection owed something to this arrangement, but it was far more subtly assembled. The only thing he was sure about at this point was that all the prefaces would be in italics.

He began “to jiggle his Self for a style” that would reflect his emerging personality, while feeling “the yaws of conscience” about such concerted and public introspection. This anxious, delicate process, he said, sent his writing “through a circus of variations and postures, a fireworks of virtuosity designed to achieve . . . I do not even know what. Leave it that I become an actor, a quick-change artist, as if I believe I can trap the Prince of Truth in the act of switching a style.” He inched along, still worried about tabling the big novel. He told Yamanishi that he had only written 70 pages, and that the final product would take “five or ten years” and be a thousand pages long. Finishing the collection—its working title was now “Advertisements”—stood in the way of getting back to the novel. In a letter to Knox, he said that he had spent a half-year trying to improve “my half-vanished techniques in writing,” which gives a hint his slow progress. Going without cigarettes for nine months, he said, had left him with “less drive and better health.” What he needed was “a stick of dynamite up my ass.”

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He did get a small jolt when “Hip, Hell, and the Navigator” appeared in early February. Lionel Trilling, the informal head of The Family, described it in a TV interview as an “important

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theological document," and this had created "a little stir" in the PR crowd. Just before this happened, Mailer was invited to appear on his second TV program, David Susskind's "Open End," along with ~~Truman~~ Capote and Dorothy Parker. He had met Parker in Hollywood several times, but knew Capote only by reputation, which in early 1959 was growing by leaps and bounds, based on the warm reception for his 1958 novella, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Mailer was "intensely curious" about Capote, he recalled, and enjoyed the limousine ride to the studio with him and Adele. With the Mike Wallace program under his belt, Mailer felt confident about appearing, while Capote, "in a dry little voice that seemed to issue from an unmoistened reed in his nostril," said that he wasn't. "When it comes to personality," he said, "I have something small and precise to offer, and it's wrong for such a medium." When the two-hour program was over, Mailer thought he had been forceful and articulate, while Capote had seemed "a hint bewildered." After a celebratory dinner at El Morocco with Capote (who repeatedly insisted that he had been awful), Mailer went to bed happy. The next day, he made a few calls to friends to garner their praises.

"Bewildering" is Mailer's word for the responses he received. His family loved the show, but most of his friends told him, "Oh man, did Truman murder you." He was getting a lesson, not only of Capote's one-upmanship, but also of the medium's distortions. The diminutive Capote loomed large in the many close-ups of his "young-old face," while the bearded Mailer appeared intense and pious in the medium shots he was accorded. Capote's voice, Mailer saw, was an asset.

Nothing like it had been heard in New York before. Such presence over the camera. Such homosexual hauteur. He seemed to be certain of every word he was

saying even if they were few words. Oh, that voice!—a cross between an adenoidal prince and a telephone operator. Whereas I was a verbose young intellectual spewing more ideas than anyone cared to hear in an over-friendly tone. Ugh! I had my first lesson in the transpositions of reality which come by way of television.

The key moment came when the discussion turned to the Beats. After noting emphatically that he was not a Beat but a Hipster, Mailer gave an endorsement of Beat writing, saying that it was “entirely new,” and had “broken clean away from the Judeo-Christian tradition.” Parker disagreed, saying that it was nothing more than reheated bohemianism. “None of these people have anything interesting to say,” Capote added, “and none of them can write, not even Mr. Kerouac.” What they do, he said, “isn’t writing at all—it’s typing.” Mailer disagreed but his defense of Kerouac was “limp,” he recalled, because he was only “two-thirds for Jack’s virtues and one-third against Jack’s vices.” A *New Republic* reviewer said that Capote “demolished Mr. Mailer’s arguments at every turn.” His putdown of Kerouac has become legendary; Mailer’s comments are forgotten. He learned that television viewers prefer terse retorts to three-minute syllogisms. The experience on “Open End” gave him an appreciation for the epigrammatic, and he worked to refine his television style.

Through the early spring of 1959, Mailer continued work on the prefaces. Barbara lived around the corner at 395 Bleecker Street, and had begun doing regular secretarial work for him. He missed the February 1 deadline he had given Minton, and got little accomplished the entire month. In one sour letter he said that he needed to get the prefaces “out of the way and fast—I’m sick of fucking around with it, and the novel is not calling me right—seems to be fading as I goof

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off more and more of my time." He and Adele were going to jazz spots, especially the Five Spot, where Thelonious Monk and John Coltrane were regulars. He was drinking as much as ever, although he had not had a cigarette for nine months. Adele wasn't drinking at all because she was two months pregnant; they hoped for a boy.

It was a curious period. He was trying "to make the scene," as he put it, at Village parties and events, all the while fiddling with the prefaces, adding confessional material and then drawing back out of his fear that the collection would become "a thoroughgoing autobiography." Some of them were brief, clear and functional. In others, he was going for something deeper. In one of his drafts, he calls himself "the only writer of my generation who has the particular passion to be great," and finds that his "ridiculous, dreary, narcissistic and noble" self has come to resemble a man he does not admire: Charles De Gaulle. Finally, he began to get some traction on how to handle his contradictions:

Begin with declaration that my overriding passion for years—from 17 on—has been to be a great writer, and I've written hardly a word which hasn't been seen for how it would look today, and how it would read a hundred years from now. This type of Gaullist narcissism runs through every turn of my ungracious prose—muscular, blunt, brutal, bullying, shrill, mean, pompous, totalitarian, timid, arrogant, clumsy—and be it said—passionate. Because for anyone who knows anything about writing, it will be evident through all the gnarled harsh turns of my prose expression, the graceless dogged determinations of my honest ideas, that I am a man obsessed with the urgency to be great, to be a great writer, leader, philosopher, seer, a God—what! And this humorless heavyweight

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clubbing toward so ineluctable a goal will appear by turns to anyone concerned with the spirit of the cool, the graceful, and the elegant, as the ludicrous thrashings of a man so impossibly gauche that one can envision him in Parnassus only as the archetype of the hippopotamus, the baboon and the pig. All right. Heavy I am and graceful I would be, and in the distance between the two lies the rhetoric of this work.

By the end of March he was working more successfully, perhaps because he had—"assassin to myself"—gone back to smoking. He finished "The Mind of an Outlaw," and continued working on an estimate of the work of his contemporaries, which would eventually be titled "Evaluation: Quick and Expensive Comments on the Talent in the Room." He also came up with the final sequencing of the pieces, and decided to include two tables of contents: the first follows the actual order of the book, and is more or less chronological; the second is generic—fiction, essays, journalism, interviews, poetry, plays and "Biography of a Style," which lists the advertisements and postscripts, 34 all told, written expressly for the collection. *Advertisements for Myself* was finally coming into focus. Putnam's re-scheduled the collection to come out in September.

The rationale for "Biography of a Style" was to encourage readers to swallow the advertisements whole, read them apart from the selections that they frame, for the purpose of revealing the new kind of writer Mailer was becoming. He wanted the agonies of creating the book to bleed through, yet sparingly, ^{in the manner of} ~~paralleling~~ Yeats, who wanted his readers to "know about the intense and unremitting labor required to create an apparently spontaneous line." For example, he concludes "Sixth Advertisement for Myself" with this tease: "The confession is

over—I sense that to give any more of what happened to me in the last few years might make for five thousand good words, but could also strip me of fifty thousand better ones.” But the confession is far from over; subsequent advertisements continue to offer glimpses of his life-in-progress. Many long passages are suffused with the rhetoric of revealing and then shrouding the writer and the process of composition. In addition to being a genre-conflating work—part confession, part tirade, part visionary testament—*Advertisements* is a great work because Mailer is adept at what we might call confession interruptus. Just when we think he is done baring his battered psyche, he returns with more revelations, laced with witty revilements and cranky pontifications.



Mailer’s sister, who was typing the manuscript, had reservations about some of the writing in the collection, but said nothing at first. But finally, she recalled, she told him what she felt about “Quick and Expensive Comments.”

‘Norman you’re not serious about publishing this thing.’ I was appalled by it. ‘You don’t do this to your fellow writers.’ I said, ‘You don’t expect to publish this until after everybody’s dead.’ He said, ‘Of course I do.’ And I said, ‘I really think you shouldn’t’—he got so angry at me. He said, ‘You’re wrong, you’re always wrong!’ And he never got over it, I mean, for years he teased me about how I’d been wrong about it. However, he did change it, a lot. He went over it pretty carefully. Some things he really toned down. I also said, ‘I think some of it’s marvelous.’

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None of the early drafts of the essay have survived, but even the softened published version explains her criticism. Most of the writers he comments on receive a mixture of positive and negative comments, sometimes in two sentences, sometimes in a page, no more. What immediately sets off the piece from the abstracted literary criticism of the day is that mixed in with the usual commentary are surmises and hunches on the characters of the writers themselves—their vanities, virtues and quirks—based on Mailer's interaction with them, even if it consisted of one meeting. The prose is obscene and prickly, but conversational, as if you were drinking with him over a long winter evening in some snug Provincetown bar. The praise given is grudging as often as not; and the criticisms are a mixture of shrewd insight based on careful reading and *ad hominem* gibes.

He makes comments on 21 writers, in the following order: Jones, Styron, Capote, Kerouac, Bellow, Algren, Salinger, Paul Bowles, Bourjaily, Brossard, Vidal, Anatole Broyard, Myron Kaufmann, Willingham, Ralph Ellison, Baldwin, Herbert Gold, Mary McCarthy, Jean Stafford, Carson McCullers and William Burroughs. He had met at least two-thirds of the group. Some samples:

Saul Bellow's NBA-winning novel, *The Adventures of Augie March*: "... at its worst it was a travelogue for timid intellectuals and so to tell the truth I cannot take him seriously as a major novelist." He goes on to call *Seize the Day* "the first of the cancer novels," although he calls the ending "beautiful," and says it is "the first indication for me that Bellow is not altogether hopeless on the highest level." To reach that level, "he must first give evidence, as must Styron, that he can write about men who have the lust to struggle with the history about them. . . ."

Nelson Algren: "Of all the writers I know, he is the Grand Odd-Ball. Once he took me to a line-up in Chicago and I could have sworn the police and the talent on the line had read *The Man with the Golden Arm* for they caught the book perfectly, those cops and crooks, they were imitating Algren."

J. D. Salinger, author of *Catcher in the Rye*, "is everyone's favorite. I seem to be alone in finding him no more than the greatest mind ever to stay in prep school."

Kerouac is "the first figure for a new generation," possessed of "a large talent. His literary energy is enormous." But "his rhythms are erratic, his sense of character is nil, and he is as pretentious as a rich whore, sentimental as a lollypop."

"Truman Capote I do not know well, but I like him. He is tart as a grand aunt, but in his way he is a ballsy little guy, and he is the most perfect writer of my generation, he writes the best sentences, word for word, rhythm upon rhythm." But "he has less to say than any good writer I know" because of "his attractions to Society."

Ralph Ellison, the author of *Invisible Man*, "is essentially a hateful writer: when the line of his satire is pure, he writes so perfectly that one can never forget the experience of reading him—it is like holding a live electric wire in one's hand."

"The early work of Mary McCarthy, Jean Stafford and Carson McCullers gave me pleasure," he says near the end of the piece, noting that he was unable to read other women novelists "out of what is no doubt a fault in me." Later, he would enjoy the work of Iris Murdoch, Joan Didion and Erica Jong, among others, but in 1959, he was gender-bound. "At the

risk of making a dozen devoted enemies for life," he continues, "the sniffs I get from the ink of the women are always fey, old-hat, Quaintsy Goysy, tiny, too dykily psychotic, crippled, creepish, fashionable, frigid, outer-Baroque, *maquillé* in mannequin's whimsy, or else bright and stillborn." He concluded by saying that "a good novelist can do without everything but the remnant of his balls," a line that would come back to haunt him. When asked about the line a few years before his death, he said, "I happened to grow up in a family with a lot of wonderful, adoring women—a marvelous, strong mother and a lot of terrific aunts. So I took it for granted that I could say anything I wanted about women because they knew I loved them." His dismissal of female writers would not only be remembered, it would be bitterly *intoned* by women for decades. It is sometimes seen as the first indication of the misogyny he would be accused of in the 1970s.

His comments on Jones and Styron destroyed whatever shreds of comity persisted after their recent quarrels. He begins his comments on Jones generously, saying that *Eternity* was the best American novel since the end of WWI, despite being "ridden with faults, ignorences, and a smudge of the sentimental." He was unique, Mailer said, because "he came out of nowhere, self-taught, a clunk in his lacks, but the only one of us who had the beer-guts of a broken glass brawl." But his early success "handcuffed the rebel in him." He concluded that if Jones "dares not to castrate his hatred of society with a literary politician's assy cultivation of it, then I would have to root for him because he may have been born to write a great novel."

Styron, Mailer said, wrote "the prettiest novel of our generation. *Lie Down in Darkness* has beauty at its best, is almost never sentimental, even has whispers of near-genius," although it had three defects: "Styron was not near to creating a man who could move on his feet, his mind

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was uncorrupted by a new idea, and his book was without evil." Without having read a word of Styron's second novel, *Set This House on Fire*, Mailer speculates that it will be "a cornucopia of fangless perceptions which will please the conservative power and delight the liberal power," because "the mass media is aching for such novel." The book's reception "will be a study in the art of literary advancement. For Styron has spent years oiling every literary lever and power which could help him on his way, and there are medals waiting for him in the mass-media."

On Baldwin he is no less severe. After lauding *Notes of a Native Son* for its "sense of moral nuance," he says that many paragraphs in the latter "are sprayed with perfume. Baldwin seems incapable of saying 'Fuck you' to the reader." But he has one large advantage: his personal experience has been "as fantastic and varied as the life of any of my fellow racketeers," and if he is bold enough "we will have a testament, and not a noble toilet water."

The last writer he discusses is William Burroughs, who had recently published a fragment of his unpublished novel *Naked Lunch*. Mailer saw in him exactly what was lacking in most of his contemporaries: an unflinching assault on the torpor-producing forces of the culture. He found the excerpt to be "more arresting, I thought, than anything I've read by an American in years," and if the rest of the novel were as good, "Burroughs will deserve rank as one of the most important novelists in America[. . .]"

Mailer submitted the manuscript of the collection in late April. *Advertisements* came in at 200,000 words, one third of which was new work. When it was in the hands of the editors at Putnam's, he made arrangements to publish three of the four pieces in magazines just before or at the same time as the collection, which was now scheduled to appear on November 6. "Outlaw"

appeared in *Esquire*, "Buddies" in the *Voice*, and "Quick and Expensive" in *Big Table*. Finally, two scenes from the dramatic version of *The Deer Park* came out in *PR*, giving Mailer close to simultaneous exposure in four very different publications, two hip and two "overground," as *Mills* *Esquire* editor Harold Hayes called his magazine. While pre-publication excerpting was nothing new, no one in 1959 was doing it quite so shrewdly or widely. He continued the practice for the rest of his career, and must be considered the leading "magazinish" (a name applied to Poe) of his era.

In "Last Advertisement for Myself before the Way Out" which concludes the collection, he is as nearly as rough on himself as on his peers. Comparing himself to Scott Fitzgerald, "an indifferent caretaker of his talent," he says that he has been "a cheap gambler" with his. He goes on to describe himself as "cowardly," "stupid" and guilty of "fear and vanity," winding up with a flourish that recalls the bold, mythical gesture of Babe Ruth, one that would be regularly quoted in the future by detractors and admirers alike. The big novel, he says,

will be fired to its fuse by the rumor that once I pointed to the farthest fence and said that within ten years I would try to hit the longest ball ever to go up into the accelerated hurricane air of our American letters. For if I have one ambition above all others, it is to write a novel which Dostoyevsky and Marx; Joyce and Freud, Stendhal, Tolstoy, Proust and Spengler; Faulkner, and even old moldering Hemingway might come to read, for it would carry what they had to tell another part of the way.

Mailer didn't hit this "longest ball," but considering what he did produce in the ten years after *Advertisements*, his strikeout was fortuitous. In addition to challenging himself, another motive for his prediction — corroborated by the taunts and dares that he leveled at his "fellow racketeers"—was to stimulate them. He genuinely believed that a great achievement by any of them would be the keenest spur for the rest.

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Minton was uncertain about including "The Time of Her Time." Its detailed sexual descriptions, he felt would likely result in legal action, but would probably deter prosecution. To this end, Mailer wrote identical letters to 13 literary critics, stating that a majority of those polled would have to approve of the story for Putnam's to go ahead. If opinion was seriously divided, ~~he~~ the story would be cut. Accompanied by a copy of the story, the letter went to the following: Howe and Podhoretz; F.W. Dupee, the Trillings and Richard Chase at Columbia; Leslie Fiedler at University of Montana; Rahv, Phillips and William Barrett at PR; two important independent critics, Alfred Kazin and Macdonald; and Mailer's former professor, Robert Gorham Davis. He said he did not like to ask for an appraisal of unpublished work, "but I believe ¹⁹⁵⁹ this piece may be important enough to justify the act." He asked for a reply by mid-July. ⁶⁰⁽⁹⁾ Mailer's plan was clever; he not only garnered 12 positive endorsements—Davis demurred—and convinced Minton of the story's merits, he also gained advance support for his collection from a group of influential figures. Four of them went on to write supportive reviews of *Advertisements*, including two that were highly favorable.

The story, a comic masterpiece and one of Mailer's finest short stories is a first-person recounting of the Homeric efforts of Sergius O'Shaugnessy, a Village stud who calls his penis "the avenger," to bring Denise Gondelman, a "proud, aggressive, vulgar, tense, stiff and arrogant Jewess" to her first orgasm. As Andrew Gordon has explained, "Sergius is the hipster battling Denise the Square, determined to liberate her from her dead-ass sexual repressions, her intellectual priggishness, and her obsession with psychoanalytic jargon; as Mailer would say, from her 'totalitarianism.'" On another level, it is both "a glorification of the power of sex and a *reductio ad absurdum*. The controlling metaphor is sex as war, and sexual intercourse takes on the qualities of a championship boxing match, an encounter between a matador and bull or an epic struggle for survival between two savage beasts in a jungle clearing." O'Shaugnessy, Gordon says, "sees himself, and only half in jest, as a sexual messiah" carrying the gospel of Lawrence and Reich to uptight pagans in Greenwich Village. After several near victories, she ultimately achieves "the time of her time," an obvious reference to God's whispered words to O'Shaugnessy at the end of *The Deer Park*. Far from being grateful for pushing her over the top after many long nights of phallic endeavor (achieved when he whispers in her ear, "You dirty little Jew"), Denise tells him the following morning that his "whole life is a lie, and you do nothing but run away from the homosexual that is you." Then she departs and is "out the door before I could rise to tell her that she was a hero fit for me." As Gordon points out, the story is a rehearsal for an even more detailed and symbol-laden (if less exhausting) series of sexual bouts in Mailer's 1965 novel, *An American Dream*. O'Shaugnessy, he notes accurately, is "the first of Mailer's *active* narrators" in a fictional work, and a precursor to Stephen Rojack, the narrator-protagonist of that novel.

Mailer also sent "The Time of Her Time" to Lois Wilson. She shared it with her husband, Graham Wilson, also an English professor, who knew of and sanctioned their relationship from the beginning. He responded by saying that the Sergius-Denise affair seemed to parallel hers with Mailer, but in reverse. Mailer wrote to her in early May about a tryst they were planning. "A man is nothing without his greed," he said. A couple of weeks later, he wrote to a New York Hotel to make a reservation for her, enclosing a money order and signing the letter "Marion Faye." Reflecting on their time together, which both enjoyed greatly, he said:

once in a while I think we're ripening for one another, that in five years we'll be very good for one another, even be able to restore the nerves of love to one another that the others (some of them) deadened away. Anyway, phony schizophrenic, Junebug Daisy DeSade, have your good time in Europe. I'll be envying you except that I've got the galleys of the book that may change my life again, and I'm working on them for the next five or six weeks. Everything has to be handed in by August First so you will either catch me either exhausted or full of myself depending on what I think of the book. And of myself.

He added that he now had a green sports car, a Triumph, and signed the letter "J. Kafka Hemingway."

Mailer continued his correspondence with the 13 critics, gently encouraging them to respond and thanking them when they did. Kazin was one of the first to respond, praising the story's "literary seriousness and power," and calling Mailer "immensely talented." Then this reservation: "You are the Rabbi of screwing, the Talmudist of fucking, the writer who has

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managed to be so solemn about sex as to make it grim." He argued for more passion, and ended by saying that the "characters make love with a stop-watch in each hand. For this I should make love?" Mailer wrote back immediately to say that being called "the Rabbi of screwing" gave him a laugh, and agreeing that the grimness of some of his descriptions were "the single most unattractive feature" of his writing. There was a reason, however: "I am more or less obsessed with the idea that sex is dying in a new ice-age of the psyche, and I think the only way to change one's readers and warm them—for yes, I am guilty of a messianic lust—is to make them set up camp on the ice for a while." In the big novel, he would depict "characters who are monsters of self-consciousness and try for the more difficult and perhaps impossible trip into a terrain where emotion becomes real again." Over the years, Kazin would continue to chide him in reviews and essays about taking his obsessions too seriously, and urging him to distance himself from his characters (a reflection, perhaps, of the Henry James revival then underway).

Kazin was not the only member of The Family pushing Mailer to be more Jamesian. Diana Trilling and Mailer liked each other from the start, and her positive vetting of the story brought them even closer. The fact that she also praised *The Deer Park* in the same letter, calling it "a fantastically courageous book, intelligent book, noble book," was further uplifting, especially since she said that her husband shared her enthusiasm. She began to see Mailer as her personal project, and her letters over the next few years mixed praise, joshing and advice. Besides giving him her counsel, she said his work was an advance on Hemingway's. He said in reply that *Advertisements* "is a bit obsessed with Hemingway—I'm afraid he crops up in the book the way an old lover appears in the conversation of a woman who insists the man could now not mean less to her." *Advertisements* is the high water mark of Mailer's interest in

A vertical strip of various sticky notes with handwritten text. The notes are of different colors (white, yellow, light blue, light green) and are layered on top of each other. The text includes:

- OK (on a white note at the top)
- OK (on a white note below the first one)
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- FIX (on a light blue note)
- 7 (on a light green note)
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- OK (on a white note)
- FIX (on a white note)
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- 44 (on a white note at the bottom)

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Mailer landed in Munich on October 11. He gave a reading there, went on to Berlin, and then flew home on the 20th. Almost all that is known of the visit is contained in a November 6 letter to Lois Wilson:

Dear Lady (with the light)

Your letter was nice. First nice letter I've gotten from you since my last work. I am at the moment empty. There was almost too much of a good time in Berlin where I stayed for six days after planning only two, and I fell in love with a bar girl (a tall tough sharp mean and rather honest lady) who fell first in love with me, and would take no further money from me after the first night (as the clean proof of her love) which act unmanned me a bit, for the dream of all whoremongers like myself is to get that hard dikey man-hating pussy for nothing, and at last I had succeeded. So you were right. It was good for me to go to Europe, and it would have been better with a month.

But there is one thing awful about falling in love in Europe. Once one is back it all slips away, inexorable bit by bit, and now the lady is no longer real to me—instead I sit around wondering whether my new rocket is going to break through that most critical smog. It'll be depressing if it doesn't, although not fatal I suspect, but I can't quite keep from thinking that it'll be nice if it does.

At any rate I would rather try to answer the question you half asked me in the letter, but I hesitate because I never have a good sense of when the words we use are the same and when we're no help to each other at all. But when you wrote

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that you never know what goes on inside me because I do not know myself which way I'll go next, I can only say you're right but hurrah! It's the one part of me I wouldn't want to change.

The German barmaid, whose name is unknown, gave Mailer a pocket photograph of herself, inscribed to "Der Dick." He never saw her again, and it appears that they did not correspond. Years later, he identified her as the model for Ruta, Barney Kelly's lubricious maid in *American Dream*. The letter also shows that the division in his psyche remained. As for his "new rocket," it made it into orbit.

Advertisements had modest sales, less than 10,000 copies in the Putnam's edition, but it was a *succès de estime*, receiving notably strong reviews in the *Times Book Review*, *PR* and the *Voice*. *Time*, unsurprisingly, panned the collection, saying that judging from the excerpts offered from the big novel, its title should be "*The Nude and the Stewed*." Two of the most positive and perceptive reviews were from prominent members of The Family, Irving Howe and Alfred Kazin. Both had caveats, as might be expected from men who finely sliced their discriminations, but overall they left no doubt about the fact that Mailer had arrived. Howe criticized Mailer for getting carried away with his own metaphors, "using cancer as a synecdoche for the spread of social rot." But he praised the "bouncy" advertisements that stitched the collection together as being "done with bravado and good humor with an utter willingness to risk full exposure." Howe, a deeply committed socialist, gave his highest praise to Mailer's "devotion to restlessness," and his "fear of stasis" in the culture. This is a new Mailer, he said, a "post-depressive Mailer."

Kazin, one of the most intelligent critics writing in the late 1950s, was Edmund Wilson's
 heir apparent. As a Brooklyn Jew with ^{Leftist} ~~left-wing~~ inclinations and Family membership, he was
 comfortable in appraising Mailer's status and prospects. He states unequivocally that Mailer's
 first three books, while interesting, were uneven. He expresses concern that Mailer's
 "overintense need to dominate, to succeed, to grasp, to win" may interfere with his artistic
 development. Nevertheless, he finds *Advertisements* to be a clear advance, a book that shows
 "how exciting, yet tragic, America can be for a gifted writer." Tragic because the country
 "hungrily welcomes any talent that challenges it interestingly—but then holds this talent in the
 mold of its own shapelessness." Exciting, because Mailer seems to have found a way to be "an
 honest and intransigent spirit," while remaining thoroughly American. The collection, he says,
 contains "more penetrating comment on the America of Eisenhower, television, suburbia, and J.
 D. Salinger than anything I have seen in years." He possesses "a remarkable intelligence," Kazin
 says, and yet is "one of the most variable, unstable, and on the whole unpredictable writers I
 have ever read."

The insight Mailer remembered is Kazin's comment on the "marvelously forceful and
 inventive style" of the advertisements. "[H]is intelligence," he continues, "though muscular, has
 no real ease or quietly reflective power; he is as fond of his style as an Italian tenor of his vocal
 cords." Previously, Mailer had doubts about whether he had a style worth discussing. Now he
 knew that his advertisements were not "crap," as he had called them a few months earlier. As he
 said in a preface to a later edition, *Advertisements* "was forged out of a continuing recognition of
 how difficult it was to put words together when writing about oneself." Nicotine deprivation, he
 explained, dulled his ability to locate the needed word, and "in compensation I was granted a

sensitivity to the rhythm of what I wrote." He moved from "the hegemony of the word to the resonance of the prose rhythm." The collection, he wrote, was assembled after the "slowest and most morale-disrupting" period of his career, the ten years after *Naked*. "I suffered prodigies of brain-curdling, and educated myself all over again how to write, write without cigarettes, and found the beginnings of a style which might begin to express the way my mind (as opposed to other writers' minds) was ready to work." The struggle to write *Advertisements* "changed my life," he said, and gave him "a style I thought I might be able to call my own." Kazin's review was confirmation.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

Sometime not long after *Advertisements* was published, Baldwin, Styron and Knox were drinking at Jones' Paris apartment. Jones had a copy of the book and they began discussing M^{rr} M¹ailer's comments on their work. It wasn't ^{MBM 201} ~~a fun evening~~, Knox recalled. They read part from the essay, Baldwin said, "in a kind of drunken, masochistic fascination." Then they attacked Knox as "a surrogate for Norman." Jones ignored the complimentary remarks in the piece on Styron, and instead kept reading the same line over and over: "Styron wrote the prettiest novel of our generation," which ^{causing} ~~caused~~ Styron great discomfort," according to Knox. He ^{note p. 45} ~~started twitching and said~~, "Okay, Jim, that's enough, Jim!" ^{fix} ~~fix~~ ⁷ ~~7~~ ^{OK} ~~OK~~ ²⁹ ~~29~~ ^{CR} ~~CR ^{fix} ~~fix~~ ⁴⁴ ~~44 ¹⁴⁴ ~~144~~~~~~

Gloria Jones told Hilary Mills that her husband ^{in the dining room} ~~kept a copy of *Advertisements* on a~~ ^{MBM 201-03} ~~sideboard of the Paris apartment~~. Whenever any of the authors M¹ailer had attacked came through Paris for a visit, Jones would have them write their comments in the book. ^{margin of text} M¹ailer and Jones did not meet again until 1965, when they met at a New York party in John Marquan

He thought they might try to kill each other, but they went off into a room and were gone for quite a while. "First Mailer came out by himself," Marquand said, "and he was quite obviously moved. He didn't seem angry; he seemed purged, almost as if there were tears in his eyes." Jones told Marquand that they had worked things out, and said "I love him, but I don't like him." When Baldwin returned to the U.S., he sought Mailer out and they went for a drink. Baldwin asked why he had not made his criticisms to his face and Mailer replied, "Well, if this was going to break up our friendship, something else would come along to break it up just as fast." But he added that Baldwin was the only one whom he had misgivings about hitting in the essay. "I think I—probably—wouldn't say it quite that way now." Their friendship held.

Aldridge liked the collection. He saw *Advertisements* as a breakthrough that dramatizes the range of your mind, the variety, even the maze, of your temper. Fiction could not. The advertisements, he says, allowed Mailer "to get in all the as yet unnovelized materials of your being—all the agony, the suspicion, self-love and self-hate, all that terrible supervising conscience which fiction hasn't allowed you to get in." Mailer was pleased and praised "the particular lucidity" of Aldridge's approach to understanding the nature of the relationship between the writer and the world. Then he turned to Styron:

I could tell you a lot about noble old Bill and how he cut off your roots, stripped your leaves, pulled your bark, scorched your lawn, and didn't even show you a face until you had gotten to the point where it was all you could do to say, "Look, man, I'm dying a little." Then his manners came to the fore and he could say, "I'm sorry to hear that," and Rose could chime in, "Yes, isn't it awful when someone is dying a little." Since I know that the same acts of surgical gardening

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were performed upon me and that you probably hold the details of my operation as I hold the details of yours, an exchange of intelligence might be mutually fortifying.

There would be no *rapprochement* with Styron for many years. Aldridge also broke with Styron and became one of his most persistent detractors. Over the next 35 years, Aldridge would have nothing but praise for Mailer, especially for his risk-taking, and very few qualifications.

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Shortly after *Advertisements* was published, George Plimpton tried to get Mailer and Hemingway together during Papa's visit to New York in January 1960. Plimpton told him stories of Mailer's thumb wrestling and got Hemingway interested. "You call him," Hemingway told Plimpton. But A.E. Hotchner, a close friend of Hemingway's, advised against it and Papa said, "Oh, well, forget it." Thumb wrestling intrigued him though, and he went at it with Plimpton. When he couldn't get the hang of it, he began to squeeze Plimpton's hand in his powerful grip, leaving marks that lasted a week. When someone asked what they were doing, Hemingway replied, "We're pretending we're a pair of Norman Mailers." Mailer waited in vain for the call from Plimpton, "both scared and excited," he told Plimpton ~~that~~ "and then both disappointed and even a bit relieved when the call never came through." This was as close as they came to meeting. Eighteen months later Hemingway would be dead.

Around this time, Lucid wrote Mailer. He invited him to speak at Wesleyan, where he was now teaching, but Mailer declined "because I've been talking much in public lately and will never get to work on the novel if I don't stop." Mailer, however, continued to accept almost

every invitation to read, debate, lecture and be interviewed, and began to create a relationship with his admirers not seen since Mark Twain's barnstorming days a half century earlier. From 1960 on, Mailer was more and more in the public eye.

Mailer grew closer to Lucid and Aldridge in the next decade, as his friendships with other writers, with few exceptions, waned. He increased his contact with aspiring writers, reading their manuscripts, writing blurbs and offering advice generously, but was out of sorts with his peers. More and more he saw himself in the company of major writers of the past than with Jones, Baldwin, Styron, Capote and Kerouac, or with the Jewish writers who came into ascendancy in the 1960s: Bellow, Salinger, I. B. Singer, ~~Philip Roth~~ ^{Sartre, Malraux} Joseph Heller, ~~Jean Sartre~~ Grace Paley, ~~Bernard Malamud~~, Cynthia Ozick and Bruce Jay Friedman, to name the most prominent. He had occasional contact with most of these writers, Salinger being the exception, but generally downplayed any suggested commonalities. He wanted his own pedestal, and a few years later Kazin acknowledged his preeminence. It was "entirely possible," he wrote in an essay on Jewish writers, "that Norman Mailer had become the representative American novelist," a Jew who had "mastered the complex resources of the modern novel, who wrote English lovingly, possessively, masterfully, for whom the language and the form, the intelligence of art, had become as natural a way of living as the Law had been to their grandfathers." Mailer may have given a nod to the shade of Rabbi Schneider when he read this, even as he was wrestling with the implications of retaining his novelistic credentials at the same time that his reputation was becoming anchored in his new role of public intellectual.

Chapter 7

A Felonious Assault and *An American Dream*

Two of the most important events in Mailer's life took place in 1960: he wrote an essay on the presidential candidacy of Senator John F. Kennedy, based in part on two meetings with him and his wife, Jacqueline, and three months later, after a black night of drinking and fighting, he stabbed Adele. Writing "Superman Comes to the Supermarket," a new kind of political commentary, and then observing its extraordinary reception, affected Mailer profoundly and led, indirectly but certainly, to the assault on Adele in the early morning of November 20th. Two unexpected upheavals—the Cuban Revolution and the political ascent of Kennedy, an Irish-American Catholic—also contributed to the calamity, but the wretched state of the Mailers' marriage and his "Napoleonic" ambition were the chief causes. There were other factors—alcohol, drugs and the dissolution of friendships—but these were effects as much as causes. Chance also played a part, and had the last featuring blow at the event his friends called "The Trouble."

Gore Vidal's review of *Advertisements*, which appeared earlier that year, focuses on Mailer's burgeoning ambition. Writing in the *Nation*, Vidal discusses in a collegial way Mailer's achievements as a writer—he especially admires *Barbary Shore*—and praises his "honorable" efforts to vex the "Great Golfer," referring to Eisenhower. He calls Mailer "a Bolingbroke, a born usurper. He will raise an army anywhere, live off the country as best he can, helped by a devoted underground, even assisted at brief moments by rival claimants like myself." Vidal has some criticisms, of course. He points to the barrier erected by Flaubert between his private woes

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and public face, and suggests that Mailer needs such a wall; he says that writers "create not arguments but worlds," and that Mailer is "a born cocktail-party orator" whose prose sometimes shifts into "a swelling, throbbing rhetoric which is not easy to read." As far as Mailer's "preoccupation with actual political power" is concerned, Vidal sees it as a waste of time in that the possibility of "the American president, any American president, reading a work by a serious contemporary American writer" is unimaginable. Within a year, President John F. Kennedy would prove Vidal wrong.

His most insightful comment concerns Mailer's sense of mission, which Vidal was among the first to clearly perceive: "His drive seems to be toward power of a religio-political kind. He is a messiah without real hope of paradise on earth or in heaven, and with no precise mission except that dictated by his ever-changing temperament, I am not sure that he should be a novelist at all, or even a writer, despite formidable gifts." Vidal finds all these tendencies to be "very dangerous" for "an artist not yet full grown." Mailer read the review and wrote a letter with some mild rejoinders to the *Nation*, but Vidal's analysis was prescient. Eight months later, Mailer was ready to abandon his literary career and become a full-time politician.

Barbara, who was still doing some work for her brother in 1960, was deeply troubled by his behavior. He had told her that he wouldn't cry at her funeral and she found him to be "violent, full of hate." He hit his wife at a New Year's Eve party, and Adele told Barbara that she feared he might hurt her seriously. "Yet," Barbara wrote, "she continually provokes his cruelty because she dislikes it less than his neglect." Both women thought that he needed psychological treatment and, in a moment of lucidity, Mailer told his sister that he was also worried about himself. Adele says little in her memoir about Mailer's interest in politics, and nothing about his

difficulties in forging a new style, except her passing comment: "I think he was having a lot of trouble writing." She does note, however, his ability to work almost every day in his studio, no matter how drunk and disorderly the night before. For Adele's 34th birthday he gave her a garnet crucifix, a momentary lull in their increasingly nasty public arguments. He preferred parties to hitting the bars, and often did not accompany him when he went to Horse, or jazz clubs in the Village, although she was with him at the Village Vanguard when Lenny Bruce performed. Mailer was thrilled by Bruce's mix of political irreverence and crass obscenity, a comic version of William Burroughs' riffs in *Naked Lunch*. He saw them as allies in the struggles ahead. Both employed shock techniques and, like Mailer, were happiest when their audiences were uncomfortable.

Parties, Adele wrote, gave her an excuse to drink, which she did soon after Betsy's birth. Her drinking led to flirting, "since I came on with everybody when I was drunk." On a few occasions, she went home with another man, once with an *Esquire* editor, which led to a bad fight with Mailer. He had several one-night stands, and at least one serious affair. We were "steadily digging the grave for our marriage," she recalled. One night they went to the Copacabana nightclub with Knox and Sammy Davis, Jr. After three martinis, Adele began talking with Davis' bodyguard. She asked to see his gun.

Norman glared at me, a silent signal for me to shut up, but my martinis had gotten there first. The bodyguard politely refused. 'Come on,' I insisted, 'let me see your gun.' He took it out and passed it around the table. It was the first time I'd held a gun in my hand. I had a strange feeling of power as I pointed it at Norman. I grinned when I said, 'I'm gonna kill you, you son of a bitch.' My finger was on

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that trigger, and my husband wouldn't have to worry about his next novel anymore. That's how much rage I had inside me.

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In a March letter to Yamanishi, Mailer answered his translator's question about Trotskyism in the U.S. He said that the movement had dwindled, and that *Dissent* might be the last outpost of its influence. While no longer a Trotskyite himself, he was pleased that Trotsky's ideas were still alive in Japan because that could "lead in the direction of something new, something radical, and something better in the same way as Castro's Barbudos in Cuba." This is his first written reference to Castro, although like everyone else he had followed Castro's Robin Hood-like progress, leading to the overthrow of the Cuban dictatorship in January 1959.

Shortly after writing to Yamanishi, Mailer's name appeared at the end of a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* for "The Fair Play for Cuba Committee," an international group challenging reports that Castro was a communist who would ruthlessly confiscate property and execute his opponents. All of these charges would ultimately prove correct, but Castro's sins were peccadilloes when measured against the hideously cruel and corrupt regime of Gen. Fulgencio Batista, who ruled the country for 25 years before being overthrown by Castro's band of bearded guerillas. Besides Mailer, there were thirty signatories, including Baldwin, Capote, Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul-Sartre. Over the next 40 years, Mailer would sign scores of open letters in the company of famous writers, academics and activists.

Mailer called Castro "the first and greatest hero to appear in the world since the Second War," and compared him to Emiliano Zapata, a hero of the Mexican Revolution. Over the years,

his belief in Castro's greatness never flagged, and was strengthened when they met in Cuba decades later. Asked late in life to list the geniuses he had met in person, Mailer named Ezra Pound, Charlie Chaplin, Muhammad Ali, and Castro. In November 1960, he anguished over "An Open Letter to Fidel Castro," in which he panegyricized the Cuban, and challenged him to invite Hemingway to write a first-hand report on the Cuban situation. He finished it after three weeks of intense work, but it became a casualty of "The Trouble," and was not published until the following April. Mailer's estimate of Castro's stature can be seen in the following passage from the letter:

Back in December, 1956, you landed near Niquero in the Oriente of Cuba with 82 men and a few arms. Your plan was to ignite an insurrection which would rid Cuba of Batista in a few weeks. Instead, you were to lose all but 12 of these men in the first few days, you were to wander through fields and forests in the dark, without real food or water, living on sugar-cane for five days and five nights. In the depths of this disaster, you were to announce to the few men who were still with you: 'The days of the dictatorship are numbered.'

Castro's confidence was unshakable. A legend began to grow about the Barbudos in the mountains, and the idea of revolution spread across the island. Mailer's golden opinion of Castro's vision and tenacity in the face of great odds invigorated his desire to mount his own revolution in the U.S.—not political, but moral and sexual. Che Guevara, Castro's chief lieutenant, elicited similar admiration from Mailer. They met briefly when Guevara came to New York to address the U.N. General Assembly. Mailer wrote, "I met him once. He had a great devotion in his eye. I had rarely liked anyone as much."

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✓ At this time, in mid-1960, Mailer stood high in the regard of *Esquire*'s editors. Harold Hayes found him to be "very astute" in recommending "The Mind of an Outlaw" for publication in the magazine a few weeks before *Advertisements* was published. "I think he gained immensely by that intersection at that moment—that is, his arrival in our magazine when it was trying to become what it later became." One night in April, Mailer bumped into another young *Esquire* editor, Clay Felker, at the Five Spot. Felker ended up sitting at a table with Mailer and Adele, Knox and Joan Morales, Adele's sister. He recalled that Adele was attacking Mailer, "exploding all over the place, saying things like, 'We're all shit; we don't add up to anything. You guys think you're significant, but it it's all shit.'" Mailer said nothing, just smiled, with anger. Finally, she left and Felker began talking to Mailer about writing a piece on the Democratic National Convention. "I had read his pronouncement in *Advertisements* that he had been running for president in his mind and wanted to create a revolution in the consciousness of our times. Pundits were going around saying the upcoming election would mark a turning point in American history and usher in a revolutionary age, so I thought, 'What is more natural than turning loose the revolutionary mind on a revolutionary event?'" It was an editor's gamble, a brilliant one. Mailer accepted the assignment but said he didn't know much about politicians and political writing, so Felker agreed to accompany him to the convention, which was to be held in Los Angeles, July 11-15.

✓ Adlai Stevenson, a former governor of Illinois, had been the Democratic candidate for president in the elections of 1952 and 1956, and ~~had been~~ ^{was} defeated both times by Eisenhower. He wanted a third chance, but did not actively campaign, saying he would accept a draft. He was the sentimental favorite of many Democrats, but several other candidates, most of them U.S.

Senators, were actively challenging him. Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas, the Senate Majority Leader, seemed at first to be the most likely to succeed, based on his experience and connections. But it was the youngest senator in the pack, John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts, who would gain the nomination, and do so, in part, because of the qualities Mailer saw in him. He had neither the jowls of old wheeler-dealers like Johnson (Mailer said he looked like "a well-to-do small-town mortician"), nor the baggage of stout trade-union supporters like Senator Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota. Kennedy was different. He was a glamorous figure, rich and handsome, with a sharp wit and great self-assurance. His most "characteristic quality," Mailer said, was "the remote air of a man who has traversed some lonely terrain of experience, of loss and gain, of nearness to death." It was Kennedy's boldness that most attracted Mailer.

The Mailers leased the Hawthorne House on Miller Hill Road for the summer of 1960, where he planned to work on the Kennedy piece. On June 1, they drove to Provincetown with Danielle, Betsy and the two poodles. Zsa Zsa got pregnant easily and Mailer, always dubious about any form of birth control, was not interested in having her spayed. Over more than a dozen years, she and Tibo produced 34 puppies. He enjoyed observing them and found much to ponder in Zsa Zsa's habit of nipping at Tibo's genitals, forcing him to sit until she regained her composure. In later years, he loved to tell what he called his "veterinarian story." One winter day in Connecticut when it was snowing, Tibo and Zsa Zsa were outside, and Mailer watched them as they engaged in the procreative act. He saw that they had seized up. Tibo couldn't withdraw, and Adele was afraid they would freeze. With some difficulty, Mailer lifted up both dogs and carried them indoors where they were still "unable to disconnect," as he put it. After a few futile efforts to separate them, he touched Zsa Zsa gently on her bunghole and, open sesame, they

came unglued. Mailer told the story with pleasure, and it always drew a big laugh. His jokes and stories were inveterately carnal, as was the store of similes and tropes he employed in table talk.

Mailer continued working on his play and followed Kennedy's campaign. Baldwin came for a visit, and they drank regularly in The Old Colony with various local characters, and also at the Atlantic House. Bill Walker and Lester Blackiston, two ne'er-do-well writers from Washington, D.C., were part of the group, as was Bill Ward, the editor of the *Provincetown Annual*, where Mailer had just published a short essay on Picasso. Seymour Krim, a Beat fellow traveler and a scaled-down version of Mailer, came to Provincetown to see the writer that he so admired. Mailer remembered the summers of the early 1960s as "wild, absolutely wild. There were fights. It was an absolutely extraordinary period." Bikers would come racing on weekends, and there were parties on the beach. "At least ten times a summer I would see the sun come up over the flats. The town had a sometimes rich and sometimes poor of impermanence to it, too." Liaisons started up and marriages broke down. Mailer was on the brink.

Roger Donoghue, whom Mailer had recently met the previous year at ~~Darryl's Hideaway~~ by way of Knox, was also in residence, and spent time at the Miller Hill house, where there were many parties. A former middleweight boxer, Donoghue retired from the ring after a fighter he knocked out in a 1951 Madison Square Garden bout died a few days later. The Mailers introduced him to Fay Mowery, a painter, who was visiting her brother Eldred in P-Town. Soon after, they married. Donoghue gave Mailer some boxing lessons and Mailer helped him with a book he was trying to write. Donoghue knew Marlon Brando, and told stories about teaching him to box for his Oscar-winning role as Terry Malloy in the film, *On the Waterfront*, written by

Budd Schulberg, and directed by Elia Kazan. Mailer was fascinated by D
 easy Irish humor. He admired the Irish, Adele said. "I sometimes thought
Irish." LP-314

A few years later Mailer explained why he had so many Irish friends: "I've always loved
the Irish and felt very close to them," he said, because "The Irish have what the Jews didn't have,
and the Jews always had what the Irish didn't have. The Jews have this funny kind of
you respect life enough, it's going to respect you back. The Irish have never understood
the other hand the Irish have this great bravura, a style, an elegance." One side of Mailer was
 drawn to the dutiful Jews; the other, more daring side, took pleasure in Irish characters like
 Donoghue and, a couple of years later, Brendan Behan, the dramatist and memoirist. Behan, who
 described himself as "a drinker with writing problems," represented Mailer's Dionysian side. His
 radical IRA past and rumbustious escapades were enormously appealing to Mailer, who later
 "blessed" Behan for teaching him to perform in public. Susan, then an adolescent, remembers
 her father arriving at the apartment with Behan and his girlfriend, Valerie Danby-Smith, a former
 intimate of Hemingway's. It was seven or eight in the morning, and they were drunk and happy
 after a night of revelry.

One night that summer, Mailer and Adele were walking home after having drinks at the
 Atlantic House. It was a little after one in the morning, and when Mailer saw a police car driving
 slowly by, he called out, impulsively, "taxi, taxi." The two policemen in the cruiser were
 unhappy with this appellation, words were exchanged, and Mailer was arrested. At the station
 house, when they put hands of escort on him, Mailer resisted. He described it in a letter to the
New York Post a few weeks later: "I was afraid of a flip, afraid I would begin to hit a uniform. I

had the sustained image of a summer or a year in cellular, and so I did no more; let us say that I was reduced by this caution to ducking, spinning, blocking and sidestepping." This passive-aggressive behavior inflamed the two officers, and one of them, allegedly, hit him in the back of the head with his billy. It took thirteen stitches to close the cut. He was charged with public drunkenness and disorderly conduct and, rather than pay a fine and admit his guilt, opted for a June 23 bench trial, at which he represented himself. Disproving the canard that non-lawyers are unable to defend themselves in relatively straightforward trials, Mailer swam easily through the forensic waters and won a dismissal of the disorderly charge, but was found guilty of drunkenness. The judge said that Mailer "had enough to drink to act like a fool," and reprimanded the police for being "thin-skinned." Mailer was quite satisfied with a draw.

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Right after the July 4th holiday, Mailer flew to Los Angeles. He wanted to get to the city before the convention. Driving with Felker from the airport, Mailer said, "The only political writing I know anything about is Marx. I'm not exactly sure how to go about it." Felker introduced him to some reporters, and Mailer found that he already knew some people there, including Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the historian, who would later join the Kennedy administration.

Mailer's name, of course, was well known. "The Democrats fascinated him, and they in turn were fascinated by him," Felker recalled. When the convention was underway, Mailer came up to Felker and said, "How to do this."

I had an epiphany the day I saw Jack Kennedy arrive at the convention. I

the back seat of an open car, his face suntanned, and there was a crowd

the other side of Pershing Park, all applauding, going crazy, while the convention

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itself was filled with the whole corrupt trade-union Mafia Democratic machine. And I could feel these two worlds come together, both juxtaposed to this incredible guy who looks like a movie star. I'd found my image, and at that moment it was almost as if I saw it like a great painting. In fact, out of all the pieces I've written, that one's probably more like a huge mural in my mind than almost anything I've done.

Mailer (smoking again) had 17 days to write his essay. Kennedy's "prefabricated politics" bothered him, however, and he did not immediately decide on the stance he would take. Recalling the moment much later, he said, "I never saw Kennedy as a politician I was in agreement with. I saw him as an active agent, as a catalyst, if you will, who would accelerate a great many trends in American life." Subsequently, Mailer was able to override his doubts and produce, for the first time in his life, a piece written with "deliberate political intention; I wanted to get a man elected." He also feared that Kennedy might lose. If party workers "had eased up a little bit," he said, "Nixon might have won." The 1960 presidential election was one of the closest in history, with Kennedy defeating Richard Nixon in the popular vote by just over 100,000 votes.

When Mailer was in the middle of writing what turned out to be a 13,000-word essay, Felker flew up to Provincetown to get an early look at it. "It was much better than I expected," *mbm 209* Felker recalled. When it was all but finished, Mailer got a bonus: Kennedy was in Hyannis Port for a few days, about an hour from Provincetown, and had agreed to an interview. On the appointed day, before meeting privately with Kennedy, he spoke with some of the people gathered in the living room of the senator's waterfront home, including Schlesing

Radziwill, the husband of Lee Radziwill (Jacqueline Kennedy's sister), Peter Maas, a writer who knew Mailer, and Kennedy's press secretary, Pierre Salinger. Everyone was dressed casually, but Mailer had worn a suit and tie, and was uncomfortable in the heat. "Sweating like a goat, tense at the pit of my stomach for I would be interviewing Kennedy in a half hour, I was feeling not a little jangled," and when introduced to Mrs. Kennedy, "I felt like a drunk marine who knows in all clarity that if he doesn't have a fight soon it'll be good for his character but terrible for his constitution." She offered him some iced tea, and they chatted about Provincetown, which she had never seen.

She must, I assured her. It was one of the few fishing villages in America which still had beauty. Besides it was the Wild West of the East. The local police were the Indians and the beatniks were the poor hard-working settlers. Her eyes turned merry. 'Oh, I'd love to see it,' she said. But how did one go? In three black limousines and fifty police for escort, or in a sports car at four a.m. with dark glasses? 'I suppose I'll never get to see it,' she said wistfully.

A year later Mrs. Kennedy, now the First Lady, got her wish. Accompanied by Gore Vidal, whose stepfather had been married at different times to her mother and to Vidal's, she spent a couple of days in Provincetown with a small Secret Service escort. She wore a blonde wig and dark glasses, but was still identified by the locals.

In their conversation, what struck Mailer was something Kennedy said at the outset, which he found to be "altogether meaningful" to him, but otherwise irrelevant. Kennedy said that he had read his books, paused and continued, "I've read *The Deer Park* and . . . the others," a remark that startled Mailer. In countless similar situations, the book invariably mentioned was

The Naked and the Dead. "If one is to take the worst and assume that Kennedy was briefed for this interview [which is most doubtful], it still speaks well for the striking instincts of his advisors." As it turns out, Kennedy was briefed by Salinger who, in turn, had been prompted by Maas. According to him, there had been some reluctance to grant the interview in the first place, because "at that time in his life Norman was not viewed as Mr. Stability." So Maas told Salinger that "if you really want him eating out of your hand," have Kennedy mention *The Deer Park*. "But string it out a little. The timing has to be just right." Salinger, who was present for the interview, saw his boss deliver the line perfectly, and "Norman just melted." They got along well enough for Kennedy to invite Mailer back the next day with his wife, which he did. Mailer wrote later, "After I saw the Kennedys, I added a few paragraphs to my piece about the convention, secretly relieved to have liked them, for my piece was most favorable to the Senator."

Three weeks before the election, on October 18, the November issue of *Esquire* appeared, and "Superman" was given wide attention. Pete Hamill, another Irishman who became friendly with Mailer, was a young journalist at that time. Looking back, he said, "When it came out, it went through journalism like a wave. Something changed. Everyone said, 'Uh. oh. Here's another way to do it.'" Mailer had taken political journalism "beyond what the best guys, Mencken, Teddy White, Richard Rovere—had done. Rather than just a political sense they had a moral sense that came out of the piece." Felker and Hayes also were impressed: "It made enormous impact and caused a lot of young writers to begin to think about politics," Felker Hayes added that the essay "set the tone for many, many things to come for him, and for us."

Arthur Schlesinger said he had "a vague memory that Kennedy was rather pleased" with Mailer's profile. Mailer only learned of Kennedy's reaction much later, but shortly after the

piece appeared, he received a four-page, hand-written letter from Jacqueline Kennedy expressing gratitude for his essay. "I never dreamed that American Politics could be written about that way—why don't more people have the imagination to do so," she asks, and then answers by saying, "I know why—the poor things don't have the talent." She then assured him that her husband had indeed read *The Deer Park*; she remembered clearly the room where he finished it on a rainy day the previous fall, as well as her own reading of it. Perhaps he and his wife could visit them at the Kennedy compound next summer, she added. Reading this, Mailer began to imagine a role he might play in the new administration.

In her letter, Mrs. Kennedy does not refer to any specific passages in "Superman," but the following scene could certainly have been one of those that elicited the wonder she felt. It is a description of Kennedy's arrival at the Hotel Biltmore, seen from Mailer's vantage point on an outdoor balcony of the hotel.

[T]he Kennedy cortege came into sight, circled Pershing Square, the men in the open and leading convertibles sitting backwards to look at their leader, and finally came to a halt in the space cleared for them by the police in the crowd. The television cameras were out, and a Kennedy band was playing some circus music. One saw him immediately. He had the deep orange-brown suntan of a ski instructor, and when he smiled at the crowd his teeth were amazingly white and clearly visible at a distance of fifty yards. For one moment he saluted Pershing Square, and Pershing Square saluted him back, the prince and the beggars of glamour staring at one another across a city street, one of those very special moments in the underground history of the world, and then with a quick move he

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was out of the car and by choice headed in to the crowd instead of the lane cleared for him into the hotel by the police, so that he made his way inside surrounded by a mob, and one expected at any moment to see him lifted to his shoulders like a matador being carried back to the city after a triumph in the plaza.

"Superman" is a classic piece of reportage and a foundation stone of the "New Journalism" not least because of Mailer's skill with long periodic sentences. They take us through the scene as if we are watching a high tracking shot in a film, while giving hints of the emotions felt not only by the writer (here designated by the indefinite pronoun "one" to emphasize his shared identity with the crowd), but by the crowd, the police, the TV camera operators, the "beggars," the Senator's handlers and Kennedy himself, the ski-instructor-prince-matador-movie-star who spontaneously elects to wade into the crowd. The consequences of the Democrats nominating "a great box-office actor," Mailer continued, "were staggering and not at all easy to calculate." The fact that Kennedy was Irish did him no harm in Mailer's eyes. When Kennedy came on the stage at the convention, a writer friend said to him, "Sergius O'Shaugnessy born rich," a remark that struck Mailer. As Schlesinger later said, "He finds the Irish dramatic; they're romantic, they're outsiders, they're oppressed and they live by words. They're also tough, and I think he responded in part to the machismo, so it's possible that Jack Kennedy came along at a useful time for him." An oft-quoted passage in the essay, which comes shortly after Mailer's description of Kennedy's triumphant arrival, demonstrates the accuracy of Schlesinger's comment about a new kind of politics:

Since the First World War Americans have been leading a double life, and our history has moved on two rivers, one visible, the other underground; there has

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been the history of politics which is concrete, factual, practical and unbelievably dull if not for the consequences of the actions of some of these men; and there is a subterranean river of untapped, ferocious, lonely and romantic desires, that concentration of ecstasy and violence which is the dream life of the nation.

The two rivers came together in Kennedy, a canny, bold political operative ready to shake a thousand hands a day and spend his father's money to win (with the help of his family) a string of nine primaries, but also a war hero with a vision for the future, funds of imperturbability, and looks as heart-piercing as the matinee idols whom Americans had loved and envied in the darkened movie palaces of the Depression and World War II.

Even after receiving Mrs. Kennedy's letter and receiving congratulations all around on "Superman," Mailer still had last-minute pangs. "The night Kennedy was elected," he wrote, "I felt a sense of woe." By presenting Kennedy as an archetype, a young King Arthur, Mailer felt he was "bending reality like a field of space to curve the time I wished to create." He didn't know if he was enabling an opportunist or bringing a hero into his own. Would Kennedy be the first hipster president, or just another politician? "Victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan," Kennedy once said, and after he won the White House a number of people claimed paternity. Mailer listed several—Mayor Daley, J. Edgar Hoover, Senator Johnson and Frank Sinatra, a strong supporter of JFK. Mailer said his "cool conclusion" that "Superman" had been one of the deciding factors "might be high presumption but it was not unique." His contribution, he argued, had been to dramatize the race between the Republican candidate, Richard Nixon—'sober the apotheosis of opportunistic lead' and JFK, "a prince in the unstated aristocracy of the American dream." He didn't claim to have shifted 100,000 votes directly, but "a million people

might have read my piece and some of them talked to other people." His essay sparked the energies of Kennedy volunteers, "enough to make a clean critical difference though the country."

When Mailer looked back at the election 20 years later, he said that part of his uncertainty about going all out for Kennedy came from his fear that he was too impressed by Kennedy's star quality. But he came to believe that he had done the right thing. "Kennedy did make a profound change, he altered the country forever and as a result was one of the most important presidents we ever had. Also, the piece left me with a feeling that the one thing I must always count on is the navigator at the center of my unconscious, which knows more than I know. I take this for granted now, but back then I wasn't as sure."

Shortly after he finished "Superman," he heard that Capote was working on a new book about the savage murder of the Clutter family on a Kansas farm the previous fall. *In Cold Blood*, published first in 1965 in the *New Yorker*, and the following year as a book, would have a strong influence on Mailer. "I hate you for writing about murder," he wrote to Capote, "I thought that was my province." He didn't say that the big novel he was preparing himself to write was also about a murder. All he said was that it was too late in the summer to make a big push on it. He added that he was trying to close a deal on a three-story brownstone in Brooklyn Heights, not far from Capote's apartment, and if it happened, "the possibility suggests itself to light a candle every night for Senor Capote, our peripatetic Truman." The Brooklyn house didn't work out at that time. Instead, the Mailers began renting a fairly large apartment at 250 West 94th Street, 13th floor.

The Mailers learned about the apartment from Harold L. "Doc" Humes, who lived in the same building. A writer, activist, *provocateur* and devoted marijuana smoker, Humes was one of

the founders of the *Paris Review*, and a legendary figure in the Hip world. He had written a brilliant novel, *The Underground City*, and in the fall of 1960 founded the Citizens' Emergency Committee in response to the plight of an eccentric comic, Richard "Lord" Buckley, whose permit to perform had been recinded. Billie Holiday, Charlie Mingus, Thelonious Monk, among many others, had also been denied permits. Mailer, who was still involved with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, signed on with Humes' committee, whose efforts ultimately led to the resignation of the police commissioner, and several years later the dismantling of the cabaret permit system. He began spending a lot of time with Humes, who he later described as "one of the few people I have ever met, who was essentially, at bottom, more vain, more intellectually arrogant than I am." The success of "Superman" had put Mailer into what he called a "Napoleonic mood." He had fantasies about becoming a member of Kennedy's kitchen cabinet. "I wanted to be an advisor," he said in 1999. "I felt that, you know, I might have a certain talent for it." At that time, he said,

I realized that life, in its imminence, in its presence, in its resonance, once you could feel it, was extraordinary, and that we were all living like cockroaches, scurrying here and there and not having that life. And so that became, if you will, my sermon. That was what I was preaching for the next 10-15-20 years: let's get back to the instinctive life. Let's get back to where we can feel what's going on in ourselves. And I felt that President Kennedy, and his wife, precisely because of their youth and their good looks, were going to encourage—willy- nilly, whether they chose to or not—an opening in America, a return more to the pagan, to the sense of oneself as an animal who lived in a field of senses.

Kennedy owed him some gratitude, Mailer felt, and in recompense, he wanted "some drinks and dinner and a chance to preach to the President." He was certain he could help Kennedy understand the country better, and perhaps he could become his confidante.

Mailer had his own confidante—"Doc" Humes—and that fall they were discussing the possibility of Mailer running for Mayor of New York on the existentialist ticket. Humes, who would become his campaign manager, recalled that Mailer "was grim-faced every day. He wasn't sleeping well, he was using a lot of Demerol and alcohol, and he had collateral worries about his work." Mailer wanted to lead New York, while calling it "this insane, cruel, rapacious, avid, cancerous and alas—in the end—cowardly city." It was certainly having an effect on him, according to Humes: "I think he transmogrified into a personage: the public persona, a projection of the media, I think he even described it once as a Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde type city driving him mad." Others noticed how Mailer changed when he returned to Provincetown. Pleased as he was about his piece in *Esquire*, he was infuriated when the magazine's publisher, Arnold Gingrich, decided to change the final word of Mailer's title from "Supermarket" to "Supermart." When Mailer saw the change on his contract, he told Felker to make the restoration, and Felker said he would. But he didn't. Consequently, Mailer instructed Rembar to ensure that his future contracts specify that no changes could be made to magazine pieces, including titles, without his permission. Then he wrote a letter to the editor at *Esquire*, detailing his complaints and ended, "You print nice stuff, but you gotta treat the hot writer right or you lose him like you just lost me. When I'm mayor, I'll pay you a visit and see if you've cleaned the stable." In later years, whenever Mailer autographed copies of the essay, he always

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carefully restored the original title by hand. Reasonable people can debate which title is slightly more euphonious.

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After discussions with friends and family in late October, Mailer began his public campaign for mayor with a flurry of letters. He asked for the support of comedian, writer and musician Steve Allen, with whom he had become friendly; liberal columnist Murray Kempton, whose idiosyncratic style he admired; Seymour Krim, who had written him about reaching out to New York Catholics and Jews; and Karl Edd, the author of a banned book, *The Tenement Kid*. He asked Edd for the names of "some very hard hip kids" to work in the campaign, and told Krim that he needed public relations professionals who would work for nothing. The kind of people he hoped to attract, he explained to Allen, were people who had "evolved a private philosophy which will have perhaps some point of possible communion with my own." He told his German publisher he had no time to answer questions because "it is necessary to start a new political party in America," and agreed to do an interview with *Mademoiselle*, on the condition that it be a discussion of politics. He did respond positively, however, to Allen Ginsberg's request for a testimonial for Burroughs *Naked Lunch*, which he had now read. For the Grove Press edition, he wrote, "Naked Lunch is a book of beauty, great difficulty, and maniacally exquisite insight. I think William Burroughs is the only American novelist living today who may conceivably be possessed by genius. And I make these remarks in sourness and without enthusiasm, since Mr. Burroughs, after all, is one of my fellow racketeers. But I don't know that we belong to the same part of the literary Mafia." The second sentence of the blurb continues to appear on editions of Burroughs' novel.

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On the campaign trail, Kennedy was talking about the possibility of sending a volunteer force to Cuba to challenge Castro, and Mailer was sufficiently disturbed to write a note to Schlesinger saying that such an operation would be "tragic," and Kennedy might "lose more than he will gain from this" in the election. He also said no to a request to use his name on a national advertisement sent to him from the National Committee of Arts, Letters and Sciences for John F. Kennedy for President. "Kennedy's Wagnerian vision of a new American expeditionary force captained by Saint Grottlesexers and soldiered by some yet undefined Marine corps lumpen proletariat for the invasion of Cuba," he wrote, was "chilling" and he hoped it was only "a perhaps forgivable mistake due to the excesses of campaigning."

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Not all of Mailer's letters were as reasonable as these. In undated letters written around election day to four writers, there are signs, at least in retrospect, that the fears of his wife and sister about his mental state were justified. The letters are to pitcher Jim Brosnan, author of professional baseball's first un-sanitized memoir, *The Long Season*; John Cheever, who had a fine story, "The Death of Justina," in the same issue of *Esquire* as "Superman"; Stephen Spender, the literary editor of *Encounter*, a highbrow British magazine, where Mailer had sent "Superman" in the hopes of publication; and T.S. Eliot. Spender was the only one that Mailer knew personally. Following are a few lines from the first three, and the whole of his letter to Eliot:

To Brosnan: "I can't pitch worth a fuck, and you write like a dull whore with an honest streak, but if you ain't afraid of a grand slam, which you is, come around when you get to the New York, and we'll have a drink or two—you to beer and small Martinis, me to B, not

X / Bourbon, but blended Bellows, if that's not bragging too hard. Your new pal Fan letter Mailer
(First name Norm)"

To Cheever: "For its length it's an extraordinary story, not altogether alienated (?) from a great literature but . . . you did . . . cowardly thing—you kept the children from seeing the dead woman—thus depriving me of their reactions. Yet one does write a letter. Your tablemate, Norman Mailer"

To Spender: "I have a hide like a Bantu flunky but you might recognize the subtle bit that I found you one of the few people who were at bottom not wholly detestable. So not hearing from you it was sad to think that Mailer, the punch-drunk clunk is wrong again. Norman

Mailer was trying to convince André Deutsch, his new publisher in England, to include "The Time of Her Time" in the edition of *Advertisements* to be published there. He hoped that Eliot, after reading that Denise Gondelman believed that the poet "was the apotheosis of manner" would endorse its inclusion. To Eliot:

If he comes out with words for The Time of Her Time, I will force my publisher to print or have nothing further to do with him. Self educated gentleman, I will swear a vow on what is important to me that I will not use his letter in any way without the perfectionist permission of his ecclesiastical Name.

Prince Mailer the Norman of Principath to T.S. Lord King of Eliot,
Impervious to Compassion, Blind by Pride, Timid as Temerity, Royal as a Royal
Roach who has Earned his Place which is High. Spirit of Denial and Quick
Withdrawal I, hereby, as Norman, do challenge your inflexible taste by presenting

the fruits of my orchard and the war of my castle. Do answer. No answer is war, and one would detest that. Mailer.

It is unlikely that these letters were sent, but it is clear that Mailer was less and less able to bridle his increasing irrationality. The struggle between the saint and the psychopath was challenging the navigator's abilities.

In his reply to Mrs. Kennedy before the election, Mailer responded to her comment about how incredible it would be if he could somehow visit earlier centuries and write reports in the manner of "Superman." Mailer said he would enjoy talking with her in Hyannis Port about his interest in the late-eighteenth century France. Specifically, he would like to discuss the works of the Marquis de Sade. "There's a man I'd like to do a biography of when I'm dead beyond repair. I might be able to throw a hint or two on the odd strong honor of the man." His balance can be gauged by his feeling that Mrs. Kennedy would naturally be delighted to discuss de Sade's thought as "a fair climax to the Age of Reason." Not surprisingly, she did not reply. Later, he deduced that he had "smashed the limits of such letter-writing," and trod "as close to the edge as I have ever come." But at the time, "I saw it somewhat differently. The odds were against a reply, I decided, three-to-one against, or eight-to-one against. I did not glean that they were eight-hundred-to-one against. It is the small inability to handicap odds which is family to the romantic, the desperate and the insane."

Two days after he wrote to Mrs. Kennedy, Mailer called a meeting to discuss his candidacy with Irving Howe and a half-dozen *Dissent* writers and editors. Mailer opened it by saying he wanted to be mayor "to establish New York as the West Berlin of the world." He called for an existential campaign. He then read his "Open Letter to Fidel Castro," and said that

if it was published, and Castro responded positively, and Hemingway agreed to write an assessment of the Cuban revolution, voters would get the sense that "New York can be a force in the world." Howe said that the Cuban situation was no way to start a New York mayoral campaign, especially a third party campaign. The meeting ended after a desultory discussion of a name for the new party.

According to his sister, Mailer was surly and difficult in the fall of 1960. One afternoon she came to the 94th Street apartment to deliver something she had typed for him in connection with the mayoral campaign. He found fault with it, and said she was trying to sabotage. They argued and, then, she recalled, "He actually hit me across the side of my face. Broke my glasses. He was very upset. Oh, God, it was a terrible time." Adele was present and remembers Barbara crying and saying to her brother, "What's the matter with you? Are you crazy?" and then leaving. Barbara now believes that Mailer had gotten fascinated with politics. He went to the Democratic convention. "I think he really felt that if I can't change my writing, I can change it if I get some power, some political power." Mailer was angry with her, she said, he was angry with his entire family: "He felt that the Kennedys all pulled together, and his family wasn't doing this for him. I wasn't happy at all about his running for mayor. Thought it was terrible idea." A decade later, Mailer said he was in complete earnest at the time. "I thought I was unique; that I had a unique mission. I had something to do in the world." When the two women spoke the next day, Barbara said, "I've never seen him like this." Adele replied, "Well I have, and it's getting worse."

His descent began to accelerate. On November 14, Mailer was arrested at Birdland, a fancy jazz club in mid-town Manhattan. He insisted on paying a bar bill with a credit card,

although the law forbade alcohol purchases on credit at the time. He spent the night in jail. The next afternoon he was cordial during his interview with two young women from *Mademoiselle*. Most of their discussion was given over to the issues raised in "The White Negro" and "Superman." Mailer said Kennedy was a hipster, and that he was as well, but a "terribly philosophical" one. He wasn't about to recommend hipsterism to everyone, he said. "I just ask that the hipster be considered at least as interesting and serious as a young congressman." Mailer admitted to still taking an occasional toke, but found that it was affecting his short-term memory. When the discussion turned to writers, Mailer praised Burroughs. "I think he's going to last a long time after me because he's more intense. He's got a quality I don't have. I mean, I write sentences that embrace people. But he writes sentences that stab people and you never forget the man who stabs you." Indeed.

Mailer was tired after spending the night before in jail, but nevertheless s drinking with Lester Blackiston and Bill Ward at the Cedar Tavern in the Village. He got to bed at six a.m. (We know the specifics of his life for the next three weeks because of a rough diary he kept from November 15 through December 8). The next afternoon he had a mayoral planning meeting at Downey's Steakhouse in Manhattan with some friends, including Seymour Krim, who along with Allen Ginsberg and Noel Parmentel, Jr. (credited with coming up with the famous line about Nixon, "Would you buy a used car from this man?"), were named informal press secretaries for the campaign. He returned to 94th Street for a meeting with Homes and the Citizens' Emergency Committee.

The following day, November 17, Mailer took the train to Providence to give a reading at Brown University. According to an account by Richard Holbrooke, Mailer began his

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presentation announcing, "I come to bring you the existentialist word" (five years later, Mailer said that at the time, "I thought I had God's message"). Another reporter, Ellen Shaffer, wrote: "The audiences were at once alienated by this brusque man, and having lost his audience, Mailer never regained it." He read from his work, and "his voice swelled with each obscenity, and he made lewd gestures to aid his re-enactment of the scene." A few members of the audience walked out; others applauded. She concluded: "Norman Mailer is an egocentric, malcontent genius, who has courageously, indignantly come to blows with the world around him."

Holbrooke ends his report with Mailer in quiet dialogue about various writers after the reading. "Fitzgerald," Mailer said, "pissed away his talent," and Farrell is "as great as Beckett." Mailer's notes sketch the rest of the evening: "Drinks at Ginger Chivvies (?), Freddy candy (?) man and punch he caught for me, going outside—Chinnie Thibault looking for WPRO, splitting with him and Reis, car-ride out for girl, no-find, eating in a spade joint, near rumble, split-out onto street, back to hotel, chinfest with Reis, sleep."

The next day he met his sister at his apartment. They had a fight about the preparations for the 30th birthday party he was giving Roger Donoghue on November 19. Mailer planned to make an informal statement at the party that he was running for mayor; a formal announcement would be made a few days later at a press conference. The Donoghues came by for drinks in the late afternoon, and then they all went to the Stork Club for more. After dinner, he went home and took Tibo for a walk, and the dog ran away. Chasing him, Mailer got into a fight with a "prep school type." He went to bed in the early morning hours.

In the morning, Mailer was "ego-dampened by fatigue." Mickey and Humes' wife, Anna Lou, came by for campaign assignments. After they left, he had had an argument with Adele.

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Then he got on the telephone to invite last-minute guests. George Plimpton was helping him, and he told Manso that Mailer called him several times that day:

You'll remember that his campaign was based on the rather interesting idea that he was truly suited to represent the disenfranchised of the city—Bowery bums, deadbeats, bag women, prostitutes, pimps, victims of police brutality, outcasts, runaways, and so forth—and if he could convince this marginal if large group that he had solid connections with the 'power structure' of New York City, he'd get their support in his quest for the mayoralty.

Dutifully, all afternoon, Plimpton made calls to various dignitaries, including the fire commissioner, police commissioner, David Rockefeller of the Chase Manhattan Bank, and Sadruddin Aga Khan, the publisher of *Paris Review*. According to one person who attended, "Norman hoped to bring together these two disparate strains of New York life, thinking that some interesting combustion, some mutual reaction, would come of it." But the only society representative Plimpton convinced to attend was Peter Duchin, the bandleader.

A heavy load of booze was delivered in the late afternoon and Adele, with the help of their maid, Nettie Biddle, was busy preparing food. C. Wright Mills, the sociologist, came early, as did various street people Mailer had invited. There were many crashers. The party was roaring by ten p.m. Plimpton remembered seeing a man wrapped in bandages and was told he was a victim of police brutality. Another guest saw a cop and a drug addict avoiding each other, and "a few silly, simpering debs around, and the usual cluster of homosexuals and floozies. There was so damn much noise I don't know how the kids and the dog—a poodle—slept through it."

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Tony Franciosa, the film star, was at the party. Mailer knew him through his old friend Shelley Winters, who had divorced Franciosa the day before. He was the closest thing to a major celebrity who attended. Several close friends were there: Roger and Fay Donoghue, Mickey Knox and Adele's sister, ~~and~~ Joan, Dwight Macdonald, Delmore Schwartz, the other two Normans, Rosten and Podhoretz, and their wives, Hedda Rosten and Midge Decter, Lew and Jay Allen, Barbara and Harold Solomon, "Doc" and Anna Lou Humes. Barbara and Larry Alson, and Mailer's parents, left early. Provincetown was represented by Bill Ward, Harriet Sohmers and Lester Blackiston. Barney Rosset, the head of Grove Press was there, along with Allen Ginsberg, and an editor from *Harper's* magazine, Robert Silvers. Jason Epstein and his wife Barbara, who would later found the *NYRB* with Silvers, also came. Gossip columnist Leonard Lyons came for a short while. Estimates of the number of guests average around 200.

Knox who thought he had seen the full spectrum of his friend's moods, said that night, Mailer "was in a strange zone." He paced through the apartment, "taut as a cat," giving his greetings. He had drunk a lot and smoked marijuana, and soon got into arguments about the campaign. He also tried to stare people down. "It was a spooky evening," Humes recalled. "It was exactly the kind of atmosphere that Norman in his state should have avoided." Allen Ginsberg, usually the mildest of men, got into a shouting match with Norman Podhoretz. X According to Ginsberg, Podhoretz was patronizing, telling ^{him} Ginsberg the only way he could gain entrée into the larger literary world was by breaking with the Beats. "To my eternal shame," Ginsberg recalled, "I lost my temper" and began screaming at Podhoretz. "You big dumb fuckhead. You don't know anything about anything." Mailer was called and Ginsberg assured

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him that he wasn't going to get violent. Ginsberg saw that he was making a scary party worse, so he left, riding down in the elevator with C. Wright Mills.

Scuffles kept breaking out as the party wore on. Larry Alson remembers that people kept challenging Mailer to a fight. When Epstein arrived, Mailer tried to box with him. "I don't know anything about boxing," he said, "so I just held out my hand as if to make him go away. I didn't touch him, and he fell over." Mailer went down to the street several times for fights, according to his notes, once with a man named Curran: "Punch at Plimpton's belly—P's counter to chin, chasing Duchin and P to cab. Fighting Curran. Taking punishment—holding on—draw. Curran getting into cab—ask him to tell accurate version—gets out, new fight, lands on ground, me astride—he squeezing, me up—finally wanes—goes home. Puerto Rican wants to fight. I shame him." Podhoretz summed it up: "There was a lot of bad feelings in the air, most of it emanating from Norman."

Around three a.m. there were about twenty people left. In his drunken state, Mailer announced he was dividing them into two groups: supporters and enemies. He judged each person; most were found wanting, including Adele. Nettie the maid, he kept saying, was the only person who had remained loyal. As Leonard Lyons wrote in his column the following day, "It has been quite apparent, for more than a year, that the gifted writer needed psychiatric help." Mailer was barely standing, but he went back down to the street. He walked north to Podhoretz's apartment on 106th Street, and called for him to come out. Neither Podhoretz nor his wife heard anything. On the way back, he saw Donoghue and his friend Terry. Mailer tried to fight Terry and then, according to his diary, Donoghue himself. Although Donoghue was as drunk as Mailer,

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he knew better, and left. Later, Mailer told Donoghue, "I wish you'd hit me." Around 4:30, Mailer went upstairs. His face and bullfighter's shirt were bloody, and he had a black eye.

Only a few people were left. When Adele saw her husband, she taunted him, as she recalled in her memoir: "Aja toro, aja, come on you little faggot, where's your cojones, did your ugly whore of a mistress cut them off, you son of a bitch." Mailer's diary reads as follows:

Head upstairs and have trouble getting in. Adele mocks me (fag cr the door, others try to push me out, I flail, fight, succeed in getting in, Adele looks away in scorn, I hit her, then order others out. Mannix offers resistance, and I rumble with him, am too weak, and Lester bops him. Then go back in. There is Neddie, Clint, Les, & Adele—Back to the hall with Adele ??? We come out, after while she leaves with others. I start to go to sleep, Les comes back, they are over at Humes—glass tale. Humes comes by—I abuse him, drive him away, as he flees, he drops bottle behind him on floor thus stopping my exit.

Humes said that when he saw Mailer in the apartment after the stabbing, he was in a "zombielike" state. "I don't think he was fully aware of having stabbed her," he said. But while Mailer's diary says nothing about a knife or a wound, the reference to the "glass tale that he later recognized what he had done. Humes had convinced Adele to tell the police and doctors that she had fallen on broken glass, and that was the cause of the wounds to her back and abdomen. That was her first explanation, but later she told the truth: "He didn't say anything. He just looked at me. He didn't say a word. He stabbed me."

Several months before he died, Mailer looked back on the worst night of his life:

Well, Adele and I had been getting into bigger and bigger games when I ran for mayor in '60 that got her, it absolutely got her, in a state of suppressed hysteria because she thought it was going to shatter our lives. What does she know about being a mayor, a mayor's wife, what if I got elected? Like, you know, we had our children by then, we had Danielle, we had Betsy. Those were very important events for me in the '50s, Danielle and Betsy being born. And, so, we were getting along very badly, and we getting into a kind of gotcha routine where each of us was doing something that was superior to the other. And so finally I had this big party at which I was going to announce my coming out for mayor, and Adele was going nuts at the party, from my point of view. And, finally, in a rage I took out my penknife and stuck it into her with the idea of, 'Here, you think you're tough, I'm tougher.' It was madness. I was pretty drunk at the time and probably on pot. The idea was not to do her any damage, just give her a nick or two, you see? Damn it, if I didn't nick her heart. She could have died from it. And, of course, they took her to the emergency hospital, cut her open from the sternum virtually down to below the navel. So for years afterwards, she had this huge scar and she'd sometimes show it at parties. This would give people the idea that I'd used a butcher knife, which is why Gore Vidal mentions a butcher knife.

Vidal's reference to a butcher knife has not been located, but if he made it, he was not alone in getting things wrong. Evelyn Waugh—no friend of Mailer's—wrote that he had cut his wife's throat, and George Plimpton—always a friend—said that Mailer had used a kitchen knife. Others alleged that scissors had been used. In point of fact, the instrument was a slender black penknife

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or pocketknife, with a two-and-a-half inch blade that Mailer used to clean his nails. Mailer stabbed her twice, once in the back, which proved to be a superficial wound, and once in the upper abdomen. This thrust penetrated the pericardium, the tough, fibrous, conical sac that envelops the heart and the roots of the great blood vessels. By great luck, he missed his wife's heart by a fraction of an inch.

Adele remembers Mannix helping her to Humes' apartment, and then disappearing. Humes says she was pale and in shock. He dragged a mattress from a bed and with his wife's help got Adele to lie down and remain still. Anna Lou Humes held her hand and tried to comfort her as Adele kept repeating that this sort of thing didn't happen to people like her, they only happened to Puerto Ricans. Humes, "always a take-charge guy," according to Anna Lou, got on the telephone and called a doctor he knew, Conrad Rosenberg, who he said he would come immediately. Humes also tried to find a psychiatrist because he believed that Mailer would fare better if hospitalized for a mental breakdown than being arrested for assault. Humes also called Barbara and Larry and told them what had happened, and they immediately left for 94th Street to get Betsy, who was alone in the apartment with her father. Fan was notified and she took a cab, leaving Barney home with Danielle, who was visiting for the weekend. Shortly after they all arrived, the ambulance took Adele to University Hospital on 20th Street and Eighth Avenue, where she was admitted at eight a.m. Nettie rode with her.

Barbara knew a psychiatrist, Dr. Emmanuel Ghent, and had called him before she left for 94th Street. She asked him to go to the apartment and examine her brother. Mailer was awakened by Ghent ringing his bell, but refused to let him in. When Fan and the Alsons arrived, Ghent told them what had happened and offered to see Mailer later. At some point, he told Barbara that Fan

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reminded him of "a Mafia mother." Before she left for the hospital, Barbara called her brother and told him the situation. He had roused himself and was gone by the time Fan arrived to pick up Betsy, who was then 14 months old.

Mailer and the Alsons arrived at the hospital at about the same time. They found the surgeon, Dr. Macklin, and according to Alson, Mailer began talking with him, carefully describing the nature of the incision. The doctor listened patiently and then left, telling them that the operation would take an hour. Mailer was able to get a glimpse of Adele and her sister Joan through a window. He and the Alsons were sent to a lower floor to wait. Mailer's diary: "Descent into Hell on elevator." They were all exhausted and distraught. "It was probably the most horrible day of my life," Barbara said. She told her brother that he had to recognize that he had "flipped," which angered him. For four hours, they waited in silence. Dr. Macklin finally came down in the early afternoon to say that she would make it. Dr. Rosenberg was also there and had a brief opportunity to observe Mailer, as he later testified.

The family and friends began closing ranks. After they left the hospital, there was a conference back at the 94th Street apartment. Attending were Fan and Barney, Cy Rembar and his wife Billie, "Doc" Humes, Knox, Blackiston, Podhoretz, a lawyer friend, John Cox, the Donoghues and a friend of theirs, Dick Devine, who advised Mailer to get a suit on. Mailer put on a good suit, and left with Knox and Blackiston in the Triumph. They had drinks at Joey's bar and then went to the hospital, where he was allowed to see Adele.

Mailer record of the visit is brief: "Descent downtown to hosp. Knife. Adele's fear." In her memoir, she goes into more detail. "He looked haggard and strained, with dark circles under his eyes," she wrote. She was fearful and tried to make him go away. He said, "Do you know

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that I watched you being wheeled into the operating room, and I'd never seen you look so beautiful. Do you understand why I did it? I love you and I had to save you from cancer." She thought he was "hopelessly crazy," but felt sorry for him. "He cried, and yes, I held him, and we wept together, but even in my grief, I knew his were tears of self-pity. It was all gone between us." Mailer stayed the night at the Donoghue's apartment. He recalled that he had "crazy ideas about going down to Cuba or something, joining Castro," perhaps by renting a fishing boat in Provincetown. But the next morning, he called the hospital and left word he would be there.

Before he left, Fan arrived, and pressed her son to see Dr. Ghent. Mailer wrote about it later in a poem, "A Wandering in Prose: For Hemingway, November, 1960": "That first unmanageable cell to / stifle his existence arrived / on a morning when by / an extreme act of the will / he chose not to strike his / mother." The poem dates the moment as coming two days after he had stabbed his wife. By his reasoning, if it can be called that, he had saved Adele from cancer by stabbing her. And, not throttling the woman who loved him more than anyone else ever would, he had allowed a cell in his own body to take the leap into cancer. He left with Knox. Mailer asked him to go into the 94th Street apartment and retrieve the open letter to Castro that he had been working on for the past three weeks. "Christ, I thought, he stabbed his wife the night before and what was uppermost on his mind? Getting the letter published. It did not surprise me. The foundation of Norman's being is the sum of his writing, and that letter to Castro was a building block in that foundation." Knox said he would get the letter if Mailer gave him the penknife. "Reluctantly," Mailer agreed, but after Knox gave him the letter, Mailer changed his mind and wanted the knife back "for personal reasons." Reluctantly, Knox relinquished it.

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From there, Mailer left Knox to see Dr. Ghent and had a conversation with him. He then kept a two p.m. appointment with Mike Wallace to tape an interview for WNTA-TV. He told Wallace that he intended to run for mayor on the existentialist ticket. He also said that disarming young gang members was probably impossible. "The knife to a juvenile delinquent is very meaningful," he said. "You see, it's his sword—his manhood." Dr. Ghent told the family, according to Larry Alson, that "the defenses Norman had built up were of such intricacy that there was no way to demolish them." Mailer met Podhoretz for dinner and asked him to do everything possible to keep him from being sent to a mental institution. Then they went to the hospital, where Mailer planned to be arrested. A nurse told them to wait for five minutes, and then three detectives arrested him and took the knife. Detective Francis J. Burns told him that his wife had admitted he had stabbed her. Mailer denied it. Adele also said that she did not wish to see him. Mailer was handcuffed and taken to the West 100th Street police station. Podhoretz was allowed to go with him, and said the police were polite. John Cox arrived and, in his presence, Mailer was photographed and booked.

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The next morning, early, Mailer was taken to Felony Court on Centre Street in lower Manhattan. Reporters were waiting. All Mailer said is that he loved his wife. He was again photographed, and then put in a lineup with other detainees. At the hearing a report from Dr. Rosenberg was read by Assistant District Attorney William Reilly: "In my opinion Norman Mailer is having an acute paranoid breakdown with delusional thinking and is both homicidal and suicidal. His admission to a hospital is urgently advised." According to wire service reports, Mailer challenged the report as "gratuitous and presumptuous." The *Times* carried the rest of his statement: "Naturally I have been a little upset but I have never been out of my mental faculties.

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I only saw Dr. Rosenberg for thirty seconds or a minute. It is important to me not to be sent to a mental hospital because my work in the future will be considered that of a disordered mind. My pride is that I can explore areas of experience that other men are afraid of. I insist that I am sane." Magistrate Rueben Levy told Mailer, "Your recent history indicates that you cannot distinguish fiction from reality," and committed him to Bellevue Hospital for observation.

Levy's judgment was wise. Mailer was incensed and intoxicated when he stabbed the mother of two of his children, but the next day, sober, he told Mike Wallace and a television audience of his intention to run for mayor of the nation's largest city on the ticket of the Existentialist Party—which did not exist. In 1960, few New Yorkers knew the meaning of the word existential. But if Mailer was unhinged, he was mad north-north-west. His diary detailing the events of the three-week period which ended when he was released from Bellevue shows a mind alert to the uniqueness of his experience and eager to garner biographical shards from the men in the violent ward where he was confined. The early part of the diary is retrospective, while the rest was written day by day in Bellevue. In the manner of the Puritan fathers, Emerson and Whitman, Mailer knew the extraordinary benefit of having a written record of a bad time. Emerson turned his diary entries into lectures and essays; Mailer saw his as ore for his fiction. He not only recorded events and his responses to them, he also noted, as he had in the army, marbles of fact that could be used in his fiction. He notes, for example, the "head-sweat on cop" who arrested him; a "Negro being beaten up" at the 100th Street Precinct; and the story of Fred Wood, a murderer who confessed to detectives, in exchange for a pack of cigarettes and a pint of sherry, how he cut the throat of a lover with a broken beer bottle. Mailer wanted to get out of

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Bellevue, but while there his novelist's instincts never waned. Three years later he would draw on these experiences for *An American Dream*.

The inmates in the violent ward passed their time betting cigarettes in a card game called Bordertown, a variant of pinochle, that Mailer called "my tranquilizer." Forty-five years later, he remembered the rules taught to him by Wood. He had visitors—his mother and father, Barbara, Cy Rembar, Joseph Brill, a criminal lawyer, and Knox, who Mailer told that he feared getting electric shock treatments. Rev. Steve Chinlund, who Mailer knew slightly, visited and told him about his visits to Adele in the hospital. Mailer was jealous and told his sister to tell Adele not to fall in love with Chinlund. The three men he spent the most time with were Wood, Arnold Kemp, and Harry Grant. Wood, a jailhouse character and con artist, was given a long sentence for his crimes. Kemp, a young man from Harlem who spent almost a decade in prison for armed robbery, later got a graduate degree from Harvard, and wrote a novel that Mailer blurbed. They corresponded for years. Grant was in Bellevue for stabbing his brother, and Mailer was eager to hear his story. He had "rabbinical" discussions with Grant, who was highly intelligent, but seriously disturbed. Grant "let slip that he is not altogether unconvinced he is the Second Coming." After he was released, Mailer wrote a poem about Grant's assault on his brother: "So long / as / you / use / a knife / there's / some / love left." It is invariably, incorrectly and unfairly seen as a depiction of his assault on Adele.

Dr. Jordan Lachmann was the hospital psychiatrist assigned to Mailer, and they met daily. Mailer recited his biography to him as he probed his resistance to treatment. Mailer told him the story of Castro in the jungle and "made the argument of existential psychosis." For a time, it was touch and go as to whether he would be released, and when Lachmann told him he

could be sent to a sanitarium for an extended period, Mailer called it "a Kafka nightmare." Much later, he remembered telling "the doctors who were quizzing me: 'Didn't you guys ever hear of a crime of passion?' From their point of view, there I was a Jewish intellectual. Jewish intellectuals don't have crimes of passion, they just go crazy." Finally, Mailer said, Lachmann "had the guts to let me out." His diary end with this entry for December 8:

At 4:30, the guard who had a writer for wife, took me aside and whispered, 'Today,' after querying me on when I would get out. A few minutes later I was called, 'Mailer, get your belongings.' So I said my goodbyes and moved to the door, feeling quite moved at leaving them, and then getting dressed, Captain Kennedy, the trip in the Black Maria with Burns, the Tombs and the Bellevue workers, out to the interview with reporters and trip home with Brill. Kids at the door and then greeting Adele.

Having been declared "not psychotic" by Dr. Lachmann, Mailer appeared on January 12, 1961 in felony court to learn if there was sufficient evidence for felonious assault charges to be sent to a grand jury. Adele accompanied him and testified. "My husband and I are perfectly happy together," she said, and declined to sign a complaint against him. When asked whether she had seen the penknife, she said she didn't remember because she had been drinking. A few weeks later, a reporter went to the Mailers' apartment to inform him he had been indicted. As Adele cooked dinner and Danielle and Betsy read a picture book, Mailer said that he couldn't say anything about the case. Asked if the charges, which could have led to a 5-10 year prison term, had affected his writing, he said, "I really couldn't say if this is affecting the writing. I don't think about it—except on certain days." He had spent eight hours that day in his Brooklyn studio.

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At first, Mailer pled not guilty, which meant he would have to stand trial. A short time later he decided to change his plea to guilty "because he feared a trial would bring harmful publicity to his wife and two children." When he appeared in court for sentencing, Judge Mitchell D. Schweitzer said, "I gamble on human beings and I intend to gamble on you." Mailer said in response, "I feel I did a lousy, dirty, cowardly thing." Six months later, having kept out of trouble, he was given a suspended sentence and three years probation.

With few exceptions, Mailer lived quietly during the first few months of 1961. Friends and family rallied around him. In a conspicuous act of support, a letter appeared in *Time* shortly after he was released in response to *Time* magazine's conclusion that Mailer's critical reputation had declined since *Naked*. Signed by eight writers—Baldwin, Epstein, Hellman, Kazin, Lowell, Podhoretz, Lionel Trilling and William Phillips—the letter said that *Time*'s recent estimate of Mailer needed "correction." His "work is of continuing brilliance and significance." Vidal did not sign the letter, but he did reach out to Mailer, inviting him and Adele to Edgewater, his home on the Hudson River 100 miles north of New York. Mailer who was awaiting trial at the time, never forgot the gesture, calling it "a fine thing to do at that point because it was his way of saying, 'I'm not afraid of you, you're first a literary man and second someone who got into criminal trouble', and that was bold and decent. If our relations had stayed that way, we'd be dear friends today." Podhoretz and Decter were similarly generous, and invited him to a party a couple of weeks after he was released, as Mailer recalled:

I walked into the room and the reactions were subtle as hell. Five degrees less warmth than I was accustomed to. Not fifteen degrees less—five. I guess that once you bring a violent man to a party, people are generally polite to him.

Looking back on it, the stabbing was not altogether the turning point. I mean it was terribly shocking and things could never be the same. If any of us does something like that, people just don't look at them in quite the same way. I think ten years went by before people forgot about it. Once in a while they would get a reminder and they would say, 'Oh my God, yes.' I think the real separation came after Adele and I split up and Jeanne [Campbell] and I started going around together, because then I started traveling in another world.

Mailer met Lady Jeanne Campbell, a New York-based reporter for the *London Evening Standard*, at a party in March 1961. He ^{the} was introduced by Marion Javits, wife of New York's ^{former} ~~senior~~ ^{senior} Senator Jacob J. Javits.

Adele was not at the party. She was out of bed and her incision was healing. She was unable to do anything strenuous. She said that there was no letup in Mailer's social life, that he was welcomed back to "the bosom of his sympathetic literary friends." Some of them blamed Adele as much if not more than Mailer for "The Trouble." James Jones, for one, ^{partly} stabbing was largely the result of Adele being "a lousy wife." Fig wrote on the letter Mailer had written to him from Bellevue: "Letter written in psycho ward after he finally did to Adele what should've been done years earlier." Fan Mailer, who on the day Mailer was committed to Bellevue told reporters, "My boy's a genius," wrote in her memoir: "Whatever happened with the stabbing she goaded him into it." Others saw Adele as being noble for not pressing charges.

Judy Feiffer, then married to Jules Feiffer, said Adele "was a lady, and her behavior towards Norman was admirable and loyal." If Adele had turned against him, if she had revealed

the harshest details of their marriage, he would probably have gone to prison. "I saved his neck," Adele wrote in her memoir. "I could have put him away for fifteen years if I had chosen to testify." But she didn't. She wanted to keep the marriage going. "In a sense," Feiffer said, "she was his creation, like in *The Deer Park*. He was the man in her life, and she's a passionate woman, so it had to be one of the most intense and convoluted and strange relationships." After Mailer's release, their relationship began to recover, and then in late March collapsed entirely.

According to Adele, the decisive moment came when Mailer returned home the morning after a literary party. She accused him of spending the night with another woman and threw him out.

The next day she called a divorce lawyer.

"The Trouble" reverberated throughout the Mailer family. Even a half-sister, Adele, Mailer's sister found the event difficult to discuss. "I remember being terribly disappointed in him," she said, "very angry about it." At the time, she thought, "We'd never be the same, sort of like the end of everything." Susan said, "It affected me very much. I wasn't so little; I was like eleven. So I understood what was going on. I was very close to, very fond of Adele. I liked her a lot." Prior to the stabbing, she felt as if she had two sets of parents—Adele and her father and Chavo and her mother—but when her father was committed, her mother wouldn't let her visit New York. This angered Mailer. "I happen to think that she was right," Susan said. "You know, if I had a kid and the same thing happened I would have done the same thing." Her mother never fully trusted her father after the stabbing, Susan said, calling the stabbing "the single most painful thing in my childhood." Danielle, asked when she realized that her father was the famous writer, Norman Mailer, replied, "That's a good question. You know what, it's like my hair was brown, my mother was stabbed, my father was Norman Mailer. Each one created about as much

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emotion in my upbringing. Those were three kind of – not so much my hair's brown – but my father's Norman Mailer, my mother was stabbed and, you know, I'm a female." Two years before her father's death, Betsy repeated to a family friend what her father had said to her about the assault: "I let God down." He had tears in his eyes, she said. The dynamic of the Mailer family was permanently altered.

"The Trouble" became one of Mailer's memory crystals, an experience to be harvested, via refraction, for his fiction, but never to be delineated autobiographically. When questioned about it, he was usually guarded. In a 1997 interview with Andrew O'Hagan, he said that his children paid a big price for his crime, and that much of the animosity towards him "comes from the fact of people saying, 'That son of a bitch—he got away with it. He doesn't deserve anything after that.' I say leave it to heaven." He did, however, make two ^{considered} direct statements in his books. X
The first was in his 1963 miscellany, *The Presidential Papers*: "One got out of Bellevue, one did a little work again. The marriage broke up. The man wasn't good enough. The woman wasn't good enough. A set of psychic stabbings took place." The second, a brief recollection titled "The Shadow of the Crime," came in his 1998 collection, an omnibus volume titled *The Time of Our Time*.

Through the years a shadow of the crime would accompany many hours. I could never write about it. Not all woe is kin to prose. It was one matter to be guilty—by inner measure, irredeemably guilty—it was another to present some literary manifest of what was lost and what was wasted, what was given to remorse and what was finally resistant to remorse. Violence is the child of the iron in one's heart, and decomposes by its own laws.

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The remainder of the piece is for the most part given over to a statement of regret about the collateral damage the stabbing inflicted on his "Open Letter to Fidel Castro," a piece of writing he felt might have had "its effect on history," but appeared too late to be of any consequence. He ended by noting the "incalculable" damage done to his daughters. "Murder and its sibling, assault," he concluded, "are the most wanton of the crimes, for they mangle the possibilities and expectations open to others."

Perhaps his most frank statement about his blighted role as an unfrocked prophet came in his 1965 interview with Brock Brower: "I lost any central purchase I had on the right to say what is happening. I'm *parti pris*. Now when I argue the times are violent, they can say, well, look what he did. I destroyed forever the possibility of being the Jeremiah of our time." Not entirely, however. A comeback was not far off. After his release from Bellevue, "a good deal of the sweetness came back," Barbara said. "It's as if he really let go of something." The fact that "he was pretty appalled at himself" made a "big difference" to the family. Years after the stabbing, he said, "A decade's anger made me do it. After that, I felt better." It would take two years for Mailer to fully resume his literary career, but then he had it all his own way, in large part, for the next dozen years.

Adele, after she had recovered, became an alcoholic for 20 years until joining Alcoholics Anonymous, and then quit drinking entirely. "The Trouble" clouded her life. She became permanently bitter, according to Danielle, and "damaged in a lot of ways. Profoundly. And obsessed—as if symbolically she was never able to cut the tie with him." At the end of memoir, Adele wrote, "I was trapped in my purgatory of hatred." Asked why she had w

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