

## Conference 2006

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### Norman Mailer Society conference panelist bios and abstracts

**Friday, October 13 @ 10:00 AM- 11:30, Panel #1 A: “The Shits Are Killing Us”**

**Moderator: Robert Begiebing**

**1. John Buffalo Mailer** is an actor, playwright, and journalist. A founding member of Back House Productions, he is author of the plays *Crazy Eyes* and *Hello Herman*. In 2006 he published with his father Norman Mailer *The Big Empty: Dialogues on Politics, Sex, God, Boxing, Morality, Myth, Poker, and Bad Conscience in America*.

#### **Norman Mailer Across the Generations**

“Because the younger generations are more attuned to learning from film, television, and the Internet, rather than from history books or the words of our grandparents, our understanding of the past is more easily manipulated by the increasingly sophisticated political and media marketing technologies used by those who hold power today. This is why it is so important that we have these conversations with the older generations . . . .,” John Mailer wrote in *The Big Empty*. John and co-author Norman went on the road and on TV with their book during 2006 for the very purpose of starting a dialogue across the generations. It was a striking way of getting the word out about Norman Mailer’s long-held views about politics and power in twentieth century America and the relevance of those views for the twenty-first. John will discuss their experience getting the word out—the reactions and the possibilities of continuing the intergenerational conversation.

**2. Michael Chaiken** is the Program Director for Film at The Maysles Institute in Harlem. He is editor of *Arthur Penn: Interviews* (University Press of Mississippi) and co-editor, along with Paul Cronin, of *Be Sand, Not Oil: The Uncollected Writings of Amos Vogel*. He has recently organized nationally touring retrospectives of the films of Luc Moullet and Peter Whitehead.

#### **Maidstone: Getting the DVDs Out**

Mailer's films are generally unavailable to the public, but this situation could be remedied by the technology and accessibility of DVDs. One example is the forthcoming DVD version of Mailer *Maidstone*, which Chaiken is in the process of producing along with Michael Mailer for the highly acclaimed Criterion DVD label. This presentation will discuss the feasibility of getting Mailer's films on DVD and increasing their availability to both scholars and a broad cross section of the reading and film-watching public.

**3. Gerald R. Lucas** is an Assistant Professor of English at Macon State College. His interests and teaching include contemporary fiction, new media studies, and technological literacy. He is currently co-editing an anthology of speculative fiction and non-fiction and authoring an article on teaching literature online.

#### **A Fine Time: Mailer Studies in the New Century**

Norman Mailer's critiques of technology are well-known: that it destroys humanity's creativity and makes the masses ripe for the monopolist's and tyrant's control. Yet, in order for Mailer Studies — and the humanities in general — to remain viable and healthy in this new century, certain technologies should be adopted to augment the conversation for the current generation of Mailer scholars while also enticing a new generation of enthusiasts into Mailer's work. This might be done by promoting not only his literary merits, but also the cultural personality, including making his films more widely available and streaming multimedia bits from his public appearances — essentially making available all aspects of Mailer that would be useful to those just beginning and those who have been studying him for years. This presentation will address several current trends in networked discourse, including streaming content (iPod video and audio) and community submissions (podcasts, blogs, and wikis), that could lead to a "hyperlocalization" of the Mailer community and bolster the community in a way that will (hopefully) keep even the Luddites comfortable.

**Friday, October 13 @ 11:45 AM- 12:45 PM, Panel #1 B: “The Shits Are Killing Us”**

**Moderator: J. Michael Lennon**

**1. Cathy Henderson** is Associate Director for Exhibitions and Education, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. She holds a Master’s degree in Library and Information Science from the University of Texas and is the author of papers on conservation issues, copyrights management, library outreach, and literary publishing. She has curated Ransom Center exhibitions on Paul Bowles, American and British theater, Alfred A. Knopf Inc., and Modernism.

**2. Richard W. Oram** is Associate Director & Librarian, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. He holds a Ph.D. in English from Cornell University and is the author of articles and papers on the history of special collections and literary publishing, as well as Victorian and modern literature. He has curated Ransom Center exhibitions on Oscar Wilde, Knopf, Inc., Evelyn Waugh, and other literary subjects.

**3. J. Michael Lennon** is Mr. Mailer’s archivist and Emeritus Professor of English at Wilkes University, where he continues to teach. He has published widely on Mailer, including (with Donna Pedro Lennon) *Norman Mailer: Works and Days* (2000), and edited several of Mailer’s works, including *Pontifications* (1982) and *The Spooky Art* (2005). Currently, he is editing Mailer’s letters, to be published by Random House in 2007, and is president of the Society.

**Norman Mailer on Display: Exhibiting a Life**

Recognizing that only a few members of the Society will be able to attend the Harry Ransom Center’s exhibition “Norman Mailer and American Culture” (September 2006-January 2007) or the accompanying Flair Symposium (December 2006) at The University of Texas at Austin, the presenters propose to bring a portion of the show to Provincetown. First, some background on the exhibition. In May 2005, with Norman Mailer in attendance, the Ransom Center announced that it had acquired the entire Mailer archive, including autograph and typescript versions of over 40 books, his voluminous correspondence with important political and literary figures which documents his engagement in significant issues of the later twentieth century. Although the materials, filling over 900 document cases, are still being processed, the curators

decided to respond to public enthusiasm about the acquisition. The result is a 200-item exhibition based on the Mailer archive and other historical resources at the Center.

The focus of our talk will be a PowerPoint digital presentation, with commentary, of 20-25 representative items from the exhibition, which centers on topics such as Mailer's "Eisenhower-era journey into the underground," the Vietnam War, Mailer's response to feminism, capital punishment, his interest in boxing, and his friends and foes. In keeping with the theme of this year's NMS conference, the presenters will examine the challenges they faced in interpreting Mailer and the events of the period 1950-1980 to a college-age audience (and their elders) using original documents. The curators set out to emphasize striking visual presentation, audio-visual exhibits, and a timeline of the era as aids in making Mailer's political-social stances meaningful to the "Millennial" generation.

**Saturday, Oct. 14 @ 9:00-10:30 AM: Panel #2: *An American Dream***

**Moderator: Raymond Vince**

**1. Kevin Power** is in the second year of a PhD on the work of Norman Mailer and Gore Vidal at University College, Dublin, where he also received his MA.

**Americanizing Kierkegaard: Mailer's Existentialism and the Politics of Form in *An American Dream***

In *An American Dream* (1963), Norman Mailer draws on the implausibilities of the popular thriller form in order to express the hidden cultural logic of 1960s America – a logic that bears a striking resemblance to the metaphysical convictions of Norman Mailer, and that finds expression in murder, attempted suicide, conspiracy, and violence. The novel is Mailer's vision of a dream-America in which Stephen Rojack becomes emblematic of all American hunter-pioneers or frontiersmen, re-enacting the fantasy of transcendence that exists at the core of American mythopoesis. The book's title also articulates Mailer's visionary imperative – Stephen Rojack's odyssey is a uniquely *American* dream. Mailer seems to imply that when America dreams, it dreams Rojack, or someone very much like him. In his ascension through the American military, political, and media establishments, through murder and sexual violence, into fugitivehood and escape, Stephen Rojack articulates America's dream of its own origins in violence and transgression. Rojack's American pilgrimage, his

journey towards transcendence, is initiated by a ritualistic act of violence – the killing of his wife. Building upon this, *An American Dream* generates a politics of form: Rojack's pilgrimage is mirrored in the progressive stages of narrative closure achieved as the chapters accumulate.

Jean Radford, in her book on Mailer, observes that Rojack “takes this thesis out of the classroom and into his (dream) life.” In a similar way, Mailer enacts this thesis through the narrative of his book. Radford also remarks upon the novel's “allegorized but distinctively American world”, and traces the novel's origins to the literary tradition of the dream-vision. However, the book also engages with quasi-existentialist ideas of the possibilities and the difficulties of freedom; Mailer has often claimed the 20th Century European existentialists among his literary and philosophical forebears, but I will argue *An American Dream* derives more convincingly from the theologically-concerned proto-existentialism of Kierkegaard. Indeed, in terms of its religious thematic, *An American Dream* can usefully be thought in Kierkegaardian terms. I will attempt to situate *An American Dream* within these terms, and in terms of its position with Mailer's *oeuvre* as a whole.

**2. Anna Beskin** is currently pursuing a Master's in English Literature as well as a Graduate Certificate in Comparative Literature at the University of South Florida. Her areas of interest include Modern and Post-Modern literature. After the completion of her M.A. degree she plans to pursue her studies and attain a PhD in English Literature. Anna currently serves as the Vice President of English Graduate Student Association and looks forward to presenting at the Hemingway Conference in Spain this summer.

### **The Psychic Outlaw and the Power Structure in Norman Mailer's *An American Dream***

Norman Mailer's *An American Dream* is about the disenchantment, the loss of innocence, and the alienation of the American people from the promised dream. By the time Mailer wrote this book, whatever naiveté and optimism that had fueled the American Dream in prior decades was gone; there had been two world wars, the holocaust, the detonation of an atom bomb, and the United States' entry into the Vietnam War. Hence, Stephen Rojack becomes a microcosmic representation of the failed dream as a whole. Despite his success in traditionally masculine arenas such as war, politics, academia, and television, Rojack feels loveless, fragmented, and suicidal. His marriage has failed and he finds himself unable to fit into the regimented and hypocritical

world. His absolute despair and finally the murder of his wife are emblematic of the violence and madness of the 1960s. The instability of the power structure leads to the fragmentation of the family, symbolic of the dissolution of the American people with the dream. No one plays the part they are supposed to. There is no love in a marriage (Rojack and Deborah); there is no nurture between a mother and child (Deborah and her Deirdre); and there is no protection from incest between a father and a daughter (Oswald Kelley and Deborah); in effect, there are no boundaries. The American Dream is crumbling. In this paper, I will focus upon the ways Mailer uses Rojack as his quintessential "Psychic Outlaw" to counteract alienation, despair, and regimentation, as well as represent the macrocosmic power shift in American culture from mainstream to counterculture.

**3. Keith Cavado** is a doctoral student at the University of South Florida. His areas of concentration are film theory and pedagogy, modernism, and Nineteenth-Century British and American literature. He teaches Film, Modern American literature, World literature, Introduction to Literature, and Composition at several higher education campuses in the Tampa/St. Petersburg area. Keith holds degrees in English (B.A.) from the University of Mary Washington and Literature (M.A.) from Virginia Commonwealth University. He draws upon his academic experience as an Adjunct Instructor and his professional experience as a Senior Editor in business publications both in and out of the classroom.

### **The Functioning and Significance of the Olfactory Sense in *An American Dream***

One of the standard techniques of fiction is the use of concrete sensory impressions to convey a character's external experiences and/or internal memories, associations, or "life." In more sophisticated literature, the way an author renders a character's subjective impressions can reveal a great deal about the character as well as his or her particular philosophical orientation and way of "seeing" (or understanding) the world. The narrator of Norman Mailer's *An American Dream* (1964), Stephen Rojack, is not an unusual character in this sense. He attempts to make sense of his experiences through carefully rendered visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, and olfactory impressions or details. However, it is in the use of the olfactory sense that *An American Dream* stands apart from less sophisticated fiction. The sense of smell functions not only for the purpose of realism – as a way for the narrator to describe or render his reality – but significantly reflects his philosophical orientation and way of seeing (and understanding)

the world. In other words, the sense of smell in the novel functions not merely as a perceptual device but also constructs an epistemological framework upon which the entire novel revolves. We can explore and better understand Stephen Rojack's character and underlying philosophical orientation by analyzing key passages in *An American Dream* that directly treat the olfactory sense. An analysis of these passages will significantly illuminate not only Rojack's character but also the literary artistry of one of Mailer's best if most undervalued fictions.

**Oct. 14 @ 9:00-10:30 AM, Panel #3: The Artist as Citizen**

**Moderator: Debbie McLeod**

**1. Brian J. McDonald** holds a Ph.D in English literature from the University of Edinburgh. His interests include post-war American and British fiction and exploring the relationship between imaginative literature and political philosophy. Brian's current research considers how issues and debates in the area of comparative constitutionalism can yield helpful conceptual tools for the study of trans-Atlantic literary cultures. He lives and works in Princeton, NJ.

**“So political and so primitive”: Norman Mailer's Existential Theory of Citizenship**

Since 1948, the work of Norman Mailer has offered such unique and compelling commentary on the defining developments of contemporary American social and political life that, as Christopher Hitchens writes, “the politics of Norman Mailer have conventionally been evaluated more as a personal register of the American zeitgeist, and less as owing any debt or duty to ideology.” Despite his flirtations with more radical political ideas, Mailer has consistently demonstrated a strong and passionate commitment to the principal concerns of American liberal democratic citizenship, a commitment that has shaped his political dissidence and helped to define the thematic concerns of his fiction. Mailer's dedication to what is really a rather traditional liberal democratic idea of America cohabitates in Mailer's writing with his struggle to understand his country existentially, which for him usually means in terms of power and self-creation. Difficult to define exactly, the term “existential,” as used by Mailer, implies more of an attitude than a philosophy. This attitude is best described as the aura that surrounds a personality with the courage and vitality to recognize the freedom inherent in existence and exercise it through action, risk, and constant self-creation. That a

nation can possess such an attitude, and express a personality capable of exercising existential freedom in this manner, is a belief that radiates in all of Mailer's musings on American politics.

It is on these terms that Mailer engages with the perpetual dilemma of liberal democracy—the reconciliation of the democratic demand for political organization (questions of political and state power) with the liberal concern for the freedom of the individual (questions of political action and subjectivity). What keeps the on-going tension between the demands of a democratic state and those of existential subjectivity productive, for Mailer, is the crucial correlation that emerges between democratic participation and existential action. Quite simply, for Mailer, citizenship in a democracy bears inescapable existential implications. My paper explores the formal and theoretical elements which underlie Mailer's understanding of the nature of political action and its function in American democracy through a close reading of *The Armies of the Night*, the work in which Mailer most substantially develops and dramatizes his “theory of citizenship.”

**2. Marc Triplett** is a lawyer with a criminal defense trial and appellate practice. He is a 1974 graduate of the University of Delaware (B.A.), and received his J.D. from Cumberland School of Law, Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama, in 1977. Mr. Triplett is a lifetime member of the Norman Mailer Society and has maintained an interest in Mailer's works since first reading **The Armies of the Night** in 1968.

### **An “Existential Errand:” Norman Mailer's Unique Campaign for Mayor of New York**

It was the year of Woodstock, the Apollo 11 Moon landing, “Midnight Cowboy,” and Rowan and Martin's “Laugh In.” It was the year of renewed escalation of the Vietnam War. It was the year that the Mets won the World Series and the Jets won the Super Bowl. And in 1969 Norman Mailer ran his campaign to become New York's Mayor and to turn it into a City-State. Why did he do it? As a writer, Norman Mailer was at the top of his game. In March 1969, he received both the National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize for *The Armies of the Night*. A new major project about the upcoming Apollo moon landing was on the horizon. The last thing Norman Mailer needed was a grueling political campaign that would certainly turn him into a veritable pin cushion for the critical New York and national media. Mailer was a commentator who was manifestly in touch with the times. His political analysis was widely quoted and respected. For Mailer, the time was right to test his ideas in his city, which he saw as suffering as never

before. After considering, but rejecting, the possibility of endorsing another Democratic candidate, Mailer was persuaded by Jack Newfield and others to enter the race himself. He would combine his belief in government as a benign democratic institution with the return of power to the neighborhoods. His vision was of a hip left-right coalition, combining “Free Huey Newton” with “End Fluoridation.” The campaign’s slogan became “No More Bullshit.” Norman Mailer’s running mate and candidate for city controller was Jimmy Breslin, the brash columnist whose connection with average New Yorkers imperfectly balanced Mailer’s cerebral, if sometimes pugnacious style. Together they forged a campaign with ideas so resonant that John Lindsay, the ultimate winner of the general election, requested their position papers. Mailer-Breslin positions included mandatory police residency in neighborhoods, conversion of Coney Island to “Las Vegas East,” “Sweet Sunday,” a monthly day of no electricity use in the city, and, of course, the establishment of New York City as the 51st State. This paper and presentation will discuss the genesis of the campaign, its participants, its driving issues and its significance to any discussion of the “Political Mailer.”

**3. Mantra Roy** is a PhD student at the University of South Florida. Coming from India, she is interested to examine the presence of discrimination both in her country and in the United States. In her Dissertation she intends to explore parallels between literatures of marginality, especially between Dalit literature in India and African American literature in the United States.

### **The Political Mailer and the Hipster in *The White Negro***

Growing up in the crowded streets of Crown Heights in New York during the Depression and then making it to Harvard by sheer talent, Norman Mailer was never far from politics. The politics of survival in competitive neighborhoods and among elite peers or ‘WASPS’ on campus, the experience of WWII as a member of the army in the 1940s, and, finally, the whole culture of sex and drugs in the 1950s occupied the young, talented, and already-famous-at-25 American writer. His *The White Negro* examines race relations in the 1950s and illustrates how the hipster and the Negro shared similar experiences by being the pariahs of society. Though the essay was not received well by one and all, he discusses the politics of social relations between races in the 1950s, and, I believe, he underlines the political and social factors that made the black experience so unique at the time. I shall explore this particularly in the context of the 50’s that saw the declaration of racial segregation as unconstitutional. Moreover,

anti-establishment feelings spread with the rising threat of Communism, McCarthyism, and the rise of the beatniks. The hipster of the beat generation was a downwardly mobile social group who wanted to identify with the middle class Negro; I argue Mailer is offering the hipster as a step toward bridging the gap between the races in an otherwise white-supremacist society during a time when the threat of Communism, the Cold War with the then USSR, and unequal race relations were grim realities in the era's excitement of the first U.S. satellite, the Polio vaccine, the construction of the highway system, and rock 'n roll music.

**Oct. 14 @ 10:45-12:15 AM, Panel #4: Women, American Decadence, and Politics**

**Moderator: Christopher Busa**

**1. Constance E. Holmes** is a Ph.D student at the University of South Florida. A former attorney, she concentrates in Modern and Contemporary Literature and Film with special interest in legal rhetoric, depiction of legal events and legal issues in literature and film. In her dissertation she analyzes these issues in novels by Dreiser, Nabokov, Mailer, and others.

**Mailer and Marilyn: Politics, Culture, and Artifice**

Norman Mailer wrote about Marilyn Monroe in *Marilyn: A Biography*, as well as in *Women of Elegance*. Both works are creative interpretations of factual events woven into narrative formats that are as distinctive formally as they are entertaining. In these works Mailer develops ideas about the political milieu of the Sixties as well as the cultural moods of American Society at that time by using Marilyn as a focus and springboard from which to sustain narrative commentary and explore complex connections created from factoids and reported material. Mailer's "creative" work resonates as only fiction can, giving the reader interpretive scenarios that, while based on factual material, present events rhetorically for political and cultural evaluation rather than as "news." Marilyn's very existence and America's love affair with her provoke Mailer to expend formidable talent on her as icon, symbol, and overarching metaphor, always through Mailer's idiosyncratic style and use of content. Thus, he presents a political and cultural painting using the most notorious woman of the times, reflecting and transcending her image and persona through loose biography and speculative rhetoric ascribed to her to create his own brand of identity exploration, which remain as a tribute to her as well as a scathing look at the Sixties and beyond.

**2. Debbie McLeod** is a master's student at the University of South Florida and instructor of English Composition and Grammar. Her primary areas of interest are Twentieth-Century American and British literature, and film. Her thesis work examines Decadent/Symbolist influence on the treatment of beauty and transcendence in works by Vladimir Nabokov and Oscar Wilde.

**Decadent Mailer: A Decadent/Symbolist Reading of Norman Mailer's *The Deer Park***

An early entry in Norman Mailer's political expression appears in his 1959 play *The Deer Park*, a work based on his earlier novel. With atom bombs exploding in the background, the play's figures meander their way through a Cold War Babylon, the Hollywood descendant of industrialized Europe and pagan Rome. Audiences must decide, however, which of Mailer's characters deserves to be called Babylon's new Whore: Marion's women, the bomb-dropping WWII flyer, the movie makers, or the director called before the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Like the Decadents of nineteenth-century Europe, Mailer's characters withdraw from a corrupt and alienating society into a perverse world of malevolent sexuality. The play's hero, Sergius O'Shaugnessy, spends his own "Season in Hell," to borrow Symbolist poet Rimbaud's title, searching through the fragments of his memory for "truth." He provides glimpses of post-war Hollywood that reflect the Decadent/Symbolist tradition in its hedonism, pessimism, prostitution, homosexuality, "existential malaise," and artificiality. My paper examines *The Deer Park* from the theoretical perspective of the Decadent/Symbolist tradition. From Marion's desire to escape to Africa, "Like Rimbaud, baby," to the perverse cripples in Eitel's script, Mailer's play of "bad manners and bad morals" presents a decadent America that questions the morality of his country in the burgeoning Cold War. I will examine how this portrayal of decadence, appearing post-World War II and pre-Vietnam, provides a political commentary on 1950s America.

**3. Allen Ahearn** is the owner, with his wife Pat, of the Quill & Brush bookstore, specializing in collectible first editions. They are also the authors of two books, used by most dealers and collectors as reference works, *Book Collecting 2000* and *Collected Books 2002*. Ahearn was a contracting officer in the 1960s working on all Navy aircraft and engine programs; an advisor in the 1970s, to the Deputy Secretary of Defense for R&D on contracting,

program management and cost estimating; and is, as a life-long Washingtonian, a political junkie.

### **Reflections on Mailer's Politics from a Political Junkie**

**Saturday, October 14, 10:45AM- 12:15 PM, Panel # 5: Mailer's Political Challenge**

**Moderator: Philip H. Bufithis**

**1. S. A. McLaughlin** first became interested in Mailer's works while studying as an undergraduate with J. Michael Lennon at Wilkes University. Currently, she is a graduate student in the department of English, General Literature, & Rhetoric at Binghamton University (SUNY). After completing her master's degree, she plans to enter a PhD program and continue her literary studies. She is also a writer of poetry and fiction, and she resides in Binghamton, NY and Conyngham, PA.

### **Mr. Mailer Takes on Washington: Wars Cold and Hot, As Well As Cultural**

It is fair to say that there are two opposing views of what is the potential political responsibility of the artist that are at war with each other at this moment of our contemporary age. Some may choose to criticize Mailer for being such a politically involved writer—those who would do so belong to the camps of the literary community that would suggest that a “serious” author must be careful to avoid becoming distracted by political involvement and social activism, activities that supposedly are unproductive and that take time away from the practice of the literary craft. Through his actions and his political writings, Mister Mailer bears witness to the opposing view—that the novelist or poet cannot shut himself away in an ivory tower for the sake of his art, but must actively engage his culture, striving with it and, if need be, against it. He must record his observations and emotions as he takes part in the throes and turmoil of his civilization. This is eloquently evidenced in Mailer's many works that directly and indirectly engage the issues generated by Cold War and post-Cold War politics and the rise of American imperialism—such as the monumental *Armies of the Night*, and his stirring coverage of the events surrounding the Democratic National Convention during the pivotal year of 1968 as related in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*.

Mailer's writings have often taken on the air of the jeremiad, as he warns us against the oppressive and

repressive elements that move within the power structures of corporate America, the military, and the government—and the utilization of technology as an agent of homogenization and the hegemonic.

Mister Mailer has also made a study of many of our most powerful politicians throughout the course of his long and continuing career, examining the effects of power on a personality, and detailing the his perceptions of the characteristics of the personalities who wield it. Mailer has written commentary on the administrations of presidents from Kennedy to Nixon, Carter to Reagan, as well as Clinton. He has written of George Herbert Walker Bush and George W. Bush, and most recently he has taken on the American imperialist drive in its most recent incarnation in *Why Are We At War?* Thus we see that Mailer continues to feel the need to challenge the powers that be and their actions—attempting to reveal them for what they are, holding them accountable, in the hopes that America can become better, can rise above baser, more destructive forces at work and at war within our society.

**2. Jeffrey Severs** has an MFA in fiction from the Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas and is completing a PhD in American literature at Harvard University. His work on Mailer is part of a dissertation on prophecies of a totalitarian America in postwar U.S. fiction.

### **Voice and Totalitarian Environment in *Why Are We In Vietnam?***

In *The Presidential Papers* and *Cannibals and Christians*, Mailer broadened his definition of American totalitarianism's effects to include "a dull, moral, abstract force" enveloping all ideologies; a new monotonous, faceless architecture that "obliterates the past" and all historical consciousness; and any homogenizing "impulse... to betray form, to abstract form, until the meanings in its creation are lost" and an "aesthetic desert" results. No longer tied down to General Cummings' claims about the military-industrial complex of the future, Mailer portrayed this newly pervasive force's impact in all of culture, which had become a "gelatin of totalitarian environment" that dulled every American's instincts and underscored the *total* in its name. How to counteract this "ocean of plague"? Why not create its ideal rival, a narratorial voice that was, in its own way, total? Mailer's description of the gelatin totalitarian environment sounds much like D.J.'s claims, in *Why are We in Vietnam?*, about his own ghostly

pervasiveness. This paper seizes on this key parallel to illustrate the mutually influential (and mutually energizing) relationship between Mailer's re-theorized enemy and the greatest formal ambitions of his fiction-writing. I read D.J. for both his self-aggrandizing wishes and the self-critique Mailer embeds in their form, that victim of totalitarianism that this anti-totalitarian novel never lets its reader forget.

Through D.J.'s schizoid nature my paper tries to explain why Mailer seized on form and aesthetics as the most basic victims of totalitarianism, ultimately suggesting that, in this period, American totalitarianism went from being the great *bete noir* of Mailer's art to become, counter-intuitively, a kind of muse, a "large and liberal theme" akin to Melville's whale. To Mailer's evolving imagination, totalitarianism had the quality of contaminated air or some other invisible medium. A grave danger, for sure – but also a staged piece of authorial good luck: for such a totalitarianism called forth from Mailer's writing a similarly covert (but also total) response, one on the level of his own medium's innate movements, the syntactic flow whose "knots and quirks" could upset for his readers the roundedness of form and temporality on which this totalitarianism depended.

**3. Phillip Sipiora** is Professor of English at the University of South Florida, where he has taught twentieth-century literature and film since coming to USF from the University of Texas in 1985. He is the author or editor of three books, two dozen scholarly essays, and has lectured nationally and internationally on modern and contemporary American Writers.

### **The Velvet Fist: Norman Mailer and the Art of Political Rhetoric**

Norman Mailer has long been recognized as one of America's finest prose stylists, as he seamlessly crosses back and forth between the frontiers and fringes of fiction and non-fiction. Indeed, Mailer's *Armies of the Night* (history as novel/novel as history) is one of the early exemplars of the "historical novel" and has played a significant role in spawning a new generation of literary form. *Armies of the Night* is clearly explicitly political discourse revealing an emphatically "Political Mailer." Mailer's complex tapestry of personal and political reporting functions as symbolic gestures representing the deepening crisis in American society, one that traverses political, cultural, social, and racial borders and margins, all within a swirl of discourse

form(s). In my presentation I will examine the specific rhetorical techniques that inform, I believe, this strategic work. More specifically, I will explore Mailer's use of *ethos* as a strategic device that both distances him and embraces him to his various audiences. Mailer's ethic of *ethos* is a complex one derived from perceived relationships (*eunoia*) moral positioning (*ethos*), and common sense (*phronesis*).

**Saturday, October 14, 10:45 AM- 12:15 PM, Panel # 6: Political Development Reflected in Mailer's Work**

**Moderator: Barry H. Leeds**

**1. Marisa Iglesias** is a student at the University of South Florida, where she is working on her Master's degree in Literature, focusing on American 20th Century Authors. She has a forthcoming publication in Banyan Literary Magazine, and is an active member in the English Graduate Student Association

**Cherry and Jill: The Influence of the Counter-Culture in Mailer's *An American Dream* and Updike's *Rabbit Redux***

I intend to compare the relationships between Rojack and Cherry in Norman Mailer's *An American Dream* and Rabbit and Jill in John Updike's *Rabbit Redux*. The two women allow the protagonists a peephole view into another world, which would not have been available to them otherwise. Both Rojack and Rabbit, after separating from their wives, become absorbed by new women who exist to help their lovers transcend a difficult situation, though their lives end tragically. Rojack's relationship with Cherry becomes a possible means of escaping the disillusionment that has overcome him. She, a symbol of hope and love, is his "vision in the desert." In *Rabbit Redux*, Jill, a flower child, introduces Rabbit to a new way of seeing. She speaks of God, beauty, and meaning, and gives Rabbit an opportunity to look through the fog that has clouded him. Both Cherry and Jill are symbolic of the hopefulness in America, and demonstrate that, even in lives as bleak as Rojack and Rabbit's, there is still the desire to attain the elusive "American Dream." The women offer acceptance and new possibilities similar to what the subculture of the 1960s offered America. Mailer and Updike experienced the counter-culture revolution, which promised new possibilities first hand and were left disenchanted with the outcome. I will show how Cherry and Jill are emblematic of

the macrocosmic picture of America's disappointment with itself and the American Dream.

**2. Scott Morrison** is a Post-Baccalaureate Student in the Professional Program for Teacher Certification at Central Connecticut State University and is currently student teaching at Hall High School in West Hartford, CT. He would like to extend thanks to Dr. Barry Leeds for exposing him to Mailer's work and to his wife, Cass, for never being offended by the author's work.

### **In 1968, Norman Mailer Was a Butterfly**

To understand the political Mailer -- Normanus Mailerus Bombasticus -- one need look no further than the insect order Lepidoptera, or butterflies. Through the lens of this working metaphor, one can trace the author's development from the enfant terrible of naturalism to new journalism's raging existentialist. The newly hatched caterpillar that penned *The Naked and the Dead* was a ravenous student of the effects WWII and its spawn, the Cold War, had on the American psyche. Shedding the conventions of his literary predecessors actually put the author into an existential chrysalis -- the "oven of burgeonings" that produced *An American Dream* -- where carnal passions and diabolic politics became the roots of good and evil. Emerging from the cocoon, the pin-striped, bourbon-soaked butterfly winged his way to Washington and proudly exposed the cabals responsible for America's ills chronicled in *The Armies of the Night*.

In this paper I hope to examine Mailer's shift from the nebulous studies of evil explored through the machinations of men like General Cummings and Barney Oswald Kelly to his mature endeavor to combat the plans the military-industrial complex had for America. This paper will also explore the development of the Manichaeon vision that marked the first part of Mailer's career, a vision which led him to opt against fiction in favor of a stylized and subjective journalism to inform America of the crimes going on right before its eyes during the Johnson Administration. Most importantly, this paper seeks to identify some of the reasons for the birth of "The Existentialist."

**3. Barbara St. Clair** is a graduate student in the masters program in creative writing at University of South Florida. She is the winner of the National League of American Pen Women, Frances Buck Sherman Memorial Award, and the Writers Sin Fronteras, Playwriting award. Her fiction and

poetry have been published in *Kalliope*, *Riverwind*, *Illya's Honey* and the *Pike Creek Review* and she is currently completing a novel.

### **The Collapse of Boundaries in *Armies of the Night* and *Of A Fire On The Moon***

If *Armies of the Night* describes the ascendancy of Hip, then *Of A Fire On The Moon* is its dark twin, beset with anxiety, the moon to *Armies'* bright sun. While *Fire* incorporates many of the same tropes as *Armies* and works in many of the same ways, I argue that the event of putting two men on the moon is of far greater import than the carnivalesque march on Washington D.C., and thus the task for the writer far more fearful and complex. I argue further that while both books can be considered expressions of a postmodern sensibility, *Armies* is more an extension of the modernist project, while *Fire*, with its unraveling of the Hipster into something far less stable, represents the postmodernist collapsing of boundaries between mythical and historical, imaginary and realistic, popular and political, producing a work of spectacular beauty and wonder.

**Saturday October 14 at 2:15-3:45, Panel #7: Now and the Future**

#### **7. Moderator: Constance Holmes**

**1. Raymond M. Vince** is an Instructor in English at the University of South Florida, and had previous careers as scientist and priest. Current interests include Medieval & Modernist literature, the Spy Novel, Rhetoric & Story, Bible as Literature, and Heroism in War. He holds a Ph.D. in English from USF, and four degrees in Theology, English, and Scientific Method from the Universities of Bristol and London.

#### **Mapping American Reality through Fiction: Politics & Rhetoric in Mailer's *The Time of Our Time* (1998)**

Mailer's own words, "nearly everything I have written derives from my sense of the value of fiction" (*Time of Our Time* xi). But what is that value? What does fiction *do*? Some believe that fiction can build bridges, create fictive worlds, and help us understand our time and identity. But does serious fiction still retain that noble value today, amid the cynical opportunism of politicians or the empty rhetoric of the 24/7 media? In the light of such calculated misdirection, amid malevolent forces prowling around, can

genuine American democracy even survive, let alone flourish?

Throughout his life, Mailer has labored eloquently with such questions, but the self-reflection inherent in his *The Time of Our Time* seems particularly timely now. Such a focus on these political and rhetorical issues is sorely needed in the waning years of the Bush Administration. According to Mailer, fiction helps us to construct “maps of reality” (xi). For him, that means specifically American reality. But what is that reality – a complex blend of Puritanism, Deism, Politics, and Populism – or something else? And how today does Mailer help us to understand that reality?

**2. Randy Laist** is currently a student at the University of Connecticut, where he’s writing his dissertation on the postmodern transcendentalism of Don DeLillo. He has previously delivered papers on Melville, Pynchon, and DeLillo and is delighted to be returning to Provincetown for a second year as a participant in the Norman Mailer Society conference.

### **Politics as Metaphysics: The Mystical Mailer of Why Are We At War?**

Although his “wonk-stud” persona seems foregrounded throughout Mailer’s discussion in *Why Are We At War?*, the characteristically mystical sensibility of the author of *The Gospel According to the Son* is still very much in evidence. Part interview, part lecture, part discursive collage, *Why Are We At War?* is written in a disarmingly colloquial and off-hand style. Most of the sentiments seem tossed off extemporaneously, and the assertions tend toward the tentativeness of casual discussion rather than being charged with the polemical bite characteristic of this genre of political tract (*i.e.*, of similar post-9/11 ruminations by Chomsky, Vidal, Baudrillard, Zizek, etc). But this style itself is characteristic of Mailer’s enduringly “existential” metaphysics; his intuition – a guiding principle throughout his career – that Truth is in the experience of the perceiving subject rather than in the theory or the objective assessment. The premises of this stylistic device underpin his perception of democracy as a kind of sacred gamble and 9/11 itself as both a kind of theophany, as Dotson Rader describes it in the opening passage of the book, and as a victory for Satan, as Mailer’s own words express it in the book’s final paragraphs. In between, in the shape and substance of

Mailer's political discussion, we are treated to a quasi-mythic depiction of a Manichean war played out in the material concreteness of contemporary events. The answer to Mailer's titular question refers us to a spiritual – rather than economic, geopolitical, or material-historical – etiology. We are engaged, Mailer implies, in a metaphysical war, which is metaphorically immanent in our American hyper-environment.

**3. Philip Morais** was born in Toronto, Canada, in 1977. He studied English and Creative Writing at York University (B.A./2001) and at the University of Windsor (M.A./2005), attending seminars at the University of Toronto's McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology for that latter degree. He has published poetry, journalism, reviews, as well as academic essays in various print and online media.

### **A Revolution in the Consciousness of Our Time: From Cynical Philosophers to Online Bloggers**

In *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957) literary critic Northrop Frye in the "Polemical Introduction" notes: "Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* is a remarkable document, but as a piece of Wordsworthian criticism nobody would give it more than about a B plus." Whether or not this is supportable one fundamental fallacy has been illustrated here: basic confusion between what constitutes grammatical interpretation and rhetorical communication in the trivium. Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, in other words, are *part* of the Lyrical Ballads and *not part* of the commentary that necessarily surrounds any text since it is an aspect of the rhetoric of the writer and must be evaluated in that sense, seen as a literary device. This is particularly important to keep in mind when reading works by Norman Mailer, which often come prefaced by himself. This paper is then an attempt at deciphering formal structure in Mailer's body of work through two *well quoted* (though not necessarily *well interpreted*) sentences in *Advertisements for Myself* (1959), placing emphasis on later publications *Ancient Evenings* (1983) and *The Time of Our Time* (1998). With one sentence I hope to illustrate that what we call "style" is actually an 18th century truncation of the five classical divisions of rhetoric, an English translation of the Latin *elocutio*, whose four corresponding modes are *inventio* (discovery), *dispositio* (arrangement), *memoria* (memory), and *pronunciatio* or *actio* (delivery); in

bringing full rhetorical tradition to attention supposedly problematic issues like metaphysical belief systems become part of the necessary whole and various metamorphoses of voice become identifiable as a type of vortex pattern spiraling in the key publications, recast as a single epic with definite contours. With another sentence I further hope to give some perspective on "a revolution in the consciousness of our time" by comparative reading of the works of Norman Mailer with those of Marshall McLuhan, paying especial attention to debates between them in the CBC archives; in refiguring one as a complementary artist to the other, I also seek as a reading one perfectly complementary to the previous on the classical divisions of rhetoric. On basis of this analysis, finally, suggestions will be put forward to address calling attention to an increasing relevance of Mailer's oeuvre framed within our contemporary situation of post-literacy in an electronic milieu.

**October 14 at 2:15-3:45, Panel #8: The Mailer Legacy**

**Moderator: Debra Noonan**

**1. Donald L. Kaufmann** is Professor of English at the University of South Florida, where he has taught American literature and creative writing since coming to USF from the University of Alaska in 1965. He is the author of *Norman Mailer: The Countdown: The First Twenty Years* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), one of the first two books to appear on the work of Norman Mailer. He has also published essays on Mailer, Updike, Bellow, Hemingway, and other twentieth-century American writers. Professor Kaufmann holds one of the largest Mailer collections of books, stories, essays, memorabilia, and ephemerals.

**Mailer's Alaskan Stopover: Four Days in an American Time-Warp**

In 1965, Norman Mailer visited Alaska, principally the cities of Juneau, Anchorage, and Fairbanks. I plan to fast-track the pre-Alaskan canon with a take off focus on *An American Dream*, written in 1964 for *Esquire*. I will then key polarized differences between Alaska and the "Lower 48" in 1965, followed by the genesis and details of Mailer's four-day visit. Next I will focus on media and language in *Why Are We in Vietnam* and in the later Mailer canon. To conclude, I will offer early last words on Mailer's on-going

Alaskan legacy.

**2. Lawrence R. Broer** is a Professor Emeritus at the University of South Florida, where he taught from 1965 to 2002. He has published widely in critical collections and professional journals, and has authored or edited eight books, including *Hemingway's Spanish Tragedy and Sanity Plea: Schizophrenia in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut*. He served as a Fulbright lecturer at the University of Paris in 1981 and 1984, and received both the Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1986, and the Theodore and Venette Askounes-Ashford Distinguished Scholar Award for 1989. He is a participating member of the Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Mailer, and Shaw Societies. Professor Broer is presently working on a book length study entitled, *Hemingway and Vonnegut: The Art of Recreation*.

### **Politics and Primitivism: Mailer's War With Fascism**

I trace Norman Mailer's unique brand of politics and primitivism through six major works: *Armies of the Night*, *A Prisoner of Sex*, *Advertisements For Myself*, *An American Dream*, *Of A Fire on the Moon*, and *Why Are We at War?* I first show Mailer's repeated warnings that technology has sterilized man's creative imagination and converted the citizenry to a plastic mass malleable enough for totalitarian take-over. I then examine and critique Mailer's attacks on "super technology land" from his position of "wise primitivist," a consciousness he describes as common to mystics, saints, bullfighters, psychopaths, and lovers. Finally, I show the way these prescient, career-long warnings climax in his portrayal of the political crises of post 9/11 America, measuring the encroachments of the new totalitarianism against Mailer's hopes for reform.

**3. Deborah Martinson**, Associate Professor of English Writing at Occidental College in Los Angeles, recently published *Lillian Hellman: A Life with Foxes and Scoundrels*. She also collaborated on Phillip Schopper's PBS television biography, *The Lives of Lillian Hellman*. Martinson's 2003 book *In The Presence of Audience: The Self in Diaries and Fictions* featured Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Violet Hunt and Doris Lessing. A founding member of the Norman Mailer Society, Martinson focuses her research on those who speak courageously—for better or ill—and auto/biography and

fiction in all its intricacy.

### **The Shits Are Killing Us**

“I still feel that yes, the shits are killing us, yes, I still feel that, yes,” Norman Mailer says decades after his original pronouncement in 1959 when he went on to explain: “each day a few more lies eat into the seed with which we are born, little institutional lies . . . but they pipe us toward insanity as they starve our sense of the real.” In contrast Mailer intends his work to “intensify a consciousness that the core of life cannot be cheated.” He is definitely not one of the shits that are killing us. He writes beautifully, profoundly. He struggles with change, grows as a thinker; his clarity and power as a writer is explosive—frightening in its clarity. He puts the gloves on and invites a few rounds—more than sparring. He uses words—cutting and biting and seductive and enticing words to exhort us to “pay the hard price of full consciousness.” He is a teacher/rhetor as much as a writer: “I’m right and I’m wrong so often that I have no interest in convincing others to think the way I do. I’m interested, rather, that we all get better at thinking.” He doesn’t force our consent but invites our rebuttal. Norman Mailer’s legacy comes from his books, his progressive politics, his fearlessness in acting out and acting for others--and also for his flamboyant rhetoric. Mailer’s essays confront the divided political landscape of our lives, the “wasting of will” and the “sapping of one’s creative rage by our most subtle and dear totalitarian time.”

Today, we know the ‘shits’ surround us. They speak a rhetoric of mealy-mouth hypocrisy designed to gut our own efforts to think and speak clearly. I propose a talk on Mailer’s essays and spoken rhetoric—fighting words, heart-felt words-- his outspoken legacy, which counteracts the soothers, the conventional, the censors, the bull-shitters. The essay venue and actual words captured in sound may be the best venue to introduce post-boomers to the Mailer canon. I hope to show Mailer at his best (and worst too)--the dangerous rhetor.

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