

she replied, "I want my book to make Mailer suffer." Over the decades, her relationship with Mailer became progressively more distant and troubled.

Betsy #

At the legal proceeding when Mailer was given his suspended sentence, his lawyer told the judge that he would make a contribution to society. He also said that Mailer had "reduced his drinking to a minimum," which was not the case. Mailer wrote little during the months before and after the stabbing, but he drank heavily. Before the event, he drank "explosively"; afterwards he drank "steadily—most nights I went to bed with all the vats loaded." His hangovers were "steeped in dread" and he feared becoming an alcoholic. To avoid drinking too early in the day, he sorted through the notes in his pockets, his record of whiskey moments when some bar conversation or insight crystallized:

Cold War

The Lady

was

quite a queen

in her

own right

You're a great man

you're a

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very

great

man

only please

why can't

you be

considerate

of others

as well?

Heh heh,

can't do two things

at once

said Rasputin.

The poems, which were published as *Deaths for the Ladies (and other disasters)*, are by turns observant—"Drinker / with a / problem said: I'll drink / to that / even if / it's not / quite / true"; angry—"Rip / the prisons open / Put / the convicts / on / television"; nuanced (and reflecting Lady Jeanne's influence)—"The English / have a sense / of ambush / about vulgarity /

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it is: / do you / descend / the steps / properly?" and blunt—"In the first week / of their life / male
 jews / are crucified." There is irony—"I want to / be a / fine / woman / and a / great/mother / to
 my / children / and / oh yes / you / she said"; and revealing: "If / Harry Golden / is the gentile's /
 Jew / can I be / the Golden Goy?" Some are impressionistic, revealing the influence of Ezra
 Pound, who Mailer had long admired: "the remembered musk / of wood-smoke at dusk / in
 Cambridge / and New Haven."

The poetry volume sank quietly, with few reviews, most of them late. *Time* was
 predictably nasty. John Simon, in the first of his long run of negative reviews of Mailer's work,
 classified him with "the various anti- and non poets, whose tribe, regrettably, increases." Writing
 in *Poetry*, May Swenson said that Mailer "longs to be a true primitive, a child making figurines
 out of his excrement," but had praise for two poems, both titled "Wanderings in Prose: for
 Hemingway." Only Richard Lanham in the *Voice*, who praised Mailer's satirical powers, and
 Selden Rodman in the *Times Book Review*, were positive. Rodman, a friend of Mailer's,
 compared his "pyrotechnic" typography to that of E.E. Cummings, and praised his "fast
 footwork and low blows." Dwight Macdonald, writing in *Commentary*, found the poems to be
 "slangy" and "ironic," but called the book "a triumph of bad taste." The only reason it was not a
 trivial collection, he said, is that Mailer "seems to be trying to find out how much weight his
 ideas (or better, his attitudes) will bear." He advised Mailer to move on, get back to prose. In the
 only interview given when the book was published, Mailer said that writing poems was an
 interlude between long stretches of disciplined novel writing. But there was another reason,
 which he later revealed: poetry was a "way of digging myself out of the hole I had dug for
 myself." Poetry was "the first rung." He was mending.

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At the party where Mailer met Jeanne Campbell (Gore Vidal's apartment on East 55th Street), they went off to a separate room to talk, had a long staring match, and were besotted. "The night I met him," she said, "I knew I was going to marry him and have his child." She didn't become pregnant that night but, as with Bea and Adele, the first night was He recalled their meeting eighteen months before he died: "I went to a party and Campbell and we spent a day and a half in the sack. That was the last straw, that and the fact that Adele wanted me to quit drinking because her psychoanalyst said I had to. I said I couldn't quit drinking then or I'd get cancer, but offered to drink outside the house a couple of nights a week. She wouldn't accept this, and so I moved out." Mailer moved into his sister's apartment in the Village, but spent much of his time at Jeanne's apartment.

If Adele lacked self-confidence, Jeanne Louise Campbell was brimming with it. On one side, she was the daughter of Ian Campbell, the 11th Duke of Argyll and head of the Clan Campbell, one of the great families in Scotland. On the other, she was the daughter of Janet Gladys Aitken, whose father was William "Max" Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook, one of the most powerful press barons in English history. A confidante of both Winston Churchill and President Roosevelt, he headed the British delegation that met with Joseph Stalin after the German invasion of Russia. Beaverbrook's daughter and son-in-law were divorced in 1934, and the year after his wife died in 1927, he took over the job of raising Jeanne Louise. She was named after Jeanne Marie, Lady Malcolm (the illegitimate daughter of American actress Lily Langtry and Prince Louis of Battenburg), and Princess Louise (the sixth child of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert). Through Jeanne's family connections, and her own moxie, she became acquainted with

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many of the most influential and accomplished people in Great Britain. Randolph Churchill, eldest son of Winston, was a particular friend.

In the late 1950s, she had a fairly lengthy affair with a man thirty years her senior, Henry Luce, the founder of the Time-Life empire, who met her at La Capponcina, Beaverbrook's villa on the French Riviera. He offered her a job at *Time*, and she came to New York in 1956. Luce thought of marrying the statuesque young woman with a wild mass of curly hair, but his wife, the politician and diplomat, Clare Booth Luce, convinced him otherwise. Campbell had left *Time*, and was working for her grandfather's paper, the *London Evening Standard*, when she met Mailer at Vidal's party. Vidal found her to be "very attractive, very bright," and Mailer thought he had "some idea of possibly having some sort of liaison with her." When Vidal asked Campbell what had attracted her to Mailer, she said, "I had never gone to bed with a Jew before." Mailer had never slept with the daughter of a duke before, and was similarly curious. Besides the personal attraction he felt, he also saw that Lady Jeanne's social ties and acumen could be a great literary resource. The fact that she was leaving the man whose magazines had attacked and ridiculed him for the past decade made her irresistible. He learned that Luce "suffered a bit" when he heard of Jeanne's affair. "I loved the idea," Mailer said.

Jeanne's voice was the first thing that Mailer noticed. "She had this incredibly beautiful voice and was capable of putting on numerous airs, a voice which was as lovely as Mozart. It had an absolute range. If she'd been able to move as well as she spoke, she would have been a great actress." She was 31 when they met, he recalled,

but she looked a little older, maybe 35. And she was slightly . . . almost plump.

And she had fiery eyes, these pale green eyes, full of spite and vigor and venom

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and wit. How to put it? They had their power. Combative, and I was just in the mood for that. She was wearing white pearls and I thought, 'She's a very wealthy woman from Westchester.' She was wearing a gray outfit with white pearls, and gloves, perhaps. I didn't know it was Lady Jeanne – all I knew was here's this dame who's attractive to me because of some sort of special social – I don't know – upper class about it. Having been with Adele for years, I was in the mood for a woman who was in the upper class.

She was poised, he said, and "very proud to be Lady Jeanne, but never said a word about it." Their dissimilar backgrounds added to their initial attraction, as Mailer recalled: "There I am, from a middle class Jewish family, and I'm in sort of an indefinable position. Because I'm a well-known author, in a certain sense I'm part of the establishment. But I'm a criminal, a felon on parole. There she is, Lady Jeanne, her father is a duke." His situation made him think of how Jones and Styron "would be eating their fucking hearts out" to be in his position. He was having great fun, he said, but more important, "I was learning about things. The novelist in me was absolutely on fire. I loved it." The two people who had shaped his thinking the most, he said, were Jean Malaquais and Jeanne Campbell, the former on intellectual matters and the latter on social ones. Jeanne's influence on *An American Dream* was especially pronounced, although she got no pleasure from being the model for the protagonist's wife, Deborah Caughlin Mangaravidi Kelly. She called the novel "the hate book of all time." Deborah is murdered in chapter one.

In May of 1961, Mailer wrote to Knox to say the affair was blossoming: "The Lady and I are making the scene and it is not at all uninteresting." He was still writing poems and had begun

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sending them for consideration at a dozen different magazines. He also continued his correspondence with his Bellevue friends, enclosing books, cigarettes and money. "Some of the best people I've come across since the Army were in Bellevue," he wrote to Carpenter. "It was just simply that for the last six months my little old navigator didn't know whether to get set for a year or less above ground or below ground and I suppose the psychotic sensation is a little like trying to hit a baseball when you are standing on a turntable." When his navigator got its bearings, it sanctioned, we might even say *urged* a liaison with Jeanne. Always unable to live alone for long, Mailer was hungry for something beyond one-night stands, and Jeanne seemed perfect. It was a fiery, intense affair. As Jeanne said after their eighteen-month marriage ended, "We had both been extremists who knew no limits; and such an alliance takes you a breath from heaven and a sob from hell." Jeanne was more than simply another rung on the ladder out of the pit of depression and nascent alcoholism. She was both the ladder and the prize at the top; she was his new mate. In June, she accompanied him to Provincetown, where they spent a few days in a dune shack, and then to Mexico, where she first met Susan. It was there that they got the news that Hemingway had committed suicide in Ketchum, Idaho on July 2, 1961.

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Often mentioned as Hemingway's successor, a role he had openly sought, Mailer expected to be contacted for a statement after Papa blew his brains out with a double-barreled shotgun. When he read the statements of regret by various celebrities and politicians in the *Times* (including President Kennedy), he had "one full heart-clot of outraged vanity that the *Times* never thought to ask *his* opinion. In fact, he was not certain he could have given it. He was sick in that miasmal and not quite discoverable region between the liver and the soul." Finally, he

gave a statement to Jeanne for her grandfather's newspapers in London, which he paraphrased in *Of a Fire on the Moon*. Papa's suicide, he wrote, would strengthen the hearts of ignoble bureaucrats because "Hemingway constituted the walls of the fort: Hemingway had given the power to believe you could still shout down the corridor of the hospital, live next to the breath of the beast, accept your portion of dread each day. Now the greatest living Romantic was dead." Mailer wrote later that Hemingway is "the father of modern American literature, at least for men."

I keep thinking of John Gardner's unforgettable remark that when a father commits suicide, he condemns his son to the same end. Well, of course, you can go to suicide by more ways than killing yourself. You can rot yourself out with too much drink, too many failures, too much talk, too many wild and unachieved alliances—Hemingway was a great cautioning influence on all of us. One learned not to live on one's airs, and to do one's best to avoid many nights when—thanks to Scott Fitzgerald's work—one knew it was three o'clock in the morning.

What was "doubly depressing," Mailer said shortly after the suicide, "was that he died in silence." Absent any valedictory message, Mailer called his hero's suicide "the most difficult death in America since Roosevelt." Until the end of his own life Mailer ruminated on Hemingway's. He examined every aspect of his life and work—his Midwest childhood, his characters (Jake Barnes, Frederick Henry and Robert Jordan, mainly), his mistakes (taking the literary world too seriously, and establishing "a royal court of followers"), his sense of identity (as strong as Mohammad Ali's), his narcissism (which he compared to Henry Miller's), his

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moral vision (comparing it to that of St. Thomas Aquinas), the inability of biographers to put his character in focus and, several times, his style: "Hemingway's style affected whole generations of us, the way a roomful of men are affected when a beautiful woman walks through—their night is turned for better or for worse. His style has the ability to hit young writers in the gut."

Mailer derided Papa for putting on airs, and also for not heeding his call to comment on the Cuban Revolution. He found it to be "damn depressing" that Hemingway didn't "come to the rescue when us Indians were about to burn one of *Life's* forts" (a comment worth noting in light of Mailer's own association with *Life* a decade later). And he worried the bone of the suicide, even to the construction of a scenario:

There's a no-man's land in each trigger. For the dull hand it is a quarter of an inch. A professional hunter can feel to the division of a millimeter the point where the gun can off. He can move the trigger up to that point and yet not fire the gun. Hemingway was not too old to test this skill. Perhaps he was trying the deed a first time, perhaps he had tried just such a reconnaissance one hundred times before, and felt the touch of health return ninety times.

Then, with a leap of empathy, Mailer gives a simulacrum of Hemingway's conversation with himself on that particular morning in July:

Look, we can go in further. It's going to be tricky and we may not get out, but it will be good for us if we go in just a little further, so we will have to try, and now we will, it is the answer to the brothers Mayo, ergo now we go in, damn the critics and this Fiedler fellow, all will be denied if papa gets good again, write about

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Monroe, and Jimmy Durante, God bless, umbriago, hose down the deck, do it clean, no sweat, no sweat in the palm, let's do it clean, gung ho, a little more, let's go in a little gung ho more ho. No! Oh no! Goddamn it to Hell.

The rendering of Papa's final moments is a run of associations: Mayo refers to the clinic where Hemingway received psychiatric treatment. Marilyn Monroe was a suicide a year after Hemingway and just before Mailer's discussed their deaths in *Esquire*. Umbriago was an imaginary companion of comedian Jimmy Durante, an Italian folklore version of Zorba the Greek. Whether Hemingway actually had any feeling for Umbriago or Durante is unknown, but the comedian did visit Havana in the 1950s when Hemingway was in residence. Leslie Fiedler wrote what can only be called a ghoulish piece, "Hemingway in Ketchum," about his November 1960 visit to the much-diminished writer. It came out in *PR* in September 1962, just before Mailer published his thoughts about Hemingway's final reconnaissance. Hemingway told Fiedler to tell Mailer, whom he called "so articulate," that he had not received the copy of *The Deer Park* sent to him in Cuba. Fiedler's profile may have led Mailer to try to find a happier explanation for Hemingway blasting off the top of his head in his *Esquire* column, which he called "The Big Bite."

Mailer's speculations are an outcropping from a longer examination of Hemingway's psychology in his philosophical self-interview, "The Metaphysics of the Belly," written in the summer of 1962. It was intended to be part of the big novel, which he was then referring to as both "The Saint and the Psychopath" and "The Psychology of the Orgy." One can wonder how this non-narrative material would fit in, and it is quite possible that the problem of integrating this and two other self-interviews contributed to the slow death of the big novel. But, as so often

happened in the course of Mailer's headlong compositional process, the interviews became part of a new project: a study of Picasso. They were to be "an introductory chapter on questions of form and function," Mailer said later. He went so far as to sign a contract for the book with Macmillan in the early spring of 1962, but soon abandoned the project, and did not return to it until 1995.

Hemingway's death was clearly one of the factors that led him—quite naturally given Hemingway's acquaintance with Picasso—to think of a book about the painter. When the self-interviews, which veer far afield from Picasso, were finally published as a whole in his 1966 collection, *Cannibals and Christians*, they came to 135 pages. There is no simple way to describe the catechetical ebb and flow of the dialogues, but his description of the growth and diminution of Being as it moves from state to state, from a molecule in the sea to a piece of driftwood, near-extinction to rebirth—it could be sub-titled "The Progress of Souls"—is close to the core of Mailer's concerns, and it could be argued, Picasso's. His method can be glimpsed in the following conversation of Mailer with himself about the division in Hemingway's psyche:

Mailer: Postulate a modern soul marooned in constipation, emptiness, boredom and a flat dull terror of death. A soul which takes antibiotics when ill, smokes filter cigarettes, drinks proteins, minerals, and vitamins in a liquid diet, takes seconal to go to sleep, benzedrine to awake, and tranquilizers for poise. It is a deadened existence, afraid precisely of violence, cannibalism, loneliness, insanity, libidinousness, hell, perversion, and mess, because these are the states that must be passed through, digested, transcended, if one is to make one's way back to life.

Interviewer: Why must they be passed through, transcended?

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Picasso

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Mailer: [. . .] These states, these morbid states, as the old-fashioned psychologists used to say, can obtain relief only by coming to life in the psyche. But they can come to life only if they are ignited by an experience outside themselves. [. . .] A dramatic encounter with death, an automobile accident from which I escape, a violent fight I win or lose decently, these all call forth my crossed impulses which love death and fear it. They give air to it. So these internal and deadly experiences are given life. In some cases, satisfied by the experience, they will subside a bit, give room to easier and more sensuous desires.

Interviewer: Not always?

Mailer: Not always. Hemingway, it seems, was never able to tame his dirty ape.

Interviewer: His dirty ape?

Mailer: It's a better word than id or anti-social impulse.

Interviewer: I think it is.

Mailer: Once we may have had a fine clean brave upstanding ape inside ourselves. It's just gotten dirty over the years.

Interviewer: Why couldn't Hemingway tame his ape?

✓ Mailer: [. . .] An artist is usually such an incredible balance of opposites and incompatibles that the wonder is he can even remain alive. Hemingway was on the one hand a man of magnificent senses. There was a quick lithe animal in him. He was also shackled to a stunted ape, a cripple, a particularly wild dirty little

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dwarf within himself who wanted only to kill Hemingway. Life as a compromise was impossible. So long as Hemingway did not test himself, push himself beyond his own dares, flirt with, engage, and finally embrace death, in other words so long as he did not propitiate the dwarf, give the dwarf its chance to live and feel emotion, an emotion which could come to life only when one was close to death, Hemingway and the dwarf were doomed to dull and deaden one another in the dungeons of the psyche. Everyday life in such circumstances is a plague. The proper comment on Hemingway's style of life may be not that he dared death too much, but too little, that brave as he was, he was not brave enough, and the dwarf finally won.

The discussion, as seems likely, is as much an exercise in self-analysis as commentary on Hemingway. The references to seconal and benzedrine, the demarcations between timidity and boldness, the predilection to explore extreme states such as cannibalism, libidinousness, violence and insanity, not to mention the need to propitiate a monster that inhabits one's psyche, point as much to Mailer's psychic states as to Papa's. Mailer's suggestion that "we" may all have our own dirty ape supports this idea. A few years later, Mailer would come to call his ape "the Beast," noting that the monster was "witty in his own way and absolutely fearless," and required a "breath of air" about once a month. Papa's death, like the death of many fathers, liberated something in Mailer, and despite his immediate woe, anger and disappointment, can be seen as the symbolic beginning of the decade of Mailer's greatest achievement.



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1961

Advertisements for Myself was scheduled for publication in England in September and Mailer had been invited by André Deutsch to fly over for a round of publicity events and public appearances. Mailer was peeved with Deutsch for convincing him to accept the evisceration of "The Time of Her Time" (20 of 26 pages cut) in the British edition, and said he did not think that "this draping of breasts and covering of asses will solve very much at all," but he had given Deutsch his word that he would accept the verdict of the lawyers. So he accepted the invitation, and was no doubt happy to have Jeanne on his arm during his visit to London. "England was absolutely abuzz with this affair," Mailer recalled. "Each of us loved it, because each of us loved being the center of attention." They arrived in mid-September for a month-long visit, with a week in Paris toward the end. Deutsch had set up a press conference at his editorial offices, and Mailer answered questions for two hours while sipping Scotch whisky and smoking English cigarettes.

Press reports on Mailer's problems preceded him, and the reporters "half-expected," as one of them put it, "a combination of Brendan Behan, De Quincey, Rimbaud, Hemingway and Kerouac." The reporters didn't know what to make of *Advertisements*, which they called a "hotch-potch," but were clearly charmed by his American candor as well as his statement that "sentence for sentence" English novelists such as Kingsley Amis, Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene "write better than we do." It was a relatively subdued event and, it seems, a successful one. Mailer had spoken at political press conferences when he campaigned for Wallace, but this was his first literary press conference. There would be many more.

At some point in his visit, Mailer did an interview with the British philosopher, Richard Wollheim, on the subject of violence. Hemingway was still on his mind, as was Adolf Eichmann,

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the Nazi death-camp bureaucrat who had recently been captured by Israeli agents. In a discussion of the nature of a free act, Mailer distinguished his definition of a free act from Sartre's idea of a willed action by which a person "can literally recreate himself." For Mailer, as for Hemingway, "the life of the day has become more complex than the morality that covers it." His assumption, he said, "is that life always advances far ahead of morality. Morality is the quartermaster corps bringing up supplies to starving soldiers." One acts and then one decides on the morality based on whether the act felt good or not. "Hemingway was writing about this all the time," he continued, and the hipster also "follows his unconscious, he acts on the basis of his id," although Mailer didn't like the word "id," and preferred "it," as in "get with it." As for Eichmann, Mailer used him to distinguish between personal and collective violence. If Eichmann, responsible for uncountable deaths, "had killed 500,000 victims with his bare hands, he would have been a monster," but he would have "worn the scar of his own moral wound," and thus gained "our unconscious respect." Mailer was not to relent on this point; he would continue to seek merit, even a smudge, in the psyches of evil people.

He ended his conversation with Wollheim by saying New York City seemed to be dying slowly. "There's a psychic poverty in the city today, perhaps in the whole country. The thing that distresses me about America is that for all the country's done, I don't think it's done one quarter of what it should. I believe it was destined, by history if you will, to be the greatest country that ever existed. I don't think it's come near it." For the rest of his life Mailer would harp on his disappointment with the U.S. for failing to achieve its millennial promise, the Puritan idea of a "city on the hill," a beacon of hope for humankind. The advent of totalitarianism in all its forms—and few writers have identified as many of its subtle variations—was the tocsin he

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pealed, much as Jonathan Edwards had warned sinners in the hands of an angry God two centuries earlier. Mailer's God was not so much angry as disappointed, tired and over-extended. Humankind was a disappointment. The desire to be a Jeremiah lingered.

He and Jeanne were in England for at least three weeks and socialized with her friends between interviews for his book. We know that he did not visit Lord Beaverbrook during this visit, his first to England since 1947, but there is a record of his trip to the Somerset home of Janet Kidd, Jeanne's mother. She threw a huge party for the couple, one which Evelyn Waugh attended, as Waugh noted in a letter to a friend:

Mrs. Kidd's ball was very lavish—nothing remarkable if it had been in Surrey but sensational in Somerset. Two bands, one of niggers & one of buggers, a cabaret, an oyster bar in the harness room, stables flood lit, much to the discomfort of the horses. One bit an American pornographer who tried to give it vodka.

I had never before met Lady Jeanne Campbell and was fascinated. She came to us next day bringing the bitten pornographer. He might have stepped straight from your salon—a swarthy gangster straight out of a madhouse where he had been sent after the attempt to cut his wife's throat. It is his first visit to England.

In 1978, the editor of Waugh's letters wrote to Mailer asking about Waugh's comments. Mailer replied:

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The horse did bite me on the finger, but I was not feeding him vodka, just petting him on the nose. Maybe it was my breath that enflamed the animal, or maybe he was fond of Evelyn Waugh. I also thought I could point to the inaccuracy that I did not cut my wife's throat but realized on reflection that throat-cutting is only a general term of description when used by Mr. Waugh. Otherwise, his account is accurate and his description of me adequate, and will doubtless enhance my status.

Mailer's forbearance is not as unusual as it might seem, and might perhaps be attributed to his admiration for Waugh's facility with sentences.

Colin MacInnes, the novelist and social activist, also interviewed Mailer when he was in London. MacInnes, sometimes called ^{the} an English Norman Mailer, had a long discussion with him on BBC radio, covering a range of issues, including the ways in which mood is undermined by modern life, God and the Devil, hip, and *Time* magazine. *Time* has "a detestation of all the younger and more adventurous American writers," he said, "and willy nilly I'm considered the figurehead." Shortly after they returned to the U.S., *Time* reported that Mailer was doing the Twist with Lady Jeanne Campbell at the Peppermint Lounge on 45th Street in New York. An unflattering photograph of a perspiring Mailer accompanied the story. He was upset and wrote to Don Carpenter that the magazine had done "a nice knife job" on him. The piece said he had "a dazed look on my face which my probation officer will naturally read as drugged. In the dreams of Walter Neo-Mitty there is one recurring fantasy. He comes to power like Fidel Castro and enters TIME MAGAZINE with a burp gun."

He decided to make a push on the big novel and in the fall of 1962 rented a house in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, about an hour north of Philadelphia. He and Jeanne spent most each week there and weekends in New York. The work did not go well. He wrote to Carpenter to complain: "I always suffer from the same thing you suffer from: to wit, I start a novel and immediately I'm getting all my best ideas on the excursions and departures from it." He had never found a way to avoid this, he said, and his only working principle was to "let the unconscious have complete dominion." He wrote to the still-incarcerated Harry Grant to say how "lucky" he, Mailer, had been to avoid prison, and to say he was sending him a pile of books and a subscription to the *Voice*. Being holed up in the country and writing every day was a "depressing activity," he said to Grant, and "sometimes after two hours of writing I feel as if I've done six or seven hours of manual labor." In December, they gave up on country living. "I suppose I suffer from some no doubt misguided notion that New York is the big leagues," he said, "and so when I get away from it for too long I begin to miss the feeling that history is being made around me." Jeanne, now pregnant, was also ready to move.

Just before Christmas, Jeanne got an assignment to cover the two-day summit meeting in Bermuda between President Kennedy and British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. The meeting was to discuss the Berlin Wall, which had recently been constructed by the East Germans to separate the Russian zone from those of the British, French and Americans. At one of their meetings, Kennedy famously told Macmillan, "I wonder how it is with you, Harold. If I don't have a woman for three days, I get terrible headaches." Campbell's contact with the President was no doubt restricted to press meetings, but she had a brief affair with him before she met Mailer, rendezvousing with him at her Georgetown townhouse. Mailer wrote to Knox about

Jeanne's trip, adding that she would be flying from Bermuda to her grandfather's villa on the Riviera for a week. "I'll be a bachelor during Christmas. How could this happen to me?" he asked Knox.

Emile "Mike" Capouya of Macmillan wrote to Mailer offering \$10,000 for a book on Castro. Mailer was tempted but wanted a larger advance, as well as an assurance that he could travel around Cuba with Castro, as Sartre had done. While waiting to hear, he plugged away at the novel, writing only a few pages at a time. On New Year's Eve he missed Jeanne, and cabled Randolph Churchill, whom he had met in England, asking him to please call Jeanne at her grandfather's villa and ask his "old honey bun, dearest alley cat," to come home to share her pregnancy with an obviously lonely husband. She flew back almost immediately. Divorce proceedings with Adele were dragging on, he told Knox, and he and Jeanne "are still together, sometimes in and out." But with a child on the way, he was eager to get married. When Clay Felker contacted him about writing a long piece on the First Lady and the upcoming televised tour of The White House she was conducting, he agreed instantly, happy to end his feud with *Esquire*, and have a paying reason to shelve the big novel.

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The winter 1962 issue of *Dissent* contained a fairly harsh critique of the Kennedy Administration by social critic, Paul Goodman, whose 1960 book on the disaffection of young people, *Growing Up Absurd*, made him a well-known left-wing intellectual casually; both contributed regularly to *Dissent*. In the course of his essay, Goodman attacked Mailer for describing Kennedy as a hipster, calling Mailer "a chump" for missing Kennedy's intentions. Eschewing forbearance, Mailer fired off a brilliantly *ad hominem* letter to the editor

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which led off by saying that he did not read Goodman often "because his style reminds me of the gray unfortunate odor in a prison laundry." He continued:

I do not know that the cause of pacifism, anarchism, socialism, radicalism, existentialism, Goodmanism, Mailerism, priapism, or the breath of a new underground is going to be enlivened much by Goodman calling me a chump. The insult is not powerful nor accurate enough to touch a creative sore and so sharpen my appetite to work, it is not on the other hand insignificant enough to be ignored. The result has the unhappy effect of an old creep's fart. It seeps into the air and dulls the mood at an office party. *Time* which takes such gas for sneaks of oxygen will end no doubt by quoting Goodman on Mailer.

Mailer's letter, "delivered exactly to the jugular," as he later put it, made *Dissent*'s editors unhappy; they wished to avoid unpleasantness, and Mailer agreed, reluctantly, to withdraw the letter. He liked his association with the journal, "although his private mixture of Marxism, conservatism, nihilism, and large parts of existentialism could no longer produce any polemical gravies for the digestive apparatus of scholarly Socialist minds." Mailer remained on *Dissent*'s Board for twenty more years, but never wrote anything for it again. It was another sign that the 1950s were over. For the next decade, the bulk of Mailer's magazine work would appear in *Esquire* and the *Voice* and, at the end of 1960s, *Harper's* and *Life*.

Something close to seventy-five percent of the national television audience watched the First Lady give a tour of the White House on February 14, 1962. Perhaps the only time she received the same measure of sympathetic interest again was ~~a thousand days later~~ when her husband was shot in Dallas. All three networks showed the program, "A Tour of the White

House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy." Unhappy with the lack of authentic furnishings, she had led an ambitious restoration effort and proudly displayed the results during the program. Earlier, Mailer met with Pierre Salinger in Washington to ask for an interview with the First Lady. A few days later, the word came back: request denied. Mailer was piqued, as he said in the essay: "One's presence was not required. Which irritated the vanity. The vanity was no doubt outsize, but one thought of oneself as one of the few writers in the country." If she was going to be the nation's muse, or "queen of the arts," he felt she should be willing to stand for an interview. His letter to her about the honor of the Marquis De Sade had not been forgotten, and he would have to do the essay, "An Evening with Jackie Kennedy," from a distance.

The White House tour was leisurely, and much attention was given to the provenance and merit of the restored furnishings. Mrs. Kennedy had worked hard for historical elegance, and had every right to brag quietly about her work. To Mailer, the details about Dolly Madison's favorite sofa and Julia Grant's desk were boring; he wanted a livelier show. "The country would stay alive by becoming more extraordinary, not more predictable," he wrote, and what it got was a description of "the booty now within the White House." Where was that sense, he asked, that "one got of her in newspaper photographs, of a ladygirl healthy and on the bounce," he wondered. "Mrs. Kennedy," he said, "moved like a wooden horse." Near the end of the piece he stated that he could only "offer his sword" to the Kennedys if, along with Robert Frost and Archibald MacLeish, non-establishment writers like Henry Miller and Gregory Corso were invited to chat with the Kennedys. Earlier he named Ginsberg, Burroughs and himself as "the apes" who had been excluded, while Saul Bellow and Arthur Miller had been welcomed. The tragedy, he concluded, is that "we diverge as countrymen" like "a space ship broken apart in

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flight which now drifts mournfully in isolated orbits, satellites to each other, planets none, communication faint." Mailer's essay was a last yelp of anger against the decorous tedium of the Eisenhower era, one he feared had not yet ended.

Mailer also made a comment about the First Lady's "surprisingly thin, not unfeverish" legs in the piece, comparing them to the legs of Southern girls walking down the street when he was stationed at Fort Bragg. This remark was seen by conservative readers, he said, "as an attack on the flag." When Roger Donoghue read the essay, he was too upset to speak. Not long after, Mrs. Kennedy came to one of George Plimpton's parties. Gay Talese recalled that as she was escorted in by Plimpton, the host surveyed the large crowd, pausing to decide which of his 100-odd guests he would introduce to her. "And I could see that the long guest list suddenly got very short. I remember one guy he wouldn't introduce Jackie to, and didn't, was Norman Mailer, who was probably the most famous writer in New York at the time." Mailer's memory coincides with Talese's: "It was a pretty mean piece, actually. Anyway, Jackie walked into George's party, and I remember she made a point of talking to Styron for the longest damn time. I was dying." It didn't end there.

Mailer remained in Coventry for several more years. In 1965 or 1966, Mrs. Kennedy asked Richard Goodwin, who had been one of her husband's speechwriters, and an important figure in his and the succeeding administration, to help Norman Podhoretz put together a party where she could meet a group of prominent New York writers and editors. Mailer, of course, would have been at the top of any such list, but one of the conditions given to Podhoretz was that Mailer be excluded. "So," Mailer said, "Norman, my good friend, didn't invite me, and told me later, in effect, that her presence at the party meant more to him than my bruised feelings."

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Styron, "who was then my dire rival," was invited, another blow. Styron's star receded somewhat in the next decade, and Mrs. Kennedy broke off her relations with Podhoretz in the late sixties. In the 1970s, she became friendly again with Mailer.

In late February, Mailer flew alone to Mexico to finalize his divorce from Adele, and then took a two-week trip to France with Jeanne to inform her father and grandfather of her pregnancy. They visited her father at the ducal seat, Inveraray Castle in western Scotland. Jeanne recalled the visit: "Because my father is really almost out of medieval times, for Norman that was like being put down in the middle of . . . a Japanese court." Mailer remembered the duke as "one of the coldest, nastiest men I've ever known." At dinner, he was seated at the opposite end of a long table from Argyll, with Jeanne in the middle. "He talked to her throughout the entire meal; I was out of it," Mailer said. "It was the stuff of a novel, a comic novel, on a very high level." The visit to Beaverbrook was easier, Jeanne said, "Grandfather and Norman had a meeting ground. Both were intellectuals, they were both very interested in politics, both men of action." Mailer described the visit to La Capponcina at Cap d' Ail, across the bay from Monte Carlo:

As I was saying goodbye to Beaverbrook at the end of a surprise visit Jeannie and I afforded him (for we did land without warning), I said to him in parting, 'Well, sir, under the circumstances you've been gracious,' at which point the, I suspect, famous gleam came into his eyes and he repeated in an evaluative voice, half statement, half question, 'Under the circumstances.' I would like to think it amused him but I can't bet on it.

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Mailer completed the essay on Mrs. Kennedy shortly after they were married on May 4, as Jeanne remembered, "by a Black woman Methodist minister in the Maryland Woods." No friends or relatives were present. Later that month, they took possession of the three-story brownstone in Brooklyn that Mailer had first seen two years earlier. The building at 142 Columbia Heights overlooks the East River's Buttermilk Channel, with a matchless triptych of the Statue of Liberty on the left, the Manhattan skyline in the center, and the Brooklyn Bridge to the right. Several famous writers have lived in "The Heights," including ~~Walt~~ Whitman, ~~Thomas~~ Wolfe, Hart Crane, ~~Gertrude~~ McCullers, ~~W.H.~~ Auden, ~~Truman~~ Capote and Mailer's erstwhile neighbor, Arthur Miller. Fan and Barney lived around the corner on Willow Street. Mailer used to tell friends that Irish politicians favored "The Heights" as a place to ensconce their mistresses, who then looked longingly across the river to Manhattan. He kept his apartment there for the rest of his life.

With the help of a carpenter, Mailer had redesigned the third-floor to give it the feel of a yacht, with rope and wooden ladders, hanging lines and catwalks. The ceiling was teak, and bowed out like the side of a ship. He also purchased a brass engine order telegraph and compass binnacle, which remained there for decades. To get to his small writing room 18 feet up, he had to climb a rope ladder and then walk across a 10" catwalk. He explained to Yamanishi that to get all the way up to the ridgepole and skylight, 25 feet up via the rope ladder, was "so arduous that I have been able to climb successfully to the top only a few times, and then during periods when I'm not smoking." He purposefully did not attach the bottom of the ladder to the floor so that it swung and twisted with the exertions of climbing, giving him exercise without "the monotony of calisthenics." Coming down was even more difficult because "one is tired and devils seem to get

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into the rope." The children enjoyed the rigging and played on it all the time. The chief reason for installing it, he said, was that "Jews have a bad head for heights," and the setup "keeps a small sense of danger present so that it can, I suspect, serve as a tonic for my much-abused liver." The nautical setup, and his memory of walking narrow ledges in San Francisco, also helped him imagine what negotiating the narrow stone parapet in Waldorf Towers was like for Stephen Rojack.

Jeanne's pregnancy proceeded well, and Mailer worked uneasily on the big novel. He wrote Fig (with whom he had reconciled after receiving Fig's glowing review of *Deaths for the Ladies*) that he was not so much moving ahead, as "making separate starts" on different versions. One of these would continue the account of Marion Faye's Provincetown party, "Advertisements for Myself on the Way Out," and then alternate, as Mailer wrote in his notes: "The novel sits in two periods, the present and the future. Present is O'Shaugnessy in Monroe St. [the long whitewashed apartment where Mailer had been attacked with a hammer], Marion out of jail, Joyce [Dr. Sandy Joyce, Denise Gondelman's shrink] with Elena, etc. The future is O'Shaugnessy as a TV star, Marion as a millionaire and President-maker, and Joyce as a great intellectual who is dying of cancer." Some brief fragments containing the openings of Faye's and O'Shaugnessy's stories are in the Ransom Center, but the most important—and final—piece of the big novel to be published is a meditative-fantastical short story worthy of Borges, "Truth and Being: Nothing and Time: A Broken Fragment from a Long Novel," which he wrote in December 1960 after being released from Bellevue. *Evergreen Review* published it in September 1962.

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Mailer called it "an odd, even exceptional, essay about: shit. Literally." It appears to be narrated by Dr. Joyce, the "archbishop of the New Royal Scatological Society," as he is dying of "a rebellion of the cells." He explains the nature of his disease with Spenglerian élan, noting that the rate of his cancer's growth bears a relationship to "the rate of increase in the decomposition of radium to lead." He describes the anus as "the final executor of that will within us to assign value to all which passes through," and ponders the digestive process by which we "expel the exquisite in time with the despised"; out of the asshole "pour the riches of Satan." We are not brave enough to extract the best nutrients from the food we eat, not any more. The piece can be better appreciated if Mailer's cosmic war between good and evil is seen as its larger context. He brings in the Holocaust, modern architecture and even invents a saint—Exquisitas of Odometamo—and concludes that "the state of Being in the Twentieth Century was close to extinction of itself because of the diseases and disasters of soul over the centuries." Totalitarianism, in its subtle and blatant forms, and its handmaiden, technology, was seeking to extinguishing civilization. Feces was one battleground.

He was in complete earnest. As the British novelist Anthony Burgess, noted in a review of Mailer's 1983 novel of pharaohs, sex, war, magic, odors and excrement, *Ancient Evenings*, Mailer understood that "Egypt is fertile because of Nile mud, and mud is a form of faeces." Thus, he continues, "The sorcery of the anal passage is the source of power." And odor is one of the keys to the meanings of excrement, as Mailer concluded in "Truth and Being": "It is characteristic," he said, "of revolutionaries, passionate lovers, the very ambitious, the greedy, the stingy, and dogs, to fix on what is excreted by others." Most commentators pass over Mailer's fecal interests holding their noses. He didn't care. His navigator told him to keep probing.

Burgess was one of a small number of who did not mock or dismiss Mailer's hypotheses about shit, but even he could not resist a joke about the matter. The only occasion he met Mailer, Burgess said, was at one of those "fabulous New York parties (literally because the big modern sources of fable were there—Lowell, Warhol, Ginsberg, *et al*)—he said: 'Burgess, your last book was shit.' I can see now that he was paying me a compliment." Burgess may have been correct. Dung was of inexhaustible interest to Mailer. As he wrote in his essay, "Some of the best and worst of us are drawn to worship at the congregation of the lost cells." In later years when the subject came up, Mailer invariably enjoined: "Never ignore shit."

The Mailers spent the summer of 1962 in Provincetown, where they rented a unit on Commercial Street owned by Eldred Mowery. The previous months had been turbulent, with the couple sometime fighting in public. Jeanne wrote later that "we could empty a room quicker than any couple in New York." But the baby was due in August and their lives, perforce, were quieter for a time. Mailer had turned in the essay on Mrs. Kennedy, and was working, somewhat fitfully, on various parts of the big novel. Before he left for Cape Cod, he had written to Grant, with avuncular advice that had personal resonance. He told him to read and "immerse yourself in the past" as a way of confronting his key problem: "your mind is three times more powerful than your culture." Mailer said that for the first time in many years "there is a small chance I am going out of my particular madness which has been like yours elephantiasis of the ego." Summer in P-town was always full of craziness, but Walker was in Tangiers, Blackiston and Donoghue were not around, and the Mailers spent July and the beginning of August in relative tranquility.



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Mailer was among the many novelists from around the world who had been invited to Edinburgh for a five-day conference, "The Novel Today," in late August. He wrote to Sonia Brownell, George Orwell's widow and one of the organizers, saying he wanted to come, especially because there would be no set speeches, just unrehearsed exchanges among the assembled novelists. He could not be definitive, however, as Jeanne was due close to the conference. They were thinking of calling the child "Christmas," Mailer said, which Brownell thought was a marvelous idea. Jeanne's mother came to New York for the birth and was charmed by Mailer. When she wasn't with her daughter, Mrs. Kidd found herself being "whirled round the nightspots" by her son-in-law. He was a "mercurial character, loaded with talent, and someone you either loved or loathed. I loved him." Mailer said he got along "famously" with her. When the baby arrived on August 18, she was named Kate Cailean. Mailer intended to remain home, but both Jeanne and her mother urged him to go to the conference. He flew to Edinburgh on August 21, arriving on the conference's second day. His first statement to the conferees was an announcement of Kate's birth.

Over 2,000 attended the conference in McEwan Hall, a massive amphitheater that Mailer likened to a Roman circus. There was much banter from the audience, and the session leaders, Mailer and Mary McCarthy among them, were not totally surprised to learn that someone had filled the water carafes with whisky. "A nice touch, don't you think?" said one of the organizers. No one was allowed to speak for more than five minutes, so the discussion of aspects of the novel was spirited and easy to follow. Besides Mailer and McCarthy, those given a speaking slot included Lawrence Durrell, Muriel Spark, Malcolm Muggeridge, Stephen Spender, Rebecca West, Alex Trocchi and two writers Mailer was to meet for the first time: William Burroughs

X and Henry Miller. The French delegation, which was supposed to include Sartre and Albert Camus, failed to appear, as did the Russian delegation. While the British and Americans dominated, there were representatives from nearly every European country, and some from Asia and Africa. Mailer said that he came to the conclusion that he had to be "a bit of a public figure" at the conference, as the audience would "listen more carefully to Behan than Dos Passos." By ^{some} ~~many~~ estimates, he was the star of the conference.

When Mary McCarthy lamented that it was difficult to have a real debate about censorship without the presence of a genuine practitioner, Mailer took on the role of devil's advocate, one he always relished. "This man Mailer," one reporter wrote, "stocky, curly-headed, almost cherubic at times (like a Rubens) has the reputation of being so far out as to be almost inarticulate," but when he spoke in favor of censorship, he did so with "quite brilliant articulateness." He began by saying that "a profound argument can be advanced that sexual literature, you see, does weaken warlike potential because it tends to drain it." He elaborated on his hypothesis and drew rejoinders from several speakers, including McCarthy, Burroughs and Miller. McCarthy cited Sparta where sex "was felt to be the pap of war," and Mailer responded with the example of Stalin using sexual censorship to make Russia into a warlike nation in the 1930s. Burroughs noted tersely that censorship of sexual material was an adjunct ^{to} ~~of~~ capitalism's desire to "channel the sexual instinct into production and purchase of consumer's goods." Henry Miller held fire until near the end, and then spoke briefly. "It's all very much more simple than it sounds," he began.

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good interesting woman is to sleep with her. We should not make any bones about that. There is nothing wrong with lust or with obscenity, we all have impure desires. We should have the pure and the impure, they exist together. Good and evil belong together. You can't separate them. Let's stop talking about censorship; let's do it, think it, talk it, act it. Thank you.

Miller's remarks (which recall D. H. Lawrence) neatly reinforced Mailer's ideas about the existential life. Remembering his first meeting with him, Mailer said he not only admired his work; he admired his personality. "It is all of a piece," he wrote, "no neurotic push-pull, no maggots in the smile, no envies, no nervousness." Miller, wearing knickers and a cap in Edinburgh, had "a good tough face, big nose, near bald head, looking for all the world like Marx's noble proletarian, like some bricklayer, let us say, you started talking to on the train, and then it turned out he had eighty-two kids and worked at his hobby in his spare time—it was translating Sophocles." Mailer recalled that Miller "leaned over and said, 'Where are you from, Norman?' I said, 'Brooklyn.' He said, 'Yeah, I'm from Brooklyn too.'" That cemented things.

Mailer's admiration for Burroughs was also burnished by their interaction. At one point, Burroughs was describing his cut-up/fold-in method of composition, whereby he cut typed pages in half vertically, and then folded one half into another cut-up section. "The method," he said, "could also lead to collaboration by writers on an unprecedented scale to produce works that were the composite effort of any number of writers, living or dead. He had used fold-ins, he explained, from Shakespeare, Rimbaud, Saint-John Perse, along with passages from magazines, newspapers and letters, to produce composite novels whose authorship he shared. When the turbaned novelist, Khushwant Singh, who sitting near him on the speakers' platform, asked if he

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Y ✓ was really serious, Burroughs, looking for all the world like Buster Keaton, answered, "Yes, of course." Remembering Burroughs at the conference, Mailer said that "he spoke to his friends exactly the same way he spoke to his enemies, which was somewhat remotely." Burroughs remained undemonstrative ~~until the end~~.

Edinburgh was still a bit Calvinist in 1962, and it was hard to get a drink in a bar after ten. Consequently, there were private drinking parties every night of the conference. "Edinburgh had very many evil spirits loose for those few days." Mailer recalled, "there was madness in the air." At a celebratory party after the final day, Mailer was drinking with Sonia Brownell and John Calder, the two chief conference organizers. Burroughs was also there. They were joined by Max Hayward, the translator of *Dr. Zhivago*, who was quite drunk. Calder says that Hayward made a clumsy pass at Brownell; Mailer remembers him complaining about being roughed up by some Edinburgh hoodlums. Hayward went on interminably, Mailer said, in a whining, self-pitying manner about this unmerited cruelty. Angry or disgusted or both, Mailer picked Hayward off the ground, and with some help from Calder carried him out to the landing. "He told me to let go," Calder said. "When I did, he heaved Hayward over his shoulder and on to the stone stairs, whereupon he rolled down all the four or five flights to the bottom. Five minutes later, he reappeared, blood flowing from several places, and quietly resumed drinking." Many years later, Mailer recalled that crazy night and shook his head. "I could have killed him," he said.

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Mailer returned to a full plate. He had agreed to a September 22 debate in Chicago with William Buckley, Jr., who Mailer called "the most important conservative in the public eye after Barry Goldwater." Two days later, he would go to Comisky Park to watch the heavyweight

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cunt whom you may have met." She also made him breakfast and lunch, walked Tibo and Zsa Zsa and helped him take care of Sadie, Jeanne's maid, whom she had left with him when she moved out. Barry said she admired his ^{ADP}freedom, his humor, his willingness to look things that are unpleasant in the eye—^{MBM 263}these are Jewish qualities, and they come through in his work as in the man." They had a warm relationship and remained in contact until his death.

The debate with Buckley was billed as "The Real Meaning of the Right Wing in America," but the context was the intensifying arms race with Russia—the Cuban Missile Crisis took place in September 1962—and the emergence of an energized conservative movement led by the ^{GOP}G.O.P. Senator from Arizona, Barry Goldwater. Buckley's magazine, *National Review*, was Goldwater's cheerleader and applauded his plan to spend more on nuclear weapons. Mailer wanted to end the cold war, arguing that the U.S. was demonizing the communist state. "Let communism come to those countries it will come to," Mailer argued before the audience of nearly 4,000. The cold war, he said, has become "an instrument of megalomaniacal delusion," and turned the nation's attention away from the true plague.

In his speech and the ensuing debate with Buckley, Mailer defines this plague in more specific ways that he had in the past, a reflection, in part, of existential philosophy, especially that of Heidegger. He points to the blandness of modern architecture, and the way it masks the functions of buildings: "The airports look like luxury hotels, the luxury hotels are indistinguishable from a modern corporation's home office, and the home office looks like an air-conditioned underground city on the moon." New drugs proliferate to treat "small epidemics with no name," but are ineffective. "Nature is wounded in her fisheries, her forests. Airplanes spray insecticides. Species of insects are removed from the chain of life. Crops are poisoned just

boxing match between champion Floyd Patterson and Sonny Liston, which he planned to write about in his *Esquire* column. He stayed at Hugh Hefner's Playboy mansion overlooking Lake Michigan. Hefner was clearly cultivating Mailer, and Mailer liked "Hef," and looked forward to mingling with the fight crowd and a bevy of playmates at his sybaritic mansion. His first concern upon his return, however, was his wife and the new baby. He found that Jeanne was recovering nicely, and that the "frighteningly bright" Kate had the admirable ability of "staring one hard in the eye." Now the father of four girls, he wondered if he possessed "some exceptional virtue or vice to be so curiously blessed." He was feeling better about himself than he had for some time. Graham Greene's recent letter saying he had been "moved and excited" by the "magnificent" *Advertisements*, was also encouraging. His literary correspondence had now grown to the point where he needed a full-time secretary.

He hired a young woman named Anne Barry, who had just graduated from Radcliffe. She had spent a day with Mailer a few months earlier, discussing her senior thesis on *Advertisements*. Her basic idea was that Mailer was having an identity crisis in the late 1950s, and although they laughed about this, she was correct. Barry typed up whatever he was working on—columns for *Esquire* and *Commentary*, stories, poems and speeches—he would edit them, and she would retype, sometimes several times. It was a routine he maintained with all his subsequent secretaries. Writing poems on scraps of paper for a couple of years had convinced him of the merits of longhand, and he never used a typewriter again. He wrote in pencil on white, unlined paper from then on. His relationship with Barry was open and friendly; they joshed and joked. She found him to be "a very funny man," and corrected his punctuation. He called her "Mrs. Mark Twain," and in a letter to Don Carpenter that she typed, "a stuck-up little New Hampshire

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slightly. We grow enormous tomatoes which have no taste." Five days after Mailer's speech, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, an indictment of environmental pollution that led to the banning of DDT, was published.

Buckley's speech was published in *Playboy* with the subtitle, "A Conservative's View"; Mailer's was "A Liberal's View." Mailer took umbrage. "I don't care," he said in a letter to the editor, "if people call me a radical, a rebel, a red, a revolutionary, an outsider, an outlaw, a Bolshevik, an anarchist, a nihilist, or even a left conservative, but please don't ever call me a liberal." Few called him a liberal again, but left conservative or, eventually, Left-conservative, stuck, despite his never-ending difficulty in explaining exactly what he meant by it. For Mailer, a liberal was a knee-jerk, unthinking incrementalist on social issues, a helpful, smiling, reverent, grown-up scout who opposed nothing but discourtesy. Mailer opposed much, and wanted to be sure that the world knew it.

When he reprinted his speech in *The Presidential Papers*, he added a brief preface of the same kind found in *Advertisements for Myself*. In it, he says that Americans are afraid of something beside the communists. "Dread," he continues, "has been loose in the twentieth century, and America has shivered in its horror since the Depression." Besides the more tangible manifestations of dread, he notes with alarm that philosophy itself may be dying. "Metaphysics disappears, logical positivism arises," and "soon a discussion of death will be considered a betrayal of philosophy," a remark reflecting Heidegger's adjuration to humans to stand "in the openness of Being, of enduring [. . .] and of out-braving the utmost (Being toward death)." Mailer notes ruefully that the logical positivists are displacing the existentialists in Anglo-American philosophy, and goes on to attack psychologists (excluding Reichians and Jungians)

for treating dread as "a repetition of infantile experiences of helplessness." The dread and anxiety felt by humanity, he believes, should be seen as something more primitive and authentic, namely, the danger of "losing some part or quality of our soul unless we act and act dangerously."

There is no way to determine how much influence Mailer's reading had on his debate speech. But we do know that during his 17-day stay in Bellevue, he read an anthology edited by Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, which contained excerpts of ten existential writers, including Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Heidegger. It is a supposition to conclude that the title of the Nietzsche chapter, "Live Dangerously," and the Nietzsche quote from which it was taken, rang a big bell for Mailer: "For believe me, the secret of the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of existence is: to *live dangerously!* Build your cities under Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas! Live at war with your peers and yourselves!"

Perhaps Kierkegaard's most influential work is *The Concept of Dread*, and an excerpt from it, "Dread and Freedom," is included in the anthology. It appears to be the source of Mailer's oft-stated notion that "the saint and the psychopath were united to one another, and different from the mass of men," and that this "paradox" had "driven Kierkegaard near to mad for he had the courage to see that his criminal impulses were also his most religious." But it is the Heidegger chapter that may have been uppermost in Mailer's mind when he decided to explore the concept of dread in his speech. Dread, for Heidegger, is felt in the face of Nothingness, and courage is the essential virtue which opposes dread and sustains Being (which Heidegger called *Da-sein*, or human existence or presence). Heidegger says the dread felt by

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courageous persons is no simple joy, but stands "in secret union with the serenity and gentleness of creative longing," which can be taken as certifying the high valor of the artist. The extent to which Mailer's conception of the artist's role was invigorated by the writings in the Kaufmann collection is uncertain, but the force of Mailer's belief in the heroic mission of the artist is indisputable. The last line of his 1971 introduction to a new edition of *Deaths for the Ladies* captures it best: *Time's* dismissive review of his poetry, he says, "put iron into my heart again, and rage, and the feeling that the enemy was more alive than ever, and dirtier in the alley, and so one had to mend, and put on the armor, and go to war, go out to war again, and try to hew huge strokes with the only broadsword God ever gave you, a glimpse of something like Almighty prose."

Gay Talese, who had met Mailer a few years earlier at a prizefight at the St. Nicholas Arena in Manhattan, covered the debate for the *New York Times*. He described it as a contest between the conservative Buckley ("a clever jabber with a tiptoe stance"), and Mailer the hipster ("who hooked with his fists as he spoke"). In his lead, he said the match was considered to have ended in a draw. Talese's story ran in the *Times* on September 24, the day before the Patterson-Liston fight. Mailer read it, and then saw the reporter at one of the pre-fight receptions for the press. Talese, who remembers wearing "a summer weight suit, a tan, gabardine, three-piece suit," saw Mailer walking his way. "I sensed that he wasn't happy, he wasn't smiling, and he was carrying a drink. I remember him walking over, and he said, 'It wasn't a draw.'" Talese tried to make light of it, but Mailer "continued to be serious and looked at me in a very hostile way. And I did see his drink in his right hand and I thought, 'He's going to throw that drink at me,' because I had a recollection of Mailer's public image as a guy who could be volatile and throw a drink at

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someone, or a punch. I thought, 'It is early in the evening, I'm wearing this suit, there are people here who will see this guy throw this drink at me.'" Talsese said Mailer looked menacing, and he said, "Don't throw that drink at me." Mailer said he had no intention of doing so. "Then there was a smile, and then there was a casual reflection on the article. That little moment passed, but it was my one moment."

✓ Mailer was adamant that he had won the debate. Buckley had used most of his 30 minutes attacking various prominent people on the left—Murray Kempton, Mailer and Castro—while Mailer had analyzed the nature of the Right Wing. "The crowd was high partisan that night and cheered separately for us with the kind of excitement one expects in a crowd at a high school football game," he wrote, and "I had succeeded in pushing a salient into the intellectual territory of the Right." Therefore, he argued, the laurels should go to him. Coming after his nimble-footed performance in Edinburgh, the Chicago debate gave Mailer another reason to feel cocky about his extemporaneous speaking abilities. Roger Donoghue, Mailer's second, scored it in the manner of a ten-round boxing match: six, three, one for Mailer.

"I was full of myself," is how Mailer described his state of mind on the eve of the championship bout. He was certain that Patterson would defeat the heavier contender, Sonny Liston, who was favored by the odds-makers. Patterson was agile and experienced, but Liston's weight and reach proved too much, and Patterson was down and out at two minutes and six seconds into the first round. Some fans hadn't even found their seats when the champion fell. Mailer published his report as his February 1963 "Big Bite" column. Titled "Ten Thousand Words a Minute," the 20,000 word-essay (10K per minute) is to sports writing what "Superman Comes to the Supermarket" is to political reportage—a revamping of the genre. Its power resides

not only in Mailer's extended slow motion analyses of the action, but in his stunning similes, as in his description of another fight in the essay in which Emile Griffith pounded Benny Paret to death:

Paret got trapped in a corner. Trying to duck away, his left arm and his head became tangled on the wrong side of the top rope. Griffith was in like a cat ready to rip the life out of a huge boxed rat. He hit him eighteen right hands in a row, an act which took perhaps three or four seconds. Griffith made a pent-up whimpering sound all the while he attacked, the right hand whipping like a piston rod which has broken through the crankcase, or like a baseball bat demolishing a pumpkin. I was sitting in the second row in the corner—they were not ten feet away from me, and like everyone else, I was hypnotized.

What further distinguishes the essay from the run of first-rate sports writing is the way Mailer opens his focus to include portraits of the fight crowd, the celebrities, the dignitaries, the hangers-on, and the reporters who covered the fight: "Have any of you ever been through the smoking car of an old coach early in the morning when the smokers sleep and the stale air settles into congelations of gloom? Well that is a little like the scent of Press Headquarters."

It is like being at a vast party in Limbo—there is tremendous excitement, much movement and no sex at all. Just talk. Talk fed by cigarettes. One thousand to two thousand cigarettes are smoked every hour. The mind must keep functioning fast enough to offer up stories (Reporters meet in a marketplace to trade their stories—they barter an anecdote they cannot use about one of the people in the event in order to pick up a different piece which is usable by their paper. It does

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not matter if the story is true or altogether not true, it must merely be suitable and not too mechanically libelous.) So they char the inside of their bodies in order to scrape up news which can go out to the machine.

The Mob is at the fight, of course—Liston had connections to the underworld—and Mailer devotes a thousand words to a group portrait. A sample: “Heavy types, bouncers, plug-uglies, flatteners, one or two speedy, swishing, Negro ex-boxers, for example, now blown up to the size of fat middleweights, slinky in their walk, eyes fulfilling the operative definition of razor slits, murder coming off them like scent comes off a skunk.” His metaphors are surprising but precise: “If a clam had a muscle as large as a man, and the muscle grew eyes, you would get the mood.” The Mob bosses are “hawks and falcons and crows, Italian dons looking like little old shrunken eagles, gulls, pelicans, condors.” The essay expands the scope of the sports essay, reshapes it, and then transcends it.

But it is Mailer’s inclusion of himself in the piece that sharply distinguishes it from the writing of fight reporters of the quality of Red Smith and A.J. Liebling, writers saturated in fight lore, but men (no female fight scribes yet) who bowed so deeply to the canons of objectivity that they could not conceive of making themselves major characters in their own work. Mailer, on the other hand, is present from the beginning, depicting his exchanges with other reporters and with handlers, trainers and managers, including Patterson’s, the legendary Cus D’Amato: “He had stopped drinking years ago and so had enormous pent-up vitality. As a talker, he was one of the world’s great weight-lifters, not brilliant, but powerful, nonstop, and very solid. Talk was muscle. If you wanted to interrupt, you had to bend his arm off.” Toward the end of the piece, Mailer moves to the center of the action.

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Drinking all night at Hefner's mansion, he convinced himself and several reporters that he knew how to publicize the inevitable rematch of Liston and Patterson so as to make it ten times more profitable. His plan is to present the idea the following morning before Liston's press conference. He explains how in the "plot-ridden, romantic dungeons of my mind" he has re-conceived Norman Mailer as a version of Castro, a man who *knows* the impossible may be accomplished. He drinks until seven a.m., washes up, and goes to the hotel where he learns that Liston had moved his press conference up a half-hour, thus stealing his crowd. He walks into Liston's meeting with reporters, plops himself down on the dais, and tries to insinuate himself into the event. He fails. Removed physically by house detectives, his caper is over, although later, he does shake Liston's hand, and they agree they are both bums.

✓ J Mailer's drunken behavior was widely reported. His probation officer read about the *his stunt*
 X J ~~contretemps~~ ^{he} was called in and told that his probation, about to end, would be continued until June 1963. He had paid a high price for his actions, and so reflected at the close of the essay that "some ghost of Don Quixote was laid to rest in me." Once more, after a notable victory, Mailer overreached. It was now a confirmed pattern. Mailer called his essay "a *mélange de genres*," but it is one of the glories of sports writing, and ample recompense for his embarrassing ejection from the press conference. Remembering his story, "The Notebook," one can wonder if Mailer staged the stunt in order to write about it. He invariably had two motives for his actions. Although he never revealed his publicity plan for staging the rematch (beyond billing it as struggle between Good and Evil), Mailer genuinely believed he was on a mission to crown Floyd Patterson as "a genius," and "our champion," for the nation to admire. He had yet to meet Muhammad Ali.

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A few days after the boxing match, Mailer sent a telegram to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy: "Go to Oxford, Mississippi, or arrange a way for me to go down. I can talk to those students." He was referring to the situation of James Meredith, the first Black to enroll in the University of Mississippi. President Kennedy had sent federal marshals backed up by army troops to quell violence and compel his admission. The Civil Rights Movement had grown in numbers, grown hugely, since the federal desegregation of the Little Rock, Arkansas public schools in the fall of 1957, and by the fall of 1962, there were outbreaks of violence all over the South arising from the actions of thousands of Black and white "freedom riders" who flouted "Jim Crow" laws by riding on busses and trains, and eating in segregated terminal restaurants. Mailer wanted to get involved, but there was trouble on the home front, and he stayed in New York to try and save his marriage.

His relations with Jeanne had improved somewhat after Kate was born, but then ~~he~~ started to fray. ~~He~~ ^{He} was traveling a lot, and when he wasn't, ~~he~~ was at meetings in Manhattan or in his studio writing. Jeanne lived on the first floor of the brownstone for a time and then moved out. She had her own journalistic career. Much was left to Anne Barry and another Jeanne, Jeanne Johnson, a 20-year-old woman Mailer had met at Bellevue, who became his ward and helped with chores at the apartment. Mailer had assumed that he and his wife would agree to some sort of household routine. "Having grown up in the middle class, life and background," Mailer said, "I was very responsible to appointments, habits, agreements. For her it was just will-o'-the-wisp. So we could agree to be doing something, and she would change her mind at the last moment. That used to drive me nuts because I thought we couldn't get along without structure."

Jeanne also didn't like living in Brooklyn. "She had a feeling that her social life was swallowed up. I don't know how powerful a factor that was because she was never someone who said, 'I'm giving up more than I'm prepared to give up.' She wouldn't have talked that way," he said. Another factor was Jeanne's strained relations with Fan. "My mother was prepared to accept any woman I was married to, but I'd never pretend they liked each other," he said. Barney, however, with his British manners, got along well with her. In regard to affairs, Mailer said that infidelities weren't the largest problem: "There may have been a few en route, but that was hardly part of it – I mean, I was screwing everybody I could – she certainly had the right. It was more, that we never could build anything. It got worse and worse. And she was a dreadful cook. I remember she'd invite people over for dinner and it was comic to watch them eating and screwing their mouths – it was awful swill – and they'd say, 'Oh, it's delicious, Jeanne.' Then they'd leave and I'd say, 'You've no idea what an awful cook you are.'" By late fall, the marriage had begun to splinter.

Whatever the domestic problems, Mailer continued to write a lot, mainly essays, and book reviews, while making no progress in the big novel. After more than seven years of work, albeit interrupted work, all he had to show was a handful of fragments. But he couldn't interrupt the flow of shorter pieces; he ^{needed income -} ~~was scuffling for cash~~. The reputation of *Advertisements* and "The White Negro," the debate with Buckley, and his "Big Bite" column led to many requests for interviews and paid speaking engagements, and he accepted virtually all of them. In 1963, he agreed to give talks at Harvard, University of Connecticut, University of Michigan, University of Chicago and Wesleyan University. He also rented Carnegie Hall for a May 31 performance, titled "An Existential Evening," and drew a paying crowd of 1200. *Playboy* and *Esquire* wanted

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more material from him, and *Cosmopolitan* interviewed him for a profile. But the big novel went begging and debts accumulated. Beside household expenses and the large mortgage payment for 142 Columbia Heights, he was responsible for support payments for several of his children, plus alimony for Adele, Anne Barry's salary, and Jeanne Johnson's expenses. Royalties from *The Naked and the Dead* helped, but his lectures and columns for *Esquire* and *Commentary* paid little, and both his U.S. and British publishers wanted him to deliver his promised novel, the big one.

Jeanne Campbell moved to Manhattan in early 1963. Mailer wrote to Adeline about the situation. "Jeanne and I are apart, yet not apart. We see each other almost every night, come together a bit, go away a little—it's deadening in the extreme. Limbo." Desirous of family stability, but eager for affairs, he was torn: "When I was young I was always married and rotting my liver with envy that I was not free. Now that I am almost middle-aged I am of course free, and see for the first time that there can be something rich in a large family and lots of responsible detail." The breakup was prolonged, and even as late as mid-June he wrote to Knox saying there were "indications" that they might patch things up. "She's the toughest babe I've ever known," he wrote, but "most of her friends I find intolerable and sickening, and of course that's a fundamental division in my psyche when I as a radical am traveling around with upper-class types." But to Harvey Breit, he spoke of the relationship in the past tense, and bemoaned the losses incurred when his marriages had ended:

Part of the absolute funk is that one ties one's creativity to one's mate, and when they start grinding you into dry goatball powder and there's nothing left but to split or become a whining piteous concentration camp victim, well there one splits

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if there's one sperm cell left, but there's a near mortal anguish which consists of even more than the awful execution of the love that's left. For one's killing part of the creativity in oneself—all those delicate habits and projects which were built up around the half-ass life one had with the beloved. And I think it's almost as bad as a woman losing a baby. I've lost three wives, and there was something large to lose in each of them, but I also lost three large chambers of the talent.

A few days later in a letter to his Aunt Moos, one meant for family consumption, he made it clear that the marriage was over: "She's got a will at least as strong as mine and was no more ready to become a Brooklyn housewife (of the grandest sort, I assure you) than I was ready to become Mr. Lady Jeanne."

There was one bright spot: collecting his recent journalism, interviews, essays and a few pieces of the big novel for a new collection. He had over 200,000 words of material and Putnam's wanted him to cut it in half, a task he savored. Initially, he planned to call the miscellany either "The Devil Revisited," but the title was changed to *The Presidential Papers* shortly before it was published in November 1963. The focus was to be on Kennedy's administration, for which he had much pointed advice, all of it unheeded. The work was satisfying, but it was only a holding action. Sometime in the winter or early spring of 1963, he came to the conclusion that he needed to write a short novel, one that would amount to a down payment on his large promise that he would "hit the longest ball ever to go up in the accelerated hurricane air of our American letters." If he wasn't ready to hit a home run, perhaps he could belt a double, "dare a bold stroke," one that would give him a big paycheck and enable him, as he wrote to Fig, "to do my big book in relative calm"

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After "10,000 Words," the most ambitious piece of this period is "Norman Mailer versus Nine Writers," subtitled "Further Evaluations of the Talent in the Room" to establish it as a continuation of his earlier essay that had so exasperated Jones, Styron and Baldwin. In the new essay, begun in early March, he discusses the latest novels by these three—respectively, *The Thin Red Line*, *Set This House on Fire*, and *Another Country*—and recent novels by Burroughs (*Naked Lunch*), Heller (*Catch-22*), Updike (*Rabbit, Run*), Roth (*Letting Go*), Salinger (*Franny and Zooey* and *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters*), and Bellow (*Henderson the Rain King*). When it appeared in the July issue of *Esquire*, it was preceded by a full-page photo of a truculent-looking Mailer in suit and tie standing in the corner of a boxing ring at the Gramercy Park Gym. Mailer's insights are as unflinching as in the earlier essay, but less rebarbative, and slightly more self-deprecatory, as in his opening comments on *Henderson*: "Well, one might as well eat the crow right here. Henderson is an exceptional character, almost worthy of Gulliver or Huckleberry Finn." He goes on for two long paragraphs that gives a nice sense of Bellow's style:

Bellow's main character, Henderson, is a legendary giant American, an eccentric millionaire, six-foot four in height, with a huge battered face, an enormous chest, a prodigious potbelly, a wild crank's gusto for life, and a childlike impulse to say what he thinks. He is a magical hybrid of Jim Thorpe and Dwight Macdonald. And he is tormented by an inner voice which gives him no rest and poisons his marriages and pushed him to go forth. So he chooses to go to Africa (after first contemplating a visit to the Eskimos) and finds a native guide to take him deep into the interior.

The style gallops like Henderson, full of excess, full of light, loaded with irritating effusions, but it is a style which moves along. *The Adventures of Augie March* was written in a way which could only be called *all writing*. That was one of the troubles with the book. Everything was mothered by style. But Henderson talks in a free-swinging easy bang-away monologue which puts your eye in the center of the action.

It is uncertain, as the novel moves to "the threshold of a stupendous climax," whether Henderson is someone who can save the world or is "a noble man lost in Faustian endeavor." But Bellow falters, Mailer says, perhaps revealing that he is "too timid to become a great writer." James Jones "or myself," he concludes, "would have been ready to urinate blood" rather than give up "the possibilities of a demonically great ending," as does Bellow in Mailer's ^{shroud} judgment.

He was working on the essay in early March, ¹⁹⁶⁴ when one evening he went with Roger Donoghue to P. J. Clarke's, a midtown saloon frequented by Frank Sinatra and other celebrities. Mailer was nursing his wounds over Jeanne Campbell. A sexy blonde sitting nearby motioned them to join her. Beverly Bentley, who knew Donoghue, was sitting with a friend and "the Raging Bull," former middleweight boxing champ Jake LaMotta, who had come over to talk to her. She got Mailer's attention immediately: "Well, if it isn't Norman Motherfuck Mailer." An actress from Georgia who broke into show business on Arthur Godfrey's television show, Bentley (formerly Rentz) had appeared in several films, including the 1960 film, *The Mystery*, and had roles in television shows (*Naked City*), and Broadway plays (*Romeo and Juliet*). In the summer of 1959, she had been part of the *quadrilla* at Hemingway's bi in Málaga, along with several Spanish bullfighters and Valerie Danby-Smith. Papa told her that

she reminded him of "The Kraut," as he called Marlene Dietrich. The Hemingway connection impressed Mailer. Shortly before he died, Mailer recalled that night at P. J. Clarke's:

So I come over and there's this attractive blonde who was full of pep and vigor. And we're chatting away and LaMotta turns to me and says, 'Hey, get lost.' And I did maybe the single bravest thing—second bravest thing—I've ever done in my life. I looked back at him and I said, 'I'll leave when the lady tells me to.' And you know something came off him that was enough to give you pause. But I held my ground and then she came through. I figured, 'This bitch, she brought me over here and I could be destroyed, then fuck it, I'll be destroyed.' In those days, I was hell-bent for destruction. And she said, 'No, Jake, Mr. Mailer is my date for tonight.' So he left and she and me just started talking—yakking and chatting. And ended up in bed. Of course. Every one of my wives—one common denominator in all of them is that we all ended up in bed the first night. Which I'm proud of in a way. I think it's as good a way of deciding something as any.

"I wanted a home and children desperately," Beverly said, recalling their meeting. "I was attracted to the vulnerability underneath the tough act. He walked me to my apartment. That night he was wonderful in bed." Mailer later learned that a few years earlier, when working as a hostess on television quiz shows, she had been in a long-term relationship with trumpeter Miles Davis, a man Mailer admired. Davis would become the model for

a brilliant jazz vocalist and one of the major figures in his ^{next} novel, *An American Dream*, a project that would soon begin to take shape.

✓ Mailer was still in touch with Jeanne, but their contacts diminished as spring blossomed.

When Randolph Churchill flew to the U. S. to accept honorary citizenship ^{for his father} from Congress in April, he stopped in New York and visited with Jeanne, a dear friend. Mailer saved an Associated Press photo of them that appeared in the *New York Post*. Jeanne, wearing a wide brim hat, is smiling and holding Churchill's toy pug, Oswald, in her lap. The dog's name seems to have stuck with Mailer: he used it in *Dream* as Barney Kelly's middle name. His first name came from I. B. Mailer.

By spring, Beverly had moved into 142 Columbia Heights. Mailer wrote to Knox in early June to say that he had been thinking about traveling around the country and seeing what the mood is." The Broadway play in which Beverly had a leading role, *The Heroine*, had folded and she was eager to join him. First, they would drive to Fayetteville, Arkansas to see Fig and Ecey, and then on to Las Vegas for the Patterson-Liston rematch on July 22. After the fight, which he considered writing up for *Esquire* as a bookend to "Ten Thousand Words a Minute," they planned to drive to San Francisco for a couple of weeks, and then take the long drive back via Georgia where he met Beverly's family. His idea was to get out of New York, range about the country with his new woman, and see what plot prompts for new work came his way. He had a wisp of a situation in mind, and he told his new agent, Scott Meredith, to leak word that he was working on a novel about "a man who takes a 21-year old girl to Las Vegas." He was thinking of Beverly, although she was 33. He said later, "I wanted a blonde American girl; it was really as simple as that. A shiksa. And she was perfect; she fitted perfectly because she was adventurous. She came from a relatively—if you want to get down to it—a quite unremarkable Southern family. She had risen in the world through her own efforts." Shortly before they left for

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Arkansas, Jeanne sent Mailer a telegram saying that her lawyer would telephone him to ask for an immediate Mexican divorce. "My darling let us now be pragmatic," she said. Mailer agreed. On July 9, he and Beverly drove off in his Ford Falcon convertible with Tibo in the back seat. Zsa Zsa was gone; Mailer had given her and the last of the pups away.

During their four days in Fayetteville, two important things happened: Beverly was tested for pregnancy and Mailer observed an autopsy. Beverly asked a pathologist friend of Fig's if he would give her a pregnancy test, and he agreed to do so. He also offered to let Mailer watch an autopsy he was doing the next day. Mailer used the experience in *An American Dream* as the basis for Rojack's observation of an autopsy. Rojack's doctor friend opens up an old man whose face was "lustful and proud, much hate in it, but disciplined." He had cancer, but died of peritoneal gangrene when his appendix burst. It is all that Rojack can do not to retch when the odor hits his nostrils:

I remember I breathed it in to the top of the lung, and drew no further. Pinched it off in the windpipe. After half an hour of such breathing, my lungs were to ache for the rest of the day, but it was impossible to accept the old man's odor all the way in [. . .] I kept getting a whiff of the smell for the next two days, all along the trip through the dried hard-up lands of Oklahoma, northern Texas, New Mexico, on into the deserts of Arizona and southern Nevada where Las Vegas sits in the mirror of the moon. Then for weeks I never lost the smell. In the beginning the dead man came back at every turn, he came back from phosphate fertilizer in every farmer's field, he rose up out of every bump of a dead rabbit on

the road, from each rotting ghost in the stump of a tree, he chose to come back later at every hint of a hole in emotion or a pit of decay [. . .]

In some, madness must come in with breath, mill through the blood and be breathed out again. In some it goes up to the mind. Some take the madness and stop it with discipline. Madness is locked beneath. It goes into tissues, is swallowed by the cells. The cells go mad. Cancer is their flag. Cancer is the growth of madness denied. In that corpse I saw, madness went down to the blood—leucocytes gorged the liver, the spleen, the enlarged heart and violet-black lungs, dug into the intestines, germinated stench.

The hypothesis that cancer and schizophrenia were mutually exclusive cohered here, and Mailer's intuition, gained on patrols in Luzon, that smell is the primal sense was further confirmed.

He explored his hunch in *Dream*, and further elaborated it in later work, especially his 1984 mystery novel *Tough Guys Don't Dance*. He also spelled it out in a one-page, handwritten note, probably written in late 1963. Titled "Cancer," it begins by hypothesizing that cancer results from "impotent emotion," which "cannot find the situation for its life." An ugly woman who waits for a handsome lover is a slave to this emotion, as is a poor young man who wishes ill on his wealthy relatives, but ~~she~~ sees them continue to prosper. So too is "any over-civilized person who carries murder within" but represses it. Without relief, the emotion is "visited upon the cells" of the body, and "when such inner tension becomes acute, the cells live at the edge of rebellion—they may dare to secede from the body." This Mailer calls a "psychosis of the cells"; this is the madness Rojack saw in the organs of the old man. "When the weight of impossible

desire becomes intolerable, either the mind or the body must divide itself from the whole."

Mailer's intuition is that certain mental states can have a discernible effect on whether one gets or doesn't get cancer, or schizophrenia. Twenty years later, in 1981, neurobiologists conclusively established the hardwired link between the body's immune system and the central nervous system.

After leaving Arkansas, the couple drove to Las Vegas via the baked landscape of the High Plains Desert. Mailer thought about beginning the new novel with a description of the autopsy, but used it in the final chapter of *Dream*, which covers Rojack's drive on the same route to Las Vegas. Encountering extraordinary bodily corruption by way of his nostrils opened new reaches in his imagination, an experience no doubt heightened by his struggle, all through 1963 and early 1964, to quit smoking two-and-a-half packs of Camels a day. "I used the sense of smell," he said shortly after finishing the novel, "because it's the closest to the dream." In addition, "it is the most shocking sense. All bourgeois society seems to be built on that one abstinence. You never mention odors." In *Dream*, he explored these off-limits olfactory lodes more thoroughly than any other American novelist before him or since.

They arrived in Las Vegas on July 20. Meeting them there was Harold Conrad, a fight promoter, and his wife Mara Lynn, both of whom appeared in Mailer's films. A good deal of drinking took place and Mailer got into at least two fistfights. The championship fight two days later was a letdown. Mailer had privately concluded that it would be a 15-round draw, but Liston again defeated Patterson. His plan had been for the novel's protagonist to drive to Las Vegas with a young woman where he gets "caught up in the fight." But the boxing match was a repeat

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of the first one. Liston again knocked Patterson out in the first round and Mailer didn't know how to proceed.

A telegram from Arkansas was delivered to their hotel: Beverly was pregnant. Because of his already weighty commitments, Mailer was distraught at first. He and Beverly fought, but during a late night drive into the desert, were reconciled. The extravagant contrasts of this artificial city in the desert—drunks and millionaires, showgirls and grandmas, winners and losers, icy air-conditioning and baking sun—imprinted themselves on Mailer, always fascinated by opposites at close quarters. He would use Las Vegas as a touchstone for the contradictions of America more than once in books to come. Toward the end of July, with the new novel gestating, they left for San Francisco, where they had made arrangements to meet his *Harvard Advocate* friend, Mark Linenthal, and Alice Adams.

San Francisco was an oasis after Las Vegas. They announced that they were getting married and there was some quiet celebration and outings with Linenthal, Adams, and Don Carpenter, a novelist with whom Mailer had frequently corresponded. They also spent time with the Beat crowd, including Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Michael McClure. Mailer liked to ramble alone around the city. During several of these walks, Mailer walked on narrow ledges, testing his nerve, probably in the Telegraph Hill area, as he later remembered. Mailer's hand-eye coordination was poor, and he did not excel at sports such as baseball and basketball. At one point, he bought a pool table in an attempt to develop his skills, practiced hard, but had no aptitude for the game. But he prided himself on his balance, and later was able to walk the catenary of a thick hawser (aided by a balance pole) on the decks of his various homes in Provincetown, and also in Brooklyn. When he awoke in the morning in San Francisco, he knew,

as he later recalled, that he would feel a compulsion to walk on narrow ledges. He drew on these daily tests of balance for his description of Rojack's harrowing minutes on the parapet of Kelly's penthouse balcony atop the Waldorf Towers, near the end ^{of} *Dream*.

After two weeks they got back on the road, driving to Arkansas, and then on to Columbus, Georgia where they visited for two days with Beverly's mother and stepfather, Brownie. In a letter to Fig, Mailer described him as "an ex-Southern master-sergeant, lick lips, blue lightning farter—one of the boys. He's really like so many guys we used to know—the kind that you'd like if you went out on a drunk with him and would dislike if he picked your ass to chew." They also met Beverly's half-brother, Charlie Brown, who two years later helped Mailer and Eldred Mowery assemble a model, "Vertical City," out of thousands of Lego Blocks. After a quick stop in Atlanta to meet Beverly's stepmother, "a real crazy Southern-Georgia rich town lady," they returned to New York in late August. With no trace of irony, he told Fig, "It was so nice not to have worries for six weeks."

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Exactly when Mailer signed off on the arrangements for the publication of *Dream* is uncertain. His new, ~~aggressive~~ agent, Scott Meredith, was involved in lengthy discussions with Cy Rembar and various publishers while he and Beverly were away. By mid-September the deal was done. Mailer had left much of the bargaining to his agent, but he personally convinced Walter Minton to release him from his Putnam's contract for one book. Mailer also pitched the idea of writing the novel as a serial to *Esquire* editor Harold Hayes, who recalled that there was ^{great} great interest in the suicidal nature of Mailer's project. As much of an editorial gambler as Felker (who had moved to the *New York Herald Tribune*), Hayes offered a payment of \$2

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Shortly before or after this, in a 48-hour wheeling-and-dealing session that Mailer said "was much like Hollywood," Meredith sold the hard and soft cover rights to Dial and its paperback subsidiary Dell for what Mailer called "a fantastic advance royalty" of \$125,000. "It seems," he wrote to Adeline, "that I am finally hot again as a property. For the next year I'm in the soup because this novel's got to be fairly good or I'll be ambushed by more crossfire than anybody I can think of in recent years, and indeed will deserve the worst, so I'm off and writing." He had worked against deadlines before, most notably on the weekly *Voice* columns, and the monthly ones in *Esquire*. But now he had agreed to write a novel at the rate of ten to twelve thousand words a month for eight months, "one hundred thousand finished words," as he wrote to Fig. The gamble was the boldest literary risk of his life to date.

He had already written the first and most of the second installment of the serial when *The Presidential Papers* came out in early November. It was reviewed neither widely nor enthusiastically, and was all but forgotten in the blur that followed the assassination of the President two weeks later. His plan for writing the serial, which he pretty much adhered to, was to stay 60 days, or two installments, ahead of *Esquire*'s monthly publication date. The nation was still reeling from the President's death and that of his assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, when the issue containing the first installment appeared.

The previous issue of *Esquire* (December 1963), contained the last short story Mailer would write, "The Last Night," a science fiction fantasy about the end of the world, and his fourteenth and final "Big Bite" column, in which he announced the serial. "The early installments," he wrote, "will be in print long before I go to work on the later ones. Indeed it is likely I will be working on each installment up to the day *Esquire* goes to press. It's been a long

time since anything of this sort has been tried by an author who takes himself seriously." He distinguished his effort from those of writers—Dreiser, Hemingway and Fitzgerald—whose serialized novels had been completed before serialization. Dickens and Dostoyevsky were his models, he continued, "novelists of the first rank who put their books together under the exigency of meeting a magazine's publication date each month." He said that "no comparison is intended to Dickens and Dostoevsky," noting that *The Idiot* was written when the Russian was "suffering from epileptic fits, two days past the date he had promised to deliver the manuscript," writing only at night "when his mind could function between each epileptic fit." But the strain Mailer was under, arguably, was somewhat commensurate. When he was only a third of the way done, he wrote to Carpenter that the serial "has me more or less pissing blood." He also called *Dream* "one of the more Dostoevskian novels of the last hundred years."

As the following passage from the opening installment in *Esquire* suggests, Mailer intended to use Kennedy, in ways undetermined, in later chapters.

I met Jack Kennedy, for instance, in 1946. We were both war heroes and were both Freshmen in Congress. Congressman John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Democrat from Massachusetts, and Congressman Stephen Richards Rojack, Democrat from New York. We even spent one night together on a long double date and it promised to be a good night for me. I stole his girl.

The assassination not only smothered the reception of *The Presidential Papers*, it also destroyed whatever plans he had for using Kennedy in the novel. Mailer had intended to set the novel in 1965, but was forced to move Rojack's narration back to an earlier time so that lack of comment on the assassination would not seem intentionally disrespectful. For the novel to be credible,

Kennedy had to be president, and he had to be alive. Furthermore, because the October 1962 Cuban Missile crisis was mentioned, and the novel was firmly set late in March, Rojack's re-telling of events could only take place in March 1963, approximately nine months before the dark day in Dallas.

But these complications came later. Immediately after the assassination, Mailer seemed ready to abandon the project. He wrote to Knox on December 17:

The Kennedy thing hit very hard here. Women were crying in the streets (mainly good-looking women), a lot of middle-aged Negroes looked sad and very worried, and then we all sat around in gloom and watched the television set for the next seventy-two hours [Mailer watched it with George Plimpton]. Altogether it was one of the three events having something profoundly in common: Pearl Harbor Day and the death of Roosevelt being the other two. And the Ruby-Oswald stuff was just too much on top of it. I haven't felt like writing a word about the whole thing, I've been too fucking depressed every which way. The main loss I think was a cultural one. Whether he wanted to or not Kennedy was giving a great boost to the arts, not because Jackie Kennedy was inviting Richard Wilbur to the White House, but somehow the lid was off, and now I fear it's going to be clamped on tight again. [. . .] With Kennedy alive it was a good book, but with him dead, it's just a curiosity, and somehow irritating in tone. I don't even mind the loss of it in a funny way.

Mailer also elaborated on his feelings about Kennedy in a letter to Yamanishi:

At any rate, I have no desire to write more now because the event is not only deeply depressing but enormous in its ramifications. Kennedy had personal charm—one misses him certainly that way—he was also nothing exceptional as a politician, rather a conventional middle-of-the-road leader of the Democratic Party. What was lost was an intangible good. There was a particular magic or let us say liberty surrounding Kennedy which enabled one to be critical of him in a way that had been impossible in America since the War, and all sorts of subtle but exciting changes were occurring in America's culture.

Mailer said that Kennedys' presidency had affected him personally: "My function has shifted in these few years from some sort of mysterious half-notorious leader of the Beat Generation, a sort of psychic guerilla leader, in fact, to something quite other, a respected if somewhat feared leader of the literary Establishment."

Before Kennedy's rise, he had seen himself as a literary outlaw who relished his role as contrarian and outsider. But Kennedy's charisma, political ruthlessness, and movie-star looks, not to mention his war hero status and beautiful, artistic wife, galvanized Mailer's imagination and drew him to the power nexus. He wanted a ticket into the new establishment; he wanted to influence it, push it in various adventurous ways; he wanted more energy, more power. He aspired to be the U.S. equivalent of what André Malraux was in De Gaulle's France: Minister of Culture. But he also wanted to maintain his ties to the demimonde—to Greenwich Village hipsters, Harlem jazz joints and Provincetown artists. The Kennedy clique seemed to understand Mailer's ambitions; one of them told Jeanne Campbell that Mailer was "an intellectual

adventurer," a remark Mailer said was accurate, if spiteful. Only such an adventurer, Mailer wrote would write an open poem to the President, which Mailer had done earlier. His interaction with the Kennedys made him understand the advantages accruing to someone who is both in and out of the game. Within two years of the assassination, Mailer would become the pre-eminent insider-outsider of American culture. While there were other rival claimants over the next 40 years—Gore Vidal, most notably—and periods of partial eclipse, it was a position he never entirely relinquished.

In a 1965 interview, Mailer said it was important to understand Kennedy's nature "because his nature once understood helped to point toward a way of understanding America. So, on a vastly smaller scale, I think some people may be interested in me because something of the same process may be present." After the assassination, Mailer thought and wrote about Kennedy as much as Hemingway, returning again and again in works of fiction and nonfiction to the assassination and what might have been. Near the end of his life, he said that no public event in his lifetime had affected him as powerfully. Although he says that a comparison with Kennedy is unfair, he was willing to make it, willing to propose the personality of insider-outsider-left-conservative Norman Mailer as a replacement for the slain president's, a new key to the deeper meanings of the nation, and would do so for the remainder of the decade. Noting that a comparison was inappropriate, but then making it anyway was one of Mailer's characteristic rhetorical gambits.

In December, Mailer flew to Juarez, Mexico to finalize his divorce from Jeanne. They disagreed on custody provisions, and Mailer saw their daughter only rarely for the first four or five years of her life, when they came to a new understanding and he saw Kate more regularly,

especially in the summer. A few years later, Jeanne recalled her marriage to Mailer: "A holocaust of a love affair in many countries and many rounds of mind," a marriage that produced "a daughter Kate who grows in beauty with hayseed speckling her yellow-green eyes. A bad divorce and a long term of silence, then years of close friendship and some good work together." The collaboration she refers to is his 1968 experimental film, *Maidstone*, in which she played an important role. Mailer's summation: "A remarkable girl, almost as interesting, complex and Machiavellian" as himself. "I was crazy about her," he said, but "our two worlds were pretty far apart."

On the domestic front, matters were much improved with Beverly ("my Georgia peach") running the household. She developed a warm relationship with Fan, who shared her son's favorite recipes. Beverly and Anne Barry organized Mailer's schedule and visits from the children—Danielle and Betsy came almost every weekend. On December 29, shortly after his Mexican divorce was final, Mailer married Beverly, now six months pregnant, in the living room of his Brooklyn Heights apartment. His gloom over Kennedy's death retreated somewhat, and he submitted the fourth installment on schedule in mid-January 1964. Novel writing on demand was getting interesting, as he wrote to Fig: "It's a little like playing ten-second chess. You have to take the bold choice each time." He was full of metaphors for the effort; perhaps the best was embodied in a story he told Vance Bourjaily.

Years ago, Theodor Reik was being analyzed by Freud, and as a talented young man he was naturally interested not only in being a superb analyst but a musician, a writer, a lover, a boulevardier, a vigilante, even a mad genius. Freud listened

and got angrier and angrier. Finally, he said, "Reik, you want to be a big man? Piss in one spot." So that is what the serial business puts you up to.

The serial may have given Mailer more focus, but writing 10,000 words a month did not completely occupy him. In addition to his college lectures, he wrote a tribute to Kennedy for the *NYRB*'s memorial issue; revised his answers to a long interview with Steven Marcus published in the *Paris Review*; engaged in a debate with Yale professor Vincent Scully on modern architecture in *Architectural Forum*; published a short story he wrote in 1960, "The Killer," in *Evergreen Review*; and debated Buckley again, this time on David Susskind's television program, *Open End*. At one point, Mailer asked Buckley why he agreed to go on television with him if he disapproved of him. Buckley answered, because "you are a magnetic field in this country." Mailer also flew to Miami to watch a young heavyweight he had met during his Las Vegas trip, Cassius Clay (now Muhammad Ali), defeat Sonny Liston for the title, a bout that so intrigued him that he asked Hayes if he could postpone an installment to write about it. Hayes said no, and Mailer went back to work.

The novel's protagonist, Stephen Richards Rojack, a 44-year old Harvard graduate, WWII veteran and New York intellectual, might easily be confused with Norman Kingsley Mailer, who was 42 when he addressed these similarities in 1965: "Rojack is considerably more elegant, more witty, more heroic, his physical strength is considerable, and at the same time he is more corrupt than me." Even so Rojack, who is half-Jewish, half-Wasp, must be considered Mailer's fictional first cousin. The resemblances, Mailer knew, would do the novel r those between Rojack's wife Deborah, who has "a huge mass of black hair and striking green eyes," and Jeanne Campbell were another matter, and potentially libelous. In the first chapter of

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X the novel, after Rojack strangles Deborah and then pushes her body out the window onto the East River Drive, it is clear that he had brazenly modeled her on his third wife. Both are tall, strong, intelligent and self-assured women who come from privileged cosmopolitan backgrounds. Like Jeanne, Deborah "could not utter a sentence for giving a tinkle of value to some innocent word," as Rojack says of his wife, although Mailer took the precaution of making Deborah Irish and Italian. There was a more worrisome problem. *Esquire* publisher Arnold Gingrich told Harold Hayes to kill the serial after he read the graphic description of anal intercourse—a first in American publishing—between Rojack and his wife's German maid, the carnal Ruta. Mailer's description of the "high private pleasure in plugging a Nazi" was based, at least in part, on the five days he had spent with the German barmaid in 1959. Only after "a pruning job as delicate as any in the annals of magazine editing" by *Esquire's* fiction editor, Rust Hills, did Gingrich ~~remove~~ ^{lift} the *verboten* signal and allow the serial to go forward.

X Almost every month there was a new problem: Hayes left a chapter in a taxicab (later retrieved); the retrospective plot summaries accompanying the later chapters had errors and imprecisions; the magazine's lawyers peppered Mailer with queries and requests about the explicit sexual descriptions; ^{and} Monthly copy ~~always~~ came in at the last possible minute. Mailer wrote to Harvey Breit on February 11, "I've been down in the mines working on my novel, five installments now done, three to go—mortal terror all around that I will run out of gas." But he didn't, and interest grew as the installments appeared. The magazine's circulation jumped to over 900,000, a record, in the first month the serial appeared. To capitalize on the buzz, *Esquire* purchased an ad in the *Times* announcing that Dial Press would publish the book in hardback, Dell would do the paperback, and Warner Brothers would make the movie.

As Beverly came closer to term, Mailer struggled to tie the plot threads together neatly, always difficult for him. He was also distracted by two major cultural events in February: the arrival of the Beatles in America (he approved of their performance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*), and the premiere of Stanley Kubrick's film, *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. He wrote to Knox about the latter: "It's the only great movie I know which is great not because it's great as a movie but because it's sociologically great that the thing was made." While he was "banging away now in the pits of the sixth installment," and "feeling wrung out, dull, and smoking too many cigarettes," his first son, Michael Burks, was born on St. Patrick's Day, 1964. Mailer reported to his Aunt Moos that the baby "looks more like his mother than like me," and that his ears were "benevolently close to his head." After four daughters, he was enormously pleased.

He was unhappy, however, about the shape of the last half of the novel. He wrote to Knox on April 19 that the fifth, sixth and seventh installments were "not up to the first four, and I've lost the chance I had to write a really major novel." He continued: "It's been an incredible push because I've had to write figuratively with a locked wrist, since there was no time to explore and follow the kind of incidental bent which two times out of three leads you up a blind alley and then discovers a bigger book within the book." The inclusion of Rojack's intuitions about the cosmic war between good and evil was also weighing on him. When the serial was nearing its close, he told an interviewer of his fears: "A good writer feels he is dealing with secrets about the nature of things, which inspires an almost biological fear." He was referring to the fact that two months before Kennedy's assassination, Mailer had given Deborah's father (and Rojack's antagonist) the middle name Oswald, a spooky circumstance that enhanced his belief in

divine and/or demonic meddling. "If psychic coincidences give pleasure to some," he wrote of the coincidence, "I do not know that they give them to me."

In retrospect, it was fortuitous that the book was written under deadlines. Mailer was forced to create a novel with an ending that grew organically from what preceded it. Given the wherewithal to wander leisurely through the alleys of plot possibility, he might have written a novel twice as long, but perhaps only half as good. The first seven chapters of *Dream* came in at just over 77,000 words, roughly the number desired by *Esquire*. The much-foreshadowed climax of the novel, the meeting between Rojack and Kelly, was by now conceived, but Mailer was late in completing it. The presses were literally held waiting for the final pages, which came in at 20,000 words. *Esquire's* editors were forced to print part of it in six-point type.

Until Mailer wrote *Dream*, his most sensually evocative and lyrical novel, his narrators were not his protagonists (excepting Sam Slovoda). Nor had he invested his heroes with his own deepest beliefs, namely: a distrust of pure reason, faith in the authority of the senses, psychic growth achieved by risk-taking, courage as the cardinal virtue, anger at the greed and corruption of American life, and fear that fascism might be getting rooted. Underlying these beliefs was the vision of a heroic but limited God locked in a struggle with a powerful and wily Devil. The fate of the world, perhaps of the universe, hinges on this struggle, one in which humans stood on both sides. Rojack shares these beliefs. A near-alcoholic talk show host and author of a popular book, *The Psychology of the Hangman* (Mailer published a poem, "The Executioner's Song," the month after completing the serial), Rojack, like Mailer, is susceptible to omens and portents. He hears voices, studies the phases of the moon, and waits for either cancer or madness to strike his person.

The operative plot is easily summarized: Rojack's wife Deborah taunts him with her infidelities (he has his share), and attacks his manhood in nasty ways, goading him into a physical attack (which recalls his assault on Adele) that ends with her strangulation. Rojack then throws her body out of her apartment window ten stories down to the pavement below. He claims that her fall was suicide and the brunt of the story is devoted to his attempts to convince his and her friends and associates, the police, and her father of his innocence. No one believes him, but the voices he hears and the balm derived from his night in bed with Cherry Melanie, a former jazz singer (modeled on Beverly and Carol Stevens), plus Kelly's indirect manipulations, keep him from being arrested, but just barely. As he overhears the beating of a Black man in another room of the station, the police press him hard, but he is able to sidestep their questions. We learn that Cherry had been Kelly's mistress, and that she also had an affair with an

extraordinarily talented African-American jazz vocalist, Shago Martin, modeled on Miles Davis.

Rojack defeats Martin in a fight at Cherry's apartment and carries off his talismanic umbrella as a victory token. She tells Rojack that she is pregnant with his child, and they pledge their love.

He begins to feel the possibility of expiation for his crime, and the end of his moral odyssey.

Barry H. Leeds, one of the most perceptive of Mailer critics, says that Rojack moves "from imminent alcoholism, damnation and madness to salvation and sanity. In a modern analogue of *Pilgrim's Progress*, Rojack confronts a series of adversaries, defeating them and the weaknesses in himself that they represent, and in the process absorbing their strengths."

The novel shows Mailer at the height of his word power. The mood of the novel, which takes place over 32 hours, is haunted; it swarms with malign and beneficent presences, especially in Kelly's apartment. As Rojack enters the lobby close to midnight, Mrs. Kennedy is about to

come down from her Waldorf-Astoria apartment, further heightening the tense *mise-en-scène*. As he waits, Rojack imagines that he has

died and was in an antechamber of hell. I had long had a vision of Hell: not of its details; of its first moment. A giant chandelier of crystal above one's head, red flock on the walls, red carpet, granite pillars (as I proceeded) now a high ceiling, was it gold foil? A floor of white and black, and then a room of blue and green in whose center stood a nineteenth-century clock, eight feet high with a bas relief of faces: Franklin, Jackson, Lincoln, Cleveland, Washington, Grant, Harrison, and Victoria; 1888 the year: in a ring around the clock was a bed of tulips which so looked like plastic I bent to touch and discovered they were real.

This is a description of the actual Waldorf Towers lobby. But, in this as well as in countless other passages in the novel, Mailer makes the reader uncertain precisely which reality is being presented: imagined, remembered, or presently experienced. The subtly shifting states of consciousness, punctuated by the corporal, the sensuous, the bloody, became Mailer's hallmark with *Dream*. In December 2005, after reading a portion of the novel, he closed the book, which he was signing for a friend, and said, "I'll never write that well again."

In a conversation in Kelly's bedroom, which resembles a sixteenth-century Italian chapel, replete with a massive gold-framed mirror and a Lucchese bed with "a canopy encrusted in blood-velvet," Kelly, who suggests he may be "a solicitor for the Devil," admits he had been in an incestuous relationship with Deborah since she was fifteen; Rojack confesses that he killed her. They speak a little longer and then Rojack picks up Shago's umbrella, now quivering ominously, and with Kelly following, goes out to the balcony of the 38th floor apartment. It is

raining with strong wind gusts, but he knows that he must walk the three-sided parapet of the balcony to propitiate Deborah's spirit. Kelly approves of the test, and Rojack gives him the umbrella before clambering up to the ledge. Sodden with fear, he walks all three sides, and then turns to Kelly who attempts to push him off with the umbrella. Rojack turns like a bullfighter, seizes the umbrella, jumps down and gives Kelly one fierce retributive whack across the face. Then he heaves the umbrella, its magic expired, over the parapet. He rushes out of the apartment and goes to Cherry's, arriving just in time to see her briefly before she dies, beaten to death by a friend of Shago's, who has also been mistakenly murdered. In the denouement, Rojack drives to Missouri where he observes the autopsy, and then pushes on to Las Vegas, where he wins \$24,000 and pays his debts. Before leaving Vegas, he makes a hallucinated telephone call to Cherry in some chamber of the afterlife. She tells him that Marilyn Monroe sends greetings. Rojack, "something like sane again," leaves the next morning to work out his destiny in Guatemala and Yucatán.

The stir created by the serialization was strong and before Mailer had completed it, Warner Brothers optioned the novel, ultimately paying \$200,000 for it. This brought his total income for the novel to \$345,000, a tremendous sum at that time. With the last installment completed, he wrote to Knox, saying "What a murderous fucking installment this last one has been. I'm in pretty good shape, but of course tense as hell, and all burned out from smoking. I feel just the way a wire must feel after a short circuit." In mid-June, he and Beverly left for Provincetown, where he would be joined by all of his children, save Kate. Assuming there were no major interruptions, he planned to carefully revise the novel over the summer.

✓ ^{date} From this ~~point in time~~ until the early 1970s, literary projects dropped into Mailer's lap just in time, all the time. On July 12, after catching up on correspondence and getting the family settled in Provincetown, he flew to San Francisco to cover the G.O.P. convention, on assignment from *Esquire*. He expected that Barry Goldwater, a conservative senator from Arizona, would get the nomination. The right wing of the G.O.P had grown strong and was ready to wrest control of the party from the old middle-of-the road gang—retired President Eisenhower, Gov. Scranton of Pennsylvania, Gov. Romney of Michigan, and their ilk. Part of Mailer wanted Goldwater not only to win the nomination, but to defeat the presumptive Democratic candidate, President Lyndon B. Johnson, whom he distrusted if not despised. His conjecture was that a Goldwater victory might invigorate the left wing of the Democratic Party. Feeling more confident writing about a convention than he had in 1960, he used the same technique as in the earlier essay: slowly delineate an overarching theme while moving from portrait to portrait of the politicians.

His sketches are acerbic, unforgiving and hit the mark. Ike, the grand old man of the party, who "usually fought a speech to a draw," comes on like "a cross between a boy and an old retainer." Romney "looked like a handsome version of Boris Karloff, all honesty, big-jawed, soft-eyed, eighty days at sea on a cockeyed passion." Scranton, the favorite of the Eastern Establishment, "a pleasant urbane man, so self-satisfied, so civilized, so reasonable, so innocent of butchers' tubs and spleens and guts." And Goldwater, who won the nomination easily: "Talking in a soft modest voice, he radiated at this moment the skinny boyish sincerity of a fellow who wears glasses but is determined nevertheless to have a good time. Against all odds. It was not unreminiscent of Arthur Miller: that same mixture of vast solemnity and unspoiled boyhood, a sort of shucks and aw shit in the voice."

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 Mailer was convinced that the nation was in terrible shape, full of bad cess, gorging itself on frozen food, sappy television, antibiotics and cut off from nature by technology and the most insidious of substances, one that was becoming ubiquitous: plastic. He never stopped raging against its lack of any direct organic connection (In 1981 he had a horrific argument with Norris about her purchase of a plastic dishwasher that "smelled like formaldehyde," and said that if it didn't go, he would. It went.). That hardly anyone took him seriously about plastic only enraged him more. The prospect of ^a Goldwater victory, therefore, made Mailer think, almost hope, that it might produce an underground movement rising against the soft totalitarianism his administration might impose. Always disposed to volatilization, Mailer came to this state of happy warrior-hood at the convention after hearing, day after day, and once at four a.m. in his hotel room, a band of bagpipers, "giving off the barbaric evocation of the Scots, all valor, wrath, firmitude and treachery," a sound that seemed "to pass through all the protective gates in the ear and reach into some nerve where the eschatology is stored." "Acute disease is cure," Mailer ~~had~~ ^{wrote}, and so the idea of a conservative victory was not just exciting, but even necessary, because "like millions of other whites, I had been leading a life which was a trifle too pointless and a trifle full of guilt and my gullet was close to nausea with the needless compromises of an empty liberal center." As he put in one of his "Big Bite" columns, "If we are ill and yet want to go on, we must put up the ante. If we lose, it does not mean we wished to die." After a decade of being an outsider, Mailer began to think closely about the state of the nation. "One worried," he said, "about it for the first time the way you worried about family or work, a good friend or the future." He would continue to brood, and for a time became Dr. Mailer, diagnostician of America's diseases. Their etiology would be explored in all of his books through 1972.

The finished essay, titled "In the Red Light: A History of the Republican Convention in 1964," went to Harold Hayes for publication in the November *Esquire*. Mailer wrote to Kemp, still in prison, to say he was pleased with it, and that if Goldwater wasn't so negative about civil rights, he might vote for him. He went on to say he was still working on *Dream*, and compared his editing method to adjusting a slack drum, tightening it all around, little by little. You have to do this, he said, "until you can't stand it any more, and then go over it twenty times more. If you're left with nothing by the end of that time, that's probably just as well. There may have been nothing there." André Deutsch hoped to publish the British edition at the same time as the American, and had been pestering him for the final manuscript. Mailer told him he was still tightening the drum, and hoped to have it completed by October 15. In the end, he needed until almost the end of the year.

Deutsch was in a dither about Mailer's new agent and his "hard stick-'em-up methods." Meredith had gotten \$125,000 up front for *Dream*, which impressed Mailer, especially since before Meredith took over from Rembar, Minton had given him only \$50,000, half up front, for a still unwritten novel. Mailer told Deutsch to stop calling Meredith a pirate, and recognize that he had good credentials: he was one of the most hated agents in New York. He said he didn't care "to hear about the less agreeable methods of people who work for me, but back them up eventually I must, until they fail to do their job, which is to get me the best publisher and the largest royalty available in every country." Deutsch had already paid \$70,000 for the rights to *Dream*, the highest price ever paid in England for the hardcover rights of an American novel, but he would be outbid on later Mailer books. Until his death in 1993, Meredith would remain Mailer's agent.

Twice more before the year ended, Mailer put aside his revisions to *Dream*. Robert F. Kennedy, formerly President Johnson's Attorney General, was running in New York against the incumbent Republican Senator, Kenneth Keating. His entry in the race came after Johnson had turned aside Kennedy's effort to be named his running mate in the 1964 election. Despite his previous disapproval of Kennedy, Mailer decided to write a piece in the *Village Voice* endorsing him for senator. His logic was this: While both were equally liberal, Keating was dull and "had a face like the plastic dough children play with." Kennedy was an "active principle," he said, "who had come "a pilgrim's distance" since his brother's assassination, and "something compassionate, something witty, has come into the face." Kennedy won easily and Mailer became his ardent supporter ~~from then on~~.

President Johnson incited Mailer's ire more than any politician of the era. Mailer sided with the Kennedy clique in distrusting his politics, and only grudgingly congratulated him for pushing through the Civil Rights Act. Vietnam was just becoming a major issue—Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in August 1964, which led to a military buildup—and Johnson's war policies would soon enrage Mailer, but at the end of 1964, it was the president's prose that riled him. Johnson had written a campaign book, and Mailer agreed to review it. J.F.K.'s prose, he wrote, is to L.B.J.'s as de Tocqueville's is to Ayn Rand's. "It is even not impossible," he said, that *My Hope for America* is the worst book ever written by any political leader anywhere." Mailer also disliked Johnson's face, which reminded him of a medieval Italian warlord, a member of the *condottieri*, with its "hard, greedy, exceptionally intelligent eyes whose cynicism is spiked by a fierce pride, big fleshy (and acquisitive) nose, thin curved mouth." Johnson won decisively and Mailer voted for him.

After turning in his revisions of *An American Dream* just before Christmas, Mailer dug into the accumulated mail. Kemp, still imprisoned, remained a regular correspondent. Jean-Paul Sartre had just turned down the Nobel Prize and Mailer told Kemp that this was a mistake. "It bugs the bourgeoisie" when iconoclasts accept big prizes, he said. Accepting awards gave one "leverage." *Life* would now find it difficult to continue calling Sartre an "Apostle of Despair." Mailer wrote to Knox to say that his piece on the Republican Convention had received more positive responses than anything he had written since *Naked* (Dwight Macdonald called it "a masterpiece of political criticism"), and this might put him "back in fashion," and help the reception of *Dream*, now scheduled for publication on March 15. In a letter to Tina Bourjaily, he announced that he was building "a city of the future" out of Lego Blocks with Beverly's half-brother, Charlie Brown, and Eldred Mowery, Mailer's friend from Provincetown. When completed, it would be a scale model of a fantastical half-mile-high city of 15,000 apartments housing 60,000 people.

A month later, "Cities Higher than Mountains" appeared in the *Sunday Times* accompanied by a photo of the assemblage, now called "Vertical City." The project gave Mailer a much-needed break from fiction writing. He told Carpenter that he was "bored, bored, bored of writing," partly because he had spent so much time on the "subtle, pervasive, and close textured" revisions of *Dream*. He enjoyed planning Vertical City, but given his aversion to plastic, pressing together 10,000-plus Legos made him "feel flat and dead." The construction—7' x 5' x 3'—stood in a corner of Mailer's Brooklyn apartment for the next 40 years. "It was a bitch to dust," Norris said, and finally began to crumble as the glue disintegrated. Members of the family

and friends kept a few pieces as souvenirs of the structure, a color photo of which graced the cover of *Cannibals and Christians*.

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Mailer was asked to help William Burroughs and his publisher, Barney Rosset of Grove Press, who was being prosecuted for obscenity in Boston. On January 12, 1965 along with Allen Ginsberg and poet John Ciardi, Mailer testified as to the merits of *Naked Lunch*, specifically about Burroughs' language: "He catches the beauty and, at the same time, the viciousness and the meanness and the excitement, of ordinary talk—the talk of criminals, of soldiers, athletes, junkies. There is a kind of speech, gutter talk, that often has a fine, incisive, dramatic line to it; and Burroughs captures the speech like no other American writer I know." The prosecution won the case, but it was reversed by the Massachusetts Supreme Court, and as Mailer said later, the decision "changed the literary history of America." The banning of books for obscenity in the U.S. was drawing to an end. Looking back on the decision, Mailer was somewhat nostalgic "for the days of oppression, because in those days you were ready to become a martyr, you had a sense of importance, you could take yourself seriously, and you were fighting the good fight." More than a few times, Mailer humorously fantasized about dying a literary warrior's death, one that would carry his boat to what he called "the golden islands of posthumous investiture."

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Mailer had been invited to Alaska by a poet-professor friend, Edmund Skellings, who taught at the University of Alaska. He replied, somewhat outrageously, that he would come if he could be met by the governor at the airport, address a joint session of the Alaska legislature, and

meet with the Democratic Party caucus. The speaker of the Alaska House of Representatives, and later U.S. Senator, Mike Gravel, was a friend of Skellings and an admirer of Mailer, and he arranged for the legislative address and the caucus meeting. Gov. William Eagan was also willing and invited Mailer to dinner as well. With all conditions met, Mailer cheerfully agreed to the visit, beginning on April 1st. The Alaskans had wanted him to come the previous week, but Mailer's friend, José Torres, a light heavyweight boxer from Puerto Rico, was fighting against the champion, Willie Pastrano, at Madison Square Garden on March 30. Mailer was introduced to Torres by Pete Hamill at the Liston-Patterson fight in 1962. They became lifelong friends, and Mailer sparred with him on weekends for many years.

Another invitation came, one which indicated that the literary establishment had changed its views on Mailer. He was asked by the Publishers' Publicity Association to participate in a Manhattan press conference as part of the annual National Book Award events, which ran for three days. On March 10, he spoke and answered questions for an hour. The first question concerned Saul Bellow, who the day before had been awarded the National Book Award for his novel, *Herzog*. In his acceptance speech, Bellow stated that "our rebels" attribute the low quality of current American literature to "the horrible squareness of our institutions, the debasement of sexual instincts, and the failure of writers to be alienated enough." Not so, he said, adding that it was "evident that polymorphous sexuality and vehement declarations of alienation are not going to produce great works of art." It seems apparent that Bellow was still smarting over Mailer comments about him in *Esquire*. In an interview a few months earlier, Bellow had sharply disassociated himself from "the apocalyptic romanticism" of 20th century writers who believed "the world is evil, that it must be destroyed and rise again," writers such as D.H. Lawrence.

When the interviewer asked his response to Mailer's comment about his timidity, he answered:

"I'm sure I'm not a great writer in Norman Mailer's light, but then I don't want to be."

Asked about Bellow's speech, Mailer acknowledged that he was one of the writers (along with Ginsberg and Terry Southern, among others) that Bellow had attacked. "But we moral nihilists," he said, "are responsible for all the real developments in literature. We are the adventurous ones. Conventional morality attacks violence, he said, but better to commit an act of violence against one person than "to curb that impulse and spend 20 years poisoning the lives of everyone around you." Then he turned to Bellow: "I admire the novel 'Herzog' very much. But it is not a book of ideas. There is nothing intellectually new in it. Bellow is mindless. There is depth of feeling in his novel. His humanity gets to you. But his mind is that of a college professor who has read all the good books and absorbed none of them." He concluded by calling Bellow a "hostess of the intellectual canapé table." Mailer's widely quoted remarks ~~scared if not~~ poisoned his relations with Bellow.

The publication party for *Dream* took place at the Village Vanguard on March 15. The booze was plentiful as were copies of the book with its distinctive dust wrapper showing a stylized American flag with an inset photograph of Beverly Bentley, the model for Cheryl Jones and Irwin Shaw were there, as were Richard Baron, the publisher of Dial Press, and his editors, Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, who had worked with Mailer on the novel. Miles Davis also came, and ^{ok} began flirting with Beverly. José Torres saw Mailer getting tense as he watched, ^{ok} and it appeared that he might get into a fight with Davis. Torres was afraid that he might have to defend Norman. "I didn't want to hit Miles Davis," Torres recalled, "but I didn't want him to punch out Norman first. Luckily, Davis just walked away." ^{ok}

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Mailer was surly. Lehmann-Haupt remembered that he was "fairly drunk and moody and deep in some funk. I've only seen him that one time in that degree of withdrawn moodiness."

Earlier, Mailer had tried to spar with James Jones, and when Lehmann-Haupt stopped at his table to say goodbye, he threw or spilled his drink when Lehmann-Haupt put out his hand. ~~Leim~~

Aldridge also attended and recalled that Mailer "was absolutely catatonic." As he was leaving, he went up to Mailer, "and he looked as though he was completely out on his feet. He was standing,

but propped up against the wall," he said. "I think he was simply plastered." But the next day

when ^{he} Aldridge visited Mailer in Brooklyn, he looked no worse for wear. The jazz musicians who played at the party were at the apartment, Beverly was there, and Anne Barry, who Aldridge remembered as "a small round girl with chubby cheeks and huge horn-rimmed glasses. There were also two black maids in white uniforms. It seemed distinctly a ménage and very much a Mailer ménage—crowded, busy, vital." Mailer had put on weight, twenty pounds, Aldridge estimated, and was sharp and alert. Styron's name came up, and Mailer noted that Styron had been invited to the White House by both Kennedy and Johnson; neither had invited him. Mailer said that Styron's social ambitions might prevent him from being a great writer. He was aware, certainly, that he faced the same problem, but to him divided loyalties were the equivalent of catnip, irresistible.

After lunch, Mailer walked Aldridge to his Brooklyn hotel, "wearing an old trench coat and looking like Harpo Marx. He shook my hand with real warmth and feeling, as if we had some affinity. I felt we had and felt sad to say good-bye to him. He's a very lovable and remarkable man, a genuine creative force, undoubtedly the very best we have." Aldridge's review of *Dream*, appeared in *Life* a few days later. Mailer liked it well enough to pay for the

reprinting of the heart of it in the same issue of *PR* containing Elizabeth Hardwick's negative review. *PR*'s editor, William Phillips, sent it to him before publication, and after reading it, Mailer sent him an excerpt from Aldridge's review and this statement:

An American Dream has received the best and worst reviews of any book I've written. Now it is rumored that Elizabeth Hardwick has written a bad review for *Partisan*. I hasten to shudder. She is such a good writer. I also hasten to furnish for her company a review by John Aldridge which appeared in *Life*. I cannot pretend I was displeased to see it there, but I'm nearly as pleased to see it here even if I have to pay for the pleasure.

As Mailer notes, the division of opinion on the novel was nearly absolute. There were few half-and-half reviews. In addition to Hardwick, who called it "a fantasy of vengeful murder, callous copulations and an assortment of dull cruelties," leading critics and literary figures such as Granville Hicks, Philip Rahv, Roger Shattuck, Stanley Edgar Hyman and Tom Wolfe said the novel was a conspicuous failure. On the other side of the chasm, in addition to Aldridge, who called it "a religious book" that "dramatizes the various ways a man may sin in order to be saved, consort with Satan in order to attain to God," were a cadre of enthusiasts: Leo Bersani, Richard Rhodes, Joan Didion, Paul Pickrel, and Richard Poirier, a young academic who would become one of Mailer's most intelligent critics.

Perhaps the most significant thing about the book's reception is that Mailer's erstwhile admirers at *PR*, the *NYRB*, and the *Village Voice* were negative, while stuffy *Harper's*, conservative *National Review*, flag-waving *Chicago Tribune* and, most surprising of all, Henry Luce's *Life*, applauded the novel, evidence of the new openness, the appetite for the outrageous

in the country. Even *Time* had a few good words, while *Newsweek* called it "noxious." William F. Buckley, Jr., sent Mailer an advance copy of the review of Joan Didion, then a young editor at *Vogue*. He added a note: "Congratulations on a nearly near-perfect novel." Didion thought it even better, "a novel in many ways as good as *The Deer Park*, and *The Deer Park* is in many ways a perfect novel." As sensitive to social fragmentation and prickly dread as Mailer, she thought the novel caught the mood of the country, which was going through the same kind of change it had in the 1920s. *Dream* is "the only serious New York novel since *The Great Gatsby*," she said, adding that Mailer and Fitzgerald shared several things: "The notoriety, the devastating celebrity which is probably in the end as nourishing as it is destructive. The immense technical skill, the passion for realizing the gift. The deep romanticism. And perhaps above all the unfashionableness, the final refusal to sail with the prevailing winds." Mailer wrote to Buckley that it was the "nicest" review he had received. "What a marvelous girl Joan Didion must be." They met soon after and became friendly. In the 1980s, she and her husband, John Gregory Dunne, wrote a screenplay based on *The Deer Park*, which was never produced.

Mailer himself was, not uncharacteristically, two-headed about the novel. In a letter to Diana Trilling, he said it was either "an extraordinary piece of crap," or "the first novel to come along since *The Sun Also Rises* which has anything really new in it." He was planning to visit her and Lionel, who was teaching at Oxford for a semester, when he went to England, and had begun anticipating the British reaction to *Dream*. He was secretly enjoying the argument over the novel's merits, he said, "because no vice of mine could be greater than my desire to create a sensation and be forever talked about. Sometimes I wonder, beloved, if I am the ghost of some

long-dead London beauty. Well, well I expect the British will give me a good whipping with the thinnest strings of leather for the outrages I've committed in the name of literature."

The novel sold quite well and spent several weeks on the *Times* bestseller list, reaching number eight in late April. It was his first bestseller (and first novel) in ten years. At this moment in mid-1965, as the country was sliding into carnival and revolt, Mailer's situation can perhaps best be summed up by the title of Aldridge's review—"The Big Comeback of Norman Mailer"—which ended by saying that *Dream* "may well represent the first significant step the current American novel has taken into fresh territories of the imagination." The country was undergoing profound change and Mailer was poised to become its chief chronicler and interpreter. Over the next decade, he would write sixteen books, create three experimental films, produce an off-Broadway play, ~~*The D-Word*~~, and in 1969, before appearing on the cover of *Life*, would run for (and lose) the Democratic nomination for mayor of New York. Five consecutive books during this period, beginning with *The Armies of the Night*, would be nominated for the National Book Award. *Armies* won it, and also a Pulitzer. It would be the most productive, celebrated and accomplished period of his life.

Chapter 8

Third Person Personal: *Armies* and After

Norman Mailer, professional writer and amateur boxer, climbed in the ring to congratulate José Torres, professional boxer and amateur writer, a moment after he defeated Willie Pastrano for the light-heavyweight championship of the world at Madison Square Garden. Mailer was as jubilant as Torres. He would soon trade writing lessons for boxing instruction

from Torres, the first Latin American to win this championship, and a heroic figure among Puerto Ricans. Mailer had offered to lend him money to guarantee the fight, a considerable sum, but ultimately, the original backers came through. The gesture endeared him to Torres. After the bout, there was a victory party at 142 Columbia Heights. Harry Grant, Mailer's Bellevue friend, was the bartender for the large crowd, which included Gay Talese and Pete Hamill—both good friends of Torres'—and also Truman Capote and James Baldwin. Barney was there—but not Fan—and enjoyed himself thoroughly as he always did at his son's parties. Torres, in a tuxedo, arrived late with his wife Ramona, and Mailer “greeted the new champ in the lambency of a triumphant party, and they embraced like two new-born orphans,” as another writer present, Brock Brower, recalled. Uncharacteristically, Torres got drunk, went home to bed, and then returned in the morning to find that the party was still going. A day later, Mailer flew to Alaska for a five-day visit.

He spent the first day in Juneau with Mike Gravel and Gov. William Egan, and received enthusiastic applause for his off-the-cuff speech to a joint session of the Alaska Legislature. Then he flew to Fairbanks, where he appeared on local television with Gravel and the two professors who hosted his visit, Edmund Skellings and Donald Kaufmann. At a reception in a downtown Anchorage Hotel, locals came to meet Mailer. As Kaufmann recalled, they glared at Mailer and said things like “Where’s that tough guy?” and “Where’s that wife-knifer?” At one point, he got into a fight, but security personnel broke it up. Early the next day, he and the two professors flew on a small plane to Fairbanks, the second largest city.

When they arrived, Mailer took a breath of the crystalline air of the city and was ecstatic. “I can breathe here. You can see for miles with clear vision,” he said. Ralph Ellison met them at

the University, and for the next three days the two writers met with students and addressed audiences assembled for a festival of the arts. As he usually did, Mailer threw himself into meetings with students. He nicknamed the state "God's Attic," and said it had an extraordinary characteristic: "The future of this state is totally unknown. But it is an unknown in extremes, for the end result will be one of two opposites, the best or the worst." Mailer was very much aware that the hawkish state was generally in favor of the Vietnam War, and that Fairbanks was Alaska's "Sin City," where military personnel came on R & R. He also knew that he was close to the magnetic North Pole, especially after he saw a display of Aurora. In words that anticipated his next novel, *Why Are We in Vietnam?* he told the University audience: "All the messages of North America go up to the Brooks Range. That land above the circle, man, is the land of icy wilderness and the lost peaks and the unseen deeps and spires, the crystal receiver of the continent." On the return trip to Anchorage, Mailer asked the pilot of the small plane if he could buzz the top of Mt. McKinley. The Indians call it Denali, "The Big One." The pilot agreed and told them the altitude would require them to breathe oxygen through small mouth inhalers. "For twenty long minutes," Kaufmann wrote, the pilot "made low passes around the peak, and with each pass, buzz, or mind-skimming on Denali's top, I looked down and wondered what Mailer was imagining or seeing as he sucked oxygen." Shortsighted and vain about wearing glasses, Mailer nevertheless put on a pair for a better look. "I lost myself," Kaufmann writes, "in simultaneous images of Papa Hemingway peering down on Kilimanjaro, seeing a frozen leopard, and Mailer (on Alaskan oxygen plus magic) peering down on Denali." Would novel about Alaska without these loops around the highest point (20,320 feet) Kaufmann, with some justice, thinks not.

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Upon his return, he wrote to Diana Trilling to nail down the dates of his April 28 visit to Oxford. Diana suggested that they dine in the Oxford faculty dining room, but Mailer had a different idea:

Now what I'd like ideally is a dinner for eight at your house and then perhaps a few more people in afterward. One can't possibly get to talk to sixteen or twenty people at dinner by any method known to man, and the Senior Common Room, while appealing to the novelist in me, and very suitable and exciting if it should come to pass promises still less in the way of a delight than dinner for eight in that charming small house you seem to possess. Surely even at Oxford people have been known to drop in after dinner. Isn't that remotely possible. I have only one firm request: you must get Iris Murdoch for dinner. I loved her novel, *The Severed Head*.

Murdoch accepted the invitation, but according to Trilling, she and Mailer were not dinner mates. "She snubbed him when he wanted to talk about existentialism, and she was very nice to him about playwriting." He, as always, hoped to both enjoy the meal and part of his conversations. Murdoch aside, Trilling said that "the guests adored you."

Dinner parties for Mailer, ideally, were a happy combination of pleasure and diplomacy, good food, plenty of drink, laughter, gossip, debate, flirtation and the exchange of intelligence. He was a careful social planner and personally assembled his guest lists and seating plans. Lunch and dinner guests were sometimes struck by the semi-formal arrangements and the solicitous manner of their host. Steven Marcus remembers Mailer preparing and serving lunch in Brooklyn "in what must be called a lordly fashion," with the host conducting himself "without affectation

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as a kind of secular prince." He drew his guests out in conversation, and was ever eager to hear about their roots, passions, opinions on the events of the day, and the occasional glimpse of an Achilles heel. Everyone was expected to contribute. In later years, he sat at the head of the table with a woman on either side, often newcomers, while Norris sat at the opposite end with their male partners. He also made it a point, even at large, loud, and crowded parties to try and speak with each guest for a few minutes. His manners were "exquisite," Marcus said.

Family dinners were a bit different. Peter Alson recalled his self-consciousness as an adolescent at uncle Norman's table:

Being around Norman exacerbated the intensity of the feeling, because he was so fucking brilliant himself that it was impossible to try and share the stage with him. And there's no question that there was a certain amount of theater in those dinners, an aspect of performance art. And of course Norman was always the red-hot center; he dominated in a way that's almost impossible to describe except that it was both incredibly fun but at the same time scary and intimidating, especially if you actually dared to take part. There were two things that characterized him; he always listened very intently when someone else spoke, but he also had an extremely short attention span. If you didn't grab him in the first few sentences you were done. I remember a few times when I started to say something, and ended up trailing off pathetically because I could see that I hadn't grabbed him.

His uncle liked to be provocative, Alson said, but you "could usually see the twinkle in his eye." He enjoyed verbal sparring, and "it could be very tough." But Alson always looked forward to the family dinners "because I knew, *knew*, I was going to be dazzled in the best possible way. I

was going to learn things." For many people, a family dinner is something to be endured, he said.

"In our family it was something to look forward to with glee and excitement."

Upon his return from England, Mailer flew to California. He had agreed to speak at a teach-in at Berkeley. The teach-in was part of "Vietnam Days," May 21-22. The event ran for 36 hours with an aggregate live audience of 30,000, and was also broadcast on radio station KPFA. There were 50 speakers and entertainers, mainly anti-war, although not because the organizers failed to invite Administration officials. The State Department and the South Vietnamese Embassy declined invitations, as did pro-war members of the Berkeley faculty. Old Left figures were invited, but they posed so many restrictions—X wouldn't come if Y was there, so-and-so didn't like the set-up, etc.—that they were excluded. The New Left had begun its climb. The organizers, including Jerry Rubin and Berkeley mathematics professor Stephen Smale, quickly concluded that the peace movement didn't need the "futilitarians," as they called the Old Left.

Rubin made up a preliminary list of speakers, including Dr. Benjamin Spock, the baby doctor; Mario Savio, the founder of Berkeley's Free Speech Movement; I. F. Stone, the independent journalist; Paul Krassner, editor of the *Realist*, who served as an emcee; Staughton Lynd, a Yale history professor; and comedian Dick Gregory. Mailer's name was on Rubin's list but there was opposition because of his unpredictability. Rubin persisted and called Mailer, who said, "I've never spoken to 20,000 people before."

On May 21, Mailer began his speech by noting that the citizenry's "buried unvoiced faith that the nature of America was finally good, and not evil" had over the past months "taken a pistol whipping." The cause: the most advanced nation in the world was "shedding the blood and burning the flesh of Asian peasants it has never seen." This was being done, officially, to keep

the nations of the Far East from falling one after another—the Domino Theory—under the Communist yoke. The Communists could only flounder in the nations they conquered, he argued. The real reason for the Vietnam War, he continued, was that the president needed to get the country's mind off the civil rights movement at home. His fear, he said, is that this "bully with an Air Force," was "close to insanity" brought on by "his need for action." And so, Mailer said, we stand at a crossroad: "Is this country extraordinary or accursed?" He ended his one-hour speech by urging everyone to attach photos and drawings of Johnson's face, on every surface, on walls and phone booths and billboards. "You, Lyndon Johnson, will see those pictures everywhere upside down, four inches high and forty feet high; you, Lyndon Baines Johnson, will be coming up for air everywhere upside down. Everywhere, upside down. Everywhere. Everywhere." Krassner published Mailer's speech in the June *Realist* with an upside down photo of the president on the cover. Mailer wrote to Yamanishi after the teach-in and said that for the first time in his life he had received "a standing ovation which went on for many minutes." It was most welcome, he said, because that at this stage of his career he was caught between "counter-waves," of approval and disapproval, and "I am being bounced like a cork at the confluence."

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Fig and Ecey and their children joined the Mailers in Provincetown at the place they had rented for the season, the Joe Acker House at 607 Commercial Street. Barbara, now divorced, joined them. Her new boyfriend, Al Wasserman, a pioneering documentary filmmaker, was also there; he rented the upper floor of the Acker house. Mailer had hoped to do some new writing, but he was mainly enjoying the summer and starting to put together a new collection, consisting

mainly of material written after *The Presidential Papers*. And he was distracted by two of his passions: boxing and protesting against the war. In mid-July, before 2,000 at Harvard's Sanders Theater, he gave the same speech he had at Berkley, appearing again with Staughton Lynd. Martin Peretz, the Harvard instructor who chaired the teach-in, said the crowd was more than twice as large as the turnout for McGeorge Bundy, President Johnson's National Security Advisor. Mailer also produced an entirely new anti-war essay for *PR*, where it appeared with those of 13 other intellectuals, including Howe, Macdonald, and ~~Sontag~~ Sontag. He began the essay by mocking the moderation of the editors: "Three cheers, lads. Your words read like they were written in milk and milk of magnesia. Still your committee didn't close shop until close after this extraordinary remark: 'The time has come for new thinking.' Cha cha cha." Mailer was all for pouring oil on the fires of anti-war protest, and was now the (unappointed) point man for The Family in this regard.

Torres defended his title against a strong contender, Tom McNeely, on July 31 in San Juan, and won on a ten-round decision. Muhammad Ali fought in an exhibition match before the main event, and the next day Mailer arm wrestled with him on the balcony of the San Jeronimo Hilton. The photo of the mock contest, with Mailer smiling and Ali appearing to strain mightily, has been reprinted endlessly. Henceforth, Mailer would be identified with Ali, even more so than with Torres. Mailer encouraged the connection and while in San Juan called himself Ali's "intellectual precursor." He said that to understand modern society an intellectual had to "infiltrate" the Establishment, "act as a spy and remain true to his ideal of the Renaissance man" who is at odds with modern man, "destroyer of the ideal."

Brock Brower, a regular contributor to *Esquire*, was writing a profile of Mailer for *Life*, and interviewed him several times. He also interviewed Beverly, Mailer's parents and sister, and a number of his friends. Mailer was uneasy about the piece, and wondered if *Life* would actually publish it. If it didn't, he told Brower, "We would each become quietly famous as a result, and quiet fame is always, repeat always, superior to public renown. How else account for the happy progress of John Updike." On September 24, *Life* did publish the profile, "In This Corner, Norman Mailer, Never the Champion, Always the Challenger." It is now hard to imagine an American writer receiving this kind of attention—Oprah Winfrey notwithstanding—and, with the exception of Hemingway, it was rare enough in the 1950s and 1960s. William F. Buckley, Jr. was impressed enough to devote his bi-weekly column to Brower's piece, stating that it was "final confirmation" of Mailer's status. "He is probably," Buckley said, "the single best-known living American writer, second only to John Dos Passos." Two things make him interesting, he said. First, "he makes the most beautiful metaphors in the business," and second, "he represents present-day America. He expresses their feelings that America today is shivering in desolation and hopelessness, is looking for her identity after a period of self-alienation." Although Buckley said he would pay "a week's wages" to avoid listening to anyone who spoke "more predictable nonsense" than Mailer on foreign policy, he nevertheless believed him to be "in his own fashion, a conservative." He based this on Mailer's disdain for big government and liberal ideology. Buckley concluded by noting that there was a good deal of hope in Mailer's "turbulent emotions" although he had scant regard for "the emunctory noises of psychic or physical human excesses" in his novels.

Mailer responded immediately, asking ~~him~~ "What the hell does emunctory mean?" and then turning to Buckley's comment about a week's wages: "Sailor Bill, I come close to loving you here. When the hell did you ever earn a week's wages, you bleeding plutocrat." Buckley, who was independently wealthy, was then running for mayor of New York on the Conservative Party ticket, and Mailer said he'd consider voting for his old debating partner if he wasn't such "a hopeless ass on foreign policy." Buckley wasn't given much of a chance, but "his flair for arch phrase-making" helped enliven what would have been a dull race for a position that had belonged to Democrats for decades. Asked what he would do if he won, Buckley said, "Demand a recount." His quixotic campaign re-kindled Mailer's own desire to be mayor, and his 1969 campaign would in many ways resemble Buckley's race. Sam Tanenhaus, Buckley's biographer, wrote, "To campaign in New York as an authentic conservative required, to some extent, redefining what modern conservatism meant—or what it might mean." Mailer's run for mayor years later in the Democratic primary was a parallel attempt to re-define the nature of the Democratic Party. But in 1965, Mailer was supporting Lindsay over both Buckley and the Democratic candidate, Abe Beame.

A week before the election, Mailer published a front-page article in the *Voice* extolling Lindsay for his platform, and chiding his conservative friend. Buckley, he said, is "majestically unsuited for here becoming Mayor since it is possible Old Bill has never been in a subway in his life." But he was also "majestically suited for spoiling Lindsay's campaign. Buckley's personality is the highest Camp we are ever going to find in a mayoralty. No other actor on earth can project simultaneous hints that he is in the act of playing Commodore of the Yacht Club, Joseph Goebbels, Robert Mitchum, Maverick, Savonarola, the nice prep-school kid next door,

and the snows of yesteryear." Mailer was correct about Buckley's strength. He drew 13 percent of the vote and is given credit by many political observers for nudging Lindsay into a victory over Beame. Buckley was irritated enough about Mailer's piece in the *Voice* to write a head-scratcher of a letter arguing that Mailer had employed an enthymeme (suppression of a logically implied premise of an argument) in his comments. The *Voice* gave Mailer a chance to respond below Buckley's letter, and he did: "Dear Bill, Be a swell. Don't sue." The two men relished opportunities to tweak each other for perceived errors and vanities. A few years later, Buckley sent a copy of a collection of his columns to Mailer, but did not inscribe it. Knowing that Mailer would look up his name in the index, Buckley wrote next to it, "Hi Norman."

Another marker of Mailer's stature at the end of 1965 came in a poll conducted by the *New York Herald Tribune Book Week*. Richard Kluger, the editor, had written to Mailer and 200 other leading literary figures, asking them to fill out a form noting the most important works of fiction by Americans in the 20 years since WWII. In his letter to Mailer, Kluger said that President Johnson, "was genuinely pissed off by your piece on him for us," referring to Mailer's review of Johnson's *My Hope for America*. Douglas Cater, the president's special assistant, called *Book Week* and "bawled the hell" out of a staff member for publishing the review two days before the presidential election. "Lady Bird was particularly pissed," Kluger said. Mailer had again gained the attention of a sitting president and his wife.

When the results of the poll, based on the comments of 117 respondents, was published, Mailer was one of the most mentioned writers, ahead of Hemingway, Flannery O'Connor, Styron and Updike, but behind Bellow, Nabokov, Salinger and Ellison. Kluger sent Mailer the results before publication, and he wrote back to say that there were no surprises. "Just think when Time

magazine gets a hold of all this, just think when they start making All-Star teams out of us, just think when they start having mass polls, just think of how James Jones feels to come in behind John Updike, just think how fat Saul's ass is now (fat as his head) just think of all the needless enemies Ellison has made with no desire at all. You are a warlock, Richard." There were 20-odd head shots of writers on the front page of *Book Week*. Mailer's photograph was in the upper right-hand corner, just above Hemingway's.



The Mailers remained in Provincetown until the beginning of October. Beverly learned she was pregnant several weeks before they returned to Brooklyn. They enjoyed the last days of Indian summer after the tourist hordes departed, always a magical time on Cape Cod. Mailer was calling the new miscellany *Cannibals and Christians*, his names for two mutant forces in contemporary life arising from the political Right and Left, respectively. The former stretch from the Republican Party to "the ghosts of the Nazis," he wrote, and the Left covers a spectrum from L.B.J. to Mao Tse-Tung. Mailer's dualisms are rarely simple, and invariably contain vigorous tinctures of their opposite, "the minority within," to borrow the astute phrase of critic Richard Poirier. A number of reviewers had difficulty understanding the Cannibal-Christian opposition. But, as Poirier noted, the first key to understanding Mailer's mind (and his life) is to realize that he "is quite unable to imagine anything except in oppositions, unable even to imagine one side of the opposition without proposing that it has yet another opposition within itself" that needs to be discovered and illumined. The collection, examines Cannibals and Christians, these "two huge types" and the historical whirlpools from whence, like sea monsters, they have emerged. It contains his latest political and Vietnam pieces, his book reviews and literary criticism, the three

long self-interviews (two of them reprinted from *Presidential Papers*), and 54 poems. The only fictional pieces he could find to include in this 397-page collection were two previously published short stories.

He was working on a piece of fiction, however, one begun in 1962, perhaps earlier, and then set aside. Known initially as "The Fisher Novel," and then "The Book of the First-Born," it was completely separate from the big novel, and like Laurence Stern's *Tristram Shandy*, begins with the protagonist *in utero*. Over the next decade, he would occasionally read "First-Born" aloud to friends and family, who found its half stately, half mock-heroic descriptions of Stephen Merrill's earliest days—his breach birth delivery ("the contractions of birth came with the panic of convicts who discovered their dynamite is not sufficient to blow the doors"), his circumcision ("an animal wounded wantonly"), and his breast feeding ("the infant's mouth flew like a hawk to the nipple")—to be riveting. Barbara remembers vividly her brother reading it to her to her in Provincetown during the summer of 1963; Carol Stevens, his fifth wife, was similarly impressed when he read it to her in the early 1970s. Mailer signed a contract with Minton for the novel and received an advance, but never got beyond 80 pages.

Merrill is born on Mailer's natal day. His head is wrenched by the forceps of Dr. Blucher (much as *Tristram Shandy*'s nose is injured by those of Dr. Slop), although it recovers its shape nicely. He has a big head and will eventually wear a size 7 and 3/8 hat (Mailer's size). Merrill also has Mailer's large red ears. His parents, Jenny (née Fisher) and Archibald "Archie" Merrill (born Mirilovicz), are Jews whose families emigrated to the U.S. from Lithuania, Archie's via South Africa. Their portraits instantly call to mind Fanny and Barney. Jenny "a woman with the

courage of a lioness and the innocence in 1923 of a nineteenth century heroine," goes into the hospital with little knowledge of the difficulties of childbirth.

No, she had been working after school in her father's butcher shop from the age of ten, and so losing all the afternoons of her childhood which might account in part for her height—she is not a half inch more than five feet tall. It certainly helps to account for her obduracy. Strong as a horse, stubborn as a mule, final in her efficiency with a butcher's cleaver or a carving knife, she was proud, timid and fierce—forty years later she still looked like those healthy woman with large pleasant features one sees in photographs put out by the offices of propaganda for Soviet womanhood, strong, direct, free of perversion and the imagination for it.

Archie has Barney's barrel chest, spats and silver-rimmed eyeglasses; they both look a bit like F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Except that Archie's mouth was narrower, his nose was shorter, he looked even more like a Goy than Scott (which is one of the reasons—let us not make Jenny too much of a heroine—that she had been drawn to him) and indeed Archie's speech was English, a touch fraudulent, and stuffy as phumphedom. At his worst (was it his best?) he could sound for five syllables like the son of a duke, and of course he carried a cane. At the age of thirty-two, he still had a panic so profound at the thought of disturbing any institution in its work (he was criminal in his heart as we shall later see) that he could not even recognize the presence of his fear.

Called by his future father-in-law "the strangest Jew I've ever seen," Archie has aspirations for his unborn child (he senses it will be a male), and while he doesn't pray much, his dreams "searched high places." He thinks of British military leaders from WWI, in which he served—Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, Field Marshal Haig—but also earlier figures such as Napoleon, Admiral Horatio Nelson and Sir Walter Scott. He also had "a secret respect for Jack the Ripper, was fond of Sir Walter Raleigh, and Charlemagne mixed into Alfred the Great at the edge of his historical vision, but for truth Beau Brummell was the name to whom he called most often in his dreams."

Jenny, the daughter of a rabbi, prayed to Solomon ("in order that her child take its place among the brightest who ever lived)," King David, the Bal Shem Tov, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, and to England's only Jewish prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli, as well as "Galileo because he defied the Church, and ~~to~~ Sampson, who was finally incorruptible. And to Moses as a matter of form." The narrator explains that the high hopes of mother and father are not just matters to be inculcated as the child grows under their tutelage, no, "the contract was already in his flesh as he was being conceived, passed along with whatever art, violence, vision, apathy, perception, high intelligence, treachery and sloth was living in the sperm of his father, and whatever courage, love, fortitude, devotion and profound cowardice was swimming in the egg of his mother." It is even more complicated because Archie, while he had "a snob's respect for the powers of the world," also possessed "a king's disdain for a few rules, and he put that into his semen too, how not?" Jenny, sentenced to be "a duchess in her family and a small little woman in the world," produced an egg that sought to incorporate "qualities in herself a little

opposite to herself." She did not love herself, and "so she wanted a warrior," one compounded of the most admirable traits of the heroes to whom she prayed.

Conceived out of this stew of docility, disdain and desire, the boy would necessarily be divided in his allegiances. But he would be extraordinary. The narrator sums up the power of Jenny's yearnings for the child who had "cost her body no small nor passing destruction (she would never have a good figure again) but love him she did. As the instrument of her will. Whatever imagination Jenny possessed was in her will." He would surpass her ideas of what was great; he would "go to places she had never gone and he would change life rather than be shaped by it. Whatever was heroic in her would find legs through him. She adored him as if she had fallen in love with herself." This is fiction, and the novelist has license to speculate on the concerted powers of will and aspiration transforming and uniting sperm and egg, but Mailer's personal beliefs, in fact, varied little from young Merrill's. When mind, body and spirit were in special accord—not balance, but a mystical configuration—then remarkable children could be conceived, or as he put it a few years later, "Good fucks make good babies." This is the simplest, crudest distillation of his long essay, published in 1971, on gender, sexuality and feminism, *The Prisoner of Sex*. "The Book of the First-Born" prefigures the more polemical discussion of the essay.

As late as the fall of 1974 Mailer was fiddling with this fragment (and he spoke of reviving it through the early 1980s), he but always stalled. After detailing the birth and early days of Stephen, the narrative examines the early life of Jenny, and her father Joseph, the rabbi—clearly a portrait of his grandfather. It then moves back in time to examine Joseph's early life in Lithuania, and that of his father, Jacob, a fisherman (Mailer's maternal-great grandmother, Leah

Sacks, was reputed to have married a fisherman). But Mailer had only a spotty knowledge of family lore, and the last three pages of the manuscript is a list of questions about his grandparents and great-grandparents, their religion, livelihoods and characters. A few examples:

- Price of kosher meat wholesale and retail
- Household duties beside store for all the girls, Rose & Fanny especially
- Some portraits of the Gentiles in town
- More detail on 3 houses on Morris Ave. I'm not clear. Where did Grandpa get the energy to convert into a forty room hotel?
- First meeting with Dad. Did you write to each other before meeting? What were his letters about?
- What is a Prince Albert suit?
- What is mandlen? How do you make noodles? How can you make a week ahead of time?
- Chronology—marriages, deaths, moves, business, etc.
- Passover in detail—2nd night a little boring
- Yiddish vocabulary (100 words for household objects)

He wrote these for his mother, and it seems likely that they led to the 1973 memoir he asked her to write about her family history, a memoir that tries to address some of the above questions, although according to his sister, Mailer was disappointed in her narrative. He considered using "First-Born" with a new title, "Alpha Bravo Universe," as the first chapter of *Of a Fire on the Moon*, published in 1971, and later planned to use it as the opening of the unwritten third volume of the trilogy that began with *Ancient Evenings*, published in 1983. But he did neither.

Besides the need for family history, Mailer gave two additional reasons for not continuing with "First-Born," which he described in 1992 as "the saga of the Mailer family back in Russia with my grandfather as I imagined him." The first is that after he had read the work of Isaac Bashevis Singer, the Nobel Prize-winning writer whose stories of life in the *shtetls* of Poland are depicted with Chekhovian finesse, he thought, "Oh Lord, there is absolutely no need for my book." He gave a second reason in a 2004 interview, where he explained that he intended that "First-Born" to be stored on the computers of a fictional Noah's Ark spaceship that leaves Earth sometime in the distant future. The information that the ship's 80 survivors have about human history before its destruction in a nuclear holocaust (he planned to use his short story "The Last Night" to depict the end of the world) is fragmentary. The chief source for the post-WWII world, he explained, was the biography of "a writer of the period in the second half of the 20th century named Norman Mailer." The ~~sequence~~^{heart} of the third novel in the trilogy was going to be the story of Merrill-Mailer as told in "First-Born." "The scheme was wonderful! The architectonics were exquisite," Mailer said. Using his American life as an exemplum, a repository of essential cultural memory for unborn generations voyaging to the stars, aligned perfectly with his deepest ambitions. But he was forced to abandon the idea not because he feared sliding into the sloughs of hubris—this troubled him not—but because mastering the scientific-technological physics of spaceships and space travel needed to make the novel credible was a bridge too far. "My brain power had passed the point where I could retain that kind of information and digest it," he said.

Yamanishi wrote in December to ask if he still planned to use his 1962 story, "Truth and Being, Nothing and Time: A Broken Fragment from a Long Novel," as part of the big novel.

Mailer responded by saying that "so many years have gone by, and I have changed so much, that I think the long novel will never be written in its original form. Rather I conceive now of another kind of book, equally long, of which I've written so far a hundred pages." He refers here to "First-Born," which he hoped would be a novel evoking the past in the manner of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. His statement to Yamanishi, with whom he readily shared professional details, reveals a key demarcation. After ten years of stunted efforts, Mailer had finally given up on the narrative adventures of Eitel and Elena, Sergius and Denise, Dr. Sandy Joyce and Marion Faye. Some of these characters would continue on in the dramatic version of *The Deer Park* that would be staged in 1967, but nowhere else. The big novel was formally dead. At least this one.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

With Mailer's blessing, Bob Lucid had organized an event at the Chicago conference of the Modern Language Association, and convinced Ralph Ellison and John Cheever to join Mailer in addressing the session, "The Modern American Writer and the Cultural Experience." An overflow audience of approximately 2,000 filled the Red Lacquer Room of the Palmer House to hear the three novelists speak. Cheever led off and spoke against Podhoretz's idea of the novel as documentary, "bringing the news," and lauded the powers of unfettered imagination. Ellison, speaking without a note, castigated sociologists for obscuring the painful realities of urban life with statistics, and evoked the alienated lives of Harlem. Richard Stern, Mailer's friend from the University of Chicago, gave the following summary of his talk:

Mailer, in a fine blue suit, vest lapped in black silk, took the microphone like a bulldog and in a voice which gripped every throat in the room, read a corrosive,

brilliant, hit-and-run analysis of the failure of American novelists to keep up with a whirling country, their division into opposed camps of those who fed titillating pap to the genteel and those, like Dreiser, who pointed American Julien Sorels to the doors of power (though *his* clumsiness could not open them). Down the road were 'the metaphorical novelists,' Hemingway and Faulkner, one of whom described the paw, the other the dreams of the social beast.

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One reason that American writers had been unable to keep pace, Mailer argued, was that American culture changed ten times faster than other cultures, "a phenomenon never before described." The country, he said, grew "like a weed and a monster and a beauty and a pig. And the task of explaining America was taken over by Luce magazines." America had not produced a 20th century writer who could "clarify a nation's vision of itself as Tolstoy had done perhaps with *War and Peace* or *Anna Karenina*." Mailer ended his talk about the failings of the nation's current novelists by saying that the communication "of the deepest and most unrecoverable human experience must yet take place if we are to survive." Although he didn't say so, it was the job he wanted, as must have been obvious to the audience. In this grand setting, a month before his 43rd birthday, Mailer, full of energy, and wearing his blue pin-stripe banker's suit (now his public uniform) described the idiosyncratic strengths and weaknesses of novelists as dissimilar as James, Dreiser, Edith Wharton, Elinor Wylie, Bellow, Capote, James Jones and Terry Southern, noting the precise location of each in a dynamic artistic constellation of his own creation. Mailer's speeches were not always successful, but Stern said that for this speech the academics "thundered applause," their thirst for affirmation of literature's noble mission "slaked by a master." It was his second major speech of the year and the professors responded to him as enthusiastically as had Berkeley students. When Mailer first began making public speeches, he had tried to make his audiences itch; now he was making them cheer.

He stayed close to home in the first months of 1966. Beverly was due in early March. He worked on *Cannibals*, which he hoped would be published in June, and appeared at several anti-war events in Manhattan. As protests against the war increased, President Johnson in February authorized Operation Rolling Thunder, a devastating bombing campaign against North

Vietnamese targets led by B-52 bombers. The expansion incited the protestors, now being joined by returning Vietnam vets. That same month Mailer spoke at the Poetry Center at the 92nd Street "Y" with Howe, Podhoretz and Marcus; a week later took part in a Read-in at Town Hall in Manhattan with 28 other writers and performers, including Hellman, Kazin, Sontag and Lowell. Mailer and Lowell enjoyed each other's company and began discussing the possibility of traveling to Japan in the summer to speak against the war, and the ominous possibility that the U.S. would enter into a nuclear war with China. Mailer wrote to Yamanishi to tell him of the possible visit, and also to inform him that he might write a nonfiction book "to explain the country to itself." He said, "America will soon divide, an underground will form, and there must be a few works whose existence will help keep alive some morale in that underground." He finished with some good news: "We had a son last week, whom we named Stephen McLeod (yes, after the characters in *An American Dream* and *Barbary Shore*) and he's a handsome boy with calm features and a deep nature, I suspect. Beverly is fine." Now the father of six, Mailer's expenses were mushrooming.

Never much of a financial planner, Mailer knew that he could not shoulder his obligations on royalties from his earlier work and the relatively small amounts he received for magazine work and college speaking gigs. He needed to produce new work. When he was asked to write an essay for a volume on the American dream, Mailer declined, saying that his load made him feel like "a 19th century novelist most of the time, Dickens, dare I say it, Balzac, Dostoevsky, you know." Despite his commitments, in April he bought a waterfront house at 565 Commercial Street, next to the one where John Dos Passos had lived for over two decades. Before leaving the city from Provincetown in early May 1966 to take possession, he turned in the

corrected galleys of *Cannibals*, and answered ~~my~~ his mail, including a letter from Eldridge Cleaver, with whom he had been corresponding. Cleaver, in prison for rape and assault, was seeking parole and Mailer wrote a testimonial to his talent. Later that year, Cleaver, who later became a leader of the Black Panther Party, was released. Writing in *Ramparts* while still imprisoned, Cleaver called Baldwin's criticisms of "The White Negro" "schoolmarmish," while praising Mailer's essay for being "prophetic and penetrating in its understanding of the psychology involved in the accelerating confrontation of black and white in America."

Ψ Ψ Ψ

Once in Provincetown, Mailer took another look at the dramatic version of *The Deer Park*. Beverly was involved in a small theater group in Provincetown, and they began discussing the idea of presenting the play to a summer audience. He began revising, and it took on a new structure. At the same time, he was thinking about writing a short novel for Walter Minton. He had parted company with Putnam's, but he still owed them a book, having accepted, and spent, an advance. "First-Born" was a possibility, but it would require major research, so he began to think about his trip the previous year to Alaska, and came up with a tentative plan. For several years, he had mulled over a story about a group of violent bikers and their women living in the scrub oak thickets of Provincetown's dunes. The novel was "so odd and so horrible" that he kept putting it off.

I was, as I say, in fear of the book. I loved Provincetown and did not think it was a good way to write about it. The town is so naturally spooky in mid-winter and provides such a sense of omens waiting to be magnetized into lines of force that the novel in my mind seemed more of a magical object than a fiction, a black

magic. Nonetheless, I began the book in the spring of '66. It attracted me too much not to begin. Yet because I could not thrust Provincetown into such literary horrors without preparation, I thought I would start with a chapter about hunting bear in Alaska. A prelude.

His plan had been to send "two tough rich boys"—Texans, based on memories of the men he served with in the 112th RCT—the father of one boy and a couple of the father's cronies to Alaska to hunt, and then transfer the action to Provincetown. But what was to be a few introductory chapters turned into a complete novel about the savage slaughter of big game with huge caliber guns, fired in some cases from a helicopter (no one missed the parallels with Vietnam), and climaxing when the two young men, D.J. and Tex, go unarmed into the wilderness. By the time they had returned to Dallas, Mailer realized that he was done with them.

His story about the two southern lads was written in an entirely different style—frantic, slangy and obscene. He was also writing much more quickly. The deadline challenges of *Dream* had enabled him to get his guns free, so to speak (marrying a southern woman and becoming the father of two sons also had an influence on *Vietnam*). It is an oversimplification, but nevertheless roughly accurate to say that from the mid-1960s on, Mailer had two compositional modalities: fast and slow. When he was in the groove, he could turn out fifteen thousand words a week. When he wasn't, he could stretch a book over a decade, shuffling, revising and wordsmithing. *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is the same length as *Dream*, but was written in less than half the time.

He called these books, "bonuses, gifts. You do not have to kill some little part of your flesh to dredge them up." *Vietnam* wrote itself, he said, and "I was full of energy when I was which is to say nothing like the shape he was in after completing his previous book

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Anne Barry had left Mailer's employ in the spring of 1966. She was replaced by Madeline Belkin in Brooklyn, and Sandy Charlebois Thomas in Provincetown. Mailer kept them both busy, Belkin with his correspondence and New York projects, and Thomas with the typing of *Vietnam* and the script for *The Deer Park*. The Mailers had a lot of other help—maids and cooks—and the house was usually overflowing with family and guests. Thomas listed some of the summer guests for Manso: Bob and Joanne Lucid, Ed Doctorow, and from nearby Wellfleet, Betty Jean and Robert Lifton (the psychiatrist and psychohistorian who would win a National Book Award the same year as Mailer), Cy and Billie Rembar, Roger and Fay Donoghue, Scott Meredith and Mickey Knox. Hal Conrad and Mara Lynn were there, as was Buzz Farbar, a young editor Mailer met a few years earlier who would become one of his closest friends. When Vance and Tina Bourjaily visited they saw that the house was full of ropewalking equipment. He said that there was ^{whole} "a mystique" about it for Mailer. "It's a feat of balancing that has religious import in some societies and is a circus act in others and a kids' showoff trick in still others." Norman has a capacity not only to get totally absorbed by something like that but also to communicate his enthusiasm for it to everybody else. We hadn't been there an hour before we were trying to find the right ropewalking shoes and Norman was showing us the basic technique. This remarkable enthusiasm for odd things seems to be an important part of his considerable magnetism." Other guests included Allen Ginsberg and his entourage, and Diana and Lionel Trilling—but not at the same time.

Trilling admired *Dream* and she and Mailer had become closer after he stayed with them in England. Now she was his best female friend, vying with Lillian Hellman. The closeness of their relationship is reflected in the number and length of the letters they exchanged over more

than two decades. While in Provincetown, he received a long letter from her, and answered at even greater length. She had asked what he said was an "an unhappy question." Did they have a real sense of each other? Did he address "the real Diana Trilling," or some construct? His answer explains what he thought about friendship:

I don't make friends with people because they satisfy my idea of them. I am friends with people because they make me feel good when I talk to them and since everything on earth is extraordinarily limited I often don't want even to have too good an idea of them. I don't want to have too much of a hypothesis to be proved or disproved—rather there's an animal pleasure in friends. One feels a little safer or a little merrier, one shores up a small bulkhead against the large dread that always waits outside the door [. . .]

He went on to say that there was a new mood afoot in the country, and he didn't know if he understood it better than anyone else. "These McLuhans, these Pinchens [sic] and Jeremy Larners and this love of electronics and plastics and folk/rock makes me feel like Plekhanov scolding the Soviets in 1917. Sometimes I think we are at the tail end of something which soon may be gone forever, so that in 50 years, for instance, there may not be anyone alive who's read all of Remembrance of Things Past." Mailer had already decided that *The Twist* was evil, and he had limited interest in rock and roll, although he would later allow that Bob Dylan did know how to write a lyric.

These sentiments are explored at great length in *Cannibals*. It is a difficult book, he told Yamanishi, because "I carry my ideas further than they have ever gone before, including for instance an attack upon the scientific method." The brunt of this attack derives from his assertion

that metaphor had partnered with science for centuries in exploring and presenting life. The scientists of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment were also "adventurers, rebels, courtiers, painters, diplomats, churchmen." No more, he said. Because the best metaphorical thinking arose from the profoundest experiences of humankind, he argued, destroying art's collaboration with scientific vision meant that our expanding knowledge of nature, of the universe, was not truly grounded. In the mid-twentieth century, science progressed mainly through experimentation and laboratory work; "Science has built a wall across the route of metaphor: poets whine before experts." And what had 20th century science produced? The gasoline engine, airplanes, modern architecture, antibiotics, psychoanalysis, the atom bomb, plastics and the exploration of space. Mailer had reservations about some of these achievements, and deplored the rest. "Modern science may prove to be the final poisoned fruit of the rich European tree, and plague may disclose itself as the most characteristic invention of our time." The plague in all its social, architectural and technological manifestations is one of the collection's three foci; the other two are literature and politics. Much of the book's political discourse is anti-war argument; it is dedicated to "Lyndon B. Johnson, whose name inspired young men to cheer for me in public."

Mailer's polemics, coming at a time when the nation was increasingly roiled about the Vietnam War, and uneasy about some of the advances of technology, brought raves from reviewers when *Cannibals* was published in August. The *New York Times* reviewer, Eliot Fremont-Smith, proposed Mailer for the Nobel Prize in his review. A British reviewer, A. Alvarez, noted that on one page Mailer writes "with the speed and rawness of insight of Dostoievsky," and on the next, when giving an "existential analysis of the bowel-movements," sounds like Gen. Jack D. Ripper, "the bodyfluids man in *Dr. Strangelove*." He went on to say

that "Dr. Mailer" was a diagnostician with "an almost extra-sensory perception for the faintest signs and vibrations which show where the sickness lies" in America. The British poet and novelist, John Wain, whose work had appeared with Mailer's in an anthology devoted to the Beats and their English counterparts, "The Angry Young Men," said in his review that Mailer was attempting "to position himself so as to stand face to face with the true identity of our time, our time in America." Written in what Wain called "a time of panic and mortal illness," *Cannibals* can now be seen as a rehearsal for what many believe to be his greatest work, *The Armies of the Night*, preparing the ground for it just as *Julius Caesar* did for *Hamlet*.

Act IV, the Provincetown theater Beverly was involved in with director Leo Garen, was a small operation, but put on some ambitious productions, including plays by Pirandello and LeRoi Jones. Mailer cast her as Lulu in Act IV's production of *The Deer Park*, which opened on August 16, 1966. She and Mailer had begun to quarrel, however, and while they would continue to collaborate on dramatic and film projects for two more years, the marriage was beginning to come apart. Torres recalled one dinner party that summer when they got into a fierce argument. When she made a comment about Mailer's mother, Torres said, Mailer was "white with fury." He said, "Beverly, I am going to get up and throw you out the window," but Torres interceded and he and Mailer went for a walk to defuse the situation. Mailer's extra-marital flings were one of the chief causes of their difficulties. Over a decade later Beverly said that Mailer was seeing other women not long after they were together "When I was pregnant, he had an airline stewardess. Three days after bringing home our baby, he began an affair." Beverly may have been referring to Carol Stevens, whom Mailer had met when he was still with Jeanne Campbell.

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An accomplished jazz singer from Philadelphia who worked with major artists such as the Modern Jazz Quartet, Coleman Hawkins and Bill Evans, Stevens recalled how they met. Sometime in late 1962, Stevens was on a date with Clay Felker at Small's Paradise, the jazz nightclub in Harlem, and Mailer walked in. Felker invited him to join them, and Mailer danced with Carol and they drank and talked. When it was time to leave, Mailer said, "Let's go," to her. To his surprise, she replied that she was going home with the gentleman who brought her. As they stood on the sidewalk talking, Mailer picked her up and whirled her around over his head, as he once did with his sister. "Sheer exuberance," Stevens recalled. A year later, more or less, he called her on the phone. "Did you finally get down to 'S' in your address book?" she said. They went out, and ended up in bed. Not long after this, she went to the party celebrating Mailer's engagement to Beverly and met several members of his family. Barney impressed her, she said. She had liaisons with Mailer a number of times when he was married to Beverly.

Beverly's acting career was a major cause of friction: She was unhappy about being cast as Lulu in the play, first in Provincetown, and again five months later when the play opened in New York. She wanted to play Elena and believed Mailer had given the part to someone else to hold her down. Mickey Knox disagreed: "Norman never held her down," he said. "In fact, one of the reasons she did *Deer Park* was to put his wives into it" (Adele was the understudy for the role of Elena). Beverly said that Mailer put her down because "he doesn't want to share the limelight. He enjoys humiliating me." Her interpretation is both strengthened and weakened by Mailer's report on the play at the end of the summer to Uncle Louis and Aunt Moos: "We did it up here in Provincetown in a theater Beverly helped to start up (she is, by the way, a superb actress—was in me—I'm not used to other talent in the family." Beverly told Mary Dearborn that she had

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devoted herself "to running the (at times enormous) Mailer household. Norman's children from his previous marriages came and went, and there were always staffers and Norman's friends underfoot, waiting to be fed." Mailer said later that the marriage had "begun to wallow, then had sunk: his fourth wife, an actress, had seen her career drown in the rigors of managing so large a home." Although Beverly told an interviewer in the spring of 1967 that "Norman's career is the most important to me," she said later that his criticisms of her acting troubled her so much that "I began to feel I had no career." After they separated, Beverly went on to a long, successful acting career, mainly on the stage, well into her eighties.

Mailer had cut the play from five hours to two-and-a-half; he told Knox he had gotten rid of "all the lard." He now planned to mount the play the coming winter off-Broadway at the Theatre De Lys in the Village. As he said in another letter, "At least I'll be done finally with the play. Clear and shut after eight years. God." In addition to revising the play and writing *Vietnam* that summer, Mailer wrote a book review of *Rush to Judgment*, Mark Lane's long critique of the *Warren Commission Report*. Lane's contention is that the Commission "had no intention of trying to find any other assassin than Oswald." He didn't quibble with the Commission's massive assemblage of fact, nor did he accuse it of suppressing information. Rather, he faulted it for presenting the evidence so that it "fitted a bed of Procrustes." His suspicion was that the Soviets had made Oswald their minion as the price of allowing him to return home after two years in Minsk. He proposed that a "literary commission supported by public subscription" and headed by someone of the stature of Edmund Wilson or Dwight Macdonald be formed to resift the material in the 26 volumes, as well as follow untouched leads. As he said at the end of his review, "The game is not over. Nor the echo of muffled drums. Nor the memory of the riderless

horse." His proposal found no backers. But Mailer persisted, and became, with some help from Jean Malaquais, his own commission of investigation. It would take him another 30 years to reach the end of his obsession.

The Mailers stayed on through the early fall in Provincetown and when they left he had finished a penultimate draft of the play and completed *Vietnam*. With his work done, he dictated replies to 100-odd letters. He wrote to Arnold Kemp and Eldridge Cleaver about their upcoming paroles, offering to help both; and brought Louis and Moos up to date on the family: "Michael is all box-office, narcissistic, brilliant, spoiled, electric, frightening, sexy, a complete self-starter, and Steve all attraction and reaction, soft smiles and chuckles and fun. They're going to make a great pair, knock on wood." He told Hellman about the New York production of the play ("Don't warn me—I know, I know, but theatre is a disease"), exchanged thank you notes with Mayor Lindsay, and informed Paul Carroll that he would do a *Playboy* interview ("I hate playing second fiddle to a tit, which is one reason I've never written for Playboy." He agreed to Aldridge's request that he set up a depository for his papers, but said that if he was going to write his biography, he had to understand that the biggest psychological turning point in his life was not *Dream* (as Aldridge ~~with some justice~~ believed), but *The Deer Park* because he almost "died of a bad liver writing it but cured my liver as a result of rewriting it." One of the longest letters was to Knox in Italy offering him \$200 a week to play Collie Munshin in the new production. Mailer was underwriting the entire budget for the play, but wanted this kept a secret. He said if he could get Max Von Sydow or Nicol Williamson to play Eitel, then there was "an outside chance to make this the biggest thing to hit New York for years." Mailer didn't know how *not* to swing for

the fences. The Mailers were back in the city just in time to attend the social event of the year, Truman Capote's Black and White Ball.

Capote chose the Plaza Hotel for the event because he thought it had the most elegant ballroom of in the city. He invited 540 people (about 400 came), including a score of titled European nobility, neighbors from Long Island, and his New York doorman. Writers who attended the November 28 event included Hellman, Plimpton, Harper Lee, Baldwin, Arthur Miller, Buckley, Elizabeth Hardwick and Lowell, Marianne Moore, and John Steinbeck. Lauren Bacall, Henry Fonda, Frank Sinatra and Mia Farrow were there, and many other Hollywood stars. The daughters of three presidents—Alice Roosevelt Longworth, Margaret Truman Daniel and Lynda Bird Johnson—came as did several Kennedys, including the late president's mother, his two brothers, Ted and Robert, and two of his sisters, Jean Kennedy Smith and Pat Lawford Kennedy, with whom Mailer began a long friendship that night. President Johnson was not invited, nor was Gore Vidal.

According to his biographer, after the tremendous success earlier that year of *In Cold Blood*, Capote's nonfiction novel about the murder of a family in Kansas, he was cockier than Napoleon after Austerlitz. He drew great pleasure from deciding who would come and who not, and said he made 500 friends and 15,000 enemies. Formally ~~speaking~~, the event was a *bal masqué*, which required men to come in black tie with black masks, while women wore either black or white gowns and masks. The table linens were red. Masks were supposed to remain in place until midnight, but this rule was honored as much in the breach as the observance. The guest of honor was Mrs. Katherine Graham, the owner of *Newsweek* and the *Washington Post*.

She and Capote greeted guests at the door after they were announced to "the party of the century."

Over his tux, Mailer recalled, he was wearing a "dirty gabardine raincoat." Beverly wore a white fur wrap over a black dress. Mailer enjoyed himself tremendously, and called it one of the best parties of all time. Looking back on it, he said, "Everything felt anointed that night. Truman had certainly brought it off. It certainly was his greatest coup. For some, and I might be one of them, that party was even greater than any particular one of his books." McGeorge Bundy, President Johnson's National Security Advisor, was present, and Mailer could not resist inserting the Vietnam War into a conversation Bundy was having with Hellman. Harsh words were exchanged and Mailer invited him to step outside. "I was dissolute and full of drink. But I'd have killed him that night, I was so angry," he said. "I had a terrible argument with Lillian Hellman as a result. Because she overheard it, she stopped it. She was always such a celebrity fucker. It must be said of Lillian that when the chips were down she'd always go for the guy who had the most clout." The argument drove a wedge between them and they didn't speak for over a year. *Women's Wear Daily* gave Mailer the Worst-Dressed Award, a tribute to his memorable raincoat. When asked about the award many years later, he laughed and said, "How little they knew about how to murder me."

The ball was held on the same day that preparations for the play began. Mailer wrote to Yamanishi to tell him about the play's upcoming premiere, and that it would be published by Dial Press in mid-1967. Dial had paid him \$20,000, a high price for a play that had not yet had a full-scale production. After casting and "ten stunning maniacally depressive days of rehearsal" under director Leo Garen, the play opened on January 31, 1967. In his introduction to the

published version, Mailer said that the play was "perhaps the dearest work of all my work," even more so that the novel from which it grew. It was, he hoped, funnier, sadder, more tragic and possessed of more layers. "If the compass was obligatorily more narrow, the well was being dug to a deeper water." He now had a play with 13 characters and 88 brief scenes (a huge electronic tote board displayed the scene number, counting down to zero) in two acts. Continuity was spotty in a play that went, Mailer said, "from explosion to explosion," as rapid as the cuts in a film. The play was a bastard, he wrote, the offspring of a "realistic play and that electric sense of transition which lives in the interruptions and symbols of *The Theatre of the Absurd*." The cast was solid, not dazzling; there was no one of the caliber of Max Von Sydow or Nicol Williamson. But Mailer, who did the casting, had some pros: Hugh Marlow as Eitel, Will Lee as the Hollywood magnate, Herman Teppis and, as Marion Faye, Rip Torn, an impressive young actor who would win an Obie for his role. Beverly continued as Lulu, and Buzz Farbar as the orgiast, Don Beda. A relative unknown, Rosemary Tory, played Elena, the female lead, and Mickey Knox was Collie Munshin, Teppis' comically unprincipled son-in-law. Mailer thought the play as staged could not be immediately understood, and was worried, therefore, about the critics.

The first reviews were generous, if not superlative, with praise, especially of Lee as the marvelously fraudulent Teppis, "a twin tower of sentimentality and ruthlessness" who is such a shameless vice figure, Walter Kerr wrote in the *Times*, that the audience is happy to see him return. Later notices were not as good, even though Mailer gave lengthy interviews to the *Village Voice* and the *New York Post*. He also published "A Statement of Aims by the Playwright" in the *Voice* and, 10 days before the premier, a long essay on the front page of the drama section of the Sunday *New York Times* explaining the difficulties of hammering it into shape through four

rewrites over 10 years. He said the play's fate will be decided in "the electric hour when the drama reviewer sprints from the theater, snatches his opening lead from the well-tuned bag of his wit, and is off to his desk, say, say, his guillotine." He ends his piece, titled "Mr. Mailer Hands Out the Cigars," by saying that the cigar's band reads: "Be advised the actors speak so clearly you need not miss a line." Walt Whitman wrote anonymous reviews of *Leaves of Grass*; Mailer didn't go this far, but he did provide all the leads, prompts, nudges and background information—a fully packed press kit—needed to make the work of reviewers easier, as well as implying that those of taste and sagacity would be the ones to most appreciate his play. "I wanted the critics to feel self-conscious at the opening," he said. "You have to hustle."

On opening night, he threw a huge party. Over 500 people crowded into the Mailers' Brooklyn apartment, where a rock and roll band played from a perch under the skylight. Mailer did brief interviews with several invited newspaper columnists about opening night. One of them, Dick Schaap of the *New York Post*, quoted Mailer as saying that while it was too early to tell, "I think we've got a hit." At the end of February, he purchased a full-page ad in the *Times*, and to celebrate the show's 100th performance at the end of April, he persuaded Dial Press to host a Village block party, with free food, drink, music and a pep talk from Mailer. By this time, however, the 300-seat Theatre De Lys was only half-full for most performances.

He did everything possible to promote the play, beating "his own drum to shreds" as one reviewer put it but, finally, it was only a middling success. Why? First, the play has 13 characters each of whom has a rich history, so "the complicated story needs vast quantities of exposition." Second, the play is set during the Korean War and the characters, now residing in some antechamber of hell, are remembering everything. The action is over; the inmates are serving

their sentences. Third, while the evil characters are vividly imagined, those with virtue are stale. As Walter Kerr, put it, "Mailer is a moralist and concerned with unmasking evil wherever he finds it, which is everywhere." So there is a great deal of laughter because "unmitigated evil invariably creates in the viewer a happy impulse to hilarity." But Eitel, the director who bewails his lost integrity, is "pompous and more than a bit foolish," Kerr says. Finally, several of the characters are philosophers and "spout philosophy and assorted Mailerisms," a practice known in France as preaching for your own saint (*prêcher pour son saint*). Faithful to his vision even as the audiences dwindled, Mailer continued to pump in money. "I hold on because . . . I don't know why—I just don't want to close it," he wrote to Knox. On May 21, after 127 performances, the play closed. He spent \$60,000.

Offsetting this money drain was income from four books he published in 1967. The first was a collection all of his previously published short stories, 19 of them, for a Dell paperback. The play's script, with a long introduction on the state of American theater (he spent two weeks seeing about a dozen plays in New York), came out in August, followed a month later by *Why Are We in Vietnam?*. Finally, in November, CBS/Macmillan published *The Bullfight*, an ill-conceived project, worked up in collaboration with Buzz Farbar. It consists of Mailer's 8,500-word profile of an iconoclastic Mexican *torero* known as "El Loco," a fine essay (and his first original piece in *Playboy*) that captures the magic of the "wild hour" of the Sunday bullfight, accompanied by 91 photographs of a bullfight. Accompanying the book is an LP record of Mailer reading part of the essay, and Hugh Marlow and Rosemary Tory reading Federico García Lorca's famous bullfighting poem, "Lament for Sánchez Mejías," which Mailer and his bilingual daughter Susan translated. The photos are small, often confusing, and do not follow one

particular fight, but several (but not El Loco's), making for a jerky presentation. The book and record came packed in a bulky, ugly plastic container that Mailer must have hated; the book was so poorly made that the front cover tended to split at the hinge. The few reviews were bad and the book, perhaps his least professional, disappeared quickly.

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That spring, the National Institute of Arts and Letters invited Mailer to become a member, but he had reservations. Letters went back and forth with Mailer expressing "reluctance" to accept. He was troubled that Henry Miller, Algren, Jones, Burroughs and Ginsberg were not members. Feeling, however, that it would be "ungracious" to his nominators to decline, he accepted membership. He later learned that Miller had been a member since 1957; Algren, Burroughs and Ginsberg were later elected. Mailer couldn't attend the welcoming dinner; he was giving anti-war speeches at several universities.

His exchange with the Institute occurred when the play was still selling out every night. Having seen it 50 times and watched the director make the necessary adjustments, he was getting bored talking to the actors about the nuts and bolts of stagecraft. Instead, he huddled with Farbar and Knox at a table in Casey's, a Village bar. They began creating characters: Mailer, "The Prince," was the leader of a Mafia gang; Knox was "Twenty Years," reflecting his two decades as an actor; Farbar was "Buzz Cameo" a reference to his brief role in the play. "We had absolutely fantastic stuff going as we were drinking," Mailer recalled. As Knox remembers it, "Norman suggested to Buzz and me that since we were so brilliantly witty during our nightly razzle-dazzle repartée, we should make a movie. He conceived of the premise: Three the mattresses (hood-talk for hiding out). That was it, leaving the field of action open

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while the hero keeps trying to rustle a sandwich together out of wax paper." The film is "almost unendurable," he said. *Wild 90* may be worse. Mailer, operating in what he once referred to as his "usual narcissistic fog," paid no attention to warnings about recording the sound properly, resulting in a film which "sounds," he said, "as if *everybody* is talking through a *jock strap*."

Mailer began editing the film almost immediately. "I just loved cutting," he said. "I loved the sort of—if you will—the metaphysical problems involved." The film premiered on January 7, 1968 at the New Cinema Playhouse in Manhattan. The reviews were abysmal. Pauline Kael, writing in the *New Yorker*, said that she had seen movies that were worse, but *Wild 90* was "the worst movie that I've stayed to see all the way through. It's terrible in ways that are portentous." Mailer said that the reviews were good for him. "I thought I was going to get a very pleasant reception," he said. "Instead, I got cockamamied in the alley. *Bam! Boom! Boy, those mothers!* I found out it was a tough racket." He had an idea for a second film dealing with relationship of the police and criminals, an idea that ~~apparently~~ grew out of being interrogated at the West 100th Street police station after the stabbing. But he had to take a break from filmmaking. He had another commitment.

When he left for Provincetown in mid-May, his plan was to return to "First previous summer Scott Meredith had gotten him a \$450,000 advance from New American Library for a novel. It was an enormous sum, and strengthened his faith in Meredith's abilities. Mailer had been spending the advance freely, but had produced nothing. He had provided NAL neither an outline nor a sample chapter, only a line in the contract calling for "a novel dealing with aspects of the whole Jewish experience, European and American, in the past 100 years." MBM 301-03 MBM 302

But he was unable to write. Bill Walker wrote him a letter from prison and Mailer wrote back to

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send him a check; he added that he usually had trouble getting anything done while waiting for the appearance of a new book (*Vietnam*). Another reason, he told Carpenter, was that he had gotten "far too concerned" with his movies: "It's such fun making movies." And it kept him away from his wife. He and Beverly had "fallen on dull, chilly days," and he kept slipping away to New York to edit the film. Even the news that Styron was publishing a major new novel, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, failed to put him in a competitive mood. He told Knox that Styron was "putting out peace feelers to him," but he was not receptive. He was concerned about Jones, however. His new novel, *Go to the Widow-Maker*, had been pummelled in the reviews. Mailer asked Knox to tell Jones that he planned to read the novel and to ignore the reviews. He added that he had a hunch that the reason the critics had been so hard on Jones was because he had praised him so highly in *Cannibals*. He knew this sounded like "paranoia, megalomania," but he sensed that "all those little fucks out there" were dying to prove Norman Mailer wrong.

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Even as he was trying and failing to extend "First-Born," and sporadically editing the film, he had several other projects percolating. The first concerned Malaquais. A few weeks before leaving for Cape Cod, he had awakened one morning with "an extraordinary idea." On the spot, he wrote to his friend in France and offered him \$6,000 for a year's full-time work. He outlined the job: a re-examination of the Kennedy assassination based on a careful re-reading of the *Warren Commission Report*. His hunch was that the murder had been committed by one or more petty conspirators, and Oswald, probably an agent for the FBI and the CIA, as well as a couple of foreign countries, was one of them. The Commission's proceedings, therefore, were "a series of attempts to conceal by multitudinous layers of meaningless evidence the simple contradictions attaching to the embarrassments of the various secret policemen when lo and

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behold one of their boys seemed to be at the gun." In addition to the \$6,000, Mailer offered him the profits of any book that might come of his "detective" work, as he called it. It was Malaquais, he reminded him, who had recited Trotsky's dictum: Find the truth by comparing the lies. Malaquais accepted and Mailer mailed him his review of *Rush to Judgment*, where he first calls the work of the Commission a cover-up.

Mailer had done the *Playboy* interview with Paul Carroll, and in July, one of the magazine's top editors, Nat Lehrman, sent him the edited version for his approval. Lehrman thought Mailer was too "metaphorical" and "elliptical" in places. In his reply, Mailer said that, yes, it was true that he was "far from crystal-clear." He was not disposed to elaborate, however, merely to please the readers of the magazine. He had avoided writing for *Playboy* until recently, he said, because of "the literality, blandness, and overdedicated organizational exposition of the magazine's style." He preferred to write pieces that made readers work a bit to understand; he wanted them to be "slightly puzzled and slightly nettled" at certain points. *Playboy* backed off and the interview, one of his most important, with extended comments Vietnam, appeared in January 1968. He was also asked to review a new book by Norman Podhoretz, a memoir titled *Making It*. Shortly afterwards, Podhoretz who was now, along with Cy Rembar and Steven Marcus, one of Mailer's literary executors, brought a copy to Provincetown. Mailer read it forthwith and told Podhoretz that he liked it, but also ^{had some criticisms.} told him what was wrong with it. But, with other projects pending, he would not write his review for several months.

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The first reviews of *Vietnam* began to appear just as the Mailers returned to New York in fall 1967. They were almost as good as for *Cannibals*, with ~~3~~ Aldridge in *Harper's* and reviewers in the *Voice*, *Times*, *Newsweek* and the *NYRB* proclaiming the novel to be a near-

masterpiece. Favorable comparisons with Joyce were made, but there were the usual detractors. *Saturday Review*'s Granville Hicks was grave in his disapprobation of "the proportion of the once forbidden Anglo-Saxon monosyllables to other and more conventional words." *National Review* was outraged, and *Time*'s anonymous reviewer found the book to be "a wildly turgid monologorrhea" narrated by D.J. The novel, however, is not a monologue; it has two narrators, D. J., or Ranald David Jethroe, a white teenager from Dallas who claims to be "Disc Jockey to the world," and his alter ego, a crippled black "genius brain from Harlem pretending to write a white man's fink fuck book." The chapters alternate between the two. Both use a super-abundance of scatological humor, and we never learn which narrator is wearing the mask, or if both are. "The fact of the matter," D.J. says, "is that you're up tight with a mystery, me, and this mystery can't be solved because I'm in the center of it, and I don't comprehend, not necessarily, I could be traducing myself." The two narrators relish the mix-up.

But what many reviewers found more compelling than his scatological ventriloquisms was what Denis Donoghue called Mailer's "remarkable feeling for the sensory event." One such passage comes after Tex has shot a wolf and Big Ollie, the Indian guide, gives him and D.J. a cup of blood to drink. It had "a taste of fish, odd enough, and salt, near to oyster sauce and then the taste of wild meat like an eye looking at you in the center of a midnight fire." Big Ollie takes a taste of the blood, and then cuts the head off and turns it for them to see:

There were two eyes open on El Lobo, both yellow coals of light, but one eye was Signor Lupo, the crazy magician in the wolf, and his eye had the pain of the madman who knows there's a better world but he is excluded, and then the other eye, Willie Wolf, like a fox's eye, full of sunlight and peace, a harvest sun on late

afternoon field, shit! it was just an animal eye like the glass they use for an eye in a trophy, no expression, hollow peace maybe, and Big Ollie dug a shallow pan of a hole with his knife in the crust bog tundra, whatever that dry shit moss was, and set the wolf's head in it, muzzle pointing to the north, and covered it over. Then he took a broken twig and laid it in a line with the end of the muzzle, but pointing further North, then got down on his hands and knees and touched his nose to the stick.

Ollie has paid his respects to the wolf. How Mailer was able to imagine this scene after only five days in Alaska two years earlier is a mystery and a marvel. As Henry James said when asked for advice to novelists, "Write from experience, and experience only, I should feel that this was a rather tantalizing monition if I were not careful immediately to add, Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!" *Vietnam* was later nominated for the National Book Award, a reflection not only of its moving depiction of the Alaska wilderness, but also its implicit anti-war message. *Vietnam* is mentioned on the novel's last page, when we learn that Tex and D.J. have enlisted and are going to Vietnam.

In early October he started work on the new film, *Beyond the Law*. He co-produced it with Farbar (although Mailer put up all the money), and is listed in the credits as the director, although there was no script and almost no direction given. Actors were given an identity and told to wing it. Joining Pennebaker were two new filmmakers, Jan Welt, and Nicholas Proferes. As with *Wild 90*, it was shot over four nights, but this time Mailer used three film crews and reliable sound equipment. The lead, played by Mailer, is an Irish-American vice squad lieutenant, Francis Xavier Pope, and one camera crew moves with him as he makes his station

X house rounds on a weekend evening. The other two crews worked simultaneously in other parts of the building, meaning that interrogations going on in one part of the precinct were interrupted by loud interactions in other parts. "The intensity of this process," Mailer wrote, "camera, actors, and scenes working simultaneously on the same floor (which is about the way matters proceed in a police station) conceivably worked a magic on the actors." Mailer thought that he had "divined and/or blundered onto the making of the best American movie about the police he had ever seen." His fundamental idea, which grows out of his existential ^{ism} beliefs, was that "people who were able to talk themselves in and out of trouble," if allowed to speak naturally in certain situations, and not required to memorize anything, could turn in unusual performances.

The cast included several professionals—Rip Torn (a freaked-out Hell's Angel), Beverly (Pope's wife), and Knox (another detective)—and two dozen more, all amateurs. Buzz Farbar also played a detective; George Plimpton was the mayor of New York, inspecting the precinct; playwright Jack Richardson was impressive as an icy gambler; and Mailer's Provincetown friend, poet Eddie Bonetti, was a very convincing ax murderer. Michael McClure was another Hell's Angel, and a stockbroker, Tom Quinn, was the station sergeant. A young woman named Lee Roscoe, who would work closely with Mailer on his next film, and with whom he had an affair, played a college girl who was a weekend dominatrix. Hal Conrad and his wife Mara Lynn had parts, as did Torres and two other boxers, Roger Donoghue, and Joe Shaw, a rising welterweight. Quinn, along with Mailer, Pete Hamill, Plimpton, and a few others were for a time Shaw's financial backers, although his career was brief. The cast, therefore, was a haphazard olio of writers, actors, lovers, poets, gamblers and boxers. Mailer drew on Brendan Behan's persona for his role. In his review, Roger Ebert said, "He's not only convinced that he can act, but that he

can play an Irish cop named Francis Xavier Pope and do it with an Irish accent. He can do none of the three," but watching him try is a "hilarious spectacle." Vincent Canby found Mailer to be "slightly manic" in a film that was "good and tough and entertaining" in its presentation of "the existential relationship between cop and crook," and compared it favorably to recent Hollywood detective films. Pennebaker said that the film influenced scriptwriters for television dramas (*Hill Street Blues* and *Law and Order* come to mind), and that it was "a real course in filmmaking for Hollywood" because it demonstrated how the cops "are sort of a counterpart to the crooks. Both sides are both good and bad."

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Wild 90 was more or less finished by the time *Beyond the Law* was shot, and Mailer was eager to begin editing the new film. He had reduced the eleven hours of raw footage by half when he got a call from Mitchell Goodman, an old friend with a "lugubrious conscience." Goodman wanted him to take part in an anti-war protest in Washington in October. When Mailer said he had no desire to stand around listening to dull speeches by pacifists, Goodman said this protest would be different. The plan was to "invade the corridors of the Pentagon," try to shut it down. In the opening of his account of the March on the Pentagon, *The Armies of the Night*, Mailer wrote that Goodman's words gave him no pleasure; he sensed "one little bubble of fear tilt somewhere about the solar plexus." Despite his reservations, he agreed to participate.

Edward De Grazia, a lawyer he had met in Boston when testifying for *Naked Lunch*, was also involved in the March. He picked Mailer up at the airport on October 19, two days before

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the March, and while driving him to his Washington hotel, the Hay-Adams, explained the situation. There was no central organizing committee, no hierarchy, and relations among the participating groups was strained. Communication was spotty, although there was agreement on a kick-off rally for the March at the Lincoln Memorial, one similar to the gathering four years earlier where Martin Luther King had given his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. Negotiations with the various governmental units on all aspects of the protest were ongoing, but meanwhile 50,000 or more marchers were en route to the city. Also on their way were U.S. Marshals, the National Guard and regular army units, all to reinforce Washington police. At this point, De Grazia said, things "are not in focus."

Neither was Mailer. On the one hand, he was being compared to Joyce as a literary artist, and called a sage for his subtle intimations of the nation's fears, follies and enervating addictions. On the other, he was thought to be loose cannon, vulgar, violent and weird, spouting ideas about orgasms and existentialism that resembled the most outrageous theories of Wilhelm Reich. While there was some consistency to his jeremiads, there was little among his novels, which appeared to have been written by five different novelists. He counted Bill Buckley as one of his best friends, but he was also close to Jerry Rubin and later, Abbie Hoffman, although he was critical of some of the actions of the Yippies (short for Youth International Party), an anarchist group which Rubin and Hoffman helped found at the end of 1967. A convicted felon, he was the devoted father of six. He had irreproachable anti-war credentials that made him a hero among the young, but he wore three-piece suits made in London. He was "modestly promiscuous" in his drinking and use of marijuana, but made his daughter Susan, a freshman at Barnard, promise she would use no drugs until she graduated. The jacket of *Vietnam*

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showed two photos of him, one with a terrific shiner, and the other with his hair as neatly coifed as his father's. Beneath was a question, "Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up?" One of Mailer's ancillary purposes in writing *The Armies of the Night*, was to do something about his image, not smooth the wrinkles—he loved his contradictions too much—but give his audience a few metaphors for appreciating what he called his "endless blendings of virtue and corruption."

In the opening pages of *Armies*, after a quick sketch of the rival factions of his psyche, he describes his attempts to shape the way he is seen by the media:

He had learned to live in the sarcophagus of his image—at night, in his sleep, he might dart out and paint improvements on the sarcophagus. During the day, while he was helpless, newspapermen and other assorted bravos of the media and the literary world would carve ugly pictures on the living tomb of his legend. Of necessity, part of Mailer's remaining funds of sensitivity went right into the war of supporting his image and working for it.

The passage captures Mailer's testy relations with the media, but also reveals that the health of his self-image relied to some extent on blandishments from his dreaming self, his unconscious.

In the "leisurely twilight," as Ed De Grazia drives him to his hotel, the Hay-Adams, Mailer observed the "tender Southern city" and sighed, for "like most New Yorkers, he usually felt small in Washington." There was no thought in his head about his centrality to the upcoming events, nor that he would write the definitive account of them, and none whatsoever that to do so he would borrow a form used by Emerson and Thoreau, described by Warner Berthoff as "the exploratory personal testament in which the writer describes how he has turned his life into a

practical moral experiment and put it out at wager according to the chances, and against the odds, peculiar to the public character of his time." Mailer merely wanted to do his bit in D.C., get arrested for the cause, pay his fine, and fly back to New York on Saturday night for an important party, one that, happily, he missed.

Again and again, for the greater part of his account of the March, Mailer the writer wheels into frame Mailer the Marcher (a.k.a. the Participant, the Novelist, the Ruminant, the Beast), and then comments humorously, obscenely, resignedly, unsparingly, and (rarely) solemnly on many salient aspects of his character and history, using, for example, his troubled marriage, timid youth in Brooklyn, army service, shifting political affiliations, and his relations with various literary figures—Paul Goodman, Robert Lowell and Dwight Macdonald, principally—as a means of presenting the drama of his three days in Washington. There is a problem, of course, with unbridled self-presentation in memoirs: readers get irritated, or bored. Mailer addressed the matter by changing "I" to "he," or one of the names just noted, and by this simple shift giving himself sanction to talk about Norman Mailer all the more. The device is unsettling at first, but soon works like a charm. He had dabbled with the thing it might be called, in his *Voice* columns and a few other places, but he said th

from editing *Wild 90*. Watching the film made him see himself "as a piece of material, as a piece of yard goods. I'd say: 'Where am I going to cut myself?'" Mailer's evolution as a writer follows step by step, from *Naked* to *Armies*, his slowly growing awareness of the merits of desegregating his personal and his creative lives.

At the outset of the narrative, he uses a cathedral to describe himself. Architectural metaphors abound in *Armies*, a reflection of Mailer's interests and the unusual shape of the

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building the protestors hope to engage—at one point, he compares the Pentagon to the colossal architecture of ancient Egypt. His boldness, his fits of shyness, his good manners, and the fact that he is often brusque, makes him conclude that “the architecture of his personality bore resemblance to some provincial cathedral which warring orders of the church might have designed separately over several centuries, the particular cathedral falling into the hands of one architect, then his enemy.” Not much further on, he extends the architectural imagery by stating that his complex personality “serves willy-nilly as the bridge—many will say the *pons asinorium*—into the crazy house, the crazy mansion” of that historic moment when American citizens marched on a bastion of the nation’s military might in order to “wound it *symbolically*”:

So if the event took place in one of the crazy mansions, or indeed *the* crazy house of history, it is fitting that any ambiguous comic hero of such a history should be not only off very much to the side of the history, but that he should be an egoist of the most startling misproportions, outrageously and often unhappily self-assertive, yet in command of a detachment classic in severity (for he was a novelist and so in need of studying every last lineament of the fine, the noble, the frantic, and the foolish in others and in himself). Such egotism being two-headed, thrusting itself forward the better to study itself, finds itself therefore at home in a house of mirrors, since it has habits, even the talent, to regard itself.

Mailer-now, the writer, observes Mailer-then, the marcher. Although they share the same name and antecedents, they have slightly different sensibilities—Mailer-now has done a bit more, and is in a position to appreciate the small-mindedness and misapprehensions, as well as the generosity and acuity of vision of his former self, a protagonist, as Mailer said later, who was

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 “half-heroic and three quarters comic.” Mailer-then fumbles and fulminates; he is in flux; but he also sees clearly and acts boldly. Mailer-then took no notes, but remembered well, as Lowell later told Macdonald: “Curious, when you’re with X [another novelist], you think he’s so sensitive and alert and then you find later he wasn’t taking in anything, while Norman seems not to pay much attention but now it seem he didn’t miss a trick—and what a memory!”

A scene between Mailer and Lowell at a party before the March will illustrate. Lowell has just finished telling Mailer that he and his wife think Mailer is the “finest journalist in America.” Having received a postcard from Lowell to this effect, he is aware of the poet’s high opinion, He suspects, however, that Lowell sends out many postcards.

X ✓ The first card he’d ever received from Lowell was on a book of poems, *Deaths for the Ladies and other disasters* it had been called, and many people had thought the book a joke which whatever its endless demerits, it was not. Not to the novice poet at least. When Lowell had written that he liked the book, Mailer next waited for some word in print to canonize his thin tome; of course, it never came. If Lowell were to begin to award living American poets in critical print, two hundred starving worthies could in fairness hold out their bowl before the escaped Novelist would deserve his turn. Still, Mailer was irked. He felt he had been part of a literary game. When the second card came a few years later telling him he was the best journalist in America, he did not answer. Elizabeth Hardwick, Lowell’s wife, had just published a review of *An American Dream in Partisan Review* which had done its best to disembowel the novel. Lowell’s card might have arrived with the best of motives, but its timing suggested to Mailer an

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exercise in neutralmanship—neutralize the maximum of possible future risks.

Mailer was not critically equipped for the task, but there was always the distant danger that some bright and not unauthoritative voice, irked at Lowell's enduring hegemony, might come along with a long lance and presume to tell America that posterity would judge Allen Ginsberg to be the greater poet.

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This was all desperately unfair to Lowell who, on the basis of two kind cards, was now judged by Mailer to possess an undue unchristian talent for literary logrolling. But then Mailer was prickly. When Mailer and Lowell meet in Washington, the poet repeated his remark. "Yes, Norman, I really think you are the best journalist in America." Mailer replied that he sometimes thought he was "the best writer in America." Lowell, now on the defensive, replied, "Oh, Norman, oh, certainly," he said, "I didn't mean to imply, heavens no, it's just that I have such respect for good journalism." Mailer answered with "false graciousness" that writing a good poem was much more difficult.

Despite the unusual, even eccentric, nature of this point of view, which Mailer remembered from reading *The Education of Henry Adams* at Harvard, its assumptions and purposes are apparent. Anyone familiar with the modern novel recognizes the double perspective used by the best writers show us the world through the eyes of their characters without effacing their narrators. A fictional character, one who is changing before our eyes, is being presented. ~~in~~ The third person personal allowed Mailer to present his sometimes brave, sometimes clownish, sometimes earnest, often peckish, invariably opinionated, regularly comic and usually honest self without necessarily sounding as if he is preaching for his own saint. By writing about himself instead of a fictional look-alike, Mailer is nevertheless obliged by his point of view to write

about some aspects of the real world of events, in this case, a large civil protest with an uncertain outcome. Half of the genius of the book resides in the fact that Mailer's sight extends so clearly to the circumference of his awareness. "The eye is the first circle," says Emerson, "the horizon which it forms is the second." In *Armies*, we see, as it were, the structure of Mailer's eye and the angles of his vision on various aspects of the March, extending to its periphery with glimpses beyond. He is an intrepid explorer of his own psyche, but his explorations in this narrative (and the five that follow it through 1975), lead us closer, not further away from the problems of the Republic.

Only Mailer could depict himself so clearly while also tackling such a variety of reportorial and analytic tasks—for example, presenting an authoritative analysis of the near-final demise of the Old Left and its "sound-as-brickwork logic-of-the-next-step" polemical abstractions, and the rise of the New Left with its focus on the most immediate injustices in the nation. As one of the youngest of the Old Left figures, and godfather to the New, Mailer weighs the assets and liabilities of both, firing commentary from his existential Gatling gun at a long line of emerging or revitalized causes, beginning with poverty and civil rights and ending with sexual freedom, free speech and environmentalism. The New Left's alphabet soup of groups, he notes, share these causes almost randomly except for a fierce opposition to the war, the sole commonly held cause of all the constituent groups.

As one scholar, Sandy Vogelgesang, has noted, the March on the Pentagon was the symbolic event that "marked the move from dissent to resistance." Before the March, many Leftist intellectuals questioned whether such actions could result in any real change; Mailer himself wondered about its effectiveness when he spoke to Mitchell Goodman at the beginning

of *Armies*. But the March became a firebrand that ignited other acts of resistance, and while tracing its influence with precision may be impossible, it was and is written about and cited repeatedly. Most of the major figures who marched with Mailer—Noam Chomsky, Dr. Spock, Goodman, Lowell, Macdonald, and Yale chaplain, Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Jr. continued to participate in various anti-war activities. Nothing written about the March (and ^{arguably} ~~probably~~ nothing written about resistance to the Vietnam War) had a more forceful impact on turning the tide of opinion against the war. As Vogelgesang puts it, "Future historians must consult Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* to understand how and why the American Intellectual Left moved to 'resistance' against Johnson's Vietnam War and, in fact, to comprehend the radicalized intellectual consciousness of the 1960s."

One of the themes of *Armies* is Mailer's rumination on the March as the beginning of a long war. He draws on memories of his combat experience as a guide to the struggle he foresees, hopes for, and dreads, as well as his awareness of the nearby battlefields of Bull Run, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. Walking together on the morning of the march, he and Lowell and Macdonald are in good spirits, "for the war spoke of future redemptions." The day is clear, "and the thin air! wine of Civil War apples in the October air! edge of excitement and awe—how would this day end? No one could know." Mailer is 44 years old and it has taken him all of his years "to be able to enjoy his pleasures where he found them, rather than worry about those pleasures which eluded him," and yet now he might face imprisonment for civil disobedience. If he was too old to be a revolutionary a la Castro, living in a mountain camp as a guerilla, he was also "too incompetent" and "too showboat, too lacking in essential judgment—besides, he was too well known!"

He would pay for the pleasures of his notoriety in the impossibility of disguise. No gun in the hills, no taste for organization, no, he was a figurehead, and therefore he was expendable, said the new modesty—not a future leader, but a future victim: *there* would be his real value. He could go to jail for protest, and spend some years if it came to it, possibly his life, for if the war went on, and America put its hot martial tongue across the Chinese border. Well, jail was the possible perspective, detention camps, disassociation centers, liquidation alleys, that would be his portion, and it would come about the time he had learned how to live.

The three men agree on their expendability, and conclude that after leading the March, they should get arrested as soon as practicable. After much frustration in crossing the bridge into Virginia in some semblance of orderly rows and files, the unruly army of protestors debouches into a road leading to the Pentagon. The column disintegrates as they arrive. Mailer feels ennobled and happy “as if finally one stood under some great arch in the mythical vault of history.” The sense of a nation divided liberated “some undiscovered patriotism in him so that he felt a sharp searing love for his country at this moment, and on this day, crossing some divide in his own mind wider than the Potomac, a love so lacerated he felt as if a marriage were being torn and children lost.” He is ready to act and reflects on why soldiers in the front line of battle are ready to die: “there is a promise of some swift transit; one’s soul feels clean.” He steps over a low rope (“It was as if the air had changed, or light had altered; he felt immediately much more alive—yes, bathed in air—and yet disembodied from himself, as if indeed he were watching

himself in a film"), and within minutes is arrested. Lowell and Macdonald hesitate, miss their opportunity, and fly back to New York. Mailer goes to jail.

The remainder of the first part of the narrative, "History as a Novel," is given over to Mailer's adventures while incarcerated. The next morning, unshaved, unkempt and "feeling like the people's choice between Victor McLaglen and Harpo Marx," he appears before a magistrate who fines him \$50, gives him a 30-day sentence (25 days suspended), and releases him on \$500 bail (he will appeal the decision). He has missed the dinner party—hosted we finally learn, by Lowell and Elizabeth Hardwick—which "had every promise of being wicked, tasty, and rich." Mailer's time in the federal workhouse in Occoquan, Virginia, was none of these things, but it enabled him to meet a variety of fellow protestors, guards and minor officials; he gives quick intaglio portraits of several, and a longer one of a member of the American Nazi party, with whom he nearly comes to blows. None of these match Mailer's high-relief depiction of Lowell, one of the narrative's greatest assets.

In 1969, when a friend asked him if he was embarrassed by Mailer's description of him, he replied, "No, in fact I was quite flattered. Norman didn't have to say all that about me." Writing to Mailer right after he had read the first part of *Armies*, Lowell said, "I've been trying to shake off mannerisms etc. you note. Of course one can't. Probably I am more sharply outlined, Bostonish, noble, sorrowful in Mailer than in life." Mailer's account—which Lowell pointedly says is *not* journalism, but comedy and history, "seems as true as one could ask." Two years later, he said that while Mailer had made him "a Quixote in the retinue of Sancho Panza," it was still "the best, almost the only thing written about me as a living person." He goes on to say that he and Mailer were not close before the March, but became so afterwards, and that he had

written to him to say he hoped that they would "remain as good friends in life as in fiction."

Lowell later published a collection of brief poems, *Notebook, 1967-68*, which includes two on the March, and another, "For Norman Mailer." It begins with a jibe at "the 9 A.M. man," the corporation man whose heart is a watch and who "imagines being paid for being on time."

Mailer is the counter figure at the end of the poem: "Norman Mailer, / his wardrobe two identical straight blue suits / and two blue vests to prove monotony, / disproves the many false faces I see as one." The inscription on Mailer's copy reads, "For Norman, This brief though true return for your kind portrait, from Cal."

Lowell had another observation on *Armies*. He said it was possible that "the form of the book came from me. Not from anything I said but from contrasting me symbolically with himself." This contrast starts in the opening pages and continues right up until Mailer is arrested. After the party where they joust, Mailer and Lowell move on to the Ambassador Theater, where they speak at a fundraiser. Mailer, the "Prince of Bourbon," drinking from a borrowed mug, observes his friend as they wait to go on. Lowell had "the expression on his face of a dues payer who is just about keeping up with the interest on some enormous debt." He looked most unhappy with the bad acoustics, the unruly crowd, and the cold floor and with the "fatally vulgar" Mailer. Lowell is perceived as possessing a mixture of strength and weakness, "a blending so dramatic in its visible sign of conflict that one had to assume he would be sensationally attractive to women." He was a man who would fight to the death for some causes, "with an axe in his hand and a Cromwellian light in his eye."

It was even possible that physically he was very strong—one couldn't tell at all—he might be fragile, he might have the sort of farm mechanic's strength which

could manhandle the rear axle and differential off a car and into the back of a pickup. But physical strength or no, his nerves were all too apparently delicate. Obviously spoiled by everyone for years, he seemed nonetheless to need the spoiling.

He looks over and gives what Mailer reads as a look of dismay, one which says, "Every single bad thing I have ever heard about you is not exaggerated." Mailer looks back, and thinks ruefully:

'You, Lowell, beloved poet of many, what do you know of the dirt and the dark deliveries of the necessary? What do you know of dignity hard-achieved, and dignity lost through innocence, and dignity lost by sacrifice for a cause one cannot name? What do you know about getting fat against your will, and turning into a clown of an arriviste baron when you would rather be an eagle or a count, or rarest of all, some natural aristocrat from these damned democratic states?

Mailer didn't participate in the March with the idea of writing about it. The event, therefore, unrolled naturally with no imaginative forcing which, like his time in the army and in Bellevue, was the kind of experience he found most valuable. When the March was over, his first thought was, "What a good short story I've got." He called Scott Meredith and told him what he had seen and done, and the ever-enterprising Meredith negotiated a \$10,000 article in *Harper's*, which the magazine's editor, Willie Morris, said was "an astronomical figure" for that time. Morris, who met Mailer in Austin in 1963 through Barbara Probst Solomon, moved in 1963 from the editorship of the *Texas Observer* to *Harper's*, and in 1967 published an acclaimed memoir, *North Toward Home*. As an associate editor, Morris had tried to

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get Mailer into *Harper's*, but his superiors rejected his recommendation. But Mailer's new stature changed things, and Morris arranged the deal with Meredith—20,000 words to be written in a month. Later that day, walking up Sixth Avenue, he ran into Mailer and Farbar. He told Mailer that he had spoken with Meredith. Immediately, Morris recalled, Mailer "crouched like a boxer—he used to do that a lot in those days, like he was shadowboxing with me—and he said, 'I know you did; I just talked to him. I'm going to Provincetown tomorrow, and I will have a great twenty thousand words in one month from today.'" m3m 321

Mailer wrote at breakneck speed, over 10,000 words a week, but not at first; he had difficulty getting traction. He became gloomy. "No book I wrote kept me in a more sustained bad mood (while doing it) than *The Armies of the Night*," he said. His deteriorating relationship with Beverly was one reason. Podhoretz's wife, Midge Decter, a *Harper's* editor at the time, visited Provincetown while he was writing *Armies*. She said that Beverly, who loved Provincetown, felt "isolated and bored" that winter. "She wasn't very happy with that month she put in; that was very clear." After a week or more of false starts, Mailer remembered that when Picasso began a new project, he had a way of "going off in a new direction. He was telling us a secret, which was that style is a tool by which you explore reality." *Time* magazine's brief piece on Mailer March, "A Shaky Start," gave him a handhold. Accompanied by a photo of him holding cup of bourbon, and mocking him for "mumbling and spewing obscenities" at the "scruffy Ambassador Theater," the piece made him sound like an incoherent fool, passing over entirely his humor and badinage with the audience, which "really tied the thing together," as De Grazia recalled. He praised Mailer's "excitement and energy" that night, and "this particular genius he has when he's drunk," something the *Time* stringer missed. "The average reporter," Mailer

don't know when this quote comes from.

wrote, "could not get a sentence straight if it were phrased more subtly than his own mind could make phrases. Nuances were forever being munched like peanuts." He began his narrative with *Time*'s 300-word squib followed by: "Now we may leave *Time* in order to find out what happened."

In his freshman English course at Harvard, Mailer read a long chapter from Adams' *The Education of Henry Adams* ("The Virgin and the Dynamo," probably) and, like most readers, was slightly puzzled by the perspective, but he had no memory of thinking of the book afterwards. Anyone that reads *Armies* and knows Adams' masterpiece, however, immediately sees the influence. "It's as if I were the great-grandson," Mailer wrote later. "Adams must have remained in my mind as a possibility, the way a painter might look at a particular Picasso or Cézanne and say to himself, 'That's the way to do it.' Yet the influence might not pop forth for twenty or thirty years. In effect, that's what happened with Henry Adams." But even after he was well into the account, he found that it took an effort of will to write every day. The point of view was "damned odd," he said, and he wrote half the book before he adjusted psychologically to this "dislocating way to regard oneself." Finally, he got used to it, and relished employing that "part of the ego that is superior to ourselves—that person who observes us carefully even as we are doing bizarre things, that special persona, possessed of immaculate detachment." By mid-November, the hand-written pages were piling up, and Mailer's secretary, Sandy Charlebois, had difficulty keeping up.

As Mailer worked in his third-floor study looking out at Long Point and the Provincetown harbor, Morris and Decter waited and worried in New York, while Meredith tried to sell the book version of a narrative he was hard pressed to describe. The New American

Library finally purchased it, but the advance was only \$25,000. Robert Gutwil
 said this was because NAL had "already laid out so much for the novel which wasn't being
 written"—referring to "First-Born"—and "nobody, including Norman, had any idea what kind of
 book it was going to be"—referring to *Armies*. On November 20, Mailer wrote to Yamanishi that
 he thought his account might reach 40,000 words. Sometime after this, Morris, who hoped to get
 Mailer's essay in the March issue of *Harper's*, called for a progress report. Mailer invited him
 and Decter to Provincetown. When they arrived in early January, the manuscript, some of it still
 on yellow legal pads, had grown enormously. "I was stunned," Morris said. "He had gone up
 there and hadn't had anything to drink for a month, leading a Spartan life with Beverly, and he
 had turned out this incredible ninety thousand words." Morris telephoned his managing editor,
 Robert Kotlowitz, to tell him and when Kotlowitz asked him how many words he wanted to run
 in March, he said "I think we should run all of it at once." Morris made the decision on the spot
 to run the longest piece ever published in an American magazine.

Working 12 and 14 hours a day, Mailer finished writing "The Nove
 after they arrived. The manuscript all but completed, Beverly cooked a cele
 which Mailer contributed his signature dish, mushrooms stuffed with duxel.
 known to take a drink, brought out a bottle of Wild Turkey bourbon. After dinner, Mailer took
 Morris and Decter on a drive around Provincetown in his jeep. It was snowing lightly and few
 lights were visible in the almost-deserted town. He drove down narrow, winding Commercial
 Street along the harbor to the town's center, past the tall stone memorial to the Pilgrims, and then
 on to the place where they had first landed before sailing to Plymouth, a spot occupied then and
 now by a huge, ghostly motel. From there, he drove to the state highway that separates the town

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"...all at once"

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"...run it all"

also in Morris NY Days

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I was stunned
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from the towering dunes of the Cape Cod National Seashore, as Morris recalled in his memoir, *New York Days*. It was snowing more as they turned off the highway.

On one especially precarious dune the vehicle stalled momentarily in the sand, and we had to push it. Mobile again, as we took turns with draws on the bottle, he began talking in the redneck Texas accent he said he had acquired from back-country Texans in the Army. He rolled out in prefaces to sentences a lot of twangy 'little ol's' while gesturing sharply with his arms. He said he liked southerners. 'Why did you say I had frizzy hair in that book [*North Toward Home*] you wrote?' he asked. 'Well,' I replied, 'because you do.' The motor of our conveyance began to buzz and hum a little, and the driver put his wary ear to the dashboard and said, 'I think this thing has tuberculosis.'

The only open bar in the town was at the local VFW post, and Mailer took Decter and Morris there for a drink. Morris offered a toast to the manuscript, which would be called "The Steps of the Pentagon," when it appeared in *Harper's*. Mailer said, "Look, I wish you'd stop praising it. It makes me edgy"—his unwillingness to welcome good luck too lavishly always hovered in the wings. Some months later, when Fan Mailer heard that *Armies* had won the Pulitzer Prize, she recalled, "I said, '*Umbashrien Got tsu danken!*'"—to ward off the evil eye. She said that her father had done the same when good things happened. "I had hoped he would win the prize, and then when he got two prizes, the National Book Award too, I said it again, a double *Umbashrien!*" As they drank, Mailer pushed Morris to publish the second part of *Armies*, the still unfinished, "History as a Novel," which recapitulates the entire story of the March in an objective, factual fashion. Morris told him that this 30,000-word piece would work well in book

form, but would be “only an afterthought” to the dramatic first part. Mailer disagreed, but was unable to convince him. He subsequently turned to his “old dear great and good friend Norman Podhoretz,” who agreed to publish it in *Commentary*’s April issue as “The Battle of the Pentagon.” When the threesome returned to the house, Beverly was searching for the needle of her stereo. She told Mailer that he had worked voodoo on the record player because he hated it. Mailer said nothing. He dedicated *Armies* to Beverly, but by then the marriage had taken another step toward its conclusion.



Shortly after he finished the second part of *Armies*, he began his review of Podhoretz’s *Making It*. He found that his initial estimate had changed for the worse. He had also read the reviews. Podhoretz’s thesis is that sexual lust, the “dirty little secret” of Victorian times (according to D. H. Lawrence), had been replaced by lust for success in society, and most certainly by his colleagues in *The Family*. He admits his own unqualified desire to be rich, famous and powerful in the memoir’s opening pages, and then goes on to relate his life story as it pertains to his career up to the age of 35 (he was born in 1930). The response of reviewers to Podhoretz’s revelation of his ambition, and his final admission—thought to be candid by him, considered to be crass by others—that the book itself was a “Mailer-like bid for literary distinction, fame, and money all in one package” was, he said later, “very nasty indeed.” Mailer’s review, which appeared in *PR* just before the second half of *Armies* appeared in *Commentary*, contained some positive comments about his friend’s “agreeable variety of aperçus on matters such as status, class, privilege and clan.” While it was not “a great or major book,”