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Norman Mailer: A Double Life

J. Michael Lennon

Simon & Schuster

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Also by J. Michael Lennon

ACL

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Critical Essays on Norman Mailer (~~Critical Essays on American Literature~~)

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(BT)

Norman Mailer **A Double Life**

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(AU)

J. Michael Lennon

(IM)

Simon & Schuster

(IMC)

New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi

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DEO

To my wife, Donna Pedro Lennon,

and

Barbara Mailer Wasserman,

with love and gratitude

and to the memory of
Robert F. Lucid

donor

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BEP

"There are two sides to me, and the side that is the observer is paramount."

BEP

¹
m Norman Mailer

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Norman Mailer: A Double Life

The Ripides of Faint: June 1948

After following the manuscript of his wife novel, The Naked and the Dead, Norman Mailer asked to borrow with his wife, Marilyn.

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Norman Mailer: A Double Life

By J. Michael Lennon

Draft #4, Submitted to Robert Bender, Simon and Schuster, 12-4-12

"There are two sides to me, and the side that is the observer is paramount." Norman Mailer

(CN)

Prologue

(CT)

The Riptides of Fame: June 1948

(LOT)

After delivering the manuscript of his war novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, to his publisher, Norman Mailer sailed to Europe with his wife Beatrice on October 1, 1947. Having

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for most of his life known only the Depression and the War in the Pacific, he had always viewed with romantic envy the expatriate pasts of the Lost Generation writers he admired: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos and Henry Miller. So to go to Europe on the GI Bill ^{as he now could} seemed like a miraculous opportunity. Paris was the bulls-eye destination for aspiring writers, including Stanley Karnow, a Harvard graduate and veteran who arrived there a few months before Norman Mailer. His memoir, *Paris in the Fifties*, opens with the question: "*Porquoi Paris?* Its name alone was magic. The city, the legendary *Ville Lumière*, promised something for everyone — beauty, sophistication, culture, cuisine, sex, escape and that indefinable called *ambiance*." Mailer partook of all of these pleasures during his ten-month stay ^{there} in Paris. He differed from most of his countrymen, however, in one respect: he *was* a writer when he arrived: besides *Naked*, he had written two unpublished novels in college. While enjoying Paris and taking trips to other countries, he was trying to get a new novel going. It was one of the happiest seasons of his life, shadowed only by his anxiety about the future.

(TX) In the spring of 1948 he drove to Italy in a small Peugeot, accompanied by his wife, ^{younger} sister and mother — ^m Beatrice, Barbara and Fanny. They left Paris on June 1, drove east to Switzerland and then south to Italy. It began to rain as they drove through the foothills of the Alps, and turned to snow when they reached higher elevations. Mailer had to keep downshifting on the hairpin turns because the Peugeot didn't have much horsepower. By the time they reached the St. Gotthard Pass, they were in a blizzard. At the peak they had to back up to let another car pass, coming perilously close to the edge. Mailer relished the experience. They spent a few days in the villages and resorts of the northern lake country, and then moved on to Florence and Venice. In

mid-June they arrived in Rome where they hoped to pick up their mail, forwarded by Mailer's father Barney, an accountant working for a post-war relief organization in Paris.

Just before the Italian excursion Mailer and Bea had completed several months of language courses at the Sorbonne. The courses were not demanding and were mainly a pretext for the long European adventure. He and Bea were able to take ski trips, visit Chartres cathedral and the monastery at Mont St. Michel, and drive to Spain for a week. The money they had saved during the war, and their GI bill stipends—they were both veterans—enabled them to pay their tuition, eat amazing meals in student restaurants, and rent a small apartment. As children of the Depression and quondam Marxists, they were used to living frugally. "It was an extraordinary experience to be an American in Europe in 1948," Barbara wrote in her memoir of that time, "because it was possibly the only time in the history of the world when one could be both rich and loved (even if poor, any American who could get to Europe then was, by European standards, rich)." She recalled staying at the best hotel in Madrid, the Palace, for four dollars a night. Americans abroad, she said, felt both entitled and guilty.

fixed notes p. 59

Rinehart and Co., Mailer's publisher, had mounted a major publicity campaign for *The Naked and the Dead*, and he and his family (his mother and sister ^{had come} came over in April of 1948) were eager for more news of its reception. The mail in Rome contained several reviews, all positive, even glowing. After two or three days of sightseeing, Fan left them and took the train back to Paris to join Barney. Mailer, Bea and Barbara drove down to Naples, ^{then} They considered taking a boat to Capri to see where the Emperor Tiberius had thrown his ravaged victims into the sea, but decided it was "too touristy a thing to do," as Barbara put it, and went instead to the island of Ischia, where they stayed a few days. In Pompeii, they paid a few lire and were shown

~~an ancient painting of a priapic man. Bea burst out laughing, which shocked their guide, and amused Mailer.~~

On the morning of June 23, they began the long drive back to France, driving north from Rome along the Ligurian coast. Barbara and Bea wanted to see the Leaning Tower, and convinced a reluctant Mailer to detour to the enormous piazza in Pisa where it stands. No sooner had the car stopped than he said, "Okay, you've seen it, let's go." The two women got out for a minute to stretch, and then they were off again. Mailer was preoccupied, thinking about the reviews, the return trip to the U.S., and a cable he had just received from Lillian Hellman, who wanted to do a dramatic adaptation of his novel. He had seen her play, *The Little Foxes*, on Broadway when he was in college, and had "a lot of respect for her as a playwright," as he told his editor. In Paris, he had begun a new novel, but it was a fragment, and he didn't know if he wanted to continue with it. He had the feeling that he'd be busy when he got home in August. They drove on, and after a long ride, arrived in the late afternoon at the American Express Office in Nice. Barney had forwarded the next batch of mail from the States.

A month earlier, Mailer recorded his anticipations in his journal. He had seen "batches of reviews" by May 12¹_m—the novel came out on May 6¹_m—and realized its prospects were excellent.

☐ The thing I've got to get down here is my reactions to the book's success. The depression to start with¹_m I feel trapped. My anonymity is lost, and the book I wrote to avoid having to expose my mediocre talents in harsher market places has ended in this psychological sense by betraying me; I dread the return to America where every word I say will have too much importance, too much

(N)

(N)

(N)

(N)

EAR
EXTF..

misinterpretation. And of course I am sensitive to the hatreds my name is going to evoke.

EXTL

But across from that is the other phenomenon. I feel myself more empty than I ever have, and to fill the vacuum, to prime the motor, I need praise. Each good review gives fuel, each warm letter, but as time goes by I need more and more for less and less effect. This kind of praise-opium could best be treated in fiction through the publicity mad actress who has to see her face and name more and more to believe in her reality, and of course loses the line between her own personality, and the one created for her by the papers.

TXFL

determining how he might write about whatever it might be
 Mailer's desire for fame, and his distaste for it, never abated over his long career. Nor did his ability to see how his current situation might be turned to use, embodied in his writing. It became a reflex.

OK

TX

Hot and dusty and sweaty from the ride to Nice, Barbara and Bea sat in the Peugeot while Mailer went in for the mail. He returned with an enormous packet of clippings, cables, reviews and letters. "The reviews were mostly marvelous," Barbara ^{wrote} said, "Our friends were all excited and writing to us (I remember my Progressive Party lover wrote, 'What kind of book is this that both the Times and the Daily Worker praise?')". The atmosphere in the car got "somewhat frenetic and hysterical."

praise?"

EXTL

EXTL

I don't think we finished reading any letter or review because it was always interrupted by word of a comment on what someone else was reading. Finally Norman said, in a rather small voice which I will never forget the sound of

because it so totally captured the feeling that none of this was quite real, "Gee, I'm first on the best seller list." We laughed. And laughed. And I thought of all this excitement going on 3,000 miles away, and Norman was the cause of it, but it didn't seem to have any relation to "Us."

TX Ex 2
Looking back on that day almost sixty years later, Mailer said, "It was a great shock." He had been hoping he would earn enough money from Naked and the Dead to write his next book, and now the novel was number one on the New York Times best seller list, where it stayed for eleven consecutive weeks. All told, it remained on the list for 62 weeks. "I knew I'd be a celebrity when I came back to America and I felt very funny towards it, totally unprepared," he said. "I'd always seen myself as an observer. And now I knew, realized, that I was going to be an actor. An actor on the American stage, so to speak. I don't mean I knew it all at once. But there were certainly intimations of that."

Shortly after leaving the army, Mailer had been told by a New York editor that no one was interested in war novels. Everyone was tired of the war. But by 1948, readers were eager to remember and explore the experience, and Mailer's novel, which looked at World War II from both the battlefields of the Pacific and the home front, was perfectly suited. "It was the luckiest timing of my career," he said later. Even so, he was concerned that the publicity surrounding the novel, and its huge sales, would alienate the readers of the leading literary journal in the United States, the Partisan Review. Success as a writer, he said, was like getting "caught in a riptide. Two waves coming in from different directions. You get more attention in one place and less in the other. The ego is on a jumping jack." He and Bea believed *PR*'s readers were mainly snobs, but he still wanted to see his name on its front cover.

Mike Last part of this paragraph is a bit vague.

But the largest drawback of fame was that it cut him off from real experience, as he called it, the kind he'd had in the army, experience that was thrust on you, as opposed to the kind one sought. "I used to feel that I didn't know anything because I got rich too soon," he said. "I used to feel sorry for myself." But after some years of demeaning his fame, he started to enjoy it. It was "an acquired appetite." He ^{agreed with} credited the Marquis de Sade for pointing out that "there is no pleasure greater than that obtained from a conquered repugnance." When he reached that point he wanted more and more of it, recognizing that being famous at an early age was a genuine, if unusual, experience. If he was unable to enjoy normal life, he now had "a sense of how... not tenuous, not fragile... how delicate, perhaps, is identity." ^{Success had brought on} He had been through an ^{ordinary} identity crisis and survived. ^{Before that he said} Earlier, "It was as if there was somebody named Norman Mailer, but to meet him people had to meet me first." Then, as his fame waxed and waned over the next decade, he saw that "I could now write about the identity of people who had a certain amount of power." Mailer's entire career can be seen as a series of studies of how power is gained, lost, regained or dwindled away, and the conflicted, intricate psyches of those who exercise it.

His literary career had a significant foreground ⁱⁿ in Brooklyn, Harvard and combat in the Philippines ⁱⁿ but it began officially, one might say, on that hot day in Nice. Before they opened the mail and saw the magnitude of the novel's reception, Barbara said, "was the last time Norman could feel he was himself and not Norman Mailer." He said that he "felt kind of blue" after reading the mail in Nice. When they returned to Paris a few days later, he told his sister, "I think the book may be better than I am." He had turned ²⁵ only a few months earlier.

(N)

(OK) (N)

Ordinary ?

Meaning his status as a best-selling writer?

Not so much those who exercise power as those who seek it, no?

(N)

(N)

his career? or is great subject?

⬇

(CN) Chapter 1

(CT) Long Branch and Brooklyn

(COT) Norman Mailer knew his grandparents came from northern climes, but he knew little about their lives in Lithuania, then part of Russia. The Mailers and the Schneiders lived in three towns, not more than 60 miles apart, in central and northeastern Lithuania: Panevezys, Anykscia and Utena. Unknown to each other in Russia, the two families emigrated at the end of the nineteenth century to escape economic hardship or persecution, or both, the Mailers settling in Johannesburg, South Africa, and the Schneiders in New Jersey. (N) (N)

(TX) Mailer's maternal grandfather, Hyman (Chaim) Jehuda Schneider, was a precocious child who and studied the Torah and Talmud from a very early age. Mailer's mother Fan said that he was "sent at the age of seven to the yeshiva in Wolozin [Volozhin] Russia, which was comparable to Columbia [University] in the U.S." Commonly referred to as "the Mother of Yeshivas," the Volozhin Yeshiva was the home of the *Misnagdim*, the opponents of the Hasidism, the rambunctious, anti-formalist movement which developed in the latter part of the eighteenth century. "My father," Fan wrote, "was a staunch follower of the *Misnagdim*. He felt the Hasidim were not so learned; they depended too much on the rabbi and his blessings." There is more than a slight irony in the fact that her son was fascinated by the mysticism of the Hasidim. In the early 1960s, he wrote six columns for *Commentary*, reflections on folk stories collected by Martin Buber that centered on the Hasidim's dialectic, which, Mailer said, "placed madness next to practicality, illumination side by side with duty, and arrogance in bed with humility." Early and late, Mailer gravitated to incompatibles. (N)

Born in 1859, Schneider was a rabbi by 16 and, at about the same age, married Ida Kamrass. They had six children, in order: Joseph, Rebecca (Beck), Jennie, a son who died at childbirth, Rose, and the youngest, Fanny or Fan. At the end of the century, the Jews in ~~The~~ Pale of Settlement (comprised of the bulk of Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus) were being driven abroad by double taxation and forced enlistments in the ~~Czar's~~ army. Parlous conditions from 1881 to 1914 forced over two million to emigrate. Sometime in early 1891, Schneider left for the ^{United States} U.S. with his half-sister Lena, his half-brother Morris, and his wife's youngest sister Minnie. Ida, pregnant with Fan, stayed behind. As Fan put it, her father wanted his children to "get an education and not worry about the Cossacks and muziks raiding a town and massacring the Jewish residents." The Schneiders were separated for three years. Ida, her 62-year old mother Leah Sacks and the five children arrived in New York in October 1894, sailing from Rotterdam on the S.S. Veendam.

When Hyman arrived in 1891, he was advised to set up a soda water and newspaper stand on the lower east side. He and Lena opened the stand at four a.m. and worked shifts until late at night. Irish gangs, operating with impunity, dominated the area and took what they wanted. Sixty years later, Mailer had an apartment not far from where his grandfather had once sold cigarettes. ~~During a party one night in the spring of 1951, some toughs busted in to his loft and during the ensuing fight, he was hit in the head with a hammer. Stubbornly, Mailer remained on the lower east side, but his grandfather moved on.~~ After six months, Schneider left the city and became a peddler in rural New Jersey. He also taught Hebrew to Jewish families in Belmar, before finally settling in the resort town of Long Branch, where, according to Fan, he was "induced" by the small local Jewish community to start a kosher grocery store.

In *The Naked and the Dead*, Mailer drew on his earliest memories for a description of the store run by Joey Goldstein's grandfather, a learned Jew who quotes the medieval Jewish poet and scholar Yehuda Halevi:

Inside there is a narrow marble counter and an aisle about two feet wide for the customers who stand on the eroded oil cloth. In the summer it is sticky, and the pitch comes off on one's shoes. On the counter are two glass jars with metal covers and a bent ladling spoon containing essence of cherry, essence of orange. (Coca-Cola is not yet in vogue.) Beside them is a tan moist cube of halvah on a block of wood. The flies are sluggish, and one has to prod them before they fly away.

The Schneider store catered to the Jewish population, which burgeoned each summer with the arrival of middle-class visitors and a few wealthy New Yorkers. Pre-occupied by his studies, Rabbi Schneider played a relatively small role in the store; the women and older girls did most of the work with the two younger girls helping after school. Only Rose and Fan were able to graduate from high school, Beck, starting at the age of 12, went to Manhattan to order kosher beef at the abattoirs on First Avenue, which was then shipped by rail to Long Branch. The family was nine in number, but there were regular guests—poorer cousins and “greenhorns” from Russia who stayed with the family until they were established. The Schneider home, Fan wrote, “was a sort of Traveler's Aid, ready to offer food and lodging to many a weary soul.”

Probably due to the fact that we had a grocery and meat market, there was always enough food in the house, but profits were small and my father was always sorry

for the poor so in extending them credit, he actually ruined his own. He had much faith in human beings and felt they would pay. But they couldn't pay out of empty pockets so when he finally would tell some of them that they would have to pay cash he decided to help them in other ways. If he waited on them, they were always sure of getting at least 5 ounces of butter for a $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. and 19 or 20 oz. of meat when they would ask for one pound. . . . his whole outlook on life was not based on a hard calculating plan in business whereby he could give his wife and children comfort and ease.

Along with recent arrivals from ^{others} The Pale, itinerant rabbis, cantors and maggids were put up for days at a time at their home, often staying until enough money could be collected for them to move on to the next town. Hyman was their informal counselor, an independent scholar who was glad to learn and teach. Over tea and sweets, he regaled the household with stories from the Talmud or read accounts of the life of his hero, Baruch Spinoza, a freethinking Portuguese Jew who was excommunicated by the orthodox Jewish community of Amsterdam. According to M^{iller}'s younger sister Barbara Wasserman, Schneider was also a freethinker and "absolutely open about his apostasy." During "my atheistic teenage years," Barbara said, "my mother and I argued about religion. She really didn't have a religious bone in her body, but she had the habits of long years of ritual, and she didn't approve of atheism, since it denied Judaism. So I would say, 'Well, what is God?' And she would answer, 'I believe what my father always said, that God is all around us and in everything.' I would shout, 'That's pantheism, you're a pantheist, and Spinoza was excommunicated for that.' Her huffy answer was, 'You can call me anything you want — I'm still a Jew.'"

Rabbi Schneider's intellectual ability is an article of faith in the Mailer family. Fan's husband, Barney, said the source of his son's talent was "his maternal grandfather. A Talmudic scholar." Fan chimed in, saying, "three of his grandsons went to Harvard." Marjorie "Osie" Radin, the eldest of Mailer's American cousins, who was 19 when the Rabbi died, said, "[T]hat's where all the talent and brains came from." In her memoir, Barbara answers the question, "Who was Grandpa?"

Certainly, in one view, the archetype of the timid Jew, the one who whispers in front of the firing squad, "Don't make waves." But also the saintly, kindly man, the revered intellectual, brave enough to come to a foreign land and work at menial entrepreneurship, too afraid of violence to stay in New York (a gang of thugs once overturned his peddler's cart), but too proud to be a rabbi who takes orders from others, orthodox in his rituals, but on the edge of apostasy in thought.

Almost from the beginning, the Schneiders worked in the Long Branch's chief industry, tourism. The town was first established as a resort in the early part of the nineteenth century. Mrs. Lincoln raised the resort's profile sharply when she spent ten days there in August of 1861. The presence of President Grant and his family for a few months every year from 1869 to 1884 made Long Branch more popular than Saratoga Springs or Newport. In the last half of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, Long Branch had two major attractions: a magnificent beachfront and gambling. When horseracing and wagering were introduced at Monmouth Park in 1870, the seasonal population surged. Col. James "Jubilee Jim" Fiske and his friend Jay Gould were there as both gamblers and developers, joined by Diamond Jim Brady, Lillian Russell, Lili Langtry, Horace Greely, Henry Ward Beecher and a brace of Civil War generals, including Phil

Sheridan. Representing the wealthy class were the Biddles, Drexels, Wideners and Lorillards; the Vanderbilts alternated between "The Branch" and Newport. Six presidents, in addition to Grant, came to escape the summer miasmas of the capital. On September 1, 1916, Woodrow Wilson accepted the Democratic nomination for President in Long Branch and addressed a crowd of supporters from the porch of the palatial summer White House, "Shadow Lawn." Far remembered "walking quietly a distance behind" the President and "his beautiful wife" as they strolled on the Long Branch boardwalk in the summer of 1916, not a policeman in sight.

(Tx) In 1913 the Schneiders established a boarding house with 60 rooms in three adjacent houses on Morris Avenue, naming it the Maple Hotel and Cottages. Beck and her husband, Louis Shapiro, partnered with her parents in the operation of the Maple for two years before it burned to the ground in the winter of 1915, one of many such fires in Long Branch. The family remained in the hotel business, however, especially since it was easy to provide kosher food from the store to the guests. From 1916 to 1918, again with Beck and her husband, they leased the Scarboro Hotel on Ocean Avenue, built in 1882 and catering to an almost exclusively Jewish clientele. Beck and Louis later bought the hotel, expanded it and added a coat of white stucco; eventually it became the largest hotel (200 rooms) in Long Branch and was a source of family pride until it too burned down in 1941.

Although the Schneider girls worked 12-hour days in the family business, they had a passionate interest in culture. Rose took piano lessons from several teachers. Jennie, the prettiest of the daughters, was the finest pianist and entertained visitors with such stirring numbers as "The Charge of the Uhlans." The family, dressed in best clothes, also took Sunday strolls along Ocean Avenue and relished their father's readings and the Talmudic discussions that he led. At

age 12 Fan read *Anna Karenina* (her son's favorite novel) and, later in high school, Dickens and George Eliot. On Saturday nights, they went to the movies and, in the summers, saw Broadway try-out plays and the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas at Riverside Park.

By the summer of 1919, Fan ~~was tired of working in the family store with Joe, as well as helping in the various summer hotels that the family leased.~~ A family agreement was reached: Joe and his family would take over the store after the season and Fan would go full-time into the hotel business with her parents. She and her father went to Lakewood, New Jersey in October of 1919 to lease a place as a winter resort. The 15-bedroom house was called Lakeview Lodge, although Fan noted bluntly, "I assure you there was no view." New visitors were sought by placing ads in the New York Yiddish newspaper, the *Tageblatt*.

One of the ads was read by a 28-year-old veteran of World War I, Isaac Barnett Mailer. Barney, as he was generally known, had studied accounting at Transvaal University in Johannesburg and then joined the South African Army. Stationed in London from 1917 to 1919, he was mustered out in the summer of 1919 and decided to travel to the U.S. rather than return home. His parents, Benjamin and Celia Mailer, had lived in Johannesburg since emigrating from Lithuania in 1900, when Barney, the second of eleven surviving children, was nine. The Mailers had established themselves solidly there, operating various businesses. One son, Louis, became wealthy in stock trading. Barney's older sister Ann married an entrepreneur, David Kessler, who had made a fortune early in life in various businesses, including theatrical production. The Kesslers came to the U.S. before the War and Dave soon created the Sphinx Candy

Manufacturing Company. Its chief glory was the chocolate-covered cherry, which made Dave an even richer man. Barney arrived from Liverpool on the White Star liner, S.S. Baltic, in November 1919 ^{his sister Anne and her husband, David} and moved in with the Kesslers, who were then living in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn.

The favorite child of his mother, Barney was a compulsive gambler whose debts had caused his family considerable anguish. According to Barbara, the family finally gave her father "an ultimatum: go in the army or we will wash our hands of you." ^{or 10 War I} WWI forced Barney to give up or at least curtail his betting in London; the ^{United States} U.S. was to be where he redeemed himself. The plan was simple: live with Anne and Dave ^{(who were childless) he found} until a professional position and a wife were found, and then settle down. Shortly after Barney's arrival, Anne caught the flu at the tail end of the pandemic of 1918-19. ^{Lakeview} Reservations were made at Fairview Lodge for her recuperation and in January 1920, Barney and the Kesslers took the train to Lakewood. Fan recounts the various circumstances of their first meeting three separate times in her memoir, written at the request of her son. ^{Lakeview on p. 15}

The rug was rolled back, so we could have dancing Saturday night. Sunday afternoon we all took a walk to the Lake, and Monday morning just before leaving, ^{Barney} Dad and I found we were all alone in the living room. We were both shy, there was a pack of playing cards on the table and Dad said, "Let me show you some card tricks." I thought he was very nice, polite and really handsome.

Barney Mailer was also a fashion plate. His dress, if somewhat conservative, was tasteful. He wore pearl-grey ^a spats, carried gloves, an umbrella or cane and wore a felt hat. In his

photographs, he seems always to be dressed in a three-piece suit. His manners were refined, his accent intriguing and his handwriting spidery and graceful. Unlike his son, whose unruly hair became a trademark, Barney was always neatly coiffed. He had a strong, slightly cleft chin and good features, and looked a bit like Donald Rumsfeld, his son said. With his round spectacles, he appeared slightly owlsh. He did not look uneasy holding a martini/or a deck of cards. Women found him attractive and he reciprocated; he had a roving eye. Mailer used words like "dapper," "fussy" and "punctilious" to describe his father; he also called him "an elegant, impoverished figure out of Chekov," who "was very English as only a South African can be."

Barney and Fan immediately struck up a correspondence. Barney wrote the first letter, as propriety dictated. His letters are courtly, self-conscious and somewhat reserved; Fan's are warmer, bolder; her infatuation was obvious. In June 1920, she told him that she loved him and he replied that she was too young to make this sort of statement. Without revealing his gambling addiction, he warned her of it obliquely, writing that she didn't really know who he was. Fan was ready to take the next step; Barney was not ready. But in September he arranged for a visit to Long Branch. It was during this visit or shortly afterwards that Barney brought up his vice. Mailer recalled his mother telling him the story: "Before they were married, he said to her, 'I gamble.' 'Oh,' she said, 'well, you won't gamble after we're married, I'm sure.' And he said, 'I guess not.'" When Barney met the extended family at the Phelando Hotel, they were quite impressed with him, although his Beau Brummell appearance and British accent puzzled them slightly. "I think it always pleased him," Barbara wrote, "that he wasn't readily taken for Jewish." He had long ceased using his Jewish name, Yitzhak Benjamin, and in New York

gambling circles his code name was "I.B. from Brooklyn," as his son learned from his bookie decades later. (N)

Before Barney left in October 1920 for Milwaukee and a new accounting job with a large firm, ^{he and Fan} they were unofficially engaged. The following spring, he was back in New York and the engagement became official. Barney found a job in the city, commuting from Long Branch, where they lived temporarily with her parents. Decades later, after Barney had died, she said that he "seemed to pick up gambling friends in New York. I was so naïve about gambling, I couldn't understand why anyone would want to lose hard earned money, money that was needed for daily life, money that furnished freedom to give one hope and ambition to climb the ladder of success." But as a young woman (but not as young as she pretended), Fan was elated for having made "a very favorable match," as she described it, with a professional man. They were married by two rabbis on February 14, 1922 in Manhattan, with ^{a hundred} 100 guests in attendance. After a week in Atlantic City, they returned to Long Branch. Barbara noted in her memoir, "Dad once confided to Norman that of all the women he'd known, Mother was the best." By the beginning of May, Fan was pregnant.

Each had a secret: Barney gambled and Fan lied about her age. Sometime after they were out of school and looking for husbands, Fan and her sisters lowered their ages. Prompted by the desire, if not the necessity, to find a suitable husband, they availed themselves of the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity afforded to immigrants from faraway places. Fully aware that birth records in Russia were inaccessible, they felt secure in erasing a few years. Fan went so far as to claim in her memoir that she and Rose were born in this country. According to Barbara, Fan's likely birth (N)

date is December 1891. She told Barney that she had been born in 1901. He probably never knew her true age.

After Fan's death in 1985, Barbara spent countless days researching census, immigration records and ship arrival dates to establish Fan's age. She finally assembled a chain of fact and surmise that substantiated the true ages of the Schneider siblings. "They all lied," she concluded. When Fan was alive, Barbara attempted to trip Fan up by asking casual questions such as "How old were you when Beck got married?" Fan parried every probe. Mailer followed his sister's research with interest and was "delighted" with Fan's deception; he felt that Fan must be hiding "some awful secret." His method was to beguile the truth from her. Years later he enjoyed recreating his catechetical dialogues with Fan:

Mother, you know I love you greatly.

Yes, son, I know you do and I love you the same.

And you know that I would do anything in the world for you.

Of course, I know you would.

And you would do the same for me?

Yes, son, anything.

Good, what year you were born?

Just keep talking.

→ Fan gave a number of birth years, but never relented on her fundamental story that she was several years younger than Barney (born January 1891), even long after he died. Born within months of him, she outlived him by almost 13 years. Her gravestone and the family Bible record the false dates.

Fan's deception was a ~~carpe diem~~ fib, one common in that era. On the other hand, Barney's secret compulsion, one he clung to his entire life, was deeply hurtful. His gambling destroyed Fan's blithe hopes for a carefree life, forced her to become the chief breadwinner, and caused severe tensions with the Kesslers. Mailer said that "the Kesslers felt guilty. They knew that they hadn't really leveled; they had not warned her off. They were happy to get him married to her." In retrospect, the only member of his family who was not completely appalled by Barney's gambling was his son. In 1944, while undergoing basic training, Mailer ended a letter to his father, as follows: "As time goes by, I feel more and more like you, more and more your son. On outward things we are very different, but I think I understand and sympathize with you, better than any person I know."

He concluded that he was "lucky that my parents are so different, that I have had such a range of personality to draw on." Shortly after his mother died, he described his parents. "My mother," he said,

was, if you will, the motor in the family, and without her I don't know what would have happened to us. My mother had an iron heart. My mother was not unlike many other devoted, loving Jewish mothers. She had circles of loyalty. The first loyalty was her children. The second was her sisters, her family. The third

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loyalty was her husband. The fourth her cousins, the fifth, neighbors she'd known for 20 years. It was a nuclear family. And my mother was the center of it and my father was one of the electrons. I must say he was a most dapper electron. And women adored him because he had the gift of speaking to each woman as if she was the most important woman he'd ever spoken to. And he didn't fake it. He adored women.

In the early evening of January 30, 1923⁵, Fan felt labor pains and was admitted to Monmouth Memorial Hospital. Dr. Slocum, the Schneider family physician, was summoned. A son was born at 7:04 a.m. on January 31, 1923⁵ after Fan had been in labor for twelve hours. It was a difficult, breach birth. The baby's Hebrew name, Nachum Melech, came from his grandmother Mailer's brother, Nachum Melech Shapiro, who arrived in the U.S. in 1900. Melech means king in Hebrew, but his birth certificate says "Norman Kingsley Mailer." Because Fan had lost her American citizenship when she married Barney, and he had not yet applied for citizenship, their son was legally a British citizen at birth. He chuckled when he learned of this circumstance many years later from his sister, joking that it might allow him to become "Sir Norman." His parents became citizens in 1926.

The Schneiders began to prosper in the hotel business during the boom year summers of 1920-23. They purchased three large "cottages" on Ocean Avenue. The complex, overlooking the beach, was named "Kingsley Court" in honor of Norman. This success encouraged Fan and Barney to try their hand at what was now a burgeoning family business. Barney was still working in an accounting position in New York, but in 1924 he and Fan rented Kingsley Court

check this
I'm not
sure you
are right.

Not sure
about
this
either
even if
both
parents
got not
citizens

from her parents for \$4,000 and ^{operated} conducted it as a small hotel. They did the same the following summer and made a good profit.

^{Anne} Norman was the darling of the clan, catered to by his parents, grandparents, three aunts, and three older female cousins, Osie, Adele and Sylvia, plus Dave and Anne Kessler, who visited often. One summer day in 1925 when Norman was two ^{and a half} and a half, Adele remembered, he locked himself in the bathroom and called out the third-floor window, "Goodbye forever." Fan went into hysterics and called the fire department, but he let himself out before the firemen came. During the summers of the mid-1920s, he often left home in a huff. Adele said, "He'd get angry; he'd leave a note for his mother, 'Goodbye forever,' and he'd walk around the block. His temper would abate and he'd come back." These tantrums are the first recorded instances of Mailer's life-long and pronounced impetuosity, and his impulse to dramatize.

Nearly every year one or another member of the family leased a new hotel, trying to find the right combination of variables for a windfall season. But profits were meager and Fan got discouraged. She ^{became} got pregnant in the summer of 1926 and by the end of the season was drained. "I had no heart for the hotel business," she wrote, "It was just devouring all my strength for nothing." The birth of Barbara Jane on April 6, 1927 increased the load, as did her aging parents, whose health was declining rapidly. The stress of running a busy resort hotel and taking care of her small children made Fan "very, very upset," according to Barbara. "Her parents were dying, and she realized my father was a gambler; she went to her doctor and told him, 'I think I'm going to have a nervous breakdown.'" ^{in 1927} Dr. Slocum said, "Fanny, there's nothing I can do for you.

You're going to have to pull yourself together.' My mother said, 'So I pulled myself together.'" Fan's mother died on May 29, 1928, at the age of 70. Shortly afterwards, when Barbara was 18

months old, and her brother five and a half, the Mailers moved to Brooklyn, while rabbi Schneider moved in with his son Joe. In late November, the beloved patriarch died of heart disease and was eulogized at the synagogue he had helped to found.

The Mailers settled on Cortelyou Road, a few blocks from Flatbush Avenue. Norman, not yet six, began school in September at P.S. 181, a few blocks from their four-room apartment. Barney left early for work in Manhattan and Fan walked Norman the half mile through the lower middle-class Jewish neighborhood to school, leaving Barbara with the nurse, Agnes. As always, Fan was anxious about the goyim many second-generation Irish and Italians lived nearby. Mailer completed grades one through four at P.S. 181 and his grades were uniformly excellent. His mother was the leader of a tribe of women who, throughout his childhood, coddled and praised him, catered to his whims and encouraged his individuality. His cousin Adele remembered that for Fan, "it was always Norman." Barbara quickly recognized his preeminence but never showed any animosity or jealousy. There were no gaps in the circle of female affection surrounding the young prince.

With the passing of her parents, Fan and Barney began living a different kind of life. They gave up observance of Jewish dietary laws requiring different sets of dishes and cutlery for meat and milk products. Mailer recalled that his mother was not deeply religious. "She was observant," he said. "There's a difference." Barney, he continued, "was pro-forma observant." Barbara remembers her mother lighting the candles on the eve of the Sabbath. "I still have the image of Mother, her back to me, lighting the candles that sat on the antique cabinet and

whispering a prayer in Hebrew. It was one more element in that adult world which baffled but protected me." Her brother remembered his mother telling him that the Shekinah, a divine female embodiment of the spiritual, passed over the candles when they were lit. Often, he said, Fan had tears in her eyes.

When he was seven or eight, with Fan's encouragement, he began writing stories. One of the earliest surviving pieces, in six chapters of ^{three to four hundred} 300-400 words each, is "The Adventures of Bob and Paul," ^{the story of} In each chapter, the twin brothers ^{who survive perilous adventures} take a trip, always sanctioned by their father, a mine owner. The action consists of threats and attacks made by ghosts or invisible giants; in one episode they are swallowed by a whale. The attacks are often preceded by a voice that chants, "You shall die, you shall die." Plucky, sure-footed lads, they tend to land on their feet when, invariably, the floor gives way or they fall through a trap door. Another notable piece among the early juvenilia is a three-page, how-to booklet, "Boxing Lessons." It consists of a series of tips and observations about Mailer's favorite sport, boxing. "When I land," it begins, "every ounce of my weight goes into the punch. The timing of it I get by humming a tune and crashing in when I see an opening." Boxing was a sport that he engaged in and wrote about for several decades, producing what are, arguably, ^{some of} the finest boxing narratives ^{ever} written by an American. (N)

The culmination, and the conclusion, of Mailer's early writing career came early. During the winter of 1933-34, he finished reading the Princess of Mars books of Edgar Rice Burroughs and also became a devoted fan of the Buck Rogers Show on the radio. Encouraged by his mother, he wrote a 35,000-word novel, "The Martian Invasion, A Story in Two Parts," and dedicated it to "My mother, who always wanted me to write a good story." "This novel filled two and half paper notebooks," he recalled. "You know the type, about 7 x 10. They had shiny blue (N)

covers, and they were, oh, only ten cents in those days, or a nickel. They ran to perhaps 100 pages each and I used to write on both sides. The novel was written in a disciplined spurt during the summer of 1934 at one of the family's hotels in Long Branch. His main characters, Capt. Bob Porter and Private Ben Stein, fly to Mars with a fleet of rocket ships. Their science officer, Dr. Hoor (a name borrowed from a Buck Rogers' sidekick, Dr. Huer), betrays them and they are imprisoned by sadistic Martians. The Martian leader, a gloating Jabba-the-Hut figure, who speaks with a French accent, promises them "a slow long drawn out death" by suffocation, which they adroitly evade, blasting to freedom with their electric pistols. The Martian warlord is the first personification of power lust in a long line of such antagonists in his work, Mailer's bottomless fascination with war, violence and suffering has its foundations in this adventure novel.

Mailer noted on his application to Harvard that as a boy, encouraged by Fan and his aunts and cousins, he "used to write stories at the 'drop-of-a-hat,'" but he also engaged in the usual activities of stickball, marbles and roller skating. In the late fall of 1932, the family moved a couple of miles north to the mainly Jewish neighborhood of Crown Heights, where Norman finished fifth grade at P.S. 161. They lived in a four-story, ornamental brick apartment building at the corner of Albany and Crown Streets. Mailer described the neighborhood as "a quiet section of two-family houses and trees, a mile from Ebbets Field and Prospect Park." He recalled that "[i]n those days there was so little traffic we used to play touch football and roller hockey in the streets." The houses had "small lawns in front, so small that when you were playing roller hockey, if you bodychecked somebody hard they'd go flying across the sidewalk, and you had to

go scrambling up a lawn that was banked. If that ever happened to you you'd come out with fire in your eyes and your skates full of dirt."

Roller hockey was as physical as the somewhat delicate young Mailer ever got. Late in life, he told Christopher Hitchens that Jews "had to make certain basic distinctions very early in life. Would you fight if someone called you a dirty Jew, or wouldn't you?" In the interview's context, his question is rhetorical and unanswered, but other statements make it clear that the young Mailer shied away from violence. "I was a physical coward as a child," he said in 1959, a statement supported by the recollections of childhood chums who said Mailer never got into fistfights and stayed close to home. One of them, Arnold Epstein, said, "He seemed to be on a shorter leash, more obedient, kind of quiet." Epstein added that Mailer's family "was very proper." More testimony comes from Aaron Goldman, a summer chum of Mailer's older cousin, ^{Barbara} Cy, Beck's son. He remembers Mailer during the summers of the early 1930s as a tearful, bookish momma's boy who watched Cy play baseball and tennis in the recreation area behind the Scarboro Hotel. While the Crown Heights neighborhood was not particularly rough, it was not without hazard, as Mailer explained in 1980. "I grew up in a world where really I was cultivated. I was cultivated in the sense that my mother and father treated my sister and myself as very important people. We were the center of their universe and so it was the outside world that was difficult. You know, go out in the street and you know if you didn't have friends you get beaten up. It was as simple as that." And so I was always terribly alert to the outside world. I took the inside world for granted. And I was free to indulge myself too, to change from one personality to another. ^{Barbara} Barbara confirms the affirmation she and her brother felt: "Not only did we know that we were expected to be better and smarter than everyone else, we pretty much

(N)

(N)

(N)

(N)

(N)

end
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line
Q?

thought we were." Fan was insistent on her children's exceptionalism, but the unintended consequence was that ^{Mailer}he had, as he later explained, "an ego that was lopsided." (N)

The Crown Street apartment was a bastion where Mailer was spoiled and protected. Fan kept out most of the neighborhood boys, but another kind of trouble came home regularly with Barney. On rare occasions he would win at cards or on horse races. But more often, he would run up a debt with the bookies and try to win it back. When this failed, he would write a string of bad checks or embezzle from his employer (General Motors, for example) in an effort to recoup his losses. The crises accelerated when Barney lost his job and the debts—^{\$5,000 to \$10,000}five to ten thousand dollars, ^{during}vast sums in The Depression—^msoared. The bookies would begin calling on the telephone and Fan would become frantic. Invariably, the Kesslers would be summoned. "I've got criminal blood in me," Mailer said later, adding that his father "would have gone to jail if it hadn't been for my uncle, who would always bail him out and my father knew it." He first became aware of Barney's gambling because of his parents' "terrible fights." A day or so after a bad one, "Dave would come over with Anne and Anne would be crying. Everybody was stiff and tense all through the meal. Barbara and myself would be packed off to bed after dinner. I'd lie awake for hours listening to them argue." Barney was cool in these clinches, Mailer said, and it was a bit of a comedy, but "a comedy on the edge of a cliff. Dave would get apoplectic. Dave died of asthma, finally, and I think my father was one of the people who gave it to him because Dave would blow gaskets in his brain to keep from strangling my father." When Dave would verbally assault his brother-in-law, Barney would reply in his clipped British accent, "'I don't know Dave how you can speak to me in that fashion.' At which point Dave's asthma would deepen."

Norman's

After one particularly bad confrontation just before his Bar Mitzvah in February 1936, a distraught Fan contemplated leaving Barney and confided in her son. He said, "How can you do that to us, when we're kids?" Fan then gave him a blunt report of the extent of Barney's gambling. "I knew my father was an irresponsible gambler," Mailer said. "I always heard it from her side, never from his." But Fan never spoke again of a divorce because, Mailer said, it "went against every tradition in her. In those days, you got married and took what you got and didn't complain. To her, a divorced woman was a whore."

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She had a great anger at my father—it was almost implacable—for not being a provider. But at the same time, she loved him in her way. After that one attempt, she gave it up. If the children didn't want it, then she was not about to do it against our will. Years later, I used to think, "Gee, maybe I did her a terrible injustice and cut off her life and her possibilities." On the other hand, when I think of a stepfather and how it would have torn her. I didn't brood about it except for those awful nights which went on until I went away to college; those dreadful nights when my uncle came to the door and I could see by his face: "Uh-oh, one of those nights."

TX

At some point, he told his sister that Barney was a gambler. She "resented it more. And so she was cool toward him; she stayed cool and angry towards him. Which broke his heart. He adored her." Barbara was "closer to my mother," he said. "It was that feminist business: my mother was working so hard and this man's not responsible." From the mid-1930s on, Fan ran a small oil service and delivery firm, the Sunlight Oil Corporation, which Dave Kessler had set up, partly to provide oil to his candy company and partly to help out the Mailers. Initially, Barney

worked there, but after he began tipping the till, he was out and Fan took over entirely, working with one driver. "She really lived and breathed for that business," Mailer said, taking late night calls from customers with broken furnaces and empty tanks while earning a quarter of a cent per gallon profit.

Barbara explained that her mother's hard work and financial anxiety, combined with her loathing of Barney's addiction to games of chance "leached the complexities out of her and made her monolithic." No surprise that she referred to herself, as did her children, as the Rock of Gibraltar, "deep and large, and all there to see. The metaphor for Dad, on the other hand, could be a tidal pool—ⁱⁿ charming on the surface, and teeming with a secret life in the shallows beneath." Barney gambled when he could and worked when he could, but usually lost his bets and was rarely employed. "One of my recollections in the depth of the Depression," Mailer recalled, "is my father coming home after looking for work all day and Barbara and myself running to the door and saying, 'Did you get a job today, Dad?' And he sadly shaking his head no. How sad we all were about that. 'Brother, Can You Spare a Dime' is one of my favorite songs."

One of the Mailer's daughters, Betsy, learned of her grandfather's gambling when she was a young girl, and saw its effect on her grandmother: "It seemed like she carried this heavy mantle, the burden of the consequences of what he had done. It was in her very being, her demeanor, in her aura. It just wasn't something she could shake, and it just pulled her down. She didn't talk about it, because she had that pride and the sense of dignity, and the sense of the reputation of the family. But one could sense the heaviness all the time."

In addition to his parent's precarious financial situation and the possibility of a divorce, he was buffeted by a cross-hatch of pressures. On the one hand, there was his mother's unshakable belief in his talents, buttressed by the approval of his tight-knit extended family, with Anne and Dave acting as a second set of parents. He was also enthralled by the gangster films of the 1930s (especially the brash energies of James Cagney), and the romantic novels of Raphael Sabatini and James Farnol, which he had begun to devour. On the other side of the ledger were his fear of the Irish toughs a few blocks outside the Jewish cocoon and a sharp sense of his puny physicality ("We also had a sense," he remarked decades later, "of not being as tough as the Irish"). Vying for primacy with Fan in defining his emerging ego was his father's "prodigious double life," as he later described it, a life he pondered with awe. Nine months before he died, he told a friend about Barney's influence: "Everything that is adventurous in me came from him." These opposed pressures opened a fissure in the adolescent Mailer's personality that widened as time passed until it became a gaping ~~an adamant~~ divide.

"Very intense" is how his sister remembers him as a boy; their older cousin Osie, she said, called him "Desperate Ambrose," after the comic strip character. His friend Robert F. Lucid compared the young Mailer to Alexander Portnoy, "the most fabulous kid who ever lived," but one who had been given a "tremendous sense of mission." Mailer put it this way: "I'd been frightened in the womb by my mother's dream of having a little Einstein in her belly." His sister recalls that his family regularly referred to him as a genius from the time he took the Stanford-Binet IQ exam in third grade. He excelled in all his classes and even skipped the latter halves of grades seven and eight. Fan's hopes were confirmed when, according to Barbara's friend Rhoda

Lazare, the principal announced at his eighth-grade graduation that Norman Mailer had an IQ of 170, the highest ever recorded at P.S. 161.

If on the lip of puberty his inner life was a narcissistic moil, his pursuits were ordinary. After school, he spent most of his time studying, attending Hebrew School (through eighth grade), reading, playing stickball and Monopoly, building model airplanes and fiddling with his chemistry set. He also went to movies at Loew's Kameo and the Savoy on Eastern Parkway, often bringing his sister along. ^{old word choice} His preference was for the films of tough guys—Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, John Garfield and Humphrey Bogart. ^{experimenting} He often said that he felt he knew Bogart as well as a favorite uncle. ^{see gangster} Summers, of course were spent in Long Branch, where he observed the feats of his cousin Cy, eight years his senior. ^{mystery mp 30}

I worshipped him (with enormous funds of love and envy) because he was a hero. He was one of the few people I've ever known who had a happy look on his face when he came to bat in the late innings with men on base, his side behind, and the need for a homer prominent in everyone's head. Indeed he had his smile because it was slightly better than even money he was going to hit that homer. In fact, he would. This is not hyperbole. If I saw him in a hundred baseball games, there must have been fifty late-inning spots of exactly the sort I describe: he probably hit thirty-six homers out of fifty. ^{Humphrey} These were Depression years. Much gloom abounded in everyone, but he was the bright spot.

Pamela
 Cy remained Mailer's hero (later becoming his lawyer) and one of his most important role models. His cousin's string of victories on the playing fields contrasted glaringly with his father's ~~endless~~ run of defeats at the poker table.

TX In a memoir written just before he died, Barbara described her brother as generous, encouraging and always interesting. "He loved to teach," she said, and often recommended books to her. She remembers that in high school he got a book that diagrammed the fox trot and they practiced together. "I learned to dance," she said. "I'm afraid he did not." Mailer recalled going with his father, who cared little for baseball, to see the Dodgers play when a doubleheader cost fifty-five cents. ~~The Brooklyn home team was locked in the cellar in the mid and late 1930s. His sympathy for the underdog was reinforced by their poor showing before Leo Durocher took over as manager and led them to a pennant in 1941.~~ Mailer was not a recluse, but as a friend recalled, he did not hang around much at the candy store on the corner of Crown Street and Kingston Avenue with the other boys. By the time of his Bar Mitzvah in February 1936 at the Temple Shaari Zedek in Brooklyn, Fan had long since transferred her hopes from Barney to her brilliant son. She guarded him like a mother hawk.

Coached by his Hebrew teacher, who had Leftist sympathies, Mailer wrote, memorized ^{five-hundred =} and delivered a 500-word Bar Mitzvah speech that was, with two exceptions, conventional. He began by thanking his family, citing the commandments and stating his joy at becoming "a member of the people of Israel." He lauded some great Jews: ^{last} Moses Maimonides, Albert Einstein and Baruch Spinoza and Karl Marx. Naming these two ^{last} a freethinking ex-communicant and an atheist radical ^{last} raised a few eyebrows and "the rabbi looked very pale" after his speech, Mailer remembered. ~~The Spinoza reference is a reflection of Rabbi Schneider's~~

reverence for the philosopher; the salute to Marx came from his radical Hebrew teacher. Fan's fears are reflected in the second notable remark in his speech: "Yes, my friends! From now on I become a Jew, but not a MAYOFIS JEW, with a bent back to receive innocently the inhuman Nazis. I become a Jew to uphold the ideals and strengths of Judaism, and the rights of my country." In an interview he gave in connection with his final novel about Hitler's youth, *A Castle in the Forest* (2007), Mailer remembered his mother's warnings about the Nazis from three-quarters of a century earlier.

Hitler has been in my mind since I was nine years old. By 1932, my mother was already sensitive, and intensely so, to the dangers he presented. After Hitler came to power in 1933, everything that happened in Nazi Germany used to cause my mother pain. It was as if she knew in advance what was going to occur. She'd grown up with the knowledge of the anti-Semitism her father had had to face in Lithuania. Then, as a child going to school in Long Branch, New Jersey, kids on the street would call her "Christ killer"—no surprise, then, if Hitler was immensely real to her.

His bar mitzvah speech, including the reference to the Nazis, pleased the family, most of whom had come up from Long Branch despite a storm that left more than a foot of snow. Millionaire Uncle Louis in South Africa sent a \$500 gift, which enabled Fan to put out a fine buffet at 555 Crown Street after the ceremony. Thirty-five years later, she remembered everything purchased with this largesse: a sofa, chairs and end tables, new clothes for everyone, "gefilte fish, taglach, stuffed prunes and apricots, a turkey, corned beef, a big cake." But Barney's secret life again intruded. His bookie sent the gift of a watch. Fan didn't hesitate to

reply: "I phoned his home, his wife answered. I did not spare either of them, I cursed him out of existence. She begged me not to say those things, that her husband had a weak heart, so I followed it up by saying he could drop dead that minute and I hung up." Fan took no prisoners.

Less is known of Mailer's high school years than any other period of his life. He had

stopped writing stories the year before he entered and wrote few letters before going away to college. We do know that like most of the Crown Heights boys, he took the Tompkins Avenue trolley to Boys High in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, or walked to save a nickel.

We also know that because he had skipped a primary school grade, he was one of the youngest boys in his class, entering his freshman year five months before he was 13. He later recalled,

"I felt straddled between my friends who were my age at home and were two years behind me at school. So I didn't feel I belonged particularly in one life or another." His interest in his

chemistry set and sports waned, but his passion for model airplanes, some with tiny gasoline engines, burgeoned during his high school years, 1935-39. He was a devoted member of the

Aviation Club in high school and his first piece in print is "Model Airplanes," appearing in a mimeographed school publication, *Physical Scientist*, in December 1938, when he was a senior.

Occasionally, on weekends, his parents would drive him out to the open fields in Canarsie where he could launch his fragile creations. The largest of these, which took him six months to build,

had an amazing six-foot wingspread. "When launched," he recalled, "it soared briefly, but then its wings suddenly folded up like an umbrella." The event is emblematic of his unsettled

sensibility in adolescence.

This last sentence seems to have a right of such an ordinary event.

seldom
 M^Tailer never wrote about his childhood. In 2004, he said that he had avoided writing

about Long Branch and Brooklyn because "too many crystals are there" and "you don't want to write about the material *T...* [Preserve it because it's endlessly fruitful." Crystals, as he explained several times, are memories of wrenching or exhilarating experiences, epiphanies in one's past that, properly considered, are illuminating. When a crystal is aligned just so, it casts an imaginative beam that clarifies a new experience, acting as a kind of emotional spectrometer.

One of the few crystals that he ever discussed occurred in the early 1960s when he was breaking up with his third wife, Jeanne Campbell. After a night of solitary barhopping in Brooklyn, he went to an all-night diner and ordered coffee and a donut. When he finished a voice told him to leave without paying. "I think it's one of the very few times I felt God was speaking to me," although he concedes it might have been a malign influence. "I wanted to be a wild man, but I couldn't even steal a cup of coffee." The petty theft, God told him, would irrigate his priggishness. He walked out without paying. We can only speculate on his childhood crystals, but given the instances of childhood fear and timidity already noted, it seems quite possible that he was referring to moments of ignominious humiliation. Late in life, he said, "I don't feel joy" going back to the old streets in Brooklyn."

Mailer was an outstanding student at Boys High, graduating near the top of his 650th member class. His grades were nearly as high as of those of valedictorian Martin Lubin, a boy he knew slightly and later roomed with at Harvard. But Mailer's lack of involvement in athletics and student government—indeed, his lack of involvement in any school activity except for the Aviation Club—left him out of the running. Overall, his best grades were in math and science (a 99.5 in algebra and a 99 in Chemistry), but his English, French and history grades were only a

You have a good memory of it

I don't see the connection between the diner incident and childhood. By the early 1960s Mailer was already had some wild experiences.

for valedictorian

few points lower. His lowest academic grade was in drawing, an 80; his grades in physical training were dismal. Beatrice Silverman, his first wife, said he had trouble vaulting over the horse in gym class. His report cards gained plaudits at home, especially the math and science grades, but not in the neighborhood, where he was just another skinny kid. "In Brooklyn I was always a little ashamed of being smart," he said. "Somehow you weren't manly if you were smart." He did have some success with the opposite sex, however. Barbara's friend Rhoda had a crush on him and his girlfriend, Phyllis Bradman, according to his sister, was the prettiest girl in the neighborhood, although they never got beyond kissing and light petting. The summer before he died, he remembered his situation.

I was 13; it was 1936. The New Deal was on; a great deal was happening. But we, in Brooklyn, in my end of Brooklyn, weren't thinking about anything but sex. We wanted to get laid. We wanted to muzzle a girl as they called it, and put our hands on their breasts. We wanted to be able to neck with them. And none of us were. The girls were nice Jewish girls who were loathe^d and we were inhibited^d—the Jews were very inhibited about sex [J./J./J.] And I remember that in all those years of adolescence, I was absolutely focused on girls and pornography. There used to be little magazines like *Spicy Detective* in those days, where the women had huge tits poking through gossamer scraps of torn blouse. And that was a huge turn-on.

One scheme dreamed up by Mailer and two other boys, Arnold Epstein and another friend, Harold Kiesel, was to form a musical trio and get a summer job at a Catskills resort where they might seduce some Jewish women. He convinced his parents to buy him a clarinet; Kiesel played the trumpet and Epstein the drums. On afternoons after school, they practiced at the

apartment of Epstein, who remembered their sessions: "I could keep beat with anything. But Kiesel and Norman had to get tunes out of their instruments, and I think they were equally bad. We'd laugh and giggle and fall on the floor." The project soon collapsed. Mailer never learned to play an instrument and had trouble carrying a tune. He remembered going to a few dances in high school, but was "a wallflower . . . a terrible dancer, very stiff-legged." At the Scarborough Hotel one summer there was a flirtation with a pretty girl named Bunny Schwab, but nothing sexual came of it. Decades later, he told Norris that he still vividly remembered his humiliation when Bunny described his large, sunburned ears as "red sails in the sunset."

"High school's that place, that country," he reflected later, "where you get laid for the first time; you have marvelous memories and you go around with a girl, you go to the prom." But for him high school was studying and he was bitter because his social life was so dull. People who knew him in high school, he said, thought he was "quiet, studious and inconsequential." His work paid off, however. His grades got him accepted to both MIT and Harvard. He knew that he was more likely to realize his dream of becoming an aeronautical engineer at MIT, as it had a full-fledged program in this specialty, something Harvard lacked. But because of his age, MIT wanted him to go to prep school for a year. This circumstance led him to Cambridge. What clinched it, he often said, was the reaction of girls on Crown Street. MIT's name didn't impress them, but "when I said I might go to Harvard, they lit up and they saw me with new eyes." Choosing Harvard, for reasons he could not have guessed at the time, was one of the luckiest things he ever did.

(CN) Chapter 2

(CT) Harvard

(COT) The distinguished historian and journalist, Theodore H. White, who graduated from Harvard in 1938, came up with a system of classifying pre-war Harvard students. They were divided, he wrote, into three groups, "white men, grey men, and meatballs." The first group was comprised of wealthy WASPs from New England who graduated from private prep schools. The ^a grey men were middle-class boys from public schools, mainly from outside New England. The meatballs were non-WASP students who commuted and/or were on scholarship. White, a Jew whose father was born in Russia, claimed meatball status. He didn't attend Harvard "to enjoy the games, the girls, the burlesque shows of the Old Howard, the companionship, the elms, the turning leaves of fall, the grassy banks of the Charles." He was there to gobble up cultural riches from learned professors, from the libraries, museums, poetry readings, tutorials—all of this under a dome of reverence for intellectual and scholarly pursuits. Mailer and his friend Marty Lubin, ^{Esophomore year for Mailer} both of whom received scholarships, were classic meatballs, although such was the subtlety of condescension at Harvard that they probably never heard the term. Mailer was also there for the culture, although it took him the better part of a year to find it. Unlike White, he was profoundly interested in girls, although the kind he sought was just as difficult to find as were the right professors. ^{WWS} In the meantime, there was Rose la Rose and her colleagues, strippers at the Old Howard burlesque house, which he visited shortly after he arrived.

(TX) He was assigned to Grays Hall, a five-story freshman dorm on Massachusetts Avenue accommodating about 60 men. They lived in comparative luxury in two- or three-person suites,

cleaned by "biddies," with a shared bathroom and a working fireplace. Like the Oxbridge house system which it mimicked, Harvard's houses and halls had a master living on the first floor who regularly invited students for tea and dinner. The administration more or less randomly assigned the approximately 800 resident members of his class (about ^{a hundred} 100 more commuted) to approximately 15 freshman dorms. Most nationalities, states and several foreign countries were represented, WASPs, German-Americans and Irish-American dominated, although ^{more than} ~~over~~ ^{ten} percent of the class was Jewish. Mailer shared his second floor suite with Richard Weinberg from Memphis and Maxwell Kaufer from Kingston, Pennsylvania. Looking back, he said that he noticed no discrimination. Harvard, he said, "had solved more social situations than any other institution [...] of the establishment." He estimated that during his first year four out of five of his friends were middle-class Jews and they socialized in the same way black students would a generation later. In his second semester, he would become friendly with several non-Jewish men, most of whom he later associated with on the college literary magazine, the *Advocate*, or the Signet Society, an intellectual luncheon club. But for his first semester, his group included three other Grays men, Seymour Breslow, Myron Kaufmann and Stanley Lampert. Marty Lubin, Harold Katz, Douglas Woolf, Peter Ruderman and Harold Marantz, who lived in other dorms, made it nine. All Jews, all meatballs.

Mailer's and Lubin's parents had gotten to know each other a bit in Brooklyn and Mr. Lubin drove the boys up to Cambridge on September 16, 1939. Later, Fan Mailer and Eva Lubin would occasionally take Saturday night train trips to Cambridge bringing cookies and clean laundry to their sons, returning late Sunday and arriving in Brooklyn as the sun came up. For his college wardrobe, Mailer had purchased an outlandish set of clothes that could have been worn

with Charles Bovary's infamous hat: green and blue vertical striped trousers, a gold jacket and saddle shoes. These garments were quickly discarded once he observed the narrow-lapelled, tweed jackets and ^agrey flannel trousers of the other students. Mailer said later that in going from Brooklyn to Harvard he felt like "a young man going from a small town in the Caucasus to Moscow for advanced studies."

"Unformed" is the word Mailer used to describe himself as a first semester freshman. We can add unprepared; Harvard was a shock and at first he drew inward. ^{later said} Kaufer told Manso that his new roommate was quiet, pleasant, "a smiler" who didn't venture out much during his first semester, unlike his gregarious roommates. Shortly after arrival, he wrote home to describe his routine. Classes ended at three and then he went to tryouts for the class crew team. In the evenings, there were two to three hours of homework and six more on Sunday. Saturday was his day off and he either went to a Harvard home football game or explored Cambridge. During first semester, he had no dates in Cambridge or Boston and gawking at the Old Howard burlesque dancers was as close as he came to the opposite sex. Meals were taken at the Harvard Union. Later he also ate at the Hayes-Bickford cafeteria on Massachusetts Avenue or at the Boylston Street hot dog shop across the river in Boston, usually taking notes on the local characters.

Write in One thing that his classmates all seem to remember about Mailer as a freshman is the collage of pinups over his desk. We know that one of them was a George Petty centerfold from *Esquire*, signed salaciously by his buddies, because Mailer wrote home to give his parents fair warning of its placement before their first visit. Betty Grable's legs were probably included and there was also a photograph of Amy Arnell, a vocalist in the Tommy Tucker big band; her big hit was "I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire." When the band had appeared in Long Branch in

the summer of 1939, Mailer was much taken by a large, framed photo of Arnell in the lobby of the West End Hotel. Wearing a tool belt and work clothes, he brazenly unscrewed the entire frame containing Arnell's photo and walked out with it. A friend from Long Branch remembers seeing it in his Harvard room. There were bull sessions about sex, of course, and he discovered that he had "a bunch of roommates who also hadn't been laid . . . We'd heard of working-class kids who got laid when they were 13 or 14. Here we were, good middle-class kids, and we weren't able to get laid. / . . . you bore a standard of shame."

The required courses for his first semester were an engineering drafting course, physics, and the first halves of math and English courses. His sole elective was French. The English course, English A, was a composition course, required of all students who did not turn in an outstanding performance on the English exam taken by new freshmen. In Mailer's time, students in English A had to write a variety of descriptive and argumentative themes, often in response to assigned readings in collections of essays and short stories and, later, novels. At first, he did not like the course, writing home on October 25 that the course was "about the duller." But when he read the contemporary novels assigned, his interest not only sharpened, he said, they changed his life.

Before I was seventeen I had formed the desire to be a major writer, and this desire came upon me rather suddenly in the last two months of my sixteenth year, a time I remember well enough because it was my first semester at Harvard. All through December 1939 and January 1940 I was discovering modern American literature. In those sixty days I read and reread *Studs Lonigan*, *U.S.A.*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Later I would add Wolfe, Hemingway and Faulkner, and to a

small measure, Fitzgerald; but Farrell, Dos Passos and Steinbeck were the novels for me in that sixty days before I turned seventeen.

Of the three books that Mailer names, James T. Farrell's *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, set on the south side of Chicago in the early part of the ^{twentieth} century, was at first the most influential. For the rest of his life he said that Farrell had awakened him to his vocation. What Farrell provided was the recognition that the social atmosphere of Brooklyn was ^{similar to} roughly the same as that enveloping the lower [^] middle [^] class Irish toughs that Farrell chronicled. It was liberating, Mailer wrote, to find a novelist who could write about "the monotony and the boredom, and the killing deadness of the average simple life among many people who were not well educated." Until he read Farrell, Dos Passos and Steinbeck, the novels he prized were stories of the romantic past or the imagined future; he had no sense that the stumblings and longings of his pals at the candy store and the burlesque house were the stuff of fiction. "Suddenly," he said, "I realized you could write about your own life."

During his first semester, the struggle to keep up with his courses and daily crew practice was wearing him down. Several weeks into the semester, he was cut from the 150-pound crew team. It was, he said, "the bitterest blow freshman year," salved only slightly when he learned from a friend that the coach never had the slightest interest in him because his arms were too short. The other disappointment was women: he had no dates until he returned home for the Christmas holiday and saw Phyllis Bradman, taking her to a New York Rangers hockey game. But on New Year's Eve he had no date, and went skating in the afternoon and to a burlesque show. Back at Harvard for semester exams in late January, ^{he realized} it became apparent that physics was too much for him and he dropped it early in the second semester. He was maintaining A's and

B's in his other courses, including English A, where the instructor had informed the class that short stories could be submitted in lieu of topical essays. Mailer, who once said, "I threw down my pen at 11," began writing fiction again.

He also looked into the possibility of getting on the Harvard Lampoon, but he was rejected by the Lampoon, which was dominated by these ^{students} with prep school pedigrees. "I can't write humorously," he told his parents, and also noted the Lampoon's \$100 initiation fee. Then, on February 12, 1940, he attended an open house put on by the Advocate, the college's venerable literary magazine, founded in 1866, and ^{whose} ^{ways} counting among its contributors T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore and Henry Miller. At the meeting, he met Bruce "Pete" Barton, also a freshman and the son of prominent advertising executive and congressman from Manhattan's Silk Stocking district. Mailer was attracted to the quiet, well-mannered young Barton. "He was the first man I met who was the son of a very powerful man, a tycoon. And he was also very much a gentleman," he said. Barton was drawn to Mailer not only for his literary interests but because he felt the Brooklynite could tell him about life outside his pampered existence, life in the raw. The next day, Mailer wrote to his parents to say he was trying out for the magazine and ask if they would pay the \$40 initiation fee. They gave their enthusiastic assent in a telephone call and he began assembling the required three-piece application packet.

Also in February, he took two additional steps in pursuit of his ambition: he accepted an invitation to join a weekly, extra-curricular, writing seminar, and he began keeping a notebook, the first of innumerable such records he kept for the rest of his life. Not much is known about the seminar, save an anecdote from his friend, Larry Weiss, a sophomore transfer student, who had considerable influence on him. Weiss recalls that Mailer argued for the importance of writers

describing every bodily function, including bowel movements, and Weiss said he had no problem with such descriptions, but it was wrong to call them literature. Mailer responded by reading aloud, from the "Calypso" chapter of *Ulysses*, Joyce's account of Leopold Bloom in the outhouse.

The pocket-sized notebook of 300-odd pages contains one-sentence character sketches and two-sentence plot ideas, memorable people, places and moments, a list of his dates with girls in Brooklyn, with telephone numbers and a letter grade next to each (Phyllis Bradman got a B, the highest), snippets of conversation and quotations from several writers, including Hemingway ("Everybody was drunk"). Some of the ideas are the usual freshman theme fodder: tearing down the goal posts after a football game. But others are more ambitious: a boy with a castration complex, based on a line from Havelock Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*; a young white man dancing with a black woman for "altruistic reasons" who gets sexually aroused; "fellow meeting mother long lost and finding she is a prostitute[;] you know that's crap have him lay her first then find out it's mother—don't give it away but have it sharp dialogue piece"; "a homosexual who has an otherwise fine character [i.e.] have it from an accident." A significant number are pensées about the writing life: "It is only when an author reproduces some personal experiences of ours that we can fully understand his meaning."

The most impressive thing about the notebook is how nicely it actually functioned as a wellspring. The examples of his literary trinity of Farrell, Dos Passos and Steinbeck, encouragement in English A, and interaction with other aspiring writers in the seminar, generated the momentum for a spurt. He wrote fifteen stories based on the notebook jottings over the second semester of his freshman year and the following summer. His desire to write was also

whet by the possibility of getting on the *Advocate*. When his Uncle Dave found out about his hopes for the magazine, he offered to speak to Bruce Barton ^{Sto} senior, who he knew from New York business circles, but Mailer nixed the idea, writing home on February 28 that Dave should not "use his drag with Barton senior to get me on the *Advocate*. There's no use making it, if I can't do it on my own." A week later, he wrote home with the bad news that the *Advocate* had rejected his application, saying the stories he submitted were deemed fluid but deficient in plot. The editors, he admitted, were probably right. (N)

His first semester papers for English A are on garden ⁼ variety topics, for example, freedom of speech and a discussion of Malthus' Law. But second semester he turned in six short stories, including the two he submitted to the *Advocate*. Never the minimalist, he wrote one that was almost 6,000 words. His grades ranged from C+ to B+. For the last paper of the year, Mailer asked if he could submit one more story and his instructor, after some discussion, agreed. (N)

Originally titled "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep," he concluded that this too blatantly echoed a Hemingway story title and settled on "Prelude to Sleep." Submitted on May 21, the story is a first-person psychological account of the loss of virginity by Mark, a Brooklyn youth, before he goes off to college, an event preceded by months of frustrated petting with his girlfriend Susan, punctuated by the presentation of his self-serving theories on free love, true love, the family and society. After Mark convinces Susan to have sex, he concludes that the "long, terrifying, childish period of sexual self-analysis and shame" was finally over only to find the consummation tainted. He discovers that "even at the height of coitus, his analytical mind was working and it annoyed him." The story received an A-, his highest grade of the year, and brought his final grade up to B. Harvard was stingy with grades, especially for freshman. (N)

Mailer's grades were pretty good

As Mailer was forging his literary vocation in the smithy of English A, isolationists and interventionists were lining up against each other on campus. Poet Archibald MacLeish, in a welcoming address to his class, compared it with the class of 1918. The earlier generation saw World War I "as a finality," he said, but they were wrong. "The last war was not an end but a beginning." Harvard's students were not at all pleased with this news. The *Crimson* came out four-square against the war, saying in an editorial, "We are frankly determined to have peace at any price." But President Conant told the first chapel service of the year, "The forces of violence must be beaten by superior violence." Mailer's first response to the war, made while MacLeish was giving his importuning speech, was to jot down a very brief story, titled, "It," which follows:

We were going through the barbed-wire when a machine gun started. I kept walking until I saw my head lying on the ground. "My God, I'm dead," my head said. And my body fell over.

If his mini-story demonstrates his awareness of the war, it should be said that ^{the war} it was impossible to ignore. The newspapers, newsreels and radio were saturated with reports of the pell-mell events in Europe — the German-Russian pact, the German-Italian alliance, the invasion of Poland, speeches by Hitler and Churchill and general mobilizations in England and France. Harvard's 3,500 undergraduates knew that if the U.S. entered the war they would be among the first to go and, compensatorily, they partied a lot. Swing bands were the rage and Glenn Miller's "Moonlight Serenade" was the big hit of the year. A member of the class of 1942, one Lothrop Withington Jr., started a nationwide craze by swallowing a live goldfish, just months

before Congress began discussing the first-ever peacetime draft. In his letters home Mailer made no mention of anything but grades, football games, laundry, allowance checks and, more and more as time went on, literary activities. In avoiding the topic of war, he was not much different from his fellow Harvard students. In a May 1940 poll, 91 percent of them opposed going to war. In 1939 and early 1940, Harvard wanted it to go away.

A good part of student reluctance to accept the inevitability of war came from the widespread sympathy for leftist ideas and principles. The leader of Harvard non-interventionists was the grave, revered F.O. Matthiessen, an avowed socialist and author of *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1940). Mailer heard him lecture more than once and was deeply impressed. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (Harvard '38) visited Matthiessen at a time when England was beleaguered. During their discussion of the war situation, Schlesinger said that Churchill was the only hope. "Matty said with great intensity, 'Winston Churchill is the epitome of everything I have hated all my life.'" But when Germany invaded Russia ^{in June 1941} less than two years later, Matthiessen nimbly shifted allegiances and endorsed the war. He even wrote an essay for the 1943 yearbook, "The Humanities in a Time of War," in which he praised the engaged humanism of André Malraux, who would soon become one of Mailer's heroes.

Mailer's sentiments changed in about the same time frame as Matthiessen's. John Crockett, with whom Mailer would later be associated on the *Advocate*, remembers talking to him after MacLeish's welcoming address. Mailer, he said, called the speech "crap" and argued that there would be no war. Although he did not remember meeting Crockett until February 1940, he could very well have been anti-war in September 1939. In his "Harvard Journal" he

recalls that after reading Farrell, Dos Passos and Steinbeck, he became "a leftist & an advocate of free love. The leftism came from the books; I can't remember that the problem bothered me before then." He adds that by his sophomore year, "I was violently leftist, & almost joined the YCL [young Communist League]." Support for U.S. involvement in the war began to grow with the fall of France in June 1940, but Mailer showed no real interest in world events until later. He had something else on his mind: sex.

During his sophomore year, Mailer went to the Treasure Room of the Widener Library and there read D.H. Lawrence's novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, unpublished in the U.S. at that time. It was one of the perks of the Harvard experience and deeply moving, he said. "It changed my sex life, or rather, accelerated it." He read Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* at about the same time and later paid homage to Lawrence and Miller in his work. From the very beginning of his writing career, Mailer wanted to jump into the ocean of sex and plumb its secrets. He admired resistance to the push-back against anti-obscenity laws and prudery in general by Lawrence, Joyce and Henry Miller, and was eager to explore sex from A to Z. From one perspective, his 60 years of writing can be seen as an untrammelled examination of all things sexual—a long list. He would grapple with everything from the funky odors of lovemaking to the inalienable joys of marriage and children, from promiscuity and free love to abortion, masturbation and orgies. The humor in obscene speech and writing was examined, as well as the problems of contraception and the mysteries of conception and pregnancy. He wrote about homosexuality, bisexuality, sadism, masochism, pornography, AIDS and incandescent one-night stands. Sometimes he seemed ahead of the times, as when he was called the prophet-seer of the 1960s sexual revolution; sometimes he appeared to be deeply regressive, as in his views of contraception, but he was always a

passionate responder to the conundrums of sexuality and identity. In Henry James's era, he would have expired of frustration. In 1941, when he read the unexpurgated *Lady Chatterley*, the Depression was ending, life was opening up and the Victorian ark of sexual repression was sinking. But it was going down too slowly. Mailer wanted to torpedo it. (N)

One of the last stories he wrote his freshman year, "Life Is Where You Find It," concerns an 18-year-old Harvard student, Hal Stewart, a would-be-writer who wants to go hitchhiking in the summer to find "some cheap tail." When he returns to school, Hal realizes that he will have to face his big dilemma: "whether he'd be a writer or an engineer." Mailer was not ready to tell his family that he was approaching this same crossroad. That announcement would have to wait until such a time as he could produce some literary bona fides. As it stood, it was still understood by the family that he was preparing for a career designing airplanes, although shortly after he arrived at Harvard he must have recognized that his degree would be in a general engineering program (engineering sciences), as Harvard did not have an aeronautical engineering program, merely a few courses. Further complicating matters was the fact that he had not taken high school Latin, which was required for a bachelor of arts degree at Harvard, and so could not change his major to English, although he talked to his friends about doing so.

Another issue was money. He had entered Harvard with the understanding that his parents would, by whatever means (including help from Uncle Dave and Aunt Anne), find the money for his first year's college expenses, \$1200, a huge sum for a family with a sporadically employed father. On his application he had put down \$3,000 as total family income for the year, supplemented by the \$60 he claimed he would earn as a summer counselor at the Scarboro Hotel. For his part, he agreed to apply himself to his studies so as to be eligible for a scholarship in his

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sophomore year. This meant getting on the dean's list, which he accomplished by getting three B's and an A (in Mathematics, the subject in which he always scored highest). His family was happy with his performance but, apparently, these grades weren't high enough, for in July he was informed that his scholarship application had been turned down. Another disappointment was not getting into one of Harvard's residential houses for his sophomore year. He and Sy Breslow applied for a suite in Dunster House, with Adams as a backup, and were rejected for both. Marty Lubin was also turned down, and the three friends decided to share a suite in one of the dormitories, Claverly Hall.

Mailer went to Long Branch for the summer to write. Over the next ten weeks, holed up with his portable Remington in the Scarboro Hotel room provided by Aunt Beck, he wrote eight short stories, all of which he would submit the following year. This would be the pattern for three successive summers: write during the summer and bank the work for the fall, a routine which enabled him to tackle more and more ambitious projects. He also wanted to roam and gain experience, especially sexual experience, something that was hard to obtain in Long Branch where there were too many sharp-eyed cousins. In August he and a summer friend, Herb Zilber, decided to hitchhike 125 miles to Scranton where, they had learned from college chums, there was an entire street of brothels. Mailer anticipated this experience in "Love Is Where You Find It," and captured it retrospectively in another short story, titled "Love-Buds," written his senior year but never submitted as class work. In a 2007 interview he told the story again, now referring to it as "the disaster of Scranton." The two versions, more than 60 years apart, tell essentially the same story, except for the boys' names, which are changed in the short story. Al is Zilber and Eppy is Mailer.

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 They
 Al and Eppy set off with toothbrushes, clean underwear, chocolate bars and some apples, more like Huck and Tom than red-eyed Lotharios. Both are 17-year old virgins and "privately, they were each convinced they would die without having known a woman." They arrive in

Scranton at four in the afternoon, rent a room and then saunter out in the early evening looking for the street of dreams. They stumble into brothel row and "Woman seemed to appear in every ground floor window; calls were hissed at them and purred, and shrieked, and murmured."

Mailer's later version of the event follows:

I stopped in front of one of the windows and there's a blonde there, a cold, rather good-looking blonde. And I say, in my toughest voice, 'What's the tariff?' And she says, 'What, honey?' I say, 'The tariff, the tariff.' And she says, 'Huh?' I say, 'The cost.' 'Oh,' she says, 'A buck, dearie.' I say, 'All right.' So we go in and I'm looking at the floor. I've picked her already, and I'm looking at the floor and my roommate, he's looking at the floor, and he picks one and we both go upstairs, follow them. The stairs are dirty, filthy – they hadn't been vacuumed in a year. And we get there and the beds upstairs – very bare little room – with a blanket folded, that was the bed. And she says, 'Don't bother to take off your shoes; just drop your pants.' And so I say, 'Why?' She says, 'The blanket at the foot of the bed is dirty with shoes of the men who've come before.'

And I couldn't get it up. So humiliating, after all this time. And she says at a certain point, 'Do you speak French?' And I knew what she meant and I said, 'Nah.' I don't know why, but 'Nah.' I had a feeling I couldn't get it up that way either. And I go downstairs, pay her the dollar – oh, at a certain point she says, to

me, 'Time's up, honey,' after I'd been there about five minutes. I said, 'Hey, wait a minute, wait a minute.' She said, 'Don't do that.' And I thought of all the hoods waiting in the woodwork to tear us apart, so, all right, I give her the buck. Walk downstairs, trying to look as debonair as I can. There's my buddy, Herbie was his first name, and he's debonair, so the two of us set out down the street.

→ The short story ends with:

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"How was it?" Eppy asked tentatively.

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"It was wonderful," said Al.

"Yeah, just wonderful."

"Were you able to do it?" Al squeaked.

"No. Were you?"

"No."

By the admission, each had somehow saved the honor of the other. Al let out a whoop of laughter, and Eppy pummeled him on the back. They laughed, they hugged one another, they jumped up and down on the city street beneath the light of a street lamp, and roared with laughter at themselves and each other.

EXT

He concludes his remembrance by saying that "it was a huge relief that I had an honest buddy and we were not alone in our shame. And all that night we just kept talking and talking"

about what fools we were. All that way and couldn't get it up. And we agreed that we would never tell anyone. We had a mark on how many years the quarantine would be on, in any event."

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Mailer

In the fall of 1940, he signed up for required courses in engineering, math and physics and one full-year elective: English A-1, a creative writing course taught by Robert Gorham Davis. An active Communist and a member of Matthiessen's clique, the Waspish Davis later wrote short stories for The New Yorker. Armed with his cache of stories written over the summer, Mailer impressed Davis, who was exactly the mentor he needed at this stage of his life, although their relationship almost foundered at its start. He submitted "He Was Her Man," a 1400-word story, and Davis selected it to read in part to the class of approximately 50 students. A businessman and his wife are staying at a resort hotel and when he leaves on a trip, she invites a bellboy to her room. The man returns unexpectedly and finds his wife in bed with him and shoots her in the back of her head. When another bellboy gets to the room, the first one having fled, he finds blood and brains splattered everywhere. The man had shot his wife and then himself.

Mailer said later that the description of the woman's corpse was influenced by Hemingway's "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," but Spicy Detective seems more likely. "I could make out where her eyes and mouth had been, but I wondered what had happened to her nose. I couldn't guess whether it was smashed into the carpet, or if it was still floating around. I hoped it was in the ground, because stepping on it was certainly better than breathing it in."

TX

At this point, the class broke up. "I can't tell you how my back was scalded by the laughter," Mailer said. But the next day Davis apologized to him, and the relationship was

and repaired, strengthened. He was invited to Davis's home where he met his wife Hope. She recalled the strong impression he made: "When his eyes looked at you, you just melted." He was the first student that they entertained at Harvard. He got a C- on the story, which Davis said in his written comments was "just a mash of brains and nausea." Mailer remembered the grade to be an A-, but his error is clearly a tribute to the man who helped launch his writing career.

In his sophomore year he read Thomas Wolfe and said that he "made the biggest dent," although his influence was not apparent until later. He also read Saroyan, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway. Sy Breslow said that Mailer kept a gin bottle on his mantle because he read that Hemingway drank it. Papa's macho athleticism and his adventures in the Spanish Civil War were well known and he tried to emulate him. Friends remember the skinny kid from Brooklyn shadow boxing and pretending to be Rocky Graziano. His shyness began to fall away. Along with his friend Larry Weiss, who also lived in Claverly Hall, he tried out for the house football team. Mailer was a fan of contact sports, but not much of a participant, made the team, while Weiss did not. The team wore pads and uniforms, but only 14 or 15 players showed up for any one game and, except for the running backs, everyone played both offense and defense for the full 48 minutes. "I weighed 135 pounds then and played the line: running guard on offense, cannon fodder on defense. And I had fun." Mailer talked proudly about playing house football at Harvard many times over the years; it was a significant milestone.

On the sexual front, his virginity weighed heavy, especially after the Scranton disaster. As he wrote later, he had "accepted Lawrence's thesis about untrammelled and illimitable rights and liberties and pleasures of sexual love," but alas, alack, no partner was to be found. Phyllis Bradman came up to Cambridge once each semester, but he never progressed beyond first or

second base with her, in Brooklyn parlance. At the end of his freshman year Harold Marantz had introduced him to a young woman who might solve his problem, as she had solved Marantz's. Mailer began seeing her and resumed the seduction when he returned for sophomore year, traveling once a week to her home in Cambridge. "She was too plain to take out," he said, "I would have been embarrassed." After a few visits, he got to third base. "I remember I had not washed my hands, purposely. And I walked by one of my sleeping roommates, put my fingers under his nose and said, 'Whiff that.' That was exactly the level of our social discourse in those days."

The seduction went slowly. The woman's mother hovered in the kitchen, listening and breaking in on their petting. Finally, one evening after several hours on the couch, it happened. "And now I was a man. And I paid a hell of a price because I didn't like the girl. I felt for her, but I didn't like her." During the course of his visits, he had mentioned his literary interests and she reciprocated by giving him a novel she had written. He read it and saw that she had copied it, word for word, from a recent bestseller by Robert Nathan, *Portrait of Jennie*, a treacly fantasy. Asked for his opinion of her manuscript at their next meeting, he said, "Robert Nathan couldn't have done better." She replied, "Who's he," and said it so convincingly that he concluded she was a great actress. "That gave me a sense," he said, "then limited—much greater now—of the depth of that poor girl's need." Nor would he reveal her name when, 67 years later, he finally told the story of losing his virginity to a Cambridge "towny."

The second semester of his sophomore year began well. His grades improved, even in physics, continued his friendly relationship with Robert Gorham Davis, and was awarded a \$150 scholarship for the term beginning in January, which took some pressure off the family's

finances. On the social front, he made new non-Jewish friends, and began dating girls from the local colleges. He was also producing longer and more sophisticated stories, most of them revealing the influence of Hemingway. Over the weekend of February 8-9, he wrote a ^{five-thousand-}5,000-word story, "The Greatest Thing in the World." He said later that it resembled the crude apprentice work of someone who would go on to write successful action films for Hollywood, and he is accurate. The story of Al Groot is briskly told and rife with tension; every rivulet of sweat is recorded. The protagonist is a young tramp, down to his last dollar, who is trying to hitch a ride to Chicago. Given a ride by three wisecracking goons who see a sucker, he agrees to a game of straight pool in a joint run by a fat Greek named Nick. After several games, he finds himself the winner and the ten dollars in his pocket seems like a fortune. When he refuses to continue playing, they drag him to the car and drive away, planning to beat the money out him, perhaps kill him. Groot is petrified yet manages to jump out on a turn and escape into the night. After a good meal, he goes to a flophouse where he methodically squashes the bedbugs—one of many such gritty details—and then lies down and plans his next day. He will eat a big breakfast and have "a clean woman," then another meal and another woman. "By God," he says, "this is the happiest moment of my life."

By the beginning of ^{March} March, the *Advocate* had informed Mailer that the Groot story was a suitable submission for his application, but probably would not be published. Davis also liked the story, saying it was the best he had received all year. He relayed this information home with the announcement, "I simply can't stand any of my engineering courses," adding that he would discuss his dissatisfaction when he came home later in the month. But then his hopes dimmed. He wrote home to say that although the editors liked the story, especially its suspense, "they're a

bunch of snobs, and Brooklyn may go against me." He had reason to believe this; not many Jews had ever been selected for the magazine. Ultimately, however, his raw talent appealed to a majority of the *Advocate* Board, especially those who deplored the cape-and-walking-stick crowd who had long dominated the magazine. Pete Barton led the new faction and John Crockett and Bowden Broadwater, a "supernova of eccentricity" who later married Mary McCarthy, were the leaders of the esthetes. A week later Mailer was invited to be ^{an editor} a literary associate on the magazine.

As was customary, the new associates were told to write and present a sketch at the Advocate House initiation, where heavy drinking was *de rigueur*. Mailer and George Washington Goethals, one of his new *Wasp* friends, wrote a lewd parody of Hemingway's latest novel, titled *For Whom the Balls Squall: Farewell to Qualms*, with a cast of four: Goethals as Martha Gets-Horned, David Roberts as Ernie the Hernia Kid, Mailer as I. Ram Soreloins and John Elliott, Jr. as Ariscrofulus. The script is lost; only a playbill survives. It lists the players and notes that the play is "a little piece probing into copulation without population, or safety first." Goethals recalled that he was wearing high heels and a snood and got "horned" with a large sausage wielded by I. Ram Soreloins.

A few days after the April 9 initiation he wrote home with the news that the ^{"The Greatest Thing"} ~~Groot story~~ would be in the lead position in the April magazine. He also reported that he'd written ^{eight thousand} ~~8000~~ words of a "novelette." The most important news was that "The Greatest Thing" was chosen to be submitted to the nationwide college contest sponsored by *Story*, a magazine of short fiction founded in 1931 by Whit Burnett and his wife Martha Foley. The magazine published the early work of a number of Mailer's contemporaries, including Salinger, Capote and Joseph Heller.

↓
 Mailer felt his chances of winning were slight, but was nevertheless happy that his was one of two stories selected out of 45 submitted. ^{by Harvard students} Davis, he learned, was one of the judges, along with two other professors, Mark Schorer and Howard Baker. A week after the April magazine's publication, an editorial appeared in The Harvard Crimson. Mailer's first review, in effect, praising the story for having "the emotional conviction of a nightmare." It ended with an endorsement of the *Advocate's* new direction, realism replacing the "artificialities and the polished sophistications" of the old *Advocate*. He sent a copy of the editorial home and Fan pasted it the scrapbook of Harvard memorabilia she proudly kept. "It's all happening too easy," he wrote to his parents.

Millie Brower, a friend from Long Branch, read the editorial when she came up for a weekend in early May 1941. Apparently she also read some of his writing because in a letter to her written after her visit, Mailer comments on "The Greatest Thing in the World," which Millie passed on to a college friend, an editor at a college student newspaper. The friend, Bernice Scarr, criticized the story's grammar and Mailer did not take the criticism well. "Please tell your friend to go take a hot-running fuck," he wrote, and went on angrily for a full page, calling her "immature" and "a bore." Further on, he links Scarr with Bowden Broadwater, the Pegasus, or literary editor of the *Advocate*, whose picture had just appeared in a major story on Harvard in *Life* magazine. "Very cordially dislike him," he wrote. "He writes very well, and bores me so much I can't finish his stories. His grammar is perfect." Mailer's string of victories was stocking the medicine chest of his psyche with energy and frankness, as well as some angry defensiveness. "The nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn" who he later found to be "absolutely insupportable" would never entirely fade out but, at this point, he was in decline.

On May 7, he was informed that he had been elected to the Signet Society, which unlike the *Advocate*, had its own building at 46 Dunster Street. The Society's members, now as then, are chosen on merit, unlike Harvard's "final clubs," which selected their members based on family ties and prep school affiliations. ~~Jews and Blacks had little or no chance to "punch" for Fly, Owl, Delphic, Porcellian or Spee, where John F. Kennedy ('40) and Mailer's son Michael ('87) were members.~~ For the Signet, members of the college's various publications were often chosen for some of the 28 seats given to each class. Mailer ate lunches regularly at the Society over the next two years and returned several times after graduation for reunions. For his initiation on May 20, he produced a second sketch parodying Hemingway. For this one, he borrowed from a recent *Life* article on the novelist, ^{that was} accompanied by Robert Capa photographs of Papa in Sun Valley and Spain. The heavily illustrated, buttery piece notes that Hemingway rewrote some passages in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* ^{sixty to seventy} 66-70 times "to achieve the precise feeling." Mailer's five-minute piece, which he delivered in a borrowed tuxedo, purports to contain excerpts from some of these rewrites; for example: "She was bare and nude and clear and cold and clear and tight and warm and hot, rich inside and richer insider ^{her} breasts were square." He always had great admiration for Hemingway as writer and man, and some reservations ^{his} his snobbery and his anti-intellectualism ^{but} but Papa, even after his 1961 suicide, was the measure ^{he} he used to gauge himself for nearly 70 years.

Good news continued to pour in. As a new *Advocate* editor, he attended the magazine's 35th anniversary dinner on April 10 at the Harvard Club. That night he met Roy E. Larson, the executive editor of *Time*, who had read "The Greatest Thing in the World." He told Mailer he was impressed. Larson then sent the story to a young editor at Farrar & Rinehart, Theodore

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p. 57

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Amussen, who immediately sent his own congratulatory comments. He said he'd like to see more material, especially a novel, and Mailer wrote back saying he'd have one soon. He was working hard on the ^{novella} ~~novelle~~ that would eventually be a full-length novel titled "No Percentage." Amussen seemed more than ordinarily impressed with Mailer's prose and joined his growing band of supporters and became, eventually, his first professional editor. Another of his champions, his cousin Osie, was reading the opening of the novel in early May. During the summer she wrote to Fan to say that the long set piece in "No Percentage" describing a summer heat wave in Crown Heights was "one of the most exquisite and descriptive passages I have encountered."

All of this praise certainly encouraged him, but nothing fortified him more than the thunderbolts that arrived at the beginning of June. First, Professor Davis wrote to him to congratulate him for winning the national *Story* magazine contest. Then, a telegram from Whit Burnett arrived at the *Advocate* with the same news. It was followed a few days later by a formal letter from Burnett to Mailer at the *Advocate* offices, forwarded by a non-plussed John Crockett, stating that the story was the unanimous choice of the judges. It would be published by *Story* in the fall, Burnett told him, adding that the Story Press, affiliated with Lippincott's, would be eager to consider any novel he might submit. "Probably nothing has happened in the years I've been writing which changed my life as much," Mailer wrote in 1959. "The far-away, all-powerful and fabulous world of New York publishing—which, of course, I saw through Thomas Wolfe's eyes—had said 'yes' to me." That summer the \$100 prize money from *Story* arrived, proof positive to Fan and Barney of the genius of their son. The airplane models that hung in the

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apartment on Crown Street were no longer seen as a preamble to his life's work. ^{Now} From then on, he was a writer.

By late June, ^{T&B} ~~with Hitler advancing into Russia and London feeling from heavy bombing,~~ Mailer had set up shop at the Scarboro. Before he arrived, he had written 45,000 words of "No Percentage" and was no longer referring to it as a novelette. The Schneider clan, of course, was aware of all that had happened at Harvard and gave their prodigy even more deference. Fan and Barney came down on weekends and in between, ^{T&F} she wrote encouraging notes: "How is the writing coming along, honey? Put all the feeling you possess into it and it has to be good. When you were a tiny infant every time I nursed you, I would whisper a little prayer in your ear, 'Please God, make him a great man some day.' This is a secret between you and me, sonny. Take care of yourself. Love, Mother." Word came to Long Branch a few weeks later that Fan had to go in the hospital in Brooklyn for an undisclosed operation, which turned out to be a hysterectomy. No details were mentioned in the flurry of notes and letters among the family, and when he wrote to his mother at the end of July he merely said that he hoped she was feeling better (she recovered quickly). But this comes at the end of his letter; he leads off by announcing that he has written another 14,000 words of "No Percentage." ^{non-fig. (N)}

Initially, he had intended the novel to be set entirely in Brooklyn and the Jersey shore. ^{T&X} His plan was to focus on the romantic problems of Robert Branstein, a ^{21-year} old arts graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. But after winning the Story contest, and with Amussen eager to see a full-length work, he decided to expand it by one-third and add an additional setting. As ^{Mike Give us a short paragraph summary}

recast, the novel opens with Branstein back home in Crown Heights, with his father Louis, a well-to-do lawyer, and his mother Harriet, and a younger sister, Joyce. Branstein has a wealthy blonde girlfriend, Sheila Wexler, who lives with her parents in the penthouse of the tallest building in the neighborhood. Her father, Sherman, a powerful and devious figure, has links to both organized crime and corrupt politicians, much like Barney Kelly in Mailer's 1964 novel, *An American Dream*. The gorgeous, vacuous Sheila satisfies all of Branstein's sexual needs, but he yearns for involvement in some altruistic cause, and berates himself for not leaving college to fight in Spain with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Her father attempts

The second of the novel's three parts takes place on the Jersey Shore hotel, the Fiesta Shore, easily recognizable as a copy of the Scarboro. Branstein goes there to brood and escape Sheila, who wants him to marry her. Her father follows him there in an attempt to blackmail him into the marriage, using some incriminating evidence he has on Branstein's father. There is some presentation of life in a resort hotel, which suggests Mailer borrowed from his own experience at the Scarboro. There is a good deal of violence, including the most striking scene in the entire novel, a bloody altercation between Sherman Wexler and Branstein's grandfather, Abram.

We first meet Abram near the opening of the novel, where there is a flashback of his escape in a hay wagon from Russia during a pogrom. When the grandfather, now old but still feisty, learns of the attempt to blackmail his grandson into marriage, he confronts Wexler, calling Sheila a "filthy hot-pants." Abram strikes him repeatedly with his cane, knocking out one of his teeth. The old man also takes a beating but fails to deter Wexler, whom he calls a "pascudnyak," the Yiddish word for a vile monster. "Ach," the grandfather wails, "I did not do any good at all. It is only left for me to be wishing I was dead." Robert, disgusted with these events, drinks a

quart of gin and then wrecks a car while driving with Shelia, who has shown up at the hotel. At this point, Mailer broke off, recognizing Robert had to get away again and undergo a testing. Around the beginning of August, he mailed off part one to Amussen at ^{Theodore} Barrar & Rinehart and then set off on a hitchhiking trip.

Going on the road was a crucial experience for Mailer, a leap from the family safety net. He said the idea came from Dos Passos, whose *U.S.A.* has many stories of bumming around the country. He also hoped his trip would give him the wherewithal to make his protagonist more dynamic. In two weeks he hitchhiked over 1200 miles, slept almost every night outside and pushed himself to his limits. He got as far south as New Bern, North Carolina before turning back. Along the way he visited Washington, D.C., and explored the city's black ghetto, here seen by Branstien:

All morning he rambled through one Negro slum section after another, peering through broken windows, or around the torn curtains, going into houses, on the pretext of drinking a glass of water, to examine the interiors as carefully as he knew how. The dominant color, he decided, was grey. Inside, the walls, the old scanty furniture, the dust everywhere coincided and blended into a grey of terrible poverty. All though the south he was to find that grey; dry, hot, poor, dusty, grey. The grey that has never seen a twenty dollar bill, the grey that has never known a coat of paint; the grey, finally, that absorbs all other colors into it as soon as contact is made.

He ^{hitch=}hiked through numerous sleepy southern towns. In Danville, Virginia he went to a warehouse. This time he was up for the occasion, but found it unsatisfying. He told his friends how he lost his virginity to an old prostitute named Lila, ^{thus} protecting the identity of the Cambridge woman. Two days later he arrived home hungry, dirty and broke. After a few days of rest and Fan's cooking, he returned to the Scarboro to finish the novel.

Part three begins, somewhat unconvincingly, with Branstein agreeing to go to brothel row in Scranton with a Brooklyn friend. Then the two split and Branstein turns south to define himself in some unforeseen way. Finding it difficult to hitch a ride because of his filthy clothes, he is emboldened to ^{centers on Branstein's attempt} hop a moving freight car, something he has never attempted. He tells himself that a successful attempt will be the equivalent of his grandfather's escape from Russia. But his ^{and} timing is off and he misses the ladder. Much chastened, he hitches home where he learns that his grandfather has died from his beating by Wexler. ^{this} His failure to leap onto the train presages another defeat, with which the novel concludes. Branstein crawls back to Shelia and his "past life of indecision and fear." Their marriage ceremony is seen through the eyes of ten participants. The shifts are handled in a cinematic fashion. The novel ends with a gloomy coda describing their honeymoon in California. Shelia is pleased with her catch; he is beaten down and morose.

Bristling with adjectives, thin on motivation and clogged with dialogue, Mailer's first novel is nevertheless an amazing feat for a 19-year old. He was teaching himself how to write an extended narrative with a dozen or fifteen major characters, all seen from an omniscient point of view, a practice run that would help him in depicting the thoughts of as many G.I.s in *The Naked and the Dead*. With some gaps here and some repetitions there, he was still able to maintain a

narrative line for 90,000 words, pacing it with various set pieces, some of them containing sharply observed evocations of place. The novel also recycles, sometimes awkwardly, previously written short stories. He was learning to marshal his resources. While the novel shows promise, and some of his one-dimensional characters are sharply drawn, especially the grandfather and Sherman Wexler (the precursor to a long line of power-hungry amoral monsters in his work), the background of a world at war—ⁱⁿ save for a few references to the Civil War in Spain—is ⁱⁿ completely ignored. The novel is a revilement of hedonism and corruption. Robert sells out to the power nexus but is not entirely despicable because he has learned some lessons, the first being to dislike himself. Shortly after Mailer finished the novel, there was a fire at the Scarboro, a major tragedy for his ^{the family} Aunt Beck and Uncle Louis Shapiro. The Schneider clan was distressed; the retreat where he had learned to write burned to the ground.

The completed novel went off to Amussen at about the same time that Mailer arrived at Harvard in mid-September 1941, driving up in a 1936 Chevy convertible given to him by Uncle Dave. He and Marty Lubin had been accepted the previous spring into Dunster House, home of the "Dunster Funsters" and had moved into a fifth-floor suite overlooking the Charles River. The Dunster suite, the car (equipped with a mattress in the trunk), not to mention his *Advocate* and Signet sinecures, gave him for the first time the sense of being fully vested at Harvard. He was again playing house football and was co-captain for a time. His family had let him keep the \$100 from *Story* and he had a student job drafting a schematic of Harvard's gas and water mains. The only fly in the ointment was his major, now that his avocation had become his vocation. He wrote home that he hated his sole engineering course. His other courses were philosophy, sociology and English ^{2-A} A-2, the second in Harvard's series of creative writing courses, taught by

Professor Murray Kempton. As in his sophomore writing class, he submitted portions of his summer's work—¹excerpts from "No Percentage"—¹as well as six new stories to Kempton (not be—¹confused with the political columnist, who later became a friend).

He relied on his usual sources for material, but experimented with tone and point of view. One of the most sophisticated of the six stories is "The Schedule Breaker," written on December 5, 1941 and based on his Cambridge affair. On the submitted copy, Mailer made a notation to the effect that it was based on an incident that happened to him at the end of his freshman year and while he had changed the character's names, he was certain it would be "recognizable to the girl." He relates only the first stages of the seduction, focusing on the exasperation felt by the young man on a particular evening when, after several interruptions, she pushes away her suitor. "Whoa Brooklyn, you're fast," she said, and then started crying.

'Oh, you bastards. All of you damn bastards. What did I ever do to you, that you toss dice for me? What the hell, I'm alive just like you. I can get hurt. You boys don't care; you wouldn't understand that maybe I'm kind of bored. Now get out of here. Get out. Damn you, get out. Just go way.'

'Maybe some other evening,' he tried, playing the percentages all the way.

Kempton said that while he might have made the characters too tough, too much like Farrell, the story "hits the mark precisely." He gave it a straight A, the first Mailer had received for a story at Harvard.

Amussen arranged to meet Mailer in Cambridge and came by on October 4 to tell him that John Farrar liked "No Percentage" and was going to show it to his partner, Stanley Rinehart, who would publish ~~the Naked and the Dead~~ seven years later. Anne and Dave Kessler, whose support of their nephew seemed overly proprietary to Fan, visited twice during ^{he} fall semester to congratulate him. "The Greatest Thing in the World" came out in *Story* on October 15 and within days Mailer had received letters expressing interest in his work, one from a literary agent and another from an editor. They were followed by a letter from Burnett, who wrote to say he hoped Mailer would give him right of first refusal for future work. Two weeks later Amussen wrote to say that he had given the novel to an agent, Monte Stein, for an outside opinion. Stein said it "shows brilliance," and Amussen agreed. Whit Burnett, who had been sent one of several copies of the typescript, came to the same conclusion, telling Mailer that "the writing and psychology are brilliant."

On December 7, while he was sorting through the plaudits and rejections, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and the next day the ^{United States} U.S. declared war. President Conant called a mass meeting at Sanders Theater. Mailer probably attended, but if not he certainly heard the gist of Conant's message: the time of uncertainty about the U.S. war role is over and Harvard men will be called on to serve. The campus was transformed within weeks and graduation was accelerated for many students. ^{Mailer's} His response was to begin a new journal of observations, plans and sketches. Sy Breslow said that Mailer felt the war would "feed the novel he wanted to write afterward. He was desperately searching for experience," an observation confirmed by what Mailer later wrote about the moment his generation would never forget.

~~EXX~~
~~EXFL~~

I may as well confess that by December 8th or 9th of 1941, in the forty-eight hours after Pearl Harbor, while worthy young men were wondering where they could be of aid to the war effort, and practical young men were deciding which branch of the service was the surest for landing a safe commission, I was worrying darkly whether it would be more likely that a great war novel would be written about Europe or the Pacific.

~~EXX~~
~~TX~~

Mailer's journal was also used for a running commentary on his relationship with Beatrice Silverman, a Boston University student from nearby Chelsea who he met just after Pearl Harbor, ^{the} and with whom he had his first mature sexual relationship. Larry Weiss, now one of his closest friends, introduced him to Bea, as everyone called her. The plan was for the two Harvard men meet Bea and another B.U. woman at a Boston Symphony concert. While waiting to see if tickets were available, they talked and Bea saw that Mailer "didn't know his ass from his elbow about music." He suggested that they return to his room at Dunster for a drink. Necking followed and when the others had left they went to bed. Bea was not a sexual novice. "She was very helpful, put it that way," Mailer ^{I recalled} said, "and it worked."

~~EXX~~
~~EXFL~~

And so we were off to the races for a year and a half. We were together all the time. But I had to be the best she'd ever had, which started a crazy theme in my head, which I didn't get rid of for many, many, many years, because I always had a fear that I wasn't the best lover with any woman I was with, that I was serious about, and if it didn't take, that was the end of it. And if it did take, then I had to be the best. And if I couldn't be, that was probably the end of it, too. So, you know, you can get a woman to tell you anything.

~~EXX~~

Physically, they were an odd couple. Bea was ^{five foot two} 5'2" and slightly broad-beamed, ^{ran} zafitg.

She had long brown hair and an attractive heart-shaped face. Mailer was a few pounds lighter ^{than Bea} and six or seven inches taller. He described himself in his journal as having a "triangular face, oily, too much hair, glasses too big, chin too small." No matter, they were in love and were soon a well-known couple at Harvard, where Bea spent a lot of time. Women were not allowed in the houses in the evening, but she stayed overnight on many a weekend and their adventures in the sack became notorious; they were setting records, he said, and were proud of it.

Bea used profanity regularly and this offended some of their friends, but Mailer admired Bea's use of crude language, which surpassed his own. Her favorite expression, meant to convey *tempus fugit*, was "Meanwhile, the foetus is growing." But she was also kind and maternal, he said. They were both leftist in their politics but Bea was a step ahead, having read a lot of leftwing literature as well as Havelock Ellis and some Freud. In a psychological profile of her, written as a term paper his senior year, Mailer noted that "to her any concept of absolutes or static custom is absurd." She was a feminist 30 years ahead of the wave, he said later, and felt ^{was} herself to be both intellectually honest and ^{candid} intellectually superior. He believed that he was brighter than she was and liked that because it gave him a "comfort zone," but he admitted that she was more knowledgeable and was a better student. A musicology major, she also took courses in social psychology. Lacking much financial support from her parents, she paid for her final two years of college by waitressing and giving lessons on the piano, an instrument she ^{had} played from an early age. Her relations with her parents were sour and she looked forward to being out of the house and independent. Within a few months, they were talking about marriage.

Mailer's Advocate Friend
a Pete

At the start of the spring semester Barton invited Mailer for dinner at Lowell House, where they discussed Mailer's writing, specifically, "The Schedule Breaker," which Barton liked. The story of the seduction led Barton, in a halting manner, to ask ^{Mailer}him how many times he had had sex. Mailer told him everything and they went on to speak of Barton's fears of disease and pregnancy. The contrast between the reserved Barton and the uninhibited Mailer can be seen in another entry in his journal. At first titled "Exit Blues," but later known (by its chorus line) as "The Bodily Function Blues," it was to be sung to the tune of "St. Louis Blues." The fact that Mailer was classed as a "listener" or "monotone" in grade school music classes did not deter him from delivering it with gusto from his college days until well into his ^{eighties}80s. A sample:

VF

Ah can't piss, Ah can't urinate

✓

Ah can't bleed, Ah can't even menstruate

Ah can't talk, Ah can't elucidate

Ah can't shit, Ah can't defecate

Ah can't gargle, Ah can't salivate

But worst of all, the worst of all

Ah can't fuck, Ah just can't copulate

VL

Ah got those bodily function blues.

✓

(TX) In addition to the exaggerated carnality of the lyrics, the contrast between the Anglo-Saxon and Latinate synonyms is worth noting. The juxtaposition of the two lexical streams, which would become one of the hallmarks of his prose, came in great measure from what he termed a "triangle" of influence ^{in part} Hemingway, Faulkner and Farrell. From Hemingway there was "the power of restraint" deriving from the sparing use of Latinate words; from Faulkner, "the power of excess" that came from the expansive use of multi-syllabic words; Farrell was powerful because he "gave you the sense that reality is what you had to obey more than anything. I think I learned more from those three writers than any other American writers."

The influence of the three was heightened because Mailer never took any courses in English or continental literature except for a drama course his senior year. Because of the courses required for his major, and the six writing courses he took, his program of study was tight. Besides a year of French, his only other electives were one course each in philosophy, psychology, sociology, fine arts, and, in the second semester of his junior year, "Modern American Literature," with Howard Mumford Jones. It was in this course, which he later said meant a lot to him, that he first encountered the writing of Dreiser and Faulkner. During his four years at Harvard, the only contact he had with European literature was when he sat in on some of Harry Levin's course on Proust, Mann and Joyce. Mailer had scant interest in ^{came} 18th century British ^{eighteenth =} poetry and this was another reason (the lack of high school Latin being the other) he didn't change majors. Temperamentally, he was never much in sympathy with the British literary tradition, especially poetry, although he came to admire Milton. In later years he did favor continental writers, especially the French, an admiration that began when he read *Man's Fate*

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[Insert, p. 71. Mailer bio manuscript]

curriculum

^{not} In an unforeseen way, Mailer's lopsided course of study, coupled with his early loss of interest in engineering, was a boon. With little opportunity to be seduced by liberal arts courses, he put much of his energy went into mastering fictional techniques and reading contemporary writers. His curriculum, or lack of one, allowed him to look at the world without disciplinary glasses, much as another Harvard man, William James, had, and do so fearlessly.

(1933) in his senior year. Shortly after graduation he told ^{a friend} Edwin Seaver, "I'd like to be another Malraux." (N)

At the same time as he was reading Faulkner, he was enrolled in his fourth writing course, English 3A, with Theodore Morrison, a poet, novelist and Chaucer scholar, who said he was "struck at once by the unmistakable presence of talent in M^ailer's undergraduate work." The story that impressed him was "Right Shoe on Left Foot," a taut ^{seven thousand} ~~7,000~~ word story about racial injustice in the South in which he attempted, with some success, to present the dialects of both southern blacks and whites. Pete Barton, M^ailer wrote home, was crazy about the story and it was immediately accepted by the editors of the *Advocate*. The *Crimson* praised the new story, calling it a welcome departure from the "haunted degeneracy" of the esthetes who had earlier dominated the magazine. M^ailer was turning out stories at a rapid rate now, and Fan and a co-worker at Sunlight Oil had some difficulty keeping up with his requests for clean, typed copies for his submissions and competitions. Another of his stories for Morrison, "Maybe Next Year," was also accepted by the *Advocate*. ^{Mailer} He thought enough of it to reprint it in *Advertisements for Myself* with a prefatory note explaining that the inspiration was Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. (N)

When he learned that MGM was running a college contest to identify fledgling screenwriters, he bundled five stories he had written for Morrison, added "The Greatest Thing," and submitted them. At the same time, he sent "Maybe Next Year" to Amussen (his unofficial agent) who sent it on to the *New Yorker*. He was also corresponding with Whit Burnett and planned to see him in New York. In his regular letters home, he often devoted a page to comments on the short stories of his sister, the beginning of his lifelong mentoring of other (N)

But Amussen was still an editor at *Fury* + Whit? Right?

writers. As the reigning star of the *Advocate*, he spent a great deal of time in the *Advocate* board room reading old copies of the magazine, although he found time to drop condoms filled with water out a third-story window. Goethals found Mailer to be "incredibly self-disciplined," but not at all starry-eyed about writing. "To him it was work. He used to say, 'George, this business of inspiration is shit.'"

When Barton took over as president of the magazine, Crockett replaced Broadwater as Pegasus. Mailer was a senior editor. It was the job of Pegasus to gather up all the manuscripts, supervise the layout and get the magazine printed. The April '42 issue was the first effort of the new team and each staff member had a story or poem in it. The issue was delayed, however, and delayed again. Crockett reported problems with the printers in Vermont and cautioned patience. Barton, Mailer wrote, "had suspended himself into a state of forbearance worthy of a Zen warrior considering the immense agitation the late appearance of the magazine had caused." When it finally appeared, the contributions of almost all the new editorial team were gone. Crockett had boldly replaced the planned magazine with an entirely new one, a 75th anniversary double issue containing essays, poems and stories from the likes of Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams and many others. Crockett told Hilary Mills that his motive was to publish material of high quality rather than the "smart-alecky undergraduate juvenilia" that Barton and Mailer wanted to publish. Years later in a wickedly funny memoir, "Our Man at Harvard," Mailer described Crockett's coup as "a mammoth virtuoso literary crypto-CIA affair." Barton, who he likened to Billy Budd, took the blame for the entire situation, which was not a total fiasco in that Crockett's assemblage, the last crack of the esthete's whip, was acclaimed in the Boston papers. To keep everyone happy, Barton decreed that the planned issue would come

out in May, ^{containing} and would contain the material that Crockett (Claggert, to Mailer) had suppressed. As a result, the *Advocate* fell into a financial slough and remained there until well after World War II.

"Right Shoe on Left Foot" appeared in the May issue and "Maybe Next Year" in June, which lessened any pain ^{Mailer may have} he felt when he learned that the story Amussen submitted to ^{was} the New Yorker ^{were} turned down. He was also disappointed to learn that he was not selected in the MGM competition for young screenwriters [↑] which, on the basis of his *Story* feat, he thought he had a chance to win. MGM had asked about his military obligation, but he didn't want to think about it, although he knew he would have to sign up for the draft. His parents were getting concerned as millions of young men were enlisting or being drafted. There ^a was family discussion toward the end of his junior year in which a graduate school deferment in engineering was considered. When classes ended, Mailer told his family he wanted to remain in Boston, ostensibly to work on his latest literary interest ¹ writing plays ¹ but Bea, of course, was the magnet. The family knew about her by now and wanted to meet her as much as Bea wanted to meet them. He recorded a vignette in his journal that says a lot about their besotted state in early 1942.

Bea and I were eating at McBride's tonight. We were sitting next to each other, alone, sitting very close. When the waitress came for the desert & handed us two menus, Bea looked at them, smiling. "Two?" she said. "Two? Do we look like two people?"

TXFL

One unhappy by-product of their romance was a drop in his grades. For the second semester, he had only one A (from Morrison), two Cs and a B. This slippage caused him to lose the scholarship he had had for two years and would crimp the family's finances.

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Before final exams, Mailer nursed the Chevy back to Brooklyn to be junked. When he returned and the school year was over, he and Douglas Woolf, a Dunster friend, got jobs as attendants at the Boston State Hospital (formerly called the Lunatic Asylum) in near-by Mattapan. They were paid \$15 a week plus room and board. He wrote home to say that the inmates were not dangerous and the grounds looked like a college campus. Fan was upset and Mailer tried to calm her down by telling her he was working mainly with shell-shocked veterans and that he was collecting material for his writing. They were assigned to the violent ward, where there were 60 inmates. Woolf was exhausted by the workload—mainly herding the unruly inmates—and the 65-hour week and quit. Mailer hung on but after eight days left because of the pervasive brutality. When a black inmate went berserk, swinging two table legs, the attendants moved in with mattresses and Mailer tackled him. Then they beat him into unconsciousness. He did not take part, but he sensed that he eventually might and, in revulsion, quit. He wrote home that the job had been “very hard, very horrible.” The systematic and heartless use of violence as an instrument of control marked him deeply.

His parents and Uncle Dave sent him money to stay afloat and he sought work at the Navy Shipyard, newspapers, theaters and at Harvard. He had written a one-act play, “The Darndest Thing Happened on Mars,” and made friends with members of the Harvard Dramatic Society. Within three days of leaving the hospital, he landed a soda fountain job for \$18 a week and meals at a big department store, the C.F. Hovey Company in the Savin Hill section of

Boston, not far from where he was sharing a room with friends. He had nights and weekends off and of course spent as much time as possible with Bea, mainly at her home on Cary Avenue in Chelsea, as neither the Chevy nor the Dunster suite were available. This threw him into contact with Bea's mother Jenny, who was annoyed by the couple's petting.

She used to wrinkle her nose and looked on the sex like it was smelly, which was a big thing among most of those middle-class women at that point, that sex was something you didn't talk about; it was kind of a smelly activity and let's not get into it. And of course, I was all for the smells. For me, that was the most positive thing about sex, precisely, that it was a smelly activity. So there we are, and we'd neck on the couch. And Jenny would come marching in, making enough noise so that we could disengage if it was getting that far. And she'd say, "Norman, I just wish you knew how many times I've come in here and seen Bea necking with one of you or another." And I'd say, "Just getting ready for me." I was very sassy with her.

Fan, unaccompanied by Barney, came up for a visit in mid-July at about the same time that Mailer quit his job making sandwiches and sundaes. It is likely that it was during this trip that she met Bea, although there is no record of it. He started work as a press agent for the Joy Street Playhouse, a carriage house theater on Beacon Hill. There was no pay, but he got some free meals. He wrote releases, distributed posters, performed in short walk-on roles, and schmoozed drama critics. "The work is congenial," he wrote home at the end of July, "everyone is poor." In mid-August he went to a reception where he met the cast of *Othello*—Paul Robeson, Uta Hagen and José Ferrer—who were trying the play out in Boston before its two-year run on

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Broadway. This foray into the dramatic world sparked an interest that would last a lifetime. It also gave him a sufficient sense of stagecraft to recast his experience at the State Hospital in dramatic form.

To write the play, he decided, quite naturally, to go to the Jersey Shore. The Scarborough was now a vacant lot so he went to Monmouth Beach, where ^{Aunt} Beck was running a hotel. It had been decided that it was time for Bea to meet the clan and she traveled, separately (and thus appropriately), to Monmouth Beach sometime during the last week of August. The round of visits with the aunts and cousins apparently went smoothly because Mailer sent his mother a postcard on the last day of August saying that ~~aunt~~ Beck, the senior sister, liked Bea very much. Bea returned to Chelsea and he got to work on the play, using as the inciting incident the beating of the black inmate. He called the play *The Naked and the Dead*, a title that will always be linked with his name. ^{Mailer scholar} Robert F. Lucid, in his commentary on the unpublished play, noted that "Fear, for Norman, had probably always been the most authentic emotion," and "the administration of fear as a public policy" that he encountered at the hospital "penetrated to the deepest center of his imagination." He would return again and again to the ways powerful regimes and administrations at all levels of American society created what he called in his first published novel, a "fear ladder," whereby blandishments, threats, favors and physical harm were ^{increased or decreased} dialed up and down as necessary for the maintenance of control, much as the water temperature (euphemized as hydrotherapy) was modulated at the State Hospital to pacify unruly mental patients. ^{"A friend and father of the hydrotherapy"}

It took him ¹⁵ days to complete the three-act, eight-scene play, all of which takes place in a mental institution. In more than one way, it seems to anticipate Ken Kesey's 1962 novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo Nest*. The combined and disorienting use of both harsh and sophisticated

control methods by a despotic head nurse, the slow corruption of well-meaning staff members in an atmosphere of spying and informing, and the eventual revolt and escape of some of the tyrannized can be found in both works. The play has a number of redundant scenes and the line of action is sometimes difficult to follow, yet it has the force of its "fear ladder" thesis as well as the most believable dialogue he had yet written. After the rebellious black inmate is subdued and sent to hydrotherapy, the two young orderlies in the play, ~~David Land and Ralph Hughson~~, realize they cannot change the institution's deeply embedded methods of control. They quit and go on a fishing trip to regain their equilibrium, much as Nick Adams does in Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River." But before they go, David has an epiphany, which he blurts out to ^{one} ~~Ralph~~ ^{the other} during an argument: "This all happened on a bigger scale in Germany. Germany is like an attendant!" Shortly after finishing the play, ^{Mailer} ~~he~~ returned to Cambridge where he submitted the play to the Harvard Dramatic Society and prepared for his senior year. (N)

TXB
TXF By the fall of 1942, Harvard had gone to year-round instruction and thousands of army and navy officer candidates were housed on campus. Isolationist talk had subsided to the point that no one protested the appearance of Secretary of War Henry Stimson and Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox at the May 1942 graduation ceremonies. Mailer returned to Dunster, sharing a fourth floor suite with Harold Katz, a mathematics and philosophy major from Indiana. Many of the class of '43 had gone into an accelerated program and graduated a year early. In late September, he began talking with the Harvard draft advisor about joining the enlisted reserve. He also began checking on graduate school requirements in engineering, but was told that no course could keep him from being drafted. (N) (N)

to p 80

For Barbara's visit on the weekend of October 31, Mailer had arranged three separate dates for her, and bought tickets to the Princeton football game. She stayed at Bea's home that weekend and met her sister, Phyllis, who would become a close friend when they both attended Radcliffe the following year. Barbara liked her second date, Jack Maher, another of his *Advocate* friends, well enough that the third one was cancelled. Her continuing relationship with Maher later created some serious difficulty with Fan, who was suspicious, to say the least, of anyone with an Irish name. A week later he filled out a questionnaire for his Brooklyn draft board and was duly registered. Uncle Dave, who had contacts at the board, got involved and in early December he sent Mailer a telegram confirming that he was deferred until graduation.

TX Harvard had gone to war and Mailer was eager to engage war in his writing, not as background as in several of his previous year's stories, but head-on. He had been reading Malraux and Hemingway and began planning a new narrative, to be set in the south Pacific, where American soldiers were fighting. Like everyone else, he was getting the dispiriting news from the warfront. In April 1942, shortly after Gen. MacArthur left the Philippines for Australia, the American-Philippine army surrendered to the Japanese on the Bataan peninsula. The battle for Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands dragged on all though the last half of 1942, causing dismay. The reality began to strike home: the tide was not turning. This cheerless mood would be reflected in Mailer's writing. He was not taking a writing course, but worked on the novella with his usual focus. His courses that semester were two required engineering courses, a drama survey course with Prof. Theodore Spencer, a Shakespeare specialist, and Henry Murray's course in abnormal psychology. And, for the length of the fall semester, he awaited word from the Harvard Dramatic Society on the fate of his play. Because of wartime limitations, the Society was only

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mounting plays that could be handled with small stage crews. A note in the *Crimson* said his play, now re-titled "Man Chasm," was "a dark horse among the plays considered." Ultimately, the play was turned down and he focused on completing the war novella, which carried a title, "The Foundation," plucked from a passage in *Man's Fate*:

All that men are willing to die for, beyond self-interest, tends more or less obscurely to justify that fate by giving it a foundation in dignity: Christianity for the slave, the nation for the citizen, Communism for the worker.

There was one additional influence: the horrendous fire and pandemonium at the Coconut Grove supper club in Boston. On the night of November 28, 492 people, including many servicemen and their companions, were burned, asphyxiated or trampled to death when flammable paper decorations caught fire. For identification purposes, the morgue where most of the bodies were sent, the Southern Mortuary, was opened to the public. Mailer wrote home to say he was safe in Dunster when the fire occurred, not mentioning that he and Bea had gone to view the bodies. Afterwards, he transposed his memory of one of the victims to the memory of the key figure in the novella, ^{captain} Bowen Hilliard, a Harvard graduate:

He remembered the burnt body of a man that he had looked at for quite a time. It had seemed a terrible degradation, as if the man in burning to death had reverted to a prehistoric type. He had been blackened all over, his flesh in shriveling had given the appearance of black fur, and his features, almost burned off, had been snubbed and shrunken, so that the man's face in death had only registered a black

circle of mouth with the teeth grimacing whitely and out of place in the blackness of the ape.

ETS
TX

The novella is a kind of prospective dirge in which five Americans inwardly grieve and ponder their all-but-certain deaths as a force of invading Japanese surround them on the fictional island of Tinde in April 1942. Besides Hilliard there is an American Indian, Sgt. Thomas Rice, two privates, DaLucci and Swede "Jewboy" Wexler, and a chaplain, Fr. Timothy Meary. Mailer uses long flashbacks, in the mode of Dos Passos, to anchor the action and reflections of the G.I.s, and goes so far as to have Hilliard project, in a self-lacerating way, how his ex-wife Cova will react to news of his death. The novella contains only brief and tentative descriptions of combat; *are provided* he is much more at home in giving the texture of American life in capsule biographies of his characters. Like Mailer, Hilliard was an editor at Harvard's literary magazine and is the first in a long line of artist figures in his work. In the mid-1930s, Hilliard wrote a poorly received book in which he comments angrily on Malraux's idea of the dignity of transcending self-interest, saying, "But in America, men work, live and die without even the rudest conception of a dignity." The other four men, if less reflective than Hilliard, are also uncertain what meaning their deaths will have. Hilliard believes that America covers up its sins in defensive flag waving, although he holds out hope that "something would come out of the country, and it wouldn't go hard and selfish as it always had before," a theme that would reverberate in Mailer's work.

The novella winds down quickly after the five realize they are completely cut off. Meary and DaLucci are machine-gunned when they try to surrender; Wexler gets shot while demonstrating how he once threw a football pass. The Indian and the Captain are still firing as the sun rises on their final day, recalling Robert Jordan's final moments in *For Whom the Bell*

It ends with a Hemingway flourish. As they smoke their final cigarettes, ^{one character} Hillyard notes that it is going to be a sunny day. "Yes," ^{says another} the Indian answered slowly, "sometimes you want to look pretty carefully at it." ^{the novella} The novella, later re-titled "A Calculus at Heaven," strongly prefigures The Naked and the Dead, especially in the use of a hovering, brooding, sympathetic narrative consciousness. He completed the novella over semester break in Brooklyn in preparation for submitting it in Professor Hillyer's English 5A course the upcoming semester, his last at Harvard. In the middle of his senior year, he wrote in his journal that he wanted to do "a little philosophical accounting." What is most striking about this nine-page entry is his effort to tell the worst, to probe and pinch his weaknesses as if they were lice on his body. He starts by casting back to his arrival at Harvard, saying he came with little self-knowledge.

I lived completely (and my moods depended on) in the impressions of others. I would lie, boast, exaggerate so that they would think more of me, & so that I by some rather difficult rationalization might believe it too. This deception did not always work with me, & I went through periods of extreme realization & unhappiness. To myself I was no good.

He continues with a description of the stair steps of his growth as a reader, writer and lover, commenting on his failure in the Scranton brothel, his success in the one in Virginia and the seduction in Cambridge. He examines his political awakening and discusses hitting "the jackpot" with "The Greatest Thing." At the end of his sophomore year, he writes, "My egoism was extreme, & the fact of it bothered me." In his junior year, lacking any belief in God, he constructed a sensualist philosophy. Then he met Bea and "I've been loving-not loving her ever since. The sex-ego business is laid to rest. I'm a good lover without being as great as Bea thinks I

am." He ends with a reflection that augured well for a writer who would later examine sympathetically the psyches of moral monsters such as Gary Gilmore, Lee Harvey Oswald and Adolf Hitler: "Every villain in a melodrama considers himself as the hero. That is one of the fundamental things to learn about life. It is one of the milestones of intelligence."

Amussen wrote at the end of March 1943 to say that "Calculus" was the best piece of writing he had yet produced and began searching for a publisher for the 20,000-word novella.

Mailer's friends, who he said were his toughest critics, agreed with Amussen's evaluation as Mailer reported to Millie Brower in an April letter. He also told her that he expected to be in the army by July 1, and that he'd like to see her in New York in June if she would be there. His relationship with Bea is still very much alive, he continued, but it had been through many evolutions. "It's been wonderful, & exciting, & maturing for me, (and her) but it won't survive the next five years of war, I fear. Nothing could."

He wrote to his parents the same day to discuss what was on everyone's mind as graduation approached—the army. He was both resigned to being drafted and eager to seize the experiential possibilities of life in the army melting pot.

You say, Mother (and I'll include you dad) that you will worry if I'm in the army, and that therefore, I should reconsider it. If you only knew how much I've thought about this, and how many my temptations have been. (Don't forget, I have much besides Harvard to keep me in Boston.) And yet, as a writer, and you must believe me since I can't explain it to you, I feel it necessary to enter a private, to get the

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feel of the nation, to know what ^{ital} ~~the~~ ^{service} ~~DaLuceis and Wexlers~~ think about, rather than guessing.

^{TX} Uncle Dave came up to Cambridge in April to discuss his nephew's plans ^{no family} ^{Mailer's} member came more often. As a graduation present, he offered to underwrite his participation in a trip to Mexico with several of his friends, and Mailer seemed eager to go. His friends planned to leave on May 20, a week before graduation, but Mailer decided to go through the ceremony with the family in the audience. "Lord knows you've waited long enough for it," he wrote to them. He ^{novella} had already told them that he was planning to start a new work, another novel, which he would base on his play about the insane asylum. He had a title: *A Transit to Narcissus*.

For the remainder of the semester, he worked on the novel and did sufficient work in his final, required engineering course to get a passing grade. He told his parents he might only get a C, which was not impressive, "but what importance do my marks have now anyway." He was also engaged in deep conversations with Bea. Earlier in the semester, she had asked him if he wanted to get married and he replied that their commitment would persist without marriage, even if one or both of them were unfaithful. There was no sense, therefore, in getting married just "so we can participate in the great American custom," he wrote in his journal. "Bea loves me as a vase now, something valuable to her because it's clever and sensitive." The romance was obviously a work-in-progress because when the time came to make a decision about going to Mexico, Mailer opted out. He told his parents he'd prefer to take his vacation in a small town on the tip of Cape Cod, Provincetown, ^{with which he would be associated for the} where he would be buried in 2007. He didn't tell them that Bea would be going too, or how serious their relationship had become.

^{TX} This is not ideal, I know, but I don't want to keep the synopsis of the novel.

(N)

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remainder of his life (N)

He got a B in his engineering course and A's in his other three courses, which enabled him to graduate cum laude. With his parents, Barbara, and the Kesslers in the audience, he received his S.B. degree in Engineering Sciences, on May 27. Winston Churchill was to have been the graduation speaker and receive an honorary degree, but his meetings in Washington with President Roosevelt forced him to cancel. Bea also did not attend the number of tickets was limited but Barbara stayed with her in Chelsea and Barney met her for the first time. After a reception at Dunster House, the family returned to Brooklyn and Mauder awaited greetings from the army.

Chapter 3 Three

The Army

Two weeks after his graduation, Mailer and Bea took the ferry from Boston to Provincetown. A fishing village on the tip of Cape Cod, P-Town, as it is often called, is encircled by ocean, tidal flats and sand dunes. During the week they vacationed there, the town had an "unearthly" beauty at night, Mailer said. A wartime blackout had been imposed on the East Coast a year earlier and when the couple walked along Commercial Street fronting the harbor, a gibbous moon gave the town's colonial architecture "the feel of 1790," Mailer said. They stayed at an inn on Standish Street where their marital status went unquestioned by the landlady, or anyone else, and enjoyed an idyllic week in each other's arms and at the beach. Provincetown has never been a starchy place and the two free love advocates promised that they would return if and when he returned safely. He was certain that a draft notice awaited him at his parents' new

residence in Brooklyn Heights, an apartment at 102 Pierrepont Street. Bea had a final semester to complete in Boston and they went their separate ways after they left on June 15.

(TX) Ambivalence is the only word to describe Mailer's attitude about the army during that summer. Right after graduation, he told George Goethals that he planned to enlist and get it over with, but in July, he asked Amussen to request that Stanley Rinehart write a letter to his draft board seeking a deferment so he could finish ^ATransit. ^{to Narcissus}Rinehart was interested in his writing but counseled that such a request would be unwise. "I was a little frightened of going to war, and a great deal ashamed of not going to war, and terrified of my audacity in writing so ambitious a novel," Mailer wrote in the introduction to *Transit* when it was finally published in 1978. Every day the draft notice was expected and every day it failed to appear. He pushed on with the first draft of *Transit* and then began the second. Occasionally, he took the train to see Bea in Chelsea, or she visited Brooklyn. For both, it was an anxious period and Mailer's state of mind—"I was as lonely as I have ever been"—^mis reflected in the mood of the novel, a mix of the febrile and the lugubrious. (N) (N) (N)

There was some cheer that summer. Amussen's efforts to find a publisher for "A Calculus at Heaven" were successful. Edwin Seaver wrote at the end of August to say that he was accepting the novella, with only minor changes, for publication the following spring in *Cross-Section: A Collection of New American Writing*, the first of a series of anthologies of new work by young writers. It would be Mailer's first appearance in a book (excepting the reprinting of "The Greatest Thing" in an Alfred Hitchcock collection of mystery stories a few months earlier). Published with him were several important young writers whose careers were also given (N) (N)

a boost: Jane Bowles, Richard Wright, Shirley Jackson, Ralph Ellison and two others who Mailer came to know well in Brooklyn after the war, Arthur Miller and poet Norman Rosten.

Set in the summer of 1938 in an unnamed city, *Transit* focuses on a college senior, Paul Scarr, who works at what is called "the insane asylum," where he is a ward attendant charged with keeping the inmates quiet and moving through their daily schedule. As in Mailer's own experience and his play, "The Naked and the Dead," a troublesome black inmate is punched and kicked into unconsciousness by the attendants. Scarr is distraught but also strangely exhilarated by the regular and condoned brutality. Another attendant, Joe Cap, becomes his closest friend. Recently in prison, Cap took the fall for a higher up in the Syndicate, a criminal cartel. An emotionally hardened nurse, Marion Gannon, is the third major character. A dozen inmates, along with their afflictions and symptoms—catatonia, schizophrenia, drooling, tremors—are described with clinical precision. Scarr and Cap both vie for Gannon's affections and Scarr wins and has an affair with her. The Syndicate controls the asylum's budget and siphons money off in crude ways: low pay, poor food, inflated supply contracts.

The overarching struggle is between the Syndicate and a crusading newspaper run by an idealistic publisher, Paul Cowles. The action moves back and forth with little dexterity from the asylum to the newspaper to the Syndicate. Cap pretends to like Scarr, but secretly attempts to get him fired so he can succeed him as Gannon's lover. When the other attendants learn Cap is a stool pigeon, they arrange for him to be attacked by an angry inmate. The attack takes place and Scarr helps rescue Cap, but during the fight a senile inmate, "Stinky" Stinovicz, gets in the way, and is kicked in the stomach by Scarr and Cap, dying a few days later of peritonitis. Scarr and Cap are arrested and charged with manslaughter. Because the syndicate controls the D.A.'s

during a *ruckus* with inmates Scarr kicks one in the stomach, and the inmate later dies. Because the Syndicate controls the D.A.'s

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office, Scarr is offered a lighter sentence by the Syndicate's *consigliere*, a Mephistophelean lawyer named Riorden, if he does not reveal the horrors and graft at the asylum. He agrees but later reneges.

Scarr is clearly neurotic, "with the seed of the psychotic," as Mailer put it, and his altruism is regularly sideswiped by his sadomasochistic impulses. Before becoming an attendant, Scarr was an idealist who wanted to fight with the Loyalists in Spain, but did not because of his "almost mystic fear of bodily contact." As the novel proceeds, he becomes emotionally calloused and finds that violence beguiles him more and more. The methods employed to cow the inmates eventually turn nearly all of the employees into little fascists. The hospital scenes and routines (including an elaborate, fiendish system of distributing discarded cigarette butts among the inmates), based on Mailer's experience, ring true. The depiction of the newspaper and its staff and the Syndicate and its thugs is thin. The sex scenes, written shortly after he completed Henry A. Murray's abnormal psychology course, are ridiculously Freudian. Scarr's sexual problems with Nurse Gannon come to a head when he is out on bail, having brooded about her during his week in jail. Angry because sexually she is neither harlot nor mother, Scarr plans to kill her as she lies naked (an emblem of the title of his play), in the penultimate scene in the novel, but he pulls back the knife at the last instant. Now in a hallucinatory state in which he sees Stinovicz's corpse riddled with insects, he slashes at the bugs, cutting his own wrists, and dies. The novel ends, unconvincingly, here. Plot strings are left dangling, nothing is resolved. Scarr's muddled motives and apparently accidental death give every sign of authorial haste and confusion.

TXF

The novel may have ground to such an abrupt ending because the size of Mailer's ambitions finally overpowered him. He was worn out by what he called the novel's "ponderosities" and the tensions between Marxist and Freudian themes. Bea was also a large factor. He took the manuscript with him when he went on a ski trip with her to North Conway, New Hampshire for a week in late December. The real purpose of the trip was a serious discussion of their future, now that she was about to graduate and his army service was looming. Both of them were somewhat uncertain because they prized their freedom, but Bea's mother knew they were sleeping together and was nagging her to get married and not bring great shame on the family.

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Yeah, and suddenly I felt very bad. Like: I do love her, she's so lovely, why am I so mean to her and so I said, "Let's get married." She smiled, looked a tiny bit, nodded her head. Years later, she told me she felt a moment of gloom when I asked her. (laughs). In any event, gloom, doom and happiness, whatever.

TXFL

On January 7, 1944, he and Bea were secretly married in a civil ceremony in Yonkers, a suburb of New York. He gave her a twenty-five cent silver Mexican ring. There was no honeymoon, no guests, no reception; she returned shortly afterwards for graduation from Boston University.

TX

He was encouraged by a meeting at this time with a literary agent, Berta Kaslow of the William Morris Agency, who had written to him at the suggestion of Seaver. She became an enthusiastic admirer of *Transit* and while he was in the service sent it to a dozen publishers, albeit unsuccessfully. Still ambivalent, he again sought respite from his draft board. At his request, Seaver wrote a "To Whom It May Concern" letter, attesting to Mailer's talent and

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seeking an extension. He wrote to Seaver to thank him, adding that seeking a delay "occasions [in] me a great deal of soulsearching for I feel guilty when I think of some candy store owner torn from his loving children." Sometime around the middle of the month, the draft notice arrived. Mailer responded on January 19 by submitting a formal request for a ^{thirty to forty =} 30-40 day delay, arguing that he was trying to finish "an important literary work" that contained "an attempt on my part to analyze some of the fundamental differences between the Fascist and democratic minds" that had "some relevance to the war effort." His appeal was rejected and he was ordered to report for induction on March 27. (N)

According to Bea, Fan wanted the first marriage annulled. "Fanny," she said, "just didn't want her little genius to be married." ^{Bea's mother} His mother said she was opposed because Bea "wasn't trustworthy" and was domineering. Jenny Silverman wasn't entirely happy either; she had hoped Bea would marry a doctor. The opinion of the two fathers is not recorded; Fan and Jenny ruled their households. Ultimately, everyone came around when it was clear that the couple was committed and on March 18, they were married again at her home in Chelsea. The families wanted, and got, a full Jewish service: a rabbi, a service under a *chuppa*, the reading of the *Sheva Brachot* (seven blessings) and the ceremonial breaking of the wine glass. Mailer despised the ritual. Writing to his mother months later to defend Barbara's continuing relationship with Jack Maher, he said: (N)

[N]either Barbara nor I feel very strongly about being Jews—I am neither proud nor ashamed. But what I am ashamed of, and to this day my face flushes when I think of it, was that disgraceful exhibition—my marriage ceremony. Ughh. And you insisted on it, and were wrong, as I think you realized that night. Certainly, it

was hardly an encouragement for Barbara to marry a Jew; she was as nauseated by it as I.

After a week at Camp Upton where he took an army I.Q. test and scored 145, Mailer reported for basic training at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, arriving in early April. Before he departed, Berta Kaslow sent him a telegram informing him that Robert Linscott, the top editor at Random House, felt after reading *Transit* that he was a "potentially very important writer." His family, especially Fan, wrote to him weekly and he and Bea wrote to each other several times a week for the next two years. They had an extraordinary correspondence, over 400 letters, full of plans for the future, erotic and literary. Shortly after he had departed, she joined the Waves, went though officer training, was commissioned ensign and assigned to Norfolk, Virginia. When the men in his unit learned of her rank, he was asked over and over if he had to salute before they had sex. He grew weary of the joke.

As a Harvard graduate, Mailer could easily have obtained a commission and a desk job, perhaps in intelligence, but he decided that being in the enlisted ranks would give him a far greater chance to observe. Although he told Steven Marcus in 1963 that he was burned out after the dispiriting effort of writing *Transit*, he quickly recovered and began pondering the shape of his next novel. Before he departed, he told Bea that he intended to write "THE war novel" and shortly after he arrived at Ft. Bragg on April 8, he wrote home to say that instead of keeping a journal, he would send home regular observations to Bea, a plan he kept to for the duration of his time in the army.

Because of his engineering degree he was assigned to training for an assignment in artillery fire control. He found the math to be elementary. Even with calisthenics, rifle practice and marching ^{in addition to} on-top of his artillery training, he found time to compile a lexicon of military slang for his parents. He provided detailed explanations for "goldbricker," "chow," "snafu" and his favorite, "t. s.," the army's blunt, unsympathetic response to G.I. complaints: "tough shit." The obscene humor of the army resonated happily in Mailer and was a staple in *The Naked and the Dead*. Twenty years later in *The Armies of the Night*, he recalled the humor he discovered in the army:

Mailer never felt more like an American than when he was naturally obscene ^{all} the gifts of the American language came out in the happy play of obscenity upon concept, which enabled one to go back to concept again. What was magnificent about the word shit is that it enabled you to use the word noble: a skinny Southern cracker with a beatific smile on his face saying in the dawn in a Filipino rice paddy, "Man, I just managed to take me a noble shit." Yeah, that was Mailer's America.

His platoon sergeant, Donald Mann, was a southerner (and later his physical model for Sgt. Croft in *Naked*), but most of his friends in basic training were New York Jews. One of his closest friends was Clifford Maskovsky. He kept an eye on Mailer because, as Maskovsky recalled, "He wasn't good at physical things." Nor was he adept at inspections. A few weeks into basic, he was "gigged" for some infraction and his entire unit lost their weekend passes. "When it came to taking care of myself," Mailer said, "I had little to offer next to the practical sense of an illiterate sharecropper." One of his distractions was reading; another was taking notes on the

sex lives of the other soldiers. Everyone knew he was a Harvard graduate, but he didn't reveal his literary aspirations. A copy of *Cross-Section* arrived in late May, along with reviews of it in the *New York Times Book Review* and the *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review*, but he doesn't seem to have shown these around the barracks. Maskovsky said he never saw Mailer in an argument with an officer during basic, and Mailer recalled that he got through the war "with my lip buttoned." There ^{would be a} was one notable blow-up just before he was discharged, but for most of his 25 months of active duty, his reputation was that of a detached, quiet observer.

In late May, he sent Bea his first extended piece of writing for later use, a description of a fierce rainstorm that hit his unit when they were on the firing range. The most notable detail that he used later is a tableaux of sodden G.I.s huddled in the uncertain lee of a truck singing "Buddy, Can you Spare A Dime." Every other letter to Bea contained some patch of observation—the rhythms of insect life on the square foot of ground before your face as you lay prone with your rifle, the "phaWhom" sound of dynamite exploding in the water, a comparison of the sound of a passing artillery shell with the slithering noise a snake makes in dry grass. His letters also contained comments on his reading. He praised Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940), calling its author "one of the best novelists living today"; and found John Hersey's *A Bell for Adano* (1944) to be a "stinker." Kaslow continued to pepper him with letters about *Transit*'s chances with various publishers and her enthusiasm deterred him from abandoning the novel. As late as April 1945, he wrote to Bea that he wanted to make a pile of money so that he could write "a twenty volume *Transit* that would out-Joyce James."

His letters also contained speculations about the nature of combat and, as the summer approached, eager anticipation of Bea's visit to Fayetteville July 29-30. He scheduled the

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never visit

reunion to the minute. On the weekend before he inspected the room, and checked to see if her train would be on time. All went according to plan. Bea arrived with a silver chain for his dog tags and they had a lusty 32 hours together.

Mailer did not yet have a plan for the war novel. All he knew was that it would be a combat novel. When he learned of the D-Day invasion in France, he wrote to Bea, "my first reaction was of disappointment—I wanted to be on the beach. Secretly and selfishly I had wanted the invasion to wait for me." Later on, he recognized that being sent to the Pacific was fortunate in that the American hunger for power was palpable in places like the Philippines, but not in Europe. More important, to write about the war in France and Germany, it was necessary to have "a feeling for the culture of Europe and the collision of America upon it." Irwin Shaw did this in *The Young Lions* (1948), an ambitious novel that looked at the experience of both the German and American soldiers. Mailer wrote in 1959 that this novel's "considerable merits" were flawed by Shaw's lack of feeling for the continent's past, a comment that reflects Mailer's competitive nature in that period more than the lacks of Shaw's novel, which was based on his war experience. Shaw did land at Normandy and a few days later greeted a chagrined Ernest Hemingway as he waded ashore.

After completing his artillery training in early August, he had a ten-day furlough. He divided it between Brooklyn and Norfolk, and then boarded a train at Penn Station with his friend Clifford Maseovsky for the five-day trip to the West Coast and his next assignment at Ft. Ord, California. The train took the northern route, via Chicago, which gave him the opportunity to feel insignificant in the great empty spaces of the prairie, the foothills and finally the mountains. Writing from the King George Hotel in San Francisco, he recalled a conversation

with his sister about William James' ^S observation that the fundamental human emotions come from nature:

EXTL
I can understand that ^I_m in the cities God is a reactionary, an anarchic & perverted symbol. In the west, in the heart of the prairie and the foothills and the sky God seems to be everywhere, he is the hills and the sky and the battle between light and darkness, he is all the thundering vast music ever written, and in the city he is nothing. He is the frenetic beat of tension, anxiety, city jazz. Nerves snapping all the time. *EXTL*

EXTL
Mailer is often described as an urban writer. This is glib. From *Naked* and *Why Are We in Vietnam?* to *The Executioner's Song* and *Tough Guys Don't Dance* (not to mention his matchless renderings of the craters and pockmarks of the moonscape in *Of a Fire on the Moon*), his landscape descriptions crackle and pulse with energy and must be ranked among the best of postwar American writers. Diana Trilling observed, "The most dramatic moments in *The Naked and the Dead* are precipitated by intensities in nature," which is to say that Mailer's terrain is often an externalization of the thoughts, moods and sometimes the unconscious promptings of his characters. Later on, his responses to nature will be filled with heartache at the Faustian destruction of the American wilderness, "^I that sad deep sweet beauteous mystery land of purple forests, and pink rock, and blue water, Indian haunts from Maine to the shore of Californ, all gutted, shit on, used and blasted ^I." Although he grew up in cities, his sensitivity to nature's resonances must be counted as one of his most commanding skills. *EXTL*

(Tx) After spending a few days in San Francisco at the end of August, Mailer and Masdovsky took the bus to Ft. Ord, some 90 miles south. He told his ever-anxious mother that his artillery assignment would keep him well behind the front lines. Knowing Fan's detestation of Hitler, he told her he was reading one of the first major biographies, Konrad Heiden's *The Führer: Hitler's Rise to Power* (1944), which he found to be difficult but exciting. Sixty years later, he re-read it when researching his novel of young Hitler, *The Castle in the Forest* (2007). Shortly after finishing the Hitler book, he began reading Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1926) and right away wrote to his sister to say it would become one of the most important books of his life. Spengler's "immense thundering insight which takes all of history as its meat and re chops it as no man has ever done" excited him, gave him a sense of historical scope and flux that he had not encountered before. He was astonished by Spengler's ability to seize the relationships among developments in widely separated fields—warfare, astronomy, architecture, medicine, agriculture, the arts, statecraft—and align them to reveal a culture's tendencies, to show its movement in the inevitable cycle of development and decline, as well as to identify parallel cycles in other cultures. Always seeking the distinctive characteristics of a culture that were manifest of its deep structure, its morphology, he ranged with apparent ease through Egyptian, classical, Chinese, Hindu, Arabian and Western civilizations, commenting on, for example, the arcana of Egyptian breast plates, the nature of the tribunate in Rome, the advent of infinitesimal calculus and the discovery of the circulation of the blood.

Diana Trilling once observed that Mailer's "mind is peculiarly violable by idea, even by ideology." Spengler's study is perhaps the clearest instance of this susceptibility. In 1944, not yet having read Nietzsche, nor much Marx, he was ravished by Spengler's ideas about the Faustian

desire in the West to achieve the Godhead, to strive for the divine, even if it led to death.

Spengler saw the past as an organism. Every culture moved through stages of flowering, decadence, ossification, death and rebirth. Mailing's pronounced preference for the organic over the analytic, for metaphor over measure, has its origin in *The Decline of the West*. An invincible dualist, Spengler based many of his arguments on the superiority of the second term in a set of paired opposites—causality-destiny, space-time, nature-history, thought-will. He distrusted the rational scientist (Darwin was his negative hero), while admiring the forceful, intuitive artist (Goethe was his positive hero). Whatever the roots of Mailing's own dichotomous thinking, Spengler deepened the cleft. Within two weeks of his letter to his sister, he was writing to Bea about a new idea for a novella with "a ridge or peak as symbol" of "the higher aspirations of man, the craving for the secret, the core of life, (or as Spengler might say—the Faustian need) for power and particularly for Godhead and the vanquishing of death."

On November 7 he cast his first vote, an absentee ballot for F.D.R. A week later he completed his fire control training and after three weeks at Camp Stoneham, the West Coast embarkation center, shipped out on the U.S.S. *Sea Barb*. He sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge on December 6, almost three years after Pearl Harbor. In October, the Japanese had experienced catastrophic naval losses in the Battle of Leyte Gulf and were about to be defeated on Leyte Island. Southern Europe had fallen to the Allies, ^{who had invaded} France had been invaded and the Allies were pushing into Germany. The Battle of the Bulge was being fought as Mailing's ship crossed the Pacific, and planning was underway for the invasion of Luzon, the main island of the Philippine

archipelago, where the capital of Manila was located. MacArthur was returning. On all fronts, the tide was finally starting to turn, although the Axis Powers were offering ferocious resistance.

TX He spent most of his time on deck writing letters and watching the water and sky. It was a quiet crossing. He wrote Bea that he was at peace with himself and believed that he would survive the war—a soothing lie he repeated many times—in part because of his artillery assignment. “Without you,” he wrote, “I should have been an insolent unhappy youth forever jousting with the dark shadows of my vanity.” As he sunned himself during the long transparent days, he went over the “ridge novella” in his mind and began to populate it with soldiers he had known, although except for Sgt. Mann, none of them would be used in ~~Naked~~ ^{and the Dead}. Instead, he would draw on the men from a unit as yet unknown to him: the 112th Cavalry Regiment, a National Guard unit out of Ft. Bliss, Texas.

Created in 1921 mainly with men from north Texas, the 112th was federalized in November 1940 and served over five years on active duty, with 434 days of combat. After a hot, gloomy Christmas anchored in Hollandia Bay, New Guinea, on the *Sea Barb*, Mailer joined the unit on Leyte on December 29, 1944. It had received many replacements, but as he remembered, “the aristocracy of the outfit were these old Texas boys, most of them privates who had been busted down a number of times.” He continued:

EXTS
EXTFL They’d been overseas for three years at this point; they’d been allowed to keep their own sidearms. They had handkerchiefs tied around their heads, and they all had jungle rot, these open ulcers on the skin the size of fingernails that they had been painting with iodine. They just stared at us and sharpened their knives. It

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was like *Deliverance*. I didn't open my mouth for six months in that outfit. They were all crazy.

EXX
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 All the Texans could ride, as the unit had originally been a horse cavalry unit with a reconnaissance mission and roots going back to engagements against Pancho Villa. For its first overseas assignment on the French island of New Caledonia, the troopers still had their horses, making it ^{one of} the last U.S. Army unit to be deployed as a mounted force. A Texas historian described them as "a Texas regiment defending a French island from a Japanese aggressor while mounted ^N on Australian horses." The horses were impractical for jungle fighting, however, and the 112th became an infantry unit after it left New Caledonia, but the reconnaissance mission continued. When Mailer and twenty other replacements arrived, they learned that the 112th Cavalry was now part of the 112th Regimental Combat Team (RCT), along with the 148th Field Artillery. Because of his advanced training, he expected to be assigned to the 148th. But several weeks earlier, the 148th had received a group of infantrymen, trained them as artillerymen and ^{wasn't} about to give them up. As he put it, "So, the infantry replacements had been retrained as artilleryman, and we artillerymen found ourselves in the infantry. Typical Army SNAFU." ^{Disappointed} Crestfallen at the time, he soon recognized how ^{fortunate} his happenstance infantry assignment had been.

General Walter
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 The MacArthur's invasion of Luzon, began on January 9, 1945. The 112th arrived at Lingayen Gulf, Luzon, on the U.S.S. *Monrovia* (APA-31) and went ashore on January 27. The Sixth Army, under Gen. Krueger, was already on its way south to Manila, and the job of the 112th was to cover the left flank of the advance, which had bypassed many Japanese units, and guard supply lines from the beachhead. The 112th Mailer said, was "a 'trip-wire,' assigned to slow down any Japanese forces that attempted to attack the Sixth Army from the rear. The 1,200 men of the

112th were stretched out to the east of a north-south highway 80 miles long, as well as in observation posts in the hills beyond. Other units were involved in fighting on the outskirts of Manila with the 1st Cavalry Division, which entered Manila in early February. The Luzon campaign was huge. The Americans and the Japanese committed more troops than in any previous campaign of the war, including North Africa and Italy. Each army had over a quarter-million troops stationed on Luzon. But the Japanese were ill equipped and by the end, sick and starving. After Manila fell in early March, the fighting diminished throughout the spring and by July was all but over. MacArthur's victory came relatively easy.

In his first letter to Bea after arriving on Luzon, he told her not to fret about his safety as he would always be between two and twenty miles behind the front lines, a disingenuous assurance in that there was no discernible front line for the 112th. But regimental headquarters company, where he had a typing assignment in the Intelligence and Operations section of Headquarters Troop (the Harvard pedigree again), was of necessity removed from immediate danger, although the men assigned kept their rifles next to their typewriters. His assignment was to type daily intelligence reports. For the moment, he was happy with the work because he had an inside view of how the campaign was unfolding. He was also for the first time working closely with officers. At one point, he was present when the commanding general of the RCT, Julian W. Cunningham, was discussing operations with a colonel.

A self-taught typist, his work was error filled. He took pains to improve but to no avail, and he was reassigned to read manuals on interpreting aerial photographs with the possibility of getting a permanent assignment, but nothing came of it. He told Bea that it was "galling at times to be so utterly insignificant," but it deepened his novelistic commitment. Then, he was given the

lowly job of building a shower for officers. He was, apparently, of little value where he was and towards the end of March, he was transferred to a communications platoon unrolling and repairing wire between outlying units and HQ.

The advantage of the assignment was getting to observe small units of the 112th in villages, rice paddies and on hilltops. There were large tracts of uncontested territory—no-man's-land—and he rode far afield in a jeep laying wire and repairing breaks. As junior man in the platoon, Mailer had to squat on the fender of a jeep with his carbine ready. The downside of the assignment was that occasionally the enemy would cut the wire and ambush the repair team. "Variety, darling," he wrote to Bea, "is the only spice in army life, so I cannot gripe. And look at the training I'm getting for being a general. I'll know my army." He took copious notes and sent them to Bea four or five times a week. Perhaps a third of his letters are love letters, filled with erotic fantasies and plans, but the rest are experiential logs. His unflagging belief in his future greatness as a writer compensated in his mind for his serious lacks as a soldier.

While he was still in HQ Troop, the 112th engaged the Japanese in a small town on the highway to Manila. he went with some staff officers to see the aftermath. "It had a little bit of the spirit of an outing," he wrote to Bea, "almost to the packing of sandwiches." After a half-hour ride, they neared the front and he noticed an odor that was "a good deal like faeces leavened with ripe garbage." When he saw the dead Japanese, he was immediately reminded of "the ape-like charred bodies" in the Boston morgue after the gruesome Coconut Grove fire. His description of one body, which follows, was used in Chapter 7 of Part Two of *Naked and the Dead*, an account of the search for enemy souvenirs on a battlefield by soldiers in a reconnaissance platoon. These were the first war dead that Mailer encountered.

EXTC
EXTFL

Another Japanese lay on his back a short distance away with a great hole in his intestines which bunched out in a thick white cluster like a coiled white garden hose. They were surrounded by the very red flesh of his belly, and it seemed curiously like the jettison of some excrement by a red flower. He had an anonymous pleasant face with small snubbed features, and he seemed quite rested in death. His legs had swollen and his buttocks so that they filled his pants tightly as if they were full stockings. Somehow he looked like a little ballet dancer with those curiously full perfect legs, but more like a doll whose stuffing had broken forth.

EXTC
TX

The army on Luzon could not always come up with hot chow, but books seem to have been available, even new titles. In his early months, he read widely: Spengler in short bursts, each of which occasioned some reflection in a letter; Walter Benton's anthology of love poems, *This Is My Beloved* (1943), which Bea also read; Robert Graves' *I, Claudius* (1934); and Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918). He savored Strachey's portrait of Cardinal Manning for its dissection of papal diplomacy and intrigue. The Catholic Church would continue to fascinate Mailer but, excepting Spengler, it was the work of Somerset Maugham that elicited the most commentary in his letters.

He found Maugham's 1941 novella, *Up at the Villa*, to be "an unguent for the psyche." Set in Florence in the late 1930s, it is the story of Mary Panton, a young British widow juggling the attentions of three men. She has a one-night stand with one of them, a young Austrian fiddle player, who kills himself with her pistol when she rejects him. Complications ensue. One of the other suitors, a rich "waster" named Rowley Flint, is described as someone who is not "any

better than he should be," a remark that caused Mailer to reflect on the "perpetual oscillation" in himself between the kind of live-and-let-live attitude that would wink at Flint's conduct and a countervailing view ^{that} which saw

man only as tragic and of large dimensions and universality; when all of his acts of love, so magnificent at the instant, do have permanence and dignity, an individuality as perfect as he believes. But curiously, somewhere in all the twisted crannies of my nature, the two have become mixed, for my good spirits come always from the cynical view, the abstention of judgment, and my depressions are deepest when I take the tragic view.

Maugham's tolerant cynicism made Mailer question his belief that everything was the product of inner drives and outer forces. Perhaps some people were demonstrably better and some obviously worse than they ought to be. Perhaps he could stretch himself. ^{later} He referred to Maugham's line about Rowley in *The Deer Park* (1955), where Sergius O'Shaughnessy derides it as equivalent to a view of the universe as "an elaborate clock." Mailer's Spinozan determinism, buttressed by Spengler's sense of historic destiny, would persist, however, through the writing of *Naked*. ^{and the Dead}

Barney was working in Washington D.C. at the Office of Price Administration and Mailer wrote to him occasionally. But he wrote his mother and sister about once a week, knowing that Fan would start calling her congressman if she didn't hear from him regularly. In one letter from Luzon, he told her that "there's a wonderful quality in you like that of an unspoiled young girl who's always looking eagerly and zestfully for what's going to happen

next." Barbara has the same quality, he added, but it is "a more timid rather breathless facsimile." When he had returned safely after the war and was sorting through his correspondence while writing *Naked*, he wrote a note on the letter: "At the time, I was in Luzon and probably believed my bullet was being made in some Japanese factory so thought I'd give the old girl something to keep." Men in the 112th were being killed. The unit had 192 casualties during the Luzon campaign, including 41 killed. In early February, he was awarded the Combat Infantryman's Badge and began receiving combat pay.

In early April, he wrote Bea that he'd "been in a little combat, nothing very tremendous, but still one of the three or four 'first experiences' a man has." While searching for a wire break in no-man's ^{land}, his patrol of twenty soldiers ran into a Japanese patrol. Mailer stood guard with a few others at a creek crossing while the bulk of the patrol went ahead. Shots were fired in their direction and a tommy gun returned fire. Then the largest part of the American patrol returned and reported that ten Japanese had been killed. The American lieutenant in command brought back a shiny, bloody Samurai sword. Mailer reported that when the firing started what he felt was "not exactly fear—it was more, well, 'awareness.' But an awareness so acute that it approached pain and fear." He became adept at carefully unpacking and recording his emotions in every circumstance while in the Philippines, and was able to harvest the nuances when he did the same for a dozen soldiers in *Naked*.

During his time on Luzon, Barbara's romance with his college buddy, Jack Maher, was percolating. Jack had joined the army but kept writing to her at Radcliffe. Mailer wrote to his mother more than once about their romance, which Fan still ferociously opposed. In late April Mailer wrote to Bea, who was now asked her to intercede with Barney, who heretofore had sided

with Fan on the unhappiness that would ensue if the romance continued. "You must make him realize," he told Bea, "that he'll have no intimacy with his daughter" if he tries to block her life decisions. Fan's opposition to Barbara marrying a ^{guy} was granitic; she believed she was saving her love-struck daughter's life by her interference. The romance continued long distance and shortly after Mailer returned from the war, Fan overheard Barbara talking to him about Maher. With great bravura, Fan fell to the floor with a heart attack and would not get up to get help until Barbara agreed to break it off. Barbara caved in and except for a few meetings did not see Maher again for over 50 years. She remained angry with her mother—whose attack almost certainly was feigned—and their relations were strained for years to come. Fan's victory, which marked the high water mark of her control over the family, was more than a little Pyrrhic. Mailer told Barbara that she acted nobly.

Uppermost in his mind during this period, however, now that he had seen some combat, were plans for the "ridge novella." Ideas for revising ^A ~~Transit~~ ^{to Narcissus} still came up in his letters, but as the spring wore on, the new project moved to the fore. He had heard about the mythic eight-day patrol undertaken by a 112th platoon across the upper Angat River in Leyte and his imagination, exercised by the veterans' tales, began to see the novella structured around a long patrol. He thought about beginning it with soldiers on a boat watching a sunset, followed by a "birth allegory," with the patrol moving through thick jungle brush to "emerge into sentience and then fear" as they glimpse the mountain, "ineffable ridge beyond ridge." On April 24, a week after writing Bea of his plans for the novella, Mailer asked for a transfer to the Reconnaissance Platoon of HQ Troop.

TX The next day, he explained to Bea that he had felt humiliated in his previous assignments. His transfer decision might be seen as "quixotic," he said, but it was the only way to maintain his dignity. "You're doing something when you go out on a patrol that you don't do when you lay a mile of wire." To allay her fears he said that Recon was no more dangerous than the wire job because the platoon's job, some of it in enemy territory, was to gather information, not to fight. General Cunningham used Recon as his intelligence arm. Yes, he told Bea, the unit had lost men in previous campaigns, but on Luzon, it had so far experienced no casualties. He had already been on two patrols and the landscape, the heat and the sweat added up to a good feeling, he said. Over the next three months, he would make at least 25 patrols, mainly in the area around the town of Antipolo, 20 miles south of Manila.

He had read John Hersey's *Into the Valley* (1943) and Harry Brown's *A Walk in the Sun* (1944) before he arrived in the Philippines, and the idea for writing about a patrol originated with these books. But it was his time in Recon that solidified it. The patrols gave him time to think and plan. "A part of me," he told Steven Marcus in 1963, "was working on this long patrol. I even ended up in a reconnaissance outfit which I had asked to get into. A reconnaissance outfit, after all, tends to take long patrols. Art kept traducing life." It was clear that the Japanese were going to be defeated and "none of us had the slightest desire to be killed in an action which could not even give a good marble of fact to the ponderous idiots who directed our fate." Most platoon leaders, therefore, would not push into potentially dangerous areas unnecessarily. His sergeant asked his men if they saw any activity through field glasses and if the answer was no, he'd say, "Good, I don't see none either. Let's go back." The platoon would report no enemy activity in the area and a red pin would go into the map. Mailer had already read *War and Peace* and

remembered Tolstoy's observation that every army moves on waves of ignorance and misinformation. Recon's troopers often walked miles with their heads down. They would traverse rice paddies, walk through streambeds, climb over hills and return at night "fifteen miles older in the feet, wet twice with rain and sweat." It was grueling, but the novelistic gleanings were rich.

Sometimes patrols were accompanied by Communist partisans, the Hukbalahap or "Huks," who had fought the Japanese from the start. One day they found a dead Huk with a Japanese light machine gun in his arms. His Filipino comrades carried him away to their village and Recon platoon went along. Maller volunteered to carry the 20-pound gun and, as he wrote Bea, immediately regretted it. He consulted his letter for the following, taken from a 1952 short story, "The Dead Gook."

[T]he gun had a detestable odor. There was the smell of Japanese fish oil, and the smell of Luiz who had acquired the gun, the smell of a Filipino peasant which to Brody meant carabao flop and Philippine dust and Filipino food, an amalgam not unlike stale soya sauce. Worst of all, there was the odor of Luiz' blood, a particularly sweet and intimate smell, fetid and suggesting to his nostrils that it was not completely dry. It was the smell of a man who had died, and it mingled with the fish oil and the soya sauce and the considerable stench of Brody's own body and Brody's own work-sweated clothes, until he thought he would gag.

His most memorable patrol took place in mid-May. Colonel Philip Hooper, the C.O. of the 112th Cavalry and one of the few officers he admired, gave Recon an important assignment.

According to an intelligence report, a unit of "crack Japanese marines," perhaps as many as 70, had infiltrated American lines. Recon, with its 30 men, was to find and destroy them. Most of the platoon carried a rifle, two bandoliers of ammunition, a cartridge belt of ammunition, two grenades, two canteens, C-rations and a helmet, about 40 pounds. At 130 pounds, Mailer was in good shape at the time, although he was still recovering from jaundice. Other men carried the machine gun, ammunition boxes containing 250 rounds, and the radio.

The platoon was dropped off by jeeps and began walking. Soon they had to climb a 500-foot hill. The footing was miserable; they ascended a steep, slimy staircase of waist-high rocks covered with vegetation and surrounded by bamboo thickets with vicious thorns. Quickly, everyone was exhausted. "The most intense ecstasy I could imagine," he said, "would have been to stop climbing." The radio operator was gasping and nauseous. The machine gun crew fell behind. The remaining men, led by Lieutenant Horton, pushed on. Mailer discovered that "you can never plumb the last agony of exertion, there seems always a worse one beneath it." Pride kept him from quitting. The men at the front of the column had the worst of it because they anticipated an ambush at every turn of the trail. After an hour of climbing, at the edge of total collapse, they were attacked. Someone in the front of the column kicked over a nest of hornets and the enraged insects buzzed and stung the entire line. The thrashing, frenzied platoon was cut in half. Mailer and the men in the lead made it to the top; the rest, including those with the machine gun, stumbled down to the valley.

He ended his description of the ordeal to Bea by saying that the hornet patrol was "the kind of experience I never want to become a connoisseur of." But, in fact, it is precisely what he became: a discriminating observer of war's pains, pangs, fears and throes. As one commentator

on *Naked* observed, "[N]o other writer on war has so devastatingly caught the depths of physical tiredness." The climactic chapter in which Sgt. Croft attempts to drive his platoon over Mt. Anaka becomes an odyssey of fear, exhaustion and death. Croft kicks the football-sized nest, derailing Recon's mission to determine if the Japanese could be attacked from the rear. Driven off the mountain, Croft's platoon, like Horton's, collapsed on the muddy ground, twitching. As they rested, it began raining, which brought some relief. Horton radioed back to HQ saying the platoon had hit a hornet's nest and was returning. The duty officer who got the message said, "What the hell did Horton mean by all of that? Is he speaking of a literal or a metaphorical hornet's nest?" Like other great naturalistic writers—Zola, Crane, Steinbeck—Mailer in *Naked* presents a natural world that is uncaring, unyielding, implacable and, occasionally, beautiful.

His erotic letters could be as long and elaborate as his descriptions of patrols. They often had dramatic elements—costumes, props, scene changes—and resemble Jacobean masques as much as pornography. In one letter he describes a small room, heavily curtained and lit by candles. He is dressed only in a robe and Bea has a "black halo, black stockings and shoes and flimsy-like short black panties with no seat, and of course some wisp across your paps." They drink wine and he places an olive in her navel and then lettuce leaves on her breasts which he nibbles. They eat off the same plate, taking bites between embraces.

We go back to finish the raspberry ice, and you straddle me in the chair and my hot hard pride slips into your lubricious embrace. We fuck very gently, and finish the ice, and light cigarettes, and drink more wine, until we glow and become tumescent so that I must lay you out on the divan, and fuck the shit out of you. Do

Don't
want
to
give
us
a
synopsis
of
the
novel
before
telling
us
what
other
people
said
about
it
(N)

and
to
Dead

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has
EAT

you like my French mind, darling? Do you love the thought of alternating food nibbles and love nibbles? Am I heating your snatch from 10,000 miles?

Bea's letters, while ardent, were more restrained. They were long, supportive and full of plans for the future. Her duty was considerably easier than his and her belief in his potential as a writer was rock-steady. She told him about her friends, family news and sent him portions of the novel that she was writing about life in the Waves. Mailer sent back supportive critiques, but her novel was turned down after the war and she didn't have the desire to continue. "I gave up writing," she said in 1948. "I found out how hard it was."

When Bea wrote to him about being heartsick and confused by photographs of war atrocities, asking what it all meant, he gave her two possibilities. Perhaps God was the supreme artist, he said, detached but curious about how the situations and oppositions put in motion would play out. This deity would resemble "a very intense Somerset Maugham," but one utterly without compassion. Another possibility was that everything was chaos, meaningless, and men killed each other in the same savage way that ants did. Years later, he said to an interviewer, "Remember that awful priest who said, 'There are no atheists in foxholes'? It was a remark to turn people into atheists for 25 years. I remember every time I got into a foxhole I said to myself, 'This is one man who's an atheist in a foxhole!'" He would remain one for another decade.

By late June, the 112th began to relax a bit. The invasion of Japan was at the back of everyone's mind, but it was many months away. Patrols continued, with only occasional contact with the dispirited enemy. Mailer was able to focus more on the novel, especially after he learned that Seaver was turning down an excerpt from Transit for the 1945 Cross-Section. He knew the

men in Recon well by now and had begun the culling process, choosing his models. He told Bea that this novel would differ from his earlier ones in two respects: he wanted it to grow out of the interaction of his characters with the natural environment, and he intended to pick his characters before he had the plot. (N)

In June, Mailer met Francis Irby Gwaltney, or "Fig," a tall, red-haired soldier from Arkansas, who transferred into the 112th. He had not been to college but had literary interests and the night they met the two sat up all night in a foxhole talking about the novels of Thomas Wolfe. He admired Fig's nasal drawl and his irreverence. They soon became buddies and their friendship deepened when a soldier said something negative about Jews. Fig shouted, "You can't talk that way—I'm Jewish!" The soldier said Gwaltney was no Jew and Fig yelled back, "I am a fuckin' Jew." Fig, Mailer said, was about as Jewish as George W. Bush. Assigned to Recon, Fig made patrols with Mailer, who he later described as "a brave soldier, but not a good one. He couldn't see worth a damn. Nearsighted." Mailer told Fig about his plans for the novel, but had not yet decided to use him as the model for Wilson, one of the key characters of *Naked*. Fig was the only member of the 112th who Mailer stayed in regular contact with after the war. (N)

In addition to Fig, Sgt. Mann and Gen. Cunningham, Mailer selected four other soldiers as models: Red Matthiesen, Ysidro Martinez, Isadore Feldman and Roy Gallagher, four whose ancestry was, respectively, Swedish, Mexican, Jewish and Irish. He sent Bea a few comments on Feldman, a Brooklyn welder who was the model for Joey Goldstein, but never mentioned Gallagher, the sullen Bostonian whose name he retained. Martinez (Julio in the novel) and Red (Valsen in the novel) were described at length because they were the principals in incidents that would be plot turns in the novel. Martinez was one of a half dozen sergeants in Recon, and led (N)

Mailer's squad. The contradictions in his character attracted Mailer. He was "soft-spoken, sly, deceitful, like an animal in the brush, and demonstrated more courage than any man I've ever known." Terribly fearful and certain he was going to be killed, he nevertheless volunteered repeatedly to lead patrols. He had huge qualms about killing, yet slit the throat of a Japanese soldier in the dead of night, as does his namesake in *Naked*. (N)

He had even more to say about Red, and borrowed more of his actual words than from any other soldier. An itinerant worker who rode the rails around the country from 1931 to 1937, Red was often only a few dollars away from hunger. He was in his late ~~30s~~ ^{thirties} when Mailer met him. Uneducated but intelligent, he impressed Mailer with his theology: "If there is a God, He sure must be a son of a bitch." They became friends, and the reticent Red eventually told him his life story. He had no allegiances to any individual but huge sympathy for every underdog, including blacks. Fearless and ready to fight anyone who gave him any trouble, he recognized that his kidneys were going and he would soon have to compromise. In *Naked*, a weakened Red is forced to back down by the platoon sergeant who is based ^{crawfish} ~~physically~~ ^{sergeant} ~~physically~~, not psychologically. (N)

on Sgt. Mann. His name is Sam Croft.

In selecting a soldier as a character mold, he looked for traits that would enable him to put that individual in dramatic situations with others. Obviously, he combined some characters and sculpted the personalities of others. But he began with real soldiers. Thus, the framework of the novel grew by accretion as he sorted through the hundreds of ⁶⁴ ~~G.I.s~~ ⁶⁶ he had known. Later, he constructed charts showing which soldiers had scenes with others to ensure that all characters had been used sufficiently and appropriately. "I studied engineering at Harvard, and I suppose it was the book of a young engineer," he said. The last two major characters (who would not be (N)

delineated or given major roles until much later), were the commanding ~~General~~, eventually called Edward Cummings, and a young second lieutenant, perhaps based in part on Horton, but definitely owing something to ^{Lieutenant} Lt. Hilliard in "A Calculus at Heaven." At first he was just called "the second looey" and then later, Robert Hearn. He is the novel's ^{seemingly} ~~titular~~ hero and he is murdered by Croft, the novel's secret hero.

By mid-July, fighting on Luzon was effectively over and Mailer was in garrison learning for the umpteenth time the manual of arms, reading Spengler and discussing books with Fig. He was excited about the new ^{G.I.} Bill and the 52-20 Club, which would provide veterans with \$20 a week for 52 weeks or until they got a job. He calculated that the two programs would give him and Bea a combined income of about \$300 a month, plus tuition money. In addition, they had already saved \$2,000. She was able to increase her savings rate because she was living with Fan, having transferred to New York. Barney was still in Washington and Barbara in Cambridge. Mailer and Bea discussed living in Boston and taking graduate courses at Harvard. Influenced by Spengler, he was interested in studying comparative religion and history.

There was but one obstacle, but it was stupendous, and studiously avoided in Mailer's letters: the pending invasion of Japan, which was to be the largest amphibious assault in history. Operation Olympic would land 14 divisions on the southern Japanese island of Kyūshū on November 1, 1945. Four months later, using Kyūshū as a base, Operation Coronet would land 25 divisions on the southern shore of the main Japanese island of Honshū and push north 100 miles to Tokyo. His outfit, he learned later, was scheduled to land at Tateyama Naval Airdrome on

Honshū, which was surrounded by gun emplacements embedded in cliffs surrounding the base on three sides. "We would have been massacred," he said. (N)

The invasion plans became moot when atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki three days apart in early August. The Japanese surrendered on August 15.

~~Approximately 125,000 Japanese died instantly in the two attacks, a figure that within a few months rose to a quarter of a million. Although the casualties were mainly civilians, 10,000 Japanese soldiers were also killed when the first bomb landed on its target, the parade grounds of the Japanese Second Army in Hiroshima. To keep these figures in perspective, one million Allied troops would certainly have died invading Japan, and at least as many Japanese. There was much cheering when news that the Enola Gay had dropped the bomb reached the American troops in the Pacific. On August 8 he wrote to Bea that he approved of anything that got Americans home sooner, but he found the prospects for the future to be horrifying.~~ (N)

He goes on to condemn the sentimental adulation for machines that he had observed, especially among men in the air corps and the navy, and says he feels the same way about machines as his mother does about Jack Maher: "pathological." He ends on a Spenglerian note: (N)

"We have come to the age when we love machines and hate women." Mailer's suspicion of all things mechanical and electronic, which would become one of the hallmarks of his worldview, became deep-seated and irreversible by August 1945. Twelve years later, he would begin his most famous essay, "The White Negro," by pointing to the ongoing, immeasurable "psychic havoc" created by the combination of the atomic bomb and the concentration camps. He was perhaps the first writer to link these horrors in an integral way with the suffering and discrimination felt by blacks, the aftermath of slavery. (N)

The invasion force was transformed into an occupation force. He was eager to see Japan and curious about the people, having only seen "starved, grinning, irritatingly polite and friendly prisoners." But his comments on Japan, indeed his comments on all topics (save his novel) were outweighed for some time by speculation about and plans for his homecoming. Using the military's point system, he calculated that he would have sufficient credits to be discharged in about a year. He wrote Bea that he could now think of the months ahead as "milestones instead of a chasm." The knowledge that he was going to survive and that there would be no more campaigns made him think of all the dead, and of the "many summers that had gone by while they had hopes to go home. I could have wept for them."

At the end of August, the 112th sailed on the U.S.S. *Lavaca* (APA 180) for Japan. His ship was with the assembled fleet when the Japanese signed the surrender documents aboard the U.S.S. *Missouri* (BB-63) on September 2. There was a radio hook-up so that everyone could hear the words of Gen. MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz at the ceremony. The 112th was given a place of honor, the 50-yard line, as one trooper put it. All eyes were trained on the *Missouri*'s main deck. He wrote to his parents, "The commentator said, 'The sun has come out and is shining on Tokyo Bay as the surrender is signed and peace is with us.'" This, he said, "was one of the largest, bare-assed lies I'd ever heard." The day was cloudy, with rain threatening. That afternoon the 112th landed at the Tateyama, across the bay from Yokohama.

His unit was now a constabulary force charged with demobilizing Japanese combat units. Tateyama was on the lip of a mountainous peninsula honeycombed with caves and bunkers connected underground by roads wide enough to accommodate jeeps. For a month, the soldiers detonated munitions and destroyed weapons. As they did their work, they saw the big guns that

rolled on rails through tunnels cut to the backside of the mountain. The Japanese planned to elevate the guns and fire over the mountains into the harbor, while remaining unseen and impervious. The troopers shook their heads when they realized how deadly Operation Coronet would have been.

Boredom set in and he volunteered to be a cook. Now that fighting was over, he was unemployed as a rifleman, so to speak, and had little to do but stand inspections. He hated the arrogance of Army cooks, but liked the idea of learning to cook. The real incentive, however, was getting every other day off. He captured the raspy relationship between cooks and soldiers in "Chorus: The Chow Line," one of the comic interludes in *Naked*.

The troops file by in an irregular line . . . As they go by they sniff at the main course which has been dumped in a big square pan. It is canned Meat and Vegetable Stew heated slightly. The second cook, a fat red-faced man with a bald spot and a perpetual scowl, slaps a large spoonful in each of their mess plates.

Red: What the fug is that swill?

Cook: It's owl shit. Wha'd you think it was?

Red: Okay, I just thought it was somethin' I couldn't eat.

Wilson: Ah swear, don't you ration destroyers know another way to fug up this stew?

✓
Cook: "When it's smokin', it's cookin'; when it's bur⁶rin', it's done." That's our motto.

6
Wilson: (chuckling). Ah figgered you all had a system.

EMIS
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MAILER was still a Pfc ^{private first class} (having been promoted a few months earlier), and the chances for further promotion in Recon Platoon were slim. As much as he disliked the army, the idea of a sergeant's stripes on his sleeve ¹—which would come if he became a first cook ¹—was attractive. The mess sergeant liked him, he told Bea, and that augured well. (N)

TX
Despite his exasperation at the delay in getting home, his time in Tateyama, and later in Choshi, ^{one hundred} 100 miles north of Tateyama on the Pacific coast, was his happiest time in the military. He quickly mastered the army cooking routine and took pride in his work. Off duty, he explored the cliffs overlooking the ocean and made many notes for what he now referred to as "the jungle novel." And he read widely. For the last half of 1945, a partial list includes Eric Ambler's spy novels, Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* (1944) and Koestler's collection of essays, *The Yogi and the Commissar* (1945). He praised Lillian Smith's novel about the lynching of blacks, *Strange Fruit* (1944), but said it would have been better if it also explored the poor whites who committed the lynching. Her novel ends, he says, with the old question, "Why evil, why, why, why?" His answer: "Evil is not hard to understand. It is difficult only when the explanation tries to establish that it is not fundamental to the nature of man." Charles Jackson's novel of alcoholic abandon, *The Lost Weekend* (1944) terrified him "because I have so much in common with the hero." He said *Alice in Wonderland* (1866) "indirectly reveals so much of the child's mind, the perfect ease with which it can appreciate incongruity and horror and cruelty" and found French

novelist Georges Simenon's *Home Town* (1937) to be magnificent. Over the years, Mailer read and reread hundreds of books by the prolific Simenon, praised his ability to construct tight, believable plots and gave copies of the Inspector Maigret novels to friends. But after Spengler, he had the most to say about Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

He tackled *The Brothers Karamazov* first, reading it at the same time as *Bea*. He wasn't at all impressed, he said, with the saintliness of Dostoevsky's Alyosha or by any of Tolstoy's peasants in *War and Peace*. The men he had liked in the army because of their goodness struck him even more because of their lack of force. "[T]heir goodness had no radiation," he said. For the "jungle novel," he planned to present each character in the manner of Tolstoy, that is, in "the self-beloved circle of his own mind." He rhapsodized about *Anna Karenina*, finding it to be much greater than *War and Peace*. Throughout his life, he remarked on Tolstoy's deep knowledge of humanity, his severe and unsentimental compassion, which he said later "reminds us that life is like a gladiator's arena for the soul and so we feel strengthened by those who endure, and feel awe and pity for those who do not."

Tolstoy's Kitty reminded him of *Bea*, and he pictured *Anna* with *Bea*'s face and body. He recalled their meals at Petitpas, a table d'hôte restaurant on West 29th street where they engaged in "the language of knee against knee." While he aimed for Tolstoyan scope and severity in his writing, his letters to *Bea*, now that their reunion was certain and near, often gushed with tenderness: "I adore thee sweets. Ever. I miss you as hard and clearly now as I did ten months ago. I shall never learn to live without you." He would, of course, but he could hardly have foreseen it at the time.