

Examples for Re "B" file

key card

File chronologically

Kluger, Richard, "To dig, Get off
the Middle Ground," Book week, I,
9 (10 Nov 63) 4, 21. [Review of
P.P.]

[Attacks Lucid xerox material]

cross-ref. card

File alphabetically

Kluger, Richard, "To dig, Get off
the Middle Ground," - review of
P.P.

see Book week 10 Nov 63
key card

Newsweek, "Savage Ending"
56:33 5 December 60

Biographical account ms attack
on Adl.

[attack Lucid xerox]

Newsweek, "Savage Ending"

56:33. 5 December 60

see key card

Foster, Richard, Norman
Mailer

Univ. of Minnesota Pamphlets
on American writers, #
73. 46pp

Univ. of Minn. Press, Minneapolis,
Minn. 1965 [pub. date 4
Oct 65]

Foster, Richard, Norman
Mailer

See key card, Oct. 4,
1968

- A. Critical reception of The Presidential Papers.
(The following bibliography is arranged alphabetically according to the title of the magazine in which the review appeared.)

Adams, Phoebe. The Atlantic, 212, 6 (Dec 1963), 164-8.

Presidential Papers (hereafter to be referred to as P.P.) is the third book reviewed in the book review section. The article is rather curt, the gist being that Mailer's stated reason for writing this book (which she interprets as a concern for Kennedy's lack of imagination) is an "ex post facto notion, designed to give importance to a collection of magazine pieces, some brilliant, some trivial, all...the oddmeats turned out by a novelist who is not writing a novel!" (pp.164-8). The concern with why Mailer has not written any fiction pervades these reviews, though the way in which this problem is treated depends upon the disposition of the reviewer towards Mailer. This particular review presents the standard condescending voice of the stuffy establishment, misunderstanding, willfully, I suspect, Mailer's aims in his book.

Kluger, Richard. "To Dig, Get off the Middleground," Book Week, 1, 9 (Nov 10 1963), 4, 21.

A more charitable review. Begins by stressing Mailer's tendency toward self-advertisement and refers to his renting Carnegie Hall. Claims that this act added to the legend taking shape of Mailer as a "volcanic despoiler of the stifling orthodoxy" of America. He is a personality like Liston and Sinatra. Then Kluger discusses Mailer as writer of nonfiction. He feels we must not make any value judgements between Mailer's nonfiction and a future novel he may write, despite Mailer's claim at Carnegie Hall that being a great novelist is his primary ambition. Mailer merits praise for his engagement which is greater than any other writer's. He will not settle for the middle-ground; the reader must decide if he is "a true savant or a foaming madman" (p.4). He is doing for our time what Dos Passos did for his. He is very good at determining our problems, but has difficulty providing an alternative. Kluger criticizes Mailer for ego-flaunting, as do most of the other reviews. Also, like many others, Kluger finds the piece on Jackie Kennedy embarrassing and guesses it was prompted by her unwillingness to be his "pen-pal" (p. 21). Attribution of personal and perhaps unflattering motives to Mailer is common in these reviews.

Decter, Midge. "Mailer's Campaign," Commentary (Feb. 1964), 83-5.

This reviewer attempts to analyze the strategy behind Mailer's "public Performance" (p.83). Essentially, Mailer, in his effort to work a revolution in the national consciousness, is seeking to be our "social microcosm... the voluntary scapegoat of all our weaknesses and corruptions" (p.84). To do this, he makes everything about him matter, he forces us to take him on his own terms, thus his prose and his gestures are inseparable. She also implies a personal motive behind this: "Just when we begin to feel comfortable about him, he's off again, setting up the next test of his personal strength and our willingness to venture...For everywhere he goes, he must take everyone, must have confirmation." She also claims that what most people object to in P.P. is not the sanctity of JFK being violated,

but the fact that "a writing man may with impunity act out just about anything in relation to the society out there...except a simple desire to be implicated in its power" (p.83). She claims that the stakes of Mailer's endeavor to be a microcosm and work his revolution are "murderously high" but states that this stems not only from personal bravery. It is also because he is thoroughly American; he has experienced, not analyzed, the America he describes. Some of this may be due to the "virtual movie stardom" he experienced as a young man. As with the reference to Sinatra and Liston, there is a hint here of Mailer's role as a public personality as having more significance than just as a means to an end, but neither reviewer pursues the implication. She finally says that Mailer will not achieve his ultimate goal, although he will "improve the manners of radicalism" (p.84) because he is not enough of a systematic philosopher. His "intellectual brashness and his novelist's habit of thought lead him not to respect sufficiently the history of man's difficulties" (p.85). This idea of a "novelist's habit of thought" as an impediment to social analysis contains interesting implications about the society's conception of the novelist and appears in a number of reviews.

DeMott, Benjamin. "Seasonable Truths," Harper's, 227, 1363 (Dec. 1963), 108-110.

P.P. reviewed along with Edmund Wilson's book on the income tax, the two books being collectively treated as 'crank books.' Both men have a bone to pick with society and hence have ventured out of their natural element. Mailer's personal grudge is that of a "man miffed at not having been asked round for a meal." His perspective "is not more eccentric than Edmund Wilson's but it inspires considerably more distrust" (p.110). The 'personal grudge theory' is common to the reviewers who, being thoroughly allied with the Establishment, choose not to take Mailer seriously.

Velde, Paul. "The Hemingway Who Stayed Home," The Nation, 180, 4, (Jan. 20 1964) 76-7.

Velde compares Mailer to Rudyard Kipling; both men seek a heroic counter-~~part~~ in the world of deeds to the heroic character of the artist. He sees Mailer's novels as a search for this hero. In Advertisements, the war becomes personal. "Mailer acted as his own decoy to test the enemy's strength [a variation of Decter's claim that Mailer makes himself a scapegoat/... as it turned out, he emerged with a...case of literary shell-shock." Self-testing (p. 76) seems to suit Mailer, he functions as a "Hemingway who stayed home" [parallels with Hemingway are common in these reviews]. Kennedy was a returned war hero. P.P. cannot be called political commentary because "Whenever artists are interested in politics, we can look for the heroic element... Artists are generally not interested in great practitioners of 'the art of the possible! That is the forte of political commentators.'" Once again we encounter an attempt to define the artist's conception of society as we did at the end of Decter's review.

Wills, Garry. "The Art of Not Writing Novels," The National Review, xvi, ii (Jan 14 1964), 31-32.

For obvious reasons, this is a very unfavorable review, offering no interesting theory for Mailer's public performance, except as an excuse to make snide or vicious comments about him. Its only significance is

that it touches upon a few of the themes we see in more well-balanced reviews. These include a parallel with Hemingway, Mailer's egoism, and the fact that he can write no more novels. To discuss the context in which these themes appear would be to dedicate more attention to this review than it deserves.

Newsweek, 62, 110 (Nov. 11 1963) 110-111.

As in some of the previous reviews, this one supports the 'personal grudge theory'. Mailer "pouts over the fact that tidy artists like Frost and Macleish got invited to the President's dinner while rambunctious souls like himself and Allen Ginsburg...were ignored"(pp. 110-111). It is somewhat more charitable than some in that it states that had Mailer been invited to an establishment affair, his usefulness to the nation would have ended.

Prynne, Xavier. "Vice Presidential Notes," The New York Review of Books, 1, 7 (Nov. 28 1963) 23.

A rather unfunny parody of P.P.

Galbraith, John K. "The Kennedy's Didn't Reply," The New York Times Book Review Section (Nov 17 1963).

This review is, in effect, the Kennedy Administration's reply to P.P. Rather than touch upon any significant issues concerning Mailer's posture as a political critic, Galbraith chooses to dispose of Mailer by implicitly questioning the validity of his attempting to discuss politics at all. A series of jibes and a highly sarcastic, superior tone serve to communicate to us the inappropriateness of a novelist even attempting to involve himself in politics. This article can be seen as the apogee of the conception of the artist's ineptitude as a political commentator which I have indicated in earlier reviews.

Miller, Jonathan. "Black-Mailer," ^{Partisan} The Parisian Review, xxxi, 1 (Winter 1964) 103-7. ?

Miller analyzes Mailer's strategy and motives along much the same lines as Midge Decter does. He claims that Mailer forces us to listen to him by making a drama out of his own development. Because of his desire to to work a revolution in our consciousness, "he heaps up the already rich, regenerative violence of his challenge with every conceivable stunt and self-advertisement in the book." He "employs himself without mercy, recruiting his his public and private personality in the service of his own campaign." But Miller goes farther than Decter in claiming that Mailer believes "in a magical way...in the potency of his own presence, bringing changes, not just in the consciousness, but more hopefully, in the actual events of our time." Although P.P. does "resonate with paranoid effects," Mailer is sane. He is, however, "monstrously uncouth" and a "boorish public nuisance." As Decter says, we are forced to take Mailer' all of a piece. His "daring capacity for self-exposure" is part of his view of life as an "existential' ordeal of testing challenges! Mailer's "uncouth self-importance" must be seen in the light of his aim to revolutionize our values. Miller also sees a more personal motive, a desire for "unquestioned greatness! Mailer is "running, not just in...his own mind,

not just for President of the United States, but for President of everything else." Finally, Miller suggests that Mailer is setting up a sort of heroic reputation for himself, a proxy, until his achievements catch up with his ambitions.

Capouya, Emile. "The Move Towards Immobility," Saturday Review (Nov 16 1963) 37-8.

This is another 'Establishment' review. The reviewer tries to depict the folly of Mailer's ways and urge him back to the fold. He claims that Mailer's courage is at the expense of his judgement. Although Mailer embodies the revolutionary mentality, he combines this "with all the trivial preoccupations of all the anciens regimes of history: self-aggrandizement, sensation, épater le bourgeois" (p.38). He then discusses Mailer's audience, a topic that comes up in later reviews of Cannibals and Christian. Today, he claims, there is less need than ever for an artist to be "popular with the audience (which really means having access to publishers and booking agents) [this is not Mailer's goal] at the price of exhibiting ones quirks and crochets." Although "the artist as a sideshow freak is an invention of our era...the audience at the sideshow is a depressing example of our citizenry." Mailer is evading his political responsibility "when he consents to play Wild Man of Borneo before their bumkinships" (p.38). As with the Atlantic review, which saw P.P. as a group of occasional pieces written between novels, this review implies that Mailer's proper role is not self-advertisement. It also implies that were Mailer to settle down to more respectable behavior, the 'Establishment' would take him in.

Time, 82, 22 (Nov.29 1963) 106-108.

The review is accompanied by a picture of Mailer at Carnegie Hall with the caption "Mostly about himself." Mailer has the typical leftist temperament. But left today can do little but discuss racial equality which Mailer does, added his individual twist of having asked James Baldwin to marry his sister. He suffers from megalomania. He has put his best talents into shaping his own personality. If he wants to run for mayor, the review ends, he should know that one does not "win votes by going around talking about 'the corroded vaults of my ambitious and yellow jaundiced soul'" (p.108). Again, we encounter the notion that the novelist is ill-equipped to function in the political arena, here because he is too 'high-brow.'

I am including the two following English reviews separately since they are not American and thus not as directly linked to our topic.

Miller, Karl.. "Let the Bum Speak," The New Statesman (May 1, 1964) 690.

Contains a lengthy summary of P.P. which, the reviewer feels, is "more fascistic than socialist." Furthermore, Mailer should realize that violence kills people. "Mailer...seems to be engaged in prescribing his own complaint as a sovereign antibiotic, glorifying his own complicity in that miserable raw destructiveness of which his country has too much" [this is the first review which alludes to Mailer's own experience with violence and also the first to imply that, after the assassination, P.P. is somewhat inappropriate]. Mailer started as a novelist, evolved into an "autobiographer and short-story-writer who won a highbrow public." Now

he may become "a third kind, who is paid giant sums by magazines of large circulation and advertising revenue to write spectaculars." He then goes on to discuss P.P., of which he does not think very highly. Finally, concerning Mailer as a public figure, he says, "Mailer's pretensions as a presidential varlet or vizier have a paranoid air which is not lessened by the fact that he has actually achieved a precarious national renown in this role...He clearly has presidential longings, though he must be aware that his political career has already run its course from log cabin to White House, this last being the famous Greenwich Village bar where he and 'Jimmy Baldwin' meet to upbraid one another" (p.690).

Sigal, Clancy. "The Mailer Problem," The Spectator, (May.1 1964) 598.

The dizzying pace of the "digestive process" of the N.Y. Lit. Scene "has been killing [Mailer] for years." He would not be Mailer if he did not position himself at the vortex of things. But the result is that Mailer fails as a "self-appointed prophet" because he does not realize that "if you will take people into the terror, you first lead yourself into sobriety." Mailer is "the last of the major public writers of America." He has "used up language and...must go on to stake a more serious, lonely claim to the frontier he is on, or go crazy, or die, or become a very bad writer." Discussing Mailer's attitude towards America, Sigal claims that "the America is dying but Mailer" just won't give up on it. Concerning P.P. per se, Sigal sees Mailer's "biggest hang-up" the fact that his book may have had, as he definitely wants to have, some effect on the "national destiny." Still, his fevered cries stand up well against the assessments of "more mature" writers. Yet there is less and less "genuine conviction" in both American life and Mailer's writing. His idea of the 'existential hero' is nothing more than Mailer "crying for papa. He is his own papa." [I have not indicated this, but many reviewers point to Mailer's 'adolescent' quality.] Mailer cannot stand the fact that he is not "Hemingway, Gide, Genet, or Balzac." He is not that good, but he is "the best we've got" (p. 598).

B. Critical reception of Cannibals and Christians.

Lindroth, James R. America, 115, 14 (Oct.1 1966)

A Catholic magazine. The review yields nothing particularly relevant.

Handlin, Oscar. Atlantic, 218, 4 (Oct. 1966) 144.

Very stuffy review with little insight. Handlin claims that, as a social critic, Mailer "cannot tolerate reality."

Rosenthal, Raymond. "Mailer's Mafia," Book Week (Sept. 4, 1966), 1, 14.

Front page review, accompanied by the picture of Mailer that appears on the dust-jacket of Cannibals and Christians (hereafter to be referred to as C.C.). This review begins by giving a rather standard appraisal of Mailer's appeal, which Rosenthal feels is due to the fact that Mailer positions himself at the very center of the current scene. He is a kind of "intellectual answering service" and seems to thrive in this role whereas Joyce or D. H. Lawrence would "go mad" (p. 1). In order to write a piece such as that on Goldwater, one must be at once aware of certain gossip of the other worlds beyond. Rosenthal then analyzes Mailer's relation to his audience, a topic which was touched upon in the reviews of P.P. but to which Rosenthal gives a novel twist. Rosenthal states that Mailer seems to be a "distinct personality" but actually has been "created bit by bit by his audience." Bellow and others are the same. This is "especially nervous" for a writer who considers journalism as a respite from his real work, writing novels. Because "when he tries to turn off the journalistic current and switch on the creative work, he suddenly discovers that his former allies have become enormous... obstacles to the solitude and distance a creative writer must have." When Mailer seems to be talking about America in general, he is really discussing his "particularly stifling relation with [his] audience." Rosenthal then discusses the 'scapegoat' concept which I pointed out in the reviews of Dexter and Killer. He claims Mailer's self-conception as an "historical mouthpiece" is bit ludicrous because Mailer is "genial, gregarious and easy-going at heart" but he "wants to be the funnel for madness at all costs." Mailer is good when he forgets his audience (as in his review of The Group) but then "the mob" returns and he becomes "a conduit for received, fashionable opinions and eager pronouncements of doom." Thus much of the time he sounds insincere. The involved theory presented in this review is, ultimately, a very consoling one for the Establishment, its implication being that Mailer would be a very likeable guy if he had not gotten caught up with his 'Mafia' which controls his views. But as it is, he need not be taken seriously.

"Letters from the Mailer Bag," Christian Science Monitor (Aug. 25 1966), 7.

Mailer's belligerence and will-to-win has not been seen since Hemingway. He cannot find a subject large enough for his ambition so there is frequently an "almost grotesque disparity between his stance and... his material." Mailer is called "egotistical" in this review as in so many others. He is yearning to have a message and talks nonstop in the hopes that one will come to him. The review quotes Diana Trilling as saying that Mailer is more a messiah than an artist. He tries to convince himself that his "increasingly fragmented writing bears witness to a fragmented world." But unlike Samuel Becket, Mailer does not have a "wasteland" mentality. On a much lower level, this review contains many of the ideas here are similar to those of Rosenthal above. There is the same desire to affirm the fact that Mailer is really just like the rest of us. Mailer will doubtlessly "go on talking and talking... mouthing his way towards identity" (p. 7). This review, like many others, does not quite know how to cope with the diversity of material in C.C.

Krim, Seymour. "An Open Letter to Norman Mailer," Evergreen Review (February 1966), 89-96.

Krim tries very hard in this lengthy article to talk Mailer's language. He ends up by sounding more like a self-appointed member of 'Mailer's Mafia.' Essentially, Krim is trying to cope with Mailer's literary development, questioning the form in which Mailer has chosen to cast his ideas in C.C. For eleven years, Mailer has been "making babies in public" that is, writing for magazines and then collecting the articles into books. Krim feels this method is beginning "to lose its spine" for Mailer. What should Mailer turn to next? Concerning that part of Mailer's career that has been dedicated to journalism, Krim feels Mailer created "a totally new confrontation in American journalism" (p.90). Reality is so confusing these days that journalism is perhaps the only medium to work with. The task of serious writers may be today to "shape the flux itself as they once would a novel." Krim suggests that perhaps "the Great American Novel today is society itself, and its author is the man who can give squirmy living material the harness of meaning and purpose that once went into a book." [This idea not only provides a response to the 'Establishment' critics who want Mailer to go back to his 'proper' sphere of novel-writing, it also is directly related to our concern with the artist as one viewed by society as having certain powers, the one who literarily or extra-literarily is able to perceive meanings that elude the rest of us.] Krim then goes on to describe the dangers of Mailer's journalistic role as all-purpose prophet. He must become "shrill to be heard above the din." He is also guilty of "intellectual gluttony," an example of the very things he condemns in his writing, i.e., "decay running amok" (p.94). In becoming a monologist, he loses the necessary opposition of characters a true artist must have. His problem now is to avoid the pitfalls illustrated by Henry Miller and William S. Burroughs who "lost most of their...audience... by subjectively willing to remain monologists rather than reality-edited dramatic writers, stars rather than telescopes, egos rather than super-egos" (p.96). Krim is, however, aware of Mailer's immense consciousness about what he does and the fact that he probably realizes the dangers of his latest stance.

Cayton, Robert F. Library Journal, 19, 14 (Aug 1966), 3730.

Another review that is utterly bewildered by the diversity of material in C.C. which it calls "absolutely boring trivia" (p.3730).

Samuels, Charles T. "Mailer vs the Hilton Hotel," National Review, XVIII, 42 (Oct 18 1966), 1059-60.

Again, this magazine uses the occasion to review Mailer's book as an excuse to belittle its author. But the reviewer does refer to aspects of C.C. which also trouble other reviewers. These include Mailer's 'adolescent' quality, and the fact that his style becomes "screech" (p.1059). [Even an admirer like Krim is bothered by Mailer's shrillness.] Samuels sees Mailer's "advertisements" as "double-mouthed," a cruder accusation than that of Rosenthal, but not qualitatively different (p.1060).

Wain, John. "Mailer's America," The New Republic, 153, 14 (Oct 1 1966), 19-20.

Wain begins with the familiar observation that Mailer "is trying to position himself so as to stand face to face with the true identity of our time." He continues, in this essentially favorable review, to elaborate on this theme. Mailer does the above because he wants to write but also writes because he wants the insight. This dilemma has "driven Mailer's mind hard." "he is like Hemingway, for whom he has great respect, in this at least, that he approaches his work as a bullfighter approaches a dangerous bull, knowing that if he makes a miss it will kill him" (p.19). He is a "natural extremist who leaps to the challenge of an extreme situation." He has succeeded in being "entirely of his time" and at the same time able to "diagnose its ill-health" (p.20). This review bears many similarities to a number of others. (One feels as though a formula were emerging to review Mailer) but the familiarity of these ideas indicates that perhaps this review expresses the general conception the society has of Mailer. Whether or not he evokes a favorable reaction, Mailer's desire to be at the crossroads of our time and his courage in braving the very high stakes of his endeavor, seem to be the starting points of a great number of these reviews.

"Pasta Fazool," Newsweek (Aug 29, 1966), 73.

Unimportant, brief review.

Thompson, John. "Catching Up on Mailer," The New York Review of Books, VIII, 7 (April 20 1967), 14-16.

The latest stage in Mailer's feud with this magazine, and perhaps the last. C.C. is reviewed with the play of The Deer Park and little of significance is said about the former.

Sheen, Wilfred. "One-man Dance Marathon," The New York Times Book Review Section (Aug 21 1966).

Front page review. Again, we find in this review many ideas which appeared in others. Sheen takes the opposite tack from that suggested by Rosenthal in suggesting that Mailer's bad writing is due to his desire to keep one step ahead of and thereby control the whole industry of Mailer criticism. An idea which clearly implies the power Mailer as a writer has over his more pedestrian critics. He then doubles back on himself a bit by resorting to the comforting idea we have noticed elsewhere that underneath his eccentricities, Mailer is just like the rest of us. In his literary criticism, Mailer forgets to be eccentric and sounds like a Harvard professor manqué. Sheen repeats the suggestion, given by Wain and others, that Mailer writes in order to stay alive. Finally, he repeats the familiar idea that Mailer is trying to be our 'historical mouthpiece' but ~~then repeat~~ the thesis that in C.C., Mailer sounds like an acidhead and is purposely trying to portray the kind of vision one gets under LSD because that's what's happening this year. This accounts for the disjointed quality of C.C.

Darack, Arthur. "Man Against his Times," Saturday Review, (Sept 1966), 35.

As a novelist, Mailer has a vision, whereas an essayist, he has an axe to grind. What upsets him is that the novelist is no longer considered a "public lecturer on the way things ought to be...Mailer's essays are an attempt to recapture the old position" (p.35).

"Feeling the Truth," Time, 88, 10 (Sept 2 1966), 82-3.

Somehow Mailer always manages to draw a crowd, even if its pockets are filled with "ripe eggs". Mailer tries to make the italicized material give the book the appearance that it is unified, but of course it is not. Time then gives little examples of Mailer's philosophy to make him look ludicrous.

C. Miscellaneous Reviews.

Architectural Review, CXXXVI, 809 (July 1964), 2-3.

A review of "Mailer vs Scully" [see section D under Architectural Forum]. The contents of the review are unimportant but at least Mailer got himself reviewed as an architectural critic by an architectural magazine. This magazine is British.

"Running Down," Time 74, 13 (March 30 1962), 84.

This is the review of Deaths for the Ladies to which Mailer replied in "A Poem to the Editors of Time" [see section D under Time]. Although the review is rather unimportant, I shall reproduce it so that one can see the exchange between Time and Mailer in its entirety:

(read down the page)

Ever	
see	
a drunk	counted
come on	the words
daring	and concluded
I mean	Mr M
drunk	is making up
like	for his
daring	first book
was a	which had
sloppy	too many.
entrechat?	You
Mr M	didn't
comes on	score
with fourbucks	this
of poems	time
about sex	M
not love	a
that run	n
down	.
like this	
only	But hell you know that.
not	
lined up	
neat.	
Having less	
than	
fourbucks	
fun	
a reader	

I discovered only this minute that I had forgotten to read this article which, I believe, is about Mailer. I don't know the extent to which P.P. is reviewed (the article appeared before C.C.) and thus to what extent it falls within the confines of my subjects. But if it does not turn up in someone else's bibliography, it would probably be worthwhile to read.

THE DEER PARK

I. Reviews of The Deer Park

These are all straight literary studies of the novel. At this point in his career, Norman Mailer was simply the author of one best-selling novel, The Naked and the Dead, and one flop, Barbary Shore, and, as such, he was only another new novelist. Not until the publication of Advertisements For Myself do the critics realize what Mailer is trying to do.

1. "Not Even Good Pornography." S. Alexander. Reporter 13: 46-48. Oct. 20, 1955
2. "Fattening For the Slaughter," D. Rainer. New Republic 133: 25. Oct. 31, 1955.
3. "The Writer as Vengeful Moralist". William Pfaff. Commonweal 63: 230. Dec. 2, 1955.
4. "The Deer Park" Saturday Review 33: 15. Oct. 15, 1955.
5. "Secret Places of the Groin," D. Nichols. Nation 181: 393-395. Nov. 5, 1955.
6. "Novelist Going Places," Richard Chase. Commentary 20: 581-583. Dec., 1955.
7. "The Deer Park," Orville Prescott, The New York Times, Oct. 14, 1955, p. 25:1.
8. "The Deer Park," New York Times Magazine, Oct. 16, 1955. Sec. VII, p. 5:3.

(These articles are not individually annotated as the material that they contain is practically similar for mostly the same reasons.)

II. Articles About Up-and-coming New Novelists and Writers

1. "Literary Underground," William Bittner. Nation 183: 247-248. Sept. 22, 1956.

Although this review deals in part with The Deer Park, it also attempts to generalize about the new novelist in America. It seems to miss Mailer completely as a public figure, for it calls him a member of the "Silent Generation," a sly, cynical writer, unlike Walt Whitman or Mark Twain, "one of the crafty Thoreaus, operating an underground movement dedicated to dropping sand in the gears of the big machine."

This quote is trying to evaluate the effect of his writing only upon the social community, and does not refer to his role as a public figure.

2. "They Needn't Say No." Granville Hicks. Saturday Review 43: 14. July 2, 1960.

Dealing with Mailer and Salinger, Hicks' article sees Mailer as a "simon-pure rebel, acutely self-conscious, worrying about it all the time." Mailer is really more than Hicks sees here; Mailer is not just a rebel. He wants to be the unique one, but also within the status quo. He is correct about Mailer's self-consciousness, probable more than he knows.

3. "Must Writers Be Characters?" Harvey Swados. Saturday Review 43: 12-14. Oct. 1, 1960.

This is the first article that understands what Mailer's about. Swados feels that, "Stunned by Mailer's nerve, they will vote him successor to Ernest Hemingway."

4. "Mystique de la Merde," R. E. Fitch. New Republic 135: 17-18. Sept. 3, 1956.

Negative material for our study. This concerns only the literary use of "The deidication of dirt." Neither Mailer nor Hemingway emerge as the big man; he is Tennessee Williams.

5. Reply to "Mystique." Time. 68:94. Oct. 1, 1956.

Again negative. Mailer is only a minor figure in Fitch's study anyway (which is what the original article said.)

III. Articles about Mailer exclusively.

1. "Innocent Nihilists Adrift in Squaresville." Eugene Burdick. Reporter. 18: 30-33. April 3, 1958.

The article is about the Hipster in America, and Mailer is billed as one of the founding fathers. Very little Mailer, though--mostly general sociology. Mailer name-dropped at the beginning of the first paragraph as documentary source. This was his reputation before A for M.

2. "Our Far-Flung Correspondents." Dwight MacDonald. New Yorker 36: 154- Oct. 8, 1960

Story of run-in with the Provincetown Police on drunkenness. Mailer is pictured very sympathetically, as a victim of police brutality, but able to take care of himself. He calls witnesses at the hearing, in which he defends himself,

to testify as to exactly how many drinks Mailer can take without noticeable change. Degenerates into farce, as the judge notices. All other characters besides Mailer are one dimensional, especially the police. Very entertaining.

3. "Savage Ending." Newsweek. 56: 33. Dec. 5, 1960.

Story of the cocktail party where stabbed wife Adele. Sections of A for M, re cocktail party, inserted to show parallels between real and fictional. There is an amazing correspondence. Mailer's life becomes a part of his fiction? The same sort of affair? If even Newsweek sees it...

4. "Of Time and The Rebel." Time. 76:16-17 Dec. 5, 1960.

Mailer as public figure, a la Time--dope addict, writer of definitive World War II novel, stabber of wife. Curiously lacking in any real assessment of the artist, either pro or con. Time backs out? Or Time already sees the real important Mailer?

Barbary Shore

- ** 1. Charles J. Rolo, Atlantic Monthly, 187 (June, 1951), 82.

concedes M's talent, but considers it still born in the political purgatory of BS——compares BS and N&D, in regard to style, content, etc.

"In trying to create the political nihilistic tone through grotesquerie and an aura of pointlessness, M seems to make a game in which the reader is mystified, for behavior is inexplicable"——Rolo is not accusing M of an intentional gamesmanship, one-up-manship, but rather, I am sure, is merely describing what he believes to be a flaw in the novel——but, as this self-conscious kind of sparring with his audience dominates much of M's later writing, we are free to speculate whether Rolo's observation affected M's personal and/or literary attitude, either by clarifying for Mailer an unrecognized tendency in himself or by defining a position which, though heretofore foreign to himself, M might find it interesting or profitable to assume henceforth——anotherwords, we must from the beginning recognize the problem of the relative weight of internal and external reference in forming the writer as writer, the writer as man, as well as, the man as man: in a sense the question is the general one of the dynamics of heredity and environment

2. L. O. Rogers, Canadian Forum, 31 (October, 1951), 167.

M the artist is commended for attempting to fill a literary void by sending back a more or less coherent report on the world of underground politics——attributes the book's failure to a personal ^{dilemma} of M, "that he is a socialist living in a country where there is no socialist party," but this is patently a critical, and perhaps also a political, absurdity

3. John Cogley, Commonweal, 54 (June 8, 1951), 220.

M has, as a novelist, "too much on the ball to be exchanging his birthright for a pot of message like this"

- ** 4. Irving Howe, Nation, 172 (June 16, 1951), 568.

faults M for his unconsciousness about style, his willingness

to imitate the jargon and cant of whatever he reads; similarly, says that M "has come to his radicalism a little late, he does not know in his flesh and bones what has happened"——interesting to consider that eight years later Podhoretz (20) would try to explain M's peculiarities in terms of a refusal to learn from anything but his own immediate, active experience——could Howe have influenced M's life style, or is ^{it} merely that Howe is ignorant of or ignoring M's well-publicized flesh and bones experience of radicalism in the Wallace campaign and its aftermath?

like others (2, 6, 7), Howe notes M's courage in choosing to write a book which "He must have known would bring him grief and attack," but the problem is not explored

5. Newsweek, (anon. rev.), 37 (May 28, 1951), 95.

picture of the t-shirted author looking like a Mr. Young American Newsboy of 1951——BS viewed as modish, expertly contrived, minor novel of political fantasy and suspense——interestingly, they note an undertone of "exasperated bitterness at contemporary intellectual processes"

6. Anthony West, The New Yorker, 27 (June 9, 1951), 106

M wrote, "not funny at all was Anthony West in The New Yorker" (ADV, 95)——as M quotes West, West feels those reviewers who commend M's courage in writing, and blame the failure of the book on the subject of, an overtly Socialist book are hedging the question: the book shows "a monolithic flawless badness," "a complete loss of emotional command," and is (is this of BS or M?) "soggy with self-pity and masochism"

7. Harry Sylvester, The New York Times Book Review, May 27, 1951, 7:5.

speculates whether M intentionally chose the cryptic form, suggests that "If he is after a succes d'estime he has failed ... badly, for the book lacks ... "——claims the form and technique are familiar, but emphasizes that the despair is M's own

8. Maxwell Geismar, Saturday Review of Literature, May 26, 1951, 15-16.

finds BS unsatisfactory for "our ablest post-war writer"

- ** 9. Time, (anon. rev.), 57 (May 28, 1951), 110.

"not so funny was Time" (ADV, 95)——BS viewed, without extenuation, as bad literature and bad politics——refusal (6, 9) to look either to M's personal reasons or to his past literary record as mitigation of BS's failure as a novel

Miscellaneous: Articles Discovered by Systematic Accident

Personal Biography

10. Norman Mailer, Atlantic Monthly, 209 (January, 1962), 62.

Poems

written by
masochists
flop like cows
in the meadow.
Take pity on me
they cry, pay
attention, I
am so sensitive
to nature, and
full of milk

Poems

should be like pins
which prick the skin
of boredom
and leave
a glow
equal in its pride
to the gait
of the sadist
who stuck
the pin
and walked away

11. Dwight MacDonal~~d~~, "Our Far-Flung Correspondent: Mass. verseus Mailer," The New Yorker, 36 (October 8, 1960), 154.

MacD seems interested less in M as artist in and/or against society than in the more masscult question of the individual verseus the system; thus, M comes off not as artist-hero but as Everyman trying to maintain identity, dignity—that MacD does not consider the artist to be the necessarily preeminent representative (those two words can't cohabitate, can they?) of common man is indicated by his judgement that, for M, "the trial was the legal verseus the novelistic mind, and the latter always gave way"

12. "Americana: Of Time, and the Rebel," Time, (anon. story), 76 (December 5, 1960), 16.

unsympathetic, jeering account of M's arrest for stabbing his wife—in passing it is noted that M's fall as politician, pugilist, stunt man, corresponds with his deterioration as artist

13. Benjamin DeMott, "Docket Notes: 15833," American Scholar, 30 (Spring, 1961), 232-7.

most remarkable aspect of article is that The American Scholar would devote space to article about an abortive trial for wife-stabbing—a general overview of M, attempt to discover relationship between personality(ies) of M as wife-stabber, writer, guest-list celebrity, political figure on the Existentialist ticket, and man of ideas, as in "The White Negro"—then, startlingly, perhaps because he suddenly realizes the scope of the question he is asking, declares: "The relationship between an ideology of violence set forth in an essay and a charge of felonious assault set forth in a police affidavit cannot be known": for those of you who missed it, "cannot be known".

11. General Literary Articles

14. Eugene Burdick, "The Innocent Nihilists Adrift in Squaresville," The Reporter, 18 (April 3, 1958), 30.

article by a real square on the beats, for whom M, of "White Negro" and The Village Voice, and Rexroth are chosen as intellectual spokesman—however, the quotations from these two men, whom Burdick seems to see no difference between, reveal that M is the sociologist, the pseudo-beat (cf., Black Like ME), whereas Rexroth is Beat-66—thus, it seems that M says You-Out-There won't understand because he so desperately wishes you to, whereas Rexroth just doesn't want the Squares around him

15. "The Virtues of Vulgarly," I (Spring, 1960), 29-40.

on Dostoevsky, Fitzgerald, Brando, Mailer, Beatniks and Buffoons—although M is dissociated from the buffoonery of a Papa Karamazov, they both engage in a similar game with their audiences and their fluid selves, I think—from all of M's insults and intemperance the picture which emerges is of, not self-flagellation, buffoonery, but "an image of M on a white horse [as Vidal termed it, "Bolingbroking": cf. (31)] conducting a campaign, promoting himself and his various causes with all the talents at his disposal": many critics, from many perspectives, try to show that M is messianic

- *16. Harvey Swados, "Must Writers Be Characters?" Saturday Review, 43 (October, 1960), .

sees, in wake of the reviews of ADV, that "not by his works but by his personality" the critics are driven to crown him as the successor to Hemingway, "which is precisely what M, by his own confession, has been dying to be told"—notes also that

his excessively noisy semi-self-accusations and admitted self-pity have led the critics to feel that M deserves re-evaluation: thus, as we shall see, in many of the reviews of ADV the reviewers attempt, rather blushingly, to admit that BS is a better novel than they first thought it, (when they read it only as a novel)——furthermore, Swados dislikes the fact that Podhoretz (20) excuses all of M's eccentricities in public and private life by explaining that M needs to experience things for himself: for Swados, altho he doesn't say it, this is an unforgiveable extension of M's mistaken confusion of literature and art, the self and the world——for Swados the pity is that anti-social behavior is a higher card in our culture than properly artistic and moral behavior

17. Thomas Curley, "The Quarrel with Time in American Fiction," American Scholar, xxix (Autumn, 1960), 552-60.

concerned with the hip, escape through unconvention from the past, as seen in contemporary American fiction——"as good a summary of the difficulties of novel-writing in America as I know. He may be wrong, he may be muddle-headed, but he is never irrelevant": whatever that means

18. R. W. B. Lewis, "American Letters, A Projection," Yale Review, 51 (December, 1961), 211-26.

Lewis sees central theme of postwar fiction to be the integrity of the self; as Malcolm says, "Keep your hands off my soul"——"M, a man of disconcerting public behavior but a writer of immense ability [note this obligatory aside; and its assumption that the artist and the man are only coincidentally, in this case unhappily, related], gives up traditional fiction and turns a book that, echoing the long poem of Whitman, he calls ADV for Myself.... the theme of the curious and brilliant hodge-podge of fact and fiction is to be nothing but himself": remarkable that, perceiving this much, he refuses to relate it to M's "disconcerting public behavior"

- *- 19. Marvin Mudrick, "Mailer and Styron: Guests of the Establishment," Hudson Review, xvii (Autumn, 1964), 346-66.

notes that, following initial successes, both have since failed artistically, and have attempted to leave art and join the establishment, have tried to invent and capture power and popularity, but all the while know that where and when it counts

both power and popularity are unachievable——furthermore, tries to associate M's "constricted anxious hectoring intonation" with the frustration of failing in what M considers the big world; claims that M is so involved in his scheme that his artistic creativity fails him——there is, remarkably consistently and conformably, among literary critics the belief that activity "out there" debilitates one for those moments when one really needs one's full resources, the moments of literary creation: as this is supposed to be a bibliography, not a paper, henceforth I shall show, in good undergraduate fashion, the clues to the secret treasure, but if you need further help, t'hell with you

Critical and Thematic Overviews of M's work

20. Norman Podhoretz, "N.M.: The Embattled Vision," Partisan Review, xxvi (Summer, 1959), 371-92.

Pod argues that M refuses to accept anything on faith, must experience it for himself——such an insistence on personal experience leads directly to a biographical perspective on M, yet this article appeared before the publication of ADV: question whether to credit Pod with a perspicacious observation, or to assume he had seen a pre-publication manuscript of ADV; latter seems unlikely, for his thematic analyses of M's novels tends to emphasize political notions and ignore sexual and existential ones

- * 21. George Alfred Schrader, "N.M. and the Despair of Defiance," Yale Review, 51 (December, 1961), 267-80.

reads "The White Negro" and the story of wife-stabbing (13) as case-documents in a Kierkegaardian, or existential, analysis of M the individual: makes no distinction between the inherent qualities of lifework and artwork——Schrader values the quality of the life over the quality of the art, unlike the literary critics who seem to devalue all lifedeeds because they might, and by some standards always do, diminish the pure quality of the artwork——Schrader sees the stabbing as an action in the real world which was, more or less, necessitated by ideas which are adumbrated in the art, both fiction and essay; he does not consider the possibility that the action was a failure of the ideas, but rather that it was psycho-logically consequential——"M seems clearly to believe that in order to present the radical possibilities of the self in the form of art one must first have

9
experience it oneself. The artist as writer and the writer as existing human being are not to be separated. To write about courage adequately one must have courage and live by it".
"His success as a novelist had not only brought him permanently into the consciousness of others but delivered him into a dramatically new self-consciousness": that is, Schrader implicitly believes that it is not the process of creating an artwork which distinguishes the artist from his human peers, but the fact that he might thereby gain notoriety (cf., ADV, 83-5)—in sum, for Schrader the vital factor in M's life, as in any life, is the relation of man to his world; the author's relation to his audience is in essence the same as that of any public figure to his peculiar group of auditors—; finally, Schrader does declare the purpose of his analysis is to discover whether M will ever be capable of becoming "the outstanding novelist he so desperately wants but doesn't yet will to be": still, ultimately, Schrader cares whether M as man will fulfill himself, he does not care whether a novel, a work of art, is created

* 22. Diana Trilling, "N.M.," Encounter, 19 (November, 1962), 45-56.

long, frequently interesting analysis of M's fiction; attempt to discover M's controlling ideas and attitudes—Miss Trilling's dominant concern is with the appearance of M's ideas in his fiction, but her perceptions are generally enlightening about M as artist in society as well—

ADV "assumes that its audience shares the writer's own sense of his importance in the record of his period, which indeed it may, but no public likes to have this certification demanded of it.... And it requires of its readers enough grace to forgive if it cannot forget the persistent self-reference": that is, because ADV not only has the literary theme of self-assertion against the world, but also in its very nature is an act of self-assertion against the world (i.e., the reader), naturally we are offended by it and respond by asserting ourselves against M—Miss T offers, in another place, a further explanation of our response to M: "he outrages conservative opinion by the ultimateness of his judgement upon modern life, and he equally alienates radical literary opinion by his offense against the reality it is most disposed to acknowledge, that of our helplessness before conditions": that is, those in the ivory tower of art excuse their residence there by claiming the world won't accept them; so M is a threat because he might show them what they could do if they

Miss T notes that, in their desire to deny a moral position which might threaten the wall (regardless which side built the wall) between art and the world, the critics slighted "The compelling force of the volume, its demonstration of the courage and complexity of M's talent"; thus, Miss T is implying the sad possibility that the open-mindedness of the literary community obtains only within the narrow borders of the imaginary reality

another possibility, according to this article, is that we dislike M because he refuses to conform or succumb to ~~order~~ of our literary myths of impotence, that after the precocious flowering of genius the artist is destroyed by our society; however, she notes that M's desertion of art for polemic, his choice to offer the public the "myth of the man rather than the work of the writer," has in its own way contributed to fulfilling our myth of impotence

she claims that M's various contradictions contribute to his appeal to us; what she is speaking of, I think, is the neurotic irresolution of energy which we spoke of in class—for Miss T this neurotic contradictoriness gives M "a striking resemblance to present-day America": thus M is, in his way, representative man

- * * 23. Edmund L. Volpe, "James Jones—N.M.," in Contemporary American Novelists, ed. Harry Moore, (Carbondale, 1965), .

"M writes in DP: 't artist was always divided between his desire for power in the world and his desire for power over his work.' It would probably be difficult to find validity for such an observation in the careers of most artists, particularly in America, but it does seem to apply to M": Volpe assumes this assertion is self-evident; if it is, we are damned

"M confuses art with politics.... His championing of violence . is artistically justifiable but politically irresponsible. What these essays make clear is that M thinks not as a politician but as an artist and that in continuing to cater to his desire for power he is wasting a precious talent"—Moore assumes, and there is ample justification for doing so, even if the artist . as a species belongs in the real world as well as the imaginary one, M as a wife-stabber does not: this is a damning indictment, for it implies that M is out of place in reality not by definition as he is an artist, but rather because, quite obviously, he misunderstands it

14 11

Advertisements for Myself

24. Charles Rolo, Atlantic Monthly, 204 (December, 1959), 166.

(reviewed with The Stature of Man, by Colin Wilson, an existential sociologist)——sees ADV as manifesto of hate-filled, perverse ideas; M has joined the hipster-nihilists, who are the scourge of our century, because he has been "soured by what he interpretes as 'defeat' at the hands of the literary world"; he has chosen to become a "literary terrorist"——apparently Rolo believes that M's non-literature is the spoiled-grapes petulance of an adolescent who couldn't make it as artist

* * 25. F.W.Dupee, Commentary, 29 (February, 1960), 128-32.

notes that M's defiant apologetic tone leads critics to aim for his jugular and think they've cut it, but M keeps advancing doggedly——from M's claim that he writing the new American Moby Dick, Dupee argues that M is concerned not with the art of that novel, but with the "literary power and prestige" the novel has accumulated——the greats like Hemingway "represent to him a massed accumulation of potency, they are symbols of literary prestige;" and he is concerned with their "position in the literary market place"——however, although this type of literary ambition is legitimate, M "gives unmistakable signs of having conjoined it to dreams of worldly power"; Dupee traces M's "confusion" to fact that American economic prosperity becomes somehow associated in the artist's mind with his own power: Dupee might be on the right track, but his analysis has derailed——finally, as a good literary critic, asks, "Why, with a 1000 page novel to finish, does anyone want to be President, unless he fears that he will never finish the novel"

26. Richard Horchler, Commonweal, 71 (December 4, 1959), 296.

lists ADV among choices for Christmas: a book about everything. but "mostly the psyche of their way-out author"

27. James Finn, Commonweal, 71 (February 12, 1960), 551-7.

Finn tells his readers a great deal about what M is doing, but fails to admit he is paraphrasing the self-advertisements——notes that M is moving target, who can shoot at you when you can barely identify him, & commends M for this impressive talent——

Finn declares this is the age of literary confession, on couch, confessional, or typewriter; wisely perceives that often what is revealed is not what is confessed, but apparently, being limited to a six page review, hasn't the time to specify what is revealed

*** 28. George Steiner, "Naked but not Dead," Encounter, 17 (Dec., 1961) 67-7:

Steiner begins by using M as representative American: declares Americans aren't afraid to look at reality, whereas we British are——traces M's motivation to four sets of values: Jewish, Socialist, Hipster, Writer——identifies M's concern for guiding men's minds to truth and justice with his Messianic Judaism, which also is responsible for M's dissatisfaction from a moral perspective with the importance of art; according to Steiner, the Messianic Jew "knows" that art is impotent, yet is drawn to it as to a Devil——in reappraising earlier novels in light of ADV (but why should they be reappraised) he finds that "the stimulants M was taking at the time seemed to have shifted DP out of focus," which is, of course, nice to know, but what has it to do with anything except M's life

*** 29. Seymour Krim, "A Hungry Mental Lion," Evergreen Review, 4 (January-February, 1960), 178-85.

"His being is no longer satisfied with the traditional novelistic role, his ambition and sense of mortal worth refuse to be stymied any longer by the atrophied forms of either conventional literature or government. He lives now, shedding day by day the mask of a character in his fictions, going further in defying his fears and devastations.... in this book seen as a whole he comes completely, destiny-baitingly out in the open, enjoying the role of guiltless assassin.... Yet Norman's leadership could be consumed in the heat of his own private flight.... There is a Mensch among us, and it makes life heroic and purposeful for a generation that really needs him as it doesn't need 98% of its writers"

"Beneath his obsessive profile consciousness [he is a melodramatic combination of "MacArthur, Humphrey Bogart, Hemingway, Poe"] we are given an individual so intensely aware of his and other existences that we can only marvel that a man can participate so completely in the hot centers of his time"

greatness of ADV is that M has gone outside pure art to find a form matching the present mood, organized around the only

13
stability possible today, the self——M's watchful eye on the public beat and his competition also marks him, for Krim, as a representative man, if not a representative author, of our age——for Krim, as for Schrader (21), books are valuable not for themselves, but as documents opening into the individual——notes that M is generally regarded as having difficulty with narrative, with combining energy of first person and objectivity of third person, but to Krim this is proof of M's integrity and mark of his modernity

30. Roger McDonough, Library Journal, 76 (May 15, 1951), 862.

"The average person will have difficulty finding the moral behind the story, if there is any.... Frank language!"

*** 31. Gore Vidal, "The N.M. Syndrome," Nation, 190 (January 2, 1960), 13-17

Vidal perspicaciously observes that, since ADV links life and work, we may not criticize the one separate from the other (but Vidal is interested in only those aspects of M's life which M has recorded for us; indeed, relevant to our inquiry, Vidal analyzes why M forges this connection and what effect it has and will have according to V, M is fundamentally Messianic, a "Bolingbroke, a born usurper": however, as all the traditional positions of power in western culture have proven either bankrupt or corrupt, M turned to literature; yet, "telling stories does seem, (for such as M) a silly occupation for one full grown"——but the difficulty M is encountering is that American society has quietly placed narrow limits on the prestige and power of the artist-as-artist——to cross the border into the broad real world, one must don a cultural mask; so M has attempted to follow the example of Hemingway, and also those of Wolfe and Fitzgerald, who sold the trappings of a personality rather than the substance of his art——What M is not enough aware of is that this audience which no longer responds to novels does cannibalistically, albeit with the religious piety with which the sacrament is consumed, devour personalities, and in so doing the cannibals are not transformed to Gods, but the Gods are turned into human fecal matter——yet V admits that perhaps M is conscious of the always threatening meaninglessness of his own position, and, with "his eye always on the main chance," can do guerilla warfare in the out-there world without losing the encompassing vision that his artistic detachment earns him——M may lose himself in gaining the ear of the mob, but potentially only M among V's contemporaries has the force to

H 14
32. Norman Mailer, Nation, 190 (January 30, 1960), 88.

M replies to V's article (31) in a brief, gentlemanly letter to the editor——M admits that to brag of "making new enemies" would be foolish, but he must don motley since the alternative is to allow himself to be accused of playing politics, which he would consider more foolish——he refers editor and reader alike to V, whom M supplied with a full list of new enemies made in ADV

*33. Stuart Hampshire, "M United," New Statesman, 62 (October 13, 1961), 515-16.

(this review is of the British edition, in which "The Time of Her Time" has been censored)——says ADV is addressed to those who have followed M's career "as one follows a team"——H tries to limit M's following to the nostalgic ex-radicals of the thirties, but contradicts himself: "M reminds them [but this applies to all of us] that the sense of liberation which comes from new forms in imaginative writing is not without relation to a possible new sense of freedom in society.... the young writers who introduce forbidden themes are unacknowledged legislators.... Mr. M runs between his supporters and literature itself, desperately, to keep the two in touch": H ignores the fact that M wants a larger audience than one composed of middle-aged practicing litterateurs

H perceives that M is also running a desperate race with "the spectre of his own impotence and the impotence of art itself," but sees no connection between this fear and the success or failure of his attempt to be an acknowledged legislator——racing against fear, M has no time for design, so his audience must participate in the creation with him, and thus, instead of finding the calm of art, they are "left moved, restless, dissatisfied": though H doesn't see, clearly, he is on the verge of discovering the nature of the neurotic relationship between man and man, a relationship which will [ambiguity is intentional] not be bound by the 'forms of' art

34. Newsweek, (anon. rev.), 54 (November 9, 1959), 126-7.

review responds to M as he appears in ADV, but unlike the longer reviews does not attempt to analyze what M is doing——M "shows up as a genuinely big talent.... who is still a big sucker (sic)... turning himself into a dotty messiah"——"a fascinating performance by a likeable personality whose passion to be a great writer is touching and worthy of respect ... and in need of a swift kick"

35. Harry T. Moore, "The Targets are Squares," The New York Times Book Review, November 1, 1959, 7:4.

(with four accompanying photos labeled "Growth of an Author")—reviews early novels, finds them much improved on second reading [cf., (16)]—he is concerned solely with the big novel M may write, and with the problems M will confront in writing it; very neatly ignores, in good NTYBR fashion, the work in front of him; what is remarkable is that he finds nothing else to talk about

36. Charles Poore, The New York Times Book Review, November 3, 1959, 29.

the closest Poore gets to the book is to say, "the essays with which Mr. M has chosen to precede," rather than merely, "The essays which do precede..." "

37. The New Yorker, (anon. rev.), 35 (November 14, 1959), 233.

reviewer takes advantage of M's self-perceptions to appear, by paraphrasing M, as if he had some original observations to record——asserts that if M stopped squandering all his energies in "evading" the writing of his book, in scrapping with the public, he would probably produce something great: refusal even to consider that, from M's perspective, ADV might be art at its best because potentially most effective

38. Irving Howe, "A Quest for Peril," Partisan Review, XXVII (Winter, 1960), 143-50.

approves ADV, as he had BS (4), as a "systematic assault" on America's liberal moderation and sweetness——he desires a new chivalry which will break out of the enervating sterility of modern life in order to face the real, albeit hidden, dangers; thus commends M for his "chivalry" in reprinting Polsky's article——"M is one of the few younger writers who has made his public self into a matter of legitimate interest, as Hemingway did": however, he fails to explain what standards legitimize this

39. Alfred Kazin, "How good is N.M.," Reporter, 21 (Nov. 26, 1959), 40-2.

Kazin's review is remarkable for confronting so many of the central matters in ADV without attempting to pass any judgement on its literary or non-literary status: he discusses the stories, the essays, and the advertisements in the manner most appropriate to each, but then, instead of making a general evaluation of ADV instead he tries to look into M's future——although he analyzes

in general terms the peculiarly self-conscious nature of M's love-hate relationship with his society, and although he recognizes that M is not more anxious to destroy American culture than he is to be loved by it, nevertheless Kazin fails to discern, or at least to comment on, the unique form or content or tone of address which ADV consequently has——Kazin is aware of the possibility that M may never achieve greatness, but he, unlike most of the literary critics, does not attribute this to M's attempted usurpation of non-literary territory; rather, he fears that M's outer-directed competitive pride may preclude the growth of a stabile internal vision; anotherwords, in his highly literary way, M may nevertheless be the perfect representative of the Age of Happenings, the representative figure but not an artist

40. Granville Hicks, The Saturday Review, 42 (November 7, 1959), 18-19.

Hicks' review has a petulant, pettish tone, which erupts in comments like, "M throws his weight around ... expects to be listened to whenever he opens his mouth ... not a particularly appealing person," and, for his closing sentence, "I wish he would get about it instead of frittering away his time"; one feels very strongly that Hicks is offering not literary criticism but personal advice to a student who has been sounding off in class——Hicks, like most critics, looks with M to his past and future, but except for comments on M's rudeness, seems oblivious to the fact that the volume, ADV, constitutes M's present——Hicks says M is "ambitious but no more ambitious than many another," as if he were laying a question to rest, not stirring up many more

41. Mordecai Richler, The Spectator, 207 (October 13, 1961), 510.

(review of British edition)——says M, Hemingway and Fitzgerald are the Messianic American talents, and from them we learn what life in America is like, but doesn't explain why this can't be learned from the novel; indeed, R ultimately says the stories are so good, it's a shame M wastes his talent and energy in impure art, in competition: "more like a dress manufacturer than a cool cat" or writer——attacks M's notions of the Hipster on sociological grounds (no inclination anywhere to believe that M might be using pseudo-facts as metaphors; by giving up the pure art forms, M has lost the creative impunity of the artist——"A novel is one thing and a pot-dream is another": yes

17
42. Time, (anon.rev.), 74 (November 2, 1959), 90.

nastily, often meaninglessly hostile——reviewer assents to M's notion that America is a cruel place for talent, for it has killed M's——having cracked-up, M is writing a record of his regeneration; happily, he doesn't know he is still insane

*43. Charles J. Glicksburg, "The Angry Young Novelist in America,"

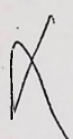
WSCL, 1 (Winter, 1960), 25-35.

3 ✓
4
"What M never comes to grips with (he is, after^{all}, a novelist, not the founder of a sexual cult) is the fundamental question of how Hip provides a viable esthetic for a writer of fiction.... The hipster may be what M claims, but one fails to see what this has to do with M's own development as a writer or how it helps to fructify American literature and art. Why should a serious novelist affiliate himself with a psychopathic lawless group like the hipsters?... The hip movement may have gained an impassioned and superbly talented spokesman, but it may hasten the death of M's career as a novelist"——Glicksburg insists that what bothers him about M is that he has deserted literature before he has proved himself there; instead he should have, like Camus and Tolstoy, stuck to his artistic last until he had constructed himself a set of shoes which would carry him through the world; Mr. Glicksburg makes no attempt to defend this evaluative hierarchy, but his defender-of-the-faith tone suggests that he conceives of art not only as the source of potency in the world, but also as the transforming medium through which nothing can pass without being moralized (~~if the pun is there, I put it there~~)——that is, for Glicksburg the process of bending one's ideas to conform with esthetic criteria of balance, consistency, etc., would squeeze out all impure, radical moral tendencies——"The fate of the writer in America has never been an easy one, but what is the solution.... Did Hawthorne and Melville ever stoop to advertise themselves, for all the reverses they suffered.... M is of the opinion he has been blackballed because he has been a disruptive force, but ... has he produced work that would entitle him to belong to the major order of literature?"

The Reception and Reputation of An American Dream

Out of twenty-nine reviews of An American Dream, I classified them as follows: sixteen definitely had Mailer as their subject; five were primarily book reviews, some of which referred briefly to Mailer, the man; nine avoided the book, Mailer and the whole problem of the significance of the two. Some of my categorizing was a bit arbitrary, particularly in the case of such reviews as that by Edmund Fuller in the Wall Street Journal which seemed to me so vulgar and such a negative statement of the reviewer himself that it warranted little significance in this study.

Out of the sixteen reviews^W which definitely had Mailer as their subject, I chose eight which I classify as more interesting and comprising a fuller treatment of Mailer as public figure. I will begin with these. They are listed in chronological order.

 Tom Wolfe, "Son of Crime and Punishment Or: How to go Eight Fast Rounds with the Heavyweight Champ--and Lose," Book Week pl., March 14, 1965.

Tom Wolfe begins his review with a rather long discussion of Mailer as public figure, through which emerges a lot of Wolfe's own self-advertisement in his humorous treatment of Mailer's antics and works, in his own crazy-quilt language. He describes Mailer as a competitor who has eliminated all of his living competition and is now turning to the dead greats, particularly to Dostoevsky. Then follows a rather detailed comparison of Mailer and Dostoevsky in which Wolfe suggests that Mailer must have read Dostoevsky's letters and diaries, a suggestion which indicates that he Tom Wolfe has done so and thus is able to make this rather elaborate comparison. Wolfe sees Mailer's greatest hang-up as the roman a thoso or philosophical novel. Here his comparison of Mailer and Dostoevsky reaches rollicking proportions as Wolfe gives a detailed account of

of Mailer's characters being killed or squashed with his ideas. Wolfe criticizes Mailer's lack of humor, his taking himself too seriously, in his own humorous style and use of words. Consonant with this seriousness is Mailer's stance as a moralist; Wolfe here compares him to a Methodist minister who has just discovered orgone theory with "all these little gods, devils and orgasms running around."

After a rather light and humorous, although critical, treatment of Mailer, Wolfe concludes with some positive statements on Mailer's talent and work. In Mailer's favor are his drive, his pace, his gift of narrative, his nervous excitement. Yet Wolfe closes his article with a comparison of Mailer to James M. Cain: "I think Mailer can climb into the same ring as James M. Cain...", quite a far distance from his goal of taking on Dostoevsky. In the article Tom Wolfe emerges in his humorous treatment of Mailer and his work, in his obviously researched knowledge of Mailer and Dostoevsky, in his comparison of the two which is unique in that it is so detailed, in his own characteristic style with its very funny verbs. Wolfe's light treatment of Mailer suggests a favorable attitude toward the latter; but one of his most serious criticisms of Mailer is that all of his antics are conscious efforts to emulate other men or to hold the public attention.

Conrad Knickerbocker, "A Man Desperate for a New Life," New York Times Book Review pl., March 14, 1965.

A strange tone pervades this article. Knickerbocker begins with a defense of Mailer, stressing first his need for "a cohesive sensitive audience," and reaching melodramatic heights: "he might have been happier as one of those half-crazy wandering poets who exalted Irish villagers two-hundred years ago...someone the crowd believed in and listened to." He excuses Mailer's antics or offenses by quick successes, earned almost too

easily. Knickerbocker further releases Mailer from any blame in hinting vaguely that his actions are the fault of the American public as a whole, "the peculiar nature of the fame we confer." Implicit in the above is the suggestion that Mailer has been manipulated by the public imagination to play a role they expect him to play.

Knickerbocker returns to his impassioned defense of Mailer, describing him as more put-upon than any other writer alive, again the fault lying with the public, "enemies of promise kicking down the doors day and night." In Knickerbocker's eyes, Mailer becomes a spokesman for what in all of us is most painful to accept, and for all of America. Therefore, the public's criticism of and hostility toward Mailer can be attributed to the aversion of the American public to accept what is really a part of themselves. Knickerbocker then suggests a personal relationship between himself and Mailer -- "He told me recently..." -- in the latter's telling him of the rewriting of An American Dream for publication in book form, "sounding every sentence, he said, ten times for timbre." Knickerbocker gives his positive view of Mailer's future in a rather curt statement: "Now he is whipping his powers into line." The whole article is a strange, melodramatic plea for Mailer in which Knickerbocker uses strange words and images, "the cabala of American power...the mana...", "a man whose switchboard has been sabotaged." He says very little about An American Dream and very little really about Mailer himself; rather he barrages the reader with his strange, impassioned and personal plea for Mailer.

John W. Aldridge, "The Comeback of Norman Mailer," Life 58:12, March 19, 1965.

Aldridge begins his review with a statement of the difficulty of Mailer's struggle to affect the life and thought of his time, suggesting

that in the force of this struggle, Mailer's objective might be construed as self-annihilation. Aldridge's review is an important departure from most of the reviews of An American Dream because he is the only reviewer who really approaches what Mailer is trying to do in his work: "Deep within those books one felt the pressure of something big growing, a vision or prophecy or simply a hatred that was perhaps too radical and disturbing even for Mailer himself." He is the only reviewer who speaks of Mailer's new approach to fiction, the creation of the compelling realities of our fantasy life as opposed to the realities we think we know. Aldridge attributes this creation to Mailer's "devastatingly alive and original creative mind...capable of responding with seismographic sensitivity to an enormously wide range of impressions. Aldridge is the only reviewer thus far who has not been limited by conventional form, plot, resolution of the novel and who suggests that Mailer might well be doing something fresh and new. (Many of the other reviewers recognize that Mailer's work is a departure from convention, but they criticize it on this ground, failing to use their imaginations to consider that he might be doing something ^{importantly} original.) "...it may well represent the first significant step the current American novel has taken into fresh territories of the imagination."

Philip Rahv, "Crime without Punishment," New York Review of Books 4:1, March 25, 1965.

(A large picture of Mailer with huge head and arms completely obscured by large boxing gloves, standing defensively between open pages of his book, heads the article.)

Rahv sees Mailer's work as a projection of Mailer himself, "a programmatic statement of his own desires, power drives and daydreams." Much of his review is thus aimed at Mailer and his motives for writing rather than at the novel itself. His first criticism of An American Dream is that

Mailer is intentionally and visibly manipulating the plot; therefore, Rojack is not held responsible for his acts in any conventional or logical way. Incongruous with the above departure from convention is Mailer's lack of humor; Rahv comments that An American Dream is written without a trace of irony, in the realistic convention.

Rahv criticizes Mailer for repressing his common sense as well as his moral sense; Rojack and Mailer evade all responsibility of murder and don't carry out the implications of the plot. Perhaps here Rahv himself is bound up in his conventional conception of the novel. He sees Mailer as a part of a group of conventional swingers who are "expressing the fickle moods of a certain sector of American society by no means the least affluent, into which every sphere but the political has collapsed into total permissiveness." Mailer emerges in this article as a contradiction of the conventional and unconventional. And Rahv stays away from his unconventional handling of the novel; rather he prefers to attack Mailer on grounds of his conforming to a stale form of nonconformity.

Rahv carries Mailer's identity with his characters to an extreme. Not only is Rojack described as an expression of Mailer himself, but his secondary characters are also labeled as mere mouthpieces for Mailer's ideas. These ideas are not, for Rahv, an expression of the national character which would be a much more impersonal, larger social expression, but rather are the expression of the dream of power, of "romantic omnipotence" of one man, expressed through violence.

Rahv concludes his review in a much more favorable tone toward Mailer. Mailer is no ordinary swinger but is "a prose writer of considerable gifts." His problem is that he is a victim of his own ideas. Rahv believes that if Mailer can free his ideas from dreams of power and romantic domination,

"he may yet emerge as one of our greater talents." It is interesting to note that every criticism of An American Dream was directed personally to Mailer himself. Rahv made no attempt to study An American Dream outside the conventional framework of the novel. Perhaps this is an example of the artist dominating his work to the point where the reader is led to criticize the writer instead of his work. A question must be asked here: are these men afraid to approach the novel because of the ideas, the departure from common sense, responsibility, morality, or do they really brush the work aside as poor and relatively insignificant, focusing on the eccentricities of the artist himself, a focus which Mailer himself invites?

Joseph Epstein, "Norman X: The Literary Man's Cassius Clay," New Republic 152:22, April 17, 1965.

Epstein characterizes Mailer as a loser: "Bitten, battered and bleeding -- Mailer nonetheless appears to enjoy the action..." He compares him to Cassius Clay, both are unbearable, but Mailer much more so as he comes close to winning. Epstein carries Mailer's stance as an unappealing loser even further in that the latter never wants to appear endearing or appealing. His failures seem almost conscious. Epstein does comment on Mailer's courage, "his willingness to go to the depths of modern experience, are often such as to offset his unerring bad taste." He follows this with the possibility of Mailer producing something big.

Yet, any positive suggestion is tempered by Epstein's interpretation of Mailer's work to date; his work is no more than a backdrop for Mailer's ego, "one more flashy background in which one more sprawling brawling hipster ego can operate with maximum panache." He characterizes Mailer as an exhibitionist, indulging in self-defeating excesses.

Epstein seems to be unable to free himself from conventional conception of the novel. He criticizes Mailer's use of the spectacular because it prevents him from presenting a convincing presentation of life. Epstein himself is limited to fiction that is believable.

Epstein's review is an example of those who prove unable to understand, or to attempt to penetrate what Mailer is doing in An American Dream. For this reason it could be included in the section of those reviews which refuse to deal with the problem of Mailer and his work. I have included it here because Epstein talks about Mailer as a public figure although he seems unable to consider the significance of anything that Mailer does or writes.

A. Alvarez, "Norman X," Spectator, May 7, 1965, p. 603.

The Mailer that emerges in Alvarez's review is one who has lost his cool, is balancing on a "shrill edge of frustration," which Alvarez attributes to the failure of his attempt to shock the American public. Alvarez refers to Mailer's own conception of himself as the leader ("Trotsky") of the sexual revolution. But he goes further to suggest that Mailer's preoccupation with sex, with the orgasm, stems from infantile psychological problems, which produce the reaction, "However omnipotent and overpowering Daddy is, you shall take notice of me." Alvarez further states that Mailer's handling of sex is a mere distraction through the novel.

Midway through the review Alvarez's tone changes; he begins to handle Mailer and his work more carefully and moderately. He sees one of Mailer's greatest strengths as a writer his sense of what issues are about to erupt into the American consciousness; the example he uses here is the assassination of President Kennedy two months after An American Dream is begun in serial form, followed by a proliferation of violence through the States. Mailer's

writing has given violence a kind of class. Alvarez follows this discussion of violence and irrationality by characterizing Mailer as an intellectual: "madness does not come naturally to him. He is above all an intellectual: Jewish, Harvard New Yorker..." Alvarez ends his review on an ambiguous note so far as concerns our interest in Mailer as public figure, calling An American Dream "a splendid fill-in on the most improbable fictional character since Moby Dick: ...Norman Mailer."

Richard Poirier, "Morbid Mindedness," Commentary 39:91, June 1965.

Poirier's review constitutes a defense of Mailer as artist. He goes against the general stance taken by reviewers that Mailer is primarily interested in advertising himself: "In this novel, and despite his big fuss about serializing it in Esquire, ... Mailer is not at all interested in advertising his or anyone else's private life." Instead Poirier sees his real purpose as a "nearly impersonal honesty about the tightest knots in himself," and about the related knots in society. Poirier further refuses to identify Mailer the man personally with his work; rather for him, Mailer the writer emerges through the language in his novel.

Mailer emerges in the review as an artist interested in the creative rather than the destructive. Poirier uses as example Mailer's revulsion for degenerate or perverse sexuality, sexuality that represents the decreative impulse in America. Poirier criticizes Mailer for leaving out of sex any possibility for tenderness and pleasure, but he redeems Mailer from any criticism in his emphasis on the latter's "commitment to creativity invested...in acts of writing." Poirier's is a radically different review in which he seems to refute many of Mailer's more severe critics by attributing to artistic impulse the writer's motivation, behavior, work. His is an odd review in that he interprets the most obvious of Mailer's

public acts as the behavior of a man not at all interested in advertising himself.

Robert Maxwell, "Personal Reactions to a Presidential Candidate," Minnesota Review 5:244. Index Issue, August-October-December, 1965.

In a very long and badly written review, Robert Maxwell unloads his criticism of Norman Mailer, the man. He begins by calling An American Dream "a disaster, one of the most self-indulgent pieces of fiction ever slapped between covers," and proceeds to say very little about the novel and a large amount about Mailer. Maxwell sees An American Dream as part of Mailer's public act, "a sad and frenetic attempt of a very brilliant writer to keep his name before the public and get back in the sweepstakes." The beginning of the review is very like an uncontrolled tirade against Mailer. Maxwell describes an extension of Mailer's public act in that the latter, like Hemingway, has joined his audience and is watching himself perform, implying a great self-consciousness on the part of both writers. Again Mailer is like Hemingway in that both are defensive and aggressive writers.

Throughout the review there are positive allusions to Mailer such as references to his technical gift, the nerve and courage of his vision. But Maxwell believes that Mailer has failed to use well his own talent and he, Maxwell, takes this failure and waste personally. In this reaction, Maxwell is suggesting the extent to which the American public identifies with its artists. Perhaps most of his tirade against Mailer can be explained by this tendency to personally identify with the artist and the artist's failure to act as a noble or worthy model. He attributes Mailer's very technical proficiency to psychological causes such as paranoia, power drive. Maxwell sees Mailer's major appointed role as that of the novelist, and in this role, Maxwell believes that he has not only

failed but has become an "absence, a cipher,...a promise still-born, a promise dying."

Maxwell's article is filled with contradictions. After pages of bitter personal criticism of Mailer, he makes a statement about Mailer's promise as a novelist: "he is, indeed, one of the few writers around with the possibility of forging that uncreated conscience of his age." But again Maxwell qualifies this statement of promise by stating Mailer's most serious flaw, his joining of his own audience, his self-conscious advertisement. He lists and discusses Mailer's many self-appointed roles: warrior, politician, Helen's (Jackie Kennedy's) abductor, psychologist, thinker, T.V. personality. Throughout the article Maxwell explains Mailer's work in terms of Mailer the man, attributing it primarily to two drives, a drive for power and a desire to be "in," to be inside the same circle as such charismatic figure as the Kennedy's and the Borgia's.

Much of Maxwell's review degenerates into a personal tirade against Mailer. It is significant that he continually talks about Mailer rather than about his work; it is "given" in the beginning of the review that the novel is bad. The rest of the review is occupied with explaining why it is bad in terms of Norman Mailer the man.

I have classified separately the other eight reviews which feature Mailer because they seemed to me too brief or less interesting, featuring Mailer only briefly, or unoriginal.

Newsweek 65:101, March 15, 1965.

Two faces of "the mercurial Mailer" are seen by the reviewer in An American Dream, his brilliance and his blindness. The review itself

is untitled, unsigned, very short, and says little else but that the reader's impressions of the new book are dominated by a sense of Mailer's furious efforts.

Time 85:112, "The Public Act."

Mailer as public figure is the central focus of the review. "If Norman Mailer is not the best U.S. novelist of his time, he is certainly the most conspicuous." His two major roles are described as spokesman for the intellectual life and prophet of the new morality. Time calls Mailer "inescapably square" because of his preaching. He is in danger of becoming more a public act than a writer or a private sensibility. Time states that Mailer is a born writer and that all of his escapades, and Time's recording of them, are a bit absurd.

William Barrett, "Reader's Choice," Atlantic Monthly 215:152, April 1965.

Barrett speaks of Mailer as departing from his true calling as novelist to perform as a public figure. And he sees Mailer's effort in An American Dream as a further waste of his superior talent. Barrett is preoccupied with Mailer's talent which he does find in parts of An American Dream, but he deplores Mailer's choice of material.

Christian Science Monitor 57:11. April 1, 1965.

The reviewer focuses on Mailer's literary act. He concedes that Mailer is the "most promising novelist of the generation," but follows with a concern that the literary act obscures or becomes a substitute for the writing. Mailer seems to have used this position as promising young writer as a stage from which to act, his reader's becoming his audience. Mailer himself becomes a fictional character. The reviewer deplores this substitution as Mailer's is "too valuable a voice to be lost in its own echo."

Christopher Ricks, "Saint Stephen," New Statesman 69:687, April 30, 1965.

Ricks begins his review with reference to Mailer discouraging the novelist in himself. Most of his support for this contention is taken from the novel, but added to all that he places Mailer's characteristic love of making things difficult for himself. He sees the novel, and particularly the character of Rojack, as a manifestation of Mailer's "ceaseless self-regard;" we are forced throughout the book to think of Mailer rather than the characters he's created. The review is negative as a whole toward the book and toward Mailer. And most of Ricks' references to Mailer the man are attacks against his self-consciousness and egotism.

Paul Schulerter, "American Nightmare," Christian Science Monitor 82:659, May 19, 1965.

Schulerter makes brief mention of Mailer as public figure, referring to "the author's sometimes flamboyant and publicity-hungry personal qualities," but says nothing else about Mailer that is not connected with his work. He identifies Mailer with Rojack -- both of them are obsessed with sex and here Schulerter criticizes Mailer for making sex an ordeal. They have other common obsessions, a list which Schulerter finds too complete to be ignored, Jack Kennedy, negroes, sex in all forms and as great a quantity as possible, self-conscious immolation, egotistic propaganda. Schulerter sees An American Dream as autobiographical, "a perhaps unconscious autobiographical glimpse into Mailer's own life."

The review has little which directly answers to our inquiry into Mailer as public figure, but Schulerter is one of the many who have responded to An American Dream with an attack against Mailer himself, oftentimes objecting to the artist playing such a self-conscious role.

Howard Green, "The Countess' Hat," Hudson Review 18:286, Summer 1965.

Green's is a rather harsh treatment of Mailer and the novel, criticizing Mailer's pretentiousness and seriousness. Still, Mailer has real talent which he cannot quite submerge here, in particular a strong sense of drama and an element of narrative energy. Green calls Mailer "a sheep in wolf's clothing." Mailer emerges as absurd. Magic provokes literary men to absurdity. Green suggests Mailer's impotency through the medium of magic and dread: "...Mailer is firing a popgun loaded with blank cartridges."

Granville Hicks, "A Matter of Crucial Opinion," Saturday Review 48:19, August 7, 1965.

Granville Hicks begins the review by calling Mailer's An American Dream "an uncommonly bad novel," and Herzog, "an uncommonly good one." The rest of the review is composed of statements by Mailer and Hicks' personal response to them. (The statements are taken from an interview in the New York Post) To Mailer's statement defending An American Dream as a modern legend, Hicks answers that Rojack is no more a hero than Mailer who "resembles him in many ways and would be glad, I am sure, to resemble him in more." To Mailer's statement about the "extraordinary price" which must be paid for loving, Hicks sarcastically answers that there is little indication that Mailer, who knows a lot about sex, knows anything about love. To Mailer's reference to Conrad Knickerbocker and John Aldridge in their reviews favorable to his book, Hicks becomes more actively angry with Mailer: "What egotism! Indeed, what paranoia!" He goes on to say that madness does not prevent a man from being a novelist, but that Mailer pretends to be crazier than he is, and, indeed, that he is not creative enough to turn this madness into good literature.

Hicks' review is a response to Mailer's, and others', defense of Mailer.

The review itself shows a progression toward more anger and less tolerance with what he finds phony or pretentious and egotistic in Mailer. But unlike many reviewers who protest against Mailer's pretentiousness and egotism, Hicks does not seem to believe that Mailer is obscuring or ignoring some real talent. His statement, "He (Rojack) has even less interest in ideas than Mailer himself," suggests that Mailer does not have the ideas requisite for good literature.

I have categorized eight reviews as having avoided the book, Mailer and the whole problem or controversy. As I mentioned before, I have placed several of the reviews here arbitrarily because they seemed to me either too vulgar to warrant much importance in our inquiry or responded in such a conventional way as to indicate that perhaps the reviewer did not even read the book. Of course such sources as Choice, Booklist, Library Journal, Publishers' Weekly cannot be expected to enter into whatever controversy concerning Mailer and his work. Perhaps Mailer's radical departure from the conventional novel, as discussed by John Aldridge in Life, is a partial cause of these negative findings. Some of the articles included in the following are necessarily very brief because of the assigned role of the periodical in which they appear, but their conventional, unoriginal treatment of An American Dream suggests the evasion of the possibility that he might be doing something radically different.

Robert F. Clayton, Library Journal 90:1349, March 15, 1965.

A very dull and short summary of An American Dream in which Clayton lapses into very trite and meaningless phrases; e.g., "Mailer tries desperately to find meaning in our lives, but he fails in this novel

perhaps because our society itself finds no meaning." I include this only because it represents a failure to even consider Mailer and the novel.

Edmund Fuller, "Norman Mailer Plumbs the Depths of Filth," The Wall Street Journal 45:12, April 23, 1965.

Edmund Fuller characterizes Mailer as the leader or copronaut of the obscenity race and, through his review, emerges as extremely vulgar. "In... An American Dream, he has probed new depths, tumbling acrobatically is the stuff..." The review is not totally unfavorable toward Mailer; Mailer has an interesting mind and an avowed ambition. Rather, Fuller objects to Mailer's subject matter and distorted morality. He goes further to call Mailer "a seductively compelling writer," but his tragedy is "so destructive a misdirection of so large a gift."

Fuller proves unable to go beyond the apparent sexuality and irresponsibility for crime in An American Dream to a more creative reading of the novel. In his conventional treatment of the novel, he reveals his own not-very-probing mind and is yet another example of those who fail to take Mailer in any but their own terms, by their own definition of a novel, and thus fail to see that he might be doing something original and radically different. The review is significant in that it mirrors this common failure of the reviewers to go beyond Mailer's apparent advertisement and attempt to shock to any deeper reading.

Booklist 61:906, May 15, 1965.

A two-sentence summary and advertisement for An American Dream.
Negative finding.

Venitia Pollock, "New Novels," Punch 248:752, May 19, 1965.

Venitia Pollock says nothing at all about Mailer as a man or public

figure, but her very short review is humorous for her obvious distaste at having to handle what she considers vulgar. She is too delicate to even use the word "sex" or any sexual term; rather, Rojack "visits" the maid. Somehow, her delicate and long-distance treatment of the novel evokes more disgust than an actual honest confrontation with the book itself. A negative finding.

Choice: Books for College Libraries 2:299, July August, 1965.

After a two-sentence summary of the novel, the reviewer concludes: "However, Mailer is an outstanding American writer and this book should be added for students of contemporary literature and sociology.

Newsweek 66:72B, December 27, 1965.

Handled metaphorically as a fight, the review is a very facile treatment of Mailer and the book. Newsweek likens An American Dream to a light contender in a heavyweight match and characterizes Mailer as "an imp of the perverse slugging with the gloves of angels." In two neat sentences the reviewer summarizes the book. He places the public at ringside, waiting for Mailer's new novel.

Barbara A. Bannon, Publisher's Weekly 189:314, January 24, 1966.

A short blurb to create suspense so that people will want to read the novel. I don't believe that Bannon read the novel as she spelled Rojack's name wrong. A negative finding.

Observer, August 28, 1966, p. 14.

A two-sentence advertisement for the novel, "It's up to you to decide..." Negative finding.

The following are five book reviews which I have classified as largely negative findings. They illustrate the general inability of the reviewer to review the unconventional in other terms but the conventional and his failure to begin to understand what Mailor might be doing in his act and in his fiction.

Elizabeth Hardwick, "Bad Boy," Partisan Review 32:291, Spring 1965. 

Elizabeth Hardwick slams the book and talks very little about Mailor. She characterizes Mailor as a pretender, a stance which, to her, is fatal for "the perverse writer." She suggests that Mailor was very careless in writing An American Dream, that the words merely flow and, worse, the thoughts. In her conclusion, she suggests that Mailor is impotent as a writer; he had attempted to create a vision of evil, "a new Lucifer," and instead has created "a pile of dust." She ends on a note of sympathy which certainly does not negate her long criticism of Mailor and his work, "The odd thing is that his best gifts are often genial. Those gifts are serious ones, always unexpected and original. The review is largely a book review and answers little to the purpose of the study.

Eliot Fremont Smith, "Mailor's Fantasy about Mailor," New York Times (daily) 114:43, March 17, 1965.

Smith sees An American Dream as a book about Norman Mailor's fantasy of himself and states that it can be read as a continuation of his public performances. He identifies Mailor with Rojack; their obsessions are the same. He then lapses into criticism of the book for its unbelievability, for being a parody of a novel and of the writer himself. He comments on Mailor's unconscious hatred for women, which is obvious to him (Smith) through the book, and the vacancy of Mailor's ideas. He concludes by calling the substance of An American Dream, "the stuff of comic books."

The review is not very significant for our study.

Granville Hicks, "A Literary Hoax?" Saturday Review 48:23, March 20, 1965.

Hicks begins with a comment on the duality of Norman Mailer as public figure and writer, stating that he has been taken seriously by such people as Diana Trilling in the latter role. He then gives a long detailed summary of An American Dream. He comments on Mailer's pretentiousness, his carelessness in creating the novel. Hicks identifies Mailer with Rojack, "he exists simply as a projection of Mailer's fantasies about himself" -- and suggests that the extent of this identity deprives Rojack of any reality himself. The other characters are subordinated to Rojack and thus to Mailer. Hicks concludes his article with a statement of uncertainty as to whether or not Mailer will be able to retain his "place in the forefront of modern writers."

The review is concerned largely with criticism and summary of the book and has little beside the above-mentioned that is significant for our study.

Paul Pickrel, "Thing of Darkness," Harper's Magazine 230:116, April 1965.

Pickrel says nothing about Mailer but that when An American Dream was serialized, Mailer seemed to be playing a role as "middle-aged bad boy of American literature,...trying too hard to shock a bourgeoisie already curled up with City of Night and Last Exit to Brooklyn." The review is a favorable criticism of the novel as a whole and is a negative finding from the standpoint of this study.

London Times Literary Supplement, "In Carcinoma City," April 29, 1965, p. 325.

Largely a book review, the London Times review is strange in that the reviewer compares An American Dream to a symbolist poem. The reviewer does refer to Mailer's quest to shift the moral consciousness of his time and

comments that there is more of failure than success in this effort because of his chosen weapons. Although Mailer has failed in his real motive, he has made a valiant effort in "adjusting his perspective to understand...the subterranean..." The review is an example of the critic's inability to free himself from the conventional form and criteria for the novel. A negative finding.

It is difficult to come to any final conclusion as to the significance of the reactions to An American Dream. Most of the reviewers responded in some degree to Mailer the man. Many of them proved unable to say anything penetrating or original about the work, suggesting a conservatism or fear of something new and with the implications expressed by such men as John Aldridge. Perhaps the response, which was overwhelmingly conservative and limited to conventional forms and resolutions, is a response to the implications of Mailer's work, to his tampering with the world of dreams, fantasy, power, intuition, violence, the dark imaginative world which is a part of every man and which most men would rather ignore. It has been suggested in class that Mailer is on the verge of his greatest work and that what has come before is merely leading up to that work. An American Dream seems to be an important step in that departure toward something new and original. And perhaps the overwhelming conservative response, attempting to dismiss the work and the writer as not conforming to a standard conception of novel and writer is a measure of Mailer's success in this departure.