

Mailer wrote, it was for the most part "very well written for much of its length." After these tentative plaudits, Mailer decimated the memoir.

Podhoretz felt betrayed. He knew that Mailer was reviewing the book, and thought that it would be positive, even a rave. A rave in *PR*, even one that appeared, as Mailer's did, three months after the book's publication, could offset the damage done by book's early reviewers, that "squalid yard of humpty-beaters and hard-ons," as Mailer referred to them. "Here I was," Podhoretz told Manso, "being beaten up all over the place, and instead of helping me when I was down, my great friend was giving me another kick in the ribs." Mailer's critique is two-fold, and depends to some extent on his own view of how *The Family* had all but abandoned its critical responsibilities in favor of an adoring but unspoken appreciation for the waves of Camp and Pop rolling across the country. His first point, however, is that is that Podhoretz had failed to see that in writing about himself in the motions of mid-career, he was, in effect, writing a novel. His obligation, therefore, had been to present "himself as a *literary* character, fully so much as any literary character in a work of undisputed fiction." Mailer does not say—nor does Podhoretz seem to have noticed in his scab-picking rejoinders to the review—that Mailer is also referring, implicitly, to the protagonist of *Armies*, his own just-completed work of self-portrayal, clearly labeled as a hybrid of the novel and history. Such an amalgam is tricky, Mailer said, because readers will respond to such a character much the same way they react to characters in a novel. "One is advancing and endangering one's career" by taking on such a challenge,

the book is now a protagonist in the progress of one's success. Self-interest naturally slants a word here, literary honesty bends it back there. One does not know whether to tell the little lie or shrive oneself. An overload of choices

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descends on the brain of any ambitious man engaged in giving a contentious portrait of himself. Yet that is not even the worst of the difficulty. The real woe is that one is forced to examine oneself existentially, perceive oneself in the act of perceiving (but worse, far worse—though the act of perceiving, perceive a Self who may manage to represent the separate warring selves by a Style).

The connection is not made and Podhoretz fails to present himself as an American Julien Sorel, a young man from the provinces possessed of a frenzy for riches and renown, and the audacity to seize them. Instead, the reader is “forced to jog along on the washboard road of a memoir,” and consequently loses all interest when Podhoretz provides the dreary bureaucratic details of his climb to the editorship of *Commonweal*. All that remains are “sketchy anecdotes, abortive essays, isolated insights, and note of the drone—repetitions.” The potential of presenting “interplay between ambitious perception and society” is lost, and Podhoretz’s “dirty little secret” loses its force in what becomes a “muted limited account of a young provincial.”

“Podhoretz apes Mailer, but he is no Mailer. He is, in the end, a small bore,” states Robert Kirsch in his review of *Making It*. He lacked the narrative sophistication to write his memoir as Mailer wished him to, but this is not surprising. He was a critic, not a novelist, and it seems somewhat unreasonable to have asked him to write his book according to the specifications of an accomplished novelist who has discovered after twenty years of assiduous effort an innovative way to present himself in nonfiction. But Mailer’s other major criticism is quite fair, and devastating. Podhoretz displays a fatal weakness in the book: he flatters The Family instead of revealing the byzantine contours of its envious and brilliant self-aggrandizements. Mailer lists 33 Family members and notes that references to each are

"invariably as attractive as the sort of remark one makes when giving a reference to a Foundation for a friend." His portraits are "full of sugar"; he depicts "an Establishment composed of the kindest folk: into their ranks enters an ambitious Provincial—what a novel!" Podhoretz, Mailer concludes, "deserted his possibilities as thoroughly as if Stendhal had presented the family of Mademoiselle de la Mole as charming."

Eventually Podhoretz recovered from Mailer's review, and went on to become a major figure in the neoconservative movement, having abandoned his earlier radical-liberal stance. In later years, he said the U.S. had sacrificed its honor by leaving Vietnam, chided President Reagan for being soft on the Soviets, supported President George W. Bush's Iraq War, and argued that the U.S. should invade Iran. How far the pendulum moved can be seen in his 2010 editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, where he states that he would "rather be ruled by the Tea Party than the Democratic Party, and I would rather have Sarah Palin sitting in the Oval Office than Barack Obama." Podhoretz became an American Coriolanus, vociferous in defense of what he had previously opposed. But in the spring of 1968, he was depressed and bitter, as he stated in a hand-written letter to Mailer. The review was devastating, he said, chiefly because he was relying on his dear friend, of all people, to say something about *Making It* that would offset all the nasty reviews. He was also bothered that Mailer seemed to judge the memoir as a literary performance, rather than an intellectual one, a justifiable complaint given his comparative lack of interest in fiction, and the ability to write it.

After the review, their relationship slowly dissolved, but they saw each other occasionally. In 1979, Mailer invited Podhoretz to his home for dinner, and told him that he would like his new book, *The Executioner's Song*. Podhoretz answered by saying that Mailer

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"probably would dislike what I had written about him in his new book, *Breaking Ranks*. 'Well,' he said, 'you owe me one,' and I laughed and replied, 'Yes, I do.'" Afterward Podhoretz told his wife, who had helped edit *Armies*, that Mailer would never forgive him for *Breaking Ranks*. ~~He was right~~. They did not speak again for almost 20 years.

The quarrel, and *Making It*, was soon lost in the roar of acclaim for *Armies*. Besides the Pulitzer and the National Book Award, Mailer also won a George Polk Award for magazine reporting. Among the major reviews, only John Simon and Mario Puzo were negative—even *Time* was mildly approving—and when Willie Morris wrote to him about the honors for which it was being considered, Mailer replied, "Willie, if I ever get the Pulitzer Prize you realize that the cows are going to come home." Alfred Kazin's front-page review of *Armies* in the *NYTBR*, *Times Book Review* perhaps the most important and intelligent of the book's notices, described it as a "diary-essay-tract-sermon," and compared Mailer's self-presentation with that of "the best American writers of the 19th century [who] talked about themselves all the time—but, in the Romantic American line, saw the self as the prime condition of democracy." Kazin concluded with this thought: "Mailer's intuition is that the times demand a new form. He has found it." Published twenty years to the day after *The Naked and the Dead*, *The Armies of the Night* completely disarmed the literary world, and reaffirmed Mailer's genius. The paradox of his achievement is that in a narrative that sundered the protagonist into teller and told, Mailer-now and Mailer-then, he was able to unite all the actors, currents and rich particularities of the March, seeing them through the oppositions of his psyche. This division of self by fiat, the resolution of twenty years of point-of-view uncertainties, was a masterstroke and the most significant aesthetic decision of Mailer's career.

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Armies' triumph was a *success d'estime*, it did not make the best seller list, although it has remained in print since publication and appears on most lists of the greatest nonfiction books of the twentieth century. Mailer's family saw it as a happy endorsement of their son's talents. Barney and Fan came to the ceremony when Mailer was awarded the National Book Award in March of 1969. Robert J. Lifton, also from Brooklyn, received a N.B.A. in the sciences for his moving study, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima*, on the same night that Mailer received his in the arts and letters category. Lifton and his wife Betty Jean knew Mailer and Beverly from summers on Cape Cod. Lifton recalled the ceremony, where they met Mailer's parents: "He immediately took BJ and me over to meet them, and by then they were elderly and they came across as nice Jewish older people. Norman said, 'This is Bob Lifton; he also won a National Book Award.' And she looked at me and said, 'It's so nice that you both won it.' I'm sure what she meant was it was so nice that another nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn also won it. That was my translation." There was a bar backstage and a certain amount of drinking took place before the ceremony. The crowd, Lifton said, "was terrified that Norman was going to misbehave because of his reputation for doing that. He got up and gave a choirboy speech." Mailer said he disagreed with Sartre about turning down the Nobel Prize and, referring to himself in the third person, said, "Your speaker is here to state that he likes prizes," seeing them as "measures of the degree to which an Establishment meets that talent it has hindered and helped." This was especially true, he implied, in a time when society was "poised on the lip, no, the main of a spiritual revolution which will wash the roots of every national institution out to sea." For the next few years, Mailer would alternately warn of and welcome this revolution brought on by American hubris, and what he called in the speech the "Armageddons of technology."

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Writing to Knox a week after *Armies* appeared in *Harper's*, Mailer said he was pleased by its "pleasant" reception, and had "a few small hopes for the book." Completing the editing of *Beyond the Law*, however, was his immediate concern. With Farbar's help, he had cut it to 110 minutes, but there was more work to be done before its April 2 premier at the University of Notre Dame. His interest in *Wild 90* had all but disappeared. He had considered entering into the competition at Cannes Film Festival, but he had already spent \$10,000 on theater rentals and advertising. Very few people went to see the film, mainly because of the hideous reviews, but also because Farbar had rented a room in the bowels of a Manhattan office building that lacked a marquee. Mailer was advised by unnamed friends, he told Knox, to forgo Cannes, "because the odds against gaining anything would be very great and the perils of being wiped out enormous." His hopes were now pinned on *Beyond the Law*, and between anti-war speaking engagements, he worked steadily on completing the editing.

✓ Despite an imperfect sound system, the premiere of *Beyond the Law* at Notre Dame on April 2, 1968 was a success. It held an audience of 3500, mainly undergraduate students, to the very end and boosted Mailer's cinematic ambitions. But a few months later when the film had its New York premiere at the New York Film Festival, a significant number of people walked out of Philharmonic Hall, reacting to its violence and obscenity. One critic said in his review that Mailer didn't understand the movies. Unlike novels, the unnamed critic said, "the movies are not there to hit people where they live. The movies are there to keep people alive." Mailer said that this was true in the past, but in the late 1960s "the horror of life has become so completely pervasive" that this sort of emotional nourishment was beside the point; filmgoers needed to be

jolted. Nevertheless, he learned something from his first two films, namely, that he hadn't given himself utterly to filmmaking. "Making movies is a religious act," he said, and up to now, "I've just been having an affair with movies." At some point, he said, he was going to have to choose between writing and marrying the movies.

Beyond the Law lost money just as handily as *Wild 90*—over \$70,000—although it continued to play to receptive audiences on the college circuit. Its appeal, Mailer felt, lay in his vision of getting "below the reality, beneath the reality, within the reality of an evening in the police station." The relationship of cops and criminals is incredible, he said. "No one's ever begun to deal with how fantastic they are in their love-hate relationship." According to Michael Chaiken, *Beyond the Law* worked because the film had a baseline premise: "people were pegged either a cop or a criminal." *Wild 90*, on the other hand, was less successful because of its "anything-goes-bottomless quality." Mailer's cast in *Beyond the Law*, however, "could easily tap into the cops-and-crooks scenario because in personal moments we're all questioning our own kind of morals and integrity. Mailer found a group of people who were able to draw out things that were very truthful for them." Chaiken added that he thinks that Mailer's experience at Actors' Studio enabled him to do a superb job of casting.

All told, he spent nearly eight months editing *Beyond the Law*, four times as much as he had spent writing *Armies*. Between editing stints, he continued to give time to the anti-war effort, but he had much else on his agenda. Jack Newfield wrote a piece for the *Voice*, here summarized, about a day in the life of "Norman Mailer, novelist, counterpuncher, filmmaker, mayoral candidate, stud, essayist, egomaniac, and successor to Whitman and Henry James as American Zeitgeist." On the day in question, May 24, 1968, after several hours of editing, he met

with Tom Hayden, one of the founders of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and asked for his help in meeting Castro. "I want a guarantee," he said, "man to man, that I can see Fidel." Then Mailer went to a cocktail party at Dwight Macdonald's apartment, where he met Mark Rudd and other members of Students for a Democratic Society. He said he didn't agree with everything SDS was doing, but he gave them a check because "they are an active principle. They are taking chances." From Macdonald's, he went to a taping of the *Merv Griffin Show*, where Griffin announced him by saying, "Norman Mailer is one of the leading spectator sports in America." He walked on stage, Newfield wrote, "hunching up his shoulders like Carmen Basilio coming to Ray Robinson," two of the great boxers of the era. Afterwards, he attended the light heavyweight championship match at Madison Square Garden between Bob Foster and Dick Tiger (who had taken away Torres' title in December 1966), which Foster won. After midnight, Mailer climbed over a 15-foot fence to confer with Mark Rudd and the other students who had recently taken over the administrative offices of Columbia University, an event that reverberated at campuses across the nation.

Preoccupied as he was with *Beyond the Law*, Mailer got the idea for a new film in June. The nation was still in mourning for Martin Luther King, shot to death on April 4, when Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated shortly after midnight on June 5, just after he won the Democratic presidential primary in California. Two days earlier Andy Warhol had been shot four times and almost died. Over the next few days, as the country fell into a state of horror and confusion, Mailer conceived of *Maidstone*. The new film, he wrote, was calling to him "with every stimulus and every fear." Named after a fictional estate on Long Island where the events unfold, the film focuses on a famous-infamous director. Norman T. Kingsley is "one of fifty men who America

in her bewilderment and profound demoralization might be contemplating as a possible President." In *Armies* Mailer admitted that except for J.F.K., "there had not been a President of the United States or even a candidate since the Second World War whom Mailer secretly considered more suitable than himself." Kingsley's ambition is similarly large, but the chain of assassinations had unnerved the country, and he believed he could be next. To guard against attack, he is watched by a super-secret police agency called "Protection Against Assassination Experiments-Control" (PAX-C). We soon learn, however, that some of the agency's operatives seem just as interested in assassinating Kingsley as protecting him. This could be paranoia, or it could be genuine—the hints are contradictory. Mailer himself did not know. Carol Stevens, who had a role in the film, said that the mood on the set was "incredibly paranoiac." Again, there was no script, just a situation.

The situation within the situation is a film Kingsley plans to make about a male brothel located at Maidstone; much of the action—there isn't much—consists the director interviewing young actresses to play the role of brothel customers. There is another shadowy group of men at Maidstone, the Cashbox, consisting of male prostitutes who are almost as portentous as PAX-C. The two groups overlap. Kingsley's half-brother, Raoul Rey O'Houlihan (played by Rip Torn), is either completely loyal to Kingsley, or tempted to kill him. He runs the Cashbox (Buzz Farbar and Eddie Bonetti play the roles of key members). The rest of the cast of 50-60—the numbers change as people drop in and out over the week—include Beverly Bentley who plays Kingsley's estranged wife; two women Mailer was having affairs with, Lee Roscoe and Shari Rothe, who are two of the "belles"; Grove Press publisher Barney Rosset who plays a member of the local gentry, and Robert David Lion Gardiner, who owned one of the estates. Jeanne Campbell plays a

major role as a British television reporter, and Adeline is a college president. A number of other Mailer friends, including Anne Barry, Paul Carroll, Michael McClure, ~~Jose~~ Torres, ~~Bob~~ Lucid and Noel Parmentel, Jr. have roles, as do Hervé, the dwarf from *Fantasy Island*, and Ultra Violet, Warhol's "superstar." Several film crews, led by Pennebaker, Nick Proferes, Jan Welt, and one of Mailer's Harvard classmates, Richard Leacock, filmed the action using hand-held cameras and color film over five days in late July on four different estates in or around East Hampton, Long Island.

James Toback, who later made a number of important films and was influenced by Mailer, wrote a long piece about the making of the film for *Esquire*. He described what he saw when he visited the set:

There was a fair amount of tension all through the whole shoot and I would say that he was never in control in the way a director is normally in control of a set. First of all, the set was all sprawled out; things were being shot all over the place. People were inventing things at the last minute. So it wasn't subject to any of the normal protections that a director has if in fact he wants to keep control of a set. I don't think Norman minded it at all, I think that was part of the idea. But there was, I would say without sounding too melodramatic about it, there was a danger in the air.

Mailer had deliberately created this mood, and made it "tacitly understood" that O'Houlihan was free to threaten or attack Kingsley if the situation called for it. Mailer had told the cast, after all, that they were "a bunch of enforced existentialists." Torn plays his role perfectly and never looks less than ominous, especially on the last night of shooting when he and Mailer, dressed in formal

clothes and top hats, attend "The Assassination Ball," along with most of the cast. Torn-O'Houlihan debates whether to strike; it seems imminent. But the moment passes.

The next day, the last day of shooting, he struck. Most of the cast and camera crews had departed, and Mailer and Beverly are walking with four of their children, Elizabeth, Kate, Michael and Stephen, through a field on Gardiner's Island. The children are eight, five, four and two, respectively. Pennebaker is following them, recording what appears to be a summer idyll. With no warning, Torn, who had been off in the distance, comes running at them, full tilt, with a hammer in his hand. He strikes Mailer in the head twice and blood flows. Beverly screams; Mailer bellows, "You crazy fool cocksucker"; the children cry in terror. O'Houlihan, still holding the hammer comes forward and speaks: "You're supposed to die, Mr. Kingsley. You must die, not Mailer, I don't want to kill Mailer, but I must kill Kingsley in this picture." The real and the fictional merge. The two men wrestle and roll on the ground. Mailer bites Torn's ear. More blood, more screams; Beverly cries like a wolverine. Finally, with her help, the two men are separated, and after mutual recriminations, they part. Mailer tells Torn he is taking the scene out of the film.

But on reflection, he changes his mind, realizing that he was complicit, if not directly responsible, for what happened. Through the fall of 1968 and into the first half of 1969, Mailer watched the 45 hours of film shot by the five crews. To his dismay, he discovers that only six or seven hours are usable. He has given too much autonomy to the camera crews and casts, and the most of the good material, "all too unhappily," centers on Kingsley. When he realizes that there is too much Kingsley in the raw footage, he concludes, reluctantly at first, but then unequivocally, that "Torn had therefore been right to make his attack." He proceeds to make the

fight the violent culmination implicit in all the whispering and plotting and knowing looks that precede it. The hammer attack completes the arc.

For the next three years, working with two professionals, Jan Welt and Lana Jokel, Mailer devoted more time to editing *Maidstone* than to anything else. He continued to write and produced three books—two of them major works, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* and *Of a Fire on the Moon*—and also ran for mayor of New York in the 1969 Democratic primary. Film became his passion, however. Just as Henry James, discouraged after years of novel-writing, sought in the 1890s to begin a more lucrative, exciting career in the theater, Mailer in the late 1960s considered shelving, or even giving up, the solitary work of a writer to become a producer-director. He imagined himself about to join the company of the period's great directors—Jean-Luc Godard, Federico Fellini and Michelangelo Antonioni. When he read Toback's *Esquire* article about the filming of *Maidstone*, "At Play in the Fields of the Bored," he was unhappy with it. "When we discussed it," Toback recalled, "he said that he thought that I had taken him too lightly, that it was the first thing to appear in print about him as a director and the result of the article was to encourage that part of the journalistic community that was always ready to make fun of Norman, always ready to take him with a grain of salt, to ridicule him, to mock him. He felt that ideally I would have been writing about him as the American Godard. Instead, I gave ammunition to his enemies." Mailer later saw the merit of the article and got Toback's permission to reprint it in as a preface to *Maidstone: A Mystery*.

Another reason for Mailer's fascination with film is that it was challenging the dominant narrative mode, the novel. His films are of continuing interest, Chaiken said, because "they're part of a certain conversation that was happening in New York City at that time about direct

cinema and the new American cinema of Cheryl Clark and John Cassavetes. His films are in there with the stuff Andy Warhol was doing, the stuff Jonas Mekas was showing at the Filmmakers' Cinémathèque—Norman's films are absolutely part of that conversation. He was throwing his hat into that ring and was going for something that was unique. He was turning direct cinema on its head. He was using documentary techniques to film quasi-fictitious situations." The novel was the main event from the 1920s until the 1950s, but by the 1960s, film *had supplanted it* and Mailer wanted to be a player, Chaiken said. His reputation, coupled with New York City's position as a filmmaking incubator, generated tremendous media interest in *Maidstone*. An early version of it was shown in Provincetown in August 1970, and at the Venice Film Festival later the same month. When Mailer arrived in Italy with Carol Stevens—he and Beverly separated in the fall of 1969—he said, "We came here to try to pick up the marbles." The film did not win a prize, however.

At its showing two months later at the London Film Festival, billed as its world premiere, there were huge crowds. Mailer told Knox that he "drew more than anybody in the whole festival, including the personal appearances of Taylor and Burton. (Which last gives me delight, I confess it.)" But the acoustics were bad and the audience was restless, and when it was over, Mailer appeared on stage, much as Henry James had after the premiere of *Guy Domville* 75 years earlier. James was hooted off the stage and subsequently gave up the theater. Mailer said the dialogue with his crowd "came under the head[ing] of free swinging." One voice from the dark asked, "With all this money to throw around, couldn't you make a film with some content?" Mailer retorted, "I'd rather make a movie to agitate than fortify the far recesses of your leaden brain." *Maidstone*, he said, had "an esthetic coherence of a new order," and demonstrated "new

modes of perceiving reality." But the audience's comments stung him, and when he returned to the U.S., he reedited the film. On September 22, 1971, the film had its American premiere at the Whitney Museum. It ran for ten days, three showings a day, in a small theater and drew 7,000, a record attendance. But when it was shown commercially the next month, the audiences were tiny, and it folded. Mailer was confounded and asked a good friend to explain what had gone wrong. The friend said that there were 7,000 people in New York who were eager to see *Maidstone*, and they all saw it at the Whitney. Mailer later called it "my failed cinematic masterpiece."

Within days of the end of shooting *Maidstone*, Mailer left to cover the G.O.P. National Convention, August 5-8, in Miami, on assignment from *Harper's*. Morris had promised him the same kind of space given to *Armies*, and Mailer needed income after spending \$125,000 on the film. To raise this sum, he had sold a majority of his shares in the *Village Voice*. After Miami, he would have a two-week break, after which he planned to travel to Chicago to cover the Democratic National Convention, August 26-29. The summer of 1968, Mailer wrote at the beginning of *Miami and Siege of Chicago*, was a time when "the Republic hovered on the edge of revolution, nihilism, and lines of police on file to the horizon." John Updike, who at the time resided in the suburbs of Mailer's esteem, provided Mailer with a line about the nation's throes, made after Robert Kennedy was killed: "God may have withdrawn his blessing from America," he said.

The two conventions could not have been more different. The Republicans were united and optimistic about their chances of winning the White House; the Democrats were bitter and divided over the Vietnam War. Richard Nixon had returned from the political graveyard after

losing the race for governor of California in 1962, and had traveled the country for five years building support. Neither Gov. Nelson Rockefeller of New York nor Gov. Ronald Reagan, both relative latecomers to the race, had sufficient backing to mount a real challenge to him. President Johnson's decision not to seek re-nomination after losing to Sen. Eugene McCarthy of Wisconsin—an early and eloquent opponent of the war—in the New Hampshire primary, and Robert Kennedy's assassination had fractured the Democrats and weakened their eventual, equivocating nominee, Johnson's vice president, Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota. Mailer's report on the Miami convention contains the same sharp-etched character sketches as in *Armies*, and the same sure grasp of the currents of a large, multi-faceted event. The currents, however, were turgid. There were no real surprises at the convention. One of the two most memorable patches of writing in part one, "Nixon in Miami," is the examination of Nixon redux. Referring to himself as "the reporter," Mailer admits he has never written anything favorable about him. "There had never been anyone in American life so resolutely phony as Richard Nixon, nor anyone so transcendently successful by such means," he wrote. And yet, "Tricky Dick" seemed to have changed. His dark-jowled face now revealed a hint of "inner debate about his value before eternity." His appearance had shifted

from looking like an undertaker's assistant to looking like an old con seriously determined to go respectable. The Old Nixon, which is to say the young Nixon, used to look, on clasping his hands before him, like a church usher (of the variety who would twist a boy's ear after removing him from church). The older Nixon before the Press now—the *new* Nixon—had finally acquired some of the dignity

of the old athlete and the old con—he had taken punishment, that was on his face now, he knew the detailed schedule of pain in a real loss [. . .]

The press was not admitted to the grand gala dinner at the Fontainebleau Hotel the night before the convention at which Nixon and his wife Pat received the guests, but by luck Mailer got into the room before it began. Seeing no place to stand unobserved, he took up a position before the main doors, standing at parade rest with his hands clasped behind him, as some two thousand delegates and their spouses strolled in. Posing as a security man, he scrutinized faces for 30 minutes. What he saw helped him understand why the new Nixon had such stout support.

Most of them were ill-proportioned in some part of their physique. Half must have been, of course, men and women over fifty and their bodies reflected the pull of their character. The dowager's hump was common, and many a man had a flaccid paunch, but the collective tension was rather in the shoulders, in the girdling of the shoulders against anticipated lashings on the back, in the thrust forward of the neck, in the maintenance of the muscles of the mouth forever locked in readiness to bite the tough meat of resistance, in a posture forward from the hip since the small of the back was dependably stiff, loins and mind cut away from each other by some abyss between navel and hip.

Lacking kindred feeling for these stolid, immaculately neat people, he nevertheless "felt a sad sorrowful respect." He saw "in the heavy sturdy moves so many demonstrated of bodies in life's harness [. . .] the muted tragedy of the Wasp—they were not here on earth to enjoy or even perhaps to love so very much, they were here to serve, and serve they had in public functions and public charities (while recipients of their charity might vomit in rage and laugh in scorn)."

Nixon's landslide in the voting for the nomination is dutifully described. But except for Mailer's miniature of Reagan, then 57 years of age ("he had the presence of a man of thirty, the deferential enthusiasm, the bright but dependably unoriginal mind," coupled with another personality, "very young, boyish, maybe thirteen or fourteen, freckles, cowlick, I tripped-on-my-sneaker-lace aw shucks variety of confusion"), the Miami narrative offers little more than high reportorial professionalism and, in his elaborations of Waspish rectitude, a shrewd application of Wilhelm Reich's theories of psychological "body armoring."

Upon his return, Mailer spent ten days writing the 25,000-word Miami narrative, working rapidly so he had a few days to spend with Jan Welt and Lana Jokel as they worked on *Maidstone*. On August 24, he flew to Chicago. He loved the city, and his opening paean has been quoted by boosters of the Windy City for decades. "The reporter was sentimental about Chicago," he states at the outset of part two, "The Siege of Chicago," because Chicagoans "were like the good people of Brooklyn":

They were simple, strong, warm-spirited, sly, rough, compassionate, jostling, tricky and extraordinarily good-natured because they had sex in their pockets, muscles on their back, hot eats around the corner, neighborhoods which dripped with the sauce of local legend, and real city architecture, brownstones with different windows on every floor, vistas for miles of red-brick and two-family wood-frame houses with balconies and porches, runty stunted trees rich as farmland in their promise of tenderness the first city evenings of spring, streets where kids played stick-ball and roller-hockey, lots of smoke and iron twilight.

The evocation becomes all the more powerful in memory as the narrative unfolds, culminating in a wrenching description of the "police riot" that besmirched the Democratic Convention. Thousands of protesters and many innocent bystanders were beaten bloody by 12,000 Chicago policemen backed up by 7,500 members of the Illinois National Guard. Some of the violence was seen on national television and helped to insure Nixon's election. Chicago's reputation was badly injured, and Mayor Richard J. Daley, whose constituency was made up of "people whose ancestors were at home with rude instruments in Polish forests, Ukrainian marshes, Irish bogs," lost a portion of his national clout. When Gov. Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut, in a speech nominating George McGovern, accused Daley of "Gestapo tactics," Mailer wrote, "Daley was on his feet, Daley was shaking his fist at the podium, Daley was mouthing words. One could not hear the words, but his lips were clear. Daley seemed to be telling Ribicoff to go have carnal relations with himself." Mailer faithfully records all the violence on Michigan Avenue and in Lincoln Park, and all the hypocrisy inside the convention hall, including the falsely enthusiastic nomination of Sen. Humphrey.

Unlike the March on the Pentagon, Mailer was not a central figure at the convention. He knew his chief function was to record the event, yet he felt waves of shame for not being on the front line with the protestors. Instead, he drank in the Hilton Hotel and contemplated his fear. "It seemed to him that he had been afraid all his life, but in recent years, or so it seemed, he had learned how to take a step into his fear." But now he was hesitating. He was reluctant to lose his place, even in a country that was going mad. His country "had allowed him to write—it had even not deprived him entirely of honors, certainly not of an income. He had lived well enough to have six children, a house on the water, a good apartment, good meals, good booze, he had even

come to enjoy wine. A revolutionary with taste in wine has come already half the distance from Marx to [Edmund] Burke." Mailer's sympathies were on the side of the Hippies and Yippies and the S.D.S., but he hated to see the country fall into "the nihilistic maw of a national disorder." He wanted his life to continue as it was going—making films and writing books and enjoying his growing family—but not if that meant being silent about an unjust war. After WWII, he said, he lived for a decade or more with the "potential militancy of a real revolutionary," "the timing in his soul was apocalyptically maladroitness." But when the time came, he did walk across Michigan Avenue to Grant Park and, after listening to Ginsberg and Burroughs he got up and gave a brief speech to the crowd about how long the struggle might continue, perhaps twenty years. He ended by explaining that he would not be with them the next day because he had a deadline and didn't want to chance getting arrested. When he had finished, the crowd yelled, "Write good, baby."

Morris planned to run Mailer's account of the conventions in the November *Harper's*, which would be on the newsstands three weeks before the election. New American Library would publish hard and soft cover editions at the same time. The hope was that *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* would have the same kind of influence that "Superman Comes to the Supermarket" and "In the Red Light" had on the 1960 and 1964 elections, respectively. Mailer went to work shortly after he returned from Chicago, writing if anything slightly faster than he had on *Armies*. By August 21, Morris and Robert Gutwillig at NAL had the 75,000-word manuscript in hand. He had written the 50,000 words of part two in 18 days. The book's reviews were quite positive, but somewhat less rapturous than those received by *Armies*. Most reviewers agreed with Eliot Fremont-Smith, the *Times*' reviewer, that it was "more conventional" than *Armies*. Jack Richardson, for example, in a highly complimentary essay in the *NYRB* noted that

Mailer had allowed the conventions "to unfold for the most part unchallenged by his imagination." *Miami* stands in the shadow of *Armies*, and has suffered for it, but in the introduction to a 2008 reprint, Frank Rich said that it "holds up better than most political journalism written last week, let alone four decades ago." Rich argues that Mailer's genuine ambivalence about the event, coupled with his "literary energy and intellectual independence" transcends the "small-bore pack mentality" of what passes for much of today's political journalism, in print and on line. How much *Miami* affected the outcome of the election cannot be gauged. Nixon, as we know, defeated Humphrey by less than one percent in the popular vote, although the ten million votes, mainly in southern states, received by third-party candidate, George C. Wallace may have cost the Democrats the election.

Chapter 9

Politician to Prisoner

Mailer's campaign for mayor in 1969 was considerably different than the one he envisioned in 1960. He made it clear to his backers that he intended to run a real campaign, filing nominating papers for the Democratic primary and hiring a professional staff. Nevertheless, the campaign was the operative definition of quixotic. While the literary intelligentsia saw it as intellectually provocative and slightly heroic, the mainstream media considered it to be somewhat nutty and eminently newsworthy. Both were correct. He made his decision in early March at almost exactly the same time that he agreed to write a series of articles for *Life* magazine on the upcoming mission of Apollo 11 to put a man on the moon, achieving the goal

announced by President Kennedy in 1961. A major factor in his decision was that his stature as a writer was higher than it had been in 20 years, and few intellectuals came close to him as a construer of the tumultuous events of the period, a time when, as he said, "the real had become more fantastic than the imagined." The offer from *Life* and suggestions from three writer friends—Jack Newfield, Noel Parmentel and Gloria Steinem—that he run for mayor reinforced each other, and satisfied both sides, or all sides, of his nature. He saw that he had reached a critical juncture in his life, and it seemed incumbent on him, as he put it when referring to the March on the Pentagon, to take his recent victories and "bring them whole, intact, in sum, as they stood now, to cast—nay—shades of Henry James—to ^[then] fling on the gaming tables of life resumed in New York, and there amass a doubling and trebling again." What were these victories?

His two most recent books had both been better received than any *The Naked and the Dead*. Written nine months apart, both were nominated for the 1969 National Book Award. *Armies*, in which he foregrounds his presence, was an Arts and Letters nominee; *Miami*, in which he steps back several paces from events, was nominated in the History and Biography category. After watching Mailer discuss politics on the *Today* show shortly after *Armies* was published, Pulitzer Prize winning playwright William Inge wrote to him to say that he admired his work and thought he was handsome enough to run for office. Inge urged him, however, to remember that the artist's concern should be "with the heart and human sensibilities." In his response, Mailer admitted he wanted to do just what Inge suggested, but had concluded that "the disease of the 20th century is that politics had invaded the heart and polluted our sensibilities and there is no real way out—that one must write about politics as endemically as love." As Emerson notes in "Fate," "One key, one solution to the mysteries of the human condition, one solution to the old

knots of fate, freedom and foreknowledge, exists: the propounding, namely, of the double consciousness. A man must ride alternately on the horses of his private and his public nature, as the equestrians in the circus throw themselves nimbly from horse to horse, or plant one foot on the back of one and the other foot on the back of the other." Like Emerson's equestrians, Mailer made such leaps with great skill during these years.

There were other indications of how brightly Mailer's reputation shone at the time: In June 1968, The Kennedy family asked him to be a member of the honor guard during the memorial for the slain senator. His new British publisher, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, planned to rush *Armies* into print shortly after its American publication. Thomas Nagel, a Harvard alumnus, asked to nominate him for a position on the Harvard Board of Overseers. Mailer's first impulse was to say no, but after reflecting on the "comic, philosophical, spiritual, existential" possibilities of having a voice in governing his alma mater, he gave his permission. Perhaps the most striking evidence of his standing came from *Time* magazine: the editor proposed him for a cover story. Henry Luce had died in the spring of 1967, and the magazine was moving closer to the political center, but it was Mailer's achievements that forced the decision. The new managing editor, Henry Grunwald, wrote to Mailer to say it was "an auspicious moment to achieve a truce." They had lunch and the story was scheduled for late October, right after the publication of *Miami*. *Newsweek* also contacted him to propose a fall cover story.

Not all of these possibilities worked out, but his three-day trip to London to publicize *Armies* was a success, and he was nominated for the Harvard post. He and the other "insurgent" nominee, Herbert R. Norr, a member of the S.D.S., were not elected, however, and *Time* dropped its plans to do a cover story on him when *Newsweek* beat it to the punch, publishing a head shot

of Mailer, looking lean and hungry, on the cover of its December 9, 1968 issue. He agreed, of course, to the Kennedy family request, and watched a huge crowd wait up to six hours to pass by the Senator's body as it lay in state in St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue. Watching "the poorest part of the working class of New York" file by and touch the flag-covered coffin led Mailer to recall "the awful cry of the wounded pig in his throat" the night he learned that the Senator had been shot. He had for years believed that one must "balance every moment between the angel in oneself and the swine," and the sound of his cry shocked him. He had spent the afternoon before the Senator was shot in Los Angeles "enjoying a dalliance," which led him to conclude that his infidelities had provided "one less piton of mooring for Senator Kennedy in his lonely ascent," a conclusion that demonstrated, once again, Mailer's belief in the concordance of human and divine endeavors. His urge at that moment had been to confess to Beverly, but he lacked the courage to confront "his wife's illimitable funds of untempered redneck wrath." So he remained silent, and the marriage took another turn for the worse.

At the start of 1969, Mailer had intended to devote himself entirely to editing *Maidstone*, and had written a form letter of regret to be sent to the many colleges and universities who had asked him to speak. He did agree to accept an honorary degree from Rutgers University, however, an honor recommended by English professor, Richard Poirier, a stalwart admirer. In the form letter, he said he wanted time to think and edit *Maidstone*, adding that he was "feeling a little tired of the sound of my voice," a remark that in retrospect seems comic considering his daily speaking chores during the mayoral campaign. During the eight-week campaign, his work on the film ceased entirely, and the only writing he had time for was speeches and campaign policy papers. Shortly after making the decision to run, he had his new secretary, Carolyn

Mason, invite about 20 potential supporters to a March 31 meeting at his apartment. Joe Flaherty begins his hilarious campaign biography, Managing Mailer, with an account of this meeting. In addition to the three writers who had urged him to run, three close friends—Torres, Hamill and Farbar—were there, as well as Flaherty, Jerry Rubin, and several former workers in Sen. McCarthy's campaign. Columnist Jimmy Breslin, a tribune for working-class readers of New York tabloids, was also invited. Some of the group thought he should run on the ticket with Mailer, and give the campaign some "street smarts," as Steinem put it. p18 MM

Mailer asked the group for their opinions of his candidacy, and the dialogue that ensued, Flaherty wrote, "could be matched only by the construction crew who worked on the Tower of Babel." It got no better when Mailer said he intended to forge "a hip coalition of the left and right." When he said he intended to run as a Democrat, Rubin said, "Electoral politics is not relevant." Mailer replied: p18 MM
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p20 MM

'What do you believe in, Jerry—spirituality?' p20-21 MM

'Yes. Spirituality, Norman.'

'Then what about the spirituality of the machine? To make it hum, hum, hum ...'

Suddenly, Rubin looked like a convert as the 'hums' graced the air like so many Kyrie Eleisons.

The meeting broke up soon after, and when the group got to the street, Breslin shouted, "Do you know something—that fuckin' bum is serious!" A day later Mailer went to Provincetown for two weeks to think. p 23 mm

While he was away, a full-page ad appeared in the *Voice* asking "Do you want Norman Mailer for Mayor and Jimmy Breslin for President of the City Council?" The ad asked for volunteers and contributions and listed some of those who supported the ticket. Lawyer and Black activist Flo Kennedy was one of them; Gloria Steinem, who would soon emerge as one of the leaders of the Women's Liberation Movement, was another. Steinem agreed to raise money and to run on the ticket as comptroller. She skillfully accomplished the former but, pleading fiscal ignorance, dropped off the ticket almost immediately. Mailer had pursued her romantically, and they had a one-night stand during the campaign. Steinem's biographer says that she went to bed with Mailer "either because of fatigue or because of the nonfeminist kindness that gives out 'mercy fucks.'" Whatever the case, she stuck with the campaign to the end. After he returned from Provincetown in mid-April, he went to a meeting at her apartment. When campaign manager Flaherty, a noticeably slimmer and rested Mailer snapped at him, "You're a half hour late. Let's make it on time in the future." He was ready to campaign. p 32 mm

A staff was hired, volunteers poured in, nominating petitions were printed and an office was rented in Midtown Manhattan, near Columbus Circle. Alice Krakauer, a former McCarthy staffer, was put in charge of scheduling. Newfield and Peter Maas, were appointed press co-secretaries. A young Rutgers professor, Peter Manso, and Susan Harmon, an urban affairs expert, were assigned to draft position papers. Shortly before the official announcement on May 1, Mailer adopted what would be the campaign's most appealing if controversial plank: make New mm
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York City the 51st state. He got the idea from either Clay Felker, then editor of *New York* magazine, or Hamill, then a *New York Post* columnist, although the idea may go all the way back to William Randolph Hearst. As late as 1995, New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani was quoted as saying that if the city was the 51st state, it would not have a budget deficit. It was one of several innovative ideas from the campaign that are still discussed.

It took Mailer time to learn how to speak to political audiences. Early on, he met with the memberships of several so-called "reform clubs," whose members opposed the Democratic machine. At the Lexington Democratic Club on East 86th Street, Mailer was challenged on the idea of the 51st state. Why would the representative and senators in the State capital, Albany, give the city its freedom, especially if it would result in the loss of city tax dollars —Mailer had pointed out that the city residents paid out much more than they received back from government. He replied that if he won, a constitutional convention would be called, followed by approval by the state assembly, and then by the U.S. Congress. The club's members were unconvinced. At this point Mailer shifted gears and took on what he thought were the folksy tones of an Albany farmer. "Well," he said, "those farmers up there might want to get rid of all us evil Jews and niggers." His impersonation brought groans from the crowd. As the campaign unfolded, he improved. p43

At the Union Theological Seminary in upper Manhattan, Mailer and Breslin presented another key position of the campaign: neighborhood power. Every part of the city would be allowed, within yet undefined limits, to live in its own way. If Harlem wanted a statue of Martin Luther King, fine; if Staten Island wanted one of John Birch, that was okay too. Breslin spoke first, and said how impressed he was to appear before such an educated group. As for his own

education, he went to John Adams High School in Queens—"for five years." Adams High was located near Aqueduct Racetrack, he recalled, and "The first English sentence I ever learned was 'It is now past time.'" Peals of laughter followed; Breslin knew how to warm up a crowd.

It wasn't his partner's style. As Flaherty points out, "Mailer was after all still middle class, Jewish, and Harvard, a reader of Blake, Lowell, and Kierkegaard." He told the assembled academics that the biggest issue facing the city was race relations, and former mayor Robert Wagner, who had just entered the race, was not equipped to settle it. Then he quietly explained that it was "a spiritual necessity" to give all races, nationalities and interest groups, left and right, the chance to express themselves. "People are healthier if they live out their prejudices rather than suppressing them in uniformity," he said. The audience sat "in ecclesiastical reverence as he did that of which only he was capable—convincing a collective body that the sadness in his soul was symbolic of the sadness in the land." Flaherty was as moved as the audience and, ignoring the political odds, "swore to Christ Mailer was going to become the mayor of New York City."

Besides the 51st state, several other campaign ideas took root: free bicycles at city parks, a central farmers' market offering fresh vegetables and fruit, citywide stickball competitions. A monorail around Manhattan, an old idea revived by Mailer and Manso, was refurbished and became one of the most discussed proposals of the campaign. One impossible scheme continues to be discussed. Mailer articulated it at Menora Temple in Brooklyn, where he said he felt at home among "real people," rather than "phony liberals in Manhattan." The idea was Sweet Sunday, based on a description that he had written in Provincetown: "One Sunday a month, all traffic would stop, all airplanes, all trains. It would be known all over the world that one could not enter or leave New York on that day. With luck, New Yorkers could get a hint of fields or

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sea in the breeze on Sweet Sunday." He upped the ante by saying that electricity would be shut off, except at hospitals. Not everyone liked the concept. "What about refrigerators and air

conditioning?" he was asked. ~~When pressed, he said:~~ "On the first hot day the populace would

impeach me," As the campaign went on, Mailer developed a knack for disarming one-liners. One

day at Brooklyn College when talking about the Brooklyn Dodgers, he was interrupted by a questioner who wanted to know what he would do if faced by a snowstorm like the monster that

had tied up traffic in Queens for several days the previous winter. Mailer shouted back, "I'd piss on it." He began to get his share of laughs, and Breslin began to talk about issues.

There were lost opportunities and blunders. At Sarah Lawrence College before a notably feminist audience, Mailer described his power-to-the-neighborhoods plan. A young woman

spoke up: "Where are the pigs going to live?" Mailer, Flaherty wrote, "made the mistake of putting on his whisky baritone Rhett Butler accent to reply. 'Look, sugar,' he began, and got no further as a chorus attacked him for the endearment." The campaign staff wasn't worried as

much about what Breslin would say, but they were uncertain whether he would continue at all.

Whenever he threatened to drop out, he was cajoled back by staff members, as well as Flaherty and Mailer. In response to the announcement that Mailer had won the Pulitzer for *Armies*,

Breslin was adamant about leaving, saying he couldn't carry Mailer's shoes, and only much handholding brought him around. At the formal announcement of candidacy at the Overseas

Press Club, Breslin failed to show up at the appointed hour. Mailer, accompanied by Beverly, started without him. He began by saying that recently "candidates had become a little like the products put out by corporations."

Well, Breslin and myself were not manufactured in large corporations. We were, in fact, put together by piecework. And if you wish to look at us as products, then think of us as antiques. Because we are sentimental about the past. We want New York to thrive again. We want New York to be a city famous around the world again for the charm, ferocity, elegance, strength, calm, and racy character of our separate neighborhoods.

When the television camera operators asked Mailer to stand on something so he could be seen over the cluster of microphones on the podium, he refused, saying that the city would have to learn to appreciate a man of his stature. Then he told them that he "would not deal in any deceptions, since his campaign slogan was 'No More Bullshit.'" At that moment, Breslin, who "obviously had been on guard duty all night in some saloon," showed up, and after some opening remarks castigated the reporters present for not giving the Mailer-Breslin ticket sufficient coverage.

In truth, the campaign received a disproportionate amount of coverage. "The press was horny with expectation," Flaherty wrote. All five New York dailies, including the *Wall Street Journal*, wrote regular stories, so did the weeklies—the *Voice*, *New York* and *Brooklyn Heights Press*. National magazines—*Look*, *Life* and *Time*—published features, and *Women's Wear Daily* described Mailer as having "the grace of the Doge and the depth of Dante." But the *Times* outdid all of them, devoting at least a dozen news stories entirely to the Mailer-Breslin ticket. At the height of the campaign, the *Times* Sunday magazine published Mailer's most considered statement on why he should be mayor, "Why Are We in New York?" With few exceptions, the media loved the Jewish-Irish underdogs. "Vote the Rascals In" became as popular a campaign

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slogan as "No More Bullshit," and "I Would Sleep Better If Norman Mailer Were Mayor." This last button was displayed on the wall of Mailer's Brooklyn apartment for the next four decades.

Mailer's second oldest child, Danielle, remembers the campaign well. She and her sister Betsy went to several events with their father. But most of the time when he was campaigning, the two girls were in school or with their mother. On weekends, however, they were usually at the Brooklyn apartment, where the maid, Hetty Diggs, was in charge when Mailer was away. One day an angry man showed up at the door. Danielle believes he was a friend of Abbie Hoffman. He had a gun, and said he was going to shoot Mailer. Hetty said, "Mr. Norman isn't home," and the man said, "Where the fuck is he?" She said she didn't know. Danielle and Betsy remained silent and he left. When they told their father, he said calmly, "Oh, I wonder who he was." After that, however, an intercom system was installed, and no one could enter the building without being buzzed in.

The campaign had one near-ruinous evening followed a few weeks later by a day of redemption. On May 7, when Flaherty was convinced that enough nomination signatures had been gathered, a party was scheduled for the Village Gate. It had two purposes: raise campaign funds and give the hard-working staff a night off to meet the candidate, who had just signed his \$1,000 Pulitzer Prize check over to the campaign. The momentum was positive and everyone was feeling good. Mailer sat at a "booze-laden table" with Bill Walker, recently out of prison, and now Mailer's bodyguard. After Newfield and Breslin spoke, Mailer came to the stage carrying a glass of whiskey. Speaking in his Southern accent, he began to berate the campaign staff, calling them "a bunch of spoiled pigs," whose egos were undermining the campaign with "dull little vanities." When he was interrupted, he shouted back, "Fuck You." Mailer's half-

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drunken harangue put the staff in shock. As he was concluding, Flaherty saw Breslin heading for the exit. Mailer didn't notice. He thought his speech had been a success, and went home to bed.

At four a.m., Breslin called Newfield on the telephone and asked, "Why didn't you tell me I was running with Ezra Pound?" The next morning Flaherty went to Brooklyn to confront Mailer. He carried the morning *Times*, which contained a damning account of the evening.

Flaherty told him ^{ec} that he had been "genuinely scary" the night before, and that staff members were dismayed; a few had quit. As Flaherty quietly criticized Mailer's performance, Beverly ^{came into the room} entered the room, and Mailer said, "This guy is bullying me to death." She ^{flatly} replied, "I'm with him." Then Flaherty asked why he had called the staff a bunch of spoiled pigs. "He looked unbelieving: 'Did I say that?'" Beverly indicated that he had. "Tears welled up in his eyes, and he turned his head and buried it in the couch." Flaherty told him that the staff could survive one bad night. Mailer visited headquarters that afternoon and ^a was a "portrait of repentance." For the rest of the campaign, Flaherty wrote, the candidate worked 14-hour days during a long hot spell, shaking hands at subways and speaking at synagogues, social clubs and street fairs. "Like the girl with the curl," Flaherty said, "when he was good he was very, very good." Mailer also cut back on the bourbon, imbibing only after the day's work was done.

Perhaps the finest moment of the campaign came on Memorial Day. Like Breslin, Flaherty loved horse races, and the two of them put together a plan for the ticket to meet the crowd of 70,000 gathered at Aqueduct for the Metropolitan Handicap. Mailer, dressed ^{ci} in a blue blazer, "his head a full-blown mass of curls, looked like the gentleman plunger," with "a radiant Beverly" at his side. Breslin wore a bright pink shirt and a huge speckled tie. The threesome worked the festive crowd and got perhaps the best reception of the entire campaign. Flaherty had

put together a single-sheet flyer with the "Railbird's Picks for the Mayoral Handicap," and it was given to every reporter in attendance. On it, former mayor Wagner, "a gelding" who "knows the track," was the favorite, going off at 8-5. Ranged against him were the conservative city Comptroller, Mario Procaccino, "Bronx Ridgling [a colt with undescended testicles], By Fear—Out of Law and Order," Congressman James Scheuer and Herman Badillo, both "By Liberal—Out of Loser." Going off at 20-1 was long-shot Mailer, "By Amateur—Out of Statehood, First-time starter, Good Barn." Railbird listed him as "Best Bet." In the actual horserace, the favorite was a three-year-old named Arts and Letters. "Such an omen," Flaherty wrote, "was not lost on Mailer the Magician" who put down a \$90 bet and watched the chestnut colt come from behind to win. "When I saw him coming into the stretch," Mailer said to himself, "Maybe, maybe." p. 183
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Mailer in the lead to be

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Writing about the campaign later that year, Mailer said that he had awakened "on many a morning with the clear and present certainty that he was going to win." Feeling guilty about sins that he does not name, he decided that he ought to be elected "as a fit and proper punishment." But it was not to be. On election day, June 17, 1969, Breslin got 66,000 votes and lost to Francis X. Smith; Mailer got 41,000. The mayoral race was won by the law-and-order candidate, Procaccino, with 33% of the vote. Wagner was second with 29%; Badillo was third with 28%; Mailer was fourth with 5%; Scheuer also had 5%, but had 2,000 fewer votes. In the Republican primary, John Lindsay lost to conservative Congressman John Marchi by a few thousand votes, after which Lindsay decided to run in the general election as a liberal-independent in a three-way race against Marchi and Procaccino. As liberal a Republican as can be conceived, Lindsay proceeded to defeat the two conservatives, getting 42% of the vote and becoming mayor in 1970. It has been argued that if Mailer had not run, his 41,000 votes might have gone to Badillo, who

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then could have defeated Procaccino. By keeping the liberal Badillo out of the general election, Mailer may have enabled Lindsay to win. Maybe. Flaherty asks in his epilogue, "Did Mailer save the city for liberalism?" Inclined to say no, he nevertheless leaves the door ajar on the question of whether the two rascals kept the nation's largest city out of conservative hands.

Perhaps more important than the help provided Lindsay was the fact that Mailer and Breslin tried to change the nature of political debate. Mailer's son, John Buffalo, writing 40 years after the primary, said that his father's ideas "enflamed, enriched, and deepened the public discourse," forcing audiences "to contemplate matters uncomfortable to their rigid ideologies."

Theodore H. White, author of *The Making of the President* series, who was living in New York during the election, said that while he didn't vote for Mailer, he considered his campaign to be "considered and thoughtful, the beginning of an attempt to apply ideas to a political situation." The job of intellectuals is to come up with ideas, and all we've been producing is footnotes."

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Mailer had been prepared to give up writing and work an elected official's long days for the rest of his life, as he says in the opening pages of *Of a Fire on the Moon*, his third consecutive book written in the third person personal. "He would never write again," he said, "if he were Mayor (the job would doubtless strain his talent to extinction) but he would have his hand on the rump of history, and Norman was not without such lust." But he lacked "any apocalyptic ability to rustle up huge numbers of votes." His foray into politics, like his filmmaking, confirmed that writing was his *métier*—not that he had given up on *Maidstone*, far

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from it. But he had to separate himself from filmmaking for a time, and in late June he traveled to Houston to begin work on the moon shot book. He hardly had time to say goodbye to his wife.

Beverly appears several times, briefly, in *Managing Mailer*, usually in the role of supportive spouse. In the one place that Flaherty characterizes her, he says she was "an earthy woman who, like Breslin's wife, would rather tend to the privacy of her home and children than get involved in the public limelight." But, according to Mailer, the limelight was precisely what Beverly sought. "In the early days, she was marvelous," he said. "She made a home for my boys, and earlier, for my girls." But after a few years, he continued, "It turned south." The chief reason was that "she gave up acting too soon. And it ate at her, it ate at her, it ate at her. We did okay for a while; we used to have wonderful parties and stuff like that. It wasn't enough for her. And I didn't know what to do." He arrived at Texas with the impending breakup of his marriage on his mind. "It was impossible to believe," he wrote in *Fire*, "but they each knew—they were coming to an end. They could not believe it for they loved their two sons as once they had loved each other, but now everything was wrong. It was sad." Aquarius and Pisces—as he referred to himself and Beverly—had met on a night when the moon was full:

She was extraordinarily sensitive to its effects; she was at best uneasy and at worst unreachable when the moon was full. Through the years of their marriage Aquarius had felt the fullness of the moon in his own dread, his intimations of what full criminality he might possess, had felt the moon in the cowardice not to go out on certain nights, felt the moon when it was high and full and he was occasionally on the side of the brave. And she was worse. Call her Pisces for the neatness of the scheme. Beverly born of Pisces. She was an actress who now did

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not work. An actress who does not work is a maddened beast. His lovely Pisces, subtle at her loveliest as silver, would scream on nights of the full moon with a voice so loud she sounded like an animal in torment.

Aquarius and Pisces communicated poorly over the next two months as he moved through his journalistic chores at the NASA Manned Space Center in Houston, the Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, and the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral, Florida. When they spoke on the telephone, one or the other of them often hung up in the middle of a heated conversation. Aquarius, a political also-ran suffering through an all-but-concluded marriage, had a diminished sense of self, despite his recent accolades and prizes. He likened himself to a "disembodied spirit." It was, however, the perfect condition—"detached from the imperial demands of his ego"—to puzzle out an approach for writing about the huge, audacious program to put a man on the moon. Mailer found Apollo 11 to be a "spooky" enterprise, apparently transparent, but ultimately mysterious.

Shortly after he signed contracts for his account of the moon shot, an article appeared in the *Times* under the headline, "Million Advance for Mailer Seen." The seven-figure number was a gross exaggeration by his agent, and Mailer was upset. He was distressed about having such huge attention drawn to a book he hadn't yet figured out how to write. In actuality, *Life* would pay \$100,000 for three installments; Little, Brown (Mailer's new publisher) guaranteed \$150,000 for the hardback version; New American Library matched this amount for the right to publish the paperback. Meredith was quoted as being "quite positive" that foreign and subsidiary rights would bring the figure to \$1 million by the time the book was published in January or February 1970. He was wrong about the sum and off on the date, but from then on Mailer was known as a

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million-dollar writer. The article also stated, correctly, that Mailer would begin the book in July, and would again use his own participation. It noted that he would describe the July 20 Cape Kennedy launch, and would also include "a chapter on the philosophical and technological implications of the moon landing." As it turned out, the exploration of these implications would comprise the better part of the 180,000-word book, Mailer's longest since *Naked*.

Apollo 11 was an enormously complex and expensive project that grew out of a decade of planning and development, not to mention the pioneering work of rocket scientists such as Wernher von Braun and his colleagues in Nazi Germany (Mailer would later interview Von Braun, who was directing the Saturn rocket program for NASA). If Mailer had the advantage of an engineering degree to help him understand the physics of rocket science, he also faced obstacles that other reporters did not, all self-imposed. Most of the reporters covering the moon shot would be there for a few weeks, write their reports using NASA handouts and quotations from controlled interviews with the astronauts, and move on to another assignment.

Aquarius, it was a matter of professional pride: "if you're gonna be paid a huge sum of money, you've gotta come back with something", and also a matter of exploring his obsession with the

"disease of technology," one of his major themes since *Cannibals and Christians*. Consequently, soon after his arrival in Houston, although he was tempted to take a shortcut," he saw that he could not merely write about the hoopla of blast-off and folksy tidbits about the astronauts. "That would have been a cheat," he said. His mission was to write about "certain metaphysical problems" associated with the "technological sacrilege" of rocketing humans to the surface of a dead moon, a surface beneath which no humans were buried.

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Everyone in the country knew the the names and faces of the three astronauts, Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins, and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin, but little more of consequence. *Life's* editor, Thomas Griffith had agreed to arrange for Mailer to be given access to them but, as he told Mills, NASA refused because it was "afraid he would write harsh things" about them. *✓*
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 Mailer then wrote a letter to the astronauts saying, "You wouldn't let a commercial pilot fly Apollo, why not let someone who is recognized as one of the better journalists in the country fly you in order to write about you?" Armstrong wrote back and said, "Your argument is convincing but the answer is no." Through the magazine's Houston connections, Mailer was able to spend an evening with Charles "Pete" Conrad, who would command Apollo 12 on the next moon mission. Conrad said that although Mailer had a reputation of being on the left, while he himself flew "right wing for Attila the Hun," they got along, helped by the better part of a bottle of scotch. *MJM 351*

Mailer said his time with Conrad and another unnamed astronaut made them were "not dull people," and "not all of a piece." The Apollo 11 trio, however, remained off limits except for carefully orchestrated appearances. Consequently, Mailer's portraits of the three men may be the weakest part of the book. He demonstrated that he could re-package official biographies, quotes from staged events, and cursory interviews with the three national celebrities behind a glass wall as adroitly as any talented reporter. But not much better. He admitted years later that he was unhappy with what he had written about the trio: "I tended to lean too heavily on the few times I saw them in interviews with other writers," he said. "I saw them for a total of perhaps about three hours, and on that I attempted to understand them to write a book, and it got me into great trouble. I would have been better off if I'd never met them." There is a tendency if

you meet someone for a little while, he said, "to see all of their personality as being similar to the little bit you glimpsed." Mailer spent his first days in Houston with the herd of reporters, all of them cramming.

Before he began to write the first installment for *Life*, Mailer told his new editor at Little, Brown, Ned Bradford, that he didn't know "how to locate myself in reference to it," and he had to figure it out because "one's stance determines one's style." He had a similar conversation with Willie Morris, who wanted Mailer to write about the moon shot for *Harper's*, but could not match the offer from *Life*. Remembering that the writing he had done for *Harper's* was not going to participate, more or less, in the events in question, Mailer asked, "How can I participate in a landing on the moon?" It was not entirely a rhetorical question. "God dammit," he told Morris, "I really would like to go to the moon," and said that he would get into good physical shape if he could get a seat on the rocket. In early 1971 shortly after *Fire* was published, he was asked if he would have liked to make the trip himself. He said, "If I could have gone up it would have made a better book. I keep thinking I'm going to spend all my life pleading with NASA to send me to the moon, and then they'll finally decide to send John Updike." Mailer interviewed NASA officials, read technical manuals, and pondered his approach to the event.

During the summer, Beverly embarked on a love affair and traveled to Mexico. The unraveling of the marriage drove Mailer into his work, and may even have aided it. He said many times that some of his best work was done when he was depressed. *Life's* deadline for the first installment was in early August. The editors were expecting under ten thousand words, but as Mailer said in some prefatory comments, "I can't write anything in 5,000 words, and 10,000 words is just for poker money." Working eight to ten hours a day for a 15-day stretch, he

completed his 30,000-word account of the Saturn V launch on schedule. "The pleasures you get writing," he said, "are the pleasures of the marathon runner." *Life* was mainly a pictorial magazine, although it occasionally published long prose works—Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, for example. Graves, Griffith and their colleagues were not accustomed, however, to huge slabs of marbled prose in a nonfiction report. When it appeared in the August 29 magazine, his 26,000-word report—he cut it slightly—was by far the longest nonfiction piece the magazine had published in a single issue.

Mailer's description of the Saturn V rocket, as long and heavy as a U.S. Navy destroyer, seen from the press grandstand three-and-a-half miles away, is the best thing in the installment. The influence of *Moby-Dick* (especially the "The Whiteness of the Whale"), which years later Mailer admitted to be "enormous," is palpable here, especially when he compares the innards of the rocket to the innards of a whale—miles of tubes and massive tanks—which brings to mind Ishmael's survey of the skeleton of a whale on a Pacific island. Mailer had already stood in awe of the rocket as it was being readied for flight in the Vehicle Assembly Building, the largest building on the planet. The sight encouraged him "to release the string of the balloon and let his ego float off." He recognized that "a Leviathan was most certainly ready to ascend the heavens—whether for good or ill he might never know." Saturn was a furnace filled with a million gallons of varied fuels—kerosene and liquid oxygen and hydrogen. At blast-off, the flames sluiced away on each side for two hundred feet, "and in the midst of it, white as a ghost, white as the white of Melville's *Moby Dick*, white as the shrine of the Madonna in half the churches of the world, this slim angelic mysterious ship of stages rose without sound out of its incarnation of flame and began to ascend slowly into the sky, slow as Melville's Leviathan might swim, slowly as we

might swim upward in a dream looking for air. And still no sound." When the noise of blast-off does come, it is with "the sharp and furious bark of a million drops of oil crackling suddenly into combustion." The wooden bleachers begin to shake, and Mailer hears himself saying over and over, "Oh, my God!" Then he has "a moment of vertigo at the thought that man now had something with which to speak to God."

After the launch, Mailer flew back to Houston to watch the four-day trip to the moon, the walk on its surface, and the flight back to earth. The astronauts' capsule splashed down in the Pacific on July 24, after eight days in space. President Nixon was there to greet them. By then Mailer had returned to Provincetown, where he watched the capsule being fished out of the drink by the crew of the aircraft carrier, U.S.S. *Hornet* (CV 12). He wrote his *Life* articles, and then commenced work on the book. Beverly was gone, and Carol Stevens, who had visited Mailer in Houston, joined him. He rented an apartment for her in the Ice House, a large condo building at 501 Commercial Street, which like Mailer's house a few hundred yards away away, faced the harbor. She recalled that Mailer brought her to 565 to meet his children, his father, and Uncle Louis, Barney's brother who was visiting from South Africa. "Barney was adorable," she recalled, "greeting me with, 'Oh, what a beautiful girlie,' in an accent hard to repeat. A mix of Jewish and South African, unlike any accent I have ever heard. Uncle Louie was charming and persuasive, urging me to join them. He said jokingly that he was ready to leave [his wife] 'Moos' for me, and Norman agreed we would make a perfect pair."

Later, Carol met Mailer's mother who, she said, was not quite as friendly. In the fall of 1970 when she was pregnant with Mailer's fifth daughter, Maggie, Fan "lectured me on the

merits of her genius son, explaining how unusual he was, and how he needed more love than other men. I would have to 'be more, give more, find more love, time, energy, devotion, for HIM.' That he 'needed more love than other men' was a line I obviously never forgot. I guess she was right on about that." Meeting the children that summer, Carol said, was also difficult. "The girls were young and fragile. They were obviously upset and frightened, more so, it seemed than Michael or Stephen. They were probably afraid to speak. They all acted like terrified little orphans. I think the boys were three and five when I met them." Mailer too [redacted] Italian restaurant, Ciro and Sal's, for dinner. "He introduced me to Ciro as a CIA agent from Hong Kong, explaining I had taken a cab from NY."

In the fall of 1969, Mailer wrote a brief note to Ginsberg about the "Call to War Tax Resistance" project they were both supporting. He added that the moon shot book, "keeps opening like a string one follows through the caves. So I hardly know where it will lead me." He had already written about the eight-day roundtrip of Apollo 11, the human adventure, in Part I of the account. Now, in Part II, he was exploring obdurate material: the physics of liquefied gases, combustion and thrust, gravity and weightlessness, electricity and magnetism, orbits and the dark side of the moon. Drawing on his Harvard engineering knowledge, he presents superb expositions of these matters as they relate to Apollo 11, viewing them as mysteries to be probed, rather than complexities to be rendered. Few newspaper feature writers covering the moon shot, nor those who wrote full-length books about the event, entered into discussions of this kind. Few could. Nor did many commentators on the moon shot find it necessary to link the Apollo 11 mission with the inflamed state of race relations in the U.S. Mailer had begun writing about the situation of American Blacks in "The White Negro," and then did not address it substantively

until 1968. He commented favorably on Black Power in a *PR* symposium in 1968, and again a year later in an essay in *Look*, "Looking for the Meat and Potatoes—Thoughts on Black Power." In between these two pieces came his comments in *Miami*, which reveal a new ripple in his thinking, one that reflected the shift in the national mood in the years following the passage of landmark civil and voting rights legislation during Johnson's administration.

Irritated that the Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy, one of the late Dr. King's closest associates, was "scandalously late" for a press conference at the G.O.P convention in Miami, Mailer realized that "he was getting tired of Negroes and their rights." This leads him to a seven-page reverie on "how to divide the guilt" for Black misery and disenfranchisement. On the one side, Blacks had burned neighborhoods and threatened "Whitey" in half the major cities in the country over the previous four years. On the other, there were countless incidents of police breaking Black heads with impunity, and unforgivable illegal discrimination. An "ugly thought" comes to Mailer as he waits. However much the wealth and well-being of America was dependent on the underpaid or unpaid labor of Blacks, "still the stew of the Black revolution had brought the worst to surface with the best, and if the Black did not police his own house, he would be destroyed and some of the best of the white men with him." Mailer wondered why only five of his fifty friendships with Blacks over the past decade continued with any warmth. Who was to blame?

Although his admiration for Black élan continued unabated, he was now "heartily sick of listening to the tyranny of soul music," and "bored with Negroes triumphantly late for appointments." Waiting with the other reporters for close to an hour, he became more and more peeved with Abernathy for making him wait "while the secret stuff of his brain was disclosed to his mind." Mailer's admissions are candid. He does not mention, however, that his current

distaste for Black arrogance, his weariness with "the smell of booze and pot and used-up hope in blood-shot eyes of Negroes bombed at noon" that he observes in the subways of New York, is squarely at odds with his praise for the dangerous life of Blacks in "The White Negro." There he notes that the Negro knows "in the cells of his existence that life was war, nothing but war," and he admires how Blacks "subsisted for Saturday night kicks." His views on Blacks shifted again the day after the astronauts walked on the moon.

He ran into a Black professor at a party in Houston. The two had met several times in the past, and ^{were} ~~are~~ friendly. The unnamed professor, much admired on his Ivy League campus, has the "impressive voice and deliberative manner of a leader." Mailer observes that he has been drinking heavily, perhaps for several days, "as if he were looking to coagulate some floor between the pit of his feelings at boil and the grave courtesies of his heavy Black manner." As they talk, Mailer recognizes that his friend is drinking because two white men have landed on the moon and are now flying back, an accomplishment of the "White superstructure which had been strangling the possibilities of his own Black people for years." Mailer and the professor agree that Blacks are "possessed of a potential genius which was greater than whites." This genius is based not on numbers, but magic and telepathy. There are no Black astronauts, the professor observes. No Jews either, Mailer replies. The victory of WASP culture relied on numbers and computers. If there was ever to be a great Black civilization, he predicts, "magic would be at its heart. For they lived with the wonders of magic as the Whites lived with technology." The professor had good reason to drink, Mailer observes. Technology was winning on all fronts, and NASA had scant interest in race relations or, for that matter, Mailer's hypothesis about the existence of the Thanatosphere, a ring around the moon where the souls of the departed rose after

death, waiting, presumably, to be reincarnated. Mailer's magic side was worried that Apollo 11 might interfere with this celestial holding pattern, but the engineering side took some pleasure in what NASA had accomplished. Mailer's deepest loyalty, however, was for magic. Apollo 11, Mailer said later, was either "the greatest achievement of man," or "the most sacrilegious act that man ever committed." His navigator would keep him on a tack windward of technology to the end of his life.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

Through the fall of 1969 and the first four months of 1970, living in Provincetown with Carol on Miller Hill Road, Mailer immersed himself completely in *Fire*, seldom traveling. Money was tight, as he was now supporting six children, plus Adele, Beverly, and, in part, Carol Stevens, who still worked professionally as a singer. He did make a trip to Chicago in January, where he testified at the trial of seven men, including Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman who were accused of inciting a riot at the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention. The trial went on for months and was widely seen as a polarizing moment. When chided for loquacity by the presiding judge, Julius Hoffmann, Mailer answered, "Facts are nothing without their nuance, sir." At a press conference afterwards, he said that the Yippie strategy at the convention was not to attack the convention amphitheater, but rather to "just surround it and make faces at the people inside and let them have nervous breakdowns and destroy themselves." The seven were convicted, but the verdict was overturned on appeal.

Mailer complained to Harvey Breit's son, Luke, who had worked on his campaign staff, that *Fire* was going to take nine months, all told, and he had hoped to complete it in three. But it

appears that he had almost a complete draft in hand by the latter part of March because he spent a day answering a huge pile of mail. In his letter to Breit, he gives a sketch of his quiet days:

[I]t's like doing a benevolent stretch in stir. The meals are good, the prisoner gets his fresh air and walks, but can't drink or go out at night for fear of losing the next day's work. So gray Provincetown winter days go by and nothing happens and not much inner life and all that work until you begin to get the same kind of quiet self-pity that a lifer has. You're condemned to work at a species of literature for your natural life and it all began with the power of imagination.

The manuscript was nearly complete when Mailer flew to Washington to serve the remainder of his sentence for disorderly behavior at the March on the Pentagon. He had lost his appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, and on May 5 checked in the Alexandria city jail for the last three days of his sentence. His jail time was "near agreeable," he said. "I'm a believer in the rules of the game," he told reporters after he was released, and "if you cross that line you get arrested." New anti-war protests were scheduled for Washington the following day, and Mailer cautioned the protestors to avoid violence: "A winning hand this weekend is to have no violence. The point to be made is it's the administration shedding blood—not the New Left," referring to recent reports that the U.S. had been secretly bombing North Vietnamese troops in Cambodia for over a year. At Kent State University in Ohio, four students had just been shot dead by national guardsman. Mailer said that when President Nixon had called protesting students "bums," it gave the guardsmen "an out to pull the trigger." Nixon's comments about the U.S. not losing its first war, he continued, "are the babblings of a Chekhovian character." For good measure, he also called the President a "cathedral of hypocrisy," and compared him to Dickens' unctuous villain,

Uriah Heep. Mailer was driven to the airport by Rip Torn, with whom he was now reconciled. Torn's ear had healed completely.

The final manuscript of *Fire* went to Little, Brown shortly after Mailer returned from Washington, and he spent the next two months shuttling between Provincetown and New York, where he worked on *Maidstone*, which now ended with Torn's attack. He and Carol relaxed before the summer season was at its height. In early June, they spent a few days at one of the dune shacks of the National Seashore outside Provincetown. The shacks, a dozen or more, are sprinkled across miles of dunes and reached only by a jeep or a long walk. There is no sound but the wind and the waves. "There are few places on the Eastern Seaboard where one could bury a man as easily and leave one's chances so to nature," Mailer had written. The shacks have neither electricity nor tap water. According to Carol, it seemed certain to them that a child had been created while they were there. Maggie Alexandra, his fifth daughter, was born a little more than nine months later.

Ever since his first visit to Maine in 1948, Mailer had wanted to return. Sometime in late June 1970, he left Provincetown for Mt. Desert Island where he rented a house for the summer. Acadia National Park is on the island, and within the Park is Cadillac Mountain (elev. 1528 ft.), where the morning sun first hits the continental U.S. during the fall and winter. The Mailer clan would explore the park on many an outing over the next dozen summers. "Fortune Rock" the house that Mailer rented, is a spacious modern structure built by the Wells Fargo heiress, Clara Fargo Thomas in the late 1930s. It stands at the end of Somes Sound, a fjord that runs nine miles to the ocean. The tide shifts are over ten feet in this part of Maine, and at high tide the water was about twenty feet below the house's cantilevered living room. At low tide, there is nothing but

rocks and sand below. Carol remembers that Mailer was always testing himself, and at one point began walking on the narrow railings outside the living room. "He could have killed himself," she said.

Carol and all of his children—save Susan, who was in Europe—joined him there, as did his sister, who came to help for two weeks. "It was," he later wrote, "not an unhappy summer, and he ended with the knowledge that he could run a decent home and sleep without a turn of guilt, knew he could run a home without screaming at children and be as a result thus mind-empty at night that solitaire pleased him." Danielle, Elizabeth and Kate, 13, 11, and 8, helped with Michael and Stephen, 6 and 4. The boys, Mailer recalled, were "small powers out of doors. Inside, on rainy afternoons, their whining gave a hint of the whistle in the pipes of a maniac." They swam, hiked and went on picnics. The summer experiment in housekeeping and family excursions—which Mailer referred to as "the paving blocks at the crossroads of existence"—made him ponder parental roles: "[H]e knew at last what a woman meant when she said her hair smelled of grease." He realized that, with help, he could handle a large family day to day, but he also believed that by doing so "the most interesting part of his mind and heart" would shrivel.

Until the end of her pregnancy, Carol traveled regularly with Mailer. She was three months pregnant in late August, during their trip to Italy for the showing of *Maidstone*. Prior to their arrival in Venice, a friend, Mary Jane Matz had made arrangements for them to visit Ezra Pound and his companion, the violinist Olga Rudge. Carol remembers that Pound "was in a period of silence, but did say something to Norman." The old poet, she said, had "the most intense, penetrating blue eyes." A year after their visit, an American journalist, Alan Levy, visited Pound. He noticed a copy of Mailer's book of poems, *Deaths for the Ladies*, on a

bookshelf, and asked how it got there. Rudge said that Mailer had given them a copy. She added, "I had heard this Mailer was a wild man and I was a little afraid, but he was on his best behavior. Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth." At this point, Pound interrupted: "Mailer? Nice . . . young . . . fella." Rudge said that she read Mailer's poems to Pound, and then turned to him: "And you liked some of them. Do you remember any?" Her thin, frail companion answered, "All of em!" Mailer wrote Matz to thank her for arranging the visit, and said he was reading "quite a bit" of Pound, including Noel Stock's recent biography. "[T]he funny thing is that my poetry in Deaths for the Ladies while having unfortunately little of the sensuous quality of his work does subscribe to a few of his poetic principles." The difference, he said, is that "I have no talent—not for poetry but the prose is awfully good." In 2007, he recalled his visit to Pound's Venice apartment, noting that he was now the same age as Pound—84—during the 1970 visit. The poet kept scratching at his hands and nails, Mailer remembered, "like an old eagle."

Ψ Ψ Ψ

Stock market losses plus a "staggering" income tax bill on the horizon led Mailer to consider a proposal from Willie Morris to write an essay on the Woman's Liberation Movement. He had hoped to begin another "big book"—the Egyptian novel, as it came to be called—but had to work his way out of his financial hole first. Earlier, in the summer of 1970, he received a call from *Time* editor Henry Grunwald as Mailer recalled in his essay, "The Prisoner of Sex." The magazine wanted to interview him. Mailer was interested because a cover story might help him find a distributor for *Maidstone*, but he demurred largely because the idea of his five children "cavorting for *Time*'s still camera did not make him happy." In addition, Carol Stevens, to whom he dedicated *Prisoner*, was present, and she was "too proper to be photographed, too proud to be

passed over." Grunwald said he was not proposing a cover story; rather, he wanted Mailer's opinions on the Women's Liberation Movement, which was the burning topic of the day. Grunwald told Mailer that he was the Movement's "major ideological opposition." This announcement surprised and tempted Mailer: "To be the center of any situation was, he sometimes thought, the real marrow of his bone—better to expire as a devil in the fire than an angel in the wings." His strong suit was to "mobilize on the instant" with sharp remarks about "the ladies of the Liberation." But, finally, he said no: "Only a fool would throw serious remarks into the hopper at *Time*." Pithy statements for magazine readers came best from wits like Gore Vidal, he said.

Mailer had learned again about *Time*'s proclivity for unfairly condensing one's comments, most recently at a press conference in Venice. Asked by reporters to comment on the charge that his depiction of a brothel for female customers in *Maidstone* contributed to the exploitation of women, Mailer went on for five minutes in a fairly complex fashion to discuss Women's Liberation. *Time* boiled his commentary down to this: "Exploitation of woman? But it is impossible to exploit her because she has magic powers. I am against the emancipation of women just because I respect them." Mailer complained about what he believed to be unfair treatment by the magazine in a letter that they printed, but these three sentences do, in fact, encapsulate one of the major arguments of his *Harper's* essay, "The Prisoner of Sex," on gender, sex, procreation and women's rights.

"There was a tissue of communion between the children and himself" that summer, Mailer wrote, but by Labor Day the children had returned to their respective mothers to prepare for school and Mailer and Carol returned alone to Provincetown. They rented the Lily Harmon

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House, a large, brick-faced house on the harbor at 627 Commercial Street that he would later purchase. He continued to worry about *Maidstone*, awaited the publication of *Fire* in January, and worked on his "big, fat discursive piece" for Willie Morris. At the beginning of November, a copy of *Women's Wear Daily* containing a profile of Gore Vidal came his way. Amidst a stream of remarks, Vidal noted that he was in unison with the Women's Liberation Movement on the lack of substantial difference between the sexes. He was different in this regard, he continued, from his colleague Norman Mailer, who "often sounds like the deranged commander of an American Legion post, particularly about women, whom he doesn't like very much. He has made politics out of sex." Vidal himself, as he explained, held that everyone is bi-sexual, although "not everyone practices it." Mailer read this as an endorsement of unisex, which he ~~believed to be~~ ^{considered} an abomination. Mailer sent a letter to the paper a week later saying that Vidal's comments should be seen in the light of some statistical evidence: "marriages, Vidal-0, Mailer-4; children, Vidal-0, Mailer-6; daughters, Vidal-0, Mailer-4." While these figures were not conclusive, he continued, one might conclude that "Gore neither wed nor bothered to sire because he put womankind in such high regard that he did not wish to injure their tender flesh with his sharp tongue." The exchange was the beginning of a small war between Mailer and Vidal, one that went on for more than 15 years.

Vidal's comments in *Woman's Wear Daily*, *Time's* desire for Mailer's response to the Women's Liberation Movement, and Willie Morris' solicitation of an essay for *Harper's* on the phenomenon were all the direct result of the publication of a fierce attack on male chauvinism by Kate Millet, an apologist for feminism whose stated goal was "enlarging human freedom."

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Written originally as a Columbia University thesis, *Sexual Politics* was published in August 1970,

exactly 50 years after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution giving women the vote. "There was a great wave of feminism building," that summer, Millett wrote, and her book rode the crest. She appeared on the cover of the August 30 *Time*, and every literate person in the country, it seems, had an opinion about her polemic. Mailer ordered a copy and was soon plowing through what he called "Kate Millet's hard clay." Although he comments on a score of feminist works (including Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, also published that year), *The Prisoner of Sex* is a concerted attempt to rebut and discredit Millett.

Her book was not the first postwar feminist work to create a stir. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949, translated into English in 1953) has that honor. A learned, multi-disciplinary work, Beauvoir's pioneering study explores the myths and facts of the female gender, focusing on the ways women had been marginalized, culturally conditioned to think of themselves as "other" through the ages. Mailer wrote to a friend that "the first inkling I ever had of woman's liberation" was when he heard his sister speak passionately about *The Second Sex* shortly after it was published in the U. S. Barbara remembers that he leafed through it and was generally dismissive. Betty Freidan's 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, was also a powerful influence, and is often credited with initiating the "second wave" of feminism in the U. S. after the reverses that followed the achievement of suffrage. Its "fundamental argument," as distilled by Louis Menand, "is that there is no such thing as women's essential nature. The belief that women are biologically destined to be domestic and subordinate, is just a construct, constructed by psychologists and social scientists." Mailer never argued that women should be homebound cooks and babysitters, but he did believe that they shared an immutable biological identity.

The Woman's Liberation Movement gained momentum all through the sixties, aided by governmental action—President Kennedy's National Commission on the Status of Women and the Equal Pay Act of 1963, for example—and the formation of innumerable organizations supporting women's rights—Freidan and other women and men founded the National Organization for Women in 1966—and reached its full flowering with the publication of *Sexual Politics*. Millett attacked the positions of a wide range of male thinkers in her study, including Freud, Reich and Erik Erikson, but her three chief targets are D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller and Mailer.

In late December, Mailer received his advance copies of *Of a Fire on the Moon*, which reproduced as cover art René Magritte's painting of a huge rock and the sea, titled, "Le Monde Invisible." The official publication date was January 11, 1971, and the major reviews came out that month. They were generally positive, but compared to those of *Armies* and *Miami* were less glowing by an order of magnitude. The old pattern of evenly divided reviews began to reestablish itself, and would continue until the end of the 1970s. Benjamin DeMott's review in *Saturday Review* straddled the extremes. He complained of Mailer's "unremitting self-involvement and self-regard," but also argued that the author's narcissism "blesses him as an enthusiast," one who writes "pages that physically breathe with the vitality of the writer's will to pack in the whole, nail the kit complete—all two million functioning parts, every sensation, every fear, every-lucked-out crisis" of the Apollo 11 mission. So it went through the rest of the reviews: encomiums for Mailer's ability to drill through NASA's layers of bureaucracy with his diamond-hard ego, and protest against the revelation of his personal life and theology, especially his "Manichean ox-team—his God and Devil in harness pulling on the universe in opposite

directions," as Christopher Lehmann-Haupt described it in his *New York Times* review. The book's length put off some reviewers; others were troubled by what Morris Dickstein in the *Times Book Review* called "a certain slackness of execution" in some of the technical descriptions, paralleling the tedious parts of the cetology chapters in *Moby-Dick*. But these lapses are small, Dickstein argued, and Mailer's attempt, not just to bridge science and the humanities, "to leap over and back, to reclaim the event for mystery, romance and human dread," made the book exemplary.

Little, Brown pressed Mailer to do some publicity for *Fire*, and he agreed, but with no joy. In late January, he made appearances in New York, including *The David Frost Show*, and later travelled to Houston, Miami, and Los Angeles. At almost every stop, the crowd of reporters seemed more interested in his views on Women's Lib than in *Fire*. He wrote Aldridge about how much he disliked the publicity grind: "I'm caught these days in the low hope that perhaps the book won't do too well and so prove my thesis that TV does not sell books." Mailer never entirely gave up this thesis, even after numerous appearances on television talk shows. What he was looking forward to at the time was the March 8 championship bout between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier at Madison Square Garden. It would be the first of three epic boxing matches in the 1970s between the two men, both of whom were then undefeated. Ralph Graves wrote to Mailer and asked if he could write a 5,000-word report for *Life* on what was being called "the fight of the century." The magazine's publication schedule meant he would have to submit the piece two days after the fight.

Working from seven in the morning until seven at night, he met the deadline and produced a 9,500-word essay. "I never wrote so fast in my life," he told Knox. "Ego: The Ali-

Frazier Fight," is one of the best depictions of a prizefight ever written. Accompanied by nine color photographs taken by Frank Sinatra (one of many celebrities attending), it was *Life's* March 19, 1971 cover story. The piece marks a subtle change in Mailer's self-referencing. In much of his writing from *Advertisements* on, he had used the incidents of his life, willy-nilly, to illumine whatever topic was at hand. But in "Ego", he began talking intently about *the artist* as an exemplary type, comparing, for example, Picasso and Joyce to the boxers with the most powerful egos, heavyweight champions such as Rocky Marciano and Muhammad Ali. "Boxing is a rapid debate between two sets of intelligence," he said, likening a championship bout to his public debate with William Buckley. Prizefighting is a language of the body, he argues, one which is "as detached, subtle and comprehensive in its intelligence as any exercise of mind." From this point onward, Mailer would return again and again to the artist as archetype (with Norman Mailer as the unmistakable signature), using it as a species of divining rod to explore the psychic depths of personalities as disparate as Marilyn Monroe, Henry Miller, Gary Gilmore, Lee Harvey Oswald, Picasso, Christ and Hitler. In retrospect, "Ego" can be seen as the beginning of a major phase in his writing career: Mailer as biographer.

"Ego," however, was overshadowed by the appearance of "The Prisoner of Sex" in *Harper's* a few weeks earlier. Morris bought a 10" x 15" ad in the *New York Times* on publication day featuring the cover of the *Harper's* issue under this tag: "The Favorite Target of Women's Lib Chooses His Weapon. Harper's Magazine." At the bottom of the page was further enticement: "Pick Up a Copy. Before Your Newsstand is Picketed." The ad, aided by Mailer's incendiary comments in various interviews, worked. Ideologues on both sides weighed in, columnists and pundits gleefully reported the battle between the sexes, and nine days after the

magazine had arrived on newsstands, it sold out entirely, if not entirely to Mailer admirers. He was now booed and heckled at some public appearances, mainly by women. The badgering, he felt, was unjust, even though he certainly abetted it. One of the few women who gave him public succor was Joan Didion. Mailer's position "strikes me as exactly right," she said. "I think sex is a lot darker than Kate Millet does. I think there is a lot more going on than meets her eye."

Didion defended the sex scenes in *An American Dream*.

Making matters worse for Mailer was a comment he made to Orson Welles the previous June on *The Mike Douglas Show*. Welles was "being pious for a moment about women," Mailer recalled, and he jumped in: "Oh, come on, Orson, women are sloppy beasts, they should be kept in cages." This pronouncement "poured ice cubes down everyone's back," Mailer said. Welles then got solemn, even after Mailer tried to take the edge off his pronouncement by saying that he did not hate women, adding, "Orson, we respect the lions in the zoo, but we want them kept in cages, don't we?" Years later, Mailer said that he had made the remark "for fun and idiocy," and failed to realize "how intense the anger, fury and frustration, which I had caused, had become. I meant the remark as a joke, but I will admit that it was the wrong remark at the wrong time." The women's revolution was nearing its apogee, and Mailer became its pifiata. Few feminists, radical or not, failed to remember his "joke." When *Harper's* essay appeared, it was merely confirmation for them, even if they had not read it, of Mailer's chauvinism. Later, while on a speaking tour for the book version, Mailer complained to a *Miami Herald* columnist that although he'd "spent my life writing about men and women and their enormously complicated relationship," the feminists were "killing my wallet, my ego, my reputation." New, young

movements, he said, have to "kill someone symbolically. But that person has to have value." He never stopped believing that he was that scapegoat.

If the impetus to *Prisoner* was Millett's 25-page attack on him in *Sexual Politics*, Mailer immediately realized in writing it that he was addressing all the major issues of his life, as listed by one enthusiastic reviewer, the *Times*' Anatole Broyard: "revolution, tradition, sex, the family, the child, the shape of the future, technology, the ethics of the critic, the male mystique, and the rights of minorities." The framework for Mailer's argument, as another reviewer, the novelist David Lodge explained, was how he equated "the technological destruction of nature with the ideological destruction of male-female differentiation, likening Kate Millett to a 'technologist who drains all the swamps only to discover that the ecological balance has been savaged.'" The end result of freeing women from her reproductive role, Mailer warned, would be "coitus-free conception monitored by the state," and the death of heterosexual romance. Forty years after his dire warnings, we can observe that sex differentiation is decidedly less clear-cut, but heterosexual romance rumbles on. If Mailer exaggerated the possibility of Big Sister supervising the embryo assembly line, some of the literature he surveyed for the essay looked forward to it. The SCUM Manifesto, written by Valerie Solanis, who shot Andy Warhol, proposed a program to "overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation, and destroy the male sex." Her manifesto was reprinted in *Sisterhood is Powerful*, a bestselling anthology. Solanis' program "while extreme, even extreme of the extreme," Mailer argued, "is nonetheless the magnetic north for Women's Lib." Technology could win.

Mailer's passionate, if somewhat tendentious brief against such a world is built on a biological fact about women and an assertion about men: A woman possesses a "mysterious

space within," while a man is "simple meat," a creature of unrest "who proceeded to become unmasculine whenever he ceased to strive." The "purse of flesh" that was the womb, contained

Psychic tendrils, waves of communication to some conceivable source of life, some manifest of life come into human beings from a beyond which persisted in remaining most stubbornly beyond. Women, like men, were human beings, but they were a step, or a stage, or a move or a leap nearer the creation of existence, they were—given man's powerful sense of the present—his indispensable and only connection to the future.

If women wished to enter the male occupations and professions, Mailer argued, "go to work with a lunch pail and a cigar" (sarcasm was not off limits), wear a uniform and die of male diseases, what would happen to her link to the infinite? He said that he would assent to every feminist demand for equality, certainly all their economic demands; he would "agree with everything they asked but to quit the womb." But in 1970 it was no longer a simple either/or decision for women (if it ever had been), and in the years since then it became clear that women, while still lagging in paycheck size, have achieved parity in many professions—medicine, law, psychology, the clergy and education—while still behind in engineering, finance and a few others. In 2008, *most* mothers, even those with infant children, were in the workforce, and the percentage has continued to increase. Equilibrium for women between child rearing and work was possible, but no one would claim it was easy.

Millet unfairly truncated some of the quotations she took from the work of Henry Miller and D.H. Lawrence, or as Mailer put it, "the bloody ground steamed with the limbs of every

amputated quote." He restored the severed parts as carefully as Isis reconstructed the body of Osiris, and then situated the sexual investigations of Miller on the ridge line between love and lust "where the light is first luminous, then blinding, and the ground remains unknown. Henry, a hairy prospector, red eye full of lust, has wandered these ridge lines for the years of his literary life." Mailer's admiration for Miller's pioneering explorations of the ways in which lust "can later alter to love or be as suddenly sealed from love," is obvious. Miller read it and wrote him a warm letter from Big Sur, his last retreat. In 1976, Mailer would publish a full-scale examination of Miller's work, *Genius and Lust*. The finest chapter in *The Prisoner of Sex*, however, is Mailer's discussion of D.H. Lawrence, arguably his most incisive piece of literary criticism.

For Mailer, Lawrence's literary and personal life stood as clear evidence "that a firm erection on a delicate fellow was the adventurous juncture of ego and courage." Successful coitus was an achievement, but loving sex was harder, yet Lawrence believed in it with all the passion of the last romantic: the love affairs he depicted in a half-dozen novels—*Lady Chatterley's Lover* was Mailer's favorite—"come in like winds off Wuthering Heights—but never had a male novelist written more intimately about women—heart, contradiction, and soul, never had a novelist loved them more, been so comfortable in the tides of their sentiment, and so ready to see them murdered." Like Mailer, he was spoiled, "and could not have commanded two infantrymen to follow him, yet he was still a great writer, for he contained a cauldron of boiling opposites—he was on the one hand a Hitler in a teapot, on the other he was the blessed breast of tender love, he knew what it was to love a woman from her hair to her toes." The parallels with Mailer—recall Lindner calling him "a pint-sized Hitler"—here become obvious, and when we hear that Lawrence's incompatibles were intensified by an "intellectual ambition sufficient to

desire the overthrow of European civilization," it is clear that Mailer identifies with Lawrence as much as with Hemingway, and owes him a deeper debt. "Lawrence's point, which he refines over and over, is that the deepest messages of sex cannot be heard by taking a stance on the side of the bank, announcing one is in love, and then proceeding to fish in the waters of love with a breadbasket full of ego. No, he is saying again and again, people can only win at love only when they are ready to lose everything they bring to it." Mailer elaborates masterfully on Lawrence's derision of "meaningless fucking [. . .] that was the privilege of the healthy," and his celebration of genuine sexual love as "the only nostrum which could heal," but only when the partners were without what Lawrence called "reserves or defenses."

The son of a mother who loved him "outrageously," and a father who despised him, Lawrence was a sickly youth, "bone and blood of the classic family stuff out of which homosexuals are made," Mailer avers, and became masculine only by will power. Lawrence stole Frieda von Richthofen, a German baron's daughter, from her husband. She left him and her three children, risking everything for a poor miner's son from Nottingham. The love of Lawrence's mother and that of Frieda empowered Lawrence psychologically even as he was slowly dying of tuberculosis. He was dead at 44. Mailer says he was "possessed of a mind which did not believe any man on earth had a mind more important than his own," a mind that created a novelistic manifest for heterosexual love as the saving power of humanity. Mailer compared him to a general, deploying his words as battle troops. Reading Mailer's 40 pages on Lawrence, a brilliant interpretation of Lawrence's profound belief in erotic instinct and risk, reinforced by a close reading of a dozen key passages (restored from Millet's truncations), one cannot escape the conclusion, as one critic, Peter Balbert put it, that Mailer's books—"through their familiar litany

of concern with love, sex, inhibitive society, and modern mechanization—appear like a karmic reformulation of Lawrence's own most prominent preoccupations." In a 1985 letter to another Lawrence scholar, Jeffrey Meyers, Mailer said, "*Lady Chatterley* changed my life."



Both *Of a Fire on the Moon* and *The Prisoner of Sex* were nominated for the National Award in 1972, the former in the sciences, and the latter in contemporary affairs. Neither won, but the publicity helped sales and eased Mailer's financial burden somewhat. *Prisoner* brought in just under \$200,000 in advances, and *Fire* earned nearly \$500,000. In late 1974, he would begin to receive advances from Little, Brown for a trilogy of unwritten novels. Rivers of money flowed in, rivers of money flowed out. While his needs were great, the sums he was earning would have been sufficient had it not been for the amount spent on filmmaking and play production—close to \$400,000. These projects put him in a deep hole, and the IRS began dunning him. He began taking on more and more lecturing work, flying around the country to pick up a few thousand here and there, shoveling honoraria against the tide of debt. Ultimately, he was forced to get loans from Scott Meredith (\$185,000) and from his mother (\$90,000, her life savings) to keep solvent.

Shortly after *Prisoner* appeared, Willie Morris resigned under pressure from the publisher, William S. Blair, and the chairman of the magazine's board, John Cowles, Jr. He had been summoned to a corporate meeting in Minneapolis where the centerpiece was the magazine's balance sheet. It had not made a profit in three years, and Morris' editorial boldness was very much on the minds of the financial stakeholders. Over his four-year tenure, he had

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published not only Mailer's lengthy pieces, but a big chunk of Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, an excerpt from James Jones' novel, *The Merry Month of May*, and Seymour Hersh's expose of the 1968 My Lai massacre in Vietnam. Editorially, the magazine tilted to the left; the Cowles family tilted the other way. One board member at the meeting said to Morris, "No wonder it's such a failure. Who are you editing this magazine for? A bunch of hippies?" "The money men won," Morris said. The entire editorial staff resigned, save a young editor, Louis Lapham, who at a last-ditch staff meeting with Cowles agreed with him, and stayed behind when the rest walked out. He was later appointed editor and remained in the position for thirty years.

In his letter, Morris said that *Prisoner* had "deeply disturbed the magazine's owners. Mailer is a great writer. His work matters to our civilization." It was widely believed, as *Time* reported, that Morris' downfall "was precipitated in large degree by a prominently displayed, controversial article by Norman Mailer." Asked if this was true, Mailer said that he suspected "a strong connection, at least." He called the resignation "the most depressing event in American letters in many a year. Under Willie's editorship, *Harper's* has been the boldest and most adventurous magazine in America." Later, in his memoir, *New York Days*, Morris admitted that Mailer's resignation "was not central to the issue, only part of it," he wrote, "less at that moment substantive than symbolic." But at that moment, Morris felt impelled to make Mailer the heroic artist arrayed against the benighted forces of Midwest plutocracy. For some time, the media had shown a tendency to drag Mailer from the margins to the center of events, and now it intensified. X / When it was clear that Morris was out, Mailer said he would never write for the magazine again, and kept his word, as did many other important contributors—Styron, James Jones, David Halberstam and Larry L. King.

Meredith had negotiated a million-dollar deal for the trilogy, "the highest known payment agreed to for a single unpublished work of fiction," according to what New York publishing executives told the *Times*. Mailer would be paid in installments, however, and not receive the full amount until he had completed the 600,000-word work that would, according to Meredith, "encompass the entire history of a human family from ancient times to the world of the future." After he finished *Prisoner* and "Ego," Mailer began assembling a library of books on ancient Egypt, where the first novel of the trilogy would commence. He and Carol had moved to her East 54th Street apartment to await the arrival of the baby, due in early March. After Carol delivered, they planned to go to either Maine or Vermont where he would begin writing.

Maggie Alexandra was late, born on March 21, 1971, Earth Day, at Beth Israel Hospital in Manhattan. Carol remembered the day: "My water broke and suddenly we were in a panic. I was surprised by Norman's behavior. He was the most anxious of all." In the lobby of the hospital, people asked for his autograph as they waited for the elevator. "We hadn't a minute to spare as baby presented herself feet first, cord wrapped around her neck," she said. Mailer described Maggie, to Knox: She has "my mother's nose, bless her, but when she looks the strongest, you would think you were staring at the bust of a Roman emperor or a big man in the Mafia. Tough!" Shortly after the birth, Mailer rented a house in South Londonderry, Vermont not far from the New York border. Before leaving New York, he had to fulfill a commitment. He had agreed to be the moderator at a meeting sponsored by New York University and The Theatre of Ideas, "A Dialogue on Women's Liberation," to be held at Town Hall, on W 43rd Street.

Diana Trilling, one of the four women panelists at the event, writing about her experience, said: "It would be difficult to exaggerate the disorder of the evening: the

raucousness, the extreme of polemic, invective, obscenity." It seemed perfectly clear to the audience that Mailer's challenge to Women's Liberation in *Prisoner* made it incumbent upon him to take his turn on the ducking stool. The *Times* reporter opened his account of the evening by saying, "For a while last night it seemed like Norman Mailer against the world." Three of the four panelists attacked *Prisoner*; the fourth Jill Johnson, a columnist for the *Village Voice*, gave a prepared speech in a kind of singsong chant, beginning: "All women are lesbians, except those who don't know it, naturally," and "all men are homosexuals." The evening was given a name by Germaine Greer, another of the four panelists: "Town Bloody Hall."

Among the luminaries present were four writers, Betty Friedan, Susan Sontag, Cynthia Ozick and Elizabeth Hardwick, all of whom threw barbs barely disguised as questions at the moderator. There were plenty of men in the packed auditorium, including two Normans, Rosten and Podhoretz, neither of whom rose to defend Mailer. The *Times* reviewer, Anatole Broyard, tried to frame a question about the nature of heterosexual sex after the women's revolution, but Greer told him his "unreasonable question" was out of order. The first panelist to speak was Jacqueline Ceballos, the president of the National Organization of Women. She said that it was Women's Lib—"not the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement or the environmental movement"—that was addressing the root problem of the country. Mailer, she said, had been "sincerely trying to understand" the movement in his essay, but missed the distorted way women were depicted in our culture. In commercials, she said, the woman "gets an orgasm when she gets a shiny floor." Mailer, unimpressed, asked sarcastically, "Is there anything in your program that would give men the notion that life would not be as boring as it is today?" The tone for the night was set by this exchange.

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Greer began by suggesting that the masculine artist figure is "more a killer than a creator." Throughout the evening, she returned to this theme, calling for a return to the anonymous artists of the past—those who built Chartres cathedral. Greer, ^{had} who wanted to meet Mailer and go to bed with him, was quite solicitous toward him during the evening, and passed him a number of notes. To men, she said, "We were either low sloppy creatures or menials, or we were goddesses, or worst of all we were meant to be both, which meant that we broke our hearts to keep our aprons clean." A few months later, she wrote her own report on the event for *Esquire*.

Diana Trilling, the final speaker, was the most cogent, and the most sympathetic to the situation of her old friend, whom she referred to in her speech as "the most important writer of our time." He was "under most intemperate assault," she wrote in her account, and she was therefore happy that he struck back; she did not want to be part of "a symbolical slaughter." X/ Nevertheless, "his working posture, half boss-man and half Old World gallant" did little to X/ mollify the audience. Trilling was a Lawrence scholar, and her partial agreement with *Prisoner* was based on her admiration for the "poetry of biology" in the work of Lawrence and Mailer. Both novelists, and Henry Miller, believed in "the body as the gateway to heaven." While avowedly a feminist, she couldn't join Mailer's female attackers because she preferred "even an irresponsibly poeticized biology to the no-biology-at-all of my spirited sisters." Someone called out "traitor" when she made this comment.

Mailer said that he was in agreement with some of what Trilling and her colleagues said, but he saw no reciprocity. The movement seemed to overlook the fact that "men's lives are also difficult." He conceded, however, that "Women's Lib has raised the deepest questions facing

us," and ended by thanking everyone present "for an incredible evening." Rarely is Mailer given any credit for writing a treatise that lays out such an array of arguments—shrewd, skewed, impassioned and crazy (contraception leads to over-population)—on every aspect of human sexuality and gender identity, publishing it in a popular magazine, and then taking a stage to debate his ideas with all comers. He had, in effect, put himself into the clutches of his detractors, and then offered them a bully pulpit to shred his ideas. At the end of the section on Miller in *Prisoner*, he notes that Henry Miller's male readers were not ready to stand with him in any debate with women, no, "the men moving silently in all retreat pass the prophet by." Few stood with Mailer either. Women were too angry.

Not long after the Town Hall debate, Mailer ran into Dotson Rader and Germaine Greer at a party. She was "tracking Norman like a bounty hunter," Rader said. After a good deal of drinking, the three left in a cab. They had a "terrible row" on the ride, Rader said, because she wanted Mailer to return to her hotel with her, and he refused. Mailer yelled, "Stop the fucking cab," and he and Rader got out. Greer told him to have sexual relations with his own person. Rader and Mailer went to a bar.

Danielle remembers meeting another woman who was close to him during this period, Suzanne Nye. She said that Nye looked a bit like a tomboy, petit, with dark eyes, a button nose, and dark, shoulder-length hair. Still married to Beverly Bentley, and living with Carol Stevens, Mailer always introduced Nye as his assistant, and she did do secretarial work for him. She was also good at martial arts. Rader says that during the period after Town Hall, Mailer was often "short-tempered and cranky." He first noticed this at a Museum of Modern Arts cocktail party that Mailer attended with Nye. Mailer got irritated with an older friend of Rader's who was at the

event, unshaven and seedy looking. Mailer thought he was a bum, and said to Nye, "Do it," whereupon "she gave a kick worthy of a Radio City Rockette and knocked the drink out of my friend's hand and across the gallery. It was a stunning feat," but humiliating to Rader's friend. Rader speculated that Mailer's behavior was attributable to booze, although he found out later that he had been targeted by the government "because of his prominence and politics." Mailer suspected that he was under surveillance, and when he finally obtained parts of his FBI file in 1976, he found out that he had been under surveillance for years, with agents recording what he said on talk shows, keeping track of his foreign travel, and watching his various New York apartments.

The reviews for *Prisoner* were significantly less positive than for his previous five books. Because almost every female reviewer attacked the book, and at least half the males as well, the ratio of favorable to unfavorable reviews enjoyed by *Fire* was reversed. The spectrum of nasty comments is too broad to summarize here, but Brigid Brophy's conclusion in the *Times Book Review* that Mailer's essay "is modeled on a dribble: long and barely continuous," while not typical, is closer to the tone of the majority than is Anatole Broyard's, who called it "Mailer's best book." Henry Miller was one reader who liked it. He wrote to Mailer to tell him it was a "blast" and "incredible." *Prisoner* was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection and sold fairly well, but soon it was viewed more as the fruit of a benighted mind than a fair response to Women's Lib. Proud of "his ability to apprehend what lived on the other side of the hill," Mailer may have sensed the coming avalanche. He told Bourjaily that he was in "a stinking depression" during its composition.

Joyce Carol Oates is one of the few female reviewers who showed some sympathy for Mailer's essay. She calls him "a visionary, a poet, a mystic—he is shameless in his passion for women, and one is led to believe anything he says because he says it so well." Her admiration is qualified, however, by a counter-argument to which Mailer gives short shrift: "Sexual identity is the least significant aspect of our lives," Oates says. She speaks for herself; her primary identity, like Mailer's, is artist. But many women, perhaps most women, have aspirations that equal or exceed the one that he says is paramount: "to find the best mate possible [. . .] and conceive children who will improve the species." Mailer detested all technology that sought to supplant or undermine natural procreation—the pill, the diaphragm ("corporate rubbery obstruction"), test-tube babies, extra-uterine gestation. In the long term, he believed that technology's tendency was to homogenize nature, eliminate gender distinctions, and leach out individual differences. He was thinking a century ahead; women were remembering the suffering of the ages.

Oates argues that for all of human time on the planet "women have been machines for the production of babies," and until this function is ameliorated or abrogated, women's full potential will not be realized. "Once we are freed from the machine of our bodies, perhaps we will become truly spiritual." This is the crux: Was childbearing a function that could be assumed by technology, freeing women to be more than sacred vessels, or was it an inevitably harrowing but heroic destiny, one which elicits male adoration of women, itself biologically destined? Or both? Oates calls it "a difficult question." For insisting on women's procreative destiny, Mailer drew "the rage of Women's Liberation," she says. "And we understand slowly that what is being liberated is really hatred. *Hatred of men*. Women have always been forbidden hatred." Mailer stepped freely to the center of the target, and Women's Liberation was pleased to see him pinned

X and wriggling. Danielle, then 14, was present at the Town Hall debate, along with her younger sister Betsy, and her older sister, Susan. Norman's sister and mother were also there. Danielle recalled being "devastated by the abuse" of her father. Susan was similarly upset, but kept asking herself why her father kept egging the women on. When she saw the film years later, she saw that he was being deliberately playful, something often missed in his encounters with feminists. Mailer said it was the night his hair turned white. MBM 371

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When school was out, Mailer's six elder children joined him and Carol and the baby at a farm they rented in Vermont. Myrtle Bennett, a nanny from Honduras who would become a member of the family, joined them to help with Maggie. It was a huge spread, 470 acres, and they had six horses, three ponies, and several cats. The summer was hot and the bugs plentiful, but it was peaceful. "I haven't felt as collected in a long time," he wrote to Knox. The idea of organic farming intrigued him (he was reading the *Whole Earth Catalog*), and he planted a large vegetable garden. But he planted it a long walk from the rambling farmhouse. There was a drought that summer and the task of watering the garden fell to Danielle and her sisters. With modest help from the boys, they carried buckets of water, every day, Danielle recalls, "endlessly, it seemed, like the brooms in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*."

X J and Ramona
X J José Torres and his wife visited in June and July, and rented a nearby house. Mailer had hung boxing bags in the barn and he and José boxed three two-minute rounds daily. Mailer said later that if he learned anything from Torres in Vermont, it was defense. "He was a marvelous teacher for that because he would tap me with a jab, let's say, and if I made the same mistake

he'd tap me a little harder." With the encouragement of Pete Hamill, Torres had started writing boxing articles for the Spanish-language newspaper, *El Diario*. He asked Mailer to help him improve his English writing skills, and for over a month, every day, he would bring his new pages to Mailer who gave him "a fatherly hand with verb tenses." Mailer said that the book that came out of that summer's work, *Sting Like a Bee: The Mohammad Ali Story*, was a "modest phenomenon," because it offered "a view of boxing which comes for the first time, genuinely and authentically from the inside." He swore that it was Torres' book.

Susan, who turned 22 that summer, recalled taking long horseback rides in to the mountains and playing volleyball. One night she was out late with a young man, and returned to find the paterfamilias awaiting her, both angry and concerned, which surprised her a bit. Barbara and Al visited, and Fan and Barney too. Mailer enjoyed riding, but was thrown by his favorite horse Coyote, and was laid up for ten days with a bad back. Everyone rode, even Fan, who Mailer somehow convinced to get on a pony. He jogged regularly, usually with Danielle or Torres, and tried to live cleanly. He also fasted for two weeks to lose weight and purge.

When Selden Rodman, the poet and art collector, came for a visit, Mailer showed him the book he had used as a guide, *Fasting Can Save Your Life*. Barney and Fan, who were also visiting, were reading it on their son's recommendation. He explained that by the fourth day of eating nothing and drinking only water, you lose your appetite, and "all your poisons are coming out as sweat." The regimen was soothing, he said. "I began to get actually *calm*! No temper, no fighting anymore." This clarity of mind made him think fasting might be beneficial for schizophrenics. Rodman watched Mailer spar, and he jogged along with him. At lunch one

day, Carol told Rodman about the time Mailer had rushed to get his rifle to shoot a pesky raccoon, but then hesitated. "I, the great *macho*," Mailer added, couldn't pull the trigger.

Mailer did no writing that summer, although he did begin to assemble his magazine work of the previous five years into a collection titled *Existential Errands*. Over 125,000 words in length, it contains "Ego," essays on filmmaking, theater and bullfighting, and a sampling of reviews and interviews. Departing from his method in the earlier miscellanies, he made no attempt to write a set of prefaces. He told Yamanishi that he "just lay fallow like an old field. But now I feel the stirrings of literary work. It would be nice if the time has come to begin a long book." That summer he made some forays into Egyptian history and mythology. The two books that led him in this direction were André Schwarz-Bart's novel, *The Last of the Just* (especially the first 30 pages), and Will Durant's chapter on ancient Egypt in *The Story of Civilization*. In early 1972, he would begin "the Egyptian novel," and continue work on it for the next ten years, breaking away only when unable to resist some contemporary phenomenon. He would be 48 in January 1971, and was ready to make the big push.

After the children left, Mailer intended to get to work, but two public depictions of him, one comic and one near-libelous, made him too angry to write. The September 1971 issue of *Esquire* contained "My Mailer Problem," Germaine Greer's account of her various interactions with Mailer. The cover bothered him more than her essay. But given his raspy, flirtatious relationship with Greer, it now seems to have been almost inevitable. Mailer, decked out in a gorilla suit, holds a reduced-sized Greer, smiling seraphically, in his simian hands: King Kong Mailer and Fay Wray Greer. A year earlier, Harold Hayes had written to Mailer apologizing for the way *Esquire* had treated him, and promised "empathetic treatment" in the future. In his reply,

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 Mailer recounted a recent conversation with an *Esquire* editor about a possible article on Fidel Castro. Mailer told the editor what would happen if he took the assignment:

I would spend two months getting ready to do the piece and a lot of time in Cuba and then I would work at writing the piece for another few months and maybe it would be the best thing I'd ever done and then *Esquire* would print a picture of Fidel Castro on the cover with Richard Nixon's asshole installed on his forehead, And the kid said, 'Do you really think *Esquire* would do that?' And I said, 'Don't you?'

Mailer ended his letter by saying that there was a "philosophical gulf" between him and Hayes. The gulf widened after the King Kong cover appeared, and Mailer appeared only a few times in *Esquire* over the next 20 years. His allegiance was transferred to *Playboy*.

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X✓ The other, much more painful, depiction of Mailer came from Gore Vidal. In a July 1971 review of *Patriarchal Attitudes* by Eva Figes, Vidal linked Mailer with Henry Miller and Charles Manson, who had recently been convicted of masterminding the murders of nine people in California, including pregnant actress Sharon Tate. Vidal's stated contention is that men hate women, and the three named men are emblematic of this loathing: "The Miller-Mailer-Manson man (or M3 for short) has been conditioned to think of women as, at best, breeders of sons; at worst, objects to be poked, humiliated, killed. During the Puritan era, "M3 was born, migrated to America, killed Indians, enslaved blacks, conned women." In an interview the year before, Vidal had called Mailer a "deranged" American Legion commander; now he likened him to a "VFW

commander in heartland America" who sees women "as a creature to be used for breeding." Mailer seethed; he said he felt something blow in his brain. Instead of attempting to show that there were "startling and frightening similarities" between Mailer and Manson, he said, Vidal spoke of M3 as if it were an established fact. Mailer looked forward to engaging his erstwhile friend, and before the year was out, he would.

Torres' book was to be published on October 15, and Mailer came up with the idea of a televised boxing exhibition to promote it. He contacted Dick Cavett and it was agreed that a prizefight ring would be created for Cavett's program. On the live program October 7, Mailer tried hard to hit Torres, a great defensive boxer, with a telling blow, and failing, took more than he gave, which was his boxing style. At one point, Torres was concerned that he had hurt Mailer with a punch, and paused, but his opponent was okay. Later, Torres called his former manager, Cus D'Amato, and told him, "Cus, I hit him hard in the stomach and he didn't go down. Not *hard*, but hard." He wrote to his Uncle Louis and Aunt Moos that he had "boxed three moderately confident two-minute rounds with him, and I hope my enemies and detractors gnash their teeth. I know my friends did." For many friends and foes, the exhibition was all too obvious an attempt by Mailer to link himself with Hemingway, which it certainly was, in part. But Mailer's deeper view, as noted in his comments on Hemingway's suicide, was that Papa was not particularly brave; rather, "the truth of his long odyssey is that he struggled with his cowardice." So did Mailer, who saw the match with Torres as another rung on the ladder out of his fears. He wrote the following about Hemingway's boxing: "There are two kinds of brave men: those who are brave by the grace of nature, and those who are brave by an act of will." Hemingway was the latter, Mailer said.

Mailer did not do a great deal of writing in 1971, but he published more titles than in any other year of his career: *Fire* came out in January; *King of the Hill* (a paperback edition of "Ego" with photographs) in April; *Prisoner* in May; *Sting Like a Bee*, with his preface, in September; *Maidstone* in early October; *The Long Patrol*, a 739-page collection of selections from 12 Mailer books, edited by Lucid, appeared at the end of October; and in December, a paperback edition of *Deaths for the Ladies*, with a new introduction. Lucid's edited collection of critical essays, *Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work*, which opened the floodgate of comment on his work, was also published in 1971. Mailer especially liked Lucid's comment that although Mailer had yet to write a single work that would put him in the company of Faulkner or Hemingway, "he has accumulated a body of work which can be taken to have an overall unity—Mailer himself has often remarked on this unity—and which so considered is fine enough to be called an actual realization of Mailer's soaring aspiration." What remained to be accomplished, Lucid concluded, was "a huge novel, vast as his imagination is demonstrably vast." Mailer's candidate for this leviathan was the still-unnamed *Ancient Evenings*, which he would begin in January 1972.

Twice more before the end of the year, Mailer found himself in the public eye. Dotson Rader asked him to participate in a "Remember the War" benefit rally at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York. The Episcopal Bishop, Paul Moore, Jr. welcomed the anti-war coalition. Rader, who was a close friend of Tennessee Williams, had also convinced the playwright to take part. Mailer decided to stage his one-act play, *D.J.*, adapted from *Why Are We in Vietnam?* For this performance, Rip Torn, Beverly Bentley and her boyfriend, Paul Guilfoyle, played the key roles. Six thousand people packed the church, and Mailer's play followed speeches by Gloria Steinem and Williams. "It was a disaster," Rader wrote. "Tennessee walked

out halfway through the play's performance, furious at hearing such filthy language profaning a great Christian house of worship." Mailer was pleased with the event, and told the crowd that it was "the first time in my life that students, a peace movement, ever succeeded in shifting a major empire from its military aims."

According to Rader, the Bishop almost lost his job, as outraged Episcopalians around the country complained about the sacrilege. "It was intense," the Bishop said. "They wanted my head." Williams was so distraught by the situation that he never appeared at a political event again. Mailer wrote to Rader after the event to ask "why Tennessee acted like a ruptured dingleberry that night and give my regards to the Bishop, who is a gentleman." But a few weeks later, he wrote a *mea culpa* letter to the Bishop, saying, "I should have had the wit to recognize that the humor would be lost in the caverns of a public address system and that each word would quiver like a psychotic animal." Years later, Rader visited Moore when he was dying, and the Bishop asked about Mailer. He told Moore he would send him Mailer's novel, *The Gospel according to the Son*, which he said was "the best book I've ever read about Jesus." Moore answered, "I know. I read it."

Mailer's other moment in the public eye was his public debate with Vidal on the *Dick Cavett Show*. The December 1, 1971 program was his most memorable television appearance, one which challenged the rules of the talk show. Appearing with him and Vidal was Janet Flanner, the *New Yorker's* longtime Paris correspondent, who was 79 at the time. Before the show, Mailer had several drinks at a publication party and was well-oiled as he waited in the Green Room. Vidal caressed the back of Mailer's neck and got a slap to the cheek, which Vidal returned. Then Mailer head-butted him "between half and three-quarter throttle," after which

Vidal called Mailer crazy and departed. Mailer came on stage after Vidal and Flanner. Cavett described his entrance: "His hands were fists and carried high, and he had the tousled look of having visited a favorite bar or two en route. His suit was disheveled, his bow to Miss Flanner courtly, and his refusal to shake Vidal's extended hand caused a murmuring in the audience." Mailer's plan was to confront Vidal about the review, but he undercut himself by passing a copy of the magazine to Vidal and ordering him to "read what you wrote." Vidal demurred, and then Flanner leaned over to whisper something to him. Mailer complained about this breach of decorum:

Mailer: Hey, Miss Flanner, are you workin' as the referee or as Mr. Vidal's manager? [laughter] I'm perfectly willing to accept you in either role ... my mind is fragile, and I find it very hard to think, and if you're muttering in the background, it's difficult.

Flanner: I made only the slightest mutter. [laughter] You must be very easily put off center.

Mailer: It's true, you made only the slightest mutter.

Flanner: A tiny mutter.

Mailer: Yes, yes, but I listen to you spellbound.

Flanner: I won't bother you anymore. [laughter]

Mailer reported later, according to Cavett, that after this exchange "he began to wonder whether anything he did was going to work, and that he made a small vow never to drink again before going on TV."

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Louis Menand summed up the situation at this juncture: "Mailer was entitled to think that he had wrestled with the questions raised by the women's movement honorably, and that Vidal was high-handedly slandering him; but he was unable, in the condition in which he had entered the ring, to lay a glove on his opponent. Vidal feigned perplexity at Mailer's distress, joined forces with Flanner (who clearly found him *très gentil*), and made Mailer look ridiculous the way a cat makes a dog look ridiculous." At this point, Mailer went after Cavett:

Mailer: Why don't you look at your question sheet and ask a question?

Cavett: Why don't you fold it five ways and put it where the moon don't shine.

[Following this exchange, wild, sustained laughter. Mailer, eager to reply, can only stab the air with his finger until it subsides.]

Mailer: Mr. Cavett, on your word of honor, did you just make that up, or have you had it canned for years, and you were waiting for the best moment to use it?

Cavett: I have to tell you a quote from Tolstoy?

[Mailer turns his chair away from us and to the audience.]

Mailer: Are you all really, truly idiots or is it me?

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Mailer got the worst of nearly every exchange. The rules of talk shows at that time were as strict as the codes of a Cistercian monastery, and as the television audience watched in amazement, Mailer flouted them, pushing the genre in a new direction. He assumes, or tries to assume, the host's position as moderator, punctures the format's drawing-room civility, brings in

private quarrels, and roundly insults the other guests. "Finally," as one television historian has pointed out, "Mailer also challenges the studio audience. He refuses to let it play its role as an invisible surrogate for the audience at home, an unquestioned presence and responsive but essentially silent chorus to the talk on the stage. Mailer forces the audience to articulate its own position." He was booed more than once.

Writing to a friend a few weeks after the show, Mailer said that he had "never received so many letters on any single thing in my life, and well-written or pretty poorly, sympathetic or critical, what gets me is that they are penetrating." As one correspondent wrote to him: "The studio audience was not aware (monitors notwithstanding) of the stark terror in Vidal's eye and your own basilisk glance. And, if they had read his article in The New York Review they would have noted his woeful sense of wrong-doing." Mailer wrote to another friend to say that he had been charged up that night "to meet any one of ten people (like Germaine Greer, you know, who has been putting ice-picks in my wax doll all summer) and Gore happened to be the one; but I think I would have commenced an ulcer in my stomach that night if I had found myself on the show playing ping-pong with Gore." Television critics, for the most part, raved about the show. Bob Williams, in the *New York Post*, said the program was "the kind of plain-spoken talk-show that all three networks should be carrying, free of the incessant stars plugging plays and movies and records with inconsequential small-talk. Call the Cavett show with Vidal and Mailer nothing less than honest." Mailer wouldn't see Vidal again until 1977.



"Provincetown is beautiful now: grey days with lights of pearl and sunlight with pink and blue of diamonds," he wrote Bonetti, adding that he and Carol would spend the winter there. "It

is five years since I tried fiction," he said. "Who knows if the steam is there?" If there was no economic pressure, "I wouldn't write for another two years." He had to produce 100,000 words to get an advance from Little, Brown, and to bring in some money in the meantime, he had come to an understanding with *Life* about writing about the upcoming political conventions. He also contracted with a professional agency to arrange speaking engagements at various colleges and universities, where he was much sought after. Underwriting *Maidstone* (in part by selling most of his *Village Voice* shares) had proven to be the worst financial mistake of his life. "I was looking for fuck you money," he told his cousin Basil Mailer, "and was ready to gamble my all on my ability to make a million dollars profit." What he also disliked about the ordeal ahead was that writing "is so bad for your vanity. You get fat; you get soft; you get out of condition; and it takes you a number of drinks at a party before you feel even moderately agreeable." A small wave of self-pity came over him as he commenced writing.

In another letter, he gave a clue to the kind of book he was embarking on. "I have come to a place where I think it is almost impossible to go on with a novel unless one can transcend the domination of actual events—invariably more extraordinary and interesting than fiction." Accordingly, the locus Mailer chose for his new novel is the reign of Ramses IX, an obscure pharaoh, who ruled from 1123 to 1104 BC. As Lucid argued in 1986, Mailer was "following his navigator toward a novel that he himself found bewildering: a novel set so far back in time as to be out of history altogether." Moving back over three thousand years gave Mailer the freedom to create a society unfettered by the ruling beliefs of Western culture—Judaic monotheism, Christian compassion, Faustian progress, romantic love and Freudian guilt. At age 49, he knew it

was time to write the novel of his life, or give it up and be satisfied with the primacy first accorded him by Lowell: the nation's finest journalist.

Another prompting, a bit more than a nudge, came from a new critical study by Richard Poirier, who had already given Mailer's work high praise in an essay in his collection, *The Performing Self*. Mailer had liked it well enough to write to Poirier's publisher in April 1971 to say he was "on the way to becoming America's first authoritative critic in many a year." By then, Poirier was writing his critical study, and shortly afterwards sent him the manuscript for his response, which Mailer provided, prompting Poirier to thank him for the "detailed usefulness of your comments." He ended his letter by saying that when Mailer was "writing or talking about

writing there's no one alive who is better." This mutual esteem notwithstanding, Mailer undoubtedly read a troubling summative statement in Poirier's manuscript, which was published

in 1972. ~~He begins by echoing what Lucid had said about Mailer's hugely varied output really~~

~~being one large work, "which constantly comes alive with extraordinary accumulations of intensity and brilliance."~~ ~~Despite this merit, he continues,~~ "Mailer now is like Melville without

Moby-Dick, George Eliot without *Middlemarch*, Mark Twain without *Huckleberry Finn*." In

Mailer's recent work—*Fire* and *Prisoner*—Poirier said, he seems locked into a system of dualisms and needs to escape. He could escape, Poirier says, because he is an inveterate critic of his past efforts, and so "is always implicitly proposing for himself some fresh start in the future." Mailer later acknowledged to Poirier that he got this message, but there would be no departure from his system.

But after only five weeks of work, Mailer had to break away from the novel. "I am off and running on the road," he wrote to Rader, "since I am broke to the point where I have got to

pick up some bread by way of the lecture circuit—give three ughs on the fart-horn.” Over the next three weeks, he spoke at two dozen universities. He showed *Maidstone* at almost every stop, and also got into some heated discussions about Women’s Liberation. The crowds were large, and he felt like “a carpetbagger because each day you pick up a fat lecture fee.” Mailer said to Lucid that he felt something was wrong with his approach to college audiences. Lucid wrote back to say that unlike the students of the 1960s, who were sympathetic to the new order promoted by Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin and the S.D.S., their younger brothers and sisters were more worried about graduating with marketable skills, and were less interested in drugs than careers. ~~Apocalyptic expectations were dwindling.~~ Writing about ancient Egypt was not a bad idea at this juncture, Lucid said.

Sparrring with Torres the previous summer led to a detached retina, and on April 7 he went to a Boston hospital for an operation. ~~Adeline, who he not seen since *Maidstone*, came to visit him and raved over the translation of the Lorca bullfighting poem he had done with Susan.~~ Carol came to see him after the operation. She recalled that when she entered his darkened room, “I felt his pain. It was intense. I sat down next to him and in a few minutes, he turned to me and said, ‘I know what you are doing. It’s working. The pain is leaving my body, but be careful. You can hurt yourself.’ I was astounded that he immediately knew that I was working to take away his pain.” Mailer attributed psychic powers to Carol, and said her singing could cure cancer. He called her a white witch.

After the operation he wrote to Yamanishi about the difficulty of writing a novel “with very little tradition or precedent to help one along.” His plan was to continue on the novel until the Democratic Convention in Miami Beach in July, write his account over a two-week period,

and do the same at the end of September for the Republican Convention, also in Miami Beach. In June he and Carol went to Maine for the summer, and the children again joined them. By this time he had written 60,000 words on the Egyptian novel. Just before he left, he wrote to Lucid, inviting him to come to Maine to read the opening chapters. "I promise you, the new book is going to take the top of your head off," he said. "These pioneer works are pissers." Lucid, with the help of Mailer's mother, had recently begun organizing and storing Mailer's papers and putting them in storage, and their friendship had deepened. He would be one of the first to read Mailer's new work for the next 35 years.



The upcoming elections, Mailer believed, would be "the most exciting American election in my memory." He told Yamanishi, "There is a new mood in America these days," he said, and while Nixon was strong, "McGovern will prove no Goldwater and easily could win." His victory would "carry the disease to a higher level," for the Right would mobilize against the idealistic and radical elements in his politics. Mailer was wrong about the Johnson-Goldwater race in 1964, and just as wrong about the Nixon-McGovern race in 1972. Goldwater won six states; McGovern won only Massachusetts and the District of Columbia, and was defeated by 18 million votes, the worst popular vote defeat in any presidential election. There was indeed a new mood in America, but it was not radical. Assassinations and antiwar activism, and some of the excesses of the Woodstock Generation, as it was now called, had moved the nation toward conservatism, although the pendulum would swing the other way after the Watergate scandal. While Mailer would continue to prognosticate, he never felt in touch with the 1970s. At the beginning of the decade, he had written to Ginsberg that he was constantly being asked what he

thought it would be like. "I don't have the remotest idea," he said. "We were sure of what would happen in the 60's and we weren't far from wrong. The 70's are just a fearful blank to me."

In early June Mailer and Carol and Maggie drove to Maine from Provincetown, again renting the Thomas house on Somes Sound. The children arrived when school was out. Right after the July 4th weekend, Mailer left for the Democratic National Convention in Miami Beach. His affair with Suzanne Nye had moved beyond casual and she joined him there. She still did research and secretarial work for him, but not much was needed in Miami. Compared to its predecessor, the 1972 convention was a subdued affair. Senator George McGovern, an anti-war progressive from South Dakota had won more primary votes than his closest competitor, Senator Humphrey, and withstood all nomination challenges, although conservative democrats—Mayor Daley's contingent, for example—were unenthusiastic. At the end of July, *Life* published "The Evil in the Room," the first part of his report on the conventions.

This report, while full of keen-eyed portraits of notable Democrats at the convention, is hobbled by lack any real convention drama. Some of McGovern's supporters tried to pass platform planks supporting in various ways drug users, draft evaders and women's reproductive rights—"acid, amnesty and abortion," as the platform was crudely described—but these were easily defeated, despite the energies of Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman and others who feared the coming of a corporate, technocratic world. The Democratic Party was weak; fissiparous forces were afoot. And the nation itself was also divided. "Out in America, far beyond Miami, lived a dull damp *wad* of the electorate," Mailer wrote. "They often did not vote. It took no ordinary issue to fire their seat." But they would stand strong against unsanctioned sex, proscribe marijuana, condemn welfare, and look with disfavor upon concessions to Black Power. They

were against much and for little, and perhaps could only hold hands on the flag, the family and the nation's military. They were the Silent Majority of Richard Nixon.

Most of the remainder of Mailer's account of the conventions—published in book form by New American Library as *St. George and the Godfather*—is devoted to the unrepentant chicanery of President Nixon, the ultimate, brilliant, political puppeteer, and his consummate control of the Republican Convention. This portion of the book was published in the *NYRB* under the title, "The Genius." It was accompanied by a David Levine ink sketch of Nixon scrubbing up in a bathtub full of blood, the caricaturist's response to the savage bombing of Cambodia and Laos. Nearly five million were killed, wounded or became refugees under Nixon—a million more than under Johnson. Mailer likens the U.S. bombing to the irrationality of "a man who walks across his hometown to defecate each night on the lawn of a stranger—it is the same stranger each night." Yet the President retained the support of a majority.

Nixon was the artist who had discovered the laws of vibration in all the frozen congelations of the mediocre. Other politicians obviously made their crude appeal to the lowest instinct of the wad, and once in a while a music man like George C. Wallace could get them to dance, but only Nixon had thought to look for the harmonics of the mediocre, the miniscule dynamic in the overbearing static, the discovery that this inert lump which resided in the bend of the duodenum of the great American political river was more than just an indigestible political mass suspended between stomach and bowel but had indeed its own capacity to quiver and creep and crawl and bestir itself to vote if worked upon with unremitting care and no relaxation of control.

He finished writing *St. George and the Godfather* in late August, just in time to move to a shingled, three-story house on five acres in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. He paid \$75,000 (\$60,000 mortgage) for the large rambling place. Carol did not like the house and begged Mailer not to close on it. "The house had bad vibrations," she said. Later, she learned that a couples who had lived in the house had gotten divorced. But Mailer was adamant. T room enough for all of his children, and it was not a long drive to New York in his now owned three homes: 565 Commercial in Provincetown, where Beverly lived most of the time with the two boys, 142 Columbia Heights, and the new place in the Berkshires.

The only way for *St. George* to influence the election was for it to appear in paperback. Mailer agreed, hoping it could appear in mid-October, at the latest, three weeks before Election Day on November 7. In late September he left on a 30-day, 20-college speaking tour to publicize the new book and earn approximately \$50,000 to stanch his financial bleeding. He complained more than once during the tour about the delay in getting the book to bookstores. "Book publishers are all Democrats," he said, "and distributors all Republicans." It finally appeared at the end of October.

At every college, his audience brought up his opposition to Women's Liberation. When he felt feisty, he brought it up first. He usually stated, as he did at Towson State in Baltimore, that he agreed with "the body of demands that ask for equity," but disagreed with the movement's "sexual ideals." He also complained that women would not enter into a dialogue with him, which he called "potentially totalitarian." This college tour went west, with Mailer speaking, among other places, at San Francisco State (where he saw Lois Wilson), and University of California, Berkeley. At this stop, Mailer began by asking the feminists in the

audience to hiss. When they did, he said, "Obedient little bitches," which drew laughs and more hisses. He then went on, according to a news report, to deliver an electrifying speech, "dumping poisonous invective on just about every aspect of the feminist movement and gleefully one-upping most of the epithets that his audience snarled back at him." In the course of the speech, he said that "a little bit of rape is good for a man's soul." Whatever the context, the line was widely reported, and cemented his position as the *bête noir* of Women's Liberation. *Time* ran it, unadorned, as the beginning of its "People" squib on the speech in the November 6 issue. Mailer wrote a letter, complaining as he had in the past, about being quoted out of context. But the damage was done.

Barney had been treated for cancer for several months, and on October 12, when Mailer was speaking in New Orleans, he died. Suzanne Nye was with him when he got the news. He came back for the funeral service and interment at the cemetery in Long Branch where Fan's parents were buried. Shortly after the funeral, an elderly woman showed up at Fan's apartment in Brooklyn Heights. She had a signed note from the secretive Barney, notarized, for \$26,000. Mailer recalled discussing it with his mother. "I think we have to pay it," he said. "My mother didn't altogether want to pay it. He just charmed her [the woman]; I just know it." The family paid. Mailer had made Barney the dedicatee of *St. George*. His father, 81, died two weeks before Mailer could put a copy in his hands.

Chapter 10

The Turn to Biography

When Mailer was in New York, he often ate and socialized at Elaine's, an Upper East Side restaurant that had become a gathering place for people in the arts. Plimpton and Talese and other writers had made the place a sort of clubhouse, and the film crowd as well as celebrities such as Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis dined there. Woody Allen had his own table, and you might give you a glance as you passed it on the way to the restrooms, or to "Siberia," the dining room where tourists were exiled. During a visit to the city in November 1959, Mailer had dinner there with Jeanne Campbell and Frank Crowther, a *Paris Review* editor and Mailer's publicity agent. They suggested that he organize some sort of bash for his 50th birthday. Mailer was opposed, saying, "Another ego trip. Who needs it?"

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A short time later, he was at another dinner at another favorite restaurant, Vincent Rao's on 114th Street in East Harlem, with independent filmmaker John Cassavetes and Larry Schiller, a journalist and media entrepreneur. Schiller had agreed to pay Mailer \$50,000 to write a preface to a collection of photographs of Marilyn Monroe that he had assembled for an exhibition earlier that year. Mailer brought up the birthday party idea, and also mentioned his huge alimony and child care expenses. A few days later Schiller called up and proposed that Mailer charge admission as a way of generating some income. It was the first of many financial schemes he would suggest to Mailer over the next 35 years. Mailer liked the suggestion. Celebrities typically pay for attendance at such events with their presence. Members of the Fourth Estate wouldn't pay on principle. For this party, everyone, even Mailer's ex-wives, had to purchase a ticket—\$30 a person, \$50 a couple. Some friends—Kurt Vonnegut and Rip Torn, for example—refused to pay and stayed home. Fan Mailer said to Larry Schiller, "All these people are paying to see my son. I see him all the time for nothing."

Mailer called the project *The Fifth Estate*, but gave no details, promising to make “an announcement of national importance (major)” at the event. In December 5,000 invitations were mailed out for the February 5 party at the Four Seasons Restaurant on Park Avenue. Working out of a rented office at the Algonquin Hotel, Campbell and Crowther made all the arrangements. Crowther described the event as “a family and literary event—a night for the written word,” which only increased speculation. Would Mailer make a serious proposal, or was it a ploy to raise money for alimony, or to send his children to college? Perhaps it was Mailer’s answer to Capote’s Black and White Ball (Capote didn’t attend Mailer’s party). Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. joshed that Mailer was going to announce his vasectomy. As the night of the party neared, interest surged and there was a last-minute run on tickets. Calls came in asking what to wear—the invitation said “finery.” Mailer’s new secretary, Molly Malone Cook, bought an ankle-length pink gown, and died her prematurely white hair black. She and her partner, poet Mary Oliver, also in a gown, drove in from Provincetown. Later, “in a rare tender moment,” Oliver recalled, Mailer told them how touched he was by their thoughtfulness. Mailer and Carol drove down from Stockbridge, arriving at noon on the 5th. The party began at ten p.m. and almost everyone came on time.

Close to 600 people attended, including Senator and Marion Javits and Senator Eugene McCarthy. Jack Lemmon, Shirley MacLaine and Rod Steiger were part of the Hollywood contingent; Larry L. King, Larry McMurtry and Jessica Mitford were three of the many writers. Dotson Rader came with Princess Diane Von Furstenberg; Elaine Kaufmann, owner of Elaine’s, was there; George Plimpton, of course, Andy Warhol, and nightclub singer Bobby Short. The major gossip columnists and reporters showed up, grudgingly in some cases. Dorothy Schiff,

owner of the *New York Post* came, but Gloria Steinem did not. She called and left a message for Mailer: "Tell Norman it's been a breathless 10 years." The Mailer family was represented by Fan, Al and Barbara, Mailer's four eldest daughters, ex-wives Jeanne and Adele, and current partner, Carol, who Mailer was now calling his fifth wife. His assistant, Suzanne Nye, in a low-cut satin dress, was at his side during the evening. Everyone drank and nibbled for close to two hours. The *Voice's* reporter watched the swirling crowd: "At its center was sure to be Norman Mailer, in the flesh, feet wide planted, drink in hand, finger jabbing chests or tits or air, sterling silver Brillo pad hair bobbing up and down to the rhythm of the crowd he had drawn, pink face-a-pulsing, vibrating jigsaw puzzle impossible to assemble without first killing the man, making him quiet and still." At midnight, Jimmy Breslin introduced Mailer as "one of the half dozen original thinkers of this century."

He began with a dirty joke concerning the respective lengths and depths of male and female genitalia. He began to lose the audience. He maundered. He was, as he said the next day, "a hint too drunk." Finally, the announcement: the Fifth Estate would be a people's organization to track and publish the activities of the F.B.I. and the C.I. A. in the wake of the Watergate scandal—the burglary of the Democratic national headquarters in Washington, D.C. the previous June. "If we have a democratic secret police keeping tabs on Washington's secret police, which is not democratic but bureaucratic, we will see how far paranoia is justified." Sally Quinn, the *Washington Post's* reporter, summarized what followed: "He digressed, with a few attacks on the press. He used words like 'totalitarianism,' 'plots,' 'Kennedy assassination,' 'J. Edgar Hoover,' 'sober organization,' 'bugging.' A few people began hissing and walking out."

There were some shouted questions and catcalls as Mailer warned of the nation's drift toward totalitarianism, but the crowd was ebbing away. Adele shouted, "You blew it, Norman." He ended by saying that he planned to form a steering committee in the near future, and left the podium saying he would return in 30 minutes for discussion. Applause was light. Crowther told him to save his remarks for the press conference at the Algonquin Hotel the following day. Mailer acquiesced. At 2:30 in the morning, he was drunk and disconsolate: "I have a demon inside me," he said. The next day, the Algonquin was packed with TV cameras and reporters.

Mailer had a hangover. It was a "terrible mistake" to call the Fifth Estate "a democratic secret police," he told the media. What he was really proposing, he explained, was an organization like the American Civil Liberties Union. He wanted it to be staffed by "the best literary, scholarly and detective minds," and serve as a kind of national ombudsman in a "morally dastardly" country, one that should take a long, hard look at the events of the recent past to determine if government conspiracies existed. He had no desire to head the organization, but would like to have "an umbilical relationship with it." After expenses, the party netted only \$600.

A year earlier, Wilfred Sheed, a novelist and essayist, had written a magazine piece titled, "Norman Mailer: Genius or Nothing," which argued that Mailer "has caught every fashion at its crest." He ended the essay: "[H]e gives himself unstintingly, opening his lungs to experience with a romantic willingness that comes close to being noble . . . a weather vane with that kind of accuracy is something to prize. Watch Mailer: if he turns to contemplation, buy a prayer mat; if he stays with politics, expect huge voter turnouts. As Mailer goes, so goes the nation." But after the embarrassing failure of the birthday party, and despite his sober and reasoned explanation of

the Fifth Estate idea the next day, it seemed as if Mailer's status as a national bellwether had begun to shrink. Even some of his friends piled on. Pete Hamill said that "the best writer in America was reduced to the role of a nightclub comic"; Shirley MacLaine called the party "a disaster," although she felt Mailer's concerns were on target. John Leonard, editor of the *Times Book Review*, said that as proposed, Mailer's idea was "just another vigilante group." Tim Ferris of *Rolling Stone* quoted (without attribution) someone who said, "What a clumsy, awkward, cumbersome man he has become." Like MacLaine, Rader also felt Mailer was on to something, but after the party, he said, "there was a general feeling around New York that Norman Mailer was nuts, and getting nuttier, poor old Norman, he shouldn't drink so much . . . the journalists I talked to put Mailer down, some of them viciously, and most of them said Watergate was nothing, it would blow away."

On February 7, 1973, the day after Mailer's press conference, the U.S. Senate voted to create the Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities, chaired by Sen. Sam Ervin, a Democrat from North Carolina, and co-chaired by Sen. Howard Baker, Republican of Tennessee, to investigate the Watergate burglary. This action was prompted in large part by reports in the *Washington Post* by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward. Also on the same day, there was a secret meeting of Nixon underlings who sought to cover-up the investigation, as later revealed by President Nixon's White House counsel, John Dean. By the third week in April, Dean and Attorney General John Mitchell were implicated in the cover-up, and slowly but relentlessly the trail led to the Oval Office. Nixon writhed and prevaricated, but the following summer became the first U.S. president to resign. As these events unfolded, Mailer's warnings at the party were reevaluated.

Crowther revisited the matter in a July 12 *Voice* article. He contacted all of Mailer's detractors, and most of them ate some crow. Jimmy Breslin said that Mailer had been right, "and the asshole dilettantes who laughed didn't know what they were talking about, as usual. The only two guys who should have been at the party were Woodward and Bernstein, but they couldn't come because they were too busy." Mailer, writing to Poirier about the party, said "I have rarely behaved with less éclat." But as Crowther reported, Mailer still saw merit in the Fifth Estate idea. "I still think there's a function for it, when Watergate is over," he said. "A continuing investigation can break a powerful institution, with extraordinary results." Mailer helped establish the fledgling organization over the next two years, and was pleased when in March 1974 it merged with CARIC, the Committee for Action/Research on the Intelligence Community. In an article in *Counter-Spy*, the magazine published by the new organization, Mailer characterized its role as "homeopathic medicine—one small drop for a large disease." He was vindicated by events, but his time at the pinnacle of celebrity was winding down. *Time* now referred to him as "the grand middle-aged man of American letters." The Fifth Estate faded away a year or so after Nixon's resignation. Times were changing; the "breathless 10 years" were over.

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Back in Stockbridge after the party, Mailer picked up where he had left off with the preface to the Monroe photographs from the Schiller exhibition, 111 of them by 24 photographers. With the help of Schiller and Robert Markel, editor-in-chief at Grosset & Dunlap, he obtained copies of 24 of her 30 films and watched them. Before that, he read the first detailed biography, *Norman Jean* by Fred Lawrence Guiles, and *Marilyn Monroe* by Maurice Zolotow. He read a few more books, including *Marilyn—An Untold Story* by his Brooklyn pal, Norman

Rosten, who shared it with him in manuscript. He also consulted a series of gossip-crammed articles by Ben Hecht. Because he had only two months to write his piece, he interviewed—"in modest depth"—only 14 people who had known her, including two of her ex-husbands, Jim Daugherty and Arthur Miller, several co-workers and friends. Pat Newcomb, Monroe's publicist, lent him a nine-hour tape of Monroe talking informally, which he said was "no small bonus." He learned that Monroe's favorite perfume was Chanel No. 5, and bought a bottle to see if he could pick up the scent of her personality. One of the photographers in the Schiller exhibition, Milton Greene, and his wife Amy, shared their memories of the months Monroe lived with them in New York. Joe DiMaggio, Monroe's second husband, was not interviewed. Mailer didn't think the Yankee Clipper would stand for an interview, and didn't try to get one. DiMaggio was "not a man who's famous for the precision of his search into his emotional depths," Mailer said. His research agenda, therefore, was modest, but sufficient, he thought, for a preface of twenty-five thousand words.

As he wrote, he got "so excited," and the preface kept growing. "[L]et it be the longest preface ever written," he thought. At some point, he realized that he was embarking on a biography. "I wanted to say to everyone," he told a *Time* interviewer, "that I know how to write about a woman." He would rely on Guiles and Zolotow for the basic facts, add new ones obtained from the interviews, and draw on his own experience: "I know an awful lot about living with one's legend," he said later. "And I know an awful lot, as a result, about the sort of separation of mind that goes on. I know what it's like to live a little bit on the edge of schizophrenia." His film work had given him insight into the sensibilities of actors, and his sports writing, especially his profile of Muhammad Ali, gave him a sense of how Joe

DiMaggio's ego might function. His Brooklyn roots were a factor, he said, not merely because Arthur Miller came from there, but because Monroe "had the basic stuff out of which Brooklyn dream girls are made." For everything else, he said, "I speculated."

Beneath her celebrity, her comic ability, her beauty and her sexuality ("the sugar of sex came up from her like a resonance of sound in the clearest grain of a violin"), was her divided self. Mailer believed that he shared "existential similarities" with her. Monroe was both sweetly vulnerable and a strong-minded careerist. Depending on who you listened to, she was either sexually voracious or terrifically frigid. Lacking much formal education, she was intellectually ambitious and read Freud, Whitman, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Joyce's *Ulysses*. She was brave, she was timid. Most appealing to Mailer was her determination to be a great movie star. His description of her intense desire to succeed recalls his own:

She'd finally laid down a directive for herself. She'd become the instrument of her will. And her will said: you will succeed. Whenever anyone does that, they take everything that's weak in them and they submerge it, very often for years. All hegemony is given to the strength. There'll be a much weaker personality travelling with that strong personality which has its own habits, its own demands, and it will become more and more inflamed. At the first success there's a tendency to relax just that little bit.

Mailer had done the same after *Naked*, engaging in what he called the "ego-gobblings" of celebrity.

The manuscript was due on March 1, and as he approached the deadline, he saw that there was much he would not be able to write about, including an “indelible” impression he had of Monroe. In 1961 or early 1962, he had sat behind her at an Actors Studio performance. “She just looked like a tired blonde. She had a red nose and straw hair . . . really a great mound of straw hair wedged under a black babushka . . . all hair and big dark glasses in a forlorn little huddle. She had this sort of off-beat laugh, an irritating giggle not unlike the buzz of a bee or a wasp, an incredible sound.” The other thing he lacked time to investigate fully was her death, and when he was interviewed on *60 Minutes* by his old adversary, Mike Wallace, just before publication, this lack would cause him grief.

Mailer had seen many of the photographs that would be in the Monroe book, but hadn’t given much thought to how they would appear in the book. But for Schiller, the layout of photographs by world-famous photographers such as Richard Avedon, Cecil Beaton and Bert Stern was the main chance; the text was secondary. Dyslexic, and blind in one eye from a childhood accident, Schiller was not much of a reader; he had to lock himself in the bathroom and concentrate just to read a newspaper article. He said that when he was working on *Marilyn* he could count on one hand all the books he had read in his life. Despite this, he saw “The Legend and the Truth” exhibition of Monroe photographs he had assembled as the heart of an iconic book. He hired a leading book designer, Allen Hurlburt and, initially, gave as much thought to Mailer’s text as Mailer gave to the photographs. It was Mailer’s name and what he stood for that he wanted. “We’re laying out the book to make it exciting,” he said, “to make it lovable, huggable, and fuckable, you know, and so it doesn’t matter who the writer is, as long as the text is controversial.” All Schiller wanted, as Mailer told Lawrence Grobel, was “some nice

grey matter between the photographs." When Schiller went to Stockbridge at Mailer's invitation, he got his first inkling of their opposed conceptions of the book.

Schiller was a bit nervous, remembering Mailer's reputation as a brawler. "I expected somebody like the Hulk," he said, but he found his host to be "very polite, overly courteous." The evening started well. Mailer told Schiller that his wife was a jazz singer—"You're going to love her," he said—and for the first hour of his visit they listened to her records. "This guy's easy for me to handle," Schiller recalled thinking. But when they discussed the book and looked at the 50 photos that Schiller brought, Mailer wasn't entirely pleased—he liked some pictures but not others, and asked questions about their placement. He felt that photographs of the younger Monroe should be near the beginning of the book to conform to his narrative. As Schiller drove back to New York that night, he was worried. He didn't want to ask Hurlburt to redo his exquisite layout, but he saw that Mailer would not be easy to convince.

Hurlburt called Schiller sometime in early March. He had received a copy of Mailer's preface and was disturbed. He was prepared for up to 40,000 words, but not for the 105,000 he received. "We'll have to tear the book apart," Hurlburt said. Schiller convinced him that the basic layout would stand. The longer text could be handled by using longer runs of prose at various places. Mailer cut his text by about 10,000 words, and Hurlburt made the necessary changes. But when Mailer saw the new layout, he was unhappy. He told Markel that he wanted some pictures moved around or he wasn't going to let the book be published. Markel passed this on in a call to Schiller, who replied that Mailer didn't own the book. "I'm not going to fuck up the book because of some writer's threats," he said. If need be, he'd throw out Mailer's text and get another writer—Schiller had final approval of the text. The book had been well publicized by

Grosset & Dunlap; a deal had been cut with the Book-of-the-Month Club and expectations were high. Markel, caught in a bind, suggested a meeting. A meeting was set up at J.F.K. airport in New York at the United Airlines Friendship Lounge.

By this time Schiller had read the text, and liked most of it, but was worried and angry about Mailer's discussion of Monroe's close relationship with Robert Kennedy, and the lack of an interview with Monroe's housekeeper, Eunice Murray, who was there the night she died. He told Markel that what Mailer had written could lead to a negative story on *60 Minutes*. How much of this Mailer knew before the meeting is uncertain, but he recalled that by this time he and Schiller "were adversaries, and we remained adversaries." Mailer came into the Friendship Lounge, "striding in like he's coming out of the corner of the ring, ready to box," Schiller said. Page by page they went through the book; Mailer suggested moving several photographs next to his text, violating the original design. Schiller fired back, "Your text is strong alone, isn't it? You're a writer, aren't you?" Mailer replied that this was the first time he had written anything illustrated by pictures, and "it's going to be the way I war back and forth, and as Markel recalled, "There was a monumental stalking around and slamming of doors, and I had to go out with each of them for individual walks and cooling-off periods." At some point, Mailer suggested that some photos be reduced in size and placed in the margins of the oversized book at chronologically pertinent points. "Schiller argued against it vehemently," Markel said, but ultimately agreed to six small photos in the margins of the first two chapters. The basic design would stand. Realizing that he needed a publicity photo of Mailer, Schiller asked him to go outside, which broke the tension. Schiller shot a role of black-and-white film

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with his Leica. Mailer was “pretty mad” when he left the meeting, Schiller said, but “I was on the train to success with the book and nothing was going to deter me.”

Schiller's exhibition had been given a *Life* cover story the previous summer and, given the swell of interest in Mailer writing the text, he believed the book had every chance of getting a *Time* cover. Mike Wallace had arranged to interview Mailer, Schiller and five of the photographers for *60 Minutes*, and Grosset & Dunlap threw a \$25,000 cocktail party for the book in Los Angeles on June 11. On June 21, the British publishing firm, W.H. Allen, accused Mailer of plagiarism, saying he had lifted portions of *Marilyn* from the biographies of Zolotow and Guiles, both published by Allen in England. “No one is going to call me a plagiarist and get away with it,” Mailer said. “I do not need other writers' words or thoughts to make myself a book.” He had, however, very definitely needed and used the work of both Zolotow and Guiles for his basic chronology and for many quotations, and Grosset & Dunlap had entered into permission agreements with both writers. Zolotow claimed Mailer had exceeded the limits of the agreement, and shortly after publication filed a \$6 million suit against Mailer; Mailer threatened a countersuit. Then, as quickly as the controversy had arisen, it died. Both writers received additional payment, and Zolotow later issued a written statement apologizing for calling *Marilyn* “the literary heist of the century.” Whatever was paid to Zolotow and Guiles—reportedly \$15,000 apiece—was well worth it, and the publicity did nothing to diminish interest in the biography.

Nor did it harm Schiller's effort to get Mailer and Monroe on the cover of *Time*. The magazine made the first move, asking for interviews and also for a dozen or more photos from the book. It was agreed that *Marilyn* would be the cover story for the magazine's July 16 issue,

and that the cover photo would be from the book or the earlier exhibit. When *Time* showed Schiller the proposed cover, he didn't like it and refused to supply the photo—Mailer was unaware of all this. ~~Time was running short, and~~ *Time*'s editors were getting angry. Then, one of Hurlburt's associates, Will Hopkins, came up with an idea: Send *Time* a layout of what we think the cover should look like—a photo of Monroe mussing up the hair of French actor, Yves Montand (with whom she had a brief affair), but substitute Mailer for Montand—Schiller had the photos of Mailer he had taken at the Friendship Lounge. Knowing that the magazine only permitted its own staff to assign or design a cover, Schiller and Hopkins made up a dummy (not camera ready, however) and sent it to *Time*'s picture editor, unaccompanied by a letter or return address. Recalling the situation, Schiller said, "I don't mean to brag, but in those days I was very shrewd on all these little things." It worked. Six days later the picture editor contacted Schiller and asked for originals of the two photos, the one of Monroe in color and Mailer in black and white.

The cover appeared as created by Hopkins and Schiller. Mailer still had no idea what it would look like, and Schiller knew that when he found out, "It's going to drive him fucking crazy." The magazine appeared the same week as Mailer's interview with Mike Wallace on *60 Minutes*. Wallace focused on the last chapter of the biography where Mailer theorizes that Monroe's friendship with Robert Kennedy may have led to her murder by rogue elements of the F.B.I. or the C.I.A. As Mailer put it, "If she could be murdered in such a way [she died from an overdose of sleeping pills] that it would look like a suicide for unrequited love of Bobby Kennedy, it would have been a huge embarrassment for the Kennedys." Pressed, he says the motive might have been anger at President Kennedy's botched handling of the Bay of Pigs

invasion of Cuba. Mailer had some basis for his theory, based on the work of ~~William~~ Richard Stratton, whom he had dispatched to Los Angeles to poke around. But Mailer made it clear that murder was only a possibility, saying that if he were giving a handicapper's estimate, it would be ten to one that it was an accidental suicide. He also said that he did not think Kennedy and Monroe were having an affair. It was, however, 50-50 that Robert Kennedy had been with her the night that she died, he continued, despite the insistence of Monroe's housekeeper, Eunice Murray, that Kennedy had not been there—a statement she later recanted. Mailer stumbled when asked why he didn't interview Murray, saying he had to meet a publishing deadline. Wallace was unrelenting on two points: that Mailer wrote it for money—the segment was titled “Monroe, Mailer and the Fast Buck”—and that Mailer failed to do the research that would have made it a good biography.” Mailer refuted the first point easily—what writer doesn't write for money—but conceded that the book is “a half-finished exploration.”

As painful as this admission was, the controversy probably added to the appeal of *Marilyn*. Besides *Time*, the biography was a cover story for *Atlantic*, the *New York Review of Books*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Book-of-the-Month-Club News*. Reprint rights were purchased by publishers in at least 15 countries. Including the printings by the BOMC and other book clubs, over 400,000 hardback copies were in print in the U.S. by the end of August, the largest number of any Mailer book since *The Naked and the Dead*. The paperback, which had a new final chapter on Monroe's death, appeared 18 months later, and sold over 600,000 copies.

Mailer's largest regret about the book was the cover of *Time*, which he felt had hurt his reputation as a serious writer. Schiller recalled that shortly after magazine appeared, Mailer either called him or saw him in person. “I remember him saying very strongly, ‘With that

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fucking *Time* magazine cover, I'm never going to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.' And he did say that to me just in those words." Schiller wasn't particularly bothered at first, but later "I remember it haunting me a lot of times." he said. "I had not perceived how something could really hurt somebody who was very, very important." Over the years, he said, "those words just ring in my ears, all the time." Mailer's memory is somewhat different, but not contradictory. Asked about the *Time* cover and the Nobel, Mailer said, "I don't recall saying that," but admitted he might have had the thought. "I can promise you there are a good many things that are going to keep me from winning the Nobel Prize," he said, and that might be one of them, but that's one item in a prime list of 50 or 60 items."

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No Mailer book was as widely reviewed as *Marilyn*. Every major and countless minor media outlets, took a crack at it. The combination of Hemingway's heir as biographer of Hollywood's sex goddess and an extraordinary selection of photographs elicited comment from almost every small-town newspaper book editor. The publicity, beginning with the *Life* cover story on the 1972 exhibition, continuing through the lawsuits and accusations, intensifying with the nearly simultaneous *Time* and *60 Minutes* stories, and persisting through contentious press conferences and talk show appearances, never let up. It continued through the English book tour, and culminated at year's end with a double-page ad in the *Times Book Review* for which Mailer personally wrote the copy. The header reads: "*Marilyn* is a literary phenomenon, a mine of comment with ore at every strata. It is also a giant banana split. *Marilyn* is yummy." At a certain combustible point, both crude critiques and elegant appreciations fed the bonfire. Although few were unequivocal in their praise, few panned it completely. John Simon, writing in the *New Leader*, was the exception; he referred to it as "a new genre called transcendental masturbation

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or metaphysical wet dreaming," and had not one good word for "a very poorly written, very demented book." Simon's review solidified his position as Mailer's leading reviler.

In his May 17 review of "Last Tango in Paris," a highly praised film starring Marlon Brando and directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, Mailer said that the *New Yorker's* rave review of the film by Pauline Kael had surprised him coming from "Lady Vinegar," the "first frigid of the film critics." Kael took no offense, apparently, for her review of *Marilyn* two months later on the front page of the *Times Book Review* was notably fair, chiding Mailer for not paying enough attention to Monroe's films, but finding much to admire. She describes it as "a rich and creamy book, an offensive physical object," (the oversized book is bound in white cloth and weighs over three pounds), but says it "goes like a streak" and is "brilliant." Half of the book, she says, "is great as only a great writer, using his brains and feelers could make it." Several reviewers found merit in the chapters about the relationship between Monroe and DiMaggio, between "one of the last of cinema's aristocrats" and "an American king," the greatest ballplayer to wear the Yankee uniform since Babe Ruth, and the ways they were perfect and not perfect for each other:

He will certainly be her champion in any emergency. He will die for her if it comes to that. He will found a dynasty with her if she desires it, but he does not see their love as a tender wading pool of shared interests and tasting each other's concoctions in the kitchen. He is, in fact, even more used to the center of attention than she is, and probably has as much absorption in his own body, for it has been the instrument just so much as her anatomy has become her instrument, and besides, the body of a professional athlete is part of the capital of a team, and numbers of trainers have spent years catering to it. Indeed, the one of her

✓ associates he likes the most is Whitey Snyder, her makeup man, who looks like a cross between Mickey Spillane and a third-base coach. DiMaggio can understand and get along with the man who helps her keep her professionalism in shape. ^{to}

A lot of reviewers hasten to mention that Mailer did not know Monroe, as if this were a disqualification for a biographer. *Marilyn*, however, makes it quite clear, that Mailer never met Monroe, and that he is offering "a literary hypothesis of a *possible* Marilyn Monroe." This hypothesis is grounded in his now venerable theory of the two selves we all contain, selves that "are analogous in our mental life to twin trees." In Monroe's case, her early years in an orphanage are perfectly suited for "creating too wan a psyche and too glamorous a one."

Since the orphan's presence in the world is obliged to turn drab, the life of fantasy, in compensation, can become extreme. We are all steeped in the notion that lonely withdrawn people have a life of large inner fantasy. What may be ignored is the tendency to become locked into a lifelong rapture with one's fantasy, to become a narcissist. The word, however, fails to suggest the hermetic imprisonment of such a love affair, or the depth of the incapacity to love anyone else, except as a servant to one's dream of glamour.

Laid bare here is what Mailer believed to be the mainspring of Monroe's psychology, and with some qualifications, his own as well. He was no orphan, but his narcissism, born of early spectacular success, parallels hers. He uses the same word—"Napoleonic"—to describe her desire to capture the attention of the world that he often used in connection with his own. "[S]he is her career, and her career is herself," he says, and this shoe fits him as well, if not quite as

snugly. Like him, she is an actor with many faces: “[N]o one can be certain whether she was playing an old role, experimenting with a new one, or even being nothing less than the *true self* (which she had spent her life trying to discover).”

The trying on of faces by great actors, Mailer continues, is the desperate search for an identity. “It is no ordinary identity that will suit them, and no ordinary desperation can drive them. The force that propels a great actor in his youth is insane ambition.” Monroe’s whirligig nature can only be captured by a novelist, he says. His biography must be seen, therefore, as “a *species* of novel ready to play by the rules of biography.” He puts it another way: “Set a thief to catch a thief, and put an artist on an artist.” Great actors (Monroe, Brando), like great politicians (Kennedy, Nixon), great poets (Lowell, Ginsberg), and great boxers (Torres, Ali) are best grasped by the handles of identity and ambition. Novelists are best equipped to do the grasping, and great novelists have the surest hands.

Mailer described his working relationship with Schiller on *Marilyn* with a Yiddish word, *shidduch*, a matchmaking or engagement. But “a *shidduch* made in Hell is the way it felt. Neither of us was very happy with the other, not at all.” Schiller felt the same. “I was done with Norman Mailer. He had fucked me over,” he said. They didn’t speak for over a year. Nevertheless, the collaboration set each of them on a new path. Schiller got into publishing in a big way. The following year, two books that he “produced” appeared: *Ladies and Gentlemen, Lenny Bruce* by Albert Goldman, and *Muhammad Ali: A Portrait in Words and Photographs*. For Mailer, *Marilyn* provided a way to use his experience less directly than he had in *Armies*, while undertaking a life study on a larger scale than in his political and boxing profiles. Looking back in 1981, he said, “All through the 1970s I just sort of staggered along feeling very confused.”

Turning to *Marilyn* was useful, he said. "If you write a book about one person, it helps to focus what you think." *Marilyn* was "more pleasurable" than most of his other books, because "with biography you have to submerge your personality in a way you don't in a novel, or journalism."

Over the next decade, he would write four more books of a biographical nature, all the while plowing ahead on the Egyptian novel.

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During the summer of 1973, Mailer spent several weeks in a rented house in Sorrento Maine. Carol and all of the children were there, save Susan, who was in Mexico, studying to become a psychoanalyst. Danielle recalled the routine of those summers: "We'd be in our bunks and Dad would come down with his Army bugle and he would blow it a few times and he would say, "Drop your cocks, pick up your socks, now get out of your fart sacks, you bastards!" And we'd get up and we'd have this elaborate choreography of tuna fish sandwiches and lemonade. All of us would be in gear and ready to sail. We'd go out in our Luters 16 and often would sit in irons for half the day." She also remembered summer activities in Provincetown: "There was always some drama, something a little scary, something unpredictable. We used to take rides in the dunes in his Land Rover. We'd go up cliffs and do things that were really c
Afterwards, we'd be shaking with fear, and Dad would say, 'But don't you feel virtuous naving looked the Devil in the eye?' He was also testing himself, Danielle said.

Danielle's brother Michael remembers the time in Maine as "the quintessential summer experience," a time when they cohered as a family.

We did, you know, the Bataan death marches, we scaled the highest peaks we could climb; we went sailing into the treacherous winds of Maine. I loved it, and I always found it to be an exciting time not only because we were all together for a concentrated period of time as a family, but because we also had our dad's attention. He would set aside a few hours a day, morning or evening, but he always gave us a chunk of the day. It felt like a blessing.

In addition to the physical challenges, there were the psychological ones, Michael said:

We were away from our mothers; we didn't have that sort of protective shield. If Dad pushed us too hard, we didn't have somebody to fall back on to protect us, so to speak. I think that for him it was a way to test his child-rearing philosophies. From my standpoint, we got a lot out of it. It pushed me through my fears – I was a very fearful child and he knew that. He wasn't always correct in his methodologies, but by and large, I think those summers allowed me to transcend those fears.

Speaking at her father's memorial in 2008, Kate added another dimension: She recalled the summer artistic pursuits: "One summer he gave us all movie cameras, to film, splice and edit our own creations. Another summer we were to work on scenes from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, cast and directed by him." Her father said that all these pursuits were undertaken for the purpose of "improving our souls by going beyond what we thought we were good at." All nine Mailer children have similar memories of summers in Maine.

Mailer wrote to Susan on August 8 with news of the summer doings. He added that he had attended the Watergate hearings in Washington a few weeks earlier, and was thinking of a book on it, "but for some reason it fails to turn me on." He said that *Marilyn* was selling well, despite its \$20 price, but the controversy surrounding it was ugly, "mainly because I was so unpolitic as to say I wrote the book in two months." He made notes on Watergate, and edited a long interview on women and marriage with Buzz Farber. Carol accompanied him in August when he was awarded the MacDowell Medal for his "extraordinary contribution to literature" at the writer's colony of the same name. Earlier in the year, when she told him that she was uneasy about their relationship, he bought her a wide gold Tiffany band, and gave it to her under a full moon. They considered themselves to be married, although he was not yet ready to start divorce proceedings against Beverly. He knew they would be difficult.

In the fall, after the book tour in England, he fulfilled the last of his college speaking commitments. Suzanne Nye traveled with him. She was also at the MacDowell Colony event in Peterborough, New Hampshire and Carol began to suspect that she was more than an assistant. On the drive back to Maine, she confronted him. He admitted the affair. "As long as you didn't know about her, everything was fine between us," he said, which only made matters worse, as far as she was concerned. "I had had it and wanted out," Carol recalled, but the family was waiting for them in Maine, he was contrite, and she relented. Still angry, she flushed her gold ring down the toilet, but hedging her bet, tied a string to it. Mailer fished it out and put it on his dresser.

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At the end of 1973 when the *Times* surveyed him and other celebrities on their New Year's resolutions, Mailer's reply was: "To work on a novel . . . just those five words, to work on a novel." To aid him in recreating the Egypt of three millennia past, Mailer began to collect books on Egypt. One of his chief sources was E.A. Wallis Budge's edition of *The Book of the Dead*, a collection of spells and prayers placed in the coffins of wealthy Egyptians. Mailer was gripped by the specifics of Egyptian embalming and burial customs, and their ideas of the afterlife. He was especially interested in the perilous journey that all souls had to make through ~~the Duat~~, a horrific underworld where monsters and demons threatened them as they made their way to final judgment by the dog god Anubis, who weighed each person's heart. Those heavy with sin and crime were eaten by Ammit, a female demon, part lion, part hippopotamus and part crocodile. The good went on to heaven. He found Egyptian myths and customs to be a relief from American ~~politics~~ and culture, and saturated himself in all their gruesome complexity. He wrote to Poirier in early March to say that after all the speed writing he had done over the previous decade, he was finding that "novel writing is hard—I move so cautiously." He said, that the novel was different "from anything I've done before, in style, matter, stance, nitty gritty. I think you'll love it." He was doing pushups every other day, 50-60 sit-ups daily, and was planning to jog when the weather got warmer. Fasts, exercise and less drinking (he gave up bourbon almost entirely) enabled him to get down to 165 pounds.

Financial problems were still giving him worry. "These days I pant after money in one heat after another," he said. When he received an advance or large royalty check, he rarely escrowed a portion for taxes. The money went out immediately for mortgages, tuition payments, alimony and child care. Consequently, he was always in arrears with the IRS. What made it

worse was that someone in Scott Meredith's office had spread the word about his deal with Little, Brown. "Now everybody thinks of me as a no-good rat-fuck millionaire," he wrote in a long, complaining letter to Knox. He continued, saying that there were a dozen or more American writers making more than him—"I must include Mr. Vidal on this list"—but a perception was growing that he was "Mailer the radical who sold out." Knox's divorce and separation from his children led Mailer to comment on the damage to his own children from divorce. "[T]here's no kidding oneself," he said, "something always gets lost in them, some little pinching off of some of their higher possibilities." The only consolation is that children do grow up, he wrote. Remembering the troubled marriage of his own parents, he said that he had finally comprehended why his mother had never left his father: "It was as if it would interfere with the largest particular work of her life, which happened to be me." More marital problems, and the concomitant toll on the children, were on the near horizon.

After Molly Cook came to work for Mailer in 1972, she found herself dealing with "a lot of personal stuff, especially with Beverly Bentley, who was always fighting with Norman," as her partner, Mary Oliver, who also worked for Mailer, recalled. It was a consuming job, and "Molly was always busy. Generally, she kept a bank account and kept records of what was paid out, 'took care' of the wives, made travel arrangements, took many phone calls asking what the caller wanted, then reporting to Norman." There were calls from editors, journalists and from one of Scott Meredith's chief associates, Jack Scovil, who was Mailer's contact at the agency for many years. Oliver also recalled hearing from a range of celebrities: "Jackie O, Dick and Doris Goodwin, Plimpton, Lillian Hellman, Tennessee Williams and so on." As time passed, Mailer asked Cook to take on more and more. She established an excellent filing system for his

correspondence and manuscripts, and dealt with fans, friends and family. She and Mailer had some "terrible tiffs," Oliver said, but established a close working relationship. Working for him was "very heavy duty." He could be "brutal," but he was also "a bright, tender, funny guy." Oliver mainly typed his manuscripts (including parts of *The Executioner's Song* and *Ancient Evenings*) and letters. Once, when he asked her to take on an onerous task, she said, "Deliver your own shit." When Molly drove the kids to Stockbridge (smoking her pipe "incessantly" in the car, Michael remembers), Mary always came along. "I was backup," she said.

One of the people who contacted Molly Cook was Larry Schiller. Sometime in February or March 1974, he called say that he had a collection of interesting photographs of New York graffiti artists and needed some text. He offered Mailer \$50,000 for an essay to accompany the photographs of Jon Naar, in a book designed by Mervyn Kurlansky. The book would be published in England as *Watching My Name Go By*, and in the U.S. as *The Faith of Graffiti*.

✓ Mailer ~~called Schiller back~~ and agreed to write a ten-to-fifteen thousand word essay for the book, which was to be published in early May, with a long excerpt appearing simultaneously in *Esquire* (Mailer said he allowed it to be printed there because Harold Hayes had left the magazine). He and Schiller "hardly spoke," Mailer recalled, "not because we were cold, but because there was just nothing to talk about. It was understood that I'd write my piece [. . .] he could do what he wanted with the pictures." They had little contact, Mailer said, but "we cooperated completely, almost as if to say, 'This is really like a shakedown cruise for future material.'" Schiller remembered the situation the same way, as he told Manso: "Whether or not either of us believed we'd be doing another book together, the ice had been broken for *The*

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Executioner's Song." Work on this book, the most important in the Mailer-Schiller collaboration, would commence two years later.

The Faith of Graffiti may be Mailer's least cogent major essay. He gives two chief reasons for admiring the work of the teenagers with spray cans, several of whom he interviewed briefly. First, their "masterpieces in letters six feet high on the side of walls and subway cars" are acts of transgression. Urban graffiti is another battle "in the long war of the will against the power of taboo." To bolster his argument, he refers in Giotto, Raphael, Van Gogh, Jackson Pollack and ten other major artists, but makes no substantive connection between the graffitiists and any of ^{them} ~~these~~ artists. He admires the boldness of the young men from the ghetto who risk beatings from the Transit Police if caught with a spray can. The second reason for his esteem, like the first, begs the question of whether nicknames scrawled on public surfaces have any intrinsic merit, ^{of} ~~beauty or esthetic force~~ ^{beauty or esthetic force}. If their work had not been painted over as soon as time allowed, he speculates, then the face of New York "might have been transformed, and the interlapping of names and colors, those wavelets of ego forever reverberating on one another, could have risen like a flood to cover the monstrosities of abstract empty techno-architectural twentieth-century walls where no design ever predominated" over the lust for profit. Many did not agree, Mayor Lindsay for one. When Mailer interviewed him, Lindsay made it clear that he was "the implacable enemy" of graffiti writers, not only because of the cost of effacing it, but because seeing new subway cars marked up inside and out, "depressed people terribly," Lindsay said. Mailer's faith in the piece never wavered.

While living in Stockbridge, Mailer and Carol got friendly with a local couple, Ann Edwards and Stephen Citron, who ran an inn called Orpheus Ascending. Carol had not done much singing for a few years, and when they invited her to sing on Friday nights, her "enormous black eyes which are deep and compassionate" opened wide with anticipation. In her memoir, *The Inn and Us*, Edwards described Carol's opening night. Mailer was sitting next to two loud, boisterous couples. When Carol began her first number, Mailer asked the man nearest him to lower the volume. The man paid no attention. Mailer began to get very angry.

Halfway through Carol's third number, the man nearest Norman turned away from his companions and called out, 'Is that broad stacked!' 'Be quiet,' Norman ordered. 'Sex-y!' the man continued. With that Norman turned to face the stranger, grabbed him by the ears and in a split moment had butted his own head so hard against the man's head that there was a resounding *craaaaaack!* The stranger was holding his head and moaning. Norman had turned back to watch Carol. She was a ghostly sight, unable to conceal the fear in her eyes as she raised the decibel level of her voice.

The music stopped. A melee was in the offing. Carol told Mailer that if that happened she would never forgive him. Mailer and the man went outside. Carol was worried that man might have a knife. She and Edwards waited, and then walked into the bar, where most of the patrons were gathered. "Standing in the center were Norman and the stranger, no longer a stranger, bear-hugging, toasting each another. 'You have a hard head,' Norman said admiringly." The evening, just another night out for Mailer, ended happily.

Sometimes Beverly would come up with Michael and Stephen, occasionally staying overnight. Fan was also a regular visitor. One weekend when Fan, Beverly and the boys were at the house, Carol was singing at another local nightclub, and Beverly stayed for her performance. According to Carol, there was a good deal of drinking, and when Mailer introduced her as Mrs. Mailer (as he always did), Beverly declaimed to the crowd that Carol was not Mailer's wife; she was. Carol was mortified. Later, back at the house, Carol and Mailer had a fight, "the only big one we ever had." Mailer, Beverly and some of the local crowd were going to a late-night party and Carol refused to go. As he was making a drink, he squeezed a lemon in her face and then shoved her. She fell down and banged her head. Fan heard the noise and came down from her bedroom. "She stepped right over me to see if Norman was all right," Carol recalled. Mailer left to join Beverly and the others; Carol went to bed and locked the bedroom door. He was furious when he found it locked, and they did not speak to each other for a week.

Another visitor to Stockbridge in the spring of 1974 was Richard Stratton, an aspiring writer. Their conversations, which began in Stockbridge and continued through the summer in Maine, eventually became one of Mailer's most important interviews, appearing in two consecutive issues of *Rolling Stone* the following January. They had met three years earlier in Provincetown when Stratton was a writing fellow at the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, and doing ~~some~~ carpentry on the side. He had read a lot of Mailer's work, and it "changed my life," he said.

When I read 'The White Negro,' I felt like Norman was writing about me.

Because that whole thing of being brought up in the suburbs in a kind of air-conditioned nightmare . . . the malls, the malling of America, and the mediocrity

of that life. I was rebelling against that from the earliest age. I went to reform school at 14; I was a juvenile delinquent. But I didn't understand it until I read Mailer. I was rebelling against the aridity of that life, the blandness, and not taking risks. I was living it, and I think when Norman met me, he saw that.

On the spring night in 1971 that they met, Mailer was 48, Stratton was 25. They watched a football game, drank scotch and cognac, and stayed up until dawn talking about writing. Stratton recalled that Mailer told him that writing was a blessing, and that "the real joy is to discover some shard of truth on the page at the end of the pen." He hired Stratton to build wooden tables for his son's model trains, and gave him the keys to 627 Commercial so he could keep an eye on it when he and Carol were traveling. Their friendship and frank conversations continued for the next 35 years.

Stratton helped Mailer move twice, the first time to Maine in the summer of 1971, and then again in the fall of 1972 when they bought the house in Stockbridge. Just before the Stockbridge move, Stratton himself moved to a farm in Phillips, Maine that Mailer and Dick Goodwin had purchased as an investment. They paid about \$10,000 for 160 acres on the side of a mountain, Goodwin recalls, and a farmhouse that needed a good deal of work. Stratton and his then-wife Gabriella rehabilitated it, working through the following winter. Through Mailer, Stratton had met Goodwin, and through Goodwin he met Jan Wenner, *Rolling Stone's* editor, who gave him the assignment to interview Mailer.

The two-part interview, accompanied by photographs by Annie Leibovitz, stands out for the breadth of matters discussed. Mailer comments on Capote's *In Cold Blood*, praising its

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 "elegiac tone," but criticizing its lack of penetration into the minds of the two murderers, Perry Smith and Richard Hickock. And then, in a demonstration of his own abilities in this line, he provides an analysis of Charles Manson (the interview notes that Mailer and Stratton made a trip to the site of Manson's Spahn Ranch headquarters in California). Mailer sees something extraordinary in him: "If Manson had become an intellectual, he would have been most interesting"; he had "bold ideas, and he carried them out." His personality was "Dostoyevskian" because he was "more psychopath than just about any psychopath and more of a hustler than any average hustler that's come along." To see him only as "an example of pure evil, unrestrained psychopathy," he argues, is to miss the "Napoleonic" dimensions of his psyche. Vicious mass murderer, yes, but utterly devoid of worthy qualities, no. Reading this in 1975, a reader might have wondered if Mailer might even discover some humanity in Adolph Hitler.

There is comment on other topics and people: Women's Liberation ("they're winning their war"); Ken Kesey (admires him personally, but hasn't read him); Thomas Pynchon ("we're polar"); the Rolling Stones and the Beatles (eight bars of *Sgt. Pepper* are "more frightening" than anything the Stones can do); LSD (loathes it); Bob Dylan ("superb" lyrics, but there is something "boring about a man who comes from a fine Jewish family in Minneapolis sounding like an Oklahoma Okie"). The interview also contains his first public comments of any length on the Egyptian novel, made with an eye to disparage comments made by Scott Meredith that the novel would follow a Jewish family for a few thousand years. Although Mailer was still considering using *"The Book of the First-Born,"* he wanted to snuff out any notions that he was going to trace the Schneider clan back a thousand generations. "Some of the early book may take place in Egypt," he said, "but that's not to say that the book begins there and inches along

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chronologically." Actually, Mailer had no settled idea of the novel's structure at the time. The country was moving into "apathetic hippie beatdom," he tells Stratton, and it was time for him to "look for some ground on which to rally." In the late summer of that year, he found it in Africa.

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Muhammad Ali was 25 years old, undefeated, and perhaps the fastest heavyweight champion of all time when he refused, after being drafted in 1967, to enter the army. "I ain't got no quarrel with the Viet Cong. No Viet Cong ever called me nigger," he said, a comment treasured by anti-war activists. He almost went to prison, was stripped of his title, and forbidden to box. In 1970, he regained permission, and over the next four years won and lost some major bouts—including the 1971 bout with Joe Frazier that Mailer wrote about in "Ego." By 1974, he had earned the right to challenge the current champion, George Foreman, who had destroyed Frazier, knocking him down six times in their match. Foreman was 25, seven years younger than Ali. The fight was scheduled for the end of September 1974 in Kinshasa, the capital of Zaire. The publicity build-up was massive; some said that Ali was the most famous man in the world. Early that summer, Mailer recognized that he was going to again postpone work on the novel, being quite unable to resist a ringside seat at what promised to be one of the greatest prizefights in history. So he put Scott Meredith to work selling a magazine deal so he could obtain press credentials. In the meantime, there was time "to think over the peculiarities of a passion for boxing which could take a man away from his work for months and more," and time to ponder the depth of his loyalty to Ali.

He made the decision in early July, just about the time he wrote to Crowther to say that he hoped to see him in New York. I want to explain "the transformations of the Egyptian gods," he said. "To fuck a lady of their choice they were ready to become a hippopotamus, baboon, a reptile or a beetle. Anything to get in," he said. "Those daimons knew how to live." He also responded to a friendly invitation from Kate Millet (who, he had learned, was one of Susan's instructors at Columbia) to have a drink. "Only the Irish could invite you so pleasantly to have a drink," he wrote, although he was in New York too briefly to get together with her or Crowther. He flew to Cairo from New York in early September. Before he left, he learned that the 100,000-word segment of the novel he had submitted to Ned Bradford, his editor at Little, Brown, was well received, and he would be paid his first installment of \$150,000. This news was welcome, as was an agreement with *Playboy* to publish his account of what would be called "The Rumble in the Jungle."

Mailer had never been to the Middle East and "was hardly a Zionist," but his week-long visit to Cairo made him feel more sympathy for Israel. The Ramadan-Yom Kippur War had taken place the previous year and the city had not recovered. He was repelled by "the collision of overflowing new wealth and scabrous poverty, teeming inefficiency, frantic traffic and cripples walking on sores." The opening of *Ancient Evenings* takes place inside the Pyramid of Khufu, and Mailer wanted to see it. A guide drove him there at six a.m. and they began the illegal climb. "I always thought when I got up to the top of the pyramids I would have an epiphany, but just as I got to the top, heaving and panting, my vision blurred, there were the smoke plumes of the police coming through the desert." He got down just as the police arrived. Later, he realized

"I could do my book only if I didn't go back there." He left the next day for Kinshasa, a

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on the day that the fight was postponed. Foreman had been cut over his eye while sparring, and the fight was rescheduled for October 30, 1974.

Mailer remained in Zaire for "three miserable days," and then flew back to New York. Along the way, he picked up some kind of undulating fever, and back home went to bed and stayed there for ten days. He wrote to Fig when he was recovered that he was worried about getting sick again, but he couldn't afford *not* to go back; he needed the money. "I'm beginning to think that part of Hemingway's genius was that he knew how to keep from getting the Turistas, as simple as that." He said he was now making a portion of his income lecturing, and wondered if a speaking gig at Arkansas State University in Russellville, where Fig was teaching, might be possible, perhaps in the spring. At the end of October, he flew back to Kinshasa.

As a fight reporter with *Playboy* credentials, Mailer had access to both Foreman and Ali, especially the latter, as they were more than just acquaintances. He observed their training regimens, and their friends and flunkies. He also walked the streets of Kinshasa, and noticed that "the black crowds moved about him with an indifference to his presence that succeeds in niggering him; he knew what it was to be looked upon as invisible," like Ellison's protagonist. Initially, this revives the same resentment toward Blacks that he recorded in *Of a Fire on the Moon*, but this passes as he perceives the "tragic magnetic sense of self" in the slim, tall Zairois. All at once, he feels the uniqueness of Africa: "even if Kinshasa was to the rain forest as Hoboken to Big Sur—yes impossible not to sense what everyone had been trying to say about Africa for a hundred years, big Papa first on line: the place was so fucking sensitive! No horror failed to stir its echo a thousand miles away, no sneeze was ever free of the leaf that fell on the

other side of the hill." The book that helped him to fathom this quality was *Bantu Philosophy* by a Dutch priest, Placide Tempels.

The gist of the book, as summarized by Mailer, is that the Zairois see humans not as beings, but as forces. People are more than the sum of their parts; they are the vectors of the energies that possess them, emanating from the living and the dead. A man, in Mailer's extrapolation, is not merely "a human with his own psyche but a part of the resonance, sympathetic or unsympathetic, of every root and thing (and witch) about him." Without ever having said so in as many words, he recognizes it as something he had always believed. The boxing match Mailer would watch and then retell would be presented as the battle of two men wielding their ever-changing *n'golo* (the Congolese word for life force). It would be a bout enveloped in "the messages, the curses, and the loyalties of the dead."



Mailer met Foreman in the lobby of a Kinshasa hotel. When they are introduced, the champion makes a generous comment about Mailer, who greets him and holds out his hand. "Excuse me for not shaking hands with you," Foreman answered softly, "but you see I'm keeping my hands in my pockets." This tautological remark made Mailer remember his week of work at the mental hospital 30 years earlier, and the catatonic who remained motionless for hours, "only to erupt with a sudden punch that broke the jaw of a passing attendant." Foreman practiced a similar discipline: "One did not allow violence to dissipate; one stored it." The champ wanted no unnecessary contact. Ali was the hero of Africa, and Foreman's "concentration would

become the ocean of his protection against Africa." When Mailer saw Foreman training he realized how much power was there.

Hitting the heavy bag is a daily task, and it is hard work. The 80-pound bag (some are heavier) hangs from a chain, and someone holds it to keep it from swinging wildly. Foreman hits it 150 times in three minutes, takes 30 seconds off, and does it again, four times altogether, 600 hits in less than 15 minutes. His punches, Mailer says, "were probably the heaviest cumulative series of punches any boxing writer had ever seen. Each of these blows was enough to smash an average athlete's ribs; anybody with poor stomach muscles would have a broken spine." As he works, his sweat forms a circle about his feet; the bag develops "a hollow as deep as a ^{his} ~~man's~~ head." Foreman's strategy is palpable in the purest sense of the word. When Ali gets tired in the late rounds and can no longer slip punches, or absorb them on his arms, then Foreman will hammer him as he does.

Foreman reappears in the book before the account of the fight, but briefly. There are 19 chapters in the book, and Ali dominates most of them. We meet his team, watch him train, and follow him as he circulates through the country, press corps in his wake, collecting accolades from his fans, and absorbing *n'golo* as he can. Mailer and Ali had known each other since Las Vegas in 1963, well enough for Mailer to go jogging with him. Mailer had done no exercise to speak of for two months. The run starts at three a.m. and Mailer does not sleep beforehand. He runs a mile and a half, and then has to drop out. Ali commends him for doing so well in his fifty-second year. On the walk back to Ali's villa, Mailer hears a lion roar. It was "no small sound, more like thunder," the same sound described by Hemingway in his Africa stories. He begins running, impelled by the thought of death by carnivore. His only solace is that such an end would

all but guarantee ensconcement in the canon of American literature. "To be eaten by a lion on the banks of the Congo—who could fail to notice that it was Hemingway's own lion waiting down the years for the flesh of Ernest until an appropriate substitute had at last arrived." When he tells Ali's retinue the story, they laugh. The lion is a denizen of the nearby zoo.

Every move Mailer makes before the fight is calibrated to help Ali defeat Foreman, whether by inveigling his body around a partition separating his seven-story balcony from the balcony of the adjacent room (done while "good and drunk"), accepting derision for telling the lion story, or happily losing at the casino as a way of gaining compensatory *n'golo*. Spin and reverse spin. By doing these magical things, (even as he is "furious at the vanity" of thinking that he can affect the outcome) he is acting out of conviction: "If Ali wins, Mailer ardently believes, it would be "a triumph for everything which did not fit into the computer: for audacity, inventiveness, even art." Ali's victory would demonstrate how an artist can regenerate his powers. "What could be of more importance to Norman?" he asks.

The fight ends in the eighth round. Ali comes off the ropes and throws a combination of punches ending with a hard right that knocks Foreman down. But the final punches Ali threw did their work only because of the amazing innovations of the previous rounds. Possessed of exceptional reach (80 inches), and one of the greatest left jabs of all time, Ali threw straight right hand punches in the first round. Right-hand leads are usually reserved for the later rounds, and Foreman is shocked by them. Ali also had the fastest feet of any heavyweight fighter, and bragged about his ability to "dance," but in the second round, he retreated to the ropes and let Foreman pound him. No one had ever seen what Ali later called his "rope-a-dope" tactic; it seemed insane to let the hardest puncher alive hit you at will. "For as long as Foreman had

strength," Mailer writes, "the ropes would prove about as safe as riding a unicycle on a parapet. Still what is genius but balance on the edge of the impossible?" Ali covered his head with his hands, his belly with his elbows, and leaned back on the ropes (which had been loosened just before the match by Ali's team), forcing Foreman to almost fall on him. "Blows seem to pass through him as if he is indeed a leaf spring built to take shock," Mailer wrote. Ali taunts Foreman. "Can't you hit," he says, "You can't hit, you push." His scorn maddens Foreman, who overextends himself.

The rope-a-dope is a stupendous success. Foreman has a good round in the fifth, but after that tires quickly and begins to look "like a drunk, or rather a somnambulist, in a dance marathon." Mailer avails himself of every weapon in his metaphoric armory to capture the stages of the champion's disintegration: "Foreman was becoming reminiscent of the computer Hal in 2001 as his units were removed one by one, malfunctions were showing and spastic lapses." By the seventh round he was moving as "slow as a man walking up a hill of pillows." On the occasions when he was able to put together a flurry, Ali would reach over the barrage and "give a prod now and again to Foreman's neck like a housewife sticking a toothpick in a cake to see if it is ready." After Ali hits him with the winning combination in the eighth, Foreman "went over a like a six-foot sixty-year old butler who has just heard tragic news, yes, fell over all of a long collapsing two seconds, down came the champion in sections." Guile bested force; art defeated power.

Mailer began work on his account right away, as *Playboy* had scheduled it for the May 1975 issue. As usual, he gave them far more than they were expecting, approximately 54,000 words, which they published in two parts in May and June. When it appeared in book form in

late July, it had grown to 67,000 words, but was still divided in two parts, "The Dead are Dying of Thirst," and "N'golo." It is perhaps the most detailed, certainly the most dramatic ~~and~~ ^{engrossing} arguably the most evocative description of a major prizefight ever written, as well as a demonstration that professional boxing, brutal, sleazy and corrupt as it often is, can be the locus of artistry of the highest order. As Mailer said in a later interview, it is "a book about a genius." But pleased as he was to depict Ali's abilities and applaud his against-the-odds comeback, he had doubts about continuing to write this kind of nonfiction.

He states this baldly in *The Fight*, speaking of himself: "He was no longer pleased with his presence. His daily reactions bored him. They were becoming like everyone else's. His mind, he noticed, was beginning to spin its wheels." He could continue chasing events, writing a book every year, but he was having some doubts about his ability to read the river of American life. His reputation "had been burning low in the literary cathedral these last few years," he admitted. The reviews of *The Fight* were generally positive, but were few in number. It could be argued that Mailer's fecundity in the late sixties and early seventies irked the literary world, especially after the story appeared about his million-dollar advance for the "descendant of *Moby-Dick*," promised in *Advertisements*. "Let us see this masterwork" was the unspoken sentiment.

In his review, George V. Higgins said, "Nobody else could have done it," but Terrence Doody, called it "another installment in Mailer's continuing autobiography," and found it to be "perfunctory, interstitial, a holding action." Even Seymour Krim, one of Mailer's most devoted admirers, was discouraged, as he noted at the end of his generally favorable review: "These reportorial books after a while become something of a sham, a waste, a kind of John Barrymore exhibition for the cash no matter how much fine skill goes into the performance." When this line

was read to him, Mailer said, "I think it's legitimate," adding that he had "mixed feelings" about the book. "Maybe I have ten years left to write," he said, "maybe I have 20." He had spent a half year on *The Fight* and he wondered aloud, "was that right, was it sensible?" Looking back now at what is considered a masterpiece of sports biography, it seems clear the expenditure was worth it.



In early 1975, Mailer was in a state of what must be called anomie. Dogged by debt, caught in a web of romantic relationships, displeased with recent work, and uncertain of his ability to deliver promised work, he wanted change on every front. He had to agree with reviewers who were getting weary of him as a lens, a protagonist, an autobiographer, and a self-described "Nijinsky of ambivalence," and without announcing it, he concluded that the participatory journalism phase of his career was over. He would describe himself in the third person again, occasionally, but only in short pieces. For the remainder of his writing life—he had 30 more years, not 20—he would move back and forth between the novel and biography of various kinds, sometimes combining the two. But at this point, he knew that he had to heed the message coming up from the navigator, two words repeated over and over: "big novel . . . big novel." He wanted it and his fans wanted it (his publisher certainly did), and so for the next three years he would be faithful, after his fashion, to the Egyptian novel, which he referred to as a forgiving wife, a lady always ready to welcome him home from the fleshpots of other genres.

The actual lady he was living with, Carol Stevens, had a bit less forbearance. She suspected that Mailer's affair with Suzanne Nye was continuing. Matters came to a head in late

1974. Carol said that they agreed to sit down and have a formal discussion of the situation, at which time Mailer confessed. "He had tears streaming down his cheeks and I suddenly felt sorry for him. We talked for some time and when I asked him if he wanted to be with her or hold on to what we had, he said he would leave her. We agreed on a six-month period where he would remain faithful. I really believed that he meant it." He may have. For three or four months, he stayed close to home and worked on *The Fight*. When it was finished, he went on another college tour. After speaking in New Orleans, he flew to Arkansas in early April to spend a few days with Fig and Ecey.

X ✓ The Gwaltneys threw a party for him, one attended by Fig's colleagues and friends at Arkansas Tech. One of the people he met was a former student of Fig's, a stunning redheaded schoolteacher named Barbara Norris. ~~She had bought Marilyn~~ *her copy of Marilyn* and when she learned Mailer would be visiting, she got herself invited to the party so she could get it signed. Divorced and the mother of a young boy, she was a tall drink of water, 5' 10". That day she had on platform shoes called Bare Traps that made her an inch or two over six feet. She said, "How are you, Mr. Mailer," and shook his hand. He turned and walked out of the room. "The *last* thing I had on my mind was romance," she wrote years later in her memoir, although she changed her mind later that night. Mailer had a favorite French expression, *force majeure*, an irresistible force or compulsion which overrides previous commitments and obligations. Norris Church, as she would soon sign her name, was such a force for him, and would be his last great love. It was the same with her. When she was asked, as she often was in their early years together, which wife she was, her answer was the same: "The last one."

She was about to leave the party when he returned. She remembered "the intensity of his blue eyes, and his charisma" (which she compared to that of Bill Clinton, a former lover), and the way he "radiated energy like a little steam heater. He couldn't sit still." When he discovered that they had the same birthday, and were born one minute apart, he got quite excited. She did as well, being just as skeptical as he was about coincidences being accidental. At the dinner party, Mailer told her how beautiful she was, something he repeated to her over and over for their 33 years together. He borrowed Fig's car and followed her home, where she offered him a glass of Boone Farm apple wine. They made love on the living room rug, but it was uncomfortable because her son Matthew was in the next room sleeping.

✓ *That night*
Before he left, he explained his obligations: three homes, seven children, three ex-wives, an estranged wife, Beverly, and Carol, the woman to whom he was currently married (except in the eyes of the law). All told, he was sole supporter of 14 people. "It was all rather overwhelming," Norris wrote, "but I appreciated his honesty." She did not want to become part of his harem, however, just as she had dropped out of Clinton's. Maybe it was just an "interlude on his lecture tour," she thought. Getting married again was not something on her agenda. Nevertheless, they agreed to think about a meeting in late May when he would be on the road again. He promised to send her a box of his books, as she had only read part of *Marilyn*, and she sent him a photograph to the address he gave her, a post office box in Lee, Massachusetts, a small town a few miles from Stockbridge. Mailer used it for correspondence with his girlfriends.

Before he met Norris, Mailer had promised his sons an adventure. Stephen recalled that his father flew with him and his brother Michael to Denver in late May 1975, and then took them on "a great rafting trip" down the Delores River in Colorado, ten people on three rafts. The boys