FROM FICTION TO FACT: THE LITERARY DEVELOPMENT OF NORMAN MAILER

by

LAWRENCE SHERWOOD CAMPBELL

B.A., University of British Columbia, 1969

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of

English

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September, 1975
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Head of my Department or by his representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of **ENGLISH**

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, Canada

Date **OCTOBER 8, 1975**.
The thesis concerns the development of Norman Mailer's work, focusing particularly upon the nature and significance of his change in form, from novel to compilation to journalism, from fiction to fact. The argument is that the movement from one form or category to another represents an attempt to solve problems inherent in the previous form. The problem that initiates and underlies his entire evolution might be stated crudely as that of reconciling "reality" and "meaning" in a single work, though these terms should be understood as abstractions whose actual definition varies with different works.

This desired reconciliation, it is argued, is not attained in the novels. Mailer goes through three general phases, however, in attempting to bring it about: his first novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, is limited by its naturalist format to a depersonalized, omniscient depiction of a seamless reality, alien to human value or meaning; his second phase, represented by *The Deer Park*, tries to correct this limitation by introducing a peripheral narrator, with the result, however, that meaning (or the potential for meaning) and reality appear as balanced but separate and mutually irrelevent terms; and his third phase, represented by *An American Dream*, virtually abandons the real world altogether, devolving into a private realm of meaning centred about a hero-narrator. Mailer's fiction is seemingly caught in a bind where meaning and reality appear as opposing
terms, so that the pursuit of one requires the relinquishment of the other.

With _Advertisements for Myself_, however, published prior to _An American Dream_, his development branches in a direction that allows escape from this trap. This is the first of the "compilations", unique and self-contained forms consisting of a double level: a collection of earlier writings and a unifying, interlaced commentary. While relieving Mailer from the imaginative burdens of fiction, they provide a display for a scattered variety of alternate forms and styles, including the later journalism. More importantly, they present the construction and elaboration of a Mailer persona, the embodiment of a kind of Mailer-myth, and a potential hero who provides a basis for an eventual synthesis of reality and meaning. But the compilation itself is a transitional form, becoming obsolete as the persona becomes stabilized and the gap between its two levels vanishes.

After this gestation period, Mailer achieves his greatest success to date with _The Armies of the Night_. Here, meaning derives explicitly from the "Mailer" character constructed in the compilations, rather than implicitly from a fictional narrative; and reality is secured simply through the reporting rather than through a mimetic realism. Mailer's fundamental problem of fusing reality and meaning is solved in this work (and to a lesser extent in his subsequent journalism) by means of a symbiosis of history and persona. The later journalism,
however, exhibits a growing rigidity, as the Mailer persona becomes stereotyped and increasingly divorced from his subject, meaning divorced from reality.
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1 The Naked and the Dead</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2 Barbary Shore and The Deer Park</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 An American Dream and Why Are We In Vietnam?</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 Advertisements for Myself and the Compilations</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5 The Armies of the Night and the Journalism</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footnotes</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Norman Mailer has always considered himself primarily a novelist. "... I wouldn't want ever to be caught justifying journalism as a major activity (it's obviously less interesting than to write a novel)", he told an interviewer in 1964. Yet, in the twenty-six years of his literary career, he has written only five novels, and only the first of these has received unmixed acclaim. The rest of his published works have taken a variety of forms—a book of poetry, a play, a film script—but since the publication of his last novel to date they have been almost exclusively journalism; and the irony of this change is deepened by the fact that it is Mailer's journalism that is principally responsible for the great improvement in his reputation. Despite his own intentions, therefore, Mailer's development represents a curious reversal of the more traditional process by which reporters grow into novelists (as exemplified by his own mentor, Hemingway). It is the purpose of this thesis to investigate such an unusual evolution through a study of certain of Mailer's works, seeking to isolate at key points the literary forces, tensions, and tendencies that are its causal factors.

That this is an examination of a literary development, and not merely of selected autonomous works, should be emphasized. The works that are studied are therefore not necessarily Mailer's best—rather, attention is concentrated on those that mark the significant phases of his career. Three of these books, discussed in the first three chapters, are novels---The Naked and
the Dead, The Deer Park, and An American Dream; the apparently disproportionate amount of space devoted to a form that Mailer eventually seems to leave behind is a consequence of the fact that he himself (however mistakenly) places so much value upon the novel as an ideal, and it is in his various attempts to make that ideal concrete that one can trace the origins of the problems and contradictions that are at the basis of his entire development. The fourth chapter focuses on the pivotal work of Mailer's career, Advertisements for Myself, a book that is of a unique though unstable form itself, and which begins his movement toward the journalism of his maturity. And the fifth chapter discusses the first and best example of that later journalism, The Armies of the Night.

These five books constitute the principle markers of Mailer's literary development. With the exception of the last, perhaps, they tend to be imperfect, spoiled, unbalanced, or unfinished, yet usually charged with a kind of potential energy that is the source of Mailer's power as a writer. This peculiar combination of strength and weakness, frequently troubling to critics, can be explained by the same quality that makes it difficult to study his works as separate entities: Mailer's writings, as he himself states in the Introduction to Cannibals and Christians, "are parts of a continuing and more or less comprehensive vision of existence into which everything must fit". It is this totalizing consciousness that not only allows but requires the
consideration of his work as a development, as a progressive series of struggles to give literary form to a vision that is itself undergoing evolutionary change.
Chapter 1  The Naked and the Dead

The key question to ask of this first novel, in any study of Mailer's development, is why it is unique among his works. It was an immediate and enormous success, both popularly and critically. Alfred Kazin, for example, regards it as "still the only one of Mailer's novels that continually reads like a novel that is stable in conception." Why, then, did Mailer not continue to write novels of the kind he had seemingly established with his first? He himself has told of his refusal to return merely to the subject-matter of The Naked and the Dead, but that hardly explains his abandonment of its very form or type. It is an insufficient explanation, that is, unless one supposes that the form itself is in some way an obstacle, that it contains certain inherent limitations that render it incapable of giving expression to new-found visions and ambitions. The question of the uniqueness of Mailer's first novel involves the broader question of the initiating impulse behind the whole of his development, the question of the origin of those literary forces and strains that have sustained his often risk-filled quest for new forms.

To answer these questions it is first necessary to examine the form or type of The Naked and the Dead itself, so as to understand more precisely what it is that Mailer is rejecting. If we begin, conveniently, at the beginning, we notice only a
short and simple opening paragraph; it is interesting simply in that Mailer chooses not to begin in media res, with dialogue or specific description, but rather with a fairly abstract and objective statement. Like the establishing shot in film, this first paragraph is a means of quickly situating the story in space, time, and mood. The following two paragraphs, separated from the first by a textual gap, are then obviously designed to illustrate that mood; the first sentence had stated that "Nobody could sleep", and now, like the cut from a long shot to a close-up, we are shown the anonymous case of one of those sleepless soldiers, his simple efforts to get to a toilet told in a dramatic present tense. Then, with another break in the text, the novel cuts to a scene of men playing poker elsewhere aboard the same troop ship the night before the landing. Here, for the first time, we are provided with names, descriptions, and brief characterizations. Wilson, Gallagher, and Staff Sergeant Croft are introduced in turn (though not, it is interesting, the two other men who will play no further role in the novel), along with just enough of their thoughts and feelings to distinguish each as a separate personality. The poker game itself functions as little more than a frame upon which to hang the character portraits, but its climax provides an almost textbook example of foreshadowing: Sergeant Croft receives a sudden intuition that he is going to win ("Croft didn't question it. A certainty as vivid as this one had to mean something.")³, but he is wrong and loses; his mistake
here obviously presages his more momentous defeat at the end, and is the first instance of the sort of ironic reversal that is common in the novel. Yet, apart from this literary relationship, the scene is essentially an isolated vignette, without further consequence in the action of the book.

Enough has been said about the writing to allow some preliminary generalizations. Firstly, there is the matter of the cinematic analogy in the discussion of these opening segments. This is not merely a result of their juxtaposition, like the edited sequences of a film, but of their depersonalized narrative tone; they seem not to be "told", in other words, but rather, in some objective fashion, simply recorded, like the pictures of a camera. Yet, unlike the rigidly externalized "camera-eye" narration, the recording instrument behind these scenes is omniscient, potentially able to provide an unmediated, shadowless vision of every thought, every emotion, and the consequences of every deed. The result of such an overviewing narration (one can hardly speak of a "point" of view) is that an air of determinism enters the novel from its early pages, an antidramatic implication that its course is predestined, and all that remains is a methodical working-out through the display and exemplification of its material.

A second general observation concerns precisely the degree of "method" involved in these segments, the evidence of a very deliberate and organized composition. They are arranged, for example, in a clear sequence from abstract statement, to
representative detail, to fully developed illustration. Within the segments, as well, one finds an orderly arrangement of material; the principle characters are presented as they play their cards before the scene moves to its contrived anti-climax. The very use of a scene, in fact, as no more than a frame for such devices as characterization or foreshadowing argues a high degree of technical calculation, and this is a quality manifested throughout the novel, as Mailer himself later admitted: "I studied engineering at Harvard, and I suppose it was the book of a young engineer. The structure is sturdy, but there's no fine filigree to the joints. Just spot welding and riveting."\(^4\) The consequence of such a compositional method, combined with the depersonalized omniscient narration, is that the novel tends to appear somewhat arbitrary as a whole; its natural units are the individual segments and scenes which are simply added to one another like a pile of blocks to produce a totality that may be ingenious but is nonetheless mechanical.

Certainly, neither of these general characteristics are extraordinary, but they may suffice to provide an indication of the type of this novel, as well as some idea of its inherent limitations. Consider the following passage, for example, in the light of what has been said of *The Naked and the Dead*:

The composition consists of the assemblage of all the important details as seen from various points of view. The result is a series of static pictures, of still lives connected only through the relations of objects arrayed one beside the other according to their own
inner logic, never following one from the other, certainly never one out of the other. The so-called action is only a thread on which the still lives are disposed in a superficial, ineffective fortuitous sequence of isolated, static pictures. What might seem an apposite summary of Mailer's first novel is in fact a piece from an essay by Georg Lukács in which he sets out those aspects of "naturalism" that contrast with "realism". Of course, one does not need Lukács to classify this work as naturalist—Mailer himself admits to that label, albeit reluctantly:

"That terrible word 'naturalism'. It was my literary heritage—the things I learned from Dos Passos and Farrell. I took naturally to it, that's the way one wrote a book."  

Still, Lukács' contentious but trenchant generalizations give significant insight into those features of the naturalist novel that limit or channel its vision. For him, naturalism constitutes a decadent usurpation of the legitimate line of epic narration by a "descriptive" mode of fiction:

In description men's qualities exist side by side and are so represented; they do not interpenetrate or reciprocally effect each other so as to reveal the vital unity of personality within varied manifestations and amidst contradictory actions.

In this type of novel, therefore, "A character appears as a finished 'product' perhaps composed of varied social and natural elements"—an observation that pertains especially to Mailer's use of a Dos Passos-like interpolation, "The Time Machine", to provide his characters with a sketchy, explanatory past.
Lukács' views on naturalism are interesting for one of the very reasons that make them controversial—they go to the root of the phenomenon. He does not see Mailer's "literary heritage" as simply one brand of realism among many, nor does he define it in terms of some superficial characteristic such as determinism or sordid subject-matter; rather, these often-noted features are derived from deeply based metaphysical and epistemological assumptions. Perhaps the keystone of his critique is the idea that naturalism is but one strand of the modern split between subjective and objective, between "inner" and "outer" worlds, so that

It makes little difference whether the multidimensionality of the outer and inner worlds or of their uninterrupted interaction is reduced ultimately to an internalized monotonous stream of associations in monologue or whether an autonomous external, self-sufficient world emerges in the trend toward lifeless objectivism, a world which can have no relation to men and with which they can have nothing in common, where every meaningful interaction between an individual's inner life and his environment is precluded by the very mode of representation.9

(It is this "single-dimensional" objectification of human existence that eliminates the conscious, decisive quality of will, thus giving rise to naturalism's characteristic determinism, its reliance upon cause and chance as its motivating principles.)

Lukács' criticism is clearly related to Mailer's first novel, and the passage quoted above—most especially its last clause—deserves particular emphasis, for it contains a
possible answer to the question posed at the beginning of this study: Mailer abandons the heritage that had given him his first and greatest success because its "very mode of representation" precludes the expression of genuine, integrated human struggle. The entire dichotomy between subjective and objective has a deep and lasting significance throughout Mailer's career, which in many ways can be seen as a search for a hero with which to heal that divide.

At this point, however, Lukács' relevance is only somewhat tentative and abstract. His comments on specific works tend to be more concrete and judicious than his occasionally sweeping attacks upon the naturalist tradition generally, and he has in fact singled out *The Naked and the Dead* for special commendation, given the "existing conditions" of its time. He himself, in other words, displays a caution in the application of his larger theories that one would be wise to emulate. With this in mind, and within the context that his illuminating remarks have provided, we can return to the novel, looking for evidence of his general diagnosis.

For the purposes of this investigation of Mailer's development two aspects of *The Naked and the Dead* deserve special attention since they represent the opposing extremes of weakness and strength not only of this novel but of most of his work. The first has to do with the artificial or mechanical nature of the structure already evident in the opening segments. In fact, this is a quality that pervades the book, from its largest
to its smallest elements. The very choice of war as a subject lends itself to this sort of structural simplification, clear, defined, and stark, by its very nature it provides a ready-made paradigm of human existence. (War, with its attendant imagery, has remained the most common metaphor in all of Mailer's works.) And the author intensifies the paradigmatic quality of his subject by means of fictionalizing as much of his story as possible; rather than set his novel within an historical place and time (as James Jones did in From Here to Eternity), Mailer chooses to invent a South Pacific island, "Anopopei", as the scene for his imaginary invasion which is conducted by a fictional General. The novel is very neatly contained within the limits of this illustrative act of war, opening with a description of the landing (in Part One: "Wave") and closing with some scenes from the "mopping-up" (Part Four: "Wake"). With this model invasion as background, then, the novel focuses upon a representative platoon, establishing its regional and ethnic cross-section of character types by means of interpolated biographical sketches and some scenes of typical military situations (weathering a storm, building a road, moving guns, facing combat, and so on). Indeed, the novel is laid out with an orderliness resembling that of a workshop or laboratory, the characters like specimens, the events like exercises or experiments.12

This plodding deliberateness is a basic characteristic of
the book's structure. Part Two, "Argil and Mold", makes use of a stock ironic contrast between the immediate view of the "ordinary soldiers" of the platoon and the overview of the officers at Headquarters, as trivial decisions at the latter level result in momentous, even fatal, consequences at the former. Only in Part Three, "Plant and Phantom", is the platoon finally sent on the "long patrol" that was the original purpose of the book. Again, Mailer himself gives the best summary of the novel's overall construction:

... the working plan was very simple. I devised some preliminary actions for the platoon in order to give the reader an opportunity to get to know the men, but this beginning ... took over two-thirds of the book. The patrol itself is also simple, but I did give more thought to working it out ahead of time.

The actual novel, of course, is more complex than this "working plan" indicates, but it at least provides evidence of the book's programmatic composition and corresponds to Lukacs' general analysis of naturalism as a "series of static pictures" (a quality best epitomized, again, by the "Time Machine" interruptions). This careful arrangement of material, then, combined with its paradigmatic subject and its fictional removal from the real world, give the novel a manipulative effect that is its greatest weakness. The fundamental problem is that Mailer too often tends to substitute a willed or intellectualized plan for a full fictional creation—a failure of the imagination, perhaps, that manifests itself in a frequent reliance upon the "representative", the "illustrative", or the merely
"average detail.\textsuperscript{15}

The impression of light-weight artificiality conveyed by this construction, however, is counterbalanced by a series of remarkably vivid and concrete scenes in which the detail seems not at all "representative" but exhaustively inclusive. In stark contrast to the structural aridity of the novel, these scenes present a reality that is thick, immediate, and inescapable. Here, for example, is a detail from the long description of the climb up the mountain in Part Three:

In the awful heat of the middle slopes they bogged down. Each time they passed through a draw or a hollow the air seemed to be refracted from the blazing rocks, and after a time their cheek muscles ached from continual squinting. It was a minor pain and should have been lost in the muscle cramps of their thighs, the sullen vicious aching of their backs, but it became the greatest torment of the march. The bright light lanced like splinters into the tender flesh of their eyeballs, danced about the base of their brains in reddened choleric circles. (p. 657)

The "minor pain" of the refracted light is exactly the sort of precise and particular observation that distinguishes these descriptions. (Some other examples are the storm pp.\textsuperscript{[95-102]}, the scene of the old, body-strewn battle field [pp. 210-217], or any one of a number of segments in Part Three on the long patrol.) In their accumulation of objective detail and their relentless focus upon the concrete realities of collective experience, these scenes provide the novel with its weight and substance, and thus, to an extent, redeem the artificiality of its form. Certainly this is the aspect of the book most frequently singled out for praise by critics, though they rarely
give it close attention: John W. Aldridge refers simply to Mailer's "magnificent reportorial sense"; Diana Trilling speaks of "his feeling--unmatched in our time, even by Hemingway in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*--for topography, for the look of the natural scene"; and Norman Podhoretz points to Mailer's "phenomenal talent for recording the precise look and feel of things".

It is difficult to specify just how these passages produce such an impression, for there seems little about them that is out of the ordinary. It is only when one notices their general length that one begins to suspect the effect may be cumulative rather than isolable. Mailer's usual style in this novel is an unobtrusive one, its chief virtue being its lack of affectation, its practical lucidity; but in these long descriptions one senses a subtile note of strain in the language, due in part, perhaps, to its very repetitiousness. This is a sample from a scene of men pulling field guns:

Their feet sank into the deep mud and, after a few yards, their boots were covered with great slabs of muck. The men on the guns would lunge forward for a few feet and then halt, lunge forward and halt. Every ten yards a gun would bog down and the three men assigned to it would have to tug until their strength seeped from their fingers. They would wrestle the gun out of its rut and plunge it forward for fifteen feet before their momentum was lost. Then they would pull it and lift it for another few yards until it sank into a hole once more. (p. 130)

The language here seems to imitate the spasmodic repetition of the activity itself; and one can say in general that these passages are characterized by an incessant return, again and
again, to the actual experience, in all its detail, its minutiae, its variety. There is no attempt to summarize or condense, no effort to present the "meaning" of experience; in fact, though there is an abundance of similes in this style, there are almost no metaphors—as though only the comparison of apparent differences were tolerable, not their identification, even as figure of speech. This is a language, in other words, that is scrupulously of appearance, of the surface. It strains toward experience itself, adhering as closely as words allow to the sensuous texture of feeling (especially under the extremes of fatigue or dread). It is, in a radical sense, therefore, a reportorial language, concerned solely with the phenomenon, not the essence, faithful only to the rich density of reality.

These two aspects, then, can be seen as opposing tendencies in The Naked and the Dead: on the one hand, there is an abstract, intellectualized form; on the other, a purely concrete description. They coexist uneasily in this novel, the form providing a rough container for the description, the description giving substance to the form. But even this coexistence cannot overcome the weaknesses inherent in the naturalist format. Despite their immediacy and their individual excellence, the descriptive scenes clearly are still no more than a "series of tableaux", arbitrarily selected, and patently arranged in a "fortuitous sequence of isolated, static pictures". The very inclusiveness with which they report experience reduced their detail to what Lukacs terms "mere particularity" (as
opposed to the "concrete typicality" of realism, and so, in the end, only exaggerates that divorce between "inner life" and "environment" that constitutes the central flaw of naturalism.

Lukács' general theories, therefore, illuminate this novel (whatever one may think of them in other contexts); but there are certain anomalies in its naturalist fabric that have not been discussed until now because they represent important indications of the direction of Mailer's subsequent development. These centre about the peculiar figure of Staff Sergeant Croft, but extend as well into other areas of the novel, especially the characters of General Cummings and his aide, Lieutenant Hearn. Hearn himself, as a disillusioned liberal intellectual, is a rather expectable figure, but his dialogues with Cummings grant him some share of the latter's stature. Cummings is an altogether more complex personality, both attractive and repellent, as Hearn attests (p. 77). He possesses an "almost unique ability to extend his thoughts into immediate and effective action" (p. 77), a power that, in the course of the novel, is developed to such a degree that he looms as a kind of Satanic embodiment of war, as in these reflections after firing an artillery piece while on inspection:

He dwelt pleasurably in many-webbed layers of complexity. The troops out in the jungle were disposed from the patterns in his mind, and yet at this moment he was living on many levels at
once; in firing the gun he was a part of himself. All the roaring complex of odors and sounds and sights, multiplied and remultiplied by all the guns of the division, was contained in a few cells of his head, the faintest crease of his brain. All of it, all the violence, the dark coordination had sprung from his mind.

Yet Cumhings is discredited in the course of his debates with Hearn, by both his overt fascism and his (trite) homosexuality—traits that allow him to be fixed and categorized finally. The ironically accidental manner in which his "victory" is achieved is only the token of this loss of prestige, and he is last seen reduced to the level of the calculating politician: "In the end the important thing was always to tote up your profit and loss" (p. 717). Hearn is killed during the long patrol when Croft allows him to walk into an ambush, thereby regaining the leadership of the platoon. Essentially, only Croft himself remains an anomaly to the end, silent and mysterious even in his personal defeat.

Croft is unquestionably an extraordinary man, as is apparent from an early account of his behavior under fire: "'But Croft—I tell you Croft loves combat, he loves it. There ain't a worse man you could be under or a better one, depending on how you look at it'" (p. 17). Yet the naturalist novel is able to portray powerful and extraordinary figures, characters embodying an elemental force or drive (London's Wolf Larsen in The Sea Wolf, for example, or Dreiser's Cowperwood in The Financier). What sets Croft apart from the heros of those books and lifts him out of the naturalist tradition is not his strength so much
as his mystery. Like Cummings, his moral nature is radically divided, and he seems both admirable and repulsive, courageous and murderous. "No, but why is Croft that way?" is the rhetorical question asked early in his "Time Machine" segment:

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

One begins to sense a literary strategy at work in this sort of misdirection, as though Croft's nature were being deliberately obscured or mystified in order to distinguish him not merely from the other characters but from his literary context as well. There is no answer to the question of his nature because he is fundamentally inexplicable, and so he alone is shielded from the withering omniscience of the naturalist vision, and is preserved as the enigmatic Other.

At the core of his mystery is an inchoate vision that comes to him at odd moments of crisis or change. We have seen a minor instance of this during the opening poker game:

Somehow, he knew he was going to pull a seven or a ten for a full house. Croft didn't question it. A certainty as vivid as this one had to mean something . . . He had a deep unspoken belief that whatever made things happen was on his side . . . (pp. 8-9)

In its larger dimensions--first seen here when one of his men is killed during the landing--it is almost a mystic experience:

His reaction was similar to the one he had felt at the moment he discovered his wife was unfaithful. At that instant, before his rage and pain had begun to operate, he had felt only a numb throbbing excitement and the knowledge that his life was changed
to some degree and certain things would never be the same. He knew that again now. Hennessey's death had opened to Croft vistas of such impotence that he was afraid to consider it directly. All day the fact hovered about his head, tantalizing him with odd dreams and portents of power.  

(p. 40)

Interestingly, Cummings too is seized by such visions, as in this reaction to his first glimpse, as a young officer, of a massed attack:

There were all those men, and there had been someone above them, ordering them, changing perhaps forever the fibre of their lives. In the darkness he looks blankly at the field, tantalized by the largest vision that has ever entered his soul.  

(p. 415)

The similarity between these expressions is a sign of the deep but implicit link between these characters, and indicates a wider strategy of mystification. But, as we have seen, Cummings' aura of mystery recedes, and Croft alone is left to bear the vision. In Part Three, on the long patrol, that vision acquires an external object or goal in the shape of Mount Anaka, which Croft obsessively determines to climb, regardless of his ostensible mission. At their first sight of it his special nature is emphasized again in the contrast between his reaction and that of another soldier:

Gallagher stared at it in absorption, caught by a sense of beauty he could not express. The idea, the vision he always held of something finer and neater and more beautiful than the moil in which he lived trembled now, pitched almost to a climax of words. There was an instant in which he might have said a little of what he was feeling, but it passed and he was left with a troubled joy, an echo of rapture.  

(p. 447)
Gallagher too seems struck by thoughts beyond the reach of his expression, but his wordlessness seems merely impotent and pathetic; Croft, on the other hand

... was moved as deeply, as fundamentally as caissons resettling in the river mud. The mountain attracted him, taunted and inflamed him with its size ... He stared at it now, examined its ridges, feeling an instinctive desire to climb the mountain and stand on its peak, to know that all its mighty weight was beneath his feet. His emotions were intense; he knew awe and hunger and the peculiar unique ecstasy he had felt after Hennessey was dead, or when he had killed the Japanese prisoner. (p. 447)

Croft's vision is not only stronger than Gallagher's it is different in kind—it possesses the incompleteness of the sign or portent and conveys a promise of some later fulfilment, some ultimate revelation. These passages, in fact, provide almost a model of the contrast between Croft and his naturalist context, for Gallagher's "vision", like virtually everything else in the novel, is easily and condescendingly contained within the panoramic, encompassing overview, whereas Croft's vision, with its wordlessness, suggests the possibility of some truth or meaning that is larger than the novel itself.

The enigmatic, visionary Croft, then, comes as close to being a "hero" as this novel will allow.22 Towards the end, as he and what remains of the platoon near the summit, his isolate will is all that is left to support him, against which is not only the mountain but the recalcitrance of the men and even his own body:

The closer he came to the crest of the mountain the greater became his anxiety. Each new turn of
the staircase demanded an excessive effort of will from him. He had been driving nearer and nearer to the heart of this country for days, and it had a cumulative terror. All the vast alien stretches of land they had crossed had eroded his will, pitched him a little finer. It was an effort, almost palpable, to keep advancing over strange hills and up the flanks of an ancient resisting mountain. (p. 699)

He becomes the protagonist in an archetypal struggle between human purpose and simple physical resistance. In an early interview, Mailer had said that, despite its naturalist heritage, the biggest influence on *The Naked and the Dead* was *Moby Dick*: "'I had Ahab in it, and I suppose the mountain was Moby Dick.'" But Melville's novel comes to a catastrophic conclusion, Ahab's maniacal pursuit ending with him tied in death to his immortal antagonist; Croft's climb, on the other hand, ends absurdly: he stumbles into a hornets' nest on the verge of the summit and, in one of the book's rare humourous scenes, the stinging "bugs" send the platoon fleeing down the slope in a hopeless, final abandonment of the mission. Croft's defeat, therefore, is not tragic but ironic, an accident, a product of the same indifferent, mundane contingency that over-rules the will of each of the human protagonists of this novel. The dominant naturalist vision reasserts itself in the final concatenation of defeat, reversal, death, and loss; Croft only shares in the common fate.

Paradoxically, Croft's defeat is the only means by which the integrity of his vision can be preserved. His final reflections, gazing back at the mountain from the boat returning them to base, are interesting for what they reveal of the
vision's true potentiality:

Croft kept looking at the mountain. He had lost it, had missed some tantalizing revelation of himself. Of himself and much more. Of life. Everything. (p. 709)

Even after his defeat, therefore, the abstract possibility of "some tantalizing revelation" remains; whereas, had Croft actually reached the summit what would have resulted? The revelation would have had to be named, the vision finally put into words, and so become, like Gallagher's, only one more tattered, ersatz "truth" among many, equally valid, equally partial, and equally illusory in the levelling overview of naturalism. Just as his nature is shielded by being mystified, so the special quality of his vision (the heart of his nature) is saved by being lost.

Though he does not alter the basic naturalism of the novel, Croft remains as a warp in its fabric, an indication of a strain or tension that will be of consequence for Mailer's future evolution. The important thing about him, as we have seen, is not the particular nature of his vision but that he has a vision at all; in a sense, he struggles not for any one truth or meaning but for meaning as such, to be asserted in the face of the mute being the world. And his ironic, paradoxical defeat in that struggle is the result, oddly, of the inherent bias of his literary medium, for naturalism necessarily takes the side of the objective, the material, and the contingent. Its problem is that, in attempting to enclose everything within the sweep of its vision, it removes itself too far from the
human scale and loses the human dimension. One might predict, therefore, that Mailer's next phase will be marked by the introduction of a human measure, as a way of restoring the potential for meaning.
In bringing to a focus—and to a climax—both the strengths and the weaknesses of its literary type, *The Naked and the Dead* might be said to constitute, by itself, one phase of Mailer's development as a novelist. One difficulty in trying to establish some pattern to that development is the great variation between each of his novels. Still, despite numerous real differences, certain of these works are similar in ways that suggest they share a common origin, that they are products of a common strategy. The first novel succeeded so well that it both initiated and culminated its particular phase; *Barbary Shore*, on the other hand—a startlingly radical departure from that earlier book in virtually every feature—failed dismally, and so, paradoxically, gave rise to a further attempt at its altered conception of the novel. It is this shared conception that sets apart *Barbary Shore* and *The Deer Park* as the second phase of Mailer's novelistic career.

*Barbary Shore* by itself is simply too spoiled a book to provide much insight into the nature of this conception. Some critics (including Mailer himself) are able to find occasional flashes of hallucinatory brilliance scattered randomly through its pages, but most seem mercifully content to pass over it in silence, a consensus probably based upon Alfred Kazin's brief description of it as a "dark, sand testament of a book, only distractedly a novel". Such a failure might seem somewhat sur-
prising, perhaps, in that it follows so soon upon an immense success, but a little reflection should make it apparent that it is the very existence of that first novel, its powerful reputation looming as an undigestible fact in Mailer's career, that explains a good deal of his miserable performance here. In many ways *Barbary Shore* conforms to a pattern seen in the work of a number of writers, and one to which Mailer alludes when he speaks of himself as "full of second novel panic" prior to its writing. This pattern of a botched second attempt arises from the inhibiting, constipating influence of the initial success, and the entire subject has been discussed at some length by Mailer himself in his numerous self-commentaries. But, apart from these largely biographical excuses, there is, perhaps, a literary reason as well for this ruin of a novel: it testifies to the strength of Mailer's rejection of his naturalist "heritage", at whatever cost. Kazin, as quoted earlier, considers *The Naked and the Dead* to be the only one of Mailer's novels that is "stable in conception", while *Barbary Shore* seems so forced and uneven as to be "only distractedly" a novel at all; one might look upon the extremity of this disparity between two works adjacent to one another in time as both a manifestation and a measure of their divergence in type and inspiration.

Though its poor quality will not repay a close investigation, it is still worth while discussing, very briefly and generally, the particular nature of *Barbary Shore* 's failure, so
as to isolate, in this extreme form, a failure or breakdown that recurs in Mailer's fiction. And a clue to this flaw might be found in the contrast between this novel and the style and type of its predecessor. There are still some fragmentary remnants of Mailer's naturalist "heritage"—the boarding-house locale, perhaps, or the slang-dialects of Guinivere and Hollingsworth—but these touches of lower-class reality are all but lost in the arid verbiage of the book, in the stilted monologues, the strained dialogues of characters clumsily constructed out of some Meccano set of stereotypes and put through a series of artificial encounters in what serves for a plot. In terms of its relationship to the real world Barbary Shore is the polar opposite of The Naked and the Dead. One of the major virtues of the latter novel, as we have seen, is its ability to communicate the sensuous texture of experience—immanent, contingent, concrete, virtually unfiltered by schemes of "meaning" or "value"; here, on the other hand, the physical environment has almost faded out of existence, leaving only an abstract, broken skeleton of words and signs. It is, as one of the characters points out, a tale told by a narcissist,⁶ and its oppressive, often-noted air of claustrophobia derives not from any spatial confinement so much as from an intellectual one, from the sense of entrapment within the boundaries of a disembodied, dematerialized mind.⁷ What is absent in Barbary Shore, in other words, is precisely that which is almost too present in The Naked and the Dead—simple physical detail—and the consequence of this lack (its primary weakness) is that the
novel is without foundation or grounding. Even the political allegory that provides what little substance the story possesses seems baseless, thin, forced, and banal. Towards the end the style itself becomes increasingly strained and distorted, almost hysterical, perhaps an anxious attempt to compensate through rhetoric alone (a kind of Faulknerian elegaic) for the vitiating pointlessness of the whole. *Barbary Shore* is the product of an ambition to create a novel *ex nihilo*, by simple fiat, free of any anchor or root in reality; and so it floats in a curious realm of concoction, best viewed, perhaps, as an experiment, whose failure (just as the first novel's success) establishes a limit for Mailer's further search for a form.

*The Deer Park* moves back from this limit toward a more conventional realism. Published four years later, in 1955, it is an altogether better novel—more structured, stable, and credible, built around a "story" or group of stories involving authentic characters, plausible events, and a physical setting of some density. These are very orthodox virtues, befitting a somewhat chastened ambition. One suspects that, whereas the writing of *Barbary Shore* was done with a hope that the words would still come as fluently as they had for *The Naked and the Dead*, here the writing was a good deal more deliberate and disciplined, as though in reluctant recognition of the simple work involved in a novel. The *Deer Park*, then, might be seen as a regrouping of Mailer's forces on more familiar terrain (to use one his favorite metaphors), but it is not, in any fundamental
sense, a change of strategy—for all the superficial differences between these two novels of the second phase (even including the contrast between allegory and realism), the essential difference is one of degree, not of kind.

What use or interest Barbary Shore possesses, then, so far as this inquiry into the nature of that conception is concerned, lies primarily in those of its features that reappear in The Deer Park, these being the invariant characteristics of this phase. One such unfortunate similarity—to be mentioned only in passing as, perhaps, a symptom of a deeper and more pervasive weakness—is a seeming inability to call things by their proper names. In Barbary Shore, for example, the United States and the Soviet Union are only referred to, collectively, as "the Colossi"; the Soviet Union itself is "the land across the sea"; Marx is "the great man"; Trotsky is variously "a great man who lead us" and "the man with the beard", and so on.\footnote{9} One might suppose, at first, that such circumlocution, however awkward, was made necessary by the requirements of allegory—a "distancing" or universalizing measure (though even as such they seem transparent to the point of coyness). But a similar pattern of euphemism can be found in The Deer Park, where one would have expected the requirements of realism to preclude such usage: thus Palm Springs becomes "Desert D'Or", Hollywood is called "the capital of cinema" or simply "the capital", the House Un-American Activities Committee, a notorious and powerful name, is reduced merely to "the Subversive Committee",\footnote{10} and even the
Oscar, the very epitome of Hollywood tinsel, is blandly renamed "Hercules". In deliberately abandoning the historical connotations of these words Mailer obviously loses a good deal, particularly insofar as the world of this novel is no allegorical microcosm but rather the setting for a realistic narrative, the credibility of which is of some importance. And it is difficult to see how he gains any compensating advantages except those of a negative or defensive nature--these substitutions serve to protect his story from the demands of historical accuracy, providing a licence for his invention. But, though his fiction is thus freed of certain constraints, it has imposed upon itself an enormous, indeed, impossible, burden--the recreation of the entire fabric of reality. With the failure of so hopeless a task the novel is necessarily weakened, its fictional world somewhat patched and threadbare. So, although The Deer Park is a vast improvement upon Barbary Shore, it does not escape some of the afflictions of the earlier book; and the reasons behind this recurring problem (it is similar, in fact, to the use of a fictional island in The Naked and the Dead) are complex and profound, going, I think, to the heart of Mailer's literary quest itself. It is, therefore, too early to attempt to elucidate such reasons themselves; at this point it is sufficient simply to note, and to begin to link together, the various manifestations.

There are, in any case, other and stronger parallels between these novels than their tendency toward a kind of defensive
fictionalization. Perhaps the aspect in which they seem most alike, and most sharply differentiated from the works of Mailer's other phases, is in the character and function of their narrators. Sergius O'Shaugnessy, like the story he tells, may be a more rounded and vivid figure than the insipid Mikey Lovett, but they are not fundamentally different in outline. Both are veterans of war, and both, in one sense or another, have lost their origins (Lovett is an amnesiac, O'Shaugnessy an orphan). Emerging from the background of organized, technological violence that characterizes the twentieth century, they appear initially almost as blank tablets, upon whose passive personalities the events to come may be recorded. Perhaps in compensation for their relative lack of past or purpose, both share an amorphous desire not simply to write, but to be a "writer". Most importantly of all, both occupy a similar position in relation to the stories they narrate—that of an interested bystander. They are primarily observers, in other words, not participants, and their stories are largely of others, not of themselves. They seem, in many ways, to have been modeled upon the character of Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*: both detached and judgmental, their expression often reads like a rather stilted imitation of Fitzgerald's rhetorically retrospective style, striving to attain that Romantic, poetic quality of "emotion recollected in tranquillity". Yet, despite his peripheral status, Nick Carraway plays a far more significant role in *The Great Gatsby*.
than either Lovett or O'Shaugnessy in their respective novels, and the reasons behind this discrepancy may be found to be at the heart of the failure of *The Deer Park* in particular, and of Mailer's second phase in general.

In making so large a claim for the importance of the narrative focus of these novels, especially of *The Deer Park*, it would be well to consider the general notion of "point of view" in fiction as Mailer himself conceives it. He ascribes, to it in fact, as surprising amount of weight, once remarking, in a discussion of this very novel, that "The most powerful leverage in fiction comes from point of view...". This is a statement one might expect more from Henry James (or Percy Lubbock, perhaps) than from Norman Mailer, with whom one does not usually associate much concern with the technique or the "craft" of fiction. But there is a difference in the metaphors chosen to describe and define the importance of this particular technique that is crucial for an understanding of Mailer's position: point of view, for him, is not to be seen as a "window" in the "house of fiction", as a mere vantage point upon the story, but as a lever, a tool with which to work upon his story, a means to an end.

The nature of that end—indeed, the defining objective of this second phase—might be made clear if we recall some of the discussion of the first phase, *The Naked and the Dead*. There, the naturalist form required a narration that was neutral,
omniscient, and depersonalized, thus eliminating any real point of view. The result, as we have seen, was a lack of moral relief, a flattening of values, and a consequent loss of potential for human significance or meaning. In the uncompromising, "scientific" overview of naturalism, the struggles of men appear to possess little more import or purpose than the random activities of insects. The "leverage" gained by locating the narrative within a particular character of the novel, then, is intended precisely as a means of prying up that flattened or submerged dimension of meaning. It is by providing an embodied observer--the distinctive characteristic of these novels, as against his first--that Mailer attempts to gain a measure or standard of value for the stories that they mediate.

This, of course, is not much different from Fitzgerald's use of Nick Carraway, or, indeed, from the function of any such peripheral narrator. But a peculiar thing happens to Sergius O'Shaugnessy as the story he tells proceeds: this supposedly critical mediator, this judge and standard of the novel all but disappears! He begins properly enough by introducing himself, and describing the setting for his story, the resort town of "Desert D'Or"; in the pages that follow, taking up almost the first quarter of the book, he slowly establishes the cast of characters: Marion Faye, a strangely ambiguous figure as a pimp; Charles Eitel, the middle-aged film director, plagued by political and personal problems; Elena Esposito, his lower-class mistress; and Lulu Meyers, a portrait of the Hollywood
sex-goddess. Through most of this lengthy stage-setting Sergius narrates his story in the accepted manner of the fictional witness, reporting scenes and conversations, drawing together scraps of hearsay, and making surmises; but as these paraphrases and theories become more and more elaborate Sergius' function as a mediator becomes less and less essential, until finally (using as an excuse his ambition to be a writer) he simply announces, "I know that for a lot of what follows I must use my imagination" (p. 88), and virtually passes from existence. He reappears again somewhat later, but no longer, effectually, as a peripheral narrator, only as another participant. It point of view provides "the most powerful leverage in fiction", it would seem as though Mailer has deliberately abandoned his lever.

To understand the reasons behind, and the consequences of, this strange development it will first be necessary to look more closely at the actual events and structure of the novel. From the point that Sergius abdicates his role as narrator (becoming instead the "author"), The Deer Park is split into separate parts, interlaced with one another in the course of the text, but, for the most part, mutually irrelevant. The first of these, and the cominant one, is the story of the love affair between Eitel and Elena, comprising Eitel's artistic and political crises as well. The second concerns Sergius himself and his relationship with Lulu Meyers. And the third part--not so much a "story" as simply a presence--is centred about the enigmatic Marion Faye. The characters of these different segments encounter one another and occasionally exercise
some influence upon each other, but, with the absence of the unifying presence of a narrator, they fall into realms that are largely independent of, and isolated from one another, at least on the level of plot.

On the level of implicit patterns and themes, however, some connections can be made. The story of Eitel and Elena is, in many ways, Mailer's greatest realistic narrative. They are both heroic figures of whom, I think, even Lukacs would have approved—bounded but not determined by their temporal and physical environment, shaped by their pasts but, through both their actions and their inactions—their choices and their failures to choose—giving form to their futures; struggling, finally, amid the corruptions of a decadent culture to preserve a degree of personal integrity. For Eitel (whose role as an older mentor to the narrator is strongly analogous to McLeod's in *Barbary Shore*), that struggle is primarily public and definable: on the one side are his liberal conscience and his aesthetic values; on the other are the combined forces of the "Subversive Committee" and the financial backers essential for the realization of his art. At the start of the novel, with his career stagnant, Elena appears to offer both solace and a renewal of energy:

Sitting beside Elena, thinking of how he was back where he had begun, he had a hope that his talent would return. She would help him, he could live with such a woman now. (p. 95)

But his relationship with her comes to epitomize, in a sense,
his entire struggle, and in the end, his capitulation complete
and final, he is left only with dependent proprietorship:

. . . for of all the distance she had come, and he
had helped her to move, and there were times like this
when he felt the substance of his pride to depend
upon exactly her improvement as if she were finally
the only human creation in which he had taken part,
he still knew that he could help her no longer . . . .
(p. 316)

For Elena, on the other hand, the struggle for integrity is
more private and confused--directed more toward the sort of
self-understanding indicated in her letter to Eitel (pp. 263-70)
than toward open conflict. She alone achieves some success in
her struggle, and it is left for her--easily the finest por-
trait of a woman Mailer has so far written--to put the question
that haunts the entire novel (after a banal response from Eitel):

"No Charley," Elena said, "you see, that doesn't
answer it. I can't talk to you unless you'll under-
stand this. What am I going to do with my life? (p. 316)

It is a large question, but one that demands a real answer. It
is not Why am I here? but What am I going to do? Hers is a
search for concrete motives and purposes, in other words, just
as Eitel's struggle is to produce actual films in the face of
concrete opponents and temptations. They are, simply, charac-
ters who exist on the terrain of the real.

Such is not the case with Marion Faye, in comparison with
whom Eitel and Elena seem almost mundane. He is a paradoxical,
insubstantial figure, given an age and a description (p. 17),
yet a pure appearance more than an embodied character, unchang-
ing, unfixed in space and time. He impinges slightly upon the
action—it was apparently he who had prompted Eitel to refuse to testify before the "Subversive Committee", and later it is he who takes in Elena after she leaves Eitel and tries to coax her into suicide—but in general Faye is simply outside of whatever plot exists in this novel. His periodic appearances assume the function of a kind of baleful commentary upon the main text, as though he were the static incarnation of some strange spirit or principle. In some aspects, that principle may seem "good", as when, in the role of Eitel's protege and conscience, he pressures the older man to maintain his political and artistic standards (see pp. 39-40 and p. 158). In other aspects—as in his treatment of the call-girl, Bobby (pp. 131-5), or of the addict, Paco (pp. 136-8)—it seems plainly "evil". In fact, Faye is a character much like Croft in The Naked and the Dead, both fascinating and repelling; and at least one reason behind his ambiguous moral status is that, as in the case of Croft, it is a means of mystifying his essential nature, placing him beyond the pale of conventional behavior ("I hate slobs," he said. "They always think what they have to think." [p. 128]), preserving him as the indefinable, unclassifiable element of the novel, the one character untainted by humbling considerations of consequence and responsibility. And yet, unlike Croft (who genuinely transcended his naturalist setting), Faye seems limited by a certain "driven" quality to his character, a Dostoyevskian essence that finally allows him to be placed and labelled:

"'You know,' Sergius said, 'you're just a religious man turned
inside out." (p.128). He is impelled, as he himself admits (p.128), toward some purified extreme of experience, the direction of that extreme irrelevant so long as it is free of the corrupt compromises of the middle, the mundane world. His attempt to induce Elena's suicide is motivated precisely by this desire:

Faye had the feeling so deep in himself that this was finally the situation where he could push beyond anything he had ever done, push to the end as he had promised me so many nights ago, and come out—he did not know where, but there was experience beyond experience, there was something. (p. 282)

Ultimately, his is a particular and an extreme form of the religious rejection of the flesh: "... for the body and the soul are separate, and to be pure one must seek out sin itself, mire the body in offal so the soul may be elevated" (p. 280); and it is this rejection that underlies his struggle not just against lust (p. 135), but against those emotions such as fear and compassion (p. 131 and p. 138) that tie him to others, that bind him to the contingent world. Finally, even language, and even the human world itself, must be included in this rejection:

... for the words belonged to the slobs, and the slobs hid the world with words.

So let it come, Faye thought, let this explosion come, and then another, and all the others, until the Sun God burned the earth. Let it come, he thought, looking into the east at Mecca where the bombs ticked while he stood on a tiny rise of ground trying to see one hundred, two hundred, three hundred miles across the desert. Let it come, Faye begged, like a man praying for rain, let it come and clear the rot and the stench and the stink, let it come for all of everywhere, just so it comes and the world stands clear in the white dead dawn. (p. 139)
The part of the novel that Faye represents, then, might be seen as the inverse of the part taken up by Eitel and Elena: where the former is abstracted, removed, and almost effectless, the latter are very much in and of the world, concrete, complicitous, defined by their situation. Faye, on the other hand, is defined by his intellectual project—the goal of extricating himself from the entanglements of the body, of physical being in general—a definition that helps to explain his ethereal presence in the novel.

Sergius O'Shaugnessy, the postulated narrator, has a good deal more substantial a presence in the book—and perhaps too substantial. That is, the impairment of his role as a mediator of events may be partly due to the emphasis given his role as a participant or actor in his own story. For, unlike Nick Carraway (whose affair with Jordan Baker was never of much importance), Sergius has his own part in this novel, quite distinct from that of the others. His story, however—centred about his relationship with Lulu, the movie star—is peculiarly flat and stereotyped, Sergius playing the awkward and eager adolescent to Lulu's toying child-woman, bitch-goddess (see especially pp. 113-21). Later, on "principle", he turns down a movie contract in order to be a "writer":

I suppose what I really was thinking is that I would always be a gambler, and if I passed this chance by, it was because I had the deeper idea that I was meant to gamble on better things than money or a quick career. (p. 195)

Later still, in pursuit of "experience", he goes to Mexico,
learns bullfighting, sets up a bullfighting school in "the Village", and reads a lot (this is summarized in a kind of epilogue on pp. 297-303). Occasionally there are some interesting speculative passages, but on the whole these episodes are simply bad examples of fictional technique—quick, sketchy, impatient with detail, too often choosing the trite or commonplace for the representative. To some degree, these defects seem a product of that same insecure defensiveness noted earlier in Mailer's tendency to allegorize his fictional worlds, a need to hurry his descriptions lest their thin fabric become too apparent. Thus, of his rented house in Desert D'Or, he writes: "I could describe that house in detail, but what would be the use? It was like most of the houses in the resort" (p. 8); or, of his gambling interlude with Lulu: "... long description is unnecessary—all real gambling is more or less the same" (p. 186). Implicit in this impatience is a clear desire to hurry past the fabric of the fiction toward some more abstract goal or point, to use the fiction as a means to an end.

This functional approach to the writing of novels ought to remind us of Mailer's concern with point of view as the source of the "most powerful leverage in fiction". In fact, the problem mentioned above, concerning the reasons behind Mailer's seeming abandonment of Sergius' narrative function and the resulting fragmentation of the novel into three main parts, appears strongly though unclearly related to the reasons for the relative banality of Sergius' own part. For Mailer's notion of the
use and importance of point of view is a particular one, as
different from Fitzgerald's as it is from James'. \textit{The Great}
\textit{Gatsby}, in many ways, is a novel of disillusionment, of the bitter
discrepancy between gilded appearance and sordid reality, with
Nick Carraway, the observer and judge of this hollow world, acting as the surrogate or stand-in for the reader. \textit{The Deer Park},
on the other hand, has no revelations to make; the tinsel
corruption of its world is plainly evident from the start.
Lacking the inherent drama of discovery that shapes Fitzgerald's
novel, this book simply makes the Carraway type of narrator
irrelevant, its characters acting as their own judges. And in
place of the conservative, "Middle Western" wisdom within which
Fitzgerald so neatly contains \textit{The Great Gatsby}, Mailer is manifestly striving for some more radical, transcending vision,
particularly at the end; not content merely to depict corruption,
he wishes in some manner to redeem it. When he speaks
of the "leverage" obtained from point of view, therefore, it
is with this salvational purpose in mind, as he indicates in his
discussion of the book's second draft some time later:

I was able, then, to create an adventurer whom I believed in, and as he came alive for me, the other parts of the book which had been stagnant for a year or more also came to life, and new things began to happen to Eitel my director and to Elena his mistress and their characters changed .... I was no longer telling of two nice people who fail at love because the world is too large and too cruel for them; the new O'Shaugnessy had moved me by degrees to the more painful story of two people who are strong as well as weak, corrupt as much as pure, and fail to grow despite their bravery in a poor world, because they are finally not brave enough, and so do more damage to one another than to the unjust world outside them.\textsuperscript{18}
The narrator is of importance, that is, not so much as a mediator of events but, quite specifically, as their measure—their stature, and indeed their status, rising or falling with his own.

This, at least, is the theory and the hope. Why is it, then, that, whatever the quality of the portrayal of Eitel and Elena, this narrator who had been "for three years . . . the frozen germ of some new theme" emerges so bland and predictable? It is obvious that Mailer intended to convey the opposite impression, as is evident from the generalizations about Sergius that he puts in the mouths of other characters—Eitel's view of him, for example, as a potential "intellectual", is contradicted by that of the producer, Collie Munshin:

". . . I see him growing into a super-Western type. The whole bit. He'll put hair tonic on his chest, and he'll kick you in the crotch if it's a fight to the death. I'll say something worse. I sense ugliness in that kid . . . ."

Eitel shrugged unhappily. "Well, I don't know that I disagree with you. That's possible, too. This particular light-heavyweight can go in any one of a hundred directions. It's why I find him interesting."

Collie nodded. "You may have a taste for hipsters, but they're just psychopaths to me." (p. 170)

But this interesting, ambiguous, multi-directed Sergius O'Shaugnessy is not the thin, imitative figure that actually appears in the novel—rather, he is simply a concept, an abstraction, a pure idea. He is a character arising from, and based upon, an intellectual notion. The idea itself may be rich and profound, but the translation of that idea into real terms, the provision of flesh and blood, offers difficulties of another order altogether, and it seems apparent that the
novel has foundered upon this discrepancy between the conception and the realization.

It is a common enough failing, of course, and seems especially understandable when one looks at the nature of the idea from which Sergius is supposed to have been formed; for he represents the ideal of potentiality, of total, unbounded possibility beyond the ordinary limitations of time and situation. As an orphan, he lacks a true past or lineage; as an ex-Serviceman, living on winnings from a gambling streak, he is without a fixed position in the present. It would be difficult to make a credible personality from such sparse material in any case—but when that personality is required to be the walking embodiment of some notion of potentiality the problem becomes virtually impossible. Physical existence is itself a limitation, a restriction, and everytime Sergius appears in the novel, no matter how quietly or reservedly, he is to some extent defined, part of his future shaped. Mailer is thus faced with a dilemma: because of his understanding of point of view, he needs a strong and positive narrator; yet, because he must be a figure suggesting endless possibility, the narrator is precluded from all but the most neutral and typical of actions. Here, then, lies a deeper reason for the failure of the novel, and a hint toward the reasons underlying the breakdown of Mailer's entire strategy in this phase.

Let us briefly recapitulate the argument of this critique thus far: *The Deer Park* begins as a novel told by a peripheral
narrator, but less than a third of the way through that narrator seems virtually to disappear as such, though he remains as a character at the centre of one of the three main fragments into which the novel subsequently divides. One of those fragments, at least, seems good in itself, but the book as a whole is badly weakened by the relative independence—almost the mutual irrelevance—of the three taken together. Furthermore, the part grouped around the (ex-)narrator—the one character, it was hoped, whose stature would provide dimension to the rest—is itself flawed by the seemingly inescapable colourlessness of his personality ("inescapable" because he is not, in a sense, a true character at all, but the personification of an idea, the essence of the potential). It remains, now, to link these various perceptions and judgments into a general assessment.

The key to the problem of this novel is that its fundamental vision is split into two different directions, represented by Eitel and by Faye. The former might be characterized as the "real world", the world of contingency and of moral consequence (aptly described, perhaps, in Eitel's final words to Sergius, as the world "where orphans burn orphans and nothing is more difficult to discover than a simple fact." p. 318); the latter looks in the opposite direction, away from the immanent, toward a world of transcendence, of "experience beyond experience" (p. 282), beyond moral consequence ("good and evil"), beyond the contamination of existence itself. Between
these two terms there is an obvious room for, and need of, a mediator, and it is plain that Sergius O'Shaugnessy was intended for that role. Had he been adequate to his task, he might have salvaged the best from both the alternatives—Faye's transcendent vision without his obsessive rejection of the body, Eitel's moral strength without his weakness for material temptation—and, fusing these qualities in his own being, emerged clearly as the redemptive hero for which Mailer had planned. But the task, as it is set up, is an impossible one. The two opposing terms are given from the start as realities outside of Sergius, objective and (their occasional interaction notwithstanding) autonomous. There is nothing in Faye's self-purgative project that would be of any help to Eitel in his real struggles and torments; and there is nothing in Eitel's real concerns that would make any difference to Faye's world-spurning ambitions; they are each, to the other, like a denizen of an alien realm, gazing across an impenetrable barrier. There is no ground, in the novel itself, upon which those realms can be brought together, and Sergius is therefore left hanging in the space between them, an intellectual construct, a concept of potentiality. Sergius relinquishes his role of narrator because he cannot unify, in his own person, the disparate elements of the novel, and the fragmentation that afflicts it on the level of plot is but the external correlative of an inner fragmentation of vision.

With The Deer Park, the second phase of Mailer's novels
has come to an end. Its characteristic strategy has been partially successful and partially a failure. Certainly, by introducing a narrator, a mediator of its story, the novel regains a moral dimension—a level of meaningful struggle—that *The Naked and the Dead*, with its inhuman omniscience, had lost. Yet, by leaving that narrator on the periphery of the story—making the story, in other words, external to, and independent of the narrator—another problem, as radical as the first, is encountered. For the vision that Mailer wishes to project (perhaps his defining quality as a writer) is bifurcated, and so long as its two branches are established as objective terms from the beginning there will be no means of fusing them into a unified expression. Instead, given Mailer's unwillingness simply to abandon either term, the novel breaks apart, and the narrator becomes ineffectual, rendering irrelevant even his capacity as witness. With this assessment in mind, therefore, one might propose a sort of scheme for Mailer's development thus far: in the first phase, the story was set at a distance, with the reader provided not so much with a "point" of view as with an "overview"; in the second phase, the story is moved closer to the reader, his viewpoint (through the narrator) that of an observer at its edge; in the third phase, then, assuming the continuation of this tendency, one could predict that the reader will be placed in the very centre of the story, the hero-narrator giving unity to its vision in the course of his own actions and struggles.
Between the publication of *The Deer Park* and of *An American Dream*, Mailer's fourth novel, there is a gap of almost ten years. Though he wrote no major fiction in that time, however, Mailer was far from idle. A number of smaller pieces were collected together, interlaced with an extensive commentary, and published in two books: *Advertisements for Myself* in 1959, and *The Presidential Papers* in 1963. The first of these, in particular, had an impact upon his career comparable only to that of *The Naked and the Dead*; consequently, there is a fairly large omission at this point if we simply continue with the discussion of Mailer's novelistic development. The excuses for doing so, regardless, are two: firstly, the novels by themselves exhibit a pattern of development that can best be displayed by considering them together; and secondly (an excuse that will, perhaps, only be understandable later), the examination of these later novels will not be dominated by the Mailer "persona" brought into being by the intervening compilations. What problems and peculiarities result from this unchronological procedure can hopefully be resolved when we return to those omitted links.

It is necessary to understand, however, that the public context within which *An American Dream* was first received was very different from that of any of Mailer's other novels. No longer merely the erstwhile author of a good war novel, Mailer,
by 1965, was widely and critically regarded as a Writer, still somewhat on the edge of the respectable establishment, no doubt, but certainly among its most visible profiles. These new-found attentions were due in part to his own insistent self-advertising, and, since his role was that of a novelist who had not attempted the form for nearly a decade, high expectations were naturally generated. What is surprising about the critical response to An American Dream, however, is not its intensity but its extreme diversity. The novel is easily the most controversial of all Mailer's works, and as such it occupies a crucial position not so much in his actual development as in the assessment of that development. It might almost be seen as the touchstone among his writings, dividing critics into camps whose opposing judgments bear upon the whole course and worth of his career. For this reason the debate surrounding the novel is of exceptional importance and will be given considerable emphasis in this discussion.

An idea of the sharpness of that debate, and of some of the positions and issues involved, can be provided at the outset, as a context for the study of the novel itself. Both sides are at least unequivocal. For Elizabeth Hardwick the book is "an intellectual and literary disaster, poorly written, morally foolish and intellectually empty."¹ For Stanley Edgar Hyman (in an article with the inspired title of "Norman Mailer's Yummy Rump")
An American Dream is a dreadful novel, perhaps the worst I have read in many years, since it is infinitely more pretentious than the competition. Mailer's novel is bad in that absolute fashion that makes it unlikely that he could ever have written anything good.²

Tom Wolfe, dismissing what he takes to be the book's Dostoevskian ambitions, compares Mailer to James M. Cain:

Of course, Mailer cannot match Cain in writing dialogue, creating characters, setting up scenes or carrying characters through a long story. But he is keener than Cain in summoning up smells, especially effluvia.³

And Philip Rahv, though a little more tentative than the others, makes the statement that seems to represent the common ground of the hostile camp, and most invokes the disdain of the novel's defenders: "On the technical side what the novel obviously lacks is verisimilitude, even in the most literal sense."⁴ Beneath the outrage and satire, it seems evident that the literary opposition to the novel is based upon its lack of certain conventions of realism: believable characters, credible plot, real dialogue, accurate metaphors, and so on.

The defenders, not surprisingly, choose to direct their counter-attack at this very point. Richard Poirier, for example, rejecting the "always outmoded criteria of verisimilitude", upholds instead the "extravagance of Mailer's rendition" of a variety of fictional modes.⁵ Leo Bersani admonishes readers in words very similar to Poirier's:

The plot of An American Dream is . . . nothing more than a mode of Rojack's inventive exuberance, and, while it is perhaps understandable that the anecdotal aspect of fiction should trick us most easily into confusions between art and life, we should be admiring
the power of extravagance in Rojack's tall story, instead of upholding the faded banner of verisimilitude.  

John Aldridge puts the argument for the defense in brief and in general: "... what the critics failed to comprehend was that An American Dream could not be properly judged by standards normally applied to the novel. . . ." These critics, then, find a virtue in the novel's very disappointment of what are seen as the old-fashioned expectations of its opponents. Evidently, the notion of "verisimilitude" represents a key to the debate, and it raises the old (but obviously still current) question of whether that criterion, even in its "most literal sense", can be abandoned in the novel, and whether any alternative can be found to take its place.

A particular answer to the question, at least, may be derived from this particular novel. From its opening sentence—"I met Jack Kennedy in November, 1946"—it announces its break with the pattern of Mailer's previous novels and the inauguration of a new phase; one would not have expected the name of an actual President even to be mentioned in those earlier works, much less in personal connection with the narrator, given their defensive obsession with fictionalization. The narrator himself, here, is of a new type, and it is interesting to see in just what ways he differs from his predecessor. Stephen Rojack appears somewhat similar to Sergius O'Shaugnessy in his tone of studied nonchalance:

We went out one night on a double date and it turned out to be a fair evening for me. I seduced a girl who would have been bored by a diamond
But in other aspects he is more like Eitel: middle-aged, with a stalled career, and an estranged wife he is both addicted to (pp. 24-5) and frightened of (p. 31). Finally, the strangling of his wife is a deed of which only the amoral, impulse-driven Marion Faye could have been capable. In a sense, then, Rojack represents the internalization of the three fragments into which The Deer Park had split, and this may be one reason why he appears to Poirier, for example, as "an assemblage of parts, some of them disjunctive with others." As such, he is not only at the centre of the novel, he is virtually the whole of the novel, other characters appearing only one by one in what Wolfe calls "cameo parts". It is this sort of engulfment—a means of healing the divided vision that afflicted the previous novel—that is the characteristic feature of the novels of Mailer's third phase.

The composite personality of the narrator, however, is only one of the features distinguishing this novel from earlier ones—and, though it is central, it is by no means the most obvious. The most immediate manifestation of that difference is surely the style—unlike the subdued, pragmatic prose of The Naked and the Dead, this is language that calls attention to itself; and unlike the Fitzgeraldian rhetoric of The Deer Park, this is a style unique to Mailer. Sentences that are short and abrupt alternate with sentences that are long and ornate, frequently obscure in syntax, and so abundant with allusions and metaphors...
as almost to over-whelm their subjects. So much is made of this highly visible style by both detractors and defenders, in fact, that it could almost be made the focus of the debate over the novel itself. The following lengthy passage from Rojack's reminiscence of a war experience is quoted for the double purpose of both illustrating this style and of providing a reference for the later discussion of that critical debate:

Years later I read *Zen in the Art of Archery* and understood the book. Because I did not throw the grenades on that night on the hill under the moon, it threw them, and it did a near perfect job. The grenades went off somewhere between five and ten yards over each machine gun, blast, blast, like a boxer's tattoo, one-two, and I was exploded in the butt from a piece of my own shrapnel, whacked with a delicious pain clean as a mistress' sharp teeth going "Yummy" in your rump, and then the barrel of my carbine swung around like a long fine antenna and pointed itself at the machine gun hole on my right where a great gloody sweet German face, a healthy spoiled over-spoiled young beauty of a face, mother-love all over its making, possessor of that overcurved mouth which only great fat sweet young faggots can have when their rectum is tuned and entertained from adolescence on, came crying, sliding, smiling up over the edge of the hole, "Hello death!" blood and mud like the herald of sodomy upon his chest, and I pulled the trigger as if I were squeezing the softest breast of the softest pigeon which ever flew, still a woman's breast takes me now and then to the pigeon on that trigger, and the shot cracked like a birth twig across my palm, whoop! and the round went in at the base of his nose and spread and I saw his face sucked in backward upon the gouge of the bullet, he looked suddenly like an old man, toothless, sly, reminiscent of lechery. Then he whimpered "Mutter", one yelp from the first memory of the womb, and down he went into his own blood just in time, timed like the interval in a shooting gallery, for the next was up, his hole-mate, a hard avenging specter with a pistol in his hand and one arm off, blown off, rectitude like a stringer of saliva across the straight edge of his lip, the straightest lip I ever saw, German-Protestant rectitude. (pp. 11-12)
The long sentences, of course, remind one of Faulkner, but they do not have—do not try for—Faulkner's narrative, rhetorical cadence; rather, their length seems to result from the exfoliation of intellectual associations, one allusion triggering another in a self-generating process. Such a style provides hostile critics with innumerable examples of what Hyman calls "Mailer's s\lovenly misuse of language"\textsuperscript{11}, and yet Poirier, for example, admiringly describes this very passage as showing Mailer's "intense involvement in the words he uses and in the patterns of association among them."\textsuperscript{12} As always, the issue of the style is inextricably linked to the larger issue of the novel itself, but it offers an interesting and possibly crucial, illustration of the differences in critical opinion surrounding that issue.

The style, however, is not the only aspect of this book that separates it not merely from Mailer's other novels but from the realist tradition of the novel generally—almost as significant and as obvious is its strange proliferation of occult paraphernalia. On the first page one finds a reference to "ogres" that "stand on guard before the portal of an heiress", though this seems only a figure of speech. On the very next page, however, just prior to his story of his war-time heroism, Rojack admits that "The real difference between the President and myself may be that I ended with too large an appreciation of the moon . . . ." (p. 10), and later we see him hanging by one hand from an apartment balcony, engaged in a dialogue over
suicide with the moon, "that platinum lady with her silver light" (p. 19). Shortly after, leaving the apartment, he fails to shut the door: "I turned around to jam it once again and felt a force on me as palpable as a magnetic field. 'Get out of here,' said a voice in my brain" (p. 20). But it is only after Rojack's murder of Deborah, his wife, at the end of the first chapter, that the supernatural apparatus fully manifests itself:

Something touched me and now pushed me without touch toward the door. Once again I could have been in a magnetic field where some force without sensation other than its own presence was coaxing me firmly to step away from Deborah, cross the room, and out the door. (p. 44)

From this point on, "voices", "forces", and omens of various kinds are found on virtually every page, intermixed with the world of tangible things, and so evoking a synthesis of realms displaced from the plane of the real. Perhaps the epitome of this odd fusion is the duel Rojack fights in the nightclub with "psychic particles, pellets, rockets the length of a pin, planets the size of your eye's pupil when the iris closes down" and "even some artillery . . . ." (p. 95).

Rojack describes himself early in the novel as "a professor of existential psychology with the not inconsiderable thesis that magic, dread, and the perception of death were the roots of motivation" (p. 15), and later admits that, through his marriage with Deborah, ". . . . I had come to believe in spirits and demons, in devils, warlocks, omens, wizards and fiends, in
incubi and succubi" (p. 40), so one might expect the story he tells to reflect this psychological bias; but since the story only exists as Rojack's narration his "bias" is authoritative, and establishes a version of reality for the novel, which in turn has a profound effect upon the nature of the novel. One such consequence is the relative absence of psychology or of full subjectivity. In the case of Rojack himself it is as though his psyche has been turned inside out, his inner desires and fears, his motivations in general, externalized in the form of outer forces and voices. The other characters seem more like the embodiments of certain moral essences, defined by their spiritual alliances to God or the Devil, rather than changing, evolving personalities; they are complex only to the extent that the twin alternatives of their moral nature are mixed or obscured, as exemplified by Rojack's puzzlement over his wife:

She was evil, I would decide, and then think next that goodness could come on a visit to evil only in the disguise of evil: yes, evil would know that goodness had come only by the power of its force. I might be the one who was therefore evil, and Deborah was trapped with me. Or was I blind? (p. 40)

In the non-reality world of this novel, then, Rojack becomes, as Poirier describes him, "a kind of battleground where external forces which inhabit the soul or the psyche war for possession," and the other characters become the ambiguous agents in that war.

A further consequence of the book's supernaturalism is the absence of plot, in the sense of a causal or motivated sequence of events. Thus, the novel as a whole is composed of a series of episodes, within which Rojack's activities (which comprise
most of the action of the book) result simply from the mystic forces and voices that impel him. What might be taken as the very climax of the novel, in fact—Rojack's walking of the parapet at Kelly's apartment—is a perfect illustration of this plotlessness, for it is purely gratuitous action, whose origins and effects are on a wholly occult level:

I bent to pick up the umbrella, and then the message came clear, "Walk the parapet," it said. "Walk the parapet or Cherry is dead." But I had more fear for myself than for Cherry. I did not want to walk that parapet. "Walk it," said the voice, "or you are worse than dead." (p. 238)

But, before he walks the parapet once, the voice tells him he must walk it again, which he neglects to do, and in the end Cherry is indeed dead. By linking the events of his novel through such a mystical dimension Mailer obviously gains a considerable freedom, since he provides himself with an automatic excuse for coincidences or connections that would seem incredible in a realistic setting. In this world one simply accepts the fact that Cherry herself was once involved with Kelly, for example, or that she should be killed because Rojack fails to heed an injunction to "go into Harlem this night and drink until closing" (p. 190), or that Rojack should evade the legal consequences of his murder because his wife was involved with spies. Here, such intertwinnings of characters and events seem fateful rather than random or accidental, and good deal of the novel's isolation from the real world results from this pervasive sense of fate that operates as a kind of seal upon its own world.
There are a few instances, however, in which Rojack himself appears to attempt an escape from the sealed, fateful world of the novel:

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

Later, he argues with his "voice" over going to Harlem:

"Go to Harlem," said the voice, "if you love Cherry, go to Harlem--there is time." Then I knew how afraid I was of Harlem, and argued with that voice, saying, "Let me love her some way not altogether deranged and doomed. It makes no sense to go to Harlem. Let me love her and be sensible as well." (p. 196)

And still later, just before venturing onto the parapet, the desire to escape becomes almost a repudiation of the novel:

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

(p. 238)

Poirier seizes upon these brief and pathetic passages to suggest that there exists a fundamental opposition in the novel, manifested by Rojack's desperate desire not only "to escape from the world as it is contrived and structured by conspiracies
of power" but also "to escape from his own, which is to say from Mailer's counter-conspiracies, his alternative but often insane inventions." But this would seem to place undue emphasis upon what are, after all, only rare and fitful wishes, slight interruptions in the dominating tone of "magic" and "mystery". Rather, recalling the title of this novel, these moments more strongly resemble those occasional efforts of a dreamer to wake himself from his own dream, free himself from his own imprisoning fantasy. The following passage from Sartre's Psychology of Imagination, describing this occurrence, seems a good characterization of Rojack's own escapist desires:

... nothing is more strange than the desperate efforts made by the sleeper in certain nightmares to remind himself that a reflective consciousness is possible. Such efforts are made in vain, most of the time, because he is forbidden by the very "enchantment" of his consciousness to produce these memories in the form of fiction. He struggles but everything glides into fiction, everything is transformed in spite of him into the imaginary.

Just so is Rojack's every attempt to be "some sort of rational man again" absorbed back into the fictional fabric of this particular American Dream.

These momentary wishes of Rojack, then, may have provided the very clue necessary to gain at last some intellectual hold upon the manifold peculiarities of this novel. Poirier is only one of a number of critics who have detected a double reality in the book, with Rojack placed schematically in the middle: "He lives at the divide of two kinds of equally unacceptable power: of demonic social and economic systems and of demonic
imaginations of himself as a kind of Ubermensch." It may both simplify and clarify the novel to think of Rojack as, in this sense, a dreamer—one who uses his own "demonic imaginations" as a weapon or a defense against the external systems in which he finds himself enmeshed—and to think of the story itself (or at least of a good deal of it) as his dream, triggered, perhaps, by the murder that sets the rest of the story in motion: "I was floating. I was as far into myself as I had ever been and universes wheeled in a dream." (p. 36)

Now, there is a kind of "vulgar" Romantic conception of the dream which looks upon it as a release from the mundane shell, as a mystic portal opening onto inner worlds of primordial meaning and splendor; Rojack, for example, likens the strangling of his wife to the forcing open of "an enormous door": ". . . I had had a view of what was on the other side of the door, and heaven was there, some quiver of jeweled cities shining in the glow of a tropical dusk . . . " (p. 35). But Sartre's conception of the dream sees it not as a release, not as a liberation, not as an opening at all, but as a very prison of the imagination:

... what we want to show is that the dream is the perfect realization of a shut imaginary consciousness, that is, a consciousness for which there is absolutely no exit and towards which no external point of view of any sort is possible.17

Sartre, of course, is an existentialist whose temper is not entirely compatible with Mailer's, but some of his comments on the dream may serve as an illuminating gloss upon much of this
particular novel. He speaks, for example, of the "unique nuance of fatality" of the dream: "The events occur as if not being able not to happen, in correlation with a consciousness which cannot help imagining them." And one thinks, in this connection, not only of the fateful "plot" of the novel, but of its intense immediacy, an effect by which even memory (the killing of the Germans, pp. 10-13) and anticipation (the dread of prison, pp. 85-6) are rendered with all the vividness of present realities; speaking of the dream as a "story", Sartre elaborates upon this effect:

All anticipation at a given moment of a story derives from the very fact that the anticipation appears as an episode of the story. I cannot entertain, conceive another ending, I have no choice, no recourse, I am compelled to narrate the story to myself: there is no "blow for nothing". So each moment of the story occurs as having an imaginary future, but a future I cannot foresee, which will come of its own accord, in its own time, to haunt consciousness, against which consciousness will be crushed.

Ordinary retrospection, in other words, gives a certain shape to events, drawing them toward, or releasing them from, some particular point or climax; but retrospection requires a reflective consciousness that is disruptive of the "fascination" essential to the dream, so that in the dream, as in this novel, the events reel past in mere serial order. Sartre's passage seems an apt commentary on the situation of Stephen Rojack, "no longer a person, a character, a man of habits, rather a ghost, a cloud of loose emotions which scattered on the wind" (p. 57), driven about a dream landscape by projections
of his own impulses, haunted by, crushed against, his own compulsive imaginings.

The real significance of this phenomenological description of the dream, and of its comparison with An American Dream, can only be appreciated in the context of the larger study of the imagination. For in his book Sartre tries to upset the romantic convention of the priority of imagination: he speaks of "the wealth of my actual perception" and, by contrast, of the "essential poverty" from which the (imaginative) image suffers; and later, referring to the dream itself, he states that, in a fundamental sense, its images "remain isolated from each other, separated by their essential poverty . . . ; there is no other relationship between them than the ones consciousness can conceive at each moment in constituting them." The dream, for Sartre, is the apotheosis of the imagination, but of an imagination conceived in a new and diminished fashion: "So, contrary to what could be believed, the imaginary world occurs as world without freedom: nor is it determined, it is the opposite of freedom, it is fatal." With this reversal of conventions as a context, Sartre draws a highly significant comparison between the dream and the novel:

[The dream] is primarily a story and our strong interest in it is of the same sort as that of the naive reader in a novel. It is lived as a fiction and it is only in considering it as a fiction which happens as such that we can understand the sort of reaction it arouses in the sleeper. Only it is a "spell-binding" fiction: consciousness . . . has become knotted. And what it lives, at the same time as the fiction apprehended as a fiction is the impossibility of emerging out of the fiction.
This might be taken as a diagnosis of Mailer's story as well, and in this light Sartre's final comments on the dream read almost like a summary and a judgment of the novel:

... what constitutes the nature of the dream is that reality eludes altogether the consciousness which desires to recapture it; all the effort of consciousness turns in spite of itself to produce the imaginary. The dream is not fiction taken for reality, it is the odyssey of a consciousness dedicated by itself, and in spite of itself, to build only an unreal world.26

If one eliminates the implication that its unreality is unintentional, however, this statement is close to what the novel's defenders would claim for it. Their position, as we have seen, is that the book turns its back upon the demands of "verisimilitude", that, as Bersani asserts, "... the seriousness of An American Dream involves a denial of certain kinds of novelistic seriousness, of social probability and relevance, as well as of so-called intellectual depth."27 Bersani's is perhaps the most aggressive of these defences, and his argument is sometimes pursued to unconvincing extremes:

The plausibility of Rojack's similes is irrelevant; what matters is that he makes us feel his associations as spontaneous, irresistible fantasies and that we accept his most elaborate verbal constructions as illustrating the elaborateness of immediacy rather than of development toward an idea.28

What is interesting about his case, however, is that it is founded, to a radical degree, upon the notion of "style":

... the playfulness of the novel is by no means a frivolous attitude toward "dirty" or "ugly" events, but rather the natural tone of a man for whom events have become strictly literary-novelistic situations to be freely exploited for the sake of a certain style and the self-enjoyment it perhaps unexpectedly provides.29
The foregrounded style that was so derided by the opponents of the novel is required, by Bersani, to bear the whole of the argument for its worth, the content dismissed as no more than an opportunity for display: "Rojack's experience is largely a pretext for trying his hand at different ways of telling a story."\(^30\) Bersani's case is weakened, however, by his focus upon the narrator as the source or creator of this stylistic extravagance: "The telling of his story becomes Rojack's invention as well as Mailer's once his life confronts him as choices to be made about language and novelistic form."\(^31\) But this sort of controlling, shaping, "playful" Rojack seems more a figure concocted to suit the purposes of a critical apology than a character that appears in the novel, wherein the narrator seems much more the victim or the prisoner of fantasy rather than its inventor.

A somewhat more sophisticated version of this argument from style, however, is put forward by Poirier, who at least manages to distinguish sufficiently between author and narrator. In his essay on the novel, he reprints the lengthy passage on the killing of the Germans quoted above (page51), and analyzes its associational sequence of images. He finds therein a series of sexual metaphors, allusions, and suggestions that he then relates to "the obsessive tension throughout the book between creative sexuality . . . and sex that is murderous, associated with blood, mud, feces, and buggery."\(^32\) Such an organization would seem to indicate a fair degree of calculation in
the style, but Poirier wishes to avoid that conclusion:

Perhaps Mailer planned this sentence, but I suspect it represents something better than planning, some saturation of the author's mind in what he wants to do that makes everything that spontaneously issues from it part of the life that the language has already produced.33

By itself, this statement too seems a little weak and apologetic, an excuse for what may, after all, be no more than an accumulation of obsessive images, as random and as uncontrolled as the associations of the dream. But in his later book on Mailer Poirier introduces a peculiar notion of linguistic autonomy that both deepens and brings to a focus the issues raised by this defense of the novel's style. Speaking of Rojack, Poirier asserts that "His hyperbolic imagination of himself and of his psychic powers occur in language: his experience and his expression are as one."34 This idea is expanded:

... the writing of Mailer is the experience of a Rojack or a Sergius or a D.J. or a Mailer. It is known for what it is in the language which invents it, and not otherwise known. The language is, then, not a reference to experience. To read Mailer as if the language were a series of referential signs is wholly to misread him, to make him an obnoxious puffer.35

Now, either this statement is merely trivial (all fiction, all literature, is "known for what it is in the language which invents it and not otherwise known"), or it is a radicalization of the argument from style to an extent that is almost cryptic— for how can language not be "a series of referential signs", not be, in some sense, a "reference to experience"? Perhaps what is meant is that the language is self-referential, a property implied by Bersani also when he compares Mailer to
Proust and the later James:

In both James and Proust, what seems to be a fascination with the suggestiveness and self-inventive possibilities of language leads to some carelessness about novelistic situations, a tendency to allegorize the world as a rather transparent (rather than hidden) projection of the self.\textsuperscript{36}

But even a self-referential language remains at least referential, coiling in upon itself and constituting its own linguistic and literary substance as its subject (a better example of which may be the writings of Nabokov or Borges). Such a language may be freed from the constraints of physical or social reality, but it remains linked to, and controlled by, the literary realities of language, style, and tradition.

But Poirier appears to go even further than Bersani in severing Mailer's language from its connection to the world (at least in the passage quoted above), for he seems to imply not a self-referential aestheticism but the possibility of a purely self-contained, self-enclosed literary creation, fashioned out of language but no longer constrained by any referential requirement at all. What he speaks of as the "oneness" of Rojack's experience and expression, then, is really just the consequence of the absence altogether of experience in its usual sense—as encounter with the real world. It is precisely this absence, in fact, that produces the curious ineffectuality of the book's many moral transgressions, \textsuperscript{37} for morality has meaning only in a contingent world, in which it serves as both a guide and a standard for the consequential decisions and actions of people; but in a world governed by "fate", a world in which events evolve
only out of the compelling associations of language or fantasy, morality is simply irrelevant.

By its non-referential language, then, An American Dream is as effectively sealed as the Sartrian dream, its world as fatal, as obsessive, and as essentially impoverished. There is an important distinction to be made at this point: Mailer's book is not an aesthetic representation of the dream (in the way, for example, that Joyce "represents" a stream-of-consciousness, or Proust "represents" reverie), but is, in a sense, its linguistic-literary equivalent. Earlier, the novel was spoken of as though it were, in part, Rojack's dream, and that description suits those portions of it that are especially magic-ridden, "voice"-driven. But in the light of Poirier's argument, especially, one can see that the quality of the dream is something that inheres in the very style of the book, and that it is not Rojack but Mailer himself who is the "dreamer" here, projecting his "dream" not in images but in words.

With this distinction in mind it may be possible at last to reach an understanding of some of the reasons behind, and the nature of, the extreme divergence in critical opinion over this novel. The opponents, as we have seen, tend to complain of its lack of "verisimilitude", which is, at first sight, an old and possibly naive criterion; but that complaint may be only a frustrated response to the very closedness of the novel, to its lack of reference to any external standard by which it could be judged. The defenders, in dismissing the old-fashioned criter-
ion of verisimilitude, have had to focus almost entirely upon
the style of the novel—that is, upon the manner of its telling
or writing—as the source of its worth; in doing so, however,
it is interesting that they do not refer to stylistic, liter­
ary criteria, but rather to such virtues as "exuberance",
"extravagance" or a "frightening" "fluidity of association". 38
What this argument from style is actually attempting to do,
clearly, is to defend the closedness of the novel by finding
purely internal qualities to praise in place of the lack of
external reference. But these mere qualities of the language
are not really virtues at all, for it is obviously possible (in­
deed, common) for a style to be both extravagant and bad. And
that (Bersani and Poirier notwithstanding) is what must finally
be stated of the style of An American Dream. The passage that
Poirier quotes to exhibit the excellence of Mailer's language
(see above, page 51) is perhaps superior to its surroundings,
largely because it at least concerns a concrete action, but even
there the words and allusions seem juxtaposed in accidental or
merely obsessive order, with images looming absurdly out of pro­
portion (" . . . a delicious pain clean as a mistress' sharp
teeth going 'Yummy' in your rump . . . " p. 11). The sexual
theme that Poirier finds in the passage is doubtlessly there,
in however broken or confused a fashion, but it seems, because
of the very anarchy of the style, to be foreign to the event
described, a sort of willed, intellectual imposition that only
serves to discredit the theme and obscure the event. Poirier is
correct to state that this language is "not a reference to experience", but he is wrong, I think, in the conclusions he draws from that, for a language that is without reference is a language that is out of control, its words and images lacking the specific shape and structure, the **point**, of denotation, retaining only an empty connotative resonance.

The effect of this uncontrolled language is not the "marvelous lightness of imagination" in which Bersani professes to delight, but a purely private, idiosyncratic vision, accessible to Mailer initiates, perhaps, who possess an interpretive key derived from his more lucid writings (contained in the so-far omitted compilations), but an arcane, impenetrable, strained, and flat piece of writing for an average reader. Implicit in much of the critical defense of this novel (and perhaps in the novel itself) is the vulgar Romantic view of the imagination that sees that faculty not merely as "esemplastic" but as self-sufficient, and as, in an almost divine sense, creative; the book itself, however, lends credence to the Sartrian view of the imagination as an essentially impoverished faculty, whose images display only what has already been constituted in them. It is this "poverty" that explains the Pop or paste-board quality of the images of the novel, the impression that such characters as Deborah or Cherry, such places as the police station or Kelly's apartment are no more than facades, two-dimensional cut-outs from prior sources; it is this that forces the concoction of an occult apparatus of external "forces" and "voices" as the only
means of manipulating these fixed and isolated figures; it is this that makes the allusiveness of the novel merely idiosyncratic; and it is this oppressive sense that everything has already been constituted, already worked-out, that traps the novel in its seal of fate. The novel, then, is like a linguistic Sartrian dream, shut off from the real world and from the "wealth" of "actual perception", left only with a limited fund of old images and themes, to be re-worked in obsessive patterns. Lacking even the vividness of the true dream's unmediated image, its "non-referential" language devolves finally into stale and hollow verbiage.

Much the same sort of criticism can obviously be made of Mailer's last novel to date, *Why Are We In Vietnam?* (1967), and a detailed analysis of it would only be redundant. Here again, in an even more extreme manner, language is used not as a reference to, but as an insulation from, experience. The actual events of the novel are few, banal, and derivative, but they are all but concealed behind a manic torrent of words that are rarely so much as gathered into an image. The "narrator" from which all this sound and fury issues is ostensibly a Texas adolescent, "D.J.", but of course "one can't be sure":

Bishop Berkeley, goes the mad comptometer in old D.J.'s head, am I the ideational heat of a real crazy-ass broken-legged Harlem Spade, and just think myself D.J. white boy genius Texan in Alaska imagining my opposite number in Harlem land, when in fact, Good Lord, when in fact, I, D.J., am trapped in a Harlem head which has gone so crazy that I think I sitting at a banquet in the Dallas ass white-ass manse remembering Alaska am in fact a
figment of a Spade gone ape in the mind from outrageous frustrates wasting him and so now living in an imaginary white brain, or is that ether-load man?40

Even as a parody of the ambiguous narrator this seems weak, for it is blatantly evident that the only entity speaking here is Norman Mailer, the imitation dialect ("... I think I sitting...") an embarrassingly inadequate mask for the antically posturing author. The most charitable reading of the novel, perhaps, would be to view it as merely a private exercise, the hyper-active, throw-away language simply a kind of soup in which to mix personal themes, old ideas, and borrowed plots.

More than anything else, the novels of Mailer's third phase convey an impression of decadence, of a spent fictional or novelistic impulse turning in upon itself to dabble with the remnants of a petrified mythology. The question that gives this last novel its catchy title, for example, was asked and answered much more honestly and powerfully two years previously in a speech and essay,41 and those pieces provide the key to what little content is to be found in this work. Even Poirier seems to be aware of the intellectually exhausted, programmatic quality of these later novels when he speaks of Rojack, in An American Dream, as moving "in obedience to a map already charted in Mailer's earlier works, a diagram of the formative workings of Mailer's imagination."42 Yet he, among others, continues to insist upon the worth of these books, describing Why Are We In Vietnam? as "the most dazzling and perhaps the most incomprehensibly slighted of his novels."43 This sort of judgment can
only be explained as a manifestation of the skew or bias imparted to Mailer criticism by the introduction of the Mailer persona in the earlier compilations, and, like the phenomenon of decadence in the novels themselves, cannot fully be understood until those works are discussed. But on one point Poirier seems clearly and instructively wrong: he asserts, without really providing any examples, that this novel is "a funny book, among the comic masterpieces, I think, of American literature." But, despite the book's incessant and most strenuous attempts at a sort of fast-talking adolescent wit, I myself am unable to find more than one or two instances of genuine humour in it ("Intro Beep 7" is perhaps the only good example). If this inability is not merely a matter of taste but reflects a real failure of the novel, one can link that failure to the fundamental flaw of this third phase. For humour, in a sense, results from the juxtaposition of reality and human expectations or pretentions; the problem is not that Mailer lacks a sense of humour, for that is amply demonstrated in his journalism, but that, in his later novels, he has lost his sense of reality.

With the publication of *Why Are We In Vietnam?*, in 1967, Mailer's novelistic development comes to an at least temporary halt. The large novel that is reportedly now in progress, if it is successful, will constitute a major addition to that development and may well relegate all of the novels discussed here to merely an "early phase". Any conclusions concerning that development to be drawn at this point, therefore, must
necessarily be partial, but the five novels that have so far appeared, as organized into three phases, display a pattern of evolution that is remarkably and significantly symmetric. The key to that pattern, and perhaps the primary reason behind Mailer's frustration with the novel form, is that divided vision first indicated in the discussion of *The Deer Park*. That novel, it will be recalled, was split into mutually irreconcilable fragments, one centred about a moral hero, a man who struggles within, and against, a real world, for such traditional virtues as love, integrity, and justice; and the other centred about a kind of dream-hero, a figure projecting a narcissistic counter-world of sex and power, a vision of meaning that is either immediate or mystic. For the sake of schematic simplicity these opposing tendencies might be termed "world" and "meaning", the former representing that which is contingent, perceptual, and temporal, and the latter representing not any particular meaning but the idea of meaning. In this sense, *The Naked and the Dead* is clearly a novel in which the world is dominant, to the virtual exclusion of meaning; but for the lost vision of Croft, its naturalist overview presents a reality that is substantial, seamless, and mute, alien to all notions of value or purpose, closed by its determinism. The second phase (*The Deer Park*), moving the narrative perspective closer to the action, attempted a fusion of world and meaning, but managed instead only a kind of strained balance that left the two terms separate and distinct. And the third phase, fixing the narrative perspective...
in the very centre of the action, has simply moved entirely into "meaning", its characters and events reduced to the level of signs in a dream, its world insubstantial, weightless, sealed by fate. Mailer's novelistic development, then, moving along an axis defined by the alternatives of "world" and "meaning", and using, as the lever of that movement, the relative distance between narration and narrative, has concluded (thus far) only in the opposite end of the box in which it began. Georg Lukács, the critic whose general remarks on naturalism so illuminated the discussion of The Naked and the Dead, would doubtlessly call this box the box of modernism, and it is again significant that his comments on a prevalent literary situation are so pertinent to the particular case of Norman Mailer:

The extreme subjectivism of the new bourgeois literature is only apparently in opposition to the trend toward the common-place. Even the apparently fierce attempts to oppose naturalism by depicting the "exceptional" man, the "eccentric" and even the "superman" are locked in the stylistic vicious circle of the naturalism in which they originate. In literature and life the eccentric individual, alienated from daily reality, and the "average" man are complementary, interdependent polar opposites.

Both types--the superman and the philistine--are equally fatuous, equally divorced from significant social conflicts, equally devoid of historical content. They are pallid, single-dimensional phantoms, not living beings. In order to invest them with some meaning authors must represent such types as instruments of some mystical force. Otherwise, nothing at all can happen in a work in which the hero is supposed to be a superman. Naturalism and its opposing movements rest on the same philosophic base and offer essentially similar approaches to composition. Both rest on a solipsistic conception of man hopelessly isolated in an inhuman society.
There is, perhaps, an ironic pathos in this conclusion for a writer possessed of such reaching ambitions for the novel as a form. Yet, as we shall see, it is only with the abandonment of that form that Mailer finally begins to move toward a way out of his box, toward a representation of that ultimate synthesis, a meaningful world.
Chapter 4  Advertisements for Myself and the Compilations

Mailer's novels (thus far) exhibit an evolution that appears complete in itself, though ultimately abortive. But between the second and third phase of that evolution his wider literary career branched out into alternate forms, and began to achieve that long-sought combination of popular and critical success that had eluded him since *The Naked and the Dead*. These unique 
"compilations"¹ are truly like missing links in the discussion to this point, not only in that they elucidate certain anomalies of the later novels (such as the partisan nature of the critical response to them, the idiosyncrasy of their style and thought, or their exhausted decadence), but also in that they are purely transitional forms, products of the failure of one line of development and indispensable phases in the evolution of another—the journalism of Mailer's maturity. These intermediate works allow Mailer a release from the imaginative burdens of fiction while displaying a scattered variety of alternate forms and experiments, literary mutations in a sense. More importantly, they present the coming into being of a Mailer-persona, a literary creation that will figure as the central character of the later journalistic narratives. *Advertisements for Myself*, published in 1959, is of particular significance since it is the first of the new species, the two others (*The Presidential Papers*, in 1963, and *Cannibals and Christians*, in 1966²) re-
presenting only more polished variations. More than just the first example of a form, it is a work that marks a watershed in Mailer's career, gathering up all that has gone before and forecasting much that is to come, changing the direction of his literary development fundamentally and irreversibly.

Yet it is a work that has rarely been given any close attention by Mailer critics, the reason no doubt having to do with its peculiarly unclassifiable format. For at first sight *Advertisements for Myself* hardly appears to be a "work" at all, in the sense of a single, unified literary artefact. Thrown together in these pages one finds juvenile short stories, political essays, poems, reprinted newspaper columns, excerpts from novels, early drafts, letters to the editor, unpublished notes, and work in progress. But the book is not simply a miscellany (like those put together by publishers to keep an author's name current during a quiet period), and an indication of this difference is to be found both in the comprehensiveness and in the disparateness of the material gathered here. These are the very qualities, of course, that make the book difficult to study as a totality, but they are as well the mark of an ambition that extends beyond the limits of the mere anthology, toward some inclusive presentation of self. The double Table of Contents—one sequential, the other categorical—is a minor but interesting hint in itself of a greater degree of organization and purpose to this book than is apparent on the surface. But the aspect that makes this book a "work", the state-
ment of its ambition, the source of its organization, its purpose, and its unity, is the italicized self-commentary, the set of interspersed reflections that, altogether, constitute an amazing and powerful amalgamation of apology, explanation, confession, retrospection and intimation, regret and promise. This is a work, then, that is constructed on two levels: one consists of the collected pieces themselves, the raw material of Mailer's literary self, set plainly before the reader like the letters of an epistolary novel; the other is a kind of meta-commentary, distinguished from its subject-matter by its very print, collectively labelled "Biography of a Style" by Mailer himself in his "Second Table of Contents". Mailer's title for this level seems both appropriate and inaccurate—that is, it seems true to say that the subject of this commentary is not so much a person, as a "style", not a psychological but a literary reality; on the other hand, the treatment of that literary reality seems more properly termed a "story" than a biography, and the book as a whole might well be read as a form of **bildungsroman**. In this sense, *Advertisements for Myself* is the story of the formation of a "hero".

The very profusion of the book's material, however, prevents any exhaustive analysis of that formation, requiring instead a focus upon certain of its crucial moments. Mailer himself, in a prefatory "Note to the Reader", selects what he believes to be "the best pieces in this book", and, though he is hardly objective, his first two choices in particular seem
to fulfil that description—"The Man Who Studied Yoga" is a short story written in 1952, and is perhaps Mailer's best work of fiction; "The White Negro" is an essay written in 1957, and is among his best-known writings. These appear respectively about a third and about two-thirds of the way through the volume and so provide a neat, if mechanical, division of its contents. But, more importantly, they represent key stages in the development being narrated here, and so will serve as twin focal points in this discussion.

"The Man Who Studied Yoga" seems at first relatively simple, its strength deriving from the fact that it returns (after the abstract disaster of Barbary Shore) to a substantial reality, to the closely observed depiction of social and psychological surfaces. It presents, ostensibly, a day in the life of Sam Slovoda, married, middle-aged writer of continuity for comic magazines, ex-radical and novelist-manque:

In his living room he would go out to tilt the windmills of a vast, powerful, and hypocritical society; in his week of work he labors in an editorial cubicle to create spaceships, violent death, women with golden tresses and wanton breasts, men who act with their fists and speak with patriotic slogans. (p. 148)

Such a character, of course, seems almost ready-made for the purposes of satire, and the story takes advantage of those satirical opportunities in numerous instances, such as the Freudian-tinged breakfast gossip in which Sam and his wife engage the morning after a party: "'Charles hates women,' Sam says smugly. 'If you notice, almost everything he says about them is a dis-
charge of aggression." (p. 146). But in its central action, the story seems unusual and almost discordant: Sam and his wife and two other couples—similarly genteel, educated, bourgeois, similarly settled in their repressed social contexts—gather at Sam's home to watch a pornographic movie. Such a scene could obviously pass quickly from satire to burlesque, but, apart from a gently sardonic commentary, Mailer takes the situation oddly seriously, as though he wishes not merely to mock the anxious fears and desires of his middle-class specimens, but to study them. And as the film becomes graphically sexual the narration itself becomes increasingly suggestive, losing its tone of condescending irony, and exerting upon the reader too the hypnotic fascination of the erotic—the "audience" that "laughs no longer" (p. 159) is larger than just the fictional one, and their response, though more intense, is a reflection of the reader's as well:

A little murmur, all unconscious, passes from their lips. The audience sways, each now finally lost in himself, communing hungrily with shadows, violated or violating, fantasy triumphant. (p. 159)

The story thus involves its very readers in a kind of fictive experiment in a manner that the superior vision of satire generally precludes, and its conclusions are thereby endowed with a peculiar force. It is Sam—no longer an object of amusement, but now become our representative—who, as the film is projected a second time, draws these conclusions. Thinking of the Deer Park of Louis XV, to which were brought "the most beautiful
maidens of France", he contrasts that "lewd translation of a
king's power" with our present uses of power:

That century men sought wealth so they could use
its fruits; this epoch men lusted for power in or-
der to amass more power, a compounding of power in-
to pyramids of abstraction whose yield are cannon
and wire enclosure, pillars of statistics to the
men who are the kings of this century and do no more in
power's leisure time than go to church, claim to
love their wives, and eat vegetables.
Is it possible, Sam wonders, that each of them here,
two Rossmans, two Sperbers, two Slovodas, will cast
off their clothes when the movie is done and per-
form the orgy which tickles at the heart of their
desire? They will not, he knows, they will make
jokes when the projector is put away, they will
gorge the plate of delicatessen Eleanor provides,
and swallow more beer, he among them. He will be the
first to make jokes. (p. 160)

One notices, in the juxtaposition of the paragraphs of this
passage, a sudden shift in focus from the historical to the
personal that is the key not just to this story but to much of
Mailer's thought in general; it explains the real seriousness
behind the story's juxtaposition of the bourgeois and the porno-
graphic, and associates that confrontation with the more general
dissociation between politics and sex, between public action and
private lust, between reality and dream, between history and
the moment. It is Mailer's diagnosis of a cultural illness--
that there has formed a split, in our time, between desire and
power, and that as a consequence each side of the divide,
growing in isolation, has become perverted and diseased. A
powerless desire twists in upon itself in a futile consumption
of energy, while, on the other side, a desireless power swells
without purpose or check. It is this cultural lesion, then--
and not the minor comedies of the bourgeoisie--that constitutes
the story's real theme.

It is this theme that provides the radical foundation for
the social criticism of the story, infusing even such conven­
tional liberal vices as "alienation" and "conformity" with new
profundity and relevance. The evasive intellectualization, for
example, to which these characters are so prone (as in their
determination to talk "for a respectable period of time" before
the film [p. 154], or their need to "dominate" it with discussion
after [p. 160]) becomes not just a common psychological failing,
but a symptom of a general cultural malaise, and a part of the
elaborate system of apologetics by which that illness is sus­
tained. Even a trite observation concerning the blandness of
Sunday Supplements acquires a larger and more ominous signifi­
cance in the context of such a diagnosis:

Sam throws the Magazine Section away. Moments
of such anger torment him frequently. Despite
himself, Sam is enraged at editorial dishonesty, at
the smooth strifeless world which such articles
present. How angry he is--how angry and how help­
less. "It is the actions of men and not their
sentiments which make history," He thinks to himself,
and smiles wryly . . . .

I know what Sam feels. As he sits in the armchair,
the Sunday papers are strewn around him, carrying their
war news, their murders, their parleys, their en­
tertainments, mummery of a real world which no
one can grasp. It is terribly frustrating. One does
not know where to begin. (p. 148)

One of the chief virtues of this story is its ambiguous presen­
tation of Sam Slovoda, who might so easily have been a simple
caricature; here he seems at times both small and large, both
deluded and aware, both object and subject. By the end, seeing
him as a disillusioned revolutionary and now impotent artist
"He cannot find a form, he explains. He does not want to write a realistic novel because reality is no longer realistic", [p. 163]), his character has assumed the very features and proportions of his time. Indeed, it is, a time or an "epoch" itself that is the true subject of this story.

But Sam is no hero, and the time, as one of the symptoms of its disease, is inimical to heros:

One could not have a hero today, Sam thinks, a man of action and contemplation, capable of sin, large enough for good, a man immense. There is only a modern hero damned by no more than the ugliness of wishes whose satisfaction he will never know. One needs a man who could walk the stage, someone who--no matter who, not himself. Someone, Sam thinks, who reasonably could not exist. (p. 167)

These thoughts occur near the end of the story, when Sam is in bed and about to fall asleep; they are triggered by a sudden thought of "the novel he wants to write",

... that huge work with which he has cheated himself, holding it before him as a covenant of his worth, that enormous novel which would lift him at a bound from the impasse in which he stifles, whose dozens of characters would develop a vision of life in bountiful complexity ... (p. 167)

And these thoughts, in turn, trigger others, anxiety-ridden night thoughts, "yeast-swells of apprehension" (p. 167); one in particular concerns a girl he and Eleanor had once visited in a mental hospital, who babbled of movies, convents and sexual violation:

Sam sweats. There is so little he knows, and so much to know. Youth of the depression with its economic terms, what can he know of madness or religion? They are both so alien to him. (p. 168)
To escape these tormenting self-reflections he attempts to talk himself to sleep, at which point the narrator enters the story in a cryptic manner; these are its concluding lines:

In the middle from wakefulness to slumber, in the torpor which floats between blankets, I give an idea to Sam. "Destroy time, and chaos may be ordered," I say to him.

"Destroy time, and chaos may be ordered," he repeats after me, and in desperation to seek his coma, mutters back, "I do not feel my nose, my nose is numb, my eyes are heavy, my eyes are heavy."

So Sam enters the universe of sleep, a man who seeks to live in such a way as to avoid pain, and succeeds merely in avoiding pleasure. What a dreary compromise is life! (pp. 168-9)

The portrait of Sam Slovoda is thus clearly an anatomy of the anti-heroic, that anxious paralysis of the spirit that neither damns nor saves and that desires only sleep.

But there is another dimension to this story entirely, pervasive, and virtually explicit in the final lines. The exclamation mark at the end in itself seems oddly out of keeping with the pessimistic tone of the conclusion. More significantly, there is at least an "idea" here, however oracular its expression, for the very existence of an "idea" is a promise that Sam's condition is neither necessary nor universal. And behind that "idea" is that intrusive narrator, a paradoxically omniscient first person, a ubiquitous, judgmental, condescending, controlling, and disembodied intelligence who, in a defiant antithesis of Jamesian reticence, is constantly placing himself between the tale and the reader, guiding one's response in almost every particular. He introduces his characters with sweeping, gener-
alized assessments ("May I state that I do not dislike Sam Slovoda; it is just that I am disappointed in him . . . . Of his appetite for a variety of new experience I may say that it is matched only by his fear of new people and novel situations" [pp. 142-3]); he takes sides ("At those times when I do not like Eleanor, I am irritated by her lack of honesty" [p. 145]); he affects a skeptical puzzlement ("I find it hard to explain their attitude" [p. 153]); he makes admissions ("I suppose I am a romantic" [p. 164]); and indulges in aphorisms ("I would introduce myself if it were not useless. The name I had last night will not be the same as the name I have tonight" [p. 142]). And he tells the entire story in the present tense, as though giving a moment by moment account of events seen through some dimensional keyhole. He appears, in other words, quite literally to transcend the story that he narrates, and thus provides, in tonal counterpoint to the anti-heroic subject-matter, at least the possibility of a transcending vision. The enigmatic "idea" that he gives to Sam at the end is meant, perhaps, simply as a focus for this sense of "possibility", not as a statement interpretable in itself.5

This ghostly narrator, therefore, represents a technical innovation of considerable impact, a means of avoiding certain pitfalls or limitations that plague Mailer's past and future attempts at narration. In The Naked and the Dead, as we have seen, the absence of a narrator left its story without human or moral measure, and so flattened the significance of its events;
the presence of a narrator in *The Deer Park* tended to re-establish a moral relief—but as an embodied character, Sergius O'Shaugnessy had to become the realization of that novel's redemptive vision, a task to which neither he nor (at that point) Mailer himself was equal. Being neither absent nor physically present, the "I" of this story can be its judge and measure, the bearer of its saving vision, but, because he has no effect upon its events, he is not forced in any way to realize or live that vision, as was O'Shaugnessy. So the vision that will heal the culture so finely dissected here remains hidden but "promised", a potentiality. For this very reason the technique of this story cannot be easily or frequently duplicated, as repetition would tend to discredit its promise. The story, in other words, derives a good deal of its unusual force and intensity from the fact that is is fundamentally off-balance, leaning toward, and depending upon, some undefined but ultimate revelation.

This story has something of the force of prophecy though when it was written, in 1952, Mailer was himself apparently still engaged in the task of discovering or forging his revelation. There are some indications of its eventual nature, however, to be found among those very elements that, with the narrator, contribute to its unbalanced lean. The title of the story, for example, refers to a character named "Cassius O'Shaugnessy" in a sub-story told by one of Sam's guests, who has "done about everything"—he has been a businessman, entered a monastery, "influenced T.S. Eliot", become a Communist, an
anarchist, a gangster, and finally a man who studied yoga (pp. 155-7). Later, Sam and another guest speak of "Jerry O'Shaugnessy", a figure out of their radical background, who possessed, like Cassius, a varied and adventurous history (pp. 161-2). And it was earlier revealed that Sam was undergoing psychoanalysis with an analyst named "Dr. Sergius" (p. 144).

These scattered allusions to the narrator of *The Deer Park* are explained in the short Preface that Mailer wrote for the Ballantine edition of the story:

> My last novel, *The Deer Park*, was originally conceived as the first book of an enormous eight-part novel. The themes of this huge—and finally unworkable—conception are buried in "The Man Who Studied Yoga", a short novel written as a prologue to all eight novels. (p. 141)

And he points, in the same Preface, to "a play on certain names, particularly 'O'Shaugnessy'" as being among "certain excursions and diversions remaining as part of the abandoned architecture of the large work" (p. 142). In the "Advertisement" for this story, Mailer provides a more complete statement of his ambitious original scheme:

> I woke up in the morning with the plan for a prologue and an eight-part novel in my mind, the prologue to be the day of a small frustrated man, a minor artist manque. The eight novels were to be eight stages of his dream later that night, and the books would revolve around the adventures of a mythical hero, Sergius O'Shaugnessy, who would travel through many worlds, through pleasure, business, communism, church, working class, crime, homosexuality and mysticism. (pp. 139-40)

It is this figure, then—Sam Slovoda's dream-ego and so a kind
of anti-"anti-hero", a creature out of myth—who is the key to whatever revelation lies beyond this story.

The development of this figure, and of the vision of salvation that he bears, is to be the dominating feature of Mailer's work for many years, continuing, with progressively less commitment, at least up to *An American Dream*; but it reaches something of a climax in 1957, with the publication of "The White Negro". One might mention two brief clues as to the nature of that vision that appear in Mailer's earlier works: in "The Man Who Studied Yoga", as Cassius O'Shaugnessy's random assortment of careers is recited, one of the guests remarks that "'Today, we'd call Cassius a psychopath'" (p. 156); in *The Deer Park*, the producer, Collie Munshin, refers to O'Shaugnessy at one point as both a "hipster" and a "psychopath"; finally, in "The White Negro" (subtitled "Superficial Reflections on the Hipster"), Mailer risks displaying his hand as fully as possible:

In short, whether the life is criminal or not, the decision is to encourage the psychopath in oneself, to explore that domain of experience where security is boredom and therefore sickness, and one exists in the present, in that enormous present which is without past or future, memory or planned intention, the life where a man must go until he is beat, where he must gamble with his energies through all those small or large crises of courage and unforeseen situations which beset his day, where he must be with it or doomed not to swing. The unstated essence of Hip, its psychopathic brilliance, quivers with the knowledge that new kinds of victories increase one's power for new kinds of perception; and defeats, the wrong kinds of defeats, attack the body and imprison one's energy until one is jailed in the prison air of other people's habits, other people's defeats, boredom, quiet desperation, and muted icy self-destroying rage. (pp. 304-5)
Here at last, though swaddled in an abstract rhetoric, is that long-promised revelation, that escape from the prison of our time—the salvation of "Hip". Nowhere else has Mailer laid bare the vision lurking at the core of his thought and work for at least a decade so completely or so forcefully. Before "The White Negro" it was largely inchoate, still seeking a formulation that would bring together its disparate strands; after, it tended to become a defensive, qualified vision, the vitality slowly leaking from it over the years. But in the long, winding, enraptured sentences of this essay the vision is charged with a passionate, apocalyptic energy, a youthful and strangely innocent energy that will not, so clearly, be found in his writing again.

Analyzing such a vision is not easy, as its hortatory appeal interferes with the necessary attitude of objectivity, but the attempt must be made, for we will only be able to understand the inherent drama of development that is *Advertisements for Myself* once we have achieved an understanding of the vision toward which so much of it points. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of this essay, given Mailer's socialist past, is its anti-social bias, its tendency to view "other people" as prisons of habit and boredom, its hostility to the very notion of man—or at least of oneself—as a social being. The response of the "hipster" to the cultural malaise that surrounds him is not a cure at all but a renunciation:
... if the fate of twentieth-century man is to live with death from adolescence to premature senescence, why then the only life-giving answer is to accept the terms of death, to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self. (p. 304)

It is this need for a radical break with society that attracts Mailer to the model of the psychopath, for the psychopath is one who is cut off from society not just legally, as an "outlaw" (though Mailer uses that frontier term as a metaphor for the condition), but culturally, morally, and psychologically as well, isolated in a manner that cuts to the very root of his being.

The consequence of this sort of psychopathic break is an almost Hobbesian vision of society as a collection of human atoms, and life as "a perpetual competition of colliding explorers" (p. 314). So, however ironical, it is no accident that we find the emergence of a capitalist economic imagery in this description. The world, firstly, is seen as a realm of scarcity:

Like children, hipsters are fighting for the sweet, and their language is a set of subtle indications of their success or failure in the competition for pleasure. Unstated but obvious is the social sense that there is not nearly enough sweet for everyone. (p. 314)

In such a world, "energy" takes the place of capital as the goal of all strivings:

And so the sweet goes only to the victor, the best, the most, the man who knows the most about how to find his energy and how not to lose it. The emphasis
is on energy because the psychopath and the hipster are nothing without it since they do not have the protection of a position or a class to rely on when they have overextended themselves. (p. 314)

And like all capital, once accumulated this energy cannot be allowed to sit idle, but must be incessantly re-invested:

For life is a contest between people in which the victor generally recuperates quickly and the loser takes long to mend, . . . in which one must grow or else pay more for remaining the same (pay in sickness, or depression, or anguish for the lost opportunity), but pay or grow. (p. 314)

The hipster must become, therefore, a hustler, psychic entrepreneur, constantly having to risk his hard-won energy in new situations, new gambles, in which loss may lead to the spiritual bankruptcy of the "beat":

. . . one can hardly afford to be put down too often, or one is beat, one has lost one's confidence, one has lost one's will, one is impotent in the world of action and so closer to the demeaning flip of becoming a queer, or indeed closer to dying, and therefore it is even more difficult to recover enough energy to try to make it again, because once a cat is beat he has nothing to give, and no one is interested any longer in making it with him. (p. 317)

Having exhausted his collateral, in otherwords, the beat hipster can no longer negotiate loans.

One might wonder, given this déclassé imitation of the bourgeois rat race, wherein lies the superiority, the saving vision, or even the appeal of the hipster. Mailer suggests one answer in his excited description of hipster heaven, the apocalyptic orgasm:
But to be with it is to have grace, is to be closer to the secrets of that inner unconscious life which will nourish you if you can hear it, for you are then nearer to that God which every hipster believes is located in the senses of his body, that trapped, mutilated and nonetheless megalomaniacal God who is It, who is energy, life, sex, force, the Yoga's prana, the Reichian's orgone, Lawrence's "blood," Hemingway's "good," the Shavian life-force; "It"; God; not the God of the churches but the unachievable whisper of mystery within the sex, the paradise of limitless energy and perception just beyond the next wave of the next orgasm. (p. 316)

But this breathless sexual mysticism is not the real key to the vision, and Mailer himself does not take it so seriously ("... what I have offered above is an hypothesis, no more ... [p. 316]). A part of its real appeal undoubtedly has to do simply with its romantic potential:

... the element which is exciting, disturbing, nightmarish perhaps, is that incompatibles have come to bed, the inner life and the violent life, the orgy and the dream of love, the desire to murder and the desire to create, a dialectical conception of existence with a lust for power, a dark, romantic, and yet undeniably dynamic view of existence for it sees every man and woman as moving individually through each moment of life forward into growth or backward into death. (p. 308)

But the central strength of this vision, the foundation of its redemptive promise, is something inherent only in the radically anti-social model of the psychopath, and the following peculiar passage provides a clue to its true nature:

The strength of the psychopath is that he knows (where most of us can only guess) what is good for him and what is bad for him at exactly those instants when an old crippling habit has become so attacked by experience that the potentiality exists to change it, to replace a negative and empty fear with an outward action, even if—and here I
obey the logic of the extreme psychopath—even if the fear is of himself, and the action is to murder.  

(p. 312)

Now how, precisely, is murder an action that is able to replace a fear of oneself? And what, in the first place, does it really mean to fear oneself? Such a fear would seem to imply a split in one's being, some sort of psychic self-betrayal, as though a part of oneself tyrannizes over another part: and this begins to suggest a Freudian answer, particularly when placed in the context of Mailer's remarks on psychopathy as an alternative to psychoanalysis:

Like the neurotic he is looking for the opportunity to grow up a second time, but the psychopath knows instinctively that to express a forbidden impulse actively is far more beneficial to him than merely to confess the desire in the safety of a doctor's room.  

(p. 311)

Mailer looks upon the hipster as a kind of deliberate or willing psychopath, and upon the psychopath as one whose "fundamental decision" is to "try to live the infantile fantasy" (p. 311); murder, in this sense, is then seen as a means of re-enacting, and finally breaking through, the Oedipal Complex:

For if he has the courage to meet the parallel situation at the moment when he is ready, then he has a chance to act as he has never acted before, and in satisfying the frustration—if he can succeed—he may then pass by symbolic substitute through the locks of incest.  

(p. 311)

In the Freudian system, of course, it is through the Oedipal Complex that the super-ego comes into being, an implantation of external social norms and values, and potentially an inner tyrant, an all-seeing critic of every action and motive, thwart-
ing one's will, stifling one's impulse, setting every person at a distance from his self and so creating a hollow at the centre of his being; it is the very agency of repression. The defining ambition of the hipster, therefore, is "the divorce of man from his values, the liberation of the self from the Super-Ego of society" (p. 318); and the real significance of Hip, for Mailer, is that it represents a vision of the end of repression, a vision of redemption from the original sin of culture.

In a sense, and despite Mailer's own contrary opinion (see pp. 317-18), the emphasis of Hip really is upon simplicity, not complexity. In the vision of Hip, moral responsibility is impossible, "because it would argue that the results of our actions are unforeseeable" (p. 318); and knowledge is either lost in an "absolute relativity where there are no truths other than the isolated truths of what each observer feels at each instant of his existence" (p. 318), or it is instinctive and immediate, the hipsters' "knowledge that what is happening at each instant of the electric present is good or bad for them, good or bad for their cause, their love, their action, their need" (p. 308). It presents a world, as we see, that is stripped even of the temporal dimensions of past and future, governed only by the instantaneous imperatives of "need" (p. 319). The one real variable in this life-view, the hipster's only virtue, is courage, his only vice is cowardice. And his hope is that with such a vision he can make himself
whole and solid again, heal the wound of repression, fill the
self-critical hollow of his psyche with an instinctive body-
knowledge, and so escape the bonds of the diseased and doom-
ridden culture that surrounds him.

The naivete of such a hope, of course, is scarcely hidden
by Mailer's romantically charged prose. On the whole, the vi-
sion that is presented in this essay seems undeniably flawed—
easily dated, often illusory or self-contradictory, and wist-
fully, excitedly boyish; the opinion of the "Negro jazz musi-
cians" that Mailer and James Baldwin knew in Paris—"They
thought he was a real sweet ofay cat, but a little frantic"—
seems to characterize much of this essay well. The middle sec-
tions, especially, in which Mailer is trying to elucidate the
hipster's psychopathy or his quaintly obsolescent jargon, seem
weak; the sentences are too long, the clauses anxiously repeti-
tive, the arguments frequently undergoing an opportunistic
reversal ("By this premise the hipster is a psychopath, and yet
not a psychopath but the negation of the psychopath . . . ."
[p. 308]; Mailer does not always appear to recognize that not
every contradiction is dialectic). The very attempt to "argue"
Hip, apparent in the style's profusion of logical conjunctions—
"if", "why then", "because", "and so", "for", "since","there-
fore", and so on—is in conflict with the hipster's affirmation
of the instinctive, the intuitive, and the irrational; and the
effect of this conflict is to isolate Mailer from his subject,
leaving him, to a degree, merely an uncritical observer, an out-
sider gazing upon an experience that seems rich and strange, but is untried and unlived. It is the position of the adolescent, of course, and accounts for much of the earnestly boyish tone of the essay; Mailer himself seems to realize and accept this comparison, for he describes the language of Hip as one that "most adolescents can understand instinctively, for the hipster's intense view of existence matches their experience and their desire to rebel" (pp. 308-9). But he does not appear to appreciate the simple bad faith involved in the abstract "desire to rebel"—unlike the hermit, for example, the anti-social hipster is tied negatively but inextricably to the very society that he rejects, becoming a kind of rebel-manque. Because his rebellion is without a cause, it is devoid of direction, purpose, or content, and so becomes, finally, no more than a posture or an affectation.

Yet the essay has some very real strengths as well, and these are particularly evident in the opening and closing statements, when Mailer leaves aside the discussion of the hipster himself, and speaks instead of the historical conditions out of which he arose and to which he is a response:

Probably, we will never be able to determine the psychic havoc of the concentration camps and the atom bomb upon the unconscious mind of almost everyone alive in these years. For the first time in civilized history, perhaps for the first time in all of history, we have been forced to live with the suppressed knowledge that the smallest facets of our personality or the most minor projection of our ideas, or indeed the absence of ideas and the absence
of personality could mean equally well that we might still be doomed to die as a cipher in some vast statistical operation in which our teeth would be counted, and our hair saved, but our death itself would be unknown, unhonored, and unremarked, a death which could not follow with dignity as a possible consequence to serious actions we had chosen, but rather a death by deus ex machina in a gas chamber or a radioactive city; and so if in the midst of civilization—that civilization founded upon the Faustian urge to dominate nature by mastering time, mastering the links of social cause and effect—in the middle of an economic civilization founded upon the confidence that time could indeed be subjected to our will, our psyche was subjected itself to the intolerable anxiety that death being causeless, life was causeless as well, and time deprived of cause and effect had come to a stop. (p. 303)

And he concludes with a sweeping peroration in which the hipster's vision of personal salvation is situated within the socialist tradition of collective redemption, an impassioned expression of hope for a vast synthesis of the outward and inward halves of human being:

For if a revolutionary time should come again, there would be a crucial difference if someone had already delineated a neo-Marxian calculus aimed at comprehending every circuit and process of society from ukase to kiss as the communications of human energy—a calculus capable of translating the economic relations of man into his psychological relations and then back again, his productive relations thereby embracing his sexual relations as well, until the crises of capitalism in the twentieth century would yet be understood as the unconscious adaptations adaptations of a society to solve its economic imbalance at the expense of a new mass psychological imbalance.

(p. 322)

Here might be found the true significance and relevance of this essay, for the hope of a bridge between Marx and Freud, the twin pillars of modern secular theory, is associated not only
with much of the radical thought of our time but with Mailer's own notions of cultural split, discussed above, and with the whole of his attempt throughout the novels to create a vision that would reconcile world and meaning.

Still, it remains only a hope or at best a potential. The fundamental and ineradicable weakness of "The White Negro" is that its hero remains an ethereal, unrealized abstraction; even the historical and intellectual context within which that hero is placed is general and lacking in concrete illustration. For that illustration one could turn to "The Man Who Studied Yoga", and in this sense one might view the essay as leaning back toward the earlier story, just as the story, as we have seen, pointed toward the essay for the fulfilment of its promise. The two pieces are like exact inversions of one another: the one is fictional and concrete, quotidian in subject, ironic and skeptical in tone; the other is journalistic and abstract, apocalyptic in subject, direct and committed in tone. As such, they are strongly dependent upon one another for their ultimate validity, essentially incomplete as isolated pieces, the separation between them approximating that gulf between world and meaning that, through various forms, constituted a perpetual problem for Mailer as a novelist.

Despite the fact that they were originally published independently, however, in Advertisements for Myself these writings are not isolated pieces, for not only are they collected together with other samples from the whole Mailer's career to 1959 but they are embedded in a commentary that unites the en-
tire collection into a narrative and dramatic totality. Sam Slovoda, it will be remembered, is a would-be artist, a novelist who lacks a hero; the hipster is a would-be rebel, a hero, in a sense, who lacks a concrete context; the figure that could bring these two together would therefore be a rebel-artist, a hero with an actual context and substance. This book, as stated earlier, is the story of the development of such a hero, his substance provided not by any physical reality but by the collected pieces themselves, his shape given by the italicized self-commentary. This is how he introduces himself:

Like many another vain, empty, and bullying body of our time, I have been running for President these last ten years in the privacy of my mind, and it occurs to me that I am less close now than when I began. Defeat has left my nature divided, my sense of timing is eccentric, and I contain within myself the bitter exhaustions of an old man, and the cocky arguments of a bright boy. So I am everything but my proper age of thirty-six, and anger has brought me to the edge of the brutal. In sitting down to write a sermon for this collection, I find arrogance in much of my mood. It cannot be helped. The sour truth is that I am imprisoned with a perception which will settle for nothing less than making a revolution in the consciousness of our time. Whether rightly or wrongly, it is then obvious that I would go so far as to think it is my present and future work which will have the deepest influence of any work being done by an American novelist in these years. I could be wrong, and if I am, then I'm the fool who will pay the bill, but I think we can all agree it would cheat this collection of its true interest to present myself as more modest than I am. (p. 15)

The speaker of course is Norman Mailer himself, who is finally able to produce a credible, viable hero only by becoming one, by adopting the heroic role of "the Novelist". Because that is a role, however, only manifested, so far as this discussion is
concerned, in his literary self-presentations, and serving there a significant literary function, it would be well to distinguish at the outset between the person that is Mailer and the persona he adopts and manifests; for it is only as the latter that "Mailer" becomes an object of critical study.

It is by means of this complex persona that is "Mailer" that the compilation is unified, its abstract, transcendent hopes tied to concrete, immanent realities. The key to this unity is to be found in the component parts of the persona—Sam Slovoda and Mailer's representative of the hipster, Sergius O'Shaugnessy—and in the peculiar relationship that they bear to one another. For Sergius is Sam's dream-ego, his inner projection of a hero to set against his time, "a man of action and contemplation, capable of sin, large enough for good, a man immense" (p. 167); and Sam is Sergius' ground and root, the epitome of his time, the very image of his social and political circumstance. The inner/outer ambivalence already inherent in such a relationship is further complicated by the fact that Sergius, though the embodiment of abstract hope, is also representative of the physical, the solid, the instinctual, while Sam, though immersed in his concrete situation, appears as a hollow man, the mere type of the larger condition. The fusion of these two figures in "Mailer" produces a character who is truly a match for the paradoxes of his time, alternately bold and diffident, boastful and confessional, passionate and cynical; above all, at the intricate heart of his personality, he unites internal and external, engulfing elements of the outside
world, and projecting an inner design to give shape and meaning to the world—he is a man who runs for President in the privacy of his mind. Unlike Sam, the dreamer, and unlike Sergius, his dream, he is at last the literary incarnation of the dream.

The "First Advertisement for Myself" (of which the above quotation is the first paragraph) introduces this character in his finished form (to 1959); before discussing him in more detail, however, it would be well to look briefly at the general pattern of his development as presented in the rest of the book. Here, the two focal works discussed previously can be used to divide that development into three rough phases. The first section presents "Mailer" as an innocent, reprinting some early and very imitative attempts at stories, some excerpts from Barbary Shore, and some polished but unassuming short stories that followed that novel as evidence. His innocence was not uncomplicated, however, and the conjunction of his first novel's astounding success with his second novel's abysmal failure, combined with "a dumb dull set of intimations that the things I was drawn to write about were taboo" (p. 96), tended to produce a rather frightened defensiveness: "Three or four years of constipated work, lack of confidence, cowardly sweetness and bouts of churlishness were the results of these dumb dull intimations" (p. 96). It is only with "The Man Who Studied Yoga", however, that "Mailer" makes the decision that ends his innocence, the decision to accept the burden of his ambition:
That evening was the end of many dead months for me. I was done with short stories and markets and editors and agents and thoughts of making my way back as some sort of amateur literary politician, done with trying to write less than I knew, rather than getting ready for something too large. (p. 139)

The second phase concerns the education of the innocent, in which he gradually gives form to his ambition, slowly and painfully, through a series of bad experiences, shaping its vision. It consists of essays and some columns for the newly-established Village Voice that are tainted, as Mailer confesses, by "an intricate and less forthright narcissism" (p. 243); but the centrepiece of this section is provided by the long story of his problems with his third novel, entitled "Fourth Advertisement for Myself: The Last Draft of The Deer Park". Here, he describes, still with some self-pity, the crisis engendered by the numerous rejections of the first draft:

I turned within my psyche I can almost believe, for I felt something shift to murder in me. I finally had the simple sense to understand that if I wanted my work to travel further than others, the life of my talent depended on fighting a little more, and looking for help a little less. But I deny the sequence in putting it this way, for it took me years to come to this fine point. All I felt then was that I was an outlaw, a psychic outlaw, and I liked it, I liked it a good night better than trying to be a gentleman . . . (p. 211)

After this, "The White Negro" comes not as a crisis so much as a culmination, a climactic formulation, which Mailer associates with two of the fragments from his projected novel:

In "The White Negro", in "The Time of Her Time", and in "Advertisements for Myself on the Way Out" can be found the real end of this muted autobiography of the near-beat adventurer who was myself.
With these three seeds, let us say the book has its end. (p. 302)

The third section, consisting of this work in progress, miscellaneous scraps, and further defenses, elaborations and refinements of the theme of Hip, can be seen as a kind of extended denouement, a gathering of loose ends. The pieces from the novel, which Mailer (and some critics) feel to possess great intrinsic merit, seem on the contrary to be disappointing in themselves—either predictable or obscure concoctions of detail that merely illustrate the abstractions of Hip that have already been enunciated. They might better be read simply as tokens of that vast and ultimate work whose promise haunts this book, or perhaps as appendices to the better conclusion, the "Last Advertisement for Myself Before the Way Out" (a finely ambiguous title for an ending). In this parting word, the focus of the commentary broadens to include some angry reflections on the condition of the contemporary writer, within which "Mailer" situates himself; and in the midst of that situation he voices again the ambitious prophecy first heard in the opening paragraph, tying together the whole of this work with the promise of a novel that will redeem the present corruption of literature by adding a link to the larger tradition of literary truth:

For if I have one ambition above all others, it is to write a novel which Dostoyevsky and Marx; Joyce and Freud; Stendhal, Tolstoy, Proust and Spengler; Faulkner, and even old moldering Hemingway might come to read, for it would carry what they had to tell another part of the way. (p. 427)
Having displayed the evidence and told his story, in the end "Mailer" returns to the beginning, to the simply stated "sour truth" of the opening paragraph in which the angry, confessional hero-narrator first reveals the scope of his imprisoning perception.

The "First Advertisement for Maysel", in fact, is an ideal introduction to the book, since it contains in brief all the varied parts of the persona who is the subject of the story. That figure, we have seen is a union of Sam and Sergius, of inner and outer, internalizing elements of the world and externalizing an inner design in which those elements reappear charged with private emotion and meaning. "Running for President", for example--that typical "Mailer" activity--is a republican form of the desire to be king, to possess the kind of effective power that could indeed make a revolution. "Hemingway", as another example, is in these pages more than just a name in the history of the American novel, but is a kind of generational father-figure, an ego-ideal for the rebel-artist "Mailer":

For you see I have come finally to have a great sympathy for The Master's irrepressible tantrum that he is the champion writer of this time, and of all time, and that if anyone can pin Tolstoy, it is Ernest H. (p. 17)

But he becomes, necessarily, an ideal outgrown, and betrayed: "He's no longer any help to us, he's left us marooned in the nervous boredom of a world which finally he didn't try hard enough to change" (p. 18); he becomes, in fact, both a model and a warning for those novelists (such as "Mailer") who would
use their personalities to advertise their work. "Cancer", as one further example, is not just a disease, but an image of the central error of our time, "that disease which is other than disease, that wave of the undifferentiated function, the orgy of the lost cells" (p. 21). These and other such images and fragments of the real world gradually accumulate a significance in this book (and throughout the rest of Mailer's career) that is over and above their ordinary connotation, and are fitted into an evolving private system or "myth" that should be seen as simply the outer side of the created persona.

The duality of the "Mailer" persona, in other words, is inherent in the opposition between the self and the time that pervades this commentary. The inside of "Mailer" is concerned with physical bravery and cowardice ("... I've been hit on the head by a hammer, and had my left eye gouged in a street fight—and of course I'm proud of this (I was a physical coward as a child) ... "[p. 20]); concerned with psychic waste and exhaustion ("I've burned away too much of my creative energy .... It will be fine if I can write so well and so strongly as to call my shot, but unfortunately I may have fatigued the earth of rich language beyond repair, I do not know, but it is possible"[p. 20]); and concerned, sometimes arrogantly, sometimes anxiously, with self ("To write about myself is to send my style through a circus of variations and postures, a fireworks of virtuosity designed to achieve ... I do not even
know what" [p. 15]). But this very self-consciousness becomes a means of reflecting him outward, not only through the more objective realities of style, but through his identification with his contemporaries, with what he terms "my rebel generation" (p. 18). And this generation is then set against the cultural milieu, "our most subtle and dear totalitarian time, politely called the time of conformity":

Yes, I wanted to say, my creative rage is being sapped, I have been dying a little these fifteen years, and so have a good many of you, no doubt--none of us are doing quite so much as we once thought we would. But then this has been a bad time, we've all been flattened by the dead air of this time, dinched and tamped into a flat-footed class. (p. 16)

Just as the persona that is "Mailer" is generalized to include far more than merely the person Mailer, so "the time" should be seen as more than a particular historical period ("the fifties")--rather, it refers to any age in which an anxiously enforced social conformity has grown up in the place of lost traditional values and beliefs, in place of the meaninglessness and dread that such a loss produces. "Mailer", then, is a character linked inextricably to his social surroundings, a man for whom self and time are but opposite poles of a single perception.

And the focal point of that perception, the very basis of his role as an artist-hero, is that externalization of self in the form of a novel, a redemptive artistic work with which to effect "a revolution in the consciousness of our time" (p. 15).
For "Mailer" is the antitype of the aesthete, the artist for whom art is an end in itself; in his view, art is instead a tool, a cultural weapon in the struggle against the encroaching "totalitarianism" and in the defense of value and meaning:

So, yes, it may be time to say that the Republic is in real peril, and we are the cowards who must defend courage, sex, consciousness, the beauty of the body, the search for love, and the capture of what may be, after all, an heroic destiny. (p. 21)

It is this public and utilitarian approach to art, in fact, that is partly behind the competitiveness of "Mailer's" attitude toward the business of writing, the reason for his frequent tendency to compare himself with his contemporaries (and with his predecessors), and for his numerous references to the size of one's "talent" (as though that were some inherent and common quality in all novelists); for he sees his fellow writers as essentially engaged in the same task, the common struggle, and the great novel that he promises as the validation of his heroic role is seen as the object of a race, its size and scope becoming a measure of his own status as an artist-hero. At least as much as "truth", "Mailer" is concerned with effect:

If it is to have any effect, and I can hardly look forward to exhausting the next ten years without hope of a deep explosion of effect, the book will be fired to its fuse by the rumor that once I pointed to the farthest fence and said that within ten years I would try to hit the longest ball ever to go up into the accelerated hurricane air of our American letters. (p. 427)

By now, of course, those ten years have long past, and no such immense, "unpublishable" "outlaw of the underground" (p. 427)
has appeared. Like the Second Coming, it has, perhaps, had a greater impact in its failed promise than it ever could have had in its realization. It seems, at least, to be a major reason behind the peculiarly skewed response that has beset Mailer criticism since the appearance of *Advertisements for Myself*, for the salvational role that "Mailer" adopts in this book tends to divide critics into the sharply opposing camps indicated in the discussion of *An American Dream*: the partisans, whose interpretations, all too often, are little more than paraphrases of Mailer's personal themes and notions;¹¹ and the antagonists, who generally content themselves with sweeping, mocking dismissals.¹² It has had the unfortunate effect of encasing Mailer, even in his own mind,¹³ in the role of the Novelist, and critics either make allowances for the potential of that role or become indignant at its corruption (both sides being in agreement that *An American Dream* was not the promised work¹⁴). Because of this bias, Mailer's actual work, including *Advertisements for Myself*, too often is relegated to a minor, incidental, or merely preparatory status.¹⁵

But such a response seems due to an overly-literal reading of this crucial book, a failure adequately to appreciate the constructed, or the literary, nature of the "Mailer" persona, and of the promise he represents. In the book itself, "Mailer" at one point speaks of this promise as the "seeds" with which the book is ended: "Seed is an end, it is the end of potentialities seen for oneself, and every organism creates its seed out
of the experience of its past and its unspoken vision or curse upon the future" (p. 302). The creation that grew from that seed, however, was not a novel, not another work at all, but rather a figure, a literary character, fabricated out of the writings of an actual author but clearly made into something more than, and other than, that person himself, and for whom the promise of a novel is but an aspect or a quality. It is this figure that offers the real "Way Out" indicated in the title of the "Last Advertisement". For in the pages of this book, Mailer creates, from the stuff of his own literary substance, a figure whose dimensions and whose complexities reduce the heroes of his subsequent fictions to the level of self-parodying imitations; he produces a hero able to engage an entropic, contingent reality with the fiat of his work, and so at last introduce form and meaning to the world. Here, of course, that reality if not yet engaged, the word not yet said, for this book simply presents the development of the hero. He has still to find his story.

Advertisements for Myself, then, constitutes a breakthrough in Mailer's literary development, and the success of its unique format lead to further attempts at the compilation. These later works--The Presidential Papers, in 1963, and Cannibals and Christians, in 1966--are similar in their two-part structure of a collection of assorted writings strung together by a unifying commentary, and many of the ideas and images of the first book recur in varying forms in these. They exhibit variations
in theme and in structure, however, that are not merely arbitrary, but display a particular development, an evolutionary trend that, as we shall see, will eventually lead to the obsolescence of the form. The most obvious change in the later compilations, perhaps, is the virtual absence of any reference to "Hip", the central theme of Advertisements for Myself. This seems largely a result of the fact that "Hip" was so quickly and easily co-opted by the media, the hipster, with all his stylized paraphernalia and his jargon, soon reduced to merely another colourful cult figure in the American tapestry. In the face of such corruption, Mailer has simply tended to substitute the more abstract and intellectually prestigious term "existentialism" for "Hip", retaining at least its philosophical core. But that substitution, however necessary, is itself an indication of a new element of defensiveness and caution in his vision.

A more significant absence in these books is all but the briefest of allusions to that huge novel whose promise seemed so important an aspect of the "Mailer" persona. Without that promise, the later compilations—and particularly their narrators—are fundamentally altered in stance, becoming more stable and confident, but at the cost of some of the ambitious, unbalanced force of Advertisements for Myself. The rebel-artist, the "near-beat adventurer" of that book is transformed, in The Presidential Papers, into "a court wit, an amateur advisor" and, in Cannibals and Christians, into a calmer and more dis-
tanced social prophet.

But the real evolution of these works is to be discerned in the diminishing status of the commentary, the gradual reduction in the role of the narrator himself. This is a process that is manifested firstly in terms of the actual length or amount of the commentary, and secondly in terms of its relevance to, or integration with, the collected pieces that make up the compilation. In *Advertisements for Myself*, as we have seen, the commentary is crucial, a controlling, shaping, unifying medium, closely intertwined with its subject; in *Cannibals and Christians*, however, it has become almost a separate "Argument" in itself, threaded throughout the individual pieces but largely independent of them and leaving them independent of it. The reason that Mailer's last collection to date, *Existential Errands* (1973), has not been included among the "compilations" is that, in taking this process to its conclusion, it is lacking entirely in a commentary or a narrator, and so marks the passing of that uniquely double-leveled form Mailer created in 1959.

Mailer tacitly acknowledges that passing in some prefatory remarks to the last collection that provide a clue to the real significance of this extinction:

If the emphasis is then less personal than *Advertisements for Myself*, *The Presidential Papers*, or *Cannibals and Christians*, it ought also to be said before too many apologies are upon us that this book may have a particular merit the others do not possess. Its parts are more even. It is more coherent. The ends of one piece are likely to buttress the ideas
in the next. What is said about film has its relation to boxing, and to theatre and to bullfight; the pieces side by side offer elucidation of one another . . . 18

In order to understand what has happened here it is necessary to recall the nature of the relationship between the levels of the earlier compilations. The pieces that are collected together in those books are a widely varying assortment, both in form and in quality; written at different times, under different conditions, they constitute the raw material of the story or the argument of the work itself. It is the self-reflective commentary that places these pieces in their proper logical or historical position in the work, rising above them to direct their force against the larger threat—"the time", "totalitarianism", "cancer"—that is seen as the abstract form of the enemy. In each subsequent compilation, however, as Mailer's vision becomes steadily more encompassing, more cohesive, and more stable, the gap between the two levels narrows; Mailer, who is the author of the pieces, approaches the "Mailer" who is the persona of the commentary, with the result that the second level tends to become redundant. The double level of experience and reflection that was so clearly distinguished in Advertisements for Myself has, in Existential Errands, simply been integrated into the fabric of the pieces themselves, Mailer's every writing becoming a self-commentary.

This should explain, then, the transitional nature of the compilation form: originating as a means of shaping a persona out of literary substance, it becomes obsolete as that persona
is worked into the substance itself. One effect of this change in the later compilations is to shift the emphasis from the commentary to the pieces themselves; indeed, these books might be seen as forums for the display and testing of a wide range of forms, techniques, styles, and manners, of a variety of literary mutations, in a sense, whose "survival" is determined by the degree of their public success—that is, by their impact, or their potential for a large effect. From such a testing will emerge the course of Mailer's future evolution, so that he derives from the compilation not only a persona, or a hero, but a form for that hero as well, as the compilation, in passing, gives rise to the third stage of his literary development.

It would require a disproportionate amount of space to consider each of the forms and techniques that appear in these books in detail, but it would be instructive to look briefly at a particular type of piece that seemed at one point to be of major importance, taking up almost a third of the length of Cannibals and Christians. This is what might be termed the imaginary or the fictional interview, the first example of which was published in Paris Review in 1961, entitled "The First Day's Interview". In The Presidential Papers, Mailer included a longer, more abstract and ambitious, and previously unpublished sequel to that piece, entitled "The Metaphysics of the Belly"; and in Cannibals and Christians, the two pieces are reprinted along with a third example of the type. "The Political Economy
of Time", as long and as bombastically metaphysical as the second. With the last two "interviews", described by Mailer as "done consecutively as two chapters of a projected book on Picasso"20, the form reaches its climax. The latest example appeared originally in the **New York Times Book Review** in 1967, and was reprinted in **Existential Errands**; much shorter, lighter, and totally without the metaphysical pretensions of the earlier pieces, it seems clearly to mark the end of the "experiment"21.

Here is a form, then, that has apparently failed, and in that failure constitutes almost a perfect example of the most enfeebling tendency in all of Mailer's writing, the tendency to devolve into self. This might be made evident by means of an interesting comparison of the two versions of "The First Day's Interview", the first in the **Paris Review** and the second in **Cannibals and Christians**. The latter, according to Mailer, is an abridgment, merely eliminating some early pages "where the manner is directly cloying",22 but in fact the piece seems to have been revised somewhat more extensively, and the effect of those changes is certainly larger than Mailer implies. The material that was cut out served primarily to establish the personalities of both the "interviewer" and "Mailer" as independent and divergent characters; and this is a virtue that Mailer himself appears to understand when, in a preface to the first version, he compares that piece to Gide's **Corydon**:

> In this fragment . . . the encounter is less narcissistic. The subject is a Norman Mailer, a weary, cynical, now philosophically turned hipster of middle
years; the interviewer is a young man of a sort the author was never very close to.23

The exchange of short remarks that Mailer later feels to be "directly cloying" in fact display a degree of genuine humour and intelligence, especially on the part of the interviewer:

INT.: Some have accused me of being a touch donnish.
MAILER: There is a cloying English simplicity to your remarks.
INT.: The I-am-simple school of Oxford interrogation?
MAILER: There you go. First time I've smiled.24

Such an opening provides a basis for the claim that the form is "a play with two characters"25, and defines the rambling remarks that follow as the amateur philosophical speculations of a public figure, of interest not for themselves so much as for the insight they offer into the mind of this particular "Norman Mailer".

But the elimination of this opening in the second version tends to depersonalize the interviewer, and so, by depriving "Mailer" of a real opposite in the piece, transforming it from a play or a dialogue into what is essentially a monologue, merely broken up by a series of coy, inane, and irritating interruptions:

MAILER
For instance, I know nothing about Heidegger, but I get the impression from Barrett's book, _Irrational Man_, that Heidegger might argue mood has precedence over matter. I know I would argue that.

INTERVIEWER
Why?

MAILER
Too difficult to talk about yet.26
Moreover, because the personality of the interviewer is eliminated the character of "Mailer" is also severely reduced, lacking an alternate against which it could be given definition. As a result (no doubt partially intended), the discursive speculations themselves become, through default, the focus of attention, and their intellectual content is simply not substantial enough to bear that weight; here, for example, is the abstract idea that Mailer felt was "Too difficult to talk about yet":

Mood is a harmony. The harmony of a Gestalt. The harmony of the life in the toom, or the harmony one senses in a landscape. And harmony permits one to relax. As one relaxes, so new perception comes from the conduits of the unconscious, and one has added one's contribution to the mood, which is now subtly different but is still alive in the growing tissue of previous sensation, precisely that tissue which was the mood of the previous moment. When a mood is shattered, the life in the room contracts, and a new mood, discontinuous to the last, begins its existence.27

What might have been interesting as a brief metaphor ("mood" as a kind of disembodied organism) is instead pretentiously elaborated—over another seven pages—into a concept that is either banal or absurd.

In the "vastly more ambitious"28 pieces that follow, this peculiar combination of banality and absurdity is only intensified, as various other "concepts"—shit, bull's balls, form, driftwood, soul, spirit, and vision—are taken up with high seriousness, torporous length, and numbing abstraction; at best, these are no more than a twisted melange of Plato, Bergson, and popularized Existentialism, philosophy made simple-
minded. The predominant impression to be gained from reading the "fictional interviews" is of self-indulgence; having earlier expressed a distaste for the dialectic of the real interview ("I never have good nor accurate interviews since I always seem to get into disagreeable situations with reporters . . ." 29), Mailer has simply made and published for himself a protected form that allows him to pontificate at his ease, to the admiring wonderment of his puppet interviewer. The only worth in discussing such pieces at all is that they exemplify, in an extreme form, a weakness that afflicts a good deal of Mailer's writing, and is especially apparent in his last two novels; the "ideas" of these interviews, in fact, seem to generate themselves in a manner strongly reminiscent of the proliferation of images in An American Dream or the verbal concatenations of Why Are We In Vietnam?. Each of these cases represents a mode of entrapment within the narrow confines of a concoction, a pure fiction, wherein the ideas, images, or words are produced only through the contingencies of non-referential association. The failure of this "interview" form, then, represents in an exemplary manner the failure of that entire tendency in Mailer that, impatient with the strictures and complications of reality and perhaps fearful of its ultimate absurdity, seeks merely to postulate truth, to assert a meaning, and so to lose himself in the impoverished figments of his pure imagination.

If the fictional interviews represent Mailer's tendency to devolve into self, however, the compilations also contain the emergence of a form that represents the very opposite ten-
dency, the injection of self into the world. In the interviews, the "Mailer" persona is deprived of any limit or boundary, and so his shape, his character is lost in the billowings of his argument; in immersing that persona in concrete existence, however, where his struggles are not with the wisps of his own fantasy but with the sharp, obdurate surfaces of the real world, with actual people and situations, his character can be defined, tested, and disciplined, hardened so that it may be the heroic embodiment of meaning. The records of such struggles that appear in the compilations are what are variously termed "accounts", "reportage", or "journalism", but none are quite adequate labels for the blend of observation and imagination, description and assertion, "reality" and "meaning", that Mailer achieves here. By any measure, including Mailer's own--that of "effect--they represent the most successful pieces of the compilations.

The evolution of this form, complete with precursory stages and awkward early versions, can be easily traced through these books. The first example, though probably not yet a conscious attempt at a new form, is the article Mailer wrote for *Esquire* in 1958 on his battle with the New York publishing houses over his third novel, and reprinted as part of the italicized commentary in *Advertisements for Myself* (pp. 205-25). The first deliberate attempt at reportage is an article on juvenile gangs entitled "'She Thought the Russians Was Coming'", written in February, 1960, and reprinted in *The Presidential Papers*;
it is not yet, however, an example of the form at its maturity, for it is too neutral and disengaged, too conventionally reportorial. In July and August of that same year, however, he wrote "Superman Comes to the Supermarket"\(^{31}\), his article on the 1960 Democratic Convention, and, as he fatefully admits, "This piece had more effect than any other single work of mine . . ."\(^{32}\). In October and November of 1962 he wrote "Ten Thousand Words a Minute"\(^{33}\), a long, ornate story on the Patterson-Liston heavyweight fight in which Mailer himself becomes involved both in mind and body. These two pieces stake out the two principle areas of the real that he will continue to explore in a series of brilliant sequels, the first of which is "In the Red Light: A History of the Republican Convention in 1964"\(^{34}\). With these last three pieces, the journalistic form is brought to a peak of excellence within the confines of the "article"; the stage is set for Mailer's next major literary advance, the emergence of the form in an autonomous work of its own.
Chapter 5 The Armies of the Night and the Journalism

What is remarkable about Mailer's literary development is the ease with which it can be divided into clear phases or periods, each marked by an explosive and uniquely formed work at their initiation, and each characterized by subsequent works of an imitative form and of diminished intensity. The books that followed *The Naked and the Dead*, of course, are not strictly imitative of that work, but they do indicate a generally failed attempt to repeat its success in the novel form. Ten years after its appearance Mailer published *Advertisements for Myself* which, as we have seen, changed the direction of his career forcefully and fundamentally. Thereafter, despite two rather decadent later novels, the emphasis of Mailer's work shifted away from fiction toward a more overt presentation of self in the guise of a literary persona, and toward the formation of an abstract system or "myth" in the commentaries of the following compilations. With this phase too, however, the later works begin to seem repetitive and self-exploitative; in fact, a careful examination will reveal a double process occurring in each phase: as the old form grows increasingly rigid and stereotyped a new vision is incubating, and the energy released by that vision, welling beneath the constrictions of the form, eventually results in a work that, in Mailer's peculiar pattern, both begins and brings to a climax the new phase. So, in 1967, eight years after *Advertisements for Myself*, there appeared what
is perhaps Mailer's greatest work to date, *The Armies of the Night*. With this book he completes his movement away from fiction by situating the persona that he had fashioned from his literary substance in the midst of a concrete historical occasion; and in this symbiosis of persona and history he manages at last to achieve the fusion of meaning and reality that had eluded him throughout the novels.

*The Armies of the Night* is not merely a lengthier version of the sort of journalistic account that appeared in the compilations. Those antecedents may bear some similarity to this book, but a major difference should be apparent from the start, with the reprint of *Time* magazine's scathing report of Mailer's behavior at the Ambassador Theater. Not only are we introduced to a "protagonist" here, and not only do we find that protagonist to be Mailer himself, but we are immediately provided with a comically scornful summary of the entire story. In the next section the protagonist is referred to explicitly as "Norman Mailer" and throughout the book is mentioned only in the third person. One is reminded of Mailer's resolute avoidance of the third person in his last four novels, and of his remark in an interview in 1963: "I think I must have felt at that time as if I would never be able to write in the third person until I developed a coherent view of life". Indeed, one quickly notices a new tone of expansive, almost contented self-confidence inherent in the rambling, digressive style of these opening sections that would tend to imply the attainment of such a
view of life. Thus, as "Mailer" (the protagonist) reaches for the telephone, over the space of two pages, the reader is provided with his diverse opinions on telephones, drugs, and his own image; these views are given with a surprising diffidence for Mailer (he admits one of his ideas to be "undeniably oversimple"), and with a genuinely comic sense of self-reflection ("Sometimes he thought his relationship to his image was not unlike some poor fellow who strains his very testicles to bring in emoluments for his wife yet is never favored with carnal knowledge of her" [p. 16]). This is not the work, in other words, of a literary prodigy, or of an angry young man with vast ambitions, but of a distinctly middle-aged and relatively established writer, sure enough of himself and of his image both to make it the center of his narrative and to accept it as an object of humour.

Perhaps the best way of approaching this work is by means of the protagonist, the "Mailer" persona finally objectified as a character in a narrative. He is, of course, the character developed through the compilations, and so his substance has accreted dense and complex layers—more than just a character, a personality, in fact, he is the voice, the "prophet" of a private myth, an intricate articulation of notions and images that has come to be regarded as Mailer's characteristic vision, by which he yokes together Hip, totalitarianism, orgasm, technology, existentialism, cancer, courage, magic, God, and the Devil. Thus, the persona is founded upon a certain polarity—on the
one hand, personal and confessional, and on the other, abstract and theoretical. In terms very similar to the opening paragraph of Advertisements for Myself, Mailer admits to a degree of chronological ambiguity:

Mailer had never had a particular age—he carried different ages within him like different models of his experience: parts of him were eighty-one years old, fifty-seven, forty-eight, thirty-six, nineteen, et cetera, et cetera—he now went back abruptly from fifty-seven to thirty-six. (p. 20)

Significantly, he returns to the rebellious age at which he wrote that first compilation in accepting the invitation to participate in the march on the Pentagon. And typically, his interest in such a march is piqued by the suggestion of violence: "He felt one little bubble of fear tilt somewhere about the solar plexus. 'Yes, this sounds more interesting,' he growled" (p. 19). At the other pole, the social, cultural, and philosophical concerns of the later compilations are abundantly evident in "Mailer's frequent digressions and "ruminations":

he punches again at the liberal academics:

If the republic was now managing to convert the citizenry to a plastic mass, ready to be attached to any manipulative gung-ho, the author was ready to cast much of the blame for such success into the undernourished lap, the overpsychologized loins, of the liberal academic intelligentsia. (p. 26)

And he again exposes his crankily romantic views on sex:

For guilt was the existential edge of sex. Without guilt, sex was meaningless. One advanced into sex against one's sense of guilt, and 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—each time guilt herded one back with its authority, some primitive awe—hence some creative clue to the rages of the deep—was left to brood about. (p. 36)
These samples of the "Mailer" persona are simply intended as an indication of the consistency of the character; to be sure, he has matured, and his sense of himself and of his opinions is more settled, but in that self and its integument of opinion one can still easily discern the rebel of _Advertisements for Myself_, the amateur advisor of _The Presidential Papers_, or the cultural critic of _Cannibals and Christians_.

Yet, even as a "court wit" in _The Presidential Papers_ Mailer took himself comparatively seriously; what distinguishes _The Armies of the Night_ from his previous work is not merely its humour but the fact that so much of its humour is directed at himself, that "Mailer" is in fact the very butt of the comedy. The humour of the book is rich and complex, deriving from different sources and serving different functions—the withering and reductive ridicule of the _Time_ report at the beginning, for example, is in sharp and deliberate contrast to the ornate self-satire with which Mailer himself describes "what happened" at the anti-war meeting in the Ambassador Theater. In the high burlesque of this scene one can find parodies not only of Mailer as a character but of virtually every theme and theory that have ever found a place in his idiosyncratic system. His anti-technological bias, for example, returns to haunt him when the microphone fails to work at the start of his performance:

... the gentle high-strung beast of a device pushed into a panic by the electric presence of a real Beast, let loose a squeal which shook the welds in the old foundation of the Ambassador. Mailer immediately decided he had had enough of public address systems, electronic fields of phase, impedance, and spooks in
the circuitry. A hex on collaborating with Cancer Gulch. (p. 149)

Even "existentialism", Mailer's respectable substitute for his original obsession, Hip, is gently mocked, used by "Mailer" to commandeer the stage:

"We are having a disagreement about the value of the proceedings. Some think de Grazia should resume his post as Master of Ceremonies. I would like to keep the position. It is an existential moment. We do not know how it will turn out. So let us vote on it." Happy laughter from the audience at these comic effects. Actually Mailer did not believe it was an existential situation any longer. He reckoned the vote would be well in his favor. (p. 52)

But the greatest humour is directed at the confessional mode itself, viewed as "the Romantic's great military dream, which is: seize defeat, convert it to triumph" (p. 43)—"Mailer" attempts an Emersonian transcendence by planning to announce to the audience that he had missed the bowl in the men's room:

Well, he would convert this deficiency to an asset. From gap to gain is very American. He would confess straight out to all aloud that he was the one who wet the floor in the men's room, he alone! While the audience was recovering from the existential anxiety of encountering an orator who confessed to such a crime, he would be able--their attention now riveted--to bring them up to a contemplation of deeper problems, of, indeed, the deepest problems, the most chilling alternatives, and would from there seek to bring them back to a restorative view of man.

Man might be a fool who peed in the wrong pot, man was also a scrupulous servant of the self-damaging admission; man was therefore a philosopher who possessed the magic stone; he could turn loss to philosophical gain, and so illumine the deeps, find the poles, and eventually learn to cultivate his most special fool's garden: satori, incandescence, and the hard gem-like flame of bourbon burning in the furnaces of metabolism. (p. 44)
It is interesting to compare the genuine comedy of such a scene with the much more frantic attempt at humour in such a novel as *Why Are We In Vietnam?*. There, comedy is defined as "the study of the unsound actions of the cowardly under stress"\(^4\)--a statement whose very pretentiousness is an ironic indication of the reason behind that book's singular lack of humour. Here the comedy results precisely from the juxtaposition of pretension and reality. It is, somewhat paradoxically, the very laughter engendered by such scenes, with their clear awareness of reality, that ultimately rescues Mailer's pet obsessions from the oblivion of mere eccentricity.

For Mailer is more than just a buffoon in this book, as the author himself realizes in his reflections on his chosen protagonist:

... an eyewitness who is a participant but not a vested partisan is required, further he must be not only involved, but ambiguous in his own proportions, a comic hero, which is to say, one cannot happily resolve the emphasis of the category--is he finally comic, a ludicrous figure with mock-heroic associations; or is he not unheroic, and therefore embedded somewhat tragically in the comic? Or is he both at once, and all at once? (p. 67)

But even such pertinent self-criticism only touches upon the depth of ambiguity inherent in this character, for beyond these remarks is the fact that, after all, the author is himself the protagonist at a later stage of reflection--not only is he ambiguous in his serious/comic status but there is a further uncertainty attached to his very awareness of that ambiguity, to his consciousness of himself as his own hero. And this suggests
the real function of this third person mode of narration, the
most immediately distinguishing feature of this book. With the
new-found self-consciousness of *Advertisements for Myself* Mailer
spoke of "the yaws of conscience a writer learns to feel when
he sets his mirrors face to face and begins to jiggle his Self
for a style which will have some relation to him"; with
*The Armies of the Night*, Mailer has learned to control that
shivering self-consciousness by taking it a step further, by
turning it into his explicit subject, in fact, and constituting
himself as a literary object in a literary text. This aestheti-
cized self-consciousness is the real foundation of the book's
saving humour, the source of its essential ambiguity, and the
means by which meaning and world are brought together.

Mailer is obviously doing more, in other words, than merely
providing a journalistic account of the march on the Pentagon—
indeed, one might as easily take "Mailer" himself as the sub-
ject of the book, rather than the march, and view that event
as but the framework of the concrete opportunity, for the dis-
play of the persona and its attendant myth. But in fact the
two subjects are merged here in a work of sustained tension be-
tween the literal and the literary, a work that raises a contin-
gent, historical event to the level of aesthetic significance.
"Mailer", the comic-hero, is only one part of this narrative;
at the opposite pole, sharing the focus of the book, is the
theme and notion of "America", "that country who expresses our
will" (p. 320), the nation whose fundamental ambivalence contains
all others. Associated with "Mailer" as fellow characters for much of the book are Dwight Macdonald and Robert Lowell, the three constituting a triptych of the American literary conscience, "the Critic, the Poet, and the Novelist" (p. 123), gathering before the Lincoln Memorial on the day of the march, with Mailer conjuring images of the "ghosts of the Union dead" (p. 105). Lowell, particularly, is well drawn, filling the role of "Mailer's" opposite, a kind of anti-"Mailer", whose inherent aristocratic nobility inspires in the protagonist an envious, disgruntled admiration:

"You, Lowell, beloved poet of many, what do you know of the dirt and the dark deliveries of the necessary? What do you know of dignity hard achieved, and dignity lost through innocence, and dignity lost by sacrifice for a cause one cannot name. What do you know about getting fat against your will, and turning into a clown of an arriviste baron when you would rather be an eagle or a count, or rarest of all, some natural aristocrat from these damned democratic states. (p. 54)

Even the concrete base of this literary structure—the march itself—is tinged with aesthetic overtones, for it is repeatedly emphasized that the demonstration is symbolic in intent (see p. 68, for example), though not of course in result. In a long and magnificent sentence just at the beginning of the march, Mailer brings together all these diverse threads of his narrative and holds them in the moment of a single statement—because it so epitomizes the literary dimension of this book, and expresses so many of the central themes of Mailer's work in general, it deserves quotation in its entirety:
In any event, up at the front of this March, in the first line, back of that hollow square of monitors, Mailer and Lowell walked in this barrage of cameras, helicopters, TV cars, monitors, loudspeakers, and wavering buckling twisting line of notables, arms linked (line twisting so much that at times the movement was in file, one arm locked ahead, one behind, then the line would indulate about and the other arm would be ahead) speeding up a few steps, slowing down while a great happiness came back into the day as if finally one stood under some mythical arch in the great vault of history, helicopters buzzing about, chop-chop, and the sense of America divided on this day no liberated some undiscovered patriotism in Mailer so that he felt a sharp searing love for his country in this moment and on this day, crossing some divide in his own mind wider than the Potomac, a love so lacerated he felt as if a marriage were being torn and children lost--never does one love so much as then, obviously, then--and an odor of wood smoke, from where you knew not, was also in the air, a smoke of dignity and some calm heroism, not unlike the sense of freedom which also comes when a marriage is burst--Mailer knew for the first time why men in the front line of a battle are almost always ready to die: there is a promise of some swift transit--one's soul seems clean; as we have gathered, he was not used much more than any other American politician, litterateur, or racketeer to the sentiment that his soul was not unclean, but here, walking with Lowell and Macdonald, he felt as if he stepped through some crossing in the reaches of space between this moment, the French Revolution, and the Civil War, as if the ghosts of the Union dead accompanied them now to the Bastille, he was not drunk at all, merely illumined by hunger, the sense of danger to the front, sense of danger to the rear--he was in fact in love with himself for having less fear than he had thought he might have--he knew suddenly then he had less fear now than when he was a young man; in some part of himself at least, he had grown; if less innocent, less timid--the cold flame of a perfectly contained exaltation warmed old asthmas of gravel in the heart, and the sense that they were going to face the symbol, the embodiment, no, call it the true and high church of the military-industrial complex, the Pentagon, blind five-sided eye of a subtle oppression which had come to America out of the very air of the century (this evil twentieth century with its curse on the species, its oppressive Faustian lusts, its technological
excrement all over the conduits of nature, its entrapment of the innocence of the best—for which young American soldiers hot out of high school and in love with a hot rod and his Marine buddies in his platoon in Vietnam could begin to know the devil of the oppression which would steal his soul before he knew he had one) yes, Mailer felt a confirmation of the contests of his own life on this March to the eye of the oppressor, greedy stingy dumb valve of the worst of the Wasp heart, chalice and anus of corporation land, smug, enclosed, morally blind Pentagon, destroying the future of its own nation with each day it augmented in strength, and the Novelist induced on the consequence some dim unawakened knowledge of the mysteries of America buried in these liberties to dissent—What a mysterious country it was. (pp. 131-33)

In this immense sentence—as, indeed, in the book as a whole—Mailer manages to effect a genuine synthesis of public and private concerns, to associate the concrete odor of wood smoke with an abstract patriotism, to transcend a personal fear with historicalimaginings—to link the literary beings of "Mailer" and "America" inextricably, as though the latter were a kind of projection of the former, or as though "Mailer" were a micro-cosm of "America".

This particular type of synthesis, however, is not everywhere effective—a point that may be evident if one considers the contrast between the relative seriousness of Mailer's sentiments here and the satirical treatment of his notions earlier. An obvious difference between the two situations, and a sufficient explanation for "Mailer's" contrasting status, is the fact that he is here merely reflecting, whereas in the earlier instance he was acting. So long as "Mailer" is merely an anonymous participant in a mass event his meditations (or "rumina-
tions", [p. 105]) can grow naturally and freely from the event itself, unchecked by any contrary experience; but when he is required to take action himself, on the basis of his various and particular theories, those "ruminations" are put to a test, and the frequent comedy is a consequence of the usual discrepancy between his notions and the real world. "Mailer" is therefore a character constantly misunderstood, and perpetually having to explain himself—in a sense, the whole of Book One might be seen as an attempt to explain "what happened" (p. 14) to correct the impression left by the *Time* report. (The Press, of course, and the media in general, are the manifestations of public impression, so it is little wonder that one of "Mailer's" most common themes is the duplicity of the newspaper [see pp. 237-40]).

The peculiar combination of the serious and the comic in "Mailer's" character must be resolved by viewing him as a certain type of hero—he is not simple serious, as is Rojack, for example, for he must act in the real world, not in a dream; nor is he simply a fool, for he retains a noble innocence of motive that is present beyond all the oddities of his actual behavior. In a word, his character is Quixotic, the type that contains all the ambiguities that Mailer himself ascribed to his protagonist (p. 67). As a self-appointed "hero", pursuing the fantasies of his own romantic imagination, in defense of values either outworn or eccentric, "Mailer", like Don Quizote,
is a comic figure. But in the implicit motive underlying such pursuit or defense both characters attain a poignant dignity, for, in a world that appears in some sense "fallen", emptied of meaning, and so merely trivial and mendacious, the fact that they each struggle for an ideal at all seems, despite all their comic disproportions, simply and undeniably heroic. It is this Quixotic quality that underlies "Mailer's" representative stature in this book, and that gives rise to such critical judgments as Richard Gilman's: "More than ever, Mailer's embattled ego is seen to be the troubled, sacrificial, rash and unconquerable champion for all of ours."6

Considering "Mailer" as a modern Don Quizote (and, in his capacity as author, Cervantes as well) helps to make clear the true symbiosis of history and persona in this work, its real fusion of private and public realms. For each aspect, each pole plainly requires the other: the account of the March on the Pentagon would be an empty document without the comic-heroic presence of "Mailer" to infuse it with life and meaning; and "Mailer" himself, of course, would vanish into the dream of his own romanticism (as he has done in his fictions) without the contrast and discipline of the real, public, and historical world. Here then is the solution to Mailer's long-standing problem of bringing together "meaning" and "world". The importance of the journalistic aspect of the work is that it frees the narrative itself from the necessity of bearing the meaning
(as it must in fiction, where "meaning" is implicit in the narrative structure); instead, that meaning is embodied in a persona who is made a part of the events that he describes producing a meaningful world, in spite of himself, through his Quixotic struggles.

What Mailer struggles for, finally (looking upon him now in his double role as both author and protagonist), is not for any particular "meaning" so much as for the very possibility of meaning. Like Sergeant Croft in his first novel, Mailer is impelled by a partially inchoate vision, but unlike Croft he is not so fortunate as to have located the fulfilment of that vision at the peak of an unclimbable mountain, forever inviolable. Hence Mailer's struggle must really be in two directions, a further source of his Quixotic ambivalence: he must attempt to preserve the potential for meaning, a heroic task; but he must also guard that meaning from being reduced to the banality of words, an exercise in bad faith that seems frequently comic. In effect there are two threats to Mailer's project, though he often, and perhaps rightly, tends to associate them: these might be roughly labelled "comprehensibility" and "chaos". The first especially seems an odd sort of threat, and, indeed, in the past it might not have been regarded as such—Mailer writes with an easy nostalgia of the style of his Washington hotel "which spoke of a time when men and events were solid, comprehensible, often obedient to a code of values, and resolutely nonelectronic" (p. 69); but the present, for Mailer, is threaten-
ed indeed by the total and reductive vision of science, by the pervasive technology it engenders, and by the concomitant potential for control that could manifest itself in a new totalitarianism. The threat of chaos, on the other hand, is more immediately understandable—it is implicit in Mailer's customary metaphor of "cancer" or "the plague", and it is invoked, with vivid horror, in his image of the "irredeemable madness of America", the Las Vegas Grandmother with orange hair (pp. 172-4). The tactic by which Mailer manages to avoid either alternative, to preserve the potential of meaning without ever having to give it shape, is to mystify, to make his goal neither the discovery of meaning nor its obliteration, but the preservation and exaltation of Mystery. There is, as mentioned above, a strong element of bad faith in such a project, an assiduous need to avoid certain modes of awareness and realization, a refusal of consciousness. But the triumph of The Armies of the Night is that Mailer is able to make an object of humour of that bad faith (as in "Mailer's" "Emersonian transcendence" at the Ambassador Theater, [p. 44]), and yet still hold to the notion of Mystery, still conclude his book with an apocalyptic and ecstatic peroration, still end merely "on the road to that mystery where courage, death, and the dream of love give promise of sleep" (p. 320; my emphasis).

Mailer's later journalism has rarely been quite so supple or complex in its manipulations of mystery, and the inherent bad faith of the project has grown increasingly evident and
corrupting. As with the compilations, he continued to exploit a form with which he had had some success, making use of a third person narration, and objectifying himself under various titles: "the Reporter", "Aquarius", "the Prisoner", even "A-I", for "Aesthetic Investigator". The second work in this form was Miami and the Seige of Chicago (1968), continuing his series of reports on the Presidential Conventions, and it stands among Mailer's best work as well, exhibiting that crucial synthesis of private and public focus that constituted the literary worth of The Armies of the Night. Of a Fire on the Moon (1970), however, seemed too conventionally reportorial for much of its length, its technological subject-matter clearly resistant to the themes and notions of the "Mailer" persona. And The Prisoner of Sex (1971) was simply too abstract, its lack of events depriving the work of the essential dimension of reality, and leaving it no more than a cranky and too-literal defense of a private ideology. Finally, of course, there appeared Marilyn (1973), recognized by Mailer himself as among his weakest books. Other accounts and writings have appeared before and since, some of them (St. George and the Godfather [1972], for example) displaying a well-controlled style and a fine observation; but none have approached the literary excellence as a whole of his first journalistic narrative. What has happened is simply that the "Mailer" persona has hardened into a dead and rigid mask, and the system, into a grid of set responses and sterile oppositions. For these to have retained a life Mailer would have had to put himself and his beliefs re-
peatedly at the mercy of the contingent events on which he is reporting, and this would have required a greater commitment, a greater investment of energy than he was obviously willing to allow. Instead, as he withdraws his authentic self from these later works, his style becomes increasingly oblique and baroque, as a device for manipulating "mysteries" in a purely rhetorical, mechanical manner. Cheap speculations, mock discoveries ("Of course!"), syntactically obscure plausibilities ("Who could say but that it would not be impossible . . . ."), and empty, ultimate, unanswerable questions ("Did God voyage out for NASA, or was the Devil our line of sight to the stars?"\(^8\))—these, despite all the undoubted virtues of Mailer's mature style, are unmistakable signs of an exhausted literary impulse; indeed, the pure reliance upon style is a good definition of decadence.

But it has by now been about eight years since Mailer's last major breakthrough—the usual length of a phase in his career—and there are the reports of a major new novel in progress. It is difficult to imagine how he would be able to revive a form that had previously become moribund for him, but more than any other writer alive (and most dead) Mailer has demonstrated a repeated capacity for sudden, even revolutionary, self-renewal; so it is entirely conceivable that this apparently decadent journalism is in fact incubating a new form of the literary imagination as unique, as radical, and as powerful as *The Naked and the Dead*, *Advertisements for Myself*, and *The Armies of the Night*. 
Conclusion

Like everything else about him, Mailer's literary evolution is largely a product of his idiosyncracies, impelled by forces and strains that are peculiar to him. The dominant feature of that evolution, in fact—the movement from fiction to journalism—can be viewed simply as a consequence of his particular deficiencies as a novelist. A symptom of this weakness might be his seeming impatience with the fictionalizing process, with the need for a minute attention to the recreation of appearances (noted above in the discussion of *The Deer Park*). And this in turn seems to result from his overriding concern for the effect of his writing, from his notion of his art as an instrument in the service of larger ends (evident especially in *Advertisements for Myself*). Diana Trilling characterizes this quality in Mailer aptly:

To a greater extent than he perhaps recognizes, Mailer is an anti-artist, deeply mistrustful of art if only because it puts a shield between the perception and the act. His writer's role, as he conceives it, is much more messianic than creative.¹

For such a writer, therefore, the turn to journalism seems a very natural development.

Yet the tortuous path of Mailer's evolution suggests a greater complexity of motive than this initial assessment would indicate, and perhaps offers a clue to underlying themes in his development that extend beyond his particular case. For
Mailer is, by his own admission, a romantic, and thus a self-conscious member of a literary tradition that is at the foundation of modern consciousness. A major source of the strength of the romantic tradition is that it is inherently problematic, necessitating paradox, dialectical contradiction, "negative capability", and so on; and a prime example of a romantic dilemma that is still perplexing is the question of the nature of art, the status and function of the artist. Since Keats set the terms of this problem, with his troublesome identification of truth and beauty, it has undergone numerous vicissitudes: the notion of "art for art's sake" might be seen as an attempt to eliminate truth from the nature of art, leaving "beauty" as its own raison d'être. With his naturalist heritage and his concern for effect, Mailer clearly represents the opposite school, for whom "truth" is paramount and beauty but a means to that end. His struggle with the novel is a result of the fact that, sharing a romantic cultural prejudice, he regards the novel as a supreme form, and the novelist as a kind of gifted philosopher:

... since the novelist is the only philosopher who works with emotions which are at the very edge of the word system, and so is out beyond the scientists, doctors, psychologists, even—if he is good enough—the best of his contemporaries who work at philosophy itself.²

This is simply a version of the common idea that novels tell us truths, illuminate our lives, but it is at the basis of the "messianic" ambition that incapacitates Mailer as a novelist.
Ironically, such a notion may well form the basis of his success as a journalist. For the desire to tell the truth is the impulse behind the branch of romanticism that developed into social realism, and then into naturalism. As movements, these now seem moribund, and it was Mailer's fate to begin his career just as his "literary heritage" was in decline. But it may be that the impulse is simply manifesting itself under a new guise, that, as Tom Wolfe argues, the tradition of social realism is now being continued by the "New Journalists", filling the gap left when the novelists abandoned "the richest terrain of the novel: namely, society, the social tableau, manners and morals, the whole business of 'the way we live now,' in Trollope's phrase." In this sense, Mailer's development displays an underlying consistency, as his talent for "recording the precise look and feel of things," stifled in the novel after his rejection of naturalism, emerges with renewed vigor in his journalism. As Wolfe points out, such a talent is not taken very seriously today:

Balzac prided himself on being 'the secretary of French society.' Most serious American novelists would rather cut their wrists than be known as 'the secretary of American society,' and not merely because of ideological considerations. With fable, myth and the sacred office to think about—who wants such a menial role?

But the mention of Balzac, especially, should recall the criticism that Georg Lukács levels at the modern abandonment of realism. For Lukács, the rejection of realism leads to an in-
eradicable split between the subjective and objective aspects of human nature, as writers content themselves either with a sterile description of an external world in naturalism, or with an equally pointless absorption with subjective fantasies; it is a diagnosis that is remarkably pertinent to Mailer's own entrapment between the extremes of "reality" and "meaning" in his novels. But Mailer was never content with either extreme, and the impulse to escape from the trap of modernism is behind the whole of his peculiar and sometimes painful evolution; the mark of his greatness as a writer, redeeming his particular failings, is his determination to reunite the halves of human nature, to effect a synthesis of reality and meaning, even at the cost of his first love, the novel.
Footnotes

Introduction


2 See Time, July 16, 1973, 44.

3 Mailer, Cannibals and Christians, xi.

Chapter 1 The Naked and the Dead


2 See Norman Mailer, Advertisements for Myself (New York: Signet Books, 1960), pp. 83-5, where he writes clearly and powerfully about his situation after The Naked and the Dead, and of his search for a new subject: "If my past had become empty as a theme, was I to write about Brooklyn streets, or my mother and father, or another war novel (The Naked and the Dead Go to Japan) . . . ?"


7 Lukács, p. 139.

8 Ibid., p. 139.

9 Ibid., p. 9.

An indication of the arbitrariness of this subject is suggested by Mailer's own history of the novel's title in Advertisements for Myself—like any other young man Who Wishes to Write, Mailer had made a number of unpublished attempts at a novel in college: "The very last thing was to try to start a novel about an insane asylum... It was called A Transit to Narcissus, and it was based on a play I had written earlier about the same insane asylum called The Naked and the Dead." p. 24.

This comparison recalls the "scientific" ambition of Zola's naturalism, as described in The Experimental Novel; see especially The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature, Richard Ellman and Charles Feidelson, Jr., eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 273-74.

Even the "Time Machine" and "Chorus" interpolations tend more to emphasize a representative microcosm than to provide a social panorama as in Dos Passos; see John M. Muste, "Norman Mailer and John Dos Passos: The Question of Influence," Modern Fiction Studies, XVII, No. 3 (Autumn, 1971) 361-74.


Lukács, Realism In Our Time, p. 43.

In fact, this similarity brings up a Freudian analogy inherent in these characters which, though not essential to their understanding, is nevertheless further evidence of the degree to which they depart from the naturalist norm. The triad of Hearn, Cummings, and Croft parallel the three Freudian psychic agencies, ego, super-ego, and id: Hearn is rational but motiveless, Cummings is authoritarian, and Croft is wordlessly, narcissistically impulsive. In this sense, the implicit association between Cummings and Croft corresponds to Freud's
notion of the unconscious link between super-ego and id. The analogy is particularly interesting in its relevance to the plot of the novel: Hearn's death results from the separate but unwittingly complicitous wills of both Cummings and Croft, just as, in the neurosis Freud terms "melancholia", a weakened ego is crushed between the implacable purposes of super-ego and id.

A Freudian motivation, of course, is not necessarily foreign to naturalism since it "explains" or "determines" behavior. But a Freudian pattern implicit in the structure of the novel itself suggests a tendency toward non-rational literary forms beyond the limits of naturalism.

The fact that, in Lukács' sense, a genuine hero is impossible within a naturalist context may be behind some of the critical confusion over Croft's role in the novel. Norman Podhoretz, for example, regards both Cummings and Croft as unambiguous heroes, but feels that their final defeat violates "the emotional logic" of the book (p. 67); Diana Trilling, on the other hand, views them both initially as villains, but finds a "curious shift in the moral focus" of the novel in which Croft "usurps the place in his author's sympathies which we had thought was Hearn's" (p. 118). Such comments, I think, reflect a failure to understand Mailer's strategy of moral mystification as a means of preserving Croft from the reductive omniscience of his naturalist context.

Breit, p. 200.

Chapter 2  Barbary Shore and The Deer Park

For Mailer's opinion, see Advertisements for Myself, pp. 83-5. Other opinions partially favourable are Allen Gutman's, in The Jewish Writer in America: Assimilation and the Crisis of Identity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 158; and Podhoretz's, pp. 68-75.

Kazin, p. 1.

Marcus, p. 34.

See especially Advertisements for Myself, pp. 83-5; and Marcus, pp. 34-5.

Kazin, p. 1.

"Claustrophobic" is a somewhat peculiar description for a literary work, but it interesting and significant how frequently it recurs in the criticism of Mailer generally, and of Barbary Shore particularly. For some examples, see Harris Dienstfrey, "The Fiction of Norman Mailer", in On Contemporary Literature, Richard Kostelanetz, ed. (New York: Avon Books, 1964), p. 431; Gutman, p. 158; and Trilling, p. 117.

Mailer contrasts the actual labour involved in writing the two novels in his Paris Review interview: "... working on Barbary Shore I always felt as if I were not writing the book myself, but rather as if I were serving as a subject for some intelligence which had decided to use me to write the book", whereas The Deer Park "was far and away the most difficult of my three novels to write" (Marcus, p. 35). See also Advertisements for Myself, pp. 205-24, for an extended account of the difficulties encountered in the latter work.

Barbary Shore, pp. 161, 159, 152, 91, and 136, respectively.

Mailer himself concedes this likeness in the first draft, though he mistakenly feels he has eliminated it in the final version—see Advertisements for Myself, p. 212.

Mailer's own remarks on this issue of "craft" are particularly relevant not only to his use of point-of-view, but to his conception of fiction and art generally: "... I'm a bit cynical about craft. I think there's a natural mystique in the novel which is more important than craft. One is trying, after all, to capture reality, and that is extraordinarily and exceptionally difficult. I think craft is merely a series of way-stations" (Cannibals and Christians New York: Dell, 1970, pp. 215-6). Later he describes craft as being among the "enormous evasions" thrown up by writers in the face of this uncaptured reality: "Indeed, I think this adoration of craft, this specific respect for craft makes a church of literature for that vast number of writers who are somewhere on the spectrum between mediocrity and talent. But I think its fatal for somebody who has a large ambition and a chance of becoming a great writer" (Cannibals and Christians, pp. 216-7. This is a continuation of his important Paris Review interview).
It should be clear that these comments do not apply
to the general topic of point-of-view, but only to the parti-
cular use made of it in the novels under discussion. But Mailer
himself seems to imply a more general theory of this notion in
a short comment on the influence of E.M. Forster on his writing
in the Paris Review interview: "I suppose what I realized,
after reading Forster, was that a novel written in the third
person was now impossible for me for many years." After the
interviewer points out that "Forster has never written a novel
in the first person", Mailer continues: "I know he hasn't, but
in some funny way Forster gave my notion of personality a suf-
ficient shock that I could not manage to write in the third
person. Forster, after all, had a developed view of the world.
I did not. I think I must have felt at that time as if I
would never be able to write in the third person until I devel-
oped a coherent view of life. I don't know that I've been able
to altogether" (Cannibals and Christians, p. 209).

This affair, in fact, seems to have been the conceptual
origin of the novel, like the "long patrol" in The Naked and the
Dead--see Marcus, pp. 40-1.

This is an opinion that is fairly common, in one form
or another. Podhoretz, for example, regards the novel as a
whole as exhibiting "a newly liberated capacity for sheer relish
in the look and feel and sound of things", and sees the account
of the affair as one "where every nuance in the progress of
a vastly complicated relationship is registered with a delicacy
and a precision that recall Proust himself" (Podhoretz, p. 77
and pp. 80-1). A more interesting comparison, perhaps, in view
of Lukacs' appreciation of realism, is to be found in Richard
Chase's early review: "...the sustained account of the re-
relationship between Eitel and Elena Esposito is worthy of Balzac
and makes a small masterly novel within a novel", from
"Novelist Going Places", Commentary, December, 1955, 582.

Advertisements for Myself, p. 214.

Ibid., p. 212.

This is also a common opinion, best exemplified by Richard
Foster's comment: "Sergius, both as a character and as an arch-
etype of new styles of human value, is vague and inchoate as well
as faintly absurd." Foster, in fact, puts his finger on pre-
cisely the problem: "... neither Sergius nor his author has
yet formed the requisite life-style, the new heroic mold through
which to turn understanding and affirmation into creative,
perhaps redemptive action" (Foster, "Norman Mailer", in Lucid,
p. 33 and p. 34). In his later reflections on the book, Mailer
himself seems to be aware of the failure of his narrator, though
confused as to its exact nature—he says that ". . . my narra-
tor became too interesting, and not enough happened to him in
the second half of the book . . ." (Advertisements for Myself,
p. 219), which appears to be a contradiction unless one understands the "interest" to be largely in Mailer's own mind. Mailer himself perhaps admits this when he confesses that "I knew I had failed to bid on the biggest hand I ever held" (Ibid., p. 224).

There are occasional attempts to link these two in the novel itself, the strongest, perhaps, being the scene on pp. 39-40, in which Faye tries to persuade Eitel not to testify. A hypothetical basis for such a link could be derived from some generalizations about these characters—Eitel possesses morality without integrity; Faye, integrity without morality; and each is attracted to that aspect of the other that is lacking in himself. But this remains an abstraction, never realized or made credible in the novel. The inescapable fact is that these are not merely different characters, but different conceptions of character.

Chapter 3  An American Dream and Why Are We In Vietnam?

1Elizabeth Hardwick, "A Nightmare by Norman Mailer", in Lucid, p. 145.


6Leo Bersani, "The Interpretation of Dreams", in Lucid, p. 176.


8An American Dream (New York: Dell, 1966), p. 9. All subsequent page references in this chapter are to this edition.

9Poirier, p. 133.
10 Wolfe, p. 160.

11 Hyman, p. 278. The title of his review, in fact, is taken from a clause in this passage.


13 Poirier, Mailer, p. 133.

14 Ibid., pp. 128-9.


17 Sartre, p. 215.

18 In Advertisements for Myself, p. 379, he lists Sartre on the side of the "Square", as opposed to Heidegger, who is "Hip".

19 Sartre, p. 220.

20 Ibid., pp. 220-1.

21 Ibid., p. 219 and pp. 220-1.

22 Ibid., pp. 10-11.

23 Ibid., p. 217.

24 Ibid., p. 221.

25 Ibid., p. 228.

26 Ibid., pp. 228-9.

27 Bersani, p. 173.

28 Ibid., p. 178.

29 Ibid., p. 176.

30 Ibid., pp. 176-7.
This lack of affect is noticed by Elizabeth Hardwick, though it seems to puzzle her: "How strange it is, though, that ugly and meanness spirited as this book is, no heat arises from its many brutal couplings, no real sense of danger from the heedless cruelty. You do not feel confronted with some unpleasant but original force" (p. 167).

For the last quote, see Poirier, in Lucid, p. 168.

Bersani, p. 179.


See Cannibals and Christians, pp. 68-90:

Poirier, Mailer, p. 127.

Ibid., p. 131.

Ibid., p. 142.


Chapter 4  Advertisements for Myself and the Compilations

No label seems quite adequate for these works, but it is hoped that "compilation" would convey a more consciously structured quality than would "collection" or "anthology".

The reason for the exclusion of Mailer's last collection, Existential Errands (Scarborough, Ontario: Signet, 1973), from this list of compilations is explained below.

A number of critics have compared the work to a novel, including Mailer himself—see Norman Martien, "Norman Mailer at

4 Advertisements for Myself, p. v. All subsequent page references in this chapter are to the edition named in Chapter 1, note 2.

5 This reference to "time" is the first intimation of what will later become a major, if somewhat derivative, theme for Mailer--The Deer Park, as we have seen, also closes with a similarly cryptic allusion, this time provided by "God": "Rather think of Sex as Time, and Time as the connection of new circuits" (p. 318). One could attempt to interpret such statements, of course, but the central impression remains that Mailer is concerned with time, and uses it as a theme, not because it provides any answers, but for precisely the opposite reason, it evokes mystery, which is his primary objective. Here, specifically, the mention of time seems to be a part of that "abandoned architecture of the large work" to which the story was originally a Prologue (Advertisments, pp. 141-2), and to which he refers in the preceding Advertisement: "To thicken the scheme, I was going to twist and scatter Time, having many of the characters reappear in different books, but with their ages altered" (Ibid., p. 140).

6 The Deer Park, p. 170.

7 This central function of courage in the vision of Hip explains a good deal in Mailer's writing, including, for example, Rojack's reported ambition "to blow up poor old Freud by demonstrating that the root of neurosis is cowardice rather than brave old Oedipus" (An American Dream, p. 235).

8 James Baldwin, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy", in Lucid, p. 222.

9 This fusion of characters was suggested by Richard M. Levine, "When Sam and Sergius Meet", The New Leader, July 8, 1968, 16-9; David Hesla makes a similar observation on the Mailer
hero (though not specifically on the "Mailer" persona) in "The Two Roles of Norman Mailer", in Adversity and Grace: Studies in Recent American Literature, Nathan A. Scott, Jr., ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968): "He is a synthesis of intellectuality and sexuality, mind and body, sentiment and courage, experience and vitality, and also of the traditions and cultures which make up the American Style" (p. 213).

10 This long commentary was originally published in Esquire, November, 1959 (as "The Mind of an Outlaw").

11 A prominent example of such a disciple is John W. Aldridge, who too often sounds like a mere popularizer of Mailer: "Ideally, the function of obscenity would be to mediate between the superego and the id elements of American society, releasing the buried fears and hatreds of the WASP Establishment classes to something like the emotional freedom of the Negro and hipster", "From Vietnam to Obscenity", in Lucid, p. 190.

12 A number of the best examples of these (Hardwich, Hyman, Wolfe) have been given in the discussion of An American Dream.

13 Thus, as we have seen, he relegates journalism to the status of a minor activity (Cannibals and Christians, pp. 218-9); also note the numerous references to himself as "the Novelist" throughout The Armies of the Night, his greatest work of journalism.

14 Poirier is not unusual in finding that, despite the "extraordinary accumulations of intensity and brilliance" that characterize Mailer's career, "It is nonetheless a chaotic mixture that awaits some larger redemptive effort . . . ", Mailer, p. 11.

15 Foster, for example, though he appreciates The Armies of the Night, asks the typical question: "Are such varied and frequent detours from the high road of novel-writing threatening, at this prime of his creative life, the ultimate dissipation of Mailer's talent as a major writer?" (p. 47); he is uncommon, however, in answering the question negatively.

16 See Eve Auchincloss and Nancy Lynch, "An Interview with Norman Mailer", Mademoiselle, February, 1961, 163: ". . . The White Negro is for the time, but it wasn't true enough. There weren't enough White Negroes around and so the organized world took on my notion of the White Negro and killed the few of us a little further. And I betrayed my own by writing that piece."

Chapter 5 The Armies of the Night and the Journalism

1 Cannibals and Christians, p. 209.

2 The Armies of the Night (Toronto: Signet, 1968), p. 15. All subsequent page references in this chapter are to this edition.

3 The Presidential Papers, p. 1.

4 Why Are We In Vietnam?, p. 84.
Advertisements for Myself, p. 15.


Conclusion

Trilling, in Lucid, p. 136.


Podhoretz, in Lucid, p. 61.

Selected Bibliography


*Modern Fiction Studies*, XVII, No. 3 (Autumn, 1971).


... "Why They Aren't Writing the Great American Novel Anymore", Esquire, December, 1972, 152-9, 272-80.