



ERRATUM

Please note the following errors and corrections. The references are by page and line unless otherwise specified.

- 26 n6 Tony Tanner, *City of Words : American Fiction 1950-1970*, 3rd. edn., London, Jonathan Cape, 1971, p. 356.
- 10 : 7 synchronisity : should read synchronicity
- 13 : 7 from bottom 'and Mailer's' : delete 'and'
- 26 n20 Richard Poirier, *Norman Mailer*, New York, Fontana / Collins, 1972, p. 11
- 16 : 3 - 8 sentence should read as follows :
'His much-vaunted contribution to the so-called new journalism is Mailer's effort to determine a form for shifting social antagonisms and anachronisms through the creation of a literary identity to sift events and record reality. In this way he creates a further reality which is his representation of history as an evolving phenomenon in an imagined past, the dynamic present and an anticipated future.'
- 20 : 8 and 28 : 20 'millieu' : should read 'milieu'
- 25 : 6 'belies' : should read 'underlies'
- 47 n4 book title in last two lines should be underscored
- 34 : 7 'revulsion of' should read 'revulsion from'
- 49 : 4-5 quotation source: Poirier, Richard, *Norman Mailer*, New York, Fontana / Collins, 1972, p. 79
- 49 : 8 sentence should read as follows:
'By such logic, contradiction is therefore a biological component of human personality, and it is precisely these contradictions and complexities within the human psyche Mailer wishes to exacerbate rather than disguise or deny.'
- 65 : 8 'Menehetet': should read 'Menenhetet'
- 72 long quotation, 8th last line: 'alter' should read 'altar'
- 137 first line indented quotation: 'hes' should read 'yes'
- 172 eighth line indented quotation: 'god' should read 'good'

173 : 2 'and so on': omit

245-6: 4 from bottom - 9 from top: quotation should be indented and single-spaced

247 : 12 from bottom: 'spurns' should read 'spurs'

248 : 4 'borne' should read 'born'

274 : 7 'milliux' should read 'milieux'

385 : 4 'wher' should read 'where'



DIALECTICAL STRUCTURES IN THE WORK OF
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Thesis submitted for the
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November, 1988.

Awarded 1989

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ABSTRACT

Dialectical Structures in the work of Norman Mailer

The thesis is divided into two sections; the first section comprises an introduction and six chapters, and the second section comprises a long chapter divided into three parts. Section One explains the thesis and provides the basis for Section Two, which demonstrates, through a close examination of three of Mailer's works, how this thesis is applied in the writing of Norman Mailer.

The body of Mailer's prose, plays and poetry can be viewed as a holistic, self-referential system of work in which a consistent and complex structuring is the metaphorical means of delineating a dialectical conception of personality. Mailer's existential, Hip ethic proposes that, in a situation of uncertainty (in which the outcome of one's actions is unknown), which is contextualised by a sense of one's fear, the individual is confronted with the buried motivations, weaknesses and strengths which comprise the whole of one's being. Such an experience of "existential confrontation" reveals the dialectical nature of one's personality in the alternatives for action which present themselves. The decision to act in one way as opposed to another manifests the shape, or worth of one's being, which is the revelation of a capacity for courage, or cowardice - the capacity for growth, or the character of inertia.

The alternatives for action which are presented simultaneously entail the decision between "chaos" and "convention": the former expresses the principle of entropy, the formlessness which characterises the absence of the dialectic. The latter expresses the rigidities and fixities of the principle

of totalitarianism, which is, in turn, the expression of the value structures and systems of "the Establishment" (the maintenance of the status quo).

The individual faces these alternatives balanced "on the edge of the divide", a situational metaphor for the vision of truth afforded by the experience of existential confrontation. Most frequently, the specific character is poised on a parapet, on an overhang, or in some other situation which proposes the crucial alternatives for action.

The achievement of balance whilst poised on the edge is also the means by which one progresses toward a "dream of being" - the process of self-individuation. The achievement of balance is the means by which one defeats the "dream of power" (totalitarianism) and the devilish principle of entropy (inertia or acquiescence), both of which entail the loss of the dialectic, which is the loss of one's self, the death of one's being.

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University and, to the best of the author's knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

NAME: SUSAN LOHMEYER..... COURSE: MA, ENGLISH LANGUAGE
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I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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Susan E. Lohmeyer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Dr B.R. Westburg for his interest and guidance during the progress of the work. Interesting and helpful discussions have been held with many colleagues and staff of the Department of English Language and Literature, and particular thanks are extended to M.J. Tolley and S.J. Wilson. The author is grateful for the support of the Government of South Australia through the Department of Technical and Further Education for the provision of weekly leave from employment for the purpose of completing this thesis. Grateful acknowledgement of enduring support and encouragement is also extended to G.W. Wood.



INTRODUCTION

I.

Mailer's epigraph to *The Deer Park*, "Please do not understand me too quickly", taken from Andre Gide, is subsequently paraphrased on at least three further occasions in his writing.¹ Mailer is sounding a cautionary warning to the hasty reader on two accounts: that his novels should properly be viewed as part of an homogenous entity beyond the individual work, inhabiting a moral universe in which Mailer's self-referential philosophy lends meaning and form to the individual work; and secondly, that Mailer's idiosyncratic and polemical view belies a serious writer for whom nothing is simple and certainly never one-dimensional. Mailer's conscious effort as self-appointed moral guardian and arbiter of a modern, specifically American culture, finds expression in the authorial "I" which, as the primary voice (whether as part of the narrative action or not) dissects the significance of events in terms of an ambivalent responsiveness, viewing existence as a vast network of dualities and oppositions.

Mailer has created a fictional universe in which his thematic impetus is to reveal the buried, or hidden reality of the oppositions at work both within the individual but also as the "other", or sub-stratum level of existence which exists in a dialectical relation to the personal perception of one's autonomy. Fiction, for Mailer, is the means by which the nature of reality is revealed, where reality embraces that which is considered phenomenologically extraordinary; what I have termed the metaphysical universe and which equates to Mailer's concept of magic. Moreover, the fictional work is also the means by

which the experience of reality is ordered and structured to reveal the antagonisms and dialectical oppositions which inform one's perception of good and evil. Mailer's sensibility is profoundly moral; his vision embraces a perception of the individual² as divided between the capacity for good and the propensity for evil, but further, one's actions manifest the battle for ascendancy of God and the Devil which Mailer posits as the moral context for our experience of existence. Indeed, "the final purpose of art is to intensify, even, if necessary, to exacerbate, the moral consciousness of people"³ and Mailer believes that the realisation of oneself as a moral being necessarily places one in dialectical opposition to the social context; the cultural milieu of the late Twentieth Century, which epitomises compromise, apathy, and the rigidities of empty value structures.

Mailer is an obsessional writer, for whom belief and fiction coincide to create an ordered literary universe in which Mailer, *auteur*, presides both as creator of the text but also as the medium through which reality is experienced, ingested and transformed to the fictional representation, or revelation of reality. Each of Mailer's novels, fictional fragments, prose pieces, and poems inhabits this literary universe, in which Mailer has fashioned a "fictional project" - the exploration of individual identity as the dialectical relationship of opposed or contrary inclinations and motivations; and the means by which one determines a form for oneself which expresses the worth of oneself. This primary theme - Mailer's fictional project - is understood only in terms of a self-referential language by which Mailer transmutes even the most common objects - plastic, for

example - to a system of metaphor and iconographic imagery as a function of his polemical and idiosyncratic vision. This is why, further, the reality of, say, Robert Lowell in *The Armies of the Night*, or that of the major American authors Mailer dissects in *Cannibals and Christians* is a "reality" entirely subsumed by Mailer's self-contained and self-referential body of ideas and belief-structures: Mailer literally absorbs the objective reality of his experience of living in America in the middle-to-late Twentieth Century and turns it into the substance of his own systemic body of fiction. The evolving persona - the creation of identity in which identity is an assertion, not an accident, is Mailer's central narrative preoccupation, and provides thematic focus to Mailer's conviction that the creation of form is a process in which reality (a specifically American reality) is revealed. In fact, the reality of Norman Mailer is a function of the literary process of creating a fiction: by positing "Norman Mailer" as the primary voice within the universe his texts inhabit, Mailer-as-author determines a fictional form for Mailer, the created self. In turn, the created self expresses the dialectical oppositions which Mailer reduces to a system of dualities, such as God and the Devil, Hips and squares, being and nothingness. Finally, Mailer proposes that the structure his fiction inhabits mirrors, or reveals, the process by which the self is created in the recognition of the dialectical form of the self.

II.

Mailer's belief that the act of writing is itself the creation of a form for something which engages one at the

subliminal level of one's buried, or hidden desires and motivations necessarily entails a quality of responsiveness in which one may seek to uncover the meaning of the text. In this sense, the reader is exhorted to "embrace" the text as an act of faith; Mailer proposes that the reality of the text is the discernible expression of some truth of existence which may be hidden, or which one may fail to recognise. Mailer implies that the created text, whether fiction or non-fiction, has, at some level, determined a magical, or mysterious force for creation so that the author is to some degree separated from the text; the agent through which this force is expelled. At the same time, the text expresses the nature of the authorial "I" responsible for its conception, inception and delivery: the metaphor of birth Mailer delivers (compounding metaphor upon metaphor) at the close of *The Armies of the Night* is the means of expressing his belief that writing brings one close to the "seat" of creation.

Thus, Mailer believes that the text is itself the revelation of some truth of existence, as well as the creation of a form for the self. Indeed, Mailer's vehement literary effort is the creation of form - the form his novels inhabit; but also, the creation of an ordered literary universe in which form is also a metaphor for the process of self-creation and self-realisation. In itself, Mailer's metaphoric structuring, used to delineate a consistent and unifying system of beliefs and thematic concerns, is not a startlingly original literary device. I believe, however, that Mailer has suffered from misrepresentation and the easy assumptions of critics who have failed to recognise his coherent fictional system and the spectacular originality of Mailer's use of language to literally force the reader

(perceptive enough) to the requisite quality of responsiveness to his themes. I propose that Mailer's holistic, homogenous body of writing is a self-contained and self-referential system in which a consistent structure is used to express Mailer's complex and consistent themes. For this reason, I further propose that Mailer's work can be properly understood and appreciated in its total relation to the self-same themes and structuring and, as such, I have confined my treatment of Mailer's important contribution to contemporary American literature to a close examination of the text, whether as novel or as play, poem, or so-called journalism. I believe it is necessary to isolate that particular quality of Mailer's writing which has, it is fair to say, been overlooked in the many critical appraisals which abound: even Harold Bloom, who has perceptively stated that "when (he) think(s) of (Norman Mailer), *Advertisements for Myself* comes into (his) memory more readily than any other work, perhaps because truly he is his own supreme fiction. He is the author of "Norman Mailer", a lengthy, discontinuous, and perhaps canonical fiction" fails to note that, although Mailer's importance "seems to transcend any of his individual works"⁴ it is precisely this insistent, demanding and obsessive voice, known as "Norman Mailer" which heralds the birth of a self: a self which transcends its relation to the author, Norman Mailer, in terms of its place within time past, present and future. The created or realised self - not self-aggrandizing - is Mailer's consistent, coherent theme which informs his metaphoric structuring. Thus, my thesis is directed toward this process of self-creation and self-realisation as the thematic basis for the unifying dialectical structuring which expresses and contains the form of

Mailer's literary universe. Specifically, I have chosen to isolate the primary dialectical structure, which I believe informs all of Mailer's writing, in terms of the various stages, or component parts of this structure as the basis for the structure of the thesis itself. The first section of the thesis is divided into six chapters, each of which is concerned with a separate stage or component part of the dialectical structure. In the second section of the thesis I have dealt exclusively with three of Mailer's novels, *An American Dream*, *Why Are We in Vietnam?* and *Tough Guys Don't Dance*. In the first section, my intention is to explain Mailer's structured vision by dissecting the consistent, repeated dialectical pattern in terms of its constituent parts and its distinctive, thematic imagery and allusions. In the second section, my attempt is to demonstrate Mailer's use of a pivotal metaphoric structure in a close examination of its presence in three of Mailer's most important, and, I believe, vastly entertaining, brilliantly written novels.

Thus, my reference to these novels, as well as to the other prose-pieces, poems, plays, and fragments which comprise the body of Mailer's work, is of necessity, repetitive. It is a function of the homogenous quality of Mailer's body of fiction that his themes, his metaphors, his imagery and his beliefs are self-referential and self-contained. Similarly, my examination of Mailer's work is synchronic because I believe that Mailer's theme and his self-referential metaphors, within the context of his structured vision, are consistent in their application throughout the various texts, plays and poems. Thus, I have chosen to deal with Mailer's fiction as a body of ideas, expressed through a consistent metaphoric structuring and imagery which, as such, is

the consistent basis for the thematic underpinning of such diverse works as *Marilyn* and *Ancient Evenings*. In a sense, one approaches Mailer as a translator of his internal "language", and I would propose that any worthy critical account of Mailer has assumed the implicit and internalised terms of reference for understanding Mailer, which comprise the self-same themes, metaphors and imagery.

III.

Mailer's primary dialectical structure comprises four stages, or, more appropriately, four separate psychological states of being: the experience of existential self-confrontation, the revelation of the dialectical self, the acquisition of equilibrium, and the anticipated dream of being. The dream of being is my expression for Mailer's preoccupation with the creation or realisation of selfhood: Mailer proposes that the individual effort to determine a form for the self is simultaneously the effort to determine a "dream" of personal fulfillment - a dream, because the perfectly realised self exists as a projected ideal. Of intrinsic importance, rather, is the process of self-individuation, of determining and asserting the worth of one's selfhood. Indeed, Mailer is an American existentialist whose perspective is a version of Descartes' maxim but which states I act, therefore I am, but Mailer's sense of the "I am" is fluid, such that the determination of the shape of one's selfhood is a continually evolving and consistently repeated process of self-individuation. Thus, in none of Mailer's novels or prose-pieces does the hero-figure achieve a personal dream of being, which expresses the perfectly realised

self. Rather, the acquisition of equilibrium is Mailer's metaphoric expression of individual self-recognition: the revelation of the dialectical self which has preceded the determination of balance of the inner, dialectical oppositions; which is, of course, the realisation of the form of oneself.

The basis for the dialectical patterning is the experience of existential confrontation. The experience of existential confrontation occurs when the meaning of one's own being is implicit in the actions determined by the situation in which one finds, or places oneself. Such a confrontation is existential, because it occurs in a context of fear and in which the outcome of any action taken is debilitatingly uncertain. In this way, action becomes the pure expression of one's being, where being manifests the meaning of one's life in action. Mailer's distinction between a character - "someone you can grasp as a whole" - and a being - "someone whose nature keeps shifting" is the attempt to codify a version of existentialism which emphasises existence before essence; that the meaning of an event or an individual being is determined through action. Thus, "the primary quality of man was an assertion, and on the consequence, an isolation, that one had to alienate oneself from nature to become a man ...".⁵ The experience of existential confrontation returns the individual to the experience of oneself, exposing one to the deepest, most subliminal motivations, desires and compulsions of the self. Frequently, the experience, which manifests the possibilities for action, is imaginatively characterised and metaphorically construed as descent to a nether world in which one exists in a state of lawlessness, as a "psychic outlaw". Such a descent experience is necessary to

prefigure transcendence, together, the dialectical expression of growth, or re-birth - the evolving process of self-individuation.

Importantly, Mailer's moral context for his idiosyncratic universe derives from his perception of the individual as a "collection of possibilities", which may or may not be realised, depending upon the individual's capacity for growth. Growth, in turn, is given meaning by Mailer as the propensity to "move forward", to explore one's depths and limitations and become more than one thought oneself capable of becoming. Indeed, as Tony Tanner has noted, "Mailer has a 'dynamic view of existence' which sees every individual as 'moving individually through each moment of life forward into growth or backward into death'";⁶ a view which states that all experience manifestly offers the potential for growth or death. Death becomes, for Mailer, a metaphor for the expression of the Devil, a "principle of Evil ... whose joy is to waste substance".⁷ Death is a negation, the absence of form, the nothingness of no order, no shape; entropy is Mailer's favoured concept for the meaning of death. Mailer's perspective entails only growth or death: in the internal dialogues of one's contrary and conflicting compulsions, one must acknowledge that to not act is to anchor oneself more firmly on the side of death because one has refused the opportunity to realise growth; similarly, to act in the sure knowledge that one is denying the possibilities for one's growth also contributes to the death of one's being: "For life is a contest ... a perpetual competition of colliding explorers in which one must grow or pay more for remaining the same (pay in sickness, or depression, or anguish for the lost opportunity), but pay or grow".⁸

The revelation of the dialectical self occurs as the manifest possibilities for action in a moment of existential self-confrontation express the divided nature of one's inner motivations and compulsions. "Revelation" connotes "epiphany", and Mailer means to contextualise the experience of existential self-confrontation and the resultant perception of one's inner dialectic as a religious experience. This is because Mailer believes that to approach synchronicity of one's actions and one's most resonant, sublimated desires, motivations, strengths and weaknesses is to explore the nature of the battle between an existential God, and His equal, the Devil. In Mailer's reckoning, God's destiny is realised in the fate of the individual: every instance in which the individual acts to realise the possibilities for growth manifests God's victory in His battle against the Devil.

The revelation of the dialectical self is expressed as the choice between cancer or madness, "chaos" or "convention". I have chosen the latter terms in order to emphasise the distinction in the metaphoric dialectical structure; Mailer's use of disease imagery, however, is literal. The appeal to convention is simultaneously the exhortation of what I have termed a "dream of power" - the expression of, in Mailer's terms, the totalitarian will to dominate. The totalitarian urge is characterised fundamentally as technological rationality and the circumvention of nature, a cancerous sickness defined by Mailer as a "plague rather than ... a style of ideology".⁹ Totalitarianism is further defined as "a shapeless force, an obdurate emptiness, an annihilation of possibilities";¹⁰ moreover, totalitarianism is the attempt to dominate all of time, nature and eternity through

technology, rationality and the exercise of power because the fearful implications of the metaphysical universe (in which reside time, nature and eternity) demand a moral consciousness which has been corroded, even lost, through a misplaced faith in the self-same technology:

So the crucial characteristic of modern totalitarianism is that it is a moral disease which divorces us from guilt. It came into our being as a desire to escape the judgements of the past and our responsibility for past injustice - in that sense it is a defense against eternity, an attempt to destroy that part of eternity which is death, which is punishment or reward. ... In our flight from the consequence of our lives, in our flight from adventure, from danger, and from the natural ravages of disease, in our burial of the primitive it is death the twentieth century is seeking to avoid.¹¹

The spirit of totalitarianism is the denial of God and, ultimately, the denial of full self-consciousness by which God's destiny may be revealed. It is the denial of an heroic destiny for mankind because the causal link between individual effort and action has been sundered. Instead, totalitarianism asserts nihilistic authority over creativity, and waste, boredom and atheism as the reflexive responsiveness of "the Faustian urge to dominate nature by mastering time, mastering the links of social cause and effect".¹²

Conversely, the seductive appeal of chaos is the desire to flee all restrictions and constrictions - to abandon the formal context of known reality for the formless and dissolute realm of one's own imaginative autonomy. The nature of chaos is the absence of form, in which state of being action or event occurs as isolated chance activity: "And there is Chance. That is the life of an organism which has been deprived of the possibility to organize itself - it is the lowest form of active life, it is

entropy".¹³ Importantly, the realm of chaos is differentiated from the metaphysical universe, in which the individual may experience reality as phenomenologically extraordinary - Stephen Rojack's experience of the moon, for example, in *An American Dream*, Tim Madden's perception of spirits and demons in *Tough Guys Don't Dance* - but such experience occurs as a force working through the individual but not originating within him. Rather, the urge to chaos is simultaneously abdication to a void characterised as the absence of any relation between action, desire, and motivation; in short, a schizoid dislocation of oneself and the "I" of oneself.

The experience of existential self-confrontation, thus, precipitates a dialectic in which the individual discovers the potential both for growth or death. The dialectic expresses the alternatives of chaos and convention, but the manner in which the individual acts within this context determines his capacity for growth, heroism, courage; or, alternatively, death, stasis and cowardice. This is because Mailer's dialectical perception of the individual personality posits the dual compulsions for both power (convention) and absolute autonomy (chaos) as components of the self. The form of oneself is discovered in the way in which one acts within the context of existential self-confrontation, and the process of self-individuation is the growth that is determined in each subsequent vindication of one's capacity for growth in action.

The acquisition of equilibrium - the balance of the inner, dialectical oppositions - is metaphorically conveyed as the individual poised "on the edge" - Mailer's situational metaphor for the divided compulsions to both chaos and convention. In *An*

American Dream, Rojack finds himself "Half-drunk, half-sick, half on the balcony, half off"¹⁴ as he finds himself torn between the desire to embrace a world of demonic undertones and seductive appeals to "fly" to the moon (chaos), and the desire to retreat to the world of social, political and economic power he has formerly inhabited with his wife, Deborah, and which is encapsulated in his father-in-law, Barney Kelly (convention). The climactic scene in which Rojack walks around the parapet is the metaphoric expression of the equilibrium of these compulsions Rojack has achieved. In *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, D.J., the appealing anti-hero, fights the urge to retreat to the icy Northern wilderness, the exhortation of the Beast who is also suggested as God (chaos); but is unable to vindicate his capacity for courage, briefly experienced in communion with the natural environment, and inherits the brutality and competitiveness of his father, Rusty, the encapsulated spirit of the corporation (convention). Finally, in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, Tim Madden climbs the Provincetown Monument in an attempt to deny what he perceives is the feminine, weaker side to his nature. His failure to complete the climb or to even retreat, expresses the entropic tendency to inertia characterising Tim's deeply compromised self, and for which he subsequently achieves self-redemption and self-reclamation. The latter novel, and Mailer's most recent to date, employs the dialectical patterning in the most complex manner of the three novels, in that Tim's relationships express the nature of the masculine-feminine dichotomy characterising Tim's divided self. Equilibrium is attained through the achievement of love and courage, within a relationship which also expresses redemption for past failure.

The experience of existential self-confrontation, which metaphorically posits the individual at the edge of the divide between alternatives for action, subsequently precipitates what I have termed a dream of being, which is itself anticipated by the achievement of equilibrium. The hero/individual has necessarily arrived at a point of pivotal self-recognition; of determining a shape for the self through action, which embodies the desires and the strengths of the self. Self-recognition in this way is metaphorically suggested as balance, as the expression of the form of self-individuation. The dream of being denotes growth and refutes inertia, so that Rojack, walking around the parapet, has balanced the contrary urges to both chaos and convention. Similarly, although Tim Madden has "lived for years on such an edge"¹⁵ (of the desire to vent anger through violence), he is able to determine an existence which is "not uncomfortable and not insecure"¹⁶ by facing his own capacity for murderous violence and an ambivalent sexual identity; and discovering the extent and limitations of his capacity for both courage and cowardice. Both Tim and Rojack live on the divide between two types of power - on the one hand, the social and economic systems by which Barney Kelly has exhorted influence through wealth and Rojack's sense of selfhood has been extinguished (convention), and on the other hand, the demonic imaginings which lead both men to feel that they have some connection to, and therefore influence over, a sub-stratum of existence characterised by Tim as Hell-Town (chaos). Both men ultimately determine an existence beyond both types of power - an existence which, as the reconciliation of the influence each type of power exerts over them, expresses the

state of equilibrium the two men have arrived at in shaping a form for the self.

IV.

Mailer's theme of the evolving self was initiated long before publication of his first, highly acclaimed novel, *The Naked and the Dead* catapulted its youthful author to major fame, effectively serving as the "lobotomy to (his) past".¹⁷ Indeed, Mailer is able to pin-point the precise time at which he had "formed the desire to be a major writer, and this desire came upon me rather suddenly in the last two months of my sixteenth year, a time I remember well because it was my first semester at Harvard. All through December 1939 and January 1940 I was discovering modern American literature".¹⁸ Mailer's effort, although initially realised in *The Naked and the Dead*, was projected toward a far more ambitious goal. The influence of the modern American literature he discovered at Harvard - Dos Passos, Steinbeck, Hemingway, exacerbated Mailer's sense of himself as a literary outlaw, whose ambition was to "revolutionise" the American literary heritage with the creation of a work of art which would alter "the consciousness of our time".¹⁹ The relative success or failure of this goal has been widely and variously chronicled by critics both adulatory and damning, although as Mailer approaches his sixty-sixth year, it is not unreasonable to assume that Mailer will remain, as Richard Poirier evaluated him in 1972, "like Melville without *Moby Dick*, George Eliot without *Middlemarch*, Mark Twain without *Huckleberry Finn*".²⁰ Whether or not Mailer has revolutionised the consciousness of the late Twentieth Century seems to me to be an

inappropriate question; nevertheless, Mailer has made an important contribution to the way in which literature, and fiction may be perceived. His much-vaunted contribution to the so-called new journalism is Mailer's effort to determine a form for shifting social antagonisms and anachronisms through the creation of a literary identity to sift events, record reality; thereby creating a further reality; the nature of history as an evolving phenomenon in an imagined past, the dynamic present and an anticipated future.

Advertisements for Myself is Mailer's first attempt at providing his literary career to that point with a form, the creation of which constituted fictional self-determination. Moreover, *Advertisements for Myself* is Mailer's attempt to provide a literary context to the dialectic between the fictional creation and the author's effort to shape and control that creation; in so doing, Mailer produced a "new" type of novel in which his central preoccupation concerned the determination of an "heroic destiny"²¹ for an age fast slipping into apathy and cowardice. The structuring of *Advertisements for Myself* mirrors the individual effort at capturing such an heroic destiny - the creation of a new form for fiction, and earlier anticipated in *The Deer Park* as Eitel's posthumous urge to Sergius: "'I have lost the final desire of the artist, the desire which tells us that when all else is lost, when love is lost and adventure, pride of self, and pity, there still remains that world we may create, more real to us, more real to others, than the mummery of what happens, passes, and is gone. So, do try, Sergius And with the pride of the artist, you must blow against the walls

of every power that exists, the small trumpet of your defiance' ".²²

If both *Barbary Shore* and *The Deer Park* anticipated the loss of "the final desire of the artist",²³ Mailer's essay, "The White Negro", which first appeared in 1957, marked a pivotal juncture in Mailer's career and his style as a writer. The first hints of brash self-confidence, coupled with a rhythmic and lyrical expressiveness, gave voice to Mailer as existentialist, for whom the experience of the hipster lent meaning to "Death, despair, and dread, intimations of nothingness, the mystery of mood, and the logic of commitment" and "our American obsession with courage and sex"²⁴ which Mailer defined as the central concerns of the specifically American existentialist. "The White Negro" is really Mailer's most succinct and coherent account of how he views the nature of experience - in this single essay, he lays the groundwork for an ethic of courage, and a dialectical perception of personality, both of which inform the moral sensibility governing the text. The hipster became Mailer's embodiment of heroism, in the romantic context of Hemingway's testament that "in a bad world there is no love nor mercy nor charity nor justice unless a man can keep his courage",²⁵ and the emphasis of Mailer's philosophy of Hip aligns self-knowledge with one's capacity to realise courage. In the sense that self-knowledge is one's ability to "feel oneself - ... know one's desires, one's rages, one's anguish ... the character of one's frustration and ... what would satisfy it",²⁶ the hipster's basis for action and decision is the psychological, rather than social, reality of his instinctual consciousness. Thus, the hipster knows, at any instant, the action or experience to enhance his

best possibilities, and, conversely, what will inhibit his courage or his receptivity to love and excitement. The hipster's intuitive and sensuous responsiveness provides him with a guide to the state of his psychic well-being, because the hipster knows that he is "moving individually through each moment of life forward into growth or backward into death",²⁷ and, as such, the hipster is also aware that he contains within himself both possibilities: life and death. Life, for the hipster is defined as sensuous and sensual gratification, because the energy with which the hipster spurns himself on to explore further opportunities for growth is derived from the orgasm - and the search for an orgasm "more apocalyptic" than the one which preceded it.

The radicalism of "The White Negro" is inherent in Mailer's exoneration of individual acts of violence as preferable to the "collective violence of the State".²⁸ Collective, or mass violence - war, for example - is viewed by Mailer as one instance of the modern, diseased Twentieth Century; a disease characterised as "a sickening of our substance, an electrification of our nerves, a deterioration of desire, an apathy about the future, a detestation of the present, an amnesia of the past".²⁹ In war, there is no direct relation between the violence that is perpetrated and the perpetrator, with the result that war has become a socially acceptable means of expressing violence. Conversely, Mailer proposes in "The White Negro" that the freedom to express any, even the most heinous desire, will beget a cathartic sense of individual creativity to be better than one thought oneself capable of becoming and so defeat the urge to destruction of self and other:

... the nihilism of Hip proposes as its final tendency that every social restraint and category be removed, and the affirmation implicit in the proposal is that man would then prove to be more creative than murderous and so would not destroy himself. ... Hip, which would return us to ourselves, at no matter what price in individual violence, is the affirmation of the barbarian, for it requires a primitive passion about human nature to believe that individual acts of violence are always to be preferred to the collective violence of the State; it takes literal faith in the creative possibilities of the human being to envisage acts of violence as the catharsis which prepares growth.³⁰

The "creative possibilities" of individual acts of violence and the implicit catharsis promised by such violence is the thematic base of *An American Dream*, and, to a lesser extent, *Why Are We in Vietnam?*; and certainly lends meaning and coherence to much of Mailer's writing, but the real force of "The White Negro" is to be found in Mailer's unacknowledged portrait of his own psyche. With its emphasis upon the creative id - the inner life of the individual - Mailer's emotional and psychical perspective in "The White Negro" and *Advertisements for Myself*, in which the essay appeared, signals a distinct abdication from the social spectrum, and a reliance upon the self as the means of determining creativity and fulfillment. Indeed, Mailer's pronouncement, that he "wished to attempt an entrance into the mysteries of murder, suicide, incest, orgy, orgasm and Time"³¹ expresses Mailer's primary effort to determine a shape for his own selfhood through the literary assertion of his own identity. Whether or not Mailer's characters - Rojack, Tim Madden, or even Menenhetet Two of *Ancient Evenings* - bear an autobiographical relation to Norman Mailer is unimportant; of significance is the experience of each of these "existential heroes" of murder, suicide, incest, orgy, orgasm and Time as the parallel experience

of their creator for whom the text is the revelation of some existential truth.

The Presidential Papers, which followed *Advertisements for Myself*, is Mailer's attempt to reshape reality through fiction. Mailer addresses President John F. Kennedy through a series of papers covering pertinent political issues (the Cuban crisis, for example), as well as employing various literary styles to sketch a mosaic of American society within a milieu of radical change, political unrest and the heady excitement of an "existential hero" at the Presidential helm. *The Presidential Papers*, and, indeed, the other novels similar in style and intent, *Cannibals and Christians* and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, attempt to contain reality within the ordered universe of the novel form; to subdue time itself, to enter the mysteries of time by preserving the present as if it were already the past. Mailer's effort is to explore and dissect the nature of a peculiarly American reality; to, in effect, describe the social, political, psychical and sexual forces at work and interacting in the daily lives of the American public. Mailer's intent is to exacerbate the individual's conscious awareness of such forces which belong to the metaphysical universe, because Mailer believes that our "primitive" sense of awe before supposedly unknowable phenomena such as magic has been corroded by the impact of technology and the modern, "technocratic" age.

In *An American Dream*, Mailer's supreme achievement is to reconcile the seemingly disparate worlds of factual reality and the unreality of magic, spirits, and the presence of God and the Devil in an attempt to show that the two levels of existence comprise a total view of reality and experience. *An American*

Dream synthesises the moral perspective of the author with that of the hero-protagonist, so that Rojack's central thesis, that "magic, dread, and the perception of death were the roots of motivation"³² and his belief that the primitive, instinctive dread of non-human nature has been disrupted by civilised man's sense of superiority over all of nature is also the moral impetus for Mailer's polemical perspective in this novel and throughout his writing. *An American Dream* is not allegory; rather, it was conceived as, and concerns, the real expression of existentialism in the late Twentieth Century. Rojack is the first fully developed existential hero (Mike Lovett in *Barbary Shore* exists without a past and so must act without the context of a personal history, but the characterisation is empty and the structure of the novel forced) and in effect establishes an archetype for Mailer of the pivotal existential experience and the dialectical conception of personality.

Ten years after *An American Dream* first appeared, Mailer underscores the importance of the metaphysical universe, as he discovers in the Bantu philosophy a perspective "close to his own". This "instinctive philosophy of African tribesmen" suggests the psychological basis of Mailer's ethic of courage within the context of the shifting, complex "unreality" of, in particular, *An American Dream* and, especially, *Ancient Evenings*; but more importantly, Mailer's absorption of the Bantu philosophy into his own dissection of the fight between Muhammed Ali and George Foreman as a metaphysical encounter of opposed forces demonstrates Mailer's systemic and self-contained style. Mailer's explanation of the Bantu philosophy thus reveals his assertion, throughout his writing, that one's selfhood is

simultaneously one's style: the "project" one has fashioned for oneself, which mirrors the quality, or worth, of oneself:

A man was not only what he contained, not only his desires, his memory, and his personality, but also the forces that came to inhabit him at any moment from all things living and dead. So a man was not only himself, but the karma of all the generations past that still lived in him, not only a human with his own psyche but a part of the resonance, sympathetic or unsympathetic, of every root and thing (and witch) about him. He would take his balance, his quivering place, in a field of all the forces of the living and the dead. So the meaning of one's life was never hard to find. One did one's best to live in the pull of these forces in such a way as to increase one's own force. ... For if we are our own force, we are also a servant of the forces of the dead. So we have to be bold enough to live with all the magical forces at loose between the living and the dead. That is never free of dread. It takes bravery to live with beauty or wealth if we think of them as an existence connected to the messages, the curses, and the loyalties of the dead.³³

Miami and the Siege of Chicago, although not as complete or as carefully executed as the novel which preceded it, *The Armies of the Night*, advances the stylistic qualities of Mailer's new approach to the novel, in which his treatment of a fictional self against the backdrop of the "enormous present" of American culture and society reverberates with a Whitmanesque projection of the self as the embodiment of the soul of the country, America. The political convention had always been a source of fascination to Mailer as a microcosm of the social and cultural forces characterising modern America, but in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* the political convention becomes a metaphor for the dialectical encounter between the vast sets of opposed dualities which inform Mailer's view of existence. Both *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* and *Of a Fire On the Moon*, which bears great similarity to the former novel in style and tone, reveal a keen

perception of the sociology of events as important or as shattering as the political conventions, the moon shot, and the assassination of Robert Kennedy. Partly, this impact is achieved through the personal immediacy of the authorial voice - Mailer as hero-protagonist, for whom the moral complexity of the decision to join rioting protesters is confounded by the discovery of deep-seated cowardice; or Mailer, known as Aquarius, trying to come to terms with the breakdown of his marriage, and wrestling with the ambivalence of man's single most spectacular achievement in the Twentieth Century: the moon shot. Mailer's purpose in placing the fictional, that is the created self as the focus of these novels is to dissolve the easy distinction between the apparent fictional and real worlds. For Mailer, the "subterranean river of untapped ferocious, lonely and romantic desires"³⁴ - the life of the imagination - constitutes the means by which one approaches the unknowable or the unreachable provinces of experience.

If Mailer's "theological and literary humanistic heritage"³⁵ had always been apparent as the essential key to understanding Mailer's assumptions, biases, even his attraction "toward the violent and the orgiastic",³⁶ Mailer's obsession with the way in which we approach God as a parallel means of discovering the meaning our existence may hold for us, seems to be at the base of the huge, sprawling novel, *Ancient Evenings*, as well as *The Executioner's Song*, and *Tough Guys Don't Dance* which, in many ways, resolves the qualified achievement of fulfillment and a personal sense of being; of Stephen Rojack. In *The Prisoner of Sex*, Mailer declares, "the novelist is the only philosopher who works with emotions which are at the very edge of the word

system",³⁷ a pivotal declaration which anticipates Mailer's almost eery command of language to express provinces of experience which defy the boundaries of expression - the account of sexual intercourse between Nefertiri and Menenhetet in *Ancient Evenings* is one such example. In many ways, all of Mailer's later fiction and especially *Ancient Evenings*, *The Executioner's Song* and *Tough Guys Don't Dance* concern the relation of man to his individual destiny as the fulfillment of the moral equation of his life. Tim Madden's epiphanatic realisation that "He exists, or It exists, or *They* are out there. It was confirmation that the life we live with all our wit and zeal is only half our life. The other half belongs to something other"³⁸ alludes to Mailer's belief that the individual exists within a network of forces and fields, including the social, political, emotional and psychical entanglements of the cultural milieu. The presence of magic is not the nebulous realm of fantasy; simply the unspoken presence of others who have passed beyond life into another manifestation of life. This means that the way in which one chooses to dispose of one's life may have some bearing on the way in which one is propelled into further life, or whatever may lie beyond life. Mailer's metaphysical view is no simple espousal of karma but rather, a somewhat more quixotic means of getting to what has always existed as the philosophical basis of his writing: the supreme effort required to be a man against the debilitating force of anything which would quell one's courage, one's imagination and one's sense of personal fulfillment. At bottom, Mailer is a writer concerned with the experience of man, not in the generic sense, but a man in relation to God and in relation to women. Mailer views both women and God as part of

the mystery of existence to which he seeks entrance, and for whom he has always fashioned himself as muse. In *Advertisements for Myself*, Mailer confesses that "The sour truth is that I am imprisoned with a perception which will settle for nothing less than making a revolution in the consciousness of our time",³⁹ an important statement which belies Mailer's sense of a personal destiny in his capacity as a writer. As part of that destiny, Mailer has appointed himself as the purveyor and arbiter of a specifically American consciousness wherein the reflexive responsiveness of his imagination explores and gives expression to the experience of America in the late Twentieth Century. In this capacity, Mailer's true literary antecedent is Fitzgerald, rather than Hemingway: in Fitzgerald, as in Mailer, social and moral issues are played against the nuance of meaning to extract a cultural portrait that reverberates with an imaginative and poetic lyricism, and a vital sense of affirmation of human endeavour.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 See *The Executioner's Song*, p. 882; *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 230; and *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, p. 177.
- 2 Where possible throughout this thesis, I have referred to "the individual" encompassing, of course, both the masculine and feminine genders. Elsewhere, for convenience and because Mailer's narrative voice is exclusively male, I shall refer to "he", "him", etc., but naturally the generic is denoted.
- 3 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 312.
- 4 Harold Bloom (ed.), *Modern Critical Views : Norman Mailer*, New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986.
- 5 *The Prisoner of Sex*, p. 132.
- 6 Tony Tanner, *City of Words : American Fiction 1950-1970*, 3rd edn., London, Jonathon Cape, 1971.
- 7 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 211.
- 8 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 281.
- 9 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 191.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 198.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 192.
- 12 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 270.
- 13 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 298.
- 14 *An American Dream*, p. 18.
- 15 *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, p. 223.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 228.
- 17 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 87.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 20 Richard Poirier, *Norman Mailer*, New York, Viking Press, 1972.
- 21 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 23.
- 22 *The Deer Park*, p. 347.
- 23 As an anecdotal account of this "loss", see *Advertisements for Myself*, pp. 195-214.

- 24 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 215.
- 25 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 272.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 273.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 275.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 286.
- 29 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 179.
- 30 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 286.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- 32 *An American Dream*, p. 15.
- 33 *The Fight*, pp. 37-38.
- 34 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 51.
- 35 Poirier, p. 101.
- 36 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 98.
- 37 *The Prisoner of Sex*, p. 124.
- 38 *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, p. 182.
- 39 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 17.

SECTION 1.

THE BALANCE OF OPPOSITES: THE PROCESS OF INDIVIDUATION

CHAPTER 1: THE DEFENCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

... a person who has what he wants, a satisfied person, a content person, ceases to be a person ... I feel that to be a person is to be in a dialectical situation. A truly adjusted person is not a person at all.¹

John Updike's elaboration upon the themes of his own novel, *Couples*, lends meaning and coherence to what is possibly the central theme of the life and work of Norman Mailer. The public life of the fictional hero-protagonist, "Norman Mailer" and the underlying life of the characters, events and themes of the novels, prose and plays of the author, Norman Mailer intertwine and overlap, creating a murky third area between so-called reality and fiction which has left critic and reader alike confounded as to the essential meaning and nature of Mailer's work. Mailer's intent is to exacerbate the reader's sense of the dialectical complexities inherent within the text and, by direct association, within the larger social milieu comprising the reality of existence in the late Twentieth Century. Indeed, what is of primary importance to Mailer is the necessity to continually question one's desires and motivations; to, in short, exist as a dis-contented person which is, as John Updike believes, the means by which one becomes aware of the quality of one's individualism and the sense of one's humanity.

Moreover, the discovery of one's individualism in this manner is simultaneously the recognition that one exists as a separate entity to the powerful force of, in Mailer's terms, the debilitating disease of the modern age: totalitarianism. Mailer is a paranoid, obsessive author for whom the constricting,

nullifying presence of totalitarianism, or its obverse, entropy, is detected in any endeavour in which individual consciousness is absent. This means simply that for Mailer, one must exist in a continual state of "war" - the sense of one's dialectical relation to the social context - with whatever prevailing authority, circumstance, event or other would seek to absorb one's individualism; in order to maintain the sense of having a being, of being a person. Simply, Mailer's emphasis upon the dialectical complexity of self and circumstance is the means by which he both seeks and preaches self-determination and self-salvation.

Mailer's perception of the individual belongs to a romantic moral sensibility wherein the possibilities for a significant life are found in the relation of the individual to his instinctual self, including his perception of God and the Devil, and to his capacity for realising the maximum potential of his abilities. Moreover, the underpinning belief is a recognition of one's capacity for heroism, where heroism may be viewed as simply the ability to be more than one thought oneself capable of becoming, realised in action and in opposition to the authority of prevailing systems and value structures. For this reason, a person as unlikely as Gary Gilmore may possess the quality of heroism in this sense:

(Gary) had a lot of meanness in him, a lot of small-mindedness. He also had an extraordinary imagination. He proved to me that genius can also find a home in mediocrity. That was incredible. He was a very brave man, too; that has to be said. The press called him a punk, which as an inaccurate name for him, because he would've died before he allowed anyone to call him punk to his face. He was a bad man, a dull man, a mediocre man, but he had heroic elements.²

The impetus for Mailer's espousal of heroic self-assertion is his hatred of what he terms the "plague" of totalitarianism, a force which lacks the definition of any internal tensions or complexities. Totalitarianism is one instance of the late Twentieth Century tendency toward the formlessness of entropy: a devilish principle in opposition to God, and which represents the negation of being.³ Mailer's frequent use of the imagery of disease - the "cancer plague", schizophrenia, madness - delineates its function as the literal embodiment of a modern technological age in which an authentic and individual response to life has been corrupted and sickened by the displacement of the individual to the anaesthetising force of mass opinion, the media, and the compromising dependence upon technology. Mailer's assertion is that totalitarianism and its associated effects are experienced universally, which highlights his near-paranoiac obsession with the need to escape the rigidities of any prescribed or pre-determined patterning whereby authentic and individual expression of autonomy is seen to be threatened. At the same time, it is important to note Mailer's dual suspicion that the retreat to formlessness may also be the desire of the individual to reject the defining and ordering principle of identity: Mailer stresses the importance of a balance of the need to reject restrictive or confining principles or imperatives which are not an authentic expression of the individual self with the need to establish a conception of self which is the perception of one's individual identity. Self-realisation in this manner is itself an ordering principle for once the individual achieves what I have termed existential self-recognition, then he is necessarily involved with facing, and

heeding the challenges his own inner self provides. The mark of heroism is the ability to authenticate in action, such challenges.

Mailer's war is against the compromise of any person or thing which is divorced from authenticity or which lacks authentic relation to its environment. Authenticity is explained in terms of its antithesis, "social cowardice":

We gave our freedom away a long time ago. We gave it away in all the revolutions we did not make, all the acts of courage we found a way to avoid, all the roots we destroyed in fury at that past which still would haunt our deeds. We divorced ourselves from the materials of the earth, the rock, the wood, the iron ore; we looked to new materials which were cooked in vats, long complex derivatives or urine which we called plastic. They had no odor of the living or of what once had lived, their touch was alien to nature. The spoke of the compromise of incompatibles. The plastic which had invaded our bathrooms, our kitchens, our clothing, our toys for children, our tools, our containers, our floor coverings, our cars, our sports, the world of our surfaces was the simple embodiment of social cowardice.⁴

The context for this perceived displacement of the individual and the resultant sense of compromise and cowardice is the social macrocosm, viewed as an arbitrary force separate from, but not alien to, the individual. The challenge for the individual is to defeat the tendency toward easy and unquestioned acceptance of the status quo and to resurrect imagination and the assertion of one's own individualism. Mailer's invective throughout his writing is directed against any tendency toward the voiding of instinctive, authentic, imaginative responsiveness. Such self-awareness occurs at what Mailer terms the existential level: unless the individual can act in terms of what is most essentially true of his being, his selfhood, then the individual is inevitably subsumed by the prevailing unquestioned order of

things Mailer frequently identifies as the "Establishment". The following passage from *The Presidential Papers* explicates Mailer's rage against the vast, peculiarly American tendency toward in-authenticity and alienation of self:

... that bleak gluttonous void of the Establishment, that liberal power at the center of our lives which gave jargon with charity, substituted the intolerance of mental health for the intolerance of passion, alienated emotion from its roots, and man from his past, cut the giant of our half-wakened arts to fit a bed of Procrustes, Leonard Bernstein on the podium, John Cage in silence, offered a National Art Center which would be to art as canned butter is to butter, and existed in a terror of eternity which built a new religion of the psyche on a God who died, old doctor Freud, of cancer.⁵

Mailer is warning of the potential loss of being - the sense of one's individual selfhood - and his writing, possessing the proportions of life-or-death consequentiality reverberates with the conviction of a moral basis for the separation of those who accept the terms of death, of love, of courage; from those whose perception of life and self denies, or fails to recognise these instinctual themes. Mailer proposes a conception of the individual founded on the instinctual relation of the individual to his "roots" in both the sociological sense, and beyond that, in the sense of the primitive relation of man to the meaning and beginning of existence. Indeed, Stephen Rojack's "not inconsiderable thesis that magic, dread, and the perception of death were the roots of motivation"⁶ forms the nucleus of Mailer's conviction that modern man has become alienated from his primitive beginnings, and now exists in an uncomfortable relation to the metaphysical universe, preferring to rely upon the easy causal links between action and outcome offered by science and

technology. The point is explicated by Rojack, but mirrors Mailer's view:

In contrast to the civilized view which elevates man above the animals, the primitive had an instinctive belief that he was subservient to the primal pact between the beasts of the jungle and the beast of mystery.

To the savage, dread was the natural result of any invasion of the supernatural: if man wished to steal the secrets of the gods, it was only to be supposed that the gods would defend themselves and destroy whichever man came too close. By this logic, civilization is the successful if imperfect theft of some cluster of these secrets, and the price we have paid is to accelerate our private sense of some enormous if not quite definable disaster which awaits us.⁷

The relationship of the individual with the world of magic, dread, and death and his perception of God and the Devil has been all but corroded by the self-same reliance upon the quantifiable objectivity of technology. Mailer's distinctions, his postulation of opposed dualities, has its basis in his vision of good and evil as the manifest expression of God's battle with the Devil; and in which man figures importantly as the expression of God's destiny. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the individual embodies the "embattled vision"⁸ of Mailer's God, who expresses Himself in every defeat of cowardice, emptiness, compromise, inertia, formlessness - the entropic presence of the Devil:

If God is not all-powerful but existential, discovering the possibilities and limitations of His creative powers in the form of the history which is made by His creatures, then one must postulate an existential equal to God, an antagonist, the Devil, a principle of Evil whose signature was the concentration camps, whose joy is to waste substance, whose intent is to prevent God's conception of Being from reaching its mysterious goal. If one considers the hypothesis that God is not all-powerful, indeed not the architect of Destiny, but rather the creator of

Nature, then evil becomes a record of the Devil's victories over God.⁹

Quite simply, totalitarianism, which contains within itself the appeal of technocratic rationality, expresses the wish of the Devil, which is the negation or denial of the spiritual, the mysterious, the subjective, the imaginative. Mailer's hatred of technology arises from a near-paranoiac revulsion of anything which does not contain within it the suggestion of the primitive: used, in this context, to denote magic, mystery, the psychic interplay of minds, awareness of God and the Devil, and unseen spirits. Essentially, the experience of the metaphysical universe is seen by Mailer to be a vitally individual experience wherein one reaffirms one's position on the side of God or the Devil; the latter characterised as the Faustian desire to dominate all mystery, all experience, which is, of course, the primary objective of scientific rationality.

Mailer's condemnation of the Twentieth Century infatuation with technology derives partly from his particular dread of integration - the denial of the dialectical tensions so important to Mailer and which form the basis of his perception of individual existence. The rise of technology as one instance of the powerful, encroaching force of totalitarianism is, according to Mailer, primarily responsible for the corrosion of dialectical tensions such as that which exists in the relationship of the sexes. The sexual revolution, and, specifically, Women's Liberation (referred to by Mailer as "Women's Technology ... the female Armies of Liberation"¹⁰) as one expression of totalitarianism has been responsible for the gradual dissipation of the dialectical struggle, in sexuality, between one's desire and one's sense of sin, with the result that Twentieth Century

man no longer approaches sexuality with an adequate sense of dread, commensurate with its importance as an existential guide to man's sense of his own being. Moreover, not only has modern man lost his sense of primitive awe (which sexuality should engage), he has also been deprived of a sense of the contradictions and oppositions implicit in his social existence manifest in the relation of the sexes. This is why Mailer postulates the individual in opposition to the social whole: it is a means of maintaining the vitality of the dialectical tensions at work both in terms of the relationship of self and other, as well as within the social macrocosm. The sexual and technological revolutions - the embodiment of what Mailer terms Left Totalitarianism - are simultaneously the attempt to regiment and pacify existence; to, in effect, repudiate man's instinctive and sensuous relation to his own existence:

... history was created by man's decision to conquer nature, and the evolution of his institutions may have come out of the need to shape the body and mind into proper parts of a social machine which could move into attack upon the mysteries and powers of his existence.¹¹

For Mailer, acceptance of the status quo, becoming part of the "social machine", finds its basis in compromise and cowardice. This is because the dread of facing, existentially, the worth, or shape of one's selfhood in order to vindicate courage in action is sublimated as the urge to shape oneself in accordance with social and cultural iconography and value systems. In the following passage from *Advertisements for Myself*, Mailer vents his rage at this kind of self-trickery which, because its resultant tendency is toward the schism of

self and action, Mailer believes presages disease - the disease of compromise, cancer:

... the shits are killing us, even as they kill themselves - each day a few more lies eat into the seed with which we are born, little institutional lies from the print of newspapers, the shock waves of television, and the sentimental cheats of the movie screen. Little lies, but they pipe us toward insanity as they starve our sense of the real. We have grown up in a world more in decay than the worst of the Roman Empire, a cowardly world chasing after a good time ... but chasing it without the courage to pay the hard price of full consciousness, and so losing pleasure in pips and squeaks of anxiety. We want the heats of the orgy and not its murder, the warmth of pleasure without the grip of pain, and therefore the future threatens a nightmare, and we continue to waste ourselves. We've cut a corner, tried t cheat the heart of life, tried not to face our uneasy sense that pleasure comes best to those who are brave, and now we're a nation of drug addicts (caffeine, equanil, seconal and nicotine), of homosexuals, hoodlums ... The heat in our juvenile delinquency is matched only by the unadmitted acceleration of our race into cancer, that disease which is other than disease, that wave of the undifferentiated function, the orgy of the lost cells.¹²

At the same time, Mailer's dialectical vision balances his harsh invective, directed against a society less corrupt than anaesthetised, with his romantic affirmation of the individual for whom conflict with the social whole is a mark of authentic individualism and heroism. Mailer's vision, whilst idealistic, is also religious: the individual whose destiny or will inspires defence of "courage, sex, consciousness, the beauty of the body, the search for love ..." ¹³ simultaneously expresses the nature of God; a point of view profoundly expressed in *An American Dream* where Stephen Rojack realises literal salvation in the expression of love and courage in his relationship with Cherry.

To Mailer, the antithesis to this kind of heroic affirmation of self is nihilism: not merely disbelief, but the absence of any

structuring or ordering principle against which the form of one's being may be determined. Once again, the force of totalitarianism exerts its nihilistic authority in the seductive compulsion to sublimate the desire for self-fulfilling action in the prevailing social directives and structures. A wonderful example of this is found in the figure of Sam Slovida, Mailer's abortive anti-hero and representative WASP American, in "The Man Who Studied Yoga". Sam encapsulates that quality of compromise and compensation endemic in a technology obsessed, bored and unimaginative society: "The fact is that like most of use, he is full of envy, full of spite, a gossip, a man who is pleased to find others are as unhappy as he, and yet - this is the worst to be said - he is a decent man".¹⁴ Sam suffers from all the representative qualities of this existence characterised by cowardice and anxiety: less an existence than a formless drifting with the tide of available experience. Sam lacks courage, as well as the ability to face, existentially, the inherent cowardice which motivates him. Sam is involved in analysis, which, in Mailer's terms, is the psychical equivalent of the painkiller for the body: a means of avoiding those experiences which might offer the greatest clues to the state of health (both psychically and physically) of one's selfhood. Further, the language of analysis is divorced from the reality of what it describes - Mailer's implication is that what motivates a particular action or belief is discoverable if one can bear to face, existentially, the truth of one's hidden or buried desires and needs, without the deceptive, manufactured terminology of analysis: "Sam, however, cannot accept the notion that many people are dissatisfied with the present, and either dream of the

past or anticipate the future. Sam must call this "ambivalence over possessions".¹⁵ Inevitably, Sam's inability to come to terms with his compromised, cowardly existence leads to the schism between desire and action which Mailer sees as the basis for the loss of self; the disease characterising the modern age: in Sam's case, his dream is to write a novel, but his certain fate is the daily abnegation of his deepest desires to the daily maintenance of the status quo:

'It is the actions of men and not their sentiments which make history,' he thinks to himself, and smiles wryly. In his living room he would go out to tilt the windmills of a vast, powerful, and hypocritical society; in his week of work he labours in an editorial cubicle to create spaceships, violent death, women with golden tresses and wanton breasts, men who act with their fists and speak with patriotic slogans.¹⁶

The pivotal event of the story, the pornographic film viewed by the Slovdas and two other couples, confirms the dislocated and cowardly existence of Sam and his friends by which they are unable to locate, let alone act upon their most resonant urges. The buried, fearful, yet exciting desires of each individual remain unacknowledged and unexpressed, the anticipation of cancer in Mailer's terms. The experience in watching the film is, for Sam, existential: it forces him to view himself and his relations to these others in an entirely new, and disturbing light:

Is it possible, Sam wonders, that each of them here, two Rossmans, two Sperbers, two Slovdas, will cast off their clothes when the movie is done and perform the orgy which tickles at the heart of their desire? They will not, he knows, they will make jokes when the projector is put away, they will gorge the plate of delicatessen Eleanor provides, and swallow more beer, he among them. He will be the first to make jokes.¹⁷

For Sam, however, the experience is temporary, and less than cathartic. He remains unable to translate to action his sublimated desires and motivations. Sam's dreaming-waking existence is formless and hence, entropic, because he cannot see past his various postures to what might constitute the true expression of his selfhood. Moreover, Sam's subsequent contemplation in the night, the closest he comes to the kind of existential self-analysis necessary for growth, only confirms his deep-seated compromise and cowardly tendency to inertia. Sam forfeits the chance to confront his particular dread of himself and of existence because he is too ready to accept that "One could not have a hero today ... a man of action and contemplation, capable of sin, large enough for good, a man immense. There is only a modern hero damned by no more than the ugliness of wishes whose satisfaction he will never know".¹⁸ Sam is capable of delineating his fears, his dread and his desire, but he is resolutely incapable of translating this pivotal self-realisation into action, to presage growth.

Mailer's most significant account of the individual as a dynamic being, existing in opposition to the social context, occurs in his essay, "The White Negro". Mailer's vision is ambivalent: his perception of a modern age characterised by a sterility of the imagination and the compromise of cowardice and inertia also recognises the opportunity for redemption and salvation, exemplified by the courageous self-assertion of the hipster, the White Negro, "the man who knows that if our collective condition is to live with instant death by atomic war, relatively quick death by the State as *l'univers concentrationnaire*, or with a slow death by conformity with every

creative and rebellious instinct stifled ... why then the only life-giving answer is to accept the terms of death, to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self".¹⁹ The hipster explicates Mailer's thesis that we "grow" when we face, with courage, our most violent possibilities, that when the outcome of a particular situation is both serious and uncertain, this is an existential situation, and true growth derives only from the individual confronting himself in such situations.

The fear of a chaotic, senseless death at the direction of some super-state, sparked by the memory of the concentration camps, and the connected realisation of man's inherent capacity for evil have resulted in "A stench of fear (emerging) ... out of every pore of American life, and we suffer from a collective failure of nerve".²⁰ The hipster, or American existentialist, emerges as a response to this kind of fear - the person who is fully alert to the absolute precariousness of contemporary human enterprise, the person who has the courage to step outside the conventional orders of life and give himself over to the incandescent consciousness that he carries within himself of the myriad possibilities of human fulfilment contained within his own selfhood. In short, being a hipster means being in touch with the greatest and most significant problems and experiences of existence for man. What characterises Hipsterism most fundamentally is the assertion of the individual before the powerful force of collectivism - that force of repression and conformity which repudiates the individual and any attempt to move beyond established orders of existence. The alternatives -

Hip or square - definitively align one on the side of individualism or totalitarianism:

The unstated essence of Hip, its psychopathic brilliance, quivers with the knowledge that new kinds of victories increase one's power for new kinds of perception; and defeats, the wrong kind of defeats, attack the body and imprison one's energy until one is jailed in the prison air of other people's habits, other people's defeats, boredom, quiet desperation, and muted icy self-destroying rage. One is Hip or one is Square ... one is a rebel or one conforms, one is a frontiersman in the Wild West of American society, doomed willy-nilly to conform if one is to succeed.²¹

The assertion of one's individualism necessarily entails the discovery, and assertion of courage. Mailer cites Hemingway - that, "in a bad world there is no love nor mercy nor charity nor justice unless a man can keep his courage"²² as the definitive principle of Hip, as well as the basis for the Negro as the cultural impetus of Hip. Historically, the Negro has always lived with the imminent threat of danger, but, moreover, the embellishments of security for most white people - home, job and family - are not even a possibility to many Blacks. On these terms, the Negro inhabits a world beyond the accepted and prevailing orders and structures of society. The effect of this, Mailer determines, is to force the Negro into an existence pivotally dialectical: a life of constant humility, or ever present and ever increasing insecurity and danger. The response of the Negro has been the assertion of self and the acceptance of the terms of danger; and sheer responsiveness to the needs of the body:

Knowing in the cells of his existence that life was war, nothing but war, the Negro ... could rarely afford the sophisticated inhibitions of civilisation, and so he kept for his survival the

art of the primitive, he lived in the enormous present, he subsisted for his Saturday night kicks, relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body, and in his music he gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream and despair of his orgasm.²³

Hipsterism and existentialism thus are inclusive of each other because the hipster is involved in life in the sense that every moment is either good or bad for him at the fundamental level of increasing or decreasing his sense of well-being. Further, Hipsterism embodies dialectical form:

... the element which is exciting, disturbing, nightmarish perhaps, is that incompatibles have come to bed, the inner life and the violent life, the orgy and the dream of love, the desire to murder and the desire to create, a dialectical conception of existence with a lust for power, a dark, romantic, and yet undeniably dynamic view of existence for it sees every man and woman as moving individually through each moment of life forward into growth or backward into death.²⁴

Mailer conceives of the hipster as moving through experience as through instantaneous differentials by which one moves forward into more, or retreats backward into less. As such, each moment for the hipster is charged with its own immediate implications for the hipster's well-being: both physical and psychical. This complex vision of existence spurns moral responsibility in the sense that each action is immediate and unforeseeable and therefore without the usual connotation of good or bad. Moreover, because men and women cannot be seen as good or bad (in a one-dimensional, static sense) they are viewed, instead, as containing within themselves the myriad possibilities for growth or inertia, seen within the larger context of the situation at any given moment. Whereas a situation of potentially extreme danger requires greater reserves of courage than a less

frightening situation, for example, the individual is shaped both by the discovery (and vindication in action) of courage as well as by the situation itself.

Implicit in Mailer's philosophy of Hip is the separation of the individual and the social context. The latter is seen as a network of value systems and practices based on allegiance to the maintenance of those systems and practices, whereas the hipster's desire is to explore the limitless possibilities of experience; a desire which entails disregard for the precepts, laws and rules by which society is maintained. While Hip proposes that all societal restraints be removed, it also offers an implicit affirmation of man's creative potential: suggesting that while man exists within the repressive and constrictive social context he also forfeits individual creativity and the capacity for realising his true potential. This is the delineation of the religious core of Hip - the essential faith in man's desire for a better world at the heart of his instinct. The philosophy of Hip is, in the end, the expression of a romantic moralist:

The essence of (the hipster's) expression, his faith if you will, is that the real desire to make a better world exists at the heart of our instinct ... that man is therefore roughly more good than evil, that beneath his violence there is finally love and the nuances of justice, and that the removal therefore of all social restraints while it would open to us an era of incomparable individual violence would still spare us the collective violence of rational totalitarian liquidations ... and would - and here is the difference - by expending the violence directly, open the possibility of working with that human creativity which is violence's opposite.²⁵

Mailer provides an exponent of the existential Hip ethic in Sergius O'Shaugnessy, heir to Charlie Eitel's elusive advice in *The Deer Park*: "'Rather think of Sex as Time, and Time as the connection of new circuits'".²⁶ Sergius re-appears in "The Time

of Her Time" and confirms his radical individualism by strict adherence to the sensuous quality of experience anticipating Rojack in *An American Dream*. It is in sexual activity that Sergius finds literal re-connection of the psychic circuits of his consciousness; sexual activity also offers Sergius the realisation of a profound dialectic in which instinctual affinity with the nature of one's desire is offset by the rational and intellectual compulsion to dominate Time:

It was a hell of thing to be holding a nineteen-year-old girl's ass in my hands, hefting those young kneadables of future power, while all the while the laboratory technician in my brain was deciding that the experiment was a routine success - routine because her cheeks looked and felt about the way I had thought they would while I was sitting beside her in the bar earlier in the evening, and so I still had come no closer to understanding my scientific compulsion to verify in the retort of the bed how accurately I had predicted the form, texture, rhythm and surprise of any woman who caught my eye.²⁷

Sergius, intimately aware of his needs, his motivations, his capacity to seek out new experience, exists in a dynamic relation to society - the continual flux of opportunity and activity provides him with the opportunity to explore the limits of his own courage and heroic individualism. The extent and character of his courage is discovered in the dialectical realisation of fear and weakness: "I was warning myself to play it carefully, and yet I pushed myself a little further than I should, for I became ashamed of my caution. ... As we got up to go, I managed to turn around and get another look at the three spades in the next booth. ... they stared back with no love. the anxiety came over me again, almost nice - I had been so aware of them, and they had been so aware of me".²⁸

The specific meaning of Sergius' radical individualism is found in his adherence to a primitive order of life characterised by a rejection of the rational and an espousal of the sensuous - precisely the same quality of experience Rojack discovers when the murder of his wife determines for him an existence at a potentially nefarious sub-stratum of reality. It is appropriate that the sexual description of "The Time of Her Time" uses the metaphors and imagery of combat: Sergius literally uses sexual domination of Denise as a means of asserting the force of his will against that of her, and Mailer implies that Denise encapsulates the rigidities of attitude without the flexibility of receptivity to sensuous experience. In essence, Mailer means to portray the battle of the individual will against the rigid force of totalitarianism, to the extent that it is questionable whether or not Mailer could appreciate how offensive this story was to many, the feminists not alone in their outcry at such statements as "(Denise) had fled the domination which was liberty for her".²⁹ Mailer's emphasis, however, is directed toward the quest of the hipster, which is to defeat the entropic principle of inertia in which the tendency toward passive acceptance of self and other explicates the totalitarian force of the status quo. The dynamic of Hipsterism is the ability to move with, to respond to, and contain within oneself the rapidly evolving complexities and tensions of the flux of experience. By such means does one grow; one has thus arrived at "a consciousness that the core of life cannot be cheated. Every moment of one's existence one is growing into more or retreating into less. One is always living a little more or dying a little bit".³⁰

Thus, Mailer proposes that the discovery of one's individualism - of what it means to truly be a person, a being - entails the assertion of oneself in dialectical opposition to the prevailing context. To exist, undifferentiated from the attitudes and structures of the social macrocosm; or to relinquish one's own most resonant desires and motivations to the authority of prevailing attitudes and value systems, is, in Mailer's terms, to forfeit one's existence as a being. One has been subsumed by totalitarianism, the force of inertia, the implicit denial of the imagination, of being able to "feel oneself", of realising one's true potential.

The hipster is Mailer's most articulate expression of the individual as the realisation of a dynamic existence: importantly, Mailer stresses the need for constant evaluation and assertion of one's propensity for movement - the ability to move forward, to grow. One recalls, again, that for Mailer, as for John Updike, the discovery of one's sense of being is also the discovery of one's "maladjustment" - the dialectical self, the state of war in which one must reside in order to affirm one's self-knowledge and defeat the powerful tendency toward entropy - the quality of formless, dissolute shapelessness which characterises acquiescence to any given system or belief; and the inability to differentiate oneself from the totalitarian force of the social context.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ John Updike, *Paris Review*, Winter, 1968; as quoted by Tony Tanner in *City of Words*, p. 292.
- ² Jennifer L. Farbar, an interview with Norman Mailer, "Mailer on Mailer", *Esquire Magazine*, June, 1986, p. 248.
- ³ Entropy is defined by Mailer as "the life of an organism which has been deprived of the possibility to organize itself" (*The Presidential Papers*, p. 298) and he goes further to align the entropic tendency toward increasing disorder and inertness with the Devil: "And what is going on in the universe as a whole is a battle between an existential God and a principle of Evil whose joy is to waste substance". (*The Presidential Papers*, p. 211).
- ⁴ *The Presidential Papers*, p. 173. Beyond its metaphoric capacity to emphasise and explicate the impact of a modern, technological age upon the individual, plastic becomes, for Mailer, the literal embodiment of mankind divorced from a proper relation to his environment, cut off from true sensuous affinity with his authentic roots: "A fibreglass hull can go through storms which would spring a leak in a wooden hull. Then, one day in a modest squall, the fibreglass splits completely. Or abruptly capsizes. That is because it is a material which is not even divorced from nature but indeed has not ever been a part of nature. Plastic is the perfect metaphor for twentieth-century-man and for the curious stupefying bewildering nature of much modern violence". W.J. Weatherby, an interview with Norman Mailer, "Talking of Violence", originally appeared in *Twentieth Century*, Winter, 1964-1965; and reprinted in *Pieces and Pontifications*, v. *Pontifications*, p. 30.
- ⁵ *The Presidential Papers*, pp. 279-280.
- ⁶ *An American Dream*, p. 15.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 150.
- ⁸ *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 309.
- ⁹ *The Presidential Papers*, p. 211.
- ¹⁰ *The Prisoner of Sex*, p. 65.
- ¹¹ *Advertisements for Myself*, pp. 349-350.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 149.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

- 17 Ibid., p. 163.
- 18 Ibid., p. 170.
- 19 Ibid., p. 271.
- 20 Ibid., p. 271.
- 21 Ibid., p. 272.
- 22 Ibid., p. 272.
- 23 Ibid., p. 273.
- 24 Ibid., p. 275.
- 25 Ibid., p. 294.
- 26 *The Deer Park*, p. 348.
- 27 *Advertisements for Myself*, pp. 398-399.
- 28 Ibid., pp. 396-397.
- 29 Ibid., p. 403.
- 30 Ibid., p. 313.

SECTION 1.

CHAPTER 2. THE DEFENSE AGAINST ENTROPY: DIALECTIC TENSION

Mailer proposes that the sense of inner conflict which characterises the dialectical relation of the individual to the undifferentiated social context originates as the biological necessity of the "hopeless contradictions (we) knew as an infant and as a child". For Mailer, childhood is, in fact, a stage of complexity and inner conflict, later corroded in adulthood. Richard Poirier explicates the view in relation to "The White Negro":

The "Negro" is the child in all of us, but the child after Freud, and the essay is a call to us to become 'children' not that we might escape from time but that we might re-engage ourselves with it. We must face again the "hopeless contradictions (we) knew as an infant and as a child'.¹

The "hopeless contradictions" Mailer sees within the child refers partly to the child's retarded physical development in relation to his sexual precocity. Mailer's view derives from Wilhelm Reich, who refers to this condition as the desire for "end-pleasure" before one is capable of achieving it and Mailer believes that the individual reacts to this crisis of contradiction in the development of sexual repression. By such logic, contradictions is therefore a biological component of human personality, and it is precisely these contradictions and complexities within the human psyche Mailer wishes to exacerbate rather than disguise or deny.

The qualities of contradiction and complexity are implicit within what Mailer conceives of as the "collective psyche", in sharp contrast to his notion of collectivism, which is the obdurate force of the status quo, the expression of the

"Establishment". The collective psyche is Mailer's sense of a shared quality of human-ness, which, within the individual may have been denied or buried and remain inarticulate, but which embraces such existential phenomena as the fear of death, the terror of the unknown and the desire for sexual fulfillment. Hence, individual actions carry reverberations for understanding the nature of mankind, and Mailer's emphasis throughout his writing of the immense responsibility the individual bears in the disposal of his life is thus made coherent:

The Second World War presented a mirror to the human condition which blinded anyone who looked into it. For if tens of millions were killed in concentration camps out of the inexorable agonies and contradictions of superstates founded upon the always insoluble contradictions of injustice, one was then obliged to see that no matter how crippled and perverted an image of man was the society he had created, it was nonetheless his creation, his collective creation ... and if society was so murderous, then who could ignore the most hideous of questions about his own nature?²

Mailer effectively follows a logical line of reasoning from the individual nature to what he terms the collective nature of mankind (and vice versa) so that his consideration of the questions of good and evil, and the reality of God and the Devil bear immense significance for Mailer in the conclusions he draws regarding individual personality or the psychical being. The metaphysical quality of this reasoning and its significance for Mailer's dialectical view, is most apparent in Mailer's view of women. Mailer believes that women are one step closer to "Creation" than men, because they possess a womb and are able to give birth. In other words, the female exists in an "intimate relationship with Time", because she is able to contain the future within her own person; thereby realising what Mailer

believes is the spiral-like quality of time: the interdependent relation of the past, present and future. Mailer translates the analogy to the writer who, similarly, performs a correlating function in the creation and gestation of the text, a point conveyed with lyrical intensity at the conclusion of *The Armies of the Night*. Mailer then goes further to propose that the masculine need to dominate something corresponding to the female womb results in the desperate desire of the male to subjugate women to the level corresponding to his own in relation to eternity:

... precisely that it was man's sense of awe before woman, his dread of her position one step closer to eternity (for in that step were her powers) which made men detest women, revile them, humiliate them, defecate symbolically upon them, do everything to reduce them so that one might dare to enter them and take pleasure of them.³

As such, Mailer's conception of the inner dialectic - the internalised contradictions and complex, interdependent desires - embraces a perception of the individual as manifesting both masculine and feminine compulsions, where the woman's connection to eternity may be offset by the desire for power (Mailer's sense of the masculine need to dominate, a facet of totalitarianism); and where the masculine assertion of will may find its dialectical opposite in the creation of a form for something - often, the self.

The relation of the individual to his place in time compounds the dialectical complexity of one's inner contradictions. For Mailer, the present anticipates the future as the experience of looking back to the past to understand more fully the meaning and resonance of what one has done and felt in the past. In this sense, one's actions and experiences are given

context by past actions and experiences, and which themselves impinge upon future action and experience. Action and experience, therefore, exist within a network of dialectical oppositions and complexities, and Mailer can conceive of no human act which is free, or isolated in its relation to the passage of time. Thus, at any given moment the individual is prey to the conflicts and complex tensions of inner compulsions which react against each other. As such, the way in which one does choose to act is a reflection of the capacity to measure the literal worth and significance of one's actions for one's psychical well-being: am I denying myself the opportunity to realise courage? Am I simply acquiescing to the easiest course of action out of fear? For Mailer, experience exists in a framework of past and possible action, and is measured against the lessons of the past and the aspirations for the future. This gives one a clue to one's moral worth: the literal "goodness" or "badness" of the decision to act in a particular way, but as a constantly evolving, dynamic phenomenon. For example, in the story, "The Language of Men", Carter's ambivalence between acquiescence motivated by fear and courage spurred by the need to defeat self-loathing finds its basis in the habit of cowardly action and the legacy of past cowardly action, but the decision to elect the braver course of action thus allows Carter to learn more of his capacity for courage for future action.

Mailer's existential perspective, expressed fully in "The White Negro", states that because the outcome of one's actions is unknown, such actions cannot, *a priori*, be judged as good or bad although one exists as a moral being, as every moment of life offers one the chance to realise courage - Mailer's "good". The

individual is viewed as a collection of possibilities - realised in action and which express the worth of one's being as one vindicates one's capacity for courage or cowardice. Additionally, Mailer believes that of the possibilities contained within one, some are more possible than others - ultimately, the expression of the shape, or worth of one's being: "some humans are considered more capable than others of reaching more possibilities within themselves in less time, provided, and this is the dynamic, provided the particular character can wing at the right time".⁴ This view implies that the context within which one acts is at least as significant as one's character; in fact, character is viewed not as a static entity apart from the situational context, but as the sum of whatever influences, attitudes, internal contradictions, and desires constitutes the given context for action, at any given moment. This perception of character as necessarily fluid thereby places emphasis upon the dialectical complexity of the inner tensions, compulsions, contradictions and motivations of the individual experience of being.

An example of the individual in what I have termed a state of dialectical tension occurs in "Advertisements for Myself On the Way Out", a brilliantly written piece which was to have been the prologue to the huge, eight novel *piece de resistance* Mailer planned but has never executed:

But now I go, the vortex does not stop, the winds of the whirlpool - God's gyre again? - are heavy with consequence, clear as the icy eye of cocaine, I race toward a point of judgement, my courage and cowardice (my masculine thrust and retreat from the avaricious energy-plucking hairy old grotto of Time) trailing behind me in that comet of connotations which is the past topologically reversed by the vision of now, as if in recovering

the past I am chasing after the future, so that the past, the net of the name-giving surface perceiving past, is my future again, and I go out into the past, into the trail of the cold eye of past relationship, the eye of my I at home in the object-filled chaos of any ego I choose ... I race into the midnight mind, the dream-haunted determinations of that God of whom I was part, and will He choose me to be born again? have I proven one of his best? am I embryo in some belly of the divisible feminine Time, or is the journey yet to make? ... So I approach Him, if I have not already lost Him, God, in His destiny, in which He may succeed, or tragically fail, for God like Us suffers the ambition to make a destiny more extraordinary than was conceived for Him, yes, God is like Me, only more so.⁵

"Advertisements For Myself on the Way Out" coyly alludes to Marion Faye, who stands out as the dark centre of *The Deer Park*, as Mailer's partially developed existential hipster-hero. The dialectical interplay of self (what one recognises as the "I" of one's being) and the structures of what may be termed externality (the sense of things which lie beyond the immediacy of the "I am") is the hallmark of the hipster's experience. In many instances, externality is experienced as an ambiguous force working through one - for example, in *An American Dream*, Stephen Rojack is engaged in a battle with a nameless dread manifest as telepathic powers, omnipotent smells and inner voices, signalling the inner dialectical battle between the desire to embrace the chaotic world of Harlem and the compulsion to the rigid and totalitarian confines of Barney Kelly's society.

The context for much of Mailer's writing - even the rambling and obtuse verse of *Deaths For the Ladies (and other disasters)* - has Mailer placing himself centrally within the dialectical interplay of tensions, both internal and external. In the prose piece, entitled "Death", Mailer juxtaposes Floyd Patterson and Sonny Liston as the opposing encapsulations of good and evil,

love and sex, art and magic, respectively. The sense of the dialectic thus engendered is vital, and in its absence, Mailer perceives the negation of such tension as death-like:

The driver, as I have said, was for Patterson. He was a big round Negro about thirty with a pleasant face, sly yet not quite dishonest, but he had a pompous manner which seemed to fill the cab with psychic gas as dead as the exhaust from a bus. He was for Patterson, Hamill was for Patterson, I was for Patterson. We were left with nothing but the search for an imaginary conversationist to argue for Sonny.⁶

The opposition Mailer draws between Liston and Patterson contains the reverberations of a cultural portrait seen with the dialectical perception of the Negro as Hipster, and the Negro as the lonely and romantic isolationist:

But the deepest reason that Negroes in Chicago had for preferring Patterson was that they did not want to enter again the logic of Liston's world. The Negro had lived in violence, had grown in violence, and yet had developed a view of life which gave him life. But its cost was exceptional for the ordinary man. The majority had to live in shame. The demand for courage may have been exorbitant. Now, as the Negro was beginning to come into the white man's world, he wanted the logic of the white man's world: annuities, mental hygiene, sociological jargon, committee solutions for the ills of the breast. He was sick of a whore's logic and a pimp's logic, he wanted no more of *motherwit*, of *smarts*, or *playing the dozens*, of battling for true love into the diamond-hard eyes of every classy prostitute and hustler on the street. The Negro wanted Patterson, because Floyd was the proof a man could be successful and yet be secure. If Liston won, the old torment was open again.

... Patterson was the champion of every lonely adolescent and every man who had been forced to live alone, every protagonist who tried to remain unique in a world whose waters washed apathy and compromise into the pores. He was the hero of all those unsung romantics who walk the street at night seeing the vision of Napoleon while their feet trip over the curb, he was part of the fortitude which could sustain those who lived for principle, those who had gone to war

with themselves and ended with discipline. He was the artist.⁷

Mailer wants to emphasise the opposition between Patterson and Liston in this way because his conception of a personal destiny must force him to accept some responsibility for Patterson's defeat. That is, Patterson and Liston are not merely individuals seeking victory in the ring; in the existential sense they are beings, "which is to say (they are) no longer finite in the usual sense, (they are) no longer ... creature(s) of a given size and dress with a name and some habits which are predictable"⁸ and, as such, they encapsulate the warring and intermingling forces and tensions of all the unspoken dreads, hates and loves present within the larger social context.

Given Mailer's own sense of dread - "a feeling of gloom came over me ..." ⁹ - he must accept his part in the failure of Patterson to locate adequate strength and courage for the fight because his own faith in strength and courage was lacking:

The result had been turned by betrayal. And it was by one's own person that the guilt was felt. I had been there with half a body from half a night of sleep for too many nights, and half a brain from too many bouts of drinking drinks I did not want that much, and dim in concentration because I was brooding about the loss of a friendship which it was a cruel and stupid waste to lose. And Baldwin too had been brooding. We had sat there like beasts of burden, empty of psychic force to offer our fighter.¹⁰

Moreover, the fight between Patterson and Liston, signifying as it does the archetypal contest between art and magic, sex and love, God and the Devil, reveals to Mailer a certain dialectical warring within himself of the same opposing tensions for which Patterson and Liston each are aligned: from this recognition, Mailer can use such perception to grow in self-knowledge and

further, arrive at a recognition of a deeper dialectic - that between self and other:

... for of course the fighters spoke as well from the countered halves of my nature, what more had I to tell myself of sex versus love, magic against art, or the hustler and the infantryman? - out of desire to end some war in myself, as if victory by Patterson might have given me discipline, and the triumph of Liston could now distract me only further, out of a fury to exercise defeat, I began in the plot-ridden, romantic dungeons of my mind, all subterranean rhythms stirred by the beat of this party, to see myself as some sort of center about which all that had been lost must now rally. It was not simple egomania not simple drunkenness, it was not even simple insanity: it was a kind of metaphorical leap across a gap.¹¹

Thus, Mailer contextualises the shared emotional and psychological reality of man's experience - what Mailer terms the collective nature of mankind - as the inner, dialectical warring of opposed compulsions, desires, motivations and needs. Mailer's metaphoric and thematic emphasis upon the necessity of balance "at the edge of the divide" views the dislocation or dissipation of the dialectical interdependencies as disease: the disease of schizophrenia or the disease of cancer. In Mailer's terms, cancer occurs as, in Poirier's phrase, "the unopposed proliferation of undifferentiated cells"¹² and schizophrenia results from an irredeemable dislocation of one's inner dialectical propensities and urges. In both instances, the end result is the same: a quality of sameness characterised as the absence of form, where form is "the record of a war". Quite simply, the inner dialectical warring of one's contrary impulses and urges embodies the shape of one's selfhood because one subsequently acts with a sure knowledge of, and as the expression of, what constitutes one's greatest strengths and weaknesses. In Part Four: Arena of Cannibals and Christians, Mailer's mock

interview embodies dialectical form whilst also expounding upon the nature of dialectical form: driftwood, states Mailer, expresses the essence of form because "it proclaims the value of what is kept. Form always makes one tacit statement - it says: I am a definite *form* of existence. I choose to have character and quality ... I am - everything considered - the best that could be done under the circumstances, and so superior to a blob." Moreover, form "is the record of a war which has been taking place ... whatever is alive, or intent, or obsessed, must wage an active war: it creates the possibility of form in its environment by its every attempt to shape the environment. Wherever the environment resists, the result is a form. When the soul is mighty and the environment resists mightily, the form is exceptional or extraordinary".¹³ By such logic, the self that denotes one's being is itself the "record" of the inner, dialectical oppositions; and consequently, the worth of one's selfhood is the measure of that dialectical warring. Thus, the greater one's fear, for example, the more terrifying the situation one should necessarily seek out, in order to give life to the dialectic and so determine the form of one's being in action:

If I am secretly in love with death and terrified of it, then the effort to restrain and domesticate these emotions and impulses (which are not less than the cross-impulses of suicidal bravery and shame-ridden cowardice) exhaust so much of my will that my existence turns bleak. A dramatic encounter with death, an automobile accident from which I escape, a violent fight I win or lose decently, these all call forth my crossed impulses which love death and fear it. They give air to it. So these internal and deadly emotions are given life.¹⁴

The life of the dialectic, which gives form to the self, or, where it is non-existent, the ensuing sickness and the gradual dissipation of the dialectical self, is Mailer's primary preoccupation throughout his writing and represents the basis of his thematic and metaphoric structuring. In *The Deer Park*, for example, Sergius is both attracted to, and repelled by the false, morally bankrupt society of Desert D'or and Lulu Meyers. His recognition of this inner dialectical warring is the necessary precipitate for self-knowledge - the discovery of the form of selfhood:

As (Collie Munshin) spoke, I felt a touch of sickness. It was no more than a turn in my stomach and an instant when I felt pale, but I had one of those hints of what cold and violent ambition had been stifling in me for so many years, and it was as if deep inside two powerful hands fought each other forward and back, locked in a test of strength which left room for little else.¹⁵

In contrast, very few of the other characters in *The Deer Park* are capable of such pivotal self-recognition. The society Mailer portrays suffers from an endemic moral dislocation characterised as the inability to recognise the dislocation of the values that are espoused and the actions and attitudes which contradict them. Herman Teppis delivers a speech to Collie Munshin concerning the fundamental necessity of the laws by which one lives; at the same time his sexual meandering and manipulation emphasise his disregard for the moral precepts he espouses. Similarly, in his portrait of Neil Armstrong in *Of a Fire on the Moon*, Mailer emphasises Armstrong's divided consciousness as the singularly significant aspect of his character: it is a means of understanding a personality which seems to evade such understanding in simple terms. However, the division which

characterises Armstrong does not represent the vitality of dialectical interplay, but is, more disturbingly, a hint of the deeper schizophrenia within the age itself:

He was a presence in the room, as much a spirit as a man. One hardly knew if he were the spirit of the high thermal currents, or that spirit of neutrality which rises to the top in bureaucratic situations, or both, both of course - why should Armstrong have a soul less divided than the unruly world of some billions of men? Indeed, contradictions lay subtly upon him - it was not unlike looking at a bewildering nest of leaves: some are autumn fallings, some the green of early spring. So Armstrong seemed of all the astronauts the man nearest to being saintly, yet there was something as hard, small-town and used in his face as the look of a cashier over pennies. ... He could be an angel, he could be the town's devil, who knew? You could not penetrate the flash of the smile - all of America's bounty was in it. Readiness to serve, innocence, competence, modesty, sly humor, and then a lop-sided yawning slide of a dumb smile at the gulfs of one's own ignorance, like oops am I small-town dumb! - that was also in it.¹⁶

Mailer extends the portrait of Armstrong to embrace a recognition of the schizophrenic oppositions implicit in an astronaut's personality which allows such an individual to engage life at its most terrifying and primitive level, but within the relentlessly boring and factual realm of bureaucracy and technology. Further, the contradiction implicit in Armstrong's, and, by association, the other astronauts' personalities, finds its correlation in the age itself: the technology-obsessed late Twentieth Century. The division within the psyche Mailer notes in Armstrong has its basis in the ever increasing tendency of the age toward contradiction and division in which no dialectical interdependence of those contradictions exists. As a result, the inherent, Twentieth Century schizophrenia is itself a point of reference for the modern individual who lacks the ability and

awareness necessary to affect balance of inner contradiction. The individual living in the Twentieth Century, like Armstrong, is prey to schizoid division by which he would go mad, if not for the resonance of division all around him:

And this conviction was not without the most direct kind of intellectual intoxication, for it dramatized how much at odds might be the extremes of Armstrong's personality or for that matter the personality of astronauts. From their conscious mind to their unconscious depth, what a spectrum could be covered! Yes ... astronauts have learned not only to live with opposites, but it was conceivable that the contradictions in their nature were so located in the very impetus of the age that their personality might begin to speak, for better or worse, of some new psychological constitution to man. For it was true - astronauts had come to live with adventures in space so vast one thought of the infinities of a dream, yet their time on the ground was conventional, practical, technical, hardworking, and in the center of the suburban middle class.

... They lived, it was evident, with no ordinary opposites in their mind and brain. On the one hand to dwell in the very center of technological reality (which is to say that world where every question must have answers and procedures, or technique cannot itself progress) yet to inhabit - if only in one's dreams - that other world where death, metaphysics and the unanswerable questions of eternity must reside, was to suggest natures so divided that they could have been the most miserable and unbalanced of men if they did not contain in their huge contradictions some of the profound and accelerating opposites of the century itself.¹⁷

This sense of duality, of opposites and contradictions is Mailer's major thematic concern in *Of a Fire on the Moon*, to the extent that Mailer's divisions and dualities become formulaic. It is Mailer's way of making sense of experience and of people; of ascribing a sense of form to a universe in which the prevailing tendency is toward schizophrenia on the one hand and dissolution and entropy on the other. In describing Wernher Von Braun as "a man of opposites ..., a confusing aura of strength

and vulnerability, of calm and agitation, cruelty and concern, phlegm and sensitivity"¹⁸ Mailer's unstated assertion is that, without such contradiction, Von Braun would hardly be worthy of description; bland, shapeless, formless. Moreover, when Mailer states that "Immediate reflection must tell you that a man who wishes to reach heavenly bodies is an agent of the Lord or Mephisto"¹⁹ the pivotal focus of the novel is made clear: the sense of opposition felt to be everywhere is itself the expression of a greater warring, of which the individual is agent and expression, that warring between God and the Devil and which Mailer then reduces to technology versus metaphysics, science versus art, death versus creativity. According to Mailer, the Devil is manifest in the absence of the dialectic, so that when one loses the ability to assert himself before someone or something out of a sense of personal strength and moral certitude, then one has become formless, shapeless. Mailer likens such an individual to the computer, another favoured Mailer-metaphor for the insidious and ubiquitous quality of totalitarianism because the computer exists in a static, one-dimensional relationship with the information it receives and supplies - it can only react upon information by responding according to a set of programmed rules and directives.

Of a Fire on the Moon is Mailer's most detailed (if, at the same time his most simplistic) account of the war between God and the Devil in which the Devil, manifest as technology, represents the unspoken urge to dominate all of science, mystery, religion, time and nature. Mailer's hatred of technology for precisely this reason is dialectically offset by a nagging sense of the ambivalence of the space mission itself: "was our venture into

space noble or insane, was it part of a search for the good, or the agent of diabolisms yet unglimped?".²⁰ Once again, Mailer's determination of the dialectic is his own attempt to reject the untenable (for him) possibility of the unopposed victory of the Devil, whose presence is felt in every instance of objective, technological certitude. Similarly, Mailer's conception of a future age governed by the "logic of the computer" also proposes that such an age would also produce a renegade society of "drop-outs", the saintly, the mad, the militant and the young".²¹ Simply, Mailer cannot conceive of any experience, person or thing, without the mitigating presence of the dialectic. One's inner, dialectical contradictions are vital as a means of defining oneself because it is only as one faces, existentially, the self-same contradictions and opposing inclinations and motivations that one is able to arrive at knowledge of what constitutes the shape of one's selfhood, and the action necessary for one's psychical growth: one is "moving individually through each moment of life forward into growth or backward into death".

The experience of self-confrontation occurs for Mailer, who posits himself as the protagonist of *The Fight*, an account of the heavyweight championship fight between Muhammed Ali and George Foreman. It occurs to Mailer that "He no longer knew whether he loved Blacks or secretly disliked them, which had to be the dirtiest secret in his American life"²², the realisation of which precipitates dialectical self-analysis and, subsequently, pivotal insight:

When the sheer evidence of Africa finally overcame these newly bigoted senses (when a drive over miles of highway showed thousands of slim and

probably hungry Zairois ... in some absolute statement of aesthetic, ... these Blacks could still show in silhouette, while standing in line for the bus, ... an incorruptible loneliness, a stone mute dignity ... some tragic magnetic sense of self as if each alone and all were carrying the continent like a halo of sorrow about their head) ... Then he could no longer hate the Zairois or even be certain of his condemnation of their own Black oppressors, then his animosity switched a continent over to Black Americans with their arrogance, jive, ethnic put-down costumes, caterwauling soul, their thump-your-testicle organ sound and black new vomituous egos like the slag of all of alienated sewage-compacted heap U.S.A.; then he knew that he had not only come to report on a fight but to look a little more into his own outsized feelings of love and - could it be? - sheer hate for the existence of Black on earth.²³

The fight between Foreman and Ali is, once again, contextualised in Mailer's familiar terms of good and evil, art and technology, form and chaos. Just as the fight between Patterson and Liston is, for Mailer, a struggle for ascendancy of good and evil, and Mailer posits himself on the side of the forces seeking a victory for Patterson, Mailer once again employs the same metaphysical interpretation of the fight between Ali and Foreman as the struggle for ascendancy of art and love, and, more importantly, the defeat of formlessness and cowardice: (a victory for Ali) "would be a triumph for everything which did not fit into the computer: for audacity, inventiveness, even art. (Norman) knew some part of him would have to hate Ali if the fighter lost without dignity or real effort, even as a part of him could not forgive Hemingway because of the ambiguity of his suicide".²⁴ Whereas Mailer's terms of reference for the dialectic in *The Fight* are clear - he wants Ali to win because Ali represents to him inventiveness, art, and love - at the same time, Mailer hints at a fundamental ambiguity characterising the nature of one's relation to the forces of good and evil, formlessness and order,

and so on. Mailer informs the reader, "He never knew which forces he helped"²⁵ by which he suggests both the lack of epistemological certainty as the inadequate basis for interpreting experience as well as the complex character of the dialectical relationship of self and other.

The complex character of the dialectical relationship is given a literal basis in *Ancient Evenings*, Mailer's huge and sprawling account of the various lives of Menehetet One, a courtier in the Twentieth Dynasty kingdom of Rameses and Nefertiri, in the conception of the Egyptian soul. At the body's death, a double, the "Ka", is born, which, whilst possessing no body of its own, does possess its own individuality and personality. Mailer employs the body's relationship to the Ka to give literal expression to the inner, divided compulsions of one's nature. In the opening chapters of *Ancient Evenings*, the voice which introduces the reader to the strange and mysterious world of the novel is presented as an individual presence before the reader (and the voice itself) is aware that this existence is really a non-existence, the Ka of Menehetet Two:

For now I knew why Meni was my dearest friend and his death an agony to me, yes, my dim memory of his life was now nothing but the dim memory of my own life. For now I knew who I was, and that was no better than a ghost in a panic for food. I was nothing but the poor Ka of Menehetet Two. ... Now I was no more than the Double of the dead man, and what was left of him was no more than the corpse of his badly wrapped body, and me.²⁶

In fact, the Double, or Ka is only one of the seven component parts of the Egyptian soul, and Mailer's fascination with this conception of existence is due in no small part to his personal belief that the individual embodies the attitudes, values, desires, motivations and compulsions of all the social, genetic,

interpersonal and economic forces governing the "time of one's time" as well as those forces of all the living and dead beings sharing one's existence; indeed, it is precisely such forces which call forth the dialectical warring within, each as significant in determining action and decision. *Ancient Evenings* proposes the dialectical confusion literally, as Menenhetet One's great-grandson (of whom the Ka is his Double) finds himself in two different places at once - his separate inclinations lead him in two quite different directions:

I began then to have the most unusual experience although it was without peril and came as no surprise to me. It was just that - my mother having told me not to stray - I was nonetheless able to go off like two people in separate directions. My mind most certainly was now inclined on the one hand to leave the Palace altogether and follow our boatman, Bone-Smasher, as he went drinking through the marketplace of Memphi, yet by the other hand, I also sat in attendance on the Pharaoh and listened to how He disposed of the problems of government.²⁷

The separate influence of one's divergent inclinations, and the subsequent dialectical conferring within is given emphasis through Mailer's reiteration of the theme of doubleness. Continually, Mailer refers to "two houses of the mind"; the young Meni Two says, "I saw two existences at once", and Egyptian lore states that the right and left hands be differentiated by their separate functions: the right, reserved for bearing arms and touching food, to be treated like a temple, and the left, to perform such functions as going to the toilet. The Pharaoh manifests duality in his existence as both man and God, and Mailer emphasises the need for balance of one's separate inclinations, employing the familiar terms of the dislocation of the dialectic - madness:

Ptah-nem-hotep paused and looked at each of us in turn, ... 'I have looked for the wisdom,' He said, 'and have come to the conclusion that a Pharaoh being in part a man, and, in part a God, must never err too much to one side, or madness becomes His only choice. Khufu erred by seeking all the powers of a God. Whereas I may be seeking too few.'²⁸

The thematic impetus of *Ancient Evenings* is the dialectic of sex and death, in which death itself engages the creative act of vaginal intercourse as a means of defeating death. Mailer's use of sexual intercourse in a metaphoric capacity to denote creativity or de-creativity has always carried the connotation of Gnosticism: one recalls Rojack's ambiguous vision, which may signal creativity or sterility, as he alternates between vaginal and anal intercourse with Ruta; and "The Time of Her Time" is explicit in its tone of outrage with results in the act of buggery, meant as "liberation" for Denise. Mailer's implication is that sex may be one way in which we summon, or approach the forces of good or evil, by which the sexual act gains its character of creativity, or de-creativity. As such, the repeated emphasis upon duality and doubleness in *Ancient Evenings* always reverberates with a sense of the ambivalence of the moral quality of event, action, or character (in the Judaistic or Christian sense) and establishes instead, Mailer's own aesthetic - the dialectic of engaging life through death.

Mailer's emphasis upon duality or doubleness in *Ancient Evenings* echoes its thematic and metaphoric use in his other works. The dialectic by which the form of one's being is revealed is essential to the passage of self-discovery upon which Mailer's protagonists are inevitably embarked. Even when Mailer posits himself as protagonist, the hero-figure is ultimately

faced with a moment of existential revelation by which conflicting alternatives for action or decision present themselves, and which signifies the opportunity for brave or cowardly action, growth or death. Frequently, a moment of dialectical uncertainty is accompanied by the recognition of one's absolute precariousness within a context of uncertainty and terror. Such an experience occurs as existential self-confrontation because the absence of any directives for action or external, mediating influences brings one face to face with one's innermost depths, and, accordingly, the true worth of one's selfhood. The ability to recognise, and act upon one's capacity for bravery indicates reserves of courage which may only become manifest against the dual recognition of cowardice. In such a dialectical encounter, the vindication of one's capacity for bravery in action, against the knowledge of the presence of cowardice, represents the purchase of self-knowledge or self-recognition; the realisation of the form of oneself:

Now (the Pharaoh) stood in silence, and looked about the room, staring at many of us, one by one, until the silence was equal to a great commotion, and His heart was beating like a stallion. Then I knew myself at last, and I was indeed "Master of the Secrets of the Things Only One Man Knows", for I new His heart, and the terrible fear in it, and the great pride, and when He looked at me, I also knew for the first time that He loved me and valued me. For with His eyes, He asked, 'What shall I do?' I felt His fear again. There is no magic whose terror is more powerful than the fear of a Pharaoh before the strength of His Son. ... Yet His pride that He was the One was great, and He hated to bow before His fear of Amen-khep-shu-ef.

... In this moment I did not understand why He decided to do what He did, but I know now. In the embrace of Your mind, Great Ninth of the Ramses, I see Him, and understand that He could never make His choice from fear, or He would be no longer divine.²⁹

The Pharaoh's decision vindicates his capacity for courage, realised in its relation to the dual recognition of cowardice. The context of imminent threat places the Pharaoh in existential confrontation with his deepest and most resonant fears and desires, manifest as the dialectic of fear (the threat posed by Amen-khep-shu-ef precipitates the fear of violent death) and the dual need to defeat fear (the pride in his divinity). It is precisely this type of situation, wherein the hero-protagonist, engaged in pivotal self-examination against a context of fear and uncertainty, forms a decision for action based on the revelation of what is truest of his selfhood, that Mailer establishes as the moral and thematic centre of the particular work. It is only at one's physical death that the internal conflict of tension which Mailer views as the necessary embodiment of the form of one's being, is dissipated: Meni says, at his own death, "I felt my heart divide. The Two-Lands sundered".³⁰

Sexuality provides Mailer with his most resonant and expressive means of exploring the dialectical relationship. The sexual encounter between Menenhetet and Nefertiri which follows the important scene cited above, is significant in terms of the multifarious tensions which play against each other. Menenhetet's divided feelings for the Pharaoh (known as Usermare) are offset by Nefertiri's own sense of humiliation as well as her anger; the sexual act itself thus gains the momentum and dialectical vigour of tension:

I grasped Her with all my strength, with too much strength. The truth is that I was weakened by love for Usermare again. I could hate Him no longer, and if, last night, I had known the strength of a bull, now I had no more than the loins of a hare, but She was washed by pain on one hand, fury in the other, and never had I known Her

more passionate. ... but the more passionate She became, the colder my own heart, for in my fear I also had my pride, and would feel no fear, so I was very cold and much like a priest, indeed, I was a priest in the embrace of a lion, and as She spoke all those words so much alike upon which She loved to play, spoke of my lips and the bank of the river, of my heart and Her thirst ... She also cried out as I entered, oh, so suddenly cried out, and with harsh words of fucking and theft and murder.³¹

For Mailer, sex is "the mirror of how we approach God"³² and the "primitive awe" one feels (or should feel) during sexual activity is the recognition of one's place in God's vast creation, compounded by the consciousness that humans are perhaps the only beings who can feel anything other than physical gratification during sex. Mailer conceives of sex as a vital dialectic in which the unconscious and conscious parts of one's being are engaged, and in the resultant relationship, one explores one's relation to God. This is why, also, the relation of men and women is a source of enduring interest and fascination to Mailer, because men and women possess different perceptions of the world based on the fundamentally different relation each has with the nature of their own being. That is, whereas women must perceive of the world and themselves from the standpoint of their capacity to bear the future within their wombs, men, Mailer seems to argue, must seek to dominate a corresponding "space within" in order to attain a similar perception; in lieu of this, they must seek to gain the courage to be a man in Mailer's Hemingway-esque rhetoric of heroism. It is in the sexual arena that the dual male-female perspectives form a vital dialectic, precipitating the guilt one feels at the purchase of the secrets of existence. Mailer's perspective is defiantly masculine: the dialectic of sexual intercourse expresses the masculine need to defeat guilt,

which is simultaneously the fear of the male before the female's inherent, intuitive relation to creation:

... and sex to Mailer's idea of it was better of dirty, damned, even slavish! than clean, and without guilt. For guilt was the existential edge of sex. Without guilt, sex was meaningless. One advanced into sex against one's sense of guilt, and each time guilt was successfully defied, one had learned a little more about the contractual relation of one's own existence to the unheard thunders of the deep - each time guilt herded one back with its authority, some primitive awe - hence some creative clue to the rages of the deep - was left to brood about. Onanism and homosexuality were not, to Mailer, light vices - to him it sometimes seemed that much of life and most of society were designed precisely to drive men deep into onanism and homosexuality; one defied such a fate by sweeping up the psychic profit which derived from the existential assertion of yourself - which was a way of saying that nobody was born a man; you earned manhood provided you were good enough, bold enough.³³

In Mailer's literary universe, sexuality carries the metaphysical reverberations of a dialectical encounter between the conscious assertion of one's desires and needs and the unconscious fears, dreads, motivations and compulsions which express the collective nature of mankind. Mailer suggests, as is apparent in the passage from *The Armies of the Night* cited above, that sexuality is the appropriate forum for discovering, existentially, the state of one's psychic health; moreover, as has been stated, sexual intercourse suggests the nature of our relation to God. Richard Poirier succinctly expresses Mailer's scatological and theological obsessiveness, and anticipates the remarkable first sexual encounter between Menenhetet and Nefertiri: "The word, "God" like the word "shit" is no more than the cry of inarticulateness in search of a theology".³⁴ In this remarkable scene, language is more than itself, more than the expression of conscious awareness and the formal means of

defining experience. Mailer's attempt is to demonstrate, through language, the multiplicity of meaning by which the individual consciousness of experience gains individual form. In this sense, sexuality is a means of giving shape to the ebb and flow of time and the meaning of (theological) creation, as they impinge upon the other in the experience of sex. Once again, the dialectical interplay of good and evil demonstrates Mailer's continued efforts at resurrecting a theology by which the form of his own place within the creation takes shape:

As I stood before her, trembling, all but flinging myself and my seed in all directions at once, a fire in my stick, and honey in my bowels, my mind was aflame with the stories She had told, and I had to seize myself at the brink before the cream of my loins was shining on Her queenly face. But I had another desire now, large as Usermare Himself. It was to fuck Her, fuck Her good, good and evil. She was murmuring, 'Benben, benbenben,' but with such little twists and stops of Her mouth, such a beat of Her breath that as I heard it, benben said all too many words, 'Oh, *come forth with Me, you little God of evil, you fucker, give Me your obelisk*' - for that was also a *benben* - and then Her gown of woven air was gone, and Her field was open before me, Her thighs like slim pillars, and Her alter wet with the passions of my tongue. '*Hath, hath, hath,*' She panted like a cat in heat, '*Let us fuck, let us fly. Come into My flame, My fire, My hath, My cunt, come into My snare, enter My sepulchre, Oh, come deep into My cemetery, unite with Me, copulate with Me, come to your concubine, O heaven and earth, hath, hath, hath!*'³⁵

Throughout this scene, remarkable in the sheer virtuosity and intensity of expression, there remains an abiding sense of two individuals engaged in singularly personal battles of domination - of the other, their own fears, jealousies, unadmitted desires. This is the sense of the dialectic: Mailer emphasises Menehetet's need to transcend the love-hate relationship with the Pharaoh, Usermare, which is the basis for

his continued fascination with death as a means of re-entering life, through sex. At the same time, Nefertiri is portrayed, in the duplicity of her emotions and loyalties, as seeking to dominate the power Usermare exerts over her. Sex is the means by which they both discover the truth of these desires and the reality of their individual selves: here, once again, language is the expression of the dialectic, the very back-and-forth of sex itself:

... She cried out, '*Shep, shep, shepit, shepit*', and all such words like '*shepu and shepa and shepat, Oh, light, oh radiance, oh, brightness, oh, blindness, oh, wealth and shame, vomit and shipwreck, shef, shef, shef, ram into Me, swell into Me, give Me your weapon, give Me your power, shefesh, shefesh, I have your sword, I have your gift, give Me your evil, give Me your wealth. ... Oh, by the sacred backbone of Osiris, give Me tcham, tcham, tcham, qef, qef, qef, show Me to My Ka, dead white, dead black, I am a fortress, ai, ai, what light, what splendor, go deeper, you obelisk, fuck Me into glory, take Me to flame, I am rich, oh, stop, I am fire and light, I am your filth, your offal, your devils, your friends, your guide, oh, good, good, good, give Me your benben, evil fucker, nek, nek, nekk, nekk, fuck Me, slash Me, murder Me, aar, aar, I am your lion, your bird, your lock of hair, your sin, I come, oh, I come, I come forth, I am the Pharaoh.*' And even as I was rising into a celestial city by a field of golden reeds, there to know a change as great as death itself, I heard the deep sounds of the bowels and the high sounds from the wind in my throat ... and I flung myself out to fly to the heavens, or crash on the rocks, and saw the legions of the Land of the Dead and a myriad of faces, all the damned and perfected souls that Nefertiri could command, and rammed into the last gate of Her womb with the moan and groan of a peasant cock, the radiance of Amon blazing in me like the Hidden Sun of my mother's belly, and She rebounded beneath like a beast, Her limbs storming over mine with the strength of Usermare as I was borne aloft, but not by Her so much as by the wrath of my Pharaoh who lifted me like a feather over the flame, and slammed me down like a rock

... "36

Mailer's use of language in this particular sexual encounter serves another purpose. Whereas Mailer's invective is directed against a "civilization founded upon the Faustian urge to dominate nature by mastering time, mastering the links of social cause and effect"³⁷ he seeks to gain the same sort of mastery, through writing and language, of the contradictions and mysteries of our human existence that he sees the self-same civilisation as attempting to disguise through such domination. Mailer has formulated a literary universe in which a self-referential system of indicators and an internal metaphoric structuring are the means by which Mailer seeks to defy and defeat the Faustian urge.

The final pages of *Ancient Evenings* are important to an understanding of Mailer's dialectical vision. The exploration of the experience of death proposes that the quality of one's life may be reflected in the "shape" of one's death, but that the reincarnation of one's spirit may, indeed, offer the possibility of a new form of being:

Across from me was now a sight of the Elysian Fields, and the grain was golden and the sky blue, but the current tore through my legs in a tumult of forces. The wall receded from me even as I took each step. The stench grew worse, the waters rose above my head and I did not know how to swim. By the horror of my limbs, I knew I was sinking into fecal waters. Down on me came the outrages and squalors of life. The furies of my shame were choking my breath. I had no strength to contest these waters, and was ready to give up my will. But my shame began to expire as well. A peace that was like death itself, as darkness comes to the sky in the evening, was on my heart. I was ready. I would die my second death and know no more.

... Then I heard my great-grandfather. 'You do not have to perish,' he said into my ear.

I knew what he meant. His though had come already to my mind - it came with the peace that was like death itself. One might drown in the bowels of this river and be washed into the

fields. The last of oneself would pass into the plants of the field.

Or - could one have a bold and final choice?
- could one enter another fundament? At the center of radiance was pain.³⁸

For Mailer, death of one's physical being may be the means by which the form of one's selfhood is reconstituted (in contrast to the earlier reference to Meni's sense of physical dislocation at death; of being "sundered"); death in this sense differentiated from Mailer's more frequent, metaphoric use of death as the means of expressing the stultification of one's sensual and sensuous receptivity to experience and one's imaginative responsiveness, which is the dissipation of one's selfhood through acquiescence to totalitarianism or inertia. *Ancient Evenings* continually asserts Mailer's conviction that the quality and vitality of life may be re-engaged through the conscious anticipation of death - the obsessive preoccupation of the Twentieth Century with the ways and means of denying and sterilising death is contrasted with the sex-and-death ridden universe of *Ancient Evenings*.

The final, elegiac passages of the novel portray the strengthened double-Ka, the literal embodiment of the Ka of Menenhetet Two joined with the dying Ka of Menenhetet One. The double-Ka is, in effect, Mailer's means of giving form to the multiplicity of inclination, compulsion, and motivation by which the dialectical nature of one's personal experience takes shape:

I felt the sorrow of his heart, however, come into me, and with a thought as beautiful as radiance itself: If the souls of the dead would try to reach the heavens of highest endeavour then they must look to mate with one another. but since the soul was no longer a man nor a woman, or to know it better, now contained all the men and women among whom one had lived, it might not matter in the Land of the Dead whether the vow was taken between a man and a woman, two men or two women,

no, no more was required than that they would dare to share the same fate.³⁹

This fate is unknown, and Gnostic in terms of the ambivalence of the God who awaits the double-Ka in death-rebirth. This pivotal ascension to Osiris is contextualised entirely as the dialectical manifestation of the various and conflicting inclinations which characterised the previous life of the double-Ka: "I took the rungs of this ladder one by one, and each rung was as strong as the umbilical cord of each person I had known well, and I felt the embrace of their bodies. They came about me as I climbed and held my arms, and I could not move to the next rung until I lived with the honest thought of how I loved them or how I did not, and recalled all I loved most in each, and all I loved least".⁴⁰ The moral ambivalence of this final journey confirms Mailer's theology of Gnosticism as indeed, it confirms Mailer's place within the main tradition of American literature: commenting on Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and Melville's *Pierre*, John Irwin's interesting study⁴¹ sheds light on *Ancient Evenings*, as it proposes that in Emerson, Poe and Melville there is a pre-occupation with Egypt as a vision of resurrection through reincarnation that is differentiated from the Hebraic version of the resurrection of the body. Thus, as the double-Ka approaches Osiris, an alien god who may represent the culminated strength of one's worth and yet who may also signal the shame of one's cowardice, the purpose of this journey through life, and into death and beyond is unclear, and ultimately a journey into the final dialectic of existence, the expression of destiny:

A pain is coming that will be like no pain felt before. I hear the scream of earth exploding. In this terror, vast as the abyss, I still know more than fear. Here, at the center of pain is

radiance. May my hope of heaven now prove equal to my ignorance of where I go. Whether I am the Second or the First Menehete, or the creature of our twice seven separate souls and lights, I would hardly declare, and so I do not know if I will labor in greed forever among the demonic or serve some noble purpose I cannot name.⁴²

In an entirely different context, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* expresses Mailer's conviction of the dialectical character of the form of one's being in the conflicting tensions which characterise Eugene McCarthy. Mailer posits himself centrally within the text, giving shape and form to events as they impinge upon, and are impinged upon by, his own consciousness, the means by which Mailer seeks to enter and so reveal the mysteries and visions to which liberal rationality is blind. Thus, of McCarthy, Mailer can say,

... yes, everything in McCarthy's manner spoke out in profound detestation of the Romantic impulse. Man was not his own project, not his own creation to be flung across the void in the hope that a thread of gray matter he might be carrying would end as a bridge right over the abyss, no, man was probably damned and where not damned, a damn fool, and so must always distrust the boldest and most adventurous of his own impulses. That McCarthy was also a Romantic could hardly be denied - only a Romantic would have dared the incalculable wrath aroused in Lyndon Johnson by the disruption of his volcanic properties, but McCarthy reaching out with his left hand for the taboo would restrain himself by the right.⁴³

Miami and the Siege of Chicago asserts Mailer's attempt at immortality through creativity. Mailer's belief in the masculine need to dominate a space corresponding to the inner space of the feminine womb finds expression in his efforts at conceiving and gestating the future, through writing of the present as if it were already the future, thereby anticipating the future. In such a way does he assert the existential quality of his life as a writer, "on the edge of the divide". Once again, Mailer's need

is to exacerbate the dialectical tensions he sees in all of existence as the parallel means of determining a form for the expression of himself, in writing. Thus, in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, as in *The Armies of the Night*, Mailer purposefully evokes his presence as writer, participant and witness, so as to establish and delineate a tension of interests and elements wherein the deeper, more resonant life of America as well as that of his own personality assumes greater clarity.

A pivotal example of this occurs in the later section of *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, as Mailer, the hero-protagonist, subjects himself to intense self-analysis: questioning his own fear, courage, cowardice, and more - his own relation to America, or more properly, the America of his imagination. Mailer's self-examination results from the discovery of an inner cowardice, a discovery even more traumatic as Mailer reflects upon his personal espousal of the need for bravery and heroism:

In consequence, as he left the Amphitheatre, he went off by a different route to his car, agitated, ashamed, overcome with curiosity that these liberals whom he had always scorned had the simple dedication tonight to walk through strange streets, unarmed, and with candles. Was it remotely possible that they possessed more courage than himself?⁴⁴

Having thus discovered his fear, Mailer is forced into a situation of existential confrontation. The context for any action Mailer may elect reverberates with the possibilities of danger; moreover, the outcome of any action Mailer may elect is unknown. Thus, Mailer is forced to confront the nature of his cowardice in terms of a seeming loss of personal bravery: in this way, he comes face to face with his most subliminal motivations, desires and weaknesses:

It seemed to him that he had been afraid all his life, but in recent years, or so it seemed, he had learned how to take steps into his fear, how to take the action which frightened him most (and so could free him the most). He did not do it always, who could? but he had come to think that the secret to growth was to be brave a little more than one was cowardly, simple as that, indeed why should life not be just so simple that the unlettered and untrained might also have their natural chance? It was a working philosophy and he had tried to follow it, but it seemed to him that he was deserting his own knowledge in these hours. Had his courage eroded more than his knowledge of fear ...?⁴⁵

The realisation of these questions is the basis for the remarkable chapter which follows, which is significant both in terms of the sincerity of Mailer's confessional self-examination, and in terms of its larger, thematic intent and force. Mailer's purpose is to demonstrate, through his own tortuous experience of self-confrontation, the dialectical interplay of the personal and the political, the individual and the social network. Further, this chapter encapsulates one of Mailer's most significant existential ethics: that we grow when we face, with courage, our most resonant fears, weaknesses or desires; that if, indeed, the discovery one makes in this manner results in the action to overcome fear or cowardice; or the horrible possibility of some desires is realised, then we are contributing, a little more, to our final destiny (which is, of course, a destiny grounded in the dialectical conferring of God and the Devil). Thus, as Mailer confronts, and examines both his fear, and the "much reasoned argument in its support" he is involved in a process of uncovering what is truest and most implacable in his own self, and his perception of America:

... he looked into his reluctance to lose even the America he had had, that insane warmongering

technology land with its smog, its super-highways, its experts and its profound dishonesty. Yet it had allowed him to write - it had even not deprived him entirely of honors, certainly not of an income. He had lived well enough to have six children, a house on the water, a good apartment, good meals, good booze, he had even come to enjoy wine. A revolutionary with a taste in wine has come already half the distance from Marx to Burke; he belonged in England where one's radicalism might never be tested; no, truth, he was still enough of a novelist to have the roots of future work in every vein and stratum he had encountered, and a profound part of him (exactly that enormous literary bottom of the mature novelist's property!) detested the thought of seeing his American society - evil, absurd, touching, pathetic, sickening, comic, full of novelistic marrow - disappear now in the nihilistic maw of national disorder.⁴⁶

As the tone of Mailer's self-examination becomes gradually more self-pitying, it becomes apparent that his incapacity to act in any way is the basis for the sense of crippling inertia by which his *angst* derives its meaning. Occurring no less than four times in various novels and pieces, Mailer's conviction that philosophy is meaningless unless it acquires shape in action is stated emphatically as follows: "How poor to go to death with no more than the notes of good intention. It is the actions of men and not their sentiments which make history". Mailer suggests that it is only by testing one's heart-felt beliefs and convictions in action that the worth of such values and beliefs may be determined. As such, Mailer's malaise in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* is two-fold: not only is he caught in dialectical deliberation where no easy alternative for action exists or the possibility of acquiring some form of balance between alternatives does not appear to be possible, but he lacks also the forum for testing, and so determining the worth of his decisions for action. The quality of the dialectic is

characterised negatively as conflict and indecision, the basis of which is a niggling sense of self-chagrin and self-disgust:

... he knew he was buried once again in those endless ledgers he kept on the balance between honor and shame, yes, on the way to the Amphitheatre tonight, driving south on a street parallel to Michigan Avenue, he had passed a gas station where many National Guard were standing about, and the odor of tear gas was prevalent. There had been a suggestion to stop and investigate, but he had refused. Perhaps it had been his fatigue, but he had been feeling undeniably timorous. He spent time reassuring himself that he had made an honest effort, and by an honest effort had he lost. There had been no need to go out on these last marches. By the terms of his speech, it made no sense to scuffle along with a token number of delegates who could be easily arrested and as easily look foolish - of that, he was still convinced he was correct. No sense therefore to poke one's nose into a scene of teargassing a block away. These arguments were no good: all the while he drank he knew he was floundering in bad conscience.⁴⁷

If the Mailer of *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* is hopelessly divided between the certainty of his fear and the stringent demands of his conscious awareness of the need to defeat this fear, Mailer-as-author extends the same portrait of the dialectical self in his dissection of Marilyn Monroe, "sweet angel of sex".⁴⁸ Mailer's treatment of Marilyn is the singularly possessive adoration of one long obsessed with the movie star; in fact, Marilyn becomes, for Mailer, the archetypal blonde, less a woman than the embodiment of all women. Mailer's understanding of Marilyn is, furthermore, the imposition of his thesis of dialectics, as he proposes that Marilyn can be determined only in the multiplicity of her various identities; that within her personality existed a deep-rooted conflict which was itself the definition of her being. Mailer's conviction that "exceptional people (often the most patriotic, artistic, heroic or prodigious)

had a way of living with opposites in themselves that could only be called schizophrenic when it failed"⁴⁹ is the basis for his portrait of her as the embodiment of paradox: he suggests that there is no trait of personality characterising Marilyn without its opposite also being true of her. Moreover, Mailer's own attempt to transcend the experience of his being and so enter Marilyn's is couched in the dialectical terms of their individual destinies:

No matter how much he could learn about her, he could never have the simple invaluable knowledge of knowing that he liked her a little, or did not like her, and so could have a sense that they were working for the same god, or at odds.⁵⁰

In *Marilyn*, Mailer proposes the idea which flourished into the full-blown thesis of *Ancient Evenings* and which is also the core to the extraordinary vision and structural complexity of *Tough Guys Don't Dance*:

... it could be time to look upon human behaviour as possessed of a double root. While the dominant trunk of our actions has to be influenced by the foreground of our one life here and now and living, the other root may be attached to some karmic virtue or debt some of us (or all of us) acquired by our courage or failure in lives we have already lived.

As such, Mailer conceives of Marilyn as the heir to a vast network of conflicts, obsessions, imperatives and karmic debts, courtesy of the concentrated insanity of her familial past. Mailer's contention that Marilyn can be understood only in terms of the contrary aspects and parts of her personality is the effort to construe her novelistically as the only way in which the complex and contradictory tensions characterising her life and being may be understood. Given that Mailer's thematic impetus is to discover the truth of her "unspoken impulses," the

novelist sets himself a large task: to approach the reality of a figure who has already assumed the proportions of myth, in terms that are idiosyncratic and belong to a conception of her that is both fictional and personal.

As the same time, Mailer's perception and rendering of the biographical detail of Marilyn's life is astute, and grounded in a sensitive awareness of the cultural milieu in which she assumed the myth-like proportions of her fame. *Marilyn*, most importantly, however, is the promulgation of a personal thesis of dialectics which states that Marilyn Monroe was subject to the conflicts and separate desires of a nature which attained definition through duality. That she also happened to be real, and more, the embodiment of the cultural aspirations and dreams of generations establishes a further dialectic between the reader's expectations of fiction and the satisfaction of those expectations by Marilyn's iconographic status. Essentially, Mailer is concerned with furthering his conception of Marilyn as the dialectical embodiment of the various desires and needs by which her personality assumed the proportions of her fantasies. Marilyn is seen by Mailer as a presence motivated by "magic, incantation, spell and necrophilia"; an actress who infused her artistry with "the transmutations of a sorceress"⁵² and whose life was surrounded by omens. Mailer sees Marilyn as reflecting a double psyche, but one in which the interdependence of the divergent parts has been fragmented:

If we are indeed born with a double psyche and so are analogous in our mental life to twin trees, possessed of one personality which is plunged into the life before us, and of another karmic root that retains some unconscious recollection of another existence from which we derive, it is not the same as saying that because each of us builds

a mental life on two fundamentally separate personalities, that we are all therefore, in the old fashioned sense, schizophrenic. Two personalities within one human being may be better able to evaluate experience (even as two eyes gauge depth), provided the personalities are looking more or less in the same direction. A fragmented identity is the refusal of one personality within oneself to have any relations with the other. If such a notion has value, let us assume that the conditions of an orphanage are suited to creating too wan a psyche and too glamorous a one. Since the orphan's presence in the world is obliged to turn drab, the life of fantasy, in compensation, can become extreme. We are all steeped in the notion that lonely withdrawn people have a life of large inner fantasy, what may be ignored is the tendency to become locked into a lifelong rapture with one's fantasy, to become a narcissist. The word, however, fails to suggest the hermetic imprisonment of such a love affair, or the depth of the incapacity to love anyone else, except as a servant to one's dream of glamour. Since there is also a great tendency for every bastard to become a narcissist - the absence of one parent creating a sense of romantic mystery *within oneself*, within one of the two governing senses of self, the future Marilyn Monroe was by illegitimate birth already in a royal line of narcissists. The orphanage would confirm it. She would come out an orphan - which is to say a survivor - which is to say her love affair would be of necessity with herself.⁵³

Underlying Mailer's portrait of Marilyn in this book is his belief that one uncovers the nature of one's selfhood within the various roles and situations that force confrontation with what is most essential and true of one's nature. That is, existing within a network of various social forces means that the way one decides to act in a given situation represents the discovery of some truth of one's being. Mailer's portrait of Marilyn locates her desperate search for selfhood in and beyond the various identities she created for herself in the myriad roles she assumed: that of the working-class Italian queen whilst married to Joe DiMaggio; that of the Jewish princess, wife of the famous playwright, Arthur Miller; that of the quintessential movie star.

To Mailer, identity exists within the roles we assume or create for ourselves, by which means we discover the truth, or worth, of our selfhood: for example, in *The Armies of the Night*, Mailer assigns himself the various roles of Master of Ceremonies, general, actor, director, ambassador, banker, historian and novelist; all of which enable Mailer, and the reader, to discover a little more about his capacity for wild extravagance, courage, and moxy before adversity. Thus, Mailer can say of Marilyn,

... she is the whole and double soul of every human alive. It is ... as if an ambitious and sexual woman might not only be analogous in her particular ego and unconscious life to Madame Bovary ... but rather is a woman with two personalities, each as complex and inconsistent as an individual. This woman, then, is better seen as Madame Bovary and Nana all in one, both in one, each with her own separate unconscious. Of course, that is a personality which is not seriously divided ... It is when Nana and Joan of Arc exist in the same flesh ... that the abysses of insanity are under the fog at every turn. ... double Monroe, one hard and calculating cunt (no other English word is near) and that other tender animal, an angel, a doe at large in blonde and lovely human form. ... It is her transcendence of these opposites into a movie star that is her triumph.⁵⁴

whilst also concluding that within such transcendence exists the root of her demise: she is unable, finally, to reconcile the public image - the roles she is assigned and which she assigned to herself - with her belief that somewhere, beyond those roles, existed the centre of her self.

Mailer's portrait of Marilyn reverberates with the suggestions and implications of myth, magic and mystery, although his perception of the nature of her being does not extend much beyond his definition of her as divided by the oppositions and conflicts of her personality; and her desperate need to create something akin to identity out of the vast theatre of roles, men,

relationships and experiences which gave meaning to her life. The primary achievement of *Marilyn*, explored with even greater license in *Of Women and Their Elegance*, is the consolidation of a personal psycho-philosophy of dialectics. In *Marilyn*, Mailer's attempt is to contain a shifting, complex personality in the poetic and literary tensions of the novel and thereby mirror the internal conflicts and oppositions characterising the fictional Marilyn's personality. In a very real sense, Marilyn Monroe is Mailer's most consistent fictional representation and exploration of the dialectical self. She is the unspoken presence offering meaning to Mailer's characterisation of women, all of whom, individually and in relation to each other, manifest the dark/light, brunette/blonde dichotomy. Mailer delineates this dialectic in the systemic oppositions - Cherry/Deborah; Patty-Jessica/Madeleine; Rama-Nefru/Nefertiri - which underscores his masculine perspective and his inability to construe women except as a means of expression of the self-same thesis of dialectics.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Poirier, p. 79.
- ² *Advertisements for Myself*, pp. 270-271.
- ³ *The Prisoner of Sex*, p. 116.
- ⁴ *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 285.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 441-442.
- ⁶ *The Presidential Papers*, p. 258.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 260-261.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 276.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 258.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 277.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 282.
- ¹² Poirier, p. 115.
- ¹³ *Cannibals and Christians*, pp. 236-237; see also, *The Presidential Papers*, p. 214.
- ¹⁴ *The Presidential Papers*, p. 306.
- ¹⁵ *The Deer Park*, p. 211.
- ¹⁶ *Of a Fire on the Moon*, pp. 29-30.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- ²² *The Fight*, p. 35.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 143.
- ²⁶ *Ancient Evenings*, p. 31.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

- 28 Ibid., pp. 203-204.
- 29 Ibid., pp. 648-649.
- 30 Ibid., p. 652.
- 31 Ibid., p. 651.
- 32 *The Prisoner of Sex*, p. 117.
- 33 *The Armies of the Night*, p. 36.
- 34 Poirier, p. 94.
- 35 *Ancient Evenings*, p. 529.
- 36 Ibid., pp. 530-531.
- 37 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 270.
- 38 *Ancient Evenings*, p. 707.
- 39 Ibid., pp. 707-708.
- 40 Ibid., p. 708.
- 41 John Irwin, *American Heiroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Heiroglyphics in the American Renaissance*, Yale University Press, 1980.
- 42 *Ancient Evenings*, p. 709.
- 43 *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 116.
- 44 Ibid., p. 179.
- 45 Ibid., pp. 179-180.
- 46 Ibid, p. 181.
- 47 Ibid., p. 206.
- 48 *Marilyn*, p. 15.
- 49 Ibid., p. 19.
- 50 Ibid., p. 19.
- 51 Ibid., p. 23.
- 52 Ibid., pp. 149-151.
- 53 Ibid., pp. 37-38.
- 54 Ibid., p. 97.

SECTION 1.

CHAPTER 3: CHOICE MADE MANIFEST: THE DIALECTICAL SELF

Mailer's belief in the essential duality of the individual self, the internal dialectic wherein opposed or conflicting desires and compulsions both seek expression, is the basis for the thematic and metaphoric structuring of his writing. Mailer is an existentialist for whom the alternatives for action in a given situation reflect the divergent demands of one's inner, divided compulsions; the way in which one chooses to act thereby vindicates whatever is truest of one's selfhood. Mailer, then, believes that within all individuals lies the potential for heroism or compromise, expressed as the ability to grow or the tendency to retreat backwards into something less. One discovers one's potential for growth in the experience of existential confrontation. Further, Mailer views each individual as manifesting the destiny of God, who is engaged in an existential battle with the Devil, the expression of decreation and dissolution. The way in which one chooses to dispose of one's life in action, therefore, aligns one unquestioningly on the side of the Devil - sterility, laxity, cowardice - or on the side of God - creativity, courage, individualism. The measure of the latter is the ability to be better than one thought oneself capable of becoming, an assertion of oneself that is an effort, an act of will, a test of strength.

It is the denial of, or refusal to confront, such possibilities for growth, which results in death, asserts Mailer: the denial of the opportunity to grow, to become more than one assumes one is capable of becoming, means that one has retreated into something less. It is only as one comes face to face with

one's most subliminal fears and desires, strengths and weaknesses that one is, indeed, able to gauge the state of one's psychic health: the necessary basis for any action to vindicate one's capacity to grow. What Mailer is suggesting is that, no matter how awful the implications, one must dare to "enter" one's potentialities and possibilities, in order to confront, and so come to an understanding of the essential truth of oneself. It is by such efforts that the individual grows in the dynamic and existential sense of moving forward to the realisation of new possibilities and fresh opportunities for oneself.

Mailer states his thesis enigmatically: "Somewhere in the deep coma of mortal illness or the transfixed womb of danger, death speaks to us. If we make our way back to life, we are armed with a new secret".¹ Mailer is attempting to explain (one suspects essentially to himself) the fact of Hemingway's suicide in the personal, dialectical terms of a private flirtation with death as the confrontation with his, Hemingway's own capacity to endure the seductive call of death to its own mysteries, against the fear and terror of death itself:

I wonder if, morning after morning, Hemingway did not go downstairs secretly in the dawn, set the base of his loaded shotgun on the floor, put the muzzle to his mouth, and press his thumb into the trigger. There is a no-man's land in each trigger. For the dull hand it is a quarter of an inch. A professional hunter can feel to the division of a millimetre the point where the gun can go off. He can move the trigger up to that point and yet not fire the gun. Hemingway was not too old to test his skill. Perhaps he was trying the deed a first time, perhaps he had tried just such a reconnaissance one hundred times before, and felt the touch of health return ninety times, ninety respectable times when he dared to press the trigger far into the zone where the shot could go. ... On that particular morning in July, it is not impossible he said (because the curiosity could be that indeed he talked to himself the way

he talked in his books), Look, we can go in further. It's going to be tricky and we may not get out, but it will be good for us if we go in just a little further, so we have to try ...²

Mailer subsequently betrays even the logic of the preceding passage when, in *The Fight*, he bitterly decries the ambiguity of Hemingway's death.³ One suspects Mailer's need to counter something as potentially chaotic as death with the suggestion of implicit choice, by which one enters or refutes death out of a clear sense of the alternatives as they manifest brave or cowardly action, growth or stasis.

Mailer's perception of the dialectical self is extended to posit the individual in a dialectical relation to an undifferentiated social context. At the same time, the totalitarian, wholly unyielding force of the status quo is founded on a basis of deep-seated contradictions and divisions; the schizophrenic core of American life. President John F. Kennedy brought this schizophrenic quality of dislocation into focus: Kennedy appealed at the level of harsh, political reality; at the same time he embodied the fantasies of a national of movie-goers, a nation of people who daily inhabited dreams of mystery and intrigue, glamour and adventure:

Since the First World War Americans have been leading a double life, and our history has moved on two rivers, one visible, the other underground; there has been the history of politics which is concrete, factual, practical and unbelievably dull if not for the consequences of the actions of some of these men; and there is a subterranean river of untapped ferocious, lonely and romantic desires, that concentration of ecstasy and violence which is the dream life of the nation.⁴

The contradiction, explicit as the "double life" of Americans occurred as "mass man" assumed electronic and technological precedence in the Twentieth Century. The Twentieth Century saw

the emergence of a fearful phenomenon: man became as interchangeable as commodities; blandness and sameness replacing the vitality of individuality and the search for new frontiers of experience. However, simultaneously, Americans still held fast to "the dynamic myth of the Renaissance - that every man was potentially extraordinary"⁵ and when the western frontier could be broached no longer, the belief in the personal possibilities for heroism was displaced to the artificial rendering of heroes and myths in Hollywood. The film industry maintains the "dream life" of Americans with a force to equal the obsession with the factual, the marketable, with technology, business and economics. Indeed, the two currents of American life exist in a relationship of mutual dependency:

And this myth, that each of us was born to be free, to wander, to have adventure and to grow on the waves of the violent, the perfumed, and the unexpected, had a force which could not be tamed no matter how the nation's regulators - politicians, medicos, policemen, professors, priests, rabbis, ministers, *ideologues*, psychoanalysts, builders, executives and endless communicators - would brick in the modern life with hygiene upon sanity, and middle-brow homily over platitude; the myth would not die. Indeed, a quarter of the nation's business must have depended upon its existence. But it stayed alive for more than that - it was as if the message in the labyrinth of the genes would insist that violence was locked with creativity, and adventure was the secret of love.⁶

Mailer moves from the macro to the micro - from the collective psyche to the individual - in order to give emphasis to his themes in what he would see as a personal, as opposed to a political, context. Much of his writing about the American social milieu forms the basis for his further conception of the specifically American individual. This is because Mailer's vision of the individual in existential confrontation with an

inner, dialectical conferring has its basis in the experience of being American. Thus, Stephen Rojack in *An American Dream* (as the title might suggest), in his adventures with the factual and hard-nosed world of Roberts and Leznicki as well as the frightening and mysterious world of voices and strange omens is Mailer's encapsulation of a particularly American phenomenon where such seemingly disparate experiences are matched and married in the fabric of the cultural reality. In fact, Rojack does not reflect the opposition, it is a constituent part of his being; it is this "double life" of the American individual.

Mailer's postulation of opposition is, of course, his way of dissipating vagueness, or, indeed, any formlessness which is an indication of chaotic entropy. This is why much of Mailer's writing delineates people and things in terms of a binary reduction of life to its absolute oppositions - brutes and victims, square versus hip, cancer versus orgasm, love and death, being and nothingness, God and the Devil. the individual gains the form of his being as he confronts his own possibilities implicit in such oppositions, and electing to act in a particular way, by which some truth of the self - that one is hip, for example - is made known. One is, therefore, both the sum of one's constituent parts as well as the potentialities one carries within oneself: "was Nixon a man who would prove strong enough, or was one to fear his weaknesses would make him prove too strong?"⁷ Indeed, Richard Nixon becomes, for Mailer, the embodiment of the modern American malaise - an ambiguity of vision in which the form of opposition has become blurred, indistinct: the absence, in fact, of the dialectic; the presence, only, of contradiction and division:

... for the first time (Mailer) had not been able to come away with an intimation of what was in a politician's heart, indeed did not know if he was ready to like Nixon, or detested him for his resolutely non-poetic binary system, his computer's brain, did not know if the candidate were real as a man, or whole as a machine, lonely in his sad eminence or megalomaniacal, humble enough to feel the real wounds of the country or sufficiently narcissistic to dream the tyrant's dream - ... He had no idea at all if God was in the land or the Devil played the tune.⁸

Mailer's sense of an inner dialogue between opposing or conflicting desires and compulsions, or, where such dialogue is non-existent, the schizophrenic dislocation of the dialectic, has occupied Mailer's thoughts from the outset of his writing. As early as *The Naked and the Dead*, Mailer presaged Part Three of that book with the following passage from Nietzsche, "Even the wisest among you is only a disharmony and hybrid of plant and phantom. But do I bid you become phantoms or plants?"⁹ Mailer wishes to emphasise the dialectical nature of any situation in which one must choose, in order to act. Of course, Mailer believes that this is implicit in any given situation - his perspective delineates the myriad alternatives for action as expressing one's inner opposed, conflicting or complementary desires and motivations, and the way one acts manifests the worth, or shape of one's being as the vindication of one's best possibilities, or, alternatively, the expression of one's compromise or cowardice - acquiescence to inertia or action which does not express one's heart-felt urge: the division, in Mailer's terms, between the propensity for courage and the debilitating presence of cowardice. Robert Merrill's informative study of Mailer notes that both Hemingway and Mailer espouse an important ethic of courage - the need for a sense of personal

heroism - but whereas *A Farewell to Arms* establishes Hemingway's mature conviction that life is itself a tragedy, that "If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them so of course it kills them ..." ¹⁰ Mailer's reiterated conviction emphasises the need for individual acts of courage, even against a context of fear and uncertainty. In this sense, the decision to act in a certain way assumes meaning only in the vindication of the action itself; the "countered halves" of one's inner nature reveal the form of one's being as one acts to realise one's truest, most resonant desires and motivations.

The body of Mailer's work exhibits progressive maturity and refinement (if not development) of this theme, and one notices the distinct difference in treatment of the simple, binary oppositions of *The Deer Park*, for example, and the later suggestion of the inner dialectic as an archetypal polarity: by the time Mailer came to write *The Presidential Papers*, his belief in the dialectical consciousness, manifesting conflicting and complementary motivations, has been refined sufficiently to suggest that the fight between Patterson and Liston is an archetypal opposition, present within all individuals. This is why Mailer can postulate something as seemingly absurd as the passage in *Of Women and Their Elegance*, in which Mailer's fictional Marilyn Monroe and a character named Bobby, plan the murder of Bobby's wife. Mailer's intent is partly to explore the bounds and limitations of a reality - Marilyn Monroe - which has become fictionalised both as his effort and in the proportions of her fame, but his more serious intent portrays the archetypal double-soul - the nature of the consciousness that both seeks and

is repelled by violence, the angel admonishing as the whore seeks gratification:

He squeezed my arm so hard I could feel the bruise instantly. 'No', he said, 'we'll finish her off like the dog.'

What I couldn't believe was the excitement it gave me. I was nearer to myself than I ever wanted to be. I remembered then what Abraham Robert Charles had said a few nights before, and I saw inside myself to the other soul, the one that never spoke. It was ready to think of murder.¹¹

In fact, Mailer states the case rather more explicitly earlier in the book through the character, Abraham Robert Charles, who postulates the notion of a double soul, rather like our father and our mother within us: "Two souls meet when a baby is conceived ... Afterward, for the rest of your life you had to contend ... with those two different souls. Each became a separate person inside you. Both were receiving the same experience every day, but in different ways. It was like two naked actors in a closet who fought over each piece of clothing you handed in so one of them could get dressed for a role".¹² One recalls Mailer's statement in *Marilyn*, "exceptional people ... had a way of living with opposites in themselves that could only be described as schizophrenic when it failed", but by the time Mailer came to write *Of Women and Their Elegance*, his view of the double-soul encompassed not only exceptional people, but all people, a view which forms the thematic and metaphoric base of *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, written only four years after *Of Women and Their Elegance*.

Mailer's later writing directs its interest to the individual who has confronted the inner dialectic of conflicting urges and motivations, but where the context for determining the action to vindicate the worth of one's selfhood is debilitatingly

uncertain. In *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, for example, Tim Madden's notion of what it means, and how he should act, to be a man is continually confounded by the sense of ambiguity characterising the sexual attitudes and proclivities of all around him - even Mailer seems to suggest a far more complex thesis than the title would imply, for the effort required to be a man. The wildly extravagant prose of *Ancient Evenings* emphasises the point by positing the individual in a state of absolute dialectical uncertainty, demonstrated as the God, Set, confronts both the (supposed) conviction of personal valour (his act in bugging Horus, and refusing to allow himself to be bugged) against the evidence denying this conviction:

'It would not have been over, and Set might have plotted another revenge, but on His return to camp, He found out He was pregnant. A God may conceive a child by His mouth, or His anus, but if we know it was here by way of the mouth, Set did not. A miserable pregnancy! The creature was born half-man, half-woman, and soon died in the suffocations of attempting to make love to Itself. Set still serves as the Lord of Lightning and the God of Thunder, but He is bewildered, a heavy and near-motionless God who cannot be certain whether He told the truth, or was, indeed, bugged.'¹³

Importantly, the basis of the preceding passage from *Ancient Evenings* is Mailer's belief that the nature of totalitarianism is manifest both as an external force, characterised as sterility and conformity, and made explicit in the presence of technology and the mass media - as well as an internal condition manifest as the rejection of any individual of the challenge of the inner dialectic. Mailer stresses the need for the individual to exist as a dynamic being, by which he means that one is either growing - acting in such a way to mirror the truth of some newly discovered knowledge of oneself - or one is retreating into

something less, the literal dissipation of one's being. The inner dialectic, therefore, expresses one's infinite possibilities, both for growth and for death, the latter, of course, a state of being characterised entropically as the absence of form, the inability to act in order to vindicate one's best possibilities. The thesis is expressed most coherently and explicitly, in "The White Negro," and Mailer's hip view is essentially a romantic affirmation of the individual's capacity to realise his true potential, his best possibilities.

Mailer wishes to restore faith in the individual; to return the individual to himself in the sense of affirming the individual's faith in the "counsel of the heart". This is why, for example, *An American Dream* has correctly been referred to as a tale of salvation: Rojack's radical acts of murder, buggery and voodoo are the means by which he reclaims his lost "center", the sense of his selfhood, through the confrontation of his most dire possibilities and the discovery of his capacity for courage, and for love. At the outset of the novel, Rojack feels that he has "come to the end of a very long street. ... I had come to decide I was finally a failure"¹⁴ and Mailer suggests a direct correlation between Rojack's state of nihilistic apathy, and the existence he has come to inhabit: sterile, compromised, amoral. The existence thus described has resulted from moral dislocation; in the terms of Rojack's own philosophy, the loss of a capacity for dread in the Kierkegaardian sense. In essence, the inability to measure the moral quality of one's actions and attitudes, because the moral basis of evaluating action and attitude has been displaced, means that one exists in a moral vacuum. In the Kierkegaardian sense, one has lost one's sense of "primitive awe"

before the most profound questions of existence: death, life, God, the Devil. Instead, the Faustian urge of the Twentieth Century has led to a misplaced faith in the (technological) achievements of man, the inability to bear the suggestion of the supernatural, and the resultant loss of moral sense - the suggestion of the rightness, or wrongness of action, attitude and outcome.

The necessity therefore, of discovering, instinctually, the truth of one's buried nature - the subliminal motivations and desires which seek issue in action - is a moral necessity because one has therefore discovered the basis for making a decision to act with a clear sense of what is worthwhile for oneself (against the arbitrariness of isolated actions leading to indeterminate effects). Mailer explicates the point in the following comparison of what might be called directed and directionless violence:

The kind of modern totalitarianism which we find in America, however, is as different from classical Fascism as is a plastic bomb from a hand grenade. The hand grenade makes an imprecise weapon. Thrown into a room full of people, one cannot know who will be hurt, who will be killed, who will escape. But the aggression is still direct: a man must *throw* the grenade, and so, in the French sense of the word, he must 'assist' at the performance of the act. He would have some idea of whom he was throwing it at. Whereas, the *bombe plastique* ... consisted of a kind of putty which could be left in a trash-basket or stuck onto a wall. When it went off, an hour or two after its placement, only laws of chance were operating. The bomber could not know whom he was killing for he was usually miles away. ... The actor was now wholly separated from his act.¹⁵

What is crucial in the preceding passage is the sense of connection between the act, and the individual responsible for the action. Mailer implies that any action which is the result

of the conscious decision of the individual is moral, because one has thereby chosen to act in a particular way against one's knowledge of whatever may inhibit, or endanger one. Thus, even Rojack's reprehensible acts of murder and sodomy represent, within Mailer's particular ethical perspective, the conscious and moral decision of an individual desperately seeking salvation, to reject the nihilistic social context he has come to inhabit.

The practical application of the thesis behind *An American Dream* was thought to be the basis for Mailer's near-fatal stabbing of his second wife, Adele. Such speculation is worthless, although it is possible to correlate this incident with the intent of Mailer's most important thesis, which is to demonstrate that the true test of courage - the test of one's worth - is found only in action, but it is the consciousness of having chosen to act in a certain way against one's knowledge of whatever would inhibit that action which lends meaning to the shape of one's selfhood. Consider for example, the following passage from "Advertisements For Myself On the Way Out" in which the hip ethic is pitched against a dual recognition of the price one must pay for gambling with one's soul: the hipster, after all, is engaged in a quest of fulfilling his needs against the estimate of how he might have to pay for his "kicks" either in a future life, or in Hell:

... he knew, perhaps as well as anyone alive, how costly is defeat when it is not soothed by greater consciousness, and how wasteful is the profit of victory when there is not the courage to employ it. So he knew the danger of inertia (if one does not grow, one must pay more for remaining the same), and for months there had been a decision he was unable to make: as had happened before, he felt his powers leaving him. His strength came from decision and action, he was religious (in a most special way to be sure), he was superstitious



with the most sophisticated of superstitions, but as a practical matter he believed in the reality of Hell, and he had come to the point in his life, as he had foreseen in terror many a time, when the flux of his development, the discovery of the new beauties of his self-expression, depended on murdering a man.¹⁶

For Mailer, to refuse to admit the existence of a particular desire and to refuse to allow this desire expression, results in a rebellion of the cells which is the literal embodiment of the compromise of one's instinctual self. The rebellion of the cells - cancer - expresses the nature of entropy, defined as "energy still existing but lost for the purpose of doing work".¹⁷ In this way, Mailer's use of disease imagery affirms his belief in the mutual dependency of one's psychological and physical health. At a more complex level and on a grander scale, Mailer proposes, in *Barbary Shore*, that all human malaise, whether political, spiritual, psychological or sexual in nature, is traceable to the failure of the Russian Revolution. *Barbary Shore* is understood in terms of Mailer's statement, made some years after the book was written, "The growth of human consciousness in this century demanded - for its expanding vitality - that a revolution be made" and his dual conviction that the Russian Revolution, apart from being an important historical event, represented the culmination of an evolutionary process, itself the expression of the necessities of the human spirit. This view suggests a generic consciousness, a sense of a universal spirit of humankind for which a retreat to something less is manifest as a radical dislocation in the whole organism - an entropic retreat to formlessness and chaos.

If the social network, against which the individual must assert the strength and vitality of his being, represents the

entropic force of totalitarianism, this is different in kind to Mailer's assertion of the need of the individual to realise his best possibilities and reject compromise and cowardice. Mailer views society as a force separate from (but not alien to) the individual, and one which constantly threatens to overwhelm the individual. Thus, it is vital that one define one's self through the choice of a personal style (expressed in one's actions and attitudes) that differentiates one from the prevailing social context. The differentiation of the self in this sense is the basis of one's dialectical relationship with the social whole within which one necessarily exists; and in relation to, one defines the form of one's being. Mailer constantly engages the social macrocosm in order to delineate the individual's experience of a social reality which is both separate from, and yet intrinsic to the shape the individual inhabits. Most frequently, this is apparent in the journalistic writing which explicates Mailer's effort to define himself in terms of his relationship with the America of his vital and perceptive imagination. Diana Trilling explicates Mailer's conflicts and contradictions as they reflect his relationship with the country:

(Mailer's) work reveals (a more) abundant or urgent endowment (but) which is yet so little consistent with itself - so much moral affirmation coupled with so much moral anarchism; so much innocence yet so much guile; so much defensive caution but such headlong recklessness; so much despair together with so imperious a demand for salvation; so strong a charismatic charge but also much that offends or even repels; so much intellection but such a frequency of unsound thinking; such a grand and manly impulse to heroism but so inadequate a capacity for self-discipline; so much sensitiveness and so little sensibility; so much indignation and such insufficient art. Contradictions like these ... describe a talent which necessarily lives on the sharp edge of uncertainty. Yet to trace the

paradoxes in Mailer is not to figure an unknown constellation. It is to experience the shock of recognition, for in the sum of his contradictions he bears a striking resemblance to present-day America.¹⁸

Mailer's contradictions are better understood as the dialectical tensions which lend vitality to the writing; moreover, Mailer's metaphors, his extravagant use of imagery and his sensuous affinity for the language derive, in part, from a highly developed consciousness of the inconsistencies and internal contradictions of the language itself.

Contradiction, or, put another way, the relationship of opposition, defines form. The "statement" of one entity (that is, that which truly expresses the essential nature of something) in relation to a conflicting or opposing statement of another entity, creates a third entity - the form of that relationship. Hence, form is, in Mailer's terms, the "record of a relationship" which is necessarily dialectical - a "war-like relationship": "war reveals the balance of forces, discloses the style of the forces, it hints at the move from potential to the actual".¹⁹ A splendid example of the latter occurs in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, in which Tim Madden, engaged in a literal battle with the perverse and thugish Stoodie and Nissen, reclaims squandered courage by facing and defeating the force of cowardly violence as encapsulated by Stoodie and Nissen. Simply, the strength with which one counters a resisting environment is the measure of the strength or vitality of one's personal style, differentiated from the prevailing environment, and signifying the determination of the form of one's being. This, in turn, is the expression of one's best possibilities, the vindication of the strength, or will of one's selfhood which seeks issue in action.

Mailer's assertion of the dialectical relationship of the self and the social context which expresses the nature of one's differentiation from the social context (one's personal style) derives in part from the idiosyncratic relationship of the (American) individual and America itself. Mailer's assertion that "all acts of violence, love and war presuppose some unconscious dialogue with eternity. ... our unconscious dialogue with eternity assumes that America is closer to God's will than other lands"²⁰ delineates his conviction of the dialectic of individual consciousness and the social milieu, which embraces the collective consciousness of mankind. At the same time, the relationship which exists for the American individual, who has inherited the "dynamic myth of the Renaissance" - the sense of imaginative transcendence over any obstacle by which the myth of discovery upon greater discovery sought expression in the movement from frontier to Hollywood - with the America of everyday boredom and mediocrity entails a deep-seated inner division in which the dialectic has been undermined. Again, Mailer presents Marilyn Monroe as the focus for this particular phenomenon: she encapsulates the dreams and desires of a nation smitten by the possibility of their fulfillment but for whom the reality of an unbelievably dull and unadventurous life negates such aspirations:

She is now the secret nude of America's dream-life - secret precisely because it has been so public! Our heroine has been converted from some half-clear piece of cheesecake on the hazy screen of American newspapers (where focus always shifts) to another kind of embodiment altogether, an intimate, real as one's parents, one's family, one's enemies, sweethearts and friends. She is now part of that core of psychological substance out of which one concocts one's life judgement.²¹

In this way, Mailer conceives of the relationship between Marilyn and Arthur Miller as the encapsulated vision of the dream and its basis in reality:

We must picture this tall and timid hero of middle-class life, as guarded in his synapses as a banker, when he is visited by the return of a dream, a blonde and indescribable movie star as wild in reputation as the buried dynamos of American life (of which he has seen so little), and she is as delightful in her presence, as funny, as changeable, as interesting, and as remarkable as any adolescent dream of a heavenly blonde. Yet this blonde heaven wants him.²²

In fact, when Mailer says of Marilyn, "As if anticipating the big dinner at Peter Lawford's to honor the Attorney General, she has never looked more like a Kennedy than in Stern's pictures of her drinking champagne"²³ he unites the myth of the movie star with the myth of a political reality; emphasising the peculiarly American ability to harbour dreams and imaginings of grandiose dimensions within the context of a reality often horribly corrupt, painfully cruel, and most frequently, deadeningly mediocre.

The recognition of dialectical form is important to Mailer because it signifies self-recognition: the ability to act in the knowledge of what constitutes one's best possibilities. The denial or absence of the dialectic constitutes the principle of entropy, "the state of Being in the Twentieth Century ... close to the extinction of itself because of the diseases and disasters of soul over the centuries, the victories of the Devil".²⁴ Entropy - the inability of something or someone to organise itself - signifies, further, the dislocation of any principle, person or thing from its origins, and the absence of a proper relation to the context from which that principle, person or

thing has been derived. Such dislocation is most apparent in the loss of primitive awe characterising man's relation to his past. Traditionally, man's perception of his place in the universe was superstitious: he lived in a terror of offending the gods, demons and spirits who existed, for primitive man, in a continuum embracing time past, present and future. Mailer decries the Twentieth Century loss of faith in the super and sub orders of existence which has resulted in man's sense of himself as the indomitable (technological) presence in the universe. In this way, man has effectively undermined his sense of the past - his origins - which Mailer believes is intrinsic as the dialectical offset to one's sense of self in the present. The sense of a dislocated past - that is, history which exists in isolation, bearing no relation to the individual's perception of the present (which is, therefore, also dislocated time, in Mailer's conception of time), exists as a principle of entropy and which can be expressed aesthetically: "History was now made by cowards who gave no shape to History even as they blurred the shape of what we saw (those modern buildings without faces)".²⁵ As such, Mailer draws together the principle of entropy as the manifestation of the Devil's will, with the promulgation of a modern obsession with technology, plastic, and artificiality which has accelerated the dislocation of the individual from his environment, his own sensuous relation to his body, and ultimately, his being - his sense of autonomous self-worth.

Mailer has described *Why Are We in Vietnam?* as "a totem, not empty of amulets for the author against curses, static, and the pervasive malignity of our electronic air"²⁶ by which he means to lend emphasis to the pivotal dialectic of self and society, where

society, is perceived as a conspiracy of the forces of entropy, totalitarianism and "de-creativity". In the absence of such a dialectic exists, for Mailer, the nightmarish inability to determine the form, sense or quality of an event, person or thing against which one defines oneself. For example, early in *Of a Fire on the Moon*, Mailer concludes "that he hardly knew whether the Space Program was the noblest expression of the Twentieth Century or the quintessential statement of our fundamental insanity. It was after all the mark of insanity that its mode of operation was distinguished by its logic"²⁷ - and the impetus for this debilitating uncertainty is felt to be a deep-seated breakdown of moral order in the (American) Twentieth Century:

... after the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, it was updikey who had made the remark that God might have withdrawn His blessing from America. It was a thought which could not be forgotten for it gave insight to the perspectives of the Devil and his political pincers: Left-wing demons, white and Black, working to inflame the conservative heart of America, while Right wing devils exacerbated Blacks and drove the mind of the New Left and liberal middle class into prides of hopeless position. And the country roaring like a bull in its wounds, coughing like a sick lung in the smog, turning over in sleep at the sound of motorcycles, shivering at its need for new phalanxes of order. Where were the new phalanxes one could trust?²⁸

For Mailer, such dissipation of the vital dialectical tensions finds its corollary in the figure of Richard Nixon, "the spirit of television"; a man who is "without shame and certainly without fear".²⁹ Nixon is the impetus for Mailer's associative leap to a vision of America containing the possibilities within of both salvation and damnation - better the presence of tension, the vindication of the dialectic, than the absence of any ordering principle:

It might even be a measure of the not-entirely dead promise of America if a man as opportunistic as the early Nixon could grow in reach and comprehension and stature to become a leader. For, if that were possible in these bad years, then all was still possible, and the country not stripped of its blessing. New and marvellously complex improvement of a devil, or angel-in-chrysalis, or both good and evil now at war in the man, Nixon was at least, beneath the near to hermetic boredom of his old presence, the most interesting figure at the convention.³⁰

Better, also, the inner communication of opposition, the expression of form, the "back and forth, hate and sweet, leer-love, spit-tickle, bite-lick"³¹ of the dialectic, than the schizophrenia afflicting modern America:

All over America in the summer the night fields were now filled with Americans sleeping on air mattresses which reposed on plastic cloth floors of plastic cloth tents - what a sweet smell of Corporate Chemical, what a vat and a void to mix with all the balmy fermy chlorophylls and pollens of nature! America the Sanitary, and America the Wild, went out to sleep in the woods, Sanitary-Lobe and Wild-Lobe nesting together neatly, schizophrenic twins in the skull case of the good family American.³²

If Mailer conceives of America as divided in its cultural legacy to the mythic proportions of its origins of discovery and adventure, and the factual reality of the everyday compromise of such dreams and visions, he extends this theme to encompass the political conflicts and contradictions of both the Republicans and the Democrats. Thus, the strong certainty of the American WASP Republican - "Then the nation had lived in their mind like the sure strong son of their loins, and they had been ready to take the fight anywhere", shattered by the debacle in Vietnam - "How could the nation fail to win when its strength was as five to one, unless God had decided that America was not just?"³³ is translated by Mailer as Nixon's capacity to offer the strength of

renewed vision as well as the possibility of nullity and endemic insanity. In like manner, John F. Kennedy is perceived by Mailer not simply as a remarkable president whose untimely death spelled tragedy to the American soul, but as the embodiment, no less, of the "Existential Hero," in whom the nation could invest renewed faith in the (re-engaged) myth of their country:

With such a man in office the myth of the nation would again be engaged, and the fact that he was Catholic would shiver a first existential vibration of consciousness into the mind of the White Protestant. For the first time in our history, the Protestant would have the pain and creative luxury of feeling himself in some tiny degree part of a minority, and that was an experience which might be incommensurable in its value to the best of them.³⁴

Kennedy's near religious status as the heroic encapsulation of the promise of America is the context for Mailer's perceptive vision of the nation wherein the "American faith ... belief ... mystique that America was more than the sum of its constituencies, its trillions of dollars and billions of acres" resides in an unacknowledged, unadmitted assertion that "America ... was the world's ultimate reserve of rectitude, final garden of the Lord".³⁵ Mailer must, however, contain such conviction of the moral certitude of America's efforts within a dialectical equation in which the purpose of that effort is ambivalent. Mailer conceives of the American urge to dominate the world and the heavens as a desire to discover, or uncover the origins of time and space; and that the peculiarly American fancy is that such a discovery will align the American effort with the discovery of God. Mailer, of course, believes that in the urge itself lies the dialectic: is the purpose to discover God, or

will the Devil be revealed in this Faustian desire to wrestle knowledge from the unknown? Extending the dialectical equation, Mailer asserts the divided consciousness as the basis of the collective (American) psyche, postulating the individual as possessed of a deep inner conflict which expresses the dual compulsions to "Mystery" and to technology. As such, Aldrin, "with his prodigious will and senses oriented to technological rather than sensuous perception", in smuggling consecrated bread and wine aboard the space vehicle to celebrate communion on the moon becomes, for Mailer "the pure spiritual ancestor of that line which runs from Calvin, Luther ... to Edison, Ford and IBM's own Watson. ... he illumines something in the mystery of the Wasp, gives us purchase on that dichotomy between technology and dogma which inhabits their lives".³⁶

Mailer's fascination with America is directed specifically to those public spectacles - the political arena most frequently - which are for Mailer representative of the battle of forces within the American psyche and which manifest aspects of the national character which might otherwise remain hidden. The narrative in much of Mailer's writing thus constitutes an archetypal American duality for which Mailer's ambivalent involvement in many of the books is the pivotal expression. Most often, this duality concerns the separation, or dislocation of modern man from his primitive beginnings and instincts such that his lack of receptivity to mystery, to dread, to death and so on has resulted in a schizophrenic division of the modern soul for which the only "cure" is violence:

The love of the Mystery of Christ, however, and the love of no Mystery whatsoever, had brought the country to a state of suppressed schizophrenia so

deep that the foul brutalities of the war in Vietnam were the only temporary cure possible for the condition - since the expression of brutality offers a definite if temporary relief to the schizophrenic.³⁷

Thus, the dislocation of the individual and the primitive or instinctual orders of life is seen by Mailer in a specifically American context as an irreconcilable allegiance to both Christianity ("Mystery") and to technology ("the love of no Mystery whatsoever"), which has resulted in the deep schizophrenia affecting the American psyche.

The Armies of the Night is Mailer's attempt to come to an understanding of one instance of this deeply ingrained division. The title of the book, from Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach* - "And we are here as on a darkling plain/ Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, / Where ignorant armies clash by night" - implies that both factions in the war implicit in such division are ignorant and might be viewed as villains. Mailer construes the two sides of *The Armies of the Night* as embodying nihilism and totalitarianism respectively, a view which was to be reiterated in *Of a Fire On the Moon* in which "the awful air of America on its perpetual edge, nihilism gathering at the poles"³⁸ points toward the division of WASP and left radical, but where both factions suffer from an internal dislocation of action and belief. Mailer's analysis of the peculiarly American schizophrenia which has given expression to the division and conflict apparent in *The Armies of the Night* determines that the belief in America's indomitable superiority contains within it the unadmitted assertion that America expresses God's power: "They believed in America as they believed in God - they could not really ever expect that America might collapse and God yet

survive".³⁹ At the same time, the obsession with technology and scientific explanations for the experience of reality exists in opposition to the espousal of faith in God; the outcome, Mailer asserts, is a division in the national psyche which is no less than insanity, a sundering of "mind" and "soul":

Any man or woman who was devoutly Christian and worked for the American Corporation, had been caught in an unseen vice whose pressure could split their mind from their soul. For the center of Christianity was a mystery, a son of God, and the center of the corporation was a detestation of mystery, a worship of technology. ... The average American, striving to do his duty, drove further every day into working for Christ, and drove equally further each day in the opposite direction - into working for the absolute computer of the corporation. Yes and no, 1 and 0. Every day the average American drove himself further into schizophrenia; the average American believed in two opposites more profoundly apart than any previous schism in the Christian soul.⁴⁰

In contrast, in *An American Dream*, Stephen Rojack engages death, horror, mystery, hallucination and psychotic imaginings in order to regain the sense of dread and instinctual affinity with the primitive orders of life which he feels he has lost and which has resulted in the loss, also, of his "center". As Jan Hokenson puts the case, Rojack "tries to locate in himself as in the world the "fine divide between madness and sanity".⁴¹ That divide is encapsulated by Mailer in the deft shift in tonal focus from the brutally real world of Roberts, the Mafia, money, newspapers, parties and so on to the equally as real nightmare world of inner voices, commands from the moon, portentous odours and demons. Rojack, of course, demonstrates Mailer's existential ethic: that it is only by confronting our most violent or extreme possibilities that we can grow in self-knowledge, for true growth is possible only if courage is discovered and vindicated in a

situation that is both "serious and uncertain". Thus, Rojack's experience also represents the literal means of salvation from the plague of insanity and schizophrenia in which America is gripped. Once again, Mailer exhorts his theme in apocalyptic and metaphoric terms: "The great fear that lies upon America is not that Lyndon Johnson is privately close to insanity so much as that he is the expression of the near insanity of most of us ... A future death of the spirit lies close and heavy upon American life, a cancerous emptiness at the center which calls for a circus".⁴²

It is Mailer himself who often presents the conflict of ambivalence within his own tortured wrestlings and deliberations. Mailer, the author, is not Mailer, the protagonist of, for example, *The Armies of the Night* or *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*. Mailer's particular skill in dissecting and discovering the submerged or complex nature of events and people is located partly in the creation of a fictional Mailer, the encapsulation of the competing pulls of the various attitudes, habits and forces within American social milieu. In *The Armies of the Night*, for example, Mailer the protagonist is both the willing participant of a protest march against the war in Vietnam, as well as the sympathetic equal of those who are supposed to be his opponents. Similarly, the liberal intellectuals with whom Mailer is aligned socially and morally are portrayed by Mailer as suffering from moral dislocation - these people neatly separate thinking and obscenity, sex and some ultimate "scream and pinch of orgasm", vision and lust, justice from love of power.⁴³ Mailer wishes to exacerbate, in his writing and within the individual consciousness, the dialectical oppositions which, for

Mailer, constitute his ontology. Thus, Mailer himself creates a personal agitation in which the embarrassing memory of "the nice boy from Brooklyn" is used to offset "the man who courts the funky and the odiferous, who wants to get back from the "liberal party" in Washington to a quite different party in New York that has every promise of being wicked, tasty and rich".⁴⁴

It is the deprivation of, or the dislocation of these oppositions and tensions that Mailer decries. Whereas Mailer believes that the individual can grow in self-knowledge only by confronting the most elemental parts of one's being, it is fundamental that such confrontation engage the dialectical oppositions and conflicts so that what is truest of oneself be discovered. Mailer's identification of creativity and the imagination with the assertion of a minority viewpoint is his way of emphasising what for Mailer amounts to an imperative of dialectical certainty with regard individual consciousness:

Minority groups are the artistic nerves of a republic, and like any phenomenon which has to do with art, they are profoundly divided. They are both themselves and the mirror of their culture as it reacts upon them. they are themselves and the negative truth of themselves. No white man, for example, can hate the Negro race with the same passionate hatred that each Negro feels for himself and for his people; no anti-Semite can begin to comprehend the malicious analysis of his soul which every Jew indulges every day.⁴⁵

It is within a context of uncertainty and fear that confrontation with one's separate urges and allegiances occurs. This is the experience of self-reckoning that Mailer construes as necessary to defeat the prevailing tendency toward schizophrenia or cancer, both of which manifest the imbalance or dislocation of the internal dialectic of conflicting and complementary opposites. Such an existential moment of reckoning occurs for

Sam Slovoda in "The Man Who Studied Yoga", for whom the pivotal realisation that his life and ambition lack shape and motivation is countered by an epiphanatic insight into the expectations of the novelist that he, Sam possesses, and which he, Sam, has failed:

The novelist, thinks Sam, perspiring beneath blankets, must live in paranoia and seek to be one with the world; he must be terrified of experience and hungry for it; he must think himself nothing and believe he is superior to all. The feminine in his nature cries for proof he is a man; he dreams of power and is without capacity to gain it; he loves himself above all and therefore despises all that he is.

He is that, thinks Sam, he is part of the perfect prescription and yet he is not a novelist. He lacks energy and belief. It is left for him to write an article some day about the temperament of the ideal novelist.⁴⁶

Sam's recognition that his desire to rise above the mediocrity of his life through an epic novelistic effort is not larger than his acquiescence to the compromises of his life signals his abdication to cowardice. Thus, Sam's assertion that "One could not have a hero today ... a man of action and contemplation, capable of sin, large enough for good, a man immense. There is only a modern hero damned by no more than the ugliness of wishes whose satisfaction he will never know" is Sam's unwitting self-estimation; the unconscious decision he ultimately makes to deny himself the opportunity for courage and growth. His confrontation with his own inner compulsions, then, is denied as an opportunity for growth, because the implications of self-examination are too fearful: "what can he know of madness or religion? They are both so alien to him. ... He is the quarter-Jew, and yet he is a Jew, or so he feels himself, knowing nothing of Gospel, tabernacle, or Mass ... What ... whatever did

he know of penance? self-sacrifice? mortification of the flesh? the love of his fellow-man? Am I concerned with my relation to God? ponders Sam, and smiles sourly in the darkness. No, that has never concerned him ..."⁴⁷

Mailer's perception of the divided character of the psyche, and the dialectic of self and social context, differentiates between the public demands and private necessities which both seek expression within the individual in his quest for self-definition. Mailer's unspoken assertion is that the demands of one's inner compulsions and the necessity of one's public existence are contemporaneous: both exist as part of the inner dialectic by which the individual establishes his place in the world through action and decision. Thus, Mailer's themes do not demonstrate a simple polarity of opposed couples which are mutually exclusive of each other; rather, these oppositions exist in dialectical relation to each other wherein the nature of each helps define the other. Stephen Rojack, for example, defines the nature of God and the means of salvation in the discovery of the Devil's deeds; murder, sodomy. Thus, Mailer perceives of a complex interdependence within the nature of experience, by which no event can ever be understood in simple or one dimensional terms. This is because an event or personality is understood only in terms of the war of forces and inner compulsions which constitute the form of the event or person. Referring to Henry Miller in *The Prisoner of Sex*, Mailer confirms the American context for his theme of the interdependent, dialectical character of the conflicting forces within experience and entity: "Miller was a true American spirit. He knew that in a nation of transplants and weeds the best was always next to the worst, and

right after shit comes Shinola. It was all equal to him because he understood that it is never equal - in the midst of heaven a hole, and out of the slimy coruscated ridiculous comes a pearl"⁴⁸. Moreover, Mailer's romantic sensibility is convinced that greater dignity is afforded the individual who struggles to achieve his greatest dreams, and fails, than the individual who is content with a mediocre victory. In the struggle - the resistance to whatever would inhibit one - exists the opportunity and, indeed, the realisation of growth. In other words, the presence of conflict, or tension, is necessary as the means by which the form of something or someone is determined, and is therefore also the means by which entropy, and totalitarianism, are defeated. Indeed, the "back-and-forth" of the dialectic is also preferred to the onset of revolution (Mailer's fear in *The Armies of the Night*) in which dialectical conferring is lost to one-sided factionism.

Mailer's conviction of the complex interweavings of the personal and the public, the "inner" and the "outer", and which engage the dialectic of one's own dealings with experience is the thematic and structural basis of his work. This dialectical vision gains a maturity of expression which is profoundly realised in *An American Dream*, *Why Are We in Vietnam?* and, especially, *Tough Guys Don't Dance*. In the earlier novels, Mailer portrays his characters as the embodiment of certain qualities or characteristics and who realise their own divided response in conflict with another individual who, similarly, embodies the opposite of their own selves. This is apparent in *The Naked and the Dead* in the figures of Cummings and Hearn, in which the homosexual struggle for dominance foreshadows, for

example, "The Time of Her Time" and the realisation of feminine attributes in overt masculinity as one of Mailer's predominant themes. *Barbary Shore*, also, mechanistically draws together characters who are less than characters and more properly viewed as the embodiment of political allegiances; and in which couplings Mailer's allegory is made explicit: the affair between Lannie and Lovett, for example, represents the failure of the factions in the idealistic post-war Left to achieve reconciliation.

In *An American Dream*, Rojack's personal crime, the murder of his wife (who is involved with spies) and his "public" killing of four Germans converge as Mailer demonstrates that both fit into the larger design of international politics. Far from being a "shamelessly shabby deus ex machina"⁴⁹, as one critic put it, Mailer demonstrates that Rojack avoids prosecution for the murder of Deborah in accordance with the precepts of a larger scheme in which the linear equation of cause and effect is erroneous. Instead, Mailer's remarkable sentence construction, and his ingenious facility for evocative and sensuous imagery, draws together seemingly disparate ideas and concepts, suggesting the interdependent relationship of private and public neuroses, fears, desires and motivations. Consider, for example, the following passage:

Years later I read *Zen in the Art of Archery* and understood the book. Because I did not throw the grenades on that night on the hill under the moon, *it* threw them, and *it* did a near-perfect job. The grenades went off somewhere between five and ten yards over each machine gun, *blast, blast*, like a boxer's tatoo, one-two, and I was exploded in the butt from a piece of my own shrapnel, whacked with a delicious pain clean as a mistress' sharp teeth going 'Yummy' in your rump, and then the barrel of my carbine swung around like a long fine antenna

and pointed itself at the machine-gun hole of my right where a great bloody sweet German face, a healthy spoiled overspoiled young beauty of a face, motherlove all over its making, possessor of that overcurved mouth which only great fat sweet young faggots can have when their rectum is tuned and entertained from adolescence on, came crying, sliding, smiling up over the edge of the hole, 'Hello death!' blood and mud like the herald of sodomy upon his chest, and I pulled the trigger as if I were squeezing the softest breast of the softest pigeon which ever flew, still a woman's breast takes me now and then to the pigeon on that trigger, and the shot cracked like a birth twig across my palm, *whop!* and the round went in at the base of his nose and spread and I saw his face sucked in backward upon the gouge of the bullet, he looked suddenly like an old man, toothless, sly, reminiscent of lechery.⁵⁰

By association, Rojack's fantasies embrace heterosexuality, homosexuality, sodomy, blood, mud, female anatomy, childbirth; in a remarkable and disturbing catalogue of images, impressions and suggestions. Mailer's point is that the world of our experience is the reflection of our neurotic, or otherwise, imaginings. Thus, the world of experience and reckoning exists as an active participant in the dialectic of inner and outer forces and compulsions which direct action and motivation. John F. Kennedy is the "existential hero" of American politics in the same way that Marilyn Monroe is the "sweet angel of sex" in the American dream, because both seek to live in the "enormous present" of their imaginings and dreams of future fulfillment and power; where such fulfillment expresses the infinite possibilities of the collective imagination of the American nation. Thus, when Mailer says, "The urge to eat another does not exist in some cannibal we watch in the jungle, but in the hinge of our own jaws" he is suggesting the self-same collective experience of reality; which, if entered into in the existential sense of

Mailer's demand for self-confrontation, presages growth, and the discovery of the form of one's being.

Frequently, the discovery of one's inner possibilities, desires, compulsions and motivations is made sense of only in terms of the relation of the outer, external world to oneself. Thus, Rojack's murder stimulates self discovery and self-renewal because his act is a rebellious gesture of defiance against the entropic forces which seek to overtake and dissolve his "center" (self), but also, he can only discover the meaning of death by daring to admit the fascination it holds for him against his knowledge of death as a publicly feared and denied phenomenon. Mailer's vision of the complex and interdependent relation of the social other to the experience of oneself suggests the thematic undertones of *Why Are We in Vietnam?* in which the epistemological uncertainty of interpreting experience undermines the dialectical sense of one's relation to the experience of reality. That is, in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, any assumption that D.J. is a reliable interpreter and a consistent expression of experience is undermined by his continual, mocking dissuasion against the certainty of his identity. The narrative voice which tells the reader that it might belong to a crazed Harlem Negro who is hallucinating that he is a rich white boy in Texas also proposes the reverse, that he is "A Spade and writing like a Shade." In essence, the reader is told that one cannot be sure whose consciousness one is receiving, and that, anyway, there is not security in this consciousness.⁵¹ Once again, Mailer demonstrates his virtuosity and sensuous affinity for the evocative power of language to convey meaning at any number of levels. Mailer's sense of the lack of epistemological certainty

for interpreting experience is the basis for his exploitation, in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* of as many different levels of speech and communication channels which comprise the means by which modern Americans make sense of reality. From the obscenity riddled slang of the Harlem Negro to the Macluhan-esque jargon of the sociologist; from the pedantry of academic dissection and analysis to the often senseless chatter of the disk jockey, Mailer's narrative engages a vast array of linguistic and semantic subtleties in order to delineate the subtle imposition of versions of reality through the onset of technological advancement, the overwhelming and inescapable presence of the media, and the insidious efforts of the corporation to dominate all of existence.

Mailer's impetus is to emphasise the corrosion of dialectical form; where the multiple voices of *Why Are We in Vietnam?* work against each other to undermine the reader's sense of what is, in any case, a shifting, formless reality: the reality of the text. The text in this case, is not only concerned with a political and moral debacle in the history of the United States but also embodies the condition which has precipitated that debacle. Mailer is preoccupied with the schizophrenia which has sundered the political life and the dream life, the religious life and the life of everyday experience which is divorced from consideration of superstition and mystery; the life which is hip in its existential relation to the pure moment of experience and the life which is square in its considered denial of the opportunity to explore the limitations and potential of an unknown situation. Mailer's response is to exacerbate the dialectical tensions which have become dislocated

in the absence of any relation - that is, form - by which opposed or conflicting compulsions derive their meaning from each other. In *The Armies of the Night*, for example, Mailer is embarrassed to hear himself say, at the end of his speech at the Ambassador Theatre, "bless us all". The overwhelming applause he receives in response leads Mailer to repeat the phrase, but with the characteristic addition of obscenity: "bless us all - shit!" Mailer's intention is to dialectically balance what he perceives to be the sentimentality of the "drug-gutted flower children" with his own obscenity.

In fact, the novel, *The Armies of the Night* itself expresses the form of the event Mailer describes by containing the multifarious, complex tensions which Mailer himself embodies as the hero-protagonist of the novel. The Mailer who participates in the events of *The Armies of the Night* is beset by conflicting and contradictory urges and motivations which lead him to feel strangely unable to control, or order the events as they occur around him. The Mailer responsible for writing *The Armies of the Night* has, in necessarily confronting his personal relation to the events he describes, given form to a social and cultural reality, a moment in history. The form thus determined is, in fact, the dialectical relationship of the individual and an antagonistic social context; but where the conflict of individual responsibility and the desire to abnegate such responsibility has been internalised as the private warring of one individual who both embraces, and yet rejects the society which has spawned an atrocity such as Vietnam.

Mailer's continual assertion of what has been termed the "minority point of view" both in his writing and in the events of

his life which have been as equally responsible for his notoriety, is, as Richard Poirier puts it, an attempt to stave off the "inveterate drift toward alienation from himself and from America".⁵² What this effectively means for Mailer is the total engagement of the myriad qualities and characteristics of American life in order to approach an understanding of the mysteries and the unfathomable inequalities upon which the country is structured. Mailer believes that by entering into the experience of American life, literally, the individual will discover a point of reference between his own divided loyalties and mixed compulsions, and the expression of the same, in the character of America itself. Quite simply, the forces that mailer believes control and characterise America are the same as those which comprise the individual psyche, and which are discovered in confrontation with one's most resonant and authentic motivations and desires, within a context of uncertainty and extremity. The full impact of the realisation of Patty Lareine's death, for example, results in Tim Madden's remarkable reckoning of his relationship with his wife which itself finds its meaning in America:

For even as I had told Wardley, we had our romantic point of reference. It was the night we met and fornicated like fire dancers and copulated into cornucopias of each other, one night - yes - when we were as happy as Christopher Columbus, for we each discovered America, our country forever divided into two halves.⁵³

In *The Naked and the Dead*, the characters of General Cummings and Sergeant Croft exist in implicit, conspiratorial relation to each other: Mailer's suggestion is that the two are somehow responsible for Lieutenant Hearn's demise, in terms of their alliance of power, which both individually exert over

Hearn. In Cumming's case, Hearn is psychologically and spiritually emasculated; Sergeant Croft, however, sends Hearn to his literal end. Mailer's point is that Cummings and Croft express the force of totalitarianism and rationalism, which exists in sharp contrast to, say, individual heroism but which may engage heroism in order to promulgate its own existence. Cummings and Croft embody a spirit of pure, unquestioned rationality and a desire for power which is itself part of the fabric of American social reality, and it is not difficult to see Mailer's emerging theology of the battle for ascendancy of God and the Devil; good and evil, which Mailer views as seeking and obtaining expression in both the social fabric of America and in the daily reckonings of the individual of his capacity for individual expression in an increasingly entropic milieu; Mailer's greatest fear is that the battle between God and the Devil will end in the failure of both, which would be the dissipation of any dialectical tensions. This, of course, would signal the total onset of the "plague" of totalitarianism which spells death for man's most elemental relation to himself and to life: the awe one should feel before sex, for example, the sense of the immensity of death, the meaning, indeed, of life.

This, then, is the basis of Mailer's emphasis upon an existential ethic wherein each moment of life affords the individual the opportunity to come to a closer reckoning of oneself, and, subsequently, to grow in the realisation of one's best possibilities. The realisation of the dialectical self anticipates the experience of existential confrontation but is, in fact, revealed as the form of one's being as one elects

action, in such an experience, to vindicate one's best possibilities or to deny such possibilities.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 117.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 117.
- 3 See *The Fight*, p. 142.
- 4 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 51
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.
- 7 *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 75.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- 9 *The Naked and the Dead*, p. 366.
- 10 Robert Merrill, *Norman Mailer*, Boston, G.K. Hall & Co., 1978.
- 11 *Of Women and Their Elegance*, p. 137.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- 13 *Ancient Evenings*, p. 88.
- 14 *An American Dream*, p. 15.
- 15 *The Presidential Papers*, pp. 191-192.
- 16 *Advertisements for Myself*, pp. 426-427.
- 17 This definition, taken from Chambers Dictionary, underscores Mailer's perception of cancer as "a disease which is not a disease, but a loss of self, for unlike death by other causes, cancer is a rebellion of the cells. They refuse to accept the will, the dignity, the desire, in short, the project of the person who contains them". (*The Presidential Papers*, p. 223).
- 18 Diana Trilling, "The Moral Radicalism of Norman Mailer", originally appeared in *Encounter*, November, 1962, under the title, "Norman Mailer"; reprinted in Robert F. Lucid (ed.), *Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1971, v. p. 110.
- 19 *Cannibals and Christians*, p. 237.
- 20 *Marilyn*, p. 29.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 143.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 227.

- 24 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 298.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 298.
- 26 *Why Are We in Vietnam?* p. 5.
- 27 *Of a Fire on the Moon*, p. 15.
- 28 *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 15.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- 31 *Why Are We in Vietnam?* p. 126.
- 32 *Of a Fire on the Moon*, p. 60.
- 33 *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 60.
- 34 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 63.
- 35 *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 33.
- 36 *Of a Fire on the Moon*, p. 338.
- 37 *The Armies of the Night*, p. 212.
- 38 *Of a Fire on the Moon*, p. 439.
- 39 *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 33.
- 40 *The Armies of the Night*, pp. 211-212.
- 41 Jan Hokenson, in James Vinson (ed.), *20th Century American Literature*, London, The Macmillan Press, 1980, v. p. 367.
- 42 As quoted by Robert Merrill, p. 81.
- 43 See Ch. 4 of *The Armies of the Night*.
- 44 See Poirier, p. 92.
- 45 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 205.
- 46 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 170.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 171.
- 48 *The Prisoner of Sex*, p. 104.
- 49 See Poirier, p. 166.
- 50 *An American Dream*, pp. 11-12.
- 51 *Why Are We in Vietnam?* p. 26.

⁵² Poirier, p. 25; see, also, Poirier, Part III, "The Minority Within".

⁵³ *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, p. 205.

SECTION 1.

CHAPTER 4. EXISTENTIAL CONFRONTATION: SEEKING AN ENTRANCE

Mailer's implicit suggestion throughout his writing is that the individual contains within himself the myriad possibilities for action which reflect the individual capacity for courage and cowardice, good and evil, love and hate, and so on. It is when the individual finds himself in, or places himself in a situation that is fearful and in which the outcome is unknown that one may determine, by the action one elects, to what degree one is courageous or cowardly and so on. Such a situation forces the individual to a pivotal accounting of the sum of one's self: an existential confrontation with what, at that point in time, constitutes the shape, or worth, of one's selfhood. Mailer claims, in *Advertisements for Myself* that *Barbary Shore* was the "first of the existentialist novels in America"¹ (albeit qualifying this statement with the exception of Faulkner), a reference, in part, to the character of Lovett who, through the total loss of memory is without a past, a history, a personal context in which he can feel connected (in the familial sense) or defined (within a social context). Lovett, therefore, can act only out of a sense of the immediate present, and the way in which he acts is necessarily the expression of desires or compulsions unimpeded by any consideration of past failings or successes, political or familial alliances, social position or economic poverty. This lack of connection to a past or personal history means that Lovett must define himself through action, and in this way was Mailer heading toward his later espousal of the Hip ethic in which "Character being thus seen as perpetually ambivalent and dynamic enters then into an absolute relativity

where there are no truths other than the isolated truths of what each observer feels at each instant of his existence".²

In Mailer's terms, action offers the greatest clues to the state of one's psychic health: Mailer himself described as his "best sentence ... ever written" the assertion that - "it is the actions of men and not their sentiments which make history"³ and which is repeated throughout Mailer's work no less than four times. It is through the contemplation of the meaning a specific course of action holds for one, and the subsequent exercise of that decision to act in a particular way which delineates the worth of oneself. Moreover, it is the conscious decision to place oneself in situations necessarily fraught with potential or imagined danger that offers the greatest test of the worth of oneself. Thus, Mailer himself set the parameters of his own literary quest, in the following statement from *Advertisements for Myself*: "For I wish to attempt an entrance into the mysteries of murder, suicide, incest, orgy, orgasm and Time",⁴ thereby delineating his desire to challenge the conventional attitudes of the literary "Establishment", as well as to discover the meaning such taboo subjects held for him personally.

In "The Man Who Studied Yoga," Mailer hints at this theme which achieves profound expression in the later novels, such as *An American Dream*, *Why Are We in Vietnam?* and *Tough Guys Don't Dance*. The party which Sam Slovida hosts has, as its impetus, a pornographic movie which establishes an existential focus for the participants of the gathering by bringing the six persons present face to face with the sublimated desires and urges they may, or may not choose to act upon: "But when the room lights are on, they cannot look at one another. "Can we see it again?" someone

mutters. ... They watch it soberly now, the room hot with the heat of their bodies, the darkness a balm for orgiastic vision".⁵ Indeed, the experience is, for Sam Slovida, the precipitate for the realisation of the compromise and cowardice he has, and will continue to live by. Sam is fittingly described as "a man who seeks to live in such a way as to avoid pain, and succeeds merely in avoiding pleasure"⁶ and the emphasis of this description is Sam's avoidance of the possibilities of life which might be his only hope of salvation from the dreariness and compromise of his life.

In contrast, "Advertisements for Myself on the Way Out" proposes a hero, Marion Faye, for whom the contemplation and execution of such extreme acts as murder represents his literal salvation. Like Stephen Rojack, Marion Faye can literally recharge his psychic circuits by the conscious decision to locate the murderer within himself, determine the strength of the urge to kill, discover the courage to act upon this urge; thereby assuming the energies of the victim in the course of perpetrating this act of violence. Mailer believes in the literal pay-off; that is, "Brave murder gave the charge of the man one killed. Time potential and Time dynamic - it was the grand connection, and the dead man's Time because one's own Time, his energies regenerated the dead circuits of one's own empty-balled Time".⁷ At the same time, the decision to act in this particular way, because extreme, must be countered by an awareness of the price exacted. The individual who dares to summon such profound and awful (in the sense of whatever would seek to question, and defy what is held to be a moral certainty) urges within has also engaged the forces of good and evil, God and the Devil; and must

therefore acknowledge the life-or-death consequentiality of his actions.

"Advertisements for Myself On the Way Out" presents Marion Faye as an archetype; hip hero, whose quest, no less, is to discover the God within himself because each movement through life must be to something more, something greater. Thus, "seeking an entrance" into the mysteries of murder, suicide, orgy, orgasm and Time is essentially Mailer's way of reconciling those aspects of the collective psyche of mankind which represent man's most dire possibilities (murder, for example) with those questions of existence which offer the least answers or conclusions. Implicit in Mailer's schema is the suggestion that what is unfathomable in mankind (Mailer is fond of proposing Naziism as the supreme instance) equates with the unknown and all important mystery of existence and man's place therein. It is the profound obligation of the individual, then, to dare the legacy of one's humanity in the existential contemplation of such extreme acts, and the meaning they hold for one personally.

Frequently, Mailer proposes death; the experience of death and the meaning it holds for one, as the context for such a pivotal moment of existential reckoning. Mailer's concern with death establishes its own focus in the dialectic death inhabits with life: because Mailer believes that each moment of life offers the chance to move forward into more ("growth") or backward into less, the logical conclusion of his argument sees each individual as either electing to purchase more life, or relinquish to death, in the metaphoric terms of Mailer's division between the realisation of courage and the acquiescence to cowardice; but also in the literal terms of one's ability to act

in order to prevent the dissipation of one's being" to entropy or to totalitarianism. Moreover, Mailer's belief in the existence of a "navigator" at the "seat of (one's) being reveals - or betrays - the very real moral sense he brings to bear on the subject of the individual experience of life. When mailer says, "... the unconscious ... has an enormous teleological sense, that it moves towards a goal, that it has a real sense of what is happening to one's being at each given moment ... that the messages of one's experience are continually saying, "Things are getting better", or "Things are getting worse. For me. For that one. For my future ..." ⁸ he implies not just some *a priori* core of knowledge or reason within the human psyche, but an *a priori* ability to sift experience in terms of its good/bad character or quality. In this way, then, to locate and act upon one's best possibilities is to embrace life, which is good, and to deny one's best possibilities is to contribute to the eventual death of one's being, which is bad. As Mailer states explicitly: (For where consciousness cannot be supported by the courage to make one's action, then consciousness lapses into despair and death). ... Man's nature, man's dignity, is that he acts, lives, loves and finally destroys himself seeking to penetrate the mystery of existence, and unless we partake in some way, as some part of this human exploration (and war) then we are no more than the pimps of society and the betrayers of our Self".⁹

Mailer's emphasis upon individual responsibility in this sense, is concerned with the nature of human experience as a collective experience, and one which impinges upon individual experience. Thus, determining or grounding one's own dignity in actions that truly reflect one's best possibilities is itself

affirmation of something good within mankind, and the opposite is also true. As such, Mailer's self-appointed role as commentator upon and regulator of, the experience of living in the Twentieth Century is less the grandiose ambition of one who presumes some ultimate connection to the channels and reservoirs of meaning and knowledge; and more the fervent expression of one who "seeks and entrance" into the mysteries of existence, as a life-saving proposition. This is because what is true of the collective psyche - again, Mailer proposes the Holocaust as an example of the seemingly limitless boundaries of man's inhumanity to man - is true also of the individual. It is left to the individual brave enough, or sufficiently excited by the possibilities for growth, regeneration and purchase of new knowledge, to explore the limits of experience; in order to penetrate the mysteries of experience, in order to defy the easy tendency to reject any opportunities for growth and discovery. Mailer's archetype for such an individual is, of course, the hipster, the American existentialist, the psychic outlaw.

The formulaic couplings of science and the imagination, God and the Devil, and so on throughout *Of a Fire on the Moon* allow Mailer to extend and build upon the themes and metaphors of his earlier writing, to the extent that these themes are undermined somewhat by the simple polarity of Mailer's thematic structure. However, there are instances in the novel - Mailer's discussion of the quality and meaning of dreams, for example - which provide some insight into the nature of existential vision as Mailer himself understands the inner, or buried part of our psyche which is most frequently denied expression in the relentless tedium of daily existence. Thus, to Mailer, a dream is no longer the

phenomenon explained as "wish-fulfillment" by Freud and understood as the means by which our unconscious deals with the information and experiences undergone and ingested by the individual, but rather, is the intimation of an epistemological certainty beyond what can be seen or experienced as real; the certainty that only the "Navigator" at the seat of one's being can recognise:

... there was a statement in the nightmare all direct, a clap of psychic thunder, a vibration from the deep. There had to be more to the dream than Freud had ever given it - the dream was like the third eye of the Navigator, it looked into many a situation the eyes of reality could hardly assess. Perhaps the dream was indeed a simulation chamber where the possible malfunctions of life tomorrow and life next year could be tested, where the alternate plans could be tried. That at least must be one essential function of the dream. For as one moved through the situations of the day, reality kept giving intimations to the senses that reality was not what it appeared to be, not altogether.¹⁰

The "reality subtly beneath reality" that the Navigator recognises is the truth of one's buried possibilities and potential, discovered as the familiar qualities of bravery or cowardice; good, or evil; hip, or square. That is, Mailer believes that the individual receives and interprets information and experience at two different levels - what might be termed the waking (conscious) and dreaming (unconscious) levels. It is when one dreams that the unconscious is fully engaged, but further, the information received at the waking, or conscious level may be explored and ingested at the deeper, "unconscious" level in the experience of the existential confrontation: as one faces the possibilities for action in order to determine one's response, and, consequently, the true worth of one's selfhood:

It was possible that in the dream, one travelled through a scenario where one was his own hero, and in the dream one might learn how one would react to death ... and conceivably have glimpses of reaction to one's own death as well? ... The dreamer was no longer consoling himself. Rather he was exploring the depths of his own ability to perceive crisis and react to it; he was exploring ultimate modes of existence in sex and in violence, in catastrophe and in death. So the real substance of a dream was a submersion into dread. One tested the ability of the psyche to bear anxiety as one submerged into deeper and deeper plumbings of the unknowable until one reached a point where the adventurer in oneself could descend no longer, panic was present - one was exploded out of the dream. But a dangerous shoal had at least been located.¹¹

Of course, if the dream - or whatever precipitates existential confrontation - brings one face to face with dread, Mailer's emphasis is placed firmly on the need for bravery at the moment of reckoning; the ability to be more than one thought oneself capable of becoming. Most frequently, the immersion in dread, the context for existential confrontation, is accompanied by the presence of death. Mailer's characters - Stephen Rojack, Tim Madden, the wild inhabitants of *Ancient Evenings*, Gary Gilmore and Nicole Baker, even Mailer himself - exist in intimate relation to death, either their own or that of someone close to them. The experience of death brings into sharp focus the moral balance of one's life - the extent to which one has vindicated one's best possibilities in action, or conversely, the tendency to deny oneself the opportunity for growth in compromise and cowardice. Moreover, death inhabits, with life, a dialectical relationship: Mailer believes that death may be considered a necessary part of life in that it represents the final "orgasm" into a future life (literally the means by which Menenhetet achieves reincarnation: "For he had been able during an embrace, to ride his heart right over the last ridge and breathe his last

thought as he passed into the womb of the woman and thereby could begin a new life, a true continuation of himself"¹²). In this sense, death is both an end and a beginning; elsewhere, Mailer's fear of the death of one's being is the metaphoric expression of spiritual and psychical nullity, the negation of life.

Death, then, fascinates Mailer because it hints at the final mystery: the gateway to hitherto unfathomed reserves of knowledge and meaning. Death is the most profound existential experience: "Somewhere in the deep coma of mortal illness or the transfixed womb of danger, death speaks to us. If we make our way back to life, we are armed with a new secret".¹³ In this way, death offers knowledge both of oneself, in the existential sense of providing a clue to the state of one's psychic health, but also of what lies beyond death - the experience of death itself. That one may engage one's life in a flirtation with death (one of the premises of *Ancient Evenings*) provides the sense of the dialectic, as the narrator of "Advertisements For Myself On the Way Out" makes abundantly clear:

I am, oh hes, now I know who I am or was, I am the dead man on the floor, for so I am, yes (what a pure moment of grief at all that has not been done), I am in the endless deliberate instant of the vision given by death, the million dying spasms of the radiating consciousness of words, this last of me, wailing within, turbulent with the terror that I no longer know where I am, nor if there are voices to hear me and answer back. I am off finally, departed on the demented journey whose first echoes I knew in those over promiscuous moments of malice, licence, promise and horror at the heart of a cocktail party when, too drunk with the knowledge of what courage was demanded of me, and what little I had ...¹⁴

Similarly, the astronauts about to embark on the first trip to the moon are viewed by Mailer as individuals who have been placed in existential relation to their own (possible) death, "hovering

on that ultimate edge of moral balance where one wonders if the sum of one's life has been for good or ill and if the morning will return a fair and just verdict ...".¹⁵ The astronauts are, in Mailer's perspective, in the position of having been granted the opportunity to realise their own profound depths in existential contemplation of the meaning of death, and hence, life, in a way that most other individuals will never experience; at the same time, the individual who lives in the "enormous present" - the awareness, simply, that each moment of life offers the opportunity for growth - is similarly placed in existential confrontation with the depths of their being.

The experience of existential confrontation is simultaneously the discovery of the truth of one's possibilities and potential - what I have termed the worth, or shape of one's selfhood. Moreover, the existential experience provides the means by which one enters into the profound dialogues of heaven and hell, God and the Devil, good and evil - that level of existence which Mailer believes informs the collective nature of mankind. An intimation of this is given as Mailer - "the reporter" - responds to the news of Bobby Kennedy's assassination:

'No,' he bellowed. 'No! No! No!' his voice railing with an ugliness and pain reminiscent to his ear of the wild grunts of a wounded pig. ... He felt as if he were being despoiled of a vital part of himself, and in the middle of his horror noted that he screamed like a pig, not a lion, not a bear. The reported had gone for years on the premise that one must balance every moment between the angel in oneself and the swine - the sound of his own voice shocked him therefore profoundly. The balance was not what he thought it to be.¹⁶

Of course, Mailer is also profoundly conscious of his own conception of the double-nature, the dialectical perspective

wherein the individual, in order to act, must confront the conflicting, contradictory and opposing compulsions and motivations that comprise his being. It is at the pivotal moment of existential awareness that one vindicates, in action, whatever is truest of one's mixed and divided compulsions, thereby giving shape - determining the worth - of one's selfhood. Gary Gilmore is profoundly aware of his fascination with death - he has to exhort his own in order to confront his desire to kill another: Having almost collided with another car, he returns his brother's retort, "You almost got us killed" with a statement of existential face, "Sometimes ... you have to be able to face that".¹⁷ If Gilmore killed two men simply because he "did not want to kill Nicole",¹⁸ he had (at the very least) discovered some ultimate truth of his being, which was that his murderous potential knew no limits. Implicit in Mailer's account of the tragedy, furthermore, is that Gilmore's actions explicate Mailer's own hip ethic, that, indeed, "Hip, which would return us to ourselves, at no matter what price in individual violence, is the affirmation of the barbarian, for it requires a primitive passion about human nature to believe that individual acts of violence are always to be preferred to the collective violence of the State".¹⁹

Mailer is drawn to Gary Gilmore because Gilmore's self-professed affinity with death²⁰ is understood in terms appropriating Mailer's own view of karma, and the notion that our actions in the earthly present carry with them a realisation in some future life beyond death (again, one of the central premises of *Ancient Evenings*). The context, once again, is found in the Hip ethic: the hipster's desire to realise his own potential, to

explore beyond the limits of taboo, is measured against his sense of the price he must pay, eventually, for the discovery of the definition of his excitement and well-being. One's actions, therefore, are invested with the significance of their moral ramifications for a future existence; the significance of which is dialectically offset by the hipster's need to fulfil the imperious demands of the search for "a good time."

Mailer's implied assertion throughout his writing is that the individual has been insulated against the experience of his own existence through the pervasive and insidious impact of technology. Awareness of one's own physical presence in relation to the environment within which one exists (encompassing the social as well as the natural environment) impinges upon one's psychic health because one's impulses - both physical and emotional - are the most significant guide to understanding one's varying compulsions and motivations, and hence, how one might act in order to realise self-growth. Additionally, one seeks an entrance to the existential phenomena of sex, death, orgasm, and Time by responding, instinctually and impulsively, (meant in the sense of one's reaction to one's impulses and instincts) to such phenomena, unimpeded by social, cultural, technological, political or economic assumptions and conclusions. In essence, "one must be able to feel oneself - one must know one's desires, one's rages, one's anguish, one must be aware of the character of one's frustration and know what would satisfy it".²¹ To feel oneself in this way is, in turn, to approach an awareness of the existential dimensions of humanity - again, the sense of the collective nature of mankind which mailer differentiates from the force of collectivism, the "spirit of the corporation".

One's closest communion with oneself, the experience of existential confrontation, also returns or reveals one's capacity for "primitive awe", the realisation of dread. The experience of dread is the realisation of powers and forces greater than oneself; dread reminds one of the extreme fragility and precariousness of one's existence within the schema of such powers and forces in communion with God and the Devil; dread is the realisation of the confrontation between God and the Devil; dread is commensurate with awe. Or, as Mailer succinctly expresses the experience of dread in the awareness of death:

And D.J. breathes death - first time in his life - and the sides of the trail slam onto his heart like the jaws of a vice ... it's death D.J.'s breathing, it comes like attack of vertigo when stepping into dark and smelling pig shit, that's what death smells to him, own pig shit smell, terrible fear right out of his lungs and pores, mucous lining of now flappy-ass organs ...²²

Mailer maintains a sense of the dialectic in the experience of dread - the "Blasts of rage and bouts of fear"²³ that Rusty feels in the contemplation of his desire to kill grizzly bear is not dissimilar to Mailer's own divided feelings in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, when he contemplates the anomalies of his allegiance to the flower-children and yippies whose views he cannot totally accept. The inability to reconcile himself to either of the factions of American society results in the perception of an inner fear, which is the dread Mailer feels at this vision of contradiction both within himself and within the orders of society: "The children were crazy, but they developed honor every year, they had a vision not void of beauty; the other side had no vision, only a nightmare of smashing a brain with a brick. The fear came back again."²⁴

What is most vital, of course, to Mailer's understanding of the experience of dread as a means of entering the mysteries of existence is the ability of that experience to return the individual to a sensuous affinity with one's own existence. Mailer explains precisely what he means by this as he recounts his personal involvement with marijuana:

One can feel the importance of each moment and how it is changing one. One feels one's being, one becomes aware of the enormous apparatus of nothingness - the hum of a hi-fi set, the emptiness of a pointless interruption, one becomes aware of the war between each of us, how the nothingness in each of us seeks to attack the being of others, how our being in turn is attack by the nothingness in others.²⁵

Similarly, once D.J. and Tex Hyde leave the "mixed shit" of Rusty and his "Medium Asshole" cronies behind, the experience of the untrammelled wilderness affords D.J. an epiphanatic realisation of the essential mystery and meaning of existence:

and D.J. could have wept for a secret was near, some mystery in the secret of things - why does the odor die last and by another route? - and he knew then the meaning of trees and forest all in dominion to one another and messages across the continent on the wave of their branches up to the sorrow of the North, the great sorrow up here brought by leaves and wind some speechless electric gathering of woe, no peace in the North ...²⁶

The experience of existential confrontation is important also because of the relationship of the individual to God. Mailer believes that, just as we manifest the destiny of God in his existential battle with the Devil, our instincts, impulses and inner voices derive from God. Thus, "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".²⁷ This

thesis is most dramatically demonstrated in *An American Dream*, as Rojack's inner voices tell him to murder Deborah, start a relationship with Cherry, remove her diaphragm during sex, attack Shago Martin, and walk around Barney Kelly's parapet. The moral of *An American Dream* delineates Rojack's literal salvation by adhering to the demands of these inner voices: Rojack is Mailer's testimony of the need to attain to God through the existential experience of one's inner, buried nature. Of course, one's inner buried self also calls forth the world of chaos, entropy - the Devil- and Mailer wants to emphasise the need to affect balance (as Rojack's parapet walk demonstrates) of the divergent demands of the self. One recalls Mailer's shame and humiliation at Patterson's defeat before the greater prowess of Sonny Liston: Patterson's defeat is felt personally by Mailer because he feels that he has failed the demands of his own best attributes and inclinations. That is, Mailer perceives Patterson's defeat as the failure of love, art, and God; and his assimilation of that failure is meant to demonstrate that Patterson and Liston do not individually represent art versus magic, or God versus the Devil, but that they encapsulate those qualities as we may recognise them within ourselves. As Mailer himself recognises his own inner compromise and apathy, so too, we might discover some buried truth of our selves through receptivity to existential confrontation. In fact, when Mailer pronounces, "Everything I write is a card out of the same deck",²⁸ he is referring not just to the cohesive and structured use of metaphor, imagery and sentence construction which unifies the themes and, certainly, the language of all of Mailer's work, but also to what Mailer obviously perceives as the underpinning basis for his work - the

need to enter the mysteries of existence, through confronting one's rages, one's desires, one's frustrations, in order to gain some hold on "the feel of our human condition, which by the logic of existentialism, is the truth of the human condition".²⁹

Ancient Evenings is Mailer's most ambitious attempt to explore this theme: indeed, the outrageous literalism of the book is itself the means by which Mailer dramatises the quest to enter and confront the phenomena of existence. Thus, when the Ka of Menenhetet Two says, "For I was dead, so I understood once more (again as if for the first time) and being dead, might now be obliged to meet every terror I had fled while living" Mailer unites theme and form, so that the literal experience of death restores to the Ka the dual sense of dread and self-fulfillment at the realisation of the sum of his life's meaning: "It was the happiness of being next to my fear, yet separate from it, so that I could be free at last to know all the ways I had failed to live my life, all the boredom I had swallowed, and each foul sentiment of wasted flesh".³⁰

Similarly, Mailer allows his characters in *Ancient Evenings* to go beyond the normal bounds of perception such that the extraordinary nature of experience and event delineates the self-same existential ethic. The child Menenhetet, therefore, anticipates a future event in a vision of his own capacity for compromise:

So I wept. ... The dog had managed to tell me of a terrible fright in a far-off place and I was more afraid than I had ever been, as if I might not live like a slave but still knew the fear that sooner or later I, too, would know a life I did not want, and be powerless to go where I wished, and this feeling was great enough to set me shaking with a force that shattered the steadiness of the light. Then it was as if I lived in the

sun, and in the dark, but quickly, in the tremors, as if I were blinking. Yet my eyes stayed wide open. I saw two existences at once: myself at six debauched into tears, and myself in the dark, weeping in shame as I gorged on Menenhetet's cock, the tears so powerful my nostrils poured two rivers all over the old man's phenomenon of a grand member, yes, at six had a sight of myself debased in the Land of the Dead when I was twenty one ...³¹

The vision of his dead self, or Ka, is made sense of when, subsequently, the child Menenhetet learns of the elder Menenhetet's ability to beget himself into a future existence via an apocalyptic orgasm. The vision of Menenhetet One making love to his mother forces the younger Menenhetet to confront the dual possibilities: that he is the fifth appearance of Menenhetet One, or that he is, in fact, his great-grandfather's son. Further, given either alternative, Menenhetet Two must also face the possibility of similar powers within himself, and this in turn reveals to the child Menenhetet his own ambition and lust for power. Therefore, the initial vision of Menenhetet Two of his Ka is Mailer's means of underscoring the inevitability and, in this instance, the debilitating squalor of death. Against the dual recognition of ambition, Menenhetet Two's woe and distress assumes meaning. To add metaphoric emphasis, Mailer employs an everyday object - a mirror - to delineate the book's themes. The mirror's function, in *Ancient Evenings* reveals not just one's image, but encapsulates the existential experience wherein one may come face to face, literally, with the constituent sum of one's parts - one's being:

I had the expression of one who serves the Good and Great Gods, and was startled by how much caution now dwelt in a man who had once been a charioteer. How smooth and worried were my cheeks. All those rubbings from the cheeks of honey-Ball! A tomb of corruption must be my

heart! That was the first thought at seeing my face, and it came from the side of myself that is noblest in spirit, nearest to the brave Gods, and most demanding of myself ... Then I was full of fear because I realised it was not my own face I saw, but my Ka ... and I knew that I loved my Ka and it did not matter how much corruption was in those features when my life was also in them ...³²

Thus, Mailer proposes the experience of existential confrontation as the realisation of the form of one's (dialectical) being, in terms of the manifest worth of oneself. As one acts to realise either courage or cowardice, being or nothingness, one is therefore simultaneously partaking in the monumental battle for ascendancy of God and the Devil, Mailer's conceptual beings who preside over, respectively, all the forces for good and evil. The revelation of the alternatives for action facing one in a moment of pivotal self-reckoning requires the assertion of what constitutes one's best possibilities, in order that the untenable propositions of chaos (entropy) and convention (totalitarianism), explicit as one's acquiescence, or one's cowardice, be defeated.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 98.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 285.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 391.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 162.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 171.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 436.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 314.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 262.
- 10 *Of a Fire on the Moon*, p. 159.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 160.
- 12 *Ancient Evenings*, pp. 161-162.
- 13 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 117.
- 14 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 441.
- 15 *Of a Fire on the Moon*, p. 417.
- 16 *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 91.
- 17 *The Executioner's Song*, p. 501.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 691.
- 19 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 286.
- 20 See, for example, *The Executioner's Song*, p. 692.
- 21 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 273.
- 22 *Why Are We in Vietnam?* p. 136.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 107.
- 24 *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 208.
- 25 *Pieces and Pontifications*, v. *Pontifications*, p. 21.
- 26 *Why Are We in Vietnam?* p. 196.
- 27 As quoted in Merrill, p. 74.

²⁸ Paul Carroll, "Playboy Interview", originally appeared in *Playboy Magazine*, January, 1968, reprinted in Robert Lucid, v. p. 295.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 295.

³⁰ *Ancient Evenings*, p. 36.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 498-499

SECTION 1.

CHAPTER 5: SALVATION THROUGH CONFRONTATION: SELF REALISATION

The realisation of the form on one's self - discovering and maintaining the dialectical relationship of one's inner motivations and desires - requires that one assert the form of one's being in the dialectic of self and social context. Thus, the vindication of one's best possibilities in action expresses the worth, or shape of oneself, differentiated from the powerful influence of entropy (chaos), which is the absence of any conflicting or resisting forces and which expresses formlessness; and totalitarianism (convention), the force of unreasoned acceptance of the status quo, which expresses the rigidity of uni-lateralism. Both chaos and convention are, in Mailer's terms, metaphors for stasis, for nothingness, for formlessness. Chaos is entropy turned Manichaen, a devilish principle in which there is no principle except the dissipation of form and order. Chaos represents the retreat to any system or suggestion in which the expression of one's being is negated, and, similarly, convention is Mailer's means of describing the status quo, but as an insidious network of assumptions and directives which inhibit (to the point of eradication) personality and integrity in order that its existence be maintained. Mailer extends the theme into a metaphoric structure within his writing, explicated as follows: the need to confront the truth of one's being as a means of salvation from either of these two fearful manifestations of formlessness and the assertion of one's best possibilities - one's courage - precipitates the achievement of equilibrium, which is the balance of the divergent claims or urges of the self. The individual, necessarily placed within the social

whole, cannot exist apart from society: such complete autonomy is itself the abdication to an entropic principle of formlessness. As such, the Mailer hero is exhorted to achieve the necessary balance of the various claims upon his psyche (including the external as well as the internal compulsions), such that in discovering the definition of his identity in an existential context, the individual can thus act in such a way as to defeat those urges which are death to his being, and to maximise his capacity for growth.

Mailer's view proposes that to act existentially is to face the truth of oneself. Further, this view presupposes that the truth of oneself is often hidden - buried, or denied by the stultifying force of social opinion and social habit. In discovering the truth of oneself, Mailer suggests that reality - the way the world is perceived - is subtly changed, mirroring the exciting and fresh possibilities one has envisioned for oneself. Similarly, Mailer proposes that one's psychic health - one's sense of selfhood - is maintained only by confronting dread, death and mystery. To feel anxiety at the realisation of imminent terror or death, or to feel fear at the knowledge that only some dangerous action will restore a sense of integrity to oneself is Mailer's touchstone for one's psychic health - being in tune with; knowing, one's most resonant needs and desires, and hence, what would assail and sicken one, emotionally and physically. Mailer believes that psychoanalysis denies or rather, avoids, the necessity of confronting one's dread and one's fear by which one discovers one's needs; but further, Mailer proposes that psychoanalysis is one instance of the "plague of totalitarianism" (as indeed, are painkillers for the

body) as a result of which, the peculiarly American urge, states Mailer, to venture into the unchartered territory of its own will to discover has been destroyed and, created in its place, a nation characterised as a "vast central swamp of tasteless toneless authority". Thus, rather than explore and discover one's own excitement and source of well-being, the individual has come to depend upon the supposed authority of those arbiters of the popular consciousness: "FBI men, doctors, television entertainers, corporation executives, and athletes who could cooperate with public-relations men".¹

One thus contributes to the death of one's being, in having forfeited the opportunity to realise a worthwhile sense of self, which is the awareness of one's greatest physical and psychical needs. Mailer decries the sanitisation of death (any means of, or instance in which the reality of death is denied or hidden) because it is precisely the phenomenon of one's personal relation to death which must be embraced, if one is to achieve salvation from the insidious presence of death all around one - the cancerous emptiness of an entropic and totalitarian social milieu. Thus, to discover one's truly authentic responses and urges in existential confrontation is, simultaneously, the knowledge or intimation of one's death. This is because, necessarily, an act is existential if its outcome is unknown and potentially fearful for oneself; one acts, therefore, in response to one's most resonant needs and motivations against the knowledge of the possibility of one's death. In contrast, man faces no peril greater than "alienation from his soul", and such a fate is described by Mailer as a "death which is other than death, a disappearance into nothingness rather than into

Eternity".² In effect, to discover the character of one's soul is to purchase knowledge of eternity as the continuation of life beyond the present existence, beyond death as the fearful possibility of nothingness. Subsequently, what Mailer terms one's "soul" is the vital link between existence and "mystery" - dread, death, magic, the spirit world, and so on. One seeks an entrance to the phenomena of mystery in order to restore or retain one's psychic health - the well-being of one's soul. One recalls Mailer's famous pronouncement:

Postulate a modern soul marooned in constipation, emptiness, boredom and a flat dull terror of death. A soul which takes antibiotics when ill, smokes filter cigarettes, drinks proteins, minerals and vitamins in a liquid diet, takes seconal to go to sleep, benzedrine to awake, and tranquilizers for poise. It is a deadened existence, afraid precisely of violence, cannibalism, loneliness, insanity, libidinousness, hell, perversion, and mess, because these are the states which must in some way be passed through, digested, transcended, if one is to make one's way back to life.³

In fact, life, in this sense is perceived as the degree to which one is intimate with one's inner desires, urges, compulsions and so on because the loss or absence of such self-awareness heralds the onset of cancer, "a disease which is not a disease, but a loss of self".⁴ Cancer, in Mailer's terms, gains a hold on the individual who betrays his own best inclinations and motivations; the individual who in effect denies or betrays his own self-awareness. The usual recourse of the cancerous individual is to place all faith in the societal institutions and external agencies which might absorb responsibility for the cancerous condition. This, according to Mailer, is to cease existence as an existential being, because one is denying one's personal impetus in the determination or eradication of cancer. Hence, to

know what would make one well is, indeed, the first measure toward maintaining one's well-being, and one's intimate relation to life and self. Confronting one's innermost urges as well as the fearful phenomena of existence is construed by Mailer as the responsibility one bears in relation to oneself; moreover, the necessity of differentiating oneself from the prevailing social context is expressed by Mailer as the discovery of oneself as a moral being - of existing within a network of forces of good and evil.

As has been noted by John Aldridge, *An American Dream* is a "radically moral book ... a religious book",⁵ and it is precisely Mailer's moral sensibility which informs the thematic and metaphoric structuring of the novel. Mailer's use of language offers a hint of the profound moral, existential theology by which Mailer proposes a universe of good and evil, being and nothingness. Mailer uses language, specifically the hyperbolic language of melodrama, to exacerbate individual consciousness of a spiritual reality which has been hidden, submerged by the gradual dislocation and dissipation of myth and magic which characterises the considered, accepted form of reality. As mankind lost the sense of primitive awe which accepted the existence of good, evil, gods, magic and mystery, and which offered a constant reminder of the precariousness of man's existence in the presence of greater powers, he has also lost his sense of the necessity of one's actions to vindicate a moral point of view. Mailer's effort, in stimulating the melodramatic imagination, aims also at stimulating the reader's sense of what Peter Brooks calls the "moral occult":

The melodramatic imagination is, then, perhaps a way of perceiving and imagining the spiritual in a world where there is no longer any clear idea of the sacred, no generally accepted societal moral imperative, where the body of the ethical has become a sort of *deus absconditus* which must be sought for, posited, brought into man's existence, through exercise of the spiritualist imagination. Balzac's and James' melodrama, and the development of the melodramatic mode from, say, Samuel Richardson to Norman Mailer, is perhaps first of all a desperate effort to renew contact with the sacred *through* the representation of fallen reality, to insist that behind reality, hidden by it yet indicated within it, there is a realm where large moral forces are operative, where large choices of ways of being must be made. I have called this realm the moral occult: it is occult in a world where there is no clear system of sacred myth, no unity of belief, no accepted metaphorical chain leading from the phenomenal to the spiritual, only a fragmented society and fragments of beliefs. Yet the most Promethan of modern writers insist that this realm does exist, and write their fictions to make it exist, to show its primacy in life. ... The melodramatic mode of utterance is a victory over the repression and censorship of the social reality principle, a release of psychic energy by the articulation of the unsayable. One might say that the gothic quest for renewed contact with the numinus, the supernatural, the occult forces in the universe, leads into the moral self.⁶

Determining a sense of one's moral point of view, then, is necessarily one's salvation from the world at large which would seek to deny the existence of forces and entities whereby one's moral self gains its context: the perception of good and evil, for example, is the personal confrontation with one's actions and inclinations, when the constraints of social considerations and demands have been removed and one is receptive to the portents and powers of spiritual forces and entities. This is one theme of *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, in which Tim Madden's plunge to the dark world of evil and mayhem strips him of any attachment to social directives or value structures, and which thus forces him to take stock of the state of moral compromise which

characterises his sense of self. Tim's receptivity to the demons and spirits of Hell-Town is borne of the terror he feels at his sudden confrontation with evil - possibly his own - as well as his existential existence in which his actions possess no (remembered) past and anticipate a debilitatingly uncertain future.

Similarly, Mailer's polemical language is meant to disturb the reader into an analysis of the meaning beyond meaning, which is the hint of the deeper and more resonant realities with which Mailer is concerned: the spiritual reality of God, for example, or the demonic presence of the Devil. Thus, in "The Time of Her Time" Sergius' desire to bring Denise to orgasm, expressed as a competition with some imagined "bearded Negro cat who would score where I had missed and thus cockold me in spirit, deprive me of those telepathic waves of longing (in which I obviously believed) speeding away to me from her over the years to balm the hours when I was beat, because I had been her psychic bridegroom, had plucked her ideational diddle, had led her down the walk of her real wedding night"⁷ must be seen as the hipster's search for love which is more than the love popularised on television and in movies, but that love which is the expression of man's mortality, his being, his desires. Language, then, provides a form for man's common, or collective experience of his humanity, and Mailer exhorts the reader to discover the buried realities of experience in the confrontation of one's own responses to his scatological, violent and poetic prose. Mailer's tendency to bring together images and ideas which are disparate, as well as his compulsive obsession with violence and obscenity, is his attempt to maintain a personal dialectic with the conventional

modes and manners of expression. Moreover, Mailer wishes to bring into focus "emotions which are at the very edge of the word system"⁸ so as to delineate his theme of the interdependence of the world of the demonic, supernatural and the mysterious, with the world of supposed factual reality.

Mailer's perception of a morally debased society emerges from his belief that the individual has lost, or squandered his birthright, which is the capacity for heroism and the receptivity to love. We have, in effect, "cut a corner, tried to cheat the heart of life, tried not to face our uneasy sense that pleasure comes best to those who are brave ..."⁹ and Mailer's emphasis is placed resolutely upon the necessity of facing the truth of oneself as, itself, the realisation of courage, and, in turn, acting upon the realisation of one's capacity for heroic resistance to compromise and cowardice. In "A Calculus at Heaven", which anticipates *The Naked and the Dead* both in subject matter and theme, Mailer provides an immediate existential context for his characters by placing them in combat: Mailer conveys a sense of an immediate present, in which the imminent possibility of death is dialectically offset by an intense inner questioning of the value and meaning of life. The moral centre of the story is the Captain, Bowen Hilliard, whose sense of inner integrity masks a debilitating inability to face the truth of his own facility for compromise and weakness. Hilliard's personal maxim of believing in nothing is itself a contradiction of his dependency upon the myriad belief structures which support his existence. Even when Hilliard writes, "'Malraux says that all that men are willing to die for tends to justify their fate by giving it a foundation in dignity. Perhaps, everywhere, this is

felt. But in America, men live, work and die without even the rudest conception of a dignity. At their death ... well then they wonder what the odds are on a heaven, and perhaps they make futile, desperate bets on it, adding up their crude moral calculus, so that if the big team, heaven, comes through, and wins and therefore exists, they will be able to collect their bets that evening ...'"¹⁰ he cannot reconcile his personal struggle for integrity and dignity with the ideas which form the basis of his writing and painting. Hilliard's search for a form for his selfhood parallels his gradual confrontation with the truth of his existence, wherein he arrives at a recognition of the gap between his desire for dignity and the lack of any action to precipitate this. Hence, he is able to conclude that, "to justify his life, to find some meaning in it would be possible only when he faced death"¹¹ and Hilliard joins the army in an attempt to realize his struggle for a personal form of self-expression, for meaning through such existential confrontation with death. Hilliard's subsequent, pivotal realisation that death itself offers no immediate, obvious meaning for one's existence, allows him the further realisation that death can provide a context for self-examination which is itself the meaning one finds for oneself. Thus, in his imagined scenario in which Cova, his wife, learns of his death, Hilliard both creates a form for his being as well as determines a means of transcendence over what he has come to see is the essential meaninglessness of his death in terms of the larger impetus of the war.

Another of Mailer's early stories, again set against a backdrop of combat, reiterates this early (and sustained)

thematic preoccupation in which an experience of pure, existential reckoning serves to bring into focus the truth of oneself, in relation to others and in terms of one's perception of a collective humanity. In "The Dead Gook", Private Brody is shaken from the complacent numbness which is his defence against the intimate presence of death; and the subsequent experience of the brave Filipino Luiz precipitates Brody's important and pivotal reckoning of his own capacity for courage; indeed, the meaning of courage, and his own precarious humanity in the face of the larger, all-encompassing presence of war. As such, Brody moves from a state of emotional and mental nullity, "his sense diminished, his thoughts slowed, ... time was a neutral vacuum in which neutral experience was spent", to an awareness of himself in relation to imminent, intimate death: "It made death vivid to him again, and worse than that, it made him conscious of himself. ... it made Brody wonder who he was, and what it would mean if he would die".¹² Brody's re-awakened sense of himself is given literal force through rage as his sublimated compulsions and desires come alive. Thus, when the body of Luiz is recovered and the patrol make their way back to the village, Brody is painfully aware of his body, his physical discomfort, the odour of Luiz's gun, which he carries back, and, importantly, the odour of Luiz's blood: this last, the literal embodiment of Brody's cathartic experience of death, and his own precarious physicality:

Worst of all, there was the odor of Luiz's blood, a particularly sweet and intimate smell, fetid and suggesting to his nostrils that it was not completely dry. It was the smell of a man who had died, and it mingled with the fish oil and the soya sauce and the considerable stench of Brody's own body and Brody's own work-sweated clothes, until he thought he would gag. The odor was everywhere; it stuck to his lungs and eddied in

his nostrils. As he perspired, his sweat touched the gun, seemed to dissolve from it newer, more unpleasant odors.¹³

Brody's cathartic experience of self-confrontation is anticipated on the march back to the village when the gun he is carrying becomes imaginatively construed as the body of a dead man. Essentially, Brody's experience is of the meaning of death, and more fundamentally, his own death:

Through the stupor of the march, he could not rid himself of the idea that he was carrying a dead man in his arms. A man who was completely dead. He had seen dead men whole and dead men in fractions and mutilations, but this was the first dead man who was completely dead to Brody, and it filled him with fright. ... It seemed almost possible that Luiz was carrying him, and he was the one who had died.¹⁴

In this way, Luiz, and the meaning of Luiz's actions become real for Brody, and he is able to experience the meaning of Luiz's death as it relates to him personally. Mailer contrasts the Filipino villagers' respect for life and death with the casual disregard of death that is Brody's armour against the experience of war, by presenting Brody, finally, in a state of confrontation with the meaning, or meaninglessness of his life and death. Although the experience is transitory, for a moment, Brody is "stripped of the casual monotony, the dull work, and the saving depression which had wrapped him like a bandage. He was naked, and it was one of the most terrifying experiences in his life".¹⁵ The experience, however, does serve to restore to Brody his sense of a common humanity (what Mailer refers to as "collective" humanity), and Mailer's intent is to demonstrate that Brody's existential self-reckoning has prevented him from losing all sense of identity and the interdependent, dialectical relation of life and death, through nullity and inertia.

If "A Calculus at Heaven" and "The Dead Gook" anticipate the consistent and patterned use of a major metaphoric motif - the experience of existential reckoning within an extreme context, which presages self-discovery and the realisation of courage - Mailer is able to formulate this motif within the literary universe of *Advertisements for Myself* (in which the two stories appear) as he recounts the personal impetus for the experience of self-analysis. With the sudden and unparalleled success of *The Naked and the Dead*, Mailer's sense of personal identity lost its meaning as his escalated fame replaced Mailer, the nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn, with Mailer, the celebrated young novelist. In this sense, Mailer felt that his past history had been "lobotomised" from the present shape of his existence and he was therefore responsible for shaping the form and character of his subsequent life and self:

Willy-nilly I had had existentialism forced upon me. I was free, or at least whatever was still ready to change in my character had escaped from the social obligations which suffocate others. I could seek to become what I chose to be, and if I failed - there was the ice pick of fear! I would have nothing to excuse failure. I would fail because I had not been brave enough to succeed. So I was much too free. Success had been a lobotomy to my past, there seemed no power from the past which could help me in the present, and I had no choice but to force myself to step into the war of the enormous present, to accept the private heat and fatigue of setting out by myself to cut a track through a new world.¹⁶

Mailer's by now familiar testament, "for I wish to attempt an entrance into the mysteries of murder, suicide, incest, orgy, orgasm and Time" was the conscious decision to act upon the realisation of his own vision, which "was leading toward the violent and the orgiastic". What was later to become the thematic base to Mailer's writing was initially the means by

which Mailer determined the direction and, for him, salvation of his career as a novelist. In the process of his self-analysis and confrontation, Mailer discovered "Three or four years of constipated work, lack of confidence, cowardly sweetness and bouts of churlishness",¹⁷ the result of denying, or failing to recognise those themes which would most closely mirror the personal vision he was now discovering. Mailer's exacting self-appraisal in the act of writing itself is the means by which he confronts the truth of his own wasted potential and the compromise of a denial of his courage to say what he truly wished. Mailer, must therefore, admit both to himself and to the world that stories like "The Dead Gook" represented a "retreat" in his work because he "was not trying for more than (he) could do".¹⁸ *Advertisements for Myself* is itself the experience of catharsis by which Mailer was able to purge himself of this sense of debilitating cowardice and compromise, as well as determine a form for his inner rage and the personal conviction of an endemic apathy which gave the book its impetus:

I was eliminating some of the sludge of the past. My style then came into being out of no necessity finer than a purgative to bad habit, but my emotions, warlike and dictatorial, came from rage. It was rage for what had been wasted in me, and conceivably there was equal rage for what had been wasted in others. If I had one noble emotion it was rage against that national conformity which smothered creativity ...¹⁹

Mailer, then, is concerned with existential self-confrontation as a literal means of salvation from conformity, inertia, compromise - in short, from the debilitating and entropic tendency to deny oneself the validity and expression of one's desires, urges, compulsions. The context for self-confrontation must be existential - that is, any situation in

which the individual is unencumbered by the influence of social directives and in which there are no mitigating, social constraints; a situation in which the implications for action are fearful but unknown; a situation in which the individual comes face to face with the most fundamental questions of existence - because it is only in such situations that the truth of one's limits and potential are revealed. Further, it is because a "stench of fear has come out of every pore of American life, and we suffer from a collective failure of nerve"²⁰ that one must, at some point, divorce oneself from society in order to discover, and test the limits of one's capacity for courage.

The basis of Mailer's exhortation of self-confrontation is "The White Negro"; implicit in this important essay is the view that the individual must be seen as a "collection of possibilities". One does not, therefore, locate one's courage beyond oneself, rather, one discovers one's potential for courage within, and vindicates this discovery in action. Moreover, Mailer's perspective is dynamic: one must determine the capacity to detect the nature of a situation in order that one act at the right time (that is, when one is most likely to discover and act upon whatever is good, brave or strong, in one). Even Rusty, the "cream of corporate corporateness" is presented, in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* as a collection of possibilities wherein the capacity for heroism is realised temporarily. By leaving the "Medium Assholes" behind, Rusty and D.J. place themselves in existential confrontation with their own, individual responses to fear; the social constructs by which Rusty exists in a power relationship with the Medium Assholes have been removed, and the paternal-filial relationship of Rusty and D.J. is brought into focus as

the means by which Rusty might achieve authenticity, and D.J., courage.

Mailer's concerns centre upon an heroic imperative in a world in which such an imperative has become displaced, if not lost altogether. Mailer construes the world of his novels as the struggle of life and form against death and chaos, and he emphasises the individual's moral responsibility within the context of this struggle: if one does not seek out and act upon the best of one's inclinations for growth and courage, then one contributes, by default, to the principles of entropy, disorder, chaos and the totalitarian rigidity of simple acceptance of social convention. Mailer's demand for heroism is his belief that one must not accept the limitations inherent in any situation as final, but rather, one must seek to test the limits of one's capacity for courage in order to locate greater reserves of determination, energy, and bravery. Implicit, then, is Mailer's belief that the individual defines himself through action, and this forms the basis of Mailer's existential ethic in which the discovery of the form of one's being is the discovery of courage or cowardice at the moment of crisis. Indeed, Mailer cannot divorce the individual effort and the collective character of the nation, and his espousal of the requirement of heroism is based on a perception of America, slipping gradually further into an entropic malaise of disorder and chaos, masked by the rigid totalitarian structures of the "Establishment".

The dialectic implicit in Mailer's perception of society as manifesting both an entropic tendency toward chaos, and the rigidity of totalitarianism parallels the divisive compulsions of the individual for both complete autonomy of will and the

assertion of will through social power. Mailer frequently portrays his characters as seeking to divorce themselves totally from any social constructs or imperatives (Stephen Rojack's urge to jump, to "fly"; D.J.'s compulsion to head to the icy North) whilst at the same time they are as strongly enticed by the desire for power and the brute assertion of will (Rojack feels compelled by Barney Kelly's invitation to "get shitty" with him, D.J. is finally seduced by the wealth and power of the corporation). Mailer's theme is one which figures importantly and frequently in American fiction. In determining the relationship of self and society, Mailer fears the constriction of any externally imposed "outlines" or constructions, but equally fears what Tony Tanner refers to as "the nightmare of non-identity":

... the dread of utter formlessness, of being a soft, vulnerable, endlessly manipulable blob, of not being a distinct self. The nightmare of non-identity, of no-form, is a recurrent one. On the other hand, any one adopted armature which will contain and give shape and definition ... is at the same time felt to be an imprisoning deathly constriction, as Rojack's marriage is; and in the name of liberty these armatures, or imposed outlines, or the constructions other people build around us are to be cast off or broken through.²¹

Mailer's portrayal of Marilyn Monroe, for example, emphasises his perception of her as divided by her various conflicting desires and compulsions, as the dialectical response to his fear that she lacked any sense of self in order that she could act in any particular way for any particular purpose. Thus, in "The Misfits" she is "not so much a woman as a mood, a cloud of drifting senses in the form of Marilyn Monroe",²² and in *Of Women and Their Elegance*, Mailer has Marilyn "confess", "I guess I have no personality of my own. Maybe that is why I am an actress. I

feel like I can be anybody else for a little while"²³ or, even more pointedly, "My secret fear was that if I let everything go, if I just relaxed, I would be nothing but mud".²⁴ Mailer's point, of course, is that defining oneself is necessary to prevent the annihilation of oneself through formlessness and inertia. Furthermore, one defines oneself dialectically, in terms of the divisions and inner, conflicting tensions, the absence of which entails dissipation, formlessness, nothingness.

Rejecting the opportunity for self-confrontation and self-discovery is itself the retreat to "something less"; the denial of growth which aligns one more firmly on the side of entropy and formlessness. Sam Slovoda aptly portrays the individual who, faced with the pivotal questions of existence as they relate to him personally, chooses to deny himself this opportunity for growth explicit in the experience of existential self-confrontation, thereby confirming of himself the verdict he ascribes his never-to-be-completed novel: "However could he organise his novel? What form to give it? It is so complex. Too loose ... too scattered".²⁵

Mailer's vision is based on his assertion that the easy acceptance of any given structure is unhealthy because one is denying oneself the opportunity to develop what might be termed mental muscle-tone - the ability to seek out, test, and act upon the compulsions which will enable one to be better than one thought oneself capable of becoming. Similarly, in response to his perception of himself as author, Mailer decries the "craft" of the writer as the tendency to rely on past, proven habits, rather than daring the terror of attempting an entrance into unchartered territory: " ... 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. Craft protects one from facing those endless expanding realities of deterioration and responsibility".²⁶ Mailer's response to his perception of society as drifting toward the formless, entropic principles of chaos and disorder is to embrace in its totality, life, as offering redemptive possibilities in both its positive and negative aspects. That is, disease and violence may be necessary as a means of opening one's vision to embrace love and salvation - as, indeed, Stephen Rojack discovers in *An American Dream*.

Mailer's most resonant theme - that of the search for selfhood in a world increasingly alien to any notion of self, and, indeed, a world in which identity is subsumed by mass conformity - is given a personal context by Mailer's pointed self-reference in many of his novels. Mailer's polemical ideology is offset by a self-conscious literariness, and in the balance of the two one discovers a reconciliation of Mailer's divergent impulses toward politics (convention) and psychology (chaos) in the creative act of writing itself. In such a way does Mailer seek to enter the "time of his time" by positing his personal history within the larger focus of the national endeavour: the process of history. In *Of a Fire on the Moon*, for example, Mailer's participation in the events of the novel allows him to expand upon a personal awe at the events of history being created ("... and he heard himself saying (as the Apollo rocket lifts heavenward) 'Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Oh, my God ... and had a poor moment of vertigo at the thought that man now had something with which to speak to God ...'"²⁷) to delineate a personal polemic as well as underscore the experience as

universal: "It was somehow superior to see the astronauts and the flight of Apollo II as the instrument of ... celestial or satanic endeavours, than as ... a sublimation of aggressive and intolerably inhuman desires ... Aquarius preferred the ... assumption, that we were the indispensable instruments of a monumental vision with whom we had begun a trip".²⁸

Mailer's sense of the dialectical interplay of forces and compulsions, both within the individual and within the social universe, anticipates his moral condemnation of uni-lateralism (embracing both the entropic principle of disorder and chaos and the restrictive rigidity of totalitarianism) because he views the absence of confronting one's divergent impulses, or the inability to perceive the complex interdependence of warring factions within the social whole as symptomatic of the "disease" of moral dislocation. *The Deer Park* for example, is a microcosmic portrayal of America, where the reality of evil is consistently denied by the simplistic assertion that one can get what one wants at no real cost. *The Deer Park*, moreover, both in the manner of its (eventual) completion as well as its themes anticipates Mailer's important existential ethic. For this reason, it requires special attention because, in many ways, *The Deer Park* lays the groundwork for the metaphoric dialectical structuring apparent in the later works.

The world of Desert D'or provides a moral context for understanding the central characters of the novel - Elena, Eitel, Sergius and Marion are delineated by their separation from the morally anaesthetised world of Desert D'or (which is not to suppose that all these characters are delineated by their moral "goodness", in fact, Marion Faye is special because he

encapsulates a principle of evil). Mailer's point is that these characters are separated from their environment by their individually perceived sense of identity as a moral being: capable of good and bad, growth and self-betrayal, or by the necessity to dissociate themselves from their environment in order to secure a sense of identity. The demand for self-confrontation is therefore Mailer's sense of the means of escape from the modern malaise of "constipation, emptiness, boredom and a flat dull terror of death". This is because to confront the truth of one's self - to secure a sense of one's identity - thus provides one with knowledge of what constitutes the worth of one's existence, and how one might achieve this. Even Marion Faye, secure in the knowledge of what turns him on (to use the language of the hipster), can subsequently get his kicks in a wholly self-fulfilling, socially reprehensible manner.

The quality of moral dislocation endemic in *Desert D'or* is contrasted with Eitel's painful self-analysis, which is underscored as the necessary step toward self-definition; which is further established as the central moral theme of the novel. Eitel's failure to realise the courage to be more than his scared self-estimate resonates with a sense of tragic fatality, because his self-analysis is pivotal and searching:

... there had been the luxury of looking at his life as wine he decanted in a glass, studying the color, admiring the corruption, leaving for himself the secret taste: he was above all this, he was better than the others, he was more honest, and one day he would take his life and transmute it into something harder than a gem and as imperishable, an art work. Had he been afraid to try, he would think, for the fear that his superiority did not exist? The manuscript lay like a dust-rag on his desk, and Eitel found, as he had found before, that the difficulty of art was that it forced a man back on his life, and

each time the task was more difficult and distasteful. So, in brooding over his past, he came to remember the unadmitted pleasure of making commercial pictures. With them he had done well, for a while at least, despite all pretences that he had been disgusted, and looking back upon such emotions, concealed so long from himself, Eitel felt with dull pain that he should have realised he would never be the artist he had always expected, for if there were one quality beyond all others in an artist, it was the sense of shame, of sickness, and of loathing for any work which was not his best.²⁹

Similarly, his love affair with Elena ultimately fails, -because Eitel does not possess sufficient courage to act upon the knowledge of his inner cowardice and transmute this fear to strength and determination. Eitel must pay for electing to remain the same, instead of electing growth. In fact, Mailer's emphasis throughout his writing is placed firmly on the necessity of action as the only means of vindicating self-knowledge or the realisation of one's capacity for growth. Eitel is portrayed as possessing such knowledge - his moral courage in refusing to cooperate with the special investigators is given further impetus by his desire to make a movie that "can justify so much bad work" - but this realisation lacks adequate focus for translation to action. As Eitel himself says, "I had always been mixed up in something I didn't exactly want. I began to think that the reason I acted the way I did with the Committee was to give myself another chance. And yet I didn't know what to do with the chance".³⁰

If Mailer exhorts both the characters of his novels and his readers (in the moral polemic which underscores the themes of all his writing) to face the truth of character in an existential context, and to translate this to action in order to precipitate growth, *The Deer Park* is Mailer's account of the compromise of

one character beyond the point at which balance of the divergent claims of the self might be achieved. Whilst Eitel fails the test of courage in this way, Sergius delineates the important thematic basis of Mailer's dialectical structuring throughout the book: his sense of two disparate "worlds" - the "real world ... a world of wars and boxing clubs and children's homes on back streets, and this real world was a world where orphans burned orphans" and "the other world in which almost everybody lived. The imaginary world"³¹ - is Sergius' inarticulate desire for abdication from his fears and perceived weaknesses, as well as his need of connection to something which may restore his sense of being alive and valuable. Sergius' involvement with Lulu Meyers signifies his desire to forget the memory of the "real world", where "orphans burn orphans" as well as his desperate need to affirm his manhood, which he feels has been irrevocably lost. Whereas Sergius finally is able to reconcile his need for affirmation in his relationship with Lulu Meyers and the world she inhabits with a perception of self integrity which can manifest itself only in exclusion from Desert D'or, Eitel's fragile self-perception gradually undermines his capacity for courage to affirm the love he feels for Elena. In this sense, Eitel cannot balance his belief in, and need for the love Elena offers, with his cynicism and his fear of failure - of failing in love, of failing his own potential. As such, Eitel's real failure is this fear itself, because his desire to defeat inner cowardice and restore his courage and self-dignity is, finally, not strong enough.

Eitel and Sergius are engaged upon similar quests for self-renewal and self-affirmation, borne of a pivotal experience of

self-reckoning. In a way, the relationship of Eitel and Sergius manifests Mailer's sense of the dialectic as the expression of the divergent claims of an individual personality. Certainly Eitel and Sergius are not meant to represent the divided halves of a single being, but their separate responses to what amounts to a similar predicament of existential confusion represents the decision to realise integrity on the one hand, and the compromise of heartfelt desires and needs on the other. Eitel continually hovers on the edge - to use Mailer's favoured metaphor - of realisation so profound as to precipitate action on his part that might restore his sense of lost integrity and self-identity. His pivotal realisation, "Eitel was mourning the death of the unwritten hero; buried by Freddie; no, buried by himself"³² is sufficient for him to translate the experience of personal failure into the determination to realise love and courage in his relationship with Elena, but this desire is inarticulate, and, ultimately, expressed in terms of his own fear and jealousy. Eitel's response to his own inarticulated fear and cowardice, not dissimilar to that of Sam Slovoda as he too, faces the truth of his own compromised existence, is contrasted with Sergius' reaction to the discovery of his own ambition. In fact, as Collie Munshin attempts to seduce Sergius to the morally bankrupt society of Desert D'or with the offer of a movie contract, Sergius experiences a pivotal moment of recognition in which the disparate real and imaginary worlds become the nexus to a greater self-understanding in terms of the reality of his, Sergius' experience of his past:

I had been tempted more than once to sign the papers Munshin would hand me, but it wasn't stubbornness alone which held me back. I kept

thinking of the Japanese K.P. with his burned arm, and I could hear him say, "Am I going to be in the move? Will they show the scabs and the pus?" The closer I came to wanting the contract, the more he bothered me, and all the while Collie would go on or Lulu would go on, painting my career with words, talking about the marvellous world, the real world, about all the good things which would happen to me, and all the while I was thinking they were wrong, and the real world was underground - a tangle of wild caves where orphans burned orphans.³³

In this way, Mailer also alludes to his belief that the way in which one comes to a pivotal sense of one's own worth - the shape of oneself - is a function of one's ability to fathom the self that is (in the present) in relation to the self that was (in the past) and in terms of one's most heartfelt desires and aspirations (anticipated for the future).

As early as *The Deer Park* is within the context of the body of Mailer's work, it marks an important juncture in Mailer's self-perceived identity as a novelist and his as-yet unformulated existential ethic. Whereas *The Deer Park* fulfills the reader's expectations of the novel (in terms of plot, structure, and theme) it was written in circumstances which Mailer could later describe in terms befitting the experience of the hipster:

I turned within my psyche I can almost believe, for I felt something shift to murder in me. I finally had the simple sense to understand that if I wanted my work to travel further than others, the life of my talent depended on fighting a little more, and looking for help a little less. ... All I felt then was that I was an outlaw, a psychic outlaw, and I liked it, I liked it a god sight better than trying to be a gentleman, and with a set of emotions accelerating one on the other, I mined down deep into the murderous message of marijuana, the smoke of the assassins, and for the first time in my life I knew what it was like to make your kicks.³⁴

Mailer's experience in this manner, focused partly in the figure of Marion Faye, shows Mailer moving toward his theme of the

necessity of confronting the important questions of existence - those concerning murder, suicide, lust, fear, and so on - as they impinge upon one personally and as the necessary impetus for self-evaluation in terms of one's capacity for courage, cowardice, compromise and bravery. If one arrives at the root of obsession through alcohol or drugs, as Mailer believed at the time of writing *The Deer Park*, Eitel's drunk testament, "'Why is my brain always so alive when I'm too drunk ever to do anything about it?'"³⁵ shows Eitel finally confronting the truth of his cowardly, compromised nature. He faces his own fundamental inability to rise above his fear and sense of inadequacy by which he knows he will engage in the orgy which will end his love for Elena once and for all; and he knows he will give in to the Committee in a final gesture of compromise and moral inertia.

By contrast, Mailer explores the intimation of his personal perception of the "psychic outlaw" in the character of Marion Faye. Faye's marijuana-induced fevers and nightmares are his personal means of facing his most awful longings, desires and temptations: in Marion Faye, the archetypal hipster longs for fulfillment beyond the socially acceptable means and, unlike both Sergius and Eitel, when Marion Faye declares, "'It's bullshit, it's all bullshit. Cut the bullshit. Cut it dead'" it is with the assurance that he can seek out, dare to engage, and, finally, determine what would "cut the bullshit" and restore to him the adventure and excitement of life that he requires for his own sense of personal integrity and identity. Like Stephen Rojack, salvation for Marion Faye is to be found in the contemplation and perpetration of violence and perversion. In his wild imaginings, Marion prays, "'Oh, My Lord, ... I have sinned and fallen from

Grace, for I wish Damnation upon You'" but, rather than avoid the implications of his most awful thoughts, Marion dares these fearful desires as the potential for freedom, for greater thrills and excitement:

... as if indeed his thoughts had become needless to probe the Sorcerer in him, and when the dot of his brain was found where the needle entered without pain, then he was damned, he was discovered. Or was he freed? For beyond, in the far beyond, was the heresy that God was the Devil and the One they called the Devil was God-in-banishment like a noble prince deprived of true Heaven, and God who was the Devil had conquered except for the few who saw the cheat that God was not God at all. So he prayed, 'Make me cold Devil, and I will run the world in your name.'³⁶

The Deer Park is structured in such a way as to posit Sergius between Eitel and Marion in terms of their common experience of self-reckoning within an existential context. Just as Eitel is called upon to face his innermost desires and his capacity for courage in love and in his moral relationship to himself, Marion seeks the same experience of, and affirmation of the shape of his being, but through daring the excitement of the taboo, and forcing himself to confront his fear. Whereas Eitel faces, and rejects the opportunity to engage his fear to realise greater personal growth, Marion seeks out the source of his largest and most deeply buried fears in order to confront this fear and so transmute fear to strength. Sergius - like Rojack, Tim Madden, even the Mailer of *The Armies of the Night* - determines the shape of his being in the balance of his divergent desires and inclinations. In this sense, the Mailer hero is capable of realising courage as well as cowardice, but to acknowledge the existence of both as motivating and compelling one to action is the initial step towards achieving equilibrium of one's

conflicting desires, what Mailer would term balance at the edge of the divide. Sergius' realisation of his need to write as a means of securing an identity as well as integrity simultaneously precipitates acknowledgement of his inner fear, his cowardice and his vanity:

Somehow, I had known Eitel would help me to refuse the offer. On the way back, knowing my decision was made, I discovered I was feeling fairly well. I knew that my decision didn't mean very much; if my movie was not made then others would be made, but at least my name would not be used. I suppose what I really was thinking is that I would always be a gambler, and if I passed this chance by, it was because I had the deeper idea that I was meant to gamble on better things than money or a quick career. I had a look then into the kind of vanity I shared with Eitel. Each of us judged himself hard, for strong in us was the idea that we must be perfect. We felt we were better than others and therefore we should act better. ...

By evening my fear had come back, physical fear with a dry throat and a hot heart. I was scared and there was no check on it because I knew my mind was made up and I would not change it now. I even forced myself to tell Lulu.³⁷

By refusing Munshin's offer, Sergius gains an insight into his capacity for courage, as well as the definition of his innermost needs, fears and weaknesses. Sergius experiences, as he never has before, the reality of his existence, both past and present.

Up until this point, Sergius' life has been characterised by an absence of structure: when Sergius says, early in the book, "I had always thought that to know oneself was all that was necessary, probably because I didn't know myself at all"³⁸ he offers a hint of a directionless existence which, in Mailer's terms, is chaotic because formless. Indeed, Sergius explains the impetus for his stay at Desert D'or in the following terms, "... I hardly wrote a word while I was at the resort. But I was not ready to work ... I did not want to feel too much, and I did not

want to think"³⁹ thereby underscoring the importance of the experience of confrontation with his past which follows his decision to reject Desert D'or implicit in refusing Munshin's offer. By acting in such a way as to affirm his sense of himself, Sergius is re-engaging his past, but in terms of its reality to him now, in the present. Sergius experiences a "metaphorical leap across a gap"⁴⁰ in which the relationship between self and other is made explicit to the "I" of one's being. As such, although Sergius experiences a sense of self-affirmation in his relationship with Lulu, his feelings are the affirmation of his capacity to feel, and Lulu is incidental to this:

What she said made me afraid again, and it was a tangible fear, as if the moment I left her room the burned corpses of half the world would be lying outside the door. We started to make love, and I couldn't think of her or of myself or of anything but flesh, and flesh came into my mind, bursting flesh, rotting flesh, flesh hung on spikes in butcher stalls, flesh burning, flesh gone to blood. ... I had a horror I would start crying, and I couldn't trust myself to speak. We weren't inches apart and yet I had the feeling I had to reach out to her across a great distance.⁴¹

Moreover, Sergius is also able to confront the root cause of his impotence in a startling admission that marks the juncture between his previous formless existence and his present sense of identity; explicated as the rejection of Lulu, and, by association, Desert D'or:

... finally there had come the time when I could no longer go the geisha girls, so nice, so feminine, because flesh was raw, flesh was the thing one burned in the real world, and in a kind of sweat at myself. I would yell into the pressure of my brain, 'I enjoy it. I enjoy the fire. I have the cruelty to be a man.' So I had been without a woman and without love until the night I met (Lulu) ... I loved her more now, and

yet it was with bitter love, with a feeling of loss. For each of us knew that there was nowhere to go after this night.⁴²

Sergius explicates Mailer's theme in which the individual must defeat inertia through achieving the necessary equilibrium of the divergent compulsions to both chaos and convention: the urge, on one hand, to escape from or avoid the fearful implications of action by denying their existence; and the urge, on the other hand, to reject the opportunity to grow by abdicating to the seductive but rigid limitations of society. Eitel, although he perceives clearly what it is necessary for him to do in order that he defeat cowardice, cannot act upon the recognition of his own capacity for heroic resistance, and retreats, therefore, into the fundamental principle of entropy: inertia. When Eitel declares, "The essence of spirit ... was to choose the thing which did not better one's position but made it more perilous. That was why the world he knew was poor, for it insisted that morality and caution were identical"⁴³ it is with no conviction of his personal need to act upon this realisation: Eitel is doomed, by his own decision to reject the opportunity for growth, to the poor moral squalor of defeated idealism and the pettiness of cruelty which lacks adequate focus for translation to insight and action:

He was weary, he was exhausted - a defeated man cannot be asked to have the moral bravery of a victor. So Eitel turned on Elena, and in his best accent he said, 'Must you worship stupidity as if it were your patron saint?' She wept then. ... He heard her slip out of bed, grope her way to the bathroom, felt like a whip against his eyes the glare of the bathroom light before she closed the door, and then he was alone, left with nothing but his rage, his cold animosity, and the knowledge that Elena was crying ... Eitel tried to shut her from his mind, and all the while his own feet chilled, his body shuddered from cold perspiration

... 'It really is my fault,' he thought, and he got out of bed and went to her. ... Yet the stern taskmaster of his conscience knew that he had denied Elena a most valuable opportunity to grow because he had called her stupid at the instant when she had been most perceptive of his character.⁴⁴

In contrast, Sergius' pivotal experience with the special investigators reveals to him his capacity for bravery - the experience is fundamental to his growth and self-perception, because it marks the point at which he can effect the clean break from Desert D'or which has been anticipated already by his action in refusing Munshin's movie offer. The distance Sergius travels from his scared self-estimate, "all in all I was about as brave as an eight-year-old boy at the bottom of an abandoned mine shaft",⁴⁵ to the point at which Sergius is able to say: "I got up all my courage, which is to say I showed more courage than I had"⁴⁶ reflects Sergius' moral, or spiritual journey from a sense of inadequacy, personal emptiness and failure, to the balanced perception of the divided compulsions which form the whole of his selfhood. This perception of being is possible because Sergius has come face to face with his own capacity for heroism; the experience with the special investigators provides Sergius with sufficient insight to balance the desire to be a hero with the urge to escape the potential terror of the situation. Furthermore, Sergius' realisation of inner courage is the necessary antecedent to his recognition of the meaning of his past as it impinges upon his present experience, and, indeed, as it anticipates his future experience. If Sergius is initially aware of his inner emptiness and moral inertia, he can translate this awareness to a vision of future possibilities for brave and self-fulfilling action. In essence, Sergius has defeated both

chaos - the desire to flee from the rigours of self-analysis which would force confrontation with the implications of one's self and one's experience - as well as convention - the rigidity and conformity of the system, which imprisons the self in a vacuum of imposed values perceptions. Sergius achieves the important connection between action and self-awareness which is all but non-existent in Desert D'or and which is the important means by which one prevents the annihilation of one's personal sense of being through inertia, or nothingness:

Because these finally were the kind of men I had grown up with ... and when all was said I knew I was not so different from them, not nearly so different as I liked to think. All the while they had been in my room and we had talked, I had been nervously and crucially divided, and much of me had been agreeing with everything they said. So I had another inkling of the kind of secret dialogues which had been going on in me through the years, and I lay there for more than one night, ... and I began to think, at least I learned how to try to think, for to do that, one must be ready to live in a hunt for the most elusive game - our real motive or motives and not the ostensible reason - and therefore I would have to look into myself. But that was not the easiest thing to do, for what did I have to discover? I was nothing, a false Irishman from a real orphanage, a boxer without punch, a flier whose reflexes were gone, a potential stool-pigeon for every policeman who would use his knuckle, and worst of all, a preliminary boy in the bedroom - that was something to stop thought forever.⁴⁷

It is this important experience of existential confrontation which precipitates Sergius' realisation of the dialectical interdependence of one's inner, warring compulsions and motivations. In fact, Sergius becomes Mailer's mouthpiece for the ideas which have been refined and are familiar as the dualisms and oppositions which Mailer posits as the dialectical perception of personality:

I thought of courage and of cowardice, and how we are all brave and all terrified each in our own way and our private changing proportion, and I thought of honesty and deception, and the dance of life they make, for it is exactly when we come closest to another that we are turned away with a lie, and blunder forward on a misconception, moving to understand ourselves on the platitudes and lies of the past. And, vaguely, thinking of certain words not as words but as the serious divisions of my experience, and every man's experience is serious to himself, I thought of such couples as love and hate, and victory and defeat, and what it was to feel warm and what it was to be cool. I explored with humility and early arrogance ... knowing I was weak and wondering if I would ever be strong. For I touched the bottom myself, there was a bottom that time. I returned to it, I wallowed in it, I looked at myself, and the longer I looked the less terrifying it became and the more understandable. I began then to make those first painful efforts to acquire the most elusive habit of all, the mind of the writer, and though I could hardly judge from my early pages whether I were a talent or a fool, I continued ... but I knew that finally one must do, simply do, for we act in total ignorance and yet in honest ignorance we must act ... for we can hardly believe what we are told, we can only measure what has happened inside ourselves.⁴⁸

The final sentence of the preceding passage is vital because Mailer's emphasis throughout his writing states firmly that any experience of self-reckoning must gain expression in action, in order that the experience be valid as an opportunity for one to increase in self-knowledge, to move forward, to grow. As Sergius (Mailer) intimates, the discovery of one's capacity for courage occurs only in the decision to act bravely; similarly, the fear which leaves one inert is the measure of one's debilitating cowardice. In *The Executioner's Song*, Nicole decides that she will be reincarnated as a "little white bird". In a moment of pivotal self-reckoning, however, she confronts the truth of her own madness of heart and knows "that if she didn't straighten out the way she lived with men, she was going to come back ugly and no man would ever want to look at her".⁴⁹ The implicit

suggestion is that life cannot be cheated, that the way in which one chooses to dispose of one's life impinges directly upon the quality of both the life one leads in the "enormous present" as well as that life which is anticipated beyond death. Cancer, disease and schizophrenia are the manifest expression of carelessly misused, abused lives, or lives that have been compromised beyond any hope of retrieval.

Mailer believes, somewhat simply, that if we deny our feelings, in whatever capacity, we are denying the truth of what is most real about ourselves and what gives us the best indication of the way we should live and act. The simple certainty of this supposition is at the basis of Mailer's explanation for Nicole's relationship with Gary Gilmore, beyond the more complex moral issues surrounding Gary's murders and his subsequent wish to be executed. In this sense, Nicole determines the form of her being in confrontation with her mixed feelings for Gary, and in the admittance of those feelings she can both assert herself as well as prevent the total compromise of herself which she feels would be inevitable otherwise. Gary is also, as Mailer portrays him, aware of the responsibility one has for one's life in terms of one's actions: in the first of his articulate and disturbing letters to Nicole, he refers to a large debt, "something I owe", as part-explanation for his need to redeem his actions through death by execution. Gary Gilmore in this sense, expresses Mailer's belief that one can achieve wholeness, that is, the equilibrium of one's divergent inclinations and desires only through confronting the truth of those inclinations and determining action which reflects one's decision to realise some moral good, as opposed to what would

represent acquiescence or compromise to inertia or totalitarianism - the principle(s) of evil Mailer refers to as "Entropy turned Manichaen".

Mailer's terms are moral because he separates action and decision between what is "good" and what is "bad", both for oneself (one's growth or one's retreat to something less) and for the larger collective condition of mankind. Thus, when Gary writes to Nicole, "Once you asked me if I was the devil, remember? I'm not. The devil would be far more clever than I, would operate on a much larger scale and of course would feel no remorse. So I'm not Beelzebub. And I know the devil can't feel love. but I might be further from God than I am from the devil. Which is not a good thing. It seems that I know evil more intimately than I know goodness and that's not a good thing either. I want to get even, to be made even, whole, my debts paid ... to have no blemish, no reason to feel guilt or fear. I hope this ain't corny, but I'd like to stand in the sight of God. To know that I'm just and right and clean"⁵⁰ his sense of the division between what is morally right and what is morally wrong is the expression of Mailer's own division of God and the Devil in the same terms.

Mailer asserts that to move toward God, or to retreat to the Devil is dependent upon one's capacity to withstand the deepest and most dire questioning regarding the nature and meaning of existence, within a personal context. As such, Mailer would want to contextualise Gary's intense analysis of the experience of death, "What will I meet when I die? The Oldness? Vengeful ghosts? A dark gulf? Will my spirit be flung about the universe faster than thought? ..." in terms of his subsequent reckoning of

death in the personal sense of his relationship with Nicole: "Nicole, I believe we always have a choice. And I choose, that when I die, or change form, or whatever best describes this thing called death, I choose that I wait for you, that I meet you, that I find you - the part of my heart and soul I have sought for so long - ".⁵¹ Mailer would assert that to thus enter the experience of death in the personal contemplation of its relation to oneself, is to assist in the creation of the form of the experience for oneself, so that death is not defeat or annihilation but can be seen as the means toward the final embodiment of one's being. Indeed, the very experience of terror can benefit one's psychic health:

If you were really scared, and went through it, and came out on the other side intact, then it was hard not to believe for a little while that you were on the side of the gods. It felt as if you could do no wrong. Time slowed. You were no longer doing it. For good or ill, *it* was doing it. You had entered the logic of the other scheme where death and life has as many relations as Yin and Yang.⁵²

In this passage, Mailer is referring to any experience which is fearful and which, therefore, may provide one with the greatest opportunity for growth and self perception. Mailer's concern is that one's sense of identity and integrity - the two should be synonymous - are continually under threat of extinction through the pervasive influence of anything which would inhibit the instinctual relation of the individual to his sense of self. This is why Mailer decries plastic as one of the modern evils of the technocratic age, because it is an artificial substance wholly divorced from nature. Its pervasive presence in the late Twentieth Century serves to delineate the distance modern man has come from his natural relation to his origins; from his capacity

to feel and respond in terms of his instincts and feelings. Similarly, pills create a numbing effect on the individual's capacity to feel his pain, which is a vital reminder of his physicality, and which may also be the indication the individual requires of the source of some deeper, spiritual or emotional pain. As such, Mailer's repeated emphasis is placed upon the necessity of confronting oneself through embracing the experiences of one's life as a means of determining the physical, emotional and spiritual shape of one's selfhood. Only in this way can one know what one requires to develop, grow, and move toward wholeness of being, which, in Mailer's terms is the reconciliation of one's divergent compulsions and desires.

Rather than simple compromise, Mailer views the achievement of equilibrium, or the balance of one's contrary inclinations as the way in which one thwarts the onset of decay, which is the result of inertia: of literally being/doing nothing. Thus, Nicole's conviction, in *The Executioner's Song*, that "slowly, real slow, but real sure, they were smothering her soul" is partly the effects of her incarceration in a mental hospital, but is essentially her expression of the debilitating effects of having to surrender, or deny the sense of herself which is the only means she has of retaining her sanity and her integrity as a person. Even her decision to attempt suicide is less an escape from life and more an effort to penetrate the mystery of death as a means of securing her relationship with Gary forever; a relationship which, for Nicole, is the realisation of a valuable and worthwhile sense of self. Thus, "She was so angry at herself for failing in that suicide. Now she had really lost control of her life". Nicole's response - to give in to the rigid rules

and functions of the hospital - is expressed by Mailer in terms of a dialectical division between acquiescence to inertia which is the death of being, as well as Nicole's attempt to safeguard an inner core of herself from the intrusive and corrosive effects of the hospital and its rules and regulations:

She would be sitting in a line of girls, listening to them bitch and holler and would put her head on her knees and never even look up, not once, never react to anything going on. Just sit through a whole meeting with her head on her knees crying away. Nobody paid any attention. ...

Nicole wanted to say, "You goddamned idiots. I don't care what any of you do. You're all so dumb you think I'm sick. It doesn't matter. Even if you think I'm crazy, this is the way I want to be. I don't want to change."⁵⁴

Nicole's attempt to reconcile her desire for integrity with her perceived need to conform to the system of the hospital is perceived by Mailer as the requisite equilibrium of the divergent claims of her selfhood. In effect, Nicole is able to transcend the debilitating effects of the rigid hospital structure because she has been able to locate that part of herself which is most separate from the authoritarian structures of the hospital - one instance of totalitarianism - and therefore, the truest indication of her selfhood. In this way can Nicole retain the shape of her being rather than succumb to defeat by either inertia, or by conformity.

Mailer purports to show that one may compromise oneself in two ways: by relinquishing to the chaos of no form (wherein one can claim no moral responsibility for one's self or for one's actions), or by acquiescing to convention and the rigid structures of systems that have no relation to oneself. In a compelling and important episode in *The Executioner's Song*, Mailer emphasises this theme and shows how the individual may

translate newly-discovered knowledge of one's best possibilities - one's courage - to action, as the vindication of the discovery of selfhood. Lawrence Schiller, the journalist with whom Mailer collaborated in writing the novel, is also an important figure in the events of the novel. Once again, Mailer's context is the experience of pivotal self-reckoning, in which the cathartic discovery of one's most resonant urges provides the necessary impetus for action which is the vindication of one's sense of identity and integrity. Schiller discovers his relation to the events of Gary Gilmore's murders and subsequent demand for execution in moral terms, and this discovery presages the decision to act in the only way he knows can restore to him his displaced sense of selfhood:

He said to himself, 'I don't know any longer whether what I'm doing is morally right,' and that made him cry even more. He had been saying to himself for weeks that he was not part of the circus, that he had instincts which raised him above, a desire to record history, true history, not journalistic crap, but now he felt as if he was finally part of the circus and might even be the biggest part of it, and in the middle of crying, he went into the bathroom and took the longest fucking shit of his life. It was all diarrhea. ... The horrors were loose. The diarrhea went through him as if to squeeze every last rotten thing out, and still it came. When he thought he might be done, he looked out the window at the snow and made the decision that in no way was he every going to sell Gary Gilmore's execution. ... He had to stay by what his gut told him.⁵⁵

The scenario is not unlike that in *An American Dream*, when Stephen Rojack's physical (instinctual) reaction to the discovery of a cure for his loss of self - murder - is to vomit "with all the gusto of a horse on a gallop, cruds, violations, the rot and gas of compromise, the stink of old fears, mildew of discipline, all the biles of habit and the horrors of pretense".⁵⁶ In both

instances, Mailer means to show that the body literally rebels against the compromise of one's instincts for what one knows one must be, or do; and the realisation of these indicators of one's identity and integrity is cathartic. Furthermore, Schiller's experience locates the truth of the necessity of action to validate the discovery of one's integrity. When Schiller says, "He understood some of the fear at the center of his diarrhea", it is with the recognition that his decision not to sell Gary short demands action which is difficult, even fearful. He discovers, in essence, that "all the people who were respected in all the worlds he had gone through, respected for their integrity, had maybe not all been born with it, not every last one, but built it, job by job and night by separate night".⁵⁷ By engaging his most fundamental feelings and instincts, Schiller has thus discovered the shape of his being by which he can act in order to defeat compromise and the abdication to any principle that is not a true reflection of his sense of identity and integrity. Indeed, Schiller's vindication is complete as he determines the equilibrium of the divergent claims on his psyche - to retain his dignity, to do the best by his journalistic instincts, to ascertain where those instincts will lead him - again, Mailer couches the experience in the literal terms of Schiller's physical reaction to having vindicated a moral point of view: his retort to the newspapers demanding his pictures:

'Two weeks ago, you called me an entrepreneur, called me a promoter. Now, you want pictures. Want me to give you more about the execution. Well, I'm taking offence,' he said. 'We got to lay out a few ground rules. If you want to say that I hustled interviews from Lenny Bruce's widow, then I also want you to write about Minimata which is a book I'm proud of. If you want a picture of Marilyn Monroe, then also put in

a picture from the story I published on mercury poisoning.' He said, 'If you're gong to slant the story one way, balance it the other,' and he banged it back, and he banged it forth, and could feel his blood flowing through his veins again, instead of all that shit.⁵⁸

Mailer's impetus for emphasising the need for a balance of one's divergent compulsions is his recognition of the dialectical intensification of opposites as the means of securing form, as opposed to no-form: in describing the followers of Eugene McCarthy, in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, and contrasting them with his own opinions of Bobby Kennedy, Mailer says, "Their common denominator seemed to be found in some blank area of the soul, a species of disinfected idealism which gave one the impression when among them of living in a lobotomized ward of Upper Utopia. ... 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 overlords of corruption".⁵⁹ Here, Mailer's implication is that it is precisely Kennedy's ability to reconcile the contrary claims of idealism and the desire for magic, evil, and mystery which defines him as a whole, moral being, as opposed to the McCarthy groupies (and, by implication, McCarthy himself) who can be defined only in terms of the principles of formlessness, that which has no inner substance or character: "some blank area of the soul" ... "disinfected idealism". Moreover, the news of Bobby Kennedy's assassination serves to remind Mailer of his own lack of balance of the contrary inclinations of his psyche. Interestingly, Mailer's recognition of this imbalance between what he terms "the angel in oneself and the swine" is his recognition of his personal quality of moral dislocation. Mailer is able to locate a connection between his own evasion of

personal moral responsibility (in this instance to his marriage) and his perception of the moral impetus of Bobby Kennedy's heroic attempt at the Presidency of the United States:

... knowing no good answer could come for days, if at all, on the possible recovery of Bobby Kennedy, he went back to bed and lay in a seat of complicity, as if his own lack of moral witness (to the subtle heroism of Bobby Kennedy's attempt to run for President) could be found in the dance of evasions his taste for a merry life and a married one had become, as if this precise lack had contributed ... to one less piton of mooring for Senator Kennedy in his lonely ascent of those vaulted walls, as if finally the efforts of brave men depended in part on the protection of other men who saw themselves as at least provisionally brave, or sometimes brave, or at least - if not brave - balanced at least on a stability between selflessness and appetite and therefore - by practical purposes - decent.⁶⁰

What is vital in Mailer's recognition of this connection is his sense of personal responsibility for Kennedy's tragedy. In this way, Mailer reconciles the dialectic between the autonomous "I" and one's sense of an intrusive externality. At the same time, Mailer is able to perceive his own divided response to the necessity for action which is fearful - even terrifying - in terms of his sense of the situation: what could be termed an empathetic reaction to the form, or character of events. In this way, Mailer translates his recognition of "the fear with [which is] almost palpable outside" to the description of Chicago preparing for battle in the following terms: "So fear was in these empty streets, and the anger of the city at its fear, an anger which gave promise not soon to be satisfied by measures less than tyranny".⁶¹ Thus, confronted with his own dialectical uncertainty, Mailer's own uncanny sense of Chicago nearly matches his perception of the form of his being:

There was, of course, now every pressure to return but he would not - there was the real (if most fortuitous) danger to exposing the boxer; there was his own decision. He was either being sensible, militarily sensible, revolutionary in the hard way of facing into twenty years of a future like this, and the need for patience till the real battles came; or he was yellow. And he did not know. Fear was in him, but he had acted boldly in the past with much more fear than this. He could not decide whether he was in danger of deteriorating, or becoming sufficiently tough to be able to take a backward step.⁶²

The perception of one's divided inclinations or desires is the necessary basis from which one may determine action to precipitate balance, or equilibrium of those divided responses. Mailer aligns the personal experience of self-reckoning with the novel's plot development, so that the perception of his inner conflict, which leads to a vision of the action necessary for balance, finally results in the discovery of a capacity for courage greater than cowardice. Following the perception of his fear which itself may be the expression of what he terms his "toughness", Mailer discovers the inner impulse, as he puts it, for action which allows him to feel "as if he had joined some private victory between one part of himself and another".⁶³ This in itself is the impetus for further action which is the vindication of this sense of personal victory, because Mailer discovers "one whole new notion of himself. All courage was his and all determination, provided he could lead. There seemed no rank in any Army suitable for him below the level of General - extraordinary events deliver exceptional intuitions of oneself. No wonder he had spent so many years being General of an army of one. It was something to discover the secret source of the river of one's own guts or lack of them".⁶⁴

The juxtaposition of intense self-analysis and the action that is precipitated as a result of the discovery of inner truths and motivations forms the structural basis of *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*. In this way, Mailer's tortuous self-examination, in which he feels he is "buried once again in those endless ledgers he kept on the balance between honor and shame" is the necessary impetus for the subsequently conscious decision for brave action, which in turn, anticipates a cathartic self-reckoning in which Mailer vindicates his capacity for courage: His description of this perception of inner strength reverberates with a sense of having defeated formlessness; as Tony Tanner says, "of being a soft, vulnerable, endlessly manipulable blob, of not being a distinct self".

And as he thought this, he realized suddenly that he was not really afraid, he did not feel weak - scared, he felt, and very awake, but he was ready, he was going to try to do his best when they started to work. He did not feel in a jelly or a bath - he felt as electric and crazy as the cops. The fact that he had this sentiment now, that he was ready to fight, made him feel close to some presence with beatific grace ... and that left him happy, happier than he had been at any moment since he had heard the awful cry of the wounded pig in his throat at the news Bobby Kennedy was shot: so he stood there and glared at the policemen who were glaring at him and knew he could wait like this for an hour and not feel weak.⁶⁵

The necessity, in Mailer's view, of confronting the dialectical form of one's being in order that one might act in such a way as to precipitate one's growth, is delineated by the gap Mailer perceives between the reality of a collective humanity and the Twentieth Century experience of this sense of a shared physicality; of being. This theme is given emphasis in *Of a Fire on the Moon*. Mailer keenly feels the distance between the

astronaut's experience - monumental in its implications for mankind - and the wall of technology which separates him from the experience itself: "The damn astronauts weren't even real to him. He had no sense at all of three psyches full of awareness on the edge of the horizon. Just that gray stick out there".⁶⁶ In this way, Mailer makes sense of his black mood following the space launch. The mission, Mailer feels, has perverted his understanding of the existential questions and issues surrounding this profound venture into the unknown areas of existence. The astronauts, because they are not demonstrably brave in a way that concurs with Mailer's romantic notion of heroism, seem therefore, to Mailer, to possess no relation to the existential experience of the "collective" self; embracing the fear of death and the fear of the unknown. Mailer admits, "he could not forgive the astronauts their resolute avoidance of a heroic posture". In the astronaut's unstated faith in technology lies the assertion that all mystery can be penetrated, and, ultimately, all fear overcome. This attitude is anathema to Mailer because fear provides the necessary context for discovering the shape of one's being.

The impetus for Mailer's view is his perception of the dissipation of man's relation to himself through the onset of entropy as any manifestation of nothingness, formlessness. Thus, when Mailer says, "The real heroism ... was to understand, and because one understood, be even more full of fear at the enormity of what one understood, yet at that moment continue to be ready for the feat one had decided it was essential to perform" his implication is that knowledge (in the sense of the knowledge provided by technology, that is, facts) and understanding (as the

recognition of the nature of some mystery of experience itself) occupy mutually exclusive territory in the realm of human experience. To place all faith in knowledge as a principle of discovery of the terms of human experience is to deny the moral basis of man's relation to his existence: "But the astronauts, brave men, proceeded on the paradoxical principle that fear once deposed by knowledge would make bravery redundant. It was in the complacent assumption that the universe was no majestic mansion of architectonics out there between evil and nobility, or strife on a darkling plain, but rather an ultimately benign field of investigation which left Aquarius in the worst of his temper".⁶⁷ The moral basis of the individual's relation to himself is his realisation of the worth, or shape of his being: it provides the basis for the individual to act in such a way as to maximise his potential for growth, as well as preserve a sense of primitive awe - the belief in a religious principle as opposed to the espousal of nothingness. Mailer's desire to restore a religious sensitivity to the understanding of man's experience of reality is heightened by the moon launch precisely because the event itself implies unfathomable mysteries beyond man's comprehension, but which are denied by the mission and those who control it: Mailer, once again, provides a context for this theme in dialectical terms:

To make sense of Apollo II on the moon ... was to embark on a project which could not satisfy his own eye unless it could reduce a conceptual city of technologese to one simplicity - was the venture worthwhile or unappeased in its evil? If Marx had done his best to gut the past of every attachment to the primitive, the sacramental, and the magical, if the Marxian formula that history was a reflection of the state of productive relations had thereby elevated reason to that vertiginous even insane eminence out of which

technology had been born, then the task now appeared in reverse: one was obliged to make a first reconnaissance into the possibility of restoring magic, psyche, and the spirits of the underworld to the spookiest venture in history, a landing on the moon, an event whose technologese had been so complete that the word "spook" probably did not appear in twenty million words of NASA prose.⁶⁸

The journey to the moon, profound in its implications for man's progression toward knowledge of his innermost soul and the nature of his endeavour - the shape of the collective self - is dialectically perceived by Mailer as "a venture which might help to disclose the nature of the Lord and the Lucifer who warred for us".⁶⁹ The context for Mailer's espousal of a religious principle of self-affirmation through self-discovery is his ethic of courage. Mailer believes that, "people can win at love only when they are ready to lose everything they bring to it of ego, position, or identity - love is more stern than war - and women and men can survive only if they reach the depths of their sex down within themselves. They have to deliver themselves 'over to the unknown';⁷⁰ and he is reacting against the impact of technology which disallows the subtle nuance of anything other than that which can be known in factual terms. To Mailer, this denies the truth of one's relationship both with oneself and with the individual experience of reality by which one confronts the truth of one's actions as they manifest the shape of one's being. This is why, moreover, Mailer defends D.H. Lawrence with such vehemence. In Lawrence, Mailer discovers the individual in close communion with the source of personal motivation and desire as it impinges upon one's sense of a shared humanity and the collective experience of reality; moreover Lawrence embodies Mailer's dialectical perception of personality. Whilst Lawrence

"illuminates the passion to be masculine", he also possesses the "soul of a beautiful woman"⁷¹ and Mailer means to show that Lawrence's sensuous affinity for the experience of being female is offset by his desire to be as overtly masculine as possible. Mailer believes that in achieving this kind of balance between the conflicting or opposing aspects of one's psyche one thus achieves the wholeness of duality which is, again, the dialectical balance of form as opposed to the chaos of no-form; form being, of course, the "record of a relationship". In this sense, the conflict of one's opposed desires and motivations is itself the dialogue of the inner dialectical form of one's being.

To Mailer, "identity" is not simply the accident of one's personality, but the daily struggle of determining, and maintaining the truest expression of what is best in one. For this reason, the overtly masculine tone of Mailer's writing is his own personal attempt to "be a man" against the dual recognition of an inner feminine component - the desire to gestate the future from within the present context, as a writer. Indeed, the conflicting compulsions Mailer perceives as characterising of Lawrence's personality neatly match his own:

What a nightmare to balance that soul! to take the man in himself, locked from youth into every need for profound female companionship, a man almost wholly oriented toward the company of women, and attempt to go out into the world of men, indeed even dominate the world of men so that he might find balance. For his mind was possessed of that intolerable masculine pressure to command which develops in sons outrageously beloved by their mothers - to be the equal of a woman at twelve or six or any early age which reaches equilibrium between the will of the son and the will of the mother, strong love to strong love, is all but to guarantee the making of a future tyrant ...⁷²

What is best in one does not necessarily equate to any socially or externally imposed ideal, but is itself the recognition that one can be more than one thought oneself capable of becoming. This presupposes that one has discovered the form of one's being in the action necessary to precipitate growth. For example, in *Ancient Evenings*, the Pharaoh experiences a great dread, coupled with woe, which expresses his fear of his gross lack of respect for the Gods, and hence, by implication, for himself. This, together with his realisation that "He did not know how to make amends"⁷³ demonstrates Mailer's theme of the interdependent relationship of self-knowledge and the action that would vindicate self-knowledge. Similarly, when Menenhetet is confronted with the untrammelled truth of his existence - "for the first time I saw my life without pride" - he is forced to come to terms with the inner, dialectical warrings which express the form of his being: "I felt the balance of heaven waiting for what I would next decide, as if the timid poisons of my blood and the bravery of my heart stood arrayed before one another like legions in the hour when the horn is blown". Furthermore, Menenhetet discovers his own reserves of inner courage, and in this discovery lies the power to act in such a way as to vindicate this self-knowledge as well as anticipate greater courage and determination - growth:

And I said to myself, "I am not afraid of death. I will dare it," ... It was then I left the place. I would look for Nefertiri.

... a calm came to me of a sort I had never felt before. I had no peace in it, but for the quiet that comes when you know that no matter how many tortures lie in wait, at least you will never suffer impatience again. My life was before me, I felt. Whatever of it was left, was at last before me. I would not die in the grinding exasperation of the aged turned to stone by their fear of the

stone that will lie on them, no, I would find Nefertiri and I would fuck Her. The thought of my cock in Her, my agony in Her honey, my fatigue in Her wealth, my pride in Her royal privacy, my beating heart in Her sweet quiver, my peasant meat in the sauce of a Queen, my sword in Usermare's skin! - every high and low passion I ever felt came together, and my life was simple. I would fuck Her or die in the attempt; or I would be with Her and noone would know; or was it that I would be with Her and we would love each other so well that I would dare what noone would dare: if She wished me to kill the Pharaoh, I would.⁷⁴

In a similar fashion, the Pharaoh, Usermare, is able to re-claim the courage he discovered at the Battle of Kadesh through acknowledging his own fear, and transcending it through action which is necessarily fearful, but which also reveals his capacity for courage. In a moment of pivotal self-reckoning - Usermare must choose between his two wives - he is confronted with his fear as well as his pride; and in which dialectical encounter Usermare determines the form of his being. His decision to choose Rama-Nefru is itself the vindication of his ability to transcend what he perceives are his worst qualities, and to maximise his potential for growth. The achievement of self-knowledge, in this sense, is also the achievement of equilibrium, the wholeness of duality, because the recognition of what is best in one is simultaneously the vision of one's worst qualities; subsequently, to discover the shape of one's being is to vindicate one's best attributes in action.

Frequently, Mailer's emphasis upon the need for heroism has been confused as the theme of a writer obsessed with overt masculinity. Mailer's perception of the need for courage at the moment of crisis, however, is based on his belief that the necessity for one to surmount the "rungs of fear" equates to a means of personal salvation. Indeed, this theme provides the

thematic base to Mailer's fiction throughout his extensive and varied body of work: even the diabolical Sergeant Croft, in his relentless pursuit of the challenge posed by Mt. Anaka, anticipates the hipster's approach to God (or the Devil) in the satisfaction of his kicks and the apocalyptic orgasm. Similarly, Harry, the young narrator of Mailer's most recent piece of fiction, *A Piece of Harlot's Ghost*, is educated in the delicate subtleties and dialectical intricacies of courage and cowardice, God and the Devil by Hugh Montague, an enigmatic figure who refines the crude archetype established in Sergeant Croft and Marion Faye:

' ... God is near us when we are rock-climbing because that is the only way to get a good glimpse of Him. You experience God when you're extended a long way out beyond yourself and still trying to lift up from your fears. Get caught on a rock and of course you want to howl like a dog. Surmount that terror and you rise to a higher fear. That may be our simple purpose on earth. To rise to higher and higher levels of fear. If we succeed, we can, perhaps, share some of God's fear. ... His fear of the great power He has given the Devil. There is no free will for man unless the Devil's powers are equal on this embattled planet to the Lord's. ...'⁷⁵

Being a hero, then, is often no more complex and no less demanding than doing what one knows one must do, in order to satisfy one's conception of oneself, or the possibilities for growth one has envisioned for oneself. Henry Miller is "a hero twice, to take up writing late and to take it up by writing books he could think no one would ever publish"⁷⁶ because he has obeyed the demands of self reckoning (in Mailer's terms) which exhorted him to become a writer against the knowledge of probable (commercial) failure. In fact, growth, in Mailer's terms, is synonymous with heroism, because "one cannot gain a great deal

unless one is willing to dare losing all".⁷⁷ One must "look for the risk", but, again, one can only determine what is most fearful to one with a firm knowledge of the source of one's fear, and this, in turn, is dependent upon self-knowledge borne of confronting one's innermost desires, inclinations and motivations at a pivotal moment when the outcome of one's actions is unknown. Hence, Mailer's most favoured situational metaphor - the individual balanced on the edge of the divide - is realised as Rojack's parapet, Tim Madden's Monument, Norman's balcony in *The Fight*, and most recently, the exercise of rock climbing in *A Piece of Harlot's Ghost*.

The relationship between self-knowledge (which is itself knowledge of form) and the balance of contraries (which gives meaning to form) is conveyed repeatedly throughout all of Mailer's writings, but in the idiosyncratic universe of *Ancient Evenings*, this theme is given form as Maat, the Egyptian Goddess of Truth and the literal embodiment of balance. Maat, with the body of a woman and a large feather for her head and neck, encapsulates a fundamental Egyptian principle: that in the depths of one's soul, the difference between a truth and a falsehood weigh no more than a feather. Thus, the dialectical relationship of truth and falsity is itself the expression of the balance of one's inner conflicting compulsions. At any given moment one is faced with the necessity to act in order to define oneself - to determine the shape of one's being - and the perception of one's best possibilities has meaning only in terms of the dialectic such a perception shares with the vision of what is worst in one. The negation, or denial of the dialectical form of being is a state of non-being characterised as moral dislocation, the

absence or denial of the relationship between self-knowledge and the essential, existential reality of experience. Mailer's perception of the Twentieth Century existence, afflicted with this "disease" is the important basis of his demand that one move forward and grow as a moral necessity (one's manifestation of God's will, or the Devil's). Referring to Richard Nixon, "There had been a gap between the man who spoke and the man who lived behind the speaker which offered every clue of schizophrenia in the American public if they failed to recognize the void within the presentation",⁷⁸ Mailer gives emphasis to the need for an interdependent relationship between the determination of a shape for one's self and the perception of that self. Mailer's description of Nixon, "there was an attentiveness in his eyes which gave offer of some knowledge of the abyss"⁷⁹ recalls a similar description of Rusty Jethroe from D.J.'s exacting perspective: "I mean that's what you get when you look in Rusty's eyes. You get voids, man ..."⁸⁰ and highlights Mailer's thematic parallel of self-knowledge and the form of one's being; and, alternatively, the absence of self-knowledge which explicates nothingness. Mailer's sense of moral accountability emphasises the relationship between action, motivation, and ultimately, self-perception. The individual who is morally anaesthetised has no sense of how he might act in order to precipitate growth. In Mailer's schema, such an individual is not morally accountable, a state of being to be deplored because such absence of self-perception in the moral terms of what is good and what is bad for one (how one approaches God, or the Devil) is itself an act of compromise - abdication to inertia and a principle of nothingness.

Conversely, the clinical objectivity with which the events surrounding the narrative are reported in *The Executioner's Song* is Mailer's means of isolating Gary's actions and contextualising them only by Gary's own moral reckoning of his actions. In this way, the reader confronts Gary's highly developed sense of personal moral accountability. Gary's understanding of the need to face, existentially, what is most fearful in oneself and in existence is both the impetus for his urge to meet death by execution as well as the basis for his sense of moral responsibility (Gary's understanding of Karma) for the actions one may not, or cannot avoid. Menenhetet Two, in *Ancient Evenings*, neatly states Mailer's primary, thematic concern and the pivot, for Gary Gilmore, around which his plea for execution turns: "there is no loneliness ... that is worse than being ignorant of the worth of your soul".⁸¹ If Mailer is fully aware of the social reprehensibility of Gary's actions, he also means to demonstrate Gary's heightened awareness of the need to confront the reality of one's actions, motivations, desires and so on in the strict terms of one's moral accountability before death.

Further, for Mailer the qualities of good and bad as moral terms are meaningful only in relation to each other, the perception of which forms the thematic base of *The Deer Park: a Play*. The characters in the play are located in Hell, but Mailer emphasises the character's ignorance of their environs in order to delineate the moral vacuum in which they reside. This, "the first dislocation of the moral space"⁸² is Mailer's means of underscoring entropy as a state of being far worse than actually inhabiting a realm of evil.

The relationship between a moral basis for action and self-perception is thematically important to the action of *The Armies of the Night*. Mailer's concerns centre on the nature of moral choice, defined by one's consciousness of the necessity to assert oneself existentially through courage in one's choice. When a colleague elects to serve a five day jail sentence rather than promise to stay away from the Pentagon for six months, Mailer is forced to confront his reactions to this choice. Mailer's recognition - that "prison could be nothing but an endless ladder of moral challenges" (and which is subsequently developed into the literal means by which the Ka ascends to an ambivalent moral climax in *Ancient Evenings*) provides an insight into the emphasis upon the need for courage at the moment of crisis. Mailer extends the metaphor of the moral ladder as follows: "Each time you climbed a step ... another higher, more dangerous, more disadvantageous step would present itself. The first step down in a failure of nerve always presented the same kind of moral nausea".⁸³ The implication is two-fold: the discovery of courage necessarily precipitates the action to vindicate this courage, as well as the discovery of greater reserves of courage; at the same time, in the discovery of one's moral worth one has moved forward - experienced growth - and anything less than maintaining that growth is compromise, the retreat into something less. As Harry learns in *A Piece of Harlot's Ghost*, the exacting demands of rock climbing entail nothing less than the gargantuan courage required to defeat cowardice at every turn; the price of failure is the inevitable usurpation of one's being by the memory of such failure: Hugh Montague tells Harry,

'(rock climbing is) an activity that insists on excellence. Harry, if you went on, it would take your life over. You could not rest with the fear. Whenever you failed on a climb, the memory would overpower every thought until you succeeded. Even among good people, that can be a terribly corrupting process. An addiction. One ends as a coward, a victim, or a mediocre monomaniac whose defeats always equal his successes.'⁸⁴

More importantly, Mailer's demand for a moral basis for action (that is, the basis of self-knowledge by which one knows what would precipitate one's growth, the means of approaching God) is itself dialectically offset by his recognition that determining the form of one's being is a process in which one actually discovers one's capacity for growth (or stasis) in one's actions. Thus, self-knowledge, the determination of the form of one's being, exists in a dynamic relationship with the failures and successes which lend meaning or are given meaning to by one's perception of self. The need for equilibrium - the realisation of balance - of the divergent claims of one's self is itself the expression of self-perception; the form of one's being is simultaneously the recognition of the dialectical character of one's self. It is the absence of reconciliation between the shape of one's selfhood and one's perception of self which anticipates the loss of self, because it is only by locating the character of the self (that is, the dialectical form of the self) that one may act in such a way as to vindicate one's best possibilities, and grow. Whereas the dialectical form of one's being expresses the relationship of one's warring, conflicting desires and motivations, and whereas one determines the form of one's being in action; one achieves the wholeness of duality in the balance, or equilibrium, of the divergent claims of one's self.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 199.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 232.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. 305-306.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 223.
- 5 John W. Aldridge, "The Big Comeback of Norman Mailer", *Life Magazine*, March, 19, 1965, p. 12.
- 6 Peter Brooks, "The Melodramatic Imagination", *Partisan Review*, no. 2, 1972, pp. 209-211 passim.
- 7 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 409.
- 8 *The Prisoner of Sex*, p. 124.
- 9 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 23.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 133-134.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 100.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 241.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 271.
- 21 Tanner, pp. 18-19.
- 22 *Marilyn*, p. 193.
- 23 *Of Women and Their Elegance*, p. 114.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 130.
- 25 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 171.
- 26 *Pieces and Pontifications*, v. *Pontifications*, pp. 22-23.
- 27 *Of a Fire on the Moon*, p. 100.

- 28 Ibid., p. 152.
- 29 *The Deer Park*, p. 159.
- 30 Ibid., p. 48.
- 31 Ibid., p. 51.
- 32 Ibid., p. 197.
- 33 Ibid., p. 209.
- 34 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 201.
- 35 *The Deer Park*, p. 233.
- 36 Ibid., pp. 307-308.
- 37 Ibid., p. 213.
- 38 Ibid., p. 49.
- 39 Ibid., p. 51.
- 40 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 282.
- 41 *The Deer Park*, pp. 214-215.
- 42 Ibid., pp. 215-216.
- 43 Ibid., p. 239.
- 44 Ibid., pp. 273-274.
- 45 Ibid., p. 297.
- 46 Ibid., p. 300.
- 47 Ibid., pp. 301-302.
- 48 Ibid., pp. 302-303.
- 49 *The Executioner's Song*, p. 184.
- 50 Ibid., pp. 305-306.
- 51 Ibid., pp. 344-345.
- 52 Ibid., p. 395.
- 53 Ibid., p. 726.
- 54 Ibid., p. 728.
- 55 Ibid., pp. 857-858.
- 56 *An American Dream*, p. 98.

- 57 *The Executioner's Song*, p. 858.
- 58 Ibid., p. 1007.
- 59 *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 90.
- 60 Ibid., pp. 91-92.
- 61 Ibid., p. 142.
- 62 Ibid., p. 144.
- 63 Ibid., p. 186.
- 64 Ibid., p. 191.
- 65 Ibid., p. 214.
- 66 *Of a Fire on the Moon*, p. 96.
- 67 Ibid., p. 109.
- 68 Ibid., p. 131.
- 69 Ibid., p. 471.
- 70 *The Prisoner of Sex*, p. 147.
- 71 Ibid., pp. 151-152.
- 72 Ibid, p. 142.
- 73 *Ancient Evenings*, p. 608.
- 74 Ibid., pp. 614-615.
- 75 *A Piece of Harlot's Ghost*, *Esquire Magazine*, July, 1988, p. 90.
- 76 *The Prisoner of Sex*, p.124.
- 77 *Ancient Evenings*, pp. 65-66.
- 78 *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 41.
- 79 Ibid., p. 43.
- 80 *Why Are We in Vietnam?* p. 36.
- 81 *Ancient Evenings*, p. 706.
- 82 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 312.
- 83 *The Armies of the Night*, p. 219.
- 84 *A Piece of Harlot's Ghost*, p. 89.

SECTION 1.

CHAPTER 6: THE PROCESS OF GROWTH: BALANCE ON THE EDGE

The experience of self-confrontation, which precipitates the vision of the dialectical self, requires that one vindicate the form of one's being, in action. Subsequently, and ultimately, one maintains one's sense of possessing a self, in the "daily ability to live with a reasonable balance between one's courage and one's fear"¹ - the ability to affect "balance on the edge" in terms of Mailer's metaphoric dialectical structuring. One's effort in this regard is, Mailer believes, constantly and subtly assisted or assailed by the presence of spirits and forces (including the insidious forces of chaos and convention) of all the living and the dead entities around one: it is whilst he is in Zaire for the World Heavyweight Championship fight between Muhammed Ali and George Foreman that Mailer discovers a book, *Bantu Philosophy*, which causes him "no small excitement". This is because in the African philosophy Mailer locates a view "close to his own", in which he proposes that the individual exists in a relation to time, viewed not in a linear sense, but where time past, time present and time future co-exist in a spiral-like relationship. This means, quite simply, that no event or person is unconnected in terms of the interdependent relationship of past, present or future forces (those for which one is directly responsible, one's self-articulated desires and motivations, and those one may have inherited from the past or anticipates in the future):

... men or women were more than the parts of themselves, which is to say more than the result of their heredity and experience. A man was not only what he contained, not only his desires, his memory, and his personality, but also the forces

that came to inhabit him at any moment from all things living and dead. So a man was not only himself, but the karma of all the generations past that still lived in him, not only a human with his own psyche but a part of the resonance, sympathetic or unsympathetic, of every root and thing (and witch) about him. He would take his balance, his quivering place, in a field of all the forces of the living and the dead. So the meaning of one's life was never hard to find. One did one's best to live in the pull of these forces in such a way as to increase one's own force.²

Thus, Mailer believes that the form of one's being embraces a vast network of forces and motivations which express one's own perceived sense of being, as well as the presence of beings or forces from ages past or future. The individual, therefore, must be "bold enough to live with all the magical forces at loose between the living and the dead" so that, in facing, existentially, the myriad compulsions which comprise the shape of one's selfhood, one is able to maximise the inclinations which will propel one forward into growth and greater self-knowledge. This process, which I have termed the process of individuation, is therefore also a process of realising heroic individualism, because the act of maximising one's potential is the act of discovering and realising in action, courage. Indeed, "It takes bravery to live with beauty or wealth if we think of them as an existence connected to the messages, the curses, and the loyalties of the dead"³ and in Mailer's schema, this is not a metaphor for the inspirations or fears one cannot name; rather, every individual is the repository for the messages and desires, the voices, as it were, of spirits still in existence.

Balance, therefore, can be achieved only as the recognition of one's capacity for heroic resistance to any force or presence which would assail one's sense of self, is, itself, balanced by the recognition of one's vulnerability to such forces. Thus, the

process of individuation is, at the same time, the realisation of redemption because in having moved forward - experienced growth - one has, in part, absolved oneself of past instances of failure and cowardice. Such is the nature of Tim Madden's experience in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, for whom the admission of cowardice and the capacity for evil is itself the means by which he can both overcome this fear as well as acknowledge the form of his being. The necessity of balance in the discovery of one's capacity for growth is the recognition that one's compulsions may lead one to abandon the structures of the external world altogether - the retreat to chaos - or that one may decide to elect the safe proposition of convention in which the rigidities of totalitarianism stifle the individual capacity for expression and heroism. This situation is conveyed metaphorically by Mailer as balance on the edge - of a parapet, an overhang, or, in the case of D.J. and Tex, of the wilderness. The choice that the individual makes manifests the shape of the self: the form of one's being.

Mailer's view is at times, difficult to comprehend seriously, as for example, his piece entitled "On Waste" in *The Presidential Papers* testifies. His theme, however, offers an interesting corollary to the individual process of self-discovery and affirmation. Mailer's suggestion is that whereas the individual is heir to the forces and influences of the spirits and beings all around one, these are manifest in one's own being as the expression of one's best and worst qualities, in one's excrement. At the same time as disease is frequently used by Mailer as a metaphor for the effects of compromise and failure, disease is also the literal embodiment, for Mailer, of the death

or sickness of cells, which are themselves the living embodiment of our urges, motivations; our weaknesses and strengths, and so on. Thus, "Each cell in each existence labors like all of life, to make the most of what it is or can be, each cell is different, perhaps even so different as one of us from another". As such, each cell is engaged upon its own quest for locating and affirming the form of its existence; and the achievement of equilibrium of the divergent inclinations or forces which would assail or distract those cells is therefore the maintenance of both one's physical and one's psychical health:

So perhaps we do not digest all that is good for us. Indeed, some is lost because it is too good for us, we do not deserve it, the guilt in the enzymes of our stomach prevents the process. (Who among you? scientists? chemists? doctors of organism? can prove that guilt is incapable of entering an enzyme?) Yet other riches elude the peristalsis - the best of us cannot absorb a nutrient which is beyond the possibility of our style: particles of food which urge us to be generous are disagreeable to the stingy; spices which gratify our sense of the precise are lost and refused by thick-witted minds.⁴

Thus, the necessity of confronting one's most fundamental motivations and inclinations is necessary in order that one discover what would make one well - both physically and psychically. This view, which Mailer would develop into the complex patterning of the dialectical structures of his later writing, is apparent in *The Naked and the Dead* in General Cummings and Sergeant Croft, both of whom are motivated by a desire for absolute freedom, of exercising will without limit or obstruction. In fact, Cummings tells Lieutenant Hearn that man is a being "in transit" between brute and God, and that man's deepest urge is to achieve God. It is precisely this urge which prompts Croft's assault on Mt. Anaka, and it is this urge which

separates Croft and Cummings from Hearn, and Red Valsen respectively: it is the desire to realise heroism and the force of one's own will against anything which would resist it. Cummings and Croft embody a principle of behaviour in which they refuse to accept the limitations inherent in any given situation; they believe fundamentally in the possibility of the expansion of the human spirit through courage and determination. This is, of course, Mailer's early formulation of psychological hipsterism - the belief in man's ability to determine a life, and a shape for that life which, as Diana Trilling succinctly puts it, is "designed to return man to the center of the universe and to bring the individual into direct and vital communication with the self and its needs".⁵ It is because, most importantly, that "Man's nature, man's dignity, is that he acts, lives, loves, and finally destroys himself seeking to penetrate the mystery of existence" that Mailer sought out a philosophy which would alter man's consciousness, because he saw man's "capacity to alter history, to make change",⁶ to, in effect, penetrate the mystery of existence; as being undermined irrevocably by the stifling presence of an endemic boredom and the impact of the Twentieth Century with its greed, technology and complacency. The philosophy of Hip returns the individual to the rebellious imperatives of the self, but more so, it calls forth the spirit of heroism within, as well as the romantic propensity to believe that all is possible, that in the bad can be found good, that in the discovery of one's own good is the expression of God's spirit.

The Hip view is religious in the sense that it proposes that the basis of seeking one's needs for fulfillment and for self-

creation possesses an ultimate purpose whose "end is meaningful but mysterious". Moreover, because the hipster lives with the possibility of death at every instant, he has engaged the terms of death such that his existence is based on the profound knowledge that "at each instant of the electric present" the hipster is progressing forward to self-knowledge and growth or is retreating into something less, death. Because, therefore, "the heart of Hip is its emphasis upon courage at the moment of crisis", and because the effort of the hipster is to constantly progress forward into the growth of new possibilities for the self, courage defines itself as the "necessity of life to become more than it has been".⁷ Mailer's conception of the hero, then, is someone who dares to summon courage that would require more of him than he thinks he might be capable of realising: it is also a dialectical conception, for Mailer's view supposes that in every step forward, in every approach to the god within, the Devil is necessarily engaged to create the balance of resistance: "Ultimately a hero is a man who would argue with the gods, and so awakens devils to contest his vision".⁸ Heroism, moreover, engages the imagination because it suggests infinite vistas of possibility for the individual - a hero is someone who, after all, does not heed caution or accept limitations, self-imposed or otherwise - and therefore suggests that one's fantasies and dreams may, indeed, come true: "only a hero can capture the secret imagination of a people, and so be good for the vitality of his nation; a hero embodies the fantasy and so allows each private mind the liberty to consider its fantasy and find a way to grow".⁹

Mailer's theme of the need to progress toward a conception of heroic individualism for oneself is a structured vision embracing the metaphor of the parapet or similar to denote the necessity of balance at the edge of the divide between one's fear and the demands of courage. As such, when, in *The Fight* Mailer recalls an episode in which he climbed a ladder in the studio of a friend, he contextualises the episode in terms befitting the enormity of the deed for one's psychic health:

Once Norman had climbed up a ladder in the studio of a man who had died the season before. His heart beating ridiculously on that folding ladder, he mounted from the penultimate rung to the top. There, on the top rung, his body quivered back and forth like a tuning fork. He was caught in a current which had nothing to do with him. He had climbed the mast into a squall of magical forces.¹⁰

Of course, in light of Mailer's self-professed espousal of the Bantu view, Mailer's implicit suggestion is that such a deed engages the presence of spirits and forces which would aid or abet the individual in his progress toward greater knowledge of the mystery of existence - one's own, and one's relation to the larger world of experience beyond. Furthermore, a second walk along the parapet of an old building in Boston is sufficiently fearful an imperative for Mailer that, having adhered to this imperative he wonders at the connection between his action and Ali's torn groin muscles:

Once, a little earlier in that same period of his life, while covering the second Ali-Liston fight, then scheduled for Boston, he had been miserable for days before forcing himself to take a short walk on a parapet. The parapet was a foot wide and required no exceptional sense of balance. Still it was fifteen steps along the edge of a roof of a high old building in Beacon Hill. He had been sick for days with the imperative to do it. Finally, he did it. One hour later, Ali's

groin muscles tore. The fight was called off for months. How could you ever know with clarity whether the walk on the roof had been connected or absolutely unconnected to Ali's rupture? A small obsession for a magician.¹¹

Mailer believes that because we are the repositories for the forces and spirits of other existences in other times, we have the capacity (if not the receptivity) to realise the truths of existence beyond the so-called reality of the external world of things and people. This is, in effect, Mailer's notion of what magic means, as his use of the excerpt from Yeats at the beginning of *Ancient Evenings* testifies. Mailer equates magic with the "visions of truth in the depths of the mind", and because "the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and ... many minds can flow into one another ... and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy ..."¹² Mailer ascertains that one's confrontation with the shape of one's being is fraught with the presence of magic: the influences, the forces and spirits of other beings in one's present existence as well as in time past and time future. Hence, the necessity of testing and confronting the worth of one's being is offset by the dual recognition of whatever would seek to assail one's self-estimation and affirmation. Thus, Mailer is serious in his pursuit of the meaning of mystery and magic, because his exhortation of a moral basis for action (or, put another way, individual responsibility for action) recognises the presence of "magic" - the spirits and the beings which inhabit one's existence - which may inhibit the discovery of one's truest desires and motivations. Tim Madden's intimate relation to the spirits of Hell-Town is measured by his receptivity to the voices which assail him; for Tim, "it is a rare day when you cannot feel the weight of spirits in a bar ...

I walked in full of my sleepless nights with the wraiths of Hell-Town"¹³ and ultimately, it is Tim's discovery of his own ability to rise above fear, and his capacity for love which frees him from the disturbing, violent and obscene messages from Hell-Town.

Further, when Mailer says that he is "weary of his comic relation to magic. He never knew which forces he helped"¹⁴ he is providing another view of the dialectical relationship one has with the source of one's motivation. Just as Stephen Rojack's vision of the jewelled city alternates between a vision of splendour and a vision of desolation and death, and Rojack cannot be sure whether he has discovered some of the truth of creativity after the sterility of his political existence; or whether the source of his desire is Satanic and wasteful, Mailer, in *The Fight*, is not sure whether he is an agent of good, or bad luck for Muhammed Ali - he is certain only that Ali must win, so as to vindicate Mailer's desire that he should win, and that Ali should win in a way befitting the strength of Mailer's desire for him to win. A victory for Ali would vindicate, apart from Mailer's own psychic efforts at raising Ali's strength to win, what Ali has come to represent to Mailer: "audacity, inventiveness, even art".¹⁵

Achieving balance of the contrary claims of one's self is thus compounded by the difficulty of determining the source of one's motivations and inclinations, and the dialectical, metaphoric motif by which the individual is posited "on the edge" of the divide between alternatives for action is Mailer's means of emphasising the necessity of entering and thereby determining the character of the dialogues of one's conscious (and unconscious) urges and inclinations. Mailer repeatedly

underscores this sense of being caught "on the edge" as the metaphoric expression of the inner dialectical conflict. Gary Gilmore, for example, says that being in prison "is like walking up the edge and looking over 24 hours a day for more days than you care to recall",¹⁶ and in the pivotal episode when April Baker accompanies Gary on his murderous mission, she recalls being raped, which she experiences as "vertigo".¹⁷ April, in these terms, cannot maintain balance at the edge of the divide. Gary is frequently described as being "on edge", in fact; "It wasn't that he was relaxed, but he had been on edge since the day he broke up with Nicole. This morning he was just normally on edge"¹⁸ and Mailer's description of Gary in this way is meant to highlight the metaphoric use of the image of being on a literal edge between action for salvation or action for annihilation. Gary's self-admitted testimony that he killed Max Jensen and Benny Bushnell because he did not want to kill Nicole points toward the psychical divide wherein he chose to purge his inner violence as an act of redemption for the violence he felt toward Nicole. Killing Nicole would have been, in Gary's terms, an act of chaos because it would have killed what he perceived as that which was good in him: the capacity to love. Similarly, Gary's use of the same image to convey Nicole's lack of fear - "Fear is an ugly thing. I haven't seen any in you. It's like you've passed your test in life and know it. Like you've been up to the edge. And looked over"¹⁹ - echoes Mailer's thematic use of a psychic edge between one's caution and the limitless possibilities for oneself, if one can locate one's bravery and courage. Mailer includes, as part of Nicole's reminiscence of Kip, an ex-husband, an incident which bears out this thematic and

metaphoric use of the parapet image. The incident echoes the pivotal scene in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, when Tim Madden attempts to climb the Provincetown Monument. The "fellow" who is trying to climb a rock wall up a cliff in *The Executioner's Song* reaches the little ledge about three feet from the ground, but keeps losing his nerve to go higher. The focus of this incident, for Mailer, is Kip's reaction - he is bothered because he is ashamed of his own lack of moxie before the greater daring of the rock climbers, and before Nicole, for whom he wants to be brave, "a man". The extent to which this episode mirrors accurately Nicole's memory of Kip or reflects Mailer's own view is not clear; the episode does, however, indicate the emphasis Mailer would wish to give to the scene because it thematically highlights his personal view of the need to determine the worth of one's being in the terms of bravery and courage, in the literal embodiment of his metaphor of the individual at the edge of a decision to choose courage, or cowardice.

The image of being on the edge or at the divide is used to describe the individual in confrontation with his deepest impulses, in an existential situation, so that the worth of one's being may be determined. As part of this image, in which the alternatives for action present themselves, Mailer frequently refers to related images of an abyss, descent, or a "leap across a gap". Mailer's structured vision views the necessity of action as the means by which one prevents the annihilation of oneself through inertia. In this sense, then, one metaphorically is able to leap across a gap, or cross over the abyss in the election of action which would offset inertia, or compromise. Similarly, Mailer uses images of descent, of falling, or vertigo as the

realisation of one's precarious poise between the alternatives for oneself: the necessary difficulty of locating and acting upon one's courage. Rusty's fear, for example, offset by his psychosexual desire for violence ("He had to get it up. They had to go for grizzer now") is described as "like the odor of the long fall in a dream"²⁰ and similarly, D.J.'s experience of death "comes like attack of vertigo when stepping into dark ...".²¹ In the *The Executioner's Song*, then, the realisation of Gary's imminent death, the manner in which he is to die, and the implications of the involvement of those marketing Gary's death for communication throughout the world is described as follows: "It came over them that everybody was walking around with death in his belly. At a given moment a man they knew was going to be killed. On signal, everybody was going to leap across an abyss".²² The "leap across (the) abyss" is the realisation of personal involvement in the death of another, which is the existential confrontation with one's own relation to death. The "leap across the abyss" is, in other words, the realisation of dread. Indeed, Mailer conceives of dread in the same terms as paranoia - the belief in the Devil and the possession of primitive instincts by which one is able to gauge one's own precarious place in the universe of good and evil: "Indeed, gifted with a paranoid edge, one could even argue that the Nazis had been the diabolical success of a Devil who wished to cut man off from his primitive instincts and thereby leave us marooned in a plastic maze which could shatter the balance of nature before the warnings were read. No less far could paranoia take you - for what indeed was paranoia but belief in the Devil?"²³

Mailer describes the existence of women in the same metaphoric terms. When he says, "From the point of view of the man, it was if women were obliged to live on that existential edge ...²⁴ he means that women, in relation to men, are always potential victims (whether real or imagined) and thus live with a sense of precariousness and fear which men can experience only in situations of existential intensity, for example, combat, or say, illegal activity where the danger of being caught is high. The theme is therefore the same: that living existentially returns one to oneself in the sense of knowing one's pain, one's anguish, one's desire, one's fear, and so on. Furthermore, Mailer believes that women, because they are able to bear children and therefore contain the future within themselves, are "a step, or a stage, or a move or a leap nearer the creation of existence" and he uses the same metaphor to highlight his theme of the dialectical necessity of existence to be reduced to its ultimate alternatives: in action (or the refusal to act), in choice (to maximise one's potential for growth or to elect death), in one's relation to time (existing in the present with knowledge of its relation to the past and the future):

Women, like men, were human beings, but they were a step, or a stage, or a move or a leap nearer the creation of existence, they were - given man's powerful sense of the present - his indispensable and only connection to the future; how could a woman compete if she contained the future as well as the present and so lived a physical life on the edge of the divide?²⁵

An important part of this "physical life on the edge of the divide" is, for Mailer, one's relation to the phenomenon of death in a personal sense; a relation which has been partially lost due to the technological impact of the Twentieth Century. Whereas

the modern age has reduced the risks inherent in pregnancy, Mailer believes that women's intimate awareness of their possible death in childbirth has been dissipated. So, too, Mailer decries contraceptives because they eradicate one's sense of the enormity of one's actions in terms of the future life one may be creating. Mailer believes that, without contraception, one's awareness of the true source of one's motivations is made known: one goes ahead and against one's knowledge that to get pregnant may or may not be the worst or best thing to happen to one. In other words, one discovers whether pregnancy is truly desirable, and Mailer believes that women have the power (by virtue of their intimate, existential relation to creation) to effect or disallow pregnancy. Once again, Mailer uses the same metaphor to describe this existential state of self-awareness and the action to reflect self-perception:

Yet, after centuries in which the population of humans increased at the smallest rate, and healthy women only took conception when it was the wisest biological choice in a life sometimes filled with unhappy choices and difficulties, after such centuries with never a contraceptive in sight and women forever out on the existential edge of knowing that to become pregnant might mean their death, yet not to be pregnant might bring on the worst of illness, after such fear-filled and existential centuries, the years of sexual prophylaxis could begin. The birthrate in response began to climb.²⁶

In describing his own process of heroic individuation - the creation of a shape for the self which is the reflection and vindication of one's truest, deepest impulses; heroic because accomplished against the perception of one's fear and the demands for courage - Mailer uses the terms of the metaphor to emphasise his palpable sense of a loss of self and the requisite efforts to re-claim that selfhood: "- for the first time in my life I had

worn down to the edge, I could see through to the other side of my fear, I knew a time could come when I would be no longer my own man, that I might lose what I had liked to think was the incorruptible centre of my strength",²⁷ and, "[I was on the edge of many things and I had more than a bit of violence in me".²⁸ Mailer means to show that in the perception of his inner violence lies the key to restoring the "centre of (his) strength". In such self-knowledge is the first step toward action which will return one to an adequate perception of one's capacity for courage.

This is why, moreover, Stephen Rojack, alone on the balcony, literally and metaphorically on the edge of the divide between the beckoning of the moon (the call the chaos) and the retreat to the living room ("which felt like an indoor pool" - the claustrophobics of convention) can proceed from insight, "The only true journey of knowledge is from the depth of one being to the heart of another", to self-perception:

I was nothing but open raw depths at that instant alone on the balcony, looking down on Sutton Place, the spirits of the food and drink I had ingested wrenched out of my belly and upper gut, leaving me in raw Being, there were clefts and rents which cut like geological faults right through all the lead and concrete and kapok and leather of my ego, that mutilated piece of insulation, I could feel my Being ...²⁹

Rojack's perception of the gradual dissipation of his sense of self is simultaneously his perception of the need for catharsis. In Mailer's metaphoric schema, catharsis is precipitated when Rojack vomits over the balcony: in such a way can Rojack start to "feel himself" without the residue of whatever would assail his precarious sense of self. Rojack's efforts at heroic individuation - the process of growth - begin at this point, when

in an experience of pure existential self-confrontation, he is able to locate the dialectical interplay of the contrary claims on his psyche: "I looked into my Being, all that lovely light and rotting nerve and proceeded to listen"³⁰ (emphasis mine). Rojack later confronts the same dialectical impasse between the urge to jump from Barney Kelly's balcony, and the desire to retreat to Kelly's apartment, and subsequently walks around the parapet in order to satisfy the demands of the imperative he has discovered is necessary for his own salvation - both psychological and physical. In fact, the impetus that leads Rojack to engage in this psychic test and which subsequently precipitates affirmation of his courage is explicated in *Ancient Evenings* and Mailer's emphasis rests firmly on the relationship between self-perception and discovering the limits of one's capacity for courage:

It was as if I had decided on some terrible day to make an end of myself and had walked to the edge of a cliff, looked down into the gorge, knew I would certainly step into the space before me and in one fall be dead. At such a moment I might know fear in every drop of my blood, yet the future would feel as alive as lightning. Just now I had that sense. It was the happiness of being next to my fear, yet separate from it, so that I could be free at last to know all the ways I had failed to live my life, all the boredom I had swallowed, and each foul sentiment of wasted flesh.³¹

Just as Rojack discovers in his urge to jump the desire to be "created again, free of (his) past" Menenhetet Two's experience in the Land of the Dead provides him with a vital sense of himself, even beyond that which he possessed whilst alive. Mailer's point is that the experience of death is the affirmation of life - the embodiment of balance - that in confronting the

meaning of death one may re-evaluate and re-claim one's own life with fresh vision of its worth and motivation.

Ancient Evenings proposes these themes in Mailer's idiosyncratic terms, so that Menenhetet experiences the divide between life and death as the abstinence of ejaculation in sexual intercourse. In this sense, the narrative structuring of *Ancient Evenings* employs the same metaphoric images of balance at the edge, of descent, of vertigo if one's balance is lost; but the context for their use is the wild and extravagant universe of Mailer's imagination. Thus, because Menenhetet was conceived on the night his father knew he would be killed, Menenhetet is blessed with a sensitivity to the "tender presence of death" in everything he does. What this entails for Menenhetet is his flirtation with death as the dialectical contest of strength of will versus desire, in sexual intercourse. Menenhetet learns "how to dally for hours and wander at the edge. I could draw into myself all that was rich and foul, splendid and nasty, groaning and glorious in Nub-Utchat, and yet not go spilling forth in misery at all the thefts and corruptions her blood would ask of me, could, yes, still absorb her seven souls and spirits far up into my loins and my heart until my life became not only faint, but more and more like a fine thread. ... At such moments I knew I had only to tear a thread between my body and my Ka ... and I would die. My heart would burst even as I came forth. I cannot tell you how many nights I hovered on such a brink".³²

Mailer's thematic imagery of the edge is given expression in a different way in the early novel, *The Deer Park*, but its presence as a metaphor for the limits to which people push themselves in search of a dream of fulfillment anticipates

Mailer's use of the same image in the later writing. Situated on the edge of the desert, Desert D'or is located in California, which is itself on the edge of the Pacific. Already, the American frontier myth has been engaged: people first came West in search of a dream of fulfillment; ostensibly in search of gold, but manifestly in search of whatever would satisfy the demands of adventure, curiosity and the dream of a new life. In *The Deer Park* Mailer employs this myth as the basis of the dreams and aspirations of the inhabitants of Desert D'or, but it is shown to be perverted by the inability to connect the vision of fulfillment with the action necessary to precipitate that vision. In metaphoric terms, the quest for fulfillment has brought the characters of *The Deer Park* to a kind of extreme edge: Marion Faye, for example, has brought himself to the psychic edge of his own capacity to debase himself and others in a quest for some new dimension of experience. Similarly, Stephen Rojack's quest to re-engage the supernatural orders of life, necessary because he believes that civilisation has disrupted primitive man's instinctive sense of dread in his relationship with non-human nature, makes him sensitive to powers, forces and spirits which the conventional orders of society have denied: his existence is, like Marion Faye's, on the edge of the divide between the perception of a different order of existence and the conventional context in which one exists. In other words, Rojack is balanced precariously between the two orders of existence: the chaos of relinquishing totally to the world of spirits, demons and lunar voices, and the rigid structures of conventional, totalitarian society. The metaphor is delivered in Rojack's walk around the parapet; the dialectical structuring of *An American Dream* is thus

made apparent in his quest for equilibrium of these divergent claims upon his psyche.

In the frontispiece of *Cannibals and Christians*, Mailer presents a model of a vertical city of the future, which he designed himself. In the section entitled, "Architectural Excerpts" Mailer says,

Perhaps we live on the edge of a great divide in history and so are divided ourselves between the desire for a gracious, intimate, detailed and highly particular landscape and an urge less articulate to voyage out on explorations not yet made. Perhaps the blank faceless quality of our modern architecture is a reflection of the anxiety we feel before the void ...³³

Mailer's visionary city of the future represents an attempt at filling the void between the old style of the past and the unknown explorations into future dimensions of experience and existence. In this way, Mailer wants to achieve the same kind of dialectical balance as Rojack, and in a sense, the style of his writing encapsulates that attempt. Tony Tanner views Mailer's visionary city as a metaphor for "the city of his own style"³⁴ which is perhaps a succinct way of describing the attempt, in Mailer's writing, of effecting the leap across a gap between the dimensions of spiritual, and factual experience.

Mailer's fiction, therefore, encapsulates the divide between the world of factual reality, and the world of spirits, demons, omens, and strange voices, and Mailer wishes to show that these two worlds are co-existent and demand that the individual seek to maintain balance on the "dangerous edge of things". Indeed, "what is genius but balance on the edge of the impossible?"³⁵ and Mailer's rhetorical question is designed to bring into focus his use of the metaphors of balance, of being at the edge, and

visions of the abyss in a literal context; hence, when Mailer describes Foreman's defeat by Ali, as follows, "In the void of the effort, Foreman is so off-balance that Ali could throw him through the ropes"³⁶ Mailer implicitly suggests the relationship between his theme of the necessity of balance at the edge, and the vision of the abyss, which is the descent, or fall into the void of inertia.

Mailer's mix of metaphor and image, used in the literal terms of the narrative of documentary in this way is again his own personal means of maintaining balance at the edge of contrary literary compulsions: to describe the factual events of his personal experience, but also to invest his perception of those events with an adequate sense of nuance. Thus, in describing the huge building housing the rockets in *Of a Fire On the Moon*, Mailer draws together the disparate terms of the language of science and a sensuous appreciation of the building and its purpose, by which the dialectical interplay of discernible reality and the implications of man's endeavour to reach beyond his immediate environment, is made known:

One did not always know whether one was on a floor, a platform, a bridge, a fixed or impermanent part of this huge shifting ironwork of girders and suspended walkways. It was like being in the back of the stage at an opera house, the view as complex, yet the ceiling was visible from the floor and the ceiling was more than fifty stories up, since above the rockets were yet some massive traveling overhead cranes. To look down from the upper stages of the rocket, or from the highest level where the crew would sit, was to open oneself to a study of the dimensions of one's fear of heights. Down, down, a long throw of the soul down, down again, still falling was the floor of the building, forty floors below. The breath came back into the chest from an abyss. ... Looking into any portion of the interior of a rocket was like looking into the abdominal cavity of a submarine or a whale. ... He could not even

be amused at the curtained walls of white and the in-sucking wind of the dust collectors and the electrical shoe polishers, the white smocks and the interns' caps they were obliged to put on before they could peer through the hatch of the Command Module, and see the habitation of the astronauts. A gray conical innerland of hundreds of buttons and switches looked back at him, and three reclining seats vaguely reminiscent of instruments of torture. Three dentist's chairs side by side! Yes, he could have found the white outfits they were wearing a touch comic - if dust they were to protect the machine against, then garments they could wear, but why white, why the white hospital walls? And thought that of course they would keep it like the sterile room in a delivery ward, for indeed there was something about space which spoke of men preparing to deliver the babies they would themselves bear. The aim of technique was to parallel nature, and the interior of the VAB was the antechamber of a new Creation.³⁷

In a completely different context, Mailer suggests that in the acknowledgement of the inner sexual dialectic - the dual feminine and masculine compulsions - one is able to balance one's fear of what is abhorrent to one (for example, the masculine fear of being overtly "feminine", that is, weak) with the assertion of what is best in one. Mailer is able, in this way, to accommodate homosexuality within his dialectical framework. For example, in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, Tex and D.J. exist, in their relation to each other "on the knife of the divide in all conflict of lust to own the other yet in fear of being killed by the other"³⁸ and Mailer's overt suggestion is that a vital sexual dialectic has been engaged: "Where a man can become more male and a woman more female by coming together in the full rigors of the fuck ... homosexuals, it can be suggested, tend to pass their qualities over to one another".³⁹ Thus, in the anticipated sex between Tex and D.J., Mailer suggests that each is confronted with the origins of desire and the qualities which they implicitly can offer the other, or which they fear in themselves

and so wish to pass on to the other. In D.J.'s case, his buried female nature is offset by his competitive, murderous desire for violence and power; and Tex Hyde's overt masculinity masks a fear of D.J.'s capacity to dominate him - which Mailer (wittingly or unwittingly) aligns with femininity.

Similarly, in *Ancient Evenings*, Mailer portrays the violent sexual episode between Usermare and Menenhetet as a transaction whereby Menenhetet literally receives the gift of Usermare's masculinity, so that he is later able to perform a buggery upon a thief with the same driven force as Usermare had perpetrated upon his own person. At the same time, the episode reveals to Menenhetet his divided nature, in much the same way as D.J. confronts his own feminine nature. In this sense, Menenhetet is able to say, "For I have never know more shame than in the days that followed. Yet a great part of this shame was for the joy of remembering. My bowels felt gilded. The light of a God was in my chest. A God had entered me. I was not like other men, although I felt more of a woman".⁴⁰ Menenhetet's shame at the joy of remembering is his recognition that "I was no longer myself but His, and loved Him, and knew I would die for Him"⁴¹ but the Pharaoh's rape of Menenhetet also provides Menenhetet with the necessary impetus to redeem himself; to locate and act upon his capacity for courage and masculinity: "Even as the very center of me had been stolen by my Pharaoh, so did I steal it from another, and knew it could never stop. I had an appetite as strong as the color of my blood"⁴² and, "I also knew I would never forgive Him, not when I ate, not when I drank, and not when I defecated. Like an arrow flew one thought through my mind: it was that I must revenge myself".⁴³ For Menenhetet, the rape is

both debilitating, as well as a source of strength and authority; further, the source of Menenhetet's act of revenge which is to fuck (to use the only word which most effectively conveys the force and determination of Menenhetet's resolve) Nefertiti, is the act of buggery itself, and in this way Mailer means to delineate the achievement of balance in the sexual terms by which Menenhetet confronts the nature of his being: from the admission of awful desire, "so was I captured by my despised allegiance to that godly phallus - yes! I wanted to be used by Usermare again"⁴⁴ to the realisation of the dialectical self - "The more He had made me feel like a woman, the more I knew the anguish of a man".⁴⁵

Mailer's perception of an inherent dialectical coupling of contraries is extended to embrace the biological certainty of the two sets of genes each individual receives from their parents. In Mailer's metaphysical terms, "we live with not one soul but two, our father and our mother"⁴⁶ and this literal inheritance of an inner dialogue of matched pairs signifies, to Mailer, the necessity of balance as a fundamental principle of physical and psychical well-being:

The first cell of an embryo was put together out of the twenty-three chromosomes of the mother and the twenty-three of the father. Every one of the cells of the human body yet to develop in her womb would contain a replica of those forty-six chromosomes. What a joining was implied, what a sense of union (or what an imbalance!). The essence of one's experience, written on the twenty-three tablets of the chromosomes, would combine with the equal number of the mother. It was as if one nest of heiroglyphics had been put in connection with another, as if two separate languages spoke across a void and then combined into one new and different language.⁴⁷

In this way, Mailer aligns his convictions with the metaphoric structuring and his consistent imagery and allusion; so that, for example, Mailer's symbolic use of the Devil, plastic and cancer, to convey his sense of the encroaching force of totalitarianism is not only part of his complex metaphoric structuring; Mailer sees them as the literal, material conditions of evil. So, too, one's excrement is literally the waste that accrues from one's inability to make heroic acceptances and undergo heroic assimilations.

Mailer's use of metaphor is necessarily complex in that it is in the structured use of images and the subtle interplay of language that Mailer delineates his primary metaphoric themes. In *An American Dream*, for example, the remarkable passage in which Rojack recounts killing the three Germans displays Mailer's virtuosity in the sheer force and brilliance of the language itself; moreover, the long, uninterrupted sentences connect every seemingly disparate image and idea such that the implications of the passage exist in an interdependent relation that mirrors the state of Rojack's mind. As such, the movement from images of magic - "Because I did not throw the grenades ... it threw them, and it did a near perfect job" - to implications of homoeroticism and heterosexual fantasy, with associations of blood, mud and bodily waste, to the reminder of childbirth (the shot itself feels like a "birth twig") is metaphorically relevant to Mailer's division, throughout, between creative sexuality and devilish sexuality, and which, itself, expresses the dialectic by which Rojack's compulsion to the sterile, "death"-ridden world of convention (Ruta, Barney Kelly) as well as to chaos (Harlem, the

moon) is balanced in his desire to "love Cherry well" - metaphorically delineated as he walks around the parapet.

In a similar way, *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is the archetypal, mythic American tale of quest and initiation, but it is also one which, in its extreme and perverse obscenity belies a dark underside to the tale of D.J.'s rite of passage. In both *Why Are We in Vietnam?* and *An American Dream* Mailer's central theme is that of the individual poised on the edge of the contrary inclinations, both of which suggest some manifestation of good, or evil. This is the primary metaphoric structure in both novels; in each, the terms of the battle are conveyed as the distinct responsiveness of the individual - D.J. and Rojack - to the situations in which they find, or place themselves. D.J.'s seemingly endless babble of psycho-sexual violence, literary parody, witty obscenity and so on is the means by which he separates himself from what he perceives is the true obscenity of America (personified, he implies, in Rusty), which, through repeated reference and innuendo, is conveyed metaphorically as "shit", excrement, and waste. John Aldridge illuminates Mailer's scatological pre-occupations as they delineate the metaphors of *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, as follows:

For over the years Mailer has evolved a sort of eschatology of scatology, a highly idiosyncratic metaphysics of feces. Excrement represents to him the organic form of defeat and dread. It is linked in his mind to the work of the Devil, who is engaged in unremitting warfare with God to determine the ascendancy of death or life in the universe, a contest which on the human level becomes the individual's unremitting struggle against dread.⁴⁸

In Mailer's metaphysical view, one defecates in order to rid oneself of the presence of the Devil: the waste products which

are the literal evidence of the devilish tendency toward the entropic denial of one's heroic potential. In the same metaphysical scheme, orgasm is for Mailer the literal experience of one's potential godliness, in that orgasm, apart from being a sexual experience, is also the realisation of new circuits of energy generated within oneself. These circuits in turn connect with other circuits in operation throughout the universe, so that one finally approaches nothing less than God, in the experience of orgasm. As John Aldridge correctly points out, for Mailer, "scatological obscenity is a means of clearing the psychic bowels of defeat and dread". In the sense that one ejaculates toward divinity and defecates the Devil's evidence, D.J.'s verbal emphasis upon shit, buggery, and so on is itself the expression of balance, it is his means of ridding himself, at least partially, of the "mixed shit" everywhere around him and which he feels may overpower him. Balance at the edge is thus conveyed as the approach to God and the defeat offered by acquiescence to the Devil, expressed in the psycho-sexual terms of surrender and will-power: on the one hand, to engage in homosexual intercourse with Tex Hyde is an act of courage because it would engage D.J.'s most deeply buried reserves of courage, but at the same time, Mailer is clearly emphasising the devilish associations of buggery - the anus being the repository of excrement.

Mailer constructs his metaphorical structures so as to determine a sense of order, or form, to what might otherwise be seen only as the contradictions of late Twentieth Century existence. Mailer wants to exacerbate the sense of a dialectic wherein the individual acts from a standpoint of contradictory inclinations, because he believes that the individual is a

microcosmic expression of the fundamental quality of the American experience. That is, the individual expresses what it means to live in America, in terms of the often schizoid sundering of effort and ambition, desire and determination, authenticity and acquiescence. Whereas the individual, in Mailer's terms, must seek to acquire balance of the contradictory compulsions of the form of one's being, and act in a way which expresses a capacity for authenticity and courage, Mailer means to show that the acquisition of balance is itself necessarily the expression of the dialectic. This is because the interdependence of one's opposed desires or compulsions is the means by which dissolution, or nothingness is defeated. The absence of a dialectical relationship - both within oneself and between oneself and the larger social context - entails for Mailer, the loss of one's self to one-dimensionality and formlessness.

Balance, as the ability to maintain the dialectical interdependence of inner, contradictory compulsions, is conveyed metaphorically by Mailer as the individual poised on the edge of crucial alternatives. In *Ancient Evenings*, however, balance is even ascribed form as a character - Maat, "'a genius of balance between heartfelt attraction and clear immolation'".⁴⁹ The presence of Maat in *Ancient Evenings* delineates Mailer's concern with balance as necessary for maintaining the dialectical interplay of contradictory inclinations, and the prevention of schizophrenia, which is the disruption of that dialectical interplay. Hence, in one particularly graphic scene, the aftermath of the Battle of Kadesh is described in terms befitting both the vulgarity and violence of war as well as the exhilarating and fulfilling experience of victory. The ensuring

orgy is conveyed as a dialectical encounter of pleasure and pain - "Sometimes you could not tell the oaths of pleasure from the wails of the doomed" - and if the reader is in any doubt as to Mailer's thematic emphasis upon the dialectical quality of the events he is describing, Mailer then proceeds to liken the excitement of orgiastic orgasm to the violence of death throes, but moreover, the orgy itself is even granted the seemingly inappropriate qualities of love and courage:

Even in this riot, where one came forth so much more than one wanted that the joys were like the throes of one's death, it was still extraordinary with these women. They were only camp whores with putrid breath, but I saw the gates of the Heavenly Fields open in my loins - these women took the sweetest shoots right into the center of themselves. It must have been all the blood and burning flesh. Maybe Maat approaches with love when all are choking with smoke. You have to wonder how many Generals are conceived on campgrounds such as this.⁵⁰

The acquisition of balance, and the fundamental relation of balance to the decision to act in one way as opposed to another, is a moral necessity, in Mailer's terms. Thus, when Mailer says, again of Maat, "that same feather is used by Anubis to weigh the moral worth of the heart of each dead person"⁵¹ the final pages of *Ancient Evenings* assume a meaning which is resonant throughout Mailer's writing. Menenhetet II says, "So I mounted on this ladder of lights to that place in the heavens where one might gaze like Osiris upon the portents of all that is ahead, and try to turn the storm before it breaks. All the while I knew the fear that I was not pure enough for such a task, nor my great-grandfather, and neither of us could offer a feather to lie upon the heart as nicely as the sense of right and wrong".⁵² Mailer's intention is to show that the ability to determine the quality of

an event or situation, which necessarily precedes the decision to act in one way as opposed to another, demands an awareness of the discernible difference between right and wrong, good and evil. Moreover, what is right and wrong, good and evil, is determined on the basis of action which will allow one to grow, as opposed to anything which would quell, or deny that self-growth. In other words, action which maximises one's courage and capacity for bravery is good; anything which would deny the opportunity to realise bravery and courage, is bad. Any action which denies the expression of one's capacity for bravery or any situation which denies self-expression in these terms, is a lessening of that capacity for authenticity and courage. Again, Mailer's schema is anchored firmly in a notion of the balance which lends shape, or form, to events or circumstances:

Just as a man serving a long sentence in prison will begin to live in despair about the time he recognizes that the effort to keep his sanity is going to leave him less of a man, so a fighter goes through something like the same calculation. The prisoner or the fighter must give up some part of what is best in him (since what is best for any human is no more designed for prison - or training - than an animal for the zoo). Sooner or later the fighter recognizes that something in his psyche is paying too much for the training. Boredom is not only deadening his personality but killing his soul.⁵³

Whereas Mailer draws a clear distinction between right and wrong, good and evil; his morality rests firmly on a basis of action which precipitates greater self-knowledge and growth in terms of the capacity for love, courage, and self-expression within the social framework. Hence, Mailer draws together the fluidity of motion (movement, as opposed to stasis), morality as the discernible divide between right and wrong, and balance, as the dialectical interplay of the oppositions by which the

individual personality determines action and decision: "but the laws of motion like the laws of morality invoke every notion of balance".⁵⁴ For Mailer, no action occurs in isolation but is the reflection of the context in which that action takes place, as well as the impetus which has resulted in that action. For this reason, Mailer conceives of the "moral pay-off", again invoking a sense of the necessity of balance as the expression of form; for example, where action which is extreme invokes an extreme reaction, whether as the heightened awareness of the perpetrator of his own capacity for that action, or even as a fundamental disturbance in the universe. Hence, the expedition to the moon is necessarily viewed by Mailer as the literal manifestation of one of two alternatives: the expression of God's destiny, or the will of the Devil. Man's impetus - to reach beyond the known boundaries of knowledge and experience - therefore engage the primitive, instinctual origins of man in a dialectical encounter with his own destiny:

Few men could sleep with such happiness flowing unaccustomed in them, but now add a fear which has been kept in the vaults, a firm, well-regulated natural concern of the executive mind, yet a fear not even primitive, but primeval in its uncharted depths: are they going to be able to ascend from the moon? It is one thing to shatter a taboo, it is another to escape the retribution which follows the sacrilege - where is the savage society whose folklore is not crowded with tales of the subtlety of every outraged curse?⁵⁵

Ultimately, Mailer's conception of balance reveals the moral sensibility of a novelist pre-occupied with life as the justification of individual courage, heroism, and the capacity for love; or, alternatively, a life which is not a life but which is the negation of life - the formlessness and nullity of inertia or acquiescence: "... hovering on that ultimate edge of

moral balance where one wonders if the sum of one's life has been for good or ill and if the morning will return a fair and just verdict ...".⁵⁶ Indeed, balance is integral to form, the lack of which Mailer fears is the legacy of the modern, late Twentieth Century propensity to refute the existence of death as the necessary accompaniment to life. Mailer believes that one can grow only when one faces a situation which is fearful, in which the outcome of any action is unknown. Growth is the result of facing the innermost depths of one's being, and electing the action which demands the greatest reserves of courage. Whereas this process of self-confrontation demands facing the alternatives of courage and cowardice, or even action as opposed to acquiescence (that is, no action at all in the sense of action which reflects our desire or our intent), the ability to determine a course of action which maximises the potential for bravery but which does not deny the presence of one's own cowardice is the achievement of balance of equilibrium between the "incompatible compatibles" which constitute the dialectical shape of one's self.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 *The Fight*, p. 110.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- 4 *The Presidential Papers*, pp. 296-297.
- 5 Diana Trilling, "The Moral Radicalism of Norman Mailer", in *Lucid*, p. 122.
- 6 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 262.
- 7 For a full discussion, see "The White Negro", in *Advertisements for Myself*, pp. 269 et seq.
- 8 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 6 (Preface).
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- 10 *The Fight*, pp. 109-110.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- 12 W.B. Yeats, *Ideas of Good and Evil*, (pt.), used as introductory quote on facing page to title page of *Ancient Evenings*.
- 13 *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, p. 130.
- 14 *The Fight*, p. 143.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- 16 *The Executioner's Song*, p. 8.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 226.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 242.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 327.
- 20 *Why Are We in Vietnam?* pp. 106-107.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- 22 *The Executioner's Song*, p. 856.
- 23 *The Prisoner of Sex*, pp. 186-187.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 202.

- 27 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 208.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 227.
- 29 *An American Dream*, p. 18.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 31 *Ancient Evenings*, p. 36.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 673.
- 33 Included in the original (1966) version of *Cannibals and Christians* but later removed from the abridged (1979) paperback edition. As quoted in Tanner, p. 364.
- 34 Tanner, p. 364. Tanner's thesis emphasises Mailer's role as the creator/controller of the text as a means of securing a personal "space" separate from the rigidities of imposed structures and the fluidity of absolute autonomy. My thesis attempts to show that a primary metaphoric structure is proposed by Mailer as the means of explicating this self-same theme.
- 35 *The Fight*, p. 162.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 163.
- 37 *Of a Fire on the Moon*, pp. 54-55.
- 38 *Why Are We in Vietnam?* pp. 203-204.
- 39 *The Prisoner of Sex*, p. 171.
- 40 *Ancient Evenings*, p. 289.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 288.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 306.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 288.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 592.
- 45 *Ibid.*, pp. 600-601.
- 46 *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, p. 181.
- 47 *The Prisoner of Sex*, p. 210.
- 48 John W. Aldridge, "From Vietnam to Obscenity", originally appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, February, 1968, reprinted in *Lucid*, v.p. 189.
- 49 *Ancient Evenings*, p. 53.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 363.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 708-709.

⁵³ *The Fight*, p. 16.

⁵⁴ *Of a Fire on the Moon*, p. 231.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 415.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 417.

SECTION 2.

A COMPLEX PATTERNING: DIALECTICAL STRUCTURES IN
AN AMERICAN DREAM, WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM? AND
TOUGH GUYS DON'T DANCE.

INTRODUCTION

Mailer's work exhibits a preoccupation with a specific theme which is structured to metaphorically elucidate that theme, as well as provide the form to the patterning or plot development of the particular work. In this section, I will attempt to demonstrate the consistency of Mailer's patterned use of this theme in terms of the dialectical structures which form the basis of the plot development in a specific novel or piece. I have chosen to highlight this consistency and patterning by drawing reference to three of Mailer's novels: *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, *An American Dream*, and *Tough Guys Don't Dance*.¹ The first two novels exhibit a similarity in the development of, and thematic intent, of the dialectical structuring. The third novel represents the resolution of certain conceptual difficulties in terms of the application of the theme - the effort to achieve a dream of being - to Mailer's idiosyncratic use of metaphor: often, Mailer's narrative construction is made sense of only in terms of his private - even precious - use of a system of metaphor and image; however, in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, Mailer fuses plot development, theme, and imagistic and metaphoric patterning so as to create a novelistic universe in which the supernatural quality of Tim's experience is wholly believable, seen within Mailer's idiosyncratic perspective.

PART 1. AN AMERICAN DREAM

An American Dream is a remarkably written book: from the nonchalant reference to Jack Kennedy at the novel's start, to the weirdly funny telephone call to heaven with which the book ends, the reader is confronted with a universe which suggests the nefarious presence of spirits, omens, voices, and demons; and yet is also obstinately real in the fine detail with which Mailer presents place, manner and character. Apart from a personal conviction in the simultaneous existence of, and interplay between the so-called real world and what might be called the spiritual world, Mailer presents *An American Dream* as the personal dream of fulfillment of one individual, Stephen Rojack. In this sense the novel is Rojack's own creation; the novel is a mirror of his perceptions and imaginative transmutations as he discovers self-worth and reclaims a sense of being, of having a "center".

In his intelligent essay, "The Interpretation of Dreams", Leo Bersani describes Rojack's attempt to fight the "empty dread" he feels at the possibility of losing his "center" as "literary transcendence" where Rojack is able to re-create himself through the imaginative fictionalisation of events, the self, and other:

(Rojack possesses) ... a willingness to entertain the most extravagant fantasies and hallucinations in order to change their effective coefficient. By taking the risk of abandoning himself to the fantastic suggestiveness of every person, every object, every smell encountered during the thirty-two hours he writes about, Rojack discovers fantasy as a source of imaginative richness in himself instead of fearing it as an ominous signal from mysterious external powers. He moves, in other words, from fantasy as a psychological illusion about the world to the use of fantasy as

a somewhat self-conscious but exuberant display of his own inventive powers.²

By giving himself over to his own sensuous awareness of all around him, Rojack is able to locate the means by which he can achieve individual heroism, imagination, love, courage, hope, faith, salvation and redemption. Certainly, the religious quality of Rojack's experience is intentional; he literally requires salvation because he has been reduced to the last vestiges of a sense of self: Rojack has "come to understand there was suicide" in him, (15) but moreover, he has "lost (his) sense of being alive and here on earth".(21) *An American Dream* both describes, and is the fulfillment of, Rojack's efforts to defeat this inner suicide and return to an adequate sense of self and being. Furthermore, the novel details this process in terms of Mailer's dialectical structuring.

Rojack himself anticipates Mailer's themes when he says at the outset of the novel, "for I looked down the abyss on the first night I killed: four men, four very separate Germans, dead under a full moon - " (10) and the ensuing tale is Rojack's pivotal experience of existential reckoning whereby he confronts the meaning of death as a personal phenomenon. The fourth German soldier brands Rojack with the impact and experience of death:

for I could not face his eyes, they now contained all of it, the two grenades, the blood on my thigh, the fat faggot, the ghost with the pistol, the hunchback, the blood, those bloody screams that never sounded, it was all in his eyes, he had eyes I was to see once later on an autopsy table in a small town in Missouri, eyes belonging to a redneck farmer from a deep road in the Ozarks, eyes of blue, so perfectly blue and mad they go all the way in deep into celestial vaults of sky, eyes which go back all the way to God ... and I faltered before that stare ... and suddenly it was all gone, the clean presence of it, the grace, it had deserted me in the instant I hesitated, and

now I had no stomach to go, I could charge his bayonet no more. (12-13).

In this moment of existential confrontation, Rojack also discovers, in his hesitation, the seeds of cowardice before the imperatives for action he sets for himself. More importantly, this first existential exposure to the inner depths of his being has been contextualised by the experience of death, and Rojack subsequently evaluates his socially representative self (the congressman, socialite, and so on) in terms of this apocalyptic vision of death: "Where many another young athlete or hero might have had a vast and continuing recreation with sex, I was lost in a private kaleidoscope of death. I could not forget the fourth soldier. His eyes had come to see what was waiting on the other side, and they told me then that death was a creation more dangerous than life".(14) The experience of existential self-confrontation has returned Rojack to himself, so that he is able to recognise that he "could have had a career in politics if only (he) had been able to think that death was zero, death was everyone's emptiness. But I knew it was not. I remained an actor. My personality was built upon a void".(14)

The self that Rojack has re-discovered through existential confrontation is really a non-self: he has discovered, in fact, that he has "come to the end of a very long street. ... For I had come to decide I was finally a failure".(15) This realisation precipitates Rojack's examination of his relationship with his wife, Deborah Kelly, a relationship which encapsulates Rojack's dialectical perspective on death: "Living with her I was murderous; attempting to separate suicide came into me".(16) The dialectic is subsequently engaged as Rojack confronts the alternatives for action in Mailer's archetypal parapet context.

As Rojack stands on the balcony, he is confronted, existentially, with the inner depths and limitations of his being so that he is able to locate his most authentic motivations and desires. The existential context is located in Rojack's response to the moon, by which he gains entry to the sub-orders of existence: the voices and spirits of beings beyond accepted, external reality. Whether construed by the reader as the excesses of Mailer's imaginative facility or simply the literary inventiveness of Rojack himself hardly matters - the episode is important for the existential realisation of an inner, dialectical warring:

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

This inner, dialectical warring is metaphorically delineated as Rojack places himself half on, half off, the balcony. The beckoning voice of the moon is the seductive urge toward chaos which, in this instance, is perceived by Rojack as a strangely appealing "flight" into death: "Half-drunk, half-sick, half on the balcony, half off, for I had put my leg over the balustrade as if I were able better to breathe with one toe pointing at the moon, I looked into my Being, all that lovely light and rotting

nerve, and proceeded to listen. Which is to say, I looked out deep into that shimmer of past death and new madness, that platinum lady with her silver light, and she was in my ear, I could hear her music: 'Come to me,' she was saying, 'Come now. Now!' ... Because I knew I would fly. My body would drop like a sack, down with it, bag of clothes, bones, and all, but I would rise, the part of me which spoke and thought and had its glimpses of the landscape of my Being, would soar, would rise, would leap the miles of darkness to that moon".(19) In this sense, Rojack has himself explicated the dialectic - "all that lovely light and rotting nerve" - which characterises the self in terms of his relationship with death. His urge to jump into the chaos of a formless death (formless because without the shape of adequate motivation or purpose except as the expression of instinct) is manifest as a retreat to madness, which is then offset by Rojack's perception of the other alternative - cancer. In this way, Mailer retains the dialectical structuring in the choice facing Rojack between madness and cancer: in this early episode, the experience of existential self-confrontation reveals to Rojack his desperate need to re-claim, or re-affirm his being, his selfhood, because the action he elects - to refuse the call of the moon - is an unsatisfactory resolution of the alternatives. Rojack is in touch with his instinctual self - "Instinct was telling me to die", but he has not been able to locate the source of motivation, which would precipitate the action to reaffirm his being and determine the worth of his self: "Which instinct and where?" (19):

'Yes,' said the moon, 'you haven't done your work, but you've lived your life, and you are dead with it.' 'Let me be not all dead,' I cried to myself,

and slipped back over the rail, and dropped into a chair. I was sick. I assure you I was sick in a way I had never been sick before. Deep in a fever, or bumping through the rapids of a bad nausea, one's soul could always speak to one, 'Look what this illness is doing to us, you coward,' that voice might say and one would shake or twist in the fever, but that at least was a nightmare. This illness now, huddling in the deck chair, was an extinction. I could feel what was good in me going away ... perhaps forever, rising after all to the moon, my courage, my wit, ambition and hope. ... Will you understand me if I say that at the moment I felt the other illness come to me, that I knew then if it took twenty years or forty for my death that if I died from a revolt of the cells, a growth against the design of my organs, that this was the moment it all began, this was the hour when the cells took their leap? (19-20)

In the subsequent episode in which Rojack visits Deborah, his sense of existing without substance or identity is reiterated, but also, Rojack is able to explicate the nature of his condition in terms of what - or who - has assailed his being; corrupting and undermining the last vestiges of a sense of self: "I had opened a void - I was now without center. Can you understand? I did not belong to myself any longer. Deborah had occupied my center".(32) It is this realisation which spurs Rojack to action, to the act of violence which in Mailer's perception, is an act of salvation for Rojack. Indeed, as he is murdering Deborah, Rojack imagines that he is opening a door, revealing "heaven ... some quiver of jeweled cities shining in the glow of a tropical dusk" (35) and the implication is that Rojack's action in murdering Deborah has freed him, both from Deborah's destructive vindictiveness, but also from the convention realm of society which she represents. Moreover, this episode marks Rojack's metaphoric descent to another order of existence: he is, literally, a fugitive from the law and must engage in a game of cat and mouse with the police to escape

incarceration, but also, Mailer suggest that, as the "door flies open" Rojack has gained access to the inner reserves of his being such that his perceptions are now invested with a sensitivity borne of his instinctual, sensuous affinity with his deepest motivations and desires. One notes, also, that the murder itself resonates with the dialectical sense of Rojack's rational self engaged in battle with his instinctual urges. The alternatives Rojack has recently discovered for himself - madness and cancer - have now been resolved as the choice between conventional rationality (which would mean death to Rojack's being) and heeding the imperatives of the instinctual self (described here in the typically Mailer-esque terms of sexual "creativity"):

... and I thrust against the door once more and hardly felt her hand leave my shoulder, I was driving now with force against that door: spasms began to open in me, and my mind cried out then, 'Hold back! you're going too far, hold back!' I could feel a series of orders whiplike tracers of light from my head to my arm, I was ready to obey. I was trying to stop, but pulse packed behind pulse in a pressure up to thunderhead; some blackbiled lust, some desire to go ahead not unlike the instant one comes in a woman against her cry that she is without protection came bursting with rage from out of me and my mind exploded in a fireworks of rockets, stars, and hurtling embers, the arm about her neck leaped against the whisper I could still feel murmuring in her throat, and crack I choked her harder, and crack I choked her again, and crack I gave her payment - never halt now - and crack the door flew open and the wire tore in her throat, and I was through the door, hatred passing from me in wave after wave, illness as well, rot and pestilence, nausea, a bleak string of salts. I was floating. I was as far into myself as I had ever been. ... I was weary with a most honorable fatigue, and my flesh seemed new. (35-36)

The vision of the jewelled city is important as the manifestation of Rojack's divided compulsions in another sense. When Rojack engages in both vaginal and anal sexual intercourse

with Ruta, the German maid, he has another vision of the city, but this time, "the colors had the unreal pastel of plastic and the main street was flaming with light at five A.M. A million light bulbs lit the scene".(49) In essence, sex is, in this instance, a metaphor for the dialectical interplay of Rojack's compulsion towards, and desire to be free of his former existence as politician, socialite, and so on. That is, whereas vaginal sex is, for Mailer an act of creativity and anal sex just the reverse, the vision of a jewelled city and a plastic metropolis delineates Rojack's efforts to break through to knowledge of self and of existence, as against his dual effort to defeat the forces of waste and nothingness which he perceives as a constant threat to his selfhood.

Rojack's state of "outlawness" which results from his murder of Deborah is characterised as the descent to an underworld life of spirits, voices, omens, odours, and magic. It is a world in which one's deepest and most authentic passions and desires, fears and weaknesses are granted full expression because all the conventional restrictions, considerations and values have been abandoned. The movement to this underworld is presaged by Rojack's own admission that he has "come to believe in grace and the lack of it, in the long finger of God and the swish of the Devil"(38) and, again, "Yes, I had come to believe in spirits and demons, in devils, warlocks, omens, wizards and fiends, in incubi and succubi; more than once I had sat up in a strange woman's bed feeling claws on my chest, a familiar bad odor above the liquor on my tongue and Deborah's green eyes staring at me in the dark, an oppression close to strangling on my throat. She was evil ..."(40) Mailer's intent is to demonstrate Rojack's receptivity

to the sub-orders of existence, a receptivity which is exacerbated subsequent to the murder when, for Rojack, everything assumes a new potency: "But the towel was in my hand, and my hands could have been picking up the crisp powder of autumn leaves as they crumbled in my fingers. So it went with the shirt. ... Each of its odors (those particular separate molecules) was scattered through the linen like a school of dead fish on the beach, their decay, the intimate whiff of their decay a thread of connection leading back to the hidden heart of the sea".(41) Mailer's point is also resoundingly clear when, immediately after the murder, Rojack discovers that his initial experience of death with the four German soldiers has been re-engaged: in fact, whereas in the first instance Rojack uncovered his inner capacity for cowardice and a frank, unadmitted fear of death, Rojack now finds in death the vistas of new possibilities for himself, encapsulated in a virtual physical transformation and the dialectical possibility of the presence of God's grace or the Devil's betrayal:

I looked into the mirror, searching once again into the riddle of my face; I had never seen a face more handsome. It was the truth. It was exactly the sort of truth one discovers by turning a corner and colliding with a stranger. My hair was alive and my eyes had the blue of a mirror held between the ocean and the sky - they were eyes to equal at last the eyes of the German who stood before me with a bayonet - one moment of fright flew like a comet across the harbor of my calm, and I looked deeper into the eyes in the mirror as if they were keyholes to a gate which gave on a palace, and asked myself, 'Am I now good? Am I evil forever?' - (42)

This is itself a moment of existential self-confrontation in which Rojack comes face to face with his own possibilities for both renewal and self-creation on the one hand, and waste (cancer

or madness) on the other. This moment of confrontation is encapsulated metaphorically in the sexual episode with Ruta, when Rojack discovers "a desire suddenly to skip the sea and mine the earth, a pure prong of desire to bugger, there was canny hard-packed evil in that butt, that I knew".(47) Rojack's literal back-and-forth juxtaposition between vaginal and anal penetration is also a kind of metaphoric balance at the edge of the divide as he confronts the devilish force of de-creation offset by the instinctual urge toward inner godliness. The sex itself delineates the choice facing Rojack between God and the Devil - in this instance, as Rojack engages in "a raid on the Devil and a trip back to the Lord", (48) Mailer means to emphasise that at this point, Rojack has, indeed, broken through to some deep, existential mystery through the act of murdering his wife, but the character of that mystery - its fundamental force, whether for good or for evil, is unknown to Rojack. Hence, Ruta's womb is variously described by Mailer/Rojack as "her deserted warehouse, that empty tomb"(48) signifying the presence of some de-creative urge or power - "her box spoke of cold gasses from the womb and a storehouse of disappointments" (47) - but in the interplay of vaginal and anal sexual interchange, Mailer seems to suggest that the dialectic offers possibilities of renewal and growth: "I was leaping back and forth, in separate runs for separate strokes, bringing spoils and secrets up to the Lord from the red mills, bearing messages of defeat back from that sad womb, and then I chose ... her cunt. It was no graveyard now, no warehouse, no, more like a chapel now, a modest decent place, but its walls were snug, its odor was green, there was a sweetness in the chapel".(48) This sense of dialectical interplay between

opposed forces and desires is maintained as Rojack approaches orgasm, itself a Mailer-metaphor for the approach to knowledge of existence and the self's palace therein. In this instance, the creative possibilities inherent in vaginal intercourse are undermined by Rojack's conviction that to achieve orgasm in Ruta's vagina is "what prison will be like for (him)"; (49) the enticing urge of the Devil (implicit in the urge to come in anal intercourse), however, results in the plastic vision of electric waste:

... except that I could feel the Devil's meal beneath, its fires were lifting through the floor, and I waited for the warmth to reach inside, to come up from the cellar below, to bring booze and heat up and licking tongues, I was up above a choice which would take me on one wind or another, and I had to give myself, I could not hold back, there was an explosion, furious, treacherous and hot as the gates of an icy slalom with the speed at my heels overtaking my nose, I had one of those splittings of a second where the senses fly out and there in that instant the itch reached into me and drew me out and I jammed up her ass and came as if I'd been flung across the room. She let out a cry of rage. ... And with my eyes closed, I felt low sullen waters wash about a dead tree on a midnight pond.(49)

The importance of this scene becomes apparent as Rojack discovers his capacity for heroic courage. He discovers his own potential for re-creation and renewal because he elects to dispose of Deborah's body in a way which is recognised as "the boldest choice".(53) Such action thus reveals to Rojack that he can, indeed, be "brave enough" (53) for this, and subsequent tests of his courage, and as a result, he undergoes a kind of catharsis in which he can appreciate Deborah's loss as a personal phenomenon as well as feel cleansed: "... and I howled then in a simulation of woe, but the woe was real - for the first time I knew she was gone - and it was an animal howl. One scalding wash

of sorrow, and I felt clean".(54) This sense of catharsis is maintained, even as Rojack is confronted with the barely suppressed aggression of the detectives intent upon convicting Rojack of the crime he has, indeed, committed. The sensuous detail of the following description of Rojack's state - mental as well as physical - after the murder emphasises Rojack's new found affinity with his own feelings and desires, motivations and weaknesses:

I could feel my heart beating now like a canary held in my hand. It throbbed with a tender almost exhilarated fatigue; I could have been no more than a drum with a bird's heart trapped inside, and the reverberations seemed to sound outside my body, as if everyone in the car could hear me. ... Like a bird indeed in a cage in a darkened room, the passing flare of light from outside gave some memory of the forest, and I felt myself soaring out on the beating of my heart as if a climax of fear had begun which might race me through swells of excitement until everything burst, and I flew out to meet my death.

The men in the car looked red to me, then green, then red again. I wondered if I were close to fainting. It was suffocating to sit between those men - it was like being a fox in a bog while hounds crooned on either bank. I knew at last the sweet panic of an animal who is being tracked, for if danger were close, if danger came in on the breeze, and one's nostrils had an awareness of the air as close as that first touch of a tongue on your flesh, there was still such a tenderness for the hope one could stay alive. Something came out of the city like the whispering of a forest, and on the March night's message through the open window I had at that instant the first smell of spring, that quiet instant, so like the first moment of love one feels in a woman who has until then given no love.(74-75)

Mailer's belief, expressed in "The White Negro", that the individual is "not only his character but his context"³ finds expression in *An American Dream* as Rojack confronts the deadening force of institutionalised law and realises, at the same time, the alternatives of chaos and convention as the only

possibilities which await the outcome of any action he may take. The police precinct which provides the context for Rojack's self-examination in this instance is experienced by Rojack as a constrictive, oppressive atmosphere: "... all the while I would keep breathing the air of this room with its cigarettes and cigars, its coffee which tasted of dirty urns, its distant hint of lavatories and laundries, of junk yards and morgues, I would see dark green walls and dirty white ceilings, I would listen to subterranean mutterings, I would open my eyes and close them under the blistering light of the electric bulbs".(85) Consequently, Rojack feels as though "that emptiness ... that sense of void"(85) has returned, and he does not "have any certainty at all that (he) could go on".(85) In effect, the atmosphere and environment of the police station, aligned by Mailer with the totalitarian force of social structures and values, has literally wasted a measure of Rojack's newly discovered courage. He thus perceives the necessity of action as realising one of two, equally destructive courses of action: the crushing force of convention - "I would live for ten or twenty years in a subway, I would lie in a cell at night with nothing to do but walk a stone square floor. I would die through endless stupors and expired plans";(85) or, alternatively, death as a chaotic nothingness - "... and walk one morning into a room where ready for nothing, where nothing done, failed, miserable, frightened of what migrations were ready for me, I would go out smashing, jolting, screaming inside, out into the long vertigo of a death which fell down endless stone walls".(85-86) Moreover, Rojack realises a personal dialectic within his own conscious awareness of a desire to harness and act upon his capacity for

courage - he is ready to admit defeat, but he has "a horror of appearing feeble before that young blonde girl"(86) - as well as his pivotal recognition that "there was a vast cowardice in (him) which was ready to make any peace at all, ready to pillage in public the memory of that wife I had had for near to nine years, ready to mock the future of my brain by preparing to cry out that I too was insane and my best ideas were poor, warped, distorted, and injurious to others".(86) Once again, Rojack elects the course of action which promises him freedom - in this case, from the dread which is the reminder of cowardice and individual frailty: "I stood up then and started out with some idea of going to the back room, but the dread lifted even as I stood up and once again I felt a force in my body steering away from that back room, and a voice inside me said, 'Go to the girl'".(87-88)

It is this specific act of self-determination which, like the very act of murder itself, precipitates a moment of existential catharsis. Just as Rojack's act of violence against Deborah is purgative, returning him to the experience of his own feelings whilst at the same time freeing him of the accumulated hatred and petty jealousies Deborah has instilled in him, Cherry provides Rojack with a psychic connection to the source of all his inner fears and weaknesses. In the metaphoric terms of *An American Dream*, and in concurrence with Mailer's metaphysical connection between food, waste, and the character of one's selfhood, Rojack is able to purge himself of such psychic waste products as he vomits - the two passages, the first following the murder, the second as Rojack discovers an inner imperative to "connect" with Cherry, echo each other: "... hatred passing from

me in wave after wave, illness as well, rot and pestilence, nausea, a bleak string of salts";(36) and:

once again this night I was taking one of those fine new breaths I had not known in twenty years, so it seemed, and then I vomited with all the gusto of a horse on a gallop, cruds, violations, the rot and gas of compromise, the stink of old fears, mildew of discipline, all the biles of habit and the horrors of pretense - ah, here was the heart of the puke! - came thundering out with the fluid intent downrushing sounds of a stream tearing through the wood to recover its river, I felt like some gathering wind which drew sickness from the lungs and livers of others and passed them through me and up and out into the water. I was draining the poison from the wound I had inflicted in Cherry's belly ... (98)

Mailer repeatedly describes people and events, in *An American Dream*, in the dialectical terms of Rojack's own divided compulsions. Thus, Cherry is literally experienced by Rojack (when he kisses her for the first time) as the expression of his own dialectical responsiveness: "For a draft of something sweet and strong came off her mouth and spoke of what she knew, of small Southern towns and the back seats of cars, of expensive hotel suites and years of listening to good jazz, of simple honest muscle in her heart and the taste of good wines, jukeboxes and crap tables, stubborn will, something compromised, inert and full of gas, something powerful and dull as her friends, the smell of bourbon, too, the raw red promise ...". (105) Cherry becomes the literal embodiment of both Rojack's instinctual affinity with the underworld of voices, demons, spirits and omens, as well as his compulsion toward the structures and directives of convention. Indeed, *An American Dream* details Rojack's growing affinity, subsequent to his initial, pivotal act of violence against Deborah, with his own desires and motivations, as well as the source of those motivations in terms

of the shape of his being. Thus, every person, event, thing, and experience is interpreted by Rojack in the context of his own relation to that person, event, thing or experience as they, or it, may help or hinder the realisation of a worthwhile existence. Gannuci's nephew, Tony, is thus perceived by Rojack as follows; "Tony's oppression was muddy, a stench of wet concrete. I could feel him burying me beneath it".(112)

If Mailer's moral intent is not, at this stage altogether clear, one is, however, reminded that Rojack's murder of Deborah is indeed an act of self-redemption, as Deborah is invoked to provide Rojack with the necessary strength to fight his psychic battles:

So I called on Deborah. How many times talking to Deborah had my hand gone to my throat - doubtless she had been drawing an imaginary razor down one ear and up the other. Small wonder she believed in miracles. Now I in turn put my hand in my pocket to feel my pocket-knife and took it on a small mental trip into my palm where figuratively I opened it, reached across, and made a slash into Tony's neck deep across the apple.(112)

Once again, the necessity of Rojack's experience of self-discovery in these terms - of determining the shape of his being in the source and quality of motivation, desire and action - is realised existentially by Rojack in a moment of self-confrontation with Cherry: "I did not go on to say that when I was in bed with a woman, I rarely felt as if I were making life, but rather as if I were a pirate sharpening up a raid on life, and so somewhere inside myself - yes, *there* was a large part of the fear - I had a dread of the judgement which must rest behind the womb of a woman".(115) Even this admission expresses an inherent dialectic: in response to Cherry's determination that death engages the individual and one should heed the call and

embrace death, Rojack asserts that life itself can be engaged through the experience of death: "'Well,' I said, 'maybe you have to take a chance on dying that particular day. But if you take the chance and get through it, maybe you're not as close to suicide the next time'".(114) However, he subsequently admits that "The dread had settled in on my last brave speech. To be not afraid of death, to be ready to engage it - sometimes I thought I had more of a horror of dying than anyone I knew", (114) and Rojack's existential confrontation with his own fear of engaging life in the sexual act (creating a new life) is thus contextualised dialectically by his fear of death - which may offer a new chance at a worthwhile life.

Mailer purports to show that the existential experience whereby one is faced with some truth of oneself is the necessary catalyst for a metaphoric descent to what might be termed the primeval level of existence: the existence which returns one to the experience of oneself as well as to the sensuous, spiritual or magical experience of other orders of existence. Thus, Rojack's earlier realisation of his fear of sexual creativity is offset now by his determination to engage life in Cherry's womb with the removal of her diaphragm. More importantly, this occurs subsequent to Rojack's sense of himself as freed from every constraint or characteristic of his social self: "I was alive in some deep water below sex, some tunnel of the dream where effort was divorced at last from price. ... we met in some depth beneath the lights and salts of one's eyes and mind. Fatigue had left me all but dead - I had no brain left, no wit, no pride, no itch, no smart, it was as if the membrane of my past had collected like a dead skin to be skimmed away".(121)

Furthermore, Rojack's sexual experience with Cherry is visionary in the same way as his experience of murdering Deborah. Once again, the vision of the jewelled city (fulfillment) is accompanied by a dialectical propensity to deny the possibility of an enriched, worthwhile existence: just as Rojack metaphorically pushes against the door which is released once he murders Deborah, signalling his act of self-determination, in this instance, Rojack must face the stringent demands of love, against his fear of failing at love. The passage detailing Rojack's visionary orgasm is marvellously and beautifully written, and is meant to align authentic passion with the sensuous intensities of one's deepest and most resonant desires and needs:

I was passing through a grotto of curious lights, dark lights, like colored lanterns beneath the sea, a glimpse of that quiver of jeweled arrows, that heavenly city which had appeared as Deborah was expiring in the lock of my arm, and a voice like a child's whisper on the breeze came up so faint I could hardly hear, "Do you want her?" it asked. 'Do you really want her, do you want to know something about love at last?' and I desired something I had never known before, and answered; it was as if my voice had reached to its roots; and, 'Yes,' I said, 'of course I do, I want love,' but like an urbane old gentleman, a dry tart portion of my mind added, 'Indeed, and what has one to lose?' and then the voice in a small terror, 'Oh, you have more to lose than you have lost already, fail at love and you lose more than you can know.' 'And if I do not fail?' I asked back. 'Do not ask,' said the voice, 'choose now!' and some continent of dread speared wide in me, rising like a dragon, as if I knew the choice were real, and in a lift of terror I opened my eyes and her face was beautiful beneath me in that rainy morning, her eyes were golden with light, and she said, 'Ah, honey, sure,' and I said sure to the voice in me, and felt love fly in like some great winged bird, some beating of wings at my back, and felt her will dissolve into tears, and some great deep sorrow like roses drowned in the salt of the sea came flooding from her womb and washed into me like a sweet honey of balm for all the bitter

sores of my soul and for the first time in my life without passing through fire or straining the stones of my will, I came up from my body rather than down from my mind, I could not stop, some shield broke in me, bliss, and the honey she had given me I could only give back, all sweets to her womb, all come in her cunt. (122-123).

In the terms of Mailer's dialectical structuring, the moment of existential confrontation with the divided allegiances of one's contrary compulsions is subsequently accompanied by a vision of truth regarding the shape of one's being. In this instance, Rojack elects love, knowing that "love was not a gift but a vow. ... love was love, one could find it with anyone, one could find it anywhere. It was just that you could never keep it. Not unless you were ready to die for it, dear friend".(156) The decision to follow the imperative by which his capacity for bravery is thus discovered also brings Rojack face to face with the irrefutable fact of his initial act of self-determination: "Knowledge arrived from outside - the way a Negro child might understand on one particular morning that he is black. There was no desire to take my pulse. I was a murderer. I was: murderer".(123) In this case, Rojack's metaphoric descent to the underworld of voices, omens, gangsters and demons is also a retreat from the external world, which threatens extinction: "I knew everything was all right inside the room. Outside, everything was wrong".(123) Rojack's initial act of violence has placed him outside the conventional orders of society, but the inner universe he inhabits as he discovers the source and quality of his motivations and desires is womb-like: Cherry's hideaway is a Mailer-metaphor for Rojack's as yet unfocused need to determine action which is the truest expression of his self and which represents the balance of his dual need to embrace his

instinctual affinity with the subterranean world of spirits, as well as flee the self-same world. Thus, Cherry's room is without smell - up till now Rojack has determined the quality of both situations and people in the odours that emanate from both - and Rojack describes his own state of being as "kin to a pie in a warming oven".(124) As such, when Rojack leaves Cherry's room, the threat of extinction is palpable: "fresh air came into my lungs like an intricate message of alarm ... an auto horn struck my ear like a screamer on an unhappy New Year's Eve, there was ambush everywhere", (125) and it is this sense of paranoia which marks Rojack's return to a world which both repels and yet entices him. This is conveyed via the dialectic in which Rojack battles the desire for a drink - this simple desire, however, is translated to the more fundamental urge to align self with the Devil. In this case, Ruta is once again seen as the Devil's agent. Thus, referring to his sexual episodes with, alternately, Ruta and then Cherry, Rojack determines the choice facing him as a decision to honour his vow of love, and hence, bravery, or the decision to heed the enticing call of the Devil:

My heart was racing up like a trapped bird once more. I was on the run. Like a petty criminal I had sold my jewels last night to the Devil, and promised them again this morning to some child's whisper. I had a literal sense of seed out on separate voyages, into the sea of Cherry's womb, into the rich extinctions of Ruta's kitchen. That second time I made love to Ruta - where had I left it then? I could not remember, and this fact: yes to the Devil, yes to the Lord ..." (126-127)

The narrative impetus of *An American Dream* is not to demonstrate the means by which Rojack is able to commit murder and get away with it; rather, Mailer maintains the sense of inner battle which is the vital dialectical warring by which Rojack

seeks a personal dream of being. Even after Rojack is allowed to leave - free of all charges - he experiences a pivotal moment of dialectical self-confrontation whereby his compulsion toward both the restrictions of conventionality and the chaos of formlessness is expressed as a desire to flee "mystery" and retreat to the secure, but rigid constraints of a prison cell. Indeed, as Rojack comes to terms with the implications of his new found outlaw existence, the experience affords him a pivotal recognition of the alternatives of chaos and convention: both, of course, unsuitable as he attempts to find that third plateau of existence I have termed the dream of being and which is here expressed as Rojack's plea to "love that girl, and become a father, and try to be a good man, and do some decent work"(153):

Each time I closed the cab window the air from the gas heater was foul, a bad exhaust had seeped in. But with the glass rolled down, I could hear the wind too well, and it had the long ripping sound of a voracious wind at sea which tears off the water and snatches at the roots of the grass.(153)

In so saying, Rojack defines the divided universe he inhabits, and which brings him face to face with his own divided compulsions toward the womb-like embrace of rigid conventionality as well as the seductive appeal of chaotic nothingness. Elsewhere, the same division is apparent as Rojack is poised on the edge of the parapet between chaotic death and whatever manifestation of conventional society presents itself. In this particular instance, Rojack feels the presence of a deep and pivotal mystery, but its character is ambiguous, and ultimately reveals the inherent, personal dialectic by which Rojack defines his own divided compulsions:

And I lay back on my seat and felt something close to nausea because mystery revolved about me now, and I did not know if it was hard precise mystery with a detailed solution, or a mystery fathered by the collision of larger mysteries, something so hopeless to determine as the edge of a cloud, or could it be, was it a mystery even worse, something between the two, some hopeless no-man's-land from which nothing could return but exhaustion? And I had a sudden hatred of mystery, a moment when I wanted to be in a cell, my life burned down to the bare lines of a legal defense. I did not want to see Barney Oswald Kelly later tonight, and yet I knew I must for that was part of the contract I had made on the morning air. I would not be permitted to flee the mystery. (153)

Rojack's decision to find a meaningful existence through his love for Cherry is important because it signals the choice which is boldest, and hence, the choice which will precipitate growth rather than stasis. Love also offers to Rojack literal redemption, new life: "like a gift I did not deserve, that new life began again in me, sweet and perilous and so hard to follow, and I went up with it and leaped and flew over, vaulting down the fall to those washed-out roses washed by the tears of the sea, they washed out to me as my life went in, and I met one cornucopia of flesh and sorrow, scalding sorrow, those wings were in the room, clear and delicate as a noble intent, that sweet presence spoke of the meaning of love for those who had betrayed it, yes I understood the meaning and said for I knew it now, 'I think we have to be good,' by which I meant we would have to be brave." (154-155) Love becomes Mailer's means of demonstrating Rojack's re-birth, because in love a primary dialectic between the "I" of one's selfhood and that of another is engaged. Again, maintaining the dialectic, but in such a way as to achieve that third space by which balance is determined is vital, and "people can win at love only when they are ready to lose everything they bring to it of ego, position and identity".⁴ In this sense,

Rojack can be receptive to love - authentic, passionate love - because he has shed the outer facade of identity (as TV host, academic, politician, socialite) and broken through to his innermost desires and motivations. Love, therefore, is both a reward and a test for Rojack; through love, he has determined the means of personal salvation, but love demands that he continually assert his hard-won courage and the effort to escape rigid convention and seductive chaos. An initial test of his courage occurs when Cherry reveals her past affair with Barney Oswald Kelly and even at this point, Rojack's murderous jealousy is construed by Mailer in dialectical terms: Is Cherry the reward of love, or is she a trick of the Devil?

If Rojack has, in confronting his dual fear of, and fascination with death, been able to transmute this ambivalence to a desire to engage life, Mailer shows that Rojack's newly discovered capacity for courage is also the means by which he can engage death, and so grow to a deeper understanding of his inner self. Thus, facing Shago Martin, who embodies the dark underside of the formless world of madness and chaos, for the first time, Rojack perceives the possibility of the violence implicit in Shago as an opportunity for his own progression to some core of knowledge beyond what he has already experienced: "A wind came off him, a poisonous snake of mood which entered my lungs like marijuana, and time began to slow. Then a curious happiness came to me from the knowledge Shago was capable of murder, as if death right now would carry me over just that moment I had known in Cherry when something went up and into the fall".(173) An important juncture in *An American Dream* subsequently follows, as Rojack employs this sense of the possibilities for self-growth

implicit in violent confrontation; once again, as Rojack comes face to face with the realisation of his capacity for courage, Mailer exemplifies his theme in the profound metaphoric terms of balance at the edge of a divide:

Shago retreated a step, the blade held out in his open palm, his wrist dipping to some beat he heard in the mood. Looking at that blade was like standing on the edge of a high cliff, one's stomach sucking out of one, as one's eyes went down the fall. I had a moment when I remembered the German with the bayonet, and my legs were gone, they were all but gone; I felt a voice in me sending instructions to snatch the whiskey bottle and break it, break it now that he was out of reach and so could not slash me with the knife, not without taking a step, but the voice was like a false voice in my nerves, and so I ignored it and took another step forward against all the lack of will in my legs, took the step and left the bottle behind as if I knew it would be useless against a knife. My reflexes were never a match for his. What I felt instead was an emptiness in his mood which I could enter.(175)

Rojack's defeat of Shago in the ensuing fight is qualified by a sense of dread, which "now flew in silent as the shadow of a bat, and my body was like a cavern where deaths are stored".(183-184) Mailer implies that whatever distance Rojack has already come in terms of self-knowledge, self-fulfillment and an authentic dream of being is insufficient before his own imperatives for authenticity and bravery. As such, Rojack perceives "something false in (his) voice" as he rationalises his victory to Cherry (185) and, when Rojack then says, "... the memory of Deborah pregnant came floating up. I could not mourn Deborah. I could not begin to mourn or my mind would ride off with me" (185) he provides an explanation for this sense of an empty victory: until Rojack properly and fully engages the experience of death in terms of the violence he has perpetrated against Deborah, he cannot discover his innermost reaches of

selfhood and so realise self-individuation. Furthermore, he must also fulfill the strict demands of love, which is another way of saying he must discover and translate to action his own potential for bravery, heroism and authenticity:

Yes, love was a mountain which was climbed with a good heart and a good breath: one was brave and the other was true. The ascent was not yet begun, and I had been ready to betray. What we had was spoiled in part already: like all love which is spoiled we were now locked together a little more.(188)

Mailer's dialectical structuring is given pivotal expression as Rojack realises two fundamental alternatives for action, both of which he confronts as a test of his courage and hence, worthiness for love and self-fulfillment. As Rojack leaves Cherry, his sense of being wrenched from a secure, womb-like environment and thrust into a demon-filled, nefarious sub-world is exacerbated, and Mailer implies that Rojack's experience is "interior" - that the exterior world of things, people, and so on has been invested with a quality of super-charged, magical eeriness, the result of Rojack having been literally returned to himself in the murderous act. Thus, Rojack's perception of everything around him is the manifest expression of his own desire to forge a worthwhile existence through love and courage, against his fears of his own inadequacy, and the powers he believes may destroy him. Thus, the imperatives he sets for himself express, also, his dual desire to embrace chaotic nothingness, as well as the empty security of the rigid structures of convention.

Chaos, in *An American Dream* finds expression in Shago, an off-the-rails hipster whose own ethic of self-fulfillment has become sickened through cowardice and a lack of dignity. As

such, Rojack formulates Harlem as a necessary evil which he must overcome, both as a means of blessing his relationship with Cherry, but also as the pay-off for the fight with Shago. Harlem, however, represents another version of that voice which initially urged Rojack to jump from the balcony and "fly" heavenward; Rojack tells himself (or rather, his mind tells him, but in Mailer's schema, the mind may be heeding the voice or message of another entity, being or spirit) to go to Harlem in the full knowledge that Harlem will return his effort with evil, and "evil" in this instance is the curse of Shago Martin:

- no, I believed in Africans and demons. If tonight I entered those bars the sound of Shago's fall would reverberate from my mind and I would not escape some evil incident. 'Do you want your love to be blessed?' said my mind, 'go to Harlem.' (190)

At the same time as Rojack is ready to capitulate to this imperative - precisely because it is perceived as a test of his bravery and his love for Cherry - he determines also that his fear of Barney Kelly must be embraced in order that it be overcome. Just as Harlem is Mailer's metaphor for a chaotic sub-world, the retreat to Barney Kelly and the Waldorf Towers (the book's metaphoric structuring neatly explicates the division between the sub-world of Harlem and its opposite, the rigid, immovable structures of Barney Kelly's world) represents Rojack's desire to flee demons and the supernatural, and succumb instead to a dream of power. Interestingly, as Rojack confronts these alternatives for action, he cannot tell which is the most authentic expression of his innermost desires and motivations - precisely because he has yet to discover that he must forge action which balances the two urges in order to achieve the

equilibrium which represents self-fulfillment and self-realisation: Until he does so, he can realise only fear, and a debilitating sense of uncertainty before action:

Something was wrong, very wrong. It had been right for a little while, for an hour with Cherry in that room it had been almost right, I had felt safe, and now it was bad again - some air of hurricane lay over my head. Once again, I wished to rush back to her - she was my sanity, simple as that - and then I remembered the vow I had made in her bed. No, if one wished to be a lover, one could not find one's sanity in another. That was the iron law of romance: one took the vow to be brave.

Therefore I must go to Harlem. One could see Kelly later. Or was that still another excuse? Was it Kelly I feared the most; would I waste the early morning hours in one up-town bar after another, my bankroll (\$75) safe, my person safe, neither mugged, nor accosted, nor even recognised as the latest white man to give up the guilt; would I come to understand at four in the morning, all bars shut, that I played a trick on myself to skip an encounter with the real fear? 'Go to Kelly,' said a voice now in my mind, and it was a voice near to indistinguishable from the other voice. Which was true? When voices came, how did you make the separation? "That which you fear the most is what you must do," said my mind. "Trust the authority of your senses." But I had taken too long to decide: I had no senses. I was now nothing but fear.(190-191)

Mailer contextualises the dialectical structuring in terms of God's war with the Devil. Thus, the alternatives for action which confront Rojack - the dream of power and the chaos of nothingness - and which express the ambivalence of Rojack's own divided consciousness now assume importance as another dialectic is employed which offsets Rojack's personal sense of inner division. Murder engages the Devil - and God is outraged: Rojack, therefore, must come to terms with his own relation to good and evil; is he evil himself, or merely the agent of some force of evil?: "No, men were afraid of murder, but not from a terror of justice so much as the knowledge that a killer

attracted the attention of the gods; then your mind was not your own, your anxiety ceased to be neurotic, your dread was real. ... There was an architecture to eternity which housed us as we dreamed, and when there was murder, a cry went through the market places of sleep. Eternity had been deprived of a room. Somewhere the divine rage met a fury".(192) The sense of dialectical interplay is maintained as Mailer deliberately construes Barney Kelly and his associated milieu - the Waldorf Towers - as a Twentieth Century encapsulation of the Devil, at home in a modern version of Hell.⁵ Clearly, Barney Kelly represents an embodiment of evil, at odds with the vision of self-fulfillment and the individual dream of being which is Rojack's salvation: "But for a moment I had died and was in the antechamber of Hell. I had long had a vision of Hell: not of its details; of its first moment. A giant chandelier of crystal above one's head, red flock on the walls, red carpet, granite pillars (as I proceeded) now a high ceiling, was it gold foil? a floor of white and black, and then a room of blue and green in whose center stood a nineteenth-century clock ... in a ring around the clock was a bed of tulips which looked so like plastic I bent to touch and discovered they were real".(194) Even in this description Mailer belies his thematic intent with his own favoured metaphor for the Twentieth Century ailment of entropy, the hallmark of the Devil: plastic. Mailer's most obvious hint that Rojack is about to confront an embodiment of evil as the necessary opposite to the dream of fulfillment that represents personal salvation occurs as Rojack approaches Kelly's enclave. Rojack literally experiences a dissipation of his own vital sense of being alive and with purpose: again, that sense of being

"without a center" is implied as the imminent threat of Kelly's devilish environs:

Up we went, rocketing the stories of the Waldorf, while the umbrella in my hand quivered like a rod, a dowsing rod, as if here, here, we had just passed some absolute of evil to the left, and there to the right an unknown concentrate, crypts of claustrophobia, abysses of open space, now through a distillate of gloom - what depression surround the rich - and some compass of direction went awry in my mind; I had the physical impression we were moving through a tunnel rather than rising in a shaft; once again I felt something begin to go out of the very light of my mind, as if the colors which lit the stage of my dreams would be more modest now, something vital was ready to go away forever even as once, not thirty hours ago, I had lost some other part of myself, it had streamed away on a voyage to the moon, launched out on that instant when I had been too fearful to jump, something had quit me forever, that ability of my soul to die in its place, take failure, go down honorably.(195-196)

The following passage underscores the ethic of courage which preoccupies Mailer throughout his writing - Kelly's evil presence forces Rojack to existentially confront the truth of his motivations, strengths and, weaknesses, and he realises now the depth of his fear before the imperative to enter Harlem, to virtually engage the darker sub-conscious of his own fearful attraction to Shago's demonic world. His fear is perceived as an inability to properly love Cherry, but the passage itself reverberates with a sense of the need to balance the separate urges to live within a conventional framework ("let me love her some way not altogether deranged and doomed", (196) as well as heed the strict imperatives of one's desire to be braver, or better than it is thought possible:

Now something else was preparing to leave, some certainty of love was passing away, some knowledge it was the reward for which to live - that voice which I could no longer deny spoke again through

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

'The sensible are never free,' said the voice.

'Let me be free of you.'

'Free as you wish,' said the voice, and something departed from me, some etched image of Cherry's face turned to mist. (196)

Mailer qualifies Rojack's existential experience, as the necessary achievement of balance of the divergent inclinations to self-destruction implicit in both a voyage to Harlem and a retreat to Kelly. Later, as Rojack is balanced precariously on the parapet outside Kelly's apartment, this theme is conveyed metaphorically and forms the nucleus of Mailer's dialectical structuring which frames the novel. Indeed, Rojack is able to perceive Harlem as an alternative precisely because he has faced, and determined his own capacity for courage and heroism.

Mailer's early metaphoric division between the separate visions of a jewelled, and a plastic city; visions accompanying initially brave murder and subsequently devilish anal sex, is reiterated as Rojack is revitalised by Ruta's presence. Mailer's implication is that Ruta's energy (a barely disguised adjunct of that devilish presence emanating from Barney Kelly) runs counter to the energy, or seductive force of the moon (the appeal of chaos). In this way, Mailer maintains the inner dialectic by which Rojack's experience is metaphorically delineated: "Ruta answered. She was wearing an expensive black silk with a string of pearls, and her face stared back at me, piquant and painted, inquisitive, rapacious - some energy returned to my blood - the blood no longer felt as if it would flow away to the moon, no, some pig's riot gave promise of existing still, and I stood at

the door, giving a full stare at her, while a provisional sanity began to form".(196-197) While Ruta's presence dialectically offsets Rojack's urge to embrace the chaotic nothingness of a "trip to the moon" (both in terms of the voice which urges him to jump and the voice which urges him to Harlem), Rojack experiences authentic self-fulfillment and restoration - feeling "joined" to himself again - when he heeds the test of courage which is an authentic expression of his own desire to be a creative, responsible, loving human being. This is embodied in Diedre, Deborah's daughter, and Rojack's step-daughter. The "pure woe" (198) Rojack feels - before his own articulated fear of having to confront, in Diedre's embodiment, his earlier murderous action and its implications, is actually the existential realisation of his inadequacy in Deborah's perception of him. Such a realisation - as Tim Madden must also experience - is the necessary vision of what Mailer terms "being female as well as male" which dialectically offsets the one-dimensional macho perception of self and other which Mailer is at pains to renounce, despite the usual feminist interpretation: "I had a pure woe, as if an airplane dropped suddenly. The route was too round about. I had forced my nerve to be ready for Kelly; now such preparation would be lost. Memories might begin. I did not want them. Indeed I had met Diedre on the day I met Kelly, here in this suite nine years ago, and the recollection was not pleasant. Deborah had too been terrified of her father. Her lips quivered when Kelly spoke to her. I was never to see her so useless again, and thus had a hint of what shame she felt in marrying me".(198) The existential experience which precipitates brave action - seeing Diedre - returns Rojack to authentic

experience of self: "For the first time since entering the hotel I felt back in myself again".(198-199)

The dialectical structure is maintained as Rojack's existential experience of self as Diedre's loving stepfather (the recognition of the capacity to feel) is also the discovery of his inner divided responsiveness. This is manifest in his reaction to, and perception of Barney Kelly. Rojack simultaneously encounters Kelly as an evil, treacherous presence; but in his resemblance to Deborah, Kelly also invokes in Rojack feelings of authentic, instinctive emotion:

... - there was an intimation of treachery one could recover only in a dream as if alone in a room, windows shut, a paper had blown from the table. Beneath a toilet water of punctilio and restraint (a mixture of cologne and limewater which Deborah liked to borrow) a deep smell came off Kelly, a hint of a big foul cat, carnal as the meat on a butcher's block, and something else, some whiff of the icy rot and iodine in a piece of marine nerve left to bleach on the sand. With it all was the congregated odor of the wealthy, a mood within the nose of face powder, of perfumes which leave the turpentine of a witch's curse, the taste of pennies in the mouth, a whiff of the tomb. It was all of Deborah for me.

'Bless, bless,' said Kelly in a muffled voice. ... There were tears in his eyes, and looking at him, there were tears in mine, for he had some of Deborah's face, the wide curved mouth, the green eyes with a needle's point of light - some of the love I had never been able to give her came rising up in me now, so that our embrace done, I had a desire to hug him again and truly, as if there were a comfort to be found in his flesh, as if indeed it was Deborah and me on one of those rare occasions when having fought to a bruised exhaustion we would grasp each other in a kind of sorrow, my sense of myself as a man all gone, her sense of herself as a woman equally gone, both of us reduced to the state of children in a tearful misery, in that soreness of the heart which looks for balm and makes the flesh of man and woman equal for a moment.(203-204)

The experience is important, because, as Tim Madden must learn in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, one's manhood is affirmed only through

the dialectical sense of one's inner, feminine self, realised here as the recognition of equilibrium of the relation of the sexes. For Mailer, the feminine component in men is often sickened by a homoerotic desire for masculine power, and in *An American Dream*, Barney Kelly represents the embodiment of this urge: his necessity to dominate both people as well as the social and political milieu within which they exist underscores his representative function within the book as the concentrated, evil force of totalitarianism. Thus, as Rojack gradually reclaims a sense of self which is an authentic expression of his innermost desires and motivations, he is also moving toward achieving what might be termed the balance of dialectical interplay between the contrary urges characterising his need to love Cherry well (against his fear of not being able to do so) and the imperatives he sets himself (also against any suspicion he may have that he lacks the courage to carry these through).

In Mailer's terms, the individual who discovers the inner dialectical warring between contrary or conflicting urges is caught in a dichotomy that can be resolved only through a pivotal moment of self-revelation: in Mailer's terms, this is manifest as a test of courage, exemplified by the metaphor of balance on the edge. Such an episode follows, as Rojack retreats from the close confines of Barney Kelly's apartment to the terrace outside. The seductive appeal of a retreat to chaos is metaphorically delineated as Rojack stands at the edge of the parapet and is tempted to jump as a test of his love for Cherry. Rojack perceives the decision to jump as promising re-birth, but moreover, the urge to jump is dialectically offset by Rojack's conviction that to return to Kelly's apartment is tantamount to

both failure and a betrayal of his best possibilities. Ultimately, Rojack comes face to face with the imperative by which he engages dread - the necessary existential context for a pivotal moment of self-discovery: he tells himself that he must stand upon the parapet (thereby realising the metaphoric intent of Mailer's dialectical structuring) so as to "dare the desire" and hence, form some calculus regarding his capacity for courage.

At this point, Mailer's dialectical structuring engages the primary image for Rojack's rite of passage which underscores the thematic intent of *An American Dream*: as he stands on the parapet, Rojack acquires a mental peace which Mailer describes both here and in *Tough Guys Don't Dance* as knowledge of God's existence. Such knowledge is Mailer's unspoken assertion that Rojack (and Tim, in a similarly structured episode in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*) has discovered some core of knowledge which is tantamount to discovering, or reclaiming his own selfhood. Once again, Mailer's assertion is that the path to self-discovery and self-affirmation is also the means by which we discover our literal inner godliness: every time the test of courage is affirmed, God's presence is also affirmed. Indeed, as Tim Madden discovers (in a characteristic moment of existential, dialectical revelation), "In that instant when my heart spun like a cat on a high power line and I thought I would die, I knew some far-off chord of exultation and woe: He exists, or It exists, or *They* are out there".⁶ As such, Rojack's discovery of God's presence as a real, personal experience can properly be viewed as the means by which he construes a personal dream of being: the equilibrium (via the metaphor of balance upon the parapet) Rojack achieves between the divergent demands of his contrary inclinations to

chaos and convention is also the realisation of a third sphere of existence beyond both chaos and convention, and which is exemplified in this pivotal episode as the imperative Rojack establishes for himself - he must walk around the parapet. In this way, Mailer demonstrates the metaphoric base to the dialectical structuring wherein Rojack discovers the means by which he may achieve a dream of being by facing, existentially, his inner divided consciousness and determining his capacity for courage via a crucial test of his courage. The passage is quoted in full because it anticipates the primary instance of Mailer's dialectical-metaphoric structuring in which the test of courage Rojack is convinced is necessary for his personal salvation and renewal, is taken. Also, this passage encapsulates the metaphoric drama of the novel thus far: Rojack's "frightened romance" with the moon (the seductive appeal of a retreat to chaos) and the dialectical interplay with the fear of Barney Kelly's constrictive force, set against the dread of death by which both alternatives (chaos, and the conventional world of Kelly) are insupportable in terms of Rojack's desire to re-claim himself and realise love, courage, authenticity and fulfillment:

It was a good respectable terrace, perhaps thirty feet long and twenty feet deep, and I walked out to the end of it and looked over the parapet, a stone railing about forty inches high, taking the gift of looking down to the street, all thirty and more stories of vertical fall, a swoop and stop, drop and ledge, fall again, down some eternity of measurement to the wet pavement below, and a desire started up in me again, faint as the first tuning of a bow in an empty hall. The moon was pushing through scud, and drifts passed over its face. I knew the longer I stayed at this parapet the more I would be tempted - ... And I had a sudden thought, 'If you loved Cherry, you would jump,' which was an abbreviation for the longer thought that there was a child in her, and death, my death, my violent death, would give some better

heart to that embryo just created, that indeed I might even be created again, free of my past. The wish to jump was clean, keen and agreeable, nice as the nicest things I had done, 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 by coming closer to it would be logical, and the dread which followed this thought had a pure thrill like the moment in adolescence when one realises one is finally going to get it, get sex - but what a fear! I was trembling. And then as if I were entering a great calm, like that calm I found the moment I began to run up the slope of the hill in Italy, I stood on a deck chair, and took the half-step up to the parapet. It was a foot wide, room enough to stand, and I stood on it, my legs a jelly, and felt some part of the heavens, some long cool vault at the entrance, a sense of vast calm altogether aware of me. 'God exists,' I thought, and tried to steal a look down the fall, but was not ready, not so much of a saint was I, the street rose up with a crazy yaw of pavement and I looked away, looked back at the terrace just a step down on the other side, was about to get off, and had a knowledge that to quit the parapet now was too soon - the desire to jump would be only more powerful. 'But you do not have to jump,' said the voice in my mind, 'just take a walk around the parapet.'

'I cannot take even one step,' I answered.

'Take one step.'

I pushed my foot forward, scraping it forward inch by inch; my will, divided against itself, was quivering from the effort: I looked ahead and was frozen. For I was in the middle, fifteen feet from the corner of the terrace, fifteen feet of walk on a parapet one foot wide, and a fall of thirty stories on my right; then I would have to turn the corner, and walk another twenty feet back to where the terrace ended at the wall of the suite. It was beyond my strength. Yet I took another step, still another. I could do it perhaps. And then the wind came up with a sudden blast ... and I almost lost my balance: the fall to the street was sharp as a blade, Shago's blade, and I jumped off, back to the terrace, and looked at the French windows to see Kelly standing in them. 'Here,' he said, 'come on in.' (210-211)

Like Alvin Luther Regency in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, Barney Kelly encapsulates a powerful force which is described by Mailer as "a hint of the void".⁷ As one recalls that in Mailer's terms, the Devil is best understood as a principle of entropy turned

Manichaen, the subsequent interchange between Rojack and Kelly is important as Kelly becomes even more intimately associated with a force of evil which Rojack must confront in order to affirm his newly discovered capacity for love and courage. Moreover, Rojack must, like Tim Madden, confront Kelly in order to locate and come to terms with his own point of reference with Kelly. Initially, however, Kelly's presence is sufficient to dispel Rojack's recently-discovered inner surety and self-determination: "Nothing seemed here and present, not Deborah's death, nor guilt, nor his suffering - if he felt any - nor mine: I did not know if I was real any longer, which is to say I did not feel connected to myself".(219-220) One recalls, of course, Rojack's early fear that someone, or something, was about to "steal his center" - the sense of paranoiac threat is here realised in Barney Kelly, whose characterisation assumes the proportions of a whole tradition of acquisition and hunger for power: "There was a presence in the room like the command of a dead pharaoh. Aristocrats, slave owners, manufacturers and popes had coveted these furnishings until the beseechments of prayer had passed into their gold. Even as a magnet directs every iron particle in a crowd of filings, so a field of force was on me here, an air rich with surfeit and the long whisper of corridors, the echo of a banquet hall where red burgundy and wild boar went down".(220) Even Kelly's story of Deborah's conception resounds with the unspoken assertion of the Devil's presence, and Mailer's impetus is to anchor the themes of *An American Dream* firmly in the dialectical warring of God and the Devil, both at the level of Rojack's battle for courage, for salvation, and for redemption; but also at the deeper, more fundamental level of man's place in creation

and the interdependent destiny of both man and God. In fact, Kelly's explanation for the eery, almost magical way in which he made his fortune is firmly grounded in a version of Catholicism which resonates with the typically Maileresque dualities of good and evil, and the ensuring battle for supremacy: "... God and the Devil are very attentive to the people at the summit. I don't know if they stir much in the average man's daily stew, no great sport for spooks, I would suppose, in a ranch house, but do you expect God or the Devil left Lenin and Hitler or Churchill alone? No. They bid for favours and exact revenge'".(230)

Kelly's relation to Rojack is important for another reason. As he tells his "real little buried story" (222) it becomes clear that Kelly's experience has been the dark obverse to Rojack's. So too, does Kelly's story maintain the same metaphoric-dialectical structuring, as Kelly's discovery of the urge to commit incest with Deborah, itself a moment of pivotal, existential self-reckoning, precipitates a vision of the alternatives for action which mirror his inner conflicting desires. Indeed, Kelly experiences a similar urge to jump which he perceives as the action necessary to absolve him from the dreadful deed he is contemplating:

'Locked myself in my room. I had all kinds of thoughts. Suicide. Murder. Yes, I thought of killing her. First time I felt unbalanced in fifteen years. And then I felt an awful desire to go to her room: my teeth were literally grinding, my belly was a pit of snakes. It was as if the Devil had come into the room at that instant and was all over me, I tell you I could smell him, he smelled just like a goat, it was horrendous. 'Deliver me from all this, O Lord,' I cried out to myself. Then I felt a powerful impulse to go to the window and jump. ... if it had been Heaven there waiting for me at the bottom, I didn't have the nerve to jump. ... I stayed at that window for an hour. I was almost blubbing at my inability

to take that simple jump. And the goat kept coming back. 'She's down the hall,' said the goat, 'she's on her bed, it's there for you, Oswald.' Then I would reply, 'Save me, Lord.' Finally, I heard a voice say quite clearly, 'Jump! That will cool your desire, fellow. Jump!' The Lord, you see, had a bitch of a humor about me'.
(234)

Subsequently, Mailer introduces his main thematic preoccupation by once again structuring the narrative dialectically in terms of Rojack's discovery of self through confronting his contrary desires and motivations. Barney Kelly invokes a "stopped-up violence" and a "promise of power" to which Rojack responds, but it is a sickened, perverse force; an invitation to Rojack to "get shitty" with Kelly and with Ruta. As Rojack discovers his own "unfamiliar desire(s)" prompted by this invitation from Kelly, he also has a vision of Cherry and Shago together, a vision which resonates with an eerie, magical threat. Rojack's resultant of dread is also his profound realisation of inner jealousy and hate, and anticipates his determination of the imperative by which equilibrium and a personal dream of being may be discovered:

... a death passed between (Kelly and Rojack) like a beating of wings, and I was scored with a vision of Shago knocking on Cherry's door, and she opening to receive him, opening her wrapper, opening the heart of her thighs, the lips, the hair, the picture as clear in my mind as the burning house Kelly had seen in the bath at Antibes. I would never forgive her for Kelly, and with that thought, dread came in. I was certain Shago was with her now, it was in the balance of things, he was there with her just so soon as I was here with Kelly. Or was a man being murdered in Harlem at this instant - the picture in my mind was broken with shock - did I feel a broken sawed-off bat go beating on a brain, was a man expiring. ...?

Then I was caught. For I wanted to escape from that intelligence which let me know of murders in one direction and conceive of visits to Cherry from the other, I wanted to be free of

magic, the tongue of the Devil, the dread of the Lord, I wanted to be some sort of rational man again, nailed tight to details, promiscuous, reasonable, blind to the reach of the seas. But I could not move.

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

Rojack is caught precisely between the urge to convention, which in this instance is the seductive appeal of Barney Kelly's "promise of power", and the strange, magical force of chaos which provides Rojack with his own visionary power but which, he is never sure, may actually represent the presence of God, or the presence of the Devil: the agent of life (salvation), or of death (damnation). The imperative he sets himself - to walk the parapet - is the metaphoric Rojack's progression toward a personal dream of being.

From this point, all the preceding events of the novel culminate in the ensuing psycho-drama in which Rojack engages in a battle of desires: the desire to "dive right on over" (240) and the desire to defeat cowardice ("I felt some hard contemptuous disgust of my fear" (240)), and the desire to retreat from the test of courage. The context for Rojack's parapet test, is of course, existential, as he engages a situation in which the outcome is necessarily fearful, and unknown. The terms of reference in this instance, for Rojack, are embodied in Rojack's perception of death: "I understood the final moments of a man condemned to a firing squad, and had envy for that man - his death was certain, he could prepare himself, but I had to get ready for I did not know what - that seemed worse than any certain knowledge of one's end".(239) Indeed, Rojack states, "I

had left my life behind me" (239) by which he means that he is now reduced to the bare, elemental state of pure responsiveness - he can feel and do and be only what is truest of his being, minus the trappings of his various social personas. As Rojack mounts the parapet, he "almost (breaks) in both directions, for a desire to dive right on over swayed me out over the drop, and I nearly fell back to the terrace from the panic of that" (240) which is Mailer's neat encapsulation of Rojack's still strong urges to both chaos and to convention. Discovering "pure cowardice", Rojack also comes to terms with his own capacity for courage and he is able to translate this knowledge to action: "My will slipped away from me, and I stood motionless, trembling and a blubber. I might have wept like a child if I were not afraid even of that. And then I felt some hard contemptuous disgust of my fear. ... I was soaking wet, but I took one step, one full step".(240)

The dialectical metaphor is delivered as Rojack nears the end of his parapet test. The seductive appeal of chaos is perceived as the "desire to leave the balcony and fly, (Rojack is) certain (he) would succeed" but mitigating against this desire is the equally strong urge to retreat to the security of convention: "... and then my mind went out to a place on the edge, as close to going as an exhausted driver on a highway is close to sleep, and I said to myself, 'Get off now. You can hardly see'".(242) Instantaneously, the appeal of a "flight" to the moon is once again experienced by Rojack, but this time, Rojack is able to perceive the context for this urge in terms of the reality of what he has done to Deborah, and the way in which he may seek his own absolvment and redemption: "But something else said, 'Look

at the moon, look up at the moon.' A silvery whale, it slipped up from the clouds and was clear, coming to surface in a midnight sea, and I felt its pale call, princess of the dead, I would never be free of her, and then the most quiet of the voices saying, 'You murdered. So you are in her cage. Now, earn your release. Go around the parapet again,' and this thought was so clear that I kept going down the third leg".(242) Moreover, this pivotal moment of self-discovery is also the impetus for a feeling of re-birth; of re-claimed selfhood and strength: "... and the wall came nearer to me; my limbs came alive again; each step I took, something good was coming in, I could do this, I knew I could do it now".(242)

Rojack's rite of passage nears completion when, "in relief, some relief, wrong or right, I did not know, I turned and hurled the umbrella over the parapet - Shago's umbrella was gone - " (243) which action signifies the autonomy of self-realisation: thus far, Shago's umbrella has acted as a source of "black" (energy or life-force⁸) to Rojack, and by dispensing with this prop, he is asserting the strength of his own will, his own being. In fact, as Rojack wrestles against the imperative established for him by the voice which is itself the dialectical other of the urge to flee the test of courage, he is able to effect action which represents the achievement of equilibrium of his divergent inclinations. Thus, his perception of what is necessary as an ultimate test of his courage and love is also the perception of what will drive him further into a nether-region of madness:

... and was almost at the door to the hall outside when I realised that I had not made the trip back along the parapet, and saw Deborah's green eye

again in my mind. 'Oh no, oh no,' I said to myself, 'I've done enough. By God I've done enough.' 'It's not enough. It goes for nothing if you don't do it twice,' said the voice. 'Damn you,' I thought, 'I've lain with madness long enough.' And went through the door even as I caught a glimpse of Ruta coming out of a room.(243)

Cherry's death, which may be interpreted as the necessary result of Rojack's decision to refuse a second parapet test, should more properly be viewed as an indictment against all "the dirty polluted blood of all the world"(247) which, in Mailer's terms, is the daily acquiescence to cowardice, compromise, boredom; in short, the inevitable difficulty of the effort to live with, and by, an ethic of personal courage by which cowardice, compromise and the encroaching force of entropic totalitarianism may be defeated. It is such a force which Mailer refers to when he says, "There was a beast in New York, but by times he slept. Other nights New York did not, and this was a night for the beast".(244) In effect, in the daily warfare between God and the Devil, every manifestation of weakness or compromise or personal failure is yet another victory for "the beast" - the Devil. Even though Rojack determines action which ultimately allows him to live with a sense of balance of the divergent inclinations of his opposed motivations and desires, his acquiescence to the less demanding course of action is itself a tiny death of the God - within.

The sense of an implicit dialectic is maintained even as Rojack moves beyond New York and into what may be termed the third area of existence, specifically, Las Vegas and then Guatemala and the Yucatan, but metaphorically, the dream of being wherein Rojack has realised the equilibrium of opposed desires and motivations. His "frightened romance" with the moon and with

the experience of death is resolved in the literal experience of the dead man whose odour is perceived by Rojack as the madness he has grappled with, and defeated by initially acting upon the urge to kill Deborah, and secondly, by pushing himself to the limits of his courage on the parapet. Rojack's trip to the edge is also a descent to the basic and most elemental parts of himself; for this reason he is able to offset the sense of his own complicity in the general madness of the modern existence ("some of the real madness went into me ... I got into Las Vegas at five, ... The lights were on in town. ... The car took a ride down the Strip in the dawn, carburetor smelling the burned-out air, madness forming, madness consumed"(250)) with his sense of personal autonomy; his separation from the technocratic, madness-infused, social context. Rojack describes two atmospheres - the searing, desert heat, and that of the air-conditioned hotel room which is like "an empty space where something was dying alone".(251) The juxtaposition between an existence which is like "a voyage through space as if you were in the pleasure chamber of an encampment on the moon and fortified air was brought in daily by rockets from the earth" (251) and the second existence, the "trip through the furnace with the sun at one hundred and ten, a sprint along the Strip ... driving not only your own piece of the mass production but shifting lanes with the six or seven other cars in your field of collision" (250) is once again a Mailer-metaphor for a deeper division between the conflicting urges toward chaos and convention, respectively. The delineation in this case serves to emphasise two separate levels of existence, both of which lack authenticity and integrity, so far as one is able to truly feel and live and act with a sense of one's desires,

motivations, senses, faculties; in short, one's very being. This division is encapsulated in Rojack's perception of Las Vegas: "a jeweled city ... spires rising in the night, but the jewels were diadems of electric and the spires were the neon of signs ten stories high" (251) but, importantly, whereas Rojack's earlier visions of, alternately, a jewelled and a plastic city occurred separately and in isolation of each other, here the vision itself represents the balance of the dialectical opposition. Moreover, this vision is accompanied by a pivotal recognition of self-limitation: "I was not good enough to climb up and pull them down" (251-252) which is itself the dialectical other to Rojack's hard-won sense of self-determination through courage.

SECTION 2.

PART 2. WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

Why Are We in Vietnam? explores the question posed in the title by underscoring the moral bankruptcy of Twentieth Century America and the extent to which the totalitarian, corporate spirit has dissipated man's relation to his environment, and, indeed, to any sense of authenticity or integrity. Mailer uses the narrator, D.J., to demonstrate that, like Stephen Rojack, the potential for both cowardice and bravery, compromise and integrity exists within the individual and, as manifest in action, represents literal salvation or damnation. The context for this effort at self-individuation is aptly conveyed in the following passage from an interesting study of the historical antecedents of American literary thought; and is particularly relevant to *Why Are We in Vietnam?*

Thus, in a world where most of the old certainties have been removed, modern man in the last quarter of the twentieth century finds himself confronted by crucial alternatives. Will he, bereft of his old religious beliefs, shaken in his sense of values, hounded by fanatically ideological enemies, cursed by economics, and seemingly betrayed by even his beloved science, give way once and for all to a spiritual inertia that will lose him all he has gained? Or will he, remembering that past discoveries of new horizons have always been interpreted as presaging the end of mankind, realign his cosmic sights, adjust his ego to the individually dwarfing conception of an expanding universe, and regain the integrity required to carry him forward to a new era?⁹

Mailer's intent is hinted at when D.J. pronounces, in Intro Beep 1, "America, this is your own wandering troubadour brought right up to date, here to sell America its new handbook on how to live, how to live in this Electrox Edison world".(8) In this way, D.J., who, at the novel's end is clearly the purveyor and

amplifier of the debased morality implicit in America's presence in Vietnam, anticipates Mailer's moral condemnation of the modern, technocratic age in which the ability to assert one's imaginative and creative individualism has been stifled by the increasing prevalence of pills, plastics, conformity, sexual sterility and laxity. *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is a chronicle of spiritual inertia in which the pioneer spirit of courage and the desire to seek out adventure and challenge as a tool for self-discovery and self-affirmation has been replaced with a stopped-up violence and a desire to dominate through belligerence and pettiness. Mailer explores this theme by subverting his self-same intention - to reveal the basis for the American debacle in Vietnam - beneath the witty, hip/pop dialogue of the novel. Mailer's purpose: to portray a frighteningly violent and yet cowardly society, for which brutality and murder are the only means of defeating boredom and which represent compensation for a deep-seated inability to realise adventure, courage and heroism, is embodied in D.J., "Disk Jockey" both to America and the world.(24,208) In fact, the voice which is recognised as D.J. is actually incidental to the continually shifting narrative focus which encapsulates the myriad qualities and voices of America and its popular culture; *Why Are We in Vietnam?* therefore presents a whole cultural portrait in D.J.'s frenzied leap from one voice or persona to another, and, in the ambiguity of the narrative voice - D.J. may be the white, sassy son of a Texas millionaire or he may be a Negro living in Harlem - Mailer delineates the pervasive presence of the media by which the mixed messages the individual receives may, or may not have a basis in what is real, or what is true.

Mailer's intention is also to show a personality - that of D.J. - deranged by the society from which he is spawned, a society embodied in D.J.'s corporation executive father, Rusty Jethroe; but D.J.'s derangement is more properly an estrangement from his own potential for heroism and authentic responsiveness as D.J. faces his capacity for courage and the autonomy of his own sense of self in a context explicated as a rite of passage, a literal baptism by blood. *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is the account of a hunting trip taken by Rusty Jethroe, his "Medium Asshole" buddies, D.J. and his best friend, Tex Hyde; a trip centering around the whim of Rusty Jethroe to "get grizzer". Rusty Jethroe is a consummate instance of the "stopped-up pioneer impulses" toward adventure and heroism which have turned inward, become the brutish expression of what Mailer terms "the dynamic myth of the Renaissance - that every man was potentially extraordinary"¹⁰ which has been stifled through the lack of adequate or authentic expression. Rusty, who looks "like a high-breed crossing between Dwight D. Eisenhower and Henry Cabot Lodge", (31) is the purveyor of a deep-seated psychosexual violence, aptly described by Mailer as "the sexual peculiarities of red-blooded men, which is to say that one of them can't come unless he's squinting down a gunsight, and the other won't produce unless his wife sticks a pistol up his ass -". (12) Indeed, Rusty is best understood as the encapsulated attitudes and compromises of the Twentieth Century, perverted by acquiescence to boredom and brutality. Rusty's portrait reverberates with the dimensions of a whole cultural legacy of brutish, unquestioned domination: "D.J.'s father, Big Daddy, old Rusty, has got the dynamite. He don't come, he explodes, he's a geyser of love, hot piss, shit,

corporation pus, hate, and heart, baby, he blasts, he's Texas will-power, hey yay!".(13)

Why Are We in Vietnam? is concerned with what Mailer refers to as "a state of suppressed schizophrenia" afflicting contemporary America and finding expression in people such as Rusty and his "Medium Asshole" allies, and Mailer wants to demonstrate how, through the compromise of one's most resonant instincts and the brutish revelry in violence as a panacea for boredom, the achievement of equilibrium - of a dream of being - is not possible. Instead, the dialectical interplay of the inner urges and motivations has been compromised beyond measure and become schizophrenic: even before the narrative action unfolds, D.J.'s fate as a result of his Alaskan experience is explicated as follows. D.J. becomes:

"... recalcitrant, charming, gracious, anti-Semitic, morally anesthetized, and smoldering with presumptive violence, a host of incense, I mean incest fixes, murder configurations, suicide sets, disembowelment diagrams and diabolism designs, mandalas! Face into the eye of the real, Hallelujah, he's a humdinger of a latent homosexual highly over heterosexual with onanistic narcissistic and sodomistic overtones, a choir task force of libidinal cross-hybridized vectors."(14)

This quality of schizophrenic dislocation - discussed previously with particular reference to *The Deer Park* - is implicit as the fluid narrative focus of *Why Are We in Vietnam?* and it is important to note that this novel, whilst employing the same thematic structuring as *An American Dream* and *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, is less coherent in its exploration and dissection of that thematic structuring, as a function of Mailer's theme itself. The prose itself undermines any attempt to structure or order the themes of the novel, and this is Mailer's deliberate

means of underscoring the way in which the reader, inhabiting an "Electrox Edison world" has learnt to continually realign his mental processes, in order to adjust to the constant shift in focus as the result of watching television full of interruptions - advertisements. In the space of a paragraph - which may extend over two or more pages and embrace many more related and unrelated ideas, images and allusions - the reader is called upon to effect many imaginative leaps and bounds; from the narrative focus, the hunting trip, to whatever obscene fantasy with which D.J. is currently preoccupied, to any number of other images and associations. The reader is told that "D.J. suffers from one great American virtue, or maybe its a disease or ocular dysfunction - D.J. sees right through shit";(49) at the same time, D.J.'s ability to discern what is most abhorrent in his father as well as his desire for a personal dream of fulfillment is undermined by his allegiance - however unstated or unadmitted - to the values and attitudes embodied in Rusty and, by association, the whole corrupt American social system.

For this reason, the shifting base of *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is further compounded by D.J.'s inability to assimilate experience and self-perception. In a very real sense, the existential experience of self-revelation is lost to D.J. because his alienation and cynical disavowal of anything given is itself the denial of any opportunity for self-realisation: precisely Mailer's point in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*; that the qualities characterising the modern American experience are the same as those which drive America into the debauched violence of Vietnam in the first place. D.J. is, in fact, both the character - the wild, witty, and not altogether unappealing youth - as well as

the context - as Richard Poirier puts it, "the locus for an American mixture which is finally committed to the kill".¹¹ *Why Are We in Vietnam?* embraces the reader both as participant in the unfolding drama of the narrative, as well as pupil in the lesson that is ultimately delivered: the reader, as a participant in the Twentieth Century is therefore, to a degree, responsible for its evils; at the same time the reader is called upon to reject the awful propensity toward inertia, compromise and cowardly brutishness and elect bravery, love, and heroism, which is the moral basis of the novel's themes.

Why Are We in Vietnam? is the account of a hunting trip, but it is an account as recalled by D.J. at a dinner party given in honour of the two boys - D.J. and Tex - before they leave for Vietnam the next day. In the juxtaposition of the "Chaps" and the "Intro Beeps" it is apparent that in the process of the trip to Alaska and since, D.J. has been initiated into Rusty's particular brand of psychosexual violence and the desire (deliberately conveyed as sexual) for power. Rusty encapsulates hard-edged competitiveness, a vicious, power-seeking desire for conquest, the kind of attitudes implicit in D.J.'s description of Rusty's business enterprise, Central Consolidated Combined Chemical and Plastic which makes the Pure Pores cigarette filter: "Pure Pores - is the most absorptive substance devised ever in a vat - traps all the nicotine, sucks up every bit of your spit. Pure Pores also causes cancer of the lip but the surveys are inconclusive, and besides, fuck you!" (31) Thus, when D.J. tells the reader, "But Rusty's got cunt in him. Vicious little streak he passed right on intact to D.J." (120) this is consonant with the violent sexual imagery as D.J., too, realises the urge to

kill: "He too has got to get grizzer. The wolf is burning fever in him now, best future of his blood is going to boil off it he can't get on a bear ... maybe it was all that jack-off tension over Ruby Lil".(121) Ultimately, D.J. is initiated into the violent force and unimaginative brutality of contemporary machismo as typified by Rusty.

The context for this literal and thematic seduction, the Alaskan wilderness, whilst having been "driven crazy" by the infiltration of modern man's violence, also offers redemptive possibilities, and Mailer ably captures the dialectic wherein the promise of America has been soiled by the reality of greed, avarice and the desire for domination:

A ring of vengeance ... rings out of the air as if all the woe and shit and parsimony and genuine greed of all those fucking English, Irish, Scotch and European weeds, transplanted to North America, that sad deep sweet beauteous mystery land of purple forests, and pink rock, and blue water, Indian haunts from Maine to the shore of Californ, all gutted, shit on, used and blasted, man, cause a weed thrives on a cesspool, piss is its nectar, shit all ambrosia, and those messages at night - oh, God, let me hump the boss' daughter, let me make it, God, all going up through the M.E.F. cutting the night air, giving a singe to the dream field ... (205-206)

Mailer's sense of the dialectical propensity of all of existence toward interdependent doubles, or matched contraries, gains expression in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* at several different levels. Allusions to "D.J. Dicktor Doc Dick and Jek" (7) and "Tex, Tex Hyde" (17) hint at a metaphoric relationship of opposed dualisms; in fact, the pivotal, later episode suggests the homosexual coupling of Tex and D.J. as the means of salvation for D.J.: the metaphoric expression of a state of interdependent equilibrium of the inner contradictions. Thus, D.J.'s "encounter with all the

human shit and natural depth of (the) Moe Henry hunt" (157) is explicated in terms of crucial alternatives for action which express his own inner possibilities. He is heir to the "fear, shit, disgust and mixed shit tapeworm ... of fucked-up guts and overcharged nerves" (176) which characterises the corporation executives, but it is when D.J. confronts the vast, empty "God-filled" wilderness and the most primordial part of himself that the "human shit" and "natural depth" of D.J.'s consciousness collide and become dislocated as D.J. is unable to effect the necessary balance of this inner division. This schizophrenic dislocation is, however, anticipated at the novels' outset, both in terms of the ambiguous identity of the narrative voice, but also in the juxtaposition of the Intro Beeps, which contain the present and which subvert the experience of the past, contained in the Chaps. At the wider level of the context for the narrative action - the Alaskan wilderness - Mailer parallels the fate of the two boys by demonstrating that the wilderness, the ultimate macho domain, has been soiled by the prevailing American disease of cowardice and compromise, exemplified by the mechanised and motorised onslaught upon the wilderness. The wilderness now contains this message of cowardly violence within itself - the deer, eaten for lunch, isn't "exactly gamy, it tasted loud and clear of nothing but fresh venison steeped in bile, shit ..." (98)

If the natural world of *Why Are We in Vietnam?* has been driven half-crazy by this onslaught of guns and machines, so that the instincts and habits of survival of both man and beast have been dissipated, D.J. embodies the dialectical fever of confusion, the result of his natural affinity for adventure and

challenge, as well as his attachment to this modern, violent age. Indeed, D.J.'s perception of his father as "a pig! ... a real pig, man!" (33) is a function of his more important realisation that he is "up tight with the concept of dread" (34); itself the experience of existential reckoning because his disgust at the values embodied by Rusty is simultaneously a vision of his own future:

But its Rusty's eyes kick off the old concept of dread in D.J. Fyodor Soren Kierkegaard Jethroe because they remind him of his favourite theory which is that America is run by a mysterious hidden mastermind, a secret creature who's got a plastic asshole installed in his brain whereby he can shit out all his corporate management of thoughts. I mean that's what you get when you look into Rusty's eyes. You get voids, man, and gleams of yellow fire - the woods is burning somewhere in his gray matter - and then there's marble aisles, better believe it, fifty thousand fucking miles of marble floor down those eyes, and you got to walk over that to get to The Man ... if D.J. wouldn't take to pot at family dinners he might not have such a Fyodor Kierk kind of dread looking into Big Daddy's chasm and tomb. But that dread's out there, man. Because Rusty is also the highest grade of asshole made in America and so suggest D.J.'s future: success will stimulate you to suffocate! (36-37)

This moment of self-reckoning explicates, for D.J., Rusty's potential both for cruelty and a competitive desire to dominate, as well as Rusty's capacity to test his abilities and determination to the very limits; described as "plain hardpan thriftily won, modestly assumed, holy acquired plain old Christian Grace and Get-up, Go, Spunk".(37) Mailer's intention is to portray both Rusty and D.J. in the dialectical terms of their individual capacity for both brutality and compromise on the one hand; and self-fulfillment through courage and authentic, instinctive responsiveness, on the other. As D.J. perceptively points out, "(Rusty's) a pig with a wild snouty mouth, but he's

got good blood. ... The thing to understand is that a high-grade asshole is characterized by a specific and even unique property which endows him because of it with his rank - it is that a high-grade of A.H. is not easily recognized as any kind of A.H., and usually appears the contrary. Despite the cock and bunghole details D.J. has furnished you up to here on some few of Rusty's opinions and habits, the portrait has been highly unfair to high-grade assholes because it has emphasised the hole rather than the high grade".(37-38) Thus, Mailer's dialectical perception of individual personality allows even Rusty the temporary realisation of the qualities of heroism and instinctive responsiveness - demonstrated in the lone father-son trek through the wilderness - although Rusty's more resonant need to dominate; his competitive desire to win at all costs, entails the compromise of these very qualities. This is underscored in the episode in which Rusty claims the bear D.J. has shot, and in this way, any positive affirmation of his capacity for courage or tenacity (in the positive sense of testing one's abilities to the limits) is undermined by Rusty's petty but vicious exercise of filial power. D.J. proceeds to detail Rusty's perverse need to dominate, and delineates the basis for this competitive urge not as the desire to be better than one thinks oneself capable of becoming, but rather as the unadmitted expression of cowardice and moral hypocrisy:

'Randy,' said Rusty, afterward, 'you got to be a nut about competition. That's the way. You got to be so dominated by a desire to win that if you was to squat down on the line and there facing you was Jesus Christ, you would just tip your head once and say, 'J.C., I have to give you fair warning that I'm here to do my best to go right through your hole,' Actually, if Rusty had ever seen J.C. on the line he'd have shit, he'd have said with a

little funky wink, 'Are we going to be so fortunate as to get you for the Contemporary Speaker's Series at Southern Methodist?' no, D.J.'s here to say that Rusty bit his ass so bad because he was too chicken to bite Hallelujah's beautiful butt - she'd have made him pay a half million dollars for each separate hole in her marble palace.(41)

Why Are We in Vietnam? purports to show a universe that is alternately crazed but also offering possibilities for renewal and redemption. Again, the moral impetus is located in Mailer's invective which is directed against the modern, technocratic age. The Alaskan wilderness has been driven literally crazy by man's presence, just as the individual must affirm his own potential for authentic responsiveness against the oppressive and nihilistic force of the totalitarian social mechanism. Just as the wilderness manifests both the spirit of authenticity and renewal as well as chaotic craziness, the individual living in the Twentieth Century can elect to live by an ethic of personal courage and moral responsibility, or can, through inert acquiescence, be subsumed by the overwhelming force of totalitarianism. This sense of the dialectic is conveyed eloquently, as follows:

... you can feel that one bear out in those woods sending out its message - don't come near, motherfuck-that message transmitted from the bear to Big Luke and relayed to us, you can tune in on the madness in the air, you now know where a pine tree is rotting and festering somewhere out there, and red ants are having a war in its muck, and the bear is listening to those little ant screams and smelling that rotten old pine, and whoong goes his nose into the rot, and he bites and swallows red ants, slap, bap, pepper on his tongue, he picking up the bite of death in each ant and the taste of fruit in the pulp, digging that old rotten tree whose roots tell him where we are, capisce, Luigi? There's a fucking nervous system running through the earth and air of this whole State of Alaska, and the bear is tuned in, and Big Luke, and Ollie and the assistant guide packers, and the ants, and

Tex and D.J., and the air, man, the air is the medium, and the medium is the message, that Alaska air is real message - it says don't bullshit, buster.(54)

Similarly, Rusty is possessed with a macho desire to vindicate what he perceives represents the qualities of bravado and heroism, but Rusty's potential for authentic courage (the realisation of the effort to be better than one thought oneself capable of becoming, is perverted by the urge simply to dominate as a sheer reckoning of power, of force. Hence, Rusty's desire to shoot grizzly bear is really a desire to prove what he perceives is the tangible evidence of his manhood, except that in Mailer's terms, all Rusty proves is that he is singularly without the mental facility to recognise that his efforts are little other than the absence of imagination, and, without a doubt, the denial of a true vindication of courage: the desire to be a man as the expression of every battle won against the prevailing force of whatever would seek to thwart one's efforts toward authenticity and fulfillment. Rusty's desire is to face the ultimate existential test of his capacity for heroism and bravery, but his terms lack the adequate perception of modesty required by Mailer for the acquisition of what Mailer calls "awe" before the phenomena most familiar as the religious realm: "'I just want to make a point, teacher. I want to cut the fiercest mustard you ever tasted with a piece of bear steak, I want to behold Bruin right in his pig red eye so I'll never have to be so scared again ...'" (62) Similarly, when Tex Hyde shoots a wolf, the episode is encased in the religious terms of a ritual blood sacrifice. The episode is contextualised as a dialectical confrontation between the mystery of death, experience as a

religious phenomenon; and the barely concealed violence of the psycho-sexual lust for brutal domination:

The look on Big Luke's face was amiable like any boy who could hit a wolf at four hundred yards was not totally undeserving of guided service. Well, he got down and gave us each a cup of blood to drink and that was a taste of fish, odd enough, and salt, near to oyster sauce and then the taste of wild meat like an eye looking at you in the center of a midnight fire, and D.J. was on with the blood, he was half-sick having watched what Tex had done, like his own girl had been fucked in front of him and better, since he had had private plans to show Tex what real shooting might be, and here was Tex, King Front Sight Indian Hunter, Killer of Wolves. D.J. next thing was on his hands and knees, looking into that upper Yukon wolf mouth, those big teeth curved like tusk, and put his nose up close to that mouth, and thought he was looking up the belly of a whale, D.J. was breathing wolf breath, the just dead air from the dead interior, but raucous breath, all the fatigue of the wolf running broken ass to the woods and the life running the other way from him, a crazy breath, wild ass odor, something rotten from the bottom of the barrel like the stink of that which is unloved, whelp shit smell, wild as wild garlic, bad, but going all the way right back into the guts of things, you could smell the anger in that wolf's heart (fucked again! I'll kill them!) burnt electric wire kind of anger like he'd lived to rip one piece of flesh from another piece, and was going to miss it now, going to miss going deep into that feeling of release when the flesh pulls loose from the flesh, and there D.J. was sweating, cause he was ready to get down and wrestle with the wolf, and get his teeth to its throat ... it was all that blood he'd drunk, it was black shit fuel, D.J. was uptight with the essential animal insanity of things.(69-70)

"wolf blood drunk that morning like wine is the up and Adam of D.J.'s racing or expiring consciousness", (74-75) and Mailer purports to show that it is precisely the same urge toward a dream of fulfillment characterising Rojack's religious quest for salvation which forms the thematic focus of the ensuing tale in the Alaskan wilderness, and D.J.'s baptism by blood.

D.J.'s experience in Alaska brings him face to face with the opportunity to realise his own capacity for heroism and for personal fulfillment, set against the oppressive force of his father's brutality, and the quality of collective barbarism Rusty embodies - massed, arbitrary acts of violence, perpetrated only for the enjoyment of the power exerted over a disadvantaged inferior entity: Rusty enthuses, "'That's where I want my power. Right there. Right then. Maybe a professional hunter takes pride in dropping an animal by picking him off in a vital spot - but I like the feeling that if I miss a vital area I still can count on the big impact knocking them down, killing them by the total impact, shock! it's like aerial bombardment in the last Big War'".(85) In a sense, Rusty is less an autonomous character within the narrative milieu than the embodiment of those attitudes and values implicit in what I have referred to previously as the dream of power. In this sense, D.J.'s experience in Alaska is the subsequent vision of the alternatives of power/totalitarianism, and chaos as he faces, existentially, the depths and limitations of his own selfhood. This pivotal experience is conveyed most remarkably in the important episode when Tex and D.J. retreat to the metaphoric edge - the isolated Brooks Range - and, in a state of existential, psychical nakedness, must face their (respective) deepest and most elemental urges and motivations. The experience is religious, but the quality of the being who "speaks" to the boys is dialectically conveyed as manifesting either violent beastliness or the opportunity for authentic fulfillment. Even D.J. and Tex should properly be viewed as inhabiting a relation to and with

each other that is itself the manifest dialectic of their complimentary and contradictory attitudes and desires.

The pervasive force of totalitarianism - delight in the sheer exertion of force and the unmitigated desire to control and subsume through brutal domination - is conveyed via Mailer's detailed description of the vast battery of armaments with which the hunting group conducts its assault on the Alaskan wilderness, as well as the presence of "Buster Bubbletop" (96) - the helicopter which Luke Fellinka ("wilderness was tasty but boredom was his corruption" (98)) employs to track down, and so kill by unfair advantage, the caribou which M.A. Pete has wounded. Both Mailer's outrage at such compromised half-measures, as well as the impetus for a wilderness driven half-crazy by the presence of man and machine is described evocatively as follows:

Man, that caribou looks as dogged and frantic as a prospector climbing a mountain to get a hill of gold, and then the helicopter is on top of him and hovering and holding him frozen, and it lands not fifty feet away, and the caribou turns his ass and starts to climb up a cliff with a set of deliberate steps like (1) fuck you, (2) go kill, (3) shit on you, each step a pure phrase of the blues - take me away, Mr Dixieland - and there is M.A. Pete stepping out gingerly from the copter, like man, he's *close* to the caribou, and got his cannon with him, and just as Old Buck Broken Ass gets to the top of his little cliff, ... M.A. Pete sends a Nitro Express up into his gut from the rear, right into the red mask of the old wound ... and the .600 900-grain blasted through his intestines, stomach, pancreas, gallbladder, liver and lungs, and left a hole to put your arm in, all your arm, up to the shoulder if you are not squeamish, entrail swimmer, and then bullet breaking, some of the fragments ripped into the brain and out the head, leaving it scarred to the point where M.A. Pete could claim (and believe) two years later that the scars on the mouth and face of his deer trophy were the fighting marks of a big buck caribou fighter ... (97-98)

Why Are We in Vietnam? is concerned not simply with the corruption and compromise implicit in Rusty's desire to command wealth and power by whatever means he wishes; Mailer purports to show, rather, that Rusty's particular values and motivations are implicit within the social fabric of modern America, and that D.J., as a consummate instance of the culture, manifests both the potential to realise this corruption as well as the potential for authenticity and self-fulfillment. He is therefore dialectically poised between alternatives for action - later brilliantly captured in the metaphoric terms of his relation to Tex - which will vindicate his capacity for courage or anchor him more firmly on Rusty's side of the moral equation: the side which is actually morally bereft, characterised by hollowness, conventionality, sterility of imagination and obsession with money and power. In fact, Mailer's dialectical structuring in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is manifest in the narrative itself: the shift from third-person to first-person - from an authorial voice to D.J.'s obscene and meandering verbiage - also marks the juncture between the potential fulfillment of authentic self-realisation, and the actual realisation of the dream of power - the desire to kill - and the revelry in brutality and waste.

Why Are We in Vietnam? is, then, the dissection of a social malaise through the disturbingly obscene narrative of D.J., who has himself been corrupted by a system rather than by an isolated event or experience. Vietnam is not the problem, it is simply symptomatic of a far deeper and more resilient corruption. Because D.J. is narrating the events of the novel (despite the presence of a distanced, third-person authorial presence) as he prepares to leave for Vietnam - to "fulfill (the) will" of the

beast and "go forth and kill" (204) - the novel itself testifies to D.J.'s ultimate abdication to a dream of power as opposed to a dream of being. However, Mailer's intent is nevertheless to portray a dialectical conception of character wherein the possibilities for oneself are implicit in the choices for action one makes:

... the first animal D.J. got in Alaska was a mountain goat at two hundred and fifty yards ... and when he died, *Wham!* the pain of his exploding heart shot like an arrow into D.J.'s heart, and the animals had gotten him, they were talking all around him now, communicating the unspoken unseen unmeasurable electromagnetism and wave of all the psychic circuits of all the wild of Alaska, and he was only part of them, and part he was of gasoline of Texas, the asshole sulfur smell of money-oil clinging to the helicopter, cause he had not gotten that goat by getting up in the three A.M. of morning and climbing the mountain ... D.J. had gotten up at seven back in the bunkhouse at Dolly Ding Bat Lake, ... since good old Hail the Cop Turd could take you a day's walk in ten minutes ... (99-100)

Mailer maintains this pivotal dialectical structuring wherein the individual, subsequent to an experience of existential self-revelation, comes face to face with both the capacity for courage and the presence of cowardice. Throughout *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, the experience of death is the necessary context for existential self-revelation, when the terms of death are engaged as a personal phenomenon: as D.J. discovers, "it wasn't until that night when he was in the bunkhouse back at Dolly Ding Bat that D.J. relaxed enough to remember that goat picking his way up and down rocks like a slow motion of a skier through slalom, his legs and ass swinging opposite ways, carefree, like take one leg away, I'll do it on the other, and it hit D.J. with a second blow on his heart from the exploding heart

of the goat and he sat up in bed, in the bunk, listening to the snores, stole out to the night, got one breath of the sense of that *force* up in the North, of land North North above him and dived back to bed, his sixteen-year-old heart racing through the first spooks of an encounter with Herr Dread".(101-102)

This structuring is apparent as Rusty comes to terms with his desire to "get it up. ... to go for grizzer".(106) Rusty's near brush with death - providing the necessary context for existential self-reckoning - spurns the recognition of fear as well as the desire to dominate this fear and locate a personal sense of bravery. This dialectical vision is contextualised by Mailer's familiar metaphoric terms, in which the experience of existential confrontation necessitates one's descent to a netherworld in which one defines one's experience for oneself; moreover, the psycho-sexual terms of Rusty's own reckoning of this dialectic vindicates Rusty's allegiance to the dream of power and his ultimate disavowal of the effort to achieve authenticity and inner courage:

Discussion that night. Rusty was sick. He had to get it up. They had to go for grizzer now. Well, he was man enough to steel his guts before necessity, he not D.J.'s father for naught tickle, D.J. was conceived in *deep* waters. So Rusty agreed in his own heart to get it up. Now he's awake, man, lying in his bunk looking out a small six-pane window at moonlight on the lake, and the smell of the pine grove around the bunkhouse is strong, it speaks of Indian caverns, of forest no white man ever saw, which is to say it smells like no pine forest Rusty ever saw, for the odor goes in and in again until he is afraid to breathe all the way, aisles are opening in his brain before the incense of it which is like the odor of the long fall in a dream. Blasts of rage and goutts of fear burn like jets and flush like bile waters and he is humped in his mind on Hallie, D.J.'s own father, Rusty, married twenty years to a blond beauty he can never own for certain in the flesh of his brain.(106-107)

Mailer wishes to emphasise that Rusty's desperate macho ethic, which is the basis for his desire for power and dominance, is motivated by fear. Rusty is a singularly limited personality, whose desire to defeat cowardice is not the discovery of courage, but the expression of a more resonant fear - of not being a man, but where manhood is defined as little else than the exercise of power and the influence of wealth. As Richard Poirier says, "the boys (Tex and D.J.) are doomed to the kind of masculinity which has none of the dialectical vitalities so profitably at work in Mailer: of being female as well as male, of feeling a space within where the gestations of imagination take place, and a keen sense of the space without, which calls forth the will and lust for public power".¹²

As has been said, *Why Are We in Vietnam?* represents an interesting diversion from Mailer's use of the dialectical structuring apparent in *An American Dream*, insofar as the dialectical structuring is manifest in the shifting narrative focus. From D.J.'s entertaining, if colourful account of the hunting trip, Mailer shifts to the third person; to a description of Big Luke's thoughts as he leads the "goose fat and gaggle" through the wilds of Alaska - except that, quite unexpectedly, one learns the following: "This Big Luke's thought? No, it's D.J. on the edge of masturbating in the Alaska night, with the excitement of going for griz in the morning, and holding off, holding off, cause a handful of spit on a sixteen-year-old dick puts a worm on the trigger and you slip off your shot".(116) The effect of this shifting narrative focus is to delineate, within the text itself, the alternatives between convention (the conservative macho tone of D.J.'s obscenities) and chaos (the

continual undermining of reader expectation and the debilitating lack of certainty of the identity of narrative voice). When Mailer employs the third person to detail D.J.'s actions and responses, the dialectical realisation of either courage, or cowardice is manifest. Thus, as D.J. reports the events and experiences of the trip to Alaska, it is from the perspective of memory, but, more importantly, it manifests his abdication to the conventional values and brutishly violent attitudes of Rusty. When Mailer, as author, controls the narrative, the dialectical possibilities for self-fulfillment and authenticity on the one hand, and the desire for domination and for the sheer thrill of the kill on the other, become apparent as D.J. comes face to face with his own possibilities and his deepest desires and motivations through the rite of passage- the literal baptism by blood - he undergoes in Alaska. This is given wonderful expression immediately after Tex, and M.A. Pete claim bears; M.A. Pete's "cannon" virtually disembowelling the bear, thereby providing D.J. with a vision of blood not unlike that of Lady Macbeth (indeed, the allusion is introduced at the novel's very beginning (7)) and which provides the impetus for D.J.'s own psych0-sexual lust for blood:

... following the trail of the female whose blood was red on the alders and the dwarf birch trees, blood looking to expire into brown gum on the pine needles still bright as electric red on the cedar leaves, that red vibrating up D.J.'s nose in the cool gray blue ass sky green gray ground of Northland, up above the Circle, red above the Circle, red in the cool September Arctic air. Some giant wolf in D.J.'s heart, some prehistoric wolf all eight feet big began to stir new boils and springs and pools in the river of D.J., in his blood, beastly audience, in his blood, and he had to get him a wolf in the form of a bear like the grizzly bear plugged with twelve shots which lay there still shaking and broken and dead but still

twitching, that female bear her belly half demolished by the Nitro Express of Medium Asshole Assistant to Procurement Manager Pure Fores Pete.(119)

It is the same, specifically sexual, desire for domination which is the basis for both Rusty's and D.J.'s lust for the kill, which is the impetus for the two to depart from the main hunting group in search of bear. D.J. is "in the heart of horror" (121) and Rusty is "half-insane" (123) because both are consumed by the macho ethic which demands that they prove their manhood, in competition with men they believe to be less manly than themselves: "(Rusty) ain't trundling his ass for two hours forty in order for Big Luke to radio the Cop Turd and taxi them in, he's not up there to have his lust blooded and placated, he is up, his guts are there".(123) The ensuing experience, as father and son venture into the heart of the Alaskan wilds, is dialectically structured. The proposal from Rusty brings D.J. face to face with his own capacity for courage, as he approaches a metaphoric edge between the possibility of death and the possibility of heroism:

So (Rusty) turns to D.J. and says, 'Son, let's split from Luke the Fink cause he ain't going to get your ass or mine near a grizzer.' And D.J. who has been feeling the high hairy cool of a terrible turn where your short will hold or not hold old bitch road, it's endless, yes, that moment has been riding the next moment every step of their walk, he don't know if he's going to be a hero or dead, but he loves his daddy this instant, what a fuck of a stud, they will take off together, they will make their own way back to Camp, and Big Luke will sweat a huge drop.(123)

Once again, the dialectic is implicit in the narrative structure, as Intro Beep 8 offsets the affirmative quality of this moment of existential self-confrontation (which occurs in Chapter 7) in the virulently obscene tone of D.J. as he anticipates the forthcoming

events via his recollection of the experience. Thus, the juxtaposition of (the shifting) narrative focus as a function of the transit between past and present is Mailer's means of delineating a further dialectic between the self perceived as is - in the present - and the self that has been shaped and modified by past experience but which influences the present self as the future self is anticipated in terms of one's desires and motivations.

The subsequent experience in the Alaskan wilds - Chap Eight - marks a pivotal juncture in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*. The positive relationship between Rusty and D.J. finds its basis in the opportunities for courage and heroism they both perceive has been expressed in leaving the rest of the group. This occurs in marked contrast to the macho ethic which gains expression the desire to kill grizzly, which thus far has been the primary focus of the hunting party - the urge simply to dominate through the exercise of power, which in Rusty's terms, is to kill before anyone else, and to kill better than anyone else. However, once Rusty is "free, man, loose, loose as Henry with a goose, shedding those corporation layers" (127) he is able to return to a truly authentic experience of himself - "he's being bad Rusty and it's years, man, he wants to holler hallo for a grizzer any size big ass beast" (128) - a return to those impulses toward bravery and the assertion of one's best possibilities. In fact, Mailer distinguishes between Rusty's competitive desire to dominate through the assertion of power, and the more fundamental, authentic expression of masculinity implicit in the lone trek through the wilds: "Rusty got just a hint of sweet rot in his smell but when the balls is back in as now he's okay, many a hero

smell worse than old Rust".(128) Moreover, the sense of Rusty and D.J. as father and son finds its most coherent and believable expression in the conversation about flowers and camping: the notable lack of obscenity signifies an important change in tone which, in turn, underscores the positive affirmation of self through this experience, for both Rusty and D.J.:

On and on they go for half an hour, talking so close that D.J. can even get familiar with Rusty's breath which is all right. It got a hint of middle-aged fatigue of twenty years of doing all the little things body did not want to do, that flat sour of the slightly used up, and there's a hint of garlic or onion, and tobacco, and twenty years of booze gives a little permanent rot to the odor coming off the lining of the stomach ... but with all this detraction, fatigue, booze, Nick the Teen, garlic and cavity, it's still a good breath, it got muscle and a big happy man with that clean odorless white American flesh ... and point coming here, point your nose, auditor, is that D.J. riding on currents of love can take all the smell of his daddy's breath and love him still, cause that's love - you can go to the end of the other's breath and still forgive him."(133-134)

The existential context for the subsequent, pivotal episode is, necessarily, found in the experience of death. Mailer's familiar narrative structuring is apparent: as D.J. comes to terms with the potential danger implicit in their situation, he faces, existentially, his own fear, spurned by the personal recognition of his own (possible) death. The experience is couched in Mailer's metaphoric terms of descent, and, most importantly, D.J. comes face to face with his most elemental urges - he is "hip to the hole of his center".(136) As he faces the inner depths, limitations and motivations which are the authentic expression of his selfhood, D.J. must also face the alternatives for action which express the dialectical basis of selfhood. In this instance, D.J. discovers the source of his

cowardice - "little man saved by cunt, virility grew with a taint in the armature of the phallic catapult" (137) but he also determines the action to remedy such cowardice - "cause D.J. for first time in his life is hip to the hole of his center which is slippery desire to turn his gun and blast a shot into Rusty's fat fuck face, thump in his skull, whawng!"(136) Thus, D.J. is poised between the alternatives for action which will realise courage, or which will reveal his inner cowardice. The experience is temporary, and does not reach resolution, although the basis for the subsequent important episode with Tex is thus anticipated and is, for this reason, quoted in full, as follows:

And D.J. breathes death - first time in his life - and the sides of the trail slam onto his heart like the jaws of a vise cause that grizzer could come erupting out of the brush, could a grizzer travel at speed through that brush? it's death D.J.'s breathing, it comes like attack of vertigo when stepping into dark and smelling pig shit, that's what death smells to him, own pig shit smell, terrible fear right out of his lungs and pores, mucous lining of now flappy-ass organs, and back of fear like man riding chariot pulled by eight wild pigs in harness is crazy-ass murder, cause D.J. for the first time in his life is hip to the hole of his center which is slippery desire to turn his gun and blast a shot into Rusty's fat fuck face, thump in his skull, whawng! and whoong! with the dead-ass butt of his Remington 721, D.J. is shivering on the death in this hot-ass vale of breath, cause each near-silent step of his toe on the tail sounds a note, chimes of memory, angel's harp of ten little toes picking our the blows of Rusty's belt on his back, he five years old and shrieking off the fuck of his head, cause the face of his father is a madman ass, a power which wishes to beat him to death - for what no longer known - a child's screaming in the middle of, and so interrupting, a Hallelujah Sir Jet Throne fuck? nobody know now, D.J. just remembers the beating, screaming, pleading, smell of pig shit in his five-year-old pants, and death, coming in like oscillations red and green waves pulsating from oscilloscope ... and first seed of tumor, figure-toi, could that be? - little pretty seed of back-up murder passed from valve asshole Rusty's heart to the seat of D.J.'s brain, for Hallie rushed in

then, picked up decanter whiskey, flung it through on a line through window ... and spell broke, murder weather cracked in thunder, and D.J. all pig shit smell and five-year-old ass and back burning like the flesh in the burns of Hell run all screaming into Hallie's arms, little man saved by cunt, virility grew with a taint in the armature of the phallic catapult, call it tumor if that's what D.J.'s got in his brain ... (136-138)

The dialectical construction of personality which gains expression in the alternatives for action facing D.J. - to shoot his father, or to reject this opportunity for an authentic statement of his inner courage - is also implicitly conveyed via the natural world, driven "crazy" by the presence of man and machine. However, in this particular instance, Mailer purports to show the natural world mirroring the dialectical premise by which D.J. realises both positive connection with his father, as well as a desperate revulsion, sufficient to entice him to murder. Thus, just as D.J. experiences the "currents of love" for Rusty which signify the positive affirmation of their relationship through the decision to elect the brave course of action (to leave the hunting group), the natural world echoes this sense of affirmation and becomes a Mailer-metaphor for the realisation of courage which both Rusty and D.J. have experienced. Indeed, "each step a rock God laid on water ... and hum the smells in that wood, Prince of Pals, they took one step through a kingdom of pines, mad genius pine trees ...". (138)

At the same time, the natural world manifests an inner sickness, a sense of something "dying over the years", (139) which, in Mailer's terms, signifies not simply the termination of life but the inability to grow, the distinction made sense of in terms of the facility to perceive what is necessary for the promulgation of life as opposed to acquiescence to whatever would

thwart, or destroy the potential to grow, to be truly alive. Of course, this is Mailer's major thematic preoccupation, and, when Mailer writes, "... cause a ring of bark had been cut and the skin of such dying tree go to rot beneath the trunk, fell down. Into the open mouth of that remaining stump came the years of snow, sun, little jewels of bird shit ... the monomaniacal electric yodeling of insects, and wood rotting into rotting wood, into gestures of wood ... and stinking with fracture between earth and sky, yeah, D.J. could smell the break, gangrene in the wood, electric rot cleaner than meat and sick shit smell and red-hot blood of your flesh in putrefaction ... a chaos of odor on the banks of the wound, nothing smells worse than half-life, life which has no life but don't know it ..." (139) his intention is to show, through this elaborate metaphor, the alternative of chaos facing D.J. if he elects to reject the positive action to vindicate his capacity for courage. Simultaneously, Mailer preserves his dialectical structuring by demonstrating D.J.'s decision to authenticate his capacity for courage, through, once again, the metaphoric response of the natural world: "Next step was into a pool of odor which came from the sweets of the earth, sweet earth smell speaking of endless noncontemplative powers, beds of rest, burgeonings, spring of life, a nectar for the man's muscles on the odor of that breath, yeah, D.J. was breathing his last, he was in the vale of breath, every small smell counted, it was the most fucking delicious moment of his life up to that point, for there are those who know and those who do not know when a very bad grizz is near to you (a final division of humanity) and D.J. knew, and D.J. was in love with himself

because he did not wish to scream or plead, he just wished to encounter Mr. D., big-ass grizz ..." (139-140)

When Rusty and D.J. encounter the grizzly bear, the tone of finality marks the crucial nature of the confrontation: Chap Eight is vital because it marks the penultimate juncture between a positive experience of affirmation (the positive relation between Rusty and D.J. with which Chap Eight begins) and the negative preoccupation with sexually-anticipated violence which follows in Intro Beep 9 and Chap Nine. Thus, in the bear's roar, D.J. hears "the crazy wild ass moan of every animal they'd gunned down and the tear and blast of all flesh from all fat exploding knockout Magnums".(140) Having discovered his capacity for courage, and having vindicated this discovery through action - "and D.J.'s heart and his soul sweet angel bird went up the elevator of his body and all balls but flew out before he slammed bolt and fired again at grizzer not ten yards away" (141) - Mailer must preserve the dialectical construction of the narrative by returning D.J. to an experience of his cowardice - "the moment they are silent, echo of the event opens silence after silence - they are close to puking they are so scared" (142) - but which vision of the inner, contrary compulsions paves the way for a further discovery of the action to vindicate the urge toward bravery and heroism: "58% of D.J. wanted nothing but to leave Mr. Wounded Grizzer and get the fuck out But D.J. is a head man. Which is not to say he gives head, but is ruled by his head. A creature of will. That will now says to sixteen-year-old flesh, 'Go back without looking for this griz and Tex will ride your ass to shit'".(143)

At the same time, D.J.'s response must be dialectically perceived as both the effort to regain courage as well as the macho urge for domination in competition; the legacy, of course, of Rusty's brutal machismo. Mailer seems to suggest that the real test of courage, for D.J. (and one which reappears later, but fashioned in a more complex manner) is the murder of Rusty, action which signifies the rejection of the values of conventionality and brutishness which Rusty embodies. Since this action has been subverted by the bear's appearance, D.J. determines a test of his courage which is qualified by the masculine lust for power. However, almost simultaneously, Mailer contains the dialectic by affirming D.J.'s capacity for bravery, and posits D.J. "on the edge" of his own fear on the one hand, and his courage on the other. As D.J. approaches the bear, because "D.J. just had to see him up close" (146), the bear also implicitly manifests Mailer's dialectical structuring, such that the mixed messages the bear sends to D.J. imply both the positive qualities of D.J.'s action in shooting the bear as well as a monstrous future of brutality and violence awaiting D.J. because of the lust to kill he has inherited from Rusty:

At twenty feet away, D.J.'s little cool began to evaporate. Yeah, that beast was huge and then huge again, and he was still alive - ... and D.J. looked in from his twenty feet away and took a step and took another step and another step and something in that grizzer's eyes locked into his, a message, fellow, an intelligence of something very fine and very far away, just about as intelligent and wicked and merry as any sharp light D.J. had seen in any Texan's eye any time (or overseas around the world) those eyes were telling him something, singeing him, branding some part of D.J.'s future, and then the reflection of a shattering message from the shattered internal organs of that bear came twisting through his eyes in a gale of pain, and the head went up, and the

bear now too weak to stand up, the jaws worked the pain.

Then the gale subsided. The peace came back to the eye, pain fading like the echo of the last good note, and that wild wicked little look of intelligence in the eye, saying something like, "Baby, you haven't begun," ... (146-147).

The episode is important also because it marks the "Final end of love of one son for one father" (147) which, rather than signifying D.J.'s conscious decision to reject the attitudes and values encapsulated by Rusty, signifies instead a tonal juncture in the narrative schema. D.J.'s obsession with obscenity becomes specifically anally oriented, which, as is metaphorically significant in *An American Dream*, indicates a devilish predilection for waste: anal sexual intercourse being, in Mailer's terms, the negative corollary to vaginal sexual intercourse; the latter offering the possibilities of new life and the former negating such possibilities. The sense of waste, disease, and rottenness is re-introduced in Intro Beep 9 as D.J. says, "Return to civ, which is to say syphilization and fuck James Joyce" (149) and D.J. himself confirms the negative implications apparent as the dialectical other to whatever positive affirmation of his courage has already occurred, when he says, "Now D.J. is a shit-oriented late adolescent, he is marooned, in case you have not noticed, on that balmy tropical isle pronounced Selador, spelled cellardoor - asshole - ".(150) Indeed, D.J.'s detailed, if idiosyncratic explanation for the relationship between defeat, excrement and urine confirms his status as "Grand Synthesizer of the Modern Void", (152) at least as the purveyor of a peculiarly Maileresque belief: that every rejected or failed impulse constitutes a defeat which ultimately results in cancer; the disease of chaos, of nothingness as no-

form. The alternative, schizophrenia, is subsequently detailed by D.J. in Chap Nine as follows:

Some tooth and cunt hostesses are closet fucks. Walk in on them in an unlocked bathroom and you can have a two minute red-hot steaming ass blubber wet slap-dizzy oceanic cunt fuck. ... Key to it all, cause not all do, is don't make a mistake, adolescents! with the wrong kind of tooth and cunt responsible hostess type or she'll kick your nuts in: you got to pick the one with the right schizophrenia, that beam in the eye, that gleam of the mind which says I keep a closet for occasions, meet you on the moon for a sixty-second suck. Well, when fucking these mad insane ones, D.J. here to advise, get in fast, get out fast, cause they greedy fiends. This ain't young cunt from which you cop the goods - this is used cunt, burnt meat, cliff-hanging menopause types which can't get rid of the poisons by any hole but the pussy hole. ... And the tooth and cunTERS are converting their schizophrenia into cancer juice for you. (155-156).

The remarkably obscene quality of the narrative voice - even more so than previously - is accounted for in terms of the "powers" that both D.J. and Tex receive on the hunting trip. As such, the previous chapter, which outlines both the perceived opportunity for the vindication of courage (the murder of Rusty) and the ultimate failure of that resolve (which leaves D.J. in "such a murder ball of sick disgusted piss-on-dad" (157)) is itself a metaphoric representation of the balance of D.J.'s contrary urges toward courage and cowardice. In Chap Nine, D.J. himself acknowledges the failure of this attempt to vindicate his capacity for courage; his theme is itself the acknowledgement of a failure to achieve balance between the contrary compulsions and motivations which alternately spurn a positive affirmation of the self (through bravery, the responsiveness to the natural world) and a negative obsession with exerting the will through brutality and sexually-anticipated violence:

They also on freak activities. No just fucking two or three forty-year-old women on separate shots in the bathroom in one night ... but they off on real freaks. For instance, they are digging corpses in Tex's father's funeral parlor, I don't mean the ultimate, the boys are never without some kind of jammed-up taste and principles but listen city slickers from the East, they are engaging in private autopsies ... this weird unpalatable action to be explained on the basis that it gives them powers. They are not hunter-fighter-fuckers for nothing, no, ... without having to snoop here there for powers, which they get from crime, closet fucking, potential overturn of incest since Tex is almost not above trying to get Hallie Jethroe in one closet fuck this very night, plus ghoulish surgery on corpses which is demonological you may be shit-and-sure, and derives from their encounter with all the human shit and natural depth of their Moe Henry hunt two year ago. (156-157)

Moreover, from Chap Nine onwards, Mailer's focus is directed toward Tex Hyde, who, until this point in the narrative, has received little authorial attention and no definitive status as a character in the Moe Henry Hunt, except in passing reference, as D.J.'s "bosom buddy". Tex Hyde, Mailer seems to suggest, is the negative other to D.J. - whereas D.J. is "full of mother-love received in full crazy bitch perfume aromas from Hallie" (160) Tex Hyde is "full of ape shit daddy-love", (160) as well as being "a killer, baby, got one of those dull Texas faces to prove it".(160) Tex Hyde is Mailer's expression of the negative "other" in terms of his dialectical conception of personality - "a most peculiar blendaroon of humanity and evil, technological know-how, pure savagery, sweet aching secret American youth, and sheer downright meanness as well as genius instincts for occult power (he's just the type to whip asses at Black Masses) as well as being crack athlete. Such consummate bundle of high contradictions talks naturally in a flat mean ass little voice".(162) If D.J. and Tex Hyde bear a metaphoric relation to

each other in the same way as the divided compulsions of one's interior motivations and desires form the basis for Mailer's dialectical conception of personality, Mailer purports to show that personality, like the spiral of time, is itself an intricate array of contradictions and opposed contraries. This is why Mailer's description of Tex Hyde's parents, Gutsy Hyde and Jane McCabe Hyde - possibly the pinnacle of the novel's obscene delight in pornographic detail - is, itself, the impugnation of the dialectic: explicating the negative qualities implicit in Gutsy's voracious sexual appetite, qualifying the positive qualities of tenacity and bravery implicit in the description of Jane McCabe Hyde's ancestry.

Chap Ten presents the major impetus of the novel's thematic and narrative focus: the rite of passage; the "baptism by fire" by which the boys determine the attitudes and action to align themselves unquestioningly on the side of the High-grade and Medium-grade assholes accompanying them on the hunting trip. The dialectic is implicit in the "purification ceremony" (175) - perceived by Tex and D.J. as the means by which they can affirm their best qualities and rid themselves of the "mixed shit" characterising the trip thus far: "... half-clean themselves from the walk, half-fouled with the emanated nauseas of medium assholes and Rusty high-grade asshole, disillusioned with Big Luke's Cop Turd copping out on the big game hunter's code and oath, and just in a general state of mixed shit, for the walk up to here has done them only a minimum of good. They have not cleaned the pipes, not yet". (175) Similarly, when Tex establishes the criteria for the purification ceremony, Mailer anchors the positive affirmation of the boys' capacity for

courage in the negative terms befitting Rusty's macho ethic of competitive brutality: "They each know even as he (Tex) says it that this is how you get the fear, shit, disgust and mixed shit tapeworm out of fucked-up guts and overcharged nerves. But D.J. is in a grab for your dick competition snit that he didn't think of this first, so says, 'Let's leave the Randalls behind, too'.(176) Thus, the existential quality to the purification ceremony, by which the boys "own clean fear now" (176) is both the result of a decision to explore the limits of bravery in an effort to achieve authentic fulfillment, as well as the result of the sheer desire to dominate within a competitive context. Similarly, the terms of the "ceremony" are qualified - the boys decide to take the necessary equipment for self-preservation - to allow Mailer to delineate the discovery of the inner dialectic as the necessary precipitate for the achievement of balance. Thus, the boys' outward show of bravado - the "grab for your dick competition" by which they leave themselves bereft of gear for their excursion - is qualified by the discovery of inner fear and cowardice. The achievement of balance in such dialectical terms is explicated as the absence of compromise: "... and they know they got to go back a little on their new found principles, they got to take a bedroll and grub, their pup tent, the matches, a rope, shit, they can't go clean, they even take the binoculars, but mixed shit does not flow in again to the reservoir of their heart because celestial mechanics is built on equations and going with nothing into the forest is not necessarily more loaded with points of valor than going with rudimentary bag and forage yet without arms into mountain snow".(177-178)

At the same time, Mailer juxtaposes, paragraph by paragraph, the dialectical back and forth of the contrary qualities expressing the boys' desire for authenticity and integrity, as well as that which undermines the self-same desire: the homoerotic lust for power, and the masculinity which is sickened by an inability to perceive the essential doubleness of sexuality - the female in male, and the male in female. The "pederastic palaver" (179) characterising the boys' dialogue is itself a means of avoiding the very intimacy implicit in their relationship; at the same time, Mailer emphasises the sense of moral dislocation separating action and attitude:

'Why,' said Tex, 'tell me about Herod and his fuck hole in Caesarea. When you done I'm gone to do a Caesarea up your ass.'

'You ain't seen the day you was strong enough to unzip it out of your pants around me, pussy kisser.' ...

Hey, hey, is this the way they really talk? And at sixteen and seventeen. Well, yes, they is geniuses, D.J. been telling you. And all that pederastic palaver? Hell, yes. They is crazy about each other. They even prong each other's girls when they can, but fear not, gentle auditor, they is men, real Texas men, they don't ding ding ring a ling on no queer street with each other, shit, no, they just talk to each other that way to express Texas tenderness ... and D.J. here to tell you, don't get upset by the boys' last dialogue, they so full of love and adventure and in such a haste to get all the mixed glut and sludge out of their systems that they're heating up all the foul talk to get rid of it in a hurry like bad air going up the flue and so be ready to enjoy good air and nature ... and so fret not those of ye who live for the quiet of Sunday on our quiet streets, those boys would not talk that way to your daughter or your sister, no, sir, they would just ruminate privately a little, and do their best to fuck her.(179-180)

The dialectic is also implicit in the relationship of the boys to the natural environment. Mailer anchors the terms of this relationship in a personal thesis regarding the electric

waves which each - human and animal - manifests as a measure of their impact on the physical and non-physical environment: "Each of those boys rings up the voltage in their resolve, like let that fuck wolf try to come to them, and they will give him a time ... man, they're fired, and that electric fire goes off them. Two waves of murder, human and animal, meet across the snow in a charge as fantastic and beautiful as Alexander Nevsky ...". (181)

Interestingly, even as Mailer connotes a negative quality to this relationship with the use of electricity to characterise the relationship,¹³ the descriptive terms used to describe the "waves of murder" connecting the boys and the wolf resonate with a positive sense of harmony and beauty. Mailer's point, of course, is that beauty (or even ugliness) like sexuality, is not one-dimensional but exists as a dialectical construct of complementary contraries by which its form is determined. Moreover, as Mailer is quick to point out in *Of a Fire On the Moon*, to be able to see beauty within what is conventionally regarded as evil or awful, is the facility for dialectical perception as opposed to an attitude of totalitarianism, of thinking one-dimensionally: " For all he knew, Apollo-Saturn was still a child of the Devil. Yet if it was, then all philosophers flaming in orbit, the Devil was beautiful indeed".¹⁴ This theme is of particular significance to Mailer in *The Prisoner of Sex*, where Kate Millett (and feminists in general) is variously described by Mailer as the purveyor of a "single permissive sexual standard where the man's asshole is the democratic taxpaying equivalent of any vagina"¹⁵; as "lab assistant Kate"¹⁶; and as having "a mind like a flatiron, which is to say a totally masculine mind"¹⁷. Millett is thus described because "she hates

every evidence of the dialectic"¹⁸ and Mailer goes further to align the dialectic with the essence of American spirit (thereby construing every non-dialectically perceptive American an aberration), as personified by Henry Miller: "Miller was a true American spirit. He knew that in a nation of transplants and weeds the best was always next to the worst, and right after shit comes Shinola. It was all equal to him because he understood that it is never equal - in the midst of heaven a hole, and out of that slimy coruscated ridiculous comes a pearl".¹⁹

Mailer employs the implicitly conveyed relationship of Tex and D.J. with the animal world to delineate the sense of the dialectic. Thus, as the wolf and eagle fight to the death, the wolf's domination is qualified by the hint of cowardice not unlike that already associated with the two boys. The wolf has "decided to slide away from" "the D.J. wave and the Tex Hyde wave" (182) which results in "a call which starts low, calls in all the beastly guts for miles around, tells them of the taste of fresh game, goes up higher than a coloratura into ascents of panic and power... . And the boys understood every sound of it".(183) In essence, the wolf is Mailer's metaphoric means of emphasising the legacy of courage and cowardice, power and passivity, bravery and brutality which Tex and D.J. must come to terms with on the hunting trip. Indeed, to drive the point home, Mailer anticipates the boys' equivalent of Rojack's parapet test in the following description of their state of mind as they embark further into the wilderness:

But they don't have a gun and once again they feel just as clean and on-edge and perfect as would you, sedentary send-in-terror auditor of this trip, when you, sir, are about to insert the best piece of cock you ever mustered up into the cunt

which is all fuck for you, and your nose is ozone you so clean and perfect, well, they feeling like that every instant now, whoo-ee! whoo-ee: they can hardly hold it in, cause this mother nature is as big and dangerous and mysterious as a beautiful castrating cunt when she's on the edge between murder and love, forgive the lecture ... (184)

One notes, also, the familiar terms of Mailer's metaphoric-dialectic structuring: the boys are placed in a position, physically and psychically, that equates with being "on the edge". Moreover, the existential quality of their experience is suggested by Mailer in the fearful uncertainty they feel: "Man, it's terrifying to be free of mixed shit".(184) In fact, this moment of existential realisation subsequently anticipates a revelation of fear, which is itself the perception of their own vulnerability and essential cowardice. Accordingly, this revelation is accompanied by the threat of a return of "mixed shit": "... Mr. Sender, who sends out that Awe and Dread is up on their back clawing away like a cat because they *alone*, man, you dig? why, they just dug, they all *alone*, it's a fright wig, man, that *Upper* silence alone is enough to bugger you, whoo-ee, all the twiddles have turned to plummets and they don't even know from what, and then know, it's their laughing up in the silence. They turning everything on in the wrong way, and they ready to retreat. And mixed shit is ready to drop in again on the lip of their liver".(187) Thus, in the terms of Mailer's dialectical structuring (one notes that the two have become one entity in Mailer's references to "their" liver, etc.;²⁰ itself an indication of the dialectical construction of personality at the basis of Mailer's thematic structuring), this revelation of the boys' dual fear and courage, implicit in their initial action in leaving the group, is an experience of existential exposure which

leads them to the metaphoric edge - in this instance, to confrontation with grizzly: "and D.J. first to dig into the dimensions of the message which is simple, yes, direct - bear is nearby".(187)

Importantly, though, the existential experience returns the individual (in this instance, D.J. as the discernible "I: controlling narrative impetus and event) to an authentic experience of self, beautifully conveyed by Mailer as follows: "and D.J. full of iron and fire and faith was nonetheless afraid of sleep, afraid of wolves, full of beauty, yeah, he unashamed ...".(196) One notes, also, the dialectical interplay between D.J.'s perception, and hence, realisation of courage - the "iron and fire and faith" denoting a psychical affirmation of his best possibilities - and his inherent cowardice, the fear before the unknown as well as the known ("nonetheless afraid of sleep, afraid of wolves"). The "beauty" that D.J. is filled with is, indeed, his own sensuous awareness of both the external world around him, itself an indication of the authenticity of the experience of self and other; as well as of his own capacity to effect - to impact upon - that external world via the expression of his own being:

and D.J. could have wept for a secret was near, some mystery in the secret of things ... and he knew then the meaning of trees and forest all in dominion to one another and messages across the continent on the wave of their branches up to the sorrow of the North, the great sorrow up here brought by leaves and wind some speechless electric gathering of woe ... something gruff in the sharp wounded heart of things bleeding somewhere in the night, a sound somewhere in that voice in the North which spoke beneath all else to Ranald Jethroe Jellicoe Jethroe and his friend Gottfried (Son of Gutsy) "Texas" Hyde. (196-197)

The pivotal final section of *Why Are We in Vietnam?* reiterates Mailer's dialectical structuring by re-establishing the existential context for an experience of self which is fearful, in which the outcome of any action taken is unknown, and for which life-or-death terms are employed: "and they were wired up by the mixture of fatigue, cold, and the first good rest they'd got, and by the life of the day they had just passed, and by the clean in them free of mixed shit, and lying without a gun or knife which was like traveling naked at night now weaponless in near unmarked mountains watching wolf and griz ... lying next to each other like two rods getting charged with magnetism in electric coils, the ante going up and up under that blanket, and in the next half hour as they lay there saying not a word in an intensity of hung suspension, like purgatory so near they are to reaching across, fingers poised, hands up, throats near to gorging with heartbeat ...". (201) What follows echoes Rojack's experience atop the parapet: the metaphoric journey to the edge brings both Tex and D.J., Rojack and, indeed, Tim Madden to a point of penultimate recognition of the form of the self, and which is contextualised as an experience of God.

In *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, the revelation of God as a "beast" is also the urge toward chaos - the seductive appeal of the magnetic North. This reiterates Mailer's device in *An American Dream*, where Rojack, poised on the parapet, experiences the urge to jump, to "fly" to the moon. In both instances, to elect action in this way is a retreat to the chaos of no-form, of nothingness. Compare the following passages, the former from *An American Dream* and the latter from *Why Are We in Vietnam?*

... I stood on a deck chair, and took the half-step up to the parapet. It was a foot wide, room enough stand, and I stood on it, my legs a jelly, and felt some part of the heavens, some long cool vault at the entrance, a sense of a vast calm altogether aware of me. 'God exists,' I thought, and tried to steal a look down the fall, but was not ready ... and I looked away, looked back at the terrace just a step down on the other side, was about to get off, and had a knowledge that to quit the parapet now was too soon - the desire to jump would be only more powerful.²¹

and:

And they each are living half out of their minds. For the lights were talking to them, and they were going with it, near to, the lights were saying that there was something up here, and it was really here, yeah God was here, and He was real and no man was He, but a beast, some beast of a giant jaw and cavernous mouth with a full cave's breath and fangs, and secret call: come to me. They could almost have got up and walked across the pond and into the north without their boots going up to disappear and die and join that great beast. (202)

Just as Stephen Rojack is poised between the alternatives of chaos (the seductive urge to "fly" to the moon) and convention (abdication to Barney Kelly) both Tex and D.J. manifest the same alternatives in their relation to each other, and in the wider context of the appeal of the north versus the legacy of their respective parents - Rusty and Gutsy. Mailer anchors the terms of the dialectical struggle between these alternatives in a battle for sexual supremacy, the basis for the novel's thematic focus on the macho ethic which has, in part, been responsible for the war in Vietnam. Thus, Mailer aligns the urge to retreat to the north (the appeal of chaos) with D.J.'s desire to "put (his hand) square on Tex's cock and squeeze", (202) a desire, it is apparent, which is both the recognition and the denial of the feminine in D.J.'s masculinity: "In the field of all such desire (to go to the north and to die) D.J. raised his hand to put it

square on Tex's cock and squeeze and just before he did the Northern lights shifted on that moment and a coil of sound went off in the night like a blowout in some circuit fuse of the structure of the dark and D.J. who had never put a hand on Tex for secret fear that Tex was strong enough to turn him around and brand him up the ass, sheer hell for a noble Texan but he, D.J., was beloved son of perfume on the poo Hallelou and *her sweet ass was his sweet ass and so temptation made him weak at the root of his balls* and he always swelled to be muscle hard around Tex so that Indian could never get it up his ass nor no man living".(202-203) (My emphasis) The desire to engage in homosexual activity with Tex (and vice versa) is really the admission of the feminine component within the masculine - itself the discovery of the form of his being for D.J. - but this existential experience of self also entails the recognition of the dual urge to dominate through brutality - the legacy of Rusty, and otherwise referred to as the urge toward convention. Both D.J. and Tex manifest these complementary-contrary desires: in their relation to each other, the two can be seen to represent the dual female-male components of the psyche (D.J. and Tex, respectively), but the relationship is dialectical, and the interplay between the separate urges to dominate and to succumb exists for both. The passage is quoted in full, because it represents the nexus between the narrative action of the novel, and the thematic and metaphoric focus established in the novel's title. Moreover, the elements of Mailer's dialectical structuring are brought together in a virtuoso effort: from the pivotal recognition of the inner feminine component, offset by the desire to dominate as a function of the macho ethic, the

possibilities for action become apparent as either the vindication of courage, which is the defeat of whatever fear is strongest, or the achievement of balance of those separate but complementary urges. D.J. recognises a deep-seated fear of his own feminine component; Tex, similarly, is fearful of coming face to face with the feminine component in D.J. These pivotal realisations spurn the recognition of the action necessary to overcome inner cowardice: for D.J., the effort to "steal" Tex's "iron" in a homosexual coupling is really the admission of his feminine nature as well as the vindication of his courage; and for Tex, the necessary fight to the death with D.J. is itself the means by which he can overcome his fear of the feminine in both D.J. and himself:

... and vibrations coming off Tex tonight like he giving up the secret of why he never tried to bugger old D.J., Tex who'd bugger any punk, cause asshole is harder to enter than cunt and so reserved for the special tool but Tex, who never sucked a dick and never let no one near him not even to touch, could bugger all but was never ripe to try for D.J.'s dangerous hard-ass soft mother's cherry although secret unvoiced almost unknown panic for attempting such entrance had him nipped in the groin with a claw, but it came out in the night some tension of waves of unspoken confession from Tex to D.J., that Tex Hyde he of the fearless Eenyen blood was finally afraid to prong D.J., because D.J. once become a bitch would kill him, and D.J. breathing that in by the wide-awake of the dark with Aurora Borealis jumping to the beat of his heart knew he could make a try to prong Tex tonight, there was a chance to get in and steal the iron from Texas' ass and put in in his own and he was hard as a hammer at the thought and ready to give off sparks and Tex was ready to fight him to death, yeah, now it was there, murder between them under all friendship, for God was a beast, not a man, and God said, "Go out and kill - fulfill my will, go and kill," and they hung there each of them on the knife of the divide in all conflict of lust to own the other yet in fear of being killed by the other ... (202-204)

The "murder ... under all friendship" is, as for Rojack, a penultimate recognition of the capacity for violence as an authentic expression of the elemental urges and motivations of the self. D.J.'s earlier desire to "turn his gun and blast a shot into Rusty's fat fuck face" (136) occurred, one recalls, when D.J. is "hip to the hole of his center".(136) In both this early instance and in the later important episode just detailed, the violence is sublimated and becomes merely the expression of a brutal desire to dominate - what I have referred to as the macho ethic which Rusty embodies. Mailer's depiction of the separate qualities of violence as both an experience of authenticity and as a function of the collective, totalitarian spirit of the late Twentieth Century is given full expression in "The White Negro", and is particularly relevant to *Why Are We in Vietnam?* because the boys become, indeed, purveyors of the latter, brutal and indiscriminate violence explicit in the experience of Vietnam.

The abdication of Tex and D.J. to the side of Rusty, the Medium Asshole allies and Vietnam is anticipated at the end of Chap Eleven, as the boys return to "the same specific mix of mixed old shit" (204) and, with the dual return to D.J.'s obscene and unfocused dialogue in Terminal Intro Beep and Out, is confirmed. Initially, it is important to note that the dialectic has been undermined, become ambiguous - the boys are "killer brothers, owned by something, prince of darkness, lord of light, they did not know" (204) - and this in itself points toward a debilitating absence both of form and of balance, which, in Mailer's terms, is the expression of chaos (entropic formlessness, the absence of the dialectical interplay of complimentary-contraries) and convention(the one-dimensionality

of rigidity and the totalitarian desire for inflexible domination). Mailer's thematic intent is brought into focus as Terminal Intro Beep and Out begins, as Mailer offers a personal theory to explain "North America, that sad deep sweet beauteous mystery land of purple forests, and pink rock, and blue water, Indian haunts from Maine to the shore of Californ, all gutted, shit on, used and blasted, man".(205) The "psychic glug" (206) emanating from the greater majority of individuals is Mailer's explanation for every denied impulse, retracted urge, and sublimated desire, which in turn expresses an inability to act with courage which is itself the absence of self-recognition - Mailer proposes that each individual possesses the capacity for courage which must be determined through existential self-discovery and vindicated in action. In *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, the existential experience of self is metaphorically structured in dialectical terms and echoes a similar use of the same theme in *An American Dream*. Whereas Rojack both discovers his courage as well as his ability to forge balance between his contrary urges to vindicate this courage and retreat in cowardice, D.J. and Tex merely acquiesce to the path of least resistance - they become purveyors of the debased morality Rusty encapsulates, embodied in on experience of collective brutality and exemplary totalitarian cowardice: "Vietnam, hot damn".(208)

SECTION 2.

PART 3. TOUGH GUYS DON'T DANCE

Tough Guys Don't Dance, Mailer's most recent novel (1984), is also his most mature and finely developed work of fiction. Mailer employs the same dialectical structuring apparent in the previous novels I have discussed, but the structuring is more complex, and mirrors a further complexity in the thematic base. In *An American Dream*, the self in dialectic tension between opposed desires and the effort to acquire equilibrium as a means of salvation is profoundly realised in the figure of Rojack; in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* the same dichotomy gains expression as the twin entity of D.J. and Tex but where each manifests a similar dialectical struggle between compromise and bravery; and in *Tough Guys Don't Dance* Mailer presents a complex triad structure: Tim, Wardley and Dougy manifest the ambivalence of the self (where Tim is the "I" of the self) caught between the divergent desires and motivations of the struggle to be a man. Whereas Barney Kelly and Shago Martin encapsulate, respectively, Rojack's twin urges toward convention and chaos, the exemplary force of conventional brutality in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, Rusty Jethroe, is not without the capacity to (momentarily) realise authenticity and self-fulfillment through the exercise of courage. Similarly, *Tough Guys Don't Dance* purports to show the dialectical interplay of motivation, inclination and desire within all the major characters - even Regency, whose competitive brutality and violence match Rusty's, possesses the courage to die for love; and ultimately, Wardley is presented as a hipster, but a failed hipster. The characters of *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, in fact, are less characters than beings, a division summed up by Mailer as

follows: "A character is someone you can grasp as a whole, you can have a clear idea of him, but a being is someone whose nature keeps shifting".²²

Tough Guys Don't Dance, as Mailer himself has said, "is about a man's immersion in his own vices, miseries, obsessions, and sometimes feeble attempts to get out of them. There happened to be a murder mystery circulating around that. But the center of the book was Madden and his relation to his wives, his father. It was essentially a novel about a man who lived through his obsessions".²³ More importantly, *Tough Guys Don't Dance* is the exemplary expression of an earlier Mailer pronouncement, "... for being a man is the continuing battle of one's life, and one loses a bit of manhood with every stale compromise to the authority of any power in which one does not believe".²⁴ The Dougy-Tim-Wardley nexus is to be found in the relation of each individual to an idea of masculinity which is both the imposition of a social or conventional ideal as well as the inner urge to be better than one thought oneself capable of becoming - Mailer's conception of what it means to grow, to move forward. In contrast to *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, which portrays an ethic of machismo encapsulated in the figure of Rusty and which is characterised as a brutal desire for domination, *Tough Guys Don't Dance* is Mailer's personal statement regarding what it means to be a man within a specific cultural milieu: "A tough guy is not necessarily machismo-obsessed. Macho is a quality, not an essence. American men are dedicated to finding out how strong they are, I think, because the country itself is the most powerful in the world. Their identity behooves them to measure themselves in terms of power. And ever since Hemingway, there

seems to be only that measure of a man. ... People who disdain power, or laugh at it, are ignoring what is absolutely central to being an American. And it's not just a physical notion of what macho means. ... Am I the only defender of a spiritual, political, dynamic machismo in American life?"²⁵ Tim Madden's struggle, in *Tough Guys Don't Dance* is two-fold: Mailer presents a picture of the varying levels and types of power which operate both within the social, and within the more nebulous context of the spirit world, and Tim must come face to face with these differing conceptions and manifestatons of power as part of his dual effort at reclaiming, or redeeming his sense of manhood which embodies his sense of self. This is the basis for his struggle to achieve a dream of being, which is, like that of Rojack, the struggle to achieve equilibrium of the divergent claims upon his psyche.

In an interview with *Esquire* Magazine, Mailer neatly encapsulates the thematic base of *Tough Guys Don't Dance*: in response to the interviewer's question, "How can a man rise above mediocrity?" Mailer replies:

Well, you don't have to be the strongest guy on the block; you just have to end up being a little better than most people thought you'd be. That's being a man. A homosexual who surprises everybody with how artful he is in running his life, is a man. Being a man is a style rather than a sexual centrality; if you end up being just a little better than the prevailing acumen would guess you're going to be, then you're a man. Finally, being a man is an assertion. I work on the principle that nobody's born a man, you have to assert yourself to become a man, which is why it's so difficult.²⁶

Tim's recollection of the incident atop the Provincetown Monument presents him in a state of inertia or stasis - he is unable to move either upwards or downwards - which metaphorically

delineates his confused and compromised selfhood. This is because Tim himself interprets his failure on the Monument as a failure of manhood, but, as Mailer has suggested, Tim's conception of manhood subscribes to a conventional ideal which is unrelated to his sense of self as a man. The promise of descent offered by falling from the Monument is subsequently realised in the ensuing events - as Tim is confronted with murder and madness (a loss of security in his own consciousness) - Mailer's tone suggests a metaphoric descent to a nether world of spirits, voices and omens. In turn, this experience is itself the necessary existential confrontation with the form of his being, and Tim is able to acquire psychical equilibrium or balance through self-discovery: he virtually re-creates his self through a reclaimed past.

Tim discovers the shape of his being through the dual discovery of love and courage, a theme which echoes that of *An American Dream*. Tim's discovery is the difference between authentic courage, which is the ability to face and transcend one's largest fears, and the desire for power as a function of the machismo ethic in the conventional sense of brutality and domination. In essence, tough guys trust their own instincts for what will be best for them (that is, what will help them become more than they thought they could achieve) and rise above their fear; tough guys do not act out of a motivation of fear and a desire for domination (the fear of a "castrating woman" and the desire to subdue her through the domination of will). Moreover, Tim's efforts at achieving a sense of selfhood which is an authentic expression of his deepest and most resonant urges and motivations is also his duty to Madeleine: by denying her her

function as a creative being, Tim's journey toward a redeemed and reclaimed self extends to Madeleine as well.

The existential nature of Tim's experience in *Tough Guys Don't Dance* is established at the novel's beginning where, like Mikey Lovett and Sergius O'Shaughnessy, Tim Madden is temporarily without a past, a personal history. The alcoholic binge which has left Tim feeling "as if (he) had died and the birds were feeding on (his) heart" (3) is compounded by the recent departure of his wife, Patty Lareine. At once, Mailer's style and tone is both reminiscent of the works of Chandler and Hammett, as well as a parody of the self same works. In his lengthy and detailed account of the foibles and rigours of the smoking habit, reminding one of a latter-day Philip Marlowe, Tim also calls forth an early Mailer pronouncement: "Smoking cigarettes insulates one from one's life".²⁷ With the resumption of his smoking habit, Madden effectively elects to deny himself the opportunity for existential self-realisation and self-confrontation, as he himself admits: "after four or five (cigarettes), I was sometimes able to inhale in peace, thereby cauterizing what I had come to decide (with no great respect for myself) must be the wound of my life".(5) At the same time, the context for the ensuing events resonates with a nefarious quality of violence, at worst; tinged with the anxious suggestiveness of paranoia, at best: such a context is Mailer's deliberate means of delineating Tim's experience as existential and establishes the basis for the subsequent tale of murder and madness:

On the other hand, if you were unable to endure loneliness, the vessel of your person could fill with dread during the long winter. Martha's Vineyard not fifty miles to the south and west, had lived through the upsurge of mountains and

their erosion, through the rise and fall of oceans, the life and death of great forests and swamps. ... The northern reach of Cape Cod, however, on which my house sat, the land I inhabited - that long curving spit of shrub and dune that curves in upon itself in a spiral at the tip of the Cape - had only been formed by wind and sea over the last ten thousand years. That cannot amount to more than a night of geological time.

Perhaps this is why Provincetown is so beautiful. Conceived at night (for one would swear it was created in the course of one dark storm) its sand flats still glistened in the dawn with the moist primeval innocence of land exposing itself to the sun for the first time. Decade after decade, artists came to paint the light of Provincetown ... but then the summer ended and most of the painters left, and the long dingy undergarment of the gray New England winter, gray as the spirit of my mood, came down to visit. One remembered then that the land was only ten thousand years old, and one's ghosts had no roots. We did not have old Martha's Vineyard's fossil remains to subdue each spirit, no, there was nothing to domicile our specters who careened with the wind down the two long streets of our town which curved together around the bay like two spinsters on their promenade to church. (6-7)

Tim's speculations on the Pilgrim's first landing at Provincetown calls forth a further Mailer preoccupation, in which the past, as the basis for present experience, provides a link between the self that is, and the forces, habits, qualities, strengths and weaknesses of the people and events that preceded the physical and psychical birth and maturation of the self. Where the links with the past have been sundered (as is the case with modern architecture) so, too, one's self is debilitatingly without a sense of context or an attachment to some antecedent history. As Mailer pronounced in *The Prisoner of Sex*, "... the marrows and sinews of creation were locked in the roots of the amputated past",²⁸ and in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, the "marrows and sinews" of the specifically American experience of the Pilgrim's first landing has given way to a cheap reminder of that event: "... across from the plaque to the Pilgrims, not fifty

yards away, there where the United States began, stands the entrance to a huge motel. If it is no uglier than any other vast motel, it is certainly no prettier, and the only homage the Pilgrims get is that it is called an Inn. Its asphalt parking lot is as large as a football field. Pay homage to the Pilgrims".(8)

Tim's conscious awareness of the past as it serves to shape the quality and experience of late, Twentieth Century existence in Provincetown is irrevocably linked to his sense of impending doom, or more correctly, his sense of dread. One recalls that for Mailer, the present is always in anticipation of a future which will lend shape to one's actions and motivations in the past, which means, of course, that no experience is ever isolated, ever disconnected from the passage of time. In this sense, then, the dread that Tim feels is both a function of his individual anxieties, as well as of the inherited past - the particularly gruesome and violent beginnings of the town. Mailer, though, delineates Tim's dread as the necessary antecedent to a pivotal experience of the self. Tim's statement, "The compensation for misery, self-pity, and despair is that fed enough drinks, the powers of imagination return with force" (10) is itself the other, the dialectical offset to dread, in which imagination gives way to hesitancy and fear: "... but what I do recollect, what I cannot ignore, is that in the evening I got into my Porsche and drove up Commercial Street very slowly, as if afraid that this night I might run into a child -".(9) In this way, Mailer anchors the nature of Tim's existential experience of self in the dialectical conception of dread as both the

precipitant of imaginative receptivity and its opposite that which denies imaginative receptivity through fear and cowardice.

Something of this quality of dialectical interplay is captured in the title of Tim's as yet, still anticipated novel: *In Our Wild - Studies among the Sane*. What is of more interest than this title, however, is the memory which returns as a result - "one rush of love for my father".(11) Mailer lays the groundwork for the thematic impetus of the novel by separating Tim's memory of the past from the events that constituted this past: "Each change of name had been an event in my life - if I could only recover the events".(11) In essence, the connection between past and present which has been sundered with the erection of a bland and ersatz architecture provides a metaphoric backdrop to Tim's own lack of connection between the self that is, and the self that was. His necessity to reclaim that past self is also the necessity to provide a shape for his present self: as indeed Rojack must do in confronting the experience of death, both as the murder of four German soldiers and as the possibility of his own demise by jumping from the parapet.

Authorial control of narrative event and character in Mailer's novels is, of course, assumed. In *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, however, Mailer's deliberate manipulations of both the characters' and the readers' responses to a continually shifting base of reality - of what is gradually revealed to be true - reverberates around a complex notion of ambiguity; what, indeed, it is possible to know, and how one might arrive at possession of the truth (hinted at, but for a different purpose, in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*). Mailer's premise, apart from preserving the elements and accoutrements of a good murder mystery, is

anticipated in his quote from James Elroy Flicker which precedes the novel: "Is it the mist or the dead leaves? Or the dead men - November eves?" The quality of ambiguity surrounding event and character in *Tough Guys Don't Dance* is Mailer's deliberate means of underscoring the lack of epistemological certainty with which the individual must determine action and belief. In a very real sense, Mailer suggests, the individual exists surrounded by the mixed messages and often confusing suggestiveness of the forces, spirits, personalities and powers which constitute the basis of experience. Ultimately, it is the individual's receptivity to those forces and to his own sensuous capacity to contribute to those forces which is his best guide to the nature of existence and to the appropriateness of any action at any given time.

In *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, Tim describes this quality of sensuous receptivity in the following manner: "... I had the strongest feeling I should not go on - just as irrational as an unaccountable smell of smoke - do you know, I sometimes think we are all of us equal to broadcasting stations and some stories should not be put on the air".(18) This theme is reiterated throughout the novel, and is crucial to understanding Mailer's conception of the varying levels of existence and the phenomenological nature of reality.²⁹ For this reason, Mailer introduces several of the main players in *Tough Guys Don't Dance* - Jessica Pond and Lonnie Pangborn, Patty Lareine and Wardley - from the perspective of Tim Madden, whose perception of character and event, of what is going on, matches the reader's at this point. It is only after having amassed the several different versions of reality by the novel's end that one can set the novel, and indeed, the characters, into some form and order. If,

however, the characters in *Tough Guys Don't Dance* turn out to be other than Tim, and the reader initially perceive them (Lonnie's homosexuality, for example, or the story Wardley perpetrates concerning entrance to the mysterious third-floor room) they are revealed, ultimately, as beings rather than merely characters; Mailer presents people who are not one-dimensional representations of a single quality but for whom experience is the catalyst for continuous re-appraisal and re-focusing of desire, motivation, inclination and ambition.

Nonetheless, Mailer does provide some clues to understanding the characters of the novel as they are initially introduced via Tim's thoughts and recollections. Tim's description of Patty Lareine, which is given as a corollary to his description of Jessica Pond, expresses Mailer's dialectical conception of personality: "true to (Tim's/Mailer's) premise that blondes believe it obscene not to comport themselves as angels or bitches - each option must be equally available -", (12-13) Patty Lareine is at once the embodiment of the manipulative qualities of power as well as possessed of a positive facility for imagination and grace: "Patty's wits were true wit - that was all she had to stand between her and the crass and crude".(14) Similarly, Jessica Pond is presented both as the "essential woman" (in Mailer's terms, a woman in possession of full awareness of her proximity to creation by dint of her sexual engineering) as well as the embodiment of the corporate values of totalitarianism: Jessica is described in the glowing, adulatory terms of Maile's obsessive preoccupation with blonde women - "She had a charming upturned nose and a full pout on the mouth, as spoiled and imperious as the breath of sex ... What a piece!"(13) but she is

also representative of "The most complacent kind of West Coast money. ... Corporate California had moved right into (Tim's) psyche".(13) Tim's/Mailer's most damning critique of Jessica and Lonnie, however, aligns them unequivocally with the unreality and deliberate artificiality of the mass media: "They had the patina that comes off a TV screen from characters in a soap opera".(16)

Mailer's multi-layered narrative focus is delineated as Tim recollects fragments of his evening with Jessica and Lonnie from the unreliable perspective of a shattered memory and several notes for his unwritten novel, *In Our Wild - Studies Among the Sane*. Tim's imaginative facility as he entertains Jessica and Lonnie with the Wardley-story (not knowing, of course, as the reader does not know, that Lonnie and Wardley have been lovers) is also his unwitting perception of the need for balance of the extremes of his personality: the note he writes to himself is an uncanny antecedent to the question which will burn at the back of his consciousness as subsequent events proffer the possibility of his own capacity for murder: "'RECOGNITION. The perception of the possibility of greatness in myself has always been followed by desire to murder the nearest unworthy.'" Then I underlined the next sentence: 'It is better to keep a modest notion of oneself!'".(21) This note is itself the trigger for Tim's subsequent ruminations on the ease with which he could perform a murder and get away with the deed, but, more importantly, his inability to remember beyond that point, and the unsettling suggestions of an evening spent to some disastrous or awful end - the dog is in terror of him and he has a tattoo he did not have before - catapult Tim into the realm of existential self-

confrontation. Moreover, as one remembers Mailer's testament that "A being is anything which lives and still has the potentiality to change, to change physically and to change morally"³⁰ the note that Tim writes to himself before embarking on whatever misadventures he cannot recall reverberates with a deep-seated sense of compromise - even a loss of selfhood: "'Despair is the emotion we feel at the death of beings within us'".(23) Tim's effort, in *Tough Guys Don't Dance* is to re-claim both the past (in the immediate sense of the previous night's activities and in the wider context of missed opportunities for courage and authentic responsive-ness) as well as a sense of selfhood - of realised being.

This existential context for the nature of Tim's experience of reality from this point is confirmed by Tim as a feeling of intense dread: "I ... lay nearly still for an hour before I chose to open my eyes. I was feeling dread with an intimacy I had not known since I came out of prison".(25) Tim's experience is existential because the outcome of any action he may elect is contingent upon action in the recent past which may or may not have been heinous beyond belief; Tim's only connection to this past is by way of a shattered memory in which action possesses as much cognizance as dream: "Did drink have me chasing for the root of the wound? I can only say that my memory would be clear to me in the morning, but shattered, that is to say, in pieces. Each fragment was sharp enough, yet like puzzles that have been thrown together, not all the pieces seemed to come out of the same box. Which is equal, I suppose, to saying my dreams were now as reasonable as my memory, or my memory was as untrustworthy as my

dreams. In either event, I could not tell them apart. "It is a frightful state".(24-25)

At once, Mailer maintains the dialectical structuring by contextualising Tim's existential experience as the revelation of his deepest fears and most resonant motivations. Patty Lareine appears to Tim as a possible participant in the events of the previous evening; the recollection or perhaps imaginative conjecturing is enough to bring Tim face to face with the realisation that her predilection for big, beautiful black men stirs his fear of not being man enough for her, but also his capacity to overcome this fear through action which is heroically violent - like that of Rojack, or that of D.J., had he elected to realise such a capacity in the murder of Rusty:

Yes, but how much of this had actually happened? It was obvious to me that I could conceive conversations as easily as I could live them. Was I not a writer after all? Patty Lareine disappeared twenty-five days ago with a black stud of her choice, a tall, sullen, beautifully put together dude who had been hanging around through the summer, ready to capitalize on that carnal affinity toward black men which lives in the hearts of certain blondes like lightning and thunder. Or, for all I know, smolders in the heart like oily rags behind a barn door. Whatever she felt, there was no mistaking the results. Once a year, given a season or two, she would have a fling with Mr. Black. Some big black. He could be heavy, or he could be as quick as a basketball player, but he was always big. The size put them out of my physical reach - I think it delighted her contempt for me that I was not man enough under such circumstances to load my pistol and do a down-home chase-off. 'Just like your dad would in North Carolina?' I asked. 'You bet!' she'd reply with all the sassy, spiteful untrammelled mouth of an eighteen-year-old in cutoffs at some Dr Pepper gas station. God, she was unafraid of me. I was terrified I would indeed get my gun, but never to chase Mr. Black. He was just appropriating what I, too, would grab if I could fill his jock strap and sweat properly in his black logic. No, I was afraid I would get my

pistol and never leave the house before emptying a magazine into her all-superior fuck-you face.(26)

The revelation of both cowardice and courage in this way, is however, undermined by the vacuum of available evidence and experience in which Tim can elect action to vindicate one or the other. Rather, Tim must face his most awful possibilities as the more likely explanation for the events of the previous evening - an experience which calls forth Tim's instinctual, sensuous affinity for interpreting the nature of reality as well as the return of debilitating dread:

It occurred to me that if my wife had indeed come to visit, and then departed, some evidence must remain. Patty Lareine usually left half-consumed objects behind her. ... but in the living room there were no traces of her. The ashtrays were clean. Why, then, was I now twice certain our conversation had taken place? Of what benefit were clues if one's mind was stimulated to believe the opposite of the evidence? It came upon me that the only true test of the strength, the veritable muscle tone, so to speak, of one's sanity, was the ability to bear question upon question with not an answer in sight.

It is good I had such a perception, for I soon needed it. In the kitchen, during the night, the dog had been ill. The treasures of his belly befouled the linoleum. Worse, the jacket I had been wearing last night was hanging on a chair, crusted with blood. I felt of my nostrils. I suffered from nosebleeds. Yet the passages seemed clear. Now the dread with which I had awakened took a turn. A whistle of fear stirred in my lungs when I inhaled.(27)

From this point, Tim's experience possesses the quality and emotional sensibility of descent, to a nether region of ominous voices and nefarious spririts. Even the blood which Tim washes from his car speaks to him: "Blood, like any force of nature, insists on speaking. It is always with the same message. 'All that lives,' I now heard, 'clamors to live again'".(29) At the same time, Tim is unable to connect action, event, motivation and

intention, both in terms of his relation to himself, and in his relation to the external world, confessing to "the abyss beneath (his) vanity". (36) The experience mirrors that of Rojack at the outset of *An American Dream*, who feels as if he is about to be robbed of his "center":

I had a tatoo I could not account for, a good dog who was frightened of me, a car interior just washed of its blood, a missing wife whom I might or might not have seen late last night, and an ongoing, nicely simmering tumescence for a middle-aged blonde real estate lady from California, yet all I could think of as I took my walk to the center of town was that Alvin Luther Regency ought to have a reasonably serious purpose for interrupting a writer's working hours.

Now, the fact that I had done no writing in twenty-five days was not something I bothered to taken into account. Rather, like those mornings in prison when I could not enter my day, so was I now like an empty pocket pulled out, and as much without myself as an actor who leaves his wife, his children, his debts, his mistakes, and even his ego in order to step into a role.(30)

The introduction of Alvin Luther Regency - "... the spirit of competition, and crazy mayhem had come together. ... one Christian athlete who hated to lose" (31) - provides the impetus for further recollection, which, in turn, offers an unwitting indication of Tim's legacy to an ideal of machismo in which the notion of dialectical interplay between the male and female components of personality is anathema. Tim's "fear" - that Regency is "a big-breasted mother with an enormous phallus" (33) reveals more about Tim's own fear of a self-same dichotomy within, and an inability to view the dichotomy as the dialectical interplay of complementary contraries. At the same time Regency is revealed as more complex than his initial description would suggest. In Mailer's terms, Regency bears all the distinguishing characteristics of the totalitarian desire for power and an

obsessive urge toward violence - rather like Barney Kelly and Rusty Jethroe. Regency is described as possessing "military rectitude", (31) as having a "kind of warmth, when liking you, that reminds one most certainly of granite after it has been heated by the sun - the warmth is truly there, the rock likes you - but the eyes were two steel bolts drilled into the rock"; (32-33) but, at the same time, he also touts a Mailer-maxim regarding the dialectical battle between God and the Devil, which is, of course, one of Mailer's most fundamental assertions regarding the nature of man's experience of existence: "... Conservatives aren't right in every last item of the inventory. They miss the point here. They think marijuana destroys souls, but I don't believe that - I believe the Lord gets in and wrestles the Devil'". (34)

Tim's subsequent ruminations on the care and handling of marijuana allow Mailer to explicate a personally felt thesis on entropy - the life of any organism deprived of the opportunity to organize itself - and, related to this, waste,³¹ but the primary thematic intent is to emphasise Tim's sense of affiliation with a darker, subterranean existence; in essence, an affiliation with the violent history of Provincetown: "... but I did grow marijuana with a find edge. If one wished to entertain the illusion that one could commune with the dead, or at least put up with the possibility that they were whispering to you, then my pot was fine. It was as spooky as any stuff I ever smoked. That I attribute to many factors, not least of which is that the Truro forests are haunted. Years ago ... a young Portugee in Provincetown killed four girls, dismembered their bodies, and buried them in several graves in these low woods. I was always

immensely aware of the dead girls and their numb, mutilated, accusing presence. ... What an air of vengeance was about!" (38) Tim's sense of affiliation with this darker, nefarious realm of spirits and omens is Mailer's means of confirming Tim's experience as profound, and one in which the terms of death are employed: once again, death is the existential reminder of the precarious nature of human existence. As such, Tim's propinquity to the spirit world, which he terms "Hell-Town" forces him to question the nature of life after death, and allows Tim to come to terms with a notion of reality which embraces a sub-stratum of existence beyond that which can be experienced via the five sense: "I had never been able to make a philosophical peace with the notion of spirits, nor come to any conclusion. That you might die but still remain alive in some vale of our atmosphere seemed no more absurd to me than the notion that every part of your person ceased to exist after death".(40) Furthermore, like Rojack, Tim's perception of self and other is now invested with a sensitivity to this sub-stratum of existence in which the "voices" he hears are a continual reminder "that the most vigorous law of the spirit is: Do not exploit death".(41) Of course, as with Rojack, this kind of perception is distinguished from the experience of reality attributed as normal, and Tim is thereby placed in a position of isolation; social autonomy. He, like Rojack, becomes a psychic outlaw, and he must contend with "Desires ... that (he) did not care to name. Serpents were laboring up from the murk".(41)

Tim's metaphoric descent to this nether world of darkness, murder and mayhem is confirmed when he discovers the severed blonde head in the burrow: " ... I poked and saw enough at once

to give one frightful moan, pure as the vertigo of a long fall itself", (45) but the pivotal moment or recognition occurs as an experience of existential self-confrontation:

... it was only after I was back in my house and deep in a chair trying to calm my shivering with bourbon neat that the realization came over me in all the burning woe of one wall of flame falling upon another that I did not even know whether it was the head of Patty Lareine or Jessica Pond lying in that grave. Of course, I also did not know whether I should be afraid of myself, or of another, and that, so soon as night was on me and I tried to sleep, became a terror to pass beyond all notions of measure. (45)

The theme of a metaphoric descent is reiterated as Tim confirms the discovery of cowardice - "I was a jelly. I preferred to molder in the last suppurations of cowardice" (46) - as well as confronts his most dire possibilities in a moment of pivotal confrontation: "I was like a man plummeting down a slippery slope who finds a little horn of ice to grasp, but so soon as he embraces it, the projection breaks loose. I saw that if I could not decide the first question, which was : Put it! - Was I the killer? - then I could not stop the slide, and madness would wait at the rim". (47) Even in facing this awful possibility, however, Tim has initiated the first step toward reclaiming his lost, compromised self. It is appropriate in terms of Mailer's metaphor, that Tim should liken the distant memory of his Exeter days to "a rope cast down into the abyss" which will "lash ... (him) to the edge". (48) In this instance, Tim's balance is maintained by his pleasant memories of Exeter, meant to "insulate the dread" (48) - finally, however, Tim can only achieve equilibrium by embracing his dread and facing the dire implications of his own possibilities which have spurned this dread. Indeed, Tim himself initiates the metaphoric descent to

the nether regions of his own potentially awful possibilities, and, at the same time, explicates further dimensions of the metaphor. In contemplating a past dalliance with murder, Tim offsets the present possibility of violence, thereby determining the balance of a dialectical relationship between the certainty of a past inability to murder and the present suggestion of a capacity to murder: " ... I thought again of Meeks Wardley Hilby III. There had been a month in my life down in Tampa when I literally awakened each morning with the problem set before me: How were Patty and I to murder him successfully? Still that recollection caused no pain now. Indeed, it aided my concentration for two good reasons which served me like panniers carried on either side for balance. One was that I most certainly did not kill Wardley, even came to discover that there was no very determined assassin in me - not the worst thought to have on this morning!".(50)

The dialectical structuring is maintained as Tim's existential experience of self-reckoning, by which he has confronted his cowardice and the potential for murderous violence, precipitates realisation of the action necessary to vindicate courage: Tim must return to his burrow in the woods and investigate the identity of the severed, blonde head. The wholly "unmanageable panic" (54) that Tim feels as a result of this imperative is the return of deep-seated, resonant dread; but moreover, the juxtaposition of this revelation of a desperate need for courage and Tim's continued reliance on memory to act as a ballast confirms Mailer's thematic impetus - it is in Tim's relationship to the past that he may seek a means of reclaiming himself and vindicating his capacity for courage. Specifically,

it is Tim's perception of what it means to possess courage - to be a man - in terms of his relationship to his father, which establishes the basis for his progression toward self-knowledge and self-fulfillment.

The story of Dougy Madden's "great hour" (55) that Tim relates is important because it confirms Mailer's thematic concern with the effort required to be a man, but also presents in microcosm Mailer's assertion of the necessity of courage as the extension of one's own capabilities; to be more than one thought oneself capable of becoming. In effect, Dougy Madden explicates Mailer's thesis that unless one grows - in this sense of being more than one thought one could be - one must pay for remaining the same. Dougy Madden's penultimate loss of courage results in a sickness far more debilitating than merely the loss of blood and associated injuries sustained by gunshot wounds - he loses a little part of his machismo, his very selfhood:

He was renowned in those days for his strength. A strong man among longshoremen had to be a phenomenon, but he must have been as powerful as a Kodiak bear on this occasion because he looked at his assailant and took a step forward. The gunman (whose .45, I assume, was now empty) saw that his victim did not drop. So he began to run. I find it hard to believe, but my father chased him. For six blocks along Seventh Avenue in Greenwich Village he ran after his assailant ... but it took all of such a distance before Dougy recognized that he could not catch him and came to a stop. Only then did he see blood oozing from his shoes and realize that he was dizzy. He turned around just before the street began to turn around on him and saw that he was outside the emergency entrance to St. Vincent's Hospital. So he knew he was in bad shape. He hated doctors and he hated hospitals, but he was going in.

The attendant at the desk must have decided the new arrival was a drunk. A huge distraught man with a considerable amount of blood on his clothing was teetering over the table.

'Please sit down,' said the orderly. 'Wait your turn.'

... 'Take care of me,' Dougy Madden said in a low, deadly voice ... 'I'm hurt.' He was. They kept him in St. Vincent's for three months. When he came out, his hair was white, and he was done with the union. (55-56)

At the same time, something of this legacy - Dougy's loss of conviction in his own best possibilities, his own strength - is implied in Tim's progression toward adulthood. Mailer's intense dislike of modern architecture as formless and possessing no relation to the past is obvious;³² what is of more importance is the implied assertion that Tim's boyhood environment is somehow responsible for Tim's (perceived) lack of macho. As such, it is Dougy's concession to Tim's mother to move to Atlantic Lanes as well as the debilitating effect of living at Atlantic Lanes that Mailer asserts as the original point of reference for Tim's compromised self: "... my mother made one error. She won a fundamental argument with my father and got him to move from our floor-through apartment above his bar, to a town called Atlantic Lanes, and that was quite a catastrophe. The shift proved equal, doubtless, to the shock his grandfather took on leaving Ireland. ... Something was leached out of all of us who grew up there. I cannot name it, although in the eyes of my father we kids were awfully civilized. We didn't hang out on a street corner - no right angles in Atlantic Lanes - we didn't run in gangs (we had best friends instead) and once when I was having a fist fight, my disputant said in the middle of it. 'Okay, I quit.'" (57-58)

Tim's prolonged recollection of Dougy Madden and the legacy of a half-failed machismo (Dougy's "fallen state" (59) is Tim's phrase to describe Dougy's present state of being) is the necessary antecedent for Tim's further recollection of his attempt to climb the Provincetown Monument - itself a pivotal

event in both the narrative structure and in terms of the thematic impetus of the novel. Indeed, Tim's experience on the parapet of the Monument is the impetus for present perception of debilitating compromise within - and, of course, the precipitate for Tim's attempt to seek reclamation of self through courage. Moreover, the experience finds its point of reference, for Tim, in what he suspects is "an unruly attack of latent homosexual panic" (62) in himself. This, together with an intimate encounter with the possibility of his own death, provides Tim with an experience of self which is existential (will he remain alive?) and terrifying, as well as revelatory and altogether too disturbing for Tim to bear with equanimity:

If normally I looked at our monument without seeing it, now I most certainly did. It was the same vertical tower that I had tried to climb on a drunken night almost twenty years ago, and I came so near to the summit as to reach the overhang of the parapet not thirty feet below. ... That night was the only hour in my life when I lived on a wall near to two hundred feet from the ground, but it came to so poor an end that I never had the moxie to try again.

... There I perched, then there I clung, while all the collected valor of the spirits I had drunk began to wane. Then I was sober, and so frightened that I began to shout, and soon, I suppose, to scream, and to cut such recollection to its shortest, I was rescued by the Volunteer Fire Department in the middle of the night ... but by then I was like a cat trapped for six days in a tree - I had smelled my death - ...

Of course, I had some idea of what could be at the core of it. Years later, reading Jones's biography of Freud, I came across a reference Freud made to what was 'doubtless, an unruly attack of latent homosexual panic in myself,' and had to set the book down, for just so suddenly was I overcome with thinking of the night I tried to scale the monument. Now my tattoo throbbed. Was that *unruly attack* with me still? (60-62)

Spider Nissen, introduced at this point by Tim as the only other person who has also tried to climb the monument, exists in

an important metaphoric relationship with Tim, in much the same way as Shago Martin is the negative underside to Rojack's "I", entreating him to the chaotic realm of Harlem; and as Tex Hyde is the wholly negative other to the persona of D.J. Spider Nissen - "He had a touch of the hyena ... the same we-eat-tainted-meat-together intimacy that burns out of a hyena's eyes behind the bars of his cage" (62-63) is Tim's "dirty, treacherous, raunchy neighbor-friend" (63) but more than this, Spider's intimacy with violence, intimated by Mailer in the precision with which Spider uses a knife - excites Tim to a point of reference with this quality in Spider that must be viewed as an extension of Tim's exploration into his own, frightful possibilities: "I remember wondering on my walk why I was visiting him now, and soon recalled that the last time I had been at his house he had cut a plug from a melon, poured in vodka and later served it to all of us with hash cookies. There had been something in the way he cut the melon - a high surgical precision in the turning of the blade that excited me to the joys of using a knife, much as a man who is eating with a highly refined gusto can inspire your taste for the same food".(64) In fact, it is this realisation which, consistent with the form of the dialectical structuring, immediately pre-figures Tim's pivotal recognition of Spider's capacity to murder - an extension, of course, of Tim's insight into his own capacity for murderous violence: "With no more than this recollection of how he (Spider) used a knife, and the quick but immaculate certainty (which came to me like an angel's gift) that he might know how I received my tattoo, I was suddenly possessed of the conviction it was Spider's knife that severed a blonde head from its neck".(64)

The subsequent description of some of Spider's more reprehensible habits and characteristics is Mailer's means of anchoring Nissen to a perception of evil which is actually determined as the absence of any formal, structured means of understanding the known and the unknown world - in other words, a perception of evil as the entropic force of chaos:

He used to urinate on her, there also for us to see on the TV screen. ... You may ask why I watched, and I can tell you: I knew the vaults of heaven were for the angels, but there were other conduits in the sky, and underground railways for the demons, and I used to feel as if Nissen's house ... was one more station on the line. ...

I could have endured him, this Spider, this monster, who shared with me the feat of climbing seven eighths of the way up the stone phallus of the highest monument between here and Washington D.C. .. if only he had believed in God, or the Devil, or both. If he had been a soul in torment, or wished to murder the Lord, or had kissed the Devil beneath his tail and was now a slave, I could have put up with heresy, fallacy, perjury, antinomianism, Arianism, emanatism, Gnosticism, Manicheanism, even Monophysitism or Catharism, but not this damn atheist who believed in spirits that came in electronic streams. (67)

Thus, just as Rojack descends to a nether world of spirits and voices, and confronts the alternatives of chaos and convention as the alternatives for action, Tim's sense that he is "in a cave out there on the edge of the future civilization - out with the new cavemen of the cerebrates" (68) contextualises his experience, subsequent to the discovery of the blonde head, as a descent or outlaw experience in which he has already confronted an encapsulated force of chaotic, entropic violence in the form of Spider Nissen. Mailer emphasises Nissen's metaphoric capacity in this regard by delineating the "ubiquitous colorless color" (68) of Nissens' lounge room; Mailer's perspective on "those endless half-pretty repetitive smaller towns of the Middle and

the West, whose spirit is forever horizontal and whose marrow comes to rendezvous in the pastel monotonies of Los Angeles architecture"³³ an interesting corollary, and one which anchors Nissen in the negative realm of chaos, of no-form. Indeed, even their shared experience on the Monument is ultimately an experience of the Devil for Tim; the "dreadful odor of corruption" (71) which oozes from Tim as he hangs beneath the overhang and which now emanates from Nissen is, Tim fears, "the nearness of the Devil waiting to receive (him)".(71) Implicit in confronting Nissen, both as an adjunct to Tim's monument experience and as the encapsulation of violence anticipated by Nissen's vision of Patty's decapitation, is Tim's existential experience of his own fear by which he may discover the imperative for action which will vindicate his capacity for courage, as against the realisation of cowardice:

Let me not even speak now of our purpose (referring to the seance), but in that darkened room by the back shore ... it seemed to me that with each question asked the table was actually coming closer to some small quiver when, right then, our communal senses were shattered by Nissen's fearful scream. Having brought this much back for myself, I must have returned the memory to him as well, for now he said, 'I saw her dead. I saw your wife dead and with her head cut off. The next fucking moment, she saw it too. We were looking at it together.'

In this instant the smell that came off him was overpowering, and I could feel a reverberation of my fear beneath the overhang. So I knew that no matter how I might like to banish the impulse, I had no choice: I must go back to the tree on the sandy ridge and discover whose head was in the burrow below. (72)

Tim's descent experience, which is thus far contextualised as an induction into the realm of chaos, is exacerbated when he visits Harpo, whose relation to the spirits and omens of a substratum of experience similar to that described by Tim as "Hell-

Town", is sufficiently unbalanced to place Harpo within the self-same chaotic realm of entropic no-form. As Tim perceptively understands Harpo, "Some would argue that Harpo was psychic and some that he was punchy from playing without a helmet, and I always expected that he was both, and each reinforced the other. ... Now he lived in the heavens, and the words of angels and demons were major events to him".(76) It is just such voices which provide Harpo with the knowledge of Madeleine's proximity to Provincetown; echoing, of course, the manner in which Stephen Rojack discovers the various imperatives for action throughout *An American Dream*. Tim's induction into this realm is apparent when he is able to come to terms with a significant realisation which is actually the recognition of his personal relation to the self-same sub-stratum of existence. Recalling another seance, Tim is able to place the extra-ordinary events of that past evening in the context of the present eeriness and mystery of events he cannot order or fathom. The effect is to highlight Tim's deep-seated fear as the response to a subliminal demand for some level of epistemological certainty of the phenomena which characterise the nature of Tim's existential confrontation with self and other:

It was only past two in the morning, driving home through a wind like this, that I realized how a common end table, in defiance of many laws of physics, had been able to rise and fall hundres of times in order to send a word or two across a divide whose gulf I could no longer measure. It was then, alone on the highway, that the hair stiffened on the back of my neck, and I knew I had been present at an eerie and incomprehensible evening. Whatever had made it possible might still be in the air around me. I was alone with *it* on a wind-swept highway not far from the depths of the sea - no, I had never felt so alone in my life. The awe I had hardly experienced while it was happening was now all about me on the road.

... Arriving back at my house, I started a fire, poured a drink, and was just beginning to search for any recollections I could recover of a trip out to Wellfleet two nights ago, carrying two other people in one small Porsche, when there was a thump on the door knocker, or so I would swear, and the door blew open.

I do not know what entered, or whether it left when I bolted the door, but I heard that clapper as a summons. I had a sniff again of the intolerable odor of corruption I had breathed beneath the overhang, and could have cried out at the inexorable logic of the demand on me. For with all the weight of a decree I could not refuse came the bidding to go back to that wood in Truro.(80-81)

The pivotal existential experience for Tim - the intimate vision of his own fear and potential violent end as he hangs from the Monument overhang - thus also calls forth Tim's present fear as the recognition of deep-seated cowardice before the dialectical offset provided by the urge to vindicate courage through action - through returning to the burrow in the woods. As Tim recognises, he must return to the burrow, simply because he has no choice: "... whether it took an hour or three days, whether I finally went forward sober or became so drunk I could live in flames, I must indeed go out and search the burrow. There could be no release until I did. That force which went into the tapping of the table had now siezed me - by my entrails and my heart. I had no choice".(81)

What follows, as Tim grapples with this terrifying imperative, is vital to understanding Mailer's thematic impetus for a form of narrative structuring which posits the individual between equally unacceptable alternatives for action, within a context both terrifying as well as seductively exhilarating. Tim notes the connection between the present imperative to return to Truro and the earlier urge to climb the Monument - "Once before I had been in the grip of an imperative larger than myself, and

that was the week twenty years ago when I walked each day to the Provincetown Monument with cold oil in my lungs and sick worms in my belly" (81) - but is able to make sense of the compulsion to climb the Monument not in terms of the climb itself, but in terms of what it means to not carry through the directive: "If I did not make the attempt, something worse than panic would befall me".(81) Mailer is, of course, alluding to his personal maxim regarding the necessity to move forward, less one pays for remaining the same; at the same time the central focus of the Monument experience is delineated as an existential exposure (for indeed, the individual comes face to face with a truth of the self which was unknown but which is now revealed) in the parallels that Tim draws with the individual whose daily legacy is to live with such an imperative: "Maybe I learned nothing else from those old siezures of terror in the middle of the night when I used to sit bolt upright in bed, but, at least, I gained ... some small measure of compassion for all who are afflicted by the compulsion to go out and do what is absolutely not to be done - whether it is the seduction of little boys or the rape of adolescent girls - at least I knew the nightmare that blazes beneath the stupefaction of those who never dare to come near themselves, or disaster will ensue".(81-82) The emphasis, in this instance, is upon the intimacy with which Tim has encountered his being through the experience of terror and fear engendered by events thus far. That is, just as climbing the Monument proves to be an exercise which leaves Tim with the knowledge that he is "better afterward" (82) simply because he has mustered the courage to answer the imperative, Tim now knows that he must return to Truro, only because "the importance of the

journey must be estimated by (his) dread of doing it" (82) - in both instances, the measure of the quality of the experience itself is the transition of the self to a state of being perceived to be better than before. In this way, Mailer places the individual in a state of metaphoric balance, at the edge of the divide between alternatives which are equally unacceptable, but where the decision to not act in any way is even less palatable in terms of one's state of being; one's selfhood. As both Tim and Rojack discover, the very action itself reveals some truth of the state of one's selfhood - one's capacity for courage, for example; the presence of debilitating cowardice; the measure of each.

Tough Guys Don't Dance concerns itself with an individual facing certain large, existential questions within a context of mystery, implied and literal violence, the suggestion of menace and paranoid suspicion. Mailer's pivotal thematic impetus is, as has been stated, the necessity for self-discovery and self-reclamation through the existential exposure of one's capacity for love and courage. The means by which this thematic impetus is given form is Tim's relationship to others in terms of his - and their - perception of manhood, what it means to be a man. The revelation of Lonnie Pangborn's homosexuality, rather than upsetting the reader's notion of Pangborn beyond the brief introduction afforded him, is telling in terms of the response of both Tim and Alvin Luther Regency: "I handed the letter back. I think we both made an effort not to look into each other's eyes, but they met nonetheless. Truth, they caromed off each other like magnets bearing the same pole. Homosexuality was sitting between Regency and me as palpably as the sweat you breathe when

violence is next to two people".(89) Regency's view of homosexuals - "degenerate faggot(s)" (86) - is similarly bereft of the "dialectical vitalities" Richard Poirier refers to (in his description of Tex Hyde and D.J. who are "doomed" to a version of masculinity encapsulated by Rusty, and now, Regency): "... being female as well as male, of feeling a space within where the gestations of imagination take place, and a keen sense of the space without, which calls forth the will and lust for public power".³⁴ Regency, like Barney Kelly, exercises an obsessive "will and lust for public (and private) power",³⁵ although Mailer maintains a certain ambivalence within Regency's characterisation, manifest in Regency's perception of the relationship between God and the individual: "'I want to serve God,' he said. 'What people don't comprehend is that if you want to serve, you have to grow balls big enough to take on His attributes. That includes the heavy responsibility of exercising vengeance'".(90)

Mailer's introduction of Madeleine through Tim's recollection of her focuses Tim's particular concern with the state of his manhood on the nature of his sexual relationships with women. The juxtaposition of Tim's sense of woe as he ponders lost love, with his remarkably graphic description of Madeleine's sexual genitalia (which, by Tim's admission, "helped to break (them) up"(92)) serves to demonstrate the process by which Tim is now, in the present of the narrative action, coming face to face with the state and shape of his selfhood, the means by which he can reclaim courage, love; and his broken relationship with Madeleine. Every important realisation of this nature Tim makes occurs in the context of an existential

revelation commensurate with the form of Mailer's dialectical structuring. In this instance, the knowledge that Madeleine is now Regency's wife provides the existential context for Tim's revelatory reconciliation of two separate motivations: his lust to engage sex as insulation from love, and the present desire to vindicate the self-same love through making amends for the past: "No male ego is the same after hearing the same ongoing female cry of pleasure given to a strange new (very long) dick. 'It is better to be a masochist than a faggot,' I said to myself more than once during those two days, but then I spent hours that had their own glory for me, since the chiropractor's wife, formerly his nurse, this Patty Erleen, had a body as pneumatic as a nineteen-year-old in *Playboy* standing unbelievably before you in life, and we had one hot high school push-on romance ... we had such hooks for each other, so mean and intimate and nasty and superpleasurable (as Californians say) for being nasty. God, Patty Erleen was nice, you could fuck her till you died. Even now, twelve years later, I was close to that first night again, and did not want to be, as if to think well of Patty would betray Madeleine once more". (95-96) Tim's subsequent, pivotal recollection of his evening with Lonnie and Jessica delineates his use of sex as both a desperate attempt to vindicate masculinity by insulating him from whatever he perceives is threatening his sense of being a man; indeed, Mailer suggests that Lonnie's homosexuality exacerbates Tim's sublimated fear of his own innate homosexuality: "Once I stopped the car in the woods just before we got to Harpos's house, and made love to her on the front fender, yes, because on this morning, awakening in the third-floor study chair, recalling it all, I could still feel

the grasp of the walls of her vagina on my monster of an erection. How I had to fuck her! Down with Patty Lareine! It was as if Jessica and I had been designed in some heavenly shop, part for part, our privates were inseparable, and where was Lonnie but watching! He was crying ... and I never felt more of a brute. His misery was as good as blood to my erectile tissue".(98)

It has been said that Mailer employs a form of dialectical structuring wherein the individual, posited in a context of existential uncertainty and fear, discovers the alternatives for action which delineate the divided compulsions of his psyche, usually the discovery of both courage and cowardice. The action chosen by that individual reveals the truth of the state of selfhood, and it is the ability to maximise one's best possibilities (the capacity for courage, for example) whilst maintaining the balance of one's opposed desires and motivations which is the means by which the individual progresses toward a dream of being. Mailer's means of explicating this theme places the individual metaphorically on the edge of unacceptable alternatives - chaos and convention. The realm of chaos entails any retreat to nothingness; either not acting at all, or electing action which refuses the test of courage. The realm of convention, similarly, entails the death of one's being through the systematic denial of one's instinctual responsiveness. One elects convention by acquiescing to any given order, directive, habit, or system which does not reflect the quality or nature of one's innermost desires and inclinations. In *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, this thematic structuring is repeatedly and consistently maintained as Tim grapples with his sense of being a man in the

context of a mystery which poses large and frightening questions about the nature of existence as well as the form of Tim's selfhood. Thus, even as Tim is able to confront and come to terms with certain of his less than admirable actions, he is thus also able to locate his courage - "... and all of this (Tim's recollections), as I soon came to realize, was an exercise to drive my psyche up the high wall of my fear" (99) - by which discovery he may vindicate his capacity for courage by electing to visit Madeleine despite the obvious peril implicit in the journey to visit Regency's wife.

As has also been mentioned, the particular thematic focus of the narrative structuring in *Tough Guys Don't Dance* is Tim's relationship with the other characters in terms of his, and their perceptions of what being a man entails. Specifically, Tim's self conception is entirely an extension of his conception of his sexual prowess; his sexual being. This is expressed marvellously as he determines, for himself, why he chose Patty Lareine over Madeleine:

'How the hell could you pick her over me?' was what Madeleine wanted to say. ... That was one question she would never ask aloud, and I was grateful. What could I have replied? Would I have said, 'Call it a question of Comparative Fellatio, dear heart. You, Madeleine, used to take a cock into your mouth with a sob, or a sweet groan, as if hell were impending over this. It was as beautiful as the Middle Ages. And Patty Lareine was a cheerleader and ready to gobble you up. Albeit with innate skill. It came down to whether you wished your lady to be demure or insatiable. I chose Patty Lareine. She was as insatiable as good old America, and I wanted my country on my cock.' (109-110)

Similarly, the vow that Tim subsequently makes is the expression of a desire to vindicate courage in the psycho-sexual terms of proving manhood through sexuality: referring to Madeleine's

description of Regency as "Mr. Five" (the number of times Regency achieves orgasm each night) Tim locates the source of his courage in the reclamation of his love for Madeleine: "Against every intent of my will, there were tears in my eyes from the pain this speech gave me. ... Yet, at that moment, I fell in love with her all over again. Her words would show me where I put my feet for the rest of my life. It also stirred a pride I though was dead. For I took a vow that one night before I was done, I would obliterate her admiration for Mr. Five".(110) One recalls, of course, that "love was not a gift but a vow. Only the brave could live with it for more than a little while",³⁶ and the central thematic focus of *Tough Guys Don't Dance* is, indeed, Tim's discovery of courage as the means by which he may reclaim love. The anecdote from which the novel's title comes places this thematic focus in terms of the novel's preoccupation with the question of what it means to be a man. In essence, Tim is able to redeem the mistakes and failures of the past and reclaim love when he is able to acknowledge that "tough guys" rely upon their own instinctual responsiveness; "tough guys" rise above their own fear and do not act out of a motivation of fear or its obverse, the desire to dominate through the brutish assertion of power.

Wardley's introduction to the narrative action of the novel emphasises this theme. Again, Mailer proposes two levels of truth by which one interprets the events of the novel, such that Wardley's previously acclaimed "show of moxie" is now revealed as the fabrication necessary for him to promulgate his own facade of masculinity. Indeed, Wardley himself perpetrates a romantic fiction for himself in which Patty is his "romantic hope";(203) a

fiction which underscores Wardley's role in *Tough Guys Don't Dance* as a failed hipster/psychopath: "At bottom the drama of the psychopath is that he seeks love. Not love as the search for a mate, but love as the search for an orgasm more apocalyptic than the one which preceded it. Orgasm is his therapy - he knows at the seed of his being that good orgasm opens his possibilities and bad orgasm imprisons him".³⁷ Wardley's fiction of the self does not extend to a perception of his own inadequacies - his courage is limited to the speculation of his own possibilities, as when he describes to Tim his reasons for wishing Patty's death at hands other than his own: "I want her to look into the eyes of her killer and have it all wrong. I don't want her to see me as the last thing in her life and say, 'Oh, well, it's Wardley going in for pay-back'".(121) Wardley's inability to realise, in action, his own possibilities for courage and self-fulfillment is, in the dialectical structuring of the novel, the obverse to Dougy Madden's ethic of masculinity, both of which are presented to Tim Madden as his own ambivalence regarding his perception of himself as a man. In effect, Wardley fails the test of courage his own sexuality presents to him, whereas Dougy Madden redeems himself from an instance of failed courage, also perceived in terms of Dougy's sexuality - and what "being a man" entails. Tim is poised on the edge of the two alternatives as he discovers, and comes to terms with his own manhood - his own quality of being.

Mailer's conviction that the question of one's masculinity and the notion of what courage entails are simultaneously concerned with the quality of one's selfhood is most fully realised in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, despite Mailer's use of

similar themes and images in his earlier work. In *An American Dream*, in the presence of Barney Kelly, Rojack feels "particularly unarmed" until he literally locates the source of his courage in Shago Martin's umbrella: "... and the handle came into my palm; grasping the umbrella I felt stronger now, like a derelict provided with a cigarette, a drink, and a knife".³⁸ Similarly, in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, Tim's confrontation with "Mr. Black" is itself the existential reckoning of courage for Tim, courage which, in effect, Tim has received from Bolo Green. Shades of "The White Negro" are also present:

... at this moment Mr. Green put his hand on my shoulder again and dug his fingers in - viciously, I tell you - and said, 'Where the fuck is Patty Lareine?', all of his fury passing into me. With that, I woke up and shook off his hand with an equally violent move, and replied, 'Get your filthy lunch hooks off of me,' words that came right out of an old high school fracas. But for the first time, I was not afraid of him.

... Let me say there was little doubt in my mind what he could do to me. If you have ever been in an interesting penitentiary, you come to know that there are blacks and blacks, and a few you never mess with. Mr. Green was not on that high shelf, or I would have been dead. But he could fit on the second level: mess with him under few circumstances. Now his eyes glared into mine and I looked back, and the light in the room turned red between us - ... I had to stand in the considerable wrath of all that had happened to him over his last twenty-five years (from the first cuff in the cradle) and he stood in the maniacal disproportion of all that had been happening to me.(135).

It is the Negro, of course, who faces the daily existential battle of determining courage against fear of death: "Any Negro who wishes to live must live with danger from his first day, and no experience can ever be casual to him, no Negro can saunter down a street with any real certainty that violence will not visit him on his walk".³⁹ However, not only is violence the only

context in which the Negro lives, it is the means by which his survival necessarily determines the shape of his life. Moreover, Mailer's curiously masculine tone, especially in "The White Negro" but also throughout his writing⁴⁰ delineates the struggle for courage as a specifically masculine preoccupation. In the context of *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, the specifically male burden of determining courage is also the impetus for Tim's reclamation of a lost sense of selfhood. Indeed, as part of the confrontation with Bolo Green, Tim himself suggests that he has reached the nadir of his metaphoric descent experience and is now sufficiently returned to himself in order to reclaim selfhood: "Will it give you an idea of how close I felt to annihilation, and how comfortable this idea had become (after all the rat-scurry of keeping myself alive) that I could now recognize that Bolo had not treated me so badly as I had treated Wardley. The remains of my rage began to fade and a peace came in to replace it".(136)

Tim's subsequent encounter with Regency sustains Mailer's metaphoric structuring. Mailer's central theme in *Tough Guys Don't Dance* concerns Tim's perception of what it means to be a man, as part of his need to secure a sense of selfhood in the reclamation and redemption of the past. The notion of evil is also of primary thematic significance, and, as with *An American Dream*, the individual is pitted in dialectical combat with a force of evil characterised in terms which evoke entropic nothingness, or barbaric violence denied release.⁴¹ In *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, Regency emanates "nothing ... but a hint of the void" (146) which necessarily anchors Regency firmly within the realm of the Devil. It is the context for the confrontation

between Regency and Tim which underscores the psycho-sexual thematic base to the novel, initially as Patty Lareine - shared sexual property of the two men - focuses relations between the two as competitive; and subsequently as the story Regency relates brings Tim face to face with his own ambiguous, potentially perverse sexuality:

'There was one case,' he said, 'of a good-looking bachelor who would pick up a girl and get her to go to a motel with him. He would make love to her, and convince her to spread her legs while he took Polaroids. Then he would kill her. Next, he'd take another photograph. Before and after. ...'

'Why do you tell this story?'

'Because it turns me on. I'm a law enforcement officer and it turns me on. Every good psychiatrist has a touch of the psycho in him, and you can't be a good cop without sitting on a kettle of potential monstrosities in yourself. Does my story turn you on?' ...

On the street, I began to shiver all over again. Most of it was simple relief. For the last hour I might as well have been touching every word I uttered. They had all had to be put into position. ... But I hated his intelligence. The story he told *had* turned me on. One tickle down at the core. (146-147)

Tim's important, pivotal exploration into the limits and depths of his own capacity for evil is reiterated: "I recollected nude Polaroids I had taken of Madeleine years ago and of Patty Lareine not so long ago. ... I felt a mean sense of possession at the very thought of their existence. It was as if I had the key to some dungeons. I began to ask myself again: Was I the bloody dispatcher?" (147) Tim's existential confrontation precipitates catharsis conveyed in exactly the same metaphoric terms employed in *An American Dream*: "I cannot describe how much revulsion came to me then. I was physically ill. The marijuana magnified the spasms of my throat until they were near to orgasmic in the power of their heaves".(147) This catharsis is

of itself the revelation of alternatives for action which will, in turn, determine the truth of Tim's capacity for murderous violence:

I knew why I had thrown up. I had to go back to the burrow. 'Oh, no,' I whispered to myself, 'it's empty!' But I did not know. Some instinct in myself, powerful as Hell-Town, told me to go back. If the killer, as we would have it, always returns to the scene of the crime, then some switch may have been thrown, for I was convinced that the only way I could demonstrate to myself for another night that I was not guilty of slaughter was to go back. If I did not return, I was guilty. (148)

It has been said that, in terms of Mailer's dialectical structuring, the experience of existential exposure to oneself, metaphorically conveyed as a descent experience to some nether region of existence, is also the discovery of some truth of oneself. Usually, this discovery is characterised as the recognition of one's capacity for courage, or the determination of cowardice to prevent heroic action. Mailer is at pains to delineate the experience of existential exposure to one's deepest, innermost compulsions and motivations as the epiphanatic realisation of one's divided nature. In effect, one's divided compulsions manifest the contrary urges toward chaos and convention, and the way in which the individual chooses to act vindicates one's courage, or one's cowardice. Certainly, in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, Mailer's allusions to the divided nature of the individual are consistently repeated. As Jessica Pond/Laurel Oakwode engages in fellatio with Tim, Lonnie Pangborn emits "a sound that was half joy and half agony pure" (98) and even Stunts, Tim's dog, provides the opportunity for the theme to be given emphasis: "his voice now raised in a mixture of elation and fright as if, like us, he could call upon two deep and

divided halves of himself. Indeed, he never sounded more human than with his throat coming forth in these cries of pleasure and wheezes of panic".(149) Indeed, Tim's desire is for his "country on his cock";(110) a desire he subsequently expresses succinctly as follows: "For even as I had told Wardley, we (Patty and Tim) had our romantic point of reference. It was the night we met and fornicated like fire dancers and copulated into cornucopias of each other, one night - yes - when we were as happy as Christopher Colombus, for we each discovered America, our country forever divided into two halves".(205) Consistent with the form of the patterning, Tim's discovery of the two heads in the burrow - Patty and Jessica - is itself the action to vindicate his capacity for courage, where the choice for action (to come to burrow) could have been rejected. Courage is now the affirmation of Tim's soul, or, in other words, the sense of connection between the individual and the collective experience of humanity: "I took one look, could not take another, closed the bag. I knew in that instant that I had a soul. I felt it turn in my heart even as my finger retied the knot at the top of the bag".(149)

The thematic emphasis upon the divided nature of the self finds expression in a similar way to *An American Dream*, where the individual is repeatedly placed in a situation of dialectical war with another person, or experienced within his own being, as voices urge him in contrary directions. In *An American Dream*, Rojack is pitted against Barney Kelly, a force of evil who also embodies the power and rigidity of totalitarianism (convention). Rojack's battle with Shago Martin places him in conflict with the powerful force of chaos: the seductive urge toward formlessness or nothingness. Shago embodies the spirit of the hipster, out of

control, plunging (the metaphor delivered) into an abyss of magic, mayhem and madness. In *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, Tim's exploration of the realms of chaos and convention occur in a psycho-sexual context, such that, in his relations with all the other characters in the novel, he must evaluate the state of his being in terms of the various representations of sexuality and manhood (or, in the case of Jessica, Patty and Madeleine, the particular version of manhood which is exhorted from Tim) presented to him in the various individuals. Thus, as Tim battles with Nissen and Stoodie, he is, in effect, battling the particular qualities and characteristics embodied by the two and which Tim perceives within himself. One recalls that Tim's negative kinship with Nissen exists within the context of the novel's major metaphoric motif - the two, caught inextricably on the ledge of the Provincetown Monument - a motif Tim has already perceived as indicative of his confused sexuality. It is important, furthermore, to recall Mailer's idiosyncratic notion of the quality of form: "the record of a war". Form is, in essence, the relationship existing between two contrary, opposed phenomena; wherever the environment resists, the result is a form. In conflict with Stoodie and Nissen, Tim locates both the courage to fight as well as, most fundamentally, the shape of his reclaimed, redeemed self. One remembers, of course, that Tim has already elected the action to vindicate courage in going to the burrow; in confronting the force of chaos as embodied by Stoodie and Nissen, Tim has located the form of his being:

Shall I tell you the virtues of such a war? I held myself together long enough to take both plastic bags down to the basement, where I laid them in a carton. ... Then I dug a grave in the yard for my dog and buried him, doing it all with

one good arm and one good foot - the ground in this mist was soft - and then I took a shower and went to bed. If not for the war by the side of the road, I could never have slept and would have been ready for a mental home by morning. As it was, I slumbered as well as any of those who were dead and awoke in the morning to find my father in the house. (152)

Delineating the psycho-sexual context, the conversation between Tim and his father allows Mailer also to develop the relationship between the two men in the specifically macho terms of their mutual obsession with the quality and nature of manhood. Dougy's perception of Patty as "macho" concurs with the archetypal image of the "ball-breaking" female feared by men because she is a threat to their sexual self-image; at the same time Dougy locates within Patty a further fearful quality - the power she exerts through both her femaleness and her money: "'A guy who marries a rich woman deserves every last thing he gets', says Dougy, and, by way of expanding, he continues, "'I liked her guts. If all the other rednecks was as macho as her, they'd be running the world. But I didn't like what she was doing to you. Certain dames ought to wear a T-shirt that says: 'Hang around. I'll make a cocksucker out of you'". (155-156) It is Tim's reply to Dougy, and Dougy's subsequent rejoinder that demonstrates the path toward self-fulfillment through growth, that both men have embarked upon: ultimately, what might be termed the moral of this novel:

'You were always worried about me, weren't you?'
 'Well, your mother was delicate. She spoiled you a lot. Yeah,' he said, looking at me out of his ice-blue eyes, 'I worried about you.'
 'Maybe you didn't have to. I took my three years in the slammer without a fall. They called me Iron Jaw. I wouldn't take cock.'
 'Good for you. I always wondered.'
 'Hey, Dougy,' I said, 'what's the virtue? You think I feel like a man most of the time? I

don't. What was I protecting? You're an old line fanatic. You'd put all the faggots in concentration camps including your own son if he ever slipped. Just cause you were lucky enough to be born with tiger's balls.' (156)

and, following on from this, Dougy admits the following:

'Tough guys don't dance,' I tell them (the spirits). 'Hey, you bigot,' the spirits answer, 'keep dancing!' He looked into the lights of the bourbon as if their kin could be found there, and sighed. 'My illness makes me less of a bigot,' he said. 'I think about faggots and you know what I believe? For half of them, it's brave. For the wimps, it takes more guts to be queer than not. For the wimps. Otherwise, they marry some little mouse who's too timid to be a dyke and they both become psychologists and raise whiz kids to play electronic games. Turn queer, I say, if you're a wimp. Have a coming-out party. It's the others I condemn. The ones who ought to be men but couldn't show the moxie. You were supposed to be a man, Tim. You came from me. You had advantgages.' (156-157)

For Tim, Dougy's speech is important because it contains the thematic underside to the novel: that real men (that is, tough guys) are possessed of self-knowledge which in turn is the ballast, or courage required to live fully and fulfilled within the particular shape, or form, of that selfhood. Tim fears his own feminine nature, and for this reason, is continually attempting to vindicate a version of masculinity which does not fit the form of his being. His relationship with Patty is, in effect, Tim's attempt to deny and so defeat the perceived scourge of an inner feminine component, and in this sense, Mailer's ethic of courage has taken a shift in tone from previous writing. Courage, in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, demands only that one determine the form and quality of one's being, and to find fulfillment within that self knowledge. Wardley, of course, fails the test of courage in these terms, as indeed, do Regency and Patty whose ambivalent urges toward both a dream of power

(drugs, money) and a dream of being (for Regency, to exist in fulfilled unity with Patty; for Patty, the idiosyncratic search for adventure and excitement) cannot be reconciled. Similarly, Dougy's explanation for the cause of his cancer - his failure to maintain pursuit of the man who has shot him - is resonant of the Mailer maxim exhorting the individual to locate his courage in the existential moment when that courage is pitted against the realisation of cowardice, but Dougy's excessive macho obsession is also offset by his present admission of his "regard" for Tim.(157) That is, Dougy's loss of respect both for himself, and by default, Tim, has its roots in his perception of a loss of courage at the pivotal moment, but in the present admission of love and regard for Tim, Dougy finds the form for his innermost feelings, and hence, the absolution for past failure.

The nature of Tim's relationship with his father reflects his ambivalent sexual identity. The dichotomy is expressed by Tim in the following way: "Was I coming to understand for the first time why the warmth (Dougy) had for me always seemed to cross a glacial field? I may once have been a seed in Douglas Madden's body but only after that body was no longer held by him in high esteem. I was, to a degree, defective".(159) Whereas Tim's obsession with the quality and nature of manhood is his desire to vindicate what he sees is his macho birthright, his fear of an inner, feminine, "weak" nature plays against the need to be a man in the conventional sense. Tim himself expresses the inner dialectic as the rage as well as compassion he feels for his father: "Intimations came how in years ahead - if I lived - the memory of this conversation might make me shake with rage. ... Yet, I also felt compassion for my father. Damnable

compassion".(159) Once again, the form of the dialectical structuring has the recognition of the inner conflict precipitate an existential realisation of the submerged, profound capacity of the self: "Next, I knew a considerable amount of fear. For it seemed real to me again that I had murdered two women. How many times over these last few years had I come to the edge of battering Patty Lareine with my bare hands?"(159) The experience of existential confrontation, whereby the individual comes face to face with the capacity for courageous action or the propensity for cowardly retreat or inertia, thus provides Tim with the appropriate impetus for self-redemption and self-reclamation. He is able to confide his worst fears to his father - "'I am capable of such atrocities,' I said to him. 'I can tell you. I know that ...'" (164) - and, in this "confession" finds catharsis, necessarily the antecedent experience for self-renewal. The cathartic experience is expressed as the consistent Mailer-metaphor for purging, cleansing the psyche as well as the body: "While he (Dougy) was gone I went to the bathroom and threw up. I wish I could have wept instead. Now that I was alone and no longer had the fear of breaking down in front of my father, there were no tears. Instead, I took a shower, put my clothes back on, splashed my face with aftershave lotion and went back to the kitchen".(166) From this point, the process of self-reclamation for Tim occurs as the (re)-discovery of the form of his being. In a pivotal admission to Dougy, Tim says, "'I don't care if my great-grandparents cut peat in Irish bogs every stinking day of their lives, I'm, yes, I'm as fancy as my mother'" (168) thereby admitting the feminine side to his nature which he has feared is a weak, or somehow contemptible aspect of his self; that which

has qualified his manhood. The admission anticipates Tim's subsequent, important recognition of the dialectical structure of the individual psyche, or soul: "It was then I understood, as never before, that we live with not one soul but two, our father and our mother - at the least! - the night and the day, if you will ..." (181)

The form of the dialectical structuring is repeated as, once again, Tim comes face to face with the submerged reaches of his being. The obscene photographs Tim has taken of Patty and Madeleine hint at the inner perversity Tim has already recognised as Regency related the story which "turned" Tim on; of greater consequence is Tim's implied capacity for murderous violence in the now-beheaded photographs. The resultant "bombardment" from Hell-Town, (173) like the moon beckoning Rojack to jump, and the voice which exhorts D.J. to the North, is the manifest expression of the inner dialectic, the moment at which the individual is poised on the edge between alternatives of chaos and convention. In this instance, the voices of the spirits beckon Tim to the chaos of madness - Tim's resistance to this force is also his absolution as he mentally embraces the fate of Patty and Jessica, and resolves action to vindicate both his courage and his innocence:

'Fuck-face, foul and moldy,' shrieked the first voice. 'Sieg heil to the ghoul, fool,' said the second.

'It's Timmy Light-Fingers, smash his yeggs.'

'Maim the bloody sandbagger. Open the moon cancer full of pus.'

'Hey, Timmy, sniff the rot, burn the snot.'

'You're a raider; you're a depredator, you traitor.'

'Bring him in - he stole my house.'

'You ravisher, you floated across on my bed.'

'Disembowel the pikeman. Masticate his prick.'

'He and his dad did the job. Crazy kooks. Cockeyed killers.'

'You murdered Jessica!' came the howl in my ear.

'Dougy killed Patty!' screamed the harpy in the other ear.

'Why? Why did we kill?' I asked aloud.

'Oh, darling boy, Dad is looking for his cure. That's the cure. Sniff the blood.'

'That's him,' I said aloud, 'but what of me?'

'You're sick as well, you swagman. You're under our spell.'

'Go away, you whores!' I shouted.

Standing alone in the rosy-gray air of twilight in that third-floor study, my eyes out to sea, my ears in the sands of Hell-Town, and my feet, for all I knew, on the floor of the bay, I saw in my mind how the heads, blonde hair waving, descended like sea flowers tied to the stem of the chain and the root of the anchor. ... I believe I knew the moment when the anchor touched, for the voices ceased. ...

Now my limbs began to tremble freely of one another. ... It was then I felt an idea coming forward to the center of my attention, pressing into my spirit against all resistance, as if the thought and I were on opposite sides of a door. Then I could hold it off no longer: I had to examine my pistol (Patty's pistol). It was a .22. (173-174)

Once again Mailer echoes the metaphoric motifs of *An American Dream*: the implied catharsis and absolution is conveyed as "entrance" through a door. Tim determines the action necessary to vindicate his innocence - "the subpoena (is) served: I had to examine the .22" (174) - as a force against which his resistance must be defeated so that he, too, can pursue a personal dream of being. Indeed, acting thus allows Tim the first confirmation of his innocence: "I did not feel guilty. I was angry. ... yes, I felt innocent and full of anger".(174)

Tim's relationship with Madeleine expresses his self-reclamation and self-redemption. Madeleine's declaration of love for Tim which follows Tim's affirmation of innocence is a further confirmation of the process in which Tim is engaged: the process of rediscovering and reclaiming the shape of his selfhood through

love and courage. Tim's obligation to Madeleine is two-fold: he has betrayed her love, and he has been responsible for the injury to her physical being, but this particular "debt" to Madeleine is only one instance of the profound sense of compromise and complicity Tim feels and for which he seeks absolution. Tim expresses this sense as follows: "'I'm beginning to think, however, that I'm responsible in some way for the minds of all the others.' When I saw that he did not really follow me, I said, 'It's as if I was polluting the pipeline'".(179) Tim's effort at self-reclamation, however, can reach fruition only when he has properly made the connections between self and other which necessitates the self-knowledge required for such connection. This is expressed, again, in terms of his relationship with Madeleine. In a sense, Madeleine is a reward - the gift of love which Tim may receive only when his emotional and psychological circuits are properly functioning: "Patty Lareine was dead. This thought, which kept arriving in my mind like a telegram delivered every fifteen minutes, still had nothing to offer but its integument. It was like the envelope to a telegram that has no message inside. Certainly no emotion. Yes, Madeleine, I said to myself, I could get crazy about you, but not now".(178) Similarly, in his relationship with his father, the admission of love - "'I love you'" (180) - is also the necessary emotional certainty for Tim's progress toward self-fulfillment and self-reclamation.

Tim's pivotal realisation - that he feels responsible for the minds of others - itself the admission of his fallen state, precipitates the resolution for action to reveal the state of the self. The existential experience is conveyed as follows: "An

outsized stimulation had begun as soon as I said, 'I'm responsible for the minds of others.' A recognition stirred that I must get into my car and drive around town. The impulse was as powerful as the force that came through my drunkenness on the night I tried to climb the Monument. I knew the same fear, delicate, near to exquisite in my chest, like the shadow of one's finest pride".(180) This existential context stimulates Tim to a further recognition of action necessary to vindicate his courage; at the same time, Tim is dialectically offset by the dual realisation of his great fear before such action. The revelation of the alternatives for action is delineated in the psycho-sexual terms (the conception of the "male-female soul") of the novel's thematic impetus:

I took a turn to the right at Town Hall and parked across the street from the basement entrance to the police station. Regency's car was outside, standing double-parked and empty. The motor was running.

Then came a temptation clear as the mandate to mount the tower. It told me to step out of my car, walk over to his, turn off the motor, take his keys, open his trunk, look inside - speak of creative visualization, I saw the machete in the trunk! - remove it, lock the trunk, put the keys back in the ignition, start the motor, leave his car and stroll back to my Porsche and a good exit, yes, I saw all of this in advance and as vividly as any trip to the burrow I had thought out for myself before I went. Now my first reaction was yes, do it! My second was no.

It was then I understood, as never before, that we live with not one soul but two, our father and our mother - at the least! - the night and the day, if you will; well, this is no exposition of dualities, but two souls I possessed that were equal to two matched horses - badly matched! - if one said yes, the other said no, and the poor driver was nothing but my own person who now cast the deciding vote: Yes, I would do it, I had to. I could not live through the debacle of the Monument one more time. (181)

In this way, Tim locates the action which is necessary both to vindicate his capacity for courage, as well as redeem past failure. Furthermore, in the vindication of his courage lies the discovery of God: one recalls that for Mailer, the effort to determine the shape of one's selfhood through a personal dream of being is simultaneously the effort to arrive at the God-in-man. The process of growth - of moving forward - is also the vindication of God's destiny. This particular narrative event in *Tough Guys Don't Dance* is the metaphoric equivalent to both the earlier Monument episode, as well as to Rojack's parapet test in *An American Dream*. The pivotal recognition of another order of existence is expressed in a remarkably similar fashion in both novels: upon discovery of his soul after retrieving the heads from the burrow, Tim experiences an epiphanatic vision of truth: "In that instant when my heart spun like a cat on a high power line and I thought I would die, I knew some far-off chord of exultation and woe: He exists, or It exists, or *They* are out there. It was confirmation that the life we live with all our wit and zeal is only half our life. The other half belongs to something other".(182) In *An American Dream*, Rojack answers the imperative to mount the parapet and "felt some part of the heavens, some long cool vault at the entrance, a sense of vast calm altogether aware of me. 'God exists,' I thought ...".⁴² Interestingly, Tim likens his own experience thus far to that of Regency, now vilified as the murderer of, at least, Jessica. Tim's admission, "If one is going to perch on the abyss, it is reassuring to discover that one's fellow maniacs also know fear and trembling" (182) is both the confirmation of the self-knowledge Tim has acquired so far, as well as the encapsulated

form of the dialectical structuring: the existential context for the discovery of a dialectical opposition which posits the individual on the edge of alternatives for action. In *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, moreover, the experience is not the singular expression of one individual's progression toward a dream of being; rather, Mailer draws together all the characters in the novel in terms of each individual's personal quest for fulfillment, using the major metaphoric underpinnings of the dialectical structuring.

For this reason, Wardley's dramatic return to the narrative action of the novel is necessarily the revelation of Wardley as a version of the existential hero. Ultimately, Wardley's quest for a personal dream of being fails - in terms of the thematic context, he fails the test of courage his own sexuality presents to him, but at the same time he is possessed of a similar desire to redeem the failures of the past and determine a self-fulfilled existence, as Tim. The psycho-sexual context is delineated as Wardley underscores the degree to which Tim has fractured the connectedness between himself and other; in short, his ability to perceive a collective nature of humanity:

'I don't understand why he was carrying a gun on Friday night.'

'He always carried that gun. It made him feel like a man, Tim.'

'Oh,' I said.

'Never occurred to you?'

'If he was so bothered by what I was doing with Jessica, why didn't he plug me?'

'You don't carry a gun,' said Wardley, 'because you would use it. He couldn't. Oh, I know Lonnie. His fury wished to reach cataclysmic proportions. Kill you, kill Laurel - but, of course, he could do neither. He was queer, dear.'

(193)

Wardley is also the means by which Tim is brought to a state of existential, psychological nakedness where his "courage ... now down to the reserve tank" (195) is his only ballast against the immediate threat of Wardley, as well as memories of the past which bring Tim face to face with an ambivalent sexuality and an inability to come to terms with this realisation. Mailer offers several clues for this quality of sexual ambivalence in Tim, which is given expression in Tim's relationship with Wardley, who embodies the quality: Wardley informs Tim, "'Certain men indulge the female component in themselves by encouraging their women to practice special oral sex'".(195) To Wardley, Tim's "sexual naivete" is matched only by his inability to face the truth of his ambivalent sexuality.

Wardley's death is, in the form of the dialectical structuring, a retreat to chaos. In his relationship with Patty Lareine, Wardley discovers both the courage to act upon his deepest desires and motivations; to realise the dream of fulfillment Patty encapsulates - "... Patty was my romantic hope ..." (203) - but also, ultimately, his deep-seated cowardice by which he is prevented from achieving his dream of fulfillment. For Wardley, it is easier to kill Patty Lareine than to match her cunning and cruelty; so, too, it is easier to kill himself than to endure the ridicule of a public trial. For Tim, however, Wardley's death brings him to a level of self-possession that represents the achievement of self-knowledge and self-redemption. For this reason, Tim is able to "at last ... think of the death of Patty with something like a commencement of grief" (204) as the events of the past, nightmarish hours culminating in Wardley's suicide bring Tim face to face with the existential

equations of life and death, as they impinge upon his him personally.

Subsequently, Tim's recollection of the last day spent with Patty is noticeably different in tone to his initial obsessive descriptions of her. His admission to Patty on this last day together, "'I don't feel near anymore. It's as if I don't even have half a half of you'" (205) is important because it occurs at this point in the narrative - Tim is only able to face this truth now that his progression toward self-knowledge and the necessary reclamation of the past has also provided him with the knowledge of his own shortcomings, failures, and, indeed, his own capacity for evil. Tim's pivotal recognition, "For even as I had told Wardley, we had our romantic point of reference. It was the night we met and fornicated like fire dancers and copulated into cornucopias of each other, one night - yes - when we were as happy as Christopher Columbus, for we each discovered America, our country forever divided into two halves" (205) establishes his relationship with Patty Lareine as the dialectical metaphor for the nature of the divided self. For Tim, discovering what it means to be a man in terms of his relationship with Patty is simultaneously the discovery - or admission - of an inner feminine nature. Tim's progression toward self-knowledge in this way is also the discovery of courage to live with the knowledge of such an inner nature, the implicit meaning of the anecdotal title of the novel and given emphasis in his relation to Dougy. In her relationship with Tim, Patty Lareine's discovery of "America, our country forever divided into two halves" is the revelation of a capacity for evil, realised in her relationship with Regency. The various relationships in *Tough Guys Don't*

Dance provide Mailer with the means by which the dialectical structuring is given form, but the context for the dialectical structuring is, of course, America. Mailer's own dual fascination with, yet disgust at the peculiarly idiosyncratic American culture focuses his conviction of a deep-seated American schizophrenia, realised in *Tough Guys Don't Dance* in the figure of Big Stoop, "one of our fundamental American madmen: he could orgy on Saturday and baptize on Sunday".(205)

Mailer's consistent thematic preoccupation is the individual effort at acquiring balance - one recalls Dougy's theory: "I figure it this way: either your body goes crazy, or your mind. Cancer is the cure for schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is the cure for cancer".(158-159) The effort of the heroic individual, in Mailer's terms, is to acquire the balance necessary to defeat both cancer and schizophrenia. Tim desires the "answers to a couple of questions" before he can completely embrace his new relationship with Madeleine; in response to her question, "for peace of mind?", he replies, "To keep from going crazy".(210) Similarly, Dougy's remission from the cancer eating away at his body is vindication of the courage he has affirmed in undertaking the dreadful task of burying the corpses at sea. In both instances Mailer's point is that the two men have acquired (the emphasis upon the effort required) balance of their contrary urges - in Tim's case, the divided nature is expressed as the feminine nature battling a macho self-image; in Dougy's case, the knowledge of courage against acquiescence to the easy alternative.

Tim's final confrontation with Regency extends and delineates the thematic structuring. Mailer hints at the

dialectical nature of Tim's self-perception as it is given expression in his relationship with Dougy: "My father's mouth, however, was tight. He was not pleased with me. I could see wher it would be a disadvantage to have him there. Regency would not be divided so much as myself. Alone with Alvin, I would not have cared if he said 'Fuck you' all night long".(213) Mailer's focus at this point, however, is to provide Tim with the metaphoric equivalent of the Monument episode in order to delineate the distance Tim has come toward self knowledge and self redemption through the acquisition of courage. Regency, like Wardley, does not exist in a one-dimensional relationship with Tim (that is, to provide the metaphoric other to Tim's self-perception) but is himself a complex amalgam of qualities both positive (Regency's espousal of hall-mark Mailer philosophies of God and karma must be viewed as positive in order to make sense of the novel in terms of Mailer's self-referential philosophy, his moral universe) as well as negative (the rigid totality of his views on homosexuals, his affinity to a devilish principle of evil).⁴³ In confronting Regency at this point, Tim is faced with both the "enforcer and ... the maniac" (215) - the admission, on Regency's part, of a desire for Devilish power which echoes Barney Kelly's own testament, "Well, for all we know, I am a solicitor for the Devil'".⁴⁴

Regency's barely contained violence as he, too, comes to grips with the nightmarish events centering upon Patty's and Jessica's deaths, recalls Mailer's testament in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* regarding the relationship between illness (both mental and physical) and one's suppressed impulses:

If civilization has made modern man a natural schizophrenic (since he does not know at the very center of his deliberations whether to trust his machines or the imperfect impressions still afforded him by his distorted senses ...) the average man is a suicide in relation to his schizophrenia. He will suppress his impulses and die eventually of cancer, overt madness, nicotine poisoning, heart attack, or the complications of a chest cold. It is that minority - cop and crook - which seeks issue for violence who now attract our attention. ... The cop tries to solve his violence by blanketing it with a uniform. That is virtually a commonplace, but it explains why cops will put up with poor salary, public dislike, uncomfortable working conditions and a general sense of bad conscience. They know they are lucky; they know they are getting away with a successful solution to the criminality they can taste in their blood.⁴⁵

Regency's criminality is, however, offset by a prodigious suppression of violence which, in turn, drives him to a point of madness - itself the expression of an inability to acquire the necessary balance of the inner dialectical contradictions characterising Regency's courageous effort at self-determination as well as his desire for manipulative power.

Regency's determination to "finalize" his fate with that of Patty (223) is both the expression of courage, as well as abdication to the Devil within Mailer's moral universe. Just as one recalls that "... people can win at love only when they are ready to lose everything they bring to it of ego, position or identity" and one recognises, along with Tim, that Regency "had been ready to die for (Patty), not (Tim); (223) one recalls also, that Patty, like Deborah Kelly, is characterised in terms of her close affinity to a principle of Devilish evil.⁴⁶ In what may be Tim's most pivotal admission, he delineates a distinction between himself and Patty whereby his own acquisition of balance of inner contraries is the necessary ballast against both chaos and convention: "Patty, like me, had lived for years on such an edge.

With anger such as ours, murder - most terrifying to say - could prove the cure for all the rest".(223) Whereas Patty's murder of Jessica is the expression of jealous rage and the desire for ultimate power over another (as Tim/Mailer leads us to surmise)⁴⁷, Tim's experience throughout *Tough Guys Don't Dance* is the existential self-examination of the same capacity for murder, here given expression in this admission. Patty's death is chaotic: the chain of events which culminate in her death are arbitrarily connected, essentially only through Tim's involvement with all the major players. In Mailer's terms, her death lacks form, because it bears no relation to the context of surrounding and ensuing events, and is, in fact, a function of what Wardley terms her "crassness".(203)

The novel's end confirms Mailer's thematic and dialectical structuring in terms of Tim's ultimate self-reclamation through the acquisition of love and courage. The experience of existentially confronting inner compromise and cowardice, as well as the necessity of coming to terms with the question of manhood provides the context for a metaphoric descent to the nightmarish world of murder and mayhem - the promise implicit in the Monument episode. In coming face to face with the dreadful implications of formlessness and chaos, encapsulated by Stodie and Harpo and Wardley's and Patty's deaths; as well as the sheer barbarism and lust for power characterising Nissen and Regency, Tim acquires equilibrium through self-discovery. Tim virtually re-creates himself through the re-claimed past: the discovery, and determination to retain love and courage in his relationships with both his father and Madeleine is expressed by Tim in the

balanced terms of newly-acquired self-knowledge, the form of his being:

And I? Well, I am so compromised by so many acts that I must try to write my way out of the internal prison of my nerves, my guilts and my deep-rooted spiritual debts. Yet I would take the chance again. In truth, it is not all bad. Madeleine and I sleep for hours with our arms around each other. I live within the fold of her deed, not uncomfortable and not insecure, deeply attached to her and aware that all my present stability of mind rests on the firm foundation of a mortal crime. (228)

SECTION 2

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ All references to the major text under discussion (*An American Dream*, *Why Are We in Vietnam?* and *Tough Guys Don't Dance*) are given in parentheses following the quotation.
- ² Leo Bersani, "The Interpretation of Dreams", originally appeared in *Partisan Review*, Fall, 1965, reprinted in *Lucid*, v.pp. 175-176.
- ³ *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 285.
- ⁴ *The Prisoner of Sex*, p. 127.
- ⁵ One recalls the setting for *The Deer Park: a Play - Hell*, but where the inhabitants are unaware of their damnation: in Mailer's schema, a state of being far more reprehensible than the realisation of one's damnation.
- ⁶ *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, p. 182.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 146.
- ⁸ See *Advertisements for Myself*, pp. 281-283.
- ⁹ Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edwards, *Backgrounds of American Literary Thought*, 3rd. edn., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974, pp. 515-516.
- ¹⁰ *The Presidential Papers*, p. 52.
- ¹¹ Poirier, p. 130.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 152.
- ¹³ See, for example, Mailer's association between technology, electricity and evil - in *Of a Fire on the Moon*, pp. 4, 103; *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, pp. 93, 135, 138, 213.
- ¹⁴ *Of a Fire on the Moon*, p. 103.
- ¹⁵ *The Prisoner of Sex*, p. 113.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- ²⁰ This is repeated from pp. 187 ff. See, especially, p. 195 - it is reasonable to say that Mailer's references to "their" liver, etc., denotes the achievement of dialectical equilibrium,

- commensurate with the harmony and authenticity experienced by D.J. and Tex in isolation from the hunting group.
- 21 *An American Dream*, p. 210.
 - 22 *Pieces and Pontifications*, v. *Pontifications*, p. 20.
 - 23 Karen Jaehne, "Mailer's Minuet", *Film Comment*, August, 1987, p. 13.
 - 24 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 190.
 - 25 Karen Jaehne, p. 17.
 - 26 Jennifer L. Farbar, p. 244.
 - 27 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 39.
 - 28 *The Prisoner of Sex*, p. 222.
 - 29 See also, *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, pp. 162, 179, 118, 127, 132.
 - 30 *The Presidential Papers*, p. 318.
 - 31 See *The Presidential Papers*, "On Waste", especially pp. 298-326.
 - 32 See also *The Presidential Papers*, p. 194.
 - 33 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
 - 34 Poirier, p. 152.
 - 35 Compare Regency's and Barney Kelly's political power-mongering: *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, p. 107; and *An American Dream*, pp. 206-207.
 - 36 *An American Dream*, p. 156.
 - 37 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 279.
 - 38 *An American Dream*, p. 220.
 - 39 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 273.
 - 40 Even Mailer's pseudo-autobiography of Marilyn Monroe, *Of Women and Their Elegance*, is, essentially, an artful account of a life, betraying the author's obsession both with his subject and with his theme - the gulf in perception between man and woman. The book is, itself, Mailer's attempt to bridge that gap.
 - 41 See *An American Dream*, pp. 203 ff.
 - 42 *An American Dream*, p. 210.
 - 43 Mailer's self-referential philosophy aligns "non-spiritual" drug use (i.e. to gain power or money) with the Devil, "whose joy is to waste substance".

44 *An American Dream*, p. 221.

45 *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, pp. 168-169.

46 See, for example, *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, pp. 36, 39-40.

47 In *Advertisements for Myself*, Mailer declares that he hates "people who have power and no compassion, that is, no simple human understanding" (p. 230): Mailer's point of demarcation between Patty, for whom this applies, and Tim, whose repeated phrase, "Patty shot Jessica. Patty shot Jessica" (p. 222) underscores his shock at the brutality of the act.

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