

(was it his best?) he could sound for five syllables like the son of a duke, and of course he carried a cane. At the age of thirty-two, he still had a panic so profound at the thought of disturbing any institution in its work (he was criminal in his heart as we shall later see) that he could not even recognize the presence of his fear.

Called by his future father-in-law "the strangest Jew I've ever seen," Archie has aspirations for his unborn child (he senses it will be a male), and while he doesn't pray much, his dreams "searched high places." (He thinks of British military leaders from ^{World War} WWI, in which he served —

Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, Field Marshal Haig — but also earlier figures such as Napoleon, Admiral Horatio Nelson and Sir Walter Scott. He also had "a secret respect for Jack the Ripper, was fond of Sir Walter Raleigh, and Charlemagne mixed into Alfred the Great at the edge of his historical vision, but for truth Bear Brummell was the name to whom he called most often in his dreams."

Jenny, the daughter of a rabbi, prayed to Solomon ("in order that her child take its place among the brightest who ever lived)," King David, the Bal Shem Tov, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, and to England's only Jewish prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli, as well as "Galileo because he defied the Church, and Sampson, who was finally incorruptible. And to Moses as a matter of form." The narrator explains that the high hopes of mother and father are not just matters to be inculcated as the child grows under their tutelage, no, "the contract was already in his flesh as he was being conceived, passed along with whatever art, violence, vision, apathy, perception, high intelligence, treachery and sloth was living in the sperm of his father, and whatever courage, love, fortitude, devotion and profound cowardice was swimming in the

egg of his mother." It is even more complicated because Archie, while he had "a snob's respect for the powers of the world," also possessed "a king's disdain for a few rules, and he put that into his semen too, how not?" Jenny, sentenced to be "a duchess in her family and a small little women in the world," produced an egg that sought to incorporate "qualities in herself a little opposite to herself." She did not love herself, and "so she wanted a warrior," ^{a son who would} ~~one compounded of the most admirable traits of the heroes to whom she prayed.~~

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

As late as the fall of 1974 Mailer was fiddling with this fragment (and he spoke of reviving it through the early 1980s), but always stalled. After detailing the birth and early days of

ms. p. 502
follows

~~Born" with a new title, "Alpha Brave Universe," as the first chapter of *Of a Fire on the Moon*, published in 1971, and later planned to use it as the opening of the unwritten third volume of the trilogy that began with *Ancient Evenings*, published in 1983. But he did neither.~~

sum in ^a Besides the need for family history, Mailer gave two additional reasons for not

continuing with "First-Born," which he described in 1992 as "the saga of the Mailer family back in Russia with my grandfather as I imagined him." The first is that after he had read the work of

Isaac Bashevis Singer, the Nobel Prize-winning writer whose stories of life in the *shtetls* of *ram*

Poland are depicted with Chekhovian finesse, he thought, "Oh Lord, there is absolutely no need

for my book." He gave a second reason in a 2004 interview, where he explained that he intended

that "First-Born" ~~to~~ be stored on the computers of a fictional Noah's Ark spaceship that leaves

Earth sometime in the distant future. The information that the ship's 80 survivors have about

human history before its destruction in a nuclear holocaust (he planned to use his short story

"The Last Night" to depict the end of the world) is fragmentary. The chief source for the post-*world war*

WWII world, he explained, was the biography of "a writer of the period in the second half of the

20th century named Norman Mailer." The heat of the third novel in the trilogy was going to be

the story of Merrill-Mailer as told in "First-Born." "The scheme was wonderful! The

architectonics were exquisite," he said. Using his American life as an exemplum, a repository of

essential cultural memory for unborn generations voyaging to the stars, aligned perfectly with his

deepest ambitions. But he was forced to abandon the idea not because he feared sliding into the

sloughs of hubris—this troubled him not—but because mastering the scientific-technological

physics of spaceships and space travel needed to make the novel credible was a bridge too far. *beyond him*

(N)

(N)

“My brain power had passed the point where I could retain that kind of information and digest it,” he said.

Yamanishi wrote in December to ask if he still planned to use his 1962 story, “Truth and Being, Nothing and Time: A Broken Fragment from a Long Novel,” as part of the big novel. Mailer responded by saying that “so many years have gone by, and I have changed so much, that I think the long novel will never be written in its original form. Rather I conceive now of another kind of book, equally long, of which I’ve written so far a hundred pages.” He refers here to “First-Born,” which he hoped would be a novel evoking the past in the manner of Proust’s Remembrance of Things Past. His statement to Yamanishi, with whom he readily shared professional details, reveals a key demarcation. After ten years of stunted efforts, Mailer had finally given up on the narrative adventures of Eitel and Elena, Sergius and Denise, Dr. Sandy Joyce and Marion Faye. Some of these characters would ^{appear} continue on in the dramatic version of *The Deer Park* that would be staged in 1967, but nowhere else. The big novel was formally dead. At least this one.

With Mailer’s blessing, ^{his friend} Bob Lucid had organized an event at the Chicago conference of the Modern Language Association, and convinced Ralph Ellison and John Cheever to join Mailer in addressing the session, ^a ~~entitled~~ “The Modern American Writer and the Cultural Experience.” An overflow audience of approximately 2,000 filled the Red Lacquer Room of the Palmer House to hear the three novelists speak. Cheever led off and spoke against Podhoretz’s idea of the novel as documentary, ^{also} “bringing the news,” and lauded the powers of unfettered imagination. Ellison, speaking without a note, castigated sociologists for obscuring the painful realities of urban life

with statistics, and ⁱⁿ evoked the alienated lives of Harlem. Richard Stern, ^g Mailer's friend from the University of Chicago, gave the following summary of his talk. ^{Mailer's}

Mailer, in a fine blue suit, vest lapped in black silk, took the microphone like a bulldog and in a voice which gripped every throat in the room, read a corrosive, brilliant, hit-and-run analysis of the failure of American novelists to keep up with a whirling country, their division into opposed camps of those who fed titillating pap to the genteel and those, like Dreiser, who pointed American Julien Sorels to the doors of power (though *his* clumsiness could not open them). Down the road were "the metaphorical novelists," Hemingway and Faulkner, one of whom described the paw, the other the dreams of the social beast.

One reason that American writers had been unable to keep pace, ^{Mailer} he argued, was that American culture changed ten times faster than other cultures, "a phenomenon never before described." The country, he said, grew "like a weed and a monster and a beauty and a pig. And the task of explaining America was taken over by Luce magazines." America had not produced a ^{twentieth-} 20th century writer who could "clarify a nation's vision of itself as Tolstoy had done perhaps with *War and Peace* or *Anna Karenina*." Mailer ended his talk about the failings of the nation's current novelists by saying that the communication "of the deepest and most unrecoverable human experience must yet take place if we are to survive." Although he didn't say so, it was the job he wanted, as must have been obvious to the audience. In this grand setting, a month before his ^{forty-third} 43rd birthday, Mailer, full of beans, and wearing his blue pin-stripe banker's suit (now his public uniform), described the idiosyncratic strengths and weaknesses of novelists as dissimilar as James, Dreiser, Edith Wharton, Elinor Wylie, Bellow, Capote, James Jones and Terry Southern,

noting the precise location of each in a dynamic artistic constellation of his own creation.

Mailer's speeches were not always successful, but Stern said that for this speech the academics "thundered applause," their thirst for affirmation of literature's noble mission "slaked by a master." It was ^{Mailer's} his second major speech of the year and the professors responded to him as enthusiastically as had Berkeley students. When Mailer first began making public speeches, he had tried to make his audiences itch; now he was making them cheer.

He stayed close to home in the first months of 1966. Beverly was due in early March. He worked on *Cannibals*, ^{and Christians} which he hoped would be published in June, and appeared at several anti-war events in Manhattan. As protests against the war increased, President Johnson in February authorized Operation Rolling Thunder, a devastating bombing campaign against North Vietnamese targets led by ^{B-52} B-52 bombers. The expansion incited the protestors, now being joined by returning Vietnam vets. That same month Mailer spoke at the Poetry Center at the 92nd Street ^{Columbia's Steven} "Y" with Howe, Podhoretz and Marcus; a week later took part in a Read-in at Town Hall in Manhattan with 28 other writers and performers, including Hellman, Kazin, Sontag and Lowell. Mailer and Lowell enjoyed each other's company and began discussing the possibility of traveling to Japan in the summer to speak against the war, and the ominous possibility that the ^{United States} U.S. would enter into a nuclear war with China. He wrote to Yamanishi to tell him of the possible visit, and also to inform him that he might write a nonfiction book "to explain the country to itself." He said, "America will soon divide, an underground will form, and there must be a few works whose existence will help keep alive some morale in that underground." He finished with some good news: "We had a son last week, whom we named Stephen McLeod (yes, after the characters in *An American Dream* and *Barbary Shore*) and he's a handsome boy

with calm features and a deep nature, I suspect. Beverly is fine." Now, ^{he was} the father of six, ^{and his} ~~Mailer's~~ expenses were mushrooming.

Never much of a financial planner, Mailer ^{nevertheless} knew that he could not shoulder his obligations on royalties from his earlier work and the relatively small amounts he received for magazine work and college speaking gigs. He needed to produce new work. When he was asked to write an essay for a volume on the American dream, he declined, saying that his load made him feel like "a 19th century novelist most of the time, Dickens, dare I say it, Balzac, Dostoevsky, you know." Despite his commitments, in April he bought a waterfront house at 565 Commercial Street, ^{in Provincetown} next to the one where John Dos Passos had lived for over two decades. Before leaving the city from Provincetown in early May 1966 to take possession, he ^{wrote to} ~~turned in the~~ corrected galley of *Cannibals*, and answered his mail, including a letter from Eldridge Cleaver, ^{who was} ~~with whom he had been corresponding.~~ Cleaver, in prison for rape and assault, was seeking parole and Mailer wrote a testimonial to his talent. Later that year, Cleaver, who later became a leader of the Black Panther Party, was released. Writing in *Ramparts* while still imprisoned, ^{praised} ~~Cleaver called Baldwin's criticisms of "The White Negro" "schoolmarmish," while praising~~ Mailer's essay for being "prophetic and penetrating in its understanding of the psychology involved in the accelerating confrontation of black and white in America."

Once in Provincetown, ^{Mailer responded} ~~he~~ took another look at the dramatic version of *The Deer Park*. Beverly was involved in a small theater group ^{there} in Provincetown, and they began discussing the idea of presenting the play to a summer audience. He began revising, and it took on a new structure. At the same time, he was thinking about writing a short novel for Walter Minton. He

had parted company with Putnam's, but he still owed them a book, having accepted, and spent, an advance. "First-Born" was a possibility, but it would require major research, so he began to think about his trip the previous year to Alaska, and came up with a tentative plan. For several years, he had mulled over a story about a group of violent bikers and their women living in the scrub oak thickets of Provincetown's dunes. The novel was "so odd and so horrible" that he kept putting it off.

I was, as I say, in fear of the book. I loved Provincetown and did not think it was a good way to write about it. The town is so naturally spooky in mid-winter and provides such a sense of omens waiting to be magnetized into lines of force that the novel in my mind seemed more of a magical object than a fiction, a black magic. Nonetheless, I began the book in the spring of '66. It attracted me too much not to begin. Yet because I could not thrust Provincetown into such literary horrors without preparation, I thought I would start with a chapter about hunting bear in Alaska. A prelude.

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

(Tx) His story about the two southern lads was written in an entirely different style—frantic, slangy and obscene. He was also writing much more quickly. ~~The deadline challenges of *Dream* had enabled him to get his guns free, so to speak~~ marrying a southern woman and becoming the father of two sons also had an influence on *Vietnam*. It is an oversimplification, but nevertheless roughly accurate to say that from the mid-1960s on, Mailer had two compositional modalities: fast and slow. When he was in the groove, he could turn out fifteen thousand words a week. When he wasn't, he could stretch a book over a decade, shuffling, revising and ~~wordsmithing~~ further. *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is the same length as *Dream*, but was written in less than half the time. He called these books "bonuses, gifts. You do not have to kill some little part of your flesh to dredge them up." *Vietnam* wrote itself, he said, and "I was full of energy when I was done," which is to say nothing like the shape he was in after completing his previous books.

1967 Anne Barry had left Mailer's employ in the spring of 1966. She was replaced by Madeline Belkin in Brooklyn, and Sandy Charlebois Thomas in Provincetown. He kept them both busy, Belkin with his correspondence and New York projects, and Thomas with the typing of *Vietnam* and the script for *The Deer Park*. The Mailers had a lot of other help—maids and cooks—and the house was usually overflowing with family and guests, including ~~Thomas listed some of the summer guests for Manso:~~ Bob and Joanne Lucid, Ed Doctorow, and from nearby Wellfleet, Betty Jean and Robert Lifton (the psychiatrist and psychohistorian who would win a National Book Award the same year as Mailer), Cy and Billie Rembar, Roger and Fay Donoghue, Scott Meredith and Mickey Knox. Hal Conrad and Mara Lynn were there, as was Buzz Farbar, a young editor Mailer met a few years earlier who would become one of his closest friends. When Vance and Tina Bourjaily visited they saw that the house was full of ropewalking equipment. He

said that there was "a mystique" about it for Mailer. "It's a feat of balancing that has religious import in some societies and is a circus act in others and a kids' showoff trick in still others. Norman has a capacity not only to get totally absorbed by something like that but also to communicate his enthusiasm for it to everybody else. We hadn't been there an hour before we were trying to find the right ropewalking shoes and Norman was showing us the basic technique. This remarkable enthusiasm for odd things seems to be an important part of his considerable magnetism." ~~Other guests included Allen Ginsberg and his entourage, and Diana and Lionel Trilling—but not at the same time.~~ (N)

Trilling admired ~~Dream~~ and she and Mailer had become closer after he stayed with them in England. ~~Now she was his best female friend, vying with Lillian Hellman.~~ *Diana Trilling had become* ^{Mailer} *Trillings* The closeness of their relationship is reflected in the number and length of the letters they exchanged over more than two decades. While in Provincetown, he received a long letter from her, and answered at even greater length. She had asked what he said was an "an unhappy question." Did they have a real sense of each other? Did he address "the real Diana Trilling," or some construct? His answer explains what he thought about friendship: (N) (N)

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I don't make friends with people because they satisfy my idea of them. I am friends with people because they make me feel good when I talk to them and since everything on earth is extraordinarily limited I often don't want even to have too good an idea of them. I don't want to have too much of a hypothesis to be proved or disproved—¹—rather there's an animal pleasure in friends. One feels a little safer or a little merrier, one shores up a small bulkhead against the large dread that always waits outside the door [...]

EXA

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

TX These sentiments are explored at great length in *Cannibals* ^{and Christians}. It is a difficult book, he told Yamanishi, because "I carry my ideas further than they have ever gone before, including for instance an attack upon the scientific method." The brunt of this attack derives from his assertion that metaphor had partnered with science for centuries in exploring and presenting life. The scientists of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment were also "adventurers, rebels, courtiers, painters, diplomats, churchmen." No more, he said. Because the best metaphorical thinking arose from the profoundest experiences of humankind, he argued, destroying art's collaboration with scientific vision meant that our expanding knowledge of nature, of the universe, was not truly grounded. In the mid-twentieth century, science progressed mainly through experimentation and laboratory work; "Science has built a wall across the route of metaphor: poets whine before experts." And what had ^{twentieth =} 20th century science produced? The gasoline engine, airplanes, modern architecture, antibiotics, psychoanalysis, the atom bomb, plastics and the exploration of space. Mailer had reservations about some of these achievements, and deplored the rest. "Modern science may prove to be the final poisoned fruit of the rich European tree, and plague may N

disclose itself as the most characteristic invention of our time." The plague in all its social, architectural and technological manifestations is one of the collection's three foci; the other two are literature and politics. Much of the book's political discourse is anti-war argument; it is dedicated to "Lyndon B. Johnson, whose name inspired young men to cheer for me in public."

His polemics, coming at a time when the nation was increasingly roiled about the Vietnam War and uneasy about some of the advances of technology, brought raves from reviewers when *Cannibals* ^{and Christians} was published in August. The *New York Times* reviewer, Eliot Fremont-Smith, proposed Mailer for the Nobel Prize in his review. A British reviewer, A. Alvarez, noted that on one page Mailer writes "with the speed and rawness of insight of Dostoevsky," and on the next, when giving an "existential analysis of the bowel-movements," sounds like Gen. Jack D. Ripper, "the bodyfluids man in *Dr. Strangelove*." He went on to say that "Dr. Mailer" was a diagnostician with "an almost extra-sensory perception for the faintest signs and vibrations which show where the sickness lies" in America. The British poet and novelist, John Wain, whose work had appeared with Mailer's in an anthology devoted to the Beats and their English counterparts, "The Angry Young Men," said in his review that Mailer was attempting "to position himself so as to stand face to face with the true identity of our time, our time in America." Written in what Wain called "a time of panic and mortal illness," *Cannibals* ^{and Christians} can now be seen as a rehearsal for what many believe to be his greatest work, *The Armies of the Night*, preparing the ground for it just as *Julius Caesar* did for *Hamlet*.

Act IV, the Provincetown theater Beverly was involved in with director Leo Garen, was a small operation, but put on some ambitious productions, including plays by Pirandello and LeRoi Jones. Mailer cast her as Lulu in Act IV's production of *The Deer Park*, which opened on

August 16, 1966. She and Mailer had begun to quarrel, however, and while they would continue to collaborate on dramatic and film projects for two more years, the marriage was beginning to come apart. ^{Jose} Torres recalled one dinner party that summer when they got into a fierce argument. When she made a comment about Mailer's mother, Torres said, Mailer was "white with fury." He said, "Beverly, I am going to get up and throw you out the window," but Torres interceded and he and Mailer went for a walk to defuse the situation. His ^{extra}-marital flings were one of the chief causes of their difficulties. Over a decade later Beverly said that Mailer was seeing other women not long after they were together "When I was pregnant, he had an airline stewardess. Three days after bringing home our baby, he began an affair." Beverly may have been referring to Carol Stevens, whom Mailer had met when he was still with Jeanne Campbell.

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

Beverly's acting career was a major cause of friction. She was unhappy about being cast as Lulu in the play, first in Provincetown, and again five months later when the play opened in New York. She wanted to play Elena and believed Mailer had given the part to someone else to hold her down. ^{Miley} Knox disagreed: "Norman never held her down," he said. "In fact, one of the reasons ^{he} he did *Deer Park* was to put his wives into it" (Adele was the understudy for the role of Elena). Beverly said that he put her down because "he doesn't want to share the limelight. He enjoys humiliating me." Her interpretation is both strengthened and weakened by Mailer's report on the play at the end of the summer to Uncle Louis and Aunt Moos: "We did it up here in Provincetown in a theater Beverly helped to start up (she is, by the way, a superb actress—^{woe is me}—I'm not used to other talent in the family)." ^{Mailer biographer} Beverly told Mary Dearborn that she had devoted herself "to running the (at times enormous) Mailer household. Norman's children from his previous marriages came and went, and there were always staffers and Norman's friends underfoot, waiting to be fed." ^{to Beverly} Mailer said later that the marriage had "begun to wallow, then had sunk: his fourth wife, an actress, had seen her career drown in the rigors of managing so large a home." Although Beverly told an interviewer in the spring of 1967 that "Norman's career is the most important to me," she said later that his criticisms of her acting troubled her so much that "I began to feel I had no career." After they separated, Beverly went on to a long, successful acting career, mainly on the stage, well into her eighties.

Mailer had cut the play from five hours to two-and-a-half; he told Knox he had gotten rid of "all the lard." He now planned to mount the play the coming winter off-Broadway at the Theatre De Lys in the Village. As he said in another letter, "At least I'll be done finally with the play. Clear and shut after eight years. God." In addition to revising the play and writing *Vietnam*?

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that summer, he had written a book review of *Rush to Judgment*, Mark Lane's long critique of the *Warren Commission Report*. Lane's contention is that the Commission "had no intention of trying to find any other assassin than Oswald." He didn't quibble with the Commission's massive assemblage of fact, nor did he accuse it of suppressing information. Rather, he faulted it for presenting the evidence so that it "fitted a bed of Procrustes." His suspicion was that the Soviets had made Oswald their minion as the price of allowing him to return home after two years in Minsk. He proposed that a "literary commission supported by public subscription" and headed by someone of the stature of Edmund Wilson or Dwight Macdonald be formed to resift the material in the 26 volumes, as well as follow untouched leads. As he said at the end of his review, "The game is not over. Nor the echo of muffled drums. Nor the memory of the riderless horse." His proposal found no backers. But Mailer persisted, and became, with some help from Jean Malaquais, his own commission of investigation. It would take him another 30 years to reach the end of his obsession.

The Mailers stayed on through the early fall in Provincetown and when they left he had finished a penultimate draft of the play and completed *Vietnam*. With his work done, he dictated replies to 100-odd letters. He wrote to Arnold Kemp and Eldridge Cleaver about their upcoming paroles, offering to help both; and brought Louis and Moos up to date on the family: "Michael is all box-office, narcissistic, brilliant, spoiled, electric, frightening, sexy, a complete self-starter, and Steve all attraction and reaction, soft smiles and chuckles and fun. They're going to make a great pair, knock on wood." He told Hellman about the New York production of the play ("Don't warn me—I know, I know, but theatre is a disease"), exchanged thank you notes with Mayor Lindsay, and informed Paul Carroll that he would do a *Playboy* interview ("I hate playing second

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I had the
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that the
book was
already
finished
several
pages
ago.

fiddle to a tit, which is one reason I've never written for Playboy"). He agreed to Aldridge's request that he set up a depository for his papers, but said that if he was going to write his biography, he had to understand that the biggest psychological turning point in his life was not *Dream* (as Aldridge believed), but *The Deer Park* because he almost "died of a bad liver writing it but cured my liver as a result of rewriting it." One of the longest letters was to Knox in Italy offering him \$200 a week to play Collie Munshin in the new production. Mailer was underwriting the entire budget for the play, but wanted this kept a secret. He said if he could get Max Von Sydow or Nicol Williamson to play Eitel, then there was "an outside chance to make this the biggest thing to hit New York for years." Mailer didn't know how *not* to swing for the fences. The Mailers were back in the city just in time to attend the social event of the year,

perhaps of the decade, Truman Capote's Black and White Ball. *Capote sponsored the event to introduce the Washington Post's new publisher, Katharine* Capote chose the Plaza Hotel for the event because he thought it had the most elegant

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

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

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

rumpled

raincoat. When asked about the award many years later, he laughed and said, "How little they knew about how to murder me."

The ball was held on the same day that preparations for the play began. Mailer wrote to ~~Yamanishi~~ ^{WAS TO} to tell him about its upcoming premiere, and that it would be published by Dial Press in mid-1967. Dial had paid him \$20,000, a high price for a play that had not yet had a full-scale production. After casting and "ten stunning maniacally depressive days of rehearsal" under director Leo Garen, the play opened on January 31, 1967. In his introduction to the published version, Mailer said that the play was "perhaps the dearest work of all my work," even more so that the novel from which it grew. It was, he hoped, funnier, sadder, more tragic and possessed of more layers. "If the compass was obligatorily more narrow, the well was being dug to a deeper water." He now had a play with 13 characters and 88 brief scenes (a huge electronic tote board displayed the scene number, counting down to zero) in two acts. Continuity was spotty in a play that went, Mailer said, "from explosion to explosion," as rapid as the cuts in a film. The play was a bastard, he wrote, the offspring of a "realistic play and that electric sense of transition which lives in the interruptions and symbols of The Theatre of the Absurd." The cast was solid, not dazzling; there was no one of the caliber of Max Von Sydow or Nicol Williamson. But Mailer, who did the casting, had some pros: Hugh Marlow as Eitel, Will Lee as the Hollywood magnate, Herman Teppis and, as Marion Faye, Rip Torn, an impressive young actor who would win an Obie for his role. Beverly continued as Lulu, and Buzz Farbar as the orgiast, Don Beda. A relative unknown, Rosemary Tory, played Elena, the female lead, and Knox was Collie Munshin, Teppis' comically unprincipled son-in-law. Mailer thought the play as staged could not be immediately understood, and was worried, therefore, about the critics.

The first reviews were generous, if not superlative, with praise, especially of Lee as the marvelously fraudulent Teppis, "a twin tower of sentimentality and ruthlessness" who is such a shameless vice figure, Walter Kerr wrote in the *Times*, that the audience is happy to see him return. Later notices were not as good, even though Mailer gave lengthy interviews to the *Village Voice* and the *New York Post*. He also published "A Statement of Aims by the Playwright" in the *Voice* and, 10 days before the premiere, a long essay on the front page of the drama section of the Sunday *New York Times* explaining the difficulties of hammering it into shape through four rewrites over 10 years. He said the play's fate will be decided in "the electric hour when the drama reviewer sprints from the theater, snatches his opening lead from the well-tuned bag of his wit, and is off to his desk, say, say, his guillotine." He ends his piece, titled "Mr. Mailer Hands Out the Cigars," by saying that the cigar's band reads: "Be advised the actors speak so clearly you need not miss a line." Walt Whitman wrote anonymous reviews of *Leaves of Grass*; Mailer didn't go this far, but he did provide all the leads, prompts, nudges and background information — a fully packed press kit — needed to make the work of reviewers easier, as well as implying that those of taste and sagacity would be the ones to most appreciate his play. "I wanted the critics to feel self-conscious at the opening," he said. "You have to hustle."

On opening night, he threw a huge party. Over 500 people crowded into the Mailers' Brooklyn apartment, where a rock and roll band played from a perch under the skylight. He did brief interviews with several invited newspaper columnists about opening-night. One of them, Dick Schaap of the *New York Post*, quoted Mailer as saying that while it was too early to tell, "I think we've got a hit." At the end of February, he purchased a full-page ad in the *Times*, and to celebrate the show's 100th performance at the end of April, he persuaded Dial Press to host a

Village block party, with free food, drink, music and a pep talk from Mailer. By this time, ~~three-hundred~~ however, the 300-seat Theatre De Lys was only half full for most performances.

He did everything possible to promote the play, beating "his own drum to shreds" as one reviewer put it, but finally it was only a middling success. Why? First, the play has 13 characters each of whom has a rich history, so "the complicated story needs vast quantities of exposition." Second, the play is set during the Korean War and the characters, now residing in some antechamber of hell, are remembering everything. The action is over; the inmates are serving their sentences. Third, while the evil characters are vividly imagined, those with virtue are stale. As Walter Kerr put it, "Mailer is a moralist and concerned with unmasking evil wherever he finds it, which is everywhere." So there is a great deal of laughter because "unmitigated evil invariably creates in the viewer a happy impulse to hilarity." But Eitel, the director who bewails his lost integrity, is "pompous and more than a bit foolish," Kerr says. Finally, several of the characters are philosophers and "spout philosophy and assorted Mailerisms," a practice known in France as preaching for your own saint (*prêcher pour son saint*). Faithful to his vision even as the audiences dwindled, he continued to pump in money. "I hold on because I don't know why—I just don't want to close it," he wrote to Knox. On May 21, after 127 performances, the play closed. He ~~spent~~ ^{had lost} \$60,000.

Offsetting this money drain was income from four books he published in 1967. The first was a collection ^{of} his previously published short stories, 19 of them, for a Dell paperback. The play's script, with a long introduction on the state of American theater (he spent two weeks seeing about a dozen plays in New York), came out in August, followed a month later by *Why Are We in Vietnam?* Finally, in November, CBS/Macmillan published *The Bullfight*, an ill-

conceived project/ worked up in collaboration with Buzz Farbar. It consists of Mailer's 8,500-
 word profile of an iconoclastic Mexican *torero* known as "El Loco," a fine essay (and his first
 original piece in *Playboy*) that captures the magic of the "wild hour" of the Sunday bullfight,
 accompanied by 91 photographs of a bullfight. Accompanying the book is an LP record of
 Mailer reading part of the essay, and Hugh Marlow and Rosemary Tory reading Federico García
 Lorca's famous bullfighting poem, "Lament for Sánchez Mejías," which Mailer and his bi-
 lingual daughter Susan translated. The photos are small, often confusing, and do not follow one
 particular fight, but several (but not El Loco's), making for a jerky presentation. The book and
 record came packed in a bulky, ugly plastic container that he must have hated; the book was so
 poorly made that the front cover tended to split at the hinge. The few reviews were bad and the
 book, perhaps his worst least professional, disappeared quickly.

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

His exchange with the Institute occurred when the play was still selling out every night.
 Having seen it 50 times and watched the director make the necessary adjustments, he was getting
 bored talking to the actors about the nuts and bolts of stagecraft. Instead, he huddled with Farbar

and Knox at a table in Casey's, a Village bar. They began creating characters: Mailer, "The Prince," was the leader of a Mafia gang; Knox was "Twenty Years," reflecting his two decades as an actor; Farbar was "Buzz Cameo" a reference to his brief role in the play. "We had absolutely fantastic stuff going as we were drinking," Mailer recalled. As Knox remembers it, "Norman suggested to Buzz and me that since we were so brilliantly witty during our nightly razzle-dazzle repartée, we should make a movie. He conceived of the premise: Three hoods go to the mattresses (hood-talk for hiding out). That was it, leaving the field of action open for us to improvise, be funny, wild, crazy, or inventive." Farbar knew an accomplished young filmmaker, Donn Pennebaker, who had made *Don't Look Back*, a documentary about Bob Dylan, and he agreed to film the action for \$10 an hour; he also supplied a room in a Brooklyn office building for the shoot. Mailer put up an initial \$1600 and, in mid-March over four consecutive evenings from midnight until dawn, they made a film called *Wild 90*. There was no script.

Film historian Michael Chaiken described the result as "a gestalt of galoot poetics, direct cinema, and lowbrow comedy with three drunkards launching a barrage of profanity-laced repartee and virulent put-downs." None of the three principals could claim a drop of Italian blood, but they knew how to curse creatively. "Mailer," Chaiken wrote, "sounding like Paul Muni trying to pass a kidney stone" is central to all that transpires in the 90-minute film (thus the title). He harangues his pals for 45 minutes, which soon becomes tedious. It revives somewhat in the second half when visitors come to the hideout. Beverly Bentley, playing The Prince's wife, drops in, as do José Torres and his wife Ramona, and other members of the cast of *The Deer Park*. Torres brings his German shepherd and the film reaches its climax when Mailer gets down on all fours and barks face to face with the dog.

One reason for making the film was critic Jonas Mekas, who convinced Mailer to watch several experimental films at the Filmmakers' Cinémathèque. He and Beverly saw Kenneth Anger's 1964 film about bikers, *Scorpio Rising*, and Andy Warhol's 1965 film, *Kitchen*. Mailer admired Warhol's courage in dramatically slowing the action, but otherwise found it to be "horrible." He said that Warhol's film "had the horror of the twentieth century in it. The refrigerator was making too much noise. The beautiful heroine, Edie Sedgwick, has the sniffles. She keeps blowing her nose while the hero keeps trying to rustle a sandwich together out of wax paper." The film is "almost unendurable," he said. *Wild 90* may be worse. Mailer, operating in what he once referred to as his "usual narcissistic fog," paid no attention to warnings about recording the sound properly, resulting in a film which "sounds," he said, "as if everybody is talking through a jock strap."

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

When he left for Provincetown in mid-May, his plan was to return to "First-Born." The previous summer Scott Meredith had gotten him a \$450,000 advance from New American Library for a novel. It was an enormous sum, and strengthened his faith in Meredith's abilities.

Mailer had been spending the advance freely, but had produced nothing. He had provided NAL neither an outline nor a sample chapter, only a line in the contract calling for "a novel dealing with aspects of the whole Jewish experience, European and American, in the past 100 years." But he was unable to write. Bill Walker wrote him a letter from prison and Mailer wrote back to

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

Even as he was trying and failing to extend "First-Born," and sporadically editing the film, he had several other projects percolating. The first concerned Malaquais. A few weeks before leaving for Cape Cod, he had awakened one morning with "an extraordinary idea." On the

spot, he wrote to his friend in France and offered him \$6,000 for a year's full-time work. He outlined the job: a re-examination of the Kennedy assassination based on a careful re-reading of the Warren Commission Report. His hunch was that the murder had been committed by one or more petty conspirators, and Oswald, probably an agent for the FBI and the CIA, as well as a couple of foreign countries, was one of them. The Commission's proceedings, therefore, were "a series of attempts to conceal by multitudinous layers of meaningless evidence the simple contradictions attaching to the embarrassments of the various secret policemen when lo and behold one of their boys seemed to be at the gun." In addition to the \$6,000, he offered him the profits of any book that might come of his "detective" work, as he called it. It was Malaquais, he reminded him, who had recited Trotsky's dictum: Find the truth by comparing the lies. Malaquais accepted and Mailer mailed him his review of *Rush to Judgment*, where he first calls the work of the Commission a cover-up. (N)

Mailer had done the *Playboy* interview with Paul Carroll, and in July, one of the magazine's top editors, Nat Lehman, sent him the edited version for his approval. Lehman thought Mailer was too "metaphorical" and "elliptical" in places. In his reply, he said that, yes, it was true that he was "far from crystal-clear." He was not disposed to elaborate, however, merely to please the readers of the magazine. He had avoided writing for *Playboy* until recently, he said, because of "the literality, blandness, and overdedicated organizational exposition of the magazine's style." He preferred to write pieces that made readers work a bit to understand; he wanted them to be "slightly puzzled and slightly nettled" at certain points. *Playboy* backed off and the interview, one of his most important, with extended comments on Vietnam, appeared in January 1968. He was also asked to review a new book by Norman Podhoretz, a memoir titled

Making It. Shortly afterwards, Podhoretz who was now, along with Cy Rembar and Steven Marcus, one of Mailer's literary executors, brought a copy to Provincetown. Mailer read it forthwith and told Podhoretz that he liked it, but also had some criticisms. But, with other projects pending, he would not write his review for several months.

The first reviews of *Vietnam* began to appear just as the Mailers returned to New York in fall 1967. They were almost as good as for *Cannibals*, with Aldridge in *Harper's* and reviewers in the *Voice*, *Times*, *Newsweek* and the *NYRB* proclaiming the novel to be a near-masterpiece. Favorable comparisons with Joyce were made, but there were the usual detractors. *Saturday Review's* Granville Hicks was grave in his disapprobation of "the proportion of the once forbidden Anglo-Saxon monosyllables to other and more conventional words." *National Review* was outraged, and *Time's* anonymous reviewer found the book to be "a wildly turgid monologorrhea" narrated by D.J. The novel, however, is not a monologue; it has two narrators, D. J., or Ranald David Jethroe, a white teenager from Dallas who claims to be "Disc Jockey to the world," and his alter ego, a crippled black "genius brain from Harlem pretending to write a white man's fink fuck book." The chapters alternate between the two. Both use a super-abundance of scatological humor, and we never learn which narrator is wearing the mask, or if both are. "The fact of the matter," D.J. says, "is that you're up tight with a mystery, me, and this mystery can't be solved because I'm in the center of it, and I don't comprehend, not necessarily, I could be traducing myself." The two narrators relish the mix-up.

But what many reviewers found more compelling than his scatological ventriloquisms was what Denis Donoghue called Mailer's "remarkable feeling for the sensory event." One such passage comes after Tex has shot a wolf and Big Ollie, the Indian guide, gives him and D.J. a

cup of blood to drink. It had "a taste of fish, odd enough, and salt, near to oyster sauce and then the taste of wild meat like an eye looking at you in the center of a midnight fire." Big Ollie takes a taste of the blood, and then cuts the head off and turns it for them to see.

There were two eyes open on El Lobo, both yellow coals of light, but one eye was Signor Lupo, the crazy magician in the wolf, and his eye had the pain of the madman who knows there's a better world but he is excluded, and then the other eye, Willie Wolf, like a fox's eye, full of sunlight and peace, a harvest sun on a late afternoon field, shit! it was just an animal eye like the glass they use for an eye in a trophy, no expression, hollow peace maybe, and Big Ollie dug a shallow pan of a hole with his knife in the crust bog tundra, whatever that dry shit moss was, and set the wolf's head in it, muzzle pointing to the north, and covered it over. Then he took a broken twig and laid it in a line with the end of the muzzle, but pointing further North, then got down on his hands and knees and touched his nose to the stick.

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

How is the NBA nomination a reflection of these things?

(TX) In early October he started work on the new film, *Beyond the Law*. He co-produced it with Farbar (although Mailer put up all the money), and is listed in the credits as the director, although there was no script and almost no direction given. Actors were given an identity and told to wing it. Joining Pennebaker were two new filmmakers, Jan Welt and Nicholas Proferes. As with *Wild 90*, it was shot over four nights, but this time Mailer used three film crews and reliable sound equipment. The lead, played by Mailer, is an Irish-American vice squad lieutenant, Francis Xavier Pope, and one camera crew moves with him as he makes his station house rounds on a weekend evening. The other two crews worked simultaneously in other parts of the building, meaning that interrogations going on in one part of the precinct were interrupted by loud interactions in other parts. "The intensity of this process," Mailer wrote, "camera, actors, and scenes working simultaneously on the same floor (which is about the way matters proceed in a police station) conceivably worked a magic on the actors." He thought that he had "divined and/or blundered onto the making of the best American movie about the police he had ever seen." His fundamental idea, which grows out of his existentialism, was that "people who were able to talk themselves in and out of trouble," if allowed to speak naturally in certain situations, and not required to memorize anything, could turn in unusual performances.

The cast included several professionals—¹Rip Torn (a freaked-out Hell's Angel), Beverly (Pope's wife), and Knox (another detective)—¹and two dozen more, all amateurs. Buzz Farbar also played a detective; George Plimpton was the mayor of New York, inspecting the precinct; playwright Jack Richardson was impressive as an icy gambler; and Mailer's Provincetown friend/poet Eddie Bonetti was a convincing ax murderer. Michael McClure was another Hell's Angel, and a stockbroker, Tom Quinn, was the station sergeant. A young woman named Lee

Only James
Mastrop
alter ego
is Irish

(N)

(N)

Roscoe, who would work closely with Mailer on his next film, and with whom he had an affair, played a college girl who was a weekend dominatrix. Hal Conrad and his wife, Mara Lynn had parts, as did Torres and two other boxers, Roger Donoghue, and Joe Shaw, a rising welterweight. Quinn, along with Mailer, Pete Hamill, Plimpton, and a few others were for a time Shaw's financial backers, although his career was brief. The cast, therefore, was a haphazard olio of writers, actors, lovers, poets, gamblers and boxers. Mailer drew on Brendan Behan's persona for his role. In his review, Roger Ebert said, "He's not only convinced that he can act, but that he can play an Irish cop named Francis Xavier Pope and do it with an Irish accent. He can do none of the three," but watching him try is a "hilarious spectacle." Vincent Canby found Mailer to be "slightly manic" in a film that was "good and tough and entertaining" in its presentation of "the existential relationship between cop and crook," and compared it favorably to recent Hollywood detective films. Pennebaker said that the film influenced scriptwriters for television dramas (*Hill Street Blues* and *Law and Order* come to mind), and that it was "a real course in filmmaking for Hollywood" because it demonstrated how the cops "are sort of a counterpart to the crooks. Both sides are both good and bad."

Wild 90 was more or less finished by the time *Beyond the Law* was shot, and Mailer was eager to begin editing the new film. He had reduced the eleven hours of raw footage by half when he got a call from Mitchell Goodman, an old friend from Paris with a "lugubrious conscience." Goodman wanted him to take part in an anti-war protest in Washington in October. When Mailer said he had no desire to stand around listening to dull speeches by pacifists, Goodman said this protest would be different. The plan was to "invade the corridors of the

Pentagon, ^{try to} try to shut it down. In the opening of his account of the March on the Pentagon, *The Armies of the Night*, Mailer wrote that Goodman's words gave him no pleasure; he sensed "one little bubble of fear tilt somewhere about the solar plexus." Despite his reservations, he agreed to participate.

Edward de Grazia, a lawyer he had met in Boston when testifying for *Naked Lunch*, was also involved in the March. He picked Mailer up at the airport on October 19, two days before the March, and while driving him to his Washington hotel, the Hay-Adams, explained the situation. There was no central organizing committee, no hierarchy, and relations among the participating groups ^{were} was strained. Communication was spotty, although there was agreement on a kick-off rally for the March at the Lincoln Memorial, ^{one} similar to the gathering four years earlier where Martin Luther King had given his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. Negotiations with the various governmental units on all aspects of the protest were ongoing, but meanwhile 50,000 or more marchers were en route to the city. Also on their way were U.S. Marshals, the National Guard and regular army units, all to reinforce Washington police. At this point, De Grazia said, things "are not in focus."

Neither was Mailer. On the one hand, he was being compared to Joyce as a literary artist, and called a sage for his subtle intimations of the nation's fears, follies and enervating addictions. On the other, he was thought to be ^a loose cannon, vulgar, violent and weird, spouting ideas about orgasms and existentialism that resembled the most outrageous theories of Wilhelm Reich. While there was some consistency to his jeremiads, there was little among his novels, which appeared to have been written by five different novelists, and his poems by some ^{mutant offspring} mutation of William Burroughs and Ogden Nash. He counted Bill Buckley as one of his best friends, but

he was also close to Jerry Rubin and later, ^{that} Abbie Hoffman, although he was critical of some of the actions of the Yippies (^{short for} Youth International Party), an anarchist group ^{and multiply divorced} which Rubin and Hoffman helped found at the end of 1967. A convicted felon, ^{now} he was the devoted father of six. He had irreproachable anti-war credentials that made him a hero among the young, but he wore three-piece suits made in London. He was "modestly promiscuous" in his drinking and use of marijuana, but made his daughter Susan, a freshman at Barnard, promise she would use no drugs until she graduated. The jacket of Vietnam ^{Why are we in} showed two photos of him, one with a terrific shiner, and the other with his hair as neatly coiffed as his father's. Beneath was a question, "Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up?" One of Mailer's ancillary purposes in writing *The Armies of the Night* ^{at the Night} was to do something about his image, not smooth the wrinkles—he loved his contradictions too much ⁱⁿ but give his audience a few metaphors for appreciating what he called his "endless blendings of virtue and corruption."

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

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

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

In the "leisurely twilight," as Ed de Grazia drives him to his hotel, the Hay-Adams, Mailer observed the "tender Southern city" and sighed, for "like most New Yorkers, he usually felt small in Washington." There was no thought in his head about his centrality to the upcoming events, nor that he would write the definitive account of them, and none whatsoever that to do so he would borrow a form used by Emerson and Thoreau, described by Warner Berthoff as "the exploratory personal testament in which the writer describes how he has turned his life into a practical moral experiment and put it out at wager according to the chances, and against the odds, peculiar to the public character of his time." Mailer merely wanted to do his bit in D.C., get arrested for the cause, pay his fine, and fly back to New York on Saturday night for an important party, ~~one that, happily, he missed.~~

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

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

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

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

forward the better to study itself, finds itself therefore at home in a house of mirrors, since it has habits, even the talent, to regard itself.

Mailer-now, the writer, observes Mailer-then, the marcher. Although they share the same name and antecedents, they have slightly different sensibilities. ¹Mailer-now has done a bit more, and is in a position to appreciate the small-mindedness and misapprehensions, as well as the generosity and acuity of vision of his former self, a protagonist, as Mailer said later, who was "half-heroic and three quarters comic." Mailer-then fumbles and fulminates; he is in flux; but he also sees clearly and acts boldly. Mailer-then took no notes, but remembered well, as Lowell later told Macdonald: "Curious, when you're with X [another novelist], you think he's so sensitive and alert and then you find later he wasn't taking in anything, while Norman seems not to pay much attention but now it seem he didn't miss a trick ¹and what a memory!"

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

The first card he'd ever received from Lowell was on a book of poems, *Deaths for the Ladies and other disasters* it had been called, and many people had thought the book a joke which whatever its endless demerits, it was not. Not to the novice poet at least. When Lowell had written that he liked the book, Mailer next waited for some word in print to canonize his thin tome; of course, it never came. If Lowell were to begin to award living American poets in critical print, two hundred starving worthies could in fairness hold out their bowl before the

escaped Novelist would deserve his turn. Still, Mailer was irked. He felt he had been part of a literary game. When the second card came a few years later telling him he was the best journalist in America, he did not answer. Elizabeth Hardwick, Lowell's wife, had just published a review of *An American Dream* in *Partisan Review* which had done its best to disembowel the novel. Lowell's card might have arrived with the best of motives, but its timing suggested to Mailer an exercise in neutralmanship—neutralize the maximum of possible future risks. Mailer was not critically equipped for the task, but there was always the distant danger that some bright and not unauthoritative voice, irked at Lowell's enduring hegemony, might come along with a long lance and presume to tell America that posterity would judge Allen Ginsberg to be the greater poet.

EXCL

This was all doubtless desperately unfair to Lowell who, on the basis of two kind cards, was now judged by Mailer to possess an undue unchristian talent for literary logrolling. But then Mailer was prickly.

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When Mailer and Lowell meet in Washington, the poet repeated his remark. "Yes, Norman, I really think you are the best journalist in America." Mailer replied that he sometimes thought he was "the best writer in America." Lowell, now on the defensive, replied, "Oh, Norman, oh, certainly," he said, "I didn't mean to imply, heavens no, it's just that I have such respect for good journalism." Mailer answered with "false graceousness" that writing a good poem was much more difficult.

Despite the unusual, even eccentric, nature of this point of view, which he remembered from reading *The Education of Henry Adams* at Harvard, its assumptions and purposes are

Mailer's in the book

Shirley is
fold on
p. 542

apparent. Anyone familiar with the modern novel recognizes ^{that} the double perspective used by the
 best writers show us the world through the eyes of their characters without effacing ^{themselves} ~~their~~
 narrators. A fictional character, one who is changing before our eyes, is ~~being~~ presented. The
 third person personal allowed Mailer to present his sometimes brave, sometimes clownish,
 sometimes earnest, often peckish, invariably opinionated, regularly comic and usually honest self
 without necessarily sounding as if he is preaching for his own saint. By writing about himself
 instead of a fictional look-alike, Mailer is nevertheless obliged by his point of view to write
 about some aspects of the real world of events, in this case, a large civil protest with an uncertain
 outcome. Half of the genius of the book resides in the fact that Mailer's sight extends so clearly
 to the circumference of his awareness. "The eye is the first circle," says Emerson, "the horizon
 which it forms is the second." In ^{at the right} ~~Armies~~, we see, as it were, the structure of Mailer's eye and the
 angles of his vision on various aspects of the March, extending to its periphery with glimpses
 beyond. He is an intrepid explorer of his own psyche, but his explorations in this narrative (and
 the five that follow it through 1975), lead us closer, ^{to} not further away from the problems of the
 Republic.

Only Mailer could depict himself so clearly while also tackling such a variety of
 reportorial and analytic tasks—for example, presenting an authoritative analysis of the near-final
 demise of the Old Left and its "sound-as-brickwork logic of the next step" polemical
 abstractions, and the rise of the New Left with its focus on the most immediate injustices in the
 nation. As one of the youngest of the Old Left figures, and godfather to the New, Mailer weighs
 the assets and liabilities of both, firing commentary from his existential Gatling gun at a long line
 of emerging or revitalized causes, beginning with poverty and civil rights and ending with sexual

freedom, free speech and environmentalism. The New Left's alphabet soup of groups, he notes, share these causes almost randomly except for a fierce opposition to the war, the ^{common} ~~sole~~ commonly

held cause of all the constituent groups.

As one scholar, Sandy Vogelgesang, has noted, the March on the Pentagon was the symbolic event that "marked the move from dissent to resistance." Before the March, many Leftist intellectuals questioned whether such actions could result in any real change; Mailer himself wondered about its effectiveness ^{the} when he spoke to Mitchell Goodman at the beginning of *Armies*. But the March became a firebrand that ignited other acts of resistance, and while tracing its influence with precision may be impossible, it was and is written about and cited repeatedly. Most of the major figures who marched with Mailer—^{of the March} Noam Chomsky, Dr. Spock, Benjamin Paul Goodman, Lowell, Macdonald, and Yale chaplain, ⁱⁿ Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Jr. ⁱⁿ continued to participate in various anti-war activities. Nothing written about the March (and arguably nothing written about resistance to the Vietnam War) had a more forceful impact on turning the tide of opinion against the war. As Vogelgesang puts it, "Future historians must consult Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* to understand how and why the American Intellectual Left moved to 'resistance' against Johnson's Vietnam War and, in fact, to comprehend the radicalized intellectual consciousness of the 1960s."

One ^{is} of the themes of *Armies* ~~are~~ his ruminations on the March as the beginning of a long war. He draws on memories of his combat experience as a guide to the struggle he foresees, hopes for, and dreads, as well as his awareness of the nearby battlefields of Bull Run, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. Walking together on the morning of the march, he and Lowell and Macdonald are in good spirits, "for the war spoke of future redemptions." The day is clear,

"and the thin air! wine of Civil War apples in the October air! edge of excitement and awe—^h_m how would this day end? No one could know." Mailer is 44 years old and it has taken him all of his years "to be able to enjoy his pleasures where he found them, rather than worry about those pleasures which eluded him," and yet now he might face imprisonment for civil disobedience. If he was too old to be a revolutionary a la Castro, living in a mountain camp as a guerilla, he was also "too incompetent" and "too showboat, too lacking in essential judgment—^h_m besides, he was too well known!"

He would pay for the pleasures of his notoriety in the impossibility of disguise.

No gun in the hills, no taste for organization, no, he was a figurehead, and

therefore he was expendable, said the new modesty—^h_m not a future leader, but a

future victim: *there* would be his real value. He could go to jail for protest, and

spend some years if it came to it, possibly his life, for if the war went on, and

America put its hot martial tongue across the Chinese border. Well, jail was the

probable possible perspective, detention camps, disassociation centers, liquidation alleys,

that would be his portion, and it would come about the time he had learned how to live.

The three men agree on their expendability, and conclude that after leading the March, they should get arrested as soon as practicable. After much frustration in crossing the bridge into Virginia in some semblance of orderly rows and files, the unruly army of protestors debouches into a road leading to the Pentagon. The column disintegrates as they arrive. Mailer feels ennobled and happy "as if finally one stood under some great arch in the mythical vault of history." The sense of a nation divided liberated "some undiscovered patriotism in him so that he

felt a sharp searing love for his country ⁱⁿ at this moment, and on this day, crossing some divide in his own mind wider than the Potomac, a love so lacerated he felt as if a marriage were being torn and children lost." He is ready to act and reflects on why soldiers in the front line of battle are ready to die: "there is a promise of some swift transit; one's soul feels clean." He steps over a low rope ("It was as if the air had changed, or light had altered; he felt immediately much more alive ⁱⁿ—yes, bathed in air ⁱⁿ—and yet disembodied from himself, as if indeed he were watching himself in a film"), and within minutes is arrested. Lowell and Macdonald hesitate, miss their opportunity, and fly back to New York. Mailer goes to jail. (N)

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

In 1969, when a friend asked him if he was embarrassed by Mailer's description of him, Lowell ^{Lowell} he replied, "No, in fact I was quite flattered. Norman didn't have to say all that about me." (N)

Writing to Mailer right after he had read the first part of *Armies*, Lowell said, "I've been trying to

shake off mannerisms etc. you note. Of course one can't. Probably I am more sharply outlined, Bostonish, noble, sorrowful in Mailer than in life." Mailer's account^m—which Lowell pointedly says is *not* journalism, but comedy and history, "seems as true as one could ask." Two years later, he said that while Mailer had made him "a Quixote in the retinue of Sancho Panza," it was still "the best, almost the only thing written about me as a living person." He goes on to say that he and Mailer were not close before the March, but became so afterwards, and that he had written to ^{Mailer}him to say he hoped that they would "remain as good friends in life as in fiction." Lowell later published a collection of brief poems, *Notebook, 1967-68*, which includes two on the March, and another, "For Norman Mailer." It begins with a jibe at "the 9 A.M. man," the corporation man whose heart is a watch and who "imagines being paid for being on time." Mailer is the counter figure at the end of the poem: "Norman Mailer, / his wardrobe two identical straight-blue suits / and two blue-vests to prove monotony, / disproves the many false faces I see as one." The inscription on Mailer's copy reads, "For Norman, This brief though true return for your kind portrait, from Cal." ^{Lowell's nickname from youth was Caligula}

Lowell had another observation on *Armies*. He said it was possible that "the form of the book came from me. Not from anything I said but from contrasting me symbolically with himself." This contrast starts in the opening pages and continues right up until Mailer is arrested. After the party where they joust, Mailer and Lowell move on to the Ambassador Theater, where they speak at a fundraiser. Mailer, the "Prince of Bourbon," drinking from a borrowed mug, observes his friend as they wait to go on. Lowell had "the expression on his face of a dues payer who is just about keeping up with the interest on some enormous debt." He looked most unhappy with the bad acoustics, the unruly crowd, and the cold floor and with the "fatally

Lowell's nickname from youth was Caligula
 of the Night
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(N)

vulgar" Mailer. Lowell is perceived as possessing a mixture of strength and weakness, "a blending so dramatic in its visible sign of conflict that one had to assume he would be sensationally attractive to women." He was a man who would fight to the death for some causes, "with an axe in his hand and a Cromwellian light in his eye."

It was even possible that physically he was very strong—one couldn't tell at all—he might be fragile, he might have the sort of farm mechanic's strength which could manhandle the rear axle and differential off a car and into the back of a pickup. But physical strength or no, his nerves were all too apparently delicate. Obviously spoiled by everyone for years, he seemed nonetheless to need the spoiling.

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

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

Mailer didn't participate in the March with the idea of writing about it. The event, therefore, unrolled naturally with no imaginative forcing which, like his time in the army and in

Bellevue, was the kind of experience he found most valuable. When the March was over, his first thought was, "What a good short story I've got." He called Scott Meredith and told him about what he had seen and done, and the ever-enterprising Meredith negotiated a \$10,000 fee for an article in *Harper's*, which the magazine's editor, Willie Morris, said was "an astronomical figure" for that time. Morris, who ^{had} met Mailer in Austin in 1963 through ^{Mailer's old friend} Barbara Probst Solomon, moved in 1963 from the editorship of the *Texas Observer* to *Harper's*, and in 1967 published an acclaimed memoir, *North Toward Home*. As an associate editor, Morris had tried to get Mailer into *Harper's*, but his superiors rejected his recommendation. But Mailer's new stature changed things, and Morris arranged the deal with Meredith ¹/_m 20,000 words to be written in a month. Later that day, walking up Sixth Avenue, he ran into Mailer and Farbar. He told Mailer that he had spoken with Meredith. Immediately, Morris recalled, Mailer "crouched like a boxer ¹/_m he used to do that a lot in those days, like he was shadowboxing with me ¹/_m and he said, 'I know you did; I just talked to him. I'm going to Provincetown tomorrow, and I will have a great twenty thousand words in one month from today.'"

He wrote at breakneck speed, over ^{started} 10,000 words a week, but not at first; he had difficulty getting traction. He became gloomy. "No book I wrote kept me in a more sustained bad mood (while doing it) than *The Armies of the Night*," he said. His deteriorating relationship with Beverly was one reason. Podhoretz's wife, Midge Decter, a *Harper's* editor at the time, visited Provincetown while he was writing *Armies*. She said that Beverly, who loved Provincetown, felt "isolated and bored" that winter. "She wasn't very happy with that month she put in; that was very clear." After a week or more of false starts, Mailer remembered that when Picasso began a new project, he had a way of "going off in a new direction. He was telling us a secret, which was

that style is a tool by which you explore reality." *Time* magazine's brief piece on Mailer and the March, "A Shaky Start," gave him a handhold. Accompanied by a photo of him holding a coffee cup of bourbon, and mocking him for "mumbling and spewing obscenities" at the "scruffy Ambassador Theater," ^{during the rally before the March} ~~the piece~~ ^{the piece} made him sound like an incoherent fool, passing over entirely his humor and badinage with the audience, which "really tied the thing together," as ~~De Grazia~~ ^{his} recalled. He praised Mailer's "excitement and energy" that night, and "this particular genius he has when he's drunk," something the *Time* stringer missed. "[T]he average reporter," Mailer wrote, "could not get a sentence straight if it were phrased more subtly than his own mind could make phrases. Nuances were forever being munched like peanuts." He began his narrative with ^{three = hundred =} *Time*'s 300-word squib followed by: "Now we may leave *Time* in order to find out what happened."

In his freshman English course at Harvard, Mailer read a long chapter from Adams' ^S *The Education of Henry Adams* ("The Virgin and the Dynamo," probably) and, like most readers, was slightly puzzled by the perspective, but he had no memory of thinking of the book afterwards. ^{who} Anyone that reads ^{of the night} *Armies* and knows Adams' masterpiece, however, immediately sees the influence. "It's as if I were the great-grandson," ^{Mulier} he wrote later. "Adams must have remained in my mind as a possibility, the way a painter might look at a particular Picasso or Cézanne and say to himself, 'That's the way to do it.' Yet the influence might not pop forth for twenty or thirty years. In effect, that's what happened with Henry Adams." But even after he was well into the account, he found that it took an effort of will to write every day. The point of view was "damned odd," he said, and he wrote half the book before he adjusted psychologically to this "dislocating way to regard oneself." Finally, he got used to it, and relished employing that "part

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Did the
writing
begin
before
the March?
This is
2nd year
from but
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tell us
what the
Amb
Theater
is about

(N) (N)

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(N)

of the ego that is superior to ourselves—that person who observes us carefully even as we are doing bizarre things, that special persona, possessed of immaculate detachment.” By mid-November, the hand-written pages were ^{accumulating} piling-up, and his secretary, Sandy Charlebois Thomas, had difficulty keeping up.

As Mailer worked in his third-floor study looking out at Long Point and the Provincetown harbor, Morris and Decter waited and worried in New York, while Meredith tried to sell the book version of a narrative he was hard pressed to describe. The New American Library finally purchased it, but the advance was only \$25,000. Robert Gutwillig, editor-in-chief, said this was because NAL had “already laid out so much for the novel which wasn’t being written”—referring to “First-Born”—and “nobody, including Norman, had any idea what kind of book it was going to be”—referring to *Armies*. On November 20, Mailer wrote to Yamanishi that he thought his account might reach 40,000 words. Sometime after this, Morris, who hoped to get the piece in the March issue of *Harper's*, asked for a progress report. Mailer invited him and Decter to Provincetown. When they arrived in early January, the manuscript, some of it still on yellow legal pads, had grown enormously. “I was stunned,” Morris said. “He had gone up there and hadn’t had anything to drink for a month, leading a Spartan life with Beverly, and he had turned out this incredible ninety thousand words.” Morris telephoned his managing editor, Robert Kotlowitz, to tell him and when Kotlowitz asked him how many words he wanted to run in March, he said, “I think we should run all of it at once.” Morris made the decision on the spot to run the longest piece ever published in an American magazine, 80,000 words.

Working 12 and 14 hours a day, Mailer finished writing “The Novel as History” soon after they arrived. The manuscript all but completed, Beverly cooked a celebration dinner to

check
New Yorker
run all of
John
Mailer's
trough him

AON Pt 1
80,000 words
Harper's
30k words

which Mailer contributed his signature dish, mushrooms stuffed with *duxelles*. Morris, who was known to take a drink, brought out a bottle of Wild Turkey bourbon. After dinner, Mailer took Morris and Decter on a drive around Provincetown in his jeep. It was snowing lightly and few lights were visible in the almost^r deserted town. He drove down narrow, winding Commercial Street along the harbor to the town's center, past the gothic town hall and the tall stone memorial to the Pilgrims, and then to where they had first landed before sailing to Plymouth, a spot occupied then and now by a huge, ghostly motel. From there, he drove to the state highway that separates the town from the towering dunes of the Cape Cod National Seashore, as Morris recalled in his memoir, *New York Days*. It was snowing more as they turned off the highway.

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

The only open bar in the town was at the local VFW post, and Mailer took Decter and Morris there for a drink. Morris offered a toast to the manuscript, which would be called "The Steps of the Pentagon^y" when it appeared in *Harper's*. Mailer said, "Look, I wish you'd stop praising it. It makes me edgy"^m—his unwillingness to welcome good luck too lavishly always

hovered in the wings. Some months later, when Fan Mailer heard that *Armies* had won the Pulitzer Prize, she recalled, "I said, 'Umbashrien Got tsu danken!'" ^{of the Night} ^{God protect us from the} ^{to ward off the evil eye.} ^{translate}

She said that her father had done the same when good things happened. "I had hoped he would win the prize, and then when he got two prizes, the National Book Award too, I said it again, a double *Umbashrien*." As they drank, Mailer pushed Morris to publish the second part of *Armies*,

the still unfinished, "History as a Novel," which recapitulates the entire story of the March in an objective, factual fashion. Morris told him that this 30,000-word piece would work well in book form, but would be "only an afterthought" to the dramatic first part. Mailer disagreed, but was unable to convince him. He subsequently turned to his "old dear great and good friend Norman Podhoretz," who agreed to publish it in *Commentary*'s April issue as "The Battle of the Pentagon." When the threesome returned to the house, Beverly was searching for the needle of her stereo. She told Mailer that he had worked voodoo on the record player because he hated it. Mailer said nothing. He dedicated *Armies* to Beverly, but by then the marriage had taken another step toward its conclusion.

Shortly after he finished the second part of *Armies*, he began his review of Podhoretz's *Making It*. He found that his initial estimate had changed for the worse. He had also read the reviews. Podhoretz's thesis is that sexual lust, the "dirty little secret" of Victorian times (according to D. H. Lawrence), had been replaced by lust for success in society, and most certainly by his colleagues in *The Family*. He admits his own unqualified desire to be rich, famous, and powerful in the memoir's opening pages, and then goes on to relate his life story as it pertains to his career up to the age of 35 (he was born in 1930). The response of reviewers to

Podhoretz's revelation of his ambition, and his final admission—¹thought to be candid by him, considered ~~to be~~ crass by others¹—that the book itself was a “Mailer-like bid for literary distinction, fame, and money all in one package” was, he said later, “very nasty indeed.”
 Mailer's review, which appeared in ^{Parkland Review} ~~PR~~ just before the second half of *Armies* appeared in *Commentary*, contained some positive comments about his friend's “agreeable variety of aperçus on matters such as status, class, privilege and clan.” While it was not “a great or major book,” he wrote, it was for the most part “very well written for much of its length.” ^{But} After these tentative plaudits, Mailer decimated the memoir.

Podhoretz felt betrayed. He knew that Mailer was reviewing the book, and thought that it would be positive, even a rave. A rave in *PR*, even one that appeared, as Mailer's did, three months after the book's publication, could offset the damage done by ^{the} book's early reviewers, that “squalid yard of humpty-beaters and hard-ons,” as Mailer referred to them. “Here I was,”
 Podhoretz told Manso, “being beaten up all over the place, and instead of helping me when I was down, my great friend was giving me another kick in the ribs.” Mailer's critique is two-fold, and depends to some extent on his own view of how ~~The Family~~ had all but abandoned its critical responsibilities in favor of an adoring but unspoken appreciation for the waves of Camp and Pop rolling across the country. His first point, however, is that ~~is that~~ Podhoretz had failed to see that in writing about himself in the motions of mid-career, he was, in effect, writing a novel. His obligation, therefore, had been to present “himself as a literary character, fully so much as any literary character in a work of undisputed fiction.” Mailer does not say ¹nor does Podhoretz seem to have noticed in his scab-picking rejoinders to the review¹ that Mailer is also referring, implicitly, to the protagonist of *Armies*, his own just-completed work of self-portrayal, clearly

labeled as a hybrid of the novel and history. Such an amalgam is tricky, he said, because readers will respond to such a character much the same way they react to characters in a novel. "One is advancing and endangering one's career" by taking on such a challenge.

The book is now a protagonist in the progress of one's success. Self-interest naturally slants a word here, literary honesty bends it back there. One does not know whether to tell the little lie or shrive oneself. An overload of choices descends on the brain of any ambitious man engaged in giving a contentious portrait of himself. Yet that is not even the worst of the difficulty. The real woe is that one is forced to examine oneself existentially, perceive oneself in the act of perceiving (but worse, far worse—though the act of perceiving, perceive a Self who may manage to represent the separate warring selves by a Style).

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

"Podhoretz apes Mailer, but he is no Mailer. He is, in the end, a small bore," ^{says} states ^{one reviewer} Robert Kirsch in his review of *Making It*. He lacked the narrative sophistication to write his memoir as Mailer wished him to, but this is not surprising. He was a critic, not a novelist, and it

Perhaps it was, but the review cast invaluable light on the involuted perspective he used to depict himself in *Armies*.

seems somewhat unreasonable to have asked him to write his book according to the specifications of an accomplished novelist who has discovered after twenty years of assiduous effort an innovative way to present himself in nonfiction. But Mailer's other major criticism is quite fair, and devastating. Podhoretz displays a fatal weakness in the book: he flatters ~~The~~ Family instead of revealing the byzantine contours of its envious and brilliant self-aggrandizements. Mailer lists 33 Family members and notes that references to each are "invariably as attractive as the sort of remark one makes when giving a reference to a Foundation for a friend." His portraits are "full of sugar"; he depicts "an Establishment composed of the kindest folk: into their ranks enters an ambitious Provincial^m—what a novel!" Podhoretz, he concludes, "deserted his possibilities as thoroughly as if Stendhal had presented the family of Mademoiselle de la Mole as charming."

Years later, Mailer said his review "was probably too cruel."

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

I don't know how Podhoretz was even "radical"

~~the nasty reviews. He was also bothered that Mailer seemed to judge the memoir as a literary performance, rather than an intellectual one, a justifiable complaint given his comparative lack of interest in fiction, and the ability to write it.~~

No 9 After the review, their relationship slowly dissolved, but they saw each other occasionally. In 1979, Mailer invited Podhoretz to his home for dinner and told him that he would like his new book, *The Executioner's Song*. Podhoretz answered by saying that Mailer "probably would dislike what I had written about him in his new book, *Breaking Ranks*. 'Well,' he said, 'you owe me one,' and I laughed and replied, 'Yes, I do.'" Afterward Podhoretz told his wife, Midge Decter, who had helped edit *Armies*, of the Night that Mailer would never forgive him for *Breaking Ranks*. They did not speak again for almost 20 years.

The quarrel ~~and Making-It~~ was soon lost in the roar of acclaim for *Armies*. Besides the Pulitzer and the National Book Award, Mailer ~~also won~~ and a George Polk Award for magazine reporting. Among the major reviews, only John Simon and Mario Puzo were negative even *Time* was mildly approving and when Willie Morris wrote to him about the honors for which it was being considered, he replied, "Willie, if I ever get the Pulitzer Prize you realize that the cows are going to come home." Alfred Kazin's front-page review of *Armies* in the New York *Times Book Review*, perhaps the most important and intelligent of the book's notices, described it as a "diary-essay-tract-sermon," and compared Mailer's self-presentation with that of "the best American writers of the 19th century [who] talked about themselves all the time but, in the Romantic American line, saw the self as the prime condition of democracy." Kazin concluded with this thought: "Mailer's intuition is that the times demand a new form. He has found it." Published twenty years to the day after *The Naked and the Dead*, *The Armies of the Night* completely disarmed the

literary world, and reaffirmed Mailer's genius. The paradox of his achievement is that in a narrative that sundered the protagonist into teller and told, Mailer-now and Mailer-then, he was able to unite all the actors, currents and rich particularities of the March, seeing them through the oppositions of his psyche. This division of self by fiat, the resolution of twenty years of point-of-view uncertainties, was a masterstroke and the most significant aesthetic decision of Mailer's career.

Armies' triumph was a success d'estime, ^{The book} it did not make the best seller list, although it has remained in print since publication and appears on most lists of the greatest nonfiction books of the twentieth century. Mailer's ^{parents} family saw it as a happy endorsement of their son's talents.

Barney and Fan came to the ceremony when he was awarded the National Book Award in March of 1969. Robert J. Lifton, also from Brooklyn, received a ^{National Book Award} N.B.A. in the sciences for his moving study, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima*, on the same night that Mailer received his in the arts and letters category. Lifton and his wife Betty Jean knew Mailer and Beverly from summers on Cape Cod. Lifton recalled the ceremony, where they met Mailer's parents: "He immediately took BJ and me over to meet them, and by then they were elderly and they came across as nice Jewish older people. Norman said, 'This is Bob Lifton; he also won a National Book Award.' And she looked at me and said, 'It's so nice that you both won it.' I'm sure what she meant was it was so nice that another nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn also won it. That was my translation." There was a bar backstage and a certain amount of drinking took place before the ceremony. The crowd, Lifton said, "was terrified that Norman was going to misbehave because of his reputation for doing that. He got up and gave a choirboy speech." Mailer said he disagreed with Sartre about turning down the Nobel Prize and, referring to himself in the third person, said, "Your

speaker is here to state that he likes prizes," seeing them as "measures of the degree to which an Establishment meets that talent it has hindered and helped." This was especially true, he implied, in a time when society was "poised on the lip, no, the main of a spiritual revolution which will wash the roots of every national institution out to sea." For the next few years, he would alternately warn of and welcome this revolution brought on by American hubris, and what he called in the speech the "Armageddons of technology."

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

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Despite an imperfect sound system, the premiere at Notre Dame was a success. It held an audience of 3,500, mainly undergraduate students, to the end and boosted Mailer's cinematic ambitions. But a few months later when the film ^{was shown} had its New York premiere at the New York

Film Festival, a significant number of people walked out of Philharmonic Hall, reacting to its violence and obscenity. One critic said in his review that Mailer didn't understand the movies. Unlike novels, the unnamed critic said, "the movies are not there to hit people where they live. The movies are there to keep people alive." Mailer said that this was true in the past, but in the late 1960s "the horror of life has become so completely pervasive" that this sort of emotional nourishment was beside the point; filmgoers needed to be jolted. Nevertheless, he learned something from his first two films, namely, that he hadn't given himself utterly to filmmaking. "Making movies is a religious act," he said, and up to now, "I've just been having an affair with movies." At some point, he said, he was going to have to choose between writing and marrying the movies.

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

All told, he spent nearly eight months editing *Beyond the Law*, four times as ^{long} much as he had spent writing ^{of the Night} *Armies*. Between editing stints, he continued to give time to the anti-war effort, but he had much else on his agenda. Jack Newfield wrote a piece for the ^{Village} *Voice*, here summarized, about a day in the life of "Norman Mailer, novelist, counterpuncher, filmmaker, mayoral candidate, stud, essayist, egomaniac, and successor to Whitman and Henry James as American Zeitgeist." On the day in question, May 24, 1968, after several hours of editing, he met with Tom Hayden, one of the founders of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and asked for his help in meeting Castro. "I want a guarantee," he said, "man to man, that I can see Fidel." Then Mailer went to a cocktail party at Dwight Macdonald's apartment, where he met Mark Rudd and other members of ^{SDS} Students for a Democratic Society. He said he didn't agree with everything SDS was doing, but he gave them a check because "they are an active principle. They are taking chances." From Macdonald's, he went to a taping of ^T the *Merv Griffin Show*, where Griffin announced him by saying, "Norman Mailer is one of the leading spectator sports in America." He walked on stage, Newfield wrote, "hunching up his shoulders like Carmen Basilio coming to Ray Robinson." Afterwards, he attended the light heavyweight championship match at Madison Square Garden between Bob Foster and Dick Tiger (who had taken away ^{Jose} Torres' title in December 1966), which Foster won. After midnight, Mailer climbed over a 15-foot fence to confer with Mark Rudd and the other students who had recently taken over the administrative offices of Columbia University, an event that reverberated at campuses across the nation.

Preoccupied as he was with *Beyond the Law*, Mailer got ^{an} the idea for a new film in June. The nation was still in mourning for Martin Luther King, shot to death on April 4, when Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated shortly after midnight on June 5, just after he won the Democratic

presidential primary in California. Two days earlier Andy Warhol had been shot four times and almost died. Over the next few days, as the country fell into a state of horror and confusion, Mailer conceived of *Maidstone*. The new film, he wrote, was calling to him "with every stimulus and every fear." Named after a fictional estate on Long Island where the events unfold, the film focuses on a famous-infamous director. Norman T. Kingsley is "one of fifty men who America in her bewilderment and profound demoralization might be contemplating as a possible President." In *Armies* Mailer admitted that except for J.F.K., "there had not been a President of the United States nor even a candidate since the Second World War whom Mailer secretly considered more suitable than himself." Kingsley's ambition is similarly large, but the chain of assassinations had unnerved the country, and he believed he could be next. To guard against attack, he is watched by a super-secret police agency called "Protection Against Assassination Experiments-Control" (PAX-C). We soon learn, however, that some of the agency's operatives seem just as interested in assassinating Kingsley as protecting him. This could be paranoia or it could be genuine—the hints are contradictory. Mailer himself did not know. Carol Stevens, who had a role in the film, said that the mood on the set was "incredibly paranoiac." Again, there was no script, just a situation.

The situation within the situation is a film Kingsley plans to make about a male brothel located at Maidstone; much of the action—there isn't much—consists of the director interviewing young actresses to play the role of brothel customers. There is another shadowy group of men at Maidstone, the Cashbox, consisting of male prostitutes who are almost as portentous as PAX-C. The two groups overlap. Kingsley's half-brother, Raoul Rey O'Houlihan (played by Rip Torn), is either completely loyal to Kingsley, or tempted to kill him. He runs the Cashbox (Buzz Farbar

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and Eddie Bonetti play the roles of key members). The rest of the cast of 50-60—the numbers change as people drop in and out over the week—include Beverly Bentley who plays Kingsley's estranged wife; two women Mailer was having affairs with, Lee Roscoe and Shari Rothe, who are two of the "belles"; Grove Press publisher Barney Rosset who plays a member of the local gentry; and Robert David Lion Gardiner, who owned one of the estates. Jeanne Campbell plays a major role as a British television reporter, and Adeline is a college president. A number of other friends, including Anne Barry, Paul Carroll, Michael McClure, Torres, Lucid and Noel Parmentel, Jr. have roles, as do Hervé, the dwarf from *Fantasy Island*, and Ultra Violet, a Warhol's "superstar." Several film crews, led by Pennebaker, Nick Proferes, Jan Welt, and one of Mailer's Harvard classmates, Richard Leacock, filmed the action using hand-held cameras and color film over five days in late July on four different estates in or around East Hampton, Long Island.

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

There was a fair amount of tension all through the whole shoot and I would say that he was never in control in the way a director is normally in control of a set. First of all, the set was all sprawled out; things were being shot all over the place. People were inventing things at the last minute. So it wasn't subject to any of the normal protections that a director has if in fact he wants to keep control of a set. I don't think Norman minded it at all, I think that was part of the idea. But there

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was, I would say without sounding too melodramatic about it, there was a danger in the air.

Mailer had deliberately created this mood, and made it "tacitly understood" that O'Houlihan was free to threaten or attack Kingsley if the situation called for it. ^{Mailer} He had told the cast, after all, that they were "a bunch of enforced existentialists." Torn plays his role perfectly and never looks less than ominous, especially on the last night of shooting when he and Mailer, dressed in formal clothes and top hats, attend "The Assassination Ball," along with most of the cast. Torn⁻ O'Houlihan debates whether to strike; it seems imminent. But the moment passes.

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

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

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

ready to make fun of Norman, always ready to take him with a grain of salt, to ridicule him, to mock him. He felt that ideally I would have been writing about him as the American Godard. Instead, I gave ammunition to his enemies." Mailer later saw the merit of the article and got Toback's permission to reprint it in as a preface to *Maidstone: A Mystery*.

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

At its showing two months later at the London Film Festival, billed as its world premiere, there were huge crowds. He told Knox that he "drew more than anybody in the whole festival, including the personal appearances of Taylor and Burton. (Which last gives me delight, I confess

it.)" But the acoustics were bad and the audience was restless, and when it was over, Mailer appeared on stage, much as Henry James had after the premiere of *Guy Domville* 75 years earlier. James was hooted off the stage and subsequently gave up the theater. Mailer said the dialogue with his crowd "came under the head[ing] of free swinging." One voice from the dark asked, "With all this money to throw around, couldn't you make a film with some content?" Mailer retorted, "I'd rather make a movie to agitate than fortify the far recesses of your leaden brain." *Maidstone*, he said, had "an esthetic coherence of a new order," and demonstrated "new modes of perceiving reality." But the audience's comments stung him, and when he returned to the U.S., he reedited the film. On September 22, 1971, the film had its American premiere at the Whitney Museum. It ran for ten days, three showings a day, in a small theater and drew 7,000, a record attendance. But when it was shown commercially the next month, the audiences were tiny, and it folded. Mailer was confounded and asked a good friend to explain what had gone wrong. The friend said that there were 7,000 people in New York who were eager to see *Maidstone*, and they all saw it at the Whitney. Mailer later called it "my failed cinematic masterpiece."

Within days of the end of shooting *Maidstone*, Mailer left to cover the ~~GOP~~ Republican National Convention, August 5-8, in Miami, on assignment from *Harper's*. Morris had promised him the same kind of space given to *Armies*, and Mailer needed income after spending \$125,000 on the film. To raise this sum, he had sold a majority of his shares in *the Village Voice*. After Miami, he would have a two-week break, after which he planned to travel to Chicago to cover the Democratic National Convention, August 26-29. The summer of 1968, he wrote at the beginning of *Miami and Siege of Chicago*, was a time when "the Republic hovered on the edge of

revolution, nihilism, and lines of police on file to the horizon." John Updike, who at the time resided in the suburbs of Mailer's esteem, provided him with a line about the nation's throes, made after Robert Kennedy was killed: "God may have withdrawn his blessing from America," he said. (N)

The two conventions could not have been more different. The Republicans were united and optimistic about their chances of winning the White House; the Democrats were bitter and divided over the Vietnam War. Richard Nixon had returned from the political graveyard after losing the race for governor of California in 1962, and had traveled the country for five years building support. Neither Gov. ^{elmer} Nelson Rockefeller of New York nor Gov. ^{elmer} Ronald Reagan, both relative latecomers to the race, had sufficient backing to mount a real challenge to him. President Johnson's decision not to seek re-nomination after losing to Sen. Eugene McCarthy of ^{check - did he lose or just barely win} Minnesota—an early and eloquent opponent of the war—^(only narrowly defeating him) in the New Hampshire primary, and Robert Kennedy's assassination had fractured the Democrats and weakened their eventual, equivocating nominee, Johnson's vice president, Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota. Mailer's report on the Miami convention contains the same sharp-etched character sketches as in ^{at the night} ~~Armies~~, and the same sure grasp of the currents of a large, multi-faceted event. The currents, however, were turgid. There were no real surprises at the convention. One of the two most memorable patches of writing in part one, "Nixon in Miami," is the examination of Nixon redux. Referring to himself as "the reporter," Mailer admits he has never written anything favorable about him. "There had never been anyone in American life so resolutely phony as Richard Nixon, nor anyone so transcendently successful by such means," he wrote. And yet, "Tricky Dick" seemed (N)

to have changed. His dark-jowled face now revealed a hint of "inner debate about his value before eternity." His appearance had shifted

from looking like an undertaker's assistant to looking like an old con seriously determined to go respectable. The Old Nixon, which is to say the young Nixon, used to look, on clasping his hands before him, like a church usher (of the variety who would twist a boy's ear after removing him from church). The older Nixon before the Press now—the new Nixon—had finally acquired some of the dignity of the old athlete and the old con—he had taken punishment, that was on his face now, he knew the detailed schedule of pain in a real loss [...]

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

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

small of the back was dependably stiff, loins and mind cut away from each other by some abyss between navel and hip.

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

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

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

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

The evocation becomes all the more powerful in memory as the narrative unfolds,

culminating in a wrenching description of the "police riot" that besmirched the Democratic

Convention. Thousands of protesters and many innocent bystanders were beaten bloody by

12,000 Chicago policemen backed up by 7,500 members of the Illinois National Guard. Some of

the violence was seen on national television and helped to insure Nixon's election. Chicago's

reputation was badly injured, and Mayor Richard J. Daley, whose constituency was made up of

"people whose ancestors were at home with rude instruments in Polish forests, Ukrainian marshes, Irish bogs," lost a portion of his national clout. When Gov. Abraham Ribicoff of

Connecticut, in a speech nominating George McGovern, accused Daley of "Gestapo tactics,"

Mailer wrote, "Daley was on his feet, Daley was shaking his fist at the podium, Daley was mouthing words. One could not hear the words, but his lips were clear. Daley seemed to be

telling Ribicoff to go have carnal relations with himself." Mailer faithfully records all the

violence on Michigan Avenue and in Lincoln Park, and all the hypocrisy inside the convention

hall, including the falsely enthusiastic nomination of Sen. Humphrey.

Unlike the March on the Pentagon, Mailer was not a central figure at the convention. He knew his chief function was to record the event, yet he felt waves of shame for not being on the front line with the protesters. Instead, he drank in the Hilton Hotel and contemplated his fear. "It seemed to him that he had been afraid all his life, but in recent years, or so it seemed, he had learned how to take a step into his fear." But now he was hesitating. He was reluctant to lose his place, even in a country that was going mad. His country "had allowed him to write—it had even not deprived him entirely of honors, certainly not of an income. He had lived well enough to have six children, a house on the water, a good apartment, good meals, good booze, he had even come to enjoy wine. A revolutionary with taste in wine has come already half the distance from Marx to [Edmund] Burke." Mailer's sympathies were on the side of the Hippies and Yippies and the S.D.S., but he hated to see the country fall into "the nihilistic maw of a national disorder." He wanted his life to continue as it was going—making films and writing books and enjoying his growing family—but not if that meant being silent about an unjust war. After WWII, he said, he lived for a decade or more with the "potential militancy of a real revolutionary," "the timing in his soul was apocalyptically maladroit." But when the time came, he did walk across Michigan Avenue to Grant Park and, after listening to Ginsberg and Burroughs he got up and gave a brief speech to the crowd about how long the struggle might continue, perhaps twenty years. He ended by explaining that he would not be with them the next day because he had a deadline and didn't want to chance getting arrested. When he had finished, the crowd yelled, "Write good, baby." Morris planned to run Mailer's account of the conventions in the November Harper's, which would be on the newsstands three weeks before the election. New American Library would publish hard and soft cover editions at the same time. The hope was that Miami and the

✓ *Siege of Chicago* would have the same kind of influence that "Superman Comes to the Supermarket" and "In the Red Light" had on the 1960 and 1964 elections, respectively. He went to work shortly after he returned from Chicago, writing if anything slightly faster than he had on ~~of the Night~~ *Armies*. By August 21, Morris and Robert Gutwillig at NAL had the 75,000-word manuscript in hand. He had written the 50,000 words of part two in 18 days. The book's reviews were quite positive, but somewhat less rapturous than those received by *Armies*. Most reviewers agreed with Eliot Fremont-Smith, the *New York Times* reviewer, that it was "more conventional" than *Armies*. Jack Richardson, for example, in a highly complimentary essay in the *NYRB* noted that Mailer had allowed the conventions "to unfold for the most part unchallenged by his imagination." *Miami* stands in the shadow of *Armies*, and has suffered for it, but in the introduction to a 2008 reprint, Frank Rich said that it "holds up better than most political journalism written last week, let alone four decades ago." Rich argues that Mailer's genuine ambivalence about the event, coupled with his "literary energy and intellectual independence" transcends the "small-bore pack mentality" of what passes for much of today's political journalism, in print and on line. How much *Miami* affected the ~~outcome~~ ^{vote totals} of the election cannot be gauged. Nixon, as we know, defeated Humphrey by less than one percent of the popular vote, although the ten million votes, mainly in southern states, received by third-party candidate George C. Wallace may have cost the Democrats the election.

CN Chapter 9

CT Politician to Prisoner

Only a writer would imagine that a book would affect the outcome of an election

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 Mailer's campaign for mayor in 1969 was considerably different ^{from} than the one he ^{had} envisioned in 1960. He made ^{it} clear to his backers that he intended to run a real campaign, filing nominating papers for the Democratic primary and hiring a professional staff. Nevertheless, the campaign was the operative definition of quixotic. While the literary intelligentsia saw it as intellectually provocative and slightly heroic, the mainstream media considered it to be somewhat nutty and eminently newsworthy. Both were correct. He made his decision ^{to run} in early March at almost exactly the same time that he agreed to write a series of articles for *Life* magazine on the upcoming mission of Apollo 11 to put a man on the moon, achieving the goal announced by President Kennedy in 1961. A major factor in his decision was that his stature as a writer was higher than it had been in 20 years, and few intellectuals came close to him as a construer of the tumultuous events of the period, a time when, as he said, "the real had become more fantastic than the imagined." The offer from *Life* and suggestions from three writer friends—^mJack Newfield, ^mNoel Parmentel, and ^mGloria Steinem—that he run for mayor reinforced each other, and satisfied both sides, or all sides, of his nature. He saw that he had reached a critical juncture in his life, and it seemed incumbent on him, as he put it when referring to the March on the Pentagon, to take his recent victories and "bring them whole, intact, in sum, as they stood now, to cast ^m—^m—^mshades of Henry James ^m—^mto fling [them] on the gaming tables of life resumed in New York, and there amass a doubling and trebling again." What were these victories?

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 His two most recent books had both been better received than any ^{since} *The Naked and the Dead*. Written nine months apart, both were nominated for the 1969 National Book Award.

The ^{of the Night} *Armies*, in which he foregrounds his presence, was an Arts and Letters nominee; *Miami*, in which ^{and the Secret of Chicago}

he steps back several paces from events, was nominated in the ~~History~~ and ~~Biography~~ category. After watching Mailer discuss politics on the *Today* show shortly after *Armies* was published, Pulitzer Prize ^{winning} playwright William Inge wrote to him to say that he admired his work and thought he was handsome enough to run for office. Inge urged him, however, to remember that the artist's concern should be "with the heart and human sensibilities." In his response, Mailer admitted he wanted to do just what Inge suggested, but had concluded that "the disease of the 20th century is that politics had invaded the heart and polluted our sensibilities and there is no real way out—^m that one must write about politics as endemically as love." As Emerson notes in "Fate," "One key, one solution to the mysteries of the human condition, one solution to the old knots of fate, freedom and foreknowledge, exists: the propounding, namely, of the double consciousness. A man must ride alternately on the horses of his private and his public nature, as the equestrians in the circus throw themselves nimbly from horse to horse, or plant one foot on the back of one and the other foot on the back of the other." Like Emerson's equestrians, Mailer made such leaps with great skill during these years.

There were other indications of how brightly Mailer's reputation shone at the time: In June 1968, The Kennedy family asked him to be a member of the honor guard during the memorial for the slain senator. His new British publisher, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, planned to rush *Armies* into print shortly after its American publication. Thomas Nagel, a Harvard alumnus, asked to nominate him for a position on the Harvard Board of Overseers. Mailer's first impulse was to say no, but after reflecting on the "comic, philosophical, spiritual, existential" possibilities of having a voice in governing his alma mater, he gave his permission. Perhaps the most striking evidence of his standing came from *Time* magazine: the editor proposed him for a cover story.

Henry Luce had died in the spring of 1967 and the magazine was moving closer to the political center, but it was Mailer's achievements that forced the decision. The new managing editor, Henry Grunwald, wrote to him to say it was "an auspicious moment to achieve a truce." They had lunch and the story was scheduled for late October, right after the publication of *Miami*. *Newsweek* also contacted him to propose a fall cover story. *and the Siege of Chicago*

Not all of these possibilities worked out, but his three-day trip to London to publicize *of the Night* *Armies* was a success, and he was nominated for the Harvard post. He and the other "insurgent" nominee, Herbert R. Norr, a member of the S.D.S., were not elected, however, and *Time* dropped its plans to do a cover story on him when *Newsweek* beat it to the punch, publishing a head shot of Mailer, looking lean and hungry, on the cover of its December 9, 1968 issue. He agreed, of course, to the Kennedy family request, and watched a huge crowd wait up to six hours to pass by the Senator's body as it lay in state in St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue. Watching "the poorest part of the working-class of New York" file by and touch the flag-covered coffin led Mailer to recall "the awful cry of the wounded pig in his throat" the night he learned that the Senator had been shot. He had for years believed that one must "balance every moment between the angel in oneself and the swine," and the sound of his cry shocked him. He had spent the afternoon before the Senator was shot in Los Angeles "enjoying a dalliance," which led him to conclude that his infidelities had provided "one less piton of mooring for Senator Kennedy in his lonely ascent," a conclusion that demonstrated, once again, Mailer's belief in the concordance of human and divine endeavors. His urge at that moment had been to confess to Beverly, but he lacked the courage to confront "his wife's illimitable funds of untempered redneck wrath." So he remained silent, *as* *worsened* *and the marriage took another turn for the worse.*

and his egotism concerning the signal importance of his own actions

not to mention his own egotistical production of his personality

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

Shortly after making the decision to run, he had his new secretary, Carolyn Mason, invite about 20 potential supporters to a March 31 meeting at his apartment. Joe Flaherty begins his hilarious campaign biography, *Managing Mailer*, with an account of this meeting. In addition to the three writers who had urged him to run, three close friends—Torres, Hamill and Farbar—were there, as well as Flaherty, Jerry Rubin, and several former workers in Sen. McCarthy's campaign.

Columnist Jimmy Breslin, a tribune for working-class readers of New York tabloids, was also invited. Some of the group thought he should run on the ticket with Mailer, and give the

campaign some "street smarts," as Steinem put it.

^{Gloria} With some arm-twisting, Breslin agreed to run for president of the City Council.

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

"What do you believe in, Jerry—spirituality?"

EXT

"Yes. Spirituality, Norman."

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

EXT

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

TX

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

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

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

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

niggers." His impersonation brought groans from the crowd. As the campaign unfolded, he improved.

At the Union Theological Seminary in upper Manhattan, he and Breslin presented another key position of the campaign: neighborhood power. Every part of the city would be allowed, within yet undefined limits, to live in its own way. If Harlem wanted a statue of Martin Luther King, fine; if Staten Island wanted one of John Birch, that was okay too. Breslin spoke first, and said how impressed he was to appear before such an educated group. As for his own education, he went to John Adams High School in Queens—"for five years." Adams High was located near Aqueduct Racetrack, he recalled, and "The first English sentence I ever learned was 'It is now post time.'" Peals of laughter followed; Breslin knew how to warm up a crowd.

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

the city's becoming
 fifty-fifty
 Besides the 51st state, several other campaign ideas took root: free bicycles at city parks, a central farmers' market offering fresh vegetables and fruit, citywide stickball competitions. A campaign associate Peter monorail around Manhattan, an old idea revived by Mailer and Manso, was refurbished and became one of the most discussed proposals of the campaign. One impossible scheme continues to be discussed: Mailer articulated it at Menora Temple in Brooklyn, where he said he felt at home among "real people," rather than "phony liberals in Manhattan." The idea was Sweet Sunday, based on a description that he had written in Provincetown: "One Sunday a month, all traffic would stop, all airplanes, all trains. It would be known all over the world that one could not enter or leave New York on that day. With luck, New Yorkers could get a hint of fields or sea in the breeze on Sweet Sunday." He upped the ante by saying that electricity would be shut off, except at hospitals. Not everyone liked the concept. "What about refrigerators and air conditioning?" he was asked. "On the first hot day the populace would impeach me," he said. As the campaign went on, Mailer developed a knack for disarming one-liners. One day at Brooklyn College when talking about the Brooklyn Dodgers, he was interrupted by a questioner who wanted to know what he would do if faced by a snowstorm like the monster that had tied up traffic in Queens for several days the previous winter. He shouted back, "I'd piss on it." He began to get his share of laughs, and Breslin began to talk about issues.

Mike
 we find
 it's
 virtually
 my whole
 life and
 I've never
 heard this
 idea dis-
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There were lost opportunities and blunders. At Sarah Lawrence College before a notably feminist audience, Mailer described his power-to-the-neighborhoods plan. A young woman spoke up: "Where are the pigs going to live?" Mailer, Flaherty wrote, "made the mistake of putting on his whisky baritone Rhett Butler accent to reply. 'Look, sugar,' he began, and got no further as a chorus attacked him for the endearment." As for Breslin? The campaign staff wasn't worried as

need a
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much about what ^{he}~~Breslin~~ would say, but they were uncertain whether he would continue at all.

Whenever he threatened to drop out, he was cajoled back by staff members, as well as Flaherty

and Mailer. In response to the announcement that Mailer had won the Pulitzer for ^{The}~~Armies~~ ^{of the Night}

Breslin was adamant about leaving, saying he couldn't carry Mailer's shoes, and only much

handholding brought him around. At the formal announcement of candidacy at the Overseas

Press Club, Breslin failed to show up at the appointed hour. Mailer, accompanied by Beverly,

started without him. He began by saying that recently "candidates had become a little like the

products put out by corporations."

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

When the television camera operators asked Mailer to stand on something so he could be seen over the cluster of microphones on the podium, he refused, saying that the city would have to

learn to appreciate a man of his stature. Then he told them that he "would not deal in any deceptions, since his campaign slogan was 'No More Bullshit.'" At that moment, Breslin, who

"obviously had been on guard duty all night in some saloon," showed up, and after some opening remarks castigated the reporters present for not giving the Mailer-Breslin ticket sufficient coverage.

(TX) In truth, the campaign received a disproportionate amount of coverage. "The press was (N) (N) horny with expectation," Flaherty wrote. All five New York dailies, including the *Wall Street Journal*, wrote regular stories, so did the weeklies—the *Voice*, *New York Magazine* and *Brooklyn Heights Press*. National magazines—*Look*, *Life* and *Time*—published features, and *Women's Wear Daily* described Mailer as having "the grace of the Doge and the depth of Dante." But the *Times* outdid all of them, devoting at least a dozen news stories entirely to the Mailer-Breslin ticket. At the height of the campaign, the *Times* Sunday magazine published his most considered statement on why he should be mayor, "Why Are We in New York?" With few exceptions, the media loved the Jewish-Irish underdogs. "Vote the Rascals In" became as popular a campaign slogan as "No More Bullshit," and "I Would Sleep Better If Norman Mailer Were Mayor." This last button was displayed on the wall of Mailer's Brooklyn apartment for the next four decades.

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

The campaign had one near-ruinous evening followed a few weeks later by a day of redemption. On May 7, when Flaherty was convinced that enough nomination signatures had been gathered, a party was scheduled for the Village Gate. It had two purposes: raise campaign funds and give the hard-working staff a night off to meet the candidate, who had just signed his \$1,000 Pulitzer Prize check over to the campaign. The momentum was positive and everyone was feeling good. Mailer sat at a "booze-laden table" with Bill Walker, recently out of prison, and now his bodyguard. After Newfield and Breslin spoke, Mailer came to the stage carrying a glass of whiskey. Speaking in his Southern accent, he began to berate the campaign staff, calling them "a bunch of spoiled pigs," whose egos were undermining the campaign with "dull little vanities." When he was interrupted, he shouted back, "Fuck You." Mailer's half-drunken harangue put the staff in shock. As he was concluding, Flaherty saw Breslin heading for the exit. Mailer didn't notice. He thought his speech had been a success, and went home to bed. At four a.m., Breslin called Newfield on the telephone and asked, "Why didn't you tell me I was running with Ezra Pound?" The next morning Flaherty went to Brooklyn to confront Mailer. He carried the morning *Times*, which contained a damning account of the evening.

Flaherty told him that he had been "genuinely scary" the night before, and that staff members were dismayed; a few had quit. As Flaherty quietly criticized his performance, Beverly entered the room, and Mailer said, "This guy is bullying me to death." She replied, "I'm with him." Then Flaherty asked why he had called the staff a bunch of spoiled pigs. "He looked unbelieving: 'Did I say that?'" Beverly indicated that he had. "Tears welled up in his eyes, and he turned his head and buried it in the couch." Flaherty told him that the staff could survive one bad night. Mailer visited headquarters that afternoon and was a "portrait of repentance." For the

rest of the campaign, Flaherty wrote, the candidate worked 14-hour days during a long hot spell, shaking hands at subways and speaking at synagogues, social clubs and street fairs. "Like the girl with the curl," Flaherty said, "when he was good he was very, very good." Mailer also cut back on the bourbon, imbibing only after the day's work was done. (N)

Perhaps the finest moment of the campaign came on Memorial Day. Like Breslin, Flaherty loved horse races, and the two of them put together a plan for the ticket to meet the crowd of 70,000 gathered at Aqueduct for the Metropolitan Handicap. Mailer, dressed in a blue blazer, "his head a full-blown mass of curls, looked like the gentleman plunger," with "a radiant Beverly" at his side. Breslin wore a bright pink shirt and a huge speckled tie. The threesome worked the festive crowd and got perhaps the best reception of the entire campaign. Flaherty had put together a single-sheet flyer with the "Railbird's Picks for the Mayoral Handicap," and it was given to every reporter in attendance. On it, former mayor Wagner, "a gelding" who "knows the track," was the favorite, going off at 8-5. Ranged against him were the conservative city Comptroller, Mario Procaccino, "Bronx Ridgling [a colt with undescended testicles], By Fear—Out of Law and Order," Congressman James Scheuer and Herman Badillo, both "By Liberal—Out of Loser." Going off at 20-1 was long-shot Mailer, "By Amateur—Out of Statehood, First-time starter, Good Barn." Railbird listed him as "Best Bet." In the actual horserace, the favorite was a three-year-old named Arts and Letters. "Such an omen," Flaherty wrote, "was not lost on Mailer the Magician" who put down a \$90 bet and watched the chestnut colt come from behind to win. When Mailer saw him in the lead, he said to himself, "Maybe, maybe." (N)

Writing about the campaign later that year, he said that he had awakened "on many a morning with the clear and present certainty that he was going to win." Feeling guilty about sins

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Mailer

Bronx Borough President

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that he does not name, he decided that he ought to be elected "as a fit and proper punishment."

But it was not to be. On Election Day, June 17, 1969, Breslin got 66,000 votes and lost to Francis

X. Smith; Mailer got 41,000. The mayoral race was won by the law-and-order candidate,

Procaccino, with 33% of the vote. Wagner was second with 29%; Badillo was third with 28%;

Mailer was fourth with 5%; Scheuer also had 5%, but had 2,000 fewer votes. In the Republican

primary, John Lindsay lost to conservative Congressman John Marchi by a few thousand votes,

after which Lindsay decided to run in the general election as a liberal-independent in a three-way

race against Marchi and Procaccino. As liberal a Republican as can be conceived, Lindsay

proceeded to defeat the two conservatives, getting 42% of the vote and becoming mayor in 1970.

It has been argued that if Mailer had not run, his 41,000 votes might have gone to Badillo, who

then could have defeated Procaccino. By keeping the liberal Badillo out of the general election,

Mailer may have enabled Lindsay to win. Maybe. Flaherty asks in his epilogue, "Did Mailer save

the city for liberalism?" Inclined to say no, he nevertheless leaves the door ajar on the question

of whether the two rascals kept the nation's largest city out of conservative hands.

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

Theodore H. White, author of *The Making of the President* series, who was living in New York during the election, said that while he didn't vote for Mailer, he ^{felt} considered his campaign to be "considered and thoughtful, the beginning of an attempt to apply ideas to a political situation.

The job of intellectuals is to come up with ideas, and all we've been producing is footnotes."

other, but now everything was wrong. It was sad." Aquarius and Pisces¹—as he referred to himself and Beverly¹—had met on a night when the moon was full:

She was extraordinarily sensitive to its effects; she was at best uneasy and at worst unreachable when the moon was full. Through the years of their marriage Aquarius had felt the fullness of the moon in his own dread, his intimations of what full criminality he might possess, had felt the moon in the cowardice not to go out on certain nights, felt the moon when it was high and full and he was occasionally on the side of the brave. And she was worse. Call her Pisces for the neatness of the scheme. Beverly born of Pisces. She was an actress who now did not work. An actress who does not work is a maddened beast. His lovely Pisces, subtle at her loveliest as silver, would scream on nights of the full moon with a voice so loud she sounded like an animal in torment.

Aquarius and Pisces communicated poorly over the next two months as he moved through his journalistic chores at the NASA Manned Space Center in Houston, the Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, and the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral, Florida. When they spoke on the telephone, one or the other of them often hung up in the middle of a heated conversation. Aquarius, a political also-ran suffering through an all-but-concluded marriage, had a diminished sense of self, despite his recent accolades and prizes. He likened himself to a "disembodied spirit." It was, however, the perfect condition—"detached from the imperial demands of his ego"¹—to puzzle out an approach for writing about the huge, audacious program to put a man on the moon. Mailer found Apollo 11 to be a "spooky" enterprise, apparently transparent, but ultimately mysterious.

Shortly after he signed contracts for his account of the moon shot, an article appeared in the ^{New York} ~~Times~~ under the headline, "Million Advance for Mailer Seen." The seven-figure number was a gross exaggeration by his agent, and Mailer was upset. He was distressed about having such huge attention drawn to a book he hadn't yet figured out how to write. In actuality, *Life* would pay \$100,000 for three installments; Little, Brown (his new publisher) guaranteed \$150,000 for the hardback version; ^{COVER} ~~New American Library~~ ^{SCOTT} matched this amount for the right to publish the paperback. Meredith was quoted as being "quite positive" that foreign and subsidiary rights would bring the figure to \$1 million by the time the book was published in January or February 1970. He was wrong about the sum and off on the date, but from then on Mailer was known as a million-dollar writer. The article also stated, correctly, that he would begin the book in July, and would again use his own participation. It noted that he would describe the ~~July 20 Cape Kennedy~~ launch, and would also include "a chapter on the philosophical and technological implications of the moon landing." As it turned out, the exploration of these implications would comprise the better part of the 180,000-word book, Mailer's longest since *Naked*. ^{and the Dead}

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

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July 20 was the date of the moon-landing.
 July 20 correct

Aquarius, it was a matter of professional pride: "if you're gonna be paid a huge sum for it, you've gotta come back with something", ^{The book also gave him the chance to explore} and also a matter of exploring his obsession with the "disease of technology," one of his major themes since *Cannibals and Christians*. Consequently, soon after his arrival in Houston, although he was tempted to take a shortcut," he saw that he could not merely write about the hoopla of blast-off ^{provide} and folksy tidbits about the astronauts. "That would have been a cheat," he said. His mission was to write about "certain metaphysical problems" associated with the "technological sacrilege" of rocketing humans to the surface of a dead moon, a surface beneath which no humans were buried.

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

His time with Conrad and another unnamed astronaut made him see that they were "not dull people," and "not all of a piece." The Apollo 11 trio, however, remained off limits except

for carefully orchestrated appearances. Consequently, Mailer's portraits of the three men may be the weakest part of the book. He demonstrated that he could re-package official biographies, quotes from staged events, and cursory interviews with the three national celebrities behind a glass wall as adroitly as any talented reporter. But not much better. He admitted years later that he was unhappy with what he had written about the trio: "I tended to lean too heavily on the few times I saw them in interviews with other writers," he said. "I saw them for a total of perhaps about three hours, and on that I attempted to understand them to write a book, and it got me into great trouble. I would have been better off if I'd never met them." There is a tendency if you meet someone for a little while, he said, "to see all of their personality as being similar to the little bit you glimpsed." Mailer spent his first days in Houston with the herd of reporters, all of them cramming.

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

the moon, and then they'll finally decide to send John Updike." Mailer interviewed NASA officials, read technical manuals, and pondered his approach to the event.

During the summer, Beverly embarked on a love affair and traveled to Mexico. The unraveling of the marriage drove Mailer ^{deeper} into his work, and may even have aided it. He said many times that some of his best work was done when he was depressed. *Life's* deadline for the first installment was in early August. The editors were expecting under ten thousand words, but as he said in some prefatory comments, "I can't write anything in 5,000 words, and 10,000 words is just for poker money." Working eight to ten hours a day for a 15-day stretch, he completed his ^{thirty-thousand-}30,000-word account of the Saturn V launch on schedule. "The pleasures you get writing," he said, "are the pleasures of the marathon runner." *Life* was mainly a pictorial magazine, although it occasionally published long prose works — Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, for example. ^{The editors} Griffith and his colleagues were not accustomed, however, to huge slabs of marbled prose in a nonfiction report. When it appeared in the August 29 magazine, his 26,000-word report — ^mhe cut it slightly ^m — was by far the longest nonfiction piece the magazine had published in a single issue.

Mailer's description of the Saturn V rocket, as long and heavy as a U.S. Navy destroyer, seen from the press grandstand three-and-a-half miles away, is the best thing in the installment. The influence of *Moby-Dick* (especially the "The Whiteness of the Whale"), which years later Mailer admitted to be "enormous," is ^{evident} palpable here, especially when he compares the innards of the rocket to the innards of a whale — ^mmiles of tubes and massive tanks ^o — which brings to mind Ishmael's survey of the skeleton of a whale on a Pacific island. Mailer had already stood in awe of the rocket as it was being readied for flight in the Vehicle Assembly Building, the largest

building on the planet. The sight encouraged him "to release the string of the balloon and let his ego float off." He recognized that "a Leviathan was most certainly ready to ascend the heavens—ⁱⁿ whether for good or ill he might never know." Saturn was a furnace filled with a million gallons of varied fuels—ⁱⁿ kerosene and liquid oxygen and hydrogen. At blast-off, the flames sluiced away on each side for two hundred feet, "and in the midst of it, white as a ghost, white as the white of Melville's Moby Dick, white as the shrine of the Madonna in half the churches of the world, this slim angelic mysterious ship of stages rose without sound out of its incarnation of flame and began to ascend slowly into the sky, slow as Melville's Leviathan might swim, slowly as we might swim upward in a dream looking for air. And still no sound." When the noise of blast-off does come, it is with "the sharp and furious bark of a million drops of oil crackling suddenly into combustion." The wooden bleachers begin to shake, and he hears himself saying over and over, "Oh, my God!" Then he has "a moment of vertigo at the thought that man now had something with which to speak to God."

After the launch, he flew back to Houston to watch the four-day trip to the moon, the walk on its surface, and the flight back to earth. The astronauts' capsule splashed down in the Pacific on July 24, after eight days in space. President Nixon was there to greet them. By then Mailer had returned to Provincetown, where he watched the capsule being fished out of the drink^{water} by the crew of the aircraft carrier, U.S.S. *Hornet* (CV 12). He wrote his *Life* articles, and then commenced work on the book. Beverly was gone, and Carol Stevens, who had visited Mailer in Houston, joined him. He rented an apartment for her in the Ice House, a large condo building at 501 Commercial Street, which like his house a few hundred yards away, faced the harbor. She recalled that Mailer brought her to 565 to meet his children, his father, and Uncle Louis,

Barney's brother who was visiting from South Africa. "Barney was adorable," she recalled, "greeting me with, 'Oh, what a beautiful girlie,' in an accent hard to repeat. A mix of Jewish and South African, unlike any accent I have ever heard. Uncle Louie was charming and persuasive, urging me to join them. He said jokingly that he was ready to leave Moos [his wife] for me, and Norman agreed we would make a perfect pair."

Later, Carol met Mailer's mother who, she said, was not quite as friendly. In the fall of 1970 when she was pregnant with Mailer's fifth daughter, Maggie, Fan "lectured me on the merits of her genius son, explaining how unusual he was, and how he needed more love than other men. I would have to 'be more, give more, find more love, time, energy, devotion, for HIM.' That he 'needed more love than other men' was a line I obviously never forgot. I guess she was right on about that." Meeting the children that summer, Carol said, was also difficult. "The girls were young and fragile. They were obviously upset and frightened, more so, it seemed than Michael or Stephen. They were probably afraid to speak. They all acted like terrified little orphans. I think the boys were three and five when I met them." Mailer took Carol to the local Italian restaurant, Ciro and Sal's, for dinner. "He introduced me to Ciro as a CIA agent from Hong Kong, explaining I had taken a cab from NY."

In the fall of 1969, he wrote a brief note to Ginsberg about the "Call to War Tax Resistance" project they were both supporting. He added that the moon shot book, "keeps opening like a string one follows through the caves. So I hardly know where it will lead me." He had already written about the eight-day roundtrip of Apollo 11, the human adventure, in Part I of the account. Now, in Part II, he was exploring obdurate material: the physics of liquefied gases,

combustion and thrust, gravity and weightlessness, electricity and magnetism, orbits and the dark side of the moon. Drawing on his Harvard engineering knowledge, he presents superb expositions of these matters as they relate to Apollo 11, viewing them as mysteries to be probed, rather than complexities to be rendered. Few newspaper feature writers covering the moon shot, nor those who wrote full-length books about the event, entered into discussions of this kind. Few could. Nor did many commentators on the moon shot find it necessary to link the Apollo 11 mission with the inflamed state of race relations in the United States. Mailer had begun writing about the situation of American Blacks in "The White Negro," and then did not address it substantively until 1968. He commented favorably on Black Power in a Partisan Review symposium in 1968, and again a year later in an essay in Look, "Looking for the Meat and Potatoes—Thoughts on Black Power."

In between these two pieces came his comments in Miami, which reveal a new ripple in his thinking, one that reflected the shift in the national mood in the late 1960s following the passage of landmark civil and voting rights legislation during Johnson's administration.

Irritated that the Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy, one of the late Dr. King's closest associates, was "scandalously late" for a press conference at the G.O.P convention in Miami, Mailer realized that "he was getting tired of Negroes and their rights." This leads him to a seven-page reverie on "how to divide the guilt" for Black misery and disenfranchisement. On the one side, Blacks had burned neighborhoods and threatened "Whitey" in half the major cities in the country over the previous four years. On the other, there were countless incidents of police breaking Black heads with impunity, and unforgivable illegal discrimination. An "ugly thought" comes to him as he waits. However much the wealth and well-being of America was dependent on the underpaid or unpaid labor of Blacks, "still the stew of the Black revolution had brought the worst

to surface with the best, and if the Black did not police his own house, he would be destroyed and some of the best of the white men with him." Mailer wondered why only five of his fifty friendships with Blacks over the past decade continued with any warmth. Who was to blame?

Although his admiration for Black élan continued unabated, he was now "heartily sick of listening to the tyranny of soul music," and "bored with Negroes triumphantly late for appointments." Waiting with the other reporters for close to an hour, he became more and more peeved with Abernathy for making him wait "while the secret stuff of his brain was disclosed to his mind." Mailer's admissions are candid. He does not mention, however, that his current distaste for Black arrogance, his weariness with "the smell of booze and pot and used-up hope in blood-shot eyes of Negroes bombed at noon" that he observes in the subways of New York, is squarely at odds with his praise for the dangerous life of Blacks in "The White Negro." There he notes that the Negro knows "in the cells of his existence that life was war, nothing but war," and he admires how Blacks "subsisted for Saturday night kicks." His views on Blacks shifted again the day after the astronauts walked on the moon. (N)

He ran into a Black professor at a party in Houston. The two had met several times in the past, and were friendly. The unnamed professor, much admired on his Ivy League campus, has the "impressive voice and deliberative manner of a leader." Mailer observes that he has been drinking heavily, perhaps for several days, "as if he were looking to coagulate some floor between the pit of his feelings at boil and the grave courtesies of his heavy Black manner." As they talk, he recognizes that his friend is drinking because two white men have landed on the moon and are now flying back, an accomplishment of the "White superstructure which had been strangling the possibilities of his own Black people for years." Mailer and the professor agree (N)

that Blacks are "possessed of a potential genius which was greater than whites." This genius is based not on numbers, but magic and telepathy. There are no Black astronauts, the professor observes. No Jews either, Mailer replies. The victory of WASP culture relied on numbers and computers. If there was ever to be a great Black civilization, he predicts, "magic would be at its heart. For they lived with the wonders of magic as the Whites lived with technology." The professor had good reason to drink, he observes. Technology was winning on all fronts, and NASA had scant interest in race relations or, for that matter, Mailer's hypothesis about the existence of the Thanatosphere, a ring around the moon where the souls of the departed rose after death, waiting, presumably, to be reincarnated. Mailer's magic side was worried that Apollo 11 might interfere with this celestial holding pattern, but the engineering side took some pleasure in what NASA had accomplished. His deepest loyalty, however, was for magic. Apollo 11, Mailer said later, was either "the greatest achievement of man," or "the most sacrilegious act that man ever committed." His navigator would keep him on a tack windward of technology to the end of his life.

Through the fall of 1969 and the first four months of 1970, living in Provincetown with Carol on Miller Hill Road, Mailer immersed himself completely in Fire, seldom traveling. Money was tight, as he was now supporting six children, plus Adele, Beverly, and, in part, Carol Stevens, who still worked professionally as a singer. He did make a trip to Chicago in January, 1970, where he testified at the trial of seven men, including Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman who were accused of inciting a riot at the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention. The trial went on for months and was widely seen as a polarizing moment. When chided for loquacity by the presiding

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judge, Julius Hoffmann, Mailer answered, "Facts are nothing without their nuance, sir." At a press conference afterwards, he said that the Yippie strategy at the convention was not to attack the convention amphitheater, but rather to "just surround it and make faces at the people inside and let them have nervous breakdowns and destroy themselves." The seven were convicted, but the verdict was overturned on appeal.

TX
 Mailer complained to Harvey Breit's son, Luke, who had worked on his campaign staff, that ~~Fire~~ ^{on the March} was going to take nine months, all told, and he had hoped to complete it in three. But it appears that he had ^{an} almost a complete draft in hand by the latter part of March because he spent a day answering a huge pile of mail. In his letter to Breit, ^{Luke describes writing} he gives a sketch of his quiet days.

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

TX
 The manuscript was nearly complete when he flew to Washington to serve the remainder of his sentence for disorderly behavior at the March on the Pentagon. ^{he had lost his appeal to} ~~He had lost his appeal to~~ ^{refused to hear his appeal} the U.S. Supreme Court, and on May 5 ^{he entered} ~~checked in~~ the Alexandria city jail for the last three days of his sentence. His jail time was "near agreeable," he said. "I'm a believer in the rules of the game," he told reporters after he was released, and "if you cross that line you get arrested." New anti-war protests were scheduled for Washington the following day, and Mailer cautioned the N N

protestors to avoid violence: "A winning hand this weekend is to have no violence. The point to be made is it's the administration shedding blood—not the New Left," referring to recent reports that the U.S. had been secretly bombing North Vietnamese troops in Cambodia for over a year.

At Kent State University in Ohio, four students had just been shot dead by national guardsman.

Mailer said that when President Nixon had called protesting students "bums," it gave the guardsmen "an out to pull the trigger." Nixon's comments about the U.S.—not losing its first war,

he continued, "are the babblings of a Chekhovian character." For good measure, he also called the President a "cathedral of hypocrisy," and compared him to Dickens' unctuous villain, Uriah Heep. Mailer was driven to the airport by Rip Torn, with whom he was now reconciled. Torn's

ear had healed completely.

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

heavily
 (Mailer would draw on his summers
 in Maine ^{for} his 1991 novel *Harlot's Ghost*)

Ever since his first visit to Maine in 1948, Mailer had wanted to return. In late June 1970, he left Provincetown for ^{Mount} Desert Island where he rented a house for the summer. Acadia National Park is on the island, and within the Park is Cadillac Mountain (elev. 1528 ft.), where the morning sun first hits the continental ^{United States} U.S. during the fall and winter. The Mailer clan would explore the park on many an outing over the next dozen summers. "Fortune Rock" the house that he rented, is a spacious modern structure built by the Wells Fargo heiress, Clara Fargo Thomas in the late 1930s. It stands at the end of Somes Sound, a fjord that runs nine miles to the ocean. The tide shifts are over ten feet in this part of Maine, and at high tide the water was about twenty feet below the house's cantilevered living room. At low tide, there is nothing but rocks and sand below. Carol remembers that Mailer was always testing himself, and at one point began walking on the narrow railings outside the living room. "He could have killed himself," she said. (N)

Carol and all of his children ^{save} Susan, who was in Europe ^{joined} him there, as did his sister, who came to help for two weeks. "It was," he later wrote, "not an unhappy summer, and he ended with the knowledge that he could run a decent home and sleep without a turn of guilt, knew he could run a home without screaming at children and be as a result thus mind-empty at night that solitaire pleased him." Danielle, Betsy and Kate, 13, 11, and 8, helped with Michael and Stephen, 6 and 4. The boys, Mailer recalled, were "small powers out of doors. Inside, on rainy afternoons, their whining gave a hint of the whistle in the pipes of a maniac." (N)

~~They swam, hiked and went on picnics.~~ The summer experiment in housekeeping and family excursions ^{which} Mailer referred to as "the paving blocks at the crossroads of existence" ^{made} him ponder parental roles: "[H]e knew at last what a woman meant when she said her hair

smelled of grease." He realized that, with help, he could handle a large family day to day, but he also believed that by doing so "the most interesting part of his mind and heart" would shrivel.

Until the end of her pregnancy, Carol traveled regularly with Mailer. She was three months pregnant in late August, ^{when they went} during their trip to Italy for the showing of *Maidstone*. Prior to their arrival in Venice, a friend, Mary-Jane Matz had made arrangements for them to visit Ezra Pound and his companion, the violinist Olga Rudge. Carol remembers that Pound "was in a period of silence, but did say something to Norman." The old poet, she said, had "the most intense, penetrating blue eyes." A year after their visit, an American journalist, Alan Levy, visited Pound. He noticed a copy of Mailer's book of poems, *Deaths for the Ladies*, on a bookshelf, and asked how it got there. Rudge said that Mailer had given them a copy. She added, "I had heard this Mailer was a wild man and I was a little afraid, but he was on his best behavior. Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth." At this point, Pound interrupted: "Mailer? Nice... young... fella." Rudge said that she read his poems to Pound, and then turned to him: "And you liked some of them. Do you remember any?" Her thin, frail companion answered, "All of em!" Mailer wrote ^{of Pound's} Matz to thank her for arranging the visit, and said he was reading "quite a bit" of Pound, including Neel Stock's recent biography. "[T]he funny thing is that my poetry in Deaths for the Ladies while having unfortunately little of the sensuous quality of his work does subscribe to a few of his poetic principles." The difference, he said, is that "I have no talent—not for poetry but the prose is awfully good." In 2007, he recalled his visit to Pound's Venice apartment, noting that he was now the same age as Pound—84—during the 1970 visit. The poet kept scratching at his hands and nails, Mailer remembered, "like an old eagle."

IXB

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~~Women's Liberation~~. *Time* boiled his commentary down to this: "Exploitation of woman? But it is impossible to exploit her because she has magic powers. I am against the emancipation of women just because I respect them." Mailer complained about what he believed to be unfair treatment by the magazine in a letter that ~~they~~ printed, but these three sentences do, in fact, encapsulate one of the major arguments of his *Harper's* essay, "The Prisoner of Sex," on gender, sex, procreation and women's rights.

"There was a tissue of communion between the children and himself" that summer, he wrote, but by Labor Day the children had returned to their respective mothers to prepare for school and Mailer and Carol returned alone to Provincetown. They rented the Lily Harmon House, a large, brick-faced house on the harbor at 627 Commercial Street that he would later purchase. He continued to worry about *Maidstone*, awaited the publication of *Fire* ^{on the Mountain} in January, and worked on his "big, fat discursive piece" for Willie Morris. At the beginning of November, a copy of *Women's Wear Daily* containing a profile of Vidal came his way. Amidst a stream of remarks, Vidal noted that he was in unison with the ~~Women's Liberation Movement~~ on the lack of substantial difference between the sexes. He was different in this regard, he continued, from his colleague Norman Mailer, who "often sounds like the deranged commander of an American Legion post, particularly about women, whom he doesn't like very much. He has made politics out of sex." Vidal himself, as he explained, held that everyone is bi-sexual, although "not everyone practices it." Mailer read this as an endorsement of unisex, which he considered an abomination. He sent a letter to the paper a week later saying that Vidal's comments should be seen in the light of some statistical evidence: "marriages, Vidal-0, Mailer-4; children, Vidal-0, Mailer-6; daughters, Vidal-0, Mailer-4." While these figures were not conclusive, he continued,

Zero

one might conclude that "Gore neither wed nor bothered to sire because he put womankind in such high regard that he did not wish to injure their tender flesh with his sharp tongue." The exchange was the beginning of a small war between the two, one that went on for more than 15 years.

9] This flurry of activity on the topic of "women's liberation"!
Vidal's comments in *Woman's Wear Daily*, *Time*'s desire for Mailer's response to the

Women's Liberation Movement, and Willie Morris' solicitation of an essay for *Harper's* on the phenomenon were all the direct result of the publication of a fierce attack on male chauvinism by

Kate Millet, an apologist for feminism whose stated goal was "enlarging human freedom."

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

1970, exactly 50 years after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution

giving women the vote. "There was a great wave of feminism building," that summer, Millett

wrote, and her book rode the crest. She appeared on the cover of the August 30 *Time*, and every

literate person in the country, it seems, had an opinion about her polemic. Mailer ordered a copy and was soon plowing through what he called "Kate Millet's hard clay." Although he comments

on a score of feminist works (including Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, also published that year), *The Prisoner of Sex* is a concerted attempt to rebut and discredit Millett.

Her book was not the first postwar feminist work to create a stir. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949, translated into English in 1953) has that honor. A learned, multi-disciplinary work, Beauvoir's pioneering study explores the myths and facts of the female gender, focusing on the ways women had been marginalized, culturally conditioned to think of themselves as "other" through the ages. Mailer wrote to a friend that "the first inkling I ever had of woman's liberation" was when he heard his sister speak passionately about *The Second Sex*.

Simone de Beauvoir's groundbreaking exploration of the ways

shortly after it was published in the U. S. Barbara remembers that he leafed through it and was

generally dismissive. Betty Freidan's 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, was also a powerful

influence, and is often credited with initiating the "second wave" of feminism in the U.S. after

the reverses that followed the achievement of suffrage. Its "fundamental argument," as distilled

by Louis Menand, "is that there is no such thing as women's essential nature. The belief that

women are biologically destined to be domestic and subordinate, is just a construct, constructed

by psychologists and social scientists." Mailer never argued that women should be homebound

cooks and babysitters, but he did believe that they shared an immutable biological identity.

The Woman's Liberation Movement gained momentum all through the sixties, aided by governmental action—President Kennedy's National Commission on the Status of Women and

the Equal Pay Act of 1963, for example—and the formation of innumerable organizations

supporting women's rights—Freidan and other women and men founded the National

Organization for Women in 1966—and reached its full flowering with the publication of *Sexual*

Politics. Millet attacked the positions of a wide range of male thinkers in her study, including

Freud, Reich and Erik Erikson, but her three chief targets are D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller and

Mailer.

In late December, he received his advance copies of *Of a Fire on the Moon*, which reproduced as cover art René Magritte's painting of a huge rock and the sea, titled, "Le Monde

Invisible." The official publication date was January 11, 1971, and the major reviews came out

that month. They were generally positive, but less glowing than those of *Armies* and *Miami*. The

old pattern of evenly divided reviews began to reestablish itself, and would continue until the end

of the 1970s. Benjamin DeMott's review in *Saturday Review* straddled the extremes. He

that women had been marginalized through the ages.

1960s in 1961

Millet's

(N)

and the scene of Chicago

complained of Mailer's "unremitting self-involvement and self-regard," but also argued that the author's narcissism "blesses him as an enthusiast," one who writes "pages that physically breathe with the vitality of the writer's will to pack in the whole, nail the kit complete^{ly}—all two million functioning parts, every sensation, every fear, every^y lucked-out crisis" of the Apollo 11 mission. So it went through the rest of the reviews: encomiums for Mailer's ability to drill through NASA's layers of bureaucracy with his diamond-hard ego, and protest against the revelation of his personal life and theology, especially his "Manichean ox-team^m—his God and Devil in harness pulling on the universe in opposite directions," as Christopher Lehmann-Haupt described it in his *New York Times* review. The book's length put off some reviewers; others were troubled by what Morris Dickstein in the ^{+ New York} ~~Times~~ *Book Review* called "a certain slackness of execution" in some of the technical descriptions, paralleling the tedious parts of the cetology chapters in *Moby-Dick*. But these lapses are small, Dickstein argued, and Mailer's attempt, not just to bridge science and the humanities, "to leap over and back, to reclaim the event for mystery, romance and human dread," made the book exemplary.

Little, Brown pressed Mailer to do some publicity for *Fire*, and he agreed, but with no joy. In late January, he made appearances in New York, including *The David Frost Show*, and later travelled to Houston, Miami, and Los Angeles. At almost every stop, the crowd and reporters seemed more interested in his views on Women's Lib^{as it was popularly called} than in *Fire*. He wrote to Aldridge about how much he disliked the publicity grind: "I'm caught these days in the low hope that perhaps the book won't do too well and so prove my thesis that TV does not sell books." Mailer never entirely gave up this thesis, even after numerous appearances on television talk shows. What he was looking forward to at the time was the March 8 championship bout between

Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier at Madison Square Garden. It would be the first of three epic boxing matches ^{then} in the 1970s between the two men, both undefeated. Ralph Graves, a *Life* editor, ^{prove to} wrote to him and asked if he could write a ^{five-thousand} 5,000-word report for *Life* on what was being called "the fight of the century." The magazine's publication schedule meant he would have to submit the piece two days after the fight.

Working from seven in the morning until seven at night, he met the deadline and produced a 9,500-word essay. "I never wrote so fast in my life," he told Knox. "Ego: The Ali-Frazier Fight," is one of the best depictions of a prizefight ever written. Accompanied by nine color photographs taken by Frank Sinatra (one of many celebrities attending), it was *Life*'s March 19, 1971 ^{cover story}. The piece marks a subtle change in Mailer's self-referencing. In much of his writing from *Advertisements* ^{for himself} on, he had used the incidents of his life, willy-nilly, to illumine whatever topic was at hand. But in "Ego," he began talking intently about *the artist* as an exemplary type, comparing, for example, Picasso and Joyce to the boxers with the most powerful egos, heavyweight champions such as Rocky Marciano and Muhammad Ali. "Boxing is a rapid debate between two sets of intelligence," he said, likening a championship bout to his public debate with William Buckley. Prizefighting is a language of the body, he argues, one ^{that} which is "as detached, subtle and comprehensive in its intelligence as any exercise of mind." From this point onward, he would return again and again to the artist as archetype (with Norman Mailer as the unmistakable signature), using it as a species of divining rod to explore the psychic depths of personalities as disparate as Marilyn Monroe, Henry Miller, Gary Gilmore, Lee Harvey Oswald, Picasso, Christ and Hitler. In retrospect, "Ego" can be seen as the beginning of a major phase in his writing career: Mailer as biographer.

"Ego," however, was ^{published in the shadow} ~~overshadowed by the appearance~~ of "The Prisoner of Sex" in

^{Wells} ~~Harper's~~ a few weeks earlier. Morris bought a ^{ten-by-fifteen} 10" x 15" ad in the New York Times on

publication day featuring the cover of the *Harper's* issue under this tag: "The Favorite Target of Women's Lib Chooses His Weapon. Harper's Magazine." At the bottom of the page was further

enticement: "Pick Up a Copy. Before Your Newsstand is Picketed." The ad, aided by Mailer's

incendiary comments in various interviews, worked. Ideologues on both sides weighed in,

columnists and pundits gleefully reported the battle between the sexes, and nine days after the

magazine had arrived on newsstands, it ^{had} sold out ~~entirely~~, if not entirely to his admirers. He was

now booed and heckled at some public appearances, mainly by women. The badgering, he felt,

was unjust, even though he certainly abetted it. One of the few women who gave him public

succor was Joan Didion. Mailer's position "strikes me as exactly right," she said. "I think sex is a

lot darker than Kate Millet ⁺ does. I think there is a lot more going on than meets her eye." Didion

defended the sex scenes in *An American Dream*, ^{for example}

Making matters worse was a comment ^{had} he made to Orson Welles the previous June on *The Mike Douglas Show*. Welles was "being pious for a moment about women," Mailer recalled, and he jumped in: "Oh, come on, Orson, women are sloppy beasts, they should be kept in cages."

This pronouncement "poured ice cubes down everyone's back," Mailer said. Welles then got solemn, even after Mailer tried to take the edge off his pronouncement by saying that he did not hate women, adding, "Orson, we respect the lions in the zoo, but we want them kept in cages, don't we?" Years later, he said that he had made the remark "for fun and idiocy," and failed to realize "how intense the anger, fury and frustration, which I had caused, had become. I meant the remark as a joke, but I will admit that it was the wrong remark at the wrong time." The women's

revolution was nearing its apogee, and Mailer became its piñata. ^{His} Few feminists, radical or not, failed to remember his "joke." When ^{ed} Harper's essay appeared, it was merely confirmation for feminists, ^{that grew out of the essay} whether they ^{cornot, that Mailer was a male} read it, of Mailer's chauvinism. Later, while on a speaking tour for the book version, he complained to a *Miami Herald* columnist that although he'd "spent my life writing about men and women and their enormously complicated relationship," the feminists were "killing my wallet, my ego, my reputation." New, young movements, he said, have to "kill someone symbolically. But that person has to have value." He never stopped believing that he was that scapegoat.

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

"overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation, and destroy the male sex." Her manifesto was reprinted in *Sisterhood is Powerful*, a bestselling anthology. Solan's^{as} program "while extreme, even extreme of the extreme," he argued, "is nonetheless^a the magnetic north for Women's Lib." Technology could win. (N)

Mailer's passionate[✓] if somewhat tendentious brief against such a world is built on a biological fact about women and an assertion about men: A woman possesses a "mysterious space within," while a man is "simple meat," a creature of unrest "who proceeded to become unmasculine whenever he ceased to strive." The "purse of flesh" that was the womb, contained (N)

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

If women wished to enter the male occupations and professions, he argued, "go to work with a lunch pail and a cigar" (sarcasm was not off limits), wear a uniform and die of male diseases, what would happen to^{their} her link to the infinite? He said that he would assent to every feminist demand for equality, certainly all their economic demands; he would "agree with everything they asked but to quit the womb." But in 1970 it was no longer a simple either/or decision for women (if it ever had been), and in the years since then it became clear that women, while still lagging in paycheck size, have achieved parity in many professions^{through not all}—medicine, law, (N)

psychology, the clergy and education—while still behind in engineering, finance and a few others. In 2008, ~~most~~ mothers, even those with infant children, were in the workforce, and the percentage has continued to increase. Equilibrium for women between child rearing and work was possible, but no one would claim it was easy.

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

For Mailer, Lawrence’s literary and personal life stood as clear evidence “that a firm erection on a delicate fellow was the adventurous juncture of ego and courage.” Successful coitus was an achievement, but loving sex was harder, yet Lawrence believed in it with all the passion of the last romantic: the love affairs he depicted in a half-dozen novels—*Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was Mailer’s favorite—“come in like winds off Wuthering Heights—but never had a male novelist written more intimately about women—heart, contradiction, and soul; never had a novelist loved them more, been so comfortable in the tides of their sentiment, and so

ready to see them murdered." Like Mailer, he was spoiled, "and could not have commanded two infantrymen to follow him, yet he was still a great writer, for he contained a cauldron of boiling opposites—he was on the one hand a Hitler in a teapot, on the other he was the blessed breast of tender love, he knew what it was to love a woman from her hair to her toes." The parallels with Mailer—recall Lindner calling him "a pint-sized Hitler"—^{are} here become obvious, and when we hear that Lawrence's incompatibles were intensified by an "intellectual ambition sufficient to desire the overthrow of European civilization," it is clear that he identifies with Lawrence as much as with Hemingway, and owes him a deeper debt. "Lawrence's point, which he refines over and over, is that the deepest messages of sex cannot be heard by taking a stance on the side of the bank, announcing one is in love, and then proceeding to fish in the waters of love with a breadbasket full of ego. No, he is saying again and again, people can only win at love only when they are ready to lose everything they bring to it." Mailer elaborates masterfully on Lawrence's derision of "meaningless fucking [. . .]" that was the privilege of the healthy," and his celebration of genuine sexual love as "the only nostrum which could heal," but only when the partners were without what Lawrence called "reserves or defenses."

The son of a mother who loved him "outrageously," and a father who despised him, Lawrence was a sickly youth, "bone and blood of the classic family stuff out of which homosexuals are made," Mailer avers, and became masculine only by will power. Lawrence stole Frieda von Richthofen, a German baron's daughter, from her husband. She left him and her three children, risking everything for a poor miner's son from Nottingham. The love of Lawrence's mother and that of Frieda empowered Lawrence psychologically even as he was slowly dying of tuberculosis. He was dead at 44. Mailer says he was "possessed of a mind which

did not believe any man on earth had a mind more important than his own," a mind that created a novelistic manifest for heterosexual love as the saving power of humanity. ^{Mailer} He compares him to a general, deploying his words as battle troops. Reading Mailer's 40 pages on Lawrence, a brilliant interpretation of Lawrence's profound belief in erotic instinct and risk, reinforced by a close reading of a dozen key passages (restored from Millet's truncations), one cannot escape the conclusion, as one critic, Peter Balbert, put it, that Mailer's books—"through their familiar litany of concern with love, sex, inhibitive society, and modern mechanization—appear like a karmic reformulation of Lawrence's own most prominent preoccupations." In a 1985 letter to another Lawrence scholar, Jeffrey Meyers, Mailer said, "*Lady Chatterley* changed my life."

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

TX
 Shortly after ^{The of Sex} ~~Prisoner~~ appeared, Willie Morris resigned ^{from Harper's} under pressure from the publisher, William S. Blair, and the chairman of the magazine's board, John Cowles, Jr. He had been summoned to a corporate meeting in Minneapolis where the centerpiece was the magazine's balance sheet. It had not made a profit in three years, and Morris's editorial boldness was very much on the minds of the financial stakeholders. Over his four-year tenure, he had published not only Mailer's lengthy pieces, but a big chunk of Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, an excerpt from James Jones's novel, *The Merry Month of May*, and Seymour Hersh's expose of the 1968 My Lai massacre in Vietnam. Editorially, the magazine tilted to the left; the Cowles family tilted the other way. One board member at the meeting said to Morris, "No wonder it's such a failure. Who are you editing this magazine for? A bunch of hippies?" "The money men won," Morris said. The entire editorial staff resigned, save a young editor, ^{Lewis} ~~Louis~~ Lapham, who at a last-ditch staff meeting with Cowles agreed with him, and stayed behind when the rest walked out. He was later appointed editor and remained in the position for thirty years.

resignation "The of Sex"
 In his letter, Morris said that ~~Prisoner~~ had "deeply disturbed the magazine's owners. Mailer is a great writer. His work matters to our civilization." It was widely believed, as *Time* reported, that Morris's downfall "was precipitated in large degree by a prominently displayed, controversial article by Norman Mailer." Asked if this was true, Mailer said that he suspected "a strong connection, at least." He called the resignation "the most depressing event in American letters in many a year. Under Willie's editorship, *Harper's* has been the boldest and most adventurous magazine in America." Later, in his memoir, *New York Days*, Morris admitted that Mailer's essay "was not central to the issue, only part of it," he wrote, "less at that moment substantive than symbolic." But at that moment, Morris felt impelled to make Mailer the heroic

artist arrayed against the benighted forces of Midwest plutocracy. For some time, the media had shown a tendency to drag Mailer from the margins to the center of events. When it was clear that Morris was out, Mailer said he would never write for the magazine again, and kept his word, as did many other important contributors—ⁱⁿStyron, James Jones, David Halberstam and Larry L. ^{playwright and novelist}King.

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

Maggie Alexandra was late, born on March 21, 1971, Earth Day, at Beth Israel Hospital in Manhattan. Carol remembered the day: “My water broke and suddenly we were in a panic. I was surprised by Norman’s behavior. He was the most anxious of all.” In the lobby of the hospital, people asked for his autograph as ^{couple}they waited for the elevator. “We hadn’t a minute to spare as baby presented herself feet first, cord wrapped around her neck,” she said. Mailer ^{safely delivered}described Maggie, to Knox: She has “my mother’s nose, bless her, but when she looks the strongest, you would think you were staring at the bust of a Roman emperor or a big man in the Mafia. Tough!” Shortly after the birth, Mailer rented a house in South Londonderry, Vermont,

not far from the New York border. Before leaving New York, he had to fulfill a commitment. He had agreed to be the moderator at a meeting sponsored by New York University and The Theatre of Ideas, "A Dialogue on Women's Liberation," to be held at Town Hall, on West 43rd Street.

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

Among the luminaries present were four writers, Betty Friedan, Susan Sontag, Cynthia Ozick and Elizabeth Hardwick, all of whom threw barbs barely disguised as questions at the moderator. There were plenty of men in the packed auditorium, including two Normans, Rosten and Podhoretz, neither of whom rose to defend Mailer. The *Times* reviewer, Anatole Broyard, tried to frame a question about the nature of heterosexual sex after the women's revolution, but Greer told him his "unreasonable question" was out of order. The first panelist to speak was Jacqueline Ceballos, the president of the National Organization of Women. She said that it was Women's Lib—"not the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement or the environmental movement"—that was addressing the root problem of the country. Mailer, she said, had been

"sincerely trying to understand" the movement in his essay, but missed the distorted way women were depicted in our culture. In commercials, she said, the woman "gets an orgasm when she gets a shiny floor." Mailer, unimpressed, asked sarcastically, "Is there anything in your program that would give men the notion that life would not be as boring as it is today?" The tone for the night was set by this exchange.

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

Diana Trilling, the final speaker, was the most cogent, and the most sympathetic to the situation of her old friend, whom she referred to in her speech as "the most important writer of our time." He ^{had been} ~~was~~ "under most intemperate assault," she wrote in her account, ^(later) and she was therefore happy that he struck back; she did not want to be part of "a symbolical slaughter." Trilling was a Lawrence scholar, and her partial agreement with *Prisoner* was based on her admiration for the "poetry of biology" in the work of Lawrence and Mailer. Both novelists, and Henry Miller, ^(she said in her speech) believed in "the body as the gateway to heaven." While avowedly a feminist, she couldn't join Mailer's female attackers because she preferred "even an irresponsibly poeticized

biology to the no-biology-at-all of my spirited sisters." Someone called out "traitor" when she made this comment.

Mailer said that he was in agreement with some of what Trilling and her colleagues said, but he saw no reciprocity. The movement seemed to overlook the fact that "men's lives are also difficult." He conceded, however, that "Women's Lib has raised the deepest questions facing us," and ended by thanking everyone present "for an incredible evening." Rarely is Mailer given any credit for writing a treatise that lays out such an array of arguments—shrewd, skewed, impassioned and crazy (for example, contraception leads to over-population)—on every aspect of human sexuality and gender identity, publishing it in a popular magazine, and then taking a stage to debate his ideas with all comers. He had, in effect, put himself into the clutches of his detractors, and then offered them a bully pulpit to attack his ideas. At the end of the section on Miller in *Prisoner*, he notes that Henry Miller's male readers were not ready to stand with him in any debate with women, no, "the men moving silently in all retreat pass the prophet by." Few stood with Mailer either. *The righteaus ire of* Women were too angry. *was too strong*

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

Book came out 5 mos later

Not in a magazine, but a book

book article?

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

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

to homogenize nature, eliminate gender distinctions, and leach out individual differences. He was thinking a century ahead; women were remembering the suffering of the ages.

Oates argues that for all of human time on the planet "women have been machines for the production of babies," and until this function is ameliorated or abrogated, women's full potential will not be realized. "Once we are freed from the machine of our bodies, perhaps we will become truly spiritual." This is the crux: ^{of the issue Mailer confronted} ~~Was~~ childbearing a function that could be assumed by technology, freeing women to be more than sacred vessels, or was it an inevitably harrowing but heroic destiny, one ^{that} ~~which~~ elicits male adoration of women, itself biologically destined? Or both? Oates calls it "a difficult question." For insisting on women's procreative destiny, he drew "the rage of Women's Liberation," she says. "And we understand slowly that what is being liberated is really hatred. *Hatred of men.* Women have always been forbidden hatred." Mailer stepped freely to the center of the target, and ~~Women's~~ Liberation was pleased to see him pinned and wriggling. Danielle, then 14, was present at the Town Hall debate, along with her younger sister Betsy, and her older sister, Susan. Norman's sister and mother were also there. Danielle recalled being "devastated by the abuse" of her father. Susan was similarly upset, but kept asking herself why her father kept egging the women on. When she saw the film years later, she saw that he was being deliberately playful, ^{provocative} something often missed in his encounters with feminists. Mailer said it was the night his hair turned white.

When school was out, Mailer's six eldest children joined him and Carol and the baby at a farm they rented in Vermont. Myrtle Bennett, a nanny from Honduras who would become a

virtually a

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

José and Romona Torres visited in June and July, and rented a nearby house. Mailer had hung boxing bags in the barn and he and José boxed three two-minute rounds daily. He said later that if he learned anything from Torres in Vermont, it was defense. "He was a marvelous teacher for that because he would tap me with a jab, let's say, and if I made the same mistake he'd tap me a little harder." With the encouragement of Pete Hamill, Torres had started writing boxing articles for the Spanish-language newspaper *El Diario*. He asked Mailer to help him improve his English writing skills, and for over a month, every day, he would bring his new pages to Mailer, who gave him "a fatherly hand with verb tenses." Mailer said that the book that came out of that summer's work, *Sting Like a Bee: The Mohammad Ali Story*, was a "modest phenomenon," because it offered "a view of boxing which comes for the first time, genuinely and authentically from the inside." He swore that it was Torres' book.

Susan, who turned 22 that summer, recalled taking long horseback rides in to the mountains and playing volleyball. One night she was out late with a young man, and returned to find the paterfamilias awaiting her, both angry and concerned, which surprised her a bit. Barbara

and Al visited, and Fan and Barney too. Mailer enjoyed riding, but was thrown by his favorite horse Coyote, and was laid up for ten days with a bad back. Everyone rode, even Fan, who her son somehow convinced to get on a pony. He jogged regularly, usually with Danielle or Torres, and tried to live cleanly. He also fasted for two weeks to lose weight and purge.

When Selden Rodman, the poet and art collector, came for a visit, Mailer showed him the book he had used as a guide, *Fasting Can Save Your Life*. He explained that by the fourth day of eating nothing and drinking only water, you lose your appetite, and "all your poisons are coming out as sweat." The regimen was soothing, he said. "I began to get actually *calm*! No temper, no fighting anymore." This clarity of mind made him think fasting might be beneficial for schizophrenics. Rodman watched Mailer spar, and he jogged along with him. At lunch one day, Carol told Rodman about the time Mailer had rushed to get his rifle to shoot a pesky raccoon, but then hesitated. "I, the great *macho*," Mailer added, couldn't pull the trigger.

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

48 is correct
 not
 only when unable to resist some contemporary phenomenon. He would be 48 in January 1971, and was ready to make the big push.

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

I speak for sometimes
 = that they would clash

miniature

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EQ
 EXPL

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

EQ
 EXPL

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

(N)

TXB
 TXE

The other, much more painful, depiction was ^{by Vidal} ~~Vidal's~~ work. In a July 1971 review of *Patriarchal Attitudes* by Eva Figs, Vidal linked Mailer with Henry Miller and Charles Manson, who had recently been convicted of masterminding the murders of nine people in California, including pregnant actress Sharon Tate. Vidal's stated contention is that men hate women, and the three named men are emblematic of this loathing: "The Miller-Mailer-Manson man (or M3 for short) has been conditioned to think of women as, at best, breeders of sons; at worst, objects to be poked, humiliated, killed." During the Puritan era, "M3 was born, migrated to America, killed Indians, enslaved blacks, conned women." In an interview the year before, Vidal had called Mailer a "deranged" American Legion commander; now he likened him to a "VFW commander in heartland America" who sees women "as a creature to be used for breeding." Mailer seethed; he said he felt something blow in his brain. Instead of attempting to show that there were "startling and frightening similarities" between Mailer and Manson, he said, Vidal spoke of M3 as if it were an established fact. Mailer looked forward to engaging his erstwhile friend, and before the year was out, he would.

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TX

Torres' book was to be published on October 15, and Mailer came up with the idea of a televised boxing exhibition to promote it. He contacted Dick Cavett and it was agreed that a prizefight ring would be created for Cavett's program. On the live program ^{aired} October 7, he tried hard to hit Torres, a great defensive boxer, with a telling blow, and failing, took more than he gave, which was his boxing style. At one point, Torres was concerned that he had hurt Mailer with a punch, and paused, but his opponent was okay. Later, Torres called his former manager, Cus D'Amato, and told him, "Cus, I hit him hard in the stomach and he didn't go down. Not

check if doubt this
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hard, but hard." He wrote to his Uncle Louis and Aunt Moos that he had "boxed three moderately confident two-minute rounds with him, and I hope my enemies and detractors gnash their teeth. I know my friends did." For many friends and foes, the exhibition seemed to be an attempt to link himself with Hemingway, which it certainly was, in part. But Mailer's deeper view, as noted in his comments on Hemingway's suicide, was that Papa was not particularly brave; rather, "the truth of his long odyssey is that he struggled with his cowardice." So did Mailer, who saw the match with Torres as another rung on the ladder out of his fears. He wrote the following about Hemingway's boxing: "There are two kinds of brave men: those who are brave by the grace of nature, and those who are brave by an act of will." Hemingway was the latter, he said.

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

was "a huge novel, vast as his imagination is demonstrably vast." Mailer's candidate for this leviathan was the still-unnamed *Ancient Evenings*, which he would begin in January 1972.

Twice more before the end of the year, he found himself in the public eye. Dotson Rader asked him to participate in a "Remember the War" benefit rally at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York. The Episcopal Bishop, Paul Moore, Jr. welcomed the anti-war coalition. Rader, who was a close friend of Tennessee Williams, had also convinced the playwright to take part. Mailer decided to stage his one-act play, *D.J.*, adapted from *Why Are We in Vietnam?* For this performance, Rip Tom, Beverly Bentley and her boyfriend, Paul Guilfoyle, played the key roles. Six thousand people packed the church, and Mailer's play followed speeches by Gloria Steinem and Williams. "It was a disaster," Rader wrote. "Tennessee walked out halfway through the play's performance, furious at hearing such filthy language profaning a great Christian house of worship." Mailer was pleased with the event, and told the crowd that it was "the first time in my life that students, a peace movement, ever succeeded in shifting a major empire from its military aims."

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

Bishop asked about Mailer. He told Moore he would send him Mailer's novel, *The Gospel according to the Son*, which he said was "the best book I've ever read about Jesus." Moore answered, "I know. I read it."

His other moment in the public eye was his public debate with ^{Gore} Vidal on the Dick Cavett Show. The December 1, 1971 program was his most memorable television appearance, one ^{that} which challenged the rules of the talk show. Appearing with him and Vidal was Janet Flanner, the *New Yorker's* longtime Paris correspondent, who was 79 at the time. Before the show, Mailer ^{had} had several drinks at a publication party and was well-oiled as he waited in the Green Room. Vidal caressed the back of Mailer's neck and got a slap to the cheek, which Vidal returned. Then Mailer head-butted him "between half and three-quarter throttle," after which Vidal called him crazy and departed. Mailer came ^{help the room} on stage after Vidal and Flanner. Cavett described his entrance: "His hands were fists and carried high, and he had the tousled look of having visited a favorite bar or two en route. His suit was disheveled, his bow to Miss Flanner courtly, and his refusal to shake Vidal's extended hand caused a murmuring in the audience." ^{Mailer's} His plan was to confront Vidal about the review, but he undercut himself by passing a copy of the magazine to Vidal and ordering him to "read what you wrote." Vidal demurred, and then Flanner leaned over to whisper something to him. Mailer complained about this breach of decorum.

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

EXT DI

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

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

Flanner: A tiny mutter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The rules of talk shows at that time were as strict as the codes of a Cistercian monastery, and as the television audience watched in amazement, Mailer flouted them, pushing the genre in a new direction. He assumes, or tries to assume, the host's position as moderator, punctures the format's drawing-room civility, brings in private quarrels, and roundly insults the other guests. "Finally," as one television historian has pointed out, "Mailer also challenges the studio audience. He refuses to let it play its role as an invisible surrogate for the audience at home, an unquestioned presence and responsive but essentially silent chorus to the talk on the stage. Mailer forces the audience to articulate its own position." He was booed more than once.

Writing to a friend a few weeks after the show, Mailer said that he had "never received so many letters on any single thing in my life, and well-written or pretty poorly, sympathetic or critical, what gets me is that they are penetrating." As one correspondent wrote to him: "The studio audience was not aware (monitors notwithstanding) of the stark terror in Vidal's eye and your own basilisk glance. And, if they had read his article in The New York Review they would have noted his woeful sense of wrong-doing." Mailer said he had been charged up that night "to meet any one of ten people (like Germaine Greer, you know, who has been putting ice-picks in

my wax doll all summer) and Gore happened to be the one; but I think I would have commenced an ulcer in my stomach that night if I had found myself on the show playing ping-pong with Gore." Television critics, for the most part, raved about the show. Bob Williams, in the New York Post, said the program was "the kind of plain-spoken talk-show that all three networks should be carrying, free of the incessant stars plugging plays and movies and records with inconsequential small-talk. Call the Cavett show with Vidal and Mailer nothing less than honest." ^{Mailer} ~~he~~ wouldn't see Vidal again until 1977.

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