

MAILER'S SEARCH FOR A HERO: THE AMERICAN  
EXISTENTIALIST

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## ABSTRACT

### MAILER'S SEARCH FOR A HERO: THE AMERICAN EXISTENTIALIST

By

Morris Wei-hsin Tien

This study examines Norman Mailer's work from The Naked and the Dead (1948) to Of a Fire on the Moon (1970) in an attempt to account for his search for a hero both in fiction and in reality. Mailer's persistent quest for a hero mainly derives from his passionately held conviction that life in America is hopelessly dehumanized by science and technology. Unless some radical transformation takes place in the consciousness of our time, it has become increasingly difficult for any individual to assert his authenticity in life. Mailer insists that science is insufficient to explain the mystery of life. Each individual has unlimited possibilities to act out his heroic potential. By removing all the restraints of a manipulative and totalitarian society, every individual has the ability to live up to the best that is in him. The hero that Mailer has finally found in reality and created in fiction is an American existentialist.

Chapter One examines Mailer's attempt to re-define American heroism and formulate his own concept of an ideal hero who may rebel against the tyranny of social conventions and political domination. Chapter Two traces in what respects the four major European existentialists--Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre--have directly influenced Mailer in the formation of his own existential vision. Although Mailer has by no means adopted any of their existential systems, their attitudes toward life, death, and Being have aroused his ardent responses, either positively or negatively. The willingness of Mailer's hero model, the



hipster, to "accept the terms of death," "exist without roots," and seek growth through the "unchartered journey with the rebellious imperatives of self" all reflects how closely Mailer is related to the original idea of existentialism developed in Europe.

It is in Chapter Four of my study that Mailer's hero, the American existentialist, makes his first appearance as Marion Faye in The Deer Park. In this novel, we find that sex, art and politics are existentially related to unveil the thoughts and actions of the three major characters, Eitel, Sergius, and Faye, as the three stages of Mailer's development of a hero: non-hero, hero-in-training, and the hero as the American existentialist. Mailer believes it is at the very point of social stagnation that his hero of opposition emerges as a force to challenge the conventions, norms, mores and the empty rituals of American contemporary life. In "The White Negro," Mailer conceptualized Faye's thought and action in the image of the hipster. For Mailer then, the only "life-giving answer" to the mid-twentieth century condition of death is embodied in the hipster, the "American existentialist." It is the hipster rather than the "square" who is able "to live with death as immediate danger," because the hipster believes that "every man and woman is moving individually through each moment of life forward into growth or backward into death."

With the idea of an American existentialist hero image in mind, Mailer found in the early 1960's President Kennedy as close to any to being the hero that he was searching for. Kennedy's personality and life style attracted Mailer. He thought Kennedy's administration would instill a dynamism in American life after fifteen years of political stasis. But Kennedy's assassination put an end to all Mailer's

practical hopes. Instead, he created Rojack in An American Dream, the hero who was the closest image that Mailer was able to make to resemble Kennedy in the fictional world.

But upon the appearance of D. J. in Why Are We in Vietnam? Mailer creates an American existentialist, no longer the hipster of opposition, but a hero who not only fails to make contact with God but also falls inescapably into evil. D. J. turns out to be a tragi-comic hero of a kind. He is tragic in the sense that he has deserted Mailer's original code for growth, and his act of going to Vietnam would lead to his own destruction. He is comic because his obscene language provokes humor more often than not.

With D. J. leaving for Vietnam, Rojack exiled to the jungles of Central America, and the hipster only as model of abstraction, Mailer has not created another American existentialist hero for ten years in fiction since the time of Why Are We in Vietnam? (1967). With the deaths of Kennedy and Hemingway, Mailer has not yet found another public figure whose life style could embody his existentialist thoughts. In these years, Mailer the existentialist has become more and more tied up with Mailer the artist. Instead of looking for a hero in the outside world, Mailer has been searching for the heroic in himself. With the ideas and concepts of a mature American existentialist and the talent and aesthetic energy of a fully developed writer, Mailer finds himself more qualified than ever as the hero he has been searching for more than a decade.

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## PREFACE

As a student of American culture, I was first drawn to Norman Mailer by his all-encompassing public personality which has made itself felt in so many areas of American experience--"the literary world, politics, filmmaking, prize fighting and street fighting, marital infighting, drinking and partying, debating ardent female liberationists, and traveling the pervasive airs of TV talk show."

However, as I started reading him seriously, I was convinced that it is still Mailer's voice, the ideas he expresses in his extraordinary prose, that makes him more than a famous writer. As Richard Stratton recently wrote, "A reading of the important literature of this century would be incomplete without a thorough examination of Mailer's work." To a foreign student like myself, it is Norman Mailer, even more than Hemingway or Faulkner, who has led me to the understanding of contemporary American culture--of course, it can still be argued whether my understanding is in a sense accurate or inaccurate--at a deeper psychic level and on a broader basis than any other contemporary American writer is able to. In each of Mailer's books he manages to capture the mood and sentiment of his time. As Robert Lucid noted, ". . . by 1966 and the publication of Cannibals and Christians, Norman Mailer has become the most talked about, the most prominent, in the frankly blatant sense the most celebrated writer in America."

Most of the major critical writings about Norman Mailer have

enlightened me in my study of him, particularly the recent three book-length studies--Robert Solotaroff's Down Mailer's Way (1974), Jean Radford's Norman Mailer: A Critical Study (1975), and Laura Adams' Existential Battles: The Growth of Norman Mailer (1976). Yet, since each of these books has its own angle of approach to Norman Mailer, they have helped me only to a certain extent. And my purpose in this study is not to sum up the critical views that have preceded me; but I have concentrated on Mailer's own work, trying to shore up my arguments with quotations from his work wherever possible. I have further observed what Sartre has said, "A fictional technique always relates back to the novelist's metaphysics. The critic's task is to define the latter before evaluating the former." In discussing Mailer, I stress the evolution of his existential thoughts embodied in his characters before examining his art.

To the following people I would like to express my deep gratefulness for their help in my study: Dr. Victor Howard, Dr. Donald F. Koch, and Dr. Joseph J. Waldmeir. Dr. Howard has taught, encouraged and aided me throughout my four-year stay at Michigan State University. He also served as the chairperson of my committee. Together with him were Dr. Koch and Dr. Waldmeir: They were thorough readers and perceptive critics, who kept their patience and sense of proportion through their careful readings of my manuscript. Without their generous assistance this dissertation could not have been completed in time to meet the deadline of my Fulbright study grant. I would like to thank them for their time and close attention to my work.

My heartfelt thanks are also given to two other members of my committee: Dr. Linda W. Wagner and Dr. Douglas T. Miller. Both of

them have also taught and helped me through my graduate study at MSU. While it was in Dr. Wagner's class that I was introduced to a serious reading of William Faulkner whose stylistic influence on Mailer I could easily trace out, it was in Dr. Miller's class that I was first encouraged to study Mailer as a social critic.

Next, I would like to thank the Fulbright Foundation in the Republic of China and the Institute of International Education in the United States whose financial support of me for four years made possible the pursuit of my advanced study at Michigan State University. My academic achievement here will undoubtedly benefit me in my future teaching career back in Taiwan.

Finally, I owe my wife Su-O the most for whatever worth this study has. For the past four years, she bore the daily struggles, not only as wife, graduate student, and mother to our children, but as critic, collaborator, and upholder of spirit.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction: Heroism Re-defined

From his immediate success in 1948 with The Naked and the Dead to the appearance of Of a Fire on the Moon (1970), Norman Mailer has been unswervingly concerned with the existence of an individual in the cultural milieu of America. As the modern technology and the various forms of totalitarianism are hand in hand developed in American society, Mailer sees that the authentic life for an individual becomes increasingly difficult. Both as an American novelist and social critic Mailer assumes the mission of finding or creating a hero for the second half of the twentieth-century America, a hero with the potentiality to alter the course of American society before the total destruction of Americans in particular, and mankind in general, begins. As Emerson said, "The true work of genius should proceed out of the wants and deeds of the age as well as the writer."<sup>1</sup> It is Norman Mailer, I believe, who fulfills Emerson's requirement in the twentieth century, for "more than any other American writer, Norman Mailer. . . appears as the chief representative of the age."<sup>2</sup> And furthermore, more than any other novelist of the contemporary age, Mailer, as noted by Theodore L. Gross, "has been specifically concerned with the authority of institutionalized life in America, with what he characterizes as the totalitarianism of America."<sup>3</sup>



Since the Second World War, Mailer sees Western man as having been witness to the process of dehumanization in all phases of culture and of social life. In the second half of our century, rocketing through space and on the point of conquering the whole universe, man is even, however, more rapidly losing touch with his world than before. Scientific and technological revolutions, and unparalleled economic growth have not eliminated all the human miseries, nor have they alleviated man's struggles for freedom. As Mary Josephson has put it, "Powerless in the face of modern mechanical and social forces, we have reached a point in history where knowledge and tools intended originally to serve man now threaten to destroy him."<sup>4</sup> The machine has obviously dehumanized human life more severely than one might expect. "Man, desiring no longer to be the image of God, becomes the image of machine."<sup>5</sup> Illustrations of this idea can be found almost everywhere in our daily life. The New York Times of OCT. 22, 1972:

The impact of the computer is felt in virtually every corner of American life, from the ghetto to the moon. And data-processing is the world's fastest growing major business; sometime during the next decade, it is expected to become the world's largest industry.

Therefore, even more so in the second half of our century "Western man has become mechanized, routinized, made comfortable as an object; but in the profound sense displaced and thrown off as a subjective creator (Italics, mine)."<sup>6</sup> And what Nicolas Berdyaev said more than forty years ago is still true today, perhaps even more true than at that time:

Man has ceased to be the supreme value: he has ceased to have any value at all. . . . Man is subject either to cosmic forces or to technical civilization. It is not enough to say that he subjects himself: he is dissolved and disappears either in cosmic life or else in almighty technics;

he takes upon himself the image, either of nature or of the machine. But in either case he loses his own image and is dissolved into his component elements. Man as a whole being, as a creature centered within himself, disappears. . . there remains only certain of his functions.

This dissolution of man into certain functions is the product, first of all of technical civilization. The process of dehumanization attains its climax in the technique of modern war, where human bravery is no longer necessary. Technical civilization demands that man shall fulfill one or another of his functions, but it does not want to reckon with man himself--it knows only his functions.<sup>7</sup>

The idea that man has lost all his authentic individuality and been rendered powerless and at most is able to fulfill only one function or another at a time can certainly be further substantiated by many recent writings in various fields. But just a few examples will be sufficient to demonstrate the situations in the 1960's and 1970's. Herbert Marcuse in two of his books, An Essay on Liberation (1968) and One Dimensional Man (1969), sees the contemporary era as dominated by highly industrialized, bureaucratized societies in which human nature is twisted and destroyed by the structures it encounters. He describes the United States, with its capitalist ethos, as the leading example of the prevailing mode. One example he gives is that in industrial society, man is constantly bombarded with messages concerning commodities and gadgets connected to accumulative and violent life styles. The media also manipulate political judgments, presenting alternatives such as socialism as beyond the pale. The cumulative effect of training and media manipulation is so great that it not only affects attitudes, but structures the physical needs of men. "The people recognize themselves in their commodities, they find their soul in their automobiles, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment."<sup>8</sup> Man has been transformed into "one dimensional man" in whom "the inner

dimension of the mind in which opposition to the status quo can take root is whittled down," in whom the power of critical thinking is absent.<sup>9</sup>

With the power of critical thinking being stripped off, men are "other-directed" rather than "inner-directed." In David Riesman's terms they are attempting to determine what is appropriate as defined by the status definition and rules provided by those around them rather than by having any inner imperatives or principles to determine their behavior. Thus their presentation of self is geared to others rather than to the Self principles. They have limited if any interior definition for their behavior which is thus dominated by image or status requirements set by the surrounding society. Finally, the whole society is transformed into a mass society which respects "model citizens" or "model students" but shows hostility toward those who act out of their spontaneity.

C. Wright Mills presents a view of society that, in general, is similar to that of Marcuse. His work, however, focuses more specifically and in more detail upon social institutions and is more explicitly political. Mills sees that the United States has been transformed into what he termed a "mass society," one in which masses of individuals are manipulated by remote rulers and lose any potential for democratic direction of important social institutions. Thus the great mass becomes politically powerless. This point has been fully proved and enthusiastically justified by a more recent work entitled Political Alienation in Contemporary America (1975). As Robert S. Gilmour and Robert B. Lamb indicate in the first chapter of their book:

In this book we define political disillusionment and alienation as the combination of several distinct feelings: distrust of government and politicians, a sense of the meaninglessness of electoral politics and political choices and personal powerlessness to influence or change the course of American political life. Disillusionment with government might begin with any one of these feelings, but thoroughgoing alienation--the end of faith in the practice of American politics--we contend, is a combination of all three.<sup>10</sup>

Before the book was written, these political scientists made hundreds and hundreds of interviews throughout the United States, especially about the middle and working classes. A sense of meaninglessness in choice between poor candidates and outmoded parties was echoed wherever they went. "It doesn't matter which way you vote; they are all the same, talk the same, promise the same. But all out for themselves, that's all," was a Boston doorman's way of summing up this meaninglessness of choice.<sup>11</sup> A sense of powerlessness to make any political impact or to make needed changes of direction was another repeated theme. "I am powerless to influence any political vote, any political decision, or any politician," a New Jersey housewife explained. "There's no relation between my vote and what any politician does," a New York City cabdriver said. "It's like worshipping a pagan god, 'cause once you vote for them they never again have any contact with you," a heavy-equipment operator in Iowa summed up all these feelings.<sup>12</sup> Of course, it was the Watergate scandals, the numerous indictments and convictions, and the investigation and the subsequent resignations of Vice President Spiro Agnew and President Richard Nixon that are the cause of the widespread sense of distrust. All in all, disillusionment and political alienation, according to Robert Gilmour and Robert Lamb, have now become well rooted in the public mind of America.

What has been perceived and attacked by Norman Mailer about the social ills and the plight of individuality of the contemporary America is therefore not merely visionary but based on the actual feelings of his fellow Americans. Mailer also asserts that the America of the Fifties was a period of "dull anxiety," in which "one is more likely to look for security than a dramatic confrontation."<sup>13</sup> Eisenhower's "new conservatism" shifted the public mood of the country to the defensive side. The whole country was divided by "the unspoken war. . . between the city and the small town:

the city which is dynamic, orgiastic, unsettling, explosive and accelerating to the psyche; the small town which is rooted, narrow, cautious and planted in the life-logic of the family.<sup>14</sup>

Eisenhower only satisfied "half the needs of the nation,

the needs of the timid, the petrified, the sanctimonious, and the sluggish. What was even worse, he did not divide the nation as a hero might (with a dramatic dialogue as the result); he merely excluded one part of the nation from the other. The result was an alienation of the best minds and bravest impulses from the faltering history which was made.<sup>15</sup>

When it came to the Sixties, the American society stifled man "not in the brutal straightforward manner that primitive capitalism or fascism did, not by violence, but by subtler almost untraceable processes involving the cultural apparatus and institutions of advertising." Within this period, Mailer focused his attention on one target--"totalitarianism"--which penetrated the whole society and contaminated the American culture. By "totalitarianism" Mailer means more than the merely political system of an authoritarian government. "Totalitarianism" includes any means which, physically or mentally, dominate or manipulate an individual's life style. In this broad sense, Mailer saw that it was totalitarianism that broke upon the incompatible military

force of Russia and America. And it was totalitarianism that altered America "from a nation of venture, exploitation, bigotry, initiative, strife, social justice and social injustice, into a vast central swamp of tasteless, toneless authority whose dependable heroes were drawn from FBI men, doctors, television entertainers, corporation executives, and athletes who could cooperate with public-relations men."<sup>16</sup> Mailer also believed that totalitarianism appeared first in Nazi Germany as "a political juggernaut" and in the Soviet Union as "a psychosis in ideology." But totalitarianism has slipped into America with no specific political face. "There are liberals who are totalitarian, and conservatives, radicals, rightists, fanatics, hordes of the well-adjusted." And

totalitarianism has come to America with no concentration camps and no need for them, no political parties and no desire for new parties, no, totalitarianism has slipped into the body cells and psyche of each of us. It has been transported, modified, codified, and inserted into each of us by way of the popular arts, the social crafts, the political crafts, and the corporate techniques. It sits in the image of the commercials on television which use phallic and vaginal symbols to sell products which are otherwise useless for sex, it is heard in the jargon of educators, in the synthetic continuums of prose with which public-relations men learn to enclose the sense and smell of an event, it resides in the taste of frozen food, the pharmaceutical odor of tranquilizers, the planned obsolescence of automobiles, the lack of workmanship in the mass, it lives in the boredom of a good mind, in the sexual excess of lovers who love each other into apathy, it is the livid passion which takes us to sleeping pills, the mechanical action in every household appliance which breaks too often, it vibrates in the sound of an air conditioner or the flicker of fluorescent lighting. And it proliferates in that new architecture which rests like an incubus upon the American landscape, that new architecture which cannot be called modern because it is not architecture but opposed to architecture.

Mailer continues, "The essence of totalitarianism is that it beheads. It beheads individuality, variety, dissent, extreme possibility,

romantic faith, it blinds vision, deadens instinct, it obliterates the past."<sup>17</sup> Thus, to Mailer, the plague in America is the insidious and cancerous growth of totalitarianism, the destruction of the individual consciousness, and the evolution of a mass man without personal distinction. Most contemporary Americans, Mailer assures, have been suffering from this plague and have as a consequence been deprived of their existential authenticity.

After stating all the social ills and various pathological forms that the American institutionalized life has contracted, Mailer feels strongly that the alternative that modern Americans are faced with is precisely what F. H. Heinemann thinks that modern Western man is confronting:

The alternative . . . is: either atrophy of our brain power; degeneration of man; decline of his intellectual and spiritual activities which become more and more mechanical; and in the end slavery in new totalitarian regimes with over-centralized control; or a spiritual revolution; an awakening of man to the fact that he, after all, is a spiritual being with inexhaustible spiritual powers; and a stern determination to defend his liberty and to subordinate the so-called progress of science and technology to moral and spiritual ends of humanity within a democratic order.

What reflects more of Mailer's intention of creating a hero to cope with "totalitarianism" in America is Heinemann's one statement after this either-or alternative: "Courage, faith, and heroic defiance may be the only means for mastering a dangerous development which we are unable to stop (Italics, mine)."<sup>18</sup> There can be no doubt that in his considering the heroic qualities Mailer has seriously contemplated the ideas of courage, faith, heroic defiance as means, though not the only means, to cope with many a dangerous situation. The subsequent chapters of this study will show how Mailer has converted these ideas into his code for

his hero to act upon. But it suffices to say that Mailer at this point declares that "America's need in these years [the Fifties and the Sixties] was to take an existential turn."<sup>19</sup> And he further points out, "It was a hero America needed, a hero central to his time." The reason for his insistence on finding or creating a hero is that "At the 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 to itself."<sup>20</sup>

With his recognition of the importance of finding or creating a new hero who might be allowed every possibility to act against the plagued America, Mailer tries to formulate the basic assumptions of his new hero. From the outset, however, Mailer eliminates all the stereotypes of heroes. For instance, this new hero should not be allowed to represent the major themes of his ethos, because this would mean that the hero conforms to the norms of his society and therefore he would feel at home with the "plague." Instead of reacting against the plague, a hero of this kind would merely be a conformist. Nor has Mailer intended to create heroes "by making them gods and eliminating through reductive generalization the very things which make them distinctive." William H. Gilman further explains what he means by "reductive generalization":

The habit of generalizing, or mythologizing, has given us concepts of the hero in which the status is accorded by mere label. "Natty Bumppo is a saint with a gun." Ahab is Prometheus--or rather, a "false Prometheus." Joe Christmas is Jesus Christ--and so is Stephen Crane's Jim Conklin, and Billy Budd, and the old man of the sea, and Faulkner's 33-year-old idiot Benji--they are all Christ.<sup>21</sup>



Mailer has never attempted to create a hero with a fixed label. Although his heroes, such as Marion Faye, John F. Kennedy, Rojack, or D. J., do have similarities, but they are not identical in any sense.

A mythical figure like the Adamic man, who is said to be "the hero of American fiction generally," and whose success consists in non-involvement instead of involvement with his society, will not be a hero for Mailer, either. Mailer wants to create a hero who might be defined as "an embattled cultural hero." "Cultural forms or institutions appear to him insofar as they perpetuate human energies that contemporary life tends otherwise to suppress."<sup>22</sup> He might psychologically divorce himself from society, to exist without roots, but physically he is deeply involved in action and process, and is confronted by the immediate dangers of physical violence and death.

Certainly Mailer does not want to mold his hero in the image of another, such as Ahab resembles Prometheus, Joe Christmas, Jesus Christ, or Melville's Pierre "is Oedipus-Romeo-Hamlet-Memnon-Christ-Ishmael-Orestes-Timon-Satan-Cain-Manfred."<sup>23</sup> Mailer believes that Gilman has convincingly argued, "A man, a hero, is distinguished first of all by being himself, not by resemblances he may bear to somebody else. The hero virtually disappears when he merely becomes the first factor in a simple equation of which the second factor is a universal figure."<sup>24</sup> Mailer likes his hero to be Kierkegaard's "that individual," "to be alive, to be the whole man alive," like no one else and to be a hero who is able to make "a revolution in the consciousness of our time."<sup>25</sup> He will be a hero who refuses to capitulate to the repressive dehumanizing death-force of a "totalitarian" society.

Believing that each age creates its own heroes and defines its own ideas of what the heroic actually is, Mailer has never considered a kind of hero with one outstanding quality of a different century, such as an intellectual hero like Emerson's American Scholar, an ethical hero like Hawthorne's Arthur Dimmesdale, or a Southern Gentleman who functions as a kind of social hero of the nineteenth century. Of the first half of the twentieth century, the Hemingway hero is perhaps closest to the type that Mailer intends to create for his own time. Both the Hemingway hero and the Mailer hero-to-be would like to observe what Hemingway said in The Sun Also Rises, "I did not care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it."<sup>26</sup> Both the Hemingway hero and the Mailer hero-to-be have a distrust of civilization and are determined to face the central conflict between human possibility and institutional power, between hope and despair, between idealism and authority. Self-reliance assumes the practical function of self-survival. However, the similarities end here. The differences between Hemingway and Mailer are down deep and even more lasting. "The time may have gone too much out of joint to include Hemingway and Mailer in the same slice of literary history . . . ."<sup>27</sup>

According to Donald Kaufmann, the "generation gap" between Hemingway's best years and the first twenty years of Mailer's literary life looks like a chasm. It is because "The radical transfiguration of American life and letters in the 1950's and '60's has pushed Hemingway and Mailer into separate spheres of no-man's lands.

In the Hemingway canon, a thin slice of experience repeats itself. Heroes look and sound alike. A code emerges with an inner order. . . . The Hemingway hero enters as a fix-  
 ture. His face fits the contour of a generation more letdown  
 than lost. He is masculinity plus with a next-door name.  
 He sports a big wound (scarring body and soul) but puts down  
 any self-pity. With heavyweight thought in hock, he leads  
 with his body, seeks out a life of sensation with much  
 courage and coolness until hedonism turns into his religion.  
 If Nada still bothers, the hero counters with an ironic lip  
 and enough cosmic stoicism to insure belief in selfhood.  
 Such a life style clings to the Hemingway hero with little  
 variation--Nick Adams, Jake Barnes, Frederic Henry, Robert  
 Jordan, and others all resembling the same Papa with the  
 same message. The code to be emulated enables an individual  
 to erect a no-man's land between himself and the Establish-  
 ment.<sup>28</sup>

Although I cannot agree with Kaufmann on his commentary on the Mailer hero, I think that his description of the Hemingway hero is precise and can be generally accepted. But Mailer's America is cancerous, too sick to justify Hemingway's heroism. Mailer simply cannot let his hero escape to "a no-man's land" and abide by the code of "grace under pressure." On the contrary, he must be social and be involved in action. In the pursuit of his ends he shows unusual intensity of thought and feeling. As Mailer has not found a hero of this kind, in his early novels he creates non-heroes, or heroes-in-training, but not the Hemingway code heroes. The code hero can no longer reflect one's struggles with the authority of America seen in all its ugly manifestations.

Because of the ugly manifestations in every corner of American society, many contemporary writers tend to create the hero of the absurd. The absurdist vision may be defined as the belief that "we are trapped in a meaningless universe and that neither God nor man, theology nor philosophy, can make sense of the human condition."<sup>29</sup>  
 For instance, in Saul Bellow's writing the absurd hero seeks freedom

from a purposeless suffering in his desire to achieve human dignity, a measure of affirmation. As Bellow has said of himself, "I seem to have asked in my books, How can one resist the controls of this vast society without turning into a nihilist, avoiding the absurdity of empty rebellion? I have asked, Are there other, more good-natured forms of resistance and free choice?"<sup>30</sup> From the heroes he has created, we may understand that his own answer is obviously negative. David D. Galloway interprets Bellow's absurd heroes as picares, wandering aimlessly, meaninglessly in the world. He finds that there is a striking similarity between Bellow's Dangling Man and Camus's The Stranger. "Both Dangling Man and The Stranger describe the absurd experiences seem to fit no logical pattern: they are simply there, and their presence announces itself with the same apparent lack of reason to both reader and participant."<sup>31</sup>

Bellow's later masterpiece, Herzog, in some respects, resembles his Dangling Man. The absurd hero Herzog reminds one of Joseph's digressive journal and his long dialogue with himself. But Herzog is a wanderer in the mind as well as heart. His actual travels to Europe, the abortive trips to Martha's Vineyard and Chicago, the retreat to the ruined house in the Berkshire--these are sharply detailed and memorable episodes, but the real pilgrimage is internalized. His absurdity results from the fact that he must learn to live with reality without sacrificing heart, without crippling the "vital part," without denying "Spirit; courage, center." However, only contact and engagement can keep the law of the heart alive; only brotherhood can legitimate feeling. In a world dominated by "actors" who depress and exploit and distort this law, such an intention is purely absurd.

Mailer's own criticism of Herzog is exceedingly severe but penetrating at the same time:

Not one of the critics who adored the book would ever have permitted Herzog to remain an hour in his house. For Herzog was defeated, Herzog was an unoriginal man, Herzog was a fool--not an attractive God-anointed fool like Gimpel the fool, his direct progenitor, but a sodden fool, over-educated and inept, unable to fight, able to love only when love presented itself as a gift. Herzog was intellectual but not bright, his ideas not original, his style as it appeared in his letters unendurable--it had exactly the leaden-footed sense of phrase which men laden with anxiety and near to going mad put into their communications. Herzog was hopeless. We learned nothing about society from him, not even anything about his life. And he is the only figure in the book. His wives, his mistress, his family, his children, his friends, even the man who cuckolds him are seen on the periphery of a dimming vision. Like all men near to being mad, his attention is within, but the inner attention is without genius. Herzog is dull, he is unendurably dull--he is like all those bright pedagogical types who have a cavity at the center of their brain.<sup>32</sup>

Mailer's criticism of Herzog is not without reference to his own ideas as to what a Mailer hero ought to be. Mailer would by no means attempt to create a hero who is "defeated," "hopeless," and "unendurably dull." The Mailer hero is to be defined as someone to be emulated in terms of cultural survival. Unlike Herzog, the Mailer hero, to exist without roots, will "set out on the uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self."<sup>33</sup> He is convinced that every man is absolutely free and potentially extraordinary. He is free to cope with chaos, evil, and the grim reality without appealing to any kind of transcendent view of man's fate. The world could be oppressive, sickeningly absurd, and meaningless. It is in such a world that man must create his own purpose and meaning by the sum total of his free acts. Thus heroism can be redefined, but not in the traditional sense of creating an ethical hero, nor in the modern popular sense of creating an absurd hero, but in Mailer's American

existentialist sense of creating a value-asserting hero.

Nevertheless, although Mailer's heroism is not to be defined by the traditional sense of romanticism, nor by the modern popular sense of absurdity, his very act of searching for a hero still relates him to America's hero-worshipping tradition. And his very belief that the national character is to be reflected in the character of its hero is still romantic in a sense. It is in this sense that Mailer has not entirely separated himself from the American tradition. It is in this sense that in whatever doctrine or metaphysical system he is going to develop in the future its American qualities will be exhibited at the same time. These and more American qualities are revealed in this paragraph:

Nowhere, as in America, however, was this fall from individual man to mass felt so acutely, for America was at once the first and most prolific creator of mass communications, and the most rootless of countries, since almost no American could lay claim to the line of a family which had not once at least severed its roots by migrating here. But, if rootless, it was then the most vulnerable of countries to its own homogenization. Yet America was also the country in which the dynamic myth of Renaissance--that every man was potentially extraordinary--knew its most passionate persistence. Simply, America was the land where people still believed in heroes: George Washington; Billy the Kid; Lincoln, Jefferson; Mark Twain, Jack London, Hemingway; Joe Louis, Dempsey, Gentleman Jim; America believed in athletes, rumrunners, aviator; even lovers, by the time Valentino died. It was a country which had grown by the leap of one hero past another--is there a country in all of our ground which does not have its legendary figure? And when the West was filled, the expansion turned inward, became part of an agitated, over-excited, 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 neo-renaissance man, be it Barrymore, Cagney, Flynn, Bogart, Brando or Sinatra, but it was almost as if there was no peace unless one could fight well, kill well (if always with honor), love well and love many, be cool, be daring, be dashing, be wild, be wily, be resourceful, be a brave gun. 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 no matter how the nation's regulators--politicians, medicos, policemen, professors, priests, rabbis, ministers, ideologues, psychoanalysis, builders, executives and endless communicators--would brick-in the modern life with hygiene upon sanity, and middle-brow homily over platitude; the myth would not die. Indeed a quarter of the nation's business must have depended upon its existence. But it stayed alive for more than that--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.<sup>34</sup>

The chief significance of this quotation lies in the expression of Mailer's own understanding, or interpretation, of America's hero-worship and its heroism. Built by rootless people drawn from every part of the world, America has nothing to believe in but heroism. The concept of heroism is based on the fundamental assumption that "every man was potentially extraordinary." So heroes may be discovered in all walks of life: from politicians to movie stars. Americans also have a strong belief in athletes whose physical strength illustrates the fact that "violence was locked with creativity." No matter how the dogmatists or doctrinaires try to suppress America's spontaneous voicing of its "dynamic myth"--hero-worshipping--it will stay alive with its people because of their "passionate persistence."

By its tone and language, this paragraph implies that the conflict between the traditional individualism and modern mass culture lies at the center of American society. Mailer's own hero-search has its historical significance. In the process of totalitarian control, a rootless country like America may collapse at any moment. But what may still hold it together as a whole is its deep conviction of the individual potentiality and great respect for the heroic. The ideas of hero and heroism may change in accordance with time, but the

conviction itself is too deep-rooted to be eradicated by any means of the modern institutionalized life. A hero of the present age must "fight well, kill well, love well," and "be cool, be daring, be dashing, be wild, be wily, be resourceful, be a brave gun." Only a hero of this kind may avert the leveling tendencies of the authoritarian system and break the stagnation of all possibilities for individuals. Mailer calls this the "existential mobilization," which will awake the nation to its creative spirit.

After formulating the general concepts of a hero for his own time and redefining the meaning of heroism, Mailer starts searching for a rebirth of heroism everywhere--in the American Negro, in President Kennedy, in the younger generation, in the American writer, in the Hollywood director, in the architect and athlete and artist and lover, finally in himself. The real hero that Mailer has found has emerged as an American existentialist.

The Mailer hero possesses not only the qualities inherited from the American tradition, as has been analyzed so far, but also the existential qualities derived from European existentialism. As this study will demonstrate, there can be no doubt that in the development of his literary career Mailer has become increasingly indebted to the continental existentialist thought for the central themes in his novels and prose writings. But most Mailer critics, while belittling this indebtedness, emphasize more often than not Mailer's American heritage and his originality as a social critic, or a prophet, or even a moralist. Even up to the time of writing this study, not a single essay of well-balanced view on Mailer's hero--the American existentialist--has been offered. As will be proposed, it is due to Mailer's



discovery that because existential medicine is the only kind of medicine which is able to cure the worsening plague in America that he consequently conceptualizes his ideas of a present-age hero as an American existentialist. It may still be open to question whether the Mailer heroes have ultimately achieved the purpose--"making a revolution in the consciousness of our time"--that Mailer has set for them; but they are unquestionably a group of memorable American existentialists who have consciously demonstrated their "courage, faith, and heroic defiance" in acting against the "impersonal social progress" of America.

## Notes to Chapter One

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7. The Fate of Man in the Modern World, pp. 25-33.
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20. Ibid., pp. 41, 42.
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32. Norman Mailer, Cannibals and Christians (New York: A Dell Book, 1967), pp. 100-101.
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34. The Presidential Papers, pp. 39-40.

## CHAPTER TWO

### European Existentialism Assimilated

Like many other existentialist writers of this century, Norman Mailer only regards himself as an "amateur philosopher," but repeatedly affirms that he is primarily a novelist. Thus, rather than doing any systematic study of European existentialism, Mailer first came to existentialism through his personal experience: "Willy-nilly I had had existentialism forced upon me."<sup>1</sup> And further, his existentialism is closely related to his experience as an American. I consider his version of existential philosophy as American existentialism simply because it must be understood with relation to his Americanness--specifically his awareness of the American "dynamic myth" and his own "mysticism of the flesh."<sup>2</sup> Mailer believes that man must understand and cope with the imperatives of the flesh. Unless the individual begins the search for the self with an inquiry into his psychic and physical nature, he will simply become a reflection of mass, industrial society and thereby advance the potential and actual twentieth-century totalitarianism. Mailer is thus convinced that by understanding his biological and psychological nature, man can discover both personal and universal values, leading him to existential philosophy, the religion of modern man.

In this chapter I would like to concentrate on a few major European existential philosophers and describe only those ideas of

theirs which have had both positively and negatively influenced Mailer in formulating his own existential scheme. By "negative influence" I mean those existential ideas which are either repudiated by Mailer or expanded to a certain extent to meet his own system.

Fundamentally speaking, existentialism is a kind of revalued attitude toward human existence. One feels himself separated from the world, from other people. In isolation, one feels threatened, insignificant, meaningless, and in response demands significance. He may constitute himself as a hero or anti-hero, as a prophet or a revolutionary. Thus existentialism begins with the expression of this self-discovery by a few isolated individuals of genius, "who find themselves cut adrift in the dangerous abyss between . . . the warmth and comfort of the 'collective idea' and the terror of finding oneself alone."<sup>3</sup> Since these isolated individuals of genius stress so much the importance of the individual, their writings bear the unmistakable mark of their own individuality. If it makes sense to speak at all of "existential philosophy," it is only because of those shared attitudes and problems which constitute a distinctive philosophical orientation.

Problems such as freedom, decision, and responsibility are prominent in all the existentialist philosophers. These matters form the core of personal being. It is the exercise of freedom and the ability to shape the future that distinguished man from all the other beings that we know on earth. It is through free and responsible decisions that man becomes authentically himself. In John Macmurray's language, the "self as agent" provides the central themes for existentialism, whereas traditional Western philosophy, especially since the time of Decartes, has concentrated attention on the "self as

subject"--and by "subject" is understood as "thinking subject."<sup>4</sup>

Topics such as finitude, guilt, alienation, despair and death form another group of existentialist problems. Discussions of these concepts have not been prominent in traditional philosophy, yet they are treated at length among the existentialists, for all of existentialists seem aware of the tragic elements in human existence. Man's freedom and his quest for authentic personal being meet with resistance and sometimes with frustration. In any case, as far as the individual is concerned, existence ends in death. Perhaps the tragic side of existentialism is already implied in its starting point where human existence is set over against the inanimate world. For the existentialist, man is never just part of the cosmos but always stands to it in a relationship of tension with possibilities for tragic conflict.

The last problem that occurs in the writings of existentialists which has been seriously treated is the emotional life of man. This again is something that has been in the main neglected by philosophers of the past, or else turned over to psychology. But the existentialists claim that it is precisely through these that we are involved in our world and can learn some things about it that are inaccessible to a merely objective beholding. From Kierkegaard to Heidegger and Sartre, the existentialists have provided brilliant analysis of such feeling states as anxiety, boredom, nausea, and have sought to show that these are not without their significance for philosophy.

While our attention has been drawn to those problems that have been commonly treated by existentialists, the divergences among them are just as striking. Indeed, it would be difficult to find many thinkers prepared to acknowledge themselves existentialists at all,

and those whom we might regard as existentialists in spite of their protests could certainly not be counted as forming a "school" in the usual sense. Roger L. Shinn observes, "Almost any self-respecting existentialist refuses to call himself an existentialist. To say, 'I am an existentialist,' is to say 'I am one of that classification of people known as existentialists;' whereas the existentialist wants to say, 'I am myself--and I don't like your classification.'"<sup>5</sup> What all this means is that each existentialist demands an individual treatment if we think that his thoughts do lead us to a better understanding of human existence.

#### Soren Kierkegaard

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), referring to himself as "that individual," is widely held as the father of modern European existentialism. Like Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, he first diagnosed the sickness of modern man at a time when most people could not believe him. Kierkegaard's influence on Mailer is deep and wide; even recently in an interview Mailer still expressed, "Well, it could be said that all I'm doing is leading people back to Kierkegaard.

I'd remind you I've written this several times: Kierkegaard taught us, or tried to teach us, that at that moment we're feeling most saintly, we may in fact be evil. And that moment when we think we're most evil and finally corrupt, we may, in fact, in the eyes of God, be saintly at that moment. It's a Dostoevskian, Kierkegaardian notion. Its first value is that it strips us of that fundamental arrogance of assuming that at any given moment any of us have enough centrality, have a seat from which we can expound our dogma, or measure our moral value.<sup>6</sup>

It was certainly against the rationalistic and dogmatic life of his time Kierkegaard was all fighting. For his whole life, Kierkegaard was in revolt against three aspects of his contemporary world: the

widely accepted rationalist idealism of the German philosopher, Hegel, the institutionalization of the Lutheran Church, and the spiritual shallowness of so-called Christian civilization. Basically, his criticism of all three factors stems from a single belief, namely, that each in its own way negated the importance of the individual and glossed over the necessity for making the authentic choice--God or the world.

Kierkegaard repudiated Hegel on both philosophical and religious grounds. Hegel had attempted to explain all history as the result of the working out in time of the power of World Spirit. This World Spirit reveals itself in all the events of our daily experience in an orderly plan. The dialectical process, by which each new phase of history arises out of the resolution of the tension between every object and its self-generated opposite (thesis, antithesis, synthesis), provides for the process of becoming and explains the apparent dichotomy between the world of spirit and the world of matter. All of this Hegelian system, Kierkegaard dismissed as pure logic. In his view, Hegel was trying to explain the world of experience by the operation of logic--and logic, said Kierkegaard, never made anything happen. Nothing happens in the world of man without the presence of an actual person who wills to do a particular thing. Further, the Hegelian dialectic reduces man to the role of a mere actor in a drama which completely transcends his personal experience. As Ernst Breisach has noted,

The grand design of world history reduces the place of the individual's existence and actions to that of a grain of sand in forming a desert. While the grain of sand certainly makes contribution, it hardly has decisive importance. . . . Man has become the agent of an all-powerful



process. The world is the stage, history the drama, man the actor, and the self-realization of the spirit its final denouement.<sup>7</sup>

Opposing the pursuit of pure logic and the passion for totality which he found in Hegel, Kierkegaard proposed the notion that truth lies in subjectivity; that true existence is achieved by intensity of feeling. "In the principle," wrote Kierkegaard, "that subjectivity, inwardness, is the truth, there is comprehended the Socratic wisdom, whose everlasting merit it was to have become aware of the essential significance of existence, of the fact that the knower is an existing individual."<sup>8</sup> Truth thus defined certainly reflects Kierkegaard's stress on the existing individual. He alone will find truth, whereas what Kierkegaard calls the objective thinker, disintegrated from his own personality and purely speculative, will find little more than pale abstractions. "The thinker who can in all his thinking forget also to think that he is an existing individual will never explain life. He merely will attempt to cease to be a human being in order to become a book, or an objective something which is possible only for a machine."<sup>9</sup> One of his reasons for reformation of the concept of truth was actually to combat the Hegelian de-emphasis of human responsibility. Human choice, decision, and action should carry real weight and not just be means or tricks of reason.

Just as Kierkegaard directed his wit and irony against Hegel's philosophy, so did he indict the institutionalized Christianity and the complacency of middle-class materialism. The Church, with its creeds and dogmas and sacraments, presumed to smooth the path of the Christian by "rationalizing" his beliefs, by making God in some degree comprehensible to the human mind--whereas in fact there was an impassable

gulf between God and his creatures. For Kierkegaard, God is synonymous with the principle of eternity, infinity, and the absolute. Man was created in the image of God. In his freedom he has estranged himself from God. Man above all is a finite and particular being. Between him and God there is therefore an impassable gulf. The infinite absolute and the finite particular cannot be "united" in any way. Whether one tries as a mystic to leap over this gulf in moments of ecstasy or hopes to bridge it by building theological or philosophical systems subsuming God and man alike in their paragraphs, the result will be total failure. As an example, Kierkegaard points to Hegel, whose attempts to integrate God, man, and religion in general into a universal system led to the loss of the real importance of all of them.

If, then, the enormous gulf between God and man is accepted as a basic fact, what does it mean to live as a Christian? Kierkegaard approaches this question empirically, i.e., he not merely speculated but used the total experience of his life to bring forth an answer. He proceeded in a logically quite consistent way to trace through the stages of his own life the answer to what it meant to lead a Christian life. There are three stages he came to distinguish: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. The aesthetic stage of living shows man deeply involved in the world of immediacy. Kierkegaard defined what he called the "aesthetic," as a dimension of existence and an overall design for living, by means of the immediate. "The aesthetic in a man is that by which he immediately is what he is."<sup>10</sup> Like the child, the aesthetè we all are at one time, he lives in that moment. He tries always to remain in the moment of pleasure and to

forget all continuity and personal involvement in his life. The aesthete is essentially a driven man, even if he thinks he is pursuing a life of purpose. He is easily fascinated, but just as easily tires of everything. And in this pursuit of the sensuous and the sensual which is the last essence is a chasing after enjoyment, man is unable really to communicate because he is solely concerned with himself. George A. Schrader thought that Mailer's hero, the hipster, corresponds nicely to Kierkegaard's esthetic hero, the 'sensuous-erotic genius.' . . . the categories are essentially the same."<sup>11</sup> My later analysis will show that Mailer's American existentialist hero, the hipster, does not correspond "nicely" to Kierkegaard's esthetic hero, nor do they belong to the same category. What can only be said is that in formulating his idea of the hipster hero Mailer is undoubtedly influenced by Kierkegaard's three-stage approach to the study of a real Christian life. The hipster at most bears some qualities of Kierkegaard's aesthete. However, the hipster is no more a fixture of the Mailer hero than Kierkegaard's aesthete is the final stage of a Christian life.

In the ethical stage, man finds himself abandoning the attitude of the speculator and making commitments. He begins to wrestle with the concept of responsibility. Kierkegaard's own experience led him to discussing the ethical stage mainly in terms of marriage. Here a general code makes demands and man decides to live according to it. He decides but once, yet the consequences are life-long. However, the ethical man is infinitely superior to the aesthetic in that he has the freedom of choice and the sense of concrete selfhood. "The aesthetic in a man is that by which he is immediately what he is; the ethical is that whereby he becomes what he becomes."<sup>12</sup> By giving up

the vain endeavor to be himself (aesthetic), a man is first enabled to become himself (ethical). As Louis Mackey has said, "What exists before the choice is the self as immediately given. The self that comes to be by the choice is the same self lifted from nature to self-consciousness by means of freedom."<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, ethics is still based on rational considerations. Universal demands are made in the form of codes which man accepts. He thus submits to abstractions and abstract bodies like societies. This submission leads at last to a dead end. The obstacle which prevents any real further progress in the ethical stage is still the attempted self sufficiency of man. The way to break out of this containment is to accept the way to God. In confronting God, man finally recognizes himself as the unique individual and his unique situation becomes obvious. He experiences lonesomeness, risk, or as Kierkegaard puts it, fear and trembling. Kierkegaard uses the example of Abraham to illustrate the religious stage of living. Abraham puts his living personal relation to God above all moral laws when after a fierce struggle he decides to sacrifice his son. Here is the Kierkegaardian "leap" which projects man into a new stage of being. Abraham did not reason in syllogism; a momentous decision gave his whole life a new direction. Not that man has now arrived once for all at an ultimate goal and possesses it. On the contrary, he has immersed himself in a most exhausting struggle, the struggle to be worthy. He has accepted not a doctrine but a new way of life. Summarizing "stages of life's way," Kierkegaard wrote, "While aesthetic existence is essentially enjoyment, and ethical existence, essentially struggle and victory, religious existence is essentially suffering."<sup>14</sup>

When Kierkegaard asserts that a religious life is a life of suffering, he actually means that it is a life of anxiety. If the individual chooses to base his life totally on the ground of his relation to God, there are nevertheless no sure signposts, no religious "categorical imperatives" that will tell him specifically what he should or should not do. The true Christian's only recourse is absolute, unquestioning faith in what he believes to be the will of God. Faith for Kierkegaard is a completely subjective affair, involving the solitary individual and his God. Neither his family, his friends, nor his pastor can tell him whether what he proposes to do is right or help him to achieve the necessary faith to do it. The final stage is marked by a series of acts of commitment which he must make in the blindness of absolute trust in God. This is what Kierkegaard means by the "leap of faith." No single act assures the rightness of any other, and no single act, however crucial for the individual, can "prove" his faith and release him thereafter from the anguish of uncertainty in his future decisions. It is this radical discontinuity of experience that constitutes man's perpetual Christian opportunity and his continual "crucifixion by faith." While Kierkegaard demanded the "leap of faith" from a Christian in his lifetime, what Mailer demands from a Christian of his own time is a belief in the "embattled vision" that God is no longer "all-powerful" but "exists as a warring element in a divided universe."<sup>15</sup> But the conclusion Mailer has arrived at is the same as Kierkegaard's that no single act can free one from the anguish of uncertainty in his future decisions. With the exception of some important elements to be added

by Nietzsche, Kierkegaard's thought has laid the foundation of modern existentialism.

### Friedrich Nietzsche

Whereas in discussing Nietzsche (1844-1900) Karl Jaspers carefully catalogues the similarities between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard in his essay, "Kierkegaard and Nietzsche," Walter Kaufmann stresses that it is the differences between the two that strike us. Perhaps, the best balanced observation is from H. J. Blackham:

Nietzsche and Kierkegaard are as divided as the poles and as close as twins. Nietzsche cast his supreme choice upon the finite world Kierkegaard rejected and resigned. Kierkegaard wrote in flesh and blood his epigram, Nietzsche his rhapsody. For both, their drama moved its inevitable catastrophe: Kierkegaard precipitated himself into the irrevocable either-or of his final unforgivable attack on the Church, Nietzsche into his dionysian nihilism, his euphoria and eventual madness. Both are formidable and command respect. Both opposed themselves to the culture of the day and returned to the Greeks. Kierkegaard cast himself for the role of Socrates for the salvation of the age; Nietzsche denounced the role of Socrates as the ruin of the age; both are solitaires, self-driven into desolating isolating. Both are existentialists.<sup>16</sup>

They are existentialists in the sense that the essence of existentialism is not concerned with points of school doctrine but with the recall of philosophy as to how the existing individual may lead an authentic life of his own.

Nietzsche preached the danger of nihilism to his contemporaries and he despaired at their lack of understanding. At times he even hoped for nihilism to reach its peak so that doubters might at last recognize its presence. Mailer even pushes "nihilism" further and sees it with positive function. When silence, exile and cunning cannot undercut modern civilization's obsession with control, Mailer

concludes that "nihilism might be the only answer to totalitarianism."<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche diagnosed the disease of nihilism in three specific areas in the system of his time: science, humanism, and liberalism. The total scientific endeavor of Nietzsche's time was as deeply penetrated by the spirit and methods of natural sciences as is ours. Nietzsche argued that in human sphere there are never the equal conditions which alone make situations comparable for experiments patterned after those in the natural sciences. Even the slightest differences are significant sources of error. Neither can exact measurements really be made since man is a part of a whole, the moving and therefore constantly changing world system. For Nietzsche the scientific world view, patterned after the natural sciences, is only the world view of a special generation. Contrary to the generally held opinion, its objectivity is no greater than that of previous views. Like all of them, it is based not on facts but on interpretations. Man knows no facts in the sense of statements which contain no elements of interpretation. Truth is always a subjective creation, knowledge always contains evaluation. The scientific world view is so widely accepted only because of its usefulness and not because it is the ultimate truth.

However practical this viewpoint may be, it certainly offers no final explanation of the world. It does, however, do something else, something unexpected and unintended. It paves the way for nihilism. This is because of the tragic fact that the scientific world view destroys what it considers illusions but is totally unable to fill a human life with meaning. In The Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche thus wrote:

. . . science is a hiding-place for every kind of cowardice, disbelief, remorse, despectio sui, bad conscience--it is the very anxiety that springs from having no ideal, the suffering from the lack of a great love, the discontent with an enforced moderation. Oh, what does all science not cover to-day? How much, at any rate, does it not try to cover? The diligence of our best scholars, their senseless industry, their burning the candle of their brain at both ends--their very mastery of their handiwork--how often is the real meaning of all that to prevent themselves continuing to see a certain thing? Science as self-anaesthetic: do you know that?<sup>18</sup>

Modern science, like Hegel's world-history, was one of the many elaborate ways in which the modern individual took refuge from himself and sought to lose himself and dodge the decisive struggles of human destiny. It seems that Mailer's criticism of modern science is a direct continuation of Nietzsche's. Mailer surely knows "science as self-anaesthetic," because he notices that "Our scientists are only experts; those of the last decade are dull in person as experts, . . . they write jargon, their minds are narrow before they are deep. Their knowledge of life is incarcerated."<sup>19</sup> And Mailer further mentions that "Modern science may prove to be the final poisoned fruit of the rich European tree, and plague may disclose itself as the most characteristic invention of our time."<sup>20</sup>

For liberalism with its political ideal of democracy Nietzsche has two criticisms, one of which even a person who views democracy as the most practical form of political life must heed and the other related to Nietzsche's own answer to nihilism. The first is directed against blind relief in inevitable progress, exaggerated expectations from democracy, and a too simple interpretation of man as good and liberty-loving. Democracy, however, is not his ideal. As William M. Salter stated, "He [Nietzsche] desires a rule of the intelligence rather than of the many. . . ."<sup>21</sup> At this point, we find that Mailer



is Nietzschean again. Mailer at one point labels himself a "Left Conservative" and desires to be an aristocrat by birth. In The Armies of the Night, Mailer wants to ask Robert Lowell, who is an aristocrat by birth whereas Mailer must win his aristocracy.

What do you know about getting fact against your will, and turning into a clown of an arriviste baron when you would rather be an eagle or a count, or rarest of all, some natural aristocrat from these damned democratic states.<sup>22</sup>

The phrase "natural aristocrat from these damned democratic states" suggests that Mailer feels the conflict between the idea of egalitarianism in democracy and the special need for heroism and natural nobility he specially cares for. Mailer's many statements about the necessity and possibility of heroism in the modern society show the truth of the remark for him.

Nietzsche's second criticism of democracy concerns the validity of the aim of democracy itself, which Nietzsche sees as the happiness of all or at least of the most. What democracy wants to do is to create and guarantee independence for as many as possible--independence of thought, of manner, of life, and of occupation. To this end, however, it must make restrictions--must deny the right to vote on the one hand to the propertyless, on the other to the rich. "These are the two unpermissible classes in the community, for whose removal democracy must constantly labor, the one because they are without independence, the other because they threaten it; they and the party system are the three great foes of independence."<sup>23</sup> For Mailer, he has doubted from the very beginning in his career both as a novelist and social critic that the modern American political system, when developed to this stage, has ever guaranteed independence for individuals. He has no

regard for a political system in which power is diffused among the bureaucrats in a state in which no one is any longer accountable. Neither the reactionary Cannibal nor the liberal Christian is capable of a creative evolution in which man's independence and dignity are enhanced.

For Nietzsche, the problem of nihilism arose basically out of the discovery that "God is dead." And in the absence of God, Nietzsche saw not an occasion for rejoicing but a terrifying challenge:

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festival of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invest? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it?<sup>24</sup>

With God, meaning and value system depart from the world. A situation arises which threatens human dignity itself. But this also offers the first and supreme challenge for man to realize himself fully. Because of this he hopes man will become part of a "Higher History" than all history hitherto. The crucial point is that in order to overcome the onslaught of nihilism, man must go beyond his previous answers, which Nietzsche viewed as highways for the advent of nihilism. For far too long a time man had been clinging to answers, which comforted him and alleviated his premonitions. These comfortable systems of thought, however, are not easily given up. And thus the advent of nihilism is coming in a quiet manner since it is well hidden behind a thick veil. In the belief that he is choosing means against nihilism, man embraces ideas which actually accelerate its coming: for instance, the dangerous intellectual playing offered by the humanist, who first

abolishes God and then shifts the functions of God to some such substitutes as the goodness of man or benevolent natural laws. But with the vanishing of God who created man, "the" authority dies. No pseudo-gods can be substituted. The attempt to escape the impact of the death of God in the human heart through a humanistic view of the world still fails.

Mailer has not, as noted earlier, altogether abandoned God; nor has he adopted a humanistic view of the world to comfort himself. He only feels that God's authority is dead and "there is the greater agony of God at the mercy of man's fate, God determined by man's efforts, man who has free will and can no longer exercise it and God therefore in bondage to the result of man's efforts."<sup>25</sup> Mailer has certainly accepted Nietzsche's assumption that man is "offered the first and supreme challenge to realize himself fully." So Mailer told his interviewer Richard G. Stern:

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.<sup>26</sup>

After all his criticisms of scientism and the ideologies of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche directed his sharpest criticism against religion, and particularly Christianity, in which he had detected all the elements of nihilism and decadence. Like Kierkegaard, he saw the first proof of those in the hypocritical and lukewarm attitude toward religion on the part of the Christians themselves--an attitude which he regarded as infinitely more demoralizing than honest atheism. To call oneself Christian, when the whole of life is in practice one continuous refutation of Christianity was, according to Nietzsche, the height of indecency and moral cowardice at its worst. Such a

state of things he could only despise. In one of his latest books, The Anti-Christ (1888), he argued:

That which separates us from other people is not the fact that we can discover no God in either history or nature, or behind nature--but that we regard what has been revered as "God" not as "divine" but as wretched, absurd, pernicious; not as an error but as a crime against life. . . . We deny God as God. . . . If the existence of this Christian God were proved to us, we should feel even less able to believe in Him. . . . A religion such as Christianity which never once comes into touch with reality, and which collapses the very moment reality asserts its rights even on one single point, must naturally be a mortal enemy of the "wisdom of this world. . . ."27

Nietzsche's real objection to Christianity is a fundamental one. It is essentially a question of his interpretation of mores and morality. For him, "Customs (mores) represent the collective experiences of bygone generations with regard to what is useful and harmful --but morality does not refer to these experiences as such but rather to the age, holiness, and unquestioned acceptance of the customs. And these feelings prevent man from making genuinely new experiences and from changing his customs. This means that morality obstructs the creation of newer and better customs--it makes man dull."28 It is the charge that Christianity had developed into a tranquilizer for man which Nietzsche was opposed to. He accused Christianity of remaining on the plane of mere morality, as in codes of conduct which require adherence, rather than stimulating creativeness out of one's full personal life. Thus Christianity sins against the very principle of life itself which demands that creativeness go on as long as there is life in this world. To suppress this creativeness in man by forcing him merely to accept the products of bygone acts of creativity is to kill life itself. Over the centuries Christian

morality had killed the personal and creative elements in morals. Nietzsche was convinced that Jesus himself would deny such a following.

Mailer could never agree with Nietzsche more than on his sharp criticism against Christianity, for in Mailer's time, Christianity altogether collapsed as a religion. In a Christian country like America, the deterioration of workmanship, the erecting of aesthetically drab buildings, the sexual revolution sustained on drugs, the survival of "mediocrities" by surgery, the perpetuation of a society on welfare, an economy based on war and war production are all symptoms of a world:

. . . not of adventurers, entrepreneurs, settlers, social arbiters, proletarians, agriculturists, and other egocentric types of dynamic society, but instead a world of whirlpools and formlessness where two types remerge, types there at the beginning of it all: Cannibals and Christians.<sup>29</sup>

"What characterizes the Cannibals is that most of them are born Christian, think of Jesus as Love, and get an erection from the thought of whippings, blood, burning crosses, burning bodies, and screams in mass graves." Christians are the commercial. "The commercial is the invention of a profoundly Christian nation--it proceeds to sell something in which it does not altogether believe. . ."<sup>30</sup>

These Christians

are utterly opposed to the destruction of human life and succeed within themselves in starting all the wars of our own time, since every war since the Second World War has been initiated by liberals or Communists; these Christians also succeed by their faith in science to poison the nourishment we eat and the waters of the sea, to alter the genetics of our beasts, and to break the food chains of nature.<sup>31</sup>

Mailer seems to say that society cannot survive the Christians nor can it endure the Cannibals. But he finally accepts some of Nietzsche's

final answers to the problems of man.

Nietzsche's final answers can be put in three phrases: the will to power, the eternal recurrence, and "Higher Man" (Superman). Nietzsche hoped that his answers would not give rise to new illusions about man's position in this world and thus lead man further into decadence. Going beyond "the will to live" of Schopenhauer, he posited as the animating force behind all life, the will to power. This was definitely not to be understood as the will to success, wealth, or military, racial, or political power (although at certain times Nietzsche proved not to be free from such ideas). As Horton and Edwards have observed, "This will manifests itself in an eternal process of becoming and gives to human nature its secret, universal quality of the desire for power--ideally, the power to overcome (transcend) the weakness and insufficiency of mere human capacity."<sup>32</sup> In other words, man must overcome himself in order to become what he is. Will, of course, implies both a force and an aim and is not merely aimlessly rushing streams. It also means that man should strive for the truly human in himself. To do this would make him free and independent of what hinders his spontaneity and creativity, whether it be traits of character, powerful traditions, or other restraints.

Mailer's reaction to "the will to power" is that it can be easily taken to mean only "the will to military or political power." To illustrate this point, Mailer created a character, General Cummings, in The Naked and the Dead. Cummings is a power-mad fascist; the only morality he worships is the power morality. "The general sees the entire war as a consolidation of power, a preparation for the imminent time when a few strong men (ideally one strong man--himself) will

subordinate the great mass of individuals to the machine."<sup>33</sup> Cummings believes that man's deepest urge is

not religion, that's obvious, it's not love, it's not spirituality, those are all sops along the way, benefits we devise for ourselves when the limitations of our existence turn us away from the other dream. To achieve God. When we come kicking into the world, we are God, the universe is the limit of our senses. And when we get older, when we discover that the universe is not us, it's the deepest trauma of our existence.<sup>34</sup>

With the exception of the last two sentences, Robert Solotaroff considers that "this is straight Nietzsche." But he believes that "Mailer has misunderstood the philosopher."<sup>35</sup> I think he himself has misunderstood Mailer, because Mailer never meant to have Cummings as a hero in the novel but as a non-hero. For, as the novel ends, the power morality is rendered useless for the campaign. Even Cummings himself finally realizes that all his planning and tactics meant nothing in winning the war on the island. Obviously, Mailer meant to ridicule Cummings' misunderstanding of Nietzsche.

Nietzsche also emphasizes the Superman as future development, as a new chapter in human history. The Superman is the one who has sublimated his will to power into a creative power over the force of life itself. He is the passionate man who is at the same time in control of his passion, who makes both passion and reason serve in the enlargement of his creative powers. In discussing his ideal Superman, Nietzsche also implies a strong biological foundation. As Janko Lavrin has said, "His defense of life thus became also a defense of the body against any encroachments on the part of the 'soul,' of traditional morals, and the world 'beyond.'"<sup>36</sup> With Nietzsche's Superman, nothing supernatural will happen; but through the creation

of a strong will to power the Superman may be just as totally integrated into the realm of nature as man has been before. Only a new unprecedented height will be reached in human existence. The mass man will be overcome. Though mass man has been pledging allegiance to all kinds of aims, he has really followed only one--comfortable security. In him the passion for creation has burned itself out or has never been lighted. What is left is the willingness to accept whatever public opinion preaches. The most frightful aspect of this is that the mass man would even sacrifice freedom and the right to creativity for the feeling of security. That is why Nietzsche saw in his "Superman" the last hope. If the mass man were ever to glimpse even a tiny part of the nihilism he was actually confronting, then he would sell himself to the Leviathan of the totalitarian state in order to escape the frightful prospect and obligation of creativity. The mass man is constitutionally unable to accept the Nietzschean solution of viewing the specimens of Superman in his midst as sufficient meaning for his own life. Instead he tries to prevent their very appearance. The mass man is and has been an opponent of all that is new and harbors only feelings of resentment toward it. He is preoccupied with opposition and does it through what Nietzsche called a slave morality. This is designed to prevent anyone's rising above the level of the mass man himself. Nietzsche nevertheless hoped for the victorious emergence of Superman in the coming decades despite this determined opposition. He would bring the morality of positive creation.

Seventy-five years before the appearance of "The White Negro," Nietzsche incorporated his existentialism with his defense of body in the Superman. And there are striking similarities between



Nietzsche's Superman and Mailer's American existentialist heroes.

Robert Solotaroff saw these similarities, too:

Once we throw out the God-Devil part there are considerable resemblances between Mailer's existential heroes and Nietzsche's superman, tapping his will to power as he extricates himself from a biologically bankrupt society and rises toward moral horizon which he has created.<sup>37</sup>

As has been shown, it can be in many aspects that Mailer has been influenced by Nietzsche for his social criticism even though Mailer has not made as many references to Nietzsche as he has done to Sartre, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger. As for Nietzsche's position in the existentialism, Kaufmann has made a clear observation,

In the story of existentialism, Nietzsche occupies a central place: Jaspers, Heidegger, and Sartre are unthinkable without him, and the conclusion of Camus' The Myth of Sisyphus sounds like a distant echo of Nietzsche. Camus has also written at length about Nietzsche; Nietzsche is the first name mentioned in Sartre's philosophic main work, Being and Nothingness; Jaspers has written two whole books about him and discussed him in detail in several others; and Heidegger, in his later works, considers Nietzsche even more important than Jaspers ever did.<sup>38</sup>

Nietzsche might not agree with Mailer in spreading the idea of a White Negro hero with so much emphasis on violence and sexual orgasm, but he would surely appreciate Mailer's intention to defeat the mass man of the totalitarian society.

#### Martin Heidegger

Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche point up a profound dissociation, that has taken place in the being of Western man, which is basically the conflict of reason with the whole man. According to Kierkegaard, reason threatens to swallow up faith; Western man now stands at a crossroads forced to choose either to be religious or to fall into

despair. Having chosen the former, he must, being rooted historically in Christianity, enact a radical renewal of the Christian faith. For Nietzsche the era of reason and science raises the question of what is to be done with the primitive instincts and passions of man; in pushing these aside the age threatens us with a decline in vitality for the whole species. What lies behind both prophetic messages is the perception that man is estranged from his own being. Now, the estrangement from Being itself is Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) central theme. Since his major effort in philosophy has been to discover the meaning of Being itself, rather than to describe the relation to the existent individual to the world as given, Heidegger insistently dissociates himself from existential philosophy. "My philosophical tendencies," wrote he in his letter to Jean Wahl, "can not be classed as Existenz-philosophie. . . . The question of Being in its totality and as such."<sup>39</sup> For all that, Heidegger is inescapably put among the existentialists because he is one of them in his themes and ideas and in his treatment of them and in the language he uses, as well as in his debt to Kierkegaard and in his influence upon others especially upon Sartre.

Nearly all Heidegger's works reiterate the theme that philosophy must return to the truth of Being and that only through a rediscovery of Being can modern man be saved from the chaos which threatens him. The beginning of his major work, Sein und Zeit (Being and Time) sets forth in great detail his own concern with this problem. According to Heidegger, the concept of "Being" is the most universal one, as was also realized by Aristotle, Thomas and Hegel; and its universality goes beyond that of any "genus." At the same time it is obscure and

indefinable; "Being" cannot be comprehended as anything that is; it cannot be reduced from any higher concepts and it cannot be represented by any lower ones; "Being" is not something like a being, a stone, a plant, a table, a man. Yet "Being" seems somehow an evident concept. We make use of it in all knowledge, in all our statements, in all our attitudes toward ourselves. We are used to living in an "understanding of Being," but hand in hand with it goes the incomprehensibility of what is meant by "Being."

Instead of starting his investigation of Being with the things encountered in the world, however, Heidegger takes "human Being"--"Dasein," or "Being-in-the world" as the starting point of his investigation. His first task is the examination of human existence with a view to describing its characteristic mode of Being. Since the existential analysis of human being occupies the major part of Being and Time, it is not surprising that--in spite of Heidegger's protests--existentialism can claim to have received considerable inspiration from his work.

Superficially, man looks like many other components of the world, but this is not affirmed by a closer analysis of man's situation. The phrase closer analysis, of course, means existential analysis, the analysis of the connection between Being and human being. The fact that man can make such an analysis is in itself a decisive characteristic of man. He alone of all beings is concerned with his connection with Being, and he alone can ask what it means "to be." Heidegger emphasizes that he aims at no more than the intrinsic meaning of the word "be." He also frequently puts it in the more common question why there is anything rather than nothing.

Always, however, the questioning focuses on the great puzzle of how man himself is connected with Being, since it is here that Heidegger sees the only access to an answer, Man is that place in Being where the question about Being can be put. Heidegger refers to man as that particular being which stands as the only access to what it means to be, as Dasein.

According to Heidegger, Dasein obviously has two dimensions. First, the Dasein is not an essence clothed with certain "qualities," which are intelligible apart from its particular existence. It "has" no qualities: it is this concrete way of existing and nothing else. In all questions concerning the nature of Dasein existence will always have priority over essence. As specifically human existence Dasein has as its second dimension the possibility of being aware of or knowing about its connection with Being, asking questions pertaining to its own being, and thus transcending all other beings. As Ronald Grimsley has interpreted, "The Dasein can 'pro-ject' itself, and so to speak, hurl itself forward."<sup>40</sup> But this second dimension is possibility only. Man can ignore this question and just not ask it. He can exist like other beings not knowing and not caring about his connection with Being.

When a man exists like others not caring about moving "beyond" or "ahead" of himself, Heidegger calls that he is in the condition of banal existence. This kind of existence may provide an excuse and justification for the flight from responsibility and individual choice and it may also enable the individual to take refuge in the seeming solidity of a socially approved mode of existence, thus giving comfort and assurance as to the reality and stability of his

life. Actually what the individual is doing is behaving as though he were a thing among other things, a substance with a given number of properties, with no power or responsibility to project himself toward his possibilities. As Heidegger himself put it:

We enjoy and amuse ourselves as One enjoys; we read, see, and judge literature and art as One sees and judges. . .<sup>41</sup>

This One who presides over our daily life is not this person or that person, or is it all other people. But still it is One who presents the appearance of doing our judging and deciding, thereby taking away responsibility from the Person. This condition Heidegger calls a state of fall.

Like Kierkegaard, Heidegger believes that man should transcend this banality and achieve authentic existence. Why so? When he does, two things happen. Man, as Nietzsche would have said, becomes the one he "is," meaning that only then does he become truly man. And, secondly, as Heidegger puts it, only in authentic existence Dasein experiences Being in its immediacy. This experience comes to man in the fullness of his life and not after leaving the world on paths of abstraction. But "to become aware of Being involves the whole person, not just 'pure consciousness,'

Dasein is, therefore, first like a closed, darkened window. Only in authentic existence is it opened. And then it is done not for a disinterested look at Being, . . . but in order to gain the deepest personal experience man can have.<sup>42</sup>

As we can see, it is Heidegger who makes most clear about the idea of authentic existence for an individual. And only in authentic existence does man experience Being; also the time of the fullness of his life. In this respect, Heidegger has influenced both Sartre and Mailer. Based on Heidegger's metaphysical concept of the nature of

pure Being, Sartre develops his own concepts of Being-for-itself, Being-in-itself, and Being-for-others, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Out of his understanding of Heidegger's concept of Being, and with the help of his knowledge of Freud, Mailer is concerned with discovering the "authenticity" of the self and he is searching for extreme situations, those situations which "burn out the filament of dull habit and turn the conscious mind back upon its natural subservance to the instinct."<sup>43</sup> This means that the individual is encouraged to liberate himself "from the Super-Ego of the society."<sup>44</sup>

The other concepts that arouse Mailer's deep interest are Heidegger's speculations on dread and death. According to Heidegger, dread is the most powerful of the feelings that affect man's attitude toward his existence. Like Kierkegaard's Angest this is an unlocalized but deeply disturbing feeling that something is wrong with one's life. Kierkegaard had analyzed "the concept of dread" in order to penetrate to the deepest layer of human feeling, and Heidegger uses it for the same purpose. Dread differs from fear. Fear refers to the feeling of being threatened by something particular, like a thunderstorm or a dark room. Dread is always undermined in the sense that it does not depend upon specific objects. In dread the whole pattern of worldly objects dissolves away and sinks into meaninglessness. Dread is not dread of anything, for the object of dread is "nowhere"; dread is of Nothing.

Dread is therefore not in any way similar to a fear caused by a superstition or a misunderstood context. As H. J. Blackham has interpreted,

The decisive character of dread is that it cannot be localized and it refuses to be pinned down to anything in which we are interested and which we feel to be threatened, by emptying everything in the world of all interest for me: it invests everything alike with a common worthlessness.<sup>45</sup>

Dread thus gradually empties man's life of all enjoyment and meaning and finally brings him to the point where he has to decide whether to continue his inauthentic existence or to take charge of his life and accept his responsibility to become what he can will to be. In other words, dread has its roots in the confrontation with nothingness and offers the way to an authentic life, to a finding of one's ground in Being, in authentic existence. In this positive evaluation of the experience of nothingness Heidegger is closely akin to Nietzsche. But Nietzsche's answer to nihilism was his call for "Superman." Heidegger takes another way. For him, dread can lift man out of the limbo of the seemingly natural condition of everyday life and gives him the awareness of being alone and thrown back on himself.

Thus it is dread which finally reveals to the individual the true nature of Dasein, Being-in-the-world, and is the foundation of his attitude toward it. He finds himself in a condition of perpetual becoming, facing an open future, and bound up with other things. The generalized word which Heidegger uses to characterize this attitude of concern is "Care." Since Care is the definitive attitude of one who exists by anticipating what he will be in a world into which he is thrown and to which he is bound, the one possibility he should be most concerned about is his own death. As Horton and Edwards have expounded, "Since his existence is really only a constant self-projection into a realm of possibilities, his life is never finished except by death, which differs from all other possibilities by being peculiarly his

and by being imminent, that is, possible at any moment."<sup>46</sup>

It is precisely the constant taking into consideration of death as man's most personal destiny which the average man tries to escape. He lives "as if" his life were, in the near future at least, without end. For some it is even in bad taste to mention death. Others try to dull the impact of death by finding worlds beyond death. For them death constitutes not a true end but a change from one life to another. For Heidegger all these evasive positions take from death its positive dimension. Man must realize in its full immediacy that death comes not in general (everyone must die) but to each individual (one dies). For a literary representation of this idea Heidegger refers the reader to Tolstoy's story, "The Death of Ivan Ilych."

For Heidegger, however, the story has interest as an illustration of "the shattering and the collapse of the 'One dies.'" Prior to his illness Ivan Ilych's attitude toward death was no different from that of the doctor. He knew, of course, that he would die, but death to him was a biological or social category. He was neither more nor less mortal than a dog. He was someone who would die in the same way as a lawyer and a family man. The category of death, indeed, had even less significance for him than that of lawyer or married man. His illness changed all this. The insignificance of his social functions as lawyer, husband, and father was impressed upon him forcefully; and it may well have occurred to him for the first time that men alone among the animals know that they are going to die. The shopworn word "death," which had been previously no more than a coin used in the business of social intercourse, began to take on a unique meaning--a meaning for him as an individual human being. At last he was obliged



to face the truth which he had for so long and with such art concealed from himself.

Heidegger's analysis of death reveals in thought the truth that the novelist Tolstoy had revealed in his story. The authentic meaning of death--"One dies"--is not as an external and public fact within the world, but as an internal possibility of my own Being. Nor is it a possibility like a point at the end of a road, which I will in time reach. So long as I think in this way, I still hold death at a distance outside myself. The point is that I may die at any moment, and therefore death is my possibility now. It is like a precipice at my feet. It is also the most extreme and absolute of my possibilities: extreme, because it is the possibility of not being and hence cuts off all other possibilities; absolute, because man can surmount all other heart-breaks, even the deaths of those he loves, but his own death puts an end to him. Hence, death is the most personal and intimate of possibilities.

According to Heidegger, only by taking my death into myself does an authentic existence become possible for me. I am projected in advance of myself becoming what I will be, whether I will to be or not, but I can anticipate here and now what I will be, not waiting for the end, and this is the only way in which I can command and possess my existence and give it unity and authenticity. I anticipate death not by suicide but by living in the presence of death as always immediately possible. This flat acceptance of death, lived out, is authentic personal existence. By doing this, I cease to be the impersonal and social One among many, as Ivan Ilych was, and I am free to become myself. Though terrifying, the taking of death into ourselves is also

liberating: It frees us from servitude to the petty cares that threaten to engulf our daily life and thereby open us to the essential projects by which we can make our lives personally and significantly our own. Heidegger calls this the condition of "freedom-toward-death."

Of Heidegger's interpretation of death, what Mailer could not accept is the idea that death is the very end, the extermination, of one's existence. What difference does it make between the authentic existence and the inauthentic if death is the same end for any kind of life? Since death itself is meaningless, the flat acceptance of death as the most imminent, personal and immediately possible still brings no meaning to death. Mailer believes that

the reluctance of modern European existentialism to take on the logical continuation of the existential vision (that there is a life after death which can be as existential as life itself) has brought French and German existentialism to a halt on this uninhabitable terrain of the absurd--to wit, man must lead his life as death is meaningful even when man knows that death is meaningless.<sup>47</sup>

Mailer's criticism of Heidegger is that Heidegger's "working hypothesis" has ended "the possibility that one can construct a base for the existential ethic." And "Heidegger can give no deeper explanation why man should bother to be authentic than to state in effect that man should be authentic in order to be free."<sup>48</sup> Mailer is convinced that "existentialism is rootless unless one dares the hypothesis that [the confrontation with] death is an existential continuation of life,"<sup>49</sup> that we forsake our potential unless we are willing to risk the plunge into eternity. Thus,

by accepting this hypothesis, authenticity and commitment return to the center of ethics, for man then faces no peril so huge as alienation from his own soul, a death which is other than death, a disappearance into nothingness rather than into eternity.<sup>50</sup>

## Jean-Paul Sartre

We may as well begin with Jean-Paul Sartre in a moment of his heroism, because Sartre's search for heroism in France in the 40's was in many respects anticipating Mailer's search for it in the 50's. Much in Sartre's writings is distinctly unheroic in nature, but the note of heroism does sound, and here it is in The Republic of Silence, where Sartre is describing the life of French Resistance from 1940 to 1945:

We were never more free than during the German occupation. We had lost all our rights, beginning with the right to talk. Every day we were insulted to our faces and had to take it in silence. Under one pretext or another, as workers, Jews, or political prisoners, we were deported en masse. Everywhere, on billboards, in the newspapers, on the screen, we encountered the revolting and insipid picture of ourselves that our suppressors wanted us to accept. And because of this we were free. Because the Nazi venom seeped into our thoughts, every accurate thought was a conquest. Because an all-powerful police tried to force us to hold our tongues, every word took on the value of a declaration of principles. Because we were hunted down, every one of our gestures had the weight of a solemn commitment. . . . Exile, captivity, and especially death (which we usually shrink from facing at all in happier days) became for us the habitual objects of our concern. We learned that they were neither inevitable accidents, nor even constant and inevitable dangers, but they must be considered as our lot itself, our destiny, the profound source of our reality as men. At every instant we live up to the full sense of this commonplace little phrase: "Man is mortal!" And the choice that each of us made of his life was an authentic choice because it was made face to face with death, because it could always have been expressed in these terms: "Rather death than. . ." And here I am not speaking of the elite among us who were real Resistants, but of all Frenchmen who, at every hour of the night and day throughout four years, answered No.<sup>51</sup>

It is necessary to emphasize a passage like this one to understand why "Existentialism in its French version is basically a philosophy of freedom. . . ." <sup>52</sup>

Sartre came to maturity during the 1930's. The atmosphere of Leftist politics was pervasive, and Sartre has never ceased politically to be on the Left. But over France also hovered the stale and tired atmosphere of a world already doomed to defeat; The Popular Front government of Leon Blum drifted, nerveless and flaccid, incapable of meeting the crisis of the time; the French bourgeoisie hung on, entrenched and petty, unable even to conceive the possibility of any great action. "Les salauds" became a potent term for Sartre in those days--the salauds, the stinkers, the stuffy and self-righteous people congealed in the insincerity of their virtues and vices. This atmosphere of decay breathes through Sartre's first novel, Nausea. The nausea in Sartre's book is the nausea of existence itself: Nausea is the intuitive awareness of the contingency of all beings. By contingency Sartre means lack of necessity. Reality was not caused by anything and is not kept in existence for any reason. But for Sartre it is better to encounter it at all--as the salaud in his academic or bourgeois or party-leader strait jacket never does. The Resistance came to Sartre and his generation as a release from disgust into heroism. It was a call to action, an action that brought men to the very limits of their being, and in hearing this call man himself was not found wanting. He could even rediscover his own irreducible liberty in saying No to the overpowering might of the occupying forces.

The essential freedom, the ultimate and final freedom that cannot be taken from a man, is to say No. This is the basic premise in Sartre's view of human freedom: freedom is in its very essence negative, though this negativity is also creative. At a certain moment, perhaps, the drug or the pain inflicted by the torturer may

make the victim lose consciousness, and he will confess. But so long as he retains the lucidity of consciousness, however tiny the area of action and freedom are thus given together. Only if consciousness is blotted out can man be deprived of this residual freedom. Where all the avenues of action are blocked for a man, this freedom may seem a tiny and unimportant thing; but it is in fact total and absolute, and Sartre insists upon it as such, for it affords man his final dignity, that of being man.

As F. H. Heinemann has observed, "Sartre's philosophy arises from a combination and analysis of these two experiences, i.e. of liberty in resistance, and of the apparent absurdity of being and experience, both of which are primarily negative."<sup>53</sup> He experiences his freedom in saying "no" to the oppressor, and he experiences reality in that it says "no" to him, that it is repulsive to him. He also discovers himself able to say "no" to the situation. When we find that the three concepts of freedom, situation, and negation are fundamental for our understanding of Sartre, the remarkable thing is that negation is dominant and that it enters the concept of freedom as well as that of situation.

Sartre's influence on Mailer is both positively receptive and negatively opposed. In formulating his own existentialist position, Mailer has never been indifferent to Sartre. What we must understand is that Mailer's positive reception of Sartre usually remains unnoticed because Mailer seldom mentions his indebtedness to Sartre. But when disagreeing with Sartre, Mailer denounces him openly. For instance, in presenting the hipster's struggle to assert his own freedom in "White Negro," Mailer derives his ideas in good part from Sartre's

"Existentialism Is a Humanism." Throughout the essay Mailer has never referred to Sartre in this connection. But, instead he accuses Sartre of his neglect of the unconscious and of Sartre's insistence on atheism and existential absurdity:

Only the French, alienated beyond alienation from their unconscious could welcome an existential philosophy without ever feeling it all; indeed only a Frenchman by declaring that the unconscious did not exist could then proceed to explore the delicate involutions of consciousness, the microscopically senuous and all but ineffable frissions of mental becoming, in order finally to create the theology of atheism and so submit that in a world of absurdity is more coherent.<sup>54</sup>

Actually, two of the fundamental tenets presented in the essay are directly derived from Sartre's analysis of freedom. They are that political freedom and sexual freedom are inextricably connected, for the sex act can only express the totality of the individual when the individual is free from socially-induced tensions and anxieties. The hipster is asserting his freedom by saying "no" to the totalitarian society.

There can be no doubt that Sartre's Being and Nothingness (1943) was charged with concrete, personal experiences when it was written in the early forties. An individual who was faced with the permanent threat of annihilation discovered that non-being is a permanent possibility connected with being, and that Nothing haunts Being. Out of this experience arises his metaphysics. The theme of Being and Nothingness is individual freedom, and its central intention is to characterize human existence in such a way that it is "without excuse." To begin with, the fundamental distinction is that between different modes of being. Of these there are three: Being-in-itself, Being-for-itself, and Being-for-others. Being-in-itself (en-soi) is the

self-contained being of a thing. A stone is a stone; it is what it is, and in being just what it is, no more and no less, the being of the thing always coincides with itself. At this point, Sartre refuses to accept Heidegger's Being as the basis of all beings, and rejects any view of the world as an entity which in its very core harbors some meaning apart from the one man himself creates. But, Sartre accepts Heidegger's Dasein as the particular being of man which opens a fissure in the otherwise solid front of beings. Yet, it is not that man through this fissure can discover his root in Being. What actually happens is that out of the fissure there grows like a solitary plant in seemingly solid rock the new phenomenon, consciousness.

Being-for-itself (pour-soi) is identical with consciousness. Human beings are often referred to as "the For-itself." As the seat of consciousness, man is forever "that individual" whom Kierkegaard had so passionately believed in--but with no possibility of being able to make "the leap of faith" to Kierkegaard's God. Yet, although man is never at home in the world, he is irretrievably attached to it. This attachment is evidenced by the psychological fact that consciousness, to be at all, must always be consciousness of something. Sartre says that consciousness is vacancy or an emptiness. It essentially consists of a gap--a gap, that is, between thought and the object of thought. The gap between the thought and its object actually consists in the power which consciousness has of affirming or denying; of accepting what is false or of rejecting it. Freedom consists in this ability to affirm or deny, and to imagine what is not the case; and this freedom turns out to be the essence of consciousness.

Sartre, however, warned that this consciousness must be understood in a special sense. It is not an intelligent projection of a world as seen from within (Descartes' Cogito, ergo sum) but exists only as an intuition of its presence to something which it is not. Consciousness is always present to an object and to itself (I am aware that I am aware), but always in form of not being the object. As previously emphasized, consciousness is a perpetual No which constitutes the world around it by separation and denial of itself--i.e. it is not what it is aware of, and it is continually becoming other than what it is. Thus since consciousness exists as possibility, it has the power of transcendence of going beyond itself which brute existence has not. Further, Sartre insists that external objects have no meaning except for the individual human observer, nor do they have any structure or pattern except insofar as man organizes them in the carrying out of his projects.

Since it is man who imposes pattern or meaning upon the external world and since freedom is the essence of man the consciousness, man thus has the total freedom to choose and is entirely responsible for his choice. It is because man is "condemned to be free" and must carry its burden alone, without the traditional aids of conventional morality, God, or an all-justifying Absolute. Sartre here makes a vivid description of the feeling of anxiety:

I have not and cannot have recourse to any value when I am confronted with the fact that it is I who maintain the values in being: nothing can protect me against myself--cut from the world and from my essence by the nothingness I am, I have to achieve the sense of the world and of my essence: I make the decision concerning that sense, alone, unjustifiable, and without excuse.<sup>55</sup>

Anxiety is thus the twin brother of this responsibility, and is not to be separated from it. This is especially so if one realizes that one's



own choices and responsibility carry beyond one's own life into the lives of others.

Furthermore, in a world without a God or gods, man is left without any comforting support, and he is forlorn. There are no guide posts along the road of his life. Man himself builds the road to the destiny of his choosing. He is the creator. What he gets from tradition, like values and moral codes, are only the remainders of former men's decisions and acts of creativity. They hinder more than they help, since they pose as seemingly easy guides. They cannot relieve man of his destiny to create, invent, and project himself forward. In a world in which man must act without hope of any meaning other than what he himself introduces, he also feels despair. Of course, it means that no hope exists for man outside himself. Sartre teaches that man should not pin their hope on God, nor should he let such things as mass movements carry the meaning of world history. The mass in this function is an illusion. Sartre here says "no" to Marxism and its reliance upon the collective, the proletariat. For Sartre this is a cathartic and energizing despair. Stripped of all illusions and having accepted the full responsibility of his freedom to perpetually transcend himself, man can set about achieving the authentic existence which is the goal of the existentialist approach to life.

There are no problems for Mailer to be agreeing with Sartre's basic assumption that the existentialist approach to life is through freedom. But there are problems for Mailer at this point in accepting Sartre's pessimistic interpretations that in a world without a God or any hope, man is both forlorn and despair. Both Mailer's heroism and romantic vision are incompatible with Sartre's hopeless understanding

of freedom. Mailer's own perception of freedom is not necessarily without hope of any kind:

I was free, or at least whatever was still ready to change in my character had 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 much too free.<sup>56</sup>

And Mailer further believes that "To be a real existentialist (Sartre admittedly to the contrary) one must be religious, one must have one's sense of purpose."<sup>57</sup> One is religious in the sense that he has faith of his own courage and believes that an existential God relies on his victory in the world. Sartre's pessimistic interpretation of freedom primarily results from his atheism and the absurd situation in which he believes man falls. Mailer argues that "given its roots in atheistic philosophers like Sartre, existentialism has always tended toward the absurd."<sup>58</sup> Recently, Mailer made it very clear that he is an existentialist but not in the sense that Sartre is:

By way of Sartre, we are to act as if there were a purpose to things even we know there is not. And that has become the general concept of existentialism in America. But it's not mine. I'm an existentialist who believes there is a God and a Devil at war with one another.<sup>59</sup>

However, it should be understood that unlike the great majority of people who deny their freedom, hiding it from themselves with all kinds of deterministic excuses, Mailer states that his theology is the existential kind: the end of the war between God and the Devil is still unknown. Toward the great majority of people, Mailer holds the same attitude as Sartre does. By denying their freedom, they try to flee from anxiety by grasping themselves from outside. They flee from what they are in order not to know what they are. They are, in Sartre's terms, "in bad faith." Sartre treats Bad Faith as both a very important

and a completely familiar human trait. Basically, Bad Faith is an attempt to escape from the anxiety which men suffer when they are brought face to face with their own freedom. It arises from our effort to escape our responsibilities by accepting some ready-made, socially acceptable, stable values as our true and fixed identity. Bad Faith also consists in pretending to ourselves and others that things could not be otherwise--that we are bound to our way of life, and that we could not escape it even if we wanted to.

One of Mailer's recurrent terms for twentieth century civilization is "totalitarianism," by which he means not merely a political system, as was pointed out earlier, but a quality close to Sartrean Bad Faith. "The crucial characteristic of modern totalitarianism is that it is a moral disease which divorces us from guilt."<sup>60</sup> Indeed, "totalitarianism" is almost exactly the equivalent of Bad Faith, for it is not only an escape from accountability, but an escape from the constants of the human condition--"anybody who wants a quick solution for a permanent problem is a low grade totalitarian."<sup>61</sup> It is finally an escape from all the existential anxieties:

In our flight from the consequence of our lives, in our flight from adventure, from danger; and from the natural ravages of disease, in our burial of the primitive, it is death the Twentieth Century is seeking to avoid.<sup>62</sup>

So far we have treated Sartre's view of man--Being-for-itself--as a solitary and creative individual, but have never touched upon the last mode of existence, Being-for-others, and the relation between Being-for-itself and Being-for-others. Sartre has described how, in Bad Faith, we aim to evade our responsibilities by pretending to be like Being-in-themselves; and how we do this either by treating ourselves as wholly determined in our behavior by the view which others take of us. If I

am thought by others to be a waiter, and labelled as such, then this is the role I may decide to play. Sartre defines Being-for-others in two related ways. First, I am aware of my own bodily existence as something which is known to other people. Secondly, I am aware of the bodies of other people, and then of their existence in the world. Therefore, we must not search for the Other outside us. He is in us, in our heart. He is a presence; a presence which Sartre says reveals itself to each of us through a familiar conduct: shame. Just as nausea and anxiety had brought us in the presence of freedom and of ourselves, respectively, so shame would place our consciousness before the Other.

As noted already, consciousness is always consciousness of something. It has an object, and here the object is me. It is of myself I am ashamed, because, while I was acting, I felt that I was being seen. Here lies Sartre's theory of "look.". If I exist for the Other, I do so through the "look." Consequently my fundamental relation to the Other is determined by the permanent possibility of being seen by him. The look of the Other reveals himself to me as a Being-for-itself, a subject, a consciousness, a free project of itself, able to transcend all given data toward its own possibilities, its own ends. But this means also that by his look this Other can transcend me and change me from a Being-for-itself into a Being-in-itself, from a free project into a determined thing--as I can change him by my look. By looking at other people, I measure my power, and by looking at me, they measure theirs. Thus, Being-for-others is basically a conflict, a struggle of two transcendences, each of which tries to "out-transcend" the other. And our relations with others must ultimately be defined in terms of conflict and not cooperation in a given situation.

Confronted by the inescapable existence of the other person I may adopt two attitudes. As Ronald Grimsley has summarized:

- (a) I allow the other to keep his freedom but at the same time I try to hold it captive without destroying it as freedom. This attempt to assimilate the other person's freedom gives rise to love, language, and masochism.
- (b) In order to protect myself against the petrification and alienation effected in me by the other's look, I may seek to objectify him in my turn. This desire to transform the other into an object is at the basis of desire, hatred, and sadism.

Grimsley concludes, "Whichever of these attitudes I adopt, I shall be engaged in a fundamental conflict which expresses the meaning of my Being-for-others."<sup>63</sup> Thus the social relations of man is in a permanent state of conflict. It is due to man's incapability of fusing two subjects into a harmonious whole.

However, pessimistic as Sartre's view of man's social relations may be, he has not called for a retreat of man from social involvement. Man is predominantly seen in a situation no matter how much Sartre insists on man as Being-for-itself. Sartre himself has not led a solitary life, nor has he shied away from speaking out about French public affairs. Even his often debated cooperation with the French Communist Party, particularly until 1956, has to be viewed as growing out of what a traditional philosopher would not hesitate to call sympathy with one's fellow man, in this case the French worker. In many ways this was a contradictory choice he had chosen. Since that time he has struggled to overcome the contradiction between the individualism inherent in his existentialism and the collectivism required by his ethics of commitment.

Finally, Mailer is in many respects reflecting Sartre's life. Once a fellow traveler of the American Communist Party, Mailer campaigned

for Henry Wallace, the presidential candidate on the Progressive Party ticket in 1948. In that campaign Mailer blamed American capitalism for most postwar problems with Russia. Yet, in the Fifties, Mailer found Russia a monolithic totalitarian country and, as unaligned radical, called himself a "libertarian socialist" which "is equivalent to accepting almost total intellectual alienation from America."<sup>64</sup> But in the Sixties he said that he was a "private mixture of Marxism, conservatism, nihilism, and large parts of existentialism (Italics, mine)."<sup>65</sup> All these changes of labelling himself indicate that Mailer has never tried to shy away from social involvement in America, nor has he ever hesitated to speak out, loudly and outrageously, about American public affairs. All these also prove that Mailer, like Sartre, for all his insistence on individualism, insists on seeing man in an experiential context. There is no constant self since the self is constantly creating itself act by act. The self is no solid identity, but a series of actions in reaction to the context in which it stays. That is why Mailer could see:

the context as generally dominating the man, dominating him because his character is less significant than the context in which he must function.<sup>66</sup>

However, a creative man is still able to manage to dominate the context. In freedom he is provided a supreme opportunity to give meaning to his character in the context. Sartre agrees, too, that man is the being through whom values come into being, and as soon as man realizes that it is he who posits all values, he will want freedom as the basis of all values. In this sense, existentialism is a humanism, because it makes man the only legislator in the realm of values.

It is obviously true that the existentialist influence over Mailer is not confined merely to the general problems, nor to the four major figures described in this chapter. More specific existential qualities can only be elaborated when each particular occasion requires in the following chapters. But it should be emphasized that I have not intended to interpret that Mailer owes every aspect of his existentialist thought to the continental existentialists. Yet, as has been analyzed, I do see that Kierkegaard's radical individualism and his interpretation of truth are harmoniously assimilated in Mailer's American existentialism. Nietzsche's diagnostic analysis of European nihilism of his age anticipates Mailer's obsession of American totalitarianism of the contemporary time. In many an aspect, Nietzsche's Superman reminds one of the existentialist heroes that Mailer is in search of. And it is Heidegger's detailed study of the existential meaning of death that inspired Mailer to outline his own concept of death for his philosophical scheme. Sartre's existential ideas are both accepted and rejected to formulate his own system throughout Mailer's work. In answer to a question concerning his politics, Mailer once replied, "Let me put it that today I'm a Marxian anarchist, which is a contradiction in terms, but a not unprofitable contradiction for trying to some original thinking."<sup>67</sup> By considering all his relationships and conflicts with the European Marxists, Sartre could have made the same statement.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### The American Existentialist Hero Searched:

#### The Naked and the Dead and Barbary Shore

When Ihab Hassan writes that Mailer is a novelist of shifting ideologies, "from liberalism to radical socialism, and from the latter to anarchic existentialism,"<sup>1</sup> he obviously has Mailer's first two novels, The Naked and the Dead and Barbary Shore, in mind for Mailer's first shift, and the later writings, for his shift to existentialism. It is certainly true that any critical analysis of Mailer's writing should acknowledge his own desire to be read in chronological order. Each of his major works does represent a stage in his intellectual and literary development, and all are interrelated parts of a comprehensive social and artistic vision. This is Barry H. Leeds' approach for his The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer (1969), Robert Solotaroff's, for his Down Mailer's Way (1974), and Laura Adams', for her Existential Battles: The Growth of Norman Mailer (1976). It is because Mailer has chosen to imitate what he believes was the intent of Hemingway and Lawrence: an author's books, taken in their entirety, should be a historical document of a man and his times. Rather than following suit with the above critics of Mailer but observing his own intention to be understood, this study will also adopt the chronological approach to understanding his constant effort in search of a hero who may eventually make "a revolution in the consciousness of our time."

As stated in Chapter One, from the very beginning, Mailer has been a social-minded novelist and concentrated in his work on analyzing the collapse of sustaining democratic values and attacking the sickness and corruption of American society, deploring the fact that individualism has declined as totalitarianism has grown. Both The Naked and the Dead (1948) and Barbary Shore (1951) contain in embryo the political ideas which he later developed into his criticisms of totalitarianism and mass culture on the one hand, and his hopes for changes in consciousness, a psychic revolution on the other. Therefore, Mailer is not, strictly speaking, a novelist of "shifting ideologies," because he has not shifted from one ideology to another, rather, his liberal and socialistic ideas, and existentialist thinking have been simultaneously developed from the very beginning. It is only through his gradual realization that neither the liberal reform nor the radical change provides the solution for an individual to survive the wounds which society inflicted upon him and to grow, does Mailer abandon all other ideologies except existentialism. The following readings of Mailer's first two novels will make this point self-evident.

#### The Naked and the Dead

Although The Naked and the Dead, technically speaking, was a novel half-heartedly dismissed by Mailer himself as "a conventional war novel" and repeatedly pointed out by critics as the most derivative of his novels<sup>2</sup> and though it was conceived and composed in a manner that Mailer was not to use again, it is much more than a "war novel." "The embracing action of the novel--the taking of a Japanese-held Pacific island in World War II--is rendered with the skilled realist's commitment

to the truthful and vivid depiction of actuality."<sup>3</sup> But in the year of its publication Mailer put on record his view that The Naked and the Dead though cast in the realist mold, is "symbolic," expressive of "death and man's creative urge, fate, man's desire to conquer the elements--all kinds of things you never dream of separating and stating so baldly."<sup>4</sup> From Mailer's truthful depiction of actuality and the symbolic meanings he himself suggested, the novel ought to be read on several different levels. On the socio-political level, the book bears the theme of conflicts between individual and society, and between liberalism and fascism. On the existential level, the book takes on the significance of the annihilation of authentic existence and the loss of individual identity. Consequently, The Naked and the Dead is a novel without a real Mailer hero. As will be shown, all six or seven major characters have failed, in one aspect or another, to achieve the stature of the heroic of any kind although a couple of them do demonstrate a few prototypic qualities of an existentialist hero that Mailer will make full development in his later writings.

The society Mailer was depicting in The Naked and the Dead was a sick one which was to be viewed in the microcosm of an army division that had been assigned the task, under Major-General Cummings, of seizing a Pacific island from the Japanese. Thus the military organization was the only social structure on the island, tightly organized and efficiently ruled, but inhibiting any idea of individual fulfillment. Individuals are alienated and threatened with pain, fear, and moral destruction. The instrument of this organization was, of course, the totalitarian officer or the enlisted men and its analogue was the literal totalitarian in Germany and Japan which the apparatus was

created to fight. It is a specific example that the existentialist philosopher, Karl Jaspers, feared. Jaspers regarded the social structure of this kind as a sinister "apparatus," characterized by "mass-life," and threatening the "real self" of every human being.<sup>5</sup> Mailer specifically identifies it as fascist in that it enforces obedience and submission through fear and violence, minimizing individual contrasts and possibilities in order to strengthen its own structure. The two main victims of the fascist apparatus are the democratic American society which is seen as the provider of both order and freedom, and the individual soldier who is put into the impossible position of having to either surrender his humanity to the system or lose his physical life in resisting it.

In The Naked and the Dead, by combining the fascist structure of the army with the civilian society as it was described in the "Time Machine" flashbacks and the memories and actions of the soldiers, we may find that not one character in the novel is free of circuits laid out in him by the structures of his past and present. The "Time Machine" flashbacks are used, as Norman Podhoretz put it, "to demonstrate Mailer's contention that American society is essentially a disguised and inchoate form of the army."<sup>6</sup> Thus Mailer uses various backgrounds of his characters to build a broad condemnation of American society and politics. He is also advancing a perception of the human condition darker and more hopeless than that of any of his literary mentors, such as, Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Steinbeck: a total lack of any ennobling or tragic qualities in his main characters.

For Mailer, war as a "social institution" in America has reduced man to an animal existence. Animal imagery abounds in Mailer's "war

novel," particularly as a metaphor for the appearance and behavior of the enlisted men. Dog eats dog, and a dogtag is hung around a man's neck. Mailer's own fictional analogy (N&D, p. 18)<sup>7</sup> to Pavlov's experiments with dogs points out another fact of war--instead of man fearing to become an animal, he is more fearful of becoming a man and surviving. When the exhausted men dully drag their bodies up a swift stream, it is "with the motions of salmon laboring upstream for the spawning season (N&D, p. 364)." Under enemy fire, the men are seen "retreating pell-mell, sobbing like animals in anger and fear (N&D, p. 398)." As Donald L. Kaufman has observed, "Above the enlisted man, higher in the hierarchy of bestiality, the officers' style of atavism is more refined."<sup>8</sup> On reviewing his relationship with General Cummings, Lieutenant Hearn can analyze what those ranked lower can only feel:

He had been the pet, the dog, to the master, coddled and curried, thrown sweetmeats until he had had the presumption to bite the master once. And since then he had been tormented with the particular sadism that most men could generate only toward an animal. (N&D, p. 247.)

Regardless of army rank or social position, all the characters in the novel are little more than human equivalents of animals in a conditioning box.

When the purely narrative material--the sections devoted to accounts of battle and descriptions of the jungle--is set aside, it becomes clear that at the core The Naked and the Dead is primarily a novel of character. It is around character that the entire action revolves, and it is through character that Mailer finds his central thematic meanings expressed on various levels. The "Time Machine" sections are used to "explain" ten major characters as products of their environments. Martinez, the Mexican-American in the novel,



dreaming of revenging himself upon white Protestant women, is the most pathetic. Prejudice and its social and economic effects have closed off the normal avenues of social mobility to him. Brought up on the same American fables as the "White Protestants," he wants to be like them, "heroes, aviators, lovers, financiers," and to possess their blond women. When his adolescence passes away with his dreams, Martinez joins the army to be a hero. He is Sergeant Croft's only friend, gaining his esteem by acts of daring. But his efforts to prove to Croft that he is a better soldier than any other man in the platoon has all dehumanized himself.

At the beginning of the novel he is already described as a human equivalent of one of Pavlov's dogs; the sound of a shell fills him with terror, and "now any sudden sound would cause him panic." Fear of losing Croft's approval is the only force preventing him from collapsing. He comes upon a Japanese soldier sitting behind a machine gun, and for a brief instant:

Martinez had a sense of unreality. What was to keep him from touching him, from greeting him? They were men. The entire structure of the war wavered in his brain for a moment, almost tottered, and then was restored by a returning wash of fear. If he touched him he would be killed. But it seemed unbelievable. (N&D, p. 462.)

Paralyzed by fear, he remembers a conversation he had overheard between two Texans, "Never trust a Mex when he's got a knife (N&D, p. 463)." And it is with a bayonet that he kills the Japanese sentry. Mailer has rendered the incident significantly for two reasons. First, the human reason is a feeble bastion and has no place in war. "Insofar as Martinez and the guard are men, they are men irrevocably isolated by the hostility and distrust inherent in the human condition."<sup>9</sup> They are conceived more as animals than human beings. Second, Martinez is what

prejudice makes of himself; and indeed his personality is formed by prejudice. He cannot overcome his sense of inferiority. Croft exemplifies in his self-assurance and aloofness the kind of man he would like to be and Croft is that standard against which he measures all the others:

His loyalty, his friendship, and his courage were all involved. And as he looked into Croft's cold blue eyes he felt the same inadequacy and shabbiness, the same inferiority he always knew when he talked to. . . to White Protestant. (N&D, p. 538.)

Martinez's diametric opposite is Roth. Roth is the most ineffectual man in the platoon and the most dishonest to himself. A Jew and scapegoat, he is portrayed by Mailer as a contemptible character. A college graduate, a declared agnostic, a weakling and coward, he neither says nor does anything except whine and indulge in self-pity. He prides himself on being a "modern Jew," educated, "far above all the men here," superior to Goldstein who "was like an old grandfather full of muttering and curses, certain he would die a violent death (N&D, p. 44)." Because he has adopted the American middle class ethic and has forsaken his religious identity, Roth has lost all ennobling qualities, but been "torn, in fact, between the temptation to absolve himself of certain failures by crying anti-Semite, and the desire to play the agnostic intellectual."<sup>10</sup> In short, he is another character who has lost "the courage to be."

Actually, Goldstein, the Jew who has retained a traditional Jewish identity, is the stronger and better man. Goldstein, an orthodox Jewish proletarian from Brooklyn, is good-natured and naive, but is continually ridiculed by his comrades. His earliest ambition was to be an engineer or a scientist. Trapped in poverty and fatherless, he

lives with his mother and grandfather in the filth of Brooklyn. Marrying after graduating from a welding school, he discovers his wife is frigid. Taught by his grandfather that the Jew's role in life is to "suffer," he allows himself to be inducted, abandoning the secure old habits and surroundings. In "turning his face to the wind," Goldstein is taking the first step in liberating himself from the belief that "a Jew is a Jew because he suffers. Olla Juden suffers (N&D, 376)." His naivete and good-naturedness in one way adapt him ideally to the victim's role. Whenever he suffers insults from the others, he retreats into his grandfather's fatalism. But his suffering from insults and ridicule is much relieved by the respect and friendship he achieves with an illiterate Southerner, Ridges.

Ridges, son of a Mississippi sharecropper, is an unimaginative, ignorant farm boy, characterized by a sustaining capacity to endure, labor and suffer. He is also a Jew who believes in the Old Testament conception of God and the world. He is the only soldier who is genuinely religious. He does not question the inexorable working of life's mysteries because they are to him insoluble, part of God's indecipherable design. Ridges and Goldstein share one important trait: they are both resigned to a life of modest ambition and an unresisting, uncomplaining acceptance of a will external to their own. They both build up their true friendship by the continuing effort to carry the wounded and dying Wilson from the platoon's bivouac to the beach.

At first, after Wilson is wounded, Ridges, Goldstein, and two others, Brown and Stanley, are selected to carry him back. The work is painfully exhausting, and eventually the other two drop out. Both Ridges and Goldstein, however, feel for a variety of reasons that they

must succeed in getting Wilson to the beach. They know no other purpose in life for the two days they carry him; their lives have their only meaning in their task. Even when Wilson finally dies, they continue to carry his litter, as though their own lives are attached to it. Mailer puts it this way:

Wilson was a burden they could not leave. Goldstein felt as if he would be carrying him forever; he could not think of anything else. The limits of his senses were confined to his own body, the litter, and Ridges' back. He did not look at the yellow hills or wonder how far they had to go. Infrequently, Goldstein would think of his wife and child with a sense of disbelief. They were so far away. If he had been told at that moment that they had died, he would have shrugged. Wilson was more real. Wilson was the only reality. (N&D, p. 520.)

Each man relates to Wilson and his job in terms of his own deepest perceptions of reality. For Ridges, the Southern fundamentalist, the salvation of his own soul depends upon getting Wilson to the beach. He feels that if he were in any way responsible for Wilson's death his own soul would be ineradicably blackened and he would go to hell. For Goldstein, Wilson represents the heart of Israel, and his task recalls to him his grandfather's words that Jews must suffer for all people, thus making Israel "the heart of all nations." Thus both men come to feel the basic truths of their religions. As James Scott has written, Mailer

has selected as stretcher bearers two men of deep fundamentalist conviction--one a Christian and the other a Jew. Together they represent whatever is most stable and most enduring in Western culture. This almost primitive idealism, precisely because it was designed to sustain a defeated people, a political nonentity and a social minority, does succeed in that it keeps them harnessed to their burden where Stanley and Brown, nominal Christians, are incapable of real sacrifice.<sup>11</sup>

But Wilson dies of his stomach wound when Ridges unknowingly gives him water and his body is lost in the rapids of a stream they have to cross. "One moment they had been carrying Wilson, and now he had

disappeared. Their hands were empty (N&D, p. 530)." As Robert Solotaroff has pointed out, "Whatever Mailer had in mind, the rush of the water that carries Wilson's body away generates the novel's most explicit statements about the contemporary spiritual dryness--the collapse of those beliefs and values which have traditionally brought significance to human activity. . . ."12

However, against the collapse of the traditional beliefs and values, man should assert his own value by recognizing his own freedom and considering himself as a free creator and the founded foundation of all values. But both Ridges and Goldstein deny their own freedom, hiding it from themselves with all kinds of deterministic excuses. Like Goldstein assuming his fatalism, Ridges assumes his own by declaring "The Lord giveth and He taketh away," and "God's ways were God's ways. . . and a man did not try to brook them." It is through accepting this kind of socially stable and inherited religious values as their true and fixed identity that Ridges and Goldstein feel that all their work they have ever done is meaningless. Ridges reflects:

All his life he had labored without repayment; his grandfather and his father and he had struggled with bleak crops and unending poverty. What had their work come to? "What profit hath man of all his labor wherein he laboureth under the sun?" The line came back to him. It was a part of the Bible he had always hated. Ridges felt the beginning of a deep and unending bitterness. It was not fair. . . . God's way. . . . What kind of God could there be who always tricked you in the end? (N&D, pp. 530-31.)

Goldstein's reaction is equivalent:

And Goldstein stood beside him, holding onto Ridge's shoulder to steady himself in the current. From time to time he would move his lips, scratch feebly at his face. "Israel is the heart of all nations. . . . All the suffering of the Jews came to nothing. No sacrifices were paid, no lessons were learned. It was all thrown away, all statistics in the cruel wastes of history." . . . There was nothing in him at the

moment, nothing but a vague anger, a deep resentment, and the origins of a vast hopelessness. (N&D, p. 531.)

Both Ridges' "deep and unending bitterness" and Goldstein's "deep resentment" indicate obviously that they have been deceived by what they have believed in. That is the reason for their ultimate failure to bring meaning to life. However, Mailer had had them fail to be heroic through Bad Faith. For both Mailer and Sartre, conventional values create for us a make-believe world, a world in which fears are transformed into certainties and pretenses. In Sartrean terms, God, as being-in-itself, is outside the range of human anguish. He provides no example and less wisdom because, whatever intelligence he might have to offer is established, as is all wisdom, through men.<sup>13</sup> Sartre described that contemporary man, deprived of God, is not easily deprived of a desire to have the benefits provided by God. Bad Faith, then, is the generic label for all such attitudes. Bad Faith, as stated in the preceding chapter, also consists in pretending that we are not free, that we are somehow determined, that we cannot help doing what we do, having the role that we have. Acting upon their ancestors' convictions, Ridges and Goldstein pretend to play the roles they are required to. Acting in Bad Faith, they are both the deceivers and the deceived at the same time.

Unable to unceasingly recreate his own values or even to quicken within himself, sincerely and authentically, values that already exist, taking refuge in false values and using them as a mask is, too, a kind of Bad Faith. Both General Cummings and Lieutenant Hearn are examples of Bad Faith in this sense. Intelligent and effective as Cummings is in military affairs, he takes refuge in the false values of fascism. On the other hand, under the mask of liberalism, Hearn is intellectually

crippled, only to be victimized by Sergeant Croft in the end. Mailer has purposely chosen Cummings and Hearn to represent the clash between the Fascist and liberal philosophies. The chief irony underlying the conflict between "the fascist" Cummings and the "progressive-liberal" Hearn is that "they are both officers involved in fighting a war against fascism with a military instrument which is itself fascistic in organization, structure, and ideology."<sup>14</sup>

Instead of a real hero Mailer is seeking, Cummings is the special object of both his satire and fascination. On the one hand, Cummings embodies many of the things that Mailer furiously protests against in the American experience. But on the other hand, he also possesses some qualities, such as strength and the stamina to resist the limitations inherent in any given situation as final, that fascinate Mailer and he wishes to develop them into his later existentialist hero. But in this novel, Cummings is flatly disqualified as a Mailer hero because of his Bad Faith, mistaking Nietzsche's "the will to power" for "the drive for power" and acting as a reactionary, instead of a radical individual, to strengthen the American totalitarian system.

Son of a small-town robber-baron-banker, Cummings has repressed his homosexual longings by enormous exercise of self-discipline and restraint received in the military schools. Suffering from paranoia, he envisions that all men are envious of his social and intellectual superiority and wish to humiliate him. Therefore, he is the person most preoccupied with power, who wishes to "control everything" on the island. As Jean Radford has stated, "Cummings believes that beyond the desire to survive and the sexual urge, instincts which men share with other animals, man's primary drive (qua man) is toward the achievement of power

over other men and the natural world."<sup>15</sup>

Cummings' fascism directly stems from this view of man. He maintains that the best armies are those with a superior material force and a poor standard of living (N&D, p. 138). Since America has the high standard of living, its soldiers "have an exaggerated idea of the rights due to others. It's the reverse of the peasant, and I'll tell you right now it's the peasant who makes the soldier (N&D, p. 139)." Consequently, "to make an Army work you have to have every man in it fitted into a fear ladder." "The Army functions best," continues Cummings, "when you're frightened of the man above you, and contemptuous of your subordinates (Ibid.).". The hate produced by such an arrangement can be directed outward against the enemy. The fear ladder concentrates power in the hands of the few, which fits the "realities" of modern life: "The machine techniques of this century demand consolidation, with that you've got to have fear, because the majority of men must be subservient to the machine, and it's not a business they instinctively enjoy (N&D, p. 140)." By nature, that is, men lean toward their own individual spontaneity, a tendency which authority must check. Therefore, the general--or any officer--who possesses power cannot think of his men as individuals. "In the Army the idea of individual personality is just a hindrance. . . . I work with grosser techniques, common denominator techniques (N&D, 143)."

Such a doctrine is fascist in every way, and Cummings minces no words in making the connection: "The concept of a fascism, far sounder than communism if you consider it, for it's grounded firmly in men's actual natures, merely started in the wrong country, in a country which did not have enough intrinsic potential power to develop completely. In



Germany with that basic frustration of limited physical means there were bound to be excesses. But the dream, the concept was sound enough (N&D, p. 253)." And then, as though to give validity to the fears of the liberals of the thirties, Cummings declares confidently: "America is going to absorb that dream, it's in the business of doing it now (N&D, p. 254)." The "morality of future" is a "power morality," which will give postwar American society the same form as the army. Here Cummings sees the army as a metaphor of society.

According to Cummings, "power morality" is not merely a historical event of one era, but has its psychological foundation in human nature. In a conversation with Hearn, Cummings asserts that "man's deepest urge" is not, as Hearn thinks, "the sexual urge" but "omnipotence":

To achieve God. When we come kicking into the world, we are God, the universe is the limit of our sense. And when we get older, when we discover the universe is not us, it's the deepest trauma of our existence. (N&D, p. 255.)

It sounds Nietzschean; it reminds one of Nietzsche's theory of "the will to power." But in the context, Mailer obviously has the power-crazed general mistaking Nietzsche's "the will to power" for "the drive for power," and his Superman, for the supreme egotist, whose sole delight is the exercise of power over the masses of people.

According to Psychoanalyst Arnold A. Hutschnecker, once Richard Nixon's doctor, "The Drive for power can be neurotic, unrealistic and so turbulent that it strives for a ruthless, godlike omnipotence. Born out of man's weakness, it can serve to elevate him--though only for a moment--to a position above all others. It is for this reason that some people kill (Italic, mine)."<sup>16</sup> Dr. Hutschnecker has not only precisely described Cummings' symptoms but anticipated Croft's as well. Nietzsche does have the idea that "The only thing that all men want is power, and

whatever is wanted for the sake of power." But, for Nietzsche, "The acme of power is embodied in the perfectly self-possessed man who has no fear of other men, of himself, or of death and whose simple personality, unaided by any props, changes the lives of those who meet him only at second hand, in literature."<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the power that Cummings constantly talks about is the power which "can flow only from the top down. When there are little surges of resistance at the middle levels, it merely calls for more power to be directed downward, to burn it out (N&D, p. 255)." He dedicates himself both personally and politically to the "power morality."

In the end, however, the power morality is rendered entirely ineffective. Mailer makes the men the victors over the danger of fascism. Even though they have no systematic purpose, as a group they possess a will over which no general or dictator has total control. Like Sartre, describing the life of the French Resistance in The Republic of Silence, Mailer makes Cummings understand:

The men resisted him, resisted change, with maddening inertia. No matter how you pushed them, they always gave round sullenly, regrouped once the pressure was off. You could work on them, you could trick them, but there were times now when he doubted basically whether he could change them, really mold them. (N&D, p. 556.)

Cummings also realizes that all his planning and all his brilliant tactics meant nothing in winning the campaign, because it was during the period when he was off asking for support from the navy, that the division, commanded by his servile, inept aid, Major Dalleson, broke through the Japanese lines and captured the island.

For a moment he almost admitted that he had very little or perhaps nothing at all to do with this victory, or indeed any victory--it had been accomplished by a random play of vulgar good luck larded into a causal net of factors too large, too vague, for him to comprehend. (N&D, p. 555.)

At the same time he sees that all his theories about running an army and all his theories about the evolution of history toward a period of fear dominated by fascists and reactionaries no longer held together.

Time was going by, and with it opportunity. It would be the hacks who would occupy history's seat after the war, the same blunderers, uncoordinated, at cross impulses. . . . There would be few Americans who would understand the contradictions of the period to come. The route to control could best masquerade under a conservative liberalism. The reactionaries and isolationists would miss the bell, cause almost as much annoyance as they were worth. Cummings shrugged. If he had another opportunity he would make better use of it. What frustration! To know so much and be hog-tied. (N&D, p. 556.)

To shrug off the idea that history would be led by liberal hacks is the ultimate irony for Cummings since he had spent his entire life building his conviction that the future of the world lay in the hands of the reactionaries.

A typical example of the liberal, Hearn serves as the bridge connecting the two separate worlds of the officer and enlisted men. Through his eyes and the conversations he has with Cummings, Mailer issues his warning for the political shape of the post-war future. He has said, ". . . you can see something of the turn my later writing would take in the scenes between Cummings and Hearn."<sup>18</sup> For Mailer, Hearn is a convenient vehicle for exposing the subconscious motives of the intellectual liberal. Like Cummings, Hearn is the son of a dominant, wealthy, boorish father, whom he rebels against. But his life is a series of disillusionments--with parents, with prep school, with medicine, with radicalism, with literary criticism, with his jobs as a literary editor, union organizer, and radio copywriter, and with one woman after another. Hearn's own dilemma is typical of the modern liberal and humanist: he is unable to commit himself to any kind of ideology

for solutions. Mailer calls him a "shell," a "hypocrite," a "hollow man," a "bourgeois idealist." Drifting from one intellectual position to another, he spends his life in each just long enough to discover the "shoddy motive" which will allow him to abandon it. As John Aldridge has said, "His (Hearn's) class reservations prevent him from becoming a good Communist; his Communist reservations prevent him from becoming a useful member of his class. In the Army he is torn between his obligations to the military hierarchy to which, as an officer, he automatically belongs and his obligations to the men under him."<sup>19</sup>

The liberals of Hearn's generation are, however, no different in intention than theoretical fascists like Cummings for whom power over men is a source of pleasure. Although he rejects his theories as simplistic and subhuman, Hearn acknowledges the intellectual power and the personal magnetism of Cummings. His political liberalism fails to oppose Cummings' "peculiarly American" fascism in their discussions. As a man who "liked very few people and most men sensed it uneasily after talking to him for a few minutes (N&D, p. 258)," Hearn also fails at the practical level in his relations with other men. Believing in the necessity of revolution, he shrinks instinctively from those who would have social control, knowing they will be no different from the reactionaries Cummings predicts will inherit the century. Hearn realizes the truth in Cummings' assessment of liberals and radicals and the extent to which it applies to him:

There are the ones who are afraid of the world and want to change it to benefit themselves, the Jew liberalism sort of thing. And then there are the young people who don't understand their own desires. They want to remake the world, but they never admit they want to remake it in their own image. (N&D, p. 451.)

As Jean Radford has put it, "Hearn's weakness is twofold: he neither challenges the terms of Cummings' argument. . . nor offers a consistent humanist view of human nature."<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, Hearn's rebellion against the system is sterile and ineffective, for it involves nothing more than a determination to preserve their "inviolable freedom," as Hearn himself puts it, from "all the wants and sores that caught up everybody about him (N&D, p. 64)." In a key passage, Mailer tells us that Hearn tries to "get by on style":

"The only thing to do is to get by on style." He had said that once, lived by it in the absence of anything else, and it had been a working guide, . . . The only thing that had been important was to let no one in any ultimate issue ever violate your integrity, and this had been an ultimate issue. (N&D, p. 258.)

But as Norman Podhoretz has commented, "Style without content, a vague ideal of personal integrity, a fear of attachment, and a surly nihilistic view of the world are not enough to save a man in the long run from the likes of Cummings, and certainly not enough to endow him with heroic stature."<sup>21</sup>

Shortly before his death, Hearn recognizes something of his predicament; "Beyond Cummings, deeper now, was his own desire to lead the platoon. It had grown, ignited suddenly, become one of the most satisfying things he had ever done (N&D, p. 451)." Hearn sees in himself and in all the liberals he had known, not frustrated do-gooders suffering from "paranoia," but Fausts, as power-mad as Cummings and Croft. He is appalled by his own discovery. He decides to resign his commission, but his decision has never been carried out. When Cummings' strategy requires a reconnoitering of the Japanese rear, Hearn is assigned to the leadership of the reconnaissance patrol. This mission commences

action which mirrors the conflict between Cummings, Hearn, and the troops, and further examines the fascist mentality. The platoon chosen for the patrol has up to now been headed by Sergeant Croft. Croft sees Hearn, as the official commander of the group, to be a threat to his position. Deceived and out-maneuvered, Hearn is killed in an ambush which the platoon blunders into because Croft had kept from him the real results of Martinez' scouting mission the night before. Hearn had tentatively decided to end the patrol after an ambush the day before, but had been reluctant to face Cummings "with empty hands, excuses, and failure (N&D, p. 451)." Hearn's indecision and lack of faith in his own judgment, which by now are habitual responses to very complex situations, are partly responsible for his death.

Hearn's death is obviously symbolic, a preview of the fate of all like-minded liberals in the new age of massive concentrations of power in the super state of mass man. For Mailer he is a convenient vehicle for exposing the subconscious motives of the intellectual liberal, the true meaning behind the facade of upper-class equalitarianism. Norman Podhoretz argues that what Mailer learns from the first novel is

That American liberalism is bankrupt because it cannot provide an answer to the challenge with which history has presented it. Not only does liberalism confine itself to the terms of the given at a time when there can be hope of working within these terms, but it is animated by a vision of the world that neither calls forth heroic activity nor values the qualities of courage, daring, and will that make for the expansion of the human spirit.<sup>22</sup>

He is of course referring here to the failure of a liberal like Hearn to maintain any convictions about his life and his future, and his inability to live an authentic life of any kind.

However, it is a character like Hearn in the novel "whose thought

most resembles that of the author at the time of writing. The fascination which Cummings holds for Hearn interestingly anticipates Mailer's . . . telling James Baldwin in the late 1950s. 'I want to know how power works. . . how it really works, in detail':

. . . he couldn't escape the peculiar magnetism of the General, a magnetism derived from all the connotations of the General's power. . . . The General might even have been silly if it were not for the fact that here on this island he controlled everything. It gave a base to whatever he said. And as long as Hearn remained with him, he could see the whole process from the inception of the thought to the tangible and immediate results the next day, the next month. That kind of knowledge was the hardest to obtain, the most concealed in everything Hearn had done in the past, and it intrigued him, it fascinated him (N&D, pp. 68-69).<sup>23</sup>

If Mailer, like his own creation, Hearn, is intellectually attracted to Cummings by his theory of power and his courage, he is emotionally more attracted to Croft by his practice of power and his ruthless daring to assure his power. After the death of Hearn, it is Croft who leads the platoon on its doomed assault upon the mountain, "dominating his men by the sheer intensity of his undefined 'hunger' for the mastery of life."<sup>24</sup> As Mailer later commented in The Presidential Papers, "Beneath the ideology in The Naked and the Dead was an obsession with violence. The characters for whom I had the most secret admiration, like Croft, were violent people (PP, p. 136)."<sup>25</sup> Although both intellectually and ideologically, Mailer could not accept violence as one characteristic of his existentialist hero in the making at the time of his first novel, he did show his preference for Croft as an early embodiment of his hipster in the sense that Croft is a character of will and passion, instinctively and unflinchingly seeking a new self.

Unlike Cummings or Hearn, Sam Croft, revealed in his Time Machine, is by nature a "mean" character. Why? Mailer answers:

He is that way because of the corruption-of-the-society. He is that way because the devil has claimed him for one of his own. It is because he is a Texan, it is because he had renounced God.

He is that kind of man because the only woman he ever loved cheated on him, or he was born that way, or he was having problems of adjustment. (N&D, p. 124.)

He is a man who "hated weakness" and "loved practically nothing." Like Cummings, Croft is a latent homosexual in the sense that he cannot stand to be touched by a man. Mailer also traces Croft's urge to omnipotence to his psychic origins, "I hate everything which is not in myself (N&D, p. 130)." He shoots a Japanese prisoner for the thrill it gives him, he uses other men's wives as a means of revenging himself on them. And he threatens to kill Red Valsen, counterpart of Hearn in the enlisted men, who possesses insight and sympathy to an extent, when he refuses to continue up the mountain. Croft is incapable of establishing a relationship with any one; men are merely given to be hunted and shot. When Hennessey becomes the platoon's first casualty, because of his own frenetic attempts to move from a relatively secure position to one he feels will be safer, the reactions of Croft and Red are dramatically different. While Red fearfully senses the presence of some malignant force, for Croft, "Hennessey's death had opened to Croft vistas of such omnipotence that he was afraid to consider it directly. All day the fact hovered about his head, tantalizing him with odd dreams and portents of power (N&D, p. 35)."

Croft's "crude unformed vision in his soul (N&D, p. 124) is, however, different from both Hearn's ineffectual liberalism and Cummings' theoretical authoritarianism. It is something like "an energy with fierce tendencies but no form."<sup>26</sup> Croft knows no theories of power, but "a man of practical activity, expressing a fearless, unself-conscious



desire for power":<sup>27</sup>

Leading the men was a responsibility he craved; he felt powerful and certain at such moments. He longed to be in the battle that was taking place inland from the beach. . . (N&D, pp. 26-27.)

No one can match Croft for effective leadership and active courage. Even Hearn admits: "Croft they would obey, for Croft satisfied their desire for hatred, encouraged it, was superior to it, and in turn exacted obedience (N&D, p. 349)." Croft enjoys his leadership over the platoon and takes their fear and hatred as the inevitable consequence of his command. Morally and emotionally estranged as he apparently is, Croft finds compensation in his instinctive closeness with nature, searching for a new unity of being.

Croft felt the nature of rock and earth, knew as well as he knew the flexing of his muscles how in an age of tempest the builders had strainted and surged until the earth had shaped itself. He had always a feeling of that birth-storm when he looked at land; he always knew how a hill would look on the other side. It was the variety of knowledge that felt intuitively the nearness of water no matter how foreign the swatch of earth over which he was traveling. (N&D, p. 494.)

Croft's love for nature is "felt intuitively," and he also takes nature "as an index of self-fulfillment,"<sup>28</sup> to satisfy his transcendent ego. Accordingly, scaling Mount Anaka becomes an inevitable action, psychologically and militarily. The imposing peak lies between the American and Japanese positions on the island. At the sight of the mountain, "Croft was moved as deeply, as fundamentally as caissons resettling in the river mud.

The mountain attracted him, taunted and inflamed him with its size. He had never seen it so clearly before. . . He stared at it now, examined its ridges, feeling an instinctive desire to climb the mountain and stand on its peak, to know that all its mighty weight was beneath his feet. His emotions were intense; he knew awe and hunger and the peculiar unique

ecstasy he had felt after Hennessey was dead, or when he had killed the Japanese prisoner. He gazed at, almost hating the mountains, unconscious at first of the men about him. "That mountain's mighty old," he said at last. (N&D, pp. 348-49.) .

By attempting to "conquer the elements," Croft intends to prove through willpower his omnipotent new self, a self which has a complete mastery of life and "which can free itself enough from the restrictions which external circumstances have inflicted upon it to be open to the blessings of the irrational."<sup>29</sup>

However, having dragged the exhausted soldiers almost to the summit, Croft blunders into a nest of hornets, and the men maddened by the stings and completely beyond Croft's control, run pell-mell into a wild tumble down the jungle-covered wall they have just painfully scaled. The patrol's mission and climbing the mountain end almost farcically. Mailer flatly describes Croft's weary acceptance of defeat, the platoon's return to the beach where they had landed, and Croft's half-conscious relief "that he had found a limit to his hunger (N&D, p. 546)." Croft can only sense how close he came to uniting the forces of nature with the irrational in his being:

Croft kept looking at the mountain. He had lost it, had missed some tantalizing revelation of himself. Of himself and much more. Of life. Everything. (N&D, p. 552.)

Mailer's humiliation of Croft is necessary to preserve the continuity of failure under the totalitarian system. Just as nothing comes of Cummings' elaborate calculations of strategy, so nothing comes of the suffering enforced upon Croft's platoon by his efficient leadership.

Mailer's secret admiration for Croft and his redeeming effort toward the end of the novel might have saved him from acting as another example of Bad Faith, but Mailer's intolerance of the totalitarian

system of fascism for the future American society simply makes Croft incapable of meeting his own criteria for heroism. Throughout the novel, no one is allowed success, false hopes, or privilege of certainty. At the end of the book a foolish major is planning to lay a co-ordinate grid system over a picture of Betty Grable to "jazz up" his map-reading class. It is a last farcical reminder of the futility of imposing any authoritarian patterns on the mysterious undulations of life. Most men cannot, collectively, be made to do what they do not want to do regardless of how skillfully they have been conditioned to respond. Power used to control others tends to diffuse; only the Croft's holding guns can force men to act against their instincts. And even they can never master fortune, but must succumb to it as everyone must. Undermining Cummings' certainty that the future of America will be totalitarian is the complexity and diversity mirrored in the enlisted men. No two are alike, their needs psychologically and economically different, their outward behavior a distortion of the inner man. There is no way to anticipate nor manipulate their behavior. They are "a bunch of dispossessed. . . from the raucous stricken bosom of America (N&D, p. 278)." From such a group no hero can emerge. As Richard Foster has observed, "One notices not only that a true hero is lacking from the novel's epic-like action, but that his opposite, a forceful antagonist, is lacking too."<sup>30</sup>

On the existential level, Mailer's thought is expressed in his recognition of the meaninglessness of human life. There is no significance in the battle between different political ideologies; there is no significance in elaborate plans of actions, there is no final significance in the actions themselves. It is only in isolated moments that

the individual can find any truth to his being, any meaning to his life. But Mailer shows us that the individual of Bad Faith is incapable of grasping the truth in the existential moment; he is either incapable of understanding it intellectually or he rejects what his subconscious mind tells him. Mailer says, in other words, that the body, when placed in an existential situation, usually a confrontation with death, will become naked and reveal its deepest urges to the individual. But the individual must be sufficiently alert either intellectually or psychologically to capture the significance of the moment. The novel shows us that the individual is capable of neither. But the novel was absolutely necessary for Mailer to write, because it raises the fundamental existential problem for him. If life is meaningless, then how can man live a meaningful life in the present era of America? What Mailer does in his work, from this point on through to the present, is develop an existentialist hero who creates his own values for his own life. But it is not until The Deer Park and "The White Negro" does his American existentialist hero fully emerge. In Barbary Shore, he makes a further exploration into the struggle between Capitalism and Communism in American society where both systems have become so massive and so bureaucratized that they are really two sides of the same coin, annihilating any idea of an authentic individual existence.

### Barbary Shore

Continuing his assessment of a situation in America in which one must create his own values and assert his meaning of existence, Mailer shifts his focus from the microcosmic island in The Naked and the Dead

to an insignificant Brooklyn boardinghouse in Barbary Shore (1951). It has an air, as Mailer has put it, "of our time, authority and nihilism stalking one another in the orgiastic hollow of this century (ADV, p. 87)." And he further emphasizes 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 (Ibid.)."

Along with the shift of the locale, the center of Barbary Shore has also altered from the emphasis upon characterization to the stress of ideology. The half dozen roomers in the boardinghouse are, instead of being realistically presented, simply personified ideas. Like The Naked and the Dead, Barbary Shore is once again a novel of non-heroes. Besides Willie Dinsmore, who "served as a handle (BS, p. 7),"<sup>31</sup> and is quickly forgotten, all the other five major characters intended to reflect the enduring reality of the sick American society, are either pathological, or debased, or sexually perverted. As Diana Trilling has observed, "Barbary Shore is a web of fine-spun phantasies, as obscure as they are frightening, allowing us no connection with any recognizable world of feeling. . . . Greed, cupidity, sloth, a sporadic and wildly mis-directed energy, spiritless lust, stupidity, and mean ambition--these, Mailer is telling us, are what today define democratic man, or woman; . . ."<sup>32</sup>

Mickey Lovett, narrator of the story, is an amnesia victim with a surgically reconstructed face and nothing but vague memories from the past. He cannot recall anything but dream-like images of incidents, nor even how his face was destroyed in the war. With no past to burden him and no commitment to the future, Lovett lives in an existential situation of "the enormous present (ADV, p. 86)." Sensitive and intellectual,

he is seeking something to commit himself as the story begins during the cold-war period in America. To this end, he is led by Dinsmore to the shabby boardinghouse in Brooklyn Heights, where he becomes involved in a surrealistic atmosphere with the five other inhabitants of the building. To Lovett's great surprise, living in the "cubicles" in the anonymous house are a bunch of the transitory and the faceless who like him claim no identity and whose present has somehow disconnected from their past. The gaunt, middle-aged McLeod is not merely a mild-mannered department store worker, but a former Communist, once high up in the party, who is now fleeing both from the Party and the FBI. McLeod destroyed his identity ten years earlier and has been "obliged to take up a wholly new existence (BS, p. 160)." Lannie Madison is a mental patient who has lost the "record of [her] self (BS, p. 109)" during a series of shock treatments. LeRoy Hollingsworth is not "a simple small-town boy (BS, p. 29)," but a government agent, sent to interrogate McLeod and get from him a "little object" of great importance. Even the voluptuous, red-haired landlady, Beverly Guinevere, has some mystery about her. Guinevere, it turns out, is McLeod's wife and her daughter Monina is his, too.

As in The Naked and the Dead, Mailer's language throughout Barbary Shore performs on two levels, the political-social and the psychological-existential--one literal and the other usually ironic. As one juxtaposed with the other, the language accordingly reaches the level of symbolic significance. The little world of the boardinghouse functions as a metaphor of the human mind. Just as each of the tenants is partitioned in his or her separate room, so alienated in each mind which reveals nothing but the rootlessness inherent in the structure

surrounding the thought. Rooms, like values and attitudes, are rented for brief occupancy because people "Drifted in and out, drifted in and out. . . as driftwood (BS, p. 18)." And so do ideas shift with the boarder. Lovett's first impression of the place is presented on his arrival:

It was a big house and gave the impression of being an empty house. Downstairs there were ten names arranged in ten brackets next to as many bells which did not ring, but a week could go by and I would pass no one upon the stairs. (BS, p. 16.)

Of the ten roomers, Lovett the narrator introduces his readers only to four. In Barbary Shore, the human nature seems unable to form a complete and satisfying design for its courage. The American bureaucracy which has succeeded in stifling the human personality assumes the same kind of totalitarianism seen in The Naked and the Dead which makes individual existence impossible.

In order to explain how the novel deals simultaneously with the themes on various levels, it might be best to describe briefly the characters and their symbolic significance in the novel. The struggle between Capitalism and Communism is presented through the struggle between McLeod and Hollingsworth. At the beginning of the novel, they serve to represent adequately the two opposing forces.

Hollingsworth (whose name reminds one of the Hollingsworth of Hawthorne's Blithedale Romance) is the stereotyped citizen of the American capitalistic society. Mailer deliberately makes him a mass of incongruities. His personal appearance and manner are falsely assumed:

He was obviously from a small town; the talk about the weather, the accent, the politeness were unmistakable signs. The simple small-town boy come to the big city.

The features were in character. He had straight corn-colored hair with a part to the side, and a cowlick over one temple. His eyes were small and intensely blue and were remarkable immediately, for his nose and mouth were without distinction. . . . He was still freckled. . . .

I had a picture of the places in which he had slept through his boyhood: a bed, a Bible, and in the corner a baseball bat perhaps. As though in confirmation, the only decoration upon his wall was a phosphorescent cross printed on cardboard. (BS, p. 29.)

In contrast to his personal appearance his room is in terrific disarray, but the floors and windows and woodwork are clean. It is as if he searches his own room after cleaning it, for it "seemed to be visited more by violence than by sloth (Ibid.).\" To complete the portrait, Mailer gives Hollingsworth a small-town background, parents who own a store, and as a cover story, a job in New York on Wall Street. Mailer's choice of Hollingsworth, whose features are "without distinction," seems to suggest that "secret policemen do not spring full blown from the ground, bearing fangs and truncheons, but appear naturally from the ranks of the populace when governmental policy requires them."<sup>33</sup>

Hollingsworth proves to be a cunning and relentless detective, who displays no real understanding of political or moral issues. He is interested only in facts, and is contemptuous of theory and feeling. He may befit the representative of the fascistic force that is to execute the political dreams of a Cummings, but he has none of the general's intellectual distinction to understand the issues of a Capitalistic society like America.

We ain't equipped to deal with big things. If this fellow came to me and asked my advice, I would take him aside and let him know that if he gives up the pursuits of vanity, and like everybody else, he'd get along better. . . . I don't give two cents for all your papers. A good-time Charley, that's myself, and that's why I'm smarter than the lot of you. (BS, p. 31).



A self-styled realist, Hollingsworth is, ironically, totally blind to the reality in which he acts. Through the novel he moves machine-like, directed by a power remote from the scene of his activities. Therefore, he is a creature of conditions he neither controls nor comprehends. His only ethic appears to be one of self-advantage. Toward the book's end he is ready to desert his country for personal gain, for he decides to appropriate the "little object" from McLeod, he still must flee to repeat the pattern of hiding from the secret police. The hunter becomes the hunted. Instead of a hero in any sense, he is a debased character who embodies all the qualities that Mailer despises in the "average" American. Thus under the control of the totalitarian establishment, as McLeod analyzes the forces that made the Third World War inevitable, "the aim of society is no longer to keep its members alive, but quite the contrary, the question is how to dispose of them." Far from being strong and purposeful, Hollingsworth is one of those bureaucrats who come to power "at the very moment they are in the act of destroying themselves."

McLeod's own answer to totalitarianism is "revolutionary socialism." According to McLeod, revolutionary socialism postulates an open system which will be created when enough individuals choose to be free in themselves, and act on their own motives to break out of the rigid classifications of the conformist society. But Barbary Shore gives no reason to hope that such a new era will ever be ushered in. McLeod becomes an impotent, betrayed, and self-betraying idealist of the old revolutionary left.

McLeod is a revolutionary socialist who worked for the Communist Party for nineteen years, mainly in Europe, and became known during this

period as "the Hangman of the Left." After what he calls "nineteen years with the wrong woman (BS, p. 87)" and the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact, he leaves and returns to the US to work for the State Department. After a year of this he leaves and works at various jobs under the name of William McLeod. Traced by the FBI who wish to recover the mysterious "little object," he agrees to undergo interrogation sessions to reconstruct his past actions. It is through him that Mailer is able to introduce long passages of Marxist theory. In one of his many speeches during the "interrogation" which Hollingsworth puts him through, McLeod tries to explain his analysis of the forces of history and particularly the compulsion of Capitalist monopoly to expand. He predicts the future as a series of wars which will result from the inability of such an economy to fulfill itself--the classic Marxist position. The result of these wars will be the artificial stimulation of the economy leading eventually to artificial competition within the growing bureaucracy of government. Such competition will become so fierce that failure to succeed will lead to the expulsion or even death of bureaucrats. This then introduces the stage of cannibalism where the bureaucracy starts to destroy its own members in order to survive. McLeod's prophecy has already partially materialized.

The psychological implications of this are ironic, for as a result of the extraordinary pressures bureaucrats will live under, they will be torn between saving themselves as individuals and devoting themselves totally to the establishment. He puts his prediction of such a psychological tension this way:

There is a conflict between their [the bureaucrats'] desire for a private life and their public and party obligations. They function for the collectivity and the most terrible greeds for personal enrichment begin to torment them.

Psychologically, the check must at last be paid. The bureaucrat becomes driven to express his personality through anti-social action. (BS, p. 201.)

It would appear that McLeod is describing the evolution of the false Hipster in this portrayal of the evolution of the bureaucrat. Mailer sees a relationship between the reactionary and the Hipster, especially in their conviction that it is man's tendency toward collectivity that is destroying his basic biological nature. The irony, of course, is that the reactionary, believing as he does that Communism is his greatest enemy, moves even further into the very bureaucracy he detests, feeling to his dismay that this is a temporary but necessary step to survival. The ultimate result of such a step, however, as McLeod points out, is a manifestation that intensifies the bureaucracy and distorts the desire from a return to a basic biological orientation in life into the barbaric. Thus instead of the bureaucrat turning inward to free himself, to liberate his flesh and discover his soul, as the Hipster would do, he becomes masochistic, feeding on himself in order to achieve some sustenance for survival. And, finally, this masochism turns outward into sadism.

Hollingsworth is obviously the epitome of such a bureaucrat. His relationship with women reflects his obsession to have them do his will. But his relationship with Guinevere is the example par excellence. Lovett reports a scene between Guinevere and Hollingsworth as follows:

I was to hear another Hollingsworth. "Yes, I love you," he said, his delivery pitched in novel tones for me. As though language with a catapult he proceeded to tell her how he loved her, his speech containing more obscenity than I had ever heard in so short a space, and in rapid succession, with a gusto which could have matched Guinevere's description of the doctor (one of Guinevere's fantasies), he named various parts of her body and described what he would do to them, how he would tear this and squeeze that, eat here and spit there,

butcher rough and slice fine, slash, macerate, pillage, all in an unrecognizable voice which must have issued between clenched teeth, until his appetite satisfied, I could see him squatting beside the carcass, his mouth wiped carefully with the back of his hand. With that, he sighed, as much as to say, "A good piece of ass, by God." (BS, p. 146.)

Thus after Hollingsworth concludes telling Guinevere of his "love" he insists that she tell him what it is like to sleep with her husband.

She replies, "Don't think of that character as my husband."

But she would deprive Hollingsworth of something very essential. "Oh, yes, he is your husband, and there's no getting away from that I would say." He must have been holding her now. "And you know, he's an unusual fellow. I can see how a girl would get a crush on him." His voice throbbed suddenly. "He's been a big fellow in his time." (BS, p. 147.)

What Hollingsworth doesn't recognize, but McLeod is beginning to realize is that such bureaucrats move the world toward a giant concentration camp, a reduction to a condition of cannibalism. Both men are the guards of such a camp.

Following the Troskyist interpretation, Mailer believes that the Russian Revolution was betrayed by the bureaucratism of the Stalinists in dealing with the economic crisis after the revolution. However, a man of acute intelligence and analytic mind as McLeod is, in the early stage of his life he deserts his position of the theorist and revolutionary but becomes an instrument of the Stalinist state and is active throughout the purges and work camps of the thirties. For the Party, he even commits such acts as the murder of deviationists. To Lannie, McLeod is more cannibal than Hollingsworth. She explains this to Lovett:

He destroyed the world, do you understand? (She is speaking of McLeod.) He's a murderer of the best (She is referring to McLeod the Stalinist who is connected in her mind with the murder of Trotsky) and thus he gives an impression of being one of the best, just as my friend is a murderer of the

worst, and so you do not like him. One after another, through the years, he picked them off, all of the best, and each night he would come home and prostrate himself before the picture of the man with the pipe, and say, "Oh, My Lord, in my thoughts I have transgressed against Thee," and then he would spit at the picture with all the force of his puny neck and say, "What crimes have I committed in Thy Name," and spit again, spit, spit, until he could only weep, and the picture of the man with the pipe never taking his eyes off him because he is waiting and it comes; "Forgive me, my Lord," he cries, "for I know not what I do." (BS, pp. 151-152.)

McLeod is a bureaucrat like Hollingsworth. Lannie is apparently disgusted by his hypocritical Christianity. Even McLeod himself recognizes the parallel when the bureaucrat of the monopoly Capitalism faces the former bureaucrat of "State capitalism": "The truth is that there are deep compacts between LeRoy and myself, you might almost say we are sympathetic to each other (BS, p. 172)."

Mailer condemns both kinds of capitalism as totalitarian. They do not take people as human beings, but as tools to be manipulated in the development of the bureaucratic system. But what makes McLeod in his later stage a character not as despicable as Hollingsworth is the contrast between the self-recognition of the former and the self-assurance of the latter. As Barry Leeds has observed, "He [Hollingsworth] is, finally, despicable because he is so unquestioning in his assurance that what he does is right,"<sup>34</sup> But on the other hand, McLeod is disillusioned by the betrayal of the Revolution and ashamed of his own part in that betrayal. Furthermore, McLeod comes to understand himself that the meaning in life is not found in the facts of one's existence but rather in the form that one's existence takes. In other words, the form of one's life reveals the battles that one's soul had undergone and when one sees one's whole life spread out before him, as in a picture or a novel, then one has an existential vision of what he really is.

McLeod comes to this understanding not by the things which Hollingsworth has accused of him, for it turns out that they are not really true, but as the result of the metaphoric truth in what Hollingsworth has said.

Thus McLeod says to Lovett about Hollingsworth's interrogation:

I can assure you that all through it, all through the fiction and fancy of all the things I was alleged to have done in Mediterranean waters, there was not a word of legal truth and all the parallel truth in the world because if it were not one act I committed it was another, and you must notice his devilish cleverness, unconscious I am certain, for his instincts are perfect. He knew how I would react if the specifics were given. I've covered that over for myself these years, oh, aware what I did, but none the less there's a certain crutch to the name of a thing, it all seems more reasonable and possible until you put it figuratively, muzzle if you come down to it, blasts you in the face. (BS, p. 172.)

McLeod's new understanding does enable him to re-modify his vision to the existential position for the future of man. In many ways it is similar to Mailer's. McLeod sees human life as a drama in which the individual man witnesses the struggles between opposing forces going on within himself and in the universe at large. And he is led to this vision through his realization of the significance of the metaphorical way of looking at human and historical events. His vision of the future is delivered in his last meeting with Hollingsworth. He says:

But how may it come about? Here we arrive at what is the knot of history. We assumed far too long that socialism was inevitable and the error has reduced us to impotence. Socialism is inevitable only if there will be a civilization. What we have never considered is the condition that there would not be. For socialism as I have remarked is not a positive rag to be cut to shape by the politician's scissor. It depends upon the potentiality of the human, and that is an open question, impossible to determine philosophically. Well may it be that men in sufficient numbers and with sufficient passion and consciousness to create such a world will never exist. If they do not, however, then the human condition is incapable of alleviation, and we can only witness for a century at least and perhaps forever the disappearance of all we have created. (BS, p. 203.)

But, if we succeed, what a period will follow! I am not a prophet dreaming of heaven, I do not assume that we leap at a bound from hell to Arcady. At last there will be, however, a soil in which man may play out his dream. It will be a time of the most extraordinary contrasts, a time of despair as well as of hope, a moment when each injustice which is ended may birth another, one we cannot conceive yet. There is so little we know about ourselves, our historical life has been spent in battling nature and each other. This will be the opportunity to discover of what we are capable and what we shall never achieve. We may even learn if we can attain a rational life or if we are condemned to remain forever the most tragic of the animals. It will be the first time in history that man freed of hostile environment shall be able to discover his real dilemmas and real fulfillment if there is any. How I wish I could see that day. It would be so much more interesting than our own. (BS, p. 205.)

What McLeod is expressing in his vision is the existential fulfillment of a man's life to his essential Being. In this sense, what McLeod is expressing could be the real substance of the "little object" that he has stolen from the State Department, which is never identified. But "we can be fairly confident in thinking of it as Hope or Dedication or Vision or a 'coagulation' of all three."<sup>35</sup> Foreseeing his own doom and his incapacity of protecting the "little object" any longer, McLeod passes it on to the narrator Lovett before he is finally killed by Hollingsworth.

For all his acute intelligence, repentent conscience and existential vision, McLeod, however, has been killed as a victim instead of a Mailer hero. He has not succeeded in achieving a heroic stature of heroism. McLeod suffers from exhaustion and inertia. "All he has left is heroic verbosity and his overdeveloped conscience."<sup>36</sup> At one point, Hollingsworth's criticism is certainly correct when he says, "You're just like an old thing. . . . Bable, bable, bable about how sweet it used to be. Only you make it the future (BS, p. 206.)." All McLeod's action has yielded to memories of a prior commitment to the revolution. Therefore,

McLeod is a character who shows no likelihood of growth, no sign of vitality, but all the evidence of emotional cripple. The fact that he is murdered by Hollingsworth of course indicates that he is a victim of both kinds of Capitalistic systems. He has never been, though a Communist, a free agent, like Sartre's Hugo of Dirty Hands; nor has he ever had the chance to affirm his individual freedom and turn himself into a Sartrean tragic hero.

A Mailer hero McLeod has not been, but his importance in the novel cannot be overlooked either. McLeod's function in Barbary Shore is threefold: (1) serving as the vehicle to express Mailer's prescient warnings about the American economy's growing dependence on war production, (2) by understanding his personal history we are presented that "The historical function of La Sovietica is to destroy the intellectual content of Marxism (BS, p. 174)," (3) whatever hope revolutionary socialism may still offer, it must be communicated to the younger generation. Thus it is Lovett who finally inherits the "little object" and becomes the agent of what good can be taken from the book: the "remnants of (McLeod's) socialist culture (BS, p. 223)" to be protected in troubled times until it can be restored to its rightful place of power.

In creating a character like Lovett without an identity, Mailer liberates him from all determining influences; family, environment, education, and most important, a political past. He can see the historical trend better than the others because he is outside of it, has no stake in it, no burden of guilt from the past to impair his vision. Under McLeod's tutelage his early reading in Marx and Trotsky are revived. For instance, after his first discussion with McLeod, Lovett begins to



recall his days as a member of a Trotskyite study group, and he describes them in a remarkably evocative passage:

I was young then, and no dedication could match mine. The revolution was tomorrow, and the inevitable crises of capitalism ticked away in my mind with the certainty of a time bomb, and even then could never begin to match the ticking of my pulse. . . . For a winter and a spring I lived more intensely in the past than I could ever in the present, until the sight of a policeman on his mount became the Petrograd proletariat crawling to fame between the legs of a Cossack's horse. . . . There was never a revolution to equal it, and never a city more glorious than Petrograd. (BS, pp. 90-91.)

As we can see, his awakening is strictly theoretical. There is no memory of bloody hands and betrayals, merely a recollection of a youthful enthusiasm for Trotsky's epic Russian Revolution and the promise of a new world created in the Soviet model of a socialist culture. Upon his reviewing the present world situation, he finds that the Russian Revolution and the Communist movement have changed nothing for mankind:

The proletariat which crawled to glory beneath the belly of a Cossack's horse, the summer flies of Vyborg, I could see it all again, and know with the despair which follows fervor that nothing had changed, and social relations, economic relations were still independent of man's will. (BS, p. 117.)

Mailer felt that the Russian Revolution, as noted earlier, had failed because it had not abolished the totalitarian system and so had not made a revolution in the consciousness of the Russian people. Several years after the appearance of Barbary Shore Mailer declared that Marxism had failed in application because it was "an expression of the scientific narcissism we inherited from the nineteenth century" and motivated by "the rational mania that consciousness could stifle instinct (ADV, p. 336)."

In Lovett, therefore, Mailer seems to have presented a muted hope. The last paragraphs of the book summarize Lovett's final point of view:

So the heritage passed on to me, poor hope, and the little object as well, and I went out into the world, If I fled down the alley which led from that rooming house, it was only to enter another, and then another. I am obliged to live waiting for the signs again.

Thus, time passes, and I work and I study, and I keep my eye on the door.

Meanwhile, vast armies mount themselves, the world revolves, the traveller clutches his breast. From out the unyielding contradictions of labor stolen from men, the march to the endless war forces its pace. Perhaps, as the millions will be lost, others will be created, and I shall discover brothers where I thought none existed.

But for the present the storm approaches its thunderhead, and it is apparent that the boat drifts ever closer to shore. So the blind will lead the blind, and the deaf shout warnings to one another until their voices are lost. (BS, p. 223.)

The image of the drifting voyager recurs throughout the book. In the first chapter Lovett describes a frequently recurring dream in which a traveller returning home in a taxi through the streets of his native city suddenly finds everything unfamiliar. The traveller, horrified and afraid that he is dreaming, allows the cab to go on and on, while Lovett shouts to him that "this city is the real city, the material city, and your vehicle is history (BS, p. 7)." But the traveller cannot hear him. And the final sentence of the book: "So the blind lead the blind and the deaf shout warnings to one another until their voices are lost."

The frail vessel of civilization is drifting helplessly down upon the Barbary shore. Why Barbary? The answer is given by Guinevere, who has asked Hollingsworth to take her away with him. When he asks her where she wants to go, she replies "Anywhere. To the ends of the earth. To Barbary--I like the sound of that (BS, p. 148)." Anywhere. The sickness of American society, Mailer seems to be saying, is mindless and cannot be treated rationally. Under the totalitarian system, American

society lacks interest in any ideas at all. It has become a great Guinevere--materialistic, faithless, obsessed with its own sensual gratification. In Barbary Shore Mailer goes much deeper into the psychic origins of behavior than in The Naked and the Dead. Although his characters are not presented primarily in sexual terms as they are in much of his later work, their sexual natures begin to take on significance as the story develops to the latter part. As John Stark has noted, "This Marxism-Capitalism dichotomy becomes less important as the book progresses, not because Mailer chooses Marxism but because he begins to believe that politics are less important than psychological problems."<sup>37</sup>

The psychological problems are largely caused by the Hollywood culture which includes the frustrating sexual pressure that the characters feel. On the political level, McLeod seems to have received most of our attention; but on the cultural level, Guinevere is obviously the center about which the other characters sexually revolve. This does not mean that she is in control of any of them, but it means that she represents a pivotal point which all get in touch with at some time. While Hollingsworth is the epitome of the bureaucrat of the Capitalistic government, Guinevere is the epitome of a sick body of the Capitalistic culture. All her values are the values of Hollywood, where she claims to have slept around and where she dreams of sending her daughter Monina. With a background in burlesque, she is a sex advertiser whose motives are materialistic and vulgar. The brief summary of her "story that's worth a million bucks (BS, p. 46)" is a perfect example of barbaric art or her own sexual fantasies. In the boardinghouse, she makes her bedroom available to first one and then another of her lodgers and

seems always to have been prepared to accept anyone who shows interest in her, for she freely relates to Lovett, "I tell you I've had all kinds of men, and there hasn't been one of them who didn't fall in love with me (BS, p. 41)."

Guinevere is in fact McLeod's wife. They dwell under the same roof but no longer occupy common quarters or maintain any semblance of keeping their marriage intact. On the contrary, it is Hollingsworth who boasts of his "interesting experiences with the lady downstairs." Furthermore, after discovering the nature of Hollingsworth's mission, Guinevere is ready to sell out her husband and proposes that they get hold for themselves of the "thingamajig (BS, p. 182)" which McLeod has and run away to sell it to some foreign power. It seems that she lives a life completely outside politics, just to live by and for the grasping, mindless self. As a matter of fact, McLeod's love for Guinevere is greater than he consciously admits, but it fails because his attempts at reconciliation with her are intellectual and verbal, in a language foreign to the sensual "queen." And McLeod does not understand her language either; he does not realize until too late that existence must be sensual as well as intellectual. Here is McLeod's last attempt to reconcile and his final breakup with Guinevere:

"I've realized something. You loved me when we married, and I could love you now. I would devote the energy I possess, for you and for the child. Do you understand? You could blossom in the admiration I would furnish, and there's a part of you never given up the idea." So he (McLeod) would woo her (Guinevere). . . .

"You got a crust," she shrieked suddenly. "Anybody else offers . . . offers me lots of things," she finished lamely, "and you won't give me anything, not even when you can." (BS, p. 182.)

What Guinevere wants from McLeod is of course devoted love and material possessions.

Politically speaking, Guinevere is the American masses, who are fascinated by materialistic and lascivious desires but ignorant of political doctrine. As she once expressed, "I don't know anything about politics (BS, p. 24)." McLeod married Guinevere for purely rational reasons at the beginning: both the Party and the FBI were looking for a single man, so he tried to confuse them by marrying. Their failed marriage seems to suggest on the political level the broken relationship of Marxism with the American masses. While one lacks the proper emotional involvement, the other has no comprehension of the historical forces struggling in her times. But on the psychological level, Guinevere is unable to be intellectual partner to McLeod while he in turn cannot give what she needs. Both are narcissistic and can only find pleasure in seeing the reflection of themselves in others but not the compassionate love for each other.

A mindless hedonist and masochist, Guinevere uses sex not only to play upon Hollingsworth and Lovett, but she also employs it to discover new forms of ecstasy with Lannie. Lannie, like McLeod in this sense, is haunted by her feelings of guilt for the death of Trotsky. She has a perverse need for martyrdom. She seeks sex as a form of punishment and gets a strange pleasure from her sexual degradation. Her sexual relations with Lovett, Hollingsworth, and Guinevere all reflect this psychic need for pain and punishment. In Lannie, we get an image of pathological alienation.

Lannie is an ex-Trotskyite who was literally driven mad by the murder of Trotsky, and has spent the time since 1939 in various institutions, receiving a series of shock treatments. She escaped her last clinic, only to be involved in the boardinghouse. Lovett tries to save

her with sex, yet the best response he can elicit from her is at first a "fathomless desperation." "If it were love, it was also fear, and we might have huddled behind a rock while the night-wind devoured the plain." "Save me," "I heard her cry (BS, p. 100)." When he tried again, remembering a girl he had once taught "to love her flesh," Lannie reacts like "sweet suffering Jesus upon the Cross (BS, p. 110)." Working with Hollingsworth, she, however, enjoys his brutality, "the peace of being with a man who looks at you as if you do not exist, so that slowly you're beaten beneath him. . . and love has finally come the only way I want ever to see it is when it is smoke and I am in the opium den and thugs beset me, I do not care for I feel nothing any more (BS, p. 113)."

Driven by a hostile world into psychosis, Lannie tells Lovett, "There is neither guilt nor innocence, but there is vigor in what we do or the lack of it." By her version of reality, she sees vigor in both Hollingsworth and Guinevere. She believes that Hollingsworth is strong and purposeful:

"You see he's consecrated, and we just wander, and every day is new to us and ends by being silly, but he has a purpose and so he's fortunate." (BS, pp. 108-109.)

To her he is the embodiment of those who now rule the earth. What she finds in Guinevere is good and beautiful. We may understand this from a plea that Lannie makes to Guinevere for her love.

You are different. There is no one else like you, and you are beautiful. . . . To think of you years ago. . . and how everyone passed through you and over you. . . . You were too beautiful, and what did they know of you, what does a boat know of the ground it soils? You gave yourself to them, and yet you were always free, for you wanted more than they did, you agreed to them and followed their ways, but you were miserable because that could never be for you. How could you love them when it was only yourself that you

loved, and you were so right in that because we are born to love ourselves and that is the secret of everything. All your life you searched for a mirror to find your skin glows and your body swells in rapture and the hymn that is in you may be sung to yourself. . . . And that is why you love me, for I would be a mirror to you, and we escape only when we follow our mirror and let it lead us out of the forest. I can let you see your beauty, and so you will love me for I adore you and unlike the others want nothing but to lie in your arms, the mirror." (BS, p. 186.)

Distorted as Lannie's vision of reality is, what she speaks about Guinevere is more truly than she knows. Without doubt, Guinevere is the most obvious narcissistic and sexually-obsessed character in the novel. To a certain extent, Lannie is the mirror to everyone in the novel, especially Guinevere and Hollingsworth at the beginning. As has been pointed out earlier, both are products of the historical forces and the culture. Both lust for power but fulfill themselves only in their fantasies. Hollingsworth lives a world circumscribed by the bureaucracy, and Guinevere lives in a world circumscribed by Hollywood. Both see reality as that which is presented to them by the mass media, and it is this reality which cuts them off from the psychic levels of their being which flow beneath their public minds. Their attitude toward reality can be summed up through a dialogue between McLeod and Hollingsworth.

"Would you call yourself a realist?" McLeod asked almost dreamily.

"That's the word a fellow would employ for me."

"Then, philosophically speaking, you believe in a real world."

"More words," Hollingsworth sighed. "I'll say yes."

"A world which exists separately from ourselves."

"Oh, yes, that was what I wanted to say."

"You didn't," McLeod told him. "I want to point out to you that no one may be disqualified from coming close to a knowledge of the relations of such a world. One's psychological warp, upon which you harp so greedily, may be precisely the peculiar lens necessary to see those relations most clearly." "You're trying to confuse me," Hollingsworth said. (BS, p. 194.)

The irony of Hollingsworth's disclaimer that McLeod is trying to confuse him is obviously that McLeod is trying to enlighten him and show him that the world he would like to see and his relations with that visionary world are within. But neither he nor Guinevere can see this, so it is significantly paired that they run off together at the end of the novel in bewilderment and fear, Guinevere shouting, "I'm doomed, I'm doomed," and Hollingsworth whimpering, "It's off we go. . . and no time to lose, and now nobody will ever have it (the "little object"), and what have I done (BS, p. 221)?"

As the mirror to McLeod, Lannie sees McLeod as the virtual assassin of Trotsky. It is under Lannie's tirade that McLeod loses control of himself, not really under Hollingsworth. When Lannie shouts at him, "Have you. . . ever opened the door to the assassin outside (BS, p. 136)?" McLeod loses control of himself for one and only time during the interrogation. Through her reminding him of his past crimes, McLeod quickly comes to realize that he has lived so completely with his own intellectual fantasies that he has destroyed whatever good there was in himself and thus whatever good he could have brought into the world. And McLeod, in his vision of the future, has demonstrated that he understands that man, if he is to survive, must be committed to his potential, not his potential in an abstract scientific sense, but his emotional potential. Thus McLeod, moments before his death, can discover the ego that he can extend into the world, and he literally transfers himself to Lovett, to whom he writes in his will:

To Michael Lovett. to whom, at the end of my life and for the first time within it, I find myself capable of the rudiments of selfless friendship, I bequeath the remnants of my socialist culture. (BS, p. 223.)



However, it is only at the very end of his life that becomes capable of the "selfless friendship" which he discovers to be the only truly worthwhile human relationship. But by then it is too late.

As the mirror to Lovett, Lannie directly calls him "Narcissus." In the course of the novel, Lovett, as has been shown, is teased but rejected by Guinevere. His brief sexual involvement with Lannie causes her "fathomless despair" and reflects his own incompleteness. At one point, when Lannie rejects him and says:

"You can't love anybody, Mickey, for you're Narcissus, and the closer you come to water the more you adore yourself until your nose touches, and then you're alone again." (BS, p. 111)

To this Lovett responds:

I did not want to believe this. "It's true," I said, "but it's. . . it's not true. It's not all true." I caught her by the shoulder with enough force to hurt her. "Don't you understand? I want to live." I caught myself on the point of weeping. "It's not all true," I heard myself repeating. This made her furious. "You want to live?" she asked, flinging my arm away. "You can't, you don't know how to. You can't,". . . "You came to me because I was easy, and you thought it would not cost you anything. . . . But we never buy anybody without paying the price." (BS, pp. 111-112.)

What Lannie has accused of Lovett is both true and not entirely true. He is preoccupied with himself because he doesn't know who or what he is. He is indeed continually looking at himself in a mirror in order to catch some glimpse of himself, some notion of what he once was. The narcissism which Lovett exhibits at the beginning of the novel is primarily inward. To the outside world he is detached and observing. But after he finds his image reflected in McLeod he comes alive and a new conception of self is born in him. He can both see his past in perspective and the present with commitment.

Aided by McLeod's proddings, Lovett is able to recollect the past events in a sort of auto-psychoanalysis. From one point to another,

his mind moves progressively to the human commitment. Lovett's clearest memory of the past, the only thing which he feels really happened, a memory which keeps recurring to him, is that of a brief love affair he had with a girl who came to love herself and him as the agent of her self-love. He recalls the experience this way first:

Across the blur of the past, I have a memory which returns over and over again, and I am almost certain it happened . . . . I know a girl then who was in love with me and I very much in love with her. . . . For the girl love had always been difficult and clothed in a hundred restrictions of false delicacy. She had been ashamed of her body and almost indifferent to men. What combination of circumstance and mystery could bring it about I no longer know, but I adored her, so completely, so confidently, that my admiration seemed to accomplish everything. The room we shared burgeoned for her. She came to love her flesh, and from there it was but a step to loving mine. We lay beside each other for hours on end, brilliant with new knowledge. I had discovered magic to her and reaped the benefit; I could shine in the reflection of her face. Never, as she would assume me, had a man been more ardent, more thoughtful, and more desirable. She blossomed in that week, and I was so proud of myself. (BS, p. 34.)

As Lovett's memory gradually comes back, his neurotic narcissism is replaced by a free expression of his self love and his love for others. As a result, he can no more just stare at himself and cut himself off from the world. Furthermore, he recognizes the limitations of the past, and for the first time becomes truly committed to the present as he has claimed to be from the outset:

Where was that girl and what did she look like? . . . Frustration put me on the rack, and with the frustration came something worse. For I would never meet that girl, and if I did I would not remember her and she would not recognize me. And if all these impossibilities one by one were to be solved and the wheel presented a double miracle for the same chip, then undoubtedly the girl and I, having changed, would be magical no more to each other. So that was done and that was dead. There could be no solutions from the past nor duplicates found in the present. . . . I . . . knew in all hopelessness that whatever I was to find could not come from the past. (BS, p. 115.)

When Lovett's mind is no longer fettered by the past, not by his own "Narcissus," he steadily moves forward. Ultimately he thinks of the future and finally he is prepared to take on McLeod's burden. Lovett's commitment even includes much more than revolutionary socialism. It also takes on what McLeod may vaguely visualize but can not be fulfilled: the individual's existential need to fulfill himself. As Lovett himself reflects:

Thus the actions of people and not their sentiments make history. There was a sentence for it, . . . 'Men enter into social and economic relations independent of their wills,' and did it not mean more than all the drums of the medicine men? (BS, p. 117.)

To counteract the fact that "men enter into social and economic relations independent of their wills," the individual must take bold and direct action against the social determinants of his situation. The only problem for Lovett is that his amnesia has confined him to his "enormous present" for so long that he still has difficulty in taking any actual action. With McLeod dead, Lannie carried off by the FBI, and Hollinsworth gone with Guinevere and Monina, he retires almost into seclusion: "I'm not a brave man. . . . I have no future anyway (BS, p. 218)." As stated earlier, it is a muted hope when the novel finally ends. And Lovett ends another non-hero like McLeod.

In the process of creating the existentialist hero, what progress Mailer has shown in Barbary Shore is: while The Naked and the Dead left the future in the hands of the Major Dallesons, Barbary Shore left the future in the hands of a potentially hopeful. He is still able to "elect to have a future (BS, p. 218)." As Barry Leeds wrote, ". . . if this is a flimsy vision of hope, it is better than none."<sup>38</sup> It is with Barbary Shore that Mailer's existentialism takes noticeable form; "this

first of the existentialist novels in America (ADV, p. 96)," Mailer calls it. Instead of actions manipulated by almost invisible forces, we have the fate of the world (supposedly in the "little object") hinging on the choices made by individuals. As Podhoretz has put it, "Everything in Barbary Shore seems to hang on the will of the people involved, and in this sense, Mailer is right to describe the book as 'existential' in spirit."<sup>39</sup> Such existential spirit is apparently derived from Mailer's recognition that political ideology has come to an end and political solutions are of no help in the dehumanizing situation of America. This is another step Mailer has made in his second novel. If it is a flawed novel in characterization, it is, as John Stark has argued, the basis for Mailer's best work "because this prepares the way for future, greater works."<sup>40</sup>

### Notes to Chapter Three

1. Radical Innocence, p. 141.
2. That The Naked and the Dead sounds like "a pastiche of the novels about World War I" and echoes Dos Passos, Farrell and Steinbeck has been repeatedly pointed out by many critics. See, for example, Maxwell Geismar, American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity (New York: Hill and Wang, 1958), p. 171; Walter B. Rideout, The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1956), p. 271; Nathan A. Scott, Jr., Three American Moralists: Mailer, Bellow, Trilling (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), p. 23; Solotaroff's Down Mailer's Way, p. 5, and many others.
3. Richard Foster, Norman Mailer (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1968), p. 9.
4. Norman Mailer, Current Biography (1948).
5. See Jerry H. Bryant, The Open Decision: The Contemporary American Novel and Its Intellectual Background (New York: The Free Press, 1970), p. 76.
6. Norman Podhoretz, "Norman Mailer: The Embattled Vision," in Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work, ed. Robert F. Lucid (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1971), p. 63.
7. Norman Mailer, The Naked and the Dead (New York: A Signet Book, 1948, 1970). Hereafter all references are to this edition and will be cited in the text.
8. Donald L. Kaufmann, Norman Mailer: The Countdown (The First Twenty Years) (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois Univeristy Press, 1969), p. 4.
9. Barry H. Leeds, The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer (New York: New York University Press, 1969), p. 42.
10. Ibid., p. 29.
11. Quoted by Solotaroff, Down Mailer's Way, p. 31.
12. Ibid., p. 32.
13. Cf. Being and Nothingness: ". . . it is the For-itself which

established this co-existence (of things in the world) by making itself co-present to all. But in the case of the presence of the For-itself to being-in-itself, there cannot be a third term. No witness--not even God--could establish that presence; even the For-itself can know it only if the presence already is." (p. 122.)

14. Jean Radford, Norman Mailer: A Critical Study (London: The Macmillan Press, 1975), p. 44.
15. Ibid., p. 8.
16. Arnold A. Hutschnecker, The Drive for Power (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), p. 275.
17. Walter Kaufman, "Friedrich Nietzsche" in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, V (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1972), p. 511.
18. George Plimpton, ed., Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews, The Third Series (New York: 1967), p. 257.
19. John W. Aldridge, After the Lost Generation (New York: Noonday Press, 1958), p. 137.
20. Norman Mailer: A Critical Study, p. 11.
21. Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work, p. 65.
22. Ibid., p. 67.
23. Down Mailer's Way, p. 19.
24. Richard Foster, p. 11.
25. The Presidential Papers, p. 136.
26. Richard Foster, p. 12.
27. Norman Mailer: A Critical Study, p. 47.
28. Mailer: The Countdown, p. 114.
29. Down Mailer's Way, p. 28.
30. Richard Foster, p. 11.
31. Norman Mailer, Barbary Shore (New York: Signet Book, 1951), p. 7. Hereafter all references are to this edition.
32. Diana Trilling, "The Radical Moralism of Norman Mailer," in Norman Mailer: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Leo Braudy (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 15.
33. The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer, pp. 62-63.

34. Ibid., p. 63.
35. Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work, p. 75.
36. Norman Mailer: The Countdown, p. 115.
37. John Stark, "Barbary Shore: The Basis of Mailer's Best Work," Modern Fiction Studies, 3 (Autumn, 1971), 405.
38. The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer, p. 100.
39. Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work, p. 69.
40. John Stark, 408.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The American Existentialist Hero Emerged:

### The Deer Park and Advertisements for Myself

#### The Deer Park

After finishing his first two novels and examining the political and social situations of America, Mailer in the mid-fifties was fully convinced that "One could not have a hero today. . . a man of action and contemplation, capable of sin, large enough for good, a man immense (ADV, p. 172)." But he insists 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. Each mind can become more conscious of its desire and waste less strength in hiding from itself. (PP, pp. 41-42.)

And in the fictional world of his third novel, The Deer Park (1955), a Mailer hero does finally emerge. He is one version of an American existentialist who anticipates Mailer's later American existentialist heroes, such as White Negro, Stephen Rojack, D. J., and others. The Deer Park is a crucial book in the process of Mailer's search for a hero who must honestly face the existence of evil in a repressive and totalitarian society and who must also have the potentiality not just to cope with the evil, but to demonstrate creativity, compassion, and a vision for the future. In Deer Park, Mailer reveals that his existentialist vision



has found a fairly complete fictional form to be presented. The reason Mailer finds an ideal fictional form to express his vision is that he wants to explore and define resources and possibilities for his existentialist heroism.

In Deer Park, Mailer has actually created three types of hero: a traditional liberal hero, Charles Eitel; an American existentialist, Marion Faye; a hero-in-training, Sergius O'Shaugnessy. By creating these three heroes, Mailer intends to show: how the traditional liberal hero as a social "snob" cannot transcend the evil of the society but is defeated as he falls back into his old habits, how the existentialist hero asserts his authentic existence by using evil to fight evil, and how the hero-in-training is influenced by both Eitel's existentialist theory and Faye's existentialist action and tries to search for a life style of his own. Jean Radford has made similar observations in her reading of the novel:

There are in fact three heroes to the novel: Eitel the "potential artist" and professional director, Marion Faye the nihilistic pimp and pusher to the film world, and Sergius O'Shaugnessy, the would-be writer and narrator of the novel. . . Faye emerges as the novel's ultimate hero. . .<sup>1</sup>

In Deer Park the American society of the fifties is reflected in the Hollywood world and Mailer wants to expose the roots of the illusion, the degrading influence movies have had on sexuality, and the political power that determines the content of films. Even Barbary Shore, Mailer claims, "is really a Hollywood novel. I think it reflected the impact of Hollywood on me in some subterranean fashion."<sup>2</sup> The impact is most clearly seen in the effect movies and the image of Hollywood have on Guinevere's sexual imagination. There is no way of distinguishing reality from fiction in her stories of her sexual adventures and of the graphic account she gives of the superior physical endowments and bedroom virtuosity of

the men in Hollywood: ". . . the fellows out there really got whangs on them cause they use it so much." In the movie script she is writing there is a doctor who "got the biggest whang on him in the whole town . (BS, p. 46)." Her vulgarity and her sick sexual fantasies mirror a national imagination conceived in the image of Hollywood.

Deer Park is a pleasure garden in the desert, the sexual playground for the matinee idols. After shifting focus again from politics and larger historical currents to sex and the flow of individual psychic history, Mailer finds that the place is an excellent environment in which the contemporary American life is mirrored in the reality of the emotional and sexual perversity of the Hollywood supersexual athletes. The title The Deer Park is explained in an excerpt from Vie Privee Louis XI quoted at the beginning of the novel. Hollywood is the twentieth-century counterpart of the eighteenth-century pleasure palace; and the studio owner, producers, gossip columnists, and hangers-on are the equal of the pimps and madames of Louis XV's France. The evil Louis XV's Deer Park did to the "morals of the people" is matched by the influence Hollywood has on the morals of modern man.

In the Paris Review Interviews Mailer also explains the original inspiration from which The Deer Park grew:

The original title of The Deer Park was The Idol and the Octopus. The book was going to be about Charles Frances Eitel, the Director, and Herman Teppis, the Producer, and the underlying theme was the war between those wished to make an idol out of art, the<sub>3</sub> artists, and the patron who used art for power, the octopus.

In both the original and the final title there is a hint of Mailer's favorite imagery, animal. Like its two predecessors, The Deer Park teems with bestial images; Teppis's son-in-law is named Collie; and Teppis, of course, derives from Octopus. The intent is also similar.

Men, Mailer alleges, have been reduced to a set of conditioned reflexes, dogs made to salivate in response to certain stimuli. In all of Mailer's first three novels the conditioning is a consequence of the pressures society brings to bear upon the individual to conform. The Deer Park is an exploration of the Hollywood Dream-Machine that in Mailer's mind is a key element in the process. The artist, if allowed to follow his instincts, represents some hope of salvation, the restoration through art of human awareness to the pain and anguish of reality. And again, as in the earlier novels, the weight of too many forces, internal and external, turn the artist into a false idol. Aesthetic integrity is compromised by vanity, the need for recognition, venality, and the wish for personal contentment.

The movies are, in Mailer's mind, indisputably the major influence on the modern consciousness, the cultural phenomena more real to the Guineveres than the world they actually inhabit. If art can alter consciousness, then films are the medium for a psychic revolution. However, the cooperation of government and myth makers is so powerful and corrupt that the possibility of the movies becoming an instrument of liberation is non-existent. To be an artist one must be a revolutionary. Mailer demands an either-or: either the artist is a knight of truth in the legions of the rebellious, or he compromises his revolutionary zeal and becomes a lackey, a court jester in a society that will eventually come to despise him. And, ironically, he will come to despise himself as well.

Like Barbary Shore, Deer Park is also an existentialist novel, although hardly the existentialist novel that Barbary Shore is. Mikey Lovett is reincarnated as the narrator Sergius O'Shaugnessy. Mikey was an amnesiac, Sergius is an orphan. But the shift of emphasis is more than biographical. As we first meet Mikey he is estranged from his past

and he subsequently seeks a political identity. As we first meet Sergius he has not enjoyed sexual fulfillment in over a year, and thus in Mailer's terms is estranged from the bodily rhythms; he seeks a quite unpolitical identity, specifically a sexual one. The theme of the search for identity is not the single element Deer Park shares with existentialist fiction. The characters, as Mailer conceives them, are not characters at all, but "beings"--"a being is someone whose nature keeps shifting." According to Mailer, "Everybody in The Deer Park is a being except the minor characters like Herman Teppis."<sup>4</sup> Into the arid landscape of Desert D'Or, populated by alienated "beings," is introduced the theme of Hip and regeneration through sex, the search for the good orgasm. This latter theme is not necessarily the "Sartrean" existentialism, but it does indicate one peculiar quality of Mailer's American existentialist hero.

The action of Deer Park takes place mostly in Desert D'Or, a fictional Palm Springs, California, where the veterans of the Hollywood wars come for rest and rehabilitation. It is a "much more believable metaphor for America than the boarding house in Brooklyn."<sup>5</sup> It is a place built since the Second World War, where "everything is in the present tense (DP, p. 7)"<sup>6</sup> and where everything is other than what it appears to be. The stores, for example, look "like anything but stores":

In those places which sold clothing, no clothing was laid out, and you waited in a modern living room while salesmen opened panels in the wall to exhibit summer suits. . . . There was a jewelry store built like a cabin cruiser; from the street one peeped through a porthole to see a thirty-thousand-dollar necklace hung on the silver antlers of a piece of driftwood. (DP, pp. 7-8.)

And the hotels--the Yacht Club and the Debonair and the Desert D'Or Arms--are not hotels but arrangements (hidden behind elaborately sculpted shrubberies) of carports and swimming pools shaped like free-form coffee

tables and pastel bungalows, all lit up at night by Japanese lanterns strung to the tropical trees. Everything is parched by the searing sun, so that all human activity takes place within the air-conditioned bars and cocktail lounges and nightclubs which are "made to look like a jungle, an underwater grotto, or the lounge of a modern movie theater (DP, p. 9)," in which one never knows whether it is night or day.

It is to this place, wearing his flying wings and first lieutenant's uniform, that Sergius O'Shaugnessy, a young veteran of the Korean War, comes. Sergius is like Lovett in that, lacking a home or family background, he finds himself suspended between past and future, biding his time in Desert D'Or. He has little sense of family heritage: as an orphan, he was reared by Catholic sisters and the son of a would-be actor, sailor, bum, drunk, and anarchist. Even his name, O'Shaugnessy is false, "but something which sounded close to Slovene (DP, p. 22)." Driven by "a desire to be like everybody else, at least everybody who had made it (DP, p. 43)," he boxes his way into an Air Force enlisted man's tournament and on to flying school. The Air Force is his home until after a napalm raid on a village during the Korean War when he sees a Japanese boy in the officers' mess with a burned arm. Suddenly he became aware that he "had busy setting fire to a dozen people, or ten dozen, or had it been a hundred? (DP, p. 44)" He begins to feel alienated from the fliers; his sudden awareness that they burn real people separates him from their ranks: "They were one breed and I was another (DP, p. 45)." He has a mental breakdown, and is consequently rendered sexually impotent by the intensity of his self-disgust. After being discharged from the service, he comes to Desert D'Or. He explains the reason he has come here the following way:

But I was not ready to work; I needed time, and I needed the heat of the sun. I do not know if I can explain that I did not want to feel too much, and I did not want to think. I had the idea that there were two worlds. There was a real world as I called it, a world of wars and boxing clubs and children's homes on back streets, and this real world was a world where orphans burned orphans. It was better not even to think of this. I liked the other world in which almost everybody lived. The imaginary world. (*Italics mine.*) (DP, p. 45.)

All one has to do to avoid the real world is to pretend it isn't there, to manufacture another world by assuming one of the many roles which are readily available--Air Force hero, movie star, bullfighter. Of course, this also requires that one never face himself or ask about the fit of the mask. Sergius has preferred the imaginary world since childhood; he has always been a faker. As a child, he delighted in adventure stories ("it all seemed very true to me"), wore many different names, and felt "like a spy or a fake (DP, pp. 23 & 25)." He actually enjoys giving a false impression: "I was understood to be an Air Force pilot whose family was wealthy and lived in the East, and I even added the detail that I had a broken marriage and drank to get over it (DP, p. 10)." This is another reason that explains his attraction to Desert D'Or and the people who inhabit it. Their business is the manufacture of roles, and they are quite willing to involve Sergius in their version of the imaginary world.

Of the various residents of the resort Sergius shortly meets, it is to the film director Charles Eitel that he finds himself most drawn. Like the pupil-tutor relationship between Lovett and McLeod, Sergius's relation with Eitel is thus built. Eitel is an artist-technician of considerable talent. He is now blacklisted for his refusal to name his former leftist associations to a congressional investigating committee. "He was the only son of an auto dealer in a big Eastern city," as Sergius

tells:

Eitel was the first of his family to go to college. It had been expected he would be a lawyer, but while he was at school he got interested in the theater and quarreled with his parents about his career. By the time he graduated, the argument was settled; his father had lost his money in the Depression. Eitel drifted around New York looking for work. (DP, p. 31.)

His movement to the Hollywood world is smooth and fast. Even "in the worst of the Depression his own career grew. He was hired to put on a play in a government-sponsored project, and it was a success. A lot of people heard his name for the first time. He was a playwright, a director, an actor; he was offered a career in the movies (DP, p. 31)." As an ambitious young director outraged at social injustices, Eitel intended to write the honest script that can really be regarded as art. Telling himself that if he became successful enough he would wield enough power at the studio to make the movies he really wanted to make, Eitel makes a series of bad but successful pictures. But with the growth of his success, his original goals disappear.

Rather than fight for an opportunity to make an artistically uncompromised film, Eitel continues directing films from scripts chosen for him by the studio heads, men with the single purpose of money-making. Along the way he divorces his first wife, who had supported him early in his career and who had introduced him to radical politics. In the course of making Hollywood's sexual rounds he marries and is divorced twice more, his third and most recent failed marriage being with Lulu Meyers, the current Hollywood sex goddess. Having spent nearly twenty years making films for Teppis's Supreme Pictures, and losing all the courage to challenge the static patterns of social expectations, Eitel did make his last attempt to preserve his artistic integrity by refusing to testify to the Subversive Committee. By so doing, he was blacklisted by the movie

industry and out of his job. His struggle to write the script he'd been "saving for years" reminds one of McLeod's decision, after twenty years as a Party bureaucrat, to return to theory. Sergius is attracted to him by the display of talent and promise in his earliest movies and by his agile performance as hostile witness in front of the investigating committee. He is also drawn to Eitel by his magnetic personality and ironically elegant display of self knowledge, something in Eitel which is both attractive and mystifying, for he cannot see how Eitel could "talk about himself so clearly and be able to do nothing with it."

Now, exiled from the film capital, Eitel comes to Desert D'Or to seek a diametrically opposed world to that of Sergius: the real world. Sergius has seen the horrors of the real world and is withdrawing into the fantasy world of Desert D'Or before returning to reality. Eitel's initiation has been purely theoretical; he has not "burned orphans" and is committed to nothing other than his sensual gratification. Refusing to testify makes him an outcast but does not exclude the possibility of his recanting and cooperating even though he knows it will mean again becoming the pimp of Teppis and Supreme Pictures. But there is for both men a series of revelations from which they are able to gain a new level of consciousness, a fresh perception of their place in the real and imaginary worlds that Deer Park contrasts.

Through the affair with Elena Esposita, Eitel gains entrance into the world of orphans. "Without family and without friends," she becomes his mistress. Elena, who has been badly used by many men, is a generous, honest, and sensitive character. She is without any gifts of intellect or refinements of culture, but she has the rare ability to instinctively and quite naturally give herself over completely to love, which is extremely important to Eitel. She has an intuitive understanding of his



every need and she is totally responsive to him. The result of their success in bed gives Eitel new energy and new confidence. He begins to feel that he will now be able to rediscover the talent he had when he was young:

It had happened before. He had had women who gave him their first honest pleasure, and he had taken all the bows for his vanity, but he had never met so royal a flow of taste. It was remarkable how they knew each other's nicety between love-making and extravagance. . . . But Elena carried him to mark above mark. Her face was alive, she was alive, he had never been with anyone who understood him so well. . . . Sex was his dream of bounty, and it nourished him enough to wake up with the hope that this affair could return his energy, flesh his courage, and make him the man he had once believed himself to be. With Elena beside him he thought for the first time in many years that the best thing in the world for him was to make a great movie. (DP, p. 97.)

However, at this point, it should be noted that Eitel and Elena are involved in a relationship which is full of contradictions and complexities, largely the result of the contradictions and complexities in each of them. Eitel's love for Elena is very much based on self-love, for Elena is to bring Eitel, he thinks, the capacity to go on to achieve his ambitions and preserve his artistic integrity. On the other hand, through his own vanity, he cannot tolerate Elena's lack of social grace and vulgarity of her manners. As one of the gossip columns describes their relationship, Eitel is really Pygmalion to Elena. He is not content with her the way she is--she is too inarticulate, she does not perform well with company; he wants to make her his property, something that would be an asset to him. By doing so, he might be destroying what is unique in Elena, her "buried nature", but he is tormented by her "faults, her ignorance, her inability to do anything but mate." As Eitel tells Sergius, he believes that each person has two distinct natures, the "noble savage" and the "snob." The noble savage represents the "buried nature of the individual

which was changed and whipped and trained by everything in life until it was almost dead. Yet if people were lucky, and if they were brave, and sometimes they could find a mate with the same buried nature and that could make them happy and strong. (DP, pp. 106-107.) .

The snob, on the other hand, would fight the individual's effort to discover the buried nature and would do everything possible to kill it.

"The snob could be a tyrant to buried nature (DP, p. 107)." The relationship between Eitel and Elena is a search for their buried nature, yet Eitel's snob keeps interfering.

And Eitel felt changes in his body race beyond the changes in his mind, as though all those nerves and organs which he had tired almost to death were coming back to life, carrying his mind in their path, as if Elena were not only his woman but his balm. He had the hope that he would keep this knowledge of her, that the old snob would not come back to torture him with her little faults. . . (DP, p. 107.)

It is at this point in his writing that Mailer is moving very close to a clear statement of his existentialist theory. What Mailer is looking for is a theory of individual's existence which will incorporate both body and mind, a theory that will demonstrate how the individual can, by becoming sensitive to his body and its needs, move the mind toward an intuitive rapport with the essential nature of the body. In other words, the human emotions can give shape and direction to the individual's thoughts, can give the individual an intellectual understanding of himself that will be true to the mysterious core of his being. Furthermore, this must be achieved not by any external theories, such as psychoanalysis--and indeed Eitel is disturbed to discover that Elena is in analysis because he sees it inconsistent with her character. Rather, this state is achieved through the parallel growth of the body and the mind, for as the former becomes more clearly defined, the latter moves to find the necessary construct to give the individual an understanding of his being and, perhaps, his fate.

Eitel's theory of art is consistent with Mailer's evolving existentialism, too. His one true love, he realizes as he becomes more involved with Elena, is his art. The problem for him has always been that he has been torn between "his desire for power in the world and his desire for power over his work (DP, p. 109)." What Eitel begins to feel is that his desire for power over his work is now more important to him than the other. He can feel this because as his sensitivity to himself develops, he realizes that he must capture this new life and gain control over it. And the way to do this is through his mind, through his art. He begins a script that he hopes will transform his life into an "imperishable" work of art and at the same time gain him re-entry into the inner circle of influential directors. As we can see, even as he thinks this, he is thinking that a success in his art will lead him back into some power in the world.

However, the script Eitel begins to write goes stale on him as his affair with Elena sours. She does not automatically transform herself into a "wise mistress" and, to torment him more, begins to participate in orgies. Elena chooses the opposite course he had selected for her. When their relationship is from bad to worse, his sense of inadequacy is growing and he feels that he may never regain the power over his work. His failure mainly lies in his cowardice, not to delve deep into himself. The financial and social pressures upon him are not the real reasons for his surrender. His first appearance before the committee had been, in a sense, an empty gesture, the futile assertion of an integrity which he had already lost. He had already sold out too often in countless small ways; now he finds that he cannot write the honest script he had always wanted to. His years of shallow success have killed his ability to create the art which he still believes in. His affair with Elena is too short

to eradicate the deep-rooted "snob" in him.

By now, Elena is no longer an asset to Eitel; but instead, she is just in his way and he starts to work out a plan to get rid of her. When she sees what is happening to him and makes it clear that she understands and says that she will go when he wants her to go, Eitel, still admiring the noble savage in her, is torn apart by the conflict between his cowardice and cruelty and his continuing desire for her and even love for her.

Finally, she had gained his respect, and he could never explain it to her. With numb fingers he touched her foot. The essence of spirit, thought to himself, was to choose the thing which did not better one's position but made it more perilous. That was why the world he knew was poor, for it insisted morality and caution were identical. He was so completely of that world, and she was not. . . . For that minute and for another minute he loved her as he had never loved anyone, loved her he knew that he dare not love her. Young as she was, he had heard experience in her voice which was beyond his own experience, and so if he stayed with her, he would be obliged to travel in her directions, and he had been fleeing that for all of his life. (DP, p. 220.)

At this point Eitel begins to realize that he is at best a commercial artist doing formula work with cynical speed and that he would never be the artist he always expected, "for the one quality above all others in an artist" is a "sense of shame, or sickness, and of loathing for any work which was not his best." His past erased, the present blunted, and the future eroded, Eitel no longer masquerades as an artist and comes to understand himself and the snob he actually is. He makes a deal with his old studio, commercializes his script, recants before the Subversive Committee and returns to his old life. He has thus achieved power over the world, but he has forsaken forever the chance to have power over his work. He is moving back inexorably into the imaginary world of Hollywood and to all his old familiar habits. As he tells Sergius, he also knows all the while that his surrender to the world of Herman Teppis proves him to

have lost the final desire of the artist, the desire which tells us that when all else is lost, when love is lost and adventure, pride of self, and pity, there still remains that world we may create, more real to us, more real to others than the mummery of what happens passes, and is gone. (DP, p. 235.)

For Mailer, Eitel is finally a traditional liberal hero who at last still conforms to the social norms of his age. But he has failed to realize his theory. He has also failed to renew the courage to live by the imperatives of instinctive self. The only virtue Eitel has is that he understands fully what he has done, and he has been honest with Sergius who can learn his lesson from Eitel's failure.

If Sergius is looking toward Eitel as a possible heroic model, the foil for the values he has intended to represent but has eventually sold out is Marion Faye. Faye is the first introduction into Mailer's fiction of a form of the American existentialist hero. First of all, Faye attempts to reject both the imaginary world of success and comfort and the real world of pain and compassion, but to explore the depth of feeling and the relationship between the sensations and the mind much further than any of the other characters dare in Deer Park. Faye's vision is nihilistic and apocalyptic: nihilistic in the sense of repudiating, like Nietzsche, his "civilized" or Christian self; apocalyptic in his prediction of a great final cataclysm. Faye is a Hipster, a rebel artist, a psychopathic philosopher. For him the whole world is "bullshit."

You take two people living together. Cut away all the propaganda. It's dull. The end. So you go the other direction. You find a hundred chicks, you find two hundred. It gets worse than dull. It makes you sick. I swear you start thinking of using a razor. I mean, that's it. . . screwing the one side, pain the other side. Killing. The whole world is bullshit. That's why people want a dull life. (DP, p. 20.)

When Sergius asks him what all this leads him to, Faye is unable to answer. Yet, with the Hipster's instinct, he makes his living as a pimp.

Begotten by an unknown, "passing European prince" but brought up with the name of O'Faye, a vaudeville hoofter, who "would never marry a girl who carried his own child (DP, p. 16)," Marion Faye (as a boy he had dropped the "O") never knows his real father. Between Faye and his "nominal father, there was nothing at all (DP, p. 17)." His mother, Dorothea O'Faye, "had been a call girl, a gossip columnist, a celebrity, a failure (DP, p. 11)," who now presides over a big house which is called The Hangover in Desert D'Or. When Sergius meets Faye the first time, Faye is twenty-four and is someone "very special."

Slim, tight-knit, with light wavy hair and clear gray eyes, he could have looked a choir boy, I suppose, if it had not been for his expression. He had an arrogance which was made up of staring at you, measuring your value, and deciding you weren't there. At the present time he was living in Desert D'Or, but not at his mother's house. They got along too badly for that, and besides his occupation would have interfered. He was a pimp. (DP, p. 17.)

In Faye's eye, all these people--the old lecher and ruthless tycoon, Herman Teppis; his clever, grasping huckster of a son-in-law, Collie Munshin; the sexual goddess Lulu Meyers; even, one suspects, his own mother--are a whole gang of "snobs," in the debased and villainous society. As Nathan Scott, Jr. noted, "For it is this young pimp who sees, with a burning clarity, the essential decadence not just of Desert D'Or and the 'capital' in the background but, more significantly, of the larger American reality of which he considers the Hollywood scene to be the most revealing symbol."<sup>7</sup>

In his efforts to find meaning to existence in such a society, Faye pursues any situation that aids him in killing his compassion for men and even his fear for his own life. He lives perilously but not to grow better as Eitel insists, but rather to purge himself of all pity for the great mass of "snobs. . . who always think what they have to think (DP,

p. 128)." Everything he does is done precisely because it is repugnant to him, and he believes that "there is no pleasure greater than that obtained from a conquered repugnance (DP, p. 127)." When he is talking about his cruelty to Teddy Pope, a leading star in the movies but a notorious homosexual, he explains to Sergius:

Cruelty, yes. That's where I dig being homo. You see, cruelty is repugnant to me. When I tell Pope he's disgusting and repulsive, and all he wants is for me to give him the time of day because he's willing to do all the loving, deep down he's nothing but a sweet little flower waiting to be stomped, well at times like that I have to force myself to be cruel, but afterward I feel fine. Almost, that is. I've never made it all the way, not in anything in life. (DP, pp. 127-28.)

In response to Faye's explanation, Sergius appraises, "'you're just a religious man turned inside out.'" Faye reluctantly accepts the label and several nights later returns with a dictum of nihilistic extremes:

Nobility and vice--they're the same thing. It just depends on the direction you're going. You see, if ever make it, then I turn around and go the other way. Toward nobility. That's all right. Just so you carry it to the end. (DP, p. 128.)

In this sense, Faye is saint turned upside down whose strategy for heroism in a rotten world is to defend himself against evil by converting himself into a creature of evil. He is not naturally cruel but forces himself to be repugantly vicious by cultivating "the arts of sadism and debauchery,"<sup>8</sup> By so doing, he may assert his existentialism; and he may also pursue the absolute experience. It does not matter what the experience is so long as it is a total and extreme confrontation, something that will call forth all his courage and all his will power. He prepares himself for the right moment by challenging Eitel to take one of his girls, on the grounds that Eitel has lost his courage. Then he mistreats the girl Eitel has spent an evening with by forcing her to give up her illusion that Eitel loves her. In the end he is sorry that he did not really drive the lesson home by sleeping with her himself. Thinking about his

reluctance to sleep with her, he recognizes that people are vain and thus incapable of being honest:

Suddenly he decides to be without pride. He could do it. He could be impregnable if sex was of disinterest to him and that was how to be superior to everybody else. That was the secret to life. It was all upside down, and you had to turn life on its head to see it straight. (DP, p. 135.)

Faye is in every way possible to fight all compassionate impulses, because he wants to see the world cleansed of all sentimentality and himself purged all his own feeling of pity and guilt for others. Immediately after what Faye has expressed in the foregoing quotation, the heroin addict Paco comes to him for a fix. He refuses him, and then reflects:

There was no pressure in all the world like the effort to beat off compassion. Faye knew all about compassion. It was the worst of the vices. . . . It was fear, it was guilt; once you knew that guilt was the cement of the world, there was nothing to it; you could own the world or spit at it. But first you had to get rid of your own guilt, and to do that you had to kill compassion. (DP, p. 138.)

After this episode Faye drives out into the desert. However, he discovers that he has not killed his compassion for he "burned for that sad pimply slob" of an addict. If he cannot wipe away his pity, then he cannot isolate himself from the rest of mankind who are plagued by guilt. He can only hope for the destruction of the world and of all the snobs and the words with which they hide the real world. Standing in the desert, facing the sun rising over the atomic bomb testing site, Faye begs God for the apocalypse:

So let it come, Faye thought, let this exploding come, and then another, and all the others, until the Sun God burned the earth. Let it come, he thought, looking into the east at Mecca where the bombs ticked while he stood on a tiny rise of ground trying to see one hundred, two hundred, three hundred miles across the desert. Let it come, Faye begged, like a man praying for rain, let it come and clear the rot and the stench and the stink, let it come for all of everywhere, just so it comes and the world stands clear in the white dead dawn. (DP, p. 139.)



The test of Faye's effort at purging himself of compassion and guilt reaches the climax when he takes advantage of Eitel and Elena's separation to induce her into living with him. The relationship extends the idea implicit in the relationship between Elena and Eitel, because Elena is so sensitive at this point that she is on the verge of a breakdown or even suicide and Faye is determined to push himself all the way into vice by which he means a complete conquest of all compassion. Unlike Eitel, Faye is the artist who has the courage to find power over his work, largely because he realizes that if he achieves power over his work then he has achieved power over the world. He thinks of himself as a priest and Elena as his nun whom he will convert into a witch; in other words he will be a black priest.

He made up stories in his mind, novels, volumes, drawing on himself the anguish of the priest who begs God to let the devils enter him in order that he alone be burned in Hell so that the others, the nuns, the parish, the castle, the country, indeed the world be spared. Father Marion has been praying for this, he would think, and all the while he prays, what does he do? It is so little and yet he is so damned, . . . and stealing from the most devoted Sister, the purest, the most spiritual, her devotion itself, so that she loves not God but Father Marion, carnally, insanely, and even this is good, he will tell her, for the body and the soul are separate, and to be pure one must seek out sin itself, mire the body in offal so the soul may be elevated. (DP, p. 280.)

What Faye feels he must do is compel Elena to despise her body and her emotions, to separate her feelings from her intellectual understanding of herself. He would, in other words, do the opposite of what they both believe. He would play the classical Christian who believes the body and the soul are separate and thus try to destroy the body, rather than helping her fulfill her own noble savage. He sets out to drive her to suicide by destroying her sense for herself, by destroying her only means of understanding her life. To do this, he inverts the traditional roles of God

and the Devil, replacing it with the heresy of God as the Devil in banishment, "and God who was the Devil had conquered except for the few who saw the cheat, that God was not God at all. So he prayed, 'Make me cold, Devil, and I will run the world in your name,' (DP, p. 281)"

Nevertheless, while he is praying for the strength to do this and hoping that when Elena dies she will ask God to forgive Faye because "he is a saint in Hell," he is afraid that God will desert him in Hell as the ultimate punishment, for he has fallen from Grace and wished damnation upon God. And partially moved by the new warmth Elena gives him, in his preparation for his task, a refrain runs through his head:

"It's bullshit, it's all bullshit. Cut the bullshit. Cut it dead," as if indeed his thought had become needles to probe the Sorcerer in him, and when the dot of his brain was found where the needle entered without pain, then he was damned, he was discovered. Or was he freed? (DP, p. 281.)

Obviously he is not freed. Moving in directions he had not anticipated, "to his horror and to his pride he came to understand himself at a moment his body curled next to hers, seeking warmth on the chill of his limbs (DP, p. 281)." In his last effort to achieve an "experience beyond experience," he sets out to force her to kill herself by, first exhausting "her energy, her pleasure itself, and she would be left with nothing (DP, p. 284)." But finally he has failed, because even though he drove Elena to begin to commit suicide (he put the pills in her hand and challenged her), she could not bring herself to do it, and so life conquers death.

Ironically, it is Marion Faye who is ultimately converted by Elena. Against his will, compassion for her springs to life from some hidden corner of his mind, "alive but not alive." During her abortive suicide Faye feels remorse at having instigated her into taking poison. He is relieved when he finds she has not taken the pills and knows that "he was defeated. He could not help it--he had his drop of mercy after all (DP,

p. 290)." He is defeated because his choice is primarily an overly rationalistic one that belies his own existentialist vision: he is forcing himself to a direction opposite to the one he knows is true. The final emergence of Faye's compassion for Elena and for all the helpless "orphans" like her demonstrates that he is not just a pure thinking but a feeling creature who is able, unlike Croft, to balance his emotions and mind. His hatreds, fears, and sadistic acts are measures employed to let him descend to the very heart of darkness; and in this way one may "push to the end. . . and come out--he did not know where, but there was experience beyond experience, there was something. Of that, he was certain (DP, p. 286)." Thus it is Faye, the American existentialist, not Eitel, the traditional liberal, who teaches Sergius by example that

Finally one must do, simply do, for we act in total ignorance and yet in honest ignorance we must act, or we can never learn for we can hardly believe what we are told, we can only measure what has happened inside ourselves. (DP, p. 277.)

Sergius has come to a realization of this kind only after his observation of Eitel's loss of nerve for the existential demands of love and art and his falling back on tricks and compromises of the sake of security. But Faye, man of ever-present rebelliousness and defiant action, shows quite a contrast. Even Elena, by instinct, can tell (in her letter to Eitel): "But this I do know, at least there's something doing with Marion, he's not a coward and a snob like you (DP, p. 269)." At Desert D'Or, Sergius's experiences parallel those of Eitel's. While Eitel intends to regain his artistic integrity by writing an honest script, Sergius wishes to be a writer of creative originality by living at first in the imaginary world of the Hollywood resort.

Like the Eitel-Elena relationship, Sergius has an affair with Lulu Meyers, Supreme Pictures' great siren, vacationing in Desert D'Or at the

time of Sergius's arrival. This is particularly significant because his early thoughts about Lulu concern her legs which he remembers seeing in pin-up pictures at every base he had ever visited. Thus, his affair with her is really an affair with himself. In a different context, describing his love-making with Elena, Eitel describes himself similarly: "'The onanist at heart,' he had thought (of himself) and made love to a woman with care enough to have made love to himself (DP, p. 97)." As though to confirm this similarity Sergius reports his enthusiasm after he has made love to Lulu the first time. He compares the experience to taking off on a mission in the pre-dawn hours.

When the morning came to meet us five miles high in the air with the night clouds warmed by a gold and silver light, I used to believe I could control the changes of the sky by a sway of my body as it was swelled by the power of the plane, and I had played with magic. (DP, p. 85.)

In other words, Sergius is regaining his sense of power from making love to Lulu. He feels his pride returning; he feels that he is overcoming his isolation and is playing a role in the world.

Then I could feel her as something I had conquered, could listen to her wounded breathing, and believing that no matter how she acted other times, these moments were Lulu, as if her flesh murmured words more real than her lips. To the bigger pride of knowing that I took her with the cheers of millions behind me. Poor millions with their low roar! They would never have what I had now. They could shiver outside, making a shine in their office desk or on the shelf of their olive-drab lockers, they could look at the pin-up picture of Lulu Meyers. I knew I was good when I carried a million men on my shoulder. (DP, p. 85.)

But, Lulu is a woman who loves movies; and stardom sustains her. Leaving a party at four in the morning, she is besieged by autograph seekers. Their adulation feeds her ego: "Isn't this a wonderful life?" she remarks. Her career comes first, before any human considerations, such as her love for Sergius. Therefore, even though it is with her that Sergius recovers his sexual potency, she is, as Nathan Scott, Jr. has

observed, not to be thought of as exemplifying any redemptive principle.

For she is the quintessential embodiment in the novel of the spangled speciousness distinguishing the society which is here being analyzed, this dimpled blonde with her throaty voice and little turned-up nose who is, in every aspect of her personality, a creature of the mass media.<sup>9</sup>

In this sense, Lulu is another Guinevere, but not another Elena. Sergius further tells us, when they were together in a restaurant,

It always seemed to her as if the conversation at another table was more interesting than what she heard at her own. She had the worry that she was missing a word of gossip, a tip, a role in a picture, a financial transaction, a . . . it did not matter; something was happening somewhere else, something of importance, something she could not afford to miss. Therefore, eating with her was like sleeping with her; if one was cut by the telephone, the other was rubbed by her itch to visit from table to table. . . (DP, p. 121.)

She is also convinced that her breasts will droop as she grows older, and so she insists that Sergius be careful when he touches them. In Deer Park, she is the consummate narcissist and the perfected sex-object, whose entire existence is a ceremony performed before mirrors. Lulu is thus presented "as a symbol for how the film world uses women, as both bait and victim."<sup>10</sup>

After recognizing how hypocritical and self-deceptive Lulu and the others are, how inept the wavering Eitel is, Sergius experiences the sexual wasteland without deluding himself and decides to turn down the opportunity, offered by Collie Munshin, to star in a movie about his life in Air Force. He finally opts for the real world that Eitel advises him to enter but the director himself is unable to:

"So, do try Sergius," . . . "try for the other world, the real world, where orphans burn orphans and nothing is more difficult to discover than a simple fact. And with the pride of the artist, you must blow against the walls of every power that exists, the small trumpet of your defiance. (DP, p. 318.)

It is a hard decision for Sergius: the depth of his fear of the real

world is made clear by the impotence which plagues him after his release from the Air Force. But after going through all sorts of traumas, temptations, sexual gratifications, and psychic twists, he does come through to freedom and now sounds more like Faye than Eitel:

For I touched the bottom myself, there was a bottom that time. I returned to it, I wallowed in it, I looked at myself, and the longer I looked the less terrifying it became and the more understandable. I began then to make those first painful efforts to acquire the most elusive habit of all, the mind of the writer, and though I could hardly judge from my early pages whether I were a talent or a fool, I continued, I went on for a while, until I ended with an idea that. . . finally one must do, simply do. . . (DP, p. 277.)

Sergius now also understands what Eitel once said that the "law of life so cruel and so just which demanded that one must grow or pay more for remaining the same (DP, p. 294)." To remain the same is to accept the world of "morality and caution," or the world of false values, complacency, snobbery, and the imaginary world in which Eitel has ironically always remained. Yet, the true artist must be, like Faye, anti-social without denying himself the inspiration a "good time" gives his creative powers:

For do we not gamble our way to the heart of the mystery against all the power of good manners, good morals, the fear of germs, and the sense of sin? Not to mention the prison of pain, the wading pools of pleasure, and the public and professional voices of our sentimental land. If there is a God, and sometimes I believe there is one, I'm sure He says, "Go on, my boy, I don't know that I can help you, but we wouldn't want all these people to tell you what to do. (DP, p. 318.)

The novel ends with Sergius asking God:

"Would you agree that sex is where philosophy begins?" But God, who is the oldest of the philosophers, answers in His weary cryptic way, "Rather think of Sex as Time, and Time as the connection of new circuits." (DP, p. 318.)

Although the answer is enigmatic, it opens up directions Mailer will follow in his later writing. Time is the embodiment and a necessary cause of being, of active, vital being in both an historical and a

personal sense. And the basic, truest instincts of a being are those of the flesh. In denying sex man alienates himself from himself. To be reborn into authenticity, man begins with the mysteries of sex and the natural compassions that spring from the most elemental of all relationships, sensual love. Time thus takes a human, existential meaning, in which a person chooses significantly between new experiences and the stultifying habits of his past.

The imaginary dialogue between Sergius and God is revealing in indicating where he should direct his positive commitment. As a hero-in-training, Sergius is one who is much stronger, more courageous and dedicated than Lovett was at the end of Barbary Shore. The hope Sergius possesses is not muted but promising and realizable. By assimilating Eitel's existentialist theory and following the example set by Faye, Sergius will eventually become another exemplar of new values in action, that is, another American existentialist hero of a kind. In Deer Park, Mailer's version of American existentialism is presented in a compelling form within a fully developed fictional context. Sex--"good orgasm"--is existentially related to the creative powers of a being. A considerable critical emphasis has been focused on the essay "The White Negro" that has neglected to examine the circumstances that prompted Mailer to write it, even though "The White Negro" does theoretically mark a turning point for Mailer's thinking. The generative sources for many of the controlling ideas and metaphors in Mailer's later work are from both "The White Negro" and The Deer Park.

Advertisements for Myself

By the time of the publication of The Deer Park (1955), Mailer has finally found the right character to embody his version of American existentialism and his unyielding search for a hero has ultimately resulted in the creation of Marion Faye as his incipient American existentialist hero. As Robert Solotaroff has recently noted, "Though the book ends with Sergius's supposed regeneration, Faye unmistakably emerges as the novel's ultimate adventurer and actual hero." "Perhaps the most important way," he continues, "that The Deer Park marks a watershed in Mailer's career is . . . at pressing onward with a character who is best or driven to test the extremes of experience, with an adventurer who would be considered psychopathic in his disregard for conventional morality,"<sup>11</sup> As a matter of fact, Faye is not only "psychopathic in his disregard for conventional morality," he also "has settled the new direction of purposeful, as opposed to purposeless, death."<sup>12</sup> And it is Faye, too, "who closely conforms to Mailer's anatomy of the white Negro several years later."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it is Faye who "pinpoints the link between The Deer Park and 'The White Negro.'"<sup>14</sup>

Most Mailer critics agree that "The White Negro" is indisputably the heart of Advertisements for Myself (1959). For instance, while Nathan Scott, Jr. considers the essay "one of the most crucial statements of Mailer's career,"<sup>15</sup> Richard Foster regards it as "a paradigm of the vision, the ideas, the motifs and symbols that will shape all of Mailer's future work in whatever form."<sup>16</sup> Even Laura Adams thinks that the whole book of Advertisements is Mailer's "literary manifesto," which "is a dramatic account of the manner in which the man and the style come together, and of the potential released by the synthesis," she still believes that the



"essay is certainly the ideological core of Advertisements. . ."17 In discussing Mailer's heroism and heroes, "The White Negro" takes on a further special significance. With the appearance of "The White Negro" in 1957, not only has Mailer formulated his existentialist position and laid the theoretical foundation for it, but also has set the white Negro as the model of his American existentialist hero, to be imitated to make "a revolution in the consciousness of our time." In my examination of Advertisements I shall concentrate on the essay and the short story "The Time of Her Time," one of Mailer's best short stories, with the re-emergence of Sergius O'Shaugnessy as the regenerated existentialist hero both in thought and life style.

In order to distinguish his version of American existentialism from the European existentialism, Mailer calls his own the philosophy of Hip, or Hipsterism. Before the forthcoming "The White Negro," in one of the Village Voice columns, "The Hip and the Square," Mailer divides American society into two classes: the Hip and the Square. The Square's distinguishing trait is his anality. In the unending war between the two factions, the Square is preeminent for he is mass man in mass society; his ethos is preached by the media, government, the technologist and the corporation. Driven by anxieties formed by his anti-eroticism, he is a neurotic becoming more neurotic as he constantly must suppress and sublimate his sensuality to the demands of civilization. The Square drives the Hipster underground, is jealous of him and his liberated sexual life style, and to justify himself, pursues the Hipster, censors him, and whenever possible, eliminates his threat by assimilating him into the Square world. Dominated by people of this kind, the society, Mailer warns, is running away from its true nature, its biological reality:

. . . the shits are killing us, even as they kill themselves-- each day a few more lies eat into the seed with which we are born, little institutional lies from the print of newspapers, the shock wave of television, as the sentimental cheats of the movie screen. Little lies, but they pipe us toward insanity as they starve out the senses of the real. We have grown up in a world more in decay than the worst of the Roman Empire, a cowardly world chasing after a good time (of which last one can approve) but chasing it without the courage to pay the hard price of full consciousness, and so losing pleasure in pips and squeaks of anxiety. We want the heat of the orgy and not its murder, the warmth of pleasure without the grip of pain, and therefore the future threatens a nightmare, and we continue to waste ourselves. (ADV, p. 21.)

The Republic, Mailer insists, is in genuine danger, in peril of becoming a nation of "drug addicts, homosexuals, hoodlums," and juvenile delinquents led by effeminate politicians and all rushing into cancer.

It is against the Square and his society that Mailer began to formulate his theory on the Hipster and his life style, thereby he was provided the concrete image to embody his existentialist anti-social convictions and rebellious impulses. Norman Podhoretz's observation is certainly valid when he states:

The Hipster is the product of a culture (exemplified beautifully in the Hollywood of The Deer Park) whose official values no longer carry any moral authority, and he reacts to the hypocrisy, the lying, and the self-deception that have contaminated the American air during the cold-war period by withdrawing into a private world of his own where everything, including language,<sup>18</sup> is stripped down to what he considers the reliable essentials.

Mailer identifies Hipsterism as an American existentialism "based on a mysticism of the flesh," its origins

traced back into all the undercurrents and underworlds of American life, back into the instinctive apprehension and appreciation of existence which one finds in Negro and the soldier, in the criminal psychopath and the dope addict and jazz musician, in the prostitute, in the actor, in the--in the marriage of the call-girl and the psychoanalyst. Unlike the rationality of French existentialism in the work of Sartre, Hip is an American phenomenon. . . (ADV, pp. 292-93.)

At this point, Mailer may identify the Hip as "an American phenomenon" which has nothing to do with the French branch of existentialism. But

in another place, he also makes clear that in writing "The White Negro" he is not discussing negritude per se, or even discussing Hip exclusively, but mainly expressing his conceptualized model of the American existentialist hero.

We might begin with one of Mailer's statements of commitment to the existentialist philosophy in the American situation:

Death, despair, and dread, intimation of nothingness, the mystery of mood, and the logic of commitment have been the central preoccupations of the existentialists. In this country, there has been a tendency to add our American obsession with courage and sex. These concerns are the no-man's-land of philosophy. Insubstantial, novelistic, too intimate for the coiled cosmological speculation of metaphysics, irrational and alien to the classical niceties of ethics, utter anathema to the post-Logical Positivists of Oxford, existentialism remains nonetheless the one non-sterile continuation open to modern philosophy, for it is the last of the humanisms, it has not given its unconditional surrender to science. (PP, p. 197.)

In the essay itself, besides the ideas of courage and sex that have been added as the qualities of the white Negro, the other main points are still closely related, or, to put it more accurately, indebted, to the European existentialism. The essay opens with an existentialist survey of the human conditions of post World War II society, a series of images of the crippled condition of the twentieth-century man whose only reality is death and whose only response to it is no more than fear, anxiety, and apathy.

Probably, we will never be able to determine the psychic havoc of the concentration camps and the atom bomb upon the unconscious mind of almost everyone alive in these years. For the first time in civilized history, perhaps for the first time in all of history, we have been forced to live with the suppressed knowledge that the smallest facets of our personality of the most minor projection of our ideas, or indeed the absence of ideas and the absence of personality could mean equally well that we might still be doomed to die as a cipher in some vast statistical operation in which our teeth would be counted, and our hair would be saved, but our death itself would be unknown, unhonored, and unremarked, a death which could not follow with dignity as a possible consequence to serious actions we had chosen, but

rather a death by deus ex machina in a gas chamber or a radioactive city; and so if in the midst of civilization founded upon the Faustian urge to dominate nature by mastering time, mastering the links of social cause and effect--in the middle of an economic civilization founded upon the confidence that time could indeed be subjected to our will, our psyche was subjected itself to the intolerable anxiety that death being causeless, life was causeless as well, and time deprived of cause and effect had come to a stop. (ADV, pp. 311-12.)

It is especially interesting to read this paragraph together with the first paragraph of William Barrett's Irrational Man: A Study in Existentialism (1958), which appeared almost in the same year as Mailer's "The White Negro." The first chapter, "The Advent of Existentialism," opens as follows:

The story is told (by Kierkegaard) of the absent-minded man so abstracted from his own life that he hardly knows he exists until, one fine morning, he wakes up to find himself dead. It is a story that has a special point today, since this civilization of ours has at last got its hands on weapons with which it could easily bring upon itself the fate of Kierkegaard's hero: we could wake up tomorrow morning dead--and without ever having touched the roots of our own existence. There is by this time widespread anxiety and even panic over the dangers of the atomic age; but the public soul-searching and stocktaking rarely, if ever, go to the heart of the matter. We do not ask ourselves what the ultimate ideas behind our civilization are that have brought us into this danger; we do not search for the human face behind the bewildering array of instruments that man has forged; in a word, we do not dare to be philosophical. Uneasy as we are over the atomic age, on the crucial question of existence itself we choose to remain as absent-minded as the man in Kierkegaard's story. . . .<sup>19</sup>

Between these two opening paragraphs, the similarities are extremely striking and the feelings behind are exactly the same; what most bothers modern man, in the aftermath of the war, is the "intolerable anxiety that death being causeless, life was causeless as well." It is the mass violence and moral atrocities that have deprived the man of the meaning of his existence but reduced him to nothingness. It is on such a bleak scene that the American existentialist, the hipster, appears. Living with the constant threat of death by atomic war or state, he chooses "to

live with death as immediate danger, to divorce [himself] from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self (ADV, p. 313)." We see here the familiar existentialist theme of courage and choice in the face of nothingness by accepting the reality of death. Among the European existentialists, Karl Jaspers has said that "to philosophize is to learn how to die."<sup>20</sup> Heidegger, as has been shown, insists that authentic existence is possible for one only when one takes one's death into oneself. As written in Chapter One:

Though terrifying, the taking of death into ourselves is also liberating: It frees us from servitude to the petty cares that threaten to engulf our daily life and thereby opens us to the essential projects by which we can make our lives personally and significantly our own. Heidegger calls this the condition of "freedom-toward-death."

For Mailer, the American existentialist, white Negro, is also one who lives in the "enormous present which is without past or future, memory or planned intention, the life where a man must go until he is beat (ADV, p. 313)." He must encourage the psychopath in himself. In doing so he calls upon all his energy and all his courage which, because he exists outside the society, might enable him to increase his "power for new kinds of perceptions (ADV, p. 313)." This liberty frees one from "the prison air of other people's habits, other people's defeats, boredom, quiet desperation, and muted icy self-destroying rage (ADV, p. 313)." Mailer thinks that there is no other avenue which will open the creative potential of the unconscious.

The American existentialist, like the European existentialist thinkers, rejects a priori definitions of human nature. He differs from "the passing verbal whimsies of the bohemian" by having

no interest in viewing human nature, or better, in judging human nature, from a set of standards conceived a priori to the experience, standards inherited from the past. Since Hip sees every answer as posing immediately a new alternative, a new question, its emphasis is on complexity rather than simplicity. (ADV, p. 326.)

It follows, therefore, that "men are not seen as good or bad (that they are good-and-bad is taken for granted) but rather each man is glimpsed as a collection of possibilities (ADV, p. 327)." This recalls the distinction Mailer draws between "characters," and the "beings" who inhabit in his The Deer Park. At this point, Mailer's formulation corresponds to Sartre's theory, even though he does not accept Sartre's atheism, that a man is a being-toward-the-future who creates himself through his own acts. As Sartre has repeatedly emphasized, "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism."<sup>21</sup>

Again, like Sartre, Mailer, for all his insistence on individualism, insists on seeing man in a situation. There is no constant self since the self is constantly creating itself act by act. The self is no solid identity, but a series of "intentions," as Sartre would have it, upon the material around it. Nor is there a determinism controlling the individual. A man is best seen as the chemistry created between the intention of the self and the dominating situation. Barrett, writing specifically of Heidegger, calls this the "Field Theory of Man."<sup>22</sup> Mailer describes it this way:

Hip sees the context as generally dominating the man, dominating him because his character is less significant than the context in which he must function. Since it is arbitrarily five times more demanding of one's energy to accomplish even an inconsequential action in an unfavorable context than a favorable one, man is then 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. (ADV, p. 327.)

Since the success of any individual will depend more upon the context than upon his character, thus making the individual character dependent to a large degree upon the various contexts in which he lives. What results is "an absolute relativity where there are no truths other than the isolated truths of what each observer feels at each instant of his existence (ADV, p. 327)." Just as the nature of an individual to the intention and the situation of the moment, so is the nature of truth relative to the experience of the moment. Furthermore, truth is not revealed by man, it is "a changing reality whose laws are remade at each instant. . .

truth is not what one has felt yesterday or what one expects to feel tomorrow but rather truth is no more nor less than what one feels at each instant in the perpetual climax of the present. (ADV, p. 327.)

What all this means is of course what Mailer has again and again stated: the individual is encouraged to liberate himself "from the Super-Ego of the society (ADV, p. 327)."

Given the absence of a transcendent Truth and left with the truth of the "enormous present," the American existentialist inherited from the rhythms of Negro marginal life a "morality of the bottom (ADV, p. 322)" in which "all situations are equally valid (ADV, p. 321)."

The only Hip morality (but of course it is an ever-present morality) is to do what one feels whenever and wherever it is possible, and--this is how the war of the Hip and the Square begins--to be engaged in one primal battle: to open the limits of the possible for oneself, for oneself alone, because that is one's need. (ADV, p. 327.)

The morality of the bottom is mainly based on the experience of the Negro in the cultural situation of America. As Mailer puts it:

Hated from the outside and therefore hating himself, the Negro was forced into the position of exploring all those moral wilderness of civilized life which the Square automatically condemns as delinquent or evil or immature or morbid or self-destructive or corrupt. (ADV, p. 321.)

By developing such a moral principle, the American existentialist protects himself against self-destruction and handles a language and art based on the choices one makes about using energy. The choices are good when one feels that he has moved closer to a knowledge of the unconscious self; they are bad when one is further from that knowledge than before the act. Each good act accumulates more energy (self-awareness) to achieve a greater self-fulfillment the next time. When one is in total command of a situation one will communicate the total self, one will be "with it."

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 Reichians' 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. (ADV, pp. 324-25.)

What is revealed in this quotation is not just one's communication with the total self, it also identifies the sole source of one's energy from which he may achieve such a communication. It has been labeled in various ways; but actually it is nothing but "the unachievable whisper of mystery within sex," which is to be brought out by the "apocalyptic orgasm."

So far, most of the qualities of Mailer's American existentialism, as has been examined, are inherently part of European existentialism. What might be claimed the peculiarly outstanding in his version is his strong advocacy of sexuality and violence, violence on the individual basis, to be assimilated in the life style of his American existentialist hero. Since the hero, the hipster, is conceived in a time of war, the war against all the pressures of a technocratic society that are calculated to obliterate any sense of the sanctity of the private self, his instincts



are his means of survival and his chief weapon. As Jean Radford has pointed out, "The orgasm is celebrated by the hipster because it is the highest point, the epitome of the life of the instincts which the State has not yet brought under its control. . . ."23 So, when the hero seeks love, he seeks it not

as the search for a mate, but love as the search for an orgasm more apocalyptic than the one which preceded it. Orgasm is his therapy--he knows at the seed of his being that good orgasm opens his possibilities and bad orgasm imprisons him. (ADV, p. 321.)

For the particular part of orgasm, Mailer is directly influenced by his reading Wilhelm Reich, especially by the book The Function of Orgasm. According to Reich, the "energy" which nourishes neurotic symptoms and destructive attitudes can be adequately discharged only in fully satisfactory sexual intercourse. A person with a genital character, unlike the neurotic, possesses "orgastic potency." This Reich defines as "the capacity of surrender to the flow of energy in the orgasm without any inhibitions; the capacity for complete discharge of all dammed-up sexual excitation through involuntary pleasurable contractions. . . free of anxiety and unpleasure and unaccompanied by phantasies. . . ."24

But for the treatment of sexuality in general, the existentialist thinkers have their insights which Mailer could have taken into consideration, too. For the existentialists, John Macquarrie wrote:

The ecstatic character of the sexual act points to the central existential role of the body in sex, for ecstasis is "ex-sistence," the going out of oneself. In the sexual relation the individual goes out from himself to the other in a unity of being-with-the-other. The sex act is not only ecstatic, it is also total. . . . Sex is thus an attempt at a total sharing of being. If Berdyaev is right (as I believe he is) in insisting that human sexuality is not just a biological function but has its inescapable ontological dimension, then even so-called "casual" acts of sex cannot be regarded as merely peripheral to existence but are to affect the persons concerned quite deeply; for in them too

something of the totality of being-with-the-other is expressed, however badly.<sup>25</sup>

It is in the sense of "a total sharing of being" through sex that Mailer's hero is widening his own possibilities widens then "reciprocally for others as well, so that the nihilistic fulfillment of each man's desire contains its antithesis of human co-operation (ADV, pp. 327-28)." Like some European existentialists, Mailer moves from the social criticism into a search for the psychic causes of social attitudes and begins to concentrate his hopes on the psycho-sexual level to achieve "the paradise of limitless energy and perception beyond the wave of the next orgasm" for oneself, and subsequently, for others.

Before such a goal can be achieved, each social restraint and category must be removed. And, in order to cope with the "authoritarian philosophies" that "appeal to the conservative and liberal temper (ADV, p. 328)," individual violence is preferred for such a task. Mailer explains:

What haunts the middle of the twentieth century is that faith in man has been lost, and the appeal of authority has been that it would restrain us from ourselves. Hip, which would return us to ourselves, at no matter what price in individual violence, is the affirmation of the barbarian, for it requires a primitive passion about human nature to believe that individual acts of violence are always to be preferred to the collective violence of the State; it takes liberal faith in the creative possibilities of the human being to envisage acts of violence as the catharsis which prepares growth. (ADV, p. 328.)

Only through such actions can the individual protect himself against the State and at the same time most significantly threaten the State. Mailer further argues, for all "the destructive, the liberating, the creative nihilism of the Hip," and for all "its violence, its confusion, its ugliness and horror,

the 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, for the only revolution which will be meaningful and natural for the 20th century will be the sexual revolution one senses everywhere. . . .

Man's nature, man's dignity, is that he acts, lives, loves, and finally destroys himself seeking to penetrate the mystery of existence, and unless we partake in some way, as some part of this human exploration (and war) then we are no more the pimps of society and the betrayers of our Self. (ADV, p. 303.)

To be properly understood, what appears to be an indiscriminate call for violence and sexual revolution must be seen in the whole context of the slaughters and concentration camps of World War Two, as Mailer has extraordinarily well expressed at the beginning of the essay.

Since the American existentialist is concerned with both acting out and understanding the demands of the self, and since 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," the hero is thus conceived as an individual with a religious purpose and this "concept of Revelations is not remote from the Christian one."<sup>26</sup>

Disagreeing strongly with Sartre, Mailer here asserts:

To be a real existentialist (Sartre admittedly to the contrary) one must be religious, one must have one's sense of "purpose"--whatever the purpose may be--but a life which is directed by the notion that the substratum of existence is the search, the end meaningful but mysterious; it is impossible to live such a life unless one's emotions provide their profound conviction. Only the French, alienated beyond alienation from their unconscious could welcome an existential philosophy without ever feeling it at all. (ADV, p. 315.)

Mailer rejects the French version of existentialism at this point because of its total neglect of the unconscious and its concept of "death as emptiness." Mailer prefers a vision of "the possibilities within death" unclosed by an intensified consciousness. And the religious purpose is fulfilled when the hero can convert "his unconscious experience into much conscious knowledge" and thereby shift "the focus of his desire from

immediate gratification toward that wider passion for future power which is the mark of civilized man (ADV, p. 317)."

The American existentialist's search for power makes him a potential political force in the society, and indeed Mailer sees his characteristics among politicians, soldiers, newspaper columnists, artists, and movie, television, and advertising executives. But the hero's search for power is also often deflected "because the fundamental decision of his nature is to try to live the infantile fantasy (ADV, p. 319)." Such a decision forces him to explore

backward along the road of the homosexual, the orgiast, the drug addict, the rapist, the robber and the murderer. . . to find those violent parallels to the violent and often hopeless contradictions he knew as an infant and as a child. (ADV, p. 320.)

The hero is urged to meet the parallel situations and give "expression to the buried infant in him." By doing so, according to Mailer, he is able to "free himself to remake a bit of his nervous system (ADV, p. 320)."

The American existentialist hero is thus in a sense the synthesis of all contradictions. All incompatibles become reconciled:

but the element which is exciting, disturbing, nightmarish perhaps, is that 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. (ADV, p. 316.)

By bringing the buries of self to consciousness, the hero is able to grow toward wholeness. The essay concludes with a vision of the nature of society having been acted upon by the American existentialist 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 (ADV, p. 331.)"

In "The White Negro," Mailer has presented a clear image of his American existentialist hero, who has embodied all his existentialist convictions. These convictions are expressed with power and intensity. It might be difficult for one, who does not share his convictions, to take any of his views seriously. When Paul Breslow first reviewed Advertisements in 1960, he called the essay "a clever piece of nonsense."<sup>27</sup> But recent serious critics of Mailer all take the essay seriously and read it closely. For instance, Laura Adams thinks that "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, that is, the 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. . . .<sup>28</sup>

Nathan Scott, Jr. has found that "The White Negro" "has had an influence on the radical young of our period so deep as to be well-nigh incalculable" and the essay "can be recognized as Mailer's first systematic effort at defining a pattern of life alternative to that which (in the language he was regularly thereafter to employ) leads to 'cancer'."<sup>29</sup>

Followed after "The White Negro" in the collection are essays by Jean Malaquais and Ned Polsky and Mailer's responses to them called "Reflections on Hip" in which Mailer further explores his philosophy of Hip. In response to Malaquais's rejection of the Hipster as the "gorgeous flower of Mailer's romantic idealism (ADV, p. 335)," Mailer points out that the Hipster is first and foremost a sexual rebel who "attacks conventional sexual morality, and to some degree succeeds in disturbing the balance (ADV, p. 335)." The significance of the Hipster's sexual attack on civilization is that Western civilization is built on property relations among

people and these relations denied the basic instinctual and psychic characteristics of man:

A civilization from now, the vast chapter of Western expansion which was built on property and such inhuman abstractions of human energy as money, credit, and surplus value, may be seen as an ice-age of cruel and brutally slow liberations of productive, creative, and sexual energies which the contradictions of inequity and exploitation congealed not only into the institutional hypocrisies of society, but indeed drove as cancerous ambivalences and frustrations into the texture of being itself. (ADV, p. 335.)

Therefore, the significance of a revolution in this century must come first from a revolution in the consciousness of men which effectively challenges these basic relationships among people. Here Mailer gives a good account for his version of "liberation revolution," I quote him at some length:

The growth of human consciousness in this century demanded--for its expanding vitality--that a revolution be made, that a mankind be liberated, and since the attempt failed in its frontal revolutionary attack, failed precisely to change the exploitative character of our productive relations, it may well be that the rise of the hipster represents the first wind of a second revolution in this century, moving not forward toward action and more rational equitable distribution, but backward toward being and the secrets of human energy, not forward to the collectivity which was totalitarian in the proof but backward to the nihilism of creative adventures, a revolution admittedly impossible to conceive even in its outlines, for unlike that first revolution which was conscious, Faustian, and vain, enacted in name of the proletariat but more likely an expression of the scientific narcissism we inherited from the nineteenth century, a revolution motivated by the rational mania that consciousness could stifle instinct and marshal it into productive formation, and the second revolution, if it is to come, would come indeed as antithesis to the "Great Experiment:"--its desire would be to turn materialism on its head, have consciousness subjugated to instinct. (ADV, pp. 335-36.)

Thus the emphasis of the Hipster revolution is that man's instincts are basically good and that if man could be freed from institutional violence, which subjugates and destroys him, and finds outlets for his tensions, then goodness will carry through the private violence of the release of

these tensions "and open the possibility of working with that human creativity which is violence's opposite (ADV, p. 336)."

Mailer's additional exploration of the implied meaning of his American existentialism is best seen in the short story "The Time of Her Time," in which the revolutionary ideas of sexuality are convincingly personified in the two major characters, Sergius O'Shaugnessy and Denise Gondelman. In this story, Mailer obviously intends to create personalities and not simply stereotypes, people, not masks over the categories delineated in "The White Negro." Sergius reemerges in this story as, like Marion Faye in The Deer Park, the real existentialist hero that Mailer wholeheartedly celebrates. Sergius here is roughly similar to the white Negro, more substantially developed than he was in The Deer Park. When we saw him at the end of the novel, he left Desert D'Or and first tried his luck as a matador in Mexico. Although he failed at bullfighting there, he learned how to dominate fear and open the possibilities for growth.

At the beginning of the story, Sergius intends to open his own bullfighting school "Escuela de Torear" in Greenwich Village of New York. The atmosphere of the village qualifies as appropriate for the White-Negro-like Sergius. His loft is in a rundown building on Monroe street, a garbage and filth-covered block inhabited by Puerto Ricans, Negroes, poor Jews, and Italians. The setting gives Sergius an opportunity to test his courage, especially in the Negro hashhouse on the corner where he drinks coffee with the Black who is painting his loft. Explaining how he intends to set up a bullfighting school and knowing that the "barbarians would notice me" anyway, he deliberately talks like Faye in the novel in a way that he knows is a challenge to anyone listening:

I felt the clear bell-like adrenalins of clean anxiety, untainted by weakness, self-interest, neurotic habit or the pure yellows of

the liver. For I had put my poker money on the table, I was the new gun in a frontier saloon, and so I was asking for it, not today, not tomorrow, but come sooner, come later, something was likely to follow from this. . . there would come an hour so cold or so hot that someone, somebody, some sexed-up head, very strong and very weak, would be drawn to discover a new large truth about himself and the mysteries of his own courage or the lack of it. (ADV, pp. 443-44.)

Sergius coolly lets it be known that he is a bullfighter, that he regularly and fearlessly faces death. These last lines explain the importance of the confrontation. One gains manhood by testing it. The consequences affect one's essence: to find oneself courageous means to become more so, to have more courage for the next encounter. To find oneself less of a man leaves one weaker for the next time, or at worst, it can destroy one. Sergius himself recalls a crippling defeat which left him with an existential nausea.

The story is divided into two parts. In the first section, Mailer demonstrates Sergius's desire to live existentially, to continually test his courage in every small challenge that chances present. Confrontation of danger is to be repeated to present the existential tension between life and death inherent in every moment of significant Time. Section Two records Sergius's affair with Denise. It is an entirely different challenge, infinitely more difficult than staring down the Negroes in a hash-house. In the street manhood is defined by ability to fight; with women it lies in sexuality. Sergius endeavors to initiate her into the mysteries of apocalyptic orgasm. More importantly, Mailer here uses sex as the arena for his existentialist hero's adventure and growth. The second "Time" of the title refers to Denise's critical moment, her season of "time fulfilled." That moment is charged with meaning, and causes her to change dramatically as she comes to the end of an era of unfulfilled waiting time in her life.



Denise is a Jewish girl, "one of those harsh alloys of a selfmade Bohemian from a middle-class home (ADV, p. 449)." Mailer makes much of Denise's being a Jew, a combination of "strength, complacency, and deprecation which I found in many Jewish women--a sort of 'Ech' of disgust at the romantic and mysterious All (ADV, p. 449)." A college junior, she admires T. S. Eliot, a preference Sergius finds amusing considering her Brooklyn background. She possesses all the pseudo-intellectual trappings of a totalitarian culture, the repressive mechanism that hinders men and women from discovering "the buried nature." To the fact that Denise is also being psychoanalyzed, Sergius responds,

she was in that stage where the jargon had the totalitarian force of all vocabularies of mechanism, and she could only speak of her infantile relations to men, and the fixations and resistences of unassimilated penis-envy with all the smug gusto of a female commissar. (ADV, p. 450.)

Her analyst is also Jewish ("they were working now on Jewish self-hatred"), and is a type Sergius intensely dislikes, for the analyst is like Eliot, one of "the doers and healers of life who built on the foundationless prevalence of the void those islands of proud endeavor (ADV, p. 450)." Adopting Reich's sexual theories from her analyst who also accepts Reich, Denise claims she is "vaginally. . . anaesthetized," and can only find satisfaction with her lover, also Jewish, "via the oral perversions." She explains her relationship with her lover as "an aggressive female and a passive male--we complemented one another (ADV, p. 455)." Her snobbery and her condescension inflame Sergius's desire. By taking her to bed, he desires to humiliate her. He translates sex with her into a bedroom class struggle with himself representing "a working-class phallus. . . one of the millions on the bottom who had the muscles to move the sex which kept the world alive (ADV, p. 450)." In fact, the whole basis for

their relationship is a struggle for mastery. The object of their brief affair is like that of a fight: to see who will win. This is best seen by the fact that the sustaining metaphor for sex in the story is that of battle. Sergius and Denise make love "like two clubfighters in an open exchange (ADV, p. 451)." Later he "[throws] her a fuck the equivalent of a fifteen round fight (ADV, p. 463)." Using a "tactician's cunning" he waits "under sexual waters" to engage in what sounds like submarine warfare. After "she was away, she was loose in the water for the first time in her life (ADV, p. 464)," Sergius declares, ". . . finally, I had won. At no matter what cost, and with what luck. . . I had won nonetheless. . . (ADV, p. 464)."

The affair between Denise and Sergius is a case study of the application of Mailer's sexual theories and all of their social and ideological implications. Early in the story Sergius claims that he is a stud, the "messiah of the one-night stand (ADV, p. 447)," a touch-stone for women who want to evaluate their lovers by a little comparison shopping. He sets the standards for good love-making. Denise's failure to climax challenges Sergius's "certified professionalism (ADV, p. 447)." Worse yet, if she succeeds in denying him her orgasm, she threatens to destroy some of his vital powers, because just as one victory strengthens one for the next encounter, a defeat weakens one. Sergius's state of being becomes simply tied up with his ability to bring on an orgasm in Denise. He imagines at first the consequences of his possible failure to produce apocalyptic change as a far-reaching spiritual defeat:

I was reminded of Kafka's Castle, that tale of the search of a man for his apocalyptic orgasm: in the easy optimism of a young man, he almost captures the castle on the first day, and is never to come so close again. Yes, that was the saga of the nervous system of a man as it was bogged into the defeats, complications, and frustrations of middle age. (ADV, p. 456.)

The quotation demonstrates Mailer's belief that in the absence of apocalyptic adventure and growth (through the capture of castle or orgasm), experience is reduced to absurd Sisyphean repetitions. In the story, Sergius understands his task to be the successful rolling of Denise's Sisyphean "stone of no-orgasm up the cliff, all the way, over (ADV, p. 457)" to fulfillment. Such an accomplishment is able to change the absurd, repetitive time into the significant moments of living Time. Time and sex are thus associated to make "the connection of new circuits," as God revealed to Sergius at the end of The Deer Park. The connection can be an existential and mystical experience, a change in one's essence, what Mailer calls "remaking the nervous system."

Where Mailer limits himself in The Deer Park to distant descriptions of sex, here he insists on presenting graphically the dynamics of sexual interplays. He does this because he is convinced that the way people literally make love is a good indication of their character and their secret inner life. Sex in this story reveals crucial aspects of the characters' inner natures. Denise makes love "as if she were running up an inclined wall so steep that to stop for an instant would slide her back to disaster (ADV, p. 451)." Her anger, her greed and her selfishness are all made manifest in the way she assaults Sergius's mouth in her kisses, makes love with no sensual play, and "hammers her rhythm" at him, using him as the "dildoe of a private gallop (ADV, p. 451)." On the other hand, Sergius displays in his love-making his sense of artistry and his need to dominate. "Over and over in those days I used to compare the bed to the bullfight, sometimes seeing myself as the matador and sometimes as the bull (ADV, p. 457)." By exposing himself in primal situations, Sergius, like Faye and the white Negro, has explored the uncharted ground of dangerous experience for growth and the remaking of the nervous system.

As the story unfolds, their first sexual combat is a tie; Sergius performs well but Denise manages to keep her will unbroken. Their second meeting winds "itself up with nothing better in view than the memory of the first night (ADV, p. 456)." It is only on the third night that Sergius is determined to "beat new Time out of her, if beat her he must," because the stakes have risen alarmingly:

tonight this little victory or defeat would be full of leverage magnified beyond its emotional matter because I had decided to bet on myself that I would win, and a defeat would bring me closer to a general depression, a fog bank of dissatisfaction with myself which I knew could last for months or more. (ADV, p. 458.)

The rewards of such a victory will be splendid; he contemplates the qualities of character that he will absorb through physical contact in the winning:

Whereas a victory 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 ambition. (ADV, p. 458.)

However, all his sexual project for the third night does not go off without a hitch, for Sergius first suffers a premature ejaculation. The climax becomes almost anti-climatic. Sergius finally brings Denise to her first orgasm by sodomizing her, violating "the bridal ground of her symbolic and therefore real vagina (ADV, p. 463)." And it is worth noting that Sergius wants to "prong" Denise in their first meeting, and later brings on her orgasm by doing exactly that, as she fights in earnest, "fierce not to allow him this last of the liberties (ADV, p. 463)."

Denise's challenge to Sergius carries an important dimension in its relationship to time. What bothers him most is her quality of independence, the assurance that in a year she won't remember him. Denise threatens a kind of sexual extinction, unless Sergius can insure his

continued existence in her mind. He must create a deathless memory of himself as a mark of his victory. Then the lasting quality of the experience in Denise's memory will transcend time. His final triumph comes when he rubs into Denise's face the token of his mastery. And also, as "the first big moment in her life" is to come, Sergius further humiliates her physically by saying, "You dirty little Jew (ADV, p. 464)."

For Sergius, the final triumph and mastery helps him discover a small new truth about his manhood and his ability to master this particular kind of threatening encounter:

I had won nonetheless, and since all real pay came from victory, it was more likely that I would win the next time I gambled my stake on something more appropriate for my ambition. (ADV, p. 464.)

But, on the other hand, for Denise, "with a satisfied body but a defeated will, her only retaliation is to accuse Sergius of latent homosexuality and flee before her conqueror, in his hipster's triumph, can tell her that she was a hero fit for him."<sup>30</sup> The sodomy and the insult serve to break down Denise's defense and rigidity. As a product of twentieth century--Eliot, psychoanalysis, college, a certain social snobbery--she represents all the elements of the Square world Mailer attacks outrageously in the whole book of Advertisements. Sergius is looking for apocalyptic orgasm, a search that means "full engagement of my will in some go-for-broke I considered worthy of myself. . . . (ADV, p. 457)." Denise is vaginally frigid, has been made so by cultural conditioning. To cure her, give her a regenerated sense of Being, Sergius instinctively attacks the symbol of her false acculturation, the anus, the seat of all of society's preliminary proscriptions on life-regenerating pleasure.

Whatever way we may read the story, Mailer's style, language, and convictions are all wholly at the service of Sergius. In "The White

Negro" Mailer identifies the American existentialist hero in language strikingly identical to the story's characterization of Sergius: "so, too, for the existentialist. . . and the saint and the bullfighter and the lover. The common denominator for all of them is their burning consciousness of the present, exactly that incandescent consciousness which the possibilities with a death have opened for them (ADV, p. 316)."

However, up to this point, it should be immediately understood that Mailer has not created the American existentialist hero as a static figure who never grows but always behaves in the same manner in each story. If this were the case, Mailer would contradict himself in advocating his American existentialism. Yet, this is not the case.

It is true that by observing the same existential principles Sergius in "The Time of Her Time" acts like Faye in The Deer Park in many respects. But they are not identical twins. Sergius may like Faye engage in sexual activities less for pleasure than as a spiritual exercise for growth. But Faye seriously deludes himself with visions of his sainthood, and his mission to "burn honesty" into prostitutes, or make Elena commit suicide. Sergius speaks of the saint in himself with greater irony. His piety consists in his unfailing generosity. He even renounces the glories of superior performance when he knows that his partner is in love with another man:

For the smell of Arthur (Denise's boyfriend) was the smell of love, at least for me, and so from man to woman, it did not matter. . . that voiceless message which passed from the sword of the man into the cavern of the woman was carried along from body to body, and if it was not the woman in Denise I was going to find tonight, at least I would be warmed by the previous trace of another. (ADV, pp. 460-61.)

While Faye's attitude toward sex was mainly construed as the pursuit of religious purity, Sergius here still derives healthy pleasure from sex.

By the time we get to An American Dream, we will find that Mailer's full-fledged existentialist hero, Stephen Rojack, grows in another direction. Whereas both Faye and the later Sergius sin to purify themselves and the world from evil, Rojack comes to enjoy the commission of sin.

#### Notes to Chapter Four

1. Norman Mailer: A Critical Study, p. 20.
2. Steven Marcus, "An Interview with Norman Mailer" in Norman Mailer: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 25, 33.
3. Ibid., p. 34.
4. Down Mailer's Way, p. 53.
5. The Deer Park (New York: A Signet Book, 1955, 1964). All later references are to this edition and will be cited in the text.
6. Three American Moralists, p. 44.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 43.
9. Norman Mailer: A Critical Study, p. 134.
10. Down Mailer's Way, p. 68.
11. Diana Trilling, "The Radical Moralism of Norman Mailer," in Norman Mailer: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 56.
12. Ibid.
13. Norman Mailer: The Countdown, p. 73.
14. Three American Moralists, p. 46.
15. Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work, p. 41.
16. Laura Adams, Existential Battles: The Growth of Norman Mailer (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976), pp. 3, 64, 53-54.
17. Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work, p. 83.
18. William Barrett, Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), p. 3.
19. Karl Jaspers, The Way to Wisdom (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1951), p. 53.
20. Irrational Man, p. 217.



21. Norman Mailer: A Critical Study, p. 144.
22. Wilhelm Reich, The Function of Orgasm (New York: A Bantam Book, 1942, 1967), p. 79.
23. John Macquarrie, Existentialism (New York: Pelican Books, 1973), p. 87.
24. Existential Battles, p. 57.
25. Paul Breslow, "The Hipster and the Radical," Studies on the Left, 1 (Spring, 1960), 103.
26. Existential Battles, p. 54.
27. Three American Moralists, p. 46.
28. Down Mailer's Way, p. 81

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The American Existentialist Hero Found in Reality and Re-created in Fiction: The Presidential Papers and An American Dream

#### The Presidential Papers

As proposed in the preceding chapter, the actual model of Mailer's American existentialist hero, the white-Negro Hipster, was created under such circumstances that Mailer in the mid-Fifties was psychologically burdened by the deadening effects of the American society and by the impotence of the radical movement. The Hipster was supposedly the hero who was able to transcend his society and create the values, the very conditions of his existence as he moved through the psychic underworld of that totalitarian universe which spawned him, but which could not control him. Such a hero might "finally break open the bleakly conformist surface of Eisenhower America."<sup>1</sup> The hero might not think of himself as a political man, but to Mailer he was the authentic revolutionary of the mid-century America. Mailer insisted, again and again, that at the time of his creating the hero model, the Hipster was intended to fulfill certain political functions.

However, Mailer saw in the early Sixties that his hopes of the Hipster as a hero had petered out in a culture where the hipsters abounded, though they did not act in the Mailerian sense of heroes. Instead of bearing out courage and energy in their character, these hipsters were weak, both mentally and physically, and perverted the life of myth:

But today in America the generation which respected the code of the myth was Beat, a horde of half-begotten Christs with scraggly beards, heroes none, saints all, weak before the strong, empty conformists of the authority. The sanction for finding one's growth was no longer one's flag, one's career, one's sex, one's adventure, not even one's booze. Among the best in this newest of the generations, the myth had found its voice in marijuana, and the joke of the underground was that when the Russians came over they could never dare to occupy us for long because America was too Hip. (PP, p. 41.)

The hipsters of this kind could never fulfill the desired political functions, nor could they "dominate those mutually contradictory inhibitions upon violence and love which civilization has exacted of us (ADV, p. 318)" so as to create a new nervous system for growth. Having been disappointed with these powerless psychic outlaws, Mailer continued his search for a hero among the public figures: a writer like Hemingway, a boxer like Patterson, or a politician like Kennedy.

In 1960, Mailer was greatly attracted by Kennedy, whose glamour and magnetism gave him the potential of an "existential hero" in the arena of politics, with the requisite "existential" political consciousness. Mailer's White Negro may not exist at all as a man of flesh and bone in reality. But according to Mailer, John F. Kennedy might be just the incarnation of White Negro who would possibly perform all his political functions in the actual world of America. Kennedy, the bright young man with style and the first national leader of heroic potential since Roosevelt, almost converted Mailer to a more reflective appreciation of politics and brought him hope for change within the American political tradition. With Kennedy's administration, there would have been a dynamism that was going to be instilled in American life after fifteen years of political stasis. At this point, Mailer certainly reflected the general feeling about Kennedy throughout the nation. Even the New Leftists and the black activists had much the same feeling at the beginning. As

Julius Lester, a New Leftist and black activist, wrote:

With John Kennedy in the White House and Jackie on the front pages looking like the mistress of the hunt, the country entered a period which was beyond an intellectual's wildest dreams. Ideas were not only listened to, but sought out. . . The Kennedy's gave the intellectual a place in the smog-obscured sun and created an image with which the young could identify. With their games of touch football, their ability to laugh at themselves, their directness and honesty(?), they created a feeling of hope in most sectors of the nation. . . They represented hope to many who had ceased to hope.<sup>2</sup>

The Presidential Papers (1963) is a collection of essays, interviews, and magazine columns, which were published in the interval between the publication of Advertisements and May, 1964, the majority during the Kennedy administration. Apparently, the criterion for selection of these diverse pieces is that "their subject matter is fit concern for a President (PP, p. 1)." Mailer's purpose was to catch the attention of President Kennedy, who he thought would be receptive to his ideas and capable of carrying them out. As Mailer himself put it in his "Special Preface to the Bantam Edition" written after Kennedy's assassination,

The Presidential Papers were written while Jack Kennedy was alive, and so the book was put together with the idea that the President might come to read it. . . . Thus, the book was inspired by a desire to have its influence. (PP, p.v.)

The persona Mailer adopts in this book is that of "a court wit, an amateur advisor (PP, p. 1)." Mailer as "advisor" sticks to the ways of the American existentialist. He insists on the need for a radical break with "political ritual and vocabulary (PP, p. 152)," but centers on fresh ways of looking at things so as to change politics from a science of probability to "the art of the possible (PP, p. 4)." The result is of course "existential politics":

This book has an existential grasp of the nature of reality, and it is the unspoken thesis of these pages that no President can save America from a descent into totalitarianism without shifting the mind of the American politician to existential styles of political thought. (PP, p. 5.)

To a reader familiar with his earlier works, The Presidential Papers offers only limited additional insight into Mailer's philosophy. It is important, however, in substantiating and amplifying the existentialist ideas and concepts expressed in his earlier fiction and essays. It illustrates the application of these ideas to the actual social situations, as, for example, in his analysis of the existential heroism, the character of President Kennedy, the motives of juvenile gangs, and the nature of American politics. In "A Prefatory Paper--Heroes and Leaders," Mailer says that the central problem in America is that life is becoming "more economically prosperous, and more psychologically impoverished each year (PP, p. 4)." The President must be more than a leader; he must be a hero. "Existential politics is rooted in the concept of the hero" and "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, p. 6)." "All heroes are leaders. . . but not all leaders are heroes (PP, p. 6)."

Anonymity is an important criterion, for such is the mark of the leader who is not heroic, a man who embodies the history of his time but is not superior to it. To Mailer any power that is faceless is "insidious, plague-like, and evil power (PP, p. 6)." The FBI then had a leader, but not a hero. "So it is faceless in history. . . . Power without a face is the disease of the state (PP, p. 6)." To clarify the nation's need for an existential hero as President, Mailer compares the nation to a diseased body. He explains that a body becomes diseased when "one or another organ has become too weak or too powerful in its function (PP, p. 7)." Then the body goes through a war "which initiates a restoration of balance (PP, p. 7)." Unlike the body, a diseased nation needs clarification of those large historical ideas which resemble the slack diseases, featureless, symptomless diseases like virus and colds and the ubiquitous cancer.

(PP, p. 7)." In such a situation the nation needs men to "personify" or "dramatize" the struggle. "Acute diseases are like potential forces personified by heroes."

Mailer saw that Kennedy is such a President with "the face of a potential hero (PP, p. 7)" who would possible shift "the mind of the American politicians to existential styles of political thought (PP, p. 5)." He has traits of a "Sergius O'Shaughnessy born rich (PP, p. 44)"--youth, courage, energy, intelligence, wartime heroism, sex appeal, and marriage to a beautiful woman. Kennedy would, for example, become a positive hero for those youth who have retreated from the society into juvenile delinquency. In "The Second Presidential Paper: Juvenile Delinquency," Mailer argues that juvenile delinquency is one of the prime symptoms of the national disease. Suffering from boredom, such youth seek drama in the rumble, spending "the days and nights of their adolescent years waiting for the apocalyptic test which almost never comes off (PP, p. 21)." Yet they have much of the same imagination and drive that is typical of any "artist, any salesman, any adventurer, any operator (PP, p. 21)." And they have many virtues which Americans once prided themselves on: "courage loyalty, honor and the urge for adventure. (PP, p. 21)."

However, they find that America is a place for everyone "who is willing to live the way others want him to, and talk the way others want him to, with our big, new, thick leaden vocabulary of political, psychological, and sociological verbiage (PP, p. 21)." However, America is not a place "for those who want to find the limits of their growth by a life which is ready to welcome a little danger as part of the Divine cocktail (PP, p. 21)." "The best way," Mailer suggests, "to combat juvenile delinquency was to give artistic outlet to the violence, creativity, and sense of

pagentry which drives the average wild adolescent into disaster (PP, p. 22)." It is because existential politics has a basic argument: "if there is a strong ineradicable strain in human nature, one must not try to suppress it or anomaly, cancer, and plague will follow (PP, p. 22)." Therefore, the nation must find a place for such people to express themselves and grow, and not hide them in a wrap of psychological and sociological jargon.

For such a role Kennedy would be aptly suited. He was unlike any political personality on the American scene and thus promised to turn politics into a true relationship with history by bringing forth the repressed American dreams and myths. Describing the Democratic Convention of 1960, "The Existential Hero: Superman Comes to the Supermarket," Mailer sees Kennedy as the right man to rediscover those American roots covered over by the "spirit of the supermarket, that homonogenous extension of stainless surfaces and psychoanalyzed people, packaged commodities and ranch homes, interchangeable, geographically unrecognizable (PP, p. 32)" so well represented in the architecture and mood of Los Angeles. For it was Kennedy, upon arriving at the Biltmore Hotel, ironically located on Pershing Square, "one of the three or four places in America famous to homosexuals," who "saluted Pershing Square." And "Pershing Square saluted him back, the prince and the beggars of glamour staring at one another across a city street, one of those very special moments in the underground history of the world. . . (PP, p. 38)."

Furthermore, Kennedy was inexplicable to traditional politicians. He understood the underground myth of America, while they moved only on the visible river of American history.

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, p. 38.)

Kennedy could appeal to those uncounted numbers of Americans who had internalized "the romantic possibilities of the old conquest of land" and turned the movement westward "into a vertical myth, trapped within the skull, of a new kind of heroic life, each choosing its archetype of a neo-Renaissance man. . . (PP, p. 39.)." And also, in America, "the life of politics and the life of myth had diverged too far. There was nothing to return them to one another, no common danger, no cause, no desire, and most essentially, no hero (PP, p. 41)." Kennedy could be such a hero to unite politics and myth into one life and help America return to a "psychological frontier." Such an achievement could end "America's tortured psychoanalytic search for security. . . and we as a nation would finally be loose again in the historic seas of a national psyche which was willy-nilly and, at last, again, adventurous (PP, p. 27)." It is based on such a hope for America that Mailer began to write "Superman Comes to the Supermarket" and other articles to support Kennedy's candidacy. At the convention Mailer was struck by Kennedy's appearance outside the convention. The reception accorded him was a repetition of scenes from the movies; the Democrats, to Mailer's amazement, were about to nominate a man who was "going to be seen as a great box-office actor (PP, p. 31)."

According to Mailer's argument, Kennedy's nomination is the demonstration that the United States, though anchored in the factual and the concrete, the antithesis of the frontier since World War I, remains the country where the myth of the Renaissance--"that every man was potentially



extraordinary (PP, p. 39)"--is still alive. Americans continue to believe in heroes, for America was "a country which had grown by the leap of one hero past another. . . (PP, p. 39)." The older generation of heroes, once the West was settled, were replaced by the dreamworld of cinema, and the Renaissance man became the Hollywood actor. They became the bearers of the frontier, a new kind of heroic life in which there was no peace "unless one could fight well, kill well, (if always with honor) love well, and love many, be cool, be daring, be dashing, be wild, be lively, be resourceful, be a brave gun (PP, p. 39)."

The frontier myth, romanticized in films, became the national ethos dictating:

that each of us was born to be free, to wander, to have adventure and to grow on the waves of violence, the perfumed, and the unexpected, had a force which could not be tamed no matter how hard the nation's regulators, politicians, medicos, policemen, professors, priests, rabbis, ministers, ideologues, psychoanalysts, builders, executives, and endless communicators--would brick in the modern life with hygiene upon sanity, and middle brow homily over platitude. . . it was as if a message in the labrynth of the genes would insist that violence was located with creativity and adventure was the secret of love. (PP, pp. 39-40.)

During the Second World War and after, a few men emerged who were larger than life, in whom everyone could see a part of himself, and who generated in their personalities the secret longings of the people. Mailer cited Hitler as one in whom this mysticism was embodied but who was, as the evil version of the Hipster, the "hero as monster." What Hitler may have served for the German character, the American hero needs to serve in order to revive the national psyche by being larger than life, capable of giving direction to and thereby helping the people to discover their deepest and most repressed sense of communal identity. It was Mailer's hope that Kennedy would accomplish this through his image; under him the country would either rediscover itself and grow, become more adventurous, or

sink deeper into the false security and the small town logic of caution, religion, the family, committees, and sensibilities of the FBI and mass men. Mailer found one unique characteristic which made Kennedy most like the American existentialist hero and which would help him accomplish the mission, that was his awareness of death:

Kennedy's most characteristic quality is the remote and private air of a man who has traversed some lonely terrain of experience, of loss and gain, of nearness to death, which leaves him isolated from the mass of others. . . . He has the wisdom of a man who senses death within him and gambles that he can cure it by risking his life. It is the therapy of the instinct, and who is so wise as to call it irrational? (PP, pp. 48-49.)

Irrational it can never be, because in Mailer's version of existential politics, our only true guide is "the instinctive logic our inner voice tells us (PP, p. 269)." In his "Last Open Letter to John Fitzgerald Kennedy," Mailer summarizes all his ideas about existential politics. Besides repeating "the need for a hero" and "the meaning of politics as the art of the possible (PP, p. 269)," Mailer makes a sharp distinction between the "classical politics" and the "existential politics":

Classical politics begins with the notion that a great many facts and a few phenomena are hard, measurable, and concrete, and thus may be manipulated to produce corrective results. Existential politics, however, derives not from politics as a prime phenomenon, but from existentialism. So it begins with the separate notion that we live out our lives wandering among mysteries, and can construct the few hypotheses by which we guide ourselves only by drawing into ourselves the instinctive logic our inner voice tells us is true to the relations between mysteries. The separate mysteries we may never seize, but to appropriate a meaning from their relationship is possible. The first preoccupation of the existentialist is not then the fact itself (for the fact is invariably a compression of nuances which alienate the reality), but rather is the root from which the fact may have evolved. (PP, pp. 269-70.)

The more the President, Mailer assumes, insulates himself from existential reality with facts, figures, and statistics, the less apt he is to adopt the free-wheeling reliance on his instinct and imagination that will save the nation from totalitarianism. Mailer further assumes that

the instincts are totally separate and uninfluenced by one's experiences. They remain pure, their messages absolute truisms. What is peculiarly advantageous about being President is that the office makes available an opportunity for the man, since he has in his grasp the fate of the nation, to place complete faith in the infallibility of his instincts. The White House is the testing grounds for American existentialism. All that is necessary is to repudiate advisors and facts and rely on the dictates of the inner voices. Armed with his faith and listening to his instincts, the American existential hero will lead the people out of the totalitarian suppression, out of the captivity of reason and technology. In the actual scene of the administration, Kennedy's liberal advisors were trying desperately to prove that they were really tough guys and authentic liberals. As Arnold S. Kaufman wrote, "They proclaim that their predominant concern is to achieve 'personal authenticity,'"<sup>3</sup> They also condemn as "finks" liberals who refuse to participate in their projects of protest when those projects seem ineffective or counter-productive. Yet, however conscientious they were in their efforts to be authentic, these advisors virtually accomplished nothing, for they had no way to cope with what Mailer usually calls the totalitarian establishment of the American democratic machine. Their private virtue, instead of producing any public benefit, brings them "public vice." Here in The Radical Liberal--The New Politics: Theory and Practice, Arnold S. Kaufman sounds very much like Mailer in his criticism of the American democratic system:

Oppressed by the pervasive hypocrisy of American society; smothered by the institutional acquisitiveness of established interests; tyrannized by the benevolent paternalism of academic administrators; dirtied by the philistinism and ugliness of the prevailing American culture (how much better to be dirty on the outside and clean on the inside, than the reverse); stultified by the mindlessness of the realists who purvey what passes for social wisdom; . . . they are propelled into a desperate pursuit

of authenticity that requires, for the younger radicals, generational mistrust. The worst cut of all is that private virtue, an exemplary life of absolute middle-class integrity, is not only consistent with, but often the very vehicle of public vice.<sup>4</sup>

Mailer's support of Kennedy made him feel partially responsible for the successes and failures of his administration. His first commitment to politics, under the hope that a great conversion was coming, was the stimulus which goaded Mailer to "follow Kennedy's career with obsession as if I were responsible and guilty for all which was bad, dangerous, or totalitarian within it (PP, p. 61)." Mailer's first three "Presidential Papers" explain why he supported Kennedy; the fourth through the sixth admonish him for a number of inaccurate decisions Kennedy made as the President, such as the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Before his assassination, Kennedy in several respects failed to live up to Mailer's expectations.

First of all, dissatisfied with Kennedy's lack of imagination, Mailer criticized him for his failure to incite the people to some unstated heroic action modeled on the Frontier myth. No "adventurous" legislation was ever proposed. Many of the Kennedy programs were just a renovation of the New Deal Progressivism. Mailer was also disappointed in the way Kennedy handled the Cuban Missile Crisis. Appalled at the New Yorkers' apathy to the Crisis, and seeing in such apathy an overwhelming fear of death which leads to a loss of courage, Mailer suggested that Kennedy send his wife to New York as a hostage, thereby demonstrating to the people of the nation that he was willing to confront death, that he was willing to meet the demands of life in the mid-twentieth century.

New York is the place where we have air raid drills every year and no way at all to save a single body from a single Russian bomb. Yes, let your wife's helicopter land on the Hotel Carlyle, and we will know it is likely you are ready to suffer as we

suffer, and that the weakness we feel before war is not merely our own pathetic inability to stare into the mountain passes of Heaven, the stench of Hell, or the plastic of cancer, but is the impotence of men who would be brave, and yet must look at the children they have become powerless to protect. (PP, p. 113.)

Although such a proposal is far-fetched it illustrates Mailer's conviction that the country is dying, morally and spiritually.

In connection with Jackie Kennedy, Mailer believes that existential politics reveals itself to her. She is a "lady of beauty caught willy-nilly in political life" and "reveals the insubstantial existential nature of political acts (PP, p. 81)." Mailer condemns Jackie Kennedy's televised tour of the White House for her attempt to find the meaning of the country's history in its artificats. This sort of thing, Mailer assumes, "Eleanor Roosevelt could have done, and done well. She had grown up among objects like this. . . no doubt they lived for her with some charm of the past. But Jackie Kennedy was unconvincing. One did not feel she particularly loved the past of America. . . (PP, p. 95)." What American people needed and what she could offer them was "much more complex than this public image of a pompadour, a tea-dance dress, and a Colonial window welded together in committee (PP, p. 95)." According to Mailer, Jackie Kennedy should show herself to the American people as she really is. Mailer gives the existentialist reasons for Jackie's assertion of her own style:

Because what we suffer from in America, in that rootless moral wilderness of our expanding life, is the unadmitted terror in each of us that bit by bit, year by year, we are going mad. Very few of us know really where we have come from and to where we are going, why we do it, and if it is ever worthwhile. For better or for worse we have lost our past, we live in that airless no-man's-land of the perpetual present, and so suffer doubly as we strike into the future because we have no roots by which to project ourselves forward or judge our trip.

And this tour of the White House gave up precisely no sense of the past. To the contrary, it inflicted the past upon us, pummeled us with it, depressed us with facts. (PP, pp. 95-96.)

Mailer understood that Jackie Kennedy was trying to be a proper First Lady. But it was not necessary at all "to copy the Ladies who had come before her (PP, p. 97)." She must regain freedom to assert her own nature as an existential heroine if she wanted to be of any use to the nation.

For Mailer, the nation has given up too much of its freedom and too much of its nature. Freedom has been squandered in abortive revolutions. People always find a way to avoid all acts of courage. They divorce themselves "from the materials of the earth, the rock, the wood, the iron ore." They have "no odor of the living or of what once had lived, their touch was alien to nature (PP, p. 159)." Mailer believes that the nation's rejection of nature is equivalent to a rejection of God. From now on, Mailer's ideas about God and the Devil are more pronounced, and they eventually take on a new significance in his American existentialist system. His new insight is that the logic of a belief in God is a belief that each man has a mission--"one of us to create, another to be brave, a third to love, a fourth to work, a fifth to be bold, a sixth to be all of these. Was it not possible that we were sent out of eternity to become more than we had been? (PP, p. 159)." If we failed in our mission, then we failed God. To fail God suggests that we have given ourselves over to a Devil, that force which is opposed to God and nature.

Mailer further sees that God has been forced to an existential position and is no longer all powerful. That is why Mailer postulates an existential God:

If God is not all powerful but existential, discovering the possibilities and limitations of His creative powers in the form of history which is made by His creatures, then one must postulate an existential equal to God, an antagonist, the Devil, a principle of evil. . . whose joy is to waste substance, whose intent is to prevent God's conception of Being from reaching its mysterious goal. (PP, p. 193.)

In the American society, God and the Devil represent the life-forces and death-forces in a bitter struggle. For instance, collectivism is the mark of the legions of the Devil. For this reason Mailer is sympathetic to the Right Wing in America which senses "that there seems to be some almost palpable conspiracy to tear life away from its roots (PP, p. 167)." In a debate with William Buckley, reprinted as the eighth "Presidential Paper," Mailer analyzes the Right Wing movement as an attempt to get back to biological roots. This attempt is appropriate for the present century:

The essence of biology seems to be challenge and response, risk and survival, war and the lessons of war. It may be biologically true that life cannot have beauty without its companion--danger. Collectivism promised security. . . Collectivism may well choke the pores of life. (PP p. 167.)

The Right Wing's mistake, however, is seeing Communism as the source of collectivism and promoting the Cold War. The true war is not the American race with the Soviet Union, but a war between collectivism and self-expression. The conservative, although he is opposed to collectivism, does not recognize the meaning and the significance of the American existentialist hero for the society. The conservative, according to Mailer, would be content to see the nation's life built on a materialistic survival of the fittest.

The ultimate danger of the Right Wing movement is that it moves America backward into totalitarianism, not forward into freedom, for any society built on fear turns toward repression. As a matter of fact, Mailer already perceives that the inroads of totalitarianism in the American consciousness in the "body cells and psyche of each of us" has been long pervasive. Every American has been conditioned to accept totalitarianism by the "popular arts, the social crafts, the political crafts, corporate technique (PP, p. 184)," television, advertising, educational jargon, poor

industrial workmanship, tranquilizers, frozen foods, household appliances, and the monotony of modern architecture. The purpose of totalitarianism is to behead "individuality, variety, dissent, extreme possibility, and romantic faith, it blinds vision, deadens instinct, it obliterates the past (PP, p. 184)." The new architecture specifically is designed to make modern Americans forget the preceding centuries and the sense of the lives of the men who came before the present age. "So we are less able to judge the sheer psychotic values of the present. . . . Totalitarianism came to birth at the moment man turned incapable of facing back into the accumulated wrath and horror of his historic past (PP, p. 185)." Cancer is the result of avoiding our natural destiny by taking medicines that disrupt the organ's sense of what diseases it is supposed to combat. As the organization of society becomes separated from its historical destiny, the body responds with an equivalent confusion. All of this Mailer alleges to be the responsibility of those few who in pursuing their egotistical interests disrupted nature.

One practical proposal Mailer has made for Kennedy to implement to defend against totalitarianism and return America to the state of nature is allow minority groups, such as the Black and the Jew, full access into the culture. The administration must find a way "to liberate the art which is trapped in the thousand acts of perception which embody their self-hatred, for self-hatred ignored must corrode the roots of one's past and leave one marooned in an alien culture (PP, p. 189)." For Mailer, the Jew and Negro represent the best chance for the Republic. The Black in "The White Negro" is the new hero, the prophet of primitive existentialism who by his example will convert the nation's youth. The other minority for whom Mailer has a shred of hope is the Jew. If they can avoid



becoming assimilated, they can attain equality by working "an art" upon the manners of the socially superior, "the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant and the Irish Catholic," "then America will be different (PP p. 188)." Assimilation will only result in making America the same as it is now, "only worse." "Nothing can be more conformist, more Square, more profoundly depressing than the Jew-in-the-suburb, or the Negro as member of the Black Bourgeoisie (PP, p. 188)." Once they have lost their existential authenticity and adopted the standards of the "superior," then they are nothing more than a "mediocre ersatz Protestant."

In discussing both groups, Mailer is not preoccupied with the average but rather the exceptional Jew and Negro, the Jew of the Hasidim and the Negro as heavyweight champion and contender. At the root of the modern Jew's problem is a theological dilemma:

The Jews have staggered along for centuries wondering to their primitive horror whether they have betrayed God once in the desert or again twice with Christ; so they are obsessed in their unconscious nightmare with whether they belong to a God of righteousness or a Devil of treachery--their flight from this confrontation has rushed to produce a large part of the mechanistic jargon which now rules American life in philosophy, psychoanalysis, social action, production process, and the arts themselves. (PP, pp. 189-90.)

The Jews actually have contributed to the growth of totalitarianism in their flight from the existential anxiety. The Negro, too, is obsessed with doubts. Is he a child of God or the Devil? Magic, his secret fixation, "that elixir of nature," prevents him from making "his peace with Christianity, or mankind." Subconsciously the Negro

does not know if he is a part of mankind, or a special embodiment of nature suspended between society and the gods. As the Negro enters civilization, Faust may be his archetype, even as the Jew has fled Iago as the despised image of himself. (PP, p. 190.)

The Negro and the Jew are suspended between their desire to imitate their imagined superiors, the political and economic establishment, and

an inner commitment to spiritual values which will make their adjustment to American civilization a process whereby they might lose their souls. In both cases they are a product of history. For Mailer, the Negro is the primitive innocent and his capacity to convert civilization is greater than his capacity to conform. Unlike the Jew, the Negro does not have to carry the staggering load of twenty centuries of accumulated doubt and guilt. While the Negroes created whatever is vital in American culture, the spontaneous and sensual, the Jews epitomize everything Mailer hates about the nation: liberalism and the dependency on the analyst as the means for rationalizing guilt. Furthermore, the Negro, untainted by the original sin of Protestantism and the crimes against God that have been committed in the name of scientific progress, is willing to search for extreme situations, those situations which "burn out the filament of dull habit and turn the conscious mind back upon its natural subservience to the instinct. (PP, p. 198)."

The danger of civilization is that its leisure, its power, its insulation from nature, so alienate us from instinct that our consciousness and our habits take on an autonomy which may censor even the most necessary communication between mind and instinct. For consciousness, once it is alienated from instinct, begins to construct its intellectual formulations over a void. The existential moment, by demanding the most extreme response in the protagonist, tends to destroy psychotic autonomies in the mind--since they are unreal they give way first--one is returned closer to the reality of one's personal strength or weakness. (PP, p. 198.)

After analyzing all the possibilities that the Negroes have been endowed with for defending against totalitarianism and its corrosion of American culture, Mailer again reminds Kennedy of his responsibility to the minority: "So a responsible politician, a President, let us say, professionally sensitive to minority groups, cannot begin to be of real stature to that minority until he becomes aware of what is most pressing and ubiquitous in their need (PP, p. 189)."

Mailer in most of his later "Presidential Papers" was apparently critical of certain aspects of the Kennedy administration, but it was always criticism infused with the hope of helping to stimulate a dynamic quality in the personal style of President Kennedy and his wife. Even "about twelve weeks before Jack Kennedy took his visit to Dallas," Mailer, in "The Leading Man: A review of J.F.K.: The Man and the Myth," criticized Victor Lasky's book, as one "which will give pleasure to every Kennedy-hater who reads it (CC, p. 165),"<sup>5</sup> and Lasky himself was obviously "an all-out Nixon man." Mailer's conclusion was that "with all his documentation of Jack Kennedy's political life, the large disappointment in the book is that Lasky has no intimation of the curious depths in the President's nature (CC, p. 168)." Mailer firmly believes:

Jack Kennedy is a new kind of political leader, and study of his past political sins will not help us to comprehend his future. . . . He is not a father, nor a god, nor a god-figure, nor an institution, nor a symbol. He is in fact--permit the literary conceit--a metaphor. Which is to say that Jack Kennedy is more like a hero of uncertain moral grandeur: is his ultimate nature tragic or epic? Is he a leading man or America's brother? (CC, p. 168.)

As a "metaphor" of America, Kennedy is cast in a more existential role--a leader who transcends the cultural norms of good and evil, of heroism and villainy in the traditional sense, who becomes one without any preconceived nature or "a Kierkegaardian hero": "Kierkegaard had divined that there was probably no anguish on heaven or earth so awful as the inability to create one's nature by daring, exceptional, forbidden, or socially impossible acts (CC, p. 169)." Mailer then explains the metaphorical relation between hero and culture:

We had become a Kierkegaardian nation. In the deep mills of our crossed desires, in the darkening ambiguities of our historic role, we could know no longer whether we should prosper or decline, whether we were the seed of freedom or the elaboration of a new tyranny. We needed to discover ourselves by an

exploration through our ambiguity. And that precise ambiguity is embodied in the man we chose for our President. His magnetism is that he offers us a mirror of ourselves; he is an existential hero, his end is unknown, it is even unpredictable, even as our end is unpredictable, so in this time of crisis he is able to perform the indispensable psychic act of a leader, he takes our national anxiety so long buried and releases it to the surface--where it belongs. (CC, p. 170.)

However, all the hope that Mailer has invested in Kennedy unexpectedly and irreplaceably vanishes with the assassination of the hero. As Donald Kaufmann has noted, "Kennedy's death in November of 1963--which transformed him into a historical symbol rather than an existential metaphor--deadens America so much that one of its noisiest spokesmen suddenly loses his voice."<sup>6</sup> Bitterly frustrated with the actual political scene of America and further convinced of the impossibility of an existentialist hero in reality, Mailer turned to fiction for hero-creation again. Whereas it is unusually quiet in Cannibals and Christians (1966) for Mailer to voice any of his feelings about the actual death of Kennedy, "everywhere in Rojack's characterization there is a hint of Mailer's attempt to resurrect Kennedy as a hero who belongs more in a novel than in America."<sup>7</sup>

### An American Dream

Mailer's intention of creating a figure resembling Kennedy as the full-fledged American existentialist hero in fiction is clearly shown even by the very first sentence of An American Dream (1965): "I met Jack Kennedy in November, 1946, (AD, p. 9)."<sup>8</sup> In many respects, the hero-narrator of An American Dream, Stephen Richards Rojack, reminds us of President Kennedy. As Rojack recollects at the outset of the novel:

We were both war heroes, and both of us had just been elected to Congress. We went out one night on a double date and it turned out to be a fair evening for me. (AD, p. 9.)

On the surface, this piece of information seems to be the point of departure for Rojack's account of the dramatic differences between the subsequent directions of his life, and those of other more successful politicians like John Kennedy. But in An American Dream, Mailer has actually used President Kennedy and his assassination as the basis for the growth and development of Rojack the ideal American existentialist hero. Rojack failed to become the U. S. President, but for Mailer the reasons for this failure are the very central part of his heroism. Unlike Kennedy, whose fatal drawback, according to Mailer, is the lack of imagination, Rojack is a hero of superhuman imagination. Rather than President Kennedy, Rojack is just the hero "whose personality might suggest contradictions and mysteries which reach into the alienated circuits of the underground" and who "embodies the fantasy and so allows each private mind the liberty to consider its fantasy and find a way to grow (PP, pp. 41-42)."

Even the title of this novel suggests that Mailer this time has left the surface river of American life and plunged into the subterranean current to explore "that concentration of ecstasy and violence which is the dream life of the nation" although Kennedy's assassination has been used as the basis in the story. The evidence for relating the events of the novel and the historical event is slim. For Mailer intends to be concerned primarily with plumbing the depths of the American psyche of the Kennedy era, what he eventually wants to find is a medium that will give him a close access to the psychic significance of the event and not be misled by the "facts." Mailer believes that mass media and journalism are totally inadequate to convey the truth of a situation to the public. Instead, they cloud the truth by brow-beating the public with information. This is why this time Mailer places his existentialist hero outside of politics. As he earlier said in the essay "On Dread":

But then politics, like journalism, is interested to hide from us the existential abyss of dread, the terror which lies beneath our sedation. Today, a successful politician is not a man who wrestles with the art of the possible. . . he is, on the contrary, a doctor of mass communications who may measure his success by the practice of a political ritual and vocabulary which diverts us temporarily from dread, from anxiety, from the mirror of dream. (PP, p. 52.)

In the political arena, the American Dream has turned into a nightmare of material success and security. But Rojack's dream is that of existential experience through magic and violence, and the display of courage in a moment of crisis so as to come closer to that "unachievable whisper of mystery (ADV, p. 325)" than any of his predecessors, such as, the old Sergius, the new Sergius, Marion Faye, or the model hero, White Negro. Therefore, if the book has any focus, it is on the existential psychic mysteries of existentialism, rather than in any other philosophical or social theories, that Mailer is now searching for new directions for the growth of his American existentialist hero. Unlike the narrators of Mailer's earlier novels, Rojack himself is the central figure for the exploration of the existential psychic mysteries. Unlike the earlier narrators again, Rojack knows what he is looking for from the very beginning of the story. His central thesis, also the thesis of the novel, is that "magic, dread, and the perception of death were the roots of motivation (AD, p. 15)." At this point, my observation largely accords with what Helen Weinberg said about Rojack and the novel:

Finally through the catalyst of the definition of the ideal American existentialist, the hipster archetypally found in the modern American Negro, [Mailer] fuses the old Sergius, the new Sergius, and Marion into a single hero who is put into action as Stephen Rojack in American Dream. . . . In An American Dream, Mailer's ideology again triumphs over existential reality. However, since An American Dream is a construct flexible enough to include a personal vision as well as a preconceived ideology, it has an artistry of its own. . . . Certainly the personal visionary element in his philosophy, no matter how much it had been described and predefined in his essays and

journalistic pieces (collected in Advertisements for Myself, The Presidential Papers, and Cannibals and Christians) gives his dieology the intensity of dramatic poetry, metaphor, and symbol in An American Dream.<sup>9</sup>

However, upon its first appearance in 1964 in monthly installments in Esquire and for some time afterwards, An American Dream received very little sympathetic and in-depth criticism like that which has been quoted above. In fact, very few critics were sympathetic to this particular outgrowth of the evolution of Mailer's ideas. The early criticism reacted severely to the elements of plot, character, and pace of the novel. Many critics preferred to regard the book as unrealistic, irresponsible, even hysterical. The most severe attack came from Elizabeth Hardwick. To her, An American Dream was a "fantasy of vengeful murder, callous copulations and an assortment of dull cruelties" which were unjustified literarily because it was "poorly written, morally foolish and intellectually empty."<sup>10</sup> Hardwick goes on to describe it as "dirty," "degrading," "smelly," "fatuous," "messy"; her final verdict is that it is "just a pile of dust."<sup>11</sup> Joseph Epstein had this to say of it in his review in The New Public: "For any way and on any level one chooses to read it, An American Dream is confused and silly."<sup>12</sup> He also says that it has fewer ideas than any of Mailer's previous novels, "and fewer still which are convincingly stitched into the novel, and fewer than that which are of any value."<sup>13</sup> Philip Rahv, in his review in The New York Review of Books, said that although the novel's title "implies a generalization about the national life," it is "palpably unsupported either by the weird and sometimes ludicrous details of the story or by the low-level private mysticism informing its imaginative scheme."<sup>14</sup> This mysticism Rahv equates with Mailer's ideas on "hip," which he says "is scarcely a report on something that exists outside himself, but is basically a programmatic statement of his

own desires, power drives, and daydreams."<sup>15</sup>

This is, however, not to say that there were no early reviews and criticism that were positive; both Richard Poirier and Leo Bersani made early and favorable responses to the novel.<sup>16</sup> Both warned the detractors not to take the novel's events literally, and that it is not a novel of crime and punishment in the conventional sense. Furthermore, many irrelevant attacks upon An American Dream merely resulted from the fact that the novel was so different from anything Mailer had done up to this point that few readers could see the seriousness of intent of its particular details and larger structures. If we try to understand the novel in a larger context by seeing through the relationships between Rojack and President Kennedy as Mailer perceived him in Presidential Papers, and Mailer's urgent search for a hero who might take the place of his political Kierkegaardian hero in fiction, we may not be so easily confused and thereby irritated by Rojack's headlong rush into the mysteries of murder, suicide, the insane edges of sex, and magic and demonism. There are also indications in Mailer's work that provide sufficient transitions in the reader's mind for such seemingly abrupt shifts, such as from Faye's playing the role of villain to descend to the very heart of darkness and from the new Sergius's sodomizing Denise by violating the "bridal ground of her symbolic and therefore real vagina," to Rojack's existentialist forays into the American psychic underworld of sex and violence.

In fact, Rojack's adventures in the thirty-two hours of the novel are not just an "assortment of dull cruelties and callous copulation," as Hardwick's review called them, but the spiritual travails of one of the "voyagers and explorers" in God's "embattled vision." But as Jean Radford has recently noted, "To liberate himself from the violence and perversions



of what Mailer sees as the American way of life, Rojack decides that he must, like Marion Faye, 'make it to the end'--act out the dream fantasies of his culture in order to reach a new state of consciousness."<sup>17</sup> Rojack's journey through this psychic terrain towards the "heavenly city (AD, p. 122)" is constantly described in religious imagery. Even such an observation was clearly prepared by Mailer himself in Presidential Papers. In a fictional fragment functioning as a preface to an imaginary interview on the subjects of scatology and eschatology entitled "The Metaphysics of Belly," the narrator defines himself as a philosopher of sorts, now dying of cancer, and speculates from some future point in time on his effect on the "internal history" of the second half of the twentieth century. He sees his greatest achievement as his "sensitivity to the dialectic" and the subsequent decline of his power as his most woeful loss. His achievement, however, was not in the operation of the skill itself but in his use of it for a Manichean adventure--to divert the consciousness of the time to considerations of the mysteries of God and the Devil:

There were others who possessed the dialectic with greater power; the Frenchman Jean Paul. . . Sartre I remember was his last name had a dialectical mind good as a machine for cybernetics, immense in its way, he could peel a nuance like an onion, but he had no sense of evil, the anguish of God, and the possible existence of Satan. That was left to me, to return the rootless disordered mind of our Twentieth Century to the Kiss sub cauda and the Weltanschauung of the Medieval witch. (PP, p. 273.)

According to Mailer's system of American existentialism, the concept of God and the Devil is interlinked with a series of opposites: the rational and the instinctive, the intellectual and the mystical, the conscious and the unconscious. At the start of the story Rojack introduces himself as a man seeking alternatives to intellectuality and rational explanations of experience:

There are times when I like to think I still have my card in the intellectual's guild, but I seem to be joining company with that horde of the mediocre and the mad who listen to popular songs and act upon coincidence. (AD, p. 10.)

Prior to the beginning of his narrative, Rojack has already realized the Horatio Alger's American Dream of success: Harvard graduate, war hero, Congressman, husband of an heiress, TV celebrity, college professor. Rojack's achievement of the American Dream, however, has brought him no happiness. And at the very outset, he comes to the conclusion: "I had come to decide I was finally a failure (AD, p. 15)."

Having had a very intense experience of the mystery of death during the war when he killed some Germans in a desolate moonlit landscape, Rojack finds that the political game and worldly fame come to seem like an unreal distraction in which the real private authentic self is swallowed up in a fabricated public appearance. Rojack tells us that the crucial difference between him and President Kennedy stems from a predisposition towards death that was forced on him one night in Italy in combat during the war:

The real difference between the President and myself may be that I ended with too large an appreciation of the moon, for I looked down the abyss on the first night I killed: four men, four very separate Germans, dead under a full moon--whereas Jack, for all I know, never saw the abyss. (AD, p. 10.)

In other words, Kennedy is more in the tradition of the American Faustian hero; his connection is closer to the Devil than to God because he has never seen the abyss. Further, the moon image in this novel takes on a special symbolic significance. It is associated with "magic," "dread," and the "perception of death." Throughout the novel, Rojack has not tried to define "magic," but from the situations he described and the actions he took, "it seems to mean the psychic power which the existentialist achieves in his heroic confrontation with the absurd--an instinctive sense

of what to do."<sup>18</sup> The incident is described in Rojack's recollection. He was then a young second lieutenant, and on that particular night he had led his platoon up a hill only to be trapped by two German machine-gun nests. Feeling the horror of his failure, he says,

"Death this night first appeared to me as a possibility considerably more agreeable than my status in some further disorder," [and] "I was so ready to die in atonement I was not even scared." (AD, pp. 10-11.)

Having come to accept his death, he felt danger withdraw from him "like an angel, withdraw like a retreating wave over a quiet sea (AD, p. 11)," and he was able to destroy both emplacements with hand-grenades tossed simultaneously.

What takes on a different coloring when Rojack tells us that some other agency was at work in that night when the moon was full--that besides feeling danger withdraw from him, he in fact did not throw the grenades, "it" did. Further, when he looks into the eyes of the fourth wounded German, who comes for him, bayonet in hand, the agency of his invulnerability--"it, the grace"--suddenly disappears. He cannot charge the German soldier now, and the shots he takes at him miss. The wounded German dies before reaching him, however, and Rojack himself collapses. It was the eyes of this soldier that he could not confront,

eyes of blue, so perfectly blue and mad they go all the way in deep into celestial vaults of sky, eyes which go all the way to God is the way I think I heard it said once in the South, and I faltered before the stage, clear as ice in the moonlight, and hung on one knee, not knowing if I could push my wound, and suddenly it was all gone, the clear presence of it, the grace, it had deserted me in the instant I hesitated, and now I had no stomach to go, I could charge his bayonet no more. (AD, pp. 12-13.)

Although he eventually won, he was then still bothered by "those blue eyes" because they "kept staring into the new flesh of my memory until I went over with a thud (AD, p. 13)."

It is the memory of eyes that ruins Rojack's budding political career. Elected to Congress at the age of 26, he is not at home in this role, and considers it to be as unreal and insane for him as the life of "those particular movie stars who are not only profiles for a great lover, but homosexual and private in their life. They must live with insanity on their breath (AD, p. 14)." The one single reason for this division within him is the memory of "those blue eyes":

His 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. I could have had a career in politics if only I had been able to think that death was zero, death was everyone's emptiness. But I knew it was not. I remained an actor. My personality was built upon a void. (AD, p. 14.)

Rojack has seen in a moment of transcendence the meaning of life inextricably woven into the meaning of death. For all his superficial success, he is a man who instinctively knows that a political style ignoring death is an ideological void. It is in this sense that he says to himself, ". . .you also know if still you are sane that politics is not for you and you are not for politics (AD, p. 15)."

The importance to Mailer of the acknowledgement of the engagement with death as a pre-requisite for existential growth has been noted in my discussion of "The White Negro." It is most significantly enuciated in the section in which he distinguishes atheistic European existentialism from the mystic and romantic death-drawn existentialism implicit in the life style of the American existentialist hero, the hipster. However, the notion that death is not final in the usual sense, but may be a continuation of life in some way, is the real point of separation between Mailer and atheistic European existentialists. This is a notion that he returns to again and again in all of his writing after "The White Negro." Indeed, many of his other existentialist ideas can be considered from now

on derivative from or dependent upon the acknowledgement of the possibility that death may not be dimensionless. In Presidential Papers, Mailer discussed the various existentialist positions on the meaning of death and made his own position very clear:

. . . the reluctance of modern European existentialism to take on the logical continuation of the existential vision (that there is a life after death which can be as existential as life itself) has brought French and German existentialism to a halt on this uninhabitable terrain of the absurd--to wit, man must lead his life as death is meaningful even when man knows that death is meaningless. This revealed knowledge which Heidegger accepts as his working hypothesis and Sartre goes so far as to assume is the certainty upon which he may build a philosophy, ends the possibility that one can construct a base for the existential ethic. The German philosopher runs aground trying to demonstrate the necessity for man to discover an authentic life. Heidegger can give no deeper explanation why man should bother to be authentic than to state in effect that man should be authentic in order to be free. Sartre's advocacy of the existential commitment is always in danger of dwindling into the minor aristocratic advocacy of leading one's life with style for the sake of style. Existentialism is rootless unless one dates the hypothesis that death is an existential continuation of life, that the soul may either pass migrations, or cease to exist in the continuum of nature. . . . But accepting this hypothesis, authenticity and commitment return to the center of ethics, for man then faces no peril so huge as alienation from his own soul, a death which is other than death, a disappearance into nothingness rather than into eternity. (PP, pp. 213-14.)

The conception that death may have dimension thus forces Rojack, if he is determined to undergo existential growth, to step aside from the collectivist drift of American life and proceed himself to assume the burden of his own destiny. Rojack is thus from the beginning of the novel established as an American existentialist. Even though he is married to an heiress, and is a professor with tenure at a New York university, and has his own talk show on a local TV network, the rift Rojack's obsession causes between him and the contemporary psychic life of society is to be seen as much more radical and profound than that which underlay the alienations of Lovett, Sergius, or even Faye.

The actual events of the novel begin with a scene on a balcony in New York where Rojack is contemplating suicide. He realizes that his life has been a failure, thus leading him to the urge to put his life at rest, to fulfill his love for himself and his realization that he cannot be what he wants to be. After a cocktail party in a friend's apartment, Rojack vomits violently over the edge of the balcony and finds that this purge has even more rawly exposed the vacancies in himself and has made him highly receptive to the pull to suicide that the magical power of the full moon exerts on those who are already so inclined:

So I stood on the balcony by myself and stared at the moon which was full and very low. I had a moment then. For the moon spoke back to me. By which I do not mean that I heard voices, . . . no, truly it was worse than that. Something in the deep of full moon, some tender and not so innocent radiance traveled fast as the thought of lightning across our night sky, out from the depth of the dead in those caverns of the moon, out a leap through space to me. And suddenly I understood the moon. Believe it if you will. The only true journey of knowledge is from the depth of one being to the heart of another and I was nothing but open raw depths at that instant alone on the balcony, looking down on Sutton Place, the spirits of the food and drink I had ingested wrenched out of my belly and upper gut, leaving me in raw Being, there were clefts and rents which cut like geographical faults right through all the lead and concrete and kapok and leather of ego, that mutilated piece of insulation, I could feel my Being, ridiculous enough, what! (AD, p. 18.)

Suffering from a Sartrean nausea, Rojack feels that if he jumps he will fly. "My body would drop like a sack. . . but I would rise, the part of me which spoke and thought and had its glimpses of the landscape of my Being. . . would leap the miles of darkness to that moon (AD, p. 19)." Responding to the call, he climbs over the balustrade and looks again at the moon. Instinct tells him to drop, but an appropriate moment seems to pass, and he then feels that "Now if I dropped, all of me passed down (AD, p. 19)." Further, the "formal part" of his brain presses him to stay alive because he has not yet done his life's work; however the moon on

the other side seems to argue, "You've lived your life and you are dead with it (AD, p. 19)." Yet he cries, "Let me be not all dead" and climbs back over. Nevertheless, he has at this moment become ill in a more serious way than before, that his cowardice has moved his body's chemistry to the point of cancer:

This illness now, huddling to the deck chair, was an extinction. I could feel what was good in me going away, going away perhaps forever, rising after all to the moon, my courage, my wit, ambition and hope. Nothing but sickness and dung remained in the sack of my torso. And the moon looked back, baleful in her radiance now. Will you understand me if I say that at that moment I felt the other illness come to me, that I knew that if it took twenty years or forty for any death, that if I died from a revolt of the cells, a growth against the design of my organism, that this was the moment it all began, this was the hour when the cells took their leap? Never have I known such a sickening--the retaliation of the moon was complete. What an utter suffocation of my faculties, as if I had disappointed a lady and now must eat the cold tapeworm of her displeasure. Nothing noble seemed to remain of me. (AD, pp. 19-20.)

The cancer which Rojack now believes has begun in him is, according to Mailer, a signal of possible extinction of the soul--either in life or after death. But, on the other hand, cancer, as has been shown in other contexts, can also be caused by psychic ills, ills that stem from compromise and cowardice and result in loss of individuality. As Rojack himself indicates, he suffers from illness of this kind as well. And it is to the fact of marriage with Deborah that he attributes his illness. He tells us this in a digression in which he recounts his self-hatred and cowardice for his dependence on her and his insufficient strength to leave her. It is the same morbid need to keep returning to her that now drives him to visit her, sick and weak, on this cold night of the full moon. Deborah has the same meaning to him as the moon at a moment like this:

At moments like that I would feel as if I had committed hari-kari and was walking about with my chest separated from my groin. It was a moment which was physically insupportable, it was the remains of my love for her, love draining from the wound, leaving

behind its sense of desolation as if all the love I possessed were being lost and some doom whose dimensions I would hardly glimpse was getting ready on the consequence. (AD, pp. 21-22.)

His love for Deborah is based on his dependence upon her; "marriage to her was the armature of my ego (AD, p. 23)." It is with his ego that he loves her, and with the same ego that he derives satisfaction from having been "the man whom Deborah Caughlin Mangravidí Kelley had lived with marriage." Because of his dependence on her name and on her extensive social and political connections, and the omnipresence of her father Barney Oswald Kelley and his tremendous wealth and power, Rojack feels that his faith in his "strength to stand alone" has been completely undermined. This marriage Rojack calls "a devil's contract." Deborah has the magical power of the wealthy and the Devil's access to the world.

Deborah is indeed in league with the Devil and she has the power of destruction to exercise it on Rojack. He describes this of hers when he goes to see her in her apartment:

They (her breasts) radiated a destestation so palpable that my body began to race as if a foreign element, a poison altogether suffocating, were beginning to seep through me. Did you ever feel the malignity which rises from a swamp? It is real, I could swear it, and some whisper of ominous calm, that heavy air one breathes in the hours before a hurricane, now came to rest between us. I was afraid of her. She was not incapable of murdering me. There are killers one is ready to welcome, I suppose. They offer a clean death and free passage to one's soul. The moon had spoken to me as just such an assassin. But Deborah promised bad burial. One would go down in one's wind. She did not wish to tear the body, she was out to spoil the light, and in an epidemic of fear, as if her face--that wide mouth, full-fleshed arrows--would be my first view of eternity, as if she were ministering angel (ministering devil?) I knelt beside her and tried to take her hand. It was soft now as jellyfish, and almost as repugnant--the touch shot my palm with a thousand needles which stung into my arm exactly as if I had been swimming at night and lashed onto a Portuguese *man'o' war*. (AD, pp. 30-31.)

The mood at this point becomes dangerously charged, when Rojack admits that he still loves her and suffers from getting none back, and his



separation from her has made him feel as though he is coming apart. Deborah responds by saying that she too has known this feeling, but admits to have loved another man far more than him, "the finest and most extraordinary man I ever knew. Delicious. Just a marvelous wild feast of things. I tried to make him jealous once and lost him (AD, p. 33)." Deborah adds to the humiliation of this by disclosing a particular unnamed sexual act which they used to share, and which Rojack believes she would never have done with anyone else. She emphasizes that she now practices it freely with other lovers. At this he slaps her, harder than he intends, and she in turn charges him "like a bull," going for groin, first with her knee, and then, "missing that, she reached with both hands, tried to find my root and mangle me (AD, p. 35)." With all his accumulated hatred released, Rojack starts to strangle her in a mighty effort against her own extraordinary strength and kills her.

His murder of her is like his killing of the German soldier; it is a mystical experience. His description of the strangulation shows the relationship between the two events. He says first that he felt as though "I was pushing with my shoulder against an enormous door which would give inch by inch to the effort." He is about to stop, but

I had had a view of what was on the other side of the door, and heaven was there, some quiver of jeweled cities shining in the flow of a tropical dusk, and I thrust against the door once more. . . I was driving now with force against that door, . . . I was trying to stop but pulse packed behind pulse in a pressure up to thunder head; some black-biled lust, some desire to go ahead not unlike the instant one comes in a woman against her cry that she is without protection came busting with rage from out of me and my mind exploded in a fireworks of rockets, and hurtling embers. . . and crack the door flew open, and the wire tore hatred passing from me in wave after wave, illness as well, rot and pestilence, nausea, a bleak string of salts. I was floating. I was as far into myself as I had ever been and universes whelled in a dream. To my closed eyes Deborah's face seemed to float off from her body and stare at me in darkness. She gave one malevolent look which said: "There are

dimensions to evil which reach beyond the light," and then she smiled like a milkmaid and floated away and was gone. (AD, pp. 35-36.)

The result of this experience leaves Rojack with the sense that his "flesh seemed new. I had not felt so nice since I was twelve. It seemed inconceivable at this instant that anything in life could fail to please (AD, p. 36)." Obviously, the door image has the function of releasing every hatred that Rojack has buried in himself all these years. Further, the brutal murder becomes the first illumination in Rojack's pilgrimage from a spiritual illness as it is seen in cancer, to the regeneration of psychic resources for more vital and autonomous correspondences with existence and thereby saves his soul. Suicide would have freed him from falling "into nothingness"; but after the abortive suicide, murder is the only other alternative to experience a total catharsis, a mental orgasm, to prepare himself for growth. Here Mailer has given fictional expression to the full range of possibilities implicit in the hipster ethic of "The White Negro":

Hip, which would return us to ourselves, at no matter what price in individual violence, is the affirmation of the barbarian, for it requires a primitive passion about human nature to believe that individual acts of violence are always to be preferred to the collective violence of the State; it takes literal faith in the creative possibilities of the human being to envisage acts of violence as the catharsis which prepares growth. (ADV, p. 328.)

And though Mailer had acknowledged in "The White Negro" the danger that "Hip might actually destroy civilization," he was insisting then, as he was still insisting at the time of the writing of An American Dream, that the slow death by depletions of spirit which is institutional death may be countered only by personal acts of violence.

Just after Rojack murders Deborah, and while still filled with the "new grace," he muses a while, thinking about Deborah when she was alive,

about her own notions of grace, of the revelations he got from the smells she gave off in sex ("of the wild boar full of rot" and "something other-- a hint of sanctity, something as calculating and full of guile as high finance (AD, p. 39)"), and of her own conviction that was "more good and more evil than anyone alive," but in the balance, "evil if truth be told." She had claimed to despise evil; however, it drew her because "evil has power (AD, p. 40)." Living with such a person had caused Rojack to "come to believe in grace and the lack of it, in the long finger of God and the swish of the Devil, I had come to give my scientific apprehension to the reality of witches (AD, p. 38)." Rojack's new state of grace also helps him make a switch in his mind from an ego-dominated consciousness to that part of the consciousness which is led by the instinctive self, the more surely teleological "navigator at the seat of our being (ADV, p. 355)."

After a brief interior debate about whether to call the police, confess the crime, and go to prison, another voice in his brain says "'Look first at Deborah's face.' (AD, p. 43)" This he does, and believes that he divines from her appearance in death and that "what was good in her had been willed to me (how else account for the fine breath of this calm) (AD, p. 43)" and that "every last part which detested me was collected now in the face she showed for her death--if something endured beyond her dying, something not in me, it was vengeance (AD, p. 43)." Adding this to all that has gone on before, we see that Rojack's psychic turn is now complete, and from here on his actions will be directed from what are to be seen as totally different psychic resources; he has undergone an existential realignment to accommodate the reality outside:

The verdict now came clear. I was not going to call the police, not now, not yet--some other solution was finding its way up through myself, a messenger from the magician who solved all riddles was on his way, ascending those endless stairs from the

buried gaming rooms of the unconscious to the tower of the brain. He was on his way and I was doomed if I thought to do my work in jail. For her curse would be on me. (AD, pp. 43-44.)

Next, in obedience to another force which comes upon him, and which seems rejuvenatingly sexual, Rojack strolls out of Deborah's bedroom, walks down the stairs to the maid's room, and enters without knocking to find her masterbating in bed. Led to Ruta's room by the magical force, Rojack is in what is best described as a heightened mental state where all his senses are remarkably keen and, for the first time in his life, he feels the magic of his own potentialities. With this power, Rojack has the intuitive sense of Ruta's greed, and so in the midst of their sexual intercourse he turns her over and enters her anus. Like a scene in "The Time of Her Time," Rojack describes the "thin high constipated smell" that came from her, and thinks:

She was hungry, like a lean rat she was hungry, and it could have spoiled my pleasure except that there was something intoxicating in the sheer narrow pitch of the smell, so strong, so stubborn, so private, it was a smell which could be mellowed only by the gift of fur and gems, she was money this girl, she cost money, she would make money, something as corrupt as a banquet plate of caviar laid on hundred-dollar bills would be required to enrich that odor all the way up to the smell of foie gras in Deborah's world and Deborah's friends. I had a desire suddenly to skip the sea and mine the earth, a pure prong of desire to burger, there was canny hard-packed evil in that butt, that I knew. But she resisted, she spoke for the first time, "Not there! Verboten!" (AD, pp. 46-47.)

When he completely penetrates her anal passage he calls her a Nazi, to which she responds in the affirmative. He thinks:

There was a high private pleasure in plugging a Nazi, there was something clean despite all--I felt as if I were gliding in the celar air above Luther's jakes and she was loose and free, very loose and very free, as if this were finally her natural act: a host of the Devil's best gifts were coming to me, mendacity, guile, a fine-edged cupidity for the stroke which steals, the wit to trick authority. (AD, p. 47.)

As they continue, Rojack alternates between her anus and her vagina, "a

raid on the Devil and a trip back to the Lord." Her vagina was, however, impoverished, a "graveyard." At the moment of their climax, even though Rojack has finally chosen her vagina which has become "a chapel now, a modest decent place," he cannot resist returning to the Devil, in large part, it is suggested, because Ruta has made no contraceptive preparations. He has chosen, then, death over life, the Devil over God, but he is too late:

I had come to the Devil a fraction too late, and nothing had been there to receive me. But I had a vision immediately after of a huge city in the desert, in the same 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. A million light bulbs lit the scene. (AD, p. 49.)

Rojack shows the intuitive understanding that Ruta does not have. He knows part of the distinction between God and the Devil, and he knows which is the place for each. It is significant, finally, that when he returns to his wife's bedroom where she lies dead on the floor that she has voided her bowels. "There was a stingy fish-like scent in the air, not unreminiscent of Ruta. They were mistress and maid and put their musk in opposite pockets (AD, p. 54)."

It is in this section of the extended dramatic description of Rojack's seduction of Ruta, the dialectical argument of good and evil, and the metaphysical and moral implications of womb and anus, that many reviewers found especially disgusting. But one early critic, John Aldridge, did recognize the inter-relations of scatology, sex, and existential growth in Mailer's metaphysical system:

For over the years Mailer evolved a sort of eschatology of scatology, a . . . metaphysics of feces. Excrement represents to him the organic form of defeat and dread. It is linked in his mind to the work of the Devil, who is engaged in unremitting warfare with God to determine the ascendancy of death or life in the universe, a contest which on the human level becomes the individual's unremitting struggle against dread. Closely related

to this is the concept of apocalyptic orgasm which Mailer first explored in his famous essay, "The White Negro." The apocalyptic orgasm. . . is above all else a psychomystical experience whereby new circuits of energy are generated in the self, which in turn come into connection with the circuits operating through the universe. Finally, therefore, it is a means of attaining oneness with God. But for this to become possible, the Devil in us must first be vanquished. Hence, behind every apocalyptic orgasm is an apocalyptic defecation. From one exit we ejaculate toward divinity. From the other we ejaculate the devil's work. The route to salvation is thus from anus to phallus, from organic excretion to organic ecstasy. If there is in fact a Great Chain of Being, Mailer's advice would obviously be to pull it.<sup>19</sup>

Making such a connection between scatology and sex is certainly part of Mailer's intention, but, instead of espousing the idea of a Great Chain of Being, Mailer wants all the knowledge he got from Norman O. Brown coherently assimilated in his American existentialist system.<sup>20</sup>

Specifically, in American Dream, Rojack is convinced that he has taken from Ruta gifts of guile and the toughness to get along, and moreover, that these are the devil's gifts, since they are received largely through anal intercourse. He also believes that whatever force of good there may have been in Deborah has been similarly passed to him by his communion with her in murder. Thus the devil may not be so simply evacuated; it may become necessary to enter into some temporary contract with him in order to withstand other evils and dangers to survival. Therefore, Rojack's encounter with Ruta represents a fuller realization than before in Mailer's fiction, within the confines of a single consciousness and a single dramatized moment, of the dialectical of existential growth with his new ideas absorbed into the system.

In "The White Negro," Mailer had declared, as shown in the previous chapter, that a "dialectical conception of existence" which would be obligatory for life and growth would include a conception of character so radically existential, so isolated and autonomous, that it must proceed on "no truths other than the isolated truths of what each observer feels

at each instant of his experience (ADV, p. 327)." Moreover, this life would have no goals other than an eschatology of perpetual becoming, "a life committed to the notion that the substratum of existence is the search, the end meaningful but mysterious (ADV, p. 315)." In American Dream, Mailer attempts a full expression of this "dialectical conception." In Rojack's case, it is not so much that murder is being legitimized, but it is that Rojack and his murder are, for his existential growth. From now on Rojack will be put in each existential situation to experience anxiety and test his courage. The situations are existential in the sense that the end result of each situation is as unpredictable as that of the other. Like the Kierkegaardian Abraham filled with "fear and trembling," Rojack is committed to ride through each of them ahead, depending mainly on intuition and instinct. In the story, this will mean: (a) outwitting the police by guessing their own strategy, and doing this by instinctively reading the character of each one he comes in contact with, aided by the character-revealing odors that each gives off; (b) braving down Mafia types by telepathic battle in order to steal Cherry from them and gain her respect; (c) learning to love for the first time and trying to live up to the commitment to be brave which he believes its continuation will depend upon; (d) surviving an encounter with the very large scale evil of Barney Kelley, high in his suite in the Waldorf Towers, where Rojack, for various reasons, attempts a walk around the parapet of the balcony.

When Rojack returns to his wife's body after the encounter with Ruta and looks at her, he feels that he has not yet quite "plumbed the hatred where the real injustice is stored" and feels an impulse "to go up and kick her ribs, grind my heel on her nose, drive the point of my shoe into her temple and kill her good this time, kill her right (AD, p. 53)."

For disposing of Deborah's body, he conceives a plan of having a cannibal feast with Ruta:

I had a little fantasy at this moment. It was beyond measure. I had a desire to take Deborah to bathroom, put her in the tub. Then Ruta and I would sit down to eat. The two of us would sup on Deborah's flesh, we would eat for days: the deepest poison in us would be released from our cells. (AD, p. 53.)

Rojack finally rejects the plan. His instinct, the messenger, has slipped in to the tower and tells him to push her body out of the window, "for it was also the boldest choice. Was I brave enough? (AD, p. 53)" Rojack's instincts are telling him to make the existential choice, to enter into a contest with the police in an extraordinarily conceived fake suicide. He has chosen to risk everything rather than confess and go to prison.

During his initial questioning by the police, Rojack tells an elaborate series of lies. They know he has had intercourse with Ruta, they discover Deborah's hyoid bone is broken, a sure sign of death by strangulation, and suspect Rojack of murder. The religious reasons he gives for Deborah's purported suicide are highly dubious. Suicide is forgiven by God if "your soul was in danger of being extinguished." Although the argument has little impact on the police, the cancer that later shows up in the autopsy seems to confirm some part of Rojack's story. Cancer begins as the soul dies, and "If the soul is extinguished in life, nothing passes on into Eternity when you die (AD, p. 68)." In the station the police are unconvinced by Rojack's explanations and continue to question him. The chain of events inaugurated by Deborah's fall on to East River Drive begin to take form.

The car that hit the body contains Cherry, a Mafia Eddid Ganucci, and his nephew. Because the police have a warrant for Ganucci, they do not push their interrogation of Rojack. The first sight he has of Cherry, "with the perfect American face, a small town girl's face with the sort of



perfect clean features which find their way onto every advertisement and every billboard in the land (AD, p. 62)," causes his immediate interest. Her presence in the station is one factor that prevents him from breaking down and confessing; the other is the shame a confession and trial would bring on Deborah's memory and on himself for pleading that he "too was insane and my best ideas were poor, warped, distorted, and injurious to others (AD, p. 86)." Too weak to cry out his guilt, his "voice" keeps him in his chair ordering him to wait, "as if some power had cast a paralysis upon me (AD, p. 86)." Praying to God for a sign, he raises his eyes and sees Cherry, and a voice tells him to "Go to the girl." From her Rojack gets the address of the nightclub where she sings, and, although she is mixed-up with the Mafia, he intends to go and see her. Later, when he is released from the police station, he goes to the nightclub where Cherry is singing and then leaves with her. Rojack has recovered his sense of magic and he finds a kindred spirit in Cherry.

Cherry understands Rojack's state and talks with him about death and suicide, because she has her own set of corruptions and defeats. She is indirectly responsible for her sister's suicide; she has had an affair with Barney Kelley which resulted in an aborted pregnancy; she has been the mistress of a Mafia narcotics king (she was passed on to him by Kelley); she has been indirectly connected to gangland murders; and after trying for love with Shago Martin, a famous black singer, she somehow fails at this and has her pregnancy by him aborted as well. Thus her sex so far has been "decreative" (as has Rojack's). However, Cherry, the fair-haired Southern girl, is the diametric opposite of Deborah, the black-haired bitch. Cherry understands the significance of death. In a sense she and Rojack are allies because they are both locked in the danger and potential that death gives.

So far, Rojack has been faced with a series of existential choices each of which has challenged his Being, each of which has tested his ability to discover his essential nature, whether he will create or destroy. And so far his instincts have been perfect. In his first love-making with Cherry, he is committed to move in a better direction. When they begin to make love, Rojack feels freed from his exhaustion. "I was alive in some deep water below sex, some tunnel of the dream where effort was discovered at last from price (AD, p. 121)." But as they continue, Rojack feels hindered by the diaphragm which Cherry is using, "that corporate rubbery obstruction I detested so much." So they stop and he removes it. When he enters her again, he comes face to face with her will--their souls begin a battle. They cannot really fulfill each other until he makes a decision and until they decide whether they will love each other.

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 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 had 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 don't fail?" I asked. "Do not ask," said the voice, "Choose now!" and some continent of dread speared wide in me, rising like a dragon, as if I know the choice were 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 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 or 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. (AD, pp. 122-23.)

Though mixed with sexual images, this is one of the most beautiful passages in the book. Breaking the shield of his old fears and restraints, Rojack, in his sensitivity to his total being, and with the decisions of life and death hanging over him, is able for the first time in his life to express the deepest urgings of his soul for life. He is able to give himself entirely to the voice of his deepest and essential Being, and completely overcome all the other voices which plague him. Love is a reward for those who are brave, for Rojack believes "God was not love but courage." And it is also the existential willingness to risk all. Any faltering in courage is a sapping of love.

Later on, Rojack has come to understand that one can fall in love but that it is not very easy to maintain that love, for this takes great courage, "for now I understood that love was not a gift but a vow (AD, p. 156)." Both Rojack and Cherry have taken their vows, for Rojack has committed himself to love Cherry and she had her first orgasm and both believe that they have conceived a child. In order to earn the love of Cherry Rojack forces himself into some final tests before the novel ends. The first final test comes in facing down Shago Martin, Cherry's ex-lover. After Cherry's confession to Rojack of her past and her links to Kelley, they are intruded in their lovemaking by Shago Martin. Upon entering the apartment and finding Rojack there, Shago threatens him with a knife and orders him to leave. But when he sees Rojack does not cower and refuses to leave, Shago begins to admire his courage. Shago himself is not to be seen as a potentially heroic but finally defeated combatant of the American Negro with a fragmented identity. Shago's greatest failure is that he wasn't brave enough to encounter the world head-on as he would have

been required to if Cherry had been allowed to carry her pregnancy with him to termination. Now when he insults Rojack and flauntingly turns his back on him, Rojack leaps on him from behind and subdues him by repeatedly lifting him up and smashing him to the floor. Then Rojack throws him down a flight of stairs to the street.

After the fight and leaving Cherry asleep, Rojack goes to meet with Kelley, only armed with the two drinks he has imbibed and the umbrella Shago has left behind. Although Rojack manages to love Cherry freely and, in spite of dread, courageously, he has not managed to keep his love safe and Cherry falls victim to a gang of Harlem hoodlums while Rojack walks a parapet railing around the balcony of Kelley's apartment. In fact, Rojack has several chances to prevent Cherry's death. On his way to meet Kelley, his inner voice tells him to go to Harlem: "'Do you want your love to be blessed' said my mind, 'go to Harlem' (AD, p. 190)." He knows that he has to see Shago. He has to meet Shago head-on in a fair fight; he has to destroy the Devil in Shago that had damaged Cherry. If he does not, that Devil will eventually destroy Cherry. Yet he is afraid; he is afraid of the significance of murder for the first time:

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. (AD, p. 192.)

It seems by this point that the instinct that served him so well up to now is being worn down by perpetual crisis into something like neurotic compulsiveness. It is in this state that Rojack goes to see Kelley whom he equates with the Devil. If he can survive his confrontation with the master, then he has lost relatively little by not going to meet his disciple, Shago.

However, once at the Waldorf Towers, and riding in the elevator to Kelley's tower apartment, Rojack feels again that this choice was a mistake, and that failing to go to Harlem will perhaps deprive him of some extraordinary possibility within himself, as might also have his earlier refusal to obey the call to suicide:

. . . once again I felt something begin to go out of the very light of my mind, as if the colors which lit the stage of my dreams would be more modest now, something vital was ready to go away forever, even as once, not thirty hours ago, I had lost some other part of myself, it had streamed away on a voyage to the moon, launched out on that instant when I had been too fearful to jump, something had quit me forever, that ability of my soul to die in its place take failure, go down honorably. Now something else was preparing to leave, some certainty of love was passing away, some knowledge it was the reward for which to live--that voice which I could no longer deny spoke again through the medium of the umbrella. (AD, p. 195.)

Obviously, Rojack is beginning to understand that when one kills he tampers with the divine economy, he competes with the gods. Hence he thinks that his fear is a very real dread, the dread that Kierkegaard speaks of.

Rojack's final test occurs in his meeting with Kelley. Mailer has almost made Kelley a symbol of the entire history of American totalitarianism. This identity is combined with the worst of all evils, an air of external calm and gentility comouflaging a bestial, violent, and power-mad personality. If Deborah is a symbol of evil of High Society on the social-political level and Ruta a symbol of hatred on the personal-metaphorical level for a man of Rojack's American-Jewish background, Barney Kelley is certainly a symbol of evil and hatred on all levels--"a kingly devil, ready to tempt, bribe, and seduce in order to exert control."<sup>21</sup> There is also added to Kelley's sanguine disposition two separate manners: a British one "clipped jolly, full of tycoon; he might have you knifed but dependably you would feel a twinkle as the order went down." The American mien is found revealed in the eyes, "those wyes would buy you, sell you, close you out, walk past your window. . . (AD, p. 206)."

The climactic scene takes place in Kelley's library. It is presented as an evil which is rotten with the accumulated viciousness and greed of aristocratic excess:

There was a presence in the room like the command of a dead pharaoh. Aristocrats, slave owners, manufacturers and popes had coveted these furnishings until the beseechments of prayer had passed into their gold. Even as a magnet directs every iron particle in a crowd of filings, so a field of force was on me here, an air with surfeit and the long whisper of corridors, the echo of a banquet hall where red burgundy and wild boar went down. That same field of force had come on me as I left Deborah's body on the floor and started down the stairs to the room where Ruta was waiting. (AD, pp. 220-21.)

The confrontation with Kelley in his throne room and Rojack's walk around the parapet is the longest episode in the novel. The surface subject is Kelley's wish and Rojack's refusal that he attend Deborah's funeral. Kelley intuitively knows that Rojack did kill Deborah. He then draws Rojack into a strange intimacy with him by making a long confession of his own past. A man of enormous wealth, with extensive political and criminal connections, from the President and CIA to the Mafia, Kelley is originally a Minnesotan whose life is a moral inversion of the Alger myth. Rojack and Kelley both shared the same ambition, to escape the world of the parvenu, to enjoy a world money and position can buy, a world of political power and influence.

After relating an incident of temptation to incest with a grand lady and her daughter, Kelley admits to his incestuous relationship with Deborah. The Devil in the form of a goat had tempted him, and he had been unable to repress the urge to go to her room. "Incest is the gate to the worst sort of forces (AD, p. 225)." And incest is the act upon which Kelley's power, his ultimate pact with the Devil, resides. Kelley also gets Rojack to admit that he killed Deborah. Now that everything has surfaced, Rojack senses the powerful evil in Kelley, emanated as a sort of sexual musk. Yet along with this he also senses just how closely linked

in brotherhood he is to Kelley. Kelley finally invites him to participate with him (and Ruta, who is also at the apartment) in a three-way orgy:

. . . bring Ruta forth, three of us to pinch and tear and squat and lick, swill and grovel on that Lucchese bed, fuck, until her eyes were out, bury the ghost of Deborah by gorging on her corpse. . . . (AD, p. 237.)

Responding to Kelley's carnality, Rojack feels desire stir in him similar to the urge that made him want to "eat with Ruta on Deborah's corpse." Kelley asks him, "Come on. . . shall we get shitty?" The proposal, tacitly understood by Rojack, is an invitation to a Satanic rite. They are the evil impulses analogous to Nazi instincts Rojack had passed to him by sodomizing Ruta. Kelley's desire to engage in a three-way orgy with Rojack is against the law of love, is sex for death, and lust, not creativity demanded by the life force. Rojack's first impulse is run, but the ever-present threat of Kelley having the Mafia kill him anywhere nullifies that alternative. He wants to:

escape from that intelligence which let me know of murders in one direction and conceive of visits to Cherry from the other, I wanted to be free of magic, the tongue of the Devil, the dread of the Lord, I wanted to be some sort of rational man again, nailed tight to details, promiscuous, reasonable, blind to the reach of the seas. (AD, p. 238.)

Answering a voice which tells him to "walk the parapet," or "Cherry is dead," he proposes to Kelley who accepts it as an alternative to his own offer.

Once on the parapet, Rojack experiences intense fear, numbing cold wind and rain, and Deborah's curse (Deborah's lone green eye flew into my eye. Hands came to pull me off, her hands. . . (AD, p. 242).") He succeeded in his first walk. With increased confidence he now decides to obey another urge he has to go around again as final expiation for his murder

and also, somehow, to prevent harm from coming to Cherry. Kelley, however, can't allow him the success this time and tries to poke Rojack off the parapet with Shago's umbrella, which he has been holding. Rojack grabs the umbrella from Kelley, jumps down from the parapet, and beats Kelley to the floor with it. Resisting the urge to kill, Rojack turns to leave the apartment. He then rushes back to Cherry's apartment to find her dying from a beating by Shago's Harlem friends, for they thought that she caused his death in a park.

The last chapter of the novel has Rojack going West to Las Vegas, where in the air-conditioned world of the casinos, and the impossibility of distinguishing between night and day, he sees America breeding a new man. It is his last fling with the Devil--he has come to Las Vegas in order to make enough money to pay off his debts he had accumulated while married to Deborah. When he is done, he walks off into the desert where, in a telephone booth, he "calls" Cherry and is told that she is getting along with Marilyn and that "the moon is out and she's a mother to me (AD, p. 252)." The next day, feeling "something like sane again" he starts "on the long trip to Guatemala and Yucatan (AD, p. 252)."

Why does Rojack finally make a self-imposed exile to the jungles of Central America? Considering Mailer's emphasis on Rojack's qualities of primitive instincts, intuition, sex, magic and being, we may guess some of the reasons for his heading south, to the tropical weather jungles. Mailer answers part of the question in one of his "Presidential Papers":

. . . tropical people are unusually more sexual. It's easier to co-habit, it's easier to stay alive. If there's more time, more leisure, more--we'll use one of those machine words--more support-from-the-environment than there is in a Northern country, then sex will tend to be more luxuriant. Northern countries try to build civilizations and tropical countries seek to proliferate being. (PP, pp. 146-47.)



Further, by observing Mailer's existentialist law of "grow or pay," Rojack has to keep on moving so as to grow. And in search for the true "heavenly city" to stay, he, from East (New York) to West (Las Vegas), finds that Las Vegas is after all only a distillation of the corruptions and violences he has encountered in New York, or another tasteless Desert D'Or. In the streets one sees not by sun but at night by immense towers of neon. The desert to Mailer is a sacred place where "man may come to feel immensely alive, more portentously in his own psychic presence than any manifest in nature (AD, p. 191)." But in Las Vegas, the air itself is "a smell of death in the nose." The air-conditioned hotels and casinos are like a "pleasure of chamber of an encampment on the moon and fortified air brought in daily by rockets from the earth. . . . You caught the odor of an empty space where something was dying alone (AD, p. 251)." God no longer reveals himself to solitary man in the desert and it is no longer a sacred place. The insanity Rojack senses in the city of death in the desert is beyond a cure. He consequently realizes that he has exhausted all possibilities of growth provided by his culture. In this sense Rojack is also ready to leave the country. At the beginning of the novel, it is his existentialist new awareness that prompts Rojack to abandon the American Dream of power but seek the Dream of Being. At the end, it is the same awareness that guides him for the jungles of Guatemala and Mexico.

As a full-fledged American existentialist hero, Rojack certainly has not acted like Lovett the non-hero to retire into monastic seclusion to wait for the sign of revolution. Despite the fact that he has lost the true love of Cherry in his meeting with Kelley, Rojack has demonstrated his courage by confronting the devil and walking parapets. Ultimately, he has achieved the total freedom, kept his individualistic integrity, and

and fulfilled the American myth--"to be free, to wander, to have adventure and to grow on the waves of the violent, the perfumed, and the unexpected. . . (PP, p. 39)." In Sartrean terms, Rojack has pursued the identification of the For-itself with the In-itself. For Sartre, such an identification is impossible. That is why he asserts that man is a "useless passion." But for Mailer, Rojack is the man, the For-itself, who has created his essence by the sum total of his free acts. In order to achieve this total freedom for his being, Rojack has undergone various stages of spiritual progress: the murder of evil (Deborah), the conquest of hatred (Ruta), the gain of true love (Cherry), and the face-to-face encounter with the Devil (Kelley). He has undergone all these existential experiences that Lovett, Sergius (both the old and the new), and Faye have each only partially gone through. It is in this sense that Rojack finally considers himself a "new breed" of man possessing a "new soul" and thus becomes Kierkegaard's "that individual."

## Notes to Chapter Five

1. Down Mailer's Way, p. 124.
2. Julius Lester, Search for the New Land: History as Subjective Experience (New York: The Dial Press, 1969), p. 49.
3. Arnold S. Kaufman, The Radical Liberal--The New Politics: Theory and Practice (New York: A Clarion Book, 1968), p. 47.
4. Ibid., pp. 49-50.
5. Cannibals and Christians (New York: A Dell Book, 1966), p. 165. Hereafter all references are to this edition and will be cited in the text.
6. Norman Mailer: The Countdown, p. 123.
7. Ibid.
8. Norman Mailer, An American Dream (New York: A Dell Book, 1965, 1974), p. 8. All later references are to this edition and will be cited in the text.
9. Helen Weinberg, The New Novel in America: The Kafkan Mode in Contemporary Fiction (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 124-25.
10. Elizabeth Hardwick, "A Nightmare by Norman Mailer," in Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work, p. 145.
11. Ibid., p. 150.
12. Joseph Epstein, "Norman X: The Literary Man's Cassius Clay," in The New Republic, (April 17, 1965), p. 24.
13. Ibid., p. 25.
14. Philip Rahv, "A Review on An American Dream," The New York Review of Books, (March 25, 1965), p. 1.
15. Ibid.
16. Richard Poirier, "'Morbid-Mindedness'," Commentary (June, 1965), collected in Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work; Leo Bersani, "The Interpretation of Dreams," Partisan Review (Fall, 1965), collected both in Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work and Norman Mailer: A Collection of Critical Essays.

17. Norman Mailer: A Critical Study, p. 34.
18. Howard M. Harper, Jr., Desparate Faith: A Study of Bellow, Salinger, Mailer, Baldwin, and Updike (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), p. 123.
19. John W. Aldridge, "From Vietnam to Obscenity," Harper's Magazine (February, 1968), reprinted in Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work, p. 189.
20. In developing his ideas about life after death and scatology, Mailer drew heavily from Norman O. Brown's book, Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1959, 1977), especially those chapters like "Death, Time, Eternity," "The Excremental Vision," "Filthy Lucre," and "The Resurrection of the Body."
21. The New Novel in America, p. 135.

## CHAPTER SIX

The American Existentialist Hero Sought Among Politicians and Artists but Discovered as a Young Hunter Contaminated: Cannibals and Christians and Why Are We in Vietnam?

### Cannibals and Christians

Rojack's final departure from America, mainly resulted from his disgust with the country--its mood of suicide and its dead end heroes. Both Rojack and his creator seriously questioned the feasibility of America's survival after Kennedy's assassination. "The American Dream of public life as an outlet for individual growth is dead, and all of American frontiers (even Kennedy's belated 'New Frontier') are closed to the individual on the move."<sup>1</sup> Mailer's "unspoken" shock and grief immediately after Kennedy's death also shapes Cannibals and Christians (1966), a book in which existential politics gives up all its meaning. As Donald Kaufmann puts it, "The Dallas aftermath brings to the 'arena' President Johnson and his great society whose advent marks the end of the 'art of the possible' in American politics."<sup>2</sup> Mailer's own response is as follows:

Jack Kennedy may not have been as skillful a politician as Lyndon Johnson, but he had one hundred times as much effect on the styles and modes of American life, on the desires of Americans, on what they finally demanded from life; so Jack Kennedy had a revolutionary effect on American life. (CC, p. 56.)

Although a volume of unrelated writings--political essays, poems, stories, literary commentaries, interviews--Cannibals and Christians is still thematically unified, for these writing "are parts of a continuing and more or less comprehensive vision of existence into which everything must

fit (CC, p. xi)." By linking himself to writers such as D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Hemingway, Mailer considers that "everything they wrote was part of one continuing book--the book of their life and the vision of their existence (CC, p. xi)." Whereas the structure of the book is similar to that used in Advertisements and Presidential Papers, the theme, as Mailer himself says,

has been the continuing obsession of this writer that the world is entering a time of plague. And the continuing metaphor for the obsession--a most disagreeable metaphor--has been cancer. The argument is old by now: its first assumption is that cancer is a disease different from other diseases, an ultimate disease against which all other diseases are in design to protect us. (CC, p. 2.)

Perhaps the only difference is Mailer's search for an American existentialist hero has become so desperate that he even declares that "a hero, even a failed hero, or a hero-as-monster, is more likely to create other heroes, by his example or by opposite to him, than a man who gains power and has never been anything at all (CC, p. 58)." He further makes a distinction between a political structure with heroes and that without them:

A forceful political structure with a great number of particular heroes is a way to describe the Renaissance; a powerful political structure governed by faceless men is a way to describe the Mafia. (CC, p. 58.)

However, the nation is bankrupt, bankrupt of "charisma" and "style." It is because "the totalitarianism [steals] in from without, from the formless forms and

imprisoned air of a new society which had lost the clue that a democracy could become equable only if it became great, that finally the world would continue to exist only by an act of courage and a search for style. Democracy flowers with style; without it there is a rot of wet weeds. (CC, pp. 51-2.)

"Which is why," stresses Mailer, "we love the memory of F. D. R. and J. F. K."

In this book Mailer still has not altered his convictions that science and reason are inadequate explanations of all the mysteries of the universe. The fact that a society consumed by the plague goes through the motions of improving the conditions, but in reality only perpetuating an intolerable world, is proof of its lack of understanding of the universal mysteries:

In a modern world which produces mediocrities at an accelerating rate, and keeps them alive by surgical gymnastics which go beyond anyone's patience but the victim, the doctor, and the people who expect soon to be on the operating tables themselves; in a civilization where compassion is of political use and is stratified in welfare programs which do not build a better society but shore up a worse. . . (CC, p. 3.)

With a rudimentary faith in his American existentialism and regarding himself as a physician to the national psyche, Mailer feels that he is obligated "to explore the mystery (CC, p. 5)." He has first diagnosed that modern man, in a search for a palliative to assuage his fear of death, is corrupting his body and its biological capacities and thereby is becoming weaker and sicker. And cancer is the consequence of the loss of man's natural biological condition. The deterioration of workingmanship, the erecting of aesthetically drab buildings, the sexual revolution sustained on drugs, the survival of "mediocrities" by surgery, the perpetuation of a bad society on welfare, an economy based on war and war production are all symptoms of this illness. In "a world of such hypercivilization," it is a world

not of adventurers, entrepreneurs, settlers, social arbiters, proletarians, agriculturists, and other egocentric types of dynamic society, but is instead a world of whirlpools and formlessness where two types re-emerge, types there at the beginning of it all: Cannibals and Christians. (CC, p. 3.)

The Cannibals are those of the Right Wing who believe "there is too much on earth and too much of it is second rate." And they believe that

they can save the world by "killing off what is second-rate."

They believe that survival and health of the species comes from consuming one's own, not one's near-own, but one's own species. So the pure cannibal has only one taboo on food--he will not eat the meat of his own family. Other men he will conserve in his own flesh, their vices he will excrete, but to kill and eliminate is his sense of human continuation. (CC, p. 4.)

The Christians, on the other hand, are "the commercial. The commercial is the invention of a profoundly Christian nation--it proceeds to sell something in which it does not altogether believe, and it interrupts the mood (CC, p. 4)." Practically all those--"From Lyndon Johnson to Mao Tse-tung,"--who are not of the Right Wing are Christians. What characterizes the Christians is that

we believe man is good if given a chance, we believe man open to discussion, we believe science is the salvation of ill, we believe death is the end of discussion; ergo we believe nothing is so worthwhile as human life. We think no one should go hungry. (CC, p. 4.)

For all their compassion and concern, these Christians are not really interested in Christ. On the contrary, they have caused all the misery that abounds in the world and have, in the name of progress and enlightenment and faith in science, poisoned the food, the sea, tampered with the "genetics of our beasts," and broken the "food chains of nature." However, those who are Cannibals think they are Christians, because they "think of Jesus as Love, and get an erection from the thought of whippings, blood, burning crosses, burning bodies, and screams in mass graves (CC, p. 4)" while the nominal Christians, opposed to war, have succeeded in starting all the wars of this century.

Mailer's purpose in making these definitions is to restate some of the social implications of his American existentialism. His concept of the Hipster is similar to the Cannibal, but the Right Wing Cannibal, as pointed out in "The Red Dread," does not understand the individual's



responsibility to explore the limits of existence and find the meaning of his life. Rather, the Cannibals see the fulfillment of life in destruction for its own sake, instead of seeing personal violence as a key to the secrets of Being. The Christian, on the other hand, because of his fear of death, is the harbinger of the totalitarian society--the society which pretends to elevate man and create the perfect, but which in fact, leads man to a living death, because it renders him incapable of exploring the limits of life. By criticizing both the Cannibals and the Christians, Mailer repudiates all forms of political ideology and social programming. Even revolutionary socialism holds no attraction for him. Society cannot survive the Christians nor can it endure the Cannibals. The events of the mid-sixties, Goldwater's nomination and the war in Vietnam, support Mailer's growing sense of impending doom, a final cataclysmic eruption of plague terminating in an apocalypse. Tinged with flip satire and black humor, the political tone throughout the book appears more invective and intensely charged than before.

By covering the Republican Convention in 1964, Mailer had an opportunity to watch the rise of the Cannibal party in America. It is, he asserts, the triumph of capitalism, an hysterical disease inherited from the Puritans who "carried the viruses and were so odious that the British were right to drive them out (CC, p. 8)." Their heirs, the Goldwater Wasps, are described as vindictive provincials left behind in the development of the nation. Culturally supplanted by the immigrant East and its intellectual Establishment, these Wasps demand a purge of everything: civil rights, Jews, Communism, sexual excesses, everything they believe that threatens them. But, on the other hand, as Mailer was excited about the potentialities of Kennedy as President, the sense of

the existential, the powerful and threatening, and the risk of death made Goldwater momentarily appealing to him. Mailer found that Goldwater was a man who "had dimensions": "he was not an easy man to comprehend in a hurry (CC, p. 20)." Then, "He could be President of the United States in less than half a year, he could stop a sniper's bullet he never knew when, he was more loved and hated than any man in America (CC, p. 24)." Finally, there was the sense of national suicide caused by the Goldwater movement:

And this had an appeal which burrowed deep, there was excitement at the thought of Goldwater getting the nomination, as if now finally all one's personal suicides, all the deaths of the soul accumulated by the past, all the failures, all the terrors, could find purge in a national situation where a national murder was being planned (the Third World War) and one's own suicide might be lost in a national suicide. There was that excitement, that the burden of one's soul. . . might finally be lifted. (CC, p. 25.)

It was a new crusade in which all the failures of the past would be rectified and it was a crusade which was united in a mystical communion of the dispossessed. Mailer welcomes this crusade:

Yes, the Goldwater movement excited the depth because the apocalypse was brought more near, and like millions of other whites, I had been leading a life which was a trifle too pointless and a trifle too full of guilt and my gullet was close to nausea with the endless compromises of an empty liberal center. (CC, p. 26.)

There was the hope that America was coming to face the essential totalitarianism at its heart. And there was the sense that the Right Wing Cannibals could have shaken the foundations of America. But Goldwater lost because he was too inept to carry across his message. The Republican Convention of 1964 was otherwise another ordinary convention, but Mailer sharpened his journalism to a fine art and spotlighted those nuances that gave the convention a psychic drama all its own.

Immediately following the convention history is a review of Johnson's book, My Hope for America. Johnson rallied the anti-Wasp forces under the banner of liberalism, an ideology dependent on committees, foundations, and science. "Lyndon Johnson is a triumph of spirit, wholly scientific (CC, p. 67)." But to Mailer, Johnson has "no vision (CC, p. 67)" and does not have the kind of leadership that the country urgently needed:

Yes, our country was fearful, half mad, inauthentic. It needed a purge. It had a liberal Establishment obeisant to committees, foundations, and science--the liberal did not understand that the center of science was as nihilistic as a psychopath's sense of God. We were a liberal Establishment, . . . the much under-rated and doubtless a power upon the land; civilization had found its newest helmsman in the restraints, wisdom, and corruption of legit and illegit, all syndicates, unions, guilds, corporations and institutions, cadres of conspiracy and agents for health, Medicare, welfare, the preservation of antibiotics, and the proliferation of the Pentagon could bend their knee. (CC, p. 43.)

Mailer's existential politics is based on unwavering assertion of the individual over the community, personality over organization, and style over system. For Mailer, Lyndon Johnson's takeover has pushed America deeper into the "plague" and nearer the world of Barbary Shore.

In reviewing My Hope for America, Mailer dismisses it as "an abominable, damnable book, and what makes it doubly awful is that nearly all of its ideas are blessed (CC, p. 49)." The book reveals no style but was written in "totalitarian prose." According to Mailer,

The essence of totalitarian prose is that it does not define, it does not deliver. It oppresses. It obstructs from above. It is profoundly contemptuous of the minds who will receive the message. So it does its best to dull this unconsciousness with sentences which are nothing but bricked-in power structures. (CC, p. 51.)

The Great Society, both advocated in his book and implemented by his Administration, "famished for popularity," even to Johnson himself, "is

a dud": "The President believed very much in image. He believed the history which made the headlines each day was more real to the people than the events themselves. It was not the Negro Movement that possessed the real importance, it was the Movement's ability to get space in the papers (CC, p. 70)." And, "So the President needed another issue. Then it came to the President. Hot damn. Vietnam (CC, p. 71)."

Vietnam for Mailer, among many things, is America's great scientific war. It represents the merger of the Cannibal and the Christian. The connection between the two concepts rest in Mailer's idea that science, as the only religion left in America, destroys man's potential to discovering the mysteries of the universe because it is too involved in facts and figures and has none of the sense of the spirit of mystery. In "Speech at Berkeley on Vietnam Day," Mailer explains that "President Johnson's motive in escalating the war in Vietnam may be psychic in its nature. . . it is a thesis which would say that the mystery of Vietnam revolves around the mystery of Lyndon Johnson's personality (CC, p. 47)." Mailer explores the "mystery" by finding that Johnson is alienated, but certainly not alienated from power, because "he is the most powerful man in the United States, but he is alienated from judgment, he is close to an imbalance which at worst could tip the world from orbit (CC, p. 76)." This alienation is equivalent to the kind of schizophrenia in which the President takes on the characteristics of a member of a minority group--namely, he is a man who lives with two opposing concepts of himself:

What characterizes a member of a minority group is that he is forced to see himself as both exceptional and insignificant, marvelous and awful, good and evil. So far as he listens to the world outside he is in danger of going insane. The only way he may relieve the unendurable tension which surrounds any sense of his own identity is to define his nature by his own acts; discover his courage of cowardice by actions which engage his courage; discover his judgment by judging; his loyalty by being

tested; his originality by creating. . . . What characterizes the sensation of being a member of a minority group is that one's emotions are forever locked in the chains of ambivalence--the expression of an emotion forever releasing its opposite--the ego in perpetual transit from the tower to the dungeon and back again. (CC, p. 77.)

For Mailer nearly every American is a member of a minority group, given this existential definition. The American fever has intensified the anxiety of ambivalence so that it becomes necessary at a certain point to have either a purge or a war. The nation turned to war because this seemed to be the scientific way of coming to terms of American malady; it was the Christian way because Americans "are the defense of civilization" and the Communists are the barbarians out to destroy it. But at the same time there is the appetite of the Cannibal in this solution to this national sickness. Mailer states the connection between the two as follows:

As is evident by now, 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 the strange people seems to relieve this plague. (CC, p. 91.)

The Vietnam War of course also illustrates the lack of potent leadership; Johnson is using it as a catharsis for everything wrong with America that he did not have the courage to challenge.

In Cannibals and Christians, Mailer repeatedly points out that Kennedy was the only American President since Roosevelt with the ability to influence the style of American life by enriching "the emotional complexity" of the people's lives. Besides his appeal as "an active principle," Kennedy is a man "who will grow and change and become--odds are--a powerful leader (CC, p. 58)." The political scene of the post-Kennedy sixties was a landscape of faceless men. Mailer is still searching for a hero who may coerce others to become heroic in opposition. Perhaps Robert

Kennedy is the only figure who offers a tenuous hope of an American existentialist hero: "I have affection for Bobby Kennedy. I think something came into him with the death of his brother. . . . Something compassionate, something witty, has come into the face. Something of sinew (CC, p. 58)." However, the current style of democracy has turned America into a "rot of wet weeds," and totalitarianism is so deep-rooted in American life that any "resistance" through politics would cover too small a part of culture.

In An American Dream, Rojack's dream, after a political start, settles on the "mysteries" of murder and suicide. Like An American Dream, Cannibals and Christians starts with political essays but ends with private visions, because it is no longer for Mailer to imagine "some optimistic love affair with the secret potentialities of this nation. . . . The romance seems not even tragic or doomed, but dirty and misplaced (CC, pp. 72-2)." The only thing Mailer feels that America is better in than the Soviet Union is that "our artists are better, our writers are better, our jazz musicians are better, our painters go further, our vision is more fierce, it explores more (CC, p. 89)." To Mailer, only great art can penetrate into "the tomb of the modern soul and bring a moment of cease to the backed-up murders of the modern heart (CC, p. 89)."

When neither the reactionary Cannibal nor the liberal Christian is capable of producing an existentialist hero to enhance man's dignity and hold his attitude of self-consciousness, art becomes the only tool left to awaken the masses to their latent powers and the only shock treatment to cure the plague-ridden for the great conversion. In eliminating politicians and scientists as a panacea for healing economical and social ailments, Mailer turns to the artist for his hero quest. In his destiny

as savior, an artist is very similar to the nineteenth-century romantics' notion of poet as a cultural hero. As the poet was the bearer of truth, so is the existentialist artist the new Adam who may restore the city of God and regenerate man by his existentialist vision.

However, Mailer does not credit contemporary American literature or art for having providing the guidance and inspiration needed in a period of turmoil. He instead finds that American writers have been engaged in a war between Naturalism and the Genteel Tradition and neither has been effective in describing or dealing with the problems that the country has posed and continues to pose. In its early stage the upper class, having adopted the European canon of taste and manners, was aligned against the proletariat, immigrant lower classes, ignoring a generation of readers needing fiction that stimulated a sense of class mobility, "Because a young adventurer reads a great novel in the unvoiced hope it is a grindstone which sharpens his axe sufficiently to smash down doors now locked to him (CC, p. 97)." Ideally the novel is a clarification of "a nation's vision of itself." A member of the upper class cannot write such a book since all he has is the "strategy provided for him by the logic of his class (CC, p. 98)." The gap in the literary tradition was further widened by the lower class writer's--Steinbeck and Farrell, for example--failure to create characters who could cross the bridge dividing ruling class and proletariat. Mailer claims that the two greatest writers of the century, Hemingway and Faulkner, were content to focus on "microcosm" and to ignore the great unifying book. Their motto became "the country could be damned. Let it take care of itself (CC, p. 99)."

As a result, the masses gave up literature as irrelevant; it became an art form unsuited to their needs and dreams:

It was not quite vital to them. It did not save their lives, make them more ambitious, more moral, more tormented, more audacious, more ready for love, more ready for war, for charity and for invention. (CC, p. 99.)

Mailer now attributes everything he believes is wrong with America to the failure of the novelist to write a book defining the national character, the "great" book that would finally resolve the class distinctions that are the heart of America's moral and spiritual predicament. The vacuum in American letters is, however, filled by television, movies, and the mass media in general:

The American consciousness in the absence of a great tradition in the novel ended by being developed by the bootlicking pieties of small-town newspaper editors and small-town educators, by the worst of organized religion, a formless force filled with the terrors of all the Christians left to fill the spaces left by the initial bravery of the frontiersmen, and these latterday Christians were simply not as brave. (CC, p. 102.)

Reacting against the rigidity of the social hierarchy, the lack of genuine mobility open to the younger Americans and their hatred of America "for what it offered and did not provide, what it revealed for opportunity and what it excluded from real opportunity (CC, p. 102)," American writers, according to Mailer, must assume the responsibility for the nation's "schizophrenia," further worsened by the mass communications, as "the last liberators in the land."

The ideal novelist, the one who has the last chance of writing the desperately needed great book, must be an American existentialist, a writer who has the courage to make the journey through the jungle of his unconscious and engage the concealed "bestiality" of the world. Death is constant opponent; in his persistent encounter with death he derives finest inspiration. Mailer also criticizes the modern writers that have abandoned the spiritual quest for God's truth. They should realize that with the curse of contemporary civilization modern society masks the



mysteries behind the mundane with <sup>235</sup> "a world of slick surface and rock knowledge." Industry and a preoccupation with work prevent the ordinary man from ever exploring the chaos beneath the surface, from wrestling with hysteria and panic. "Thus a man cannot afford to go too deeply into the underlying meaning of a single subject. He prefers to become interested in the practical surface of things (CC, p. 119)." Mailer insists that the way back to salvation is in the artist's discovering of "the world of the Self" and "the crossroads of the inner mind (CC, p. 129)." In order to do this, the artist "must not explore into himself with language given by another. A vocabulary of experts is a vocabulary greased out and sweated in committee and so is inimical to a private eye (CC, p. 129)." And in the unconscious there are still "hills," the "highest faces an abyss." So there are dangers in the jungle, too, for the writer brave enough to undertake the journey. Even "in the crucial climatic transcendental moments of one's life, there is revealed still another dilemma. God, is it God one finds, or madness (CC, p. 130)." The writer needs to rediscover his personal piety by risking finding only madness.

Death as the end of existence, as has been shown, is intolerable to Mailer, but nor does he agree with the conventional religious notions of heaven and hell. One dies in life and condemns his soul by practicing repression and sublimation and preventing his imagination from probing into the mysteries of the universe and the self. To him there is "no anguish on heaven or earth as awful as the inability to create one's nature by daring, exceptional, forbidden, or socially impossible acts (CC, p. 169)." If, as Mailer contends, God is only slightly more powerful than man, and that He is in danger of extinction because men do not act as though He exists, then the God the writer is supposed to search

for in his unconscious could exist in a diminished form and possess nothing, no transmittable logos that could liberate humanity from its debased state. But all the courage and daring needed for staring into the abyss is a cleansing of the unconscious dross that obscures the existentialist hero's vision and a purification of the flesh.

Obviously, Mailer intends the artist, like the former Hipster and great politician, to be a leader in the society. And he must be even more than a leader, he must be an existentialist hero. What it leaves out is the specific means by which the artist can shock the society into feeling, and free people from their repressions and dig down into the subterranean core of their Being. The question for Mailer now is how the artist is going to find those areas of human experience which will effectively make people more alive. As my previous discussions have indicated, Mailer used the "apocalyptic orgasm," the motivating force of the Hipster's life, as a direct attack on the sexual repressions of the society and the accompanying censorship of art. At the same time, he was also concerned with any attack on apathy. He felt that nihilism and violence of the Hipster's was essential. He was arguing that nihilism and violence of the Hipster was really a counter-force to the nihilism and violence of a totalitarian society--a nihilism that ignored the basic needs of the human body and soul and a violence that brutalized man's sense for himself and his potentiality for creative relationship.

Further, to be nihilistic and violent for the existentialist Hipster meant to be a rebel against society, but not against life. It meant leaving the "safety" of civilization behind and returning to the primitive forces of life; it meant coming to terms with evil, it meant, finally, escaping from the cliches of social morality and moral

responsibility in order to discover and hopefully use the potentialities within. And it also meant, like Rojack's nihilism and violence, throwing oneself to the mercy of the unknown, entirely entering the arena of the ultimate and most powerful battles of the most forces in the universe in order to discover moment by moment what one was and what his relationship to those ultimate forces are.

The apocalyptic orgasm for Mailer is one of the best metaphors to describe the search for the unknown, because it represented the most powerful moment in the life of man, a moment at which all his being was called into play, a moment which could change his life either by leading him into a state of greater life through the discovering of hitherto unused energies and potential or into a state closer to death by the failure to achieve the actualization of such energy and potential. And one is definitely changed by his act of sexual intercourse:

If one has the courage to think about every aspect of the act-- I don't mean think mechanically about it, but if one is able to brood over the act, to dwell on it--then one is changed by the act. . . . So finally one has had an experience which is nourishing because one's able to feel one's way more difficult or more precious insights as a result of it. One's able to live a tougher, more heroic life if one can digest and absorb the experience. (PP, p. 140.)

Thus a healthy, primitive sexuality is the very thing to rescue man from falling into pathy but sustain his mood to develop his Self.

However, when it comes to the period of Cannibals and Christians, Mailer is no longer exploring the meaning of life in orgasm, not the "logic" of a particular act but the total context of the act, the mood of it. The role of man, and particularly the role of the artist, therefore, becomes the search for mood: mood in oneself, in the separate parts of oneself, and the mood in others, even mood in the universe at large. Mailer is moving here clearly toward a definition of artist-as-the-

existentialist-hero, implying that the most potent politician that America can have might yet be the artist. Mailer develops the concept of mood through an elaboration on the complexities of Being, the refinement of his American existentialism. First of all, Mailer explains mood in terms of a Gestalt:

Mood is harmony. The harmony of a Gestalt. The harmony of the life in the room, or the harmony one senses in a landscape. And harmony permits one to relax. As one relaxes, so new perception comes from the conduits of the unconscious, and one has added one's contribution to the mood, which is now subtly different but still alive in the growing tissue of the previous sensation, precisely that tissue of which was the mood of the previous moment. When a mood is shattered, the life in the room contracts, and a new mood, discontinuous to the last, begins its existence. (CC, pp. 253-54.)

Mailer goes on to explain these ideas by describing the sexual relationship between two adults:

Sex-as-mood is a conversation with respect for nuance. Does one raise one's voice to make a point?--one may soften the next remark. Does one wait too long?--the whip of wit must intervene. The dialogue of such sex is tender, it is respectful--it respects the slow conversion of character into mood, it seeks for an artful loss of each separate identity in order to find and give life to the mood which passes from body to body. (CC, p. 256.)

The above quotation is a key passage for Mailer because it is an obvious development of the ideas on sex expressed in "The White Negro" and earlier work. But here he emphasizes that the orgasm always exists in a particular Gestalt and so will be affected by that Gestalt. Whatever mood is created, and it can be a mood of violence as well as a mood of tenderness, it will determine the result of the orgasm. The reason is "that a mood is a psychic organism. Like all living things it reacts to each new breath of the environment. It can grow, be wounded, weakened, changed, colored, fortified, it can adapt itself to many a change or shift in its circumstances. It can also be killed. . . . But like any

other organism, a mood is mysterious, and the most exceptional intrusions can give it life. . . . As is true of all organisms, the possibilities are sometimes limitless (CC, p. 258)."

Mailer is moving toward the existential idea that life is affected by the particular moment in which it finds itself, and so the essence of life is to use each particular moment for self-discovery and change. But what he is also moving toward, and this is what is significant about these statements, is that the artist needn't, like the Hipster, search for extreme situations. What he must do is realize that any situation offers the potential he is searching for. He must realize, too, that he is continually living in dramatic situations, and so he must become more sensitive to each moment and the subtle and often quiet forces within.

Mailer further associates his ideas of mood with the concept of harmony. He says that the artists are "those who see associations and connections everywhere, tend to live in a psychic medium which is heavier, more dense, than the average man's (CC, p. 265)." The role of the artist is find the latent beauty in these connections, to find the harmony implicit in all things. Harmony means "that separate parts function in a lively set of rhythms with one another. No organ is too fast or too slow vis-a-vis another organ. The pleasant relation inspires proportions in the outer forms which are healthy, harmonious, and beautiful (CC, p. 265)." Thus Mailer is seeing beauty and harmony in biological terms. And "our concepts of beauty are not arbitrary but a function of nature (CC, p. 266)."

Mailer even argues that we can find beauty in things which are sometimes ugly or sinister because we have expanded our faculties for observation and thus are able to conceive what beauty should be--we have, in other words, an ideal concept at any particular moment:

Compassion, for example, illumines the ugly, makes it beautiful. As we look upon an ugly face--provided it is our kind of ugly face--we see how it could have been beautiful, we see the loss implicit in it, we feel tender toward the disproportionate or even anomalous development of features in it. Their inversion of beauty which failed to be, at least until that moment when we conceived that this ugly sight could have been beautiful. So at that instant, looking at a plain face we can feel intimations of beauty. Beauty--so runs this argument--has its sort in any being which is harmonious, imaginative, adaptable, brave, artful, daring, good for life, good for the continuation of life. (CC, p. 266.)

Thus interpreted, beauty is the function of the individual's ability to live fully at any particular moment, so that beauty will be perceived if the individual has the capacity to understand and live fully with his mood, if the individual is artistic enough to see the harmony in all things. Even death and scatology take on the elements of beauty.

Mailer feels that death and scatology are necessary themes for the existentialist artist precisely because they challenge him to find the beauty in them, the meaning of existence in them. On the subject of death he argues that each individual has within him a fear of death and also a morbid fascination with death. The individual can only come to terms with these emotions if he becomes consciously aware of them. They must be brought to life through an experience which will enable the individual to understand them:

If I am secretly in love with death and terrified of it, then the effort to restrain and domesticate these emotions and impulses (which are no less than the cross-impulse of suicidal bravery and shame-ridden cowardice) exhaust so much of my will that my existence turns bleak. A dramatic encounter with death, an automobile accident from which I escape, a violent fight I win or lose decently, these all call forth my crossed impulses which love death and fear it. They give air to it. So these internal and deadly emotions are given life. In some cases, satisfied by the experience, they will subside a bit, give room to easier and more sensuous desires. (CC, p. 270.)

Mailer uses Hemingway as an example of an artist who had such conflicting emotions. The measure of the success of an artist is how well he

tests himself, pushes himself beyond his own dares to "flirt with, engage, and finally embrace death. . . (CC, p. 271)." Once again Mailer is committing himself to the drama of life, to the search for the harmony which is the beauty of existence.

Mailer moves at this point to the final level of the nature of mood, harmony, and beauty. The essence of an individual's life resides in his biological foundations. If the individual can return to the primitive sense of life, he will be able to find the connection between his mind and his body. He must break through the socially imposed impasse between mind and body in order to uncover the drama that is continually taking place at the core of his being, the drama which defines his being. Once the individual becomes aware of his internal nature he is on the threshold of defining his relationships with the world outside himself, he is ready to discover that he is part of the universe. Mailer further defines being as "anything which lives and still has the potential to change, to change physically and to change morally. A person who has lost all capacity for fundamental change is no longer a being (CC, p. 297)." The soul is one element in the struggle of the individual to establish his being. It is the individual's connection to eternity, to the world beyond himself. Hence the individual's relationship to his soul defines his being by clarifying his relationship to the universe, to God.

Soul is what continues to live after we are dead. It is possible, I should think, that if the soul does exist, that if there is such an entity, that if there is indeed a part of us which is eternal, or which can endure certain conditions remain eternal, that the soul could well have the property of being able to migrate from body to body, from existence to existence, . . . So long as the soul resides in a body or is trapped in a body or at war in a body or indeed even enamored of the body in which it finds itself, the soul must exist in a relation with that body which is not unlike marriage. The soul affects the body,

the body is able to affect the soul. They grow together or apart, they are good for one another or they may be bad, they can be tragic for one another or merely cool and efficient, tolerating one another because they would be savage and wasteful if apart. (CC, pp. 278, 287-88.)

All that Mailer has explained about mood, harmony, beauty, and finally soul is a counter argument to science, the latter day Christianity, which he insists has destroyed man's ability to deal poetically with the universe, to see mysteries in metaphor. Modern science, he says, "began with the poetic impulse to treat metaphor as equal to equation; the search began at that point where a poet looked for a means (which only later became an experiment) to measure the accuracy of his metaphor (CC, p. 308)." The discovery was, however, in the metaphor and the purpose of science was simply to reveal the insights of man's deepest experience --the poetic insights into the mysteries of life. So twentieth century science is nothing more than technological achievement built on the work of men who approached nature with awe, a poetic vision deriving from their culture and motivated by a desire to reveal nature, not to dominate it.

Metaphor is Mailer's way of saying here that all experience is related. As an example of the use of metaphor in science, Mailer talks about a disease as a drama enacted on the stage of the body. All disease is a message from the body that should not be suppressed with medication. If an illness wages "conflict, drama, and distress through the body, and has obliged the body to sit in attention upon it" the body has gained knowledge of itself, "its experience has become more profound, its intimate knowledge of its own disharmony is more acute (CC, p. 309)." Disease, then, "is the last attempt (at a particular level of urgency) to communicate from one part of the body to the other, a last attempt to



tell us that if we do not realize the function before us is now grievously out of harmony, then we will certainly sicken further (CC, p. 309)." However, chemical healing is the worst of the two evils since "the body does not know how well it could have cured itself, or even precisely what it had to cure." The cured patient is trapped in ambiguity, the "seat of disease." Since the individual no longer knows what caused his illness nor what form it may manifest itself in again, he has been deprived from the drama enacted in his body. The body loses its chance to explore its mysteries, to understand the core of its own life. Thus science in this sense blocks man from pursuing the psychic, the metaphoric, the most profound mysteries of existence.

Well aware that the European existentialism is extremely inadequate in explaining the relationship between body and soul, and the possibility of soul's eternity, Mailer in his last essay, "The Political Economy of Time," further treats his newly developed view on soul. By doing so, Mailer has made his version of existentialism uniquely American and uniquely his own. He now emphasizes that soul exists in terms of vision, which it struggles toward and tries to satisfy:

When the soul inhabits a body, it tries to exercise its intent within that body. Sometimes it satisfies itself, often it fails, but it carries some instinct which leads it toward something mysterious, something I will be so badly mistaken as to now call the Vision. . . . The Vision may be beautiful, heroic, epic, contemplative, tragic, harmonious, or even Faustian; the Vision may shift in its direction; perhaps it is capable of a Satanic contract. . . . For now, it is enough to say that by our definition the soul has an instinct which leads it toward that part of the Vision it can sense or comprehend. . .  
(CC, p. 329.)

The soul needs to manifest itself in some physical form and is always striving to do so. The reason for the struggle of the soul is that the soul existed in a body "as a dynamic will. . . it was part of a body

which was able to change its environment. Yet once the body is dead, a soul is no longer free, or at least it is no longer free to alter its environment actively through the agent of the body (CC, p. 330)."

The struggle of the soul leads it to discover its essence, for when the soul enters this new state, a state outside of a form, it must resist those forces which would destroy it by rejecting them. This state of war enables the soul to reduce itself to its bare essentials. In this state of essence the soul looks for a new body or object which it can inhabit. When it finds such an object it exerts its will upon it. The object in turn can then have an influence on other people or objects, and in this way the soul continues to live. Thus the soul takes on the function of God: as a result of its struggle for survival it reveals the shape of its being, its essence. And all the time that the soul is exerting its will to find a new home, it is opposed by Satan, who opposes it because he hates nature, who hates nature because he cannot control it.

So far, Mailer's explanation of soul is still closely linked to the ancient idea of "Transmigration of Souls." Soul's existential meaning is best seen when Mailer tries to define it as a creature:

Suppose I define soul by saying that it is a sort of creature, doubtless invisible, which has a purchase on eternity. It also has an individual life, a personal life, which is, contained in itself, and this personal life is carried through its metamorphoses. . . the soul is amoral. Its purpose is not to be ethical, but to live. Its desire is to live. . . . So long as it is a healthy soul, its nourishment comes from growth and victory, from exploration, from conquest, from pomp and pageant and triumph, from glory. . . . It lives for stimulation, for pleasure. It abhors defeat. Its nature is to become more than it is. (CC pp. 340-41.)

The soul then is the root of the unconscious. It is the core of the individual. "Passion comes from the soul. But the soul can only love what

offers it growth. It loves most what offers it the happiest, richest growth. It detests sickness, dying, death (CC, p. 341)." Still the soul can die if it is not offered beauty, if it cannot find the appropriate spirit (or function) which will allow it to fulfill itself.

If the soul cannot find beauty or is afraid to put its trust in the spirit that it will bring it to beauty, then it stops growing the body it inhabits begins to die. Or if the soul cannot find the kind of harmony or beauty essential to it, then the body it inhabits might even choose to die. The soul in such situations would rather risk looking for beauty somewhere in eternity than to continue to exist in a state where there is no beauty or no possibility for beauty, because the soul itself dies when it gives up its struggle toward eternity, toward beauty and harmony. More often than not, the world is striving to frustrate the soul's need for stimulation, growth, and challenge because it is the Devil's environment, and the Devil needs to exhaust men's souls if he is to win his battle with God for the universe. The "Plague" is the Devil at work killing soul by creating through technology an environment in which all the challenges necessary for human growth are suppressed.

In this essay Mailer is primarily concerned with explaining that the writer as an American existentialist must develop a "coherent view of life," and that this view of life must enable him to find the soul and spirit of his characters and situations. Equally important, the writer must be in command of mood, or harmony--this is his only way to beauty and truth. In other words, the writer must discover and be true to his own soul. This is particularly true when the writer creates a character. A good character is someone you can grasp as a whole, you can have a clear idea of him, but a being is someone whose nature keeps

shifting."<sup>3</sup> Likewise, "a book takes on its own life in the writing. It has its laws, it becomes a creature to you after a while."<sup>4</sup> And if the novel fails to fulfill its potential as a being, then the writer has failed, he has destroyed the beauty inherent in the work. To prevent himself from deteriorating as a soul and as an existentialist artist, the novelist must continue to keep himself alive and sensitive to everything he experiences. And he must bring this sensitivity to his work. Thus America can be saved by the existentialist writer inspiring the "people with the great, unifying novel."

Why Are We in Vietnam?

Just as An American Dream is, thematically, closely related to The Presidential Papers, so is Why Are We in Vietnam? (1967) to Cannibals and Christians. This pattern--a collection of essays followed by a novel--suggests that Mailer has felt the need to clarify and extend the themes he has stated in the essays in a work of fiction so that an existentialist hero may be created to embody the stated ideas. In so doing, the new novel may capitalize on his new understanding and extend the themes of his existential philosophy even further and refine them even more. The close connection on surface between Cannibals and Christians and Why Are We in Vietnam? is the war in Vietnam. One year (1966-67) saw the war situation changed from bad to worse. War protest almost became a national phenomenon in America. The question of "Why are we in Vietnam?" was then a question asked by millions of Americans. Mailer offered his own answer first in Cannibals and Christians, and then he tried to respond to the question by exploring right into the national psyche in Why Are We in Vietnam?, and finally he elaborated it further in The Armies of the Night.

However, no matter how close in terms of the Vietnam theme the connection between Cannibals and Vietnam may be, the theme itself is not explicitly but only obliquely expressed in the story of the novel. Roger Ramsey even argues that "the novel is not about Vietnam; it is always about D. J."<sup>5</sup> Ramsey's argument clearly derives from the fact

that Why Are We in Vietnam? is the story of a bear hunt in the far North and that the Vietnam war is not directly mentioned until the last page of the book. I would agree with Ramsey that the story is about D. J. But I am not convinced by his argument that the story, either implicitly or explicitly, has nothing to do with the title of the book. Both one year before the novel in Cannibals (1966) and one year after it in Armies (1968), Mailer was almost obsessed with the war in Vietnam. In "Speech at Berkeley on Vietnam Day," he asserted that America turned to war as the only way to relieve her plague-ridden situation and Johnson escalated the Vietnam War because of his personal schizophrenia. These ideas were greatly elaborated in Armies. Only about six months after the novel was published, Mailer wrote:

He [Mailer himself] came at last to the saddest conclusion of them all for it went beyond the war in Vietnam. He had come to decide that the center of America might be insane. The country had been living with a controlled, even fiercely controlled, schizophrenia which had been deepening with the years. Perhaps the point had now been passed. Any man or woman who was devoutly Christian and worked for the American Corporation, had been caught in an unseen vise whose pressure could split their mind from their soul. For the center of Christianity was a mystery, a son of God, and the center of the corporation was a detestation of mystery, a worship of technology. Nothing was more intrinsically opposed to technology than the bleeding heart of Christ. The average American, striving to do his duty, drove equally further each day in the opposite direction--into working for the absolute computer of the corporation. . . . Every day the average American drove himself further into schizophrenia; the average American believed in two opposites more profoundly apart than any previous schism in the Christian soul. Christians had been able to keep some kind of sanity for centuries while countenancing love against honor, desire versus duty, even charity opposed in the same heart to the lust for power--that was difficult to balance but not impossible. The love of the mystery of Christ, however, and the love of no mystery whatsoever, had brought the country to a state of suppressed schizophrenia so deep that the foul brutalities of the war in Vietnam were the only temporary cure possible of the condition--since the expression of brutality offers a definite if temporary relief to the schizophrenia. So the average good Christian American secretly loved the war in Vietnam. (Armies, pp. 211-12.)<sup>6</sup>

This passage fully demonstrates that during the period of his writing the novel Mailer hardly changed his view of America and the American involvement in the Vietnam war. Actually in many respects, the story, as this study will show, anticipates almost all the ideas expressed in the above passage. It both answers the question posed in the title, though its action and setting have nothing directly to do with Vietnam or American conflict there. In his review of the novel, Eliot Fremont-Smith noted, "He [Mailer] sees the war as a wholly destructive, wholly brutalizing exercise of American violence whose only rationale now is the verification of a vulgarized self-image of potency, toughness, masculinity. Why are we in Vietnam? Because it's there, man. And violence is American as cherry pie."<sup>7</sup>

The occasion for the story is a going-away party given by D. J.'s parents for himself and his best friend, Tex Hyde, on the eve of their departure for Vietnam. The story itself is formed by D. J.'s reminiscence of an Alaskan bear hunt undertaken two years before when he was sixteen. His memories begin as he sits at the party. Ranauld (D. J.) Jethroe, who narrates the story, is the eighteen-year-old son of a high-ranking executive in one of those conglomerate corporations, "David Rutherford Jethroe Jellico Jethroe, Rusty (Vietnam, p. 14)"<sup>8</sup> and his wife, Hallie. The hunting expedition from Texas into Alaska includes Rusty, D. J., Tex, and "Rusty's two accompanying flunkies," M. A. Pete and M. A. Bill ("Medium Asshole Pete and Medium Asshole Bill (Vietnam, p. 51).") The hunt, as D. J. remembers it, is a ghastly travesty of the Hemingway cult where one tests one's personal courage against that of animals; the hunters use a helicopter and outrageously powerful weapons. Thus D. J.'s experience of the hunt is another version of the American myth in which

knowledge is achieved through a mystical confrontation with the forces of nature.

Mailer maintains that he has never read Faulkner's "The Bear," but he needn't have, in order to write Why Are We in Vietnam? because he could have found the formula easily enough in Huckleberry Finn or Moby Dick. What, then does Mailer's version of the story contribute to a tradition which has been enriched by Faulkner, Twain, and Melville? Of course, the conduct of the hunt itself reflects American policy in Vietnam, with painfully obvious parallels being drawn between the hunters' delight in their outsized weapons against which the animals' instincts are helpless, and the napalming of the Vietnamese population. Rusty's obsession with victory over the bear is analogous to the American insistence upon victory in Vietnam. For instance, the head guide, Big Luke, thinks like a general when placing the men in the hunt. Mailer wrote:

Big Luke had a military decision. Whether due to the atom bomb or to Al Bell and his 47J and numerous other yclepts helicopts from Sam Sting Safari, and other Safari Counters with their reflective airplane, Cop Turds, and general fission of the psychomagnetic field. . . of the wild life in the Brooks Range, the fact is that the grizzlers were charging the hunter before the first shot. So Big Luke took a military fix. (Vietnam, p. 118-19.)

To complete the analogy, the guide employs a helicopter to transport the party from place to place and in extreme cases to protect them from dangerous animals. Rusty--as Mailer's corporation executive who supports the war in Vietnam--regards himself as the "fulcrum of the universe." If he misses getting a bear, he will fail, and his failure will be the "world's doom." This seems to be the same self-important pretentiousness that accounts for the American involvement in Southeast Asia, the notion that upon American righteousness the world stands or falls. Perhaps in this sense, the novel also answers the question of its title.



Of course, Why Are We in Vietnam?, unlike Barbary Shore, is more than a merely political allegory. The most outstanding qualities of this novel, which distinguish it from Mailer's all preceding novels, are its style and language. These qualities will be pursued later. But D. J.'s linguistic display has not only restated Mailer's thesis about the diseased and obscene environment in which D. J. and his contemporaries live, but revealed as well that D. J.'s perceptions are so much affected by the environment that he as a Mailer hero is no longer able to hold the Mailer code as Faye, new Sergius, and Rojack were able to hold. In other words, his American existentialist vision is in part contaminated. In the process of searching for American existentialist heroes, Mailer, it seems, has come to the point of impasse by creating an American existentialist like D. J. Such an impasse in Mailer's hero creation was almost anticipated in the final section of my examination of Stephen Rojack in the preceding chapter. Perfect as Rojack was as Mailer's American existentialist hero, he was ready to leave the country. His flight to Central America suggested that a Mailer hero like him, "active rather than passive, 'self-centered' rather than 'other-directed,' given to murder rather than suicide,"<sup>9</sup> could not possibly exist any longer within the limits of American culture. In the meantime, it intimated that a similar hero might not appear again in Mailer's fiction, because such an embattled hero would be contaminated as Mailer himself already was--"the man and the society are each grappling with his own piece of the plague (CC, p. 3)." D. J. is just such a contaminated existentialist hero. Instead of challenging, strongly and violently, the post-war "technologizing" of America and the American involvement in the Vietnam War, D. J. compromises himself by disclosing an appreciation of American technology and much

enthusiasm for going to Vietnam. For the rest of this chapter will be devoted to the exploration of these points.

As D. J. himself explains, "D. J." stands for "Disc Jockey to the world (Vietnam, p. 22)." As disc jockey, D. J.'s medium is the radio and the air-waves which transmit his voice. In this sense, Mailer has captured in D. J.'s patter the frenzied pace and characteristic colloquialisms of the hundreds of all-night radio disc jockeys who keep Americans awake and supplied with popular music. Thus, D. J.'s voice is a typical and familiar one to many Americans. In addition, D. J. addresses his "listeners" directly--"dear grassed-out auditor"--echoing the companionable style of the disc jockey who always assumes audience involvement. At one point ("Intro Beep Six") he even apologizes at length for having held up the progress of the narrative: "forgive and forget that slow smelly backed-up hardly moving narrative stream of facts, figures and general meaningless horse-shit which D. J. has been feeding. . . (Vietnam, p. 96)" thus demonstrating his good will toward all Americans "little punsters out in the fun land (Vietnam, p. 185)." As Ramsey noted, "The novel is apparently meant to be read as though one were listening to an actual radio broadcast."<sup>10</sup> Mailer thus has created a popular character who may fully identify himself with the American mass media and thereby with the American culture in general. He is no longer a Lovett who was fettered by his own "Narcissus." Nor is he a Faye who constantly sought to live perilously so as to purge himself of all pity for the great mass of "snobs . . . who always think what they have to think (DP, p. 128)." Nor is he a Rojack who was deeply interested in the exploration of the existential psychic mysteries. Certainly, D. J. is not in the same way that Rojack is, an exemplar "of that 'new consciousness' requisite to continuing

life's ancient battle against death in a psychotic world bordering on apocalyptic crisis," as Richard Foster has thought they are.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout the novel, Marshall McLuhan is mentioned several times. D. J. shows interest particularly in the electronic gadgets which are, as McLuhan claims, "the extensions of man," extending "our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned."<sup>12</sup> McLuhan further defines that "radio is that extension of the central nervous system that is matched only by human speech itself."<sup>13</sup> And "Radio created the disc jockey, and elevated the gag writer into a major national role. Since the advent of radio, the gag has supplanted the joke, not because of gag writers, but because radio is a fast hot medium that has also rationed the reporter's space for stories."<sup>14</sup> Here we have found the very source of D. J.'s idea as "Disc Jockey to the world." D. J. is surely also a gag writer, for he suggests that his story is "a tape recording of my brain in the deep of its mysterious unwinding (Vietnam, p. 23)." According to McLuhan, the miracles of electronic media will bring back to the self the "wholeness, empathy and depth of awareness which have been lost since "the Gutenberg technology had produced a new kind of visual, national entity in the sixteenth century. . ."<sup>15</sup> Therefore, we have lost the communal, medieval village life. But radio "certainly contracts the world to village size . . ."<sup>16</sup> and "turns to the individual needs of people." D. J. undoubtedly borrows this idea from McLuhan to assure his own optimism as he describes himself as America's "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 (Vietnam, p. 6)," derisively telling all of us squares, fools, and cowards "out there in all that implosion land" how the good life is to be lived.

Furthermore, D. J. shows his appreciation of technology in general by quoting Edison at the beginning of his story (Vietnam, p. 6) and praises him not only for the phonograph (the disc jockey's livelihood) but for his philosophy as well: "Edison was hip, baby, the way you make it is on the distractions (Vietnam, p. 6)." Sometimes D. J.'s language also suggests an admiration for electricity: "incest is electric man, never forget," and "the itch-dick memory of electric red on the leaves (Vietnam, p. 128)," and ". . . this land up on the top, cold bare electric land of North, magnetic-electro fief of the dream, and D. J. full of iron and fire and faith (Vietnam, pp. 210-11)," especially in the description of the climatic moment of the Northern Lights:

. . . over the next half hour the Arctic lights began, Aurora Borealis was out like she had not been out any night in September this trip and looked to begin above their feet across the pond, North of them in a corona of red and electric green wash and glow colors rippling like a piece of silk and spikes of light radiating up like searchlights, diamond spikes from the crown of the corona going two hundred miles up vertically into the sky while rays and bands, curtains of light, draperies rustled, pulses of color went up into the dark, something agitated in the bend of the night, and a crackling sound like agitations of sparks run over a run of silk, some light was alive and spoke to them. (Vietnam, pp. 216-17.)

This is one of the most beautiful descriptive passages in the book. The electricity images are vividly visualized through a variety of colors of Aurora Borealis. McLuhan argues that "the instant speed of electric information that . . . permits easy recognition of the patterns and the formal contours of change and development" and men will be freed from the slavish identification with the linear processes of machinery:

Electricity compels us to play our mechanical development backward, for it reverses much of that development. Mechanization depends on the breaking up of processes into homogenized but unrelated bits. Electricity unifies these fragments once more because its speed of operation requires a high degree of interdependence among all phrases of any operation. It is this

electric speed-up and interdependence that has ended the assembly line in industry.<sup>17</sup>

Apparently, none of McLuhan's ideas and concepts are accepted by Mailer the American existentialist. "Mailer perceives no particular difference between what mechanical "aids" have done for and what electronic ones will do. They are only heightened causes of the same sad, dehumanizing process":<sup>18</sup>

The twentieth century may yet be seen as the era when civilized man and underprivileged man were melted together into mass man, the iron and steel of the nineteenth century giving way to electronic circuits which communicated their messages into man, the unmistakable tendency of the new century seeming to be creation of men as interchangeable as commodities, their extremes of personality singed out of existence by the psychic field of force the communicators would impose. This loss of personality was a catastrophe to the future of the imagination . . . (PP, pp. 38-39.)

Since Advertisements for Myself, Mailer has had an outspoken rejection of technology. In most of his writings technology is considered part of the American "plague." But in this novel, unlike his creator, D. J., "in both his pretended profession of disc jockey and in his language patterns, relies on it."<sup>19</sup> Robert Solotaroff even calls D. J. "a disciple of the celebrated Canadian," Marshall McLuhan.<sup>20</sup> To Mailer, D. J. is an American existentialist hero contaminated by American technology.

However, it is only when D. J. further identifies himself as "Dr. Jekyll," and as "some genius brain up in Harlem pretending to write a white man's funk fuck book in revenge (Vietnam, p. 26)," does he exhibit qualities of Mailer's American existentialist hero in his youthhood. Roger Ramsey suggests that when "D. J." is reversed, it stands for juvenile delinquent. D. J. surely sounds like one, like the twentieth-century Huck Finn or the Holden Caulfield of the late Sixties. This is how he starts broadcasting his story to the silent audience, where he introduces the major existential themes of the novel:

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, like the asshole belonged to Egypt, man, and penis was the slave of the Hebes and the Brews, for they got it girdled with a ring of blood fire, and the nose was the Negroes, for they split it. Now, remember! Think of cunt and ass--so it's all clear. We're going to tell you what'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 prex, present dent, and God has always wanted more from man than man has wished to give. Zig a zig a zig. That is why we live in dread of God. Make me another invention, Edison. Bring in the electric come machine. Do you know I think there's a tape recorder in heaven for each one of us? and all the while we're sleeping and talking and doing our daily acts, bonging the gong, blasting the ass, chewing the milch, milking the chintz, and working the jerk, why there is that tape recorder taking it all down, this is D. J. broadcasting from Texas, from Dallas, Big D in Tex, and listen children to your old dear ma, ever notice how blood smells like cunt and ass all mix in one, but rotten, man, the flesh all rotten like meat and fish is biting each other to death, and Death where is your gates, Mother Fucker, are they hot? Big ass tomb, big ass tomb, the fish are in the fireplace. and the nerve's begun to sing, make it cool, D. J., make it cool. (Vietnam, pp. 6-7.)

Nevertheless, D. J. is not an ordinary juvenile delinquent. What clearly singles him out from all other juvenile delinquents is his credibility. At eighteen D. J.'s independence is complete; there is no one in the older generation, no Eitel or McLeod from whom he can learn, just a generation helplessly bogged down in "shit." And his credibility is proved by his repeated references to his creativity and intelligence ("You're contending with a genius, D. J. is his name (Vietnam, p. 21).") and the accuracy of his perceptions: "take it from D. J.--he got psychic transistors in his ears. . . which wingding on all-out hearts of the prissy-assed and the prigged (Vietnam, p. 160)."

D. J. is particularly adept at piercing the manly facade which is assumed by those in control of American corporations, whose mental outlook is suitably characterized by D. J.'s "Anal Referent Metaphor":

"D. J. sees right through shit. There's not a colon in captivity which manufactures a home product that is transparency proof to Dr. Jekyll's X-ray insight. He sees right into the claypots below the duodenum of his father. . . (Vietnam, p. 50)." Barry Leeds doubted whether the narrative voice is integral to the ideas and concepts expressed by D. J. and whether we should accept Rojack and D. J. with equal credibility.<sup>21</sup> The main problem with Barry Leeds' criticism of D. J.'s credibility is in his grouping together the forty-three-year-old Professor of Existential Psychology with the eighteen-year-old small-town Texan. D. J. does not follow the straight line of Faye, new Sergius, and Rojack in Mailer's development of American existentialist heroes. D. J. never poses problems about his Being as Rojack usually did. One thing Leeds has certainly missed in his reading of this novel is D. J.'s comic qualities. At this point, Jean Radford's observation is more pertinent when she thought that D. J. as a hero "differs in two key respects: he is presented as a comic-hero in ways Faye and Rojack clearly are not, and, since in this novel character gives way to language, he exists as the 'voice' of the novel rather than just its 'hero'."<sup>22</sup> I still have reservations to call D. J. a comic-hero. He does own some comic qualities, but not necessarily a comic-hero, for in his seriousness D. J. speaks soberly and continues to elaborate on Mailer's existentialist concepts of soul, form, scatology, and the conflict between God and the Devil. Besides, he honestly admits to perplexity when necessary, as when he puzzles over the cause of Rusty's status with the hunting guide, Big Luke: it forms "an ambiguity right at the center of D. J.'s message center." In contrast to "all those North American shit heads," D. J.'s vision is pure. Even his ranting and obscene rhetoric have certain purifying functions.

The style and language, as noted earlier, are different from any of Mailer's previous works. Except for a few passages at the end, D. J.'s language is deliberately obscene and his tone, offensively sneering. At the appearance of the novel, even those who could fairly appreciate An American Dream were shocked. Even a sympathetic critic like John Aldridge declared that "the book was obscene--relentlessly, brilliantly, hilariously obscene, very probably the most obscene novel ever published in this country."<sup>23</sup> Many critics believe that the style of this novel derived from Mailer's encounter with William Burrough's Naked Lunch.<sup>24</sup> But in his most recent writing (1976), Mailer attributed his indebtedness of Why Are We in Vietnam? like Naked Lunch to Henry Miller:

It is even not unfair to say that Henry Miller has influenced the style of half the good American poets and writers alive today; it is fair to ask if books as different as Naked Lunch, Portnoy's Complaints, Fear of Flying and Why Are We in Vietnam? would have been as well received (or as free in style) without the irrigation Henry Miller gave to American prose.<sup>25</sup>

This statement clarifies two points: (1) both Naked Lunch and Mailer's Vietnam are in a sense indebted to Henry Miller, (2) Mailer's novel is "different" from Naked Lunch. We might further assume that these novels have benefited from Miller's "irrigation" in the sense that they were all written in a prose reacting against the totalitarian society.

The style of Why Are We in Vietnam? is even closer than that of An American Dream to the ideas Mailer as an existentialist artist presented in both his "Paris Interview" and Cannibals and Christians, for with it he is trying to create a being, instead of a character, "whose nature keeps shifting." In so doing, "one's emotions are forever locked in the chains of ambivalence--the expression of an emotion forever releasing its opposite--the ego in perpetual transit from the tower to the dungeon and back again (CC, p. 77)." D. J. is clearly such a being who has a



multiple voice to present himself. On the one hand, he is both himself and a Mailer hero who "sees right through shit." But on the other hand, he is the mirror of American culture which reflects both the minds of the Christians and the Cannibals. Richard Poirier called him "the theorist of multiple identity."<sup>26</sup> D. J. does respond to this idea when he cautions us that

We have no material physical site or locus for this record, because I can be in the act of writing it, recording it, slipping it (all unwitting to myself) into the transistorized electronic aisles and microfilm of the electronic Lord (who, if he is located in the asshole, must be Satan) or I can be an expiring consciousness, I can be the unwinding and unravelings of a nervous constellation just now executed, killed, severed or stopped, may be even stunned, you thunders, Herman Melville go hump Moby wash his Dick. Or maybe I am like a Spade and writing like a Shade. (Vietnam, pp. 25-26.)

The "voice" here is a composite of various identities, attuned to the pace of a disc jockey taped talk. But in the very psyche of D. J. there is a kind of battleground where both internal and external, or psychological and social, forces inhabit and war for possession. The reader is never certain about who the narrator is or what he is, but forced to face up to the confusion and the ever-present dread that D. J. himself faces.

The language of the novel is accordingly adapted to the emissions of D. J.'s hopped-up mind. As John Aldridge has pointed out, "D. J. speaks by turns with tongue of a Hell's Angel, a Harlem hippie, a small-town Southern deputy sheriff, a drunken tent-revivalist preacher, and the filthiest-minded top sergeant in the U. S. Army."<sup>27</sup> In the meantime, D. J.'s strings of four-letter words are not just appropriate to his age and his viewpoint, but also the outlet of the subconscious suppressed streams of American thought that can be expressed only at night:

If the illusion has been conveyed that my mother, D. J.'s own mother, talks the way you got it here, well little readerster,

you're sick in your own drool, because my mother is a Southern lady, she's as elegant as an oyster with powder on its ass, she don't talk that way, she just thinks that way. (Vietnam, p. 21.)

Mailer further says that man is "obscene as an old goat." The common man's obscenity works to help him keep his sanity. In Why Are We in Vietnam? he allows D. J.'s language to play on obscenity as freely as he wishes. Mailer made this point very clear as he reflected on the novel in The Armies of the Night:

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 wishes, 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. . . (Armies, p. 62.)

In addition, reacting against the totalitarianism manipulated by "communication engineers" like LBJ, D. J. also employs his obscene rhetoric "as the terrible swift sword of conscience that slices through the pretensions of everything he finds obscene in American society."<sup>28</sup> In the book, D. J. fully uses his eloquency to attack all the pretensions of his father, Rusty. Rusty has a long history of development in Mailer's fiction: he is a General Cummings, a Hollingsworth, a Subversive Committee of U. S. Congress, and a Barney Kelley all wrapped in one. He is identified with a multitude of organizations from local country club to the CIA. He is the top executive of a firm engaged in manufacturing plastic cigarette filters. D. J. half-jokingly says that Rusty is "an unlisted agent for Luce Publications, American Airlines Overseas Division." Rusty, who is violently competitive and will destroy anyone who gets in his way, is a rough, fast-shooting cowboy proud of his ancestors. Here I will quote D. J. at length to demonstrate his penetrating insight into the archetypal corporate man:

Well, now Rusty's got normally some kind of big pointy nose with fleshy backing, good shape, but it's a tool, man. On pot, it looks suddenly like a hand, got a red mean finger at the tip, stab you right in the middle of your lie, or grab your mouth and twist it off. It's a shit converter of a nose--any flunky talking to Rusty and not knowing what to say cause he's hiding some fuckup is going to find all the hardpan constipated Texas clay in his flunky gut turning abruptly to sulfur water and steam. . . . But it's Rusty's eyes kick off the old concept of dread in D. J. Fyodor Soren Kierkegaard Jethroe because they remind him of his favorite theory, which is that America is run by a mysterious hidden mastermind, a secret creature who's got a plastic asshole installed in his brain whereby he can shit out all his corporate management of thoughts. I mean that's what you get when you look into Rusty's eyes. You get voids, man, . . sort of dead ass and dull with a friendly twinkle--typical American eyes--and when he's turned on, like when he's ready to prong a passing cunt in a hurry-- which D. J. estimates six eight times a year--or when he's about to consummate the big signing (listen to the silent bagpipes) in some ten-mouth pass-the-buck or stand-and-fuck game of negotiations, why then Rusty's eyes are like yellow coals, liquid yellow fire ready to explode in its own success. . . . If D. J. wouldn't take to pot at family dinners he might not have such a Fyodor Kierk kind of dread looking into Big Daddy's chasm and tomb. But that dread's out there, man. Because Rusty suggests D. J.'s future: success will stimulate you to suffocate! (Vietnam, pp. 36-38.)

The dread that D. J. feels when looking at his father partly results from Rusty's courageous determination and tremendous selfishness, because he represents a destructive and debasing force in American society. The plastic cigarette filters his company manufactures sterilize and destroy the natural. The "Pure Pores" filter can, says D. J., also be used as a contraceptive for women. It not only prevents life, but corrupts it as well, for it is said to cause cancer of the lip. As Jerry H. Bryant has explicated it in this way:

The filter and the men who produce it represent that feature of American business which dams up all impulses and healthy spontaneity, straining out all but the conforming, and produces cancerous knobs of unexpressed desires which turn into "knots of hatred."<sup>29</sup>

D. J.'s dread also results in part from his father's strength and the necessity of competing with him. Actually it is the nature of the

competition that fills D. J. with this kind of dread, because the real relationship between the two is an Oedipal relationship. This is brought out in the episode in which Rusty and D. J. escape from the surveillance of Big Luke, their guide, and go off to kill their own bear. Separated from the rest of the hunting party, the two begin to develop a close emotional bond. They are in the wilds together, totally dependent upon each other for survival, and thus can potentially experience the classic bond between father and son--the father guiding and teaching the son. Rusty himself, freed from the corporate spirit of the hunt and out in nature with his son, is able to tell D. J. of the worst thing he ever saw--an eagle killing an already wounded deer--and considers it "a secret crime that America. . . is nonetheless represented, indeed even symbolized by an eagle, the most miserable of the scavengers, worse than a crow (Vietnam, pp. 139-40)."

D. J. feels familiar with his father for the first time in his life. He describes his feelings this way:

On and on they go for half an hour, talking so close that D. J. can even get familiar with Rusty's breath which is all right. It got a hint of middle-aged fatigue of twenty years of doing all the little things body did not want to do, that flat sour of the slightly used up. . . but with all this distraction, fatigue, booze, Nick the Teen, . . it's still a good breath, it got muscle and a big happy man with that clean odorless white American flesh. . . is that D. J. riding on currents of love can take all the smell of his daddy's breath and love him still, cause that's love--you can go to the end of the other's breath and still forgive him. (Vietnam, pp. 140-41.)

But it is right after this description that Rusty and D. J. come upon the tracks of a bear and the smell changes and with it the love that D. J. feels for his father turns to hatred. The reason is that D. J. comes in contact with death and his father represents death to him.

And D. J. breathes death--first in his life--and the sides of the trail slam into his heart like the jaws of a vise cause that grizzer could come erupting out of the brush, . . it's death D. J.'s breathing, it comes like attack of vertigo when stepping into dark and smelling pig shit, that's what death smells to him, . . terrible fear right out of his lungs and pores, mucous lining now flappy-ass organs, . . cause D. J. for first in his life is hip to the hole of his center which is slippery desire to turn his gun and blast a shot into Rusty's fat fuck face, thump in his skull, whawng! and whoong! with the dead-ass butt of his Remington 721, D. J. is shivering on the death in this hot-ass vale of breath, cause each near-silent step of his toe on the trail sounds a note, chimes of memory, angel's harp of ten little toes picking out the blows of Rusty's belt on his back, he five years old and shrieking off the fuck of his head, cause the face of his father is a madman ass, a power which wishes to beat him to death--for what no longer known. . . D. J. just remembers the beating, screaming, pleading, smell of pig shit in his five-year-old pants, and death, coming in like oscillations red and green, stop, go, Rusty's eyes in to kill on D. J.--fat five-year-old spoiled beautiful little fuck in the middle between husband and wife. . . little pretty seed of back-up murder passed from valve asshole Rusty's heart to the seat of D. J.'s brain, for Hallie rushed in then, picked up decanter whiskey, flung it through on a line through windows, and glass cracked all scythe and lightnings, and spell broke, murder weather cracked in thunder, and D. J. all pig shit smell and five-year-old ass and back burning like the flesh in the burns of Hell run all screaming into Hallie's arms, little man saved by cunt, virility grew with a taint in the armature of the phallic catapult, call it tumor if that's what D. J.'s got in his brain, cause brilliance is next to murdering the son, breath of his own murder still running in the blood of his fingers, his hands, all murder held back, and then on the trail came a pressure, no longer the fear of death but concentration, murder between the two men came to rest, for murder was outside them now, some murder which had been beaming in to D. J. while he thinking of murdering his father, the two men turned to contemplate the beast. (Vietnam, pp. 143-46.)

This long passage is again a revealing one in the novel. It not only spells out the deep-rooted incompatible relationships between father and son, but it also states in what sense D. J. is a Hipster, or a "philosophical psychopath." A psychopath, according to Mailer, is one who has "chosen" to express his infantile fantasies--"those violent parallels to the violent and often hopeless contradictions he knew as an infant and as a child (ADV, p. 320)." "In thus giving expression to the buried

infant in himself, he can lessen the tension of those infantile desires and so free himself to remake a bit of his nervous system (ADV, p. 320)." This is exactly what D. J. intends to do. By killing or murdering, he may empty his hatred. He wants to kill his father in the same way that Rojack wants to kill Barney Kelley. With his desire comes a memory. He sees his father beating him when he was five years old, and his father's face has the look of a madman, reflecting "a power which wishes to beat him to death." Only in attempting to carry out such a murderous action, does D. J. discover his sense of self, "the hole of his center." Although he has not actually killed his father, his killer instinct is given vent to in his shooting of the bear.

D. J.'s total rejection of Rusty and Rusty's final inability to break away from the corporate spirit are presented in the conclusion of their bear hunt. After D. J. and Rusty turn their separate impulses to murder to the collective will to kill the bear, both of them get shots off. But it is D. J. who wounds the bear first and feels compelled to walk up to it before it dies. In this episode, D. J. experiences a similar mystery as Rojack experienced with the fourth wounded German soldier before he died:

His eyes looked right at D. J.'s like wise old gorilla eyes, and then they turned gold brown and red like the sky seen through a ruby crystal ball, eyes transparent, and D. J. looked in from his twenty feet away and took a step and took another step and another step and something in that grizzer's eyes locked into his, a message, fellow, an intelligence of something very fine and very far away, just about as intelligent and wicked and merry as any sharp light D. J. had ever seen in any Texan's eyes any time. . . those eyes were telling him something singeing him, branding some part of D. J.'s future, . . . and that wild wicked little look of intelligence in the eye, saying something like, "Baby, you haven't begun," and when D. J. smiled, the eyes reacted, they shifted, they looked like they were about to slide off the last face of this presence, they looked to be drawing in the peace of the forest preserved for all animals as they die, the unspoken cool on tap in the veins

of every tree, yes, griz was drawing in some music of the unheard burial march, and Rusty--wetting his pants, doubtless, too shoot, and griz went up to death in one last paroxysm. . . (Vietnam, pp. 155-56.)

In recognition of nature at its most fierce, D. J. recognized "Mr. D (Death)" and D for Dread at the same time. This recognition has both matured D. J. and led him to seeking the ultimate experience that the bear's eyes suggest. But such a significant moment of an ultimate experience is stripped off by Rusty when he, in his fear and frustration, destroys the bear. On the existential level, Rusty, in D. J.'s eye, is associated with violence, death, dread, and destruction. Rusty has brought death to animals, but he has never faced the fact of death in his own mind. He knows only the experience of dread, the great fear of defeat, but never "such a Fyodor Kierk kind of dread looking into Big Daddy's chasm and tomb."

The classical bond of father and son is completely shattered when Rusty falsely claims the bear as his. As they return to camp, Big Luke asks who got the bear:

D. J., in the silence which followed, said, "Well, we both sent shots home, but I reckon Rusty got it," and Rusty didn't contradict him--one more long silence--and Rusty said, "Yeah, I guess, it's mine, but one of its sweet legs belongs to D. J." Whew. Final end of love of one son for one father. (Vietnam, pp. 156-67.)

Rusty is, as D. J. has said earlier in the book, "the cream of corporation corporateness" and the direct current of Washington, D. C. In this connection, Joseph Epstein has made a good association in his review of the book:

Rusty, in his obsessive need for victory in landing a bear, disaffects his son, so America in its obsessive need not to lose face in Vietnam has disaffected some of the best of its young people. The style of these Texans is characterized by mindless destruction, awe of technology and a mania for status, but these elements are not absent from the American venture in

Vietnam. Mailer . . . has created a powerful metaphor for his own nation's intrusion in another land, and through the force of this metaphor shown that intrusion to be the wretched affair as it is.<sup>30</sup>

After Rusty takes credit for killing the bear that D. J. actually downed, disillusioned with Big Luke and his violation of the hunter's code by using a helicopter ("Cop Turd"), and fouled with nausea emanating from the company of "high grade asshole" (Rusty) and "medium grade asshole" (Pete and Bill), "D. J. sneaks out of camp with his best friend, Tex Hyde. D. J. proposes a walk to "clean their pipes," departing from a "general state of mixed shit (Vietnam, p. 186)." Obviously, the flight into the Brook Range away from guides and the omnipresent helicopter is a retreat from cowardice and the technology the older men use to disguise their fear and incompetence in the forest. In a seemingly pointless section on the guns the men are carrying, Mailer gives the largest caliber rifle to the biggest coward. Each has a weapon disproportionately more powerful than is necessary to kill Alaskan game. The helicopter is a device to aid men who have lost the woodsman's lore and is an aid to compensate for a lost endurance.

By deliberately having the boys undergo the "purification ceremony," the last part of the novel certainly reminds one of Faulkner's classical story "The Bear." D. J. and Tex are cleansing themselves through a ritual regression to a primitive communion with the forces of nature. They first defeat a wolf in a psychic battle, then they witness a struggle between the wolf and an eagle and finally they watch a bear kill a young caribou. But what they are continually faced with is the dread of being alone in the North. Their confrontation with dread is both exhilarating and overwhelming. In the beginning of their journey they are pure and are able to live, as the rest of nature, on their sense of smell. D. J.



describes his sensations the following way:

And once again they feel just as clean and on-edge and perfect as would you, sedentary send-in-terror auditor of their trip, when you, sir, are about to insert the best peice of cock you ever mustered up into a cunt which is all fuck for you, and your nose is ozone you so clean and perfect, well, they feeling like that every instant now, whoo-ee! whoo-ee; they can hardly hold it in, cause this mother nature is as big and dangerous and mysterious as a beautiful castrating cunt when she's on the edge between murder and love, forgive the lecture, Pericles, but the smell is everywhere, the boys are moving on smell, snow smell, better believe it, good here, not so good there. . . . Man, it's terrifying to be free of mixed shit. (Vietnam, pp. 196-97.)

However, when they witness the death of the calf at the paws of the grizzly, D. J. says, "and she breaks like a stick of wood and is there lifeless and her death goes out over the ridge and slips into the bowl and the afternoon takes a turn and is different having just passed through one of those unseen locks of the day, everything is altered, not saying how (Vietnam, pp. 206-07)." And then they watch the mother of the calf sniff the body of her creation, kicking at the excrement that the bear has left "as if hate was suddenly stinging her feet":

But never takes her nose off as if she is going to smell on through to the secret of flesh, as if something in the odor of her young death was months ago when some bull stud caribou in moonlight or sun illumined the other end of the flesh somewhere between timber slide and lightning there on the snow, some mystery then recovered now, and woe by that mother caribou nuzzled in sorrow from her nose while the sky above blue as a colorless sea went on and sun burned on her. . . (Vietnam, p. 208.)

D. J. is then led by this sight into a meditation on the nature of smell, as the night comes on:

A sigh came out of the night as it came on and D. J. could have wept for a secret was near, some mystery in the secret of things --why does the odor die last and by another route?--and he knew then the meaning of trees and forest all in dominion to one another and messages across the continent on the wave of their branches up to the sorrow of the North, the great sorrow up here brought by leaves and wind some speechless electric gathering of woe, no peace in the North, not on the top of the rim. . . (Vietnam, p. 211.)

Writing some twenty-five years late after Faulkner and from an urban background, Mailer seems to question the traditional dichotomy between unspoiled nature and corrupted civilization. Like the eagle Rusty described earlier, the grizzly is blind and castrates any other living thing, not for food but simply for the sake of the kill. At least this is the basis of nature that D. J. is exposed to. Tony Tanner has summarized Mailer's attitude in this manner:

Man does indeed despoil the beauties of nature, cuts himself off from its prime mysteries, devotes himself to corporations like the Pentagon, collects guns and contracts cancer, invents helicopters defoliate and decimate, lives inside the deadening impurities of industrial and mental smog, and is curiously attracted to death--all this and more is touched on by Mailer's novel. But it generates the further suggestion that the original prompting for this compulsion to waste substance was not brought by man into the unspoiled realms of nature but rather contracted there--whether in the jungle, the desert, or at the polar ice cap.<sup>31</sup>

What Tony Tanner has said about Mailer's attitude toward nature might be in part Mailer's intent to present through D. J., but the trip by the boys is made into an existential experience. In terms of purification, the trip does serve the function of antidote in the beginning to the obscenity of the mechanized bear hunt. This can even be seen by D. J.'s language. In the long lyric passages describing the boy's first day alone in the forest, the four-letter words are almost entirely absent; so are the various cants and mixed media gags. But, the thing is that this kind of purifying experience has not lasted long. As the story draws to its climatic moment, right in the center of this idyll there are suggestions of violence, killing, death and "a Fyodor Kierk kind of dread." These messages are most dramatically presented in their witnessing the Arctic Lights. In the middle of the night, they are suddenly awakened by a spectacular display of the Aurora Borealis. Stimulated by the electric

messages of this sight, they experience the mysteries of their beings in the novel to see D. J.'s struggle to identify himself with his Being and his failure to do so, I like to quote the paragraph in its entirety:

Silence. And they each are living half out of their minds. For the lights were talking to them, and they were going with it, near to, the lights were saying that there was something up here, and it was really here, yeah God was here, and He was real and no man was He, but a beast, some beast of a giant jaw and cavernous mouth with a full cave's breath and fangs, and secret call: come to me. They could almost have got up and walked across the pond and into the north without their boots, going up to disappear and die and join that great beast. In the field of all such desire D. J. raised his hand to put it square on Tex's cock and squeeze and just before he did the Northern lights shifted on that moment and a coil of sound went off in the night like a blowout in some circuit fuse of the structure of the dark and D. J. who had never put a hand on Tex for secret fear that Tex was strong enough to turn him around and brand him up his ass, sheer hell for a noble Texan but he, D. J., was beloved son of perfume of the poo Hallelloo and her sweet ass was his sweet ass and so temptation made him weak at the root of his balls and he always swelled to be muscle hard around Tex so that Indian could never get it up his ass nor no man living, and vibrations coming off Tex tonight like he giving up the secret of why he never tried to bugger old D. J., Tex who'd bugger any punk, cause asshole is harder to enter than cunt and so reserved for the special tool but Tex, who never sucked a dick and never let no one near him not even to touch, could bugger all but was never ripe to try for D. J.'s dangerous hard-ass soft mother's cherry although secret unvoiced, almost unknown panic for attempting such entrance had him nipped in the groin with a claw, but it came out in the night some tension of waves of unspoken confession from Tex to D. J. that Tex Hyde he of the fearless Eenyen blood was finally afraid to prong D. J., because D. J. once become a bitch would kill him, and D. J. breathing that in by the wide-awake of the dark with Aurora Borealis jumping to the beat of his heart knew he could make a try to prong Tex tonight, there was a chance to get in and steal the iron from Texas' ass and put it in his own and he was hard as a hammer at the thought and ready to give off sparks and Tex was ready to fight him to death, yeah, now it was there, murder between them under all friendship, for God was a beast, not a man, and God said, "Go out and kill-- fulfill my will, go and kill," and 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 pulsed 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. (Vietnam, pp. 217-20.)

This dramatic account fully presents D. J.'s failure to maintain his stature as one of Mailer's American existentialist heroes. It is in this paragraph that we see that D. J. the American existentialist and D. J. the small-town Cannibal meet head-on in the struggle for possession of D. J.'s Being (soul). In the process of this struggle, the ideas of, love and hatred, murder and suicide, God and the Devil, are all dialectically presented to dramatize the embattled state in D. J.'s mind. The struggle starts with the revelation from the Aurora Borealis: "the lights were saying that there was something up here. . . yeah God was here, and He was real and no man was He, but a beast." With an image more frightening than the bear, the beast like the one in Yeats's "Second Coming," is a sign, in Mailer's system, of the Devil instead of God, of decline instead of growth. The secret call is the indication to induce D. J. to death by committing suicide. D. J. perceives the meaning of the beast instantly and responds to it by putting out a hand to touch Tex so that he may overcome his suicidal death by "buggering" Tex, because at this moment he does not have a Deborah to be murdered or a Ruta to be sodomized to clear his existential vision. In his attempt to have an anal intercourse with Tex, D. J. simply desires to gain Tex's power to maintain his own. D. J. believes at first that "there was a chance to get in and steal the iron from Texas' ass and put it in his own."

Tex is the son of a mortician, "the fattest strongest fuck of an undertaker in Dallas ass County (Vietnam, p. 170)." While Tex is a boy filled with vitality and "full of daddy-love," D. J. is a "my-Momma-loved-me" one. The relationship between Tex and D. J. is the relationship built on the merger of father love and mother love; each is the other's ultra ego. Thus, homosexuality is, both consciously and unconsciously, a natural tendency for either of them, which as a result would lead to their deterioration, for, to Mailer, "homosexuality has to be overcome in the process of earning manhood." Therefore, even D. J.'s attempt to sodomize Tex is successful, his resistance to the beast's call will not be necessarily successful. In the mysteries of murder and suicide, only the action of murder may, as Mailer has repeatedly emphasized, relieve one of his suicidal temptation, such as Rojack's murder of Deborah.

In addition, D. J. has a secret fear "that Tex was strong enough to turn him around and brand him up his ass. . ." It is certainly possible for Tex to "bugger" him, because Tex does have an "unvoiced almost unknown panic for attempting such entrance." So each is desirous of maintaining his own powers by gaining the other's. Yet, Tex, too, has his own fear, "because D. J. once become a bitch would kill," especially when he is under the influence of the Arctic lights just as Rojack was under the influence of moonlight. In such a highly strained situation, D. J.'s emotions are undeniably "locked in the chains of ambivalence--the expression of an emotion forever releasing its opposite." As D. J. himself says, "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. . ." Then D. J. hears the secret call from the beast for the second time, "Go out and kill--ful-fill my will, go and kill." Through "some communion of telepathies and new powers," they become "twins, never to be near as lovers again, but killer brothers, owned by something, prince of darkness. . ." Finally, D. J. has lost God's message of growth; instead he is possessed by the Devil. The temporary "purification ceremony" has turned out to be D. J.'s initiation for death, because he has accepted the Cannibal ethic of the beast: "but to kill and eliminate is his sense of human continuation (CC, p. 4)." After their return to the camp, D. J. willingly becomes part of "the older voices filled with the same specific mix of mixed old shit which" he has heard before. Two years later, D. J. accepts his parents' go-away party with pleasure and is prepared for Vietnam with enthusiasm as he in the end announces to his silent audience, "This is D. J., Disc Jockey to America turning off. Vietnam, hot dam (Vietnam, p. 224)."

As is evident by now, the world is indeed McLuhan's global village, for no one is able to escape from "the total electronic configuration,"<sup>32</sup> not even a Mailer hero. D. J. finally sees himself "not as a soldier of Growth but as an amplifier of that hopelessly debased morality pouring through him."<sup>33</sup> Mailer the American existentialist is of course not content nor unconcerned to see his heroes, such as Faye, new Sergius, Rojack, find self-fulfillment through a denial of life. He is much more preoccupied with how the individual can reaffirm his authentic existence by going to its limits--to death--and by incorporating death into life rather than by giving life over to death. D. J. is obviously not such a hero though he has the potentiality to become one. Irreparably contaminated by the American technology, he simply loses all his courage at

the most crucial moment to assert his authenticity by risking his life to overcome his fear. Ultimately, D. J. and Tex are but instruments of a diabolic power so enormous as to defy rebellion.

## Notes to Chapter Six

1. Norman Mailer: The Countdown, p. 67.
2. Ibid., p. 62.
3. "A Paris Review Interview," in Norman Mailer: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 34.
4. Ibid., p. 35.
5. Roger Ramsey, "Current and Recurrent: The Vietnam Novel," Modern Fiction Studies, XVII, 3 (Autumn, 1971), 415.
6. Norman Mailer, The Armies of the Night (New York: A Signet Book, 1968), pp. 211-12. Hereafter all references are to this edition and will be cited in the text.
7. Eliot Fremont-Smith, "Norman Mailer's Cherry Pie," The New York Times, CXVI (September 8, 1967), p. 37.
8. Norman Mailer, Why Are We in Vietnam? (New York: A Berkley Medallion Book, 1967, 1971), p. 14. Hereafter, all quotations are referred to this edition and will be cited in the text.
9. Norman Mailer: A Critical Study, p. 42.
10. "Current and Recurrent: The Vietnam Novel," p. 417.
11. Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work, p. 37.
12. Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), pp. 4 and 3.
13. Ibid., p. 302.
14. Ibid., p. 303.
15. Ibid., p. 301.
16. Ibid., p. 306.
17. Ibid., p. 352.
18. Down Mailer's Way, pp. 183-84.
19. "Current and Recurrent: The Vietnam Novel," 418.



20. Down Mailer's Way, p. 183.
21. The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer, p. 196.
22. Norman Mailer: A Critical Study, p. 38.
23. John W. Aldridge, "From Vietnam to Obscenity," p. 181.
24. See Adams's Existential Battles, p. 100; Solotaroff's Down Mailer's Way, pp. 202-03; and others.
25. Norman Mailer, Genius and Lust: A Journey Through the Major Writings of Henry Miller (New York: Grove Press, 1976), p. 5.
26. Richard Poirier, Mailer, p. 132.
27. Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work, p. 184.
28. Ibid., p. 184.
29. Jerry H. Bryant, The Open Decision, p. 391.
30. Joseph Epstein, "Mailer Rides Again: Brilliant, Idiosyncratic, Unquotable," Book World, (September 10, 1967), p. 34.
31. Tony Tanner, City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970 (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 367-68.
32. Down Mailer's Way, p. 199.
33. Ibid., p. 200.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Norman Mailer the American Existentialist as the Hero:

The Armies of the Night and Of a Fire on the Moon

### The Armies of the Night

In his creation of the young American existentialist D. J. in Why Are We in Vietnam?, Mailer's search for a hero has suffered, as has been shown in the preceding chapter, a regression. This regression results not so much from D. J.'s lack of the existentialist insight into the nature of the reality in which he lives, as from his lack of courage to assert himself and his failure to obey his inner voice to act at the crucial moment. Instead, D. J. has become a tragi-comic hero of a new kind in Mailer's world of fiction. D. J. is tragic in the sense that he has deserted Mailer's original code for growth, and his act--going to Vietnam--he finally takes is his own destruction, which will annihilate not only his physical body but also his spiritual soul. And D. J. is comic because he is the "shit-oriented late adolescent" hero with "Dr. Jekyll's X-ray insight (Vietnam, p. 50)," whose obscene language provokes humor more often than not.

By creating a tragi-comic American existentialist like D. J., Mailer has evidently changed his direction in his search for a hero. After about a decade in his effort to make "a revolution in the consciousness of our time," Mailer as a writer, especially a novelist, clearly perceives that he has not wielded enough power to force America to change its direction. The kind of fiction he hopes to write lies tantalizingly

beyond his imaginative grasp. The "great book" he has promised to produce in his Advertisements still seems as remote as his election to the Presidency.<sup>1</sup> The period after Why Are We in Vietnam?, "with every thought of beginning a certain big novel which had been promised for a long time," Mailer did intend to start writing it but "the moot desire to have one's immediate say on contemporary matters kept diverting the novelist impulse into journalism."<sup>2</sup> Mailer wrote this in the preface to Existential Errands (1972). But before its appearance and after Vietnam, he produced The Armies of the Night (1968), Miami and the Siege of Chicago (1968), Of a Fire on the Moon (1970) and The Prisoner of Sex (1971). In all these journalistic writings or fictional journalism Norman Mailer the American existentialist is the hero that Mailer the Novelist has been in search of.

That Mailer finally decided to make himself the hero he has been seeking for more than a decade is not without its reasons. First of all, when it came to the late Sixties, the hipster suggested as a possible hero in Advertisements for Myself, Mailer later realized, could represent only one extreme but not a viable embodiment of the existentialist philosophy he later has developed into his system. And after the death of John F. Kennedy, Mailer was forced to create a fictional possibility in Stephen Rojack as the super-American existentialist hero of that time. But "[with] the deaths of his candidates for heroism" as recently noted by Laura Adams, "and with the expatriation of his fictional hero, Rojack, Mailer in these years is coming to rely more heavily upon his own potential heroism."<sup>3</sup> He became more politically active and in 1969 he ran for Mayor of New York. In the meantime, Mailer centered his attention on the war in Vietnam from Cannibals, Vietnam, to Armies.

Another reason for making himself the hero in the four journalistic efforts is closely related to his existential theory of growth, trying

to assimilate Mailer the existentialist politician, Mailer the existentialist journalist, and Mailer the existentialist celebrity in the idea of Mailer the existentialist hero. Though Mailer did not explicitly utter such an assimilation, his recent development of the theory of growth certainly implies it. As he said in the 1968 Playboy interview:

I think moving from one activity to another can give momentum. If you do it well, you can increase the energy you bring to the next piece of work. Growth, in some curious way, I expect, depends on being always in motion just a little bit, one way or another. Growth is not simply going forward; it's 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.<sup>4</sup>

D. J. is positively a character signaling that Mailer's search for a hero "is not simply going forward" but "to retreat and look for another way to go forward." And Mailer also said in this interview "that the best way to growth was not to write one novel after another but to move from activity to activity. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

This new development in Mailer's theory of growth is aimed both to justify his recent political activities and his intention of turning away from the writing of fiction. Upon the completion of his four non-fictional writings, he further justifies his intention by reiterating what he said about his Cannibals in the following manner:

Such passing books began to include many of the themes of the big novel. On the way shorter pieces were also written for a variety of motives and occasions, written in a general state of recognition that if one had a philosophy it was being put together in many pieces. Still a view of life was expressed in those books and those years.<sup>6</sup>

While putting together a philosophy is one motive, having himself as the sustained hero to voice the philosophy in these pieces is undeniably another of his motives. As early as 1952 in his review of Riesman's Individualism Reconsidered, Mailer already thought that the novelist plays a role as important to the definition and description of society as the

sociologist and scientist. As he has matured as a novelist and as he has developed his existentialist philosophy, Mailer has come more and more to see the importance of the artist's role in criticizing and shaping the society.

A particular reason for making himself, similar to D. J. in his full manhood, Mailer as the tragi-comic hero of Armies attempts to explore the depth of his own guilt and his own courage in order to determine to what degree he is able to speak to the society as an existential social critic. Armies is therefore a deeply introspective and autobiographical work. As history, the book records a single political event, the March on the Pentagon in October, 1967 to protest against the Vietnamese war. The work is divided into two books. Book One is "History as a Novel: The Steps of the Pentagon." However, Mailer explains his process at the conclusion of Book One, saying that what started as a history of the March on the Pentagon necessarily turned into a history of himself over the four day period of the preparations for the March and its immediate aftermath. It is the main reason for his writing the history of this kind. This idea is much more clearly illuminated in his review of Norman Podhoretz's Making It:

If a man is writing an accurate narrative about himself with real names, and this narrative arises because some imbalance or pressure or obsession or theme persists in dogging the man through all his aesthetic or moral nature until he sets to work, then he is willy-nilly caught in the act of writing into the unexplored depths of himself, into those regions which are as mysterious to him as other people. So he can comprehend, no, rather he 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 so much as any literary character in a work of undisputed fiction.<sup>7</sup>

This is precisely what Mailer himself has done in Armies. By "creating himself as a literary character. . . as any literary character" in Armies, Mailer wrote "into the unexplored depths of himself."

Another point which is even more illuminating is Mailer's explanation of the difficulty the writer may encounter in creating himself with his own name as a literary character in the narrative work:

The real woe 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, perceiving 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.<sup>8</sup>

In this case, Sartre's pour-soi is the subjective experience of the hero while his en-soi is the objective happening of the events. For Mailer in writing Armies, the most difficult thing is the question of how the hero with a subjective consciousness intends to present the objective events of the March to the Pentagon. And further, how the hero is able to perceive what he perceived of the events is objective. This is the necessary agonizing process the hero-narrator must go through in his presentation of the events.

Mailer's existential approach is that once he has uncovered the significance of his own personal struggles in the event, he has a perspective from which to write a history of the event itself. Mailer believes that by examining his own reactions to his experiences he could grasp the "mysterious character of that quintessentially American event (Armies, p. 241)."<sup>9</sup> But what further worries Mailer the Novelist is the "Style" to be employed "to represent the separate warring selves." Mailer solves this problem by playing two narrative roles. As the Historian he focuses on what happened, when and to whom and also presents an account of the cause and effect relationships between the people and the events in his narrative. But in this respect he still insists on finding an appropriate protagonist related to the event:

To write an intimate history of an event which places its focus on a central figure who is not central to the event, is to inspire immediate questions about the competence of the historian. Or, indeed, his honorable motive. The figure he has selected may be convenient to him rather than critical to the history. Such cynical remarks obviously suggest themselves in the choice of our particular protagonist. It could be said that for this historian, there is no other choice. (Armies, p. 67.)

Mailer the Novelist goes beyond those historical facts and their relationships to suggest their moral, emotional or spiritual importance to the people who experienced them. As the Novelist he could also seek to manipulate the reader's emotions by adapting suspense to his narrative. Mailer addresses this directly to the reader:

One of the oldest devices of the novelist--some would call it a vice--is to bring his narrative (after many an excursion) to a pitch of excitement where the reader no matter how cultivated is reduced to a beast who can pant no faster than to ask "And then what?" At which point the novelist, consummate cruel love, introduces a digression, aware that the delay at this point helps to deepen the addiction of his audience.

This, of course, was Victorian practice. Modern audience, accustomed to the superhighways, put aside their reading at the first annoyance and turn to the television set. So a modern novelist must apologize, even apologize profusely, for daring to leave his narrative, he must in fact absolve himself of the charge of employing a device, he must plead necessity. (Armies, p. 152.)

However, the Novelist, "working in secret collaboration with the Historian," sometimes makes the transition between these roles right before the reader's eye, as he does at the beginning of Book Two: "Let us prepare then (metaphors soon to be mixed--for the Novelist is slowing to a jog, and the Historian is all grip on the rein) let us prepare then to see what the history may disclose (Armies, p. 246)."

That Mailer could play such double roles of the Novelist and the Historian is justified by Kierkegaard's proposed notion that "truth lies in subjectivity." According to Kierkegaard, the "paradoxical character of the truth is its objective uncertainty; this uncertainty is an expression for the passionate inwardness, and this passion is precisely the

truth."<sup>10</sup> In Armies, the existing individual is of course Norman Mailer the American existentialist. For Mailer, the reason for the Novelist and the Historian to play the interchangeable role is that facts are always elusive and no single impression of an event is without distortion. This statement can be certainly supported by the conflicting accounts given by the mass media covering the same events. So every history is finally

interior--no document can give sufficient intimation; the novel must replace history at precisely that point where experience is sufficiently emotional, spiritual, psychic, moral, existential, or supernatural to expose the fact that the historian is pursuing the experience would be obliged to quit the clearly demarcating limits of historical inquiry. (Armies, p. 284.)

In other words, while history is factual in recording specific bits of data, the novel, drawing as it does on the novelist's impression of the data, is factual as well in recording as it does the truth of the internal reality of an individual mind.

The Armies of the Night begins with a scathing Time account of Mailer's speech at the Ambassador Theater the night before the March. By starting with this article Mailer opens war on one of his primary enemies, and he shows his intention of distinguishing his book from simple reportage by immediately dismissing Time's account of the events. Instead he will tell the reader what happened. Time refers to "antistar . . . author Norman Mailer"; borrowing Time's labelling practices, Mailer reverses their purpose, and uses labels throughout the work to expand his personality by suggesting his many faces, faults, and talents. He is thus, at various points in the book, "the Participant," "the Beast," "the Historian," "the Novelist," "the Master of Ceremonies," "the Existentialist." At one point he celebrates some of his titles as D. J. did about his voices in Vietnam. He is a:



Warrior, presumptive general, ex-political candidate, embattled aging enfant terrible of the literary world, wise father of six children, radical intellectual, existential philosopher, hard-working author, champion of obscenity, husband of four battling sweet wives, amiable bar drinker, and much exaggerated street fighter, party giver, hostess insulter. (Armies, p. 153.)

All these titles may serve to clarify, but, paradoxically, also to suggest the impossibility of discovering one "real" Mailer, and thus it is impossible to say exactly what motivated him to perform various acts on the weekend in Washington. Yet Mailer's account adds rich mood, an account of his mental struggle, ethics, and even metaphysics. His report is much more complex, and is therefore more accurate. He constantly reminds the reader of how close inaccuracy lurks to the surface of any report. At the party before the Ambassador Theater speech he notes that he

ran into Paul Goodman at the bar--a short sentence which contains two errors and a misrepresentation. The assumption is that Goodman was drinking alcohol but he was not; by report, Goodman never took a drink. The bar, so-called, was a table with a white tablecloth. . . . Finally he did not run into Goodman. Goodman and Mailer. . . tended to slide about each other at a party. In fact, they hardly knew each other. (Armies, p. 34.)

This accuracy is comic, but it hints at some roots of the press's lies. The press fosters assumptions, misnames things in order to simplify, and chooses words too hastily, ignoring or purposely promoting false connotations.

Mailer's "scrupulously phenomenological (Armies, p. 138)" account of himself, the event, and other participants has certainly succeeded in making himself a tragi-comic hero of his own brand. And it is this tragi-comic American existentialist hero who embraces all the titles in one character. By combining his double roles, many faces and talents, Mailer "the existential philosopher"

has perhaps tried to build with his novel a tower fully equipped with telescopes to study--at the greatest advantage--our own horizon. Of course, the tower is crooked, and the telescopes warped, but the instruments of all sciences--history so much as physics--are always constructed in small or large error; what supports them now is that our intimacy with the master builder of the tower, and the lens grinder of the telescopes. . . had given some advantage for correcting the error of the instruments and the imbalance of his tower. (Armies, p. 245.)

As "the master builder of the tower," Mailer the hero tries to approach as close to truth as the limitations of human perceptive powers permit. The particular warpings of the telescopes and the crookedness of the tower produce a picture of the demonstration that none of the newspaper accounts, even those favorable to the demonstrators, could produce. For this reason, Barry Leeds has a very high opinion of the book. Comparing it with Barbary Shore, says Leeds, "The Armies of the Night, by contrast, is the effective culmination of Mailer's perceptive movement towards an assimilation of the best of his perceptions within a clear and compelling prose voice."<sup>11</sup> I also share Leeds' opinion about Mailer's heroic qualities exhibited in this book:

If Mailer is often deadly serious in this book, he is also his own comic figure. If he examines the motives of others, from hippies to literary peers to governmental figures, he is equally honest, painstakingly so, about the validity of his own.<sup>12</sup>

In Armies, by giving a personal shape to the elements of history, Mailer has made history as personally oriented as possible and most of the time examines himself by analyzing the contrasts between himself and the youth or himself and those well-known participants he both likes and dislikes. The first part of the work outlines the themes of the psychic struggles which Mailer experiences during the entire week-end of the March on the Pentagon. The two battles which he is fighting within himself from the outset are the battle with his pervasive guilt and the battle against his romantic egotism. He talks about guilt initially in

reference to his inability to fully understand the psychic characteristics of the people participating in the March.

On the afternoon of October 19, 1967, Mailer the hero arrived in Washington because he had agreed to speak that night at the Ambassador Theater with Paul Goodman, Robert Lowell, and Dwight Macdonald. From the start, Mailer is offended by Paul Goodman's "scientific humanism." Mailer is upset that Goodman, a leader of youth, has tried to take guilt out of sex, even homosexuality and onanism are as valid forms of sexual activity as heterosexual activity. Such a position runs against Mailer's basic assumption that guilt was the existential edge of sex. Without guilt sex was meaningless (Armies, p. 36). Mailer further stresses the vices of homosexuality and onanism:

Onanism and homosexuality were not, to Mailer, light vices--to him it sometimes seemed that much of life and most of society were designed precisely to drive men deep into onanism and homosexuality; one defies such a fate by sweeping up the psychic profit which derived from the existential assertion of yourself--which was a way of saying that nobody was born a man; you earned manhood provided you were good enough, bold enough. (Armies, p. 36.)

Here Mailer once for all clarifies his ideas on onanism and homosexuality and reaffirms his basic American existential doctrine that nothing could be more evil than the concepts or assumptions that obstruct one's total assertion of his own growth as an existing individual. For Goodman "all obstacles to the good life derived precisely from guilt: guilt which was invariably so irrational--for it derived from the warped burden of the past (Armies, p. 36)." For such rationalistic thinking, Mailer disdains Paul Goodman.

The Prisoner of Sex, except for the ultra-conservative 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,"<sup>13</sup> is a book that makes a plea against the technologizing and totalitarianizing the sex act by women's liberationists and their allies. Mailer abhors many of the new sexual freedoms, such as the use of birth control devices, because they take all the dread and guilt out of sex, and therefore technologize it. In the 1968 Playboy interview he says, "The American liberal is programmatic about sex. . . . When sex becomes programmatic, in walks the totalitarian."<sup>14</sup> For Mailer, guilt, dread, irrationality are all states of mind which oppose technology: they must not be eliminated from the sex act.

Mailer is also particularly concerned with the youths' awareness of guilt or their lack of it. He sees hope in the power emerging among the youth of America. Their willingness to test themselves through drugs, sex, and confrontation with the Establishment is exemplary of the courage he sees necessary to become totally human. They seem willing to face death, too. For Mailer this means that they might be more capable of leading a heroic life than the rest of society, and if they are, then their power will eventually reside in a vision of life based on a perpetual advance into the unknown, paralleled by a continual search for the Self. However, Mailer has grave doubts about whether it is possible and whether the youth will define themselves as they go, gathering new energy with each courageous action. He fears that the youth have an insufficient sense of evil to enable them to fight the forces they have undertaken to battle. He fears, in fact, that they may deceive themselves about their own souls, not having a realistic understanding of the tremendous amounts of courage they will need, and fall into the evil themselves. For instance, he is at first delighted with the hippies assembled for the March in the costumes from history, comics, films, but

he is "haunted by the nightmare that the evils of the present not only exploited the present, but consumed the past, and gave every promise of demolishing whole territories of the future (Armies, p. 110)." Although Mailer gives these hippies his "final allegiance," he sees them as "villains who . . . had gorged on LSD and consumed God knows what essential marrows of history, wearing indeed the history of all eras on their back as trophies of their gluttony (Armies, p. 110)."

Mailer's fear is that one can be too easily tempted away from struggling with the society and struggling within the self; one can too easily "drop out." Unless the youths were sufficiently sensitive to the threat their principles posed to the mass of Americans, particularly their principles on drugs and sex, their political involvement might not have the effect they wished it to have. In Miami and the Siege of Chicago, for example, he says, "They did not necessarily understand how much their simple presence hurt many good citizens in the secret velvet of the heart --the Hippies and probably the Yippies did not quite recognize the depth of that schizophrenia on which society is built."<sup>15</sup> Thus Mailer fears that a rejection by the society will simply turn them toward some kind of emotional totalitarianism, some emotional equivalency to the existing society. Mailer articulates his concern this way:

These mad middle-class children with their lobotomies from sin, their nihilistic embezzlement of all middle-class moral funds, their innocence, their lust for apocalypse, their unbelievable indifference to waste: twenty generations of the buried hopes perhaps engraved in their chromosomes, and now conceivably burning like faggots in the secret inquisitional fires of LSD. It was a devil's drug--designed by the Devil to consume the love of the best, and leave them liver-wasted, weeds of the big city. (Armies, p. 47.)

Mailer also fears that the youth might be coming closer to the Devil and not God if they do not confront their intellectual and moral heritage.

Mailer has all these doubts and fears because he has seen the pattern of the young revolutionary in himself. And he begins to fear that he has fallen short and his capacity for public courageous action is already gone. And he perceives that he is no longer the underground leader in the city. So reflects Mailer:

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 judgment. . . . 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 value. (Armies, p. 94.)

For Robert Lowell, Mailer evidently could not at all become a future leader if he had not virtually turned out to be a victim, for Lowell's eyes expressed, "Every single bad thing I have ever heard about you is not exaggerated (Armies, p. 54)." Toward Lowell, Mailer has mixed feelings: admiration and disgust. What Mailer admires is that Robert Lowell is the one who best understands the imperatives of self-control for the continual struggle for the self and against the demands of the society: Lowell maintains the reserve and dignity needed to elevate the meeting at the theater two days before the March and capture the audience. Lowell also understands the inadequacies of the audience and the place to deal fully with the moral issues which the March calls forth. Yet he is upset at Lowell's silent condemnation of him for his antics in attempting to focus on the moral issues of the March. He is upset because he believes that he has been true to his own style, something he thinks Lowell should

appreciate. Lowell has not been sufficiently sensitive to the guilt which Mailer is laboring under and to his efforts to challenge the audience to face their inner emotions also. If he had the chance, Mailer would challenge Lowell and ask him:

"You, Lowell, beloved poet of many, what do you know of the dirt and the dark deliveries of the necessary? What do you know of dignity hard-achieved, and dignity lost through innocence, and dignity lost by sacrifice for a cause one cannot name. What do you know about getting fat against your will, and turning into a clown of arriviste baron when you would rather be an eagle or a count, or rarest of all, some natural aristocrat from these damned democratic states." (Armies, p. 54.)

The phrase "natural aristocrat from these damned democratic states" suggests that Mailer feels the conflict between the idea of egalitarianism in democracy and the special need for heroism and natural nobility in an individual's life.

Lowell is an aristocrat by birth whereas Mailer must win his aristocracy if he desires it. Personally, Mailer resists what apparently is to him the limiting classification of being known as a Jew from a lower-middle class family. In this book he mockingly notes that there was "one personality for himself he found absolutely insupportable--the nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn (Armies, p. 153)." He fears being regarded as average; he rebels against a feeling of modesty "because modesty was an old family relative, he had been born to a modest family, had been a modest boy, a modest young man (Armies, p. 93)." The statements may appear humorous, but Mailer seems to mean them seriously. Mailer might wish to ignore his background, but he is always aware of it, as this book clearly shows. The "only subject" that Mailer shares with Lowell "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 (Armies, p. 54)." If they are the same in this aspect, continues Mailer his

challenge, "how dare you condemn me! You know the diseases which inhabit the audience in this accursed psychedelic house. How dare you scorn the explosive I employ? (Armies, p. 54)" After such a silently bullying challenge of Lowell, Mailer is wrenched by his jealousy and led to another round of psychoanalyzing of himself:

Mailer was jealous. . . . A buried sorrow, not very attractive, . . . released itself from some ducts of the heart, and Mailer felt hot anger at how Lowell was loved and he was not, a pure and surprising recognition of how much emotion, how much simple and childlike bitter sorrowing emotion had been concealed from himself for years under the manhole cover of his contempt for bad reviews. (Armies, pp. 58-9.)

At first, the bad reviews of his books did not make him feel the sting, "but in the subsequent pressure which, like water on a point, collected over the decade (Armies, p. 58)," he did feel the pain, because "People who had not read your books in fifteen years were certain they were missing nothing of merit (Armies, p. 59)." For Mailer all these bad reviews may affect the audience's reception of him. While Lowell's grand Maitre brought himself adoration and "a good standing ovation, much heartiness in it," "Mailer knew his own version of grand Maitre did not compare. Of course no one would be there to accept his version either (Armies, p. 58)."

Robert Lowell and Paul Goodman are obviously Mailer's opponents at the Ambassador Theater. Mailer has no "intellectual accord" with Goodman and the Dissent crowd. While they are with their "scholarly Socialist minds," Mailer with "his private mixture of Marxism, Conservatism, Nihilism, and large parts of existentialism (Armies, p. 35)." With Lowell, Mailer desires the love he receives and his aristocratic bearing. In short Mailer admires and envies the very qualities and the environment and tradition that spawn those he has been attacking for years. His



mixed feelings derive from the fact that he is jealous of the man but condemns the class. Among the literary peers who spoke on October 19, 1967 at the Theater, Dwight Macdonald was the only author, Mailer thought, that evoked his most respect, because Mailer tells us that it was Macdonald who had given him the most important lessons he had ever learned about writing:

Of all the younger American writers, Mailer was the one who had probably been influenced most by Macdonald, not so much from the contents of Macdonald's ideas which were always going in and out of phase with Mailer's, but rather by the style of Macdonald's attack. . . . Macdonald had given him an essential clue which was: look to the feel of the phenomenon. If it feels bad, it is bad. Mailer could have learned this as easily from Hemingway, as many another novelist had, but he had begun as a young ideologue --his mind had been militant with positions fixed in the concrete, and Macdonald's method had worked like Zen for him--at the least it had helped to get his guns loose. (Armies, p. 37.)

If a writer is concerned with ideology, as Mailer is, it is still not sufficient to articulate such ideology only through "the substance of one's ideas." The better way to get at the "feel of the phenomenon," to discover the mysteries of an event, to understand the soul of the society and the relationship between that soul and one's own soul is through "the style of one's attack." Good examples of this aesthetic can be found in An American Dream and Why Are We in Vietnam?

On Friday, October 20, 1967, Mailer the hero attended and spoke to a gathering in front of the Department of Justice Building, and "he watched the delegation take the bag into the Department of Justice with 994 cards contained inside. . . (Armies, p. 94)." These draft cards were intended to present to Attorney General Ramsey Clark, but Clark was not in his office and his assistant refused them. However, right before this, Mailer saw a clear difference between the students and the faculty in collecting their cards. The students' were collected in "a little more than

a half hour while the faculty must have stood there debating with themselves for a long time before the decision could be reached. Mailer visualized the moral struggle in their minds:

Unlike the students, they had not debated these matters in open forum for months, organized, proselyted, or been overcome by argument, no, most of them had served as advisers to the students, had counseled them, and been picked up, many of them, and brought along by the rush of this moral stream much as a small piece of river bank might separate from the shore and go down the line of the flood. It must have been painful for these academics. They were older, certainly less suited for jail, aware more precisely of how and where their careers would be diverted or impeded, they had families many of them, they were liberal academics, technologists, they were being forced to abdicate from the machines they had chosen for their life. Their decision to turn in draft cards must have come for many in the middle of the night; for others it must have come even last night, or as they stood here debating with themselves. Many of them seemed to stand irresolutely near the steps for long periods, then move up at last. (Armies, pp. 92-3.)

The passage reveals not only Mailer's sympathetic attitude toward these faculty members but also his own drastic change in attitude. Mailer the protagonist is no longer "the wild man in himself" and the "Romantic great military dream" is gone as well. As stated earlier in this chapter, the protagonist is not most of the time now savoring the revolutionary potential of men turning away from "the machine they had chosen for their life." The guerrilla with the gun in the hills is no more the image he admires. Instead Mailer the hero looks inward and explores his own fears. At this time he has "fear of the consequences this weekend in Washington, for he had known from the beginning it could disrupt his life for a season or more. . . (Armies, p. 93)." In other words, he is fighting with his own variation of dread, the dread that comes from the uncertainty of one's role in the actions he is witnessing.

Then Mailer makes the most open confession about his enjoyment of the middle-class life he has earned in these years (he has made a lot of money and established himself as one of the major American writers of the last

a half hour while the faculty must have stood there debating with themselves for a long time before the decision could be reached. Mailer visualized the moral struggle in their minds:

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decade):

He was forty-four years old, and it has taken him most of those forty-four years to begin to be able to enjoy his pleasures which eluded him--it was obviously no time to embark on ventures which could eventually give one more than a few years in jail. (Armies, p. 93.)

Mailer is showing definite signs that the firebrand of Advertisements for Myself is cooling. If he still disdains the liberalism of "liberal academic intelligentsia," he desires to remain outside the arena of ideological dispute. As Mailer shows at the beginning of the book, it was with reluctance that he agreed to join the peace marchers in Washington. "When was everyone going to cut out the nonsense and get to work, do their real work? One's literary work was the only answer to the war in Vietnam (Armies, p. 19)." Literature, not brawls at the Pentagon, is his solution to the perplexing and socially divisive Vietnamese War, and "Mailer wished as the Washington weekend approached the the Washington weekend were done (Armies, p. 21)."

On Saturday, October 21, Mailer the hero attended a rally at the Lincoln Memorial and then marched with about fifty thousand others across the Potomac and into the vast north parking lot of the Pentagon. One of the key reasons for him to join the March was that it is an "open ended" political activity which fits perfectly well with his existential politics. The goals and reasons for it are uncertain: "Politics had again become mysterious, had begun to partake of Mystery; that gave life to a thought that the gods were back in human affairs (Armies, p. 103)." On the one hand, the speech is "improvised, impromptu, or dangerously written": the speaker cannot predict what the outcome of his speech will be. On the other hand, "The aesthetic of the New Left now therefore began with the notion that the authority could not comprehend nor contain nor finally manage to control any political action whose end was

unknown (Armies, pp. 104-5)." About the hippies, Mailer the Existentialist, though very much opposed to their abuse of such dangerous drugs as LSD, now describes them at the Pentagon with great sympathy:

The new generation believed. . . in witches, in tribal knowledge, in orgy, and revolution. It had no respect whatsoever for the unassailable logic of the next step: belief was reserved for the revelatory mystery of the happening where you did not know what was going to happen next; that was what was good about it. Their radicalism was in their hate for the authority--the authority was manifest of evil to this generation. (Armies, p. 103.)

In addition to their spontaneity and anti-authoritarianism, their New Left politics also earns Mailer's heartfelt support because

The New Left was drawing its political aesthetic from Cuba. The revolutionary idea which the followers of Castro had induced from their experience in the hills was that you created the revolution first and learned from it, learned of what your revolution might consist and where it might go out of the intimate truth of the way it presented itself to your experience. . . what seemed significant here, was the idea of a revolution which preceded ideology. (Armies, p. 104.)

In a word, the youth believed in action first and logic next. All these ideas conspicuously reflect the fundamental principle of existentialism: "existence precedes essence." As "a good working amateur philosopher (Armies, p. 107)," Mailer also applies this principle to speaking and writing. Like revolution, a good writer's style must precede fixed ideas. Mailer thus makes a complete equation between his style and the political event it describes:

Just as the truth of his material was revealed to a good writer by the cutting edge of his style (he could hope his style was in each case the most appropriate tool for the material of the experience) so a revolutionary began to uncover the nature of his true situation by trying to ride the beast of his revolution. The idea behind these ideas was then obviously that the future of the revolution existed in the nerves and cells of the people who created it and lived with it, rather than in the sanctity of the original idea. (Armies, p. 104.)

The March is a mystery, possibly a revolution; the marchers will discover its true nature only by participating in the event, riding the

"beast" of it. Mailer's style thus suited to the occasion is as flexible, changing, and irreducible as the March itself. It is almost dry and spare in the second, "Novel as History" part of the book. In the first part it often seems overblown, almost absurd, like the "hero" it describes. Like D. H. Lawrence, whose work he so much admires, Mailer is not afraid of an overstatement which might be dismissed as silly. A very long sentence about the passing of witchery and magic from the small towns of America almost seems like a parody of Faulkner. The sentence tumbles together metaphors, abstractions, and examples; the punctuation varies wildly, and there is a staccato quality almost like a loss of breath at the end. The sentence mirrors the madness of the Vietnam war and of its causes:

[The small town]. . . had grown out of itself again and again, its cells traveled, worked for government, found security through wars in foreign lands, and the nightmares which passed on the winds in the old small towns now traveled on the nozzle tip of the flame thrower, no dreams now of barbarian lusts, slaughtered villagers, battles of blood, no, nor any need for them--technology had driven insanity out of the wind and out of the attic, and out of all the lost primitive places: one had to find it now wherever fever, force, and machines could come together, in Vegas, at the race track, in pro football, race riots for the Negro, suburban orgies--none of it was enough--one had to find it in Vietnam; that was where the small town had gone to get its kicks. (Armies, pp. 173-4.)

This sentence, which demands some reader sympathy, is a good example of Mailer's placing existence before essence, having "the truth of his material. . . revealed. . . by the cutting edge of his style." Obviously he rejects linear logic in trying to explain a phenomenon like the war in Vietnam; he does not wish to fall into the brickwork-logic trap of the Old Left. His explanation of the war goes beyond politics and his style encourages the reader to find the meaning with him at the same time. And further, Mailer does not fear being wrong: to seek total correctness

by avoiding unusual or daring thoughts leads to technologese. The trouble with Paul Goodman's language is that "everything he said was right, so naturally it had to be said in a style which read like LBJ's exercises of Upper Rhetoric (Armies, p. 115)."

By joining the March, Mailer not only finds that the open-ended nature of the New Left's strategy and tactics corresponds with his political and philosophical preoccupations of the last twenty years, but at the same time Mailer, walking "in this barrage of cameras, helicopters, TV cars, monitors, loud-speakers, and wavering buckling twisting line of notables," perceives a new conception of himself: "the sense of America divided on this day now liberated some undiscovered patriotism in Mailer so that he felt a sharp searing love for his country in this moment and on this day, crossing some divide in his own mind wider than the Potomac, a love so lacerated he felt as if a marriage being torn and children lost--never does one love so much as then. . . (Armies, p. 132)."

Even after the event is completely over, Mailer the hero still feels the new growth in him:

Mailer knew for the first time why men in the front line of a battle are almost always ready to die: there is a promise of some swift transit--one's soul feels clean; as we have gathered, he was not used much more than any other American politician, litterateur, or racketeer to the sentiment that his soul was not unclean but here walking with Lowell and Macdonald, he felt as if he stepped through some crossing in the reaches of space between this moment, the French Revolution, and the Civil War, as if the ghosts of the Union Dead accompanied them now to the Bastille. . . he was in fact in love with himself than he had thought he might have. . . in some part of himself at least, he had grown. (Armies, p. 132.)

But Mailer the hero must take one final step before he can understand his new relationship to himself and his new relationship to his country. He must move beyond the symbolic into the physical, the actual, the real. For him the psychic world is only meaningful as long as it is

in parallel with the physical from in which to function. In this book Mailer makes a connection between his search for his soul, the soul of America and the soul of his wife:

He would have considered it irretrievably heavy-handed to have made any direct correspondence between his feelings for his wife, and the change in his feelings toward America. . . but he would also have thought it cowardly to ignore the relation, and dishonest to assume that none of his wife's attractiveness (and un-attractiveness) came from her presence so quintessentially American. (Armies, p. 193.)

Mailer is convinced that the search for love incorporates all the characteristics of the search for the individual soul, and the search for the individual soul is equivalent to the search for the soul of America. It is in this connection between the search for love--love of self, love of his wife and love of America--that Mailer the hero discovers the light of his new vision.

This new vision strengthens his idea that he is "an egotist of the most startling misproportions, outrageously and often unhappily self-assertive, yet in command of a detachment classic in severity. . . (Armies, p. 68)." In Kierkegaardian terms, he is the existent individual "who is in an infinite relationship with himself and has an infinite interest in his destiny" and at the same time "always feels himself to be in Becoming, with a task for him."<sup>16</sup> Since he is such an existent individual, Mailer later in the book calls himself "a simple of a hero and a marvel (Armies, p. 241)." And among the groups of the protest movements, he "can feel no sense of belonging to any of those people (Armies, p. 83)," even though he has definite sympathy for the New Left. As he sees "members of SANE, or Women Strike for Peace--looking about, there were signs enough: American Friends Service Committee, CORE, W.E.B. DuBois Clubs. . ." Mailer observes:



In the apocalyptic garden of his revolution these sects and groups and clubs and committees were like the rusty tin cans. He had the impression from previous days--now so much as fifteen years ago, for he had not gone near a sect in years; as quickly would he breed mosquitoes!--that the best to be said was that they were probably like vitamins, injurious to a healthy stomach, smelling like the storeroom of a pharmacology company's warehouse, doubtless productive of cancer over the long haul, but essential perhaps! to a Left forever suffering from malnutrition. (Armies, pp. 111-12.)

Urged by the new conception of himself and also feeling himself "to be in Becoming," Mailer the American existentialist hero desires to be arrested: ". . . it was not his March on the Pentagon in conception or execution. . . . His function was to be arrested--his name was expendable for the cause. He did not like the idea of milling about for hours while the fine line of earlier perception (and Vision!) got mucked in the general confusion (Armies, p. 137)." He was pleased that he was finally being arrested for a real cause after twenty years of radical opinions. Mailer was proud that upon the arrest the many dissimilar parts of his life--his many ages--came together:

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 will, heart, mind, and sentiment to be a man, as if he had arrived, as if this picayune arrest had been his Rubicon. (Armies, p. 157.)

Mailer purposely "transgressed a police line" as Ceasar crossed the Rubicon river to initiate the war, so that he might be as heroic as Ceasar was. Mailer proclaims in the 1968 Playboy interview that "the West is built ultimately on one assumption--that life is heroic," like what he said in Presidential Papers that "America was the land where people still believed in heroes."<sup>17</sup> Being arrested is one way to fulfill his view of existential heroism. By using himself as the representative "hero" he intends to create, Mailer the Novelist has virtually turned Armies into a "song of himself." He explains his choice of himself as

star rather than as mere camera eye as follows:

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 association; or is he not unheroic, and therefore embedded somewhat tragically in the comic? Or is he both at once, and all at once. (Armies, p. 67.)

Of course, Mailer himself means that his heroic qualities are "both at once" and "all at once."

The tragi-comic hero of Armies comes to Washington to confront power. His journey through Washington is a small "rite of passage" similar to the ones the pioneers made. But Mailer's new vision has not blinded him from perceiving the evil represented by the powerful forces of the Pentagon. As Mailer faces at the symbolic source of all these forces, he recapitulates what he has said about the Pentagon throughout the book:

. . . Pentagon: an enormous office building in the shape of a fortress housed the military center of the most powerful nation on earth, yet there was no need for guards--the proliferation of the building itself was its own defense: assassination of any high official in the edifice could serve only to augment the power of the Pentagon; vulnerable to sabotage, that also could work only for the fortification of its interest. High church of the corporation, the Pentagon spoke exclusively of mass man and his civilization; every aspect of the building was anonymous, monotonous, massive, interchangeable. (Armies, p. 255.)

The opening events at the Pentagon focused, appropriately for Mailer's metaphysics, on the exorcism of hatred, evil and death from the Pentagon and the infusion of love, God, and life. A flier passed out to those assembled included the following:

We Freeman, of all colors of the spectrum, in the name of God. . . do exorcise and cast out the Evil which has walled and captured the pentacle of power and perverted its use to the need of the total machine. . . . We are demanding that the pentacle of power once again be used to serve the interests of God manifest in the world as man. We are embarking on a motion which is millennial in scope. Let this day, October 21, 1967, mark the beginning of suprapolitics. (Armies, pp. 139-40.)

By a series of compromises with the Mobilization and the group directing the March, the government however manages to dim the "revolutionary aesthetic (Armies, p. 268)" and thus rob the day of any significant drama and heroism. The Pentagon spokesman spoke "in totalitarianese, which is to say technologese, which is to say any language which succeeds in stripping itself of any moral content (Armies, p. 315)." Such a language of course leads to the deterioration of heroism and individuality, or what Mailer the hero calls the "negative rite of passage": "How much must a spokesman suffer in such a way? (Armies, p. 316)" Even the government technique of arrests is geared to this destruction of individual acts of heroism:

The essence of that technique is to arrest at random. The arrested hero having done nothing in particular feels like a victim or a fool. Upon his release, his friends treat him like a hero. But he is the sort of hero who must end by disappointing them. (Armies, p. 302.)

Mailer the existentialist tries to avoid feeling like either a victim or a fool on the weekend in Washington; he fights to act heroically, following his existential "warlike credo" that "nobody was born a man; you earned manhood provided you were good enough, bold enough" and "Mailer hated to put in time with losers (Armies, p. 18)." As a representative hero in Armies, Mailer's struggle to act heroically is a paradigm of the March itself, and his success provides some hope that individuals will survive to continue the fight against all the forces that produce mass man. The hope in Armies, because of Mailer's success, is stronger than the hope in his preceding works. In his congratulatory review of Armies, Alfred Kazin compares Mailer's use of himself to Whitman's work: "Whitman staked his work on finding the personal connection between salvation as an artist and the salvation of his country."<sup>18</sup> In like

fashion, Mailer's heroism or lack of it in Armies becomes a crucial factor in determining the possibility of salvation for America.

As for America, however, at a high moment on the March, Mailer feels "some undiscovered patriotism," and, paradoxically, while considering the might of the Pentagon, finds "some dim unawakened knowledge of the mysteries of America buried in these liberties to dissent--What a mysterious country it was (Armies, pp. 132-33)." Mailer the "amateur philosopher" could not arrive at a definite conclusion about America's future. America could give birth to the "most fearsome totalitarianism the world has ever known" or to "a babe of a new world brave and tender, artful and wild." With a "gloomy hope" for the regeneration of a few middle class youths, Mailer the existentialist finally invokes, "Deliver us from our curse. For we must end on the road to that mystery where courage, death, and the dream of love give promise of sleep (Armies, p. 320)."

#### Of a Fire on the Moon

If the first March on the Pentagon, 1967, is a history-making event significant enough for Mailer to make himself the hero in it, man's first trip to the moon, 1969, is more so for him to project himself as "Aquarius," to recast history as individual experience from his on-the-spot report of Apollo II, for the latter is far more portentous in world history than the former can possibly be. If the American politics and violence are challenging enough for Mailer the Existentialist in The Armies of the Night to examine and define the darker motives for America's involvement in Vietnam, the American technology and the NASA spacecraft are even more so the chance for Aquarius the hero in Of a Fire on the Moon (1970) to explore motives of the same kind for the moon decision.

America needs the Vietnamese war, Mailer the Existentialist repeatedly finds out in Cannibals, Vietnam and Armies, and will continue to need wars as therapy for the schizophrenia at the nation's core. Vietnam and all the future wars are predictable "so long as the future technology expanded on every road of communication, and the cities and corporations spread like cancer, the good Christian Americans needed the war or they would lose their Christ (Armies, p. 212)." What Aquarius has found out as the darker motives behind the flight of Apollo 11 parallels those behind the war decision in more aspects than one may expect. The enormity of the event proves nothing but:

a meaningless journey to a dead arena in order that men could engage in the irrational activity of designing machines which would give birth to other machines which would travel to meaningless places as if they were engaged in these collective acts of hugely organized but ultimately pointless activity because they had not the wit, goodness, or charity to solve their real problems, and so would certainly destroy themselves if they did not have a game of gargantuan dimensions for diversion, a devilish entertainment, a spend-spree of resources, a sublimation, yes, the very word, a sublimation of aggressive and intolerably inhuman desires as if like a beast enraged with the passion of gorging nature, we looked now to make incisions into the platinum satellite of our lunacy, our love, and our dreams. (Fire, p. 138.)<sup>19</sup>

Like The Armies of the Night, Of a Fire on the Moon is another fictional journalism with author as the protagonist narrating in the third person the historical event of man's first trip to the moon from the NASA Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston. It may appear that this book is, thematically, another repetition of his old implacable hostility to the technologizing of human existence. But Mailer insists this time that he is "detached this season from the imperial demands of his ego" and therefore "in superb shape to study the flight of Apollo 11 to the moon (Fire, p. 11)." I think he is mainly correct, in the sense that his philosophical scheme is in a state of constant qualification and transmutation as

each time the fresh information or bald fact is assimilated into his existential system. He may still attack the new development of the dehumanizing technology as severely as he did more than a decade ago; but he could no longer afford to ignore its ego-shattering impact, nor could he remain unnoticed about its heroic qualities in the test and proof of America's national manhood. As Raymond A. Schroth points out,

The first moon voyage was seldom seriously challenged in public; it seemed to flow naturally from the American spirit--a continuation of the first voyage of Columbus, a fulfillment of God's promise to the New Israel, an extension of the Turner frontiersman's struggle with the forests and plains and the Wilsonian battle for democracy.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore in the meantime Mailer tries to convince the reader that the radically novel challenge of his subject forced him to become "an acolyte to technology. . . to live without his ego. . . to observe as if he were invisible (Fire, pp.55-6)."

It took Mailer more than a decade of unswerving attack on the technocrat before he could create a hero who did more than just oppose the excesses of the technocrat. The hipster hero was not the answer to the excesses of the technocrat, the scientist, the military industrial magnate; the hipster was a reaction to him. The truth of the hipster is the truth of opposition. The hipster was criminal because it was the last way to be creative in the smother and gloom of the Eisenhower years. It is possible that Mailer knew all along that the hipster's merit was not absolute but provisional and that his true value lay in his ability to promote the dialectical process. Change, Mailer has repeated endlessly, must come before creation. Faye, the first revolutionary of the instinctual among Mailer's American existentialist heroes, broke through the brick walls of security and conformity so that the new Sergius, Rojack, and finally Aquarius could pass through. Mailer's achievement in this

book, even more desirable than what he did in the creation of D. J. in Vietnam and Mailer the Existentialist in Armies, has been to create a hero whose dimensions of sensibility not only counterweigh the impoverishment of a technological culture but reveal how one can move beyond the alienation of that culture and live with contradictions disentangled if not completely resolved. Aquarius has shown that the hipster can grow beyond his violence. As Mailer predicted in "White Negro," "the affirmation implicit" in the hipster's denial of social restraint "is that man would then prove to be more creative than murderous and so would not destroy himself (ADV, p. 328)."

However, Aquarius has not gained his dimensions of sensibility without a bitter struggle with his ego. He fights his disappointment and turns the event into an experience in self-education--which comes somewhat to resemble The Education of Henry Adams, with its famous account of Adams' unexpected awe before that earlier artifact of 20th-century technology, the dynamo.<sup>21</sup> Even the three-part structure of the book bears out the dialectical process of Aquarius' struggle and ambivalence in his attempts to comprehend the moonshot mission. Part I, "Aquarius," could be the thesis: Aquarius' earth-bound view of himself and his complaints that NASA strips the romance from heroism. Part II, "Apollo," by far the largest portion of the book, might be said the antithesis: the imagined fact-recording version of Apollo 11 mission and the astronauts on the moon. Part III, "The Age of Aquarius," comparatively short, is the tentative synthesis that Aquarius could reasonably draw after a brief comparison of the Provincetown nihilists and their NASA counterparts: he "must in some part applaud the feat and honor the astronauts because 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 (Fire, p. 412)."

In this sense, Of a Fire on the Moon is Mailer's best organized treatise on his fully developed existential eschatology. It deserves a much fuller consideration than most critics have provided.<sup>22</sup>

In Part One, as a reporter covering Apollo 11, Aquarius works back and forth between the Houston Manned Space Center and the Cape Kennedy launch complex attending orientations and parties, reading handouts, interviewing the main figures and going to the astronauts' homes. After a time, however, it becomes apparent that the interconnected complexities of the event cannot be dominated intellectually. Consequently, Aquarius begins to feel more and more inadequate; and the looser his grip on himself becomes, the less sense of self he has. Finally, he can only see the lunar mission largely in terms of his own loss. Aquarius' main problem is, in waiting to witness the first attempt to put on the moon, his persistent attempts to construct a conceptual framework with which to both protect his sense of self-importance and to dominate his subject. In pitting his own ego against the inhuman mechanization he notices in almost every aspect of the NASA manned space program, Aquarius is attempting to define himself every bit as much as he is attempting to define the moonshot. He finds that he cannot intellectually do this, because at this stage he still suffers from "the imperial demands of his ego" and he cannot "think about astronauts, space, space programs, and the moon, quite free of the fact that none of these heroes, presences, and forces were by any necessity friendly to him (Fire, pp. 11-12)."

Part of Aquarius' problem is also implicitly expressed in his attitude toward Hemingway's suicide at the outset of the book. Though he does not state it directly, Aquarius seems to wonder in giving itself over so completely to technology, the twentieth century, like Hemingway,



is about to commit a kind of spiritual suicide. Certainly something beautiful and courageous is dying as the century approaches its end:

Hemingway constituted the walls of the fort: 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 due, and something awful was in the air. Technology would fill the pause. Into the silences static would enter. (Fire, p. 10.)

Heroism, romance, courage, the will to live intimately with one's fears: these are the things which seem to Aquarius to have died with the Hemingways, the Monroes, the Kennedys and Kings of the Sixties. As he wanders through the Manned Spacecraft Center, Aquarius feels "like a spirit of some just-consumed essence of the past (Fire, p. 12)," which could not catch up with the Age yet, for he senses that those outstanding human qualities have been simply reduced by NASA technology into mathematical formulas. For instance, those at NASA, "like real Americans. . . always talked in technological code (Fire, p. 17)." When the astronauts are asked what would happen if the Lem failed to reignite and lift them off the face of the moon:

Aldrin spoke of this as a "new item" then of rendezvous with the Command Module, which would return them to earth, of "various contingencies that can develop," of "a wider variety of trajectory conditions"--he was talking about not being able to join up, wandering through space, lost to life in that short eternity before they expired of hunger and thirst. Small hint of that in these verbal formulations. Even as the Nazis and the Communists had used to speak of mass murder as liquidation, so the astronauts spoke of possible personal disasters as "contingency." The heart of astronaut talk, was a jargon which could be easily converted to computer programming, a language like Fortran, or Cobol or Algol. Anti-dread formulations were the center of it, as if words like pills were there to suppress emotional symptoms. (Fire, p. 29.)

Thus the astronauts' language, computerized and stripped of the personal feelings, is purely functional. One astronaut could have completed any

given sentence for another in their communication. From Aquarius' perspective, the anti-dread formulations of the astronaut's language are symptomatic of one of technology's greatest threats. It deadens certain elements of the human psyche while accelerates others.

Astronauts' machine-like natures are not just reflected in their language but in their unheroic assumption of their lunar mission as well. They insistently avoid attaching more than a technological significance to their mission when Armstrong was asked, "Would he at least recognize that his endeavor was equal in magnitude to Columbus' adventure?" his answer was "Our concern has been directed mainly to doing the job." It seems to Aquarius virtually to reply, "If not me, another," and to assert that "there had been only one Columbus--there were ten astronauts at least who could do the job, and hundreds of men to back them up (Fire, p. 40)." So they are only representatives of "a collective will." Aquarius was utterly disappointed,

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 highly improper--it was technology and the absence of emotion which were the only fit mates for the brave. (Fire, pp. 100-01.)

At NASA, Aquarius is disappointed not only at the astronauts' total lack of heroic personality and their codified language, but also by the contrived artificial environment. It is so artificial that it seems to eliminate the need for all senses but the sense of sight. And also, NASA has performed these changes on such an incredibly gargantuan scale as to block out Aquarius' charged-up consciousness of self. The sheer size of the thirty-six-story Saturn V Vehicle Assembly Building is intimidating:

The full brawn of the rocket came over him in his cavernous womb of an immensity, this giant cathedral of a machine designed to put together another machine which would voyage through space. Yes, this emergence of a ship to travel the ether was no event he could measure by any philosophy he had been able to put together in his brain. (Fire, pp. 54-5.)

At the conclusion of Part One, with the astronauts already having landed on the moon and safely begun their journey back to earth, Aquarius leaves for Provincetown to write his account, not at all sure that he has really understood what he has seen, but determined nevertheless, if he cannot find the answers to his questions on the television screens at Mission Control, to find them in himself. "The true gestalt of an event is available only to the charged-up romantic imagination acting as co-creator of reality in a universe adapted more to the metaphor than the computer."<sup>23</sup>

Most of Part Two is not narrated from Aquarius' earth-bound point of view, but rather from the point of view of what John Sisk has called Aquarius' "charged-up imagination acting as co-creator of reality." We may also say that it is narrated from his ubiquitous impersonal alter-ego. At the beginning of Part Two we are told that having already seen the mission once, we are going to see it yet again, this time from a different perspective, and that by rehearsing the event this second time and perhaps a number of additional times we will learn more about what it meant than we could have otherwise known. Thus, after a short transition, the second part of the book describes Apollo not as it was seen by a witness-narrator situated inside the command capsule with Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins. Now Aquarius is a narrator who has lost his ego and has no personality; in this sense he is markedly different from the former Aquarius with frustrations, fears and preconceptions.

However, while free from self-doubts, envies and prejudices, the narrator now also lacks Aquarius' sense of purpose--there are no ego-

related identity crises forcing him to answer questions. The large amount of unselected technical data in Part Two demonstrates that Aquarius in this part has a psychology like those of the machines he described in Part One. He collects data not in order to construct rational explanations of what has happened or is about to happen as Aquarius formerly did. He does not distinguish between the important and the trivial. It seems that he sees everything with an equal eye, to be just as interested in recording the astronauts' sleeping patterns as in describing what they do on the face of the moon. In fact, in a way the Aquarius of this part bears a close resemblance to the astronauts themselves:

This endless preciousness of specification was necessary. In relation to their equipment, the trip was not unique, but merely another store of information in the continuing line of missions from the past which would lead toward expeditions in the future. So everything was important--the malfunctions in the oxygen transducer, and the glare from the foil wrappings of the Lem, the time it took the waste-water cloud to dispense, and the hours they slept, the unexpected reactions of the computer. Everything was important. After a while everything began to seem equally important, even the crumpling of the food bag. Like narcissists, like children, like old people, the astronauts all exhibited a single-minded emphasis on each detail which arrived before them, large or small. (*Fire*, p. 243.)

It might be said that Mailer uses the imaginary fact-recording method in this part of the book to bring the reader right into the very center of the technologized world and dramatizing it. By doing so, Mailer demonstrates the distinct contrast between the humane world of personal narrative of Part One and the mechanical world of the fact-recording report of Part Two. And Mailer might also intend to show that a reader is so overburdened with technological facts that he may be in danger of forgetting his humanistic inquiry about the astronauts' ultimate function to the moon, but become just submerged in the objects of our rational thought. However, Aquarius the hero warns, too, in this section that the

highly sophisticated electronic gear aboard Apollo may sometimes behave as if it had a mind of its own, which defies rationalistic grasp:

If the title of our chapter is The Psychology of Machines, the bewilderment of the reader at the notion is a hint direct to the anxieties of technology. For if machines have psychology, the technology is not quits with magic--technology is founded on the confidence that magic does not exist and so machines may be designed to perform the most extraordinary acts. It is the premise of magic that if the same act is repeated ceremoniously enough times, it will invoke a spirit. Or at least it will if the conditions are appropriate. (Fire, p. 147.)

By defying the rationalistic assumptions of their makers, these machines, rather than producing the expected results, produce just the opposite: completely unforeseen, mystifying results.

Obviously, such an imagined fact-recording approach--a mind-without-ego approach--is not a valid approach to understanding either the mission or the astronauts. Further, it is unreal and dream-like. As a matter of fact, all along with the fact-recording description in this section, there is Aquarius' retrospective voice which constantly reminds the reader that the state is unreal and dream-like in the astronauts' command capsule. If we read Part II carefully, we notice a subtle alternation between two voices, one of them, retrospective, centered somewhat outside the event itself, separated in time and space from the action, and the other, fact-recording, located almost directly amidst the action. Through this alternation of focus, we may sense two contrasting views of a single moment in time:

Optics were zeroed for the night, and the crew had dinner and prepared for sleep. Music was heard in the background. The crew played music while eating dinner. The last chores were worked upon. . . . The problem of automatic reacquisition of signal was finally solved to the satisfaction of Mission Control. The bunks and zip-in hammocks were set up. Around midnight the crew went to sleep. They would be up in six hours. It was their last night before the moon landing. They were obliged to wonder whether two of them would sleep tomorrow on the moon or sleep forever. Yet calmly they went to sleep. . . . There are souls whose

health is to sleep upon the edge of profound uncertainty, men whose greatest calm resides in the edge of danger. Who indeed can understand the psychology of astronauts? Let us try to comprehend how men can be so bold yet inhabit such insulations of cliché. As they sleep, we are forced to think again about the mysteries of makeup in these men who are technicians and heroes, robots and saints, adventurers and cogs of machine. Let us try to think of astronauts. (Fire, pp. 276-77.)

In this passage we move from a highly detailed record of what the astronauts are doing inside their capsule to a retrospective reflection on the psychological implications of their actions. The first half of the passage is rather specific and emotionally noncommittal while the second half is more personal and seems to be aimed at establishing an immediate contact between reader and narrator, or listener and speaker. The effect is reminiscent of a documentary film; the focus shifts from picture to voice, from the imagined experiential context of the tale itself to the metaphorical context of its telling.

The retrospective voice is used to emphasize the psychological significance of Apollo 11. Since the long middle section is located in space, in which the protagonist Aquarius travels out into space with the astronauts on an imaginative journey, it could best be described as a kind of dream to be differentiated from the first section that is located on earth. The astronauts' flight into space is mirrored by Aquarius' flight into a dream, and the astronauts' exploration of the moon becomes a metaphor for a similarly important exploration of Aquarius' mind. Clearly, for Aquarius, there is a connection between the Apollo II space flight and the kinds of flights men make in their dreams. By suggesting that both dreams and space explorations serve similar purposes, Aquarius opens up an interesting interpretive possibility. Is it possible, he asks, that the twentieth century had made the Freud-like mistake of oversimplifying the significance of the dreams which created the moonshot in

the first place? Is the Apollo mission in fact a projection of our own future fears and anxieties, a sort of psychic simulation by which we plot the future trajectory of national consciousness.

Speaking of the Age itself, Aquarius points out that if we are to learn anything from such dreams as these, we must first realize that over the years we have become so rational, so single-mindedly devoted to the techniques of our craft, that we have frequently forgotten the questions we set out to answer. In the process of doing this we have lost not only our selves, but our sense of reality as well:

There was no security. Everybody was underwater, and even the good sons of the middle class could panic in those depths, for if there were no surface, there was no guide. Anyone could lose his soul. The recognition offered a sensation best described as bottomless. So the Twentieth Century was a century which looked to explain the psychology of the dream. The real had become more fantastic than the imagined. And might yet possess more of the nightmare. (Fire, p. 128.)

Clearly, then, if Americans are ever to climb back out of the topography of their technological dreams, they must realize that their technological dreams are dreams, and that being dreams, they must be understood as dreams are understood, not simply in terms of rational analysis alone, but rather in terms of conceptual frameworks which take their primitive irrational elements into account as well.

There is little doubt that Aquarius tends to think of the moonshot as a dream. Watching Armstrong and Aldrin walk on the moon via television in Houston, he is struck by the essential impalpability of their images:

The television image was improving. It was never clear, never did it look any better in quality than a print of the earliest silent movies, but it was eloquent. Ghosts beckoned to ghosts, and the surface of the moon looked like a ski slope at night. Fields of a dazzling pale ran into caverns of black, and through this field moved the ghost of Armstrong. There were moments when one had the impression it was possible to see through him. His image was transparent. (Fire, p. 115.)

Thus, the moon is the very "centrifuge of the dream (Fire, p. 252); it accelerates all our new ideas into "incandescent states." Yet just as mysterious and surrealistic as the moon, is our own moonshot, which combines two of the most mysterious elements in man's experience: the mastery of fire and the communication of human thought. The Saturn V, with its command module on top, is the very essence of these mysteries; and man's lighting a fire on the airless surface of the moon is a paradox almost beyond analysis.

If the first section of this book constitutes one vision of the Apollo 11 story, then clearly this second section represents a separate vision of the moonshot, one which has the same relation to the first version that a day's events "recaptured in a dream" have to their original context. Moreover, the implication is that this second telling, imagined fact-recording narration in a dream-like state, has an existential quality altogether different from that of the former telling. Rather than focusing on the day-to-day frustrations Aquarius suffered as the narrator of the first section, it focuses on the "more extraordinary" reality of a dreamer's inner spaces.

At this point Aquarius the existential psychologist explains his own version of the function of the dream. First, he says that the mind operates both consciously and unconsciously. The conscious mind, the mind in possession of its sense of self, functions on a day by day basis arranging its perceptions in ways which are designed to gratify certain needs and desires. It has a will, and it seeks self-satisfaction. In addition to this conscious part of the mind there is a more mysterious, more intangible, unconscious area of the mind, which acts as a kind of seismograph of the psyche. The unconscious stores "varieties of practical



information (Fire, p. 142)" in the memory, and registers a wide range of more or less irrational, symbolic, primitive impressions in the imagination. It is with this part of the mind, we are told, that one thinks of such things as "the rites of barbarians in all the dark forest; we think of witches, and sniff the communions of mood (Fire, p. 142)"; in this part of the mind, in the "mansions, theaters, and dungeons of the deepest unconscious. . . knowledge of a more poetic and dread-filled nature may reside (Fire, p. 142)."

Standing midway between these two parts of the mind, acting as the agent of the conscious will in the unconscious, is what Aquarius calls the Navigator, which provides a sort of mediating influence. The Navigator co-ordinates conscious and unconscious thought; thus he acts as a guide and plays many roles. On the basis of whatever information is available, this Navigator

was usually capable of piloting a man's life through everything from the small decisions of a day to the critical dilemmas of the age. . . . The Navigator had varieties of conscious and unconscious information available on request. He was, if one were to think on him crudely, a memory bank of reference to everything which had been learned and was still available to recall, as well as a cerebral library of the opinions and judgments of respected authorities outside oneself. On the basis of one's acquired experience and those worldly guidelines one was ready to accept from without, a future course of action could be estimated, and large and little decisions could be taken. The Navigator was thus the agent of the ego in the unconscious, the dispatcher at the switch. (Fire, pp. 142-43.)

Since, according to this scheme, the Navigator is a kind of decision-maker, one of his primary responsibilities is to create a comprehensive vision of the world as a basis on which to make his decisions. Like a novelist, the Navigator creates a version of the way things are. However, since events themselves are continually taking shape in unpredictable patterns, the Navigator is forced to keep altering his vision of

the world; thus he is "forever drawing up new social charts upon which to make his calculations (Fire, p. 143)."

One of the means by which these new charts are drawn up is by dreaming. "The dream," says Aquarius, "provided another sort of information for the Navigator. It ran simulations. Perhaps they were not unlike the simulations put into the computers in Mission Control at the Manned Spacecraft Center (Fire, p. 143)." Thus, the Navigator has three inter-related perceptual tools at his disposal: the conscious mind, which provides the will to act; the unconscious mind, which provides vision of a third kind "into many a situation the eyes of reality could hardly assess (Fire, p. 145)." In a sense, dreams are the Navigator's prophetic tools. The unconscious mind notes and stores all the pieces of "extra-real information" it comes into contact with during the course of a day, and then later that night they are "served in the dream as the ingredients of a scenario which would look to test and explore a hundred possible avenues of that subterranean future which had been offered so many curious and sometimes threatening intimations in the previous day (Fire, p. 145)."

According to this scheme, the Navigator works back and forth across several levels of conscious and unconscious experience, creating his own personal sense of reality as he goes. It follows that the Navigator could, therefore, see any given event from at least three points of view simultaneously if he chose to: in terms of its relationship to the conscious mind's urge toward ego-gratification, in terms of its relationship to the unconscious mind's fantasies, and in terms of the dream's prophecies--or in terms of past needs, present experiences, or possible future predicaments. However logical or illogical this scheme might seem, it does, Aquarius thinks, give new importance to the role of dreams in the

human psyche, greater importance, at any rate, than the old Freudian concept of wish fulfillment gives them:

It gave dignity to the dream and to the dreamer. The dreamer was no longer consoling himself. Rather he was exploring the depths of his own ability to perceive crisis and react to it; he was exploring ultimate modes of existence in sex and in violence, in catastrophe and in death. So the real substance of a dream was a submersion into dread. One tested the ability of the psyche to bear anxiety as one submerged into deeper and deeper plumbings of the unknowable until one reached a point where the adventurer in oneself could descend no longer, panic was present--one was exploded out of the dream. But a dangerous shoal had at least been located. (Fire, p. 146.)

Certainly Aquarius is preoccupied throughout the book with the problem of finding some means of approaching Apollo 11 which will enable him to gratify his own ego; the Navigator is undoubtedly a kind of guide who directs the reader through a world which he himself has constructed in order to reach certain conclusions about the meaning of the moonshot. Aquarius sees that the Apollo 11 project does many of the things dreams do;

Even to think of the dream as a set of simulations which explore into dread is to open some obvious comparisons with the trip of Apollo 11 to the moon. For it is in the nature of our lives to explore for meaning not only in the duties and surprises of a working day, but at night in the alleys of the unconscious (where revelations of terror beyond the terror we already know suggest the very perils of our souls), what force resides then in the parallel thought that our voyage to the moon was finally 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. (Fire, p. 146.)

The psychology of the dream is like the psychology of other forms of dangerous exploration. To give oneself over to the dream is to jeopardize one's sense of self--particularly if the dream is a technological one, one whose fundamental premises are built on ideas such as interchangeability, standardization, repetition, mechanization, and the minimization of human error. Sleep is the closest thing to death in man's

experience, and dreams give shape to sleep; thus, in confronting one's dreams one must necessarily confront the dread of one's annihilation. If the dreamer keeps his nerve in the face of this dread, the act of dreaming can be as potentially heroic as Hemingway's constant confrontations with death were. However, if one refuses to confront one's dread, or refuses to admit that one is dreaming--which in a sense is the attitude NASA's cold rationality promotes--then there is the very real danger that one will simply become lost in one's dreams and learn nothing from them. The essence of the dream is to learn how one will react to one's fear; this is what gives a dream its existential meaning; this is also what gives the dreamer his dignity. But a dream without fear is like a life without dignity. It is destructive rather than creative; and so the question of whether Apollo 11 is a life-giving or a life-destroying dream recurs throughout Of a Fire on the Moon.

Once we understand that Aquarius's one assumption is that the moon-shot is in fact a dream, it then becomes extremely important to define and separate what in the dream is potentially creative from what in it is potentially destructive. In other words, giving up one's most fundamentally human quality, one's ego, is no light matter. If what one receives in return is more important than one's sense of self, then the loss of ego is justified; but if what one receives is not as important as this sense of self, the loss of the ego is a tragedy. This is all the truer when what is at stake is not simply an individual person, but rather a whole society. The Apollo 11 dream, if it is to mean anything, must ennoble the collective dreamer; if it does not, then collective mankind has entered the dream and given itself over to a sort of psychic death, all to no purpose.

Aquarius suggests that a good deal of what can be decided about the value of the Apollo 11 dream can be measured by analyzing the style with which the dream is entered by the dreamer--and in this case the dreamers are of course the astronauts themselves. When Aquarius watches, as was noted earlier, the astronauts prepare for their mission, he finds it difficult to forgive them for their stolid refusal to assume heroic proportions:

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. (Fire, p. 101.)

According to Aquarius, this sort of acceptance of fear was implicit in Hemingway's bravery, as well as in the bravery of Julien Sorel when he kissed Madame de Renal in The Red and the Black, James Dean in Rebel Without a Cause, Joe Namath when he mocked the Baltimore Colts, and Cassius Clay when he taunted Sonny Liston. Yet it seems wholly absent in Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins, almost as if the astronauts "proceeded on the paradoxical principle that fear once deposed by knowledge would make bravery redundant (Fire, p. 101)."

Yet if the astronauts' style is analyzed from another perspective, it is not without humanity or heroism at all; precisely the opposite. Seen from within the topography of the technological dream inside their capsule, the astronauts are in the most intimate contact with the dreadful mystery of death:

Yes, there was the moon before them, as visible finally as lands of the horizon in the endless twilight nights of a northern summer, the satellite of the earth, a body mysterious beyond measure, unique in the solar system, a moon whose properties and dimensions resisted all categories of classification between planet and satellite, that moon whose origins remained a mystery, whose human features were shaped--no one could prove quite how they had been shaped. . . . It was an eerie sight, eerie as a presence,

eerie as a strange and desert shore emerged across a dream of sky and glassed-up surface of waters. How to row? How to breathe? The blue and desert shore approached across the impalpable space, cathedrals of light bent around the rim of its edge. (Fire, pp. 250-51.)

From within their orbiting capsule, the astronauts see death on a scale practically beyond imaginable dimension. The moon is a land of "holes and torture pots and scars and weals and welds of molten magma (Fire, p. 251)," a dead land which has been "punched-out, eviscerated, quartered, twisted, shucked, "where there are craters an inch deep, craters a mile deep, craters so huge that the Grand Canyon could exist in one as a small sub-crater. It is a place where one confronts one's dread, a place where there are scoops and "pocks and cracks and scums of wrinkling on the plain (Fire, p. 252)." Altogether it is a land to put one in fear for one's mortal soul--even if one is an astronaut. So viewed from the dream-like world of the journey itself, the astronauts are not mechanically self-controlled as they seem to the earth-bound Aquarius. Rather, they are three very extraordinary men, men with consuming ambition and vision:

All astronauts were brave men and all astronauts lived with death: landing on the moon, however, might require a special sensibility. While a man could get killed undergoing a routine check-out on the pod, while a man was certainly in danger going out into space for a walk, where the crew of Apollo 8 had stepped right over to the unknown when they had gone behind the moon, still none of that was equal to landing on the moon! A man ready to do that would need not nerves of steel but some sense of intimacy with death, conceivably some sense of death as a pale ancestor one had met before and known for years, or failing that, a sense of tradition so profound, a faith so great, that the moon could reside in some outlying yard of that faith. A more ordinary astronaut, no matter how brave, might be dislodged from normal command of his nerve by the physical dimensions of the event.

Finally, there had to be motivation beyond measure, some need to succeed which would keep a man pointed to his target, locked into his target, ready to dare the very explosion of his flesh before he would give up his destination. It would have to be a motivation powerful enough to take him through training, public

exposure, in human tension, and the dread weight of being responsible for NASA's effort even ten years. (Fire, p. 289.)

In other words, in addition to being intellectually capable of mastering the complexities of their mission, the astronauts must have both the emotional strength to bear the de-humanization forced on them by the technological world they have chosen to function in, and the spiritual strength to perform efficiently even in the face of their own dread. After all, the astronauts are heroes of a new kind. They have been able to develop within themselves a psychology which enables them to stand with one foot in the world of technology and the other in the world of man; they have learned to translate human terms into mechanical terms without suffering from the confrontations inherent in the translations.

However, it is only when the Apollo mission is thus understood in the dream, do the conflicts between the rationalism of technology and the anti-rationalism of the human mind come together. And it is also in this dream that the connection has been discovered between the men on the moon and the society which sent them there. What makes Aquarius most outraged is "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. . . . (Fire, pp. 101-2)." Aquarius' profoundest intuition is of "a charged and libidinous universe (Fire, p. 201)," a universe he compares to a complex and recalcitrant lock whose "key was metaphor rather than measure (Fire, p. 413)." As has been shown in the preceding chapters, Mailer's position in this respect is quite different from some of the European existentialists' who see the extra-mental world as neutral, gratuitous, mindless or even antagonistic, like the forehead of the White Whale. And his own existential cosmology has been consistently

evolving with the basic assumption that the universe can be the "majestic mansion of architectonics out there between evil and nobility, or strife on a darkling plain," surely not blank or lacking meaning. So Aquarius in this book still aches for and craves interrelatedness, meaning in reality. The fact that "men would now dare to walk on an ancient and alien terrain where no life breathed and beneath the ground no bodies were dead (Fire, p. 35)" certainly stimulates Aquarius to cosmological speculations. At the beginning, "he hardly knew whether the Space Program was the noblest expression of the Twentieth Century or the quintessential statement of our fundamental insanity (Fire, p. 20)." Later, the questions he poses for himself are:

God was, for instance, at war with Devil. Certainly the Devil had a most detailed vision of existence very much opposed to His own. In any case the war had gone on for so long that nearly everything human was inextricably tangled. Heroism cohabited with technology. Was the Space Program admirable or abominable? Did God voyage out for NASA, or was the Devil our line of sight to the stars? (Fire, p. 75.)

Throughout the book Aquarius is trying to answer these questions. However, the further one looks into Apollo 11, the more perplexing the questions become: "like a dive into a dream, explorations of these questions. . . only open into deeper questions (Fire, p. 84)." Aquarius' feeling persists even into the later parts of the book, and near the end we find him still unsure of whether "Apollo 11 was the noblest expression of a technological age, or the best evidence of its utter insanity (Fire, p. 337)." Furthermore, at the end of the book, in perhaps the largest explication of his belief in a God who "wrestled for the soul of man in some greased arena with the Devil (Fire, p. 411)," Aquarius sets himself a series of questions which serve to sum up Mailer's theories and doubts developed both in this book and in some of his preceding works:



. . . he had brooded again and again, on that simple conception of God as an embattled vision which had terrified him from the hour he first encountered the thought around one of the bends of marijuana fifteen years ago. Every other one of his notions had followed from that, for if God were a vision of existence at war with other visions in the universe, and we were the instruments of His endeavor just so much as the conflicting cells of our body were the imperfect instrument of our own will, then what now was the condition of God? Was He trapped in the wound of nature, severed from our existence as completely as the once exquisite balances of the shattered ecology? had that vision He wished to carry across the universe depended altogether upon human mind and flesh in sensuous communication with nature? had the savage lived in a set of communions with the invisible messages of nature which we had pulverized with our amplifiers? These days Aquarius carried Frazer's Golden Bough on long trips by plane. (Fire, pp. 409-10.)

Three linked strands of belief run through all of these speculations: First and foremost, Mailer sees the universe as process, a cosmic dialectic with the final synthesis unwritten; second an existential insistence on free will and beyond that--the belief that the destiny of man and God are mutually dependent. "The moral consequences of this," says Mailer, "are not only staggering, but they're thrilling, because moral experience is intensified rather than diminished (ADV, p. 351)." Finally, there is a pronounced awareness of evil which is associated both with the imperfections of men and God and the action of a powerful, wily and insidious Devil.

Ultimately there are no truly satisfactory answers possible to any of those questions, but in Part III just a provisional answer emerges in the comparison of the dream itself to the realities Aquarius faces upon his return to Provincetown. When he comes home to write about Apollo 11, Aquarius cannot help but make certain comparisons between the quality of the experience he has just witnessed and that of life in Provincetown. At first he feels that the people he knows in Provincetown are much more spontaneous, more imaginatively alive, and in many

ways more admirable than anyone in NASA. Yet they are also more jaded, more spiritually exhausted, more hopeless, and in some ways much more superficial than the technicians. In Provincetown, everywhere Aquarius looks things are dying: marriages are falling apart, his friends stay "stoned out of the very head of sensation (Fire, p. 383)" most of the time, they lose themselves in drunken bombast, become offensive; they seem in some sense to be groping painfully for some means of bringing meaning to the emptiness of their lives, or that failing, they look for something to help them laugh at their own misery. As Aquarius thinks about this situation, he discovers that he can distinguish between his friends in Provincetown and the technicians in Florida and Houston only in terms of their relative nihilism. His friends make a pathetic army:

an abominable army. A debauch. And he hated his good friend Eddie Bonetti for this, hated him for drinking at the post. "You've been drunk all summer," he felt like saying to him, "and they have taken the moon." Yes, there was a wild nihilism in his own army: the people were regurgitating the horrors of the centuries, and into the air, while the curse reentered their seed through every additive in every corporate food. And on the other side, heroes or monsters, the Wasps had put their nihilism into the laser and computer, they were out to savage or save the rest of the world, and were they God's intended? Looking at his drunken own, Aquarius did not know. (Fire, p. 386.)

Thus, only the directions of two sides' nihilisms differ. The technologists direct their nihilism into their machines, while the artists and writers Aquarius knows in Provincetown direct their nihilism into a vacuum, which is perhaps to say inwards, where it feeds on itself. No one can say which is worse, least of all Aquarius, who after all, is writing out of his own despair at the overwhelming sense of finality which pervades every aspect of the latter half of the twentieth century. Only one thing is certain: the technicians at NASA have a dream, a dream which in spite of their own soul-deadening rationality, their facelessness and

their worship of mechanical detail, raises them somehow beyond themselves in a way the Provincetown bohemians do not understand.

Perhaps the most telling contrast between the Provincetown nihilists and their NASA counterparts is in the ceremony with which the people end that summer. There is a mock-burial. Some of Aquarius' friends had bought a car for the summer, but it died before Labor Day, and as a large festive crowd gathers, a hole is dug, elegies are read, and the useless machine is half buried in a standing position on the beach. The image is ironically reminiscent of Aquarius' first view of the Saturn V standing on the launching pad at Cape Kennedy; but whereas the moon rocket was almost phallic--suggestive of impregnation and impending birth--the automobile suggests precisely the opposite; sterility, and the end of possibility. Thus, the end of the summer, the end of Aquarius' marriage, the deaths of Hemingway, Monroe, the Kennedys, Martin Luther King, the end of heroism as Aquarius once knew it; all these are somehow implicit in the ritual on the Provincetown beach. Yet the question persists. Has what mankind sacrificed to journey into the technologically-inspired dream of conquering the moon been worth it? Moreover, are the alternatives to submerging the self in that dream valid?

Part of the answer occurs to Aquarius later, as he stands looking at a piece of moon rock in Houston. Perhaps, he says, it is finally impossible to tell whether technology represents the death of all that is best in mankind or the birth of some new, even more noble kind of humanity. But he stands before the rock, Aquarius knows that he must "in some part applaud the feat and honor the astronauts because 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 (Fire, p. 412)."

In other words, to reach out into mystery as NASA had done, even though the consequences might destroy the very fabric of the world's psyche, is preferable to singing pointless hymns to dead automobiles; because it implies a direct confrontation with death rather than a passive, cynical acceptance of it. And it is also because the mission does have the irreducible quality of heroism which dignifies everyone connected with Apollo 11 in spite of their individual limitations.

Just as the dream of landing a man on the moon is more important than the mechanical dramatization of the dream, it is the idea of the rock at the end of the book which is important, not its physical existence behind several layers of glass in Houston. The moon rock has a distinctly mystical aura. In making this realization Aquarius becomes once again capable of feeling the stirrings of his ego, as if having submerging himself in the dream and then come back out of it--and having in the dialectic process located some of the dangerous shoals of self-annihilation--he has finally assimilated his subject and once again discovered who he is:

He saw the lunar piece through not one glass but two, rock in a hermetically tight glass bell on the other side of another glass with still another hermetic seal. Yet she was not two feet away from him, this rock to which he instinctively gave gender as she --and she was gray. . . gray as a dark cinder. . . just a gray rock with craters the size of a pin and craters the size of a pencil point, and even craters large as a ladybug. . . and maybe it was just the constant sore in his heart as the blood pumped through to be cleared of love, but he liked the moon rock, and thought--his vanity finally unquenchable--that she liked him. Yes. Was she very old, three billion years or more? Yet she was young, she had just been transported here. . . there was something familiar as the ages of the bone in the sweet and modest presence of this moon rock, modest as a newborn calf, and so he had his sign, sentimental beyond measure, his poor dull senses had something they could trust. . . and child of the century, Nijinsky of ambivalence, hanging man Aquarius, four times married and lost, moved out of MSC with the memory of the moon, new mistress. . . and knew he could live with the thought of a visit. (Fire, pp. 413-14.)

Thus the synthesis Aquarius has finally derived from his thesis and antithesis in Of a Fire on the Moon is more than Mailer the existentialist's invocation at the end of The Armies of the Night, but rather a surprising hopefulness. So long, says Aquarius, as there are mysteries as tantalizing as the mystery in the hieroglyphics on that tiny moon rock, so long as it remains possible for man to find himself by working his way through his dreams, and so long as he can still seek out the metaphorical mistress of his own imagination, the heroic life is still possible for him to create--even in the hermetically sealed world of technology. About this book, no one has made more laconic and judicious remarks than Robert Lucid did in his anthology of Mailer's work to 1970, The Long Patrol: "For years, Mailer has written of the cultural effects of technology, but for the first time here, he tries to cut into the cultural origins of technology, to illuminate it from inside. Nothing like it has ever been attempted by a serious American writer."<sup>24</sup> I certainly agree with him.

## Notes to Chapter Seven

1. "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 (ADV, p. 15)."
2. Norman Mailer, Existential Errands (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1972), p. ix.
3. Existential Battles, p. 103.
4. Paul Carrol, "Playboy Interview," in Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work, p. 261.
5. Ibid., p. 263.
6. Existential Errands, p. x.
7. Norman Mailer, "Up the Family Tree," Partisan Review, 35 (Spring 1968), p. 240.
8. Ibid., p. 241.
9. The Armies of the Night, p. 241. Hereafter all references will be cited in the text.
10. H. J. Blackham, ed., Reality, Man and Existence: Essential Works of Existentialism (New York: Bantam Book, 1971), p. 25.
11. The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer, p. 249.
12. Ibid., p. 250.
13. Norman Mailer, The Prisoner of Sex (New York: A Signet Book, 1971), p. 167.
14. Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work, p. 286.
15. Norman Mailer, Miami and the Siege of Chicago (New York: A Signet Book, 1968), p. 140.
16. Jean Wahl, A Short History of Existentialism, p. 4.
17. Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work, p. 281; Presidential Papers, p. 39.

18. Alfred Kazin, "The Trouble He's Seen," Review of The Armies of the Night, The New York Times Book Review, May 5, 1968, p. 1.
19. Norman Mailer, Of a Fire on the Moon (New York: A Signet Book, 1971), p. 138. Hereafter all references are to this edition and will be cited in the text.
20. Raymon A. Schroth, "Mailer on the Moon," Commonweal, (May 7, 1971), p. 216.
21. For further understanding of their similarities, see Gordon O. Taylor's detailed analysis, "Of Adams and Aquarius," American Literature, XLVI (March, 1974), pp. 64-82.
22. The early book-length discussions of Mailer, such as Leeds' The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer and Kaufmann's Norman Mailer: The Countdown, are too early to consider this book. None of the recent books on Mailer, such as Poirier's Mailer (1972), Solotaroff's Down Mailer's Way (1974) Radford's Norman Mailer: A Critical Study (1975) and Adams' Existential Battles (1976) have a full chapter or section on this book. The only in-depth study is Thomas Werge's essay, "An Apocalyptic Voyage: God, Satan, and the American Tradition in Norman Mailer's Of A Fire on the Moon," Review of Politics, XXXIV (October, 1972), pp. 108-128. But Werge has entirely ignored Mailer's existentialism in his essay.
23. John P. Sisk, "Aquarius Rising," Commentary, (May, 1971), p. 84.
24. Robert F. Lucid, ed., The Long Patrol: 25 Years of Writing from the Work of Norman Mailer (New York: World Publishing Co., 1971), p. 699.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Conclusion: The American Existentialist

#### Hero in Retrospect

At the outset of his literary career, Mailer based his search for a hero on an enquiry he made into two fundamental questions concerning human life: Does the individual create society, by choosing the manner of his behavior in complete spontaneity and freedom of choice? Or is it society that creates the individual and determines his mode of behavior? These questions are the questions that have been asked and answered by Romanticists, American Transcendentalists, Existentialists and Marxists. It is in answering these questions that the American Transcendentalists are closely related to the European existentialists. Despite the differences in their beliefs of the Absolute, both the Transcendentalists and the existentialists by giving an affirmative answer to the first question insist on the uniqueness and importance of the individual, the insufficiency of science to explain the mystery of life, and the necessity for rebellion against the tyranny of social conventions and political domination. They all believe that human existence has its infinite potentiality and that every individual has the obligation to live up to the best that is in him.

It is in elaborating on his own answer to the first question that Mailer finds himself both a Transcendentalist and existentialist. Mailer is a Transcendentalist without Emerson's moral optimism, for God and



the Devil are engaged in an existential war whose end result is still unknown. Mailer is an existentialist without Sartre's feeling of the irredeemable absurdity of one's life in the world, for he still accepts the romantic notion that man is "more creative than murderous," that he is "roughly more good than evil (ADV, p. 336)." If one follows the "rebellious imperatives of the self," a better world will result even though the world at the present appears chaotic, meaningless, hopeless. It is on the basis of this notion Mailer has analyzed the American heroic tradition, and he is convinced that his hero quest has its historical significance. Mailer differs from European existentialists in that he is not fully convinced that the isolated individual's struggle with the alien forces the world around him is entirely senseless and tragic. Sartre's philosophy has become the most typical of this kind of existentialism and has exerted the greatest influence over modern literature since World War II. Mailer believes that the Sartrean trend in America should be averted. Sartre and his followers, "alienated beyond alienation from their unconscious," and so cut off from its "enormous teleological sense," can only begin with the premise of Sartre's *Roguentin* that "really there is nothing, nothing, absolutely no reason for existing."<sup>1</sup> Thus choice becomes meaningless, hopeless, and purposeless.

However, choice for Mailer is the most forward edge of the quest, existential because it is a foray of the unknown strategic value in the war between God and the Devil, yet absolutely necessary because the alternative is entropy. Choice and movement are never purposeless because they provide definition. Mailer believes it is crucial to allow all thoughts, emotions, desires, fears to come to the surface.

And the law of life demands that "one must grow or else pay more for remaining the same (DP, p. 294)."<sup>2</sup> If society stifles an individual, smothers him in conformity, then he cannot act in any moral way. Stultified by the homogenization of technological society, man's first impulse should be to escape--escape first, assertion of self first, change first--then morality, then self-discipline, then harmony, community, love. This is the basic argument of "The White Negro," Mailer's 1957 essay which uses the American Negro's experience as a model of how to retain one's individuality and ability to grow in an increasingly totalitarian society. The hipster, or American existentialist, by acting is at least in motion and so accumulating a body of experience to react to later. To be an American existentialist Mailer says, "one must be able to feel oneself--one must know one's desires, one's rages, one's anguish, one must be aware of the character of one's frustration and know what would satisfy it (ADV, p. 315)."

Nevertheless, before Mailer was able to formulate his American existentialist vision in the image of the "White Negro" and as he found out that "the underlying illness of the twentieth century is the war between being and nothing,"<sup>3</sup> he believes that man's problem is not his ability to choose good but his inability to choose at all. For instance, all the characters in The Naked and the Dead, dominated by their Bad Faith in one sense or another, are unable to choose. As was pointed out in Chapter Two, Mailer's "totalitarianism" is almost exactly equivalent to Sartre's "Bad Faith." In Mailer's search for a hero, one thing is definitely certain: From the start, he made it very clear what kind of character he would unequivocally reject as his ideal of a hero even before he had had any precise idea as to what his hero would be like

in the future. None of the major characters in The Naked and the Dead was meant to be a hero. They are all products of their environments, non-heroes. Mistaking Nietzsche's "the will to power" for "the drive for power," General Cummings is predominantly obsessed with the values of fascism while Lieutenant Hearn, though intelligent and physically strong, has no real conviction of any kind to support him. His traditional liberalism is an ineffective counter to the kind of reactionary vision that Cummings represents. Mailer's increasing fascination with Sergeant Croft might have brought him closest to emerging as the only character capable of acting on a heroic scale. But when Mailer has finally had Croft defeated by the hornets he steps on in his climb to the summit of Mt. Anaka, it becomes clear again that Mailer does not want to have anything coming of Croft's ambition just as nothing comes of Cummings' power morality under the totalitarian system.

If Mailer's first novel is in some ways an existential novel, it demonstrates that the individual's pursuit of his own soul is impossible. In his effort to find some meanings in life which sustain him each fails because he cannot find any pattern in society that will make sense out of his struggle. The tightly organized military structure gives no chance to develop oneself. The war also has a metaphoric meaning, which is related to Mailer's idea of the war between God and the Devil, between life and death and between creativity and destruction. But none of the major characters in the story perceive this.

The bleak situation in Barbary Shore is no better than that of The Naked and the Dead. But the scene is shifted to the native ground of America in a boardinghouse in New York. In this ideology-ridden novel, Mailer continues to develop the backgrounds for shaping his ideas

of an American existentialist hero and the need of him. Obviously, Mailer at this point hadn't found a form to adequately express the individual's search for a personal identity. Nor had his quest for a hero yet arrived at the point at which the hero might fully emerge. Therefore, Barbary Shore is another novel without a hero. Interwoven in the sexual relationships, Guinevere is at the center. Wife of the ex-Stalinist agent McLeod, slave of the F.B.I. man Hollingsworth, willing recipient of Lannie's Lesbian affection, Guinevere resists only narrator Mike Lovett's attempts at seduction. She is Mailer's symbol for America at the socio-cultural level; her tawdriness, greed, sexual fantasizing, and Hollywood-shaped mind are expressions of the perversions and cultural degeneration of the country. Hollingsworth, the symbol of the new state, is drawn in detail to expose the bureaucratic organizations whose goals are the same as were General Cummings's. By understanding him, we will understand America of his time: the apparent prosperity, tranquility, and national purposefulness is a mask for society's real condition of apathy, confusion, and the giving over of individual control to the nearly invisible but powerfully coercive forces.

McLeod's answer to these coercive forces is "revolutionary socialism." Yet McLeod's impotence and self-betraying character all indicate that "the rational concepts of socialism" were inadequate for dealing with present realities. It is Lovett the narrator who anticipates the later hipster in a certain way, because he has to find his way in "that enormous present which is without past or future, memory or planned intention (ADV, p. 313)." But unlike the hipster, Lovett is not endowed with that commitment to the needs of the deeper instinctive

self, which Mailer later came to see as elementally important for a combative personal stance by which one might successfully counter the "collective condition of slow death by conformity (ADV, p. 312)."

However, starting with Barbary Shore for his pursuit of a hero, Mailer was moving his novelistic frame of inquiry from the external to the internal, from social and economical considerations of man and society to an individual consideration, from uncommitted passive contemplation to dramatic engagement as a source of growth. Most importantly, a movement is indicated--away from rationalistic determinations of man's nature in the context of history to the more perplexing and morally disturbing exploration of the instinctive and the unconscious. In his third novel, The Deer Park, Mailer for the first time found a fictional expression for his American existentialist vision and a character as an acceptable existentialist hero he had been seeking. In The Deer Park, the Desert D'Or setting is presented as the favorite resort of the movie industry's more successful people, and here their inverted work-play lives take on an even more brilliant intensity and sharper focus through its clear and super-heated desert air, than they would, had the setting been Hollywood itself. Mailer's shifting context from the politics and larger historical current to sex and the flow of individual psychic history does not mean that Mailer had given up in this novel all claims on public authority, for sex will be linked existentially and seen as "intertranslatable" with other areas of life such as art and politics.

Sergius is an immeasurably better narrator than Lovett. In the first fifty pages of the novel, Sergius has introduced us practically to every character in the story, providing short capsules of their

background and giving us carefully chosen facts of their interaction, their intercourse--carnal and social--while all the time establishing the pastel-colored and plastic environment of Desert D'Or. Sergius pries open the affair of Elena and Eitel and get at the heart of Faye's hipster ethics. By permitting Sergius to scan the thoughts of Eitel and then Faye, and examine the most private aspects of their sensibilities and their sex lives, Mailer is demonstrating that his view of character, indeed his whole world picture, has changed.

What Sergius is to find through his observation of this frustrating and finally defeated Hollywood affair (and also through his own affair with Lulu) is, ironically, the "real" world that he was hoping this world would be an escape from. And this is what Hollywood more generally becomes in the novel, an image of American society at an impasse. Mailer believes it is at the very point of stagnation that his hero of opposition or defiance should make his first appearance. Marion Faye is the first introduction into Mailer's fiction of a form of the hipster model of "The White Negro." Faye is sensitive to the self-deception and corruption of the world in which he has grown up. He finds that the God of modern society is evil, evil in fact because of the evil of society. Upon his discovery of evil in such a manner, Faye decides to commit himself to evil. He does this because he believes that society is full of hypocrisy and therefore must be purged, as he must purge himself of society's taint by using evil to fight evil. Here, Mailer intends us to understand that Faye's commitment to evil, like the hipster's, is only a means for discovering the good. It cannot be an end in itself. And his nihilistic vision is directed both explicitly and implicitly to damn the ideals of sensibility of which Eitel is the

representative. He is able to succeed in a way that Eitel does not in purging himself of debilitating emotions.

Sergius also shows great interest in Eitel's affair because he finds that Eitel's crisis is roughly parallel to his own and Eitel represents "the distillate of the best values of the past by which Sergius has been fathered and orphaned. . . ." Thus, "the question of his potential for rebirth and self-renewal--has crucial moral significance."<sup>4</sup> Yet, Eitel is in one sense another portrait by Mailer of the failed traditional liberal hero, a victim of his own lack of commitment and self-serving guilt. Eitel does use Elena sexually to regenerate his lost respect for himself. But both his old debilitating habits and his own ironic intelligence smother his desire to commit himself to love. His cynical intelligence puts himself at such a distance from his own instincts that he cannot feel any emotion strongly. What Sergius has learned from Eitel is not from his action but from his theory of life--the courage to live by the imperatives of his instinctive self. If Sergius is looking toward Eitel as a possible heroic model, the foil for the values he has represented and tries in his later life to recapture is Faye. From Faye, Sergius learns that "if one is to change one's habits one must go back to the source of their creation" where one "has a chance to act as he has never acted before." And "in giving expression to the buried infant in himself" one may finally be able "to free himself to remake a bit of his nervous system (ADV, p. 320)."

In Deer Park, Sergius is gradually regenerated but through an alternative route to the cul-de-sac which Eitel has allowed himself to be drawn into. Sergius's regeneration is reminiscent by contrast of Hearn's unwillingness or inability to let any ultimate issue penetrate

the mask of protective habits and stances he calls his integrity, which is finally seen as a disease he cannot fight his way through. Sergius, as he begins writing The Deer Park, discovers he is stronger, understands a little more, and is able to "to keep in some permanent form those parts of myself which were better than me." And he is also ready to blow "the small trumpet of (his) defiance" "against the walls of every power that exists (DP, p. 318)." If Faye is the earliest version of Mailer's American existentialist hero, Sergius is the hero-in-training in the novel but becomes a full-grown hero in the story of "The Time of Her Time." In Deer Park, Mailer's existentialist ideas, as far as they had been developed at this time, are distributed over all its major characters, and this includes Eitel, Elena, Sergius, and Faye. This is so, simply because all the elements of Mailer's emerging ideology are not yet completely absorbed into its fictional contexts. But through this novel of transition Mailer has developed his American existentialist vision to the stage of full maturity.

According to existentialists such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre, the indispensable starting for the formation of an authentic existential personal vision or philosophy is the intuitive recognition of the contingency, absurdity, and separateness from man of raw being, for the "In-itself." Moreover, this intuitively received radical discovery, while it is conscious and rational event, is not to be seen as the result of an empirical process of measuring and weighing alternatives: it is entirely intuitive and so also implies the validity of intuitive perception. In certain ways Mailer's account of his change-over to a "psychic outlaw" is similar to the classic existential pattern of this intuitive recognition. We know that his psychic conversion came as the



result of a long formative process, but Mailer makes it seem to have taken shape suddenly for him. After Rinehart contracted to publish The Deer Park and then broke the contract, and after eight more publishers refused it, Mailer began to come to a new realization of himself.

I was out of fashion and that was the score; that was all the score; the publishing habits of the past were going to be no help for my Deer Park. And so as the language of sentiment would have it, something broke in me, but I do not know if it was so much a loving heart, as a cyst of the weak, the unreal, and the needy, and I was finally open to my anger. I turned within my psyche I can almost believe, for I felt something shift to murder in me. I finally had the simple sense to understand that if I wanted my work to travel further than others, the life of my talent depended on fighting a little more, and looking for help a little less. But I deny the sequence in putting it this way, for it took me years to come to this fine point. All I felt then was that I was an outlaw, a psychic outlaw, and I like it, I like it a good night better than trying to be a gentleman, and with a set of emotions accelerating one on the other, I mined down deep into the murderous message of marijuana, the smoke of the assassins, and for the first time in my life I knew what it was to make your kicks. (*Italics, mine.*) (ADV, pp. 216-17.)

One important difference to be noted between Mailer's account of his own conversion to a position which he described as existential and the view which is consistent among the European existentialists, is that each has a different emotion accompanying the first illumination. For the Europeans it is anguish, but for Mailer it is anger. This suggests that in the development of his existential views he has been drawing on more non-rational sources for their definition and validation than the most representative European existentialists have. Moreover, as alienated from certain social realities as Mailer presents himself in the quotation, he does not seem to be making the kind of radical division between the world of society and ultimate being, between "being-in-itself" and "being-in-the midst-of-the-world," as did Heidegger and Sartre, as a requisite for "authentic" existential awareness. Also worth noting here

is the suggestion that violence may be a source of creativity and self-generation. This is how Mailer has all existential ideas put together in his essay "The White Negro," as a sort of manifesto for his American existentialism. Since in Chapter Three, I made a detailed study of this essay, I have no intention to repeat myself again. But I do want to emphasize what Mailer himself emphasized about his American existentialism, which is in a way significantly related to his personal experience:

Hip is an American existentialism, profoundly different from French existentialism because Hip is based on a mysticism of the flesh, and its origins can be traced back into all the undercurrents and underworlds of American life. . . . Unlike the rationality of French existentialism, which has its points of inauguration in the work of Sartre, Hip is an American phenomenon, and it has come into being without an intellectual mentor. It is a language to describe states of being which is as yet without its philosophical dictionary. (ADV, pp. 292-93.)

Mailer further insisted that the hipster has a particular function. The hipster may not think of himself as a political man, but to Mailer he is the authentic revolutionary of his time:

. . . it may well be that the rise of the hipster represents the first wind of a second revolution in this century, moving not forward towards action and more rational equitable distribution, but backward towards being and the secrets of human energy, not forward to the collectivity which was totalitarian in the proof but backward to the nihilism of creative adventures, a revolution admittedly impossible to conceive even in its outlines. (ADV, p. 335.)

Living in a world as Mailer did in the Fifties, political action was no longer a meaningful possibility. Mailer came to the conclusion that neither the society he lived in nor his own tortured ego was the real villain. The enemy was reason itself, the intellect. As he said, the Russian Revolution failed because it was a product of the scientific narcissism we inherited from the nineteenth century," an expression of "rational mania that consciously could stifle instinct." A true

political radical had to rebel against reason in the name of the instincts. Hip, by restoring us to an immediate relation with our senses, made our actions meaningful agains.

In this connection, we can also see that existence becomes purposive for the American existentialist far beyond a narrow self-gratifying sense, for he exists to "make a better world." And also because of the existential condition of God, the American existentialist's moral action is significantly heightened, for God himself is capable of being changed by our actions. Both the last quotation and this idea are spelled out not in the essay itself, but are added as a postscript. Here is how Mailer later synthesized his concepts of Hip and God:

I think Hip is particularly illumined by one notion so central and so shattering that its religious resonances and reverberations are going to dominate this coming century. And I think there is one single burning pinpoint of the vision in Hip: it's that God is in danger of dying. In my limited knowledge of theology, this never really has been expressed before. I believe Hip conceives of Man's fate being tied up with God's fate. God is no longer powerful. The moral consequences of this are not only staggering, but they're thrilling, because moral experience is intensified rather than diminished. (ADV, pp. 350-51.)

Of course, the real problem is whether the hipster ever exists at all, whether he is, as Unamuno would say, a man of flesh and bone or whether he is a bloodless abstraction. Lawrence Goldman believes that "As Mailer defines him, the hipster does not exist, that he never existed."<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Mailer never expected that the hipster would exist in life in America even though his creation was based on the American Negro. Mailer is celebrating the hipster only as a tentative model for speculation on the requisites of the existential personality. It is important to see this, because not only does Mailer not intend that

the "hipster" model be seen as the only possible expression of his American existentialist vision, but also that he should not be confused with what is commonly brought to mind by the term "beat" or "beatnik" (or the beat's successor, the hippie). Stephen Rojack, his first fully realized fictional American existentialist hero is far from being like either type. An American Dream is the fictional point at which Mailer's notions of the existential requisites for heroism are first given a relatively complete embodiment in a single character. It is in this novel that Rojack's actions and words become much more than rhetorical gesture, and this is because the world he moves in is the first instance in Mailer's fiction of a pulsing fictional embodiment of his American existentialist conception of the conditions of modern American life. Any study of An American Dream must deal with the questions of how effectively Mailer has used his theories for fictional purposes and how adequately the novel has been meant to present Rojack as the hero, and finally how well does the novel serve Mailer's purpose of a psychic analysis of American life in the mid-Sixties.

For Mailer, the American dream can only be recovered by a return to more basic, a more primitive conception of life. As he says over and over again in The Presidential Papers, America must discover the vitality at the center of existence, the sense of uncertainty about the outcome of the struggle between life and death, the sense of the continual dialectic between meaningfulness and absurdity. America must, in other words, recognize that the life of its soul is in jeopardy and that it will not be saved by economics-as-usual or politics-as-usual. America desperately needs an existentialist hero who will revitalize its consciousness. Kennedy came as close to any to being

the existentialist hero that Mailer was seeking in reality. However, the event of the Kennedy assassination destroyed all Mailer's hope of finding another hero in real life to lead America in Kennedy's style. Turning to fiction, Mailer created Rojack, the hero who was the closest image that Mailer could possibly make to resemble Kennedy in the fictional world. The themes which An American Dream deals with, and it is obvious and necessary that it deals with these if it is about the Kennedy assassination, are death, the magic of power, the greed of American financial wealth, the fear and cowardice of the American Establishment, the complex interrelationships between love and hate, the role of the police in the society, and the American hero.

As Mailer indicates in An American Dream, the American Dream is the dream of power, the will to dominate. But the dream is a Faustian dream and demands a price, namely a commitment to the Devil which means in Mailer's metaphysics a commitment to destruction and the death of nature and the self, especially the death of the potential of the soul for Mailer's idea of eternal life. There is an alternative to power over nature, however; it is power over the self, especially the psychic power to discover God and the mysteries of the universe that come from releasing the essential soul of man trapped within his body, trapped there by the accumulated repressions that make for a totalitarian society. So the novel details the conflict in America between God and the Devil, a conflict which takes place both within each American and within the society at large.

This novel has also absorbed Mailer's later development on the concept of death. Death does not mean only self-destruction and the victory of the Devil. Death, if it is the right kind of death, can also release

great potential, great understanding. The fact that the Kennedy assassination is the subject of the novel simply bears out Mailer's understanding of violence through his fiction and non-fiction. From The Naked and the Dead on, he has recognized the violence at the core of the American psyche; he has seen that in America violence and death impart a magical power to those who engage in it and control it. Men like Croft and Cummings were unable to understand the significance of violence and death even though they felt its power. Marion Faye, in Deer Park, on the other hand, was closer to recognizing that violence and death catapulted man into a new dimension of time where man became sensitive to the inner workings of his body, became alive to his soul, came closer to understanding the interrelationships among men as well as the fears and sickness of the society. Faye, however, saw death as a means of eliminating life, of destroying its ugliness and viciousness. He is the hipster pushed to the extreme, to nihilism. He is an example that demonstrates that Mailer had himself not yet found the meaning of death. In An American Dream, Mailer comes to understand the creative power of death; he comes to argue that death gives life and that the American preoccupation with death and violence serves as a clue to her power and the essence of her life. Rojack has had his initiation into life as a result of his intimate experience with death, and this initiation becomes the essence of his psychological existence. It is apparent from a close reading of An American Dream that Mailer has put to work all existential ideas about the soul and the struggle between life and death and God and the Devil in his novel. One of the successes of the novel is that it clarifies some of his earlier theories in his non-fiction prose work and shows how they actually work by putting

them in a fictional setting.

However, just as Mailer heroes are not heroes of a fixture, so are his existential ideas not presented in a rigid system without any possibility of evolving or extending. In terms of style, Mailer has in Why Are We in Vietnam? developed an organic style to reflect the further evolution of his existential vision embodied in the new hero, D. J., who is no longer the hipster of opposition or defiance but a hero who not only fails to make contact with God but also falls inescapably into evil. His sharp cynical intelligence reminds one of Eitel in his younger age. D. J.'s obscene language does cut "through the pretensions of everything he finds obscene in American society;"<sup>6</sup> but it also reflects that he is a hero who has been more inspired by the Devil than God. At the end of the novel that fact that D. J. deliberately returns to camp to fulfill the beast's will to "go forth and kill" raises the uncertainty about the nature of Mailer's God, or, more significantly, about the state that his God is in. One further wonders whether D. J. had a chance to survive in the moral chaos that has created and resulted from the Vietnam war.

In Why Are We in Vietnam?, Mailer has assimilated his excremental vision, primarily illuminated in "The Metaphysics of the Belly," into a fictional context. According to the new development of Mailer's vision, if the world is really the province of the Devil, as he only suggested in An American Dream, then it is a place filled with excrement and man himself is anally oriented. Then it is consistent to state that man's self-expression comes through the anus and that the spirit of the society is found in excrement. A further connection is made between such an excremental vision and the corporation, particularly the

corporation as the function of technology, and technology as the result of an age obsessed with electricity and computers. D. J. himself has a mind like a computer--"my mental connections are faster than anything afoot (Vietnam, pp. 22-23)"--and conceives of himself as the Disc Jockey to the world, the person who communicates with mankind through electricity. Thus he has particular insight into the nature of the corporate society which is also built on electricity. His view of God is linked with his view of corporate society, for he believes that God's link with man is through a tiny transistorized tape recorder which He inserts in man's anus at the beginning of each man's creation--God is making an "operation in the bowels of Creation (Vietnam, p. 24)." Everything which man ever thinks is recorded in God's files; then when God wants to know about a particular person, He simply presses a button and the recording emits one beep; this is the sum and total of the individual and his life.

D. J., however, offers the hypothesis that his communication with God might be based on false information, that he is, in other words, feeding the tape records false information in order to trick God. And he is doing this, furthermore, because he is not sure whether God is really God or really the Devil pretending to be God. He is, if his role is to save mankind, setting out to confuse a fake God (a God who is really the Devil), and in doing so not presenting a recording of his own soul but rather presenting a recording of the corporate soul of American society. In fact D. J.'s exploration leads him to the insights which give him his understanding of the American soul, particularly the corporate soul. And it is the corporate soul of America which denies God. D. J. explains this at the end of the novel. The corporate soul



is identified with greed, and thus with excrement and Satan. And due to this greed, American society is kept in hatred and frustration.

But the problem which D. J. discovers about America is more complex than this, for he has his own problem in his search for the soul of God. In his search for the beauty that represents the truth of the form of his soul, D. J. becomes acutely aware of dread and death and the very ambiguity of God himself. The novel progresses by a series of confrontations between D. J. and frustration and death. There is the frustration he experiences in his love for his father, his mother, and for Tex. There is the death he confronts with his father, who is the agent of death as well as, at a different time, the ally in the face of death. And there is the death that he faces with Tex in the Brooks Range. Finally, D. J. is made impotent to judge and act courageously, and will become a senseless killer by joining the Vietnam war.

Mailer's answer to the question Why Are We in Vietnam? is, then, that Americans are in Vietnam because of their frustration, because of their fear of death, because they have forsaken God and sold their souls to the Devil, because they have sublimated their natural impulses and have as a consequence turned into killers. If D. J. is still a hero, he will not be Mailer's American existentialist hero but a European existential tragic hero. Richard Lehan defines the European tragic hero as one who

does not reaffirm his identity through a tragic fall. Rather his tragic quest usually allows no noble form of self-fulfillment or higher return to the community, and often leads a form of self-destruction. The fate of the hero is really consistent with existential theories of absurdity and society.<sup>7</sup>

D. J. certainly discovers "no noble form of self-fulfillment" because he lives in a world of frustration, dread and death. Nor does he find any higher principles upon his return to the community, because they do not exist. The act--going to Vietnam--which he finally takes is "a form of self-destruction." D. J. is not Mailer's American existentialist hero in the sense that Mailer is not willing to accept the credo of the European existentialists who, like Sisyphus, say that man achieves his humanity by continuing to live although he knows he will be defeated.

With D. J. leaving for Vietnam, Rojack exiled to the jungles of Central America and the hipster only as a model of abstraction, Mailer has not created another American existentialist hero for ten years in fiction since the time of Why Are We in Vietnam? (1967). With the deaths of Kennedy and Hemingway, Mailer has not yet found another public figure whose life style could embody his existentialist thoughts. In these years, Mailer the existentialist has become more and more tied up with Mailer the artist. Instead of looking for a hero in the outside world, Mailer has been searching for the heroic in himself. With the ideas and concepts of a mature American existentialist and the talent and aesthetic energy of a fully developed writer, Mailer finds himself more qualified than ever as the hero he has been seeking for more than a whole decade. There might be various reasons, such as financial or psychological reasons for his change to new literary experiment. Almost all his writings after the Vietnam novel, such as The Armies of the Night, Miami and the Siege of Chicago, Of a Fire on the Moon, The Prisoner of Sex, and St. George and the Godfather, were produced with Norman Mailer the American existentialist as the hero. Unlike his five novels, these five journalistic works present various aspects of the same hero and share common

themes and narrative techniques.

Besides earning him the reputation of "the best New Journalist in America," these books bring an ample chance for Mailer to develop himself as the hero and apply his thoughts to the public events so that he may have his "immediate say on contemporary matters." As to his artistic talent displayed in his journalism, Michaël L. Johnson has thus observed:

Mailer's journalism, . . . is frequently poetic, and that poetic quality sharpens the edge of his observations and speculations, giving them the vitality of a dawning consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, few works of nonfiction record, as vividly as Mailer's do, what it is really like to be present at momentous events. Certainly Of a Fire on the Moon will someday be much more widely-known than it is today, because it captures like no other contemporary report the paradoxes inherent in a particular time, in the particular society, at the moment men first walked on the face of the moon. Likewise, The Armies of the Night will continue to be a significant sociological document, an impressive, brilliantly executed work of art, and valuable record of the creative processes by which events themselves are translated into history.

However, in his search for a hero, Mailer has both failed and succeeded. His search has failed in the sense that it is almost entirely impossible for him to find a hero in reality who might be guided by his existentialist thoughts to avert the dehumanizing trend of America. President Kennedy would hardly have ever noticed his Presidential Papers had he not been assassinated then. The fundamental problem with Mailer's existential politics lies in its impracticability

in a democratic country like United States. Mailer's own failure in running for New York mayoralty also indicates the infeasibility of his political theory in reality. Despite his genuine moral concerns and his significant contributions to literature, Mailer has failed to come to grips with American politics on the pragmatic level. Lawrence Goldman's review of Presidential Papers seems to be fairly justified in this sense:

The Presidential Papers contain some tough-minded unpopular statements about American politics, and some brilliant insights into the cultural process, but the book is not really successful and Mailer ends by amusing those he wants to attack. He appears as a harmless oddity, a kind of left wing court jester.<sup>9</sup>

For the same reason, Mailer's proposal of the hipster as a solution to the political and social ills is a myth, which results in no practical functions.

Nonetheless, it should be pointed out immediately that Mailer has indisputably succeeded in creating his existentialist heroes in fiction. After seeing all the ineffectiveness of his attacks on American politics, Mailer has finally come to the realization that "I'm probably better as a writer than a man of action (CC, p. 221)." He is exactly the kind of writer that he thinks an American writer should be:

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 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, p. 108.)

In other words, this writer must be a believer of Mailer's American existentialism. In the literary world, Mailer seeks maximum growth for

his heroes. He has whole-heartedly applied his courage, honesty toward his mission to create heroes of his vein. His vision of modern existence has gone far beyond the European existentialism to assert positive values for the individual's authentic life. The truth of the hipster is the truth of opposition. The importance of the individual is always emphasized as against the mass. By observing the law of growth, the hipster is able to grow beyond his violence and become Aquarius, an American existentialist hero with emotions mellowed and insights further deepened. Mailer's personal theology of an embattled God has been one of his major resources for such a change. Mailer's art cannot be said to adhere strictly to either a European existential or an American transcendental cosmology. His cosmology is uniquely his own. His radical imagination has always been probing for new metaphors for his heroes. Any judgment of Mailer's literary achievement in the future should be based on the group of heroes he has created and the existential ideas they have presented in their respective social contexts.

## Notes to Chapter Eight

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, Nausea (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 112.
2. This line, which might be called the pith of Mailer's ethics, first appeared in Deer Park, p. 294. It is repeated twice in Advertisements, first in "The White Negro" (p. 323), and then in "Advertisements for Myself on the Way Out" (p. 476). Mailer reprints the statement from Deer Park in "The Big Bite," Esquire, 58(November, 1962), 134, and then reprints the column in Presidential Papers, p. 104. In both of these last two instances he adds, "I think the line is true. I think it is biologically true. And I think its application is more ferocious in America than anywhere I know."
3. Stephen Marcus, "The Paris Review Interview," Norman Mailer: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 36.
4. Richard Foster, p. 15.
5. Lawrence Goldman, "The Political Vision of Norman Mailer," Studies on the Left, 4(Summer, 1964), 135.
6. John W. Aldridge, "From Vietnam to Obscenity," Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work, p. 184.
7. Richard Lehan, "Existentialism in Recent American Fiction: The Demonic Quest," in Recent American Fiction: Some Critical Views, edited by Joseph J. Waldmeir (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963), p. 64.
8. Michael L. Johnson, "Journalist: Norman Mailer," in Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up, edited by Laura Adams (Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat Press, 1974), p. 177.

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