

THE '60s MAN: Hierarchical Structures and the Articulation of Male Experience in Selected Novels of Norman Mailer, Ken Kesey and Philip Roth.

Part One: "To Scale the High Pyramids": Norman Mailer's *An American Dream* and *Why Are We In Vietnam?*

Chapter Two: The View From the Parapet: *An American Dream*.

"I used literally to conceive of a snake guarding the cave which opened to the treasure, the riches, the filthy-lucreed wealth of all the world, and rare was the instant I could pay my dues without feeling a high pinch of pain as if fangs had sunk into me." Norman Mailer, An American Dream.

Norman Mailer had during the 1950s widely published his ability to "hit the longest ball ever to go up into the accelerated hurricane air of our American letters,"¹ and thereby occupy the "alpha" position in the hierarchy of American novelists. After eight years without producing a major work of fiction, Mailer had an urgent need to create the conditions which would encourage him to match his own hyperbole. However, he put aside his "grand schemes of multinovel cycles, especially since his need for money was desperate,"² and in 1963 agreed to write a serialised novel for *Esquire* magazine, which, he acknowledged in that magazine's pages, would lack "huge proportions and extreme ambition...But it will be a good novel...If I fail, the first price to be paid is the large wound to one's professional vanity—If I succeed, well, we may all know more."³ In his notebooks Mailer was alive with bravado, ready to "write something which would be talked about for 100 yrs.'"⁴ Mailer insisted he had an idea for a novel that was "so splendid" that he did "reverence before it."⁵ This idea became *An American Dream*.

It was noted in the introduction that Norman Mailer's fiction is particularly amenable to the kind of analysis which focuses on the hierarchical relationships between characters, and thus hopes to elucidate aspects of the hierarchical structures in the society on which these relationships are modelled, and whose reality they reflect. Hierarchies are integral to *An American Dream*, and significant in terms of its thematic and symbolic structures. *An American Dream* is a record of the conflicts, or hierarchical accommodations, which shape the life of Stephen Richards

Rojack, D.S.C., war hero, one-time congressman, educator, author and minor television celebrity. The essence of hierarchical accommodation is competition, and the novel charts the series of ascending and descending competitive “accommodations” in which Rojack is engaged. Before the novel's commencement, Rojack has been involved in a series of accommodations which have resulted in great successes; *An American Dream* charts a corresponding series of unsuccessful accommodations and disasters. Having, in the early part of his adult life, forced close accommodation on a number of hierarchical structures, increasingly Rojack comes to realise that the hierarchies to which he has gained access are forcing distant accommodation on him, and, although he believes that forcing close accommodation on those hierarchies remains a possibility, a number of reverses and set-backs finally convince him that this is not so—the dream has failed.

As the novel begins Rojack's “American dream” marriage is in tatters, he is in debt, he has begun drinking heavily and, despite the fact that he still enjoys comparative youth and considerable material advantages, and while “many another young athlete or hero might have had a vast and continuing recreation with sex,”⁶ Rojack has “come to the end of a very long street. Call it an avenue. For I had come to decide I was a failure.”⁷ The sense of chagrin and the demands of his damaged pride for reparation are more than he can bear. A “perfect” product of a society which stresses achievement and prominence, Rojack is driven—and eventually driven mad—by his desire to succeed, and his desire to force a close accommodation on the nation, and rise to the very “top of the heap.” Rojack's essence, his soul, remains so implicated in the vision of material success and prestige required by a society which places major emphasis on attainment that he will, quite literally, murder to obtain his last chance to realise his version of “the American Dream.” “The ordeal of Stephen Rojack,” Jean Radford comments, “is precisely what Mailer terms an anxiety ‘dream’...The American dream has turned into a nightmare of material success...[Rojack] has exhausted all the possibilities of growth provided by his culture.”⁸

The most important accommodations in Stephen Rojack's life are recalled in the novel's opening pages. Rojack derives his character traits and attitudes from the archetypal soldier-hero of American tradition. War permits decisive hierarchisation; killing eliminates further and future competition from opponents. Rojack initially becomes differentiated from the mass of his fellows, the “baseline” of American manhood, through the emergence of a notable physical courage in wartime. Under a full moon, in

a World War Two skirmish, on a night during which "death...first appeared to me as a possibility considerably more agreeable than my status in some future disorder,"⁹ Rojack overcomes his fear, enters into a zen-like state of un-premeditated action, and kills four German soldiers, an act for which he earns the Distinguished Service Cross. A first taste of celebrity in the wake of the accomplishment whets Rojack's ambition for greater challenge and reward, and a second successful hierarchical accommodation is achieved during the post-war years as he parlays his status as war hero first into a political career and then into an advantageous marriage. Rojack presumes to "assault" "Deborah Caughlin Mangaravidi Kelly, of the Caughlins first, English-Irish bankers, financiers and priests; the Mangaravidis, a Sicilian issue from the Bourbons and the Hapsburgs"¹⁰ and the world of institutionalised wealth and political and economic power she represents. Her father, Barney Oswald Kelly might be "just Kelly; but he had made a million two hundred times,"¹¹ and through his connection with his father-in-law influence and riches seem to beckon to the young man. However, Congressman Rojack reaches the limit of his ability, if not his ambition; in the Machiavellian world of Kellys, Kennedys, and the political machinery which characterises the hierarchy of national power, his career soon stalls. With his ambitions to be referred to hereafter only in symbolic form as the "peaks" or "heights" amongst which he wanders, Rojack's ascension of the national hierarchy ceases. His descent begins when his marriage is revealed as an ill-matched encounter in which Deborah bemuses, taunts, and cuckolds him, and he loses the ability or the will to compete with her. Drained of energy and money and status, in an attempt to regain his life's lost impetus, Rojack entertains dark metaphoric possibilities in which Deborah becomes the cause of all his problems, economic, political, and social, as well as domestic. He eventually decides that a renewed advance on the seat of power is only possible after her murder. At the end of the first chapter of the novel Rojack's thwarted "American dream" boils over in frustrated rage, and Deborah's corpse lies on the floor of a Manhattan apartment.

After such a meaty beginning, the rest of *An American Dream* is always likely to prove anti-climactic. Rojack spends the remainder of the novel attempting symbolically to atone for his action, and, in the "real" world of the novel, avoid its consequences. Until his final confrontation with Deborah's father, the Mephistophelian Barney Kelly, the opponents with whom Rojack accommodates are of a progressively lesser stamp. He descends through the same structures which saw his rise, like an aging boxer

finding only matches with increasingly lower-ranked opponents; each of Rojack's "victories" merely confirms the extent to which his status is falling. On the lower levels of one of these hierarchical structures, at the apex of which sits an abstract figure of justice, he spars with Detectives Leznicki, O'Brien and Roberts, the officers assigned to pursue the murder case and Deborah's killer. Although Rojack wins a "victory" over them which is shown to be the result of the influence of someone else, probably Kelly, who causes the case to be dropped, his star continues to wane. He overcomes Shago Martin, a popular black singer, erstwhile mate, and all too-literal *bête noire* of his new lover, Cherry, but this triumph, too, is compromised. Rojack cannot accept the salvation Cherry offers, and he leaves her to pursue, through Barney Kelly, certain unresolved and perplexing aspects of his relationship with his late wife, while Cherry is murdered by one of the singer's cronies. Rojack's descent is completed when he realises Kelly is "a spider...[with] strings in everywhere from the Muslims to the *New York Times*,"¹² and it has been his father-in-law, the typically urbane representative of a power undoubtedly bloodier and more potent than anything of which the pretentious Shago Martin could dream, sitting poised at the centre of the "mysteries" which have haunted Rojack, and which have made themselves felt in his subconscious at critical times in the novel. "Magic," sex, money, politics, power, psychic and mythic verities: Kelly is at or near the heart, or the apex, of all the hierarchical structures in which Rojack has been involved, and which he has hoped to master. In Rojack's final attempt at accommodation he realises that he cannot compete with the puissant Kelly, who pushes a most unwelcome distant accommodation in Rojack's direction as a last "lifeline." Rojack has ignored his own "spirit guides," and his perception that the world is what may be called, after Karl Jaspers' usage, a *Chifferschrift*, or symbolic book, and he abandons his last (symbolic) accommodation, his last hope for forgiveness and renewal—a walk around the "magic circle" of the parapet of Kelly's apartment building, a transparent symbol for the "heights" he has "dared" and failed—before paying the price traditionally extracted for hubris and "plunging" southward, exiled from American life to the jungle wilderness of Guatemala, and, ultimately, to his death.

Rojack's heroic status grants him access to a world which encourages him to dream the American Dream in its most potent short-hand form: "Executive Office"; "The White House"; "The First Lady." From the novel's opening sentences —"I met Jack Kennedy in November, 1946. We were both war heroes, and both of us had just been elected to Congress"¹³— he is

at pains to compare himself with the slain president and, in finding equivalencies between his and Kennedy's careers, to invoke the figure of the late monarch of the New Camelot and epitome of the American Dream, like a talisman, to emphasise that his own aspirations were once of the highest order. Rojack goes on to observe ruefully that "[o]f course Jack has gone on a bit since those days...and I have voyaged down."¹⁴ By the time of the novel's release Kennedy's death and the not-entirely-forgotten furore surrounding Mailer's stabbing of Adele Morales Mailer must have made the subjects of *An American Dream* appear to have been concocted with a ghoulish eye on their publicity value.

Rojack's inability to rise to the presidency is like a galling defeat which he elevates in his own alcohol- and self-pity- soaked sensibilities to a "tragedy" of cosmic proportions. "Failure" robs him of a sense of perspective as much as a sense of self-worth, and elicits from him the most bizarre rationalisations and justifications. "The real difference between the President and myself," Rojack confides to the reader, "may be that I ended up with too large an appreciation of the moon, for I looked down the abyss on the first night I killed...whereas Jack, for all I know, never saw the abyss."¹⁵ Rojack continues to believe he "could have had a career in politics if only I 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."¹⁶ It is almost as if Rojack must invent a compensating myth to explain why Jack Kennedy, and not he, ascends to the presidency, and surely none more satisfying can be found than in the explanation that his career-path has been diverted because he has become the focus of cosmic forces of good and evil ranged in battle over the fate of his soul. Paranoid as such an idea might seem, Rojack not only entertains but embraces it. Rojack's perception is that his ambitions have been thwarted, and his vital energies sapped, by malevolent energies. His spiritual and psychic malaise is caused by the ascendancy of the 'negative' forces. As Richard Poirier notes: "Mailer's heroes and heroines, especially in *An American Dream*, are a kind of battleground where external forces which inhabit the soul or the psyche war for possession."¹⁷ The stakes involved in the ascension of a national, political hierarchy are as nothing in comparison.

Rojack becomes obsessed with lunar symbolism; he becomes "lost in a private kaleidoscope of death"¹⁸ and in what he calls "my secret frightened romance with the phases of the moon."¹⁹ Rojack believes he had seen a profound message in the eyes of the last soldier he killed as he destroyed the German machine-gun nest: "they told me then that death was a creation

more dangerous than life."²⁰ The moon is to Rojack as Freud's *thanatos* is to the human organism; it is a hierophantic thanatopsis which, once the act of murder has been committed, engulfs the residue of the persona of the socially responsible Rojack. He is at the mercy of the call of the moon, whether its voice is that of his slain wife, some guardian angel/demon, or merely the urging of his own booze-soaked, stress-besieged, guilty and embittered mind. The tidal ebb and flow of the thirty-six hours of madness and fear covered by *An American Dream* is well symbolised by the evocation of lunar patterns. The old expression "moon-struck" has particularly appropriate resonances, too; the association between earth's satellite and insanity has a long and complex cultural history. Rojack also links Deborah, Hecate- and Diana- like, with the moon. Connecting the killing of his night of heroism (his "launch") with his waning romance with Deborah and his waxing romance with the phases of the moon, Rojack seems to hope that if he kills again his "rise" will be renewed by the power of the "creation more dangerous than life." The reputed benevolence of wiccan practices is denied in the evocation of more populist notions of witchcraft. According to Rojack, "Deborah had been in touch with the moon...she was psychic to the worst degree, and she had the power to lay a curse."²¹ Near the novel's end he will more clearly identify her as "the Devil's daughter."²²

The congressman abandons his political career and leaves Capitol Hill after deciding not to make a particular speech "because it is the week of the full lunar face,"²³ and he finds a place teaching at an un-named university in New York as "a professor of existential psychology with the not inconsiderable thesis that magic, dread, and the perception of death were the roots of motivation."²⁴ Although Rojack becomes the host of a television talk show, and "an author of sorts"²⁵ with "one popular book published, *The Psychology of the Hangman*,"²⁶ he will be satisfied neither with these accomplishments, nor with income and status. The complete hierarchical animal, he continues to strive for attainment on the level above the one on which he is placed, and is left unfulfilled by the exercise of such power as is available to him, or by the prestige he has accrued. Rojack becomes increasingly resentful of his wife, who has symbolically emasculated him by enmeshing him in a marriage which is a power struggle weighted in her favour, and which has degenerated into a zero-sum game in which each sees success and pleasure as being gained at the other's expense. The murder of Deborah, and the quasi-mysticism by which her husband rationalises the deed, both derive from Rojack's awareness of the slow, progressive

attenuation of his potency, and the role his marriage has come to play as symbol and metaphor for his impotence in the pursuit of power in other areas. Deborah is, to Rojack, "a symbol of his inauthentic past and an expression of all the destructive and negative aspects of his present existence. Their marriage had been a war which had never been resolved."²⁷ Mailer, in fact, via Rojack, employs a succession of military metaphors to describe the "losing war"²⁸ of their nuptial engagement. *An American Dream* pivots on the last moves in the war of emotional and psychic attrition waged between Deborah and Stephen Rojack.

Rojack's "natural" masculine ascendancy has been challenged from the first by the wilful Deborah, whose personal charms have only ever been secondary attractions for Rojack. He admits that he married the well-born and well-connected Miss Kelly because he "thought the road to President might begin at the entrance to her Irish heart."²⁹ From the moment of their initial meeting Deborah seems by far the stronger of the two; although he claims to have "seduced"³⁰ her, behind Rojack's narrative lie intimations that it is she and not he who has been in control of their courtship. For example, it is seven years after their first encounter that they marry, during which time the younger Kelly presumably has more pressing or promising items on her agenda. In the *Esquire* version of *An American Dream*, Kennedy and Rojack are "double-dating", and Rojack "steals" Kennedy's date, Deborah. Mailer might have sensed her strength was not consistent with the original description in altering the detail.

"By the time I found Deborah again...she was no longer her father's delight, and we were married in a week,"³¹ comments her spouse. The former warrior is no match for this formidable woman, who, aware of his dependence on her, goads him with reminders of her superiority, "an artist at sucking the marrow from a broken bone."³² As Rojack admits, "marriage to her was the armature of my ego; remove the armature and I might topple like clay...probably I did not have the strength to stand alone."³³ The night of her death she devastates Rojack by telling him that she no longer loves him:

She said it so quietly, with such nice finality, that I thought again of the moon and the promise of extinction which had descended on me. 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.³⁴

Rojack's future political ambitions, as he also knows, "would not be possible without the vast connections of Deborah's clan,"³⁵ and he bitterly reflects on the accommodations, compromises, and even surrenders and

retreats, into which he has been forced in order to gain access to that power: "I might have despised the money if it had not become the manifest of how unconsummated and unmasculine was the core of my force."³⁶ Without Deborah he is mere facade; with her support and love he is aware of a greater potential within himself: "She had...a winner's force; and when she loved me...her strength seemed then to pass to mine."³⁷ Rojack's narrative also admits, however, that he and Deborah have been, as the novel opens, "married most intimately and often most unhappily for eight years."³⁸ As he says:

for the last five [years] I had been trying to evacuate my expeditionary army, that force of hopes, all-out need, plain virile desire and commitment which I had spent on her. It was a losing war, and I wanted to withdraw, count my dead, and look for love in another land, but she was a great bitch, Deborah, a lioness of the species: unconditional surrender was her only raw meat.³⁹

Implied here by the military metaphors is the suggestion that despite the rhetoric of sentiment and romance marriage is just as much of an urgent hierarchical struggle as accommodation between any two aggressive male *isotimoi*. To complement the image of a leonine predator, the propensity of the female arachnid to assassinate her mate is evoked by Rojack's identification of Deborah as "a Great Bitch [who] delivers extermination to any bucko brave enough to take carnal knowledge of her. She somehow *fails in her role*...if the lover escapes without being maimed...or nailed to the mast."⁴⁰ "In *An American Dream*," Judith Fetterley notes, "the equation, inherent in the system of sexual politics, of love with war and sex with power is so complete there is not even the pretence of romance left."⁴¹ Rojack sees his reduction as part of Deborah's plan: "Living with her I was murderous; attempting to separate, suicide came into me."⁴²

One night, at a party in a friend's penthouse apartment, he feels a strong impulse toward this self-annihilation. Made unwell and feverish of mind by the large amount of alcohol he has consumed (and in this novel his thirst is prodigious) Rojack is seized by the impulse to brave all his demons in one symbolic, theatrical gesture. With adolescent bravado he climbs over a balustrade and hangs on to the ledge, with his "thumbs...up and pointing like horns at the moon," with "only...eight fingers to hold me from the plunge."⁴³ Rojack is making the sign of devil, of "the old religion" of pre-Christian Europe, associated with deities analogous with Broghedda (a moon-associated female deity) and Cernunnos, (her horned male consort); it

signals the beginning of his entry into the orbit of the demonic forces symbolised by "the Lady,"⁴⁴ the moon, already associated in his mind with his "witchy" wife. Beginning a descent into a quite-literal lunacy, he feels the moon calling to him: " 'Come now,' said the moon, 'now is your moment. What joy in the flight.' And I actually let one hand go. It was my left. Instinct was telling me to die."⁴⁵

Although aware he is being tempted toward death, Rojack is convinced that if he releases his grip on the parapet to commit suicide he will fly, not fall. If his physical body might plummet, he is convinced that "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. Like a lion would I join the legions of the past and share their power."⁴⁶ Rojack concludes, as the moment passes, that instead of death-as-finality he is being called to a rebirth, to new life from death. The death involved, however, will not be his:

'You can't die yet,' said the formal part of my brain, 'you haven't done your work.'

'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.⁴⁷

This incident gives birth to what one may call Rojack's "parapet mythos";⁴⁸ Rojack comes to believe that what he has to do to regain himself, be forgiven for his sins, especially his murder of Deborah, is to conquer his fear of heights, which seems to stand for a fear of success and/or failure in hierarchical terms, which is ubiquitous in the modern world, and which Norman Mailer was hardly the first to notice, although he may indeed be uniquely well-placed to discuss it. This possibility is open to Rojack once at the start of the novel (he doesn't let go) and once at the end of the novel (having walked once around the balcony of Kelly's penthouse he is told by the moon he must fall, or walk again in the opposite direction, and Kelly provokes him into climbing down before he can). Rojack never completes the "magic circle," but he remains convinced that the ceremony would have restored his strength and granted him renewed vitality in the struggle to realise his lofty ambitions.

At the start of the novel the birth of the "parapet mythos" marks a classic moment of temptation, reminiscent of the biblical confrontation between Christ and Satan, during which the latter shows the former vistas of worldly kingdoms which could be His, and tempts Jesus to throw himself from a

great height.⁴⁹ Although Mailer continues to maintain the illusion that a battle is taking place between polarities of good and evil, it is more accurate to acknowledge that Rojack is in the midst of a temptation by the possibilities offered by evil; a positive, life-affirming force only tenuously establishes its existence in the novel. Like Milton, Mailer finds it difficult to paint good in convincing or attractive tones; "Good" exists in Mailer chiefly, if not only, as an implied opposition to evil, lacking specific content or distinction.

Rojack decides that the moon is a special messenger of power, with his fate tied to the revelations it brings. He believes that his life and his advancement can begin again if he can be freed of Deborah's malevolent influence, and, further, that illness will strike him if he does not seize the opportunity. Impelled to seek Deborah out, although he has not yet consciously settled on her murder, Rojack reports that he "felt a force on me as palpable as a magnetic field. 'Get out of here,' said a voice in my brain... 'If you're not out of here in thirty seconds,' said the same voice, 'your new disease takes another step. Metastases are made of moments like this, lover-man.'"⁵⁰ Rojack believes his refusal to trust his instinct will set off a reaction in his body, and, he says, "I knew then if it took twenty years or forty for my death, that if I died from a revolt of the cells...that this was the moment it all began, this was the hour when the cells took their leap."⁵¹ This belief is an example of what Poirier calls the "seemingly insane readings of the world offered by Stephen Rojack in *An American Dream*."⁵² Pinning his future hopes on "mystical moonshine" of this kind, Rojack makes his choice and declares his allegiance. Proof of the moon's association with the Mailerian pole which conflates negativity, death, the Devil and excrement seems clear

This illness now, huddling in the deck chair, was an extinction. I could feel what was good in me going away, going away perhaps forever, rising after all to the moon, my courage, my wit, ambition and hope. Nothing but sickness and dung remained in the sack of my torso...[n]othing noble seemed to remain of me.⁵³

Rojack has seen, in his vision, the course he must take. In a metaphorically linked set of ironic reversals, the way "up" lies in the way "down"; refusing to "drop" to salvation, Rojack now intends to "climb" again by associating himself with infernal powers. To achieve his heart's desire, to make real his "American Dream," it has not been enough for him to rely on his courage, resourcefulness and resolve. He has needed the

energy he has drawn from Deborah, the money and connections she has provided; and now he needs to fully ally himself with the source of her power. Deborah has once told him: " 'I'm evil if truth be told. But I despise it, truly I do. It's just that evil has power.' "⁵⁴ Rojack now discovers this for himself. He visits his wife, from whom he has been separated for some months, and, as the couple converse, the atmosphere in Deborah's borrowed apartment is filled with "the malignity which rises from a swamp."⁵⁵ Steeling himself, Rojack reminds himself of what he imagines are Deborah's ultimate intentions toward him:

I was afraid of her. She was not incapable of murdering me. There are killers one is ready to welcome, I suppose. They offer a clean death and free passage to one's soul. The moon had spoken to me as just such an assassin. But Deborah promised bad burial. One would go down in one's death, and muck would wash over the last of one's wind. She did not wish to tear the body, she was out to spoil the light.⁵⁶

Once again Mailer provides a clue about the identity of the forces with which the Kellys are allied. Demonic and occult influences affect Barney and Deborah, and their lovers and friends and children also; the intimation of a connection with a magical "other life" colours the novel subtly but pervasively.

In Deborah's borrowed apartment, the tension, anger and competition between the estranged couple is intense. After a charged and malicious conversation, Rojack and Deborah fight, at first verbally, then physically. The reader learns that Deborah, like her husband, feels truncated, or incomplete, and her bitterness has a number of causes at which she hints. Deborah has lost a baby, and the miscarriage has, Rojack says, thinking as he always does only of the consequences as far as he is concerned, "left behind...a heart-land of revenge."⁵⁷ As they struggle, Mailer describes the "balance" between them; a momentary equilibrium, a "window" wherein the choice between good and evil is still possible, but Rojack, for all his frequent claims that he has the qualities of a saint, again illustrates the nature of the forces which have begun to possess him. He feels he is pushing "against an enormous door which would give inch by inch to the effort."⁵⁸ His desire to comprehend what is on the other side of that door is too much:

I was trying to stop, but pulse packed behind pulse in a pressure up to thunderhead...and *crack* I choked her harder, 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...Deborah's face seemed to float off from her body and stare at me in darkness. She gave one malevolent look which said: 'There are dimensions to evil which reach beyond the light,' and then she smiled like a milkmaid and floated away and was gone.⁵⁹

Rojack knows that sooner or later the police will consider the possibility that he is his wife's killer, but for the moment he believes his "daring" may bring him the prize he desires. What amounts to a ritual sacrifice designed to liberate his own energies and imbue him with his wife's is now completed; Rojack feels charged with vitality, appetite, and power. He engages in a prolonged bout of intercourse with Deborah's German maid, Ruta, symbolically re-enacting his struggle between the forces of good and evil in him. Her vagina is "heaven" and her anus "hell," and he describes "how I finally made love to her, a minute for one, a minute for the other, a raid on the Devil and a trip back to the Lord."⁶⁰ He intends to climax in her vagina "which was like a chapel now,"⁶¹ but, aware that he must make "a choice which would take me on one wind or another,"⁶² at the last moment he "jammed up her ass and came as if I'd been flung across the room."⁶³

After finishing with Ruta, who, it transpires, is a functionary in the employ of Barney Kelly, demonically convicted Rojack returns to the scene of his crime, and pragmatically adds defenestration to homicide, depositing Deborah's body onto the pavement thirty-five metres below. He is not, however, rid of his wife; if anything, her hold over him increases after her death. Deborah Kelly never ceases to be a character in *An American Dream*. The mysterious urgings in Rojack's head and heart will increasingly be identified with her as she communicates with him from those "dimensions to evil which reach beyond the light." It is possession, at least of a kind, as Deborah becomes the moon, instead of merely its priestess, and her disembodied voice continues to nag and direct and taunt her husband/killer. "Deborah was trapped with me,"⁶⁴ he laments. Rojack becomes the tool of Deborah's intensity, moved directly by her wishes, as even in death she is mistress of his desires.

Chaos results on the street below as Deborah's body falls into the evening traffic. It lands in front of a car carrying Eddie Ganucci, a criminal identity; in his entourage are several figures who will have parts to play in the events of the rest of the novel, including the young singer, Cherry Melanie. The

centrality of Barney Kelly to the thematic and narrative weave is shown by his direct or indirect connection to the threads of "coincidence" which bring most of the secondary characters in the novel together, and place them on the street at that time, and thereby propel them to the police station where Rojack is interrogated by Detectives Leznicki and Roberts. " 'Sometimes,' " the former confides to Rojack, " 'I think there's a buried maniac who runs the mind of this city. And he sets up the coincidences.' "65

Mailer takes this opportunity to tighten the connection between the elements in his homological table; his favourite association, between physical or moral cowardice and the contraction of cancer, is high on the agenda of priorities for such reinforcement. Rojack's "excuse" for his wife's suicide has been that she had come to believe that she had contracted the disease. Now Leznicki describes the "luck" of the event of Ganucci's presence on the street at the time as one of the "coincidences" caused by his "buried maniac": " 'Your wife goes out of a window, for instance. Because of cancer, you say, and five cars smack up on the East River Drive because of her. Who's in one of the cars but little Uncle Ganooch, Eddie Ganucci...a [crime] prince. One of the biggest in the country.' "66 Leznicki tells Rojack that good fortune, or, rather, Ganucci's superstition, has placed this nefarious figure in police custody. The mobster, it seems, had plenty of time to leave the scene of the accident but refused out of a belief involving cadavers. He was, Leznicki claims, afraid

"she'll curse him if he walks away. He must have had twenty guys killed in his time...but he's afraid of a dead dame's curse. It's bad for his cancer, he tells his nephew. Now just look at the connection you could make. Your wife you say had cancer, Uncle Ganooch is swimming in it. There it is."67

Further connections are pursued in the almost sensual relationship between prey and predator which develops between the detective and the suspect. During his arrest and questioning Rojack admits: "I knew at last the sweet panic of an animal who is being tracked."68 With some insight, just prior to the aforementioned exchange, he further states: "I had come to the conclusion a long time ago that all women were killers, but now I was deciding that all men were out of their mind. I liked Leznicki enormously—it was part of the fever."69 A direct link is established between emotional tension and sexual tension, which will also colour elements of the relationships in Mailer's next novel. Rojack's description of Detective Roberts allows the reader to be forgiving for thinking that he is flirting with

the police officer rather than under suspicion for murder: "Sitting next to me Roberts gave off the physical communion one usually receives from a woman. He had an awareness of me; it was as if some instinct in him reached into me and I was all too aware of him."⁷⁰ Rojack likens the experience to "the first moment of love one feels in a woman who has until then given no love,"⁷¹ and later informs the reader "that merciless lack of charity which I had come to depend on in Deborah (as a keel to ballast the empty dread of my stomach) was now provided by the detective."⁷²

In Mailer's depictions of masculine experience this kind of homoerotic frisson is a characteristic of hierarchical accommodations, particularly between *isotimoi*. The intimacy between "rivals" has been explored by writers like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men*,⁷³ while Mailer himself has explored the relationship, as if between lovers, which can develop between men even in intense, violent, conflict and hierarchicisation. In *Why Are We In Vietnam?* that novel's narrator advises males that

if you get in a fight with a fellow, you're well advised to destroy him half to death. If y'get him down, use your shoe on his face, employ your imagination, give him a working-over, hard to believe, but often enough that man is your friend afterward, you've made him sane—maybe he thought before he had the fight with you he could lick whatever was in sight so he was half-crazy, now he knows that is not exactly so. Whereas if you give him a nice clean whipping, you've stimulated him to give you a nice clean whipping back.⁷⁴

The relationship between love and violence, and Mailer's belief in the wholesome benefits of intense hierarchical accommodation, are never better illustrated.

Waiting at the police station, listening to a cacophany of miscreants and suspects, aware of the presence of the girl, Cherry, he has briefly met earlier, Rojack is all nerves and guilt. He is tempted to end the tension between himself and the officers and admit to the murder, and be done with the game. In a moment of intense, uncomfortable perception he feels "leadens anxiety,"⁷⁵ as he weighs his feelings and his motivations, and Rojack experiences the first of many moments when he could to an extent undo what has been done, and when he could certainly, at least, renounce his allegiance to the moon/Devil/pole of negativity and make new choices and alignments. However, the chance for confession (with its consequent punishment and absolution) passes swiftly and conveniently under Rojack's

rationalisation for inaction that he "had a horror of appearing feeble before that young blonde girl."⁷⁶ More germane is the urgent plea which escapes him as he compares his feelings to those of the very old or the terminally ill, ready to make a "compact...with some lesser devil of medicine—'Keep me away from God a little longer.' "⁷⁷ Rojack fears judgement himself, and is ready to entreat the Deity: "'Oh God, give me a sign,' crying it into the deeps of myself as if I possessed all the priorities of a saint."⁷⁸

For answer, all Rojack can do is interpret the auguries before him, the most promising of which happens to be "the long blonde hair of Cherry standing across the floor."⁷⁹ Moved again by the impulse to return to the detectives in the back room and tell all, Rojack notes that "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.' "⁸⁰ The Mary of Magdalen-like figure of this complex woman-child, the "fallen" nightclub singer who closes her act the night Rojack first hears her sing with 'Every Day With Jesus (Is Sweeter than the Day Before),'⁸¹ becomes Rojack's guide, his "good angel." As partner to Rojack she stands as Eve in relation to Deborah's Lilith, the blonde, self-possessed all-American Southern belle to Deborah's dark, spoiled, rich "daddy's little girl"; Cherry's (relative) innocence is the counter-weight to Deborah's corruption. In the dualistic universe of Norman Mailer, Cherry is a victim whereas the malevolent Deborah is "the quintessential 'itch goddess.' "⁸² Cherry attempts to save Rojack, and dies, while "Rojack murders [Deborah] to save his own soul from similar corruption."⁸³ Nonetheless, both women are a mixture of goodness and evil, and Cherry's fate is no less unhappy than her counterpart's. Marriage to Acam, it seems, is, like being his son, a prescription only for death.

The scene at the police station marks the beginning of the decline of Rojack's fortunes. It is after this that Mailer's writing, too, deteriorates in quality. Following the intensity, directness and relative clarity of the depiction of the murder and the scenes which follow there is a falling away in terms of dramatic definition accompanied by repeated failures of tone. There are, during the rest of the novel, a number of points at which Mailer seems to promise climactic events or disclosures, thematic or narrative denouement, the possibility of new direction, and/or points at which the possibility of salvation and renewal are offered afresh to Rojack. Not one of these moments assumes any permanence or importance; after being implied by the novelist, the narrative proceeds with the moment's import

unrealised. For example, while at the police station Rojack tells of his reaching a point where he feels he is

letting go of some grip on my memory of the past...giving up my loyalty to every good moment I had with Deborah and surrendering the hard compacted anger of every hour when she had spoiled my need...even saying goodbye to that night on the hill in Italy with my four Germans under the moon...[like a creature that has taken] a leap over the edge of mutation so that now and at last it was something new, something better or worse, but never again what it had been on the other side of the instant. I felt as if I had crossed a chasm of time and was some new breed of man.⁸⁴

The new man, unfortunately, continues to think and feel exactly like the old one, and the possibility of some radical or novel departure or disclosure arising from the proffered perception of crisis does not eventuate. Mailer resorts again and again to this device, as the novel rises to pseudo-climaxes which are used to fuel pretentious metaphysical digressions, or to flesh out the thin plot. The climactic event has occurred at the novel's start, and there is little of dramatic impact to follow. Such failures might well arise from uncertainty on the novelist's part, or, even more likely, from Mailer's attempts to increase the anticipation felt by his readers during the course of the serially-published novel. The eight instalments which appeared in *Esquire*, as Joseph Epstein points out, were reminiscent of "the way, as the author himself modestly pointed out, Dostoevsky and Dickens wrote many of their novels. But Dostoevsky, but Dickens, *An American Dream* is not."⁸⁵ E.L. Doctorow remembers offering the editorial advice to Mailer that the murder should have taken place at the end, not the beginning, of the novel. The author's response was to ask: " 'Where were you when I could have used that?' "⁸⁶

In a novel in which a murder has taken place, and in which the murderer is the protagonist, it is difficult to avoid the novel degenerating into a cat-and-mouse game between the "criminal" and the "law," and if the protagonist is to "escape" justice, one must ask, how is this to be satisfactorily accounted for? The structural problem is "solved" by Mailer when he makes each successive accommodation in which Rojack engages in the novel an excuse for the recapitulation and restatement of the message of its first major event, the murder of Deborah Kelly Rojack, and a re-enactment of Rojack's choices between good and evil. Each of the lesser battles into which Rojack is forced—with Roberts, O'Brien and Leznicki,

with Ike "Romeo" Romalozzo, Cherry's would-be paramour, and with Shago Martin, the African-American singer and Cherry's long-time lover—provides Mailer with the opportunity to restate some of the essentials of his theories about power, courage, self-definition and expression, and the role a transcendent dualism plays in everyday life. Highlighting the unrelenting competition and hierarchicisation in American life, each man Rojack encounters is, in one way or another, a competitor, and women, the only source of comfort and understanding, little more than elaborate trophies, and/or messengers from the gods. Each encounter is translated into a "triumph," an affirmation of renewed potency, or an omen of impending disaster. However, there are no interactions of a more complex nature, and even in this the characters (not to mention the characterisations) in the bulk of the novel do not match up to those depicted in its earliest pages. Between the scene of the murder and Rojack's final confrontation with Deborah's father, Rojack's repetitious trials become less and less engaging.

The parade of these opponents of the second water begins with the detectives. Rojack dismisses Lenicki as looking "more like an old thief than a Lieutenant of Detective;"⁸⁷ O'Brien looms with nothing more threatening to offer than "a pronounced smell"⁸⁸; while the quasi-sexual interplay between Rojack and Roberts facilitates the dismissal of this officer by allowing Rojack, and encouraging the reader, to think of his avoidance of prosecution as one more "notch" or conquest, achieved by the attractive, devilish Stephen Rojack. Following his first bout of questioning Rojack is allowed to leave the police station and, after fevered perambulations, he arrives "accidentally" outside the nightclub where Cherry is singing. There his conviction of his ability to influence events in the physical world with his new-found "powers" reaches proportions of epic self-delusion. "Hierarchies of soul and spirit turned in my brain,"⁸⁹ Rojack comments, sure that as a result of the empowerment which has followed the killing of Deborah he halts the laughter of Cherry's ex-prizefighter "escort", "Romeo" Romalozzo, with "psychic particles, pellets, rockets the length of a pin,"⁹⁰ and defeats in a wordless mental duel a judge and his attractive but vacuous companion. When Cherry invites him to her table he disposes of the aptly-named Romeo's attention to his Juliet after heeding advice from Deborah's shade; in his imagination he draws a pocket-knife over his rival's throat, and hears Deborah mutter encouragingly: " 'at last you're learning. Put some salt in the wound.' "⁹¹ Once he has "convincingly" dealt with the "opposition," Cherry and Rojack leave together, and become lovers. Rojack's victories are minor, however, and in a "minor league" compared

with the hierarchies in which he had once operated. Rojack, once on the road to presidential contention, has been reduced to solipsistic duelling in which he alone keeps score and interprets results.

His imagined "power" notwithstanding, as the newspapers begin to feature Deborah's murder, Rojack's employers and friends begin to distance themselves from him. His television programme is cancelled, and he is "advised" to take a leave of absence from teaching. In both instances Rojack does not/can not call on his new-found "magic" to aid him, and so the implication is compelling that the psychic trials of strengths of the night before were illusions resulting from alcohol and Rojack's highly emotional condition. The existentialist professor returns for another interview with the police, to find that medical evidence which indicates that Deborah was dead before her body exited from the apartment window, and which thus points to his guilt, has been uncovered. However, as it so often does in Mailer, and in *An American Dream* to excess, the shadow of some order of supra-phenomenal reality intrudes in the form of an unconvincing *deus ex machina*, and, when it seems that arrest is imminent, and Roberts is ready to pounce on his "prey," a " 'big brother somewhere,' "92 as the disgruntled detective puts it, arranges for the investigation to be halted.

The dark mechanisms of the C.I.A. are hinted at, and Rojack later connects Barney Kelly and his daughter with unsavoury activities on their government's behalf. He, not unnaturally, is filled with a sense of relief and gratitude as he leaves the police station, and is "close to prayer then...very close to prayer."⁹³ He tells the reader: " 'God,' I wanted to pray, 'let me love that girl, become a father, and try to be a good man, and do some decent work. Yes, God,' I was close to begging, 'do not make me go back again to the charnel house of the moon.' "⁹⁴ Instead of communion with the Almighty, however, Rojack returns to Cherry's apartment "like a soldier on six-hour leave to a canteen,"⁹⁵ and yet another of his mystical intimations convinces him that his time with her is temporary. At their reunion Mailer again raises the idea that, even now, Rojack might be forgiven his sins, and, because he has turned to "true love" in his involvement with Cherry, as they make love once more Rojack feels that "like a gift I did not deserve...new life began again in me."⁹⁶ Rojack has an intuition "of the meaning of love for those who had betrayed it"⁹⁷; he says to Cherry: " 'I think we have to be good,' by which I meant we would have to be brave."⁹⁸ Yet another turning point, although signalled by the novelist, passes unobserved by plot or characters, and instead the time for bravery, of the simple kind at which Rojack excels, soon arrives. When an enraged Shago

Martin comes into Cherry's room, Rojack seizes his moment and, taking the knife-wielding black man unawares, administers a vicious beating. The incident isolates the homoerotic relationship between men of "equal" status which characterises Rojack's relationship with Detective Roberts, and between many characters in this study; as Rojack and Martin struggle the former's nose detects "a whiff of his odor which had something of defeat in it, and a smell of full nearness as if we'd been in bed for an hour — well, it was too close: I threw him down the stairs."⁹⁹

For both men the principal motivation in their mutual dislike does not seem to be the person of Cherry, but the right to "possess" her. The confrontation becomes violent when the men discuss the "potency" required to make Cherry pregnant, and cause her to have vaginal orgasms. It is Rojack's pride in being the pulchritudinous Cherry's current lover, and Martin's wounded ego at being supplanted by a man he considers his inferior, a white intellectual, that causes their violent accommodation; the battle is about prestige, in which "access" to desirable females is both a symbol and a result, and the females themselves tokens with "beauty" a denigrating, objectivising yardstick, in an example of what Deborah Cameron calls "pornoglossia."¹⁰⁰

Rojack has been offered many chances at redemption. Yet, each time, he is drawn by unfathomable, obscure, obsessive urgings back to the centre of "the mystery" which surrounds Deborah. He could have dropped to his death, and avoided the murder, at the party in the novel's beginning, at which time his pride caused him to enter into his unholy compact with the moon; there was a moment when he felt the urge to stop his attack on Deborah short of murder; he had the opportunity to confess to the police; there is an implied "magic" in his promise to Cherry, and later to his step-daughter, that he will not consume alcohol for a set period, promises which he breaks; he could have found absolution through Cherry, and found a way to make a new life with her, an impulse which tempts him mightily, yet which he rejects; at the last he could pay attention to the strong intimations he has that he should not leave Cherry alone. Yet he does, out of fear of Barney Kelly, and keeps an appointment he has made with him that morning. Reminding himself that it is "the iron law of romance: one took the vow to be brave,"¹⁰¹ Rojack's voices tell him: " 'That which you fear most is what you must do...Trust the authority of your senses.' "¹⁰² Given the "successes" which have recently ensued from his faith in his own advice and the evidence of those befuddled conduits, this course of action shows poor judgement and betokens only defeat.

Barney Kelly lives in a penthouse apartment. Filled with foreboding as he ascends to its peak, Rojack reminds himself, and the reader, that his one-and-a-half day odyssey began at the top of a tall building, and with the urge to dare death. At Kelly's still one more opportunity for salvation presents itself to the former soldier. After the two men discuss the tragedy of Deborah's death, their conversation takes a metaphysical twist to subjects of sexuality, power, and magic. Kelly seems to suspect, but not be unduly perturbed by, Rojack's guilt; he himself admits to a long-standing incestuous affair with his daughter. The terms he employs in his account of succumbing to that temptation, and his conviction that "forces" of supernatural potency await the outcome of such moments in the lives of the important, the strong, the wealthy and the influential, echo those which occur to Rojack in the early part of the novel, and indicate that Kelly is indeed in league with arcane forces of which he is both a well-rewarded functionary and a bond-servant. Left alone on the balcony outside the apartment, Rojack is seized again by the temptation to leap to his death. He has "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 violent death, would give some better heart to that embryo just created, that indeed I might even be created again, free of my past."¹⁰³

As on the occasion he first challenged his tendency to acrophobia, as this moment of temptation passes, Rojack is possessed by the need to test his courage further in the ritual resolution of the "parapet mythos." All the other moments of daring from his past recur in his mind:

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 realizes one is finally going to get it, 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.¹⁰⁴

His voices urge him to walk around the parapet, as an alternative "penance" to jumping. He completes one circuit, and then, in respect of Deborah, "the most quiet of the voices,"¹⁰⁵ says to him: " 'You murdered. So you are in her cage. Now, earn your release. Go around the parapet again.' "¹⁰⁶ Kelly interrupts this widowers parade, although he fails in his attempt to push Rojack off the building. However, when the younger man loses the umbrella (Shago's) with which he has been balancing himself, and

watches it plummet to earth, Rojack decides " 'I've lain with madness long enough.' "¹⁰⁷ and he breaks off the circuit of propitiation and atonement. With this gesture, the final avenue of redemption closes for Rojack, and the victory of Kelly's power and the forces of his hierarchical structure over the "innocent" Rojack is complete: "I waited ten seconds, twenty seconds," Rojack informs the reader, "at war with the impulse to...take the parapet again... 'The first trip was done for you,' said the voice, 'but the second was for Cherry,' and I had a view of the parapet again and the rain going to ice, and was afraid to go back."¹⁰⁸

As his courage finally falls to his fear Rojack rejects his last opportunity, and such "luck" or power or autonomy as he might have purchased with his killing of Deborah runs out. He compounds his magical "error" by breaking a vow he made to his step-daughter, Deirdre, who was in the Kelly apartment, that he would not drink. He has earlier admitted his addiction, and indicated his occult-sacramental use of alcohol when commenting: "I was on the habit when whiskey felt equal to blood."¹⁰⁹ His compulsion reactivated, he now wastes crucial minutes in a bar on the way back to Cherry's side.

Hoisting the drink...I looked into my mind — the memory of Deborah now like a scroll which must be read from back to front — and thought, 'You've gotten off easy,' and gagged on the drink, for dread came up like a wave...The city was awake. 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. Suddenly I knew something was wrong, something had gone finally wrong: it was too late for the parapet now.¹¹⁰

He arrives at Cherry's flat, her "special place,"¹¹¹ only to find that that she has been fatally beaten by a thug in the employ of Martin, and she expires in Rojack's arms. The black singer himself has also died in mysterious circumstances that night, possibly as a result of the thrashing administered by Rojack. It is not our "hero," however, but the hardened, former F.B.I. man Roberts, who sheds tears: "The Irish are the only men who know how to cry for the dirty polluted blood of all the world,"¹¹² concludes the poetic-cynic Rojack.

The "Epilogue" of *An American Dream* has puzzled some critics. It begins with Rojack having apparently conceded some kind of defeat, leaving New York, and the remnants of his ambition and his career, to head "way out West, driving through the landscape of Super America."¹¹³ He favours the

reader with more of his theories on cancer, death, and luck, and makes a telephone call to the shade of Cherry (who tells him: "Marilyn says to say hello"¹¹⁴). Although Rojack thinks to call her again, "in the morning," he says, "I was something like sane again, and packed the car, and started on the long trip to Guatemala and Yucatán."¹¹⁵

The moral problem of what to do about Rojack's guilt has been discussed by most critics of *An American Dream*. Richard Poirier summarises many of the criticisms of the novel and its ending in noting "the always outmoded criteria of verisimilitude, the accusation that the characterization of Rojack is the occasion merely for a vulgar ego trip by Mailer, the charge that the book is simply dirty and that it fails for not making the hero pay for the crime of murder."¹¹⁶ Hilary Mills offers a common mixture of artistic praise and moral condemnation with her comment that

both Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* would be reenacted in Mailer's novel but with significant moral differences. What Dreiser perceived as tragedy Mailer perceived as a dream of liberation. And Dostoevsky's punishment never comes, for Rojack is not prosecuted.¹¹⁷

Obviously seeing Rojack's "escape" as furthering "the novel's major strategy, justifying patriarchy as survival," Judith Fetterley pithily notes that "[a]t the end of the book Rojack is alive and the women are dead."¹¹⁸ Rojack's retreat to Guatemala, however, must be the signal for his decline and death. One might recall that in the novel a set of ascending hierarchical accommodations (which take place before the novel begins) is matched by the set of descending accommodations which occur during it. Rojack kills, and begins to rise; at the end of his fall, he must surely die. Directional pointers of "up" and "down" are employed during the novel to gauge Rojack's progress. He goes "downtown" as his fortunes fall, and his most important encounters take place in rooms situated "up" in tall buildings. Suggestions of "flying" and "falling" accompany the moments of danger, drama and epiphany as Rojack risks death on the sides of two of those buildings near the start and near the finish of the novel. In the nightmare city landscape Mailer creates within the novel all values are inverted: war is the only way to bring peace; love and hate are interchangeable among the Kellys; in Rojack's terms, murder is the best way to forgiveness and salvation; and more than once Rojack senses a possible freedom, a "new life" in death. One's conclusion after reading Norman Mailer's *An American Dream* is that the fear of failure, the "fear of falling," lurks in the

psyche of the American male like an ancient nightmare. The events of the novel take the protagonist, Stephen Richards Rojack, on a journey which has death as its starting point, and which oscillates constantly between metaphoric poles of elation and despair, heaven and hell, high and low, God and the Devil, vagina and anus, heroism and cowardice, safety and danger, and, at the last, success and failure. One notes that the novel begins with the evocation of a particular geographical location which may have an identifiable meaning, and that this meaning may well be connected with the geographical location mentioned at the novel's end.

Related on the first page of *An American Dream* is the information that on their first date Deborah and Stephen have enjoyed (although in terms of these characters one doubts this is the right word) intercourse on the back seat of his car "parked behind a trailer park on a deserted factory street in Alexandria, Virginia."¹¹⁹ The more fanciful connotations of the name of this location might refer to Mr. Rojack and Miss Kelly: she the American aristocrat, a virgin country, or "park," for she behaves the coy, perpetual "virgin," although already a widow and a mother, when she "makes out" on the backseat like a teenager with the uncertain "jock" Rojack. His college nickname, we learn, was "Raw-Jock," and he is not only an upstart *arriviste* of limitless ambition and gall, like a young Roman *novus homo*, but, like Alexander of Macedon, a military man, a conqueror, with a world stretched before him, at least in theory. This vista will, however, turn out to be a dead end street, as Rojack tells us, and his dream will desert him.

Virginia was the economic heartland of early America; culturally it is associated with The Old South and the Confederacy, and in history and in the idealised image of popular myth with both slavery and the privileged lifestyle it afforded an aristocratic few. Rojack's fall from the hierarchical peaks of political power, reputation and prestige takes him from this once-promised land and his promising beginnings through murder and madness to, at the last, Yucatán and Guatemala. Tony Tanner advances the idea that "Rojack heads south in space and back in time, aiming perhaps to penetrate the secret centre of his own, and America's, identity."¹²⁰ This seems a profitable line to pursue. By "banishing" Rojack from the U.S.A. to Yucatán (the peninsula is within the modern state of Guatemala) Mailer seems to be, through use of the archaic resonances in the former name, deliberately evoking the earliest American civilisations: the great Meso-American culture-complexes, especially the Mayans. Rojack has "fallen" from civilised, intellectual, aristocratic, political power into a brutal —if colourful and resonant— neolithic graveyard of the soul. As Rojack falls from the

hierarchical peaks of North America, he descends to the “pre-historic” (or at least pre-Columbian) Mayan pyramid-altars. This is not at all inappropriate, in terms of Rojack's murder, time, and power-obsessed psyche. In the centuries either side of the date of the birth of Christ the Mayans, whose culture is intimately associated with the Yucatán peninsula, were an important influence on the other civilisations of Central and South America. They were a sanguineous people, however, obsessed by chronologies, of which they kept track on meticulous and elaborately artistic astronomical calendars for which they are famed. Mayan life was permeated by religious belief and ritual, and with warding off disaster and ensuring continuity and prosperity through propitiatory sacrifice. It was devoted to a number of deities who fit neatly Rojack's description of his god as “not love but courage.”¹²¹ Although the Mayans were accomplished, and their settlements, societies, systems, cosmologies and myths intricate, their ceremonies involved regular, multiple torture and disembowelment of captives, and even “favoured” Mayans. The arbitrary cruelty reminds one of the callous, intensely superstitious, omen-riddled mind-set shared by Rojack and Mayan culture. Rojack, King-priest-victim, should feel at home in the shadow of the gradients of the Mayan ruins. In the jungle of the Yucatán the pre-verbal soul of the continent may be said to remain, and amid the still-dizzying heights of the ruins of the temples and the ruined pyramids, Rojack must make his final hierarchical accommodation. Far from Rojack's flight at the end of the novel representing some kind of victory, salvation, or even an escape from justice, it seems Yucatán represents the final step of Rojack's descent into himself. Surely he is to be “lost” in the primordial jungle, parapets aplenty to dare, surrounded by memories and ghosts and dreams of ruined hierarchies (his own, among others) which will at last provide him with the appropriate setting for his psycho-drama, to play out the last act of his physical existence in one more symbolic-geographic metaphor for the themes which have totally shaped the work which depicts his life. Rojack has fallen, south, geographically, and in time, and from high place, into hell. There is no possibility of a movement of ascension to counter this final plunge. There are no positive choices left to be made. Salvation has been lost, and rejected, and more than once; spiritual redemption has been spurned for a last chance at earthly power. At the end Rojack finds not the White House, but the ruined symbol-structures of an American geographical situation with strong and archaic associations with death, time, and ritual killing. Yucatán is a suitable destination for the soul

of Stephen Rojack and the nadir, if not terminus, of the life's journey described in *An American Dream*.

Notes:

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- ¹ Norman Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself* (New York: Perigree, 1981) 438.
 - ² Carl Rollyson, *The Lives of Norman Mailer, A Biography* (New York: Paragon, 1991) 162-3.
 - ³ Hilary Mills, *Mailer: A Biography* (Dunton Green: New English Library, 1982) 275.
 - ⁴ Rollyson 162.
 - ⁵ Rollyson 162.
 - ⁶ Norman Mailer, *An American Dream* (London: Paladin, 1992) 14.
 - ⁷ Mailer, *An AD* 14.
 - ⁸ Jean Radford, *Norman Mailer: A Critical Study* (London: Macmillan, 1975) 33.
 - ⁹ Mailer, *An AD* 10.
 - ¹⁰ Mailer, *An AD* 9.
 - ¹¹ Mailer, *An AD* 9.
 - ¹² Mailer, *An AD* 209.
 - ¹³ Mailer, *An AD* 9.
 - ¹⁴ Mailer, *An AD* 9.
 - ¹⁵ Mailer, *An AD* 10.
 - ¹⁶ Mailer, *An AD* 14.
 - ¹⁷ Richard Poirier, *Mailer* (London: Fontana-Collins, 1972) 133.
 - ¹⁸ Mailer, *An AD* 14.
 - ¹⁹ Mailer, *An AD* 14.
 - ²⁰ Mailer, *An AD* 14.
 - ²¹ Mailer, *An AD* 26.
 - ²² Mailer, *An AD* 181.
 - ²³ Mailer, *An AD* 14.
 - ²⁴ Mailer, *An AD* 14.
 - ²⁵ Mailer, *An AD* 14.
 - ²⁶ Mailer, *An AD* 14.
 - ²⁷ Radford 35.
 - ²⁸ Mailer, *An AD* 15.
 - ²⁹ Mailer, *An AD* 9.
 - ³⁰ Mailer, *An AD* 9.
 - ³¹ Mailer, *An AD* 9.
 - ³² Mailer, *An AD* 21.
 - ³³ Mailer, *An AD* 22-3.
 - ³⁴ Mailer, *An AD* 30-1.
 - ³⁵ Mailer, *An AD* 23.
 - ³⁶ Mailer, *An AD* 23.
 - ³⁷ Mailer, *An AD* 23.
 - ³⁸ Mailer, *An AD* 15.
 - ³⁹ Mailer, *An AD* 15.
 - ⁴⁰ Mailer, *An AD* 15.
 - ⁴¹ Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader, A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978) 155.
 - ⁴² Mailer, *An AD* 15.
 - ⁴³ Mailer, *An AD* 18.
 - ⁴⁴ Mailer, *An AD* 18.
 - ⁴⁵ Mailer, *An AD* 18.
 - ⁴⁶ Mailer, *An AD* 18.
 - ⁴⁷ Mailer, *An AD* 18-19.
 - ⁴⁸ see Tony Tanner, "On the Parapet," *Critical Quarterly* 12 (1970): 153-176.
 - ⁴⁹ See Matthew Ch. 4; Mark Ch. 1; Luke Ch. 4.

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- ⁵⁰ Mailer, *An AD* 20.
⁵¹ Mailer, *An AD* 19.
⁵² Poirier 75. See also Norman Mailer, *The Prisoner of Sex* (London: Weidenfeld, 1971).
⁵³ Mailer, *An AD* 19.
⁵⁴ Mailer, *An AD* 38.
⁵⁵ Mailer, *An AD* 29.
⁵⁶ Mailer, *An AD* 29-30.
⁵⁷ Mailer, *An AD* 30.
⁵⁸ Mailer, *An AD* 34.
⁵⁹ Mailer, *An AD* 34.
⁶⁰ Mailer, *An AD* 46.
⁶¹ Mailer, *An AD* 46.
⁶² Mailer, *An AD* 47.
⁶³ Mailer, *An AD* 47.
⁶⁴ Mailer, *An AD* 39.
⁶⁵ Mailer, *An AD* 77.
⁶⁶ Mailer, *An AD* 77.
⁶⁷ Mailer, *An AD* 77.
⁶⁸ Mailer, *An AD* 70.
⁶⁹ Mailer, *An AD* 76.
⁷⁰ Mailer, *An AD* 59.
⁷¹ Mailer, *An AD* 70.
⁷² Mailer, *An AD* 74.
⁷³ see Sedgwick, Chapter 2, "Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles."
⁷⁴ Norman Mailer, *Why Are We In Vietnam?* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 85.
⁷⁵ Mailer, *An AD* 74.
⁷⁶ Mailer, *An AD* 81.
⁷⁷ Mailer, *An AD* 81.
⁷⁸ Mailer, *An AD* 82.
⁷⁹ Mailer, *An AD* 83.
⁸⁰ Mailer, *An AD* 83.
⁸¹ Mailer, *An AD* 105.
⁸² Mills 277.
⁸³ Mills 277.
⁸⁴ Mailer, *An AD* 75.
⁸⁵ Joseph Epstein, "Mailer Hits Bottom," *Commentary*, 76.1 (1983): 65.
⁸⁶ Peter Manso, *Mailer: His Life and Time* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985) 400.
⁸⁷ Mailer, *An AD* 79.
⁸⁸ Mailer, *An AD* 70.
⁸⁹ Mailer, *An AD* 93.
⁹⁰ Mailer, *An AD* 89-90.
⁹¹ Mailer, *An AD* 106.
⁹² Mailer, *An AD* 143.
⁹³ Mailer, *An AD* 145.
⁹⁴ Mailer, *An AD* 145.
⁹⁵ Mailer, *An AD* 145.
⁹⁶ Mailer, *An AD* 146.
⁹⁷ Mailer, *An AD* 146.
⁹⁸ Mailer, *An AD* 146.
⁹⁹ Mailer, *An AD* 172.
¹⁰⁰ Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1985) 77.
¹⁰¹ Mailer, *An AD* 180.
¹⁰² Mailer, *An AD* 180.
¹⁰³ Mailer, *An AD* 198.
¹⁰⁴ Mailer, *An AD* 198.
¹⁰⁵ Mailer, *An AD* 229.
¹⁰⁶ Mailer, *An AD* 229.

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- ¹⁰⁷ Mailer, *An AD* 229.
¹⁰⁸ Mailer, *An AD* 230.
¹⁰⁹ Mailer, *An AD* 174.
¹¹⁰ Mailer, *An AD* 230-1.
¹¹¹ Mailer, *An AD* 109.
¹¹² Mailer, *An AD* 233.
¹¹³ Mailer, *An AD* 234.
¹¹⁴ Mailer, *An AD* 237.
¹¹⁵ Mailer, *An AD* 238.
¹¹⁶ Poirier 125.
¹¹⁷ Mills 277.
¹¹⁸ Fetterley 178.
¹¹⁹ Mailer, *An AD* 9.
¹²⁰ Tony Tanner, *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970* (London: Cape, 1976) 361.
¹²¹ Mailer, *An AD* 181.

THE '60s MAN: Hierarchical Structures and the Articulation of Male Experience in Selected Novels of Norman Mailer, Ken Kesey and Philip Roth.

Part One: "To Scale the High Pyramides": Norman Mailer's *An American Dream* and *Why Are We In Vietnam?*

Chapter Three: The Small Town Gets Its Kicks: *Why Are We In Vietnam?*

The country had...always had a fever...but now the fever had left the blood, it was in the cells, the cells traveled, and the cells were as insane as Grandma with orange hair...the American small town grew out of itself, and grew out of itself again and again...technology had driven insanity out of the wind and out of the attic, and out of all the lost primitive places: one had to find it now wherever fever, force, and machines could come together, in Vegas, at the race track, in pro football, race riots for the Negro, suburban orgies—none of it was enough—one had to find it in Vietnam; that was where the small town had gone to get its kicks.

Norman Mailer, The Armies of the Night.

Between *An American Dream* and *Why Are We In Vietnam?*, in the summer of 1966, Mailer published *Cannibals and Christians*, a book of essays which, from the title on through, furthered the concerns of Mailer's dichotomous metaphysic. Mailer's awareness of, and involvement in, political issues continued, and he maintained the "high profile" afforded him by the controversy surrounding *An American Dream*. A new generation of readers found the concerns and themes which Mailer had always pursued relevant and engaging, and his next novel reinforced the perception that he had an ability to "tune in" to the consciousness of American society and produce work which both held up a mirror to, and indicated the future direction of, mainstream American social and cultural life. Participation in the movement opposed to America's involvement in the war in Vietnam and an amount of well-publicised journalism also provided an outlet for Mailer's considerable fund of passion and energy. Since the era of "The White Negro" Mailer had been fascinated by the extremes of male behaviour, especially violence; he had always been interested in professional pugilism, and this penchant, which included friendships with a number of professional fighters, most notably José Torres, would culminate in his research and writing on Gary Gilmore and his

involvement with Jack Henry Abbot. It also provided the subject for Mailer's fifth novel.

Why Are We In Vietnam? was written in four months during late 1966, and published the following year. It was originally conceived as part of a much larger work about two psychotic and murderous youths. Mailer decided to publish as a novel in its own right an overgrown preliminary chapter concerning a bear-hunting trip set in the Alaskan wilderness.

The tone of *Why Are We In Vietnam?* is clearly influenced by Mailer's fondness for psychotropic drugs, and its style a distinctively Mailerian synthesis of James Joyce, Dylan Thomas, William S. Burroughs, and the technique of "stream of consciousness" writing. However, the novel probably owes as much to William Faulkner's short-story "The Bear," from which *Why Are We In Vietnam?* derives much in terms of subject matter, tone, characters and characterisations. For example, the novelists employ similarly poetic diction and disregard of syntax in their descriptive styles. In *Why Are We In Vietnam?* Mailer writes:

a flight or cranes went over...hundred and hundreds...birds wrapped up in the mission to go south carrying some part of the sky in their thousand wings as if the very beginning of autumn, seed of the fall, for North America below in all the weeks to come was in the high cawing and wing beat clear up to the fanning and vibrating of reeds some high long-gone sound such as summer coming to the very end.¹

Faulkner couples a comparable, if more sentimental, sensibility with greater economy and clarity of style. In his description of the sounds of hunting dogs barking in the forest in early morning he recalls "the sweet strong cries ringing away into the muffled falling air and gone almost immediately, as if the constant and unrummuring flakes had already buried even the unformed echoes beneath their myriad and weightless falling."²

However, while it is worth noting the similarities between the two works, there are some marked, and important differences. The protagonists of the two novels have oppositional orientations toward nature and the natural world. Mailer's protagonist, D.J. Jethroe,³ is an embryonic "modern" Texan urban-corporation man, etched by an almost Marxist sense of alienation; Faulkner's pre-industrial rural yeoman, on the other hand, experiences oneness with his forest and has an affinity with his prey, with his bear, of a kind the D.J. Jethroe who begins *Why Are We In Vietnam?* would hardly comprehend. Additionally, the youth in Faulkner learns his appreciation of the wild from a male authority figure who has more in common with "Big"

Luke Fellinka and his Native American assistant Ollie than with D.J or the other Texans in *Why Are We In Vietnam?* In "The Bear," if Sam Fathers has been the boy's teacher, Faulkner tells us, "and the backyard rabbits and squirrels his kindergarten, then the wilderness the old bear ran was his college and the old male bear itself; so long unwifed and childless as to have become its own ungendered progenitor, was his alma mater."⁴ However D. J., until his epiphany at the end of *Why Are We In Vietnam?* at least, is schooled only by his brutish father in the basic tenets of American competitiveness: "mutually exclusive goal attainment" and the attitude necessary to attain one's desires: "toughness, dominance, emotional detachment, callousness toward women...[and]...eagerness to seek out danger and fight."⁵

Additionally, Faulkner's characters are in a much more vital and organic relationship with the land and with each other than Mailer's imperious and imperial Texans. In Faulkner the history and geography of the land form a dialectic which shapes the families and the individuals which live there. In this way, as well as stylistically, Faulkner and "The Bear" are closer to Kesey and *Sometimes a Great Notion* than to Mailer and *Why Are We In Vietnam?* For example, Faulkner and Kesey share a more clearly defined moral sense of the ties of family to region, state and nation than Mailer, whose *isolatoes* regard excessive dependence on others as weakness. The changes of narratorial perspective also have analogous functions in "The Bear" and in *Sometimes a Great Notion*. Faulkner and Kesey further share the technique of using italicisation in the text to indicate either a shift to an intimate, interior-voice narrative modality, or to signify the interpolation of other textual material into the narrative (personal letters and reveries in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, journal entries and interiority in "The Bear").

The principal participants in the bear hunt in *Why Are We In Vietnam?* are the novel's narrator, Texan teenager Ranald "D. J." Jethroe (the "D. J." stands for David Jellicoe and "Disc Jockey," as well as Doctor Jekyll); his father, "the cream of corporation corporateness,"⁶ business executive Rutherford David Jethroe Jellicoe Jethroe (known as "Rusty"); D.J.'s best friend, Gottfried "Tex" Jnr., perhaps predictably surnamed Hyde; two of his father's subordinates; and a professional group headed by one of Alaska's most celebrated guides and hunters "Big" Luke Fellinka and his assistant Ollie. Hunt and hunters serve as metaphors for American rapaciousness, greed and militarism, and as examples of the dehumanising effect of its competitive, hierarchical corporate systems; at the same time, as he had done in *An American Dream*, Mailer also uses the novel to promote his

belief in a universal struggle between positive and negative polarities which operate in the natural world, in human societies and systems, and within each individual human being.

Whereas in *An American Dream* Rojack's accommodations with various hierarchical structures can be elicited from analysis of the text, it is nonetheless chiefly in sub-textual and thematic ways that these things are important to that novel. In *Why Are We In Vietnam?*, however, hierarchical structures predominate on the literal, the symbolic, and the thematic levels, and the way in which one hierarchy may be likened to another, and the way the actions and interactions within one hierarchy may serve as a metaphor for those in another provides both an obsession and a central narrative technique for the novel's protagonist. Giving the impression that he is only talking about one thing, America, and that everything in his mind is a metaphor for that thing, D.J.'s scattergun approach collects and connects ideas related in only the loosest sense to stretch the applicability and universality of what amounts to a portrait of a nation's —or a gender of a species'— subconscious. D. J. is Mailer's embodiment of the emotional greed and egocentricity of America —“the narcissist he finds embedded in the psyche of most Americans, engaged by a ceaseless and passionate inner dialogue between parts of himself”⁷— Once again a weakness the novel shares with most of Mailer's fiction and non-fiction is the conflation of the experience of middle class, white American males and all human beings. For all his attempts at inclusiveness, and calls to Bangalore, Rangoon, Brighapore etc. etc. Mailer's hopes for a universally encompassing system fail through his assumption that arguments pertinent to America and Americans can be applied to humanity as a whole.

The idiosyncratic ordering of D.J.'s reminiscences and the jumble of metaphysical and national themes in his drug-fogged consciousness seem to emerge “naturally” from his cannabis-intoxicated state as he relates his tale at a remove of two years, during a dinner celebrating his departure for active service in the Vietnamese-American War. D.J. sees the events of his Alaskan odyssey as integral to his decision to enlist. In the icy vastness of the Alaskan north he has learned a great deal about himself and his father, as well as gaining an insight into status, fear, and greed, and what motivates, and controls men, especially when faced with tension, exhaustion, wild country and even wilder animals. Aim, method, philosophy and facade fuse in the novel's narrator, as when, near its commencement, he invites his readers to:

bite on D.J.'s Texas dick—America, this is your own wandering troubadour brought right up to date, here to sell America its new handbook on how to live...in this Electrox Edison world...Well, Huckleberry Finn is here to set you straight, and his asshole ain't itching, right? so listen to my words, One World, it's here for adolescents and overthirties—you'll know what it's all about when you and me are done, like the asshole belonged to Egypt, man, and the penis was the slave of the Hebes and the Brews...and the nose was the Negroes...Now, remember! Think of cunt and ass—so it's all clear.⁸

Mailer employs his usual Manichaeian system of homologies and metaphors to link all the terms employed in the writing, and all the hierarchical structures he depicts in the novel are likewise associated according to their possible metaphorical alignment with the two polarities of "good" and "evil." As in *An American Dream* and Mailer's non-fiction of the 1950s and 1960s, the principal oppositions are: positive-negative; good-bad; black-white; dirty-clean; cancer-growth; nature-technology; God-Devil; Man-women; and penis-vagina, which converts when convenient into a penis-anus opposition. The principal negative polarity Mailer employs in the novel is a modern, designer Satan, a malevolent entity known as the "Great Plastic Asshole."⁹ D.J. describes it as "his favorite 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."¹⁰ D.J.'s father and his subordinates are, by being in thrall to the imperatives of corporate America, the agents of the G.P.A., which in turn is linked to an entity with both positive and negative polarities which feeds on and directs the psychic life of the United States, the "Magnetic-Electro fief of the dream,"¹¹ or M.E.F. This M.E.F. is at various times identified as both/either God (at its positive pole) and/or the Devil (its negative polarity).

D.J.'s most important experience in Alaska is his "discovery" of, and communion with, the Magnetic Electro fief. One of his central concerns is to tell the reader, his "gentle auditor,"¹² how he and Tex came to have the remarkable insight, intelligence and perception by which he feels they are characterised; in his words, to describe how "the boys got their power...all Alaska style, as weird and wild-ass as the entrails of a wild-ass goose."¹³ D.J. makes the novel's essential theme and its basic technique, the setting in opposition of the positive and negative polarities, clear when, on behalf of

his creator, he ponders that "it's a wise man who knows he is the one who is doing the writer's writing—we are all after all agents of Satan and the Lord, cause otherwise how explain the phenomenological extremities of hot shit and hurricane."¹⁴

Near the opening of *Why Are We In Vietnam?* D.J. muses: "I think there's a tape recorder in heaven for each one of us...while we're sleeping and talking and doing our daily acts...why there is that tape recorder taking it all down."¹⁵ He implies that the account he gives in the novel is being simultaneously retrieved and broadcast via this "tape recording of my brain in the deep of its mysterious unwindings."¹⁶ Later he confides that he must take great care to be accurate because "the events now to be recounted in his private tape [are] being made for the private ear of the Lord."¹⁷ Everyone, says D.J., is equipped with one of these devices, and although "we have no material physical site or locus for this record,"¹⁸ life's experiences and acts are recorded on "a tiny little transistorized tape recorder not as big as a bat's gnat's nut,"¹⁹ and stored in "the transistorized electronic aisles and microfilm of the electronic Lord (who, if he is located in the asshole, must be Satan)."²⁰ This "machine"

makes a total tape record of each last one of us...everything you ever thought and your accompanying systole and diastole and pisshole and golden asshole all recorded, our divine intuitions and clacal glut, all being put down forever on a tiny piece of microfilm...and now face your consequence, the Lord hears your beep, the total of all of you, good and bad.²¹

This transcription of an individual's consciousness passes northward by a kind of psychic-organic-electro-magnetic conductivity toward Alaska, and into the Brooks Range. As D.J. explains, "those mountains are a receptacle, man, a parabolic reflector, an avatar, a bowl of resonance."²² The unspoiled peaks of the far north are the antennae and transceiver of D.J.'s God/Satan entity, the locus of what he also refers to occasionally as the "Universal Mind, henceforth known as UM."²³

As in *An American Dream*, a movement from pinnacle to nadir is associated with economic and social ambition and spiritual aspiration. In "Intro Beep 10" D.J. offers "the sweet intimate underground poop"²⁴ on the arcane psychic and spiritual processes which direct the nation. He tells his reader:

when you go into sleep, that mind of yours leaps, stirs, and sifts itself into the Magnetic-Electro fief of the dream,

hereafter known as M. E. or M. E. F., you are a part of the spook flux of the night like an iron filing in the E. M. field...and it all flows, mind and asshole, anode and cathode, you sending messages and receiving all through the night.²⁵

The citizen of the United States is "off in flux, part of a circuit...swinging on the inside of the deep mystery [of]...the in and out, the potential and the actual, the about to be and the becoming of Something."²⁶ This process has a mechanical as well as a psychic aspect, for the North Pole is the

orifice...to where the field runs, nay *flows* out from the center of the earth to go around the earth into the other end (South Pole, Newton!) and back through the fires, the molten red lava flaming slit furnace at the core where the heat is, changing all the way over to ice again as the electromagnetic field and stream passes from inside blazes to outside crust.²⁷

This process has an analogue-in-reverse in the M.E.F's "mental" element, its "undiscovered magnetic-electro field of the dream, which is opposed to the electromagnetic field of the earth just as properly as the square root of minus one is opposed to one."²⁸ There is a corresponding "reversal" of the normal state of consciousness in each American citizen while he or she dreams:

God or the Devil takes over in sleep—what simpler explanation you got, M. A. expert type? nothing better to do than put down Mani the Manichee, well, shit on that, D. J. is here to resurrect him through a point of declaration in the M. E. field which is this—all the messages of North America go up to the Brooks Range. That land above the Circle, man, is the land of the icy wilderness and the lost peaks and the unseen deeps and the spires, crystal receiver of the continent.²⁹

Clearly, a structure analogous to the "inverse hierarchy" of *An American Dream* is outlined.³⁰ Mailer's system places terms, characters and symbols in direct oppositions to further his philosophical concerns. These depict prestige hierarchies of the kind outlined in this study, operating in a literary way so as to reinforce Mailer's Manichaeic cosmology.

In the "Terminal Intro Bleep And Out" D.J. provides a final elucidation of the details of the process by which the M.E.F. is "fed" on the by-products of

American consciousness as "a weed thrives on a cesspool, piss in its nectar, shit all ambrosia."³¹ D.J. paints a nightmarish picture of

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, all the United Greedies of America humping up that old rhythm, turning the dynamo around...so the Devil feeding them from one side and God having to juice man from the other.³²

Mailer posits, as he did in *An American Dream*, two mirror-hierarchies ruling American life: one, spiritually transcendent, focused "upwardly," or heavenly, and the other focused "downwards," toward confusion, waste, and excrement. This second hierarchy, equated with the G.P.A., in ways not made clear has become dominant, and is causing a stasis, or "clog," in a system which should be characterized by movement and dynamic. D.J. is an example of the cured, and the process of cure. If he believes it has been revealed to him that the primal drives and desires of his countrymen and women are collected and then fed back to them while they sleep by the M.E.F, shaping their thoughts and actions during "waking" hours, he also seems to have come to believe as a result of his experiences that only courage, honesty and self-awareness can prevent one from being warped by the overloaded, "evil," polluting, excremental energies of the M.E.F. and turned into a minion of the G.P.A. The survival of "God," of positive polarity, and the maintenance of movement in the system, requires that America renew its battle with all that is restrictive and dishonest. If the war in Vietnam is an example of America's mis-direction, presumably the valour, ferocity and clarity of "warriors" like D.J. can serve as an antidote.

D.J.'s intense and near-mystical experience of these forces, as well as the more readily explained, but no less overwhelming, perceptions which result from his exposure to the flora, fauna, weather and terrain of the wilderness, emerges in a jumble of private coinages, portmanteau words, patois, American slang and Texas street argot. The mixture is a "hip" melange which results in a quicksilver, marijuana-hallucinogenic-amphetamine state-of-the-nation inter-textual "rap" characterised by punning, an enormous amount of technical information, folklore, pseudo-history and pop-psychology. Metaphors deriving from military and frontier life and history and sexuality are predominant, and, as the book progresses, D.J.'s favourite metaphoric association also becomes clear as both "medium" and "message." "Cunt" and "ass," and his energetic, passionate pursuit of sexual

domination and satisfaction provide either a metaphor or an homology for everything. All activities are seen in terms of sex and war, for in Mailer's world sex is a war and war is like sex. All human interactions, to D.J.'s eyes, are a kind of fornication; courage leads to satisfying sex, while compromise or hesitancy are either a kind of masturbation, or described as some kind of degraded or thwarted sexual encounter.

While the ingenuously arrogant D.J. is, in his own words, "bonging the gong, blasting the ass, chewing the milch, milking the chintz, and working the jerk,"³³ and when his "stream-of-conch"³⁴ rave forgets to try to keep to the point, Mailer probably gets closer than he ever does elsewhere to a convincing fictional exfoliation of the philosophical system he developed in the 1950s and brought to perfection in the 1960s. It is an unabashed, intimate statement of a personal mythos, and D.J.'s techno-bombast paradoxically becomes near to being the most engaging and honest voice ever chosen or created by Mailer. For once creation grows away from creator; instead of a thinly-disguised Mailer, the writer's talent convincingly produces a character who may not be realistic, but who nonetheless "lives." Mailer abandons his habitual attempt to convince through reason or dazzle with intellectual complexity—and neither is his long suit—to allow words to do the work, and he successfully employs his bent for strong, autonomous characterisation and vivid story-telling in allowing a likewise natural yarn-spinner (D.J.), to carry the thematic weight of the novel.

The validity of D.J.'s perceptions are pinned on his claim that he "suffers from one great American virtue, or maybe it's a disease or ocular dysfunction—D. J. sees right through shit."³⁵ Whereas the clumsy self-consciousness and pretentiousness of the essays in works like *Advertisements for Myself* thrust their inconsistencies at the reader, and in *An American Dream* Rojack's delusions rarely seem anything more potent than just that, *Why Are We In Vietnam?*'s obscure homologies and metaphors and the feeling of improvisation, of jazz-like solo-work, and Burroughsian tone, allow Mailer's thoughts and ideas a most detailed expression. Whatever his relationship to Mailer, D.J. might be said at least partly to be justified in his boast.

The intensity with which D.J. interprets his inner world and its "external reality" usually conveys to the reader the general sense of his ideas. D.J. races so quickly that only the most obvious of his references need be followed; when the reader fails to connect, or finds lack of clarity, or encounters an association, suggestion or metaphor which is too obscure, or outrageous, he or she might say, along with Carroll's Alice after reading the

poem 'Jabberwocky' in the first chapter of *Through the Looking-Glass*, "Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don't exactly know what they are!"³⁶ In the headlong rush of his monologue, D.J. also thoroughly informs the "reader" about the accommodations he forges with his father, with Tex, and with the "natural" world, and about the insights he gains into himself, into America, its citizens, its businesses, and the hierarchies which shape all the inter-relationships of American life, individual and corporate. The stripping bare of the perverted, self-serving soul of Corporation Man, and the damage which results from the operation of the G.P.A. on individual, family and nation is part of D.J.'s strategy. To complete this task he details many examples of the accommodations between equals, and also between unequals— between *isotimoi* and *anisotimoi*.

The tale of the hunt is told, but its main landmarks are not the deaths of animals, although these are realised in technicolour details. Instead D.J. recalls the first hierarchical tussle between Rusty Jethroe and the guide; the failure of M.A. Pete cleanly to kill his target first shot (a metaphor for the American insistence on keeping their operations in Vietnam to the scale of a "limited war," and thereby crippling their chances of eventual success); he details the hike he takes with his father, their brief communion, and then the traumatic sundering of their intimacy after Rusty claims the killing shot on a bear which was actually delivered by D.J.; finally Mailer shows the two boys defying the authority of the older men to head into the wilderness to seek communion with the spirit(s) of the north, and share the almost palpable message the north delivers to them.

Why Are We In Vietnam?'s major concern is the relationship between father and son. The main accommodation discussed in the novel is between D.J. Jethroe and Rusty Jethroe; perspectives on this relationship are provided by Mailer's depiction of the homosocial accommodations which result from Rusty's hierarchical jousting with the other men on the trip: their guide, the archetypically grizzled, laconic, and supremely competent frontiersman-hunter, Big Luke Bellinka, and the men-without-surnames, Pete and Bill, Rusty's corporation subordinates.³⁷ An accommodation of secondary importance in *Why Are We In Vietnam?* occurs between D.J. and his *isotimos* Tex; like the accommodation between Rojack and Roberts in *An American Dream*, it is marked by pronounced homoeroticism. All the accommodations and conflicts in the novel are connected by D.J.'s narrative, and used to further Mailer's thematic concerns. Rusty is the "alpha" in D.J.'s world and, whether related to D.J. or Tex or Luke, all accommodations

in the novel centre on the potent, masculine figure of Rusty Jethroe, a prime example of the American male in all his rampant glory, greed, and hypocrisy. Rusty, D.J. tells the reader,

is a heroic looking figure of a Texan, 6 1/2, 194, red-brown lean keen of color, eyes gray-green-yellow-brown which is approved executive moderate shit hue color for eyes if you want to study corporation norms...he look like a high-breed crossing between Dwight D. Eisenhower and Henry Cabot Lodge.³⁸

Rusty is characterised by "plain hardpan thriftily won, modestly assumed, holy acquired plain old Christian Grace and Get-up, Go, Spunk,"³⁹ and is in every way a prime example of the Corporation Man so disparagingly portrayed by William Whyte, the product of the historically-derived American imperatives of masculinity and masculine hierarchical behaviour, further conditioned by its recent history. Rusty is a typical Cold War corporate warrior, a department head for a company which changes its name from the unpatriotic C.C.C.P. to Central Consolidated Combined Chemical and Plastic "or," as D.J. informs us: "as the team began to say, 4C and P."⁴⁰ The pun of "foresee" and "pee" (urinate), in other words, "precognition is a source of terror," is an example of how Mailer's habitual concerns with time, fate, and dread are worked into this novel more thoroughly, and with greater consistency and effect, than in most of his other works. 4C and P is a plastics manufacturer; "Rusty" Jethroe's special project is (unintentionally) carcinogenic cigarette filters.

With his usual charm and preference for sexual metaphors D.J. informs us that "Rusty and his status...are as up tight with each other as two plump yoni—that's Hindu for cunt, son!—doing sixty-nine in the long Hindu night."⁴¹ Barney Oswald Kelly's insistence in *An American Dream* "that God and the Devil are very attentive to the people at the summit,"⁴² is similar to Rusty's belief "that the Lord despising mass methods does not bother to weigh man in the aggregate or the mass; instead he stays close to a chosen few, and they ain't Hebes."⁴³ Rusty, in fact, in his own mind, is God's chosen yardstick for humanity. He is "one of the pillars of the firmament...If he is less great than God intended him to be, then America is in Trouble."⁴⁴ The source of Rusty's power lies in his combination of genetic inheritance and training —nature and nurture— or, as D.J. phrases it: "Rusty's...cells are filled with the biological inheritance and trait transmissions of his ancestors, all such raw-hide, cactus hearts, eagle eggs, and coyote,"⁴⁵ a natural heritage carefully honed to produce "a geyser of

love, hot piss, shit, corporation pus, hate, and heart...he's Texas willpower, hey yay!⁴⁶ Rusty revels in the accommodations favoured and demanded by his society. The bear hunt itself is originally conceived as the setting for a kind of "trial" of prestige and strength, and as a status enhancing "reward," for two equally placed corporation figures: Rusty, head of "Pew Rapports — the filter with the purest porosity of purpose"⁴⁷ and one of his "friends" and colleagues in the corporation hierarchy, "his opposite number Al Percy Cunningham, the managing director of Tendonex, which is 4C and P's answer to Fiberglas."⁴⁸ This relationship parallels that of Tex and D.J. as an example of a relationship between *isotimoi*, and seems to be an example of jousting between *isotimoi* for the "inside running" toward the apex of a hierarchical structure.

The trip was to have been "a Class A hunting trip—a Charley Wilson, John Glenn, Arnold Palmer, Gary Cooper kind of trip."⁴⁹ The employment of the names of the respected big-businessman, the original "all-the-right-stuff" astronaut, the champion golfer and the screen's best-known portrayer of the archetypal western hero shows by evoking the kind of historical "heroic" associations and hierarchical processes which are being highlighted in this study how the two executives are making a prestige statement, "stepping up out of category, reaching just a bit,"⁵⁰ and signalling ambition, in attempting to engage Luke Fellinka. The head guide of "the Moe Henry and Obungekat Safari Group"⁵¹ is normally so choosy that

he wouldn't even take Senators, and you was a Congressman and you wanted Big Luke Fellinka...you could lie down on your back and say Big Luke if you consent to be my guide you or Ollie can take one big crap in my mouth just for openers, and Big Luke would yawn.⁵²

"Holiday" for the two hierarchy climbers requires a special definition. Filled with the rhetoric of sexual conquest, physical violence, and emotional tension, organising the expedition has involved setting up a situation which will test the two corporation males' respective employments of the tenets of masculinity in competition with each other, with Luke, and with the physical challenges of the Alaskan wilderness. D.J. comments: "So you can see what a hoedown of a hunting trip it would have been if Al Percy C...and Rusty had each been burning up that Alaska Brooks Mountain Range brush trying to light a light of love in Big Luke's eye."⁵³ However, when Cunningham is "called off at the last by the Astronaut Program hotline,"⁵⁴ to attend to the details of bidding for a N.A.S.A. contract Rusty is disgruntled,

not cause A.P. Cunningham ain't with him, but because the hunting trip is now downgraded...Rusty feels like a movie star who's going out to pump for a weekend with the best new Pumper-head Penis in Cinemaville, and then hears she's missing the opportunity to have a commissary lunch with Prince Philip or Baldy Khrushchev.⁵⁵

Not only is power, as has been elsewhere observed, a potent aphrodisiac, but power also seeks to associate with power, capitalising on the association by turning power into prestige while in competition and accommodation it seeks its "natural" level. The metaphor for Rusty's disappointment concludes: "Well, you know a movie star, she'd rather have Big K stomp his big shoe jes once in the crack of her ass while he's still Mr. Big than have her cunt stick-tickled into heaven for three days with no one up there in the redwoods to see it."⁵⁶ The down-grading of the hunting trip partly explains Rusty's bad-temper, and his lacklustre performance in power-accommodation in the early part of the trip. "D. J. will never know," notes *Why Are We In Vietnam?*'s high-spirited narrator,

if Rusty dropped points in the early stages of his contest with Luke because he was dying inside for not being down at the Canaveral table where big power space decisions were being made by his opposite number, Wise-Ass Cunningham, or whether Rusty would have lost in the early stages to Big Luke on the best week he ever had.⁵⁷

"Take away A. P. Cun," Rusty continues, "and what you got—ego status embroilments between numbers. guides and executives. All right—look into it. You may never get out."⁵⁸ In other words, without an adversary of status, and real, permanent hierarchical risks, Rusty's efforts are devalued. (Rusty and Luke dispute prestige only, for they do not operate in the same hierarchy, only in the "temporary" structure of the hunting party.) The stress of hierarchical accommodation has to be commensurate with the risks; as in any power play, the higher the stakes and more valuable the ultimate prize, the greater the intensity, and potential for violence, in the accommodations. Like Rojack in *An American Dream*, when faced with unworthy opponents, and with little at stake, the pleasure of winning is greatly reduced, and the sense of failure increased, whether win or loss, close or distant accommodation, results.

Mailer's world-view involves accepting that readiness for challenge, with an always-consequent risk of failure, is the only way to achieve lasting success; one must be ready to test one's competence, potency and ability, or

lose the advantages they might have brought. When fate sends A. P. Cunningham to play more important games, it is too late for Rusty to cancel the trip. As a way of wringing what advantage he can from the affair, he invites two corporation cogs along, principally to provide later corroboration of the feats of Rusty Jethroe in Alaska. If his father is “a high-grade asshole”⁵⁹ who “is characterized by a specific and even unique property which endows him because of it with his rank,”⁶⁰ and “is not easily recognized as any kind of A. H., and usually appears the contrary,”⁶¹ D.J. takes the measure of his father's flunkies when referring to them as “Medium Asshole Pete and Medium Asshole Bill.”⁶² To the questions: “‘Isn't that so, Pete? isn't that so, Bill?’”⁶³ the twinned answers: “‘It sure is, Rusty,’”⁶⁴ will be anticipated as being forthcoming “without a trace of strain, they're yes-men, it is expected of them.”⁶⁵ “These corporation pricks are not there for nothing”, D.J. says, for, despite appearances, “they are not all that dumb. Being medium-grade...asshole[s], they have high competence in tunnels and channels. They can all swim uphill through shit face first.”⁶⁶ This shorthand metaphor indicates the other men's facility and competence in the interplay of hierarchical accommodation. “[T]hey know enough,” comments D.J., “not to try to read each other's corporate fish features when they can read each other's corporate ass voices.”⁶⁷ Vocal cues are stressed on a number of occasions by D.J. as important in hierarchical interplay. In *Mailer* the olfactory sense is always accorded great cachet; in *Why Are We In Vietnam?* sound is paired with it. One of Rusty's strengths is his “chameleon pussy sphincter chattering of a voice,”⁶⁸ which he can employ to be “Texas ass, man, common as dirt,”⁶⁹ and seem like a simple man of the soil who “rolls his prejudices around in his throat like a fat cricket in honey.”⁷⁰ However, once placed “behind a dinner table with candles, tablecloth, nubian black-ass Washington, D. C. type Pullman Porter butlers,”⁷¹ D. J. comments on “the critical contrast in Rusty's voice between down home talk (biggest Texas ass accent in the corporation) and Cosmo high-fashion dinner talk, gentry ass style, no ideas, but a thousand fine names.”⁷² The “ability” to accrue prestige by implied association — commonly known as name-dropping— aside, the real test of Rusty's impressive vocal register, is that “Rusty is corporation, right...he's a voice, got nothing unexpected ever to say, but he got to say it with quality.”⁷³

Despite having to play “second fiddle” to the vocally adept Rusty, and even to his son, who displays an inherited facility when he is, in his own words, “coming on like Holden Caulfield when I'm really Doctor Jekyll with balls,”⁷⁴ participating in a successful hunt with Rutherford Jethroe will be

worthwhile for his assistants, too, and grant them superior status to those back at the office who were not invited to take part. Having gone into debt in order to finance the trip and the weapons he will require, for M.A. Pete the investment “means a two- to five-year expediting of his dangerously dull slick as owl shit ascent of the corporation ladder.”⁷⁵ In the novel obsequiousness produces better results than efficiency; American corporations, Mailer is highlighting, have come to depend on “yes men” and those who opt for safe, steady ascents and distant accommodation, rather than those who dare close accommodations and/or high-risk/high-return hierarchical tactics. In this fictional account an intimate portrait is realised of the males of the post-war generations of whom Joe Dubbert wrote: “An ever-increasing number of corporate obligations, guidelines, ethical standards, government regulations, and, most important, government contracts promoted subservience from businessmen to a degree unheard of in American history.”⁷⁶ In this novel, D.J. explains A. P. Cunningham's defection to take care of business imperatives by noting: “Some Americans giving up a lot for the astronauts.”⁷⁷ Fearful of mistakes and vigorously adaptive to the boss' or company's vagaries, the corporation men in *Why Are We In Vietnam?* are every bit as chilling a depiction of American masculinity as the amoral predators of Mailer's earlier works. At least Lt. Cummings, Mickey Lovett and Marion Faye are aware, and vital, and human; Bill and Pete seem more like machines, while even Rusty, for all his vibrant progenitors, “obeys the orders only of G. P. A.”⁷⁸ When high on cannabis, behind his father's eyes D.J. is always filled with “a Fyodor Kierk kind of dread looking into Big Daddy's chasm and tomb,”⁷⁹ in which he sees

voids, man, and gleams of yellow fire—the woods is burning somewhere in his gray matter—and then there's marble aisles...fifty thousand fucking miles of marble floor down those eyes, and you got to walk over that to get to The Man.⁸⁰

It is not coincidental that it is this perception at the Dallas dinner party which causes D.J. to be reminded of the tale of his Alaskan encounter with the E.M.F and his theory that a fiendish, disembodied corporate mastermind is really running America.

Those functionary minions of “The Man,” Pete and Bill become less important as the novel progresses. It is not so much that M.A.s Bill and Pete are weak or stupid; they are simply not quite of the same competitive, aggressive stamp as their superiors. The relationship Rusty has established

with them is not depicted as bullying; his physical size and the force of his personality are enough to keep his underlings in deferential positions, unable and unwilling to summon the resources to challenge his place. They are hierarchical animals as much as he is, relatively happy with the benefits which devolve from their places. Doubtless, back in Dallas they have "lackeys" of their own who tremble at their voices the way they do at the sound of Rusty's, and who could not dream of being able to aspire to or afford the "enjoyment" of a hunting trip to the pristine Alaskan forests. From the points of view of Pete and Bill, presumably, after the course of years, events like the hunting trip and, more importantly, the tapestry of stories and boasts each can later produce, will enable one of the two to begin to emerge as favoured by "the boss," and to ascend even further, perhaps even to follow Rusty's further ascension and replace him on his eventual retirement. Bill emerges as "favourite" after Pete's failure to kill a mountain goat with one shot in the early part of the trip results in a long, tedious chase for the whole party. This provides D.J. with the excuse to make some sarcastic observations about American attitudes to firearms and firepower, and squeamish modern attitudes to "the kill," while Pete's distress provides an example of the fear which accompanies hierarchical accommodation. Elsewhere Pete and Bill serve as a kind of muted Chorus, two small figurines of American mediocrity, middle-management illustrations of the perils of a system which encourages deceit, hypocrisy and self-serving as the qualities most likely to produce success. Essentially, however, Pete and Bill provide little more than "light relief," and throw into higher relief those men of true puissance and genuine high standing, Rusty and Luke.

The most aggressive accommodation that occurs in the novel (beside that between D.J. and Rusty) is between the tour guide and Rusty. The similarities between these highly ranked males are pointed out by Mailer, albeit that they exist normally in hierarchies requiring vastly different skills, and employing vastly differing place-determining criteria. Competitive hierarchisation is Rusty's natural state, this point being made when D.J. notes that his father "can't bear the sight of a man who ever broke under pressure."⁸¹ D.J. builds the suspense for his readers to anticipate the clash which must arise between his father, "the most competitive prick there is,"⁸² and the other, "a sweet old bastard, who's so tough that old grizzly bears come up and kiss his ass."⁸³ When the group meets their guide wary, mutual circling occurs, as between bucks or bulls sizing each other up. D.J. notes with approval that his father begins to accommodate immediately the

party arrives in Alaska: "First, Rusty spends no time trying to be the equal of Big Luke head on! He takes Luke's suggestions, is friendly but aloof. When Luke addresses him as Sir, Sir Rutherford Jet-Throne does not say call me Rusty."⁸⁴ Luke's instinctive understanding of the difference between the authority exerted by Rusty and that exerted by Pete and Bill—who are also paying customers of the Moe Henry and Obungekat Safari Group—is indicated by the fact that although he calls Rusty "sir," Pete and Bill find "Luke naturally picks them up by the handle of their first name, and Rusty...chuckles...indulgently."⁸⁵ D.J. admires his father's tactics as Luke is questioned on the arrangements for the hunt: "Rusty...hasn't put in the years being a first-line Ranger Commando in 4C and P for zero return, he knows how to keep an expert on the defensive (and remind him of a nightmare or two) by poking in just hard enough to the mysteries between the facts."⁸⁶ Rusty respects, even admires Luke; he simply has priorities of his own which must be achieved, and it is the nature of a successful hierarchiciser never to allow a chance for close accommodation to pass. Rusty eventually comes to the conclusion that he and Luke are much the same type of person, simply sundered by the imperatives of different, but equally appropriate, sets of skills. Each is a man who has nurtured the qualities which allow him to succeed in his particular environment. Rusty's "full estimate of Big Luke"⁸⁷ is that "man to man, if you put each in the other's job from birth"⁸⁸—with the implication that making hierarchical accommodations is a lifetime's work which begins at the cradle and is not at an end until the grave—"Rusty could have done everything Luke did."⁸⁹ The exception is in the case of the latter's uncanny marksmanship, "cause that ain't practice, that's magic, and Rusty is modest about magic,"⁹⁰ although Rusty's egocentric final analysis is that "Big Luke in Rusty's shoes would not have gone as far because he might be...too fucking lazy."⁹¹

Among his other attributes, D.J. has credited his father as well as himself with "a shit converter of a nose,"⁹² by which he means he can sense lies. This ability can reduce a prevaricating subordinate to fear-induced diarrhoea, "all that hardpan constipated Texas clay in his flunky gut turning abruptly to sulfur water and steam."⁹³ Such a capacity is apparently shared by all truly powerful males, regardless of their field of operation or method of asserting their place in a hierarchy:

D. J. and Tex read right away the #1 reason all the minions of the Great Plastic Asshole were slobbering over the bear grease on Big Luke's boots. It wasn't just because among

Alaska guides he was *primus inter pares*...no, what made Big Luke The Man was that he was like the President of General Motors or General Electric...he had like the same *bottom*, man, I mean D.J.'s here to tell you that if you even a high-grade asshole and had naught but a smidgeon of flunky in you it would still start—you may purchase this in full confidence—it would still start in Big Luke's presence to blow sulfur water, steam, and specks of hopeless diarrhetic matter in your punny little gut, cause he was a *man!*⁹⁴

The fabled hunter “sends out a wave every time he has a thought, you can feel it, and around him you can get messages back.”⁹⁵ He is responsive to his environment, whereas Rusty tries to dominate his surroundings, human or natural, and he reacts, as opposed to responds, to all challenges, real or imagined. At least tentatively one might argue that Luke is in tune with the positive and negative elements of the M.E.F., with the “nervous system running through the earth and air of this whole State of Alaska,”⁹⁶ carrying and amplifying the basic message of Alaska. One cannot lie to a harsh and unforgiving wilderness; it respects neither place nor prestige. As D.J. notes: “the air is the medium and the medium is the message, that Alaska air is real message—it says don't bullshit, buster.”⁹⁷ Rusty is the representative of a “false,” intrusive technology, in thrall to the unnatural, anti-nature power-source of Corporate America, the entirely negative energy D.J. calls the Great Plastic Asshole, which is based on hierarchy, division, conquest and exploitation, while Luke is as one with an order in which predator and prey are part of the same order.

In more than one way, then, the conflict between Rusty and Luke is inevitable. In the place of Rusty's profanity and penchant for scatology (which his son shares) and the auality which is appropriate to his character and position and allegiances, Luke is quietly spoken, and does not share Rusty's way of comporting or expressing himself. Mailer makes this clear when mentioning the sang-froid with which the guide would spurn the most tempting of congressional enticements. The outdoorsy, taciturn Big Luke is contrasted with bluff, chatty Rusty; to an extent the former represents the “old” “frontier” values of America in competition with the slick, corporate world of the modern Texans. Perhaps Mailer is admitting, however reluctantly, that the day of the old values, which Luke represents, has passed. Rusty senses the slight weakness in Luke, which D.J. notes: “Big Luke used to be a big hunter, but those grizzly scratches have weakened his

Arnold Toynbee coefficient—he's interested less in challenge than response."⁹⁸

Although

Big Luke had known grizzlers all his life—there was a time when he knew them so well he could walk up to a peaceful one and pat him on the shoulder... now the psychomagnetic field was a mosaic, a fragmented vase as Horace said to Ovid, and Big Luke couldn't be sure if he was still in contact with his monumental cool.⁹⁹

Yet Rusty cannot simply force distant accommodation on Luke; the latter is in his element, and Rusty is away from the reassurance of his. Rusty is aware that he is at Luke's "mercy," and may be "caught stalking around in the brush with a guide who's holding such a rep he can afford to save himself for his major clients and make the minor executives like Rusty do a little work for him."¹⁰⁰ The success of the trip is up to Luke, so Rusty must proceed cautiously if he is to impose his will on the situation.

In order to justify the expense of the trip, and to capitalise on the presence of a pair of acquiescent assistants and a pair of admiring teenagers (each of the four, of course, ready to pounce on his slightest weakness) Rusty is aware that "[s]omething bona fide has got to happen, they can't just go up to Alaska woods, get drunk for a week, buy a bear skin in Fairbanks or McGrath, take pictures, and slip a suppository up the folks back home."¹⁰¹

Although much hierarchicisation in the human world as in the wider animal kingdom is bluff, or display, prestige must ultimately rest on real or at least potential power. If in Alaska and the realm of the wilderness hunter one cannot contingently "bullshit," in the long term this is true of Texas and corporation life also. Power based on pretence, dissemblance or jactancy will eventually be shown up; hence the stress D.J. places on one of the main lessons he learns in Alaska: "don't bullshit, buster."¹⁰² On the hunting trip, Rusty must prove his potency through direct violence; he must kill, kill competently and cleanly, and he must kill a bear. The "top" executive must kill the "top" animal in the "top" way, that is, in open hunt. As D.J. is only too-well aware:

Rusty's problem is simple. He can't begin to consider how to go back without a bear. He got a corporation mind. He don't believe in nature; he puts his trust and distrust in man. 5% trust, 295% distrust. He figures if Big Luke wants him to tag a bear, that's the ball game— if Big Luke don't want him to, then Rusty is left close to being a dead ass this season.¹⁰³

Failure to bag a decent-sized ursine will be an unmitigated, irrevocable disaster, with ramifications for Rusty's career. For what amount to symbolic reasons any future accommodation and ascension within the hierarchy he has planned will be seriously compromised should "Rusty travel all that round trip 6,000 plus miles, spending 6,000 plus dollars on D.J. and himself...and present himself at 4C and P with a deer's head and no bear."¹⁰⁴ The result would be that "Rusty and his status...can now take a double pine box funeral—they'll never get off his ass at Combined Consolidated, no, no."¹⁰⁵ Rusty's evident concern with this subject, and his distress when the issue is raised by Luke, is genuine. He is obliged to digest and present the "manly" reason for hunting as his own. On learning of the potential scarcity of bear he tells Luke: "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, not until I got to face The Big Man."¹⁰⁶ However, it is not so much that Rusty deeply desires to come face to face with a bear, as he knows he now has to. He is aware of the devaluation of the trip after A.P. Cunningham's defection, suspecting that "despite the big man death-guts charisma"¹⁰⁷ of the guide, Luke may desire to reflect this and avoid having to "lead various grades of ass-holes and tough but untrained adolescents into the brush to look for Mr Wounded Honey Grizzly."¹⁰⁸ Rusty's fears are confirmed soon after the arrival of the group in Alaska. Luke suggests they go about their hunting by "'starting the week with caribou.'" ¹⁰⁹ D.J.'s father, however, takes this as an insult. "Rusty," D.J. informs us, "would as soon start the week with rabbits as caribou deer."¹¹⁰

Luke, for his part, argues from a conservationist point of view which has the added advantage of allowing him to "take it easy" without losing face in his own or others' eyes: "Luke tells Rusty that it's not the best season this year for bear,"¹¹¹ of whom he says, "'[t]hey're scarce now. When bear get lonesome they can smell far.'" ¹¹² Later, this opinion is reinforced by Luke's laconic assistant, an Indian named "Big Ollie". D.J. notes this man "talks like a cannibal in a jungle bunny movie. 'Brooks Range no wilderness now. Airplane go over the head, animal no wild no more, now crazy.'" ¹¹³ Rusty, lapsing into his most articulate corporate persona, the hard dealer who has laid down the actual dollars paying for the trip, responds that he "'didn't come to Alaska to debate the merits and vices of technological infiltration.'" ¹¹⁴ He insists that he is interested in killing a bear and very little else. The jousting, poker-fashion bluffing, and alpha-male feinting which takes place between Luke and the corporation executive gather impetus.

Rusty's "subtle" power gambits, designed to ensure the successful execution of his agenda, revolve around his trying to make sure Luke acknowledges him as no ordinary executive, no ordinary tourist-hunter. He launches his attack:

"I don't want to carry on about where I've hunted, because I could tell you about going for wild boar in Bavaria, and for elephant in Africa...I even got in on a tiger hunt with the Maharajah of Pandrasore, but that I don't count because I was present in 'semiofficial function' "¹¹⁵

This last piece of information D.J. interprets as a way of his father's implying C.I.A connections; and the rest of Rusty's story, of course, makes a similar point in trying to impress, and thus in serving his power accommodation with Luke. Praising his aristocratic Indian host, Rusty claims that all in attendance on such a "variety of the Great White Hunter"¹¹⁶ know " '[i]f there's a tiger this side of Tibet the Maharajah's magnetism will draw him. Sure as bird shit on a parasol, damn if we didn't attract three tigers.' "¹¹⁷

" 'Maybe I get to learn a couple of new things about hunting from you,' "¹¹⁸ is Luke's canny riposte, requiring Rusty in turn to counter self-effacingly: " 'Say, Mr. Fellinka, I may look like a variety of Texas bull, but not that big, I swear. No, no, no. I'm not here to instruct, I'm here to imbibe. At the foot of a master.' "¹¹⁹

Rusty's reason for recounting the story is so he can later bring the same comparison into play to flatter and cajole Luke:

"Listen, Luke, here's what I suspect is true—it is that you are the Maharajah of this woods and this range of earth, and so I'm expecting you to make the impossible become directly possible and we're going to carry our stretch of hunting to what I would call a successful termination."¹²⁰

Rusty fears that he will be denied the chance to even take a "fair shot"¹²¹ at a bear, and complains that such a opportunity is guaranteed in the contract he has signed. Luke and the others from the Safari group stick to their guns—or, in this case, to their unwillingness to raise them unnecessarily. To Rusty's reminder about the contract his hosts declare that no one has ever asked for a rebate. A gentleman named Kenneth Easterly, described as "the olive oil in this operation,"¹²² agrees --" 'Yes-sir, there's a rebate of five hundred per head if we neglect to get you in proper range for a shot at a visible grizzly' "¹²³— before going on to aver that thus far in the history of his company's operations so impressed has every client been that even

those who have not had the “peculiar good fortune”¹²⁴ to shoot at a grizzly bear have nonetheless “had the kind of hunting experience the desire for which brought them out here in the first place.”¹²⁵

Corporation Man Rusty knows excuses when he hears them. He shows the aspect of his personality of which D.J. is in dread when he snarls at Easterly: “‘I don't believe I follow you, boy.’”¹²⁶ Rusty states his opinion baldly: “‘I see...you're going to keep us well up above timber so no bear can sneak near on us. We'll have to spend our week climbing rocks just to get a shot at five hundred yards down on some mountain goat across a canyon.’”¹²⁷ His perhaps having actually cut to the intention of their hosts, the reaction to this remark is one of indignant denial. As if to show his disdain for the suggestion that untamed animals might be held to a man-made contract, when Rusty demands some kind of further guarantee —“‘Let's specify,’ says Rusty”¹²⁸— Luke finally offers in return his trump card. D.J. relates the end of the conflict as follows:

A sad-ass show. It flickers off, on, off, for ninety minutes, a muted hot shit hurricane. Finally, Big Luke hints that Rusty can have his rebate now, his deposit, his contract and his week, and that is the end of the first contest, for if there is one thing worse than coming back with no bear, it is coming back a rejectee and rebatee from the Moe Henry and Obungekat Safari Group.¹²⁹

Round One seems to go to Luke rather convincingly. All that is left for D.J.'s father to do is retreat with grace. The final encroachment of the technology focused, results-oriented corporation type on the mysteries of the wilderness realm, nonetheless seems inevitable, however:

Sir-Jet-Throne...he saves face. He compromises, he agrees Luke will give the word on when they go for grizzer. Say. They all go to bed in rooms with a foam-rubber mattress, pink-tile bathrooms, and Venetian blinds.¹³⁰

Progressively the demands of the “Sir Jet-Thrones” and their minions do force compromise on the wild, dilute the experience, and almost certainly drive more than the animals crazy.

The accommodations between Rusty and his minions, and between Rusty and Luke have, however, only been a preamble to, or been juxtaposed with, the main hierarchical accommodation depicted in *Why Are We In Vietnam?*, which is the relationship between Rusty and his son. “Rusty” is a sporty, outdoorsy, patriarchal and competitive Texan, so inured to and approving of hierarchical accommodations that they characterise his home

and social as much as his business life. He dominates his friends and acquaintances, his adoring wife —Alice Hallie Lee Jethroe, known as “Hallelujah Death-row”¹³¹— and he attempts to do the same to his son. Every encounter is a chance to practice hierarchical skills; every relationship with another man must firmly be contextualised, and relative hierarchical place established.

In *Why Are We In Vietnam?* the D.J.-Rusty relationship is one element in the depiction of a vast “Parent-Child” system which owes an obvious debt to Freud. Freud's suggestions concerning the relationship between the child and the male parent have frequently been the subject of discussion in literature as well as in psychoanalysis. Given that his view of the important role of childhood sexuality in the development of the individual is correct, it is not surprising that this should be so. Freud's views on child sexuality, and the relationship of the child to its progenitors reveals “the rationale for the social order”¹³² and provides “the point of departure for understanding mythology, religion, art, semantics and group behavior.”¹³³ In *Why Are We In Vietnam?* father-imagos abound, from Rusty to the E.M.F., a kind of god; these figures of authority and meaning occupy the place of linguistic/ideological “centres.” They delimit “play” in not only the literary-linguistic sense, as outlined by Derrida,¹³⁴ but in the augmentary sense that they order the passing of males from childhood to adulthood, from play to “work” (i.e. play controlled by the higher members of a hierarchy in which the male enlists). With conscious irony D.J. conflates the principal controlling (hierarchical) centres of American life—economics, politics, and religion—by comically asking himself if, given the acronymic penchant of corporate America, the initials “G.O.D.” stand for “Grand Old Divinity...biggest corporation of them all?”¹³⁵ Given that the deity in America might well be said to take precedence behind the G.O.P (the Grand Old Party, the Republicans), superior corporate acronyms like G.M., G.E., and I.B.M, D.J., and the other substitutive religions of the United States Rusty concludes that he “often thinks not.”¹³⁶

Man's accommodation with the deity, and the perils inherent in the failure to attempt it, as well as the perils inherent in maintaining it on the terms set by the divinity, are the subject of many of D.J.'s digressions, as much as D.J.'s relationship with his biological father. In a relationship with many facets, D.J. tries to come to terms with his father as Father-imago, as a man, as a male parent, as an example of a corporation man, as a patriot, and as another male bent on accruing power. Leaping, as it does, from the present to the past, D.J.'s narration depicts the shifts and changes in the

character of the power relationship between Rusty and his son as D.J. grows older, stronger and more confident. Not only are the normal elements of competition between a father and a son present, but, as his son realises, "Rusty is also the highest grade of asshole made in America and so suggests D.J.'s future: success will stimulate you to suffocate!"¹³⁷ D.J. sees his own future in the not-always attractive face and behaviour of Rusty. Jethroe Senior has risen, like an Horatio Alger boy-hero, from dirtbowl poverty to affluence, and Mailer's portrait portrays the unattractive, callous and selfish side of a male driven by status games, unable to participate in any aspect of life without turning it into a competition, while at the same time he does not allow the reader to forget that these are the very qualities which "made America great" and which were responsible for defining events like the heroic defense of the Alamo, the westward expansion of the United States, and the military successes and the economic growth of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The violent undercurrents of inter-masculine relationships are seen in D.J.'s account of an incident in his childhood. D.J. recalls with hallucinogenic clarity being beaten by his male parent for some unspecified childhood transgression. As they walk together in the Alaskan wilderness D.J. is lulled into a recollection of

picking out 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.¹³⁸

D.J. recalls that it was only the intercession of his mother which brought calm to the situation and ended the thrashing. Instead of being grateful, however, he believes thus began a warped attitude to his accommodations with his father, and a miscalculation of his understanding of the real power structures of life. D.J. sees himself forever branded as a "little man saved by cunt,"¹³⁹ and so he concludes that his sense of "virility grew with a taint in the armature of the phallic catapult."¹⁴⁰

His mother's continuing intervention between father and son is the pivot which connects D.J.'s memory of this earlier event with his account of the first "adult" confrontation between father and son, which occurred during D.J.'s early adolescence. Engaged in a "one on one" football scrimmage, in what might be between some fathers and sons loving, light-hearted

horseplay, D.J., as he gracefully puts it, was a “thirteen-year-old swivel ass”¹⁴¹ who, with youth and agility on his side, “was running Third Team All-America TCU tackle Rusty Death-row’s middle-aged dead ass into the Dallas lawn fertilizer.”¹⁴² Having led his father an almost literal merry dance D.J. makes what he later admits is “a fatal miscalculation of reckoning—he felt sorry for his dad,”¹⁴³ and allows his father to effect one tackle on him. Rusty, the reader is told,

was so het up, he *flung* D. J. and—mail in your protests—he bit him in the ass, right through his pants, that’s how insane he was with frustration, that’s how much red blood was in *his* neck...That poor D. J. He was a one-cheek swivel ass running on one leg for the next ten minutes while Rusty tackled him whoong! whoong! over and over again. Trails of glory came out of his head each time he got hit.¹⁴⁴

D.J. sees at the heart of the incident more than natural competitiveness, the assertion of the hierarchical imperative and an individual case study of the American corporation psyche. Resorting to the amateur psychoanalysis of which he is so fond, D.J. informs us “that Rusty bit his ass so bad because he was too chicken to bite Hallelujah’s beautiful butt.”¹⁴⁵ The aftermath of the incident, however, is even more significant than the idea that Rusty is seized by the desire to displace a fantasy of biting his wife’s posterior onto his son. The incident’s importance lies in its signal of the outbreak of overt hostilities between Rusty and D.J. After the “game” is over D.J. relates that he

limped broke-ass to the gardener’s shed, picked up a pick-axe handle, and bopped his daddy over the center of his head...When Rusty didn’t fall and in fact an electric shock traveled from his head down the pick-axe handle into D.J.’s overheated heart, why our boy knew in some competitions sanity was better than being a nut, so he split, man, he took off on one leg and a wound in cheek of his ass, and it took a week of negotiations by his ma to bring him out of the hideout in Mineral Wells where she’d stashed him and into audience with his father again.¹⁴⁶

The result of this accommodation between father and son, doubtless fuelled by the reminder to Rusty of the inevitability of one generation’s succeeding the next, is the questionable assertion that: “Now, of course, Rusty Jethroe ain’t an habitual asshole with anyone but his son.”¹⁴⁷

In *Why Are We In Vietnam?* the competition which brings out Rusty's most energetic defences and accommodation strategies is not his duel of personalities with Luke Fellinka, nor his seemingly effortless ability to keep Medium-Grade Assholes Pete and Bill in their place; it is his competition with D.J. The hunting trip provides a chance for D.J. and Rusty to accept one another as adults, but Jethroe Senior is unwilling to allow his son to move from his place in the parent-child dynamic.

In Alaska their "automatic" and "natural" hierarchical jousting results in an incident which permanently narrows the relationship between father and son. It begins, paradoxically, with Rusty and D.J. attempting to affirm the bond between them when, chafing under the restrictions of Luke's leadership, Rusty leads his son on an expedition of their own. At first all goes well, and D.J. relates that "when they stop to rest, they are real good, man, tight as combat buddies."¹⁴⁸ The men locate a bear's tracks, and go in search of the animal which their hunter-guide has thus far failed to locate for them. The tension and the fear combine to produce a state of heightened awareness and perception. It is at this point that D.J. has the first of the epiphanies that punctuate his sojourn in Alaska. Walking behind his father he has an olfactory revelation as he catches a whiff of body odour: "it's death D.J.'s breathing, it comes like an attack of vertigo when stepping into dark and smelling pig shit, that's what death smells to him, own pig shit smell."¹⁴⁹ The smell triggers the memory of being beaten by his father. The combination of terror, high excitement, shame and bitterness cause D.J.'s arrival spontaneously at conclusions which Sigmund Freud reached after a considerably more laborious process: "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! and whoong! with the dead-ass butt of his Remington 721."¹⁵⁰

The corollary of D.J.'s murderous intensity is "the death in this hot-ass vale of breath"¹⁵¹; as if reified by the intensity of the youth's memories and emotions, a savage grizzly lurches out of the reality of the Alaskan woods. D.J.'s reverie is interrupted as "then on the trail came a presence...murder was outside them now, same murder which had been beaming in to D. J. while he thinking of murdering his father, the two men turned to contemplate the beast."¹⁵² Both males shoot at the bear, but only D.J.'s bullet strikes home; it fatally wounds the bruin. At the time, however, the two are not aware of the extent of the animal's injuries. The experience of the silent, terror-filled moments of tracking the bear, trapped in the vicinity of an animal he has wounded, a creature he has been informed will be in a

state of insane, pain-fuelled vindictive pugnaciousness, “comes back to D. J. eating in the Dallas ass manse, and he shivers—no man cell in him can now forget that if the center of things is insane, it is insane with force.”¹⁵³ Even at the time, however, American hierarchiciser D.J. is more afraid of his friend Tex's scorn should he not perform acceptably in the situation than he is of the bear. D.J.'s desire to outpace his *isotimos* in the hierarchy of masculinity causes him to observe that “Texas will carries Texas cowards to places they never dreamed of being.”¹⁵⁴ When they come across the bear, which is lying, apparently insensate, on the ground, D.J. takes the initiative which perhaps should be his father's. He walks toward the creature, which from a distance of twenty feet he notes is “huge and then huge again, and...still alive.”¹⁵⁵

D.J. has an unparalleled opportunity for close communion with the animal. The bear's “eyes looked right at D.J.'s like wise old gorilla eyes...and...those eyes were telling; him something...something like, ‘Baby, you haven't begun,’ and when D.J. smiled, the eyes reacted...they looked to be drawing in the peace of the forest preserved for all animals as they die.”¹⁵⁶ Just then, however,

Rusty—wetting his pants, doubtless, from the excessive tension—chose that moment to shoot, and griz went up to death in one last paroxysm legs thrashing, brain exploding from new galvanizings and overloadings of massive damage report, and one last final heuuuuuu, all forgiveness gone.¹⁵⁷

With a single sentence Mailer passes over the silent trip which father and son endure on the way back to camp. When they tell of their adventure and the guide asks who killed the bear, and thus claims it for his trophy, “D. J. in the silence which followed, said, ‘Well, we both sent shots home, but I reckon Rusty got it.’”¹⁵⁸ The reader can only ponder on the fineness of the unspoken taboo which has been violated. D.J.'s father does not contradict him, saying instead: “ ‘Yeah, I guess it's mine, but one of its sweet legs belongs to D. J.’ ”¹⁵⁹ D.J.'s laconic judgement on this is: “Final end of love of one son for one father.”¹⁶⁰

If psychoanalytic thought might provide a more complete explication of this incident, and the conflict it illuminates, and the issues of power, potency, and the awareness of mutability and eventual decay which lie behind it, D.J.'s own account is certainly thorough, if not always presented with conventionality or even clarity. In ‘Intro Beep 8’ D.J. explains the nature of the relationship between father and son after the Alaskan odyssey,

which the reader now realises has been critically affected by the incident of their joint encounter with the bear. D.J. has commented on his father's business-world-induced values and said that in the novel's 1967 "present"

between D.J. and Rusty it is all torn, all ties of properly sublimated parental-filial libido have been X-ed out man, die, love, die in a diode, cause love is dialectic, man, back and forth, hate and sweet. leer-love, spit-tickle, bite-lick, love is dialectic, and corporation is DC, direct current, diehard charge, no dialectic man, just one-way street.¹⁶¹

Taking his readers back to Alaska, and reminding them of the violence which had followed the tackling and biting incident, D.J. notes that later in the evening when they return to camp

D. J. was in such a murder ball of sick disgusted piss-on-dad after Rusty took claim of the bear that he couldn't sleep for fear he'd somnambulate long enough to beat in Rusty's head, so up he got, tapped Tex in his bunk, wide-awake as well, and in one whispered minute they decided to split and make a little trek right that night into Endicott Range.¹⁶²

Mailer moves into his examination of the accommodations between D.J. and Tex. The two boys have been close friends for some time; as is often to be found between American *iso imoi*, elements at once sensitive, sexual, and violent, "macho," and competitive characterise the relationship. One compares this with the homoerotic relationships between Hank and Lee or Hank and Joe Ben, in *Sometime: a Great Notion*; or Rojack and John F. Kennedy, or Rojack and Roberts, in *An American Dream*, or Philip Roth's Nathan and Henry Zuckerman, or even Nathan and Alvin Pepler in *Zuckerman Unbound*. The boys exchange "compliments" full of sexual allusions, yet although they are "full of love and adventure,"¹⁶³ and they are "crazy about each other. They even prong each other's girls when they can,"¹⁶⁴ D.J. is keen to reassure the reader that

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 than which there is nothing more tender than a flattened pan-fried breaded paper-thin hard-ass Texas steak.¹⁶⁵

With the rest of their party "sleeping sound as slaughtered cattle,"¹⁶⁶ D.J. and Tex walk off into the "boreal-montane coniferous forest biome,"¹⁶⁷ of the Brooks Range in Alaska, "the real church of the spirits...congregating in cathedrals of black ice, blue ice, white snow, land of the dream spirits."¹⁶⁸

D.J. claims their forging into the night's intense cold as a courageous act in itself. He asks the reader: "do you have hard-on enough fraternity stud fucker Lambda Lambda Omicron Mu jockstrap frathouse faggot to put your red-hot daddy-loved-you ding into a cake of ice?"¹⁶⁹ This aggressiveness, however, gives way to a great depth of emotion and sensibility, and the first intimation of their confrontation with the M.E.F. as the boys are filled with the presentiment that they are "on the track of something—that early morning chill is tuning the boys up because they getting the stone ice telepathic hollow from the bowels of the earth after it passed through the magnetic North Pole orifice."¹⁷⁰

D.J. and Tex divest themselves of a great deal of equipment, which act is carried out for the sake of "purity." This scene contains an element which seems to have been specifically "borrowed" from a story mentioned earlier, "The Bear" by William Faulkner. In Faulkner's tale the youth is persuaded by the mentor-figure Sam Fathers that he must locate the bear he has been planning to hunt by first venturing into the wilderness alone and locating the animal. The boy leaves behind his beloved rifle when Sam tells him he must perform the task unarmed. However, he, like D.J. and Tex, follows the forms demanded of neophytes prior to initiation into a cultic mystery (for this is assuredly, in one form, what is happening): He must make "sacrifices" which indicate escalating commitment; all three of these initiates into the "mysteries" of adult masculinity must progressively divest themselves of the accoutrements of civilisation before their progression, their illumination, can be achieved.

"The Bear"'s protagonist finds "the leaving of the gun was not enough"¹⁷¹ and, standing like "a child, alone and lost in the green and soaring gloom of the markless wilderness"¹⁷² he can find no peace until he has "relinquished completely" to the wilderness. He remains "still tainted"¹⁷³ and must divest himself of all of the trappings of civilisations, the "cheats," which protect man from having to face the enormity and danger of the implacable natural world which surrounds him. Divested of "his late father's "old, heavy, biscuit-thick silver watch"¹⁷⁴ and the compass he has taken with him the boy at last enters the heart of the mystery, and the lessons of the hunting incident form part of his graduation to a higher level of awareness and connectedness with the land, as it does for D.J. and Tex in the present text.

After initially leaving everything behind, however, Mailer's duo decide they will allow themselves to take certain necessities: "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."¹⁷⁵ This provides a restatement of the extremely simple messages at the heart of *Why Are We In Vietnam?*: one should be similarly "stripped down" in order to approach life on the "strongest" or most valorous, or most "manly" terms; one should not "bullshit" oneself, others, or God; a lie is not just a sin, it weakens the liar, the collective, the society and the deity. Mailer himself would connect these ideas about courage, honesty and God some years after the publication of *Why Are We In Vietnam?* in an interview with Laura Adams in *Partisan Review*, when he stated that:

To the degree I have any intense religious notion it's that when we fail God we are not merely disappointing some mightily benign paterfamilias who'd hoped we might turn out well and didn't. We are literally bleeding God, we're leeching Him, depriving Him of *His* vision.¹⁷⁶

D.J., with his usual charming euphemistic circumlocution, puts it a slightly different way: " 'Do it or don't do it,' says D.J., 'but don't finger fuck yore ass.' "¹⁷⁷ As the boys progress into the Brooks Range, into "God's attic, that country way upstairs,"¹⁷⁸ their heightened sensibilities are open to the legend written in the book of nature. They are privy to messages they intuitively understand from wolf, eagle, caribou, and the other natural phenomena they encounter on their hike. After the youths see and hear a wolf and an eagle fighting they are filled with an almost religious sense of ecstasy, as at last

the boys understood every sound of it...they feel...clean and on-edge and perfect...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, Pericles, but the smell is everywhere.¹⁷⁹

The arrogance of the American youths is reduced by their sense of their own insignificance in the face of the vastness and wildness of the life around them. Their joy, however, is cut short by an instant and shared perception of genuine awe, which D.J. attributes to the autochthonic entities of the north, which he lists as a Trinity: "(1) the King of Mountain Peak M. E. F. shit, (2) Mr. Awe and (3) Mr. Dread—that troika—that Cannibal Emperor of Nature's Psyche...who sends out that Awe and Dread."¹⁸⁰ This "creature", this presence, "is up on their back clawing away like a cat because they *alone*, man, you dig?"¹⁸¹

As they camp that night the sexual tensions and mutual attraction D.J. has been at pains to deny intensify, at least in D.J.'s imagination. It becomes clear that to these boys sexuality is expressed in terms of domination, and this explains what is characteristic of their relationship and, it is proposed here, of most American inter-relationships. Because love and sex are conceived of as being "about" domination, any interaction which is about domination—and this study proposes that all American relationships are about domination—can be conceived of as having a sexual element. This is certainly true of the relationship between D.J. and Tex. The competition between them has always been about competition, power and prestige; their "love" for one another is inseparable from the desire of one to dominate the other. As D.J. explains:

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....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 it in his own and he was hard as a hammer at the thought and...Tex was ready to fight him to death, yeah, now it was the e, 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.¹⁸²

As well as the assertion that "God was a beast, not a man,"¹⁸³ linking this novel with the theology of *An American Dream*, it can be seen that here the naked, competitive neo-Darwinianism of the Mailerian system (and the American way it depicts, and from which it derives) is also graphically expressed.

Instead of fighting, however, the precarious equality between the two is maintained, and the moment passes. The boys become

twins, never to be near as lovers again, but killer brothers, owned by something, prince of darkness, lord of light, they did not know; they just knew telepathy was on them, they had been touched forever by the North and each bit a drop of blood from his own finger and touched them across and met, blood to blood, while the lights pulsed and glow of Arctic night was on the snow, and the deep beast

whispering Fulfill my will, go forth and kill, and they left
an hour later in the dark to go back to camp¹⁸⁴

Thereafter, in an attempt by Mailer to give some substance to the core of his philosophical system, a symbolic-geographical locus for his ideas about Americans and American society, D.J. and Tex (D.J. claims) are forever connected to “the telepathic vaults of their new Brooks Range electrified mind.”¹⁸⁵ This awful, awesome, dynamised duo become something like prophets of the pitiless order of their disembodied leader. Like Rojack they are devotees of a religion which is “[c]omfortless,”¹⁸⁶ especially for those who have come to believe that “God was not love but courage...[and] Love came only as a reward”¹⁸⁷ to the courageous. These two males’ lives, it seems, will be devoted to this “religion,” and to the perpetual reaffirmation of the unity with its God its youthful hierophants first experience in Alaska. The boys’ decision to enlist in the U.S. Army, in a tried and true process of testing and opportunity, and go together to Vietnam is not so much a testimony to their bravery or patriotism as an acknowledgment that hunting and killing are part of the imperative of the system to which they are devoted, and which has shaped them. War is the ultimate expression of such an ethos, and a way in which those who subscribe to that ethos can act it out to the mutual satisfaction of nation and individual.

Thus Mailer at last explains the title of his novel as D.J. brings the novel to an end noting that, “tomorrow Tex and me, we’re off to see the wizard in Vietnam...This is D. J. Disc Jockey to America turning off. Vietnam, hot damn,”¹⁸⁸ with a final insight into the theory and practice of masculine accommodations in America. The Christian ideology turned to the purposes of American imperialism in the constant evocation of God in the novel is balanced by the final “damning” admission that rather than being both, the E.M.F is one or the other pole of the Manichaeian principle. This confusion D.J. shares with Rojack in *An American Dream*, although, given the bloody, anal, and violent quality of the sacraments associated with it the identity of the dominant force in both novels—and hence, by implication, in American life—can hardly be in doubt for the reader. Easier is the identification of Mailer’s men with the males of the “primal horde” in Freud; but these modern iconoclasts and regicides are unashamedly eager to contemplate the psychologically significant, ritual-mythic slaughter of the father-king in order to take his place in the American hierarchy and assume his powers. Ignoring “obligations...institutions...morality and justice...the taboo on incest and the injunction to exogamy”¹⁸⁹ which should constrain ambition and promote maturation, and revelling in instinct rather than

renouncing it—a prominent sixties theme—both Rojack and D.J. in Mailer's work seek power through the investment of their energies in hierarchical structures with callous, competitive rules which override the claims of blood and marriage and political allegiance. Linked by barely suppressed homoerotic impulses and the ties of history, culture, and service to a pitiless God, under the skin all American men are revealed as killer brothers, exploiting the structures of capitalism and the ideology of the hero in the individualistic and patriarchal culture of America. "Power" is exercised by aggressive, competitive males on levels of society; by his ability to compete in a variety of status games, rituals and contests, victories, strategic defeats, force and compromise, a man in thrall to this archetype's call constantly strains to better his "height." Mailer's *Why Are We In Vietnam?* seems chiefly designed to point out to his countrymen that in their rush to seek war and conquest in defence of "right" they are instead acting out territorial-imperial impulses ingrained in American life at the national and personal level. Mailer provides in fiction a level of analysis of his fellow Americans which allows for a clear—if singular—view of American men in inter-relationship. Other literary perspectives should be sought, to see if they provide comparable information on the depiction of masculine archetypes and stereotypes.

Notes:

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- ¹ Norman Mailer, *Why Are We In Vietnam?* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 194.
 - ² William Faulkner, *Go Down Moses and Other Stories* (London: Chatto, 1960) 231.
 - ³ Representative of a culture in its D-Jen rate D.'ethroe's?
 - ⁴ Faulkner 149.
 - ⁵ Myriam Miedzian, *Boys Will Be Boys: Breaking the Link Between Masculinity and Violence* (New York: Anchor; Doubleday, 1991) xx.
 - ⁶ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 29.
 - ⁷ Michael Cowan, "The Quest for Empowering Roots: Mailer and the American Literary Tradition," *Critical Essays on Norman Mailer*, ed. J. Michael Lennon (Boston: Hall, 1986) 157.
 - ⁸ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 8-9.
 - ⁹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 37.
 - ¹⁰ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 36.
 - ¹¹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 170.
 - ¹² Mailer, *WAWIV?* 179.
 - ¹³ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 157.
 - ¹⁴ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 28.
 - ¹⁵ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 9.
 - ¹⁶ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 24.
 - ¹⁷ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 174.
 - ¹⁸ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 26.
 - ¹⁹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 24.

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- ²⁰ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 26.
²¹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 25.
²² Mailer, *WAWIV?* 177.
²³ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 170.
²⁴ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 170.
²⁵ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 170.
²⁶ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 171-2.
²⁷ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 159.
²⁸ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 170.
²⁹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 172.
³⁰ See Appendix, Fig. 2.
³¹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 205.
³² Mailer, *WAWIV?* 206.
³³ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 9.
³⁴ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 23.
³⁵ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 49.
³⁶ Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, intro and notes Martin Gardner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960) 197.
³⁷ See Appendix, Fig. 1.
³⁸ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 31.
³⁹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 37.
⁴⁰ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 30.
⁴¹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 55.
⁴² Norman Mailer, *An American Dream* (London: Paladin, 1992) 217.
⁴³ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 111.
⁴⁴ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 111.
⁴⁵ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 33-4.
⁴⁶ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 13.
⁴⁷ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 31.
⁴⁸ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 45.
⁴⁹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 51.
⁵⁰ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 51.
⁵¹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 38.
⁵² Mailer, *WAWIV?* 45-6.
⁵³ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 47.
⁵⁴ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 47.
⁵⁵ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 48.
⁵⁶ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 48.
⁵⁷ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 49.
⁵⁸ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 49.
⁵⁹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 37.
⁶⁰ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 37-8.
⁶¹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 38.
⁶² Mailer, *WAWIV?* 50.
⁶³ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 52.
⁶⁴ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 52.
⁶⁵ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 52.
⁶⁶ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 50-1.
⁶⁷ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 51.
⁶⁸ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 73.
⁶⁹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 73.
⁷⁰ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 73.
⁷¹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 73-4.
⁷² Mailer, *WAWIV?* 74.
⁷³ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 50.
⁷⁴ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 26.
⁷⁵ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 80.

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- ⁷⁶ Joe L. Dubbert, *A Man's Place: Masculinity in Transition* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1979) 247.
- ⁷⁷ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 50.
- ⁷⁸ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 37.
- ⁷⁹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 37.
- ⁸⁰ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 36.
- ⁸¹ Mailer, *WAWIV?* 36.
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