

NORMAN MAILER'S AESTHETICS OF GROWTH

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ABSTRACT

Norman Mailer announced in Advertisements For Myself (1959) that he wished to revolutionize the consciousness of our time. With this as his goal he developed an aesthetics which views both life and art as a process of growth toward a full humanity and away from post-World War II American (and universal) tendencies to stifle human growth through a technological totalitarianism.

Mailer envisions the creation of life as a function of a divine power and the destruction of life as that of a satanic power who war with each other for possession of the universe. We do not know for whom we do battle, but our intuitions of good and evil are to be trusted.

Growth for Mailer takes the form of a line of movement made by confronting and defeating opponents of a full humanity; he terms such engagements whose outcome is unknown and therefore dangerous to the self "existential". His life and his art make up a dramatic and progressive dialectic. There are three books which I believe contain Mailer's most effective expressions of his aesthetics and which have the greatest potential for revolutionizing the consciousness of our time. Each is the culmination of a phase in Mailer's

growth which contains in itself the unified strands of that growth.

The first phase includes the early success of The Naked and the Dead, the subsequent popular and critical failures of Barbary Shore and The Deer Park, the sloughing off of old models, political and artistic, the creation of a radical creed in "The White Negro" and a radical form in Advertisements For Myself. The latter is the culmination of this phase and is analyzed in detail. By the time of Advertisements Mailer has made himself the chief metaphor for his concept of growth, thus synthesizing theme and method.

The second phase enlarges the meaning of Mailer's existentialism, most particularly by his venturing deeply into the current political and social realm, and culminates in a new synthesis of growth in fictional theme and form in An American Dream (1965). The novel's protagonist, Stephen Rojack, defeated by a powerful satanic agent and by his own weakness, proves unequal to the task Mailer sets for the American hero: to unite the real- and the dream-life of the nation in himself and to lead a united nation to human wholeness which embraces all contradictions.

The central occupation of the third phase of Mailer's work, therefore, is to develop himself--in the absence of other suitable candidates--into a representative American hero. His experimentation with various media for communica-

tion--drama, film, television, and others--is a search for effective vehicles for his vision and is preparation for his assumption of the heroic role. Mailer's involvement with the central issues confronting the United States is rendered in a considerable experiment in novelistic form, Why Are We in Vietnam? The culmination of his efforts in this phase is the culmination of his work to date as well: The Armies of the Night (1968). Relating the experiences of a character called "Mailer", Mailer as narrator and novelist-historian not only creates himself as a representative comic American hero but invents a form which carries a total vision of the events of the 1967 March on the Pentagon, uniting traditional methods and aims of history, the novel, and journalism. With this book Mailer assumes the role of interpreter for our time, immersing himself in important contemporary events in order to present us with his views of their meaning and significance.

Mailer's three books following The Armies of the Night are discussed in a final chapter as similar to but lesser efforts than Armies.

In this thesis Mailer's work is placed in two specific contexts which provide a basis for suggesting his significance: that of American literature, with emphasis upon his contribution to the literature of the American Dream and upon his indebtedness to Hemingway in particular and

twentieth-century novelists in general; and that of contemporary thought which also seeks to influence the direction of future human life.

Because his aesthetics of growth sees human progress as its art, Mailer's nonliterary roles are considered a vital part of his total work and consequently the critical standards applied in this thesis are Mailer's own: how well does each work register growth on Mailer's part and how potentially effective is the work in revolutionizing the consciousness of our time?

Mailer scholarship is still in infancy. The contribution of this thesis to that scholarship lies in its approach to Mailer's work as a progressive whole and its delineation of that progress; its critical approach which confronts Mailer on his own terms; its extensive treatment of works other than novels; the broad contexts which suggest the significance of Mailer's work; and the comprehensive bibliography, the most complete yet assembled on Mailer.

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INTRODUCTION: THE AESTHETICS AND THE CONTEXT

1. The Aesthetics

In 1959 Norman Mailer opened his artistic manifesto, Advertisements For Myself, with the admission that he was "imprisoned with a perception which will settle for nothing less than making a revolution in the consciousness of our time."¹ The grand assumption in this statement lies not so much in Mailer's confidence in his own ability to create such a revolution as in the belief that a writer, especially a novelist, may wield enough power to force his society to change its direction. The belief that "it is the actions of men and not their sentiments which make history", a sentence which Mailer has called "the best . . . I ever wrote" (Adv, 439), leads him to determine that a cause and effect relationship should exist between writing and acting: "there is no communication unless action has resulted, be it immediately or in the unknown and indefinite future" (Adv, 266).

Mailer assumes that the written words of one man can be transformed into the actions of enough others to have a discernible effect on the consciousness of an age. The feasibility of such an assumption in our electronic age is a question best left to students of media, social scientists, and future generations of literary analysts. What is pertinent here is Mailer's belief in the role of artist as

maker and the aesthetics he has designed to further his aim.

The main tenet of that aesthetics is that life is better than death. On such a simple and indisputable basis, Mailer designs his life and his art in such a way as to sustain life and fight off death--quite literally in some cases, more metaphorically in others. To Mailer there is no such thing as stasis, for at any given moment one is either dying or growing. In a 1958 interview Mailer stated it this way:

Ideally, what I would hope to do with my work is intensify a consciousness that the core of life cannot be cheated. Every moment of one's existence one is growing into more or retreating into less That the choice is not to live a little more or to not live a little more; it is to live a little more or to die a little more. And as one dies a little more, one enters a most dangerous moral condition for oneself because one starts making other people die a little more in order to stay alive oneself. I think this is exactly the murderous network in which we all live by now (Adv, 355-56).

It is upon this theory that Mailer has based the aesthetics of growth which gives his work its thrust. Through this aesthetics, one can view Mailer's work as a process aimed at sustaining life.

That process Mailer gives in terms of a revolution whose nature is concerned with changing the direction of the "consciousness of our time". By this he means the complex network of attitudes which results in the behavior that moves our society in the direction it is taking, and the direction of that society he clearly sees as toward death. Each of his works, although they span a quarter-century,

contains the theme that the death of the human spirit is fast approaching and that only a radical change from a death-producing, or "totalitarian", state to a life-producing one can arrest the progress of the disease which Mailer images as "cancer" or "the plague".

Briefly, Mailer sees the machine technology and those who contribute to the furtherance of its power as the villains and the whole man as the victim. Leo Marx has shown us that the theme of the machine in the garden has been present in American literature since its inception,² but in Mailer's version of it the machine has a human face, for finally the machine is man himself, product of a lengthy technological process, whose mind is divided into a complex of isolated compartments, whose senses have all but atrophied and whose instincts are all but extinct, whose body functions at a remove from its mind, and whose spirit can no longer be believed to exist. Through a revolution of his own making, in the manner of the God of Genesis, Mailer wishes to breathe life into this robot, to change it back into a man with all of his faculties reintegrated and once more capable himself of producing life. The magnitude of such an act of creation gives some perspective on the importance of the sex act in Mailer's writing, as well as on the necessary emphasis it receives because of his belief that sex was (and one can use the past tense partly because of his efforts) "the last remaining frontier of the novel"

(Adv, 251). Mailer's sexual explicitness has been a considerable roadblock to his being taken seriously by literary critics, although they experienced little difficulty in discerning what is a similar metaphorical connection between sexual imagery and the artist's conception of himself (double-entendre intended) as creator in the poetry of Walt Whitman.

The recreation of the human consciousness which Mailer envisions (and which he has come to recognize as parallel to the emergence of the Renaissance out of the Middle Ages) is to be accomplished through a series of small but meaningful victories over the death-impulse. The fulcrum for this view is Mailer's self-developed existentialism, considered by him as well as by Mailer scholars³ to be American rather than European in nature and origin, which can be summarized as follows: since death is the end of our lives both biologically and as the product of the process which moves our culture, the only way to live is to face the fact of that death and fight it off with all of one's resources. Extreme courage and honesty in the face of death or more often a destructive force outside of oneself are the weapons to be brought to each confrontation, and if one is victorious he extracts from his defeated opponent some of his force, which is then used to sustain and nurture his own life. The affinities of this theory to Darwin's are obvious. Mailer's theory of violence, articulated most clearly in "The White

Negro" and most powerfully and imaginatively in An American Dream (to be considered in subsequent chapters), is an extension of this concept and is largely responsible for Mailer's delayed admission to the American literary establishment. Ironically, it was not until he advocated the overthrow of a force which that establishment also found reprehensible--the President of the United States, the Pentagon, and "their" war in Vietnam--that Mailer won his tickets of admission in the forms of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award in 1969 for The Armies of the Night. Ironically too, Mailer comes to believe through the experience he recorded in Armies that unorganized violence such as that practiced by the demonstrators is self-defeating and that one must use other means to defeat the enemy, means which capture real power.

On another level, to seek victory over what one considers evil and death-producing is to strive toward the heroic condition. Mailer not only seeks it for himself but demands of those whom America has chosen as her heroes--John and Robert Kennedy, the Apollo astronauts--that they become authentic heroes, which is to say, that they close the gap between their images and their actions. The fact that Mailer himself has been engaged in a similar task, that is, of bringing in line the image ascribed to him as the best-selling author of The Naked and the Dead with a more authen-

tic one, one which he had to grow into, is the subject of Advertisements For Myself and will be discussed at length in Chapter I. In Advertisements, Mailer records the hard-won battles in which the strength of one's resources must be equivalent to a great victory even though only a minor one may result, because unless one overreaches the immediate goal he is not "growing into more" but "retreating into less".

Mailer, then, like the hero in modern literature who must create the value of his life, conceives of life as constructed on an existential plane from a series of moments, and growth takes the form of a line of movement which he has described as drawn by "going forward until you have to make a delicate decision either to continue in a difficult situation or to retreat and look for another way to go forward."⁴ The line has breadth as well as length, for growth is expansive--it pushes back the boundaries of consciousness and enlarges meaning and possibility. And "in widening the arena of the possible [for oneself], one widens it reciprocally for others as well" (Adv, 327). So the vulnerable self is exposed to a spectrum of confrontations ranging from the most mundane to the most extremely dangerous, for the gains to be made from each are measurable. The most growth results from the greatest victory, but even a little growth is necessary to keep cancer from taking root and pro-

gressively destroying life.⁵

It must be emphasized that the growth of Mailer the man does not have a separate existence from that of Mailer the artist; the victories or defeats of each aspect of the total man nurture or impede the growth of the others. It is impossible in Mailer's aesthetics as in Hemingway's to be a good writer without first achieving manhood, so while there is a question of the order in which the growth of the separate aspects of the self occurs they are nevertheless parts of one whole. The kind of approach taken by even such a sympathetic critic of Mailer as Donald Kaufmann, i.e., that one should separate Mailer's disturbing public personality from his "art", is anathema to his aesthetics.⁶

If growth is the theme of Mailer's work it is also the method. "The method is married to the vision", he has put it.⁷ Believing that one's words and actions can excite others to act, Mailer makes his personality the "armature" (Adv, 203) of his work, not only in the sculptor's sense of a framework to flesh out artistically, but also in the biologist's sense of a protective covering serving an animal's offensive or defensive purposes. The use of himself as a character in his work, first seen in Advertisements, perfected by the time of The Armies of the Night, and since that time rendering fictional characters obsolete, serves three functions.

First, the character "Mailer" is always at a stage

of growth behind that of the narrator, enabling Mailer to study him with perhaps more detachment than he could bring to the creation of a fictional character who resembled himself in intangible ways. Mailer has explained it this way: "the writer . . . can deal with himself as a literary object, as the name of that man who goes through his pages, only by creating himself as a literary character, fully as much as any literary character in a work of undisputed fiction To the extent that he succeeds in making a viable character who will attract literary experience metaphorically equal to the ambiguous experience in his life which impelled him to write in the first place, so he will set out on the reconnaissance into the potentialities of an overpowering work."⁸

Second, by making himself the chief metaphor of his work, he unites its form and content in himself, bringing his art, his life, and the world as he sees it under his control; by developing a man big enough to encompass a given situation Mailer is developing an artistic ability to control not only a fictional but also the "real" world.

Third, the progress of Mailer's growth by expansion through confrontation and subsequent integration into the whole self, or thesis: antithesis: synthesis, therefore takes on for him enormous significance for the future of mankind. Mailer not only grows as an artist and into a representative hero, but his work itself, by enlargening the

possibilities of art, can bring about an expanded human consciousness.

Unlike Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Mailer has learned that unless a man develops worthy successors the power of the self, however great, is ended by death. Mailer believes--to use the analogy of a tree--that he is the roots which initiate growth into branches and limbs which will not end until the whole tree dies at the apocalypse. This concept of transcending death is as old as the impulse to write or to produce a child, but Mailer presents it as if original. His writing is thus not an end in itself but a means of producing new life in others, not a product but a process.

Like the Poe of Arthur Gordon Pym, Mailer ultimately wishes to probe the mysteries of existence itself and to bring as much as is possible under his control while risking death to do so. As Poe could image but not articulate, Mailer believes that those mysteries and terrors are buried in the human subconscious. Bringing to light what he can of the subterranean nature of the American mind is one of Mailer's most significant artistic goals, while his aesthetics of growth as a whole is his most important contribution to his age. It is a vital aesthetics, both figuratively and literally. There are, however, three books which I believe contain Mailer's most effective expressions of his aesthetics and its development and which have the

greatest potential for "making a revolution in the consciousness of our time". Each is a culmination of a phase of growth which contains in itself the unified strands of that growth. Therefore, in three subsequent chapters, each of these books will be examined in detail for what it reveals of Mailer's process of maturation, and the total statement of these three chapters will be concerned with how Mailer moved from the style and themes of The Naked and the Dead to those of The Armies of the Night. By considering Mailer's work as a progression in phases, not as separate products for analysis, I hope to preserve its spirit whose nature is wholeness. Further, largely because of the impossibility of telling when Mailer the man ends and Mailer the writer begins, as well as that of viewing his work as a product to be subjected to textual analysis, it has been suggested that Mailer has invalidated existing critical methods for dealing with an author.⁹ Believing this to be the case, I wish in this thesis to explicate his aesthetics of growth and to assess how close he has come to writing up to the level of his own high standards. To provide perspective for this approach, I will use American literature as a context in which to view Mailer, for it is the context most closely aligned with his major concerns and approaches and also one in which he might wish the measure of his stature to be taken.

2. The Context

In the next pages I wish to consider Mailer as an American writer. There are two approaches to the subject: 1) through the major figures whom he either acknowledges as influential or to whom in my judgment he exhibits affinities; and 2) through the aims and methods and attitudes which run through all of American literature and which Mailer carries a little farther. I shall attempt to draw both approaches together by working backward from his contemporaries through the generation of writers which preceded him to the less tangible, more subtle connections which make the context of American literature the most relevant in which to view him.

First one must note that the literary title that Mailer most frequently assigns to himself is that of "the novelist". Although only five of Mailer's fifteen books¹⁰ are novels and although he has produced a play, three films, and dozens of uncollected magazine articles, it is significant that he emphasizes the role of novelist above the others. When he turns to literary criticism his "competitors" are always novelists, not poets, critics, playwrights or film directors, although some of them have doubtless not limited themselves to novel-writing. This is due not only to the fact that Mailer began as a novelist but that for him novel-writing is the highest form of art. He does not wish to restrict himself to the novel because he thinks himself

a Renaissance man for experimenting in other genres, although he confuses the Renaissance artist's desire to master each classical form with his own view of art as process. Mailer's preference for the novel is in accordance with America's national taste for that form, and his emphasis on his role as novelist says something for the tradition in which he sees himself working.

Perhaps Mailer views himself as capable of influencing his generation through his writing because he himself was profoundly influenced by the great generation of novelists who preceded him--Fitzgerald, Wolfe, Steinbeck, Dos Passos, Farrell, Faulkner, and especially Hemingway. But if the influence of the best work of these men fired Mailer's ambition to emulate them, the worst of their work inspired him to outdo them. His yardstick for them as for all others, including himself, is whether their work was consistently worthy of their talents. In a key section of Advertisements entitled "Last Advertisement for Myself Before the Way Out", Mailer sets himself the task both of exceeding the limitations which in his opinion sapped the artistic energy of these men and of becoming mentor to the next generation of writers. While Cooper, Hawthorne, and James, among other of our novelists, have complained of the lack of native material for the American novelist, Mailer complains that America's talented writers burn themselves out in the heated

struggle for success. I quote from the section at length,¹² not only because it is the first important statement of the relationship I have mentioned between Mailer and his predecessors but also because of the metaphors of growth and destruction in which Mailer expresses the immensity of the committed writer's task:

If America is rich in talent, which it is, this wealth seems more than equaled by the speed with which we use up our talent . . . no one from that generation of major American writers who came before my own has put out work of the first importance since the war

Yet what a generation they were--how much more impressive than my own. If their works did not prepare us for the slack, the stupor, and the rootless wit of our years, they were still men who wrote strong, original novels, personal in style--so many of us were ready to become writers because of the world they opened.

To call the role today is depressing [The great but burned-out talents of Wolfe, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner, Dos Passos, Farrell, and Steinbeck are considered.] One must go back to an earlier time, to Dreiser, to Lewis, and to Sherwood Anderson, in order to come across men who wrote across the larger length of their lives and had a career which came close to the limit of what they could do.

America is a cruel soil for talent It stunts it, blights it, uproots it, or overheats it with cheap fertilizer. [Here Mailer castigates "publishers, editors, reviewers and general flunkies" for promoting tastelessness and the reader for being their victim.]

So the strong talents of my generation, those few of us who have wide minds in a narrow undeveloped time, are left to wander through a landscape of occult herbs and voracious weeds, ambushed by the fallen wires of electrical but meaningless situations If it were not for some new generation coming to life--a generation which might be more interesting than my own, or so I must hope, it would be best to give up, because all desire is lost for talking to readers older than oneself. Defeated by

war, prosperity, and conformity, the best of our elders are deadened into thinking machines, and the worst are broken scolds who parrot a plain housewife's practical sense of the mediocre--worn-out middle-class bores of the psychoanalytical persuasion who worship the cheats of moderation, compromise, committee and indecision, or even worse, turn to respect the past

[Mailer concludes that his "new book"--never written as he then conceived of it--] will be fired to its fuse by the rumor that once I pointed to the farthest fence and said that within ten years I would try to hit the longest ball ever to go up into the accelerated hurricane air of our American letters. For if I have one ambition above all others, it is to write a novel which Dostoyevsky and Marx; Joyce and Freud; Stendhal, Tolstoy, Proust and Spengler; Faulkner, and even old moldering Hemingway might come to read, for it would carry what they had to tell another part of the way (Adv, 436-39).

Several points should be emphasized here. First, Mailer locates the failure of the best talents of the 1930's in their having become psychological casualties of the war and of the post-war America which followed in its wake. Second, the job of the writer, he believes, is to consistently strive to widen the horizons of possibility to the limits of his talent for those who follow him, and he must have successors or he too has failed. Third, although Mailer's ambition to write was generated by the American novelists of his youth, his conception of the significance of writing was fostered by the example of the great nineteenth- and early twentieth-century minds whose writing can truly be claimed to have changed the shape of the future. Fourth, he envisions that a novel which he will write will have the power to produce such a change. Fifth, he wishes

to claim his impending victory in the name of "our American letters", thus indicating the context in which he places himself. Finally, he does not here (and only to a limited extent does he later) see himself as a product of the novelistic traditions delineated variously by Richard Chase, R.W.B. Lewis, or Leslie Fiedler, for example. He reaches back to the beginning of this century for his American models but as a rule not into the last.

Having laid some basis for the remarks to follow, I would like to examine briefly Mailer's acknowledged relationships to American authors, with some greater emphasis on that with Hemingway, before proceeding to what in my opinion are his claims to a position in the mainstream of American writing.

In the articles entitled "Evaluations--Quick and Expensive Comments on the Talent in the Room" from Advertisements and "Some Children of the Goddess" from Cannibals and Christians, Mailer proceeds through a list of his contemporaries--novelists all--whom he considers and generally dismisses as "competitors". Here are a few characteristic comments. On James Jones: "the only one of my contemporaries who I felt had more talent than myself" but who will not be worthy of it unless "he gives up the lust to measure his talent by the money he makes" (Adv, 426-27). On William Styron: "how much more potent he will seem

to us, his contemporaries and his competitors, if he has had the moral courage to write a book equal to his hatred and therefore able to turn the consciousness of our time, an achievement which is the primary measure of a writer's size" (Adv, 428). On William Burroughs' Naked Lunch: "The ideas have pushed into the frontier of an all-electronic universe . . . one gets intimations of a mind which might have come within distance of Joyce, except that a catastrophe has been visited on it, . . . a junkie's needle which left the crystalline brilliance crashed into bits" (CC, 116-17). (Following Burroughs' example, Mailer was himself to push into "the frontier of an all-electronic universe" in Why Are We in Vietnam?.) On Saul Bellow's Henderson the Rain King: "The book is on the threshold of a stupendous climax--for the first time in years I had the feeling I was going to learn something large from a novel--and then like a slow leak the air goes out of the book in the last fifty pages. Dahfu is killed in a meaningless action, Henderson goes home to his wife, and the mystery that Bellow has begun to penetrate closes over his book, still intact" (CC, 127). (Oddly, Mailer never mentions the parody of Hemingway written into the character of Henderson, which most other critics leapt upon.)

Whether or not one agrees with Mailer's "evaluations", one cannot argue with the consistency and directness of

application of Mailer's standards--the same standards he applies to himself. He freely admits his biases and this, he thinks, makes his reviews superior to those of most critics, who do not.

"Style is character", Mailer believes, and in a key passage he reveals that his standards are those characteristic of the American romance as defined by Richard Chase and others:¹³

As he writes, the writer is reshaping his character. He is a better man and he is worse, once he has finished a book. Potentialities in him have been developed, other talents have been sacrificed. He has made choices on his route and the choices have shaped him

The writer, particularly the American writer, is not usually--if he is interesting--the quiet master of his craft; he is rather a being who ventured into the jungle of his unconscious to bring back a sense of order or a sense of chaos, he passes through ambushes in his sleep and, if he is ambitious, he must be ready to engage the congealed hostility of the world. If a writer is really good enough and bold enough he will, by the logic of society, write himself out onto the end of a limb which the world will saw off. He does not go necessarily to his death, but he must dare it (CC, 107-08).

Mailer is convinced that few of his contemporaries will take that dare; Hemingway's generation, on the other hand, produces ambiguous feelings in Mailer. He finds it difficult to reconcile his early respect for these authors with his later bitter but uncompromising attitude toward their failures to live up to their talents. They chose--quite literally in the cases of Faulkner and Hemingway--death over life, and this is something Mailer cannot accept

of one who could have been an authentic hero.

From Steinbeck, Wolfe, Dos Passos, and Farrell, the essential lesson Mailer learned was that when large minds engage great chunks of life, a strong personal style is the catalyst which turns data into art--a lesson exemplified in even his most recent work, though most directly as a derivative in The Naked and the Dead.

But Mailer's indebtedness to Hemingway is more complex. No other writer is more frequently mentioned by Mailer, nor in more mixed tones of contempt and awe. I will deal more specifically with the relationship in Chapter I on Advertisements, a book designed in many ways to exorcise the still-living spectre of Hemingway from Mailer's nightmares, although later comments reveal his incomplete assimilation into Mailer's image of himself. A few of the contours of that relationship, given below, can be seen in Mailer's work as recently as 1970. The epigraph to Of a Fire on the Moon is from Hemingway: "Now sleeps he with that old whore death . . . Do thee take this old whore death for thy lawful wedded wife?"¹⁴ The book begins:

Hemingway's suicide left him wedded to horror. It is possible that in the eight years since, he never had a day which was completely free of thoughts of death [Mailer is annoyed at the time that the major newspapers did not elicit his response to Hemingway's death:] the reactions of one of America's best-known young novelists would certainly be appropriate to the tragic finale of America's greatest living writer Hemingway had given the power to believe you could still shout down the corridor

of the hospital, live next to the breath of the beast, accept your portion of dread each day. Now the greatest living romantic was dead. Dread was loose. The giant had not paid his dues, and something awful was in the air. Technology would fill the pause. Into the silences static would enter. It was conceivable that man was no longer ready to share the dread of the Lord (Fire, 3-4).

It can be seen, first, that Hemingway was Mailer's symbolic father: he was the authentic hero both as man and as artist whom Mailer wished to emulate. Second, Hemingway had achieved authority on the national level also, both among critics and general readers. Mailer's own desire to be so acknowledged, i.e., to be accorded both popularity and significance in his lifetime, is based on a somewhat limited insight for a man so often in the public spotlight: that one cannot be influential unless one is read. The Mailer who had been running for President "in the privacy of [his] mind" (Adv, 15) since the popular and critical success of The Naked and the Dead proposed quite seriously though incredulously that Hemingway be the Democratic party's Presidential candidate in 1956, mainly because he was "more man than most" (Adv, 291). Mailer saw him as a mythic hero with the power to lead the forces of light against those of darkness and to win. Understood in these terms it is no wonder that Hemingway's suicide was devastating to Mailer. Third, Hemingway perpetrated two great failures for which Mailer could not forgive him: he deserted his followers and he killed himself. Of the first, Mailer says in The

Presidential Papers that Hemingway "has been our greatest writer. It is certain he created my generation--he told us to be brave in a bad world and to be ready to die alone." In recent years, however, "we feel he has deserted us and produced no work good enough to justify the silence."¹⁵ Perhaps it was emotional logic that brought Mailer from a repudiation of his Jewish heritage to the incarnation of Christ in Hemingway.

Concerning Hemingway's death, the following comment from The Presidential Papers should be imposed between the quotation given just above and that previously quoted from Of a Fire: Mailer explores the possibility that Hemingway's death was not a suicide but a "reconnaissance from which he did not come back", a drastic attempt to arrest the progress of the plague through consecutively more dangerous incursions into death's territory until he entered too deeply to return (PP, 117). But although such an explanation would have redeemed Hemingway's manhood if not his sainthood for Mailer, it is clear from the opening page of Of a Fire that Mailer could not believe in it. Further, the enormity of the debt Mailer owed to Hemingway for providing him with a model on which to base his life and work amounted to an obsession, which in a 1968 interview he described this way:

An obsession is created . . . in the wake of some event that has altered our life profoundly, or perhaps we have passed through some relationship with someone else that has altered our life drastically

. . . ; it's the most fundamental sort of event or relation. It has marked us, yet it's morally ambiguous.¹⁶

This obsession with something in the past can cripple one's movement into the future, so one must come to terms with it either by breaking it or by entering it. The only way to make artistic use of it is to enter it, as Mailer has done in a continuing struggle to pay his dues so that he can grow free of Hemingway's shadow--and his curse.

Mailer's relationship to earlier American writers should be seen first in light of what he considers in a typically dialectic way as "a war at the center of American letters". Using a Marxist metaphor, he sees the war as a class struggle between the "upper-middle class" which "looked for a development of its taste, a definition of its manners, a refinement of itself to prepare a shift to the aristocratic" and a lower-class literature "which grappled with a peculiarly American phenomenon--a tendency of American society to alter more rapidly than the ability of its artists to record that change" (CC, 95). The difficulty of the latter task was compounded by a concentration of power in the hands of those favoring the genteel literature and the necessity of the "lower class" novelist's divorcing himself from manner in order to describe "the social machine" (CC, 97) because he had not time to learn to describe both. Mailer sees Wolfe and especially Dreiser

as the titan-heroes who undertook to bring light to the underlings. But they could not offer them the manners or tactics with which to enter the palaces of the gods themselves. This war of "Naturalism versus the Genteel Tradition" (CC, 98), has continued, according to Mailer, without producing a writer able to "clarify a nation's vision of itself" (CC, 98) by uniting the two traditions, and in recent times the war has been transmogrified into "moral seriousness" vs. Camp, with Herzog and Candy as the "protagonists" (CC, 100). Mailer sees his own role as regenerating a literature which is essentially dead, not as carrying on a vital tradition. It will be argued later that he envisioned An American Dream as that book which would "clarify a nation's vision of itself" and win him acclaim as the American Tolstoy.

One of the most perceptive critics of American literature, D.H. Lawrence, with whom Mailer shares much of his vision, identified the conflict at the heart of American life and the literature which has imaged it: that freedom and democracy are basically antithetical. America's attempts to work out a compromise between the two ideals have resulted in a tug of war between the proponents of each. The question of how much individual freedom one must sacrifice to the general welfare is as dynamic today as it was at the drawing up of the Constitution. As Lawrence sees it,

"Liberty in America has meant so far the breaking away from all dominion. The true liberty will only begin when Americans discover IT, and proceed possibly to fulfill IT. IT being the deepest whole self of man, the self in its wholeness, not idealistic halfness."¹⁷ Lawrence saw further that a similar conflict is characteristic of American artists, a conflict between the intellect or conscious self and the subconscious or instinctual self.

In an essay entitled "Superman Comes to the Supermarket", intended to help elect John F. Kennedy to the Presidency, Mailer sees a similar division in American life but links it to the aftermath of the First World War. Since then, Mailer believes:

Our history has moved on two rivers, one visible, the other underground; there has been the history of politics which is concrete, factual, practical and unbelievably dull if not for the consequences of the actions of some of these men; and there is a subterranean river of untapped ferocious, lonely and romantic desires, that concentration of ecstasy and violence which is the dream life of the nation (PP, 51).

Mailer saw the possibility of once again uniting these rivers in the person of Kennedy, whose charisma could inject a sense of adventure back into politics. Mailer argued that

It was a hero America needed, a hero central to his time, a man whose personality might suggest contradictions and mysteries which would reach into the alienated circuits of the underground, because only a hero can capture the secret imagination of a people, and so be good for the vitality of his nation; a hero embodies the fantasy and so allows each private mind the liberty to consider its fantasy and

find a way to grow At bottom the concept of the hero is antagonistic to impersonal social progress, to the belief that social ills can be solved by social legislating, for it sees a country as all-but-trapped in its character until it has a hero who reveals the character of the country itself (PP, 55-56).

The hero that a nation chooses is thus a metaphor for itself, and when America chooses an Eisenhower or a Lyndon Johnson for its President, it forces underground again the essential myth of the American Dream, that America was "the country in which the dynamic myth of the Renaissance--that every man was potentially extraordinary--knew its most passionate persistence" and "that each of us was born to be free, to wander, to have adventure and to grow on the waves of the violent, the perfumed, and the unexpected" (PP, 52-53).

What Mailer has been attempting through his writing is to revive the myth of unlimited individual possibility for Americans, not in its bankrupt Horatio Alger version still presented in oral-formulaic political speeches, but in terms of uniting its instinctual life to its intellectual one, which is to say, to bring the myth to consciousness again where it had been before the closing of the Western frontier turned the myth inward. The deadly earnestness with which Mailer presents his thesis of heroism may be underscored by his belief that his essay helped elect Kennedy and the fearful responsibility he consequently felt, for he was not sure that Kennedy was the right man. If it

turned out that there was more of the intellect than the romantic in him, the nation would continue to be schizophrenic. Mailer's search for a hero capable of embodying America's vision of itself and his failure to find him in the world of politics or fiction or even in the mythic "White Negro" who long held his imagination may be what led Mailer to attempt to create himself as that American hero, who runs for President in his mind or for Mayor of New York City in a campaign whose futility is measured by the distance we remain from Mailer's ideal.

Mailer's search for an ideal condition for the self has resulted in his being categorized by some critics as an American Transcendentalist. But however much he may share with the Transcendentalists, particularly the Whitmanian quality of creating the self as a metaphor for America and the Emersonian ability to see the most in the least things, the essential passivity and optimism of Transcendentalism are foreign to his nature. In addition to the fact that he sees his world as a fallen one whose Adam, if he is to be heroic, must recreate mankind with more resistance to destructive forces, Mailer envisions the future in terms of an apocalypse, for he believes that there is a continuing war between God and the Devil for possession of the universe and that God might lose. For Mailer, God

exists as a warring element in a divided universe, and we are a part of--perhaps the most important part--

of His great expression, His enormous destiny; perhaps He is trying to impose upon the universe His conception of being against other conceptions of being very much opposed to His. Maybe we are in a sense the seed, the seed-carriers, the voyagers, the explorers, the embodiment of that embattled vision; maybe we are engaged in a heroic activity, and not a mean one (Adv, 351).

But he is never sure whether we are agents of good or evil. Unlike Melville for whom the meaning of such terms was relative (i.e., the tortoise is both dark and bright), Mailer could follow Mark Twain in imaging God and the Devil as identical twins. But Mailer can believe that one's intuitions can be trusted to tell them apart, saving him--so far --from the bitter pessimism of Mark Twain's later years.

What I have been suggesting is that Mailer has taken upon himself the task of making our most basic myth, the Adamic myth, exist on a literal level, thus synthesizing the thesis and antithesis, the dream and the reality, in much of our literature. And he is fully aware of the potential tragedy should he and his successors fail. He is engaged in developing "the deepest whole self of man" which Lawrence prophesied as the way to true liberty for Americans. Perhaps no other American writer has had a vision of such magnitude. With what justification, the following chapters will be concerned.

FOOTNOTES

¹Norman Mailer, Advertisements For Myself, p. 15. Further page references are given in the text and the title abbreviated to Advertisements or Adv.

²Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden.

³See especially Samuel Holland Hux, "American Myth and Existential Vision: The Indigenous Existentialism of Mailer, Bellow, Styron, and Ellison", Diss. University of Connecticut, 1965, pp. 179-211.

⁴Paul Carroll, "Playboy Interview: Norman Mailer", Playboy, January, 1968, p. 72.

⁵Jayne Ellison, "Cancer, Personality Linked, Psychologist Says", Dayton Daily News, April 16, 1971, p. 1. Until the results of research by Dr. Claus Vahnson were recently published, Mailer's theory on cancer had to remain metaphorical. Dr. Vahnson describes the "cancer personality" as "the man who is with the establishment, thinks discipline is good and expects high-level performance from others". He typically represses "anxiety, depression, hostility or guilt to a higher degree than all control groups".

⁶Donald L. Kaufmann, Norman Mailer: The Countdown, p. xv.

⁷Norman Mailer, Cannibals and Christians, p. 218. Further page references will be given in the text and the title abbreviated to CC.

⁸_____, "Up the Family Tree", Partisan Review, 35 (Spring, 1968), 240.

⁹Richard Gilman, "Why Mailer Wants to be President", New Republic, February 8, 1964, pp. 17-18.

¹⁰I eliminated from this count such books published separately as The White Negro, The Idol and the Octopus, The Short Fiction of Norman Mailer, The Bullfight, and King of the Hill because their contents are published elsewhere in either identical or slightly altered forms. I will consider some of these in other contexts, however.

¹¹With the notable exception of Robert Lowell in The Armies of the Night, whom Mailer places in a considerably larger context.

¹²The number of quotations from Advertisements For Myself in this chapter requires explanation. Most of the ideas expressed in that book were re-articulated in later ones, but in Advertisements they received their first and, it may be argued, their most vital expression.

¹³See especially Richard Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition, pp. 1-13.

¹⁴Norman Mailer, Of a Fire on the Moon, pp. 3-4. Further page references will be given in the text and the title abbreviated to Fire.

¹⁵_____, The Presidential Papers, p. 88. Further page references will be given in the text and the title abbreviated to PP.

¹⁶Carroll, p. 72.

¹⁷D.H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature, p. 7.

I

ADVERTISEMENTS FOR MYSELF

It may be said of Advertisements For Myself that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Critics of the "New" school would be inclined to agree with Marvin Mudrick's assessment that a large portion of the book is of interest only to thesis writers.¹ Those with a preference for novels view Advertisements as an important source book for explaining Mailer's later fiction, particularly An American Dream. Barry H. Leeds, for example, sees Advertisements as a stage toward later and more "valid" artistic forms, although he does not tell us how to determine such validity.² Others, mainly reviewers, have not found it necessary to recognize that the book contains anything besides "The White Negro" and Mailer's embittered comments on the sad state of life and literature in post-war America. It is time to step back far enough to see the whole elephant. Earlier I described Advertisements as Mailer's "artistic manifesto", for it is in this book that Mailer constructs his aesthetics of growth and declares his intention to become a major American writer. While others have noted these themes, what has generally been ignored is that Advertisements as a whole is not merely a collection of

juvenilia and fugitive pieces interspersed with paranoid delusions of persecution and grandeur. It is Mailer's first major step toward the attainment of an heroic self; it is his not-yet-fully-realized perception that the hero needed by America is not to be found between the pages of a novel; it is his declaration of independence from his literary forebears; above all it is the record of an artist's coming of age. If these themes are common enough in the annals of American literature, the form in which they are presented in Advertisements is not. One critic has stated that the book has a movement but not a form.³ I will argue that form in Advertisements is the pattern of that movement in terms of which Mailer has defined growth.⁴ Mailer has frequently imaged the pattern of growth as a curve which is part of a circle, in turn part of a spiral.⁵ The movement in these terms is circular and upward and symbolic of eternal life.⁶ General Cummings in The Naked and the Dead was able to see only a segment of the spiral, "the curve of all human powers" which are limited by death (ND, 443). It is a naturalistic point of view to see the curve as "the upward leap of a culture [which] is blunted, slowed, brought to its early doom" (ND, 444). And it is a totalitarian point of view to desire as General Cummings does to "mold the curve". By the end of Advertisements, in the prologue to the magnum opus Mailer then envisioned, the mysterious narrator has

come to see all of time and growth in terms of the spiral. "The logic of his intuition" convinces him that "the natural spiral, wherever it appeared, was the mark of a complex of feeling . . . the form of his thought was also spiral: he would have to make that all but circular voyage through experience before he would come back to contemplate the spiral again" (476). The closed forms of the rectangle and triangle are seen as symbolic of the "narrow intense faith" of the Puritans, while the freedom and potentiality of the spiral are in opposition to such closed-mindedness (479). The cryptic exhortation at the end of The Deer Park, to "think of Sex as Time, and Time as the connection of new circuits",⁷ is clarified by the hypothesis in this prologue that "passive Time, Time on its way to death" may be denoted by parallel lines, while "Time as growth" connects the lines, showing them to be "once around the route in the expanding spiral of Being" (481). The spiral in movement is a gyre (the image may have been borrowed from Yeats), "God's gyre" in which each individual is a microcosm of God: "God is like Me, only more so" (492). Ultimately the form of growth attains cosmic proportions for Mailer when combined with the existential predicament of the individual's inability to know whether the gyre of his life is a part of God or the Devil.

The total form of Advertisements For Myself approx-

imates that of a spiral. Mailer's "advertisements" serve as the connections between the parallel lines of the individual works he includes. The lines are horizontally parallel, like the rungs of a ladder, with the immature college piece, "A Calculus at Heaven", on the lowest rung and "Advertisement For Myself on the Way Out" on the top. What lies between is not so neatly progressive as this spiral metaphor suggests, but the chronological order that Mailer follows in the book is roughly equivalent to the progress of his growth as an artist. The concluding piece, while ending one book, very specifically points to future accomplishments and unquestionably documents Mailer's conception of his work as a continuing process of growth.

Since a declared purpose of the book is "the intention to clear a ground for [the long] novel" (vi) which he later abandoned, Advertisements may be seen also as an exorcism of the past, both that pre-existential part of it which committed Mailer to the obligations of a successful first-novelist, and the frustrating years of searching for a philosophy of his own and a style appropriate to it. This meant closing the gap between what he wished to be and what he believed he was. It meant finding a direction and a method for growth and satisfying himself of his progress. By the time of Advertisements, he had progressed sufficiently to consider himself with some perspective and to have dis-

covered a coherent vision of life to give artistic form. It is the further development of that vision for which I believe Mailer intended Advertisements to "clear a ground". His achievement in point of view in Advertisements is illustrative of his general development.

In The Naked and the Dead a third-person undramatized narrator, to use Wayne C. Booth's terminology,⁸ tells the story from the points of view of the various characters while maintaining an ironic tone which cues us that no final knowledge is possible. In Barbary Shore the third person is dropped in favor of the first-person dramatized self-conscious narrator-agent, in keeping with the limitations of the existentialist's knowledge to his personal experience. In order to know what goes on between McLeod and Hollingsworth in that book, Lovett must actually be invited to their meetings, a situation explainable only by Mailer's conscientious preservation of the integrity of his chosen point of view. In The Deer Park an appeal to the willing suspension of disbelief is made by Sergius, a similar type of narrator, who claims imaginative access to vital scenes between characters and so renders them for us as if he had been there. Such gymnastics are solved with considerable wisdom in Advertisements by combining all the possibilities in the author himself. He is author, narrator, protagonist, reader, and critic. His work thus becomes self-contained, which is

to say that Mailer in Advertisements becomes the chief metaphor of his work. Later, in The Armies of the Night, he separates more clearly these component points of view, for by referring to himself as "Mailer" he indicates that the narrator has progressed beyond the character and is more convincingly detached from the Mailer who has acted as opposed to the Mailer who is writing. The advantages of this technique will be examined later; it is not qualitatively different, however, from that of Advertisements. The point at which Mailer assumes these various roles is the point at which he is capable of doing so. In other words, he had to develop a vision of life, of his work, and of himself greater than any his novels had developed. The difficulties he experienced with his early narrators **occurred because he as** yet had no coherent vision of life and invariably created narrators who either were something more than he was or something less because he feared creating a character larger than himself. The fictional character he came closest to believing in was Sergius O'Shaugnessy whom he worked and re-worked in and out of the novel and play versions of The Deer Park and who continued to make appearances in short stories and projected long novels. His long embattlement with the character of Sergius led him into those "rebellious imperatives of the self" (313) where he found the character most consistently demanding and rewarding to explore. The knowl-

edge he gained of himself had future novelistic gains, for in An American Dream and Why Are We in Vietnam? he was able to create fictional characters with inner lives of their own. Thus, the point of view in Advertisements, like the book itself, is a major breakthrough from past failures to future achievements.

For Mailer, the development of the self could take place only in an atmosphere of radical freedom from all encumbrance--from hereditary and literary ancestry, from outgrown allegiances to the politics of the Thirties, perhaps most of all from the dangers of "totalitarianism" in general, the American variety in particular, whose end was the death of individualism. The not-unheroic striving to become equal to such an unlimited freedom, to create a synthesis of the self with possibility, is the great strength of Advertisements. The import of the book, then, lies not so much in the ideas meant to revolutionize our collective consciousness as in its recording of one phase of Mailer's attempt to embody American heroism in himself.

Distrusting the then current trend toward psychoanalysis because it sets up a relationship akin to priest and confessor, allowing the confessor to transfer his insight and responsibility to himself to an agent of socialization-along-acceptable-lines, Mailer becomes a proselyte of self-analysis. He declares the aims of the novelist to be

contrary to those of the psychoanalyst, the one is "a rebel concerned with Becoming", the other "a regulator concerned with Being" (282). Advertisements is a record of the self-analysis Mailer has undergone, and which he seems to undergo before our eyes in the tone of his "advertisements", for the book is a kind of purgative, a therapy, a means of "clearing a ground" for greater work ahead. Richard Foster had discerned that Advertisements is written in the dramatic mode of elegy, "being shaped as a total action embodying patterns of divestment and purgation which yield up at last a clear prospect of fresh possibilities."⁹ The metaphor of purgation is to become an important one in Mailer's future work, particularly in Cannibals and Christians and Why Are We in Vietnam? where it is given national significance. Here we see Mailer characteristically testing his ideas on himself before applying them further.

A chronological procedure through the book should reveal the progression of Mailer's struggle with himself and the tentative self-confidence won by the book's end. The prefatory matter of Advertisements, "A Note to the Reader" and the two tables of contents, satirizes the narrow-minded reader who with limited insight categorizes a work. At the same time, Mailer outdoes his readers by presenting his own categories for the work contained in the book and his critics by listing the pieces he considers best. Thus,

from the outset, at least a dual tone is operating in the book. On the one hand, through the act of advertising himself, Mailer courts an audience because it is indispensable to his stated revolutionary purpose; on the other, he ridicules that audience for not being equal to the task of comprehending him. On another level, the one that has had the least attention, Mailer struggles for his own integrity, the public be damned. The first sentence of the book proper illustrates all three of these attitudes: "Like many another vain, empty, and bullying body of our time, I have been running for President these last ten years in the privacy of my mind, and it occurs to me that I am less close now than when I began" (15). It is to the Presidency of American letters if not of the United States that Mailer aspires, and one must be elected President. At the same time he identifies himself with the typical candidate's "vain, empty, and bullying" nature, which observation is not calculated to endear him to the voters. On the third level, the flat honesty of the last clause redeems the sentence and the sentiment. These conflicting tones of solicitation, arrogance, and humility are characteristic of the advertisements which bind the book together because the justifications for Mailer's self-confidence were yet to be demonstrated to the voters, as Mailer is fully conscious. That "I am still at this formal middle of my life a creator of sentiments larger

than my work" Mailer recognizes even at the end of Advertisements (439). However, he believes that his "present and future work" will have "the deepest influence of any work being done by an American novelist in these years" (15, *italics mine*). Advertisements is an important step toward closing the gap between ambition and goal, and the gap can be closed only by the difficult inward search for the style which bears the deepest relation to the self. The magnitude of that difficulty is expressed in the book's third paragraph:

There was a time when Pirandello could tease a comedy of pain out of six characters in search of an author, but that is only a whiff of purgatory next to the yaws of conscience a writer learns to feel when he sets his mirrors face to face and begins to jiggle his Self for a style which will have some relation to him. I would suspect it is not possible, no more than one can remake oneself signature for signature, but I have to admit I am not suited for this sort of confrontation despite two novels put down in the first person and a bloody season of overexpressed personal opinions as a newspaper columnist. To write about myself is to send my style through a circus of variations and postures, a fireworks of virtuosity designed to achieve . . . I do not even know what. Leave it that I become an actor, a quick-change artist, as if I believed I can trap the Prince of Truth in the act of switching a style (15-16).

Despite the elusiveness of the "Prince of Truth" Mailer does indeed set out to expose him. One learns about himself only by purposely exposing his vulnerable self to confrontations whose outcome is unknown and therefore dangerous to the self, an existential situation by Mailer's definition, and

any role one plays as a consequence must either be accepted as a true enactment of a portion of one's nature or rejected as a false one. Such role-playing has had the greatest importance in the progress of Mailer's life and work, causing great dismay to his readers and critics who, just when they think they have categorized Mailer, are bewildered by his unpredictable shifting of roles. Many of these roles have been sensational, ranging from the stabbing of his second wife to publicly denouncing the President of the United States in "obscene" language to running for Mayor of New York, and it is not to be argued that Mailer has acted without knowledge of the notoriety to be gained by such ventures. Rather, one must reiterate that Mailer's art does not have a separate existence from his life and that the trying on of different hats as of different forms of writing is directed ultimately at exploring the limits of the self--not at how much of Mailer the public can take.

Advertisements is the recognition that such an exploration was necessary. The premise on which Advertisements is based is that Mailer has experienced defeat as a writer, which he blames alternately on a totalitarian society that stifles growth and on himself for not having the strength and courage to mature in spite of that society. The writers and thinkers of the Thirties had formed his early political and literary concepts and, as with any youthful

ideas, Mailer had to alter them on the basis of later experience. Those who note the derivative nature of The Naked and the Dead both philosophically and formally¹⁰ tend to ignore the fact that Mailer experienced combat in the Pacific theatre. He admits that his first thoughts after Pearl Harbor were concerned with "whether it would be more likely that a great war novel would be written about Europe or the Pacific" (24), so his aspirations to write such a novel were formed prior to his experience of war and must have colored his impressions of it. But although the extreme pessimism and dehumanization of the soldiers in The Naked and the Dead may be accounted for in part by the inherited philosophical bias of the Depression era, it is also attributable to his personal experience as a soldier. The fascination with power which he exhibits in the characters of General Cummings and Sergeant Croft, for example, is very much his own. Mailer tells us that he "had formed the desire to be a major writer" before he was seventeen, in his first semester at Harvard (23). By Mailer's lights, being a major writer also meant wielding power, being in a position to "mold the curve" of human life as Cummings wished to do. Others have noted that Mailer is both attracted and repelled by the notion of a concentration of power in the hands of one individual.¹¹ I believe what repelled him was the fear not only that the wrong individuals would abuse their power and

produce a totalitarian state but also that he himself would not make the best use of it should he attain it. He records that the experiences of the years following the catapulting success of The Naked and the Dead justified that fear, and I quote at length from this key passage:

. . . if once I had been a young man whom many did not notice, and so was able to take a delayed revenge--in my writing I could analyze the ones who neglected to look at me--now I came to know that I could bestow the cold tension of self-hatred, or the warmth of liking oneself again, to whichever friends, acquaintances, and strangers were weak, ambitious, vulnerable and in love with themselves

This was experience unlike the experience I had learned from books, and from the war It took me years to realize that it was my experience, the only one I would have to remember, that my apparently unconnected rat-scufflings and ego-gobblings could be fitted finally into a drastic vision, an introduction of the brave to the horrible, a dream, a nightmare which would belong to others and yet be my own. Willy-nilly I had had existentialism forced upon me, I was free, or at least whatever was still ready to change in my character escaped from the social obligations which suffocate others. I could seek to become what I chose to be, and if I failed--there was the ice pick of fear! I would have nothing to excuse failure. I would fail because I had not been brave enough to succeed. So I was too much free. Success had been a lobotomy to my past, there seemed no power from the past which could help me in the present, and I had no choice but to force myself to step into the war of the enormous present, to accept the private heat and fatigue of setting out by myself to cut a track through a new wild (86).

It was at this early turning point in his career that Mailer began to have very much more at stake as a writer than he had had in The Naked and the Dead. This is why the subsequent popular and critical failures of his next

two novels, Barbary Shore and The Deer Park, were so devastating. Hence the defensive tone of Advertisements and its issuance as a manifesto. If the success of The Naked and the Dead cut him off from his Brooklyn-Jewish past, the failures of Barbary Shore and The Deer Park cut him off from his dreams of power. At this point the aesthetics of growth had its birth. And from this point on public opinion of his work ceased to be meaningful to him; he instead worked at becoming his own critic, the one he could be sure would follow the injunction he issued as an epigraph to The Deer Park: "Please do not understand me too quickly."

Although Mailer arrived at these positions independently, he was aware of the similarities in the career of Ernest Hemingway and was most careful to emphasize the differences. Hemingway, he maintained, had secured his reputation on the knowledge that "he would have to campaign for himself, that the best tactic to hide the lockjaw of his shrinking genius was to become the personality of our time." Although Hemingway "did a lot of things which very few of us could do", Mailer goes on, "for all his size, and all we've learned from him about the real importance of physical courage, he has still pretended to be ignorant of the notion that it is not enough to feel like a man, one must try to think like a man as well." The essential lesson Mailer has learned from him, however, is that

he's known the value of his own work, and he fought to make his personality enrich his books An author's personality can help or hurt the attention readers give to his books, and it is sometimes fatal to one's talents not to have a public with a clear public recognition of one's size. The way to save your work and reach more readers is to advertise yourself, steal your own favorite page out of Hemingway's unwritten Notes From Papa On How The Working Novelist Can Get Ahead (18-19).

Believing that one must be ingratiating to win public approval and knowing this approach to be unsuited to either his integrity or his temperament, Mailer declares his independence from the Hemingway style and the Hemingway distrust of abstract thoughts. Aware of the limited accomplishments of his generation, he sees that nevertheless

we are the cowards who must defend courage, sex, consciousness, the beauty of the body, the search for love, and the capture of what may be, after all, an heroic destiny . . . it has been our act of faith, our attempt to see--to see and to see hard, to smell, even to touch, yes to capture that nerve of Being which may include all of us, that Reality whose existence may depend on the honest life of our work, the honor of ourselves which permits us to say no better than we have seen (21-22).

So ends the "First Advertisement For Myself", which along with all other such advertisements in the book make up what Mailer refers to in his "Second Table of Contents" as the "Biography of a Style". What makes it biography rather than autobiography is the critical capacity Mailer brings to bear on his own work--perhaps as objective as that of a sympathetic biographer--while the individual advertisements act as a biographer's comments on the pieces that

follow them.

In Part 1, "Beginnings", the first selection is a forty-page story written in 1942 while at Harvard entitled "A Calculus at Heaven". While Mailer does not recommend the story "except for those who have curiosity about my early work", he concedes that it makes "an interesting contrast to The Naked and the Dead, for it is an attempt of the imagination (aided and warped by books, movies, war correspondents, and the liberal mentality) to guess what war might really be like" (24). It is a less interesting contrast to The Red Badge of Courage, also an imaginative response to war, and Mailer's modesty concerning it is very much in order. One might note the use of several techniques which appeared later in The Naked and the Dead. The story has no particular plot, rather consisting of men placed in a situation and reacting to it. Storytelling has never been one of Mailer's fortes, but he had consistently used such a situational device; indeed, it is the basis of his existential philosophy. There is a focusing on a number of individuals from different ranks, as in The Naked and the Dead, with flashbacks equivalent to the "Time Machine" sections of the novel. Although these sections have been frequently cast as derivations solely from the portraits and "Camera Eye" sections of U.S.A., I think that Faulkner's influence is discernible in these distortions of time, for Mailer had read The Sound and

the Fury a year earlier and claimed to have long been influenced by it (76). Indeed, temporal distortions were to have increasing significance in Mailer's developing vision. "Destroy time, and chaos may be ordered" is the stated concept in a later story (173).

The character of the Captain in "A Calculus at Heaven" is that of an anti-intellectual artist figure, improbably named Bowen Hilliard, who can be claimed as a descendent of Hemingway and a romanticized version of Mailer himself, as well as the prototype for Lieutenant Hearn in The Naked and the Dead. Hilliard expresses the story's theme:

" . . . in America, men live, work and die without even the rudest conception of a dignity. At their death . . . well then they wonder what the odds are on a heaven, and perhaps they make futile desperate bets on it, adding up their crude moral calculus, so that if the big team, heaven, comes through, and wins, and therefore exists, they will be able to collect their bets that evening" (38).

Fortunately, Mailer becomes much more adept at handling a metaphor, although it is characteristic of him to milk it dry. More important here is the naturalistic attitude of helpless humanity struggling against an unknowable force with death the inevitable end of their actions. Mailer's move from naturalism to existentialism lies in his coming to believe that an individual must assume responsibility for his own destiny, taking a positive attitude toward what is to be gained, not the self-defeating one present

here and later in The Naked and the Dead. This story also illustrates the type of point of view Mailer used in his first novel and which he abandoned in the changeover from naturalism to existentialism.

Another early achievement, a story called "The Greatest Thing in the World" which won first prize in a 1941 contest, is notable for revealing how early the idea that what was earned dangerously was worthwhile appeared in Mailer's work. A Hemingway influence is indicated, and with modifications the concept occupies a central position in Mailer's later existentialism.

Mailer does not include excerpts from The Naked and the Dead in Advertisements, presumably since it would be well known to his readers, and neither will I discuss it separately.

Part 2 of Advertisements, "Middles", quite appropriately begins with excerpts from Barbary Shore. The "prominent and empty" Mailer of the years between The Naked and the Dead and Barbary Shore (1948-1951), who "had to begin life again" (85) began it through Mikey Lovett, whose amnesia is akin to Mailer's own "lobotomy" from his past. The book's flounderings are apparent to Mailer for he claims it was "a book to emerge from the bombarded cellars of my unconscious, an agonized eye of a novel which tried to find some amalgam of my new experience and the larger horror of

that world which might be preparing to destroy itself" (87).

Yet he postulates that

if my work is alive one hundred years from now, Barbary Shore will be considered the richest of my first three novels for it has in its high fevers a kind of insane insight into the psychic mysteries of Stalinists, secret policemen, narcissists, children, Lesbians, hysterics, revolutionaries--it has an air which for me is the air of our time, authority and nihilism stalking one another in the orgiastic hollow of the century (87).

Mailer is one of the book's few critics not to treat it as a realistic novel and consequently give it failing marks. The "psychic mysteries" have been the subject of much of his work and a continuing source of fascination to him. That Barbary Shore is a badly made novel not even Mailer would argue; that it contains something of value is not too strong a claim to make for it.

The allegorical nature of the book and its characters is often noted. Perhaps a student of Freud could make a case for its having the structure of a nightmare. Certainly there is a real structural conflict between the initiation story of Mikey Lovett and that of the fascistic nature of socialism under Stalin in the form of a tedious dialogue between McLeod and Hollingsworth. Once the author is released from the obligation to be "realistic", however, the book can bear almost as much weight as a medieval dream vision which ends where it began (with the repetition of the opening sentence in the case of Barbary Shore) and in the

meantime is not obliged to maintain a consistent literal level.¹² The narrator-hero of a dream vision generally wanders until his instruction in virtue is taken over by a guide. From this point on he reports what he has seen or heard and is usually not an active participant, although he is obliged to become one upon awakening from the dream. Lovett's role is similar, and in the book's context suggests Arthurian parallels, some of which Leeds has noted.¹³ The relationships with Guinevere and Lannie (a perverted Launcelot) are wanderings; those with McLeod and Hollingsworth are instruction, and Lovett becomes the agent of what good can be taken from the book: the "remnants of [McLeod's] socialist culture"¹⁴ to be protected in troubled times until it can be restored to its rightful place of power. McLeod is Lovett's guide and a spiritual King Arthur, passing his heritage on to Sir Bedivere whose death does not exclude the future attainment of Avalon but whose immediate result is Barbary.

Without overstating the parallels, I must suggest those of the book to another badly received American novel by a popular author which it resembles in flaws as well as virtues: The Blithedale Romance. The socialist-turned-fascist zeal of the Hollingsworth in each book is an obvious parallel. The roles of Miles Coverdale and Mikey Lovett are likewise similar, i.e., to be accessible to the

action in order to report it and to become the custodians of its moral import. Their initial amorality gives way through initiation to a certain amount of wisdom, particularly of the failings of socialist endeavors due to human limitations. What both books lose in plausibility they gain in mood and atmosphere, like true American romances. A further Hawthorne parallel is seen in the ending of Barbary Shore, this time compared with The Scarlet Letter. Leeds has noted the similarities of Pearl and Monina (67-68). In addition, at the end of Barbary Shore, McLeod, having earlier acknowledged that he is Monina's father, dies, and the child, now capable of human emotion, cries for him. She is then given into the hands of her mother's adulterous, evil lover, Hollingsworth. The situation might have provided a nightmare ending to The Scarlet Letter.

I have been suggesting that Barbary Shore has considerably more imaginative power than Mailer's earlier work and an integrity of its own, evident when it is compared to works with which it shares concerns instead of to "realistic" novels, as has too often been the case. It illustrates artistic growth in Mailer through his delving into the materials of the subconscious hitherto unexplored by him. In addition, the novel shows a progression in theme from a realization of the bankruptcy of Stalinism to the conclusion that while socialism may provide hope for an indefinable

future, what is needed at present are individuals courageous enough to withstand the encroachment of totalitarianism. Mailer's purpose in including ten pages of excerpts from the novel in Advertisements must have been to encourage a full reading of it and a more sympathetic one than previously possible, appearing as it did at the beginning of the Korean War and the McCarthy era which in its own way it prophesied. Mailer marks the novel as "a first step toward work I will probably be doing from now on . . . an entrance into the mysteries of murder, suicide, incest, orgy, orgasm, and Time" (99) and notes that "much of my later writing cannot be understood without a glimpse of the odd shadow and theme-maddened light Barbary Shore casts before it" (87).

The second major step was taken in The Deer Park, but prior to that Mailer spent a great deal of time fondering. The short stories he includes in Advertisements from the period between Barbary Shore and The Deer Park (1951-55) are in his opinion regressive since he "was not trying for more than [he] could do" (100). A slim piece called "The Notebook" explores the Hawthornesque theme of the writer as observer rather than participant and is indicative of Mailer's ability to separate the roles, though not yet to combine them in himself.

The next major piece in Advertisements is "The Man Who Studied Yoga", intended as the prologue to an eight-

volume novel, a kind of Piers Plowman or Winnegans' Wake, conceived as eight stages of the dream of "a minor artist manqué" about "the adventures of a mythical hero, Sergius O'Shaugnessy, who would travel through many worlds, through pleasure, business, communism, church, working class, crime, homosexuality, and mysticism" (143). The element of time was to be distorted, as in a dream. The contemplated novel proved to be overwhelming and was abandoned by the end of the first draft of The Deer Park. From the experience of struggling with the huge novel, Mailer began to develop a style both more imaginative and more disciplined than those of The Naked and the Dead and Barbary Shore. "The Man Who Studied Yoga" experiments with a first-person omniscient narrator who has the power to imagine himself as different characters and survey them with some detachment. Such a point of view is a progression beyond that of the third-person undramatized narrator of The Naked and the Dead and the first-person self-conscious narrator-agent of Barbary Shore; in fact it is a combination of the advantages of each; it is a way of knowing what one could not "realistically" know while maintaining distance from the character since he exists only in the imagination, and it is preparation for the assumption of all roles by Mailer himself. Sam Slovida is in fact a dramatized version of the self as failure. By depicting a "minor artist manqué" who "has wanted to be a

serious novelist and now merely indulges the ambition" and who shies away from new experience (146), Mailer creates an anti-self, separating himself from the fears and failures he acknowledges in Advertisements. This is an example of the self-analysis Mailer engages in throughout the book when he plays a role he creates and then evaluates his performance.

In the story, Sam and his wife Eleanor are satirized as patients of the psychoanalyst Dr. Sergius (a version of O'Shaugnessy), who substitute the jargon of psychoanalysis, which conveniently names and supplies causes for all human failings, for the difficult introspection which would yield real knowledge of the self. Sam is frustrated by the disparity between his dreams of affecting history (he quotes as his own Mailer's maxim that "it is the actions of men and not their sentiments which make history" [152]) and his rejection of the world he meets in the pages of his newspaper. His conflict is illustrated by the central situation of the story. A group of the Slovodas' friends, all engaged in humanitarian occupations (lawyer, teacher, welfare worker), gather to watch a pornographic movie. The movie, entitled "The Evil Act", arouses the group but instead of admitting this they feel obligated to dominate the film intellectually by discussing it as art. The schizophrenic and hypocritical nature of American life which is to be Mailer's constant

theme finds metaphorical expression here in a more mature fashion than it had in any of Mailer's previous work.

The story, as the intended prologue to the eight-volume novel, gains richness from its metaphorical pattern. Seeds of all of that novel's themes are planted here as is the nebulous character variously depicted as Dr. Sergius, Cassius O'Shaugnessy, and Jerry O'Shaugnessy, who has been everywhere and done everything, the romantic hero who is Sam's alter ego and anti-self and by implication Mailer's desired self. The Sergius O'Shaugnessy variations are metaphoric equivalents of the styles of living which Sam and his group are afraid to assume and are illustrative of the kind of viable literary character Mailer meant to "attract literary experience metaphorically equal to the ambiguous experience in [the writer's] life which impelled him to write in the first place" (cf. p. 8 above). In other words, the writer seeks to embody his experiences, ambiguous as to their essential goodness or evil, in characters who express that ambiguity. He is then in control of the ambiguity and may explore its implications in a way he could not in his own life. What Mailer does up until the writing of Advertisements is to create separate fictional characters who approximate aspects of himself which he has been able, through his self-analysis, to identify and give form to. When Mailer becomes aware enough of this process to artic-

ulate it, he is able to deal with himself more objectively. He comes to identify the act of imagining with the probing of the subconscious self through writing. In a 1967 article Mailer articulates this concept more clearly.¹⁵ He thinks that each of us carries around in his subconscious mind the stuff of a "huge and great social novel" consisting of our raw experiences. Something he calls "the navigator", a faculty which functions similarly to the ego on the id, charts its way through the massive data of our past experience and brings it to bear on the present. The navigator, like the author of a novel, gives order to the data; he charts a map, in Mailer's metaphor, and that map is the novel each of us carries in his subconscious. We deal with the world on the basis of that novel, playing the roles the navigator tells us to, even when our raw data is acquired through faulty perception. Few of us are able to tell how or why our navigator operates as he does; in fact only the best writers are able to bring a little more of the nature of the navigator to consciousness and so become navigators themselves, directing the course of human life. Mailer seems to believe that the navigator holds the key to connecting the conscious and subconscious minds, or the past and the present, which he images as schizophrenic halves of what should be whole. Joining the schizophrenic portions of his own nature into a metaphor large enough to contain them is the process we see

unfolding in Advertisements. By the end of the book Mailer has progressed far enough to have connected his past with his present, something Mikey Lovett, the amnesiac, was unable to do, and which is the crucial problem faced by the Sergius O'Shaughnessy of The Deer Park. This vital connection must be made before either Mailer or the America whose metaphorical hero he works at becoming can move into the future with any coherent force. When Sam Slovoda sits down to write a long-contemplated novel he is stymied by his inability to create a hero who would give it shape:

One could not have a hero today, Sam thinks, a man of action and contemplation, capable of sin, large enough for good, a man immense. There is only a modern hero damned by no more than the ugliness of wishes whose satisfaction he will never know. One needs a man who could walk the stage, someone who--no matter who, not himself. Someone, Sam thinks, who reasonably could not exist (172).

The liberation of the self for union with the universal spirit which is the end of yoga is impossible for Sam because of his inability to conceive of a living hero.

The political articles which follow "The Man Who Studied Yoga" in Advertisements illustrate the need for Mailer to find a style appropriate to his developing ideas. In the Partisan Review symposium entitled "Our Country and Our Culture" in which he participated in 1952, he begins to articulate the need of the artist to oppose himself to the death-producing society, not to work from within the system (a position he was later to revise), and in a 1954 article

reviewing David Riesman's Individualism Reconsidered, Mailer aligns himself with the spirit of radicalism, while acknowledging the difficulty of maintaining it since it is "equivalent to accepting almost total intellectual alienation from America" (189). Such opposition does, however, give one a "clear sense of the enemy", and Mailer has consistently taken radical positions both in politics and in literature. To be a yea-sayer to things as they are is suicidal in Mailer's scheme of things, as it was in Melville's.

In an interview included in Advertisements Mailer describes himself as a "Marxian anarchist" who is less interested in "politics as politics" than "politics as a part of everything else in life" (253). However, with the exception of The Armies of the Night, Mailer has alternated his political and literary roles in a way he might describe as schizophrenic. The radical substance of his politics, from his 1948 campaigning for Henry Wallace through his 1969 campaign for Mayor of New York on the not unsound notion that the city become the fifty-first state, has not obscured the fact that he has tried to gain power through the established system. The methods of attaining and holding political power he would accept, it seems, while revolutionizing its end.

The search for a style continues in the material included in Part 3 of Advertisements, called "Births". This

section is the most confessional of Advertisements, although in keeping with the rest of the book it is limited to the experiences which fostered Mailer's artistic growth. The banal piece, "The Homosexual Villain", for example, was the result of a conscious attempt to stop shying away from homosexuality as a subject, since it was to be explored in the eight-volume novel. Mailer acknowledges that the article was important to his growth, for he learned to dig "deep into the complex and often foul pots of thought where sex and society live in their murderous dialectic." Homosexuality also came to metaphorically represent for him "the endless twists of habit and defeat" which one must overcome to be more of a man" (206). In addition, the essay clarifies a point in Mailer's aesthetics of growth, that it is unconventionally moral:

A writer has his talent, and for all one knows, he is born with it, but whether his talent develops is to some degree responsive to his use of it. He can grow as a person or he can shrink, and by this I don't intend any facile parallels between moral and artistic growth. The writer can become a bigger hoodlum if need be, but his alertness, his curiosity, his reaction to life must not diminish. The fatal thing is to shrink, to be interested in less, sympathetic to less, desiccating to the point where life itself loses its flavor, and one's passion for human understanding changes to weariness and distaste (203-09).

The end of the first half of Advertisements quite appropriately comes with the section on "The Last Draft of The Deer Park", for it marks a turning point in Mailer's

career. When Rinehart refused to publish The Deer Park because Mailer would not edit a scene involving fellatio, Mailer sent the book to eight other publishers before finding one who would accept it, G.P. Putnam. The ten weeks the book spent between publishers forced Mailer into a number of small confrontations which sapped him of the energy he had planned to devote to another novel. His vision of himself as one of the great writers of his generation collapsed, and he turned to the world of jazz and drugs, playing the role of a "psychic outlaw" (217). His new experiences convinced him that the style of The Deer Park was false, and he began to rework it. The problem centered around finding an appropriate style for his narrator, Sergius O'Shaugnessy. Mailer's recording of the emerging of Sergius' style is lengthy but crucial:

For six years I had been writing novels in the first person; it was the only way I could begin a book, even though the third person was more to my taste . . . the first person seemed to paralyze me, as if I had a horror of creating a voice which could be in any way bigger than myself. [Having gained self-confidence from his uncompromising position with Rinehart] for the first time I was able to use the first person in a way where I could suggest some of the stubbornness and belligerence I also might have, I was able to color the empty reality of that first person with some real feeling of how I had always felt . . . I was able, then, to create an adventurer whom I believed in, and as he came alive for me, the other parts of the book . . . also came to life . . . The most powerful leverage in fiction comes from point of view, and giving O'Shaugnessy courage gave passion to the others. . . . I was now creating a man who was braver and stronger than me, and the more my new style

succeeded, the more I was writing an implicit portrait of myself as well. There is a shame in advertising yourself that way, a shame which became so strong that it was a psychological violation to go on (220-21).

Mailer's problem, then, was that he could neither write about himself nor not write about himself. He had grown into someone worth writing about, but he had not yet gained the necessary detachment to consider himself as a literary character. The remainder of The Deer Park was written through a haze of drugs. Mailer pinpoints the central problem of the book: "In changing the young man, I saved the book from being minor, but put a disproportion upon it because my narrator became too interesting, and not enough happened to him in the second half of the book" (226). A further problem of point of view in the novel, mentioned earlier, is that Sergius must imagine the dramatic scenes between Elena and Eitel at which he could not logically be present. "I have to wonder a little if I am the one to write about [the Eitel-Esposito affair] . . . Eitel is very different from me, and I do not know if I can find his style. Yet, imagination becomes a vice if we do not exercise it", Sergius says in way of explanation (DP, 88). His indecision as to whether Eitel's or his own story should have precedence is illustrated in this passage:

[Eitel] told me his theory, and although I do not want to go into theory, maybe it is a part of character. I could write it today as he said it, and I think in all modesty I could even add a complexity

or two, but this is partly a novel of how I felt at the time, and so I paraphrase as I heard it then, for it would take too long the other way (DP, 106).

A further problem traceable to point of view is that Eitel's story is at least as interesting as that of Sergius, and while they complement each other structurally and thematically, they jar because of the manner in which each is told. The subdued narrative voice in the Eitel sections contrasted to the dominant one in the Sergius sections leaves the reader with a sense of imbalance. The book's real accomplishment as an entity, it may be argued, was to push back the frontier of sex in the serious novel.

The Deer Park was originally intended as Part I of the eight-volume novel, with pleasure as its subject. It is certainly a central subject, but the exhortation issued by God at the novel's end, to "think of sex as Time, and Time as the connection of new circuits", is the significant message in terms of Mailer's work as a whole. Sex is a metaphor for either new connections and the hope that they will produce new life or for the dead-ended self-seeking of lust. The search for new life is, after all, what brought the sick-spirited Sergius and Eitel to the imaginative Hell of Desert D'Or where their courage was tested and in Eitel's case found wanting. Eitel is the failed artist figure. He espouses a theory similar to that in Matthew Arnold's poem, "The Buried Life", that each of us has a buried nature or

"noble savage" which is "changed and whipped and trained by everything in life until it [is] almost dead." A mate with a similar buried nature may be found and they may help each other thrive, but their path is full of obstacles likely to defeat them (106-07). Eitel's theory not only is acted out in the course of his relationship with Elena; it also provides the skeleton plot for An American Dream. For Eitel defeat seems almost inevitable. Near the end of the novel, Sergius' experiences with Mexican bullfighters illustrate what Eitel has never understood: "I was always most intrigued by the bullfighters who projected the most intense fear", Sergius records, "and then succeeded to put an imaginative fight together. The cowards know every way a man can fear the bull, and so on those rare days when they are able to dominate the movements of their bodies, they know more of the variations, and the moments, and the moments within the moments when something new can be done" (DP, 299). A sense of fear, of the consequences of failure, can extract a better performance from a man. This is what to Mailer is an existential situation, where one acts despite his fear and grows or, like Eitel, gives in to fear and dies a little more. Mailer acknowledges his concern with "living in Hemingway's discipline", which means "that even if one dulled one's talents in the punishment of becoming a man, it was more important to be a man than a very good writer" (247).

Sergius' growing awareness of the difference between Eitel and the bullfighters is what leads him into the writing of the novel in which he comes to terms with his and Eitel's experiences in Desert D'Or. Sergius' survival of Hell, then, is dependent upon his comprehension of the reasons for Eitel's failure to survive. "I only am alone escaped to tell you", Sergius might have said, for like Ishmael or Mikey Lovett or the Mailer of Advertisements, he has been a participant-witness in a life-changing experience which it is his salvation to tell and the reader's to understand.

To Mailer, however, who still measured a book's success by the number of copies it sold, The Deer Park was a failure. He had failed to convince others of the validity of his vision and so had to believe either that he "had no magic so great as to hasten the time of the apocalypse" or that the "wisdom, the reliability, and the authority of the public's literary mind" were at fault (231). He decided to appeal to an authority whose opinion he valued. When the copy of The Deer Park which he sent to Hemingway was returned unopened, Mailer moved one step closer to becoming his own critic.

The remainder of Part 3 of Advertisements is devoted to Mailer's columns for The Village Voice. He had backed the paper financially from its inception in 1955 but had been too involved with The Deer Park to become interested in

it. Following the publication of the novel, he described himself as

anxious above all else to change a hundred self-defeating habits which locked my character into space too narrow for what I wanted to become, I was at the time like an actor looking for a rare role At heart, I wanted a war, and the Village was already glimpsed as the field for battle . . . the column began as the declaration of my private war on American journalism, mass communications, and the totalitarianism of totally pleasant personality (258-59).

The Village Voice columns gave birth to a progression of ideas and stylistic explorations which culminated in "The White Negro". The military metaphor of the columns as battleground with General Mailer advancing upon the enemy is furthered by their defensive tone. In retrospect Mailer realizes that his rage "against that national conformity which smothered creativity" and "delayed the self-creation of the race" as well as against his own failings was untempered by the "fine conscious nets of restraint, caution, tact, elegance, taste, even [honorable] inhibition" which made for "good style" (264). "By their inner history", Mailer concludes, "these columns are a debacle, because never before had I done so little where I committed so much" (265).

Mailer is very much concerned in these columns with his personal growth. In a manner characteristic of much of his earlier and all of his later work, he positions himself for a confrontation with an antithetical force in which

what is most vital to both sides is laid on the line. He opposes himself in these columns to the social structure as he conceives of it, his object to purge it of its waste. Now imagery of purgation and waste is becoming characteristic of Mailer's writing. The artistic use of biological functions is important to his conception of the need to revitalize the human body and spirit, to invert the perversions of a death-producing society. Obscenity, for example, is presented in one of the columns as a vital God-given means of expression which speeds the "true communication of soul to soul" and its suppression suppresses also the "creative spirit" (269).

Another of the columns' major concerns is with "truth". Mailer sees truth as Robert Browning did in The Ring and the Book, as the summary of the sentiments and actions of all those concerned with an event, which in turn creates other sentiments and actions. The artist has a special ability to imaginatively relate all of these "truths" into a whole. "The novelist trusts his 'vision'", Mailer tells us (281), and the reader is invited to as well.

The most important of The Village Voice columns is "The Hip and the Square" for in it Mailer begins to formulate his opposition to society into a metaphoric equivalent, the Hipster and his style of life. This subject was the end of his exploratory columns; it provided a positive embodiment

of his anti-social convictions and rebellious impulses. As Mailer begins to define it here, Hip is

an exploration into the nature of man . . . [its] ultimate tendency . . . to return man to the center of the universe rather than to continue his reduction into less and less of a biochemical mechanism . . . Hip is an American existentialism . . . based on a mysticism of the flesh, and its origins can be traced back into the instinctive apprehension and appreciation of existence which one finds in the Negro and the soldier, in the criminal psychopath and the dope addict and jazz musician, in the prostitute, in the actor, in the--if one can visualize such a possibility--in the marriage of the call-girl and the psychoanalyst It is a language to describe states of being which is as yet without its philosophical dictionary.

. . . Hip with its special and intense awareness of the present tense of life . . . has a view of life which is predicated on growth and the nuances¹⁶ of growth (292-93).

Hemingway's contribution to Hip lies in this emphasis on feeling all of the nuances of a situation.

The claims Mailer makes for Hip in this early expository essay are to be explored more fully in the work which follows, culminating in their fictional presentation in An American Dream. The hipster becomes for Mailer the agent for change, for bringing about the revolution of consciousness which he believes vital to the nation's survival. A revolution is violent by nature, and yet Mailer believes, as he states in his final column for The Village Voice, that "violence is better without than within, better as individual actions than as the collective murders of society, and if we have courage enough there is beauty beneath" (303).

Part 4 of Advertisements, entitled "Hipsters", contains the powerfully provocative essay, "The White Negro". In the "Sixth Advertisement For Myself" which precedes that essay, Mailer indicates that circumstances forced him "to begin the trip into the psychic wild of 'The White Negro'" and that the experience resulted in "one of the best things" he has done (310). We are not given the details of the self-exploration that produced the essay because Mailer believes that a factual account would strip him of the power "to project the best of one's imagination out into a creative space larger than the items of one's life" (310). We are reminded that Mailer up to this point views his past self as he would a fictional character. He stresses that from this point on, however, he is not sufficiently detached from the events of his life to report them to us. Here the book takes a new turn; we are informed that "The White Negro", "The Time of Her Time", and "Advertisements For Myself on the Way Out" are the "seeds" which give the book its significance. In a metaphor of creation, Mailer tells us that "seed" is "the end of the potentialities seen for oneself, and every organism creates its seed out of the experience of its past and its unspoken vision or curse upon the future" (310). Seed, therefore, is that connection between past, present, and future vital to progress.

The first of these seeds, "The White Negro", was

published as a separate work in 1957 but did not receive much attention until included in Advertisements. Reviews of the book tended to seize upon "The White Negro" as the core of the book and in fact to ignore or slight most of the other material.¹⁷ The essay is certainly the intellectual core of Advertisements and a considerable stylistic advance over earlier essays. However, the reason for the critical attention it received was that it advocated the violent overthrow of the American system--social, economic, and political. The essay was labelled irresponsible, dangerous, and insane. Attempts were made to dominate it intellectually, an approach Mailer had ridiculed in "The Man Who Studied Yoga". Those who sincerely attacked the essay's ideas, however, must have believed with Mailer that a man's writing can cause significant action by others. They were right by Mailer's standards to oppose what they considered profoundly dangerous. For Mailer, such an antithetical attack was a necessary step in promoting his ideas. The defeat of a worthy opponent can bring new vigor to one's cause. F.W. Dupee correctly perceived the dialectical nature of Hip, but imputed it to Mailer's inability to handle his material. To Dupee, Mailer "over-formulates Hip, schematizes it, makes its ways and words merely antithetical to those of its enemy the Square" ¹⁸ Likewise, Edmund Fuller notes that one is either a Hipster or a Square and questions whether there

are any in-betweens in Mailer's work.¹⁹

While much attention was paid the ideas, to my knowledge no one has noted the insidiousness of the form in which they are presented in "The White Negro". It is that of a formal essay, complete with epigraph, division into sections, and quotations from authoritative sources. The careful progression from a statement with which all must agree, i.e., that concentration camps were the result of the action of a totalitarian state, to the assumption that death is the end of all actions by societies, has been overlooked as has the presentation of opinion as fact, and the loaded language calculated to produce a given response--all standard techniques of propaganda.

Mailer establishes in the essay's first section that individualism has been a casualty of the Second World War and that man must live with the fact of his death by deus ex machina rather than as a consequence of his actions. The remainder of the essay is devoted to a description of the hipster, the antithesis to the movement of the age. Mailer now begins to create the myth of the hipster, who embodies not only the radical impulses in Mailer himself but also those of Natty Bumppo and his descendants. The hipster is one with the mythic American hero whose "essential nature" Lawrence described as "hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer."²⁰

In Mailer's schematism the hipster is an "American

existentialist" who lives with the imminence of death, isolates himself from society, explores "the rebellious imperatives of the self" and exhibits extraordinary courage. His intellectual antecedents Mailer traces to Lawrence, Henry Miller, Wilhelm Reich, and Hemingway; his embodiment to the ménage-à-trois of the bohemian, the juvenile delinquent and the Negro through the **media of drugs and jazz**. The white Negro is the synthesis of these various impulses. What that synthesis means ultimately to Mailer is revealed in the following passage:

incompatibles have come to bed, the inner life and the violent life, the orgy and the dream of love, the desire to murder and the desire to create, a dialectical conception of existence with a lust for power, a dark, romantic, and yet undeniably dynamic view of existence for it sees every man and woman as moving individually through each moment of life forward into growth or backward into death (316).

By bringing the buried self to consciousness, Hip enables one to grow toward wholeness. The schematizing of Hip is thus an important stage in Mailer's aesthetics of growth. Like his creator, the hipster is a navigator engaged in "codifying . . . the suppositions on which his inner universe is constructed" (316). He accomplishes this through self-analysis, "for if one is to change one's habits, one must go back to the source of their creation." He "seeks to find those violent parallels to the violent and often hopeless contradictions he knew as an infant and as a child" and "if he has the courage to meet the parallel situation at

the moment when he is ready, then he has a chance to act as he has never acted before . . . and so free himself to remake a bit of his nervous system" (320). This commonly accepted belief that one rids oneself of unhealthy repressions by acting them out is the groundwork for the provocative concept which follows: that the commission of murder may be necessary and indeed courageous to purge oneself of violence in order to leave oneself open for love. The extremity of contemporary man's condition requires extreme action in Mailer's view, and the logic of his presentation requires us to either accept or reject his thesis in full.

Love for the white Negro is "the search for an orgasm more apocalyptic than the one which preceded it" (321). By orgasm Mailer means an intense moment in which a little more of the mystery of the self is revealed to him. The "IT" which Lawrence speaks of, the fulfillment of which brings true liberty, may have been in Mailer's mind when he wrote the following:

to be with it is to have grace, is to be closer to the secrets of that inner unconscious life which will nourish you if you can hear it, for you are then nearer to that God which every hipster believes is located in the senses of his body, that trapped, mutilated and nonetheless megalomaniacal God who is It, who is energy, life, sex, force, the Yoga's prana, the Reichian's orgone, Lawrence's 'blood,' Hemingway's 'good,' the Shavian life-force; 'It'; God; not the God of the churches but the unachievable whisper of mystery within the sex, the paradise of limitless energy and perception just beyond the next wave of the next orgasm (324-25).

If paradise lies in "limitless energy and perception", each good orgasm brings a glimpse of it and provides faith in its existence. The apocalyptic orgasm that Mailer envisions as the end of the hipster's search is a state of being in which the mysteries of existence would be perpetually unfolded. This concept of Revelations is not remote from the Christian one. Mailer rejects the atheism of some European existentialists in favor of this vision of "the possibilities within death" opened by an intensified consciousness (316).

A secular corollary to the insight obtained through the good orgasm is that of the character and his context. In Hip, the context (by which I believe Mailer means all the nuances of a given situation) dominates the man "because his character is less significant than the context in which he must function" Man is "not only his character but his context, since the success or failure of an action in a given context reacts upon the character and therefore affects what the character will be in the next context. What dominates both character and context is the energy available at the moment of intense conflict" (327). Experience is thus cumulative, a line of movement but also a series of units. The idea is common enough and is present in Mailer's own work from its beginnings. It gains importance, however, from its central position in the existentialist philosophy which dominates all of Mailer's later work. Character in

such a philosophy is "perpetually ambivalent and dynamic" and enters into "an absolute relativity where there are no truths other than the isolated truths of what each observer feels at each instant of his existence" (327). This concept is what enables Mailer to assume many roles and positions however contradictory they may appear.

"The White Negro" concludes with a vision of the nature of society having been acted upon by Hip as a "gigantic synthesis of human action" in which we come to understand what leads to "our creation and disasters, our growth, our attrition, and our rebellion" (331). The difficulty of disagreeing with the desirability of this end lends strength to the essay. Despite some unevenness and a tendency toward vagueness, Mailer's "radical humanism" gains powerful expression in this essay. Self-confidence replaces defensiveness in the tone, as indication of the growing assurance of Mailer's style as he explores ideas which excite him with a sense of direction. The essay stands in relation to Advertisements as Advertisements does to his work as a whole: it is the culmination both stylistically and intellectually of a phase of Mailer's growth, encompassing his past work and leading toward that in the future.

The debate and interview which follow "The White Negro" in the collection add nothing to Mailer's style but explore the philosophy of Hip somewhat further. Each is a

dialectical exchange, a form which Mailer favors as a means of keeping him on his toes as well as giving him "a clear sense of the enemy". "Reflections on Hip" consists of an exchange of views with Jean Malaquais and Ned Polsky. Mailer is more specific in discussing the nature of the Hip revolution. He sees it as "moving not forward toward action and more equitable distribution [as the Marxist revolution was to do], but backward toward being and the secrets of human energy" (336). Instinct is to dominate consciousness in this neo-primitive state he envisions, and he believes that human nature is basically good and creative. He reiterates that we must develop through dialectics a view of man which embraces all contradictions. This concept, the goal of his aesthetics of growth, is worthy of a Renaissance humanist.

A 1958 interview with Richard G. Stern, called "Hip, Hell, and the Navigator", ends Part 4 of Advertisements. Stern's penetrating opening question asks whether Mailer advocates Hip or is simply describing a phenomenon. Mailer sidesteps the question, but his subsequent answers reveal, as do all of his writings on Hip, that he is instead creating a mythology which has little factual basis. He compares the hipster's "state of extreme awareness" with the novelist's ability to "illumine each line of his work with greatest intensity of experience" (350). So experience and expression are linked, and one writes more about a few experiences

in order to express their "nuances". In this way Hip "opens the possibility that the novel, along with many other art forms, may be growing into something larger rather than something smaller" (352). Other claims made for Hip in this interview are that it gives meaning and morality to our actions; that our actions are good or evil as our senses and instincts inform us (another outgrowth of Hemingway's code); and that Hip, in fact, is a religion in which man's fate is dependent upon God's fate and vice versa. What this interview reveals is that Mailer's mythology of Hip has cosmic proportions and that he has for the first time developed a vision large enough to give direction and room for growth to himself both as a man and an artist and to any others wishing to save themselves and their society from a painful and progressive death.

A mythology may be described as a system for explaining and ordering phenomena concerning human relationships with nature, the supernatural, and other human beings, and this is precisely what Mailer has formulated as Hip by the end of Part 4 of Advertisements. With certain adaptations, this mythology gives structure to his vision up to the present, and his aesthetics of growth lies at its core.

In Part 5, "Games and Ends", Mailer continues to define his mythology and its antithesis, here imaged as the "Wasp" way of life ("cancer has been their last contribution

to civilization" (357)) against which Hip must wage war. Robert A. Bone accuses Mailer of arrested development, claiming that Hip is an outgrowth of Mailer's war experience and that it is "a symptom, not a cure for our malaise."²¹ World War II surely confirmed Mailer's sense of the dialectical nature of things, but the earlier study of Marx laid the foundation for his thinking. The war metaphors which Mailer uses throughout Advertisements, as well as numerous other works, are a vital part of Mailer's "embattled vision", to borrow a phrase from Norman Podhoretz,²² and in that vision there is, for him, as much at stake as in Milton's vision of the war between God and Satan for possession of the universe.

The advertisement for Part 5 makes use of a war metaphor. Mailer divides the remainder of the book into three sections: the first a "restcamp" after the "patrol" through "The White Negro"; the second a "reconnaissance" into "another difficult terrain"; and the third a "forced march on the mind" (359).

The first contains three early short stories which we may skip over; a few "letters to the editor" which continue the attack begun in The Village Voice columns on the distortions and lies characteristic of the mass media; and a fragment of a play inadequately influenced by Beckett.

The second part contains "Notes Toward a Psychology

of the Orgy", which continues the polarization of Hip and Square by listing opposing characteristics of each. One interesting pair is the Hip "obeying the form of the curve" opposed to the Square "living in the cell of the square" (389). I noted earlier in this chapter the significance of these forms to Mailer: the curve's potential is the spiral.

A short essay entitled "A Note on Comparative Pornography" points out--before Vance Packard-- that the emphasis on sex in advertising makes sex just another commodity and is symptomatic of America's destructive national tendencies. "The heart of the insane", Mailer concludes, "lives in the wish to move away from life outside oneself, grow God-like in the vault of the brain, and then move on to give the schizophrenic's gift of life to what does not have life and never can" (396). This is real obscenity to Mailer, who defines the obscene as "that which is out of joint with nature" (397). The implications of this subject are explored further in An American Dream and especially in Why Are We in Vietnam?. Again, Mailer lays the groundwork for his future novels in Advertisements.

"From Surplus Value to the Mass-Media" is a dissertation on the Marxist theme that "profit must come from loss" whose thesis is that in twentieth-century capitalism a worker's leisure time is the target of exploitation and control rather than his working time, as was the case in

the last century. The mass-media now, therefore, hold the reins of power and the individual is thoroughly institutionalized. One notes in this essay the formative influence of Marx's vision of revolution on Mailer's way of thinking. The essay also anticipates Mailer's later attempts to use the mass-media to disseminate his own views. The next piece, "Sources--a Riddle in Psychic Economy", reveals that one of Mailer's ambitions is to unite the traditions of Marx and Freud in a synthesis he calls "psychic economy" which together with Hip is a step toward that "gigantic synthesis of human action" which Mailer envisions as the desired end of human progress. The emphasis in psychic economy is upon the subconscious human tendencies to which Mailer wishes to find the key.

Sharply contrasting with these lofty essays are two short poems. One of them, "I Got Two Kids and Another in the Oven", is a fair effort on the theme of new life created through the sexual act by uniting "flesh body will" (404).

Mailer also includes in this pôt pourri a segment from the play version of The Deer Park. Although he states here that he expects to have the play published in 1960, it was neither produced nor published until 1967. During the intervening years, Mailer wrestled with the play and its characters, trying to incorporate his changing ideas into them. The character of Marion Faye, particularly, took on

layers of meaning in the transition from the novel to the play, since he was Mailer's earliest portrayal in fiction of the hipster.

The second section of Part 5 also includes the evaluations of his contemporaries which I discussed in Chapter I, as well as an essay on Picasso in which Mailer observes that for Picasso "exploration is circular, it moves along the route of the association, and so any exploration of reality must travel not from object to object but from relation to relation" (425). This is true, of course, for himself as well.

The final section of the book, the "forced march on the mind", opens with the "Last Advertisement For Myself Before the Way Out", from which I quoted at length in Chapter I. It is here that Mailer reviews with bitterness the wasted talents of his and Hemingway's generations, castigates himself for his own failures, and ends on the hopeful note that the novel with which he currently is engaged will carry what the great writers have told us "another part of the way" (439). Aside from two short introductory comments, this is the last we hear of the authorial voice in Advertisements. The "Last Advertisement" reiterates Mailer's shifting dependence from early models and public opinion to himself. He knows he is not yet the hero America needs to unite itself ("I am still at this formal middle of my life a

creator of sentiments larger than my work"), but he has delineated one in the form of the hipster, who until he proves inadequate, metaphorically contains the elements Mailer believes can revitalize the America he cares so fiercely about. In his diagnosis of America's sickness and his prescriptions for recovery, Mailer is out of step with his own generation of writers, most of whom describe futile attempts by their protagonists to break out of the patterns woven by their pasts or at best the ironic attainment of a freedom they are not equipped to handle--Bellow, Malamud, Updike, Roth, Baldwin--the list of these writers is long and impressive. They are descendants of those American writers whom R.W.B. Lewis has grouped in "The Party of Irony"²³, while Mailer synthesizes in himself the concerns both of the Party of Irony and the Party of Hope: he does not merely long for a new Eden but actively seeks it through whatever means are available to him and believes in the possibility of its attainment.

Having led us along the winding spiral of his career, Mailer stakes the continuance of his progress as an artist on the three remaining pieces of Advertisements, parts of the projected novel calculated to be "the longest ball ever to go up into the accelerated hurricane air of our American letters." Although that novel was never completed, the three pieces are of interest in ascertaining the direction Mailer

expected his work to take following Advertisements and his growing self-confidence in it, won through the struggle with the enemy in himself whose defeat is the subject of Advertisements.

"The Time of Her Time" is a long story which may stand independent of the novel which was to contain it, more so than "The Man Who Studied Yoga". Interestingly, the story was omitted from the British edition of Advertisements, undoubtedly because of its sexual explicitness.²⁴ The narrator is the Sergius O'Shaugnessy we glimpse at the end of The Deer Park, who having learned from the bullfighters how to dominate fear and open the possibilities for growth, has opened his own "Escuela de Torear" in the Village.

The numerical symbology of the opening pages prepares for the orgasmic apocalypse which is the story's object. Sergius' room is one hundred feet long (the perfect whole), with nineteen windows on three of the walls and part of the fourth (potentially apocalyptic); twelve (the apocalyptic number) and divisions of it appear. Further, it is in spring that Sergius and Denise meet and on the third occasion of their love-making that Denise reaches **her** first orgasm through intercourse. Their sexual engagements are imaged as battles each wages on the body of the other for the victory of his style of life. Sergius is an existentialist qualified to instruct Denise in the art of living, while she is a Jewish

liberal pseudo-intellectual, a victim of psychoanalysis. She is also the "Jewish college girl from Brooklyn with a Master's degree" included as one of Sergius' bullfight students in The Deer Park (DP, 301). The magnitude of the battle is evidenced by Sergius' feeling that victory, that is, bringing Denise to orgasm, "would add to the panoplies of my ego some peculiar (but for me, valid) ingestion of her arrogance, her stubbornness, and her will--those necessary ingredients of which I could not yet have enough for my own ambitions." Defeat, on the other hand, would bring him "closer to a general depression, a fog bank of dissatisfaction with [him]self" (458), the familiar "grow or pay" theme in Mailer. Although Denise cannot fully appreciate the nuances of the situation that Sergius can, it is clear that she knows that if her masculine, aggressive will can be feminized by achieving orgasm, she will then enter "the time of her Time" when body, mind, and will are in phase with one another. What finally separates Denise from her past and gives her the terrifying freedom for which she hates Sergius are the whispered words which bring her to climax: "You dirty little Jew" (464). This sentence is as full of nuances as anything Mailer ever wrote.

The second half of the story moves with a rhythm of its own; it is the work of a mature, self-confident artist. As Howard Harper has perceptively remarked of the story's

style:

. . . [Mailer] has moved to a new synthesis of rhythm, sound, and emotional tones and overtones. The words are loaded with emotional as well as literal meaning, and with their vivid evocations of sounds, smells, tactile feelings, and motions--as well as the more conventional visual images--Mailer achieves an almost overwhelming sense of the psychological totality of his situation.²⁵

"The Time of Her Time", then, achieves on a small scale what Mailer wishes to accomplish on a grand scale. The two remaining pieces depend more heavily on the context of the projected novel in which they were to be included than "The Time of Her Time". One, the poem "Dead Ends", treats the theme of the cancerous waste of narcissism and homosexuality in a form different from others in which Mailer has expressed similar ideas. However much he rails against jargon of any kind, which he considers mechanistic, this poem suffers from a concentrated overdose of his own jargon.

It is significant that Advertisements ends with a beginning: the "Prologue to a Long Novel" entitled "Advertisements For Myself on the Way Out". From the title alone it is clear that Mailer considers his new novel to be an outgrowth of the book he ends with this piece. The prologue is a fictional summation of the style of life and art which Mailer has worked up to in Advertisements. It is told by a first-person narrator resembling the navigator who writes the novel of our subconscious minds. The character of the navigator cannot be pinned down; like the Devil, he

can assume all shapes and like God, he is all-knowing. The narrator also theorizes about Time, a concept of great significance to Mailer since The Deer Park. Time is seen here as growth, as the "natural unwinding" of a spiral, as the connections forged in human relationships. Time is either potential or dynamic and each individual follows his own Time spiral. As with his concept of God, Mailer makes Time wholly dependent upon human action.

Marion Faye appears to be the novel's hero, and like a true Mailer hero Faye is characterized as "Napoleonic" in ambition, "wide as the Renaissance" in talents, with "instincts about the nature of growth, a lover's sense of the moment of crisis, [knowing,] perhaps as well as anyone alive, how costly is defeat when it is not soothed by greater consciousness, and how wasteful is the profit of victory when there is not the courage to employ it" (476). Marion has reached a crucial moment in his life, a typically extreme situation in Mailer: he must decide to murder a former friend or to wither away by stifling the desire.

The action of the novel is to derive from a gathering of people of all types in Faye's gothic Provincetown home where murder, suicide, and orgy are to engage them and the reader in the most vital mysteries of the self. As projected, the novel is most ambitious, the style of the narration is as "self-consciously attractive and formal" (219) as the

first draft of The Deer Park, and perhaps it is well that Mailer abandoned the book. It would surely have occupied all of his middle years, and he would probably have outgrown it before it was completed. And yet its very ambition is proof of Mailer's victory over his defeats and frustrations. Like the young man who wished to write the novel of World War II, Mailer still aims for the gold medal, but, as we have seen, his motives and ends have grown tremendously in these years. Thus, Advertisements For Myself is the culmination of the first important phase of Mailer's career. It is a dramatic account of the manner in which the man and the style come together and of the potential released by the synthesis not only for Mailer himself but by analogy for all mankind as well.

FOOTNOTES

¹Marvin Mudrick, "Mailer and Styron: Guests of the Establishment", Hudson Review, 17 (Autumn, 1964), 361.

²Barry H. Leeds, The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer, p. 224.

³Robert W. Lawler, "Norman Mailer: The Connection of New Circuits", Diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1969, p. 86.

⁴Carroll, p. 72.

⁵Cf. Norman Mailer, The Naked and the Dead, p. 443 (all further references are to this text whose title will be abbreviated to ND); Adv, pp. 389, 425, 476; Carroll, ibid.

⁶According to J.E. Cirlot's A Dictionary of Symbols, the spiral traditionally is "a symbol of growth", is "essentially macrocosmic", is an attribute of power, and "may symbolize the relationship between the circle and the centre. For a spiral is associated with the idea of the dance, and especially with primitive dances of healing and incantation, when the pattern of movement develops as a spiral curve. Such spiral movements . . . may be regarded as figures intended to induce a state of ecstasy and to enable man to escape from the material world and to enter the beyond, through the 'hole' symbolized by the mystic Centre" (pp. 290-92).

⁷Norman Mailer, The Deer Park, p. 318. All further page references are to this text whose title will be abbreviated to DP.

⁸Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, pp. 149-65.

⁹Richard Foster, Norman Mailer, p. 26.

¹⁰Cf. John W. Aldridge, After the Lost Generation, pp. 135-36; and Willard Thorp, American Writing in the Twentieth Century, p. 146, among others.

¹¹Cf. Ihab Hassen, Radical Innocence, p. 141; and Walter B. Rideout, The Radical Novel in the United States, pp. 270-73, among others.

¹²Cf. Max F. Schulz's discussion of Barbary Shore as a modern Purgatorio in Radical Sophistication, pp. 73-81.

¹³Leeds, pp. 66-67.

¹⁴Norman Mailer, Barbary Shore, p. 223. All further references are to this text whose title will be abbreviated to BS.

¹⁵Norman Mailer, "Some Dirt in the Talk: A Candid History of an Existential Movie Called Wild 90", Esquire, December, 1967, pp. 265-66.

¹⁶"Nuances" was originally misprinted as "nuisances", an error preserved with explanation in Mailer's text.

¹⁷Cf. the following: Robert A. Bone, "Private Mailer Re-enlists", Dissent, 7 (Autumn, 1960), 389-94; Paul Breslow, "The Hipster and the Radical", Studies on the Left, 1 (Spring, 1960), 102-05; Stuart Hampshire, "Mailer United", The New Statesman, October 13, 1961, pp. 515-16.

¹⁸F.W. Dupee, "The American Norman Mailer", Commentary, February, 1960, p. 131.

¹⁹Edmund Fuller, Man in Modern Fiction, p. 160.

²⁰Lawrence, p. 62.

²¹Bone, p. 394.

²²Norman Podhoretz, "Norman Mailer: The Embattled Vision" in Recent American Fiction, ed. Joseph J. Waldmeir, pp. 185-202.

²³R.W.B. Lewis, The American Adam, p. 7.

²⁴Hampshire, p. 515.

²⁵Howard M. Harper, Jr., Desperate Faith: A Study of Bellow, Salinger, Mailer, Baldwin and Updike, pp. 118-19.

II

AN AMERICAN DREAM

Mailer's growth in the period following the publication of Advertisements For Myself to the appearance of the final version of An American Dream in 1965 may be characterized as that from young adulthood to full maturity. Personal and artistic failures marred the years from late 1959 to 1962. Seemingly testing the theory of violence developed in "The White Negro", Mailer stabbed his second wife, Adele Morales, at a party held to celebrate his candidacy for the mayoralty of New York. Committed to Bellvue Hospital, Mailer made an eloquent courtroom plea for his own sanity and was released. The incident left deep psychic scars, however, and of course ended for the time his political ambitions. A book of poems published in 1962, Deaths For the Ladies, and Other Disasters, proved aptly named. Neither the themes nor the forms of these poems proved significant advances beyond what Mailer had already accomplished in Advertisements, although the book is not without merit if only because it represents another of Mailer's attempts to become the well-rounded Renaissance man.

Much of his writing during this period was to be found in magazines, including a monthly column for Esquire from November, 1962 to December, 1963, entitled "The Big

Bite". Some of these columns and other magazine pieces were collected as The Presidential Papers, published in 1963. More will be said of this volume later. Late in 1963 Mailer began work on An American Dream, and it occupied the center of his attention through 1965.

In Advertisements For Myself Mailer announced that he "would try to hit the longest ball ever to go up into the accelerated hurricane air of our American letters". The long novel he then envisioned as "the longest ball" he set aside in 1963 to begin work on An American Dream. The significance Mailer attached to that novel may be seen in a passage from Cannibals and Christians, quoted in the introduction. What America needed, Mailer argued, was a "single great work which would clarify a nation's vision of itself" in the manner of Tolstoy and Stendhal. Dreiser tried and failed, presumably coming close in An American Tragedy, and since then, Mailer charged, the novelist's vision has been partial, a microcosm contained in a metaphor, rather than "a creation equal to the phenomenon of the country itself" (CC, 99). Even Hemingway and Faulkner "had given up trying to do it all" (99). The magnum opus which Mailer intended to write, one may conclude, was to be the nation's as well as his own. To a practical mind the immensity of Mailer's ambition seems self-defeating if not absurdly grandiose. And yet An American Dream is surely among those American novels from the

Leatherstocking Tales to Absalom, Absalom! which help to clarify our vision of America's national self both past and present, ideally and realistically. It will be a major argument of this chapter that Mailer's novel has significantly enlarged the literature of the American Dream both in form and substance.

If one may gauge the force of a novel by the quantity of criticism it provokes, An American Dream is easily Mailer's most powerful book to date. While most criticism of it has been either favorable with reservations or extremely condemnatory, the growing number of Mailer scholars find deep significance in the novel. As one such scholar has expressed it, An American Dream "aims at fiction's ultimate virtue: the rendering of the uncommunicable"1

It is his vision of the uncommunicable dream-life of the nation in the middle of the twentieth-century that Mailer has rendered in An American Dream. The novel's title suggests that its substance is a version of the central myth in American literature, that of the dream of forsaking past corruptions to begin life anew, to make a new life in a new place. Few of America's major novelists have not recorded the failure of that dream for whatever reasons they envision--the inherent evil in man, the encroachment of the machine and "civilization"; few have found the dream compatible with experience. Typically the American hero either lights out

for the territory or is forced to compromise his expectations through an early death, madness, or a bitter old age. The American experience as recorded by our best novelists kills innocence and leaves in its place an aching sense of loss insufficiently soothed by the wisdom gained from the experience. Perhaps Mailer alone of our novelists has a vision of America's descent into the "heart of darkness", of its grappling with the Devil and of its emergence with a sense of fresh possibility gained from this most elemental battle. America has long known how to murder, let her now learn how to create, Mailer seems to be saying. In addition to rendering the past and present American experience, Mailer offers an imaginative possibility for the future, an American Dream offered in place of what has become the American Dream. In terms of Northrop Frye's cycle of myths, Mailer steps from the anti-heroic ironic literary mode of his contemporaries to begin a new cycle in the mythic-cum-romantic mode in which gods play a part and the hero is a human being who "moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended".²

Mailer presented his conception of the American Dream in conventional terms in "Superman Comes to the Supermarket", retitled "The Existential Hero" for The Presidential Papers. "We have used up our frontier", he tells us, "but the psychological frontier . . . is still alive with untouched

possibilities and dire unhappy all-but-lost opportunities." Typically he sees these possibilities in terms of combat. American politics have had "little to do with the real subterranean life of America", Mailer asserts, so that an "army which would dare to enter the valley in force might not only determine a few new political formations, but indeed could create more politics itself" (PP, 37). In other words, politics, like American life generally, has ceased to be adventurous, failed to absorb the psychological changes which have occurred over the years. I quote again the passage from this essay which could serve as the epigraph to An American Dream:

Since the First World War Americans have been leading a double life, and our history has moved on two rivers, one visible, the other underground; there has been the history of politics which is concrete, factual, practical and unbelievably dull if not for the consequences of the actions of some of these men; and there is a subterranean river of untapped ferocious, lonely and romantic desires, that concentration of ecstasy and violence which is the dream life of the nation (PP, 51).

A fall took place in our century "from individual to mass man", and America was more vulnerable to "homogenization" than Europe because comparably rootless. "Yet", Mailer goes on,

America was also the country in which the dynamic myth of the Renaissance--that every man was potentially extraordinary--knew its most passionate persistence. Simply, America was the land where people still believed in heroes It was a country which had grown by the leap of one hero past another And when the West was filled, the expansion turned

inward, became part of an agitated, overexcited, superheated dream life. The film studios threw up their searchlights as the frontier was finally sealed, and the romantic possibilities of the old conquest of land turned into a vertical myth, trapped within the skull, of a new kind of heroic life And this myth, that each of us was born to be free, to wander, to have adventure, and to grow on the waves of the violent, the perfumed, and the unexpected, had a force which could not be tamed It was as if the message in the labyrinth of the genes would insist that violence was locked with creativity, and adventure was the secret of love (PP, 52-53).

Over the years, Mailer's thesis goes, politics and the myth, or the reality and the dream, had hopelessly diverged. What was needed to reunite them again was a hero to embody the whole life of the nation (cf. pp. 23-24 above). Should such a hero be lacking, the result would be "a totalitarianism of the psyche by the stultifying techniques of the mass media" (57) and eventually national death through destruction from within and without, America's enemies taking advantage of her weakness.

The essay establishes the hope that John Kennedy would be such a hero; the book itself is a testament to Kennedy's failure to measure up to Mailer's conception of him, both in life and because of death. The Presidential Papers were written as a kind of Renaissance didactic manual to refine the inherently noble qualities in those who were to hold the reins of power. For the powerful attract the attention of the gods, Mailer believes. "Ultimately a hero is a man who would argue with the gods, and so awaken devils

to contest his vision. The more a man can achieve, the more he may be certain that the devil will inhabit a part of his creation", Mailer contends (PP, 8).

Mailer's vision of American possibility takes its inception, then, from two historical periods, both of which were uniquely vital and creative ages when the limits of human possibility were explored: The Renaissance and America before the closing of the frontier. It is Mailer's belief that such an age is possible again in America provided that she finds a hero with wit, passion and grace whose life the nation may image.

In the opening pages of An American Dream, we are presented with the current version of the American Dream, transmogrified from its original Edenic associations through the late nineteenth-century post-frontier vertical myth presented in the Horatio Alger novels, i.e., that hard work, clean living and a pinch of luck are all one needs in a land of opportunity--provided that one is a "Wasp"--to move up the ladder of success toward wealth and power. What is more likely in modern America is the attainment of wealth and power not through one's own efforts but through association by marriage or inheritance. Stephen Richards Rojack equates himself with John F. Kennedy because both have arrived at their positions through two similar routes. One is the ladder-of-success of the Harvard-educated war hero-turned-

Congressman, the other route by association with wealth and power--Kennedy through inheritance and Rojack through marriage to Deborah Caughlin Mangarvidi Kelly, whose ancestry denotes the melting-pot metaphor of America itself. Kennedy had continued along the obvious lines of the transmogrified Horatio Alger myth--that any rich son of a Catholic immigrant has a chance to be President of the United States. Mailer had already argued in The Presidential Papers that Kennedy's brand of heroism was lacking a vital ingredient: the imaginative power to act as a catalyst to unite the subterranean America with the conventional one. His purpose in thus establishing Rojack's similarities to Kennedy is to emphasize this crucial difference, to propose Rojack as a possible hero and through the act of writing the novel to attempt to make him a surrogate hero for the failed Kennedy and for Mailer himself. The novel in this light may be considered a growth experience for its author as well as a vision of the possibilities for growth for the nation itself.

Rojack is established from the beginning of the novel as an existentialist whose essential difference from Kennedy is that he has a sense of the abyss, of "magic, dread, and the perception of death" as "the roots of motivation"³, whereas Kennedy in all probability "never saw the abyss" (10) Mailer's sense of the possibility for heroism in Advertisements, it will be remembered, lay in the hipster. As has been seen

in The Presidential Papers, however, Mailer came to believe that America needed a hero who could lead a whole nation, not a divided one, a hero with a face and a personality to personify the "large historic ideas" which come to power (PP, 16), a hero out in the open who could bring the enemy out in the open, because "when no personality embodies [an idea], no other personality may contest it" (PP, 16).

Although the hipster might represent to Mailer an attractive alternative to America's present direction, he has no means of obtaining power, since the collective effort of an effective rebellion is not in his nature. "All heroes are leaders", Mailer tells us (PP, 16). They are capable of attaining and holding power and of representing their ideas. The channels of power being what they are, the practical solution would be to elect as President an heroic leader. And heroes are made, not born, in Mailer's canon; in fact they make themselves, they are existentialists. "Existential politics", Mailer tells us, "is rooted in the concept of the hero, it would argue that the hero is the one kind of man who never develops by accident, that a hero is a consecutive set of brave and witty self-creations" (PP, 16). "The basic argument" of existential politics, he goes on, is that "if there is a strong ineradicable strain in human nature, one must not try to suppress it or anomaly, cancer, and plague will follow. Instead one must find an art into which it can

grow" (PP, 35). Following his own argument, Mailer substitutes for the ineffectual hipster the existentialist who can make himself grow. The concept is a key one, not only for an understanding of An American Dream but also for Mailer's future artistic development. "If you can't find a hero, make one," goes the theory, "and if you can't make him into a hero, make yourself into one." Stephen Richards Rojack is Mailer's most significant attempt to create a hero other than himself.

So Rojack at the outset separates himself from the "found" hero, Kennedy. He records for us at the book's beginning the key experience which turned him into an existentialist. It occurred during the war on a night with a full moon. Some mysterious power, referred to as "it" or "the grace" entered Rojack and led him to kill four German machine-gunners. The fourth soldier confronted him and forced Rojack to look into his eyes, containing knowledge which went "back all the way to God" (12). Rojack faltered before the soldier's stare and the mysterious presence deserted him because of his cowardice. Later Rojack realizes that the eyes "had come to see what was waiting on the other side and they told me then that death was a creation more dangerous than life" (14). This is the glimpse of the abyss which remained with him as the authentic experience of his life, while the pattern he followed after the war, that of the conventional

twentieth-century American Dream, proved false. Out of his experience he had developed his thesis that "magic, dread, and the perception of death were the roots of motivation", but he had not tested the thesis further. Instead, he became a "professor of existential psychology", attempting to teach his thesis to others while sensing that only through experiencing it could one know its authenticity. Having arrived at the conclusion that he is a failure (although he has a Ph.D., a full professorship, a popular television show, and a rich wife), Rojack gets down to basics. He wishes a more authentic self, one in line with the one meaningful experience in his life, and that self is obtainable only through an act of violence which wrenches it free of the false self and allows it to create itself anew. Suicide is the only other alternative Rojack sees, for he cannot continue with the roles he has been playing.

The strongest tie to his old life is his relationship with his wife, Deborah. Like the "bitch goddess" Leslie Fiedler has shown us to be characteristic in modern American literature,⁴ Deborah has worked at psychologically castrating Rojack, but yet he is so bound to her by the ferocity of both his love and his hate that the only way to be free of her was either to take his own life or hers. He could not escape from her to a far place as could his mythic predecessors, Rip Van Winkle or Huck Finn. Like Jay Gatsby,

Rojack's creation of himself in his own image exposes the newborn self to the extreme dangers of a corrupt environment, and the unfit are either killed like Gatsby or, knowing evil, search for a new environment capable of sustaining life, like Rojack.

Rojack's narration of present events begins with an experience on a friend's balcony in which the moon, which throughout the novel lights up Rojack's perceptions of death and of the depths of his own being, reflects his suicidal desires; since his life is deadening, perhaps he should give it up before it is wholly dead and save his soul from extinction. Mailer's belief is that the soul migrates after death, unless one has killed it through a cowardly, suppressive existence. By entertaining the idea of suicide, Rojack can feel all that is noble in himself, his "courage", "wit", "ambition and hope" rising to the moon, while "a growth against the designs of [his] organs", a cancerous growth, begins in his body (20). This is Rojack's second authentic experience. His choices have been narrowed down quite literally to life or death. The benefit of the experience is that he has been stripped of his trappings and is in touch with his deepest being. Throughout the novel from this point on Rojack hears a voice in his mind whenever he must make a vital choice. The voice is either that navigator at the seat of our being with which we are by now familiar or the

voice of old, deadened habit, and Rojack must learn to listen to the one and deny the other. The first represents the subconscious, instinctual life in tune with the senses. It is like the guide in a dream-vision who must be trusted in peril. Rojack's progress from this point on is developed in terms of a series of tests in which he must make the right choices with or without the aid of the voices or pay for his mistakes. Mailer's organizing principle and theme in this novel as in so much of his work is "grow or pay".

The movement of An American Dream may be seen as a spiral similar to that of Advertisements For Myself. The action of the novel, concentrated into a period of approximately thirty-two hours, or, more significantly, two nights and a day, is exemplary of Mailer's concept of time as "the connection of new circuits", for time is used here symbolically, as in a dream, rather than literally. It is foolish to complain, as some reviewers have, that the novel's action could not realistically have taken place in such a short time span.

On another level, the novel as originally written was a race against clock time, for Mailer wrote it in eight installments for Esquire magazine.⁵ Although the material was considerably rewritten for the hardback edition, the tight episodic structure of the novel was retained. Mailer looked upon the serial form as a test of his imaginative and

writing powers, although he did not at the outset expect that the book would have "the huge proportions and extreme ambition" of the big book described in Advertisements For Myself.⁶

Like the novel itself, then, its potential hero was to bloom overnight. Following the balcony scene, Rojack ventures into the late March night air. The season obviously is ripe for a rebirth. His first action, after having described the parasitic nature of his relationship with Deborah--she "occupie[s] [his] center" (32)--is to telephone his wife and to be drawn to her by the residual force he must overcome. His senses still sharp from the balcony episode, Deborah's apartment impresses him as a perfumed jungle, which it proves to be. Deborah is a powerful adversary, the Devil's child we come to learn, with all of his subtlety and strength to overcome. Her malignity is palpable to Rojack and the inevitable battle to the death ensues. Deborah is described as a bull, in a reversal of male and female roles, who tries to "mangle" Rojack's "root" (35). As he succeeds in strangling her, he has a vision of "heaven", "some quiver of jeweled cities shining in the glow of a tropical dusk" like the New Jerusalem or the Renaissance vision of the New World. On an allegorical level, Rojack's action is equivalent to the American Revolution, while on a mythic level, he is reborn. A "new grace" infuses him, his "flesh seem[s] new". Now the newborn soul, created through the act of murdering

another, must try to survive in a hostile environment. If Deborah's murder is the historical equivalent of the American Revolution, Rojack's subsequent action is conducted in the present, in the America which has become as corrupt as the old world. Brom Weber has observed that unlike most novels, in An American Dream

the climatic moment occurs at the beginning; the processes, concepts, and values of reason are literally and symbolically destroyed at that stage. Thereafter only the psychic growth of Rojack is consequential; his perceptions must create a world where before there was merely arid thought disguising nothingness.⁷

The world to be created is the jeweled city in the fertile tropics as opposed to the neon city in the arid desert which is Hell.

The metaphoric level which Mailer develops in this novel runs parallel to the literal level, as in a medieval dream-vision, and the two levels constantly enrich one another with each detail contributing to the total pattern. If Deborah is evil and corruption, all that is associated with her is corrupt as well: the Catholic Church, the family fortune imaged as "the filthy-lucred wealth of all the world" (38), her father the Devil and the incestuous child they presumably beget. Not content, as he suspects his contemporaries are, to write a novel which is only "a paw of the beast" (CC, 99), Mailer heaps metaphor upon metaphor in an attempt at "a creation equal to the phenomenon of the

country itself", the Great American Novel.

The war between good and evil for possession of America is central to Mailer's vision. Remembering an earlier conversation with Deborah, Rojack emphasizes this elemental nature of the American experience. "I know that I am more good and more evil than anyone alive", Deborah tells Rojack, "but which was I born with, and what came into me?" "I'm evil if truth be told", she goes on, "But I despise it, truly I do. It's just that evil has power." "Which is a way of saying", Rojack interprets, "goodness was imprisoned by evil." It has long been the sad theme of American literature and in turn the oldest story of man that the serpent has entered the garden. What Mailer provides for us in Rojack is a confrontation with the serpent and a chance to make good as powerful as evil. Mailer's perception of God and the Devil as warring but equal visions of the universe adds dimension to Rojack's struggle. Good is not inevitably doomed as in Hawthorne or his meeker descendant, John Updike. Now that Rojack has attracted the attention of the gods by taking life and death into his own hands, they will act out their war through him. So Rojack's fate is that of God as well.

Rojack awakes from resting beside Deborah's body to a rainbow, like a covenant, at "the edge of [his] vision" (41). A heightened awareness, similar to that obtained

through drugs, and a feeling of grace remain with him after the murder, evidence of the rightness of his choice. Through the defeat of his worthy opponent, "what was good in her had been willed to [him]" (43). He is directed by a messenger from his subconscious to engage in sex with Deborah's German maid, Ruta, whose name suggests the female complement to what he calls his "root" or sexual organ. Sex to Mailer, we may remember, is a metaphor for creation or destruction. This is precisely the choice Rojack must make in his bout with Ruta: to either leave his seed in her anus, the Devil's "empty tomb", or her vagina, the Lord's "chapel". His inner voice directs him to the chapel, but on impulse he chooses the tomb. He has a "vision immediately after of a huge city in the desert, in some desert, was it a place on the moon? For the colors had the unreal pastel of a plastic and the main street was flaming with light at five A.M." (49). The city is Las Vegas, America's Hell in the desert, not the jeweled tropical city Rojack envisioned at Deborah's death. Barry H. Leeds, with whose general approach to this novel I am in accord, attributes this choice to Rojack's need of "the evil within himself in order to combat the evil beseiging him in the world" (Leeds, p. 126). The implicit significance of this statement in terms of American literature is that while the American hero's typical reaction to initiation into the evils of adulthood or "civilized" society is madness, the

desire to escape or a debilitating assimilation, Mailer's hero must learn to handle evil not simply to survive but in order to become good and to create goodness around him. Leeds and others have compared Rojack's progress to a pilgrimage, and in the exemplum of a pilgrimage the pilgrim's success or failure is the possibility of the reader's own. As in the myth of the fortunate fall, goodness cannot be preserved without a knowledge of evil, and true innocence is ignorance. Rojack's experiences subsequent to his rebirth at Deborah's death test his ability not to overcome temptations but to combat evil itself, as a type of St. George.

Under the power gained through leaguings with the Devil, Rojack returns to the scene of the crime. Strong desires to mutilate and feast upon Deborah's body, like a primitive ingesting his victim's courage by eating his heart, are restrained. Instead, the navigator, or "messenger" as this force is called in the novel, challenges Rojack to take the "boldest" (53) route by throwing Deborah's body out of the tenth-story window and making her death appear a suicide. What is boldest about this choice lies in Rojack's combating American society's most basic function, the protection of the lives of its citizens, while undermining its enforcement of this function through a lie. Ironically, society's corruption is underscored by Rojack's choice, for normally he would have been punished for an act which society

labels a crime, whereas Rojack accomplished a good by destroying Deborah's evil. Further, Rojack is later allowed to go free because the authorities cannot be certain that he is without mighty political power.

Needing another injection of gulle in order to deal with the police, Rojack returns to Ruta for a quick sexual bout. This time, however, he believes that a force within her emplants his seed in her womb, probably as payment of a life to the Devil for the life Rojack has taken from him. However, this does not prove to be adequate payment.

Rojack is now able to perform in the manner expected of him while retaining a clear mind. During interrogation, he attributes to Deborah one of Mailer's own views on the state of the soul. One may choose to commit suicide if his soul "is in danger of being extinguished", because "if the soul is extinguished in life, nothing passes on into Eternity when you die" (68). In an essay entitled "The Metaphysics of the Belly", included both in The Presidential Papers and Cannibals and Christians, Mailer explores the relationship between the soul and the being it inhabits. A being by his definition is "anything which lives and still has the potentiality to change, to change physically and to change morally." Soul, in contrast, is "what continues to live after we are dead." It enters into a type of marriage relationship with the body it enters. Each may affect the other; they may

"grow together or apart", be good or bad for each other, and the soul is "changed by its existence in the world" for better or for worse (PP, 318-19).

In projecting such a view onto Deborah's action, Rojack almost comes to believe that what he says is true. His story also postulates that Deborah committed suicide because she had contracted cancer, a Mailer metaphor with which we are by now familiar. An autopsy corroborates that much of Rojack's story and confirms physically Deborah's corruption.

Throughout these experiences, Rojack maintains a state of heightened awareness. His senses, particularly the **olfac-**tory, operate psychically. A passage following his interrogation illustrates the degree to which his senses resemble those of a primitive, an infant, or, in Mailer's chosen metaphor, an animal:

Like a bird indeed in a cage in a darkened room, the passing flare of light from outside gave some memory of the forest, and I felt myself searing out on the beating of my heart as if a climax of fear had begun which might race me through swells of excitement until everything burst, the heart burst, and I flew out to meet my death.

. . . I knew at last the sweet panic of an animal who is being tracked, for if danger were close, if danger came in on the breeze, and one's nostrils had an awareness of the air as close as that first touch of a tongue on your flesh, there was still such a tenderness for the hope one could stay alive. Something came out of the city like the whispering of a forest, and on the March night's message through the open window I had at that instant the first smell of spring, that quiet instant, so like the first moment of love one feels in a woman who has until

then given no love (74-75).

By becoming natural, that is, in touch with his own nature, Rojack is in touch with the natural world as well. Although cities have replaced forests, communication of beings to their natural environment is still possible through intense effort. The quoted passage further stresses through the two similes of sex and love the creative nature of Rojack's new being.

Temporarily free of Deborah's domination and his own fear, Rojack compares himself to a creature who "took a leap over the edge of mutation" and having "crossed a chasm of time" was now "some new breed of man" (80). This concept of the creation of the self is very much the subject of this middle section of the novel. And like Adam, the new Rojack is incomplete with a mate. The passage in which this dawns upon him is not in the least subtle. While trying to keep his new self intact under the police interrogation and his own weakness which compelled him "to cry out that I too was insane and my best ideas were poor, warped, distorted, and injurious to others", Rojack asks God for a sign, "crying it into the deeps of myself as if I possessed all the priorities of a saint." He then "looked up with conviction and desperation sufficient to command a rainbow, but there was nothing which caught my eye in the room but the long blonde hair of Cherry standing across the floor . . . the dread lifted even as I stood up and once again I felt a force in my body . . .

and a voice inside me said, 'Go to the girl'" (86-88).

As her name indicates, there is something virginal and as American as cherry pie about Cherry, despite the sordidness of her past. Her Southern family background includes incest, suicide, and madness as in the Faulknerian version of the failed American dream, and her former lovers include members of the Mafia and a black musician. Cherry too is a murderer, having arranged for the removal of the boyfriend whom she believed the cause of her sister's suicide. Cherry's wide experiences make her something of a representative American and therefore a candidate for spiritual renewal. While watching her nightclub act, Rojack establishes a psychic control over Cherry. He shoots an imaginary arrow into her womb and is nauseated by the sickness it releases. Like Error in the first book of The Fairie Queene, Rojack vomits forth all the illness within himself:

violations, the rot and gas of compromise, the stink of old fears, mildew of discipline, all the biles of habit and the horrors of pretense I felt like some gathering wind which drew sickness from the lungs and livers of others and passed them through me and up and out into the water if the murderer were now loose in me, well, so too was a saint of sorts, a minor saint no doubt, but free at last to absorb the ills of others and regurgitate them forth, ah yes, this was communion . . . (98).

A feeling of peace follows, expressed in this surprising simile: "Nausea faded like the echo of a locomotive", surely an unusual image for a contemporary American novelist but characteristic of nineteenth-century writers, as Leo Marx

has shown us in The Machine in the Garden. The locomotive is an anti-pastoral symbol, the literal "machine in the garden" of America, and here Mailer removes it from his creation. He removes as well the condition of the Sartrean existentialist as he contemplates his terrifying freedom--nausea. Rojack's growing self-assurance results not so much from his action in the novel as from his author's vision of his eventual end, that is, of the metaphorical significance attached to his actions. The making of a viable hero to serve as an exemplum at this stage of Mailer's thinking is still the province of the novelist-creator. The voices or instincts which lead Rojack to the actions he takes emanate from the Creator of Being who is Mailer and only God by analogy.

The major test of Rojack's potential for heroism lies in the strength of his love of and loyalty to Cherry. Her kernel of virtue amid the accumulations of corruption is more assumed than demonstrated. As she is the representative American who may be saved by Rojack's heroism, she is also a metaphor for America itself and of its possible survival if its core of goodness is strong enough to combat the evil which has enclosed it.

Cherry, too, is a proponent of Mailer's suicide theory, of dying while there is something to attach one's soul to on the other side, whereas Rojack, now experienced in resisting

the suicidal impulse, is characterized by Cherry as an "optimist" for his belief in the gain to one's strength in choosing to live. But Rojack still dreads death. The moon is to be full for three more days, signifying that Rojack is a type of Christ who must conquer death in that symbolic length of time. The way to life is through the courageous love of Cherry.

Rojack's initiation into love is conducted amidst a carefully constructed environment. The physical surroundings are odious; Cherry's apartment is the one in which her sister committed suicide. The time, appropriately, is dawn. Rojack and Cherry begin by being truthful with each other, then start to make love, not "as lovers, more like animals in a quiet mood":

Nothing was loving in her; no love in me; we paid our devotions in some church no larger than ourselves Fatigue had left me all but dead--I had no brain left, no wit, no pride, no itch, no snarl, it was as if the membrane of my past had collected like a dead skin to be skimmed away (120-21).

Note the Lawrencean metaphor for the American need to slough off the past. And the religious implications of the act are stronger in the passage which follows. Rojack removes Cherry's diaphragm, "that corporate rubbery obstruction I detested so much", and the decision to create more life through love is made:

I was passing through a grotto of curious lights, dark lights, like colored lanterns beneath the sea, a glimpse of that quiver of jeweled arrows, that heavenly city which had appeared as Deborah was expiring in the lock of my arm, and a voice like a child's whisper on the breeze came up so faint I

could hardly hear, "Do you want her?" it asked. "Do you really want her, do you want to know something about love at last?" and I desired something I had never known before, and answered; it was as if my voice had reached to its roots; and, "Yes," I said, "of course I do, I want love," but like an urbane old gentleman, a dry tart portion of my mind added, "Indeed, and what has one to lose?" and then the voice in a small terror, "Oh, you have more to lose than you have lost already, fail at love and you lose more than you can know." "And if I do not fail?" I asked back. "Do not ask," said the voice, "choose now!" and some continent of dread speared wide in me, rising like a dragon, as if I knew the choice was real, and in a lift of terror I opened my eyes and her face was beautiful beneath me in that rainy morning, her eyes were golden with light, and she said, "Ah, honey, sure," and I said sure to the voice in me, and felt love fly in like some great winged bird, some beating of wings at my back, and felt her will dissolve into tears, and some great deep sorrow like roses drowned in the salt of the sea came flooding from her womb and washed into me like a sweet honey of balm for all the bitter sores of my soul and for the first time in my life without passing through fire of straining the stones of my will, I came up from my body rather than down from my mind, I could not stop, some shield broke in me, bliss, and the honey she had given me I could only give back, all sweets to her womb, all come in her cunt.

"Son of a bitch," I said, "so that's what it's all about." And my mouth like a worn-out soldier fell on the heart of her breast (122-23).

The passage is surely one of the most beautiful Mailer has ever written. In touch with his deepest being, Rojack is able to choose love, and grace descends upon him like a bird. The vision of the heavenly city appears, as it did at Deborah's murder, signifying the rightness of each choice. The time to murder an old evil part of the self is followed by a time to create an extension of the new self in another human being. Rojack watches Cherry's face metamorphosize in

renewing sleep, like that of Dorian Gray after death, through the various stages of evil to that of a "golden child, . . . sweet fruit, national creation" (124). Here is America, whose "separate lives must come together" in sleep (124).

Leaving her for his appointment with Roberts, the police detective, Rojack feels fully alive. His own vitality is once again sharply contrasted to the anti-pastoral locomotive: "One hundred years before, some first trains had torn through the prairie and their warning had congealed the nerve. 'Beware,' said the sound. 'Freeze in your route. Behind this machine comes a century of maniacs and a heat which looks to consume the earth'" (125). We are sharply reminded of the nightmare which crossed the continent in the name of the American Dream. And Rojack is reminded of the pact he made to the Devil through Ruta before making one with the Lord through Cherry. Which will prove the stronger is the central question of the remainder of the novel.

Having acted with Cherry as a whole man, Rojack now, apart from her, begins to disintegrate to his "separate parts: college professor, television performer, marginal socialite, author, police suspect, lecher, newly minted lover of a thrush named Cherry. I had roots, weed's roots: Jewish father, immigrant stock; Protestant mother, New England banking family, second-drawer" (127). These separate roles, each requiring certain manners and behavior, however con-

flicting, must be shed or combined into a truer, stronger whole. The chapter begun by the vision of an authentic self through love continues with the shedding of old, inauthentic selves in "A Catenary of Manners", the chapter's title. Telephone calls from the producer of Rojack's television show, the chairman of his department at the university, and a socialite friend of Deborah's enable him to slough off the first three roles he mentions in the quoted passage. Interestingly, portions of some of Mailer's theories are attributed to these persons, as might happen in a dream. The producer quotes Mailer's favorite Marxian maxim that "Quantity changes quality"; the chairman's wife believes that "the last meal a person eats before they die determines the migration of their soul" (138); and the socialite is psychic with odors. From the latter Rojack also learns that Ruta is Barney Kelly's mistress and that both she and Deborah were spies and possibly double-agents. This information is corroborated when Rojack is allowed to drop the role of police suspect because too much secret information might be revealed if he were prosecuted. This situation is reminiscent of that in Barbary Shore (and of Orwellian "double-think"), as Rojack sees that the "secret of sanity" is "the ability to hold the maximum of impossible combinations in one's mind" (150). Rojack is further reminded of a lecture he had once delivered which strikes him with "the force of a real idea":

In contrast to the civilized view which elevates man above the animals, the primitive had an instinctive belief that he was subservient to the primal pact between the beasts of the jungle and the beast of mystery.

To the savage, dread was the natural result of any invasion of the supernatural: if man wished to steal the secrets of the gods, it was only to be supposed that the gods would defend themselves and destroy whichever man came too close. By this logic, civilization is the successful if imperfect theft of some cluster of these secrets, and the price we have paid is to accelerate our private sense of some enormous if not quite definable disaster which awaits us (150).

Rojack, a type of Prometheus waiting to be bound, is now surprisingly released, and his sense of dread at the unknowable reasons for the decision is greatly increased. Having gained the attention of the gods through the theft of their power to give or deny life, Rojack is brought close to nausea by the mysterious nature of the power which could control his destiny. His impending appointment at midnight with Barney Oswald Kelly is to be a confrontation with a visible portion of that mystery:

I had a sudden hatred of mystery, a moment when I wanted to be in a cell, my life burned down to the bare lines of a legal defense. I did not want to see Barney Oswald Kelly later tonight, and yet I knew I must for that was part of the contract I had made on the morning air. I would not be permitted to flee the mystery. I was close to prayer then, I was very close, for what was prayer but a beseechment not to pursue the mystery, "God," I wanted to pray, "let me love that girl, and become a father, and try to be a good man, and do some decent work. Yes, God," I was close to begging, "do not make me go back again to the charnel house of the moon." But like a soldier on six-hour leave to a canteen, I knew I would have to return (153).

Allan J. Wagenheim and others have misread this passage to conclude that Mailer says here that marrying, becoming a father, and writing take courage enough without following where the imperatives of the self lead.⁸ However much courage such a life takes, it is not the way of the hero, the hero needed by the nation or by the embattled vision of God, and should Rojack choose it he would fail to grow into that hero.

Returning to Cherry, her "gift" of "new life" she returns to him:

those wings were in the room, clear and delicate as a noble intent, that sweet presence spoke of the meaning of life for those who had betrayed it, yes I understood the meaning and said, for I knew it now, "I think we have to be good," by which I meant we would have to be brave (154-55).

By making a pact with the Devil, Rojack has betrayed beforehand this love. His only hope for its survival is to commit himself totally to the good, hoping to defeat the evil and invalidate the pact. Such action requires tremendous courage and the understanding that "love was not a gift but a vow. Only the brave could live with it for more than a little while" (156).

Cherry and Rojack first test the strength of their love for each other by revealing their past sins. Rojack confesses that he murdered Deborah, and Cherry that Barney Kelly had been her lover. This latter confession brings on a repetition of Rojack's vision of the city in the

desert, first present when he compacted with the Devil for the cunning to get away with murder. For the moment the relationship of Kelly to Cherry, the feeling that "Kelly and I were running in the same blood", reawakens the desire to murder. But the knowledge that their love is distinguishable from "the art of the Devil" calms him (166). He learns further that Cherry believes that he has impregnated her and that she had aborted earlier pregnancies by Kelly and Shago Martin. The importance to Rojack of the carrying on of his seed should be underscored by the passage quoted earlier from Advertisements For Myself in which Mailer defines "seed" as "the end of the potentialities seen for oneself, and every organism creates its seed out of the experience of its past and its unspoken vision or curse upon the future." As for Cherry, she has had her first orgasm through normal intercourse, repeating the situation in "The Time of Her Time", and it proves to be an apocalyptic orgasm for her, for she has long believed that her death would shortly follow its occurrence.

There are two major encounters remaining in the novel, both with Cherry's former lovers who had planted seeds of an accursed future in her womb. The weaker of the two opponents is immediately confronted. Shago Martin, a kind of hipster turned beat, appears at Cherry's apartment. He is the Negro mythologized in "The White Negro", complete

with the coolness of the jazz musician. As in a dream where all the characters have a tight circle of relationships, Shago has not only been Cherry's lover, but also has met Deborah and replaced Rojack's television show with his own. As a "captive of white shit", Shago's color is the reverse of his true nature. Cherry accuses him of losing his black, of becoming evil, in a Poe-like inversion where black equals good and white evil.

The inevitable fight that ensues between Shago and Rojack and its sexual and power implications have been well analyzed by Leeds. The outcome of the fight is most important here. Shago has been badly beaten, and Rojack is sickened by the knowledge that he has gone too far: "It had all gone wrong again. I could feel the break in the heavens" (184). For Shago still retained much of his goodness, and Cherry had once loved him as she now loved Rojack. Neither she nor Shago had proved brave enough to keep it alive. Cherry's belief that "God is weaker because I didn't turn out well" is of course Mailer's, and central to this novel. As in a Socratic dialogue, Rojack asks a leading question, "You don't believe everything is known before it happens?"

"Oh, no," Cherry replies. "Then there's no decent explanation for evil. I believe God is just doing His best to learn from what happens to some of us. Sometimes I think He knows less than the Devil because we're not good enough to reach Him. So the Devil gets most of the best messages we think we're sending up" (185).

Cherry adds that these ideas first came to her in Las Vegas, the city in the desert in Rojack's vision where Mailer himself began thinking about writing An American Dream.⁹

Rojack has second thoughts concerning his ability to ascend the mountain of love¹⁰, for not only is he too quick to betray Cherry but also he intuitively feels that years in the future she will become a bitch. Although Cherry passes on to him Shago's umbrella, symbol of his manhood and power, Rojack instinctively feels that she is not safe from harm by Shago. Nevertheless, ignoring his instincts, he leaves her, a mistake which is to be compounded into disastrous proportions later. Mailer here prepares us for the novel's outcome. Two voices now vie for control in Rojack's mind: one tells him to go to Harlem and assure Cherry's safety; the other to go to Kelly. He cannot choose between them. He knows that he should do what he fears most, perform the bravest act, for that would have the largest gain; he knows that he should "trust the authority of [his] senses" (191), but his fear is so great as to blot out his senses. Instead he allows the taxi in which he is riding to carry him to Kelly. Believing that "God was not love but courage" and that "love came only as a reward", Rojack is nevertheless overcome with fear:

I no longer had the confidence my thoughts were secret to myself. No, men were afraid of murder, but not from a terror of justice so much as the knowledge that a killer attracted the attention of the gods; then your mind was not your own, your anxiety ceased to be neurotic, your dread was real.

Omens were as tangible as bread. There was an architecture to eternity which housed us as we dreamed, and when there was murder, a cry went through the market places of sleep. Eternity had been deprived of a room. Somewhere the divine rage met a fury (191-92).

The fury, or agent of divine wrath, is Barney Oswald Kelly. Rojack's meeting with Kelly is the novel's climax. Kelly has been portrayed as the Devil with a face. His rooms at the top of the Waldorf Towers signify the power he has attained in both the natural and supernatural worlds. He is a corrupt Horatio Alger who has ruthlessly and cleverly worked his way from poverty to **incalculable wealth and power**. As Kaufmann has amply demonstrated, "America has made Kelly into a corrupt version of the Renaissance man."¹¹

Rojack's midnight meeting with Kelly has all the tensions of Faust's final meeting with Mephistopheles. This is the most weighty "grow or pay" situation yet devised by Mailer. We are aware that only the most extreme courage on Rojack's part will enable him to renounce the Devil and strengthen his vow to the Lord. The title of the chapter, "At the Lion and the Serpent", signifies that the courage of the lion will be pitted against the **willness of the serpent**.

Beginning his ordeal, Rojack starts to climb the steps to the tower. Several have noted this ascension into Hell,¹² but not its implications: that Hell resides at the top of the power structure, as in the nightmare version of the American Dream. The climb precipitates a vision of Hell

in America. Central to this vision is "a nineteenth-century clock, eight feet high with a bas relief of faces: Franklin, Jackson, Lincoln, Cleveland, Washington, Grant, Harrison, and Victoria; 1888 the year: in a ring around the clock was a bed of tulips which looked so like plastic I bent to touch and discovered they were real" (194). The year 1888 marks the end of frontier and the beginning of the machine age, thanks to the efforts of the heroic figures whose concepts of the American Dream were turned to nightmares by the machine, as the real flowers were replaced by machine-made imitations.

Rojack knows that the heroic action called for now would be to climb the stairs representing the various stages leading to the tower, symbol of the apocalyptic meeting which is to take place. But yet he takes the elevator or "cage" instead. As it ascends he feels that "some certainty of love was passing away, some knowledge it was the reward for which to live" (196). Denying the voice that urges him to go to Harlem to save Cherry, he is denying the saving grace of that love, and although his decision to confront Kelly may have been the wiser, our expectations that Rojack will prove heroic are diminishing.

On reaching Kelly's quarters, the door to which bears his coat of arms with the motto "Victoria in Caelo Terraque", Rojack must prepare to meet the Devil in stages, through several of his servants. Ruta's presence revitalizes his

demonic powers, while his visit with Deidre, Deborah's daughter, brings him comfort. Deidre is one of Mailer's ephemeral children with wisdom beyond her years. Through her we obtain our first hint that she is a product of an incestuous relationship between Deborah and Kelly, like Death born of Sin and Satan in Paradise Lost. Deidre recalls an incident in which she was provoked to call her mother a beast, to which Deborah replied, "Beware of beasts. There's a species which stays alive three days after they die" (200). The caveat, of course, is directed at Rojack, and the implication that Deborah is a type of anti-Christ is strengthened.

Armed with this warning, Rojack is ushered into Kelly's presence. He is in the company of two of his earthly lieutenants, Bess, his first lover, now an old woman reputed to be "the most evil woman ever to live on the Riviera", and Eddie Ganucci, a mobster king. To Rojack's psychic nose, the odors Kelly gives off make his presence "more real to [him] as an embodiment of Deborah than of himself" (204). The beast in Deborah now inhabits Kelly's body until the time that it may lodge itself in another, and Rojack is clearly its object. Rojack's intuitive fear that the evil soul may take possession of him leads him to reenact the scene near the novel's beginning, in which he contemplates suicide by jumping off a balcony in order to save his soul. He has "a sudden thought":

"If you loved Cherry, you would jump," which was an abbreviation for the longer thought that there was a child in her, and death, my death, my violent death, would give some better heart to that embryo just created, that indeed I might even be created again, free of my past (210).

But as we have learned from earlier works of Mailer's, freedom from the past is obtained only by coming to terms with it, and one must make such an effort before one may truly create a desirable future. This is what Rojack must now do. He must face Barney Kelly, who on all levels--as his murdered wife's father, as the American power structure given a face, as a corrupt Renaissance and Adamic figure, as Rojack's mythic father, and as the personification of Satan, Rojack cannot move forward, he cannot grow out of his past into the future, he cannot become a hero without waging psychic war against all that Kelly represents. "God exists", he thinks, as "a vast calm altogether aware of me" (210), and we are prepared for an apocalyptic moment in which the lieutenant of God meets the agent of the Devil more nakedly than we are ever again to see in Mailer's work. Whether Mailer can write Rojack out of this situation depends upon his vision of the future.

A voice tells Rojack to walk the parapet outside Kelly's apartment.¹³ It is a test of his will over his dread. His will remains "divided against itself" (211), but his intuition of God arms him for the encounter with Kelly. It is made in Kelly's library, painstakingly detailed as a

decadent Renaissance nightmare. Rojack progressively feels it as a "royal chapel", "the interior of a cave", and "an antechamber of Hell" where "a field of force" comes upon him (219-20). He still carries Shago's umbrella which brings him temporary strength, like a shield, as Kelly begins a discussion of God and the Devil. As one of Satan's agents, he reveals that the Catholic Church and organized power "from the Muslims to the New York Times" all work in the Devil's behalf. He goes on to account for his rise to power from impoverished beginnings. The story of course is that of the American Dream transmogrified. Kelly marries wealth, European wealth, to complete the picture of corruption, and conceiving Deborah in the name of Satan, his luck turns into infallible power. "There's nothing but magic at the top", Kelly confides, because "God and the Devil are very attentive to the people at the summit." One must "be ready to deal with One or the Other" or settle for mediocrity (230). We are reminded of Rojack's prayer to be allowed to settle for mediocrity by becoming a family man.

As was the case in the significant meetings between Cherry and Rojack, he and Kelly now expose their secrets to each other, thus meeting as equals. Kelly reveals his incestuous relationship with Deborah, and Rojack counters with a confession of murder. The nakedness of their confrontation as agents of God and the Devil imparts a strong psychic

dimension. Rojack feels as a force Kelly's invitation to a ménage à trois with Ruta, to "bury the ghost of Deborah by gorging on her corpse" (237). This is followed by another vision, that Shago is with Cherry or that someone is being murdered in Harlem, and again Rojack is so overcome with dread that he prays "to be free of magic, the tongue of the Devil, the dread of the Lord" (238). But instead the messenger within him tells him to "walk the parapet or Cherry is dead", to walk it or he himself is "worse than dead" (238).

The parapet walk is now the ultimate existential act, with life and death, the victory of God or the Devil in America as its outcome. Relinquishing Shago's umbrella to Kelly, Rojack steps up onto the parapet. The language in this passage is highly metaphoric, as charged with tension as a high-voltage wire. The parapet is three-sided. Making the first turn (equivalent to murdering Deborah), Rojack sees the street below: "the fall seemed twice as far, and then opened again like a crack in the earth, which deepened as I looked into it and fell away and opened out again bottomless" (241). It is the abyss, of course, which Rojack has glimpsed. Halfway into the second segment a storm arises and Deborah's "lone green eye" clouds his vision. Again two conflicting voices give orders. His cowardice tells him to get off while he can and his courage instructs him to look at the moon. The moon sends this message: "You murdered. So you

are in her cage. Now, earn your release. Go around the parapet again" (242). Gaining confidence, Rojack completes the first circuit, but as he is to begin the second passage, so clearly crucial for his salvation, Kelly tries to push him off with Shago's umbrella. Rojack manages to strike Kelly with the umbrella, then hurls it over the parapet, but his courage goes with it. Ignoring the voice telling him to walk the parapet again, he takes the "cage" to the street. Dread and a sense of woe invade him, for he knows that he has failed and that the love that is a reward for courage will be denied him. He arrives at Cherry's apartment in time to watch her die from a beating mistakenly imposed by a friend of Shago's. Shago, too, has perished in a Harlem fight. Deborah's life is paid for with Cherry's life because of Rojack's weakness. In the course of the novel's action Rojack has proved out his thesis that "magic, dread, and the perception of death [are] the roots of motivation", and that love was not a strong enough motive in the final analysis.

The epilogue to An American Dream centers on the role that America has played in Rojack's defeat. Engaged in a search for new life and for a heroism mature enough to combat demonic force, Rojack heads West, the archetypal direction toward renewal in American history and literature. The body of America is imaged as cancerous, horribly decayed. Its odor is ever-present in Las Vegas, the city of fire and

ice in the desert which is Hell. The extreme heat of the desert countered by the cold of air-conditioned buildings is metaphorically equivalent to the two rivers of rationality and madness which America has not succeeded in combining. The West once so promising is now cancer-producing. The atmosphere is that of an air-conditioned nightmare, to borrow Henry Miller's metaphor, as Mailer has, and the "arid empty wild blind deserts" of the West are "producing again a new breed of man", one more suited to a submarine or a space capsule than to his natural habitat. Mailer is to pick up this theme more strongly fifteen years later in Of a Fire on the Moon. For now, Rojack gambles the remnant of Cherry's gift to him, makes a small fortune, and prepares to leave America. Metaphorically, the message here is that America's remaining opportunity is the good fortune to be able to leave her.

Just before leaving Las Vegas, Rojack walks into the desert to look at the moon:

There was a jeweled city on the horizon, spires rising in the night, but the jewels were diadems of electric and the spires were the neon of signs ten stories high. I was not good enough to climb up and pull them down. So wandered farther out to the desert where the mad before me had come, and thought of walking into ambush . . . I was safe in the city--no harm would come to me there--it was only in the desert that death would come up like a scorpion with its sting (251-52, italics mine).

Rojack's vision of the jeweled city of heaven in a fertile

jungle which appeared like a promise at Deborah's death is not to be found in its inversion, this artificial city in the wasteland of Hell. His final vision is of Cherry in the limbo of the moon, along with her archetype, Marilyn Monroe. Dying before their souls were dead, they have escaped the fate in store for America.

Leaving the nightmarish wasteland behind him, Rojack heads south to the symbiotic jungles of Guatemala and Yucatán, carrying with him not only the possibility of his own salvation but the hope of a new America in Central America as well. Like Natty Bumppo and Huck Finn, Rojack lights out for the territory untouched by "civilization", but unlike his fictional predecessors, Rojack does not wish to escape so much as to continue "to grow on the waves of the violent, the perfumed, and the unexpected." The forces of evil have proved too powerful for his weak embryonic heroism. Perhaps the new territory will provide the nourishment America lacks and so enable Rojack to grow to maturity. Perhaps he will yet develop the strength to effectively combat the Devil. In this light, Rojack's American Dream has been successful. Having come to terms with his past, having learned something about "the beast of mystery", he can move out into the future and truly remake himself not out of weakness but of strength.

At this point in time, Mailer cannot visualize a

hero capable of recreating America within its present boundaries. He must begin anew in a new place. This option is open to the visionary and the writer of fiction, but not to the man living in and with the "real" world. In An American Dream Mailer has given us a great imaginative vision of America, one which surely will secure him a place in the chain of American writers who have told us the most about ourselves. Nevertheless, he feels a strong responsibility to remake the America he sees about him. His fictional hero inadequate to the task, Mailer himself will try to become the man of our time. His progress toward that goal will be the subject of the following chapter.

FOOTNOTES

¹John William Corrington, "An American Dreamer", Chicago Review, 18 (1965), 66.

²Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 33-34.

³Norman Mailer, An American Dream, p. 15. All further references are to this text whose title will be abbreviated to AAD.

⁴Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, p. 329 et passim.

⁵The novel appeared from January to August, 1964, in Esquire and as a book in 1965.

⁶Norman Mailer, "The Big Bite", Esquire, December, 1963, p. 26.

⁷Brom Weber, "A Fear of Dying: Norman Mailer's An American Dream", The Hollins Critic, II (June, 1965), 6.

⁸Allan J. Wagenheim, "Square's Progress: An American Dream", Critique 10, 68.

⁹Mailer, "The Big Bite", op. cit.

¹⁰Mailer's use of the mountain metaphor will be remembered in The Naked and the Dead.

¹¹Kaufmann, pp. 77-78.

¹²Wagenheim, p. 54, among others.

¹³For an interesting analysis of the parapet as a metaphor in Mailer's work see Tony Tanner, City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970, pp. 348-71.

III

THE PROCESS AND THE PRODUCT: THE ARMIES OF THE NIGHT

1. The Process

The years following the publication of the final version of An American Dream find Mailer expanding in all directions, using both media new to him and existing literary genres in new ways. In slightly more than two years Mailer authored a collection of essays, a Broadway play, two films (which he also starred in and directed), a photographic interpretation of bullfighting, a novel, numerous magazine articles, and, **finally**, a book entitled The Armies of the Night: The Novel as History/History as a Novel. The form developed in Armies was the product of Mailer's determined search for a style and a hero appropriate to that style during these years of 1966 through the spring of 1968. That Armies was the goal of Mailer's flurry of activity is evidenced by the three books which have followed it, Miami and the Siege of Chicago, Of a Fire on the Moon, and The Prisoner of Sex, all, with modifications, in the same basic style as Armies.

A chronological approach to Mailer's work in the years between An American Dream and Armies will enable us to see that Armies is in many ways the culmination not only

of a phase in Mailer's career but also of twenty years of living and writing.

In 1966 Mailer was a defense witness at the Boston trial of Naked Lunch on obscenity charges. He was deeply impressed by Burroughs' work, to which an essay written in 1963, "Some Children of the Goddess", will attest. Mailer saw Burroughs' vision of the future in Naked Lunch as that of an "all-electronic universe" described in language that "bombard[s]" the reader like the "maximum disturbance" of technological noise (CC, 116-17). The highly charged relentlessness of Burroughs' style is also impressive to Mailer, although he places little emphasis on Burroughs' subject in Naked Lunch, the nature of addiction, seemingly a subject which would interest him. Rereading the book three years later while its contents were on trial, Mailer was engaged in analyzing its art and concluding that a style which cut like a knife's edge, as Burroughs' did, was the only style worthy of emulation. It was at about this period that Mailer's last novel, Why Are We in Vietnam?, was conceived, and it will be argued later that the style of that novel derived in part from Mailer's encounter with Naked Lunch, particularly the technique of bombarding the reader with language. The principle behind this technique is that of nullifying conventional language with the force of one's own, thereby breaking the language barrier by requiring a new consciousness of the reader. The recognition of this

technique in the early part of the period now under discussion marks a turning point in Mailer's thinking. Convinced that the mass media which rely upon technological means of communication, especially the news media, the Hollywood film, and television, abuse their intent to communicate "truth" or "reality", Mailer attempts to provide an alternative to their deadening effects. He seeks authentic uses for these media, ways of communicating through technology how technology tends to destroy creativity, thought, and spontaneity, turning its viewers and readers into extensions of itself. It is as if Mailer at this point in time came to realize that the novel, the poem, the story--the conventional literary genres to which he had devoted so much of his talent and energy--were no longer capable of influencing the masses and that the revolution in the consciousness of our time would have to be abandoned or approached through radically different means. Much of the work that Mailer produced in these years is experimentation with technological or semi-technological means of reaching an audience. Mailer's synthesis of technology and art represents a major step forward in his aesthetics of growth, for heretofore his approach to the machine had been solely antithetical--destroy it in order to recreate humanity--while a synthesis of art and technology allows the artist to control and therefore transcend the machine, bringing about expansion, growth, and new theses

and antitheses.¹

During this phase Mailer's search for new ways of reaching an audience results in few works that would be considered to have lasting value. As parts of the continuing process of Mailer's growth, however, each work has a unique value. And two of these, Why Are We in Vietnam? and The Armies of the Night, I consider outstanding efforts by Mailer to communicate his ideas about America. Well conceived both thematically and aesthetically, they represent significant advances over An American Dream most especially in the conception of the author-audience relationship. On first reading (unfortunately the only reading most give a novel) the content of AAD alienates the majority of its audience, even the presumably sophisticated, as a survey of the novel's reviews will reveal. Similarly, Why tends to alienate through style and language, although its message probably is repugnant to fewer readers, evidenced by the growing portion of the American populace that opposes the war in Vietnam. This is not to say that AAD and Why have no artistic unity; I believe that they do. However, I am convinced that the separation of form and content is less difficult for casual readers than for students of literature and that as a consequence few readers of either AAD or Why comprehended the medium or the message. For Mailer this failure to connect with his audience is more than a blow to his ego; it largely

negates the work itself, for its intention is to influence, to affect change, to become a part of an expanding human consciousness. Therefore, I contend that The Armies of the Night, which fuses form and content through the participation of a believable hero in an actual event, illustrates that Mailer has learned how to capture the audience he needs to fulfill his goal. The fact that the book received the nation's two highest literary awards, the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, supports this contention. For these reasons I consider Armies Mailer's most mature work in terms of his own aesthetics, although it is likely that American literature instructors will favor the last two novels because they fit so well into the continuum of American literature as taught in universities.

Let us trace the process which culminated in The Armies of the Night. While Mailer was ingesting the electronic style of William Burroughs, he was publishing the last of his thematically unified collections of odds and ends, Cannibals and Christians. If Mailer's personality had served as the substantial armature of Advertisements For Myself, his reputation and his constant theme of the Sixties, that America is "Cancer Gulch", hold Cannibals and Christians together. The book consists largely of essays written since 1964 on politics or literary efforts written prior to 1964--criticism, poems, and stories. Mailer has organized the varied

collection on the basis that all the pieces are "parts of a continuing and more or less comprehensive vision of existence" à la Lawrence, Miller, and Hemingway (CC, xi). One considers this a "given" and perhaps CC needs no further justification. Robert Lawler, always a perceptive critic, sees further unity in the volume's junction of the political with the literary: "Politics, the obscene and the craft of fiction necessarily form a cohesive whole in Mailer's mind, for politics is the obscene of his times, as he sees it, and the writer must face both (and be involved in both) and deal with them if he is to be more than a symptom of the disease"2

In CC, Mailer selects the metaphorical role of physician to a society dying of the plague, his goal something akin to spontaneous remission of the disease by inspiring each of us to free ourselves of the plague. Rojack had been as successful a patient as he could conceive of given the state of society; Mailer now tries to promote the cure on a larger scale. At this point, however, he is still convinced that the most effective treatment is through the pages of a novel. Already the doctor is prescribing a purgative, a central metaphor in Why. Looking forward to that book we may focus on two key elements in CC: 1) Vietnam as the metaphoric American Armageddon and 2) explorations into the nature of form.

The question which has obsessed and continues to

obsess Mailer through all of his succeeding works is raised again and again in these essays: is America "extraordinary or accursed" (42)? Mailer operates on the assumption that, if accursed, America can still battle to be extraordinary and that, if extraordinary, she is perilously close to accursedness. While here he seems to equate the extraordinary with good and the accursed with evil, there remains the third possibility that the extraordinary attracts accursedness by attracting the attention of the gods. In a memorable piece on the Republican Convention of 1964 Mailer uses the suicides of his prototypical romantic heroes, Hemingway and Marilyn Monroe, and the assassination of John Kennedy to evidence the madness turned inward, the cannibalism of a nation feeding upon its vitals which is a sure symptom of its death-throes. Whether America's imminent demise is for the overall good or ill in the universal battle for possession of the universe is the great ambiguity for Mailer. However, rather than take the philosophical route of the eighteenth century, that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds, Mailer conducts his own battle for America's survival. With the deaths of his candidates for heroism and with the expatriation of his fictional hero, Rojack, Mailer in these years is coming to rely more heavily upon his own potential heroism. He becomes more active politically, focusing on the war in Vietnam and on Lyndon Johnson as the faces of

insanity in American life:

The great fear that lies upon America is not that Lyndon Johnson is privately close to insanity so much as that he is the expression of the near insanity of most of us, and his need for action is America's need for action; not brave action, but action; any kind of action; any move to get the motors going. A future death of the spirit lies close and heavy upon American life, a cancerous emptiness at the center which calls for a circus (77-78).

Mailer sees something bestial in the idea of the "Great Society", "the most advanced technological nation of the civilized world", as "the one now closest to blood, to shedding the blood and burning the flesh of Asian peasants it had never seen" (79). The rhetoric here suggests that of an inflammatory speech, which it is, Mailer's "Speech at Berkly on Vietnam Day" in 1965, a precedent for his appearance in the 1967 March on the Pentagon.

A third quotation will complete Mailer's theory on the purgative nature of the Vietnamese War:

. . . the only explanation I can find for the war in Vietnam is that we are sinking into the swamps of a plague and the massacre of strange people seems to relieve this plague. If one were to take the patients in a hospital, give them guns and let them shoot on pedestrians down from hospital windows you may be sure you would find a few miraculous cures" (91).

Vietnam, then, to Mailer represents an outlet for violence which would otherwise be directed against the self. It is cowardly action, however, no better than suicide, for no matter how Johnson and his advisors may justify it, the war consists of violence for its own sake. This is the case

because the opposition is no match for the aggressor. Remember that for Mailer, as for Hemingway and Faulkner, the worthy defeat of a worthy opponent is a brave action, and the victor gains the courage of his defeated opponent as his prize. However, the defeat of a weak opponent is cowardly brutality and propagates more cowardice and finally madness. These themes are fully developed in Why Are We in Vietnam?, while Mailer establishes his metaphor of Vietnam as America's Armageddon in Cannibals and Christians.

His thought having found its direction, even its obsession one might say--for the war and the President provided Mailer with the opposition needed to test his own potential for the role of American hero--Mailer turns his attention to his style of attack, which in turn leads him into inquiries into the nature of form itself. In an interview included in CC, Mailer talks about keeping his consciousness in shape by "fight[ing] against diminishing talent" and by not "relax[ing] into the flabby styles of thought which surround one everywhere". Interestingly, he goes on to say that

if what you write is a reflection of your own consciousness, then even journalism can become interesting. One wouldn't want to spend one's life at it and I wouldn't want ever to be caught justifying journalism as a major activity (it's obviously less interesting than to write a novel), but it's better, I think, to see journalism as a venture of one's ability to keep in shape than to see it as an essential betrayal of the chalice of your literary art (218-19).

Although he later conceded to journalism--albeit a highly personalized style of journalism which claims no objective truths--a force through sheer numbers of readers that the novel could no longer have, he would bristle when Robert Lowell complimented him for being "the best journalist in America."³ Although like Hemingway Mailer had produced more journalism than fiction, he considered it as working out for the big fight.

Concerned with finding a personal style for his attack on a concrete enemy, Mailer philosophizes on the nature of form in two lengthy dialectical "interviews" with himself: "The Metaphysics of the Belly", included in both The Presidential Papers and Cannibals and Christians, and "The Political Economy of Time" in CC. Although the latter piece contains many of the ideas that Mailer has better expressed in his fiction, it defines and clarifies certain concepts which have a way of being cryptic in the fiction. For example, here he conceives of time as "the continuation from life to death" and equates the soul with time (326). The "only container" of time is "an enlifement, that mode or character or style by which time is perceived in each different kind of being" and is thus "a set of' separate creations" (327). The soul, which is seen in terms of time, attaches itself to a body. There its nourishment comes from "growth and victory, from exploration, from conquest, from pomp and pageant and

triumph, from glory Its nature is to become more than it is" (341). The soul will try to "shape creation in its fashion" in the passive body it inhabits (353), but if the soul is frustrated in its attempts it may be defeated and eventually die or turn into spirit. Spirits are "habits, not innovations; functions, not creations; waves, not forms; not so much the act as the context; never the event, but the institution" (360). If "vision is the mind of God; soul, His Body", then "Spirit is what He has left behind. Literally. It is his **excrement**" (365). We are very deep now into the philosophic vision behind Mailer's aesthetics of growth. The growth of one's soul is not merely a personal matter, for if the soul is allowed to die or is forcibly defeated, death and eternity no longer promise peace but may continue "the worst terrors of life" (363). The growth of the soul in Mailer's mind is therefore akin to the survival of the creative power itself, of mankind's ability to perpetuate itself. As soul is time's "enlifement",

form is the deepest clue we possess to the nature of time in any epoch, to the style of the time, to the mode by which reality is perceived in the time, to the way time moves in the consciousness of man, where it possesses grace, where it is hobbled, how strength addresses itself to weakness. Time is all but equal to creativity, for time is the potential to create as it resides in each of us (367-68).

In such a view time is capable of being destroyed along with creativity. We are able to evaluate the state of time and soul in any age by the form it takes, for

form is the record of every intent of a soul to express itself upon another soul or spirit, its desire to reveal the shape--which is to say the mystery of the time it contains in itself. And it is aided or resisted in achieving that shape by every spirit it encounters (373).

"The Political Economy of Time" gives us perhaps the ultimate meaning of the "grow or pay" theme in Mailer's work and of the importance he attaches to victory over forces which would impede growth. At the same time we are impressed again with the concept of form as a record of growth and of the significance of the forms we discern in Mailer's work, e.g., the spiral movement of Advertisements For Myself. Mailer's forms are dynamic, often jagged like the charting of a corporation's profit and loss, but always moving toward something and away from something else. The more Mailer comes to rely upon an existential hero, the more the form of his fiction may be seen in terms of a line or a graph, for the hero's progress becomes measurable through confrontations won or lost. What "The Political Economy of Time" states about form, An American Dream in particular dramatizes and embodies.

Like the search of the soul to "shape creation in its fashion", Mailer experiments with forms and styles during 1967 which work toward media-breakthroughs--new and hopefully more successful ways of reaching an audience. In An American Dream, it will be remembered, the hero's opponent was a personified force. In transferring Barney Kelly's role

to Lyndon Johnson, Mailer points up the political face of power whose mechanics are not nearly so mysterious as Kelly's diabolics and therefore may be opposed with some expectations of success. By learning to use the communications media for his own ends rather than those of the established power structure, Mailer significantly multiplies his import. In a way it is a wonder that Mailer was so long in arriving at this position, since he holds a degree in aeronautical engineering from Harvard and so knows something of physical as well as socio-psychological technology.

The first media breakthrough comes early in 1967 with the Broadway production of The Deer Park. Terming his play "existential", Mailer sought to "occup[y] a space which had been left uninhabited too long, that area between the explorations of the realistic play and that electric sense of transition which lives in the interruptions and symbols of the Theatre of the Absurd".⁴ His play was to move "from one moment of intensity or reality (which is to say a moment which feels more real than other moments) to the next--a play which went at full throttle all the way" (11). Mailer had worked for ten years on the play version of his novel, rewriting it four times before arriving at what he considered a suitable form. In the final version he

cut away all dramatic scaffolding, connective tissue, road signs, guides, and left the play stripped to its essential connections, the movement ideally from one real scene to the next, with the audience left to fill

the spaces between (11).

One of the more startling aspects of the play and its technological innovation is the presence of a large neon sign which flashes numbers counting down the ninety-nine scenes. Thus the play illustrates more starkly than his other works that life consists of a series of existential moments in which all significant growth or decay takes place.

The Deer Park is to be staged so that "the set bears some relation to the inner space of Sergius O'Shaugnessy's memory, that the audience is in effect living in his mind" (33). The audience, obviously, is intended to participate in the drama, connecting the circuits left unconnected for this purpose.

Whether the play succeeded in its intended effects cannot be determined from the written version. In his dissertation on Mailer, John Stark analyzes the play as a written product and concludes that it is a "basically unsuccessful search for a new form."⁵ Gerald Weales, who saw and reviewed that play during its short run, wrote of it two years later that without the "'dramatic scaffolding, connective tissue'", "an audience comes to the scenes lacking the emotional freight that the characters presumably carry, and although they will not find it difficult 'to fill the spaces' (there is exposition enough), the scenes are likely to remain dull and flat."⁶ Diagnosing the play,

Marshall McLuhan might have concluded that while Mailer wishes his medium to be "cool", i.e., to provoke the audience to "fill the spaces" with their own sensual impressions, the play came across as an unhappy mixture of the hot and the cool, the visual effect of the flashing numbers perhaps having filled in too many spaces. One considers, too, the possibility that Mailer's play might have effected more strongly a less literate audience than professional Broadway play-goers, a student group perhaps, or a television audience. To the latter Mailer queries the effects of his play: "a work of deep drama on television might open to what?" (24) Of the television medium generally Mailer protests that in its endless "surface detail . . . fundamental distinctions between the safe and the insecure, the reality and the dream, are marinated, dramatic oppositions are bypassed--powerful conflicts are first modulated, then mashed into one another. The side effect is nausea" (23-24). Anyone who has seen Mailer appear on one of the perennial television "talk" shows will attest that he performs according to what he considers an actor's job: "not to provoke emotion, but to bring you in on a reaction" (22). McLuhan would insist that the cool medium of television is responsible for such a reaction, while I would argue that Mailer "hots up" the medium considerably, making the reaction almost chemical. As far as The Deer Park is concerned, however, the medium

seems out of joint with the intended message.

Two more experiments in media occur in the year of Why Are We in Vietnam?, one more an indulgence of a whim than part of Mailer's artistic growth. A book entitled The Bullfight: A Photographic Narrative with Text by Norman Mailer is issued along with a phonograph recording of Mailer reading his introductory essay. The idea, one assumes, is that while one looks at the professional photographs of bullfights, the recorded voice gives animation to the pictures, thus creating a third dimension of perception from the combination of the visual and auditory. I could obtain only the book from the publisher, however, and found the effect of reading words meant to be spoken similar to that of reading John Barth's collection, Lost in the Funhouse, whose purpose is defeated because it is intended as mixed media and yet is issued as a simple printed book.

Aside from being an experiment in combining media (for the essay was originally printed in Playboy), The Bullfight is Mailer's elliptical equivalent to Death in the Afternoon. Admitting that "it would be memorable not to sound like Hemingway"⁷, Mailer nevertheless echoes Papa's afición for the aesthetics of bullfighting. To Mailer, of course, a bullfighter is a potential existential hero who must display extraordinary courage against a worthy opponent in a situation the outcome of which is unknown but dangerous.

In addition a good bullfight provides a catharsis for the spectators. Mailer describes his own **catharsis** which involved learning about "the mystery of form" from the style and character of each good bullfighter. One particular matador styled "El Loco", because he was at his worst unspeakably bad and unsurpassed at his best, "spoke of the great distance a man can go from the worst in himself to the best, and that finally is what the bullfight could be all about", that "a man cannot be judged by what he is every day, but only in his greatest moment, for that is the moment when he shows what he was intended to be" (214). This essay is of a piece with Mailer's aesthetics of growth but must be said to have limited appeal, at least in the form of its publication in The Bullfight, where it reminds one of a children's record with attached pictures to keep the child's attention.

A more significant experiment with form was Mailer's first venture in film-making. The philosophy behind this film, predictably, is existentialism à la Mailer. Writing about Wild 90 in the December, 1967 Esquire, Mailer contrasts his film to a Hollywood production: Hollywood had been "part of the beginning of the computerized, unionized technological programmed torturing of talent which a generation of electronic guitars has come to take for granted as Salvation Through Chemicals."⁸ Further, "the process of commercial film-making has a natural tendency to liquidate

the collective human entity of the film" (194)--actors read lines they didn't write and move and gesture in manners prescribed by the director. Mailer's idea centers around actors as existentialists:

If existentialism is ultimately concerned with the philosophy of danger and the attractions of the unknown, acting is one of the surviving rituals of invocation, repetition, and ceremony--of propitiation to the gods (194).

Since the outcome of our actions is unknown, acting which depends upon scripts and elaborate settings is mere role-playing. In Wild 90, therefore, there is no script. Mailer as producer-director selected a few friends to appear in the film with him--for he is actor too--and gave them the situation out of which they were to develop action. Mailer also directed the cameramen, called for retakes, and edited the completed film. He has controlled its distribution as well, making it generally unavailable except at eclectic film festivals. Mailer feels that his experiment in existential film-making was successful. Out of the given situation, that of three hoodlums holed up in a room for twenty-one days, conflict began to develop not out of plot nor from the opposition of hero and villain but "from that more complex opposition which is natural to every social breath of manner, that primary if subtler conflict which comes from trying to sell your idea in company when others are trying to deny you" (267). From the point of view of the audience--and

Mailer gives us this appraisal too, making his control of the film total--the film has "the most repetitive pervasive obscenity of any film ever made for public or even underground consumption" (190) and so repels many viewers, but yet "tough guys" like the film because it is "filled with nothing so much as [their] vanities, bluffs, ego-supports, and downright collapses of front" (190). Obscenity invites total physical participation in the medium which transmits it, McLuhan tells us, and it is no wonder that when the highly literate person, used to the "hot" medium of the printed page, is drawn into such participation he is repelled.⁹ Mailer's concern with self-imposed or collective censorship is that it destroys vitality. His aim in using obscenity in Wild 90 as later in Why Are We in Vietnam? is to produce a "robust art" which "feed[s] audiences with the marrow of its honest presence" and gives "light and definition and blasts of fresh air to the corners of the world" (269).

Why Are We in Vietnam?, Mailer's last attempt at fiction, reveals the distance he has come in the understanding of media since writing An American Dream. His subject is what he had referred to in "The Political Economy of Time" as "the spirit of the total corporation" (CC, 356), which he believes has produced that malignant form called the Vietnam War. His medium is voice-print, a kind of silent tape recording which utilizes obscenity, punning, and a

style which suggests the patter of a mad disc jockey coming over the air waves of America, blocking out all other stations while he is on the air. D.J.'s role as disc jockey represents a media breakthrough rather than one in point of view, for D.J. is descended from Mikey Lovett in Barbary Shore and the other fictional first-person narrator-participants through Stephen Rojack. He particularly resembles the narrator in "Advertisements for Myself on the Way Out" because he suggests alternate identities for himself, thus deliberately creating ambiguities concerning his moral nature.

As disc jockey, D.J.'s medium is the radio and the air waves which transmit his voice. As narrator of a novel, his medium is print. To combine the two, to make a permanent record of a voice, is to record the voice on tape. Although not an actual tape recording, the narrative voice demands that the reader imagine it so. D.J. suggests the possibility that his voice-print will become the property of the "electronic Lord" who is keeper of all stored information, and because D.J. cannot identify Him as holy or demonic his own purpose is ambiguous.

We do not hear D.J.'s voice, but we imagine it. It is strident like a whining microphone to the mind's ear; it acts more like an extension of the central nervous system than of the eye. The voice establishes a private communication with the reader-listener like a radio with an ear-jack tuned to a station that plays hard rock. There is never any

let-up in the patter; if D.J. needs time to find a phrase, he fills in with nonsense, and his stream-of-consciousness is not private but meant to be broadcast. He rattles off more puns per line than any work has contained since Finnegan's Wake. Here is an example:

We're going to tell you what it's all about. Go go, Dr. Jek tell the folk, we're here to rock, the world is going shazam, hahray, harout, fart in my toot, air we breathe is the prez, present dent, and God has always wanted more from man than man has wished to give him. Zig a zig a zig. That is what we live in dread of God.¹⁰

The total effect of the voice is best described by Mailer himself:

The words come out in squeaks, spiced with static, sex coiled up with technology like a scream on the radar. Bombarded with his language, the sensation is like being in a room where three radios, two television sets, stereo hi-fi, a pornographic movie, and two automatic dishwashers are working at once while a mad scientist conducts the dials to squeeze out the maximum disturbance (CC, 117).

This is how Mailer had described four years earlier the effect on him of Burroughs' style in Naked Lunch. At that time Mailer was also disturbed by the fragmented nature of the book, not understanding that the book's style was Burroughs' response to the "senders", equivalent to Mailer's totalitarians, whose messages are designed to achieve ultimate control over the human consciousness. By breaking up their messages, Burroughs nullifies their language and becomes a sender himself, but one who would alter human consciousness for the better.¹¹ Mailer's similar intentions

are a matter of record, and by 1967 he adds his footnote to Burroughs in D.J.: even one whose intentions to control others are good may himself be unknowingly subservient to evil forces, like the America whose ostensible purpose in Vietnam is to free her people for self-determination. Since neither D.J. nor Mailer can know the outcome of his efforts to alter consciousness, the novel is in a sense a self-parody, for it questions the legitimacy of its own undertaking. At the same time it derives its legitimacy from its exposure of its methods, as seen in this early passage:

America, this is your own wandering troubadour brought right up to date, here to sell America its new handbook on how to live, how to live in this Electrox Edison world, all programmed out, Prononzo! (this last being the name King Alonso gave to the Spanish royal condom.) Well, Huckleberry Finn is here to set you straight, and his asshole ain't itching, right? so listen to my words, One World, it's here for adolescents and overthirties--you'll know what it's all about when you and me are done (6)

Mailer has pulled out all the stops in his effort to communicate with that mass audience frozen in front of their television sets who elected Lyndon Johnson to the Presidency and who condone the violent war they watch on the six-o'clock news.

Having realized that the only way to break the power of "technology land" is to use its mean for one's own ends, Mailer by the nature of his style in Why holds our attention from beginning to end. Yet many of his literate readers found that style an outrage, particularly because one of its

major devices is obscenity. One reviewer **accidentally hit upon** the point of the book during a vituperative outpouring:

"Constipated by indignation at the admittedly dreadful war, [Mailer's 'customers'] bless any purgative by calling the result a novel."¹² Using hunted animals as a metaphor for the Vietnamese, Mailer tells us that we are in Vietnam **because it is a convenient purgative for America's national violence** which suppressed will lead to suicide. And Mailer's novel is an attempt to expose that purgative as one which substitutes madness for suicide and to prescribe a purgative offering relief from both: obscenity. As John Aldridge, one of the novel's most sympathetic critics, has put it: Why Are We in Vietnam? can "be seen as telling us something important not only about the obscenity of our situation in Vietnam, but far more crucially, about the possible power of obscenity to help alleviate that situation."¹³

Ever since his Army experience, Mailer has been fascinated with the power of obscenity to cleanse. For him it is linked to his love for America. He tells us in The Armies of the Night that having discovered in the Army "the democratic principle with its faith in the common man", he came to believe that

that noble common man was as obscene as an old goat, and his obscenity was what saved him. The sanity of said common democratic man was in his humor, his humor was in his obscenity. And his philosophy as well--a reductive philosophy which looked to restore the hard edge of proportion to the overblown values

overhanging each small military existence
 Mailer never felt more like an American than when he was naturally obscene--all the gifts of the American language came out in the happy play of obscenity upon concept, which enabled one to go back to concept again So after years of keeping obscene language off to one corner of his work, as if to prove after The Naked and the Dead that he had many an arrow in his literary quiver--he had kicked goodbye in his novel Why Are We in Vietnam? to the old literary corset of good taste, letting his sense of language play on obscenity as freely as it wished, so discovering that everything he knew about the American language (with its incommensurable resources) went flying in and out of the line of his prose with the happiest beating of wings--it was the first time his style seemed at once very American to him and very literary in the best way (Armies, 62)

He goes on to say that "obscenity probably resides in the quick conversion of excitement to nausea" (Armies, 62), and if we add to this a statement made earlier, that "being half excited and half frustrated leads to violence" (CC, 196), the purgative nature of obscenity and Mailer's advocacy of it as an alternative to Vietnam becomes clear.

Appropriately, the obscenity in Why is anal in nature. From "The Time of Her Time" and the first scene with Ruta in An American Dream, we have learned that the anal is associated with the Satanic. The higher the grade of the "asshole" the more Satanic is his nature and the more difficult it is for the average man to recognize him as such because he is very much a part of the established power structure. A medium-grade asshole (or M.A.!) is a junior executive who will ascend to a higher grade through the perverted Horatio Alger method: through lying, cheating,

and destroying the competition. D.J.'s father, Rusty Jethroe, is the "highest grade of asshole made in America and so suggests D.J.'s future: success will stimulate you to suffocate!" (38) "Success" in business in Mailer's scheme is equivalent to "success" in Vietnam and, in the novel's particular metaphor, "success" in hunting. When Rusty takes credit for killing a bear rightly D.J.'s in order to achieve status, the corruption inherent in the American Dream of success is neatly exposed.

The ambiguities of identity with which D.J. invests himself, that is, whether he is a "Harlem spade", or hipster, or a Texas WASP (which is to say a murderer, for Johnson was born and Kennedy died in the state) are the result of his parentage. A metaphor for America's future, D.J. must learn to overcome the burdens of his past. His father representing America at its technological worst, D.J.'s mother Hallie is what Leslie Fiedler would term a castrating female. Worse, she is representative of America's schizophrenia: a "lady" because she suppresses verbal obscenity and "just thinks that way" (21). The identity problem is symptomatic of the larger "ambiguity at the center of D.J.'s message center" (50-51), the black and white, good and evil ambiguity in terms of which Mailer sees America. Although D.J. is able to see "right through shit" (50), he is unsure of the source of his perception and is afraid that what he sees will craze him

as the animals of the Brooks Range have been crazed by contact with technological hunting and as his father has become crazed by the lust to kill.

The motif of the hunt, which others have recognized as the "classic American myth tale of quest, initiation, and ultimate absolution" with the demonic at work beneath an idyllic surface¹⁴, and the even closer parallels to Faulkner's "The Bear" and a number of Hemingway's works,¹⁵ becomes invested with more than ritual significance in Mailer's novel. D.J.'s suppressed violence toward his father must find an outlet or turn to cancer. In a hunt conducted by professional guides with the aid of helicopters and high-powered rifles, man has so perverted the ethics of hunting as to become more bestial than the animals he hunts--and the parallels Mailer intends to the nature of the Vietnam War should be obvious. Since World War II America has not combatted a foreign enemy equal to its strength, and hunting lesser game produces not growth but madness. The hunt conducted by D.J. and his alter-ego, Tex Hyde, (The Jekyll/Hyde dichotomy runs through their relationship) is for an equal enemy. By stripping themselves of illegitimate aids, they begin to perform an ancient "purification ceremony" of a good kill. Moving beyond "The Bear" and its many predecessors in American literature, this hunt takes place on America's last frontier: the white expanses of the Alaskan North which in Mailer's

scheme is the repository of all human knowledge present in the electromagnetic force field of the North Pole. The hunt therefore takes on Faustian implications. Entering the force field where no human had set foot, the boys experience an electric charge which excites them with a lust to kill. They overlook a fight between a white wolf and an eagle (metaphorically madness vs. America) which is a cowardly draw. They evade the helicopters searching for them and, cleansed of "mixed shit", enter bear country. Having left their weapons behind, they cannot kill the bear they encounter there, although D.J. senses that "the center of all significant knowledge" (207) would be revealed to him by the bear's death, as in Faulkner's story. Instead D.J. watches the bear kill a caribou and takes away the secret that there is "no peace in the North" (211).

That night, still electrified with frustrated violence, the boys wake to the Aurora Borealis. Each is filled with a lust to sodomize the other--the Satanic implications are clear--but suppresses the desire because he knows the other will kill him. It is then that their initiation takes place, coming not in a vision (the method of An American Dream) but through electrified air waves, as if all of the violence of the continent were concentrated in the Brooks Range:

. . . they hung there each of them on the knife of the divide in all conflict of lust to own the other yet in fear of being killed by the other and as the hour went by and the lights shifted, something in the radiance

of the North went into them, and owned their fear, some communion of telepathies and new powers, and they were twins, never to be near as lovers again, but killer brothers, owned by something, prince of darkness, lord of light, they did not know; they just knew telepathy was on them, they had been touched forever by the North and each bit a drop of blood from his own finger and touched them across and met, blood to blood, while the lights pulsated and glow of Arctic night was on the snow, and the deep beast whispering Fulfill my will, go forth and kill, and they left an hour later in the dark to go back to camp and knew on the way each mood of emotion building in Rusty and Big Luke and Ollie and M.A. Bill and Pete and their faces were etched just as they had forseen them and the older men's voices were filled with the same specific mix of mixed old shit which they had heard before in the telepathic vaults of their new Brooks Range electrified mind (219-20).

The revelation which accompanies their initiation is that God is a beast, a killer. Mailer's terrifying message is that man's fate is God's fate: in becoming more evil, man remakes God in his own image. "God is like Mc, only more so", the narrator of "Advertisements For Myself on the Way Out" told us, and America's God in this apocalyptic vision is Satanic. "You never know what vision has been humping you through the night", D.J. concludes as he and Tex are off to Vietnam (224). Although the question asked in the novel's title has been answered, the central ambiguity remains. Is D.J.'s future, as America's, to be decided in a glorified Armageddon known as Vietnam? The book's vision is Mailer's prophecy of America's fate should she continue in her present direction. D.J. is no hero but a victim as America is a victim of the American Dream.

I would conclude that the book's style suggests an alternative guide to the one America and Tex and D.J. have been following. By blocking out all competitive air waves for the length of time it takes us to complete the book, by offering the essentially comic purgative of obscenity rather than the tragic purgative of war, by parodying the use of language to control consciousness, Mailer created what might have been the most vital and effective work of his lifetime. But as might have been anticipated, his patients refused to swallow the medicine.

One of Mailer's better critics, Barry H. Leeds, contends that Why suffers from a lack of integration of the political message, system of metaphor (a carry-over from AAD in his opinion and therefore invalid for Why), and narrative voice (Leeds, 203). His reading points up the difficulty of applying textual analysis to the book: one is forced to pry it loose from its context and try to objectively evaluate the harmony of its parts. Why does not lend itself to such analysis because it is designed to set the reader's teeth on edge, to jar him out of his complacency, to change him by its power to communicate. In other words, the reaction of the reader is a key part of the book. The question of the novel's success or failure, it seems to me, must rest upon whether Mailer has been true or false to his own aesthetics, whether the book represents progress or a

regression, whether it reveals or conceals a little more of the mystery of human existence. In my opinion Why registers growth in three areas: 1) it carries what Hemingway and Faulkner had to say a little further by enlarging the metaphor of the hunt to interpret America's participation in her most controversial war of this century, and by suggesting along with Burroughs that man did not taint America's virgin land (as Faulkner believed) but rather that a malignant force lay in wait for him there; 2) by offering a purgative to insanity, murder and suicide through the explosive humor of obscenity to put together the America we have rather than to look for a new one, as Stephen Rojack was made to do; and 3) by inventing a new style to cut through the deadening effects of the mass media. Although we cannot measure the effect of Mailer's book or of his ideas on the war which continues to drain America's physical, economic, and spiritual resources, we can consider the novel in the contexts it was intended to change.

2. The Product: The Armies of the Night

To the ostent of the senses and eyes, I know, the influences which stamp the world's history are wars, uprisings or downfalls of dynasties, changeful movements of trade, important inventions, navigation, military or civil governments, advent of powerful personalities, conquerors, &c. These of course play their part; yet, it may be, a single new thought, imagination, abstract principle, even literary style, fit for the time, put in shape by some great literatus, and projected among mankind, may duly cause

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changes, growths, removals, greater than the longest and bloodiest war, or the most stupendous merely political, dynastic, or commercial overturn.¹⁶

The vision of the "great literatus" is Whitman's a century ago and, with reservations, Mailer's today. The most significant statement that Mailer has made to date on the possible effectiveness of the artist is contained in The Armies of the Night, subtitled History as a Novel/ The Novel as History. What Mailer has been able to do in Armies is literally to make history. He has made a metaphor of his participation in a protest against the Vietnam War and has himself become the object of his long search for an authentic American hero. Further, as a consequence, Mailer has had to come to terms with the significance and effectiveness of such a hero in our time. In these ways and others, Armies is the culmination not only of the prolific and diversified output of work since An American Dream, but also, more than anything else he has written, a product, that is, the final result of a long process discernible in the product itself.

The two main problems of Mailer's art over the years, the search for a hero and for an effective style for that hero, are solved in Armies. We remember from The Presidential Papers that the major requirement of Mailer's hero is that he be capable of uniting in himself the two rivers of American life, the mundane and the dream of the extraordinary. In Advertisements For Myself, the hipster was suggested as a

possible hero but later rejected because he could represent only one extreme. The Mailer of Advertisements was able to see his role as that of the creator of a viable hero but knew that he himself was not ready to fill the role. The demise of Mailer's personally selected flesh-and-blood hero, Jack Kennedy, propelled him to create a fictional possibility in Stephen Rojack. But Rojack proved both too extraordinary and too weak, capable only of constructing a new America of radical possibility, a dream of an America where presumably the mundane would have no place. Similarly D.J. is too ambiguous a character to be considered heroic; neither is he his own man. Mailer's own assumption of the heroic role may well have been inevitable since neither his real nor his fictional people passed the crucial test.

To become his own hero Mailer had to pass not one but two tests: he had to synthesize in himself the commonplace and the extraordinary, possible only through experiencing the synthesis as the outcome of a significant antithetical action, and he had to find a way to convert subjectivity to objectivity, to make himself a "literary object". I have quoted earlier from his review of Norman Podhoretz's Making It, published at the same time as Armies and so presumably written somewhat concurrently, in which Mailer analyzes the difficulty of creating a character of oneself.¹⁷ The "worst of the difficulty" as Mailer sees it is that

one is forced to examine oneself existentially, perceive oneself in the act of perceiving, (but worse--far worse--through the act of perceiving, perceive a Self who may manage to represent the separate warring selves by a Style). It is necessary to voyage through the fluorescent underground of the mind, that arena of self-consciousness where Sartre grappled with the pour-soi and the en-soi: intellections consuming flesh, consciousness the negation, yes, the very consumption of being. One is digesting one's own gut in such an endeavor (240-41).

Presumably the necessary agonizing has been undergone successfully between the experiencing of the events of October, 1967, and the writing of them in Armies. The narrator is separate from the participant in this book as is evidenced by the former's referring to the latter as "Mailer". In the three novels following The Naked and the Dead, it will be remembered, the narrator was a fictional character who referred to his participating self as "I". In Why Are We in Vietnam?, however, D.J. refers to himself in the third person. The breakthrough is complete in The Armies of the Night. The "Mailer" who has acted is a separate character from the Mailer who is writing, the latter having assimilated the experiences of the former and so having gone beyond him. Such a method of distancing the one self from the other accounts in part for the essentially comic, deflating tone used of "Mailer". Further reasons for the ironic tone are discernible and perhaps attributable to Mailer's untranquil recollections of the events of the March on the Pentagon.

As already mentioned, the hero was to synthesize

the ordinary and the dream-life. The emphasis in this book on the ordinary, even the mock-heroic nature of "Mailer", illumines his small victories that much the more, as the ineptness of the bullfighter "El Loco" magnified his triumphs. The technique is an old and common one, but Mailer appears to have just discovered it in Armies, signifying that his discovery is a result of his experiences in the March. The discovery centers in the perception that one is not permitted to confront the power at the top in the United States as Rojack could confront Kelly. Who then was "Mailer" the American hero to confront and attempt to defeat--a couple of terrified National Guardsmen, a U.S. Marshal, a Commissioner who would teach him a lesson by confining him in jail, the Press who inevitably misquote him? Taken separately these opponents hardly approximate a Barney Kelly. Even combined they are hardly fit foes for a romantic hero. While standing in the cold October air as man after man stepped forward to make his symbolic gesture against the war by presenting his draft card for burning, Mailer felt threatened by the pitiful inadequacy of such gestures:

. . . As if some final cherished rare innocence of childhood still preserved intact in him was brought finally to the surface and there expired, so he lost at that instant the last secret delight he retained in life as a game where finally you never got hurt if you played the game well enough. For years he had envisioned himself in some final cataclysm, as an underground leader in the city, or a guerrilla with a gun in the hills, and had scorned the organizational aspects of revolution, the speeches, mimeograph

machines, the hard dull forging of new parties and programs, the dull maneuvering to keep power, the intolerable obedience required before the over-all intellectual necessities of each objective period, and had scorned it, yes, had spit at it, and perhaps had been right, certainly had been right, such revolutions were the womb and cradle of technology land, no the only revolutionary truth was a gun in the hills, and that would not be his, he would be too old by then, and too incompetent, yes, too incompetent said the new modesty, and too showboat, too lacking in essential judgement--besides, he was too well-known! He would pay for the pleasure of his notoriety in the impossibility of disguise. No gun in the hills, no taste for organization, no, he was a figure-head, and therefore he was expendable, said the new modesty--not a future leader, but a future victim; there would be his real value (94).

Not a leader but a victim, not to manipulate but to be manipulated--this was the chief ambiguity surrounding D.J.'s fate and the center of Rojack's dread. And yet the Mailer who narrates has grown beyond the "Mailer" watching the draft-dodgers and the author of An American Dream and Why. He realizes that like Christ or John F. Kennedy a man may be both leader and victim; that in fact one's willingness to be victimized, to attract the attention of the powers at the top, invests one with a charisma, a sense of having been touched by magic, and one's confrontations then, however insignificant they may seem, become magnified by the aura of mystery and power which surrounds the man into battles worthy of St. George. Therefore, Mailer's act of forcing a military policeman to arrest him for crossing a police line takes on mighty proportions. Following his arrest,

He felt as if he were being confirmed. (After twenty

years of radical opinions, he was finally under arrest for a real cause.) Mailer always supposed he had felt important and unimportant in about as many ways as a man could feel; now he felt important in a new way. He felt his own age, forty-four, felt it as if he were finally one age, not seven, felt as if he were a solid embodiment of bone, muscle, flesh, and vested substance, rather than the heart, mind, and sentiment to be a man, as if he had arrived, as if this picayune arrest had been his Rubicon (157).

By making his symbolic action extraordinary, Mailer turns himself into a hero. By enlarging his concept of heroism to include symbolic victimization, he has not only found a means of making a representative American hero of himself but also a way to combat power that would remain faceless and so unassailable.

Mailer further establishes the heroism of symbolic action by means of several contrasts based on the impotence of words and actions whose ends are predictable. Between himself and Robert Lowell, Mailer develops the contrast of authentic and inauthentic heroism. Lowell, the descendent of a long line of distinguished American litterateurs and statesmen, has the aura of a prince while next to him Mailer appears a buffoon. But yet it proves that the Prince is less effective than the Buffoon: Lowell foregoes arrest to return to New York to host a dinner party; Mailer, although regrettably, misses the party in order to go to jail. If Lowell wishes to be a hero, Mailer suggests that he earn the right:

You, Lowell, beloved poet of many, what do you know of the dirt and the dark deliveries of the necessary? What do you know of dignity hard-achieved, and dig-

nity lost through innocence, and dignity lost by sacrifice for a cause one cannot name. What do you know about getting fat against your will and turning into a clown of an arriviste baron when you would rather be an eagle or a count, or rarest of all, some natural aristocrat from these damned democratic skates. No, the only subject we share, you and I, is that species of perception which shows that if we are not very loyal to our unendurable and most exigent inner light, then some day we may burn (54).

Lowell represents too the suicidal direction of American life and the impotence of tradition: the "natural aristocrat", inheritor of her most upheld tradition of working for change within the system, now is outspokenly opposed to the policies of the Establishment and condones the breaking of what he considers her unjust laws, but yet is himself, to Mailer's lights, ineffective in bringing about change.

Another contrast centers around the innumerable speeches made in the three-day period of the March. Speech after speech dulled whatever inflammation might have resulted from the words. The rhetoric of the March came to represent to Mailer a kind of verbal diarrhea, like the rhetoric of the Johnson Administration. Yet Mailer feels that he himself is a good extemporaneous speaker and is somewhat insulted when not asked to speak at every gathering. To him the relationship of speaking to acting should be one of cause and effect: one's words inspire action. This has long been a part of his aesthetics and of his concept of leadership. This is why the speeches of potential leaders like Lowell, although they contain the right words, fail

because the speakers do not follow them with significant action, in this case being arrested and therefore consciously forcing the power structure to deal with one's opposition.

Other contrasts are drawn between the methods of certain power groups within the March. Mailer compares the Old Left, to which he once owed allegiance, to the New Left, which includes all those who organize to change the Establishment. The Old Left, according to Mailer, based its revolution on the "sound-as-brickwork-logic-of-the-next-step" (102), while the New Left's "aesthetic" is existential: it "began with the notion that the authority could not comprehend nor contain nor finally manage to control any political action whose end is unknown" (104-05). And yet the New Left is essentially dull, while the Old Left had an imaginative sense of apocalypse. Not only does Mailer support his own aesthetics by these contrasts, he also considers the diversity of the participants in the March and their interactions with each other and with government negotiators to be "a paradigm of the disproportions and contradictions of the twentieth-century itself" (255). If the March is a metaphor for our time, the dynamic interaction of the diverse forces should produce a new synthesis for our time, and Mailer's concept of the synthesis is present in the form of his book and in his own role as hero.

Based on a chronological account of his participation in the events surrounding the March on the Pentagon,

Mailer's new synthesis is seen unfolding in Book I of Armies. The action of Book I as a whole may be seen as "Mailer's" progress from the mock-heroic to the heroic through the increasing significance of his confrontations. The space between these encounters, by revealing that a man can be a buffoon one moment and a hero the next, gives added significance to those existential moments when one's courage is tested. This plot line, constructed on factual incidents with interpretations by the Novelist, forms the basis for the synthesis of "history as a novel". Let us examine more closely the reasons for the emergence of the new style.

Observing a busload of America's children on their way to the March, Mailer broods on the power the mass media has exerted on them and on the waning influence of America's novelists:

A part of him had always tried to believe that the America he saw in family television dramas did not exist, had no power--as of course he knew it did--to direct the styles and the manners and therefore the ideas of America (for in a country where everyone lived so close to their senses, then style, precisely, and manner, precisely, carved ideas into the senses) ideas like conformity, cleanliness, America-is-always-right

. . . As the power of communication grew larger, so the responsibility to educate a nation lapped at the feet, new tide of a new responsibility, and one had become a writer after all to find a warm place where one was safe--responsibility was for the pompous, and the public servants; writers were born to discover wine. It was an old argument and he was worn with it--he had written a good essay once about the failure of any major American novelist to write a major novel which would reach out past the best-seller lists to a major part of that American

audience brainwashed by Hollywood, TV, and Time. Yes, how much of Fitzgerald's long dark night may have come from that fine winnowing sense in the very fine hair of his nose that the two halves of America were not coming together, and when they failed to touch, all of history might be lost in the divide. Yes, there was a dark night if you had the illusion you could do something about it, and the conviction that not enough had been done (177-79).

Although the novelist has the vision, the mass media has the audience. Both have the power to create a world roughly based on facts and to manipulate one's interpretation of those facts. If one believes, as Mailer does, that his interpretations should shape the nation, he must battle for power with opposing interpretations. Mailer has outdone his competitors, the journalists who report the news, in two main ways, first in his role as participant, as protagonist of his own narrative. Like Whitman, Mailer can say "I am the man, I suffered, I was there." The various titles Mailer assigns to himself during the course of Armies indicates the growing representativeness of his roles: first only the Novelist, he becomes in addition Participant, Historian, Beast (a role assigned to him because unlike novelists, participants can be manipulated), Romantic, Master of Ceremonies, minor poet, Citizen, Ruminant, and Protagonist. Second, Mailer has learned the secret of making the mass media work for him: keep yourself in the news. However much one's words or actions are misrepresented he is still getting coverage. Applied to the March, the use of the mass media is related to Mailer's aesthetics of

growth: "A protest movement which does not grow loses power every day, since protest movements depend upon the interest they arouse in the mass media. But the mass media are interested only in processes which are expanding dramatically or collapsing" (259). If actions are meant to influence, one's style must be attention-getting. Mailer's taste for notoriety has long been cited as the motive for his actions, and even admirers of his writing have been taken in by that judgement. In Armies, interestingly, Mailer reports that his actions during the weekend of the March and notably his arrest were being filmed for a BBC documentary, later entitled "Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up?" So even while participating in the March, Mailer had occasion to direct himself for the cameras, not so much out of vanity as to keep from being manipulated by the film medium, however sympathetic the cameramen.

Having established that the main reasons for Mailer's style in Armies were to communicate all of the nuances of the March on the Pentagon to a mass audience, to substitute his style for that of the mass media, and in so doing to make through their methods a representative American hero of himself, let us look more closely at his new style and the subjects of his attacks.

Mailer opens the book with an account in Time magazine of his participation in events preceding the March.

One knows the type of article--more concerned with being catchy and provocative than with being factual and unbiased. Without commenting on the story, Mailer undercuts it with this remark: "Now we may leave Time in order to find out what happened" (14). Finding out what really happened has long been the province of the journalist or historian. Mailer's question concerning the validity of their accounts is how one can know the truth if one has not experienced it or if one does not share the novelist's gift of intuition and his feeling for nuance. Further, Mailer believes that journalists and historians are incapable of handling the ambiguous. Here is Mailer's justification for his approach:

The March on the Pentagon was an ambiguous event whose essential value or absurdity may not be established for ten or twenty years, or indeed ever. So to place the real principals, the founders or designers of the March . . . in the center of our portrait could prove misleading. They were serious men, devoted to hard detailed work; their position in these affairs, precisely because it was central, can resolve nothing of the ambiguity. For that, an eyewitness who is a participant but not a vested partisan is required, further he must be not only involved, but ambiguous in his own proportions, a comic hero, which is to say, one cannot happily resolve the emphasis of the category--is he finally comic, a ludicrous figure with mock-heroic associations; or is he not unheroic, and therefore embedded somewhat tragically in the comic? Or is he both at once, and all at once? These questions, which probably are not much more answerable than the very ambiguities of the event, at least help to recapture the precise feel of the ambiguity of the event and its monumental disproportions. Mailer is a figure of monumental disproportions and so serves willy-nilly as the bridge--many will say the pons asinorum--into the crazy house, the crazy mansion, of that historic moment when a mass of the citizenry--not much more

than a mob--marched on a bastion which symbolized the military might of the Republic, marching not to capture it, but to wound it symbolically So if the event took place in one of the crazy mansions, or indeed the crazy house of history, it is fitting that any ambiguous comic hero of such history should be not only off very much to the side of the history, but that he should be an egotist of the most startling misproportions, outrageously and often unhappily self-assertive, yet in command of a detachment classic in severity (for he was a novelist and so in need of studying every last lineament of the fine, the noble, the frantic, and the foolish in others and in himself). Such egotism being two-headed, thrusting itself forward the better to study itself, finds itself therefore at home in a house of mirrors, since it has habits, even the talent to regard itself. Once History inhabits a crazy house, egotism may be the last tool left to History (67-68).

So the quality of Mailer's performance in Armies depends on just how representative of America's ambiguities he can make himself. The whole of Book I is devoted to an unfolding of incident after incident designed to progressively reveal how noble and yet how common this man is. An examination of the most important of these incidents should reveal how successful he has been.

Following his arrest Mailer wonders how long he will be jailed. Naively he supposes that he will be released in time to make Lowell's dinner party. After all, his object was to be arrested, he had made his point, and that, he thought, was that. Hours later the inexperienced participant is enlightened by his alter-ego, the knowing Novelist:

Why had he expected the government to be crisp, modest, and pleasantly efficient in their processing of Pentagon prisoners? 'Because ass,' he said to himself, 'they have brainwashed you as well.' And it was

true. The only reason he had expected to be out of jail in half an hour was the **covert** impression he had of government as brotherly; dull but brotherly; ten thousand hours of television, ten million words of newsprint added up to one thundering misapprehension of all the little details of institutional life (182).

The noble Mailer plans to fast throughout his term in jail. And yet before the thought has settled, he takes a drink of water. He seems to himself either "saint" or "debauchee" with "no middle ground . . . tenable for his appetites" (185).

The "saint" begins to hand out the money in his wallet to pay the prisoners' fines, but the "debauchee" holds back the money from those he does not like and of course saves out enough for himself. At every turn he, like the America he has come to believe he personifies, is divided between the thought and the act, the justification and the manifestation, the good and the evil. How to put it together, how to make the good outweigh the evil? This the crucial question, Mailer finds a way. While in jail he listens to a student radical incite the prisoners to further protest and envisions prison as

an endless ladder of moral challenges. Each time you climbed a step . . . another higher, more dangerous, more disadvantageous step would present itself. Sooner or later, you would have to descend. It did not matter how high you climbed. The first step down in a failure of nerve always presented the same kind of moral nausea . . . To become less guilty, then weaken enough to return to guilt was somehow worse than to remain cemented in your guilt (219).

Such a moral ladder resembles the aesthetics of growth Mailer has operated by for so many years. You grow or you pay. Yet

in his new role and with his new experience, he learns not that his aesthetics has been wrong but that he has applied it too rigorously to himself. This new and important knowledge comes as, free at last from jail, Mailer realizes how one can imprison himself:

He felt a liberation from the unending disciplines of that moral ladder whose rungs he had counted in the dormitory . . . no, all effort was not the same, and to eject oneself from guilt might yet be worth it, for the nausea on return to guilt could conceivably prove less: standing on the grass, he felt one suspicion of a whole man closer to that freedom from dread which occupied the inner drama of his years, yes, one image closer than when he had come to Washington four days ago. The sum of what he had done that he considered good outweighed the dull sum of his omissions these same four days. So he was happy, and it occurred to him that this clean sense of himself, with a skin of compassion at such rare moment for all . . . it must come crashing soon, but still-- This nice anticipation of the very next moves of life itself . . . must mean, indeed could mean nothing else to Christians, but what they must signify when they spoke of Christ within them, it was not unlike the rare sweet of a clean loving tear not dropped, still held (238)

The moral ladder must be climbed, but one need not be perfect. Comparing this mature Mailer to Rojack at the end of An American Dream, we can see the distance he has come. America's hero is not Superman but a very human being who with courage can summon up enough nobility on occasion to rise above himself, to outweigh his failures although because he is human he will fail again. This knowledge is what makes him a "whole man" and can make America a whole nation.

With his life and art having growth together through

the establishment of himself as the metaphor for America, the Novelist's work in Armies is complete. By virtue of one's interest in this "Mailer", Book I is by far the more important, and indeed is three-fourths of the book's whole. Too, the second book suffers from its placement for because it is less interesting it is anti-climactic. And yet it is a vital part of Mailer's account of the March. As the emphasis in the first part has been on history as a novel, so in the second part it is on the novel as history, that is, the unified sensibility having been established, it will now apply itself to the events of the March. As Mailer expresses it,

The mass media which surrounded the March on the Pentagon created a forest of inaccuracy which would blind the efforts of an historian; our novel has provided us with the possibility, no, even the instrument to view our facts and conceivably study them in that field of light a labor of lens-grinding has produced (245-46).

Mailer's virtue in Book II is not that he offers an objective view of the events but that he does not pretend to. His "history" is a combination of personal experience and eye-witness accounts culled from all manner of sources, not weighed for their accuracy as might be expected in a history, but filtered through a central intelligence. Mailer explains his method:

. . . history is interior--no documents can give sufficient intimation: the novel must replace history at precisely that point where experience is sufficiently emotional, spiritual, psychical, moral, existential, or supernatural to expose the fact that the historian in pursuing the experience would be

obliged to quit the clearly demarcated limits of historic inquiry. So these limits are now relinquished. The collective novel which follows, while still written in the cloak of an historic style, and, therefore, continuously attempting to be scrupulous to the welter of a hundred confusing and opposed facts, will now unashamedly enter that world of strange lights and intuitive speculation which is the novel (284).

The final test Mailer's method must pass is whether it reveals to us more of the shape of events surrounding the March on the Pentagon than what we know from the conventional sources available to us. As we have come to expect, Mailer expresses his concept of the events as a metaphor. What the March finally comes to mean for him may be seen in the final lines of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" to which the title of Mailer's book alludes:

the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkning plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.¹⁸

As in this anguished vision of the end of security and faith and the emergence of a terrifying new age of uncertainty, Mailer sees the March as another struggle to preserve the old faith in the American Dream and one not without a measure of success. The March has analogues in all of America's struggles: the Revolutionary and Civil Wars and the Old Left movement of the Thirties are emphasized, and all are seen as "rites of passage" for the participants, either

positive or negative in nature. "Men learn in a negative rite to give up the best things they were born with, and forever" (316) and in a positive rite of passage to hold on to those things at all costs. Those who participated in support of the Vietnam War, all depicted as members of the military, police, or government, took the negative rite, Mailer believes. Like the language of "technologese", they succeeded in "stripping [themselves] of any moral content" (315). And what of the others, the other ignorant army? Even the worst of these, the "spoiled children of a dead de-animalized middle class" were forced to make a positive passage by "moving . . . to a confrontation they could only fear" (311-12). The best, perhaps, were those highest on the moral ladders, the Quakers and Pacifists who remained in jail rather than to compromise: "who was to say that the sins of America were not by their witness a tithe remitted?" (319) Diverse though they may be, these opponents of the Establishment herald that new revolution in consciousness which Mailer has long sought and which Charles Reich has recently depicted as Consciousness III in his aptly titled The Greening of America.¹⁹ The aim of the new consciousness is the transcendence of technology by making the machine enrich rather than impoverish human life, to make America green again. This, ultimately, is the aim of Mailer's book, as its final page makes clear. We must deliver America

from her bonds because "we must end on the road to that mystery where courage, death, and the dream of love give promise of sleep" (320).

If we believe at all in Mailer's vision we must allow that his interpretation of the March has imparted to it a form and an urgency unmatched in other accounts. Whether or not one agrees with his moral assignments of the sides, one must acknowledge his accomplishment in Armies: more than any other of his works, it illustrates the value of his aesthetics of growth and what it may accomplish for America. Armies unites and balances through a new maturity the separate parts of that aesthetics: Mailer's life, his art, his ambitions, and his vision. The egotism he had learned from Hemingway is tempered by the humility and wisdom of this book's spiritual father, Henry Adams. Like Adams' account of the interaction of the self with history, Mailer's "education" has resulted in a broadening of his horizons, as well as those of the novel, the autobiography, journalism, and history by combining these various ways of viewing reality in Armies. For so doing and in consideration of his abiding concern for the fate of America, he was awarded by the cultural Establishment he opposes their two highest awards for The Armies of the Night: the 1968 National Book Award for Arts and Letters and the Pulitzer Prize for General Non-fiction.

FOOTNOTES

¹The similarities of this concept of transcending the machine to Charles Reich's discussion of Consciousness III in The Greening of America should be apparent.

²Robert W. Lawler, p. 156.

³Norman Mailer, The Armies of the Night, p. 33. All further references are to this text whose title will be abbreviated as Armies.

⁴Norman Mailer, Norman Mailer's The Deer Park: A Play, p. 12.

⁵John Olsen Stark, "Norman Mailer's Work from 1963 to 1968", Diss. University of Wisconsin, 1969, p. 162.

⁶Gerald Weales, The Jumping-off Place: American Drama in the 1960's, p. 221.

⁷Norman Mailer, "The Crazy One", Playboy, October, 1967, p. 91.

⁸Mailer, "Some Dirt in the Talk", p. 193.

⁹Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, p. 44.

¹⁰Norman Mailer, Why Are We in Vietnam?, p. 7. All further references are to this text whose title will be abbreviated as Why.

¹¹I am indebted to Tony Tanner's discussion of Burroughs in City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970, pp. 109-40.

¹²Charles T. Samuels, "The Novel, USA: Mailerrhea", Nation, October 23, 1967, p. 406.

¹³John W. Aldridge, "From Vietnam to Obscenity", Harper's, February, 1968, p. 91.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁵Leeds, pp. 182, 187-88.

¹⁶Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas" in The Collected Works of Walt Whitman: Prose Works 1892, Vol. 11, Floyd Stovall, ed., 366.

¹⁷Mailer, "Up the Family Tree".

¹⁸Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach", in The Poems of Matthew Arnold, Kenneth Allott, ed., pp. 242-43.

¹⁹Charles Reich, op. cit.

IV

ON THE WAY OUT

With the establishment of himself as participator in and interpreter of contemporary American events in The Armies of the Night, Mailer's conception of his role as the instrument and director of change comes to fruition. His work following Armies is dependent upon his right to the role of hero; if we do not accept the authority of his voice we cannot accept his ideas and interpretations. Even admirers of Mailer's books, however, have expressed dissatisfaction with what they consider the monumental presumption of his running for mayor of New York, his conviction that he is the major opposition to the Women's Liberation movement, and the lesser egocentricity, ironically the prostitution of his writer's stature they think, of his rounds of television "talk" shows. However removed from writing, especially the most-favored writing of novels, these activities may appear (and Mailer's versatility is suspect in itself) they are of a piece with his aesthetics of growth and the continuing process of the development of a holistic man for a fragmented time.

Having made himself an American hero, Mailer is obliged to confront those events which have the capability

of influencing our national destiny. His active participation where possible and, lately, his research of areas not previously known to him, make his perspectives fresh and vital. He exerts on such events whatever force is possible, generally an antithetical one, in an all-out effort to affect the shape of the future. His greatest fear is that humanism will be phased out as the electronic age phases out traditional literary forms. Perhaps what is most heroic about Mailer's efforts is his continued participation in the monumental battle for human control and transcendence of the inevitable scientific and technological advancements. Mailer knows that "Being a hero is an existential state. It can vanish in a season" because a hero is someone who "embod[ies] some spirit of the time A man can be a hero only for a very short time, unless he is really in the center of that history that's moving on and on and on" ¹ He literally placed himself at the center of history in Armies and has tried to keep himself there in his work of the past three years.

A most interesting part of his ongoing dramatic dialectic was his campaign for the Democratic Party's nomination for the office of Mayor of New York in the spring of 1969. Mailer was willing to set aside writing for an active political role, a tangible means of putting his theories into practice. The campaign is the subject of two books,

Managing Mailer² and Running Against the Machine³, both by young men who were actively involved in his campaign. Mailer ran as a "left conservative", a characteristic synthesis of extremes which he described this way: left conservatism

insists that politics be an extension of our personal lives and that existence is nothing if not for individual responsibility and action. At bottom it requires every man to gauge the success or failure of his life by the extent to which he knows that life and all that it might be. It calls for democracy but a democracy which is nothing if not pluralistic. In effect, it is everything that the center is not (Manso, xii).

The major idea of Mailer's campaign was that New York become the fifty-first state. It would then be free from a crippling economic dependence upon Albany and able to develop its own great potential. The city-state would reorganize itself into independent neighborhoods with the power to conduct their own affairs:

Power to the neighborhoods would mean that any neighborhood could constitute itself on any principle, whether spiritual, emotional, economical, ideological or idealistic Life in the kind of neighborhood which contains one's belief of a possible society is a form of marriage between one's social philosophy and one's private contract with the world (Manso, 12-14).

The idea is intriguing but depends upon a kind of frontier spirit that has been all but bred out of Americans. However, the contention that the revival of that spirit is the means toward any future America might develop is a longstanding part of Mailer's aesthetics of growth. This essentially conservative element of Mailer's left conservatism is dominant in the following excerpt from a campaign essay:

. . . the old confidence that the problems of our life were roughly equal to our abilities has been lost. Our authority has been handed over to the federal power . . . we cannot forge our destiny. So our condition is spiritless. We wait for abstract impersonal powers to save us, we despise the abstractness of those powers, we loathe ourselves for our own apathy Who is to say that the religious heart is not right to think the need of every man and woman alive may be to die in a state of grace, a grace which for atheists and agnostics may reside in the basic art of having done one's best, of having found some part of a destiny to approach, and having worked for the view of it? (Manso, 3-4)

The old American Adamic myth is revived in this essay, although the suggestion of New York as a possible Eden surely is unique to Mailer. Added to this conservative philosophy with its emphasis on individualism is the left or liberal tradition of working for change within the existing machinery of the system. Thus the concept of left conservatism embraces the two greatest traditions in American political life: cooperative government designed to promote creative individualism.

However attractive or visionary Mailer's position papers might have been to certain voters (he polled 41,136 votes, his running mate nearly twice that [Manso, 138]), he proved no practical politician. In fact he demonstrated once and for all that his value to our times is not so much in his actions as in what he makes of them through his writing and in what significant action his symbolic action inspires in others. Mailer made all the mistakes a politician can make to lose votes: he was late for appointments; he offended the press by constantly reminding them of his

superior stature as a writer (his Pulitzer Prize for Armies was announced on May 6, soon after the campaign began); he offended both members of his own staff and potential contributors; he used obscenity at political gatherings;⁴ he chose as a running mate a man, Jimmy Breslin, whose public image emphasized the idiosyncracies of his own and caused the press to treat them as a comedy team; and worst of all, by his own assessment, he was forced to endlessly repeat himself, a stagnant endeavor against the grain of his aesthetics of growth.

While the campaign failed of its goal by a great margin, it was nonetheless a growth experience for Mailer. Near the beginning of his first book following the campaign, Of a Fire on the Moon, he assesses the personal effects of his political venture:

He came in fourth in a field of five, and politics was behind him. He had run, when he considered it, no very remarkable race. He had obviously not had any apocalyptic ability to rustle up large numbers of votes. He had in fact been left with a huge boredom about himself. He was weary of his own voice, own face, person, persona, will, ideas, speeches, and general sense of importance. He felt not unhappy, mildly depressed, somewhat used up, wise, tolerant, sad, void of vanity, even had a hint of humility (Fire, 5-6).

If the mayoralty campaign may be said to constitute an experiment in non-literary communication, one in which content was sacrificed by a noncomplementary style, Mailer's continued experiments with "existential" filmmaking explored

style as content. Beyond the Law, filmed in 1967 and released in 1968 and Maidstone, made in the summer of 1968 and released in 1970, were similar in conception to Wild 90. Mailer again assumed the roles of actor, producer, director, and editor and chose from among his friends and acquaintances to act out a central idea. Beyond the Law, a film about "cops and robbers", is based on Mailer's concept that schizophrenia is the modern disease and that those who seek outlets for violence, i.e., policemen and criminals, demonstrate by how thin a tissue our society is held together. The policeman and the criminal are two halves of a whole, Mailer contends in this film, which traces the after-hours activities of an off-duty policeman. Having such an idea to explore stylistically in the film represents an advancement beyond Wild 90, which was solely concerned with making film a medium of existential style.

Mailer's third film, Maidstone, received considerable advance publicity. The accounts given in the New York Times exemplify the kind of coverage Mailer typically receives for his non-literary ventures and reveal why it is that admirers of Mailer's writing find his "public image" difficult to reconcile. The first article, entitled "Norman Mailer Enlists His Private Army to Act in Film", undercuts Mailer's serious intentions in making the film by creating the impression that it is a lark or an orgy. An orgy it may have

been for some, for that was part of the film's latitude, but a lark it was not. Mailer gathered a large group of friends, associates, and technicians on four Long Island estates to try to make a film in five days. A picture shows him orienting the group on the nature of the film while the caption reads as follows: "Norman Mailer, above, explains to models, playwrights, social figures and others what the 'beautiful, tasteful, resonant, touching, evocative' movie is about. It's about a director, played by Norman Mailer."⁵

The second Times article, by the same journalist, appears eight days later under these headlines: "Mailer Film Party a Real Bash: 1 Broken Jaw, 2 Bloody Heads". The incident which drew the film together, an existential fight between Mailer and actor Rip Torn, is presented as crude and irresponsible violence and its context within the film ignored.⁶

A follow-up article appears two years later upon the release of Maidstone in London. The headlines again emphasize Mailer as pugalist: "Mailer, in London, Trades Jabs With Audience Over New Film". The bias of the article is that the film's sophisticated audience correctly panned it while Mailer egotistically defended its concepts. Here is the opening paragraph: "Norman Mailer took a pounding from young British film enthusiasts this week over his new, loose-gaited motion picture called 'Maidstone.' Mr. Mailer told

his critics they would like his picture better if they saw it 10 times."⁷

It is no wonder that Mailer became his own critic and his chief defendant, for the news media has proved to be more interested in creating stories about Mailer that sell newspapers than in presenting the reasons that lie beneath the surface of events.

In October, 1971 Mailer published Maidstone: A Mystery, a collection of reviews of the film, screenplay and stills, and a lengthy essay about the making of Maidstone, entitled "A Course in Film-Making".⁸ Mailer's observation about Hollywood films in general is that they depend upon stories as if they were books and upon actors and staging as if they were plays. He sees the nature of film quite differently:

Film lives somewhere in that underground river of the psyche which travels from the domain of sex through the deeps of memory and the dream, on out into the possible montages of death . . . it is at its most beautiful in precisely those places it is least concrete, least theatrical, most other-worldly, most ghostly, most lingering unto death (151).

Based on this conception, the existential style is appropriate to film, for it proceeds without prior knowledge of its own end as Mailer's film proceeded without scripts, just a situation to start with. An atmosphere increasingly tense and full of dread grew out of the interplay of the actors, for the filming took place only a few weeks after Robert Kennedy's death and Mailer had picked a potentially violent

situation for the film. He played Norman T. Kingsley, a film director and Presidential candidate ripe for assassination. Rip Torn played a possible assassin and completely surprised Mailer by hitting him on the head with a hammer when he least expected it. Mailer retaliated and the cameramen caught the sequence on film. According to Mailer, Torn's action was a result of the film's atmosphere. A "powerless instrument of his own will" (175), he had felt compelled to attack Mailer. If so, the film had succeeded in becoming a film about the nature of film and therefore about "the surface of reality and the less visible surface of psychological reality" (178).

Mailer considered Maidstone his film because he "wrote" it through editing, the language of filmmaking. Film, he concludes, is "the only art which can search, cut by cut, into the mystery of moods which follow and accommodate one another; film is the only art which can study sudden shifts of mood which sever the ongoing river of time a fine film has set in flow" (179-80). No doubt we will hear more from Mailer as filmmaker. His concern with form in this film is sharper than in any of his work since The Armies of the Night, as if filming had become considerably more challenging to him than writing books.

The past three years since the filming of Maidstone have brought about a significant change in Mailer's position with respect to the Establishment. Having received their

major literary awards, he is cautiously accepted as a member of the club, although his non-literary ventures are still suspect. His longstanding battle for fair coverage with Time-Life, Inc. resulted in their coming over to his side. He received between one-third and one-half a million dollars for Life magazine's rights to his views on the Apollo 11 flight. Big money also came his way for Harper's rights to both Miami and the Siege of Chicago and The Prisoner of Sex. One Mailer scholar, John Stark, expressed concern that Mailer may have "sold out" to the Establishment by accepting their assignments and accepting them for such huge sums.⁹ However, readers of Of a Fire, Miami and Prisoner can rest assured that Mailer pays no homage to Time-Life and is still characteristically opposed to what he construes as obstructions to progress. In my opinion, Mailer has won his case against Time-Life by using them to disseminate his views. The only reservation I would make to his continued use of such magazines is that he is constantly battling deadlines and has little time for reflection and revision. Although Mailer enjoys the challenge of working against deadlines, his last three books all suffer to some extent from such haste.

Linked to these efforts to affect the future by influencing our view of the present are Mailer's frequent public appearances, many on late-night "talk" shows. During an engagement on "The Dick Cavett Show" (October 7, 1971),

Mailer boxed three very respectable rounds with former light-heavyweight boxing champion Jose Torres, a close friend who taught Mailer to box in exchange for being taught how to write. Boxing has long been an obsession of Mailer's, as it was for Hemingway, for it in every way expresses his concept of existentialism. During that same program he offered an opinion on Governor Rockefeller's inept handling of the Attica prison riots and provided an alternate plan for future prison systems. Mailer never misses an opportunity to score a point.

While his ventures in politics, filmmaking, and his public appearances make their separate contributions to Mailer's aesthetics of growth, his writing still contains his most effective and enduring efforts. An examination of Mailer's three books following Armies will enable us to see the direction he is presently taking and provide some perspective on the three major works already discussed.

Miami and the Siege of Chicago was written not only against a publisher's deadline but against Mailer's own objectives of publication prior to the 1968 Presidential election in order to influence that election. Unlike his 1960 essay "Superman Comes to the Supermarket", written to help elect John Kennedy, Miami does not so much promote a candidate as a point of view. Mailer once again makes himself the representative American through whose actions the Republican and Democratic conventions are illumined.

We may consider the book in two lights: as a product of Mailer's interaction with specific events and as a part of the continuing process of his life and art. These two perspectives conflict somewhat, with the consequence that Miami is only a good book and not a great one. Central to the conflict is Mailer's conception of his role in interpreting the events of the summer of 1968. As a "reporter" with a contract from Harper's magazine to fulfill and press credentials which make him one of a large corps of reporters at the conventions, Mailer is obliged to allow the Presidential contenders center stage rather than himself. Of course it is expected that he will evolve a unique interpretation based on his own philosophical principles. Yet we do not expect a reporter to be an active participant. No reporter in Armies, Mailer depended in his narration upon his prior participation. Reporting excludes participation as narrating does not, and a nonactive role is not Mailer's strongest position.

In Part I, "Nixon in Miami", Mailer is strictly an interpretive journalist. He first establishes the place of the Republican convention, Miami Beach, as a metaphoric American Hell: a tropical climate "transmogrified by technological climate"¹⁰ and "the materialistic capital of the world" (14). Next the Republican Presidential contenders are described in language that both deflates by style and inflates by implication their importance. They are for

Mailer the faces of Wasp power in America. Only Nixon is an enigma to "the reporter". His previous impressions of Nixon are horrific:

There had been a gap between the man who spoke and the man who lived behind the speaker which offered every clue of schizophrenia in the American public if they failed to recognize the void within the presentation. Worse. There was unity only in the way the complacency of the voice matched the complacency of the ideas (42).

Now Nixon gives the reporter evidence that he has "some knowledge of the abyss" (44), the essential quality Kennedy had lacked. The current enigma Nixon presented was

whether he was a serious man on the path of returning to his own true seriousness, out to unite the nation again as he promised with every remark . . . or whether the young devil had reconstituted himself into a more consummate devil, Old Scratch as a modern Abe Lincoln of modesty (47).

In other words, is Nixon an agent of good or evil? This is the ultimate ambiguity to which Mailer sooner or later elevates any show of power. His obsession with the question provides the book's moral framework and creates the need to examine all facets of Nixon's character for whatever truth it might reveal.

Nixon's evidence of growth and his potential for heroism excite Mailer as "a measure of the not-entirely dead promise of America if a man as opportunistic as the early Nixon could grow in reach and comprehension and stature to become a leader" (50). Mailer is eager that Nixon be what he seems for he could then transfer some of his own weighty

role as American hero to Nixon. Mailer's American Dream could be embodied in Richard Nixon:

To cleanse the gangrenous wounds of a great power, to restore sanity to the psychopathic fevers of the day, to deny the excessive demand, and nourish the real need, to bring a balance to the war of claims, weed the garden of tradition, and show a fine nose for what was splendid in the new, serve as the great educator who might introduce each warring half of the nation to the other, and bring back the faith of other nations to a great nation in adventurous harmony with itself--yes, the dream could be magnificent enough for any world leader; if the reporter did not think that Nixon, poor Nixon, was very likely to flesh such a dream, still he did not know that the attempt should be denied. It was possible, even likely, even necessary, that the Wasp should enter the center of our history again (62).

It is Mailer's belief that the Wasp holds every power in America but "the one they needed--which was to attach their philosophy to history" (52). More and more American conservatism is coming to express to Mailer the vision lacked by the Left:

perhaps the Wasp had to come to power in order that he grow up, in order that he take the old primitive root of his life-giving philosophy--which required every man to go through battles, if the world would live, and every woman to bear a child For certain the world could not be saved by technology or government or genetics, and much of the Left had that still to learn (63).

This view is to prove central to Mailer's next book, Of a Fire on the Moon.

Part I of Miami ends as "the reporter stood in the center of the American scene" (63), his now-characteristic position, with his and America's hopes riding on an enigma

called Richard Nixon, who still promised something to everyone and spoke like a computer. Mailer's inability to intuit whether Nixon is friend or foe is deflating to his ego and this perhaps is the essential reason for the consistency of his role as reporter in Part I.

Part II is a different story. It owes more to the Mailer of Armies in that the significance of observed events forces him to act. The section is nearly twice as long as Part I and gets better and better as Mailer abandons the role of reporter and again becomes novelist-participant.

In contrast to Miami, Mailer sees Chicago as "the great American city" (85), a metaphor for the great energy and potential of America in the nineteenth century before it became diseased, the city that Dreiser wrote about. Mailer devotes three pages to a description of the stockyards and the butchering of hogs, preparing a metaphor for Mayor Daley's "pigs": "Watching the animals be slaughtered, one knows the human case--no matter how close to angel we may become, the butcher is equally there" (89). John Stark has noted the **prolificity of porcine imagery in this section.**¹¹ It is truly an organic metaphor. A few pages later Mailer relates his having received the news of the shooting of Robert Kennedy. He prays that Kennedy's life be spared and that he himself be punished for his recent act of adultery and generally for man's inability to maintain a balance

"between the angel in oneself and the swine" (93). (Incidentally, one is not surprised to learn in Mailer's next book that he and his fourth wife have separated. Such a personal example of the swine in oneself loses in discretion what it gains in force from honesty.)

Having reached this low only weeks before the Democratic convention, we look to see what growth experiences Mailer will have to report as his narrative continues. After establishing that Chicago is a vastly more interesting city than Miami Beach, Mailer goes on to attribute a greater dynamism to the Democratic than to the Republican convention. In his view the conflict between the Hawks and the Doves broke the back of the Democratic party. He develops as part of the view the theory of politics as property: each party member holds a piece of property that he bestows upon or withholds from a participating candidate. If one ignores the theory, as McCarthy did by being his own man, he loses the game. Humphrey, on the other hand, was a "small genius" for combining properties that had been antagonistic, such as trade-unionism and anti-communism had been before World War II (107). In the end the convention was a struggle for property by the Doves and Hawks, and the most dramatic portions of the struggle took place on the streets of Chicago where the battle between the Hippies, Yippies and others Doves and the Chicago police in Mailer's eyes became the

central metaphor for the convention, the Vietnam War, and the mood of the country as it moved into the last third of the twentieth century.

Prior to these events Mailer had been unsure of his courage and of the purposefulness of the large gatherings of anti-war demonstrators in the parks and streets. He compares the events to the March on the Pentagon:

The justifications of the March on the Pentagon were not here. The reporter was a literary man--symbol had the power to push him into actions more heroic than himself The symbol of the Pentagon had been a chalice to hold his fear

But in Chicago, there was no symbol for him (144).

It was not until the police began to clash with the demonstrators that Mailer saw a clear battleground. Playing the role of passive observer, he watches from a hotel window as the Chicago police, taunted by rocks and cries of "Pig", beat the demonstrators. To Mailer the battle is "the murderous paradigm of Vietnam"; it is "history for once . . . tak[ing] place . . . on the center of the stage, as if each side had said, 'Here we will have our battle. Here we will win'" (172-73). The police action gave rise to Mailer's vision of the future as a totalitarian nightmare in which more and more punitive control is administered until all opposition is stilled. This is the mood he saw enveloping the Democratic convention.

Now Mailer's personal reaction to the battle becomes

a test of his heroism:

He liked his life. He wanted it to go on--not as it was going, not Vietnam--but what price was he really willing to pay? Was he ready to give up the pleasures of making his movies, writing his books?

. . . Where was his true engagement? To be forty-five years old, and have lost a sense of where his loyalties belonged--to the revolution or to the stability of the country (at some painful personal price it could be suggested) was to bring upon himself the anguish of the European intellectual in the Thirties. And the most powerful irony for himself is that he had lived for a dozen empty hopeless years after the second world war with the bitterness, rage, and potential militancy of a real revolutionary, he had had some influence perhaps upon this generation of Yippies now in the street, but no revolution had arisen in the years when he was ready

These are large thoughts for a reporter to have. Reporters live happily removed from themselves (188).

This passage is the core of the book and Mailer here stands at the crossroads between his past and his future. All that he has stood for may be opposed to the fruits of his labor. That night while the battle still rages in the streets, Mailer walks among the National Guardsmen, playing his old role of gadfly.

At this point in the narrative, with Mailer once again assuming the role of leader, he breaks off to return to the convention with this explanation:

If this were essentially an account of the reporter's action, it would be interesting to follow him through the chutes on Thursday, but we are concerned with his actions only as they illumine the event of the Republican Convention in Miami, the Democratic Convention in Chicago, and the war of the near streets (197).

Here Mailer switches from history as a novel to the novel as

history, but the transition is not decisive as it is in Armies.

At the end of the book Mailer recounts an episode in which he is twice arrested and released for minor confrontations with Guardsmen and police, and the experience is renewing:

The fact that he . . . was ready to fight, made him feel close to some presence with a beatific grace . . . and that left him happy, happier than he had been at any moment since he had heard the awful cry of the wounded pig in his throat at the news Bobby Kennedy was shot (220-21)

Yet we are not convinced that Mailer's action has been significant nor that the conventions are as important as he has tried to make them. The ending is low-key, anti-climactic, disappointing. Again, I believe that the conflicting roles of reporter and novelist-participant as well as the press deadlines are mainly responsible for the inferiority of Miami to Armies, although interestingly both were nominated for the National Book Award that Armies won.

Like Miami, Of a Fire on the Moon was written against deadlines. Portions of the book appeared in Life magazine in August and November, 1969 and January, 1970 before the hardcover publication in the fall of 1970. Also as in Miami, Mailer is an on-the-spot reporter who will provide us with interpretations of the larger significances of the moonshot. Typically, he sees the flight of Apollo 11 as a paradigm of the twentieth century, the astronauts as representative of American schizophrenia, and the mission as

either divine or satanic. The moonshot with all of its nuances serves as a metaphor for what Mailer explores as the relationship of technology to the human spirit and of both to God or Devil. What he tentatively concludes represents a meaningful change in his thinking: perhaps the death of romantic American heroism, symbolized by Hemingway's suicide and by his own attempts to fill the void Hemingway left, and its replacement with the hero-scientist who controls the machine for human advancement is America's true destiny as she carries God's vision to the stars. This tentative thesis not only is unusually hopeful for Mailer; it also provides justification for the enormous sums of money and the manpower expended on the space program while we continue to wage an anachronistic war and to condone domestic ills.

Mailer examines all facets of the Apollo program but as might be expected is most fascinated with the characters of the astronauts themselves for they are the new American heroes, the frontiersmen of outer space. Since Mailer's concern has been with the conquest of man's inner space he wishes to explore the psychology of the astronauts and the possibility of a psychology in the machines which they must control on their mission.

Mailer is uniquely qualified for such explorations. His Harvard aeronautical engineering degree, his desire to exert an influence on our ways of confronting significant

events, his Emersonian ability to see the most in the least things, and his penchant for examining all the nuances of an event are all brought into play in Of a Fire. At the beginning of the book Mailer assumes the persona of "Aquarius" not only because it is his birthsign and because, as he tells it, the mayoralty campaign left him detached from his ego and able to assume a persona, but most importantly because Aquarius symbolizes the apocalyptic end of an age and the seed of a new beginning.¹² Since Mailer views the moonshot as the apocalypse of the twentieth century, the aptness of the persona is apparent.

The position at which Mailer arrives with respect to the meaning of the moonflight is not achieved without a struggle. The immensely powerful complex known as NASA impressed him as dull, humorless, and insidious. The language was functional--computerese--the machine the art. For Mailer all art was in communication while a machine which aided communication, like a typewriter, only functional. The astronauts studiously avoided attaching more than a technological significance to their mission; they were self-effacing; they spoke in computerese; they did not fit at all Mailer's concept of heroes. His disappointment in Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins is voiced in the following passage:

. . . he could not forgive the astronauts their resolute avoidance of a heroic posture. It was somehow improper for a hero to be without flamboyance as if such modesty deprived his supporters of any large

pleasure in his victories. What joy might be found in a world which would have no hope of a Hemingway? . . . it was as if the astronauts were there to demonstrate that heroism's previous relation to romance had been improper

The real heroism, he thought, was to understand, and because one understood, be even more full of fear at the enormity of what one understood, yet at that moment continue to be ready for the feat one had decided it was essential to perform

But the astronauts, brave men, proceeded on the paradoxical principle that fear once deposed by knowledge would make bravery redundant. It was in the complacent assumption that the universe was no majestic mansion of architectonics out there between evil and nobility, or strife on a darkling plain, but rather an ultimately benign field of investigation which left Aquarius in the worst of his temper (108-09).

What can men who speak like computers tell us of the moon? To deprive us of the wonder of the voyage is to deaden our souls a little more. Mailer's book is in this sense an antidote to the moonflight, redeeming it through the powerful art of language from the unbelievable dullness with which NASA had invested it. In so doing, Mailer re-romanticizes the mission, elevating technology into a human triumph, conceiving it heroically as a "force which attempted to bring back answers from questions which had been considered to be without answers" (125). In fact, Mailer likens Armstrong's role to that of Ahab controlling the White Whale of a space ship.

By the end of Part I "Aquarius" has arrived at his hopeful thesis that the astronauts are the carriers of "God's vision of existence across the stars" (150) for "it offered a reason why the heroes of our time were technologists, not

poets, and the art was obliged to be in the exceptional engineering, while human communication had become the routine function" (151). Arthur C. Clarke expressed a similar thesis in his novel which Stanley Kubrick turned into the magnificent film 2001: A Space Odyssey. The hope in both Of a Fire and 2001 is that evil will be defeated and the human race reborn in goodness beyond this planet as part of a divine plan.

Much of the remainder of Of a Fire, divided into "Apollo" and "The Age of Aquarius", is composed of Mailer's research into statistical data and his personal encounters with NASA personnel and the astronauts. Since his participation is limited by the nature of the event, its mystery had to be explored through these other means. At times his application of the data seems highly fanciful, as when he interprets astrologically the preference of a large number of the astronauts for water sports. A more obvious factor, the climate of Houston, is overlooked. He is led to this extreme by his desire to probe the psychic rather than the scientific nature of the event. One of the book's theses--and Mailer's attempt to outdo Freud--is that the dream is a "simulation chamber where the possible malfunctions of life tomorrow and life next year could be tested, where the alternate plans could be tried" (159). The dream thus provides information for the familiar Navigator of the subconscious through its "submersion into dread", and the Navigator may then redesign

his charts on the basis of this information. The theory is a progression beyond that concept of the Navigator presented in earlier work and gives even greater meaning to the dream. The moonshot is then considered by analogy as "an exploration by the century itself into the possible consequences of its worship of technology, as if, indeed, the literal moon trip was a giant species of simulation to reveal some secret in the buried tendencies of our history" (161). Such thoughts, though weighty, go nowhere. Much of this book is like this. Mailer raises all of the essential questions created by the shock waves of the mission and finally comes back to his "favorite saying", "trust the authority of your senses", to provide a conclusion to his theorizing. Standing in front of a moon rock on display at the Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston, Mailer senses the essential rightness of the moonflight:

. . . the expedition to the moon was finally a venture which might help to disclose the nature of the Lord and the Lucifer who warred for us; certainly the hour of happiness would be here when men who spoke like Shakespeare rode the ships: how many eons was that away! Yes, he had come to believe by the end of this long summer that probably we had to explore into outer space, for technology had penetrated the modern mind to such a depth that voyages in space might have become the last way to discover the metaphysical pits of that world of technique which choked the pores of modern consciousness--yes, we might have to go out into space until the mystery of new discovery would force us to regard the world once again as poets, behold it as savages who knew that if the universe was a lock, its key was metaphor rather than measure (471).

Nick Carraway was wrong; once again man is "face to face . . . with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder."

Mailer's philosophy of America's voyage to the moon is finally Edenic, religious, transcendent of technology, and very much a part of the mainstream of American literature. In these respects Of a Fire on the Moon continues its author's process of growth through his exploration of the relationship between inner and outer space. On the other hand, Of a Fire is no advancement in method. In his zeal to capture all the nuances of the mission, Mailer succeeds in being often repetitive and occasionally tedious. While the magnitude of the event greatly exceeds that of the March on the Pentagon and the political conventions (similarly considered paradigms of the twentieth century and major battles between God and Devil), Mailer's participation is limited to being there. Consequently, the book is without the strong focus Mailer as character usually provides. Although Of a Fire succeeds in rescuing the manned space program from scientific dullness, it is not one of Mailer's best achievements. However, it is very much a part of his conception of his role of Novelist as Historian.

As we have come to expect, Mailer selected as the subject of his next book another movement with the power to profoundly alter the American consciousness, Women's Liberation. The Prisoner of Sex appeared in its entirety in the May, 1971 issue of Harper's for which the editor, Willie

Morris, was fired. It seems that a sexual frontier still remains in the field of publishing and Mailer is still in the midst of gaining territory for his troops.

In Chapter I Mailer's first objective, as in Of a Fire, is to establish his persona. His references to himself in the third person in these books and in Miami where he is "the reporter" differ from his treatment of himself as "Mailer" in Armies. In the latter, Mailer played all the roles, while in the following three books a single aspect of the self is focused upon. Here Mailer refers to himself as the "PW", representing both Prisoner of Wedlock and Prizewinner, the "polar concepts to be regarded at opposite ends of his ego":¹³ winner at writing and loser at love. The failure of Mailer's fourth marriage led him to play housewife and mother to his six children during the summer of 1970. The experience provided some perspective on the woman's need for liberation from the mindlessness which so often characterizes these roles. Mailer saw too that

the themes of his life had gathered here. Revolution, tradition, sex and the homosexual, the orgasm, the family, the child and the political shape of the future, technology and human conception, waste and abortion, the ethics of the critic and the male mystique, black rights and new thoughts on women's rights (30)

His view of the woman's role in promoting growth, a vital part of his aesthetics of growth, is called into question by the Woman's Lib movement. Consequently, the book

centers around his defense of his early statement that "the prime responsibility of a woman probably is to be on earth long enough to find the best mate for herself, and conceive children who will improve the species" (231). The search for that mate is not without courage, and Mailer concedes that women are not as free as they ought to be for the pursuit. And yet the direction in which radical Women's Lib is moving is toward freedom from their ultimate female identification: the ability to bear children. To Mailer the result of such "freedom" would imprison humanity. Since power is now technological, attempts by women to gain power must result in technologizing themselves--unless there is a primal urge to be masculine which women are fulfilling. With genetic engineering just around the corner, what is best and worth preserving about human life will be brought to judgment. Mailer has little confidence in the humanism of scientists and their proclivity to choose what are to be the enduring human characteristics. The following statement by an eminent philosopher illustrates the kind of thinking exhibited even by those concerned with moral improvement of the race:

Our hope for the creation of a better world seems to lie in the harmonious integration of aspects of personality which are now frequently at odds with each other. If reason and emotion, intellect and feeling, the head and the heart and the hand, could be brought into synergic relations, we might unify personality and bring about what I have sometimes called cortico-thalamic integration. At present

such characteristics as courage, imagination, love, and understanding are infrequent traits in exceptional individuals. These traits need to be integrated and universalized. We need to invent 'mass production' techniques for evoking talents that are latent in mankind.¹⁴

This statement ignores the worth and effectiveness of the humanities and suggests that large-scale genetic engineering can create those characteristics scientifically. To what end one shudders to think. If courage were a universal characteristic what would be its use?

Mailer's fear for the liberation of women from their wombs is not without justification. As the end of Women's Liberation it is antithetical to his belief that what is best about us is what we can create of ourselves that is good, whether it is a style, a book, a moment, or a new life.

Because his aesthetics of growth is the subject of attack either directly or indirectly by advocates of Woman's Lib in The Prisoner of Sex, Mailer assumes the roles of defendant, lawyer, and judge, and makes his case against the abdication of womanhood. The largest part of Mailer's case is the prosecution of Kate Millett's Sexual Politics and the defense of those attacked as woman-haters by Millett: D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Jean Genet, and himself. Millett's penchant toward vengeance against these writers results in sloppy or biased work; deliberate misreadings and quotations out of context abound, and Mailer as scholar is quick to expose them. Lawrence and Miller were Mailer's

antecedents on the subject of sex and in defending them he defends his own views as well. Miller, Mailer asserts, "has spent his literary life exploring the watershed of sex from that uncharted side which goes by the name of lust and it is an epic work for any man". Mailer defines lust as "that power to take over the ability to create and convert it to a force". It "exhibits all the attributes of junk" (109-10). Here Mailer draws a thematic line from Miller to Burroughs to himself. Mailer also is not without sympathy for Miller's belief that "the eternal battle with woman sharpens our resistance, develops our strength, enlarges the scope of our cultural achievements" and that "the loss of sex polarity is part and parcel of the larger disintegration, the reflex of the soul's death and coincident with the disappearance of great men, great causes, great wars" (125).

In Lawrence's thought Mailer finds two essential points to defend: 1) that manhood is earned, not a birth-right as proponents of Women's Lib persist in believing and 2) that in good sex each partner brings his best to the act. Mailer continues to consider the orgasm as "the mirror to the character of the soul as the soul went over the hill into the next becoming" (88).

In Chapter IV, "The Prisoner", Mailer defends his own work against Millett's attack. His basic premise is that the woman is in touch with the mysteries of creation

through her womb, her link with the future, and that a man seeks to become a part of that mystery by planting his seed in her womb. It is precisely such awe of womanhood that Women's Lib considers a carryover from the medieval veneration of Mary. Yet, as Mailer points out, the alternative is to continue to move toward a "single permissive sexual standard" in which sex is exchanged like currency and in which ectogenesis will devoid the sexual act of any significance. The more meaning one attaches to sex the more one is its prisoner, the prisoner concludes. Finally, he says, let women be liberated from all but their wombs.

If Mailer is truly the arch-foe of Women's Liberation it is because he insists on their essential difference from men, a difference which must be preserved if what we know as humanity is to continue to exist, for technology aims at universal sameness. By moving toward equality with men, women would destroy the uniqueness which is their strength.

In terms of its themes and viewpoints, The Prisoner of Sex is a summation of Mailer's thought on the meaning of life and as such is a part of the continuing process of his art. As a product, however, the book invades no virgin territory. In ten years Prisoner will be dated as his best work will not, for his best work marries the form to the vision. Perhaps the heart of Mailer's failure to produce a great work since The Armies of the Night (and let us be

charitable--it has been less than four years) lies in this statement:

If there had been a period when he believed completely in the tonic overhauling of the state and had written his prose with fingers trembling with anger at the Establishment, he had by now lost that essential belief in himself which was critical to the idea that one could improve the world (and knew he might not regain that belief until he had written the novel of his life and succeeded in passing judgment on himself--if indeed one could) (56)

Still believing that he has ahead of him "that huge novel he had promised to begin so many times" (30), Mailer does not realize that he has been writing that novel for twenty-five years. The "huge novel" is his life's work, his books the statements and the evidence of his growth, and his newfound humility the promise that there is more and better work to come. For should Mailer lose faith in the promise of his art, we should lose faith in him and perhaps in the hope for our human future which he has taken it upon himself to ensure.

In order to assert the significance of Mailer's vision of our future, I wish to present one more context in which to view him for what it may offer of final justification for his work: the thought of contemporaries--scientists, philosophers, sociologists, teachers--on the future of human life.

One contemporary issue currently enjoying great popularity, the disruption of natural ecological balances

and its consequences, is pertinent to Mailer only by extension, his concern having been with human ecology. So let us begin with the issue of change through revolution, one which has been a central aim of Mailer's work. In The Greening of America, Charles Reich asserts that a non-violent revolution of the young against the consciousness of their parents has begun and will succeed through the development of their own sub-culture. A revolution of manners as well as morals, the result will be Consciousness III, a transcendence of technological control with the emphasis once again on humanism and its furtherment through technology--the synthesis of antitheses which is progress. And yet a recent editorial in a university newspaper accuses proponents of Consciousness III of mindlessness and proposes instead the way recently taken by Yipple Abbie Hoffmann who announced that he plans to register, vote, and work through the existing system for change. This is the only remaining way to promote desirable change, Hoffmann maintains, because one side holds all the power.¹⁵ This is also the conclusion Mailer has reached, abandoning his early dream of "revolution in the hills" because he has watched his "army" lose battles against the United States Army and the Chicago police while Wasp fortitude has captured the moon. The "left conservatism" of his mayoral campaign represents his new version of revolution.

The issue of genetic engineering was raised in The

Prisoner of Sex and may be seen as a metaphor for the human apocalypse. Below is a forecast chart worked up by Rand Corporation indicating projected achievements in genetic engineering:

Artificial inovulation in humans1972
Genetic surgery.1995
Routine animal cloning ¹⁶2005
Widespread human cloning2020
Routine breeding of hybrids and specialized mutants for space.2025 ¹⁷

It is not only Women's Lib which anticipates ectogenesis. An eminent scientist and writer, Isaac Asimov, assumes that it is forthcoming and does not express concern with its ethical and psychological implications.¹⁸ However, a microbiologist and humanist, Rene Dubos, offers a caveat to such manipulation of the genes:

. . . scientific control of man's nature may turn out to be a suicidal policy, since evolution and progress depend upon the variety of the material subject to selection. If holistic control should ever lead to the equalization of human bodies and human minds, such uniformity might spell the end of progress.¹⁹

This of course has been Mailer's assessment as well.

In his study of man's adaptability, Dubos also finds that while health or disease is an expression of "the success or failure experienced by the organism in its efforts to respond adaptively to environmental changes" (xvii), man's "very adaptability enables [him] to become adjusted to conditions and habits which will eventually destroy the values most characteristic of human life" (278). Alvin

Toffler in his bestseller Future Shock takes the opposing thesis that

there are discernable limits to the amount of change that the human organism can absorb, and that by endlessly accelerating change without first determining these limits, we may submit masses of men to demands they simply cannot tolerate.²⁰

Toffler calls this inability to adapt to rapid change "future shock" and offers suggestions to aid adaption, not to slow it down, since his book is aimed at the average man. Mailer's point has been that adapting to our technological and totalitarian society has caused cancer and would agree with Dubos that adaption is dangerous, as he powerfully demonstrated in An American Dream and Why Are We in Vietnam?

An understanding of the ways in which various media communicate, pioneered by Marshall McLuhan, has resulted in closer attention to our manipulation by those who control the media. The Federal Communications Commission still allows a single corporation to own a radio station, a television station, and several newspapers in a single community, although Commissioner Nicholas Johnson has voiced the obvious objections. If one points to Mailer's attempts to use various media for his own messages, Rene Dubos provides his justification in this statement:

. . . a sharp distinction must be made between changing people's minds by dialogue and by manipulation. The manipulator regards the other member of the interplay almost as an object; whereas in dialogue, there is a reciprocity of interaction and therefore a greater chance that human freedom and rights are respected (437).

Edmund Carpenter's belief that the medium is the message and that it therefore offers only a perspective on the whole truth has led him to advocate the preservation of all types of communication in order that we might approach the whole truth.²¹ No one is more aware of the dangers of the abuse of media than Mailer for he has often been its target.

Let us conclude by examining a few more general arguments presented by the conflict between scientific and human progress. Prefacing a collection of essays on contemporary issues entitled The Age of Aquarius, Kenneth L. Jones writes:

While astrologers disagree on the exact date [the Age of Aquarius] began and how long it will last, they generally agree that it will be characterized by tremendous scientific advancement, increased freedom of thought, honesty in human relations, and universal peace and love. But the only portion of the prophecy that has yet materialized is the increased scientific advancement.²²

Of the younger Aquarians, Jeffrey K. Hadden discovered in a survey of 2,000 college seniors in 1969 that they are both idealistic and privatistic; they do not connect the thought with the act. "More than half (53%) deny that science and technology are dehumanizing man. Only one in three doubts that technology is a very positive force creating opportunity for man to be truly free."²³ Apparently Mailer has not reached these students. Does the spectacle of watching on color television a man plant a tin American flag on the moon have any relation to these statistics, one

wonders? Two articles by scientists presented as worthy of our admiration by Richard Kostelanetz in Beyond Left and Right: Radical Thought for Our Times should shake the complacency of these young people. One is on the imminence of cybernation--computer-controlled technology which replaces human workers--"freeing" them from work.²⁴ While there is no reason to justify menial work, one wonders for what the workers are freed? How long will it take before the cultural lag catches up to technological advancement? The author of the article proposes that each worker be guaranteed an annual wage by the government but blithely ignores the source of such an income or the effects of resentment by those who must still work and pay taxes while their fellows take their leisure.

Even more insidious is an article entitled "Artificial Thinking Automata" whose authors cite in technogese their analysis of human limitations when compared to thinking computers: "Unfortunately, human beings have no output capability comparable to their parallel optical input system; no automation would be designed with such a weakness."²⁵ The authors go on to enumerate the advantages of "intelligent artificial automata" over "intelligent biological life" as 1) "ease of maintainability"; 2) "control of their own growth"; and 3) memory or learning capabilities (172-80). Mailer's suspicion would probably be that a computer wrote

this article. After reading it one is left with this question: will we transcend the machine or will it transcend us?

Victor Ferkiss, a humanist who shares Mailer's concern with the furtherment of human life, envisions the ultimate horror of the future: "What if the new man combines the animal irrationality of primitive man with the calculated greed and power-lust of industrial man, while possessing the virtually Godlike powers granted him by technology?"²⁶ To avoid such a fate "technological man" must both learn to "predict the future and . . . develop a new philosophy of society based on the future's needs" (247). Elements of that philosophy are these: 1) a "new naturalism" with man as the highest element in a dynamic universe; 2) a "new holism" of mind, body, society, and nature; and 3) a "new immanentism" based on the theory that "life exists within systems", that "systems create themselves" and that "the whole shapes itself" (247-53). Ferkiss concludes that "in a world in which man controls his environment so as to provide for his physical needs and to conquer hunger and disease, the new frontier will be within" (256).

The need for the conquest of inner space is not in the future but now. Mailer has known this at least since the publication of Advertisements For Myself. It is what he has tried to tell us all along. No contemporary writer has tried harder.

FOOTNOTES

¹Mailer quoted in an interview with James Toback in Toback's article "At Play in the Fields of the Bored", Esquire, December, 1968, p. 154.

²Joe Flaherty, Managing Mailer (New York, 1969).

³Peter Manso, ed., Running Against the Machine (Garden City, 1969).

⁴See Flaherty's account of the campaign, op. cit.

⁵J. Anthony Lukas, "Norman Mailer Enlists His Private Army to Act in Film", New York Times, July 31, 1968, p. 41.

⁶_____, "Mailer Film Party a Real Bash: 1 Broken Jaw, 2 Bloody Heads", New York Times, July 31, 1968, p. 29.

⁷John M. Lee, "Mailer, in London, Trades Jabs with Audience Over New Film", New York Times, October 17, 1970, p. 21.

⁸Norman Mailer, Maidstone: A Mystery (New York, 1971).

⁹John O. Stark, p. 184.

¹⁰Norman Mailer, Miami and the Siege of Chicago (New York, 1968), p. 12. All further references are to this text whose title will be abbreviated as Miami.

¹¹John O. Stark, p. 167.

¹²J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, pp. 14-15.

¹³Norman Mailer, The Prisoner of Sex (Boston, 1971), p. 9. All further references are to this text whose title will be abbreviated as Prisoner.

¹⁴Oliver L. Reiser, "Our World in Revolution" in Social Speculations: Visions For Our Time, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York, 1971), p. 49.

¹⁵Ed Rafferty, The University of Dayton Flyer News, October 12, 1971, p. 2.

¹⁶Cloning is the exact reproduction of an organism through the removal of the nuclei of one of its cells, which contains the full genetic complement of chromosomes. Thus a son may look exactly like his father.

¹⁷David M. Rorvik, "Making Men and Women Without Men and Women" in The Age of Aquarius: Contemporary Bio-Social Issues, eds. Kenneth L. Jones, et al (Pacific Palisades, California, 1971), p. 311.

¹⁸Isaac Asimov, "The Next Hundred Years" in Social Speculations, p. 52.

¹⁹Rene Dubos, Man Adapting (New Haven and London, 1965), p. 433.

²⁰Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York, 1971), p. 326.

²¹Edmund Carpenter, "The New Languages" in The Age of Aquarius, pp. 263-81.

²²Kenneth L. Jones, p. vii.

²³Jeffrey K. Hadden, "The Private Generation" in The Age of Aquarius, p. 243.

²⁴Robert Theobald, "Cybernation and Human Rights" in Beyond Left and Right: Radical Thought for Our Times, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York, 1968), pp. 60-72.

²⁵Roger A. MacGowan and Frederick I. Ordway, III, "Artificial Thinking Automata" in Beyond Left and Right, p. 172.

²⁶Victor C. Ferkiss, Technological Man: The Myth and the Reality (New York, 1969), p. 25.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

At the outset of this thesis I quoted Mailer's ambition, stated in Advertisements For Myself, to revolutionize the consciousness of our time. His assumption then was that a writer, through the power of his written words and the example of the actions of his life, could affect such a change. Although his experience of the thirteen years since the publication of Advertisements has taught him to constantly refine the methods of his revolution and has brought him to doubt his ability to effect it, all of his work has nonetheless proceeded from this assumption. Consequently, in this thesis I have viewed the whole of Mailer's work as a process of growth on the part of both man and artist, designed to turn the consciousness of the twentieth century, and of the American nation particularly, away from the destruction of human life through a technological totalitarianism and toward the preservation of the best of human attributes now and for the future. I have called Mailer's design his aesthetics of growth and have considered this aesthetics in contexts which suggest that Mailer has made significant contributions to American literature and to the means by which humanity can progress into the future.

In the introduction, I examined the existential moment as the basic unit of Mailer's aesthetics of growth, the moment when a man must confront an opponent and derive growth from defeating him or suffer the loss of some of his own life force. Mailer conceives of the progress of man's life as a series of such moments of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Because his aesthetics views art and life as interdependent processes which nurture or impede human growth toward wholeness of mind, body, and soul, I have considered the aesthetics itself as Mailer's most important contribution to our time. However, in order to evaluate Mailer's progress toward his announced goal, I analyzed three books which I consider to have the greatest potential as products to influence the directions of the age: Advertisements For Myself, An American Dream, and The Armies of the Night. In order to provide some perspective for the discussion of these books, I first related Mailer to those American writers by whom he was influenced or to whom he exhibits affinities.

Most immediately influential were the novelists of the Thirties, particularly Hemingway, whom Mailer both admires for his style and achievements and scorns for having slipped away into "nada". Over the years it has become apparent that Mailer has worked out his debt to Hemingway by learning both to live with failure or partial success and to overcome it, as Hemingway did not.

More generally, Mailer's early goal as an American writer, we remember, was to "clarify [America's] vision of itself" by uniting the novelistic traditions which diverged in the work of Dreiser and James. This was clearly his intent in An American Dream, as it was his related and considerably larger intention to unite the factual and the dream life of the nation in "a hero who reveals the character of the country itself". Much of this thesis has been concerned with Mailer's attempts to discover or to create such a hero and with his turning finally to the creation of himself as that hero, the quixotic "Mailer" of The Armies of the Night, whose moments of greatness--however few-- confirm the significance of Mailer's aesthetics of growth to the progress of human life.

Chapters I, II, and III traced the progress of this aesthetics in three distinct phases, each culminating with a product containing the various strands of the phase in itself. The product of the first phase, Advertisements For Myself, was considered as Mailer's artistic manifesto because in it he declared his revolutionary intentions and his artistic independence. We traced, too, the emergence of the aesthetics of growth, its dynamic, dialectical nature, approximated in the spiral form of the book, and its cosmic proportions as the means of combatting the forces of evil in the continuing struggle for possession of the human race.

Further, we delineated in Advertisements Mailer's increasingly compelling search for a hero capable of embracing the contradictions and ambiguities of his nation and its age, and for a style appropriate to that hero. Tentatively discovering him as the "White Negro", Mailer laid the groundwork for his own assumption of the heroic role by the various roles he played in Advertisements; not only was he the book's hero but its villain, not only its author but its critic and its promoter as well.

By the time of Advertisements Mailer had developed a coherent vision of life to give artistic form and a metaphor, in himself, of the struggle to actualize that vision. Having exorcised the ghosts of his past defeats, he sows the seeds of his new ambitions in Advertisements, making it not only the culmination of one important stage in Mailer's development, but a book which anticipates the even better work to follow.

An American Dream was one such anticipated achievement. A series of ventures into the philosophy of existential politics, evidenced in The Presidential Papers, prepared the way for the novel, convincing Mailer of America's urgent need for an existential hero.

It has been my conclusion that An American Dream has helped to clarify America's vision of its national self, as Mailer intended it to do. Setting himself the task of rendering the nearly uncommunicable dream-life of the nation,

he descends into the heart of American darkness and returns with only a tentative victory for his fictional hero, Stephen Rojack, but a significant one for himself.

In the act of writing the novel, Mailer attempts to make Rojack a hero. In Mailer's existential terms, the hero must be a self-made man, "a consecutive set of brave and witty self-creations". Rojack is Mailer's most significant attempt at creating a hero other than himself.

As in the myth of the Fortunate Fall, Rojack first becomes evil in order to combat evil and so survive to have a chance at goodness. Because of the nature of its subject, the action of the novel is more metaphoric than literal. In Mailer's version of the Adamic myth, his hero is presented with an opportunity to confront the inscrutable serpent in America's garden and to destroy him, an opportunity rare in American literature. Barney Kelly is the face of power and corruption, a type of Renaissance villain, and his defeat at Rojack's hands would have signified the redemptive power of Mailer's fiction. Failing, however, to be brave enough, to follow his best instincts and so to earn the grace awaiting him through Cherry's love, Rojack is defeated by the evil both within and without himself. His heroism proves too weak and embryonic to survive the hellish environment of contemporary America. Further, he is the potential hero of the nightmare portion of America only, not of its

mundane life as well. Still, Mailer holds out the possibility that in another New World his failed hero yet may grow worthy of the task set him.

With analogues both in the Renaissance and frontier America, Mailer's vision in An American Dream proclaims that what has passed for the American Dream is in reality a nightmare, and the book's metaphoric structure as well as its characters' acts of extremity fuse style and meaning into a revelatory and archetypal battle between good and evil. While Rojack's sojourn in the wilds of Central America holds out the possibility of America's redemption by a fictive hero, Mailer has strictly limited that possibility in the course of writing the novel. Phase two ends with Mailer's realization and demonstration that the hero for our time is not to be found between the pages of a novel.

Although the search for a more substantial hero continued to occupy Mailer in the years following An American Dream, experimentation with form took center stage. Its aim was to synthesize technology and art toward a more functional communication than the novel could provide. Mailer needed a larger, more responsive audience that AAD had brought him. His message having found its direction, Mailer now turned to discover its most effective medium.

Mailer's most significant experiment with form before Why Are We in Vietnam? was in film. Although Wild 90 had

little substance, the application of his existential aesthetics to film-making led to the production of more important later films as well as to the manipulation of real human responses to situations created through the interactions of the characters. Mailer's experience as actor, director, and producer of his films, moreover, prepared him for his roles in The Armies of the Night and for his eventual acceptance of the efficacy of symbolic action.

The next media breakthrough came in Why Are We in Vietnam? Here Mailer, through the voice-print medium of his narrator-participant, D.J., uses the power of the mass media for his own ends by the force of his style. The reader is bombarded with language designed to hold him captive until the novel's end. However brilliant the style may have been, it was not one with much appeal to the army of readers Mailer hoped to capture. Neither did its protagonist, D.J., have the appeal of a hero because of the ambiguity of his motives and actions. Although D.J. unites in himself the ambiguities of the American nation of which he is the metaphor, he is not so much leader as led.

Whereas in AAD the content was more radical than the form, in Why the opposite is true. Also a shift in emphasis occurs from the insufficient bravery of the defeated in AAD to the brutal and cowardly defeater in Why. Like its predecessor, Why exposes the Horatio Alger version of the

American Dream but overgoes even its forerunners in American literature of the failed Dream in its revelation that God is a killer-beast and that man's actions determine God's fate. The book's obscenity is offered as a purgative to America's violent course of action, and its style as a whole is intended to force the reader to envision the horrors awaiting us as the end of that action.

Moving beyond his last two novels, The Armies of the Night fuses form and content through the participation of a believable hero in an actual event, and in thus widening the appeal of the book to capture a larger audience, Armies becomes Mailer's most mature work in terms of his own aesthetics. More than any other of his works, Armies is a product, the end result of twenty years of living and writing. In it his novelist's perception and intuition, together with his participation in and witnessing of a contemporary event, result in a new form: "History as a Novel/ The Novel as History". His new style communicates all the nuances of the event to a mass audience as neither the novelist, the journalist, nor the historian alone could do.

Not only has Mailer literally made history in Armies, he has finally created a hero for our time through the metaphor of his own participation. In the course of events of the 1967 March on the Pentagon, Mailer comes to realize that only symbolic actions can be taken against a faceless

force. Because of this one's victimization by such inscrutable opposition may prove as heroic as a clear victory, for those rare moments when a man wounds his enemy, however slightly, redeem the ineptitude of his everyday life. The significance of Mailer's depiction of himself as a comic hero in Armies is that he has finally united the mundane and the extraordinary--those two divergent rivers of American life--in himself, and by extension has made a potential hero of any man who can summon up courage when it is needed most. Thus Armies unites and balances more than any other of Mailer's works the related parts of his aesthetics of growth: his life, his art, his ambition, and his vision.

With the establishment of himself as participator in and interpreter of contemporary American events in Armies, Mailer's conception of his role as the instrument and director of change reaches fruition. His authoritative voice established, his later work depends upon its acceptance by his readers. Since his role now is clearly that of exerting an antithetical force on contemporary events in order to affect the shape of the future, Mailer's value to us is not so much in his actions as in what he makes of them in his writing and in what significant action he inspires in others.

Although Miami and the Siege of Chicago, Of a Fire on the Moon, and The Prisoner of Sex are efforts in the same

vein as Armies, their styles are not as happily married to Mailer's vision as was the case in Armies. The progress which they register is rather in Mailer's thinking. Realizing that, however regrettably, the age of romantic heroism in America died with Hemingway and John F. Kennedy, Mailer discovers that the real hero of the future is the man, like our astronauts and our Wasp politicians, who in a mundane manner can make extraordinary things happen. Too, Mailer gains a sense of humility when measuring his own accomplishments against the "Wasp fortitude" which has "captured the moon". Ideally, the future hero would both accomplish the extraordinary and be able to communicate his experience in such a way as to recapture in the telling some of its wonder; and if Mailer cannot be such a hero himself, perhaps he can teach others to communicate ventures into uncharted territory. For the power of communication can release every man's potential to grow.

While others are exploring outer space, Mailer has consistently penetrated more deeply into inner space, concerning himself with the mysteries of the subconscious and that "navigator at the seat of our being" who directs our thoughts and actions. After all, it is the role of Navigator of the United States of America that Mailer ultimately aims to fill. His belief that the form best suited to explorations of the subconscious is the film has led him to take his

latest and most successful venture in film-making, Maldstone, on the road. Billed as "An Evening with Norman Mailer", the presentation of the film at universities and civic cultural centers is followed by Mailer's attempt to engage his audience in an open-ended dialogue. By selecting more educated and presumably more sophisticated audiences than would be possible through general distribution of the film, Mailer is more than ever in control of his work's impact.

One expects to hear more from Mailer as film-maker, and, since the New American Library has announced that he will produce for them a book on the 1972 political conventions, more from him as the American Navigator. Surely there is no doubt that Mailer will continue to grow and to surprise us with the forms of that growth. In conclusion, let us be reminded of the significance of Mailer's aesthetics of growth. It lies, finally, in its relationship to the vision which supports human life called God and in its antithesis to the vision which destroys life called the Devil. God and Devil are thus metaphors for our moral directions. Their continual presence at the center of Mailer's work also provides the raison d'être for his style, which is to attack the enemy with a fine blow to his vitals and to examine nuances and instincts, not merely facts, in working toward a more holistic consciousness of ourselves as human beings with the power to create or destroy and the responsibility of our

choice. We have seen how Mailer has increasingly taken upon himself the responsibility to create and has invested our major national events with ever greater meaning for the future of mankind. More than any of his contemporaries this Norman Mailer has reconnoitered for the rest of us "the road to that mystery where courage, death, and the dream of love give promise of sleep."

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