

"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. Solan's^a program "while extreme, even extreme of the extreme," he argued, "is nonetheless^a the magnetic north for Women's Lib." Technology could win.

Mailer's passionate^r 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, he 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 ^{their} ~~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—^{though not all} ~~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.~~

Miller 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 ^{the essay} 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"—^{are} ~~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 he 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."

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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} He compares 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."

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Both *Of a Fire on the Moon* and *The Prisoner of Sex* were nominated for the National ^{Book} Award in 1972, the former in the sciences, and the latter in contemporary affairs. Neither won, but the publicity helped sales and eased his financial burden somewhat. *Prisoner* brought in just under \$200,000 in ^{royalties} 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, ^{we} 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 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 essay "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

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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. 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 ^a ~~the~~ ^{of novels by Mailer} 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 ^{would} 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,” he 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, ^{the vernal equinox} ~~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 ^{couple} 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 ^{safely delivered} 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.

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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 ^{for} of Ideas, "A Dialogue on Women's Liberation," to be held at Town Hall, on West 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, ^{called the evening} "Town Bloody Hall."

^{in the audience} 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. ^{New York} The *Times* ^{book} reviewer, Anatole Broyard, ^{for} 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.

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 ^{such as} those who built Chartres cathedral. Greer, who had 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 ^{had been} ~~was~~ "under most intemperate assault," ^(later) 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."

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." ^(she said in her speech) ~~she said in her speech~~ 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 (for example, 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 ^{attack} ~~spread~~ 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. ^{The righteous ire of} ~~Women were too angry.~~ ^{was too strong.}

Not long after the Town Hall debate, he 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 ^{go fuck himself} ~~have sexual relations with his own person.~~ Rader and Mailer went to a bar.

Half finished—
Women were too angry and so men..

The reviews for *Prisoner* were significantly less positive than for his previous five books. Because almost every female reviewer attacked the book, ^{as did} 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, ^{comment} who called it "Mailer's best book." ^{that it was} 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 ^{ed} 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, ^{as an} 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 ^{of the issue Mailer confronted} ~~Was~~ ^{that} 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, he 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 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 ^a ~~the~~ ^{of the event} film years later, she ^{realized} ~~saw~~ that he was being ~~deliberately~~ ^{provocative} playful, something often missed in his encounters with feminists. Mailer said it was the night his hair turned white.

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When school was out, Mailer's six eldest children joined him and Carol and the baby at a farm they rented in Vermont. Myrtle Bennett, a nanny from Honduras who would become ^{virtually} ~~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 it was 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*."~~ S

José and Romona Torres 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. He 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 Muhammad 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. S

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 J

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 her son 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*. 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.

He 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 ^{more than} ~~make the big push~~. *begin.*

After the children left, Mailer intended to get to work, but two public depictions of him,
 one comic and one ^{not} ~~near-life~~ ^{miniature} ~~life-size~~, 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 him. The cover bothered him more than her essay. But given his ^{generally} ~~raspy~~ ^{sometimes} ~~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*~~ ^{*Esquire*} had treated him, and promised "empathetic treatment" in the future. In his reply,
 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?'

He 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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The other, much more painful, depiction was ^{by Vidal} Vidal's work. 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~~ ^{shot}

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 ^{aired} the live program October 7, he 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 seemed to be an attempt 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, he 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* ^{had come} 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. He 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, he 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 ^{what they regarded as a} ~~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."

His 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~~ ^{that} 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} 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 him crazy and departed. ^{left the room} 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} His 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."

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~~ ^{the others} and to the audience.]

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

[A chorus replies, (You!) Then applause.]

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 said 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 ^{critic} 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} e wouldn't see Vidal again until 1977.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

"Provincetown is beautiful now: grey days with lights of pearl and sunlight with pink and blue of diamonds," he wrote ^{to his Cape Cod friend Eddie} 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 ^{other payment} 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, ^(son of Uncle Louis and Aunt Moos) "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.

who?

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 him 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 ^{his} way to becoming America's first authoritative critic in many a year." By then, Poirier was writing ^{a critical study of Mailer's} 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 book, *Norman Mailer*, published in 1972. Despite the merit of his hugely varied books, Poirier says, "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. It was ~~useful, old shoe comfortable,~~ and at age ⁴⁹50, a permanent reflection of his double selves ☹

This is a great intro. Slight revision ought to be said simply

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 fat 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 told 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. Writing about ancient Egypt was not a bad idea at this juncture, Lucid said.

Sparring with Torres the previous summer ^{had} led to a detached retina, and on April 7 he went to a Boston hospital for an operation. Carol 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 Fan Mailer, 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.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

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. He was wrong about the Johnson-Goldwater race in 1964, and just as wrong about the Nixon-McGovern race in 1972. Goldwater ^{had} won six states; McGovern won only Massachusetts and the District of Columbia ^{He} 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 ^{Allen} 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 he, ^{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. He had begun an affair with Suzanne Nye, a young woman who had done secretarial work for him, and it had moved beyond casual. She joined him 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 ^{the} ~~lack of~~ 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, proscriber 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 his 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.

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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 him not to close on it. "The house had ^{negative} vibrations," she said. Later, she learned that a number of couples who had lived in the house had gotten divorced. But Mailer was adamant. There was room enough for all of his children, and it was not a long drive to New York in his Porsche. He 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 ^{be published} 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 stops at San Francisco State (where he saw Lois Wilson), and ^{the} 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. He wrote a letter, complaining as he had in the past, about being quoted out of context. But ^{he had said it and} the damage was done. X
0129

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, ^{that he owed} 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 ^{popular with} ~~that had become a gathering place for~~ people in the arts. Plimpton ^K 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. Celebrities Woody Allen had his own table (no. 8), and might give you a glance as you passed it on the way to the restrooms, or to "Siberia," the back dining room where tourists were exiled. ^{sketch} During a visit to the city in November 1972, ^{Mailer} he had dinner there with Jeanne Campbell and Frank Crowther, a *Paris Review* editor and freelance 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?"

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, ^J and ^{to} also mentioned his huge alimony and child care expenses. A few days later Schiller called up ^J and ^V 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 his 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
 He 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. *suggested* *says the punch line* joked 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 ^ydied 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.

Jacob
 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 ^{cabaret} 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. ^{although they weren't married} 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."

^{Mailer} He began with a dirty joke concerning the respective lengths and depths of male and female genitalia. He began to lose the audience. He ~~man~~ ^{wandered}. 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 ^{emerging} 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

we have to remind readers that in Feb '73 Watergate was still dividing

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 he 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. ^{Book} 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, Wilfrⁱed 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

That is the form his genius takes

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 ^{we had lost} his bellwether status 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."

over all

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 ^{the way} in the *Washington Post* ^{of} by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward. Also on the same day, ^{some} ~~there was a~~ ^{President Nixon's officials with} ~~secret meeting of Nixon underlings who sought~~ ^{forthcoming} 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~~ ^{thoroughly} the

cover-up was exposed on August 9, 1974, he
 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.

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1973

1973?

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. ~~and it soon faded away, however.~~
 In an article in *Counter-Spy*, the magazine published by the new organization, he
 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~~ ^{ending}. 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. ~~The "breathless 10 years" were over.~~
 what he called

Gloria Steinem
 Ψ Ψ Ψ

you told us it he merged.
 Remind us who said this

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" ^{that} 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

I don't understand what "the scent of her personality" means

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 ^{the ego of Monroe's husband} 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. He 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.

He 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 ~~fact~~^{fact} 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~~^{went}; 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, Mailer said, was "some nice grey matter between the photographs." When Schiller went to Stockbridge at Mailer's invitation, he ^{discovered} ~~got his first~~ ~~inking of~~ their opposed conceptions.

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 wanted some pictures moved around or he wasn't going to ^{allow} ~~let~~ the book ^{to} be published. ^{Grosser & Dunlap's} 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"

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~~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 ^{made} ~~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 ^{at Monroe's house} ~~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 ^{meeting} ~~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 enough to stand alone, isn't it? You're a writer, aren't you?" Mailer replied that this was the first time he had ever written anything illustrated by pictures, and "it's going to be the way I want it." They argued 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 publicity photos, Schiller asked ^{Mailer} ~~him~~ to

go outside, which broke the tension. Schiller shot a role of black-and-white film 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 ^{could get} 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," he said. "I do not need other writers' words or thoughts to make myself a book." He had, however, definitely needed and used the work of both ^{authors} Zolotow and Guiles for his basic chronology and for many quotations, and Grosset & Dunlap had entered into permission agreements with ^{them} 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 to Guiles and \$22,500 to Zolotow—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*'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. ^{using the photos of Mailer that Schiller had taken at} Schiller had the photos 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 ^{Time's} 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 ^{the cover} would look like, and Schiller ^{believed} 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 ^{by Wallace}

invasion of Cuba. He had some basis for his theory, ^{gone} ~~based on the work of~~ a young friend from Provincetown, Richard Stratton, ^{at Mailer's request} 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 ^{visited} ~~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 ^{Murray} ~~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 he 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 ^{didn't hurt sales,} ~~probably added to the appeal of~~ Marilyn. Besides Time, the biography was a cover story for Atlantic, the NYRB, Ladies' Home Journal, and Book of the Month Club News. ^{Translation} ~~Reprint rights were purchased by publishers in at least 15 countries. Including the printings by the BOMC and other book clubs, over 400,000~~ ^{spread out} ~~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.

His 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. *Schiller's recollection*
 Asked about the ~~Time cover and the Nobel~~, he 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 *Marilyn* as biographer of *Marilyn* ~~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 ^{called it} ~~had not one good word~~ for "a very poorly written, very demented book." Simon ^{had become} ~~'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." ^{In contrast film critic Pauline Kael's} ~~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 him for not paying enough attention to Monroe's films, but finding much to admire. ^{way for many quotes from reviews} ~~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 to her keep her professionalism in shape.

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 he 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.~~ *Mailer wrote in the biography that Monroes* In Monroe's case, her early years in an orphanage ~~are perfectly suited~~ *prepared her* 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 quicksilver 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 *a decade later* ~~in 1981~~, he said, "All through the 1970s I just sort of staggered along feeling very confused."

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Turning to *Marilyn* was useful, he said. "If you write a book about one person, it helps to focus what you think." Over the next decade, he would write four more books of a biographical nature, all the while plowing ahead on the Egyptian novel.



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 dangerous. Afterwards, we'd be shaking with fear, and Dad would say, 'But don't you feel virtuous having looked the Devil in the eye?' He was also testing himself, Danielle said.

Betsy recalled that at times her father was urging them "to do things that were challenging and scary and difficult and out of our comfort zone. And I would balk at that and complain and be angry at him and be scared. But in retrospect, and quite quickly after the fact, I would realize how invigorating it was that he pushed us to go out on the Luters boat, two or three of us." He helped us "overcome our apprehensions and our sense of fear," she 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~~ *Michael recalled*

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

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"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. Carol accompanied him to accept the MacDowell Medal at the writer's colony of the same name. 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 turned to books on Egypt. One of his chief sources was E.A. Wallis Budge's edition of *The Egyptian 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 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 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 ^{worrying} 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 ^{Mickey} 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 him, 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, 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~~ ^W Larry Schiller Sometime in February or March 1974, ~~he~~ ^{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 ^{and} published in England as *Watching My Name Go By* and in the U.S. as *The Faith of Graffiti* Mailer 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, ^{later for his biography of Mailer} as he told Mansor: "Whether or not either of us believed we'd be doing

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X Mansor

~~another book together, the ice had been broken for *The Executioner's Song*.~~ ¹⁴ ~~Work on this book,~~
~~the most important in the Mailer-Schiller collaboration, would commence two years later.~~

Mailer's

The Faith of Graffiti may be his 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. 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 ^{+ tags} scrawled on public surfaces have any intrinsic merit or beauty. 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. ^{most} Many did not agree, ^{New York John} 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. ^{Burt} Mailer's faith in the ^{essay} ~~piece~~ never wavered.

While living in Stockbridge, Mailer and Carol got friendly with a local couple, the biographer ^eAnn Edwards and her husband, 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" ^{us. Mailer put it,} 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 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 visit} 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 nightspot, and Beverly stayed for her performance. According to Carol, there was a good deal of drinking, and when Mailer introduced ^{Carol} 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 ^{returned home and} 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 ^{then} writer. Their conversations, which began ^{then} 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 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 ~~his Provincetown house~~ ^{his Provincetown house} ~~627 Commercial~~ ^{so he could} ~~keep an eye on it when he and Carol were traveling.~~ ^{Stratton} Their friendship and frank conversations continued for the next 35 years. (which

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.

Stratton's Rolling Stone
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

"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~~ ^{the} Spahn Ranch headquarters in California). Mailer saw 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 could even discover some humanity in ^fAdolph 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 ^{correct} with an eye to disparage ^{remark} Scott Meredith's comments that the novel would follow a Jewish family for a few thousand years. "Some of the ^{scenes in the} early book may take place in Egypt," Mailer said, "but that's not to say that the book begins there and inches along chronologically." Actually, he had no settled idea of the novel's structure at the time. The

But he was right about Manson, he did have some remarkable things not all visible - quite true. And Hitler was a human being, too. Mailer is right to insist on their humanity. That is what makes them so disturbing.

country was moving into "apathetic hippie beatdom," he ^{told} 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 ^{the right to box} 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. ~~Mailer arranged for~~ →

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,"

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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."

This is a good line that we should try to relocate elsewhere

Ben Miler stopped in Cairo.

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

He 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 ^{in bed} 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," ^{ed} like Ellison's protagonist. ^{Ralph} Initially, this revives ^d the same ^{farling d} resentment toward Blacks that he recorded in *Of a Fire on the Moon*, but this ^{felt} 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 Belgian priest, Placide Tempels.

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The gist of the book 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."

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He met Foreman in the lobby of a Kinshasa hotel. When they ^{were} introduced, the champion ^{made} ~~makes~~ a generous comment about Mailer, who greets him and ^{ed} ~~holds~~ out his hand. fix
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"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. ^{Foreman's} The 80-pound bag (some are heavier) ^{hung} hangs from a chain, and ^{it was held} someone holds it to keep it from swinging wildly. Foreman hits it 150 times in three minutes, ^{took} takes 30 seconds off, and ^{did} does it again, four times altogether, 600 hits in less than 15 minutes. His punches, ^(wrote) 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 ^{ed} "a hollow as deep as his head." Foreman's strategy ^{was} is palpable in the purest sense of the word. When Ali ^{got} gets tired in the late rounds and ^{could} can no longer slip punches, or absorb them on his arms, then Foreman ^{would} will hammer him as he ^{did} does. ^{the bag}

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} He 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 ^{lives in} ~~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 ^{were} ~~did~~ ^{effective} ~~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 wrote, "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." 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 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 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.

He 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 arguably the most engrossing 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

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highest order. As Mailer said later, 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 ^{so} 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 ^{a novel, 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 his 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

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generally
 at what is considered a masterpiece of sports biography, ~~it seems clear~~ ^{one could justly conclude that} the expenditure was worth ~~while~~ ^{of effort}
 it.

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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 ^{his big novel} 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~~ ^{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~~ ^{his} the navigator, two words repeated over and over: "big novel . . . big novel." He wanted it and his fans wanted it (his publisher ~~certainly~~ ^{expected it} 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~~ ^{showed} less forbearance. She suspected that his 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 he 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

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Don't recall his saying that he had only 20 yrs. left
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prev. page

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.

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. When she learned Mailer would be visiting, she got herself invited to the party so she could get her copy of *Marilyn* signed. Divorced and the mother of a young boy, she was a tall drink of water, 5' 10". That day she ~~had on~~ ^{wore} 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 ^{those} 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~~ ^(and ~~was~~ years) 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 ^{would} he repeated to her ^{often in} 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 ①

That night, 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 ^{didn't interest her} ~~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 flew back to New York alone, and he went to Little Rock, where Norris had reserved a room at the Sheraton Hotel. Fig and Ecey were not told of the visit. During the he visit~~ ^{He saw her a couple of months later in} ~~he~~ bought her a ring that she didn't take off for a long time. With Mathew, age three-and-a-half, staying overnight with her parents, Norris felt uninhibited; she was drawn to a man unlike anyone she had ever

met. It wasn't just physical; she admired his running commentary on everything under the sun. But the sexual connection was strong. "Through the years, no matter the circumstances of our passions and rages, our boredoms, angers, and betrayals large and small, sex was the cord that bound us together," she ^{later} wrote. They both realized after the two nights they spent together in Little Rock that their interlude could ^{develop into a full-blown relationship} be the start of something big.

~~Back to the~~ Norris was 26 when she met Mailer, exactly half his age. An Arkansas Tech graduate in art and English, she had worked in a pickle factory, as a bookkeeper, and as a high-school teacher. Married at 20 to her college boyfriend, Larry Norris, she was divorced at 25. She had ^{her memoir,} never been away from home. In *A Ticket to the Circus*, she lists the "firsts" she achieved while getting to know Mailer: flying in an airplane, riding in a cab, drinking red wine, hearing live jazz, eating real Chinese food and seeing Chicago and New York. She savored ^{it} it all, although ^{she} was a bit intimidated at times, especially by her first visit to a jazz club. Carol was a well-known jazz artist and when Mailer introduced Norris to saxophonist Sonny Stitt, she felt like "an interloper" in Carol's world. But with her height, high cheekbones and red hair cascading over her shoulders, the former Little Miss Little Rock was usually the most beautiful woman in the room. "I instinctively knew that Norman needed a strong, confident woman, and that was what I was determined to be," she wrote.

Scott Fitzgerald said that the sign of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to function while holding opposed ideas in mind. By this measure, Mailer was a genius. After he became involved with Norris, he had to balance more irreconcilables—in love, family and work—than ever before. ^{His} My private life, he wrote to Susan, "has erupted all over the place." Half of him was exhilarated by the challenges; the other half was in the dumps. Smitten by Norris, he felt a deep

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click

Tell us her
real name
here

(Carol Stevens) attachment to Carol, and was not quite ready to break off with Suzanne. There were other women as well, Lois Wilson, Shari Rothe, a stewardess, and Carol Holmes, a former student of Bob Lucid's who he was seeing in New York. He had also had a brief affair with Barbara Probst Solomon, who was a dear old friend of his and his sister's. On the work side, he had made a good start on the Egyptian novel, but was enamored of several new projects, and not merely for financial reasons. All the while, he had the children with him at the Thomas House in Maine, as well as Carol (still in the dark about Norris), his mother and Myrtle, who in many ways helped keep the household running. He was appearing on talk shows, giving interviews, and doing readings to promote *The Fight*. Cook and Oliver were running his business affairs from Provincetown, and he was on the telephone with them constantly. His relations with Beverly were "harrowing," he told Knox, and he stopped talking to her on the phone because "she'd end up shrieking." To call Norris or Suzanne, he had to go to a phone booth. His situation during the summer of 1975 might be compared to his description of Ali on the ropes: riding a unicycle on a parapet.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

Not long after meeting Norris, Barney Rosset of Grove Press contacted him about doing an anthology of Henry Miller's work. ^{Mailer met} ~~For~~ and Mailer, ever in need of ready money, jumped at the advance of \$50,000, to be divided with Miller. For all of that summer, whenever he wasn't hiking or sailing with the kids, or entertaining guests, or keeping peace with his far-flung harem, he was rereading Miller's books, beginning with *Tropic of Cancer*. Another project was editing a collection of his essays on political conventions, entitled *Some Honorable Men*, ^{which would be} published the following year. He swore that when he completed work on the collection and the Miller book, he

would return to the novel "before its spirit begins to expire." Despite this promise, he began talking to director Peter Bogdanovich about making a movie based on *An American Dream*. He wanted Cybill Shepherd, who had been in Bogdanovich's *The Last Picture Show* and *Daisy Miller* to play Cherry. The lure of film remained strong, but the project died aborning.

In mid-1975, the IRS began putting levies on ~~all~~ ^{to satisfy} his income for back taxes of \$60,000. His other debts amounted to \$140,000. He still had some shares in the Village Voice, but had been unable to find a buyer. When ^{the paper} it was sold to Clay Felker, Mailer got exactly enough from ^{the} ~~sale~~ ^{he thought} proceeds to pay off the government. "So I'm half breathing now, which is to say I got one lung back," he wrote to Larry L. King in July, adding that he would like to declare bankruptcy. "The only trouble is that the people I owe the money to I happen to be real fond of—like my mother." Then, about six weeks later, he learned that ~~his accountant had made a gigantic error,~~ ^{and} he owed another \$100,000 in taxes. This was a heavy blow, because he was living on what came in each month. "I'm really going to have to change my life style from top to bottom," he wrote to Knox, and "it's depressing because I have no habits for worrying about money." A big score was needed.

Norris knew nothing of her lover's finances. His letters to her were vague about everything except his passionate feelings. Memories of their last tryst and plans for the next one filled pages. "For the first time in my life I don't want to possess my woman's soul," he wrote at the end of July after she had made her first trip to New York. "I want to have all of you, and we've gone so far already, but only at your rate." But after he had said goodbye to her, he got depressed, he wrote, by "the heavy and crossed responsibilities of my life."

I knew all we needed was twelve hours of sleep and we would be ready to explore into one another again for another week, and instead I was going to be throwing all the switches and working and playing with the children—that special species of work—and being considerate to Carol and missing you, missing your redheaded angelic insanity and your tender sense of the next move—little Miss I Ching of Spring meeting Old Hard-Heart's Ice, yes, it is new air to breathe when one is around you, and then I always hate good-byes in airports.

^S
Norris' letters matched his for ardor.

I at last have found someone who is just a little tougher than I am, smarter than I am, and who can love with a passion and tenderness equal (at least) to everything I have to give. I love you. I believe with everything in me that we would be happy together. We feed each other—the monstrous egos that ride both our backs—the hot sexual needs that rise a little hotter each time we meet—the tenderness and love that is given and taken and in the process grows double its size. We are good for each other.

As the relationship grew, Mailer recommended that Norris (or Barbara) ^{Mailer} as he called her read D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, with its frank examination of sexual relationships. His vision of the love he hoped to achieve with her owed something to the dynamics of Lawrence's. "So often," he wrote, "one finds love, and then looks for a cave where one can feast on it—soon such love grows stale." He didn't want that; he wanted a love that they each deserved, a love that would put "every demand on us—because for once, I want to be in love without guilt, and want a

Mailer always called her Barbara

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wrote her
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woman to love me without guilt." She was in love with a man who had two selves, he wrote, and they corresponded to her own two. The first he called Cinnamon Brown:

[T]hat's your other female, the tall jaunty slightly mysterious woman who can't walk into a bar without turning it on since there's a sexual voltage comes off you then which you may even be unaware, and it says, 'I want to fuck. I want to fuck the most exciting man in the house, whoever he is, because that is the most natural expression for whatever peculiar reason I'm here,' and that lady, of course, is a distance away from Barbara who is looking to have one love till she dies and wants to make an art of that love so that she gives strength and gains strength and tenderness passes forward and back. And I, of course, love those ladies because there's one of them for each of me, Barbara for Norman since he is probably as tender as she is (that is saying a lot) and as much in love with the religion of love which is to make it with one's mate and thereby come out to a place very few people visit and you can be true to that idea of love; then another side not so different from Cinnamon, a cold creation full of lust who might just as well have a name like Ace or Duke or some such hard-cock name far from Norman—and yet not a bad side, no worse than Cinnamon, for so much of the action is there, even an instinct for some of the better adventures.

I used to be that way when I was twenty-six; I still am. One past needs to be in love—the other can remain in love only so long as the love keeps changing, and so if it is the same woman, the ante keeps rising. There has to be more and more.

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Of course one cannot always name what *more* might be—it is rather that one has to believe it is possible. Then the two sides of my nature come together.

He invited Norris to come to New York, to “try it for a while,” and sent her a plane ticket. No promises; it was an experiment. Matthew would remain with her parents for a few months until she got a job. Norris, an only child, said that her mother cried and then asked what kind of woman she was “to turn from all the people who love her?” Her father, a heavy equipment operator just a year older than Mailer, took it better, but “deep down he is very hurt,” she said. Norris told her parents that she would be living in an apartment near Mailer’s, “which would give Mother and Daddy the illusion that I wasn’t living in sin, although I certainly would be.” The cover story for Mailer’s family was that Norris was Fig’s niece, and was looking for a modeling job in New York, which was half-true. She arrived in mid-August, and he came down from Maine for a week to help her get settled. ~~Barbara and Al invited them over for pot roast, and Fan joined them.~~ A couple of months later, Norris rented a small apartment in Fan’s building on Willow Street. It was a five-minute walk from 142 Columbia Heights.

Remembering Norris’ first months in New York, Barbara said, “I always tried to be totally non-judgmental about Norman’s newest woman; I didn’t want to not like them.” In Norris’ case, she had no reservations. “It was absolutely extraordinary that one could be that beautiful and that nice.” The arrival of Norris on the scene changed things, she explained. “She had that wonderful *joie de vivre*, really. She just loved the family; she made everybody feel life was fun. She was enjoying herself. And she was tough. For instance, the relationship between Michael, Stephen and Matt was very difficult at first, but she managed to cope with it.” It was easier with the girls, she said. “They got along famously—a lot of girl stuff.” Fan also hit it off

Is Matt
Norris's
son?
Yes

with Norris, ~~and promised to teach her how to make pot-roast~~ "I'm sure they had a lot of questions," Norris recalled, "but refrained from asking them." She continued her masquerade as a country girl looking for a job. "No one mentioned his wife," she recalled.

In Maine, he continued work on the Miller book, which he thought would present no problems. When he did encounter trouble, he wrote to Norris, it made him remember what Ali had told him: "There are no easy fights. The easy ones become the tough ones." Miller's work, in Mailer's view, was radically uneven, and exasperatingly difficult to characterize. But, as he told Norris, except for the lost time, he didn't mind the effort, because Miller "is the ideal subject whenever I become too in love with love, for he's in love with cunt—a healthy corrective: I start thinking of Big Red and her Arkansas gold." He continued work on the Miller book through the summer.

~~Neither Mailer nor Norris were sure that the experiment was going to be successful. His open-mindedness can be seen in an August 26 reply to a young woman journalist he knew: "If it wasn't for the fact that I'm married to one woman, living with another, and much concerned and complicated in my relations with two other fine women, I'd say to you, move to New York right away, because I think you're great."~~ But in the fall, he had the difficult conversation with Carol. He told her that he was in love with Norris, and wanted to move from Stockbridge at the end of 1975. According to Mary Oliver, it was Molly Cook who made the difficult call to Suzanne Nye.

A few months before he died, Mailer spoke of the reasons for his breakup with Carol. He said that part of it was Stockbridge ~~which is in rural Massachusetts~~. The town is the home of the Tanglewood festivals, and many of the locals were musical, not literary. Mailer said he didn't

know anything about classical music and "found them a dull gang, essentially," he said. There was more, as he explained.

I was bored due to the fact that my life was dwindling into less and less, or so it seemed. Carol had no interest in a social life, so that was the beginning of the heart of inactivity to me in the marriage. It would have kept us together, and sexually we were fine, too, so it was a lovely marriage in that one way and that was enough for a long time because as the years went by, it built and built. But, finally, when I met Norris, there was no question that I wanted to move, and did. This was the one marriage that broke up that I'd say that I broke up – that I felt bad about. Felt bad about leaving Maggie, felt bad about deserting Carol, who had never done me any harm.

There was another element, he said. "As a novelist, I thought, 'I'm not learning anything. If I don't learn anything, I'll dry up.' That was terribly important. And, of course, Norris just filled it all up. And was beautiful as well." In addition, she "loved" the social life in New York, and had been a successful school teacher, so "to take care of six of my kids was nothing." Carol said that she never stopped loving Mailer, and after a time, began seeing him again, just as she had when he was living with Beverly.

He divided his time between Stockbridge and New York. Now that Carol knew about Norris, Mailer began to introduce her to his children. Stephen remembers meeting her in Provincetown. He was nine and Michael was eleven. "We were at Ciro's and Sal's for dinner and she walked in with Molly and Mary and my Dad. He might have introduced her as a friend of

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theirs. I thought she was great. She was beautiful, and a lot of fun. She was wearing a great hat."

Danielle remembers that at that time she and her sister "were very jagged and spinning out of control," and Norris was very calm. We were "overly analytical and second-guessing. I don't think she had that fault. She was very direct."

Q The relationship with Norris was difficult for Susan. [Norris]
Susan remembers being "very upset" when Norris came on the scene. "She was so young

and beautiful. Dad and I always had this thing with looks. I think I look most like him in many ways—in terms of physical appearance, my height, my eyes," and her father, she said, "was always finding fault with the way I looked. That's what I felt. I didn't dress well; I wasn't chic; I wasn't this, I wasn't that, my hair, my friends. So in walks this beautiful model and I had a shit fit." It was more of a shock for her than ^{for} her siblings, she said, because she and Norris were the same age. At first, she thought it might be just "another of Dad's love affairs," but then, over a couple of months, she changed her mind. "Norris was really nice. There was something very sweet and earnest about her. She really tried hard; she reached out, and so I got to know her."

Ψ Ψ Ψ

Norris was pleased when Mailer asked her to go with him to the Philippines for the third and final boxing match—"The Thrilla in Manila"—between Ali and Frazier, on October 1. He was uncertain about writing about it, but the chance to see the landscape where he had fought three decades earlier appealed to him. After a 22-hour flight, they arrived. Norris remembers that her clothes were rumpled. The first person they saw as they walked into the airport was Larry Schiller, who was photographing the fight for *Time*. Schiller had just exchanged money, and offered them a stack of Philippine pesos for dollars. Mailer, always wary of Schiller's schemes,

hesitated, but then exchanged the money (and later learned it was a fair deal). Schiller was surprised to see him with a new woman. "Lo and behold, there's Norman with this knockout chick who's taller than him. He's got this chick on his arm." Mailer introduced her, "Here's my girl," Schiller recalled, and "the way he says it is like, 'What do you think?' You know? And I say to myself, 'What a pair of legs.'" Schiller, Norris wrote in her memoir, "would figure in our lives over and over throughout the years." ~~The next collaboration would begin eighteen months~~
~~later.~~

Mailer wanted to try to find the village outside Manila where he had spent time during the war, and they took the highway south out of Manila and drove until there was no road. "There was like a little pig trail that went through the jungle," Norris recalled. "We were in this huge limousine going through this jungle with the leaves slapping on each side of the car and there's all these huts with reed ceilings and fronds and a village store." He thought he recognized a large tree in the center of a field where his unit had bivouacked in 1945, and "in the spirit of the occasion, we pulled out a picnic basket, spread a cloth on the grass, and had a picnic under the tree that once had (maybe) sheltered a young Norman Mailer when he was hatching the plot for *The Naked and the Dead*." They spent a week in the Philippines, and saw Ali retain his crown in a bruising 15-round fight. Mailer decided not to write about it; he ^{had} ~~needed~~ to finish his book on Miller.

The original title was *Mailer on Miller*, but he decided against foregrounding himself—another sign of his diminishing self-interest—and changed it to *Genius and Lust: A Journey Through the Major Writings of Henry Miller*. He completed it shortly after he returned. Because of difficulties obtaining permissions for the excerpts for the collection, the Miller book did not

appear until the fall of 1976. He had hoped to get back to the Egyptian novel, but he had agreed to write a film script, his maiden effort in the genre. It had to be written rapidly, and in Italy.

In late October, he and Norris flew to Rome. Knox had recommended Mailer to Sergio Leone, the maestro of spaghetti westerns, as the perfect person to adapt a novel by Harry Grey, *The Hoods*, about Prohibition-era Jewish gangsters in New York. Leone offered him \$75,000, a sum that would pay off most of his IRS bill. He thought he could write it in a month. During the day, he worked at Leone's office while Norris explored the city. They spent evenings with Knox. He introduced them to a fashion designer, Angelo Litrico, who made Mailer a beautiful blue velvet suit. Midway through their stay, Leone said that he wanted enough material for two films, the first one to be called *Once Upon a Time in America*. Mailer made the necessary adjustments and two weeks later turned in a script of 200-plus pages. He thought the script contained "some of my best dialogue," but Leone was unimpressed.

A master of the close-up, Leone could also paint haunting images of lonely desert places, but as Knox explained, "Mailer's screenplay gave Leone a dish he couldn't possibly eat; it had serious social content." Shortly afterwards, the Italian magazine *Express* ran a spurious account of Mailer's time in Rome. The article quoted Leone's partner, Alberto Grimaldi, who said that Mailer had been living in a hotel room with an eighteen-year old girl, and had written the script on toilet paper. It was so poorly done, Grimaldi said, that no payment was warranted. Knox was furious, and grilled Grimaldi, who insisted that the magazine had made the story up. The matter ended in a Mexican standoff, and Mailer and Norris flew home. Bogdanovich and another producer, Billy Friedkin, read the script at Mailer's request and pronounced it worthy, whereupon Mailer sued for payment. Several years later, the Italians were ordered to pay, but

much of the money went to lawyers. With the help of several writers, Leone came up with a new script, and with Robert De Niro in the lead role, *Once Upon a Time in America*, Leone's last film, was released in 1984.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

Through M^{become}ailer, Norris had ~~gotten~~ friendly with the wife of fashion photographer Milton Greene, who ran a Manhattan beauty shop. Amy Greene told her that if she lost 15 pounds and got a portfolio of photographs together, she would introduce her to Wilhelmina Cooper, who ran one of the leading model agencies in New York. Norris dutifully brought her weight down, and went for an interview. "Trying not to look like a girl from Arkansas, full of foreboding about being turned down," she presented her portfolio of head shots taken in Rome, along with others by Milton Greene, who had been one of Marilyn Monroe's favorite photographers. She was accepted and began modeling right away. ^{Mailer} He was pleased that she had stopped talking about going for an MFA and had started a new career.

It was M[✓]ailer who came up with the professional name Norris Church. She first used it in a letter to him in August 1975 when she went back to Russellville ^{Arkansas} to sell her house and furniture. Later, with his help, she wrote an article for *Cosmopolitan* about how she had gotten started. He liked her new name, she wrote in her memoir, and was "thrilled" that his "Henry Higgins strategy was paying off." Even with the new income, Norris had to take money from him for expenses, especially after Matt began living with her. "In the beginning I pretended it was a loan I would pay back, but he just laughed and said don't worry about it. That was one thing about Norman, he was generous to a fault. Not only with me but with all the kids and exes." In

For
earlier
young
man

December, Mailer wrote to Aunt Moos to tell her about "a tall lovely red-haired model whom you would find divine." The affair was over; a long-term relationship was now underway. #

Through the fall, he shuttled between Stockbridge and Brooklyn. He explained to Carol that he had promised Norris that he would move permanently by New Year's Eve. He spent Christmas in Stockbridge, and most of the ~~other~~ ^{other} children visited. A few days later, he said goodbye. He told her that the relationship with her was the deepest he had ever had, but he wanted to be with Norris. "Let me have my starlet," he said. He left Carol his Porsche and borrowed her larger car. With all the children, including Maggie, Myrtle and the dog, he drove off, leaving her alone in the big house on the hill. At the beginning of the year, Norris moved into Mailer's apartment. Carol was stricken. She remembered taking long rides in the country and crying ~~as she drove~~. ^{drives}

He now ~~steadily~~ ^{working} worked on the Egyptian novel. He found it easy to reengage, partly because of his excitement in ~~constructing~~ ^{writing about} the ancient civilization's carnal spirituality, partly because there was ample space for his imagination to wander among the dynasties, and partly because he was distressed with American culture. As he told Aunt Moos, the still-unnamed book "is like a good wife and I am like a drunken sea captain on a three-year cruise." His metaphor may also reflect the thinking he was doing, now that Norris had moved in, about marriage and fidelity. He wrote to ^{another correspondent} ~~Luke Breit~~ about how he was meditating on "the possibility of committing oneself to one mate, taking the good with the bad." He had wondered if his new-found fidelity was part of a reaction to "an entire era of narcissism which began after World War II." His early years with Norris were his most monogamous since his early years with Bea. As long as he was

working on *Ancient Evenings*, he was faithful—mainly. Norris always said it was her favorite book.

She loved its exoticism, and it was written during the happiest time of their marriage.

the apartment
While she cleaned and redecorated ^{the apartment} 142, he worked, often in a small aerie twenty feet above the apartment. In their first months together, he introduced her to his friends—Earbar,

Stratten, Hal Conrad and Mara Lynn, José and Ramona Torres, Bob and Joanne Lucid and Doris and Dick Goodwin. In late February, ^{1976, Mailer} he received the Gold Medal for Literature from the

National Arts Club, where he was extolled by Lucid and Steven Marcus. Marcus called Mailer “a

present-day Byron,” which brought a few shouts of “No! No!” Lucid described his friend as “the

American literary artist, who above all in these postwar years, is most profoundly involved in the

destiny of his nation.” Mailer may have chuckled inwardly when he heard this as he was

currently trying with some success to disengage from American life, and to cease writing about

himself. Falling in love with Norris was not the sole cause of this distancing, but it was a factor.

ed
His ego now needed less exercise. In his acceptance remarks, he lamented the difficulties of

fiction writing at present. “The nature of existence cannot be felt anymore,” he said. “As

novelists, we cannot locate our center of values.” He echoed these remarks two months later at

the National Book Awards ceremony.)

William Gaddis won the fiction award in 1976 for his novel *JR*, a brilliant, nearly formless work described by one critic as a novel of “waste, flux and chaos,” much in the mode of

Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, which ^{had} won the NBA ^{three} years earlier. Entropy is

abundant in both novels, and Mailer loathed it. (A few years later when he was asked about

Pynchon, he said he was “either a genius or vastly overrated.”) The “psychological demeanment”

and “gloom” and “corruption of self” a writer must face, he said to the NBA audience, comes

Not sure what to make of this. It's either a non-sequ or it should be read to mean that. Norris liked the book because of NM's fidelity to her theme.

child

from maintaining that one's "vision will possess illimitable value." Art is the product of struggle, and great art comes from titanic struggle.

Mailer wanted his books to be the literary equivalent of Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring," or Picasso's "Guernica," works that would ~~change the given~~ alter the course of artistic history. In the early decades, he was pushing into unexplored territory—sex, violence, revolution—but in later years, he was upping the aesthetic ante, trying to reshape narrative forms in both fiction and nonfiction, while delivering to the country a deeper vision of itself. This is one of the reasons he was always unable to complete volume two of the several multi-novel schemes he laid out for himself. He conceived of vast projects that would shift consciousness, change lives, revamp narrative modes. Consequently, when the first novel in a sequence was not all he hoped it would be, he abandoned the scheme and sought a new one. For the Egyptian novel he created the largest expectations, ^{to its highest} He raised the ~~highest~~ ^{planned} bar for it, and for a decade ~~foretold~~ ^{advertised} his forthcoming leap. or practice?

Ψ Ψ Ψ

Without Mailer's knowledge, an excerpt from his commentary in *Genus and Lust* was published in the *Los Angeles Times* at the end of March, and Miller wrote to him with thanks. The French think they are marvelous critics, Miller said, "but believe me, none that I read ever came near you for originality, muscularity or wind power." He encouraged Mailer to keep writing, not about movie stars and boxers, but "just about yourself, Life." Mailer thanked him and said that whenever he was down on himself as a novelist, he concluded, "ruefully," that his last career may be literary critic. His commentary on Miller's *oeuvre*, 88 pages of a 576-page

book, is as much biography as it is literary commentary, but this is as it should be in discussing Miller, a writer who saw no distinction between fiction and memoir[✓] and was usually the central character of his own books.

Miller's self-assurance impressed Mailer. "He has such an extravagant sense of mission that his presence is palpable," and what is on his mind at any moment is "vastly more real than any of the people who come and go in his life," a comment that could be applied to Mailer, who was similarly enraptured. Miller's lack of qualms, guilt and doubts about his genius, and his escape from his puritanical family, ^{was} ~~was~~ the foundation of his power, although Mailer must have swallowed hard when he wrote this line: "One had to go back to Melville to find a rhetoric which could prove as noble under full sail." Yet, when one reads the passages ^{Mailer} ~~he has chosen~~ from ten of Miller's books (for example, the opening of *Tropic of Cancer*, and his description in *Sexus* of the first time ^u ~~he~~ ^y met ^u ~~his~~ ^y Mona, his second wife, June Edith Smith), the following celebration of Miller's prose does not seem exaggerated.

Miller at his best wrote a prose grander than Faulkner's, and wilder—the good reader is revolved in a farrago of light with words heavy as velvet, brilliant as gems, eruptions of thought cover the page. You could be in the vortex of one of Turner's oceanic holocausts when the sun shines in the very center of the storm. No, there is nothing like Henry Miller when he gets rolling. Men with literary styles as full as Hawthorne's appear by comparison stripped of their rich language, stripped as an AP style book; one has to take the English language back to Marlowe and Shakespeare before encountering a wealth of imagery equal in intensity.

~~Miller's joyous depiction of the brute necessities of his life, and his artistic transcendence of them led him to come up with a hypothetical situation (only Mailer could contrive this test):~~ ^{posed literary} ~~colon~~

What would happen if Miller, Hemingway and Henry James had to write about a character who "entered a town house, removed his hat, and found crap on his head?" James would have been paralyzed, Mailer says, unlike Stendhal, Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky, and "Hemingway would have been bothered more than he liked," whereas "Miller bounces in the stink." If Hemingway thrived, for a time, in an earlier world of "individual effort, liquor, and tragic wounds," Miller was at home in a later one, "the big-city garbage can of bruises, migraines, static, mood chemicals, amnesia, absurd relations and cancer. Down in the sewers of existence where the cancer was being cooked, Miller was cavorting." Mailer found such cockroach vitality to be "inestimable."

When he looks at the narcissism of Miller and June, there are echoes of his "Cinnamon Brown" letter to Norris, the one in which he foresees their double selves in an upward spiral of excitement and challenge. Miller is the first American, he says, to explore "the uncharted negotiations of the psyche when two narcissists take the vow of love." The key passage not only demystifies Miller's 1600-page, three-decker novel (*Sexus*, *Nexus* and *Plexus*) about his obsessive love for June, it is also an excellent précis of Mailer's "Lipton's journal," ^{one} that tells us as much about Mailer's own inner life as anything he ever wrote:

The narcissist suffers from too much inner dialogue. The eye of one's consciousness is forever looking at one's own action. Yet these words turn us away from the psychic reality. The narcissist is not self-absorbed so much as one self is absorbed in studying the other. The narcissist is the scientist and the

experiment in one. Other people exist for their ability to excite one presence or another in oneself. And are valued for that. Are even loved for that. Of course, they are loved as an actor loves an audience. Since the amount of stimulation we may offer ourselves is obviously limited, the underlying problem of the narcissist is boredom. So there are feverish and/or violent attempts to shift the given, to alter the context in which one self is forever regarding the other. It is a reason why narcissists are forever falling in and out of love, jobs, places and addictions. Promiscuity is the happy opportunity to try a new role. Vanity is the antidote to claustrophobia.

For June, "every day is a scenario," and the question of whether she loves Miller is moot; if there is a part for a lover in that day's script, she might. None of her lives are "more real to her than last year's role for an actor." Her repertoire ^{kept} keeps Miller on the balls of his feet for 30 years, trying to understand and to play opposite. "To be living as a detective one day and as a criminal the next is to keep one's interest in one's own personality alive."

Mailer was looking for something close to this in his relationship with Norris. The repertoire of roles is much different, given the life circumstances and ambitions of the two couples, but the dynamics of the two relationships are ^{to} ~~damably~~ congruent, or so he hoped. This is what Mailer means in the letter where he tells her that he loves the two ladies ensconced in her, "because there's one of them for each of me." It will be easier, of course, if Norris develops new identities to match the mutations he will doubtless undergo. If they can make it, perhaps he will not feel compelled to improve the ^{did} ~~sarcophagus~~ of his image in his books, ^{made} ~~not~~ at least not as much as before they fell in love. Norris ^{made} ~~does~~ change, and over the years of their marriage ^{fix} ~~makes~~

serious and successful attempts at modeling, acting, painting and writing, and this versatility is one of the most important reasons why she was ^{as she always said when asked} the last Mrs. Norman Mailer. But there are other reasons, all to be explored. He probably wrote his letter to Norris before writing the narcissism passage, but we can't say for sure. It is possible that he had not even read *The Rosy Crucifixion* ^{trilogy} by that time. But it doesn't matter. He had these ideas long before he took on Miller. Meeting Norris and reading Miller were double confirmation, always the best kind for him.

Mailer told Miller that he expected to be attacked by Miller's supporters and rightly so, for "putting much of myself into you. It is the technique by which I work and I've never pretended to hide it. When I wrote about Marilyn Monroe I tried to understand her with that part of her I felt was similar to myself. I've made the same attempt with you," he said, and thought he had come even closer, given their Brooklyn background, his appreciation of Miller's style, and even the similar ways their names were spelled. He added some comments about his own writing, saying he was "guessing what Egypt conceivably might be like, and for that I have a few clues," one of them being the similarity of Egyptian theology and his own. On the day of his letter, May 25, 1976, he had written 130,000 words, and had, he told Miller, 350,000 to 400,000 to go.

For sixteen years, since 1960, Mailer had written about the quadrennial political conventions, but he lacked enthusiasm ^{to do this in 1976.} for writing about Sen. Humphrey, who was again seeking the Democratic nomination. He decided to "spend my time more profitably," as he wrote to ~~Yamanishi, working on his novel.~~ The advances from Little, Brown, he calculated, would exceed anything he could earn in piecemeal journalism, and he saw "a path through my financial difficulties." He had written one piece that spring, "A Harlot High and Low," which holds up for

puzzled scrutiny shards of evidence pointing to the CIA's involvement in the Watergate break-in. But the piece, published in *New York*, never coheres, and resembles a pile of research notes. There were far too many tendrils of fact, rumor and supposition ~~surrounding~~ ^{thinned around} Watergate than could be dealt with in a 20-page magazine article. He saw that fathoming the CIA's role in American life could only be ~~dealt with~~ ^{addressed} in a longer work, and he already had one massive narrative on his hands. Another reason to step away from journalism was his growing confidence about the novel. After writing hundreds of pages about Egypt, "I've finally come to a place where I think I understand what I'm up to," he told Yamanishi.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

For his first summer with Norris and the children, Mailer rented a place in Wellfleet, a short drive from Provincetown. The house was in a salt marsh on Lieutenant Island, and could only be reached at low tide, which required planning. Danielle, Betsy and Kate, who by this time Norris said saw her "as something between a girlfriend and an older sister," helped with the cooking and laundry. Michael and Stephen "were normal rowdy boys who half loved me and half were wary of me," Norris wrote, "now that I was the figure of authority. The kids really knew after that summer that the guard had changed." The family took long hikes, went swimming and canoeing, and occasionally went into P-Town for dinner in Mailer's old silver Porsche, ~~dented and patched with duct tape~~ ^{crammed into Mike's dented silver Porsche}. Carol was scheduled to visit the house and Norris ~~remembers being~~ ^{was} nervous. Mailer had "talked about her constantly," Norris said, "and she had achieved epic status in my imagination. I knew she was a great beauty." When she arrived, Norris thought she resembled Elizabeth Taylor. They liked each other, and although there was mutual jealousy for some years, they eventually settled into a warm friendship.

That summer, Jimmy Carter of Georgia won the Democratic nomination for president in 1976 in large part by winning a large number of delegates in primaries. As a Washington outsider, he also benefitted from the angry reaction against the Watergate scandal. But, he was still a blank to a majority of Americans. Shortly after the July convention, the *New York Times Magazine* asked Mailer to profile Carter, and he accepted, traveling to Plains, Georgia. The resulting profile, which he wrote in "a towering depression," was published in the *Times* on September 26. Mailer (only had) a few hours with the candidate, and wasted a lot of it "haranguing a future president" about "the insuperable complexities of moral examination opened by Kierkegaard," the putative benefits of the sexual revolution, and whether Carter had given much thought to "the possibility that Satanism was loose in the twentieth century." Carter smiled at these questions; he wanted to talk about politics and programs, not the affairs of the universe. Mailer left the interview with "the twice dull sense that he liked Carter more than Carter had any reason to like him." He wrote to Knox that the piece had elicited warm congratulations from many New Yorkers, and he said that the piece had helped elect Carter. Later, he thought less of it, and did not include it in his next collection of essays, *Pieces and Pontifications*.

Genius and Lust was generally ignored, especially after William Gass in the *Times Book Review* called Mailer's judgments on Miller "romantically overblown." There was little advertising and only a modest publication party. Mailer was pleased to have Norris on his arm at the party to meet friends who had yet to make her acquaintance, including his cousin Cy Rembar, Richard Poirier, Dwight and Gloria Macdonald and Clay Felker. Norris turned heads at the event, as she did at the Ali-Norton fight on September 28 at Yankee stadium. With obvious pride, he wrote to a friend to say he was at the fight with "a red-headed girl six feet tall wearing a

black velvet hat and a black velvet jump suit who had to be the best looking lady I've seen in four years."

In December he and Norris threw a party at the ^{Columb}Brooklyn Heights apartment to mark the first wedding anniversary of Dick and Doris Goodwin. Norris described the party in *A Ticket to the Circus*: "The room was so packed that nobody could move. Drinks were passed overhead through the crowd, and the guests had to link arms to get their drinks to their mouths." She made a massive bowl of coleslaw, along with ham and beans and corn muffins, but most of it was untouched; drink flowed. Jacqueline Onassis, a friend of the Goodwins, came, as did Pat Lawford Kennedy, Arthur and Alexandra Schlesinger, Dick Cavett and his wife Carrie Nye, and a number of writers, including Kurt Vonnegut and his wife, photographer Jill Krentz. Bob Dylan arrived with an entourage, but kept to himself, as Mailer later remembered. Hunter Thompson was one of the last to leave, but returned at six a.m. and asked Norris to make him eggs and bacon. She said he looked "as if his very life hinged on those eggs and bacon," and she cooked for him. He then fell asleep in the hammock under the skylight until mid-afternoon. It was, in effect, Norris' coming out-party in New York, and she made several friendships that lasted for years.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

At the end of the year, Herbert Mitgang profiled Mailer for the *New York Times*. Mailer told him that he was writing a multi-part novel about Egypt as he conceived it might have been three millennia earlier, and his aspiration in writing it was "to go beyond one's reach." But he had to take on other work fairly regularly, he said. "You have to keep the bread coming in." In

December alone, three of his smaller pieces were published: an interview with one of Nixon's top aides, John Erlichman, who was serving a prison term for his complicity in the Watergate cover-up; a preface to the memoir of Hemingway's son Gregory; and a screenplay, "Trial of the Warlock," based on the Huysmans ^{Joris-Karl 1891 novel} ~~novel~~, *La-Bas*. Mailer's editor at Little, Brown was also interviewed for the Mitgang piece, and reported that Mailer was working "systematically" on the novel and had written more than 175,000 words. first name?

in literature that

Saul Bellow won the Nobel Prize ~~in the fall of 1976~~ ^{in the fall of 1976}, shortly after the publication of his ~~novel~~, *Humboldt's Gift*, and Mailer sent him a telegram of congratulations. "To my surprise," he told Mitgang, "I felt good about Saul getting it, because he deserved it." When Meyer Levin, an old friend and the author of several long novels about Jewish-Americans, asked if Bellow was his favorite author, Mailer said no, but his congratulations had been genuine, adding, "Obviously, others also deserved it. [Henry] Miller, Nabokov, Mailer, even old rat-fuck Meyer Levin." Bellow's Nobel was another spur to his commitment to the Egyptian novel. He wrote to Knox that he was "resisting intensely" excursions from it. "Can it be that I have at last turned a little serious?" he asked.

Robert Gorham Davis, Mailer's Harvard instructor, read the Mitgang piece and wrote to ask if it were true that he was writing about the 19th Dynasty ^{and} the obscure pharaoh, Ramses IX. Yes, Mailer replied; he had picked this pharaoh because of "the total inventive freedom" it provided. ^{But} Here, ~~it should be said, that~~ as Mailer's research continued, he got caught up in the life of another pharaoh, Ramses II, the most powerful and longest-ruling (67 years) of all pharaohs, and his astounding victory over the Hittites at the Battle of Kadesh, fought in 1274 B.C. on the banks of the Orontes River in what is now Syria. ^{He decided to write about Ramses II, but} ~~to~~ accommodate his enthusiasm for the earlier

Ramses (who sired over 150 children and created the colossal sculpted figures at Abu Simbel), while retaining the opening setting of the novel in the year 1130 B.C., Mailer was forced to resort to an awkward flashback, jumping back in time 150 years from the reign of Ramses IX to that of Ramses II. The bridge figure was a general of Ramses II, Menenhetet I, who had learned from a Hebrew slave how to procreate himself / again and again, allowing him to know both pharaohs. The scheme created narrative lesions that weakened the novel, but it was the only way he could find to link the two pharaohs. He also told Davis that he planned to include a chapter on Moses, who purportedly lived in the reign of Ramses II (as depicted in the film, *The Ten Commandments*, with Charlton Heston as a muscular Moses and Yul Brynner as an august Ramses), although few historians believe it.

Writing to Aldridge in January 1977, Mailer said he had written 60 new pages in two weeks. "God, Egypt is long. God, Egypt is grand," he said. Six weeks later he told Susan that the writing was going well, but the IRS was still hounding him. He sold the Stockbridge house for \$100,000, and his net from the sale, around \$40,000, went to pay off one year's taxes. Worse, it appeared that he would also have to sell all but the top floor and the small studio on the third floor of the Brooklyn brownstone to satisfy back taxes from other years. Beverly was living with the boys in the Provincetown house, and Mailer was paying its mortgage. He told Susan that his best hope for getting out of debt was writing a book on Gary Gilmore, who was executed in Utah on January 17, 1977, the first legal execution in the U.S. in ten years. There are "plenty of pitfalls" to such a project, he said, but a large advance and the opportunity to write about Gilmore, a man who "fascinates me out of sight," led him away from the novel once again. In

At the IRS still hounded him, and in a letter he
check

retrospect, the repeated breaking of his resolve seems comic, but as he said more than once, the navigator ^{embraced} ~~welcomed~~ surprises.

Chapter 11

Death Wishes: Gilmore and Abbott

Gary Gilmore was in the news at the end of 1976. The Utah double murderer had not merely acquiesced in his death sentence. Speaking to the judge at a subsequent hearing, he said, "You sentenced me to die. Unless it's a joke or something, I want to go ahead and do it." His determination created consternation among those opposed to capital punishment, and cultish fascination among his admirers. He received over 40,000 letters during his final months, and his face was everywhere, including the cover of *Newsweek*, under the caption "Death Wish." Mailer, like half the nation, was following the story. He recalled being struck by how handsome Gilmore was in photographs. "It was an arresting face, particularly that one shot, the famous one, of the long face," he said. Legal maneuvers followed for months, and Gilmore tried twice to commit suicide. One of these attempts led to a memorable radio report: "Dr. L. Grant Christensen said Gilmore can leave the hospital and return to Death Row if he continues to improve." His first suicide attempt was in tandem with that of a young woman, Nicole Baker Barrett. "Nicole and I have known and loved each other for thousands of years," Gilmore said. She was young, beautiful and devoted to him. ^{"I Mailer found"} The story kept getting more engrossing.

X
You might want to reconsider this last sentence.

On the day of Gilmore's execution, January 17, 1977, Mailer saw Larry Schiller on the evening news. "I could see he was going through something," Mailer said. Two days later, Molly Cook told him that Schiller had called and "wants you to do some writing for him." Schiller had already done interviews with many of those involved, including over 30 hours with Gilmore, to whom he paid \$60,000 for exclusive access. In February, he sent Mailer an interview that he and ~~Barry Farrell~~ ^{upward in} had done with Gilmore. It was the longest interview ^{and was the longest} Playboy had ever published. ^{interview that} Mailer said to himself, "This ~~may~~ ^{thought it might} be the best single interview of its sort I've ever read." On March 4, he and Schiller signed a contract with Warner Books for their third collaboration. It called for 80,000 words on "the life and death of Gary Gilmore," to be submitted no later than March 1978.

The \$500,000 advance for a paperback edition, divided 50-50 with Mailer, was negotiated by Schiller with Howard Kaminsky, editor-in-chief at Warner Books, which had published ~~Marilyn~~ ^{the paperback edition of}. This money, coupled with the proceeds from the pending sale of the lower floors of 142 Columbia Heights, gave Mailer the wherewithal to take another sabbatical from the Egyptian novel ^{he made} and make plans to go to Utah. Little, Brown could not have been particularly pleased about this turn of events, not given the amount of money the firm had invested in *Ancient Evenings*. The lurid-media frenzy that had surrounded Gilmore—his execution was featured on the front page of the *National Enquirer*—did little to convince Arthur H. Thornhill, Little, Brown's president, of the story's literary merits, and at first the firm turned it down. As Schiller put it in a letter to Mailer, "I do not believe that Little, Brown took the book very seriously," at least not initially. But Mailer was enthusiastic and ultimately the firm ^{agreed to publish} went along with the

~~the book project~~

hardcover version of the

Mike:
I want to clarify
Did Warner buy the paperback rights before LB bought hard-cover rights? This was a very unusual arrangement, yes before

The book was Schiller's idea and he would not only provide the majority of the raw material, he would also have a hand in the book's marketing. Meredith had told him that it would be difficult to convince publishers that Mailer could and would write a narrative. None of his recent books explored large swaths of society such as found in Theodore Dreiser's 1925 novel *An American Tragedy*, a book that would become one of Mailer's models for *The Executioner's Song*. "All he does is write these 30,000-word articles for *Life* and everybody else and then turns them into books," Meredith ~~explained~~ ^{told Schiller}. And some of them are good books, but he's not writing narratives. They're really big essays." Schiller said, "I was lost—I don't even know the difference." But he was quick to grasp it and was careful to tell Kaminsky that Mailer intended to write a narrative, and thus the deal was struck. Mailer was unaware of this promise, and at the time had no sense of how he was going to structure the book, nor its tone, style or length. He thought he could finish it in six months.

At first, he wanted to call the book "The Saint and the Psychopath," Gilmore fit both roles perfectly, he thought. On the one hand he possessed "a deep vein of what's commonly called criminality," but he was not "an ordinary thug," Mailer said. No, he had "a quality that was almost saintly." His ability to rise above his situation and regard it with detachment was "extraordinary." Initially, he thought he'd write a 20,000-word essay and "cover the biography skimpily," focusing on Gilmore's belief in karma and reincarnation. He "embodied many of the themes I'd been living with all my life," Mailer said, and "was the perfect character for me." He planned to scrutinize Gilmore's choices: be executed and bolster his chance for reincarnation, or molder for thirty or forty years in prison and feel his soul slowly shrivel.

Schiller had been ^{interviewing} traveling to Utah, for interviews with everyone who knew Gilmore and Nicole, and then sending them to Mailer. "I'm inundating him with more and more interviews," Schiller said. "It's coming through the transom. I mean, I'm going on and on and I remember one time he does say to me, 'Stop, stop, I've got enough to write a book!' And I say, 'No, we don't have enough to tell the whole story.'" When Mailer did dig into the interviews, he recalled ^{years} ~~in~~ ^{later} 2007, he said he was "aghast because the material that was there was so rich and so deep and so full of a kind of American life that I knew only in passing from the Army, but didn't really know, and there it was." The book would have to be considerably different, and longer, than he had thought.

In late March of 1977, Nicole flew to New York with Schiller to meet Mailer. She had never been out of Utah, and they took her to Trader Vic's for lunch. Then they all went ice skating in Central Park. From the start, Mailer had seen Gilmore as "a man who was quintessentially American and yet worthy of Dostoyevsky," but when he met Nicole he saw that there was another dimension to the story, one vying for importance with Gilmore's dead-serious insistence on execution. He explained her appeal to ^a the Washington Post's ^{winter} Kevin Bezner: "She's been injured so much by life, and at the same time she's so strong. I thought that she had such a life-force in her in a way, while at the same time such despair. To me, she's a heroine in the old sense. She's a protagonist." Nicole recounted her life in many long interviews. She was "probably the most open person I've ever spoken with," Schiller said, and was particularly frank about her sexual experiences ^{with} Gilmore and others. She was sexually abused when she was not yet a teenager ^{and} and was the mother of two children before she was 19. She did not open up immediately, however. Schiller was patient.

After Gilmore's execution, Schiller got Nicole released from a mental facility and moved her, along with her children and her mother, to a beach house in Malibu. He bought her a Great Dane puppy, and paid her \$25,000 for the rights to her story. Schiller's wife Stephanie spent time with her and built a relationship. Then Schiller used the same method with her that he used with all the important characters in the book: he created what he called "a dictionary" of her life. "I listen more than I ask," he explained. "When someone starts a sentence, let them finish the sentence, let them finish the paragraph. Never interrupt." Everyone has their story, but nobody cares to listen. Except Schiller, as Mailer explained:

Very often an hour would go by before he would ask the first question about Gary Gilmore. These people had never been interviewed before in their lives, and they were having this incredible experience of talking about themselves, and having someone truly interested, or so it seemed, in everything they had to say. And so they went on and on and on, and by the time Larry got to Gary Gilmore, they were wide open, they were ready to tell all.

Mailer knew he had to get to Utah and get the feel of the local culture and the landscape, and sit in on interviews. He also wanted to visit the Oregon prison where Gilmore had done time.

^{His} The March visit to Oregon State Prison and discussions with the warden, Wyatt Cupp was the first of a number of visits to the place where Gilmore spent many years, and it enhanced Mailer's understanding of prison life. In late May, he returned again for three weeks and met members of Gilmore's and Nicole's families. He stayed in the motel room where Gilmore had spent the night with Nicole's sister, April, and met Gilmore's uncle, Vern Damico, and Vern's daughter Brenda Nicol, who befriended Gilmore after his release in April 1976. Norris went along with Mailer on

From prison
(he served 15 years for many crimes, including armed robbery)

say why he was in prison

some of his early visits to Utah, and he took her skiing. Never particularly athletic but always game, she managed, "not prettily," to get down the slopes on her first try. They had now been living together for almost a year and a half, and the Mailer clan had accepted her and her son, Matt, who Mailer treated as one of his own. "Our life was coalescing," Norris said.

Confirmation can be seen in a letter he wrote to Carol Holmes. She had written him about a rumor, first reported in ^{me} ~~a~~ ^{that Norris} ~~New York Post~~ ^{gossip column}. The columnist, Tony Schwartz, ^{one of his former girlfriends} thought he overheard an exchange in which Norris said that she was pregnant. Mailer wrote an angry letter to the editor denying the report, and the *Post* printed a retraction. Mailer explained all this to Holmes and added that she might not be hearing from him in the near future, but "you need not take it amiss. I certainly liked the way you looked the last time I saw you. These however are odd years for me. I'm interested at last in the most difficult venture of all, fidelity."

Has Carol Holmes been introduced?
yes

By this time, Norris wrote, she was handling "the minutiae" of Mailer's daily life, as well as being a stepmother for however many children were living with them. As her best friend, Aurora Huston said, "She was his practical side. He had no idea of the needs of the kids, problems with neighbors. She would tell him, 'Norman, this or that has got to be done.' She could put her foot down when she had to." She had also begun to take over the finances. Norris and Molly Cook had not hit it off, and Mailer had become progressively unhappy with ~~the way~~ ^{relationship} Cook did things, ~~the way she scheduled his travel, for example~~. The sum of their differences finally led to what he called "a bloody rupture." Norris took over the family finances for the remainder of their long marriage. In her memoir, she tells a story about needing something from Mailer one day early in their relationship. He was ^{then} ~~working~~ ^a in the studio he had begun renting, an unfurnished third-floor apartment about a block away from their apartment.

At the time I thought it was important, so I went and knocked on his door. He was not pleased. He said, 'When I'm writing, pretend I have gone to South America. What would you do if I was in South America? You have a brain. You can deal with whatever comes up.' I apologized and said, 'Okay,' and I never knocked on his door again. I realized then that he would never be a partner for me, like a lot of marriages were.

As she put it in a 2009 interview, "Norman and I had a deal. He wrote, and I did everything else."

Ψ Ψ Ψ

1976
On August 4, the family left for Maine, Norris' first visit. She had heard about the overhanging deck at the Thomas house, and the family lore about the twenty-foot plunge into Somes Sound. A few years before, Stephen had been the first one to take it, followed by Mailer, and the following summer, Michael. Norris took a look when she arrived at the Thomas house and, "pretending to be bolder and more athletic than I was," jumped in. It was "terrifying," she said, and not just because of the height. The water temperature is shockingly cold and takes one's breath away. Remembering the moment many years later, Mailer said, "When I saw that long-legged creature jump in, I knew I'd have to go," and "I dove in like a sack of potatoes." Norris said she earned many brownie points that day. A week or so later, she told him she was pregnant. He was "thrilled," she said.

Went slowly
Work on the Gilmore book progressed, but it was slow going. Plowing through a hundred-plus interviews containing "tons of scintillating details" was "a work of digestion, not

erection," he told Knox. As a break from his labors that summer, Mailer began work on a baseball betting scheme. "At some point," Danielle recalled, "He said, 'I think I have a fool-proof method of guaranteeing a windfall. I think there's a correlation between the performance of players and their biorhythms.'" The fundamental (and much derided) idea of biorhythms is that all humans experience high and low points of physical, emotional, and intellectual achievement, cycles that last from 23-33 days, pulsing up and down like a roller coaster. When the three cycles of a big league pitcher crest on the same day that he is on the mound, Mailer reasoned, an extraordinary performance is likely. Bet on the team that has the greatest number of players whose cycles are peaking. So he bought baseball magazines with birth dates, Danielle said. "We would sit with our little #2 pencils and we would mark down in columns these numbers. And then he would pull out his calculator and do this complicated calculation and come up with a prediction of who would win the game. I think he was paying us like \$10 an hour—we made a lot of money. But he didn't win much." ^{Nephew} Peter Alson also remembered working on the project, and Stephen recalled that Mailer extended it to basketball and football. ~~The bets were called in by Peter to Buzz Farbar, who was an agent for a hookie at the time.~~ "He was a terrible gambler," Peter said.

It was the engineer in him, he loved systems and he believed that there were ways to predict wins. I sort of loved that quality of his and got caught up in some of his more convoluted schemes. At his core, he had betting genes and he liked to gamble and devising a system gave him a rationale for doing so. The biggest flaw in his system was the calculator, which he found in a mail order catalog. ^{oe} There might have been something to the theory of bio-rhythms, but we were using a

device that was little more than a novelty item. It was the equivalent of using a toy telescope to practice astronomy.

In a 1989 interview, Mailer explained his error: "Finally, what came to me was the realization that these guys were not bound by the past. What makes a man a good professional is he can do his work on a bad day." The scheme "was a joke."

Ψ Ψ Ψ

Working "like a lawyer preparing briefs," through the early fall in Provincetown, Mailer accumulated over 2000 pages of notes on Schiller's interviews. He also traveled again to Utah to do more interviews. On some of these trips, he and Schiller went again to Oregon to learn more about Gilmore's time in prison there. Bessie Gilmore ^{Gary's mother} lived in trailer in Milwaukie, south of Portland, and he and Schiller knocked on her door several times, but she refused to let them in. "No, no, no, don't bother me, you don't need me," she told them. The last time they tried, it was pouring rain, Schiller recalled.

And Norman's sitting in the car. He's mad at me, and I said, 'Norman, we got to do this. I go knock on the door'—same response. I say, 'It's raining Bessie, we're out here in the goddamn rain. Norman just wants to sit and talk to you.' 'No, no, no.' And if my memory serves me right, I said, 'Bessie, Norman's got to go to the bathroom. You know, he's not a young man anymore.' 'All right,' she says, 'if he has to go to the bathroom.' She opens the door. And I make the decision not to go in. I'm not trying to make myself a hero. He's writing the book.

His
remains
of Barry,
just a little
faint
instead

While Schiller sat in the car, Bessie and Mailer had a long talk, the only face-to face interview she gave, although she spoke many times on the telephone to both men. That day, Mailer asked her about the story that Harry Houdini was related to her husband Frank, but her knowledge was "second-hand and rather fanciful," Mailer said, "and all I could conclude was that Houdini being the father of Gary Gilmore's father was a psychological reality in that family." Gilmore's father, who was much older than his mother, had been in show business for a time, but there was no hard evidence of a blood relationship with Houdini, ~~who died in 1926~~. The fact that she would discuss this with Mailer during the visit supports Schiller's ~~conclusion~~ ^{observation that} "She loved Norman," he

said

Arranging to interview the widows of the men Gilmore killed, Colleen Jensen and Debbie Bushnell, was a challenge. Schiller didn't want to contact them until it was known that Mailer was writing the book "because I knew that the Mormons might look upon me as a negative person—the guy who paid Gilmore's family money, who's going to make a hero out of him." When Mailer's participation became public, Schiller set up a reception in Salt Lake City for the attorney general, Mormon Church officials and other leaders. Mailer was the star attraction. After that, and probably because of it, the lawyers for the victims informed Schiller that the widows had agreed to be interviewed.

Looking back, Schiller said that he was nervous, as it was the first time he and Mailer were conducting interviews as a team. But as they prepared, he saw that Mailer respected his methods enough to have him take the lead. Mailer would give a sign when he wished to ask a question; otherwise, Schiller would run the ^{interview} ~~show~~. The separate interviews with the widows, delicate and emotion-laden, were each four hours long. When Mailer did ask a question, Schiller

said, "it was so perfect and important—a question I could not have conceived of." In their later collaborations, they often fought, but for *The Executioner's Song*, at least in the early going, they worked together as smoothly as Holmes and Watson.

The interviews continued through the first half of 1978. All told, Mailer states in an afterword to the ⁵published book, there were over three hundred separate interview sessions with over 100 people. Some interviews went on for weeks. This total includes a number with lawyers involved in the case, which were conducted by Judith McNally, Molly Cook's replacement, who would work for Mailer for the next 25 years. All together, the collected transcripts came to over 15,000 pages. Mailer had more material to work with than on any previous ^{book}project. In a 1980 interview with Aldridge, Mailer said that after leaving an interview with a woman, they were driving along, "and suddenly, Schiller, who has a passion for verification, started pounding the wheel and said, 'She's lying, she's goddamn lying!' Part of figuring out what happened was living with these interviews long enough to compare them to other interviews until you felt you could decide what probably did occur in a given situation." The huge amount of testimony they collected allowed them to follow Trotsky's dictum, "Compare the lies to find the truth." Mailer was fond of quoting it.

^{spet} Schiller had always collaborated with other writers, providing raw material. But he retained the final say, and this led to a falling out with ^{had} two previous collaborators, Albert Goldman and ⁱWilfred Sheed. Goldman, who worked with him on the Lenny Bruce biography, ^{Goldman} called him a "voyeur" interested in "the most lurid, the most gross, the most hideous" things imaginable. Sheed, who wrote the text accompanying a collection of photographs in Schiller's *Muhammad Ali: A Portrait in Words and Photographs*, said "he is too unreal to hate." Barry

^{pull} Unless you absolutely need these for Lenny Schiller we should cut
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Farrell, a much-admired journalist, was surprised when Schiller asked him to collaborate. He had just published an article for *New West* in which he said, "The man was apparently something of a carrion bird: already he'd done business with Susan Atkins [a member of Manson's ^{a family's} gang], Marina Oswald [Lee Harvey Oswald's widow], Jack Ruby [Oswald's murderer, who gave Schiller a death-bed confession for \$4,500], Madame Nhu [wife of Ngo Dinh Nhu, brother and counselor to Ngo Dinh Diem, President of South Korea, both assassinated] and Lenny Bruce's widow." ~~Later Schiller would be deeply involved in his own books about Jon Benet Ramsey, O. J. Simpson and Russian spy Robert Hanssen.~~ But when Farrell met him in Utah, his expectations were upended. "Schiller was always a Moriarty figure for me, an evil genius," Farrell said, but the people he spoke to in Utah turned him around. He found Schiller to be "very honest."

In return for giving an interview, Schiller often insisted that ~~every negative in the~~ ^{comments like} ~~resulting profile~~ ^{Gilmore's} to be balanced by a positive. For example, he invariably asked that the book he published by celebrated photographer W. Eugene Smith, *Minamata: Words and Photos*, be cited. Smith had been attacked and almost blinded by thugs hired by the ~~Chisso Corporation, a~~ Japanese chemical company that had discharged methyl mercury via wastewater into Minamata Harbor. ~~Thousands of people died or were disfigured from eating fish and shellfish from the~~ ^{area}. Schiller became Smith's angel and provided financial support and professional assistance so he could finish the book, one of the first photographic records of industrial pollution.

Ultimately, Chisso admitted wrongdoing and paid the victims and their families over \$80 million. Schiller was also sensitive to the misery of the families of Gilmore's victims. One of the reasons that producer David Susskind did not obtain the rights to the story was that he did not insist, as Schiller did, that the victims' families be compensated. Gilmore approved of this

payment, and they received \$40,000 of his \$60,000. M^{ail}er said that Schiller reminded him of Harold Hecht, the Hollywood agent and producer who had tried and failed to make a film out of *The Naked and the Dead*: "He wanted to do good work—wanted to raise himself in the estimate of the world, not be seen as an opportunist and an operator."

Producer David Susskind's offer to Gilmore of \$150,000 for the rights to his story, an offer that far exceeded Schiller's \$60,000, and he also

offered to share profits in the film he planned to make. But Schiller had made it a point to send Gilmore telegrams and books, and to meet with members of his family, including, most importantly, Vern Damico, Gilmore's uncle and appointed agent. Schiller spent time with Vern and his wife Ida, and their daughters, Brenda Nicol and Toni Gurney, sat their living rooms, and listened to their stories. He purposefully made several spelling errors in a telegram to Gilmore, which allowed the convict to feel slightly superior to him, as he took justifiable pride in his language skills. Susskind was peppering Gilmore and Damico with telephone calls from New York, and at one point said to Damico, "Any contest between me and Mr. Schiller would be like the Dallas Cowboys playing the local high school." When Schiller heard Damico repeat this line, he said, "Susskind is right, he is the Dallas Cowboys. But I'm suited up, I'm here on the playing field and ready to play. Where is David Susskind? I don't even see him in the stadium." Schiller won the rights.

But Schiller also insisted that the victims' families be compensated. Gilmore agreed.

~~"You have to understand," Schiller explained while in the midst of doing research and interviewing, "that when I start an endeavor I have an overall concept, okay. I'm willing to take other people's advice, but I want to be the final person to determine how my concept is represented." Working with Mailer was an exception to this rule. Schiller needed Mailer's reputation, his ability to tell a story based not only on the interviews, but also on the huge trove~~

But you told us that Larry was dyslexic. We was

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~~he had amassed of journalistic, legal and psychiatric documents associated with Gilmore's crime~~
~~and death.~~ M^uller needed Schiller's organizational abilities, his deal-making chutzpah—he called
 him ^{in a letter} "one of the great wheeler-dealers of all time"—and his bottomless energy. He said in a letter
 years later, "I owe him more than a little, because *The Executioner's Song* would never have
 been nearly as big, and perhaps not as good as it is, if it hadn't been for his skill in interviewing."
 Schiller's omnivorous information-gathering operation changed Mailer's way of writing to ^{SOME}
 degree. He had always been proud of discovering truth at the tip of his pencil, but now saw that it
 would not be sufficient for capturing Gilmore and Nicole. He began to see that literary imagining
^{could be} ~~was~~ more than ^{just} scouring his innards for original insights and waiting for prompts from the
 navigator. It could be exercised in other ways. Smelting a story from a mountain of facts,
 factoids, perceptions, hunches and lies was one. Selecting the right narrative voice, or
 rediscovering one that had lain dormant for thirty years, was another.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

One of the last of Gordon Lish's accomplishments as fiction editor at *Esquire* (1969-76)
 was to convince Mailer to write a piece on television, "Of a Small and Modest Malignancy,
 Wicked and Bristling with Dots," ^{The Essay} ~~one that~~ sorted through Mailer's experiences on programs
 going back to Mike Wallace's "Night Beat" in the late 1950s. Mailer's fight with Vidal on the
 Cavett show is the memoir's focal point, although Mailer also discusses a number of other
 programs. ^{Esquire} ~~The essay~~ was on the newsstands in mid-October 1977, about a week before Mailer
 attended a dinner party for visiting British publisher George Weidenfeld, the publisher of six of
 his books. ~~The upper echelons of the New York literary and media world were also invited.~~
 Jason Epstein, editorial director at Random House, asked if Vidal, one of the firm's authors, and

his partner Howard Austen could join them after dinner, and the hostess, journalist and biographer Lally Weymouth, said of course.

In her column describing the party, Liz Smith called it "one of the grandest private parties ever tossed in Manhattan." Weymouth, the daughter of *Washington Post* publisher Katharine Graham, invited about two dozen for dinner at her East 72nd Street apartment, and fifty for drinks afterward. Her mother came, and some good friends: CBS Board Chairman William Paley, Jacqueline Onassis, ^{accompanied by} ~~who came with~~ architect John Warnecke, Pete Hamill, Barbara Walters, Clay Felker and his date Gail Sheehy, and ^{lawyer} literary agent Mort Janklow, ~~who was to play a role in the fight after dinner~~. Rose and Bill Styron were there — still not speaking to Mailer, as were Lillian Hellman and Susan Sontag. ~~Some of the others were~~ *Rolling Stone's* Jann Wenner, Carl Bernstein and Nora Ephron, and Atlantic Records chief, Ahmet Ertegun, ^{as did} ~~who was involved in the aftermath~~. Governor Jerry Brown of California came, and some West Coast film people, including producer Sam Spiegel. The British Ambassador, Peter Jay (a friend of Weidenfeld's), ^{present} ~~was also in attendance~~.

Before dinner, Mrs. Onassis asked Mailer some questions about fighting, according to Warnecke. "Norman, who has a theory about everything, began to expound on the subject. He said, 'You must keep ice-cool.'" Vidal arrived after dinner as the guests were talking and drinking in the crowded living room. Mailer was in the kitchen, ^{again in} ~~continuing his~~ conversation with Onassis, when Norris told him of Vidal's arrival. He went immediately to the living room and as soon as he saw Vidal, Janklow said, "he charged." Mailer told a *Washington Post* reporter that he had "been looking for Gore for six years and last night I finally found him. When I saw Gore, I just felt like butting him in the head, so I did." Accounts vary, but it seems that Mailer threw a

sequence
OK —
before
dinner +
after
dinner
still at
long to
Jackie

gin-and-^{Vidal's} tonic in ~~his~~ face and bounced the glass off his head. Mailer ^{didn't} ~~doesn't~~ remember throwing a punch, but Vidal later told columnist Liz Smith, "Then came the tiny fist!" Janklow, who was talking to Hamill and Felker, said that Vidal "just stood there kind of frozen." Then they scuffled, with Vidal ^{bb} ~~grapping~~ Mailer's lapels, and Mailer gripping Vidal's arm so tightly that bruise marks remained for weeks. About this time, the hostess walked in from the kitchen, unhappy to see a fight at her party. "God, this is awful; somebody do something," she yelled. Clay Felker, at ringside, said, "Shut up, this fight is making your party."

Janklow grabbed Mailer, who was "flustered and genuinely angry. My interest," Janklow said, "was to separate them so it didn't degenerate into a brawl. Gore was stunned and his glasses askew. Then Gore's companion Howard Austen started screaming and hollering, 'Norman, you are nothing!' Norman came forward again—he's potentially dangerous—but I held him back.

W
Vidal Gore didn't say *anything*." Sam Spiegel tried to quiet Mailer, and Vidal sat down on the couch at the other end of the room and used someone's handkerchief to clean his bloody lip. Barbara Walters said, "To me the most interesting thing was that Mailer's girlfriend, slim and tall and wearing a Grecian dress, stood there like a white obelisk with no expression on her face and said nothing." Mrs. Onassis watched from the kitchen doorway. According to Warnecke, Mailer looked much the same, "taut and unruffled." At this point, Mailer said, "Howard came up to me and said he would fight for Gore. I said, 'My fourteen-year-old-son could take you.' Howard never forgave me for that remark." Shortly afterwards, Mailer approached Weymouth and said, "Either he goes or I go." Faced with a Hobson's choice, she did nothing and Mailer got ready to leave. As he and Norris were walking out, Epstein said, "Norman, grow up." Vidal stayed and "held court," as one guest described it.

The following day both men gave post-mortems. Mailer said that Vidal "was nothing but a mouth." Vidal told a reporter, "I actually feel sorry for him. After all, it's not easy being a failure like Norman." ~~Straining for a clincher, Mailer said, "People will discover that Vidal is the Richard Nixon of the Left."~~ Vidal's rejoinder: ~~"Yet again, words fail Norman Mailer."~~ Not long after the Weymouth party, Norris went alone to another dinner party as Mailer was in Utah. Someone rose and gave a toast to Mailer, after which Ahmet Ertegun gave a toast to Vidal, who was also absent. ^{word executive} ~~As one of the dinner guests recalls,~~ ^{ed w} "Norris stood up and doused him with a whole glassful of wine right in his face. Ahmet's wife was there and they both laughed. I was surprised, honestly, because if someone other than Norris had done it, they wouldn't have stood for it."

Mailer explained to Gordon Lish that even after he had excoriated Vidal in his *Esquire* essay on television, he was still angry when he ran into him at Weymouth's. "Nothing mattered. I just had to trash him. I think I'd taken a dive into cancer gulch that night if I hadn't." For her part, Norris wrote, she had been "horrificed and helpless" watching the altercation. She and Mailer never could figure out why Vidal had compared Mailer to Charles Manson, she wrote, which was the root cause of the animosity. "We were never invited to Lally Weymouth's again," she said, adding that Weymouth said later that the party "probably had made her reputation as a hostess." Vidal passed over the incident in his memoir, *Palimpsest*. When he included the essay that had started the feud, retitled "Feminism and Its Discontents," in his 1993 collection, *United States: Essays, 1952-1992*, he dropped the comparison of Mailer ^{to} and Manson.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

As 1977 ended, Mailer was ready, after eight months of research and several trips to Utah, to begin writing. He was still weighing titles and listed several in his early notes: "Let's Do It" [Gilmore's final words], "American Virtue," and "Violence in America: A Novel in the Life of Gary Gilmore." His titles all point to his search for Gilmore's humanity, the praiseworthy but recessive character traits—the minority within—that offset his banality and violent crimes. Shortly after the book was published, Mailer said that Gilmore was "a kind of litmus test for compassion" because he was "on the one hand despicable and detestable and, on the other, he's admirable. How are you going to swallow that?" He wanted the story to "force people to look at how narrow our concepts of human nature are."

For the book that he would eventually title *The Executioner's Song*, Mailer returned to methods used in *The Naked and the Dead*. Both are told by anonymous, omniscient narrators who wheel their perspective through a large cast of characters, range freely in time and space, and knit two major and several minor plot strands into a huge social tapestry. Given these similarities, it might seem that his decision to revert to this perspective, even after 30 years, was not unduly complicated. Yet it was. The materials for the story, covering the nine-month period from Gilmore's release from prison to his execution, were in hand. But Mailer was at a loss as to how to approach the story, which seemed to consist of alternating layers of complexity and simplicity, and a chain of contingencies running back 100 years, as revealed in the final sentence of the first chapter, in which Gilmore's cousin Brenda reflects on Gary flying home to Utah from St. Louis, after being released from federal prison:

With all the excitement, Brenda was hardly taking into account that it was practically the same route their Mormon great-grandfather took when he jumped

Mike
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that he
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tell the
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about
but how
you say
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know
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the diff
9/19/77

off from Missouri with a handcart near to a hundred years ago, and pushed west with all he owned over the prairies, and the passes of the Rockies, to come to rest at Provo in the Mormon Kingdom of Deseret just fifty miles below Salt Lake.

Achieving this laconic, ungarnished style—Mailer described it as “a gentle voice that seems to come in from over the hill”—was no easy matter, and during his first month of writing, from mid-January to mid-February 1978, he ~~made no bones about his difficulty.~~ “I was paralyzed,” he said. His first attempt was to begin the narrative at one remove.

He created a character named Staunchman, “a middle-aged movie-writer whose marriage had broken up and he was living in Paris and he was miserable, just a big ungainly man with two huge suitcases, sort of a figure in the Latin Quarter and everybody would wonder, ‘What is this man with the two huge suitcases?’” His baggage is filled with all the interviews with Gilmore and company, and he was charged with writing a novel-length treatment for a famous director, someone like Francis Ford Coppola, who said to him, “Put everything in, don’t leave anything out; I want to know all about this man Gilmore before I make the movie.” ~~The director was “tired of writers who digest the food for you,” and wanted all the ingredients to make the salad himself.~~ It was Mailer’s intention to have Staunchman, who was also a novelist, occasionally write the director notes such as this one, taken from Mailer’s papers:

If I were not, God save us, your old college roommate able to recollect your transcendent idiocies and occasional inspirations at a time when no one apprehended that Hugh Bryan Kimber would yet be called (by a few movie critics at any rate) our American Fellini, our—these comparisons are always polar—our Bergman—truly Hugh, I can love you for hiring me when you know I hold you in

less high regard than most of the world, in short, if I did not know you better than an alter ego, I would try to make a novel of these hundred interviews I have carried with me all these months.

The long letters from Stauchman to Kimber might come to 300 pages, Mailer told Mills. Eventually, the letters "would get into the discussion of what kind of book Mailer was probably writing" about Gilmore, and the text would segue into Mailer's Gilmore story. ~~It was an awkward approach.~~ But Mailer did not immediately see that placing Stauchman between the

reader and the Gilmore story, using him as a sort of impresario of the voices of the characters, would be a problem. ~~In several interviews after the book was published, he talked about coming to grips with the matter.~~ He was enamored of his "baroque" style, he recalled, and uneasy about making the switch to something simpler. It had been "so difficult," he said, "for me to arrive at my own style—after all I'd been a public writer for 10 to 12 years before I felt I'd come into my own style as such [with *Advertisements*]~~—I didn't start with an identity. I forged an identity.~~"

Achieving this style was a matter of some pride because "it's not easy to master. It's not supple. It does not adapt to everything that comes up." Indeed. ~~For a 1,000-page saga with approximately 300 characters, half of whom have speaking parts, the baroque style was a dull tool.~~

~~"I was brought up not to jump from one person's mind into another," he told an interviewer. "I thought that was what poor writers did when they did not have enough imagination to find a form." Creating the intermediating Stauchman—a cross between Henry James and Aquarius—gave the story provenance, but did not give Mailer the span of control he needed.~~ Finally, he decided to drop it and adopt "the shifting point of view used in the 19th."

century when people believed in God and the novelist could play at being the All Knowing Supreme Deity." He had to take the leap but he felt, as he said later, as if he'd "violated the fundamental integrity of the novel." The modern novel, it should be said. Dickens and Balzac would not object. Whatever the offense to the ghosts of Conrad and James, he concluded that he had to "get myself knuckled down to the simple point of telling that story flatly, blankly, in the third person," returning to the omniscient point of view last used in his first novel.

"The deity," reviewer Ted Morgan notes, "orchestrates the voices, but does not join the song." Gone are the hallmarks of Mailer's rococo style, "the existential musings, the outrageous ideas, the over-characterizing." In earlier years, Mailer said, he would have been unable to relegate himself to being "nothing but a transmission belt." It was hard to silence the subjunctive selves who had voiced his anticipations, intimations, fears, and, occasionally, hopes, as Mailer made clear after the fact. He surprised himself by this departure, and astounded the literary world. Habituated to his refractive presence in the nonfiction narratives of the previous dozen years, almost every one of the numerous reviewers of *Song* remarked on his conspicuous absence, one "so pronounced," Richard Stern noted, "that it dominates the book like an empty chair at a family dinner." He calls *The Executioner's Song* "unremittingly unmailerian," and "an act of literary suicide." Stern was almost alone in this view, however. The overwhelming majority of the book's reviewers agreed that Mailer's decision to tell the story of Gilmore's final months and execution in a quiet voice from the other side of the hill demonstrated "narrative technique of real genius."

The only thing he published in 1978 was a preface to his 1944 novel, *A Transit to Narcissus*, brought out in a limited facsimile edition by his friend Howard Fertig. He accepted few speaking engagements, and none at colleges, ^{save} a brief talk at his 35th Harvard reunion, where he was introduced as "the folk hero of our class and nation." In February, he attended a huge party in New York with friends and admirers of James Jones, who had died of congestive heart disease the previous May. The party ~~was to~~ ^{ad} celebrate the posthumous publication of the concluding novel of Jones' World War II trilogy, *Whistle*, published by Doubleday, where Gloria Jones was an editor. Jacqueline Onassis, also a Doubleday editor, attended the party and was quoted as saying that *Whistle* was her favorite novel by Jones. Mailer, wearing his (now tight-fitting) Angelo Litrico velvet suit, was photographed countless times by photographers during his conversation with Mrs. Onassis. Norris, who accompanied him, told reporters that she would give birth to their child in April, via natural childbirth, "and Norman plans to be in the delivery room."

Mailer had seen Gloria Jones only a few times since the late 1950s, and until that night had never met Jones' daughter Kaylie, who would become a novelist after college. Kaylie does not mention the book party in *Lies My Mother Never Told Me*, her graceful and frank memoir of her struggle to give up alcohol and become a writer, but ^{provides} ~~gives~~ an account of another meeting with Mailer in 1989. It took place at the apartment of Jean Stein, editor of the literary journal, *Grand Street*, who was a good friend of Mailer's. "He turned to me," she wrote, "and said simply, 'I loved your father. He was the best friend I ever had, and I've missed him every day of my life. Losing him was one of the worst things that ever happened to me.'" Kaylie was taken aback: "This was the tough-talking, wheedling, arrogant son of a bitch my father was so angry at

all though my childhood?" Mailer went on to say that he deeply regretted his last conversation with Jones, which had taken place in Elaine's a few months before Jones died. Jones was sitting alone at the bar when Mailer walked in and said to him, half-seriously, "Let's settle this thing once and for all, Jim. Let's go outside and fight it out," which was his time-tested way of cementing a friendship, win or lose. But Jones was not up to it. "I can't Norman, I'm sick. I've got a bum heart." Mailer described to Kaylie the way Jones said it: "There was no bravado, no self-pity, no anger in his words. Just a fact, and the total exhaustion in his eyes." Mailer felt badly, and regretted his challenge. To the end of his life, he remembered this final meeting, and ~~repeated~~ ^{to others} that his friendship with Jones was the most intense of his life. Mailer told Kaylie that he would like to help her if he could. Gloria immediately proposed that he give a blurb to Kaylie's forthcoming novel about Russia, *Quite the Other Way*, and offered to give him a blow job for his endorsement. Norris, who was listening to the conversation, burst out laughing, as did everyone else. ^{at the party} Kaylie got the blurb, gratis. Mailer knew he owed something to the memory of the man he said later had "the wisdom of an elegant redneck."

Ψ Ψ Ψ

In mid-February 1978, Mailer received a letter from a convict named Jack Abbott, who would play ^{small} a role in the composition of *The Executioner's Song*. Abbott was in the same prison that Gilmore was paroled from in 1976, the U.S. Penitentiary in Marion, Illinois, built to replace Alcatraz. Abbott had read that Mailer was working on a book about Gary Gilmore, and offered to tell him what life was like in maximum security prisons. Like Gilmore, he had also done time in the Utah State Prison (and held the distinction of being the only person to escape from it) and, through the convict grapevine, had learned a few things about Gilmore. Mailer wrote back to him

to thank him for his insights into "the psychology of violence inculcated in one after fifteen years in jail that is not easily communicable and not necessarily obliging to the works of the imagination." ~~In light of what happened after Abbott's subsequent release—aided, in a minor way, by Mailer and several others by testifying to his literary abilities—his statement about the hidden nature of prisoner violence is striking.~~ He asked Abbott to tell him stories of prison life, and Abbott did. ^{None} No one of Mailer's many correspondents mailed him more words than did Jack Henry Abbott, a convicted forger, bank robber and murderer, serving an intermediate term of up to 19 years for his crimes. Over the next three years, Abbott wrote Mailer over 2,000 pages.

The reader will pick this up. There are many lines in this story.

His first letter "was intense, direct, unadorned, and detached." His voice was unique, Mailer said, and he had "an eye for the continuation of his thought that was like the line a racing-car driver takes around a turn." He was also "an intellectual, a radical, a potential leader with a vision of more elevated human relations in a better world that revolution could forge."

So he has a mind like no other I have encountered. It speaks from the nineteenth century as clearly as from the twentieth. There are moments when the voice that enters your mind is the clear descendant of Marx and Lenin untouched by any intervention of history. Indeed, Abbott, who is half Irish and half Chinese, even bears a small but definite resemblance to Lenin, and the tone of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov rises out of some of these pages [. . .] Freedom and justice are oxygen to Abbott.

These words came three years later as part of Mailer's introduction to Abbott's prison letters, which he helped to be published. During their early correspondence, however, Mailer was too preoccupied with Gilmore to see Abbott as more than just a fairly interesting sidebar.

informant
OK?