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Acts of Regeneration

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*Allegory and Archetype in the
Works of Norman Mailer*

Robert J. Begiebing

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*For Linda
and Brie*

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R. J. B.

Manchester, New Hampshire

July 1980

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Acts of Regeneration

1

Introduction

The modern mind has forgotten those old truths that speak of the death of the old man and of the making of a new one, of spiritual rebirth and similar old-fashioned "mystical absurdities." My patient, being a scientist of today, was more than once seized by panic when he realized how much he was gripped by such thoughts. He was afraid of becoming insane, whereas the man of two thousand years ago would have welcomed such dreams and rejoiced in the hope of a magical rebirth and renewal of life. But our modern attitude looks back proudly upon the mists of superstition and of medieval or primitive credulity and entirely forgets that it carries the whole living past in its lower stories of the skyscraper of rational consciousness. Without the lower stories our mind is suspended in mid air. No wonder that it gets nervous. The true history of the mind is not preserved in learned volumes but in the living mental organism of everyone.

— Carl Jung, *Psychology and Religion*

One of Norman Mailer's widely known statements, which appears in *Advertisements for Myself*, is that his purpose as a writer is to create "a revolution in the consciousness of our time." When we understand what Mailer means by revolutionary consciousness, we can approach his work in a way that cuts through much of the critical and popular controversy about him. The first purpose of this study, then, will be to define Mailer's revolutionary consciousness by discovering how it operates in his work. In general, the consciousness Mailer and his heroes seek would integrate conscious and unconscious life, awaken metaphorical vision, and regenerate the resources of divine energy in human beings. I shall call this consciousness *heroic consciousness*. Mailer's principal theme is the struggle of Life against Death in the contemporary world. It is his conviction that the survival and growth of humanity and the victory of Life depend upon our capacity to attain heroic consciousness. We will see how Mailer consistently expresses his theme through the allegorical mode, and how he embodies acts of regeneration in universal patterns of the quest for rebirth.

Mailer sees the conflict between the positivistic perception and the metaphorical perception of existence as at the heart of the struggle between Life and Death. In particular, Mailer argues, twentieth-century man's *use* of science and technology has built "a wall across the route of metaphor." Though the purpose of true

science is to *reveal* nature, the purpose of our science is to *convert* nature. Our science, to Mailer, is therefore “incarcerated” by its own arrogance and deadened by its liquidation of metaphor. The mere piling up of laboratory methodology and the use of technology to separate humanity from nature or to control nature itself destroy the deepest experiences of mankind, which originate in metaphor.¹

That is, in fact, the unendurable demand of the middle of this century, to restore the metaphor, and thereby displace the scientist from his center. . . . The scientist will describe the structure and list the properties of the molecule . . . but the scientist will not look at the metaphorical meaning of the physical structure. . . . He will not ponder what biological or spiritual experience is suggested by the formal structure of the molecule, for metaphor is not to the present interest of science. It is instead the desire of science to be able to find the cause of cancer in some virus: a virus—you may count on it—which will be without metaphor. You see, that will then be equal to saying that the heart of the disease of all diseases is empty of meaning, that cancer is caused by a specific virus which has no character or quality, and is in fact void of philosophy and bereft of metaphysics. . . . a future to life depends on creating forms of an intensity which will capture the complexity of modern experience and dignify it, illumine . . . its danger . . . the discovery of new meaning may live in ambush at the center of a primitive fire. (pp. 310–11)

Mailer contrasts intuitive perceptions and a primitive knowledge of life with what he calls generally “totalitarianism.” On the one hand are those deeply felt experiences of mankind that are unconscious, spiritual, telepathic, and primitive. The writer must try to tap such experiences by boldly exploring the mystery of his own life and of the life around him. He explores the mystery of himself by adventuring into “the jungle of his unconscious.” With the lessons of this inward journey he explores the world around him and tries to glimpse the outer “reality . . . unconsciously, telepathetically,” and metaphorically. The writer does not explore mystery to categorize its elements or to convert or manipulate it. His explorations increase his understanding of what is and what can be. The primitive truth Mailer seeks is the nature of our world’s spiritual ecology and economy; he wants to know how the individual and humanity can best live and grow as a part of something larger than itself. Musing on Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, Mailer considers the primordial and spiritual field of force in which we live, and he believes that there is some exchange, some communication of forces and totem relation between all life—men, trees, grain, insects, and animals.²

1. *Cannibals and Christians* (hereafter cited as *CC*), pp. 307–9. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations are to works by Norman Mailer.

2. *CC*, pp. 108, 211, 274. See also *Of a Fire on the Moon* (hereafter cited as *Fire*),

On the other hand is "cancer" or totalitarianism, which Mailer calls the disease of our time. By totalitarianism Mailer refers generally to that tendency in the modern world to regiment and pacify life, to homogenize diversity and individuality, and to stifle dissent and change. Whatever cuts off humanity from its roots and from its instincts is also totalitarian. In his fiction and nonfiction, Mailer associates institutions, persons, or forces with totalitarianism by their intentions, functions, and effects in the world. Mailer's central metaphor for totalitarianism is the Devil, or Death; his central metaphor for the intuitive, instinctual life is God, or Life.³

In his fiction and nonfiction, Mailer's heroes participate in the battle between Life and Death and engage in a quest to find the roots of life and to embody what Mailer calls "It." In *Advertisements for Myself*, he associates It with Lawrence's "blood," Hemingway's "Good," Shaw's life force, the Yoga's *prana*, and divine energy.⁴ The quest of Mailer's narrator-heroes is founded upon the author's perception of transcendent forces operating in the human being and the phenomenal world. In 1975 Mailer summed up his convictions about the struggle between Life and Death forces and about the necessary quest for life force after reading *Bantu Philosophy* in preparation for writing *The Fight*. These convictions generate the theme and pattern of Mailer's whole canon.

For he discovered that the instinctive philosophy of African tribesmen happened to be close to his own. Bantu philosophy . . . saw humans as forces, not beings. Without putting it into words, he had always believed that. . . . By such logic, men and women were more than the parts of themselves, which is to say more than the result of their heredity and experience. A man was not only what he contained, not only his desires, his memory and his personality, but also the forces that came to inhabit him at any moment from all things living and dead. So a man was not only himself but the karma of all generations past that still lived in him, not only a human with his own psyche but also a part of the

pp. 468–69. Mailer makes the same point about the "telepathic power of things" in *The Faith of Graffiti*, no pagination; photographs by Mervyn Kurlansky and Jon Naar.

3. See CC, pp. 238–39, for the more complete discussion of totalitarianism. See also *The Presidential Papers* (hereafter cited as *PP*), pp. 6–7. My use of the phrase "Life against Death" derives from those words and that theme as they arise in Mailer's work, not from Norman O. Brown's *Life against Death*. I avoid parallels between Brown's work and Mailer's because I believe the two writers are on antithetical paths in one significant way. In his early work, Brown is a thoroughgoing Freudian: My psychological emphasis is Jungian. Though both Freud and Jung are seminal figures in modern psychoanalysis, Mailer himself has disparaged the reductionist and materialistic tendencies in Freudianism (just as Brown has done in his more recent work) in favor of Jung and transcendental existentialism.

4. *Advertisements for Myself* (hereafter cited as *Ads*), p. 351.

resonance, sympathetic or unsympathetic, of every root and thing . . . about him. He would take his balance, his quivering place, in a field of all the forces of the living and dead. . . . One did one's best to live in the pull of those forces in such a way as to increase one's own force. . . . but the beginning of wisdom was to enrich oneself, enrich the *muntu* which was the amount of life in oneself, the size of the human being in oneself.⁵

Mailer's work since *The Naked and the Dead* is a series of explorations into the forces operating in our lives. No writer has been more aware of the limits of programmatic realism for expressing his perceptions of these forces. In a speech to the Modern Language Association, he argues that both the realistic and aristocratic impulses in American letters have failed to "ignite the nation's consciousness of itself." In our century, movies, the mass media, and television fill the gap left by this failure with a meretricious, commercial art that disproportionately shapes the consciousness of the people. In the process, Mailer believes the deepest, most unrecoverable human experiences have been lost. For Mailer the tragedy is that our survival depends upon mankind's deepest experiences. To recover such experience, Mailer prescribes "robust art."

Such art would be existential in theme; it would depict, for example, a hero who must face his own being by defying chaos, testing his courage, and creating a self on his own terms rather than on the terms of a society that seems absurd. But Mailer's existentialism assumes metaphysical proportions. Indeed, the pattern most consistently emerging from his work, as he describes it, is a reflection of his obsession with how God exists. Is He essential or existential? Is He all-powerful or an "embattled existential creature who may succeed or fail in His vision" like the rest of us (CC, p. 214)? A robust art must also be "hearty" and "savage"; that is, it would depict a protagonist's struggle to reach somehow what is fundamental and primitive in his or her humanity. Robust art, Mailer argues, must also give definition to its subject, depict precise if extreme experience, and help to "protect the world from its dissolution in compromise, lack of focus, and entropy," all of which characterize the "plague" or disease of "progressive formlessness" in our time. In the modern world the dream is the vehicle of our deepest experiences, and one vehicle for robust art, therefore, is the dream novel. By dream, Mailer does not mean simple Freudian wish fulfillment but a "theatrical review" in which we test, with a surrealist intensity, our capacity to meet the shocks and ambushes of the waking world that affect our conscious and unconscious life. As his career developed through 1968, Mailer placed more and more em-

5. *The Fight*, pp. 38-39.

phasis on the dream, which he calls "the country cousin" of the novel.⁶

Mailer frankly considers his role as novelist to be that of spiritual missionary and embattled therapist or exorcist in the modern world. He has argued that the new frontier for the American novel lies in the attack upon the "dead forts" of the spirit and the collective cowardice that have entrapped humanity since World War II (CC, p. 130). Mailer is on a metaphysical errand as well as an existential one. He has tried to gain some of the complexity and power of expression that the oldest dreamers had. In examining medieval visionary allegory, Paul Piehler echoes Mailer's own description of the positivist's usurpation of the dreamer in the modern world: "the external troubles of modern society are no longer felt as sufficiently complex and overwhelming to require resort to visions; instead they are dealt with by purely external authorities on rational principles. Priest and prophet have given way to bureaucrat and politician."⁷

When we consider that Mailer's themes focus on the battle between Life and Death, when we see that the dream is the foundation of his concept of robust art, when we understand that Mailer's concern over the survival of the human race urges him to write books that are intended to generate action, it should not be improbable that Mailer writes allegorically. Yet it is precisely the question of the mode of Mailer's art that split his early critics into two camps—his detractors, the realists, and his defenders, those who began to see other strengths and goals beyond realism in his novels during the late sixties.

It is in his recourse to the dream, to perceptions generally termed *visionary*, and to the allegorical mode that Mailer's work is to be distinguished from realism as well as from the fabulism (the conscious or mechanical appropriation of specific parables, epics, or myths) associated with many of his American contemporaries.⁸ Yet the problem remains that if the criticism of the late sixties and early seventies has suggested an approach to Mailer, it has not been definitive, and it has abused the very terminology and tradition that criticism of Mailer most needs to clarify. In fact, the misconceptions

6. I am summarizing Mailer's discussion of robust art in CC, pp. 101–3, 214, and in *Existential Errands: Twenty-Six Pieces Selected by the Author from the Body of All His Writings*, pp. 111–12, 122.

7. Paul Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape*, p. 4.

8. Such recent critics as Robert Merrill are still missing the distinction between conscious fabulism and visionary allegory. Merrill concludes that Mailer's *An American Dream* and *Why Are We in Vietnam?* are failures of fabrication. Merrill compares Mailer's "fables" unfavorably to Nabokov's, Pynchon's, and Barth's modern fables. But Mailer's works fail as fables only because Mailer is not a fabulist but an archetypal allegorist. See Robert Merrill's *Norman Mailer* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), especially p. 85.

about allegory are so widespread that the term must be defined in any study of its use. I intend to do so specifically as I go along, but some general qualities of allegory need emphasis at the outset. We need a substantial conception of the allegorical mode in the face of loose usage, misconception, and bias. Three studies are particularly useful in clarifying what allegory is: Edwin Honig's *Dark Conceit*, Angus Fletcher's *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, and Paul Piehler's *The Visionary Landscape*.

Allegory, which excludes no literary genre, is viable in all times because it seeks to fulfill what Fletcher has called "major social and spiritual needs." The fulfillment of such needs is precisely Mailer's purpose. The problem of understanding allegory arises from the simple fact that modern criticism is still swayed by the nineteenth-century aesthetic that separated symbolic literature from the allegorical. The creators of this aesthetic, notably Coleridge, argued that in allegory the symbols are disembodied from "real" people and events and become mere simulacra in a moral lesson. But the structure of true allegory is neither preconceived nor totally opposed to the realistic, pragmatic approach to life. Fletcher has stressed that allegory is rarely a "pure modality," and Honig has said that a pure modality would "neglect the moral qualifications that make experience meaningful" as much as programmatic realism.⁹

What we may need most is a distinction between allegories. When I refer to *rational allegory*, I mean allegory that separates from the mode its ancient function of representing a spiritual world through the details of the phenomenal world, as allegory in the eighteenth century tended to separate the spiritual world from the phenomenal. The appeal of rational allegory, therefore, lies solely in the direct translatability of all the allegorical material and in the writer's display of rational ingenuity and wit. When I refer to *true allegory*, I mean allegory that reunites the spiritual and phenomenal worlds. Such allegories portray mankind's direct encounter with spiritual powers and with an inner, visionary world largely through the details of the phenomenal world.¹⁰ This second definition is crucial to Mailer's work because Mailer tries to regenerate our primitive capacity to perceive spiritual truths by restoring a lost spiritual dimension to our internal lives and our external world. True allegory subsumes rational allegory. In true allegory the conscious and symbolic functions of mind operate simultaneously, creating an indivisible, organic whole. By symbolic I mean the prerational and the

9. Edwin Honig, *Dark Conceit*, p. 180. Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, pp. 312–13. Future references are parenthetical.

10. This distinction is based on Piehler's distinction between "allegory proper" and "allegory as genre." See *Landscape*, pp. 10–12, 45.

intuitive elements of allegory that are, as Piehler has pointed out, expressed through "ancient and profound images," the emotional impact of which is strong but not entirely explicable in rational terms. As Piehler suggests, we can best understand these images "in terms of their development from the mythological imagery of Western culture," or, I would add, in terms of what we now recognize as archetypal patterns and images.

I will base my discussion of archetypal images on the work of Jung for several reasons. Like Jung, Mailer is interested in the unconscious as a primitive source of psychic truth and a potential source of psychic integration or wholeness. Both Mailer and Jung believe that the self (the total personality) has both somatic and mental bases, and that psychic phenomena are rooted not only in body and mind and not only in conscious and unconscious mind, but in the personal and transpersonal psyche. Both, for example, stress the influence of collective human experience upon the psychic experiences of individuals. Further, in examining relationships between structure and theme, an analysis of archetypal imagery helps us to understand a work's symbolic design. In allegory, structure and theme are especially close. Jung's work represents the original and most comprehensive system of archetypal imagery. Moreover, Jung's explanations of the impulses behind psychic images can, when appropriate, illuminate ramifications in a work we would otherwise miss. It is significant, for instance, that Mailer's conception of the crisis in modern consciousness is close to Jung's conception of the spiritual crisis in modern humanity, just as Mailer's view of the modern crisis is close to the view of such post-Jungians as Joseph Campbell and Erich Neumann, whose works will also help us to understand the patterns in Mailer's work.

On the other hand we do not know how familiar Mailer is with Jung, although in a rare reference to Jung in the 1960s, Mailer points out that he is an "existential psychologist." I myself doubt that Mailer is as closely familiar with Jung as he is with those psychologists he mentions frequently: Freud (with little sympathy), Wilhelm Reich, and Robert Lidner. Though of course we can assume any writer in midcentury is aware of Jung, and though we know the modern writer has much mythical material available to him as a part of his cultural inheritance, Mailer's intellectual coincidence with Jung appears to be more accidental than studied. And there are at least three other reasons to suggest that Mailer's symbolic and archetypal imagery is more authentic (or visionary) than it is mechanically borrowed.

First, after *The Naked and the Dead*, Mailer began to emphasize the unconscious elements of his work, just as he continually dispar-

aged the reductive, mechanical appropriation of psychological theory in some of his contemporaries. Mailer admits that in writing *The Naked and the Dead* he thought in terms of symbols, forms, allegorical (or rational) structures, and classical myths and that he could barely write a sentence without convincing himself it was on five levels. But as soon as he jettisons such "lower academic literary apparatus" in favor of simple writing without "a formal thought" in his conscious mind, he starts writing what I believe to be true (or archetypal) allegory, though he gives every reason to believe he is unaware of it.¹¹ In the *Paris Review* interview in 1964, Mailer again describes his mode of working in *Barbary Shore* as possession by "some intelligence" that (questions of the book's quality aside) demonstrated to him that he had "no conscious control of it; if I hadn't heard about the unconscious I would have had to postulate one to explain the phenomenon." He divides the book into conscious (political) and unconscious (sexual and psychotic) themes and levels.¹²

Second, if Mailer is aware of the unconscious themes and images in his books, he does not, however, like to analyze them himself, as he made clear when a young professor probed him on the issue during the march on the Pentagon. Mailer's "regard . . . for the power of symbols suspected a discussion of their nature was next to defacing them."¹³ In an interview with Laura Adams for *Partisan Review*; Mailer insists his books must rest on the "realistic content before their metaphorical content can be sustained." But he goes on to define his "realism" itself not as the "ordinary" realism but as the realism of extreme experience, just as he argues that the metaphorical-realistic level is not mere "fantasy" but "psychic reality."¹⁴ In short, Mailer is aware of the role of his unconscious in his work but is unable and unwilling to define that role specifically, which is

11. Mailer's statements here appear in *Existential Errands*, p. 102. In 1948, Mailer suggested what kind of rational "allegorical" element he has in mind in *Naked* when he claimed the book to be not simply realistic but a "symbolic" and "composite" view of the Pacific war. Mount Anaka, for example, was to represent for the men who challenged her "death and man's creative urge, fate, man's desire to conquer the elements—all kinds of things that you never dream of separating and stating so badly." See *Current Biography*, 1948, ed. Anna Rothe (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1948), p. 410. But no emphasis on the rational symbolism of *Naked* completely discounts a strongly derivative naturalism.

12. *Paris Review* 8:31 (1964): 35, 40.

13. *The Armies of the Night*, p. 69.

14. Laura Adams, "Existential Aesthetics: An Interview with Norman Mailer," pp. 200–201. This distinction is confusing, and Mailer, defensive about his symbolism, is probably trying to suggest something such as he did in *CC* when he said that there is "no clear boundary between experience and imagination," p. 211. At any rate, since *Armies* his comments on and use of the dream elements in his work have been gradually tempered by a caution that suggests a movement toward strengthening the realistic element in his work.

probably as it should be. Analysis is the job of the critic. And Mailer's reticence is in fact typical of a tendency in post-eighteenth-century allegorists, as Honig points out. The modern allegorist is a symbolist in retreat from any view of his art that would identify his work with a "predetermined moral or aesthetic schema." He or she also retreats from any "irresponsible eclecticism" in art and from any scientific or psychological theories that would make art seem to serve the social causes and programs of others. The modern allegorist is caught between defending his own art and assaulting all art that seems to falsify, or to distort by simplifying, the complex nature of mankind's life and destiny. Melville, Honig's first example, denied any allegorical content or intention in *Moby Dick* until Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne brought Melville to an understanding of allegory that led him to accept the "part-&-parcel allegoricalness of the whole."¹⁵

Third, in Mailer's work, the archetypal patterns and images emerge gradually over the years; they do not spring fully developed, as we would expect they might were they merely lifted out of Jung. But whether we approach Mailer with a penchant for the rational and mechanical or the prerational and spontaneous, the analysis of the archetypal patterns either way reveals coherences, meanings, designs, and themes explicable only in terms of the archetypal imagery itself. Such imagery by its nature appeals to the whole person, not just to conscious self, and that appeal to the whole is fundamental to Mailer's approach to his readers and to the extension of consciousness.

It would be useful at this point to define four general qualities of allegory based upon the work of Honig, Fletcher, and Piehler. These four qualities are important to this study of Mailer's own allegories. The general theoretical points I will make here are illustrated in detail in the three studies of allegory cited. The first quality of allegories is that they are dominated by their themes. We could say that realism is the fiction of sense experience and allegory is the fiction of ideas, but it would be more accurate to say that in allegory, the dominant idea controls sense experience, imagery, and action. Sense experience in turn reveals idea. The theme, or the ideal as Honig calls it, is the central concept the whole work "proves or fulfills." Since the ideal is typically rooted in the metaphysical impulse of the writer, allegory is not only art, but art constantly moving toward religion and philosophy.

Both Honig and Fletcher emphasize that allegorical theme is

15. Honig's examples here are Kafka, Joyce, Faulkner, and Mann. Honig points out similar attitudes toward the "allegorical" in their work on the part of Poe and Henry James. See *Dark Conceit*, pp. 51-52, 193-95.

typically reducible to an essential, theological dualism, which may, as Honig believes, arise from the polarized nature of the human mind itself. As the narrative progresses, the essential polarities are dramatized in conflict. The specific identities of persons as well as objects and events grow out of the larger oppositional relationships. The persons, objects, and events represent, in microcosm, polarities and conflicts that are macrocosmic. A person or thing is literally itself, but it is also a part, a finite manifestation, of an infinite polarity. The reader is increasingly aware that he is in a world of concentrated purpose. This concentration is one element of allegory that gives it the characteristics of a dream, or what Honig calls the "Dream Artifice."

But the reader or critic often assumes that the connection between dominant ideal and the narrative specifics is mechanical. The central argument of *Dark Conceit* is that the ideal is identified with and revealed through an organic design and purpose. The purposes and meanings of persons and things must be amplified and grow naturally out of each action in the narrative, extending in the narrative process the original identities of persons and things to as "many clusters of meaning as the traffic of the dominant ideal will bear" (Honig, p. 114). We must distinguish, therefore, between mere moralizing and symbolizing a philosophic view. In symbolizing, the fiction and the allegory are simultaneous and integrated, not separated, creations. It is this integration of the literal and the symbolic visions of reality that gives allegory its self-contained creative authority.

A second quality of allegory is that allegorical characters, which may range from the most hollow type-character to a most realistic or dynamic character, tend to act according to what Fletcher calls the principle of "daemonic agency." Characters act as if they were possessed by some larger force, idea, or habit. As main characters align themselves as agents or synecdoches fitting into the dualistic pattern, they generate subcharacters, or doubles, who react with or against them. In the daemonic world, the limits of freedom are narrow, and as we might expect, only the more heroic, powerful characters are able to alter their progress toward one element of the dualism or the other, that is, toward good or evil, Life or Death. In Mailer, for example, we will see that the stasis of a character is precisely what defines his or her defeat and the hero's danger.

This allegorical hero, whether he represents the values of the dominant culture or represents alienation or autonomy from a culture, typically undergoes the ordeal of a quest, the goal of which may be unknown to the hero. His quest is an archetypal quest for greater life, energy, movement, and self-realization, and the quest is

typically initiated by some threshold symbol that suggests the thematic center of the allegory and serves as an emblem of narrative and symbolic coherence—Dante's dark forest, Bunyan's "Den" and "man clothed in rags," Melville's Spouter Inn and Peter Coffin signs, or Hawthorne's wild rosebush beside a prison door. The hero's quest progresses in a concentrated, dreamlike world where "every experience has greater possible value than the hero himself can detect." The hero will depend on others to help him understand the quest's meaning, and he will face the choice between misleading or helpful guides (see Honig, pp. 70–74, 78). Whether we recognize the allegorical hero by such physical signs as a talisman, some burden, or some peculiarity of appearance, he is always a person about to undergo some rite of passage or ordeal that will test his capacity to be a bearer of new consciousness. Since the chief purpose of Mailer's writings is to stimulate a new consciousness, it is important to see the heroes in his work as moving toward this goal.

A third quality of allegory is equally important to any consideration of Mailer's allegories because it is relevant to a central criticism against his work: it is realistically improbable. But in allegory, plausibility of action depends on criteria other than mere verisimilitude or Aristotelian mimesis. Allegory may depend upon verisimilitude, but it often depends on other principles of causation and unity: magic, telepathy, ritualistic necessity, daemonic agency, or the generation of subcharacters and doubles. If the characters do not interact plausibly or according to probability, they still act with, as Fletcher puts it, "a certain logical necessity."

A fourth quality of allegory is symbolic action, by which I mean the structure allegories are likely to take. Fletcher divides the structural possibilities into progress and battle. Progress may be simply a physical quest in which the hero leaves one "home" to journey to another. Or, the journey may be an introspective one through the self, or as in Mailer's case, the physical journey may clearly represent an inward journey. The goal of the journey is self-knowledge. All that the journey requires to represent progress is forward motion toward some goal. To the extent that the hero is a daemonic agent, he has no choice but to stay on his quest (see Fletcher, pp. 150–57).

Battle gives allegory its peculiar dialectical structure. This structure is represented by the ancient *gigantomachia*—the battle between Titans for control of the world—of Hesiod; or, it is represented by *psychomachia*—the psychologized "fight for mansoul" typified by the "debate" and the "dialogue," as in Mailer's earliest allegories, or by actual violence symbolizing ideological warfare. Progress often merges with battle in a single allegory. But Fletcher maintains one distinction between the two. Progress assumes

“manifestly a ritual form,” a sequence of equal steps in one principal direction. Battle, on the other hand, has the effect of symmetry and balance. For whereas ritual implies “a continual unfolding, a moving sequence,” symmetry implies stasis, or conflict caught in “a given moment of time.” The conflict of battle can be symmetrically repeated within a work so that we see each side’s ideological arguments presented more or less equally, as they are in *Barbary Shore* (see Fletcher, pp. 157–59). As Honig points out, the dream, allegory, and heroic mythology all share these four allegorical qualities (pp. 68–72, 173–74).

We saw that Mailer admitted to a mechanical use of narrative levels and symbols in *The Naked and the Dead*. He has also admitted, and numerous critics have echoed, his debt to such realists as Dos Passos and Farrell in his first published novel. But our concern here will be with the quite different direction of Mailer’s work after *Naked*, with Mailer’s departure from naturalism, with his explorations into his own unconscious, and with his conscious and unconscious allegorical techniques. In the following chapters, beginning with *Barbary Shore*, we will look at each major work with a specificity seldom applied. We will approach allegory with a view to surmounting both prejudice against the allegorical tradition and misconceptions about Mailer’s use of the mode. Mailer writes books in which the material world is given transcendent meaning. He tries to create narratives that are no longer “void of philosophy and bereft of metaphysics,” that engage the writer and reader in the exploration of the unconscious, and that confront the reader with an intensity that Mailer believes may restore reality to metaphor and a future to life.

2

Barbary Shore

The Ewe of Africa bring offerings to their chopping knives . . . and other tools, and recognize spirits called *trō* in hollow trees, in springs, in nests of termites. "The moment," says J. Speith . . . "in which an object or its striking characteristics enters into any remarkable relationship with human spirit and life, whether this is agreeable or repellent, is the birth hour of the *trō* for the consciousness of the Ewe."
— Wayne Shumaker, *Literature and the Irrational*

After his success with the derivative naturalism of *The Naked and the Dead*, Mailer searched for a new subject and mode. He felt he had exhausted the experiences of his first twenty-four years in his first novel; yet he also felt he had to prove to himself and to everyone else that he was capable of something new.¹ What he discovers in writing *Barbary Shore* (1951) is the allegorical mode. We might expect that a writer's experiment with something new would have its weaknesses, and *Barbary Shore* has several. It is for one thing too pure a use of the mode. The reader is kept at too great a distance from the characters. The dream artifice is so obvious as to appear arbitrary. And just when the novel reaches its greatest potential for movement and growth, it is consumed by an ideological debate and, as Mailer put it, ultimately collapses "into a chapter of political speech" (*Ads*, p. 94).

On the other hand, in *Cannibals and Christians*, Mailer describes *Barbary Shore* as his most imaginative novel. This novel comes least from external experience and most from internal impulses.² Mailer tried to fit what he called his sense of "unreality" after writing *Naked* "into a drastic vision, an introduction of the brave to the horrible, a dream, a nightmare which would belong to others and yet be my own." Mailer acknowledges that this experiment in imagination was a failure because he tried for something beyond his reach, but he also assesses accurately the importance of *Barbary* in the evolution of his work. "Much of my later writing cannot be

1. See *Advertisements for Myself* (hereafter cited as *Ads*), pp. 92–93. Future references are parenthetical. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations are to works by Norman Mailer.

2. *Cannibals and Christians*, p. 211.

understood without a glimpse of the odd shadow and theme-maddened light *Barbary Shore* casts before it" (*Ads*, p. 94).

The critics' failure to examine the imaginative energy in *Barbary Shore* has caused a false critical emphasis. Beginning with Norman Podhoretz, critics tend not to rise above the artificiality of the novel's political allegory. Criticism has stifled *Barbary* with a series of rational, diagrammatic schemes such as John Stark's: Hollingsworth is Capitalist State, Lannie and Lovett are Trotskyism, McLeod is Bolshevism, Guinevere is the Masses—all of which, Stark assures us, add up to "a capsule history of the Left."³ But the novel is much more than its political allegory. Between 1949 and 1955 Mailer came to see "that politics as politics interests me less . . . than politics as a part of everything else in life" (*Ads*, p. 271). So while he was discovering the allegorical mode, Mailer was also moving away from his interest in political machinery and ideology and moving toward his explorations of ultimate values, toward Good and Evil. His breaking away from the Progressive party in 1949 and writing *Barbary Shore* were two acts that reflect this movement.

The political allegory in *Barbary* is a metaphor for something larger. This novel is Mailer's first definite expression of his metaphysical preoccupations; it begins his continuously expanding vision of the forces at work in our lives. It is partially Mailer's own fault that the cumulative effect of the novel's political terminology obscures its larger theme for the critics.⁴ At this stage Mailer is not completely

3. John Stark, "Barbary Shore: The Basis of Mailer's Best Work," *MFS*, pp. 403–4.

4. Early and late this is true. The novel's reception in 1951 started a view of *Barbary Shore* it has never quite recovered from. Maxwell Geismar called it a novel of the "political issues of our time" expressing the theme that a normal sex life is impossible until "the neurosis of history has been reconciled." Though he thought the novel worked well "symbolically," Geismar felt it was still a mistake. One wonders what he meant by "symbolically." To him Guinevere is a slut, Monina a "parody of a Hollywood starlet," Lannie the "ostensible" heroine. See "Frustrations, Neuroses, and History," *Saturday Review*, pp. 15–16. Irving Howe, in "Some Political Novels," *Nation*, p. 568, says this "bad" novel can be read as a "political allegory" but that the "weird collection of disembodied voices" fails to draw our interest. He ends by charging *Barbary Shore* with an unimpressive political message, which is, in the "long run," too negative, dogmatic, and untrue. Charles Rolo liked the novel better and considered it a "remarkable advance" in imaginative coloring and in style over *The Naked and the Dead*. Yet he felt the parts far more impressive than the whole, regretting that the novel never achieved "the coherence of a political parable." He also disliked the "fuzzy political nihilism" of Mailer's plague-on-both-your-houses attitude. See "A House in Brooklyn," *Atlantic*, pp. 82–83. Such recent critics as Jean Radford, Philip Bufithis, and Robert Merrill echo similar views. In *Norman Mailer: A Critical Study*, p. 51, Jean Radford considers *Barbary Shore* a political allegory in which Lovett and Lannie represent the modern split in political consciousness. Philip Bufithis, in *Norman Mailer* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1978), p. 34, calls the novel a "political commentary on the state of the world." In *Norman Mailer*, Robert Merrill dismisses *Barbary* as an "Orwellian political novel" and a "rigid allegory," see p. 66.

clear about how he will express the difference between political or historical fact and the metaphorical ramifications of that fact. But surely *Barbary* demonstrates its author's consciousness of politics as metaphor rather than politics as merely politics. The conflict between FBI agent Hollingsworth and Marxist theoretician McLeod, which is the fundamental conflict in the book, is a metaphor for the conflict between just this limited vision of things and events as facts in themselves (Hollingsworth's "realism" as McLeod calls it) and that "metaphysical" vision that sees the metaphorical meaning of things or events (McLeod's "context"). What confuses, what is unfortunate, is that Mailer, through McLeod, uses such political terminology as *socialist culture* or *revolutionary socialism* to identify what McLeod also calls "metaphysical" vision. We shall see that by such terminology McLeod does not mean any dogmatic ideology and still less any political or legislative machinery. He means a consciousness that perceives the connections between things, people, and actions, and between parts and wholes. Mailer's imprecise use of terminology suggests his own inability to use politics effectively as metaphor during this important transitional period in the early fifties.

If the misplaced critical emphasis on *Barbary Shore* is more understandable than it is admirable, we can still best comprehend the novel by examining the imaginative energy of its art. For all of its weaknesses as an experiment in allegory, *Barbary* is artistically consistent and compact. Its strengths lie not in its political, rational allegory, but in its true allegory. This novel has the coherence of a fully symbolic process. Every detail has a purpose; every character and image fit, with striking congruity, into the larger pattern and theme. This becomes clear as the characters are marshaled, through the images they project, on the side of either Life or Death. Mailer expresses his theme of Life against Death through a peculiarly allegorical technique. The important thing about this theme and technique is that they establish a pattern, a central line of organization and structure, that, with variations, becomes the pattern of Mailer's future work. In its largest outlines, this pattern is an archetype of rebirth.

— Mikey Lovett is the narrator-hero. Wounded, amnesiac, he represents the innocent, potential consciousness that will grow, and from which self-realization will increase. What he witnesses generates his growth.

Probably I was in the war. There is the mark of a wound behind my ear, an oblong of *unfertile flesh* where no hair grows. It is covered over now, and may be *disguised* by even the clumsiest barber, but no barber can hide the scar on my back. For that a tailor is more in order.

When I stare into the mirror I am returned a face doubtless more handsome than the original, but the straight nose, the modelled chin, and the smooth cheeks are only evidence of a stranger's art. It does not matter how often I decide the brown hair and gray eyes must have always been my own; there is nothing I can recognize, not even my age . . . but thanks to whoever tended me, a young man without a wrinkle in his skin stands for a *portrait* in the mirror (my italics).⁵

Lovett is at this point a hollow young man who "had no past and was therefore without a future"; he is unable to understand or see relationships between the people he meets, feeling "like an adolescent first entering the adult world where everyone is strange and individual." He has "so disconnected" himself from the world that he has "everything to discover." This loss of identity shames him. He is determined to hide his loss and to "masquerade like anyone else," indeed like every other character in the novel, while he waits for some "sign" that will return his past and future, his identity, to him.

At the end of Chapter 1, this narrator introduces us to one of his fantasies; this fantasy begins the dreamlike perspective of the novel and serves as a threshold symbol of the journey that is to come. Lovett sees a "traveller," a plump middle-aged man who returns from a "long trip" and is in a hurry to get home. He cannot read the newspaper on his "peaceful" and "weary" ride through the city in his cab. Suddenly he discovers the cab has taken the wrong route, but he dares not disturb the driver. He can only watch "his city" pass by the windows. Though it is his city, he has never seen these streets, the "architecture is strange," the people "dressed in unfamiliar clothing," a sign "printed in an alphabet he cannot read." To quiet his horror, the man tells himself this is only a dream, but Lovett, the dreamer, calls out to the man that he is wrong, that this is no dream but the real city and that his cab is history. Then "the image shatters." Immediately Lovett tells us that "what has been fanciful is now concrete." "Now" is that future from which he writes to us; it is a time in which buildings have electric circuits that no longer function and people are compelled to fourteen hours labor each day (p. 56).

Much in the first third of the novel reinforces the dream quality of the narrative that Lovett's fantasy of the traveler initiates. This dream artifice makes us continually refer the events and vision of the novel to Lovett's state of mind. His mind is fragmented between reality and fantasy; he has great difficulty telling whether his fantasies, "voyages" as he calls them, reflect real or mythical events. Some he senses are "false shores," such as his fantasy of sleeping with Guinevere and being disturbed by a stranger who enters the

5. *Barbary Shore*, p. 3. Future references are parenthetical.

bedroom from "the threshold" to menace him (p. 58). But even such "false shores" portend future events. The stranger, for example, turns out to be McLeod (p. 83). The technical function of the fantasies is to sustain the blur of unconsciousness throughout the novel and to emphasize the ambiguous possibility that the novel's world and characters are products of Lovett's dreaming mind. Indeed, the journey that began as a dream will end as one. Lovett, at the novel's end, tosses at night on his bed as all the dramatis personae dance before him. "Each of them passed before me, magnified, exaggerated, conducting a monologue to which I was audience. . . . So they danced. . . . Had I conducted dialogues with them through the night?" (pp. 289-90). The fantasies also give Lovett a kind of protean identity in this fanciful, fluctuating world while he searches for a real identity: he can be and is warrior, lover, labor-camp victim, all-American youth, or revolutionary.

As Lovett introduces his six main characters, we come to see that a particular kind of drama is taking place. In this drama characters reveal themselves to be "agents" whose conflicts are less interpersonal struggles than battles between the larger forces that compete to shape the modern world. What Mailer invigorates by such a drama is the primitive force of allegory as embodied, for example, in the medieval dream vision. With *Barbary Shore*, Mailer initiates a series of allegories in which a central consciousness registers and responds to, and to varying degrees participates in, the debates and battles of what Paul Piehler in *The Visionary Landscape* calls *potentiae*. The visionary's quest is for some principle of authority by which his life may be regulated. The *potentiae* represent spiritual forces of good and evil; their dialogues and battles are offered to the reader for "spiritual participation," so that readers may avail themselves of the processes of "healing and transcendence."

When we consider Mailer's later allegories, it becomes increasingly important to understand that the *potentiae* of allegory generally embody, as Piehler puts it, the power of mythical figures, or archetypes, as well as "the prosaic accuracy of abstract terms." The dialogues between *potentiae* and between the narrator-hero and the *potentiae* intellectualize processes "otherwise embodied in myth and ritual." *Barbary Shore* typifies the pattern of the visionary dialogue. The dreamer is "profoundly disturbed by some spiritual crisis." His cry for help brings on the dream, which has a mysterious impact; it also summons the beneficent *potentiae* who act as spiritual authorities and guides. The guides—a nature goddess or wise old sage, for example—are connected to the cosmic imagery of the allegory itself. The resolution of the dreamer's crisis is often achieved by "raising him to a higher spiritual state." The basic psychological

strategy is to overcome evil forces by identifying, analyzing, and confronting them with healing forces so that they may be "repudiated and destroyed."⁶

Throughout the first nineteen chapters of *Barbary*, Lovett gradually identifies the representatives of good and evil forces who are polarized by the images they project. Images of onanism, sexual perversity, mechanism, stasis, literalness of vision, and lack of sympathy or love express the alliance of Death. Leroy Hollingsworth projects the central image of Death and is the force or influence toward which the dead and dying gravitate.

It is a mark of Lovett's potential that he soon discovers a crack in Hollingsworth's facade, and a mark of Lovett's fortune that Hollingsworth reveals his true nature shortly thereafter in Chapter 13. After Chapter 13, Lovett has less and less difficulty seeing the nature of the other figures as they cluster about Hollingsworth and reject McLeod. McLeod, the novel's center of wisdom and life, provides the narrator-hero with his first clue to Hollingsworth's nature: "He's got a mind like a garbage pail." Yet even at their first meeting, Lovett senses a vague insidiousness about Hollingsworth. His disordered room seems visited by "violence" rather than "sloth." His movements begin to seem like empty "gestures"; his "hir-hir-hir" of laughter has "no real merriment" but sounds like "the mechanical laughter in a canned radio program, the fans whirring, the gears revolving, the klaxons producing their artificial mirth." Hollingsworth's sharp blue eyes look more and more like "identical daubs of pigment . . . opaque and lifeless." Seeing him straight on, Lovett notices Hollingsworth has the beaked face of a bird and "a black line between his gums and center incisors in his upper jaw" that gives "the impression of something artificial about his mouth" (pp. 38-41). These attributes of Hollingsworth become a sustained motif throughout *Barbary Shore*.

The first third of the novel moves gradually toward Hollingsworth's revelation of his insidious nature. But it is in the climax of Chapter 13 that Lovett feels the full impact of Hollingsworth's nature as Hollingsworth switches back and forth between his "divinity student" facade and the "shocking leer" of his hidden nature in a series of presto changes, which Lovett says "smacked of alchemy." The scene between Lovett, Hollingsworth, and the bar

6. I abstract considerable material from Paul Piehler in these two paragraphs to suggest the visionary qualities of *Barbary*. See Paul Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape*, especially pp. 4-5, 30-31, 38, 62-63, *passim*. Piehler argues that the therapeutic functions of the dialogue are suggested in its evolution from the classical impulse to arrive at "new intellectual truths to a psychodrama directed at the intuitive and emotional functions and shaped so as to promote healing and re-integration of a mind in spiritual turmoil."

waitress clearly illustrates Hollingsworth's double nature and exposes Hollingsworth as sadist, onanist, and bisexual voyeur.⁷

It is during this scene, while Hollingsworth demonstrates his capacity for mechanical cruelty, that he "triumphantly" insinuates his sexual relationship with Guinevere, who manages their rooming house and to whom Lovett is attracted. The whole experience frightens Lovett, who for the first time has "finally sensed the extent of his hatred for me." After assuring Lovett that he has nothing but sympathy for Guinevere, Hollingsworth takes Lovett back to their rooming house to prove to Lovett that Guinevere is his and to show Lovett who Guinevere's husband really is. Here the violent Hollingsworth, lashing out at Guinevere, comes into full light.

Beverly McLeod, or Guinevere, is the first to fall to Hollingsworth. She may have several meanings, depending on whether or not one stresses the political allegory, but her own hollowness is clear, and certainly she is false love and false life, a temptress endangering the hero. Everything about her suggests disorder and sterility. "Guinevere . . . had the basement apartment with its customary entrance . . . and a miniature plot whose stony soil was without even a weed" (p. 13). A personality in continual flux, she mimics the voices and actions of a telephone operator, a fishwife, a landlady, a Jehovah's Witness, a radio announcer, and a "cliché . . . blusterer with a heart of gold." To her, effect is everything, whether producing a "counterfeit simplicity" in her eyes or painting upon her real mouth a false one, "which was wide and curved in the sexual stereotype of a model on a magazine cover," but which "seemed to work in active opposition to the small mobile lips beneath." Lovett would "not have been startled if she had turned around and like the half-dressed queen in a girlie show: surprise! her buttocks are exposed" (pp. 13-14, 17-18, 28, 97). Guinevere cannot separate physical love from profit. "Now you and me could get together," she tells Lovett, "but what profit is there in it for me? You tell me" (p. 55). Though he realizes her motives and sees her facade, Lovett is obsessed with consummating his sexual desire for Guinevere. McLeod, Lovett, and Lannie are in turn attracted to her as a source of life, and each is betrayed. What Lannie sees in Guinevere is what McLeod did: her bigness, her beautiful coloring, her trumpeting "I'm full of life" (p. 103). How much Guinevere's past is another of her fantasies makes little difference. What is important is that by the time Lovett meets her she is deadened, existing in a world of Hollywood dreams fed by her hopes for her daughter Monina.

7. See Mailer's remarks on this in "The Homosexual Villain," *Ads*, p. 223. See also *Barbary Shore*, pp. 204, 206, where Hollingsworth's obsession with McLeod's sex life with Guinevere is evident.

Monina is Guinevere. Monina keeps the same hours as Guinevere, follows her everywhere ("more vivid than a shadow"), parodies her mother at every turn, and before mirrors kisses "her wrist with the absorbed self-admiration" Guinevere herself shows. Guinevere even argues that Monina is an immaculate conception. Monina acts as a foil to Guinevere and defines her death. Guinevere projects or creates Monina in an obsession to regain her "lost" fame, fortune, and youth. "You're all I got," she says to Monina, as a tear "which might have been genuine" falls down Guinevere's cheek and a compassion just "one degree from self-pity" shines in her face. As one in a parade of onanists in the novel, Guinevere has one channel of sympathy—toward herself. Monina is a stunted self. Guinevere says she wants "to keep her a baby" until they can get to Hollywood and make Monina a child star. After Chapter 13, Mailer accentuates Monina's role as Guinevere's conscience and youth. The split between Guinevere and Monina grows after Chapter 14 when Lovett sees Monina clutching McLeod "about the knees," and Monina begins returning to McLeod.⁸ Even though the love between father and daughter is not one of total commitment, it is because of Monina's encouragement that McLeod begins to hope to establish a living connection with his wife. He accepts his own part in the disaster of their marriage, and he now sees Guinevere as a "possibility." That he hopes to return to her to "force a revolution into my life" is one mark of his coming defeat.

For as Guinevere becomes more alienated from her youth and conscience, she becomes more set on destroying McLeod. As she tells Lovett, "he stole my youth away," and he gave me "nothing." Though her obsession is her lost youth, she defines that youth only as Hollywood success and her vehicle to it as Hollingsworth. The paradox that traps Guinevere is that her true youth is not Hollywood success through Hollingsworth, but just the capacity for infatuation and devotion to another that Monina begins to demonstrate toward McLeod. Guinevere capitulates to Hollingsworth, and then to Lannie, not because she needs love, but because she desires things that channel love and desire back upon oneself, not out to others. Self-love, Lannie will tell her, is "the secret to everything."

Lannie Madison is another double, but she is "a duplicate" of Lovett himself. Lannie represents possibilities of defeat Lovett must

8. Monina as an allegorical figure is here obviously comparable to Hester's Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter*. One wonders, but cannot be sure, whether Mailer is in this novel borrowing techniques and ideas from Hawthorne, whether from *The Scarlet Letter* or from *The Blithedale Romance*. John Stark suggests that Mailer does draw on Hawthorne in the essay cited above. Laura Adams, *Existential Battles: The Growth of Norman Mailer*, p. 41, compares some aspects of *Barbary Shore* to *The Blithedale Romance* and *The Scarlet Letter*.

avoid; she makes a series of contacts and commitments the hero—through luck, insight, and thwarted temptations—manages to escape. Lannie is an ambiguous figure at first; we do not know whether she is a figure of Life or Death. “Somehow,” Lovett says of her, “she wove an obligation to accept her verdicts, to feel she had discovered truths one had never discovered before” (pp. 102–3).

Lannie first appears to Lovett as an image from a dream. He sees a stranger in a ragged violet suit when he awakens from a drowse; her slender body balanced awkwardly, much “as though she would leap into flight if I stirred too quickly.” She seems to Lovett a narrow, gentle, delicate, childish yet ageless sprite. Her background as Trotskyite, her period of transformation at the hands of some medical institution, and her inability to distinguish fantasy from reality associate her with Lovett all the more. But her case is more severe, and between Chapters 14 and 17, she falls utterly to Hollingsworth. The shock of Trotsky’s death brought her to madness. In the asylum her life was drained from her and placed in a green filing cabinet, and she therefore sees herself as a sacrificial figure (pp. 151–52).

But Lannie, like Guinevere, is a false savior. She cries against the absorption of her own life in the asylum, but she supports a very similar absorption of McLeod’s life and mind by Hollingsworth, who would consign McLeod’s life to a briefcase. Lannie tempts Lovett to Hollingsworth’s side. Lovett’s escape is narrow. He begins by thinking he loves Lannie. But their lovemaking is mere onanism to him. Lovett can but “perform” upon her, “remotely without tenderness or desire or even incapacity.” “She lay beneath me stiffly and suffered it with a smile, her face calm and patient, sweet suffering Jesus upon the cross. . . . All done now?” she asks (pp. 137, 153).

Lannie capitulates to Hollingsworth, first, because she believes McLeod betrayed revolutionary socialism and must therefore suffer. She will help effect his punishment by joining forces she once stood against, since the world is hopeless now anyway and since it is the Hollingsworths who have the power to punish. Second, but even more important, is a certain magical power of influence Hollingsworth exerts over her. “I recognized,” Lovett says of Lannie’s reaction to his warning that Hollingsworth is false, “that this performance was for Hollingsworth, and not a word of her speech, not a gesture in the dance of her limbs was uninspired; she might have been a geisha tracing the ritual of the tea ceremony.” If she has a few lucid intervals where she sees through Hollingsworth, she is always somehow compelled to reject those perceptions. For example, when Hollingsworth-as-divinity-student is bitten by Monina, he immediately blurts out, “When I see that kid again . . . I’ll cut her fucking heart out,” and suddenly apologizes to “the lady” present with the

explanation that a child's bite can be poisonous. While Lovett and Lannie laugh at Hollingsworth, he sits motionless, but he finally asks, much as Lannie will ask Lovett, "Are you done now?" For "its effect upon her," Lovett tells us, "he might have pressed a button. Her laughter stopped. She quivered through every inch of her body, and I realized suddenly how close she was to hysteria." Hollingsworth taunts her further, and when Lovett threatens him, Lannie defends Hollingsworth. She is compelled to accept her false wise man (pp. 142-49).

Much of Hollingsworth's power over others lies in their strange fascination with the decreative force Hollingsworth represents, which is expressed here, as in so much of Mailer, as uncreative sexuality. It is in Hollingsworth's infertile sex and sadism that Lannie finds peace. He "looks at you as if you do not exist, so that slowly you're beaten beneath him . . . and love has finally come through the only way I want ever to see it when it is smoke and I am in the opium den and thugs beset me." "[H]e tells me what to do and then I do it, and so everything is very simple now" (pp. 156-57). Together, Lannie explains, they will punish McLeod.

But this McLeod, whom they seek to punish, is the novel's central image of Life. McLeod as the representative of Life struggles against the alliance of Death. The images of Life that cluster about McLeod project growth, movement, sympathy, and love, and suggest a kind of vision new to these characters. Until Monina leads Lovett to McLeod in Guinevere's bedroom in Chapter 13, Lovett is uncertain of him. McLeod's most striking difference from the others is his "mania about neatness" in both his room and appearance. But like the others, McLeod too is masquerading. He dresses in "anonymous clothing," keeps his marriage a secret, and works "in a department store as a window dresser." So far he has tested Lovett only in the most tentative way and has told Lovett he sees through his masquerade to pass himself off "like anyone else." By parodying Dinsmore's socialist cant, by probing Lovett to see whether he is a potential friend or enemy, McLeod guides their relationship into one of guarded trust in which McLeod begins to emerge as a teacher, guide, and confessor. "Characteristically," Lovett says of McLeod,

he sat on his hard chair, arms folded upon his chest, his knees crossed, his eyes boring into me from behind his silver-rimmed spectacles. . . . I went on with my story, and under McLeod's scrutiny, so dispassionate, so balanced, I found myself admitting details which normally I would have found distasteful. In his presence I could find enthusiasm for the balm of confession as if nothing I might relate would ever provoke a dishonest reaction. (pp. 73-74)

When McLeod—"a pedagogue reaching his climax"—responds to his own question about what kind of man Guinevere's husband must be, he gives Lovett an important clue to Guinevere's and McLeod's particular kind of defeat. One chooses life as movement and growth, or one faces the defeat of stasis: "Why does he marry her? Because she gives out an emanation, call it what you will, that makes him think he's . . . *alive*. He knows he's *frozen*, and he wants to be laid against a body that's nice and warm. He sees it as an experiment on himself. That's the kind of man he is, I'm convinced. Only what he doesn't know is that *she's frozen too*" (my italics, p. 76). But after Chapter 13, Lovett and McLeod have a new truth upon which to base their relationship, and McLeod the teacher also becomes McLeod the father. "Once you've found a father, you'd better not to track him to a brothel," McLeod says to Lovett when discovered in Guinevere's bedroom. The revealed truth about Hollingsworth in Chapter 13 and about McLeod in Chapter 14 changes Lovett's perception of the world as the narrative moves into its second phase. Lovett's consciousness of the world and the people in it extends to a new dimension of irrationality and violence. The novel focuses more and more on this new dimension of consciousness; it is a consciousness that disrupts Lovett's tenuous balance.

I was wretched, and if I had found a balance of sorts, the balance was lost now. . . . So I stood at my distance above the river, and watched a dirty moon yellow the water. Somewhere, today, I had read in the newspaper, a woman had killed her children, and a movie star had enplaned from the West to be wed in a tiny church upon some hill. A boy had been found starving on a roof, a loaded rifle in his hands. The trigger squeezed, the shot rang down the street, and I could have been holding the rifle. I could even hate the boy because he had missed. (p. 118)

The dialogue between Lovett and McLeod is the first "progress" in the allegory. This dialogue represents Mailer's no less than Lovett's movement beyond the muddle between politics and politics as metaphor, the emerging consciousness of hero as well as author. McLeod begins to guide the hero toward a verification of the images of Death. When Lovett and McLeod walk to the Brooklyn Bridge in Chapter 14, the setting of sea fog, murkiness, dull lights, and fog horns signifies the obscurity out of which the hero and his guide must travel. Here McLeod demonstrates his theoretical proclivities and tests Lovett's. McLeod hints at Hollingsworth's identity, at his own communist past, at the failure of his marriage. Tentatively approving Lovett's own assessment of the failure of Soviet Communism, "in the tone of a headmaster," McLeod establishes their alliance when he says: "You see, laddie, we're excrescences, and we're

waiting for the stones to grind us between them. Let's not fight, you and I" (pp. 120–25).

This dialogue has germinated Lovett's new consciousness of his past and his future. He recalls his adolescent dedication to Trotsky, with "the labor of parturition, a heartland of whole experience was separating itself to float toward the sea." The "sea" to which this heartland of past experience is floating is Lovett's mind. By recalling his past, Lovett is also revolutionizing his consciousness: "across my back scar tissue burned ever new circuits with its old pain. Things had altered this night" (pp. 125–56). In chapters 16, 18, and 19, when McLeod reminds Lovett of the danger the other characters and the world represent—a danger McLeod calls "onanism"—Lovett increases his confused deliberations about the seemingly blameless disintegration of peace in and the economic structure of the modern world and is forced to use the "new circuits" McLeod is helping to burn into him. Lovett must act now upon his perceptions of the other people in the rooming house. He has, for example, less and less trouble turning from Lannie as another false life and toward McLeod. He has just seen Hollingsworth's interrogation chamber in McLeod's old room (p.162), and Guinevere, in her attempt to get Lovett to spy for her, has just told Lovett that the interrogation is about to begin (p. 168). So when McLeod now asks Lovett to leave, Lovett, responding to McLeod's questions, begins to see that he must commit himself to McLeod and accept the "consequences" of that commitment. Following Chapter 19 the ideological debate begins, and we move into the final and largest portion of the novel.

We can see at this point that *Barbary Shore* has a three-part structure. The first thirteen chapters establish a dream artifice, introduce the six main characters, and clarify the central polarization of character and image. This first division of the novel is static; that is, the thematic conflict and what little progress the novel will illustrate is yet to come. The second division of the novel, chapters 14 through 19, develops the relationships and tensions between the characters. In this section the hero is tested and makes limited progress toward increased consciousness, and in the chapters between the McLeod-Lovett dialogues, the other characters are increasingly clarified as onanistic forces of defeat. But the final portion of the novel, chapters 20 through 23, will present the debate between the forces of Life and those of Death, will illustrate the impact of that debate on the characters, and will show the transfer of power from the teacher to the narrator-hero.

As the central agents of Life and Death battle for supremacy in the long debate, Lovett, the witness of this battle, has four lessons impressed upon him. He gains further insight into what makes for

Life and what makes for Death as each side argues its case. He learns that there are two kinds of consciousness, literal and metaphorical. He learns that the true meaning of "revolutionary socialism" is the latter kind of consciousness, which McLeod calls "metaphysical vision." And he learns, finally, that an expansion of consciousness makes necessary a personal commitment to the truth such consciousness reveals.

Superficially, the roles of Hollingsworth and McLeod are the stereotyped roles of FBI agent questioning his subversive prey. But in Chapter 20 as throughout the debate, Mailer heightens our view of Hollingsworth as a stereotyped, deadened agent of a larger institution. And when Hollingsworth reads from his collection of McLeod's writings in Chapter 24, we see that McLeod defines the barbarism toward which mankind drifts as an example of Death. This barbarism is perpetuated equally by Soviet "State Capitalism" and American "Monopoly Capitalism" by their exploitations of human potential to produce wholly for war and by their techniques, developed during World War II, for swallowing all opposition.

Early in the debate (Chapter 20) the principals also illustrate their sharp differences in consciousness. Hollingsworth is a factologist, McLeod a metaphysician who sees and thinks metaphorically. Hollingsworth says he is "a simple fellow who concerns himself with the facts," which he observes is no small matter because "I'm sitting where I am, and you're sitting where you are." Toward the end of their debate, Hollingsworth's charge against McLeod is that his effort to change the world is the work of vanity and futility. After all, only 98.3 people read each unit of propaganda. McLeod stresses that he depends upon potentiality and that his work is for the future. McLeod's repeated emphasis will be upon human potential, upon the possibility of some new "circuit" that even another world war may finally burn into our consciousness (pp. 237-86). To this Hollingsworth can only respond that "we ain't equipped to deal with big things."

But Chapter 20 also begins to illustrate a second kind of consciousness. Hollingsworth cannot understand what McLeod means by "metaphysical." So through the examples of the tin can and a "little object" that he has stolen from the American government, McLeod tries in vain to make Hollingsworth understand his definition of revolutionary socialism as a way of life based on the capacity to see objects, persons, and events metaphorically and to distinguish between the evil (the "petrification of stolen labor," the "gore") and the good ramifications of objects and events. When Hollingsworth responds that McLeod is off the point, McLeod argues that there is never any "point"; there is only "context."

“To begin with, the little object so-called, is completely a problem in context. What is it and where was it born? . . . I want to take into account the vast structures which created it. . . . Supposing I possessed it. Where would it be? You assume woodenly that I’ve got it wrapped in brown paper, and it’s in one of m’ pants pockets. Or perhaps it’s buried in the ground. But you’ve got no call to assume either. I might be keeping it here”—and he pointed to his head. “Or maybe nobody knows what it is. That’s possible too. You don’t have to know what something is to appreciate its value. You can still trace its relation to other things.” (p. 192)

Hollingsworth’s request for “practical examples” leads McLeod’s speculations to the furthest reaches of the novel. “‘In the modern heavens what is the condition most unbearable for the Gods?’ the question was answered with hardly a pause. ‘Why it’s a little object whose whereabouts is unknown. Something unaccounted for? No God can stomach that when he is collective’ ” (p. 193)—that is to say, totalitarian.

At several points, McLeod emphasizes the metaphorical nature of true socialist culture and consciousness that hounds him with his own insurmountable guilt and defeat. “I’ve covered that over for myself these many years,” he says of his “sins,” “oh, aware that I did, but none the less there is a certain crutch to the name of a thing, it all seems more reasonable and possible until you put it figuratively, until the metaphorical end, which is always the muzzle if you come down to it, blasts you in the face” (p. 239). The “metaphorical end” reveals to McLeod the connections between himself and the rest of the world; it reveals the meaning and malignance of his past actions as a Stalinist agent. If McLeod returned to the theoretical ideals of revolutionary socialism after his long support of the Soviet and after a year in the American government, if also he tried, as he says, to regain love through marriage to Guinevere because he believed she would bring him life, McLeod ultimately could not escape the self-defeat his metaphorical vision pressed on him:

in relentless turmoil each thought birthed its opposite, each object in the darkness swelled with connotation until a chair could contain his childhood, and the warm flaccid body of Guinevere . . . expanded its bulk to become all the women he had known, but in their negative aspect . . . the flesh of his wife . . . was the denominator of meat and all the corpses he had ever seen and some created.⁹

The one achievement McLeod grants of his life is his transformation from revolutionary to bureaucrat and back to revolutionary (“theoretician”) again. In the end, however, the small success of

9. *Barbary Shore*, p. 240. McLeod perceives the same expansion of connotation in his small part in Trotsky’s death and in his work for the U.S. government, which depends on “the misery of the rest of the world” (pp. 242, 243).

"theoretical retreat . . . grafting the little object into my flesh" cannot surmount McLeod's guilt. At the close of his defense, McLeod will separate his revolutionary hopes from his personal defeat.

It is McLeod's overwhelming guilt and his inescapable defeat that eventually lead Lovett to accept the responsibilities of his own increased consciousness, his awareness initiated by the battle of Life against Death that he witnesses. The progress of this allegory is the progress of the McLeod-Lovett relationship, for their dialogue amplifies and explains the McLeod-Hollingsworth debate and traces Lovett's expansion of awareness. As early as Chapter 21, McLeod expresses the difficulty of accepting the "responsibility." For the modern god of whom McLeod speaks here, and which will later become Mailer's Devil, is the devil that Hollingsworth represents: the devil of science-as-factology, of antimystery, of collectivism-as-totalitarianism. From lowest agent to Godhead, the totalitarian factologist is in power everywhere, and his power is overwhelming. "Yes," McLeod says, "I imagine a man could spend his life trying to find someone to pass it [the object] on to. Yet with what difficulty. For who could fulfill the specifications. . . . a man would be mad to accept such a responsibility" (p. 193). It is at just this point that Lovett moves closer to accepting "such a responsibility." Though McLeod says that Hollingsworth has whispered so tempting an offer that he is almost ready to give up the object, and though Lannie again tempts Lovett to their side, Lovett stands what little ground he has gained. He cannot yet be certain he is with McLeod, but he is sure he "can't be with them." By his mere presence, Lovett now becomes McLeod's conscience, and that transfer of roles is an initial transfer of power (p. 195).

In chapters 25 and 28, and in the final three chapters, Lovett's relationship to McLeod obviously grows more active. Lovett may be a "poor little friar," but he becomes the "confessor monk" to McLeod, who "carries his mortal illness with him, and [is] obsessed with the death he contains" (pp. 237, 244). McLeod reaffirms their friendship that began when Lovett's "theoretical equipment," however stunted, came to light (p. 245). And seeking desperately a source of healing, if not absolution, in love, McLeod inexplicably asks Lovett to judge Guinevere's potential for love. Lovett denies his power to judge, but McLeod, conferring it on him, again foreshadows the narrative's ultimate transfer of power. This last transfer will be made possible by Lovett's final acceptance of the responsibilities and commitments of consciousness when, in Chapter 28, the debate reaches an impasse and McLeod's defeat seems certain. McLeod's determination to transfer his ideas as existences (as powers or objects) is made clear when McLeod catches Lovett's eyes with

his own and delivers a speech in his own defense to “transmit the intellectual conclusions of my life . . . and give dignity to my experience” (pp. 271–72). Lovett, who with Lannie has observed the entire debate, feels for the first time completely implicated in the struggle of the forces Hollingsworth and McLeod represent. “Behind us in the room, the battle over, the casualties counted, terms were being drawn. And it was I who felt the shame.”

McLeod then performs two important events in the last two chapters; he actually transfers the object to Lovett, and he defies Hollingsworth. It had become clear in Chapter 25 that McLeod faces an existential choice. He can save himself by meeting Hollingsworth's offer and give up the object. Or, he can satisfy his “moral appetite” if he is willing to continue his theoretical work and die for it: “alive it's dead and dead I'm alive” (p. 246). By transferring the object to Lovett, who in the end has asked for it, McLeod chooses biological death but existential life. “The object” can now be recognized easily as a talisman of the hero. So Mailer uses the typical allegorical device of making the talismanic object the token of that power the hero seeks, expanded consciousness.

Angus Fletcher points out that the object is an image of power that fits the dualistic iconography the writer creates within the allegory, and it therefore plays a specific role in the dialectic form the allegory takes. In this novel, it is the object Life and Death battle to possess. And here, as it commonly is, the talisman is another example of what both Fletcher and Edwin Honig call the “Cosmic Image,” by which they mean the relationship of images—whether as persons, events, or objects—to macrocosmic polarities.¹⁰ Honig argues that it is the original function of allegory and its interpreters to sustain an explicit relationship between man and his divinities “by relating familiar archetypes to human aspirations” (p. 20). An object gains mana through its implied relationship to both natural and transcendental forces in a ceremony, dance, or allegorical text; the mana-power of the object transcends its merely physical properties. The “intangible” becomes an “energy working through the tangible and gives the object life and meaning” (pp. 22–23). Of course, this

10. See Edwin Honig, *Dark Conceit*, pp. 63, 81, and Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, pp. 88, 217, for the specific discussion of their points. In his analysis of cosmic image or Kosmos, Fletcher defines the allegorical image thusly: “It must imply a systematic part-whole relationship; second, it should be capable of including both metonymy and synecdoche; third, it should be capable of including ‘personification’; fourth, it should suggest the daemonic nature of the image; fifth, it should allow an emphasis on the visual modality . . . finally, it should be such that large-scale double meanings would emerge if it were combined with other such images” (p. 109). Honig suggests that such external signs give the hero “something of the traditional authority of dramatis personae as well as sacred figures in myths” (p. 85).

sense of energy in objects also stimulates our perception that the object and the allegory have purposes requiring explanation.

McLeod—"the pedagogue again"—reminds Lovett of his new responsibility for this object with a quote from Lenin: "Study, little father, or you will lose your head." Unlike Lannie, Lovett manages to escape the FBI at the scene of McLeod's murder and enters that world from which he writes to us. "So the heritage passed on to me, poor hope, and the little object as well, and I went into the world. . . . I am obliged to live waiting for the signs which tell me I must move on again. . . . I work and study, and I keep my eye on the door. Meanwhile, vast armies mount themselves, the world revolves, the traveller clutches his breast" (p. 311). He lives now in the time McLeod predicted, a time when one is no longer allowed even a corner in which to write a book, while "the storm approaches its thunderhead" and mankind drifts to barbarity. However limited Lovett's success as we see it, he has gained a new circuit of consciousness, a personal increase of force that is the kernel of human potential upon which McLeod placed his one hope.

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 in heritage
the remnants of my socialist culture.

. . . .

And may he be alive to see the rising
of the Phoenix. (p. 311)

Those critics who charge, as Irving Howe and Charles Rolo, that *Barbary Shore* is negative and nihilistic pay little attention to the transfer of power at the novel's conclusion. Clearly, this transfer expresses the hope of rebirth. I have said that the archetype of rebirth, of the discovery of Life through the regeneration of consciousness, is the central pattern of true allegory generally, just as it is the central pattern of the heroic quest throughout so many different cultures and epochs. With this novel, Mailer begins using the rebirth archetype as the basis for the structural and metaphorical design of his future allegories. Moreover, his use of this archetype suggests to me that Mailer succeeds early in adventuring into "the jungle of his unconscious" and finding there the materials of his art. In *Advertisements*, Mailer said that *Barbary* emerged "from the bombarded cellars of my unconscious" (p. 94). Carl Jung has emphasized that "the symbolic process"—the manifestation of archetypes as "active personalities in dreams and fantasies"—is "an experience in images and of images." And, like Mailer, in his theory of the dream, Jung considers this symbolic experience as a presenta-

tion to the dreamer not of fictitious dangers, but of real risks "upon which the fate of a whole life may depend."¹¹

McLeod, the true savior or sacrificial figure of this novel, is a consummate example of the mythic "guide," a wise man who flourishes in dream as in literature when the times are out of joint and civilization is in danger of destroying itself. McLeod's impulse to sacrifice himself expresses the archetypal, the eternal impulse to "ransom creation," in Jung's words, "from death," to renounce "ego-hood" for a total rebirth.¹² In *Barbary Shore* it is through the death of the guide that both guide and hero are "reborn." Such sacrifice and rebirth are not evidence of nihilism; they are, as Jung says in "The Psychology of Rebirth," a "purely psychic reality" that is among the "primordial affirmations of mankind." If we look closer at the process of rebirth in *Barbary*, we find that such elements of that process as allegorical "progress" and "battle" are even more explicitly archetypal than they might seem. McLeod and Lovett participate in what Jung identifies as two "main groups" or patterns of rebirth. The first pattern is "the transcendence of life." In this case, the initiate

takes part in a sacred rite which reveals to him the perpetual continuation of life through transformation and renewal. . . . [which] is usually represented by the fateful transformations—the death and rebirth—of a godlike hero. The initiate may either be a mere witness of the divine drama or take part in it or be moved by it, or he may see himself identified through the ritual action with the god. In this case, what really matters is that an objective substance or form is ritually transformed through some process going on independently, while the initiate is influenced, impressed, "consecrated," or granted "divine grace" on the mere ground of his presence or participation. . . . The initiate experiences . . . the permanence and continuity of life, which outlasts all changes of form and, phoenix-like, continually rises anew from its own ashes. (*Archetypes*, pp. 116–17)

The entire progress of the conflict between Hollingsworth and McLeod traces the defeat of the old hero or guide. Lovett is the witness of that conflict from beginning to end. During the debate specifically he is literally a mere observer, and it is through observation, enlivened to a new potential through his dialogues with

11. Carl Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, translated by R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 9, 1 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 38–39. Future brief references are parenthetical.

12. See Carl Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, translated by R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 5 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956), pp. 415, 421–35. In *Psychology and Religion*, translated by R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 11 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 272, Jung points out that the archetypal significance of "human sacrifice and ritual anthropophagy" strikes one of the "deepest chords" in the human psyche.

McLeod, that Lovett is led to make his eventual commitment. The whole drama of the novel's conflict traces the path of McLeod's existential defeat and his existential rebirth when he defies the forces of totalitarianism or Death by renewing his power in himself, by transferring it to Lovett, and by descending to Hollingsworth and his biological death. What is transformed by the long process of death and rebirth is the "object," the power of an intangible, expanded consciousness, implicitly embodied in tangible substance belonging to the old hero which is again made eternal. The important thing about any "transcendence rite," as Jung points out, is that the rite transcends life as it demonstrates eternal force in action rather than any particular historical fact or event. "It is a moment of eternity in time" (*Archetypes*, p. 118).

If the transcendence rite expresses a mythological significance to the novel's pattern of rebirth, the second "main group" of the rebirth archetype, which Jung calls "subjective transformation," suggests the psychological significance of rebirth. The McLeod-Lovett dialogues especially illustrate "subjective transformation." If at the beginning Lovett has undergone a "diminution of personality," a "loss of soul," or a "slackening of the tensivity of consciousness," which Jung says is characteristic of "systematic amnesias," Lovett, by the novel's end, has undergone an "enlargement of personality." Such enlargement, Jung points out, depends upon the potential within, the potential that Mailer's later heroes will also exhibit. "Real increase of personality means consciousness of an enlargement that flows from inner sources. Without psychic depth we can never be adequately related to the magnitude of our object. . . . a man grows with the greatness of his task. But he must have within himself the capacity to grow. . . . More likely he will be shattered by it" (*Archetypes*, pp. 120-21).

It is in such subjective transformation that the greatest potential for growth lies. But of course this wise man himself is a psychic emanation "from within." He is, as Zarathustra is to Nietzsche, "the long expected friend of his soul" who will make "his life flow into that greater life." Subjective transformations of the dreamer, for example, typically depend upon the dialogue with the guide, the "certain other one, within." It is upon the colloquy that grace depends. In more clinical terms, the therapeutic value of any archetypal figure resides in the dialogue with the archetype.¹³

13. Jung, *Archetypes*, pp. 40, 121, 124-27, 130-33. Jung gives examples of the wise-man figure in its relation to sacrificial rebirth: Khidr to Moses, in which case Moses fails "to recognize a moment of crucial importance" and thereby fails to recognize the unconscious "source of life" until he has lost it (pp. 137-41); Osiris, who is disembodied by Antichrist, to the Egyptian pharaoh and nobility; Christ to the Christians (p. 141).

In this novel where “progress” and “battle” are determined by an archetypal pattern of sacrifice, the dangers besetting the hero are embodied as false sacrificial figures, such as Guinevere, Lannie, and Hollingsworth. They all represent the dangers of defeat and stasis to the hero. McLeod, the true wise man, is a master, enlightener, and savior “who symbolizes,” as Jung writes of such a figure, “the preexisting meaning hidden in the chaos of life.” He compensates for a “spiritual deficiency” in the hero by giving him knowledge and advice and by encouraging profound reflection for someone whose conscious resources are incapable of overcoming a “helpless and desperate situation.” Mythologically, this figure often gives specific information to help the hero on his journey, but he is most notable for his moral qualities and for testing the moral qualities of others, which qualities, Jung argues, make his “spiritual character” plain. In myth, he usually represents the dynamic principle of life in battle against stasis and death. The wise man tests the hero’s potential to receive the gifts of expanded consciousness.¹⁴

When we view *Barbary Shore* as true allegory and as a narrative representation of disembodied, archetypal elements of the self interacting with the narrator-hero, we see that the psychological implications of the sacrificial patterns and figures are not foreign to Mailer’s expressed goals. For his work, as we will see, represents a continuous effort to integrate conscious and unconscious elements and perceptions in a way similar to Jung’s description of the process of individuation: “the ‘nourishing’ influence of unconscious contents . . . maintains the vitality of consciousness by a continual influx of energy; for consciousness does not produce energy by itself” (*Archetypes*, p. 142). The energy of new perception the Mailer heroes seek is that energy of intuitive, prerational perception that can be integrated with rational and conscious perception. It is the mark of Lovett’s potential, and hence of the Mailer hero, that through fortune, perception, and ultimately through choice, he accepts the source of regeneration and wisdom in a world of defeat and ignorance. It is the energy of metaphorical consciousness that not only reveals Lovett’s own identity to himself but also reveals to him what makes for Life and what makes for Death in the modern world. The hero accepts his own potential at the novel’s end, and that is *Barbary Shore*’s affirmation. But that the hero will himself be a source of regeneration to others, Mailer is not yet prepared to affirm.

14. Jung, *Archetypes*, pp. 35, 37. See especially “The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairy Tales,” pp. 210–14, 221, 239, and 253. Jung also points out that this figure typically warns the hero of dangers to come and supplies means of meeting those dangers.

3

The Deer Park

We know how, in the past, humanity has been able to endure the sufferings we have enumerated. . . . it was possible to accept them precisely because they had a metahistorical meaning, because, for the greater part of mankind, still clinging to the traditional viewpoint, history did not have, and could not have, value in itself. Every hero repeated the archetypal gesture, every war rehearsed the struggle between good and evil, every fresh social injustice was identified with the sufferings of the Savior. . . .

[W]e noted various recent orientations that tend to reconfer value upon the myth of cyclical periodicity, even the myth of the eternal return. Those orientations disregard not only historicism but even history as such. We believe we are justified in seeing in them, rather than a resistance to history, a revolt against historical time, an attempt to restore this historical time, freighted as it is with human experience, to a place in the time that is cosmic, cyclical, and infinite. . . . it is worth noting that the work of two of the most significant writers of our day—T. S. Eliot and James Joyce—is saturated with nostalgia for the myth of eternal repetition and, in the last analysis, for the abolition of time.

—Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*

Mailer conceived *The Deer Park* (1955) as the first installment of a large, eight-part work that was to be a “descendant of *Moby Dick*.” The short story “The Man Who Studied Yoga” was to be the prologue to this large work and each book a dream of the story’s hero, Sam Slavoda. These dreams, as Mailer phrased it in *Advertisements for Myself*, would “revolve around the adventures of a mythical hero, Sergius O’Shaugnessy, who would travel through many worlds.” But Mailer’s *Moby Dick* failed. All we have is *The Deer Park*, a much “simpler novel,” Mailer tells us, that emerged from the characters themselves.¹

The Deer Park itself fails. Its faults are those of a novel that was undergoing changes not only in style but in conception at the time of publication. In rewriting the Rinehart galleys, for example, Mailer began to develop the narrator’s story further. Yet his story remains vague in the second half of the book. Mailer also began to develop further the Eitel-Elena story, the story that best focuses the novel’s theme, into a larger and more complex relationship. And the novel’s final “equation of sex and time” is an afterthought inserted at the

1. *Advertisements for Myself* (hereafter cited as *Ads*), pp. 153–55. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations are to works by Norman Mailer.

last minute before the printing deadline. The final Putnam edition, therefore, represents only what was emerging from the characters and ideas in the novel. Mailer admits that he simply did not have "the guts to stop the machine, to give myself another two years and write a book which would go a little further" (*Ads*, pp. 235–37, 242–43).

When we add the personal crises and the bouts with drugs Mailer describes in *Advertisements* (beginning on page 228) to these problems of the novel's full development, it is a wonder the book ever saw light in any form. And it is, therefore, a little unexpected that Mailer should consider his central characters in this novel as among his best and most fully developed. In an interview with Steven Marcus, Mailer argues that these characters are "beings"; that is, a figure in this novel is "someone whose nature keeps shifting," as opposed to mere "characters," whose nature "you grasp as a whole."² This implies he was dissatisfied with the effect of the manifest allegory in *Barbary Shore*, and especially with the flatness of its characters. In *The Deer Park*, Mailer does in fact heighten the realistic surface of his novel. He also increases the complexity of the quest and hence of the questers or beings. What the questers oppose, however, is still expressed through flat characterizations.

Heightening the realistic surface of the allegory is a common device allegorists use to soften the effect of their mechanical control over a work. As the allegorist increases his external commentaries on his symbolism or themes, as he typically does, such devices softening the mechanical effect become even more necessary. Mailer begins to demonstrate a distinctly allegorical attribute in the pieces collected in *Advertisements*, and he continues to collect and publish a growing body of commentary external to the novels through interviews, explications, digressions, criticism, and journalism. The shift to a heightened realism is the principal softening technique Mailer uses in *The Deer Park*. In his later novels, we will see that Mailer relies more on the opposite technique for lessening the effect of mechanical control. For Mailer's novels of the sixties increase the predominance of mythic patterns and figures already emerging in the novels of the fifties. As Angus Fletcher has pointed out, we can expect in true allegory a continual alternation between the explicit emergence of the dominant idea and the emergence of either mimesis or myth, which both cause the idea to recede. Fletcher argues that such devices, whether employed consciously or unconsciously, do in fact loosen the boundaries of the allegorical mode, and they provide the artist with the means to conceive and express

2. *Cannibals and Christians*, p. 212.

his ideas organically in art. The fluctuation in allegory between mimesis, myth, and idea, and the consequent multiple levels of meaning, suggest the inadequacy of any facile or ready interpretation, invite the reader to seek the "delayed message," and give the allegory its "translative value."³

The mythological patterns Mailer began in *Barbary Shore* are not obscured by the heightened realistic surface; realism and myth function reciprocally in the narrative. The fundamental pattern of the quest and rebirth continues, and the development of the narrator-hero's potential ends at the same point it did in the earlier novel. The hero's potential is, however, revealed in a slightly more affirmative light. And if this novel's major characters are more complex, more beings, than those of *Barbary Shore*, they nevertheless retain their power as archetypal figures. Eitel, for example, is a figure similar to McLeod. Both are fallen radicals whose struggles to regain the power of brave defiance are connected to their struggles to regain love. Both fail, admitting their own guilt in their failure and the failures of others. For the hero both older men are "fathers," confidants, and guides who tell the hero a truth he feels within himself. Through the dialogue with the hero, through advice and the example of his own battles and defeats, Eitel points the way for Sergius, just as McLeod does for Lovett. The only important differences in the two older men are that Eitel's radicalism is totally apolitical and his death is existential, not biological as McLeod's is. This increases the richness and the complexity of Eitel as a metaphorical figure. He cannot be mistaken for a misguided politician in a political allegory. Through the stories of Eitel and Elena, of himself and Lulu, and of Marion Faye, the narrator Sergius depicts a series of explorers who, except for himself, are defeated in their search for life in a dead world. By their words and their actions, these explorers become for Sergius a series of guiding intelligences or indicators of life and death, of growth and stasis.

With *The Deer Park* Mailer complicates his quest for what he calls "God the Life-Giver" by exploring three alternative paths to the same goal: the path of Love and Sex, the path of the Rebellious Artist, and the path of the Hipster. The true way remains unresolved in this novel though Sergius chooses the way of the rebellious artist. But the keystone of each alternative is rebellion. In his own life no less than in the life of his heroes, Mailer considers rebellion the foundation of creative growth. Especially in his columns for *The Village Voice* and in "The White Negro" (1957), Mailer expresses his own vision of

3. Compare this last point with Mailer's epigraph from Gide to *The Deer Park*: "Please do not understand me too quickly." My discussion here is based on Angus Fletcher's *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, pp. 307-15, 321, 330.

himself as a "psychic outlaw" at war with his time and country. Mailer's answer to one of Lyle Stuart's "Sixty-Nine Questions and Answers" sums this view up best. "What advice would you give the young writer on the brink of fame?" Stuart asks. Mailer answers: "Try to keep the rebel artist in you alive, no matter how attractive or exhausting the temptations." He then adds that rebellion is "as healthy as the sense of life." For the hero and therefore for mankind, the chief resources for the encouragement of life in the world are bravery and defiance. For Mailer, "the instinct of rebellion" is the "foundation of man's consciousness, the source of his humanity and the vehicle of his evolution."⁴ With a new emphasis on rebellion as the source of creative evolution, and with characters that are more complex than those of *Barbary Shore* but as much agents of forces larger than themselves, Mailer continues in *The Deer Park* to explore his theme of the struggle of Life against Death.

If Mailer continues the basic allegorical and mythological patterns he shaped in *Barbary Shore*, he also continues his search for the sources and effects of expanded or metaphysical consciousness. But he extends his previous quest for new consciousness to an investigation into the secrets of human energy and the relationships between energy and rebellion, growth, and "Time." Rebellion and growth must use some deep energy within us to take effect in the world. The relationship between energy and Time, to use Mailer's word, is more complex and obscure. As we will see, it is necessary to bring considerable outside material to the novel itself to understand that relationship. Throughout the 1950s Mailer engages in a personal quest for the sources of energy necessary to rebel and to create. His own sense of failed creative power did much to stimulate this search.⁵ *Advertisements*, published in 1959, is the record of his search. The heroes and hipsters of his two succeeding novels will continue it.

In *The Deer Park*, Mailer explores the way of the lover and the artist through the story of Charles Eitel (pronounced "eye-TELL") and Elena Esposito. This story focuses on the dual nature of the pressures within the would-be rebel artist and lover: the impulse to live up to one's ideals and the demands of one's art and the impulse to capitulate to the demands of the dead world of commercialism, fake sentiment, hypocrisy, and falsehood. Eitel's story, most simply put,

4. See *Ads*, especially pp. 233, 269, and 305, where Mailer makes these points.

5. *Ads*, p. 240. As the "Fourth Advertisement" reveals, this quest is largely initiated by Mailer's fear of the dying of his own creative energies and talents. "The White Negro" is one of his "seeds" of new growth; it gives him the faith that he is making a fresh beginning (see especially p. 335).

is about a man whose ideals and actions are antithetical; it is the central line of action upon which the other actions in the novel depend. Eitel's potential and his best intentions are established early; his ideals are clear.

Soon after Sergius arrives in the Hollywood resort of Desert D'Or, he meets Eitel, a famous film director. The director quickly becomes a source of strength and a "best friend" to Sergius because Eitel seems to Sergius one of the few "honest men" left in the world. Sergius finds his faith in the older man on the transcript, which Marion Faye shows him, of Eitel's testimony before a Congressional Committee investigating communists. Sergius recognizes Eitel's dialogue with the congressmen as an opportunity. It reawakens Sergius's consciousness of things he had vaguely awakened to in the Korean War. From the beginning, this testimony serves him as a touchstone of genuine courage and rebellion. In this case, it is rebellion against those forces in the American government that would homogenize individuals into a collective, deadening image of itself. Sergius sees in Eitel's testimony the very sources of the power to grow and to create that, we later see, he already believes to be in himself. "I would always have a reaction from his words . . . I felt as if I were speaking my own words."⁶ For his defiance, Eitel is blacklisted. Like McLeod, Eitel suffers "defeat" following bogus success.

Eitel's commercial failure gives him his new opportunity to grow: "I began to think that the reason I acted the way I did with the Committee was to give myself another chance." Drinking, squandering his days alone, Eitel futilely clings to his hope of writing a brave and original script. It is while at the crossroads of growth and existential death, beset with temptations and pressures, that Eitel meets Sergius and confides in the younger man. The novel opens, then, with Eitel's second chance, and most of what follows is Sergius's account of Eitel's struggle and failure to gain this power of rebellious, creative energy.

Eitel fails because the temptations of the dead, unreal world prove too much for him; his inner impulses are more in time with the world than with his ideals. His earlier failure to maintain his independent art is symptomatic; it foreshadows his ultimate failure. The world that defeats Eitel in his renewed quest for himself is embodied in a series of tempters and temptations, and Eitel's former assistant Nelson Nevins is the first. Nevins reaches to the heart of Eitel's flaw. Elena tells Eitel that he depends too much on "what

6. *The Deer Park* (hereafter cited as *DP*), p. 24. Future brief references are parenthetical.

other people think," on the standards of a false world rather than on what is genuine in himself. Though Eitel despises Nevins's work, he cannot help but envy Nevins's international commercial success.

The world comes to Eitel also as Collie Munshin, the son-in-law of Supreme's head, Herman Teppis. In chapters 15 and 16, Collie absorbs the last vestiges of integrity from Eitel's script. Boiling with "movie ingredients," the script becomes a "property" and "gold mine" with Collie's collaboration. The false script now offers Eitel little resistance: "what amazed him, annoyed him, and pleased him, was how easy the writing had become." He writes with "cynical speed." Collie's temptation proves more formidable and his "rehabilitation" of Eitel more thorough than Nevins's. In a whisper that "vibrates" through the room, Collie promises that if Eitel would share the script with him, he would bring Eitel to Supreme when Teppis dies and Collie takes command. Worse, Collie continues to insist that Eitel reverse his congressional testimony as part of the deal. So Eitel's final capitulation to Congressman Crane in Chapter 22 is especially defeating because Crane's own committee admits they were wrong about Eitel's party affiliation and betrays its promise of confidentiality by insisting that Eitel's congressional testimony be made public and that he run a personal statement of guilt in the newspapers. When Eitel agrees to such falsehoods, he gets his job with Supreme.

Eitel's failure is not so much a failure of vision as it is a failure of energy, a failure of his capacity to marshal his renewed sense of energy to conquer the forces of defeat in the world arrayed against him. Elena, in part, represents the buried nature in Eitel and this renewed energy. At first Eitel's relationship with Elena seems to presage victory for Eitel, but in fact it merely describes the potential that is doomed. Their affair began well. Eitel takes a first step toward renewed self-respect when he defies Teppis by taking Elena to Teppis's party. Sergius describes Eitel's act as a defiance "of no advantage to himself." Sergius's description of Elena at this party intimates what she will represent for Eitel. She is both defiance and strength. She is uneasy with and outside of the fantastic and absurd people and the atmosphere Sergius describes in the yacht club. Her strength, suggested by her voice, appears to Sergius to be a combination of delicacy, pride, and a "sense of her body." She is like "an animal, ready for flight."

Early in their affair Eitel repeatedly thinks of Elena as a "fresh beginning." The quality Elena brings to their sexual relationship is, in Eitel's words, her "odd capacity for love." By this, we learn, he means she gives so much of herself that both she and Eitel might

"change together," and this giving of oneself is combined in Elena with her awareness that such change is always fragile (p. 123).

As long as he continues to discover his own deepest energies through Elena and as long as he is able to give himself over to her love, Eitel grows. But the growth is short-lived. While it lasts, this energy of renewed life creates new circuits of body and consciousness. "Eitel felt changes in his body race beyond the changes in his mind as though all those nerves and organs which 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" (p. 122). This "blessed woman" Elena, he explains, causes him a pain that raises his whole sense of existence and potential. Sergius sees early that Eitel himself is on a quest for regeneration: "the trip he had begun so many times and quit as often and was now making again." Together, Eitel and Elena "would explore a little further."

In one late-night dialogue, Eitel tells Sergius that Elena is a source of growth not only because to choose her is to make his position more perilous, but because he now realizes, she will nourish him with "energy, flesh his courage and make him the man he had once believed himself to be" (p. 110). She is, in fact, a kind of primitive force or buried nature:

the core of Eitel's theory was that people had a buried nature—"the noble savage" he called it—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, sometimes they would find a mate with the same buried nature and that could make them happy and strong. (p. 121)

Eitel's renewed awareness, through Elena, of his inner resources and energies reaches its height in Chapter 11.

In betraying that love [filmmaking], he had betrayed himself. . . . The artist was always divided between his desire for power in the world and his desire for power over his work. With this girl it was impossible to thrive in the world except by his art . . . sitting beside her in the sun could give him a sense of strength . . . he would feel indifference to that world he had found so hard to leave. To quit it by the bottom—that was nice, it gave a feeling there was fruit to life. (p. 124)

Elena represents also the side of Eitel's nature that sees clearly just what is corrupt and false about his work and about Collie's temptations. She is at first lucid and strong, and her actions assert this strength. In her own art, flamenco dancing, she "scorns" commercialism and professional technique. "She could never grasp the first requirement for a professional. No matter one's mood, there was

always a minimum to the performance. One was never terrible. . . . So he knew, although he hated to believe it, that the more he wanted to make of her, the less she would become" (p. 183).

Elena's wisdom has a power Eitel never quite gathers to himself. "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." That she perceives and has the strength to act upon her perception of Eitel's character and defeat marks Elena as Mailer's first and one of his strongest heroines. Yet her heroism lies in a large potential defeated. For, more subtly, she moves to a defeat similar to Eitel's.

When Elena begins to separate herself from Eitel because his defeat is certain, it is his best self, his deepest nature and potential that Eitel is losing. As he works faster with the bogus energy of the professional, Elena grows depressed and loses vivacity. He now relies completely on "borrowed technique" rather than desire during sexual relations with her. He desperately tries infidelity with one of Faye's—the pimp and hipster—call girls, named Bobby, because his continual failure to sustain a genuine connection to his art and to Elena stimulates a desire for sex without emotional involvement, a kind of onanism that would be as "exciting as the pages of a pornographic text where one could read in safety and not grudge every emotion the woman felt for another man." Eitel sees such a move as an escape from Elena's love, but the experience only sickens him and increases his self-disgust. By the end of Chapter 17 Eitel has fallen a great distance in love as well as in his art. He realizes that the destruction of his "masterpiece" and of his love is "his own fault," but he helplessly continues the destruction. He maneuvers Elena out of his life with professional disinterest, like a "fish" on "slender tackle." He grants her, he says in helpless despair, "no life at all" (see pp. 203–4, 214). Destroying the good, the life, in her, he destroys the life in himself.

All along the path of capitulation to the world, Eitel sees his own guilt, his own limitations. This clarity of vision makes his defeat especially painful. Even after Elena leaves him and he has given up all struggle to be true to his best impulses, Eitel sees his own corruption, as he clearly does when he delivers to Sergius the meaning of his and Elena's separation. She left, Eitel says, not merely because she was no mate "for a commercial man," but because by killing the life in himself he "denied Elena a most valuable opportunity to grow." His personal failure to regain any power at Beda's orgy, which Eitel felt would open "a new life," leads him to discover a "hate" for Elena that is his hatred for "the life of everything." If the

creative power he once hoped to achieve is forever dead, Eitel has gained the decreative power of "the world" (see pp. 297-98). He becomes a Collie Munshin at the end of Chapter 21, seeing Elena as Collie did. And when Sergius asks Eitel how it feels to be reconciled to the government and Supreme, Eitel sagaciously, if helplessly, sums up his defeat.

You see, after a while, I knew they had me on my knees, and that if I wasn't ready to take an overdose of sleeping pills, I would have to let myself slide through the experience, and not try to resist it. So for the first time in my life I had the sensation of being a complete and total whore in the world, and I accepted every blow, every kick, and every gratuitous kindness. . . . And now I just feel tired, and if the truth be told, pleased with myself, because believe me, Sergius, it was *dirty* work. . . . In the end that's the only kind of self-respect you have. To be able to say to yourself that you're disgusting. (p. 306)

Eitel's defeat is defined by his failure of courage in art and in love. In both adventures, Eitel is unable to follow his own prescription for growth: "the essence of spirit . . . [is] to choose the thing which did not better one's position but made it more perilous." Even following his earliest sense of weakness before Nevins, Eitel realizes he is probably incapable of carrying forward the creative spirit of growth and defiance into the world. He senses that he must pass on his own legacy of creative rebellion and "dangerous work," an act that is clearly associated here with the world-renewing force of heroic mythologies, to a new person: "perhaps a young man was needed, someone so strong and simple as to believe the world was there for him to change it."

Mailer's "mythical hero" Sergius O'Shaugnessy is such a strong and simple young man. His own struggle for increased consciousness and growth parallels Eitel's. This struggle is told more briefly in a "doubling" of the plot through the story of Sergius and Lulu. Like his predecessor Mikey Lovett, Sergius is a hero moving from impotence and unconsciousness to potency and consciousness. He describes himself as "a young man who felt temporarily like an old man" and who believed in "many things" but was able to "do very little." He wears a mask to function in a world of masks and facades. In appearance he is the all-American, Hollywood war hero. Like an "actor who tries to interest a casting director by dressing for the role," however, he never feels convincing, or, as he says in Chapter 4, he "always felt like a spy or a fake."

Dissatisfied with his hollowness as an "impersonator," he is seeking some substance or power that will give him genuine identity. Since his childhood in an orphanage, he has fought to earn the heroic name his lost father fabricated for him. His father passed on one further legacy:

he kept his little idea. There was something special about him. . . . Everybody has that, but my father had it more than most, and he slipped it on to me. I would never admit it to a soul, but I always thought there was going to be an extra destiny coming my direction. . . . But I was never sure of myself, I never felt as if I came from any particular place, or that I was like other people. (p. 21)

Sergius's belief in his destiny, his status as an orphan in search of a father, and his heroic name are signs of the typical allegorical hero. And like Lovett, Sergius discovers his heroic goal early in life: "I had read a great many books . . . about English gentlemen, and knights, and adventure stories, and about brave men and Robin Hood. It all seemed very true to me. So I had the ambition that someday I would be a brave writer" (pp. 22–23). If Sergius duplicates Eitel's struggle to learn "the way" of the rebel artist and the lover, the emphasis and focus of Sergius's story are more upon the artist as rebel.

The prerequisite of the rebel writer here is vision, a vision that penetrates false surfaces and sees the real connections between things. This is the vision of a double reality Eitel experienced in the Spanish Civil War and in World War II, especially in the concentration camps, described in Chapter 14. Eitel's and Sergius's stories represent the similar opportunities of two generations, but the old generation failed to accept and use its opportunity. This parallel between the generations is clarified by the parallels in the two plots and by the guide-novice relationship between the old man and the young man. It is through Sergius's dialogues with the older man and through his witnessing of the old man's death that he, just as Lovett before him, learns to grow.

Sergius's awakening to a double reality during the Korean War is the most significant mark of his potential. For the first time in his life, Sergius was "happy" fighting the "impersonal" war in Korea. He lived a life of simple comradeship, danger, and action with his fellow fliers, but he also lived in a world of such narrow vision that he did not see the connection between his own participation in a war and the lives and deaths of others. "Sometimes on tactical missions we would lay fire bombs into Oriental villages. I did not mind that particularly, but I would be busy with *technique*, and I would dive my plane and drop the jellied gasoline into *my part of the pattern*. I hardly thought of it any other way. From the air, a city in flames is not a bad sight" (pp. 45–46, my italics). But when Sergius's Japanese K.P. burns his arm with a kettle of soup, he undergoes a change of vision while giving the Oriental boy first aid.

Suddenly, I realized that two hours ago I had been busy setting fire to a dozen people, or two dozen, or had it been a hundred? . . . I could never get rid of the Japanese boy with his arm and his smile. Nothing

sudden happened to me, but over a time, the thing I felt about most of the fliers went false. I began to look at them in a new way. . . . I was close to things I had forgotten, and it left me sick; I had a choice to make.

Sergius turns down an Air Force career and has a "small breakdown." In the hospital he recalls his early heroic reading and returns to his "odd hope" that he may become a writer (pp. 46-47).

Sergius's vision of a double reality leads him to conclude that there is a "real world" in which the connections between oneself and others exist—the world of wars, of children's homes on back streets, a "world where orphans burned orphans." And there is another world of Teppis and Munshin—the world of narrow vision, facade, false sentiment, and hypocrisy. The other world is the setting for this novel, embodied in Hollywood and Palm Springs; it is the world of manufactured lies and of degenerate imagination, and a world in which one does not directly face the consequences of one's actions and one's life. It is the world most people live in.⁷ The "real world" of true and frightening connections is not unlike McLeod's "metaphorical end." If one has the vision—what McLeod calls the metaphysical vision—to see the connections and to see, therefore, the true world below the false world, one must live according to these perceptions.

To live according to his best perceptions is precisely what Sergius must struggle to do, and it is precisely what Eitel fails to do. No sooner does Sergius tell us of his vision of two worlds than the false world begins to work against him. It comes to him first as Lulu Myers, and her power to tempt is enormous. Though there is some ambiguity about Lulu and though she has one moment of bravery, she essentially remains as Sergius first sees her during an armed forces tour, "like some fairy princess of sex who had flown across the Pacific to anoint us with tiny favors" (p. 35). Sergius soon discovers that sex for Lulu is a series of imaginary games, and he is willing to play. Her sex life is like her work; she assesses technique and employs gimmicks, tricks, and public show rather than private substance. Although Sergius sees her at once as "bigger than life" but "also without life," although he compares the excitement he feels with her to flying a jet in an impersonal war (both are like playing

7. *Ibid.*, p. 45. Descriptions of this make-believe world abound, pp. 7-8, 29, 61-62, 184-85. It is the locus of the allegory. The opposition of the "imaginary world" of false vision and the real world becomes a fundamental, if obvious, theme in the novel. Numerous statements about this opposition express this theme; see, for example, pp. 65-67, 155-57, 192, 276. The juxtaposition of art as truth and commercialism as falsehood also expresses the same point; see, for example, pp. 88, 142, 151, 155-57. The epitome of the falsehood and hypocrisy of the "imaginary world" is in Chapter 20 in the long scene in Teppis's office.

“with magic,” a “gimmick and a drug”), Sergius is caught. He and Lulu stimulate the onanism in each other. “How I loved myself then,” he says. For Lulu, “the heart of her pleasure was to show herself” (pp. 96, 136).

One facet of Lulu’s temptation that captures Sergius is that she offers him a sense of power in the dead, unreal world. The potency she encourages in him is not the potency of the self, but the potency of extrinsic considerations. That he takes this fairy princess of sex, for example, “with the cheers of millions behind him” keeps Sergius’s excitement high. As Sergius gives in to the temptations of such extrinsic power in the world, his desire and energy to be a brave writer diminish, as Eitel’s did, “with a lack of ambition as cheerful as a liver complaint.” He mistakenly believes that making love to Lulu puts him in a class with “the champ” Eitel, even though Eitel has warned him that Lulu is no source of energy for one who seeks it: “our marriage was the meeting of a zero and a zero.”

In both Eitel’s and Sergius’s quests for growth, Mailer associates creative sexual energy with creative artistic energy, both of which oppose the absorption of the self by external forces in the unreal world. The association between genuine sexual energy expressed through love and genuine creative energy expressed through art is nothing new in human thought, but Mailer binds both energies by specifically depicting the common ground between them as disinterested choice, world defiance, and the “buried natures” of our instinctual life. Although it will become more explicit as his work develops, Mailer continually implies that biological and artistic potency and creation have some vague if no less real connections to common physiological and psychic sources of energy, which energy, as we will see, has in turn roots in divine energy or Soul.

It is only when Sergius finds the inner force and the courage to renounce the temptations of the world that he finally experiences genuine love and renews the strength of his metaphorical vision. Besides Lulu, Sergius’s temptation by the extrinsic and the false comes, as in Eitel’s case, in the form of Munshin and Teppis, who offer Sergius the opportunity to “fight” and to “grow” in the industry and to meet people with power. Sergius saves himself when Munshin reveals the false sentiment, or “bullshit” as Sergius calls it, of a planned movie where Sergius would play the hero as “war ace.”

I had been tempted . . . but it wasn’t stubbornness alone which held me back. I kept thinking of the Japanese K.P. . . . and I could hear him say, “Am I going to be in the movie? Will they show the scabs and the pus?” The closer I came . . . the more he bothered me, and all the while Collie would go on or Lulu would go on . . . about the marvelous world, the real world, about all the good things which

would happen to me, and all the while I was thinking they were wrong, and the real world was underground—a tangle of wild caves where orphans burned orphans. (p. 224)

Eitel gives Sergius the necessary courage to surmount the temptation, by encouraging Sergius to follow his "instinct," to become a brave artist. This advice leads Sergius to self-examination. "I had one of those hints of what cold and violent ambition had been stifling in me for so many years, and it was as if deep inside two powerful hands fought each other forward and back, locked in a test of strength which left room for little else." Sergius sees he shares a "vanity" like Eitel's and a similarly conflicting inner life, but he "somehow" had known "Eitel would help me to refuse the offer" (pp. 225 and 228).

The courage of Sergius's choice is so awesome that it briefly influences even Lulu, who stops tempting Sergius to Munshin's side. Lulu and Sergius are then able to have their first experience of genuine love. Staggered by the impact of his choice to redirect his life and of their experience of love, Sergius undergoes a recurrence of metaphorical vision, which is like McLeod's "expansion" of Guinevere's flesh, and suffers a relapse into impotency: "it was a tangible fear, as if the moment I left her room the burned corpses of half the world would be lying outside the door. We started to make love, and I couldn't think of her or of myself or of anything but flesh . . . bursting flesh, rotting flesh, flesh hung on spikes in butcher stalls, flesh burning, flesh gone to blood." For the first time to anyone, Sergius unburdens his guilt to Lulu, his portion of the guilt, as a human, in the cruelty of mankind. The temptress becomes healer; it is Lulu's finest moment, but it is brief. Lulu, once the horror of his guilt is passed, restores Sergius, who is braced by his new sense of love, to potency and to a faith in the beauty of the flesh. Yet they both realize their love is something they cannot sustain. The next day, Lulu leaves Sergius for two movie stars, a new movie, and her old self. Sergius, on the other hand, retains his renewed potency and renews his quest to become a brave writer.

But Sergius has passed only the first test, for by regaining his way, he accepts new struggles and perils. Though he knows Lulu is lost to him, her temptation lingers in his mind and raises new self-doubts and feelings of guilt. Having passed, with Eitel's aid, the test of the world, he must now pass the test of himself. He turns to penance and purgation. Like a saint mortifying his flesh, Sergius takes the worst possible job he can find and immerses himself in that side of life most foreign to the world in which he has been living. He becomes a dishwasher in an expensive restaurant where he had often eaten with Lulu. The "steam and the grease and the heat" are

his “poor man’s Turkish bath.” It is a self-inflicted slavery to “a gargoye of a machine” that teaches him “the most simple lesson of class,” of life beneath the facade:

after six years and eight months . . . I would earn back what I had lost in twelve days with Lulu, and this thought gave me a sort of melancholy glee, allowing me to relish like a saint counting his sores, how hard the work would be tommorrow.

It was all my doing. I still had most of my three thousand dollars and I did not have to work, but with Lulu gone, there was no other choice than to sit down and begin the apprenticeship of learning to be a writer. . . . mortifying my *energy*, whipping my *spirit*, preparing myself for that other work I looked on with religious awe. (p. 289, my italics)

When Sergius, still uncertain of any change in himself, pays a final visit to Eitel, he finds strength in Eitel’s record of defeat. And Sergius survives a last temptation; he turns down Eitel’s offer to work for him as his assistant. Eitel admires Sergius for his strength and promises to send him Elena’s letter, an act that, like McLeod’s last message and the “object,” represents a transfer of power from the old man to the new.

Strengthened by this success, by Elena’s letter, and by his own self-examination, Sergius passes his final test of courage and defiance, echoing Eitel’s original congressional testimony as he does so, when he defies the two FBI men who question him about his past associates. This final test leaves him on the edge of collapse, but his past successes generate in him the courage to go on. He embarks on a true rebirth as he begins his apprenticeship in earnest—studying, adventuring into his deepest self, writing, and renewing his determination to seek his goal.

I began to think, at least I learned how to try to think, for to do that, one must be ready to live in a hunt for the most elusive game—our real motive or motives . . . and therefore I would have to look into myself. . . . knowing I was weak and wondering if I would ever be strong. For I touched the bottom myself. . . . 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 mind of the writer . . . until I ended with an idea that many men have had, and many will have again . . . but I knew 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. (pp. 325–26)

Elena’s letter explaining her flight from Eitel to Faye helps Sergius begin his true apprenticeship and his journey within because her

honesty of vision and self-awareness encourage him. Sergius now reads Elena's letter repeatedly, in the same way that he had read Eitel's testimony. He finds Elena's understanding of her own failure so genuine that he begins to believe he and Elena might "bring out the best in one another." But Elena's turn to Faye is a desperate effort to connect a new circuit as well as a gesture of defiance, like Beda's orgy, against an outraged community's opinion of her as "dirt." If it is an ineffectual defiance, it is at least honest. For unlike Munshin and Teppis, Elena would become an honest whore, not a whore in "the world" whose sentimentality and hypocrisy lead her to believe herself something more noble and creative. But her move to Faye is, ultimately, only another stop on the way to Elena's defeat.

Faye himself, as the critics agree, is Mailer's first fictional embodiment of the hipster. Faye represents Mailer's exploration into a third way of regeneration in a dead world in *The Deer Park*. What seems to confuse readers is that the way of the hipster appears alien to the ways of artist and lover. Yet the ends of all are the same. The hipster, like the artist and lover, engages in acts of defiance. Art, if anything, is pure defiance. But the hipster's defiance is physically destructive, not merely destroying ideas, concepts, and perceptions, but destroying the actual embodiments of falsehood, oppression, and homogeneity. It is, however, a phoenix-destruction.

As Mailer argues in "The White Negro," the hipster's quest is above all "a frantic search for potent change, for liberating energy" within the self. His individual acts of violence have the dignity at least, as Mailer sees it, of the creative potential in mankind's nature—the aspiration to act, live, love, and finally to destroy oneself "seeking to penetrate the mystery of existence."⁸ The hipster seeks this self-creation by adventuring into "that inner unconscious life which will nourish" him because therein resides the dynamic energy of God Itself, of "life force" (*Ads*, p. 351). This search for the energy of life implies a further dignity to the hipster's quest and the reconciliation of self-creation and the re-creation of society. For in his search for divine energy, the hipster is a "vector" in "a network of forces" larger than himself. He can partake of those forces and in turn stimulate them. Seeking increase of divine energy for himself, the hipster engages in one side of the "primal battle" of divine energy against decreative energy and thereby opens the way to a creative future or a collective growth; he gives new birth to what we have lost through "the psychic havoc" of the twentieth century.⁹

8. See "The White Negro," in *Ads*, pp. 321, 325, 328.

9. See Mailer's columns in *Village Voice*, especially p. 325, and the introduction to "White Negro" for his specification of the "psychic havoc," in *Ads*, p. 338.

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 literal faith in the creative possibilities of the human being to envisage acts of violence as the catharsis which prepares growth. (*Ads*, p. 355)

Mailer is not facilely advocating all violence or the violence of the hipster.¹⁰ He is acknowledging the fact of individual acts of violence in our time and exploring their meaning. Admitting that his concept of the hipster in "The White Negro" is "no more than" a hypothesis (p. 351), admitting too that hipsterism could as easily veer toward fascism as toward a psychic preparation or source of some larger re-creation of mankind and society (p. 355), Mailer still considers the possibility, even the hope, that the hipster's acts of violence represent the struggle of dynamic, divine energy to regain the power to defeat a society that is "the assassin of us all." The hipster battles society with the violent image of itself. And his confrontation with society is heroic in the most primitive sense, for the hipster expresses the primitive impulse to restore energy, being, and Time, to restore what Mircea Eliade calls the "enormous present" against the ravages of "historical time."¹¹ The hipster's efforts to restore to himself the divine, the creative present is what Mailer means when he says the hipster searches for "instantaneous existential states" that arise from "the immediate apprehension and appreciation of existence." Mailer believes, or hopes, that the individual's drive for the creative or "existential" present will have a collective, creative effect upon humanity. This sense and this expression of the dynamic energy or "being" within the self is for Mailer "the new time coming."

Mailer said in his interview with Steven Marcus that Marion Faye emerged after the first draft as an embodiment of the "dark pressure" or "evil genius" in the novel (*CC*, pp. 212–13). As a result, Faye is as much outside the novel's world as Sergius is. Faye's role is to pass judgment on the strengths, weaknesses, and defeats of the others.

10. See the 1958 interview by Richard Stern, *Ads*, p. 379, where Mailer makes this point.

11. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, see especially pp. 3–4, 18, 85–86. The mythical hero's task is to imitate the heroic archetype of creation by battling evil or decreation, p. 44. Mailer realizes that creation and violence are opposites (see *Ads*, p. 363), but he also realizes the point Eliade makes repeatedly: the return to chaos, destruction, orgy prepares the way for the creative act of regeneration.

We see little, therefore, of his own quest. This may be why he is not very convincing as a "hipster." Though Marion Faye is himself defeated, the book ends with the promise of his return. But without reading the outside commentary on the hipster phenomenon, which Mailer wrote after the novel, one is hard pressed to see what Faye is learning and what his return will mean. Marion cannot say where his perception that "the whole world is bullshit" will take him, and neither can the reader.

Faye, however, is a "psychic outlaw" himself. He expresses Mailer's own rebellion against the unreal world that the movie capital and Desert D'Or represent. He is also another guiding intelligence for the hero, an indicator of courage and truth, an amateur in a world of professionals. He is, moreover, another face of Eitel, for artist and hipster are two faces of the same coin.¹² And, like Elena, Faye is a source of energy, an aid, to Eitel in his struggle. As long as Eitel displays courage, he has the support of Marion Faye. But as a measure of the power of the forces all three struggle against, Eitel drags Marion and Elena with him to defeat.

The narrator-hero also draws sustenance from Faye. Sergius cannot explain why he is drawn to him, but he feels that Faye's contempt for his affair with Lulu has something to do with it. Sergius is aware but helpless before Lulu; he sees himself as weakening from her "constant attacks." Contrastingly, Faye, by the example of his discipline, of his facing and mastering his repugnances and fears, maintains rebellious force. Faye hopes that such discipline will help him to "make it" so that he can "turn around and go the other way." Faye is, therefore, a potential healer and saint. He is "just a religious man turned inside out," who has turned "life on its head" to see the world that is anti-life more clearly (pp. 146-47, 150-51). Faye's dream of apocalypse suggests his role as a potential agent of regeneration.

Even now, there were factories out there . . . and tons of ore in all the freight cars were being shuttled into the great mouth . . . it was even possible that at this moment soldiers were filing into trenches . . . while army officers explained their purpose in the words of newspaper stories, for the words belonged to the slobs, and the slobs hid the world with words.

So let it come, Faye thought, let this explosion come, and then another, and all the others, until the Sun God burned the earth . . . let it come and clear the rot and the stench . . . let it come for all of

12. See *DP*, pp. 13-15, 27. Also Eitel's script, see pp. 126-27, clarifies that the "saint" is an impossible figure in the modern world because the predominant evil exists to destroy mankind, rather than mankind to destroy evil. The psychopathic hipster uses the very evil of the world as a source of its own destruction; he would "scathe the world with this mirror of itself."

everywhere, just so it comes and the world stands clear in the white dead dawn. (pp. 160–61)

Faye is both more and less than a hipster. He is more because he consciously, even intellectually, sees his quest as a metaphysical adventure. He thinks about things the real hipster only feels instinctively. He sees himself as a priest who will enlarge his darker, satanic potential. This potential, Faye believes, is a force he must learn to cultivate if he is truly to begin his search into the nature of God. Faye must stake everything on his hint that the true God is in exile, and that this true God-as-Life will regenerate the world. Faye believes, therefore, that he must use his satanic force to destroy what Satan has built in the world, for Satan, or God-as-Death, has now replaced God-as-Life. "For beyond, in the far beyond, was the heresy that God was the Devil and the One they called the Devil was God-in-banishment like a noble prince deprived of true Heaven, and God who was the Devil has conquered except for a few who saw the cheat that God was not God at all" (pp. 330–31). Simply put, Faye must fight fire with fire, must become satanic to destroy Satan's world of death.

In the fifties, Mailer began to assert his own belief, similar to Marion's, that the journey to God-as-Life is the human potential and, more importantly, that our destiny is "flesh and blood with God's." In his 1958 interview with Richard Stern, Mailer, a little more tentative about God's actual death or banishment, puts it this way:

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 very 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 all-powerful. The moral consequences of this are not only staggering, but they're thrilling; because moral experience is intensified rather than diminished.

These "new moral complexities" Mailer feels are more interesting, "than anything the novel has gotten into yet." If we are therefore the "seed-carriers" of God-as-Life's conception of creation, if we are explorers and battlers in God's behalf, then "we are engaged in a heroic activity, and not a mean one."¹³

Yet if Faye is more than a hipster, he is also less. He is a failed adventurer. He had not the strength to accept Elena's self-sacrifice. When she comes to live with him, he recognizes that his own failure parallels hers. Just as Elena had failed to assert life through defiance, love, and compassion, Marion has failed to assert life

13. See *Ads*, pp. 380–81.

through the "black heroic safari" into his darkest nature. He has not maintained a necessary compassionless discipline, nor has he succeeded in beginning the necessary destruction. His life, he says, seems purposeless. It is at this point in the novel (Chapter 25) that Marion, as well as Mailer, faces his own ambiguous feelings about the sacrifice and violence of the hipster. It is as if while Elena tried to kill the love, the compassion, in herself, Marion increased the compassion in himself. One fails as lover, one as hipster. Elena's final defeat is that she returns to and marries Eitel; she loses her life in a labyrinthine suburb of big houses, adjusting analysts, and a husband who takes Lulu again as a mistress. Elena's defiance is reduced to a plea to Eitel to marry her so that she may "learn" the ways of the world "this time."

In this novel of failed adventurers—lovers, artists, and hipsters—only Sergius emerges with the renewed energy to carry forward a vision of life and defiance in a dead world. Like Lovett before him, he has passed the initiation; he has accepted the guidance of a series of sacrificial figures and sources of wisdom not strong enough to carry the spirit of regeneration into the world themselves. He too has received the power from the old man. But Sergius only begins his journey as a gatherer of forces and a hero of renewed life at the end of the novel. If we are left with only a hope rather than an actual redemption of the world, we are at least left, again, with Mailer's affirmation that it is such heroes alone who may ransom creation from death.

At the end of *The Deer Park*, Eitel has a vision of Sergius setting forth on his heroic journey. As one who has gained heroic consciousness, Sergius will have to burn new circuits of consciousness into the world, to redeem Time itself from God-as-Devil. Stopped in traffic, Eitel looks out beyond the shoddy neon signs, hamburger stands, and tourist camps to a freighter at sea "with its hold-lights and mast-lamps moving away to the horizon," and he wonders if Sergius is not one of this ship's adventurers. Eitel, despairing that he did not give to Sergius "the knowledge he wanted to give me," conducts an imaginary dialogue with the young hero, still hoping he can convey that knowledge to Sergius somehow. Eitel confesses to Sergius that the artist must show the real world against the "mummery" of what passes for life; with "the pride of the artist," Eitel says, you must "blow against the walls of every power that exists, the small trumpet of your defiance." Sergius accepts Eitel's message. The young hero asks God directly for the way to follow. He asks if perhaps sex is not "where philosophy begins." But God answers: "Rather think of Sex as Time, and Time as the connection of new circuits" (pp. 374–75).

Coming suddenly as it does at the end of the novel, this equation of Sex and Time is too abrupt and isolated to mean very much to Mailer's readers. The equation opens the way to more questions than it answers. But if one views the equation as an extension of the third way to the energy within, which is the way of the hipster, one sees that by Time Mailer means one's immersion in the unconscious through sexual orgasm. This immersion, to Mailer, may connect the self with larger potential circuits. Mailer associates Time with a kind of creative present that is simply the movement of unconscious psychic energy in the self, in this case through sex. Sergius ends his journey in this novel, then, not only with the message of artistic defiance, but with the message of the energy-seeking hipster. To be sure that we are supposed to view the equation of Sex and Time as an equation of sex and the unconscious, however, we need to see Mailer's subsequent development of the relationship between sex and the unconscious.

We have seen, first, that Mailer's external commentary in "The White Negro" represents his boldest adventure into the "psychic wilds" of the unconscious in search of energy. But I should add that Mailer desires to return somehow to the senses and the deepest psychic contents without losing "the best parts of our civilized being," by which he means the "capacity for mental organization and construction, for logic." If the danger that Hip could destroy civilization is real, however, there is a greater danger that "civilization is so strong itself, so divorced from the senses, that we have come to the point where we can liquidate millions of people in concentration camps by orderly process" (see *Ads*, p. 382).

The "final purpose" of art, for Mailer, is "to intensify, to exacerbate, the moral consciousness of people." Moral consciousness is the consciousness that "the core of life cannot be cheated," that we live in such a "dangerous moral condition" that each of us must realize that every moment of our existence we grow into more or retreat into less and that as we grow or retreat we take others with us because we live in a "network" of forces, in an ecology and economy of divine and cosmic energies (see *Ads*, pp. 384-85).

We need, further, to see that this adventure back into the bodily senses and back into the unconscious psyche is, for both hipster and artist, a fundamentally moral adventure, however destructive the path to that end. Mailer associates the dynamic unconscious with divine energy, the adventure to reach the unconscious, therefore, with moral force. In his second column for *The Village Voice* he argues:

Thought begins somewhere deep in the unconscious—an unconscious which is conceivably divine—or if finite may still be vast

enough in its complexity to bear comparison to an ocean. Out of each human being's vast and mighty unconscious, perhaps from the depths of our life itself, up over all the forbiddingly powerful and subterranean mental mountain ranges which forbid expression, rises from the mysterious source of our knowledge, the small self-fertilization of thought, conscious thought. (*Ads*, p. 285)

In the fiction after *The Deer Park*, we also see an advance of the Sex-Time equation, especially in "The Time of Her Time" and "Advertisements for Myself on the Way Out," both fragments of that big, never-completed novel. In the former fragment, the same Sergius of *The Deer Park* continues the exploration, though here he goes less the way of the artist, more the way of the hipster. Sergius is a phallic figure who lives in a high, large, and white-washed Village studio, which he calls Mt. O'Shaugnessy. Women make their pilgrimages to this mountain and return with varying success. The sexual encounters are usually cold blooded and sterile, but this story focuses on one woman's experience of Time; that is, her immersion into the vast unconscious, "the sea," through orgasm. Denise Gondelman is a rational, educated, overanalyzed, pretentious young Jewess who has never made the journey. Sergius has numerous incapacities himself: he does not "make it" when Denise does; he withholds himself from the danger of emotional involvement; however, he finally takes Denise on her journey: "a first wave kissed, a second spilled, and a third and a fourth and a fifth came breaking over, and finally she was away, she was loose in the water for the first time in her life" (*Ads*, p. 502). Though Denise understandably despises Sergius because he takes her to a point of self-abandon that he was not himself prepared to experience, and though they separate, one assumes, forever, Denise at least becomes through her experience of Time—which is to say of the dynamic unconscious—a figure more heroic than Sergius himself. She is a person who might now be capable of returning the experience to help Sergius make a similar journey—"she was a hero fit for me" (p. 503).

Time is explored a little further in "Myself on the Way Out." Here the focus is on Marion Faye—just returned from prison—and on Faye's violence. The narrator is the ghost of a man Faye has killed. Faye and the ghost are on a journey to "capture Time" and the "illumination" the Prince of Darkness may furnish. The fragment is too discursive, even pretentiously theoretical. It is not difficult, therefore, to see why Mailer never finished it. I think here too Mailer may not yet have solved the problem he and Faye faced in *The Deer Park*—the inability to deal with compassion for the victims of violence. It will be only in *An American Dream* that Mailer comes to terms with the problem of violence through the effective embodi-

ment of his ideas in symbolic allegory. Yet in this fragment we see another step, indeed a final step, in the author's discursive analysis of Time. In the discussion between the prostitute and the physicist, Mailer establishes three dimensions of time. "Passive Time" is Time on its way to death, which is dynamic energy extinguished. "Active Time" or "Dynamic Time" is the experience of growth, the movement of dynamic unconscious energy, whether elicited by sex, violence, or some creative act (p. 521). "Potential Time" is that latent psychic energy that, at the moment of orgasm or violence, for example, can leap the gap to "Active Time" and make a being grow rather than die (p. 523). The concept remains as abstract in the fragment as it does in my summary of it. But one thing is clear. Mailer's heroes and heroines are searching for the energy that will be the source of regeneration. And in this search they typify what Angus Fletcher has called the search for "pure power" that is "at the heart of allegorical quest." The adventurers seeking or momentarily grasping the power of creation and growth, on the one hand, and the tempters and temptresses using their power of the world to deny the adventurer this creative power, on the other, create the basic dialectic of the allegorical mode.¹⁴

As most of his readers know, Mailer's principal theoretical resource in his search for the secrets of human energy is Wilhelm Reich's psychological theories. Mailer admits as much in *Advertisements* (see, for example, p. 301), and a number of Mailer's critics use a Reichian viewpoint and nomenclature to interpret Mailer's novels and ideas. Robert Solotaroff provides the most thorough and perceptive analysis of what Mailer accepts and rejects of Reich. In the 1950s especially, Mailer does speak of energy as "orgone" and bioelectric force, and of the release of creative energies through orgasm. Yet, as Solotaroff wisely points out, Mailer reaches for something beyond Reichian energy theory too, and to see Mailer's "energetics" after the 1950s as merely Reichian is inadequate. Reich's orgone, to use Solotaroff's phrase, "belongs in its human manifestations to a closed system with an inner final cause." For Mailer, who is perhaps closer to George Bernard Shaw's concept of creative evolution and life force, human energy has transcendent purposes, potentials, and roots, just as reproduction can be a force of creative evolution toward some greater conception of civilization as well as of Being.¹⁵

On the other hand, the nearly complete absence of references to Jung in Mailer's theoretical discussions and investigations of human energy does not necessarily suggest that Mailer has not read Jung, but does suggest at least that Jung is far less a specific theoretical

14. See Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, pp. 47–49, 338.

15. See Robert Solotaroff, *Down Mailer's Way*, pp. 95–98, 270.

source for Mailer. One finds it difficult, however, especially reading the Mailer of the 1950s, to avoid considering the possibility that the similarities between Mailer's and Jung's theories of human energy are discoveries Mailer makes largely by adventures into his own unconscious life and being. The similarities between Jung and Mailer, therefore, tend more to take on the authenticity of independent discoveries about psychic experience and take on less the artificiality of a writer's mechanical appropriation of another's (Reich's) *ideas about* psychic experience.

But whether or not we are willing to accept this "apparent" difference as indicative of authenticity, Mailer seems to me to be closer to Jung than Reich in many ways as he searches for the sources and the meaning of human energy. Philosophically, the implications of the Jungian collective unconscious and psychic manifestations of the God-image indicate a substantially open system. Jung's hesitations to assert a psychic system open to the influxes of divine energy or the *élan vital* are practical necessities for the empirical investigator who hopes to make his scientific analyses and measurements credible. In his published, scientific work he avoided such "philosophical considerations" because he believed they were outside his scope. His personal beliefs, however, were a separate matter.¹⁶

Mailer's writings immediately after *The Deer Park* postulate a system of psychic energy like Jung's. We have seen that Mailer calls the potential for psychic processes "Potential Time"; Jung calls this potential "psychic force." We should keep in mind that Jung's theory of psychic energy is the foundation for his explanation of the emergence of archetypal patterns, which are the embodiments of that energy as *active* psychic processes. The actual, dynamic phenomena of the psyche that Mailer calls "Active Time," Jung calls "psychic energy." Art embodies these active phenomena as mythological motifs that are the record of the artist's psychic experiences in the act of creation. The hero archetype, which we have seen and

16. Carl Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, translated by R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 8 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 6–7, 17. The title of this essay is "On Psychic Energy." Future references are parenthetical. Victor White, in *God and the Unconscious*, considers the theological implications of Jung's theories of the psyche at length. Although Jung never reached a definite position on the transcendental and metaphysical validity of religious images, the absence of religion was for Jung the root of adult psychological disease. Jung carries empiricism, according to White, to the very frontiers of theology (pp. 68–71, 81). Compare Jung's extra-professional letters in White's Appendix. Jung was eminently aware of the religious, even personally religious, implications of his work. "Self" may be "the receptacle for divine grace," Jung says, even though it will never "take the place of God" (p. 258). See also Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, pp. 265, 267, 269, 273. The self, for Jung, is "transcendental" because it is ultimately "indescribable and incomprehensible."

will see again in Mailer's work, is for Jung the symbol of the movement of "libido" energy to the unconscious for nourishment. Jung calls this movement "regression" and argues that it is "one of the most important energetic phenomena of psychic life." "Libido" is "life energy" within the psyche; it is not merely sexual but takes a multitude of forms; it may be spiritual as well, for example (see "On Psychic Energy," pp. 15, 17, 23, 32, 36). When Mailer reveals what his hipsters and heroes find in their journeys to the unconscious, he alienates many readers. Jung would have expected nothing less.

What the regression brings to the surface certainly seems at first sight to be slime from the depths; but if one does not stop short at a superficial evaluation and refrains from passing judgment on the basis of a preconceived dogma, it will be found that this "slime" contains not merely incompatible and rejected remnants of everyday life, or inconvenient and objectionable animal tendencies, but also germs of new life and vital possibilities for the future. ("On Psychic Energy," p. 35)

The dialectic of forces Mailer discovers in the inner life is the basis of psychic energy itself for Jung, and it is what Jung means by the psychic conflict of "Nature" and "Spirit" (p. 52). By "Nature" Jung means all the polymorphous instinctual nature of primitive man alive in the unconscious. By "Spirit" he means the opposing principle or tendency, also alive in the unconscious, to unify and integrate those instincts. For Jung, the universal experience of God is the experience of this tension, the influence of the instincts and the opposing influence of the aspiration for their unification, which is "Spirit." So, though Jung is an "empiricist" examining religious experience as a psychic phenomenon, he is able to postulate that this dynamic interplay in the psyche is precisely what mankind has always felt and believed to be God. Jung admits that from the "spiritual standpoint," this psychic energy is divine energy, the God within.¹⁷ This "spiritual standpoint" is obviously the one from which Mailer speaks by 1959.

Jung also stresses, as does Mailer, that progress in life is made by

17. *Ibid.*, p. 55. Compare Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, pp. 257-58. "[T]o grasp the full value of the mythological figures that have come down to us, we must understand that they are not only symptoms of the unconscious . . . but also controlled and intended statements of certain spiritual principles, which have remained as constant throughout the course of human history as the form and nervous structure of the human physique itself. Briefly formulated, the universal doctrine teaches that all the visible structures of the world—all things and beings—are the effects of a ubiquitous power out of which they rise, which supports and fills them during the period of their manifestation, and back into which they must ultimately dissolve. This is the power known to science as energy; to the Melanesians as *mana*, . . . and the Christians as the power of God. Its manifestation in the psyche is termed, by the psychoanalysts, *libido*. And its manifestation in the cosmos is the structure and flux of the universe itself."

individual acts of expanded consciousness—that is to say “the development of individuality” and the “growth of personality”—through one’s return to what is essential in one’s being. Whether one views such a progression of life as cyclical or linear, the return is always to the instinctual and spiritual essences of the unconscious, which will necessarily include the urges toward increased sexuality, murder, rage, and defiance (see especially pp. 56–57).

Wherever the cultural process is moving forward, whether in single individuals or in groups, we find a shaking off of collective beliefs. Every advance in culture is, psychologically, an extension of consciousness, a coming to consciousness that can take place only through discrimination. Therefore an advance always begins with individuation, that is to say with the individual, conscious of his isolation, cutting a new path through hitherto untrodden territory. To do this he must first return to the fundamental facts of his own being, irrespective of all authority and tradition, and allow himself to become conscious of his distinctiveness. If he succeeds in giving collective validity to his widened consciousness, he creates a tension of opposites that provides the stimulation which culture needs for its further progress. (p. 59)

More explicitly than *Barbary Shore*, *The Deer Park* is ultimately a novel of attempted “regressions” to the sources of one’s being, a novel of the death of the old man and the birth of the new, and a novel of the transfer of spirit as the dynamic principle of life and as the power within to survive and defy the incursions of a fallen, deadening world. When Mailer produced *The Deer Park* as a play more than ten years after the novel was published, he rewrote the closing imaginary dialogue between Sergius and Eitel to emphasize this transfer even more. In the play, Eitel’s weariness kills him outright, and Sergius reflects over Eitel’s corpse: “the poor man went of that disease which goes by so many names.” Life itself had killed him, for the “law of life so cruel and so just” is that “we must grow or else pay more for remaining the same.” Sergius continues, “And as he died, his spirit passed on to me, for to pass on one’s spirit is the small gift we are allowed in Hell.”¹⁸

18. *The Deer Park: A Play* (New York: The Dial Press, 1967), p. 189.

4

An American Dream

What shocked and astounded us at Belsen and Buchenwald was less their shaming inhumanity, than their manifestation of stark, ruthless, primitive devilry. They were inexplicable merely in terms of cynical, utilitarian power-politics. There was no use, no reason, not even a bad reason, in keeping thousands of people just alive, when they could have been so easily slain or just left to die, merely for their torture and affliction. Could it be that gods and demons, heavens and hells, are ineradicable from the nooks and crannies of the human mind, and that if the human mind is deprived of its heaven above and its hell beneath, then it must make its heaven and corresponding hell on earth? —Victor White, *God and the Unconscious*

MEPHISTOPHELES: This lofty mystery I must now unfold.
Goddesses throned in solitude, sublime,
Set in no place, still less in any time,
At the mere thought of them my blood runs cold.
They are the Mothers!

.....
Goddesses, unknown to mortal mind,
And named indeed with dread among our kind.
To reach them you must plumb earth's deepest vault,
That we have need of them is your own fault.

—Goethe, *Faust*

An American Dream (1965) represents Mailer's boldest use of the allegorical mode. This boldness drew the sharpest negative criticism of any of Mailer's novels from those who read it as an attempt to portray realistically, in any ordinary sense, the hero's quest for energy and life. The negative criticism, in turn, led to a clear division in Mailer criticism, a division that clarifies the issues central to this study of Mailer's art and ideas. For it is after this novel was published in 1965 that several critics finally began to defend Mailer's work on the basis of criteria outside the realistic tradition. Richard Poirier, Leo Bersani, and John Aldridge were in the vanguard.¹ They stimulated other critics in the late sixties to examine Mailer in light of the

1. See, for example: Richard Poirier, "Morbid-Mindedness," *Commentary*, pp. 91–94; Leo Bersani, "Interpretation of Dreams," *Partisan Review*, pp. 603–8; John Aldridge, "The Energy of New Success," *Time to Murder and Create: The Contemporary Novel in Crisis*, pp. 149–63. All three articles are collected in Robert Lucid's *Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971). Bersani also appears in Leo Braudy's collection, *Norman Mailer: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

American Romance tradition. That is to say, critics began to compare Mailer with those American writers who adventured into extraordinary areas of moral consciousness and self-realization. Richard Foster and Michael Cowan best represent the effort to place Mailer in the tradition of Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson, Dickinson, Whitman, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner.²

The critical debate is important because it clarifies the peculiar difficulties of reading Mailer and emphasizes the need for a detailed assessment of what the narrative of *Dream* means. The debate also emphasizes the need for a clearer understanding of allegory. If, for example, one reads *Dream* as the negative critics have, one has to agree the novel is absurd. From the viewpoint of realism and the boundaries of understood consciousness, the novel is, as Elizabeth Hardwick charged, a collection of "vengeful murder, callous copulation and an assortment of dull cruelties," and Rojack's wife is a "poor unreal creature brought to rest in her own filth for reasons known only to the odor-and-anal-obsessed author." Like Gore Vidal, Hardwick believes Mailer's gifts lie in naturalistic technique and that to the extent Mailer deviates from such technique, he abuses his gifts and his readers. What little success Hardwick admits to *Dream*, she concludes must be merely unorganic, "brilliant diversions," such as the Shago Martin scene.³

While this novel is so easily made to seem ridiculous, however, as indeed novels of moral earnestness and absolute values can be by the merely literal eye, it can also be seen as a symbolic dream or allegory with an astonishing symbolic consistency that draws its power from mythological roots. The author guides us through stark, brutal, and intense experiences ranging from the horrible to the beatific. We are guided into the realities of the unconscious and the dream: sex, incest, masturbation, white and black magic, murder, love, creation, and painful acts of cowardice and courage. The novel is steeped in the violence and hallucinatory horror of the nightmare as much as in the visionary's dream of healing from disease and disorder.

As if to fuel the fires of negative criticism, Mailer engages his contemporaries on their own ground in this novel, much as he does in his television appearances. Mailer had mentioned in *Advertisements* that the writer must package himself for consumption like everything else in America today if he hopes even to be considered by

2. Richard Foster, "Mailer and the Fitzgerald Tradition," *Novel*, pp. 219-30, also in Brady's collection. Michael Cowan, "The Americanness of Norman Mailer," from an unpublished manuscript excerpted in Brady, pp. 143-57.

3. Elizabeth Hardwick, "Bad Boy," *Partisan Review*, pp. 291-94. Printed in Lucid as "A Nightmare by Norman Mailer." Gore Vidal, "The Norman Mailer Syndrome," *Nation*, pp. 13-16 (reprinted in Lucid). See also Tom Wolfe, "Son of Crime and Punishment," *Book Week*, pp. 1, 10, 12-13 (also reprinted in Lucid).

those he would reach. His allegory is cloaked in the conventions of the mystery and detective novel, the spy novel, and the supernatural tale. It appeals to our taste for exposés of international intrigue and of manipulation between the CIA and Mafia.

But just as this is a novel of something other than inflexible realism, it is also something more than a collection of bestseller tactics and superficial conventions. We might go so far as to read the novel as a rational allegory, and the commentary in *Cannibals* helps us to do this. But the symbolism of the novel is far too complex, shifting, and multivalent—as mythological symbolism is—to be read only as the iconography of a rational allegory. Something more is required still. Nothing could be clearer, from title to content, than that Mailer sees this novel as a journey into the unconscious. If Mailer views his responsibilities as a novelist to adventure into the unconscious and to replace the naturalistic novel and the novel of manners with the novel of intense experience and the dream, we should expect to find here, to the degree that this adventure is genuine, the recurring of complex symbols, situations, and trials that such adventurers have experienced throughout the recorded past.⁴ Until we view the novel in such a way as to include its visionary material, we shall continue to err on the side of superficiality.

Robert Solotaroff misunderstands the novel, for example, when he remarks that he cannot keep *Dream* in “consistent focus” because of its multiple tones and levels of reality. He suggests that we cannot view this novel as conventional allegory because the forces in the novel are more than symbols in a clear-cut dualism; they are forces that are supposed to have relevance to causes in our own world.⁵ This argument has merit if Solotaroff is really referring to “rational allegory” when he says “conventional allegory,” and if one believes clear-cut dualism excludes the ambiguities of true allegory. Solotaroff seems to recognize the complexities of allegory when he

4. At the beginning of *Cannibals and Christians* (hereafter cited as *CC*), it is clear that Mailer intends us to see his faith that the resources of the unconscious may be our salvation. Questioning “absurd” art also, Mailer posits the alternatives. Absurd art is either the “patina of waste,” part of the waste itself that will entertain us while we wait for apocalypse, or it has positive value, and we “are face to face with a desperate but most rational effort from the deepest resources of the unconscious of us all [that is, to say, collective] to rescue civilization from the pit and plague of its bedding, that swinish foul old bedding on which two centuries of imperialism, high finance, moral hypocrisy and horror have lain” (p. 2).

5. Robert Solotaroff, *Down Mailer's Way*, pp. 170–75. Unlike most of Mailer's sympathetic critics, Solotaroff is not particularly sympathetic to *An American Dream*; the whole chapter discussing the novel has about it the tone of tongue-in-cheek.

contrasts Dante to Mailer, and I agree Mailer is not Dante; nevertheless, we have to approach Mailer openly, by starting with a more flexible concept of allegory, if we would confront the complexities of *Dream*, and if we would understand where the novel succeeds and fails.

There are at least three levels of reality operating in *Dream*. First is the literal reality traditionally associated with realism—the detailed, conscious, and rational experience of such events as occur in the police-station episodes, in a series of telephone calls Rojack receives from the work-a-day world, in the autopsy scene, and, to some extent, in the Shago Martin episode. Behind this is the rational allegory, or that level of the narrative in which characters and events are directly translatable into the larger dualistic pattern of the novel as it portrays the battle between Life and Death. In this particular allegory the distinctions between Life and Death, at certain points, assume definite connotations of Good and Evil, often in the Christian sense of that dualism. Behind the rational allegory is the mythological level of the allegory in which images from the external world are used, in Piehler's words, to "shape a visionary world in which spiritual powers can be encountered and portrayed." These powers, one could call them psychic powers, are ever-shifting and ambiguous. At this level the writer's intuitive functions use "ancient and profound" images and symbols prior to their identification and control by rational functions. To discuss this novel in terms of such imagery, we will need the aid of those who have investigated the mythological patterns of world religions, literature, and art. This "reality" of *Dream* is intensely subjective, but as Carl Jung has argued, there is a point at which intensely subjective experience may become objective, or archetypal. We should recall also that true allegory functions on all levels simultaneously, not on separate levels exclusively. Just as in the midst of such enumerative or scientifically realistic scenes as those in the police station, Rojack receives a sign from God, which has numerous mythological antecedents. I will be concerned here with the second two levels of this novel; they predominate. Often both levels can and will be discussed together.

It will become obvious that there are many similarities between the heroic journey in *An American Dream* and the two previous novels. However, there are some important differences. The hero is middle-aged and has achieved, compared to the other heroes, a high level of success in the world. Rojack's tests are more extreme than those of the younger heroes, and, unlike Lovett and Sergius, Rojack must depend more upon the wisdom and courage he can find in himself than upon the wisdom and spirit passed on as a legacy from

the old guide. There is, however, still one embodiment of creative force: Cherry, in whom the hero finds sustenance and with whom he must keep in touch. And, again, there are tempters everywhere.

Rojack dips below the surface of consciousness and confronts the four principal figures of his dream—Deborah, Ruta, Cherry, and Kelly. I will lend order to this novel by examining it as four successive stages of the mythical Night Sea Journey to rebirth. Each stage is heralded by a principal figure in the dream. Each stage is composed of the hero's confrontation with that principal figure and the testing situations and minor figures that cluster around the main figure.

Once Rojack has introduced himself as war-hero, ex-congressman, professor of existential psychology, and television personality who has engaged in the politics and public relations necessary to "manufacture" himself, he tells us that (like Mailer's earlier heroes) he is dissatisfied by his actor's hollowness, that the success he has achieved is really failure, and that his private obsession with death has reached the point where he must confront it. The extreme, dreamlike experiences begin when his obsession leads him to face either suicide—that "pale light" and call of something lonely, dreamlike, and dreadful—or murder—that release of rage and hatred that promises renewed strength.⁶ Rojack is a hipster facing defeat or violence, but he is more. He must slay a Devouring Dragon before he can search for "love in another land." Deborah, his wife, is the dragon-guardian at the threshold to that other land. She is the "Great Bitch," the maimer and castrater, a figure mythical heroes have faced as long as their quests have been recorded. Once we see Deborah as a mythological figure in a visionary world, we will not be marooned on the literal issue of Mailer's sexist portrayal of women, as Kate Millet and Elizabeth Hardwick are. One could make a case against Mailer's sexism, but surely the least effective way of doing so would be to base it on a translation of mythic figures and allegorical agents into merely literal characters.

Rojack cannot separate himself from Deborah. Her hold is so great that she has forced him to confront his obsession with death by committing either suicide or murder. It is in facing suicide, that Rojack first sees the state of his own Being. He has lived his life and is dead with it, full of its rottenness (pp. 11–12). He misses the moment when he could have killed himself and returns to the nausea of his rotten existence, to the call of Deborah. By doing so, he takes a first step toward his rebirth without realizing it. Failing suicide, he returns to the sea. He feels at this point merely as if he has entered some indoor pool of steam and ultraviolet light.

6. *An American Dream* (hereafter cited as *AD*), pp. 8–9. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations are to works by Norman Mailer.

On the rational level, Deborah is the love of his "ego," the love of worldly power that has poisoned his inner life. Making love with Deborah, he tells us: "I always felt as if I had torn free some promise of my soul and paid it over in ransom." She has played a role in each personal loss. Returning to her now, he feels like an addict whose "substance" has fallen out of him returning for a fix. "Can you understand? I did not belong to myself any longer. Deborah had occupied my center" (pp. 27, 35).

When Rojack is most abject and fearful before her, she taunts him with the pleasures of her infidelities, and this taunting produces another vision of his dead self or Being. But it also kindles a fire in him, and impulsively he slaps her. This act makes Rojack feel a new power contrary to the feeling of Deborah's power within him, and when she charges him in turn, literally trying to castrate him, Rojack kills Deborah.

If Deborah were merely the egotistical infidel and the domineering wife who stifles her weak husband's chances of genuine success in the world, the murder would indeed be a ridiculous and gratuitous cruelty. But if in the rational allegory, Deborah represents one of the guardians of wealth and power as it functions in the world, she is something more still. Shago sums her up as Devourer: "I got a good look at her sitting with you in the front, eating me, man, I could feel the marrow oozing from my bones, *a cannibal*" (p. 190). Rojack describes her also as a queen with a "huge mass of black hair" and the "striking green eyes" of a serpent or dragon: "there was something so sly at the center of her, some snake, I used literally to conceive of a snake guarding the cave which opened to the treasure, the . . . filthy-lucre wealth of all the world." A "sullen poisonous fire, an oil on flame" goes out of Deborah to take Rojack in. She is also temptress and witch, her mouth shifting through many shapes, her voice "a masterwork of treachery." We later discover she is Kelly's incestuous witch, daughter in damnation, and rival for his satanic power in a network of international intrigue. Her powers are directed at the life in Rojack. "She had the power to lay a curse," and with this violent power, Deborah the huntress is as capable of murder as of curse. "But Deborah promised bad burial. One would go down in one's death, and muck would wash over the last of one's wind. She did not wish to tear the body, she was out to spoil the light . . . — that wide mouth, full-fleshed nose, and pointed green eyes, pointed as arrows — would be my first view of eternity."⁷

7. AD, pp. 19–20, 22, 26, 34. This motif of the huntress in touch with supernatural forces in the spiritual and animal world is another quality of the Terrible Mother (see AD, especially p. 35). Carl Jung makes this point in *Symbols of Transformation* (translated by R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 5 [New Jersey: Princeton Univer-

Carl Jung describes the “Great Bitch” Devouress as a fundamental symbol in the transformations of mythical heroes. Jung describes the Night Sea Journey as a return to, in Goethe’s words, the “Realm of the Mothers”; that is, to the unconscious. For Jung, the devouring fish or whale and beast or dragon, the Helpful and Terrible Mothers, the Holy City and the Damned City, like the sea itself, are symbols depicting the dual aspects of the unconscious: the renewing and the devouring. Like the sea, the unconscious is the Primordial Mother, to which the hero periodically returns for nourishment and transformation. But rebirth is not guaranteed. The way is beset with danger and trial. As Joseph Campbell, in his own study of this journey, says: “the crossing of the threshold is the first step into the sacred zone of the universal source.” The demons, temptresses, and witches the hero encounters are at once dangers and bestowers of power.⁸ The first of these is the Terrible Mother, the whale, dragon, or beast who personifies devouring death.

For Jung the devouring figure represents the awesome demands of the unconscious, demands that can paralyze or enslave the hero and drain him of energy and resourcefulness like a hostile demon. She is his first view of the mysterious and awful unconscious that must be joined to the light of consciousness if rebirth is to follow, if consciousness is to be recharged with her energy. The battle against paralysis and absorption calls forth the hero’s creative powers. The assault on the Mother becomes the source of future energy in the heroic conflict; the hero battles to gain his life, and if he succeeds, he descends to confront other figures of horror and regeneration. Here, in the deeper journey, the positive aspect of the Mother resides—the beloved, the divine child, the heavenly bride, the Nourishing Mother who is the unconscious source of life.⁹

sity Press, 1956]), pp. 369–70, identifying the huntress with Hecate and Artemis. “She is the mother of witchcraft and witches, the patron goddess of Medea, because the power of the Terrible Mother is irresistible, coming as it does from the unconscious.” Jung also identifies this figure as the madness or “moonsickness” who sends invasions by the unconscious into consciousness. Mailer makes it clear that Deborah is “in touch with the moon” and aware of the moonsickness Rojack faced in facing his suicide and rotten Being alone (*AD*, see especially pp. 22, 26).

8. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, pp. 81, 83. Campbell also notes the two aspects of the woman—the symbol of all that is Life and of all that is abominable, or Death.

9. In the last two paragraphs, I am condensing Jung’s long and thoroughly documented discussion of principles found in countless myths in “The Origin of the Hero,” “Symbols of the Mother and of Rebirth,” “The Battle for Deliverance from the Mother,” and “The Dual Mother,” in *Symbols*, pp. 198, 235, 242, 245, 248, 272, 292–93, 300–301, 314, 337, and 357.

Jung adds: “The teleological significance of the hero [is] as a symbolic figure who attracts libido [psychic energy] to himself . . . in order to lead it over the symbolic bridge of myth to higher uses” (p. 314). “Every obstacle that arises in his path and hampers his ascent wears the shadowy features of the Terrible Mother . . . and in

Deborah's ambiguities arise not only from the various levels of the narrative, but from the nature of the unconscious itself. She represents the evil in Rojack too. He tells us on the opening pages of the novel that he had seen Deborah first as an heiress, as a vehicle to the kind of power he will fight to transcend for the rest of the novel. The snake rustled in his own heart. We will see that each mythological figure gives Rojack and the reader a glimpse of his or her other nature, which, taken as the contents of a dream, or of the unconscious, is the dualistic nature of Rojack's unconscious as he journeys through it. It is an intensely subjective experience because it is Rojack's unconscious self that gives meaning and value to experiences, figures, omens, odors, and totems. Rojack's dream is, as much as anything, a dream of the self's struggle with the capacities for Life and Death within. Or, as Mailer phrases it in *The Presidential Papers*: "One has to keep coming back to one notion: How do you make life? How do you *not* make life" (p. 139). One difficulty of the novel is that of true allegory. We see clear divisions of light and dark forces on the rational level, but as archetypal figures, the representatives of these forces reveal an unsettling quality of mixed good and evil; that is, the unsettling quality of the self. The balance of good or evil for each figure in this novel is simply weighted on one side or the other as it represents potential snares or balms for the dreamer.

A further complication is that Rojack gains and uses two kinds of power to free himself from the death within. On one hand, each victory, beginning with victory over Deborah, gives Rojack the strength and calm of grace, the sense of passing from night to a morning of new life. Rojack describes the murder as a catharsis of hate and illness and as a floating into himself. This first infusion of grace brings a vision of a landscape of "oriental splendor" and of a heavenly city. Twice the scene that climaxes with the murder is described as a gathering of fire (pp. 29, 31). These are symbols promising regeneration.¹⁰

On the other hand, Deborah has led Rojack to his faith in black

every conquest he wins back again the smiling, loving and life-giving mother" (p. 390).

Campbell also sees the Night Sea Journey as a descent into psyche (*Hero*, p. 321). The central "monomyth" Campbell's book explores is the journey into the unconscious, the discovery of the deepest self. The hero as "life adventurer" makes a rite of rebirth that Campbell sees as the greatest overall pattern in mythology. The function of rite, myth, and dream is to carry the life energy across the "difficult thresholds of transformation" and change the "patterns of consciousness and unconscious life" (pp. 8, 10).

10. Fire is the archetypal sign of the hero. It expresses the grace or force within him of the sun, the visible God, itself. This is the universal source of life in mythology. The fire in the hero is the creative power of his soul, which Jung argues is the "libido" or life energy. The sun-hero's task is to canalize this energy for

magic, in witches, and in the Devil. The transformation of perception Rojack undergoes in this novel, which the reader experiences as Rojack's intense sensual and psychic awareness and associations, literally begins with Deborah too. Rojack had long ago, he tells us, cast off that world view of the positivist, the technocrat, and the liberal who believe in "the *New York Times*: Experts Divided on Fluoridation, Diplomat Attacks Council Text, Self-Rule Near for Bantu Province, Chancellor Outlines Purpose of Talks, New Drive for Health Care for Aged." He now swims in "the well of Deborah's intuitions" (p. 36). Part of this magic is the force Rojack gains from those he defeats. From Deborah's murder he gains the violence and black magic that will help him wage psychic battle against such Mafia types as Tony: "We avoided each other's eye and stood there side by side in a contest: his presence against my presence, two sea creatures buried deep in the ocean silt of a grotto, exuding the repellent communications of sea creatures. . . . So I called on Deborah" (pp. 116–17).

In *Cannibals and Christians* Mailer argues that messages from the unconscious, the "well of intuitions," the source of associative consciousness, can transform one's perception. In a second dialogue with himself, entitled "The Metaphysics of the Belly," Mailer argues that perception is both physiological and psychic. Psychic perceptions arise from the unconscious as it urges itself forward into consciousness and the external world (pp. 263–65). Rojack's deepest resources of perception emerge after he slays his wife. His intensified perceptions are essential to the first stage of Rojack's regeneration. His strange calm and sense of renewed life make him aware, with a hallucinatory intensity, of the life in his body, hair, and eyes. He sees molecules living and dying around him. His eyes seem, like those of the last German he killed in the war, to go all the way back to God. He does not know whether his delicate state is more good than evil, but he is quickly captured by some dark, primitive force, some touch that pushes him to descend to Ruta, to the door of a jungle rather than a celestial city: "I could have been in a magnetic field. . . . One kiss of flesh, one whiff of sweet was loose, sending life to the charnel house of my balls. Something fierce for pleasure was loose . . . I was near a swamp where butterflies and tropical birds went fanning up" (pp. 37–41). Ruta's intrigues, like Hollingsworth's, have an onanistic taint. Rojack catches her masturbating—"off in that bower of the libido where she was queen," her fingers

regeneration. In myth, the depiction of fire-making represents the killing of the dark state of the union with the Terrible Mother. See Jung, *Symbols*, pp. 121, 149, 170, 212. Compare Campbell on this same point in *Hero*, pp. 42, 69–71, 131–33, 146.

working "like maggots"—as a consequence of her spying on Deborah and Rojack. Ruta had mistaken their fight for lovemaking.

Under the force that has sent him to Ruta, Rojack is as near to murdering her as to copulating with her. He battles her sexually for her powers. A mixture of hatred, anger, and lust gird him for the battle. He wins the Devil's gifts and treasures, which ride from her through him. The "Devil's kitchen," Ruta's anus, calls him, and his sodomy is a "theft" of satanic gifts. During his thievery, he is tempted to enter her vagina—"which, I could remind you, leads to creation"—but his excursions to the "tomb" of Ruta's vagina have not an adequate power. If he begins to enliven Ruta's womb briefly, even to make it into a modest "chapel," he still returns to the roar of the Devil's kitchen at the crisis. To Rojack's newly found perceptions, Ruta's womb had not "the glory and hot jungle wings" to keep him, her anus had the dangerous qualities and forces that he needed to confront other forces of defeat and pass other trials: "mendacity, guile, fine-edged cupidity, the wit to trick authority." "You know, at the end, you stole something from me," Ruta says. It will be the hero's test that he can channel the power of Ruta's gifts to succeed in later acts of renewal and, finally, to return to the Lord.

But as yet Rojack is unsure of his ability to use such gifts from Ruta's body, which are "now alive inside" him. Oppression gathers like a heavy force in the room, and he wonders if his seed "expiring" in Ruta's kitchen will be a curse rather than a power bestowed on him. Yet he conquers his doubts and fantasies and channels their power when a messenger from his unconscious slips "into the tower" of consciousness and tells him to use the new power for defiant confrontation. He returns to Ruta for another, if brief, rapacious sexual encounter. "I felt as fine and evil as a razor and just as content with myself. There was something further in her I'd needed, some bitter perfect salt" (p. 56). With this evil force and salt, Rojack strikes out into the street to face Deborah's corpse and to defy the police. Jung suggests that during the heroic struggle, the destructive aspect of the gods manifests itself as violent power, and it is with violence, "the violence of all unconscious dynamism," that the violence of these gods must be overcome (*Symbols*, p. 338).

When Rojack surmounts the test of Ruta, he completes the separation from the Devouress necessary for further descent, for Ruta is another aspect of Deborah, the bearer of Deborah's "gifts." Both are described as "witches" and "queens"; both are mistresses to Kelly, challenging him for power. Like Deborah, Ruta is a damned being whose little glimmer of life, or lost potential, cannot overcome the evil that imprisons it. And in a prevailing metaphor of both *Cannibals* and *Dream*, both women have a penchant for anal sex, which

associates them with death. Scatological metaphors are becoming increasingly important at this point in Mailer's work. The scatological obsessions of some of his characters are based on the theories Mailer articulates in "The Metaphysics of the Belly" about the close relationship of one's being to one's deepest cellular functions. Persons or societies may be obsessed with scatology, Mailer argues, because the material of scatology contains some message from the unconscious that reveals a person's or society's disproportions or state of being. Mailer incorporates his theory in *An American Dream* that by airing one's obsessions, by confronting the messages of disease and waste, and by engaging death, perversion, and fear, one may help a disproportionate or stifled self to become a balanced self growing toward Life (see *CC*, pp. 274–86). Such messages of the unconscious are constantly urging themselves into consciousness in *Dream*. Rojack's rebirth depends upon a return to primitive states of consciousness in which the metaphorical connections between waste and being, for example, become real to Rojack. There is a clear similarity here between Mailer's assumption and the theory of the total self as a functional balance between body and psyche that Carl Jung develops in his introduction to *Aion*. And the similarity is even clearer when a post-Jungian, Erich Neumann, investigates the relationship between body and psyche further. Neumann points out that a sense of the functional relationship between the two is indeed a primitive, fundamental state of awareness or consciousness, as Mailer believes it is. In the primitive version of the body-psyche relationship, all parts and products of the body have significance because they are all products of the functioning of mana or soul-power in the self and between the self and the external world (for example, in food).¹¹

At this point in the narrative of *Dream*, Rojack has separated himself from the Terrible Mother through Deborah's murder, which revealed the Celestial City, and through acquirement of Her gifts during the scatological encounter with Ruta, which revealed the Damned City. "I had a vision immediately after of a huge city in the 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." (p. 46). As Jung points out in his discussion of the role of the "dream city" in "Symbols of the Mother and of Rebirth," the maternal city harbors her inhabitants like children. Jerusalem and Babylon of the Old Testament are archetypal examples. The hero typically longs for the heavenly Jerusalem as he longs to be united with "the woman hard to attain." But the cursed city of Babylon is

11. Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, pp. 25–27, 288, 290–91.

"the mother of all abominations" and the "receptacle of all that is wicked and unclean," with whom "the kings of the earth" have fornicated. This image of the Terrible Mother (the Whore of Babylon) likewise threatens engulfment, the absorption of the grace of life, and damnation. At her center is the evil of unnatural fornication, of incest chiefly. By contrast, the city of healing, like the woman, is a river of life, described in images of beauty. Like the Heavenly Bride, this city represents a body of renewable life where "everything that incest would have made impossible now becomes possible" (*Symbols*, pp. 207-19).

In his own analysis of the Celestial City, Edwin Honig describes it as typically part of the allegorical "dream artifice." If the hero's goal promises to be attainable, the guiding intelligence may reveal a vision of paradise regained, the Celestial City. Even though the cosmic hierarchy of preromantic literature has dissipated, the ideal the modern allegorical hero seeks is, in Honig's words, some "good to which men need to be converted" or some "implied norm from which they have strayed." The ideal "gauges the spiritual or psychological distance that men have fallen," a distance the hero must cover in his quest and reveal to others. What the hero encounters in his quest tests the heroic stature of his consciousness and establishes a new mode of perception or a new pattern of consciousness for others to follow. The vision of the Heavenly City tells the hero his mission is nothing short of redemption in a world of sterility and defeat.¹² These are the symbols of life in the Night Sea Journey. It is toward this city and this bride that Rojack must now journey for rebirth.

The Heavenly Bride toward which Rojack moves in the third stage of his quest must not only be earned but also transformed along with the hero. Rojack's confrontation with the police leads to Cherry. Relying on what power and knowledge he has accrued, Rojack defies the police as Sergius defied the FBI. But Rojack is pushed to such physical and psychological extremity during the police interrogation that he begins to feel intimations of his coming transformation if he can hold out:

I felt just as some creature locked by fear to the border between earth and water (its grip the accumulated experience of a thousand generations) might feel on that second when its claw took hold, its body climbed up from the sea, and its impulse took a leap over the edge of mutation so that now and at last it was something new. . . . I felt as if I had crossed a chasm of time and was some new breed of man. (pp. 80-81)

A mixture of luck and destiny saves Rojack from defeat. After

12. See Edwin Honig, *Dark Conceit*, pp. 82, 152-53.

Lieutenant Leznicki has left him alone, he is finally too exhausted to call across the room and confess. And his prayer, "Oh, God, give me a sign," is answered by his sudden perception of Cherry's blonde hair across the room. "I felt a force in my body steering away from that back room, and a voice inside me said, 'Go to the girl'. . . . She looked a little like a child who has been anointed by the wing of a magical bird" (p. 89).

This "sign" is enough to make Rojack sustain his defiance and pursue a new level of his adventure: "I was like a wrecked mariner in the lull between two storms. Rather I was close to a strong old man dying now of his overwork, passing into death by way of going deeper to himself" (pp. 94-95). As Rojack goes deeper, Cherry becomes less a sign and more a source. The potential she represents must also be earned. She too is ambiguous, exhibiting the dual nature of the Mother figure. At first sight, Cherry appears to Rojack as at once a stereotype and "something better." Though she has the many empty masks of other actresses and singers, Cherry's touch has about it a "subtle hard-headed ever-so-guarded maternity." Rojack feels at times a balm in her voice. He feels in her "not one presence . . . but two," which at one point he identifies through a combination of tastes in her kiss, a health and "simplicity" mixed with "something compromised, inert, full of gas, something powerful and dull as her friends," which he calls her "taint" (see pp. 108-9). Cherry laughs "as if a silver witch and a black witch were beating their wings at one another," and she describes herself as both angel and whore. Her time with Kelly brought out the whore and "crazy killer" in her (pp. 114, 173). She represents the potential that can go either way; she is a "being" whose growth depends on Rojack's.

In Chapter 4 Rojack begins his attempt to understand and nourish this "sign" from God. In the bar where she sings, he turns his new power upon Cherry in order to protect and cleanse her.

I shot one needle of an arrow into the center of Cherry's womb. . . . a sickness came off her, something broken and dead from the liver, stale, used-up, it drifted in a pestilence of mood toward my table, sickened me as it settled in. And there was a touch of regret in that exhalation from her, as if she had been saving such illness in the hope she might inflict it on no one, that her pride would be to keep her own ills to herself, rather than pass them on. (p. 100)

In the men's room, Rojack vomits, "as humble as a saint," the disease he has taken from Cherry upon himself. He describes this as a catharsis of the ills accumulated upon his soul for the past twenty years and as a "gathering wind which drew sickness . . . from others and passed them through me and up and out into the water." He

knows he is drawing poison from Cherry when he hears her song "soaring like a golden bird free at last." Rojack's "minor" sainthood at this stage promises to grow into the sainthood of the hero-deliverer or scapegoat, "free at last to absorb the ills of others and regurgitate them forth." He finds peace and respite from "nausea," and, again, in the mirror his face and eyes partake of the new life of the "sea." But he knows that he has not completed his journey and that "insanity" is yet to be healer or destroyer; so he returns to the test (pp. 100–102). Rojack tests his courage and new psychic powers against the ex-prize fighter Romeo and the mafioso Tony to win Cherry from them. With each of Rojack's successes, Cherry draws closer and closer to him. He says she seems to be "using" him to free herself from the death that traps her. As a mythological figure, she is using the hero to transform her into the Nourishing Mother. She in turn defies Tony and the nightclub audience, mocking their fear "to go out and look at the sun," and, ironically, she sings to them her hope of deliverance: "Every day with Jesus/Is sweeter than the day before." Rojack's physical and psychic battles are both metaphors for battles between larger forces. The theoretical basis for this equation of physical tests with spiritual tests is explained in the dialogues from *Cannibals* entitled "The Metaphysics of the Belly" and "The Political Economy of Time," in which Mailer posits what he admits are tentative but sincere theories about the nature of and connections between Body and Soul. These dialogues, therefore, help us to see what Mailer believes to be the connections between the struggles of both Body and Soul in the world. Body is the vehicle of the Soul's progress in the world; we could call Body the present moment or embodiment of Soul. A "being" is a Body-and-Soul that has the potential to change and grow, both physically and morally (spiritually).

Mailer's theory of Body and Soul is important to our understanding of Rojack's quest because he is, at least potentially, an allegorical agent of divine force. For Rojack, as for Mailer, self-realization becomes Soul-realization, or Soul-growth. If Rojack's and Cherry's bodies are temporary "enlifements" of Soul, then these enlifements alter Soul (the divine force within) for better or worse, toward growth or death. Existence, in Mailer's belief, alters essence.

To Mailer, it is the Soul's instinct, once embodied, to grow beyond chaos, beyond absurdity, toward what he calls "Vision," by which he means God's mind and conception of Existence. What Mailer means by "new" or "greater proportions" of the self is this growth of Soul-in-enliferment toward God. A person's body and life may encourage such growth if that person chooses to keep in touch with the deepest requirements of his unconscious self, for ultimately in "The

Political Economy of Time," Mailer defines the Soul as the Unconscious. By a return to one's deepest instinctual life, which is precisely the journey Rojack is gradually making, a man would choose, as Rojack will choose, actions that will test the proportions of his Body and Soul. It is Mailer's basic conviction that actions which increase one's commitment to a feeling or an idea, which increase danger, which defy chaos, stasis, or death, test one's capacity to create life instead of death and prepare one's soul for growth toward God (see *CC*, pp. 287-97, 329, 342).

The union between Rojack and Cherry is a crucial test of Rojack's ability to defy chaos and stasis, to create life rather than make death: "when I was in bed with a woman, I rarely felt as if I were making life, but rather as if I were a pirate sharpening up a raid on life. . . . I had dread of the judgment which must rest behind the womb of a woman" (p. 119). The second "day" of the Night Sea Journey, then, begins with Chapter 5. It is a test of the hero more severe, closer to the edge of the abyss, than those which preceded it. And echoes of Ruta and Deborah remain. Rojack's and Cherry's first touch is merely sensual; they meet "like animals in a quiet mood, come across a track of the jungle to join in a clearing." Their "devotions" are first paid in a "church" no larger than themselves; their sex is a clash of wills. They pass the deadness within them back and forth like stale odors that "have nothing to do" with the part of them still alive.

But when they turn to sex as creation—metaphorically, when Rojack removes Cherry's diaphragm—their wills meet and "soften into some light. . . . like colored lanterns beneath the sea, a glimpse of that quiver of jeweled arrows, that heavenly city which had appeared as Deborah was expiring." They are prepared for love. "It was as if," Rojack tells us, "my voice had reached to its roots; and, 'Yes,' I said, 'of course I do, I want love'":

and some continent of dread speared wide in me, rising like a dragon, as if I knew the choice were real, and in the lift of terror I opened my eyes and her face was beautiful beneath me in that rainy morning, her eyes were golden with light, and she said, "Ah, honey, sure," and I said sure to the voice in me, and felt love fly in like some great winged bird, some beating of wings at my back, and felt her will dissolve into tears, and some great deep sorrow like roses drowned in the salt of the sea came flooding from her womb and washed into me like a sweet honey of balm for all the bitter sores of my soul. (p. 128)

This section of the novel repeatedly draws us to the words "dread," "choice," "sea," and "womb." Here Rojack faces the dread of the choice between death and life. That continent of dread is like a dragon, like the devouring Deborah, always threatening to rise again. Rojack again looks death in the face and must find the

courage to choose. The womb of woman will judge him as he chooses death again or chooses the renewal of the "sea" in Cherry's womb in his act of love. The revelation of life, as he chooses it here, is again a brief washing out or catharsis of the death and nausea within. This is a brief revelation of the potential within each of them. The simple message of the moment of revelation, as Rojack awakens and comes up "like a diver" through successive levels of the sea, is that "everything was all right inside the room. Outside everything was wrong." Cherry's "special place," her slum tenement, becomes a center of healing surrounded by filth and disease. Their journey to the center of healing intensifies the contrast between what they find there and the outside world, the civilization rational consciousness has built. For the first time, Rojack faces the central fact of his new relationship to that world. He is a murderer and there is "ambush everywhere" (pp. 129, 131). The "pact" that Rojack and Cherry make is to be "good," which is to say to be strong and courageous, as courageous as Rojack was in choosing love by facing the Dragon of Death and his dread of Her. Rojack must now surmount the temptations of Ruta and the crutch of drink after he leaves Cherry's apartment. As he withstands these temptations for a time, he feels "back with the living" (p. 133). But the return to the "living" is precarious, ever to be renewed, for without the "courage" to win such a return, there can be no pact of love. *Dream* focuses more and more on this theme: acts of courage are acts of Being; love is the reward one is made capable of recovering by acts of courage.

The tests Rojack has yet to face require more acts of courage. Those forces he has tapped deep within himself threaten to overwhelm him. Such forces stimulate the dread he feels of psychosis "stretching behind" him. Rojack is facing dread in the way Mailer believes the primitive mind faced dread, for primitive dread arises from the belief that "one was caught in a dialogue with gods, devils, and spirits, and so was naturally consumed with awe, shame, and terror." And that terror is heightened by one's sense not only of impending death, but of dying "badly," of losing one's soul.¹³

The dread and trials Rojack must now face, he faces for Cherry as well, for their "pact," for what Jung has called "the stern Mistress Soul" who sets tests of preparedness before the would-be regenerate. Part of Rojack's pact is that he will have to face and "air" the worst in himself, to face, that is, his own guilt in the disease all

13. *The Presidential Papers* (hereafter cited as *PP*), p. 151. Compare with Neumann's discussion of primitive dread in *Consciousness*, pp. 40-41. The primitive mind facing the dread of the "dynamic" and "animistic" world represents the attempt of consciousness to overcome its fear, to continue to grow, and to bring the unconscious into greater balance with and within control of consciousness.

around him (*AD*, p. 162). His trials do include new onslaughts from the rational world depicted by a series of phone calls from his television and university employers who are threatened by public opinion. Detective Roberts again deploys the “evidence” and forces of the police against Rojack, which nearly make him crack. Again, Rojack is saved by luck, or, better, by destiny, when high-level powers (Barney Oswald Kelly) doctor the “official medical report.” But when Rojack accepts Kelly’s invitation to visit, he faces not the erosions of the fact-seeking world, but the ultimate test of his ability to face the “Mystery” itself. The mystery is the mystery at the heart of the disease — the plague and cancer of his time. The mystery has something to do with nature of mankind’s Faustian (read “rational”) efforts to gain the powers or fires of the Gods.¹⁴ The mere idea of this confrontation fills Rojack with a dread as deep as “any invasion of the supernatural” to primitive man.

Rojack’s “contract” with Cherry will not permit him to “flee the mystery.” As his meeting with Kelly approaches, his fear grows in proportion to his expanding perceptions that the plague or sickness “revolved about me now,” bringing with it a dread that washes over him like waves smashing through pilings on the shore (pp. 161–62). He returns to Cherry for strength and they renew the pact they made that morning, which renews Rojack’s sense of the “new life . . . sweet and perilous and so hard to follow.” Again the sea washes into Rojack like balm and “those wings” of love return. And again he realizes that love is to be earned by acts of goodness and bravery; love is not a “gift,” like Ruta’s gifts from the Devil, “but a vow” (pp. 163–64). Rojack’s union with Cherry is his contract with the life within himself, the renewal of which he has had to earn every step of the way. He continually associates Cherry with birds, her love with wings. The bird, especially the golden-winged bird, is the mythological counterpart of the fire of life energy. The bird is the image of the soul, the spiritual messenger to the hero, and the harbinger of the resurrection of life energy.¹⁵

So the meaning of Cherry in the novel has three dimensions, which are also clear as she and Rojack discuss their pasts in Chapter 6. Here Rojack and Cherry carry on a dialogue, much to the annoyance of many critics, in the language of “The Political Economy

14. Compare “Professor” Rojack’s lecture in *Dream*: “To the savage, dread was the natural result of any invasion of the supernatural: if man wished to steal the secrets of the gods, it was only to be supposed that the gods would defend themselves and destroy whichever man came too close. By this logic, civilization is the successful if imperfect theft of some cluster of these secrets, and the price we have paid is to accelerate our private sense of some enormous if not quite definable disaster which awaits us” (*AD*, p. 159). Compare Jung, *Symbols*, p. 170.

15. See Jung, *Symbols*, pp. 159, 170, 185, 215–19, 289, and 348.

of Time." They express their fear that their own souls are dying, that they have not escaped the entrapments of the Devil, by which Mailer means Anti-Soul or Soul-Defeater. The world, or civilization as mankind has evolved it, is for Mailer the Fall itself, the field in which Devil attempts to frustrate Soul or channel Soul-Energy to his own designs (see *CC*, pp. 329, 334). But Rojack and Cherry find hope (the hope of Soul renewal) in the "wings" of love and in Cherry's feeling that she is pregnant, has had her first orgasm, and is approaching biological death. This would be ridiculous and crass enough if the novel were functioning on the literal level alone, but Cherry is a figure in the hero's destiny and is a mythic figure alive in his "dream." As we have seen, orgasm represents for Mailer the movement of unconscious, instinctual energy (Soul) in the human being, Cherry's orgasmic release, which we might call her "mythic destiny," represents the passing of the powers of the unconscious "sea" over to the hero, the integration of those powers into himself. As both real and mythic figures, man and woman have reached their greatest rapport and trust. They establish a "mood" that opens new unconscious perceptions. The "objects in the room" stand "like sentinels possessing some primitive property of radio."

It is this "mood" between Rojack and Cherry that Shago Martin interrupts. He is the herald of Rojack's final test; we could say he insures the test will be necessary. Shago is a defeated Soul and a double for Rojack who shows the hero the possibilities of defeat. Shago had come out of one of the worst gangs in Harlem to search for greater proportions for himself. Cherry had sought "something about him independent, something very fine." But instead of turning these qualities against the "society shit" that tried to mold him, he struggled and capitulated. His victory was small, but his defeats many. As the episode develops, Shago enumerates his defeats. He is not the heroic figure, "bearing his defeat with honor and pride," that Stanley T. Gutman suggests he is.¹⁶

Shago tries to put up a strong front, but admits, finally, the illness is upon him: "I'm a sick devil, no doubt of that." Like a defeated war veteran, Shago recalls his moment of strength when he spit in the face of the "Devil," Deborah. He tries to convince himself that he surmounted Deborah's temptations: "all that White House jazz, mow my grass, blackball," and the high governmental and Mafia connections. But he is without a self, marked now by the evil of protean masks and "tongues." His "big beat" now "comes from up High," from the powers of the "society" he pretends to mock: "it don't come from me, I'm a lily-white devil in a black ass. I'm just the

16. Stanley T. Gutman, *Mankind in Barbary*, p. 117.

future, in love with myself, that's the future. I got twenty faces, I talk the tongues. . . . I'm cut off from my own lines, I try to speak from my heart and it gets *snatched*" (p. 189).

Shago failed at love with Cherry. "We didn't make it. I could cry." This failure gives further definition to Rojack's earlier danger. To save face now, Shago argues that he is turning his devil's tongues against the Devil, but both Rojack and Cherry see through the ploy. "You're just an old dynamo out on the moon," says Cherry. Rojack says the same thing when he tells Shago: "Now *you're* on a television show." Shago is receding into the death Rojack is moving beyond. "I saw something in his eyes as the marijuana took hold," Rojack says of Shago when the black man realizes Cherry has "made it" with Rojack, "he had not been ready for this. He had the expression of a big fish just speared . . . something in the past had just been maimed forever" (pp. 190–91).

Rojack not only learns something about the possibilities of defeat in facing Shago, he gains a strength and violence in defeating the black singer. But by taking Shago from behind, Rojack also loses some part of what he has already gained—courage and love. "I had the choice to let him go, let him stand up, we would fight, but I had a fear of what I heard in his voice—it was like that wail from the end of the earth you hear in a baby's voice. . . . I was out of control, violence seemed to shake itself free from him . . . and shake itself into me" (pp. 192–93).

The manner of this victory contains a loss: "my body was like a cavern where deaths are stored [spirit]. Deborah's lone green eye stared up at me." Now Cherry's skin, like Shago's, goes dead to the touch; Rojack returns to whiskey for courage; Cherry compares Rojack's "victory" to the Mafia. A new falseness arises between them. So Rojack must renew his journey and regain this "child touched by an angel." He goes to his final test and the farthest point of his journey with two legacies: the gain of Shago's lost violence and strength, totemically symbolized by Shago's serpentlike umbrella,⁴ and the reaffirmation from Cherry that their love must be won anew through courage, that they may turn again to God if they can somehow "turn out well" (pp. 195–97).

In setting out on this final, fourth, stage of his heroic quest, Rojack realizes that "God is not love but courage. Love came only as a reward." At this point, Mailer is defining the failure of love in a deadening world, which he began in *Barbary Shore*, as the failure of the self to define its existence. If Rojack chooses to face some final test, it is destiny that chooses what that test will be. He cannot choose between facing Shago again and Harlem or facing Kelly. He

deliberates so long that the taxi drives him to the address he first gave, Kelly's Waldorf Towers.

There is no ambiguity, finally, about the kind of power Kelly represents, but there is some ambiguity about the magnitude of Kelly's power. Rojack approaches Kelly as if he were the Devil himself. The description of the Towers as the "ante-chamber of Hell" is too obvious to need repetition here. Rojack's psychic perceptions are so acute now that he tells us he has entered "an architecture to eternity which housed us as we dreamed." And Kelly is surrounded by subservient figures notorious for their evil—Ganucci who is "an essence of disease, some moldering from the tree of death"; Bess, who is the most evil woman in Europe; and Ruta, whose hair is now a "soft lick of flame" and "rich clay."

But when Kelly confesses his history to Rojack, it becomes clear that Kelly is not the Devil, the Plague, the Mystery itself, but rather its greatest possible incarnation in this world. By raising our expectations that Kelly is "the Big Guy" himself, and by making him a kind of phenomenal epitome of satanic power, Mailer simply embodies its destructive force and demonstrates the huge, inexplicable proportions of the Mystery against which the Soul must struggle. Kelly's motto, *Victoria in Caelo Terraque*, is especially apt, "Victory on Heaven and Earth." In the rational allegory, Kelly is another damned being, possessed by some greater power that he struggled to possess himself. He is "solicitor for the Devil," as he says, the Devil in microcosm. This is not to say Rojack does not, on the psychological or mythological level, face the heart of darkness within himself and in the world, for he clearly does, so far as it can be portrayed. Knowing the face of the enemy, Mailer has said in both *Papers* and *Cannibals*, might give death "dimension" and might allow us to "leave a curse" (CC, p. 41). Kelly is one effort to depict the face of the enemy, to suggest the kind of power it is, to suggest what kind of power can be employed against it. Kelly is not the courageous hero Gutman would have him; he is the supreme Mailer anti-hero; the Anti-Soul who cowers before the demands of his own soul and defeats the soul of others. Kelly is that darkness, that ultimate devouring power of evil Deborah threatened to be.¹⁷ Kelly's "presence," says Rojack, was "more real to me as an embodiment of Deborah than of himself"; it "was all of Deborah for me" (p. 217).

Rojack is sorely tempted by Kelly's seductiveness. Or, as Kelly puts it, "We're closer than you expect." But Rojack still has the power to

17. Contrast Gutman, *Barbary*, pp. 120, 122, 126. Compare Jung, *Symbols*, p. 338, on the Devil as devourer. He is another face, perhaps the ultimate face, of the Devouring Mother.

associate that seductiveness with the emptiness in himself, and he rejects it (see especially p. 217). To stave off capitulation, which would make Rojack himself embody evil, he performs a ritual of purification, which has an appropriate psychological and symbolic significance. The compulsive rite is a metaphorical test of Rojack's courage and a preparation for his passage, beyond the evil that binds Kelly, into freedom. When Kelly compulsively confesses the long and detailed story of his fall, or his own evil, it is clear that the power he sought and gained is the power to manipulate the processes of human life, of civilization, and of nature to slake his own greed, a power that by its nature denies the enlargement of souls on their journey toward Vision.

For example, to gain the power of Sicilian connections, Kelly damned his own child at her conception. "I took a dive deep down into a vow, I said in my mind; [*sic*] 'Satan, if it takes your pitchfork up my gut, let me blast a child into this bitch.' And something happened . . . Leonora and I met way down there in some bog, some place awful, and I felt something take hold in her. . . . Deborah was conceived" (p. 240). Though Kelly tried to renege on his vow, the Devil "collected" by giving him Bess, witch of the Riviera, who ended up stealing every last part of Kelly's soul and leaving him "carrion." But he gained, at every stage of his fall, immense manipulatory power in the world. "I decided," Kelly says of his temptation and damnation, "the only explanation is that God and the Devil are very attentive to the people at the summit. . . . That's why men with power sometimes act so silly. . . . There's nothing but magic at the top. . . . you have to be ready to deal with One or the Other" (p. 246).

Kelly, like Deborah and Rojack, has looked to both suicide and courageous action as a way out of damnation. Like Deborah, Cherry, and even Ruta, Kelly has literally faced the Devil within and without and made his choice to follow the easiest way. This is what Rojack faces when Kelly, as an "agent" of Deborah's "fury" and of "death," tempts him. "I floated out on the liquor to a promise of power, some icy majesty of intelligence, a fired heat of lust . . . between us now the way there had been heat between Ruta and me . . . and knew what it had been like with Deborah and him, what a hot burning two-backed beast." Kelly offers to bring Ruta forth, the "three of us to pitch and tear and squat and lick, swill and grovel on that Lucchese bed . . . where he went out with Deborah to the tar pits of the moon" (p. 254). Kelly's offer perfectly fits one prevailing metaphor of *Cannibals* and *Dream*; it emphasizes the polarities of Mailer's dualisms. "Shall we get shitty?" Kelly tempts.

When Rojack realizes the incest between Kelly and Deborah, which has grown into a metaphor of evil and death, he is compelled

to face that death, that disease, which has threatened to engulf him since the start of the novel. He feels himself slip "off the lip of sanity" and into "some deep waters." He wants "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 seas. But I could not move" (p. 255). Rojack has journeyed too far, must capitulate or face his fear and dread to express his soul's proportions before he can return to the rational, conscious world, which will then be filled with new meaning and with new dimensions of perception. It is in facing the fear, challenging the adversary that threatens engulfment, that the hero gains deliverance from his fear and integration of the conscious and unconscious mind.¹⁸ Facing the danger of an overwhelming darkness—of insanity, in short—Rojack reaches his deepest level of inner experience and must make his greatest commitment to be restored.

Another unconscious "messenger" shows him the task he must perform to free himself from the overwhelming "sea": "Walk the parapet or Cherry is dead." Encountering the last trial alone, without the aid of totem (umbrella) or anyone else, Rojack feels "death come up like the shadow which is waiting as one slips past the first sentinels of consciousness into the islands of sleep." He makes one journey around the parapet. He realizes that journey was for his own salvation; he must walk the parapet again, says the messenger, if he would save Cherry. "Each step I took, something good was coming in, I could do this. . . . There was the hint of when I would finally be done—some bliss from infancy moved through the lock of my lungs." Kelly says he was never able to try the parapet, and Deborah "got off midway." And when Kelly sees Rojack is going to make it, he tries to push Rojack off with Shago's umbrella, with that old power of totem Rojack no longer needs. Rojack has reached his deliverance, and he leaps down to strike Kelly unconscious, but Rojack is unable to return for a second trip around the parapet for Cherry (pp. 256, 259–60).

Cherry dies violently at the hand of Shago's friend. Rojack returns to her just before her death, saying, just as he did of Deborah, "She's my wife, officer." We really have to reach the mythological level of the novel to see what this means most fully. The hero's deliverance is incomplete. He has delivered himself from Satan, from the devouring maw of death, and from insanity, but he has not yet won the Heavenly Bride and the Celestial City. If he has been delivered from the "whale," he has yet to achieve that Vision himself.

18. Jung, *Symbols*, especially pp. 156, 259, 354, 419.

The novel's epilogue, entitled "The Harbors of the Moon Again," confirms this. In the daylight world of "Super-America," Rojack faces the "mystery" in a scientific light, in the autopsy of a cancer patient. He then emphasizes one lesson of his "dream." The plague or cancer arises from the exploitation of our organs and our selves. If one does not face and battle the "madness" that enters the self from our exploitations, one "locks" the madness inside and "denies" it, the madness grows and usurps the body and soul, the cells take the leap toward cancer. Rojack's salvation from the madness is his immersion in it, his airing of it, and his struggle to defeat it during his journey within.

Another lesson of the quest he has endured is that he must continue his search for life and growth in the phenomenal world. In the epilogue Rojack travels to South America, but he stops in the literal City of the Damned, Las Vegas, which he compares to "the chambers of the moon." He realizes he cannot defeat this city alone; he is not "good enough to climb up and pull down" the electric and neon "jewels." His journey must continue, this time to the jungles of Guatemala and Yucatán.

On the rational level of the allegory, the phone call to Cherry, which ends the novel fantastically, reaffirms that Cherry's death means Rojack has not yet reached the point where he can save others by bringing his own salvation into the world. But in the mythological sense, the phone call shows that the salvation of the hero is only partial because the Heavenly City and Bride are not yet his. To be clear on this we have to look briefly at the moon as a recurring symbol. The moon is another dual symbol, associated with Deborah's psychic powers as well as Cherry's healing balm. Cherry is several times compared to the moon as a "Silver Lady." So the moon has the ambiguity and dual quality of the Mother symbol itself in this novel as well as in myth.¹⁹

In *Dream*, the closer the hero moves to his salvation, the more terrible the moon becomes. It is Rojack's "appreciation" for the moon that has singled him out for the challenge to his soul the novel describes. He has looked into the "abyss" by facing death in the war. Then the moon's "stain" led him to surpass danger and acquire grace and force ("it") so that he could begin his attack on the machine-gun nest. Through the deaths of the first three Germans, Rojack faced death with the help of the moon. But facing the fourth German, he was on his own, the moonlight had turned "clear as ice."

19. Jung, for example, points out mythological comparisons of the sun with fertile seed and the moon with woman or uterus. The moon is also the gathering place of departed souls, the guardian of the seed of life. See *Symbols*, pp. 203, 307-18.

Here Rojack faced the other side of death in the German's eyes and saw that it was a migration more dangerous than life for which one had to prepare. The experience began his private obsession with death because it began his "perception of death" as a possibility rather than a "void" (AD, pp. 3-6, 40).

Once Rojack's "dream" begins, the moon, both tender and not too innocent, calls him to suicide. His soul is called to give up its enliferment and cast whatever is left to the moon. She is a "shimmer of past death and new madness," and it is her "madness" that may lead Rojack's soul to a growth rather than lead it in its diminished state to the moon's caverns. When he misses this moment of diminished migration, the moon retaliates and "cancer" sets in. But Rojack faces the moon's madness and the cancer within. That is his heroic potential and destiny. The moon symbol undergoes a transformation. It turns from being an "assassin" who offers clean death and free passage of a diminished soul to being more like Deborah, "the charnel house" (p. 162).

When in Chapter 8 the moon again calls Rojack to suicide at Kelly's, she also offers him a way out of this death or diminished migration; he may walk the parapet. That other face of the moon, the "tar-pits" of incest, had shown itself in Kelly's confession, but in walking the parapet solely under his own power, Rojack realizes that the moon of death can also be the "silvery whale," as he calls her, the Mother of Deliverance surfacing "in a midnight sea." He can "earn" his release from the moon's "cage," from his murder, and from his death. As he walks the parapet, Rojack gradually feels himself come alive (see pp. 223-24, 254, 259).

The important point for the regeneration theme is that Cherry is not, as many critics suggest, in "heaven." She is in a limbo, in some "safety chamber" of the moon not unlike the hollow spaces of Las Vegas. Her soul is clean but static; it is the "spirit" she feared she would become in the collective harbors of the moon, which is now, she says, her "mother" (pp. 259, 263, 269). This mother is "the mother of pain and loss" as Mailer described the moon in *Cannibals* (p. 248). Cherry's soul is at peace; it has "escaped" the confrontations of life, but its journey has ended. By the equations established in *Cannibals*, the moon is "Spirit-as-Function," ruling over the souls it harbors. By Spirit-as-Function, Mailer appears to mean any sort of static substance than can collect and harbor Souls diminished to a state of non-growth and therefore alienated from existence or Being. The Spirit-as-collective cannot grow or make the Soul's journey, only Soul-as-individual can. If one allows one's Soul to realize itself and to live out the Soul's impulses, Mailer argues in "The Political Economy of Time," then one's Soul after death passes *through* Spirit and back

into Being or Existence (see CC, pp. 336–38, 358, 371–73). The reader of *Dream* can only assume that if Cherry is ever to gain her deliverance from the “cage” of the moon, if her soul is to return to an enlivenment that will give it the opportunity to grow toward Vision, the deliverance will depend upon Rojack; he will have to complete some ritual of courage and atonement that he left unfulfilled on Kelly’s parapet. We can conclude only that the hero’s quest has returned to him his soul and potential, but his quest is incomplete at the novel’s end. The journey to Yucatán and “the old friend” is the opportunity Rojack has earned to continue his quest for growth of his soul or being. His soul may reach heroic proportions equal to the salvation of others and to the destruction of the Damned City. But if Rojack’s potential seems greater and more deeply won than that of his predecessors, he is not yet a hero who actually returns from the quest with the legacy of regeneration for the world.

In *Advertisements*, Mailer made it clear that during the composition of *The Deer Park* and afterwards he felt his life and his work had reached a crucial and desperate point. His sense of frustration and failure was acute. The tone of crisis is repeated in his collection of “poems” *Deaths for the Ladies (and other disasters)*, published in 1962. Here the despair of failing marriage and his flirtations with suicide add to the tone of personal crisis.²⁰ This tone is somewhat mitigated in *The Presidential Papers* because the subject matter is focused differently; it is the beginning of his “new journalism.” The tone of crisis, however, is still alive in *Papers*, published in 1963, as is the mixture of “defiance and self-hatred,” to borrow Solotaroff’s phrase. That year Mailer began *An American Dream*. The failure of Mailer’s second and third marriages could only exacerbate his desperate self-examinations. In November of 1960, as his readers know, Mailer stabbed his second wife Adele. He regretted it as an ungentle act. As Brock Brower suggests, the incident was part of the “personal hell” Mailer dropped into, resulting from his long flirtation with “the burning question of violence,” with hip-dares, and with drugs. Mailer had been fighting with party crashers at his pre-mayoralty campaign party just before the stabbing. Daniel

20. In *Existential Errands: Twenty-Six Pieces Selected by the Author from the Body of All His Writings*, Mailer describes the poems as existential exercises during one of the lowest points of his life. Kierkegaard, Mailer suggests, came back from such a “Christian” experience—hearing inspiration from an angel while kissing the flames—with the knowledge “that such moments not only existed but indeed were the characteristic way modern man found a knowledge of his soul—which is to say he found it by the act of perceiving that he was most certainly losing it.” It was the *Time* review of *Deaths for the Ladies (and other disasters)* that made Mailer more certain that “the enemy was more alive than ever, and dirtier in the alley,” and that he must mend, gird himself, and return to battle (see pp. 198–204).

Wolf, who introduced Mailer and Adele, knew them during the Village years, and was an editor on the *Voice*, suggests the incident was part and parcel of the Mailers' "distortions" as Norman "moved out with her to the pot scene and the sexual anomy of mere orgiastic linkage." Mailer and Adele were competing to live up to Norman's hip code; and he was sliding into a profound depression from Seconal. "Let me say," Mailer said of the assault, "that what I did was by any measure awful. It still wasn't insane." He pleaded with the court to go to prison rather than Bellevue, because if he was believed insane, "for the rest of my life my work will be considered as the work of a man with a disordered mind." He ended briefly in Bellevue and came out of it "judged responsible—even if criminally responsible—for his own acts." He continued his work and married Lady Jeanne Campbell. But he worried that he had destroyed "forever the possibility of being the Jeremiah of our time."²¹ When he wrote *Dream*, his marriage to Campbell had collapsed and he had married actress Beverly Bentley, who looks not unlike the physical descriptions of Cherry.

But when Mailer composed *Dream* serially for *Esquire* to insure he would write the book in a year and to earn some badly needed money, he did not turn back to himself merely because it was the closest and easiest subject at hand. The numerous parallels between Mailer's life and the novel that Solotaroff lists are less gratuitous and artless borrowings than self-explorations in a time of crisis intended to reveal as much about the fallen world as the fallen hero. The novel is a response to the crises he had passed through as well as to the external crises and failures of his country catalogued in *Advertisements*, *Deaths*, and *Papers*. Rojack's situation is close to Mailer's. Mailer is speaking of himself as well as of his compatriots when, in *Cannibals*, he says:

Postulate a modern soul marooned in constipation, emptiness, boredom and a flat dull terror of death. A soul which takes antibiotics when ill, smokes filter cigarettes, drinks proteins . . . takes seconal to go to sleep, benzedrine to awake, and tranquilizers for poise. It is a deadened existence, afraid precisely of violence, cannibalism, loneliness, insanity, libidinousness, hell, perversion, and mess, because these are the states which must in some way be passed through, digested, transcended, if one is to make one's way back to life. (pp. 269-70)

An American Dream is Mailer's dream of healing, of finding the knowledge of his soul by the "act of perceiving that he was most certainly losing it."

21. I use here Brock Brower's account in his article on Mailer's career, "Always the Challenger," *Life*, pp. 100, 111, 112.

We should, moreover, have little trouble recognizing that Mailer continues in *Dream* what he described in *Advertisements* as his extension of the theological and moral possibilities of the novel. He has obviously continued and expanded the resources of the allegorical mode as a dialogue between spiritual forces depicting "man caught in a dialogue with gods, devils, and spirits." The "primitive lore," this dialogue with dynamic spiritual forces, which he invokes is to Mailer one of the best weapons to subvert the foundations of modern civilization's "malignancies," whether communist or capitalist (see *CC*, p. 87). The pattern of myth, another kind of primitive lore, established in the previous two novels is used again and intensified here: the death of the old man and the birth of the new. But in *Dream* these figures are even more clearly embodiments of the hero's "dream." Rojack himself "dies" and is reborn. At the farthest point of the inward journey, Rojack faces Kelly, who, like McLeod and Eitel, is a fallen old man who "confesses" the story of his fall. It is by facing the dead man in all his horror and by defeating him that the hero of *Dream* attains the power to pursue Life, or Being, which Mailer also calls "Time" in his dialogues.²²

Though physical courage is one metaphor for the "courage" Mailer's heroes must gain to pursue Life, and though Mailer himself clearly values physical courage as somehow actually connected to or symptomatic of larger courage, we should not take courage in these novels to be only physical courage or a display of *machismo*.²³ Mailer defines courage otherwise, in this novel and in his commentaries, as we have seen, first, as making one's death meaningful through facing, and therefore knowing, the enemy before us and within us. Mailer believes that if a person would restore a lost authenticity, he or she may have to search for extreme situations because in them the conscious mind is turned "back upon its natural subservience to the instinct." Instinct is the Unconscious, or, as we have seen in *Cannibals*, the Soul itself. The return to instinct breaks down the insulation of the human being from his or her deepest psychic life as well as from nature itself. The imbalance Mailer seeks to correct is the

22. Compare Jung again in *Symbols*, pp. 280-81: "Time is thus defined by the rising and setting sun, by the death and renewal of libido, the dawning and extinction of consciousness. . . . So time, this empty and purely formal concept, is expressed in the mysteries through transformations of the creative force, libido, just as time in physics is identical with the flow of the energetic process."

23. Gutman, in effect, makes such a charge in his assessment of *Dream*, see pp. 110, 119, 131. Gutman goes so far as to suggest Mailer is engaged in "a futile embrace with *machismo*" at the conclusion of his assessment. He lumps Ruta and Cherry together as objects that Rojack must sexually dominate, and, then, nine pages later inexplicably writes about Cherry and Rojack's sexual encounter as a "mutual surrender."

imbalance of consciousness “alienated from instinct,” which causes consciousness to construct “intellectual formulations over a void.”²⁴ The confrontation with the truth within is itself enough to give the Soul power to “voyage” out to “where whatever created us wishes us to be” (CC, pp. 348, 369–73).

There is still one more kind of courage Mailer requires of his heroes, the courage to face the Vision toward which one journeys. In its present state, Vision is also the “dread of the Lord.” For given the decline of Vision—that is, God’s Existence—one faces the horrible dread of apprehending the truth that God is dying. Such an awesome recognition includes “the vision of God’s fear” and of his wrath. Mailer’s commentaries on Buber’s *Tales of Hasidim* make this point in *Cannibals* (pp. 376–79). So courage also prepares the Soul for its Vision.

Mailer’s concept of courage is important to an understanding of his novels because he believes the forces arrayed against Soul are greater in the postwar world than ever before. The “signs” of defeat are in the “forms”—these records of Soul struggle—of contemporary civilization. The mightier the struggle of the Soul and the greater a whole human’s endurance and courage, the more extraordinary the form (CC, pp. 371–73).

Objective criteria overwhelm us. The signs are everywhere. . . . They show themselves in every crack of every detail in our lives, in the processing of our food . . . in the plastic commodities we handle, the odor of vaginal jelly, the dead character of public communication, the pollution of air, the collective assaults upon human nerve. . . .

Look to the forms. The forms of the modern world break down. . . . in the art of the twentieth century, above all in the architecture, in the empty monotonous interchangeable statements of our modern buildings. (CC, pp. 366–67)

. . . When the soul is mighty and the environment resists mightily, the form is exceptional and extraordinary. . . . Stone hoisted up ramps by men became the pyramids. Cut by crude iron tools and harder stone, shaped over years by sculptors who attacked the rock out of the stone of their own being, one had Chartres, Notre Dame. Today the stones are made from liquid cooked in vats and rolled into blocks or sheets. Fiberglass [sic], polyethylene, bakelite, styrene, styronware. The environment has less resistance than a river of milk. And the houses and objects built from these liquids are the record of a strifeless war, a liquidation of possibilities. (CC, p. 371)

Since Mailer believes that Soul in the world is dying and God is dying with the death of Soul, he argues that at the prospect of death modern humanity experiences a dread and nausea unlike any ever

24. PP, pp. 128, 198.

experienced before. Modern life, therefore, comes to represent for Mailer a final battle between Soul and Anti-Soul: "existence approaches a climax" (CC, pp. 363-64, 367). The extent to which we (or, in the instance of *Dream*, Rojack) insulate ourselves from the experiences of awe, terror, beatitude, and the courageous defiance of Anti-Soul, is the extent to which we do not prepare ourselves for growth, to which we deny God and our own Soul, and to which we seek to capture Life by a series of "cheats." Courage, therefore, becomes for Mailer both a physical and an existential attribute; something one accrues by separate acts of courage.

Kelly, in contrast, had sought not to earn his power but to receive it as a gift, and as a gift he received tremendous power. The cost of the gift was the alienation of his Soul from existence. He ransomed his Soul to that which opposes divine or creative energy. Neither he nor Deborah could reverse the loss. But Rojack reversed his loss. He too had "pirated" the Devil's gifts. He used that power to fight it in other embodiments. Such power was the first stage of his encouragement. But he went beyond these gifts and, with Cherry's guidance and "balm," transformed them so that he could "go the other way," as Marion Faye once put it. To do this Rojack had to choose love; he had to choose Cherry at the moment he faced the dread of his death. In the mythic and psychological sense, he had to choose his own best innocence, the nourishing maid or child within, the healing resources of the unconscious. The allegorical progress of the hero is toward gradual, expanding revelation and power.

In one way Mailer's concern with "power" carries forward D. H. Lawrence's concern with two kinds of power. Both authors express this concern through the sexual activity in their narratives—the power to control and to dominate others (Kelly's manipulatory power) and the power to fulfill oneself, to increase one's Being. This latter power, the power of self-fulfillment, is what Lawrence ultimately calls, in *The Man Who Died*, "the greater power" and the "larger life." When in a 1961 *Playboy* interview, excerpted in *Cannibals*, Mailer said he hoped to achieve something "between" D. H. Lawrence and Henry Miller (p. 198), Mailer was referring especially to his hope to combine somehow what Lawrence said, especially in *Lady Chatterley*, about the beauty and tenderness of sex, with what Miller said about the violence of sex and the complications that impinge upon the lovers, but Mailer is closest to Lawrence in the quest for "the greater power."

Mailer associates this greater power with *his* definition of existentialism. The authenticity Mailer's heroes seek is in part the integrity of self-hood and self-created values in a chaotic world that existential fiction traditionally depicts. But Mailer carries his "existen-

tialism" beyond phenomenal and relative authenticity or value. By positing an "existential" God whose self-hood, Vision, and authenticity depend upon the state of humanity's authenticity and Soul, Mailer leaps the bounds traditionally associated with existentialism. Authenticity of self and God becomes his chief concern.²⁵ I don't think it particularly important whether Mailer's "existentialism" is or is not derived from or consistent with European existentialists. Any number of critics have argued whether Mailer's existentialism is so derived or consistent.²⁶ What is important is that Mailer is on his own "existential" quest. Since *Advertisements* he has argued that his "American Existentialism" is something else. Mailer charges "modern European existentialism" with a reluctance "to take on the logical conclusion of the existential vision": that the "life" after death is as existential as life on earth. European existentialism, Mailer feels, brings itself to a halt on "the uninhabitable terrain of the absurd" as a result.

The German philosopher [Heidegger] 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 dares the hypothesis that death is an existential continuation of life, that the soul may either pass through 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. (*PP*, pp. 213-14)

We could argue that Mailer is wrong about Heidegger, who is perhaps closer to him than he thinks. But it is Mailer's view of Heidegger and Sartre that provides him with the impetus and energy to strike out and enlarge his own concept of existentialism, to combine psychology and metaphysics through an eclectic view of what the existence of the self is.

Mailer, like Rojack and even like Jung, is an "existential psychologist" in the sense that his emphasis is always on becoming, on self-growth as soul-growth.²⁷ In his commentary on dread in 1963,

25. See *CC*, pp. 321, 323, and 326-27, where Being equals Soul, and p. 342, where Soul equals the Unconscious.

26. See, for example, George Schrader, "Norman Mailer and the Despair of Defiance," *Yale Review*, pp. 267-80 (reprinted in Braudy). Gutman argues that Mailer is a branch of Martin Heidegger's tree.

27. Compare Victor White, *God and the Unconscious*, p. 76. White demonstrates the relationship of Jung's emphasis on "becoming" to a "view of religion" that is existential as much as it is inconsistent with reductive Freudian analysis.

Mailer similarly asserts that the modern failure to see a relationship between dread, existential psychology, and ethics, as Jung and Reich did, is at the heart of the modern failure of consciousness.

What is never discussed: the possibility that we feel anxiety because we are in danger of losing some part or quality of our soul unless we act, and act dangerously; or the likelihood that we feel dread when intimations of our death inspire us with disproportionate terror, a horror not merely because we are going to die, but . . . because we are going to die badly and suffer some unendurable stricture of eternity. These explanations are altogether outside the close focus of the psychological sciences in the Twentieth Century. . . .

Faced with our failure . . . the investigators of the intellect have taken to intellectual tranquilizers. It is logical positivism, logicians, and language analysts who dominate Anglo-American philosophy rather than existentialists; it is Freudians instead of Reichians or Jungians who rule psychoanalysis; and it is journalism rather than art which forges the apathetic conscience of our time. (*PP*, pp. 151–52)

Rojack's intense and associative sense perceptions are intended to demonstrate the possibilities of associative mental processes, of metaphorical or primitive vision, and of expanded consciousness in our world, as indeed one's dreams might or one's "vibrations," as we say, might. The hero Rojack's experiences arise from his journey to his deepest Being or Unconscious life to find there a power of perception that sustains an ever-increasing growth of the self.

5

Why Are We in Vietnam?

"I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." —Matthew, 10:34–37

Why Are We in Vietnam? (1967) is Mailer's most economical narrative. Though this economy is reminiscent of *Barbary Shore*, the story of *Why* is told through a narrative consciousness of a complexity unparalleled in the previous fiction. Ostensibly, the novel consists of the narrator D.J.'s remembrance of a hunting expedition in Alaska with his father, two of his father's business underlings, and D.J.'s best friend "Tex" Hyde. As he sits "grassed out" at a dinner party held in his honor at his parents' Texas "Manse," D.J. recalls actions that took place two years ago. D.J. and Tex, eighteen and nineteen years old, are about to leave for the Vietnam War, which is not mentioned until the last page of the novel. Below the ostensible action, however, is a complicated tale of a young man's journey into self. D.J.'s particular journey illustrates that despite the hero's successive acts of regeneration, he can be defeated. D.J. is Mailer's first defeated hero and his last fictional hero to date. The narrator-hero's defeat expresses in turn the triumph of Death over Life.

The many misreadings of this novel seem to stem not only from the usual misunderstandings of allegory but also from the failure to recognize both the significance of the setting in this novel and the nature of the hero's guilt.¹ The setting, Alaska, becomes an intense

1. Critics differ widely on D.J.'s nature as a narrator, and therefore on the effectiveness of the novel. As representative examples, Stanley T. Gutman sees D.J. as the novel's greatest weakness; D.J. is unbelievable and too unreliable in his multiple identities. See *Mankind in Barbary*, p. 134. In his chapter on *Why Are We in Vietnam?* in *The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer*, Barry Leeds finds the novel a retrogression and believes the narrative voice evinces Mailer's loss of control. Donald L. Kaufmann sees the novel as a mere "cross between a leftist polemic and a political novel," and considers it "yesterday's wisdom" filtered through "pop art." See Donald L. Kaufmann, "Catch-23: The Mystery of Fact (Norman Mailer's Final Novel)," *Twentieth-Century Literature*, pp. 247–56. The opposing view is that the narrative voice reflects the madness in America itself; see Robert Solotaroff, *Down*

force field. Beginning with the “fact” of the electromagnetic force of the earth’s poles, Mailer metaphorically extends the fact to make Alaska above the Arctic Circle a collector of impulses from the “psycho-magnetic” field of southern civilizations. Rusty’s safari is the physical presence of these fragmenting forces from the south that cause a “fission” of the electromagnetic field (the e.m.f.) and the psychomagnetic “mood” (the collective “magnetic-electro fief” of the dream, or M.E.F.): “Cop Turds are exploding psychic ecology all over the place, and this is above the *Circle*, man, every mind, human, animal, even vegetable, certainly mineral (crystal mineral) is tuned into the same place. . . . Big Luke knows he’s getting away with too much, he’s violating the divine economy which presides over hunters . . . this is Yukon, man, heroes fall” (*Why*, p. 115).²

As Alaskan cities are looking more like “the high technological nexus and overdeveloped civilization of a megacity like the Dallas-Fort Worth complex,” so is the wilderness looking more like a dude ranch preparing for some kind of surrealistic military invasion. All nature is on edge with the corruption and fragmentation of its mood and economy. So when Tex gut shoots a wolf or M.A. Pete blows the rectum off a caribou with an elephant gun, the whole of surrounding nature stirs. Hills clap together, air moves, and the trees of the forest shift and fill with “awe” as they watch “one of their own take a wasting.” Because the setting is the frontier, it becomes a place of intensely conflicting forces. Like the dream itself, Alaska becomes a heightened battleground for God and Devil, a place of extreme possibilities of contagion and beatitude.³

A second cause of misunderstanding seems to be the failure to recognize the nature of the hero’s guilt. D.J. feels guilty about the wastes of his past, both the wastes of his life as the son of a

Mailer’s Way, p. 180 and *passim*. Richard Poirier argues that D.J. simply represents another of Mailer’s favorite theories: the multitude of selves within each self. See Richard Poirier, *Norman Mailer*, p. 129.

2. *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (hereafter cited as *Why*). Unless otherwise indicated, all citations are to works by Norman Mailer.

3. *Why*, chapters 9 and 10 of “Intro Beep.” Future references are parenthetical. See also Mailer’s speculations in *Existential Errands: Twenty-Six Pieces Selected by the Author from the Body of All His Writings*. Here the dream fiends of the heroic, of those who test themselves and expand their existence, are “theatrical revues” that dramatize dangers one has or will have to encounter. The “Navigator” at the seat of the heroic mind therefore becomes increasingly able to “chart a course through the possible rapids soon to be encountered in his life,” making, in short, the dreamer a greater warrior in God’s army of Being. The degree to which one’s deepest mind is influenced by the “misconceptions” of society—Hollywood, television, and modern communications—is the degree to which the Navigator may be thwarted and misdirected in his quest and the degree to which the human psyche is disrupted (pp. 112–14). See also *Cannibals and Christians* (hereafter cited as *CC*), pp. 246–47, 280, where Mailer argues that the interruption and annoyance of mass communications are “the foundation of modern existence.”

corporation chief and the wastes of his father's safari two years ago. In fact, the wastes of D.J.'s adolescence are simply epitomized in his safari experience. "D.J. has wasted his adolescence," he says in "Chap Three," "in their purlieus and company mansions and has eaten off their expense accounts all his days, D.J. knows them asshole to appetite . . . they are not all that dumb. . . . They can all swim uphill through shit face first although in fact corporate faces are never seen to move" (pp. 50–51). The waste of the safari is the massive "animal murder" D.J. says he has committed as the novel opens, a murder that gives him the "bloods," or the guilt, he is about to recall for the reader. All of this waste is "shit," and his return to it and his immersion in it are what cause much of the scatological profanity in the novel. As D.J. puts it, he is "marooned" in the shit or on the "balmy tropical isle of Anal Referent Metaphor" (p. 150). This "shit" is like the waste that Mailer himself has often returned to since he introduced the metaphor in "The Twelfth Presidential Paper," entitled "On Waste." Mailer argues here, as he will in *Cannibals*, that examining the wastes of the individual and of our industrial production will reveal "the root" of our growth—whether our growth is insufficient, or genuine, or disproportionate and cancerous. The "shit" like the "cancer" Mailer discovers in our civilization is, he argues, no "scientific image" but a "precise metaphor" for the state of society and the individual.⁴ D.J. is searching for the root of his growth, or, more accurately, for the cause of his loss of growth, by examining his wastes.

D.J.'s obscenity is a reflection of his own waste and guilt; the obscenity expresses his irreverence for all establishment authority and reminds us of Mailer's continuing belief that the real obscenity in American life is the violence done to humanity and nature by, for example, those politicians and corporation executives who are "perfectly capable of burning unseen women and children in the Vietnamese jungles, yet [feel] a large displeasure . . . at the generous use of obscenity in literature and in public."⁵ D.J.'s obscenity spews out as if to purge the speaker of the experience and guilt as much as if to affront the deadened souls who have some responsibility for the experience. As D.J. says of his and Tex's language during their hike: "they so full of love and adventure and in such a haste to get all the mixed glut and sludge out of their systems that they're heating up all the foul talk to get rid of it in a hurry like bad air going up the flue

4. *The Presidential Papers* (hereafter cited as *PP*), p. 272.

5. On this point see especially Mailer's *The Armies of the Night*, pp. 47, 49. Of his own army experience, Mailer says of common man's language: "that noble common man was as obscene as an old goat, and his obscenity was what saved him. The sanity of said common democratic man was in his humor, and his humor was in his obscenity."

and so be ready to enjoy good air and nature, cause don't forget they up in God's attic" (p. 180). On the other hand, when D.J. remembers the experiences of purgation and potential transformation, the language becomes sensitive and lyrical, suggesting a wistfulness for the opportunity that has been lost. "Memory," D.J. reminds us, "is the seed of narrative." D.J.'s memories possess him. His obsessive need to return to his sins or wastes and to his opportunity for purgation directs the stream of his consciousness, as if the mind's return to and identification of the evil and the good in one's life could somehow purge one of guilt. The entire tale could be seen as D.J.'s prayer to the Lord to obtain purgation. The tale-as-prayer is clearly a sinner's prayer, a hopeless desperate prayer for salvation. And the difficulty of the prayer increases as D.J.'s tale approaches his failed transformation and the loss of his soul: "D.J. is hung because the events now to be recounted in his private tape being made for the private ear of the Lord . . . are hung up on a moment of the profoundest personal disclosure" (p. 174).

That D.J.'s quest and the structure of his tale are determined by his obsessional anxieties is, as Angus Fletcher argues, typical of the compulsive nature of the allegorical hero's quest. The self-imposed duties, compulsive rituals and repetitions, and the hero's continual ruminations about his own desires keep his anxieties in bounds and suggest the impulse of expiation and ritual atonement. The narrative tendencies to "encapsulate" agents and isolate episodes into particular moments of contagion and beatitude express the compulsive quest for expiation in allegory and "prophetic literature" generally.⁶

D.J.'s profane language, then, is not purposeless; it is satirically directed against all that D.J. hoped to surmount: Rusty, the corporation, and the supercharged "animal murder" and "fission" in Alaska. D.J.'s description of the corporation is an example of his comically profane approach, which gains the reader's confidence, to a subject otherwise frightening, grotesque, and ultimately tragic.

Central Consolidated Chemical and Plastic . . . till they found out the Red-ass Russians had their Communist Party initials CCCP, so they changed the name—look into the difficulties—an approval vote of the stockholders 1,179,008 to 241,642, change of listing on the stock market, reams of pure shit, reprinting of stationery, invoices, packages, loading, relettering boxcars—they a bunch of tight assholes running the inner mills of the mills, so . . . they called it Central Consolidated *Combined* Chemical and Plastic, the new coagulation of title now being CCCCP or as the team began to say, 4C and P. . . . and he [Rusty] was brought back in to head a new division for Four C-ing the cancer market—big lung subsidiary. . . . they

6. See Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, pp. 284–98, 302.

come up with a plastic filter for cigarettes . . . trade name Pure Pores—is the most absorptive substance devised ever in a vat—traps all the nicotine, sucks up every bit of your spit. Pure Pores also causes cancer of the lip but the surveys are inconclusive, and besides, fuck you! (*Why*, pp. 29–31)

As if to strike out for his loss of soul and life, D.J. strikes out at everything that might have caused the loss, at everyone who might perpetuate the psychic fragmentation of our time. Even the reader is implicated. If D.J. calls the reader relatively innocuous, playful names such as Horace, Henry, son, fellow Americans, Fergus, dear clients, little punsters out in fun land, Pericles, Newton, and the like, he as often expresses his contempt for the reader as one more member of the death alliance, as one more perpetrator of the death D.J. describes. The reader becomes a contemptuous “statistics pervert” out in “implosion land,” whom D.J. will make “fly up your own asshole before you read him right.” D.J. sees himself in the role of a vernacular prophet to his time and country, a modern “Huckleberry Finn . . . here to set you straight” and teach you “how to live in this Electrox Edison world.” His mixed address to the reader, like his lack of sympathy for those he satirizes, is the strategy of satire. The humorous playfulness encourages the reader to come into the narrator’s confidence and be sympathetic to his vision of the evil the narrator points out. But the confrontation with the reader is intended to make the reader suddenly realize that he or she too is the foe, is implicated in the guilt and waste that both narrator and reader, the satirist hopes, have seen. The degree to which D.J., as a fragmented personality, is himself in control of this strategy is an open question, but the satirist Mailer is clearly behind D.J., manipulating the confidences and confrontations with the reader to expose the reader’s participation in the waste. But in this novel, Rusty and the corporation are at the center of the waste.

As in *Barbary Shore*, the struggle of Life-potential against the Death-alliance expresses the theme of *Why Are We in Vietnam?* The characters, like the setting, are highly symbolic. They are “agents,” as D.J. tells us we all are, “of Satan and the Lord.” A “heroic looking” Texan, the cream of “corporation corporateness,” David Rutherford Jethroe Jellicoe Jethroe, or “Rusty” as D. J.’s father is known, is, like Hollingsworth before him, the central image of Death toward which the dead and dying move.

Rusty and his “opposite number” in the corporation, Big Al Percy Cunningham, initiated the safari as a part of their drive to assert status and prove corporate power. But when Big Al has to go to Cape Canaveral to make “big power space decisions” and argue the merits of his corporation’s “plastic Univar valve and plug” for the as-

tronauts' space-suit toilet, Rusty is forced to invite two lower-level extensions of himself, whom DJ. calls M.A. (Medium Asshole) Pete and M.A. Bill. Rusty sees the safari as an extension of his corporate power; the safari defines the nature of the corporation. Because Rusty no longer has "Wise Ass Cunningham" to compete with and trip seems "downgraded," Rusty begins the safari as a struggle to test himself and see how he "shapes up in a contest against a man who is not an asshole, Mr. Luke Fellinka," Indian guide. But Rusty's safari ends as one more quest to increase the power of the material and the people he manipulates—corporate power—not as a quest to increase the power of his self. "He got a corporation mind. He don't believe in nature; he puts his trust and distrust in man. 5% trust 295% distrust." He is another of Mailer's fictional devils, or a grand, Kelly-like devil's solicitor. The "open war" that Rusty ("Jet Throne") and his corporate extensions declare on the animals is a metaphor for corporate power. At great length in "Chap Five," DJ. contrasts a true hunter's single, all-purpose weapon to the corporate arsenal and the Apache Helicopter "vomiting big equipment out of its guts."

Yet the ethical questions DJ.'s tale raises do not come simply from the battle between men with machines and the animals, but, more accurately, from the battle between two kinds of power—corporate or Rusty power, which is the power of external accoutrements, and self or authentic power, which is the intrinsic power of increased consciousness and self-definition. As in *An American Dream*, courageous acts develop the power of authenticity, which is a power DJ. and Tex seek in chapters 7 through 11. The exchange between Rusty and Big Luke initiates the novel's explicit reference to this ethical conflict. Rusty asks Luke "about the fine difference in ethics between using Ollie's 30.06 and my Special .404, or your .375." Rusty continues, "Yes, it may be our animals will die a degree more from shock and a hint less from vital execution. But of what final ethical consequence is that?" (pp. 85–86). Tex's practical reply that "your meat tastes better when you're executed," is shortly verified. The pragmatic difference is clear enough when the safari party eats caribou steak blown to "jelly" and "blood pudding" by Pete's Nitro Express: "it tasted loud and clear of nothing but fresh venison steeped in bile, shit, and the half-digested contents of a caribou's stomach—it was so bad you were living on the other side of existence, down in poverty and stink wallow with your nose beneath the fever—that was Luke's message to us" (p. 98). As the novel progresses, the ethical difference between "vital execution" and "massive shock" grows larger and larger. Rusty's Moe Henry and Obungekat Safari is a cheat of existence and of oneself. The guilt these "hunters" accrue is the guilt, the "cheat," that Mailer has

charged twentieth-century humanity with generally, as he did in *The Presidential Papers*.

We gave our freedom away a long time ago. . . . in all the revolutions we did not make, all the acts of courage, we found a way to avoid, all the roots we destroyed. . . . There had been a vast collective social effort in the twentieth century—each of us had tried to take back a critical bit more from existence than we had given to it. . . . Was it not possible that we were sent out of eternity to become more than we had been? (p. 159)

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. (p. 176)

The guilt from the cheat and the loss of the self is what DJ. fears. Rusty and Luke both serve as warnings to DJ., as reminders of what he may become. An important reason for DJ.'s "delinquencies"—why he has to grass-out at family dinners, for example—is that he cannot bear to see himself in his father. His father is a false guide, a betrayer. He sees in Rusty's eyes the cause of his own dread—the chasm of the empty tomb, and the power on which America now runs, which DJ. compares to some mysterious creature with a plastic asshole installed in his brain (the G.P.A.) to "shit out all his corporate management of thoughts," his waste, across the landscape. In his father's eyes, DJ. sees "voids, man, and gleams of yellow fire . . . fifty thousand fucking miles of marble floor down those eyes, and you got to walk over that to get to The Man" (p. 36). DJ. fears that his "success" will be to become like Rusty, and in this fear DJ. represents a generation of disaffected youth. Such "success," DJ. warns us, stimulates "you to suffocate," to abandon the power of the authentic self, to become one more Medium or Highgrade Asshole working for the G.P.A., or the Devil. Big Luke is another sign or warning. As a heroic figure he retains an ambiguity, but ultimately he is a failure, another unauthentic man. DJ. and Tex begin to realize that Big Luke is a fallen hero as he daily becomes more like the executives he guides.

Big Luke now got his kicks with the helicopter. He was forever enough of a pro not to use it with real hunters . . . but he had us, gaggle of goose fat and asshole, killers of bile-soaked venison, so the rest of the hunt . . . he gave what was secretly wanted, which was helicopter heaven, and it was curious shit. . . . so we broke open a war between us and the animals . . . hopping to the top of a mountain in copter wings to shoot down on goats . . . and it was a haul of big-ass game getting. (*Why*, pp. 98–100)

Big Luke, on the other hand, also serves as an introduction for DJ. and Tex, through one of several blood rituals in the novel, to the old

magic and ways of the hunter and to the primordial telepathies of the natural world as soon as D.J. and Tex begin to sense their own inadequacies as hunters early in the safari. This is their first positive lesson in the qualities of authenticity and the powers within the self, but it reveals to them another sign or warning that, like the other warnings, has a certain ambiguity. As they begin to experience the telepathies between hunters, animals, and trees, D.J. and Tex make contact with an order, economy, and instinctual life below the safari's surface that prepares them for a true hunt. The drink of wolf's blood puts D.J. "on" to the instinctual, wild, and brutal animal nature, but he also sees something of the "insanity," the "anger" like a "burnt electric wire," of the wolf as he faced his own death. The instinctual nature and wildness D.J. sees in the world are like an "eye looking at you in the center of a midnight fire," and like "looking up the belly of a whale." This wildness in the "guts of things" is not the "animal insanity" of the mangled, over-hunted beasts. The animal insanity is a disproportion, a distortion of that wildness; it is another distortion of one's deepest, authentic life. This is an important point, for critics have often confused the two and thereby misread the final pages of the book. Kenneth Easterly first hints at this insanity when he says the wild animals have changed their psychology as a result of the overkilling and maiming of animals by "hunters" who are excited by greed and a terror of being cheated. Then Big Ollie makes an important distinction when Rusty misses the significance behind Easterly's remark. The wilderness is gone, Ollie says; the hunters and helicopters are driving the animals insane ("animal no wild no more, now crazy"), and the animals are gaining the dangerous revelations of insanity (p. 65). Mailer, therefore, makes the distinction between *wildness* (animal instinctual nature) and *bestiality* (animal insanity).⁷ It is the same distinction Mailer is making between the part of D.J. that is a reflection of the disease and the part that D.J. hopes to gain—the wild, instinctual nature that Tex represents for him. The devouring bestiality is the insanity D.J. and Tex must face. It is something different than the genuine lust to hunt, kill, and eat, a lust that D.J. feels from the "black-shit fuel" of the wolf's blood. The insanity reflects not the

7. This insanity is the bestiality (as opposed to the wildness of animal nature) Mailer obviously had in mind when in *CC* he said that as the spirit dies, "the buried animal in American life grew bestial," pp. 78–79. He is referring to the failure of the "Great Society" and the nature of that society as encouraging purge or war. Mailer's principal argument against the war is the form it takes—the impersonal violence—rather than the war itself. He might have been less vocal about the Vietnam War had we fought the Vietnamese "man to man" rather than through a huge, impersonal, technological violence. But one cannot be sure, for Mailer has little sympathy with the motives of American imperialism in any form or shade. See, for example, *CC*, pp. 80–81.

wildness of the hunting animal, but the animal's response to the explosion of "psychic ecology" in the North, an insanity D.J. himself also begins to see.

This danger of insanity provides an important lesson for D.J., for it helps him to see which side of the battle he must be on and where his potential authenticity lies. Once his consciousness is stimulated by the telepathies in the natural world and by the insanity around him, he faces the loss of his self as it is absorbed and controlled by the machine, and he faces the dread of his existence as an ever-diminishing self or soul. He first encounters "Herr Dread" when he looks into the eyes of a mountain goat that he has killed, essentially, by helicopter. He realizes the machine has "hypnotized" him as much as it had hypnotized, in a different way, the terrorized animals. He sees in the goat's death his own dying, his own waste. D.J. did not have to work, to hunt, for that kill; he did not have to test himself against the terrain and the goat. Two years later, during the dinner party, D.J. sees that it is the dread he discovered in Rusty's eyes, in the goat's eyes, in the nature of his family and his whole life, and in the consciousness of his own loss that causes him to rebel and to desire the restoration of his lost self.

Whyfor does Doctor Jekyll have such a total rejection of all the positive elements in his rich secure successful environmental scene including social backing, strong sentiment, national roots, loci of power, happy physical endowment . . . and clearly individualistic and highly articulated parents?

And D.J. says in answer: ever read *The Concept of Dread* by . . . Kierkegaard? . . .

D.J. is up tight with the concept of dread. He don't have to read S.K. S.K. can stick dread up his own ass. . . . D.J. has ideas like nobody else. He sees through to the stinking roots of things, contemplate Eternity the poets might say. (*Why*, pp. 34-35)

D.J. sums up his guilt, his dread of a tremendous loss on the third page of the novel. It is intended to be our guilt and loss as much as his: "God has always wanted more from man than man has wished to give him. 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." Like Hemingway's Francis Macomber, D.J. and Tex are beginning to learn, just before they abandon the safari, that it does matter how one hunts or performs any act, that one's "life" or existence depends upon recognizing the ethical difference between authentic action and the "cheat."

If it is D.J.'s new awareness of instinctual telepathies that causes him to wake in the night recalling the manner of the animals' deaths, "his sixteen-year-old heart racing through the first spooks of an encounter with Herr Dread," it is his obsession with this dread,

with the loss of his soul, and with his consequent quest for purgation and wholeness that drives the narrative forward to the center of the novel's ethic. In the first two hundred pages of the novel, Mailer draws the progress of D.J.'s drive to find wholeness, a drive that increases the more it is frustrated by the safari's events. D.J. tells us that the frustration of an impulse leads to its crystallization as well as to increased "telepathy." The more D.J. is frustrated, crystallized, in his search for identity or for an authentic and whole self, the greater his telepathy becomes. The greater his telepathy—his consciousness of all the impulses and messages that surround him—the greater his desire to purge his guilt. "So call for the flushing waters. . . . gather here, kiss this crystal, dissolve its form. Unloose my stasis" (p. 153). When the frustration and drive for wholeness reach an unendurable point, D.J. and Tex cut loose for the mountains in a final attempt to purge themselves, to loosen their stasis. In short, the relationship between authenticity and dread is reciprocal. A heightened awareness or dread of what one is about to lose stimulates the drive for authenticity.

But before D.J. and Tex escape to search for their authenticity, Mailer further polarizes the conflict between Rusty-as-Death and the Life-potential in D.J. through the episode of the bear hunt, in which Rusty and D.J. venture out alone. The potential in the hunt, its importance, is that it is a "test" of motives and heroic potential, consciousness and courage. D.J.'s and Rusty's motives for attempting this hunt are explicitly opposed. Their motives foreshadow the outcome of the hunt as much as they exacerbate the opposition of father and son as symbolic figures.

Rusty's deepest motive to hunt is the same that has operated throughout the safari—corporate power. However close Rusty may come to loosening his own stasis, he cannot transcend this motive. He is "half-insane" with his obsession not to be outdone by Pete, so insane that he gets the "guts" to go out for a "grizzer" himself: "if he don't get a bear now, he can transfer to Japan." This potential loss of his corporate power feeds Rusty's mind as he lies awake, like D.J., contemplating the recent bear kills. Rusty fears emerging threats against white civilization, organized religion, traditional authority, white men generally, and America; he feels betrayed by his own weaknesses: "Rusty's secret is that he sees himself as one of the pillars of the firmament, yeah, man—he reads the world's doom in his own fuckup. If he is less great than God intended him to be, then America is in Trouble" (p. 111).

We see in Rusty's "large thoughts" the germ of Mailer's own philosophy, but the germ grows to distortion. Who is Rusty's god but the "biggest corporation of them all." The hunt and Rusty's deepest

motives for it will emphasize his role as a figure already beyond redemption and as the incarnation of the modern disease. Rusty is a monstrosity, a disproportion, a cancer.⁸ He has distorted a fundamental need in the individual to assert his or her existence, distorted it into the cannibalistic absorption and manipulation of other men. And Rusty's larger problem is that to make his "philosophy" work, however distorted the emphasis of the first twelve "thoughts," he, Rusty, has to be "an honest son of a bitch," because if you are a "fulcrum of the Lord"—and Mailer has always argued that such is the human *potential*—then the Lord takes "his reading off you." But Rusty cannot be honest "by definition." What he has become, what he *is*, is consummate dishonesty, the type of unguenuine existence or "cheat." Rusty has reversed the field, to use Mailer's metaphor, and it is not the divine but the satanic conception that takes its reading off him. It will be Rusty's final action that will show D.J. what he must do to save himself.

D.J.'s motives for the hunt as well as his actions during it conflict with Rusty's. D.J. wants to conquer the "dread" he feels about his existential death in the safari. He also wants to prove himself in a true hunt by conquering his fear of the bear and by shooting as cleanly as Tex, a "natural hunter" who has just taken a bear with one clean shot to its brain with his .270. What D.J. wants to prove most at this point is that he is closer to Tex than to M.A. Pete who, with his Nitro Express, has just received credit for another bear that dies from the "bomb and superblast" of "General Luke's" collective "military" operation in "Chap Seven." And D.J. now has the instincts of the true hunt to slake, which were awakened by his first drink of wolf's blood (pp. 118–19).

When father and son strike out on their own, D.J. feels his first love for his father: "he don't know if he's going to be a hero or dead, but he loves his daddy this instant, what a fuck of a stud, they will take off together, they will make their own way back to camp, and Big Luke will sweat a huge drop." As Rusty and D.J. penetrate the forest, Rusty begins to shed his corporation layers, giving off the old rot as he does, which is the smell of "many a hero." Father and son, "like two combat wolves," slowly sweep into the "mood" of everything around

8. Mailer said in his "Speech at Berkeley on Vietnam Day" "that the ill of civilization is that it is removed from nature—disproportions thrive everywhere. The war in Vietnam is just such a monstrous disproportion. We are present at a mystery. All monstrous disproportion conceals a mystery or an insanity. . . . Most strong motives are finally psychological—money or power is required to satisfy some imbalance in ourselves." The violence of the war is an attempt to purge the psychic "disease." That the purgation takes the form of massive, technological, and impersonal violence rather than direct confrontation is the measure of the disease's hold upon us. See CC, pp. 73–79.

them and begin to feel the “good” or grace that they are earning by their effort and by the danger they face. They enter the mood of the genuine hunt: “there’s fine cool in them now, they’re off the *fever* of hunting and into the *heart* of it” (p. 135, my italics). Rusty briefly reveals the other face of the father; he becomes the true father and teacher. He points out curiosities of flora and fauna. He delivers three parables to his son that teach the necessity of seeking one’s roots, of adventure and courage, and of taking what one needs from nature cleanly, economically, and with one’s intrinsic rather than extrinsic powers. But there is an important irony in these parables. For finally, Rusty cannot act in accordance with the intentions they express, a fact that is presaged by the dimness of vision Rusty expresses in his explication of the third parable. In this parable Rusty explains that the eagle is a false symbol of America’s greatness. Rusty once saw an eagle killing a wounded deer by plucking out one eye at a time and then going for the deer’s testicles. This “most miserable of scavengers,” Rusty says, betrays the country it symbolizes. What Rusty does not see is the appropriateness of the “miserable scavenger” symbol to his country as it now is, as it proliferates malignancies across the landscape and engages in an obscene war. It is Rusty’s way of life that has made his country become a “miserable scavenger.”

Though D.J. briefly sees another side of his father in the hunt and dares to hope that this side of Rusty may sustain him in his own quest, there are times even in the hunt when D.J.’s old anger against Rusty returns. D.J. is reminded of Rusty’s betrayer face, for example, when D.J., tracking the bear, realizes that this devouring beast is the foe they must conquer through alertness, skill, and force. Thrown back on his own resources, D.J. becomes aware of a “hole in his center,” of some possibly irreparable loss. He senses Rusty’s role in that loss and recalls a series of smaller betrayals. Rusty has provided as a model for courageous self-expansion only a corporate hollow. Each of the old instances of betrayal that D.J. recalls in “Chap 8” as in “Intro Beep 3” is in turn a lesser but symptomatic betrayal of the more serious betrayal yet to come. At those moments during the hunt when D.J. portentously sees the actual face of Rusty again, the face of the father who will “suffocate” the son and frustrate the son’s quest for authenticity, D.J. wants to kill Rusty, and he nearly does.

But D.J. does not slay the father-betrayer because “the beast’s” presence is so imminent that he must concentrate on the task at hand, the hunt itself. And surely Rusty’s revelations suggesting another potential, of the helpful and true father, weaken D.J.’s sense of the real danger the false father represents. Facing the immediate danger of the beast, father and son regain their “cool” and the

“heart” of the hunt. They stalk this beast as if going deeper into themselves, as if entering a calm flat sea, as D.J. describes it, going “in deeper on every step . . . a rock God laid on water” (p. 138). D.J. is ready when the grizzly, “Mr. Death,” charges out of the brush.

D.J. in some sweet cool of rest below all panic and paralysis dropped to one knee, threw up Remington, had a sail of light at the top of his head of far-gone tree and sky, and pulled off the trigger to smash a shot into that wall of fur, almost leisurely, like shot-putting a rock into a barrel. . . . it kept coming down like a twelve-foot surf of comber bamming right for your head, and D.J.’s heart and his soul sweet angel bird went up the elevator of his body . . . before he slammed bolt and fired again. (*Why*, p. 141)

Sounding like the “foghorn” of the bear that died from massive shock and like “the crazy wild ass moan of every animal they’d gunned down and the tear and blast of all flesh,” the bear comes on like the violated beast it is — the accumulated rage of all the violated animals in the North, “with affiliates down to the Equator,” as D.J. in a moment of heightened metaphorical vision sees the bear. The bear is also the Nemesis of the violated self in our century. This animal, like any true symbol, functions on more than one level of meaning in D.J.’s tale. The literal devouring beast of the forest, though now himself “insane,” is also the symbolic devourer of myth and dream. As we saw in *An American Dream*, literal and symbolic beasts are the same for Mailer. By facing the mythic beast, which represents an overwhelming insanity, D.J. faces psychological and existential death. This psychological and existential death is the loss of D.J.’s self, of the opportunity to integrate instinctual and conscious life, and of control over his now fragmented consciousness. As a symbol of a distorted, uncontrollable unconscious life that threatens to devour D.J., this bear must be faced and overcome if D.J., or indeed life in general, is to progress and triumph. This bear also prepares us for the climactic symbol of the book: the cosmic devourer, the insane beast or devil that the disintegration of psychic life in our time has unleashed upon the world.

By facing this beast, D.J. momentarily earns the grace he describes as the flight of his soul bird. The grizzly’s charge shows D.J. that the center of things is now insane and insane with force. This lesson is “like a stroke across the strings and nerve in his life—say, it will come back and back again.” But he will return to this moment of perception into the heart of things as something sacred because it also reveals to him the other essence of Nature, a nearly lost potential in Nature. This beast, finally, offers D.J. an absolution, a forgiveness, beyond the bestial insanity in the world and in oneself.

It is important to see that the center of things is not only insane, as

many of Mailer's critics seem to believe. There is still some ethical, divine order and some regenerative force in nature, however far away now, that a few might reach. But the more this ethical order is disturbed, the greater the imbalance grows and the more the insane violence erupts.⁹ The forgiveness is offered in a moment of self-transcendence that begins as Rusty and D.J. work to approach the dying bear who looks "like a tabby cat on its stomach, forelegs tucked under him, peaceful, looking to be stuffed bear served on a red plate ten feet in diameter, for that blood beneath was monumental in its pool" (p. 145). This stage of the hunt has no such meaning for Rusty as it does for D.J. Rusty would kill the bear outright. But D.J. holds his father off and gets close to the bear so that he might enter "the peace" coming off the animal "like the moment a gull sets on water." The animal's eyes now seem to D.J. like "transparent eyes" revealing Nature's message. In those eyes Nature is a "fellow, an intelligence of something very fine and far away"; the eyes "brand" some part of D.J.'s "future."¹⁰ Fluctuating between the message from the depth of Nature and the "shattering message" of pain from the animal's "shattered" organs, the bear's eyes respond to D.J. as he makes a first step toward his return to grace. The eyes promise D.J. an excruciating struggle if he would complete his return: "Baby, you haven't begun." But just as D.J. initiates his return, Rusty inflicts the ultimate betrayal; he denies D.J.'s communion with the deep-seated soul of Nature, so "very fine and far away" in the bear's eyes.

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

9. Compare my point here with Mailer's discussion of violence in "Talking of Violence," *Twentieth Century* 173 (Winter, 1964-65): 109-12. Mailer distinguishes between social and personal violence. Social violence creates personal violence, which is the "antithesis" of social violence. Our "institutional deadenings," for example, force juvenile delinquency to flourish, and such delinquency, as personal violence, is an expression of "social suffocation."

10. One cannot be sure Mailer has been reading his Emerson, but compare Emerson's description of transcendence in a similar passage from *Nature*. "The lover of Nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy. . . . His intercourse with heaven and earth becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says,—he is my creature. . . . In the woods . . . a man casts off his years, as a snake his slough. . . . In the woods we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life . . . which nature cannot repair. Standing on bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God." From Stephen E. Whicher's, *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, pp. 23-24.

was drawing in some music of the unheard burial march, and Rusty . . . chose that moment to shoot, and griz went up to death in one last paroxysm, legs thrashing, brain exploding from new galvanizings and overloadings of massive damage report, and one last final heuuuuuu, *all forgiveness gone*. And coughed blood out of his throat as he died. (p. 147, my italics)

Mailer's bear-hunting tale has generally been compared with Faulkner's "The Bear," and there are specific similarities and differences worth emphasis at this point to clarify Mailer's tale. Ike McCaslin sees in Old Ben's death some hint of nature's eternal essence, much as D.J. does in the dying grizzly's "transparent" eye. In abandoning the powers of civilization to approach the bear, Ike and D.J. both trade the power of the extrinsic for the power of the self, and both boys place themselves before the bear in a kind of humility that leads to moral insights that the extrinsic powers of civilization seem only to obscure. The wilderness and nature that both Faulkner's and Mailer's bears represent, therefore, are potential sources of moral and spiritual knowledge. Such knowledge is attained by suffering, endurance, courage, humility, and the awakening of sensibilities. Both Mailer and Faulkner oppose this moral knowledge and strength to the power of civilization because it is the wilderness, this root and source, that civilized man destroys in his greed and through the misused resources of his technology. This wilderness may be either the actual wilderness of nature or the primordial wilderness of the psyche, or it may be both. Both are obvious and traditional sources of mankind's deepest experiences and roots. R. W. B. Lewis hints that Faulkner's Old Ben possesses the characteristics of the Terrible Mother in heroic mythology. The same is true of Mailer's bear. The bear D.J. faces has the two aspects of this figure: the dark upwellings of the violated unconscious and the face of the healer and protectress who represents the nourishing potential of Goddess Nature and creative unconscious. She can aid the hero in subduing the Terrible Father, and thereby may help the hero reach his atonement with the True Father (the enlightener) and carry redemption into the world.¹¹

There are, however, significant differences between Faulkner's and Mailer's bear hunts, especially if we consider Faulkner's Ike only in the hunting tale itself.¹² If both Ike and D.J. attempt retribution

11. See R. W. B. Lewis, "William Faulkner: The Hero in the New World," in R. P. Warren's *Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 212. Compare Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, pp. 131, 155.

12. For a reading exactly the opposite of my points in this paragraph, see Richard Pearce, "Norman Mailer's *Why Are We in Vietnam?* A Radical Critique of Frontier Values," *MFS*, pp. 409-14. Pearce reverses my contrast of Ike and D.J. Considering not only Faulkner's "The Bear" but also "Delta Autumn," Pearce sees Ike as the

for the sins of their fathers, D.J. has no Sam Fathers, no true guide, to aid him on his journey to "manhood" in the primitive sense of the word—in the sense of proven "valor" and "virtue." Unlike the annual "pageant-rite," as it has been called, of Ike's hunt, D.J.'s safari is utterly corrupt. The Indian guides' attenuated rituals are mocked by their corrupt actions. The father is no source of enlightenment, but the satanic avatar of a frenetic, corporate-power-hungry civilization. In this role, Rusty contributes to the cumulative patterns of myth and ritual in the novel. As with the symbolic bear and the later "purification ceremony," the mythic level of the novel confirms the literal. As much as Rusty reveals his nature as an agent of Death in Mailer's allegory, his role as the archetypal "Terrible Father," to use Erich Neumann's phrase, extends the mythic dimension of the novel. His characteristics and actions repeat a central pattern in primitive, classical, and modern literature. Rusty's final betrayal of D.J. denies D.J.'s potential renewal of heroic consciousness through the nourishing aspect of the Mother. This nourishing aspect is revealed in the promise of the bear's "transparent" eye. Rusty, like the mythic Terrible Father, symbolizes the negative and satanic image of a "castrating patriarch" who is the old and rigid consciousness, the stifling ego, and the old ways and systems in their suffocating deadness.¹³ When Rusty adds to his betrayal the insult of taking credit for the kill before the Indian guides and his corporate extensions, D.J. separates himself from the father he failed to slay: "Whew. Final end of love of one son for one father."

D.J. separates from his father so that he, D.J., may prepare a second attempt to gain the communion with and forgiveness of that

failure and D.J. as the success. I find it curious how many critics either believe that D.J. represents some kind of moral rebirth in the end or are simply confused by his apparent effort at moral rebirth and the apparent failure of that effort.

13. See Carl Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, translated by R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 9 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), especially pp. 214–15; and Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, especially pp. 184–87, 190–91. Joseph Campbell summarizes the issue in his subchapter, "The Hero as World Redeemer": "the work of the hero is to slay the tenacious aspect of the father (dragon, tester, ogre king) and release from its ban the vital energies that will feed the universe." See *Hero*, p. 352. Campbell describes the various aspects of this Terrible Father throughout his work as Mephistopheles, as the devourer in primitive initiation rites, and as the old and rigid system of tribe or society; see pp. 73, 138, 155.

Joseph DeFalco is particularly thorough on the role of the archetypal father figure and the father as betrayer in Ernest Hemingway's heroes. See DeFalco's, *The Hero in Hemingway's Short Stories*, especially pp. 23, 31, 52, 56–62, and *passim*. DeFalco would be useful in pointing out other relevant parallels between Hemingway's fictional heroes and Mailer's: for example, Hemingway's archetypal motifs of the heroic journey and initiation, of death and rebirth, and of the struggle of mankind, particularly in our time, toward individuation. We do well to remember that Hemingway is one of Mailer's chief literary heroes.

Nature which lies beyond the "bestial insanity" of things. This second attempt, which again recalls Ike McCaslin, D.J. frankly calls his "purification ceremony." D.J.'s "ceremonial" acts move toward a restoration of certain eternal values that are, for example, typically expressed in primitive initiation rites of manhood.¹⁴ In this novel, the values are humility and endurance, self-awareness and intrinsic power, and the knowledge and acceptance of the divine economy in Nature. Loss of Life, Mailer says in *The Presidential Papers*, is the loss of contact with the past, with the earth, and with courage (p. 159). The acts that encourage such values in the "ceremony" are: hiking into the wilderness of "God's attic" in the Brooks Range, leaving the accouterments of civilization behind, and immersing themselves in the life and "messages" of the surrounding wilds. Such acts, as D.J. says of the hike, are intended to purge the hero of the "mixed shit" and "glut" of civilization, by which D.J. means the insulating, extrinsic powers of the corporation and the safari thoroughly depicted in the previous chapters. D.J. himself points out that the relationship between the acts and the values he and Tex seek are based on the "equations" of "celestial mechanics."

Mailer's "celestial mechanics" here are clearly related to the kind of metaphysic Eliade calls "primitive ontology." The mechanics of primitive ontology, which traditionally operate in archaic ritual, are based on the faith that the value of objects, humans, and acts resides in their participation in a transcendent reality that gives them eternal existence and "saturates" them with "being." Through such mechanics, concrete existence becomes a receptacle of eternal, divine force, and the meaning and value of acts come from their reproduction of primordial acts or archetypes of regeneration. Formula and ritual, as vehicles to ceremonial time, express a "reality" that corresponds to a desperate effort "not to lose contact with

14. Joseph Campbell gives numerous examples of such rites in *Hero*. See for example the Navaho myth of the "Twin Gods" who journey to the true father through tests of endurance, pp. 69-71; and the myth of Minos and Daedalus in which the hero's self-achieved submission to the sources of rebirth expresses the necessity of ritual humility, pp. 13-17. In the rites of initiation for the Australian Murngin tribe, the boys are ritually passed from the world of the mother to the world of the father, and the male phallus becomes the central point of the initiate's imagination instead of the mother's breast; it is this movement from mother to father that D.J. calls the "phallic" catapult of future "virility," pp. 136-47.

Campbell points out that the second stage of the hero's journey is the stage of purification in which the "senses are cleansed and humbled" and the "energies and interests" of the hero "concentrated upon transcendental things," p. 101. Mircea Eliade, in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, also points out that the regenerate aspiring to transform the profane to the sacred traditionally tests his endurance against difficulties. And in the case of Tex and D.J. they are enduring a trial typical of primitive religion—the ascent of the Sacred Mountain. The mountain as an archetypal "symbol of the center" confers "being" upon he who journeys to find it (pp. 5-10, 12-15, 18).

being” and to restore to concrete time or history the spiritual energy of divine Time and Being. D.J. intends his ritual purification to abolish his past time and sin as much as primitive ritual purification does. The hero’s duty is to restore “pure Time” to the degenerations of historical time. The ritualistic gesture is the gesture of the eternal return, the existential act of urging becoming toward being, and the psychological act of restoring integral wholeness and union with created existence.¹⁵

The mere “idea” of the hike into the Brooks Range begins to clean D.J. and Tex out. But the narrative specifies a series of purifying actions. Lashing their weapons and unessential gear to a tree, D.J. and Tex feel a “clean fear” and a genuine awe of nature and of the task before them. On the hike, D.J. and Tex pass through the same stages of purification and awakening consciousness that D.J. and Rusty passed through on the hunt. D.J. and Tex enter the mood of the life around them as they slough their civilized corruptions. They see again, in nearly the same order, the kinds of animals they slaughtered on the safari: wolf, caribou, and grizzly. But now they enter each animal’s mood and make some discovery, about themselves or the animals, to which they were blind before. They face down a hunting wolf by entering his “psychic field,” an act that charges their own valor enough to threaten the wolf into running away. And the boys completely understand every sound of the wolf’s howl when he regains his own energy by fending off the attack of an eagle. The grizzly they watch is specifically contrasted to the dying bear D.J. faced earlier. D.J. wonders if this animal that just devoured a baby caribou could also reveal to him “the big eye” of the dying bear—the other side of nature—“as if the center of all significant knowledge” would thereby be revealed to him (p. 193).

When D.J. and Tex enter the mood of the animals, and when they are fascinated by the return of the mother caribou to her dead, half-devoured baby, by their view of a Dall ram on an opposite peak, and by the migrations of cranes and animal herds, they begin to penetrate the surface of life. Mailer likens such penetrations to extracting a “supernatural equivalent” from concrete experience in his commentary on Buber’s *Tales of the Hasidim* in *The Presidential*

15. Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, pp. 3–4, 25, 35–42, 52–55, 90–92. Compare Campbell in *Hero*: the rites of purgation are ultimately affirmations of celestial or cosmic time against the dissolutions of the phenomenal world. Before the clean terror of his trial, the hero is prepared to understand the “majesty of Being” opposed to the “sickening and insane tragedies” of life, pp. 146–47. Neumann suggests that the telepathies of the primitive hunt and magic are a primitive truth that might well be restored, and that these telepathies are also a primitive truth of ceremony or ceremonial “time”; see *Consciousness*, pp. 268–69, 284.

Papers. When one penetrates concrete experience, Mailer argues, it is “almost as if a key is given up from the underworld to unlock the surface of reality,” to show a realm of real events “whose connection is never absurd” (CC, p. 153). As D.J. and Tex come to sense the beauty, awe, and the connections between their sights and experiences, they approach the mystery in Nature—its economy and dreadfulness, its “ambush and reward,” as Mailer called it in 1964.¹⁶

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. . . . Man, it's terrifying to be free of mixed shit. And they got the unfucked heaven of seeing twelve Dall ram on an outcropping of snow . . . heading into valleys for winter and for feed . . . they are so white and their horns, oh, man, the underside is yellow golden rosy color that gives D.J. twiddles in the gut . . . and the sun is on that snow and space! man. (*Why*, pp. 184–85)

As for Rojack in *Dream*, there is a creative potential in D.J.'s entering the deeper truths, connections, harmonies, and “telepathies” of the life about him. It is this element or action of the purification ceremony that leads to the knowledge and acceptance of the divine economy of Nature and prepares the initiate to become a part of that economy. Once the process of perception has begun, it stimulates subsequent perceptions. As they contemplate their experiences on the hike later that evening, for example, D.J.'s and Tex's “charged” memories seem about to reveal some greater truth or essence in the mysterious underworld of Nature. “D.J. full of iron and *fire* and *faith* was nonetheless *afraid* of sleep, *afraid* of wolves, full of *beauty*, *afraid* of sleep, full of *beauty*, yeah, he unashamed . . . and D.J. could have wept for a secret was near, some mystery in the secret of things” (p. 196, my italics). In *Papers*, Mailer writes that the essence of biology “seems to be challenge and response, risk and survival, war and the lessons of war.” In the biological connections of life, Mailer suggests, beauty and danger are inseparable companions (p. 167).

For the boys, now, concrete experience is transfigured in a way similar to that in which the dying bear's eye transfigured the experience of the hunt for D.J. Concrete experiences now seem supernatural; separate physical perceptions are filled with implications and connections to other perceptions. Part of the mystery D.J. now senses is the “dominion” of the trees, which bear their message of some great sorrow up in the North, some crystallization and frag-

16. See Mailer in “Talking of Violence,” p. 112.

mentation, some “speechless electric gathering of woe,” some disruption of the peace and the terrible economy of Nature. When they see the King Moose they see the beauty and terror (the moonlight and blood) of Nature as well as the fragmenting, wounding incursions from civilization. King Moose comes down to them now

with his dewlap and his knobby knees and dumb red little eyes across the snow to lick at salt on the other side of the pond, and sunlight in the blood of its drying caught him, lit him, left him gilded red on one side as he chomped at mud and salt . . . the full new moon now up before the sun was final and down silvering the other side of this King Moose up to the moon silhouettes of platinum on his antlers and hide. And the water was black, and moose dug from it and ate, and ate some more until the sun was gone and only the moon for light and the fire of the boys and he looked up and studied the fire . . . and gave a deep caw pulling in by some resonance of this grunt a herd of memories of animals at work and on the march and something gruff in the sharp wounded heart of things bleeding somewhere in the night, a sound somewhere in that voice in the North which spoke beneath all else to Ranald Jethroe Jellicoe Jethroe and his friend . . . “Texas” Hyde. (*Why*, p. 197)

But at the very moment when D.J. and Tex are about to penetrate to the heart of the mystery in Nature and transform their consciousness, the symbolic setting of this purification ceremony takes on the greatest importance. I have said that the setting is a metaphorical battleground of intensely conflicting electronic and psychic forces. The Brooks Range itself is the “Crystal,” the field of receiving nodes and needles, that stores and emanates civilization’s “Encyclopedia of Cataclysmic Knowledge.” If the purification ceremony has revealed to D.J. and Tex something of the dreadful and beautiful essence of God in Nature, then immersion in the “cataclysmic” field of civilization’s electronic and unconscious impulses reveals still more of the Devil whose force exists in those impulses from the south. The forces of contagion reveal their dominance now, as they have throughout the safari and the hunt.

Just when D.J.’s and Tex’s potential is at its height, when the purgations and the accumulated “good” of the ceremony charge the boys with a restlessness and energy that pushes them to the edge of some commitment and communion with nature and one another, the aurora borealis flashes into the sky with an opposing message. D.J. recalls that the northern lights are a “mountain of heavenly light” scientifically certified to be a reflection of magnetic disturbance, and the lights speak to the boys of the satanic south, of something agitated and crackling in the heavens like static and sparks. The “God” of the aurora borealis is here in the North. But he is no “man”; he is a “beast of a giant jaw and cavernous mouth with

a full cave's breath and fangs, and secret call: come to me" (p. 202). This God-turned Devourer is Mailer's Devil or Anti-Soul. Whether we see this Devil from the psychological or metaphysical view, it is Death. This Devil is fulfilled by ourselves and set loose upon the world as a mad devouring beast; It "hates nature," deadens "the soul of all of us, invite[s] it to surrender" (see *CC*, pp. 334, 364).

The question of whether this bestial god is God or Devil has caused the greatest confusion among critics of *Why* and has resulted in the most divergent readings of any of Mailer's books. As always, Mailer's external commentaries help.¹⁷ We have in this novel itself, however, a continuous portrait of opposed conceptions and states of being. On one hand is Rusty and his safari, the fragmentation or fission of electro- and psychomagnetic fields, the extrinsic and manipulatory powers of the corporate machine and civilization, and the insanity of devouring men and beasts. On the other hand, we have the ethical order in the transparent eye, the divine economies of animal instinct and migration, the intrinsic power of the true hunt, and the self-realization and penetrating perception that emerge during the ceremonial test. It is quite clear which is the Good and which the Evil. We can add to this opposition Mailer's distinction in *Why* between animal wildness and animal insanity or bestiality, and we can add the juxtaposition of D.J.'s diseased language and consciousness and his desire for wholeness, for connecting his instinctual or wild self with his conscious self. This search for wholeness of self is one of the earliest motifs in the novel. In the chapters before the narrative begins, D.J. imagines his mother talking to her psychiatrist, Dr. Fixit, about her desire to keep D.J. ("Jekyll") and Tex

17. In *An American Dream* no less than in *CC* and *PP*, as in mythology generally, the devouring aspect of cosmic or psychic force is associated with the Devil. In *PP*, for example, the Devil-as-Plague is continually compared to a great Devouring Goat. Yet both Solotaroff and Gutman, to take two recent critics, see this Beast as the true heart of Nature and as "God." Gutman's analysis of the violence in nature somewhat mitigates this simplification in his book; see Gutman, *Mankind in Barbary*, pp. 131, 138–39, 150–51. Solotaroff begins his chapter on *Why* with the revealing suggestion that D.J.'s flaw is that he confuses God with the Devil. But in the end, Solotaroff does not follow this insight and argues that the "Cannibal Emperor of Nature's Psyche" is God himself. Solotaroff admits he quite possibly misread the ending of the novel, but he offers in hope that he did not misread it, only the general statement that the details of the safari lead us to believe the Devourer is God. I confess Solotaroff confuses me, and I believe him to be far more accurate when he says he could have misread Mailer here. For finally it is both D.J. and Solotaroff who confuse God and Devil. See Solotaroff, *Down Mailer's Way*, pp. 196, 200, 205–6. Perhaps John Aldridge started these misreadings in his "From Vietnam to Obscenity," *Harper's*, pp. 91–97. Aldridge sees *Why* as a novel of absolution in the sense that *Moby Dick* and *Huckleberry Finn* are. All of these critics pass over Mailer's distinction between animal nature (including natural, direct violence) and bestial madness. For a representative opposing view of the novel as a defeat of the hero rather than an absolution see Roger Ramsey's "Current and Recurrent," in *MFS* (Autumn 1971), pp. 415–31.

("Hyde") separate, to keep D.J. wholly within the corporate norms. Tex is too much the wild one, the "panther," the one close to instincts, passions, and the realities of death. Though each boy has some attributes of the other, D.J., who represents the influences of technology and intellectual or accrued knowledge, seeks something in Tex that he needs to break through the technological surface of America.

To interpret the final pages of this novel we have only to ask ourselves which way the boys turn: toward the disease or toward the wholeness and expanded consciousness epitomized by the potential in the ceremonial purification and test? They are unable to reap the promises of the purification ceremony. The influence of the beast in this center of "apocalyptic messages" is too great. The love D.J. feels for Tex and the desire to be one with the instinctual "brother," a love and desire that hang suspended like "an intensity" and "purgation" above them as they nearly reach across to one another, cannot be free of the satanic presence—the cumulative forces and messages from their civilization and, perhaps, the accumulated wastes of their lives. Their failure is not that heroic, authentic act and existence are, as Stanley T. Gutman puts it, "irrelevant," but that satanic existence is so overwhelming now that they cannot be authentic. D.J. and Tex end in a lust for perverted power, which D.J. calls the "lust" to own one another, to dominate the other, literally, through homosexual assault: "something went into them, and owned their fear, some communion of telepathies and new powers" that captures the love between the boys.¹⁸ They know not *what* "owns" them—"Prince of darkness, Lord of light." They know only that they are owned and "touched forever." Now they are "killer" brothers who reach across not in love but in a pact of killers, "blood to blood." They have become the tools of the Devourer. When they return to base camp, they reenter the dead, predictable ways of corporate consciousness, but they bring with them a new power and increase of "electrified mind." They are in total communion now with the "electrified telepathies" of a Devouring, satanic civilization, not in communion with the rigorous economies of Nature or the essence of a fellow "intelligence of something very fine and far away."

The purification ritual that the boys underwent, and to which D.J. returns, is potentially the ultimate compulsive action intended to stay the threats of anxiety, dread, waste, and death in their lives. It would be an example of what Fletcher has called "visionary ritual" or the "higher function" of ritual in allegory, which traditionally leads to some "positive moment of exuberance and delight." The

18. *Why*, p. 219. Compare *PP*, p. 277, where Mailer argues that God must "raid" Evil to recover his existence and that Devil lusts to capture love.

climax of D.J.'s "ceremony" is one of those final moments of vision that, as Fletcher puts it, causes particular allegories to become a "closed climactic form," by its introduction of apocalyptic images, which promote "mere allegory" to "the higher order of mysterious language" we generally call mythical. Unlike the promise of fruitfulness and the triumph of love and creation traditionally associated with the apocalyptic vision—such as that in *Moby Dick* or Eliot's *Ash Wednesday*, to use Fletcher's examples—*Why Are We in Vietnam?* suggests the opposite triumph, the triumph of Antichrist and the destruction of order, the archetypal "catastrophic vision" like that of Orwell or Samuel Beckett (see Fletcher, pp. 353–55).

D.J. has lost his soul to the collective disasters of the e.m.f. and the M.E.F., of his civilization, and has gained a satanic consciousness, has been hypnotized by the Beast, will feed Him messages now, perform His "will" to "go forth and kill." D.J. has reached no atonement with the Father, no nourishment from the Mother. He has not rejected the Tyrant father and Vietnam, as some critics suggest. Betrayed by the corporate consciousness and the electrified mind of their homeland, D.J. and Tex have become that mind. They surface from the safari, the hunt, and the hike more like Mailer's portrait in *Cannibals* of Lyndon Johnson and the general American insanity: ready to go forth as statisticians and deny Nature, to kill, and to revel in the power of an extrinsic mechanistic force by burying the inhabitants of a faraway land, as Rusty put it, in "fire, shit, and fury." This thoroughly defeated hero "signs off" in the words Mailer ascribes to President Johnson in Mailer's Berkeley Vietnam Day speech: "Vietnam, hot damn."

If, finally, D.J. is defeated, if he has gained satanic consciousness, he is also doomed to the obsessive guilt of a sinner. For his narrative, by its manner and structure, reveals a defeated self who returns, painfully, chaotically, digressively, to a moment in his past when he struggled for expiation and failed. His tale is an imaginative return to "ceremony." And Mailer has compared ceremony, in *Existential Errands*, to a prayer, a repetition of invocation and propitiation to the gods (p. 104). The narrator-hero of *Why* is unable to combine his original intention—purgation, expiation, wholeness—with his final actions: his lust to "own" Tex, his enthusiastic acceptance of the war, his return to the world of his fathers, his fragmented speech, his demonological impulses or "freaks." *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is a record of the victory of the satanic act and the defeat of expiation and rebirth. This victory marks the death of Mailer's fictional hero: it also marks the darkest moment of Mailer's vision.

Perhaps this novel is an expression of the author's own sense of defeat by the catastrophic events of the late sixties and an admission

of his helplessness and failure before those events. Speaking of his fear of helplessness amidst the events of his time in *Advertisements*, Mailer writes: "How poor to go to death with no more than the notes of a good intention. It is the actions of men and not their sentiments which make history" (p. 477). It is only through the emergence of the nonfiction hero, of that protean persona called "Mailer," in the year following *Why* and throughout the 1970s that Mailer again engages in the battle for Life, in the effort to make his sentiments real, and in his hope of expiation and rebirth.

6

Heroic Consciousness and the Origins of the Nonfiction

Already . . . we can discern, in single individuals, where the synthetic possibilities of the future lie, and almost how it will look. The turning of the mind from the conscious to the unconscious, the responsible *rapprochement* of human consciousness with the powers of the collective psyche, that is the task of the future. No outward tinkering with the world and no social ameliorations can give the quietus to the daemon, to the gods and devils of the human soul, or prevent them from tearing down again and again what consciousness has built. Unless they are assigned their place in consciousness and culture they will never leave mankind in peace. But the preparation for this *rapprochement* lies, as always, with the hero, the individual; he and his transformation are the great human prototypes; he is the testing ground of the collective, just as consciousness is the testing ground of the unconscious. —Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*

This is a chapter of retrospection, but also of synthesis and definition. Before turning to Mailer's nonfiction, we need to be clear on two aspects of his fiction: the nature of the Mailer hero and the attributes of heroic consciousness. We will then be prepared to trace Mailer's gradual transition from fiction to nonfiction and to understand how Mailer sees himself before the years of his major nonfiction works.

Following World War II, American fiction reflects a search for the modern hero. Among many of Mailer's contemporaries, this search produced what has come to be known as the absurd hero or the anti-hero. But Mailer is anxious to establish the differences between his own goals and heroes and those of Updike, Styron, Bellow, and Salinger, to name a few. In "Some Children of the Goddess," reprinted from *Esquire* in *Cannibals*, Mailer analyzes the differences between himself and, as he sees them, his competitors. Chief among his points is that the anti-hero is too weak a figure to reflect the revolution in consciousness Mailer deems necessary for human survival and growth. The other writers and their heroes, Mailer argues, are too often evasive, retreating before the mysteries they would explore. A second difference is in part the cause of the first. Mailer believes his contemporaries' attempts to return to the self and the psyche are bogged in the "cancerous debilitation" of the reductive intellectual structure and language of psychoanalysis. Although

Mailer's own work is not free of the language of psychoanalysis, he would have us believe that his journey within is free of any conscious, reductive structure. He believes the weight of such an external structure gives to much of his competitors' work the taint of the artificial and the unauthentic. As a result, Mailer continues, the journey into self that in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance would "come closer to a vision of God or some dictate from eternity" is thwarted today (CC, see especially pp. 129–30). Much as he admires some aspects of Saul Bellow's art, for example, Mailer argues that in Bellow the necessary, rebellious urge of the power to advance one's own life is enervated by a timid quest.

Frank Cowperwood once amassed an empire. Herzog, his bastard great-nephew, diddled in the ruins of an intellectual warehouse. Where once the realistic novel cut a swath across the face of society, now its reality was concentrated into moral seriousness. Where the original heroes of naturalism had been active, bold, self-centered, close to tragic, and up to their nostrils in their exertions to advance their own life and force the webs of society, so the hero of moral earnestness, the hero Herzog and the hero Levin in Malamud's *A New Life*, are men who represent the contrary—passive, timid, other-directed, pathetic, up to their nostrils in anguish: the world is stronger than they are; suicide calls. (CC, p. 100)

In the context of his essay and the "argument" that prefaces it, Mailer is being contradictory and a little unfair. He compares apples and oranges: the realistic novel and the writer of the journey into self. Later in the essay he will establish these as two separate categories. Of course suicide calls Mailer's own heroes, and Mailer's novels are nothing if not novels of moral earnestness. But Mailer's charge against the anti-hero is nonetheless important: "Herzog was defeated, Herzog was an unoriginal man, Herzog was a fool—not an attractive God-anointed fool like Gimpel the Fool, . . . but a sodden fool, over-educated and inept, unable to fight, able to love only when love presented itself as a gift" (CC, p. 100). If *Herzog* still succeeds, Mailer suggests, it succeeds only by compassion, not by making us recognize our guilt.

If Mailer is oblivious to the similarities between his heroes and the anti-heroes and if he is somewhat confused rather than consistent and precise in his charges against his "competitors," he does draw an essential distinction. His heroes are different. They are "up to their nostrils" in their exertions to advance their own lives and to pursue growth. The anti-heroes tend to stumble or retreat merely toward a code of survival in an absurd world. But if we amplify the real similarities as well as the differences before going further, we may approach a clearer definition of the Mailer hero. In his *The Absurd Hero in American Fiction*, David Galloway considers Updike,

Styron, Bellow, and Salinger and offers useful insights that should help us avoid some of the oversimplifications Mailer himself commits as he takes on his contemporaries.

The similarities between the absurd hero, as Galloway has concisely defined him, and the Mailer hero seem striking at first. Both are exiles, outlaws of their respective cultures. Both are on a "religious" quest, as Mailer himself acknowledges in the final pages of his "Goddess" essay. But a further definition is needed here. The religious quest of the absurd hero is limited to man's hunger for unity (his intention) in a disordered universe (the reality). Using Albert Camus's conception of the absurd man as he presented it in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Galloway points out that this quest is religious simply because it seeks to fulfill a spiritual need in man for order against an omnipresent disorder. Both the absurd heroes and the Mailer heroes deny that conventional value systems and rationalism can resolve the conflict between intention and reality, and both, to the extent that they succeed, reject suicide as a solution to mankind's absurd situation. The absurd man is as wedded to life as the Mailer hero.

Also to both heroes, consciousness is of the greatest importance. Consciousness for the absurd hero is the awareness of his situation, of the absurdity of it. Absurd consciousness is therefore by its nature an abnormal expansion of awareness and an extraordinary act of the individual amongst the mass of his or her species. Camus calls this consciousness the "weariness tinged with amazement." The absurd hero's vision of the irrationality and the spiritual sterility of his environment is the fundamental fact of his awareness. The hero's refusal to avoid either his intention to seek unity or to deny the chaotic, sterile reality is the basis of his heroism (his heroic endurance) and the essence of his "absurd" position.¹

Unlike the absurd novelists that Galloway discusses, Mailer envisions a reality that reflects his intention. And this difference is crucial. Mailer and his heroes are on a quest for absolute value or truth, which Mailer calls variously Life, Vision, or God. The chaos and directionless force in the cosmos are not for Mailer the whole cosmos but one element of it. The opposing element is Life, or the order and purpose of creation. As we have seen, chaos and order, Devil and God, are at war on the smallest and grandest of scales. And for Mailer, right and wrong have not entirely lost their ancient names and become meaningless. On the basis of his faith that God's vision gives purpose to life, Mailer disavows the absurdity of disease

1. I am summarizing in these paragraphs the conclusions of David Galloway's complete study that represent points of convergence with my own study of Mailer. See *The Absurd Hero in American Fiction*, especially pp. 5-17.

and death and, therefore, of life (see *CC*, p. 311). God is not all-powerful but at war. Only if he were all-powerful, Mailer argues in *Existential Errands*, would the “monumental disproportions and injustices” of life be absurd (p. 252).

The absurd novelists and their heroes face the lack of meaning and hope in a world without God; their victories and defeats are restricted to the personal sphere. Updike’s heroes, like “Rabbit” Angstrom, find value for living in love as a communion of the flesh. But Rabbit’s fulfillment arises from fleeing the sterile environment. As Mailer puts it: “his character bolts.” David Galloway points out that as Bellow’s heroes develop, their quest for life or value is restricted to the individual, not expanded to God-in-the-individual. Herzog’s final peace, what he calls his “human life,” is that he can accept what he despises and still live. If his sin was a pedantic detachment from life, his salvation is merely “to be,” to accept a chaotic reality *and* his own life, and to hope for future engagement. But Mailer defines Life differently.

If the absurd hero portrays man finally appealing to himself, as Mailer’s heroes do, to find Life, the absurd hero does not find in himself the divine energy or the eternal, purposive, creative, and transpersonal force of some *élan vital* or, to use Mailer’s word, It. The affirmation of the self in a godless world is the defiance of the absurd hero and the goal of his religious quest. Unlike the absurd man, Mailer boldly directs his defiance against Death and disorder, and Mailer’s and his heroes’ defiance supply the energy for the quest for God and for the quest to establish a new order beyond the self.

Mailer’s quest and the quests of his heroes have moved closer to the quests of the mythological heroes of the past. For more than a century, those who have specifically studied the hero phenomenon in the heroic literature, mythology, and history of many epochs and cultures consider the heroic journey an inward quest for something larger than the self. Thomas Carlyle, Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, and Erich Neumann, to name a few, see the heroic adventure as the archetypal return to the life-source within the individual. But the goal of that return into the self is the hero’s reappearance in the world bearing the source—the divine source—of expansion, enlightenment, and nourishment of consciousness.

In the postindustrial nineteenth century, the hero and the heroic self are obvious concerns of a number of writers other than Carlyle—Emerson and Whitman, for example. But Carlyle, in particular, is studying precisely the same phenomenon as those twentieth-century writers: the nature of the hero throughout history. Carlyle’s discoveries have a great deal in common with the discoveries of the twentieth-century mythologists, and by abstract-

ing what is fundamental to them all and to Mailer, we can more precisely define the kind of heroism Mailer seeks. In particular, Mailer carries the concern with a special kind of consciousness into the late twentieth century. Jung and the post-Jungians not only illuminate Mailer's work, they are interested in the same issue as Mailer—the human urge to transcendence and expanded consciousness in the postindustrial world. For all of these writers the urge to transcendence has a larger foundation and a greater potential than it does for twentieth-century existentialists. In his study of this “monomyth” in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell summarizes the nature of this archetypal heroic journey. Once the hero, voluntarily or not, passes the “threshold of adventure,” he has dipped into the realm of the unconscious life-source.

There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his divinization (apotheosis), or again—if the powers have remained unfriendly to him—his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire theft); intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final work is that of the return. . . . At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero reemerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir). (pp. 245–46)

“The changes,” Campbell continues, “rung on the simple scale of the monomyth defy description.” A tale may isolate and enlarge one or two steps of the heroic cycle, for example. But always the hero turns to the source of life and undergoes a test or battle to regain life. Above all in importance is the boon of expanded consciousness won from the unconscious kingdom of dread, for that is the elixir to change the self and the world. This is the heroic boon sought throughout “revolutionary history,” in Carlyle's words. We could generally define *heroic consciousness* as that consciousness which synthesizes the resources both of the conscious and unconscious psyche. But as Mailer depicts and describes it, heroic consciousness has five principal qualities. The first two qualities are components of heroic consciousness in itself: metaphorical perception and divine

energy. The other three qualities define the relationship of heroic consciousness to society. Heroic consciousness is revolutionary, it redresses the imbalance between conscious and unconscious psyche in contemporary mankind, and it is discovered and carried into the world by the extraordinary individual.

The immediate goal Mailer's heroes seek is metaphorical perception, which is to say, a perception that has the capacity to see relations, connections, and telepathies between things, people, actions, and between parts and wholes. Metaphorical consciousness is a result of the fusion of the unconscious or intuitive organs of perception with those that are conscious or rational. In *Barbary Shore*, McLeod calls this perception "metaphorical vision," and that novel represents Mailer's first step in defining the metaphorical quality of a new consciousness. McLeod's perception of his own guilt in the decreativeness of the postwar world is the metaphorical end that reveals to him his true relationship with that world, the context in which to see himself and others. Death in *Barbary Shore* is loss of metaphorical perception, a loss characterized by Hollingsworth's realism—the rational consciousness of only isolated facts and statistics.

In *The Deer Park*, Sergius also discovers his real potential by observing the rise and fall of the old man. And we have seen that Sergius seeks a potential or consciousness that penetrates the surface of an unreal world, sees the connections between things in the "real" world beneath, and faces the consequences of one's actions and life as a result of such vision. Mailer, like Thomas Carlyle, defines the chief attribute of the hero in *The Deer Park* as the capacity to look beyond the visible facade of things and into them. The "seeing eye" is the basis of Carlyle's and Mailer's heroic consciousness, which Carlyle believes to be "not the result of habits or accidents, but the gift of Nature herself; the primary outfit for a Heroic Man." For both Mailer and Carlyle, the hero's imagination or "Power of Insight" is the effect of the "vital Force which dwells in him" and the source of his "moral quality." Carlyle also argues that this power of insight, heroic consciousness, integrates the rational and prerational, the moral and the courageous, in a single act of perception.²

In the 1950s and early 1960s Mailer continuously emphasized a similar point about the moral quality of the seeing eye that realizes

2. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, see especially pp. 55–56, 105–7. Carl Jung and Victor White associate expanded (heroic) consciousness with prophetic revelation and the prophet-hero. They also define "intuition" as the integration of unconscious and conscious psyche. See White's *God and the Unconscious*, pp. 178, 210.

the truths in the connections between things, connections which Mailer, in *Advertisements*, called “the quick flesh of associations.” Notably in “The White Negro,” Mailer argued that we live in a “dangerous moral condition” or “network of forces.” It is the perception of this network that leads to the hero’s perception that the “core of Life cannot be cheated.” In *The Presidential Papers* he argued that the moral quality of heroic perception was that it draws sustenance from instinct (the vital force within) and that instinct comes from God.³ Though Rojack’s salvation is obviously bound up in such a network of forces and perceptions, Mailer uses D.J. the defeated hero to give fullest expression to his convictions about the moral economy and ecology of the divine forces and energies that connect all things below the surface of life. The health D.J. seeks is the “primitive health” that Joseph Campbell, in *Hero*, calls the perception of and belief in the relationships, the divine ecology, of all things animate and inanimate (p. 169).

Mailer’s theories and his artistic practice often work toward the same goal of increasing metaphorical perceptions and awakening unconscious energy. We have seen in *An American Dream* especially how symbols function, often simultaneously, on diverse levels—the realistic, the rationally allegorical, and the mythic or visionary. When an image has timeless, mythological properties—as allegorical *potentiae* might—it is no longer a mere picture but, as both Campbell and Neumann point out, a “psychological image” or a “symbol” from the psyche. Mythological images are symbols that act as a bridge between the conscious and unconscious, that make unconscious energy available for conscious activity. If the symbol has a side that accords with rational consciousness, it also has a side that is inaccessible to rational consciousness. Because certain primordial images have latent meaning for the unconscious and because they appeal to the whole human, not just the rational elements of a being, they have always been used as metaphors for truths that cannot be discursively articulated by great teachers who seek to reach the whole human being, who seek to charge their readers or pupils with renewed psychic energies. Campbell calls such timeless images “psychological metaphors.”⁴ By comparing a woman to a goddess, and by defining her goddesslike attributes through various mythic images, Mailer uses mythic images as

3. *Advertisements for Myself* (hereafter cited as *Ads*), p. 385; *The Presidential Papers*, p. 194. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations are to works by Norman Mailer.

4. See Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, pp. 173–78; Erich Neumann’s *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, pp. 7, 365–69; and Carl Jung’s *Symbols of Transformation*, translated by R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 5 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956), pp. 124, 232.

psychological metaphors to give the largest possible connotations and associations to his work and to awaken latent unconscious energies that a simply literal realism might not.

The second quality of heroic consciousness is just this awakening of psychic energies, which Mailer associates with divine energy. With the publication of *The Deer Park* and the external commentary that begins in *Advertisements*, Mailer's quest for heroic consciousness shifts slightly in emphasis toward an exploration into the secrets of human energy. I argued that we could see *The Deer Park* as a series of attempted "regressions" to the source of one's being. Eitel's failure is not so much a failure of vision as a failure to tap the inner resources necessary to sustain his vision and live by it.

While it is true that for both Lovett and Sergius the effect of increased consciousness is metaphorical vision and penetrating perception, the lessons Sergius draws from what he observes and from his parallel temptations depend more upon his search for some substance or power within. The potency of the self is continually opposed to the potency of "the world" in *The Deer Park*. Self-potency is the basis of Marion's and, finally, Sergius's defiance of the forces of restricted consciousness and falsehood, and self-potency is the basis of Sergius's personal growth. *The Deer Park*, then, begins to explore the reciprocal relationship between energy and vision. Sergius's courage and his choice to forego the rewards of "the world" depend upon his vision of the truth of real connections below the facade. Each time Sergius sees or is reminded of this truth, he regains the energy necessary to continue penetrating the facade and to rebel against it.

But if Mailer begins to suggest the energetic qualities of sustained, expanded consciousness and its consequences in *The Deer Park*, he depicts merely tentative and failed acts of defiance. It is only after this novel, beginning with *Advertisements*, that unconscious or instinctual energy, which will be the source of self-creation and rebellion, clearly becomes the divine energy within. We saw Mailer propose that the unconscious is "conceivably" divine in *Advertisements*. And, consciously or not, Mailer's hipsters in "The White Negro," "The Time of Her Time," and "Advertisements on The Way Out" view or feel their destinies to be "flesh and blood" with God's. Their search for energy is the search for divine energy. By the time Mailer writes the "dialogues" collected in *The Presidential Papers* and in *Cannibals*, he defines unconscious perceptions as agencies of associative truth and divine energy. He frankly calls the unconscious the "soul."

Yet until Rojack appears in *Dream*, Mailer does not demonstrate

how the hero's journey into his deepest energies results in specific acts of self-creation. Lovett and Sergius are relatively passive. With Rojack, however, the quest for energy, depicted through the mythological imagery of the Night Sea Journey and the Nourishing Mother, combines with the consequences of the quest: expanded vision, self-creation, and defiance. Rojack channels instinctual energy into will through the authenticity he gains. When he faces the judgment of Cherry's womb or faces the awful temptations and powers of Kelly, or when he walks the parapet alone, Rojack engages in successive acts of courage that free the power of unconscious energy ("grace") and expand the proportions of his soul or being.

Since, as we have seen, this novel is an allegory containing numerous mythological motifs or archetypes, it is especially appropriate that Mailer should personify soul-energy in the anima-figure Cherry. She is the culmination of two other tentative and less vividly drawn female *potentiae*. As another indication that Mailer combines the journey into self with specific resultant acts of self-creation, Cherry is not ancillary but central to the hero's quest. Rojack's bride-winning is a clear point at which Rojack and the mythic heroes of the past converge. Erich Neumann has argued that the winning of the soul is the fundamental mythological act of reuniting unconscious life and "ego-consciousness." The hero must conquer his fear of the soul's power and turn that fear to joy; he must "snatch new territory from the unconscious" and place it within the power of consciousness; he must join two ways of perceiving the world—the rational and the prerational. And it is in separating the light anima from the dark mother that the hero perceives and acts to attain his goal of nourishment through soul-energy. The symbolic marriage of hero and bride, as of Rojack and Cherry, is the marriage of inner and outer worlds.⁵ Perhaps the most important point for this discussion is that we can now see *Dream* as a fusion of Mailer's avowed goal of creating a new consciousness and his embodiment of the processes of that consciousness in his art. It is by portraying the hero's quest for his soul or divine energy, which is our second quality of heroic consciousness, that Mailer connects his narrative with ancient and timeless heroic mythology and, as we have seen, with allegory generally. A century before the modern mythologists and psy-

5. Carl Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, translated by R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 9 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 35. Compare Mailer's hypothesis in *Cannibals and Christians* that each of us has male and female principles within, and that the male principle is primitively defined as virility and strength of the ego which stands against that which threatens the self from within and without. See Erich Neumann, *Consciousness*, especially pp. 137, 204, 208, 210–13, 269, 318, 343, 379.

chologists, Carlyle described the heroic quest as the quest for soul-energy on the basis of his research as much as his faith.⁶ And twentieth-century depth psychology and mythology both conclude, as Campbell and White point out, that the “sacred zone of the universal source” in which the exploits of heroes take place is both psychic and cosmic. In their intercourse with psychic images as *potentiae*, the heroes have always sought not the gods or goddesses themselves, but the “grace,” the “the power,” the “miraculous energy substance” they incarnate.⁷

This search for divine energy is inseparable from our third quality of heroic consciousness, which defines one aspect of the relationship of heroic consciousness to society. For Mailer’s heroes, heroic consciousness is revolutionary consciousness, just as it was for the “historical” and mythological heroes of the past. From McLeod’s “metaphysical” version of “revolutionary socialism,” to Sergius’s rebellious trumpet of defiance and Faye’s cataclysmic hipsterism, to Rojack’s dream of tearing down the city of the damned, and DJ’s thwarted desire to slay and transcend the tyrant father and the bestial civilization he represents, Mailer’s fictional heroes are revolutionaries in the sense that founders of cultures and religions are always “creative” revolutionaries. Such heroes are at once conservative and radical, as Mailer frankly believes he is himself, and as he stresses in the nonfiction of the late sixties and early seventies. These heroes are conservative in the sense that they would return humanity to fundamental truths even if it means reversing a “progress” that is mechanistic. The principal truth is that divine energy is the animating force behind the phenomenal world. They are radical in the sense that they are committed to the destruction of a civilization that has become static and/or mechanistic and that restricts conscious perception so that it sees the human being only as one mechanism or fact-in-itself within a larger world-machine. A point

6. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, pp. 8, 80, 108–12, 115.

7. See Campbell’s *Hero*, pp. 81, 181, 243, 258–60. Compare Campbell with Victor White’s study of Jungian psychology in *God and the Unconscious*, pp. 46, 72, 98, 135. White argues that depth psychology—by which he means analytical psychology—again and again exposes the “gods” we thought dead. They seem to be ineluctable, pervasive powers within. White compares Jungian *libido* energy with the God-as-formless-energy in traditional metaphysics. Revelation and beatific vision, White argues, are the expression of God in the unconscious. Compare also Erich Neumann’s point that the gods themselves change as the energy is transformed and tapped more and more by consciousness. See Neumann, *Consciousness*, pp. 324–26. Paul Piehler also expresses the view that if we make full allowance for the differences of approach appropriate to the Christian mystic and the modern depth-psychologist, the visionary experiences both described are “about the same phenomena,” i.e., “individuation.” See *The Visionary Landscape*, especially pp. 159–60.

central to both Carlyle's and Mailer's conception of the hero, for example, is that the hero would turn the World-Machine into the living Tree Igdrasil. In his "Open Letter to Richard Nixon," Mailer emphasizes the mechanistic disproportions of the contemporary world: "There is a crisis in the world today which comes out of the massive over-development of the machine before we have comprehended its excesses, or even how to dispose of its wastes."⁸ The hero's practical task has always been to subvert the status quo so that an influx of divine energy can make the world live and grow again, as Mailer has said, out toward whatever created us wishes us to be. If the hero is the agent of violence, destruction, and chaos, Mircea Eliade argues, he is also the agent of creation. Eliade's mythic hero is a cosmic figure engaged in battle with Evil, with what is ultimately De-creative. The hero's duty as an imitator of the heroic archetype is to "regenerate time."⁹ In *Cannibals* Mailer says that he does not want to be disruptive for "the sake of disruption," but that his function as a novelist is to be dangerous to the status quo. "Actually," he adds, "I have a fondness for order" (p. 220).

Though we have seen that *The Deer Park* tentatively explored rebellion, violence, and cataclysmic destruction as ways of self and world renewal, it is only in *Advertisements* that Mailer explicitly argues that the instinct to rebel against the existing order is fundamental to life and evolution. Particularly in his discussion of psychologist Robert Lidner's *Must You Conform*, Mailer argues in the *Village Voice* that:

It is this instinct that underwrites his survival, this instinct from which he derives his nature: a great and powerful dynamic that makes him what he is—restless, seeking, curious, forever unsatisfied, eternally struggling and eventually victorious. Because of the instinct

8. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p. 173. The Mailer quotation is from *Existential Errands: Twenty-Six Pieces Selected by the Author from the Body of All His Writings*, p. 319. Neumann, agreeing with Jung's view of the artist, points out that the hero is both progressive and conservative. The artist as hero seeks to restore a balance to his age by compensating for the one-sidedness in the "spirit of the age." By doing so he shatters the existing values and establishes new provinces of consciousness. As with Carlyle, sincerity and intensity are the prime criteria of the revolutionary's value: "The depth of the unconscious layer from which the new springs, and the intensity with which this layer seizes upon the individual, are the real criteria of this summons by the voice, and not the ideology of the conscious mind," see *Consciousness*, p. 377.

9. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, pp. 35–47, 55–57, 69, 87–88. Compare Neumann, *Consciousness*, p. 381. The hero engages the "toils of his culture" with "creative assault," destroys the old canon to build the new. Compare also Carlyle, *On Heroes*, pp. 119, 122, 127, 135. Carlyle sees this repeated theme: heroic history is revolutionary history. Times of unbelief are ever becoming times of revolution and belief. For Carlyle the "revolutionary nation" would be a nation of heroes and a believing nation.

of rebellion man has never been content with the limits of his mind. . . . Man is a rebel. He is committed by his biology *not* to conform, and herein lies the paramount reason for the awful tension he experiences in relation to Society. (*Ads*, p. 305)

An American Dream is, as we have seen, a further step in the fictional portrayal of rebellion and violence as vehicles of death and rebirth. And though later D.J. even fails at personal rebirth, Mailer does distinguish between satanic and divine violence in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* by juxtaposing the large, mechanistic, and impersonal violence of the safari to the primordial violence of the hunt and to the ceremonial test of endurance and growth. To whatever degree Mailer's heroes succeed or fail, they are all would-be revolutionaries. They come forth like the mythic heroes of the past to change the world, not to sustain it.¹⁰ For both Campbell and Neumann the warning of violent change is characterized by the words of Jesus as much as it is by the violence of the archaic, heroic cycles, and for Carlyle by Mahomet, Dante, Luther, Rousseau, and Cromwell.

From the view of modern depth psychology, Jung, Campbell, and Neumann describe the hero's journey in the monomyth as an effort to restore a balance between ego and unconscious, to place some of the unconscious under the control, within the grasp, of conscious life. This impulse to restore a "wholeness" and balance to the self and society is our fourth quality of heroic consciousness. This fourth quality also helps define the relationship of heroic consciousness to society. We have seen that Mailer's program for turning Death into Life contains a number of elements that would readjust the balance between instinctual and rational life. And Mailer, like Carlyle and Campbell, emphasizes the spiritual dimension of the journey. As Campbell explains it, this regression is a source of regeneration because it represents man's return to his spiritual potential and restores spiritual significance to a dead world (*Hero*, p. 16).

If Mailer's "way" and the ways of his heroes to reestablish a balance in favor of unconscious experience and impulse, as the "way" does, say, in "The White Negro," are iconoclastic, often violent, or filled with what seems at first "slime from the depths," to borrow Jung's phrase, the goal is still balance. Mailer tends to see his unconscious emphasis as a necessary gathering of force to overcome

10. See Neumann, *Consciousness*, pp. 161, 252. The mythic and the allegorical heroes converge here, as in many ways allegory and myth converge. Both are embattled heroes dramatizing the soul's struggle for salvation through the fundamental pattern of rebirth. The allegorical hero, like the mythic hero, shows mankind how far it has fallen from what is taken to be fundamental truth, how great the spiritual and psychological distance is between that truth and man's present state. The mission of both heroes is redemption in a fallen world. See Edwin Honig, *Dark Conceit*, pp. 82, 99, 152.

the inertia of an unbalanced civilization. We have seen in *Cannibals* and in *Existential Errands*, that Mailer believes the dream to be one vehicle that can restore this balance to the two systems of psyche. This belief in the dream is a tenet of depth psychology espoused most clearly by Erich Neumann, in *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (see especially p. 372). And Rojack's "dream" is the best fictional incorporation of this tenet.

Mailer's concern with the relationship of the individual and expanded consciousness to society places him in an important tradition of literary and social thought. Wherever the spirit is dying, wherever one or another element of the self thrives at the expense of the whole self, the mythic hero emerges seeking to restore a balance. We have seen that this theme runs through the work of Jung, White, Eliade, Campbell, and Neumann—all of whom draw from multicultural sources. But since the end of the eighteenth century, when rationalism reached its apex and the scientific and industrial revolutions began to change the shape of human life, writers have continually sought to articulate the dangers of a disproportionate rationalism. Blake, who opposes the god of rationalism to a god of irrationality and human potential (living in bondage), is a fountainhead of this prevailing theme in Western thought. Carlyle is another source of the idea. His influence upon such writers as Emerson, Thoreau, and Ruskin, to name a few others in the tradition, is commonly known. All of these writers from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries warn humanity of the dangers of its drift toward spiritual impoverishment, toward loss of unconscious life and soul, toward mechanization and totalitarianism. This is Mailer's warning, too. It is the central idea of his work. And it is upon this idea that he will have to base his claims to be a Jeremiah of his time.

Erich Neumann's post-Jungian work in mythology and psychology represents a kind of culmination of this warning and tradition in social and psychological thought, just as Mailer's work represents the twentieth-century culmination of a similar tradition in English and American literature. That the message of this tradition, as voiced by Erich Neumann, is both central and external to Mailer's work is the significant point. This point lends a certain credibility to Mailer's view of the imbalance and crisis of modern consciousness. Like Mailer, Neumann is especially interested in the psychic dynamics of this crisis. In a chapter entitled "The Balance and Crisis of Consciousness," Neumann examines the problems emerging from the separation of the conscious and unconscious systems. The evolutionary theme of his work is that such separation is a necessary product of evolution. But Neumann's consideration of the state of

that evolution as reflected in contemporary history and life leads him to warn that the separation has degenerated to a schism at a time when we most need a rapprochement. Like Mailer, Neumann considers the "degeneration of the group into the mass" as symptomatic of the crisis.

To return from the mass collective to the group is also the goal of Mailer's political ambitions. One is easily tempted to see Mailer dreaming of the presidency—as he first tells us he has in the opening lines of *Advertisements*—or Mailer announcing his candidacy for mayor in 1960 and running a hard campaign for mayor of New York City in 1969, as mere exercises in megalomania. But Mailer specifically argues that his candidacy is a real chance for him to actively repay his "debt to society." His goal is not to gain power for himself, but quite clearly to restore it to others, and to restore vitality and power specifically to the group and to take it away from the deadening mass. Giving autonomous political power to the neighborhoods and to ideological communities is the basis of his program for restoring power to the group. This program is Mailer's brand of pluralism, which he suggested in his campaign as an immediate solution to the city's political and economic disasters. "We might begin to discover which political ideas had validity, the power to continue themselves, and those ideas which, finally, were surrealistic, nihilistic, excessive, and destructive to the ultimate aims of society, which is finally to find some balance in the lives of men and women." The specifics of his proposal and the argument for it are collected in *Existential Errands* in "An Instrument for the City," "Two Mayoralty Speeches," and "To the *Time-Life* Staff" (pp. 322–62).

The degeneration of the group into the mass, Neumann points out, throws the claims of individual and society out of balance everywhere. Neumann, like Jung as well as Mailer, sees the artist's function as restoring the balance between individual and society by restoring the balance between ego and unconscious. Though the evolutionary movement of man in history as well as in each individual is ever away from the bonds of the unconscious, the ego must never lose touch with instinctual life. "Like all differentiation," Neumann writes, "it runs the risk of becoming overdifferentiated and perverse." If the hero loses his nourishing link to instinctual life, he deteriorates. This deterioration is what Neumann means by "patriarchal castration," which is true megalomania and which Rusty's relationship to DJ. and to Nature archetypally depicts. Neumann characterizes such "megalomania" as ego-inflation, loss of connection with one's body or instincts, inflation of the intellect or

of rationalism, inflation of the status quo, inability to react to sense-images, and the "hypertrophied consciousness" or spiritual sterility of the age of the machine and of mass man.

This degeneration of the self, Neumann calls "sclerosis of consciousness."¹¹ Near the end of his study of the evolutionary rise of "heroic consciousness" and the dangers of its fall, Neumann specifies the character of the modern crisis of consciousness in words and examples familiar to Mailer's readers, especially to those who have read *Why*.

Typical . . . is the state of affairs in America, though the same holds good for practically the whole Western hemisphere. Every conceivable sort of dominant rules the personality, which is personality only in name. The grotesque fact that murderers, brigands, gangsters, thieves, forgers, tyrants and swindlers, in a guise that deceives nobody, have seized control of collective life is characteristic of our time. . . . Worship of the "beast" is by no means confined to Germany; it prevails wherever one-sidedness, push, and moral blindness are applauded; i.e., wherever the aggravating complexities of civilized behavior are swept away in favor of bestial rapacity. . . .

The possessed character of our financial and industrial magnates, for instance, is psychologically evident from the very fact that they are at the mercy of a suprapersonal factor—"work," "power," "money," or whatever they like to call it—which . . . "consumes" them. . . . Coupled with a nihilistic attitude towards civilization and humanity there goes a puffing up of the ego-sphere which expresses itself with brutish egotism in a total disregard for the common good and in the attempt to lead an egocentric existence, where personal power, money, and "experiences"—unbelievably trivial, but plentiful—occupy every hour of the day. . . . and "isms" of every description take possession of the masses and destroy the individual. . . . The disintegration caused by an idea is no less dangerous than the disintegration caused by the empty, personalistic power-strivings. . . . we have attempted to show the connection between depth psychology and the new ethos. One of the most important consequences of the new ethos is that integration of the personality, its wholeness, becomes the supreme ethical goal upon which the fate of humanity depends. (*Consciousness*, pp. 391–92)

Mailer is close to Neumann here: true civilization is a civilization

11. Neumann, *Consciousness*, especially pp. 88, 220–21, 262, 286, 382–93. Compare Honig, *Dark Concert*, p. 173. The heroic ordeal of allegory is the quest for "integration" and for the affirmation by which societies hope to survive. Victor White in *God and the Unconscious* suggests that the most advanced physics and science are preparing us now to sacrifice the very intellect we thought alone could save us. For White the Fall is the loss of unconscious nourishment or of God's grace, a loss which leads to the disintegration of self and society, pp. 32, 98. Compare Campbell also, *Hero*, pp. 258–60.

of "life." Life for the individual is the wholeness and balance of the total self. In *Papers*, Mailer says that to be open to the unconscious is to be "enormously civilized" (p. 130). And in *Existential Errands*, he adds that the first spiritual problem of the twentieth century is alienation from the self. Authentic action, even if dangerous, extreme, or violent, may be necessary to return us to our selves (p. 334). True power is the power of the self, not the manipulating power of the totalitarian. This is the lesson Rojack learns in his success, and the lesson the reader sees in D.J.'s defeat. Mailer continually depicts totalitarianism's disproportionate power-strivings and opposes it with the power of the authentic, whole self. Against such agents of disproportion as Hollingsworth, Teppis, Kelly, and Rusty, Mailer places McLeod and Lovett, Sergius, Rojack, and the defeated D.J. In the context of his own warning, Neumann explains that he is not "glorifying the past" but describing the "symptoms of an upheaval," of which the "predatory industrial man" and the "power politician" are but a few. Neumann's optimism, which perhaps is more consistently buoyant than Mailer's, is that the collapse of Western civilization is a preparation for a new order, but, like Mailer's, Neumann's affirmation is guarded. Whether the way beyond the collapse, our "fate," leads to life or to death depends upon our capacity for a rapprochement between our conscious and unconscious life. Standing between an inner world that threatens to overwhelm him and an outer world that threatens to "suffocate" him, the hero today may need to be as extraordinary an individual as the hero of myth or history (*Consciousness*, especially pp. 380–81).

Considering how many of Mailer's contemporaries see him, and considering how Mailer will increasingly play the heroic role himself in his nonfiction, we should distinguish between the necessarily strong ego stability or self-assertion of the embattled hero and the megalomania of "hypertrophied consciousness." Even Carlyle, in the years before depth psychology, makes a similar distinction. It is not the sugar plums of power and luxury in the world, Carlyle points out, that lead the hero to speak his truth or do his deed, but his vision of the worthiness of his call, the challenge of danger, difficulty, agony, and expulsion that lead him forward to his task. Carlyle argues simply that he who is open to the divine significance of life must speak of it; the hero's goal of leading others toward that significance is the end in itself. This goal Carlyle specifically opposes to the pride of "ego consciousness" embodied in the mechanistic science of his day: "Knowledge without worship is pedantry" (see *On Heroes*, pp. 69–70, 115). Campbell makes the same distinction. He agrees with Arnold Toynbee that the assertion of the hero is not

simply the assertion of "egotism," for egotism is the assertion of the tyrant Holdfast. Heroic assertion is, rather, a submission to the power and necessity of rebirth through the return to the sources of life. The hero does not, like the ego-tyrant, seek to control life and nature, but, as an extraordinary individual, seeks to realize what is, and to show what is to others (see *Hero*, pp. 16, 383-86).

In his novels and throughout *Papers* and *Cannibals*, Mailer has sought to distinguish between the egocentricity of heroic types necessary for a dynamic society and the arrogant separation of mankind from nature and the lust to control nature (CC, pp. 3, 79). In *Existential Errands* Mailer defines megalomania best when he describes *Why Are We in Vietnam?* as the depiction of twentieth-century arrogance, which is the Faustian desire to control nature (pp. 221, 292). So self-confidence in the hero or artist is faith in what Mailer has called one's "vision of existence"; it is a prerequisite of heroic action and valor and a necessary attribute of any ambitious writer.

This faith in the extraordinary individual is the fifth quality of heroic consciousness. There is something fundamentally "romantic" as well as archetypal about Mailer's faith in the intensity, power, and truth of the subjective perceptions of heroic or tested individuals. Mailer sustains the paradox—perhaps we should say dialectic—of the hierarchic and democratic impulses of romanticism as well as myth. Mailer does not deny the potential in men and women to achieve expanded consciousness, but he feels dubious about the capacity of each person alone to realize this potential against the onslaughts of the deadening world. His novels are saturated with defeats, often with the defeat of considerable potential, as in the case of Elena or D.J., and his heroes' successes are provisional and earned by severe trial. In his commentaries no less than his novels, Mailer expresses little doubt about the necessity of a hero for his time. His candidates for heroism are as apparently diverse as Ernest Hemingway, John Kennedy, and Fidel Castro.

In *Papers*, Mailer most specifically discusses the hero and the myth that the modern hero must awaken. His essay on the existential hero, entitled "Superman Comes to the Supermarket," argues that the frontier that remains to be conquered is the psychological frontier. This frontier is "still alive with possibilities." To lead his people on the exploration of that frontier, a hero, such as John Kennedy may become, has to create a new psychological reality by giving a new direction to his time, by encouraging his nation to discover the "deepest colors of its character," and by altering the nature of history (pp. 41-42). Mailer is committed to the hope that

every living impulse of our instinctual life, which he calls our "underground river," will struggle against the degeneration of individual man to mass man.¹²

America was also the country in which the dynamic myth of the Renaissance—that every man was potentially extraordinary—knew its most passionate persistence. Simply, America was the land where people believed in heroes. . . . It was a country which had grown by the leap of one hero past another. . . . And when the West was filled, the expansion turned inward, became part of an agitated, overexcited, superheated dream life. . . . the romantic possibilities of the old conquest of land turned into a vertical myth, trapped within the skull, of a new kind of heroic life, each choosing his own archetype of a neo-Renaissance man. . . . 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, *idéologues*, psychoanalysts, builders, executives and endless communicators—would brick-in modern life with hygiene upon sanity, and middle-brow homily over platitude; the myth would not die. . . . as if the message in the labyrinth of the genes would insist that violence was locked with creativity, and adventure was the secret of love. (*PP*, pp. 39–40)

Mailer consistently argues that after World War II misguided social legislating and psychological engineering have exacerbated the schism between instinctual life and the public mind of the nation. In particular, the politics of the nation have too far separated from the myth of expansion, freedom, and individual growth. Mailer maintains that the period of Kennedy's rise to power was a period of the nation's collective search for a man who could capture the "secret imagination" of a people. The first quality of Mailer's personal heroes is that they embody the people's fantasy of freedom, adventure, and growth. Like Carlyle, Mailer is deeply suspicious of the machinery of progress and far more likely to found his hope of making a whole people "more extraordinary" on the extraordinary

12. Neumann is subtle and complicated on the nature of the Fall to the "mass collective" and on mankind's recovery. He sees in the "psychologically reactionary massing together of modern man" the possible birth throes of a "new canon." His central point is, however, not far from Mailer's view as expressed in the quotation that follows in my text. Neumann writes that "the sanctity of the individual soul which asserted itself throughout the Middle Ages in spite of all orthodoxy and all burnings of heretics, has become secularized since the Renaissance, though it was in existence long before that. It is the same with the accentuation of individual consciousness . . . there must inevitably be a temporary leveling down of consciousness and of individual culture in comparison with the single individual as the end product of Western Civilization since the Renaissance.

"The four phenomena—aggregation of masses, decay of the old canon, the schism between conscious and the unconscious, and the divorce between the individual and the collective—run parallel to one another" (pp. 382–83).

individual who is fit for courageous, adventurous action and battle in a time of crisis and schism. "At bottom the concept of the hero is antagonistic to impersonal social progress, to the belief that social ills can be solved by social legislating, for it sees a country as all-but-trapped in its character until it has a hero who reveals the character of the country to itself" (*PP*, p. 42). Carlyle phrased the idea more extremely: "We shall either learn to know a Hero, a true Governor and Captain, somewhat better, when we see him; or else go on to be for ever governed by the Unheroic;—had we ballot-boxes clattering at every street corner, there were no remedy in these."¹³ The hero is at the root of Mailer's "existential politics," for it is he who battles the faceless disproportions of our time through a "consecutive set of brave and witty self-creations." As he captures our secret imagination, as he bravely creates himself and promotes our growth, the hero leads his nation toward a healing beyond schism and plague (*PP*, pp. 5–7). Consciousness is in effect, Neumann points out, one of Life's experimental organs, and the Great Individual as a bearer of greater consciousness promotes cultural evolution and individual development (see *Consciousness*, pp. 35–36).

Gradually, however, in *Papers*, it becomes clear that, for Mailer, such men as Hemingway, Kennedy, and Castro are in all probability unequal to the task of becoming heroes for their time. Mailer has had more difficulty finding real heroes than fictional heroes. But as early as 1955 we begin to see Mailer himself preparing, for lack of another hero, to enter the lists. He helped found the *Village Voice*, a landmark of "alternative journalism," in 1954, and his column appeared in that paper from 1955 to 1956. In his column Mailer articulates his decision to go to war with mass media. This column, much of it collected in *Advertisements*, is often shrill and, as Mailer admits, poorly written, but it announces his candidacy as an embattled, existential hero at war with the weaknesses in himself and the defeating forces in contemporary society. He hopes "above all else to change a hundred self-defeating habits which locked my character into a space too narrow for what I wanted to become," but, Mailer

13. Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p. 217. Campbell says essentially the same thing in *Hero*, p. 16. Schism in soul and society cannot be resolved by the manipulation of secondary effects. "Only birth can conquer death—the birth, not of the old thing again, but of something new. Within the soul, within the body social, there must be—if we are to experience long survival—a continuous 'recurrence of birth' . . . to nullify the unremitting recurrences of death." For Campbell, also, this is the job of the hero today as ever: "a transmutation of the whole order is necessary, so that through every detail and act of secular life the vitalizing image of the universal god-man who is actually immanent and effective in all of us may be somehow made known to consciousness." A people's yearning for a hero is its yearning beyond a fallen life, beyond a life that is a depthless, flat world of the ego alone (pp. 308, 388–89).

writes, "at heart, I wanted war." The *Voice* is to be his field of battle. His column is to be a "first lick of fire in a new American consciousness." He adds in an "advertisement" that writing for the *Voice* leads him to "rediscover" his desire to be "a hero of my time" because the one "noble emotion" rising from the frantic prose is his "rage against the national conformity which smothered creativity, for it delayed the self-creation of the race."¹⁴ If Marcus Klein's argument is correct that in postwar America the "we" and the "they" have been obscured or have disappeared, if the enemy is no longer "high" and "low" as it appeared to be for the writers of the twenties and thirties, and if the postwar novel has tended merely to express "the state of nerves" of the individual in a faceless, mass society, Mailer's originality as a writer may be in his efforts to define the enemy.¹⁵ Mailer's early forays into enemy territory in the 1950s as the zany, outraged "General Marijuana" represent the most outrageous portion of his career. The bad-boy image, suggesting disruption for its own sake, promoted by his "warrior's" antics during this decade has stayed with him in the popular mind, and it too often obscures the issue of just what Mailer is saying about the civilization in which he lives.

From the *Voice* onward, Mailer continues to see his work as war. He defines war as the quest for the mysteries of existence and self which oppose the totalitarian culture that would destroy all mystery. Just as he described "form" as the "record of a war" in *Cannibals*, he describes it here as the study of "energy and entropy." The "Evil" in his novels has been stasis and those characters and forces attempting to make everything static, and the "Evil" in his nonfiction is also stasis. "My passion," he writes, "is to destroy stereotype, categories, and labels" (*Ads*, pp. 310, 325, 428). In this statement Mailer refers to the specific persons, institutions, and forces that either are static or that promote stasis and make "stereotypes" active agents in our culture. It is clear that this passion to destroy specific stereotypes and to depict fictionally the stereotype as a negative person or force exists in a somewhat paradoxical relation-

14. *Ads*, pp. 277-78, 283, 284. Future references are parenthetical. Compare Emerson's "Self-Reliance": "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue most in request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs. Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist . . . Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind." See Stephen Whicher, *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, p. 149. Mailer's contrast between security and self-integrity is a repeated theme, but Emerson of course emphasizes the benign self-creation of transcendentalism, not the violence of revolutionary consciousness in mythic heroes.

15. See Marcus Klein's introduction to *The American Novel Since World War II*, pp. 11, 14-15, 20-21.

ship to the larger themes of his novels. For by discovering what promotes Life and what Death, his heroes learn to perceive, which is to "label" in an ethic of ultimate values, the Good and Evil in institutions and others. This juxtaposition of finite stereotypes and ultimate values is not a blatant contradiction when we consider that God or Life is defined as anti-stasis or growth, but the juxtaposition presents a difficulty in Mailer's work that the nonfiction will approach with greater subtlety.

With Mailer's attention turned full-time to the production of nonfiction in the late sixties and the seventies, we see a reflection of the writer's own doubts about the capacity of purely imaginative writing to stimulate the actions necessitated by the extremity of the moral choices, dilemmas, and disproportions facing contemporary humanity. And the desire to stimulate action is the root of allegorical didacticism. It is as if the gap between fictional art and real action continually and dangerously widens for Mailer and forces him to make ever bolder and more difficult personal moral choices as he reassesses the relationship of his art to his life and to ours.

On one side we see Mailer's convictions about the function of art and the artist. Writing in the *Voice* of Beckett's *Godot*, Mailer asserts that the role of the artist is to increase consciousness and, as he does so, to "accelerate historical time itself." For Mailer, history is the progress of consciousness as it alters society. The velocity of history is directly related to the velocity of expanding consciousness (*Ads*, p. 324). The writer or hero who increases consciousness, therefore, accelerates history itself. In *Papers* Mailer defines history as God's creative power taking form (p. 193). In *Cannibals*, what Mailer means by history is the progress of God's vision. So redeemed time or history is the only true history for Mailer; the rest is stasis and Fall. The point to see here is that in the 1950s Mailer already viewed the writer as a potential hero for his time who might accelerate consciousness and redeem time.

In the 1960s the artist again emerges as a potential generator of expanded consciousness. Against the "moral poltroons" in political life, Mailer contrasts the artist who, through the exercise of his talent, embodies what is best in a nation, its dreams. It is the duty of culture, which is an expression of the artist's talent rather than his character, "to enrich the psyche, not just part of us." Art, he goes on to argue, is at least as necessary to civilization as any of our technology. If art is "dangerous," we still cannot afford to give up its enrichment (*PP*, pp. 69, 91-92). And in *Cannibals*, Mailer presents himself as an artist-hero and "physician" who tries to communicate his "vision of existence" as an antidote to the plague of his time (pp. 5, 218).

But on the other side we see Mailer's concern with the difficulty, perhaps the impossibility, of insuring that art becomes action, that art and action are one. *Advertisements*, as Laura Adams has pointed out, is Mailer's literary manifesto.¹⁶ Though Mailer placed his hopes for new action and work on the "seed" of "The White Negro" (p. 331), the final note he strikes in his manifesto is a note of self-doubt. He is questioning here whether his work through *The Deer Park* is a large enough and dangerous enough act. "Fitzgerald was an indifferent caretaker of his talent, and I have been a cheap gambler with mine."

The Presidential Papers continues to be a curious blend of assertion (or hope) and doubt about his ability to act dangerously enough to gain his "soul" and to help others gain theirs (p. 151). His public appearances, his political campaign, his public actions that generate his most important nonfiction of the late sixties and early seventies are clearly attempts at least to match and occasionally to combine bold actions in his life and his art. More and more in the sixties, Mailer comes to believe that the rights and freedoms of the existential life, no less than of existential politics, are "best won by face-to-face confrontation" (p. 269). His nonfiction will be the record of a war.

Mailer's work of the early sixties begins to give shape to the possibility that some new kind of journalism or nonfiction may hold for him the means of combining art and action. As we trace the development of Mailer's nonfiction in these last three chapters, we will see that in shifting from fiction to historical events, Mailer allows his own personality to play a gradually increasing and then a gradually diminishing artistic role. This rising and falling curve of ego-assertion reaches its greatest height in the early parts of *Armies of the Night* (1968) and begins its decline in the latter portions of that book. The writer's self diminishes gradually through *Of a Fire on the Moon* (1970) and *The Fight* (1975) and ends in his complete self-effacement in his last nonfiction work, *The Executioner's Song* (1979). It is almost as if Mailer's nonfiction period provides the writer with the opportunity not only to try to become the artist-hero he found absent in his time, but to become, through a cathartic process of self-assertion, the objective, mature artist who is prepared to write his final fictions in the last decade or so of his creative life.

But it is in the earliest nonfiction, that written during the sixties, that Mailer's personality rises in his work toward the fullest expression of selfhood and personal vision. From the start, the center of

16. Laura Adams, *Existential Battles: The Growth of Norman Mailer*, p. 27.

Mailer's antijournalism is his own personality. The war with conventional journalism begins in the *Voice* as a purge of his own weaknesses and as a personal indicator of whether he was daily growing into more or retreating into less (*Ads*, pp. 282–83). In Mailer's pieces about the Kennedys and in his coverage of public events, such as that of the Patterson–Liston fight for *Esquire* from 1960 to 1962, the perceptions, intuitions, and ruminations of the interviewer and journalist take on an unprecedented importance and become essential to the kind of truth Mailer intends to reveal in his journalistic work.

His earliest journalism admittedly distorts “reality” in an effort to create a new “psychological reality” that would affect the status quo and stimulate his compatriots to pursue a creative evolution. “I was bending reality like a field of space to curve the time I wished to create,” he says in his “Superman” essay (*PP*, p. 60). Mailer uses about twenty pages of this essay preparing for its subject—John Kennedy. In these twenty pages, Mailer discusses the supermarket as a symbol of disease, analyzes the shortcomings of political conventions and delegates, and argues the need for a new American hero. He only vaguely describes the convention in Los Angeles which he was to cover, and he admits that he watches most of the routine proceedings on television. When Kennedy finally appears in this essay, Mailer carefully molds him into the psychological reality of heroism that Mailer is trying to establish. Kennedy has performed the acts Mailer deems necessary to regeneration and heroism, and it is upon these acts that Mailer dwells. Kennedy has faced death and dread, courted political suicide (i.e., endangered his position rather than bettered it), and responded to pressure with coolness and grace. He is a man who has found in the trial and agony of death the energy to remake his psyche: “heroism is the first Doctor.” Kennedy, a certified war hero, emerges more than a little, as a fellow writer first suggested to Mailer, like “Sergius O’Shaughnessy born rich.” In a separate article, Mailer again draws forth one essential feature of his heroine, Jackie Kennedy, as he depicts the meeting of his personality and hers: she “disturbs the American need to believe that political life is as concrete and reasonable as the kind of engineering which produces bridges” (*PP*, p. 82).

What we see even in these early journalistic ventures is the play of a consciousness similar to Rojack's. It is an expanded, associative consciousness in which the impact of the subjective mind upon what is assumed to be the objective world is all-important. This consciousness illustrates Mailer's belief that intensity and wholeness of perceptions more closely approach the truth, or the most important truth, of the thing perceived than objective reporting. And the

tendency of such consciousness to universalize naturalistic detail, to see the macrocosmic in the microcosmic, is typical of the allegorist.

Mailer's coverage of the 1962 Patterson—Liston fight more clearly reveals his discovery of the possibilities within journalism and nonfiction of shaping from the most unlikely circumstances implications of moral and metaphysical dimensions. Mailer has laid a claim to boxing similar to the claim Hemingway laid to bullfighting, but Mailer is more explicit about the universal proportions of the contest. Mailer views champions as "prodigies of will" and of "the urge to endure" through agony and crisis. In "Ten Thousand Words a Minute," collected from *Esquire* in *Papers*, Mailer draws a portrait of two boxers who represent much more than they would if seen simply as two individual men doing their jobs. Through the details of Patterson's and Liston's past lives, the description of the people who surround and support each champion, and the delineation of the ways in which each man is connected to his embattled predecessors. Liston and Patterson become colliding "ideal archetypes," to use Mailer's phrase, or agents who battle to shift the "wealth of the universe" toward the Lord or the Devil, the authentic or the inauthentic, through their private struggles (pp. 255–61). In Patterson's defeat before a representative of inauthentic power—an agent of the Mafia, Las Vegas, the gimmick—Mailer discovers a regeneration of his own commitment to try to play a greater role himself in determining which way the "wealth of the universe" will shift. Out of the surprise and despair that Mailer and James Baldwin share over Patterson's defeat, Mailer discovers a meaning emerging out of that defeat. Patterson's loss is connected somehow with Mailer's own, with our own, loss of authentic power before the inauthentic.

Now, after the knockout, in some fatigue-ridden, feverish whole vision of one's guilt and of Patterson's defeat . . . out of a desire to end some war in myself . . . I began in the plot-ridden, romantic dungeons of my mind . . . to see myself as some sort of center about which all that had been lost must rally. It was not simple egomania nor simple drunkenness, it was not even simple insanity: it was a kind of metaphorical leap. . . . To believe the impossible may be won creates a strength from which the impossible may indeed be attacked. (p. 261)

In short, Mailer reenlists as an active archetype himself in a world of conflicting forces.

If this reenlistment determines the kind of nonfiction Mailer will later write, we have not yet focused adequately on less important factors that influenced Mailer's turn to nonfiction and to a new kind of journalism in particular. Like some of the journalists of the sixties, Mailer addressed himself particularly to what seemed to be the

pernicious influence of conventional journalism. So Mailer's new journalism becomes a reflection of other forces operating in journalism at about the same time. Since Mailer, however, was considering the question of a new journalism in the 1950s and exploring its rudimentary forms from 1960 to 1962, he is clearly in the vanguard of the movement known as the new journalism. Tom Wolfe, for example, dates its start at about 1962–1963, with Gay Talese's piece on Joe Louis, written for *Esquire* in 1962, and with Jimmy Breslin's feature column in the *Herald Tribune* in 1963. Wolfe himself tried his own wings with an article on dragsters in *Esquire* that same year.

Mailer's antijournalism, then, is less an isolated phenomenon than one might expect. By new journalism I am not referring to one specific technique. As Tom Wolfe points out, the new journalism was a force or an excitement that particularly in magazine journalism during the 1960s began to supplant the conventional formulas of objectivity and factual presentation. Wolfe, the chief proselyte of the new force, calls it a more ambitious, more intense, more detailed, and more time-consuming type of journalism than that of the previous decades. He adds that the first concern of the new journalists is to write journalism that will read like a novel, and "excite the reader intellectually and emotionally." He is not far from Mailer on this point. Everette Dennis and William Rivers argue that if the new journalist uses verifiable facts, he or she does not stop there but seeks a truth larger than the mere facts in themselves. He or she emphasizes the more imaginative potential in an event or in a character and, for example, freely depicts the subjective and emotional life of characters. This depiction may be executed through the use of dialogue, authorial speculation, or interior monologue. By completely immersing oneself in the event or the life of his character(s), the new journalist discovers the mood, experiences the atmosphere, of the event and the people he or she writes about. Such a journalist may be a participant in the event, as Mailer is in the Pentagon March, or as Hunter Thompson is in the revels of the Hell's Angels. But for Wolfe the new journalism above all reconnects twentieth-century art with what he believes to be literature's "main circuit" of "detailed realism," rediscovers the "joys" and "strange powers" of realism, and restores a sense of immediacy and life to, in Wolfe's view, a postwar fiction that has atrophied in an artificial and academic mythicism.¹⁷ This power of realism, even if one does not agree with Wolfe's assessment of postwar mythicism, will be an important discovery for Mailer. But Mailer's new journalism before

17. Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson, *The New Journalism*, pp. 9, 10–15, 20–21, 23, 28, 31, 50; Everette E. Dennis and William L. Rivers, *Other Voices: The New Journalism in America*, pp. 1–2, 5–6, 11, 15–17, 27–28.

Armies of the Night emphasizes the universality of the specific and the speculative penetration of his character's minds.

Mailer makes three specific charges against conventional journalism. His first charge, clearly stated in "Ten Thousand Words a Minute," is that journalism distorts the essential truth about the events it pretends to present as objective truth. It is difficult for a reporter to be true to precise detail because his story, his details, and his readership ride "the stocks" of public opinion and current interest. "There is a logic to news—on a given day with a certain meteorological drift to the winds in the mass media, a story can ride along certain currents." But if details are askew to ride such drifts, readers are given an unreal view of an event and of life. Especially today, the unreal view makes American life seem easier, less complex, more rewarding than it is. "A nation which forms detailed opinions on the basis of detailed fact which is askew from the subtle reality becomes a nation of citizens whose psyches are askewed, item by detailed item, away from *any* reality."

Mailer's second criticism is that the mass media too often develop a parasitic relationship to the institutions they are supposed to be reporting about and upon which they depend for news. The journalistic medium, therefore, easily becomes the handmaiden, rather than the nemesis, of those institutions. In "Ten Thousand Words a Minute," Mailer analyzes at length, for example, the relationship of political reporting to the government in the 1950s and early 1960s. He sets the mood of his discussion by describing a political press headquarters as having the odor of "cancer gulch," which is a little "like the smell of left-wing meeting halls, except it is worse . . . for there is no poverty to put a guilt-free iron into the nose. . . . everybody is getting free drinks, free sandwiches, free news releases." The releases especially erode the reporters' desire to battle for the truth; the release is a free list of facts, figures, and statistics "with a little love from the Welfare State." One manifestation of this marriage between politics and press is the curious phenomenon that the "only institutions which remain alive in American life are those which can afford a press representative." The papers stop reporting history and begin making it along with the establishment's press representatives, "so the newspapers help to create institutions which will supply them with news." Mailer's most developed example of the phenomenon of controlled or institutionalized news is the "leaks" to the *Times* during the Truman–Eisenhower years.

Mailer's third specific charge against conventional journalism is that the people who work in the media are encouraged to lust after power and money, and not the power of any particular idea or goal worth fighting for, but a power that, like Rusty-power, is "the only

thing which will relieve the profound illness which has seized them. Which has seized all of us" (p. 129),

On the other hand, Mailer has always been aware of the potential in journalism for a reporter of perception, endurance, and courage. And the honest reporter does have an excuse for unfinished writing and for confronting the "enemy" with a mere holding action. "Writing for a newspaper is like running a revolutionary war, you go into battle not when you are ready but when the action offers itself" (*PP*, p. 199). In this fact lies the strength of reporting for a writer: it has what Mailer considers existential possibilities. You enter the lists unprepared and in doubt of the outcome; you test your proportions against larger forces. In his interview with Steven Marcus, included in *Cannibals*, Mailer says that though he doesn't want "to be caught justifying journalism as a major activity," it can nonetheless be a "venture of one's ability to keep in shape" and not necessarily "an essential betrayal of the chalice of your literary art." Mailer argues that if one writes under every conceivable mood and condition, as a good journalist must, one can exercise consciousness. Journalism, therefore, Mailer continues, can be a reflection and measure of one's consciousness (pp. 218–19). Mailer is again implying an important point for understanding his nonfiction work: a "psychological reality" can be changed by an event itself if the event is strong and startling enough. Changing psychological reality is changing consciousness, and it is the first job of the writer as a consciousness in the center of an event to charge the reality of the event with sufficient strength to create a new psychological reality.

That Mailer turned to nonfiction or new journalism in the 1960s to express his consciousness is therefore a reflection of both the times and the man. As Tom Wolfe points out, we see in Mailer and Truman Capote not conventional journalists who are suddenly, in the 1960s, writing nonfiction with fictional techniques, but novelists turning from the novel to write a nonfiction that uses novelistic techniques as well as those associated with journalism: factual research, interviews, and the observation of contemporary events. And in the process, both Capote and Mailer, as Wolfe notes, tremendously revive waning careers and deteriorating reputations.¹⁸ The impetus for the new journalism was largely in that decade itself, as Dennis and Rivers point out. "In a time when old values are crumbling, when the miracle of advancing technology is suddenly seen to create as many problems as it solves, when disorder, turmoil, and violence become hallmarks of a nation . . . it cannot be surprising that the mass media . . . should feel the shock waves of change." If we add to

18. Wolfe and Johnson, *New Journalism*, pp. 15, 26–29.

the shock waves, Dennis and Rivers go on, "an affluence that allows Americans to pause and consider how one's head was put together instead of where the next meal was coming from," larger elements of the society begin to reconsider what in another time might have been left unquestioned (pp. 1, 4-5, 16). Novelists and journalists began to meet the shock waves with new techniques. In an article in *Commentary* in 1961, Philip Roth suggests the inadequacy of traditional genres to meet the experiences of the mid-twentieth century: "the American writer in the middle of the twentieth century has his hands full in trying to understand, and then describe, and then make *credible* much of the American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's own meager imagination."¹⁹

Mailer was struck by the events of the sixties in the same way that most people were. But his personal convictions, which he expressed early in the fifties, were heightened by the subsequent decade. Mailer said in *Existential Errands* that none of us knows "what reality is" now, and that we spend most of our lives looking for it (p. 360). By turning more and more to the new journalistic mode, Mailer is able, therefore, to become a hero in his own work. But what is more important, he is able to test his own consciousness not only by confronting larger forces and defining his own proportions, but by using journalism, as he earlier said it could be used, as a measure of his ability to find and report the truth of an event in such a way that the psychological reality, the consciousness of his time, may be changed. Such change, after all, is the goal of heroes and heroic consciousness in all times. Mailer's nonfiction becomes a vehicle for discovering the largest moral and metaphysical dimensions in contemporary events, for affecting the status quo by going to war with forces of defeat, for uniting art with action, and for uniting the consciousness of a hero with the psychological reality of his nation and time.

19. Klein, *The American Novel*, p. 144.

The Armies of the Night

I am not a critic of the West. I am a critic of the weaknesses of the West. I am a critic of a fact which we can't comprehend: how one can lose one's spiritual strength, one's willpower, and, possessing freedom, not to value it, not to be willing to make sacrifices for it. . . . Those people who have lived in the most terrible conditions, on the frontier between life and death . . . they all understand that between good and evil there is an irreconcilable contradiction, that it is not the same thing—good or evil—that one cannot build one's life without regard to this distinction. I am surprised that pragmatic philosophy consistently scorns moral consideration.

—Alexander Solzhenitsyn (from a BBC interview with Michael Charlton: March 1, 1976)

You see, what Solzhenitsyn has said is on an entirely different level from the comments that go on about our world on television, by politicians. It's in terms of truth. It's in terms of good and evil. . . . from a man who . . . chose to jeopardize his life, his work, everything, and to give us in the West a last chance by telling us what the world situation is *really* about, which is *not* energy, *not* inflation . . . *not* who gets into power, but good and evil.

—Malcolm Muggeridge (response to Solzhenitsyn's interview: March 10, 1976)

In *The Armies of the Night* (1968), Mailer begins a full decade of nonfiction by exploring the concerns and doubts he expressed earlier about his fiction, about his role as an actor in the events of his time, and about the possibilities for some new kind of journalism that would initiate a war against the stifling forces in the media and society. Mailer attempts here to fulfill the desire he discovered in the fifties and sixties to be a hero for his time and to become a writer who will help accelerate consciousness. Mailer's primary achievement in *Armies* is that he discovers and communicates large implications and hope for a human renaissance in an event full of absurdity, compromise, human weakness, and mass movements. And he makes this discovery in a time and country he had recently portrayed as hopelessly defeated. This book is clearly a record of a war, a war between a dead world and a living one.

Armies is, first, a continuation of Mailer's response to conventional journalism. Mailer, like so many new journalists of the sixties, will present a meaning or a truth of an event without pretending to be objective, but by comparing, or indeed fusing, the personal truths of the experience with the events themselves. The emphasis of Book

One, entitled "History as a Novel," is upon the narrator as an actor *and* observer, upon the personal truths of larger events. The emphasis of Book Two, entitled "The Novel as History," is upon the event itself and the other participants. Though this larger structural division juxtaposes the personal with the larger truth, neither kind of truth is entirely exclusive to either book. The lively narrative consciousness, as we will see, insures a fusion of the personal and the larger truths throughout the entire book.

Mailer opens Book One with a *Time* magazine account of himself and the Pentagon March. That account clearly illustrates the biases of *Time* in favor of the Establishment cause, against the demonstrators, and against Mailer personally. *Time* uses every adjective, pun, and turn of phrase it can to perpetuate a public image of Mailer as only a mad dog who "staggers" drunkenly about the stage of the Ambassador Theater the night before the March. Mailer performs a "scatological solo," *Time* assures us, for an audience ("mostly students") in the "scruffy" theater, a place of "psychedelic frolics" and "capers." *Time* also pronounces *Why Are We in Vietnam?* useless for answering the question in its title. Mailer uses this *Time* account to launch himself into the book: "Now we may leave *Time* in order to find out what really happened." The argument that the press is "the silent assassin of the republic" becomes a recurring motif, with comparisons of eye-witness and media accounts throughout. Mailer is, cumulatively, more than a little convincing on this issue of the inadequacies of the media, and at one point Robert Lowell, another participant in the March, similarly scolds the press for its facile misrepresentations. Mailer could see that even Lowell, a man of high reputation and a relatively innocuous public image, suffers from the "great wall of total misrepresentation" the press builds between a writer "and the audience reached by a newspaper," which is most of the country. Mailer admits that he has done much to create his own bad image, which he drags around like a sarcophagus. Yet all the examples of misrepresentation about himself or the events are mere symptoms of a large problem—a continual misrepresentation of events and people that divorces the public from any reality.

Mailer explains his own approach to the event at the outset of Book Two with the metaphor of the tower. Book One, he explains, is a tower he built in a forest of mass media inaccuracy so that we might better see where we are and see our own horizons.¹ The tower is built by a narrator who acts as a novelist and as a historian.

The narrator builds his tower with various techniques skillfully

1. *The Armies of the Night* (hereafter cited as *Armies*), p. 219. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations are to works by Norman Mailer.

employed. He rapidly fluctuates between narrative and digression. He may digress in the very midst of the narrative or, like Swift, in separate blocks of digression, such as the long digression opening Part IV of Book One. Each large or small digression either enlarges our knowledge of the event or allows the narrator to make important associations through speculations, explications, or asides. In Book Two, especially, the narrator compares and analyzes as many facts, accounts, and statistics as he possesses. The narrator imaginatively penetrates other people's thoughts. He ruminates on events in long sections of interior monologue. He fluctuates between comedy and serious meditation. He gives ample realistic details to describe specific characters or episodes. And he sometimes carefully delineates a point or argument with well-developed dramatic scenes. But one central technique determines the nature of all the others—the creation of a lively, ambiguous consciousness at the center of events in Book One. This consciousness is a persona for Mailer himself, whom the author treats with both distance and intimacy in a third person autobiographical point of view. The most remarkable aspect of this hero, whom Mailer variously calls Mailer, the Novelist, the Participant, the Ruminant, the Historian, and the Existentialist, is that he is a comic hero. In this regard also Mailer's journalism is not as outrageous as it might appear if considered in isolation. The device of the narrator-observer as a crazed hero or fool seems to be one aspect of the larger ferment in the new journalism of the late sixties and early seventies. Two fellow journalists whom Mailer will describe in *The Fight* use a somewhat similar technique. Hunter Thompson, whom Mailer sees as a writer whose strength is the sensational repudiation of organized madness, uses a crazed-citizen persona as the narrative consciousness of his *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971), for example. Here Thompson's "Gonzo journalism" represents the extreme emphasis on narrative consciousness. He loads himself up with drugs and careens about Las Vegas in search of the American Dream. With a mixture of outrage, buffoonery, and madness, the Thompson persona observes events he is on assignment to cover, such as the Mint-400 off-the-road race and the National District Attorney's Conference on Dangerous Drugs in Vegas. He witnesses such events only long enough to get a sense of their grotesqueness, but actually writes about himself and the impact on him of such bizarre Vegas institutions as the Circus-Circus club, which provides a picture of what the "whole hep world would be doing on Saturday night if the Nazis had won the war."

George Plimpton, whom Mailer also portrays in *The Fight*, is certainly less outrageous. But the center of his book *Paper Lion* (1966) is his own ridiculous five-play performance in an exhibition

game in Pontiac, Michigan — at the end of a long period of training with the Detroit Lions. The purpose of his personal humiliation before the “massive attention” of a stadium crowd is to demonstrate his theme — that professional athletes are extraordinary men. Plimpton specifically compares himself to such sports clowns as baseball’s Al Schacht and the Charlie Chaplin buffoons of bullfighting as he plays “the fool in Pontiac.”

Mailer’s narrator-hero in *Armies* is also absurd; but more than this, he is an inspired, prophetic figure. The hero is, first, as humanly fallible as any of us and a chief resource for the humor in the book. Describing himself as a man who had given his own head “the texture of Swiss Cheese” and had made all sorts of “erosions in his intellectual firmament,” which erosions had given him the illusion of being a genius, Mailer is most relentless on the subject of his own fantasies, illusions, and vanities. His vanity clearly emerges, for example, when he reports that his glee and sense of triumph at getting the job as master of ceremonies at the theater — over Lowell, Paul Goodman, and Dwight Macdonald — created such a disproportionate sense of his own importance and “incandescence of purpose” that he neglects to notify his fellow notables of a trip to the men’s room, which itself is described in comic detail, and thereby throws his “first gig as Master of Ceremonies” into a confusion from which it never recovers. Instead of captivating the audience with succinct and witty speeches and introductions, as he had fantasized on his way to the theater, he cranks up a vaudeville clown. “He had betrayed himself again. The end of the introduction belonged in a burlesque house — he worked his own worst veins, like a man on the edge of bankruptcy trying to collect hopeless debts” (pp. 43–44). The actor in his personality takes over and, playing a favorite part of Southern demagogue, hobbles about the stage as Lyndon Johnson’s “dwarf alter ego” answering all criticism of the war and Administration with a “fuck you!” Even Robert Lowell, who, as Mailer reminds us, has accomplishments suitable to greater vanity than Mailer, is not spared from the hero-fool’s wit. Indeed, all the characters are somewhat absurd. The episode of Mailer’s and Lowell’s conversations, their literary logrolling and “headmastermanship,” is as concise a scene as any in the book. The episode, as Lowell was to say later of *Armies* itself, does not miss a trick, which is to say, Mailer’s portrayal of the details and absurdities of the events and other actors is complete.²

2. See Dwight Macdonald’s account of Lowell’s conversation about *Armies* with Macdonald in “Politics,” *Esquire*, p. 42. “‘Curious,’ Lowell said to me after reading it, ‘when you’re with another novelist, you think he’s so sensitive and alert and you find later he wasn’t taking in anything, while Norman seems not to pay attention

The comic hero himself is, then, in some ways a microcosm of his compatriots and his time. He suffers the disease of disproportion and of multiple, uncontrolled personalities, as he tells us in detail during his opening phone conversation with Mitch Goodman (p. 8). And over all of his personalities is a division between the "modest everyday fellow of his daily round" and the "absolute egomaniac, a Beast" who seizes control of the everyday fellow quickly and with "little warning." He compares the architecture of his personality to a "provincial cathedral" designed over several centuries by warring orders of the church. If he has the desire to lead a nation toward God, he is "sufficiently devil-ridden to need action." He tells us near the end of Book One that he cannot tell "whether he was fundamentally criminal, a devil indeed."

The same Mailer who believes (who does not?) that he could better serve as president than any holder of the office since Kennedy, who fantasizes about bending the bars of a prison bus and making a dramatic escape, who dreams of leading revolutionaries with a gun in the hills, is also the Mailer who chides himself as a "philosophical monomaniac," a "sexologue," and a "surrogate Hemingway" or "poor man's Papa" who must continually face his own fear, whether it be for life and limb or for inconveniences and disruptions of his daily life. Confronting his fear of a lengthy term in jail, Mailer is appalled by his inability to keep principles first, his breaking of his own maxims: "but Mailer! with his apocalyptic visions at Lincoln Memorial and again on the March, his readiness to throw himself, breast against breast, in any charge on the foe, why now in such a rush [to go home]? Did he not respect his visions?" (p. 118).

If he is not in complete control of himself, however, he is still a hero-fool who would seek Life in an insane world, who is compelled by the force within him to speak his truths as an inspired prophet might. He cannot give up the impulse to educate his country, though his own self-doubts and shortcomings are very real. As a novelist, he feels compelled to take on the heroic role of educator on a grand scale, and in this regard he compares himself to Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Thomas Wolfe. The responsibilities of these novelists arise from their perceptions of their country's potential and loss, and they accept these responsibilities despite a preference, as Mailer suggests, for a safe place, security, and a nice wine cellar. But Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Wolfe all failed to reach out beyond the brainwashings of bestsellers, Hollywood, *Time*, and now television

but now it seems he didn't miss a trick—and what a memory!" Macdonald agrees and goes on to explain it all in memory, no notes and so forth, yet Mailer reproduces whole scenes and dialogues, to Macdonald's mind, exactly, reconstructing them "by ear."

to show to the nation its best self. In the absence of a greater hero, Mailer offers his comic hero as a philosopher-fool, "Prince of Bourbon," a "mountebank actor" and "crazed citizen" who nonetheless feels some depth of truth he must utter.

While the audience was recovering from the existential anxiety of encountering an orator who confessed to such a crime [urinating on the floor of a dark men's room] he would be able . . . to bring them up to a contemplation of deeper problems, of, indeed, the deepest problems, the most chilling alternatives, and would from there seek to bring them back to a restorative view of man. Man [i.e., Mailer] might be a fool who peed in the wrong pot, man was also a scrupulous servant of the self-damaging admission; man was therefore a philosopher . . . ; he could turn loss to philosophical gain . . . his most special fool's garden: *satori*, incandescence, and the hard gem-like flame of bourbon burning in the furnaces of metabolism. (*Armies*, pp. 31-32)

This persona "Mailer" is in part an outraged self at war with his culture, but he would still bring to his culture deep and disquieting insights. His lot will be to reveal the absurdity of his comic flaws and disproportions, to suffer persecution and humiliation by larger forces, and to travel a pilgrim's progress from egotism through humiliation and suffering, and eventually to knowledge and affirmation. He is both actor and sufferer. His grace will manifest itself as his best self. That best self is the instinctual drive for freedom, growth, and Life, a drive that Mailer will associate with God and with the assertion of one's soul, of one's creative and moral potential as a human being. The persona is, therefore, at once an absurd fool, a holy fool, and a hero.

The heroism of Mailer-the-fool is, as the fictional heroes are, part of a larger tradition. As Enid Welsford points out in *The Fool*, the fool, when he succeeds, represents the human emancipation from the stifling law or order, from the leviathan state and its representatives who threaten to swallow the individual's original personality and freedom. The fool is in this sense a hero because he embodies the cause of the stupid against the clever, the weak against the strong, David against Goliath. As a successful underdog, he can turn the tables on the authority and outwit the "wise" by his physical, moral, and spiritual resilience. His wisdom is not of the intellect, but of the spirit; he draws forth from mankind its inner antagonism between the impulse to free the self from restriction and the impulse to preserve the social order.³

In one of his longest digressions, Mailer presents his technical

3. Enid Welsford, *The Fool*, pp. 315, 317, 319.

rationale for using a hero-fool as the central narrative vehicle of his book. Since the March on the Pentagon was an ambiguous "event whose essential value or absurdity may not be established for ten or twenty years, or indeed ever," Mailer argues, it would be misleading and not resolve the ambiguity if he were to focus on the real principals—as in fact he will briefly in Book Two—such as Dellinger, Rubin, or high government officials. Mailer argues further that the monumental disproportions of the event might be resolved or imaginatively perceived and captured best by an eye-witness participant who is himself ambiguous, absurd, disproportionate, and comic. The buffoon figure traditionally breaks down the distinctions not only between wisdom and folly, but between life and art. He is equally at home in reality or imagination. He is an educator, as Welsford has suggested, who draws out the latent folly of his audience, or shows folly for what it is, and who attunes us to the possibility that at any moment life threatens to turn into a farce (*The Fool*, pp. xii, 28). Whether Mailer's hero is ludicrous with mock-heroic associations, or whether heroic and tragic, each reader must decide, he tells us. But as we will see, the hero-fool is both. Such a persona serves as a bridge to the "crazy time" of history when symbolic warfare (medieval and primitive) was reinvigorated against the avatar and high church of technological civilization—the Pentagon. Playing upon his public image as an outrageous egotist, which he cannot escape and which the media will amplify, the Mailer persona is at once self-assertive and capable of "a detachment classic in severity." These qualities equip him to act and to regard himself and others in action against the enemy. "Once History inhabits a crazy house," he tells us, "egotism may be the last tool left to History" (p. 54).

The narrator as both historian and fool will seek to find and interpret for us the timeless in the historical event. He records a war that reveals the timeless pattern of a rite of passage, which implies the potential renaissance of a people in the grip of Death. The enemy has representatives high and low, and though no single face of the enemy is the enemy itself, each literal and symbolic agent reveals a face of the enemy. The enemy is both obvious and ambiguous, both without and within. Mailer attaches chief importance to the event as an opportunity to confront the enemy for those who, in all their human confusion, are seeking some passage to the conduits of Life.

Throughout Book One, Mailer continually prepares us to recognize the sight and the feel of the enemy in its various guises from innocence and humanitarianism to obvious malignancies upon nature and life. The last test of malignancy left to each of us now may be to

“trust the authority of our senses” and to “look to the feel of the phenomenon”: if it feels bad, it is bad.⁴ The many faces of the enemy may be real or symbolic or both. The enemy may emerge as that consensus of the most powerful middle-aged WASPs after World War II, who pledged intellectual troth to the idea that Communism was the deadly foe of Christian culture and had to be fought by a series of overt and cold wars mixed with periods of “modest collaboration” (p. 181). Or the enemy may be any number of corporations who are more guilty than the Communists of debasing nature, our goods, and our sense of a meaningful work and life (pp. 72, 152). Or the literal enemy may wear the mask of the liberal. Even with the best intentions, the liberal has difficulty in doing good because the liberal cannot go to the root of the problem—to the technology that divorces humanity from real, precise, and deep experience, from metaphor, from nature, and from challenge and growth. Mailer argues here, as indeed Aldous Huxley did in his 1946 preface to *Brave New World*, that the modern liberal’s faith is not in humanity but in the “Great Society’s supermachine” and its managers.

If the republic was now managing to convert the citizenry to a plastic mass, ready to be attached to any manipulative gung ho, the author was ready to cast much of the blame for such success into the undernourished lap, the overpsychologized loins, of the liberal academic intelligentsia. . . . They were servants of that social machine of the future in which all irrational human conflict would be resolved, all conflict of interest negotiated, and nature’s resonance condensed into frequencies which could comfortably phase nature in or out as you please. So they were servants of the moon. . . . they were ready to move to the moon and build Utopia cities there. (*Armies*, pp. 15–16)

During the protest, the enemy materializes as the law enforcer, particularly the U.S. marshals to whom Mailer devotes a great deal of descriptive space. Their faces have a “low cunning mixed with a stroke of rectitude”; many look like ex-first sergeants, “the toes run out; the belly struts”; they emit a collective spirit of “apathy rising to fanaticism only to subside in apathy” (Mailer remarked in *Canni-*

4. Mailer repeats this twice in *Armies*, pp. 25 and 90–91, and thanks Aquinas, Hemingway, and Macdonald for giving him this clue, which is enough, he tells us, to “enable a man to become a good working amateur philosopher” and not just “an embittered entertainer. . . . a John O’Hara!” Part of what Mailer expresses here is his belief that sensual, intuitive, and instinctual perceptions inform consciousness with greater truth than consciousness alone can command (see *Armies*, p. 28). Stanley T. Gutman was correct, it seems to me, in assessing Mailer’s faith in one’s total immersion in experience as a means of deriving values, and this is one point of Mailer’s affinity with existential thought in general. See *Mankind in Barbary*, p. 167. But of course the values Mailer seeks are ultimately larger and more selfless than the self-contained values of existential fiction, as I pointed out in the previous chapter.

bals, p. 196, that this attitude leads to violence); their eyes speak of hollows in the soul in places like Las Vegas, "where the fevers of America go livid . . . and Grandmother," the churchgoer with orange hair, drives half-dollars into a slot machine while "gooks" burn in Vietnam. These marshals are like men Mailer had known in the army, but the dignity and humor had gone out of them and something "rabid and toothless" had come in. As we see later, by eye-witness accounts, these marshals beat the women protestors with special enthusiasm. Applicants to work in the garrisons and future concentration camps would come not only from "a hundred American novels," but from "half the Marshals outside this bus, simple, honest, hardworking government law-enforcement agents." Something is loose in America, Mailer ponders; technology had driven some wildness and nightmare out from secret primitive places and into the fevers of the air and blood. Vegas, race riots, suburban orgies were not enough to contain the fever—this "poet's beast slinking to the market place"—the country had to go to Vietnam and unleash the fever in the "nozzle tip of the flame thrower."

The protean enemy emerges in symbolic as well as in literal agents. Chief among these symbols is the Pentagon itself, a concrete entity to be sure, but in its architecture and function a representative of the disease itself: "chalice and anus of corporation land, smug, enclosed, morally blind . . . destroying the future of its own nation with each day it augmented its strength." It speaks of "oppressive Faustian lusts," entraps the nation's own innocence—just as it traps the soul of a boy (i.e., D.J.) hot out of high school before he knows he has a soul—and reminds the hero of the "technological excrement all over the conduits of nature." The Pentagon is a symbol, a paradigm with very real effects.

By writing in a journalistic-historical medium, Mailer is able to suggest the reality of his metaphors to a reader.⁵ But he finds only a grim pleasure in the verification in his metaphors. As the marchers approach it, the Pentagon looks first like an "anomaly of the sea," then like a plastic plug in a hole made in flesh by "some unmentionable operation." Closer, it looks like a "five-sided tip on the spout" of a giant deoderant spray can, or like a "cluster of barnacles" whose cancerous proliferation is its own defense. A first reconnaissance by the leaders of the demonstrators' coalition reveals the building's subtle strength: they could find no objective in the monotonous corridors. "What could one do inside?" Mailer asks. It is one of the

5. By "journalistic" I refer literally to the fact that Book One of *Armies* was first published in *Harper's* as "The Steps of the Pentagon" (March 1968). It was written with great energy and speed in about three months.

“anonymous, monotonous, monstrous, massive interchangeable” signs of totalitarianism, reflecting an image of our highways, architecture, food, and communications (see pp. 113–16, 154–55, 158, 176, 226–28).

If the enemy is a technology grown cancerous and a machine man talking technogese or using a billy club or a rifle, it is also, in its most subtle and insidious face, the enemy within, the machine man in all of us. Mailer's Crusaders are not glorious heroes, but the smallest, most oppressed representatives of some dim flame left in the core of life. General Mailer's troops are none other than the confused escapees of the urban middle class who harbor a “secret slavish love for the oncoming hegemony of the computer and the suburb,” but who also are pressed by the most outrageous occurrences into increasingly militant stands.

What is the nature of this enemy within? What shortcomings must the protestors surmount in Mailer's view? They have, first, indiscriminately consumed chemical drugs. Mailer tells us he now believes that promiscuous drug use exploits the present at the expense of consuming the past (“whether traceable in the flesh, or merely palpable in the collective underworld of the dream”) and demolishing “whole territories of the future.” The drugs continue what Mailer sees as the technocracy's lobotomy of the mind, which separates the human from a sense of responsibility and of guilt. The young people in the March seemed indifferent to waste. Second, they automatically accepted technology land. When Mailer sees, for example, that most of the black demonstrators keep themselves separate from the white demonstrators, he believes this separation to be a reflection of the denial of technology land by the Black Left, which sought to fulfill its “unruly jungle intuitions that technology land and corporation land were the same.”⁶

But these youthful “villains” display qualities that give the narrator hope. He sees beyond their worst selves another potential that the other villains from corporation land did not display. These other

6. Later in *Existential Errands: Twenty-Six Pieces Selected by the Author from the Body of All His Writings* Mailer develops this theme. He contrasts middle-class youth disaffected by war and Black Power. He believes Black Power expresses the truly conservative ethic and passion, “for any real conservation is founded on regard for the animal, the oak and the field; it has instinctive detestation of science, or creation-by-machine.” The basis of primitive life is the tradition that God resides in, sanctifies, nature. Contrastingly, what white civilization has come to see as its “wealth” is a corporate production that poisons “the wellsprings, avatars, and conduits of nature.” Mailer sees in Vietnam and Africa the rejection of technological culture by a primitive, exploited world (pp. 293–94, 300–301, 321). The conflict between primitive life and exploitative technology is also the subject of his essay accompanying Kurlansky and Naar's photography of the graffiti of urban minorities in New York City. See *The Faith of Graffiti* (New York: Praeger, 1974).

villains were, after all, utterly destroying their sons and daughters and the future of their country in a "self-righteousness and greed and secret lust (often unknown to themselves) for some sexotechnological variety of neo-fascism" (p. 93). If the New Left represented a generation born to technology and a generation embracing technology as no generation had before, the New Left still had awakened another consciousness closed to the five preceding generations of the middle class. Some of this new generation could see that the authority had lied, that people in high places were corrupt, that somehow the authority had deadened the life of everyone, had created one disaster after another for which the authority always had "the subtlest apologies." At times this new generation also demonstrated promising élan and freedom epitomized for Mailer in their variety of battle costume. Finally, this new generation of protestors returned a sense of mystery and symbol to politics. They believed in witches, magic, tribal knowledge, orgy, and revolution. And, of course, they would never have tried to blow their minds with easy visions of heaven had not the authority so sterilized the present.⁷

Since the disproportion between the forces of the government and the marchers was so great, the marchers had to create a symbolic warfare. But it was the government itself that first closed the gap between the symbolic and the literal. The government troops acted as if a symbolic wound were literal and mortal. Of course from the first a symbolic march held literal potential. The New Left learned to probe the heart of the government's fear of image, of what Mailer calls a "concrete disaster of international publicity." For everyone involved in the March and arrests, however, the dangers and discomforts were real. For Mailer, arrest was both a symbolic act of defiance of governmental policy in Vietnam and an opportunity to see the faces and operations of the other side.

Mailer's principal discovery, however, is the meaning of the event. It is the purpose of Book Two, "The Novel as History," to clarify the meaning of Book One and the whole protest. In the process of writing Book One for *Harper's* Mailer "was delivered of a discovery of what the March . . . had finally meant, and what had been won, and what had been lost, and so found himself ready at last to write a most concise Short History" (p. 216). Although Mailer argues per-versely and ironically that Book Two is more novelistic, by which he means it required more imagination because it covers incidents Mailer did not participate in, it is an attempt to objectify parts of the event through the reporting of facts by a comparison of accounts

7. I am summarizing the points Mailer makes throughout *Armies*, see especially pp. 33-34, 86-88, 92-93, 268-69.

and by guarded speculations. The meaning is ultimately that the March is both symbolically and actually a rite of passage and one of the most promising acts of regeneration since World War II. But this rite of passage is two-fold: personal and transpersonal. Despite the Mailer persona's early doubt, which he expressed to Mitch Goodman, about the value of his participation in the protest, this hero-fool experiences a lesser passage that foreshadows and prepares him to explain the larger rite.

It is, first, as a witness of some of the ceremonies in the protest that he faces certain truths about himself. In a somber, ceremonial burning of draft cards, young men perform what for Mailer is a basic existential act. They defy a large power, and the outcome of their acts is uncertain. They face a promise of trial and danger and make a "moral leap" that requires a faith in "some kind of grace." Mailer wonders if he could do as much in their place. These young men appear to have "souls of interesting dimension" and a "surprising individuality." And when faculty members, swept along "this moral stream," repeat the acts of the younger men, Mailer recognizes that the same liberal academics and technologists he had criticized the night before were still capable of perhaps greater moral leaps than the young men. For these older protesters placed themselves in a more precise danger; they were acutely aware of just how their lives, their families, and their careers were most jeopardized; they were abdicating "from the machines they had chosen for life" (pp. 76–77). Mailer also devotes seven pages to describing as a theatrical event the exorcism of the Pentagon led by the Fugs. Shouting, noise, rock music, incantations in the name of every conceivable archaic god ("Out, demons, out—back to the darkness, ye servants of Satan—out demons out!"), and a rite of sexual love intended, in the name of Priapus and Life, to rid the Pentagon, in the words of the exorcists, of "the cancerous tumors of the war generals"—all are pure grist for Mailer's Manichean mills.

On which acidic journeys had the hippies met the witches and the devils and the cutting edge of all primitive awe, the savage's sense of explosion. . . . Now, here, . . . suddenly an entire generation of acid-heads seemed to have said goodbye to easy visions of heaven, no, now the witches were here, and rites of exorcism, and black terrors of the night. . . . Yes, the hippies had gone from Tibet to Christ to the Middle Ages, now they were Revolutionary Alchemists. Well, thought Mailer, that was all right, he was a Left Conservative himself. "Out demons out!"

"You know I like this," he said to Lowell.⁸

8. *Armies*, pp. 123–24. Compare the ceremonial elements in the larger rite to Mircea Eliade's description of primitive rites of initiation in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, which are also clearly associated with purification as well as renewal. The

The Mailer persona is a little like the writer's earliest heroes in that he is a mere witness who finds himself "being steeped in a new psychical condition." The courage of others forces him to face his own fear, to face the possibility that to act himself could disrupt his own life and work. He begins to feel an uncomfortable modesty, and after the draft card ceremonies near the end of Part II of Book One, the emphasis of the narrative and description of Book One changes gradually from the narrator's sense of self-importance to his sense of self-recognition and humility. He casts aside his life-long fantasy of heroically leading a revolution; he sees that he will be too old, too incompetent, too "showboat," and too lacking in essential judgment to play such a role. His role is rather to be a hero-fool and a figurehead, a scapegoat: "not a future leader, but a future victim: *there* would be his real value" (pp. 77-78).

In this role of the holy-fool-as-a-scapegoat, Mailer's hero again becomes a figure of greater universality. The traditional scapegoat, of which Frazer provided so many examples in *The Golden Bough*, merges with certain traditional fools throughout history and myth, folklore and religion. Enid Welsford's third chapter in *The Fool*, entitled "Origins: The Fool as Mascot and Scapegoat," is a thorough study of the fusion of the fool and scapegoat in Indian, Eastern, Arabic, and European seasonal festivals and fertility ceremonies. Fool-scapegoats ruled for ritually determined periods as pariahs who scorned and rebuked the existent systems of society and culture until they were driven into exile. Before the regeneration of order or the renewal of the agricultural seasons could begin, such fools encouraged every excess, chaos, and breaking of the law. In the great seasonal festivals of Christian Europe, for example, the ceremonies were occasions for both worship and wild feasting, lawlessness, and buffoonery. At times the dances and games and general Saturnalia were carried into the cathedrals themselves. Fools, like the ancient scapegoats, belabored bystanders for their sins and folly and created an atmosphere in which all revelers became fools themselves.

Like Mailer's hero-fool, the festival fools, by their ritual roles as actors, sufferers, and observers, were endowed with holiness. The fool's usual distance from the revelers also indicated his status as an excommunicate from his culture and as a mock king. But the holy fool is also part of the prophetic tradition, from the primitive

scapegoat-clown figure is often at the center of such rites, and the ceremonial expulsions of the demons and diseases consist of fastings and ablutions; ceremonial extinguishings and kindlings of fire; group incantations, noises, and hulloaloo; collective orgies; ceremonial combats; and the interpenetration or intermingling of the souls of the dead and the living. All such ceremonies seek the abolition of corrupted past time (historical time) and the creation of a new, sanctified time (pp. 53-54).

shaman, to the Hebrew prophets and the Greek oracles. In the subsequent chapter, entitled "Origins: The Fool as Poet and Clairvoyant," Welsford discusses the attribution of divine and demonic inspiration to the mad fool, especially in Irish legend and history. The holy fool in this tradition most clearly represents the receding of the "logical soul" or psyche and the advancing of the inspired, irrational soul. This shift in the balance of the logical and the irrational has always been a goal of Mailer and his heroes. The inspired fool's satire was considered a kind of magical utterance, and satire, which began to emerge in *The Deer Park* and erupted furiously in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, returns with greater restraint and effect in *Armies*, especially where Mailer satirizes the foolishness and vanities of others and himself. Though, in this light, the clowning and coarse ridicule of D.J. might be seen as the ravings of an ultimately defeated fool, the hero-fool of *Armies* will be a triumphant fool—a fool who embodies in the oldest traditions of inspired rantings and ruminations the power of information, eloquence, and abusive raillery.⁹

Mailer's hero-fool is both actor and observer, combines in fact both attributes of the previous heroes in one. He is the focus of others' attention, one who is the actor at the center of events, but he is also a witness, or a self who is a center of perception and whose greater role will be to reveal the meaning in the events he observes. His first duty to this role of symbolic figure and real victim is to get himself arrested. And as he begins to participate in the March and in the active demonstrations, he feels the promise of purgations and renewals just beginning. Such promise is even in the absurd comedy of the March from the Lincoln Memorial to the Pentagon, which Mailer describes in detail. As he and the distraught notables struggle against the "upstarts and arrivistes" immediately behind them, who are pushed in turn by the billowing ranks and masses in the parade, as the parade monitors bellow orders at the chaotic ranks, as motorcycles roar and jockey with television cars for position, Mailer feels some timeless warrior's experience awaiting them beyond the comedy. In the front line of battle he feels "a promise of swift transit—one's soul feels clean; as we have gathered, he was not used much

9. See Welsford, *The Fool*, pp. 65–76, 78–80, 87–88, 111–12. Welsford points out, in her long discussion of the Irish *fili* or poet-wizard traditions, that the holy-fool's supernatural gifts of insight and prophecy were not only valued as prophetic powers but also as powers to ward off malignant influences and to satirize enemies with a magical potency. The divine fool is a particularly primitive form of the fool. As the modern ages approached, the fool generally became more and more a simple grotesque, until, of course, he was revived as a prophetic figure in Renaissance theater.

more than any other American politician, litterateur, or racketeer to the sentiment that his soul was not unclean . . . in some part of himself at least, he had grown" (p. 113).

When Mailer breaks through the police lines at the Pentagon and is arrested, he takes the first tangible step in his own change. The symbolic protest converges with real actions for a real cause. His senses charged by the confrontation, he compares his feeling at the moment of arrest to being confirmed; he discovers some initial stage of wholeness and a new kind of importance. "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 this picayune arrest had been his Rubicon" (p. 138). If his trials are not fantastically heroic, they are real. When he is thrust into a police wagon with a counterdemonstrator who is an American Nazi, Mailer faces down the Nazi in a Rojacklike contest where each man's eyes becomes the focus of his soul, and where Mailer, "obliged not to lose," holds his own. Imprisonment itself is a test, a series of erosions of strength and integrity for the twenty-four hours Mailer endures it. He is forced into a self-discipline in jail that he had tried to avoid earlier. To keep his strength he must learn to cast aside personal interests—returning to wife and children, going to a party in New York. Again in prison he is encouraged by the integrity of some of the young men and of such notables as Noam Chomsky and Yale chaplain John Boyle. And at his own trial he is helpless before the bureaucracy that singles him out for special punishment until a bright young lawyer named Hirschkop battles cleverly to earn Mailer's release.

Through such experiences, the narrator-hero is himself being tested throughout Book One. As actor and sufferer, he is being made aware of his own strengths and weaknesses, and he has opportunities to compare himself to others. As we have seen, the way in which the narrator sees people at first, or imagines them to be, at times contrasts with what he discovers about them in the midst of real events. To some extent, therefore, the way Mailer as a new journalist will shape his events is less under his total control than the shape of events in his novels. Imagination and reality are uniting in *Armies* to produce a new foundation for narrative structure and theme and a new complication in Mailer's relationship to his characters and material. Aware of these new elements in his material, Mailer-the-writer observes with some distance the changes in Mailer-the-persona's vision that such complications encourage.

Upon his release from prison, the final effect of all the ceremonies and trials is the hero's sense of humility and elation, a sense that

completes the comic hero's movement from brawling self-assertion to a new modesty. The comic hero's development from Beast to modest participant is important because it can better foreshadow one direction of Mailer's future work than would a hero of supernatural strengths and perceptions. Still, extraordinary consciousness is clearly important, and it is the goal. But since 1967 Mailer has increasingly sounded a note of self-doubt, of wondering if anyone can tell if he or she is finally more good than evil. Mailer's previous work suggests that some may attain the perception of good and evil in oneself and others, but that faith is now being called into doubt.¹⁰ In *Armies* this note of doubt may be a function of the author's move from fiction to journalism where the raw material is more resistant to a writer's attempts to give it shape and heroes are few.

Mailer describes his deliverance in terms of celebration and re-birth. His renewed sense of the possibilities of life and the importance of freedom make him unusually magnanimous about the possibilities in humanity and America. He associates the potential in humanity and America with the Christ within: "standing on the grass, he felt one suspicion of a whole man closer to that freedom from dread which occupied the inner drama of his years, yes, one image closer than when he had come to Washington four days ago" (pp. 212–13).¹¹ The discovery of Christ is the discovery of "this nice anticipation of the very next moves of life itself," of the wholeness of the self, and of compassion. It is the discovery of a god-in-man quite different from Mailer's embattled, banished, dread-inspiring God, but closer to some hint of the ethical order and absolutism that D.J. glimpsed in the bear's eye. If the "Christian" god and the god of protean power are not entirely reconciled in *Armies*, neither are the

10. Seven years later, in 1975, Mailer addressed this problem specifically. He abdicated his power to determine finally the good and evil in others and in oneself. Kierkegaard has, he admits, helped him to this position. But Mailer does not abdicate the capacity to feel sensations of the good and evil from the experience of an event he is participating in and reporting on. Rather than imposing categories on experience, Mailer argues that he is attracted to events in which polarities are obviously at war. I agree with the note of skepticism in Laura Adams's questions on this point. It is problematic to what degree the categories arise from the experience or are brought to the experience. It is certainly true that Mailer has made it his study to seek out the elements of each side of the dualism. At least Mailer is increasingly aware of complexities that his work to this point does not convincingly demonstrate. See Laura Adams, "Existential Aesthetics: An Interview with Norman Mailer," *Partisan Review*, pp. 197–214. I merely introduce an issue here that I will return to later.

11. For Jung's own study of the archetypal association of Christ and wholeness of self, see "Christ, a Symbol of the Self," *Aion*, pp. 36–71, and Jung's Foreword, pp. 3–23.

pagan and Christian metaphors of the book. Part of Mailer's discovery here would appear to be that the Christian and pagan gods are not entirely irreconcilable but may coexist as different manifestations of the God of Life itself.

It is not that Mailer gives up his existential god, but that he discovers another possibility of God. As wholeness, this Christ within is the opposite of that schism between body and soul and between the conscious and the unconscious that Mailer has been warning about in America since *Advertisements*. Just before he is released from prison, Mailer, in a digression, has speculated again that the average American at midcentury believes in, serves, "two opposites"—mystery, which is at the center of Christianity, and the detestation of mystery, which is at the center of the corporation and technology. The modern schism in the Christian soul, Mailer argues, is unequaled by any schism before it. Vietnam, he continues, is a result and manifestation of the schism. This schism Mailer loosely calls schizophrenia, because "the expression of brutality" offers the schizophrenic a "definite if temporary relief." Against the mystery of Christ the corporation offers security, television, the unspoken promise that the judgment of one's soul will be "no worse than the empty spaces of the Tonight Show" (p. 189). When Mailer, seeking salience rather than profundity, tells the waiting reporters upon his release that Christians have somehow become cannibals consuming Christ by technological fire in Vietnam, he confuses them. They report, therefore, only in terms of what they do understand—Mailer's public image as an anarchic fool. Mailer ends the narrative of events in Book One by quoting a press report that accuses him of being a Jew who grandstands a Sunday sermon in a court of law.

If Book One illustrates the observations and personal experiences that led to Mailer's passage through the "long dark night of the soul" in America, and if his passage illustrates the growth of the protagonist from his worst self (the Beast and vaudeville clown at the Ambassador Theater) to his best self (the humbled convict who recognizes the meaning of the Christ within), Book Two illustrates the darker passage and greater change for others. Book Two is Mailer's analysis of as many accounts as he could find of the events he did not witness, but that analysis is charged with the consciousness of a participant in ancillary events.

It is terribly important who the observer is. That's why I always try to put myself into these works of journalism so the reader can have his sense of me. It's important to be able to decide whether I'm perceiving well or where I'm perceiving badly. Whereas, if I attempt to present to readers what I consider the end product of objective truth, it's likely

to be nothing more than the harshly digested conclusions I came up with in my somewhat unbalanced soul. (What else is most journalism?) Whereas I believe the fun in reading comes from observing the observer. (Adams interview, pp. 209–10)

At least, Mailer continues in the interview, he gives even disagreeing readers a chance to approach truth by comparing lies. The synthesis of two antitheses may, in other words, lead to a higher level of consciousness in the reader-observer.

It is obvious even from the title adopted from Arnold's "Dover Beach" that Mailer will portray two ignorant armies, two antitheses, clashing by night, in this case the night of the American soul. But one ignorant army undergoes a positive rite of passage. It is with this army that Mailer will cast his lot. Mailer compares the rite of the working-class soldiers and marshals and the government officials with a negative rite of passage. "Men learn in a negative rite to give up the best things they were born with," he says of an official speaking in "totalitarianese" who has stripped his speech of moral content. "How much must a spokesman suffer in a negative rite to be able to learn to speak in such a way?" (p. 285). In contrast, wherever there were ceremonial acts and direct confrontations in Book One, there were remarkable young people emerging out of their past lives and the dimming force of all their organizations, programs, and speeches. In Book Two the actual battles between police and protestors continually narrowed the army of demonstrators down to what Mailer calls "the best." As for Rojack and D.J., the essence of the rite of passage resides in tests of endurance and courage. From the thousands who marched, to the few thousand who stayed to protest, to the final two hundred who resisted until the end, and to the last resisting Quakers, the movement from Book One through Book Two is toward the gradual revelation of the essential form or soul, the hardest core, or protest for moral obligations.

Mailer's description of the "Battle of the Wedge" near the end of Book Two illustrates the climax of this "passage through the night." For the demonstrators who stayed, this battle is a final act of defiance and courage, an act Mailer describes as outshining his own battles. These demonstrators face successively dangerous choices on the moral ladder that Mailer himself could not when imprisoned (p. 195). I disagree with the gist of those critics who believe Mailer sees his decision not to resist the sentence as a rejection of the moral ladder. Upon his release, Mailer simply suggests that ejecting oneself from the guilt one feels if one refuses to climb the ladder might be worth it if one could see the possibilities in a new freedom and reduce the nausea of guilt enough to go on with one's work. He

obviously admires the strength of the last resisters and even the martyrs; they represent Mailer's own chief hope.¹²

In the Battle of the Wedge, seasoned paratroopers and marshals move into the last group of demonstrators as they sit beside the Pentagon. Here Mailer sees that the rite of passage these young people endure is connected, in some timeless way, to such rites everywhere and especially in American history.

. . . the light reflected from the radiance of greater more heroic hours may have come nonetheless to shine along *the inner space* and caverns of the freaks, some hint of a glorious future . . . , some refrain from all the great American rites of passage when men and women manacled themselves to a lost and painful principle and survived a day, a night, a week, a month, a year, a celebration of Thanksgiving—the country had been founded on a rite of passage . . . Very few had not emigrated here without the echo of that rite . . . each generation of Americans had forged their own rite, in the forest of the Alleghenies and the Adirondacks, at Valley Forge, at New Orleans in 1812, with Rogers and Clark or at Sutter's Mill, at Gettysburg, the Alamo, the Klondike, the Argonne, Normandy, Pusan. (*Armies*, p. 280)

If this rite is pale beside some of those in our past, it is still, Mailer reminds us, a true rite for each of those resisters who, though "drug-ridden," "jargon-mired," and spoiled, faced his or her own resources of endurance and courage in a "painful spiritual test" where "some part of the man has been born again, and is better" (pp. 280–81).

In retrospect at the end of Book Two, Mailer reaffirms the timelessness of the event through recalling two continuing motifs in *Armies*: the presence of the ghosts and the esprit of the Union Dead and the spawning rites of the chinook salmon in Robert Lowell's lines from *Near the Ocean*.

O to break loose, like the chinook
salmon jumping and falling back,

12. Compare, for example, pp. 179–81, where Mailer is aware of his "unholy desire" to be released, and pp. 280–81, where the basis of the greatest rite and promise for Life is in "the incomprehensible mysteries of moral choice," of facing the moral ladder until one's last strength or sanity gives out. I agree, for example, with Adams that Mailer discovers in prison that the linear view of moral development is replaced by a cumulative view: that is, if one's cumulative acts have more good than bad, then moral progress is made. See Laura Adams, *Existential Battles: The Growth of Norman Mailer*, pp. 132–33. But the conflict between worst and best selves is ultimately always linear; that is, progressive if one approaches Life more than Death, and the moral commitments of the most-daring demonstrators are the basis of Mailer's whole new "modesty." Robert Solotaroff, in essence, agrees with Adams but is more aware of the striking "secularity" of Mailer's position in choosing not to engage the certain defeats of prison. But Mailer argues finally, Solotaroff sees, that cumulative good amidst one's bad is still a linear, that is, a Life-approaching, moral progress. See *Down Mailer's Way*, pp. 230–31.

nosing up to the impossible
 stone and bone-crushing waterfall—
 raw-jawed, weak-fleshed there, stopped by ten
 steps of the roaring ladder, and then
 to clear the top on the last try,
 alive enough to spawn and die.

The meaning of the Pentagon protest is that thousands of people underwent rites of passage that changed their inner lives, that regenerated Life to some part of body and soul. Mailer, a microcosm, a lesser initiate, was among them. What counts for Mailer, first, is that each person goes from the March and resistance with some inner victory. What Mailer admires most about Jerry Rubin, for example, is his revolutionary mysticism which sees that beyond the endless negotiations between coalition and government and beyond all the compromises in the revolutionary aesthetic or image, a war of publicity is still far subordinate to an inner victory, a transformation of the psychological reality of the initiates. This inner change is caused by the rigors of moral choice and moral action that test one's courage and endurance (one's proportions) for a point of belief. The negative rite of passage strips moral content from one's words and actions and shapes public opinion into an amoral position.

"There are places no history can reach," Mailer admits as he prepares to deliver his speculations on the last throes, the final private rigors, of the rite for those extraordinary few who choose to stay in prison and climb the moral ladder to its end. Mailer imagines for us the group of Quakers from Voluntown, Connecticut, suffering the fevers and visions of fasting and dehydration—some force-fed, some thrown in "the Hole"—dreaming of a "long column of Vietnamese dead, Vietnamese walking a column of flame, eyes on fire, nose on fire, mouth speaking flame, did they pray, 'O Lord, forgive our people for they do not know'" (p. 287). These few had struggled to the "thin source" of Lowell's chinook river, had given up that nice anticipation of life that Mailer associates with the Christ within, to bear a Christlike penance for their people. The modern crisis of Christianity, like the crisis of consciousness, is illustrated for Mailer in the opposition of military heroes in Vietnam and the last Christian heroes in prison who chose passive resistance and martyrdom.

In the final brief chapter, entitled "The Metaphor Delivered," Mailer describes America as God-in-Bondage. This country, a light to the world—born of the idea, Mailer repeats, that God as both compassion (Christ) and power (embattled creature) lives within each of us—has locked God's Life in some dreadful curse. This curse has come to reflect the will of the people, a diseased people. If the people can but find some key to turn the locks of Life, their will may

become God's will, but if they cannot, those locks must remain the will of a Devil, of a Death, whose liars now control the locks and distract us, insulate us, from seeing where lies the will of One or the Other. Whether the labor of birth that Mailer sees America undergoing will produce "the most fearsome totalitarianism the world has ever known" or "a babe of a new world" that will be tender, artful, and brave, depends upon the capacity of America's people to find the key to the locks of Life. "Rush to the locks," Mailer implores in closing, "God writhe in his bonds. Rush to the locks. Deliver us from our curse" (p. 288).

The closing prayer for deliverance suggests some of the answers to our general question about Mailer's turn to nonfiction. What does he gain in *Armies* over his past work? He gains, first, what he frankly tells us he does: new energy. The entire Vietnam experience gave Mailer the necessary impetus to express his rebellion, just as his participation in the protest of the war renewed his rebellious energy. The war and protest gave him the grim satisfaction of seeing some of his ideas and metaphors confirmed, for the awakening consciousness of the demonstrators also perceived the country as diseased, the war generals as cancerous tumors, the Pentagon as both the symbol and reality of evil. Secondly, *Armies*, obviously, and all of Mailer's journalism since then, is a workout for the main event, the big novel Mailer is finally writing under contract with Little, Brown for a reported million dollars over several years. In his preface to *Existential Errands*, Mailer describes the nonfiction as a preparation and a discovery of material and ideas for that main event (pp. ix-x). The National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize for *Armies* made Mailer credible enough to a commercial publisher that he now has an opportunity to enter the main event. A third gain is that Mailer discovered the value of a new approach to a postwar world so absurd, so chaotic, and so dangerous that, as Marcus Klein argues, "clear social fact" has disappeared and writers no longer have a sense of a civilization "against which and within which fiction might act."¹³

Fourth, Mailer has faced the problem Hawthorne faced working in the allegorical mode: the problem of making the writer's allegorical conceptions (plot, character) more warmly, complexly human. In his prefaces to *The Blithedale Romance* and *Rappaccini's Daughter*, Hawthorne attributed part of the problem to his attempt to write romance in a country without a native tradition of mystery, enchantment, and romantic atmosphere. Had there ever been less a feeling of mystery and enchantment than in our midcentury

13. Klein, *The American Novel Since World War II*, p. 15.

America, at least until the upheavals of the late sixties? Edwin Honig suggests, however, that Hawthorne's problem may well be a problem with all allegory and that Melville alone made the first real and effective attempt to resolve the problem of creating "vigorous moral and aesthetic authority" in fiction while retaining life and truth. Melville, first, removed *Moby Dick* from the world of "landlocked Christians," and then he introduced an unprecedented amount of factual material, which, Honig argues, created a "new sort of literal dimension for his allegorical narrative." Melville incorporated a natural history of whaling, immense in its detail, from which his allegory explicitly drew its effects, and by which the symbolic and literal truths were interfused. A sustained literal dimension can create a convincing realism without separating the literal and symbolic levels of the allegory. One level contains the other, as a whole contains its parts, as Melville's avalanche of facts contains "the overwhelming idea of the whale." There would be some truth in a comparison of Hawthorne's fiction to Mailer's fiction and of Melville's *Moby Dick* to Mailer's nonfiction. Hawthorne's characters are ever approaching "some dream of purpose from which the full glow of reality and self-determination has faded." But Melville, at least in *Moby Dick*, is ever "moving simultaneously on both planes," meeting the metaphysical problem head on. The impact of such an organic work as Melville's is that it expresses, to continue Honig's observations, "as comprehensive a definition of phenomenal reality as it is possible to get in allegory: a reality that is both contained in its own manifest self sufficiency and fluid and chanceful as the sea."¹⁴

Mailer increases the literal dimension of his work by approaching a real experience in which opposing polarities are already clear and by depicting a number of real people with whom he is somewhat in sympathy and somewhat in opposition. The nature of the experience itself in Book One recasts Mailer's symbolic and metaphorical concerns and enables him to give to them a viable, more convincing, more complexly human literal dimension than ever before. We have seen examples of this complexity in Mailer's description of the marshals as real men, not unlike his former army buddies, who had undergone some rabid change, or when Mailer portrays Lowell as both heroic and foolish himself, both admirable and vain, strong and humanly weak. We have seen such complexity when Mailer argues that there is an enemy within us all, and when he realizes that the moral capacity of others whom he had damned is greater

14. Edwin Honig, *Dark Conceit*, pp. 101-4, 144. Honig notes that Kafka does much the same with the bureaucracy of law and institutions, the realistic facts and details of which support the allegorical content as Melville's facts and details on whaling do.

than his own, as Chomsky and Boyle in particular suggest to him. We have also seen it when the narrator-hero is both wise and foolish, both inspired and schizophrenic, both actor and sufferer. In Book Two Mailer presents as many facts and eye-witness accounts as he has in order to give a further validity. And in the end, the facts return us to, indeed tend to substantiate, the metaphorical battle between Life and Death. Whether or not Mailer learned from Melville, one of his acknowledged masters, his ability to increase the literal dimension of his allegory, we cannot say for sure, but the overall effect is similar. Mailer seems, however, to have been more satisfied with the lessons of realism. After *Moby Dick* Melville becomes more allegorical, less factual. And both Mailer and Melville retire from fiction after their attempts to create an archetypal consciousness in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* and in *The Confidence-Man*. Yet unlike his literary hero Melville, Mailer does not retire altogether; Mailer becomes more public, more the moralizer, more a seeker of some order behind the seemingly fragmented, purposeless world of his time. Mailer turns directly to historical events to pursue his vision of a primitive, meaningful order amidst chaos.

There is, however, in *Armies* a tension between the author's allegorical, didactic purposes and the greater complexity and humanity of the literal dimension. There is often a seeming lack of complexity and human warmth, as when the forces of the enemy are defined and attached to the evils of corporate technology, or even when, one must admit, the emphasis on the marshals is more on their mechanical functioning as tools of malignant powers. It is of course possible that this tension between the real and the unreal (or the complex and the purely allegorical) is a literally and historically valid depiction of contemporary America; that when events become "sufficiently emotional, spiritual, psychical, moral, existential, or supernatural," the instincts of the novelist and the egocentric may be required to capture the event. For history itself is turning novelistic.

Stanley T. Gutman has associated Mailer's ego assertion with the romantic faith in the subjective perceptions of the artist's primary imagination.¹⁵ It is true that this romantic faith, which Mailer calls in *Armies* his "Emersonian" faith in the "incandescence" of powerful subjective states, is the starting point of the narrator's view of events. But ultimately the event itself will color Mailer's subjective consciousness of it. The allegorist traditionally creates not simply historical truth but, as Edwin Honig puts it, autonomous truth. Autonomous truth is distinguished by the artist's exploitation of what is most important to him, which becomes the "imaginative

15. *Armies*, pp. 28-29, and Gutman, *Mankind in Barbary*, pp. 189-92.

center of the action." The allegorical truth becomes autonomous because the artist creates his own authority and because the work itself proves the credibility of that authority and the value of its report. The allegorist, therefore, transforms "history and action and frees them from the bondage of time." He creates a new order and a new time—a permanent present where things past confront, in Spenser's words, "all things to come."¹⁶ Mailer's allegorical journalism does lead him to rediscover the strange powers of realism and of experience. He does begin with the allegorical or artistic assumption that by exploiting the imaginative center of the action he frees history from time. But he reverses the process by immersing himself in the experience of the event, by observing himself and others, and by finding in *the experience itself* the real center and meaning of the action. The direction and shape of his book are determined by what actually happened to him and by what he observed. The new journalism thereby becomes for Mailer a vehicle for discovering as well as for portraying the timeless in the historical, the mythic and symbolic in the literal, and the complex in the polarized. In *Armies* he goes further than ever before in dissolving the barriers between fiction and history, between ceremonial Time and historical time, between art and act. Mailer begins here a definite return to the largest possibilities within experience itself and he moves away from the tendency in allegorical art to limit the allegorical or archetypal as a purely imagined existence. It is in historical experience that Mailer discovers the primitive order of the archetypes, finds wholeness and purpose in a world apparently without wholeness and purpose, and discovers that through the unifying force of art he can demonstrate this order and thereby give meaning to the chaotic events of his time. These discoveries apparently gave him the impetus to spend the next decade of his career in the historical arena of nonfiction. In this arena, Mailer sees that an archetypal order operates through events, and that allegory still serves the ends of social criticism.

Mailer's final gain *Armies* is that he is able to show what he has meant by our worst and best selves. Both selves are embodied in Mailer and in the demonstrators as coexisting antitheses. Since Mailer believes that our hope for growth and life resides in our best selves (again echoing Matthew Arnold), if only we can learn to turn the best that is in us against the worst that is in us, he makes another important gain by an historical illustration of our best and worst selves. If as a number of critics have said, Henry Adams, whom Mailer mentions in *Armies*, is the spiritual progenitor of this book

16. Honig, *Dark Conceit*, pp. 95, 109.

depicting the hero's journey to humility, Mailer is, unlike Adams, arguing that blind power, power stripped of moral content, power void of humanity, power unleashed as chaos, has not yet triumphed. Such power has yet to defeat an opposing power of our deepest human unconscious life, which may, Mailer is saying, be undergoing a renaissance. In the hands of a blind power, the protestors pass through the trials that lead to self-discovery and inner victory. As Mailer said in *The Presidential Papers*, only self-discovery can lead one to know how one is good or how one is evil (pp. 172–73). In *Advertisements* Mailer maintained that “communication that does not lead to action is not communication” (p. 286). By illustrating how we once turned our losses to gain, Mailer is able to plea for continued, increased action; he can plead that his compatriots continue the movement they began when they waged symbolic warfare on the Pentagon, a movement to free a banished God and release the locks of Life.

8

Conclusion: A Decade of Nonfiction, Women, and Promise

All true science is "savior vivre." But all your modern science is the contrary of that. It is "savoir mourir."
—John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*

Man is not order of nature . . . nor any ignominious baggage; but a stupendous antagonism, a dragging together of the poles of the Universe. . . here they are, side by side, god and devil, mind and matter, king and conspirator, belt and spasm, riding peacefully together in the eye and brain of every man.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Fate"

Extra vagance! . . . I desire to speak somewhere *without* bounds; like a man in a waking moment, to men in their waking moments; for I am convinced that I cannot exaggerate enough even to lay the foundation of a true expression.
—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Between *The Armies of the Night* and *The Executioner's Song* (1979), Mailer published eight more nonfiction books: *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (1968), *Of a Fire on the Moon* (1970), "The King of the Hill" (1971), *The Prisoner of Sex* (1971), *St. George and the Godfather* (1972), and *Marilyn* (1973). He also published the script of his third film entitled *Maidstone: A Mystery* (1971), another collection of prose on various subjects entitled *Existential Errands* (1972), and a long essay accompanying the photography of Mervyn Kurlansky and Jon Naar in a book entitled *The Faith of Graffiti* (1974). During this time Mailer also published critical and journalistic pieces for periodicals and made a number of speaking engagements and television appearances. *The Fight*, which first appeared in *Playboy*, was published in book form in 1975. Then Mailer produced a critical anthology on Henry Miller, entitled *Genius and Lust* (1976), continued his political journalism in an article on Jimmy Carter in the *New York Times Magazine* (September 26, 1976), and published a screenplay in *Playboy* (December 1976) entitled "The Trial of the Warlock" and based on J.K. Huysman's novel *Là-Bas*. That same year, a collection of political writings, *Some Honorable Men*, appeared. And of course with the publication in October 1979, of *The Executioner's Song*, Mailer capped his decade of nonfiction with a final work that may prove to be a major nonfictional achievement on the order of *Armies*. *The Executioner's Song* appears

to be not only the capstone of the nonfiction period, but a point of departure for a third distinct period in Mailer's career, the period of Mailer's final fictions.

We cannot possibly do justice to all of Mailer's later works in one chapter. However, the differences between the presidential journalism, which certainly is interesting in its own right, and *Armies* suggest why we may look at the convention coverage only briefly to keep within the particular limits in this study. Mailer shapes the March on the Pentagon into a eternal battle and a timeless rite in which he participated. The convention coverage is frequently concise and revealing, but most of this material will surely date in a way that *Armies* will not. The 1968 and 1972 conventions in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* and in *St. George and the Godfather* are described as conventions, with digressions and ruminations. If the convention coverage is in many ways acute, perceptive, and lively in *Miami*, the coverage is not clearly part of a larger artistic purpose; the author does very little to shape and emphasize the event as a timeless moment in history. In *Armies*, Mailer develops the greatest commitment to the event; he executes his subject matter most effectively into a whole. In *Miami* nothing arises from the writer's engagement with his material like the final declaration in *Armies* that God's life (and therefore humanity's) is on the line. Mailer's last note in *Miami* is that he probably will not vote, that as for the revolution, well, "we may yet win, the others are so stupid. Heaven help us when we do" (p. 223).

One important thing about Mailer's disengagement in *Miami* is that it typifies increasing self-doubt throughout the late sixties and early seventies. Mailer's ruminations are mostly concerned with his own sense of confusion over who he is and just what he or anyone can now know. It is not so much that he loses all the convictions of his life's work, but that the Jeremiah edge is off the rhetoric and the prophetic view of himself, and a relative peace settles in, a moment of fitful rest as Mailer surveys what appear to be new complexities in the landscape of Super-America.

But Mailer also specifically stresses that the time itself, or the confusion of the sixties, contributes to his self-doubt and his disengaged reporting in *Miami*. He tells us early in his coverage of the Chicago convention that he did not find the justifications for participation he had found in the March. Until the end of the convention, he saw no definite symbol against which he could act, no bastion of the military-industrial complex that had remained impervious to the scrutiny of the press and the people. As the convention progresses, Mailer does grow more and more concerned about the demonstrators and the police violence, and he steps into the action

two or three times. He makes two speeches. He tries to mobilize two hundred delegates into a protest against the police-state tactics inside and outside the convention hall, but he fails. He is forced by shame to ruminate, mostly alone over drinks, about his own reasons for staying aloof and about his own fears. He will, finally, go so far as to confront the National Guard and come close to getting himself jailed again, but he ends up going to a party at Hugh Hefner's mansion with fellow journalists Pete Hamill and Doug Kiker. His later ruminations will force him to face the fact that in middle age he is ever moving further from Marx and closer to Edmund Burke; he is unsure of his readiness to give up his life and work for the chaos of the Yippie revolution and the alternative police state. It is only clear, finally, that Mailer is more sympathetic toward the demonstrators than toward the police. "The children were crazy, but they developed honor every year, they had a vision not void of beauty; the other side had no vision, only a nightmare of smashing a brain with a brick."¹

During the seventies, however, Mailer published three books that require our careful scrutiny because they are more directly concerned with Mailer's largest themes and more clearly represent the continuation of his allegorical art into his nonfiction period. The books are *Of a Fire on the Moon* (1971), *The Fight* (1975), and *The Executioner's Song* (1979). These texts also exemplify the movement of Mailer's work and mind in the seventies.

Fire stands between the convention reportage and the nonfiction art of *Armies*. Like *Armies*, *Fire* opens with the narrator's light-hearted irony and self-mockery: "His fury that the world was not run so well as he could run it encouraged him to speak." The narrator is rather humble and modest throughout the later book; he is weary with himself, his voice, and his sense of importance. He feels in fact disembodied or separated from his ego. But this loss of ego he hopes to turn to gain. He argues that since he is "a little shunted to the side" of the spirit of the age, he may be in the best position to observe this age.²

Yet the narrator is, as in *Armies*, also a microcosm of his time and country. "What did we know of what we did?" (p. 466). He continually calls himself a man adrift, a guideless explorer searching for clues and signs. Again the confusion of the sixties generally has considerable impact upon the narrator himself. He is part of the schism and lunacy of the decade; which he began by stabbing his second wife and ended by running for mayor of New York. He feels

1. *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (hereafter cited as *Miami*), p. 214. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations are to works by Norman Mailer.

2. *Of a Fire on the Moon* (hereafter cited as *Fire*), pp. 3-4, 51, 56-57, 63.

an ambiguity, a hopefulness and emptiness, about the flight to the moon that he believes the rest of the world shares. Vaguely recalling the hero-victim of *Armies*, he promises to pass judgments only after passing through his own torments: his dread of the conquest of the moon, his inability to comprehend the material he is assigned to cover, his failure in a fourth marriage. Near the end of *Fire*, he will invite his readers to judge the narrator for themselves. "The question is whether it is better to trust a judge who travels through his own desolations before passing sentence, or a jurist who has a good meal, a romp with his mistress, a fine night of sleep, and a penalty of death in the morning for the highwayman" (p. 435).

Like *Armies* again, *Fire* is a kind of journalism that is explicitly reacting to conventional journalism, even though this emphasis in *Fire* is relatively mild. Mailer complains that journalists covering the events in the conventional ways lose what is best in their talent because they are constantly stripping their facts of nuance. He then adds that in a time when events themselves are developing "a style and structure that [makes] them almost impossible to write about," journalists are becoming obsolete, and Mailer is beginning to wonder at this point if even the unconventional journalist can discover and report the meanings of events. Perhaps the technicalities are becoming too great, the confrontations too masked in superficiality, the nature of men and machines too ambiguous. One of his principal difficulties as a reporter is finding a way to make the astronauts seem real to him; they seem so devoid of human emotion and so machinelike (pp. 88-89, 96).

But unlike the author of *Armies* and closer to the author of *Miami*, Mailer is now employed as a journalist to cover a specific assignment for *Life*. If he retains the third person point of view, he is always shifting his emphasis away from autobiography. He plays no personal role in the events he reports. He promises to be a modest, quiet observer who will not take root, who will only occasionally pull in his ego to help him criticize what he observes. He self-consciously employs such journalistic tools as the interview (i.e., NASA officials, the astronauts), the press conference, and the informant, but he finds these tools essentially useless. The one tool Mailer finds useful in writing his book is research, hard factual research. Never has the sheer onslaught of facts, statistics, and scientific analyses played so large a role in a Mailer book.

It is as if Mailer's sense of the power of fact and reportorial realism discovered in *Armies* assumes a much larger influence in *Fire*. A look at the overall pattern of *Fire* would indeed reveal Mailer's continuous alternation of large sections of detailed descriptions and factual data and smaller, digressive commentaries on what the narrator

observes. Part I, "Aquarius," introduces the narrator, but most of its five chapters describe press conferences, NASA, Cape Kennedy, and the blast-off and flight of Apollo 11. Part II, "Apollo," accounts for at least two-thirds of the book. Here Mailer retraces the entire flight to the moon and back, and the event itself takes over almost entirely. We understand through the exhaustive details the magnitude of Mailer's research. But Aquarius is far in the background, only on occasion commenting or digressing to guide and increase the meaning of his long descriptions. Finally, however, in the brief Part III, "The Age of Aquarius," the narrator reemerges fully and his speculations become bold enough to recall the narrator of *Armies*.

But this heightened use of detail and realism should not obscure an allegorical purpose in *Fire* that is in some ways similar to the allegorical purpose of *Armies*. If *Fire* is not a strong call to action, if it is perhaps a less successful embodiment of an idea, it still has didactic allegorical intentions consistent with the central development of Mailer's work. The first of these intentions, he tells us, is to begin "a reconnaissance into the possibility of restoring magic, psyche, and the spirits of the underworld to the spookiest venture in history," despite the thick layer of "technologese" that shrouds the event, and despite "the resolute lack of poetic immortality in the astronauts' communications with the earth" (p. 293). The moon itself has always been an important symbol for Mailer, and in *Fire* he is particularly anxious to restore our sense of the mystery of the moon. He emphasizes her eerie presence, her importance as a form whose surface reveals some existential meaning about the cosmic blasts and struggles of outer space from which the earth is protected, and her vast if mysterious connection to earth life, and possibly the human psyche, especially the connection between the interval of completion of the moon's phases and the cycles of fertility of women on earth—a connection that Mailer sees as an example of "a hieroglyph from the deep."³

Mailer uses his observations to demonstrate the existence of the inexplicable. He tries to emphasize that we cannot discover any final knowledge through science alone and that even technology is never free of magic and irrationality. Modern physics, the previous NASA flights, and even the astronauts all testify to these points.⁴ His piling up of instances of the irrational behavior of machines is one example. His emphasis on the dreams and deeper levels of emotion and thought that now and again appear through the astronauts' dehumanized facade, as we will see, is another.

If the largest allegorical intention of *Fire*, then, is to penetrate the

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 278–79, 281, 286, 293, 300–302.

4. The best examples of these points occur in *Fire* on pages 160–75, 268, 331, 351, 371, 375, 429, and 430.

bland, technological surface of the moon flight and to restore mystery to that event, the profound ambiguity Mailer-as-journalist feels about what he perceives is fundamental to the discovery of the mystery. To suggest that the ambiguous forces at work in the flight are larger than the men and events themselves, Mailer develops two predominant themes. The first theme is that the central actors, the astronauts, are microcosms of a divided American consciousness. The second theme is that good cohabitates with evil in the space program as in contemporary life.

The astronauts themselves appear ambiguous to Mailer. Because they seem both noble and insane to the journalist, he views their divided nature as a microcosm of the colossal ambiguities and the "schizophrenia" of modern America. If one side of their personalities seems heroic and life-enhancing, the other side seems mechanical, damned, life-denying. They have, for example, cultivated a deadened, machinelike surface personality. In their news conferences as well as their flight performances, the astronauts try to reduce all chance, every inexplicable phenomenon, and all hint of menace into meaninglessness by, in Mailer's phrase, their "logical positivism": "Interpret the problem properly, then attack it." They talk about their adventure in a self-effacing, impersonal way. Their language develops into the interchangeable, generalized, and emotionless language of the computer, as if, Mailer says, the more natural forms of English are too primitive, direct, and frightening. Their language is incapable of matching the grandeur of their endeavor. Like the NASA officials themselves, the astronauts take every opportunity to erect an impenetrable shining surface about them; they seek to divide heroism from fear, awe, and romance.

Yet hints of a deeper, more intense life in these men do appear. If they had spent endless hours of physical inactivity adjusting their responses to a machine and "plunking all [their] ambition, avarice, charity, pluck, discipline, and education into an electrical set of brains which will give back nothing but firm answers," they had once lived lives that were athletic, adventurous, and "near-violent" (p. 252). Collins reveals a sense of humor and, relatively speaking, a tendency to be flamboyant. During the flight he is the one most likely to demonstrate a sensitivity to what Mailer endlessly documents as "the psychology of machines." Following a long exchange of numbers and technical terms between Apollo and Houston on the matter of malfunctioning fuel cells, Collins will say: "Those fuel cells . . . are funny things. . . . They are like human beings; they have their little ups and downs." He will go on to speak of the cells' "bad days," hypochondrias, and their spitefulness (pp. 268-69). Armstrong, when pressed by frustrated reporters for some clue of an inner life and a human response to his challenge, is capable of admitting that

men are flying to the moon because it is in "the nature of his [man's] *deep inner soul*" to face challenges as much as it is in the instinct of the salmon to swim upstream (p. 42). Armstrong thereby expresses Mailer's own ideas about the forces at work in the human soul and about the potential in large events to become rites of passage that change the inner life. And Armstrong expresses his point with a simile that no less a poet than Robert Lowell has used. Aldrin, a doctor of science and the astronaut who even admits he is "a sort of mechanical man," is capable of an intensely religious attitude toward his mission. He will quietly take bread and wine aboard and celebrate communion on the moon. More, Aldrin will write a monograph with his minister Dean Woodruff on the symbolic meaning of the flight to the moon, entitled *The Myth of Apollo 11: The Effects of the Lunar Landing on the Mythic Dimension of Man*. This paper searches for a symbol "of man's expanding search," as Aldrin puts it, to demonstrate that the human's "capacity to symbolize and to respond to symbols is the central fact of human existence." Apollo 11 may be such a symbol. Taking the words out of Mailer's mouth, Aldrin and Woodruff will write: "Science has created a worldwide technical civilization, and, as yet, has not given birth to any cultural symbols by which man can live. . . . We need now a paradigm of the 'experience of the whole' " (p. 339). Does not Aldrin, Mailer asks, illuminate something of the dichotomy of the WASP, a dichotomy visible in the long line from "Calvin, Luther, Knox and Wesley to Edison, Ford, and IBM's own Watson?" (p. 338).

Mailer can only explain the nature of the astronauts as divided personalities who have learned by years of training to separate "the depths of their character" from their daily lives. Their surface personalities reflect America's Faustian pole: the rationalist, the machine, and the willing absorption into the corporate mill. But hints of their deeper lives reflect irrational, religious forces that are also beginning to emerge in American life, through what Mailer calls America's Oriental pole, a pole evident, for example, in the group ecstasies of the rock festival (pp. 315-16). "From their conscious mind to their unconscious depth, what a spectrum could be covered. . . . their personality might begin to speak, for better or worse, of some new psychological constitution to man" (p. 46). Mailer will later write of Armstrong as a twin-souled figure: a *bona fide* devil or Faustian, a "cat-technician" prepared to "tamper with the rain," but also a mystic who has dreams of hovering in space and who is obsessed by his instinctual drive to engage in a large and dangerous adventure to a new frontier.

Mailer is also struck by a profound ambiguity in the space program itself. Is it "the noblest expression of the Twentieth Century or

the quintessential statement of our fundamental insanity?" (p. 15). Like the astronauts, the entire Apollo program seems to be characterized by a mixture of the heroic and the dull, the mysterious and the technological, the good and the evil. The evil in the event is the same decreative evil that Mailer has consistently argued is evident in our corporate technology. On one hand, the flight to the moon is an exercise in a consciousness and lust most clearly embodied in Rusty. Saturn V is a chariot of fire to the heavens, but it enters the heavens more like the shocking and glaring of static and electricity than like the royal spectacle and mystery of flame in the sun. The huge, three-stage rocket suggests a brute, headless power and achievement. At NASA, Mailer had never seen such "a modest purr of efficiency" in people so delighted with being cogs in a machine. Their apparent facelessness and interchangeability are emphasized by the depersonalization and monotony of their speech and behavior. The architecture of their place of work and their homes suffers the similar monotony of environments sterilized of nature. They view a machine not, like the true scientist or artist, as a tool to be used for communicating and exploring ideas, but as an end in itself. The machine is the communication. In the NASA program, Mailer continually finds reflections of a Herculean feat about to be executed with half a brain.

NASA, which Mailer argues was conceived by Kennedy's advisers to prime the economic pump as much as to insure a technological status equal to the Russians, would color and shape everything it touched. NASA would usher in the wholly technological age, "bloated with waiting," and all the phenomena of the age from the new prefabricated housing, to monotonous plants of higher education, to the computer; in short, would usher in what Mailer has long called technological totalitarianism. By depicting the actions and words of corporation chiefs and NASA officials, Mailer continually reminds us that their collective view of their adventure is totalitarian. They view their adventure as an exercise in removing contradiction and mystery from the earth, in subduing contradictory ideologies, in extricating irrationality (that counterforce growing across the land in the sixties), and in removing humanity from a sense of responsibility for its acts and from the sense that one's soul may be judged. The black professor Mailer meets in the home of Texas friends corroborates Mailer's arguments and intuitions. "Technology begins," the black man says, "when men are ready to believe that the sins of the fathers are not visited on the sons. Remission of sin—that's what it's all about" (p. 140). This statement returns Mailer to Kierkegaard: in a time without guides, anyone can lose his or her soul without knowing it.

But sin and guilt are inextricable from corporate life to Mailer, not only because a massive technology has created as many problems as it has "solved," and not only because we have made machines faster than we can control them, but because we have lied about the nature of our work. Mailer concludes, for example, that the guilt of such a lie is the real force behind a dinner conference, which he attends, celebrating the cooperative successes between NASA and the corporation. Each corporation executive must have felt some guilt over the disparity between what he said and wanted to think he was doing and what he actually was doing. The space program promised some relief from guilt because the activities of the corporation were

at once immense and petty, like the manufacture of toothpaste, immense and noxious, like the production of cigarettes or poisons for war, or immense and depressing, like the shoddy production of slovenly functioning automobiles, or even immense and scandalizing, like the ways in which aviation contracts were garnered, the corporation not only gave security but engendered [the] loneliness and woe. . . . of meaningless effort: here at last was American capitalism attached to a corporate activity which was momentous, dangerous, awesome. . . . [which] gave sentiments of nobility to corporation executives looking to find a line of connection between their work and the vault of this endeavor. (*Fire*, pp. 186–87)

Taking his lead from Collins's reference to the command ship as a mini-cathedral, Mailer will say, indeed, the ship is a mini-cathedral of corporate technology, and the astronauts are its high priests.

On the other hand, the space program seemed to have great potential, too. The flight to the moon did after all speak of some new leap in creation, even as Von Braun and Armstrong said it did. Indeed, a Leviathan was certainly ascending the heavens with men aboard. Mailer will not only describe Saturn V as electronic fire, but as a "white stone Madonna," and as a Moby Dick slowly rising into some new element like a surfacing whale. The most repeated metaphor in the book compares the moon ship and the astronauts to the womb and seed of new growth, to newborns and toddlers. Their task is compared to the delivery of a babe, of some new conception of humanity out across the universe.

This apparent congruity of life-enhancing and life-denying potentials in the space program leads Mailer to extend some of his previous ideas. At the end of Part I, and in Part II, for example, he wonders if God might be using humanity to carry his seed, his will, his conception out to other systems in the universe. If he is, then this stripping of humanity from men and this turning them largely into machines may be a measure of God's desperation in his long battle to fulfill his Vision. Mailer at first believes that the alternative to this

speculation is to view the Apollo project as "a species of sublimation for profoundly unmanageable violence in man" and as a meaningless journey undertaken because mankind had not the wit, goodness, or charity to solve its real problems. Mailer has consistently given large significance to human activity, so he struggles to see this flight as part of some great, even divine design, or as a clear blasphemy against God and humanity.

But Mailer is simply uncertain about which view to sustain. This uncertainty may indicate that with *Fire* he is approaching a crucial point in his development. He had said in Book One that the positive effect of journalism, and especially this assignment, might be that one is forced to make adjustments in one's world picture. And in Part III, one scene encapsulates Mailer's uncertain fluctuations between outrage and doubt in the whole book. Aquarius prepares himself to seek the last meanings in the event. Returned to Provincetown to begin writing for his deadlines, he takes his wife and a friend named Eddie Bonetti (a poet and novelist from South Boston) to a "Wasp spa" for dinner. Bonetti is a raucous, eccentric character who is capable of jumping over the handle bars of his bike while riding down the main street in Provincetown to give his friends a laugh, of growing the best tomatoes in town by playing his flute to them in the middle of the night, or of writing a novel so chaste no publisher will touch it. In the "spa" Eddie plays a drunken fugitive from the unwashed masses: "Norman, this place is filled with drunken assholes. Fucking drunken assholes," Eddie bellows. Though Aquarius quiets Eddie down, Aquarius is himself silently outraged when he thinks of all the "friends of his generation" and the next who have used up their years of alienation with alcohol and drugs and with a sexual revolution they sought to usher in as spoiled fools bellowing "obscenity like the turmoil of cattle." This "unholy stew of fanatics, far-outs, and fuck-outs" who had "roared at the blind imbecility of the Square, and his insulation from life," had "dropped out, goofed off and left the goose to their enemies." Aquarius berates Eddie for being drunk all summer while "they have taken the moon" by "prodigies of discipline."⁵ Yet despite his feelings of outrage, Aquarius again returns to his intellectual doubts. Looking at the outraged restaurant patrons at the opposite table, Aquarius cannot say for sure that these "sturdy worthy" people with "red righteous ire" and "beauty parlor lacquer" are not, or had not become, the

5. Mailer was not alone in seeing the moon-shot as a contest between "we" and "they." I recall a NASA official saying on television, after the LEM landed safely, "That's one for the Squares!" If we would believe Mailer's black friend in *Fire*, many black people would see the whole space program as another unnecessary venture in WASP self-aggrandizement. Mailer, of course, agrees with the anti-WASP sentiment but can't help seeing something larger in the moon flight too.

vehicle of God's Vision however compromised the Vision may at present be (pp. 440-41).

But the final mood of *Fire*, which Mailer evokes in two more brief scenes, is a mood of hope. In the last chapter, "A Burial at Sea," he depicts a symbolic act of regeneration. The Bankos, friends of Mailer, ceremoniously bury an automobile in Provincetown as Labor Day approaches. Friends and neighbors joyously crowd around; there are several readings of poetry and scripture. The sacrificial carcass of mechanism ("conceived in cynicism and sold in exhortation") is defiled, partially buried, and gradually transformed into a work of art by a metal sculptor named Kearney. Clearly the implication of the scene is that regeneration may yet reside in turning mechanism into life and art.

The potential for regeneration is, again, what Aquarius discovers as he shuttles back and forth between Provincetown and Houston "like a man looking for the smallest sign" while writing his piece. His small sign turns up in the Manned Spacecraft Center at Houston—a two-inch piece of moon rock encased in double vacuums of glass. Looking at the moonstone, Aquarius must finally return to his beginnings, to the authority of his senses and intuitions. All the factuality of *Fire* has only indicated the mysterious ambiguity of men and events, which is no mean accomplishment given the nature of the event. If this moonstone is a warning like the stone Aquarius had seen earlier in a Magritte painting, the moonstone is also a sign or a promise. The promise, first, comes from Aquarius's sense that there was "something young about her, tender as the smell of the cleanest hay, it was like the subtle lift of love which comes up from the cradle of the newborn" (p. 472). This small promise suggests that "before three and a half billion more years were lost and gone" the smell of this rock would work its way through two panes of glass. But the promise of the emerging moon rock implies a larger promise for humanity too. Might not there be, Aquarius asks looking at the stone, some divine design in this conquest of the moon by "Waspitude" and mechanism? Such space voyages, he begins to believe, may at last open the way for us to discover the "metaphysical pits" of our technological world. "Yes, we might have to go out in space until the mystery of new discovery would force us to regard the world once again as poets, behold it as savages who knew that if the universe was a lock, its key was metaphor rather than measure" (p. 471). Had not Aldrin, that self-admitted mechanical man, after all, returned from his flight seeking to restore to science and "technical civilization" a "mythic dimension," to restore cultural symbols that would give humanity an "experience of the whole"?

Fire ends on a note of hope founded less upon the kind of

thoroughly integrated and demonstrable acts of regeneration we observed in *Armies* than upon the author's positive intuitions. It is, as a result, a far less convincing and less engaging book. And some of Mailer's critics have argued that *Fire* demonstrates that Mailer is so locked in his tired dualisms (technology versus life, God versus Devil, etc.) that he seems at this point incapable of reporting anything without shuffling his material into worn-out categories.⁶ I would agree that, especially after *Armies*, there are times in Mailer's journalism when a loyal reader must wonder if the dualisms are not wearing a bit thin, becoming a bit automatic. But certainly Mailer's dualistic vision is becoming more complex than it was in, for example, *An American Dream* or *Why Are We in Vietnam?* In fact, there is every reason to suggest that the journalism represents a gradual shift in his vision. That vision may not, probably will not, exclude Mailer's long obsession with Life and Death, but surely a growing complexity and self-doubt are becoming more and more obvious in the journalism since *Armies*. Were it not that such half-human, half-machine men were in control of the events described in *Fire*, Mailer could have written about it with an easy shuffling of dualisms. But his greatest difficulties arose from the recognition that, to use his own conceptions, modern humanity's enterprises seemed to be so inextricably tangled in both the divine and the satanic. The dualisms of *Fire* are not automatic or even clearly in conflict. What Mailer succeeds in doing is to restore ambiguity and mystery to a large event and complex men who made themselves and their acts so flat and dull. But Aquarius has learned that he, like his compatriots, can no longer say for sure what is distinctly good and distinctly evil in what we do.

The Fight (1975) continues Mailer's search for mysteries and large meanings in the events of his time. This book is, for one thing, part of

6. See Richard Poirier, *Norman Mailer*, especially pp. 160–62. See Robert Solotaroff, *Down Mailer's Way*, pp. 243, 245–48. Solotaroff is correct in suggesting that Mailer oversteps his bounds as a credible writer when, in the interest of penetrating the mysteries and potentials of the astronauts and the moon trip, he expects his readers to believe he knows what the astronauts are thinking and dreaming. But Solotaroff ignores a number of real instances when the astronauts do reveal a "psychology" not easily reconcilable with their technological selves. Both Poirier and Solotaroff, rightly I think, suggest that the strength of the book is in its detailed descriptions and cogent characterizations. Laura Adams, in *Eris-tential Battles: The Growth of Norman Mailer*, p. 160, also takes Mailer to task. There are times, as she points out, when Mailer is so heavily researched and so bent on getting at mysteries and profundities that he misses more simple and obvious explanations. Her example of Mailer's fanciful application of astrological data to prove that the common water signs reflect the astronauts' personal preferences for water sports and perhaps the future of evolution is a good case in point. Mailer misses the obvious influence of the Houston climate on the astronauts' preferences.

Mailer's continuing quest for a hero. Contrary to one line of movement in his journalism of the fifties and sixties, *The Fight* leads Mailer to a hero beyond himself. Finding such a hero, the writer clearly transcends the bounds of his own ego even more than the writer and the hero of *Armies* ultimately did. The new hero will not simply embody Mailer's own will but the will of others, will not only act out Mailer's own obsessions and beliefs, his own conceptions of good and evil, but the beliefs and conceptions of others as well. This shaping of his material into a form consistent with other world pictures is important because it is the fruit of Mailer's impulse, which began in *Armies*, to combine the verification of his essential ideas with the complication of his world picture. *The Fight* focuses on two men as heroes in conflict. The question becomes not so much who represents good and who evil, but who is the greatest hero, who is the greatest gatherer of forces. This is a book about boxing as a twentieth-century art, when viewed at its best, and as a religion, in the case of the Ali–Foreman fight. By exploring the art and religion of a championship fight, Mailer continues to explore a central preoccupation of his work—Vital Force, a force that to Mailer is one of the clearest signs of the divine roots of the phenomenal world.

Mailer went to Africa to cover the fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman for *Playboy*; he was a working journalist covering his favorite sport. Yet he was also drawn to Africa because he believed Africa had something to teach him. He wanted to “look a little more into his own outsized feelings” of love and possibly hate for black people and black movements.⁷ Mailer's first impressions of Zaire, especially Kinshasa where the fight would take place, were not good. From the view of a reporter struck by “some viral disruption in Cairo,” Kinshasa looked like nothing so much as a depressing mixture of Hoboken and jungle, or a “Levittown-on-the-Zaire.” When the fight was canceled because Foreman was cut in training, Mailer returned to New York and studied two books on Africa while he recuperated from his illness. These books, in order of importance to Mailer's book, are *Bantu Philosophy*, by a Dutch priest named Father Tempels, and *Muntu, The New African Culture*, by Janheinz Jahn. These books and apparently his recuperation prepared Mailer to see Africa in a fresh way.

Mailer tells us that the first thing he noticed in Africa upon his return was “what everyone had been trying to say about Africa for a hundred years, big Papa first on the line: the place was so fucking sensitive! No horror failed to stir its echo a thousand miles away, no

7. *The Fight* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), p. 37. Mailer raised his ambiguous feelings about the black movement in America in *Miami*, see pp. 53–56. Future references are parenthetical.

sneeze was ever free of the leaf that fell on the other side of the hill" (p. 36). Mailer began to see Africa as an exemplary setting to explore his own conceptions of physical and spiritual ecology. Africa, the fight, and the two books on Africa helped confirm and extend Mailer's idea of the human being as one force in a universe of communicating and warring forces. In Mailer's and the Bantu's view, all humans are servants as well as gatherers of larger forces, including the forces of the dead. One has to be bold, therefore, to live amidst "all the magical forces at loose" as one tries to learn to bend some of them to one's own strength. And one always has to be humble before God. The whole web of forces between beings and things, whether alive or dead, is the karma Mailer will speak of so often.

Mailer approaches major heavyweight boxing matches, dominated as they are by black fighters, as one key to the deepest black experience, especially the experience of karma-force. He admits that as a white observer he is limited in what he can learn about black people and about Foreman and Ali, even though he is armed with his African books and a vast knowledge of boxing. Yet Mailer does bring readers an entirely different view of the sport than other fight journalists. What began in *Esquire* in 1962 and *Life* in 1971 as boxing reportage that introduced collective and supernatural dimensions of the boxer as hero becomes in *The Fight* Mailer's boldest voyage into the possibilities of organized combat between two men who represent the culminations of the esprit and force of those who support and apotheosize them.⁸ "A Heavyweight Championship [is] a vortex," Mailer writes, and he later describes the people and events surrounding the fight as "a charged magnetic field" that takes on the "logic" of "magical equations" (pp. 124–25). If we place any credibility upon the narrator as an observer, we discover that such speculative comments are not simply the author's own fantasies, for everyone intimately involved in the fight, as well as millions of Africans, share Mailer's perception of the fight as a vortex of forces. To both contestants the fight is a kind of religious war: Ali prays

8. Ali, as the clearest example of the hero of his people, embodies a theme Mailer introduced in "The King of the Hill," published in *Life* in 1971 and collected in *Existential Errands*. Ali has "taken all the lessons of his curious life and . . . the deep comprehension of his own people . . . and elaborated them into a technique for boxing." Mailer suggests that one might begin a "psychology of blacks" with Ali. Ali's first trip through Muslim Africa led him to his personal commitment to become a world leader for black people. Mailer views the prizefighter as a human being who speaks with his body with all the detachment, subtlety, and comprehension at his command as Henry Kissinger or Herman Kahn have when they speak using their minds. Boxing is to Mailer a "dialogue between bodies," a rapid "debate between two sets of intelligence . . . conducted with the body." See *Existential Errands*, pp. 6–8, 14–16.

from the Koran with Elijah Muhammad's son just before entering the ring; Foreman prays in a circle of special supporters. Ali's manager Drew Bundini boasts of using magic against Foreman and sees the fight as a conflict prepared by "God." Mailer describes Bundini as a man of metaphor. Bundini clearly believes in the reality of his sexual and celestial boxing metaphors. Like most men at the fight, Bundini readily admits an awareness of the magic and force God gave him to help bring the fight about. He is delighted when he discovers his name "in African" means "something like dark" or black, a meaning Bundini sees as connecting him with African roots and "black juice." Don King, the central promoter and mover of this fight, lives his life according to similar beliefs. King's chief satisfaction as a fight entrepreneur is that he becomes for a time "an instrument of eternal forces" by organizing and promoting championship bouts (pp. 117-18). Even President Mobutu of Zaire, who worked with King in arranging the fight, views the fight as one more vehicle for the unification of his people into one nation, one consciousness, and one source of power.

What the two champions represent from a religious perspective is not always clear. At times the dualism represented by the two contenders seems to be a simple opposition of good and evil, especially when Mailer focuses on the fight from Ali's point of view. But at other times the opposition is more a conflict of ideologies, of perceptions of life, and of religions. Mailer feels ambiguous about the fighters. Though he favors Ali, he admires Foreman's strength and discipline and expects him to win. Unlike Patterson and Liston, the fighters seem less ideal archetypes of good and evil, and more two different "embodiments of divine inspiration" (p. 47). When Mailer is most objective, he reduces the fight to a simple principle: he who gathers and makes useful the greater collective force will win.

During most of Mailer's coverage, however, Ali especially embodies a particular kind a heroism as "pugilism's master of the occult." Through the inner disciplines of his entire life, his audacious actions, and his bizarre training practices, Ali will seek to bend to his arena "all forces of the living and the dead." He will seek, therefore, to mobilize the collective *muntu* (the Bantu word for the amount of vital force in human beings) and *kuntu* (the force within things, characterized by audacity and beauty) of Zaire's hundreds of tribes and groups of languages, for Zaire is struggling to unify itself after a complete social upheaval and the breakdown of ancient tribal systems. Ali's success in uniting black people is clear before the fight and incredible afterward. He is a heroic figure to black people in the Third World. In conversations with Mailer, some will

refer to Ali as a genius and a god. The people of Zaire adulate Ali as their hero and redeemer.

At twilight, he took a walk on the banks of the river, and was surrounded by hundreds of Zairois men, women, and children. He kissed babies and had his picture taken with numbers of black and jubilant housewives in African Sunday dress, and with shy adolescent girls, and little boys who glared at the camera with machismo equal to the significance of these historic events. All the while Ali kissed babies with deliberation, slowly savoring their skin, as if he could divine which infants would grow up healthy. (*The Fight*, pp. 133–34)

This description shows Ali's relation to the Zairois before the fight. After it, the crowds are so dense and enthusiastic he cannot even go out for a walk. Ali is also a diplomat for the black world. If he wins, he says, he will become a black Kissinger, a true symbol who, as Ali now freely admits, has used his boxing for larger purposes—"to change a lot of things" rather than only for the "glory of fighting" (pp. 78–79). Maybe, Mailer ruminates, Ali's craziness is not so crazy. Ali has been living with a vision of himself as the leader of half the Western World, of future black and Arab republics, and his vision is given substantial reality by people around the world.

The champion's stature is indicated by his name too. Father Tempels wrote that "the name is not a simple external courtesy" to Africans, it "is the very reality of the individual" (p. 216). And after the fight, Mailer will compare another sentence from *Bantu Philosophy* with Ali's reality. "'On the occasion of his investiture,' writes Father Tempels, the chief 'receives a (new) name. . . . His former name may no longer be uttered, lest by so doing his new vital force be harmed'" (p. 222). The Muslims had bestowed on Ali a name of great weight, for the original Ali was the adopted son of the Prophet Muhammad. Mailer will realize on the flight home that Ali is wholly a Black Muslim and that being one "might be the core of Ali's existence and the center of his strength" (p. 218). Mailer now sees that Ali's beliefs are not whims and contradictions but are built on "the firm principles of a collective idea," which is to say, on national (Islamic) and tribal (African) traditions.

After the fight, African media people will gather around Ali with the awe, "solemnity and respect they might once have offered to Gandhi." And Ali assumes his role as leader and embodiment of collective will and force. He will tell the press of his admiration and love for modern Africans and guide their direction (pp. 221–22). Ali will try to make everyone see, and to some degree convince Mailer of, the essential difference between himself and Foreman, which we could say is the difference between a true hero and a pretender. Foreman, Ali argues, does not recognize the need to attach ego to

larger forces, even to the largest forces, to be an instrument of God rather than of one's own vanity. Ali says that beating George Foreman and conquering the world with his fists "does not bring freedom to my people," and that he, Ali, must now "enter a new arena." Ali implies that Foreman could not surmount the idea of winning for himself, and to the extent that Foreman saw his role as a part of something larger, he was a part of white power, of technology and America, of the white gimmick and vanity. "I got to beat this guy," Ali says. "I saw him at Salt Lake City. He was wearing pink and orange shoes with platforms and high heels. I wear brogans. When I saw his fly shoes, I said to myself, 'I'm going to win'" (p. 214). Ali is getting at the difference between true *kuntu* and the white man's gimmickry, a gimmickry of which, in Ali's eyes, Foreman was the tool and fool, a gimmickry that speaks of ego separated from the largest collective force and the dignity of black people and the Muslim philosophy.

Although Mailer is not as certain as Ali about what Foreman represents, Mailer has prepared us for an essential distinction between heroism and egotism. He is more inclined than ever to let the men and events speak for themselves. But he reminds us at the beginning that the whole purpose of training is to strengthen the ego of the fighter, to turn the raw material of his body and his anxieties into ego, to connect his ego with his will. The fighter who would be a servant of God, however, as Ali would, must also connect his ego with vital force, with libido and *N'golo* (another expression for *muntu*). Defeat then becomes a loss of vital force or *muntu*, which to the black man, Mailer believes, is "pure loss," loss of ego and status and beauty, loss of communication with other forces, loss that is tantamount to disease.⁹ He who achieves the greatest *muntu* will be the victor.

It is in Mailer's twenty-seven-page description of the fight itself, in his insight into it, that he reveals his own discovery of just how Ali has the heroic edge over Foreman. Here Mailer is at his journalistic best—fast, concise, vivid. A true aficionado, he is able to make rapid assessments of technique and comparisons with past championships. He has so prepared us for the fight throughout the first one hundred and fifty pages with the details of prefight training and events that we are indeed prepared to see the championship as a collision of opposing worlds or conceptions of existence. As we watch the fight we begin to understand the meaning of numerous details and hints in Mailer's prefight coverage. We come to understand, for example, why Ali spent so much time in training against

9. I am summarizing Mailer's points in *The Fight* on pp. 16–17, 42–43, 75, 215.

the ropes, why Angelo Dundee quietly adjusts the ropes to their greatest resilience just before the fight, why Ali chided the press as ignorant of boxing and described himself as a "boxing scientist" and artist who knew he would win despite the opposite convictions of the press. The sports writers, and Mailer includes himself, are mere engineers, Mailer argues as he continues a metaphor from *Fire*. Ali is a theorist, a physicist, and artist of pugilism. Ali revolutionizes the sport as he fights, Mailer realizes, and that is Ali's great creative potential; his heroism is demonstrated by his ability always to balance "on the edge of the possible" and to turn weaknesses and losses to strengths, as when Ali repeatedly reverses the classic maxims of boxing during the fight.

Mailer's description of the fight is a combination of blow-by-blow and running, concise commentary. If the metaphysics is subdued, it is still implicit through the preceding one hundred and forty pages of Bantu philosophy, training-camp voodoo, and all that talk about African force. Watching Foreman is, for one thing, watching a failed hero, a hero who has a failure of wit. He is convinced that he can beat Ali in the way he trained to beat him no matter what surprises the actual fight holds. Foreman is not capable of existential confrontation by Mailer's definition; Foreman prepares only for a preordained pattern of combat, which he would determine. If physical force has not yet been enough, then more physical force must be the answer. One of the best examples of Mailer's rapid, precise, metaphorical descriptions focuses on the climax of Ali's strategy in the historic fifth round. Ali's creative wit, as he uses the ropes as shock conductors, and Foreman's dogged attack are clearly opposing extremes in a conflict between two physically heroic men. Mailer's description is worth quoting at length because it also gives the flavor of the full range of his powers as a reporter of the real conflicts he observes.

Then the barrage began. With Ali braced on the ropes, as far back on the ropes as a deep-sea fisherman is braced back in his chair when setting the hook on a big strike, ³⁰ Ali got ready and Foreman came on to blast him out. . . . Foreman threw punches in barrages of four and six and eight and nine, heavy maniacal slamming punches, heavy as the boom of oaken doors . . . punching until he could not breathe, backing off to breathe again and come in again . . . great earthmover he must have sobbed to himself, kill this mad and bouncing goat.

And Ali, gloves to his head, elbows to his ribs, stood and swayed and was rattled and banged and shaken like a grasshopper at the top of a reed when a wind whips, and the ropes shook and swung like sheets in a storm, and Foreman would lunge with his right at Ali's chin and Ali go flying back out of reach by a half-inch and half out of the ring and . . . back into the ropes with all the calm of a man

swinging in the rigging. All the while, he used his eyes. They looked like stars, and he fainted Foreman out with his eyes, flashing white eyeballs of panic he did not feel which pulled Foreman through into the trick of lurching after him on the wrong move, Ali darting his expression in one direction while cocking his head in another, then staring at Foreman expression to expression . . . muntu to muntu . . . teasing Foreman just a little too long . . . somebody in Ali's corner screamed, "Careful! Careful! Careful!" and Ali flew back just in time . . . Foreman threw six of his most powerful left hooks in a row and then a right, it was the center of his fight and the heart of his best charge, a left to the belly, a left to the head, a left to the belly, a left to the head, a left to the belly, another to the belly and Ali blocked them all, elbow for the belly, glove for the head, and the ropes flew like snakes. . . . Foreman hit him a powerful punch. The ringbolts screamed. Ali shouted, "Didn't hurt a bit." Was it the best punch he took all night? He had to ride through ten more after that. . . . Something may have finally begun to go from Foreman's n'golo, some departure of the essence of absolute rage, and Ali reaching over the barrage would give a prod now and again to Foreman's neck like a housewife sticking a toothpick in a cake to see if it was ready. . . . Ali finally came off the ropes and in the last thirty seconds of the round threw his own punches, twenty at least. Almost all hit. Some of the hardest punches of the night were driven in. Four rights, a left hook and a right came in one stupendous combination. One punch turned Foreman's head through ninety degrees, a right cross of glove and forearm. . . . Foreman staggered and lurched and glared at Ali and got hit again, Zing-bing! two more. When it [round five] was all over, Ali caught Foreman by the neck like a big brother chastizing an enormous and stupid kid brother, and looked out to someone in the audience.

"I really don't believe it," said Jim Brown. . . . "He came back. He hit Foreman with everything. And he winked at *me!*" (*The Fight*, pp. 196-98)

Mailer describes rounds six through eight as "the third act" of a heroic drama, and as a drama that reveals just how much the perfection of Ali's art is based on the principle of "no wanton waste." "Back in America," Mailer writes, after Foreman falls in the eighth round "like a six-foot sixty-year-old-butler who has just heard tragic news," "everybody was saying the fight was fixed. Yes. So was *The Night Watch* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.*"

Mailer's phrase "muntu to muntu" is at the heart of his coverage. Which man's physically heroic proportions come to represent something larger than the physical, just as Rojack's physical tests come to represent something larger than machismo? On the physical level, Ali's victory is the defeat of a witless if enormous strength by a creative wit translated into physical movement and power. From the philosophical view also employed throughout *The Fight*, Ali's

victory is the defeat of vital force limited by ego and lack of wit. Ali is a hero who can apparently allow vital force both unlimited play and precise focus. Which is to say that Ali had best succeeded in bending the greatest collective force to his own energies and powers. But these powers, if focused in the hero during his trial, remain transpersonal too. This is how Mailer sees it; it is obviously how black Africa sees it. Outside the arena Mailer feels the crazy air of liberation in the streets, the air of revolution and renewed potential in life. He is the butt of catcalls from exuberant blacks who assume that he, as a white man, must have been for Foreman. Before leaving Zaire, Mailer sees young boys everywhere jogging along roadsides. And when his return flight to America stops over at Dakar before leaving Africa, thousands of black people rush and immobilize the plane to get a view of Muhammad Ali, whom they mistakenly believe to be aboard. Ali has undergone a species of apotheosis; he is the embodiment of the black people's will, their vital force, their dreams. As an embodiment also of their best selves who promulgates the principles of black freedom, work and discipline, and the community of resources in the Black Muslim religion, Ali has succeeded in awakening black people around the world to their own powers, and to the recognition of heroism for which Louis Farrakhan had pleaded in his speech on Black Family Day. "How come," Farrakhan had asked, "we can't recognize the greatness of men while they live? How come we have to wait until a man is dead and gone before we recognize what kind of man we have?" (p. 229). If the black world has at last recognized a living hero, Mailer too has at last found one. But this hero is no simple embodiment of Good or Evil; he is, rather, a collector of force in a world of communicating and warring forces.

We have seen *The Fight* as a late journalistic effort in which Mailer continues to develop his philosophical position. As in *Armies*, the narrator's relationship to the greater heroism he views is often comic by comparison. Indeed, the narrator's heroism is minute in *The Fight*. If he succeeds in being the only reporter to push his way into Ali's dressing room after the bout, he is unable to use the opportunity for an interview because he is so awed before the victor. If he faces the challenge of a run with Ali, his poor living and eating habits bring the narrator to the brink of a heart attack. If he overcomes his fear by gliding like Rojack along a parapet, he is a little drunk and is too unsure of whether his relation to such magic produces good or perverse effects, or whether he can really help Ali win by being a little more honest and brave himself. He only knows that if bravery triumphs a little here and there, Ali might somehow triumph for "everything which did not fit into the computer: for audacity, inven-

tiveness, even art" (p. 162).¹⁰ At this point in his career, Mailer's journalism shows the writer discovering personal inadequacies that lead to a position that is for the most part contrary to his earlier professed aim to be a hero for his time. It is not Mailer himself, but another man, a fighter, who actually embodies many of the characteristics of Mailer's heroes and of heroic consciousness. By focusing on the fight in light of what he learned about black Africa, Mailer is able to depict Ali as an instrument of eternal and divine force, as a man who perceives the workings of divine energy in himself and the world, as a unifying force of his people and their best potential, as a figure of collective consciousness or projection, and as a being who is able to turn loss to gain and to live on the existential edge of possibility in such a way that he can adapt himself to the fluid nature (to the experience) of a profound confrontation itself.

But both *Fire* and *The Fight* do continue Mailer's professed aim of restoring mystery and divine significance to humanity and nature. In his latest work of nonfiction, *The Executioner's Song* (1979), Mailer continues his pursuit of large significances, his fascination with the conflicting elements of personality, and his interest in the way extraordinary people can act out the eternal drama of the soul's struggle for salvation through ancient patterns of rebirth. And true to the evolving line of Mailer's nonfiction period, this long book about Gary Gilmore culminates Mailer's increasing self-effacement through his art and continues his focus upon the events and personalities of his time. *The Executioner's Song* is the capstone of his nonfiction period; writing the book seems, in the matters of point of view, style, and distance, to have prepared him for his final fictions. Mailer has come full circle since *The Naked and the Dead*. For the first time since that war novel, he is now writing again in the third person and shifting between numerous points of view. There is in *The Executioner's Song* neither narrator-hero, as in the fiction of the fifties and sixties, nor Mailer-persona (by Aquarius or any other name) to serve as the guiding consciousness of the book. *

The theme of *Song* is familiar. "You cannot escape yourself," Gilmore says. "You have to meet yourself." Mailer comes to his subject, Gilmore, with a special understanding, even sympathy, because the challenge to meet one's self is at the heart of the quest of every hero from Mikey Lovett to D.J. And in the new journalism from the *Village Voice* to *The Armies of the Night* and beyond, Mailer has been on a similar personal quest. To face yourself, your own good and evil, your dreams, rational and irrational mind, your best and

10. Compare also pp. 85, 220-21, where Mailer again emphasizes "Norman's" fatigue with his own image, voice, and ideas. He is a "master of bad timing," a being losing force, a writer trying to improve his style.

worst impulses and motives, your own life and your own death—that has long been “Dr.” Mailer’s prescription for an ailing American people and culture. Mailer interrupted his work on the trilogy he is under contract to write for Little, Brown to devote fifteen valuable months to Gilmore, a flesh-and-blood man who is the kind of character Mailer has always pursued.

Gary Gilmore, it turns out in *The Executioner’s Song*, might have sat for Mailer’s incomplete portrait of Marion Faye in *The Deer Park* or sat partially for Stephen Rojack in *An American Dream*, or even, much earlier, for Sergeant Croft in *The Naked and the Dead*. Mailer’s portrait of Gilmore answers our obvious question: Who was this Gary Gilmore that so fascinated the public, the media, and finally Mailer himself? There is more than a little of Mailer—and Mailer would probably add “of us all”—in Gary Gilmore.

Flawed, confused, frustrated, possessing large passions and designs as both man and artist, Gary Gilmore was both murderer and philosopher, both psychopath and saint, both chameleon actor and Middle American. He was the kind of man who could kill two young men in cold blood to vent his rage over lost love and then by the sheer force of his intelligence, integrity, and wit make fools of the judicial system, the media, and the whole “liberal” money-making machine. There was much in his personality that was crass and drab, and much that was brilliant and exciting.

Gilmore was, above all, a divided personality, a personality full of contradictions. On the one hand is Gilmore’s prison record, which is enough to intimidate the most hardened con. On the other hand is Gilmore’s painting and drawing, his writing of poetry and—largely through his love letters and interviews—self-educated philosophical tracts. Like the “Mailer” of *The Armies of the Night*, Gilmore is a “peculiar mélange of right-wing ideas and left-wing emotions.” He is at times the ultimate macho man, arm wrestling or fighting for his male pride, but he is at other times a creature of huge self-doubt: “I am one of those people that probably shouldn’t exist.”¹¹

With his divided self go his many masks of the actor—confidence man. Gilmore’s father, we are told, was a con artist, a man of several identities, and that father in turn may have been the illegitimate son of the great shape-shifter Houdini. In each photograph, Mailer notices, Gilmore shows a different face. Before the “theocratic” courts of Mormon Utah, the confessed murderer “might have been a graduate student going for his orals before a faculty of whom he was slightly contemptuous” (p. 674). And Mailer extends the metaphor of the masked actor right through to the end. During the postexecu-

11. *The Executioner’s Song*, p. 160. Future references are parenthetical.

tion autopsy, the doctors peel Gilmore's face off his skull like a "rubber mask" and later return the flesh to its proper position so that the corpse "looked like Gary Gilmore again."

What must have fascinated Mailer especially was that Gilmore was deeply involved with theories about the supernatural. Like Mailer himself, Gilmore is a primitive mind born into our modern factologists' world. Gilmore's interviews on karma and reincarnation read like Mailer's own philosophical "dialogues"—"The Metaphysics of the Belly" and "The Political Economy of Time." Synchronicity is a repeated motif in the book, sometimes veering toward Gilmore's more faddish obsessions with numerology, sometimes toward that quasi-Eastern, Maileresque philosophy of karmic debts, burdens, and interconnections. Mailer and Gilmore both associate karma with an intangible force field, as well with the underworld of the psyche, that ties men and women not only to one another but to the men and women who came before them, and even to the other life forms.

Gilmore's choice of death, futhermore, is typical of Mailer's "American existentialism": a choice to accept one's best and worst, one's life and death, in an effort to get closer to one's own soul and to God. In a letter from prison, for example, Gary writes to Nicole:

But I might be further from God than I am from the devil. Which is not a good thing. It seems that I know evil more intimately than I know goodness and that's not a good thing either. I want to get even, to be made even, whole, my debts paid. . . . I'd like to stand in the sight of God. To know that I'm just and right and clean. When you're this way you know it. And when you're not, you know that too. It's all inside of us, each of us. (pp. 305–6)

Later, Gilmore will comment on his murders and on his own desire for death in turn: "and if you kill somebody, it could be that you just assume their karmic debts . . . thereby you might be relieving them of a debt. But I think that to make somebody go on living in a lessened state of existence, I think that could be worse than killing 'em" (p. 833).

It is Gilmore speaking here, but it might have been Mailer. We have seen that whenever Mailer has had his fictional characters talk like this—whatever we may personally think of the philosophy—critics have hounded him for a lack of realism, as they did when Cherry and Rojack spoke similar words in *An American Dream*. In Utah, Mailer finds a real con, Gilmore, and his girlfriend Nicole, a young uneducated divorcée, talking such words in letters to one another and in interviews.

It is, however, not simply the fact of the thoughts and words spoken and written by Gilmore that interests us or Mailer. What

interests us and Mailer is the personality and mind of Gilmore. He is a kind of archetypal figure who relives the old quest for deepest self and soul, and he does so in the most unlikely conditions. The masked confidence man, the many-faced hero, the divided, fluid self that is ever creating new selves to meet the ambushes and rewards of the life he lives, in the time he lives it, is here the questing self; the self searching for a life, for some deep-rootedness and stability, in a place and time where stability and deep-rootedness can be little more than a hope or a dream. Nicole, Gilmore's chief hope, is herself a drifter, obsessively promiscuous, searching for something she never finds.

The environment in which Gilmore acts out his drama is clearly the modern social condition of rootlessness, instability, and fragmentation. Mormon Utah is a kind of focal point of Mailer's Super-America. The hundreds of ranch bungalows like a picture in a supermarket magazine where Nicole lives, the synthetic decor of Holiday Inns, the "media monkeys" crawling all over one another to get their Gilmore scoop, psychopharmacology in prisons, the dealings of the influential and rich—David Susskind, ABC, CBS, NBC, *Playboy*, *The National Enquirer*, Bill Moyers, and Jimmy Breslin all jockeying for a piece of the story—and the endless liberal justifications denying a guilty man the choice of his own death—it is all here; it is Mailer's America as "Cancer Gulch," the backdrop for his tale. It is the environment that would turn one man's struggle to meet himself and his fate into a circus and diminished experience, just as the Utah desert, which Mailer reminds us once had a beauty like Palestine's, has been turned into a smog-ridden, mini-Los Angeles: "Mormon . . . Moroni . . . More Money." Set in this environment, the archetypal quest is again used as social criticism, just as Mailer has always used that quest.

And like Mailer's previous heroes, Gilmore is a modern man in search of his soul, wondering whether he might be closer to God or Devil, wanting to make himself whole, willing to pay his debts until he is right and clean and able to "stand in the sight of God." Gilmore reenacts the essentially religious quest that has always characterized heroic effort. The appeal to the self becomes ultimately a quest for divine energy and eternal, purposive, creative force. And of course the more enormous the hero's guilt is, the more forceful and dramatic the quest becomes. It is in prison that Gilmore faces himself, by accepting his guilt and facing his death. What he finds in himself—the continuing dream of the severed head, the "Oldness," and "the darkness" that all come to represent previous lives and debts; the guilt of the murderer; his own death—he accepts and pursues to the end. He chooses expiation and death in the face of that

vast machinery a twentieth-century liberal democracy marshals against such a choice. He takes responsibility for his actions, and he acts accordingly and with little hesitancy. "Let's do it," he says before the firing squad. His last words are: "May the Lord be with you all." Only possible reunion with Nicole ever tempted him from that path.

Once again Mailer, in his nonfiction, has gravitated toward subjects and events that reveal, give life to, his own preoccupations. Yet if Mailer is still writing the book he has always been writing, if familiar images of soul-birds, tales of magic forces, descriptions of severe and dangerous tests of the self return here as in the previous books, *The Executioner's Song* does offer a significant departure too. One does not find here the voice we have come to expect, the discursive, self-conscious, intrusive narrator who, in the case of the journalism especially, finds his own response to events as important as the events themselves. Nor do we find the baroque, eccentric, energized prose that sweeps the reader along with the force of its verbal and philosophical waves and contortions. It is as if, suddenly, the old master of tumultuous prose has passed on, as if Mailer's first literary hero, Melville, has been laid to rest, and as if Mailer's second literary hero, Hemingway, is emerging as the guiding genius of Mailer's later years. The prose is hard and lean: "Right outside the door was a lot of open space. Beyond the background were orchards and fields and then mountains. A dirt road went past the house and up the slope of the valley into the canyon." Mailer now uses images and metaphors so sparingly that when they do come, they come, like Hemingway's, with renewed power. "Outside the prison, night had come, and the ridge of mountain came down to the Interstate like a big dark animal laying out its paw." The author is removed; the prose is clean.

Yet this new prose and this distance from his subject are a source of Mailer's greatest weakness in the book. For what Mailer hoped to do by letting the characters tell their own stories and by staying out of the story himself is to let the characters themselves act as myriad centers of consciousness or points of view. That idea in itself is fine; sometimes Mailer succeeds in translating the idea into effective technique; and the grace and rapidity with which points of view sometimes shift is an admirable technical achievement. But if Mailer succeeds in switching our attention from one vision of events to another, he most often fails in giving adequate dimension to the individual qualities of voice, and voice embodies consciousness. Too often the reader finds separateness of consciousness obscured by uniformity of voice.

The tapestry of figures and visions is vast: relatives, lawyers, journalists, friends, and the principals of the murder case. Yet in

presenting all these different points of view, Mailer resorts to only a few devices to capture the rhythms of individual language. Double negatives, appositive phrases in place of sentences, *like* in place of *as*, and current slang expressions are among the chief devices used. Used selectively, such devices work effectively; they may seize the quirks of unique voice and thought. But used indiscriminately, monotonously, they confuse, dissolve the qualities of personality, do nothing to convince readers of the separateness of inner selves. The same structural and grammatical devices are used, for example, to express the points of view of deadbeats and uneducated relatives as to express the views of lawyers, journalists, and law student Max Jensen. In Jensen's case we have a particular lack of necessary distinction because with Jensen Mailer is trying precisely to establish the contrast between the Mormon, college-educated, hardworking, middle-class victim and Gary Gilmore and his most subterranean associates. Mailer has done much to strike the balance he has sought in the stories of both victims and assassins—his portraits of the Jensens and the Bushnells is as sympathetic yet honest as his portraits of Gilmore and Nicole—but his blurring of voice does little to forward that balance.

Mailer's new, clean style, however, marks a definite point in his creative development. Mailer himself sees his new style and techniques of objectivity as a point in his development too. In an interview with Ted Morgan, Mailer said that he was trying to be little more than a "transmission belt" for the characters to tell their stories, and that it took him thirty years of writing "to be willing to relinquish his ego" enough to allow characters that freedom. "I couldn't have done it 15 years ago," Mailer commented.¹² The increased objectivity through which the archetypal drama is told strikes me as a definite gain in style and technique after a decade of self-oriented nonfiction. Perhaps it is gain, among other qualities, that the Pulitzer Prize Committee recognized in awarding the Prize to this book. If Mailer can only overcome his weakness—the blurring of the voices of individual selves—his new, promised fictions may gain much from the lessons and developments of the nonfiction period. What he actually produces later will remain to be seen, but he is, up until now, still seeking large, even the largest, significances in humanity and nature as he restores mystery to the events and personalities of our time.

It is this goal in all of his writing that has led to so much opposition. We have seen that Mailer's allegorical impulse has led many critics to take what they consider to be the literal unreality of

12. Ted Morgan, "Last Rights," *Saturday Review*, pp. 57–58.

Mailer's work as grounds for seeing his work as a simple failure of verisimilitude. My principal goal in this study has been to restore Mailer to himself, to discover what Mailer as an artist and a thinker is and what he wishes to be, and to suggest that it is by seeing Mailer himself and not the categories of certain critics that his work must be criticized, or even approached. It is precisely this same impulse to restore mystery and to work in the allegorical mode that has led feminist criticism and the women's movement generally to voice strong opposition similar to that (and often on the same grounds) of the "realistic" critics. Here, again, we need to restore Mailer to himself.

The feminist opposition has, first, failed to take into account the allegorical nature of Mailer's work. We have seen that Mailer speaks in his novels and nonfiction in symbolic and archetypal, as well as in realistic, modes. He has portrayed most of his women as the embodiments of light or dark forces, as mythic figures, as soul-energy and mystery as well as satanic power. To many women, Mailer's tendency to portray women as beasts at their worst and goddesses at their best is exactly, as Gloria Steinem once told Mailer in a luncheon interview, where Mailer goes astray for many readers.¹³ This is a just criticism insofar as we consider only the literal dimension of Mailer's books. But we can hardly speak of continuing, ancient, profound, cross-cultural, cross-temporal images as *simply* sexist, any more than we can label as *simply* sexist a writer who attributes to women not only huge potentials for destructive evil but huge potentials for creative good.¹⁴ Yet this dualistic tendency in Mailer is the basic cause of his problems with many women readers, espe-

13. See *The Prisoner of Sex* (hereafter cited as *Prisoner*), p. 19.

14. While we can argue reasonably that culture, epoch, and upbringing affect the dispositions of an artist as of any man or woman, there is no final evidence that every act, image, and behavior of the individual is determined by nothing but environmental factors, nor that everything a man associates with his masculinity or a woman with her femininity is a mere environmental effect. For every behavioristic-materialist, there are, if not necessarily in the American academy, mythologists, psychologists, and socio-biologists who present evidence for an opposing view; that is, not all psychic experiences or images or patterns of behavior are culturally taught responses. Many responses, or predispositions to patterns of behavior and image-making, may be inherited and transpersonal. We would do well to recall, considering the nature of this study, that Jung continually defined the archetype as an inherited disposition to the formation of images in the human psyche (not as inherited images themselves), which can be indirectly encountered through symbols. See, for example, Carl Jung's *Symbols of Transformation*, translated by R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 5 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956), pp. 158, 181, 313. Victor White defends the basic concept of the archetypal predisposition on the grounds that comparative studies of motifs and myths existed long before Jung ever mentioned "archetypes" and that the widespread use of related images proves Jung's point. The evidence is quite "empirical." From the archetypal view, the mind that turns a woman into a devourer or into a goddess is

cially since women critics have held up for attack the literal Rutas and Deborahs of the fiction to the exclusion of the literal and symbolic Cherrys.¹⁵ If Steinem and Kate Millet are indicative, many modern women wish men writers to make no extraordinary or mysterious claims for women at all, but would prefer women to be seen as merely ordinary people in an ordinary world. We might accept it as a given that in America in the 1960s and '70s, a symbolic writer will run afoul of one group of interests or another. Nothing seems more abhorrent to women in the feminist movement than to be endowed with extraordinary power and mystery by the male, unless it is, to take a more extreme case, the abhorrence Millet feels for every female figure in Mailer's novels who is not a paragon of positive human potential. We could of course quibble endlessly with Millet over the evidence that no male figures are such paragons in Mailer's fiction either and that there are as many women endowed with large evil and good as there are men. But Millet's criticism is always in danger of falling into the fallacy of a woman who, to make a simple analogy, might consider Flaubert a male chauvinist pig simply because Madame Bovary is not a paragon of sagacious womanhood, and who would necessarily have to ignore in making such a charge the considerable human frailties of Dr. Bovary and the male lovers. If one is to make a case for Mailer's sexism, one will have to make it on other grounds. One may, in fact, have to redefine sexism, at least in the way that term has been used to categorize Mailer. For if Mailer is a sexist, he is one in no superficial sense, but in a profoundly radical and conservative sense because of the way he views the forces in women's lives with which women must deal and find some balance. He has said as much of men and the forces in their lives, but he views these forces as different if as potentially restrictive. We have only to think of Ali and Foreman and of the many male characters in his novels who represent failures of human potential. The point is that a critic or a reader must go to the level of Mailer's fundamental beliefs and values before he or she can honestly assess his weaknesses and strengths.

not necessarily a sexist mind, but may be a mind functioning on the mythic, transpersonal level. In such a case, the woman does not represent only a woman, but the unconscious itself, a transpersonal symbol revealing a timeless threat and a timeless promise.

The gist of my point here about cultural conditioning versus instinctual impulse and disposition is precisely Mailer's point as he grapples with Millet's reductive behaviorism throughout *Prisoner*, see, for example, pp. 168-69.

15. We have seen an example of this in Elizabeth Hardwick in Chapter 4. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* provides another. Vivian Gornick's "Why Do These Men Hate Women?" in the *Village Voice*, pp. 12-15, takes on Mailer, Henry Miller, Philip Roth, and Saul Bellow in a similar manner.

In *The Prisoner of Sex* Mailer points out a number of ways in which he agrees with the women's movement. He is not a sexist who wants women confined to the home, to be manipulated by a superior male class, to be stifled politically, economically, and socially. But this is the charge leveled against him by Millet and other feminists. He specifically emphasizes that he is encouraged by the movement's "fundamentally radical" idea that men have proved themselves incapable of administering the world with an ounce of humanity (p. 43). He agrees that to the extent that we see women only as social and economic beings, they are indeed a class exploited by the ruling male class. He is looking for a cultural and sexual revolution too. He favors the ERA. He agrees with Linda Phelps's position that women cannot afford merely to emulate men, to live in positions of power in a man's world, or to live men's lives, but that the society males have created has to be changed before a human world can be built (pp. 48–57). He disavows Freud's sexist, reductive theories of penis envy and the castration complex (pp. 82–84) and is quite in line with Millet on this point. He denies that he is a sexual reactionary in the sense that he wants women stifled in their roles in "the ranch house and plastic horizon." His enthusiasm for the mysteries of the womb are not simply a ploy to "squeeze women back into that old insane shoe" (p. 179).

But Mailer's actual oppositions to certain implications in the women's movement certainly have led and will continue to lead him into trouble with many women. What Mailer will not give up is his conviction that human beings and human activity have great, even supernatural, significance, a significance always larger and more mysterious than the agents or actors in events themselves. To feminists such as Millet who take a wholly behavioristic and materialistic approach to human phenomena, this conviction of Mailer's will not do. Millet, for instance, is a woman who endlessly documents the male expression of the experience of "phallic power" across all cultures and times and offers no explanation, especially not instinctual explanation, for the phenomenon's origins other than suggesting that it somehow must be culturally conditioned. If there are areas of female experience men cannot be expected to understand, is it not possible there are areas of male experience that women cannot understand? Mailer, for example, searches in vain among female writers for any attempt on their part to understand a male's sense of phallic, sexual force. And there is probably no reason why women should be expected to know or understand a male's experience of his phallus.

Mailer has agreed that the culturally sustained misapplication of male sexual force against women is abhorrent. But he is not as

willing as Millet to ignore the possibility that there are psychic and biological roots to man's experience of phallic force, or even the experience of a certain sexual antagonism between males and females. Mailer is exploring instinctual factors of male sexuality; he is not condoning the use of that sexuality in a way that enlarges an already disproportionate, oppressive culture. It has always been Mailer's argument that by facing the reality of an instinctual drive or experience, we may come to accept it and use it with some less destructive balance in our lives. Indeed, if we follow the logic of Mailer's argument about instinctual behavior, we see that by facing their sexual experience of women—which Mailer has always described as both lustful and loving, both violent and tender—men might come to separate the realities of phallic force from their disproportionate technological society, a society that rapes nature of its economies and ecologies as much as it rapes women of fundamental human rights.

But what does Mailer believe about women? One must first ask what does he believe about humans. He believes they are agents of larger forces, which to some degree they can control, in a mysterious universe. He believes that human sex has significance far beyond the participants in the sexual acts themselves. His "reasonable point" is simply that "the fuck either had meaning which went to the root of existence, or it did not," that if humans "embody a particular Intent," if we can "assume just for once that there is some kind of destiny intended" and that we are not simply absurd, not totally, then "sex cannot comfortably prove absurd." Sex without larger meaning, or "absurd" sex, is best "shunted over to semen banks and the extra-uterine receptacles" (pp. 190–92). Mailer is not so much asserting that he knows the destiny of all women (i.e., the womb and the creation of life) as he is suggesting the significance of the womb's existence. It is at least probable, he says, that the significance of the womb is larger than the organs of sexual pleasure alone. He does not say that bearing children is the *whole* destiny of women; he argues that the functioning of the womb in a fertile woman is a large part of her natural existence. The womb attaches woman to a force larger than the individual, a force with which she may learn to live in balance. In fact, the specific charge Mailer makes against Henry Miller is not that he is a sexist, but that Miller's work never developed to the point where he presented a woman of moral and creative strength and integrity equal to his men. Miller never created a Nora like Ibsen, a woman who can say to the man, "I am a human being as much as you," and who will strike some balance between her "sacred" duty to herself as a human being and her "sacred" duty to her sexuality and womb (see p. 123).

Men are prisoners of their sexuality to a large extent too. A man's phallus, first, sets him in some polarity to woman, at least in the sense that phallus and womb are not the same thing and that womb has some "psychic tendrils" or closer connection to the creation of life. Mailer also suggests that there is something about a male's sexuality that tends to increase his drive toward another kind of creation than the woman, a creation that tends to separate men from nature. This too is a force in men's lives with which they must learn to live in balance. Male ego assertion has led so far only to imbalance, for its crowning achievement is our grotesque technological and industrial world. Mailer's point is not that men and women have no choice, but that their choices as individual humans must operate within a larger arena of forces. Ali, for example, is an instrument of larger forces, but he is effective as an individual *and* as a hero because he has learned to balance God's force and destiny with his own powers, to serve as a unifying center for the collective force of his people, to sense the vital force within himself and the connection between that force and larger forces, and to adapt to trial and confrontation. To balance one's destiny *and* one's will, to balance biology *and* one's wishes, to balance collective *and* individual force—these are the trials besetting all men and women.

Mailer is vulnerable to the criticism that he places too large a share of woman's destiny in one place, her womb, which limits her choice. But we have to acknowledge his actual position again. His position is not that men naturally have a greater choice or freedom from destiny or larger forces, but that, because they have no womb, men face more kinds of forces than women. The total pull of destiny or force upon men and women is roughly equal.

His principal argument with the women's liberation movement is with that tendency in it which he believes encourages women to separate themselves from their wombs. Unlike men, women are in full possession of a "mysterious space within" that, in Mailer's view, not only places them a step closer to the "creation of existence," but probably exists in women for that particular purpose—the creation of life—which purpose is larger than the individual woman herself. In technologyland, women carrying around this creative space have to compete for power, economic status, and self-expression on a technological basis; that is, on the basis of efficiency, finely tooled labor, uniform behavior, and mechanical dependability. Technologyland has no time or room for the realities of the womb, of pregnancy and birth, all of which technocratic man sees as an interruption of mechanical labor. To compete in this world, women, Mailer argues, have accepted, or have had to accept, such a world's terms. They reacted with rage against a strange, mystical commun-

ion with creation (the womb) and saw it as a burden rather than an advantage. The result is a technological attempt to solve the woman's "disadvantage" in a technological world: birth control, abortion, the upbringing of children by professionals. Rather than denying our technology as a blasphemy against nature, women embraced it, looked to technology, as Dana Densmore hopefully depicts it, to control nature. Densmore unabashedly argues for a Huxleylike world of total technological control of the processes of impregnation, gestation, and birth (pp. 64–65), looks to rid herself and women of their wombs by technology so that they might compete in and perpetuate a world where technology has already dehumanized life. She is not, by Mailer's evidence at least, a single instance. And nothing could be clearer in Mailer's work than that he argues that men too must reject technologyland. He is not suggesting that *only* women reject it. But Mailer believes that as long as you seek solutions in technology, as long as technology is your faith, you *are* a part of the oppressive, inhumane system. Technology *is* the system.

Mailer's second complaint is that there is a tendency in the feminist movement to technologize the sexual revolution, which revolution, on the contrary, should be a force against technology. The issue rests on the controversy over the female orgasm. Some feminist writers have taken the conclusions of modern sex research that the female orgasm is stimulated by and limited to the clitoris alone as reason to believe that, finally, men are unnecessary to sexual fulfillment. Mailer's counterargument is that, even if based on "facts," such conclusions are still only half-truths because the evidence derives from laboratory procedures as unnatural, sterile, and mechanically probing as the tendency of such evidence to promote the contemporary drive toward the technological and onanistic sex of "plastic pricks," "laboratory dildoes," and electronic vibrators, and is about as close to the human realities of sexual love. Mailer is, here, at least consistent with the general movement of his life's work. He offers Germaine Greer and his personal sexual experience of women as counter evidence to argue for the great variety of female orgasmic response and the "qualitatively different" orgasms, to use Greer's words, between clitoral stimulation and male penetration (see pp. 77–82).

Mailer has assumed the debatable premise throughout his life that nature depends upon the dialectic of polarities and the diversity of existence. So he argues from that premise, or faith, that the more pernicious ramification of sexual technology is that it shapes the sexual revolution into unnatural, totalitarian forms, into a unisexuality and bisexuality that homogenizes male-female sexual polarity.

It "might be more natural to believe that God had established man and woman in some asymmetry of forces" (p. 83). He is by definition reactionary because he views sex as something larger than the pleasure of the participants; he

preferred to believe that the Lord, Master of Existential Reason, was not thus devoted to the absurd as to put the orgasm in the midst of the act of creation without cause of the profoundest sort, for when a man and woman conceive, would it not be best that they be able to see one another for a transcendent instant, as if the soul of what would then be conceived might live with more light later?

Sexual technology measured orgasms by "periodicity and count," but, for Mailer, it is not technology but "the eye of your life" looking back at you at the moment of orgasm (pp. 87–88). In our age we look not for large meaning and responsibility in our acts. We are more willing to accept Dr. Shettles techniques of swabbing "vinegar or baking soda up one's love" to determine the sex of a child, or to believe that the child we create "with an eye on the alkalinity factor" is the same as the child we create in "the juices of an unencumbered fuck" (p. 214). Mailer's general point in all this is that to some extent we *are* prisoners of our male or female sexuality and that to attempt to blur all distinctions between male and female is one more example of the modern forms of totalitarianism. The second part of Mailer's argument with Millet is over just this issue of the totalitarian disintegration of sexual polarity. Millet insists that men and women are exactly alike except for reproductive systems. Mailer's reply is that "reproductive systems are better than half of it!" Millet's propensity to view the sexual apparatus as purely material and isolated from the whole self simply astounds Mailer (as if ten cubic inches of penis opposed to the 3,000 cubic inches of the body meant that male sexuality is 1/300th of the self). It is as if Mailer, who has spent his life portraying the fictional factologist-materialist as an agent of evil, found one in the flesh who outdid his own powers to imagine one.

If Mailer is to be attacked honestly for his sexual theories, it is upon such premises and theories as these that he must be criticized, or even upon his more extravagant assertions in passing that birth control was in the primitive state probably a function of the female psyche, or that women are differentiated from men by the differences in their inner lives: their closeness to nature, their irrational propensities, their mysterious associations with the moon (all positive associations for Mailer himself).

But his negative critics among women have not addressed themselves to these issues; they have, like their male counterparts, misunderstood the mode of Mailer's art. In the case of Kate Millet the

misunderstandings and misrepresentations are more serious because what she has done to Mailer is exactly what she has done to Henry Miller and D. H. Lawrence. She has written a sexual polemic in which her lack of fidelity to her material is so egregious as to embarrass a reader familiar with the texts and the life work of the writers she deplors. A male critic, of course, risks the chauvinist label himself in making such a suggestion. But it may help to point out that a woman, Laura Adams, has said the same thing about Millet's *Sexual Politics*, even though Adams personally disagrees at several points with Mailer's sexual theories.¹⁶ At any rate, the evidence of Mailer's best restorations of Miller and Lawrence is indisputable. Mailer simply places full quotations beside Millet's excised quotes and false insinuations. Mailer's full quotations from Miller's and Lawrence's texts clearly reveal that the authors are often saying something the very opposite of what Millet says they are saying. Again and again Mailer catches Millet in the act of quoting grossly out of context, making fallacious and biased summaries, and even attributing false quotations. However admirable her desire to subvert a grotesquely exploitative male-dominated society may be, Millet is still, as Mailer puts it, a "thesis-monger with an axe." In Mailer's case, Millet not only mistakes the symbolic for the literal, not only focuses on the satanic women to the exclusion of the divine "vessels," she distorts even the bare literal material of his books to peddle her thesis.¹⁷

Only when men and women free themselves from a life-denying technology, Mailer has been saying for thirty years now, will they subvert the gross imbalances in our culture. So Mailer's view of the role of the womb in woman's destiny is not in line with American postwar culture because he does not define that destiny as his culture does (i.e., the ranch house, plastic horizon, corporation, and the institutions of the ruling male class), but specifically refutes it.

16. See Laura Adams, *Existential Battles: The Growth of Norman Mailer*, p. 165.

17. The point should be clear by now, but a few examples of such misrepresentations follow: Millet misreads such a simple detail as the police letting Rojack go. She sees it as a blind comradeship among men, when, in fact, it is clearly the result of the evil and power of Kelly in the world. She talks of Elena's suicide as if it were a fait accompli, which it never is, and the suicide is no more than an automobile accident that is the direct result of Faye's suicidal impulse, not Elena's. She sees Rojack's pilgrimage as an argument for promoting the "American way of life," when nothing could be more obvious about *An American Dream* than that everything Rojack aspires to promotes just the opposite. And Millet is careless enough not to investigate and understand Mailer's distinctions about personal and impersonal violence, or to see that he most certainly is not recommending cannibalism, or to see that D.J.'s rite is not "successful" by any measure of Mailer's approach to Rusty-power, Vietnam, and technology. To Millet, *An American Dream* is nothing but "an exercise in how to kill your wife and live happily ever after"; see Millet, *Sexual Politics*, especially pp. 15, 46-47.

What Mailer is suggesting in *The Prisoner of Sex* is that a woman's life may be as open as that of Ibsen's Nora, but with this stipulation: it is equally possible that God's Intent in giving women wombs is that their lives (their "destinies," if you will) are somehow connected with the creation of new life to a larger degree than man's.

If Mailer fails women in his work and in *Prisoner*, he fails them not because he thinks women should be recast into an oppressive society. He fails them because he is too much the nay-sayer. He does not attempt to suggest a feasible alternative for a woman's technological separation from her womb if she hopes to gain any semblance of equality in our sexual, political, and economic life. If he argues that humans must reject technology and begin to find new lives on other foundations, that is little compensation for a woman facing gigantic disproportions against which she cannot effectively struggle alone. And it is on this point especially that feminist critics might readily and honestly take Mailer to task.

One is bound to assume that Mailer's war with technology and with certain implications, as he sees it, in the women's movement will continue to place him very much in the role of an adversary to his civilization and his time. But that is where he obviously wishes to be; he has always drawn enormous, if not always effectively channeled, energy from his view of himself as an adversary of the predominant culture. And whether a reader can sympathize with and enjoy Mailer's work will in large part depend upon his or her real relationship to dominant values in that culture, whether or not the reader *thinks* he or she is in opposition to those values. Mailer opposes those values that favor the technological over the natural, that rely solely upon facts and statistics rather than upon feelings and intuitions, that view the processes of nature and human phenomena as ends in themselves rather than as playing lesser roles in a universal or even divine drama, that explain human behavior in materialistic terms rather than in terms of the human struggle to balance the influences of ageless, conflicting, dynamic forces in oneself and in the world. The center of the difference between Mailer and the culture in which he lives is best expressed in *Why*. Here Mailer argues through metaphor that all life exists in a physical and divine economy and ecology, an economy and ecology that mankind (especially masculine industrial culture) violates at its peril, that no waste is acceptable, that waste is the clue to our disease, that insofar as we seek to adjust the imbalances in ourselves through external (industrial and technological) power we endanger Life and God itself.

Mailer's opposition to the dominant values of our culture during his lifetime is precisely what places him in a major American

literary tradition. He has joined the long lineage of writers who have sought to awaken the moral consciousness of their people, who have sought to attach words, through image and symbol, as Emerson said, to visible things, who have allegorically depicted the journey of the individual soul as somehow connected to the journey of America—as both an existence and an ideal—itsself. In the works of the Puritans, of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner, the pilgrim soul confronts extremes of good and evil, at times divided as God and Devil. The pilgrim often undergoes an apocalyptic voyage in which the expansion of self and soul, and the intergration of nature and God and self, are all part of the same process of growth and the same possibilities of defeat.¹⁸ It is in describing such journeys that Mailer is most American and most in the literary tradition that seeks to define America's best, most liberated, most creative self. And it is in describing such journeys that Mailer is most repetitious. Yet as Richard Poirier has said, great writers are repetitious writers, and if Mailer can only expand while he repeats, he may yet produce a work of greatness.¹⁹

Will a work of greatness be forthcoming? We can only say that, finally, in middle age, Mailer has been given the rare opportunity to write one.

Whether he seizes the chance, we will have to wait to discover. In 1975, he had submitted a 120,000-word manuscript to Little, Brown as the first installment of his "big novel," a novel that will appear in several volumes. In late 1979 in an interview with Dick Cavett, Mailer said the work was about half completed. Laura Adams has said that those who have read the manuscript describe it as "epic, Jungian, Tolstoian, dealing with a racial theme." His latest book, *The Executioner's Song*, which has ended a decade and perhaps a period of nonfiction, holds some promise of creative development. That book ends the line of his development that started most clearly in *Armies* in 1968. Throughout his nonfiction period, Mailer has turned more and more to reality as it is in his time to seek the allegorical and archetypal order in apparently fragmented events and people. In doing so, Mailer has at the same time increased his use of realistic techniques and become ever-more objective and self-effacing. The greater balance he is striking between realism and allegory points up the continued potential of allegory and archetype as social criticism. For Mailer found in Gilmore a type of modern hero. Like

18. Compare Thomas Werge, "An Apocalyptic Voyage: God and Satan, and the American Tradition in Norman Mailer's *Of a Fire on the Moon*," *Review of Politics*, pp. 108–28. Werge makes the same point about *Fire* specifically, but his point is, of course, applicable to the entire Mailer canon. Werge specifically compares Mailer to John Winthrop, Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Whitman, and Twain.

19. Richard Poirier, *Norman Mailer*, pp. 57, 160.

Lovett, Rojack, or Mailer himself, Gilmore is a man whose life when we meet him is base; he is a man psychologically and physically adrift in a fragmented world, a guideless explorer looking for clues, signs, and guides; he is a man searching—if at times ignorantly—for meaning, action, and self-definition. But in the end, as he looks into himself, Gilmore begins to grow toward some greater life, or soul, rather than to die toward some meaningless death. It is as if the resources within the self and the archetypal order of the quest still hold value for Mailer, still may serve as the symbolic stage for individual acts of regeneration and patterns of existential growth. It is this regeneration that Mailer holds up for twentieth-century humanity to witness as our world becomes increasingly fragmented, as we drift farther apart, and as society (the center of the old order) veers either toward totalitarianism or toward disintegration.

If Mailer has learned from his years of writing nonfiction more about himself, about the powers of realism (which do not exclude allegory), about the necessity of making one's material more complexly and warmly human, he may produce the work he has promised. But I doubt that he will transform the foundation on which he has built his themes—his life-long obsession with the discovery of the deepest self. D. H. Lawrence has described this drive as also a part of the American literary tradition, as part of the conflicting claims of the self in the works of Franklin, Crèvecoeur, Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Dana, Melville, and Whitman, and as a manifestation of the deep split in Western consciousness between intellect and body, love and sex, spirit and matter, the white industrial ego and the archaic soul, and between the conscious and unconscious psyche. "The true liberty will only begin," writes Lawrence, "when Americans discover IT, and proceed to fulfill IT. IT being the deepest *whole* self of man, the self in its wholeness, not idealistic halfness."²⁰ It is doubtful, too, that Mailer will jettison the power of the symbols with which he has worked, that his work will become nonsymbolic and nonallegorical.

If Yeats said that a reader need not believe his particular systems of mythology and supernatural time to understand his images and to see how his systems offered correlatives in his poetry, the Mailer critic might ask as much for Mailer, whether or not he wishes the dispensation himself. Mailer may believe in his systems; he may even ask us to believe them, but belief is not necessary to an understanding of his metaphors or to an appreciation, even a distant appreciation, of the power and timelessness of some of his values and ideas. It has been my purpose to demonstrate how the idea is

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

related to the art, both conscious and unconscious art, in Mailer's allegorical work. What seems certain is that Mailer's future writings, whatever else they may be, will continue to seek their place in the literature of ideas. The ideas are not yet necessarily set forever. In fact they increasingly raise new questions. They continue to seek fulfillment and form, just as they continue to express the outrage of a man who, however uncertain of himself, still possesses a huge, baleful uncertainty about where the human race is headed and about the disintegration of human potential. "If brooding over unanswered questions was the root of the mad . . . and sanity was the settling of dilemmas," Mailer writes in *Of a Fire on the Moon*, "then with how many questions could one live? He would answer that it was better to live with too many than with too few. Rave on, he would. He would rave on" (p. 458).

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