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THE JOURNALISTIC TECHNIQUE OF NORMAN MAILER

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INTRODUCTION

Norman Mailer emerged on the American literary scene with a bang in 1948 with the publication of The Naked and the Dead, a bestselling and critically-acclaimed novel based on World War Two. Since then, his literary career has been extremely varied. Not only has the critical and popular reception to his work fluctuated but he has branched out into a wide range of artistic activity. He has produced four other novels, essays, articles, poetry, autobiography, biography, plays, motion pictures, and a considerable amount of journalism.

With respect to his journalism, Mailer is generally regarded as being a very good reporter. As he wryly remarks in Of a Fire on the Moon, people "he had never met were forever declaring in print that he was the best journalist in America."¹ The purpose of this thesis is to examine his journalism and to attempt to show that it is a reflection of his central literary concerns equally as much as his novel writing, which he regards as his main literary activity. Furthermore, the thesis is intended to indicate that there are close parallels between his journalistic and novelistic methods. Finally, the thesis attempts to evaluate his journalism strictly as reporting and to compare it with full-length journalism written by other authors.

The specific argument of the thesis is that Mailer's subjective style of reporting embodies a conviction that the key to reality or history lies more in probing human reactions to inner impulses than in outward chronicling of events. This preoccupation with the psychological and instinctive

springs of reality means that in his journalism he must either report his own intuitions and reactions in the form of memoir or else divine "by the instincts of the novelist"² the emotions and inner impulses of others. In carrying out this subjective or interpretive reporting, he relies on the device of the protagonistic "Mailer," the observing historian.

The method of research is to concentrate on the full-length journalistic works such as The Armies of the Night as well as the journalism contained in the omnibus works such as Cannibals and Christians and the Presidential Papers. Careful scrutiny for what they reveal generally of his philosophy, style, and technique is given to Mailer's novels, poetry, articles and other work. Study is also made of contemporary full-length reporting by other authors as well as of critical material examining Mailer's writing.

NOTES FOR THE INTRODUCTION

¹Norman Mailer, Of a Fire on the Moon (Boston, Little and Co., 1969), p. 7.

²Norman Mailer, The Armies of the Night (New York, The New American Library, Inc., 1968), p. 284.

CHAPTER ONE

PHILOSOPHY OF REALITY

While Norman Mailer is a writer who seems to have a theory for everything, it is almost a contradiction in terms to discuss the Mailer 'philosophy.' He is essentially an intuitive, rather than a logically deductive thinker. Therefore, while many of his arguments have a quasi-scientific or quasi-philosophical basis, he does not really intend them to be strictly philosophical or scientific. In fact, a quick examination of many of his arguments reveals them to be fallacious in logical terms. It seems that Mailer's musings about the world are intended more as metaphorical evocations of his own intuitive thinking. This is not to say that Mailer would consider his observations to be entirely spurious but just that he does not intend them to follow the pattern of logical deduction. In fact, Mailer distrusts any entirely logical system of thought. Probably, the problem can best be summed up by Mailer himself:

But I don't like to call myself a mystic. On the other hand, I certainly wouldn't classify myself as a rationalist. I'm not altogether unhappy living in some no-man's-land between the two.

It is part of Mailer's sense of reality that there is much more going on around us than we ordinarily realize. In fact, Mailer sees everyday common reality as but the crust on the surface of boiling depths. This theme is frequently repeated in his writings, not in any specific sense usually, but in terms of a general intuition or foreboding. A typical example in Of a Fire on the Moon is Mailer's pondering the likelihood of

the Apollo 11 astronauts meeting with some strange fate as they sail toward their rendezvous with the moon: "But what if space were not so benign? . . . rather acted upon us, drew us toward her dispositions."² This general sense of unknown forces pervades Mailer's thinking. John Stark comments upon this sense of the unknown, too. "Mailer, however, prefers to think of nature as wild and uncontrollable, even full of demons and witches."³

Down through the ages man has had the intuitive conviction that there are greater forces in the universe than himself and has applied the names God and the Devil to these unknown forces. Mailer seems to be following a similar pattern in his concept of God and the Devil. He just seems to be putting names to a personal feeling, or expressing metaphorically in other words, that there is a spiritual dimension and inhuman forces within that dimension. About the specific nature of God, Mailer's thinking varies. When he speaks of "God" he is often referring to a specific spiritual force within the universe. This particular force may exist in competition with other "Gods" or "Devils."

God, he had presumed to suggest, was an embattled vision: God had created man in order that man might fulfill God's vision, but His vision of the future was at war with other visions of existence in the universe God was, for instance, at war with the Devil.⁴

Thus, when Mailer speaks of "God," he is often referring to a specific spiritual force within the universe which exists in competition with other "Gods" and "Devils." However, Mailer may also refer to "God" as representative of life force or of total reality in the universe. "God" then, is an all-encompassing spirit and nothing exists outside of Him. In a similar

way, the "Devil" may be symbolic of nonexistence or phoniness rather than "a creature of the first dimension--a fallen angel--engaged in a tragic monumental war with God."⁵

The important point about the way that Mailer talks about Gods and Devils is that he sees a God-Devil dichotomy which is a reflection of the state of man. Mailer sees man's nature as a dialectic of good and evil, both parts making up the whole. Without either part man would be incomplete, as the universe would be incomplete without either God or the Devil. Another consideration about the way Mailer talks about Gods and Devils is that his ontology is perfectly in keeping with his sense that life is a competition. Just as he does not see God as being in accordance with an all-embracing natural order, he does not see man as moving from birth through maturity to the grave in accordance with a similar all-embracing natural order. Rather, he sees both God and man as being in the midst of a hurly-burly of conflicting forces. And, in this storm, life is to be maintained more by an individual act of will than by a natural order.

It is also Mailer's feeling that each man shares through his psyche in the spiritual realm of the universe. If this seems to imply a belief in ESP and magic, there is much evidence for both in Mailer's writings. He describes himself in St. George and the Godfather as receiving telepathic communications from Richard Nixon via Spiro Agnew.⁶ He comments in Presidential Papers: "A magical action in one part of the world creates its historical action in another."⁷ The idea of an individual psyche presupposes immortality of the soul. While Mailer does not deal with the concept of soul and afterlife in any thorough-going way, he has a general

feeling that immortality is possible: "It came upon the senses that in the hour of death, consciousness might separate into other dimensions."⁸

A spiritual connection between the individual and the universe also introduces the concept of individual action being allied to spiritual power or karma as Mailer terms it. Therefore, a man is responsible for the power of his being; his being, in other words, is an act of will. Mailer applies the idea of karma to the most ordinary of occasions, the sincerity of a handshake for example:

In his own mayoralty campaign, Aquarius ended up by shaking hands whenever he could, had in fact to his surprise ended up liking that act more than anything else in politics, at least once he comprehended that the only way to do it was to offer as much of himself as was present with every greeting. The phenomenon⁹ was that energy came back, and the hand did not get tired.

A bold, positive action, even a very small bold, positive action, carries with it a spiritual charge. A man who puts together such a series of positive actions, as is explained in "White Negro," will remake his personality slightly with each action, carrying himself higher on the scale of Creation as he does so. His actions have concrete results, too, since there is a connection between the spiritual and physical. In other words, a brave action carries with it karma, which will alter physical appearance:

Do you see the curve of a beautiful breast? It is not necessarily a gift of God--it may be the record life left on a lady of the balance of forces between her desire, her modesty, her ambition, her timidity,¹⁰ her maternity, and her sense of impulse which cannot be denied.

It is interesting that Mailer makes the theory of the spiritual effect on appearance a basic technique of his journalism. In his journalism, he often judges from appearance the corresponding spiritual quality.

Although there is a spiritual connection between the individual and the universe, Mailer views it as a connection of imperfect knowledge. Man has but limited comprehension of the total reality because he has only intuitive glimpses of it, rather than rational knowledge. The term that Mailer employs to describe this incomplete view of reality that all of us hold is "psychological reality." We are now talking in terms of layers of reality because, as Mailer takes pains to indicate in his writings, we believe implicitly in the truth of our psychological realities:

For if everyday reality was a surface, or a crust, or a skin, psychological reality was a balloon which lived as a surface as long as the air of belief was within it.¹¹

Another term which Mailer uses frequently to describe man's imperfect state of knowledge is "schizophrenic." A man is schizophrenic as long as his conception of reality fails to match that of actuality. Of course, this definition means all men are schizophrenic. This is a good example of Mailer's frequent practice of using scientific or medical terms for metaphorical description. The use of the term schizophrenia introduces the concept of sanity. Mailer's belief is that all men are, to the degree that they are detached from reality, insane. However, there are degrees of insanity and Mailer generally restricts the application of the term to those on the extreme end of the spectrum.

While no man actually knows the complete reality of the world and all men are, strictly speaking, more or less insane, every man has intimations of absolute reality through intuition.

To learn from an inner voice the first time it speaks to us is a small bold existential act, for it depends upon following one's instinct which must derive, in no matter how distorted a fashion, from God, whereas institutional knowledge is appropriated by the Devil.¹²

Thus, "God" as the representative of total reality is the well-spring of intuition. Conversely, non-empirical knowledge not derived from the experience of the individual belongs to the "Devil," as symbolic of non-existence or phoniness. Paradoxically then, intuition is the key to absolute knowledge which logical, deductive rationality is incapable of comprehending. But intuition must be joined with action to produce knowledge. That is, we can never be sure of our intuitions until we check on them by acting them out in the world of actuality. Therefore, if the sum of a person's actions can be considered as his style, the extent to which impulse is translated into action determines this style. Style, then, is another word for form--the outward expression of inward experience. The creation of style through following impulse is a continuous process, unrestricted by conscious tradition. An act which creates style in this way is an "existential" action, in Mailer's terminology.

Mailer quite specifically indicates in his writings that his theory of existentialism is home-grown and bears no real relation to European existentialism.¹³ Moreover, many commentators have pointed out how Mailer's existentialism, far from stemming from European philosophy, is clearly in the centre of American literary tradition. Richard Foster describes this tradition which deals with man's inherent need to push consciousness beyond customary boundaries. He is discussing both Mailer's and Fitzgerald's philosophies with respect to the ideas expressed in Emerson's essay "Circles":

The essay "Circles" describes man's generic need to thrust toward a consciousness, a knowledge, a self-realization that lies beyond the boundaries of permitted and understood experience. It is a need symbolically embodied in the very nature of America's historical experiment, and variously expressed by its chief writers¹⁴ from the beginnings of American literature to the present.

Mailer's epistemology, then, seems to follow in American literary tradition by making intuitive action rather than logical deduction essential to knowledge. This necessity for action makes style the reality, as long as that style is a direct expression of individual impulse. Because a man learns to the extent that he applies personality to experience, personality is of increased importance. This procedure for learning is incorporated into Mailer's ideas on writing and is the basis for remarks on the best approach to writing, remarks such as "Macdonald [Dwight Macdonald, author] had given the hint that the clue to discovery was not in the substance of one's idea, but in what was learned from the style of one's attack."¹⁵ Thus, action is linked with creativity. Mailer also applies this need for action to his own personal style resulting, according to all accounts, in a continual stream of sometimes bizarre, usually uproarious, incidents.

It is evident Mailer feels that the exhilaration, the sense of power that accompanies bold and effective action is a major part of living. His non-fiction is filled with musings about his own behaviour in which he is frequently disillusioned with himself for failing, in his own mind, to carry out some impulse. Sometimes he feels uplifted, as in The Armies of the Night when he breaks free from the ranks of demonstrators before the Pentagon in order to dash through police lines: "It was as if the air had changed, or light had altered; he felt immediately much more alive."¹⁶ This exhilaration is Mailer's idea of karma, the spiritual force that accompanies positive action. He expresses this feeling of exhilaration in braving some sort of fear or danger in a way that is markedly similar to that of a character named Bumpy Johnson. Bumpy is an underworld adventurer

from Harlem who is being interviewed in Esquire magazine. He tells why he prefers the life of adventure: "'Lissen,' he said, 'when something like this happens its like a cool breeze blowing through me. Man, it's beautiful.'" ¹⁷ The similarity between Mailer's and Bumpy's feelings of karma might be coincidental except that Mailer has always modelled his philosophy on that of the hipster hustler or revolutionary.

Implicit in Mailer's credo of instinctive action, is a romantic (if romantic is taken to mean a basically positive, rather than negative, outlook) faith. In other words, who can say for sure that if social restraint were abandoned and every man were left entirely to his own devices that the result would not be a murderous frenzy. As Richard Schrader asks in an essay dealing with Mailer's moral philosophy: "What justifies his confidence in the essential goodness of primitive emotion?" ¹⁸ It is evident that Mailer has no final answer to this sort of observation, except to admit that his faith is indeed romantic. He deals with the question explicitly in his philosophical essay, "The White Negro":

The nihilism of Hip proposes as its final tendency that every social restraint and category be removed, and the affirmation implicit in this proposal is that man would then proceed to be more creative than murderous. ¹⁹

Therefore, whether he is justified or not, Mailer has the inclination to believe in the final goodness of nature. And, being an intuitive rather than a logical thinker, he constructs his philosophy accordingly.

Mailer says man can harness the good in his nature by following his instinctive impulse. But a practical problem in trying to adhere to instinct is that sometimes impulses seem to conflict. This confliction of impulses plagues Rojack in the American Dream. Once he launches himself

by the impulsive murder of his wife, Rojack is at sea in conflicting waves of impulse. For example, he is unable to decide how to dispose of the body. He wavers between turning himself into the police and cannibalistic fantasies. Finally, again on impulse, he throws his wife's body out the apartment window and resolves to claim she committed suicide. Later on in the novel, he is torn between going to Harlem to brave evil forces there and keeping an equally dangerous appointment with his father-in-law. It turns out that, in going to see Barney Kelly (the father-in-law), Rojack has chosen the wrong course. In fact, the mistake results (in a psychical-physical phenomenon) in Cherry Melanie, Rojack's lover, being beaten to death. Mailer phrases this question of how to follow instinct himself: "And when we are done, will we know truly who has spoken within us, the Lord or the Fallen Prince?"²⁰ One answer to this dilemma is that we do indeed advance into the unknown when we follow instinct but that we subsequently learn the reality by the effect of our act.

Another answer is that there is an instinctive clue about which impulse to follow in the form of the fear, guilt, or awe which accompanies certain courses of action. Mailer says these instincts, which are all essentially types of dread, are implanted in man to inform him of the existence of greater powers than himself in the universe. In other words, dread, in its various forms, is a clue to the greater reality of the universe. Mailer believes this is understood better by primitive societies than by those of the mechanistic Western world: "The primitive understanding of dread--that one was caught in a dialogue with gods, devils, and spirits, and so was naturally consumed with awe, shame, and terror has been all but forgotten."²¹

Since dread is a harbinger of the greater reality of the universe and man should always be trying to develop his knowledge of this reality, Mailer says in effect that when in doubt do the action which gives you the most fear. Thus dread is some form of guide in the maze. In fact, for humans dread "may be their only guide to heaven!"²²

In the "primitive understanding of dread" quotation, shame or guilt is felt because man feels the presence of "devils." In other words, man feels guilty about evil forces in the world; evil forces which are reflected in his own nature. This is a concept of original sin. But, as Michael Cowan points out, Mailer's treatment of guilt is indicative of his romantic outlook. In fact, Cowan says Mailer is following, in this respect, in the tradition of Melville, Hawthorne, and Faulkner. Mailer's treatment of guilt is romantic because he indicates it is necessary for meaningful action: "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 . . . deep."²³ Hawthorne treats guilt as necessary for meaningful action in The Scarlet Letter. In that book, when Hester Prynne chooses to bear her symbol of guilt, the letter "A" for adultery, proudly on her breast, she is following Mailer's prescription. That is, by maintaining her sense of sin, she achieves a clear sense of identity. Furthermore, though she never loses her shame, Hester finds she is not guilty through and through. She finds this about her own nature when her fellow townspeople sometimes forget that the A stands for adultery and interpret it rather as standing for "Able,"²⁴ for her good works. By not shrinking from her guilt, Hester finds that her nature is composed not only of pride and passion but also of courage and kindness.

While it is nice to have some guide in trying to lead the existential life, it seems continually braving one's fear is a difficult way to exist. Mailer agrees and there is a correspondingly heavy emphasis on courage and manly self-confidence in his thinking. For example, the importance of maintaining manhood is indicated in An American Dream when Rojack tells us he only murders his wife after she has tried to "find my root and mangle me."²⁵ Thus, danger of emasculation is sufficient warrant for murder. Mailer has little use, then, for Christian humility (though he is in agreement with some other points of Christian thought). He endorses ego as an essential part of the make-up of the existentialist (and the reporter-historian, as well). Mailer defines ego as "that extraordinary state of the psyche which gives us authority to declare we are sure of ourselves when we are not."^{26 27} Mailer is closely akin to Hemingway in his proclamation of the need for self-confidence and courage to brave fear in this uncertain world. The understanding, for each of them, is that an action which braves fear is spiritually restorative. Hemingway's attitude that the brave act is efficacious is indicated in this passage from Fiesta (The Sun Also Rises) in which the bullfighter Romero is described as pulling himself together and going out into the bull ring despite having being badly beaten in a fist fight:

During Romero's first bull his hurt face had been very noticeable. Everything he did showed it. All the concentration of the awkwardly delicate working with the bull that could not see well brought it out. The fight with Cohn had not touched his spirit but his face had been smashed and body hurt. He was wiping all that out now. Each thing that he did with his bull wiped that out a little cleaner.²⁸

Romero's brave act is strikingly parallel to the aggressive turns into his fear which Rojack takes in An American Dream (strikingly parallel,

that is, if one discounts the difference between the realism of the Hemingway novel and the supernatural atmosphere of the other):

And I could not quit yet--I had the feeling that to go back in the room would be equal to deserting what was best in me: I had a thought then to get up and stand on the parapet, as if to dare the desire for suicide by coming closer to it would be logical, and the dread which followed this thought had a pure thrill.²⁹

Rojack, then, climbs up on the apartment house parapet in a Romero-like expression of courage.

For Mailer, if not for Hemingway, the effect of this individual bravery goes beyond the individual situation. Since Mailer sees an integral connection between the psyche and the spiritual forces of the universe, each person is responsible for the fate of the whole. This is the basis of his vision of an existential God. Another example of his application of this idea is his condemnation of the use of drugs because a bad effect on the mind of an individual may have a corresponding effect on the general spiritual quality of the universe: "If his [the individual drug-taker's] future has already been used up . . . then maybe the pot is drawing it out of the substance of . . . God."³⁰ Therefore, it is clear that Mailer looks beyond mere physical existence on Earth and sees the individual as joined, in spiritual terms, to the absolute.

If the key to existential situations is to engage one's fear by the most direct action possible, it seems that taking the safe course away from dread will not benefit one's spirit. In terms of traditional morality, it seems that actions which are neither good nor evil or else which are solely good or evil are likely to form the safe course which Mailer abhors. The existential course, he says, is to engage both sides of human nature and to make of one's nature a dialectic

of good and evil. Thus, in Miami and the Siege of Chicago Mailer talks of how "one must balance every moment between the angel in oneself and the swine."³¹ It is for this reason that in his political reporting Mailer casts aspersions on Gene McCarthy and George McGovern for being too manifestly decent, too pure to develop the darker, but equally essential, side of human nature. He characterizes them as "saints," accusing them of poverty of spirit.³² He prefers people like Bobby Kennedy and explains his bias in terms such as:

Of course, the reporter had been partisan to Bobby Kennedy, excited by precisely his admixture of idealism plus willingness to traffic with demons, ogres, and overloads of corruption.³³

It is clear that in Mailer's existential philosophy the values to uphold are not those of traditional morality. The "good" action is the one that feels right and that engages fear and requires courage. In terms of traditional morality, Mailer's "good" act is likely to be extremely good or extremely evil. Mailer makes this case in An American Dream when Rojack, in an existential situation, murders his wife. However, the seeming enormity of the crime is lessened because the wife, Deborah, is shown to be a representative of repressive social forces. In general, the act that engages the poles of human nature reveals the reality of human nature. Hester, in stooping to adultery in The Scarlet Letter, was able to plumb the depths of her nature. A person who knows himself a little better relieves his schizophrenia and integrates his personality. As John Stark comments, Mailer's "moral imperative"³⁴ is the integration of the human personality.

In developing the principle that evil can be heroic, Diana Trilling says that Mailer has embraced a moral contradiction that Western culture

has been seeking to avoid. She says that while modern literature has consistently shown heroes to have evil, if powerful, proportions, political choices have consistently been determined on the basis of traditional morality. Expressing this idea, she says:

It is quite a long time now since Conrad asked us to choose between his Kurtz and his 'Pilgrims,' between a heroic principle of evil and a seedy, hypocritical bourgeoisie that lacks the courage of its inherent malevolence.³⁵

Mailer makes his choice even clearer when he tells us that, while heroes are essential to the rejuvenation of Western culture, these heroes should not be any better than their times.

One point that should not be overlooked in discussing Mailer and the heroic principle of evil is Mailer's self-proclaimed romanticism. While evil can be necessary and heroic under certain conditions, it seems that Mailer is telling us that the ultimate tendency should be towards good in traditional terms. This was shown with Rojack in An American Dream. Though he opts to align himself temporarily with evil in murdering his wife and lying to the police, he dedicates himself finally towards good in his hope for a new life of love with Cherry Melanie. However, An American Dream indicates that the Devil is not to be used lightly. In order to dedicate himself to good, a man must fully expiate his sins (his allegiance with the Devil). Rojack fails to completely expiate his sins and, as a result, Cherry Melanie is beaten to death. The implication is that, if Rojack had succeeded in braving his fear sufficiently, Cherry would not have been harmed. Thus, though invoking the evil side of human nature may bring power, it must be balanced by an expiation achieved by braving the fear within oneself.

This ability to see good in evil allows Mailer to proclaim himself as a qualified conservative ("left-conservative"³⁶) in political terms. Mailer favors the conservative position to the extent that he feels conservatives do not deny legitimate traits of human nature like greed, lust, and cruelty. In embracing the dark side of human nature as well as the kinder side, Mailer feels that conservatives develop more powerful, more interesting personalities. He indicates this in his comparison of the relative tastes in interior decorating of conservative and liberal academics:

Conservative professors tend to have a private income, so their homes show the flowering of their taste, the articulation of their hobbies, collections adhere to their cabinets and odd statements of whim stand up in the nooks; but liberal instructors . . . are usually poorer and programmatic, so secretly they despise the arts of home adornment.³⁷

Norman Podhoretz comments that Mailer reveals this same bias in even his first novel, The Naked and the Dead, written while Mailer was still a Marxist. Podhoretz says General Cummings and Sergeant Croft, representing fascism in the novel, are shown to be more admirable than the liberals Red Valsen and Lieutenant Hearn:

If life is truly what The Naked and the Dead shows it to be-- a fierce battle between individual will and all the many things that resist it--then heroism must consist in a combination of strength, courage, drive, and stamina such as Cummings and Croft exhibit and that Hearn and Valsen conspicuously lack.³⁸

In a similar manner, though Mailer decries the lack of vision and instinctive awareness in the "Wasp" elements in America which he believes promote the American space effort,³⁹ he applauds them for their Faustian drive. All this appreciation of the strengths in the conservative position does not, of course, mean that Mailer is an unqualified conservative. As usual,

he tries to embrace the contradiction in human nature by calling himself a left-conservative whose final allegiance is not to the status quo but to revolution.⁴⁰

While Mailer tries himself to bridge the contradictions in human nature, it is evident that in general terms he feels that people do not succeed in this effort. That is, his moral imperative is for the integration of the human personality precisely because people normally exhibit one general tendency in their nature over another. For example, they are either too goody-goody and lack courage or else they have courage and drive but lack the gentler qualities of human nature. In other words, people are always schizophrenic to some extent, not knowing the complete reality of their natures. This is not to say, however, that people do not know occasional moments of intuitive fulfillment, moments when they feel in touch with all parts of themselves. Mailer expresses this feeling in The Armies of the Night after his arrest for breaking through police lines around the Pentagon:

He felt his own age, forty-four, felt it as if he were finally one age, not seven, felt as if he were a solid embodiment of bone, muscle, flesh, and vested substance, rather than the will, heart, mind, and sentiment to be a man, as if he had arrived, as if this picayune arrest had been his Rubicon.⁴¹

However, such a state is only temporary and Mailer, after his arrest, is soon back to the familiar problem of trying to decide how far to follow unpalatable impulses. That is, he quickly loses direct touch with his intuitive impulses and begins to rationalize about what course to follow. His rationalizations lead him to conclude that he has done enough for the cause of the Pentagon March by incurring his arrest and need not, for example, engage in a hunger strike in jail as some of the other arrested protesters decide to do.

Though moments of complete illumination are shown to be transitory and man is doomed to remain schizophrenic, Mailer indicates the attempt to integrate personality must still be made. A person who fails to make the attempt becomes completely confined to the general tendency of his nature and loses his sanity. While Mailer defines sanity as knowing reality completely, in practical terms he only calls a person insane if his unawareness of reality is extreme. The imperative that a person at least try to escape his schizophrenia is the basis of Mailer's disapproval of the one-sided politicians (as he sees them) McGovern and McCarthy. Exclusively to cultivate one side of human nature is not only to show a lack of courage but a tendency towards insanity. Mailer illustrates this point when he tells us of his horror at the thought of losing "even the America he had had, that insane warmongering technology land"⁴² to some cataclysmic national revolution. For a revolution, even though Mailer is a provisional revolutionary, would force him to abandon one side of his political position and to alienate one part of his nature. Richard Poirier makes this point in his essay "The Ups and Downs of Mailer":

Revolution for Mailer would mean that he could no longer live within his dualisms, no longer partake of the characteristics of both sides; he would have to opt for a fragment of the country and of himself, and in the choice would be final madness.⁴³

The picture that Mailer gives of people who are truly insane, then, is of those who have lost any connection with the opposite poles of their nature. Mailer provides many examples of this type in his writings. In this one from The Armies of The Night he illustrates a restless search for pleasure and for diversion combined with an inability to look beyond this preoccupation:

If one could find the irredeemable madness of America . . . it was in those early morning hollows in the eye of the soul in places like Vegas where the fevers of America go livid in the hum of the night, and Grandmother, the church-goer, orange hair burning bright now crooned over the One-Arm Bandit, pocket-book open, driving those half-dollars home, home to the slot.

'Madame, we are burning children in Vietnam.'

'Boy, you just go get yourself lost. Grandma's about ready for a kiss from the jackpot.'

The burned child is brought into the gaming hall on her hospital bed.

'Madame, regard our act in Vietnam.'

'I hit! I hit! Hot deedy, I hit. Why, you poor burned child--you just brought me luck. Here, honey, here's a lucky half-dollar in reward. And listen sugar, tell the nurse to change your sheets. Those sheets sure do stink. I hope you ain't got gangrene. Hee hee, hee hee. I get a supreme pleasure mixing with gooks in Vegas.'⁴⁴

The point that Mailer is trying to make in this section quoted is the disparity between the religious faith of "Grandmother, the church-goer" and the insatiable demand for pleasure. It is not that Mailer feels that church-going and pleasure-seeking are incompatible but that madness is indicated when there can be no appeal to religious scruples in the midst of pleasure-seeking. In other words, the grandmother's religious faith is out of touch with reality when the burning of children can make no impression. The pleasure-seeking also is out of touch with reality when it becomes a ruling force.

Mailer feels that a great many people, indeed he sometimes says the very heart of America,⁴⁵ fall into the condition of this grandmother. The cause of the "irredeemable madness" is lack of courage to maintain the insoluble contradiction between the poles of human nature. The result of being consistently unable to confront the fear within oneself in the

effort to integrate personality is to become anesthetized to reality. This results because of the attempt to try and soak up instinctive impulses in mind-deadening conformities such as gambling and formal religious worship, in the case of the grandmother. Mailer calls these mind-deadening conformities "totalitarianisms." Other common totalitarianisms are: patriotism, to the extent that there is no realistic scrutiny of the country ("Well, a good healthy body plus fat-shit for a head might be the indispensable stock of the patriot"⁴⁶); the American space effort, to the extent that it is a vicarious outlet for unmotivated corporation executives; and, the biggest one of all for the 1960's Mailer, the Vietnam War, to the extent that it is an outlet for the repressed urge for violence in modern America. To express it in a different way, Mailer sees totalitarianisms as rationalizations or abstractions. They are excuses people make to themselves, sops for their instinctive vitality. Because these abstractions isolate a person from instinct, his actions lack karmic power. He is morally neutral and has none of the power of good and bad actions. Being isolated from reality, he is also prone to become fanatical. Mailer first portrayed the schizophrenic fanatic, who lacks the drive and courage of the fascist, in Barbary Shore with Leroy Hollinsworth, the government agent. The same type appears also in The Deer Park in the shape of the two Subversive Committee special investigators who interrogate Sergius. And, to continue a partial list, Senator Goldwater's workers are of the same description in the article "In the Red Light" on the 1964 Democratic convention. More recently, there are the marshals surrounding the Pentagon in The Armies of the Night:

They emitted a collective spirit which to his mind spoke of little which was good, for their eyes were blank and dull, that familiar small-town cast of eye which speaks of apathy rising to fanaticism only to subside in apathy again.⁴⁷

It is this fanaticism which most frightens Mailer and most contributes to his distrust of rationality not in the service of instinct. Therefore, after an early attachment to Marxism, he resists logically deductive systems of thought, deciding like Gore Vidal that "ultimately, not Christ, not Marx, not Freud, despite the pretensions of each, has the final word to say about the fact of being human."⁴⁸ It is this thrust which explains Mailer's effort to express the problems of life in the form of rationally insoluble contradictions, such as life being a search for a reality which is ideal. He is trying to illustrate the final inability of deductive rationality to deal with life. As far back as Mailer's second novel, Barbary Shore, this was one of his main themes: "It must be emphasized, however, that what McLoed teaches Mikey is not a rigid commitment to static values or systems, but a sense of the dynamic principle in human history."⁴⁹

If the centre of America has not already succumbed to fanaticism, Mailer sees the nation as fast heading for the time when its people will be morally drugged with slogans, living in a catatonic state. It is this final turn into fanaticism that he senses as "a growing sense of apocalypse in American life."⁵⁰ He expresses this sometimes in reference to Yeats's poem, "The Second Coming": "There was something at loose now in American life, the poet's beast slinking to the marketplace."⁵¹

Mailer says the deadening in American life is being fostered by a ruling clique of politicians. For example, he claims Lyndon Johnson

deliberately escalated the Vietnam War in order to keep fanatical elements in America happy by providing an outlet for their schizophrenic repression.⁵² He also has been most outspoken about what he sees as the dampening influence of Richard Nixon: "But perhaps no explanation of Nixon's success may suffice which fails to consider the possibility that this public personality, . . . has become a bland drone of oscillating ideological dots."⁵³ Mailer feels this repression of the public spirit is a strategy to maintain political control. He says that once the vitality of the people has been lowered they will vote for anyone who promises not to disturb them from their somnolence. Other authors see a similar plot to maintain control of the population by reducing the elemental spirit of American life. For example, Ken Kesey deals with this theme explicitly in his novel One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. The setting of this book is an insane asylum which Kesey portrays as a "factory for the Combine. . . . for fixing up mistakes made in the neighborhoods and in the churches."⁵⁴ What he means is that troublesome citizens, those who have resisted the repressive influences and maintained their vitality, are broken down in the asylum into more manageable creatures.

Such a vision of a nation slipping into totalitarianism is one of the main preoccupations of Mailer's work. The desire to expose this tendency is one of the main driving forces behind his writing. Mailer's first novel, The Naked and the Dead, uses the army as an analogy for American society and focuses on forces which break down individuality in the soldiers. Barbary Shore deals with the possibility of a proletarian revolution to overthrow fascist forces in America. The list goes on; an examination of each of Mailer's works reveals this overriding concern with social

repression. Diana Trilling comments on this preoccupation:

Even before the height of McCarthyism, as far back as his first novels, Mailer had arrived at this conviction that fascism is not merely a potential in America as in any other modern capitalism but, what is quite another order of political hypothesis, that it is the most coherent and dominant force in American society. . . .

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 Whatever our evaluation of Mailer's political predictions for America, the important point is that his work is not properly to be understood apart from his profound preoccupation with the idea that modern democratic man is about to yield his dignity, his freedom, and his very manhood before the onslaught of political reaction.⁵⁵

Besides the politicians, Mailer feels the excessive repression in American life has been intensified by two major influences peculiar to the Twentieth Century. The first of these is explained in "The White Negro", written after the publication of The Deer Park and Mailer's first explicit treatment of his existential theories. In "The White Negro" Mailer says that the combined effect of the use of the atom bomb and the attempted Nazi extermination of the Jewish race during the Second World War impressed upon the human race a sense of life being absurd. Further holocausts have maintained this feeling that individual life is meaningless. Therefore, with comforting tradition swept away, man has lost the courage to maintain an instinctive approach to life. A sense of overwhelming dread, much more oppressive and dampening than had been felt by men in more sheltered times, is impinged upon the collective mind. Mailer is still discussing this dread in St. George and the Godfather, published 15 years after "The White Negro":

Was it still loose, that sense of oncoming catastrophe going to fall on the nation like the first bolt from God? Such dread had taken many a turn--from fear of Communism to fear of walking the streets at night . . . it was a fear when all was said which suggested that the nation, in whatever collection

of its consciousness, was like a person who wakes up often in the night with the intolerable conviction that something is loose in the system.⁵⁶

The second major Twentieth Century condition which is intensifying the devitalization of the individual is the development of technology to the point where it threatens to become a religion. Mailer feels the tendency to regard technology as the complete answer is greatest among the "liberal" or "christian" part of the population which he characterizes as well-educated and placing trust in rational solutions to life's problems. A third trait of this group is indicated by the reference to Christianity which implies humility, a lack of spirit and force. Far from relying on individual initiative, this group looks for help from outside and believes "science is the salvation of ill."⁵⁷ While the "Wasp" part of the population is not characterized by Mailer as lacking drive, he indicates it, too, shares the belief in the omnipotence of science and applied science. Mailer's complaint with this tendency is its removal of faith in individual intuition. If all the answers are to come from some omnipotent, outside source, the individual becomes merely a cog in the machine. As with the sense that life is absurd, faith in technology sweeps away trust in tradition which Mailer thinks of as community instinct deriving from intuitive impulses felt by past generations. Mailer goes so far as to say that people are really banking on technology to relieve them of their innate fear of dying by doing away with death.

Mailer's argument about technology also has a strictly literal interpretation. He reasons that science and technology have so furthered the spread of machines that there is always, in the modern world, the crackle of static, the roaring of motors, and the flash of lights to disturb

peaceful contemplation. Because contemplation is interrupted man is not able to settle back into a mood and receive intuitive messages:

Man inserting himself into a mood extracts an answer from nature which is not only the reaction of the man upon the mood, but is a supernatural equivalent to the quality of experience, almost as if a key is⁵⁸ given up from the underworld to unlock the surface of reality.

While this argument obviously has some validity these days, it is really a metaphorical evocation of the interference of technology with the connection to instinct. It is, of course, typical of Mailer's reasoning to be, in the final analysis, more metaphorical than thoroughly logical. It is interesting to note that Mailer's distaste for the machine-age as making man subservient to outside forces is not always shared by modern thinkers. For example, Marshall McLuhan agrees with Mailer that nowadays man is out of touch with his essential reality. However, he believes that electronic equipment may actually enable man to regain a sense of control over himself and his world.⁵⁹

Both of these conditions peculiar to the Twentieth Century, then, are encouraging a flight from reality--a retreat to abstractions such as patriotism or vicarious experiences such as the space program or professional football. Generally, a state has been produced in which Americans are unable to penetrate beyond the illusions of their minds:

The tragedy of this city and the tragedy of this country is that we all live in a situation where none of us know what the reality is, and we explore for it . . . and we never find an objective ground.⁶⁰

In another quasi-metaphorical argument, Mailer tells us that the moribund subjectivity produced by the advance of technology and the sense of absurdity in modern life produces cancer: "a plague which appears to us

as a sickness of our substance, an electrification of our nerves."⁶¹ To take this argument as strictly literal would be to conclude like Tom Wolfe that Mailer's thinking is "incredible gothic theorizing."⁶² But, again, it seems Mailer is using cancer or plague more as a metaphorical representation of the repressed state of mankind.

In the midst of this pessimism about the condition of modern man, Mailer does see several revitalizing influences. For one, he believes the Black population of America has resisted the retreat to vicarious experience. Another that he first discussed in "The White Negro" is the hipster--the extreme existentialist, psychopathic in his necessity to convert impulse into action. While Mailer calls the hipster a "perverted and dangerous forerunner"⁶³ of a new type of man, there is a definite connection between this new type and the concept of the hero. The idea of the hero as a major revitalizing force figures prominently in Mailer's more recent writings. While the hipster is essentially a private being, the hero occupies the public stage and is a movie star writ large. But, even while the hero is a public figure, his drive like that of the hipster comes from within. Mailer believes the hero is a revitalizing force because he displays to the people the courage to confront the fear within themselves:

His magnetism is that he offers us a mirror of ourselves, he is an existential hero, his end is unknown . . . and so in this time of crisis he is able to perform the indispensable psychic act of a leader, he takes our national anxiety so long buried and releases it to the surface--where it belongs.⁶⁴

In other words, the hero, by following his inner drive in the public arena, demonstrates to the people the courage to transform impulse into action. As an example, Mailer views President Kennedy as a hero: driven by ambitions so strong that if he were to falter and fail to realize them, he

would be wrecked. He sees Kennedy as seeking the presidency as the only available outlet for the wracking forces within him. He feels that Kennedy deliberately projected a movie star image in order to capture the imagination of the people.⁶⁵ However, Mailer does not consider this projection of movie star style as phoney because Kennedy actually had the vitality, the charm, and the good looks as part of his own self. The basic point of this procedure is that the hero uses a combination of ingredients from within his own self and public demands which spring from the inner self of each citizen. Kennedy realized the public needed a movie star figure and capitalized upon it. Therefore, the hero is inextricably bound to his own times. He operates apart from traditional morality and is as good or evil as his inner being and the collective inner being of the populace (insofar as they correspond) dictate. "A hero embodies his time and is not so very much better than his time."⁶⁶

The opposite side of the coin is the anti-hero type of politician, one who exhibits a phoney style out of tune with his own nature. Mailer sees Richard Nixon in this light: a man who, through force of will, can violate his own nature. While Mailer admires the force of will, he condemns Nixon's style as an abstraction. The danger of such an anti-hero is that he leads the public away from creative self-expression. "Yet could one measure the damage to temperment, bravado, and wit which the emotional austerities of Nixon had laid on the nation?"⁶⁷

It is a fitting summation of Mailer's intuitive philosophy to provide his quasi-logical argument as to how the mythical figure of the hero can work to restore the spiritual consciousness of the people. The hero, acting as a representative individual, emphasizes Mailer's theory of individual

response which is central to his thinking. Furthermore, Mailer mingles both the concept of the hero as protagonist for the people and that of intuitive response in his artistic technique--especially that of his journalism.

NOTES FOR THE CHAPTER

- ¹Norman Mailer, Presidential Papers (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), p. 148.
- ²Norman Mailer, Of a Fire on the Moon (New York, New American Library, Inc., 1970), p. 135.
- ³John Stark, Norman Mailer's Work from 1963 to 1968 (Ann Arbor, Mich., University Microfilms, Inc., 1970), p. 32.
- ⁴Mailer, Of a Fire, p. 75.
- ⁵Paul Carroll, "Playboy Interview," Norman Mailer, The Man and His Work, ed. by R. F. Lucid (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1971), p. 271.
- ⁶Norman Mailer, St. George and the Godfather (New York, New American Library, 1972) p. 171.
- ⁷Mailer, Presidential Papers, p. 154.
- ⁸Mailer, Of a Fire, p. 266.
- ⁹Mailer, St. George, p. 161.
- ¹⁰Norman Mailer, Existential Errands (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1972), p. 166.
- ¹¹Ibid., p. 166.
- ¹²Ibid., p. 194.
- ¹³Steven Marcus, "An Interview with Norman Mailer," Norman Mailer, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Leo Braudy (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), p. 36.
- ¹⁴Richard Foster, "Mailer and the Fitzgerald Tradition," Norman Mailer, ed. by Leo Braudy, p. 141.
- ¹⁵Mailer, Armies, p. 149.
- ¹⁶Mailer, Armies, p. 149.
- ¹⁷Helen Lawrenson, "The First of the Big-time Harlem Hustlers," Esquire, Dec. 1972, p. 188.
- ¹⁸Richard Schrader, "Norman Mailer and the Despair of Defiance," Norman Mailer, ed. by Leo Braudy, p. 94.

¹⁹Norman Mailer, Advertisements for Myself (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p. 354.

²⁰Mailer, Presidential Papers, p. 173.

²¹Ibid., p. 151.

²²Mailer, St. George, p. 177.

²³Mailer, Armies, p. 36.

²⁴Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter (New York, Washington Square Press, Inc., 1955), p. 167.

²⁵Norman Mailer, An American Dream (New York, The Dial Press, 1965), p. 30.

²⁶Mailer, Existential Errands, p. 3.

²⁷Since Mailer always likes to have his cake and eat it, too, he also insists on the need for self-awareness in spite of egotism. For example, as the comic hero in The Armies of the Night, he demonstrates both unruly egotism and self-detachment. The lack of this type of detachment he laments in a political leader such as Lyndon Johnson whom he sees as driven by excessive egotism.

²⁸Ernest Hemingway, Fiesta (London, Pan Books Ltd., 1967), p. 167. Fiesta is subtitled The Sun Also Rises.

²⁹Mailer, American Dream, p. 224.

³⁰Paul Carroll, "Playboy Interview," Norman Mailer, ed. by R. F. Lucid, p. 265.

³¹Norman Mailer, Miami and the Siege of Chicago (New York, The World Publishing Company, 1968), p. 93.

³²Mailer, St. George, p. 22.

³³Mailer, Miami, p. 93.

³⁴Stark, Norman Mailer's Work, p. 17.

³⁵Diana Trilling, "The Radical Moralism of Norman Mailer," Norman Mailer, ed. by Leo Braudy, p. 57.

³⁶Mailer, Armies, p. 203.

³⁷Ibid., p. 25.

³⁸Norman Podhoretz, "Norman Mailer: The Embattled Vision," Norman Mailer, ed. by R. F. Lucid, p. 101.

- ³⁹Mailer, Of a Fire, p. 101.
- ⁴⁰Norman Mailer, The Prisoner of Sex (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1971), p. 222.
- ⁴¹Mailer, Armies, p. 157.
- ⁴²Mailer, Miami, p. 187.
- ⁴³Leo Braudy ed., Norman Mailer, p. 169.
- ⁴⁴Mailer, Armies, p. 172.
- ⁴⁵Ibid., p. 211.
- ⁴⁶Mailer, St. George, p. 126.
- ⁴⁷Mailer, Armies, p. 171.
- ⁴⁸Gore Vidal, "Norman Mailer: The Angels are White," Norman Mailer, ed. by R. F. Lucid, p. 104.
- ⁴⁹Barry H. Leeds, The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer (New York, New York University Press, 1969), p. 97.
- ⁵⁰Mailer, Armies, p. 250.
- ⁵¹Ibid., p. 172.
- ⁵²Norman Mailer, Cannibals and Christians (New York, The Dial Press, 1966), p. 71.
- ⁵³Mailer, St. George, p. 177.
- ⁵⁴Kesey, One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest (New York, The New American Library, 1962), p. 40.
- ⁵⁵Trilling, "Radical Moralism," Norman Mailer, ed. by Leo Braudy, p. 47.
- ⁵⁶Mailer, St. George, p. 4.
- ⁵⁷Mailer, Christians and Cannibals, p. 4.
- ⁵⁸Mailer, Presidential Papers, p. 153.
- ⁵⁹Tom Wolfe, Pump House Gang (New York, Bantam Books, 1968), p. 165.
- ⁶⁰Mailer, Existential Errands, p. 360.
- ⁶¹Mailer, Presidential, p. 165.

⁶²Tom Wolfe, "Son of Crime and Punishment," Norman Mailer, ed. by R. F. Lucid, p. 156.

⁶³Mailer, Advertisements, p. 355.

⁶⁴Mailer, Christians and Cannibals, p. 171.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 169.

⁶⁶Mailer, Presidential Papers, p. 42.

⁶⁷Mailer, St. George, p. 23.

CHAPTER TWO

PHILOSOPHY OF TECHNIQUE

Mailer views the artist as a heroic figure probing the depths of reality in the world by working with instinctive impulses within himself. He sees art created in such a manner as a major force in combatting the totalitarian forces which threaten to subdue the spirit of the people. Therefore, while art necessarily proceeds from an individual in tune with instinctive impulses within himself it is not a private thing: it is of consequence for the people at large. The well-being of the people--their spiritual well-being--depends upon art far more than on government, churches, or any other institution. Indeed, Mailer believes such institutions deaden individuality and are the primary threat to the spiritual health of mankind. He expresses his faith in the revitalizing effect of art in Christians and Cannibals when he is talking of the artist, as he commonly does, as a novelist or writer:

Can one now begin to think of an attack on the stockage--those dead forts where the spirit of twentieth-century man, . . . has collected, like castrated cattle behind the fence? Can the feet of those infantrymen of the arts, the novelists, take us through the mansions and the churches into the palace of the Bitch where the real secrets are stored? We are the last of the entrepreneurs, and one of us homeless guns had better make it, or the future will smell like the dead air.¹

John Stark also talks of Mailer's conviction that art is a revitalizing force in social renewal: "He believes that creating art is not an escape but rather that it is an important human act, indeed that it is a political action."² Moreover, when Mailer talks in terms of the imprisonment

of the spirit of modern man, it is evident that his sense of the importance of art as a social force is heightened by a rather gloomy view of the plight of mankind.

The art that is valid, the art that is a revitalizing force, is undertaken as an existential act (using existential in Mailer's terms). Art is not programmatic. In other words, art does not proceed from the logically deductive operation of the mind but from instinctive processes. While the artist is continually preoccupied with achieving a sense of what is right, it is his intuition which will help him in the endeavour and not any logical formula. Mailer expresses this in The Armies of the Night when he discusses writing as being essentially an act by which one seeks the elusive promise of truth: "With every phrase one was better or worse, close or less close to the existential promise of truth."³ The point that this quotation underlines is that in Mailer's philosophy of reality, truth, or absolute reality, is really an ideal for the human mind. The artist, of all men, has the best chance of achieving knowledge of truth but even he is continually seeking, achieving satori briefly and then sliding away.

Mailer says the artist, like other existentialists, must be genuine with his art. Since he is really probing his own mind for the truth to express through his art, he cannot fake the attempt. A phoney artist is not plumbing his own spiritual depths. Such an artist is abandoning his instinct and using instead a rationalization which is a flight from reality. Mailer would say that this is basically the same as the average American giving up active participation on a Sunday afternoon to sit back and watch professional football on television. Mailer, in discussing acting in

Existential Errands, expresses his conviction that an artist who does not draw on his own self in his work is sapping himself of vitality: "Skillful emotion skillfully applied to a situation which does not exist in the blood of his past experience must be as conducive to leukemia as kissing a plastic mask on the hour."⁴ The reference to leukemia is akin to the metaphorical use of cancer to express the effect of the repression of instinctive vitality.

Mailer believes that some artists draw back from probing reality for the same reason as ordinary people often repress the voice of their instinct. There is a fear or even a terror of relying on instinct. It seems safer and easier to short-circuit the process and allow the mind to fall into rationalizations, comfortable bypasses of reality. In reviewing Mary McCarthy's novel, The Group, Mailer says, in effect, that Miss McCarthy does not muster the will to probe beneath the conventionalities of experience. He says she is drawing back from a terror: "The terror of confronting a reality which might open into more and more anxiety and so present a deeper and deeper view of the abyss."⁵ This quotation underlines the elusiveness and ideal nature of truth.

Writing (or art in general terms) is then an existential act for Mailer. It is an act which attempts to transform intuitive impulse into a personal style. As such, it is only in the act that an artist can really know reality. It is only through the act of writing that he can learn if his intuition is really attached to some part of the truth. This is what Mailer means when he talks of a writer learning the truth at the point of a pencil.⁶

An artist who does honestly attempt to convert impulse to reality is

strengthening himself. He is a little closer to actuality and therefore a little further from falling into some phoney sop for reality. But, in typical Mailer terms, the artist is attempting the impossible. For one thing, he is looking for truth which is an elusive ideal. For another, he is trying to unite both sides of his nature. He is trying, in general terms, to bring all the impulses of each of his good and evil sides to actuality. Mailer talks of the artist's attempt to try and reach out as far as possible within his own nature in Of a Fire on the Moon: "But it was his profession to live alone with thoughts at the very end of his mental reach."⁷ But the reach always exceeds the grasp and the extreme ends of a person's nature are never brought together.

Mailer sometimes expresses the two sides of the artist's nature differently than in terms of good and evil, though in similar antinomies. He says the artist must unite both the world and himself in his work. Of course he adds that the attempt is both contradictory and impossible. However, to try and sidestep the contradiction is either to become so embroiled in oneself as to become insane or to become so tied up in the affairs of the world that one loses the ability to express.

It is this necessity to travel into one direction or the other up to the end which makes the writing of novels fatal for one's talent. . . . If one explores the world, one's talent must be blunted by punishment, one's artistic integrity by corruption. . . . Yet it is as dangerous to travel unguided into the mysteries of the self, for insanity prepares an ambush.

Therefore, the artist is not side-stepping life in his battle to express intuitive impulse in art. His effort is really the same as that of any other person, which is to unite the contradictory sides of his nature. Furthermore, an artist's work becomes part of his general style of being.

In general terms, the artistic endeavour is not essentially different from that of a conscientious plumber trying to express his being through a superbly-contrived arrangement of pipes for a bathroom.

However, the plumber, unless he is an insane plumber, wants to exist as a man apart from his work. The necessity of the artist existing apart from his work is a common preoccupation of Mailer's. He discusses the question often with reference to Ernest Hemingway because he believes they share the same general approach on this point.

But rather I shared with Papa the notion, arrived at slowly in my case, that even if one dulled one's talent in the punishment of becoming a man, it was more important to be a man than a very good writer, and probably I could not become a very good writer unless I learned first how to keep my nerve, and what is more difficult, learned how to find more of it.

In talking of the necessity of the artist to achieve manhood, Mailer is really underlining the importance of courage in the artistic effort. The artist's need for courage is not radically different from that which each man requires in his battle on earth to maintain his individuality. But, without it, Mailer says the artist will fail to sustain the contradictory effort of exploring both the world and oneself. Without courage and drive the artist will lapse into meaningless self-absorption, become detached from his work in worldly affairs, or fail to go sufficiently in either direction to have anything to say. Mailer says Mary McCarthy's The Group is an example of the latter case when the artistic work is commonplace, a rationalization of reality.

It appears that, in Mailer's terms, the artist's travails are essentially the same as those of the ordinary man. Indeed, if the artist is considered apart from his place on the public stage and if, furthermore,

no one else ever sees his work, he would not have a different effect on the world than the plumber or any other private man trying to express himself through his work. This is not to say that even an artist whose work is never released has no effect on the outside world. Mailer clearly believes in a magical connection between the individual psyche and the general spiritual domain. If a man can effectively co-ordinate impulse with style, as in an artistic creation, the resulting gain in spiritual power for himself will also be passed over into the general domain.

But Mailer does not consider the artist to be merely a private figure. In the first place, he naturally presupposes that the work of every artist will eventually be seen in the world-at-large. In fact, Mailer considers that art (and he extends the term to newspaper articles and television productions) has a very important effect on the population. He believes the population's view of the world is "that conception so often forged by inferior art and entertainment."¹⁰ Art is crucial in this role because it can either sink the ordinary man deeper into his particular psychological reality, closer to the lowest level of vitality, or it can point out to him some objective ground. By means of such an objective or real glimpse of the world, the common man will be better able to determine where he is astray in his thinking. Art, then, is a surrogate for action in learning reality. As an example, Mailer considers that the "establishment" or corporation executive class in America, is split off from reality. In fact, he sees the establishment as isolated in the mind as is the working class in the body. Art can teach the establishment reality by informing it of the other side of the dichotomy, the real tenor of working class life. Leo Braudy expresses this facet of Mailer's conception of art as a

messianic urge to reform: "A novel or any other work of art should have the potential to change a reader's life."¹¹ Mailer is, of course, not alone among artists in having this conviction that art can be an essential reforming force. Yeats expresses in his poem Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen that he had this desire in his younger years. However, he also indicates in the poem that, when he reached maturity, he decided that man lacks the capacity for art to have a reforming effect. But, whatever Yeats' mature opinion, Mailer's reforming urge seems to continue unchecked.

Mailer sees the artist as working in a third way to improve the general state of mankind. This way is related to but still distinct from the artist as a strictly private individual exerting a karmic influence and the Joycean-type artist keeping himself in the background albeit publishing his works. This third role is the artist as a public figure. In this role, the artist's own personality rivals his works for public exposure. Many critics feel that Mailer judges it to be the most important of all. As a public figure, he sees the artist as a hero much like President Kennedy--a man striving to express himself through his style in the full view of the public arena. Just as the hero reflects the common man, the artist's struggle to create can be seen as parallel to the average person's attempt to form a vital style. Thus the public artist, at least to some degree, writes about (in the case of the novelist) his own purely artistic preoccupations--treating them as paradigmatic of the ordinary person's. This explains Mailer's consistent use of protagonists who are would-be writers seeking somewhat uncertainly and intuitively to define their place in the world through their art. Such a description expressed in non-artistic terms would include even such figures as General Cummings

and Sergeant Croft in The Naked and the Dead who, while they are not clearly protagonists and are definitely not writers, are in tune with Mailer's existential prescriptions in that they try to define themselves through their actions. Mailer refines his view of the artist-as-hero until by the time of Advertisements for Myself he has gone past dealing with writer-figures such as Mikey Lovett and Sergius O'Shaugnessy and is specifically talking about his own personal experiences in trying to be an artist. Robert Lucid, in an introduction to a collection of critical essays on Mailer, traces Mailer's development as a public writer. He notes that Mailer further refines his role as a public writer after Advertisements for Myself until by The Armies of the Night there is Norman Mailer, the author, and "Mailer," the protagonist artist:

But in the three non-fiction books [The Armies of the Night, Miami and the Siege of Chicago and Of a Fire on the Moon] which follow them [Advertisements for Myself, Presidential Papers, and Cannibals and Christians] there is a Mailer persona at the center of each narrative, its hero and object of dramatic attention. From Advertisements through Cannibals one could see a development in Mailer's "I" toward the abstract, and at this juncture the break is made complete--Mailer produces an effaced narrator who, standing apart with the reader, focuses his attention on "Norman Mailer," a quite separate being.¹²

John Aldridge notes a similar trend for Mailer to make himself a protagonist for contemporary experience. However, Aldridge says there is an inversion in Mailer's writer-as-hero role. He says that Mailer realized after the cool public acceptance of Barbary Shore and The Deer Park, his second and third novels, that he was not to receive widespread public adulation. This realization made him determined to be an "outlaw," to be the centre of widespread public antagonism.¹³ Whether to be adored or hated, it seems Mailer is deliberately fostering the public writer role

in order to be a type of hero and exert a reforming influence through this means. He reasons that just as President Kennedy was a revitalizing influence so is the public figure of Norman Mailer. In carrying out the role of the public writer as well as the other two roles of the strictly private writer and the writer who expresses himself only through his work, Mailer is trying to be the "physician" for the nation that he discusses in Christians and Cannibals. This physician is trying to combat the "plague" which sits upon the nation.¹⁴

It could be said that Mailer's major concerns as an artist are irrelevant to his journalism since he often says that he considers his novel writing to be his most significant literary endeavour. To say that, however, might be to impute too much to the author's own words and to pass too lightly over the body of Mailer journalism which has been the largest part of his literary production during the last decade. And, even if it were true that the journalism is a second-rate activity, that would not necessarily preclude it from sharing in Mailer's general artistic intentions. To use a typical Mailer metaphor, even a sparring match before the championship fight is not entirely without merit as a boxing exhibition. And who knows?--on a particular day, the sparring bout might possess more magic than the main event.

At any rate, it is clear that even as Mailer is denigrating his journalism to some extent, he is also indicating that he approaches it as a serious artistic activity, in the same manner as novel writing. For example, he says "but if what you write is a reflection of your own consciousness, then even journalism can become interesting."¹⁵ The important point here is not the slight upon journalism but the indication that Mailer approaches

his journalism in a manner that is as true to his own self as possible. He is writing, in other words, as an attempt to explore his own intuitions. Thus, Mailer's journalism is clearly an existential activity which is a consistent expression of his literary style. Mailer indicates that even if he places the highest importance on a particular level of his style, novel writing for example, the lesser expressions of his style, such as journalism, are not stripped of meaning.

In probing his consciousness with his journalism, Mailer is trying to investigate reality. He talks of his journalism as if it were really history. He says he is trying to transcribe for posterity the reality of a particular event that he is covering. He makes this claim, in effect, when he says as he does in The Armies of the Night that he is trying to plumb the "interior" of history. He goes on to explain that by the interior of history he means the "emotional, spiritual, psychical, moral, existential, or supernatural" aspects of human experience.¹⁶ What Mailer means by the interior of history is probably what Henry James is getting at in The Ambassadors when he writes of "the quiet instants that sometimes settle more matters than the outbreaks dear to the historic muse."¹⁷ Both Mailer and James seem to be talking about the psychological condition of participants in history. At any rate, the clues that Mailer gleans from his study of the interior of history are then used as the basis for an intuitive assessment of the general meaning or implication of the event in question. In other words, he arrives at a historical perspective on the event.

Mailer's bitter attacks against the mass media for giving incomplete and incorrect coverage are further evidence that he considers journalism

to have a vital artistic role to play. He feels that mass media reports are as important as, in fact more important than, other branches of the arts in shaping the population's collective psychological reality. He resents the fact that the mass media in misinforming the public is not providing an objective basis for effectively judging intuition. He feels the media is not giving true and complete coverage because reporters are either inept and not encouraged to provide more than superficial accounts or else reporters are deliberately distorting reality. It is for these reasons that Mailer commonly refers to reporters in terms such as "silent assassins of the republic"¹⁸ and those who have "lost the best reaches of their talent by putting out facts for years which have been stripped of their nuance."¹⁹ It is nuance which Mailer is seeking in his journalism. Nuance is his intuition of the mental processes of the participants in the events he is covering. Nuance is essential to finding the interior of history.

It is interesting that Tom Wolfe, another noted American writer of non-fiction, seems to agree at least in part with Mailer's damning assessment of the mass media. Wolfe includes an example of press misrepresentation in his book, The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test, which deals with a band of LSD-takers in California called the Merry Pranksters. The Pranksters are led by Ken Kesey, the American novelist. Wolfe writes that Kesey first began taking LSD in the late 1950's and was one of the first "acid-heads." As an initiator of a major social phenomenon Kesey was or could have been at least a "big story" for the mass media. However, when reporters were sent to cover the demolition of some picturesque cottages on the grounds of Stanford University that Kesey and an early group of acid-heads were

living in, the reporters stuck entirely to the "passing of history" angle and failed to report that Kesey and his band were high on drugs, swinging in the trees:

The papers turned up to write about the last night on Perry Lane, noble old Perry Lane, and had the old cliché at the ready, End of an Era, expecting to find some deep-thinking latter-day Thorstein Veblen Intellectuals on hand with sonorous bitter statements about this machine civilization devouring its past.

Instead, there were some kind of nuts out there. They were up in a tree lying on a mattress, all high as coons, and they kept offering everybody, all the reporters and photographers, some kind of venison chili, but there was something wierd about the whole set-up--

.....
high as coons, in some wierd way, all of them, hard-grabbing off the stars, and it was hard as hell to make the End of an Era story come out right in the papers, with nothing but this kind of freaking Olsen & Johnson material to work with, but they managed to go back with the story they came with, End of an Era, the cliché intact, if they could only blot out the cries in their ears of Ve-ni-son Ch-li.²⁰

Thus Wolfe underlines Mailer's point that the mass media is not responsive to nuance and has little feel for the historical perspective, the underlying trend indicated by the event.

However, in Mailer's rather general condemnation of journalism in America, it seems that he overlooks the work being done by the so-called New Journalists--writers such as Wolfe himself, Truman Capote, Hunter Thompson, and Gay Talese. Each of these writers is carrying journalism far beyond the stripped-nuance type of reporting of which Mailer complains. Their book-length investigations of people and events display impressive researching, fine sensitivity, and excellent writing. In short, they are doing just what Mailer himself is doing in The Armies of the Night, which is attempting to probe the interior of the event and come up with

general interpretations couched in readable language. Therefore, it appears that either Mailer's criticism of journalism in America is carried too far or else that he is wholly concerned with the mass media type of journalism--daily newspapers and television.

In that it seems clear that Mailer has high intentions for his own journalism, it follows that his work in this category can be considered to embody the rules and stipulations of his artistic philosophy. Yet another reason for considering that Mailer's journalism falls under his artistic credo is that Mailer tells us, in effect, that he is writing some of it at least in the same manner as he would a novel. Mailer discusses this in his article "Up the Family Tree" in which he reviews Norman Podhoretz's autobiography Making It. Mailer criticizes Podhoretz's work for timidity because he says the first part of Making It portrays a view of Podhoretz and his life which is not carried through in the second part of the book. In other words, Mailer feels that Podhoretz alters his conception of himself as the book progresses. Mailer says the reason for this is that Podhoretz is afraid of offending the American literary establishment which figures in the second part of the book. Mailer says the same character conception should have been carried through regardless of whom it will offend. But the important point that Mailer is making is that, even in autobiography, a writer is faced with choices regarding his presentation of character. In other words, even an autobiographer has to frame a certain conception of himself in what is clearly the same procedure as developing a character for a novel:

Yet the character must first be created. If a man is writing an accurate narrative about himself with real people and real names, and this narrative arises because some imbalance or

pressure or obsession or theme persists in dogging the man through all his aesthetic or moral nature until he sets to work, then he is willy-nilly caught in the act of writing into the unexplored depths of himself, into those regions which are as mysterious to him as other people. So he can comprehend, no, rather, he can deal with himself as a literary object, as the name of that man who goes through his pages, only by creating himself as a literary character, fully so much as any literary character in any work of undisputed fiction.²¹

While Mailer does not refer to his journalism specifically in his review of Making It, it seems that the discussion can apply to The Armies of the Night, especially the first section of that book, "The Steps of the Pentagon." In The Armies of the Night Mailer deals explicitly with novelistic, non-fiction presentation. He is careful to distance himself from "Mailer," the protagonist of the first section, by writing in the third person. In other words, he presents himself as a character, a fully-developed literary creation, even while he is adhering to the actual pattern of his participation in the Pentagon march in 1967 (a demonstration against the Vietnam War which is described in The Armies of the Night). In Mailer's three other full-length journalistic works the application of his theory of autobiography is less obvious as there is a "Mailer" figure but he is much less the centre of action, much less a fully-realized character than in the first part of The Armies of the Night. However, for at least part of Mailer's journalism, there is additional reason to regard it as following his strictures for novel-writing and art in general.

One might ask why Mailer should treat his journalism at least partly as autobiography. Why should there be a "Mailer" who is a protagonist for the 1967 march? Why not treat some other person involved in the march as the protagonist? Part of the answer would seem to lie in Mailer's tendency during his career, as noted by Lucid and Aldridge, to treat his

own concerns as if they are symbolic of those of the ordinary American. At least in theory, Mailer has another reason for making autobiography of his journalism. This reason involves the difficulty which he sees in a historian (or journalist, in Mailer's case) piercing the reality of an event. To arrive at a fully objective assessment of any occurrence is ruled out by Mailer's tenet that each person is confined to a "psychological reality." Therefore, as objectivity is not possible, the reporter might as well recount events as autobiography and acknowledge the subjectivity of the report.

In terms of traditional journalism ("hard news" reporting) the idea of a reporter writing directly about himself is an anathema. The reporter is to be totally unseen, totally objective. Mailer is writing about his own feelings partly to dispel this traditional concept of journalistic objectivity. It seems that his writing may be part of a growing trend in journalism towards the subjective approach. The editor of Maclean's magazine comments on this point in a recent issue:

There have been a lot of questions raised lately about just what journalism is supposed to do. Nobody is less certain of the answers than the journalists themselves. Tell the truth; but whose truth? From which perspective? In what way? To whose satisfaction?

Nobody's found the answers to these questions yet, and in a way the questions themselves preclude answers. But certain ideas about journalism are becoming clearer, simply because the questions are being asked. One of them is that a journalist covering a story or writing a profile is not invisible and shouldn't pretend to be.²²

Mailer has a practical rationale for introducing the historian or reporter into the description of the event being covered. It concerns the necessity of the historian to avail himself of information pertaining

to the event in question. It seems that the historian must be on the scene of the event or at least connected with it in some way to personally accumulate the necessary information. He cannot, according to Mailer, rely on either the mass media or the government--the two agencies most likely to furnish information on an event--to give accurate, perspicacious accounts of a public event. An alternative might be for a reporter to interview as many participants in an event as possible. This is an obvious reporting technique. But Mailer has indicated that he sees the ordinary person as bogged down to a greater or lesser degree in a faulty picture of the reality around him. While interviewing might produce some truth, such insight would likely be lost in a helter-skelter of conflicting and mistaken information. What the historian must do, it seems, is to get as close to the event as possible. He must be on the scene in order to view with his own eyes. This again is another common reporting technique. But there is still a problem, in Mailer's thinking, in that the historian-reporter is separated from the event and looking at it from too detached a point of view. Confined as he is in his own psychological reality, he cannot fully know what it is to be a participant in the event. If he does not know the truth of that, he cannot pierce the interior of history which is Mailer's aim. Moreover, if he cannot penetrate the interior of history, he cannot place the event in historical perspective. Of course, Mailer discusses the detachment problem with reference to writers as well as historians. He indicates the writer must avoid being confined within himself and must explore the world.

What the historian must finally do, then, is to become a participant in the event. In this way, he will be able to judge from his own feelings

and sensations what it is to be a participant. Just as the writer-hero makes himself a protagonist for the population, the historian makes himself a protagonist for the participants. It is for this reason that Mailer calls himself in The Armies of the Night "the bridge . . . of that historic moment when a mass of the citizenry--not much more than a mob--marched on a bastion which symbolized the military might of the Republic."²³ But Mailer points out in that book that there are difficulties even with this technique. The historian must choose for himself the ideal position in the event, not too detached and not too involved either, or else he risks losing his objectivity.

Even in attaining an ideal point of participation within the event, the historian must meet an exacting set of requirements. Firstly, he must be ambiguous even to himself within his role. That is, he must be uncertain as to whether he is carrying out his role to the best of his ability. To be too confident would mean losing the sense of ambiguity about oneself which Mailer feels is the common lot of mankind. He says very few of us are out-and-out heroes or out-and-out villains. To carry out the role of the involved yet ambiguous historian, Mailer introduces the concept of the comic hero:

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?²⁴

The concept of the comic hero underlines Mailer's vision of mankind. Because of his romantic faith, he sees all men as potential heroes. But just as he indicates in "The White Negro" that those who have the drive

and vision to convert every impulse into action are so unnatural as to be psychopathic, Mailer feels the average man is a qualified hero. The concept of the comic hero underscores the protagonistic or representational qualities of the historian.

But to say the historian must be ambiguous in his heroism does not mean that he should be a commonplace figure. Another facet of Mailer's requirements for the historian is that he must not only be startlingly egotistical but have acutely sharp penetration about all matters including himself: "that he should be an egotist of the most startling misproportions, outrageously and most unhappily self-assertive, yet in command of a detachment classic in severity."²⁵ The egotism of the historian enables him to thrust himself forward into the event and also to see himself as the centre or protagonist for other participants in the event. Cool self-appraisal enables the historian to correctly represent himself as a limited hero. Another point is that Mailer feels the historian, by developing the disproportions of egotism and detachment in himself, is better able to judge modern history, the disproportions of which tend towards the absurd. Thus the historian matches himself with the event and is more truly able to reflect the tenor of the happening. As an example, Mailer feels the march on the Pentagon is out of proportion or absurd because it is a symbolic demonstration of an army possessed only of spiritual power against the headquarters of the greatest military force ever assembled in the world. Furthermore, Mailer says in "The White Negro" that people feel all of modern life is absurd because of the effect of the use of the atom bomb and the concentration camp in World War Two to wipe out millions of people. This widespread extermination which is carried out with such

little reference to individuality makes life seem meaningless.

In stating that the historian must be both extremely egotistical and extremely objective, Mailer is really implying that the historian is an artist. To be egotistical implies self-involvement and Mailer defines self-involvement as one direction in which the artist must travel. On the other hand, to be extremely objective implies that the historian is experienced in the world and exploration of the world is defined as the other artistic tendency. Obviously, the historian is an artist trying to embrace impossible contradictions within himself. Because the historian-artist's contradictions are proportionately greater than those of the ordinary man, he becomes someone "whose gifts of intuition and prophecy enable him to see more deeply than other men into society or human organizations."²⁶

In fact, the artist-historian's deep penetration both into himself and into the outside world makes him a prophet. Among other commentators, Richard Gilman criticizes Mailer for making the historian-artist into a kind of superman. He feels Mailer is trying to force art to do too much at the risk of debasing it to the level of didacticism.

But even though the artist-historian penetrates further into reality than the ordinary man, he is still confined within his own psychological reality. That is, Mailer says that even though the artist-historian has a better idea of objective reality, he still lacks complete objective knowledge. Therefore, he is operating on the basis of intuition. It may be an intuition better informed than most but it is still a guess. Mailer underlines this point when he says that an autobiographer lacks any final knowledge even of himself. The autobiographer must still arrive at an educated guess about his own character. As the historian is an autobiographer

of sorts, he must intuit his own reality as a participant in history. A further intuitive leap is required to gauge the general outlines of the event--its historical perspective. Therefore, when Mailer says that history is absurd he is not only pronouncing that modern history is disproportionate but that the attempt to interpret these events is, in the sense of objective truth, impossible. If history is impossible, then all historians are writing novels in a sense. The word "novel" of course implies an artistic vision. It is on the basis of this idea that Mailer entitles the second, shorter part of The Armies of the Night as "The Novel as History." This second section is not autobiography but is an objective overview of the march. It is the historical perspective the historian must provide after he has intuited the feelings of the typical participant. Mailer expresses this when he calls the autobiographical part of the book the "tower" that the historian must construct in order to take a look at the "horizon."²⁷ Paradoxically, Mailer calls (no doubt chuckling all the while to himself) the objective, overview part of The Armies of the Night a novel. He says it is historical in form but novelistic in spirit:

A most concise Short History, a veritable precis of a collective novel, which here now, in the remaining pages, will seek as History, no, rather as some Novel of History, to elucidate the mysterious character of that quintessentially American event.²⁸

Mailer is merely underlining the point that all the historian can aspire to is an educated guess or novelistic vision of what actually went on. He reiterates this when he says that "metaphors live for me with the power of mechanical laws."²⁹ In other words, even the most basic laws of physics are only approximations or intuitions of reality. It follows from this that Mailer does not try to construct a logically deductive philosophy but instead prefers to philosophize intuitively.

Of course, Mailer is not the first person to think of history as essentially a form that man imposes on the flux of reality. Thomas Mann makes this the theme of one of his short stories, "Disorder and Early Sorrow." He describes a German history professor of the 1930's as inwardly perturbed over his aversion to the turbulence of the times in which he is living. Perceiving in himself this aversion for the present and longing for the order of history, the professor realizes that history is not life but is a metaphor of life, an organized conception.

Mailer's concept that history is ambiguous as expressed in "The Novel as History" seems to follow from, and embody, his general philosophy of reality. However, his use of the converse "History as a Novel" to describe the autobiographical section of The Armies of the Night does not seem to fit in so neatly with his general philosophy. He seems to be going against his own definition of autobiography as novelistic not only in form but in spirit as well. Mailer tells us that the autobiographer has no more certainty about his own being than about that of any other. Therefore, Mailer's statements in The Armies of the Night that there is certainty about the feelings and sensations of "Mailer" because he is, after all, the author are not persuasive. The statements seem at variance with both his theory of autobiography and his effort to distance the narrator from "Mailer." It seems that Mailer is bending his own theories in order to contrast the description of the first part of his book as a history with the description of the second part as a novel. While the thoughts of the participant historian as recorded in the first part might be a degree closer to absolute reality, there is no final non-fiction-fiction distinction between the two parts.

From this discussion it follows that Mailer makes intuition as opposed to deduction the basis of his reporting technique. He makes this clear in Of a Fire on the Moon when he discusses the difference between his reporting approach and that of professional journalists:

He had known such [top] journalists, and their work was demanding. They had first of all to have enormous curiosity, and therefore to be unable to rest until they found out the secret behind even the smallest event. Since Aquarius had long built his philosophical world on the firm conviction that nothing was finally knowable . . . he had almost no interest in the small secret behind the small event. . . . He preferred to divine an event through his senses--since he was as near-sighted as he was vain, he tended to sniff out the centre of a situation from a distance. So his mind often stayed out of contact with the workings of his brain for days at a time. When it was time, lo and behold, he seemed to have comprehended the event.³⁰

Mailer distrusts the factual approach because he feels it leads down blind alleys. In his philosophy there is no objective ground to base factual findings upon. However, Mailer says we do receive clues of reality through intuition. Therefore, rationality must always be based upon intuition. Strict use of rationality without regard for intuitive clues is only a flight from reality which marks an inability to surmount the fear accompanying intuition. In judging through his feelings, Mailer is reflecting the approach which Hawthorne recommends in The Scarlet Letter in speaking of the population as a collective consciousness. Hawthorne says that when a population tries to judge on the basis of intellect, it is likely to be mistaken; but when the population relies on its feelings in deciding on some issue it is likely to judge truly.³¹ Mailer, in relying on his feelings, is making himself a surrogate or protagonist for the consciousness of the nation.

At least in theory Mailer's reporting technique depends upon a fully-

developed historian-participant character such as "Mailer" in The Armies of the Night. The rationale is that an involved historian, by reporting his own sensations, will be able to reflect the consciousness of a typical participant in an event and, by extrapolating from his own feelings, judge the historical perspective in which the event should be regarded. But Mailer seems to fall off from this pattern in the three book-length journalistic works which follow his report on the Pentagon march. In each of the three works, Miami and the Siege of Chicago, Of a Fire on the Moon, and St. George and the Godfather, there is an involved historian only to a degree. That is, in these books there is a historian reporting his own impressions of the events that he is observing. But observing is the key word for the historian in the three works. The historian is never able to integrate himself with the event being covered as effectively as in the Pentagon march. He is more like a protagonistic consciousness for the American people. But this is not the same as being a typical figure in the event.

The Armies of the Night, then, especially exemplifies Mailer's general philosophy of reality as his use of intuition in that book is grounded upon the reporter as an actual participant in the event. The historian of that book epitomizes all Mailer's strictures for the artist. The historian is involved in the events of the world as Mailer says the artist should be. The historian also penetrates himself to ascertain the feelings of a typical protagonist. Mailer says the artist must also travel the road of self-involvement. As a protagonist the historian fulfills the prescription that the artist be a hero, a revitalizing influence to combat the repression of totalitarianism. But Mailer's historian is not only

an artist but a reporter, so his journalism flows from his basic philosophy.

NOTES FOR THE CHAPTER

- ¹Mailer, Christians and Cannibals, p. 130.
- ²Stark, Norman Mailer's Work, p. 17.
- ³Mailer, Armies, p. 4.
- ⁴Mailer, Existential Errands, p. 80.
- ⁵Mailer, Christians and Cannibals, p. 216.
- ⁶Steven Marcus, "An Interview with Norman Mailer," Norman Mailer, ed. by Leo Braudy, p. 40.
- ⁷Mailer, Of a Fire, p. 401.
- ⁸Mailer, Christians and Cannibals, p. 129.
- ⁹Mailer, Advertisements, p. 265.
- ¹⁰Mailer, Of a Fire, p. 143.
- ¹¹Leo Braudy, "Norman Mailer: The Pride of Vulnerability," Norman Mailer, ed. by Braudy, p. 18.
- ¹²Robert Lucid, "Introduction," Norman Mailer, ed. by Lucid, p. 10.
- ¹³John Aldridge, "The Energy of New Success," Norman Mailer, ed. by Leo Braudy, p. 116.
- ¹⁴Mailer, Christians and Cannibals, p. 5.
- ¹⁵Ibid., p. 219.
- ¹⁶Mailer, Armies, p. 284.
- ¹⁷Henry James, The Ambassadors (New York, The New American Library, 1960), p. 83.
- ¹⁸Mailer, Armies, p. 64.
- ¹⁹Mailer, Of a Fire, p. 112.
- ²⁰Tom Wolfe, Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test (New York, Bantam Books, Inc., 1969), p. 48.

- ²¹Mailer, Existential Errands, p. 180.
- ²²Editorial, Maclean's, March, 1973, p. 3.
- ²³Mailer, Armies, p. 68.
- ²⁴Ibid., p. 67.
- ²⁵Ibid., p. 68.
- ²⁶Richard Gilman, "What Mailer Has Done," Norman Mailer, ed. by Leo Braudy, p. 165.
- ²⁷Mailer, Armies, p. 245.
- ²⁸Ibid., p. 241.
- ²⁹Mailer, Presidential Papers, p. 272.
- ³⁰Mailer, Of a Fire, p. 13.
- ³¹Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, p. 168.

CHAPTER THREE

TECHNIQUE

Mailer does a great deal of philosophizing in his journalism which seems to indicate that he is not really writing journalism at all. His philosophizing seems to indicate that he is doing something perhaps more glorified than ordinary journalism: novelistic journalism, if you like. There is no doubt that he does consider his reportage to be of a different order than that of the mass media. However, he does not deal with the question of whether his journalism is distinct from anything and everything which has been written in the genre. For example, he ignores similarities between his work and that turned out by the New Journalists who are also writing book-length studies. A question then emerges: what kind of journalism is he writing; is he really writing journalism at all? This question can be considered under two headings. One is his position as a reporter relative to the event. That is, is he actually participating in the action or completely removed from it or somewhere in between? If he is actually participating in an event is it really all that unusual as reporting? And, the second question concerns the content of the reporting. Is it really dealing with the event in question? Does he get carried away in an interesting but irrelevant exercise or is his work a genuine probe of the event? Both these questions must be considered in assessing whether Mailer's reporting genuinely belongs in the journalistic mode.

In assessing his place vis-à-vis the event, Mailer proclaims in The Armies of the Night that the best way to report on an event is to approach

it as a participant rather than as a reporter. In this way he indicates the reporter is able to reflect truly the sensations and feelings of those involved. Of all his book-length journalism, the first part of The Armies of the Night, "The Steps of the Pentagon," bears out his credo best.

Mailer really does approach the Pentagon march as a participant rather than as a reporter because he writes that he only contracted to report on the march after it was over. The reason for his attending at all is that he was asked by organizers familiar with his radical sympathies to participate as an anti-war demonstrator. In all his other journalism, Mailer has previous arrangements with various publications to write about the events concerned.

Actually participating in the Pentagon march marks Mailer off from the press contingent. It also means that he does not have to chase down facts to any great extent in that first part which is essentially a memoir of his role in that event. He mainly relies on his memory. However, to say that Mailer does absolutely no reporter-like digging even in "The Steps of the Pentagon" would be misleading. For he still deals in some facts in that first section which he would not know just from being a participant. For example, he mentions the number of marchers at various times in the day-and-one-half-long event. He also has a chapter called "Why Are We In Vietnam?" which deals in such facts as the amount of money spent on and the number of troops involved in the Vietnam War at given points. These are facts that Mailer had to determine just like any other reporter. But more significant than the pinning down of certain details in assessing Mailer's technique as a reporter is that there really does not seem to be any vital difference between participating in the march

and not intending to report on it and participating in the march while, at the same time, intending to write about it. In other words, perhaps too much can be made of the historian being an actual bona-fide participant with no ulterior motives. What is really so different about a reporter fully intending to write about some happening and therefore getting himself involved in it? This sort of thing is being done. According to Tom Wolfe,¹ a reporter named John Sack persuaded the U. S. army to allow him to join up as a reporter. Sack went through training, went to Vietnam and then into battle, and turned out a book on his experiences called M. George Plimpton wrote Paper Lion after he practised with the Detroit Lions and quarter-backed them in a pre-season game. Hunter Thompson undertook a Marlortian journey to the heart of darkness and "ran" with the Hell's Angels for eighteen months in order to do his book, Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gang. He also strung himself out on drugs and booze and rented a hopped-up car in order to "cover" the American Dream and write Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas.

To go a step further, what is so essentially different about participating in an event in order to write about it, and not actually participating in it but getting up so close to it that an excellent guess can be made as to what a participant would feel like? Truman Capote's exhaustively-researched In Cold Blood is a good example. It is true that Capote did not know the Clutters before they were murdered and he did not participate in the murders or get to know the murderers until after they had done the deed. However, by intensive probing--interviewing, viewing the scene, reading as much as possible about the event--Capote is able, no doubt, to compose a reasonable facsimile of the event.

Considering these examples, perhaps Mailer's dictum for an involved historian is something of a red herring. Perhaps he is trying in The Armies of the Night to build his book up into something other than journalism. Perhaps he is using the involved historian discussion as a ploy in order to amplify on his theories of subjective history. Indeed, maybe he dreams up the involved historian concept because he likes to do a lot of talking about himself and his ideas. All these possibilities may have contributed to Mailer's formulation of the involved historian credo. The basic point seems to be, disguise it as he may. Mailer's reporting is not that unconventional in the first section of The Armies of the Night although it is extremely close to the event. He is operating in the style of those New Journalists who deliberately involve themselves in an event in order to report on it.

And, in the second section of The Armies of the Night, "The Battle of the Pentagon," the pretense to a special historical method loses much of its force as "Mailer," the involved historian, disappears. That is, although Mailer draws an elaborate metaphor to describe what he is doing in the second section, it seems to be, purely and simply, the product of reportorial leg-work. For, in the second section, Mailer is providing an overview of the whole march, or, in other words, attempting an objective perspective. This obviously implies he has to go far beyond his own participation in the march. For example, he gives a quite involved account of the events that prompted the march and describes the principal organizers, the groups and type of people taking part, and negotiations between these groups and the government on staging the march. Since, by his own admission, Mailer was very far from the centre of the event, the assembling of all

this information requires considerable investigation. It goes far beyond what Mailer might know off the top of his head or pick up from rumour. He also recounts the events of the march that took place after he was arrested and his personal participation was ended. He makes a point of saying that he can only judge, by an intuitive leap, what the emotions of the demonstrators were in facing the troops in front of the Pentagon on the first night of the march ("Mailer" was by this time in jail).

The collective novel which follows while still written in the cloak of the historic style, and, therefore, continuously attempting to be scrupulous to the welter of a hundred confusing and opposed facts, will now unashamedly enter that world of strange lights and intuitive speculation which is the novel.²

However, it seems that Mailer is overestimating the "intuitive speculation" and underestimating the work he has obviously had to do in assembling and sorting out "a hundred confusing and opposed facts." As Richard Gilman says: "One senses something only half right in his argument that only 'the instincts of a novelist' can get at the 'mystery' of such historical events as the Washington demonstration."³ As in the first part, it seems that the second section of The Armies of the Night is not really the unconventional journalism that Mailer makes it out to be. While he is not involved in the event to the extent that he can call himself a participant, his intensive research does bring him up close to the event in a similar manner to Truman Capote in In Cold Blood.

In the journalism which follows the report on the Pentagon march, Mailer moves further away from his proclaimed special historical technique and also further from the event, itself. Therefore, while Mailer identifies himself in his march reporting in terms such as "participant," "protagonist," "comic hero," "general," and others, he is most often the "reporter" in

Miami and the Siege of Chicago, his second full-length journalistic work. In this book on the 1968 Republican and Democratic conventions, he usually operates as part of the press cadre. He attends news conferences like the other reporters, works out of press headquarters, and is on assignment from Harper's magazine. He is, then, a consciously-working reporter. Moreover, he is a reporter who does not really get involved in the event. In contrast to his being a bona-fide marching demonstrator in The Armies of the Night, he is not a delegate or party official or any other sort of actual participant. He does not take part in the demonstrations and battles with the police which figure prominently in the reporting on the Democratic convention. He does make a few speeches to the Chicago demonstrators, tries unsuccessfully to organize a protest march of delegates, and is briefly arrested twice by Chicago police. But in these intrusions into the overt action of the conventions, he seems to be playing more of some esoteric "Norman Mailer as Public Artist" role rather than merging himself as a historian into the event or attempting intensive coverage as a reporter. That is, when he does participate in the action, he figures too prominently and in too eccentric a role to be able to use his experience to judge the feelings of a typical participant. Far from maintaining a consistent place up close to the action, Mailer views much of what he reports on in Miami and the Siege of Chicago from afar, and bases much of his writing on what he observes on television.

A similar pattern is followed in Of a Fire on the Moon, in which Mailer covers the Apollo 11 space shot, and in St. George and the Godfather, which deals with the 1972 Republican and Democratic conventions. He again operates as part of the press corps in these books though he calls himself "Aquarius"

instead of the "reporter." Again, he is on assignment. Moreover, the pattern continues in that he tends to eschew active participation of any sort. Despite his leftist sympathies, he virtually ignores the demonstrators at the Republican convention. There are no speeches or arrests or other "Norman Mailer as Public Artist" escapades in the book. This passivism brings Mailer to wonder if he is growing old. He describes himself watching a demonstration march:

He is observing from the balcony of the twelfth floor. He must have turned some corner in his life for he feels no shame whatsoever. Later he will go out and eat a good dinner and not think of the kids in the park.⁴

As in Miami and the Siege of Chicago, Mailer spends much of his time just watching the convention events, often on television, and cogitating. One exception to this pattern is that in the report on the 1972 conventions Mailer does far more interviewing than in the previous book. In that earlier book he doesn't converse with any of the candidates with the exception of Eugene McCarthy. Moreover, his conversation with McCarthy is more in the form of social bantering than formal interviewing. In the later book, he has interviews with, among others, Henry Kissinger, Thomas Eagleton, George McGovern, Eugene McCarthy again, and party workers for George Wallace. Another anomaly is that Mailer does get tear-gassed at the end of St. George and the Godfather when he is caught in a police-demonstrator confrontation that he is observing.

In Of a Fire on the Moon, Mailer makes his distance from the action an important theme. Not only is he physically distant, but he is emotionally shut out by the participants and dwarfed by the event. He finds the workers at the Houston Manned Space Center rigidly rational and unemotional. He wonders whether the astronauts can be the completely-programmed robots

that they appear to be. He comments extensively on the incredible complication of the engineering that has gone into the space flight and the difficulty of a reporter, even if he could understand it all, of being able to translate it into popular terms. He finds the significance of man visiting another planet for the first time difficult to represent in everyday language. Faced with these problems, Mailer makes a valiant reporting effort but never does step up very close to the action. He seems to work a lot from National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA) publicity handouts and from material gathered from observing press conferences, including a series of press briefings with the three astronauts before their flight. For example, there is no record of his personally interviewing any of the astronauts or their families. However, by matching biographical details with traits that he has noticed in public appearances, he interprets the personality drives of the three astronauts and their wives, conjectures on their married lives, and estimates how each is reacting at various stages of the flight. Of course, to say that Mailer does seem to work a lot from press releases is not a criticism of his attempt to interpret the personalities involved in the space mission in order to make the event understandable to the layman. The point is merely to indicate that Mailer has virtually abandoned the participating reporter technique of The Armies of the Night and, furthermore, that he is not exactly knocking down doors to thrust his reportorial nose up to the action. This is not to say, either, that Mailer does not follow normal reporting procedure in any way. He does conduct interviews with NASA officials; he inspects various parts of the Houston headquarters and journeys to Cape Kennedy to see the huge Vehicle Assembly Building

in which the Apollo-Saturn rockets are put together; he studies the launch site and observes the launch; and even pores over large-scale photographs of the moon.

In general, what emerges from Mailer's reporting efforts on the space shot is a very long (414 pages of small type) account which is partly colorful, partly philosophical, and largely technical, though in popular terms. There are three sections in the book and "Aquarius," the floating consciousness figure, appears in two of them--the first and the third. But, in the long middle section which takes up one half the book, Aquarius is obliterated. Mailer devotes himself to following the flight from launch to splash-down and interpreting the technical details in popular terms. Mailer does a good job on this large task, too, and the technically-uninformed reader gains a good appreciation of the intricacies of the moon flight. An especially concise example of the helpful analogies that Mailer provides is his treatment of earth orbiting:

The space craft was travelling at eighteen thousand miles an hour, and that speed was just great enough to keep it in orbit a hundred miles above the earth. It was of course falling, it was in fact in free fall and in a virtual vacuum . . . but it was also travelling so fast in a forward direction that it fell forward like a ball thrown into an endless chasm,⁵ and as it fell forward it fell around the curve of the earth.

As another example, he gives a similarly concise explanation of how a computer works in order to convey the grave implications of computer malfunction on the success of the landing of the LEM vehicle on the moon's surface. At any rate, this is generally an exhaustive and well-done section. Though there is still an immense distance between the observing, press-release reading reporter and the three astronauts rocketing to the moon and back, Mailer does seem partially successful in bridging the gap

by explaining the technical intricacies of the operation.

Mailer tries to bridge the gap in other ways in the book. As indicated, he does not let the lack of a face-to-face encounter prevent him from assessing the personalities of the major participants. In addition, he plumbs the moral implications of the event in language which soars to the farthest flights of metaphysics. The astronauts are not only fisher-kings for an immensely-rich wasteland nation but are agents for the Gods. The Gods, moreover, are engaged in a universe-wide battle in which the astronauts play an unwitting role. Finally, Mailer reads not only the conscious minds of the astronauts but also the unconscious in assessing just what social and metaphysical forces they and their like represent.

Not only in the book on the space shot but in the two political books as well, Mailer seems implicitly to develop a theory of spiritual involvement to substantiate his far-flung use of intuition. Perhaps he realizes that, in general, in the three books which follow The Armies of the Night he comes a long way from the participating reporter technique of which he boasts in that first work and also some distance from a really intensive reporting technique. At any rate, he seems to develop the idea of the reporter as a "witness" in the religious sense of spiritual involvement. That is, he intimates that spiritual involvement in an event qualifies a reporter to make intuitive judgments equally as well as if the reporter is a genuine participant. Thus, in Of a Fire on the Moon he calls himself an "acolyte" to technology and gets emotionally wrapped up in the space flight: "A tiny part of him was like a penitent who had prayed in the wilderness for sixteen days and was now expecting a sign."⁶ He treats the Apollo 11 launch as an apocalyptic event and, while he watches the

huge white spaceship ascending in a tremendous roar of rocket engines, he cries out: "Oh my God! Oh my God!" He compares the ship taking off to Moby Dick, in stupendous majesty, rising from the ocean floor. Furthermore, he is driven to insomnia as he worries over the moral implications of the space shot. He studies space technology feverishly, drawing on his long-disused university training in engineering.

In the two political reports, Mailer's emotional involvement is less pronounced. In fact, as evidenced by the statement that Aquarius is characterized by "a slow brain, a muddy river,"⁷ a slightly perfunctory and despondent air hangs over St. George and the Godfather. However, there is again reference to the reporter as a "witness." For example, feeling an upsurge of pungent reasoning power in himself as he heads in to cover a sub-committee meeting before the Republican convention he remarks that "his powers as a witness could even feel temporarily restored."⁸ However, it might not be wise to push this idea too far as he does not explicitly outline this concept of spiritual involvement. Actually, he does much less philosophizing about reporting in his books after The Armies of the Night. But in summing up the position of the reporter in the three most recent journalistic works it seems fair to refer to Robert Lawler's words:

Mailer is not present as a "figure" or a "personality" but rather as a consciousness, a sensitive seismograph ready to record accurately the rumblings and groanings of an America on the verge of a new era--or of further disaster.

Mailer is not the protagonist in the three later books that he is in the Pentagon march report. However, he is a sort of protagonistic consciousness and still reports largely by describing his own emotions and thoughts.

On the whole, this method has validity at least in that it enables Mailer, by projecting one man's consciousness on an event, to humanize history.

Despite the at least qualified success which Mailer has with his floating consciousness technique it seems fair to ask whether there is any final reason why he does not duplicate the participating reporter role of The Armies of the Night or if nothing else push himself up very close to the action. To ask this question is to assume that the concept of the reporter as actual participant or as very close to the event has definite practical reporting advantages. It seems fair, too, to go to another reporter for an appraisal of Mailer's physically-uninvolved, psychically-involved technique. Such a reporter (formerly with the New York Herald Tribune) is Tom Wolfe. He writes in his Esquire article, "Why They Aren't Writing the Great American Novel Anymore," about Miami and the Siege of Chicago and Of a Fire on the Moon: "Even Mailer's work shows the same odd defect, the same reluctance to take out the notebook and cross the genteel line and head through the doors marked Keep Out."¹⁰ In other words, Wolfe is saying that Mailer does not seem fully committed to the essential reportorial job of getting himself as close to the action as possible. Of course, Mailer has registered in Of a Fire on the Moon his distaste for the endless chasing after facts which he sees as the lot of the professional journalist. However, to take for granted that the reporter must have some integral connection with the event, it seems that Mailer's participatory technique or at least some facsimile of it might have been advantageously applied to his later journalism. Certainly, Wolfe seems of the opinion that there is no essential reason why Mailer could not have placed himself in a closer position to the 1968 political conventions and the Apollo 11 space shot.

Maybe it does sound a little far-fetched to say that Mailer could have impersonated a space administration official in Houston or a Vehicle Assembly Building worker in Cape Kennedy in order to personally experience the feeling of participation in the space shot. Perhaps the space shot and the political conventions, too, are too massive and diffuse to afford any sort of typical participant role. Maybe a reporter would just get bogged down in unrelated detail if he took up some sort of involved role. But, if it is a little far-fetched to say that Mailer could have been genuinely involved in the space shot, for example, it still seems fair to wonder for instance whether Mailer could not have sought out personal interviews with the astronauts or even with their families. Another example of reticence occurs when Mailer is trying to decide on the day of the launch whether to ride over to the VIP bleachers and inspect the president, vice-president, congressmen and other important figures there:

The voice of duty has suggested to Aquarius that he should be there to study them, record their expressions, comment on the part of history they command and their relation to the part of history now being born, but his liver simply will not permit it. . . . No, some sense of his own desire to dwell near the rocket and contemplate its existence as it ascends, and certainly some sense of his own privacy, some demand of his vanity--aware of how grubby he looks and feels--now bids him to stay.¹¹

The question can be asked whether Mailer is not a little too self-conscious in this case. It seems that the true reporter will crawl a mile on his belly through a potato field to get a story. Perhaps, since a major theme of Of a Fire on the Moon is the social and political forces which have given rise to the space program, it would have behooved him to have inspected the representatives of those social and political forces. In general, in the book on the space shot Mailer shows little inclination to foist himself,

rudely or otherwise, upon the inner workings of the NASA team. The same sort of comment can be made about the Mailer stance in relation to the political conventions. Certainly, the question is at least moot whether Mailer could not have penetrated the armour of events a little more deeply in his books after The Armies of the Night.

Mailer's position in his journalism relative to the event, then, ranges from complete involvement to rather distinct non-involvement. But, at no time, even at the extremes of his involvement or disengagement does he seem to behave in a way radically unlike that commonly practiced by reporters. For this reason--the reportorial position relative to the event--it seems that Mailer's journalism is not really any special new breed of writing.

The actual content of the journalism is the second major consideration in assessing Mailer's work from a practical standpoint. Just what does the subjective style of journalism that Mailer is aiming at produce? Mailer tells us that his journalism is aimed at probing the "interior" of a historical event. This interior is defined in terms of the psychological processes of the participants. Mailer also says the only way to gauge this hidden interior is by means of the tool of intuition. It is Mailer's extensive use of intuition, then, which makes his reporting subjective. He criticizes mass media reporting because he says in its attempt to be factual and objective it misses the subjective essence, the interplay of human emotions and feelings which is the real story. The whole first section of The Armies of the Night is, in effect, an illustration of this point. For at the beginning of that book Mailer places an excerpt from Time magazine which purports to be a report on Mailer's activities

in the Pentagon march and in related happenings. Mailer feels this magazine account is a woefully inadequate description not only of the appearance of his activities but also of the psychological springs which motivated him. To refute this article, Mailer sets out in that first section of The Armies of the Night to give a psychologically oriented account of his activities. And, with some justification, he indicates that this account of the state of his inner self also reflects the real feelings of the other participants in the march. Therefore, the interpretive technique that Mailer is aiming at is displayed perfectly in both the first and second parts of The Armies of the Night. Mailer wants to probe the dynamics of the human psyche. If he cannot do it by talking about himself as he does in the first section, he will do it by intuiting the psychological state of others as he does in the second part of the book.

Since Mailer does not again achieve the involvement in the historical event as he does with the Pentagon march, it is evident that in the rest of his journalism he does his probing of the interior of history by standing back and intuiting the psychological state of others. To take a rather amusing example which occurs in St. George and the Godfather: Mailer goes to the office of George McGovern for a scheduled interview following McGovern's nomination as Democratic presidential candidate; McGovern is not in sight and Mailer finds himself being engaged in a somewhat laborious conversation by McGovern's secretary; he wonders why the woman just doesn't leave him alone and go on with her work; just then, there is a loud swoosh of water and McGovern emerges from a cubby-hole washroom in the office; ergo Mailer realizes the secretary was trying to distract him from overhearing McGovern in the washroom and thus intruding on his privacy. The

example is picayune but it illustrates Mailer's preoccupation not with the outward shape of events but with the thoughts and feelings which lie behind the appearances. Another typical example of this probing of psyches occurs in Mailer's account of the Liston-Patterson heavyweight title fight, "Ten Thousand Words a Minute." In this fight, Patterson is knocked out in the first round and, the way Mailer describes it, he is felled not by a physical blow from Liston but by some spiritual bolt.

Then occurred what may have been the most extraordinary moment ever seen in a championship fight. It was very spooky. Patterson, abruptly, without having been hurt in any visible way, stood up suddenly out of his crouch, his back a foot from the ropes, and seemed to look half up into the sky as if he had seen something there or been struck by something from there, by some transcendent bolt, and then he staggered like a man caught in machine-gun fire, and his legs went, and he fell back into the ropes.¹²

Mailer goes on to explain that the fight each man brings into the ring is determined by the way he lives the rest of his life. He says Liston, by allying himself with underworld forces, has gained spiritual stimulus in the same way as Rojack in American Dream when he murdered his wife. Patterson, on the other hand, is something of a goody-goody in his life and lacks the moral force to be gained from extraordinary acts of good and evil. Patterson, in Mailer's estimation, falls easy prey to the spiritual power emanating from the formidable Liston. This example gives a rough indication of the intuitive style of interpretation that Mailer brings to his journalism. The result is often something rather far-fetched which indicates that Mailer is less concerned with literal truth than with metaphorical interpretation. Leo Braudy makes a similar comment:

His factual material, . . . is neither a correlative nor an authentication of his perspective. It becomes instead a base on which he builds his own interpretation of the meaning of the events he describes, not as a congeries of otherwise iso-

lated facts, but as part of a historical tradition and a personal metaphysic.¹³

Therefore, to a far greater extent than most journalists, most mass-media journalists at least, Mailer makes use of imagery and metaphor. One of the most effective examples of such usage is his personification of America at the end of The Armies of the Night as "once a beauty of magnificence unparalleled, now a beauty with leprous skin."¹⁴ With this one eloquent image, Mailer expresses the whole of the hopes and fears for his country which he sees as embodied in the Pentagon demonstration: the beauty of the countryside through which the march is conducted from the Lincoln Memorial Park through the green fields of Maryland to the Pentagon; the huge squat ugliness which Mailer sees in the Pentagon; the beauty of the idealism of the marchers; the ugly fanaticism of the marshals; and the over-hanging brutality of the Vietnam War. This is a simplistic interpretation but it does help to indicate how Mailer uses metaphor in his journalism and how effective this style can be.

Mailer repeats his use of metaphor in Of a Fire on the Moon in a way which owes more to literary allusion. He again employs a symbol to sum up his general feelings about the event that he is witnessing. This occurs when he describes the Apollo-Saturn spaceship, firing off from the Cape Kennedy launch pad, as ascending like Moby Dick.

Two mighty torches of flame like the wings of a yellow bird of fire flew over a field, covered a field with brilliant yellow bloomings of flame, and in the midst of it, white as a ghost, white as the white of Melville's Moby Dick, white as the shrine of the Madonna in half the churches of the world, this slim angelic mysterious ship of stages rose without sound out of its incarnation of flame and began to ascend slowly into the sky, slow as Melville's Leviathan might swim, slowly as we might swim upward in a dream looking for air.¹⁵

With this image of the space ship as Melville's whale, Mailer is conveying the enormity of the spectacle of the space ship taking off. However, he is also expressing his perplexity over the ultimate trend, in terms of good and evil, of the space program. He outlines with the use of this symbol his feeling that the space program expresses both the power and ambition of the human spirit and the panic-stricken urge to bury nature under the weight of technological progress. The growing threat of the totalitarian takeover of the human spirit is also symbolized in Mailer's journalism by the image of cancer or the plague.

Despite Mailer's often effective use of metaphor, it would be inaccurate to imply that his journalism always displays symbolism thoroughly integrated into his writing. For example, he never attains the carefully structured metaphorical framework such as is epitomized by the "A" symbol in the Scarlet Letter. For one thing, such careful craftsmanship is precluded by the deadline pressure under which he is usually writing.

Because Mailer employs an intuitive, metaphorical style of reporting, the people that he deals with are often treated like characters in a novel. That is, Mailer not only provides an interpretation of their characters but furnishes accompanying details of their appearance which tend to corroborate his character assessment. An example of this is his treatment of Nelson Rockefeller in Miami and the Siege of Chicago. Mailer's opinion of Rockefeller is that he is an opportunistic politician who tends to behave, in a political situation at least, in a manner which his reason dictates will be favorable to the voters. That is, Mailer feels that Rockefeller like Richard Nixon will over-ride his own basic instincts in order to secure political advantage. Therefore, Rockefeller is described

in such a way as to bring out the calculating, iron-willed rationality that governs the consummate politician:

He had only one flaw--an odd and unpleasant mouth, a catfish mouth, wide, unnaturally wide with very thin lips. In the center of the mouth there seemed almost another mouth which did the speaking, somewhat thicker lips which pursed, opened, deliberated--all the while the slit-thin corners of the mouth seemed off on their own, not really moving with the center. So he gave the impression of a man to whom expert instruction had disclosed what he might be expected to say--¹⁶therefore only the middle of the mouth might be on call.

The point about this procedure is that it seems that Mailer, the reporter, is standing back observing someone like Rockefeller, noticing various physical traits, contemplating them and then--Voilà--coming up with a character interpretation by means of his novelistic intuition. It seems, in other words, that he is relying exclusively on his theory that actions generate karmic force which influences style or appearance. While this may hold true in some cases, it seems likely that Mailer usually has some previous experience or background knowledge on the basis of which he presents the people in his journalism as novelistic characters.

Underlining this point is Mailer's treatment of the U. S. marshals who surround the Pentagon during the demonstration in The Armies of the Night. Mailer describes himself as sitting in a bus after his arrest waiting to be taken to jail. He studies the marshals around the bus during this waiting period and comes to the conclusion that their "subtle anomalies of the body" indicate they are frustrated in spirit and tend toward fanaticism. He gives a description of what he means by these subtle anomalies--"powerful chests but abrupt paunches," for example. He continues in this interpretive vein for a few pages, expanding his view of the marshals to include a general description of the "irredeemable madness" in

America which he goes on to say is responsible for America's involvement in the Vietnam War. But it is at this point that Mailer seems to realize he has gone pretty far on what some might suppose to be pretty slim evidence--a few minutes gazing out the window of a bus: "It was a great deal to read on the limited evidence before him, but he had known these faces before."¹⁷ Mailer then adds that he had known the type of men who are marshals in his army days in the Second World War. Therefore, what he is really saying is that he is basing his conclusions not only on his window gazing but also on the basis of experience gained in a Texas army outfit in the 1940's. This is not intended to be a criticism of Mailer's procedure but mainly meant to point out that Mailer is not really, as he often seems to be, relying completely on intuitive inspiration in coming to conclusions. Mailer outlines the method he follows even more clearly in Of a Fire on the Moon:

He told himself that when the time came, he would have material enough--what kind of detective was he, if he could not divine the depths of their character by the depths of his own experience and the few clues the astronauts had already provided in their shielded public interviews?¹⁸

It seems, then, that Mailer's use of intuition can be overemphasized. It seems that while Mailer tends to come to conclusions rather more far-reaching than most journalists, he is not really following a very different technique. All journalists--especially those writing what is known in the trade as "interpretive" pieces--are forming judgments which are based on their observation of the subject in question, coupled with background information and their own personal experience.

Mailer's treatment of people in his journalism is called novelistic because he usually presents individuals as characters, complete with

opinions about what sort of people they are and physical description to back up this opinion. Mailer also deals novelistically with the event he is covering or with incidents within that happening in that he fits them into a general conceptual framework. Just as the people in his journalism seldom exist solely in themselves but are made to epitomize some general tendency, so events themselves become part of some general pattern. This tendency to place an event within a general scheme is demonstrated by Mailer's preoccupation throughout Of a Fire on the Moon with the metaphysical implications of the space shot. He wonders whether the astronauts are in the service of good or evil Gods and whether their mission heralds good or evil for the human race. What is significant about this conjecture is not Mailer's eventual hesitant decision that the faustian heroism of the attempt transcends its totalitarian tendency. The significant point is Mailer's desire to place the event in perspective. Robert Lawler also discusses this feature of Mailer's writing:

Often Mailer's style is best described a metonymic rather than metaphorical. The task of the half-involved, half-detached comic reporter of Armies is to see large implications embodied in small events.¹⁹

As an example, Lawler goes on to point out how Mailer draws the conclusion that "there is a dead nerveless area on the Left" because of the passivity of the few marchers who remained all night at the Pentagon in The Armies of the Night. Carrying his generalizing tendency to the extreme, Mailer tries, also in the Pentagon march report, to place within historical context his inadvertent urination on the floor of a washroom. He says that although he was initially dismayed by this "contretemps" he decided to mention the incident in a speech he is about to make. Discussion of such a contretemps,

he says, will shock his audience and gain its deepest attention. On reflection, he decides the whole affair, from the misplaced peeing to the attempt to make good of ill is indicative not only of the inherent foolishness of man but also of his soaring spirit, his unquenchable romanticism.²⁰ While Mailer no doubt intends this example to be humorous, it represents a recurrent feature of his journalism which is to go off on tangents from particular instances. The evident humor in the peeing discussion also indicates Mailer likes to play the court fool and utter wise sayings in the shape of jest. The desire to be a sage, to place events within historical perspective, seems to be the wellspring of the tendency to generalize about every happening, large or small. But while Mailer carries his generalizing further than most reporters, his effort to place events within a pattern is not unique. Most reporters, especially those writing interpretive pieces, carry out the same attempt.

Another point is that Mailer's unabashed philosophizing reveals his reporting to be rather subjective. As such, he is violating the traditional canon that the reporter take an objective point of view. However, it is evident Mailer does not feel he is committing any sin as it is his belief that any description of a happening is untrue to the final reality and therefore subjective. It seems that Mailer has a valid point and that even the "hard news" pages of the Winnipeg Free Press, for example, are subjective interpretations purporting to be objective (which becomes especially evident during provincial election campaigns).

Mailer's philosophizing is usually noted for a rather cavalier dismissal of the strictures of formal logic. He clearly intends much of his thinking to be intuitive rather than logically deductive. As noted, this leads to

wild sweeps of the imagination and, in general, makes for a style which swooshes between objective description and interpretive heights. It is this very readiness to employ intuition, to free the mind from the formal hunt for fact, which seems to enable Mailer to see parallels between events and to arrive at a historical perspective. It is this readiness, in fact, which is the strong point of his journalism in that it makes his writing strikingly original. However, it is also this disregard for formal logical connections and for the factual base of his material which sometimes leads to problems. Mailer, himself, notes that occasionally his intuitive leaps are downright mistaken and stupid. He makes this comment in an interview with Playboy magazine when he remembers that immediately after he heard President Kennedy had been shot he had the thought that the president was pretending to be badly hurt in order to gain public sympathy.²¹ It is this same characteristic which causes Diana Trilling to comment that Mailer's writing has "so much intellection but such a frequency of unsound thinking."²² And, in the same vein, Richard Poirier notes how one of the dichotomies which is at the core of both The Armies of the Night and Of a Fire on the Moon loses much of its impact when it is subjected to critical scrutiny. This dichotomy is the apparent contradiction between being devoutly Christian and subscribing to the technological advances of the modern world. In each of the books just mentioned, there is frequent mention of the thesis that because the average American is a firm Christian and also a believer in the power of technology, he has a huge contradiction within his nature. This contradiction threatens to drive him to madness. This thesis rides on the premises that to be Christian is to live by faith while to subscribe to technology is to assert there is certainty in life.

Poirier points out there are serious flaws in this proposition. For instance, while the average American may attend church frequently, there is no firm evidence to suggest he is devout. And, attending church frequently does not automatically presuppose that one is taking a mystical approach to life.²³

Issue can be taken with Mailer's thinking in an even more basic area. Mailer says that people gain a sense of reality or objectivity through pursuing their own subjective conceptions. That is, he says the value of individuality is that exploration of individual ideas and styles of living enables people to arrive at some assessment of the value of these personal traits. For example, even a Hitler performs a valuable function in bringing to the surface the buried cruelties of his own nature in particular and human nature in general. Because of a Hitler, mankind is able to assess the value of the brutal approach to life. It is the lack of individuality which Mailer deplores in modern America:

The tragedy of this city and the tragedy of this country is that we all live in a situation where none of us know what the reality is, and we explore for it and we explore for it--we spend our lives exploring for it--and we never find an objective ground where we can begin to locate whether some pet idea of ours or some profound idea of ours is partially true or partially untrue.²⁴

Mailer applies this idea to journalism. He says journalism is not serving its proper function if it does not probe the "interior" of history. The "interior" of history is, of course, the subjective aspect of events. Furthermore, Mailer goes on to say that the mass media is falling down in exactly this respect. Reporters are not probing the nuance of events. The problem with this sort of talk is that it does not make complete sense. First of all, Mailer himself makes the point that objectivity is not to be

found by the human race. For mankind is imprisoned in subjectivity. Moreover, objectivity is commonly thought of as impartiality or as that state which is stripped of subjectivity. What does Mailer mean then by telling us to seek objectivity through an exploration of our subjective selves? Mailer would admit that his expression on this point is intuitive rather than logically deductive or rigidly philosophical. After all, there does seem to be some intuitive validity to the concept of finding out more about yourself by testing your own limits. However, in this case especially, intuitive expression runs the risk of confusion. Mailer is not only being contradictory in terms of the common use of the word "objective" but also in terms of his own philosophy.

Not only does Mailer sometimes generalize upon an unsound or unclear basis but the extreme breadth of his thinking often threatens to undermine his work. In his writing his observations are usually pushed to the limit. Thus, in the American space program there is not only an extremely great effort to make the various space machines as perfect as possible but he says NASA has elevated the machine to the level of art. Not only is America showing a tendency to fall into dampening conformity, but Mailer says there is a plague descending upon the land. Not only is there much uncertainty and danger in the modern world, but Mailer indicates the whole world may go up in smoke in "some extraordinary holocaust."²⁵ These observations are pushed so far that there is sometimes a tendency for the journalism to lose connection with the events under discussion and to fall into abstraction. His writing, then, cannot properly claim to be journalism, or even subjective history. It becomes in these cases esoteric philosophy. The problem seems to be greatest in those works in which Mailer is most divorced

from the event. For example, in Of a Fire on the Moon Mailer's very remoteness from the action tends to breed in direct proportion the abstractness of his conclusions. For is it not an abstraction to discuss the three astronauts, Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins, as standard bearers for the God of mankind in his competition with other heavenly powers? And, in the same way, Mailer's separation from the actual event of the Democratic and Republican conventions in St. George and the Godfather seems to detach him somewhat from reality. For instance, Mailer devotes several pages in that book to the study of the prospective candidates for vice-president that George McGovern had available to him. This is well and good especially considering the unfortunate result of McGovern's choice of Thomas Eagleton. However, Mailer does not compare the prospective candidates according to any thorough-going logical criteria but more according to the sound of their names when coupled with that of McGovern: "McGovern and Shriver had a poor sound--stationers, old pharmacists, something pinch-penny!--otherwise, why not have picked Shriver after Kennedy had refused?"²⁶ This discussion is rather amusing and Mailer also includes a few factual considerations such as which candidates refused the nomination. However, since Mailer asked the question "why not have picked Shriver?" the answer is, according to newspaper reports, that Shriver was out of the country at the time of the Democratic convention. Therefore, he could not be considered at that time for the vice-presidential nomination. When he seems to be unaware of such an obvious fact, it seems that Mailer is going a little too far with his intuitive reporting. Of course, it is interesting to note that in writing this way, Mailer is committing what in his canon is the cardinal sin: that of becoming detached from reality. It seems that in his journalism

after The Armies of the Night there is a clear tendency for his reporting to be often intriguing and exciting but somehow not really dealing with the event at hand.

But, in The Armies of the Night at least Mailer seems to be able to combine a close look at the actual surface of the event with sweeps of philosophy. The key to this success is of course that Mailer does not just stand back and observe and intuit but is right in there experiencing the excitement, fear, fatigue, and the boredom of the march. Unconsciously perhaps, Mailer is duplicating the kind of reporting which makes a book like Gay Talese's Honor Thy Father come alive. For Mailer like Talese is either so close to the action or finds out so much about what has happened that he can recreate the event scene-by-scene. Mailer's strictures that a historian become involved in history are borne out, then, by the success of his coverage of the Pentagon march.

Even in symbolic terms, the use of the involved historian technique is effective in The Armies of the Night. The primary theme in Mailer's philosophy is that reality is many-layered and that mankind is always confined within reality to some extent. Jack Richardson points out how Mailer's use of himself as a character in his book illustrates this point:

Here we have Mailer as character observing himself perform,
preparing those observations for the Mailer who is relating
to us as we read what he has observed about those observations.²⁷

If Mailer had chosen to write his account of the Pentagon march without himself as a character, as Truman Capote does in his In Cold Blood, he would have missed the opportunity to express symbolically that reality is more complex than it ordinarily seems. By the way, this is probably a more effective manner of illustrating the depth of reality than talking

about Gods and Devils and other powers as Mailer does in Of a Fire on the Moon.

Despite the success which Mailer enjoys with his involved historical technique, it can easily be said that Mailer's main reason for proposing the idea of a protagonist historian is more because of his personal preference for being the centre of attraction than for reasons of good reporting. And, it could be argued that Mailer writes about himself in The Armies of the Night rather than giving a strictly third-person account because it is easier to talk about oneself rather than do a lot of interviewing and conventional reportorial digging. Both these observations can be true, however, without altering the fact that the involved historian technique in the Pentagon march report produces fine reporting by anybody's standard. In addition, the involved historian role allows Mailer to fulfill the dictates of his existential philosophy in that it calls for actual participation in place of vicarious experience. Moreover, the participation in the event affords Mailer the sense of involvement which his nature seems to require. Finally, it allows him to be at least in part the hero and protagonist for the American people that he feels the artist in modern America should be. In this role, Mailer is the quasi-heroic, uncertain type of protagonist that characterizes his fictional heroes, such as Croft in The Naked and the Dead and Rojack in An American Dream. Mailer has to be applauded for developing a technique of reporting which meshes so well not only with his general philosophy and his own personal make-up but also with his dictates for the artist.

If The Armies of the Night marks such an effective continuation of Mailer's literary preoccupations and also is excellent journalism, why

does Mailer fall away from it in his succeeding journalism? One commentator points out that "in Mailer's career expansive works are typically followed by more restricted, careful, calculated works."²⁸ Thus the flamboyant comic hero of the first part of The Armies of the Night is reduced to the nearly-invisible observer of Miami and the Siege of Chicago and following works. Another reason might be that Mailer writes in "Up the Family Tree" that portrayal of oneself as a character as in autobiography or involved historical journalism is agonizingly difficult:

One is forced to examine oneself existentially, perceive oneself in the act of perceiving. . . . It is necessary to voyage through the fluorescent underground of the mind, that arena of self-consciousness where Sartre grappled with the pour-soi and the en-soi; intellections consuming flesh, consciousness the negation, yes, the very consumption of being. One is digesting one's gut in such an endeavor.²⁹

Small wonder that because of the problems Mailer sees in such self-portrayal he tends to avoid it at least in part the next time out. That is, while Mailer does report after The Armies of the Night from his own consciousness, he does not present himself as a fully developed character.

While these reasons do not lack validity, a more practical explanation of why Mailer does not repeat his technique is that the situations are completely different after the Pentagon march. In that event, Mailer is first and foremost a participant. For the other events, he is first and foremost a hired reporter. Therefore, he has a place ready made for him in the Pentagon march that he would have to seek out in the other events. Furthermore, the complexity of the action of the political conventions and the space shot seems to make much more difficult the finding of a typical participant role. Perhaps, despite all his magnificent gifts as a writer, Mailer is not really that interested in being a dogged reporter

and shoving himself through doors marked Keep Out. To cover the other events as he did the Pentagon march--by participation--would have demanded intense dedication to the job of reporting. It is entirely conceivable that Mailer reserves this dedication for something other than journalism. It may be that Mailer was lucky with The Armies of the Night: everything turned out just right in the Pentagon march to match his capabilities. Richard Poirier makes a similar observation. He says that while Mailer has the "heroic ambition" to expose the reality of America "except in the special circumstances of Armies where the nature of his participation in events is beautifully sychronized with his writing about them, the ambition is seldom realized."³⁰

Whatever the decline after The Armies of the Night it is evident that in that work Mailer makes an exciting contribution to journalism by producing a work in which philosophy is so well meshed with good reporting technique. The result is an absorbing and accurate piece of reportage. And, despite the lapses in the later reporting when esoteric abstraction replaces hard-nosed journalism, there are many strong points about his reporting after The Armies of the Night. In his political reports and the space shot coverage, Mailer provides a wonderfully human, if sometimes eccentric, backdrop against which to view some of the momentous events of American history. This is not to say, either, that his later reporting is always lacking the conventional virtue of dogged fact-finding, as evidenced by his extreme diligence in preparing the long and excellent technical chapter on the moon shot. But whatever the strengths or faults of his journalism, it seems that he never attains a new genre of writing, such as novelistic non-fiction, which his ruminations point to. That is, while his reporting

opens up new subjective directions within journalism and fulfills many conventional virtues, it does not transcend the journalism genre. His work does not transcend the journalism genre because even when his reporting is most abstract, when his vaunted intuition is pushed to its farthest limit, he is not gathering data for his conclusions by any method foreign to conventional reporting. And even when his work is most concrete, when he is actually a participant in the action, he is only refining the technique of involved reporting practised by the New Journalists.

NOTES FOR THE CHAPTER

¹Tom Wolfe, "Why They Aren't Writing the Great American Novel Anymore," Esquire, December, 1972, pp. 152-159.

²Mailer, Armies, p. 284.

³Richard Gilman, "What Mailer Has Done," Norman Mailer, ed. by Leo Braudy, p. 165.

⁴Mailer, St. George, p. 168.

⁵Mailer, Of a Fire, p. 202.

⁶Ibid., p. 91.

⁷Mailer, St. George, p. 3.

⁸Ibid., p. 126.

⁹Robert Lawler, Norman Mailer: The Connection of New Circuits (Claremont, Claremont Graduate School, 1970), p. 200.

¹⁰Tom Wolfe, "Why They Aren't Writing the Great American Novel Anymore."

¹¹Mailer, Of a Fire, p. 85.

¹²Mailer, Presidential Papers, p. 253.

¹³Leo Braudy, "Introduction," Norman Mailer, ed. by Braudy, p. 13.

¹⁴Mailer, Armies, p. 320.

¹⁵Mailer, Of a Fire, p. 93.

¹⁶Mailer, Miami, p. 21.

¹⁷Mailer, Armies, p. 172.

¹⁸Mailer, Of a Fire, p. 83.

¹⁹Robert Lawler, Norman Mailer, p. 191.

²⁰Mailer, Armies, p. 44.

²¹Paul Carroll, "Playboy Interview," Norman Mailer, ed. by Robert Lucid, p. 273.

²²Diana Trilling, "Radical Moralism," Norman Mailer, ed. by Leo Braudy, p. 43.

²³Richard Poirier, "The Ups and Downs of Mailer," Norman Mailer, ed. by Leo Braudy, p. 167.

²⁴Mailer, Existential Errands, p. 360.

²⁵Paul Carroll, "Playboy Interview," p. 285.

²⁶Mailer, St. George, p. 76.

²⁷Jack Richardson, "The Aesthetics of Norman Mailer," Norman Mailer, ed. by Robert Lucid, p. 198.

²⁸Robert Lawler, Norman Mailer, p. 199.

²⁹Norman Mailer, Existential Errands, p. 181.

³⁰Poirier, "Ups and Downs," p. 168.

CONCLUSION

Norman Mailer's journalism may be looked on from two viewpoints. Firstly, his reporting may be regarded as developing from his general philosophy that reality is infinitely complex and that Mankind's viewpoint is correspondingly finite or subjective. This philosophy is principally borne out in his journalism through the participating reporter or "historian." That is, there is always some sort of protagonistic "Mailer" through whom events are viewed, though he is not always a complete participant in the historical action. The use of this character to describe events rather than an invisible, omniscient narrator illustrates the subjectivity of mankind's viewpoint. In other words, there is a concerted attempt on Mailer's part through the use of the involved historian to debunk the myth of objectivity conventional to journalism. Another function of the central observing figure is to epitomize Mailer's idea of the artist--the person who earns the right to interpret reality by working with impossible contradictions within himself.

The second standpoint from which to view his journalism is the more practical. It is to take a look at Mailer's journalism simply as reporting and to see what sort of a job he is really doing. Thus, what he says he is doing is more or less disregarded. From this standpoint, the device of the central protagonistic character has major advantages. For example, even when the central figure in the three books after The Armies of the Night is more of a disembodied consciousness than a full-blown character, the device is useful in providing a human frame of reference against which to

judge history. But when the central figure is the fully-rounded "Mailer" in The Armies of the Night, the device has enormous effectiveness in that its use means the action is genuinely being covered. The reporter is exerting himself to place himself in the position of the participants in the historical event and therefore has a solid basis on which to form conclusions. These are the practical strengths which can be found in an examination of Mailer's major reporting: a human frame of reference against which to look at history and, at least in The Armies of the Night, intensive coverage of the event. Both of these strengths can be attributed to Mailer's use of the involved historian technique. Therefore, the "historian" seems to be the single most important feature of Mailer's journalism. Its use not only coordinates his reporting with his philosophy but has definite practical advantages. While the protagonistic historian does not, as Mailer implies, transform his journalism into some other genre, it does make his journalism deserving of being considered art.

But this is not meant to imply that Mailer's reporting is always superlative. Sometimes, the human frame of reference that he provides threatens to become the main part of the description, leading away from the actual happening. Often Mailer is not by any means the dogged reporter of the description of the Pentagon march and it seems his use of intuition may be a cover-up for a lack of real reporting dedication.

Perhaps the most effective summation of Mailer's journalism is to repeat what he himself has frequently stated. He is not a dedicated reporter; he is a novelist taking time out from what he considers his real work to have a try at journalism. Therefore, it seems that happy circumstances as much as anything conspired to produce the excellent reporting of The Armies of

the Night. That is, Mailer fell into the Pentagon march by accident and couldn't have chosen a better position from which to report. These fortuitous circumstances coupled with the unchallenged power of his writing combine to produce a fine piece of journalism. In the later books, however, Mailer is not thrust by happy chance into the midst of the action. Moreover, he does not compensate by probing the event as deeply as he might.

In short, it seems safe to say that, whatever the undoubted strengths of his journalism, Mailer has not found his true metier in reporting. It may even be true that Mailer has had his fling with journalism and if he is not to settle down into full-time novel-writing, may move into other types of writing activities besides journalism. Thus, his recent interpretive biography of Marilyn Monroe could be an indication of a new trend away from journalism.

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