

To my wife, Donna Pedro Lennon,

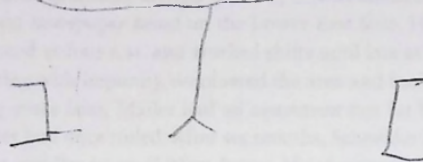
and

Barbara Mailer Wasserman,

with love and gratitude

and to the memory of Robert F. Lucid

SPACE



of Settlement (comprised of the bulk of Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, and Belarus) were being driven abroad by double taxation and forced enlistments in the czar's army. Parlous conditions from 1881 to 1914 forced over two million to emigrate. Sometime in early 1891, Schneider left for the United States with his half-sister, Lena, his half-brother, Morris, and his wife's youngest sister, Minnie. Ida, pregnant with Fan, stayed behind. The Schneiders were separated for three years. Ida, her sixty-two-year old mother, Leah Sacks, and the five children arrived in New York in October 1894, sailing from Rotterdam on the SS Veendam.

When Hyman Schneider arrived in 1891, he was advised to set up a soda water and newspaper stand on the Lower East Side. He and Lena opened the stand at four A.M. and worked shifts until late at night. Irish gangs, operating with impunity, dominated the area and took what they wanted. Sixty years later, Mailer had an apartment not far from where his grandfather had once toiled. After six months, Schneider left the city and became a peddler in rural New Jersey. He also taught Hebrew to Jewish families in Belmar before finally settling in the resort town of Long Branch, where, according to Fan, he was "induced" by the small local Jewish community to start a kosher grocery store.

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

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

The Schneider store catered to the Jewish population, which burgeoned each summer with the arrival of middle-class visitors and a few wealthy New Yorkers. Preoccupied by his studies, Rabbi Schneider played a relatively small role in the store; the women and older girls did

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Mailer seldom wrote about his childhood. In 2004, he said that he had avoided writing about Long Branch and Brooklyn because "too many crystals are there" and "you don't want to write about the material. . . . Preserve it because it's endlessly fruitful." Crystals, as he explained several times, are memories of wrenching or exhilarating experiences, epiphanies in one's past that, properly considered, are illuminating. When a crystal is aligned just so, it casts an imaginative beam that clarifies a new experience, acting as a kind of emotional spectrometer. We can only speculate on his childhood crystals, but given the instances of childhood fear and timidity already noted, it seems quite possible that he was referring to moments of ignominious humiliation. Late in life, he said, "I don't feel joy going back to the old streets in Brooklyn."

Mailer was an outstanding student at Boys High, graduating near the top of his 650-member class. His grades were nearly as high as of those of valedictorian Martin Lubin, a boy he knew slightly and later roomed with at Harvard. But Mailer's lack of involvement in athletics and student government—indeed, his lack of involvement in any school activity except for the aviation club—left him out of the running for valedictorian. Overall, his best grades were in math and science (a 99.5 in Algebra and a 99 in Chemistry), but his English, French, and History *only a few* grades were ~~on a few~~ points lower. His lowest academic grade was in drawing, an 80; his grades in physical training were dismal. Beatrice Silverman, his first wife, said he had trouble vaulting over the horse in gym class. His report cards gained plaudits at home, especially the math and science grades, but not in the neighborhood, where he was just another skinny kid. "In Brooklyn I was always a little ashamed of being smart," he said. "Somehow you weren't manly if you were smart." He did have some success with the opposite sex, however. Barbara's friend Rhoda *e* (née Lazare) Wolf had a crush on him and his girlfriend, Phyllis Bradman, according to his sister, was the prettiest girl in the neighborhood, although they never got beyond kissing and light petting. The summer before he died, he remembered his situation.

I was 13; it was 1936. The New Deal was on; a great deal was happening. But we, in Brooklyn, in my end of Brooklyn, weren't thinking about anything but sex. We wanted to get laid. We wanted to muzzle a girl as they called it, and put our hands on their breasts. We wanted to be able to neck with them. And none of us were. The girls

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of pinups over his desk. We know that one of them was a George Petty centerfold from *Esquire*, signed salaciously by his buddies, because Mailer wrote home to give his parents fair warning of its placement before their first visit. Betty Grable's legs were probably included and there was also a photograph of Amy Arnell, a vocalist in the Tommy Tucker big band; her big hit was "I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire." When the band had appeared in Long Branch in the summer of 1939, Mailer was much taken by a large, framed photo of Arnell in the lobby of the West End Hotel. Wearing a tool belt and work clothes, he brazenly unscrewed the entire frame containing Arnell's photo and walked out with it. A friend from Long Branch remembers seeing it in his Harvard room. There were bull sessions about sex, of course, and he discovered that he had "a bunch of roommates who also hadn't been laid. . . . We'd heard of working-class kids who got laid when they were 13 or 14. Here we were, good middle-class kids, and we weren't able to get laid. . . . You bore a standard of shame."

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

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

novel!

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

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

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It his mini-story demonstrates his awareness of the war, it should be said that the war was impossible to ignore. The newspapers, newsreels, and radio were saturated with reports of the events in Europe—the German-Italian alliance, the German-Soviet pact, the invasion of Poland, speeches by Hitler and Churchill, and general mobilizations in England and France. Harvard's 3,500 undergraduates knew that if the United States entered the war they would be among the first to go and, compensatorily, they partied a lot. Swing bands were the rage and Glenn Miller's "Moonlight Serenade" was the big hit of the year. A member of the class of 1942, one Lothrop Withington Jr., started a nationwide craze by swallowing a live goldfish, just months before Congress began discussing the first-ever peacetime draft. In his letters home Mailer made no mention of anything but grades, football games, laundry, allowance checks, and, more and more as time went on, literary activities. In avoiding the topic of war, he was not much different from his fellow Harvard students. In a May 1940 poll, 91 percent of them opposed going to war. In 1939 and early 1940, Harvard wanted it to go away.

A good part of student reluctance to accept the inevitability of war came from the widespread sympathy for leftist ideas and principles. The leader of Harvard noninterventionists was the grave, revered F. O. Matthiessen, an avowed socialist and author of *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. Mailer heard him

and down on the city street beneath the light of a street lamp, and roared with laughter at themselves and each other.

IN THE FALL of 1940, Mailer signed up for required courses in engineering, math, and physics and one full-year elective: English 1-A, a creative writing course taught by Robert Gorham Davis. An active communist and a member of Matthiessen's clique, the WASPish Davis later wrote short stories for *The New Yorker*. Armed with his cache of stories written over the summer, Mailer impressed Davis, who was exactly the mentor he needed at this stage of his life, although their relationship almost foundered at its start. He submitted "He Was Her Man," a 1,400-word story, and Davis selected it to read in part to the class of approximately fifty students. A businessman and his wife are staying at a resort hotel and when he leaves on a trip, she invites a bellboy to her room. The man returns unexpectedly and finds his wife in bed with him and shoots her in the back of her head. When another bellboy gets to the room, the first one having fled, he finds blood and brains splattered everywhere. ~~The man had shot his wife and then himself.~~ "I could make out where her eyes and mouth had been, but I wondered what had happened to her nose. I couldn't guess whether it was smashed into the carpet, or if it was still floating around. I hoped it was in the ground, because stepping on it was certainly better than breathing it in."

At this point, the class broke up. "I can't tell you how my back was scalded by the laughter," Mailer said. But the next day Davis apologized to him, and the relationship was repaired and strengthened. He got a C- on the story, which Davis said in his written comments was "just a mash of brains and nausea." Mailer remembered the grade to be an A-, but his error is clearly a tribute to the man who helped launch his writing career.

In his sophomore year he read Thomas Wolfe and said that Wolfe "made the biggest dent," although his influence was not apparent until later. He also read Saroyan, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway. Sy Breslow said that Mailer kept a gin bottle on his mantel because he read that Hemingway drank it. Papa's macho athleticism and his adventures in the Spanish Civil War were well known and he tried to emulate him. Friends remember the skinny kid from Brooklyn shadow boxing and pretending to be Rocky Graziano. His shyness began to fall away. Along

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with his friend Larry Weiss, who also lived in Claverly Hall, he tried out for the house football team. M~~ailer~~ was a fan of contact sports, but not much of a participant, made the team, while Weiss did not. The team wore pads and uniforms, but only fourteen or fifteen players showed up for any one game and, except for the running backs, everyone played both offense and defense for the full forty-eight minutes. "I weighed 135 pounds then and played the line: running guard on offense, cannon fodder on defense. And I had fun." M~~ailer~~ talked proudly about playing house football at Harvard many times over the years; it was a significant milestone.

His virginity weighed heavy, especially after the Scranton disaster. As he wrote later, he had "accepted Lawrence's thesis about untrammelled and illimitable rights and liberties and pleasures of sexual love," but alas, alack, no partner was to be found. Phyllis Bradman came up to Cambridge once each semester, but he never progressed beyond first or second base with her, in Brooklyn parlance. At the end of his freshman year Harold Marantz had introduced him to a young woman who might solve his problem, as she had solved Marantz's. M~~ailer~~ began seeing her and resumed the seduction when he returned for sophomore year, traveling once a week to her home in Cambridge. "She was too plain to take out," he said, "I would have been embarrassed." After a few visits, he got to third base. "I remember I had not washed my hands, purposely. And I walked by one of my sleeping roommates, put my fingers under his nose and said, 'Whiff that.' That was exactly the level of our social discourse in those days."

The seduction went slowly. The woman's mother hovered in the kitchen, listening and breaking in on their petting. Finally, one evening after several hours on the couch, it happened. "And now I was a man. And I paid a hell of a price because I didn't like the girl. I felt for her, but I didn't like her." During the course of his visits, he had mentioned his literary interests and she reciprocated by giving him a novel she had written. He read it and saw that she had copied it, word for word, from a recent bestseller by Robert Nathan, *Portrait of Jennie*, a treacly fantasy. Asked for his opinion of her manuscript at their next meeting, he said, "Robert Nathan couldn't have done better." She replied, "Who's he," and said it so convincingly that he concluded she was a great actress. "That gave me a sense," he said, "then limited—much greater now—of the depth of that poor girl's need."

had also been
 magazine. He also reported that he'd written eight thousand words of a "novelette." The most important news was that "The Greatest Thing" was chosen to be submitted to the nationwide college contest sponsored by *Story*, a magazine of short fiction founded in 1931 by Whit Burnett and his wife, Martha Foley. The magazine published the early work of a number of Mailer's contemporaries, including J.D. Salinger, Truman Capote, and Joseph Heller. Mailer felt his chances of winning were slight, but was nevertheless happy that his was one of two stories selected out of forty-five submitted by Harvard students. Davis, he learned, was one of the judges, along with two other professors, Mark Schorer and Howard Baker. A week after the April magazine's publication, an editorial appeared in *The Harvard Crimson*—Mailer's first review, in effect—praising the story for having "the emotional conviction of a nightmare." It ended with an endorsement of the *Advocate's* new direction, realism replacing the "artificialities and the polished sophistications" of the old *Advocate*. He sent a copy of the editorial home and Fan pasted it the scrapbook of Harvard memorabilia she proudly kept. "It's all happening too easy," he wrote to his parents.

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

On May 7, he was informed that he had been elected to the Signet Society, which unlike the *Advocate*, had its own building at 46 Dunster Street. The society's members, now as then, are chosen on merit, unlike

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literary agent and another from an editor. They were followed by a letter from Burnett, who wrote to say he hoped Mailer would give him right of first refusal for future work. Two weeks later Amussen wrote to say that he had given the novel to an agent, Monte Stein, for an outside opinion. Stein said it "shows brilliance," and Amussen agreed. Whit Burnett, who had been sent one of several copies of the typescript, came to the same conclusion, telling Mailer that "the writing and psychology are brilliant."

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

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

Mailer's journal was also used for a running commentary on his relationship with Beatrice Silverman, a Boston University student from nearby Chelsea whom he met just after the Pearl Harbor attack, and with whom he had his first mature sexual relationship. Larry Weiss, now one of his closest friends, introduced him to Bea, as everyone called her. The plan was for the two Harvard men meet Bea and another BU woman at a Boston Symphony concert. While waiting to see if tickets were available, they talked and Bea saw that Mailer "didn't know his

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powerful because he "gave you the sense that reality is what you had to obey more than anything. I think I learned more from those three writers than any other American writers."

The influence of the three was heightened because Mailer never took any courses in English or continental literature except for a drama course his senior year. Because of the courses required for his major, and the six writing courses he took, his program of study was tight. Besides a year of French, his only other electives were one course each in philosophy, psychology, sociology and fine arts. Mailer's lopsided curriculum, coupled with his early loss of interest in engineering, was a boon. With little opportunity to be seduced by liberal arts courses, much of his energy went into mastering fictional techniques and reading contemporary writers. His curriculum, or lack of one, allowed him to look at the world without disciplinary glasses, much as another Harvard man, William James, had, and do so fearlessly.

In the second semester of his junior year, ^{he took} "Modern American Literature," with Howard Mumford Jones. It was in this course, which he later said meant a lot to him, that he first encountered the writing of Dreiser and Faulkner. During his four years at Harvard, the only contact he had with European literature came when he sat in on some of Harry Levin's course on Proust, Mann, and Joyce. Mailer had scant interest in eighteenth-century British poetry and this was another reason (the lack of high school Latin being the other) he didn't change majors. Temperamentally, he was never much in sympathy with the British literary tradition, especially poetry, although he came to admire Milton. In later years he did favor continental writers, especially the French, an admiration that began when he read *Man's Fate* in his senior year. Shortly after graduation he told a friend, "I'd like to be another Malraux."

At the same time as he was reading Faulkner, he was enrolled in his fourth writing course, English 3-A, with Theodore Morrison, a poet, novelist, and Chaucer scholar, who said he was "struck at once by the unmistakable presence of talent in Mailer's undergraduate work." The story that impressed him was "Right Shoe on Left Foot," a taut seven thousand words about racial injustice in the South in which he attempted, with some success, to present the dialects of both southern blacks and whites. Pete Barton, Mailer wrote home, was crazy about the story and it was immediately accepted by the editors of the *Advocate*. The *Crimson* praised the new story, calling it a welcome departure from

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Mailer wanted to publish. In "Our Man at Harvard," Mailer described Crockett's coup as "a mammoth virtuoso literary crypto-CIA affair." Barton, whom he likened to Billy Budd, took the blame for the entire situation, which was not a total fiasco in that Crockett's assemblage, the last crack of the aesthetes' whip, was acclaimed in the Boston papers. To keep everyone happy, Barton decreed that the planned issue would come out in May, containing the material that Crockett had suppressed. As a result, the *Advocate* fell into a financial slough and remained there until well after World War II.

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

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

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

Before final exams, Mailer nursed the Chevy back to Brooklyn to be junked. When he returned and the school year was over, he and Douglas

say, "Norman, I just wish you knew how many times I've come in here and seen Bea necking with one of you or another." And I'd say, "Just getting ready for me." I was very sassy with her.

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

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

control, much as the water temperature (euphemized as hydrotherapy) was modulated at the state hospital to pacify unruly mental patients.

It took him fifteen days to complete the three-act, eight-scene play, all of which takes place in a mental institution. In more than one way it seems to anticipate Ken Kesey's 1962 novel, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The combined and disorienting use of both harsh and sophisticated control methods by a despotic head nurse, the slow corruption of well-meaning staff members in an atmosphere of spying and informing, and the eventual revolt and escape of some of the tyrannized can be found in both works. The play has a number of redundant scenes and the line of action is sometimes difficult to follow, yet it has the force of its "fear ladder" thesis as well as the most believable dialogue he had yet written. After the rebellious black inmate is subdued and sent to hydrotherapy, the two young orderlies in the play, realize they cannot change the institution's deeply embedded methods of control. They quit and go on a fishing trip to regain their equilibrium, much as Nick Adams does in Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River." But before they go, one has an epiphany, which he blurts out to the other during an argument: "This all happened on a bigger scale in Germany. Germany is like an attendant!" Shortly after finishing the play, Mailer returned to Cambridge, where he submitted the play to the Harvard Dramatic Society and prepared for his senior year.

BY THE FALL of 1942, Harvard had gone to year-round instruction and thousands of army and navy officer candidates were housed on campus. Mailer returned to Dunster, sharing a fourth floor suite with Harold Katz, a mathematics and philosophy major from Indiana. Many of the class of '43 had gone into an accelerated program and graduated a year early. In late September, he began talking with the Harvard draft advisor about joining the enlisted reserve. He also began checking on graduate school requirements in engineering, but was told that no course could keep him from being drafted.

Harvard had gone to war and Mailer was eager to engage war in his writing, not as background as in several of his previous year's stories, but head-on. He had been reading Malraux and Hemingway and began planning a new narrative, to be set in the South Pacific, where American

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burning to death had reverted to a prehistoric type. He had been blackened all over, his flesh in shriveling had given the appearance of black fur, and his features, almost burned off, had been snubbed and shrunken, so that the man's face in death had only registered a black circle of mouth with the teeth grimacing whitely and out of place in the blackness of the ape.

The novella is a kind of prospective dirge in which five Americans inwardly grieve and ponder their all but certain deaths as a force of invading Japanese surround them on the fictional island of Tinde in April 1942. Only brief and tentative descriptions of combat are provided; Mailer is much more at home in giving the texture of American life in capsule biographies of his characters.)

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

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

He continues with a description of the stair steps of his growth as a reader, writer, and lover, commenting on his failure in the Scranton

train to see Bea in Chelsea, or she visited Brooklyn. For both, it was an anxious period and Mailer's state of mind—"I was as lonely as I have ever been"—is reflected in the mood of the novel, a mix of the febrile and the lugubrious.

There was some cheer that summer. Amussen's efforts to find a publisher for *A Calculus at Heaven* were successful. Edwin Seaver wrote at the end of August to say that he was accepting the novella, with only minor changes, for publication the following spring in *Cross-Section: A Collection of New American Writing*, the first of a series of anthologies of new work by young writers. It would be Mailer's first appearance in a book. Published with him were several important young writers whose careers were also given a boost: Jane Bowles, Richard Wright, Shirley Jackson, Ralph Ellison, and two others whom Mailer came to know well in Brooklyn after the war, Arthur Miller and poet Norman Rosten.

Set in the summer of 1938 in an unnamed city, *A Transit to Narcissus* focuses on a college senior, Paul Scarr, who works at what is called "the insane asylum," where he is a ward attendant. As in Mailer's own experience and his play, "The Naked and the Dead," a troublesome black inmate is punched and kicked into unconsciousness by the attendants. Scarr is distraught but also strangely exhilarated by the regular and condoned brutality.

The novel's overarching struggle is between the Syndicate that controls the asylum and a crusading newspaper run by an idealistic publisher. During a ruckus with inmates, Scarr kicks one in the stomach, and the inmate later dies. Because the syndicate controls the D.A.'s office, Scarr is offered a lighter sentence by the Syndicate's consigliere, a Mephistophelean lawyer named Riorden, if he does not reveal the horrors and graft at the asylum. He agrees but later reneges.

As the novel proceeds, Scarr becomes emotionally calloused and finds that violence beguiles him more and more. The methods employed to cow the inmates eventually turn nearly all of the employees into little fascists. The hospital scenes and routines (including an elaborate, fiendish system of distributing discarded cigarette butts among the inmates), based on Mailer's experience, ring true. The depiction of the newspaper and its staff and the Syndicate thugs is thin, and Scarr's death (with which the novel ends) is unconvincing. The sex scenes, written shortly after he completed Henry A. Murray's abnormal psychology course, are

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The ending slavishly Freudian. Plot strings are left dangling, nothing is resolved. Seaver's muddled motives and apparently accidental death give every sign of authorial haste and confusion. ^

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

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

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

He was encouraged by a meeting at this time with a literary agent, Berta Kaslow of the William Morris Agency, who had written to him at the suggestion of Seaver. She became an enthusiastic admirer of *Transit* and after he went into the service sent it to a dozen publishers, albeit unsuccessfully. Still ambivalent, he again sought respite from his draft board. At his request, Seaver wrote a "To Whom It May Concern" letter attesting to Mailer's talent and seeking an extension. He wrote to Seaver to thank him, adding that seeking a delay "occasions [in] me a great deal of soulsearching for I feel guilty when I think of some candy store owner torn from his loving children." Sometime around the middle of the month, the draft notice arrived. Mailer responded on January 19

Biographer

Transit

As Mailer's Carl Rolysom notes, "Was a devastating novel to write, for Mailer deliberately

turned in on himself before he had the experience to develop the shields of the various personae who would appear in his later work."

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

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

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

They’d been overseas for three years at this point; they’d been allowed to keep their own sidearms. They had handkerchiefs tied around their heads, and they all had jungle rot, these open ulcers on the skin the size of fingernails that they had been painting with iodine. They just stared at us and sharpened their knives. It was like *Deliverance*. I didn’t open my mouth for six months in that outfit. They were all crazy.

All the Texans could ride, as the unit had originally been a horse cavalry unit with a reconnaissance mission and roots going back to engagements against Pancho Villa. For its first overseas assignment on the French island of New Caledonia, the troopers still had their horses, making it one of the last U.S. Army unit to be deployed as a mounted force. A Texas historian described them as “a Texas regiment defending

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there kept their rifles next to their typewriters. His assignment was to type daily intelligence reports. For the moment, he was happy with the work because he had an inside view of how the campaign was unfolding. He was also for the first time working closely with officers. At one point, he was present when the commanding general of the RCT, Julian W. Cunningham, was discussing operations with a colonel.

A self-taught typist, Mailer made many errors. He took pains to improve but to no avail, and he was reassigned to read manuals on interpreting aerial photographs with the possibility of getting a permanent assignment, but nothing came of it. He told Bea that it was "galling at times to be so utterly insignificant," but the experience deepened his novelistic commitment. Then he was given the lowly job of building a shower for officers. He was, apparently, of little value where he was and toward the end of March was transferred to a communications platoon unrolling and repairing wire between outlying units and HQ.

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

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

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ously, somewhere in all the twisted crannies of my nature, the two have become mixed, for my good spirits come always from the cynical view, the abstention of judgment, and my depressions are deepest when I take the tragic view.

Maugham's tolerant cynicism made Mailer question his belief that everything was the product of inner drives and outer forces. Perhaps some people were demonstrably better and some obviously worse than they ought to be. Perhaps he could stretch himself. He referred to Maugham's line about Rowley in *The Deer Park* (1935), where Sergius O'Shaugnessy derides it as equivalent to a view of the universe as "an elaborate clock." Mailer's Spinozan determinism, buttressed by Spengler's sense of historic destiny, would persist, however, through the writing of *Naked and the Dead*.

later

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Barney was working in Washington, D.C., at the Office of Price Administration and Mailer wrote to him occasionally. But he wrote his mother and sister about once a week, knowing that Fan would start calling her congressman if she didn't hear from him regularly. In one letter from Luzon, he told her that "there's a wonderful quality in you like that of an unspoiled young girl who's always looking eagerly and zestfully for what's going to happen next." Barbara has the same quality, he added, but it is "a more timid rather breathless facsimile." When he had returned safely after the war and was sorting through his correspondence while writing *Naked*, he wrote a note on the letter: "At the time, I was in Luzon and probably believed my bullet was being made in some Japanese factory so thought I'd give the old girl something to keep." Men in the 112th were being killed. The unit had 192 casualties during the Luzon campaign, including forty-one killed. In early February, he was awarded the Combat Infantryman's Badge and began receiving combat pay.

In early April, he wrote Bea that he'd "been in a little combat, nothing very tremendous, but still one of the three or four 'first experiences' a man has." While searching for a wire break in no-man's-land, his unit of twenty soldiers ran into a Japanese patrol. Mailer stood guard with a few others at a creek crossing while the bulk of the patrol went ahead. Shots were fired in their direction and a tommy gun returned fire. Then the largest part of the American patrol returned and reported that ten Japanese had been killed. The American lieutenant in com-

ogy: "If there is a God, He sure must be a son of a bitch." They became friends, and the reticent Red eventually told him his life story. He had no allegiances to any individual but huge sympathy for every underdog, including blacks. Fearless and ready to fight anyone who gave him any trouble, he recognized that his kidneys were going and he would soon have to compromise. In *Naked*, a weakened Red is forced to back down, crawfish, by the platoon sergeant, who is based—physically, not psychologically—on Sergeant Mann. His name is Sam Croft.

In selecting a soldier as a character mold, Mailer looked for traits that would enable him to put that individual in dramatic situations with others. Obviously, he combined some characters and sculpted the personalities of others. But he began with real soldiers. Thus, the framework of the novel grew by accretion as he sorted through the hundreds of GIs he had known. Later, he constructed charts showing which soldiers had scenes with others to ensure that all characters had been used sufficiently and appropriately. "I studied engineering at Harvard, and I suppose it was the book of a young engineer," he said. The last two major characters (who would not be delineated or given major roles until much later), were the commanding general, eventually called Edward Cummings, and a young second lieutenant, perhaps based in part on Horton, but definitely owing something to Lieutenant Hilliard in *A Calculus at Heaven*. At first he was just called "the second loeey" and then later, Robert Hearn. He is the novel's seeming hero and he is murdered by Croft, the novel's secret hero.

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

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There was but one obstacle, but it was stupendous, and studiously avoided in Mailer's letters: the pending invasion of Japan, which was to be the largest amphibious assault in history. Operation Olympic would land fourteen divisions on the southern Japanese island of Kyushu on November 1, 1945. Four months later, using Kyushu as a base, Operation Coronet would land twenty-five divisions on the southern shore of the main Japanese island of Honshu and push north a hundred miles to Tokyo. His outfit, Mailer learned later, was scheduled to land at Tateyama Naval Airdrome on Honshu, which was surrounded by gun emplacements embedded in cliffs surrounding the base on three sides. "We would have been massacred," he said.

The invasion plans became moot when atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki three days apart in early August. The Japanese surrendered on August 15. On August 8 Mailer wrote to Bea that he approved of anything that got Americans home sooner, but he found the prospects for the future horrifying. He went on to condemn the sentimental adulation for machines that he had observed, especially among men in the air corps and the navy, saying that he felt "pathological" about machines. He ends the letter on a Spenglerian note: "*We have come to the age when we love machines and hate women.*" Mailer's suspicion of all things mechanical and electronic, which would become one of the hallmarks of his worldview, was irreversible by August 1945. Twelve years later, he would begin his most famous essay, "The White Negro," by pointing to the ongoing, immeasurable "psychic havoc" created by the combination of the atomic bomb and the concentration camps. He was perhaps the first writer to link these horrors in an integral way with the suffering and discrimination felt by African Americans, the aftermath of slavery.

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

limit his roster to fifteen. He ended up with a total of fourteen enlisted men as significant characters in *Naked's* Recon platoon. Only three officers—General Cummings, Lieutenant Hearn, and Major Dallson—have important roles.

Looking back over his reading of the past year, he selected four books as models. He said he wanted to reread them before he started writing what he thought would be a novel of 90,000 to 100,000 words, a huge underestimation—*Naked and the Dead* is over 300,000 words. First on his list was *The Informer*, a tightly written story of betrayal and animalistic fear in the aftermath of the Irish Civil War. He prized it for its deft one- or two-paragraph character portraits. Simenon's *Home Town* was next, admired for its "insights into the weakly Evil, the men who are small of soul & afraid rather than malign." Albert Maltz's 1944 novel, *The Cross and the Arrow*, set in wartime Germany, is the story of a factory worker who perseveres as the Nazi regime begins to devour its own. He wanted to study Maltz's presentation of stubborn nobility. Finally, he planned to read *Anna Karenina* again in order "to steep myself in a good humanistic mood."

Mailer was sent to Onahama, another hundred miles up the Pacific coast, in late January on temporary assignment as mess sergeant for twenty-five men. At the end of February, he returned to Choshi, where he reported to the top mess sergeant. He had excellent relations with his Japanese KPs in all of his cooking assignments. "I don't know if it's Harvard or Aunt Anne's instruction in table manners," he told Bea, "but I cannot treat a person as a servant." The KPs worked twelve-hour days, seven days a week but they considered themselves fortunate because they ate well. He was a kindly boss. The spokesman of one KP group said to him: "Sair, there are much joyiness in the hearts of the kitchen boys since you have come to be cook here." Mailer enjoyed joking with them in Japanese, which he had learned a bit of. He also enjoyed writing "Sgt." before his name on the return address of his letters. He kept thinking how nice his stripes would look when he returned to Brooklyn.

On the night of April 3, he was awakened by the top mess sergeant. The KPs had left the kitchen in a mess, and he ordered Mailer to clean it up. Mailer wrote to Bea that he called him a "chickenshit son-of-a-bitch" and the sergeant stomped out. Mailer was summoned to the captain's office. Drunk and angry, the captain ordered Mailer to apologize, ~~drawfish,~~ to the mess sergeant and threatened to court-martial him.

Rojack in *An American Dream*, most notably—Roth is a fictional first cousin at best.

A meeting with Adeline was arranged for early September, and he and Bea took the morning ferry across the bay to Boston. He brought his first draft and Adeline sequestered herself to read it, finishing in the late afternoon. Her brief report, written that same day, stated boldly that the novel "is going to be the greatest novel to come out of World War II and we must publish it." Mailer remembered it as an "incredible document." She followed her spontaneous encomium about ten days later with a formal assessment, in which she outlined the novel's loose plot and lauded "the author's marvelous sense of spoken language rhythms and the colloquial idiom." In her conclusion she warns that if the novel is not accepted, "we are passing up the first really important novel to come out of the war and a potentially tremendous author." She predicted that the novel could sell as many as 7,300 copies, a large number for a first novel, but far below its actual sales figures. (~~*Naked and the Dead* sold 130,000 copies in hardcover in its first eight months.~~) She was the first professional to see the importance of the novel.

When Little, Brown senior editor Angus Cameron read it, he was impressed but troubled by the strong language. Raymond Everitt, executive vice president, had the same response. It went to the president, Alfred McIntyre, and he was insistent: a major expurgation would be required. It was decided to get an outside opinion from Bernard DeVoto, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian of the American West and a Mark Twain scholar. Adeline had heard that the literary guru had a foul mouth and she happily agreed to the choice.

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Mailer went along with DeVoto but offered more argument for the novel. He wrote a long letter to Adeline pointing the patrol's attempt to climb Mount Anaka as the novel's spine, and stating that it would first and foremost be "a piece of realism." He made two more key points. First, the novel would be antiwar, although indirectly: "The terrible subtle evil of war on men is in every page." Second, it would be "a romantic novel concerned with the extraordinary." He continued.

He was irritated.

There are going to be troubling terrifying glimpses of order in disorder, of a horror which may or may not lurk beneath the surface of things. Remember when Hennessey is killed, and Croft and Red and Martinez all have primitive glimpses of a structure behind things?

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history." It was a form of history, he said, "that the Jews knew all too well." While Mailer was long past the point of specifically applying the theory to *Naked*, it definitely resonated with him, as he wrote in a 1997 letter. The conclusion of *Naked* might be seen as a manifestation of this theory, although the endurance and sacrifice shown by the men on the platoon qualifies the impact of the ~~chain~~ of suffering in the last quarter of the novel.

In response to criticism that that novel paints a bleak picture of humanity, he made the following comment shortly after publication.

Actually, it offers a good deal of hope. I intended it to be a parable about the movement of man through history. I tried to explore the outrageous proportions of cause and effect, of effort and recompense, in a sick society. The book finds man corrupted, confused to the point of helplessness, but it also finds that there are limits beyond which he cannot be pushed, and it finds that even in his corruption and sickness there are yearnings for a better world.

At the end, the men move off to a new island campaign. Soon they will be in the Philippines and six months later the war will be over. The reader gets the sense that while the campaign and the novel have been conclusive, and the men tested in the harshest ways without succumbing, they will now face new challenges. The Japanese on Anopopei have been vanquished, and American casualties have been comparatively light, but what lies ahead in the peacetime world is uncertain. The experience of being at war and writing about it led Mailer to develop a corollary to his antiwar belief, as Alfred Kazin has pointed out, one that would plague him ever after: "War may be the ultimate purpose of technological society." ~~The~~ This corollary would become the chief premise of his next novel.

Mailer made changes to the novel right to the end of September, when it was submitted to Raney at Rinehart. Both novelist and editor would continue working on it long-distance, as Mailer and Bea were leaving for Paris. On October 3, after a bon voyage party at 102 Pier-report, they boarded the RMS *Queen Elizabeth* for the crossing.

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Malaquais, Mailer said, "had more influence upon my mind than anyone I ever knew from the time we had gotten well acquainted while he was translating *The Naked and the Dead*." Mailer later recommended Malaquais for the year-long task—he had a good command of written English—and added \$1,000 to the paltry \$2,000 paid to Malaquais by Mailer's French publisher, Albin Michel. By the time that the translation was completed in late 1945, the two men had become fast friends. But their meetings the year before in Paris were sometimes testy. Mailer told Malaquais about his hopes for Henry Wallace's presidential campaign as the Progressive Party nominee. Malaquais said that Mailer's voluble comments resembled those of "a boy scout or a young Kibbutznik," and proceeded to demolish Mailer's notion that Wallace represented a legitimate peace movement, or "any kind of . . . incipient revolutionary starting point." Malaquais told him that the communists would "exploit him and then they would drop him and cover him with dirt." Mailer "disliked me very strongly," according to Malaquais, especially when he told him that the Wallace campaign had been infiltrated by Stalinists. Unable to refute Malaquais, Mailer was yet unwilling to desert Wallace. At first he thought Malaquais was "an arrogant bastard. He was a little guy, very, very well knit and very determined and very superior, very haughty." Things were cool between them until they met again in Brooklyn in the fall of 1948.

1950s

Through a "long leaky French winter," he waited anxiously for reports on how *Naked* was faring at Rinehart. He was particularly concerned that Stanley Rinehart might want to cut the novel's profanity. Finally, near the end of 1947, he heard from editor William Rane that Rinehart was in love with the novel. He relayed the good news to Barney in Warsaw, where his father had a position with the American Joint Distribution Committee, a Jewish charity. "I have never heard such hosannas," Mailer wrote. Rinehart intended to write a letter praising the novel to the book trade, a tactic he used only rarely. Much relieved, Mailer told his father that he planned to start a new novel immediately, and hoped to get a lot written "so that I won't be scared if *Naked and Dead* gets a big reception."

Before he began, he and Bea went on a skiing trip over the holidays in Saint-Cergue, Switzerland, and visited the cities of Ouchy, Geneva, and Lausanne. He came back with two ideas: one a novel about a rich

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line, it is no longer my book as far as I am concerned," he said. He was willing to be overriden on the design of the book jacket, with its line drawing of a shell-shocked infantryman, and he was prepared to make other concessions, but he drew the line on Polack's remark. He ended the second letter by noting that he wanted to rewrite a few passages and asked what revisions would cost, closing with "I remain suspended, Norman."

Apparently, his volley of "howls and sulks," as he called them, acted as a purge because over the next two weeks he wrote the first fifty pages of "Mrs. Guinevere," the beginning of which centered on an ex-burlesque queen of the same name who runs a boardinghouse in Brooklyn Heights. In her self-absorption and flirtatiousness, she resembles Sally Bowles. Bea was writing too, a new novel about Russian immigrants, but she spent more time playing the piano in their apartment and enjoying Paris. The Mailers now had a fairly wide range of acquaintances, including some poor French artists. One was so destitute that Mailer and Bea, and Barbara when she arrived, took painting lessons from him. In early February, Raney wrote again to say he was coming to Paris, but did not say when the galleys would arrive. Mailer wrote him back a single-spaced, three-page, margin-less letter in which he deployed all Raney's concerns. He makes his points reasonably, emphasizing that he is burning no bridges and hopes to maintain his friendship with Raney, and includes tips on things to see during Raney's upcoming visit. After recounting the history of the manuscript in regard to obscenity at both Little, Brown and Rinehart, he got to the heart of his argument about why profanity was integral to *Naked*, saying it was not merely for authenticity;

It is a tone which creates a sub-stratum of mood for the whole thing, and there is a limit to how much can be cut out without altering its context completely, and making the dialogue cute and "tough," and placing the most disgusting kind of emphasis on it. I refer you to abortions like "A Walk in the Sun," or any number of unmentionable plays where a laugh is aroused because someone roars, "Damn" or "Hell" or "Bastard." There is a psychological process to reading where the reader's attention sinks to a second cruising level, and there profanity does not strike him directly providing attention is

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not called to it by its spacing. He will notice it in time no more than articles and prepositions, and it will affect him the way it should affect him, an element in war experience.

He also questioned the decision-making process at Rinehart, and asks for a full list of profanity changes. He also wants to know if any substitutions for "fug" have been made. Finally, he complained about the infantryman drawing on the jacket, which he described as a sentimental, Ernie Pyle version of combat fatigue (Mailer missed entirely the appeal of the now iconic ~~of~~ sketch, by Joseph Karov, riddled with what appear to be bullet holes). His insistence on authentic speech—vocabulary and cadence—and the details of book design, both of which he belabors mightily to Raney, would become abiding concerns over the course of his career.

of a GI

As his sister later pointed out, even as Mailer was agonizing over his next book and Rinehart's actions, he "always had an aura that projected a love of life." In all but the worst circumstances, "he had an ability to have a good time, and good times meshed with everything else." During the ski trips, she said, he was especially animated and full of play. "We took ourselves very seriously while we were there, but we were really playing." This European sojourn may have been the longest vacation of Mailer's life.

On February 26 page proofs arrived. He found to his great relief that there were no significant deletions or changes. He wrote back to Raney on March 1 that he had "no bitch" and apologized for all his complaining. The number of swear words dropped was not great and in one place at least, he said, the change, "crap" for "shit," was for the better. He included a list of over a hundred small corrections and a few changes and offered to pay for them. Considerably relieved, he and Bea left on March 6 for a week's skiing in the French Alps, near the town of Valloire. Upon their return to Paris, Mailer wrote letters on St. Patrick's Day to Barney in Poland and Fan and Barbara in Brooklyn about the family reunion planned for the end of April. Barney was to join Norman and Bea in Paris and they would drive to the port of Cherbourg to pick up Barbara and Fan. They would be driving a 6 *chevaux* Peugeot, purchased for \$1,100 with a loan from Fan to be paid out of anticipated royalties. Both letters were as sunny as Paris, which had warmed up considerably. "Around dusk, with everyone in the outdoor cafes," he

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and their first bullfight, they drove back to Paris. Later, after his family arrived on April 21, Mailer learned that an escape was now possible. He was getting preoccupied with prepublication activity and so asked his sister, who didn't know how to drive, if she wanted to go to Spain, to try again with Paco. Barbara, who had been having an affair with a Marxist in the States, was "thrilled" by the prospect of a romantic adventure to assist leftists. Mailer, never a proficient driver himself, gave her some driving lessons. A young woman named Barbara Probst (later married to Mailer's Harvard classmate Howard Solomon), whom Fan and Barbara met on the boat from the United States, was enlisted to go along. Probst, who had a driver's license, was eager. Mailer thought he should first test her driving skills, and his sister's, so they took a trip to Chartres. Barbara Probst Solomon recalled:

What pleased me was that he treated me like an adult. He was awestruck by Chartres yet at the same time juggled with other thoughts, other ideas. He wondered—what would my Spanish experience be? How would it affect me? There we were, two Americans suddenly stunned by the Rose Window. Architecture, when it's amazing and has soul, affected Norman (he was enthralled by the visual) as profoundly as politics and literature, and in that magical golden spring afternoon, he talked and talked, telling me tons of stuff about Chartres.

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[The rescue mission was scary but successful, and the two Barbaras rescued Paco's friends.

Mailer

He was in good spirits that spring, and enjoyed alternating between family gatherings and dealing with a wave of publishing correspondence. To Adelaide Scherer of the Sam Jaffe Agency in Hollywood, who contacted him, he said would consider having them represent him and was willing to work on a screen treatment of the novel. He also asked for Scherer's advice on hiring a literary agent. After he parted company, amicably, with Berta Kaslow, with his cousin Cy Rembar began representing him, but professional help was now needed. He also agreed to hire a clipping service and asked that all reviews be sent to him at Rue Bréa. From Rinehart, a copy of a letter from John Dos Passos arrived. Mailer's literary hero had read an advance copy of *Naked and the Dead* and written to Stan Rinehart to praise the book as "a courageous piece

of publishing," calling the author "a first rate novelist." Mailer was immensely pleased. When asked years later what American novels affected him the most as a young man, Mailer said, "U.S.A. meant more than them all."

In early May, around the time of publication, the Mailers drove with Barbara and the Linenthals to Mont St. Michel, built on a tidal island in the eighth century after St. Michael the Archangel, it is said, burned a hole with his finger in the skull of the dilatory local bishop whom he had instructed to build a church there. They spent the night and the following day admiring the architecture of the church. "Norman was flush with success, and he was doing a southern accent," Linenthal recalled. They played a game called "The Naked and the Dead," with Bea as Wilson and Mailer as Croft. It was a role that he always enjoyed, especially after a few drinks.

Gore Vidal and Tennessee Williams were in Paris in April 1948. Mailer did not meet them or Truman Capote, who visited Vidal and Williams at the Hôtel de l' Université. Over the next four decades, he would have complex and often rocky relationships with all three. Vidal recalled that the publicity about Mailer's 721-page novel reached them in Paris. He wrote, "I remember thinking meanly: So somebody did it. Each previous war had had its big novel, yet so far there had been none for our war, though I knew that a dozen busy friends and acquaintances were grimly taking out tickets in the Grand War Novel Lottery." Mailer was by no means certain that he had, indeed, *done it*, not so far, but the first reviews that crossed the Atlantic certainly augured well. In mid-May, before his month-long trip to Italy began, they began arriving. He was restrained when he wrote to Fig in late May, saying that while the reviews were good enough, only one in five understood the novel. "All they could do was choke over the profanity and while that gave me a bang in the beginning it ended by boring the shit out of me." He was eager to leave the city with Bea, Barbara, and his mother, even though he told Fig that he loved it as never before. It was too easy to do nothing in Paris and "drown in inertia."

While Mailer was traveling he learned that Lillian Hellman wanted to adapt *Naked* into a play on Broadway to be produced by Kermit Bloomgarden (the following year he would present Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*). Excited by the prospect, he wrote to Rancey from Venice that he was empowering Rinehart, working with Dave Kessler

brief, along with two hundred other writers and film industry figures, including Charlie Chaplin, John Garfield, John Huston, Dorothy Parker, and Burt Lancaster.

On October 17, he was the keynote speaker at a fundraiser at the El Patio Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard. His speech, titled "Ballots vs. Book Burning," hammered on the point that the Progressive Party was the only way to oppose a third world war. He gave the same speech several more times after he returned east, and may have garnered some support in New York, where Wallace received almost half of his 1.1 million votes, a total slightly less than Strom Thurmond's Dixiecrat Party. Truman, against all expectations, soundly defeated Wallace, Thurmond, and the GOP candidate, Thomas E. Dewey. Wallace, who was mocked for allowing communists to infiltrate his party's ranks, was quoted as saying, "Communists are the closest thing to the early Christian martyrs." He retired after the election. Mailer became disenchanted with electoral politics and didn't vote again until 1960.

JUST BEFORE THE election, the Mailers were living in a furnished apartment at 49 Remsen Street, the same address where they had lived when he was writing *Naked and the Dead*. Malaquais had moved to New York and was lecturing at the New School for Social Research. One of his students was a man named Dan Wolf, who was a friend of Mailer's. (Later, with Edwin Fancher, Wolf, Mailer and a few others would found *The Village Voice*.) Through Wolf, Mailer reconnected with Malaquais, who lived around the corner on Montague Street. They met often and Mailer ~~who~~ now found Malaquais' ideas more appealing. ~~asked~~ him to translate *Naked*. At Mailer's request, Malaquais drew up a reading list for him. "When I met Norman in Paris, he knew nothing about the history of the Russian Revolution, of the Russian movement going back to the 1880s. In Western Europe all students are political animals but in America a writer is a writer is a writer," Malaquais said. "But that curiosity began in Paris, and he became very interested. Being young and perturbed on an intellectual level by the Cold War, he was open-minded to a degree. He was willing at least to confront and combat." One of the books Malaquais suggested was *Report of Court Proceedings in the Case of the Anti-Soviet "Bloc of Right" and Trotskyites* (1938), a verbatim transcript of the Moscow show trials of Stalin's enemies, real

It was at this
time that Mailer

and perceived. The show trials and the executions that followed led many Communist sympathizers to turn against Russia. Another title Malaquais recommended was *Stalin: A Critical Survey of Bolshevism* (1939), which traced the tumultuous history of Marxism in Russia up to the outbreak of World War II. It was written by Boris Souvarine, a fervent anti-Stalinist Malaquais knew in Paris. These two books and several others on Malaquais' list obliterated what remained of Mailer's belief in the Soviet Union as the foundation of a new world culture. For the rest of his life he referred to Russian history, including the history of Russian Jews, with familiarity.

Malaquais' flinty geopolitical analyses impressed Mailer, but not his friends. Irving Howe, the founding editor of *Dissent* and a long-time flag bearer for socialism, admired Malaquais' *War Diary* (1944), but found the man to be "opinionated, cocksure, and dogmatic." He thought Malaquais was joking when he said there were only two genuine Marxists left: himself and Marc Chirik, a key figure in Malaquais' 1948 novel, *World Without Visa*. When Mailer brought Hellman and Malaquais together, "it was a disaster," Mailer said. "They couldn't bear each other." Cy Rembar didn't much care for Malaquais, and Mickey Knox, a young Hollywood actor who would become a close friend, found Malaquais to be "unrelenting." Before Mailer met Malaquais, his guide to Marxism had been Charles Devlin, and back in Brooklyn after the election, he arranged for Devlin to meet Malaquais. He said that Devlin was a specialist on the Russian economy, but Malaquais found him to be "a thoroughly constipated Stalinist hack." It was "child's play," Malaquais said, "to destroy him." The meeting with Devlin reinforced Mailer's recognition that he had been used by the communists who had infiltrated the Wallace campaign.

Wallace's horrendous showing, coupled with the ongoing popularity of *Naked and the Dead* (nineteen weeks in first place on the *New York Times* bestseller list, through November 19) led to a period of self-reflection. When he went out in public admirers surrounded him, and given the wonderful reviews *Naked* had received, he felt like a champ, bulging with self-esteem. "There were times," he said, when *Naked and the Dead* seemed like "the greatest book written since *War and Peace*." But in his sessions with Malaquais, he was painfully reminded of the limitations of his knowledge, and when he looked in the mirror, he saw someone who, he said, was "a bit of an imposter," as much a fraud as

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Mailer's

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a champ. Many times over the years, Mailer looked back at that young man who felt unworthy. For example, in 1979: "You're 25 and you've written one good book that you wrote on a streak that was a natural book, and then you don't know what you want to do with yourself after that. It was a terribly tricky time." He began to examine the assets and liabilities of fame. Two things were certain: First, women were attracted to him as never before. "Celebrity," he said, "was great for one-night stands." Second, fame "cauterizes a lot of your past." It was, he said, using another medical term, "a lobotomy to my past." ~~He was having an identity crisis.~~ There were two Norman Mailers. One enjoyed the attention and savored what he called the "ego-gobblings" of celebrity, while the other suspected that the compliments he received were ploys of phonies. "Once I had been a young man whom many did not notice," but after the success of *Naked*, "I was prominent but empty."

I was a dependable pain in the ass to a great many people, because all through the first year I'd keep saying, "Oh, now I will never know the experience of other people." . . . I kept wanting to go back to what seemed like a sweet past when only a few people knew that I had talent. A young writer, if he is unknown, can be at a party and watch what everyone is doing. If he has a marvelous ear for dialogue, he can wake up the next morning and remember all that was said and how it was said. He is a bird on a branch. Sees like a bird and writes books that can be extraordinarily well observed. But once you are successful, especially if it happens quickly, it's as if the bird is now an emu. It cannot fly. It's big and it grows haunches and fore shoulders and a mane: Lo and behold, it is a lion. And everyone is looking at the lion, including the birds. But it is a lion with the heart of a bird and the mind of a bird.

He wrote to Sinclair Lewis in mid-November and told him he was getting started on a new novel, "a big fat one." But it does not appear that he began until after he and Bea moved to Jamaica, Vermont, near several ski resorts, where they leased a house from January to May of 1949. Mailer spent November and December in Brooklyn reading and meeting with Malaquais, who later came for long visits in Vermont. After six weeks of research and outlining, he began a new novel in mid-February. The idea came from the week in October that he had spent

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referring to

in Indiana gathering information on the case of the college professor who was fired. The working title was "The Devil's Advocate," but he also referred to it as the "strike novel." For raw material, he relied on notes and clippings on a contested strike and subsequent blacklisting of Indiana union workers. Cy Rembar sent him material on the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, which labor leaders viewed as unfairly restricting the right to organize and strike. Mailer struggled to embody the strike in narrative form, but finally, realizing that he didn't know "a damn thing about labor unions," abandoned it. The twenty-one pages he eked out tell the story of the death of the matriarch of a Ukrainian union family, and the visit of a labor organizer. His name is William McLeod, the same name Mailer would use for the central character of his second novel, *Barbary Shore*, which would grow out of "Mrs. Guinevere," begun in Paris. "Full of second-novel panic," he worked on the manuscript through April, interrupting it only for a brief visit to New York at the end of March to participate in an international peace conference, sponsored by the National Council of Arts, Sciences and the Professions. It was called the Waldorf Conference, after the Waldorf-Astoria hotel, where it was held.

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The conference, which ran March 25-27, brought together close to three thousand delegates from around the world to discuss ways to promote peace. Although this sounds benign, America's attitude toward Russia at this moment was one of fear and loathing, and all the newspapers and magazines of the day, with few exceptions (most notably *The New York Times*), attacked the gathering as a communist front designed to alter American foreign policy. The hotel was literally surrounded by right-wing groups such as the American Legion and Catholic War Veterans, but also by refugees from Eastern Europe protesting Russian-backed takeovers of Eastern European countries.

The right-wing protesters had come, Mailer wrote, "out of the dream that the doors of the Waldorf might open to them, and they could smash some motherfucking Reds, loot the silk of that overrich hotel and perhaps drag back to Queens or Staten Island a real live Russian to char over a slow fire on their barbecue pit." The Russian delegation included the world-famous composer Dmitri Shostakovich, who was pale and nervous in all his appearances. It was reported that he agreed to attend only after Stalin told him to. The American delegates and sponsors, many of whom Mailer knew, were well-known Russian sympathizers, "Stalinoids," as anti-Stalin literary critic Dwight Macdonald referred

the Congress for Cultural Freedom, secretly backed by the CIA.

~~later~~

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Malaquais gave him to read, convinced Mailer that Stalin was a monster and—the central point—that the Russian and American economic systems were implicitly geared for war. He was now ready for immersion in the bible of revolutionary socialism. At Malaquais's urging, he began reading *Das Kapital* after the Waldorf Conference. By his own accounting, he spent a year "living more closely in the history of Russia from 1917 to 1937 than in the events of my own life." It should be remembered that Mailer never took a history course in college, and until he met Malaquais, Spengler was his chief historical guide. The model of cultural growth, blossoming, and decay that he absorbed from *Decline of the West* was amply confirmed by Malaquais' interpretation of the revolutions, wars, and catastrophes of the twentieth century.

Mailer said that he "felt like a rodent" at the conference because he was leaving the Progressive Party. Indeed, he was booed at the end of his speech just as vigorously as he had been cheered before he began. He was unsure if he had spoken "out of a new and deep political conviction," or if he was "afraid of the final wrath of those psychically starved hoodlums on the street outside." When Irving Howe praised his bravery and candor, therefore, he was quite pleased. "I was immediately able to recognize the intellectual fingerprint of who was behind that speech—Jean Malaquais," Howe said. When Mailer went outside, Dwight Macdonald came up to him on the street and told him he liked his speech. As Malaquais's influence waned in the mid-1950s, Macdonald would become one of his intellectual godfathers. Mary McCarthy, Robert Lowell, and especially Howe also became close to him after the conference.

Back in Vermont, he tried to work on *Barbary Shore*. There were no money worries. *Naked* had sold 197,000 copies in eight months, earning him about \$80,000 in royalties. Only Lloyd C. Douglas's book about St. Peter, *The Big Fisherman*, sold more copies that year. The Mailers banked most of the royalty money. Hellman was still working on the play, but said she wouldn't have anything ready until the fall. The plan was to ski, write, and watch Bea grow larger; she was about three months pregnant by the end of March. Mailer had written to Fig requesting him to address mail to him as Kingsley Mailer so he could "stay incognito to avoid all the literary teas." Progress on the novel was slow; he was having difficulty finding the right tone. As he had explained in a letter to a Harvard friend, Larry Weiss, his approach

alternated between "the theoretical and empirical," or between the realistic methods employed so successfully in *Naked and the Dead* and the abstractions delivered to him by Malaquais. He had also been stirred by Kafka's *The Castle* and told Fig he saw it as "an adult fairy tale." He would attempt to meld all of these elements in *Barbary Shore*.

There was something else on his mind: Hollywood. He had been lionized there and had met celebrities like Hedy Lamarr, Burt Lancaster, and John Garfield, as well as up-and-coming actors like Shelley Winters, Farley Granger, and Marlon Brando. Winters always claimed that she introduced Mailer to her roommate, Marilyn Monroe, in 1948, but he could not remember meeting her. He did remember another woman, Lois Mayfield Wilson, a blond graduate student from Kentucky whom he met at a Stanford party given by the Linenthals. She recalled that she left the party with him, and they had an erotic wrestling match in the car, which became the basis for Sergius O'Shaughnessy's tussle with Lulu Meyers in *The Deer Park*. He gave her the pseudonym of "Junebug" in his letters to her. They were deeply attracted to each other and would have a very lengthy long-distance affair.

Mailer decided to spend some time in Hollywood and asked Malaquais, who had worked as a screenwriter in Mexico and France, and his wife, Galy, to join him and Bea in California. Bea, who loved films as much as her husband did, and was equally gregarious, was eager to go. His desire to sell *Naked and the Dead* to a film studio was another consideration in relocating. In late April, he wrote to Rembar about sale possibilities and also asked for help getting screenwriting jobs, noting that Malaquais had "a good flair for plots which I do not." His conditions were \$2,000 a week and a start date of September so that he could finish *Barbary Shore*. Because of Bea's pregnancy, she would fly and he would drive.

Barbara Probst Solomon recalled that one night in Paris after *Naked's* extraordinary success was known, she was present when Barney said to Bea, somewhat bluntly, "You're going back to America, Norman's going to be famous, and you're going to have a lot of competition." He advised her to dress well and look attractive if she wanted the marriage to work. Bea blanched. But Barney was a bit of a womanizer himself and knew what he was talking about. After they returned from France, their marriage became "iffy," Mailer recalled. When Bea got pregnant, he said, "I thought maybe that would improve the marriage,

and it didn't, of course. In fact, the marriage probably was worse afterward, because I hated having a baby; I felt trapped. I wanted freedom, I wanted to be screwing a lot of girls and here I am stuck. So it was all of that. So we ended up with this . . . and then after she [daughter Susan] was born, it just kept getting worse and worse. And I kept having more and more affairs on the side, whenever and wherever I could." One of them was with Lois Wilson, whom he contacted when they reached California.

1949
MAILER LEFT IN early June for California, driving via Chicago. His sister was working in Chicago and, for a few days, he visited with her and Adeline, now married. After a week's visit with Fig and Ecey in Arkansas, he drove through Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona to Los Angeles. In late June, he arrived in "the ugliest city in the whole world," as he described it to Fig. He rented an apartment at the Chateau Marmont, the castlelike hotel overlooking Sunset Boulevard where celebrities have acted up since 1931. When Bea joined him, she was more than seven months pregnant. Mailer wrote a cheerful letter to Malaquais in early July saying that he thought they had a chance to "reap the wind yet, the golden wind." He had been seeing Montgomery Clift and interested him in the idea of making Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* into a film, with Clift as Julien Sorel. Malaquais would not arrive for a couple of months; he was only at page 380 in his translation of *Naked*.

Shortly after the Mailers left Vermont, the British edition of *Naked and the Dead* was published by Allan Wingate. There was immediate criticism, led by the *Sunday Times*. On May 1, in a front-page editorial, the paper said that the novel was "incredibly foul and beastly." It should be suppressed, the editorial continued, adding that "no decent man could leave it lying about the house without shame that his womenfolk were reading it." Mailer responded in a telephone interview with the Associated Press by saying that the London paper was entitled to its opinion, but that the obscenity in the novel "is like a bell ringing in the background while you work. Before long you don't notice it." The British attorney general, Sir Hartley Shawcross, speaking on the floor of Parliament, called the book "foul, lewd and revolting," but declined to prosecute it. Many British reviewers called the book brilliant, and the attention generated by indignant condemnation and unqualified praise

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led to tremendous sales. By the end of 1949, eighty thousand copies had been sold. Mailer took note of how the controversy sold the book. The fight against suppressing *Naked* was led by his Wingate editor, André Deutsch, a Hungarian Jew. Mailer said winning the fight to publish *Naked and the Dead* was "the biggest move" of Deutsch's life. The novel's success encouraged Deutsch and another Wingate editor, Diana Athill, to form their own firm, the eponymous André Deutsch, with which Mailer would later affiliate.

Perhaps the shrewdest British reviewer was V. S. Pritchett, the eminent short story writer and critic. He found the obscenity flap overblown, noting that "respectable society cannot expect to indulge in two major wars in one generation without getting a flood of raw documents about what goes on in the minds and comes out of the mouths of ordinary men who are sent out punctually to these slaughters." Pritchett praised the novel, especially the long patrol, which he said was done perfectly. But he found the book too long and thought the "Time Machine" episodes could have been cut entirely. Criticism about Mailer's verbosity would be heard again. of

The length of *Naked* did not trouble George Orwell, who called the novel in a 1950 letter "the best war book of the last war yet." Mailer admired Orwell's work and praised his "profoundly prophetic" vision of the future in his 1949 novel, *1984*. Mailer said that Orwell had accomplished what he was trying to do in *Barbary Shore*: "combine the political essay with fiction." Mailer worked hard on the new novel for his first two months in "Lotus Land," as he called it, and finished the first draft on August 16 as Bea approached term. Hellman was visiting Hollywood scouting for male leads in the play and met with Mailer several times. Most of his time, however, was spent trying to work out a final agreement with Norma Productions, which had optioned the film rights of *Naked*. The company was a joint effort of Burt Lancaster, whom Mailer liked, and Harold Hecht, who handled the business side of the partnership. Hecht wouldn't give Mailer the level of script oversight that he wanted and the haggling went on for weeks. Lancaster was slated to play Lieutenant Hearn. Mailer finally got the approval he wanted, but when he saw the script, written by two Hollywood veterans, he didn't like it. The deal ultimately fell apart, hastened in part by war clouds over Korea, where fighting broke out in June 1950.

Sometime shortly after the Mailers arrived, Shelley Winters asked

"Norman was making one of his big moves," Wolf said. The breakup with Bea was impending and he could smell freedom. ~~"I missed it, and I wanted it."~~ Wolf told him about a beautiful Spanish-Peruvian woman he knew named Adele Morales, an aspiring painter who made her living constructing papier-mâché displays for department store windows. She and Wolf had been lovers for a short time and Wolf's friend Ed Fancher, had more or less lived with her for three years. She was just coming off a brief affair with Jack Kerouac. Mailer was intrigued. It was late, but Wolf called her and invited her over for a drink. Mailer got on the phone and read her a quotation from Fitzgerald's unfinished novel, *The Last Tycoon*. Monroe Stahr, the novel's movie director protagonist, is beginning an affair with Kathleen Moore, the ex-mistress of a king. He feels something stirring: "He listened inside himself as if something by an unknown composer, powerful and strange and strong, was about to be played for the first time." Adele was moved and agreed to take a cab and meet him. "How could I know that Scott Fitzgerald, Norman Mailer, and that cab ride would change my life forever?" she later wrote.

Because he was thinking about writing his next novel about Hollywood, it is almost impossible to imagine that *The Last Tycoon* did not give Mailer a push in that direction. His portrait of Francis Eitel, the movie director protagonist of *The Deer Park*, clearly owes a debt to Fitzgerald's Stahr. Several weeks earlier, he had written to George Landy, his agent, about getting him a screenwriting job in Hollywood. He would prefer something light, not a war film, he wrote. "A thriller, a western (Sam Croft is my credentials) and preferably a polish job, although I don't care. Actually, I'll take anything." What he really wanted was a chance to get more material for the novel.

Experience for Mailer and many of his contemporaries—James Jones, Saul Bellow, William Styron, and Jack Kerouac, certainly—had a talismanic quality. Dust jackets of American novels from the 1930s to the early 1960s typically bragged about the author's experiences as a short-order cook, reporter, fisherman, hobo, farmworker, and, after World War II, veteran. A college education wasn't a drawback, but a working knowledge of Crane, London, Lewis, Steinbeck, Hemingway, Dos Passos, and—the key figure—Thomas Wolfe was much more important. Coming from Boston or Philadelphia was suspect. Brooklyn or Chicago or Middletown, U.S.A., was much better. The idea was to rebel

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well until about two A.M. when four or five local thugs crashed in. They were looking for a woman who had said something negative to them on the street, a guest at the party. Mailer tried to reason with them to no avail; one of them had a hammer and Mailer took two whacks to the head. He was staggering and bleeding, but still able to fight, he said later. Adele screamed and chased the gang out. Mailer wore a bandage on his head for a time and told his mother he'd gotten hurt in a taxicab accident. After that night, Adele was terrified of the neighborhood and wanted to give up the Monroe Street lot.

In August, they went to Provincetown and stayed in a seaside apartment on Commercial Street. Because of her painter friends, Adele was as well known as Mailer. He took part in a Provincetown Art Association panel on censorship with Dwight Macdonald, Willem de Kooning, and Edmund Wilson, the esteemed literary critic and friend of F. Scott Fitzgerald's, who summered in nearby Truro. At the time, Mailer said, Wilson "was the nearest thing to Jehovah" in his mind. Dwight Macdonald had nude beach parties in Truro (later satirized by Saul Bellow in his 1975 novel, *Humboldt's Gift*), and Adele remembers "the sight of paunchy, aging bodies, sipping martinis, engaged in conversations as if they were fully dressed." Macdonald, she said, "with his white goatee, a long string bean of a body, and his cute little pot belly," was a sight. For a month, Adele painted and he worked on *The Deer Park*. After Labor Day, they returned to New York and moved to a "grim apartment, renovated in battleship grey" at 14 Pitt Street in Manhattan, not far from the Williamsburg Bridge. For his living space, Mailer alternated between beat-up bohemian lofts and handsome country houses.

Shortly after moving in, he was cheered by a letter from a young novelist, Vance Bourjaily, who wrote to him with praise for *Barbary Shore* and comments about the difficulties of writing second novels. Mailer had read about Bourjaily's 1947 novel, *The End of My Life*, in John Aldridge's 1951 book, *After the Lost Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of Two Wars*, in which he and Bourjaily had been affirmed as important writers, along with Gore Vidal; expatriate Paul Bowles, author of *The Sheltering Sky*; and Truman Capote, whose slim gothic novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, was published just a few months before *Naked and the Dead*. Aldridge's study had been praised by Mailer's Harvard mentor, Robert Gorham Davis, on the front page of the same issue of *The New York Times Book Review* that contained

claimed that it was at that party that he and Jones talked about making a film of *From Here to Eternity*. The film's huge success—it won eight Oscars including Best Picture—undoubtedly helped reignite Mailer's desire to see *Naked* made into a film.

By October he had 240 pages of the new novel, but he was dissatisfied with the draft, which he later said was "the worst writing I had ever done." He then turned "dispiritedly" to short stories. The easiest topic for him was the army, and by the end of 1951 he had turned out three stories, "The Paper House" (based on a story about prostitutes in a geisha house told to him by Bourjaily), "The Dead Gook," for which he drew on his memory of the Filipino Huks he had fought with in Luzon, and "The Language of Men," a story about an army cook, his most autobiographical short story. He wrote all three in a day or two each, his idea being that if he couldn't finish a story in one day, it wasn't meant to be written. If one made a bad bet on the direction of one's plot, he said, it would mean the wastebasket and new beginning. However, when writing a novel, he said, "I move ahead like a banker, careful not to lose the investment of my work." Cy Rembar tried unsuccessfully to sell the stories to some of the most prestigious fictional outlets of that time: *The New Yorker*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vogue*, and *Mademoiselle*.

Mailer turned a small contretemps with Adele into another story, "The Notebook." They had exchanged angry words after an old friend of hers paid too much attention in a restaurant. When he began recording the incident in the small notebook he always carried, Adele became more upset and told him, "You were just watching yourself be angry, taking notes on your emotional condition." She sulked for the rest of the walk home. He turned the situation into a gem, the narrative equivalent of a mirror held up to a mirror. The story's narrator is castigated by his girlfriend, much as Adele snapped at Mailer, for being "nothing but a notebook," after which she stomps off, "her high heels mocking her misery in their bright tattoo upon the sidewalk." He asks himself if he started the fight so he could record it, and then "considers this, priding himself on the fact that he would conceal no motive from himself, no matter how unpleasant." As he runs after her, he rehearses how he will justify his incessant notebook jottings, and then asks himself if his explanation is for her or for the notebook. He stops and makes another entry. The story also underlines one clause in his credo, traceable all the way back to the notebooks he kept at

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turned muse, gives Sam an idea: "Destroy time, and chaos may be ordered." Inflamed by this idea, Sam will now dream the first novel of the sequence, which will be devoted to pleasure. He remembers reading about a garden of Louis XV where beautiful virgins were brought to be despoiled by the king. It was called the Deer Park, and Sam's meditation on it in "The Man Who Studied Yoga" reappears as the epigraph to Mailer's pleasure novel of the same name.

Adele will serve as the model for the female protagonist, Elena Esposito, who has affairs with two friends of Eitel's, the male protagonist, before settling into a complicated affair with him. Mailer may have drawn on the director John Huston—beholden to the studio system, but with a deep maverick streak—for some of Eitel's traits. Whatever the case, he now had all he needed to make a new start on *The Deer Park*: a prologue, a vast narrative scheme, and a first novel that would draw on his time in Hollywood, his current Latina lover, and his twenty-minute visit to Palm Springs with Knox. As he was finishing "The Man Who Studied Yoga," he wrote in his journal that he had the strength and optimism to work on the project for years to come, "going into obscurity if that is necessary, indeed even looking forward to that." Most of his energy for the next three and a half years would be expended on *The Deer Park*.

In April 1952 Bea married Steve "Chavo" Sánchez in Mexico, and when Mailer wrote to congratulate her, he said that he had not been in touch earlier because he was revamping the novel. The effort was "agony," he wrote to Fig, but by early May he had established a foothold of thirty pages. He was determined not to go back to the 240-page draft he had shelved; he wanted the new version to be markedly different. Writing to Adeline in late May, he described its style as "quiet, witty, sad." He mentioned to her that he had an article in the May-June *Partisan Review*, his first contribution to what was then considered one of the most significant literary-political journals in the United States. Somewhat to the right of *Dissent*, it was also more literary. Founded by William Phillips and Philip Rahv in 1934 as a platform for what was sometimes called the "independent left," it became anti-Soviet in the late 1930s. With a circulation never much above ten thousand, it was nonetheless a major force in American intellectual life until the late 1960s when it was overshadowed by *The New York Review of Books*. *Partisan Review*'s notable contributors (most of whom migrated to *The*

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New York Review of Books), included a number who became friends and/or sparring partners with Mailer: Macdonald, Howe, Rahv, Lowell, Mary McCarthy, Bellow, Baldwin, Diana Trilling, Leslie Fiedler, Cynthia Ozick, Susan Sontag, and Norman Podhoretz.

His inaugural contribution was part of a symposium titled "Our Country and Our Culture." The twenty-five participants were asked by the editors to expound on the current role of writers and whether the old American tradition of nonconformism could or should be maintained, as exemplified by exiles like Henry James and Ezra Pound, whose hostile statements about the barrenness of American life preface the editorial statement. Mailer stated boldly: "I think I ought to declare straightaway that I am in almost total disagreement with the assumptions of this symposium." He derided American intellectuals for moving from social protest to writing uplifting pieces for *Time* and *Life*. The American writer, he said, "is being dunned to become healthy, to grow up, to accept the American reality." Mailer was having none of it. The writer works best in "opposition," he said, and integration into society was "more conducive to propaganda than art."

Of the twenty-five participants on the panel, which included Howe, Margaret Mead, Delmore Schwartz, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Louise Bogan, Leslie Fiedler, and Lionel Trilling, only Howe was as truculent as Mailer. Howe contacted him after seeing the symposium in print, and asked him to write something for a new left-wing magazine that he and some others were founding. Howe and his colleagues recognized that a mass socialist labor party modeled after those in Europe could not compete with the Democrats or Republicans in the United States, not in the 1950s. *Dissent*, therefore, would try to work within the Democratic Party for some of the goals of socialism, while standing firmly against totalitarian regimes. The first issue appeared in winter 1954 and Mailer's name was on the masthead as a contributing editor. He published three pieces there in 1954, and in 1955 became a member of the editorial board.

In early 1952, Mailer saw Jones and Styron several times. Mickey Knox often joined them, making it a quartet. They hit the bars of the Village and Eighth Avenue in Manhattan, boozing and playing liar's poker for dollars. "We did a prodigious amount of drinking, and there were always flocks of girls around," Styron later wrote. Given his continuing doubts about his writing and his occasional depression, Mailer

and what have you," he said. He and Bea had promised to state frankly in their correspondence any gripes they had, and he ended his sour letter by laying into Bea for telling Fan that "Danny Wolf is a procuree," which was, apparently, her interpretation of Wolf's role in introducing Adele to him. ^{Bea's} The comment was turning Fan against Adele, about whom she already had a low estimate. "I felt very antagonistic to Adele" Fan wrote in 1971. "To me she was an interloper, a plain ignorant girl ready to satisfy Norman's physical needs. How could she ever measure up to my son, a Harvard graduate, a famous author." Mailer's love of his mother was unshakable; he revered her always but ignored her judgments about his male friends and female companions. Fan called the former "bums" and "spongers"; for the women she had harsher language. Adele "was just a plain common sucker," and his relationship with her, she said, was the first big mistake of her son's life.

After his vacation, he learned that his three war stories had been accepted: "The Paper House" by *New World Writing* and "The Language of Men" by *Esquire*, the magazine that Mailer would write more words for than any other over the next half century. The third story, "The Dead Gook," after being rejected by *The New Yorker*, was taken by a new periodical, *Discovery*. Its coeditors, Vance Bourjaily and John Aldridge, sent out a statement of the periodical's goals that tweaked the nose of Time-Life publications by saying that the editors would reject the sort of material that appeared in large-circulation magazines, writing that was "inoffensively general, meeting the romantic needs of the pabulum set at both ends of the human life span." The inaugural issue of *Discovery* was printed as a three-hundred-page paperback, and distributed by Pocket Books. Styron had the longest piece in the collection, a novella titled The Long March, ^{It's!} an account of the killing of eight Marine recruits by misdirected mortar fire during basic training at Camp Lejeune. Mailer admired the story extravagantly and wrote to Styron to tell him so: "I've been meaning to write ever since I read *Long March* about a month ago. I think it's just terrific, how good I'm almost embarrassed to say, but as a modest estimate it's certainly as good an eighty pages as any American has written since the war, and really I think it's much better than that." Styron wrote back a warm letter thanking him and said that he had been influenced by *The Naked and the Dead*, although not revealing where or how. The friendship of the Brooklyn Jew

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and the Tidewater WASP took a leap after this exchange and would grow even stronger until it blew up in another exchange of letters exactly five years later.

Lillian Ross had continued to encourage Mailer, and he wrote her with praise for her controversial "Portrait of Hemingway," which *The New Yorker* had published two years earlier. He knew she would be aware of *Life* magazine's recent publication of Hemingway's short novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. He liked Hemingway's idea of the old Cuban fisherman's Homeric struggle to land a huge fish, "but I just can't bear his prose," which he said was ripe with "affectation." But what really bothered him was that Hemingway was always implying the following: "I am a great man who happens incidentally to be a great writer. I know that all of you will be interested in my noble, strong, and beautiful attempts to exercise myself as a great man, and will be happy when I succeed except for professors, other writers, and assorted cocksuckers." This was the first time he had put his feelings about the elder writer into words since his Harvard parodies. The earlier work, especially the short stories, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *Death in the Afternoon*, were close to sacred texts, but he had reservations about Hemingway's later books and distaste for his enormous public presence.

By the late 1950s he would reverse himself, however, and praise Hemingway for struggling to "make his personality enrich his works." Looking back at the time when he was rewriting *The Deer Park*, Mailer realized that he was now "one of the few writers of my generation who was concerned with living in Hemingway's discipline, by which I do not mean I was interested in trying for some second-rate imitation of his style, but rather that I shared with Papa the notion, arrived at slowly in my case, that even if one dulled one's talent in the punishment of becoming a man, it was more important to be a man than to be a good writer." A good deal of Mailer's self-reflective writing from *Advertisements for Myself* to *The Fight* would explore the web of relations between personal valor and virtue and literary growth and mastery. In regard to Hemingway, he was inconsistent, lauding him here and socking him there.

In September, he and Adele moved from Pitt Street, but only a few blocks away, to 41 First Avenue, between 2nd and 3rd Streets. The rear windows of the apartment overlooked the Marble Cemetery, the oldest public cemetery in the city. The apartment was near Dan Wolf's and

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Mailer was a rebel with a cause: the spontaneous expression of feelings, including the violent and the sexual. Kindred spirits, they were joined by their belief that people could transform themselves, become bolder and more creative, and that society itself could be renovated. Both were tremendously ambitious and competitive, but their spheres of interest were adjacent, only partially overlapping, and thus neither had to worry about being outshined.

Mailer had read Lindner's *Prescription to Rebellion*. Lindner was convinced that most of Freud's theories were sound, but he parted company with his peers on the merits of getting along by conforming. It has "become axiomatic with our culture and in our society that adjustment is the highest good and the absolute right," he said. "A way has to be found to unbind the Prometheus within each one of us, to unloose the rebelliousness of our natures, and to give full sway to that instinct upon which our survival as free individuals depends." Lindner made this same point a variety of ways in several other books: *Rebel Without a Cause*; *Fifty-Minute Hour*; *Must You Conform?* The gist of his argument is simple: "The alternative to adjustment is rebellion." Although Mailer was eight years younger than Lindner, his relationship with him was nothing like the one he had with Malaquais, whose views were secure and settled. Mailer and Lindner were both more open to new ideas.

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Mailer had also been reading the work of Wilhelm Reich and was much taken with his ideas about the pernicious effects of repression on sexual potency. The following passage, taken from Charles Rycroft's brief study of Reich, ~~are~~ apposite, if not identical with Mailer's ideas. Reich was "surely right," Rycroft states, "in asserting that no neurotics are orgasmically potent and that the great majority of human beings suffer from a character neurosis. His theories of character armor and orgasm constitute, therefore, a sweeping indictment of the sexual life of civilized man, an indictment similar in many ways to that made by D. H. Lawrence." Mailer's infatuation with Reich would grow throughout the 1950s, and he would later build his own version of Reich's infamous "or gone box," a telephone-booth-sized chamber where one repaired to replenish or accumulate orgonic, or life energy, but also rumored to promote erections. At this point, Reich was only one of several theorists that interested Mailer.

His friendship with Lindner grew to the point where they discussed

little less. But I deny the sequence in putting it this way, for it took me years to come to this fine point. All I felt then was that I was an outlaw, a psychic outlaw, and I liked it, I liked it a good night better than trying to be a gentleman.

ON DECEMBER 1, 1954, Mailer began setting down the ideas that came in wake of the Rinehart rupture. He called it "Lipton's Journal," a not-so-veiled reference to the "tea" he smoked before he sat at his typewriter. He wrote fast, in bursts of ten or more pages every few days, and over the course of three months, until March 4, 1955, typed 248 pages containing approximately 110,000 words. The entries are numbered, 1 to 689; each is a stand-alone pensée. As he proceeded, he entertained the possibility that his insights could challenge some of the dominant ideas of Western thought, specifically, Freud's theories on the merits of sublimation and repression.

But at a dozen points he faltered, questioning the wisdom of naked soul bearing, much as Walt Whitman did in *Song of Myself*.

As was evident in the notes yesterday, I was moving toward a depression, and it came on me during the evening. I felt very tired, and rather disgusted with myself. It seemed to me as if I'd been indulging in mental masturbation for quite a few days, playing word games, playing at being a genius, playing at being at the edge of psychotic. . . .

Last night taking my seconals I thought—"A pill for the swill." And I was flat (stunned) by the recognition. How I hate this journal, hate myself, hate Adele, hate my wild kick, hate the garbage I release, how I cling to society to knock me out, to stun my rebellion. If I ever go insane I'll not be a schizo. I'll be manic depressive.

His recoveries are just as fervent; he sometimes sounds like Kerouac.

I am manic, alive, filled every day with the excitement and revelation of everything I see. . . .

I'm a synthesizer, just as a crook is. I cannot make the original discovery, but I can add the fabulous jewel to it at my best. So I dip into other books and other men's styles, take the ideas I wish, throw

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away the others, understand one facet of a person to the exclusion of the rest because what I want is the jewel in the suitcase—fuck the rest, fuck the furs and the bonds. . . .

My mind is like a tiger.

The journal jumps over a wide arc of heterogeneous material, making it hard at times to find a filament of continuity, yet it hangs together. One reason is that "Lipton's Journal" is a psychoanalytic act. Lindner wouldn't analyze him, so he does the job himself. He looks at his childhood, his wives, his family and friends, his ambitions and his failures, his writings, all with an eye to clarifying the basic lineaments and conflicts of his psyche so that he can move forward and claim his genius, which he boldly asserts. Another claim to coherence is that the journal is a dictionary of dualisms. The indubitable doubleness of all nature, all phenomena, is the centrifugal belief that supports every exploration in the journal. All the antinomies that he had pondered since his youth come tumbling out. He works through a range of commonplace oppositions such as sun-moon, conscious-unconscious, heaven-hell, as well as bodily functions—orgasms and vomiting, weeping and laughter, intercourse as giving and taking—and dozens of others: choice-habit, antacid-analgesic (which he proposes as the title of a one-thousand-page novel), and energetic repetitions of the saint-psychopath dualism. He considers his sexuality, his addictions, and like Nathaniel Hawthorne's Reverend Dimmesdale, practices vigils of self-examination.

Looking at myself in the mirror, high on Lipton's, I saw myself as follows: The left side of my face is comparatively heavy, sensual, possessor of hard masculine knowledge, strong, proud, and vain. Seen front-face I appear nervous, irresolute, tender, anxious, vulnerable, earnest, and Jewish middle-class. The right side of my face is boyish, saintly, bisexual, psychopathic, and suggests the victim.

For Mailer it was incontestable that two people—not two halves of one—lived inside every human. As he put it, "*Every man is a marriage within himself.*" The two people inhabiting him, referred to over and over as the saint and the psychopath, are linked by "the apparently silly compromise of an over-friendly anxious boyish Jewish intellectual, 'seductive' and inhibited by turns." This front-face construct, a "social

its fourth and fifth printings. As expected, *Time* panned it, comparing it to the sleazy scandal magazine *Confidential*. Putnam's spent \$10,000 on advertising, a very high sum for the period. Overall, the reviews leaned toward the negative, especially outside the biggest cities.

The most important advertisement for the novel, however, was not paid out of this budget. Appearing in the fourth weekly issue of *The Village Voice* on November 16 was a half-page ad designed and paid for (\$127.50) by Mailer. Under the headline: "All over America 'THE DEER PARK' is getting nothing but RAVES," he arrayed fifteen negative blasts, all attributed. A sample: "The year's worst snake pit in fiction," "sordid and crummy," "moronic mindlessness," "nasty," "unsavory," "dull," and in large letters at the bottom: "A BUNCH OF BUMS." It was his way of announcing, he said, "that I no longer gave a dog's drop for the wisdom, the reliability, and the authority of the public's literary mind, those creeps and old ladies of vested reviewing." He thought the ad might sell some books, and it may have, as the novel remained in sixth place on the bestseller list through the end of November. In the end, however, he would have lost his bet with Alfred Knopf. When all the returns were in, the novel had sold just under fifty thousand copies, an estimable number, but an order of magnitude less than the number eventually *Naked and the Dead* sold.

IN HIS MEMOIR, *New York in the Fifties*, Dan Wakefield recalled the mood of the Village during that decade. "Our generation," he said,

needed the Village and all it stood for as much as the artists, writers, and rebels of preceding generations—maybe even more. If the mood of the country was to force everyone to conform, to look and dress like the man in the gray flannel suit, surely it was all the more important to have at least one haven where people were not only allowed but expected to dress, speak, and behave differently from the herd. This was a time when a beard might be regarded as a sign of subversion.

When he saw that *The Deer Park* was not going to have extraordinary sales, Mailer began "to feel the empty winds of a post-partum

debated the merits of psychoanalysis with a practitioner. About halfway through the run, Mailer began including letters from readers and his responses. When someone complained about his egotism, he replied: "Let others profit by my unseemly absorption, and so look to improve their own characters." He ran a contest, offering \$20 to anyone who could guess his candidate for president in the 1956 election (Hemingway, one reader did). In his next column, he elaborated on Hemingway's credentials: physical courage, a good war record, and the charm of appearing to have had "a good time now and again." He also replied at length to another nasty letter from Jensen, who had complained about his "congenital or rigged up ostentation."

In late February, Robert Lindner died, ~~of congestive heart disease~~. He was forty-one. Mailer lauded his boldness and intelligence in his March 7 column, and also called him "one of the warmest people I have ever known." But he said that Lindner would have hated a "facile eulogy," and so devoted the rest of the column to quotations from his work, including one from Lindner's final book, *Must You Conform?*, published a few weeks before his death. Lindner's study reflects his collaboration with Mailer on "Lipton's Journal," as well as his own long-standing belief that current psychology practice falsely held that "human development is linked to human passivity." He ends the column with his own comment on Lindner's legacy: "Because of the instinct of rebellion, man has never been content, finally, with the limits of his life: it has caused him to deny death and to war with mortality. Man is a rebel. He is committed by his biology *not* to conform, and herein lies the paramount reason for the awful tension he experiences today in relation to Society."

Mailer was obviously saddened by Lindner's death. But he felt something else, as he explained when he neared his own death.

I talked to him on the phone one day and he said "There's nothing they can do; I'm going to die." And he burst into tears. And I was so cold and so full of anger at where we'd gotten, and when I look back, it was one of the most unpleasant moments in my life. I didn't feel a fucking thing for him. I felt contempt that he was weakened. You see, my feeling was: "We're soldiers and if we die, we die." I have that feeling now; it's a lot easier now, I can assure you. But I remember not being sympathetic. Going through the dull motions

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and knowing more about the "periphery," the mean streets of Harlem. He didn't know that Mailer was already thinking about an essay premised, in part, on the superior sexual prowess of blacks, but Baldwin did know that "to be an American Negro male is also to be a kind of walking phallic symbol."

intimate
 Baldwin, who was gay, had come to Paris to escape prejudice against blacks and homosexuality. Mailer, deeply curious as usual, wanted to discuss both, as well as jazz, Harlem, criminals, books, everything. When they met, Baldwin had just concluded an unhappy affair with a Swiss man, and was in no mood to discuss matters. He also saw that Mailer accepted the "myth of the sexuality of Negroes," and so he "chickened out" of what he thought would be an excruciating attempt to challenge Mailer's ideas. Instead, he socialized with the Mailers—he could drink as much as Mailer—and after a few weeks left for Corsica. He had no inkling of his new friend's roiled state, his addictions, and career anxieties. Mailer's public visage prevailed, and Baldwin's chief memory of that time in Paris was of "Norman—confident, boastful, exuberant, and loving, striding through the soft Paris nights like a gladiator."

Baldwin hid his despair over his failed affair from the Mailers. He was working on a novel, *Giovanni's Room*, a bold study of violence and homosexuality set in Paris, but was having difficulty finishing it. Nights after leaving the Mailers at the Hôtel Palais Royal, he "wandered through Paris, the underside of Paris, drinking, screwing, fighting—it's a wonder I wasn't killed," he said. Mailer had insomnia and left the hotel in the early morning hours. It would not have been surprising if they had bumped into each other. In a poem about that summer, "A Wandering in Prose: For Hemingway," Mailer begins with the memory of Adele's face "powder which smells like Paris when / I was kicking seconal and used to / get up at four in the morning and / walk the streets into the long wait / for dawn." He would find himself "at five in an Algerian / bar watching the workers take a / swallow of wine for breakfast, the / city tender in its light even to me / and I sicker than I'd ever been, / weak with loathing at all I had not done." He then recalls Adele's "detestation" of him for not being "nearly brave enough for you." Adele's memory is that Mailer, in withdrawal and "still reeling from *The Deer Park* disaster," was both angry and scared and often took it out on her. "In my own way," she said, "I could fling a lot of shit right back at his face." Mailer, however, put on a good face for Baldwin,

and I seem to have turned into a slightly punch-drunk and ugly club fighter, who can fight clean and fight dirty, but likes to fight." The literary world, as Mailer defined it, was a place of fierce struggle. Painful experience was the soundest guide.

Mailer was now in a fever to fight. Perhaps it was the memory of his eye gouging in New York or Al Morales's instruction, or the emerging ideas of "The White Negro"—all of these, no doubt, played a role—but what is clear is that in 1957, he was itching for fisticuffs, with or without gloves. One night at the Styrons', Mailer told Random House publisher Bennett Cerf, who had turned down *The Deer Park*, "You're not a publisher, you're a dentist." They took some swings at each other outside ~~last~~ ^{west}, Styron broke it up. When novelist Chandler Brossard, whom Mailer had met in Mexico, visited, Mailer wanted to box with him. Brossard, who had fought semiprofessionally and been trained by the same man who trained Hemingway—another inducement for Mailer—wisely declined, saying someone (meaning Mailer) could get seriously hurt. "Violence and pain are a form of engagement to Norman, of reality," Brossard said. In 1952, Brossard had published one of the first novels about hipsters, *Who Walks in Darkness*, set in Greenwich Village. On the dust jacket, a question is asked: "What is a hipster? The name derives from the jazz term 'hip' and denotes a person who possesses 'superior awareness.'" The lead character is an African American who passes for white. Mailer read the novel and liked it; it most certainly enriched the essay that was percolating in him.

The memories of Mailer fighting and acting out are what many friends and acquaintances of the period remember, but it wasn't all fireworks. For one thing, Susan had joined them for her annual visit shortly before they moved, and she spent a lot of time with her father. She was also fond of Adele and, like any six-year-old, deeply interested in the pregnancy. Mailer wrote to a friend that he was "beginning to see himself as the patriarch of a vast family," a premonitory remark. As the birth approached, he started writing. He began taking notes for "The White Negro" and also working on a dramatic version of *The Deer Park*. The growing extent of his literary operation can be gauged by the fact that he now had an answering service in New York. Further help came from the Miss Baltimore Agency, a domestic help service that Fan had taken over from her sister Beck in the early 1950s. She supplied maids to her son and his wives for years to come.

that one can recreate one's own identity out of the eternity of the present moment and so escape temporarily from the limits of history. From this subjective standpoint, the future exists only ^{as} vision, a romantic vision of ever-expanding possibilities merging with one's experience of freedom in the present.

Because the essay soars and swoops through such imponderables as time, sex, love, God, courage, extermination, and revolution, and is rife with qualifications, extended appositions, and restrictive clauses, it is not an easy read. Mailer later admitted that it was "too elliptic." As literary critic Morris Dickstein has commented, Mailer "rarely bothers to distinguish lurid metaphor from literal prescription," and writes a prose that "mingles fact and fiction, social criticism and confession, cultural prophecy and personal therapy." Nevertheless, one cannot help but feel the seductive energy of the essay—energy, in fact, is its pith and marrow. "The White Negro" is a dithyrambic hymn to energy which pulses in a universe that is not a fact, but "a changing reality whose laws are remade each instant by everything living, but most particularly man." "God," he says, is "energy, life, sex, force, the Yoga's *prana*, the Reichian's orgone, Lawrence's 'blood,' Hemingway's 'good,' the Shavian life-force." This is not the God of organized religion, but the God within "the paradise of limitless energy and perception just beyond the next wave of the next orgasm." How to achieve it? First, one has to be "ready to go, ready to gamble." "Movement is always to be preferred to inaction. In motion a man has a chance, his body is warm, his instincts are quick, and when the crisis comes, whether of love or violence, he can make it, he can win, he can release a little more energy for himself since he hates himself a little less, he can make a little better nervous system, make it a little more possible to go again, to go faster next time."

The essay's promise of escape from Eisenhower's wet blanket helped make it the most discussed American essay in the quarter of a century after World War II. Maligned as much for its obscurity—Baldwin said it was "downright impenetrable"—as it was celebrated for its orphic verve, it is also the most reprinted essay of the era. A generation of young people proudly carried their copies of the City Lights edition of the essay, a pamphlet whose cover depicts a reverse negative head shot of an archetypal hipster (rumored at the time to be Paul Newman) with them when they migrated to the awakening cities of the nation. Bored

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had "a tendency to stick to superficialities in conversation"; Mailer "was raffish, funny and charming, but he could also be belligerent and confrontational." The men were "ambitious and competitive, all three women were good-looking and sexy." Aldridge's memory is that while Styron "was originally king of the roost," Mailer "quite quickly became the center of energy."

One evening, Adele recalled, "Styron was going on and on about the colored people this and the colored people that" in a smug manner. She called out to him, banged her fist on the table and said, "I happen to be passing for white, so keep your fucking comments to yourself." After a pause, "someone snickered, and my remark was ignored as the conversation resumed. My husband just grinned at me, raising his glass in a half toast." Mailer said this about his relationship with Adele: "I had a situation where I was Pygmalion; I was someone who could develop someone, and I certainly could develop her, develop her into someone quite special. I had a romance with the idea that she was a member, finally, of the working class and here was I, this leftist intellectual (via Jean Malaquais), and now finally I had someone from the working class that I, as a middle-class, guarded, sheltered, spoiled individual, could work for and develop." It was a complex marriage: they drank, they experimented sexually, they became parents, they struggled with their art, they had fierce battles, and maintained a tenuous solidarity through all the difficulties of the next year.

"The White Negro" was by far the most extraordinary piece that had appeared in *Dissent*, and brought the journal needed attention, although the editors had problems with parts of it. Howe said he was excited to have the piece, but regretted not asking Mailer to cut out the hoodlum-storekeeper passage. Mailer said years later that the essay "made me one of the spokesmen for the Beat Generation," even if the more pacific Beats had their reservations. The *Partisan Review* crowd—William Phillips, Dwight Macdonald, Lionel and Diana Trilling—especially Macdonald—didn't like the antinomian emphasis of the essay, but as Phillips explained, it was still acceptable," just "as with D. H. Lawrence," because "the thinking of a man who's wild was interesting." James Jones had no use for the essay, telling Mailer it was "a good illustration of a swiftly accelerating decadence." Mailer read the essay aloud to Styron, and told him writing it was "like coughing up blood." Styron, always the formalist, didn't admire its rhetoric or agree

with its conclusions, yet was "fascinated by it nonetheless." The division of opinion on the essay continues; it is regularly used as a club in the continuing race-gender-power debates of academics. It rasps, it elates, it confuses, but it is unforgettable.

Mailer told Knox the nine-thousand-word essay was the best thing he had ever written. It will be important over the years, he said, because it points to "a new way to think." In addition to the essay's long-term influence, he saw two immediate results: "I was now the intermediary," he said, between the Beats and the intellectuals, between, say, William Burroughs and Dwight Macdonald, and this satisfied his two psyches. It also "emboldened" him later, he said, to write *Advertisements for Myself*, where he planned to take on issues that no one else would. The first new piece he wrote for inclusion in this planned collection was a fragment from the dramatic version of *The Deer Park*. He expected to have a first draft completed soon, as he said in a letter to Chandler Brossard in which he also turned down his request for an interview in a girlie magazine, *Nugget*. He liked the magazine, he said, but felt that appearing in it would show his literary enemies "that my writing about sex is not the act of a serious writer but one who is looking for notoriety."

for Putnam's

MAILER FINISHED A draft of the four-act play in early August. It was over three hours long. He wrote to Bea, Knox, and Malaquais on the same day to announce its completion. He told Knox that it was "one of the four or five best plays that have been written since the war," and said to Bea that "it's better than *Death of a Salesman* and *Streetcar Named Desire* put together." Mailer had seen both plays on Broadway and admired them extravagantly, so he may have swallowed hard when making this claim. Getting it produced, he told Malaquais, would be difficult because it was "so bold that it could really cause an explosion." Knox wanted to direct it, and Mailer told him choosing a director was the prerogative of the producer. If he ever produced it off-Broadway with his own money, however, Knox would certainly get a role. Ten years later, this is exactly what happened. Knox was the star of the production, playing the comic role of Collie Munshin, Herman Teppis's opportunistic son-in-law, who introduces Eitel and Elena.

Mailer had lunch in New York with a well-known literary agent, Monica McCall, and got her interested in the play, sight unseen. He

about Adele. Normally, I would hesitate to believe the story, but my memory of slanderous remarks you've made about other women leaves me not at all in doubt. So I tell you this, Billy-boy. You have got to learn to keep your mouth shut about my wife, for if you do not, and I hear of it again, I will invite you to a fight in which I expect to stomp out of you a fat amount of your yellow and treacherous shit.

What you choose to do about this letter is of course your own affair, but I suggest you do no more than button your lip. The majority of things you do come back to me, and my patience with your cowardly and infantile viciousness—*so demeaning and disgraceful to your talent*—is at an end.

Norman

According to his biographer, Styron was "astonished" by this letter and one that followed two weeks later. Lew Allen, whom Styron showed it to, said, "Bill was scared, really scared." He immediately wrote a point-by-point refutation, one of which accused Mailer's source of having a "warped and perverted imagination." He denied making any remarks about Adele. But he did not mail the letter, and the next day when visiting his wife in the hospital where she had just given birth to their second child, he met Jim and Gloria Jones and informed them of the situation. They concluded that something other than the alleged remarks must be bothering Mailer.

Years Later, Styron told Mailer biographer Carl Rollyson that the letters from Mailer were "profoundly upsetting and depressing." He called the first one "a lightning bolt." But he went on to say the following:

A lot of people didn't like Adele. She was aggressive. She was out of her—you know—I think a lot of people thought she wasn't a lady. I liked her, but she'd get drunk. I think a lot of people regarded her as common—or whatever the word is, and she just didn't fit in, a big aggressive broad . . . and people were put off by her. It may have been indeed—I suspect it was true—that I probably uttered something about her like a lot of other people did and it got back to Norman.

Toward the end of the interview Lucid breaks in to say that what bothers him about Mailer's comments is that while the novelist "consciously makes decisions and accepts the moral consequences," the hipster is "unconscious of risks of this kind." Mailer responds by saying that tacit in his comments is the belief that the unconscious "has an enormous teleological sense," that it is always measuring to what degree the actions of individuals are conducive or destructive to growth. Hour by hour, minute by minute, it asks, am I growing or shrinking? "It is with this thing that they move, that they grope forward—this navigator at the seat of their being." He had discovered someone new in the cockpit of his psyche. The "anxious boyish Jewish intellectual" who had been the link between the saint and the psychopath has given up his place to a helmsman from the lower depths, a guide and connection to the mysteries of Being and becoming.

AFTER RAHV HAD formally accepted "Way Out" for the fall 1958 issue of PR, Mailer wrote to his mother, who was visiting Susan in Mexico, with the news. "*Partisan* is the most important (*by far*) literary magazine in this country," he said, "and to print a long piece by me will do an awful lot of subtle good. I'm really pleased." He was also happy, as he told his Japanese translator, Eichi Yamanishi, that "The White Negro" was "much discussed," and that he was being touted as "one of the very few reliable guides to the mysteries of the American nihilism which is coming into being." To be accepted by the opposed wings of America's literary culture—the Beats and the Family—put Mailer in the catbird seat he had aspired to since falling from the heights with *Barbary Shore*. His timing couldn't have been better. *On the Road* was published in September 1957, three months after the "The White Negro." Kerouac's novel had produced a hunger for insights into the origins and meaning of the Beat movement, and Mailer's essay was often seen as its intellectual manifesto. There were condemnations and celebrations of beatniks in all the major publications, and *Life* did a photo essay.

The first chronicler of the Beat generation, John Clellon Holmes, said that Mailer brought to an understanding of Beatness "the most venturesome intellect (not to mention nerves) currently at work in American literature." He called "The White Negro" a document "fully as important to the secret history of this age as *Notes from the Under-*

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during his time in Connecticut had been to write a play in which she would star, but in hindsight it would have been a "terrible tragedy" to play Pygmalion with Monroe, admitting that he was just another of the many men who wanted to make the most of this "sweet child of life," but in his own way, not hers.

THE MAILERS MOVED back to New York in December 1958 and rented an apartment at 73 Perry Street in the Village. Mailer had known Allen Ginsberg since the days of his loft parties, but had met Jack Kerouac only in passing. Sometime after they returned, Kerouac and Ginsberg visited. Ginsberg later said that the meeting was friendly, and that the other two writers weren't competitive even though each considered himself the best writer in the country. Mailer liked Kerouac "more than I would have thought," but found him to be tired. ~~They talked about The Village Voice and writing. Ginsberg's summation was that Mailer "was just beginning to try and seize the world," while Kerouac was disengaging.~~ "In Buddhist terms," Ginsberg said, Kerouac "was already sick of the world." Mailer, however, was engaged in what Jews call *tikkun olam*, or repairing the world. There may not have been any discussion of "The White Negro," as both Ginsberg and Kerouac had reservations about its positions on violence. On the other hand, Ginsberg said that he felt "a sense of brotherhood" with Mailer, because they were both trying to undermine the nation's pervasive social conformity. For Ginsberg, Mailer's essay was "the most intelligent statement I'd ever seen by any literary-critical person, anyone acquainted with the great world of literature." Over the years, they would have many contacts with each other, especially in the 1960s when they were involved in a number of antiwar protests. But Mailer saw Kerouac at least once more, at a party the Mailers gave in mid-1958, most of which Kerouac spent under the kitchen table, dead drunk.

1959

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All through the fall and winter of 1958 and into the spring of the next year, he labored on a collection, still unnamed. Heretofore, he had never worried a great deal about his nonfiction prose style. His forte, he felt, was to deliver unsettling hypotheses and blockbuster theories that would "influence the history of my time," and not engage in the kind of fancy-pants writing he despised when he was writing for the *Advocate*. With "Lipton's Journal" and "The White Negro," his style had become

dramatic fragments $\frac{1}{m}$

more colloquial, and the preface ^{for} he was writing ~~to~~ each selection, ~~dramatic fragment~~ reflected this shift. The problem he faced was that to accurately contextualize the pieces in the collection—fiction, nonfiction, a few poems and he had to talk more about himself more than he cared to. He had always implicitly accepted Flaubert's dictum that "the artist should be in his work, like God's creation, invisible and all-powerful; he should be felt everywhere and seen nowhere," a view he was parroting when he told Lillian Ross in 1948 that it was "much better when people who have read your book don't know anything about you, even what you look like." Writing the prefaces in the face of his growing awareness of the difficulty and doubtful wisdom of separating his personal and artistic worlds had made him "a little desperate," especially since he had quit smoking, again. Yet, he still felt that the prefaces, as he told a friend, were "shit work."

I got sick of myself, sick of saying I felt this, I knew that, I wondered whether, I induced, and I and one and almost a he or two. It's weird, it's a little like self-analysis before you realize it, and your style dips into your own shitbag so fast it's staggering. So now I'm facing whether to throw all this crap away, and put the book out without the prefaces, three months of work shot, and a less readable book or maybe keep on with the gamble and waste another three months on what may not be writable for me.

But he continued, encouraged by the reception of "Way Out." He told William Phillips, Rahv's coeditor at *PR*, that he had received all good comments on the story, except from Macdonald, who "detested" it. By the end of 1958, he had a provisional plan for the collection, which he sent to Walter Minton, promising he would have everything to Putnam's by February 1. He had already completed some of the prefaces, the brief ones that introduced his short stories, the longer ones—introducing "The White Negro," the *Voice* columns, excerpts from *The Deer Park* and the big novel—remained to be written. He was considering a three-part, chronological division of the material: "Square," "Transitional," and "Hip," with an appendix for his college stories and early journalism. The final shape of the collection owed something to this arrangement, but was more subtle. The only thing he was sure about at this point was that all the prefaces would be in italics.

He began "to jiggle his Self for a style" that would reflect his emerging personality, while feeling "the yaws of conscience" about such concerted and public introspection. This anxious, delicate process, he said, sent his writing "through a circus of variations and postures, a fireworks of virtuosity designed to achieve . . . I do not even know what. Leave it that I become an actor, a quick-change artist, as if I believe I can trap the Prince of Truth in the act of switching a style." He inched along, still worried about tabling the big novel. He told Yamanishi that he had written only seventy pages, and that the final product would take "five or ten years" and be a thousand pages long. Finishing the collection—its working title was now "Advertisements"—stood in the way of getting back to the novel. In a letter to Mickey Knox, he said that he had spent a half year trying to improve "my half-vanished techniques in writing," which gives a hint about his slow progress. Going without cigarettes for nine months, he said, had left him with "less drive and better health." What he needed was "a stick of dynamite up my ass."

Now
1959
HE DID GET a small jolt when "Hip, Hell, and the Navigator" appeared in early February. Lionel Trilling, the informal head of the Family, described it in a TV interview as an "important theological document," and this had created "a little stir" in the PR crowd. Just before this happened, Mailer was invited to appear on his second TV program, David Susskind's *Open End*, along with Truman Capote and Dorothy Parker. He had met Parker in Hollywood several times, but knew Capote only by reputation, which by then was growing by leaps and bounds, based on the warm reception for his 1958 novella, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Mailer was "intensely curious" about Capote, he recalled, and enjoyed the limousine ride to the studio with him and Adele. With the Mike Wallace program under his belt, he felt confident about appearing, while Capote, "in a dry little voice that seemed to issue from an unmoistened reed in his nostril," said that he wasn't. "When it comes to personality," Capote said, "I have something small and precise to offer, and it's wrong for such a medium." When the two-hour program was over, Mailer thought he had been forceful and articulate, while Capote had seemed "a hint bewildered." After a celebratory dinner at El Morrocco with Capote (who repeatedly insisted that he had been awful),

found the excerpt to be "more arresting, I thought, than anything I've read by an American in years," and if the rest of the novel were as good, "Burroughs will deserve rank as one of the most important novelists in America."

For Myself
He submitted the manuscript of the collection in late April. *Advertisements* came in at 200,000 words, one third of which was new work. When it was in the hands of the editors at Putnam's, he made arrangements to publish three of the four pieces in magazines just before or at the same time as the collection, which was now scheduled to appear on November 6. "The Mind of an Outlaw" appeared in *Esquire*, "Buddies" in the *Village Voice*, and "Quick and Expensive" in *Big Table*. Finally, two scenes from the dramatic version of *The Deer Park* came out in *Partisan Review*, giving Mailer close to simultaneous exposure in four very different publications, two hip and two "overground," as *Esquire* editor Harold Hayes called his magazine. While prepublication excerpting was nothing new, no one in 1959 was doing it quite so shrewdly or widely. He continued the practice for the rest of his career, and must be considered the leading "magazinish" (a name applied to Poe) of his era.

In "Last Advertisement for Myself Before the Way Out" which concludes the collection, he is as nearly as rough on himself as on his peers. Comparing himself to Scott Fitzgerald, "an indifferent caretaker of his talent," he says that he has been "a cheap gambler" with his. He goes on to describe himself as "cowardly," "stupid," and guilty of "fear and vanity," winding up with a flourish that recalls the bold, mythical gesture of Babe Ruth, a passage that would be regularly quoted in the future by detractors and admirers alike. The big novel, he says,

will be fired to its fuse by the rumor that once I pointed to the farthest fence and said that within ten years I would try to hit the longest ball ever to go up into the accelerated hurricane air of our American letters. For if I have one ambition above all others, it is to write a novel which Dostoyevsky and Marx; Joyce and Freud, Stendhal, Tolstoy, Proust and Spengler; Faulkner, and even old moldering Hemingway might come to read, for it would carry what they had to tell another part of the way.

Mailer didn't hit this "longest ball," but considering what he did produce in the ten years after *Advertisements for Myself*, he had some

solid hits. In addition to challenging himself, another motive for his prediction—corroborated by the taunts and dares that he leveled at his “fellow racketeers”—was to stimulate them. He genuinely believed that a great achievement by any of them would be the keenest spur for the rest—which is not to say that he did not feel envy. He explained in a 2007 interview with Andrew O’Hagan how he felt about his contemporaries: “I remember I received a copy of *From Here to Eternity*, which I think I’d asked for, and Jones inscribed it: ‘To Norman—my most feared friend; my dearest rival.’ That’s the nature of friendship among writers. Gore Vidal—who has never been at a loss to see the negative side of human nature—pointed out that ‘Whenever a friend succeeds, a little something in me dies.’ That’s an exaggeration of this notion of competition. But in time we may get to the point where, although something of you does die, some other part of you is encouraged. You say, ‘Well if he’s doing it, I can do it.’”

MINTON WAS UNCERTAIN about including “The Time of Her Time” because of its detailed sexual descriptions. To this end, Mailer wrote identical letters to thirteen literary critics, stating that a majority of those polled would have to approve of the story for Putnam’s to go ahead. If opinion was seriously divided, the story would be cut. Accompanied by a copy of the story, the letter went to: Irving Howe and Norman Podhoretz; F. W. Dupee, Diana and Lionel Trilling, and Richard Chase at Columbia; Leslie Fiedler at the University of Montana; Philip Rahv, William Phillips, and William Barrett at PR; two important independent critics, Alfred Kazin and Dwight Macdonald; and Mailer’s former professor Robert Gorham Davis. He said he did not like to ask for an appraisal of unpublished work, “but I believe this piece may be important enough to justify the act.” He asked for a reply by mid-July 1959. His plan was clever; he not only garnered twelve positive endorsements—Davis demurred—and convinced Minton of the story’s merits, he also gained advance support for his collection from a group of influential figures. Four of them went on to write supportive reviews of *Advertisements*, including two that were highly favorable.

The story, a comic masterpiece and ^{perhaps} one of Mailer’s finest short stories, is a first-person recounting of the Herculean efforts of Sergius O’Shaughnessy, a Village stud who calls his penis “the avenger,” to bring

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Denise Gondelman, a "proud, aggressive, vulgar, tense, stiff and arrogant Jewess" to her first orgasm. As critic Andrew Gordon has explained, "Sergius is the hipster battling Denise the Square, determined to liberate her from her dead-ass sexual repressions, her intellectual priggishness, and her obsession with psychoanalytic jargon as Mailer would say, from her totalitarianism." On another level, it is both "a glorification of the power of sex and a *reductio ad absurdum*. The controlling metaphor is sex as war, and sexual intercourse takes on the qualities of a championship boxing match, an encounter between a matador and bull or an epic struggle for survival between two savage beasts in a jungle clearing." O'Shaugnessy, Gordon says, "sees himself, and only half in jest, as a sexual messiah" carrying the gospel of Lawrence and Reich to uptight pagans in Greenwich Village. After several near-victories, she ultimately achieves "the time of her time," an obvious reference to God's whispered words to O'Shaugnessy at the end of *The Deer Park*. Far from being grateful for pushing her over the top after many long nights of phallic endeavor (achieved when he whispers in her ear, "You dirty little Jew"), Denise tells him the following morning that his "whole life is a lie, and you do nothing but run away from the homosexual that is you." Then she departs and is "out the door before I could rise to tell her that she was a hero fit for me." As Gordon points out, the story is a rehearsal for an even more detailed and symbol-laden (if less exhausting) series of sexual bouts in Mailer's 1965 novel, *An American Dream*. O'Shaugnessy, he notes accurately, is "the first of Mailer's active narrators" in a fictional work, and a precursor to Stephen Rojack, the narrator-protagonist of that novel.

After he sent the story to the thirteen critics, he gently encouraged them to respond and thanked them when they did. Kazin was one of the first to respond, praising the story's "literary seriousness and power," and calling Mailer "immensely talented." Then this reservation: "You are the Rabbi of screwing, the Talmudist of fucking, the writer who has managed to be so solemn about sex as to make it grim." He argued for more passion, and ended by saying that the "characters make love with a stop-watch in each hand. For *this* I should make love?" Mailer wrote back immediately to say that being called "the Rabbi of screwing" gave him a laugh, and agreeing that the grimness of some of his descriptions was "the single most unattractive feature" of his writing. There was a reason, however: "I am more or less obsessed with the idea that sex is

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dying in a new ice-age of the psyche, and I think the only way to change one's readers and warm them—for yes, I am guilty of a messianic lust—is to make them set up camp on the ice for a while." In the big novel, he would depict "characters who are monsters of self-consciousness and try for the more difficult and perhaps impossible trip into a terrain where emotion becomes real again." Over the years, Kazin would continue to chide him in reviews and essays about taking his obsessions too seriously, and urging him to distance himself from his characters (a reflection, perhaps, of the Henry James revival then under way).

Kazin was not the only member of the Family pushing Mailer to be more Jamesian. Diana Trilling and Mailer liked each other from the start, and her positive vetting of the story brought them even closer. The fact that she also praised *The Deer Park* in the same letter, calling it "a fantastically courageous book, intelligent book, noble book," was further uplifting, especially since she said that her husband shared her enthusiasm. She began to see him as her personal project, and her letters over the next few years mixed praise, joshing, and advice. Besides giving him her counsel, she said his work was an advance on Hemingway's. He said in reply that *Advertisements for Myself* "is a bit obsessed with Hemingway—I'm afraid he crops up in the book the way an old lover appears in the conversation of a woman who insists the man could now not mean less to her." *Advertisements* is the high-water mark of Mailer's interest in Hemingway, although after his suicide in 1961, Hemingway's ghost would often return. In his reply to Trilling, written after his return from Provincetown, he did not remark on the concern Trilling expressed at the end of her letter: "I hope to God you're not falling into the trap of explaining yourself. Like seeing yourself in history, self-explanation is one of the new and most elegant ways for a writer to cut his own throat." Like Kazin, she wanted Mailer to put some aesthetic distance between himself and his creations, something he was less and less prone to do. In fact, before the next decade was over, he would do precisely what she wanted him not to, exactly what Henry James had avoided. Podhoretz said Mailer saw himself as "a battleground of history," but Mailer had bigger ideas: he wanted to intervene in history, and dramatize his intervention.

6 His

He also sent "The Time of Her Time" to Lois Wilson. She shared it with her husband, Graham Wilson, also an English professor, who knew

his ability to locate the needed word, and "in compensation I was granted a sensitivity to the rhythm of what I wrote." He moved from "the hegemony of the word to the resonance of the prose rhythm." The collection, he wrote, was assembled after the "slowest and most morale-disrupting" period of his career, the ten years after *Naked and the Dead*. "I suffered prodigies of brain-curdling, and educated myself all over again how to write, write without cigarettes, and found the beginnings of a style which might begin to express the way my mind (as opposed to other writers' minds) was ready to work." The struggle to write *Advertisements* "changed my life," he said, and gave him "a style I thought I might be able to call my own." Kazin's review was confirmation.

SOMETIME NOT LONG after *Advertisements for Myself* was published, Baldwin, Styron, and Knox were drinking at Jones's Paris apartment. Jones had a copy of the book and they began discussing Mailer's comments on their work. "It wasn't a fun evening," Knox recalled. They read passages from the essay, Baldwin said, "in a kind of drunken, masochistic fascination." Then they attacked Knox as "a surrogate for Norman." Jones ignored the complimentary remarks in the piece on Styron, and instead kept reading the same line over and over: "Styron wrote the prettiest novel of our generation," causing Styron "great discomfort," according to Knox. He "started twitching and said, 'Okay, Jim, that's enough, Jim!'"

Gloria Jones told Mailer's first biography, Hilary Mills, that her husband "kept a copy of *Advertisements* on a sideboard of their Paris apartment." Whenever any of the authors Mailer had attacked came through Paris for a visit, Jones would have them write their comments in the margin of the book." Mailer and Jones did not meet again until a 1965 party in novelist John Marquand Jr.'s New York apartment. Marquand thought they might try to kill each other, but they went off into a room and were gone for quite a while. "First Mailer came out by himself," Marquand said, "and he was obviously quite moved. He didn't seem angry; he seemed purged, almost as if there were tears in his eyes." Jones told Marquand that they had worked things out, and said, "I love him, but I don't like him." When Baldwin returned to the United States, he sought out Mailer and they went for a drink. Baldwin asked why he had criticized him, and Mailer replied, "Well, if this was going to break up our friendship, something else would come along to break it up just

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SEVEN A FELONIOUS ASSAULT AND AN AMERICAN DREAM

Two of the most important events in Mailer's life took place in 1960: he wrote an essay on the presidential candidacy of Senator John F. Kennedy, based in part on two meetings with him and his wife, Jacqueline, and three months later, after a black night of drinking and fighting, he stabbed Adele. Writing "Superman Comes to the Supermarket," a new kind of political commentary, and then observing its extraordinary reception, affected him profoundly and led, indirectly but certainly, to the assault on Adele in the early morning of November 20. Two unexpected upheavals—the Cuban Revolution and the political ascent of Kennedy, an Irish American Catholic—also contributed to the calamity, but the wretched state of the Mailers' marriage and his "Napoleonic" ambition were the chief causes. There were other factors—alcohol, drugs, and the dissolution of friendships—but these were effects as much as causes. Chance also played a part, and had the last featuring blow at the event his friends called "The Trouble."

Gore Vidal's review of *Advertisements for Myself*, which appeared earlier that year, focused on Mailer's burgeoning ambition. Writing in *The Nation*, Vidal discussed in a collegial way Mailer's achievements as a writer—he especially admired *Barbary Shore*—and praised his "honorable" efforts to vex the "Great Golfer," Eisenhower. He called Mailer "a Bolingbroke, a born usurper. He will raise an army anywhere, live off the country as best he can, helped by a devoted underground, even assisted at brief moments by rival claimants like myself." Vidal had some criticisms, of course. Pointing to the barrier erected by Flaubert between his private woes and public face, he suggested that Mailer needed such a wall; ~~he says that~~ writers "create not arguments but worlds," and ~~that Mailer was~~ "a born cocktail-party orator" whose prose sometimes

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His most "characteristic quality," Mailer said, was "the remote and private air of a man who has traversed some lonely terrain of experience, of loss and gain, of nearness to death." It was Kennedy's boldness that most attracted him.

The Mailers again leased the house on Miller Hill Road for the summer of 1960, where he planned to work on the Kennedy piece. On June 1, they drove to Provincetown with Danielle, Betsy, and the two poodles. Zsa Zsa got pregnant easily and Mailer, always dubious about any form of birth control, was not interested in having her spayed. Over more than a dozen years, she and Tibo produced thirty-four puppies. He enjoyed observing them and found much to ponder in Zsa Zsa's habit of nipping at Tibo's genitals, forcing him to sit until she regained her composure. In later years, he loved to tell what he called his "veterinarian story." One winter day in Connecticut when it was snowing, Tibo and Zsa Zsa were outside, and he watched them as they engaged in the procreative act. He saw that they had seized up. Tibo couldn't withdraw, and Adele was afraid they would freeze. With some difficulty, Mailer lifted up both dogs and carried them indoors where they were still "unable to disconnect," as he put it. After a few futile efforts to separate them, he touched Zsa Zsa gently on her bunghole and, open sesame, they came unglued. He told the story with pleasure, and it always drew a big laugh. His jokes and stories were inveterately carnal, as was the store of similes and tropes he employed in table talk.

He continued working on his play and followed Kennedy's campaign. Baldwin came for a visit, and they drank regularly at The Old Colony, and also at the Atlantic House. Bill Walker and Lester Blackiston, two writers from Washington, D.C., were part of the group, as was Bill Ward, the editor of the *Provincetown Annual*, where Mailer had just published a short essay on Picasso. Seymour Krim, a Beat fellow traveler and scaled-down version of Mailer, came to Provincetown to see the writer that he so admired. Mailer remembered the summers of the early 1960s as "wild, absolutely wild. There were fights. It was an absolutely extraordinary period." Bikers would come roaring into town on weekends, and there were parties on the beach. "At least ten times a summer," he said, "you'd see the sun come up over the flats. The town had a sometimes rich and sometimes sinister sense of impermanence to it, too." Liaisons started up and marriages broke down. Mailer's own was on the brink.

next afternoon he was cordial during his interview with two young women from *Mademoiselle*. Most of their discussion was given over to the issues raised in "The White Negro" and "Superman." Mailer said Kennedy was a hipster, and that he was as well, but a "terribly philosophical" one. He wasn't about to recommend hipsterism to everyone, he said. "I just ask that the hipster be considered at least as interesting and serious as a young congressman." Mailer admitted to still taking an occasional toke, but found that it was affecting his short-term memory. When the discussion turned to writers, he praised Burroughs. "I think he's going to last a long time after me because he's more intense. He's got a quality I don't have. I mean, I write sentences that embrace people. But he writes sentences that stab people and you never forget the man who stabs you." Indeed.

Mailer was tired after spending the night in jail, but nevertheless spent the evening drinking with his ^{previous} Provincetown friends, Lester Blackiston and Bill Ward, at the Cedar Tavern in the Village. He got to bed at six A.M. (We know the specifics of his life for the next three weeks because of a rough diary he kept from November 15 through December 8.) The next afternoon he had a mayoral planning meeting at Downey's Steakhouse in Manhattan with some friends, including Seymour Krim, who along with Allen Ginsberg and Noel Parmentel Jr. (credited with coming up with the famous line about Nixon, "Would you buy a used car from this man?"), were named informal press secretaries for the campaign. He returned to 94th Street for a meeting with Doc Humes and the Citizens' Emergency Committee.

The following day, November 17, Mailer took the train to Providence to give a reading at Brown University. According to an account by Brown student reporter Richard Holbrooke, he began his presentation announcing, "I come to bring you the existentialist word" (five years later, Mailer said that at the time, "I thought I had God's message"). Another reporter, Ellen Shaffer, wrote: "The audiences were at once alienated by this brusque man, and having lost his audience, Mailer never regained it." He read from his work, and "his voice swelled with each obscenity, and he made lewd gestures to aid his re-enactment of the scene." A few members of the audience walked out; others applauded. She concluded: "Norman Mailer is an egocentric, malcontent genius, who has courageously, indignantly come to blows with the world around him." Holbrooke ends his report with Mailer in quiet dia-

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logue about various writers after the reading. "Fitzgerald," Mailer said, "pissed away his talent," and Farrell is "as great as Beckett." Mailer's notes sketch the rest of the evening: "Drinks at Ginger Chivvies (?), Freddy candy (?) man and punch he caught for me, going outside—Chinnie Thibault looking for WPRO, splitting with him and Reis, car-ride out for girl, no-find, eating in a spade joint, near rumble, split-out onto street, back to hotel, chinfest with Reis, sleep."

The next day he met his sister at his apartment. They had a fight about the preparations for the thirtieth birthday party he was giving Roger Donoghue on November 19. Mailer planned to make an informal statement at the party that he was running for mayor; a formal announcement would be made a few days later at a press conference. The Donoghues came by for drinks in the late afternoon, and then they all went to the Stork Club for more. After dinner, he went home and took Tibo for a walk, and the dog ran away. Chasing him, Mailer got into a fight with a "prep school type." He went to bed in the early morning hours.

In the morning, he was "ego-dampened by fatigue." Mickey Knox and Doc Humes's wife, Anna Lou, came by for campaign assignments. After they left, he had an argument with Adele. Then he got on the telephone to invite last-minute guests. George Plimpton, who was helping him, later said that Mailer called him several times that day. His idea, Plimpton said, was that "he was truly suited to represent the disenfranchised of the city . . . and if he could convince this marginal if large group that he had solid connections with the 'power structure' of New York City, he'd get their support in his quest for the mayoralty." Dutifully, all afternoon, Plimpton made calls to various dignitaries, including the fire commissioner, police commissioner, David Rockefeller of Chase Manhattan Bank, and Sadruddin Aga Khan, the publisher of *The Paris Review*. But the only society representative Plimpton convinced to attend was Peter Duchin, the bandleader.

A heavy load of booze was delivered in the late afternoon and Adele, with the help of their maid, Nettie Biddle, was busy preparing food. C. Wright Mills, the sociologist, came early, as did various street people Mailer had invited. There were many crashers. The party was roaring by ten P.M. Plimpton remembered seeing a man wrapped in bandages and was told he was a victim of police brutality. Tony Franciosa, a film star, was at the party. Mailer knew him through his old friend Shelley

they immediately left for 94th Street to get Betsy, who was alone in the apartment with her father. Fan was notified and she took a cab, leaving Barney home with Danielle, who was visiting for the weekend. Shortly after they all arrived, an ambulance took Adele to University Hospital on 20th Street and Eighth Avenue, where she was admitted at eight A.M. Nettie rode with her.

Doc Humes said that when he saw Mailer in the apartment after the stabbing, he was in a "zombielike" state. "I don't think he was fully aware of having stabbed her," he said. But while Mailer's diary says nothing about a knife or a wound, he later recognized what he had done. Humes had convinced Adele to tell the police and doctors that she had fallen on broken glass, and that was the cause of the wounds to her back and abdomen. That was her first explanation, but later she told the truth: "He didn't say anything. He just looked at me. He didn't say a word. He stabbed me."

Barbara knew a psychiatrist, Dr. Emmanuel Ghent, and had called him before she left for Humes's apartment on 94th Street. She asked him to go to her brother's apartment and examine him. Mailer was awakened by Ghent ringing his bell, but refused to let him in. When Fan and the Alsons arrived, Ghent told them what had happened and offered to see Mailer later. At some point, he told Barbara that Fan reminded him of "a Mafia mother." Before she left for the hospital, Barbara called her brother and told him the situation. He had roused himself and was gone by the time Fan arrived to pick up Betsy, who was then fourteen months old.

Larry Mailer and the Alsons arrived at the hospital at about the same time. They found the surgeon attending Adele, Dr. Macklin, and according to Alson, Mailer began talking with him, carefully describing the nature of the incision. The doctor listened patiently and then left, telling them that the operation would take an hour. Mailer was able to get a glimpse of Adele and her sister Joan through a window. He and the Alsons were sent to a lower floor to wait. Mailer's diary: "Descent into Hell on elevator." They were all exhausted and distraught. "Oh, God," Barbara recalled, "that was a terrible time." She told her brother that he had to recognize that he had "flipped," which angered him. For four hours, they waited in silence. Dr. Macklin finally came down in the early afternoon to say that she would make it. Dr. Rosenberg was also there and had a brief opportunity to observe Mailer, as he later testified.

the penknife. "Reluctantly," Mailer agreed, but after Knox gave him the letter Mailer changed his mind and wanted the knife back "for personal reasons." Reluctantly, Knox relinquished it.

From there, Mailer left Knox to see Dr. Ghent and had a conversation with him. He then kept a two p.m. appointment with Mike Wallace to tape an interview for WNTA-TV. He told Wallace that he intended to run for mayor on the Existentialist Ticket. He also said that disarming young gang members was probably impossible. "The knife to a juvenile delinquent is very meaningful," he said. "You see, it's his sword—his manhood." Mailer met Podhoretz for dinner and asked him to do everything possible to keep him from being sent to a mental institution. Then they went to the hospital, where he planned to be arrested. A nurse told them to wait for five minutes, and then three detectives arrested him and took the knife. Detective Francis J. Burns told him that his wife had admitted he had stabbed her. Mailer denied it. Adele also said that she did not wish to see him. Mailer was handcuffed and taken to the West 100th Street police station. Podhoretz was allowed to go with him, and said the police were polite. The lawyer John Cox arrived and, in his presence, Mailer was photographed and booked.

Early the next morning, he was taken to felony court on Centre Street in lower Manhattan. Reporters were waiting. All Mailer said was that he loved his wife. He was again photographed, and then put in a lineup with other detainees. At the hearing a report from Dr. Rosenberg was read by Assistant District Attorney William Reilly: "In my opinion Norman Mailer is having an acute paranoid breakdown with delusional thinking and is both homicidal and suicidal. His admission to a hospital is urgently advised." According to wire service reports, Mailer challenged the report as "gratuitous and presumptuous." The *Times* carried the rest of his statement: "Naturally I have been a little upset but I have never been out of my mental faculties. I only saw Dr. Rosenberg for thirty seconds or a minute. It is important to me not to be sent to a mental hospital because my work in the future will be considered that of a disordered mind. My pride is that I can explore areas of experience that other men are afraid of. I insist that I am sane." Magistrate Rueben Levy told Mailer, "Your recent history indicates that you cannot distinguish fiction from reality," and committed him to Bellevue Hospital for observation.

Levy's judgment was wise. Mailer was incensed and intoxicated

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(Mailer told the police,
"I refuse to answer
your questions.")

and so I moved out." He moved into his sister's apartment in the Village, but spent much of his time at Jeanne's.

If Adele lacked self-confidence, Jeanne Louise Campbell was brimming with it. On one side, she was the daughter of Ian Campbell, the 11th Duke of Argyll and head of the Clan Campbell, one of the great families in Scotland. On the other, she was the daughter of Janet Gladys Aitken, whose father, William "Max" Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook, was one of the most powerful press barons in England. A confidant of both Winston Churchill and President Franklin Roosevelt, he headed the British delegation that met with Joseph Stalin after the German invasion of Russia. Beaverbrook's daughter and son-in-law were divorced in 1934, but Beaverbrook had taken over the job of raising Jeanne Louise several years earlier. She was named after Jeanne Marie, Lady Malcolm, the illegitimate daughter of American actress Lily Langtry and Prince Louis of Battenberg, and Princess Louise, the sixth child of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Through Jeanne's family connections, and her own moxie, she became acquainted with many of the most influential and accomplished people in Great Britain. Randolph Churchill, son of Winston, was a particular friend.

In the late 1950s, she had a fairly lengthy affair with a man thirty years her senior, Henry Luce, the founder of the Time-Life empire, who met her at La Capponcina, Beaverbrook's villa on the French Riviera. He offered her a job at *Time*; she accepted and came to New York in 1956. Luce thought of marrying the statuesque young woman with a wild mass of curly hair, but his wife, the politician and diplomat Clare Boothe Luce, convinced him otherwise. Campbell had left *Time* and was working for one of her grandfather's papers, the *London Evening Standard*, when she met Mailer at Vidal's party. Vidal found her to be "very attractive, very bright," and Mailer thought he had "some idea of possibly having some sort of liaison with her." When Vidal asked Campbell what had attracted her to Mailer, she said, "I had never gone to bed with a Jew before." Mailer had never slept with the daughter of a duke before, and was similarly curious. Besides the personal attraction he felt, he thought that Lady Jeanne's social ties and acumen could be a great literary resource. That she was leaving the man whose magazines had attacked and ridiculed him for the past decade made her irresistible. He learned that Luce "suffered a bit" when he heard of Jeanne's affair. "I loved the idea," he said.

Jeanne's voice was the first thing that Mailer noticed. "She had this incredibly beautiful voice and was capable of putting on numerous airs, a voice which was as lovely as Mozart. It had an absolute range. If she'd been able to move as well as she spoke, she would have been a great actress." She was thirty-one when they met, he recalled,

but she looked a little older, maybe 35. And she was slightly . . . almost plump. And she had fiery eyes, these pale green eyes, full of spite and vigor and venom and wit. How to put it? They had their power. Combative, and I was just in the mood for that. She was wearing white pearls and I thought, "She's a very wealthy woman from Westchester." She was wearing a gray outfit with white pearls, and gloves, perhaps. I didn't know it was Lady Jeanne—all I knew was here's this dame who's attractive to me because of some sort of special social—I don't know—upper class about it. Having been with Adele for years, I was in the mood for a woman who was in the upper class.

She was poised, he said, and "very proud to be Lady Jeanne, but never said a word about it." Their dissimilar backgrounds added to their initial attraction, as Mailer recalled: "There I am, from a middle class Jewish family, and I'm in sort of an indefinable position. Because I'm a well-known author, in a certain sense I'm part of the establishment. But I'm a criminal, a felon on parole. There she is, Lady Jeanne, her father is a duke." His situation made him think of how Jones and Stryon "would be eating their fucking hearts out" to be in his position. He was having great fun, he said, but more important, "I was learning about things. The novelist in me was absolutely on fire. I loved it." The two people who had shaped his thinking the most, he said, were Jean Malaquais (Lindner was second) and Jeanne Campbell, the former on intellectual matters and the latter on social ones. Jeanne's influence on *An American Dream* was especially pronounced, although she got no pleasure from being the model for the protagonist's wife, Deborah Caughlin Mangaravidi Kelly. She called the novel "the hate book of all time." Deborah is murdered in chapter one.

Kate Mailer adds that her parents were drawn to each other not only because of his fascination with Jeanne's background, but also by "her reaction to her background and her refusal to be done down by

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it, or to be hemmed in by it. A reaction which made her curious about all people in life, everyone. The most ordinary of people could capture her imagination and interest, and this was something that I think he was drawn to, as he could not at first understand it. "How could you find that person interesting at all," he told me he would ask her. "But yes, they are fascinating," she would answer, "if you only probe a little below the surface." He was also charmed by her across-the-board, unflagging gusto for life, and pleased that she shared two of his own obsessions: "politics and spies."

In May 1961 he wrote to Knox to say the affair was blossoming: "The Lady and I are making the scene and it is not at all uninteresting." He was still writing poems and had begun sending them for consideration at a dozen different magazines. He also continued his correspondence with his Bellevue friends, enclosing books, cigarettes, and money. "Some of the best people I've come across since the Army were in Bellevue," he wrote to Don Carpenter, a West Coast novelist with whom he frequently corresponded. "It was just simply that for the last six months my little old navigator didn't know whether to get set for a year or less above ground or below ground and I suppose the psychotic sensation is a little like trying to hit a baseball when you are standing on a turntable." When his navigator got its bearings, it sanctioned, we might even say *urged*, a liaison with Jeanne. Always unable to live alone for long, Mailer was hungry for something beyond one-night stands, and Jeanne seemed perfect. It was a fiery, intense affair. Jeanne said of their marriage: "We had both been extremists who knew no limits; and such an alliance takes you a breath from heaven and a sob from hell." Jeanne was more than simply another rung on the ladder out of the pit of depression and nascent alcoholism. She was both the ladder and the prize at the top; she was his new mate. In June, she accompanied him to Provincetown, where they spent a few days in a dune shack, and then to Mexico, where she first met Susan. It was there that they got the news that Hemingway had committed suicide in Ketchum, Idaho, on July 2, 1961.

OFTEN MENTIONED AS Hemingway's successor, a role he had openly sought, Mailer expected to be contacted for a statement after Papa blew his brains out with a double-barreled shotgun. When he read the state-

Some take the madness and stop it with discipline. Madness is locked beneath. It goes into tissues, is swallowed by the cells. The cells go mad. Cancer is their flag. Cancer is the growth of madness denied. In that corpse I saw, madness went down to the blood—leucocytes gorged the liver, the spleen, the enlarged heart and violet-black lungs, dug into the intestines, germinated stench.

The hypothesis that cancer and schizophrenia were mutually exclusive cohered here, and Mailer's intuition, gained on patrols in Luzon, that smell is the primal sense was further confirmed.

He explored his hunch in *An Dreamy Dream* and further elaborated it in later work, especially his 1984 mystery novel, *Tough Guys Don't Dance*. He also spelled it out in a one-page, handwritten note, probably written in late 1963. Titled "Cancer," it begins by hypothesizing that cancer results from "impotent emotion," which "cannot find the situation for its life." An ugly woman who waits for a handsome lover is a slave to this emotion, as is a poor young man who wishes ill on his wealthy relatives but sees them continue to prosper. So too is "any over-civilized person who carries murder within" but represses it. Without relief, the emotion is "visited upon the cells" of the body, and "when such inner tension becomes acute, the cells live at the edge of rebellion—they may dare to secede from the body." This Mailer calls a "psychosis of the cells" in his "Cancer" note; this is the madness Rojack saw in the organs of the old man. "When the weight of impossible desire becomes intolerable, either the mind or the body must divide itself from the whole." His intuition is that certain mental states can have a discernible effect on whether one gets or doesn't get cancer, or schizophrenia. Twenty years later, in 1981, neurobiologists conclusively established the hardwired link between the body's immune system and the central nervous system. That mind affects body as much as the reverse was an article of faith for Mailer.

After leaving Arkansas, the couple drove to Las Vegas via the baked landscape of the high plains desert. Mailer thought about beginning the new novel with a description of the autopsy, but used it in the final chapter of *An American Dream*, which covers Rojack's drive on the same route to Las Vegas. Encountering extraordinary bodily corruption by way of his nostrils opened new reaches in his imagination, an experience no doubt heightened by his struggle, all through 1963 and early

prided himself on his balance, and later was able to walk the catenary of a thick hawser (aided by a balance pole) on the decks of his various homes in Provincetown and his Brooklyn apartment. When he awoke in the morning in San Francisco, he knew, as he later recalled, that he would feel a compulsion to walk on narrow ledges. He drew on these daily tests of balance for his description of Rojack's harrowing minutes on the parapet of a penthouse balcony atop the Waldorf Towers.

After two weeks they got back on the road, driving to Arkansas, and then on to Columbus, Georgia, where they visited for two days with Beverly's mother and stepfather, Brownie. In a letter to Fig, Mailer described him as "an ex-Southern master-sergeant, lick lips, blue lightning farter—one of the boys. He's really like so many guys we used to know—the kind that you'd like if you went out on a drunk with him and would dislike if he picked your ass to chew." (They also met Beverly's half-brother, Charlie Brown, who two years later helped Mailer and Provincetown friend Eldred Mowery assemble a model, "Vertical City," out of thousands of Lego blocks.) After a quick stop in Atlanta to meet Beverly's stepmother, "a real crazy Southern-Georgia rich town lady," they returned to New York in late August. With no trace of irony, he told Fig, "It was so nice not to have worries for six weeks."

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EXACTLY WHEN HE signed off on the arrangements for the publication of *An American Dream* is uncertain. Agent Scott Meredith was involved in lengthy discussions with Cy Rembar and various publishers while he and Beverly were away. By mid-September the deal was done. Mailer had left much of the bargaining to Meredith, but personally convinced Walter Minton to release him from his Putnam's contract for one book. Mailer also pitched the idea of writing the novel as a serial to *Esquire* editor Harold Hayes, who recalled that there was "great interest in the suicidal nature" of Mailer's project. As much of an editorial gambler as Felker (who had moved to the *New York Herald Tribune*), Hayes offered a payment of \$20,000. Shortly before or after this, in a forty-eight-hour wheeling-and-dealing session that Mailer said "was much like Hollywood," Meredith sold the hard and soft cover rights to Dial and its paperback subsidiary Dell for what Mailer called "a fantastic advance royalty" of \$125,000. "It seems," he wrote to Adeline Naiman,

which reminded him of ~~that~~ of a medieval Italian warlord, a member of the *condottieri*, with its "hard, greedy, exceptionally intelligent eyes whose cynicism is spiked by a fierce pride, big fleshy (and acquisitive) nose, thin curved mouth." Johnson won the election decisively and got Mailer's vote.

Mailer delivered his revisions of *An American Dream* just before Christmas. Then he began building "a city of the future" out of Lego blocks with Beverly's half-brother, Charlie Brown, and Eldred Mowery. When completed, it would be a scale model of a fantastical half-mile-high city of fifteen thousand apartments housing sixty thousand people. Mailer was proud of it. In January, "Cities Higher than Mountains" appeared in the *Sunday Times* accompanied by a photo of the assemblage, now called "Vertical City." The project gave him a much needed break from writing. He enjoyed planning Vertical City (which he based on his memory of Mont St. Michel), but given his aversion to plastic, pressing together ten-thousand-plus Legos made him "feel flat and dead." The construction—seven feet by five feet by three feet—stood in a corner of Mailer's Brooklyn apartment for the next forty years. "It was a bitch to dust," Norris often said. It finally began to crumble as the glue they had applied disintegrated. Members of the family and friends kept a few pieces as souvenirs of the structure, a color photo of which graced the cover of his 1966 collection, *Cannibals and Christians*.

MAILER WAS ASKED to help William Burroughs and his publisher, Barney Rosset of Grove Press, who were being prosecuted for obscenity in Boston. On January 12, 1965, along with Allen Ginsberg and poet John Ciardi, he testified to the merits of *Naked Lunch*, specifically about Burroughs's language: "He catches the beauty and, at the same time, the viciousness and the meanness and the excitement, of ordinary talk—the talk of criminals, of soldiers, athletes, junkies. There is a kind of speech, gutter talk, that often has a fine, incisive, dramatic line to it; and Burroughs captures the speech like no other American writer I know." The prosecution won the case, but it was reversed by the Massachusetts Supreme Court, and as Mailer said later, the decision "changed the literary history of America." The banning of books for obscenity in the United States was drawing to an end. Looking back on the decision, Mailer was somewhat nostalgic "for the days of oppression, because in those

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Norman Mailer, professional writer and amateur boxer, climbed in the ring to congratulate José Torres, professional boxer and amateur writer, a moment after he defeated Willie Pastrano for the light heavyweight championship of the world at Madison Square Garden, March 30, 1965. Mailer was as jubilant as Torres. He would soon trade writing lessons for boxing instruction from Torres, the first Latin American to win this championship, and a heroic figure among Puerto Ricans. When financing for the fight seemed in doubt, Mailer had offered to lend him money to guarantee the fight, a considerable sum, but ultimately the original backers came through. The gesture endeared him to Torres. After the bout, there was a victory party at 142 Columbia Heights. Harry G. Mailer's Bellevue friend, was the bartender for the large crowd, which included Gay Talese and Pete Hamill—both good friends of Torres's—and also Truman Capote and James Baldwin. Barney was there—but not Fan—and enjoyed himself thoroughly as he always did at his son's parties. Torres, in a tuxedo, arrived late with his wife, Ramona, and Mailer “greeted the new champ in the lambency of a triumphant party, and they embraced like two new-born orphans,” as another writer present, Brock Brower, recalled. A day later, Mailer flew to Alaska for his five-day visit.

Mailer received enthusiastic applause for his off-the-cuff speech to a joint session of the Alaska legislature in Juneau. Then he flew to Anchorage, where he appeared on local television with Senator Gravel and the two professors who hosted his visit, Edmund Skellings and Donald Kaufmann. At a reception in a downtown hotel, locals came to meet Mailer. As Kaufmann recalled, they glared at Mailer and said things like “Where's that tough guy?” and “Where's that wife-knifer?” At one

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them reprinted from *Presidential Papers*), and fifty-four poems. The only fictional pieces he could find to include were two previously published short stories.

He was however working on a piece of fiction begun in 1962, perhaps earlier, and then set aside. Known initially as "The Fisher Novel," and then "The Book of the First-Born," it was completely separate from the long-delayed big novel, and like Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, begins with the protagonist Stephen Merrill in utero. Over the next decade, he would occasionally read "First-Born" aloud to friends and family, who found its half-stately, half-mock-heroic descriptions of Merrill's earliest days—his breach birth delivery ("the contractions of birth came with the panic of convicts who discovered their dynamite is not sufficient to blow the doors"), his circumcision ("an animal wounded wantonly"), and his breast feeding ("the infant's mouth flew like a hawk to the nipple")—to be riveting. Barbara remembered her brother reading it to her in Provincetown during the summer of 1963; Carol Stevens, recalled him reading it to her in the early 1970s. Mailer signed a contract with Walter Minton for the novel and received an advance, but never got beyond eighty pages.

Merrill is born on Mailer's natal day. His head is wrenched by the forceps of Dr. Blucher (much as Tristram Shandy's nose is injured by those of Dr. Slop), although it recovers its shape nicely. He has a big head and will eventually wear a size 7 3/8 hat (Mailer's size). Merrill also has Mailer's large red ears. His parents, Jenny (née Fisher) and Archibald "Archie" Merrill (born Mirilovicz), are Jews whose families emigrated to the United States from Lithuania, Archie's via South Africa. Their portraits instantly call to mind Fan and Barney. Jenny "a woman with the courage of a lioness and the innocence in 1923 of a nineteenth century heroine," goes into the hospital with little knowledge of the difficulties of childbirth. She resembled ~~those healthy woman with large pleasant features one sees in photographs put out by the offices of propaganda for Soviet womanhood, strong, direct, free of perversion and the imagination for it.~~

Archie has Barney's barrel chest, spats, and silver-rimmed eyeglasses; they both look a bit like F. Scott Fitzgerald. ~~Except that Archie's mouth was narrower, his nose was shorter, he looked even more like a Goy than Scott (which is one of the reasons—let us not make Jenny too much of a heroine—that she had been drawn to him) and indeed Archie's speech~~

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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. 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 further revising. His 1967 Alaska novel, *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, is the same length as *An American 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.

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 typing *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 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."

After Mailer stayed with the Trillings in England, Diana Trilling had become his best female friend, vying with Lillian Hellman. 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

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

e The ball was held on the same day that preparations for the play began. ~~It was to 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 thirteen characters and eighty-eight 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. 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's comically unprincipled son-in-law. Mailer thought the play as staged could not be immediately understood, and was worried, therefore, about the critics.

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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

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, ^{that} 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 describing a novel about the ~~whole~~ "Jewish experience." According to Meredith, Mailer was going to follow a Jewish family like the Mailer family from ancient times to the future. 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 (*Why Are*

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 graciousness" that writing a good poem was much more difficult.

Despite the unusual, even eccentric, nature of Mailer's point of view in the book, its assumptions and purposes are 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 as narrators. A fictional character, one who is changing before our eyes, is 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 *Armies of the Night*, 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

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 one reviewer. He lacked the narrative sophistication to write his memoir as Mailer wished him to, but this is not surprising. He was a critic, not a novelist, and it seems somewhat unreasonable to have asked him to write his book according to the specifications of an accomplished novelist who has discovered after twenty years of assiduous effort an innovative way to present himself in nonfiction. But Mailer's other major criticism is quite fair, and devastating. Podhoretz displays a fatal weakness in the book: he flatters the Family instead of revealing the byzantine contours of its envious and brilliant self-aggrandizements. Mailer lists thirty-three Family members and notes that references to each are "invariably as attractive as the sort of remark one makes when giving a reference to a Foundation for a friend." His portraits are "full of sugar"; he depicts "an Establishment composed of the kindest folk: into their ranks enters an ambitious Provincial—what a novel!" Podhoretz, 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." Perhaps it was, but the review cast invaluable light on the involuted perspective he used to depict himself in *Armies*.

Eventually Podhoretz recovered from Mailer's review, and went on to become a major figure in the neoconservative movement. 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

abandoned his earlier radical-liberal politics,

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STOCK MARKET LOSSES plus a "staggering" income tax bill on the horizon led him to consider a proposal from Willie Morris to write an essay on the women's liberation movement. He had hoped to begin another "big book"—the Egyptian novel, as it came to be called—but had to work his way out of his financial hole first. Earlier, in the summer of 1970, he received a call from *Time* editor Henry Grunwald as Mailer recalled in his essay, "The Prisoner of Sex," (republished unchanged as a book five months later). The magazine *an* interview. Mailer was interested because a cover story might help him find a distributor for *Maidstone*, but he demurred largely because the idea of his five children "cavorting for *Time*'s still camera did not make him happy." In addition, Stevens, to whom he dedicated *The Prisoner of Sex*, was present and she was "too proper to be photographed, too proud to be passed over." Grunwald said he was not proposing a cover story; rather, he wanted Mailer's opinions on the women's liberation movement, which was the burning topic of the day. Grunwald told him that he was the movement's "major ideological opposition." This announcement surprised and tempted Mailer: "To be the center of any situation was, he sometimes thought, the real marrow of his bone—better to expire as a devil in the fire than an angel in the wings." His strong suit was to "mobilize on the instant" with sharp remarks about "the ladies of the Liberation." But, finally, he said no: "Only a fool would throw serious remarks into the hopper at *Time*." Pithy statements for magazine readers came best from wits like Gore Vidal, he said.

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Mailer had learned again about *Time*'s proclivity for unfairly condensing one's statements most recently at a press conference in Venice. Asked by reporters to comment on the charge that his depiction of a brothel for female customers in *Maidstone* contributed to the exploitation of women, he went on for five minutes in a fairly complex fashion to discuss women's liberation. *Time* boiled his commentary down to this: "Exploitation of women? 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 it 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.

Tila

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-Barr's novel *The Last of the Just* (especially the first thirty pages), and Will Durant's chapter on ancient Egypt in *The Story of Civilization*. In early 1972, he would begin "the Egyptian novel," and continue work on it for the next ten years, breaking away only when unable to resist some contemporary phenomenon. He would be forty-eight in January 1971, and was ready to make the big push *to begin*.

After the children left, Mailer intended to get to work, but two public depictions of him, one comic and one not, 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. Given his generally *sometimes raspy*, flirtatious relationship with Greer, it seems to have been almost inevitable that they would clash. Mailer, decked out in a gorilla suit, holds a ~~reduced~~ miniature 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 would spend two months getting ready to do the piece and a lot of time in Cuba and then I would work at writing the piece for another few months and maybe it would be the best thing I'd ever done and then *Esquire* would print a picture of Fidel Castro on the cover

with Richard Nixon's asshole installed on his forehead, And the kid said, "Do you really think *Esquire* would do that?" And I said, "Don't you?"

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

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

Torres's 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 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 *hard*, but hard." Mailer wrote to his Uncle Louis and Aunt Moos that he had "boxed three moderately confident

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

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

Another prompting, a bit more than a nudge, came from a new critical study by Richard Poirier, who had already given Mailer's work high praise in an essay in his collection *The Performing Self*. Mailer had liked it well enough to write to Poirier's publisher in April 1971 to say he was "on his way to becoming America's first authoritative critic in many a year." By then, Poirier was writing critical study of Mailer, and shortly afterward sent him the manuscript for his response, which Mailer pro-

hand, finger jabbing chests or tits or air, sterling silver Brillo pad hair bobbing up and down to the rhythm of the crowd he had drawn, pink face-a-pulsing, vibrating jigsaw puzzle impossible to assemble without first killing the man, making him ~~quite~~ and still." At midnight, Jimmy Breslin introduced Mailer as "one of the half dozen original thinkers of this century."

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

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

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

quiet

would say, 'But don't you feel virtuous having looked the devil in the eye?' " He was also testing himself, Danielle said.

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

In addition to the physical challenges, there were psychological ones, Michael Mailer recalled.

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

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

Earlier in the year, when Carol Stevens told him that she was uneasy about their relationship, he bought her a Tiffany wide gold band and gave it to her under a full moon. They considered themselves to be married, although he was not yet ready to start divorce proceedings against Beverly. He knew they would be difficult. Carol accompanied him to accept the MacDowell Medal at the writers colony of the same name in Peterborough, New Hampshire. Suzanne Nye ~~traveled with them~~ and Carol began to suspect that she was more than an assistant. On the drive back to Maine, she confronted him. He admitted the affair. "As

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traveling separately,
also came,

his fashion, to the Egyptian novel, which he referred to as a forgiving wife, a lady always ready to welcome him home from the fleshpots of other genres.

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

The Gwaltneys threw a party for him, attended by Fig's colleagues and friends at Arkansas Tech. One of the people he met was a former student of Fig's, a stunning redheaded schoolteacher named Barbara (Née Davis) Norris. When she learned Mailer would be visiting, she got herself invited to the party so she could get her copy of *Marilyn* signed. Divorced and the mother of a young boy, she was a tall drink of water, five foot ten. That day she wore platform shoes that made her an inch or two over six feet. She said, "How are you, Mr. Mailer," and shook his hand. He turned and walked out of the room. "The *last* thing I had on my mind was romance," she wrote years later in her memoir, although she changed her mind later that night. Mailer had a favorite French expression, force majeure. Norris Church, as she would soon sign her name, was such a force for him, and would be his last great love. It was the same with her.

She was about to leave the party when he returned. She remembered "the intensity of his blue eyes, and his charisma" (which she compared to those of Bill Clinton, a former lover), and the way he "radiated energy like a little steam heater. He couldn't sit still." When he discovered that they had the same birthday, born one minute (and 26 years) apart, he got quite excited. She did as well, being as skeptical as he was about coincidences being accidental. At the dinner party, Mailer told her how beautiful she was, something he would repeat to her often in their

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cooked for him. He then fell asleep in the hammock under the skylight until mid-afternoon. It was, in effect, Norris's coming out party in New York, and she made several friendships that lasted for years.

AT THE END of the year, Herbert Mitgang profiled Mailer for *The New York Times*. Mailer told him that he was writing a multipart novel about Egypt as he conceived it might have been three millennia earlier, and his aspiration in writing it was "to go beyond one's reach." But he had to take on other work fairly regularly, he said. "You have to keep the bread coming in." In December alone, three of his smaller pieces were published: an interview with one of Nixon's top aides, John Ehrlichman, who was serving a prison term for his complicity in the Watergate cover-up; a preface to the memoir of Hemingway's son Gregory; and a screenplay, "Trial of the Warlock," based on Joris-Karl Huysmans's 1891 novel *Là-Bas*. Mailer's editor at Little, Brown was also interviewed for the Mitgang piece, reported that Mailer was working "systematically" on the novel and had written more than 175,000 words.

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

Robert Gorham Davis, Mailer's Harvard instructor, read the Mitgang piece and wrote to ask if it were true that he was writing about the 19th Dynasty and the obscure pharaoh Ramses IX. Yes, Mailer replied; he had picked this pharaoh because of "the total inventive freedom" it provided. But as Mailer's research continued, he got caught up in the life of another pharaoh, Ramses II, the most powerful and longest ruling (sixty-seven years) of all pharaohs, and his astounding victory over the Hittites at the Battle of Kadesh, fought in 1274 B.C. on the banks

years," he said. Finally, his old mentor began to irritate him and he said: "You are like a monkey who's lost his arms and lost his legs and clings to the top branch with his teeth. You're so afraid that if you fall into the pit below, you might have to accept one spooky or divine notion of existence." Malquais' mind was fully formed and impermeable to new ideas, Mailer believed. They remained friends, but engaged in fewer deep discussions.

Abbott told Mailer that Israel was the puppet of the capitalist democracies. Mailer replied that he was "no automatic Zionist hardon," a partisan who had the same question for all propositions: "Is this good for Israel?" Abbott also kept reminding Mailer that he didn't understand what a long-term convict's experience was like, and Mailer came back strong.

You the fuck don't know what it is to be a Jew. You don't know what it is to have six million of your people killed when there are only twelve million of them on earth. You don't know the profound and fundamental stunting of existence that got into the blood cells of every Jew after Hitler had done his work. It's easy for you, it's contemptuous, you say "There's Israel doing the lackey's work for the U.S. against the bold, brave Arab nations"—who, as you know full well, have the most hideous prisons in the history of civilized existence. Yet you have your kneejerk reflexes, and one of them is up the Arabs down the Israelis.

Mailer's stance on his Jewish identity throughout this remarkable letter is similar to Bellow's, who gave a talk in 1988 about his identity as a writer, a nonobservant Jew, and an American. Like Mailer, Bellow found it neither possible nor desirable to escape from "the Jewish past—not only its often heroic suffering but also the high significance of the meaning of Jewish history." Watching the 1945 newsreels of army bulldozers pushing piles of bodies into burial pits had given Bellow "a deeply troubling sense of disgrace or human demotion," his version of what Mailer called a "profound and fundamental stunting of existence" when he and Adele had visited Buchenwald.

In later letters to Abbott, Mailer brought up the Jewish experience several times, and encouraged him to read Heinrich Graetz's *History of the Jews*, and the Talmud. Mailer owned the six volumes of the former

THE EXECUTIONER'S SONG was reviewed as widely and as warmly as *The Naked and the Dead* and *The Armies of the Night*. With the exception of negative reviews by Diane Johnson in *The New York Review of Books* and Germaine Greer in *Hollywood Reporter*, all the major reviews were enthusiastic. The book reached number three on the *New York Times* bestseller list and spent longer—twenty-five weeks—on it than any of his other books, excepting *Naked and the Dead*. Mailer maintained the approval of his old admirers and gained the attention of a new audience. He was awarded his second Pulitzer for *Executioner's Song* (which gave him "an emotional boost," Norris recalled), and was a finalist for both the American Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. It has never gone out of print and is probably the Mailer book most often taught in college classes—English, journalism, American studies, and criminology.

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There was disagreement over the relative merits of the book's halves. Partly because of Schiller's recording of the final moments of criminals and celebrities, partly because of the media's disinclination to read about its own avidity for the sensational, and partly because of the force of "Western Voices," "Eastern Voices" was generally less admired. As a character, Schiller failed to impress everyone. One reviewer said, "When Mailer has Schiller thinking of Gilmore's letters to Nicole, 'must be tons of meat and potatoes in those envelopes,' we know Mailer isn't writing about Francis of Assisi." But another reviewer, John Cheever, notes that Schiller "is offered a large sum of money for an exclusive account of the execution [\$125,000 from one of Rupert Murdoch's editors, who called him repeatedly] but he refuses money for the first time in his career and contributes a sense of decency and fitness to the narrative that is shared by the other principals." Christopher Lehmann-Haupt found the book's finest achievement to be "a stunningly candid report on the complex, ambiguous and often-disturbing relationship that increasingly exists among the news, the newsmakers, and the reporters."

Joan Didion's review, in *The New York Times Book Review* stands with Kazin's on *Armies* as one of the finest and most influential appreciations of Mailer's work. She points out that the dominant speakers in "Western Voices" are those of women, and that "Eastern Voices" is largely comprised of stories by men: "Men tend to shoot, get shot, push off, move on. Women pass down stories." She quotes what Bessie Gilmore says after she learns that Gary is under arrest for murder: "I am

getting the message. Now whether these things are true or not, it's the way people in prison tend to think, because they have nothing to divert themselves.

Story

If there is agreement about any aspect of the Abbott business, it is that the Bowery halfway house was one of the worst places imaginable for him to have been sent. It wasn't prison, but it was noisy, filled with parolees, and located in a tough neighborhood. There were rules and regulations to be followed, including daily face-to-face checks. Later, Mailer would testify that Abbott loathed living there. "Instead of unwinding him, it was tightening him up." When someone lifted a pair of his shoes, Abbott called Norris and said he was going to kill the thief. Not much later, his blue ~~pin-striped~~ suit was missing, and when he called Norris, she got "the feeling of lava boiling down inside Jack." As it turned out, the director of the house had put the suit away so it would not be stolen.

One night after Abbott had been in New York for about two weeks, the Mailers had a dinner party for him, inviting four close friends: Jean Malaquais and his daughter, Dominique, Dotson Rader, and Pat Kennedy Lawford. Abbott was uneasy. Rader described him as "the repairman who came to fix the fridge and then was asked to stay for dinner." But Abbott knew Malaquais and agreed with his radical politics, and he had also read some of Rader's books about the anti-Vietnam War movement, so he was able to carry on a conversation. The evening fell apart, however, when Malaquais began criticizing the United States as an imperialist country. "Abbott ratcheted it up a notch," Norris wrote, "calling America a fascist hellhole run by pigs." Mailer was getting nervous, especially after Pat Lawford, the sister of a martyred president, got into it with Abbott. She asked him why, if he hated the country so unreservedly, he didn't leave it. He answered he would like to go to Cuba. That was sufficient, Norris said, to unhinge Mrs. Lawford, who replied, "Cuba! Splendid, I'll buy you a ticket. *One way!*" Then she and Rader left. On the way home, she told him that Abbott had a killer's eyes.

At the end of June, the Mailers went to Provincetown where they were renting a large house in the East End for a month. Abbott was invited for a long weekend. He had his own room on the water, and gazed out for hours. He had never seen the ocean before and didn't know

new scenes drawn from the original interviews and research, material not used in the book. His familiarity with this material was an obvious advantage, and the guild awarded him sole screenplay credit. Wynn accepted the ruling. Mailer, rankled by the rejection of his screenplay by Sergio Leone five years earlier, felt vindicated.

He was also working intermittently on *Strawhead*, his play about Marilyn Monroe. *Ancient Evenings* was still a long way from completion, but first he had to finish work on his new collection, divided into a dozen essays and prefaces (*Pieces*) and twenty interviews (*Pontifications*). His reflections on television, "Of a Small and Modest Malignancy," his comic memoir of *The Harvard Advocate*, "Our Man at Harvard," and his essay on Watergate, "A Harlot High and Low," were the key writings. The interview section included a 1975 interview with Laura Adams on reincarnation and magic. This interview, one of Mailer's most important, contains a long discussion of his belief in magic, something he was exploring in *Ancient Evenings*. The four-hundred-page collection, which he dedicated to his sister, appeared on June 21, 1982, not long after Abbott was sentenced. The timing did not help the book's reception, which was quiet and mixed.

Pieces and Pontifications, Mailer's fifth miscellany, is a product of the 1970s, when he "was much out of step." Besides dropping the third personal person, and shifting focus away from himself ~~his opposed selves~~, he had withdrawn from politics to a great extent after the 1972 election. Lucid put his finger on Mailer's malaise in the decade: he spent his first twenty years as a writer "envisioning and anticipating moments of climactic crisis," in his personal life, in politics and culture, and sometimes all three, overlapping. "But always the crisis was *about* to happen. Always our situation was *before*. The 1970s represented *after*. The counter-culture was over. The war in Vietnam was over." One world was dying and a new one had not yet been born.

He ends his review by noting that *The Executioner's Song* was "the first child" of the new time, the first reimagining. While the film version (broadcast in November 1982) did not enjoy the huge popularity of the book, it was deemed a success by the critics and the television audience, garnering the highest rating for an NBC program in fifteen months. It was nominated for five Emmys, including one for Mailer's adaptation. It won two, one for sound production and one for Tommy Lee Jones

his tale, or holds something back, Meni knows it, and also knows what the others are thinking as well. His mother and great-grandfather share this ability. It is the voice of Menenhetet, however, that we hear most, relayed to us by Meni. As Poirier noted, Mailer had "a felt need to justify in some way the telling of story," and resorted to this awkward provenance. The overlay of voices is strained and confusing—Mailer said later that "the transitions of the narrator's voice were the hardest" challenge he faced—but he was wed from the outset to his nested voices.

Menenhetet is sixty when he tells his stories in the pharaoh's garden, the same age as Mailer when the novel was published. He denied, repeatedly and unconvincingly, that he was writing about himself in any important way. When his sister told him that it was his most autobiographical novel but couldn't decide whether he was Menenhetet or Ramses, "he said with uncustomary modesty, 'More like Ramses IX.'" He did not deny, however, that his protagonist's many careers—charioteer, harem master, high priest, tomb robber, brothel keeper, papyrus merchant, speculator in necropolis sites, wealthy noble, and pharmacist-magus—were of special interest. They were. For example, the research of Menenhetet into bat dung aligns with Mailer's homeopathic explorations in "The Metaphysics of the Belly," his long self-interview from 1962.

In the last three brief chapters we learn the Menenhetet's attempt to gain a fifth life have failed. After his Sekhu was buried in his great-grandson's tomb, after which their Kas proceed into the Duad. They observe with horror the punishments of those with impure hearts, many of which recall the sufferings of lost souls in Dante's *Inferno*—boiling lakes, for example. After his great-grandfather's Ka, unbidden, merges with his, Meni feels hope. He begins to ascend the "ladder of lights" (as described in the *Book of the Dead*) "where one might gaze like Osiris upon the portents of all that is ahead." He receives a message that "purity and goodness were worth less to Osiris than strength" (a restatement of Rojack's belief that "God is not love but courage"), and Meni has an abundance of it, it seems, for he is welcomed into the Boat of Ra. But then he feels a great pain coming, followed by "the scream of the earth exploding." The knowledge comes to him that his destiny is to "enter the power of the word," and to be born again as a storyteller.

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inhabitants must be thirty men and women, all hiding. There could be no other town like it. If you were sensitive to crowds, you might expire in summer from human propinquity. On the other hand, if you were unable to endure loneliness, the vessel of your person could fill with dread during the long winter.

All that remains are some year-rounders, including a clutch of burnt-out cases. One of these is Madden, who drinks alone every night at the bar of a local restaurant, the Widow's Walk. Christopher Ricks compares him to the hero-villains of Jacobean tragedy who have been "in complicity with evil. Like them he has wit and humour and courage, and a little grain of conscience keeps him sour." Distraught but not despairing, he sips bourbon, writes in his notebook, and recalls how twenty years earlier, "held in the grip of an imperative larger than myself," he tried to climb the side of the monument. Near the top, he froze and had to be rescued by the fire department. The effort buoyed his spirit, however, and he slept better afterward. "The importance of the journey must be estimated by my dread of doing it," he concludes. Risk taking is the engine of *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, which Mailer often referred to as an "entertainment."

Locked into what he calls "the dungeon of my massive self-absorption," Madden stumbles through day 24. In the early evening he returns to the Widow's Walk. There, while brooding over his decamped blonde wife, he meets another blonde, Laurel Oakwode, and her escort, a bisexual lawyer named Lonnie Pangborn, in town to look at real estate. They drink, Oakwode and Madden flirt, and all three leave together. The next morning, Madden finds himself with a ferocious hangover, a splintered memory of seeing his wife the night before, another of Oakwode, an erection premised on it, and a new, crusty, tattoo on his arm—a heart enclosing "Laurel." The telephone rings and Police Chief Alvin Luther Regency, a macho Vietnam veteran who collects guns and knives, tells him to clean up the passenger seat of his car. Madden finds it covered with blood. At a meeting with Regency—who describes himself as half enforcer, half maniac—the chief suggests that he check his marijuana cache buried in a burrow in the woods of nearby Truro. He does and is terrified to find a plastic bag containing the severed head of a woman, a blonde. Unable to look at the face, he reburies it. The next time he checks, it is gone. When he checks again, there are two blonde heads.

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blonde

blonde

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Years ago I wrote a poem about Allen which went something like—I quote from memory—

Sometimes I think, "That ugly kike,
That four-eyed faggot,
Is the bravest man in America."

Well, over the years, Allen's gotten considerably better looking and has doubtless earned that most curious position of being a major and near to elder statesman in homosexual ranks and his poetry, bless it, goes on forever.

Mailer and Ginsberg had become close when both of them were on the antiwar ramparts, but their friendship had begun tentatively. "Ginsberg and I met in a strange way," Mailer said. "Like scientists who are each working on the same problem—far apart in every other way." But now, he continued, "I have a lot of respect for him. He is truly one of the few honorable men I have known in the literary world." He also respected Burroughs, whom he called "the shyest man in the world." They did not have a close relationship, however. After Burroughs's death in 1997, Mailer said that he had spent perhaps the equivalent of six evenings with Burroughs, all told. At Naropa, the three men took part in a discussion titled "American Soul? What Is?" Mailer had warm memories of the session, "We had the damndest time out in Colorado," he said. "Being on with Burroughs is like being with W. C. Fields. He is one of the funniest men alive. He can say, 'It is eighty degrees today in Kansas,' and the audience is wiped out." He added that he still admired *Naked Lunch*.

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Shortly after returning from Colorado, he went to a meeting of the American chapter of PEN, the international association of writers. He had served on the organization's executive board from 1968 to 1973. On July 25, he was elected president for a two-year term, and would preside over the 1986 International Congress in New York. "I always wanted to be president of something," Mailer said. For the next eighteen months, he would help plan the world congress, mostly by raising the money to underwrite it.

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FOR MAILER, THE PEN presidency forced Mailer to shelve his writing projects so that he could preside over committee meetings, twist the arms

AT THE END of 1986 Danielle married Michael Moschen, a professional juggler. Mailer invited them to live in Provincetown during their first year of marriage. For the greater part of 1987, Danielle painted in Norris's studio, Moschen practiced his routines in the basement, and Mailer wrote in the attic studio. Norris was in New York with Matt and John and came up every other weekend. Danielle, her husband, and her father shared the chores, and enjoyed long quiet meals and discussions. "It was one of the best years I spent with my father," she said. But after a time, Mailer yearned for the city. In January 1988, he wrote to Farbar to say he was getting tired of working in Provincetown and planned to move back to Brooklyn for a stretch. He was still following his usual country-city alternation, moving whenever one or the other became "a species of spiritual incarceration," as he wrote Farbar about P-Town. Mailer was paying some of his friend's legal bills, and much of their correspondence was given over to Farbar's various attempts to get his sentence commuted. These attempts failed, and Farbar became increasingly depressed. A year after his release he committed suicide.

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

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

This letter, like almost all of Mailer's letters since the late 1950s, was dictated, and he was sometimes slightly opaque. What he seems to be endorsing is the principle of spiritual growth and/or decay, while holding out for the possibility that saints and monsters have been shaped,

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Mailer's

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at least in part, by divine or demonic intervention. This idea would be further developed in his final novel, *A Castle in the Forest*.

In the eighty or ninety letters that he wrote in mid-January, his tone is valedictory. He admits that his commercial film career is over and that his experimental films are a footnote. In one letter he said he was pleased that Jonas Mekas, a leading light in experimental cinema, was showing *Beyond the Law* and *Maidstone* in Manhattan. He was satisfied to be considered "a distinguished minor artist" in cinema history.

He reacquainted himself with his novel, settling down for a long stretch writing. "It's like going back to a wife," he told Stratton, and not particularly easy, "but oh, what fun when you begin to hold hands again."

→ Harlot's Ghost has great geopolitical sweep, looking back to World War II and forward to the Vietnam War, and is full of vivid portraits, divided between historical and fictional figures—he liked the idea of mixing them up in the same way E.L. Doctorow did in *Ragtime*. Of the former, the most notable are J.F.K. and his brother Robert, their in-house nemesis J. Edgar Buddha (as everyone in the novel calls FBI Director Hoover), CIA director Allen Dulles, Uruguay station chief Howard Hunt (of later Watergate infamy), British double agent Kim Philby, Frank Sinatra, Mafia chieftain Sam Giancana, Fidel Castro, and William King "Bill" Harvey, Berlin base chief. Harvey is the most memorably drawn historical figure, matched only by the fictional Hugh Tremont Montague, a high CIA counter-intelligence official, code name, Harlot. The narrator is Herrick "Harry" Hubbard, a young agent who goes into intelligence work in 1955 after graduation from Yale, following his father "Cal" Hubbard, an OSS officer in World War II. Cal's best friend is Harlot, who is also Harry's godfather and mentor. There are two major women characters: Harlot's wife, Hadley Kittredge Gardiner Montague, who is part of the agency's brain-trust, and Modene Murphy, a fictional stand-in for Judith Campbell Exner, the lover of J.F.K., Giancana, Sinatra and young Hubbard.

It is no wonder that Mailer gave up his plan to chronicle the voyage of the spaceship-ark in favor of a novel of sharply etched character studies, none more so than Montague's, a master spy modeled on the legendary CIA counter-intelligence chief James Jesus Angleton (himself a minor character in the book), a poet who corresponded with Pound and Eliot, collaborated during World War II with cardinals, ex-fascists, Mafia *capodecinas* and Kim Philby, and worked for seven successive

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could conceivably have happened. Whether history will find you more wrong than right is hardly to the point: what counts is that you brought life back to a place in our imagination that has been surviving all these years like scorched earth, that is, just about. It's so rare when novel writing offers us this deep purpose and I swear, Don, I salute you for it.

A few years later, after he had finished *Harlot's Ghost*, Mailer told DeLillo that *Libra* had saved him five hundred pages, presumably by allowing him to leave out any exploration of the motives and actions of Oswald. He had been given one more year to turn in the final manuscript. Random House, he said, "has been damn decent to me, and I'd like to return the favor," so he was stripping down his life to the "essentials of a fighter's camp" to meet the deadline.

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

This narrator At that time, he was writing about Harry Hubbard, a young CIA agent posted to Uruguay, where Howard Hunt was the CIA station chief. Mailer could have sent Hubbard anywhere, but assigned him to this obscure post ~~for at least three good reasons:~~ in order to contrast intelligence work in this backwater with the fast-paced, dangerous work of Harvey and his associates in Berlin and to establish Hunt in preparation for using him when he got to Watergate. On Mailer's timeline

charts, Hunt had his own column, with entries running from his OSS service in World War II, through Watergate and the suspicious death of his wife Dorothy (also a CIA agent), to Hunt's 1973 conviction. His plan, we can surmise, was to use Uruguay as a breathing space between the more dramatic events in Berlin in the early 1950s, and Cuba in the early 1960s.

But once Mailer got into the small-bore espionage of Hunt and Hubbard in Uruguay, he had difficulty extricating himself. Part Four of the novel, "Montevideo, 1956-1959," is the length of a good-sized novel, 266 pages, and while it has some bright spots, they are few. Hubbard could have described his time with Hunt in memoir fashion, but he chose to depict it in the correspondence between Hubbard and Montagu's wife, Kittredge, then living in Washington. Mailer wanted to keep Kittredge before us because Hubbard will marry her 16 years later. And he also wanted to create a major woman character who is an intellectual. Kittredge is a "characterological theoretician," and the originator of the Alpha-Omega personality theory, an elaboration of his belief that we house two separate personalities. The first difficulty with understanding her theory, she tells Hubbard, is that everyone who has heard of schizophrenia or split personality assumes that Alpha and Omega are equivalent to two satchels in the psyche; one part lives, one part observes and interprets. Not so, she says, we are two people, both are "as complex and wholly elaborated as what we usually think of a complete personality." Nevertheless, Alpha and Omega can be characterized: Omega "originates in the ovum and so knows more about mysteries":

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

Each self can borrow properties from the other, and do, because they are wed "like the corporal lobes of the brain." Marriage is one model for the relationship, she says, another possibility is Czarists and Bolsheviks. Kittredge's theory mirrors Mailer's ideas stretching back to "Lipton's" in the mid-1950s. ~~He said that one of his chief interests in~~

It tells us more about Mailer than Kittredge, who appears to have been willed into existence to satisfy the perception that he could not create a female character who is both least passionate and intellectual. She is perhaps the most convincing major female character in his fiction.

the novel was epistemological, how Hubbard and the other characters learn what they know, or think they know. At the end of "Montevideo" (Part Four, 1956-1959), not much of consequence has happened, while doubts and dissimulations have piled up.

As one plows through the Uruguay years, an expectation is created that the Alpha-Omega scheme will somehow be integrated into the plot. This does not happen, and the disputed theory's only real value, as Kittredge puts it, is to suggest "how spies are able to live with the tension of their incredible life-situations." Mailer flogs the theory, reinforcing the criticism that his worst sin, as Jonathan Franzen has argued, is redundancy. This tendency, along with the unbelievable ways by which Hubbard and Kittredge carry on their plain language correspondence about all kinds of classified operations—by regular mail and by diplomatic pouch—seriously damages the novel.

AS MAILER WAS working on "Montevideo," he was drawn into the controversy surrounding Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, published in the fall of 1988. On February 14, 1989, the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a fatwa, or religious decree, stating that Rushdie's novel was blasphemous and that he and his publishers should be killed. A Radio Tehran announcer read Khomeini's words: "I call on all zealous Muslims to execute them quickly, wherever they find them, so that no one will dare to insult the Islamic sanctions. Whoever is killed on this path will be regarded as a martyr, God willing." The next day an Iranian imam announced a \$2.6 million award for any Iranian who carried out the fatwa, and \$1 million for anyone else who did it. These amounts were doubled shortly afterward. Some devout Muslims were troubled by sections of the novel that suggested that the Prophet Muhammad had distorted some of the revelations—which comprise the Koran—given to him by Allah, and also by scenes depicting the Prophet's wives in brothels. There were riots and book burnings all over the Muslim world, including in sections of England with large immigrant Muslim populations. Two of the novel's translators were stabbed to death, and many died in the rioting. What saddened Rushdie was the fact that the novel (which was short-listed for England's Booker Prize), was intended "to give voice and fictional flesh to the immigrant culture of which I am myself a member," yet opposi-

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to discover to my horror I'm out—I'm not in at all, I've merely been screwing a wrinkle in the hide." He worked steadily for the rest of 1989, taking some time off for July and August in Provincetown when the family came in shifts, but taking no trips and publishing nothing until November of 1989.

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

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IN THE QUIET months of the off-season in P-Town as he labored on the novel, the Mailers occasionally dined with a local contractor, Fred Ambrose, and his wife, Nancy. John Buffalo was the same age as their oldest son, David, and the two six-year-olds enjoyed each other's company. Ambrose was first invited to the Commercial Street house in the early 1980s to discuss various renovation projects, and he and Mailer hit it off immediately. Ambrose had spent a year in his twenties as secretary to Alan Dugan, the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet who lived in nearby Truro, and knew his way around literature. He had read and admired several of Mailer's books, but their relationship was not a literary one. "We never really talked literature," Ambrose said. "Norman, from what

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Simon had said about him and suggested that the bad review of Kate's performance was really a barb at him. Simon was given space for a counter-rebuttal, and pointed out that Mailer made no attempt to refute anything in his review, so what was the big deal? His chief complaint about the novel, he repeated, was its "prolixity." In her concluding note, Sinkler said that in her judgment Simon had written "a fair and balanced review that met the standards of this newspaper," but also admitted that the editors had not been aware of the negative review of *Armies*, a tentative mea culpa.

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

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

In the novel, Hunt proposes another qualification for a good CIA man, and he passes it on to Hubbard: "I will suggest that if anyone ever inquires why you think you're qualified to be in espionage, the only proper response is to look them in the eye, and say, 'Any man who has ever cheated on his wife and gotten away with it, is qualified.'" Mailer

who spent 32 months in
Federal prison for
his part in
Watergate

and she confronted me and I confessed. Part of me wanted to lie. I felt if I lied I could get away with it, but I just couldn't get myself to lie, so I confessed. And that was it and she left." He said, "I don't regret having told the truth, but I don't know what to do with this feeling; it's the worst feeling I've ever had."

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

noff → [A short time later, Mailer called Toback and said. "Well, she's back and I'm not going to do anything to cause her to leave again."

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

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

borrowed freely and heavily from the work of a score of biographers, memoirists, and art critics. His most important borrowings are from the memoir of Picasso's mistress Fernande Olivier, and from the first volume of the authorized biography by John Richardson. "Nothing, of course, can equal the scholarship of John Richardson's book," Mailer said, "but I think mine may give a closer sense of what it would have been like if one had known Picasso personally as a young man." The book is dedicated to Judith McNally, who did invaluable research for it.

Jeanne Campbell had introduced Mailer to Richardson and his partner, Douglas Cooper, in the summer of 1962 in the south of France. Mailer recalled getting drunk with them. He had hoped that Richardson would introduce him to Picasso, but for whatever reason this did not occur. In 1991, Richardson published the first volume of his biography, covering the years 1881 to 1906, just before Mailer began work on his. Mailer read it, quoted extensively from it, some eight thousand words; there was a good deal of paraphrasing as well. Jason Epstein, also Richardson's editor, found himself in a difficult situation. Richardson's second volume, *The Painter of Modern Life*, which would take Picasso up to 1916, was well under way, and the prospect of two Random House biographies covering the same period and being published at the same time caused him difficulty. "I was apprehensive," Epstein said, "and told Mailer there might be a problem." But in the late summer of 1992, before the problem came to a head, Mailer got a call from Larry Schiller.

SCHILLER HAD DEVELOPED extensive contacts with Russian high officials, including members of the KGB. His translator, Ludmilla Peresvetova (and later his wife) introduced him to the head of the KGB, Vadim Bakatin, and through him he was introduced to the top KGB official in Minsk, Aleksandr Sharkovsky. Schiller was informed that the KGB was interested in exploring the possibility of giving him access to its file on Lee Harvey Oswald, who had lived in Minsk in 1960-62. This file had been sealed since 1963, and everyone who had known Oswald was warned to remain silent. But under glasnost life had changed, and the KGB realized that it possessed a property that could be monetized. Schiller explained the situation to Mailer, whom he wanted as a collaborator on a project about Oswald, and found him to be "very interested, eager." Next, Schiller went to see Epstein, who agreed to fund additional trips to

you're doing is a cut-and-paste job." Schiller said. "There isn't anything new in what you're doing." Mailer's old friend was making the same accusation that Richardson had made about Mailer's Picasso biography. "He got real mad at me, you know, really mad," Schiller said. "I was treading on his creativity." Mailer deferred to Schiller when it came to collecting information, but deferred to no one when it came to interpreting ~~this~~ information. He believed he could extract the same kind of compelling story out of the vast corpus of inert material assembled by the Warren Commission as he had out of the trove of interviews and documents on Gary Gilmore that Schiller had collected. The second half of *Oswald's Tale* is a much abbreviated, ~~greatly recorded~~ and ~~brilliantly~~ expertly parsed redaction of the Warren Commission Report.

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

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

first draft, the locutions of Jesus were closer to those of the King James Bible, but Epstein objected to the overuse of words like "didst" and "mayhap," "penny" instead of "coin," and Mailer toned it down to the final, more modernized vocabulary. He was pleased when his father-in-law told him that he enjoyed the passages that presented the language of Jesus' thoughts.

Overall, *The Gospel According to the Son's* reviews were better than those for *Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man*, worse than those for *Oswald's Tale*. The harshest review was in *The New Republic*. James Wood followed Kakutani in lashing Mailer for saying that his experience of celebrity aided him in understanding Jesus. But Wood's chief criticism was the first person perspective, which he found to be absurd, and the language, which he called "a spastic simulacrum of biblical style." However unhappy Mailer may have been with the review by Wood, an important critic, he was furious about the magazine's cover, which carried a cartoon portrait of Mailer with a crown of thorns on his head under the title of Wood's review, "He Is Finished." A few months after the review appeared, in the summer of 1997, Mailer ran into the magazine's publisher, Martin Peretz, outside a Provincetown restaurant. He had known Peretz since the mid-1960s when Peretz invited Mailer to speak at a Harvard rally against the Vietnam War. "If he'd just said, 'Hello Norman,' it would have been all right," Mailer said. "But he had this huge smile on his face. So I punched him." Then Peretz went in and told everyone that Mailer had hit him twice. "I guess it was a kind of badge of honor," Mailer said. Peretz said that Mailer's punches were "flabby." Mailer told friends he had hit him "hard, but not hard."

IN MANY OF the interviews he gave when doing publicity for *The Gospel*, he was asked about his promise to write a sequel to *Harlot's Ghost*. He often brought the issue up himself. But the fiftieth anniversary of *The Naked and the Dead* was less than a year away, and he had promised to write a new introduction for the anniversary edition. It occurred to him that the date, May 6, 1998, would also be a good time for a retrospective anthology. He would turn seventy-five a few months earlier, and the two celebrations could be combined. The editing job would not be particularly difficult, he assumed, and completing a new book only a year after the last would buy him goodwill from Random House, vital

if he were to finish the sequel. Such a collection had been on his mind ever since Vidal had published his own retrospective collection in 1993. *United States: Essays, 1952-1992* is 1,295 pages long and contains the great majority of Vidal's literary and political-historical essays, but none of his fiction. Mailer decided that his book would also be long, and would include excerpts from virtually all his works.

As he worked through the spring and summer on the anthology, Mailer wrote a series of commiserative letters to his writer friend, Bruce Dexter, who was depressed about not getting published. He also tried, unsuccessfully, to get various agents and editors interested in his work. An excerpt from a letter to Dexter, who was recovering from a stroke, gives a sense of his own mood. He recalled the lecture he had heard in 1947 about the catastrophe theory of history: "Suddenly a catastrophe occurred and that was a form of history that the Jews knew all too well."

I expect on the personal level a stroke has that quality, and I know I have an uneasiness about it that probably causes me more slight but actual psychic or spiritual discomfort than the thought of death itself. Death is as large and as final a transmogrification as one could ever find, but we spend our lives thinking about death, or trying to, whereas a stroke shunts us off to a siding. So from the above you can understand that I commiserate with you.

Reading in his seventy-fifth year almost everything that he had published in book form over the previous half century produced contrary emotions. He enjoyed passages of his writing that he had forgotten, but he also realized how much his powers had diminished. The result was melancholy. Another cause for gloom was his eyesight. He had cataracts, but the doctor told him he should wait until the fall to have them removed. "It's a little like Vaseline has been rubbed over the lens," he told Ed McAlice. Lennon, who was helping Mailer assemble the collection, sent him over two thousand pages culled from his books, all of them blown up 100 percent, from which to make his selections. Mailer expected and accepted that the anthology would be seen as a farewell gesture.

The volume, now titled *The Time of Our Time* (an echo of his 1958 short story "The Time of Her Time") was finished around Labor Day

Don Juan in Hell is a ninety-minute dream sequence in the third act of Shaw's *Man and Superman*. It is often cut from productions of the play, one of Shaw's greatest, and performed separately. Mailer trimmed *Don Juan* to sixty minutes and made further refinements during rehearsal. Vidal knew his part almost by heart and while he listened politely to Mailer's suggestions, played the role his own way. On the night of the performance, October 12, Vidal, wearing his jacket with the dark red lining, told Mailer, "Norman, when I walk on that stage, you are going to hear a roar of applause the likes of which you have never heard." The applause was indeed loud, and a reviewer said, "the reading flowed and had sparks of brilliance," especially in the Devil's arguments for the superiority of his abode over the dull place above. The four dissect with every weapon of wit and rhetoric the great philosophical questions, culminating in a masterful set of exchanges between Don Juan and the Devil on the merits of the Life Force. It is brilliant dialogue, perhaps Shaw's finest. "If you were scoring the bout, it would go to Vidal," said the reviewer, who called Vidal's portrayal "flawless." Mailer agreed that Vidal was terrific, "almost as good as Charles Laughton in playing that role."

About the same time as the *Don Juan in Hell* performance, Mailer submitted the final manuscript of *The Spooky Art*. A party was planned for publication day, and invitations went out to over two hundred friends.

You are invited to a party that Norris and Norman Mailer are giving on Friday night, January 31, 2003, to celebrate their joint birthday. (Let it be stated that they were born on the same morning separated by one minute—separated by 26 years.)

The evening will be ready by nine p.m. at the Brooklyn apartment, 142 Columbia Heights, and ought to go for a number of hours. Bring no booze or presents. Prepare no speeches. Dress as you will. Be splendid, surprising, or casual.

On this night, January 31, Norman will be eighty years old. Congratulations and commiserations are in order. His new book, *The Spooky Art* (about writing itself), will be coming out the same day. There are reasonably favorable odds that this will be a good night. Please come.

We got a table and ordered a drink as the rain came down on the saltwater lagoon outside. NM wanted oysters, the famous Wellfleet oysters; so did Hans. We got a table right in the middle of the room, which held about 25 other diners, mainly older Wellfleeters. While we waited for our meals, NM told a story about a dinner meeting with the British publisher, George Weidenfeld, in the late 1960s. Joining them was K, a beautiful blonde heiress who was attracted to him, he said, and who he lusted after. But after three hours together, she said, "Goodnight Norman?" and went off with the publisher. Hans said that Weidenfeld was famously endowed; his member had a valuable twist. NM: "An S-shape?" Hans: "No, sort of a half moon." Hans went on in his blustery voice to explain—with most of the restaurant listening—that Americans mispronounce "penis." "They call it pee-NUS," he said loudly, and then repeated the mispronunciation three times for emphasis. NM laughed at this and his teeth loosened. He took them out, wiped them with his napkin, and then pulled out a tube of glue or paste and applied it. He said he usually does this in the restroom, but "what the hell." The Wellfleet locals, all of whom recognized NM, enjoyed the show. The sun came out and we enjoyed our shellfish and chowders. NM took home some of his dozen oyster shells and those of Hans too.

Whenever Mailer had oysters, which was often, he examined the shell, and half the time found a face there, in relief. The waitress at Michael Shay's with whom he flirted asked him at the end of every meal which pile he was bringing home and boxed them up. He cleaned them and then put them out on his deck to bleach. On each shell he saw the suggestion of one, a Greek warrior, or a long-dead beauty. He had Norris touch up the features with paint and photograph them. He thought they might make an interesting book.

ADVANCE REVIEW COPIES of *The Castle in the Forest* were in the hands of reviewers by late October 2006, and Mailer was scheduled for a round of interviews in New York the following month. He glanced through the Kakutani file, and read again her review of *Oswald's Tale*, which she had called "ultimately superfluous." In an upcoming *Esquire* in-

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sad, and had a fear in his eye. $\frac{1057}{1053}$

temporary—and left with her mother for New York in a rental car. He made no fuss but was clearly ~~unhappy~~. She was tearful but firm. When Lennon arrived the next evening to take him to dinner, Mailer was sitting alone in the dark. At Michael Shay's, nearly deserted, he ate sixteen oysters, and as usual pondered the shell faces. Back at the house for a nightcap, he said that his eyes were going from macular degeneration and that he could be blind in eighteen months. "I'm not worried about it," he said. Norris e-mailed friends that she was as happy as she had been for a long time. Mailer said he would like her to spend at least ten days a month with him.

Norris left their Toyota sedan in case he needed it, but Raymond or friends usually drove him wherever he needed to go. But on April 17, he announced to Raymond that he was taking a day off from working on the revision of *The Deer Park—A Play*, and going to lunch at the Wicked Oyster in Wellfleet. Raymond was a bit worried about his boss driving and offered to accompany him, but Mailer said he preferred to go alone. As soon as Mailer left, Raymond called Norris in Brooklyn, and she said there was nothing to be done. Raymond drove by the house at 7:45, but the car wasn't there. He learned later that Mailer had gotten home safely, after dinner at the Lobster Pot, the big tourist restaurant. He'd left the Toyota when he had trouble starting it, and taken a cab home. Norris e-mailed Raymond that she was proud of Norman, "and you can tell him that for me."

The next day, Mailer told Raymond about his lunch in Wellfleet, and how he'd driven around the country roads in Truro before going to the Lobster Pot for dinner, and then a final drink at the Old Colony. Mailer had done all this, but not alone. He had been saying goodbye to another old friend. Eileen Fredrickson had flown in from Chicago for a two-day visit, and Mailer had picked her up at her motel and squired her around. After she returned to Chicago, Fredrickson recalled, Mailer called her and told her it was "a perfect visit." He called her again a few days later and told her that he loved her and talked of another visit in October. It was to be their last conversation.

Norris came to Provincetown regularly in the spring, and Mailer traveled to New York for a few events—to receive the Hadada Award from *The Paris Review* on April 23, presented by E. L. Doctorow, and on June 27 to appear in conversation with Günter Grass and Andrew

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He knew ing. In the Green Room afterward, a number of friends and admirers stopped by. It was obvious that this was his last public outing. Mailer drew out his conversations. and

Back in Provincetown, Mailer was up and down—weak and dispirited one day, feisty and grumpy the next. There was talk of him getting an electroshock treatment. He said that if it didn't help, "I will be an invalid for the rest of my life." He continued to work. The success of Christopher Hitchens's *Why God Is Not Great* was a key factor in his decision not to postpone the theology conversations book. Random House was eager to publish it as soon as it was edited. After much discussion, he approved the title: *On God: An Uncommon Conversation*. It was scheduled for publication on October 16.

Norris returned to Provincetown for the summer, and all the children sensing this could be his last summer, visited. On August 1, Norris left on a three-week promotional tour for her new novel, traveling to Atlanta, Chicago, and the West Coast. She planned to return in time for the September wedding of Maggie and John Wendling on the low-tide flats behind the house. For an hour or two a day, Mailer went over the final changes and jacket design for *On God*. He also read and was impressed with Andrew O'Hagan's review of Don DeLillo's new novel about 9/11, *Falling Man*. He said that perhaps it would be DeLillo who replaced him as the writer who takes on all the big themes and events in American life. He went on to say, "There was a time when I felt completely secure in tackling all the big topics. I was totally confident." DeLillo said in 2010 that it was Mailer's "ambition, risk, broad vision, wide range—aspects of the American tradition that put me on the path I've been following all these years."

On Norris's instructions, Mailer's three upcoming speaking engagements were canceled. He was angry that this was done without his knowledge, but admitted that he wasn't up to long trips anymore. He still planned, however, to go ahead with the filming of *The Deer Park—A Play* in November. Michael hadn't yet raised the necessary production money, so Mailer planned to use the next big check from the University of Texas. Norris didn't know of his plan, and he knew she would be furious when she learned. One obvious reason that he continued to take on new projects was to keep the adrenaline flowing. But he was realistic enough to know that he probably wouldn't be able to write the next Hitler novel. "I'm too weak," he said.

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