

really is going to die, and he wonders out loud if there is something external to themselves that will justify the price that they are being required to pay. When he asks Bowen to reassure him on this, the captain can do no more than say that "we're fighting because we can't lose." Rejecting any <sup>larger</sup> ~~further~~ "idealism" than this, and ~~presumably~~ steadied by the internal foundation he has travelled so far to find, Bowen Hilliard smokes a final cigarette with his Sergeant.<sup>2</sup>

There is a certain similarity here to the conclusion of the "Naked and the Dead" play about the two young attendants who, at the end, are mutually supportive as they go off together to heal their wounds on a fishing trip. Also evocative is the short story from the previous spring, "Retreat," where the two students deal with the fact that they must go to war by drawing together, in a frozen winter setting, to perform certain rituals. The captain and the sergeant don't bond so easily or so completely as these two pairs of Harvard students--<sup>each</sup> ~~both~~ of whom <sup>are</sup> after all, ~~are~~ practically <sup>a</sup> twin<sup>s</sup>--but bonded they certainly are, and their ritual of smoking at the end is carefully orchestrated.

By contrast, Bowen's feelings about Cova as he prepares to die reveal nothing but disjunction. He fantasizes about how Cova will receive the news of his death, and in conjuring up an elaborate scene between her and another man is apparently trying to demonstrate that, whatever else might be the source of a

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<sup>2</sup> Norman's <sup>revised</sup> ~~final~~ ending for "A Calculus At Heaven" is being discussed here. In his original "Foundation" draft the Captain is killed, and the Sergeant is left to await the Japanese alone.

Great

stabilizing personal foundation, it certainly cannot be love between a man and a woman. In this respect "Calculus" recalls that other story of the previous Spring, "Land Lashed," wherein the young couple watching the forest fire are unable to find in their own union the strength to face up to the forces of destruction. The young man in that story, like Bowen, is on a quest for self-realization, and the problem Norman will pose more and more frequently in his fiction is how, if at all, that state of being can be achieved. He still will present the interactive states of hot fear and cold toughness as basic--they are everywhere operational in "Calculus"--but they will be offered now in the much broader context of a search for a mature, realized self.

The composition of his story was a whirlwind affair for Norman. After trying to get at it all through the first semester, he consulted his notes from the previous summer and began keeping a small notebook in November. Over the Christmas break, having prepared a synopsis of the story, listing characters and sketching out a map of the island of Tinde, he tore through most of a rough draft before dashing up to Cambridge and joining Bea for a big New Year's Eve and, ~~for many~~<sup>for</sup> mid-year graduation party at The Advocate. He "didn't get too drunk," he wrote home, and "got to bed about five thirty. I don't feel tired though, I've been sleeping late. Wish me luck on the writing tonight." He completed a 13,500 word rough draft on "January 2, 3, 6"-- as he noted on the last typewritten page--and gave it to Bea and several friends to read while he started struggling with his exams.

As soon as these were over, warmed by the praise of his readers, Norman returned to Brooklyn and his manuscript, completing what turned out to be the final draft on his birthday: January 31. Leaving his text for Fan and her staff to type clean, Norman made his way back up for his final semester at Harvard. He had decided to continue with the aeronautical engineering sequence instead of the electrical, having earned a B in the former for first semester and a C in the latter. He also continued with the second half of the drama course, English 3-b, despite his comedown from an A, and he formally registered for the Fine Arts F course he had audited and kept careful notes from in first semester. Having done all the work in that course already, he would now have ample time to reestablish a writing schedule, since he would need to prepare only the engineering and the drama courses in addition to English A-5, the final unit in the creative writing sequence.

He was one of a small group accepted into this workshop, which held its meetings in the living room of its professor, the magisterial Robert Hillyer. Since Hillyer's assignment required each member of his group to design and as substantially as possible to begin the composition of a novel during the semester, he must have been impressed when Norman ~~virtually~~ began the term by presenting him with the text of "A Calculus at Heaven." Not that Norman meant to suggest that he had already completed the workshop project. On the contrary, he had just learned that his play manuscript was not going to be produced by the Harvard dramatic society, and he was ready to start planning for Hillyer a novel

based upon what he had experienced at the hospital. What he wanted from his professor in connection with "Calculus" was another nomination to the MGM apprentice-screenwriter competition. Hillyer was once again chairman of the local selection committee as well as some advice about where the manuscript might be submitted for publication.

The nomination was duly taken care of, and Norman sent the story off not only to MGM, but to Ted Amussen for further publication advice and to Whit Burnett for its possible publication in Story. Amussen replied, quite promptly, praising the manuscript but adding a kind of reservation:

I worry about your writing only because you have that damned facility to write about things you haven't actually experienced, and they're real and for the most part honest and sincere. But unless you're careful, it won't always be that way. I'm not saying a writer should only write about things he's seen with his own eyes, [and] felt with his own hands and heart. What I do say is that he must always be sure to be goddamned sure of his values (especially a writer of such unholy gifted talents as yours) when he translates them into a character and a situation he understands but has never experienced.

Amussen added that while he thought the story might have a good chance for inclusion in American or Redbook magazines, he didn't think it "right" for independent publication as a book. Shortly thereafter, Burnett rejected the manuscript for Story, and Norman asked Amussen to send his copy to Redbook.

While the "Calculus" manuscript kicked around, Norman reclaimed "The Naked and the Dead" from the dramatic society and, having been given permission, turned it in as a writing assignment to his drama course. Professor Spencer liked it very much, gave it

an A, and wrote Norman a strong letter of congratulation. It was shaping up to be a strange final semester, with people disappearing--Jack Maher completed an accelerated sophomore year and went into the army in February (sending farewells to Barbara)--and planning to disappear. The new Advocate President and Pegasus from the December issue were replaced in a hurried election by yet another set of officers, who published the final wartime issue of the magazine in March.

Uncle Dave came up to Cambridge for another visit in April, during which he got quite colorfully sick while hosting a restaurant party. Though his student guests thought nothing of it, ~~their host~~<sup>he</sup> took it as a major humiliation, and perhaps as a kind of redemptive gesture he proposed a group graduation present. He laid out a subsidized plan for a trip to Mexico for Norman and any of his friends who wanted to go. He got takers, of course, Norman among them.

Norman, who had resumed his painting--"a little still life, apples, bottles, etc." he told the family--also revealed in his letters the fact that Bea's presence in his life was well enough established within his family so that he openly could add stern postscripts telling Barbara that "Bea hasn't heard from you!" Barbara, indeed, was much on everyone's mind, since she had been admitted to Radcliffe and needed to decide whether to matriculate in the summer or the fall. Her mother wanted the sixteen<sup>1</sup> year old (as of March) to get started right away, but her daughter thought she'd like to work during the summer, and Norman took her part.

Three subjects, however, ~~effectively~~ dominated what was left of the semester: Norman's new novel, his status in the draft, and the upcoming graduation itself. Norman had prepared a prospectus of the novel which, along with a copy of his play, was submitted to Hillyer and circulated to the workshop. The class seems to have constituted a kind of inner circle within the Harvard literary community, and guests as well as the class members consulted and could be asked for advice. Norman was thinking of getting an agent, and Fan suggested that he ask Bernard DeVoto, who was probably the most commercially successful of the current faculty, for the name of his own agent. This suggestion moved Norman to a highly characteristic reply:

Mom, you can't go up to a man like DeVoto, introduce yourself, and ask him for his agent. You just don't do that here. Prof. Hillyer is giving a cocktail party for his course, and DeVoto may be there.

Although he didn't get the name from DeVoto, Norman would have an agent before very long, and in fact it was just this kind of problem that could legitimately be addressed within the context of the class. The main point of the class, of course, was to elicit from each member the schema of a novel and then to get the author started. Norman started, after a week or so of discussion in class and agonizing aloud in his letters, on April 26, and he did little but drive forward on it for the next two and a half weeks. He "suspended" it then, announcing that he had three exams to prepare for, and that in any case his forthcoming trip to Mexico might start him on an alternate writing project. He didn't want to keep working on a novel he couldn't "see my way clear to finishing." At

very kind of project, somewhat

It seems that the first time was when...

this point Norman apparently saw the novel as about the size of "Calculus," and capable of being completed in about the same time. He didn't think he had time to work on a long novel.

Norman was not unequivocally committed to the Mexico trip, having on May 5 told his mother to hold off buying him a sleeping bag until he was sure he could go, but quite apart from the trip there was the question of the draft looming in his immediate future. Fan argued passionately that he should enter a program of graduate study in engineering, which he had been told by the Harvard "War Office" might keep him out of the service until he completed it. The record of this family debate may have been the reason for the removal from the files (by the secretive Fan) of all correspondence mailed in the month of March, but in a partially censored letter of April 10 Norman carefully spells out his position for his parents: "You say, Mother, (and I'll include you, Dad) that you will worry if I'm in the army, and that therefore, I should reconsider it."

He goes on to acknowledge that he has been tempted to avoid going into the service, taking the opportunity to affirm the authority of his relationship with Bea--"Don't forget I have much besides Harvard to keep me in Boston"--but he says that he feels as a writer that it is "necessary" to go into the army. With <sup>of</sup> Tem Amussen's letter urging him to write about what he knows from experience, he says that in "Calculus" he had to guess about the lives of private soldiers, and if he enters the army as a private himself he will come to "know." The letter continues:

I know this will cause you worry, and that does not make me happy. But you once said, Mother, that the important thing was not to make you happy, but myself happy, and that would make you happy. It is necessary, Mother, to cause you unhappiness here, because if I stayed out, I would do it because I gave in, but I am weak enough to hold it against you. Beyond that, it was necessary to worry you the times I went bumming, and yet I think you will agree that was worth-while in the long run. Just have faith in my ability to see for myself. We'll talk about it in June.

If Norman was determined not to map out a strategy for avoiding the service, however, he was perfectly willing to see the draft notice delayed until it was convenient for him to receive it.

*Brower* On the same day as his letter home, he wrote his friend Millicent Brauer, who was still at Rutgers' Douglass College, that "I'm going into the army about July 1, I presume." His deferral had been until May, and at the end of April, at Uncle Dave's carefully timed signal, Norman wrote the board asking for an extension. As the weeks went by he heard nothing, and he pressed forward with his arrangements for graduation.

He finished his examinations, concluding his final semester at Harvard with a blazing return to the High Honors status of his sophomore year: He repeated his B in aeronautical engineering, but got A's in the Fine Arts as well as from Spencer in the drama course and Hillyer in the workshop. The dramatic improvement in grades brought him his B.S. in Engineering Sciences cum laude. Norman's non-graduating friends departed for Mexico on May 20, but Graduation Day was Thursday, May 27, and Norman knew he couldn't think of missing it---"Lord knows you've waited for it long enough" he told his mother in assuring her he would stay---but he originally planned to catch up with the party in Mexico right after the

ceremony.

Now, unsure of whether he would go to Mexico at all, he arranged full weekend accommodations for his parents and sister-- Uncle Dave and Aunt Nan made their own reservations--and borrowed an extra admissions ticket to allow Bea to join them for the various weekend program exercises. There are no reports of problems that weekend, and the snapshots look like all graduation snapshots.

It was Bea who was the deciding factor on the Mexico decision--Bea and the novel. In Mexico, if he went, Norman had wanted to write up "all my remembrances of Harvard," but he would make the trip and do this only if the novel seemed unfinishable in the time available. Now, with graduation gone, he knew what he wanted to do. Abandoning the Mexico plan, he would go with Bea on a brief vacation to a place he had been hearing about, and while there he would see if it looked like a good place to work, for he felt now that if the draft board gave him a reasonable piece of the summer he could finish the novel.

So his family went back home, and Norman moved out of Dunster<sup>which</sup> ~~itself to~~ close a year later for the duration~~and~~ and took Bea to a new seashore. He took her to Provincetown.

END PART 4

END CHAPTER TWO

## CHAPTER THREE

### Part One

#### i

In a letter from Boston the previous summer, Norman had remarked upon the difference between New England and New Jersey beaches, and in doing so he affirmed old affiliations: "The bathing here is not nearly as good as in Jersey. I never realized how fine our beaches were until I saw these Massachusetts ones." This loyalty to the Monmouth County shoreline, recalling as it does his years at the now vanished Scarborough, lasted exactly as long as it took Norman to find the Portuguese fishing village of Provincetown, Massachusetts, which he did in the first week of June, 1943.

The two in many ways idyllic weeks he spent there with Bea marked the beginning of what would prove to be a practically permanent relationship with the place, and he would return in many different ways--and, indeed, with many different partners--over the next five decades. One way of returning was on the printed page, and fifteen years later, in the prologue to an unfinished novel, he memorializes the setting:

The peninsula of Cape Cod is perhaps eighty miles long, and bent in its middle like the knotty, no longer agreeable arm of an old man who once was strong. To the forearm and hand of this coast is given the name of The Upper Cape. . . . At the tip of the Cape, in the palm of the almost closed hand, is one of the last great fishing villages of the world, the place called Provincetown, in winter 3,000 population I suppose, its situation one of the most easterly promontories of the Atlantic coast. Three miles long and two streets wide, the town curls around the bay on the skin of the palm, a gaudy run with Mediterranean splashes of color, crowded steep-pitched roofs, fishing piers and fishing boats whose stench of mackerel and gasoline is as aphrodisiac to the sensuous nose as

the clean bar-whisky smell of a nightclub where call girls congregate.

Norman would write quite a lot about Provincetown, but over the years he found it particularly conducive to the process of composition, and he would write much more in the place than about it. Indeed, the least typical thing about his first visit was that he wasn't able to get a significant amount of writing done there. "I'm having a wonderful time," he wrote to the family on a Friday, June 11 postcard, "but I'm not getting much work done. Therefore, I'll come home early next week, probably Tuesday, and work at home."

He did exactly that, leaving Bea in Boston to work for the summer as well as to attend summer school in preparation for undertaking her final semester at Boston University. He was the more ready to part company, no doubt, because of an intermittent disagreement that had been plaguing them for many weeks, and which had even marred some of the pleasure of their time together in Provincetown. They would look back on this period in their letters of the next couple of years, where they recall how it had been a troubled time: for at least a year, Bea had been actively trying to get away from her family home, and, as Norman had mentioned in his Psychology 35 paper, she saw marriage as her best escape route. With Norman now graduated and she soon to join him, Bea wanted to at least discuss the possibility of marriage. Norman, quite simply, did not.

He was locked onto the track of his novel, which he saw

himself composing in a race against the arrival of his draft notice, and he was not in any case sure that he wanted to get married. Fiction that he wrote in his senior year, notably "Land Lashed," suggested that he was having trouble imagining monogamous heterosexual intimacy as holding the key to what he, as an artist, was trying to discover. And Bea, after all, was the only woman with whom he ever had an intimate relationship: he had started showing significant--and to her of course annoying--signs that he wanted sooner or later to be intimate with other women. As he continued to resist what he regarded as the distraction of her preoccupation, they began to quarrel. He, apparently, even began to think of breaking off their relationship altogether. Without going that far, he was nevertheless not slow to put a geographical distance between them and to turn to more pressing matters in Brooklyn.

Norman accomplished what he could on the novel, startled to find that it grew on the drawing-boards in a way utterly counter-proportionate to the shrinking prospect of pre-induction time he could reasonably expect from his draft board. The prospective inductee didn't get his notice, however, for all of seven more months--January of 1944--and there is no recorded reason why it should have taken his board so long to get around to him. There is a record of his trying to get a short-term deferment: almost as soon as he got back from Provincetown, he contacted Ted Amussen at Farrar and Rinehart, supplying him with a sample of the manuscript in progress and asking if the publishing company would petition the draft board to hold off until the novel got done. Amussen wrote on

July 9 to say that both the senior partners had "felt it would be an unwise thing to do and, in all probability, would not amount to anything anyway." He apologized for being unable to help, and there is no indication that Norman looked elsewhere for intercession.

Of course there is always the possibility that Uncle Dave Kessler's arm was long enough to reach into and decelerate the selection process for a time, but it is equally likely that Norman's own guess is correct: "The only explanation I can find for such delay is that my draft card must have fallen into the back of the file." In any case, he kept quiet and worked almost uninterruptedly right through the fall in a small rented room a couple of blocks from home. The room was "the first of the many studios [he] was to have throughout his life," Hilary Mills records, while also quoting Bea: "He always had to go away to write, and he had a propensity for wanting to be in the strangest places when he wrote." Undisturbed by his draft board, Norman proved to have time enough to complete multiple drafts of a novel that grew immensely beyond its author's initial estimates--it finally would run to some 180 thousand words--and would leave almost completely behind the modest "Naked and the Dead" play manuscript that had been its genesis.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.658-59. Though never published commercially, A Transit to Narcissus was issued in the form of A Facsimile of the Original Typescript in New York by Howard Fertig, Inc. in March, 1978. The 760 page (+ 88 appendix) folio volume includes a 2,300 word "Introduction" by the author, and was offered in a printing of one thousand copies at \$100. In 1992, remainder copies were still readily available. This "original typescript" is not to be confused with the final, quite legible typescript that made the rounds of so many publishers in 1944-45. The facsimile reproduces the working,

It is possible, nevertheless, to trace that genesis into the novel's final form, and to see how the author of both texts pulled the first one apart to get the beginnings of a basic structure for the second. The novel is set at the same hospital as the play, and two attendants still stand at its center. Only one of them, however, Paul Scarr, comes to the job from college, and the other-- Joe Cap--is made older, has been on the job longer, and has a very different personal background. The novel's action contains the episode with the rampant young black patient being tackled by the new attendant--Scarr--and subsequently being brutalized by all the attendants. Indeed, the institutionalization of brutality is as central to the novel as to the play, and so is an elaborate scheme by most of the attendants to unleash a dangerously violent inmate onto a fellow-attendant whom they wish, in one way or another, to eliminate. Nursing Superintendent Louise Tasko is transferred into the novel from the play, as is hydrotherapy room Nurse Marion Gannon, for whose romantic attentions Scarr successfully competes with Cap.

But the novel adds to its action a whole range of dimensions not even suggested by the play. The hypocrisy and inefficiency of the hospital's administration is now accounted for by political corruption and fraud, which in turn is generated by a city-wide Syndicate that has the whole of Boston in its clutches. The Syndicate stands as the target of Paul Cowles, a crusading

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heavily revised manuscript from which the typist produced the final version.

owner/publisher/editor of a small, left-wing morning newspaper who, with his somewhat saturnine, rather Bea-like wife, supplies the novel with a focus contrapuntal to Scarr and Nurse Gannon. The Cowles couple permit the novel to explore social themes, such as the relationship between capitalism and democracy, between criminality and good government, and to articulate Norman's rather undigested version of the social and intellectual values of the progressive left in America. These issues and these people are entirely absent from the action of the play.

Absent as well is any recognizable counterpart for Joe Cap, the attendant who is most closely associated with Scarr and is his rival for the affections of Marion Gannon. Joe has been working as a kind of loner-attendant at the hospital for about five months when Scarr arrives, and we soon learn that Cap came to the hospital directly from a substantial stretch in the penitentiary. He had been working on an illegal assignment for Syndicate sub-boss "Powderpuff" Fuller--also a character in the novel--when something unspecified went wrong and he was forced to take the conviction. His experience in prison has affected him very much for the worse, and tough as he is his toughness is periodically (and secretly) overcome by self-doubt, fits of panic, and immersions in hysterical fear so severe as to threaten him with permanent breakdown. It is in the tormented aftermath to one of these bouts that Cap rashly reports Scarr to Supervisor Tashko for an infraction of the rules, hoping to get him fired and thus removed from contact with Nurse Gannon.

In the process of doing this, however, Cap succeeds only in getting himself identified by the other attendants as an informer. They, in turn, conspire to make Cap the target of an arranged attack by a homicidally inclined patient in the violent ward, and a climactic scene in the novel is that in which Scarr--urged on by Nurse Gannon--comes to Cap's assistance during the attack. Between them they subdue the patient, thus thwarting the conspiracy and developing a kind of friendship in spite of their rivalry, but in their violent battle with Cap's assailant they more or less parenthetically beat an innocent and particularly vulnerable patient who happens into the melee. The innocent patient abruptly dies, and both attendants are arrested and charged with manslaughter---a situation complicated by the fact that the prosecutor's office is controlled by the Syndicate, which is already engaged in a struggle with the reformer Cowles.

Central though Cap is in the novel, he is a secondary character to Scarr, and the greatest departure from the original play-version of the action is the difference between him and the play's hero. In the play, David Land is simply a decent, rather bumbling young guy who is uncomplicatedly repelled by the presence of brutality, the moreso when he see signs of it appearing in himself. Paul Scarr, by contrast, passes quickly through a stage of seeming to be like David, and emerges as an almost formal case-study in psychopathological brutality. At the outset, the most obvious difference between Scarr and David Land is that Scarr stays on at the job, despite experiencing almost exactly the same kind of

initial moral revulsion as David.

The apparent reason for his staying is Marion, Nurse Gannon, with whom he begins a sexual affair just as he is choosing between staying or leaving. The affair intrigues him (actually, the woman's characterization as a quite maternal sexual partner in the novel is, for Norman, unusually persuasive) and Scarr quite self-consciously chooses to stay on as an attendant, not only to pursue his affair but also--like attendant Ralph Hughson in the play--to enhance his status as a prospective medical school student. What happens to him seems at first to be just what would have happened to the college-student-attendants in the play and, in Norman's apparent view, what might easily happen to any normal man in such a situation: an otherwise healthy person comes to develop, in a perverse environment, an unhealthy appetite for hurting helpless people.

As we come to know Scarr better, however, we begin to see that he is not normal, but rather is a man already traumatically "scarred" from having experienced a wholly excessive childhood immersion into fear of his father. Once again, fear emerges as the volatile element in the psychological compound of Norman's fiction, but now we see it beginning to build a cause-and-effect linkage between itself and what up to now has been its apparently polarized antonym element: bullying, sadistic brutalization. A dialectic between the two poles will develop in the Mailerian fictional text from this moment on, and it will discover its vocabulary, finally, in the formulation of the figure of the

psychopath.

The historical time-frame of the novel is earlier than the play: it is June, 1938, and Scarr has come to his job at the hospital as a direct result of having failed, out of fear, a special test that he set for himself. He has reneged on a commitment to join the volunteers at that time still fighting on the side of the Republic in the Spanish Civil War. The hospital frightens him too, so he reasons that a success in dealing with the responsibilities of being an attendant will serve to expiate his guilt over not going to Spain, and will perhaps teach him how to overcome his feelings of fear. He strikes us at first as a man in search of self-realization through the process of successful self-discovery, and things start to go wrong only when Scarr's initial rejection of the brutality of the other attendants breaks down, and he begins to beat the patients at least as much as all the others do.

As he does so, and as his immersion into violence begins to address itself to his previous immersion into feelings of fear, a kind of grotesque inner being begins to take shape and to emerge as his authentic and increasingly destructive "self." While this is going on, Scarr's sexual affair with Marion Gannon develops in an ominously parallel pattern, and he begins to build up a head of violently angry feeling toward her that is triggered into explosion when, with Cap, he accidentally kills the innocent patient and is forced to contemplate prosecution and prison. Held in prison for a traumatizing ordeal of interrogation and manipulation, Scarr cracks

completely, just as Cap was doing and had done before. The totemic code-sign for Scarr's collapse is a certain hauntingly familiar, deeply schizophrenic dream:

He was completely isolated on the most enormous field he had ever seen. He kept walking and came to a barbed wire fence which he started to crawl over very carefully. But then from nowhere, a machine gun started firing at him. He continued to walk until his head lying on the ground saw his body moving forward.

"My God, I'm dead," his head said.

And his body fell over.

Out on bail and somehow by virtue of his dream enraged at Nurse Gannon, Scarr reels through a kind of Ulysses-in-Nighttown underworld sequence that finally delivers him--armed with a knife and determined to obtain katharsis by killing with it--to his lover's apartment. She is spared, as much by luck as anything else, and a totally hallucinated Scarr, inescapably trapped in his mind's dark alley, bleeds to death from a self-inflicted slash across the wrist.

It seems likely that Norman had originally intended to balance the elements of external political/social reality in the novel with the elements of internal, psychological reality, and in doing so come up with an insight into fascism--"Germany is like an attendant!" Land says in the play--as well as into psychosis. As the novel develops, however, its external elements comes to be handled more and more mechanically, and in the final product the balance tips sharply toward the internal, across whose psychic landscape Cap and Marion and Scarr move among a population of clinically insane patients whose condition threatens increasingly to become their own. Cap and Marion survive while Scarr goes under,

lost to the sane world, but it is clear that in the complexity of his psychopathic identity he commands far more of his creator's attention than do the others.

See intro to Hallie Burnett book

If Norman has a certain difficulty in knowing exactly what to do with his character, he nevertheless clearly finds that character compelling in a way that should here be underscored: Scarr is the first full-scale presentation of an emotionally disturbed person in the Mailerian fictional cosmos, and he introduces the beginning of an era there of evolving fascination with dangerously perverse personalities. In this developing vision, even here at its uncertain start, psychosis promises to be luminous as well as agonizing, penetrating as well as opaque, brilliant as well as deranged. Like certain kinds of hallucinogens, certain kinds of madness will come to be presented as doorways to perception, and this thinking, along with the formulation of the actual figure of the psychopath in Norman's work, may accurately be said to have begun with Scarr and "A Transit to Narcissus."

The title refers to what Cowles and other collectivist progressives in the novel regard as an unhealthy, narcissistic concentration upon--or "transit to"--the figure of the disturbed individual. The figure will assume many forms over the years that follow, and it seldom will be so merely reduced as Scarr is here at the end, but it will always be identifiable somewhere along the thesis-to-antithesis-to-synthesis track of deep fear, followed by angry toughness, followed by reckless psychopathological detachment. Recklessness, most pointedly to risk the hazards of

killing or being killed, will almost always be an operative element, and, more and more, a relationship between these things and violently hostile heterosexual conflicts will be introduced. The association between the climactic moment of orgasm and the dramatic climax of killing, so central to the finally formed Mailerian vision, appears for the first time in "Transit."

By 1948, Sergeant Croft in The Naked and the Dead stands out as the next important manifestation of the psychopath figure, and his comparatively peripheral position in that novel is an indication of the self-remarked struggle in Norman's conscious imagination against acknowledging such a figure as a hero. By 1951, the dread-filled landscape of Barbary Shore, with its shockingly scarred amnesiac hero, calls up from the experience of "Transit" a powerful sensation of *deja vu*, but it is in the 1955 novel The Deer Park that, in the character of Marion Faye, the idea of a fully realized psychopath hero is strongly suggested. Marion, however, is not actually the hero of the novel--we have to wait twelve years for the play version of The Deer Park to see him become that--and Norman's revision of the text in the wake of Rinehart's withdrawing the novel from publication offers only broad foreshadowings of what is to come in the play.

It is no coincidence that the crisis in Norman's vision of himself that was discussed at the start of the present narrative--and toward a reexamination of which we are now chapter by chapter proceeding--coincides exactly with his full breakthrough to conscious discovery of his deep personal sympathy and empathy with

this psychopathological figure and all that he represents. In 1957, already well into the re-invention of his own identity and career, Norman's "The White Negro" essay approvingly quotes psychoanalyst Robert Lindner on how the psychopath figure by that time can be represented:

. . . the psychopath is a rebel without a cause, an agitator without a slogan, a revolutionary without a program: in other words, his rebelliousness is aimed to achieve goals satisfactory to himself alone; he is incapable of exertions for the sake of others. All his efforts, hidden under no matter what disguise, represent investments designed to satisfy his immediate wishes and desires. . . . The psychopath, like the child, cannot delay the pleasures of gratification; and this trait is one of his underlying, universal characteristics. He cannot wait upon erotic gratification which convention demands should be preceded by the chase before the kill: he must rape. He cannot wait upon the development of prestige in society: his egoistic ambitions lead him to leap into headlines by daring performances. Like a red thread the predominance of this mechanism for immediate satisfaction runs through the history of every psychopath. It explains not only his behaviour but also the violent nature of his acts.[AFM, p. 344]

The causal elements of initial fear, followed by act-of-the-will anger, followed by apotheosis into the psychopathic are not so much forgotten as assumed, and Norman's thrust goes past personal cause straight into historical effect. " Yet even Lindner," he says, "who was the most imaginative and most sympathetic of the psychoanalysts who have studied the psychopathic personality, was not ready to project himself into the essential sympathy." That sympathy, which Norman has clearly project himself into, is the perception that "the psychopath may indeed be the perverted and dangerous front-runner of a new kind of personality which could become the central expression of human nature before the twentieth century is over." [AFM p. 345] But as Norman finished preparing copy for the final typescript of "Transit" in the closing

days of 1943, he stood only at the very beginning of this long road, running as it does toward The Deer Park, through "The White Negro" and beyond.

In 1943, he was no doubt satisfied to have completed a book he had never expected to finish in civilian life, just as he had been glad for a stroke of literary good fortune a bit earlier in this season: he had succeeded in placing the much-rejected novella he was still calling "The Foundation." It had come back on July 27 from MGM, along with a letter telling Norman that he was not to be chosen for the studio's Junior Writer's Group. Norman promptly sent the manuscript to Edwin Seaver, who, in the act of preparing for publication with the L. B. Fisher Company an anthology of work by new American writers to be called Cross-Section, had issued a call for unpublished "novelletes, stories, poems, essays and full length plays."

Over 1400 entries were finally submitted, and among those chosen for inclusion were novellas by Jane Bowles and Richard Wright ("The Man Who Lived Underground,") short stories by Shirley Jackson, Brendan Gill and Ralph Ellison, poems by Isidor Schneider, Oscar Williams and Langston Hughes, an essay by Stanley Edgar Hyman, and a play ("The Man Who Had All the Luck") by newcomer Arthur Miller. "In all," says the promotion brochure, "Cross-Section contains 6 novelletes, 2 full-length plays and a poetic drama, 17 short stories, a long critical essay and 25 poems, none of which has been previously published." The Richard Wright piece was his first published since the very successful Native Son, but

most of the authors in the 300,000 word volume were very much newcomers--young and relatively unknown at the time.

Seaver's chief reader, fiction writer Marjorie Stengel, discovered Norman's manuscript among the flood of submissions, liked it very much, and, after a brief interview with him, brought it to Seaver's attention. He wrote to Norman in late August, saying that he very much admired the "novelette" and that he wanted "to hold it as a particularly strong entry" for inclusion in the volume. Before accepting it, though, he wanted a better ending and a better title. Norman supplied satisfactory versions of both,<sup>2</sup> and "A Calculus At Heaven" was firmly accepted in September. Somewhat later, Seaver invited Norman to meet with him in New York, and the two had a brief conversation that Norman was not to forget. He recalls muttering "in a small voice that 'A Calculus at Heaven' had been influenced by Man's Fate."

'You admire Malraux greatly?' Seaver suggested.  
'I'd like to be another Malraux,' I blurted.  
'Well,' Seaver said with real kindness, 'maybe you will, maybe you will.' [AFM p.28-29]

Norman would add some revisions to "Transit" in January, but he closed out 1943 by taking a big break for a final excursion. His recreation time that season had been so limited as to leave almost

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Two, Part Four, sub-section iii. The December 23, 1943 acceptance letter from L. B. Fischer included a check for \$50 as an advance against royalties.

no record.<sup>3</sup> Through the fall he must have made the occasional trip to Boston to be with Bea, and she might even have come down to New York once or twice, but for the most part they each went it alone, working hard. Now, though, Bea was all but graduating and Norman had all but finished his novel, so in the next to last week of December they went with a few friends to North Conway, New Hampshire, where their experience was more unqualifiedly idyllic than Provincetown had been in June. They became instant skiing converts, and found themselves growing closer together every day<sup>4</sup>.

Toward the end of the week's stay, Norman suddenly proposed that they get married. Now it was Bea's turn to pull back, foreseeing as she could that Norman must very soon vanish into the army, but he made it clear that it was exactly because of the army that he felt they should get married. His novel largely behind him now, he had been thinking of how he was going to deal with being a soldier, and he envisioned an important part for Bea in his experience. When they came home from Conway, they were secretly engaged.

ii

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<sup>3</sup>. Some forty five years later he told Frank Sinatra that he had seen the singer performing at the Paramount--which must have been that fall--and had envied him his charismatic sexual power over his audience of screaming teenage girls.

<sup>4</sup> Norman wrote two cards home from North Conway, making no mention of Bea. The assessment of their relationship at the time is based upon their many retrospective references to the trip during their wartime correspondence.

It is possible that when Norman went up to North Conway he had already received some warning of his impending induction notification. Certainly he got his first formal notice no later than Monday, January 3, and he immediately rendezvoused with Bea. She told Hilary Mills that the force behind the idea of actually going through with it came from Norman, and that while she herself remained unsure, he very much felt the need for "an anchor on the home front." That part of the home front occupied by both of their parents constituted a significant roadblock to such an action, of course, so the couple decided that the best strategy was to present them with a fait accompli. Armed with a dime-store ring and with Norman's blood-test secretly supplied by an ancient physician-uncle of Seymour Breslow[Manso p.73], they went up to Yonkers at the end of the week--on Friday, February 7--and were married in a civil ceremony.

Immediately after their return, Norman had a formal interview with his draft board to request a brief extension for purposes of finishing his book. The request was not warmly received, and after a wait of two weeks was not granted. His token appeal of this rejection then got him an extra thirty days, but he knew that he would have to report in late March<sup>5</sup>, and he turned to the completion of his revisions even as he sent Edwin Seaver a

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<sup>5</sup> By January 18 a letter to Norman from Martha Keeler, Chief Clerk of Local Board 217, rescheduled an earlier appointment with the Government Appeal Agent. Norman replied with an appeal letter asking for time to finish the manuscript. Correspondence with others reveals that, following an interview, the appeal was denied.

biographical note for Cross-Section<sup>6</sup>

Bea's parents learned about the marriage first, and Norman never forgot or forgave the fury of her mother's rejection of both it and him. Bea later argued that Norman's mother had been even more furious when --by immediate telephone call--she got the news, but there is no disagreement that the disapproval was unanimous, including all parents and most relatives. Judging from the way the union was still being discussed forty years later, Norman's aunts, his Cousin Osie, and, indeed, many of the other women concerned with Norman--friends of Barbara, associates of his Harvard classmates--seem to have assumed that Bea had been the aggressor, and a self-seeking one at that[Manso, passim]. Only the younger sisters of the two principals appear to have been wholehearted--if wholly unheeded-- supporters.

The two overwrought mothers seized a temporary control of the situation by challenging the legality of the whole proceeding. During the time this took, Bea was confined to the house in

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<sup>6</sup> "I was born in Long Branch, New Jersey, Jan. 31, 1923, but lived in Brooklyn most of my life. I graduated Harvard in June, '43, and have been working on the novel for about a year. (i.e. started it in my senior year.) Besides A Calculus at Heaven, I had several stories published in the Harvard Advocate of which I was one of the editors, and one of the pieces--The Greatest Thing in the World--won Story Magazine's college contest for 1941. That story came out of a little hitch-hiking tour which I embarked upon quite Byronically, and in retrospect, masochistically.

If you want any more, I've worked (for very short periods) as a press agent and flat painter for a small summer theater; as a soda jerk and dishwasher; and as a guard in a mental hospital which served eventually as the base setting for the novel. By the time Cross-Section comes out, I guess you can add that I'm in the Armed Forces."

Seaver reduced the note by about half, but added nothing when he published it.

Chelsea, and refused access to an indignant Norman until the question was settled. While both mothers quickly came to recognize the legal status of the arrangement, they did so with heavy hearts and, in accepting it at last, they demanded at least the satisfaction of a proper ceremony.

Thus some three weeks later the couple--angry now at everyone, including each other-- was, as Bea recalled for Hilary Mills, "married again by a rabbi under the chuppa," at the bride's family home in Chelsea. The mutual family pressure to go through with this was evidently irresistible, but the newlyweds openly detested the ceremony, as Norman reminded his mother in a letter later from Fort Ord. He cited the experience as an example of the kind of thing that would probably lead his sister Barbara--at that moment commencing a more than two-year war with Fan by falling defiantly in love with Irish/Catholic Jack Maher--to resist her Jewish identity and marry a gentile. Bea, who detested not only the ceremony but also the house and home where it was held, demonstrated how extraordinarily willing she was to live virtually anywhere else by moving forthwith to Brooklyn Heights, to reside for the time with the Mailer family at 102 Pierrepont Street.

The family's arrival at this Brooklyn Heights address had been relatively recent: Fan decided to move from Crown Street the previous summer--when Barbara went up to Radcliffe and Norman was assuming the status of a Harvard alumnus--apparently as a kind of signal that the family was coming up in the world. Indeed, years later she remembered mentioning the educational situation of her

two children to the landlord, during initial negotiations, lest he not appreciate the character of his potential tenants. A conveniently short walk from the Sunlight Oil Company offices on Court Street, the building had apparently once been a single-family brownstone, but now its recently renovated interior held six one-story apartments, and the Mailers occupied the third floor. Uncelebrated author Arthur Miller would soon occupy one of the other floors, five of which were configured identically: two bedrooms, a kitchen and bath, and a living room large enough, as Fan said--perhaps remembering Norman's "Oh, Don't You Be That Way" party at the end of his freshman year--to allow Barbara to entertain her friends from college.

In March, after a brief pause in a hotel to recover from their ordeal under the chuppa, Norman and Bea moved into one of the bedrooms, and he ran through his final preparations. As part of his nuptial arranging, Norman had taken out a substantial insurance policy with John Hancock (annual premium of \$111.55), and he had a lawyer next door to the oil company draw up a power of attorney giving David Kessler authority to act in all things legal. Norman conducted a last minute consultation with Berta Kaslow, a young woman recommended by Edwin Seaver as a literary agent at the William Morris Agency, with which Norman signed a contract on March 6. Berta was already active in marketing the manuscript of "Transit" and would be his literary representative throughout almost his whole time in the army. Then the young author packed a few belongings and on Monday, March 27, 1944, took a train out to

Camp Upton, a staging center on Long Island, to report for duty.

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Dix

Norman's time of military service was to last for two years, one month, and five days, and he would be honorably discharged on May 2, 1946 at the Fort XXX[???], New Jersey, Separation Center. Although he marked his entrance as a private by scoring a dizzying 147 on the standard army I.Q. test, as well as a very respectable 134 in Mechanical Aptitude, by the time of his discharge he was nevertheless again a private, having risen to the rank of sergeant (T-4) for only two months in early 1946. The time between was marked by an initial seventeen weeks of Basic Training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, some three and a half months in California awaiting embarkation orders, followed by the last eight months of the Pacific war, during almost all of which he campaigned with the 112th Cavalry in the Phillipines. He was then transferred to Japan, and his troopship arrived in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945, in perfect time for him to witness through binoculars the signing of the formal Japanese surrender on the battleship Missouri. He remained stationed in Japan for just over seven months, until April, 1946, when he took ship for home.

The drama, such as it was, that developed in Norman's life during this whole time is for the most part documented in correspondence: some 375 of the letters he wrote home have been preserved, as have close to 300 letters written to him. Here can be followed the fortunes of Norman's relationship with the military, with a publishing world that spent many months reading

and rejecting "Transit", with his family--the various members of which he occasionally had time to address at thoughtful length--and with his wife, who proved indeed to be the anchor on the home front he had correctly thought that he would need. Most of all, however, this record preserves an account of Norman Malier's struggle to make it through the army with all his faculties intact, and this proved to be a struggle indeed.

While Norman was spending eleven days at Camp Upton going through the standard testing, taking his shots, getting his uniforms and preparing to receive an assignment elsewhere, he was interrupted by a barrage of telegraph, telephone and postal communication asking that he come at once to New York City. He had delivered the manuscript of "Transit" to Berta Kaslow in early March, and she had taken it first to Random House, where senior editor Robert N. Linscott registered a kind of enthusiasm that led Berta and everyone in the family to believe that the book was virtually certain of acceptance for publication. But Linscott, who actually had many reservations about the book, and whose editorial colleagues had many more, said that he wanted and needed to talk with Norman in person about revisions, and in the ensuing uproar Norman discovered for the first time what he would rediscover regularly over the next two years: the army had no interest in the demands of his mother, his agent or his literary career.

Summarily refused a pass, he was shipped with a batch of other high-scoring draftees to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for seventeen

weeks of Basic Training in the context of specialization training as an artillery surveyor. As he entered training, it was amidst a flurry of correspondence concerning the status of the book at Random House, and also amidst a flurry of developments concerning Bea. Almost immediately after his departure for Camp Upton she had been notified that her hastily submitted application for officer training in the Waves--the Women's Corp of the U. S. Naval Reserve--had been accepted, and, on the same day Norman left Upton for Fort Bragg, Bea reported for duty as an officer-trainee seaman on the campus of Smith College at Northampton, Massachusetts.

Before either of them could get to their areas of basic training, however, Fan sounded a note that would become a refrain in the family correspondence throughout the war: she asked them both to council Barbara against her relationship with Jack Maher. Norman wrote, amid the chaos of Fort Upton:

About Jack Maher, Mother. I'm sorry but I disagree with you on it. I couldn't write the letter you ask me to, to Barbara. I won't interfere, but I think you're wrong, dear.

Bea, trying mightily to get along with her mother-in-law, was in the act of going to Cambridge--en route to Northampton--to deliver birthday presents to Barbara at Radcliffe, but she also declined Fan's requested alliance.

In any event, Norman and Bea began their military training at almost exactly the same time, though not exactly under the same conditions. Smith College residential housing furnished the officer candidates comfortable quarters in a beautifully pastoral spring setting, reasonably close to the Hartford, Connecticut rail link

to New York and Boston. Fort Bragg, North Carolina, by contrast, was the largest military post in the United States. It was a field artillery replacement training center, five hundred fifty buildings set on a 450 square mile tract of sandy Pinewoods country, some twenty five miles north of the South Carolina border; by April it had passed into the steam heat of summer, and it was, of course, an installation for training enlisted men<sup>7</sup>.

Bea's initial reaction to her new setting was that, though not altogether unpleasant, this woman's military installation was something of a cross between a boarding school and a prison. Norman's first impression--after a twenty-five hour ride in an ancient day coach-- was more global, as well as more stentorian: "Regimental life is horrible," he wrote to his wife. "I know now that no good Communist state could ever be achieved unless regimentation was destroyed."

In the course of the next month, Norman addressed himself first to the task of coping with everyday life in his training platoon. In the overall context of rigorous basic training, his platoon was specifically being prepared in Instrument and Survey training: placement, direction and photo-analyzing results of field artillery fire. The specific training required unusual levels of skill in mathematics, particularly geometry and trigonometry, so Norman's platoon was an extraordinarily well-educated and

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<sup>7</sup> Norman sent home a 32 page booklet, A Guide to the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center: Fort Bragg, North Carolina, with light annotation showing the location of his area, and the identity of his battery and battalion.

intelligent, if not widely admired, unit in the battery of which it was a part.

They slept in a two-story barracks, thirty men to a floor, and, apart from trying to keep it and all of their equipment meticulously clean and well-ordered, the men divided their 5:30 AM-10:00 PM days between eight hours of class (four in the morning, four in the afternoon) and a grueling routine of physical work and training. While living in the barracks the platoon was said to be in garrison. In its overall seventeen week structure the training took the men through two interim weeks and aimed at two penultimate weeks of intensive exercise out of garrison, bivouacked in the field, and would conclude with a final week back in the barracks. Reassignment, with a ten-day furlough, would bring the training to an end.

Not unpredictably, Norman found the classes tolerable and sometimes even interesting; was challenged and tested by the physical demands but took some pride in being able to stay the course; and he hated the calculated strategy of barracks and equipment inspection--not to mention Kitchen Police-- designed as they were to condition the men to take orders automatically and without question. A barracks-mate recalls that Norman proved sufficiently inept at preparing for official scrutiny that some of his fellows routinely reviewed his area and equipment before every inspection, to protect the platoon from the group punishment that his "gigs" might otherwise bring down upon them all.

Many, if not indeed most aspects of Norman's situation must

have reminded him of a combination of the worst features of Boy's High and the Boston State Hospital, and he was, in his cautious attempt to deal with it adequately, very far from being the most extroverted member of his platoon. Indeed, in a letter to Bea rather admiringly describing the man who actually was most extroverted--one Bernie Schwartz--Norman contrasts his own identity in the group by remarking, "In the barracks I am rather quiet, colorless I suppose," adding that only one of his fellows even begins to know him. The fact was, as Bea very well knew, that Norman felt himself at an enormous disadvantage in this evocative setting of crowded masculine anonymity.

For a sense of support he turns not to any barracks-mate but outside, to his family, to Bea and, in a rather different context, to his agent. Throughout the seventeen weeks, Norman wrote an average of at least five cards and letters a week, and in return received a steady stream of cards, letters, telegrams and packages containing ingeniously selected foodstuffs, clothing, patent medicines and other supplies. His exchanges with his parents--Barbara was submerged in her own situation and seldom wrote--were very like their correspondence during the Harvard years, except that now Barney was a more active participant. In late April he landed a G-11 Civil Service appointment as an accountant with the Office of Price Administration, working for the most part out of Washington, D.C., and for the first time a separate, if rather stunted correspondence grew up between father and son.

Uncle Dave and Aunt Nan wrote regularly, and of course Fan,

still in charge of the Sunlight Oil Company and accumulating extra portions of food stamps in Brooklyn for her absent husband and daughter, wrote constantly, kept the packages coming, served as contact person with Berta Kaslow, Edwin Seaver, and other literary persons, and hatched futile schemes to get her son special treatment by the military.

It was Bea however, as Norman had foreseen and intended, who supplied him with the kind of support no other person in his life could offer. Her decision to enter military training at the same time as he did proved a brilliantly successful tactic, transforming her from Fan's passive Pierrepont Street housemate for the duration--a situation that could not possibly have lasted--into Norman's active peer, discovering a new world in a way analogous to his own process of discovery. They had not only old things to share in their letters and plans but new ones, developing for both of them every day, and they must have been one of the rare separated couples during the war who grew closer, in basic ways, as a consequence of their separation.

Early on, Norman sent her what he called "A portrait your husband in uniform:"

He wears his fatigues all day, which are faded dirty green, a shirt and pants. The shirt flops loose about his hips, and his calves are covered with canvas leggings. His shoes are always dirty and caked. He wears a cartridge belt about his middle and a carbine (short rifle) is slung over his back. His face is tanned and his shirt open at the neck. His hands are always dirty; when he finishes eating he wipes them on his pants. He has a habit of spitting from a dry throat. The spit comes out in a little white ball. He looks very tough and wiry, and his hair is a half-inch long, his eyes are very blue against the dirty tanned face. You cannot see his hair, however, for a steel helmet covers his head, and the chin strap chafes against his jawbone. He looks ready to

fight tomorrow.

Bea's replies were appreciative and witty, offering in situ self portraits from the cloistered inner chambers of a women's community that often enough were indirectly erotic, and of course the correspondence on both sides included a substantial dimension of the directly erotic as well. Sharing past memories, designing domestic projects for the future, and exchanging their discoveries in the here and now, the young couple had a correspondence that might have been worth saving even if it had not also been designed to serve as a repository for the journal-notes of a writer researching vital material.

As writer, Norman used his voluminous flow of correspondence in a variety of ways, most directly in the form of publisher negotiations, through Berta Kaslow, designed to get "Transit" into print. To say that the book's author took a businesslike attitude in these matters is to say the least: he and Bea and his mother all felt that Berta might be even more dedicated as his agent if she did not know he was married, so the fact was rather awkwardly concealed from her for some four months, and still more awkwardly acknowledged when, in the normal course of business, it came to the agent's puzzled attention. Apparently undismayed by the news, Berta generated heavy correspondence through her near-miss with Robert Linscott at Random House, which revealed the publisher's view that though the novel in its present state was "quite unpublishable," Random House was nevertheless interested in some kind of affiliation with its author. The publishers suggested

unrealistically radical revisions of "Transit", but offered at the same time a small advance in the context of an option contract for the submission of Norman's "first satisfactory, book-length manuscript."

Not realizing that this would be the best offer "Transit" would ever elicit, Norman turned it down and went on, while he was at Fort Bragg, to work through negative negotiations with Knopf, Houghton-Mifflin, Scribners and Harcourt-Brace. He was also busy tracking and discussing with various correspondents the publication and reception of Seavers' Cross-Section volume, which appeared in early May. Norman's most important professional activity as writer while in basic training, however, involved the employment of part of his correspondence with Bea as a writing journal, where he could record notes, sketches, and impressions of his environment that might be of future fictional use. While referring to himself as a colorless figure in the platoon, he told Bea somewhat melodramatically:

Let it remain that way. And let it remain that I am not too prominent--it is an excellent observation post. From the observation post to the receiving station will go so much that would otherwise be unnoticed.

As the receiving station for Norman's literary observations, Bea accumulated, even in the first few months of his military training, a significant amount of material. Besides notes on his working and living conditions, he sent her verbal sketches of a number of soldiers, recorded their speech and social/sexual attitudes (as he often quite calculatedly elicited them), and wrote out vignettes and scenes complete with dramatic action and

dialogue. The closest thing to a best friend he had at first was Meyer Marotznik, an older draftee, more or less unfit for the physical training but extremely good hearted; he was uncritically admiring of Norman, who would sketch him as if he were an artist's model:

He has a powerful chest and body with very spindly old man's legs. His hair is black and thin, beginning to recede. He has a wide forehead, small deepset brown eyes and a good chin, and a broken, flat nose which looks like a European peasant's rather than a prize-fighter's.

The extroverted Bernie Schwartz is given similar treatment in the context of something close to a one-act play, and in fact over time the barracks becomes a kind of literary studio where, on the easel of his note-pad, Norman produced sketch after sketch to be displayed in the gallery of his correspondence with Bea. He is quite overt about what he is doing, routinely remarking to Bea that "it's very good having you to write to. Someone to share my secret observations with." The only problem was that since Bea also lived in the transient conditions of a military installation, she was not the most secure caretaker of this accumulating archival material. So Norman advises her early on:

Told mother I would write part of my letters to you as a journal which you would send on to her. Enables me to write shorter letters home. I'll try to keep such stuff apart from the other sheets where I make my restricted love. Explain to mother that some of my notes will seem a little raw to her.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In fact, the texts of Norman's letters can almost never be separated out into literary sketches and notes on the one hand, and, on the other, his personal, often extremely intimate communications to Bea. More frequently than not, the two dimensions are inextricably combined. It is unclear how this author's wife dealt with the resultant problem of preserving her privacy, but what is clear is that, somehow, the letters all eventually went

Norman's literary activity, beyond his ongoing business relationship with Berta, included a certain amount of reading. He read J. P. Marquand's 1943 novel So Little Time in May, quoting passages of it to Bea to illustrate various points about the publishing world, and at his request Fan sent him a copy of Thus Spake Zarathustra, which he began reading. <sup>argued</sup> He was in the right mood, because even before the Nietzsche his situation moved him to some free-style philosophizing of his own, and he develops a thesis for Bea about the relationships to be discovered between death and rhythm, rhythm and civilization, and civilization and death which she said she found fascinating (while noting that quite the opposite of what he argued could just as easily be proved.) Early reviews and notices of Cross-Section began to reach him in May, Fan having sent him a copy of the book, and he was pleased to discover that the Book-of-the-Month Club had chosen it as a selection. Norman is alert, first, for mentions of "Calculus" in the reviews--the BOMC notice did not mention him--and also, somewhat cautiously, he begins reading the other items in the anthology, always measuring himself against his contemporaries.

Most striking of all in this season, however, is the way Norman's literary imagination processes material impressions and information from the world of his training, and transfers the result over into the world of writing. "I got an idea for a war novel today," he tells Bea.

It came to me when I was thinking of how much I'd know about  
home to Fan.

artillery when my 17 weeks are over, not just shooting them, but how they are aimed, set up, and what tasks each man from the officers to the lowest cannoneers perform during a day's activity on the guns. From there the idea followed naturally.

He thought the book could cover the progress of a battery--four guns--that moved into place in a certain valley, aimed at certain targets, struck them, subsequently became engaged in a counter-artillery duel with the enemy--"one of the most nerve-wracking things in modern warfare"--and within a day or two advanced or retreated a few miles to new positions which had been prepared for them. There is a kind of blithe quality to his easy transformation of training program fact into writing program fiction:

The book would start with the survey men (me) estimating the terrain a few days before the guns are moved in, and deciding upon the site. Then the arrival of the battalion (three batteries of four guns each) and preparations. Then the rest. What do you think?

In the married couple's letters, the most central refrain speaks of how each of the young trainees tries to cope with the programs they find themselves in, and how their passionate devotion to one another permits them to prevail over the otherwise impossible demands of the training. Bea's schedule is apparently even more hectic than Norman's in terms of jam-packed calendar hours and the quite real danger of failing, or "bilging out" of the program. But it is only ten weeks overall and offers an Ensign's commission at its conclusion: she was scheduled to graduate and receive the commission on May 30, along with orders for her next assignment. For many weeks both Norman and Bea had openly fantasized that she would get a brief "Shore Leave" following graduation, which would permit an overnight meeting in

Fayetteville--just five miles from Norman's station--for a much anticipated reunion.

Their detailed descriptions of training, test scores and assorted military accomplishments and reversals reveal that they were somewhat similar as trainees: their academic text-examination scores were often at the very top of their competition, and Norman sometimes scored high on the carbine firing range and in some of the physical training, but neither of them showed well in personnel or equipment inspections. During a bad week in May Bea got cited at Personnel Inspection three times: once for a crooked stocking seam, once for dust on her coat, and once for a stray lock of hair. Norman admits that he is in the lowest fourth of his platoon for "chicken-shit" violations, and calls down "gigs" on his head for infractions far greater and wider-ranging than Bea's:

I take showers after hours, I forget to tell the sergeant I am going to see the first sergeant, I clean my equipment in the sinks instead of the big washtub, I forget to shine my shoes before a parade inspection, etc. But in the classes, the physical training, the carbine, the instruments, etc. I am easily in the top fourth.

Though Norman was accumulating a military record that would finally work against him far more than he was able to appreciate at the moment, during this early season both of them survived their everyday reversals by turning, in their letters, to thoughts of one another. It was therefore a bitter pill to swallow when they discovered that there was to be no shore leave long enough to provide time for a reunion at the end of May. Instead, Bea was required to remain at the Northampton station after being commissioned, there to take an eight-week specialization course in

communications. At just the time he had hoped for his rendezvous with Bea, Norman received instead a visit from Uncle Dave and Aunt Nan, and with a real effort the disappointed soldier was able, he hoped, to conceal from them his deep state of irritability. They went back and, the next weekend, regaled a Pierrepont Street dinner table with anecdotes of Norman's anti-military posture--Bea was there and did not enjoy the experience--while Norman turned his disaffected attention to the here and now at Fort Bragg.

Cross-Section continued to get favorable attention--Philip Van Doren Stern praised it in The Book of the Month Club News, and one Thomas Lyle Collins reviewed it admiringly in the New York Herald Tribune of May 28, 1944, singling out "Calculus" as "a remarkable achievement for so young a writer." Then on Sunday, June 4, Seaver's collection was the subject of a network radio-broadcast review that glued Barney in Washington and Fan in Brooklyn to their radios, and they were thrilled to hear Norman praised yet again. As Norman tried to assure himself that he could keep up with the training and hold his own in any arena there that he cared about, he more and more sought out the opportunity to expand the writer's notebook that he shared with Bea. It was more as a writer than a soldier that he received the news, on June 6, of the Allied invasion of Normandy, and he told Bea how much he wished that he could have been there. (He here for the first time referred to his wish to enter combat as a kind of vice that he had somehow to deal with--he called it his "dirty itch"-- and the subject would come up periodically in the course of his movement, finally, into the

status of volunteer combatant.)

He wrote a seven page sketch of how two drunken couples in Fayetteville--the men off-duty corporals, the women apparently prostitutes--wandered into a motor-pool parking lot where Norman was on guard duty, and variously amused and shocked the young soldiers on guard there with their antics. He then writes of how, on the ride home from that same guard duty, he experienced a kind of vision from the truck of the passing inland landscape as if it were a seascape, with rich sea smells. He also conjurs up an imaginary painting of a dead-empty, silence-filled scene in camp, consciously in the fashion of Salvador Dali. Most ambitiously, perhaps, he recounts how on a quiet Sunday afternoon he explores out into the camp, visiting the deserted and oddly peaceful obstacle course, and communing with nature among the isolating dunes. In exploring a wrecked and abandoned building, he is taken back in memory to an exploration of a similar place with Bea two summers earlier near the wreckage of the Scarboro.

Norman pours these things out in his letters, adding that his confidence in his ability to create continues to assert itself. Reading Stanley Edgar Hyman's essay in Cross-Section, "The New War and Peace: A Speculation," he tells Bea that:

I felt the old enthusiasm grow in me, the old hunger and the virile creative juices. So many characters appeared, so many phrases formed, a whole [paragraph] for the beginning, and I had the writer's ecstasy when something is born in his mind, perfect and complete for that moment. I swore to myself that I would write a

great novel, and it seemed so easy and positive at that second.<sup>9</sup> Similarly inner-directed is a "set of ideas on character dynamics" that for pages explores how there is an inner core to all personality formed of all the destructive human impulses and this is contained by an outer-ring of super ego forces that curb the core.

Earlier in the same week he begins an anecdote about how a new sergeant in their Battery has fallen into difficulty by failing to impose disciplinary sanctions in the right way. As Norman sketches the situation, filling in dialogue between the sergeant and the men and analyzing the exchange of their feelings, the presentation begins to assume a more and more formal shape, and, noticing this, the author remarks to Bea that this "would make a nice little New Yorker story." In fact, the sergeant in question, identified by Norman as being too understanding and human to function effectively as a "good" training non-com, is non-other than Sergeant Mann, the original model for Sergeant Croft in The Naked and the Dead. (The fictional character is of course changed, as Norman has remarked,<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hyman's essay, "The New War and Peace: A Speculation," is an eighteen page early-entrant in what will be a whole critical literature of speculation concerning the character of post-World War II writing, particularly the novel. ("It seems obvious," Hyman says, "that the novel is the only adequate form for presenting the total effect of modern war.") The new War and Peace, he concludes: "would presumably be another vast historical novel, written a decade or two after the war. The author would have to be a man of leisure or some means, who has either served in the war or had some comparable military experience. He would probably be a Marxist; probably, although not inevitably, a Russian; and certainly a genius. It would not be his first book, but probably not his last either." Cross-Section, p. 413.

<sup>10</sup> Quote Manso's interview with Norman? Get it from him direct?

by being made unfair--not to say psychotic--in ways that the actual Sergeant Mann would never have been.)

Though Norman continues to report on the progress of his training, and even begins to wonder whether it might make sense for him to give up on his case-study approach and get out of the enlisted ranks through entering Officer's Candidate School, his correspondence during the month of June is largely divided between his literary notebooking and expressions of his personal, physical obsession with his wife. As the weeks wore on, an idealized vision of their relationship and the specific goal of finding his way back into her arms began to dominate Norman's imagination, and the idea of Beatrice, as she always signed herself, emerges as the entity upon which he almost totally depends. OCS, for example, was attractive only if it did not require him to give up his furlough at basic training's end. When in fact he comes to learn, or anyway to believe that acceptance into an officer training program would cost him his furlough and require him to wait another three months before rejoining Bea, he summarily abandons the idea, choosing to exchange what at that time promised to be years in the ranks for the less than ten days guaranteed as his post-basic training leave.

It is not too much to say that he becomes totally obsessed with the prospect of their reunion, and so the effect of her telling him, in a letter on June 25, that she had that weekend experienced a kind of intimacy with another man was really quite dramatic. Their relationship had always been based on an

arrangement of mutual confession concerning intimate relations with others, past present or future, and this was apparently accompanied by a show of progressive sophistication concerning mutual freedom of choice. In reality the two were fierce in their feelings of mutual possession, and certainly their current circumstances allowed for absolutely no hope of their accepting anything but the most dedicated faithfulness from one another.

Bea's experience was actually quite funny, in a Woody-Allen-movie kind of way. She had accepted a weekend invitation from former college friends, a married couple who were trying to cope with six months of physical separation caused by a very delicate pregnancy that had concluded with a complicated Caesarian-section birth. By the time Bea arrived for the weekend the couple, evidently racked by the kind of cabin-fever that deprives parents of all sanity, had hatched the scheme of asking her--as a special favor to the family-- to relieve the young husband's unbearable sexual starvation. She refused, but during the weekend that followed the cramped quarters and frantic state of the householders brought about some fleeting and more or less compromising contact, and Bea decided to confess it all to Norman. He reacted initially with an outburst of jealous distress, but the confession's longer range effect was to drive him totally into the subject of his relationship with Bea, his need for her undivided intimate attention and the necessity of her reassurance in this regard.

Virtually every letter Norman writes through the month of July --amidst all the developing drama of the conclusion of his basic

training--addresses itself at least in part to arranging the time, the place, the structure and the most intimate details of their forthcoming reunion. Norman was going to be on maneuvers in the field until the morning of Saturday, July 29. The plan was for Bea to meet him on that Saturday in a hotel in Fayetteville--for weeks the burning question had been Fayetteville or Raleigh?- and they would be together for as much of the weekend as she could spare before departing for wherever her new navy assignment was to take her. As a practical matter, they needed to know when and where Bea was going to be sent for this next assignment, and in the absence of such knowledge they could not realistically plan anything. Undeterred, Norman planned it anyway, speculating that she would be stationed in Washington or somewhere close to it.

Waiting to find out the facts put them both through an agony of suspense before they learned, in mid-July, that as of August 1 Bea was to be assigned as a communications officer to the huge Naval Base in Norfolk, Virginia. The Fayetteville plan was, suddenly, perfectly practical. Bea's letters since the confession had immersed Norman in reassurance of every kind, and he soon stopped displaying signs of actual jealousy, but his very powerful need to join her continues to build through his letters, and it clearly was related to the structurally building drama of his basic training program. He says on Sunday, July 9, that the previous first full week of the month--Monday the 3rd through Friday the 7th--had been the most difficult he had experienced in the army.

Grueling night marches on Monday and Tuesday set up a full day

in the field on Wednesday when his platoon hand-measured miles of terrain in their "survey" exercise for setting up the heavy guns. Thursday was their time for the Infiltration Course, a trial by ordeal wherein the platoon crawls out of a trench and across a seventy yard field of black dirt canopied with low-slung barbed wire meshes while live machine-gun fire passes over their heads and dynamite charges simulate artillery fire all around them. When they have fallen into a trench on the opposite end, they are routed round and required to crawl over the course again at night, with the guns firing tracer bullets. Norman writes Bea two letters, the first of ten pages the second of eight, giving a graphic account of the experience.

The next week, strenuous enough in its own right, was also devoted to preparing for two weeks in the field, where his battery staged a full range of artillery surveys, by day and night, including mock patrol skirmishes. Norman returns from the maneuvers on Saturday morning, July 29, stores his filthy equipment, showers, shaves, and goes into Fayetteville to join Bea for a full day and a half at the Prince Charles hotel. Once in the room and in Bea's arms, Norman suddenly experienced the full force of the threat he had been living under in the unyielding crush of barracks and bivouac. So absolute is his moment of alienation from the external world that he refuses furiously to so much as acknowledge its existence: when they need ice water, Bea has to get it from the landlady. Norman will remember for a long time this crushed condition, in which he had refused even to be seen by, let

alone speak to anyone but Bea. He read it as a sign of how deep and desperate his secret sensitivity really ran, and this proof of his vulnerability worried him.

Bea reported on Monday , August 31, to her new assignment as aide to the District Communications Officer of the Fifth Naval District Naval Operating Base in Norfolk, while Norman, moving into his final week of basic training, posed with his unit for an end-of-basic photographic group portrait. He appears there as a striking combination of intrepid, hard-nosed veteran of the training and--as Bea described him looking at the time--"like a skeleton with his big ears sticking out." Norman planned a three-part structure for his ten-day furlough: time with Bea in Norfolk, time with his family in Brooklyn, and time with his agent in New York. He could hardly have divided it more <sup>unprofitably</sup> awkwardly, spending a whole day on a train for a two day New York visit, another day back down to Norfolk for six days, and then, accompanied by Bea, back up to New York for two days more.

The furlough concluded with a tense meeting in the offices of Random House, where editor Robert Linscott tried to express his admiration for "Transit" while at the same time explaining why he felt that it was unpublishable. They discussed revisions--in fact Linscott was under the impression that Norman had agreed to wholesale revisions--but, whatever he said at the meeting (he had been very nervous going in), Norman's visceral commitment was actually to something other than revising a manuscript written prior to his entering military service. It would take him a long

while consciously to acknowledge it, but at bottom he intended to continue looking forward, and to treating the military experience as an affiliation not unlike the one he had with Harvard: he intended to use the experience so that he would be if not nurtured at least catalyzed into the production of significant literary creation.

With all this churning in his mind, on August 18 he boarded a train for San Francisco, armed with orders to report to Fort Ord, California.

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Norman's days with Bea and the others had in a great many ways been restorative, but they passed quickly and the stretch of the continent--he had never been east of the ~~Appalachians~~ <sup>Seranton</sup>--impressed upon him the distance that had so massively been placed between them. Having ascertained that the cost of a Pullman ticket was beyond his means, he crossed the country by day-coach and was actually thrilled by the panoramic visual grandeur of the trip. He made it in the company of fellow-trainee Clifford Maskovsky, an eighteen-year-old Connecticut resident who had been so sharp as to have been appointed aid-de-camp in their Fort Bragg platoon. When they arrived in San Francisco the two soldiers tested their orders by not proceeding directly to Fort Ord. Instead they stayed over to explore the city--checking into an inexpensive "armed services hotel" on Mason Street, run by Lutherans and called the King

George--and seeing a production of Porgy and Bess. Maskovsky, who remembers himself as having been somewhat under Norman's influence, was worried that their delay would identify them as having been Absent Without Leave when they arrived at Fort Ord, but Norman's sense that no one would even notice turned out to have been right.

Fort Ord blanketed an area not much smaller than that covered by Fort Bragg, but its location at the top of the Monterey Peninsula, some one hundred miles down the coast from San Francisco, invested it with an utterly contrasting romantic air. Ocean vistas, bracing sea air, periodic banks of rolling fog, and easy access to the charming streets of Monterey and Carmel-by-the-Sea made it <sup>an enviable assignment.</sup> ~~a station of genuinely enviable aspect.~~ Only the fact that most of its military population was passing through to less attractive destinations made assignment in such environs other than altogether agreeable. Norman and his artillery-surveyor companion, incredulously marking their first exposure to palm trees, rejoined the eleven others who had been assigned from their Fort Bragg platoon, and were initially assigned to an Infantry Replacement Depot.

At first, they expected to be shipped overseas almost immediately: two to three weeks, Norman estimated on August 28. Because their mail in the final stage would be censored, and they were not supposed to reveal the details of their overseas assignments, Norman worked out a salutation code to tip Bea and the family off to his assigned destination. As soon as he was listed on an "alert" for a specific overseas assignment, Norman's next letter

would signal the fact by opening with a pre-arranged special salutation, differently worded depending upon whether the destination was to be Burma, India, Guadalcanal, the South Pacific Islands, Australia, Hawaii or Alaska. When two weeks had passed, however, and Norman, with his fellow-artillerymen, had been placed in an artillery platoon and begun a program of quite intensive training, they no longer felt so sure of early embarkation.

"Artillery is shipped more slowly than infantry," Norman reported to Fan and Barbara, and he tells of eighteen-mile, eight hour hikes every Wednesday night, as well as such full scale training exercises as sapping a simulated minefield at night, overnight bivouacs, working with big gun emplacements, participating in complex survey problems, and heavy assignments of KP. Maskovsky recalls, in fact, that he and Norman were given extra such duty because they were discovered in a Norman-originated scheme to avoid taking the full eighteen mile hikes, dropping out instead at a point where they knew the column would eventually pass again, and rejoining it there for the final return leg. When they were caught they were made "permanent" KPs, Maskovsky remembers, and though Norman never mentions the episode in his letters he does complain about burdensome KP assignments. (He almost surely thought the matter too trivial to have any effect upon his candidacy for ultimate assignment.)

Norman does not merely complain, in any case, and it is clear that while garrison is far from completely satisfying, he nevertheless gets his share of enjoyment out of the life he leads.

He is with twelve people he knows and has trained with for many months, after all, and he feels himself part of a community, such as it is. He plays football whenever he gets the chance, delighting in the hard contact and the bursts of participant and spectator enthusiasm. His letter-writing is interfered with for several days because of a sprained thumb: "my penchant for scuffling with guys three times my size is disabling me once again," he reports to Bea, "I hit a good-natured ape in the stomach, and wham!"

More elaborately, he tells her about a mock-battle with a fellow-surveyor one afternoon, when their platoon is in the field, from which Norman emerges with a scraped temple and a couple of cuts on his hands. He begins a wrestling match with Bull-Moose Davidian, enormous and far beyond him in strength, on the soft, dark-brown sand, and "we looked like coal miners in no time." As Davidian bears down on him--"you should see how much like an ape he looks with his head and huge lower jaw hanging loosely, and his oak-tree shoulders swaying"---Norman douses him with water from his canteen, and is doused in return. Then, while all the men cheered and laughed,

I jumped him, and quite amazed, found myself on top of him. This could never last of course, and after a minute I was on my back, and his belly was on my head. I could see his sweat-shirt, and I grinned with childish delight. I opened my mouth and bit him in the belly. He roared, leaped about a foot in air, and we were at it again, wrestling furiously in the dirt.

Just then the whistle blew to fall in, and we came running up, putting on all our equipment at once so that everything was awry. We had been dirty first, then wet, and then black-dirty again. We came up late and the officer, grinning dryly, said, 'Now if you two Gold-Dust twins will fall in, maybe we can get going.'

By early October, Norman and the other members of his platoon

had concluded that they might be staying at Fort Ord for months, placed at the end of the waiting list, they believed, because none of them had been rated as non-commissioned officers.<sup>11</sup> As they settled in and began to learn their way around the area, Norman soon discovered Carmel. After his first visit he dismissed the jewel-box community out of hand, identifying it in a long letter to Bea as a merely cute, bourgeois retreat for affected professionals or businessmen and their families. The attempt of its Chamber of Commerce to identify it as a haven for artists sparks, in this first-time visitor, an ambitious distinction between art and beauty ("The core of art is not beauty, it is meaning; the core of beauty is simply pleasure."), and he dismisses Carmel for being merely beautiful. Having condemned it, however, he proceeds to spend as much time there as possible, clearly enjoying it and its seashore area as places comparable to Provincetown and to Monmouth Beach.

To his mother and sister he writes:

I like what I have seen of California; it is much softer and less gaudy, commercial than I had imagined. Only the palm-trees infuriate me; they look artificial, as if they were made of crepe paper. But this gray fog covering the land I know. Just think of Monmouth Beach, and the sound of the water, and you will not be too far away from me.

Monterey is the largest nearby town and he likes it, calling it a very picturesque little fishing town with a lot of gaudy little bars, and souvenir shops, and some fascinatingly packed little tumble-down houses. [Fan and Barbara] would like it here, the coast is always the coast no matter where.

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<sup>11</sup> In fact, massive offensive actions were beginning in October with the ultimate goal of re-taking the Philippines. Heavy American casualties were anticipated, and Norman's was apparently among the many units being held in reserve to supply, when the time came, replacements for the dead and wounded.

On Saturdays, however, Monterey was always jam-packed with soldiers, and Norman preferred instead the clubs and USOs of Carmel.

He tells Bea of having charmed some Wave officers in a bar there, and he gives her a long account of a dramatic reading in which he participates "at some rich biddy's house in Carmel." It was a reading of Claire Booth Luce's The Women, but with all the parts being read by men "(Cute idea--get it.)", and the overcoming of his quite serious stage fright constitutes most of the story's point: "I was really good for a few lines, and I felt a wonderful joy--the tumult inside and the casual, low words." Norman's pleasure, here, is serious: he is measuring himself against that recent moment when he was too withdrawn to be able to ask his landlady for water, and he marks his progress pointedly for Bea. His more public point, for all the family to share, is that he has been able during this period to discover, if not a family, at least something of a haven in California.

His family continued, of course, to constitute a major point of reference for Norman. Having turned twenty-one just before marrying, he cast his first (absentee-ballot) vote this November in the Roosevelt-Dewey presidential contest. He told his mother that he had voted for Roosevelt--of whom she was an ardent supporter--adding "I have lost my old faith in him, but he is certainly the lesser of the two evils." At about the same time, Fan got after him on the subject of Jack Maher, fearful as she was that Barbara and Jack intended to marry, and she asked Norman to council his sister

counsel

against it. It was on this occasion that, in refusing, he recalled for his mother "that disgraceful exhibition--my marriage ceremony," and suggests that both he and Barbara have been driven away from respecting their Jewishness by Fan's unreasonable demands.

Though he becomes quite pointed in these criticisms--"If you object to Jack merely because he is a Goy, that makes as much sense as Anti-Semitism"--what ultimately must be most remarkable is the steadily affectionate tone he nevertheless maintains with his mother throughout these exchanges. "Your letter before last put me in a very good mood," he goes on after his reprimand, "It was filled with little cute things [and] I enjoyed it." He can be adversarial with Fan, and even for passing moments greatly exasperated, but he never expresses or gives any sign of harboring deep anger. His letters show almost dramatically that Norman at this time never experiences such a feeling for his mother.

His father, up to this year, had been included in correspondence only parenthetically, but since Barney had moved out on his own, living for the most part in Washington D.C. hotels and rooming houses, Norman corresponded with him directly, documenting the relationship separately for the first time. The new situation clearly sets Norman to thinking about his feelings for his father, and at one point this leads to some startling, long-forgotten recollections. To Bea, emphasizing Barney's stern remoteness as a young father, Norman recalls "the old fear of him" when "I was a horribly timid child," and goes on to tell the story of a bad beating, administered with a leather belt when "Dad lost his

temper, which even exceeds mine for rage." Still, in the few letters father and son exchange while Norman is in the army, no hint of conscious conflict is ever suggested.

The problematic idea of Barney's being off on his own must have been the subject of serious family conference when his job-offer from the Office of Price Administration appeared. He no doubt assured his wife and sister and brother-in-law that he would keep out of difficulty, and that an independent position of his own was needed to keep their lives in good financial order, but it is incontrovertible that he had continued through Norman's Harvard years to get into trouble because of gambling. Whatever Sunlight Oil Company funds he may have misappropriated--and there was some amount-- would have been comparatively easy for Fan and Uncle Dave to deal with. Thus there had been no recent breath of outside scandal to cover up, but there was certainly danger in giving him access to anybody else's money. His position with the OPA, however, would not have put him into contact with funds or securities that would be subject to misappropriation: in his Washington office and his frequent trips on the road, Barney was auditing manufacturer and merchant prices to see that they were in compliance with OPA regulations, and the low-risk character of such a position probably was what led the family to accept his decision to go ahead with it.

Living on his own, and earning the Civil Service salary of a GS 11 [figure?], Barney for the first time in over twenty years was able to follow his private inclinations without having to pass inspection by Fan or anyone else in the family for the way he spent

his free time. He heard empathetic things from Norman: "It must be a very curious sensation--as if you were living over a part of your life twenty years back, and as if you were yourself at thirty." In affirming that he and Barney are very much alike--"shy, and strong and weak, and proud"--Norman concludes:

As time goes by, I feel more and more like you, more and more your son. On outward things we are very different, but I think I understand and sympathize with you better than any other person I know.

Throughout his three and a half months in California, Norman continued comprehensively to address the question of literature and his own identity as a writer. He read, of course, starting with Maugham's Christmas Holiday, which he didn't much like, and continued with Fitzgerald's Tender is the Night, which he hated, and Dostoyevsky--he offered Bea a spirited defense of The Idiot--but his big discovery of the season was Spengler. He got a one volume edition of The Decline of the West out of the Fort Ord library, and wrote to Bea with enthusiasm:

His mind appeals to mine, he is the king of the immense generalization, scorns the petty detail for itself and yet employs it so devastatingly when necessary. Where he will lead me I have no idea, but the book is the most dazzling thing I've come across in many years.

He continues an excited analysis for five closely-written pages, saying that "I am half decided to buy Decline, read it as a bible and annotate it, but it weighs a ton, and there are so many jungles I would have to tote it thru."

After Norman got overseas he did in fact send for and carry a copy through the remainder of his service, though it accumulated as much mold as annotation. In any event, during this pre-embarkation

period Norman continues to use his correspondence as a journal repository. He records in graphic detail that scene of a platoon, on night bivouac, sapping a simulated minefield in the dark, and also comes up with a full synopsis of another war novel, this one short, and "not to be the war novel I would want to do." He envisions a squad of artillery surveyors--he gives the names of the fellow-platoon members he would use as models--sent up out of a Pacific island's dense jungle to survey the placement of an artillery battery on a high, protruding ridge that skirts the jungle. Their exhilaration at being free of the jungle quickly turns to fear, as they discover that the Japanese can see them up on the ridge, and the novel's action will be the pattern of their retreat back into the jungle's cover. "The piece would have to be delicate, done with understatement," he tells Bea at the end of the five page summary, "and would depend for its force on having the reader recognize a pattern the protagonists did not."

The most ambitious literary undertaking of this period, perhaps, was a sketch Norman wrote that he then passed on to Berta for possible placement in a magazine. In its original letter-form to Bea, the sketch was short, perhaps 1800 words, and tells in Norman's own voice how he gets on a bus in Monterey early on a Saturday night to return to the barracks before bed-check. Among the passengers on the crowded vehicle is a slightly drunk Negro sergeant who, just before the bus is set to depart, gets into an argument with another soldier. When the driver intervenes and quite unfairly puts the blame for the situation on the sergeant, the

quarrel escalates into an angry, yelling face-off, during the course of which the whole busload of soldiers turns in fury on the now-cornered Negro soldier. With the sole exception of the observing narrator, all the passengers are united in something like a frenzy of racial hostility, and only the appearance of a somewhat unnerved army captain, who in effect arrests the sergeant and turns him over to the Military Police, prevents an actual riot on the bus.

The end of the sketch contrasts the happy relief of the bus passengers, who give off "a roar of satisfaction" as the sergeant leaves, with the frozen reaction of the sergeant himself:

He was walking very straight and there was a terrible smile on his face. It was the smile of a man who has discovered once more, after a long hard struggle to create a few illusions, that the world was unutterably evil and unjust to him, and that in the face of this evil there was nothing he could do but smile, for the enormity of it was beyond rage or hope. It was a smile of awful acceptance, the smile where a man understands he can only be evil himself, that he can only follow the rules of an infinitely alien world.

Norman re-wrote the original sketch to a length of about 3000 words, called it "The Smile of Recognition," and had Berta submit it to The New Yorker. When the editors turned it down, Berta reported that, though they liked it, they felt that "the magazine field had pretty well exhausted the possibilities of violence in regard to the Negro problem." In this same season, "Transit" was turned down by the Atlantic Monthly Press in a letter praising Norman's talent, and Edwin Seaver asked Norman to edit out a fifteen to twenty thousand word excerpt from the manuscript for inclusion in his next volume of Cross-Section.

Central though his literary activities were during his months

in California, more central still was Norman's concentration upon his relationship with Bea. She wrote with faithful regularity, and as it gradually became clear that he and his fellow-surveyors from Fort Bragg might not get their overseas orders for a matter of months, he began, as he had during basic training, to fantasize about reunion. By October 12 he had asked Bea to put in for a leave and to travel cross-country for a rendezvous, and once the proposal was on his mind he referred to it regularly, elaborately embellishing the imagined event as the days and weeks passed. He begins more and more to sound a note that first surfaced in their Fort Bragg correspondence: the fear that he will remain for all his life "an essentially unimportant person." Whatever else this suggests, it probably shows that he was already apprehending that he was going to be evaluated in his official personnel file as a poor soldier, and the way this identity might affect his own feelings about himself in the military community gave him cause for concern.

Self-doubt and the contrasting feeling of self-importance are his theme, and as early as May 18 he records that "It is the greatest proof of our love that each of us needs the other to feel important at all." His dependence upon Bea to support his self-regard is something, during the months in California, that grows clearer and more complex to him. When he is self-confident, which is not infrequently, he revels in it in a thoroughly Whitmanesque fashion, concluding one four-page Song of Himself catalog of abundant antitheses with "I am so many things, that I have met no

man whose emotions I have not known at one time or other, and that is my greatest asset and severest fault." His moments of self-doubt and even self-abasement occur often, however, and as they do he turns with increasing frequency to his absent wife, at one point openly arguing that Bea's remarkably warm reconciliation with her mother--from whom she had been practically estranged while living at home--was inadvisable not only because of what he sees as Mrs. Silverman's various personal inadequacies, but because Norman needed Bea more than her mother did.

With people being alerted and shipped out all around them, the Fort Bragg surveyor group members had no reasonable basis for planning such things as marital reunions, but Bea, with Norman urging her on, apparently decided that there was nothing much to lose: she presented her commanding officer with a request for a leave of absence, for the purpose of visiting her husband at Fort Ord. Surprisingly to her, the leave was granted, fifteen days, beginning November 15, concluding November 29. Norman, as soon as he heard the news, rushed into action and obtained the necessary furlough and the San Francisco and Carmel living quarters he required, but he also, a few days before Bea's arrival, wrote a letter home that is so revealing of his feelings toward himself, his wife, and, indeed, his family, that it requires some detailed attention.

It is addressed to the quartet of adults who had constituted his Brooklyn support system for so many years, "Dear Mother and Dad, Aunt Nan and Uncle Dave." He tells them of the reunion plan,

apologizing for the extravagant expense (Bea would spend the first day and night of her leave flying to San Francisco), and his apparent self-indulgence. He thanks them for always having been a source of self confidence for him, saying:

I think all of you know how essential it is for me to believe in my own importance, my own potentiality for greatness--when I believe I shall be really something I am happy and confident; when I do not is when my fits of depression come.

He explains, however, that as a grown man he can no longer draw upon their support for this vital self-confidence--that his "lessening faith in your faith [is] a part of growing up"--and that this is where his relationship with Bea comes in:

Bea is the only other person I have ever known who could give me with such strength what all of you have given me. And indeed there is no one who can make me believe more in my own strength and my own ability to be great. I have a brilliant wife, and I believe a beautiful one, but I think I should love her if she were neither but could still give that essential support.

Norman goes on to explain that the army has been hard on him not because of the harshness and challenge of the training, which he in some ways appreciates, but because of the emptiness, the loneliness, the boredom and the anonymous, meaningless personal relationships--in which no one has any real importance to anyone else.

Frankly I cannot stomach my own insignificance for too long--my vanity which is probably my greatest fault will not permit it. As the months go by I become gloomier and gloomier, despair more and more of ever becoming a good writer. The respect my vanity demands is not forthcoming--the Army respects virtues with which I am not particularly endowed, and my anonymous, mediocre status grates on me.

Recalling the week he spent with Bea in Norfolk following basic training, he identifies her as the source of his having been

refreshed and cleansed, and he sees the need for that yet again.

Once overseas, he feels, he will be involved in training and action that will distract:

But now, when one year, or as I fear two years lie ahead of me, I am unutterably depressed at times. I have really a desperate need of Bea to refresh and cleanse me again, so that I can go overseas with the confidence that I will not go to seed.

Apologizing once again for the expense, but most especially for having seemed to substitute Bea for his elders in his affections, he closes his letter explaining that its length and detail were intended to include, rather than exclude them from the process. Failing to explain fully, he feared, might "hurt you more, make you doubt my love for you all, and that I never want to make you feel."

Bea's plane arrived in San Francisco on Thursday, November 16, and the two divided their full week together between Carmel and San Francisco hideaways, parting on the Thursday, November 23. They used their time consciously to find strength for the separation ahead, and by Thursday they felt that they had found it. That night Norman had to go back to Ft. Ord, and Bea had to take her stand-by chances for return travel--by plane if the crushingly crowded airlines permitted, by train otherwise. (She got a flight, but was forced to switch to the train in Salt Lake City.) The 23rd was Thanksgiving, and the young couple shared their holiday dinner before they parted.

Two days before Bea left, Norman, along with the rest of his Fort Bragg platoon, was alerted, and the day after her departure he was transferred from Fort Ord to Camp Stoneman, a Bay Area port of embarkation. He was about to sail into a Pacific Theater of

Operations that had been the scene of intense land, sea and air combat all during his months in California. A major invasion of the island of Leyte in the Philippines had been launched in early October, and the American fleet protecting the invading troops, under Admiral Halsey, had engaged a series of Japanese naval task forces with devastatingly successful results. As four American army divisions fought their way across Leyte, what remained of the Japanese navy limped off in retreat, its power as an offensive force virtually destroyed. The Leyte <sup>Gulf</sup> ~~Gulph~~ waters where it happened, with the beaches where the bloodily contested invasion was launched, were the ultimate destination of The Sea Barb, the small troop ship that carried Norman and his comrades out of San Francisco Bay on December 8:

We sailed at dusk, and the harbor city we left from was so beautiful as night came. It seemed to glow, to emit light in a thousand different facets. . . I couldn't take my eyes away--it was so beautiful and sad. The waters in the harbor were already purple, and the city reflected in it, and we were putting out to sea.

[CHAPTER THREE]

Part Two

i

The small ship was jam-packed with troops and Norman told Bea that he had been depressed, at first "abominably so." He referred to the "tedium and filth and heat and noise, the fact that you are rarely more than three feet from the nearest person," but above all he invoked the knowledge that he was being separated from her in a way that no elaborate schemes of reunion or rendezvous could henceforth hope to remedy. Still, so profound had been the effect of their recent reunion that it almost immediately provided a kind of practical demonstration of its therapeutic ability to rejuvenate. The demonstration consisted of the way Norman was able to weather the overseas voyage, the record of which takes the form of a remarkably upbeat 35 page

notebook-letter (the last two pages are now lost<sup>1</sup>) that occupied him throughout all of the eighteen-day crossing.

He composed it in installments in a "a wonderful place to write" he had discovered:

it's on deck, in one of the open places called hatches, but I am tucked away in a corner by the rail, under the canopy of three life rafts inclined toward the sea, and isolated from everyone by stanchions and barrels. Without any effort I could roll right off into the sea, for there is only one rail, about a foot-high, but curiously this place has a great security for me. I know I am not going to roll off, and there is a wonderful view of the sea.

This cave-like retreat seemed too good to be true, and Norman worried on the page about being discovered and evicted, but the place apparently remained secure; indeed, his old travelling companion Clifford Maskovsky was on board, and years later he recalled that for something like two weeks Norman was to be seen only at meals. The recluse held onto his retreat, and he was able to produce there, as the days went by, a running record of his feelings as he experienced what was certainly the most radical separation of his life.

Those feelings might best be described as exploratory. As he moves in the letter from installment to installment, interspersing them with bouts of reading--the first week out he reads all of The Razor's Edge--he explores his ability to

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<sup>1</sup>. "Lost," in this case, almost certainly means that Norman's mother decided that the pages should not be preserved. At the bottom of the last preserved page, Norman has just begun a discussion of the theory that the male impulse toward cunnilingus is caused by an infantile desire for maternal nourishment.

transcend the confines of a physically crushing environment by fixing his imagination on other things. He doesn't dwell on shipboard conditions, or even describe the daily routine, but rather leaves these things behind while he describes staggering sunsets and sunrises (viewed from his special place), and reflects upon the psychological effects of long, as opposed to short-term travel (in short-term you are controlled by distance traversed and are impatient to count miles in the fastest time, while in long-term the controlling element is time passed and you are impatient with people who try to measure the miles).

X He notes that color is different at sea, and writes for six pages about the phenomenology of color in everyday life. He laughs but does not in the least rage at the "list that has been posted of suitable topics to write about in order not to offend censorship:" it includes the ship's PX, its movies, its boxing exhibitions, its church services (none of which he ever writes about), and he achieves an almost genial tone as he remarks good-humoredly:

I am not indignant; I realize ship censorship must be inclusive, but there is always something so terribly droll about lists. Such formal catch-alls, such somber attempts to give miscellany a soul.<sup>2</sup>

The prospects for his immediate future were anything but positive: "The Golden Gate in '48" was the current slogan on the

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i <sup>2</sup>. All mail sent from overseas had to be read and approved by an officer-censor. Norman's long letter from the ship received no editing from its censor, and, indeed, few of his letters home were ever edited. But while the war lasted, all were read and stamped by the censor (save those that Norman smuggled through.)

ship concerning hopes for returning home, and received  
journalistic opinion at this point was that American troops would  
be required to fight their way from island to island all the way  
across the Pacific. Norman, however, considers none of this.

With an impressive self-confidence, the letter writer  
considers instead the mystique of his relationship with Bea, the  
contemplation of which frees him from military confines and  
distractions, and permits him, in the act of writing, to move  
unrestrained into recollected visions that are sometimes erotic,  
and sometimes wistful tributes to what he remembers as pure  
goodness: "What I've been trying to say, my love, was just that I  
love you in more ways than lovemaking, and that I am not afraid  
of my future as I sometimes am when I remember myself qua  
myself." If proof were needed, the notebook-letter proves that  
Norman had been absolutely accurate in his November 11 letter to  
Brooklyn explaining why and in what way Bea was necessary to him:  
to address her was to give him a redemptive sense of himself, and  
to address her in writing under the extreme circumstances that  
prevailed was to authenticate his sense of himself not only as  
admired partner and endowed writer, but also as comfortably  
adjusted inhabitant of an uncomfortable military situation.

Thus impressively armed, though he was sailing on an  
apparently unescorted, highly vulnerable troopship toward hostile  
geography and an ominously uncertain future, Norman sounds  
something approximating cheerful during the voyage. He notes that  
as he began to write, and to call upon recollections of his

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relationship with Bea, his initial state of depression suddenly disappeared, and "I was happy. This act of setting words down becomes a process of talking to you; I feel so very close at the time I write." Norman as writer, after all, is the identity under the gun in this whole venture. If his immersion into the experience he has entered reduces rather than enlarges that identity, then his whole gamble will have been lost. So far, however, he is showing himself as impressively on-track toward his private destination.

The Sea Barb's now quite public destination port, ultimately, was Leyte Gulph, the point from which the American invasion of the Philippines had been launched in October, and where the Japanese naval task forces had been so decisively defeated. But Philippine waters were still very much combat-active, and so on Christmas Day, 1944, Norman's troop ship paused first, if briefly, at the tiny harbor off the town of Hollandia<sup>3</sup> on the northern coast of the recently secured island of New Guinea. The heat was almost overwhelming as the troops--who never disembarked--watched a U.S. Navy frigate swing into an escort position and begin leading them up the final 1,300 mile northwestern leg of the voyage to their destination. They reached Leyte Gulph on December 29, disembarked promptly onto the

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3. Now named Sukarnapura.

Tacloban beach of the now officially secured island<sup>4</sup>, and set up their tents to form themselves into a replacement depot.

Here they continued their increasingly hungry wait, begun back at Fort Ord in September, for assignment to an organized military unit. Among the replacements there were perhaps twelve survivors from the original Fort Bragg Battery A platoon, all still privates and all continuing to suppose--or at least hope--that eventually they would be assigned to artillery units in the jobs for which they had been trained. While they waited, living in tents, they "pulled details" like shoveling sand to form campgrounds, digging latrines, and policing the field kitchens that fed them and others. In their off-hours they wandered through the Filipino town of Tacloban and its environs--strategically created by the natives to bring themselves into maximum proximity to the troops--drinking the home-brewed tuba, paying the children to scale the palm trees for coconuts, and arranging to have their laundry done.

The radio supplied war news to the soldiers, reassuring them concerning the European theater after the nasty shock of the German breakthrough in the December Battle of the Bulge, and informing them, on January 9, that a gigantic American invasion

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<sup>4</sup>. The island was not finally secured until May 5, and the "mopping up" undertaken by the Eighth Army about the time Norman's group landed actually took the form of a series of sharp, costly battles with the surviving Japanese. These actions took place far from the beaches of Leyte Gulph, however, and the Sixth Army, to which Norman was to be assigned, had successfully concluded the major fighting on the island and was in the act of preparing for the invasion of Luzon.

force was being launched, immediately to the north of them, onto the main Philippine island of Luzon. The invasion itself was led by the Sixth Army, and within two weeks after it landed Norman's replacement pool had been shifted to ready status. As part of that procedure its members were at last assigned to organized units: most of the Fort Bragg surveyors were scattered out to artillery battalions associated with different regiments or integrated into different Sixth Army units. Norman, along with three or four other members of his Basic Training outfit, was ultimately assigned to the headquarters unit of the 112th Cavalry Regimental Combat Team.

Attached to the Sixth Army's 1st Cavalry Division, the 112th had originally been a Texas National Guard regiment. But by January of 1945 it had seen extensive action--very seriously on Leyte, but downright devastatingly on New Guinea--and it may be that only about a quarter of its original two thousand men were still with it: the remainder were replacements, of which Norman's little group was to be only the most recent. The regiment had long before abandoned its horses and was in effect an infantry unit--Norman called it a sort of miniature division--that, because it was attached to a field artillery battalion, was designated a Regimental Combat Team (RCT)<sup>5</sup>. When Norman was not assigned to that field artillery battalion, he may for the first time have become conscious that the shortcomings of his training

*you may overrule this*

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<sup>5</sup> Edward J. Drea, "Into the Jungle: New Guinea," Chapter 6, pp 108-109, in Pearl Harbor and the War in the Pacific, eds. B.C. Nalty, Tony Hall, Smithmark, New York, 1991.

record--presumably his refusals to accept "chickenshit" discipline--marked him out from most of his fellows as an unpromising candidate for specialization assignment.

The process of posting the replacements was tumultuous, though, and Norman may have had little time to note where most of his comrades of ten months were going as he was suddenly shoved into a bivouac of Cavalry veterans waiting to board their transport. Eleven months later he recalls for Bea:

...that wet miserable hour in the mud of the 112th's bivouac in Leyte when we were told that we were infantrymen, would undoubtedly be assigned as riflemen, & were leaving that night for Luzon. We heard the stories of A Troop who had 12 men left at the end of the Leyte campaign, and of B Troop and the Bayonet charge up Baker Hill, & we wondered if we would be alive in two weeks.

Once aboard the jam-packed ship he was hardly reassured when he got a look at his new comrades:

You could tell they were Texans because they looked ten to fifteen years older than anyone else. They'd been overseas for three years at that point, they'd been allowed to keep their own sidearms, they had handkerchiefs tied round 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 me and sharpened their knives. . . . You could be in the outfit for six months before they'd even nod to indicate they recognized your existence.<sup>6</sup>

The first thing he learned on shipboard was that his actual assignment was to the regiment's Headquarters Troop, where he was limited to a choice between a clerk's position with the chief Operations and Intelligence platoon, or a rifleman's assignment with its Reconnaissance platoon. He wrote later to Bea that his

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<sup>6</sup>From The Lone Star Review, of the Dallas Times Herald, April, 1981, "An Evening with Norman Mailer," by William McDonald, pp. 1, 3.

instinct had been to take the rifleman assignment, for which he after all had some significant training and which would bring him closer to what he had entered the army to comprehend, but in the heat of the hurried moment he went with the less hazardous and more important-sounding Operations and Intelligence position. He wrote home at the time that he was excited by the prospect of participating in the activities of O. and I. just as the regiment was embarking on a new campaign, and there is considerable indication that he truly was.

Certainly he was relieved to be out of his five month limbo as a replacement non-person, and though he was disappointed to have his elaborate structure of surveyor training suddenly rendered irrelevant--and in the process to be separated from some of the closest friends he had formed since college--he at first saw no obvious reason why his new assignment should not work out very well. The fact that he had no training for the work might be offset, after all, by the additional and undeniable facts that he was very bright, had gone to Harvard and could operate a typewriter (though in this last respect his skills needed improvement). And in any case it should position him advantageously to learn much about the realities of an army in battle.

At the start, therefore, he counted himself relatively fortunate when--in the last week of January--their troop ship transported the 112th RCT along with the 1st Cavalry to the now fully secured beaches of Luzon's Lingayen Gulf. The countryside,

which two weeks before had been strategically defended by the Japanese as they withdrew to a system of defensive positions, was split by a highway flowing south to Manila. Defending the road from flanking hillsides had been Sixth Army infantry units, now replaced by line troops of the 112th and the 1st Cavalry, and Norman rolled in convoy along the road with the rest of those outfits to join the American positions already pressing toward the Japanese-occupied city.

The Manila-stage of the offensive was running behind General MacArthur's schedule, and in response to his expressions of impatience the 1st Cavalry, approaching from the north, had joined with another Division, approaching from the south, in a race toward the city. Norman's first job was to help set up and then rapidly move-forward his regimental Command Post, which was the armature of Headquarters Troop. With its infantry line-troops clearing out isolated pockets of Japanese defenders, the RCT, as part of the 1st Cavalry, was positioning itself so as to be able to play a leading part in the coordinated launch of the combined American forces upon the defenses of the city proper. Norman's assignment in the Operations and Intelligence tent--wherever it was set up at a given moment--was to keep track of and type the constant flow of despatches and other documents, as well as to keep in motion the maps which were under continuous review by his superiors.

He was one of a handful of enlisted-men clerks who worked, directly, under a Major and a Lieutenant and, indirectly, under

the commanding Colonel. The Command Post was, usually, about two miles behind the line units it was deploying, so that while Norman was at all times aware of the surge and indeed the sound of action, his own participation was limited to guard duty assignments and occasional impromptu patrols in response to infiltration alarms. He shared in the excitement that was all around him, caught up in the intensity of interplay between the RCT units, and the conferences he could overhear between his Colonel and the 1st Cavalry commanding General.

From this, the start of his assigned military life outside of the training command, to the end of his time in the army, Norman was divided in a problematic way regarding his feelings about his duties. Unproblematically, of course, he had always understood his army experience to be divided: his first priority was to use his duty assignment as a vantage point from which, as a writer, he could learn about the life he was later to address in his fiction. His second priority was, as a soldier, to discharge those duties well enough to permit him to achieve to the goals of his first priority. He had rejected any interest in other sorts of self-promotion by opting for enlisted-man status in the first place. The problem with this tidy picture was not simply that Norman couldn't keep "mere" self-promotion out of the mix: of course he found himself asking for returns from his assignments beyond a yield of raw material for his fiction. *He had a soldier's ego, as well as a writer's.*

More problematic was the question of how much he was willing, or perhaps even able to give to the assignments in order

simply to hang onto them, and thus employ them for whatever purpose he might have. His job in the O. and I. tent went well enough at first, and he was able to learn from it much that he had not known before. The simple fact that he was working with tactical officers, and senior tactical officers at that, was clearly important beyond the naive first impression he reported to his parents:

[I am] closer than I've been to officers since I've been in the army. I don't suppose I've ever said more than two hundred words [to them] in the past which didn't consist of Yessir and No sir.

Working at this level, lowest private though he was, Norman realized that he was in certain ways quite privileged. As the Commanding Officer's working center, Headquarters enjoyed the best bivouac area, living accommodations and food, and Norman found that Luzon itself--or at least this part of it--was comparatively well-situated. Instead of the steaming heat back at Tacloban Beach on Leyte, where they had been rimmed by oppressively dense and deep jungle, "the climate is wonderfully cool at night," dryer and cleaner than he could have expected. He reported "what a kick you get out of seeing long clear open fields, and a variety of trees," and he compared the terrain to the stretches of New Jersey farmland between Long Branch and Freehold and Trenton.

This atmosphere, and the pastoral situation of their bivouac--"The ground is dry and rolling and there are groves of trees that interlace with the fields all the way to the blue hills on the horizon."--made him hope that he had found a kind of

home, militarily speaking. It is true that he had been told-- perhaps automatically, perhaps after the O. and I. sergeant had seen him at work--that he had almost no hope for promotion, but at this point he felt that he had no interest in that. He was learning a lot, and had even found a hideout analagous to the one he had discovered while crossing on The Sea Barb: the boy from Monmouth Beach had a private place to swim:

There is a cold fast running clear river about a half mile from here with a hard sandy bottom. To get to it you walk along a trail through some woods and across some corn fields down to the bank which is like a little beach. It is very beautiful and quiet there, and you lie in the water or sun yourself a little on the beach feeling very relaxed and content. I look forward to it every day.

Perhaps the strongest evidence that Norman was feeling positive about his new situation was that for the first time since leaving the States, he felt inclined to actually try his hand at a piece of writing. He had of course never intended or expected that he would get much actual writing done while he was in the army. On the contrary. But it was a kind of symptom of an inner sense of stability that in what was actually a very busy situation he should be able to write formally at all. In addition to his work schedule in the O. and I. tent, Norman had begun immediately to pull various kinds of guard duty just outside the Command Post, and one such assignment is what he decided to write about. He took advantage of the availability of a typewriter to produce, on four legal-sized sheets of typing paper, a tightly-packed, single-spaced account of spending a long

afternoon on guard duty beside the dusty road leading past his C. P.

He set the margins wide on the elite-font machine, and produced a deliberately-paced narrative of about 3,600 words, in a manuscript cast in the nominal form of a letter to Bea.<sup>7</sup> Norman, in the person of a guard sitting in the shade and gradually being coated with dust from the road, watches the traffic on a busy highway in the near distance, and reviews on his own dusty side-road a sort of passing parade of travellers, talking to them in turn and after a fashion recording the fact of their temporary presence. Some of them are military personnel, such as an artilleryman who stops and talks for an hour, partly about the artillery--"I," Norman says, "being just the least bit occupationally homesick"--and then about various women left behind in the States. Later, a jeep with a frightfully emaciated Captain appears--in search of the American Prisoner of War evacuation center--and the guard recognizes the officer as one of the Bataan prisoners just freed from a Japanese prison.

I had never see a man before who gave so little impression of life, who appeared so vitiated by physical deprivation and mental humiliation. The war had destroyed him; I thought of some bare field of burnt stubble.

Perhaps the major juxtaposition in this, Norman's initial formal first-hand narrative of an overseas experience, is between various versions of the American military presence--including the

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<sup>7</sup> He wrote the letter on February 5, 1945. Untitled, it became known in his correspondence as "The Phillipine Letter."

guard--and the native Filipino population of the island. One vehicle among the traffic on Norman's road is an ox cart containing a full Filipino family: a very old woman, a few children, a young mother nursing an infant, and, in charge of them all, her husband, who is returning them to their now liberated, still distant village home. Their exchanges with the guard are very friendly, and they stop and spend some time talking to him, discussing the cruelty of the Japanese and the mysteriousness of an American watering-truck which is settling the road dust so that it doesn't blow in and bother the Commanding Colonel in his tent.

The family leaves, and their pastoral simplicity is thrown into a kind of contrasting relief by the appearance of a small contingent of Filipino guerrilla troops, who show the guard their credentials and ask him to help them get a ride from an American army truck. He finally succeeds in doing so, having apparently enjoyed the company of the "rather healthy looking men, with powerful bodies and a physical acceptance of life that had probably given a certain relish to their massacres of Japs." Certainly he appreciates the contrast with the final Filipino character in the narrative, a sardonic, foppishly dressed young man who, with self-conscious decadence, expresses his desire to go and live the good life in the United States after the war. This closing chord in the piece, however minor, evokes the combination of affection, admiration and irritated disapproval

felt toward the Filipino population by many of the American military personnel, including Norman himself.

What is striking about the sketch, of course, is not that it is done especially well (which it is not), but that it got done at all. He sent it to Bea, asking that it be passed on to Berta, but he did so in a vacuum. Norman had not heard from Bea, Berta or anyone else since boarding the Sea Barb in San Francisco--two months almost to the day of his writing--and his opportunities to get himself set for the act of formal composition had been few indeed. The catalyst that moved him to write, quite obviously, was his new assignment and the sense it gave him--despite the regret he records in the sketch at being out of the artillery--of a stabilizing internal orientation. It must have been the more disappointing, therefore, when over the next two weeks his feeling of compatibility was disturbed by a conflict that developed between him and one or more of his fellow clerks in the O. and I. tent: "A series of demeaning and petty squabbles" he called it, while brushing it aside as unimportant.

Just as he seems not to have realized that the way he handled certain aspects of his training as an artilleryman could cost him the assignment he expected and thought he had earned, in this situation he may not have appreciated that falling into conflict with the already established office hierarchy could bring about a similar sort of rejection. His perception in this regard may have been even less acute than usual because of a different, and quite distracting problem: he suddenly found that

though the Command Post kitchen was the best in the regiment, he couldn't eat the food it was serving. The "overseas chow with its heavy biscuits and dehydrated potatoes and stuff" was suddenly unbearable, "nauseating" in fact, as he wrote to Bea in bewildered complaint. His office was extremely busy, since the infantry troops of his regiment had joined in the broad, frontal attack on the Japanese defenders of Manila, but his indigestion so increased, during two problematic weeks, that after about ten days he finally went on sick-call.

To his surprise, he encountered an instant diagnosis of "yellow jaundice" and was forthwith confined to a field hospital, populated largely by combat casualties with superficial wounds:

One of them showed me his helmet, which had a long crease about half an inch deep, as if you dropped a narrow lead pipe on a leather cushion. A bullet had nicked him that closely, close enough to knock him out. He still has a headache, he says.

Norman remained hospitalized for a full week, writing to Bea on V-Mail stationary and reporting that, in his inactivity, he had produced ten or eleven V-Mails to distant friends and family not previously included in his correspondence. "I'll hate myself when I have to start answering them all," he added, noting as well that his appetite had fully returned and recovery was apparently to be swift and complete. He seems to have been released on Friday, February 23, and reported back to O. and I., discovering that the office was running on a skeleton crew because yet another clerk was out on sick-call.

Short-handed as they were, however, the people in charge of the unit had apparently decided that Norman was not the

replacement they had hoped to get, and in mid-week he got fired. He was transferred to O. and I. at Headquarters Troop--a lower-level office than Headquarters RCT Command--where he lost access to a typewriter and was given significantly more menial tasks: a heavy schedule of guard duty, and such special projects as setting up an outdoor shower for the Troop Intelligence officers. In addition, the sergeant in charge handed him a pile of instruction manuals on the subject of aerial photographic analysis: if he could make himself expert in this, he was told, perhaps something significant could be found for him to do. Trying to soften the blow by remarking to his parents that, in the new position, "I like the guys I'm with more," Norman nevertheless clearly felt the rebuff.

In about one month's time, the cum laude Harvard engineer and trained artillery surveyor had in effect been demoted twice, had discovered that he possessed a vulnerable liver, and had now increased to almost three months the time lapse since hearing from his support system at home. Even before the unwelcome surprise of his transfer he had written to Bea, from the hospital, in what turned out to be a prophetic sort of mood:

I appreciate my insignificance now, and I have lost so many of my destroying vanities. I want only one thing:--to love you in entire nakedness of body and spirit. That is my necessity; it is, I am convinced, the only meaning each of us shall ever have--to share all the life-impulses in us to the fullest extent.

The combat casualties he met in the hospital had been wounded in the ongoing assault upon nearby Manila, and the action there--in a situation of stubborn stand-off-- had escalated

throughout February. Though Norman had now been shunted depressingly to the side, losing the sense of participation that he had briefly known and had very much desired, he remained keenly aware of the furious drama playing itself out just a few miles away. The main Japanese army force having withdrawn from the city to defensive positions in the west and south, there was a final, explosive American attack on a Japanese naval and marine rear-guard force, dug deep into the inner-city and determined neither to withdraw nor surrender. The month-long campaign--during which an estimated sixteen thousand enemy troops, and over a thousand Americans were killed--came to a dramatic and bloody conclusion<sup>8</sup>: its inner-city almost totally reduced, a staggering one hundred thousand Filipino civilians destroyed--between the fury of American fire-power and the savage frustration of Japanese defenders who knew they were to die themselves--Manila fell on February 28.

On that same day a dispirited Norman, in a kind of ironically contrasting irrelevance, experienced something altogether personal: for the first time since leaving San Francisco he began receiving mail from home. A letter from Bea, mailed just three weeks earlier, reached him, as it seemed, right out of nowhere: "I must have held it for five minutes before I opened it," he told her in his hurried reply, adding after a few

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<sup>8</sup> Bernard C. Nalty, "The Philippines Reconquered," pp. 219-222: Chapter 13 of Pearl Harbor and the War in the Pacific, see note 5.

opening remarks, "Now to answer your letter. (What a pleasure to do this again.)"

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The letter was not an isolated fluke but rather was the first raindrop in a deluge that flooded the month of March with mail, completely washing Norman up out of his depression and onto a dizzy height of self-absorption and self-confidence. Despite the fact that his new assignment at Headquarters Troop O. and I. offers him nothing fruitful to engage his mind or his time, almost every day he goes through his expanding bundles of letters--the day's delivery would vary between three or four to a high, in one two-day period, of forty-five--happily immersing himself in the three-month time-warp that they represented. He stands his guard duty, tinkers with make-work assignments and dutifully thumbs through his photography manuals, waiting for the mail-call that will allow him to reenter the haven of a private world where he can be sure of discovering what his army experience is remarkably failing to supply: a sense of his own importance in the scheme of things.

He begins a systematic withdrawal from the unsatisfying present by plunging deeply into the past, there to mine out material for planning their postwar future. His past with Bea, to be sure, didn't offer much of a model for that future, since it consisted for the most part of college-residence intrigues,

fleeting weeks in seasonal resorts, and one sweltering summer, in 1942, when they did their best to conceal their relationship from their respective families. It is exactly out of these things, however, that Norman fashions his postwar model: the young veterans would return for graduate study to Harvard on the G.I. Bill (as it would soon come to be called), would live in a Cambridge Bowdoin Street apartment--where once Bea had an attic room--and they would go back to their Provincetown (actually North Truro) oceanfront lodgings with the screened-in sleeping porch. The screen would be made of gold-color copper mesh, as it had been before, and for good measure they fantasized that they would also screen-in a porch with the same material on Bowdoin street.

Their much-maligned formal wedding in Chelsea had brought them a gift from Bea's maternal grandparents of \$100 silver dollars, which she used to start their funding-for-the-future bank account. From the start, Norman allotted \$50 of his \$75 monthly pay to this resource, and Bea--whose Ensign's pay was twice Norman's, but whose expenses were much greater--scrimped to save even more. By March of 1945 the account already had a balance of \$1,600, and in their correspondence it serves as the center of their planning exercises, which range from curriculum selection at Harvard--Norman was inclined toward the philosophy of history and the history of religion--to blueprints for child raising. Early in their relationship they had created an imaginary son and daughter--Bobo and Beatty--projected from the

inner child they saw each other as containing, and when Norman lofts an argument for raising them as Christians, the better to gain them access to most similarly-raised postclassical western philosophers, Bea--who usually indulged him in his notions--firmly and with some feeling, shoots this one down.

Norman's basic after-discharge plan, of course, was to begin writing again. But at this point they both assumed that something like a government -subsidized graduate study program would be needed to supply them with everyday subsistence. While the correspondence, once resumed, continues to develop a rich vein of intimate, often emphatically erotic personal feeling, it draws with comparable emphasis upon their shared cultural sensibility, and Norman looks forward to a future time when he will be able to learn from Bea how to listen to classical music more effectively than in an episode--recounted over five pages--of listening in the tent of a friend to all of Franck's D Minor on a portable phonograph. Norman's expression of need and dependence in these letters is very marked, and as he moves away from the increasingly unattractive here and now of his regimental world his central direction is not only toward Bea in all of her aspects, but, through her, toward an affirmation of his connection with literature.

Indeed, when it is not the language of love, the language of books is the operating lingua franca of the greater part of their private correspondence. Both of them are reading and reporting on what they read all the time, Bea--along with a good many of the

family--is always sending Norman books, as well as selecting them as presents for family and friends, and the subject of literary imagining is seldom far from the surface. By the spring of 1945 Whitman and Lawrence have become standard referees, and in March/April Norman is reading and quoting Havelock Ellis on Leonardo DaVinci and the transsexual nature of the artist, Bea is buying and sending Norman volumes of Thoreau and Machiavelli and worrying that she should perhaps have included Alice in Wonderland and Candide, while after some difficulty she obtains and also sends off what will be a very slow-travelling single volume edition of Spengler's Decline of the West .

She tells of having received Black Boy and F. O. Matthiessen's 1944 study Henry James: The Major Phase as presents from Barbara, to whom Norman suggests that Bea send, as a birthday gift, some Katherine Ann Porter or "a good edition of The Rainbow or something relatively obscure like Gide's Journal." (Bea actually sent her some Henry James and a collection of WW II writing. Norman recommends A Tree Grows in Brooklyn to his mother as something he has himself recently enjoyed, and just in this two-month season he and his wife maintain an ongoing discussion of the merits of The Razor's Edge, refer to Meyer Levin's The Old Bunch with almost familial familiarity, and by the end of April they are discussing Anna Karenina, which Bea suggests is even better than War and Peace. Finally during this time, almost as if to bridge the territory between their love of literature and their love of each other, Bea discovers and

↓ Maule says  
he read this  
on the way  
back

proceeds to quote to her husband at considerable length from Walter Benton's This is My Beloved.

If, exactly because it is located far from the terrain of Luzon, the territory of published literature is compellingly attractive to Norman, even more attractive to him is the landscape of his own literary composition. He knows that if he can break so far free as to get there and successfully produce a tiny earnest of writing, he will not merely have escaped the restrictions of regimental life but will have actually converted them to his own creative use. To accomplish this, after all, had been the core strategy behind his entering the army as a disadvantaged enlisted man in the first place, and as he begins his second year of military service he finds that the stimulation of his reestablished link with home, family and Bea has at least momentarily renewed his strength for this struggle.

His correspondence in March reveals in almost poignant sequence his efforts to resume writing, with first mention to Bea coming on the 7th: "I have three prospective novellas and as many short-stories, all good. Maybe I'll get a chance to bat out one of the stories some day--it's a little foolhardy to hope for more." Four days later he continues:

I started to write a story the other night, but it was no go. As I expected after such a long layoff, I was terribly constipated. But I'm not worried, it always takes several hours to loosen. I'm only annoyed, [and] I want to tackle it again soon.

The next day, still struggling, he reports, "I was just thinking of how, if I ever did it, I would write a death scene for the

movies," and he first of all parodies the sentimental style of hack movie scenes before continuing:

This is the way it should be done. The buddie looks at his dead friend, gazing deeply, without repugnance, at his mangled bloody death-head, and perhaps he touches his shoulder slightly. Then he stands up and looks at him for a last moment. 'So long. . . . you old shit kicker,' he says, and walks away.

In effect, these small compositional starts were calculated primings of the pump, for only two weeks later--and notwithstanding some precipitous ups and downs in the area of his non-literary life-- Norman produces a full-scale narrative.

It is over nine double-spaced typewritten pages long, he calls it "Nostalgia," and it arrives in Bea's mail with an exquisitely careful cover-note. On one side of the tiny, Red Cross sheet of stationary his pencilled script tells Bea what to look for in the story--"just search the emotion you get from it and make it articulate to yourself"-- but asks her not to turn over the sheet and "get the answer" until she has read the manuscript. What it consists of is actually more of a lyric mood-piece than a structured story, for it simply presents four off-duty soldiers having a casual conversation at nightfall while sitting on a low wall in a Philippine rice paddy. Like the soldier in Norman's "Philippine Letter" sketch two months before, their regular assignment is to Command Post guard duty, but unlike him they are veterans of serious and, for three of them, prolonged combat.

They talk first about the music and lyrics of popular songs--the scene opens with them listening to the English language

Manila radio station, which dates the story at about the time of Norman's writing--and they then do nothing more than swap anecdotes about soldiers they had known in earlier times. They remember an eccentric mess sergeant, an aggressively illiterate weapons sergeant, another sergeant who once comically insulted an officer and, finally, a funny little foot-soldier who liked to sit in a motor pool jeep and pretend he was driving. Beneath their laughing reminiscence, however, they reveal a tension and exhaustion that has built up in them over the long haul of infantry combat, and they nostalgically yearn--as we see in the consciousness of one of them--for the innocent state of mind they once enjoyed during their States-side training. Then, the drills and chicken-shit discipline that prepared them for the ordeal of combat seemed nothing more than a pointless game--a preposterous "conspiracy to make us miserable," one soldier recalls, now knowing all too well what its real purpose was.

On the reverse side of the Red Cross stationary sheet, which is headed "Don't read this side first," Norman explains to Bea that he wanted "the story to be mainly a presentation of some average soldiers who have lived very close to death for a long time." They have come to employ the everyday acts of talking about music or their less threatening past military experiences as devices for repression and escape from death's presence. The story ends as the men--themselves now completely out of combat danger--are suddenly cut short in their reminiscing by the distinctive sounds of American heavy artillery batteries starting

to shell some hills where doomed Japanese soldiers are hiding. Empathetically waiting for the explosion the shells would make when they hit, one of the soldiers says: "Boy, somebody's going to catch hell in about ten seconds." In his letter to Bea, Norman observes that "there are times when [their] constant fear is not completely repressed--as when the artillery goes off at the end and brings their escapism back to their association with death."

He is of course excited at having got the story written, but is also unsure about its quality. "Whether I have succeeded I do not know. It is not a very intense story and I'm not sure of the pace--it may bog down a little. But let me know." He covers his combination of enthusiasm and apprehension by offering businesslike instructions on how the text is to be typed and sent on to Berta--who somewhat unenthusiastically had already sent "The Philippine Letter" out to market--for submission to his perennial market-target, The New Yorker. To have had some success with the story was all the more important to him, no doubt, because at the very time he was writing it he was learning that his position with Troop O. and I. had come to a dead end, and he was again being transferred.

He had known by mid-March that his new job was a blind alley, for by then he had mastered the photography manuals and could see that telling him to study them had been little more than a tasteless joke: "The decisions to be made from aerial photographs are so important that they'd never let me interpret them," he writes to Bea, adding, "I have no ambition in the army,

but it is a little galling at times to be so utterly insignificant." He is bitter, now, about his original decision to join Headquarters O. and I. instead of taking the rifleman assignment with Headquarters Reconnaissance, and wishes that he were in the artillery or, barring that, a combat unit on the line. One week later he is reassigned, probably by request:

I've been transferred again, this time to the wire crew in the troop. . . .Of course I know nothing about wire, but that doesn't bother me. There's a certain distinction in being a private all your life. You know then that you've never usurped authority. But what does annoy me is that I have to learn a new job again, and I'm a little weary and distrustful of learning.

The new job involved going out with a crew, in a jeep, and either stringing or repairing telephone wire between the various posts on the line and the rear-echelon positions with which they communicated. "At least now I'll be getting out and seeing some country, and that does break the monotony," he says, though he soon observes: "I can't say I'm nuts about it; my butt is a little too bony to enjoy sparring with the steel seats of a jeep all day. But I get a kick out of climbing trees." The fact is, of course, that the assignment is another step down the ladder of military positions, and it is a tribute to the restorative powers of Norman's correspondence with Bea that he managed to compose "Nostalgia" in the same period that this change of assignment was coming about. In fact it is just about this time that it begins to seem that there is a kind of dynamic developing between Norman's two commitments as a soldier. His surface commitment--the specific duty or assignment given him by his superiors--seems to suffer in inverse proportion to the prospering of his

subterranean assignment as artist-observer, training himself to use his military experience to nourish his creative enterprise.

In the course of his renewed correspondence, Norman discovered that since he had gone overseas Bea had not only adhered faithfully to her vision of him as a literary artist, but had begun to explore the possibilities of fiction writing for herself. She at first experimented with small sketches, began keeping a notebook of fictional entries, and gradually she evolved the idea of writing a novel about life in the Waves. Many of her letters to Norman dwelt upon her training, her assignments, her surroundings, her colleagues--dwelt, in short, upon the subject of life in the Waves-- and she asked Norman to go through what was becoming an increasingly bulky correspondence file and send back to her those letters that seemed to him contained material with good fictional potential. More often than not, Norman's response to Bea's sample-writing is supportive, and he criticizes, praises, blames and advises with a resurgence of the old enthusiasm he had shown when his sister started writing. Perhaps, he now says, their postwar years together will be spent as writers, and he dwells affectionately upon that possibility.

It is also the case, however, that Norman begins to see how a comparison between their two curves of personal experience in military service leads unavoidably to the conclusion that--at least by conventional measures-- Bea has been the one who makes the affiliation work for her. Not only did her initial training lead to her ensign's commission and her subsequent training land

her an attractive job as a communications officer, but in April-- just about the time Norman is struggling to get out of his wire crew job--she gets an assignment promotion in the Norfolk communications code room. Norman, foreseeing Bea's continuing success, now as a fiction writer as well as a sailor, remarks:

I think of you objectively very seldom, but when I do I realize how very talented and clever you are, and how many people look at you with anything from respect to awe. I impress so few people that way when I'm not with you, that I often wonder if I'm really worth anything much at all.

Consciously fighting against his feeling of insignificance by drawing upon his wife for moral support, Norman at the same time finds himself struggling with her over a point that, for some two months of their renewed correspondence, he has stubbornly been unwilling to concede. Since marrying, leaving home and joining the Waves, Bea had gradually developed with her parents, and particularly her mother, a warm relationship that had never--at least to Norman's eyes--been in evidence before. In fact, one of the things he had always valued about Bea was her defiant rejection of her parents' values<sup>9</sup>, and he was angry that she now was failing to join him in being unforgiving of her parents' initial reaction against the marriage and their having demanded the charade of a subsequent religious ceremony. Because

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<sup>9</sup> With evident satisfaction he wrote of her in his 1943 Psychology 35 paper at Harvard: "At present, her main concerns are with getting away from her family, and getting married. The second is subsidiary to the first, since she has almost accepted about four or five marriage proposals in the last two years just to be free of her home. Her greatest fits of depression today are furnished whenever she realizes that it will probably be a matter of a year or more before she can break free. The very sight of the house infuriates her."

Bea had cooperated with her parents and remained at home in Chelsea, separated from Norman until the second ceremony, he remembered her as having deserted him, and said as much in a mid-March letter.

He was in part reacting against Bea's gentle but repeated suggestions that he write a friendly letter to her parents, and that he forgive and forget what she at one point called the comedy of family errors surrounding the stormily disputed crisis. Norman's problem now is that Bea is supplying him with such a broad and solid base of personal support that refusal to indulge her on this point apparently begins to seem to him, despite his ongoing irritation, to be ungrateful. He continues to resist until late April, but he finally comes round, writing a presumably cordial letter to his mother-in-law at that time. His feelings toward Jenny, as Bea's mother was called in their correspondence, had probably not changed much--in mid-April he was testily reproving Fan for trying to nudge him in the direction of reconciliation--but he did it for Bea, to cement their vital relationship, and his concession offers an impressive measure of his dependence upon her loyalty and support.

Within a month of being assigned to the wire crew of the Headquarters Troop Communications Platoon, Norman is transferred again--this time certainly at his own request--to the Reconnaissance Platoon of Headquarters Troop, and he professes himself "happy for the first time since I've come into the Cavalry." He is now a rifleman, assigned to a platoon whose

purpose it is to patrol in squads out into the countryside in search of information about the enemy's position. It is exactly the assignment he had turned down when he chose to go into the RCT Headquarters O. and I. unit, and he told Bea that this originally mistaken choice had now been rectified:

You know that decision I made on the boat to go into RCT [as O. & I. clerk] was the wrong one--by all practical standards it was a good break, but what is practical wisdom? The proof that the RCT decision was the wrong one is that I'm now where I would have been anyway.

Far from seeing himself as having finally hit bottom in terms of military position, Norman's perception is that he has extricated himself from a humiliating situation with dignity:

If someone like me is going to be in the army, the only job he can have where he can maintain his dignity is as a soldier. I could not escape a certain humiliation and self-disgust as a clerk (RCT) as a servant (which was what [Troop] O. and I. turned out to be) or as a wireman. [ibid]

Cautioning Bea to keep this move into a combat-active situation a secret from Fan (his mailing address remained Headquarters Troop, 112th Cav., regardless of his movement from O. and I. to Communications to Reconnaissance) he clearly is pleased with the consequences of his decision. The schedule is demanding--sometimes six days of extended patrols before a day of rest comes due--but Norman liked and needed the umbilical interdependence between the squad members when the patrol leader took them out into the field. While they are out on patrol each one of them, undeniably if not equally, is a figure of significance.

By the end of April, Japanese forces in northern Luzon had been driven deep into the mountains, having been violently

dislodged and forced back from line after line. There the last of them would remain until the end, contained by combat lines of American troops, including those of the 112th. From the lowlands and valleys, American Intelligence reconnaissance units probed systematically forward--in Norman's case into the lower Sierra Madre country--making contact for the most part only with reciprocal enemy patrols and isolated pockets of their infantry. Norman reports an occasional fire-fight, the first one of which startled and momentarily frightened him. But the next time, when his patrol took some direct fire, he--

for the first time had bullets skipping just a little over my prostrate body. Curiously, I wasn't afraid this time. I think I enjoyed it--I certainly was elated on the way back.

But more often he finds himself patrolling ground that has been harrowed by earlier fighting, encountering only the grisly remains. He apparently settles with something like real satisfaction into Recon, making friends and finding, despite the routinely exhausting regimen, that he occupies an undisputed and undespised--if not necessarily highly respected-- place there. On April 9 he writes of the impact on his troop of the news of the death of President Roosevelt--he would later compare its power to the effect created by the news of Hiroshima<sup>10</sup>. Before getting his letter, Bea gives her own account of how this news deeply

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<sup>10</sup> Though no letters at all from Norman, to anyone, are preserved on the relevant dates, it is obvious from later correspondence that he responded to the news immediately, and that these are among what seem to be the numerous letters later selected out from the main file--by his mother or other auditors, including himself--and then subsequently lost.

distressed her and her friends in the Naval Base community where she resided.

Generally speaking, Bea is the one who tracks, in their letters, the unfolding of historical events around them: the advance of the American armies in Europe as the final countdown began there, and the broadcast of a false report of Germany's surrender over U.S. radio networks on Saturday, April 28 (touching off a massive celebration that President Truman broke into, saying it was a mistake.) On May 4, the day before British Commanding General Montgomery actually accepted the German surrender on his front, Norman writes to his parents that "the Germans will never surrender." He later explained to Bea that he had expected individual German combat units to go on fighting "last stands in Bavaria, Norway, etc." for months more to come. In fact, however, Supreme Allied Headquarters accepted the total and final German surrender at Rheims on May 7, and Norman says, in his next letter to his parents, "Wasn't it great about VE [Victory in Europe] day? Now maybe this war will speed up." He and Bea differed a little about President Truman, with Norman taking the more conventional view that the new president was merely a minor figure.

Whatever their awareness of history--its major and minor figures, its great and small events, and its in any case massive control over their lives--the two young correspondents continue to organize their letters around what they have tried to establish as the unshrinkable armature of their personal

relationship. Its most intimate dimensions are addressed, by them both but particularly by Norman, in more and more elaborately produced compositions of formal, even classical erotica--the writers refer to them as "free" letters--that he intricately contrives to smuggle past the censorship screen (Bea's letters were not subject to censorship on either end.) Beyond this, however, the two undertake to share as much as they can: dreams are described in exhaustive detail, moods are recorded, along with moments of isolation and depression or, less frequently, of comradeship with colleagues and cheerful distraction.

There is never any mistaking the contrasts in their two, frankly acknowledged, temperaments: Bea is the supporter, Norman the supported; she is patient, he is irritable; she is usually calm, he is frequently angry; she is in control of her institutional situation, he is harried and oppressed by his. Within these broad parameters, however, there is a spirited give and take. When he complains about her sending him the wrong kinds of snacks or using inappropriate stationary or using the wrong kind of vocabulary to describe psychological phenomena, she pinks him with ironic regrets, and calls him to account on his failure to take an appropriately progressive position on such things as the Filipino ethnic character, or Soviet Foreign policy, or the inequitable way in which women in the American workforce--military and non-military--are required to suffer the stupidities of male chauvinism. The relationship is too valuable to both participants to allow anything to shake it, and they stoically

absorbed what was perhaps the most jarring inter-personal development of this season.

In early May, Norman somehow loses his waterproof storage bag containing all of Bea's letters to him "from December to the middle of March."<sup>11</sup> Bea had of course been hoping to use some of those letters as raw material for her still embryonic novel. Throughout the winter she searched for a way to build into her crowded, community-living schedule a regular time for thinking about, planning and then actually doing her own writing. She produced several very short pieces, including a formal vignette depicting a circus barker in action that Norman professed to like, and she did sketches of several young couples who were clearly candidates for characterization in the novel, but--apart from her almost daily letters to Norman and apparently frequent letters to both of their families-- she couldn't find time to write regularly. Though Norman faced essentially the same problem, and was obviously less disciplined than she in conventional ways, his deeply established inner-identity as a writer emerges under such pressure, and his determination is too strong to allow him to get very far separated from it: it is,

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<sup>11</sup>. Since the existing file reveals an additional gap in Bea's correspondence between late August and early December, 1944, it is possible that this earlier batch of approximately one hundred letters also was stored in the lost waterproof bag. When she got the news, Bea ruefully reported jokes from a fellow-Wave about her erotica offering some interesting reading to the lonely GIs who might find the bag, and she pretends to worry that if the letters are found by the enemy, the Japanese perception of such American decadence might prolong the fighting.

after all, the basic reason why he was in this situation in the first place.

In addition, he could derive sustenance from the very significant amount of work he had already done: "A Transit to Narcissus" was still making the rounds, and Berta had both entered it in a ten thousand dollar prize contest being conducted by Harpers and had given the manuscript to Edward Seaver, who was preparing another volume of Cross-Section. When, after reading "Transit," Seaver said he wanted to include a long excerpt from it in the new anthology, they all took this to be a portent of a larger acceptance, and rejoiced accordingly. Berta was also optimistic about placing "Nostalgia" in one of the many "slick" magazines of the day--she cited signs of interest from the Saturday Evening Post, Ladies' Home Journal, and Esquire --while at the same time telling Bea that her "Barker" vignette would never sell.

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Norman also continues to use his letters to Bea as fictional sketch-pads: "More and more ideas about the novella," he wrote in May, "I'm afraid it will turn out to be a novel. Also a couple of short stories about Japanese." Later in May, in the same letter that contained a report about a patrol on which he and his comrades had carried home both a dead Filipino and a Japanese light machine gun, Norman was calling his novella "The Ridge Novel," and two days later he formulated a five page analysis/presentation of a technique of interior narration he

intended to try out in its pages. His overweight character is eating, and consciously thinking only of the food:

He cut a piece from the beef and flopped it in the gravy. When his mouth was filled with the meat and the hashed brown potatoes and the greens, he took a sip of wine. The garlic in the sauce seemed to flow into the warm breath of the liquor. Good, he thought slowly, this was good. Her body was returning the odor of his body but more gently. The plump buttocks settled on his hand, the breasts and belly spilled over his chest and loins and he felt her mouth as a moist pulsing clasp. He sighed. Nothing like a good meal. Perhaps it was why he was so fat. The children all laughed at the turtle which lay helpless on its back. He was going to reduce. It was bad to like food so much.

At about the same time, Norman was able to complete (in epistolary form) an elaborate seven page account of an impromptu visit to Manila, where he heard that city's Symphony Orchestra--silent since 1941--perform both Beethoven's Eroica and Dvorak's New World Symphony in the ruins of Santa Cruz Church. His letter is a sharply effective piece of journalism, consciously reminiscent of the Ernie Pyle he had been reading, and Norman took particular pains with his rendering of the audience:

I had the old pleasure of recognition, for all Symphony crowds the world over must look the same. Here were all the old familiar faces, the sensitive boys with the long hair and the effeminate lisping speech, the middle-aged women with the horn-rimmed glasses, the gray-haired young men of thirty who had been brokers in Boston and were now Lt. Commanders. All the old faces--I had not realized there were so many intellectuals in the army in the Philippines.

Having realized it, however, he was careful to dissociate his own identity from that of this population, for he saw himself as part of a very different kind of elite: dressed as he was in rumpled combat fatigues, he was one of a handful of cavalrymen trucked back to the concert from the field, and he was proudly aware of standing out starkly in the starched and

pressed rear-echelon audience. After the war, he said, "there shall be very few authors with combat experience, for all the authors, indeed all the bright young men are clerks in the vast mills of Base HQ." The letter is done so well--more successfully, perhaps, than anything else he attempted while in uniform--that it should have been offered for publication in the United States. But the event evidently was fully covered by the attendant correspondent corps: indeed, Life magazine, in its June 4, 1945 issue, published a three-page, four-picture story on the elaborately arranged performance (Mrs. Douglas MacArthur sat in the front row) and if Berta did try to place Norman's essay she was not successful.

Anxious though he was to position himself on the extreme left margin of the military's high-culture audience--there to affirm his affiliation with combat duty and all it implied--Norman nevertheless remains an identifiable part of that audience, continuing to draw upon music, ideas and, especially, books as a vital source of environmental sustenance. He had indeed been reading Ernie Pyle's two volumes of wartime journalistic coverage in the European theater-- Here is Your War (1943) and Brave Men (1944)-- the already enormous popularity of which had been grimly increased by the news, in late April, that Pyle had been killed by Japanese gunfire while observing the American landing on Okinawa <sup>12</sup>. Among Bea's

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<sup>12</sup> Pyle's work represented a Tolstoyan pole for Norman, and the degree to which he was immersed in the dimension of planning his own fictive response to the war experience-- even as he was

trying with such marginal success to live it off the page-- emerges in his casual comments about Pyle's work to Bea:

"His virtue lies in the accuracy of his war picture. I think you might read him to understand what the daily life of war is like. He does not hide the unutterable drabness that alternates with the misery, he knows that combat is never the dramatic adventurous charge across an open field or the catharsis of a mighty invasion as all the magazines and Hollywood have it, but merely a skirmish involving always little groups of men against similar little groups fought in a curious darkness and confusion where no one knows ever exactly what's happening, and the personal sensation is a unique band of fear across your throat and a curious vital perception that attaches itself to the earth immediately about you.

"Pyle admits that he loses the larger war in the smaller one, and he limns the courage of the American soldier in surmounting the abysmal bareness of his life. I can appreciate this for it takes a certain kind of courage to bear this vast mechanical monotony, but sometimes I wonder if it is the shallowness of the American culture which makes it possible for the men. Certain nations could not bear it--I would not be surprised if the ineptness and inefficiency of the Italian army was due mainly to the Italian soldier's emotional nature and his chronic incapacity to live a life of no emotion. Perhaps that's why the German is a good soldier.

"Anyway, read Pyle and you'll know how I'm living far better than if I were to tell you myself for I have no desire and no ability to write about it these days. Indeed I cannot see how there can be a great novel of affirmation or negation about America's part in this war for there is no emotional sense of conviction and no ideals to be betrayed. A realistic portrait of the G.I. at war could be good, but always minor. I can see a powerful war novel but it must be about tragic characters, highly personalized, great in the Dostoyevskan [sic] sense, never the Tolstoyan. It would be great because it had men at war, not Americans at war. Somehow, the loud efficient formless shell of America--the music, the business, the entertainment, the morals has carried over into the war." [my italics--see last lines below]

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[what follows here is a note for my own eyes only, for use in Chapter 4. The material is, simply, both too good for a footnote, and too distracting here from the main text. Later--when I get chapter 4 written--I can ADD A NOTE TO THIS FOOTNOTE HERE, CALLING THE READER FORWARD TO THE APPROPRIATE MAIN TEXT IN CHAPTER FOUR.]

closest Norfolk friends was a married couple who had been friends of Pyle, and she wrote to Norman about their reports of him.

The previous month, Bea provided a detailed critique of the Franck's D minor he had heard, and in other letters she reports still more. She has sent paperbacks of Alice in Wonderland, the New and Old Testaments, and some unnamed other books at his request, while remarking on her own readings of Menninger's Love Against Hate, Shaw's St. Joan, and The Education of Henry Adams. She reviews movies (Dick Powell in Murder, My Sweet) and plays (John Hersey's A Bell for Adano), and reflects upon the way in which Christian/Mosaic morality seems inevitably defeated by its basic requirement of self-abnegation, while Marxist/Leninist/Stalinist morality, based upon the concept of self-interest, seems to stand more of a chance.

Norman had got hold of a digest of Will Durant on Gibbon, and reflects at length about the relationships between historical cycles of progression from ideal to idea; at even greater length he writes about how, while on guard-duty all one comparatively

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Yet when he came to compose *The Naked and the Dead*, Norman kept not Dostoyevsky consciously in mind but Tolstoy--kept Anna Karenina, indeed, on his desk as he wrote. (On the other hand, note that Hemingway, in Ken Lynn's quoted letter to Gregory in that review of H. Mills' book, saw the Dostoyevskian quality in N&D. Said it both showed that NM was "psycho," and that he just might be great if he could recoup with a novel as strong.)

Note though how Norman's last [italicized] lines here foreshadow both the emergence, finally, of Heller's *Catch-22*, and indeed the closing section of N&D.

Purpose of this note, of course, is for my reference, not the reader's--for whom only the Pyle note here will be preserved. The rest is for Chap 4.

tense night, he fell to thinking about the abstraction from the concrete that the game of chess permitted its players, and how, still more, the operation of mathematics enabled its master to see into the abstract essence of relationships (while parenthetically he laments his own lack of a classical education and any true sense of the past. He studies and studiously applies his Machievelli to current world events, discovers Robert Graves by reading I, Claudius (especially appreciating its descriptions of military life), and in extended discussion of James Freeman's sturdily progressive, neatly polarized novel Never Call Retreat, expresses his own non-progressive impatience with conventional dualities between good and evil.

For Norman, a more acceptable concept of Godhead would itself embody the most conflicted contradictions, and he says that he sometimes thinks of God as being "like a very intense Somerset Maugham."

iii

Their freedom as a couple, insofar as Norman and Bea enjoyed any, was largely the product of their internal excursions into the life of the imagination and into the (also imagined) life of one another, while the external circumstances of their lives as members of military units tended, of necessity, to parallel the historical circumstances of a war that was clearly coming to some kind of close.

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It is not surprising, therefore, that as the month of June came to an end, these universal signs of closure began to show themselves in each of their particular situations as well. A month earlier, Bea had put in for a transfer from Norfolk to the U.S. Naval Yard Annex on Staten Island and, discovering in June that it was going to come through, she prepared to conclude her year-long assignment in Virginia. Her plan was to live with Fan at the Pierrepont Street apartment--where Arthur Miller had recently moved in as a neighbor--and in her non-duty hours get down to the writing of her novel. Whatever dimension of parent-aversion Bea may have begun with seems altogether to have eroded, and she was apparently as content to provide her mother-in-law (whose daughter was away at school and whose husband continued to work out of Washington, D.C.) with company as to be within easy visiting distance of her own parents.

While this was going forward, Norman--in mid-June having finally risen to the rank of Private First Class--was looking at a regimental change of situation that was genuinely fraught with portent. In the last week of June his platoon was assembled so hastily that he was barely able to throw off a one-line "won't be able to write" note to Bea: their orders were to move up into the Sierra Madre, where the forward units of the 112th were dug in, and participate in the evacuation of their regimental comrades from the field. While the Japanese forces would remain contained in the mountains by newly assigned units, the Luzon campaign had officially been declared to be at an end, and the Sixth Army