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THE EXISTENTIAL POLITICS OF NORMAN MAILER: A STUDY OF HIS NON-FICTION PROSE OF THE SIXTIES

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As expressed in many of his own writings, Norman Mailer deems himself as a religious artist on a self-appointed mission to alter America radically. Most of the thorough-going and perceptive critical work about Mailer attempts to illustrate this one way or another, as one can see from some of the titles alone: "Norman Mailer: The Embattled Vision,"[1] "The Radical Moralism of Norman Mailer,"[2] "Mailer's Divine Comedy,"[3] "The Political Vision of Norman Mailer,"[4] and *The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer's Fiction.*[5] All of these critical works deal with Mailer's search for the "new moral complexities" of modern time, with his denial of easy-answers to complex problems and with his personal and professional

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1 Norman Podhoretz, "Norman Mailer: The Embattled Vision," *Recent American Fiction: Some Critical Views,* ed. Joseph J. Waldmeir (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963), pp. 185-202.

2 Diana Trilling, "The Radical Moralism of Norman Mailer," *The Creative Present: Notes on Contemporary American Fiction*, ed. Nora Balakian and Charles Simons (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1963), pp. 145-71.

3 Max F. Schulz, "Mailer's Divine Comedy," *Contemporary Literature*, IX, No. 1 (Winter 1968), 36-57.

4 Lawrence Goldman, "The Political Vision of Norman Mailer," *Studies on the Left*, 4 (Summer 1964), 129-41.

5 Barry H. Leeds, *The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer's Fiction* (New York: New York University Press, 1969).

battle against the "plague" of modern American society. The plague for Mailer is the insidious and cancerous growth of totalitarianism, the destruction of individual consciousness, the evolution of a mass man without personal destination and without a sense of past, present, or future.

These critical studies argue that Mailer is a prophet of our time, pleading with modern man to accept an Existential God. By not accepting this God, man is rejecting the potentialities of his own Being, the Divine and Satanic characteristics of his most fundamental nature. Like the prophets of Biblical times, Mailer fears that the ultimate result of modern man's pursuit of safety, which means the denial of his essence, will be self-destruction. These critical studies also argue that Mailer is serious about his probphecies, a fact that not many other critics can easily accept. These other critics feel that Mailer's public positions are really public posturings, put on as the result of deep-seated personal insecurities. It is said that Mailer has destroyed his potential, evidenced in *The Naked and the Dead*, as a major realist-naturalist of the post-World-War-Two generation of writers, and that he has turned to the obscene and sensational merely as a means of maintaining, at the least, public notoriety. These critics believe that Mailer, in following Hemingway's pattern that the writer lives in the style of the hero that he himself has created, has perverted the pattern and forsaken the Muse.

The debate about Mailer's role as an American writer helps explain Mailer as a personality and his evolution as a writer. But the emphasis can be easily misplaced. One can become diverted into thinking of Mailer as a pursuer of the "bitch goddess of success" rather than seeing Mailer's self-analysis as part of his being weaned away from the goddess altogether. At the end of "Some Children of the Goddess," Mailer uses one of his everpresent war metaphors to describe the tremendous price his fellow warrior-writers have paid in their battle against the totalitarianism of the present-day mind, in their efforts to take the hill of the Self. He writes:

> There are hills beyond that hill. The highest faces an abyss. Man in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, man even in the nineteenth century, explored deep into himself that he might come closer to a vision of a God or some dictate from eternity, but that exploration is suspect in itself today, and in the crucial climactic transcendental moments of one's life, there is revealed still another dilemma. God, is it God one finds, or madness?[6]

It is clear from this passage that Mailer has been grappling seriously with his feelings of inadequacy and preparing himself to assume the role of the prophet. Mailer's self-doubt and fear appear throughout his autobiographical writings and in the struggles of his characters. Mailer sees his personal and artistic struggles as the struggles of modern man, convincing him to undertake the role of the prophet through his art. His dedication to this role becomes more evident throughout his major non-fiction writings of the sixties.

In discussing Mailer's prophetic conception of the world, attention should be paid to the question of whether he has developed his psychological-moral-existential analysis of American history and society, as well as his metaphysics, to the point where he can integrate them into a new kind of politics that will work to turn around what he sees as the growing totalitarianism of the twentieth century. Although many of these critical works on Mailer have offered significant insights into the philosophical, religious-mysterious, psychological, and economic-social-political orientation of Mailer's work, none of them is complete in itself.

Any study of Mailer which attempts to be complete must take into account from the outset three basic characteristics: first, he is an existential psychologist; second, the description he offers of man's psychological nature is extended into religious and mystical descriptions of the structure and dynamcis of the unvierse, that the two in fact run parallel so that one can discover the macrocosm in the microcosm; and

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[6] Norman Mailer, *Cannibals and Christians* (New York: The Dell Publishing Company, 1966), p. 130. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

third, these two primary concerns have not only social implications, they also have social applications. In other words, the existential, psychological, and religious synthesis which Mailer offers as a means of analyzing American society and American history goes beyond suggesting a means by which the individual can survive in the twentieth century as a moral being. To Mailer his synthesis is a prescription for change; it is the basis upon which individual humanistic political action should rest; it is, in effect, a manifesto for the contemporary political radicals.

Any religious-political crusade must begin with a description of the evils of society and be followed by a plan which will point the direction for their correction. Mailer's description and plan run parallel to the thought of the major European existentialists since Kierkegaard, with the possible exception of Sartre. Horton and Edwards, in their *Backgrounds of American Literary Thought*, offer the following list as the basis of Kierkegarrd's thought:

1. the importance of the individual as against the mass
2. rejection of abstract knowledge and philosophical systems
3. emphasis on the truly significant knowledge as private and incommunicable
4. philosophy and/or the Christian life as total commitment
5. the call to the authentic life
6. insistence upon freedom of choice
7. anxiety (dread) in the awareness of the uncertainties attending man's choices.
8. the radical discontinuity of human experience
9. despair in the consciousness of alienation from God
10. the inability of man ever to understand the world
11. the need for complete and unquestioning faith in God
12. truth as in some measure determined by the human will.[7]

Although Mailer does not begin with an affirmation of each of these principles of existentialism, he subscribes to

[7] Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edwards, *Background of American Literary Thought*, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967), p. 467.

many and in the course of his career he comes to struggle with each of them. One might say, in fact, that in all his work up to the sixties, Mailer is working his way through European existentialist thought, keeping some ideas, modifying others and discarding still others altogether. The main influences are Camus, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. From Camus comes Mailer's version of *The Myth of Sisyphus*; from Kierkegaard his conflict with Christianity; from Nietzsche the evolution of his ideas on power, the demonic, and especially the conflict between the Dionysian and Apollonian, all of which have their basic statement in *The White Negro*, and his thoughts on nihilism; and from Heidegger, his metaphysical concepts about the soul and the nature of pure being. Yet Mailer's involvement with European existentialism serves only as a basis for his development of an American existentialism, a metaphysical philosophy that attempts to synthesize the essence of European existentialism and put it into a particularly American context.

This study proposes to analyze Mailer's prose non-fiction of the sixties primarily in order to detail the evolution of his criticism of the American society and to explain how this criticism gradually evolves into an existential position of politics. Since Mailer is devoted to an understanding of man as a social being, as well as of his relationship to the universe, he is led to see the reflection of man's personal and cosmic struggles in his society and especially that barometer of social history, politics. Politics for Mailer is simply and basically the eternal battles that man wages within himself and with other men and the equivalent eternal battles waged in the universe. But even more significantly politics can become the means by which man can live out the existential truths and find his essence. It is in this sense that Mailer assumes that he, single-handedly, is able to alter America radically.

Advertisements for Myself

In *Advertisements for Myself* (1959) Mailer develops the

position that the artist must replace the political and social analyst if America is to come to terms with her psychic ills. Most of this autobiographical book describes the evolution of Mailer's conviction that the artist must be extremely sensitive to the dehumanizing forces in the society and that in his development of a personal style through which he can preserve his conception of what it means to be a human being, he is performing a political, psychological, and moral act of the highest significance. Through the development of a personal style, in other words, he is performing a prophetic act.

In his "First Advertisement," Mailer argues that the fundamental moral problem in America is cowardice, particularly evidenced by American people's unwillingness to see that if they are to have moral growth, pleasure must always be accompanied by pain. Their rejection of this moral imperative leads to their flight from "full consciousness" through drugs, sexual perversity, and passivity. They continue to live on the faith that they will fulfill their "heroic destiny," but their dishonesty obscures the reality of themselves and misdirects their efforts toward their ideals.[8]

The cowardice and lack of vision of the Americans become more apparent when one studies the themes and style of their artists and social analysts. Their artists, unable to identify their enemies, have cloaked their uncertainty in subtleties, making a virtue of alienation and "cunning." Or, as an alternative to alienation and exile, they have uncritically accepted the roles of "integration, acceptance, non-alienation" vis-à-vis society, turning their art into propaganda. Turning inward, novelists "tend to place too much emphasis upon too little, until whole systems of good and evil are elaborated out of the nuances of the drawing room" (*ADV*, p. 196).

In a similar manner, social analysts have confused scientific method and style with reality. Describing men as machines, such analysts have avoided or obscured the moral problems in

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[8] Norman Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), pp. 23-24. All subsequent references will be cited in the text.

human behavior. In a review of David Riesman's *Individual Reconsidered* called "David Riesman Reconsidered," Mailer writes, "overburdened with modern sociological jargon (individuate, marginality, personality ideals, and pluralistic)," Riesman bores the reader away from any "feel or sense of life itself" (*ADV*, p. 191). The alternative is for the social analyst to recognize that "any ambitious sociological work is created artistically and presents a *Weltanschaung* which is more comparable to the kind of world a novelist makes than the structures of a scientist" (*ADV*, p. 195). Only a creative act which fully calls forth individuality in both the artist and the reader is acceptable to Mailer. Based on the existential premise that each individual is morally responsible for his own conception of reality, a conception which once formed he must live by, Mailer arrives at the belief that each individual operates according to his own fiction of himself and the world outside the self. He concludes:

> There is finally no way one can try to apprehend complex reality without a "fiction." But one may choose the particular "fiction" which most satisfies the sum of one's knowledge, experience, bias, needs, desires, values, and eventually one's moral necessities. And one may even attempt to reshape reality in some small way with the "fiction" as a guide. What one can always do is to compare the "fictions" and try to see where they may lead. (*ADV*, p. 199)

This is an accurate summary of what Mailer is trying to do in *Advertisements for Myself.* It could apply equally well to Mailer's entire career. It is crucial to note, however, that Mailer's "fiction" is a serious attempt to describe the psychic life of the nation in order to make possible fundamental political changes. (Mailer includes in his concept of politics the gamut of symbolic, psychological, moral and sexual interpersonal relationships, economic relationships, as well as the functions of institutions and the use of power.)

Out of his self-analysis, as he calls this period of introspection, Mailer builds two fundamental tenets of his political-

artistic philosophy. They are that political freedom and sexual freedom are inextricably connected, for the sex act can only express the totality of the individual when the individual is free from socially-induced tensions and anxieties. A third tenet which Mailer proclaimed at this point was that each individual is capable of creativity if only he gets in touch with his unconscious and that creativity need only take the form of some communicative act for it to be fulfilled, for it to give the individual some dignity. Hence his "rage against that national conformity which smothered creativity, for it delayed the self-creation of the race . . . " (*ADV*, p. 283). Conformity was inhibiting self-expression. And the fourth tenet was that the great "ocean" of the unconscious had its sources, possibly, in the divine, in some vast finiteness or even infiniteness:

> 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. (*ADV*, pp. 285-86)

Finally, in the last tenet, Mailer explains that because the potential of the individual unconscious is so profound, it is by nature far ahead of the "practical social possibilities open to our immediate time." It should, therefore, be the soul of the nation's body politic, not outside it, for in being the soul of the society, it will make more possible the fulfillment of human dignity for all.

Once Mailer decided that the unconscious was a vital force in the political profile of the nation, he started to re-examine the roles of the artist and the social scientist in defining it and in exploring its relationship to society. He argues that the novelist wants to throttle them. The chief difference is that the artist "is more concerned with what a man or a woman might become in a situation which would bring out of the extreme of his or her character . . . ; the analyst, realistically, must be concerned with what is the most likely and practical

choice available to his patient" (*ADV*, p. 32). The analyst is more oriented toward society than toward individuals, while the artist is more concerned with presenting "some solitary human possibility of choice which goes a little further, a little deeper, into the mysteries of the self." Thus "the artist is a rebel concerned with Becoming, the analyst is a regulator concerned with Being" (*ADV*, p. 302).

Nevertheless, Mailer is convinced that the artist does not have exclusive knowledge of the existential process of Becoming—if he did, there would be little possibility for the revelation in the moral consciousness that Mailer is proselytizing. He quotes from Robert Lindner's *Must You Conform* to demonstrate that there are analysts who understand the importance of political "fiction" and who are concerned with the power of the unconscious as an eternal force of creativity. Lindner calls this force the "instinct of rebellion, since it reveals itself as a drive or urge toward mastery over every obstacle, natural or man-made, that stands as a barrier between man and his distant, perhaps never-to-be-achieved but always-striven-after goals" (*ADV*, p. 305). More than the key to man's survival, the instinct has pushed man beyond the "limits of his mind" to seek out the "secrets of the universe," "the fabulous inventory of the cosmo," "the very mysteries of creation."

To live consciously by this "instinct of rebellion" is, according to Mailer, "being Hip." Consistent with his intent of making Hipsterism relevant to politics, Mailer endorses Hemingway for the Democratic nomination for President. His argument is that we should vote for individual people, "rather than for . . . those political ideas which eventually are counted into the social network of life as a betrayal of the individual desires which gave birth to them" (*ADV*, p. 312). Hemingway's credentials "by rebel rule-of-Hip is that he is probably a good bit more human than Eisenhower or the others":

> Hemingway is one of the few people in our national life who has tried to live with a certain passion for capturing what he desired, and I believe he indeed succeeded in earning a degree of the self-respect for which he has always searched . . . (*ADV*, p. 312)

Mailer, once he has outlined the fundamental and political concept of Hipsterism, proceeds to elaborate upon it. He is, in a way, searching for a constituency that might accept him as its prophet, as its political leader. He is, actually, examining American society from his new perspective to see if it has political and psychological validity. He identifies Hipsterism as an American existentialism "based on a mysticism of the flesh," and its origins

> traced back into all the undercurrents and underworlds of American life, back into the instinctive apprehension and appreciation of existence which one finds in the Negro and the soldier, in the criminal psychopath and the dope addict and jazz musician, in the prostitute, in the actor, in the—if one can visualize such a possibility—in the marriage of the call-girl and the psycho-analyst. (*ADV*, pp. 314-15)

Although Hipsterism has no articulated philosophy, its characteristics effectively describe "all the sensitive congeries of the defeated, the isolated, the violent, the tortured, and the warped, . . . the alienated in America" (*ADV*, p. 315). Because Mailer believes that most Americans are alienated from themselves and from each other, he is convinced that Hipsterism could become one of the philosophies of the future. It only remained for him to demonstrate that Hip was not "totally negative," that it was "predicated on growth and the nuances of growth" because of "its special and intense awareness of the present tense in life . . . " (*ADV*, p. 315).

Mailer sees the potential in Hipsterism in its unification of sexuality and Christianity. In a public advertisement on Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, he says that Beckett suggests that "God's destiny is flesh and blood with ours," that God's destiny is dependent upon man's exertion of his free will. Updating the early Christian belief in the literalness of the merger of God and man, Mailer implies that the Hipster might be a resuscitation of a true Christ:

> It is possible that consciously or unconsciously Beckett is

> restating the moral and sexual basis of Christianity which was lost with Christ–that one finds by kissing the feet of the corners of the most degraded, that as the human condition in the world is to strive, no matter how cruelly, to rise to the top, so life and strength come from adoring the bottom for that is where God concealed himself. (*ADV*, pp. 323-24)

The despair of the twentieth century is the separation between the divine spirit and the flesh, "the cramp . . . or cowardly passivity . . . which will finally destroy Will and Consciousness and Courage" (*ADV*, p. 325). Our failure of energy calls for a revolution which will revitalize man and destroy those aspects of society which work against such revitalization. Yet for all "the destructive, the liberating, the creative nihilism of the Hip," for all "its violence, its confusion, its ugliness and horror," Mailer argues that

> the violence is better without than within, better as individual actions than as the collective murders of society, and if we have courage enough; there is beauty beneath, for the only revolution which will be meaningful and natural for the 20th century will be the sexual revolution one senses everywhere . . .
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> Man's nature, man's dignity, is that he acts, lives, loves, and finally destroys himself seeking to penetrate the mystery of existence, and unless we partake in some way, as some part of this human exploration (and war) then we are no more than the pimps of society and the betrayers of our Self. (*ADV*, p. 325)

To be properly understood, what appears to be an indiscriminate call for violence and nihilism must be seen in classic tragic terms in the context of the indiscriminate slaughters of World War Two. This is Mailer's purpose in *The White Negro*–the summary statement of Hipsterism–as evidenced in the opening sentence: "Probably, we will never be able to determine the psychic havoc of the concentration camps and the atom bomb upon the unconscious mind of almost everyone alive in these years" (*ADV*, p. 338). For a "civilization founded upon the Faustian urge to dominate nature by mastering time, mastering the links of social cause

and effect," the mass violence and moral atrocities of the war ravaged that civilization's assumptions about society and the nature of man.

The realities of the second half of the twentieth century insisted that man see his life in the context of imminent death. This is the premise of existentialism, for to "live with death as immediate danger" means to "divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey with the rebellious imperatives of the self" (*ADV*, p. 339). The existentialist must call upon all his energy and all his courage which, because he exists outside society, might enable him to increase his "power for new kinds of perceptions." This liberty frees one from "the prison air of other people's habits, other people's defeats, boredom, quiet desperation, and muted icy self-destroying rage" (*ADV*, p. 339). For Mailer there is no other avenue which will open the creative potential of the unconscious.

Because the Hipster as the American existentialist is concerned with both acting out and understanding the demands of the Self, Mailer conceives him as individual with a religious purpose:

> To be a real existentialist . . . one must be religious, one must have one's sense of the "purpose"—whatever the purpose may be—but a life which is directed by one's faith in the necessity of action is a life committed to the notion that the substratum of existence is the search, the end meaningful but mysterious; it is impossible to live such a life unless one's emotions provide their profound conviction. (*ADV*, p. 341)

This religious purpose is fulfilled when the Hipster can convert "his unconscious experience into much conscious knowledge" and thereby shift "the focus of his desire from immediate gratification toward that wider passion for future power which is the mark of civilized man."

The Hipster's search for power makes him a potential political force in society, and indeed Mailer sees his characteristics among politicians, soldiers, newspaper columnists,

artists, and movie, television, and advertising executives. Hence, Mailer's concept of Hipsterism, American existentialism, is really a political concept. It is political because it derives fundamentally from a political situation and it is a reaction to it. But it is political also because it proposes a way of surviving in that very political situation which created it and which is continually threatening its survival. The essence of its survival as a political philosophy is in its flexibility, and in its insistence upon the complexity of human life, even every particular movement of human experience.

> Given its emphasis on complexity, Hip abdicates from any conventional moral responsibility because it would argue that the results of our actions are unforeseeable, and so we cannot know if we do good or bad, we cannot even know . . . whether we have given energy to another, and indeed if we could, there would still be no idea of what ultimately the other would do with it. (*ADV*, p. 353)

For these reasons the Philosophy of Hip is concerned with potential–"each man is glimpsed as a collection of possibilities"–and how much potential is actuated will depend upon the context to any particular situation, for the context with which either to activate energy or stifle it.

> Hip sees the context as generally dominating the man, dominating him because his character is less significant than the context in which he must function. (*ADV*, p. 353)

And the success of any individual will depend more upon the context than upon his character, thus making the individual character dependent to a large degree upon the various contexts in which he lives. What results is "an absolute relativity where there are no truths other than the isolated truths of what each observer feels at each instant of his existence." This means that the individual is encouraged to liberate himself "from the Super-Ego of the society" (*ADV*, p. 354).

So social living should be a continual political drama in which men are compelled to live at their fullest. Mailer believes

that it is possible and even reasonable to allow for such liberty because he believes that once man is liberated he would "prove to be more creative than murderous and so would not destroy himself" (*ADV*, p. 354). And this is significant because it "separates Hip from the authoritarian philosophies which now appeal to the conservative and liberal temper":

> . . . [W]hat haunts the middle of the twentieth century is that faith in man has been lost, and the appeal of authority has been that it would restrain us from ourselves. Hip, which would return us to ourselves, at no matter what price in individual violence, is the affirmation of the barbarian, for it requires a primitive passion about human nature to believe that individual acts of violence are always to be preferred to the collective violence of the state; it takes liberal faith in the creative possibilities of the human being to envisage acts of violence as the catharsis which prepares growth. (*ADV*, p. 355)

These are the bases for a political program for the individual and perhaps for the state because only through such actions can the individual protect himself against the state and at the same time most significantly threaten the state.

However, the final proof of *The White Negro* as an essentially political document that analyzes life in twentieth century America and suggests what the real issues are and how both individual man and the total society must deal with them comes from Mailer's explicit political commentary in such non-fiction writings as *The Presidential Papers* (1963), *Cannibals and Christians* (1966), *Armies of the Night* (1968), and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (1968). As Robert Merideth has observed, "*The Presidential Papers, Cannibals and Christians*, and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* represent a form of political and cultural inquiry more intensely and consistently influential in shaping the radical imagination in the '60's than the work of any other contemporary American writer."[9]

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[9] Robert Merideth, "The 45-Second Piss: A Left Critique of Norman Mailer and *The Armies of the Night*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 3 (Autumn 1971), 433.

When one examines these works, it becomes apparent that the perspective that Mailer takes toward the political events of the last twelve years since he wrote *The White Negro* is incorporated in the themes of his seminal political essay. What he has been doing through these subsequent non-fiction works in the sixties is more clearly defining the ills of American society, clarifying what he means by a totalitarian society, diagnosing the psychic health of society, and proposing remedies for its sicknesses. Whatever one might think of his point of view and his proposals, this body of Mailer's work constitutes a fully developed definition and insight into the radical mind in America.

The Presidential Papers

From 1960 through 1963 Mailer wrote a series of essays on the moral and psychological condition of America in which he tried to show the similarities between the public life of the nation and its underworld by applying the concept of existential politics developed in *The White Negro.* These essays were collected and published as *The Presidential Papers* in 1963. Mailer's purpose was to catch the attention of President Kennedy, whom he thought would be receptive to his ideas and capable of carrying them out. He was particularly concerned that the President understand that he must be a moral leader for America.

In "A Prefatory Paper: Heroes and Leaders," Mailer says that the central problem in America is that life is becoming "more economically prosperous . . . and more psychically impoverished each year."[10] The President must, therefore, be more than a leader; he must be a hero, he must shift "the mind of the American politicans to existential styles of political thought" (*Papers*, p. 5). Mailer saw Kennedy as the Hipster-politician, the man who would live dramatically, even

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[10] Norman Mailer, *The Presidential Papers* (New York: Bantam Books Co., 1964), p. 5. All subsequent references will be cited in the text.

dangerously, and thus call forth the energies of his Being. Kennedy could, in fact, create those contexts that would enable individuals in the nation to become more alive. That such a political role would be dangerous is inescapable, but, as Mailer points out in *The White Negro*, there are times when one must face death if he is to be alive. The papers in the book develop and elaborate on this thesis in order to illustrate the various areas in American life which can bring forth and sustain the positive values of the Hipster and thus bring life to a spiritually-dying nation.

To clarify the nation's need for an existential hero as President, Mailer compares the nation to a diseased body. He explains that a body becomes diseased when "one or another organ has become too weak or too powerful in its function" (*Papers*, p. 7). The body then goes through a war "which initiates a restoration of balance." Unlike the body, a diseased nation needs a clarification of those "large historical ideas" which have come to power and which intensify the disease. In such a situation the nation needs men to "personify" or "dramatize" the struggle. "Acute diseases are like political force personified by heroes" (*Papers*, p. 7). Kennedy should be such a hero.

Kennedy could, for example, become a positive hero for those youth who have retreated from society into juvenile delinquency. In "The Second Presidential Paper: Juvenile Delinquency," Mailer argues that juvenile delinquency is one of the prime symptoms of the national disease. Suffering from boredom, such youth seek drama in the rumble, spending "the days and nights of their adolescent years waiting for the apocalyptic test which almost never comes off" (*Papers*, p. 21). Yet they have much of the same imagination and drive that is typical of any "artist, any salesman, any adventurer, any operator." And they have many virtues which Americans once prided themselves on: "courage, loyalty, honor and the urge for adventure." It is clear, according to Mailer, that the nation must find a place for such people and not hide them in a wrap of psychological and sociological jargon.

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

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

> . . . There has been the history of politics which is concrete, factual, practical and unbelievably dull if not for the consequences of the actions of some of these men; and there is a subterranean river of untapped, ferocious, lonely and romantic desires, that concentration of ecstasy and violence which is the dream life of the nation. (*Papers*, p. 38)

Kennedy could appeal to those uncounted numbers of Americans who had internalized "the romantic possibilities of the old conquest of land" and turned the movement westward "into a vertical myth, trapped within the skull, of a new kind of heroic life, each choosing its archetype of a neo-renaissance man . . ." (*Papers*, p. 39)). America was sick because "the life of politics and the life of the myth had diverged too far." Kennedy could bring them together.

The characteristic which made Kennedy most like the Hipster was his awareness of death:

> Kennedy's most characteristic quality is the remote and private air of a man who has traversed some lonely terrain of experience, of loss and gain, of nearness to death, which leaves him isolated from the mass of others . . . [He has] the wisdom of a man who senses death within him and gambles that he can cure it by risking his life. (*Papers*, p. 48)

For this reason Mailer was disappointed in the way Kennedy handled the Cuban Missile Crisis. Appalled at the New Yorker's apathy to the Crisis, and seeing in such apathy an overwhelming fear of death which leads to a loss of the courage essential to a fulfilled life, Mailer proposed that Kennedy send his wife to New York as a hostage, thereby demonstrating to the people of the nation that he was willing to face death, thus he rejects nature, and by rejecting nature he has cut himself off from the self (*Papers*, p. 113).

Although such a proposal is far-fetched, it illustrates Mailer's preoccupation with his conviction that the country is dying, morally and spiritually. Mailer believes that the nation's rejection of nature through its fear of death is equivalent to a rejection of God. The logic of a belief in God is a belief that each man has a mission—"one of us to create, another to be brave, a third to love, a fourth to work, a fifth to be bold, a sixth to be all of these. Was it not possible that we were sent out of eternity to become more than we had been" (*Papers*, p. 159)? If Americans failed in their mission, then they failed God. To fail God suggests that they have given themselves over to a Devil, that force which is opposed to God and nature.

Collectivism is the disease of the Godless, the mark of the legions of the Devil. For this reason Mailer is sympathetic to the Right Wing in America which senses "that there seems to be some almost palpable conspiracy to tear life away from its roots." In a debate with William Buckley, reprinted as the eighth Presidential Paper, Mailer analyzes the Right Wing movement as an attempt to get back to biological roots. This attempt is appropriate for the twentieth century:

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

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

Mailer obviously believes that capitalistic values are the cause of the dying spirit of America; they lead to the expression of basic human psychological needs. They are, in a word, unnatural. He sees the only hope for America's psyche in continual dramatic confrontations between different life-styles, confrontations which would allow for individual self-expression. Furthermore, such confrontations would really represent the struggle between life-forces and death-forces in society, or in metaphysical terms, between God and the Devil. The ultimate danger of the Right Wing's "Red Dread" is that it moves Americans backward into totalitarianism, not forward into freedom, for any society built on fear turns toward repression. One defense against totalitarianism is symbolized by allowing minority groups full access into the culture, allowing them to "liberate the art which is trapped in the thousand acts of perception which embody their self-hatred" (*Papers*, p. 189). To provide for self-expression among minority groups would shock the culture into a confrontation with its self-image, for minority groups have never made peace with the prevailing culture or themselves and thus still live with those existential questions from which America has fled.

Minority groups, such as the Hipsters, are concerned with discovering the "authenticity" of the self and hence are willing

to search for extreme situations, those situations which "burn out the filament of dull habit and turn the conscious mind back upon its natural subservience to the instinct."

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

In his last Presidential Papers, Mailer summarizes the relationship between the confrontation with death and the discovery of the self and discusses its political and psychological implications for America. In "Ten Thousand Words a Minute," a metaphysical analysis of the Patterson-Liston fight, he reiterates his conviction that "existentialism is rootless unless one dares the hypothesis that [the confrontation with] death is an existential continuation of life" (*Papers*, p. 214), that we forsake our potential unless we are willing to risk the plunge into eternity.

> By accepting this hypothesis, authenticity and commitment return to the center of ethics, for man then faces no peril so huge as alienation from his own soul, a death which is other than death, a disappearance into nothingness rather tnan into eternity. (*Papers*, p. 214)

Mailer finds America's reaction to the Griffith-Paret fight, in which Paret was killed, another example of America's fear of the primitive and biological religion he sees in boxing, or in existential politics. Ignoring the many deaths brought on by government policies, or the myriad "small deaths" of those who "swallowed" their deaths in their lives, Mailer says that boxer's death, a death "alive with dimension," presents a

fundamental challenge to the assumptions of the Establishment. Unlike those who are seduced by a society which "murders death" away from dealing with bloodshed and pain, the boxer chooses to "occupy the stage on an adventure whose end is unknown. For the length of the fight, he ceases to be a man and becomes a Being" (*Papers*, p. 225).

The Patterson-Liston fight opened the basic questions facing America. Patterson represented the Negro who was "beginning to come into the white man's world. . . . The negro wanted Patterson, because Floyd was the proof a man could be successful and yet be secure." Liston, on the other hand, was the black Hipster: to the Establishment he represented evil, black magic, Faust. "He was the hero of every man who would war with destiny for so long as had his gimmick. . . . Anyone who was fixed on power" (*Papers*, p. 241). Most important, the fight became a focus for these competing forces in the country and served as simplified model for existential politics. "Existential politics would say: Political rights like human rights are best won by a face-to-face confrontation. That is what is good about revolution" (*Papers*, p. 269). Mailer reinforces his belief in the necessity of existential politics in his concluding paper on waste. The metaphysical significance of the Patterson-Liston fight was that it proved that America had retreated from a direct confrontation between life-styles; it feared the forces which Liston represented, yet it was unwilling and unable to extend its enemy to Patterson either. The consequence of such ambivalence was to waste oneself, to give oneself over to the devil.

The first part of the final paper, "Truth and Being: Nothing and Time," is based on the thesis that man's waste tells us what he has used and what he has rejected, what his body (or his civilization) is capable of absorbing and what it is not yet ready or capable of absorbing. The importance in the study of waste is that the body (society) and all substances have certain character, so when the individual (society) digests a certain substance, the body (society) is either capable of absorbing the character (or soul or spirit) of that substance or

not, depending on the character of the body (society) itself. This thesis, Mailer argues, has historical precedent. In the Middle Ages the Devil was seen as the ruler of the anus: "God has hegemony over us only as we create each other. God owns the creation, but the Devil has power over all we waste" (*Papers*, p. 274). There are three ways we define the quality of our existence, the nature of our Being: culture, history, and chance. The first two involve the conscious choices of men and reveal the rational mind, but the third reveals the unconscious or primitive forces—"it is the lowest form of active life, it is entropy."

> With Chance we can depend no longer upon ourselves (which is the grace that History offers) nor can we even depend on growth in obedience to the shape of the culture which conceived us, no, we are cast loose, we are blown, we are transported, we are shifted, pushed, we are carried by forces larger than ourselves toward fates of elimination which inspire terror. (*Papers*, p. 275)

Thus chance is the province of the Devil, and because the twentieth century has been characterized by chance, it has been the century of the Devil. "Chance was a purposeful stream moving the bodies of all millions of us away from roots, below history, out of grace" (*Papers*, p. 276).

Mailer pursues the implication of this statement on scatology in an interview called "The Metaphysics of the Belly," which concludes the book. In essence he is trying to say that life has lost its bearings in the twentieth century and so it is as necessary to talk about scatology as it is for the Hipster to be concerned with violence: it is the only way by which we can come to terms with our illnesses and find our way back to God. By studying scatology we come to understand the workings of our own bodies, we get closer to the primitive sense of the nature of life—the metaphoric qualities of our efforts to find the spiritual meaning in our lives— and thus ultimately achieve the existential sense of life. What Mailer is moving towards here is a combination of the biological and spiritual

in a formulation of philosophy by which man can understand himself and his relationship to the universe. It is an effort to overcome the totalitarianism of science which lives on numbers and experiments, but which does not get close to the poetic qualities of human existence. And it is a fitting conclusion to *The Presidential Papers* because it is a last appeal to the President to search out the mysterious qualities of life, to get to the psychic roots of being in order to save man from a spiritual self-destruction.

What Mailer is saying at the end of *The Presidential Papers* is really only the beginning of an exploration into the nature of form and spirit. What he evidently found at the end of his attempt to define existentialism, just as he had found at the end of *Advertisements*, was that he had not gone deeply enough into the essence of Being. At the end of *Advertisements* he was compelled to push onward in order to apply the implications of Hipster to society, to history and to politics. He felt that the concept of the Hipster was not relevant unless he could show how the Hipster could influence society, if not directly at least through the qualities of his personality and the characteristics of society to which he responded. To Mailer, with Kennedy's administration there was a hope after fifteen years of political stasis that a new dynamism would be instilled in American life. For a brief period Mailer's sense of historical bleakness and fatalism is alleviated; Kennedy's assassination and the Vietnam War re-intensified it. That is the reason why by the end of the *Papers* Mailer has introduced the concepts of death, namely, form, time, soul, spirit, and the existential definition of Being.

Mailer has talked about the plague which he believes is destroying the country, and he sees this plague as cancer, the totalitarianism of cells—cells which become one mass of similarly functioning bodies with nothing to distinguish them from each other, a phenomenon which finally destroys the body and life. He is building a war against the cancer of the country, the creeping totalitarianism of sameness. But in order to mount his attacks he must understand more about the cells

of the body and the cells of the country. It is his purpose in the next book of essays, *Cannibals and Christians*, therefore, to explore these philosophical problems. What he is trying to evolve in his study is an alternative to psychoanalysis as a means of describing the interrelationships between the body and the spirit of man so that he can more accurately diagnose man's ailments and cure him.

Cannibals and Christians

A little over a year after the appearance of *An American Dream* (1965), the political pieces that followed it and the literary pieces that preceded it were collected and published in a volume called *Cannibals and Christians.* The work is divided into four parts: "Lambs," "Lions," "Respites," and "Arena," each preceded with an introductory essay called "Arguments." The parts are subdivided into shorter areas organized around the theme of that particular section: politics, literature, and philosophy. The structure is similar to that used in *Advertisements for Myself* and *The Presidential Papers.* In his "Introducing Our Argument," Mailer reiterates his consistent theme and preoccupation: that the world is in the midst of a plague of totalitarianism that is threatening human life. He states that he continues to see his role as a critic of society, recognizing at the same time that he too has been infected with the plague, so that it is as though

> the man and the society are each grappling with his own piece of the plague, as if, indeed, we are each of us born not only with our life but with our death, with our variety of death, good death and bad, and it is the act of each separate man to look to free himself from that part of his existence which was born with the plague.[11]

Mailer is reiterating here his growing conviction that to talk in general terms about totalitarianism and the plague, personal

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[11] Mailer, *Cannibals and Christians*, p. 3.

violence, death, and the Hipster, is no longer sufficient. Such talk operates on the surface of reality and does not get at the root of social problems. He realizes that he must find the universal truths that lie behind the observable phenomena.

The very fact that a society consumed by the plague goes through the motions of improving the conditions, but in reality only perpetuating an intolerable world, is proof of its lack of understanding of universal truths.

> In a breath, a world of such hypercivilization is a world not of adventurers, entrepreneurs, settlers, social arbiters, proletarians, agriculturists, and other ego-centric types of a dynamic society, but is instead a world of whirlpools and formlessness where two huge types begin to reemerge, types there at the beginning of it all: Cannibals and Christians. (*Cannibals*, p. 3)

The Cannibals are those of the Right Wing who believe that they can save the world by "killing off what is second-rate."

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

The Christians, on the other hand, are "the commercial. The Commercial is the invention of a profoundly Christian nation—it proceeds to sell something in which it does not altogether believe, and it interrupts the mood." Practically all those who are not of the Right Wing are Christians.

> We believe man is good if given a chance, we believe man is open to discussion, we believe science is the salvation of ill, we believe death is the end of discussion; ergo we believe nothing is so worthwhile as human life. (*Papers*, p. 4)

But the Christians are not really interested in Christ. While those who are Cannibals think they are Christians, "think

of Jesus as Love, and get an erection from the thought of whippings, blood, burning crosses, burning bodies, and screams in mass graves," the nominal Christians, opposed to war, have succeeded in starting all the wars of this century.

Mailer's purpose in making these definitions is to restate some of the social implications of his existentialism. His concept of the Hipster is similar to the Cannibal, but as he points out in "The Red Dread," the Right-Wing Hipster (or Cannibal) does not understand the individual's responsibility to explore the limits of existence and find the meaning of his life. Rather, the Cannibal sees the fulfillment of life in destruction for its own sake, instead of seeing personal violence as a key to the secrets of Being. The Christian, on the other hand, because of his fear of death, is the harbinger of the totalitarian society—the society which pretends to elevate man and create the perfect state, but which, in fact, leads man to a living death, because it renders him incapable of exploring the limits of life. Mailer elucidates these definitions throughout the rest of the book.

He begins with a study of the Republican Convention of 1964. Speaking of bagpipe band for Goldwater, Mailer describes "the music of the Wasps."

> There was something wild and martial and bottomless in the passion, a pride which would not be exhausted, a determination which might never end, perhaps should never end, the Faustian rage of a white civilization was in those Highland wails, the cry of a race which was born to dominate and might never learn to share, and never learning, might be willing to end the game, the end of the world was in the sound of the pipes. (*Cannibals*, p. 25).

This is a description of the Cannibal elements in the Right Wing of which Mailer earlier wrote. And as he was excited about the potentialities of Kennedy as President, the sense of the existential, the powerful and threatening, the risk of death made Goldwater momentarily appealing to Mailer. There was

the sense of a national suicide. "There was that excitement, that the burden of one's soul (always equal to the burden of one's personal responsibility) might finally be lifted . . ." (*Cannibals*, p. 25). There was the hope that America was coming to face the essential totalitarianism at its heart. There was the sense that if the Hipster could not shake the foundations of America, perhaps the Right-Wing Hipster could.

To clarify the potentialities of the Right-Wing Hipster, Mailer makes the following distinction between the political youth of the fifties (the Beat Generation or the Christians) and the political youth of the mid-sixties (the generation of the Right or the Cannibals):

> [T]he Beat Generation was a flock of early Christians gathered prematurely before the bomb, an open-air asylum for the gentle and the mad, where in contrast the underground generation of the Right is a frustrated posse, a convention of hangmen who subscribe to the principle that the executioner has his rights as well. (*Cannibals*, p. 27)

But Goldwater lost because he was too inept to carry across his message, and Mailer concludes that his real message had to wait for Vietnam. Vietnam for Mailer, among many things, is America's great scientific war. It represents the merger of the Cannibal and the Christian. The connection between the two concepts rests in Mailer's idea that science, as the only religion left in America, destroys man's potential to discover the mysteries of the universe because it is too involved in facts and figures and has none of the sense of the spirit of mystery. The Christian or scientific explanation for why Americans are in Vietnam he gives in a "Speech at Berkeley on Vietnam Day"; the Cannibal explanation he gives later.

In his speech Mailer explains that the impulse that has led Johnson and America into the war in Vietnam is a pervasive sense of alienation, alienation from judgement. This alienation is equivalent to a kind of schizophrenia in which the President takes on the characteristics of a member of a minority group—namely, he is a man who lives with two opposing concepts

of himself:

> What characterizes a member of a minority group is that he is forced to see himself as both exceptional and insignificant, marvelous and awful, good and evil. So far as he listens to the world outside he is in danger of going insane. The only way he may relieve the unendurable tension which surrounds any sense of his own identity is to define his nature by his own acts; discover his courage or cowardice by actions which engage his courage; discover his judgement by judging; his loyalty by being tested; his originality by creating. . . . What characterizes the sensation of being a member of a minority group is that one's emotions are forever locked in the chains of ambivalence—the expression of an emotion forever releasing its opposite—the ego in perpetual transit from the tower to the dungeon and back again. (*Cannibals*, p. 77)

For Mailer nearly every American is a member of a minority group, given this existential definition. The fever of America has intensified the anxiety of ambivalence so that it became necessary at a certain point to have either a purge or a war. America turned to war because this seemed to be a scientific way of coming to terms with her malady; it was the Christian way because Americans "are the defense of civilization" and the Communists are the barbarians out to destroy it. But at the same time there is the appetite of the Cannibal in this solution to America's national sickness. Mailer states the connection between the two in his preface to Part Five of "Lambs":

> As is evident by now, the only explanation I can find for the war in Vietnam is that we are sinking into the swamps of a plague and the massacre of strange people seems to relieve this plague. If one were to take the patients in a hospital, give them guns and let them shoot, you may be sure you would find a few miraculous cures. So the national mood is bound to prosper back to our hospital patients. Some of them we see stripped to the waist, crying with joy as they fire off their machine-gun blast. All the light of the Lord is in their eyes again. But not all can fire at once, and some on the side-lines throw up in sheer

> excitement, others are forced to eat from nervousness, others diddle in the slop, and zap! there went the first—the nice old man about to die has just bit the jugular of the nice old lady, and some are beginning to slide in the blood. And some are beginning to slide like snakes. Sellah, sellah—is it better to be a foul old Cannibal or a Christian dying of nausea? (*Cannibals*, p. 91)

It is a horrible image, but an effective one. And it concludes the section of Part One of the book.

In Part Two, Mailer deals with writers and the literary scene in America. In his introduction to Part Two, "The Argument Reinvigorated," Mailer talks about the failure of American writers who have been engaged in a war between Naturalism and the Genteel Tradition. But Mailer thinks that they have not been effective in describing or dealing with the problems that America has posed and continues to pose. The result is a vacuum in American letters which has been filled by television, movies, and the mass media in general.

> The American consciousness in the absence of a great tradition in the novel ended by being developed by the bootlicking pieties of small-town newspaper editors and small-town educators, by the worst of organized religion, a formless force filled with the terrors of all the Christians left to fill the spaces left by the initial bravery of the frontiersman and these latterday Christians were simply not as brave. (*Cannibals*, p. 102)

The American consciousness has also been controlled by advertisting. The advertisers, to Mailer, "were Cannibals selling Christianity to Christians, and because they despised the message and mocked at it in their own heart, they succeeded in selling something else, a virus perhaps, an electronic nihilism went through the mass media of America and entered the Christians and they were like to being cannibals" (*Cannibals*, p. 102). In time these two groups changed roles. The Christians became absorbed in their own self-hatred, while the Cannibals became preoccupied with scientific schemes of social-planning and welfare and the rest, the sure marks of Christians. So

America did a somersault and left the nation schizophrenic. The rest of Part Two is taken up with literary reviews and criticism and a few poems whose cumulative purpose is to demonstrate that the hope of America lies in the artists, for they are the only ones who can threaten the Christians and be equals in psychic power to the Cannibals.

Mailer concludes his argument in "Part Four: Arena," in which he reaffirms the necessity of the artist in America and a reinvigorated art form. Art is a mirror of the times, and absurd art is the perfect reflection of an era nurtured on the broken mood. The function of art is

> . . . to uplift us, to encourage the religious and the nonreligious to feel a heavenly glow, so declared the caretakers of art for two thousand years. But now art is a heart pill—nitroglycerin—it bends shattered nerves together by shattering them all over again with style, with wit, each explosion a guide to building a new nervous system. (*Cannibals*, p. 247)

The artist has become a neural surgeon, a physician of adaptation, and art no longer edifies but is in a therapeutic, striving to make interruption tolerable. America is in a perpetual state of shock; the ultimate result of such continual shock is apathy, and apathy destroys man's capacity to develop and sustain mood. The role of man, and particularly the role of the artist, therefore, becomes the search for mood: mood in oneself, in the separate parts of oneself, and mood in others, even mood in the universe at large. Mailer is moving here toward a definition of artist-as-Hipster, implying that the most potent politician that America can have might yet be the artist.

Mailer develops the concept of mood through an elaboration on the complexities of Being, the refinement of his existential philosophy. He tries to present a counter argument to science, the latter-day Christianity, which he insists has destroyed man's ability to deal poetically with the universe, to see mysteries in metaphor. Modern science, he says, "began with the poetic impulse to treat metaphor as equal to equa-

tion; the search began at that point where a poet looked for a means (which only later became an experiment) to measure the accuracy of his metaphor" (*Cannibals*, p. 308). The discovery was, however, in the metaphor and the purpose of science was simply to reveal the insights into the mysteries of life. The scientist grew to be uneasy with the metaphor because of its contradictory nature. So scientists became obsessed with accuracy in order to "protect the scientific artist from ambiguity." The ultimate result was the destruction of metaphor as an enlightening statement on nature.

As an example of the use of metaphor in science, Mailer talks about a disease as a drama enacted on the stage of the body. If an illness wages "conflict, drama, and distress through the body, and has obliged the body to sit in attention upon it" the body has gained knowledge of itself, "its experience has become more profound, its intimate knowledge of its own disharmony is more acute" (*Cannibals*, p. 309). Disease, then, "is the last attempt (at a particular level of urgency) to communicate from one part of the body to the other, a last attempt to tell us that if we do not realize the function before us is now grieviously out of harmony, then we will certainly sicken further" (*Cannibals*, p. 309). Medical science, even psychiatry, would deprive the human being from watching this drama enacted in the body. It would cheat the individual out of a chance, perhaps the only chance, to explore his own mysteries, to understand the core of his own life. Thus science in this sense blocks man from pursuing the psychic, the metaphoric, the most profound mysteries of existence.

What is true for the individual body is true for the total society as well. If society will not face its diseases, but covers them up with science, with false religions, it will grow sicker and perhaps die. It is therefore essential to life that the individual be granted the right to the existential experience, to the search for the authenticity of the self. And this is likewise essential for the life of a society. In fact the two are intricately related, one can understand society through the metaphor of the individual, it matters little in

which direction one goes.

The battle for life in the modern world takes place in the artistic arena, for it is here that the battle is given its form. The artist as rebel must reinvigorate poetic language; he must search out the primitive essence of life; he must destroy totalitarianism of the mind and of the body, the Christianity and the Cannibalism of contemporary society. If the artist can find the means to unleash the power of man's creativity, he will bring man that much closer to God, which is another way of saying that he will bring man that much closer to his potential. He will conquer the Faustian urge for knowledge, the religion of the Devil, with the mystical sense of knowledge. He will become magical without paying the ultimate price of self-destruction at the hand of the Devil. He will find the key to time and eternity and perpetual creativity.

Armies of the Night and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*

Mailer has always alternated his writing of fiction with his writing of non-fiction. For example, after *The Deer Park* he wrote *The White Negro, Advertisements for Myself* and *The Presdiential Papers.* After *An American Dream* he wrote *Cannibals and Christians.* And after *Why Are We in Vietnam?* he wrote *Armies of the Night* and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago.* What this pattern suggests is that he has felt the need to clarify and extend the themes he has been exploring in a particular novel in a work of non-fiction prose. Once he had done this he went on to write a new novel which capitalizes on his new understanding and extends the themes and philosophies even further and refines them even more. Mailer has, in other words, always struggled with the aesthetics of his prophecies, recognizing that central to his metaphysics and their political implications is the form they take. If the writer, like other men, is searching for his soul, then he must be continually challenging himself, putting himself on the edge of danger, to give the soul the opportunity to take its natural form.

Armies and *Chicago* are particularly interesting in this pattern because they are closer in theme to the novel which precedes them than the other non-fiction works. Mailer, in fact, calls *Armies* "history as novel" and "the novel as history," which is an account of the events of the evening preceding the march on the Pentagon in 1967. He is trying to find his way to that concept of art which he discussed in his review of Riesman's *Individualism Reconsidered* in 1952 when he said that the novelist plays a role as important to the definition and description of society as the sociologist and scientist. He is trying to find that "fiction" which will bring dignity to social man, that form which will clarify the nature of his soul. As he has matured as a novelist and as he has developed his existential philosophy and his religious convictions, he has come more and more to see that the artist's role in criticizing and shaping society might actually be sufficient for him. Thus the two separate genres that he has worked in have gradually moved closer and closer together. Mailer's self-conception as a prophet helps explain why he has been the hero of his last two works. By making himself the tragi-comic hero of his new kind of novel he is questioning and examining his ability to fulfill his own self-conception. With great severity and honesty, he has been exploring the depths of his own guilt and his own courage in order to determine to what degree he is able to and entitled to speak to society as a prophet of a lost God. *Armies* and *Chicago* are, therefore, deeply introspective and autobiographical works; Mailer's courage to face the challenges of the time is the theme of these works. One is tempted to say that he will not produce another novel until he has convinced himself that he is pure enough and until he has explored further the social and cosmic extensions of his own search for the existential theory of politics.

Mailer explains his process at the conclusion of the first part of *Armies*, titled "History as Novel: The Steps of the Pentagon." He explains that what started as a history of the march on the Pentagon necessarily turned into a history of himself over the four-day period of the preparations for the march, the

march itself and its immediate aftermath. By examining his own reactions to his experiences he felt that he could grasp the "mysterious character of that quintessentially American event."[12] Once he had uncovered the significance of the event of his own personal struggles, he had a perspective from which to write a history of the event itself. Furthermore, he owed his readers a clear picture of the perspective from which he was writing his history so that they would understand the biases of the historian, what he was trying to teach them. This is the pattern Mailer has followed throughout his career, only here it is condensed into one work.

Mailer indicates that the pattern works in both directions: the novelist can become the historian, but the historian can also become the novelist. The reason is that facts are always elusive and there is no such thing as a definitive history. Every history is finally

> interior—no document can give sufficient intimation: the novel must replace history at precisely that point where experience is sufficiently emotional, spiritual, psychic, moral, existential, or supernatural to expose the fact that the historian in pursuing the experience would be obliged to quit the clearly demarcating limits of historical inquiry. (*Armies*, p. 284)

This is another way of saying that the individual in society is continually seeking not only his own soul but his own particular relationship with historical forces as intimate as with a loved one. Not only does this humanize the individual; it humanizes society.

In both *Armies* and *Chicago* Mailer examines himself by analyzing the contrasts between himself and the youth or himself and those writers and politicians he admires. The first part of *Armies* outlines the themes of the psychic struggle which Mailer undergoes during the entire weekend of the march on the Pentagon. The two battles which he is fighting

[12] Norman Mailer, *Armies of the Night: History as a Novel; The Novel as History* (New York: The New American Library, 1968), p. 241. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

within himself are the battle with his pervasive guilt and the battle against his precipitate Romanticism. He talks about guilt initially in reference to his inability to fully understand the psychic characteristics of the various people participating in the march. Specifically, he talks about his rejection of Paul Goodman's "scientific humanism" and his difficulties with Robert Lowell's almost saintly self-control.

He is upset that Goodman, also a prophet and also a leader of the youth, has tried to take guilt out of sex and thus come to the logical conclusion that any sex act, even homosexuality and onanism, are forms of sexual activity as valid as heterosexual activity. Such a position runs against Mailer's basic assumption that "guilt was the existential edge of sex. Without guilt sex was meaningless" (*Armies*, p. 36). For guilt enabled one to test his courage and more fully understand his relationships to social norms and thus society. "Each time guilt was successfully defied, one had learned a little more about the contractual relation of one's own existence to the unheard thunders of the deep . . ." (*Armies*, p. 36). Guilt gave one a sense of primitive forces; it posed the dialectic between society and the soul of the individual man.

Mailer is particularly concerned with the youth's awareness of guilt or their lack of it. Unless they were sufficiently sensitive to the threat their principles posed to the mass of Americans, particularly their principles on drugs and sex, their political involvement might not have the effect they wished it to have. In *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, for example, he says: "They did not necessarily understand how much their simple presence hurt many good citizens in the secret velvet of the heart—the Hippies and probably the Yippies did not quite recognize the depth of that schizophrenia on which society is built."[13] Mailer's fear is that one cen be

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[13] Norman Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago: An Informal History of the Republic and Democratic Conventions of 1968* (New York: The New American Library, 1968), pp. 140-41. All subsequent references will be cited in the text.

too easily tempted away from struggling with society and struggling within the self; one can too easily "drop out." Since his own personal goal is political—how can one's struggle be turned toward social change—he fears that the youth might be coming closer to the Devil and not God if they do not confront their intellectual and moral heritage. Further, he fears that a rejection by society will simply turn them toward some kind of emotional totalitarianism, some emotional equivalency to the existing society. In *Armies* Mailer articulates his concern this way:

> These mad middle-class children with their lobotomies from sin, their nihilistic embezzlement of all middle-class moral fund, their innocence, their lust for apocalypse, their unbelievable indifference to waste: twenty generations of buried hopes perhaps engaged in their chromosomes, and in the secret inquisitional fires of LSD. It was a devil's drug—designed and leave them liver-wasted, weeds of the big city. (*Armies*, p. 47).

To Mailer it was Lowell who best understood the imperative of self-control for the continual struggle for the self and against the debilitating demands of society.

> The hollows in his cheeks give a hint of the hanging judge. Lowell is of a good weight, not too heavy, not too light, but the hollows speak of the great Puritan gloom in which the country was founded—man was simply not good enough for God. (*Armies*, p. 45)

Lowell could maintain the reserve and dignity needed to elevate the meeting at the theater two days before the march and capture the audience. Lowell also could understand the inadequacies of the audience and the place to deal fully with the moral issues which the march called forth. Mailer describes the electronics system in the theater as the "sound of a cerebral mastication from some horror machine of Outer Space . . . then a hum like the squeak in the hinges of the gates of Hell . . . odysseys from the dead brain cells of adolescent trysts with LSD . . . the media is the message, and the

message is purple, speaks of the monarchies of Heaven, madness of God . . ." (*Armies*, p. 46). He is looking at the audience and the theater through Lowell's eyes and he sees the validity of Lowell's silent condemnation of the proceedings.

Yet he is also upset at Lowell's silent condemnation of him for his antics in attempting to focus on the moral issues of the march. He is upset because he believes that he has been true to his own style, something he thinks Lowell should appreciate. Lowell has not been sufficiently sensitive to the guilt which Mailer is laboring under and to his efforts to challenge the audience to face their inner emotions also. He writes about Lowell and himself:

> . . . [T]he only subject we share, you and I, is that species of perception which shows that if most exigent inner light, then some day we may burn. How dare you condemn me! You know the diseases which inhabit the audience in this accursed psychedelic house. How dare you scorn the explosive I employ? (*Armies*, p. 45)

In *Chicago*, Eugene McCarthy plays the same role Lowell plays in *Armies*, only this time with a more dignified Mailer, a Mailer who has become clearer about his role in the on-going revolution of morals in society, a Mailer who appreciates even more the significance of guilt and being true to the self in the jungle of politics. McCarthy, like Lowell, represented the saint. Neither would force his own person on others—"as if the first desires of the Devil might be to make you the instrument of your own will"; and both insisted on remaining true to their own conception of themselves—"God would judge the importance of the event, not man, and God would give the tongue to speak, if tongue was the organ to be manifested" (*Chicago*, pp. 119-20). McCarthy was a man distrustful of the Romantic impulse and hence a challenge and source of fascination to Mailer.

> Man was not his own project, not his own creation to be flung across the void in the hope that a thread of gray matter he might be carrying would end as a bridge right over the abyss, no,

> man was probably damned and where not damned, a damn fool, and so must always distrust the boldest and most adventurous of his own impulses. The central requirement was to remember that all the filth and all the mess of all the world had come from men extending themselves further than their means, marshalling emotions they did not quite feel, pushing the stuff of the heart into theatrical patterns which sought to manipulate others . . . (*Chicago*, p. 120)

The challenge for Mailer in McCarthy's philosophy is obvious: how does one distinguish between the forces of the gods and the forces of one's own impulses. Mailer had built his entire career on the assumption that the expression of one's impulses was the only way to discover whether those impulses brought one closer to God or not. Now the problem inherent in such a program was coming home to roost: does not a total dependence upon the self lead to nihilism?

One possible solution to this problem lay in the symbols one chose to define the search for the self and the search for God. McCarthy, for example, had chosen to oppose the Johnson administration and that was a significant symbol for Mailer, demonstrating that McCarthy, for all his anti-Romantic impulses, was also a Romantic, was also willing to build "a bridge right over the abyss," and at least follow for a time "the boldest and most adventurous of his own impulses." The battle for a plot of land in Lincoln Park, however, was quite another matter. What were the connections between the war in Vietnam and the war with the Chicago police? The siege of Chicago was not the march on the Pentagon.

> The justifications of the March on the Pentagon were not here. The reporter was a literary man—symbol had the power to push him into actions more heroic than himself. The fact that he had been marching to demonstrate against a building which was the living symbol of everything he most despised—the military-industrial complex of the land—had worked to fortify his steps. The symbol of the Pentagon had been a chalice to hold his fear; in such circumstances his fear had even flavored his courage with the sweetest emotions of battle.

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

Mailer begins to struggle in these two works with a Romanticism in himself which he suspects is too precipitate. He explains his dilemma not only through his descriptions of the style of Lowell and McCarthy but also through a discussion on what he learned about writing from Dwight Macdonald. It was Macdonald, he explains in *Armies*, who had given him the most important lessons he had ever learned about writing: "look to the feel of the phenomenon" (*Armies*, p. 37). If a writer is concerned with ideology, as Mailer is, it is still not sufficient to articulate such ideology only through "the substance of one's ideas." The better way to get at the "feel of the phenomenon," to discover the mysteries of an event, to understand the soul of society and the relationship between that soul and one's own soul is through "the style of one's attack." The problem in depending upon the style of one's attack is that the romantic falls into the assumption "that everyone understands exactly what he is about to do." Such an assumption is the problem Mailer sees in the actions of the youth in Chicago. In fact, not only does the public not understand the actions of the youth, the youth themselves might not understand their own actions. Yet Mailer sees "a gloomy hope" in the "children" just because they are willing to confront dread, because they are willing to live with the unknown, they are willing to live in an existential relationship to time.

The "children" are travelling between the edges of Heaven and the edges of Hell, in Mailer's metaphysical term. They are beginning to recognize that they must search for God, and not just while on LSD trips. It is the children, therefore, who are the new politicians; they are the existential heroes, the agents of the new politics. It is fitting, given these themes, that Mailer should, in *Armies*, give an apology for his egotism. He is, of course, not really talking about egotism so much as he is talking about the willingness (and, perhaps, ability) to commit

one's soul to battling the ultimate forces of the universe. To be able to make such a commitment demands egotism of the greatest proportions. He explains his position in a description of the symbolic nature of the battle against the Pentagon, a symbolic fortress. In a world that seemed, in moral terms, to become increasingly absurd, where armies of children recited incantations against "the crazy house of history" (the Pentagon), it was necessary that one depends upon oneself and one's own vision of history. Yet the danger of such egotism, as he pointed out in his descriptions of Lowell and McCarthy, is that in depending upon oneself one ends up the struggle for ultimate truths and the search for the gods.

The alternative to such an egotism which protects one against dread and the unknown is pride and humility, as exhibited by the men who turned the draft cards in before the Department of Justice. As Mailer watches these men, he feels growing, in the midst of his egotism, a modesty, and with the modesty a kind of gloom, for he begins to recognize that one's actions could not always lead to the pleasures of eccentricity, but could just as easily, and in the circumstances of the march or the siege even more easily, lead to a profound disruption of his life. He is, in other words, fighting with his own variation of dread, the dread that comes from the uncertainty of one's role in the actions he is witnessing, the sense that he is dispensable. He realizes as he drifts down through the nether reaches of his guilt, that he must take some action—he must get arrested at the Pentagon or he must lead the delegates in a march—and he must risk danger and even death if he is to retain any right to continue as a spokesman for his own philosophies.

This acquisition of modesty is significant when seen in relationship to the style of the legions of the hippies and radical New Left youth who participated in the March and in the battle against the police in Chicago. The youth believed in action first and logic next:

> . . . [Y]ou created the revolution first and learned from it, learned

> of what your revolution might consist and where it might go out of the intimate truth of the way it presented itself of your experience. Just as the truth of his material was revealed to a good writer by the cutting edge of his style . . . so a revolutionary began to uncover the nature of his true situation by trying to ride the beast of his revolution. . . . The aesthetic of the New Left now therefore began with the notion that the authority could not comprehend nor contain nor finally manage to control any political action whose end was unknown. (*Chicago*, p. 104)

What this meant for Mailer was that he must accept the symbolic action of the March and, more significantly, the symbolic action of the siege as the key to its significance; he must accept the criteria of the New Left and follow its lead. He must be the prophet who is led by his followers; he must be the soul which struggles to find a new form if it is to stay alive and continue to have a function. This means, finally, that modesty must replace egotism. So it is that Mailer allows himself to get arrested at the Pentagon, and comes down from his observation tower in Chicago.

But Mailer must take one final step before he can understand his new relationship to himself and his new relationship to his country. He must move beyond the symbolic into the physical, the actual, the real. For Mailer the psychic world is only meaningful as long as it is in parallel with the physical world of the human being; the soul can function only as long as it can find a physical form in which to function. A pure world of ideas is as vast as abyss to Mailer as the black pits of dread. In *Armies* Mailer makes a connection between his search for his soul, the soul of America and the soul of his wife. He says that the search for love incorporates all the characteristics of the search for the individual soul, and the search for the individual soul is equivalent to the search for the soul of America. It is in his connection between the search for love—love of self, love of his wife and love of America—that Mailer most explicitly articulates the existential theory of politics.

The opening events at the Pentagon focused, appropriately for Mailer's metaphysics, on the exorcism of hatred, evil and death from the Pentagon and the infusion of love, God and life. A flier passed out to those assembled included the following:

> We Freemen, of all colors of the spectrum, in the name of God [followed by the various names of God in about twenty-five religions] . . . do exorcise and cast out the Evil which has walled and captured the pentacle of power and perverted its use to the need of the total machine. . . . We are demanding that the pentacle of power once agian be used to serve the interests of God manifest in the world as man. (*Armies*, pp. 139-40)

A grope-in was called for:

> For the first time in the history of the Pentagon there will be a grope-in within a hundred feet of this place, within two hundred feet. Seminal culmination in the spirit of peace and brotherhood, a real grope for peace. All of you who want to protect this rite of love may form a circle of protection around the lovers. (*Armies*, p. 141)

For Mailer this event revealed that the youth understood as well as he the pervasiveness of evil, of witches, in high places. That they might have seen their visions out on trips of LSD was no longer of consequence—"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" (*Armies*, p. 142). The point was that they had gotten close to the sources of power in the universe. They believed that the human soul, the repository of God on earth, was being destroyed by "all the TNT and nuclear transcendencies of TNT." Man had taken on the role of the Gods; he had tampered with nature, and sought the mysteries of energy and life. He had blasphemed and transgressed the final taboo. Thus man had cut himself off from the past and rejected his primitive awe of his relationship to nature. He had embarked on voyages of madness.

The hippies knew this, Mailer decided, probably because they had taken those trips of madness through the agency of their drugs. They knew that when man separated himself from the past, when man sought to hold the key to life and death, he would end by destroying all life.

> . . . Was the past being consumed by the present? By nuclear blasts into the collective living brain by way of all exploding acids, opiums, whiskies, speeds, and dopes?—the past was palpable to him, a tissue living in the tangible mansions of death, and death was disappearing, death was wasting of some incurable ill. When death disappeared, there would be no life. (*Armies*, p. 142)

Mailer recognized the symptoms of this knowledge—the knowledge of the mysterious forces of the universe which could not be tampered with without the risk of self-destruction. There were those generative forces which resided in the bodies of women and to which men were perpetually drawn either to be reborn or to die. Those forces could be focused on the consumption of the male, hence the forces of witches that primitive men accepted but that modern, scientific, rational men tried to regulate and dominate. So it was the modern man who was weaning himself away from the confrontation with the self.

> . . . Mailer had made his lonely odyssey into the land of the witches, it had taken him through three divorces and four wives to decide that some female phenomena could be explained by no hypothesis less thoroughgoing than the absolute existence of witches. (*Armies*, p. 143)

The youth saw what he saw: that there were "no easy visions of heaven, no, now the witches were here, and rites of exorcism, and black terrors of the night . . ." (*Armies*, p. 143).

In *Chicago* Mailer describes the hippies and Yippies caught in the schizophrenia of American society. They were trying to create a community built on a simple principle: "[E]verybody, obviously, must be allowed to do . . . his own thing, provided

he hurt no one doing it . . ." (*Chicago*, p. 140). Yet they were to learn "that society is built on many people hurting many people, it is just who does the hurting which is forever in dispute." They had a vision for society, and it was a vision of liberation. But they did not recognize that "a vision . . . was nonetheless equal to straight madness for the Average Good American" because it challenged the elaborate defenses which people had created to protect themselves against the conflicts raging within them.

> Yippies, even McCarthyites, represented nothing less by their presence than the destruction of every saving hypocrisy with consequent collision for oneself—it is not so easy to live every day of your life holding up the wall of your own sanity. (*Chicago*, p. 141)

Mailer is here, as usual, describing not just some abstract "Average Good American," but himself. As he was in *Armies*, he is challenged and threatened by the new revolutionary movement. He knows that it will bring violence because it was designed to batter away at the most vulnerable parts of the walls which Americans had built around themselves. But he also knows that such violence might be a moral necessity; it might be the only way to purge America of its decay, its disease.

Mailer's biggest problem is his fear: he did not want to disrupt his life to join in a revolution he was not sure of "the fine balance he might have achieved between the satisfaction of idealism and the satisfaction of need (call it greed) would be disrupted altogether . . ." (*Chicago*, p. 188). On the other hand, if he refused to respond to the challenge of the times, then "his life was equally spoiled, and on the poorer side." He could not live with an impure conscience. But where were his loyalties—"to the revolution or to the stability of the country (at some painful personal price it could be suggested)?"

> And the most powerful irony for himself is that he had lived for a dozen empty hopeless years after the second world war with

> the bitterness, rage, and potential militancy of a real revolutionary, he had had some influence perhaps upon this generation of Yippies now in the street, but no revolution had arisen in the years when he was ready—the timing of his soul was apocalyptically maladroit. (*Chicago*, p. 188)

The only suitable personal analogy for Mailer deal with this dilemma is the love relationship, and it is significant that he saw the hippies and even the Yippies operating in the same terms. This analogy is clearest in *Armies* when he describes his thoughts after calling his wife from jail. He says that the individual understands his relationship with his culture by the style with which he relates to that culture. This is true both for a relationship with a country and a relationship with a wife: "If one disclosed what one knew of a subject by the cutting edge of the style employed, so one appropriated a culture with a wife, at least so far as one loved a wife . . ." (*Armies*, p. 192). What distressed him in his relationship with his fourth wife, whose background was more traditionally American, unlike his other wives, was that they were in many ways strangers to each other. "It infuriated him. . . . To live four years with a woman and not be able to decide if her final nature was good or evil." For Mailer the key to his relationship with America was in its parallel to his relationship with his wife:

> It was not inconceivable to him that if he finally came to believe his wife was not nearly so magical as he could make her, but was in fact petty, stingy, small-minded and evilly stubborn (which is what he told her in many a quarrel) why then he would finally lose some part of his love affair with America. . . . No, the trick was merely to never lose sight of his fourth wife's absolutely unquenchable even unendurable individuality. Let him treat her as a symbol, and he was out of it—which is why perhaps she was so American. (*Armies*, pp. 193-94)

Mailer is saying that relationships with a country must be built on relationships with individuals in that country. His relationships, for example, with people he met during the course of

the events of the march and surrounding the march he saw in terms of his relationships with his wife and his in-laws. He made every effort to relate to strangers as people he should get to know, and because of this he was able to get along with them. He might not always like them, but he must not hate them "because they were Southerners" (*Armies*, p. 94).

> Rather he brooded over them, as his in-laws were perhaps brooding now about him. It would prove a horror beyond measurable horror if the country slid into disaster with a hundred small civil wars, and on excess of internal good will. (*Armies*, p. 194)

In *Chicago* he calls upon similar emotions in his speech before the hippies, and he was cheered. He says that the horror and tragedy of Daley and Johnson is that they were giants who ended as beasts. They were men with great power, but much of that power was used for destruction. The fundamental problem in the world, he goes on to say, is that "all over the world are leaders who have ended as beasts; there is a beastliness in the marrow of the century . . ." (*Armies*, p. 194). Thus he asks the people listening to him to "have a moment of sorrow for Mayor Daley," which is the statement which brought forth the cheers "out of good spirit and some crazy good temper as if Mayor Daley was beautiful, he had given them all this—what a great king of the pigs!" It is such personal relationships, such purposeful confrontations with individuals that are greatly emphasized in Mailer's existential politics. For in these confrontations the individuals call forth their most deep-seated prejudices, beliefs, and personalities. The beauty of these confrontations and the people engaged in them lies in honest expression of feelings and clarity of political forces.

Mailer uses one more analogy in *Armies* to explain the personal love relationship: it is the analogy to the love of Christ. When he is released from jail he gives a speech to the press in which he states that "the loveliest thing about my dear wife is her unspoken love for Jesus Christ." This love he saw as a

psychic phenomenon:

> . . . Some old pagan spirit of her part Swedish blood must have carried Christ through all the Southern exposures of her mixed part Indian blood, crazy American lass, one-time mouther of commercials on television, mother of his two—would they be mighty?—boys, angel or witch, she had a presence like silver, she was on all nights of the full moon near to mad, unexpected quixotic depths of compassion. . . . (*Armies*, p. 239)

Mailer sees in this love for Chirst the essence of human relationships: compassion. The evil of the times lay in its lack of compassion, in the unwillingness of people to work toward complex relationships with each other, to seek out each other's souls. Even if people are ideological enemies, where there is compassion the country will survive. When people become beasts, when they cease relating to each other as human beings, however, the plague is advanced and individuality is further lost. This is the tragedy of Vietnam, and this is the reason that those opposed to the war must continue to oppose it, even at great personal sacrifice: they must, by longer jail sentences and more extensive acts of love, protect the compassion of America.

> You see, dear fellow Americans, it is Sunday, and we are burning the body and blood of Christ in Vietnam. Yes, we are burning him there, and as we do, we destroy the foundation of this Republic, which is its love and trust in Christ. (*Armies*, p. 239)

What Mailer is exploring in these last two works of the sixties are the layers of the actual and symbolic, the physical and the psychic. The march and the siege have been combinations of these, and what Mailer sees is that his own life, both in his love of his wife and his sense of his role as novelist and as prophet, is also a combination of these. The madness that is everywhere present in the march, in the siege, and in American life in general is continually being changed and, at times, even controlled by the compassion that is also characteristically American. The violence of America is always

being assuaged by her guilt. The evil is always being overcome by self-sacrifice. The hope for America as a great civilization, about which Mailer is writing here as well as elsewhere, is a love affair that Americans carry on with their country. As in any love affair, each soul is trying to find the form of the other soul so that the two can merge and become one. But each soul is also both good and evil and so must find the means to overcome the evil and establish the good. The violence that results from such an effort always endangers both the relationship and the lives of the souls.

What Mailer wants is not a smooth and simple path to beauty or to love. If such a path were possible, and he believes that it is not, he would reject it. Love is only as beautiful as it is complex. It must fight through all levels of hatred and violence before it can blossom. Love which has not faced the dread of the abyss and the challenge of death cannot be a mature love. Love which has not served its time in the torture chambers of Hell cannot ascend. Love which does not have the tinctures of madness must be colorless. If America is founded on the love and trust in Christ, then America can survive only so long as it is willing to see that love is finally a willing slef-sacrifice, a return to God. To make such sacrifices takes phenomenal courage, just as to love truly takes phenomenal courage, but Americans must accept the challenge for it is the only way to survival.

Mailer is continually saying that he is not sure he has the courage, for he has known what he must do for a long time and still he has not been able to do it. The task calls for an existential politician who confronts people with moral and existential problems. He hopes that he can be such a politician. However, whether Mailer can ever fulfill his hope that he can truly serve his country or whether his work must be seen finally as one man's personal struggle and his efforts to understand himself in some social and historical context is still an open question. But Mailer does see hope in the power emerging among the youth of America in the late sixties. Their willingness to test themselves through drugs, sex, and con-

frontation with the Establishment is exemplary of the courage he sees necessary to become totally human. They live in the midst of the dialectical struggle between absolute forces; they seem willing to face death. For Mailer this means that they might be more capable of compassion than the rest of society, and if they are, then their power will eventually reside in a vision of life based on a perpetual advance into the unknown, paralleled by a continual search for the self. They will define themselves as they go, gathering new energy with each courageous action. Thus Mailer's theory of existential politics will be successfully materialized.

梅勒存在主義政治觀之研究

田　維　新

摘　要

美國當代名作家諾曼・梅勒於六十年代十年間共計出版七部作品。除了兩部小說外，其餘五本均爲散文集。這五本散文集分別是：**宣揚自己，論美國總統，食人者與基督徒，夜軍**及**遶阿密與圍攻芝加哥**。

這五本散文集，有的記述梅勒自己奮鬪成爲作家的經過，有的講述他對美國總統的看法，有的記述他參加在美國國防部五角大厦所舉行的反越戰示威遊行的情形。最後一本**遶阿密與圍攻芝加哥**則記述一九六八年美國民主與共和兩黨開大會推選總統候選人的情形。

貫穿這五本散文集的重要主題，就是梅勒個人獨創的一種存在主義政治觀。這是本論文討論分析的重點。當時梅勒認爲美國社會受到一種極權主義的侵蝕。他所謂的極權主義的侵蝕，就是現代物質文明對人類不知不覺的侵蝕以及平庸的民主制度的氾濫。人因而變成了表現集體意識的大衆人，不再具有獨立自主的個人意識，爲了求取安全而犧牲了自我生存的本質。

梅勒認爲要改變這種現象，必須提倡極端的個人主義，要求每個人在意識形態上產生革命性的改變。他深思熟慮之後認爲，五十年代至六十年代之間求奇求異的「赫普斯特」這類人，最能代表他所說的美國存在主義思想。這類人生活在法律的邊緣，生活在美國的地下社會，生活在死亡的邊緣，因爲他們隨時都有犯罪及訴諸暴力的傾向。但是這類人最能表現自我，依據自己的直覺本能生活，表現個人的獨特個性。他們或許是黑人，或許是士兵、吸毒者、妓女、演員或是犯罪的精神病患，却是最能表現個

人生活力的人。以他們的活力可以消除美國社會的呆滯、麻木，可以使一般美國個人的生命力復活。雖然「赫普斯特」這類人有破壞的力量，有製造動亂的可能，但他們富有創造力，同時表現於外的暴力勝於表現於內的暴力，能以個人暴力行爲抵制扼殺社會活力的極權控制。

梅勒所提倡的這種美國存在主義的思想，不僅是存在主義哲學觀念的表現，也是一種存在主義政治思想的表現。因爲他們所提倡的行爲表現是一種對政治環境的挑戰，同時還要在這種政治環境中求生存。在六十年代出版的這五本散文集中，梅勒急欲表達的就是這種具有存在主義思想的政治理論。