

interest, if nothing other, would like the feud to end." He asked him to float the idea to Vidal about appearing at one of the fundraisers. A month later, Mailer wrote to Vidal. "Our feud, whatever its roots for each of us, has become a luxury," he said. "It's possible in years to come that we'll both have to be manning the same sinking boat at the same time. Apart from that, I'd still like to make up. An element in me, absolutely immune to weather and tides, runs independently fond of you." Mailer gave him the roster of eleven writers who had already agreed to appear: ^{John} Didion, ^{Susan} Sontag, ^{Kurt} Vonnegut, ^{William} Styron, ^{John} Updike, ^{V.B.} Singer, ^{John} Irving, ^{John} Buckley, Tom Wolfe, Arthur Miller and himself. He offered Vidal a solo night, or a joint appearance. ~~"We won't have a full roster without you," he closed.~~ Vidal accepted.

Next he turned to the notoriously prickly Saul Bellow. Mailer's sharp criticisms of his work had not been forgotten, as ^{was} he learned the last time he had seen him in 1975. Bob Cromie was interviewing them, back to back, on his Chicago radio show, and raved to Mailer about Bellow's new novel, *Humboldt's Gift*. ^{Mailer} He recalled how he had tried to compliment the immaculately dressed Bellow when he bumped into him in the hallway. "Well, Saul," he said, "I hear you've written a terrific novel." Bellow looked up and down at the rumpled Mailer, paused two beats, and said, "Well, Norman, why not?" Then he strode off. Mailer said, "looking like an Italian count." Mailer wrote to Bellow about the purposes of the upcoming Congress, and offered him a solo evening, if he preferred. Bellow wrote back to say that the invitation, and the urging of Vonnegut, had made him decide, reluctantly, to give a reading, even though, he was "not strong on civility." Mailer was pleased, as he wrote back to Bellow, but because of theater costs he could no longer give him an evening to himself. Four more writers had been added—Woody Allen, Alice Walker, Vidal and Eudora Welty—and "I shudder to think of the matchmaking

maneuvers that will ensue, but rush to offer you, esteemed colleague, your private pick of stablemate" from the list of fifteen.

Mailer gave Vidal the same "perk" of choosing his partner. Vidal had told him that he didn't think the audience would like what he had to say. Mailer replied, "Fine. Be lugubrious, be scalding and appalling, be larger than Jeremiah." He also gave him a choice of dates, and Vidal selected November 17, and for a partner, Mailer. The "PEN Celebrations" would take place on eight Sunday evenings from September 22 to December 15, 1985. Bellow and Welty would open, Allen and Updike would close, and Mailer and Vidal would appear in the middle. The 16 writers were, arguably, the most impressive assemblage of literary talent ever ^{gathered} assembled in the U.S. Mailer did not pull it off singlehandedly, of course. Many others were involved—Sontag, Styron, Talese and Vonnegut, in particular—but Mailer did have good enough relations with most of the roster, save Miller (still unhappy with him about *Marilyn*), Welty and Walker, (neither of whom he knew), to get everyone he wanted. He said that the pressure to raise \$500,000 over the next year left him feeling "brusque and jagged." ~~He compared his situation, in a letter to Don Carpenter, to "playing catch-up football when you're behind 28-13, and the third quarter is going nowhere."~~

He had continued writing to Abbott and encouraged several people to write to him, including Malaquais. Abbott didn't like Mailer's recent books and wrote him a ten-page letter, which ended, "Do you want to end our friendship?" It was clearly falling apart, as was Abbott's relationship with Malaquais. In his reply he said that Abbott, like Malaquais, didn't like to lose an argument. "I would just as soon lose a discussion as win it," ^{Mailer} he said, because

it's the ones you lose that teach you more, and change your ideas, and I don't like living with the same idea too long because it gives me the feeling I'm inhabiting a subway. Anyway, I did my best to ponder it more and more, and finally could come to only one conclusion: guys who hate to lose arguments as much as you and Jean Malaquais must have some deep, unconscious conviction that their karma will be permanently altered if they do. Jack, if anyone wants to end our friendship it's you. That's your right. You can end it anytime you want. But don't put the onus on me.

It must be added that few individuals who argued with Mailer felt that he welcomed rejoinders. Sometimes he did; sometimes he sought them, but he could also be immodestly self-assured and dismissive. Endlessly curious, he was also terribly opinionated. Susan, his eldest, commented on this trait a few years after he died:

I couldn't have a real conversation, a discussion, with him. I mean if I had a problem and needed to talk with him about my kids or personal life, he was always ready to listen. But if I wanted to have an intellectual discussion with him it was impossible because he didn't want to listen. He'd just want to talk himself. So, he would ask a question and then go on; he'd just put his foot on me. I remember him doing that to John, I saw it. He did it to John, to Michael, to everybody. So I lost interest and I'm very sorry about that. If you ask me what is it that I regret, that's one of the things I regret most.

replace
with
839A

If Mailer could hear these words, he might respond by saying he came on strong with his children and friends to keep the dialectic supple, to encourage a strong response. "It's through

839A

If I had a problem and needed to talk to Dad about anything personal he was always ready to listen and on many occasions surprised me with his insights. But if we happened to discuss say, politics, religion or psychoanalysis, it was tough because he easily got impatient. I don't think he was really interested in what I had to say; he wanted to talk and be heard. Many times I didn't agree with him, but he expressed himself with such force my voice usually got lost along the way. Once in a while I'd surprise him with a fast rejoinder or a smart ass remark, but usually our conversations turned into lengthy monologues. He had the same attitude with all my siblings. I'd watch him with his friends, with Norris; same thing. So I lost interest and I'm very sorry about this. If you ask me what I regret, I'd say the lost opportunities are close to the top of my list.

opposition that creative possibilities rise," he maintained. A tension between being open-minded and being overbearing was characteristic of Mailer from his mid-to-late thirties on. He knew it, and explained it in a letter to a writer friend, Peter Arthurs.

We're all divided between the moralists in ourselves and the novelist. The moralist is full of platitudes and mother's milk, always telling others how to live. The novelist, who always has an eye like a pair of tweezers, never fails to pick up a detail. The novelist is amoral, witty, private, and there to be followed in each of us. What I mean is if one relaxes the moral, authoritative side of one's nature and gets over the idea that one has to say something with one's novel, and merely allows one's characters to take their turns, and is, indeed, even surprised by the turns these characters take, as if they do in some fashion have life of their own, then marvelous things can come out of it.

During 1985, Mailer's correspondence burgeoned, as it usually did when he was not writing on deadline. He kept up with all his regular correspondents—Abbott, Stratton, Knox, Carpenter, Farbar (like Stratton, still incarcerated), and Bruce Dexter, as well as to people unknown to him who wrote with questions. To the editor of *American Spectator*, R. Emmett Tyrrell, who had inquired about his current reading, Mailer said that John Cheever's collected stories was "the discovery" of the year, and that he regretted that he had never had a good discussion with him when he was alive—Cheever died in 1982. The other book he named was M.R. James' *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*. He made no comment on it, but it clearly influenced the opening of *Harlot's Ghost*, which he would soon begin. In his letter to Dexter, he repeated something that he had announced to friends more than once: "I am a phenomenon to myself." He

Bruce
 told Dexter that "no one to my knowledge has ever had the same apercu about me that you had."
 Dexter had seen clearly that

I always was my own experiment, and that is such a simple way to live, and no one could ever comprehend it. I don't even think it took great guts, just my intense scientific curiosity about one's subject, myself and the bizarre phenomenon of myself. At any rate, those years are behind me now. I'm tempted to say alas. Once you lose the power to experiment on yourself, you lose half your ideas as well.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

Fan Mailer, now in her nineties and failing, spent the summer of 1985 with her family. Barbara and Al were renting an apartment in Provincetown, and all of the children came to town as well. Fan spent most of her time in bed in the front bedroom overlooking Commercial Street. The local tour bus came by daily, and Fan could hear the driver pointing out "the home of the famous writer, Norman Mailer." Norris recalled that she and all five of Mailer's daughters, as well as Barbara, took turns sitting by her bed to keep her company. A woman named Eva, hired by the family, was almost always there. In late August, Fan and Eva were back in Brooklyn. When Barbara visited, she was disturbed when she saw that Fan was having difficulty swallowing. "The motor of the family," as Mailer called her, was shutting down. *On* The next day, August 28, Susan's birthday, Fan died. Eva called Provincetown. Mailer was out for a swim when the call came. Stephen recalled that he and Michael swam out to where *their father* he was snorkeling and to give him the news. "The three of us then, solemnly, walked back to the house with

weighty, unspoken remorse." Fan was buried in the family plot in Long Branch next to Barney. Born (probably) the same year, 1891, she outlived him by almost 13 years.

In a letter to Stratton, Mailer told him how at the end, his mother "could no longer see, she could barely walk, she was bent over from arthritis, the forefront of her memory was gone, so that conversations with her consisted of her asking you the time, like clockwork, every twelve and a half seconds." But she was still feisty on occasion.

Once, maybe a month before the end, she was complaining to her companion, a Jamaican lady [Eva] who took care of her, about how miserable she felt, and said, "I just wish I was dead," whereupon the Jamaican lady, who was probably fed up with her—she was not the world's greatest fun to take care of—said to her, "Would you like me to help you?" At that point, my mother drew herself up as well as she could with her bent back, and glaring at the woman with her sightless eyes said, ^{*}Drop dead.^{*} That was my mom.

Stratton was now in a federal prison in Petersburg, Virginia, and Mailer told him he would visit him in late November, after his appearance with Vidal. He also wanted to visit Buzz Farbar at another federal prison in Loretto, Pennsylvania, but at that time their relations had soured over some financial matters. "Buzz has been through a hideous period," he wrote to Knox. Unlike Stratton, who was keeping in shape, writing a novel and a legal brief, one that eventually reduced his sentence, and handling his situation well, Farbar, Mailer said, "hasn't gone through any metamorphoses because of his suffering. He just stands there and wails within like Job." It would be another year before their relations improved.

The fall of the year was given over to fundraising and arrangements for the eight PEN Celebrations. Richard Snyder, the head of Simon ^Eand Schuster, Tina Brown, editor of *Vanity Fair*, Gay Talese, and "takeover baron" Saul Steinberg and his wife Gayfryd were some of the key people who worked with Mailer to secure contributions from publishers and philanthropists for the Congress. Talese was instrumental in convincing Donald Trump to donate 200 hotel rooms for visiting writers. Added to the income from the PEN Celebrations, the total from major givers was more than sufficient to meet the budget. Talese, who headed the planning committee for the Congress, said that without Mailer "and his fund-raising efforts, we would not be having an international congress." His eagerly anticipated evening with Vidal on November 17 drew a sell-out crowd, but the event was a dud. Both men criticized American imperial ambitions, but with no special insights or revealing disagreements. Mailer's sister was recalled that Vidal was the better speaker that night. Before introducing Allen and Updike at the final Sunday event in December, Mailer apologized for his appearance with Vidal, calling it "a meeting of two toothless tigers." As best he could during this hectic period, Mailer kept working on the new novel, and by the end of 1985 had 400 pages of manuscript that he was ^{describing to Frank} privately calling "a spy novel."

(his boxing clown)
In the midst of the P.E.N. events, he learned from his doctor, as he told Jeff Michelson in early October, "I don't have a bad heart, but I don't have a good one either." Boxing was over for him he said, because of his wind. "It got to be sheer, simple hell just to get through a round," he said. "My chest used to feel like it was going to explode." He said he planned to eat a more healthy diet, and asked Michelson to keep his condition confidential.

Who?

The news about his health came about the same time that he was selected by *McCall's* magazine as one of the ten sexiest American men over 60, along with Paul Newman, Cary Grant, Joe DiMaggio and President Reagan. Meredith was asked for comment on Mailer and declined. When told, Mailer said that he would have given a quote: "At long last, love." He told Knox, "It's all such marvelous crap." Confirming his confused status in the public eye, a few months later the Feminist Writers' Guild made him the "Guest of Dishonor" at their ninth annual meeting where those present played a game called "Pin the tail on Norman Mailer," a protest against "his antifeminist writings." Mailer had no comment. He received one other award, on November 20, the Lord & Taylor Rose Award made annually to "a person of public accomplishment." Previous recipients included Lillian Hellman, Walter Cronkite and Ella Fitzgerald. Michael Mailer was the master of ceremonies, and Liz Smith, Plimpton, Buckley and Miloš Forman spoke. Mailer was among friends. When he got to the lectern, he said just that morning he had been talking to his wife about the award. "I said to her how nice it was that Lord & Taylor is honoring me on my 60th birthday. She smiled at me and said, 'You're 62 and it's not your birthday.'"

Ψ Ψ Ψ

The 48th International P.E.N. Congress opened on January 12, 1986 at the New York Public Library with welcoming remarks by U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz. The majority of the conferees from the U.S. and foreign countries were left-leaning and Shultz was not received warmly, even though he condemned censorship. Mailer had invited him at the suggestion of John Kenneth Galbraith, but without consulting the Executive Board—a blunder that he later apologized for—and there was significant opposition, given the unpopularity of the

Reagan administration among liberals. Mailer said he thought it was appropriate to have the nation's top diplomat welcome the international delegates. ^{E.L.} Doctorow wrote an op-ed piece saying that Mailer's action had put P.E.N. ^{at} "at the feet of the most ideologically right-wing Administration this country has seen," and 65 of the 700-plus delegates signed a petition opposing it. Things improved slightly after the opening day furor, but the sour mood never ^{dissipated.} ~~went~~

~~away.~~ One commentator described the conference as "a week of petitions and statements and strategy meetings, of walkouts and protests and confrontations." Aesthetics withered in the ideological heat.

The theme of the conference, the brainchild of novelist Donald Barthelme and poet and translator Richard Howard, was "The Imagination of the State," intended to generate a discussion of two kinds of imagination, artistic and governmental. But many argued that states don't have imaginations, just the opposite; states have agendas, narrow sets of self-serving goals rarely lubricated by literature. Shultz, many believed, was the servant of an administration that had no imagination, ^{not} ~~or~~ even a brain. It was Mailer, after all, who said later that the first precept of President Reagan was: "Be as shallow as spit on a rock and you will prevail." The conference theme was echoed in many of the titles of the panels: "How Does the State Imagine?" "Censorship in the U.S.," and "Alienation in the State." Susan Sontag chaired one of these and led off by stating that she didn't understand the theme to be discussed. Mailer, who was in the audience, reminded Sontag that the panel themes "had been around for six months," and said, "Couldn't you have picked up the phone and asked?" Sontag, it was later revealed, was a member of P.E.N.'s program committee. "I was livid," he said.

On the fifth day of the conference, Mailer was attacked again, this time for the underrepresentation of women. A petition was presented to Mailer noting disproportions in the number of women involved in the Congress—there were only 20-odd women out of 140 on conference panels. Earlier, when Betty Friedan confronted Mailer on the issue, he answered, “Oh, who’s counting?” Friedan, joined by Grace Paley, Erica Jong, Margaret Atwood and several others, were counting, and they wanted an explanation and a public apology. Mailer pointed out that at least two dozen important women writers had declined invitations, including Mary McCarthy, Iris Murdoch, Diana Trilling, Joan Didion, Barbara Tuchman, Mavis Gallant, Ann Beattie, Nathalie Sarraute and Marguerite Yourcenar. His answer did not mollify the protesters, and the atmosphere got ^{worse} ~~stiffer~~, especially after he said it was a bad idea to construct literary panels based on gender balance, adding that in many countries “there are no good women writers” because of the ingrained sexism of the culture that feminists deplored. Mailer started to dig himself into a deeper ^{hole} ~~pit~~ with comments about the mistake of stirring affirmative action into the literary pot, and some in the audience wondered if he would escape with his skin. Only after Gay Talese whispered some words of advice in Mailer’s ear did he promise that the petitions would be addressed, and shortly afterwards closed down the discussion. An ad-hoc committee, headed by Grace Paley, was established afterwards to examine the demands of the protesters. Vonnegut, another P.E.N. official, said at the time that if he had been in the president’s position he would have constituted the panels almost exactly the way Mailer had, given the roster of conferees from which to choose.

I don't think an atmosphere can be "stiffened"

In point of fact, Mailer had little to do with selecting panel members, as he explained to novelist Mary Lee Settle, who wondered why she hadn’t been chosen for one. “I stayed away

from that," he wrote to her. "If I had started picking too many people, charges of nepotism, or whatever the word is, would damage us all." Most of his effort had gone into fundraising. The participation petition called for P.E.N. to "include women in the decision-making roles." In a postmortem with the *Times*, Mailer said that the issue had not received much previous attention because "we have so many women in positions of such power." At the time of the Congress, women headed six of the eight permanent committees and occupied three of the six vice presidencies. Half of the 700-plus individuals that attended the conference were women. "What are people who are calling for change going to change?" Mailer asked. But given the paucity of women panelists, Friedan's credentials, the backing of major figures such as Grace Paley, Erica Jong and Nadine Gordimer, not to mention the feminist bull's-eye on his back, the protest could have been foreseen. The "brilliant end run," as *Time* called it, of inviting Shultz didn't help him, and continuing anger over the final defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment a few years earlier may also have contributed, although Mailer was on record as supporting it. He continued with P.E.N. until mid-1986 when his term was up, and stayed on the board for a time, but felt bruised by his treatment at the Congress. When asked in later years about P.E.N., all he could say was "cannibals."

The Congress was not given over entirely to squabbling. There were lively receptions in the Egyptian wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; at Gracie Mansion, hosted by Mayor Koch; at the New York Times Building, hosted by Publisher Arthur "Punch" Sulzberger, Sr. Nearby coffee shops and restaurants, and the bars of the two hotels where most of the panels and readings took place, the St. Moritz (Trump's hotel) and the Essex House, were crowded with writers in conversation. Mailer enjoyed the many dinners and cocktail parties, although the

presence of Carole Mallory in the same room as Norris gave him no happiness. According to Lennon and Lucid, former Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, who was one of the moderators, said that he had an amorous entanglement with Mallory. "Now she won't leave me alone," Trudeau said wearily over a drink in the St. Moritz bar.

Two months before the Congress, Mailer asked Thomas Pynchon to take part, and offered to have a drink with him. Pynchon wrote back with thanks and an apology, saying he would be away when the Congress took place. "With luck, however, we may surface together in the same piece of space/time," he said, making it sound as if some sort of psychic rendezvous was in the cards. He said he would enjoy having a drink with Mailer, although his would have to be "something like Ovaltine." Mailer wrote back and gave Pynchon his telephone number for the next time he was in New York. The call never came, however. *The Crying of Lot 49* was the only Pynchon novel that Mailer ever read, and he deplored it as an extended shaggy dog story. What might have been said if the entropist and the existentialist had clinked mugs of Ovaltine across the table, across the abyss?

Mailer's feelings about postmodern fiction surfaced in a letter he wrote to Gordon Lish a few months before the Congress. Lish had edited some of his *Esquire* essays in the 1970s, and had stayed in touch with him, sending him the books he was editing at Knopf, and his own fiction. One of these was *Peru*, an "obsessively circular novel," as one reviewer put it. The novel (which might be a memoir, or so it hints) is about the memories the narrator, Gordon, has of a boy he killed in a sandbox by gashing his skull with a toy hoe. The boys are six. Little by little, memory byte by memory byte, Gordon remembers the gory details, but does so with no emotion. Mailer liked Lish but detested his book.

Lish admired the work of Gertrude Stein, but this earned him no points with Mailer. "I whisper to you that I don't really care in my secret heart whether Gertrude Stein lives forever or perishes tomorrow in Parnassus," ^{Mailer} he wrote. "You have the perfect right to go in your direction"—Stein's direction—"just as I have to go in mine, but the directions are profoundly opposed."

What your work catches is everything I detest about modern life. The entropy first, the breakdown of syntax, of concentration, mobility, all the murky tides that wash at our sensibilities. You capture that perfectly until my teeth are ready to grind. I feel as if literature is beleaguered, and that we must no longer study the disease but erect baroque monuments to stand against it, even if they're no more meaningful than sand castles against the filthy dull polluted tide. I want literature that has more syntax, more concentration, more in the way of symbols, and not that damned torturous undertow [words ^{illegible} ~~garbled~~] deterioration of forms, pervasive indefinable dread, and anomie.

He ends his condemnation of postmodernism by saying that he hesitated to write this kind of letter, but remaining silent would only "subject us both to the dirty and mucky tide." The letter was written just at the point when he was about to break from his spy novel and take up his rain-making chores at P.E.N., and it is fair to surmise that his comments to Lish reminded him of the kind of novel he had begun, ^{which} ~~one that~~ he would devote himself to for the next five years. It would be his longest stretch of uninterrupted novel-writing in 40 years of professional writing—almost

^{un} interrupted, that is.

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Chapter 13

An Unfinished Cathedral: *Harlot's Ghost*

✓ Make it seem
as though we read
about Harlot twice
at the beginning
here after it is pub-
lished and then
later as it is being
written. See note
p. 853

"You can no longer write an all-encompassing novel about America," Mailer said after *Ancient Evenings* was published. "It can't be done." For the eight years following its publication, he published nothing but a few short pieces and a collection of his interviews. The period of focused effort ended with the publication of *Harlot's Ghost* in the fall of 1991. Mailer's tenth novel cannot justly be called all-encompassing, yet it does provide a privileged perspective on some of the most cataclysmic events and fabled figures of American life in the twenty years after World War II. Like a long freight train, Mailer's story of WASP intelligence agents in war and peace snakes through upper-class American life (Mt. Desert, Yale, the 21 Club), picks up speed as it moves through international intrigues in Europe, slows to a crawl in Uruguay, and then accelerates rapidly as it moves through the CIA's attempts to poison Castro, its failed invasion at the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban missile crisis. Some of J.F.K.'s extramarital love affairs comprise another strand of the novel's loosely braided narrative of deception, loyalty, betrayal and heroism. He said more than once that this was a period in the American Century when individuals were willing to die for an idea, and in *Harlot's Ghost* many get their chance.

What happened to tough guys? Don't dance?

Shortly before it was published, a friend pointed out to him that the book's length could be a record in American publishing, surpassing James Jones' *Some Came Running* (1266 pages). Mailer, a long-time communicant in the church of organic form, shrugged. The bound galleys of his novel came in at 1334 pages. He said that Random House would add one line to every page, to

reducing the published volume to 1310 pages. Longer and more detailed than any of Mailer's other fictions, the novel's several lines of action never coalesce. ^{really} ^{The novel} *Harlot's Ghost* cannot be said to have a plot. It has plot parcels and plot scaffoldings everywhere—scenes and vignettes, preludes and interludes, and endless expositions of intelligence techniques and mores—but only the ghost of a fully articulated story. In one sense, ^{The novel} it resembles the cluttered studio of a brilliant artist filled with works at various stages of completion. It could also ^{The novel could be} be likened to a magnificent, half-finished cathedral, to borrow a metaphor he used to suggest the dimensions of his personality in *The Armies of the Night*. "Plot is the enemy of the great novel," he said. "I'm interested in plots that do not have a resolution. Life is like that." *Harlot's Ghost* ends with these words: "TO BE CONTINUED"—a promise he would break. His greatest regret, he said the year before he died, was "the memory of the books I promised to write and didn't." Even as it stands, unfinished and abandoned, it may be his finest novelistic achievement, one of the last high peaks of his writing life, and the *summa* of his knowledge of postwar America, as seen through the eyes of two generations of CIA agents.

After 40-odd years of trying, Mailer finally found a narrative field suitable to the full deployment of his historical imagination, his biographical predilections and his psychological theories. As Salman Rushdie said in his review, *Harlot's Ghost* is "a perfect coming together of author and subject." The novel has great geopolitical sweep, looking back to World War II and forward to the Vietnam War, and is full of vivid portraits, divided between historical and fictional figures—he liked the idea of mixing them up in the same way E.L. Doctorow did in *Ragtime*. Of the former, the most notable are J.F.K. and his brother Robert, their in-house nemesis, J. Edgar Buddha (as everyone in the novel calls FBI Director Hoover), CIA director

Allen Dulles, Uruguay station chief, Howard Hunt (of later Watergate infamy), British double agent Kim Philby, General Edward Lansdale (a model for a character in Burdick and Lederer's *The Ugly American*), Frank Sinatra, Mafia chieftain Sam Giancana, Fidel Castro and William King "Bill" Harvey, Berlin base chief. Harvey is the most memorably drawn historical figure, matched only by the fictional Hugh Tremont Montague, a high CIA counter-intelligence official, code name, Harlot. The narrator is Herrick "Harry" Hubbard, a young agent who goes into intelligence work in 1955 after graduation from Yale, following his father "Cal" Hubbard, an OSS officer in World War II. Cal's best friend is Harlot, who is also Harry's godfather and mentor. There are two major women characters: Harlot's wife, Hadley Kittredge Gardiner Montague, who is part of the agency's brain-trust, and Modene Murphy, a fictional stand-in for Judith Campbell Exner, the lover of J.F.K., Giancana, Sinatra and young Hubbard.

The broad contours of the CIA's history, and many of the actual and rumored particulars of its chicanery, gave Mailer the ~~time-space amplitudes~~ ^{length of} ~~he needed, and the details of duplicity~~ ^{all the geopolitical sweep} that he relished. It is no wonder that he gave up his plan to chronicle the voyage of the spaceship-ark in favor of a novel of sharply etched character studies, none more so than Montague's, a master spy modeled on the legendary counter-intelligence chief, ^{CIA} James Jesus Angleton (himself a minor character ^{in the book}), a poet who corresponded with Pound and Eliot, collaborated during World War II with cardinals, ex-fascists, Mafia *capodecinas* and Kim Philby, and worked for seven successive CIA directors, General Walter Bedell Smith to Richard M. Helms. It was Angleton who came up with the "wilderness of mirrors" theory to explain how Soviet intelligence might be manipulating the agency. Mailer's Montague is just as fiercely determined to root out Russian

what exactly does this mean?
"space-hunt" was Pynchon's memorable phrase that you recently quoted

moles as his model, or so it seems—with Montague, there is always a deeper layer, and his deepest loyalties are a mystery.

The novel begins in 1983 just before his body is found near his boat in Chesapeake Bay with most of the head blown off by a shotgun (Hemingway is one of the novel's presiding spirits), and the finger tips nibbled off by fish. A filling in one of the remaining two teeth corresponds "astonishingly well," to the X-rays in Harlot's dental file. Is it Harlot, or a corpse of similar dimensions, tricked up to deceive? Harry disappears himself and goes to Russia to find the answer. He carries with him the "Alpha manuscript," subtitled "The Game," a 1,000-page memoir of his life in the CIA from 1955 to the mid-1960s. As he reads his microfilm copy of the memoir with a flashlight on the wall of his room in the Hotel Metropole, we read along with him. Down the street is Lubyanka Square, dominated by a gigantic statue of "Iron" Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Russian secret police, and one of the most dazzling twentieth-century practitioners of counter-intelligence. Harlot gives seminars on his techniques.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

Ancient Evenings took eleven years to complete, but Mailer left it for years at a time, and wrote a half dozen other books in the interstices of its composition. Measured by clock hours, *Harlot's Ghost* took longer to write than any of his other works. He departed from it only twice, once, briefly, to direct "Strawhead" and a second, longer, period to write a screenplay based on *Tough Guys*, and then direct the film. He was prepared to postpone the novel if either of these projects ^{was} ~~was~~ successful. But the play never got beyond short runs at Actors Studio and the film, while not without its virtues, did not lead to a career change. There was a short-lived third project, a film version of *King Lear*, based on Mailer's "Don Learo" screenplay, and directed by

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the great director, Jean-Luc Godard. Mailer said that "writing a screenplay for Godard is like putting a message in a bottle and sending it out to sea," but he completed it and sent it on for consideration. He was ~~also~~ supposed to play ^{his daughter} Lear and Kate was to play Cordelia. Godard, however, wasn't the least interested in Mailer's screenplay, or Shakespeare's play, and appears in the film as a nutty professor. Godard wanted Mailer to play Mailer and utter lines such as: "Ah! At last I am done. What joy!" ^{Mailer} The experience was "a true horror tale," he said. After only one day on the set, he and Kate left Switzerland and flew home. ^{where the film was being shot} ~~King Lear~~, called "a late Godardian practical joke" by critic Vincent Canby, was released in 1987 by Cannon Films. It baffled its small audiences.

Several months before going to Switzerland with her father, in January 1986, Kate played Marilyn Monroe in "Strawhead" at Actors Studio, and got excellent reviews. Working with her father "brought me closer to him," she said, adding that she was not particularly awed working with him. "You're doing the work," she said. "It's a play." Bert Stern, the fashion photographer who photographed Marilyn for his book *The Last Sitting*, six weeks before her death, took pictures of Kate for an April 1986 *Vanity Fair* article on the play. "No one has played Marilyn better, except Marilyn," Stern said, adding that he had seen many people imitate Monroe, "but only Kate has caught her vulnerability and sensitivity." Mailer told a friend, half-seriously, that he sometimes wondered if Monroe had been reincarnated in Kate. James Atlas described Kate's performance in the *Vanity Fair* story, performing before "a select audience" that included Dustin Hoffman, Tina Brown, Al Pacino, Robert De Niro and Elia Kazan. "Young Kate Mailer," he wrote, who had acted in college and had a minor part in an amateur repertory production of

^{lv}
~~Hair~~, amazingly *became* Monroe. She whimpered and flirted, was seductive and coy; she babbled to herself in a nervous, breathy, voice; she emanated sex. ^u

OK?

^{Mailer}
 Kate was "incredible" in the production, ~~he~~ told Malaquais, and added,

Perhaps in a year we will actually do the play Off-Broadway. I tell you, Jean, I was startled with her talent. She created a Marilyn who was lovely and vulnerable and sensitive and totally fucked-up, but restrained with instinctive taste to protect herself from her own ignorance. It was a lovely creation. People who know Marilyn came back to me afterward shaking their heads, telling me it was spooky, no one in the family can believe it. ~~We all go around saying, "Our little Kate...?"~~

Remembering the excitement surrounding *The Deer Park*'s four-month run in 1967, Mailer looked forward to returning to Off Broadway. But when the time came to ~~continue as Marilyn~~, Kate declined. Norris recalled the situation: "It was just a little complicated because of her dad directing her, and she didn't want anyone to know for a long time that she was his daughter, and [initially] called herself Kate Cailean, which is her middle name. And people didn't know for a long time that this actress was Norman's daughter. But, it was problematic for her. It's too complicated for me to talk about, but she just didn't want to make her career as being Marilyn Monroe, with her dad." Kate ~~has~~ continued to act, and after "Strawhead" had roles in several ^{plays} ~~productions~~, including Peter Brook's production of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, and the film, *A Matter of Degrees*.

With the exception of Susan, ~~who is~~ a practicing psychoanalyst and faculty member of the Chilean Institute for Psychoanalysis, all of the Mailer siblings ^{went into} are in the arts. Danielle is a ^{sketch}



visual artist whose work has been given many shows, and is the chair of the art department at a private school in Connecticut. Betsy is a writer, currently working on a novel and a memoir. Michael is a writer and independent film producer with more than twenty films to his credit. Stephen Mailer, a veteran stage and screen actor with credits going back to the 1980's, has also appeared in television, including an appearance on *The Gilmore Girls* with his father. Maggie Mailer, like her older sister, is a successful visual artist and the founder of the Storefront Artist Project in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Matthew Mailer is a director and screenwriter who made his directorial debut in 1998 with a film he made with his brother Michael, *The Money Shot*. John Buffalo, the youngest of the nine siblings, is a playwright, actor, producer and journalist. In 2006, he co-authored a book of conversations with his father, *The Big Empty*.

More
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→ Mailer was not the easiest of fathers. He lectured his children vociferously, harangued them with the line "the good is the enemy of the great," and fought with them. He and Stephen had several memorable clashes, some in public, but they always reconciled. Mailer was stalwart, however, in encouraging them in their careers. In addition to directing Kate in "Strawhead," he worked with and advised Michael on several film projects; read and praised Betsy's novel-in-progress, debated with Susan about psychoanalysis, and took pride in the elaborate, life-size horror figures that Matthew (informally adopted by Mailer) constructed, as well as his screenplay for "The Greatest Thing in the World." Stephen, whom Mailer praised for his "physical agility on stage and his sensitivity to character," said that his father "was very supportive because he is an artist." Maggie compared the houses where they summered in Maine and Provincetown to an artists' colony. "I think we were lucky," she said,

I felt encouraged and I think if Dad had not been always trying to impart the importance of being an artist, perhaps we would have rebelled and become bankers. But I always felt that he was interested in what I was doing, and sometimes too interested. I mean, his standards were so much higher than anything I could conceive of. You know, when I was a teenager, it was laughable. He once said something like 'Once you've become recognized as a leader in your community and in your college, then you'll understand what I'm talking about.' He just took it for granted that that would happen. So I think he expected all the kids to be artists. I remember at one point saying I didn't think I was up for that life, and he said, 'Look, you have to do whatever you want, you know, and my love for you is there regardless.'

He hung the paintings of ^{Danielle and Maggie} his two artist daughters on the walls of his two homes, and was pleased and proud when they had a joint show with Norris in Provincetown in 2007. Danielle, who describes her work as being "part autobiographical, part mythological and spiritual," painted a subtle self-portrait titled "The Good Daughter." She is asleep in a chair holding a copy of *Ancient Evenings*, recognizable by the color drawing on the back jacket of an Egyptian head. She finished the painting, a tribute from one artist to another, the day before her father died.

He was aware of the pitfalls surrounding parental advice. He and Knox discussed the matter several times in their correspondence. In 1992, Mailer wrote:

I agree with you: forget about giving advice to your children. It can't be done unless you have a special relation to them, and unless they have a true need for your knowledge from their own point of view. Otherwise, it's just a power trip to

them and they are trying to establish their own power center, and won't accept anything from a parent. [. . .] So who the fuck am I to steer someone else's life? I would say just assume they'll mellow out toward you as they get older. In the meantime, give them a little of the green and stop complaining. What else do we have to spend it on, after all?

~~As far as money went,~~ ^{Q1} ^{financially} Mailer was generous with his children, ^{as he was} ~~The same is true~~ with his friends. He made many loans and gifts, and few people who dined out with him ever beat him to the check.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

The deal that called for Mailer to write "Don Learo" grew out of a luncheon meeting between Godard and Israeli film producer Menahem Golan at the Cannes film Festival in May 1985. Golan, who ran Cannon Films with his cousin Yoram Globus, offered Godard \$1 million for a film based on *King Lear*. They signed the deal on a napkin, which Golan framed and hung in his office. Working with Godard was a departure for Cannon, which heretofore had mainly churned out low-budget, high-violence films. During its peak year, 1986, Cannon made 43 films. But Golan and Globus also aspired to produce high art films, which helps explain the deal with Godard. Tom Luddy, a producer at American Zoetrope Films, which for over thirty years has made films of the caliber of *The Godfather II*, *Mishima* and the restored version of Abel Gance's 1927 classic, *Napoleon*, had close ties with Godard. Golan wanted "a normal American movie," Luddy recalled, and therefore put in writing that Godard must use a screenplay approved by Cannon Films. Mailer's name was suggested by Godard as the screenwriter, and added to the

napkin-contract as "pre-approved" to write it. Golan tracked Luddy down at the festival, and asked him to enlist Mailer.

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 Mailer said no. "I knew I would have 30,000 Shakespearians out to slaughter me," he said. But Luddy knew that Mailer wanted to see *Tough Guys* made into a film, and ^{hoped to} direct it. At a September 1985 meeting at a mid-town New York restaurant, Luddy sold him on the idea of a two-picture deal. "Tell Golan," Mailer said, "that if he'll do *Tough Guys*, I'll do *Lear*." Luddy called Golan in Los Angeles and put him on with Mailer. "Mr. Mailer, I'm happy to agree with you on a two-picture contract," Golan said. Luddy agreed to be the film's executive producer. ^{Four months after} ~~When the P.E.N. Congress was over four months later~~ ^{ended}, Mailer began working on both screenplays. *Tough Guys* had taken him two months to write; the screenplay went through five drafts and took six months. Work on *Harlot's Ghost* all but ceased.

The biggest hurdle that he faced with the *Tough Guys* screenplay was that much of the novel takes place in Madden's head. A second problem was that the plot depended on actions and situations that took place months and years, even decades earlier. Somehow, this backstory had to be presented, or adroitly deleted. He eliminated some minor characters, enlarged the roles of others, wrote several flashback scenes, and flashbacks within flashbacks—one of them showed Madden in prison talking to his cellmate, played by ^{Mailer's} ~~his~~ Provincetown friend, Eddie Bonetti. He also planned to intimate Madden's half-crazy, tremulous state by using music and "subtly sinister" images of Outer Cape Cod in late fall. The sum of all these changes streamlined the story somewhat, but problems remained. He wrote most of it in Provincetown, living alone until the summer when Matt and John were out of school and joined him there with their mother. ^{Nappi's} ~~their~~ mother.

OK - since she is not Matt's mother
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Mailer wrote to Bruce Dexter ~~and~~ in late April about the translation process. Being a screenwriter, he told Dexter,

for a particular novel is, if it is not your own work, very much like being a first year medical student, and doing a long, detailed autopsy where you get to know the inside of the body you're studying conceivably better than God, who might have less time. I did a screenplay once of *The Rosy Crucifixion* and it's possible that I ended up knowing in a few small ways more of the work than Henry Miller. In working with *Tough Guys*, I can see the book on the table, all its virtues, all the places where it is not so virtuous, and it is the oddest book. The people, reduced to the tight net of a screenplay, are by the measure of anyone looking for a little cheer about human nature, a negative lot. All the while I was writing the book I was in love with them for their charms—monsters with charm have always appealed to me—and something of that, I hope, is still in the screenplay [- . .]

Ψ Ψ Ψ

In a letter to Abbott, Mailer said he would like to send him the "Don Learo" screenplay to get his reaction to the Mafia characters, "where you think it's real, where you think it's phony." Abbott had written a new book, *My Return*, in collaboration with Naomi Zack, ^{the} a young woman who had taken up his cause. Zack, who had earned a Ph.D. in philosophy at Columbia, was convinced at the time that Abbott "was unfairly convicted by an outraged public opinion inflamed by sensational treatment in the media." *My Return* consists of a play, "The Death of Tragedy," depicting the murder of Adan with diagrams of the killing knife thrust, several appendices on the trial and the legal issues, and philosophical-polemical letters to Mailer, Styron,

^{32/34}
 Silvers, Kosinski, Mailer's friend Mashey Bernstein, and several others. Abbott maintains his innocence throughout, and uses as an epigraph the last words of Melville's Billy Budd before he is hanged—"God bless Cap'n Vere"—the implication being that Abbott stabbed Adan just as Budd had killed Claggart, out of instinct not malice, which may have been true.

Zack, who had begun a documentary film on Abbott, moved in 1985 to Plattsburg, New York, near the Fishkill Correctional Facility where Abbott was confined. For a nine-month period in 1985-86 she visited him every day. She was "bringing him books, conveying his messages, typing his writing. Of her relationship, she said: 'All I can say is my main purpose is Jack needs and wants a new trial. As for his intellectual work, I take it very seriously.'" At the time, Abbott was trying, he said, "to behave like a 'real' intellectual." Zack wrote to Mailer asking if he would write an afterword to their book. Mailer replied to Abbott: "You are so associated with me and people are so pissed off at me now after the P.E.N. Congress that it would result in your being taken less seriously." He offered to write a blurb for *My Return*—"if I like it." Abbott was convinced that a cabal was persecuting him, and Mailer was tired of his paranoia. "There are not legions lying awake every night trying to figure out how to thwart you," he told him. Ultimately, he declined to write the afterword, and their correspondence ended.

She and Abbott would marry in 1990, while he was still in prison.
on give a blurb

Abbott was 37 when she met him, Zack recalled, and "he was still quite good looking. He had delicate and somewhat 'exotic' features (his mother was half-Chinese), spoke very softly in a Southwestern drawl, and one-on-one had a friendly, almost intimate manner. Combined with the background of personal suffering, this was charismatic for women." She married him in 1990. Her involvement with him over a seven-year period was "emotional pathology on my part. I never focused properly on the issue of Jack's violence, except toward the end of the years I knew

~~him." When this happened, she realized that "he was incapable of really seeing his situation—the murder." She was afraid of Abbott, and "would lie awake at night thinking about how to get out of this situation; it was terrible. My friends edged away from me. After two years of marriage~~
~~they divorced.~~ *Jack and Abbott would divorce*
 "I am lucky to have survived it," she said. "I began to see that there was something wrong with all these women visiting prisoners." Even after she broke off contact with Abbott, she continued to send him \$50 to \$100 a month until his death. "Jack had no remorse," she said, adding that he "was proud of having been told by Mailer about [the birth of] his son, John Buffalo. I also think that he was well aware of the value of the world Mailer had taken him into, however briefly. Without Mailer, Jack would not have been a literary figure."

Ψ Ψ Ψ

As his relationship with Abbott was winding down in the late spring of 1986, Mailer was working on three screenplays—"Don Lero" for Godard, "Havana" for Martin Starger at Universal Studios, and "Tough Guys." *by Mailer* He continued to work on the novel, but with no real energy. He finished "Havana" and "Don Lero" before he and Kate went to Switzerland in August, and the final draft of "Tough Guys" shortly before filming began in Provincetown on October 27. In between, there were consultations about the cast and locations for the film with Tom Luddy, cinematographer John Bailey and casting director Bonnie Timmermann. Even the 350th anniversary of the founding of Harvard in September didn't pull him away. He was asked to be "an official representative" at the commemorative celebration, but does not seemed to have responded to the formal invitation, even after he was depicted with 15 other outstanding "Sons of Harvard" in a painting on the cover of the July 20 *New York Times Magazine*. The sixteen men, grouped as if for a photo on the lawn of Harvard Yard, included five U.S. presidents—John

Adams, John Quincy Adams, Teddy Roosevelt, F.D.R. and J.F.K. Mailer, in his pinstripe suit and loosened red tie, is pictured with Leonard Bernstein on either side of a seated T.S. Eliot, the two Jews crouching on either side of the ultimate WASP, as if ready to go into the game.

There were ~~a total of~~ 65 locales used in the film, most of them in Provincetown but several in Truro and other nearby towns. Some of Mailer's favorite places—The Old Colony, Pepe's, The Red Inn and Front Street Restaurant—were ~~used~~ ^{filmed}, and the Mailers' home at 627 Commercial became the novel's waterfront house. It was given a complete makeover to demonstrate Patty Lareine's gaudy idea of wealth. The wood floors were bleached and all the ~~furniture, including a piano and Persian rugs, were white or pastel. There were several low couches, brass chandeliers and a massive circular glass coffee table with a large, half-opened shell sitting on it. The walls were peach. This décor remained for more than a decade, and then~~ ^{and the} ~~Norris redecorated the first floor in darker, richer colors, getting rid of the piano, and exiling the long chrome and beveled glass dining room table to the bay-side deck where it rusted for a few years.~~ ^{until}

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Before filming began, there was a casting call at one of the local art galleries. ~~Over 200~~ ^{and} ~~locals showed up to try out for walk-ons and extra roles. Some extras came from Boston, but about fifteen were from Provincetown, including Chris Busa, the publisher of Provincetown Arts magazine, several local artists and two retired firemen in their 80s. "I wanted to use townspeople for extras," Mailer said, "because the making of the movie had much more to do with Provincetown than the final results will. We were in the town using the town's facilities, and we had great working relations with a great many townspeople."~~ ^{some} ~~Seeing Farrah Fawcett, who came along with O'Neal, in the local A & P, or Lawrence Tierney, who played Dougy Madden,~~ ^{the actors}

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walking along the town's narrow lanes, was the topic of conversation in the town, ~~where little happens after Halloween~~. O'Neal was accessible, ~~and ready to meet Mailer's friends and family when they visited the set, as was Debra Sandlund (Patty Laraine in the film)~~, but Isabelle Rossellini (~~Madeleine~~) kept to herself, eating her meals in her trailer. Mailer admired her acting in David's Lynch's dark mystery, *Blue Velvet*, and sought the same mood for his film. Angelo Badalamenti, who scored the music for Lynch's film, was hired for Mailer's.

~~Being asked to approve the hairstyles of the female actors was a pleasure for Mailer, as was working with production designer Armin Ganz on Patty Laraine's home, and with~~

Badalamenti on the lyrics to "You'll Come Back (You Always Do)," the film's theme song. He

g Mailer
also worked with sound designer Leslie Shatz to capture the sound of a punch to the face, as

Shatz recalled at a twenty-year reunion of the cast and crew. According to Mailer, "the sounds of punches in movies are all phony." So he began hitting himself "at least twenty times in the face and the chest-until we got it right." Shatz recorded the sound and used it in many movies

afterward. "I always tell the other directors, 'You hear that? That's Norman Mailer punching himself. He's in your movie.'" Mailer's professionalism was something that Menahem Golan

had taken for granted, but before the start of filming he did some checking and got a different

picture of his director. Luddy recalled getting a five a.m. call from the Israeli, who said, "Tom, my knife is at your throat. Tom, you've given me Norman Mailer as a director. I've been talking to people in Hollywood, and they tell me he's crazy." But he proved himself to be completely

disciplined, and was "adored" by the cast and crew. ~~They all agreed that working on Tough Guys had been "a great adventure."~~ Working with a \$5 million budget and a crew of 97, he brought the

film in under budget and ahead of schedule, ~~completing it in 40 days.~~

There was some friction during the filming. O'Neal thought some of the dialogue ^{was} ~~way over the top~~ ^{and would come off as laughable,"} ~~Tom Luddy recalled,~~ ^{and Tierney, a} ~~notoriously difficult actor,~~ ^{who played Douggy Muddan,} ~~did things his own way,~~ ^{sometimes ignoring direction.} As producer, Luddy said, ~~I had a lot of back and forth with him about the screenplay, which I thought had a~~ ^{lot of problems."}

He wrote a memo listing eleven problems in the script, and Mailer agreed with most of them. But he had solutions only for a few, and ignored the rest. If he could relive the entire project, Luddy said, "I would get another writer to adapt the book and convince Norman to focus on directing it." Mailer hoped to solve his plot problems in the editing process.

In a letter written to Stratton shortly after the production was completed in mid-December, Mailer described the experience of directing:

I always felt as if I were in jail when I was writing a novel. A perfectly pleasant but subtly deadening spiritual jail. And directing the movie I found out why. Suddenly I could use my real talents: more superficial, perhaps than my developed talent as a writer, but with me all my life and dying to be honed: to wit, my practical side. Directing a movie, you contemplate 40 different categories of problem in a day, and you get an appetite for it. It becomes the best life you can have. I've been feeling logy for the last few years but on the film where we're working 15 hours a day, 6 days a week, and I had more energy, or let's say, as much energy as I've ever had.

Over and over in interviews, he compared writing and directing, in every instance grumbling about the former and exalting the latter. "Anything's easier than writing," and novel writing is the hardest, he said. It is "an excruciating activity; when I'm in the middle of one I often feel like a

monk in the wrong monastery." But directing, he said, made him feel like a general in "an ideal war" with no blood. "It is like a campaign: you eat outside standing up; everybody starts the day having breakfast together; it's a communal exercise. You move to different places every day; the campaign moves here, moves there; it's going to be over in forty-two days. It's like hunting with a camera in Africa."

When filming was done, Mailer wrote to his two imprisoned friends, and made plans to visit. He promised to visit Farbar in late January when he was in Pittsburgh to see Stephen in a play. After telling Stratton that he would definitely visit him in early spring, he went on to say that he had been relaxed during filming, but was now feeling nervous because he owed Random House "a million dollars in advance royalties they've already paid me over the last three years for a book which is only half done." His plan was to edit the film half-time and write half-time, and this is what he did, more or less, for all of 1987. At this point, he had high hopes for the film. John Bailey's imaginative cinematography captured the bleakness of Cape Cod in the late fall, and the dailies that Mailer had seen were exceptional. He apologized for not finding a role for him in the film, but "if this picture hits, then I think I'll command larger budgets" and then Knox could be given roles. "At that time," he said, "I won't have to listen to you saying, 'But, Norman, you know nothing about directing a movie.'" One commercial film, he said, means that you're a director. "Indeed, I'm even a member of the Directors' Guild. How's that for news?" Mailer remained a member for the rest of his life, but never got another chance to direct, to his great regret.

~~1987~~
Editing began in early January, and Mailer enjoyed working with a team. He told Dexter, "It's a peculiar art, probably closer to cutting away at a poem so only the essential is left, than it

is to novel writing." The goal of the process "is to have one's cuts appear seamless," but if the film has interesting, quirky material, he said, then more patience and imagination are required. When Lucid and Lennon visited him in an editing suite in the Brill Building at 49th Street and Broadway, he was sitting in front of a Moviola. He talked enthusiastically about the film coming into shape, and never seemed happier. Cutting the film was difficult, he said, because "it's not a river but a clock, a two-and-half hour clock." But plot was bedeviling him.

After enjoying Stephen's performance in Pittsburgh with Norris and John, Mailer went on alone to Altoona where Farbar was incarcerated. They spent an hour-and-a-half together catching up, and discussing what kind of work he might do after his release. He knew his friend might have trouble decompressing when he got out, and tried to buck him up. "I respect the psychological work you've done on yourself," he said. But Farbar seemed bitter and depressed.

A year after his release he committed suicide.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

In the spring of 1987 Mailer asked Carol Stevens to meet him for a few days in San Francisco where he was doing post-production sound work at Russian Hill Recording studios. He recorded her doing the voice of one of the two witches who laugh and gibber at the end of the Guys film, another attempt to give the film a haunted quality. He spent a month there in April, and had a romantic reunion with her for a few days while working on the sound track of the film. He also saw Lois Wilson. Cannon had given Mailer control over the final cut of the film, and he was trying to find a way to clarify the plot. As he began editing,

Earlier he had decided that ~~"there would be no inner voice,"~~ he said, ~~"because it would be so inviting every step of the way to put that book in. And the movie has to stand on its own terms."~~ But once he had begun editing, the dimensions of the problem began to emerge, as he wrote to Farbar, ~~"The story is unhappily murky,"~~ he said, ~~"and I am looking for ways to simplify it, mainly narration. I showed it to Golan, who half likes it and thinks it can make a lot of money here but also thought it too long and too confused. At one point he said, 'Definitely not narration—that's old fashioned'—I said to him, 'Well, fine, Menahem, I'll shoot some new scenes but that'll cost a quarter of a million dollars. He came around to the side of narration."~~ In the end, Mailer had no choice but to use voice^{overs} to explain the tangle of relationships and reveal who killed who. His screenplay departed somewhat from the novel, but ultimately was too respectful of it.

He finished editing in time for the 40th annual Cannes Film Festival in early May. He was asked to serve on the nine-member jury, headed by Yves Montand. Godard was there with *King Lear*, but he and Mailer don't seem to have met. Because he was a jurist, *Tough Guys* was screened out of competition. Mailer watched 24 films in 12 days, and met with other jurors to compare notes and vote. *Tough Guys* was shown twice, once for the press and once for a general audience. The somewhat stilted dialogue, which sounded, as Roger Ebert put it, "as if everyone in the film had learned everything they knew from watching old crime movies," went over well with the press for the most part, although it got a sprinkling of boos. Vincent Canby, who ^{had} liked "Beyond the Law," praised *Tough Guys*, calling it "a wonderfully exaggerated film noir story." Menahem Golan had several films in competition, and threw a large dinner to honor Mailer. *Tough Guys* was screened after dinner, and ^{received} got a standing ovation.

Upon his return Mailer made some final changes to the film, ~~and~~ then got to work on the novel, breaking away only to see rehearsals of Norris' ^s play at the Actors Studio in June. For some time, she had been a member of the Actors Studio, writing both plays and screenplays, and directing. "Go See," ^{her} a two-character, two-act play about an erotic dancer and an anthropology professor, ~~was~~ ^{was} staged there in May or June of 1987, with Norris and Rip Torn acting the roles. Mailer was enthusiastic about her abilities and wrote to Farbar with praise. "All my life, as you know, I've wanted to be a successful playwright and simply don't have the knack for it," he said. Watching her staged reading, he said to himself, "My God, she's a better playwright than I am." He was always impressed with the effortless way his wife moved from one pursuit to another—model, actress (she played a drug dealer for six months on the television soap opera *All My Children*), playwright, and novelist, all ~~the~~ ^{while} while running the household. The Mailers were also leading a busy social life now that most of the children were adults. "Norman and Norris," she wrote, "became almost one word in the social columns." They dined at Elaine's, Nicola's, and Indochine, but Mortimer's, at Lexington Avenue and East 75th Street, where they met with Arthur and Alexandra Schlesinger, Diane and Ivan Fisher, and other friends, was their favorite Manhattan restaurant in the late 1980s.

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After July in Provincetown, he and Norris went to Maine, and the family climbed mile-high Mount Katahdin, which stands at the northern end of the Appalachian Trail. The most well-known and difficult path to the summit lies across The Knife Edge. Several people have died in falls from this path, which is a mile long, but in places only three feet wide. In the afternoon, when descending the north slope, one is left in deep shadow. Mailer made the climb—six hours

each way—three or four times. Kate recalled one of these at her father's memorial. When they reached The Knife Edge, she announced she was going back down the mountain. He answered by saying that crossing it would enable her to grow and change in unforeseen ways. "It will be good for your karma," he said. She hollered back:

My karma, my karma? I don't care about my karma. You might care about your karma. You're fifty-five years old. You have lived! You've written thirty books, You've had six wives and soon to be nine children, I am sixteen years old and I have never even been kissed! I have never even had a boyfriend! I DON'T WANT TO DIE. I WANT TO HAVE SEX!

Mailer told her that she would have an even better boyfriend if she crossed. "The man's will and charm were no match for mine," she said, and she made the transit. She felt better, but did not admit it. Looking back, she said that eventually she got "the best boyfriend who then became the best husband anyone could ever dream of, and I think sometimes it had something to do with Dad and the mountain, courage, and will."

the words have contradicted her decision?

That summer he was ^{writing} producing 90 pages a month, and feeling good enough about his progress to say that the novel was "about the CIA." But his publisher was unhappy; he was a year past his due date. He had ^{written} produced a best seller, *Tough Guys*, in 61 days, and Random House hoped that he would repeat this every year or so. ~~By the end of the summer he had 800 pages, and had completed the Berlin. One of the finest sections of the novel, it centers on the swashbuckling gambits of "Bill" Harvey, who carries pearl-handled revolvers and drinks martinis all the live-long day, moving around Berlin in his armored black Cadillac. Friends and~~

family members who read the Berlin chapters were full of praise and Mailer was feeling confident. He thought the novel would be published in the spring of 1989.

The film premiered on September 16, 1987 at Loew's Twin ~~Bill~~ on Second Avenue and East 66th Street. It was a warm, lovely evening, and a big crowd mingled on the sidewalk before the doors were opened. The guest list shows that many of the Mailers' friends attended—the Fishers, Pat Lawford Kennedy, Lucid, Legs McNeil, Michelson, the Schlesingers, Gay and Nan Talese, Jimmy and Rosemary Breslin, Mashey Bernstein, Jason Epstein and Paul Newman. Most of the family was there. Judith McNally, his assistant, and Myrtle Bennet, the nanny for the younger children, both of whom rarely went to Mailer social events, also came. Tom Luddy, John Bailey and most of the crew came, ^{as did} and several of the actors. Carol Holmes, Mailer's former girlfriend, and Carole Mallory, his current one, were invited and showed up. Mailer had recommended Mallory for a small role in the film, but the casting director Bonnie Timmermann and producer Tom Luddy turned her down. Luddy recalled that Mallory had visited the set in Provincetown and interviewed Mailer.

In an interview with Roger Ebert during filming, he explained that as he grew older, he had changed his ways. "I stopped drinking for a year and a half," he said, and "when I went back, I didn't enjoy the hangovers so much, so now I drink in moderation, of all damn things." He went on to say ^{that} "a man who says he is happily married is a fool, but I will take a chance and say that I am. I stopped getting into trouble years ago." In fact, Mailer's liaison with Mallory ^{and other} continued, as did his relationships ^{continued} with several other women. Despite some occasional suspicions, Norris was not to learn the extent of his infidelities until he had completed *Harlot's Ghost* in 1991. He ^{red} continued to insist that she was the love of his life, and valued the way she

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had become a second mother to his oldest seven children. When he did finally explain the root cause of his infidelities, he said that they really intensified about the time he began work on *Harlot's Ghost*, as Norris wrote in her memoir.

He said his double life started when he began researching that book, and I suppose it could even be true. The timing was about right. All the clandestine talking on pay phones, making secret plans, hiding and sneaking around, were perfect spy maneuvers. He said he needed to live that kind of double life to know what his characters were going through. (It was an imaginative excuse. I do give him credit for that.)

He said he had been totally true to me, except for one or two tiny one-night stands with old girlfriends when he was on lecture tours, for eight years after we got together, which might even ^{be} ~~been~~ mostly true. It was his grand experiment in monogamy, and I had believed him. While it could hardly be said the experiment was a total success, it was the longest he had been true (more or less) to a woman in his life. His nature was to be a philanderer.

Mailer did attempt to be faithful to Norris during the early years of his marriage. If, in his confession to her, he smudged the facts about how many times he had fallen off the monogamy wagon, he was being entirely truthful about his motives for being unfaithful ~~or motives~~. He had two related reasons, one narcissistic, selfish and sensual, the other bold, experiential and ^{to his mind} necessary. His incessant affairs gave him purchase on the duplicity of intelligence agents and fed his narcissism. ^{For Mailer,} That it took a thief to catch a thief was an article of faith.

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Before and after the premiere, he spent 20 days doing interviews for the film, and said it had received enough publicity "to float the Queen Mary." But the reviews, with a few exceptions, were mixed, and the box office figures paltry (the film eventually broke even). After looking at all the early reviews, which were with few exceptions either mixed or negative, Luddy told Mailer that, overall, they were not going to help him. "It's as if you opened a restaurant," he said, "and got two reviews. One said, 'This food is crazy, wild, and interesting,' and the other one said, 'Three people I know got food poisoning after our meal.'" The restaurant was doomed, Luddy said. ~~So was the film.~~ Mailer ^{to the film} ~~accepted this analysis~~ reluctantly, sadly.

He had told Susan that after the satisfaction he got from directing the only way he would go back to writing "with any real happiness" was if it was the only way he could make a living. Cannon had hinted that he would give him another film to direct, but this was no longer in the cards, especially after the film was nominated for Golden Raspberry Awards in seven categories: worst picture, director, screenplay, actor and actress, supporting actress and new star. Mailer tied for worst director with Elaine May, who had directed the monumental flop *Ishtar*. Conversely, the film was nominated for the Independent Spirit Award in four categories: best film, cinematography, female lead and supporting male role. The fact that the film was nominated for best and worst film of the year ^{by different groups} confirmed Mailer's belief that his works would continue to receive polar receptions. Eventually Tough Guys became a minor cult classic, praised for its "amusing vagueness" about its fundamental genre: mystery thriller or black comedy, horror film or comedy of manners. Luddy summed up the film as "Tarantino before its time," which he described as "long florid dialogue punctuated by grotesque violence." Whatever the case, it was

clear that Mailer's film career was over. As he said in another letter, "Writing is the farm and movie-making is Paree." He was going home.

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Danielle got married at the end of 1986 to Michael Moschen, a professional juggler.

Mailer invited them to live in Provincetown during their first year of marriage. For the greater part of 1987, Danielle painted in Norris' studio, Moschen practiced his routines in the basement, and Mailer wrote in the attic studio. Norris was in New York with Matt and John, and ^{she} only came up every other weekend. Danielle, her husband and father shared the chores, and enjoyed long quiet meals and discussions. "It was one of the best years I spent with my father," she said. But after a time, Mailer yearned for the city. In January 1988, ^{he} Mailer wrote to Farbar to say he was getting tired of working in Provincetown and planned to move back to Brooklyn for a stretch. He was still following his usual country-city alternation, moving whenever one or the other became "a species of spiritual incarceration," as he wrote to Farbar about P-Town. Mailer was paying some of his friend's legal bills, and much of their correspondence was given over to Farbar's various attempts to get his sentence commuted. *These attempts failed, and*

Farbar became increasingly depressed. A year after his release he committed suicide.

His correspondence with Stratton was more literary. In his letters and visits, he encouraged him to complete his novel, *Smack Goddess*. Mailer read drafts of it, made suggestions, and with Meredith's help it was published in 1990. Mailer and Dick Goodwin gave it blurbs. Mailer was impressed with how Stratton had used his prison time to "look for some needed dimension of my character." His comment on Stratton's "moral grit" revealed something about his own ideas of moral growth:

A few pages back we had committed suicide. Perhaps save that detail in the letter?

That you're physically strong is one thing; that can be a gift. But the other side of ^{you} you built out of yourself. But the other side of anyone, moral strength that is, is a construction. For if that were given by God there'd be no logic to anything. We would all be dealt unequal hands, and that doesn't feel right to accept. (Before we get too far in this, I don't mean the real stark ends of the scale, morally speaking, but I believe we all have the same ability to improve or coarsen our spiritual nature.)

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This letter, like almost all of Mailer's letters since the late 1950s, was dictated, and he was sometimes slightly opaque. What he seems to be endorsing is the principle of spiritual growth and/or decay, while holding out for the possibility that saints and monsters have been shaped, at least in part, by divine or demonic intervention. This idea would be further developed in his final novel, *A Castle in the Forest*.

In the 80 or 90 letters that he wrote in mid-January, his tone is valedictory. He admits that his commercial film career is over, and that his experimental films are a footnote. In a letter to ~~Luke Breit~~ ^{one} he said he was pleased that Jonas Mekas, a leading light in the world of experimental cinema, was showing *Beyond the Law* and *Maidstone* at the Anthology Film Archive in Manhattan. He was satisfied to be considered "a distinguished minor artist" in cinema history. He reacquainted himself with ^{Harlot's Ghost and Cottol} his novel, settling down for a long stretch writing. "It's like going back to a wife," he told Stratton, and not particularly easy, "but oh, what fun when you begin to hold hands again."

^{Insert 875A, 875B, 875C} ~~Harlot's Ghost~~ ^{to the novel} Mailer said in his appended "Author's Note," was his attempt to present "a large and detailed mural of a social organism moving through some real historical events," as

Mailer said his intention was

reducing the published volume to 1310 pages. Longer and more detailed than any of Mailer's other fictions, the novel's several lines of action never coalesce. *The novel* *Harlot's Ghost* cannot be said to have a plot. It has plot parcels and plot scaffoldings everywhere—scenes and vignettes, preludes and interludes, and endless expositions of intelligence techniques and mores—but only the ghost of a fully articulated story. In one sense, it resembles the cluttered studio of a brilliant artist filled with works at various stages of completion. It could also be likened to a magnificent, half-finished cathedral, to borrow a metaphor he used to suggest the dimensions of his personality in *The Armies of the Night*. "Plot is the enemy of the great novel," he said. "I'm interested in plots that do not have a resolution. Life is like that." *Harlot's Ghost* ends with these words: "TO BE CONTINUED"—a promise he would break. His greatest regret, he said the year before he died, was "the memory of the books I promised to write and didn't." Even as it stands, unfinished and abandoned, it may be his finest novelistic achievement, one of the last high peaks of his writing life, and the *summa* of his knowledge of postwar America, as seen through the eyes of two generations of CIA agents.

move to 875
After 40-odd years of trying, Mailer finally found a narrative field suitable to the full deployment of his historical imagination, his biographical predilections and his psychological theories. As Salman Rushdie said in his review, *Harlot's Ghost* is "a perfect coming together of author and subject." *Harlot's Ghost* The novel has great geopolitical sweep, looking back to World War II and forward to the Vietnam War, and is full of vivid portraits, divided between historical and fictional figures—he liked the idea of mixing them up in the same way E.L. Doctorow did in *Ragtime*. Of the former, the most notable are J.F.K. and his brother Robert, their in-house nemesis J. Edgar Buddha (as everyone in the novel calls FBI Director Hoover), CIA director

Allen Dulles, Uruguay station chief, Howard Hunt (of later Watergate infamy), British double agent Kim Philby, General Edward Lansdale (~~a model for a character in Burdick and Lederer's Philly American~~), Frank Sinatra, Mafia chieftain Sam Giancana, Fidel Castro and William King "Bill" Harvey, Berlin base chief. Harvey is the most memorably drawn historical figure, matched only by the fictional Hugh Tremont Montague, a high CIA counter-intelligence official, code name, Harlot. The narrator is Herrick "Harry" Hubbard, a young agent who goes into intelligence work in 1955 after graduation from Yale, following his father "Cal" Hubbard, an OSS officer in World War II. Cal's best friend is Harlot, who is also Harry's godfather and mentor. There are two major women characters: Harlot's wife, Hadley Kittredge Gardiner Montague, who is part of the agency's brain-trust, and Modene Murphy, a fictional stand-in for Judith Campbell Exner, the lover of J.F.K., Giancana, Sinatra and young Hubbard.

length of drawing-do and
 The broad contours of the CIA's history, and many of the actual and rumored particulars of its chicanery, gave Mailer the time-space amplitudes he needed, and the details of duplicity that he relished. *all the geopolitical sweep material*
 It is no wonder that he gave up his plan to chronicle the voyage of the spaceship-ark in favor of a novel of sharply etched character studies, none more so than Montague's, a master spy modeled on the legendary counter-intelligence chief, James Jesus Angleton (himself a minor character) *CIA in the book*, a poet who corresponded with Pound and Eliot, collaborated during World War II with cardinals, ex-fascists, Mafia *capodecimas* and Kim Philby, and worked for seven successive CIA directors, General ~~Walter Bedell Smith to Richard M. Helms~~. It was Angleton who came up with the "wilderness of mirrors" theory to explain how Soviet intelligence might be manipulating the agency. Mailer's Montague is just as fiercely determined to root out Russian

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moles as his model, or so it seems—with Montague, there is always a deeper layer, and his deepest loyalties are a mystery.

The novel begins in 1983 just before his body is found near his boat in Chesapeake Bay with most of the head blown off by a shotgun (Hemingway is one of the novel's presiding spirits), and the finger tips nibbled off by fish. A filling in one of the remaining two teeth corresponds "astonishingly well," to the X-rays in Harlot's dental file. Is it Harlot or a corpse of similar dimensions, tricked up to deceive? Harry disappears himself and goes to Russia to find the answer. He carries with him the "Alpha manuscript," subtitled "The Game," a 1,000-page memoir of his life in the CIA from 1955 to the mid-1960s. As he reads his microfilm copy of the memoir with a flashlight on the wall of his room in the Hotel Metropole, we read along with him. Down the street is Lubyanka Square, dominated by a gigantic statue of "Iron" Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Russian secret police, and one of the most dazzling twentieth-century practitioners of counter-intelligence. Harlot gives seminars on his techniques.

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Ancient Evenings took eleven years to complete, but Mailer left it for years at a time, and wrote a half-dozen other books in the interstices of its composition. Measured by clock hours, *Harlot's Ghost* took longer to write than any of his other works. He departed from it only twice, once, briefly, to direct "Strawhead" and a second, longer, period to write a screenplay based on *Tough Guys*, and then direct the film. He was prepared to postpone the novel if either of these projects ^{was} ~~were~~ successful. But the play never got beyond short runs at Actors Studio and the film, while not without its virtues, did not lead to a career change. There was a short-lived third project, a film version of *King Lear*, based on Mailer's "Don Learo" screenplay, and directed by

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well as through imagined ones, his claim being that novelists "can create superior histories out of an enhancement of the real." To accomplish this, massive research was ^{necessary} needed. His bibliography lists 130 books. When it got to the point that an easily consulted overview was needed, he turned to Judith, who was reading the source materials right along with him. Using three 28" x 22" inch pieces of heavy stock, Judith created an event timeline, running from 1940 to 1980. Across the top, she listed 17 different people (Angleton, Harvey, Hoover, Hunt, Philby, Allen Dulles and other top CIA operatives, Lee Harvey Oswald, Marilyn Monroe, ^{Sam} Giancana and his colleagues, and several Russian spies and/or counter spies), and five event categories (Watergate, Cuba, Vietnam, CIA Mind Control and World Events). Mailer's scrawled additions, corrections and notes on the charts are easily distinguished from her elegant script. Later, a further consolidation was made on a fourth chart, clustering some of the key events of the novel. Characteristically, he saw the novel more in terms of the characters and their actions, fair and foul, than from the perspective of events.

The timeline charts, which were taped together and propped up near Mailer's desk for easy reference, show that he planned the novel to cover the four decades from the beginning of World War II—the first events noted are the assassination of Leon Trotsky in August 1940 and the start of German bombing of London a few weeks later—to the beginning of the end of the Cold War—the last event noted is the signing the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty II by President Carter in June 1979. But Mailer never reached the later events on his timelines, and the novel effectively ends ^{the} after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 ^{with} 63. The assassination of J.F.K. takes place offstage, as it were, and while the novel continues to 1966, it barely does so.

He worked deliberately all through 1988 and by the end of the year had 1300 pages of manuscript. His routine was to work four to six days at his New York studio, pack up his books and the timelines, drive to Provincetown for a week, and then return. One of the few breaks he took was for the ecumenical wedding ceremony of his daughter Betsy, who married Frank Nastasi, in New York on February 14, ¹⁹⁸⁸ and the large reception ^{he and Norris} they hosted at 142 Columbia Heights. He also found time to go to two big fights. After Muhammad Ali's retirement, Mike Tyson was arguably the most impressive heavyweight boxer, and in 1988 was the undisputed world champion at the peak of his career. Tyson's first match was against former champion Larry Holmes, who came out of retirement for the bout. Mailer and Norris flew from the West side of Manhattan to Atlantic City on one of Donald Trump's black helicopters. Mailer sat in the back row with Jack Nicholson where they discussed *Prizzi's Honor*, a film about a hit man and hit woman who fall in love. He told Nicholson that "if two people are equally murderous, they could really be in love." Tyson demolished Holmes and won the fight with a TKO in the fourth. In June, Mailer took his son Michael with him to Atlantic City to watch Tyson knock out Michael Spinks in the first round. He wrote about Tyson's amazing punching power in a September essay in *Spin* magazine, his last report on a professional bout.

Except for two advance excerpts from *Harlot's Ghost*, one in *Esquire* and the other in *Playboy*, the only other piece Mailer published in 1988 was an endorsement of Rev. Jesse Jackson for the Democratic nomination for president. It was Jackson's second run for the nomination and, for a short period, he led the eventual candidate, Gov. Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts, in delegates. His endorsement appeared on the *Times* op-ed page the day before the April 19 primary. New York Mayor Ed Koch had said that any Jew who voted for Jackson ^{was} ~~is~~

"crazy." Mailer took exception, and deplored Koch's statement as an example of small-minded political self-interest.

Although centuries of ghetto life had engendered in the Jews "a noble spirit alive in enough of us to permit the feeling that we were the first children of the Enlightenment," Mailer wrote, the "fearful curse" of Nazism was "still there to poison one's finer moral substance." The destruction of half the Jews in the world had created "an imperative to survive at all costs." The Holocaust "left us smaller, greedier, narrower, preternaturally touchy, and self-seeking." Politics for the Jews, he argued, too often boiled down to the question: "Is this good for the Jews?"

It takes no great insight to recognize that oppression of the spirit is the meanest poverty of them all. We have descended from Shakespeare's parlous defense of the Jew as being able to bleed to Ed Koch's inaccurate assumption—I hope it is inaccurate—that we are, by now, conditioned reflexes—that is, machines, buttons for a politician to press. If any Jew who votes for Jackson is crazy proves to be a useful political button, then I say we Jews have become machines and can no longer look at serious matters by their true merits, or face up to fundamental problems.

~~Jackson was not perfect, he said, but he felt the same way about the other leading candidates, Dukakis and Al Gore. What made him favor Jackson was his "cogent sense of sympathy for human suffering."~~ Mailer's greatest concern was that the country would not be able to solve "any of our worst problems in organic fashion until a black man does become president." Jackson, he concluded, was the best candidate to bring out "the potential love of black and white for each other." Nationally, Jackson came in second to Dukakis, and lost to him

in New York State, but in New York City Jackson defeated him by few thousand votes. Mailer's endorsement may have been a factor, especially in Manhattan.

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He expected and enjoyed the "marvelously opposed reactions" his endorsement brought out, he told Knox, and learned that some of his oldest friends were Jewish partisans who reacted to his piece "as if I were a Catholic and had defiled the Mass." The flurry of responses was brief, however, and Mailer returned to *Harlot's Ghost* with few interruptions for the rest of the year.

When Joyce Carol Oates sent him a story she had published, he said he would have to defer the "pleasure" of reading it, and gave an explanation he used on several occasions: "Reading good work when you're writing something of your own is like watching a marvelous Ferrari drive by while you have the parts of your own car spread over the garage floor. So I don't read good writers while I'm working."

There were exceptions to this rule, however. Mailer was an admirer of Don DeLillo's works and read his novel about Lee Harvey Oswald, *Libra*, when it was published in August 1988. They had met a few years earlier when Mailer, invited him to come to a reading at the Actors Studio. DeLillo had no idea that Mailer knew of him and his work, and was surprised to receive the invitation. He recalled that in 1959 when he was a struggling young writer, he found a copy of *Advertisements for Myself* in a desk drawer at the advertising agency where he worked.

I found it and I started reading it. I don't think I owned a single hardcover book, and now I had one, except for old school textbooks. I thought it was terrific. I still have that copy. I just ingested it. I read it at home and every subject one might try to explore had been explored by Mailer in this book—speaking, writing, arguing.

Before the ^{reading} performance at the Actors Studio, the two novelists chatted a bit, DeLillo said, and "in my awkwardness I found myself saying something I would never have said under another circumstance. I told him I was writing a novel about Lee Harvey Oswald, and it had an effect on him. I saw this in his face, obviously." After ^{Mailer} he read *Libra*, he wrote to DeLillo with praise:

What a terrific book. I have to tell you that I read it against the grain. I've got an awfully long novel going on the CIA, and of course it overlapped just enough that I kept saying, 'this son of a bitch is playing my music,' but I was impressed, damned impressed, which I very rarely am. I think we keep ourselves writing by allowing the core of our vanity never to be scratched if we can help it, but I didn't get away scot-free this time. Wonderful virtuoso stuff all over the place, and, what is more, I think you're fulfilling the task we've just about all forgotten, which is that we're here to change the American obsessions—those black holes in space—into mantras that we can live with. What you've given us [is] a comprehensible, believable, vision of what Oswald was like, and what Ruby was like, one that could conceivably have happened. Whether history will find you more wrong than right is hardly to the point: what counts is that you brought life back to a place in our imagination that has been surviving all these years like scorched earth, that is, just about. It's so rare when novel writing offers us this deep purpose and I swear, Don, I salute you for it.

A few years later, after he had finished *Harlot's Ghost*, Mailer told DeLillo that *Libra* had saved him 500 pages, presumably by allowing him to leave out any exploration of the motives and actions of Oswald. He had been given one more year to turn in the final manuscript. Random

House, he said, "has been damn decent to me, and I'd like to return the favor," so he was stripping down his life to the "essentials of a fighter's camp" to meet the deadline.

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For several years, Mailer had been corresponding with a writer from Providence, an English professor named Edward McAlice who had an Irish flair for language. They only met a couple of times, but wrote regularly. ^{Mulier} He read his manuscripts ^{McAlice's} for over twenty years, offering ^{McNally} advice and encouragement, and also enlisted Judith to give him feedback. McAlice was one of scores of aspiring writers that he helped. Writing to him in early February 1989, Mailer lauded one of his phrases—"all the steaming shit and foul midden pools," noting that he had "said the same thing about this and that condition a hundred times, but never as well." He also praised his "power to characterize people in four or five lines," which he compared to that of Gabriel Garcia Márquez. "Me," he said, "I can't get someone through a door without blowing a thousand words." Mailer was feeling bogged down. "The wind had better be breezing up," he told McAlice, because he was only half done with a novel that was due in a year.

At that time, he was writing about Hubbard's intelligence work in Uruguay, where Howard Hunt was the CIA station chief. ^{his narrator} He could have sent Hubbard anywhere, but assigned him to this ^{fairly} obscure post ^{for at least three good reasons:} 1) to contrast intelligence work in this backwater with the fast-paced, dangerous work of Harvey and his associates in Berlin, ^{and} to establish Hunt in preparation for using him when he got to Watergate, ^{and} 3) because relatively little had been written about CIA activity in Uruguay, he had the partially blank slate he preferred. He had assembled a good-sized trove of information about Uruguay, some of it based on a short trip he made there to get the feel of the place—he returned with dozens of photographs

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of Montevideo, Hubbard and Hunt's tour was relatively uneventful. Their chief task was to make friends with the country's top officials and elites in the hopes of using them to garner information from the Russian diplomatic staff (half of them, like the American delegation, spies). It was a cat-and-mouse game of a very low order, but one which demonstrated that intelligence work was generally, as Montague put it, like examining the contents of a vacuum cleaner: "There's an abundance of lint, but you can't ignore the chance that you'll find a cuff link." From his research, he had more than sufficient material about Hunt. On Mailer's timeline charts, Hunt had his own column, with entries running from his OSS service in World War II, through Watergate and the suspicious death of his wife Dorothy (also a CIA agent), to Hunt's 1973 conviction. His plan, we can surmise, was to use Uruguay as a breathing space between the more dramatic events in Berlin in the early 1950s, and Cuba in the early 1960s.

But once Mailer got into the small-bore espionage of Hunt and Hubbard in Uruguay, he had difficulty extricating himself. Part Four of the novel, "Montevideo, 1956-1959," is the length of a good-sized novel, 266 pages, and while it has some bright spots, they are few. Hubbard could have described his time with Hunt in memoir fashion, but he chose to depict it in the correspondence between Hubbard and Montagu's wife, Kittredge, then living in Washington and recently a first-time mother. About half of Part Four consists of letters. Mailer wanted to keep Kittredge before us because Hubbard will marry her 16 years later. And he also wanted to create a major woman character who is an intellectual. Kittredge is a "characterological theoretician," and the originator of the Alpha-Omega personality theory, an elaboration of his belief that we house two separate personalities. Harry tells Kittredge about station work, "all its mediocre sleazy contacts and its tedium and frustration," and she shares early motherhood (a first in his

published work) and Alpha-Omega with him. He also reveals his erotic life, "his nasty little vein of crotch-turpitude," but holds back or disguises much more so as not to impede the flow of endearments and secrets between them. He tells her one thing, and then gives another version to the reader. Deceit stains every relationship in the novel.

Kittredge's first exposition of the theory was in her senior thesis at Radcliffe. It came to the attention of Allen Dulles and, he put her on the CIA payroll and told her to flesh out her ideas in the hope that they could be used to unmask double agents. The first difficulty with

understanding her theory, she tells Hubbard, is that everyone who has heard of schizophrenia or split personality assumes that Alpha and Omega are equivalent to two satchels in the psyche, one containing one's experiences, and the other one occupied by a sifting-sorting-deciphering apparatus; one part lives, one part observes and interprets. Not so, she says, we are two people, both "as complex and wholly elaborated as what we usually think of a complete personality."

Among exceptionally talented people, the selves are far apart; in dullards, close. Each self can be neurotic, psychotic, or even schizophrenic. Nevertheless, Alpha and Omega can be characterized: Omega "originates in the ovum and so knows more about mysteries":

Conception, birth, death, night, the moon, eternity, karma, ghosts, divinities, myths, magic, our primitive past, so on. The other, Alpha, creature of forward-swimming energies of sperm, ambitious, blind to all but its own purpose, tends of course, to be more oriented toward enterprise, technology, grinding the corn, repairing the mill building, building the bridges between money and power, *und so weiter.*

But these are the archetypal Alphas and Omegas. In reality, one Omega can be "night-dwelling, a seer," while another can be Omega in name only, "even as you can find a Sicilian, I suppose, with blue eyes, a cheerful manner and blonde hair." Each can borrow properties from the other, and do, because they are wed "like the corporal lobes of the brain." Marriage is one model for the relationship, she says, another possibility is Czarists and Bolsheviks.

A test Kittredge devises to expose Russian moles, based on the theory, proves useless because the best spies have an "ultra-ego" that coerces their Alpha and Omega. Dulles retains his belief in the theory's possible utility, as does Harlot, but everyone else in the agency concludes that Alpha is merely another word for consciousness, and Omega is a surrogate for the unconscious. Discouraged, Kittredge tries LSD, hoping for a better understanding of her selves, but nearly cracks up. During her 32-month epistolary relationship with Hubbard, she drops orts and slabs of her theory into her letters, which he understands no more successfully than the CIA hierarchy. Kittredge's theory mirrors Mailer's ideas stretching back to "Lipton's" in the mid-1950s. He said that one of his chief interests in the novel was epistemological, how Hubbard and the other characters learn what they know, or think they know. Every fact has its counter-fact, every hypothesis has a competitor, every theory is potentially subsumed by another. At the end of "Montevideo," not much of consequence has happened, while doubts and dissimulations have piled up.

As one plows through the Uruguay years, an expectation is created that the Alpha-Omega scheme will somehow be integrated into the plot. This does not happen, and the disputed theory's only real value, as Kittredge puts it, is to suggest "how spies are able to live with the tension of their incredible life-situations." Mailer flogs the theory, reinforcing the criticism that

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his worst sin, as Jonathan Franzen has argued, is redundancy. This tendency, along with the unbelievable ways by which Hubbard and Kittredge carry on their plain language correspondence about all kinds of classified operations—by regular mail and by diplomatic pouch—seriously damages the novel. Norris, Epstein, Lucid, Walter Anderson and other friends told him that the section was protracted past all good sense, but he made only minor cuts.

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As Mailer was working on "Montevideo," he was drawn into the controversy surrounding Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, published in the fall of 1988. On February 14, 1989, the Supreme Leader of Iran ~~and Shia scholar~~, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a *fatwā*, or religious decree stating that Rushdie's novel was blasphemous ^{that} and he and his publishers should be killed. A Radio Tehran announcer read Khomeini's words: "I call on all zealous Muslims to execute them quickly, wherever they find them, so that no one will dare to insult the Islamic sanctions. Whoever is killed on this path will be regarded as a martyr, God willing." The next day an Iranian imam announced a \$2.6 million award for any Iranian who carried out the *fatwā*, and \$1 million for anyone else, ^{who did it}. These amounts were doubled shortly afterwards.

~~In a subsequent message, Khomeini branded Rushdie, as a *mahdur ad-damm* (a person with unclean blood) who had given up his religious birthright and become an enemy of the faith.~~

~~Some devout~~ ^{troubled by} ~~What troubled many~~ Muslims were sections of the novel that suggested that the Prophet

Muhammad had distorted some of the revelations—which comprise the Koran—given to him by Allah, and also ^{by} scenes depicting the Prophet's wives in brothels. There were riots and book burnings all over the Muslim world, ^{including} and in sections of England with large immigrant Muslim

populations. Two of the novel's translators were stabbed to death, and many died in the rioting. What saddened Rushdie was the fact that the novel, ^{England's} which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, was intended "to give voice and fictional flesh to the immigrant culture of which I am myself a member," yet opposition was fierce among these very people, especially in England. Rushdie, born a Muslim in Mumbai, was offered protection by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and went into hiding.

A week later, the P.E.N. American Center organized a rally of support for Rushdie, who had many friends in the U.S. Talese was one of the principal organizers, along with Mailer, Sontag, Doctorow and Robert Stone. The rally took place in downtown Manhattan at the ~~White Column building~~, co-sponsored by the Authors Guild and Article 19, an international anti-censorship organization. Joining these writers at the rally were DeLillo, Didion, Edward Said, Robert K. Massie (president of the Authors Guild), Robert Caro, Christopher Hitchens, Diana Trilling, Frances Fitzgerald and Larry McMurtry, among others. Hitchens was applauded loudly when he borrowed Shelley's description of King George III to describe Khomeini: an "old, mad, blind, despised and dying king." The rally ^{took place} ~~came~~ shortly after ^{many} ~~bookstores~~ ^{their} pulled the novel from its shelves, citing fear of violence. DeLillo recalled that there was an anti-Rushdie demonstration going on outside the building when he and the other writers "took our seats and waited to be called to the rostrum—all except Mailer. He entered at some later point, dramatically, and spoke with Maileresque heat." He blasted the booksellers and said that Ayatollah Khomeini "wished to show the great length of the whip he can crack, the whip whose secret name is found in our bottomless pit of terrorism." The *fatwā* will make writers learn ^{whether} ~~if~~ they are willing "to die for the idea that serious literature, in a world of dwindling uncertainties and choked-up ecologies, is the

OK?
Not
"favor"
?

absolute we have to defend." He called on other writers to join him in a vow to open up "all literary meetings with a reading of the critical pages of *The Satanic Verses*."

Rushdie was still in hiding three years later when Article 19 published a collection of letters to him from 27 writers. In his letter, Mailer said that he had begun writing as a young man "with the inner temerity" that if he kept on eventually he would "outrage something fundamental in the world" and endanger his life. Rushdie had done just this and now was in "a living prison of contained paranoia."

It is hard enough to write at one's best without bearing a hundred pounds on one's back each day, but such is your condition, and if I were a man who believed that prayer was productive of results, I might wish to send some sort of vigour and encouragement to you, for if you can transcend this situation, more difficult than any of us have ever known, if you can come up with a major piece of literary work, then you will rejuvenate all of us, and literature to that degree, will flower. So my best to you, old man, wherever you are ensconced, and may the muses embrace you.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

Just before the controversy, he wrote to congratulate Styron on receiving the MacDowell Medal. Mailer, a past winner, had been on the committee that selected him and wrote to say it was "great fun" the day he was voted in. "I think I can whisper to you that the finalists were Styron and Bellow and you won out." Styron sent Mailer an article about the ceremony, which included a George Plimpton speech in which he described a trip Styron had made:

A number of years ago, on a trip up the Amazon, Bill persuaded a group of tribal youths that the English word for 'good morning' was 'Norman Mailer,' intoned in a curious sing-song rhythm, and to be delivered with a bright smile. He got them doing this in unison—fifteen or twenty of them 'Nor-man Mai-ler!' My mother, who is 87, is thinking of taking a trip up the Amazon, and I have warned her about this—so that she can take it in stride if a row of semi-clad, spear-carrying tribesmen appear at the water's edge and call across the water: 'Norman Mailer!'

Mailer told Styron that the Amazon story had given him a good laugh, ^{which} ~~one~~ he needed because *Harlot's Ghost* was "in the doldrums."

In April he wrote to Kate, who was touring with *The Cherry Orchard* in Russia, to say the novel was "now approaching the 1500 page mark in manuscript, and God knows who will ever read it other than scattered members in the family, which is not large enough, I fear, to support me." He wrote a few more letters, and then ^{daughter} ~~shut down~~ ^{stopped} his correspondence completely for the next six months in an attempt to wrestle with what he called "a 300-lb greased beast." He used a more carnal metaphor in a letter to Knox, ~~one which provides a glimpse of his struggle to escape from Uruguay.~~ "I'm still staggering along with the novel. I tell anyone who's willing to listen that it's like fucking an elephant. Sometimes I believe I'm really in and working away, only to discover to my horror I'm out—I'm not in at all, I've merely been screwing a wrinkle in the hide." He worked steadily for the rest of 1989, taking some time off for July and August in Provincetown when the family came in shifts, but taking no trips and publishing nothing until the ^{November of 1989} ~~end of the year~~.

In that month's issue
~~Esquire~~ published a two-page restatement of his theological ideas in November of that year. It is notable for its discussion of God's gender: "It has occurred to me, despite my reputation as a male chauvinist, that God may be referred to as 'She' as legitimately (for all we know) as 'He,' or, even better, as 'They,' if one can conceive of divinity as marriage between a godlike Male and Female." It seems likely that the piece might have been intended for the novel, which is rife with theological speculation. Harlot, like Angleton, is a profoundly religious Cold War warrior who believes that "Communism is the entropy of Christ." He repeats Mailer's belief that when Christ said, "Forgive the sons for the sins of the fathers," sanction for the scientific method was given, that is, once fathers knew that their children would not suffer, they were free to experiment, probe nature's secrets. "That," Harlot, says, "was the beginning of the technological sleigh ride which may destroy us yet." Harlot also repeats a thought from Milton's *Paradise Lost* that Mailer learned from his Chicago friend Paul Carroll: "The Devil, you must never forget, is the most beautiful creature God ever made." He would repeat it several years later when he depicted Satan in *The Gospel according to the Son*. All though the fall he wrote rapidly and nothing interfered with his routine.

Since you've just told us he published nothing that year

Ψ Ψ Ψ

in P-town

In the quiet months of the off-season as he labored on the novel, the Mailers occasionally dined with a local contractor, Fred Ambrose, and his wife Nancy. John Buffalo was the same age as their oldest son, David, and the two six-year-olds enjoyed each other's company. Ambrose was first invited to the Commercial Street house in the early 1980s to discuss various renovation projects, and he and Mailer hit it off immediately. Ambrose had spent a year in his twenties as secretary to Alan Dugan, the Pulitzer-Prize winning poet who lived in nearby Truro, and knew

his way around literature. He had read and admired several of Mailer's books, but their relationship was not a literary one. "We never really talked literature," Ambrose said. "Norman, from what I could gather—and maybe this is a broad statement—Norman liked people who were involved in real time and liked what they did, whether they were plumbers^h or politicians."

I stayed with current events and, you know, I'd read, so Norman and I were able to really banter for 25 years over current topics, and if I disagreed with him I was usually able to support my position with a point and he'd get upset, so I knew I was gaining some footage. I'd never win, of course, but it was sort of like a boxing match. Norman liked to punch hard on an idea. He didn't want just a fluffy answer, he liked facts. He wanted the foundation of your argument, your premise, what your premise was. Norman was the grand inquisitor.

Ambrose was hired to replace a large window, the defining feature of the dining room^h where Mailer spent most of his time when away from his study. It was an important job, Ambrose said, because views were important to Mailer. Besides the window in the dining room, there was a similar one in his third-floor studio:

It spanned the width of his oak desk, which was very plain; there was nothing up there. I was designing upstairs and I was very intimate with his workspace, and it was very sparse. There was a yellow pad, and pencils, a couple of Hemingway books, a dictionary, and a few odds and ends, and that was pretty much what I witnessed of the writing room. There was a cot on one side. The big window looked out to the west of Provincetown and down through the harbor. If you look at his apartment in Brooklyn, again Norman had these views. Norman always had

to have a big pane of glass, and he had to have something really intricate to look at, whether it was Lower Manhattan, or he looked out at the stark view out of the dining room; it just went way out on the Bay. The window upstairs in the study was much more complicated and it looked out onto the Pier, and then some houses to the right, and then the boats in the harbor.

The 6' x 6' multi-paned dining room window had caught the spindrift for years, and was falling apart. When Ambrose redesigned it, he eliminated the small panes. "Norman had a fit," Ambrose said. "We had this heated conversation. I said, 'Norman, you got a world-class view out there. You live here because of your view. Live with it for 30 days. If you're not happy, we'll put the panes in.' Norman was really mumbling to himself and not happy." Mailer's tastes, Ambrose said, were Edwardian and neoclassical. "After about three months, Norman warmed up to the window and we never heard anything more about it. To this day the window is there."

Ambrose is also an inventor and holds a number of patents. Mailer was fascinated, he said, with ~~the idea of~~ inventing things. He came up with an idea for a hat that would shield his weak eyes. He had always been quite nearsighted, and in his late 60s developed cataracts. ^{Sixties} Driving in bright sunlight was difficult. "He wanted me to get involved in producing this bright orange baseball cap. He had taken brass wire and bent it and shaped it and put it under the brim of the hat. And he built this elaborate sliding mechanism under the bill. You could move it left and right and block the sun without impairing your vision. He just loved his invention." With Ambrose's help, Mailer built a working model. "In the marketplace, I don't think it would've gone far," Ambrose said. "I never told him to stick to his writing and stay out of the invention business. The amount of work he put into that hat was a testimony." Ambrose still has the model.

When he was ^{tried of} fed up with work, Mailer liked to go with Ambrose to local bars where he knew many of the patrons. "There was a lot of respect for Norman," he said.

The thing that Norman liked about Provincetown is that it's a very visceral town. People wear their hearts on their sleeves, and they think with their emotions. Whereas in the city people are calculating; they're guarded. In Provincetown people are either carpenters, or fishermen, or people very close to the trades, and they didn't have great secrets to keep so they were very open, and the recourse against them for speaking publicly was virtually nil. So Norman went out and talked to people and if they wanted to chew his ear off—and Norman liked to talk and sit with people—fine, it was always an open, candid conversation. People knew who they were talking with, but that would fade very quickly, and that's about it. Norman was just a regular person on the street. You have to understand, Provincetown's a walking town. You don't drive much. You can get pretty shitfaced in the center of town, and the golden rule was you didn't get flagged unless you fell off your stool. So you could do a lot of serious drinking and, you know, if you wanted to crawl home that was your business. There was a lot of freedom in Provincetown, and a lot of acceptance. I think it was the freedom that Norman liked in Provincetown.

Chris Busa grew up in Provincetown where his father, Peter, a ^{so important} ~~major~~ modernist painter, lived for many years. Father and son were both friendly with Mailer, who rented a studio from Peter. The younger Busa gave tennis lessons to Mailer's sister, Norris, and some of his children, and later sat in on Mailer's Texas ~~Hold~~ 'em games. Mailer was featured twice on the cover of the

Do we
really
need
a mayor
?

annual ^T/*Provincetown Arts*, which Busa published and edited, and sometimes Mailer attended the annual July publication party. A year-round resident, Busa wrote that he "took comfort in walking by Mailer's house and seeing his light burning in the window of the attic, knowing he was working. He was some kind of power in the neighborhood, an engine that seemed to move the leaves as I walked down the street." Busa recalled an exchange Mailer had with Eddie Bonetti, one that characterizes the kind of P-town frankness that Ambrose described:

Norman and Eddie were at a cocktail party one summer afternoon in August.

They were standing at the bar, enjoying the company and laughter and stuff, and

Eddie says, 'You know, Norman, I like you in spite of your celebrity.' And

Norman said, 'Eddie, how would you like it if I said I liked you in spite of your obscurity?' You know, that's the kind of verbal play Mailer could always use to equalize the playing field.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

When he took a break in mid-March 1990 to address the stack of mail that had accumulated, ~~the manuscript~~ ^{*of Harlot's Ghost*} was only 300 pages longer than it had been the previous April.

Mailer had been backtracking, trying to bring coherence to his sprawling manuscript. That spring, he dictated over 130 letters, most of them notes. He told ~~Mashey Bernstein~~ ^{*that he now*} had ~~"a novel of 1800 pages with four or five or six hundred to go"~~ ^{*that*} in a longer letter to Knox, he

~~said "my elephant" will be "two-thirds as long as 'Remembrance of Things Past' and half as good." Mailer's math is accurate: if he had written a sequel of equal length, the total would be a million words, a half-million less than Proust's seven-volume work.~~

The novel opens in March of 1983 as Hubbard is driving up the icy coast roads of Maine to see Kittredge, his wife of ten years. ~~She divorced Montague not long after their son Christopher died in a rock-climbing accident, one that left her husband confined to a wheelchair with a broken back.~~ In a magnificent 90-page burst, Hubbard spins out in sharp flashbacks and reveries the central characters and events of the previous three decades. These backward glances, comprised of brief vignettes and brisk character sketches, alternate with his depiction of the spooky events on the night he arrives at the ancient, ghost-ridden, Hubbard family home, The Keep, on Doane Island in Blue Hill Bay. Shortly after Hubbard arrives, he learns of Harlot's possible death and confronts the ghost of Augustus Farr, a piratical sea captain, in the vault beneath the house, after which ~~The Keep~~ ^{it} burns down and Kittredge flees with another agent, a muscular, bisexual masochist named Dix Butler with whom she is having an affair.

Harlot's hypothesis that the Watergate burglary was an attempt to tap the secrets of the Federal Reserve Bank, located on the next floor up, is also presented in this opening section, "Omega," (the last comes first), and we get our first taste of Kittredge's Alpha-Omega theory. ^{✓ Note of Howard Hunter, re: who she?} The deaths of J.F.K., Monroe and Dorothy Hunt, Hubbard suggests, may be related, as well as Oswald's. There are also allusions to Castro and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Mailer was preparing to connect the dots between some of the most vexing mysteries of postwar American life, possibly by laying blame at the feet of Richard Nixon, whose crimes and resignation would have to be presented—in some fashion—in the second volume. We ~~can't~~ ^{don't} know ~~a great deal~~ ^{much} about Mailer's plan for the sequel, but there is a clue in one of his notes, which states that the affair of Hubbard and Kittredge was "P[oly] M[orphous] perverse in its early stages, cut off by K after

*The engineers of
the Watergate break-in*

[Harlot's rock-climbing] accident." Given his druthers, it's likely that Mailer intended to present all the ~~moist specifics~~ ^{details} of their intimacies.

^{Mailer} The opening of volume one provides glimpses of Hubbard's early life, his tours in Berlin, Uruguay, Miami and Vietnam, and we learn of his two writing projects, *The Imagination of the State* (an incomplete and abandoned study of the KGB), and a detailed memoir of his work in the agency since 1955. We never see the first study, but the second, *The Game*, comprises the ^{bulk} ~~rest~~ of the novel. Hubbard also asks the questions that the reader will ponder for the next 1,000 pages: is Harlot dead? If so, by his own hand or another's? Was he a true-blue patriot and seeker of the Russian mole who has infiltrated the agency, or is he ~~that selfsame~~ ^{the} mole?

~~Another agent, Reed Rosen, shows up at The Keep that stormy night, and over tots of Glenlivet, they discuss the situation. If Harlot was a suicide, that must mean that he had been "playing for large stakes and lost," Hubbard said,~~

~~'If, however, Harlot was murdered,' I said, and stopped again. Greater difficulties commenced here. I chose an old CIA saw: 'You don't lance a boil,' I told him, 'without having some idea where the drainage will go.'~~

~~'Of course,' Rosen said~~

~~'Well, Reed, if Harlot suffered a hit, do the sluiceways point east or west?'~~

~~'I don't know. I don't know whether to look for the King Brothers or closer to home.'~~

This is
Dotson
Rader's
memoir
phrase
about
Mailer

The King Brothers is agency lingo for the KGB. If Harlot is not dead, but alive and happy and on his way to Moscow, Hubbard asks, could the KGB have located

some seventy-year-old Soviet prisoner and proceeded, after much dental work including possibly the extraction of all the other teeth on that half of the lower jaw, to go ahead and very carefully break the old fellow's spine in just the right place, and then mend him back to health, smuggle him onto this country, take him down to Harlot's boat, carefully shoot his head to leave no more than the two facsimile molars, and then consign him to Chesapeake Bay long enough to puff up the rest of the remains, while they hang around through it all to be able to nudge him back to shore?

~~There~~
Unspoken is another possibility: Harlot might have gone deeper into the wilderness of mirrors, switching sides and going to Moscow as a fake turncoat, or triple agent. Mailer's *in the sequel* provisional plan in Volume II (to be titled "Harlot's Grave") was for Hubbard to find Harlot in Russia. He has gone there, according to his notes because the general degradation he feels "convinces him that his life, reputation, career, and sense of inner status can be redeemed only if he sacrifices himself," exactly how *Mailer* he does not say. But in another note he says, "Watergate operated by Harlot to fuck Nixon since he will make peace with Russians." Harlot, like Angleton, does not trust the Russians, does not want the Cold War to end, and does not want the CIA's power to shrivel. Many of the actions of the CIA's hierarchy are calculated to overestimate Russia's strength. Mailer later publically criticized President Reagan for such fear-mongering. *6*

Kittredge's life on the run with Dix Butler, who has left the CIA, is uncertain, but Mailer's notes indicate that he intended both of them to play significant roles in the sequel. "Kittredge," he notes,

On the edge of madness, begins to envisage war as a necessary element in human history, an expression of the needs of the outer world of souls and spirits and their exceptional needs for restructuring, that is, for example, it is necessary to the needs of the cosmos that certain people, large numbers, die abruptly. The cosmos must gorge on souls even as we do on food.

A friend who had read the manuscript in 1990 said that Dix Butler didn't seem to come into focus. Mailer replied that he was saving him for the second volume, which was going to be about Watergate and Vietnam. "Also about Russia; part of it takes place in Russia. And it will deal with the marriage of Kittredge and Hubbard." But at this point "Harlot's Grave" was just a pious hope. Although he had 2000 pages of manuscript by the end of May, 1990, he was nowhere near the end of the first volume.

1990,
Random House had given him an extension until the end of June, and when he missed this deadline, it was moved to the end of July. When dates are proposed, he said, "I nod my head and agree." He knew his manuscript would have to grow. One of his models was Thomas Wolfe, who "qualified as great on several counts, and one of them was the great length of his novel. You knew you were reading something important when you picked up 'Of Time and the River.'" Nowadays, he continued, mass booksellers want authors to write 80-page books so "everyone can make more money, sell more product." Wolfe's manuscript, it should be noted, while enormous, was cut severely by Maxwell Perkins. ^{Mailer} He dismissed most of the suggestions made by

Jason Epstein on major excisions, but was always attentive to his editing. *Harlot's Ghost* is dedicated to him.

If he could reach 2,500 pages, Mailer wrote to ^{an admirer,} ~~Alex Hicks~~ ^{a professor friend}, "we can nail half the book to the mast and call it a flag." Then, Random House he assumed, would give him two more years for volume two. He worked through the summer in Provincetown where he went on the assumption that with fewer interruptions, he could "write ten to twenty percent faster." There were few family excursions, and no trip to Maine—he would never summer there again. Deadlines came and went as pages piled up in Provincetown and, in the fall, back in New York. Mailer did not socialize. Around mid-December, he was done, and announced the completion in several letters. In one he called it "a fairly ambitious book—it may, in fact, be my most ambitious." For the next three months, he worked with Epstein, his secretary, Judith (a doughty grammarian), and the Random House copy editor on the manuscript ^{2700-page} which came in at 2,700 ~~pages.~~

Veronica Windholz, Mailer's copy editor on several of his subsequent books, described her first meeting with him. She was expecting to meet an "egomaniac" but, instead, "met a curious, gregarious, deeply intelligent, knowledgeable, jocular, voluble man," who was "generous and big-hearted, but he was also all business." Mailer hated semicolons, she soon learned, and would rewrite an entire paragraph to avoid using one. "He wrote with ease, fast, fluently, and with a smile of satisfaction when he was finished. He loved to write—he loved the challenge of expressing himself just so."

Especially in the beginning, before he was familiar with my work, any query or small change I had made would cause him to reread the entire passage—and

sometimes, if he found something in his own writing that he didn't like, a whole page. He'd take the paper in both his hands, lean back in his chair, and recite the prose to himself, rocking back and forth as he said the words out loud. He listened to—and for—the rhythms of his language as if he were composing music. If something was off by even a fraction of a beat, he knew it immediately.

Everything in his prose, Windholz said, “was subservient to style.” Mailer was not a grammarian of note,⁹ and had his own rules about punctuation—insisting, for example, that “So” at the beginning of a sentence be followed by a comma. “The heavy lifting” in his prose was handled by cadence, she said. Mailer couldn't carry a tune, but he was a master of English prose rhythms.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

Bound galleys were sent to reviewers in May, and October 2, 1991⁵ was set as the formal publication date, giving reviewers the summer months to digest Mailer's behemoth—a couple of reviewers quoted what Hollywood mogul Jack Warner said when asked if he had read Hervey Allen's 1224-page novel, *Anthony Adverse*: “Read it? I can't even lift it.” Waiting for the reviews, he wrote a review of Bret Easton Ellis' novel of contemporary consumerism and sadism, *American Psycho*. It was his first assignment as Writer-in-Residence at *Vanity Fair*, where Tina Brown had been editor-in-chief since 1984. Mailer had developed a warm relationship with her after she published two long excerpts from *Tough Guys* in the magazine, and helped him raise funds for the P/E.N. Congress. They had become good enough friends for her to request a letter endorsing her application for a green card. He said she had lifted *Vanity Fair* out of a “bog-ridden beginning,” making it a magazine of “distinction and high style.” He

(she was a British citizen)

Roger Rosenblatt
~~NYT~~, 12-16-90
 would write four more essays for the magazine over the next year, and continue his relationship with her when she became editor of the *New Yorker* in 1992.

Mailer did not review many books over his career; they can be counted on two hands. Some special circumstance had to entice him. In Ellis' case, it was the outcry from editorial

writers and women's groups over the detailed descriptions of mutilation, torture and dismemberment of innocents committed by the novel's protagonist, Patrick Bateman, a serial murderer and obsessive consumer of state-of-the-art commodities. Ellis received a \$300,000

advance from Simon and Schuster, but the firm cancelled the book two months before publication after editorials condemning the 20 to 30 scenes of "unmitigated torture" in the novel—in one, a half-starved rat is introduced into the vagina of a half-slaughtered woman.

Bateman, Mailer wrote, "kills man, woman, child, or dog, and disposes of the body by any variety of casual means." Ellis' goal: "to shock the unshockable." The novel was picked up by Vintage and published on "a tidal wave of bad cess" (that made it a paperback best seller).

Mailer found the novel's violence, after the first few shudders, to be repetitive and boring. "Murder is now a lumbermill where humans can be treated with the same lack of respect as trees." After torturing women, Bateman enjoys some yuppie delicacy—"swordfish meatloaf with kiwi mustard"—and then admires his girlfriend's "silk satin D'Orsay pumps from Manolo Blahnik." Is there any good reason, Mailer asks, for readers to tolerate the novel's endless catalogues of luxury goods and its many "acts of machicolated butchery"? His answer is that art will tolerate almost any extreme if something new and valuable is learned.

Fiction can serve as our reconnaissance into all those jungles and up those precipices of human behavior that psychology, history, theology, and sociology

*Make
 let's be
 certain
 of the
 timing
 here. I'm
 not sure
 that S+S
 cancelled
 this clos-
 to publi-
 cation.*

OK?

are too intellectually encumbered to try. Fiction is indeed supposed to bring it back alive—all that forbidden and/or unavailable experience. Fiction can conceive of a woman's or a man's last thoughts where medicine would offer a terminal sedative.

Ellis intimates that Bateman resembles Raskolnikov sufficiently to use an epigraph from Dostoyevsky, but Mailer concludes that the snobbish yuppie is a cipher. "Bateman is driven, we gather, but we never learn from what." If Ellis hoped to reveal something new about the links between gratuitous violence and American materialism, then he had "to have something new to say about the outer limits of the deranged" in his chief character. "In the wake of the Holocaust," he says, it is legitimate for a novelist to seek an understanding of extreme acts of violence, but when we have finished with *American Psycho* "we know no more about Bateman's need to dismember others than we know about the inner workings in the mind of a wooden-faced actor who swings a broadax in an exploitation film. It's grunts all the way down." He ends by saying he cannot forgive Ellis for forcing the reader to go unnecessarily through his chamber of horrors.

Of In contrast

Mailer

The reviews of *Harlot's Ghost* were better than any he had received since *The Executioner's Song*, but there was little sympathy for its length and a division of opinion about the words he placed at the end: "TO BE CONTINUED." Some said the sequel could not come too quickly; others felt enough was enough and that the sequel would not be missed any more than the unwritten parts of other gargantuan works—Spenser's *The Fairie Queene* comes to mind. The tersest summation of the reviews is captured by Don DeLillo's comment: "extremely impressive if only he'd forgotten Uruguay." Except for Kittredge, Mailer's characters, both historical and fictional, were generally praised, especially Montague and Harvey, with Hunt and

Modene Murphy not far behind. Christopher Lehman-Haupt, like most reviewers, found Kittredge to be "unbelievable and inconceivable as a character until one begins to think of her as Norman Mailer." She acts so much like him, Lehmann-Haupt argues, and is so obviously a mouthpiece for his ideas that her effectiveness is sorely diminished. When she speaks, we hear her creator's characteristic locutions: "Vanity is the abominable conceit that one could run the world if only one weren't so weak."

The portrait of William Harvey got the most favorable comments. Gross, obscene, paranoid and alcoholic, he is so obsessively dedicated, so comically blunt, so unencumbered by the clouds of intellection surrounding grandees like Montague and Angleton, that he is almost lovable. A Midwesterner and former FBI agent fired by Hoover, Harvey refuses to learn foreign languages, disdains patriotic pieties, and is bored by geopolitical theory. But his tactical acumen is unparalleled. Apparently fearless, he collects odd facts, is a weapons expert, and has the callous bluster of Sam Spade. Montague (and, in real life, Angleton) was deceived by Kim Philby, but the Brit's Cambridge éclat cut no ice with Harvey, who identified him as a double agent. Philby defected and died in Moscow with full Soviet honors, including his portrait on a postage stamp. Harvey got a plum job. Assigned to Berlin at the height of the Cold War, Harvey pressed his superiors to construct a 1,500-foot eavesdropping tunnel into East Berlin. It took a year and cost millions, but working with British M16 technicians, Harvey's team was able to tap into the main trunk line carrying Russian telephone calls to Moscow. For a year, banks of tape recorders captured the calls. Maintaining the secrecy of the tunnel (code-named CATHETER) was crucial, and Harvey guarded it like Cerberus.

The song Mailer wrote in his sophomore year at Harvard, "The Bodily Function Blues," could be used as a gloss on Harvey's condition, as described in "Berlin," Part Two of the novel. Like the persona in the song, he has issues with perspiration, alimentation, regurgitation, defecation, somnambulation and so on. Not copulation, however. He tells Hubbard, his new aide, "If I ever went to a psychiatrist, he'd discover that I want to fuck an elephant. I have fucked, parenthetically speaking, everything else. Female, that is." Hubbard is awed: "He was God, if God was not too tall, thick in the middle, and had goggle eyes. For that matter, God drank like a fish and hardly slept." Fueled by adrenalin, nicotine and gin, his bowels are a mess. He vomits once a day, and says it keeps the doctor away. Hubbard observes several of his bodily functions, including expectoration: "Once again phlegm revolved in his throat. Despite myself, I thought of the taffy you see in an amusement-park mixing machine. When it was up to texture, he hawked it neatly in a handkerchief and lit a cigarette." Sometimes he is less delicate. He cleans his nails with the sheath knife strapped to his leg, burps ostentatiously, and dozes off without warning.

Only a few clicks away from being a psychopathic lush, he is nevertheless perfectly suited to his job, and imbibes precisely the amount of gin necessary to keep his paranoia and cynicism in equilibrium. His instincts are superb. After quickly sizing Hubbard up, he decides to take him on his nightly travels around Berlin in the black Cadillac, planning to tutor him in the sometimes sordid exigencies of agency work. He tells Hubbard to drop all his other duties and spend the next few days sharpening his skill with a pistol. "Get in some hours before Monday," Harvey said. "He stood up to shake hands with me, then lifted his leg and farted. 'The French got a word for it,' he said," although it is not one that Harvey knows, or cares to know. He is one of Mailer's great characters, another in the long line of crusty male mentors from McLeod and Eitel

to Menenhetet and Doughy Madden. Montague is another, but he is a mandarin professor of counter-espionage history and theory, while Harvey is a frontline warrior, tenacious, foul-mouthed and wily. Mailer compares him to Gen. Patton, the tank commander who was largely responsible for defeating the Germans at the Battle of the Bulge.

Before Hubbard was sent to Berlin, he worked in technical services in Washington. One day, he flubbed a request from Harvey, and a few weeks later when he arrives in Berlin, Harvey orders him to track down the snotty clerk who rebuffed him. Hubbard is ordered to ferret out the identity of KU/CLOAKROOM, his own former code-name. It is "a truly ingenious plot device," John Simon notes in his review, "a variation on one of the great detective plots, from 'Oedipus Rex' to that remarkable Elio Petri film, 'Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion.'" Harvey is relentless, believing that KU/CLOAKROOM is probably a rookie who is protected by "a rabbi," who is probably the leader of the agency's "Let's-Give-the-Shaft-to-Bill-Harvey gang," which is probably led by Harlot. Correct on all counts. Harvey tells Hubbard that he hates Harlot, and Hubbard, trying to maintain his boss' confidence, says he hates him too, adding that he has gone to bed with Harlot's wife, which he has not, but will.

Harlot calls Hubbard from Washington and orders him to ask Harvey's wife about her husband's relations with J. Edgar Buddha, and secretly tape her words. When Hubbard says he has qualms, Harlot tells him to "cease whimpering. Your conscience led you to this profession. Now you are discovering that your profession will oblige your conscience to see itself all too often as deplorably used, contemptible." Hubbard agrees to "anneal" his conscience, and soon learns "how easily I could succumb to large acts of lying, and outrageous expressions of excessive emotion." He tapes the conversation for Harlot; Harvey discovers the betrayal; Harlot

rescues Hubbard and flies him to Washington and a new assignment. "I was born to do this," Hubbard says. "Being a double agent is natural for me."

We last see Harvey in the spring of 1966 in Rome, where he is Chief of Station. He has bungled relations with Italian intelligence, and Hubbard has been sent to tell him that he is being recalled. By this time Harvey is a dead-end alcoholic, and is recovering from a heart attack.

Drawing on David C. Martin's account in *Wilderness of Errors*, Mailer ends "The Game" with ^{an account} his version of Hubbard's all-night meeting with Harvey over two bottles of bourbon. ~~Still~~

wearing his pearl-handled revolvers, Harvey tells Hubbard, "I am ready to return in the first body-bag that can be passed through a pig's asshole." As they get drunk, Harvey keeps taking out his pistol and pointing it at Hubbard's forehead. He complains that he has been refused access to the Italian agents that Montague cultivated in World War II, and calls ^{Montague} him his worst enemy, one he would shoot if he were in the room. After hours of fascinating rambling about J.F.K.'s assassination, Oswald and Castro (foreshadowing "Harlot's Grave"), Harvey tells Hubbard that when he fingered ^{Kim} Philby, he suspected that the Russians blew the Brit's cover to protect someone else, "*Someone* larger." He doesn't name the person, but he doesn't have to: "One part of my brain," Hubbard said, "was singed forever with the fear that it was Harlot." As he is departing with Harvey's promise to resign, Harvey head-butts Hubbard, Mailer-style, an unmistakable tap of approval from the author.

After a brief coda situating Hubbard in his Moscow hotel room in March 1984, the novel ends with the three words of Mailer's now-famous broken promise. It is worth noting that March 1984 was when Mailer first arrived in Moscow, and checked into a hotel not far from Lubyanka

Prison. If Hubbard's suspicion is correct, it would be the likely residence of the defector, Hugh "Harlot" Montague.

The generally positive response Mailer received from reviewers about his portraits of Harvey and Harlot was matched by equally warm comments about ~~Parts Four and Five of the~~ *the portions of the* novel, ⁶ which cover the years 1960 to 1963, from the preparations for the Bay of Pigs debacle in Cuba and the ensuing missile crisis, ⁷ through the unsuccessful assassination attempts on Castro (under Harvey ~~and Gen. Lansdale~~, with Hunt, Sinatra, and Gianaca as players), ⁸ to the successful assassination of J.F.K. John Simon, writing in the *Sunday Times Book Review*, said that "Mailer really comes into his own and vividly evokes the internecine intrigues among the C.I.A., the F.B.I., the Pentagon and the State Department" in these adventures, a view echoed in other reviews. He has special praise for his depiction of the invasion—"a clandestine nocturnal operation by sea and land against Cuba is a gem any novelist could be proud of"—but goes on to rail against the novel's "lopsided" shape and the many exfoliations of the Alpha-Omega theory. He was not alone in making such complaints. Both Aldridge and ⁹ Hitchens found fault with the Uruguay section (as ¹⁰ *did* almost every other reviewer), although they did not see the novel's defects to be as serious as Simon. Aldridge says that the South American operation moves "at the pace of a paraplegic snail," but calls the novel Mailer's "best written," an accomplishment showing that "he possesses the largest mind and imagination at work in American literature today" (Mailer circled the passage for use in ads for the novel). Hitchens sees merit in the "continuous emphasis [. . .] placed on the concept of 'doubling' and division," and says he has personally known and read of many CIA men who had the same "bipolar mentality" of Mailer's agents.

Simon's review infuriated Mailer—not what he had said, but that he had said it at all. Not only had Simon panned *Marilyn*, he had been one of only a very few critics who gave a negative review to *The Armies of the Night*, calling it “a demented Waring blender churning away at sexual, political, and literary power fantasies, sadomasochistic day-dreams.” Given these reviews, why did the *Book Review* editor, Rebecca Sinkler, give Simon the job of reviewing Mailer's *magnum opus*? Mailer contacted *Times* Publisher ~~Arthur Ochs~~ “Punch” Sulzberger, whom he knew slightly, to ask for a meeting with Sinkler. He got it, and asked her for space to write a rebuttal to the review. Sinkler, now in a somewhat defensive position in that she had not dug out the negative review of *Armies*, only the slam of *Marilyn*, told Mailer that Simon had read both advance excerpts from *Harlot's Ghost* in *Rolling Stone*. He liked them, she said. Simon's approval of the excerpts, coupled with his assurance that he could write a fair review, convinced ^{her} Sinkler ~~to~~ to give him the assignment, ^{which} ~~one that~~ four others had turned down. The last thing Mailer laid on the table at the meeting was Simon's disapproval of Kate Mailer's 1988 performance in *The Cherry Orchard*. After he had read it in *New York* magazine, where Simon was the drama critic, Mailer put out the word to everyone who knew Simon: “Tell him, ^u went the message, ^u not to get into the same room with me.”

This last complaint added no luster to his request for a rebuttal, but the overlooked review of *Armies* ^{did}, ^{apparently} and Sinkler gave Mailer space for his piece. In it, Mailer repeated every bad thing Simon had said about him, ^u and suggested that the bad review of Kate's performance was really a barb at him. Simon was given space for a counter-rebuttal, and pointed out that Mailer made no attempt to refute anything in his review, so what was the big deal? His chief complaint about the novel, he repeated, was its “prolixity.” In her concluding note, Sinkler

said that in her judgment Simon had written "a fair and balanced review that met the standards of this newspaper," but also admitted that the editors had not been aware of the negative review of *Armies*, a tentative *mea culpa*.

Letters taking sides poured in over the next few weeks and the *Times* published 20 of them, about evenly divided. Sinkler said she took satisfaction in the fact that "in the long run readers got the last word." She said she still stood behind Simon's review, while adding that Mailer had been a "pussycat" at the meeting and after the episode "has never been rude or unpleasant." She and her colleagues "often chuckled," she said, "about how we got 1,600 words out of Norman Mailer without paying a cent." The dust-up kept the novel in the public eye through the end of the year. Despite its high price—it was the first ~~trade edition of an~~ American novel to sell for \$30—and weight of four pounds, it made the best seller list for four weeks, his ninth book to do so.

One other review requires mention, that of Howard Hunt. He recalled meeting Mailer and Jeanne Campbell at a dinner party given by Buckley (a former CIA man recruited by Hunt), but says that the meeting was "what in espionage jargon is called a 'brush contact.'" Being included as a major character was an "unwanted distinction," he says, although he found no fault with his portrait. Hunt's generally favorable review ends the speculation that Mailer, once properly trained, might have joined the ranks of the CIA-backed Congress of Cultural Freedom back in 1949-50, an organization, ~~it will be remembered~~, that sent its members—including Robert Lowell, Mary McCarthy and Arthur Schlesinger—to challenge Mailer when he spoke at the 1949 Waldorf ~~Peace~~ Conference. It is, therefore, unlikely that Mailer would have joined the agency. But he would have been tempted.

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In the novel, Hunt proposes another qualification for a good CIA man, and he passes it on to Hubbard: "I will suggest that if anyone ever inquires why you think you're qualified to be in espionage, the only proper response is to look them in the eye, and say, 'Any man who has ever cheated on his wife and gotten away with it, is qualified.'" Mailer certainly had this qualification, and believed it was indispensable to his novelistic understanding of the CIA. His working principle, as stated by Lenny Bruce (when Hubbard, Harlot and Kittredge see him perform) was: ^{in spades!} "Never tell your wife the truth. Because biologically it has been proven. Women's ears are not constructed to hear the truth. They will slaughter you if you tell it like it is. So, lie your ass off."

Mailer did. He continued his affairs for the length of time it had taken to write *Harlot's Ghost*. Not long after it was published, Norris confronted him, and he faced the third great crisis of his life. <sup>1. Adèle
2. Abbott
wrote!</sup>

Chapter 14

A Merry Life and a Married One

In the seven years after *Harlot's Ghost*, Mailer published four books—three varieties of biography and a mammoth anthology of his work—and more political commentary and journalism than in any period since the 1963-72 outpouring. He covered the political campaigns and conventions of 1992 and 1996, travelling around the country with other political reporters on buses and planes. The oldest reporter on the campaign trail, he was referred to as "the Dean." He

took pleasure in his ability to keep up with the younger reporters, and to write books on figures as disparate as Oswald, Picasso and Jesus Christ. But he was deeply unhappy with his inability to begin the sequel to *Harlot's Ghost*. This failure in the creative realm was matched if not eclipsed by a near-disaster in the domestic one.

In the fall of 1991, Mailer's secret life all but ended. He was forced to break off, or drastically alter, relationships with several women in order to save his marriage. The crisis in his relationship with Norris continued for over a year, and for a time they separated. It was a private struggle, and few people outside the immediate family realized how close the marriage had come to foundering. In public, they went through the motions, in private they fought. After much pain, they reaffirmed their commitment to each other, although Norris did not trust him completely for several years, if ever. His work was affected for a time, especially after Norris learned the full extent of his infidelity. But "he was still able to compartmentalize," she wrote in her memoir, and kept working all through this period.

As the situation unfolded, he took on a variety of small tasks. Some of these were related to the novel—the selection of excerpts from *Harlot's Ghost* for several different publications, including three long ones in *Rolling Stone*, a U.S. book tour (35 interviews over two weeks), and another in England—and some were more enjoyable activities. Gov. Mario Cuomo, upon the recommendation of a committee chaired by Albany novelist William Kennedy, appointed Mailer to a two-year term as New York State Author, an honor that came with a \$10,000 stipend and few duties. Mailer also began organizing a dramatic reading of George Bernard Shaw's "Don Juan in Hell" with Gay Talese, Susan Sontag and Gore Vidal, a benefit for the Actors Studio, where he was still involved. At the request of John Updike, he agreed to write a chapter in the official history

of the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, *A Century of Arts & Letters*. After it was clear that Bill Clinton had the Democratic presidential nomination wrapped up, Mailer wrote Hillary ^{Clinton} a long letter recommending that her husband focus on racial tensions in his acceptance speech at the 1992 convention, hoping that it might gain him some sort of role as an unofficial advisor. Continuing as *Vanity Fair*'s Writer-in-Residence, he published several more pieces. ^{in the magazine} His report on the ^{Republican} GOP convention of 1992 was published in the *New Republic*. The companion piece on the Democratic convention was written but never published. Mailer felt it that it was too obviously approving of Bill Clinton.

He continued to state in interviews and letters that he was on the cusp of beginning "Harlot's Grave," and many of his efforts during this period were connected to J.F.K.'s assassination, which he had handled obliquely and briefly in the novel. He planned to remedy this in the sequel. For example, when Updike proposed that Mailer write the chapter on the 1960s for the history of the American Academy, he accepted immediately, seizing an opportunity to revisit his favorite decade. For a *Vanity Fair* piece, he tried to arrange an interview with Castro, who was coming to New York for a U.N. meeting. Mailer sent his request to Castro via the Cuban U.N. delegation, and also asked Gabriel García Márquez, a close friend of the Cuban dictator, to intercede. "I can promise," he wrote to Castro, "that your ideas will receive an honest display" in Tina Brown's fast-growing magazine, and gain ^{related} reflected attention in other media. Castro's reflections on the assassination, presumably, would have been an asset for the sequel.

If Castro responded to Mailer's request, no record of it has surfaced. But Mailer was able to speculate on the assassination in two of his published *Vanity Fair* ^{pieces} essays. One was a review of Oliver Stone's 1991 film, *JFK*. Mailer praised the film, which won two Oscars, for embodying a

controversial hypothesis about the assassination, ^{that rejected} ~~one that opposed~~ the conclusion of the Warren Commission that Oswald was the sole assassin. Mailer called it "the worst of the great movies," and applauded Stone for stirring the pot in an imaginative way. The other piece was a one act-play, "Earl and Lyndon: An Imaginary Conversation," which depicts, quite humorously, the arm-twisting techniques—lofty, carnal and threatening—employed by a manipulative President Johnson to convince Chief Justice Earl Warren to head ^{up} the commission investigating J.F.K.'s death.

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Mailer also continued to meet with a group of writers who called themselves, with false bluster, the Dynamite Club. It came into being in 1989 as a forum for the examination of various conspiracy speculations about the assassinations of the 1960s, Watergate and other mysteries.

The group met in Washington, D.C. and New York, often at Mailer's apartment. It included Jim Hougan, ^{a writer and magazine editor (Harper's)} ~~a novelist and nonfiction writer~~, Dick Russell, a freelance investigative writer, and

Edward J. Epstein, author of a shelf-full of books about J.F. K's assassination, Oswald, and the CIA. DeLillo also attended a few meetings, and recalls learning at one of them that Mailer had met and head-butted one of the Watergate burglars, although he could not recall which one.

Finally, he wrote a short preface to *The JFK Assassination: The Facts and the Theories*, written by Carl Oglesby, one of the founders ^{a group called} of the Assassination Information Bureau. Mailer lauded the book for clarifying his thinking, and praised Oglesby's efforts to keep the mysteries surrounding the assassination before the public eye and on the agenda of Congress.

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The crisis in the Mailers' marriage, long simmering, came to a boil in August of 1991. His appetite for "a merry life and a married one," as he once described it, had become too blatant

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to ignore. Norris had been suspicious for some time, but whenever she asked questions about his hastily scheduled, unaccompanied trips, he got angry, and when he did try to explain, his excuses were flimsy. But now she had evidence: long distance phone call bills and motel and restaurant credit card charges. "It all made sense now," Norris said. "I had been a complete and total fool. For years." One afternoon in Provincetown, she confronted him in front of his sister, as Barbara recalled:

I remember I was sitting with Norman in the bar and Norris came down in a fury. She presented him with some stuff she found, I think, on the computer or something. I don't know where she found it because he'd been denying it. And then she left. I remember looking at him and asking him, 'Why did you do it?' And he said, 'Life was getting too safe.'

Later, Mailer admitted to Norris that he had spent a night in Chicago with "an old girlfriend," Eileen Fredrickson, but swore it was the only time and promised it would never happen again. Norris was devastated and incredulous, especially when he kept changing the details of his account. For the next two weeks she peppered him with accusations, getting so angry that "I physically attacked him a time or two, hitting him with my fists like a child, him promising again and again that it was a one-time thing that was over." In late August, she returned to New York with John, 13, and Matt, 19, who was beginning college at NYU. Mailer stayed behind to do some writing.

Before she left, he gave her the keys to his studio and asked if she would drop off a small box of books there. She found this odd, because she had ventured up the three flights of stairs to the studio only once before. He called it his *querencia*, his lair or retreat. When she entered, she

saw that it had never been swept and trash was piled in corners. Mailer had a high tolerance for mess. She went to his desk and found a collection of love letters. He had always said that women pursued him for his celebrity, and that's why he received cards and letters with endearments and lipstick on them. This was certainly true. As anyone who spent much time with him in public can testify, women never stopped buzzing around him, even when he was over 80. He had told Norris that she was the love of his life, which was also true, but ^{that} it was hard for her to believe after digging through a desk crammed with *billets-doux*, photographs and mementos. It seemed to her that he wanted his secrets to be found. "This other life," Norris wrote, "as he said over and over, willing me to understand, had nothing to do with me. Except, of course, it did." She went home and wrote him a long letter.

In it, she ^{told} ~~tells~~ what she had found, including a signed note from Carole Mallory, dated December 1, 1989, in which she ^{had} ~~promises~~ not to ask Mailer for any money for three months. Then, Norris got to the nub: "Are you in a dilemma as to whether or not you will risk our marriage to feed the beast?"

After more than sixteen years I feel like I'm living with a stranger. Incredibly, insanely, the sex has been better with you these last two weeks than it has ever been, and I'm remembering the early years. You are all consuming to me now. I only want, more than anything, to go on with you in the life we have. I want us to continue to love our children and have the home life we perhaps have taken for granted all these years. But if you are truly dissatisfied—even a small part of you—and you really need other women in your life to make you complete, then I won't stay with you. I don't want to end up a bitter wife, searching phone bills

and Visa receipts for clues of infidelity, dying inside when you take a trip; not believing you when you say in that flat voice, 'I love you.' I deserve better than that.

Mailer returned to Brooklyn the day he received the letter in the mail.

Norris had a small studio on ^{heavily} Hicks Street, and they walked there to have it out. "I'm going to tell you everything," he said, "but there will be no divorce. I don't want this to break us up. You are my life, and I won't let you leave me." Norris said she was making no promises. He opened up, detailing affairs, naming women, on and on, "like he was vomiting up a bad meal, and had to get it all out." Norris listened, wept, and then attacked him, hitting and scratching. He buttoned up, deflecting what blows he could and absorbing the rest, using an old club fighter's defensive skills. When he had told everything, Norris wrote, "We went back to the apartment, where we went to bed, totally exhausted, fell into each other's arms, and had wild sex. Go figure."

Norris confided in her close friends, and ^{Susana} Danielle, Betsy and Kate. Danielle recalls talking with her on the telephone.

I was concerned that she was sharing all this with me, and I felt divided. On the one hand, I was angry with my father, and felt empathy for Norris, but I also felt loyal to my dad, and didn't want to get caught in the middle. So, I was very careful about what I said. I listened and was sympathetic, but I didn't want to be disloyal to my father. Another part of me was weary: Here we go again, dad is changing partners. My intuition was that Norris would not leave him.

The confessions continued, as he recalled brief affairs and one-night stands from years before, spitting out memories whenever they came to him—once in the back of a taxi. Norris told the driver to pull over and got out, and he chased after her. In front of others, they smiled and pretended, and somehow continued with work, family events, and black-tie social affairs. When they were alone, she said, their conversations were blunt, scathing and brutal. When *Harlot's Ghost* was published, there were several book events in New York. At the Random House party at the 21 Club (scene of Cal and Harry Hubbard's memorable lunch in the novel), hosted by Publisher Harry Evans on October 31, Carole Mallory showed up. She was "shockingly brazen," Norris said, and kept bringing photographers over to take her picture with Mailer. She seemed to be taunting Norris, or seeking to create a scene or a physical altercation. Norris ignored her, and then told her quietly that she might as well enjoy herself because "she had gotten the last nickel she was going to get out of Norman."

Norris was correct: Mallory lost her sugar daddy. In fact, Mailer had already broken with her. Their last ^{hook place} ~~tryst had been~~ in June 1991 at the Hotel Bel-Air in Los Angeles. In mid-September, shortly after his confession in Norris' studio, Mailer called Mallory ~~on the telephone~~ and told her he was severing relations. She threatened to go to the media with the story of their eight-year affair. According to Mallory, Mailer said that if she went public, her pain would be far worse than his. When she brought up his conscience, he said, "My conscience is my business. And so is my marriage. I love Norris." After a few recriminations, the call was over and except for the book party at the 21 Club, and one chance meeting a few years later, they never saw each other again. In her 2009 memoir Mallory said she finally realized that Mailer needed Norris "to feel whole."

Lois Wilson had a far different relationship with Mailer, and a longer one. They met at a Stanford University party in 1949. She was an unusual woman, as her daughter and only child, Erin Cressida Wilson, explained. Growing up very poor in Kentucky, Montana and Ohio, she was "desperate to ~~upwardly mobilize and~~ get out." At 19, she ~~graduated from college~~, and received her Ph.D. from Stanford only a few years later. Married at 24 to another English professor, Graham Wilson, she had a long, happy and complex marriage. He died in 2005 at the age of 89. Their relationship, according to their daughter, "was deep and mysterious" ~~but also,~~ ~~open.~~ Recalling her mother, she said:

Lois had many lovers. Norman was her first, and the relationship lasted the longest. The rest of the men largely and eventually became good friends. One of them was Alberto Moravia [Mailer introduced them] who fell madly in love with Lois and begged her to come live with him in Rome. She did come to him ~~for over a year~~ on a Fulbright at the University of Rome (without leaving the relationship with Graham), but was never willing to leave Graham—or her life as a professor at San Francisco State—for Alberto. She desired freedom, even from her lovers.

The relationship with Norman was almost the same length as the marriage—Graham and Norman died around the same time. Thus, the marriage with Graham and the relationship with Norman were both sixty years. There were many instances in which Norman socialized with Lois and Graham at the same time. Norman and Lois were sexually compatible—yes—but they were also good friends who didn't ask one another to hand over money, power, prestige or family

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in return. They had somewhat of a pure relationship—one of fun, sex, secrecy, and endless talks into the night, lying next to one another. Lois was married to one man the entire time, and only had one child. Norman had many wives and many children during this time. They both knew that they had mates and other lovers, and there doesn't seem to have ever been an ounce of jealousy or possession.

Lois Wilson and Mailer ^{with} ~~got together~~ in hotel rooms two or three times a year for an intense day or two, not unlike the way the two lovers meet in Robert Mulligan's play, *Same Time, Next Year*. But while their meetings continued after he met Norris, their sexual intimacy ^{Lois} ceased. Wilson recalled:

Everything changed when he met Norris. I could see that she was a good person for him. And that he loved her and that she loved him. And I thought I'd better lay off. She has a right to her own *modus operandi*. So, I would hear quite a bit about her because he liked to talk about her; he truly was very much taken with her and she made a life for him that he couldn't have made otherwise.

Wilson believes that she and Norris would have liked each other if they had met. But Mailer never brought them together, fearing Norris' jealousy. "Yes, she was jealous," Wilson said. "But she had no reason to be with me after a certain point. I was on her side."

Eileen Fredrickson's relationship with Mailer began 30 years after Wilson's, but ^{it} ~~in some~~ ^{similar} ways ~~it was the same~~. An avid reader who spoke fluent Japanese, acted in commercials, films and television programs, she had a number of careers, including modeling, bartending, and

hosting her own news radio program. Like Wilson, she sought nothing from Mailer except his presence, and saw him only when he was in Chicago. He called her weekly for many years, and sent her inscribed copies of his books. In early October 1991, just before he went on the book tour for *Harlot's Ghost*, ^{he} ~~M~~ ^{he} ~~he~~ called her to tell her that Norris had found her letters. Fredrickson recalled the conversation:

Judith got suspicious about the bills from Chicago, and she told Norris that there was something going on. Norris, at that time, knew about Carol Mallory, and she put her foot down and said she was going to divorce him if he didn't vow, on his children, not to see me anymore. So he called me and told me that Norris had found out. He asked me to sit down, and then told me he had to take a vow on his children not to see me again. So from about 1991 or 92 he wasn't supposed to see me, but he called me all the time, and he did come to see me a couple of times.

Asked why he was he involved with so many women, she said, "He just couldn't help himself. He should have been a Mormon."

Norris had stopped going on book tours with Mailer in the mid-1980s. She was tired of being ignored and disrespected by pushy fans and photographers. But she went along with him on the ~~book~~ ^{book} tour for *Harlot's Ghost*, traveling with him to Boston, Chicago, the West Coast and Washington, D.C. He wanted her to accompany him, insisted on it, she said. Her chief motive was to keep an eye on him. His was to reassure her that he was a changed man, as several of his comments indicate. For example, when asked if there was anything he wanted to do that he hadn't, he said: "I'm too happily married to answer that." Reporters referred to him as "a mellower Mailer" and "a softer Mailer," and noted his "attestedly happy 11 years of marriage to

Norris Church." With Norris sitting next to him in an ABC studio where he was waiting to be interviewed, he said he was "a more content man" than in the past. "I think you have to round out or round off after a certain age or you'll go crazy. You have to give up certain ideas of yourself. I gave up some of my crazier ambitions." He said he had followed "his inner voice" all his life, "sometimes as a clown or a fool."

His longest interview during the book tour was with David Frost. ^{Frost} He led off by asking Mailer about the humorous piece he had written in 1979, a comic obituary which began with a report that he had passed away after his fifteenth divorce and sixteenth wedding. Frost wondered if he could write such a piece today.

Mailer: Oh, I wouldn't dare. I'm married to a young, lively, proud and slightly—as she grows into imperiousness every year—woman. So, she wouldn't, she'd not look lightly on that.

Frost: That's right. No fifteen divorces. No sixteen weddings. Number six looks as though it's going to last forever.

Mailer: Oh, I think so. I think so.

He had no desire to see marriage number six end, but he wasn't sure that Norris felt the same.

She held the cards.

(told by Random House)
In Chicago, the Mailers' driver and guide was none other than Eileen Fredrickson, whom he had helped get a job driving visiting writers around town. Norris was astonished, and thought Mailer was being cruel. As they drove, Norris saw that Fredrickson "obviously adored him."

Fredrickson said that while it was a terribly awkward situation, Norris was "very gracious." He

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invited her to a reception for him that night, and she attended, but was the first person to leave. "Even though I was an adulteress," she said, "I was still a lady." The situation repeated itself in Los Angeles, where Mailer pointed out another old girlfriend (possibly Lois Wilson) in the audience. The fact that they were much older than she gave Norris no solace. "These women took over my life, I couldn't think of anything else; we couldn't seem to talk about anything else." Norris wasn't sure what to do; she prayed at night. It was the worst of times.

When they returned, Sam Donaldson and an ABC television crew came to their apartment for an interview with both Mailers about *Harlot's Ghost*. It was not her favorite book, especially after she learned that Mallory was the model for the slutty Maine waitress, Chloe. Norris liked Donaldson's "devilish air," and they got on well. With the camera rolling, he asked what it was like to live with Norman Mailer. She shot back her answer: "Well, Sam, it's kind of like living in the zoo. One day Norman is a lion; the next he's a monkey. Occasionally he's a lamb, and a large part of the time he's a jackass." Donaldson laughed; Mailer looked shocked. When the segment aired, Norris' answer was retained.

An old boyfriend, a bachelor surgeon in Atlanta, called her with concern after he saw the show, and she told him that she was thinking of leaving Mailer. The doctor invited her to visit. She declined and decided instead to go to Arkansas and see her parents and best friend, Aurora Huston. It was now late in the year, and Norman went skiing with Stephen and John. Norris enjoyed seeing her family, and then she and Aurora and her husband Phil drove to Florida where they met Jean, another old friend. "I was on the brink of totally changing my life and was giddy with possibilities," she said. But she was also worried. She had a comfortable life, loved all of

Mailer's family, enjoyed their two homes and many friends, and the freedom she had to write and paint and act. She and ^{her two friends} ~~Aurora and Jean~~ talked over the situation at length.

While Norris was away, Mailer called up a friend, filmmaker ^{James} Jim Toback, and asked him to meet him for dinner at Nicola's. They enjoyed one-on-one dinners, and shared what Toback called "extremely intense personal conversations" of the kind not to be repeated. He had witnessed Mailer's complicated relationships with several wives and mistresses, and watched him move from one to another. "There was never any notion, certainly in my observation, and I think in his, that he would ever find someone who would be the last." But when he listened to the way Mailer talked about Norris, he saw that the "endless cycle" had come to an end. Mailer told him why he had asked him to dinner:

✓ "Listen, the real reason I had to see you tonight is that I have a hole at the center of my being. I've never felt anything like it.' I said, 'Why is that?' And he said, 'Well, Norris has left and I don't know if she's going to come back.' He went on saying, 'I did certain things and she confronted me and I confessed. Part of me wanted to lie. I felt if I lied I could get away with it, but I just couldn't get myself to lie, so I confessed. And that was it and she left.' He said, 'I don't regret having told the truth, but I don't know what to do with this feeling; it's the worst feeling I've ever had.'

So I volunteered, because I felt that's what he was looking for me to do. I said, 'I've had that feeling on many occasions and I call it a bad abscessed tooth ache of the soul.' And he said, 'You can come up with something better than that.'

~~Toback tried, detailing romantic disasters in his life going back to the age of 12 when a girl named Lucy broke his heart.~~ ^{NO 91 Mainer} A short time later, ~~he~~ ^{she} called Toback and said. "Well, she's back and I'm not going to do anything to cause her to leave again."

Norris had a brief encounter with the Atlanta surgeon ^{although} ~~but~~ it "felt desperately wrong," she said, ~~and when she returned to Brooklyn she told Mainer about her one-night stand, although more to hurt him than to be forgiven.~~ ^{But} ~~The one-night stand had enhanced her sense of self, and made her ask herself: "Why had I been consumed by this old, fat, bombastic, lying little dynamo," she asked herself!~~ ^{She + No} ~~They ordered pizza for Matt and John and went to dinner at a local restaurant, where~~ ^{were to hurt him than to be forgiven,} Norris told him about the surgeon, and then announced that she was leaving him. Calmly, without tears, she began to discuss living arrangements after the marriage ended. He'd been through this with his other wives; it was an old routine for him, But he recoiled, ~~and~~ ^{he} slapped the table, his invariable reflex: "No, no, no, no, no," he barked. "We are not breaking up." Everyone in the restaurant was watching.

Norris realized that she didn't want it to end. "I loved our life, I even loved him," she ^{later} wrote, and she didn't want the family, especially John, the only one of his children who had lived continuously with his father past six, to suffer. But there had to be trust; it was ^{age} ~~a~~ ^{the} *sine qua non* for continuing the marriage. Mainer started talking, using "all his talents and abilities, which were considerable," and before the meal was finished, he had convinced her of his love; she would be the last Mrs. Norman Mainer. The family was relieved that the crisis was over; they all loved Norris. But the confessions and fights had taken a toll. "I somehow had taken a step away from him in my heart," she said. It was a necessary step, flowing from her clear-eyed recognition that it might be impossible for him to control his roving eye and promiscuous penis. But he was

This is self-contradictory
Norris tells of her affair to hurt him then for again, to love him

slowing down, and she hoped he was ready to try monogamy again. He ~~was~~ he did try, and would be notably, if not perfectly, successful, at least by his own standards. He still ~~had love for~~ ^{loved} several women—Carol Stevens, ~~certainly~~ and Lois Wilson and Eileen Fredrickson. Perhaps ~~an~~ ^{others} ~~few more~~. Norris was philosophical: "It was better to be that little bit less in love and not care quite as much," she wrote.

OK? Or
to commit
to monogamy?
no

In an interview two months after Norris died on November 10, 2011, Aurora Huston said that she believed that her best friend and Mailer "were both naïve, in their own ways. There was always an innocence about Norris, always." Aurora and Norris called or emailed almost every day. They were utterly frank with each other. Aurora recalled her first meeting with Mailer, and gave her views on their marriage:

The first time I saw them together, I knew they were real partners. Not just in a physical sense or even as a unified public entity. More than anything they were bound together in some deeply rooted corpus that they created together. Unfortunately, the very thing they created and loved was made from bits and pieces of their very souls. Norman was a hard man to love. His genius was also his folly. He thought himself right in every thought, word and action. Norris, however much she loved him, was not going to let him get away with his foolishness. I do believe they loved each other until the very end, but they tore at the flesh of their relationship. Norris, in my opinion, humanized Norman and made him see the damage caused by his reckless behavior. Norman had too large an ego to look into the mirror and accept his reflection. He needed to be adored; he needed to be lustfully adventurous with careless bravado. The very traits that

made her fall madly in love with him, made him alarmingly, ferociously, untamable. Nothing happened to their love, in truth, though both will swear differently. Life happened along the way. Disappointment, waves of illness and old age. Wherever they are, the undisputed truth is that they loved each other.

Norris also had a brief affair with someone she had known for years, and it confirmed her belief that she could also be happy with someone else. But her life, she wrote, was bound up with Norman, "that crazy wild man," and the affair, her last, was short-lived. "I knew that if I left him I would wonder the rest of my life what he was up to, and be sorry I wasn't with him." Slowly, as Mailer was covering the political conventions in the summer of 1992, their marriage began to heal.

The inscription in Norris' ^S copy of *Harlot's Ghost*, dated October 1991, reflects the tensions of their marriage at that moment:

To my baby wife alias the wise woman who is my dear lady and a hoyden heart
mean as piss on rare occasions and lovely as a forest clearing when all is still,
namely princess, I adore you Norman

In 1995, after their marriage had settled back into an easy groove, he dedicated *Oswald's Tale* to her:

To Norris, my wife, for this book and for the other seven that have been written
through these warm years, these warm twenty years we have been together.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

In early 1992, Mailer began work on a short biography of Picasso. Even in the most trying times of the crisis, he went to his studio almost every day to write. His plan was to knock it off in six months, and then turn to "Harlot's Grave." Whatever might happen to his marriage, his literary activities would ^{continue} move along. He had first gotten interested in Picasso's work in his senior year at Harvard when he had taken a modern art course, which he said was the most enjoyable course he had in all four years—he got an A. He had always been interested in the way ^{taken} Picasso's style kept changing, much as his own did. "I could've written under several different names," he said, "and gotten away with it." In the spring of 1962, he ^{had} signed a contract with Macmillan to ^{wrote} do the biography, and spent "eight happy weeks" at the Museum of Modern Art leafing through fifteen thousand reproductions of the great artist's work. "I think if you have a sensibility and you spend two intense months with Picasso the way I did, it just sits inside of you like a time bomb." But he shelved the project.

Thirty years later, he tried again. All through the first half of 1992 he worked on what would eventually be called *Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man*, completing it in September. The biography is 125,000 words in length, contains ^{over} two ~~century~~ hundred illustrations, and takes Picasso from his birth through the Cubist period, ending in the early years of World War I. It is not a scholarly biography, but an interpretive one that tries to explain the complexities of Picasso's character. Mailer borrowed freely and heavily from the work of a score of biographers, memoirists and art critics. His most important borrowings are from the memoir of Picasso's mistress, ^{with} Fernande Olivier, and from the first volume of the authorized biography by John Richardson. "Nothing, of course, can equal the scholarship of John Richardson's book," Mailer said, "but I think mine may give a closer sense of what it would have been like if one had known

Picasso personally as a young man." The book is dedicated to Judith McNally, who did invaluable research for it.

Jeanne Campbell had introduced Mailer to Richardson and his partner, Douglas Cooper, in the summer of 1962 in the south of France. Mailer recalled getting drunk with them. He had hoped that Richardson would introduce him to Picasso, but for whatever reason, this did not occur. In 1991, Richardson published the first volume of his biography, covering the years 1881-1906, just before Mailer began work on his. Mailer read it, and quoted extensively from it, some 8,000 words; there was a good deal of paraphrasing as well. Jason Epstein, also Richardson's editor, found himself in a difficult situation. Richardson's second volume, *The Painter of Modern Life*, which would take Picasso up to 1916, was well underway, and the prospect of two Random House biographies covering the same period and being published at the same time ^{caused} ~~gave~~ him ^{difficulty} ~~no~~ happiness. "I was apprehensive," Epstein said, "and told Mailer there might be a problem." But in the late summer of 1992, before the problem came to a head, Mailer got a call from Schiller.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

All through the early 1980s Schiller had been in Russia working on a mini-series, *Peter the Great*, and had developed extensive contacts with high officials, including members of the KGB. His translator, Ludmilla Peresvetova, introduced him to the head of the KGB, Vadim Bakatin, and through him he was introduced to the top KGB official in Minsk, Alexander Sharkovsky. Schiller was informed that the KGB was interested in exploring the possibility of giving him access to its file on Lee Harvey Oswald, who had lived in Minsk for two and half years, 1960-62. This file had been sealed since 1963, and everyone who had known Oswald was

It had you told us this earlier, when NM went to Russia (J.E.)

had been

warned to remain silent. But under *glasnost* life had changed, and the KGB realized that it possessed a property that could be monetized. Schiller explained the situation to Mailer, who he wanted as a collaborator, and found him to be "very interested, eager." Next, Schiller went to see

Epstein, who agreed to fund additional trips to Moscow and Minsk. Epstein did not reveal, according to Schiller, that investigative reporter Gerald Posner was already working on a book for

Random House on the assassination, which later on would affect the reception of *Oswald's Tale*.

At that time To be fair to Epstein, in 1992 the two books didn't seem to have much in common, much less, in fact, than the biographies of Richardson and Mailer.

Mailer loved to drop everything, mobilize his energies, and launch in a new direction. Metaphorically speaking, he always kept a bag packed on the chance he would hear the train whistle of new ventures, which could lead to new energy, new success. At this point in his life, the Oswald-KGB project had immense appeal. "I had a double motive," he said. First, he wanted to learn about the KGB's exhaustive scrutiny of Oswald for the new book. He and Schiller would be in the front rank of what he called "the virtual Oklahoma land grab" for long-sealed record. Second, the KGB, he surmised, might have much to tell him about J.F.K.'s assassination, even if Oswald was not involved. Information on how the agency functioned in the old Soviet Union, and how it responded to the assassination, would "get me beefed up for the second volume of *Harlot's Ghost*." There was a further incentive: the project would take him out of temptation's way and allow the recriminatory air between him and his wife to further clear. He had no idea of the shape of the book he would write, but that didn't concern him. "Oswald's Years in Russia" was the working title that Schiller had given Epstein. Beyond that, it was all guesswork. Like

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Holmes and Watson, if you will, Mailer and Schiller were going on a long journey to solve a mystery.

From September of 1992 through the spring of 1993, Mailer spent the bulk of his time in Minsk and Moscow, even celebrating, quietly, his seventieth birthday in the Russian capital. Schiller, recently divorced from his second wife, was in one or the other city almost continuously through this period. Mailer flew back and forth several times for various reasons, including a trip to Dallas to meet Oswald's widow Marina, arranged by ^{Bill} William Majeski, the New York City Detective responsible for Abbott's arrest. They also traced Oswald's footsteps around Dallas after the ~~shooting~~ ^{assassination}, and made a one-day trip to New Orleans, where Oswald had also lived. He also came back for his appearance in "Don Juan in Hell" at Carnegie Hall on February 15. But for most of this eight-month period, he was in Minsk. Norris was worried that he might be "schtupping fat, old, ugly Russian women in babushkas," but ^{Mailer} ~~her almost fully forgiven husband~~ was faithful and focused on Oswald.

Living conditions in Minsk were uncomfortable, especially ^{once} after winter arrived. It was bitter cold. The sun, rarely visible through the endless snow, set in mid-afternoon. "I doubt if there were 10 sunny days," Mailer recalled. "Nothing to do but work. No night life." Mailer wrote to Knox about the food:

[I]t doesn't matter how rich you are, you cannot buy yourself a decent restaurant meal in Minsk, so the biggest gastronomic sensations in the last five months while living there are the scrambled eggs I make myself, or the borscht, or once or twice, the tuna with cabbage. It's a sad place, and I'll tell you about it when I see you, for it made me realize how Russian I am, even though Minsk is in Belarus

(White Russia rather than Russia itself, and a separate country now) but it doesn't matter—one gets a sense of what life was like in the old Soviet Union.

He was exaggerating a bit, because Schiller, ever the dealmaker, soon came up with a way to get good food. After they had established relations with the KGB, he gave various officials (including Marina Oswald's aunt, Valya Prusakova, whose late husband had been a colonel in counterintelligence) cash to buy food on the black market. Then, the two overweight Americans were invited for lunch or dinner a few times a week; if they had borscht for lunch, they might have lamb for dinner, and some caviar. When Norris came for a two-week visit, she scrounged through the markets, buying beets and carrots, chunks of gristly beef rolled in newspaper, and "small hard eggs that came in a plastic sack of twenty, eggs squeezed from the butts of sturdy little chickens that continually pecked the frozen ground in search of an insect or a worm, scratching out a living like everybody else." Schiller didn't cook, and Mailer had a limited repertoire (including some decent pasta), so they ate better during Norris' stay. The visit was good for the marriage. After Norris returned, she told her last lover that she was ending their affair, and staying with Mailer. "I'm not sorry we had our little fling," she told him. "It made me see that I really loved Norman, for better or worse."

~~The early trips were to get acquainted;~~ Mailer and Schiller were shown the tiny apartment where Oswald and Marina lived, and the one above that the KGB used as a listening post. They met the Soviet rifle expert who attempted to duplicate Oswald's marksmanship, and they had several desultory meetings with Sharkovsky and his staff. All that they had been told of any consequence was that the Soviet Union had no hand in the murder of J.F.K. The officials were leery about receiving cash payments, but there was one thing they ardently desired: shoes.

Schiller was given a list of sizes and types and arranged for a truckload of expensive footwear to
 be driven in from Austria and unloaded at KGB headquarters. ~~Schiller~~ He was also busy making
 arrangements for food and gifts—for example, getting Aunt Valya's television set fixed by a
 black market repairman—and getting his technology set up. ~~He~~ brought in expensive optical
 scanning and duplicating equipment (plus toner and paper), and made arrangements to send
 material out daily via Sprint satellite data transfer. When he wasn't doing interviews with
 Schiller—they interviewed 50 or 60 people, all told—Mailer spent his time reading the Warren
 Commission Report. His eyesight wasn't good, so Schiller arranged to have excerpts from the 26
 volumes blown up to double size. ~~The price was good: three cents a page.~~

One night in his overheated apartment, Mailer was cooking pasta for Schiller. Just the
 two of them were there, Schiller recalled. Mailer, standing over the stove in a sleeveless
 undershirt, pointed out that something Schiller had just said or written was jumbled. As they
 discussed the matter, Mailer said, lowering his voice a little, "Larry, I think you may be
 dyslexic," and then explained that he knew about dyslexia from one of his children. Schiller had
 heard of the disorder, but ~~had~~ never thought of applying it to himself. ~~he might have it~~ Mailer was always patient
 with him when he made spelling and grammar mistakes, Schiller said, defining words and giving
 him short grammar lessons now and then. There was never any condescension. When Schiller
 flew home for Thanksgiving—as did Mailer—he ~~went to a doctor~~ was tested, and found that
 Mailer was correct. Schiller was 56 years old ~~at the time~~, and until then had not been diagnosed
 with this disability. Mailer's hunch helped Schiller understand and deal with his long-standing
 insecurities about reading and writing.

In their first months in Minsk, they spoke to people who had known Oswald and Marina: relatives and former friends of Marina, Oswald's co-workers at the radio factory, ^{where he had worked} neighbors and acquaintances. They had also been given access to the KGB library and some relatively unimportant files. But they still had not been shown the Oswald file. Finally, Schiller's instincts told him that it was time to force the situation, and he ^{asked his translator} told Ludmilla to set up a luncheon meeting with Sharkovsky and his top staff at KGB headquarters. He pondered what he would say, but wrote nothing down, trusting his spontaneity. Mailer had no speaking role; he was to play the great writer and sit in august silence. In a brief biography written for the KGB by Schiller and Ludmilla, he was described as the American equivalent of Tolstoy.

OK

Has Ludmilla been introduced?

After the elaborate lunch, Schiller began to speak, with Ludmilla translating. He said that if the Oswald ⁵file was given to the media, it would be disputed or forgotten. "But," he continued, "if you give it to a writer, such as Mr. Mailer, whose works are on the shelves of every library in the world, including your own KGB library, you are giving the information to history. You're preserving it with an independent voice that will establish the credibility of the fact that the Soviet Union was not involved in President Kennedy's assassination." He had their attention, and went on to say that Mailer ranked with Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn. Ludmilla, "being as brilliant as she was," Schiller said, did not repeat this comparison, but substituted this: "You give it to a writer who, under his photograph in the Soviet encyclopedia, says Mr. Mailer is 'a writer who dares write what he thinks.'" After he concluded, Sharkovsky said no, he would not give them the files outright. He would, however, rent them an office in the KGB building, "and every time you ask a question, we'll bring you that part of the files that answers your question. If you stay long enough, and if you're smart enough to ask the right questions, you will learn much."

Boris Aleksandr

① In Minsk in 1992 this was a fortune.

They rented the office for a \$1,000 a week, and went to work. It was a laborious process, and much time was spent in discussions about the wording and sequencing of questions. For weeks they spent five hours a day copying material in Russian from the Oswald file, which consisted of numerous bound volumes kept in potato sacks. Then it was translated into English and sent out daily by satellite.

They worked on through the darkest days in winter, accumulating more and more material. They learned that not long after Oswald arrived, the KGB suspected that Oswald had been sent to blow up a new hotel ^{there} in ^{Minsk} where Premier Khrushchev was about to visit. They followed him from store to store as he purchased what looked like the parts for a wireless radio, but it turned out to be a toy he was making for a friend's child. Another possibility the Soviets considered was that he was a new kind of mole, one who would lie low for decades and then be activated at some critical time ^{in history}. The Soviets had sent similar moles to the U.S.; ^{would be} ten were arrested in 2010 after living in the U.S. for several years. After five months ^{they had} accumulated 11,000 pages, including their transcripts of the interviews with people who ^{Schiller and Mailer} knew Oswald and Marina. ^{had known}

On several occasions, Mailer and Schiller had major disagreements ^{about} on how to pursue a line of questioning. One of the biggest fights was about Marina's virginity when she married Oswald. Was ^{Oswald} he faking it when he brought a piece of bloody sheet into the radio factory after his wedding night, the traditional Russian proof of ^{virginity and} deflowering? Some of Marina's former friends intimated that she had lost her virginity in Leningrad a few years earlier, after which, to get her away from the night life, ^{she was sent to Minsk to live with Aunt Valya.} ^{by her parents?} There would be other arguments when Schiller, the lead interviewer (as he had been for The

Executioner's Song) would ask a question, and Mailer would object and want to ask something different. As Schiller recalled:

Of course, the subject being interviewed didn't know what we were saying, because they didn't speak English, and sometimes he [Mailer] would get up and walk out of the room, saying, 'You go finish the goddam interview yourself then.' Or sometimes we would both go outside, sometimes Ludmilla would turn around and scream at us, saying, 'What are you guys doing? Why are you fighting in front of somebody?'

Towards the end of their stay, Schiller came to the conclusion that they would need copies of large portions of the ^{original} Oswald material in order to have credibility with the media in the U.S. Without such copies, Schiller asked himself, how can we prove that we're quoting from actual KGB reports? He concluded that they could not leave Minsk without copies of all the bugging reports.

Mailer wasn't worried in the least about credibility, Schiller said. He felt that his own name and voice carried sufficient weight. When Schiller told him he planned to give Sharkovsky's assistant \$10,000 for three sets of copies of the reports, "Norman went ballistic." He was worried that they would be arrested for bribing high officials. Shoes were one thing; \$10,000 in American money was another. They got into a loud argument in the stairwell outside Mailer's apartment, wrestling and pushing each other down the steps. "It was really an altercation," Schiller said. "He finally understood that I was not going to retreat." For a few weeks they weren't speaking, and then Schiller told him that he had paid the bribe. Now he had to listen. Schiller's plan was for Mailer and Ludmilla to leave from different airports; ^{he would}

Mailer
himself *three*
(now married to Schiller)
Why was Ludmilla leaving?

~~I leave from a third~~ Each would have a set of the reports. "If one of us was arrested," he said, "that made the drama, made the book more important because we would be taking out something that the West was unable to get their hands on. And that was my final argument to him: that if we were stopped at customs, we would actually be promoting the book. Mailer's answer was, 'Fine, as long as I am not the one who is arrested.'" Schiller told him that ^{on the contrary he would be} the most desirable person to be caught with the ~~bugging files~~ ^{bugging files} ~~would be the world-famous author, Norman Mailer.~~ It would be a major story in the media world-wide, which could only help the book. Mailer saw his point.

Schiller would leave from Moscow, Ludmilla ~~(now married to Schiller)~~ from Leningrad, and Mailer from Minsk. "We were worried," Schiller said. ^u I remember the night before I left I had bad cramps in my legs and I had to lie in the bathtub in the hotel." But their fears were unfounded. They were working with the KGB, paying them rent every week, and no one paid any attention to them at the airports. Their suitcases weren't even opened. The fix was in.

Whoa!
When
did this
happen?

Ψ Ψ Ψ

Back in the U.S. in the spring of 1993, Aldridge ^{John} noted in passing to Mailer that Judith was not terribly forthcoming when he asked for information on the telephone. Mailer, who had ceded a great deal of control over his public life—and some of his private—to his assistant, responded by noting that "Judith still treats me like an undergraduate and, for the record, whatever my talents, they do not include training Judith. Like Gore Vidal, she's untrainable; comes to you fully developed and you thank god for what you've got and put up with what you're not going to get." Mailer dictated this letter, and as usual Judith typed it, which added to the comic dimensions of their relationship. She could hold her own in repartee with him, and never hesitated to point out, wryly, the dangers of various rash ideas he had. Mailer valued her

verbal skills, research abilities, and wit. They spoke on the telephone daily, sometimes several times, and when Mailer was in Provincetown, he faxed whatever he had written to her for typing. A lot of material passed between them in this way. The fax machine is one of the few pieces of recent technology that Mailer deigned to use. Even so, he was ham-handed and broke several of them.

Mailer also told Aldridge about his research for "a book on Oswald in Minsk," one of his few comments on it in a letter. "Oswald," he said, "is a man of parts," and he hoped to depict "a character who's worthy, to some little degree, of the size that history has given him. At least he won't be a stick figure in a CIA/KGB set of scenarios." One of the ways he hoped to demonstrate that Oswald was worthy of a full-scale portrait was through the memories and insights of his widow, now remarried and living in Texas. Schiller had interviewed Marina earlier for an ABC-TV docu-drama on Oswald. For the new project, he offered her \$15,000 for five days of interviews in June of 1993.

During his earlier visit with Majeski, Mailer had interviewed Marina for a few hours. But, now, with the Minsk interviews in hand, he and Schiller had many more questions and needed to conduct extended interviews with her. Schiller had a friendly relationship with her, but nevertheless had to use all his resources to convince her. Mailer, who once noted that "Larry Schiller makes Baron Von Munchausen look like George Washington," described his collaborator's methods. "Larry can be utterly unscrupulous," he said, "so he went around telling everyone with whom we wanted to do interviews, I was the American Tolstoy, and they owed it to history to be interviewed by us. He also succeeded in getting Marina Oswald to sit down with us for a few days and talk." She came with a friend to the sessions in a Dallas hotel, but for the

interviews—three hours in the morning, three in the afternoon, and two in the evening—Marina would be alone with Mailer, Schiller, and a Russian-English dictionary.

The interviews started off well with questions about non-controversial matters—the date she moved to Minsk, relationships with Aunt Valya and Uncle Ilya, where she worked and so forth. They also asked more general questions: did she and Oswald live as a couple in the U.S. about the same way as in Minsk? Had she understood that he would not be guaranteed a job in the U.S. as he had ^{been} in the Soviet Union? What did she remember about the time ^{Edwin} before the assassination when Oswald tried to shoot General Walker? She had gone over this ground before with FBI; much of this material was in the *Warren Commission Report*. Mailer and Schiller also had a wealth of information from people in Leningrad and Minsk, so when they moved into more difficult territory, they could cross-check her replies.

first name?

On the third day, the questioning got tougher. As Schiller put it, “We started with Vaseline, but we knew we were going to end up with vinegar.” They began asking about the time her uncle locked the door when she was out late with a boyfriend, and she had to sleep on the landing. “She looked at me with real hatred in her eyes,” and began screaming: “You’re worse than the Secret Service; you’re worse than the FBI.” Schiller used the same tactic he had used on Nicole Baker for *The Executioner’s Song*. “What do you have to hide?” he asked. Marina could have walked out at any time; Schiller had given her a cashier’s check on the first day. “That is my modus operandi,” he said. “I always want to take a little bit of the high road. I don’t know if it produces something good or not, but you know she showed up every day.” Mailer was interested in her early sexuality, and particularly eager to learn how the blood got on the sheet that Oswald displayed to his co-workers. Eventually, she opened up and told them that she was

not a virgin when she married Oswald, but she never explained how she deceived him on their wedding night. She called Schiller a liar when he brought up the story of the bloody sheet. "You can't use your capitalistic tricks on me," she screamed.

Marina felt betrayed, Schiller said, because she had assumed their relationship was personal, not adversarial. Her awe of Mailer had evaporated. On the final day, relations soured entirely. "Every single word out of her mouth was said with venom," said Schiller. They had pressed her hard, and all bridges were burned. The next morning, she and her friend drove away. No goodbyes, no hugs. Two years later Schiller sent an advance excerpt from the first part of the book to Marina. "We had a moral obligation, not a legal obligation, to let her know beforehand what Norman Mailer thought and was writing of her," Schiller said. She wrote back an angry letter to Schiller criticizing Mailer. "Tolstoy, he's not!" she said.

Mailer began writing in Provincetown in the summer of 1993, planning, as usual, to be done long before he was. He told one friend that he would be done by the end of the year "or my publishers will be in misery." Most of his correspondents got Xerox copies of one of his drawings, doodles and cartoons, and faces made ~~up~~^{of} of numbers, an idea he says he got from Picasso, who as a boy thought the number seven was an upside down nose. He would continue to send out these drawings—most had captions—to the end of his life, often with a handwritten note. One of the few letters he did write in the second half of the year was to Peter Balbert, a professor at Trinity University who had hosted Mailer when he spoke there.

I hope eventually this book will have offshoots that prove interesting for the second volume of Harlot's Ghost. For now it's been an experience of some interest. I can tell you that I never disliked Ronald Reagan more than when I was

in Russia and Belarus (Minsk) for whatever the old Soviet Union was, you can't call it an evil empire. A depressed, oppressive third-world country but an evil empire that would take over the world? Never.

He ended by noting that his Picasso book, which was "not at all a major effort," was almost done. Picasso "comes alive" in it, he said, and he had "more honest things to say about Cubism than the artistic establishmentarians."

Ψ Ψ Ψ

The reason that the Picasso book had not ^{yet} gone to press was the opposition of these establishmentarians, none more so than Picasso's authorized biographer, John Richardson. Earlier in the year, Epstein had sent a manuscript copy of Mailer's book to Richardson. He wrote back, called it a "scissors-and-paste ^{job}" and turned down Mailer's request to quote from his biography. He and Mailer, hitherto friendly, began sniping at each other in the media. When Richardson read about a Provincetown exhibit of Mailer's drawings, "Guys and Droons," Richardson told the *New York Observer*, "He's not just writing about Picasso now, he's even trying to draw like Picasso." Mailer said that while he had no artistic ability, he had merely "let my hand, in a sense, lead me—that is, draw without preconception. There must have been some wholly unconscious message I'd gotten from Picasso." Told of Richardson's disdain for his drawings, he said "I hope the poor boy is not too disappointed," and quoted the André Gide epigraph in *The Deer Park*: "Please do not understand me too quickly." Richardson went further, accusing Mailer of writing the book as a way of funding his alimony and child-care payments.

He's been
ID'd

Another Picasso scholar, William Rubin, sided with Richardson. Director Emeritus of ~~the Museum of Modern Art in New York~~ Painting and Sculpture at ~~MoMA~~, Rubin had recently published a major study, *Picasso and*

Braque: Pioneering Cubism, ~~on~~ ^{from} which Mailer had drawn extensively. Rubin refused permission

"Obviously, Richardson sicced him on me," Mailer said. He was now in an unhappy situation, ^{that} ~~one which~~ would interfere with his work on the Oswald book. Lacking the ability to quote from

Richardson and Rubin, and possibly from the memoirs of Olivier ^{Fernande} (whose heirs were initially unresponsive), he would have to rewrite the book. And he would have to find another publisher.

His first thought was Nan Talese, wife of his good friend Gay, who had her own imprint, at Doubleday. He had known her socially for years.

"As I understood it," she recalled, "Norman said to Jason, 'Would it be helpful if I go find another publisher just for ^{this} the book?'" And I think Jason said yes because it took the pressure off of him. So Norman asked me to read it and publish it. And I said, 'I'll publish it.' And he said, 'No, no, I think you should read it first.'" She read the book and was impressed. "I loved the book because I felt if there was anyone who could get inside Picasso's spirit and sense of self-importance, it was Norman." She saw this ability in his descriptions of the young Picasso, which seemed "as if he was associating his own feelings as a young writer with Picasso as a young artist." She had some editorial suggestions, and Mailer sat down with her and the manuscript. "What was wonderful was when I asked him a question either about motive or meaning or something like that, he immediately addressed it. He didn't say let me think about it; he had a pencil and would go over it."

Richardson said he would sue if Talese published Mailer's book. "Well, this is just my guess," she said, but his "underlying motive" might ^{have been} ~~be that~~ Mailer's discussion of Cubism. "That

for Mailer
to quote
from
his work

It isn't
clear
why.

was going to be part of Richardson's next book." She said, "Norman had a theory of why Picasso was attracted to Cubism, and I think he was jumping the tracks" on Richardson's second volume, which was forthcoming. At this point she was still determined to publish and called Random House President Harry Evans. "I said, 'Harry, could you get John to just pull back so we can go ahead with this book?' And he did." Richardson relented and gave permission to quote, although William Rubin did not—he was not in the draft Talese read. But ^{quoted} by this time the imbroglia had ^{boss decided} been ~~bruted~~ about in the media, and Talese's president at Doubleday, Stephen Rubin, told her ^{not to publish because he feared that if} they were not going to do the book. When she asked why, he said, "Because John Richardson has spoiled everything, and this book is going to be trashed, and we're not going to make our money back on it." M^{ail}er had yet to sign a contract with Doubleday, ^{and}

^{Talese} When she called ^{him} M^{ail}er with the bad news, he was understanding. He asked if she could not go ahead on her own and publish it, and she explained that she could, but she wouldn't get any marketing money, and "it's not fair to the book." She ^{instead} recommended that he go to an independent publisher, and M^{ail}er did. It was published by Grove/Atlantic.

Ψ Ψ Ψ

Gerald Posner's *Case Closed* was published just a few weeks before M^{ail}er was the keynote speaker at the third annual Assassination Symposium on John F. Kennedy (ASK) in Dallas, November 18-22, 1993. Posner, after extensive research, concluded that Oswald had acted alone. His view, generally embraced by the media, cast a slight pall on the conference. M^{ail}er, long a supporter of conspiracy theories, did not mention Posner's book, but he had read it, and in his speech seemed to be moving closer to Posner's position, a stance not appreciated by the symposiasts, the great majority of whom were ferocious opponents of the single assassin

OF course if NM were writing w/out knowl Edge of Richardson's Vol. 2, how would Richard son have any basis to sue.

interpretation. Mailer said that we want to believe that Oswald was a tool of some intelligence agency because we don't like to be lied to, and neither the CIA nor the FBI were willing to open their Oswald files. This stonewalling encouraged conspiracy proponents. But Mailer was now uncertain and told the audience that they had become intoxicated by the "vertigo and fog that accompanies study of the conspiracy."

By the time of the symposium, he had been working for several months on the story of Oswald and Marina in Minsk, but before he was done he decided that he did not want the book to end there. He was more and more intrigued by Oswald's personality, which he felt had not been understood, and less and less convinced that Oswald was either a tool of the KGB, or a scapegoat for Mafia dons who ^{had} J.F.K. murdered. These theories, and countless others, were dissected at the symposium, and Mailer was growing weary of them. Like DeLillo (^{Don} ~~who remains~~ ^{also} a conspiratorialist), he wanted to dissect Oswald with the tools of a novelist, demonstrate that Oswald was not a monstrous nobody, but an understandable character with grandiose ambitions and courage. "The sudden death of a man as large in his possibilities as John Fitzgerald Kennedy," he wrote, "is more tolerable if we can perceive his killer as tragic rather than absurd."

Another motive was his desire to write about the assassination, ^{Mailer} which he called "the largest mountain of mystery in the Twentieth Century." Yet until ^{as the book Schiller and he conceived} ~~Oswald's Tale~~, he had never ^{was called,} dealt with it head-on, only obliquely via its endless reverberations in the nation's psyche. In book after book, essay after essay, he alluded to it, adding rings of scaffolding around it, as if it could only be approached but not addressed. He planned to make the assassination the opening episode of "Harlot's Grave." Reading chunks of the *Warren Commission Report* through the long Russian winter was the precipitating event. He likened the report to "a dead whale decomposing

on the beach," fascinating, pungent, and mysterious. "Every morning I'd read these juicy testimonies, and every afternoon and evening we'd have these interviews, and soon I was struck by how desperate Oswald was, how focused he was on a belief in himself, however delusional."

Back home in the spring of 1993, he went to work on "Oswald and Marina in Minsk." As he was completing it, he decided to add a 100-page epilogue about Oswald in America. He told his publishers, and they said, "Oh, don't make it too long," and he replied, "Of course not." But when he completed the epilogue, it had become the biggest part of the book, 444 pages, compared to 347 for the Minsk portion. "I started with one book and ended with another," he said. After 30 years, he had finally found a way to write about that dark day in Dallas, "a huge and hideous event, in which the gods warred and a god fell," as he described it. At Random House, no one was happy. "You've got a rose," ^{Harry} Evans told him, "why put all that greenery around it." Epstein felt the same way.

Schiller thought Mailer was "out of his mind," and told him so. "We haven't done any research in the U.S.," he said. "There's no new information. I told him it was total insanity." But Mailer had been reading the *Warren Commission Report*, and saw a wealth of material. "All you're doing is a cut-and-paste job," Schiller said. "There isn't anything new in what you're doing." Mailer's old friend was making the same accusation that Richardson had about Mailer's Picasso biography. "He got real mad at me, you know, really mad," Schiller said. "I was treading on his creativity." Mailer deferred to Schiller when it came to information ^{made} collection, but deferred to no one when it came to ^{collecting} ^{interpreting this} information-~~interpretation~~. He believed he could extract the same kind of compelling story out of the vast corpus of inert material assembled by the Warren Commission, as he had out of the trove of interviews and documents on Gary Gilmore that

collected
 Schiller had ~~presented~~. The second half of *Oswald's Tale*, ~~essentially~~ is a much abbreviated, ~~greatly re-ordered~~, and ~~brilliantly~~ ^{expertly} parsed redaction of the *Warren Commission Report*.

Posner's *Case Closed* was another factor. If it had not been published, Schiller said, "I would have insisted that we go out and do research for the second part of the book." But Posner had already picked the bones fairly clean, ~~and Mailer was leaning toward the conclusion that~~ ^{which} ~~Oswald had acted alone~~. Schiller said it made no difference to him ~~what~~ ^{which} side of the controversy Mailer came down on. His concern was the freshness of the material. In Gilmore's case, the material he and Mailer had collected was pristine, and the same was true of the Minsk material. This was not the case with the assassination. Whatever the Warren Commission had missed had been located by Posner, Edward J. Epstein, and other investigators, including Priscilla Johnson McMillan, the author of *Marina and Lee*, one of the best studies of Oswald's psychology. Mailer cited all three in his bibliography, and relied heavily on McMillan, although the *Warren Commission Report* was his chief source.

Schiller wanted Mailer to write a book that made news, something he had always strived for, and continued with books about O.J. Simpson, Jon Benet Ramsey and the Russian spy, Robert Hanssen. He valued ^{his} ~~his~~ interpretive and story-telling skills, but he wanted his ~~projects~~ ^{books} to be the first draft of history, and the second half of *Oswald's Tale* is a twice or thrice-told tale, however intelligently deployed. Getting a story on the front page of newspapers, or on network news, was always Schiller's ~~primary~~ ^{later about} goal. As he said in an interview ~~on the making of Oswald's~~ ^{later about} *Tale*, "We can talk about a book that's well written and we can talk about a book that's well written that's going to sell well. Norman had long passed the point of caring whether his books sold or not. I believe that." He told Schiller that he wrote *Ancient Evenings* for people who had

No, his
 primary
 goal was
 to make
 money

not been born, readers a century hence. ^{Schiller d} He concedes, however, that there is "brilliance" in parts of "Oswald in America," and the concluding section on Oswald's wife and mother "stands alone."

No question."

These Maile describes Oswald + Marina's last night together.

ti Marina had put Oswald off when he wanted to make love the night before the assassination, Maile wrote. She was angry with him for lying to her, and wanted to "discipline him":

Afterward, she had to think, What if he really wanted to be close to me? What if I put him in a bad mood? It torments her. What if they had made love that last night? But she is the wrong person to talk about this, she would say, because she is not a sexual person. Sensuous but not sensual. She didn't like sex, she would say. She was not expert, nor could she tell you how grandiose something had been, because she had never experienced that. No Beethoven or Tchaikovsky for her, not in bed, no grand finale.

of cigarettes
Remarried after Oswald's murder, Marina was smoking four packs a day. She didn't want to die, although her suffering was palpable:

She sits in a chair, a tiny woman in her early fifties, her thin shoulders hunched forward in such pain of spirit under such a mass of guilt that one would comfort her as one would hug a child. What is left of what was once her beauty are her extraordinary eyes, blue as diamonds, and they blaze with light as if, in divine compensation for the dead weight of all that will not cease to haunt her, she has

been granted a spark from the hour of an apocalypse others have not seen.

Perhaps it is the light offered to victims who have suffered like the gods.

Marina's mother-in-law has her own burden, and it is "difficult not to feel some guarded sympathy for Marguerite Claverie Oswald. As with Lee, the internal workings of her psyche were always condemned to hard labor, and so much of what she tried, and with the best intentions, would fail." Asked by the interviewers of the Warren Commission if she had any family with her, she answered: "I have no family, period. I brought three children into the world, and I have sisters, I have nieces, I have nephews. I have grandchildren, and I'm all alone. That answers that question and I don't want to hear another word about it." She would die alone, riddled with cancer and guilt. Mailer imagines that when Mrs. Oswald reached the Bureau of Karmic Reassignment, she probably argued with the bureaucrats, "dissatisfied with the low station, by her lights, of her next placement. 'I gave birth to one of the most famous and important Americans who ever lived!' she will tell the clerk-angel who is recording her story."

There she stands with her outrageous ego, and her self-deceit, her bold loneliness, and cold bones, those endless humiliations that burn like sores. Yet, she is worthy of Dickens. Marguerite Oswald can stand for literary office with Micawber and Uriah Heep. No word she utters will be false to her character; her stamp will be on every phrase. Few people without a literary motive would seek her company for long, but a novelist can esteem Marguerite. She does all his work for him.

