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Mailer Again: Studies in the Late Fiction

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Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the PhD program in English Literature

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Table of Contents

Legend	iii.
Abstract	iv.
Acknowledgements	vi.
I. Introduction: Mailer Again	1.
II. Imperial Mailer: <i>Ancient Evenings</i>	23.
III. Heterophobia in <i>Tough Guys Don't Dance</i>	67.
IV. Mailer's "Gnostic" Gospel	98.
V. Conclusion	142.
Endnotes	153.
Bibliography	174.

Legend

(TPP) ... *The Presidential Papers.*

(CC) ... *Cannibals and Christians.*

(PS) ... *The Prisoner of Sex.*

(PP) ... *Pieces and Pontifications.*

(AE) ... *Ancient Evenings.*

(TG) ... *Tough Guys Don't Dance.*

(GS) ... *The Gospel According to the Son.*

(TT) ... *The Time of Our Time.*

(SA) ... *The Spooky Art: Some Thoughts on Writing.*

(WW) ... *Why Are We At War?*

(WE) ... "I Am Not For World Empire."

(EB) ... "Empire Building: America and Its War with the Invisible Kingdom of Satan."

Abstract

This PhD thesis, participating in the burgeoning interest in Mailer's prolific achievement in his mature years, examines three ironies attending his career: that his leftist, antiwar writer has recently been described as a literary imperialist and as a proponent of a fascistic aesthetic, that he has been the target of feminists and gender theorists despite the fact that his writings reveal his longstanding engagement with the psychology of gender, and that he is commonly regarded as a Manichean writer, even though some defining components of this near-ancient recasting of Zoroastrianism hardly apply to his religious / existential ideas. Chapter One, a study of Mailer's neglected Egypt novel, offers a Jungian-archetypal reading of *Ancient Evenings* (1983) while examining allegations that Mailer's brand of masculinity, labeled "rogue" (Faludi, 1999) and "imperialist" (Savran 1998), evinces the "frontier psychology" (Olster 1989) that is synonymous with the fascistic attitudes attributed to him by feminists in the 1970s (Millet, 1971; Fetterley, 1978). Chapter Two, arguing that *Tough Guys Don't Dance* (1984) represents Mailer's subtle response to these allegations, claims that the novel gestures exoterically to the hard-boiled tradition—its title and main characters invoke David Madden's *Tough Guys Writers of the Thirties* (1968)—and esoterically to Reich's and Adorno's ideas about socio-biological constructions of gender. Mailer's achievement in *Tough Guys* resides in the ways in which he restores to the genre of mystery fiction the psychological elements that are usually lacking in its subgenre, the hard-boiled tradition of detective writing. Chapter Three treats *The Gospel According to the Son* (1997) as a "gnostic" narrative in which the narrator, in reconciling his Judaic and pagan inheritances, achieves a synthesis

between Platonic and Aristotelian principles, embodies the reasons that Mailer referred to himself as a “left-medievalist.” This synthesis, implicit in the novel’s many dualisms, in Satan’s dramatic role and in the fact that Mailer incorporates an esoteric passage deriving from *The Gospel of Mary*, qualifies the critic’s tendency to label the prodigal and iconoclastic Mailer as Manichean—a commonplace in Mailer studies since the 1950s. As I argue in this chapter, Mailer’s *Gospel*, if only because it participates in current debates about the meaning of the term “Gnosticism,” warrants greater critical attention.

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Introduction: Mailer Again

A highly controversial presence in American literary culture until the mid 1980s, author of over forty books, and winner of every major literary prize (but for the Nobel, for which he received a nomination in 1969), Norman Mailer continued writing until his death on November, 10th, 2007, at eighty-four years of age. His reputation waned in the 1980s, and it is only in the past few years that interest in his writings has begun to revive. Yet the consensus on even his award-winning writings held by the editors of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* denies what Mailer's few stalwart supporters insist is their warranted canonical status in post-WWII American literature to which it contributed so significantly. "His work and his career," the editors of *Harper's* anthology affirm, "surely stand among the more notable achievements of our time." The decades-running neglect of late Mailer's achievement, and the fact that he "has written more in his 'retirement years' than many writers do in their whole lives," to cite John Whalen-Bridge's call for papers for the special issue on Mailer in *The Journal of Modern Literature* (2006. 30. 1), inspired the inauguration of *The Norman Mailer Society* at the congress of the *American Literature Association* in 2003, numerous panels on late Mailer at this and other *ALA* conferences since then, *The Mailer Review*, an annual publication devoted to all aspects of his career, and a forthcoming collection of essays, *Absolutely Dauntless: Essays in Remembrance of Norman Mailer*, also dedicated to his mature writings.

These efforts to reclaim Mailer's reputation are necessary to assess the consequences of the fact that he garnered for himself a great deal of hostility amongst

critics, feminists and gender theorists. Reviled by feminists in the 1970s for the unrestrained chauvinism and sexist bravado suffusing his books and magazine articles of the previous (and Mailer's most prolific) decade, the writer *Time* magazine called their "major ideological opposition" eventually refrained from publishing inflammatory statements, but not before he invited some of that emergent movement's most influential exponents to an open panel discussion at Town Hall, in New York in 1971. Later that year, *The Prisoner of Sex*, Mailer's *apologia* for his part in the invective at the much publicized, garrulous conference, offered little in the way of a tenable defense in the eyes of many, mainly because the majority of its readers refused to take its biology-based assertions—for example, on the "existential" necessity of abjuring the use of contraception—seriously in this decade of incipient AIDS awareness. Notwithstanding the critical acclaim that Mailer received for *The Fight* (1975), for *Some Honorable Men: Political Conventions 1960-1972* (1976), for *Genius and Lust: A Journey Through the Writings of Henry Miller* (1976), and for his second Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Executioner's Song* (1979), in the seven years between *Marilyn: A Biography; Pictures by the World's Foremost Photographers* (1973), and *Of Women and Their Elegance* (1980), the acrimony instigated by what many readers considered his egregious warping of distinctions between fact and fiction in these and other works broaching on the sensational, led to the rapid decline in his reputation. And it faded in the Eighties, when even his sympathetic critics—Diana Trilling, Alfred Kazin and John Aldridge—relegated him to the ranks of misogynist writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Henry Miller, two authors whose ubiquitous presence in Mailer's books merely confirmed the feminists' suspicions about him.

In the wake of the feminists' invective against him in the 1970s, commonplace critical assumptions about Mailer the heterosexual writer further damaged his reputation. As in all but one of the major anthologies of American literature produced in the past decade, where the lacuna provides the clearest index, so in the majority of contemporary queer theorist and gender commentaries next to nothing has been said about post-1980 Mailer. What has been said about him applies to his earlier writings. But *Ancient Evenings* (1983), *Tough Guys Don't Dance* (1984), *Harlot's Ghost* (1991), *Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man* (1995), *Oswald's Tale* (1995) and *Castle in the Forest* (2006), to name just some of the works that Mailer has produced since the early 1980s, unambiguously show that Mailer is no homophobe. Nonetheless, his gender critics discuss his treatment of men and women as if he had not written such works, as if he were still a leading representative proponent of conventional masculine ideology, whose "heterosexualizing of male bonding," in the words of Michael Davidson in *Guys Like Us* (2004, 14), perpetuates "a triangulated erotics between two men in which a woman serves as a shared object ... a fulcrum of heterosexual legitimacy to mask repressed homosexual desire." Like Davidson, Joseph Allen Boone (1987), Peter Schwenger (1984) and Donald E. Pease (1992) reiterate criticism of Mailer's earlier defamatory tendency to employ homosexual metaphors as signifiers of the de-creative forces at work in post-war corporate America, criticism that was first put forward by Richard Poirier (1972) and later in that decade by numerous commentators, among them Howard Silverstein (1977), Judith Fetterley (1978) and S. James Elliot (1978). As a result, Mailer, for many in the academic community, is still an icon of the "bad boy" of American letters, to cite Leslie

Fiedler's term for this stereotyping of masculinity in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960).

Also speaking about Mailer as if he had not continued writing into the 1980s and beyond, a number of gender and social commentators treat him in the way that his detractors generally do, in an *ad hominem* manner that elides basic distinctions between the writer and his writings. Consequently, the biases and foibles that he distills into the psyches of his existentially embattled male characters are taken as evidence of *his* biases and foibles by commentators who refuse, in this way, to recognize ironic distance between them. As I discuss later in this chapter and in greater detail in the conclusion of this thesis, Mailer himself is partly responsible for his critics' tendency to elide distinctions between him and his literary productions, for it finds sanction in his statements about the writer's need to cultivate himself in fiction; to treat, in his words, his characters as extensions of his developing identity. In his interviews and *obiter dicta* about his writings and in an entire book devoted to this theme, *The Spooky Art: Some Thoughts on Writing* (2003), he encourages his readers and critics to regard his characters as spokesmen for his own opinions, a fact that serves to blur the nature of the differences between his life and his art, in ways that he saw as inherently constructive. Both, for existentially-minded writers like him, become synonymous as the one long autobiographical record of his literary career, "one continuing book—the book of their lives and the vision of their existence" (*C&C* xi)—which resembles, quite consciously on Mailer's part, Hemingway's posterity as legend. Not so much egotism, in making it difficult for his critics to discuss his literary achievement without making biographical statements, Mailer hoped to provide what he referred to as his existential mode of writing

as a model for his readers whom he would have emulate him. As Morris Dickstein describes this seemingly egotistical aspect of Mailer's writing, in *Leopards in the Temple: the Transformation of American Fiction 1945-1970* (2002, 163), "[h]e is interested in how people shape—or fail to shape—their own destiny."

Over the past few decades the charges against Mailer are becoming increasingly serious. These are complaints about his allegedly unexamined assertions of the links, as he sees them, between the heroic ego and writing and between masculinity and violence. Censuring him for his egotism, narcissism, infantilism, misogyny and sadomasochistic rendering of homosexuality, while not mentioning even a single novel that he has produced since the Seventies, critics such as Susan Faludi in *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (1999), David Savran in *Taking It Like A Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (1998), Lynne Segal in *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (1990) and Stacey Olster in *Reminiscence and Re-Creation in American Fiction* (1989) frequently cite some of his stock aphorisms to support their opinions. "“Being a man is the continuing battle of one's life”" (Cited in Segal, 1990, 104), is one such maxim. "“Masculinity is not something given to you, but something you gain by winning small battles with honor,”"¹ is another. Others include his insistence that "[w]henver one is aroused sexually and doesn't find consummation, the sex in one's veins turns literally to violence" (Cited in Olster, 1989, 47), and that "“[a]rt is not peace but war, and form is the record of that war”" (Cited in Olster, 36).

To cite Mailer out of context is unfair. Nonetheless, such statements provide these critics with the evidence they need to support their invocations of Mailer's novels as, in Faludi's words, representative examples of "rogue" (37) masculinity. Faludi goes

back to the 1950s to revive Mailer's remark, that a man could find "no peace ... unless [he] could fight well, kill well (if always with honor), love well and love many, be cool, be daring, be dashing, be wild, be wily, be resourceful, be a brave gun this myth, that each of us was born to be free, to wander, to have adventure and to grow on the waves of the violent ... had a force which could not be tamed"" (Cited in Faludi, 25). Faludi argues that the "desperado mandate" that Mailer establishes here "serve[d] as the gang leader for a host of rogue masculine traits" (37) that have come to define masculinity in our time, a masculinity that not only Faludi regards as pathological and violence-obsessed. Savran, too, sees Mailer as a proponent of a dangerously dysfunctional masculinity, one that, in Savran's opinion, became increasingly prevalent in America since the Reagan era. Mailer's notions about what it takes to achieve manhood, in Savran's opinion, partake of the "1980s fantasies about the (re)construction of an imperialist masculinity" (163), typifying the Patriot Movement. This neurotic mode of masculinity, he argues, codifying men's "relentless flirtation with pain, injury, and death," a flirtation that "goes beyond heroism and bravery to a kind of self-torture," brought about the "emergence of a particular kind of masochistic male subjectivity" (163), one that is "founded—masochistically—on a split between a passive and humiliated self and an active and violent self" (Savran 185). Epitomized, for Savran, by Mailer, the "sharply divided" men who fit this description, victims of narcissistic "self-absorption," are further "characterized by their 'dependence on the vicarious warmth provided by others combined with a fear of dependence, a sense of inner emptiness, boundless repressed rage, and unsatisfied oral cravings" (167). Securing "'the alliance' between the 'superego and Thanatos,'" so as to exacerbate "the death instinct"" (Savran 168) in men,

the “only thing truly new about the new narcissist (or new sadomasochist—take your pick),” is that “he represents a now *dominant* figure on the U.S. cultural scene” (169; his italics).

The opinions about Mailer held by two other social commentators are worth mentioning here to show that critical efforts to assist in the revival of his reputation in the wake of his recent death would do well to address his constructions of masculinity, since this issue is his critics’ major sticking point. Segal and Olster make similar cases against him, with the former regarding him as an “Arthurian knight at arms, forever at war, with [him]self, with women, with honour” (104), “still believ[ing] that living one’s life as a man involves toughness, struggle and conquest” (104). Mailer’s tough-guy posturing, Segal says, reflects “a whole post-war world increasingly in the thrall of North American cultural imperialism)” (111). Criticizing his assertion that “[v]iolence is the last frontier in literature,”² Olster calls him a proponent of “frontier psychology” (44), whose uncharted “territory” is his own undiscovered country, his unconscious. She takes issue also with Mailer’s irresponsible insistence that “[w]ar is a permanent process” (Cited in Olster, 36), his “battle cry throughout the 1970s” (36), in Olster’s terms, a process “which has an ending that is unknown for being undetermined.” Mailer’s assertion that “we can play a heroic role in deciding the nature of that ending” requires that he regard his writing career as his own “particular mission” (Olster 36), the pursuit of which, making him “both subject and object of his own investigation” (Olster 38), is inherently narcissistic, which is an observation that Segal also makes when she says that Mailer, “[l]ike many an egotist, prefers to contemplate the fascinating phenomenon which is himself in the third person” (104). Despite the fact that Mailer, whose comments, when taken in context,

become reflections of what he saw as prevalent in society, often made such assertions in order to be relevant to discussions of the psychological and sociopolitical ramifications of gender constructions, and despite the fact that his late novels, and especially *Ancient Evenings* (1983) and *Tough Guys Don't Dance* (1984), thematically engage precisely these issues, his critics discuss him as if he had not written these novels to defend himself against these charges.

The fact that Mailer's fascination with the psychology of gender has not incited any significant changes in the general consensus about his achievement is as significant as the fact that there exists no major literary analysis of the narrative devices, prevailing themes and imagery in his late-period work which takes into account the signal shifts and continuities in his long career, especially those that define the novels he wrote after *Ancient Evenings*. Efforts have been made over the past few decades to fill in this gap. The essays and reviews collected in *Norman Mailer: Modern Critical Views* (ed. Harold Bloom, 1986; rpt., 2003) and in *Critical Essays on Norman Mailer* (ed. J. Michael Lennon, 1986), offer useful summaries of criticism on the author, the plots of his fiction and nonfiction, their relative merits and demerits—in all, there are two original essays (in Lennon), one of which explores his literary influences, the other his Americanness. In Lennon's collection, Judith Fetterley's exploration of Mailer's treatment of women in *An American Dream* (1965) and, in Bloom's, Peter Balbert's study of Mailer's literary relation to Lawrence offer little for those interested in building a defense on Mailer's behalf against his feminist and gay critics. Fetterley's persuasive assessment, all but becoming diatribe against him and, in this respect, resembling Kate Millett's strong indictment of him in *Sexual Politics* (1970) as a fascistic writer, makes many of the same

points that Millett does. Balbert's comparative reading of Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Love* and Mailer's *The Deer Park* (1955), an interesting and useful analysis of how the themes of "instinct and repression" play out in these novels, treats Mailer with more respect in regarding him as a serious novelist on par with Lawrence. Neither commentary, however, provides much in the way of a persuasive defense against Mailer's feminist and gender detractors, since Fetterley *is* one of them and since Balbert's study closely focuses on the links between Mailer and another male writer whose biology-based ideas about men and women, as Mailer comments in his study of Lawrence, *The Prisoner of Sex* (1971), made him another of the feminists' favorite targets.

Nor do the two book-length commentaries elicited by his late-period work offer a tenable defense against what has become mainstream dissatisfaction with his work. In *Norman Mailer Revisited* (1992), Robert Merrill voices the opinions of those who insist that his "achievement is not 'literary,'" laments the lack of consensus caused by the dearth of literary-critical attention to his mature work, expounds on "how difficult it is to apply the known facts of Mailer's life to the interpretation of his books," but overcomes this difficulty in much of what follows in his commentary. Likewise, Michael Glenday emphasizes, in *Norman Mailer* (1995), the critical factors responsible for late-Mailer's unfavorable reputation, plot-summarizes selected narratives and arrives at the conclusion that Mailer, in his mature work, is "only kidding." Glenday's primary complaint, which circulates in many an excoriating review of Mailer produced since 1980, is directed toward his "willingness to exploit for quick effect some all-too-familiar Maileresque themes," providing further evidence, for Glenday, of the fact that Mailer's late "fiction has more fade-out than definition." While each of these commentaries on the last stage

of Mailer's literary career is certainly useful for those interested in his writings, new directions are necessary in Mailer studies, directions that do not recycle long-standing opinions of his flaws and foibles, especially by gender critics and feminists in need of a representative literary patriarch whose alleged conventional notions have remained relatively unchanged over time, so the assumption runs, and hence susceptible to the labels and categories that it has long since become fashionable to apply to him. Moreover, distracting attention from other concerns invoked by Mailer's late novels, widespread critical opinions about his treatment of gender-related themes based solely on his earlier work often tend to blur the significance of the fact that over the course of his long career, he has been one of America's most illustrious iconoclasts, whose fiction, nonfiction, and the more than seventy magazines and periodicals, dissident and elite, for which he has written (Lennon, *Works and Days*, 2000, xi), make him much more important, and interesting, than his detractors generally allow.

One new direction worth taking in Mailer studies is to address some of the stark ironies attending his career, ironies that devolve, in part, on the above-cited criticisms of him by the feminists and queer theorists and on many of his most cherished themes, themes that are usually political, psychological and / or religious in scope. How was it, for instance, that the author of *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967), a verbally violent mirroring of America's irrational aggression in that Asian nation, and of *The Armies of the Night* (1968), his Pulitzer Prize-winning account of his involvement in the largest anti-war demonstration in U.S. history, leading to his arrest and imprisonment (his cellmate was Noam Chomsky)—to name only two of Mailer's many published indictments of America's foreign policies and presidential hubris—could himself remain

so sympathetic toward those who were most responsible, at least during the Sixties and Seventies, for thus betraying the nation's ideals? Mailer's decades-running admiration for Kennedy is well-known—the president who escalated the war in Vietnam, sanctioned the CIA's biological, chemical and weather-manipulation attacks on Vietnam and on Cuba,³ and sanctimoniously lied to the American public about his knowledge of the Bay of Pigs operation. Less known is Mailer's veneration of Henry Kissinger, the most ubiquitous presence in America's political establishment, the man who, with total impunity, “ordered the illegal wiretapping” (Zinn 532) that became known as Watergate, and who, as quoted by *Washington Post* columnist Tom Braden, insisted that the “U.S. must carry out some act somewhere in the world which shows its determination to continue to be a world power” (Cited in Zinn, 539). These political figures are merely two of many elitist representatives of power against whom the self-styled left-conservative Mailer set himself, comparatively, hoping to measure up.

Consider, for instance, his interviews with Carter and with Kissinger. Toward the end of his conversation with Carter, whom Mailer sees as incarnating the “upper esthetic which would insist skill be illumined by a higher principle—whether elegance, courage, compassion, taste, or the eminence of wit” (*The Time of Our Time*, 1998, 953), the interviewer, “dissatisfied with his lack of contact on questions more fundamental to himself” (958), and feeling “[l]ike a child who returns to the profitless point (out of obscure but certain sense of need) ... looked to return their conversation to Kierkegaardian ambiguities and so spoke of marijuana, for it was on marijuana, he told Carter, that he had had the first religious experience he had ever known” (958)—until he concludes, by lamenting the fact that “Mailer left with the twice dull sense that he liked

Carter more than Carter had any reason to like him" (959). No matter that Carter "advocated more secrecy" (Zinn, 553) for the CIA, after a decade's worth of congressional hearings, in the 1970s, on the Agency's genocidal strategies—e.g., performing assassinations, instructing members of right-wing dictatorships in the art of torture, infiltrating student movements at home and abroad, and undermining socialist-democratic uprisings in dozens of Latin American countries—that his administration "struck deal[s] that kept Richard Helms out of prison" (Zinn, 553, 554), that he was fully supportive of the Vietnam war, and that he was a member of "the intellectual elite" who, in Chomsky's words, were "destroying the historical record and supplanting it with a more comfortable story, transferring the moral onus of American aggression to its victims, reducing 'lessons' of the war to the socially neutral categories of error, ignorance, and cost" (Cited in Zinn, 555). What preoccupies Mailer, during his interview with Carter, is what Carter might be thinking about Mailer.

Hoping to persuade his readers of his opinion, that politics and heroic personalities go hand in hand, Mailer insisted that Americans must "[r]espect our latest hero or Hell awaits" (*Time*, 855), that "liberal ideology imbibes its anti-machismo in daily doses," and that there is a "need in the liberal firmament for heroes." The fact that there is "little in liberal ideology [that] is conducive to hero-worship" (855), Mailer found regrettable. "It is agonizing to give up a powerful personality," he claimed, for "[i]n many an organized psyche the perquisites of the ego are the nearest one can come to sensual bliss"—a statement faintly reminiscent of Kissinger's remark, that "power is the ultimate aphrodisiac" (Cited in Reynaud, 102). Indeed, he conducts his interview with the former Secretary as he does with Carter, anxiously reviewing his own personality

while trying to deduce the other men's opinions about him. Kissinger begins by observing that "[t]oday must be my day for masochism since I dare to be interviewed by you" (*Time*, 838), and Mailer becomes no less self-referential, once he begins mirroring Kissinger. "If not for just such rare American pomp, he [Mailer] could have had the impression that he knew Kissinger over the years [they were similar] in height and build"—the size of their stomachs, their appetites, and so on. The camera-eye of Mailer's mind then hones-in on the details of Kissinger's appearance: "a sensuous man with a small mouth and plump lips, a Hapsburg mouth," a man who bears "resemblance to many a portrait of many an Austrian archduke and prince," given his "German voice, deep, fortified with an accent that promised emoluments, savories, even meat gravies of culture at the top of one's tongue—what European wealth!" This is an inadvertently Rabelaisian image of Kissinger devouring culture, but Mailer speaks without irony, admitting that his fondness causes him some difficulty: "Aquarius' work might have been simplified if he liked the Doctor less [n]or was there much impulse to resist him with argument" (839), for "[s]ecretly, he respected Kissinger [,] a man he liked and in effect was ready to protect."⁴ Declaring he feels "like a virgin descending the steps of sexual congress" (839), he asks Kissinger: "[a]s people grow up, don't they form their characters to some extent on the idea a President gives of his person to the public?"—to which Kissinger responds: "[i]s it your point of view then that in the presidency one needs to have a man it is worth being like?" (842). Mailer, responding in the affirmative, seeks his interlocutor's approval of his idiosyncratic opinion, that the writer's personality, like the president's, is not "separate from the history he would make" (*Cannibals and Christians* 55). Pondering whether he "had come into allegiance to men who worked in

the evil gears and bowels and blood left by the moral schizophrenia of Establishment,” Mailer finishes off, by pausing to note, but not analyze, the fact that “the ongoing blur of his surest perceptions” makes the “virtue of [his] pseudo-rationalizations” (843) highly questionable.

These interviews highlight a central irony of Mailer’s history, that he stood firm against hierarchy and empire, but was soft on their elitist proponents. This irony helps explain his performance in *Ancient Evenings* (1983), a performance that reveals his efforts to examine the psychological, political and social tensions wholly implicit in empire. As in his interviews, so in this novel, Mailer scrutinizes the personalities of his main characters. Chapter One of this thesis, engaging the criticism that Mailer’s male characters are representative examples of an “imperialist masculinity” (Savran 163) and that the novel itself is “pro-imperialist” (Whalen-Bridge, 2006, 2), shows that *Ancient Evenings* is hardly an endorsement of the subject it dramatizes so extensively. The Jungian-archetypal reading of this novel that I undertake in this chapter helps contextualize the ways in which Mailer draws on Egyptian mythology as inscribed in *The Book of the Dead* and facilitates my examination of critical allegations that Mailer’s brand of masculinity, labeled “rogue” (Faludi, 1999) and “pathological” (Savran 1998), condones a dangerous form of “frontier psychology” (Olster 1989). Although Mailer never considered himself a Jungian writer, Jung’s ideas about the heroic-archetypal nature of masculinity as a process facilitate my efforts to explore Mailer’s constructions of masculinity in *Ancient Evenings*. I also invoke the criticisms of his feminist critics who, in the 1970s (Millet, 1971; Fetterley, 1978), claimed that his male characters are fascistic. I argue that Mailer’s tendency to pit men against one another in sadomasochistic

relationships reflects the psychological dynamics, as defined by archetypal psychology, operative in the male heroic ego occupying the second of three stages of the hero archetype. In *Ancient Evenings* his male characters compulsively compare themselves to men whose elevated status makes them desirable as ego-ideals for those beneath them. The consequent dynamics operative in their relationships, I shall argue, while constituting the reasons that Mailer's critics regard him and his male characters as imperialistic, pathological and fascistic, are merely one of the many correspondences between his contemporary American culture in which he wrote his Egypt novel and the Egyptian dynasties in which it is set. Again, all too often in criticism of Mailer, indictments of his violent male characters become indictments of him. Yet, as *Ancient Evenings* reveals, Mailer is more conscious of what his critics take to be his punitive tendencies and biases than they allow. Labeled "imperialistic," "pathological" and "rogue," Mailer composed his Egypt novel in ways that clearly invite such terms while prompting his critics to get beyond their *ad hominem* commentary in order to recognize that the fact that his novel's historical setting, in Egypt's two most imperial dynasties, its major themes and its characters' abiding obsessions with heroic conquest can accurately be described in such terms. In other words, the author of *Ancient Evenings* is no more a literary imperialist than Melville was a "blubber capitalist" and or a literary totalitarian in writing a novel about a whaling vessel captained by the dictatorial Ahab. Or Hawthorne a Puritan or Nabokov a pedophile.

The second chapter of this thesis deals with another irony attending Mailer's career, one that centers on the fact that, arguably, his major thematic interests entail questions about the psychology of gender, about what makes men and women

themselves, biologically, existentially and environmentally, but his gender critics write as if this were not the case, as if his intentional delvings into the intricate matters implicit in the psychosocial issues implicit in sexual identity did not anticipate some of the vital concerns emergent in gender and queer theory. One of these concerns has recently been described by Michael Warner in "Homo-Narcissism, or, Heterosexuality," where he writes that "early feminism's theoretical emphasis on the "problem of women's construction of the Other, with its prehistoric sources in phallocentrism," has overshadowed the corollary problem of the "sex / gender system in which object choice is posed as an apprehension of alterity *tout court*," whose juxtaposition accounts for the normative assumption that there exists an *a priori* difference between self and other made visible in hegemonic assumptions about heterosexuality as "a sexuality of otherness." The heterosexist constructions of masculinity that participate in "the repression of the homosexual into the homosocial, in Christopher Castiglia's words in "Rebel Without A Closet," unlike those that make "the homosexual—as opposed to the heterosexual—content of the rivalry" more explicit, reflect what Lee Edelman, in "Redeeming the Phallus," calls the prevailing ideology in which gender difference is naturalized as the determining ground of identity at the expense not only of women but also of men," an ideology that "necessarily participate[s] in the process whereby biological differences come to ground differences of gender.

Although the psychoanalytic context in which the queer theorists derive their ideas derives from Lacan's responses to Freud, Chapter Two of this thesis, an examination of *Tough Guys Don't Dance* (1984), the novel that Mailer wrote immediately after publishing *Ancient Evenings*, shows how relevant these theorists'

notions are to Mailer's constructions of masculinity, constructions that reflect his indebtedness to both Adorno and Reich. In it he modifies the heterosexually oriented paradigm of male homosocial bonding, abasement of and submission to the feminine, first described by Eve Sedgwick in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985). *Tough Guys*, as I argue, also shows Mailer refuting those who claim that his mature work reveals both a dwindling of his literary talent and an inability to offer works of serious literature. For instance, Peter Schwenger claims in *Phallic Critiques* (1984, 32), that Mailer "cannot go too deeply into the underlying meaning of a single subject" and consequently must remain on "the practical surface of things" (32), a preference that compels Schwenger to observe, that "Mailer's idea of masculine perception is outward-oriented." "Outward-oriented," a term first coined by David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (1950), is an ironic term to use in light of the fact that *Tough Guys* contains esoteric clues to the solution of the murder mystery it dramatizes and that its main characters are made to embody both the traits and tendencies that formerly defined Mailer and those that have come to define him. As I shall show, the novel's exoteric surface shows Mailer critiquing the masculinist ideology inherent in the hard-boiled tradition of detective writing whereas its esoteric depths convey Theodore Adorno's and Wilhelm Reich's notions about the sociocultural factors involved in gender formation.

Mailer's longstanding fascination with Reich's writings has mostly been dismissed as so much "Reichian boilerplate" (Dickstein 151), yet *Tough Guys* clearly demonstrates how useful Reich and Mailer are to one another—both have been neglected and criticized by detractors whose biases prevent them either from entering the spirit of

their work or even from reading their work. *The Gospel according to the Son* is another novel in which Reichian ideas are implicit in Mailer's treatment of his main concerns in it, concerns that hearken back to his announced intention in *Advertisements for Myself*, to incite a revolution in the consciousness of his times. Then, his hope was backed by Reichian psychology and, particularly, by Reich's observation that, "to effect a real change in man's structure an energetic change in man's structure" is "needed" (*The Mass Psychology of Fascism* 145). Mailer has devoted most of his writing to inciting awareness of the ways in which, in Reich's terms, our "own vital interests" become buried beneath what has been "embedded and retained" in our character structure, by anti-instinctual forces manipulating it from the outside-in. Mailer's *The White Negro* (1957) is devoted to reversing what Reich considered to be the worst human error, the forced split between the sexual and the religious, in the latter's emergence as the world's dominant and dominating cult of hegemonic awareness. "The religious cult became the antithesis of the sexual cult" (146), Reich argues, the one continuing to hold sway over the other, the power to banish, persecute and annihilate it, because of the effectiveness of its system of suppression. Whereas the ecstatic remarks made by the young Mailer's lubricious hipster, are a wild application of Reichian psychoanalytic principles, the mature Mailer again wrote a provocative Christology to address the many problems he saw in contemporary religion, problems that pertain to the psychological and theological imbalances he identified especially in mainstream Christianity and Islam. If taken seriously and given its due, *The Gospel According to the Son* could lead its author to posthumously fulfill his hope of inciting revolutions in the consciousness of his times, if it were not for the fact that its critical reception has again been hindered by the aspersion

cast upon it by those who prefer to reiterate old criticisms of Mailer based on writings he produced in previous decades.

The third chapter of this thesis, also dealing with gender identity, explores what many of Mailer's commentators regard as his most explosive novel, *The Gospel according to the Son* (1997), his first-person narrative that purports to re-tell the New Testament's story of Jesus in Jesus' own words. Their response—if the title of James Woods's commentary in *The New Republic* can serve as a summarizing statement, "He Is Finished"—confirmed what many have come to expect of Mailer. The fact that Mailer's reviewers allow commonplace critical assumptions about him to precede them to the work, preventing them not only from appreciating the novel but also from understanding the nature of his achievement in it, accounts for the reason that not one reviewer or commentator, in more than ten years since its publication, has noticed that it cites the "Gnostic" scripture, *The Gospel of Mary*, one of hundreds of suppressed scrolls discovered in the late 1940s in Nag Hammadi, Egypt. Nor has any commentary been forthcoming about the fact that the role that Mailer gives to Satan resembles numerous depictions of him in other Nag Hammadi papyri.

To account for these features of Mailer's Christology, I again draw on the writings of Jung that engage the links between psychology, the New Testament and the "Gnostic" scriptures, to argue that, although Mailer, since the 1950s, sounded Manichean when articulating his cosmological opinion, that the cosmos is war-torn by the eternal struggle occurring between God and Satan, and that people's psyches are their existential battlefields, his novel cannot accurately be labeled as Manichean. The fact that its few commentators have described it as such has prevented its readers from recognizing all

that is un-Manichean about the novel, for instance, the dramatic importance that Mailer grants to both Satan and Mary Magdalene. Moreover, in discussing Manicheanism and Mailer's Christology I hope to address another major irony about Mailer, that in many respects he is not Manichean. As this chapter demonstrates, he is better regarded as a "Gnostic" writer, since he, like many an ancient recorder of the sayings of Jesus, treats the gospel story, theologically, psychologically and dramatically, as an instance of what Carl Jung called the "quaternity," a term that, subtending primitive Christianity according to many a "Gnostic" text, intimates the "four-cornered divine person: father, son, holy ghost, and Satan" (de Franz, cited in Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 1968, 246), and the elements that the Church Fathers removed from the ontology of the Christian tradition—"evil, the earth, matter, the body and the feminine" (Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 1968, 246).

In the concluding section of this thesis, I examine Mailer's opinions on his most cherished influences, Hemingway and Miller, two authors who, for Mailer, served to represent what he regarded as favorable and as inauspicious fates for the American male writer. In *The Spooky Art*, Mailer discusses what he sees as the existential links that these male authors established between their fictional protagonists and their ideal visions of themselves as incipient legends. His commentary, providing an insightful analysis of how these writers produced fictional masterpieces by throwing themselves into their work (e.g., Miller gives more than his name to *Tropic of Cancer*'s narrator), makes a case for why he so often combines biographical and imaginative material in his books, a habit for which he has been criticized as a proponent of elitist attitudes, both literary and political in scope, which endorse a myriad of negative attributes definitive of ego-

centeredness, the cult of personality and hero worship. To read him as he reads other male authors, whose projections of legendary male figures reveal their anxieties about their literary-cultural longevity, helps to identify similar concerns in the minds of Mailer's own male protagonists, who contemplate themselves as if their experiences were merely the stage on which they desire to perform the sorts of masculine roles that they consider sufficiently worthy of narrative treatment. While this feature of his dramas of male-male interactions has been defended by one of Mailer's best critics, Richard Poirier, who argues that Mailer's performative posturing in his novels merits respect as an original aesthetic construction, it is, as Poirier admits, also the reason that many critics complain about Mailer's egotism, which is his critics' polite way of referring to what his detractors regard as his inveterate narcissism.

Indeed, it is not inaccurate to say that, even as Hemingway justified his personal dynamics by claiming that writers must keep the emotional content of their sentences nine-tenths under the verbal surface, so Mailer justified his egotism by insisting that the writer's highest aspiration is the shaping of his personality in his work. His theories about the purpose of writing, about the author's relationship to his characters, and about his relationship to his readers, all center on the writer's ego. As his *oeuvre* reveals, the personality of the writer and the manner in which it becomes blurred with the personalities of his fictional creations, is one of his trademark themes. Mailer's published relationship with himself, his "doubtful side-glances," as he puts it, in terms borrowed from Joyce's "A Painful Case" is an *exemplum*, that of a personality always forming and evaluating itself, one that is wholly responsive to the socio-political environments in which he self-consciously formed it. Mailer, in his later writings,

continuing to regard his characters as extensions of himself, that is, as vehicles for his own self-explorations, saw this tendency as inherently positive and as the standard by which he felt that other writers, such as Hemingway and Miller, were to be judged. Now that Mailer's career has found its telos, some reflection on his opinions about his predecessors' posterity is warranted, to help his readers form their opinions about his own achievement. Although his protean literary production makes the critical task of defining and interpreting his late-period writings the challenging venture that the diversity of their titles alone would seem to suggest, the ironies assessed in these studies of three of his mature works can help draw all of them into taut relation.

II. Imperial Mailer: *Ancient Evenings*

“[E]go is awareness of one’s will”—Norman Mailer, *Conversations*.⁵

“Is it not true that defending the One involves, ipso facto, rejecting the unconscious; since the latter implies that part of the psyche exists which is acting in its own interests, thwarting the empire of the ego?”—André Green, *Life Narcissism, Death Narcissism*⁶

“When heroic consciousness dominates, one thinks one knows better than the unconscious who one is and feels one should therefore be in control of one’s life.”—John Beebe, *Aspects of the Masculine*⁷

“As we know from ancient Egyptian history, [events which are in accord with an end of an era] are manifestations of psychic changes which always appear at the end of one Platonic month and at the beginning of another. Apparently they are changes in the constellation of psychic dominants, of the archetypes, of ‘gods’ as they used to be called, which bring about, or accompany, long-lasting transformations of the collective psyche. This transformation started in the historical era and left its traces first in the passing of the aeon of Taurus into that of Aries, and then of Aries into Pisces, whose beginning coincides with the rise of Christianity. We are now nearing that great change which may

be expected when the spring-point enters Aquarius.”—Carl Jung, *Civilization in Transition*⁸

Ancient Evenings has been disparaged for primarily five reasons. One of them, the result of Mailer’s intention in composing it, “to treat mythology as if it were real” (Whalen-Bridge, 2006, 4), is its “outrageous literalism” (Bloom, 2003, 33). In his portrayal of the esoteric content of Egyptian mytho-theology, Mailer, drawing on W. B. Yeats’s theosophical interpretations of it, literalizes it in ways that made it all but unreadable for many of his critics. For instance, the main character of *Ancient Evenings*, Menenhetet, frequently relates the thoughts that Osiris, his ancestor, inspires in him. They share associations with zoological symbols of transformation that pre-date anthropological deities, mainly dung beetles and scorpions, creatures capable of journeying through the Duad (extispicy was the ancient Egyptian elites’ way of testing the waters)—and with Khepera, the lord of regeneration, “self-begotten and self-produced” (Budge cix). The legend of Osiris inheres globally in ritualized allegories of the born-again self,⁹ but Mailer’s die-hard hero uses his autogenetic skill merely as his means to gaining more heroic glory, more fortune and greater political status, while pursuing his ambition to become as powerful as his ego-ideals, Usermare Ramses II and, later, Ramses IX. The lassitude or dearth of kinetic energy in the plot of *Ancient Evenings* is caused by the lack of dynamism in Menenhetet’s character, for his four lives do not effect any significant changes in him. The irony of his typological relation to Osiris underwrites Bloom’s remark, that “if you read *Ancient Evenings* for the story, you will hang yourself

because this is a book in which every conceivable outrage happens, and yet nothing happens, because at the end everything remains exactly the same" (35).

A second complaint centers on the fact that the novel is situated in ancient Egypt and based on the funerary literature comprising this nation's mythological masterpiece, *The Book of the Dead*, but patently reflects the author's fascination with his own ego. After the opening section of *Ancient Evenings*, writes Benjamin De Mott, "the mentality of the dynastic world is replaced ... by the preoccupations and obsessions of a late 20th century mind: Norman Mailer's," all of which "stand forth ... as ludicrous blends of Mel Brooks and the Marquis de Sade" (De Mott 1983, 3). Mailer himself conceded that readers of *Ancient Evenings* "keep thinking of me as they read [t]hey find that they can't concentrate" (Lennon 1988, 300). Doubtless his observation is made inevitable by his insistence that fiction formalizes his desire to imagine "how [he] might act if [he] were that much more of a hero" (SA 2003, 85), that, in this way, it reflects the writer's own ego. Readers "perceive the truth of the novel by way of the personality of the writer" (*Time* 12), he remarked, they "observe the observer." As the critics complained, Menenhetet, in many moments throughout *Ancient Evenings*, sounding like the all-American Mailer, is made to become a talking head for authorial notions about death as an existential beginning, about the psychic substance of semen and feces and about repetition killing the soul, to name just a few of Mailer's stock ideas, cited so often in his late work, that their existential impact, their soul, as it were, is killed by redundancy.

A third complaint is similar to the second and involves the ways in which *Ancient Evenings* allegedly blurs distinctions between Egyptian culture and concepts and images about the United States that can be found throughout Mailer's *oeuvre*. As Stacey Olster

argues “[t]he Egypt his book revives looks all too much like the America he has always reviewed” (2003, 63). For “[u]nable to break free of the hold that it has on his own consciousness, he projects America onto every foreign culture that he encounters, and, in succumbing to this compulsion, the source of his greatest virtue becomes the source of his greatest vice” (Olster 63). Assuming a less critical stance toward this feature of *Ancient Evenings*, Bloom claims that the “relevance” of Mailer’s novel “to current reality in America” (33) resides in the fact that it “catch[es] the precise accents of psychic realities within and between us.” “We are at about 1100BCE” (35), he observes, “in an Egypt all too like the United States in the 1970s.”

For those familiar with Mailer’s writings but not with his Egypt novel, a fourth criticism, that *Ancient Evenings* is “pro-imperialist” (2006, 2), in John Whalen-Bridge’s words, may seem surprising. However, in propagating “our general idea of imperial America” (Whalen-Bridge 3), *Ancient Evenings* does reify the fact that “[o]rientalist fantasy is the cultural wing of imperialism.” Although Mailer’s late writings on the subject of American imperialism, such as *Why Are We At War* (2003), “I Am Not For World Empire” (2005) and “Empire Building: America and Its War with the Invisible Kingdom of Satan” (2005), unambiguously show that he is not pro-imperial, warrior-hero Menenhetet, the main character in *Ancient Evenings* surely is, as he ascends the hierarchical pyramid of military and political power while forging the blazoning paths of his many careers, careers spanning the dynasties of Ramses II (1200-1224) and of Ramses IX (1138-1119; cf. Wilson 319). As a literary embodiment of his author’s heroic posturing and of his desire to attain legendary status, Menenhetet, a “man who excited great emotion” (Whalen-Bridge 2006, 5), in Mailer’s words, one of the “best soldiers

[Ramses II] ever had,” embodies the spirit of Mailer’s setting, Egypt’s two most imperialistic dynasties (1320-1121 BC.). Especially in these dynasties, the Nineteenth and Twentieth, as their monumental aesthetic productions lavishly concretized for posterity, military heroes attained high cultural status. Elaborately and straightforwardly showcasing the Egyptian elites’ imperial aggression, stunning wealth, unquestioned reliance on slavery, rampant social injustices and widespread financial corruption, the setting of *Ancient Evenings* alone offers evidence for labeling it “pro-imperialist.”

Finally, the novel’s commentators objected to its most disturbing feature, its de Sade-like indulgences in murderous brutality and sadomasochistic sexuality, occurring (mostly) between men (cf., Bloom 33; De Mott 3). Mailer hoped to “deal with the spectrum of male motivation leading from homosexuality to machismo,” by “exploring power relationships among males” (Lennon 1988, 331). However, his treatment of masculinity shows him uninterested in the biological / environmental factors inherent in men’s development of their sexual identity, preferring to adhere to the Kinsey-derived idea that he propagated for more than fifty years, that a “spectrum” of possibility subtends male sexuality, with hetero- and homosexuality existing at polarized extremes.¹⁰ In *Ancient Evenings*, he mostly dramatizes those extremes, as one man sadistically brutalizing another and as the victim turning into the aggressor, anxious to perpetrate the same sexual violence against *his* subordinate (e.g., Menenhetet’s all-night raping of the Hittite soldier, as he quite consciously acts-out his revenge against Usermare for raping him). For critics who complain about Mailer’s most abiding obsession with viciously aggressive male sexuality, *Ancient Evenings* is a sort of *locus classicus*.

This chapter examines, in the light of Jungian archetypal psychology, aspects of the novel that have resulted in the critiques outlined above. Interestingly, these criticisms, focusing on its relentless exotericism, its reflection of Mailer's fascination with his ego and of his situatedness in his contemporary American culture, its status as a "pro-imperialist" narrative and its prolific depictions of brutal aggression and sexual violence, reflect the tendencies and traits that Jung attributed to the heroic ego arrested in the second of three stages of the hero archetype.¹¹ These include literalism, ego-consciousness, narcissistic projection, aggression and sadomasochism. In what follows in this chapter, I begin by specifying the ways in which Egyptian mythology became the basis for Jung's notions about the hero's archetypal "stages of life." After summarizing the plot of *Ancient Evenings*, I explore, first, the literal manner in which Mailer employs a number of Yeats's ideas in "Magic" (1901), ideas deriving from Egyptian mythology, one of which is that "many minds flow into one another ... reveal[ing] a single mind, a single energy" (Finneran 351). Mailer's literal employment of this Yeatsian motif, I shall show, represents one of many ways in which he ensures that Menenhetet never makes it to stage three of heroic-archetypal development. Since it is more than just the critical voices of the gods and of the Pharaohs flowing continuously in his thoughts that hinder his efforts to overcome his reliance on them and to fulfill his ambitions, I then examine the prevailing male-male dynamic in *Ancient Evenings* to demonstrate that another example of its "horrible literalism" (Bloom 33) is its treatment of palingenesis as Menenhetet's conduit for regression. Like many of the novel's male characters who play a subordinate / masochistic role in the pharaonic hierarchy, he is often sexually humiliated (anally raped and / or forced to perform fellatio), demoted (deprived of

military / political titles and status), exiled and / or murdered by the novel's sadistic father-figures. As a Jungian analysis of his archetypal development reveals, Menenhetet, unable to advance from stage two to stage three of archetypal development, repeatedly retreats to stage one, that of "containment / nurturance" (Papadoulous 199) wherein his ego-consciousness becomes bound up with mothers and maternal figures in what Jung called *participation mystique*. "In my second life" (787), Menenhetet recalls, "I grew up in the Gardens of the Secluded as the son of Honeyball, and slept in her bed every night."¹² Striving for power, becoming humiliated, retreating to the womb—this pattern, endlessly and even ludicrously repeated in the latter moments of *Ancient Evenings*, while accounting for its sheer repetitiveness, is, as I will argue, the result of Mailer's obsession with "power relationships among males" (Lennon 1988, 331), an obsession that Jungian psychology can also help to contextualize: male power relations constitute the main component of the hero archetype's second stage wherein the achievements of heroes, mentors, fathers and father-figures serve as mirroring ideals that, assisting the ego in its efforts to avoid regressing to the first stage, it must overcome in order to advance to the third stage of archetypal-heroic individuation.

Although throughout *Ancient Evenings* Mailer's portrayal of male interactions, consisting of extended episodes of sadomasochistic rape and violent brutality, clearly reveals why gender theorists, social commentators and feminists regard his characters as representative examples of an "imperialist" and "pathological masculinity" (Savran, 1998, 163, 63), of various "rogue traits" (Faludi, 1999, 37), such as "toughness, struggle and conquest" (Segal, 1990, 104), of "frontier psychology" (Olster, 1989, 44) and of fascism (Millett, 1971, 314-55; Fetterley, 1978, 154-89, 197-98), I will argue that his

Egypt novel is hardly an uncritical endorsement of its subject matter. In the last portion of this chapter, I scrutinize the section of it that Mailer considered its best, "The Book of the Charioteer" while invoking Susan Sontag's criteria of the "fascist aesthetic" in *Under the Sign of Saturn* (1974), to highlight the ways in which this section could be read as an example of literary fascism, if it were not for the fact that its major themes, its characterization and its setting so skillfully mirror the dynasties in which Mailer situates it. Treating this section of *Ancient Evenings* as a microcosm of the novel as a whole, I will argue that, in its depictions of imperial warfare and violent brutality, in its sheer bulk and its relentless exotericism, Mailer's novel reflects the era in which it is set, the ending of the Age of Aries, the period in which Egypt's rulers sought to extend the boundaries of their empire and, in doing so, destroyed it. In concluding, I align *Ancient Evenings* with the tradition of Occidental literary appropriations of Egyptian culture, by invoking both Edward Said's concept of "orientalism" and Egyptologists' observations of the fact that ancient Egypt often serves as a site for contemporary writers' projections of themselves and of their cultures. Mailer's achievement, I shall show, is to delineate, consciously and intentionally, an earlier imperial culture as a mirroring image of our present one.

If most readers of *Ancient Evenings* can find cause to complain about Mailer's literalizing the contents of the *Book of the Dead*, in order to make it amenable to his heroic fantasies, about the ways in which he projects himself onto ancient Egyptian culture, about his sadomasochistic indulgences and about his unabashed attraction to Egypt's imperial rulers, then this multifaceted study of his most problematic novel not only validates their reactions. It should also prove useful for those interested in the development of Mailer's career, a career that, as he insisted, reflects major cultural trends

in post-WWII America. Necessarily psychobiographical, “the most largely practised method of research in psychoanalysis of art since Freud’s *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood* (published in 1910)” (Gaillard, Cited in Papadoulous, 331), this chapter, offering an assessment of the reasons that *Ancient Evenings* is so out of favor, also asserts that the same reasons for its unpopularity make it important as a psychological allegory about men’s collective difficulty in accessing their unconscious. *Ancient Evenings* can be read as an allegory that epitomizes the fact that stereotypical male heroes fail even to glimpse, let alone enter, their archetype’s final frontier.

Egyptian mythology provides the common ground between Jungian-archetypal psychology and *Ancient Evenings*. Even as Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* was a foundational text for Freud, so Egypt’s stories of the gods were important for Jung, who treated them as allegories of psychological processes, processes whose major points of development yielded symbols and patterns, similar to those in Egyptian mythology, that appeared in the iterated experiences and dreams of clients in psychoanalysis. Deriving from Egyptian myth and from some forty years’ worth of case-studies, the hero archetype, as Jung conceived it, compels ego-consciousness “through a programmed sequence” (Papadopoulos 85; his italics) called “the stages of life,” each of which, “mediated through a new set of archetypal imperatives,” “determines the degree to which the overriding goal of *individuation* is achieved.”¹³ John Beebe explains, “the hero is a symbol of the developing ego’s libido” (*Aspects of the Masculine*, 1991, x). Libido, in Jung’s meaning of the term, “means not simply desire or psychological energy but psychological *purpose* as well” (*Aspects*, ix). As Jung and other students of Freud (e.g., Adler, Reich, Fromm) believed, Freud’s reliance on *Oedipus Rex*, the basis for the latter’s emphasizing

of sexual instinct as “a guilt-ridden executive bent on repressing his knowledge of shameful libidinal experience” (*Aspects*, x), was far from universal. By contrast, “Jung’s image of the developing ego” (*Aspects*, x) “was rather of a determined solar hero whose quest through the night sea was to maintain and increase his light against the deep instinctual forces threatening to extinguish his consciousness” (Beebe, *Aspects*, x). In forming his understanding of psychological growth, Jung associated “masculinity with the process of becoming conscious, in the Socratic sense of seeing one’s existence for what it is” (Beebe, *Aspects*, x), an association that revives the root meaning of phallus: light. The male gods of Egyptian myth, epitomized by the sun-god, Ra, symbolize masculine consciousness. Isis and her mother, Nut, the goddess of the primordial waters, represent the feminine unconscious, symbolized by darkness, the sea and the sky. Individual wholeness is imaged in Jungian psychology by the co-dependent relation of light / the sun / consciousness / the masculine principle and darkness / the moon / the unconscious / the feminine principle.

The main mythological scenarios on which Jung based much of his theory of archetypes include the dismembering and resurrection of Osiris, Isis’ poisoning of Ra, the contest between Horus and Set, and the incestuous liaisons occurring between all members of Egypt’s ur-figures. Esoterically, the story of Osiris is a “primitive way of describing the libido’s entry into the interior world of the psyche, the unconscious” (*Aspects*, 13). His story serves as an allegory of the ways in which the disintegration of ego-consciousness, usually occurring in the psyche at mid-life, brings the ego into psychology’s underworld, the unconscious, embodied by Isis, who connects all of its dissociated and split-off parts, as symbolized by the separated and buried body parts of

Osiris, after which it returns to the light of consciousness equipped with the knowledge of the contents of the unconscious. The risen Osiris, the lord of the underworld, signifies regenerated consciousness. Similarly, Isis' poisoning of Ra is another primordial allegory of the ego's death and resurrection. Isis forms a serpent out of Ra's saliva, mud from the Nile and scorpions' poison and leaves it on a path for Ra to step on. He does so and gets bitten, becoming feverish and fearful. Her mischievous means of hastening his death compels him to reveal his secret name. As the archetype of the "demon-woman in mythology [who] is in truth the 'sister-wife-mother,' the woman in man," suddenly appearing "during the second half of life" and "effect[ing] a forcible change of personality" (20), Isis represents the unconscious luring into herself "the forward-striving libido which rules the conscious mind" and "demands ... the transference of his libido" (17) to her. Even as her "serpent symbolizes the mysterious numen of the 'mother' (and of other demonia)" (17), its venom signifies "the demands of the unconscious [that] act at first like a paralysing poison on a man's energy and resourcefulness, so that it may well be compared to the bite of a poisonous snake" (18). Ra's "true name" represents his "soul and magic power (his libido)" (17). Their scenario concludes as Ra, "the ageing god[,] returns to the heavenly cow" (17), Isis's zoological form, whose horns are the yonic-symbolic prototype of the quarter moon in tarot depictions of the goddess / priestess-icon the world over (Gad, 2004, 36-42).

Similarly, the battle between Set and Horus is an allegory of the destructiveness of ego-consciousness trapped in the endless cycle of defending itself and of the ardors of male competitiveness, inviting sabotage by the feminine unconscious, again symbolized by Isis. When she betrays Horus, her son, she upsets his hard-won victory over Set. But

her apparent cruelty toward him is of saving benefit to him. Here she represents the return to awareness of long buried memories from childhood that become split-off and autonomous in the unconscious, hiding from the light of consciousness (e.g., denial, repression), but arising, unbidden, to effect the proverbial mid-life crisis, often instigated by “an unwelcome accident or a positive catastrophe” (*Aspects*, 20), also of saving benefit. “Nothing endangers” psychic wholeness, the ego’s reward for re-connecting consciousness and the unconscious, “more in a man than a successful life” (18), for “it makes him forget his dependence on the unconscious.” Yet it is “his own unconscious whose alien tendencies are beginning to check the forward striving of the conscious mind” (19). Even as Horus goes off on his own, morose and isolated for having been betrayed by his mother, so the ego enters a “state of introversion”; it “sinks ‘into its own depth’... and discovers in the darkness a substitute for the upper world it has abandoned—the world of memories” (12). Symbolized by the sulking Horus, this lower world, dominated by the mother, “is the world of the child, the paradisaal state of early infancy (12), from which the ego “must tear itself loose and force[] its way up again” (13).

A final element of Egyptian mythology that yields significance as psychological allegory is incest, symbolized by its occurrence among Egypt’s theogonic figures. “In so far as the mother represents the unconscious” (*Aspects*, 14), Jung explains, “the incest tendency, particularly when it appears as the amorous desire of the mother ... is really only the desire of the unconscious to be taken notice of.” Development “in the first part of life” (14) requires “overcoming the actual mother,” but “in the second half of life,” it necessitates reconciling with “the mother-symbolic,” hereby feminizing men by bringing

together their unconscious and conscious. In maturity, the regressing ego “always reactivates the parental imagos and thus apparently re-establishes the infantile relationship” (5). While undergoing this process of unifying their anima and their animus, the heroic ego, Horus-like, feels “[s]unk in his own depths ... like one buried in the earth, a dead man who has crawled back into the mother” (22). But it is in this stage, as in the underworld for Osiris, that primordial energy generated by the union of opposites in the psyche fuels the heroic ego’s phoenix-like transformation. Only in the “deep psyche,” Beebe explains, can the heroic ego liberate itself “from the mother archetype (and from the infantile unconsciousness that the hero’s bondage to her authority represents for the conscious personality)” (*Aspects*, xi). Unfortunately, however, as Jung observed of both mythological and actual men, their refusal to re-connect with the unconscious and, as commonly occurs, their “rejection of the unconscious” itself, “usually has unfortunate results” (14). These results are personified by aimlessly peripatetic heroes who resemble “the wandering sun,” moving in endlessly repetitive cycles toward and away from its primordial waters, the unconscious. For these reasons, Jung referred to “the myth of the hero [a]s a solar myth” (*Aspects*, 22)

All of these scenarios in Egyptian mythology, which Mailer draws on extensively in *Ancient Evenings*, are implicit in Jungian archetypal psychology. In “The Archetype as a Link with the Past” (*Psyche and Symbol*, 146, 125), Jung claims that the “archetypal forms of the hero myth can be observed in almost any individuation process.” Transition from one stage to the next always entails heroic-overcoming. Actualized during the first transitional crisis-period in which the ego moves out of the maternal and into the paternal symbolic realms, “the archetypal energy ... kills the dragon (i.e., the incest wish)” (207).

Once advanced into the second stage, that of “adapting / adjusting” (199), the ego requires the assistance of paternal figures to help it conform to the standards of society. As Herbert Read argues, “[f]or the boy, the father is an anticipation of his own masculinity, conflicting with his wish to remain infantile” (1961, 319). Crucial to its archetypal development, the ego must eventually cease its idealizing of paternal figures and, in doing so, ensure that the dragon of *participation mystique* not rear its ugly head again in the second stage, where it becomes directed toward male figures against whom it turns hostile, only to feel overwhelmed by failure and again in need of their affirmation and approval. In other words, its forging “the confidence, call it bravado, to face up to the father and meet the challenges of the patriarchal world” (Papadoulous 211) entails its detaching from its ego-ideals, often with violent “passive-aggressiveness.” During this crisis of identity occurring in this second phase of archetypal individuation, ego-consciousness must confront the contents of the unconscious in order to experience the proverbial “death of the ego,” the Phoenix-like process in which the “dominant position formerly held by external authority, by the voice of reality and by the ‘father’ and the social persona” (212) gives way to the “new structure that emerges from the inner world of the psyche,” that of the “Self, (capitalised to denote its transcendence and essential difference from the ego)” (212), and symbolized in Egyptian mythology by the risen Osiris and Horus’ reunion with Isis. Since the ego’s “persona” consists mostly of the collective culture’s prevailing stereotypes (211), individuated identity, in this third stage, becomes “grounded in the archetype of the Self rather than in the unconscious mother or father images” (212), no longer reflecting the ego’s need to mirror off of others, no longer caring about its outward-directed personality, and no longer “seeking approval

from others,” having severed its “attachment to egoistic goals.” Thus runs “‘the process of individuation,’ the “central concept of [Jungian] psychology” (Storr, 1983, 212) that addresses “the aspect of psychoanalysis that Freud most neglected—ego development” (Kline, 1984, 42).

Among the clear signifiers that appear as characterological traits definitive of the ego’s failure to move beyond the second of these life-stages is the literalism that is caused by its alienation from the contents of the unconscious, an alienation that troubles its efforts to access, intuitively, the resonant depths of symbolic language. Another indicator of its position in the second stage is its fascination with its own personality. This fascination can develop into its narcissistic inability to acknowledge the autonomy of others and into aggressive and even violent attitudes toward father-figures. Taken together, these “neurotic” characterological traits arise when the ego, aspiring to proceed from one stage of archetypal individuation to the next, is compelled to “procrastinate and delay ... by trickery and subterfuge and self-deception” (Papadopoulos 207). Concomitantly, the narcissism, megalomania, “acrobatics of the will” (Storr 198) and “unconscious automatism” to which this characterological type succumbs drives the ego to “go on re-staging the drama of separation” either from the mother or from the father, “using endless women and men as stand-ins with whom they act-out their family dramas” and needing them to “do nothing but offer adoration and mirroring” (Papadopoulos 208). Eric Fromm explains that these neurotic traits “are joined by necrophilia” (1980, 108). Eros joins Thanatos as “the craving for death and destruction” becomes one with the “craving to return to the womb and to the past.” The heroic ego, then, in order to

progress through the three major stages of psychological development, “can choose only between two possibilities: to regress or to move forward” (Fromm 119).

Readers of *Ancient Evenings* will recognize the relevance of at least some of these citations from psychology. For Menenhetet, an adept of palingenesis, or male autogenesis, from the moment of his first appearance in the first book of the novel until he disappears into the psyche of his great-grandson, Meni, in its final moments, is literally a dead man recounting, from the bottom of the Pyramid of Khufu, the many times he enters the womb of a woman and, dying while ejaculating, rebirths himself in order to enjoy another blissful childhood and to re-live another existence characterized by his compulsions for political power, monetary gain, murderous violence and sadomasochistic sex, all of which serve as his means to attaining his over-arching ambition, which is to replace the Pharaoh(s) as Lord of the Double Crown, or, at least, to become Vizier. The art of “palingenesis,” as Léon Surette describes it, in *The Birth of Modernism* (1993, 16), is a ‘backward birth’ for the male partner” (15). Although Menenhetet “possesse[s]” what only “a few extraordinary mortals” (Surette 26) can possess, this “superhuman auto-creative ability,” not without consequences are his many deaths and rebirths literal and his recycled consciousness, inscribed in almost nine hundred pages, entirely the same.

Before proceeding to show how these archetypal dynamics play out in Mailer’s novel, it must be noted that “The Book of the Gods,” the second section of *Ancient Evenings*, shows Menenhetet narrating these same stories about Egypt’s ur-figures to Meni while regarding them as historical events much like a fundamentalist discussing cosmogony in the Bible’s first book. The literalism with which he instructs his great-

grandson in these primordial stories is a foreshadowing clue to what follows in the novel, for most of *Ancient Evenings* consists of tedious montage and unmitigated description of events lacking symbolic resonance, as Menenhetet just as straight-forwardly relates the events of his four lives. As Bloom points out, there is barely a plot in *Ancient Evenings*, although it may be helpful to summarize it briefly here. In Book One, "The Book of One Man Dead," the post-mortem Meni, the narrator through whom Menenhetet channels his narrative, awakens in a confused state of consciousness, one that, inhabiting an unknown body while squeezing through a tiny shaft, struggles to gain self-awareness, as he finds himself staring down the long series of steps, leading to the base of the Pyramid of Khufu. He, too, is unready for his passage through the Land of the Dead because he is only one-ninth of himself, his *ka*, one of the nine components of the ancient Egyptians' economy of the self: "a natural body, a spiritual body, a heart, a double, a soul, a shadow, an intangible ethereal casing or spirit, a form, and a name" (Budge lxix). The *ka*—one's "image, genius, double, character, disposition, and mental attributes" (Budge lxii)—must reunite with one's body, or *khat*, before it can enjoy the burnt incense and offerings of food left in its tomb during its funeral rites." As the all-but-bodiless *ka* of the narrator wanders confusedly through the Necropolis, he makes his way towards what he thinks is the tomb of an old, dear friend, a shadowy figure he soon meets, one who closely resembles him. Both claim that the other smells too wretchedly to carry on their conversation for more than a few moments. The figure he encounters is his stinky *ba*, a word that refers to the "principle of life in man," which "still ... possesses both substance and form: in form it is depicted as a human-headed hawk," and which also "revisit[s] the body in the tomb ... re-animate[s] it, and converse[s] with it" (Budge lxiv). Meni's two

parts of self, his *ka* and his *ba*, however, do not recognize each other, the result of the fact that not only has his tomb been broken into and desecrated, his mother has moved his burial plot into the cheapest area of the Necropolis, so as to ensure that she, once dead, enters the best burial plot she could obtain, the one she acquired only ostensibly for her son. Meni, then, is in bad shape. Thus, as this neomort awakens in death, Mailer reveals just how deeply his readers will be brought into the complexities of ancient Egyptian beliefs about identity, existence and death, as recorded in *The Papyrus of Ani*, the “best illuminated of all the papyri which date from the second half of the XVIIIth dynasty” (Budge v).

Once inside his tomb Meni meets his great-grandfather Menenhetet, and the nine parts of each character become impossible to distinguish. Richard Poirier has noted that the novel’s “blurring of distinctions between persons or between historical events and visionary ones” (Bloom 44) begins as “Meni and Menenhetet commence their long, mostly telepathic conversation”—it would have to be, given the location of Menenhetet’s member—for he begins to recount his many heroic exploits only after he has placed his penis in Meni’s mouth, a seminal / semantic fact about *Ancient Evenings* that likely makes it the longest extant treatment of sexual exchange between men. “Even at the outset,” Poirier says, “and with only two figures in question, the effort to distinguish between them takes us into a thicket” (Bloom 44). Comprising most of the novel’s narrative, Menenhetet’s first life, as he conveys it to Meni, is devoted to his development as an ambitious soldier, charioteer and eventually a general in Ramses II’s imperial army. His rise to fame from his humble beginnings finds him fighting against the Hittites side by side with Ramses Usermare II. But his short-lived success is stymied by the Pharaoh,

who twice rapes him, exiles and demotes him, before forcing him to serve as Governor of The Gardens of the Secluded, watching over Usermare's many concubines. Murdered when having intercourse with Pharaoh's wife, Nefertiri, he impregnates her with himself, is born again and spends another extended period in the Pharaoh's harem under the pretence that he is the child of Honeyball, Pharaoh's concubine. Although Menenhetet eventually becomes "High Priest of Amon in Thebes" (793) and then "High Priest at Karnak" (797), hiding the wealth he amasses in the "desert of the Eastern cliffs" 800) to be used in his third life, his second life is one of "terrible boredom" (798), for he does not come close to attaining the glory and power he enjoyed in his first life. After having a fatal heart attack—"my heart ... burst even as I came forth"—in the arms of "the leading whore of Thebes" (800), he begins another existence in a harem and becomes a "brothel-keeper" (804) and later a successful papyri merchant, again "amass[ing] a fortune" (805). As at the end of his second life, so at the end of his third, far from achieving his goals, he ends up wallowing in the "profound gloom" (808) welling-up within him when still a young man and compelling him to search for his "third wife, soon to be my fourth mother" (808). The "gout, obesity, inflammation of my eyes, and curvature of the spine" (808) he incurs from having consumed too much alcohol, herbs and poisons sends him into a drug-induced cycle of death and rebirth. In his fourth life, he becomes "a General again ... a doctor, a nobleman ... and because of [his] wealth ... a Notable, a true pillar of society" (809). Again becoming depressed for not having fulfilled his long-held desire to replace the Pharaoh, he succumbs to loneliness (812) and, in the end, escapes the pain of his fourth existence by entering the "debilitating trances" (785) he learned to induce in his third life. "To look backward is to weary oneself" (785), he says, offering a statement

with which most readers of *Ancient Evenings*, a novel that is merely descriptive of the events of this man's four lives, will agree. By the end, after recounting the details of his four lives to his great-grandson Meni, the latter remarks, "[i]n none of his four lives had he found what he desired" (820). As I argue in this chapter, Menenhetet's enormous karmic burden,¹⁴ the consequences of his never discovering the contents of his unconscious, makes him unready for his final death. As a result, he must wander through the Land of the Dead for a thousand years until Meni, his great-grandson, shows up only to receive his great-grandfather's formidable emotional baggage.

Mailer's narrative *modus operandi*, namely the fact that Menenhetet seminally transmits the stories of his lives to Meni, consists of his blending of an element from Egyptian mythology and one from Yeats's *Magic* (1901) cited in the epigraph to *Ancient Evenings*. Capitalizing on the fact that the "Egyptian religion was pre-eminently a manly religion, and therefore calculated to develop manhood" (Massey 242), Mailer literalizes a passage from *The Book of the Dead* attributed to Ra—"I poured seed into my mouth, I sent forth issue" (Bishop 127; cf. Budge 282-92)—just as he does the Yeatsian doctrine, that the shifting "borders of our mind" enable "many minds" to "flow into one another ... and [to] create or reveal a single mind, a single energy" (Finneran 351). Another Yeatsian doctrine that Mailer renders literally in his novel states "[t]hat the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself"; while the third, "[t]hat this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols," is omitted in Mailer's epigraph—a surprising omission, given the fact that *Ancient Evenings* is riddled with symbols (the subtitle of each chapter bears an ancient Egyptian hieroglyph which symbolically evokes the chapter's content, while

printed on the hard-cover editions of the novel are statements in hieroglyph, one of which roughly translates, "In filth is wisdom").

Another Yeatsian motif in the novel is structural. The novel "moves in a spiral" (Lennon, 1988, 328), Mailer remarked. Yeats's apocalyptic image, in "The Second Coming," of the chaos occurring at the end of each epoch, the widening gyres and the "blood-dimmed tide loosed upon the world," provides Mailer with his main structural metaphor. As Meni, at the start of the novel, passes out of one state of existence and into another—"I have a thirst like the heat of earth on fire. Mountains writhe. I see waves of flame. Washes, flashes, waves of flame (3)—he dramatizes this Yeatsian metaphor, which also originates in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, of world-departed souls having to "mount to heaven by means of a ladder" (Budge lxx), a fiery one, after which they arrive at "the point ... where ... [they] may escape the constraints of [their] nature and that of external things, entering upon a state where fuel becomes flame" (*A Vision*, cited in Ellmann 50). For Jung, such imagery denotes the agonistic experience of the heroic ego plunging into and returning from its underworld encounters in the unconscious. But in the opening of *Ancient Evenings*, Meni remains unconscious of what happens to him in these moments. Before entering the mode of consciousness in which he narrates his awakening in the Pyramid of Khufu (3), he envisages "[a] burning number": "[t]he flame showed me an edge as unflickering as a knife, and I passed into that fiery sign [i]n fire I began to stream through the clear and blazing existence of the number 2." He is far from entering what Jung referred to as the "dualistic phase" that the transformed ego enters in the third stage of heroic individuation. Here the number merely prefigures the dualistic means to his becoming one with his great-grandfather, in the first of many

examples in *Ancient Evenings* of the blurring of distinctions between male identities. As he listens to Menenhetet narrate stories about his four existences, Meni's memories become intertwined with those of his great-grandfather, so that, ultimately, distinctions of identity vanish, as, together, embarked as one person in the Boat of Ra, He voyages to the stars.

Here again the Yeatsian allusions can assist Mailer's readers in orienting themselves. While investigating his own tomb and attempting to remember his own death, as he regresses back to the time he died, Meni discerns Menenhetet's presence in their shared crypt, a presence that is, ambiguously, "an image, man or shade," to cite Yeats's "Byzantium."¹⁵ Throughout the seven books of *Ancient Evenings*, as superhuman Menenhetet verbally "unwind[s] the winding path," of his four lives, distinctions between man, memory and representations of both become hazy, as they do in Yeats's "Byzantium," a poem that invites its readers to consider the differences, in terms of substance, between image, man and shade, in order to complicate them. "Hades' bobbin," the human soul, contains within itself the record of its experience in the body, that which becomes "bound in mummy cloth," its memories unraveling in its post-mortem states and revealing all that remained esoteric, that is, unconscious, in the still-living manes. The theosophical traditions that have produced commentaries on ancient Egyptian doctrines describe how the manes must wean himself / herself from the exoteric surface of consciousness, in order to draw sustenance from the deeper reaches of the psyche—such is the process of moving from the man, to his shadow, and, finally, to only her / his image, held within his mind's eye.

However, Mailer's treatment of these theosophical derivations from ancient Egyptian theology remains entirely exoteric, a fact that becomes apparent towards the end of the first book, when Meni, having returned to the Pyramid of Khufu, now in company with Menenhetet, remarks: "I remembered the chamber of Khufu in the center of this Great Pyramid. Was that a cave in the sky by which I had been ready to enter the Duad? [b]ut I had no taste for such questions" (105). As they head down "along a promenade in the dark, down some low tunnel that made us stoop" (109), hearing the "scuttling of rats, and a scattering of insects, while bats flew so near I all but heard the menace of their brain" (109), they arrive at a place where Meni is compelled to wonder, "had the floor become my sky?" He quickly discerns that he "was looking into a large bowl of water, and the star was a reflection. The heavens were beyond, still beyond!—Menenhetet had only led me to a place in the Pyramid where a shaft came down to us at a sharp angle from the sky" (111). Contemplating this image, he says, "I, next to Menenhetet, looking down the darkness at the star, was overcome with the force of two ... memories, myself at six, myself at twenty-one, and felt faint" (112). Moments later Menenhetet places his penis in Meni's mouth and begins his long narration. More than eight hundred pages later, Meni, returning to consciousness in the Pyramid of Khufu, again sees the "light of a star reflected in a bowl of water" (819). But then: "I could no longer see the star. Only a navel before my eyes. It was the withered navel of the Ka of Menenhetet and I was back in all the stink and fury of the old man's phallus in my mouth [t]hen all of him came forth, and in great bitterness. His seed was like a purge, foul and bitter, and I would have liked to vomit but could not. I had to take into me the misery he felt" (819-20).

This transmission of archetypal patrimony from sire to son, Meni's seminal / telepathic inheritance of Menenhetet's memories again invites Jungian-archetypal interpretation. Even as Horus listens to the admonishing voice of his father Osiris in the second book, as Meni remains attentive to Menenhetet's voice and as Menenhetet hears that of the Pharaohs throughout all seven books, so the former son / subordinate-figures, mostly adoring their father-figures while constantly seeking their approval, come to resent them, but get sternly punished for doing so.¹⁶ Subtending the dramatic apices of *Ancient Evenings*'s seven books, this embattled son-father dynamic ensures that the male characters remain trapped in the second stage of archetypal individuation. Here is Menenhetet in one of his difficult moments. Speaking of the Pharaoh, he says: "Even as Horus with His weak legs is a fool among Gods ... so I wept because I did not love my King well enough ... and on the other hand, wept because I hated His heart for stirring my old love for Him" (756).¹⁷ Like Horus and Set whose battle with each other would go on endlessly, with the one enjoying his status as victor only so long as the other has not yet replaced him, so Mailer's characters remain static in their positions as subordinate figures, for none of them replaces the Pharaohs. Sounding similar to one another, all of them of are representative embodiments of heroic ego-consciousness unable to move into the third stage and, consequently, compelled to devote their energies to fighting each other, contradictorily, for both primacy and approval, to avoid regressing back into the first stage.

Yeats and Jung operate in the decorous world of the novel's semi-abstract concepts, some of which Mailer translates into precisely those graphic details that have offended so many readers. Consider how this exploitative dynamic functions between

the male characters throughout *Ancient Evenings*. In the first book, Meni leaves the womb of his sarcophagus and ends up with Menenhetet's penis in his mouth, humiliated and confused. In the second book, young Horus and old Set battle for supremacy, with each attempting to defeat, rape and / or mutilate the other. The third book is mostly taken up with conveying infant Meni's observations of his own childhood, as he remains enfolded in his mother's security and full of admiration for his father / great-grandfather. Yet he is forced to observe other men in his family having intercourse with his mother, enraging him. The fourth book stages charioteer Menenhetet's being raped by Ramses II, after which he fights alongside him, then scorned and sent into exile, despite his heroic performance during the Battle of Kadesh. In the fifth book, Ramses II sodomizes him again, after which he orders him to become male matron in the House of the Secluded, as overseer of Usermare's little "queens"—here Menenhetet, floundering in self-pity, takes his revenge by forming a sexual relationship with Honey-Ball, Usermare's most rebellious mistress. But he spends most of his time voyeuristically observing his master's sexual performances, mightier than his own, his anxiety toward the pharaonic father-figure counter-balancing his admiration of him. He then becomes the "companion to Rama-Nefru," Pharaoh's second wife, again playing the voyeur and treating the available mistresses as stand-ins for her, as he acts-out Usermare's role. Menenhetet endures these prolonged periods of stasis by contemplating such unheroic topics as the lifestyles of the eunuchs (611) and women's "moonblasts" (662), all the while suffering a "stampede of restlessness" (677). Sensing this, Pharaoh orders his charioteer to become Rama-Nefru's governess.

By Books Six and Seven of *Ancient Evenings*, this sadomasochistic dynamic threatens to become insufferably tedious, yet Mailer persists in his dramatizing of it. Most of the sixth book narrates Menenhetet's becoming overshadowed by the Pharaoh's ithyphallic coronation ceremony—replete with actual / symbolic erections, adoring priests and images of the rising sun. Consequently, the neglected hero frantically searches for Pharaoh's first wife, Nefertiri, frantically relates every last nuance of their sexual encounter (oral, anal, vaginal), frantically recalls them once they are finished—"I was like a madman without her" (743)—then frantically goes looking for prostitutes and, after spending all night in a local brothel, devotes the next day to cherishing his intimate thoughts about Nefertiri (cf. 731-76). Later that evening, during Usermare's coronation dinner, he again has intercourse with her, this time in the royal garden. But her son (at her behest), kills him in the act (777). He dies, is born again, and, after spending nine months in her womb, becomes what he has all along unconsciously desired to be, her son, raised in Honeyball's care. He then relives another boyhood (758-842), gregariously recounting his enjoyment of his mothers' affections and of his "father's" uncritical attention. World-weary, he again dies and rebirths himself in a woman's womb, for the third time recycling himself in Stages I and II of archetypal individuation.

Toward the end of the novel, Meni is informed that his great-grandfather has heroically killed himself with the small knife that his grand-daughter's husband allegedly loaned him, but he soon learns that Menenhetet does not die. Instead, sneaking out of the Pharaoh's palace, Menenhetet goes in search of Hathferti, his granddaughter and Meni's mother, in order to have intercourse with her. He survives the ordeal this time; she gets pregnant, but aborts what would have been Meni's brother / father / great-grandfather

(826). After failing to engender himself in her, Menenhetet, succumbing to indigence and despair, dies off-stage. Even in death, however, he fails to gain surcease of his desire to live on, in order to fulfill his heroic idea of himself. In the novel's final moments, he again literalizes the links between the seminal and the semantic, as he again discharges into the throat of his great-grandson, sending himself along with his discharge—vanishing, that is, into Meni, a surrogate mother of sorts. Before They enter the bottomless river of feces, the narrator, knowing neither his origin nor his end, neither who he is nor whose memories are his own, becomes a leading candidate for the most abused and confused character in all of literature. But it is little wonder that Meni becomes enraptured in a vertigo of questions about his identity, since Mailer distinctly chose, as his setting for *Ancient Evenings*, the two dynasties in which “the hated pharaohs regarded [incest] almost as a royal requirement” (Tannahill, 1980, 77)

What becomes clear, then, as the novel unfolds, is that palingenesis is Menenhetet's way of regressing back to the womb. Applicable to young boys, not to men in maturity, Jung's remark about the fact that “fear of the father may drive the boy out of his identification with the mother” (Read, 321), but that “it is possible that his fear will make him cling still more closely to her” (Read, 321), is apposite to Menenhetet. With glaring obviousness, he embodies this fear. Each time he is raped, exiled or humiliated by his beloved Pharaoh, he anxiously seeks out Usermare's wives and concubines, retreating to the womb of security and well-being. After he dies and is reborn, he again relives the blissful *participation mystique* with his various mothers and again enjoys the uncritical adoration of his surrogate father(s). Throughout the narratives of all four lives, although he repeatedly re-births himself, his “[e]ntry into the mother,”

in Jungian terms, does not entail “establishing a relationship between the ego and the unconscious” (*Aspects*, 21). Indeed the novel “moves in a spiral” (Lennon, 1988, 328), as Mailer put it, but its circularity can also be described as the “vicious circle” that forms as the ego’s “fear of life and people causes more shrinking back, and this in turn leads to infantilism and finally ‘into the mother’” (Jung 17).

Full of “regressive longing to return to the blissful state of infancy in a world dominated by his mother” (von Franz 111), *Menenhetet* is Mailer’s entirely exoteric adaptation of the story of Osiris, the world’s oldest allegory of self-renewal.¹⁸ As M.-L. von Franz explains, in *Man and his Symbols* (1964, 111), “the hero figure is the symbolic means by which the emerging ego overcomes the inertia of the unconscious mind” (111). What makes the Osirian hero heroic is his / her confrontation with the contents of the unconscious, what Jung termed the “shadow,” which becomes his / her source of the primordial energy needed to journey through to stage three of the hero’s archetypal narrative. This paradigm lies at the heart of most tribal and religious rituals the world over: the “yearly solstice rite combined with the death and rebirth of the mythological hero,” von Franz says, re-enacts “the drama of new birth through death” (113). Again, originating in the story of Osiris, an initiation rite “takes the novice back to the deepest level of the original mother-child identity or ego-Self identity, thus forcing him to experience a symbolic death” (von Franz 123), wherein “his identity is temporarily dismembered” before becoming “ceremonially rescued by the rite of the new birth.” Such is the proverbial “‘rite of passage’ from one stage of life to the next, whether it is from early childhood or from early to late adolescence and from then to maturity” (123). Fulfilling the terms of the hero archetype, Jung writes, “is what religion—*religio*

(‘linking back’)—is all about” (*Psyche and Symbol*, 135). It “is the essence, the working basis of all religious life even today, and will always will be, whatever future form this life may take” (135). The archetype of striving heroes thus has a crucial double valence, the exoteric narrative of their victorious struggles and the esoteric story of their self-renewal, but Mailer’s treatment of it does not.

Menenhetet is a developmentally static character because Mailer, in fulfilling his desire to explore male-male relations, expunges the feminine symbolic from his treatment of ancient Egyptian mythology. His male characters, devoid of an unconscious, undergo no life-transforming experiences in their ardor to accrue more power over one another, militarily, politically and sexually. In terms of the dialogues that the novel’s female characters are given, Hathfertiti, Nefertiri, Honeyball, Rama-Nefru, and the famous Whore of Tyre, among others, sound just like the men, for they are just as hungry for power and prestige and mainly serve as mere receptacles for the mens’ compulsive lust. The men in the novel who are made to “become a woman” are raped, as Pepti, one of Pharaoh’s scribes, mockingly puts it to the embarrassed Menenhetet, as Mailer bowdlerizes one of his own opinions, that, for a man, becoming “more masculine” entails “first satisfy[ing] something feminine” (*Presidential Papers*, 1963, 298). Pepti, speaking “in a stern voice, imitating an officer” (761) and prompting “wild laughter” from the soldiers present, tells him to “[t]ake heart ... the way to become a man is by way first of learning how to be a woman.” It was not until Mailer wrote *Tough Guys Don’t Dance* that he began rendering in fiction his own ideas about the psyche as a composite of male and female principles. As the other chapters in this thesis demonstrate, the novels that come after *Ancient Evenings* dramatize an interesting polarity in Mailer’s

mature development. In these novels, embattled sons, probing the underlying causes of their fathers' anachronistic reverence of elitist heroes, their masculinist credos and their compulsions toward violence, represent Mailer's efforts to overcome his commitment to these same attitudes, credos and compulsions. The perspectival distance that they gain is the result of their incipient awareness of the contents of their unconscious, their "feminine component" (*Tough Guys*, 195), as narrator Tim Madden puts it.

As clearly delineated in *Ancient Evenings*, Mailer's violently sadomasochistic mode of masculinity would seem to affirm not only the critics' complaints about it, complaints that are cited in the introduction to this thesis, but also the more serious critique that feminists made about him during the decade he wrote it, that the psychodynamics of his male characters—e.g., Croft in *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), Rojack in *An American Dream* (1965), DJ in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967)—make them resemble the soldier-males engineered by Röhm and by Hitler.¹⁹ Indeed had *Ancient Evenings* been published a decade earlier, the feminists would surely have had a great deal more grist for their ideological mill. Again, Mailer was no fascist, as his mature writings, such as *Why Are We At War* (2003), make clear. Beneath the terminology, however, not for nothing have feminist critics and gender theorists, whose persuasiveness derives, in part, from their citations of Mailer's own most damning comments, made their claims: "rogue masculinity," "imperialist masculinity," "frontier psychology"—these terms, given the psychodynamics implicit in their meaning, are all but synonymous with "fascist."

Anyone reading *Ancient Evenings* while bearing in mind some of the definitive aspects of the fascist aesthetic, as outlined, for example, by Susan Sontag in "Fascinating

Fascism" (*Under the Sign of Saturn*, 1974, 72-105), could find ample grounds for comparison. Indeed, however often Mailer, in *The Prisoner of Sex* (1971), urges his readers to separate the forest from the trees, as it were, in recognizing the differences between him and Hitler, the fascistic aesthetic is clearly identifiable in his Egypt novel's eroticizing of mass murder and in its blurring distinctions between territorial and bodily conquest. Sontag's analysis provides some of the indicators: men's finding in mountains and super-sized monuments and statues "a visually irresistible metaphor for unlimited aspiration toward the high mystic goal," both "beautiful and terrifying, a fetishizing of the monumental that was later to become concrete in Fuhrer-worship" (76); their fascination with "victory of the stronger man over the weaker" and with "success in fighting" serving as the "main aspiration of a man's life" (89); the "rendering of movement in grandiose and rigid patterns" (91) wherein the "masses are made to take form, be design"; the "blunt massing of material" (94), the "sanctimonious promotion of the beautiful" (97); "fantasies about armor and uniforms" and about the "righteousness of violence" (99); "verbal fetishism" (100). Such elements constitute lengthy tableaux in *Ancient Evenings*. For instance, Mailer's depictions of the many trials and tests through which Menenhetet rises to power; his and the Pharaoh's journey into the Valley of the Kings, their bloody heroism during the battle of Kadesh; the moments in the novel in which the "feminine masses" (Sontag 102) cheer ecstatically as Pharaoh flashes his erection; "The Book of Queens," the entirety of Book Five of *Ancient Evenings* is, in *toto*, "sexual theatre, a staging of sexuality" (Sontag 102). And throughout Mailer's novel: sadomasochism, which, as Sontag describes the reasons for its ubiquity among the fascist soldier-male, "is to sex what war is to civil life: the magnificent experience"

(Sontag 103). “As the social contract seems tame in comparison with war” (103), she argues, “so fucking and sucking come to seem merely nice, and therefore unexciting.” *Ancient Evenings* itself is, indeed, one long “ritual of domination and enslavement” (Sontag 104), wherein “masters and slaves” become “consciously aestheticized” (Sontag 105). Readers of Mailer’s novel interested in assessing such indications of the fascist aesthetic, an aesthetic that, as Klaus Theweleit affirms in *Male Fantasies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror* (1989), celebrates violent misogyny, aggressive homosexuality, sadomasochism and emotional repression, among other examples of dysfunctional masculinity, will have no problem finding them.

However, what the critics of *Ancient Evenings* overlooked, in complaining about the fact that his Egypt resembles his America, about his obsessions with blood sport, war and violent sexuality occurring between men, and about the apparent literary imperialism inherent in his treatment of Egypt’s history, is the fact that these subjects were defining features not only of one late twentieth-century writer’s constructions of masculinity and its brutal context. They were just as definitive of Egypt’s Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties as they are prevalent in today’s Western cultures. *Ancient Evenings* also demonstrates the validity of Jung’s claim, cited as this chapter’s third epigraph, that the “psychic dominants” of earlier eras cyclically return, in widening, narrowing gyres, as Yeats describes them, to define later ones. Self-styled Aquarius, composing, at the beginning of the Aquarian Age, a novel set at the end of the Age of Aries, and depicting, in Jung’s terms, “events which are in accord with an end of an era” and which “appear at the end of one Platonic month and at the beginning of another,” made himself the author of a novel for which the terms “imperialist,” “fascist,” and “pathological,” insofar as its

depictions of masculinity are concerned, are appropriate. While composing it, Mailer embodied what Jung termed “the spirit of the age” (*Civilization*, 12), one that instills “an objective, impersonal cause,” deriving “from his collective unconscious which he has in common with all men.”

The complaints commonly made about *Ancient Evenings*, Mailer’s literalistic modes of awareness, the voiding of esoteric content from symbolic language, his relentless ego-consciousness, narcissism, projection and sadomasochistic violence, must be seen in the light of various features of the dynasties in which Mailer’s novel is set. As Egyptologists have shown, aesthetically, after the Eighteenth Dynasty, the esoteric content of Egypt’s artistic productions gradually diminished as the Pharaohs, implementing their imperial agendas, commissioned massive images of themselves posing as warrior-heroes destroying their enemies. Richard H. Wilkinson, in *Symbol and Magic in Egyptian Art* (1994, 39), explains that, toward the end of the Nineteenth Dynasty, the “New Kingdom tendency toward the massive in art and architecture reached its apex.” The “symbolic statement made by the massive was especially important from a political standpoint” (Wilkinson 40). The “representational program from the Egyptian temple reliefs” depict “scenes of warfare, the delivery of captives to the deity [and the] smiting of captives.” The point of such “propagandizing representations of both a religious and a national—and perhaps even dynastic—nature” was “the desire to awe” (Wilkinson 41). The aesthetically massive was a reflection not only of the “pharaohs’ excessive pride inflated by imperialism” (Wilkinson 39), but also of the nation’s “loss of traditional behavior” and of “the disintegration of [its] recognized culture.” These and other “changes brought in by empire,” writes John A. Wilson in *The Culture of Ancient*

Egypt (1956, 204), accelerated Egypt's demise, a demise that was profoundly significant for civilizations the world over. Existing "for some four hundred generations with but slight changes in their basic structure" (Mills, *The Power Elite*, 1967, 21), Egypt's ancient civilization was "six and a half times as long as the entire Christian era, which has only prevailed some sixty generations," and "about eighty times as long as the five generations of the United States' existence."

Indeed the changes occurring during this period—political, religious and aesthetic—brought Egypt's long cultural supremacy to an end, its duration the reward for its hermetic isolationism. As Wilson claims (170, 318), the "greatly increased power of the gods and of their priesthoods" was the result of the "enormous dominance of Amon-Re of Karnak," who, as the "'the Hidden One' by name, the invisible god of air ... might be everywhere," and thus "easily became the god of far-flung empire ... when the fortunes of the [e]mpire carried him abroad." With its government shifting from being "a 'logistical' to a 'predatory' empire" (Joxe, *Empire of Disorder*, 2002, 183), with violence increasingly "dominat[ing] the economy," with its "love of sports" and its obsessive "focus" on the "one mortal who was divine," a divinity that "was practical in the period, because it led to skill in warfare" (199), it was the era in which the Pharaohs' enthusiasm as both sportsmen and warriors "inspired a new literary genre." This genre consisted of state-commissioned narratives "glorifying the successful sportsm[e]n and athletes" (Wilson 195) and celebrating the Pharaohs' "galloping [their] horses across the desert." The perennial means of mobilizing sociopolitical support for imperial war that today's archons and solons of empire implement differ little from their counterparts' in the ancient world: propagandistic icons of warrior-heroes.

It is the particular similarities between these dynasties and Mailer's contemporary culture that are especially salient. Not only is "[o]ur social, economic, and political institutions ... generally the same as those of Egypt and Mesopotamia" (Wilson, 308), and not only did the Egyptian "[e]mpire effectively end any advocacy of the rights of the individual and force every citizen into a disciplined and submissive acceptance of the transcendent rights of the state" (Wilson 314), its "[a]dministrative houses" so closely resembled today's governmental ministries that the most important structure was called "the White House," where finances were managed and where "the chief of the army and of diplomacy, the pharaoh," who was also "the chief of clergy" (de Beler and Cardinaud, 2005, 98), resided. Egypt's theocratic king, as "the son of gods" (Champollion, 2003, 8), had "his image stamped onto the currency," in such a way as to resemble "images of prevailing deities, with the latter and the former playing," in the citizens' minds, "a game of mirrors, one reflecting the other." Although the royal currency did not depict the apex of a pyramid hovering above its broad base of support—in fact, the pyramids' most vital features were always their underground chambers—Egypt's ruling elites coined what became an oft-used political maxim, "let them hate so long as they fear," the aphorism that the Romans perpetuated—*oderint dum metuant*—and that members of the Bush administration employ. According to Egyptologist John A. Wilson, the "pharaohs inspired fear in their citizenry—fear that their injustices would be brought to light: "'Inspire the fear of thyself, so that men may fear thee'" (173). While the "(real) official is an official of whom men are afraid, because the (proper) dread of the official is that he should do justice" (Wilson 173), the pragmatic usage of this term was more likely what it was for James Woolsey, former Director of the CIA and member of the Defense

Department's Policy Board, when he commented on "the silence of the Arab public in the wake of America's victories in Afghanistan," a silence that, for him, "proves that 'only fear will re-establish respect for the U.S.'" (Cited in Blum, 392).

One section of *Ancient Evenings* that can serve to show the ways in which the critics were too quick to attribute to Mailer features of his novel that mirror the imperial culture he chose as his novel's setting is its fourth section. "The Book of the Charioteer" dramatizes Egypt's war against the Hittites. Numerous Egyptologists have shown that Ramses II did not overcome their enemies, although Mailer renders it a victory. Interestingly, some critics' reluctance to label him a literary-imperialist and his novel as propagandistic prevented them from recognizing just how inaccurate his rendering of the historical record is. For instance, Joseph Wenke, in *Mailer's America* (1987, 219), praises Mailer for the ways in which his equating of "myth and history constitutes the core of the novels' messianic message, making what is Mailer's most powerful case for a transcendent alternative to the American innocents' dangerous denial of history" (219). But Mailer, here, just like ancient Egypt's politically motivated recorders, re-writes Egyptian history while narrating Ramses II's battle against the Hittites at Kadesh, thus remaining true to the spirit of the times in which he wrote. Despite the "the noisy claim of Ramses II that he defeated the Hittites at Kadesh, we know he was badly taken by surprise in that battle and returned to Egypt without achieving his objectives" (Wilson 195). De Beler and Cardinaud confirm Wilson's opinion when they argue that, "[w]ith the Ptah and Seth divisions still far away, Ramesses sent the Vizier over to the army of Re to hurry its march, but it suffered a surprise attack by the Hittites and was wrecked[w]hen they saw the Hittite chariots advancing upon them, the pharaoh's soldiers

knew they were outnumbered and fled in fear [a]t this point in the story, history yields to myth" (104). Accurately reflecting the fact that "Ramesses' conquests," as De Beler and Cardinaud continue, "brought Egypt rich tribute from all over, such that "[a]bundance became the country's rule" (104), Mailer's depictions of Egyptian imperialism is unflinching.

The Kadesh section of *Ancient Evenings* reads like many of the emotionally-flat war-passages in Hemingway (*In Our Time* and *A Farewell to Arms*, for instance), with the main difference being Mailer's sadomasochistic indulgences, indulgences that account for the reasons that many critics invoke de Sade as one of Mailer's obvious precedents. The following passages read like a literary tribute to both Hemingway and de Sade:

As night went on, we used these captives, we gorged on them, we devoured them, of that I will speak. Everywhere was the comic if piteous sight of ten or twenty Hittites all tied with their hands behind their necks, the same cord binding them to the throat of the next fellow, until when told to walk, twenty would hobble along in lockstep, their eyeballs squeezed out of their heads by terror, their necks at an angle, yes, so hunched up and bound together you could mistake them for a clump of figs on a string, except that these figs groaned frequently from the pain of their bonds. May I say their captors guarded them poorly. Any gang of soldiers who came blundering along could cut off the first or last of the line—it was too much work to untie a captive in the middle. Then you would see some sights in the blaze of the campfires. Many a poor Asiatic's beard was treated like the groin of a

woman, and his buttocks as well; why, you would see five men working on one fellow who had already been turned into a woman, and one poor captive was even put into harness like a horse while our soldiers played with him as they would never dare play with a horse. This Hittite could not even get his mouth open to scream—it was filled near to choking. Picture the fury of the man who straddled his head.

You would have thought with all the blood we had seen this day that some would want no more. But blood is like gold and feeds that appetite. You could not smell it enough and some could not even taste it to their full content. All of us, despite the discomfort of being covered by it, sticky with it, crusted over, came, sooner or later, to want more. It was like fresh cosmetic over old. Blood was now as fascinating as fire and nearer to us. You could never travel to the center of a fire, but the blood was here in everybody's breath. We were like the birds who collected in a million and infinity on this battlefield and would feed through the night on all they could tear from the flesh of the slain....I remember some of us even took the heads of Hittites and put them on long pointed sticks. While others held torches, we waved them aloft. We stood on one side of the river, across from the walls and gates of Kadesh, and we mocked them in the night while the banks began to stink from the early corruption of the bodies and would be a monstrosity in hot days to come (423-425).

Recalling the process of composing *Ancient Evenings*, Mailer remarked: "I'd write directly out of the unconscious [which] is so much deeper than one's own self"

and which “is connected as a taproot into something else. So, if something’s going on when I write it, I’ll just obey it. I’ll follow it” (Whalen-Bridge, 2006, 6, 7). The problem with his statement is that it seems to be suggesting that the contents of his unconscious are no different from that of his consciousness. Again, Jung can help sort this out. He describes the psychological tensions defining ego-consciousness in the second stage of the hero archetype, wherein “other potential contents of consciousness” become excluded. It “is in the nature of the conscious mind to concentrate on relatively few contents and to raise them to the highest pitch of clarity” (*Psyche and Symbol*, 139), he says. And “when a part of the psyche is split off from consciousness,” he continues, “it is only *apparently* inactivated ... in actual fact it brings about a possession of the personality, with the result that the individual’s aims are falsified in the interests of the split-off part” (139). This possession of the total psyche by the ego’s obsessions is described in Allen Weiss’s *The Aesthetics of Excess* (1989, 26) as the ego’s “[i]mpossible [s]overeignty” over itself, the consequence of which is its need to dominate everything and everyone else. As *Ancient Evenings* massively dramatizes, ego-consciousness and warrior-mentality are causally linked and the consequence of both are the same, their tendency to invalidate the autonomy of others. Of his novel’s imperialistic nature, Mailer seemed completely unaware, even after Whalen-Bridge confronted him with the fact that ancient Egypt served as a site onto which he projected his obsessions. Dodging the charge and preferring to speculate about how the novel could have turned out, he claimed that he “could have restricted it to the campaign of the battle of Kadesh” (2006, 3), making it “a very good 200-page novel.”

Like the imperial rulers his novel dramatizes in such detail, in their aggressive stances toward other nations, Mailer aesthetically invaded ancient Egypt's literary culture without worrying that, in doing so, he showed indifference to another nation's right of autonomous identity. In the final moments of *Ancient Evenings*, when Menenhetet makes the surprising claim that he has "imparted" Egyptian history to Meni "in the way that these Romans and Greeks tell it to each other [f]or out Land of the Dead now belongs to them" (839), at least two implications of Mailer's having gleaned his narrative material through the lenses, as it were, of Occidental eyes, become clear. The first is that the esoteric substance of Egypt's mythology was, when writing *Ancient Evenings*, entirely lost to Mailer. As Schwaller de Lubicz writes, "[o]ur exoteric evolution, through the Greek metaphysical phases" (55), fostered rationalistic attitudes about the ancient Egyptians" that make interpreting their esotericism difficult. The Greek's conception, based mainly on Herodotus's descriptions, "presents a view of Egypt's past which shows no genuine understanding of Egyptian history" (Cited in Shaw, 13), as British Egyptologist Alan Lloyd observes: "[e]verything has been uncompromisingly customized for Greek consumption and cast unequivocally into a Greek mold" (Cited in Shaw, 13). Whereas the first implication of Menenhetet's claim that he has been relating the Greek's version of Egyptian history is that Mailer aligns himself with the tradition of rationalist exotericism, another is that his character's statement makes it impossible for Mailer to defend himself against the charge of "orientalizing" his subject matter.

As Mailer admitted in his interviews, the concept of orientalism meant nothing to him: "I never read [*Orientalism*]. My whole feeling while I was doing *Ancient Evenings* was: let's forget what present orientalism is like. It wasn't even a word for me

because it wasn't a word for the Egyptians back in 1200B.C. ... I was going at it almost like an anthropologist. So I wasn't interested in intellectual currents that might be applied to the word. I wanted to see if I could assay the ore" (Whalen-Bridge, 2006, 2). However, what he goes on to say, in this interview, directly supports his interlocutor's claims about the imperialistic elements in *Ancient Evenings*, such as his comment on what he had originally planned for it, as part one of a trilogy whose third narrative was to be a work of science fiction, as he described it: "the world would have to be destroyed in order to save a few people [t]hat was the premise the only thing they have a lot of information on was a writer of the period in the second half of the twentieth century named Norman Mailer the biography of Norman Mailer as seen by those people on the spaceship" (Whalen-Bridge, 2006, 9). His idea here is a re-playing of "The Last Night," his short story in which the President of the United States, before vacating planet earth, must destroy it (the destruction is necessary for his thrust outward into space). Thus Mailer, tongue in cheek perhaps, appropriates the president's world-annihilating role. Here, Mailer's SF ambitions reveal themselves as a wry attempt to imagine imperializing the future, with himself, given the boundless entropy of his egotism, as the messiah-figure, whose works and days create the quilt-work of fact and fiction out of which later peoples of the book, the book of Norman, will have woven their cultural mythologies. If Whalen-Bridge and Mailer's verbal sparring can be likened to arm-wrestling, it is as if Mailer, locked into one vigilantly but nervously defended ego-based state, unconsciously lends the support of his left hand to his opponent.

Mailer's *obiter dicta* on *Ancient Evenings* reveal what it does, that "part of the psyche exists which is acting in its own interests, thwarting the empire of the ego" (Green

9), as cited in this chapter's first epigraph. The ancient adage, inscribed throughout the literature of the ancient world, that one hand doesn't know what the other is doing, makes a psychological point, one that is warranted by many of Mailer's statements on *Ancient Evenings*: on one hand, he says that, "unless we are truly able to comprehend cultures that are initially alien to us, I don't know if we are going to make it" (Busa, 1999, 31); on the other, that "this ability to reinvent cultures, to make imaginative works of them that are more real than any pieces of journalism, is crucial to our continuation" (Busa 31); that, when writing it, he "was interested in finding what was going on possibly in the people who were in that society" (Whalen-Bridge, 2006, 3), and that, while doing so, "I was making it up," himself the source of his knowledge about "what was going on" for them (Whalen-Bridge, 2006, 3). The "real excitement" he feels as a novelist, he says, occurs "when I do it myself, when I'm not dealing with a legend, what I make up the story, as I did in *Ancient Evenings*" (Busa 31). However, Bloom is accurate when he observes that much of the content of *Ancient Evenings* "is already there in Egyptian mythology for him to develop" (35). If Egypt's *Book of the Dead* "is notoriously lacking in straightforward narrative-style myths" (Shaw 116), Mailer more than compensated for this lack. Obviously the tension created by these contradictory stimuli helped make the book such an important one in his career.

When Mailer, speaking of *Ancient Evenings*, insisted that he had "a right to imagine a work ... of the imagination" (Lennon, 1988, 324, 325, 327), and when he anxiously defended himself—"[i]n the case of the writer the risk is to his ego [b]ut I will say once again, that I've taken a field—I'm a bully—where there's no competition," he may not have realized that this puts him in good company. According to Tom Hare's

ReMembering Osiris, writers' attempts to "raise Egypt from the dead" are motivated to do so by its "extraordinary remoteness" (Cited in Shaw, 9), "its 'timelessness' and all the potency of nostalgia," nostalgia that fuels their treating mythological material as sites of their own unconscious projections. "Modern books and scholarly articles on ancient Egyptian religion," writes Barry Kemp, in *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization*, "are probably adding to the original body of thought as much as explaining it in modern western terms" (Cited in Shaw, 144). "My ancient Egypt is very much an imagined world," Kemp says, for there is "no way of knowing in the end if a set of scholarly guesses which might be quite true to the spirit of ancient thought and well informed of the available sources ever actually passed through the minds of the ancients at all" (Cited in Shaw, 9). Providing support for Said's claim, that "[e]very interpretation, every structure created for the Orient ... is reinterpretation, a rebuilding of it" (*Orientalism*, 1995, 158), contemporary Egyptology thus accepts the premise that nothing written by western writers about ancient Egypt can be taken as authentically Egyptian. The pioneering Occidental revisitings of ancient Egypt that Said explores—Napoleon's *Description de l'Egypte*, Chateaubriand's *Itineraire*, Lamartine's *Voyage en Orient*, Flaubert's *Salamambo*, Edward Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* and Richard Burton's *Narrative of a Pilgrimage to al-Madinah*" (Cf. Said 86, 158)—reveal that "[w]hat mattered to them was the structure of their world as an independent, aesthetic, and personal fact" (158).

Surely, Mailer's egocentric literalizing of writing as a "form of war" and of himself as an heroic writer of mythic proportions is responsible for the fact that *Ancient Evenings* has been "consigned to the purgatory of neglect" (Glenday, 1995, 118). "The

idea of the heroic author is *ridiculous* in this 'death of the author' age," writes Whalen-Bridge, "but Mailer is one of our quixotic / heroic writers."²⁰ In *The Sense of an Ending* (1967, 167), Frank Kermode has thoughtful things to say about an author's "emotional attachment to the paradigms" of a former epoch, which cause books ultimately to fail to move their readers because they "represent the world of potency as a world of act." Since old paradigms persist in the minds of contemporary authors like Mailer, *Ancient Evenings* need not "go on the dump with the other empty bottles" (Kermode 167), for it stands as an important testament to the fact that the health, ultimately, perhaps, even the survival of the collective conscious depends on its constituents' willingness to discern the unconscious matters hidden beneath exoteric surfaces.

III. Heterophobia in *Tough Guys Don't Dance*

"Today, the code of the athlete, of the tough boy ... that curious mixture of striving, asceticism, and rigor, the origins of which some trace back to Alexander the Great—is stronger than ever. Do you have feelings? There are correct and incorrect ways of indicating them. Do you have an inner life? It is nobody's business but your own. Do you have emotions? Strangle them. To a degree, everybody obeys this code [b]ut on the truest candor, it has an inhibitory effect. Most serious matters are closed to the hard-boiled. They are unpracticed in introspection, and therefore badly equipped to deal with opponents whom they cannot shoot like big game or outdo in daring. If you have difficulties, grapple with them silently, goes one of the commandments."—Saul Bellow, *The Dangling Man* (Cited in David Madden, *Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties* [1968, xxvii]).

"Tough guys are ... the true effeminate."—Adorno²¹

That Mailer's *Tough Guys Don't Dance* belongs to the hard-boiled tradition is a claim supported by the fact that the two main characters in this novel, Tim and Dougy Madden,

a father and son duo, are named after David Madden, the editor of *Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties* (1968), a pioneering collection of essays on this sub-genre of mystery / detective fiction.²² Exoterically, *Tough Guys* contains all of the sub-genre's stock elements that Madden itemizes in his introductory essay. He argues that the "tough quality of these novels ... is dictated by the social milieu, one in which norms, hollow to start with, are suddenly disrupted, and consequently by the narrating voice of the man mired in the milieu" (xx), that the hard-boiled writers have a tendency to remain on "expressive surfaces," so as to avoid "suffus[ing] their material with their subjective life" (xxi), that the "lingering appeal of these writers ... may be due in part to our common desire to deal with our lives in terms of these expressive surfaces rather than to plunge into murky depths" (xxv); and, finally, that "the tough guy is strategically placed to perceive lies and hypocrisy—he cannot live with or by them" (xviii).

Esoterically, however, *Tough Guys*, unlike most pot-boilers hurriedly written for modest profit and quick consumption,²³ is an allegory that challenges the assumptions about gender and sexuality inherent in these stock conventions of the tough-guy genre. Mailer's novel extends its boundaries, and, in doing so, restores the links between it and its larger context, the tradition of mystery / detective writing, whose founder was Edgar Allan Poe and whose definitive literary character, investigator-hero Monsieur Dupin, is an adept of feminine intuition. Mailer's sensitive narrator is a far cry from Dupin at the beginning of his autobiographical narrative but comes to resemble him toward its end. He seeks answers to a myriad of questions about his masculinity, his sexual preferences, and his psychological ability to interpret clues, questions that drive him toward his epiphanic realization, the *telos* of *Tough Guys*. This is his realization, that he, like his literary

predecessor Monsieur Dupin, embodies a dualistic psyche, a “Bi-Part Soul” (Seelye, 477), in Poe’s terms, one that consists of both masculine and feminine principles. Narrator Tim Madden’s concerns with sexuality, gender and the flow or blockage of his creative energies haunt him just as much as the nagging question of whether he is responsible, directly or indirectly, for the crimes he investigates. His capacity to solve the murder mystery, the story that constitutes only the exoteric surface of the plot, develops the longer he stays away from alcohol and drugs and the more he distances himself from the blatantly stereotypical men and women in his immediate environment, all of whom are representative embodiments of psychic imbalance. The esoteric plot of *Tough Guys* dramatizes Madden’s coming to consciousness of his feminine energies, his achieving of an inner equilibrium that empowers him with increased intuitive abilities and with creative visualization (181-83, 226),²⁴ a heightened awareness of the intersecting cosmic forces streaming through Provincetown’s highly charged atmosphere (182), and appearing in his mind as patterns of coincidence, a word that becomes ubiquitous in *Tough Guys* (118, 126, 160). So anxious is he to put himself in touch with his feminine component, that he ritualizes his need, and not just by unconsciously acquiring his tattoo (25, 78)—a means, according to occult physiological practice, of accessing feminine energy—but also “by encouraging” his girlfriends “to practice special oral sex” (195), analingus, “in order to indulge [his] feminine component” (195).²⁵ The novel’s numerous occult elements facilitate Mailer’s restoration to the hard-boiled tradition of the mystery / detective genre’s psychological substance, as conjured by Poe. Unlike the cold, hard, repressed, and usually alcoholic male narrators of the hard-boiled genre, the authentic investigator-heroes of the literary tradition founded by Poe are men

of genius, their balanced psyches enabling them to perceive the symbiotic unity between mind and matter and, consequently, to triumph over Cartesian duality. They are *sensitive*, not *tough*.

Abjuring the hard-boiled writers' tendency to avoid "autobiographical involvement" (Madden, xx) in their works, Mailer, using his narrator as his ideological vehicle, situates in *Tough Guys* many of the gender-related arguments he made in *The Prisoner of Sex* (1971), arguments concerning masculinity, the biological and existential differences between men and women, the determining psychosocial forces operative in men's development of their identity, and the usefulness of regarding the psyche as a marriage of masculine and feminine components. All of these arguments are implicit in the text of *Tough Guys*. Also running, as it were, beneath the verbal surface of the novel, Mailer's gleanings in Adorno and Reich can be traced in the psychology of its male characters, the clue to which fact is an anagram: the *Madden* men are *damned* to serve in Mailer's dramatic rendering of his take on Adorno's and Reich's ideas about the ways in which the formation of gender identity occurs unconsciously in socio-cultural environments.

Exploring the "murky" (Madden, xxv) depths of Mailer's contribution to the mystery / detective tradition entails saying something about his longstanding unpopularity among critics who condemned him for allegedly creating fascistic male characters, whose violently misogynistic tendencies reflect his less than salutary, politically-incorrect ideas about men and women. This is an *ad personam* judgment that Mailer—given his notorious stabbing of his second wife in the 1960s, his reckless labeling of women as "sloppy beasts" needing to be "put in cages," on a television talk-

show in the same decade, and his successful lobbying, in the 1980s, for Jack Abbot's release from prison, shortly before he went on to commit more murder—made all but inevitable. Since the early 1970s, misogynist opinions and fascist sympathies have been seen as linked for Mailer's detractors. First promoted by Kate Millett, whose *Sexual Politics* excoriates him for peopling his "Aryan romances" with fascistic male "blond beasts" (1970, 325), the charge was made against him again by Judith Fetterley, who castigates Mailer for continually re-staging in his fiction the "mythology of an embattled male, suffused with fear, fighting off the malign influence of witchy, bitchy women" (Lennon, 136). In the tide of negative opinion rising against him in the 1980s, he was also seen as the homophobic writer *par excellence*. For example, Joseph Allen Boone, in *Tradition Counter Tradition*, argues that he "unconsciously perpetuated the dominant order's excision of women in the real world" (1987, 276), revealing the "distrust, in a more self-conscious age, of the homosexual implications of relationships between men who metaphorically flee women" (273-74).

Yet, for Boone, as for most gender critics who do mention Mailer, it is as if their subject had stopped writing decades ago. Other examples include Peter Schwenger's *Phallic Critiques* (1984) and Jane Tompkins's *West of Everything: the Inner Life of Westerns* (1992). Schwenger claims that "[w]hat most distinguishes Mailer's language from that of mainstream *machismo* is his consciousness of the language of men *as* language" (31), in that his "use of the language of men reflect[s] above all an intense self-consciousness" (34), a consciousness, that, for Schwenger, lacks depth. He attributes Mailer's failure to delve into his own subject matter to the fact that the latter all too often rendered himself "the embodiment of what he criticizes and the criticism of what he

embodies" (34). Mailer's male characters "cannot go too deeply into the underlying meaning of a single subject," for they can only remain "interested in quick proportions and contradictions, in the practical surface of things" (32). This observation prompts Schwenger to conclude that "Mailer's idea of masculine perception is outward-oriented" (32), a statement that supports the gendered binary with which Schwenger asserts its corollary, namely, that feminine perception is inward-oriented (Cf. 32-33).

Jane Tompkins, whose invocation of Mailer, in *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (1992), as an example of the sort of man to whom Octavio Paz refers as a "hermetic being, closed up in himself," affirms Schwenger's description of Mailer, as an adherent of what he calls "The School of Virility," whose proponents employ "diction that marks the writer as 'tough'" and are as "devoted to maintaining 'masculine reserve'" (Tompkins 56). "Not speaking," Tompkins argues, "demonstrates control not only over feelings but over one's physical boundaries as well" (56). Yet the narrator of this novel is gregariously communicative about the nature of the differences between the sort of men whom Tompkins describes and himself. Moreover, the novel's most important scenes dramatize men trying to get inside each others' heads, even seeing each other's faces in their minds, and eventually confessing their innermost feelings. Although Mailer has frequently recounted the fact that, when the idea of writing *Tough Guys* first occurred to him, he thought of it as a kind of western novel set in "the Wild West of the East,"²⁶ it is clear that Boone, Tompkins and Schwenger, among other gender-attuned critics, tend to downplay or ignore the fact that none of his fictional male narrators, incessantly introspective as they are—as they must be to tell their autobiographical stories—embody

the sort of stereotypical masculinity ascribed to him, regardless of the novels that he has produced in response to such criticism.

Nevertheless Mailer, in *Tough Guys*, tries to defend himself against precisely these charges—that he is fascist, anachronistically homophobic, misogynistic and patriarchal. In its engagement with the definitive structural, thematic and psychological elements inherent in the genre of mystery fiction, *Tough Guys* is one of his formal calls for greater enlightenment concerning the psychological and physical dangers accruing to men's suppression of one half of their psyche, the feminine half. Here Mailer engages with feminist condemnation of his alleged fascistic tendencies, by treating the biologically- and socially-engendered constituents of self-awareness as a means of pitting his narrator against a bigoted spokesperson for the stereotypical and dangerous ideas that made Mailer a looming ideological target for his critics. *Tough Guys*, moreover, extends Mailer's invitation, for those who complain about what they see as the tiresomely-clichéd nature of his late work, to look again. His gender-sleuthing thriller dramatizes how tough it can be to teach old ideologues new tricks of understanding, especially when they come under attack by disgruntled younger members of their pack. The links between Dougy Madden's masculine credos and fascism that Tim Madden infers, while conjuring up various intuited explanations for his implicit connection to the Provincetown murders, are important for understanding what Mailer accomplishes in *Tough Guys*.

In the criticism devoted to the novel, Mailer's concern with gender in it has certainly been noticed. In *Norman Mailer Revisited* (1992), Robert Merrill mostly ignores the gender concerns inciting narrator Tim Madden's closeted anxieties. Joseph Wenke, broaching the novel's theme in *Mailer's America* (1987), claims that Dougy's

“legendary reputation as a model of manly virtue has served over the years, along with Patty’s domineering ways, as an emasculating force in Tim’s life, giving rise to the fear of latent homosexuality” (234), which Wenke views as one of Tim’s “self-destructive choices” (230). Martin Amis claims that the “spectre of latent homosexuality” is “directly faced” in *Tough Guys*, which, in revealing Mailer’s “loyalty to [his] old obsessions and drives” “giv[es] weight to the notion of *unconscious* self-parody” (272; his italics). Mary Dearborn comments on Tim’s “confused but desperate search for essential answers about what it means to be a man” (120), refers to him as “an emotional wreck trying to gather the remnants of his male sexuality” (120), and calls it a “difficult book to evaluate” (390). Carl Rollyson, contending that Tim “has reservations about the seemingly simple-minded macho injunction by which his father has lived” (335), argues that his timidity is the result of “having broken his code of male self-sufficiency” (335). For James Emmett Ryan, *Tough Guys* is “a rather slight novel” (*JML*, 2006, 21), one that shows Mailer “enlisting his imagination in the service of the popular crime novel” (21). Its treatment of sordid elements such as crime and pornography constitutes “a retreat from the proposition of sexuality as a realm of the mysterious and profound, or as an unknowably transcendent component of human experience” (19). Consequently, Ryan claims, Mailer’s novel “can be evaluated ... in negative or even perjorative terms” (21). By contrast, Scott Duguid claims that *Tough Guys* “enacts an addiction to masculinity” (*JML*, 2006, 23), “criticizes that addiction” and “suggests Mailer’s own increasing liberty from a masculinity that had become an ally of America’s political and economic decadence” (30).

Interestingly enough, none of the novel's commentators and reviewers have noted the important links between it and *The Prisoner of Sex*. To appreciate the extent to which Mailer, in *Tough Guys*, engages with the feminists' charge that he is fascistic, a brief summary of his themes in *Prisoner* can be helpful here. In his 1971 treatise on sexuality and gender, he comments on both surface-level similarities and radical differences between his views on sex and gender and fascism's anti-female ideology. Unlike Hitler, he says, who "cut man off from his primitive instincts" (187), "shatter[ing] the balance of nature" by treating the feminine as dangerously subversive, he regards "men and women" as "different types of being" (181), who are "equally the inheritors of a male and female personage in their individual psyche, their father and mother no less" (171). Mailer believes that equating strength with hetero-masculine men and emotional weakness with women and effeminate men is wholly erroneous. The subconscious is the realm of primitive instincts, intuitive power and psychic connection, Mailer believes, even as he insists that people's suppression of their subconscious proves psychologically and physically vitiating. Here Mailer laments how "intellectually dubious" it seems "to make any but the most cultivated appeals for a return to the primitive, since Nazi propaganda was always ready to speak in the profoundest tones of instinct and vision and soul" (179). Fearful that "cultural conditioning to be masculine or feminine" would become "the arbitrary exercise of a patriarchal society" (169), Mailer seeks to heighten our awareness of the fact that, in "a technological time," when the "historical tendency was to homogenize the work-and-leisure patterns of men and women (because that made it easier to design the world's oncoming social machine)," the telos of "cultural conditioning" (169) becomes the virtual cessation of difference between the sexes. For

these reasons, Mailer tells his readers to remember the subtlety with which “Nazism ... conquered Europe from within, conquered it before the war, conquered it psychologically” (182), by “call[ing] for a return to traditional, even primitive roots of existence,” while preceding “in the name of its opposite,” toward the subtle, gradual installment of the fascistic national state, wholly technologized and incorporated (186).

Mailer, in *Tough Guys*, warns against the dangers of failing to recognize the visible and invisible tensions repressing the subconscious of contemporary American men, and slips behind the scenes of the gendered struggle for meaning that he stages for his embattled narrator-sleuth. Tim Madden’s dualistic narrative venture moves him backward through memory and downward into the holes in his conscious awareness, as he probes not only his unbalanced feelings toward women, but also his fade-in / fade-out memories of his “unruly attack[s]” (62) of homoerotic desire. Apposite to an understanding of the tensions implicit in the “agonizing reappraisal” (70)²⁷ that Mailer’s narrator makes of his confused sexuality, is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s analysis, in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), of literary representations of the triangulated relationships between men that, formed in their interaction with the same woman, encode their latent homoerotic desire. Mailer’s perspective in the novel is non-homophobic, oriented, as it is, neither toward the heterosexual, boy-meets-girl scenario, nor toward the homosocial boys-compete-for-girl scenario in which same-sex desire is characteristically suppressed. Placed among male characters, each of whom is afraid of women, Madden, wavering in his identifications with them, nonetheless expends a great deal of narrative energy contemplating their differing stances toward alternative desire: openly gay and/or bisexual (Wardley,

Panghorn, Bolo); sadistically heterosexual (Nissen, Stoodie); homophobic / potentially homosexual (Dougy and Regency). In the novel's more closely-knit trinity of men (Tim, Dougy, and Regency), each character comes to recognize how much his insecurities about his heterosexual manliness generated by his negative relationships with women make him want to bond with other men.

In establishing an all-male triangle as a medium of exchange among men, whose insecurities and fears of women motivate them to turn toward other men, Mailer engages a primary issue in narrative constructions of gender on which a generation of theorists and critics has focused its critical attention, the "patriarchal imperative to stigmatize and discredit all that is feminine, including, significantly, the feminized male himself" (Edelman 42). In doing so, he alters the hard-boiled tradition from within, by re-uniting it with its host genre, mystery / detective writing, the genre in which the whole notion of a "feminized male" is implicit. Its foundational literary character, Poe's Monsieur Dupin, is nothing like hard-boiled. In "Murders In the Rue Morgue," for instance, Dupin's "Bi-Part Soul" (Seelye, 477) sustains a delicate equipoise between his feminine and his masculine principles, one that empowers him with his capacities to be both "creative" and "resolvent" and that makes him far more adept at solving mysteries than his haughty foils among the French police. His intuitive epiphanies occur early in the plot, as he deduces its many components, most of which remain esoteric / unconscious for those around him, the narrator included, until the end of the story. These remarks apply no less to Poe's other classic detective stories, "The Purloined Letter" and "The Mystery of Marie Roget."

Poe's literary descendents, however, diverged, and the legacy of his psychological ideas became lost in one literary branch that stemmed from him, the hard-boiled tradition,

but sustained in another: women's detective fiction. The best example of this latter development is Dame Agatha Christie's investigator-hero Hercule Poirot, fellow adept of feminine intuition and deductive reasoning, who directly reflects Poe's Dupin. In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), Poirot says that "women observe subconsciously a thousand little details ... their subconscious minds add these little things together—and they call the result intuition [m]e, I am very skilled in psychology I know these things" (185). Christie's psychologically androgynous Poirot carried Poe's psychological subtleties forward, passing them on to writers such as Margaret Maron, Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky. By contrast, the other influential inheritor of Poe's craftsmanship, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, failed to include in the psychological make-up of his leading character the defining features of his main precedent's investigator. Entirely void of feminine intuition, Sherlock Holmes resembles, not Dupin, so much as the French police. In "A Scandal in Bohemia," for instance, Watson claims that Holmes has a "cold, precise, but admirably balanced mind" (5); however, the components comprising his mental balance offer the only mystery in this otherwise non-mysterious social drama, whose dramatic climax finds the hapless Holmes standing confusedly at a wedding ceremony not his own, literally giving away Irene Adler, his would-be bride, while figuratively affirming his divorce from his feminine principle, embodied by Adler, "*the woman*" (Green 29) in his eyes. Throughout the story, Adler's "cleverness" and "wit," in Watson's terms, remain alien to Holmes, abilities that he both admires and resents because they are skills that he considers his own. Contrastingly, Holmes is "the most perfect, reasoning and observing machine" (5). To understand him, Watson says, one must contemplate a man who anxiously eschews "the softer passions," which Watson

sees as so much “[g]rit in a sensitive instrument” or “a crack in a high-power lens”—such is the effect of “a strong emotion” in the mind of Doyle’s stereotypically masculine investigator-hero.

As a number of Doyle’s commentators have shown, whenever Holmes expounds on the benefits of deductive logic, he is, in fact, being inductive. Many of Doyle’s mystery / detective stories, as Richard Lancelyn Green writes in his introduction to the Oxford collection of Doyle stories, “are not true detective stories, though the detective is essential to them. They are fantasies and fairy stories” (xvi). And like “A Scandal in Bohemia,” “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” and “The Adventure of the Dancing Men,” among other examples, the hard-boiled tradition reflects Doyle’s psychologically shallow achievement, mainly consisting, as it does, of narratives centered on half-characters, that is, on male detectives who, as the epigraph to this chapter articulates, are generally out of touch with precisely the psychological faculties they need, not only to solve their crimes, but to define them as astute investigators, men of acumen, in the tradition founded by Poe. In their wisdom, as Dupin says of the Prefect’s lack of intuitive prowess, “is no *stamen*” (Seelye 504): they are “all head and no body like a codfish.” Moreover, the female characters appearing in the majority of hard-boiled novels written by men, usually endangered, loved only superficially, betrayed, forgotten, or saved only at the end, are mostly thin projections or objective correlatives of the male authors’ inner relation to their own feminine component—their “Anima,” in Jungian terms.

What the tough writers of the 1930s considered, somewhat reductively and disdainfully, as male sentimentality, Mailer, in *Tough Guys*, renders with greater realism as the emotions befitting “the feminized male” (Edelman 42). He does so by making the

end to which everything else in the novel serves as the means his narrator's reconciliation of the feminine and the masculine components of his divided psyche. "[S]entimentality is one of the things the tough exterior is created to conceal" (xviii), David Madden observes of the typical hard-boilers, in which "a characteristic of all tough writers" is made obvious: the "importance in a tough world of knowing what you're talking about" (xxxvi). Until his epiphany occurs near the end of the novel, Mailer's narrator does not. In this respect, he hearkens back beyond Poe to the earliest prototype of mystery / detective writing, *Oedipus Rex*. The centering of a story on the narrator's coming to consciousness of his involvement in the murder mystery for which he is or is not responsible, the tracing of the past-tense causes of present-tense effects, of clues in two directions, as he solves, by means of deduction, the crime in the present only by exploring his personal history, the solving of the mystery occurring as an epiphanic breakthrough once these two plots consciously intersect in the narrator's (un)divided mind—all that Sophocles bequeathed to this literary genre created the links between it and psychoanalysis, links that Mailer's novel sustains.

Revealing the ways that his gender theme accommodates its relationship with the psychoanalysis, Mailer's attraction to the mystery / detective genre is apparent in his allegiance to these stock conventions, conventions that are more complex than those defining the hard-boiled tradition. Again, the generic mystery-fiction narrator's divided character, and the dual structure of his autobiographical narrative, in which he tells two stories, one about the crime, and the other about the investigation, are two such conventions. Bringing his text into being, the narrator in detective fiction traditionally traces the narrative and the psychosexual arcs of his symbiosis of selves, which he

sustains in his split awareness of his past and present self, a “state of perpetual contradiction” in which he exercises his “ability to impersonate, to identify with the criminal” (Hutter 235). Often portrayed as a “quaint homespun philosopher ... addicted to morphine or to drink,” for whom “sexuality is dangerous” (Pederson-Krag 15), he is “hereditarily tainted”⁷ or “defective” (*Tough Guys* 159), “an isolated, exposed man with a fragmented life” (Hartman 222); a “cynical loner, a man at odds with society and its values” whose “compendium of macho values” mirrors the “encoded assumptions of [the] narrative itself” (Godard 124). Another formal link between psychoanalysis and the detective tradition that Mailer establishes in *Tough Guys* ensures that the mystery the narrator must solve “embodies the deeper enigma at the core of the narrator himself” (Gabriel 96). His dualistic narrative reconstruction of a psychological and a criminal case-history, “whose disclosure is the central anchoring point of the story” (Hartman 222), becomes the structural equivalent of his effort to resolve the contradictions within him. As the “central clues unfold in a tapestry of memory and desire,” the genre’s typical narrator-sleuth repeats “the trajectory of analysis” by “spiraling backward ... becoming inseparable from [his] own retracing of the arc of his personal history” (Gabriel 89).

Mailer plays interesting variations on the generic structure. Not a straightforward psychoanalytic parable, *Tough Guys* takes as its leitmotiv Madden’s ambivalently gendered self-awareness, which he inherits from his stridently homophobic father, and which is further exacerbated by his homoerotic identification / antagonism with the men around him. Their shared gendered anxieties represent Mailer’s focus in what he called his “comedy of male attitudes,” in which “really macho men look at homosexuality” (Pfeifer 1984, 58-60), a comedy that depicts the “failure of [his]

characters to know not only the motivation of others, but even their own minds” (Hutter 236), a failure that “has led to the central crime of the novel.” Imagining the narrative elements within his own socio-historical context in Provincetown, in Tim Madden’s words a “place renowned for its colony of homosexuals” (62), Mailer indulges his notion that guys are “very near to homosexuality” when they act “truly macho” (Pfeifer 58-60). He accomplishes this by setting two uptight heteromaniacs epitomizing the novel’s tough-guy code—Douggy, a clear representative of patriarchy at its misogynist and homophobic best, and Regency, the hyper-virile lady-killer and exemplary figure of unexamined heterosexual machismo—against the timid and effeminate Tim. The latter alone discerns the ironies buried in consciousness of the hyper-flexed men around him, wound so tight they squeak: Douggy’s “high-tenor” (157) and Regency’s “great neigh and whinny” (114). The one’s transmission of his masculine credos and the other’s policing of Tim’s sexual orientation become increasingly disabled as these eponymous tough guys’ inherent doubts about the integrity of their hetero manliness rise out of the depths.

All three men try to adhere to the heterosexual norm that is effectively challenged by the option everywhere available in Provincetown’s “congeries of gay enterprise” (35). As if Tim alone represented the clearest homosexual threat to their heterosexual masculinity, he falls under scrutiny as Regency and Douggy check him for signs of misogynist and potentially murderous feelings toward women. Especially alert to any signs of homosexual desire latently in him, they place, in their taunting of his womanish ways, a dragnet on his sexual lawlessness, although Tim sees through their transparent efforts to make of him the sexual deviant. Regency and Douggy’s shared habit of showcasing their heterosexual potency, reveals them trying, by means of exaggerated

machismo, to seem exemplary and even legendary in Tim's eyes. He is compelled, by the oppression of their surveillance, to perform strategies of counter-surveillance of his own, in writing his narrative. Tim knows, for example, what underlies Regency's insinuation that he murdered Jessica Pond and Lonnie Panghorn, who, like Wardley, is queer but trying to stay "high on hetero" (89). He knows that Regency, uninterested in pursuing the question of Tim's culpability in the crime, merely uses it as a front for his blunt inquiries into his deviant sexual persuasions and into their shared propensity to behead photographed women, and to feel titillated upon hearing brutal accounts of sexual violence perpetrated against them. Tim's sexual capacities as well as his grievances against women, well-known to Regency, and even his vulnerability as an effeminate son of a "closet sodomite" (224), in Regency's words, underwrite the latter's suspicions of the former. The confessional Tim, embracing the guilt that goes hand in hand with his inherited high-octane Irish testosterone (11), comes clean about his proximity to whatever sordid environment offered occasions for promiscuity during Provincetown's lonely winters: "the source of half our actions ... friends like to make love with the door unlocked. If you came in, there was the option to watch or, given the phase of the moon, to join" (65). His comments here on all the "extraordinary stuff" they had to get out of them, "[d]o it the way you could" (62), sound much like those he makes when reflecting on the tedium of his days in prison, as he writes: "when one was at odds with another convict ... the smallest pleasure to reach your heart in such a state was, I learned, as valuable as a rope cast down into the abyss. Concentrate on the pleasure, whatever it was, and you could lash yourself to the edge" (48). Frequently driven by desperation, the self-styled "wet fire-cracker" (146) too cowardly ever to pull an actual trigger, and

effeminized in the eyes of his low-life cohorts and promiscuous companions for his refusals to murder someone at a woman's behest, Dougy's son is more or less a failure, his (a)vocation as a writer not exactly a manly, ego-forging career that sons of longshoremen were reared to pursue. Moreover, at the beginning of the narrative, his girlfriends and now his wife, having all left him for stronger, more virile men, have inflicted further injury to his already flagging sense of self-worth as a heterosexual man.

Heavily implicated in the Provincetown crimes, but less for official purposes than for reasons all his own, Tim resolves to account for his involvement. However, from the moment he awakes, in the opening pages of the novel, he lies in a state of emasculated paralysis, emotionally and mentally bereft after Patty's departure. The loss of his wife is an objective correlative for the absence in him of a feminine principle, as he puts it: "[d]espair is the emotion we feel at the death of beings within us" (23). His despondent emotions modulate, however, into his lascivious thoughts about Jessica Pond, to his "honest-to-God all-out ram of an erection" (25) that, in helping him to "convert the high hard adrenaline of each lustful thought into the will to lift myself out of my morass" (99), becomes a mnemonic faculty of sorts. "Memory was equal to potency" (54), he affirms. Alienated from his feminine principle, Tim empowers himself and hence his narrative energies by conjuring his memories of his sexual experiences with women, external embodiments of what he gradually learns to cultivate in himself.

The narrative unfolds as he channels his sexual energies into remembering events earlier in the evening on which the murders occurred, an evening which found him drinking alone at the Widow's Walk, when the ocean waves lent currency to his inebriated reflections on how simple it would be to kill two tourists who sat near him in

the bar, a man in the company of an attractive woman whom Tim imagined himself stealing and having sex with before ending both their lives. He recalls that he compensated, there at the Widow's Walk, for his slack production as a writer, by cultivating "the ruthlessness of the storyteller" (20) and envisioning every "crucial, carnal detail" (20) in the *ad hoc* murder scenario he plots for the tourists. He recollects how his murderous fantasy mingled with his memory about earlier times in his life—the times when he unleashed the violence inside him by smashing up bars. "I did not see myself as belonging to such a category" of violent, criminal men, he says, cross-examining himself, "[b]ut how could I say that the waitress's dire expectation did not serve me well?" (10). A self-professed writer, Tim knows he can creatively perceive all sorts of scenarios and "conversations as easily as [he can] live them" (26). The storyline of *Tough Guys Don't Dance* records Tim's obsession with an important reversal in his opinion about his abilities as the writer-killer he imagines himself to be, one that engenders the novel's central concern: is he the kind of man who could enact the murderous violence against women that he can imagine himself committing?

Tim's suspicion that he is responsible for the murders, and his sense of failure as a writer, are crucially linked for him. He painfully recalls that, for long periods of time, he had done no writing, which is a fact that, for him, makes it likely that he killed Pond and Panghorn. However, at this early point in the novel, as he goes on to explore the nature of the link between imagining and happening, he is still clueless about the murderer's identity and about the links between creative writing and feminine energy. Consequently focused on all that is blocking both, while attempting to make personal history out of his alcoholic blackouts, amnesia and night-terrors, he soon sees that his dependencies on

booze and dope are mechanisms that manifest the endless tautologies of his eddying sexual fears and anxieties. His narrative, the emerging mirror of his subconscious, gradually reveals patterns that emerge the more his mind repeatedly returns to his sexual experiences, as his attempts to re-examine the heights and the depths of his couplings with Patty, Madeleine and Jessica, modulate into his desire to compare himself to other men who have been physically intimate with the same women. His voyeuristic curiosity about the latter's sexual performances fuel his memories of a series of *ménage-a-trois* in which he has willingly participated in the past. He realizes that his attention to the other men was, for him at the time, the most exciting and memorable part of the experience. He vaguely remembers having offered himself up, sexually speaking, equally to Lonnie and to Jessica, hours after they met at the Widow's Walk. His auto-erotic sex with Jessica on the fender of Patty's Porsche, when his awareness of the tearful Lonnie looking on from inside the car, increased his sexual excitement (99); his weekend of wife-swapping prompted by the photo of Big Stoop standing with Patty, which invited his initial attention (206), all demonstrate his tendency to triangulate his heterosexual desire for women in his awareness of the presence, physical or mental, of other men.²⁸ Tim's predilection inspires even his frustrated literary efforts, as when he mingles the semantic and the sexual functions, in creating a verbal portrait of Madeleine's vagina, and wishes that the skillful John Updike were guiding him "through the inside" (93) of one.

As Tim's gender-narrative nexus brings others into its purview, he takes a bearing on himself, in relation to the other men around him, but this underlying pattern in his subconscious also defines his actual and psychic relations with men such as Regency, Wardley and the mysterious Big Stoop, among others. Intimate with each of the trinity of

women (Patty, Madeleine, and Jessica) of Tim's sexual history, Regency strikes Tim as a man whose struggles are the same as his, but in titanic proportions. Regency's incessant soliloquizing on his hyper-manly heterosexual performances betrays its volcanic precariousness and prompts Tim's imagistic impression of him as "a big-breasted mother with an enormous phallus" (33). The questions about Regency's masculinity that Tim poses to himself mirror his own sexual confusion, as he finds himself lured not only by Mr. Five's (110) hyper-manly strength, but also by the smoldering homoerotic urges that he tries to keep hidden. Garrulous with gay innuendo, and full of quirky remarks, Regency, magnetizing Tim's attention, does so, however, mostly because he shares many affinities with Dougy, who sees him as "my kind of guy" (226), the kind he "understands." Such comments make Tim feel a twinge of jealousy: "as if [Regency], not [he], were the good, strong and unmanageable son that Big Mac wanted to straighten out" (216). "Straighten out" marks a signal irony in Tim's mind, as he muses on Regency's ignorance of his own sexual dependencies on women. As each man projects onto the other his own idealizations about manly-hetero performances, each ironically acts more homosexual: Regency, in his queer repartee, and Tim, in his persistent thoughts about Regency's Herculean sexual abilities.

At one point Regency goes directly toward the issue. Having primed Tim during their conversation about Lonnie's libidiously homosexual letter to Wardley, which Regency wanted to watch Tim read, he lets down his steely guard long enough to say, "God, you or I could be queer. I can't believe how much of life is in the closet" (143). Regency knowingly fires such remarks like so many arrows into Tim's mind, destabilizing the latter's "masculine frontage" (98). The opposite occurs when Tim

encounters the gender-wobbly Wardley who, like Regency, depends on women's providing assurance and outward evidence of his heterosexuality. Distinguishing himself from all the men in Tim's environment in making of his sordid past an open book, Wardley is a fellow deviser of plots, who traces his personal narrative back along the road of his promiscuous life, recalling memories he and Tom have of themselves as classmates, convicts, and as effeminate men cuckolded by Patty. Son of a rich pervert, his sexual identity unsettled early on by bisexual opportunities on his family estate, and unsettled again later while serving his prison sentences, Wardley spends his days trying to "recover" shards of his shattered heterosexuality, as he says, and deeply wishes to stay hetero. Wardley, moreover, shares Dougy's penchant for telling inauthentic stories about himself, in order to seem tougher in the eyes of other men. Referring to his vitiated hetero-manliness, his corrupt inheritance, Wardley plots his life around the same woman because he is out of touch with his instincts. As he says to Tim, "nothing graceful has ever come naturally to me" (194). Raised by a tough father, Tim, from Wardley's vantage, has "something manly to come back to," which is an assumption on the latter's part that the former anxiously interrogates onwards from page one of his narrative. But the signal difference between them, as Tim later learns, has to do with the fact that Wardley lives a lie. Making him a magnet for the negative energies in the region's charged airwaves, his lying yarn about having, when he was young, the "moxie" to inch "out along a third-floor ledge to get into [his] father's room," deceives the anecdote-prone Tim, who takes it as an exemplum of a "wimp who got his nerve up" (125). Unlike Wardley, Tim has always kept his homosexual inclinations "locked tight" (197). He uses the same term when he later reassures his father that he, while locked in prison, built a

wall around a wall, as it were, so as not to succumb to his desire to explore “the other part” of himself.

That other part remains locked up, in Tim’s subconscious, until it forces him to create his most vertiginous memory—of himself, dizzy, drunk and desperately lodged beneath the rim of the region’s best-endowed monument (71), unconsciously joining the ranks of “men and boys who cruised the obelisk in Central Park” and the “public toilets at the foot of the Washington Monument” (62). Later, he encountered one of Freud’s provocative comments about “what was, doubtless, an unruly attack of latent homosexual panic in myself” (62), that had so stunned him he “had to set the book down,” the reasons he scaled the monument dawning on him as a measure of his repressed homosexuality. Posing to himself the question that Regency poses to them both, Tim stares into the center of his sexual enigma: “What in me had I been attempting to extirpate on that lunatic climb?” he wonders: “[w]as that unruly attack with me still?” (62).

Madden’s reference to Freud is Mailer’s red herring, merely the latter’s way of driving home the simple point, and the implications of the fact that some men have more in common with their mothers, than with their fathers. It is a point that the resentful Dougy frequently makes to his son (168). In general, the Freudian references in *Tough Guys*, clues leading readers nowhere, distract attention from the fact that the psychological tectonics of its male characters are Reichian, while the whole question of homosexuality in the novel remains as open-ended as it does in Adorno’s perspective in *Reflections From a Damaged Life* (1974). Adorno views “heterophobia” as an “index to science-based form[s] of social engineering,” forms that intensify “characterological

susceptibility to the blandishments of fascism" (*Stars* 31). He claims that "character structure has 'depth' in the sense that its complex dynamics are not fully present to self-consciousness," and warns about the ways in which the "'unconscious' dimensions of character are implicated in the ways that human individuals orient themselves to social interactions and cultural meanings" (*Minima Moralia* 29-30). In *Tough Guys*, the ambiguity defining each of the men's sexuality, their persistent or occasional fits of homoerotic desire, purposeful on Mailer's part, is symptomatic of what he takes to be the victimizing effects of their culture's oppressive hegemonic forces.²⁹ Wardley's spinelessness, his all-but umbilical dependency on Patty, Regency's zealous fixation on homoerotic desire, at odds with his hetero nymphomania, Dougy's alcoholism, his failure as a conventional husband—all show their creator pursuing the fictional potential of Adorno's allegation that homosexuality and fascistic structures might have a causal relation.

However, the psyches of Mailer's tough guys also reflect the influence of Reich's psychoanalysis on Mailer's imagination. A number of "ideas taken for granted now in psychoanalysis come from Reich," Mailer remarks (and says, without seriousness, "[a]fter Reich, I guess I stopped reading" (191 *Conversations*). The Reichian principles that *Tough Guys* illustrates and that bring Mailer deeper into the heart of the matter—the links between authoritarian-totalitarian forms of power and the intricacies of human sexuality—than Adorno was willing to go,³⁰ are threefold: that "sexual repression is of *social* origin (288), that the ego's task is to mediate between ... social influences—which later become internalized as morality or inner instinct, inhibition—and biological needs" (292), and that repressed emotions anchor "neurotic attitudes in the body" (*Oxford*

Companion to Philosophy, 754). Emotions instigate the individual's development, so Reich claimed, of the "chronic defense attitudes," necessary "to protect himself against external injury" (Theweleit 74, 315). Referring to the individual's psychological injuries and regarding his "muscular armor" as merely the somatic surface of his "character armor," Reich makes these important points: that the "ideology of a society can anchor itself only in a certain character structure," and that "the institutions of that society serve the function of producing this character structure" (*Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 754).

It can be said that Mailer has devoted most of his writing to investigating the inextricable connections between the socio-cultural and the psychic. Musing, in *Why Are We At War?* (2003), for instance, on what he feels is "the natural government for most people, given the uglier depths of human nature ... fascism" (70-71), he argues that evidence for the likelihood that fascism "is more of a natural state than democracy" is offered by the fact that while Americans are "living with a state of mind that knows we are at war" (100), there would seem to be nothing that can be done about it. His monograph is devoted to intensifying his readers' need to ask why.

While the Reich-inspired premise of much of Mailer's writing is that individual resistance entails making the unconscious conscious, it assumes primary importance as his *modus operandi* in *Tough Guys*. To borrow from Klaus Theweleit's summarizing comments, in *Male Fantasies*, on Freud's, Adorno's and Reich's perspectives on the "concept" of homosexuality, Mailer's *Tough Guys* demonstrates that, for him as for his psychological predecessors, it "sets in motion a series of prejudices, false ideas, and personal-defense mechanisms," which generate "the strained-but-safe conclusion that

homosexuals are always first and foremost the *others* (Theweleit 54-55). They “can be pinned down with a term like the ‘tough guy’ whom Adorno had in mind when he added the following to his stock of aphorisms: “Totalitarianism and homosexuality go together”” (Theweleit 54-55).

Tough Guys’ swirling, murky atmosphere reflects Madden’s externalizing of his inner density. But detecting, with increasing lucidity, the pressure points in his psyche, he deepens his awareness of the causal links between his own fascination with Updike’s “One Neighbor’s Wife” (92) and Dougy’s boasting about his clandestine affair with Freddy’s wife (157, 162); he sees his timidity as a shadow-trait of his father’s brittleness—only uprooted Dougy falls apart when the family re-locates across town. Having all his life endured the pounding of Dougy’s dogmas and clichés, Tim remembers that Dougy, considered legendary for the “number of women he could attract and the powerful number of times he could do it in a night” (58), is characterized by a “quirk.” His refusal “to kiss the girl” (58) is fired by his psychically livid awareness of her latest male stud. Concerned with his son’s lack of toughness, caused by his wife’s excessive maternal affection, Dougy, even as he forces his own self-perceptions as a “defective” (159) man onto his son, in regarding him as a “degenerate” (179) version of himself, is reluctant to find out about the harmful stuff in him. Psychologically blocked, Dougy does not detect that his quirk is justifiable in the light of some men’s sexual predilections, such as his son’s fondness for “special oral sex” (197). Taking another look at his father’s “ice-blue eyes” (156) and “enormous bald head” that made him resemble “a Prussian General,” he labels his father an “old-line fanatic” who would “put all the faggots in concentration camps including your own son if he ever slipped” (156),

dropping a clue to the cause of both their phobias and tendencies, the “principle” (179) that eludes them both: anagrammatically, the *Madden* men are *damned* to serve as vehicles in Mailer’s exploration of Adorno and Reich, as violent, misogynistic and highly dependent men, on the surface of their consciousness, and as bottled-up homosexuals, beneath it. Mailer’s message to his feminist detractors is that only by purposely creating such male characters will his readers become attuned to how ubiquitous these tensions have become, and not just for him.

By turns worrying about his negative dependency on women and anxious about the obduracy of his preoccupations with men, eventually Tim awakens to the fact that the causes of his random behavior lie closer to home, in his father. Tim’s stints in the paternally-inscribed venues of manliness, boxing and football (112), reflect his blind dedication to his father’s standard ideas about the making of men.³¹ The paternal injunction laid upon them both is to conceal chaotic emotions beneath a mile-wide, inch-deep tough-guy persona, by way of reiterated credos and stories about representative men. Take, for example, Dougy’s insistence that women “ought to wear t-shirts warning men” about their power to “turn” them into queers; his contempt for the fact that men originate between women’s legs (48), to invoke (and anglicize) another of his dull dicta; and his compulsive contempt for himself caused by what he sees as his legendary failure to chase down another New York block, and seize the man who filled him with bullets, before collapsing and leaving unfulfilled his ultimate test of manly staying-power (158). The psychoanalytic background radiation to Dougy’s drama is the Reichian idea that the “breaking down” of the ego’s “armor” sets in motion the process of “character-analytic loosening” (*Character Analysis* 292).

It is a process accelerated by his son, whose developing understanding leads him to make important conclusions about the reasons that he and his father are heavy drinkers. Booze allows them to “shut themselves out from living in everybody else’s head” (161). Tim listens to Dougy tell him that he, the son, must be “close to something bad,” and that other people are “just a lightning rod for all the shit that other people are putting on the air” (165), but the son is given some crucial information by the Helltown spirits, who type him and Dougy as slaughterers of women in the bloody fashion of Richard III (174), asserting that he and Dougy “did the job” (173), that the latter is still “looking for his cure,” and that he himself is just as “sick” (174). Tim discovers that his inheritance of Dougy’s unresolved sexual problems, forcing him to repress his own to the point they are no longer “manageable” (191), makes of him a conduit of his father’s negative energies that influenced the actual murders even as they compelled him to cut up his photographs of Patty, murdering her, as he eventually learns from Harpo, the local occultist, in the astral sphere (173).

In Adorno’s opinion, the “tendency to occultism is a symptom of the regression in consciousness” (*Stars* 172), one that undermines the individual’s “power to think the unconditional and to endure the conditional.” The *dénouement* of *Tough Guys* makes the opposite case. Madden, seeing his father’s “face” in his own “thoughts” (161), accepts the fact that he is “responsible in some way for the minds of all the others, as if [he were] polluting the pipelines (174), and writes his autobiographical narrative to assuage his feelings. Acknowledging his complicity, his “guilts, and [his] deep-rooted spiritual debts” (228) in the demise of others, particularly in the damage done to the novel’s less stable men, by having sex with women on whom Wardley and Panghorn depended to

help verify the integrity of their heterosexuality, Tim reconsiders the consequences, for men like Freddy, Wardley and Panghorn, of his and his father's behavior. But when he tries to make his father mindful of the damage done to Freddy, Dougy stares blankly and silently at the wall (158), before going out to bury the grisly evidence of the recent crimes.

While for most of the novel, the repressed, cancer-ridden Dougy is made to cater to his creator's Reichian idea that "a man's physical posture is his character" (191 *Conversations*), the elder Madden is at least more conscious of his self-contradictory sexuality than Regency, who embodies Reich's notion that the most dangerously repressed men were soldiers: "the most brutal, gung-ho types ... who regarded women as toilets, and who were either latently or manifestly homosexual" (*The Function of the Orgasm* 168). Regency's obsessive need to have sex with two women each night eventuates in his demise. Appeasing his divided identity becomes costlier for him, and self-crucifying, as the "enforcer" in him, contending with the "manic," throttle each other into unconsciousness. His high-maintenance heteromania, caused by his life-long repression of both a homosexual and a female side of himself, makes his demise inevitable—with Madeleine giving him, so to speak, his final double bang, the pay-back manner of his death. Before he goes, however, he admits to being, beneath his tough-guy exterior, a lot like Wardley: "[e]very time I take a step," he says, "Wardley's underfoot" (217). As for him, so with Wardley, in the latter's words, "[b]eing without Patty" makes life impossible for them both. Thus the men in Tim's sphere, their crushed egos exhausting their will to live, and causing their untimely deaths, fail to overcome the obstacles that prevent them from harmonizing their biological with their psycho-social

needs. In Mailer's existential sphere, survival is a matter of reconciling the claims of instinctive being with consciousness, thereby attaining a balanced awareness of reality.

Whereas without Patty to depend on, the other men die off, Tim says that he "felt no emotion for Patty's death" (178). And it is no wonder, now that he has Madeleine to depend on. During their pivotal phone conversation, before Mailer brings her to Tim, and his story to a close, they reiterate the word "need" (177). "I was approaching forty," he remarks, musing on his reunion with her, "and the moon and the mist were nearer to my sentiments" (210). Tim's emotions, compelling his allegiance to his father's wisdom about the "law of averages" (160), are based on his awareness of the reconciling factor, absent in Dougy's masculine code, that he articulates in his reconciliation of his male and female sides of self, occurring as his epiphanic moment: "[i]t was then I understood, as never before, that we live with not one soul but two, our father and our mother" (180), in his case: two "badly matched horses."

Madden's psychic vision of two men and two women dancing together in the depths of Provincetown's waters (187) images the balance that he tries to maintain between his two sides of self. His decision to recommit himself to Madeleine represents the culmination of his efforts to "conquer the unmanageable" (82) in himself—namely, his embattled attraction to / repulsion from women and the possibility that he might be or yet become homosexual. Yet his emotions are at best only "manageable" (191), for he struggles with the fact that his thoughts about Mr. Five's sexual performances with Madeleine make her more sexually desirable; and *her* former brute of a husband lives on in *his* dreams (206). Having decided to take Dougy's advice to marry Madeleine (155), and that he stop depending on "macho" women like Patty, Tim gains a secure

reaffirmation of his heterosexuality. But in the fact that Tim remains fated to be ever-mindful of the specter of Regency, Mailer purposely keeps ambiguous the extent to which his narrator transcends his inbred masculine code. Exhibiting what many detective novels do—the “ideological compulsion of narrative to (re)produce the heterosexual reproductive couple” by anxiously repressing the “‘fear’ of desire, [the] primal disruptiveness” (Barry Rutland, 3; D. A. Miller, 320-21)—the gender-tender hero of Mailer’s hetero-moralizing script-tease slips out of his heteronormative role long enough to open himself toward the homosexual alternative, before assigning it once more conventional mores. But Tim’s ultimate evasion clearly is not Mailer’s. *Pace* Amis, and unlike Tim, the novel faces latent homosexuality, and presents hetero-masculinity as an unconscious parody of queer eros. If Tim remains timid about that parody, Mailer does not.

IV. Mailer's "Gnostic" Gospel

"Wise men of old gave the soul a feminine name. Indeed she is female in her nature as well"—*The Exegesis on the Soul*³²

"It is as if Manichean dualism first made the Fathers conscious of the fact that, until then, without clearly realizing it, they had always believed firmly in the substantiality of evil"—Carl Jung, *Aion*³³

"For where the truth is with us in one place, it is buried in another"—*The Gospel According to the Son*³⁴

Mailer's oft-cited idea, one that he usually incorporated into his literary characters' speech and into his own, is that "there is a God and a Devil at war with one another, neither of whom is invincible" (*The Time of Our Time*, 1998, 1223).³⁵ This statement articulates a Manichean doctrine that Mailer found attractive for at least three reasons. Given the "philosophical vertigo" (*Time*, 1224) induced by the concept of a benevolent

deity, “capable of doing everything and anything at any given moment” (Cited in Lennon, 29), but continuously allowing war, genocide, torture, rape, disease, poverty and starvation to occur, Manicheanism dissolves theodicy’s cognitive dissonance. Based on the premise that God cannot be omnipotent, Manicheanism “diminishes the absurdity,” in Camus’s words, “of an intimate relationship between suffering humanity and an implacable god” (Cited in Smith, 545).³⁶ The second reason that Mailer was drawn to this Manichean doctrine is that it restores substance to evil, locating its cause in the fact that all things physical fall under the provenance of Satan, the world’s Archon; that is, evil is not merely the perversion or absence of the good, as the Church Fathers and Scholastics argued, but an active force embodied by Satan and his minions. Third, Manicheanism, inherently existentialist, grants free-will to human beings, whom Mailer regarded as micro-agents of benevolence or malevolence existing on “some mediating level” (*Time*, 1224) between “a Creator” and “an opposite Presence (to be called Satan, for short)” (Cited in Levenda, 2003, 1). Since there is “the most lively possibility of a variety of major and minor angels, devils and demons, good spirits and evil, working away more or less invisibly in our lives” (Levenda, 1), so Mailer believed, the responsibility for those who claim to be working on God’s side is to ensure that they are not deluded. “We can feel saintly,” he says, here existentially sermonizing on what he referred to as “Kierkegaard’s Principle of Uncertainty” (*Time*, 956) and “yet be evil in the eyes of God.” Insisting that today’s denizens of the global community are “alienated” from their “capacity to decide [their] moral worth” (*Time*, 956), Mailer felt that, “[u]nless our concept of spirituality deepens immensely in the next century,” there is no “certain[ty] that we’re going to make it” (Abbot, 3). For, without the “inner coherence”

(*Time*, 1224) that is necessary to fathom the depths of one's own motives, "consciousness alienated from instinct begins to construct its intellectual formulations over a void" (*Time*, 1235).

Yet to call Mailer's religious / existential ideas "Manichean" without disclaimers is to attribute a looming irony to his syncretism, for a defining component of this near-ancient recasting of Zoroastrianism hardly applies to them. Although the Manicheans, as Benjamin Walker elaborates in *Gnosticism: Its History and Influence* (1983, 125), were "obsessed with duality," they were anxious to resolve "this dualism," by placing "great emphasis on self-control and asceticism, and by "oppos[ing] marriage, sensual indulgence, the eating of animal food and the drinking of wine." Mailer, in his writings, early and late, is everywhere dualistic, but he is nothing like ascetic. No litany of Manichean's anti-materialist doctrines could accurately describe his exuberant verbal-formalizations of the phenomena of lived experience, in, say, *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), *An American Dream* (1965), *Why Are We In Vietnam?* (1967) and *The Armies of the Night* (1969). The titles alone of many of his writings—*The Faith of Graffiti* (1974), *Genius and Lust* (1976) and *Of Women and Their Elegance* (1981)—confirm his readers' awareness of his status as one of the twentieth-century's most prolific *littérateur*-celebrants of the body's pleasures and pains, highly influenced by such literary aficionados of the flesh as Hemingway, Lawrence and Miller. The nuances, both physical and psychic, of Promethean Ali's rising-from-the-ropes defeat of George Foreman, in *The Fight* (1975), of Menenhetet's narrative remembrances of his feats in love and war during Egypt's long Night of the Pig, in *Ancient Evenings* (1983) and of Picasso's gestalt-revisittings of the autopsies he observed, in surfaces of faces spookily

blurred-asunder, in *Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man* (1995)—Mailer's highly detailed accounts of the muscular, sexual and aesthetic performances of just these three titans alone reveal how prodigal a Manichean he is—how dissimilar to the body- and world-despising founder of Manicheanism, who conceived of human beings as reluctant spirits, trapped, for a time, in the corporeal world, the “preserve of Satan” (Walker, 189).

Rather than Manichean, Mailer is better labelled a “gnostic” writer, a term that more accurately conveys his allegiances to the immanent world of nature and of the body. His syncretistic ideas and “Gnosticism” have both been assigned an anti-physical bias that would “satisfy any characterization” of them “as world-denying and body-hating” (King, *What Is Gnosticism?*, 2003, 194).³⁷ Because “Gnosticism has come to have significant application in a variety of ... areas, including philosophy, literary studies, politics, and psychology” (King, 5), the meaning of this term is as tattered as the scrolls themselves, many of which were unearthed in the late 1940s in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, and placed under the rubric “gnostic,” the Greek ancestor of “know.” Once these papyri entered the light of unbiased textual analysis, conventional generalizations about the world-shunning impulse allegedly inherent in the term gave way to their assessors’ open-minded willingness to think a-new about its meaning. “There is no true consensus,” according to Michael A. Williams’s *Rethinking ‘Gnosticism’: An Argument For Dismantling A Dubious Category* (1996, 4), not “even among specialists in the religions of the Greco-Roman world[,] on a definition of the categories of ‘gnosticism.’” “There was and is no such thing as Gnosticism,” King similarly argues, “if we mean by that some kind of ancient religious entity with a single origin and a distinct set of

characteristics. Gnosticism is, rather, a term invented in the early modern period to aid in defining the boundaries of normative Christianity" (2).

A radical re-visioning of "normative Christianity" (King, 2), *The Gospel According to the Son*, dramatizing Mailer's naturalistic endeavor to "abstract into systems of knowledge and principles what had been before merely the reporting of gospel history" (Jeffrey, 1979, 345), is germane to discussions about the meaning of "gnosticism." In Mailer's humanizing portrayal of Jesus, a feature of many of the Nag Hammadi papyri, he becomes a person who struggles with his untimely doubts and hypothetical speculations, inconvenient feelings and nagging fears. But he also serves as Mailer's vehicle for validating the symbiotic relation between the spiritual and the natural worlds, while striving to reconcile his two main ideological inheritances, paganism and Essenic Judaism.³⁸ Another element that many "gnostic" narratives and Mailer's gospel have in common is the mentoring role that Satan assumes, as he compels Jesus to reconsider the evidence that the Old Testament provides of Jehovah's limitations. That *The Gospel According to the Son* illustrates, especially in the text of Satan's speech, Mailer's Manichean idea that God is not all powerful, has been noted by its few commentators, but that it restores dramatic and theological balance to the story of Jesus, by rendering the trinity as a "quaternity" (de Franz, cited in Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 1968, 246), a term that reflects what many of the Nag Hammadi codices do, the "four-cornered divine person: father, son, holy ghost, and Satan," has not. As Jung claims, the "Christian image of the self—Christ—lacks the shadow that properly belongs to it" (*Psyche and Symbol*, 1958, 45), the "shadow" here referring, as Mary Ann Matton explains, to the "fourth principle" (2005, 168) and representing not only the importance of Satan, but also a

number of elements that the Church Fathers removed from the ontology of the Christian tradition—"evil, the earth, matter, the body and the feminine" (Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 1968, 246), each describing "concrete reality, which contrasts with the entirely spiritual and (presumably male) Trinity." Although Mailer makes Satan a Manichean missionary who shows Jesus just how far from perfect and omnipotent his heavenly father is, in the fact that this unlikely spokesman chooses to focus on Jehovah's misogyny, Mailer, again departing from the Manichean tradition, makes way for the most remarkable feature of *The Gospel According to the Son*, one that provides the third link between it and "gnostic" literature. It pertains to psychological balance and resides in the fact that Mailer's Jesus reiterates all but *verbatim* an esoteric passage deriving from *The Gospel of Mary*,³⁹ one of the Nag Hammadi scriptures that renders evil / sin as an imbalance that attains between "the material and the spiritual" (King, cited in Robinson, 526, 532). Devoted to resolving the imbalances in human beings that lead them to bring evil into the world of experience, *The Gospel of Mary* presents its thematic concerns in terms of gender, linking the feminine with the unconscious and making esotericism an inherent component of spirituality.⁴⁰ The esoteric passage attributed to Mary and appearing in *The Gospel According to the Son* facilitates Mailer's own revival of an "essential aspect" (Smith, 540) of the Nag Hammadi papyri, the "the vessel of spiritual transformation, a feminine principle."

Taken together, these features of *The Gospel According to the Son* make it more iconoclastic than its reviewers and few commentators have allowed—iconoclastic in the way that Donatism emphasizes the primacy of instinct—and antinomian, like Whitman's rejection of the "old, cautious hucksters," who "did the work of their days, but are now an

impediment to the spirit" (Jeffrey, *Dictionary*, 345). Unsurprisingly, Mailer's hubris in authoring a narrative in which Jesus speaks in the first person inflamed its mainstream reviewers, the majority of whom, in chastising him, as if he had written an adaptation of the New Testament's Jesus-narratives as irreverent and quantum-leaping as Gore Vidal's *Live At Golgotha* (1992), generally apply old complaints to it, as has become customary in commentaries on the mature Mailer's writings.⁴¹ By contrast, among the few critics who spoke favorably about *The Gospel According to the Son*, John Updike calls it "a fresh and in its way fervent rendition of a Biblical narrative" (331), one that "Mailer's Baptist father-in-law can read without discomfort" (329). Updike praises its "eerie, neo-biblical dignity" (326), but not its rationalized presentation of Jesus' miracles, miracles that seem "rolled into the tale" (327-28). "Mailer is surprisingly submissive to the canonical material," he observes, as opposed to "esoteric texts" (327), here overlooking Mailer's citation of *The Gospel of Mary*. Aside from the novel's reviews, only two in-depth commentaries have been offered, both published in the recent Mailer issue of the *Journal of Modern Literature* (2006, 30.1). Jeffrey Partridge, who provides a "Christian perspective" in "The Gospel According to the Son and Christian Belief," argues that Mailer's novel "distorts significant Christian doctrines" (65), "replaces them with Mailer's own cosmological musings," and sustains "a subtle balance between the sacred and the profane." Attentive to the novel's theological content, Partridge also identifies some of the similarities that link it to *Harlot's Ghost* and claims that Mailer's Jesus is psychologically askew "because it is a Mailer novel about a father and a son" (67). The second detailed study of the novel is Brian Jay McDonald's "Post-Holocaust Theodicy, American Imperialism, and the 'very Jewish' Norman Mailer's *The Gospel According to*

the Son." McDonald states that Mailer's ability to "coax the polemical energy of the gospel form away from its orthodox ecclesiastical theological agenda," is tantamount to his "flirting with assimilationism and Gnosticism" (79). As McDonald claims, "the Manichean heresy ... provides the mythic frame for Mailer's narrative within which he sketches his portrayal of Jesus" (80), even as the "story of Christ," as Mailer imagines it, "provides an essential piece for the building of Mailer's theodicean 'frame of acceptance,' one that "reveal[s] a God who is uncertain of final victory over the Devil and who operates in a universe in which he cannot impose victories for the goodness and the justness of his creation."

Although the novel's two commentators do discuss Satan's dramatic importance in *The Gospel According to the Son*, neither of them discusses Mailer's additions to the biblical account as part of his efforts to restore balance to the gospel story in the way that many of the non-canonical writers sought to achieve in their gospels. Nor do they regard Mailer's version of Jesus as "one more pilgrim" (33) of "gnostic" literature, most of whom also "suffer from amnesia" (Smith, 546; cf. *The Gospel According to the Son*, pp. 9, 11, 21), are "[p]ainfully alienated" (Smith, 546) from their early childhoods and "struggle through memory to regain identification with their higher origins," while remaining "lost in 'Manichean incontrovertibility.'" Moreover, the fact that Mailer cites *The Gospel of Mary*, showing that he more than "flirts with Gnosticism," has gone unnoticed. Perhaps for this reason, he drew attention to it again by including the same passage in his selections from his gospel in *The Time of Our Time* (1264-68).

In what follows, I examine Mailer's gospel less as his Manichean narrative and more as his "gnostic" Christology, while highlighting the evidence it provides for doing

so. I begin by exploring Jesus' narration of his efforts, during his early years, to reconcile the paganism he inherits from his mother and the Essenic beliefs instilled in him as Jehovah's son. These mutually exclusive ideological inheritances, representing the different "forms of belief and practice" (King, 21) that those who assembled the New Testament texts pitted against one another, "notably Judaism and paganism" (King, *What Is Gnosticism*, 21), encode their divergent bases, respectively, in Plato and in Aristotle. Consequently, I will contextualize the ways in which Mailer's Jesus struggles to resolve his dualistic inheritance by discussing the significance of Mailer's reference to himself as a "left-medievalist."⁴² Each term, "left" and "medieval," is helpful for those interested in understanding the ways in which Mailer, engaging the theological and philosophical tensions created by the Scholastics' efforts to synthesize Platonic and Aristotelian ideas, modifies the Manichean doctrine he employs in his gospel. I then consider his rationalized presentation of Jesus' miracles, a presentation that shows Mailer leaning toward Aristotle in order to compensate for the Plato-inspired "avoidance of Christ's humanity" (Jeffrey, *Dictionary*, 344; cf. Partridge, 67), implicit in the canonical writers' stressing of his supernaturalism. Mailer instills in Jesus a tendency to hypothesize about what likely happened during his purportedly supernatural moments as recorded in the New Testament. My comments on the symbolically rich metaphor of the "left" side of classical and medieval iconography provide the framework in which Satan's role as Jesus' instructor and the passage that Mailer borrows from *The Gospel of Mary* can both be understood.

These features of Mailer's gospel constitute his method of conveying his "gnostic" doctrine, that evil is the result of imbalance,⁴³ psychological, epistemological

and theological, even as Jesus' efforts to hold in balance a series of dualities—his pagan and Judaic Essenic allegiances, his male / female sides of self, and the contents of his consciousness and of his unconscious—make him Mailer's *exemplum* for those who would come closer to knowing which side of the cosmological war they serve, God's or Satan's, by better knowing themselves. Since Mailer's ideas about human beings' struggle to achieve a balanced awareness of the dualistic forces operative in the human psyche find their wider context in the writings of twentieth-century psychological writers such as Wilhelm Reich, Carl Jung and James Hillman, I will, throughout this chapter, occasionally invoke these writers to argue that Mailer, like these archetypal psychologists, invites his readers to recognize the incongruities defining mainstream religions. Among these are the emphasizing of transcendence over immanence, the irrational nature of the whole notion of theodicy, the assigning to women the role of the scapegoat, and the avoidance of both esotericism and depth-psychology, as if the unconscious, intuition, speculation and hypothesis had little to do with spirituality. *The Gospel According to the Son* represents Mailer's endeavor to distribute an awareness of both the importance and the method of sustaining a spiritually-attuned consciousness, one that balances metaphysics and psychology in a manner that Christianity and Islam, "two essentially inauthentic unbalanced theologies" ("World Empire," 2005, 9), in his opinion, do not inspire.

Notwithstanding two features of *The Gospel According to the Son*, that it does dramatize the Manichean doctrine that a limited God is endlessly at war with Satan, and that Jesus' Essenic heritage indeed preoccupies him for much of his autobiography, Mailer's gospel problematizes his commentators' labeling of it as Manichean, Christian

and / or Jewish. Moreover, to regard him as a proponent of more than one Manichean doctrine, that God and Satan are eternally embattled, is to misconstrue the immanent nature of his syncretic ideas and to overlook the features of his gospel that do not fall under any singular rubric. Consider, for instance, how Mailer's Jesus, recounting, in the opening chapters of the novel, his early experiences as a carpenter's apprentice, "ponders on the substances of His Kingdom that we worked upon with our hands" (6), "find[s] communion with the wood" (5) and deepens his awareness of the fact that "apples from the tree in Eden had possessed knowledge of good and evil" (6), before claiming that "sometimes it would seem that good and evil were still in the wood" (6). He goes on sermonizing about the fact that "a crude plank could act with knowledge of good and evil" (6) and that he "could feel a fine spirit between grain and my hand," as if he were a medieval alchemist communing with objective correlatives to interior states of being. He is projecting what he will later learn from Satan is his own inner nature, wherein good and evil, his equivalent propensities for all that is symbolized by light and by shadow, reside. For this reason, during his youth, when he is still unconscious of the roots of his identity, he is endlessly distracted by his appreciation of what effectively serves as a mirror for himself, the natural world, in all of its beautiful physicality. His inherent pagan sensibility incites his awareness of the spiritual forces embodied in wood and of spells cast by fish hauled in by fishermen who cast stronger spells (68).

However, like Herod and Manasseh (17, 46), pagans beneath the surface, Jesus must conceal his pagan affinities. "Being Essenes," he says, "we were, of all Jews, strictest in our worship of the one God and were full of scorn for Roman religions with their belief in many deities [s]o I could hardly talk to my family of a spirit in the

wood. That was pagan" (6). At every turn of his thoughts, the growing Jesus feels Jehovah entering his mind, compulsively warning him about the dangers of becoming attached to the world of the senses, to such an extent that his warnings enter his dreams. One such dream, wherein Jesus reenacts Elijah's slaughtering of forty pagans while staging his desire to renounce his pagan identifications, gives rise to the fear, haunting him upon waking, that "[i]f I did not change my ways," then he, just like those who failed their fire-contest with Jehovah, was also in "danger of God's final judgment" (41). Nonetheless, throughout *The Gospel According to the Son*, Jesus remains loyal to "the pagan who might seek baptism" (85) and even "innocent [of] any urge to rebel against the eagle of these pagans" (216).

On one hand, Mailer's Jesus must reconcile himself to what he derives from his earthly mother, a pagan sensibility that emotionally encodes his attachment to the phenomenal world. On the other hand, he is an Essenic Jew striving to understand the imageless abstractions accruing to his unrepresentable heavenly Father, the "I AM" of the Old Testament. While remaining engrossed in the organic processes of the natural world, he must embrace an opposite perspective, the "dominant tenet of Hebrew thought ... the absolute transcendence of God" (*Before Philosophy*, 1951, 241, 242), a tenet that requires "an effort of the imagination to realize the shattering boldness of the ancient Hebrew's contempt for imagery." He experiences no difficulties learning, from the earthy John the Baptist, about "the heavy wisdom" in the River Jordan's "mud and silt" (38). By contrast, the Judaic Laws, each one giving "birth to ten laws, and each of these to another ten" (20), so that "there were now ten hundred laws concerning prayer and diet and rules of sacrifice on the altar," sharpen his sense of unreality and fuel the uncertainties welling-

up within him whenever he engages in all the guesswork required by his thoughts concerning the mostly absent Jehovah and his endless mandates. In this respect, Mailer's Jesus must deal with what adherents to the world's main religions, all deriving from Abraham, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, must also confront when they contemplate a deity who outlaws self-representation. As George Steiner describes this intellectual challenge, "[n]o fiercer exigence has ever pressed on the human spirit, with its compulsive, organically determined bias towards image, towards figured presence" (Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle*, 1971, 37), than the concept of "an immeasurable Absence." Such abstraction, writes Steiner, "hammer[s] at the confused, mundane, egotistical fabric of common, instinctual behavior" (41).

As with so much in late Mailer, in *The Gospel According to the Son*, there is a great deal going on beneath the verbal surface. To appreciate the subtle manner in which Jesus becomes Mailer's vehicle for balancing these incompatible perspectives, paganism and Judaism, the reasons that the mature Mailer often referred to himself as a "left-medievalist" must be noted. For his invocation of each term, "left" and "medieval," evinces the fact that his syncretism modifies Manichean's highly influential doctrine, that the physical world is the regrettable domain ruled by the evil principle, and draws attention to the tradition of "gnostic" writings in which Jesus' efforts to balance immanence and transcendence, along with other features of *The Gospel According to the Son* that make labeling it Christian or Manichean or Jewish insufficient, find their explanatory context. As a self-styled "left-medievalist," who could sound like a Platonic theologian when speculating about God and the Devil as transcendent personalities, but who could also sound like a proponent of Aristotelian naturalism when elaborating on his

commitment to the immanent world and to the psychological matters accruing to discussions of theology, Mailer engaged the major tension in Western medievalism that philosophers and theologians of this period inherited from their classical and biblical counterparts in the ancient world. This tension, the result of the endemic differences between “Platonic theology and Aristotelian logic” (Jeffrey, *By Things Seen: Reference and Recognition in Medieval Thought*, 1979, 225), finds succinct embodiment in Raphael’s visual metaphor of it, *The School of Athens* (1513). In Raphael’s painting, Plato and Aristotle are engaged in conversation, as the former holds his *Timæus* in his left hand, while pointing, with his right hand, toward heaven, and as the latter clutches his *Ethics* in his right hand, while pointing, with his left hand, toward earth. Here Plato directs their attention beyond the “reality line” (Jeffrey, 243), the line that separates the immanent world of becoming and the transcendent sphere of being, his pursuit of the question of what reality is elevating his mind beyond this line. This is his way of asserting that answers to this question bring him into “the intelligible world of forms, the realm of the One, the universal” (Jeffrey, 233). However, the “young and swarthy” Aristotle directs their attention to “the realm of nature, the many, the tangible particulars of creation” (Jeffrey, 240, 233). Aristotle’s insistence that only the “measurable, physical world” (Jeffrey, 235) is real, and that “all practicable questions” rightly belong in “the immanent and objective realm of philosophy,” gradually persuaded the medieval writers—Pecham, for example—to develop the “logical, dialectical techniques” (Jeffrey, 235) that would help them “carry the values of the classical and biblical past into an increasingly ‘tangible’ ... world” (Jeffrey, 251).

Although philosophically and scientifically, the medieval Scholastics' findings in Aristotle eventually eclipsed the attractiveness that Plato had held for the Western imagination for more than a millennia, theologically, Plato, more than Aristotle, was the greater influence. This fact was made inevitable by the early expositors of Christian doctrine, in their ardor to deny the immanence of evil, a denial that Manicheanism, Christianity's main competitor, made necessary. Recall the anti-physical bias in Augustine, the famously reformed Manichean who insisted that goodness and the "God-image [are] within, not in the body," and that evil is "nothing but the privation of the good" (Jung, *Psyche and Symbol*, 38, 41, 46-51), a tortuous formulation that, after disembodiment "the good," jettisons substance from evil. Here Augustine refuses to sound like his former Manichean self.⁴⁴ Like him, almost all of the Church Fathers, in alienating evil from their notion of tangibility, showed greater allegiance to Plato than to Aristotle. Origen, for instance, argued that "evil was characterized as a mere diminution of good and thus deprived of substance"; Basil, that "evil has no "subsistence in itself [it] does not inhere in its own substance [it] is not a living and animated entity"; Titus of Bostra, that "there is no such thing as evil"; and Dionysius the Areopagite, that "evil does not exist at all ... evil is neither in that which exists nor in that which does not exist." These opinions about evil's lack of substance found synonymous expression in the writings of medieval Scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas, who claimed that "it cannot be that evil signifies a being, or any form or nature." As Jung writes, "the historical reason" (48-49) that these theologians denied "the reality of evil" was "the threat presented by Manichean dualism," which "first made the Fathers conscious of the fact that, until then, without clearly realizing it, they had always believed firmly in the

substantiality of evil" (58). However, he continues, this "ideal of spirituality, striving for the heights, was doomed to clash with the materialistic, earth-bound passion to conquer matter and master the world." As a result, "the spirit of medieval Christianity ... underwent strange pagan transformations, exchanging the heavenly goal for an earthly one, and the vertical of the Gothic style for a horizontal perspective (voyages of discovery, exploration of the world and of nature)" (43).

The narrator of *The Gospel According to the Son*, aiming to counteract the canonical writers' tendency to exaggerate his divinity, by rendering many features of his narrative Aristotelian, counter-balances Plato's greater influence on Christianity, an influence that the canonical gospel writers clearly reveal, in their depiction of Jesus' supernaturalism, in their reduction of Satan's importance, and in their omission of Jesus' association with Mary Magdalene. Reflecting his pagan allegiances while relating his understanding of Judaic cosmogony, Mailer's Jesus naturalistically muses on John's Platonic rendering of the *verbal dei*, when he wonders if "God made our flesh to be like the flesh of animals" (10) or "created us by His utterance alone." The "Word had lived first in water" (10), he says, "even as the breath that carries our speech comes forth from our mouths in a cloud on a cold winter morning." "Yet clouds also bring rain ... and so the Word lives in the water of our breath. Thereby we belong to God. For all the waters, we know, are His, even as all the rivers go down into the sea" (10-11). But just as mysterious to him, as he later muses, is the geological fact that "heavy soil thrown far from its home by a volcano" (25) acquires a "new nature for itself," as "pozzolana," which, added to lime, makes a "cement" strong enough to "hold loose stones together" (25).

That Jesus' efforts to reconcile his pagan and his Essenic ideological inheritances demonstrate how influenced Mailer was by the medieval writers' efforts to achieve a balance of Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines is a claim for which Jesus' recollections of his early years are not the only evidence. His performances of his miracles show Mailer adopting the "euhemeristic (that is, allegorical and secular)" (Surette, 1993, 22) hermeneutical mode, a "rational calculus" ("Empire," 7) that serves to challenge his readers' tendency toward other-worldly Platonic *mysterium*, in their reconsiderations of the allegedly supernatural events narrated by the biblical writers. Conforming to Aldous Huxley's notion of "empirical theology" (Surette, 26), a notion that accounts for the ways in which naturalistic accounts "strip myth and ritual of ... transcendental or religious significance" (Surette, 29), Mailer's Jesus enacts the inductive process of Aristotelian logic, a process that, beginning with what his senses take in, proceeds as he forms speculative thoughts about what is occurring in his environment, a process that is premised on what Aristotle saw as the basis of "human rationality" (Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre: A History of Philosophy*, 1975, 89, 102). For Aristotle, the fact that there is "no life ... without body" entailed that all reasoning must first be grounded in the senses' response to physical reality. Affirming the continuum, as Aristotle insisted (Cf. Stumpf, 107-08), in terms of substance, between the world of the mind and that of the body, between the unseen and the seen, between natural processes and the seemingly miraculous, Mailer's Jesus naturalizes his descriptions of his miracles.

During the wedding in Cana, for example, as water suddenly becomes wine, he pays homage to the organic unity of the natural world, of the "Spirit who resided" within "one red grape" (61). Later, on the storm-tossed Sea of Galilee, he conjectures that

coincidence alone suggests a causal relation between his spoken command and the becalming of the squall, saying, "I do not know if I can say that this miracle was mine ... on awakening I could sense that the end of the storm was near" (93). Later still, he accounts for his ability to feed a large crowd with only a small amount of bread and fish, when he observes that "[t]he morsel became enlarged within [each person's] thoughts" (116), here revealing the medieval alchemists' tendency to regard nature's "prima materia" as "the unknown substance embodying or carrying the projection of psychic content" (Jung, *Abstracts*, 1976, 152). While, typically, Mailer's Jesus restrains his self-projecting tendencies, the author here speaking directly through him when he says that, "[e]ven as waste will exist in all matters, so in the working of miracles, extravagance is best avoided" (117), he mostly describes his performances of miracles skeptically, prefacing them with a series of tentative evasions and speculative questions. "I had to hope that the daughter was not dead but resting in the long shadow of sleep that is near death" (96), he remarks, "[f]or then I might save her," referring to the first person he does or does not raise from the dead. As he implores his disciples, "[e]at of me, for this is my body" (223), he reasons with himself, saying, "[a]nd what I said was true [i]n death our flesh returns to the earth and from that earth will come grain" [223]), again veering away from supernaturalism. But despite his efforts in rendering his miracles explainable, by way of logical appeals from the sensory to the rational, he resigns himself to the fact that, in people's hearts, "the miracle of faith would be present or would not" (126)—a conclusion reached also by Goethe's Faust, who says, "where belief's lacking, no miracle's possible" (787), and by his Mephistopheles, the incautious huckster, when he invokes the miracle at Cana:

"Grapes grow on the vine,
 Horns on the head of the goat.
 O vinestock of hard wood,
 O juice of the tender grape!
 And a wooden table shall,
 When summoned, yield wine as well!
 O depths of Nature, mysterious, secret,
 Here is a miracle—if you believe it" (2317-25)

Medieval theologian Siger of Brabant's observation, that "[w]e have nothing to do with the miracles of God, since we treat natural things in a natural way" (Jeffrey, 230), can serve as an apposite summary of Mailer's naturalized method. As Lawrence Eldredge comments in "The Concept of God's Absolute Power at Oxford in the Later Fourteenth-Century," philosophers and theologians susceptible to Aristotle tended to glorify the immanent creation of the transcendent creator. By "diminishing divine control," Eldredge claims, the "shadow of determinism" was cast upon Platonic speculation and removed from pagan philosophy, which "stresses nature and natural processes rather than the God of nature and his ways" (221-13). Mailer's "In Preface to the Gospel—II" makes a similar statement, that "a miracle is ... a revelation of the nature of the God behind Nature" (*Time*, 1229). "Mood is the earth of the miracle," he then remarks, rather

cryptically, “its garden, its terrain” (*Time*, 1230), invoking theosophical “account[s] of transcendental experiences,” whose “exoteric surface” (Surette, 31) become “explications of mood”: one can “stop there or ... probe deeper” into the “cognitive universe implied in each and every component of the object texts” (32-33). In this respect, the miraculous-turned-rhetorical performances of Jesus, whom Mailer imagined as “an exhausted ... magician after a long night of performance,” doing “the best that can be done under the circumstances” (Busa, 38), require what magicians’ do: “collaboration between the artist and his public,” as E.M. Butler remarks in *The Myth of the Magus* (1948; cited in Sagan, 170).

Another way that Mailer’s Jesus reveals his skeptical attitudes toward the New Testament’s claims about its supernatural content is his tendency to validate his own persistent doubts and common-sense intuitions. His penchant for speaking in the interrogative mood generates his hypotheses, not only about his deeds, but also about his ambiguous identity. Readers of *The Gospel According to the Son* opening it randomly can observe him winding an endless thread of entangling questions, making tactical evasiveness a virtue. “Was the Holiest descending toward us in the form of a dove?” (33), he asks John the Baptist. “Is it not death and destruction to see him?” (35), he again queries, prompting his cousin to wonder, “[d]id the light of the Lord appear when you were immersed?” (37). Even Jesus’ antagonists, such as the “old Pharisee” (185), hesitate to declare themselves: “what of the one who does have miracles? Is he nearer to God? Or has the Devil deluded him?” (186). Much of Mailer’s novel consists of his version of Jesus rendering New Testament texts in the interrogative mood, which is Mailer’s way of challenging readers of the Bible to ask questions about what they take in.

In this respect, Mailer, hoping to inspire some common-sense hypotheses about the story of Jesus, hypotheses that would complicate conventional interpretations of the gospels, turns Jesus into a novelist like himself, one who espouses the same standards for good writing. For Mailer, these include creating a synergy of “possibility, mystery, confusions and evocations” (Lennon, 2002, 44), in which the “waters” are never “clear.”⁴⁵ Novelists form “suppositions about the nature of reality” (“Empire,” 2), he remarked, in order to “enrich” their “minds and—it is always a hope—some readers’ minds as well” (“Empire,” 1). In Mailer’s mind, the doors of intuitive perception swing on the hinges of hypotheses, “open[ing] the mind to thought, to comparison, to doubt, to the elusiveness of truth” (“Invisible Kingdom,” 2); however, in the minds of many people, in Mailer’s words, who remain loyal to their “frozen hypotheses,” “[s]erious questions are answered by declaration and will not be reopened.” Thus the mind cannot open itself “to thought, to comparison, to doubt, to the elusiveness of truth” (“Invisible Kingdom,” 3).

While Jesus’ rationalized performances of his miracles and his persistent hypothetical speculations about the apparently supernatural events in his experience reveal Mailer’s efforts to humanize him, Satan’s role in *The Gospel According to the Son* and the esoteric passage from *The Gospel of Mary* less subtly show that Mailer’s ambition in writing it is to effect a balancing of a myriad of elements—dramatic, theological and psychological—in the story of Jesus. Here the significance of his calling himself a *left-medievalist* must be understood as his way of gesturing to his Aristotelian affinities, affinities, that is, for all that was symbolized by left-handedness in classical and medieval iconography, as his gospel reflects. Immanence, evil, darkness and the female principle “pertain to the left hand” (Jung, *Psyche and Symbol*, 54); goodness, light and

the male principle find symbolic expression in the right hand. Unlike the expositors of the early Christian church and their counterparts among the Scholastics, the author of *The Gospel According to the Son* seeks to restore substance and immanence to the notion of evil, by partaking in the tradition of non-canonical scriptures, whose proponents, in engaging these dualisms—good / evil, body / soul, mind / spirit, consciousness / the unconscious, male / female—regarded them as co-dependent. Manichean in restoring substance to evil, contentedly dualistic and uninterested in formulating any method of resolving his dualisms, Mailer is un-Manichean in doing the same to good. In this respect, he resembles the “gnostic” writers in “the ancient world ... whose arguments were very much influenced by psychic experience” (Jung, 41) and who “tackled the problem of evil on a broader basis than the Church Fathers.” They discussed evil “more substantially” than did the Christian writers, who did not enter “the plane of empirical psychology” when constructing their doctrines, and who were concerned mainly with the the “rift in the metaphysical world” (*Aspects of the Masculine*, 1991, 167), one that “has slowly risen into consciousness as a split in the human psyche,” even as the “struggle between light and darkness moves to the battleground within.” Unlike them, the “gnostic” writers, who were comfortable with the fact that, in “the empirical self, light and shadow form a paradoxical unity,” realized that they could not “omit the shadow that belongs to the light figure, for without it this figure lacks body and humanity” (Jung, *Psyche and Symbol*, 42).

Elevated in status as Jesus’ shadowy opposite, Mailer’s Satan becomes a harbinger of dark enlightenment, serving as the catalyst of the latter’s “descent into the unconscious” (*Abstracts*, 153), to invoke Jung’s description of Christ’s progress toward

self-knowledge. “[I]t is I, not He, who has a better understanding of this creation” (48), Satan boasts, “[f]or His work has given issue to many small creatures and spirits that He hardly knows as well as I do.” To make Jesus “comprehend that one must enter the darkness that lives beneath every radiance of spirit” (126), Satan establishes three main points with him, the first of which is directly Manichean, that Jehovah is not omnipotent. Foremost among His limitations, Satan insists, is his lack of empathy for human beings and especially for women. Persuading him that human limitations mirror divine ones—that Jehovah, too, is fraught with imperfections, misogyny foremost among them—Satan’s counsel announces storms of confusion in Jesus, depriving him of the idealism implicit in his misunderstanding of his Father as omnipotent. Feeling himself coming “closer to the light” by getting “nearer to the darkness,” he recognizes, “[b]y the light in [Satan’s] dark eyes” (54), that good and evil are forces of agency, both human and divine.

Satan comes to the discussion armed with the most damning evidence against Jehovah, the latter’s own words as recorded in the Old Testament. Making the fact that Jehovah “has no inkling of women” (50) and always speaks “only to men” (51) his primary target-issue, he tells Jesus about God’s failure to “comprehend that women are creatures different from men and live with separate understanding” (50), while capitalizing on the fact that Jesus stands “innocent of all that [Satan] knows” (47). As Jesus earlier remarks, “I was taught not to pursue women or even to approach them” (6-7), for Essenic men “were to live as warriors for the Lord [w]e were not to lie down with women when such acts could weaken our purpose” (7). Satan’s point about the fact that Jehovah fails to validate the differences between men and women stays with Jesus, who reaffirms it, in the final moments of his autobiographical narrative (241). But during

their conversation, Jesus is still filled with his Father's anti-female attitudes and anxiously but unconvincingly tries to defend Jehovah, as he reiterates, by rote, in the manner of an automaton, that "My father is God, and of many dimensions, and of all dimensions," in words that "tasted like straw." Reluctantly, Jesus realizes that he has not yet drawn lines of distinction between himself and Jehovah, that his attitudes, too, are just as anti-female, as when he recalls himself saying that "the mouth of a strange woman is a deep pit. And a great city is like a strange woman" (148). Both of these comments reveal his own estrangement from the feminine, having already decided that the pursuit of women "could weaken" (7) his "purpose." Insisting that he, like his father, "had not sought to save the world through the efforts of women. Only through the strivings of men" (226), he wistfully reflects on the fact that he typically traces the causes of his shortcomings, his timidity, for instance, to his mother. He realizes that, for most of his youth, he felt like "a man enclosing another man within" (26), needing the self-protective "[v]irtue" with which his mother "had built a fence around the first fence in order to guard her" (12), to hide his inmost feelings. "Fear lived like a night animal in our house" (59), "[o]ne could all but hear the scurrying in the dark." Mary's fears becomes entangled with his developing sense of identity: "she made me afraid of Romans, she was lacking in pride when she spoke to wealthy Jews" (90).

As the knowledgeable Satan goes on citing passages from the Old Testament, the evidence he conjures of Jehovah's cruel misogyny, while contriving to make Him seem, in his son's eyes, beyond defense, depicts Jehovah's sadistic reveling at its worst. The horrible demise of the various Jezebels and harlots included among Jehovah's enemies supports Satan's claim, that "[i]t is women He belittles" (51), so he lets Yahweh

speak for himself: "Wherefore, O harlot, because thy filthiness was poured out, and thy nakedness discovered ... [they] shall strip thee of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels and leave thee naked and bare and they shall stone thee, and thrust thee through with their swords" (50). Although Jesus is too naive to offer much of a defense against Satan's clear-headed remarks about Yahweh's fetishized bloodlust, he becomes aware of his own stance toward the feminine while also admitting that Jehovah is neither all-loving nor all-powerful. The consequence of Jesus' conversation with Satan is his rejecting the notion of *dei potentia absolute* and of himself as a vessel of perfection. From this point onward in the novel, Jesus, finding divine sanction, as it were, for his own human foibles, becomes more accepting of his limitations and uncertainties, his stormy periods of confusion and his irascible outbursts. For here he realizes what many sons in late Mailer's novels eventually learn, that his negative tendencies derive from his Father, whose many contradictions become his own, a fact that Jesus increasingly becomes conscious of as he progresses in his autobiographical narrative (Cf. Partridge, 71). By instilling in the relationship between Jesus and Jehovah many of the son / father dynamics that constitute the drama of his other novels, Mailer illustrates the fact, in Jung's words, that "the images of God and Christ which man's religious fantasy projects cannot avoid being anthropomorphic ... [and, therefore,] are capable of psychological elucidation like any other symbols" (*Psyche and Symbol*, 67).

By lessening Jehovah's status to that of "one god among many" (48), a god who "is not in command of Himself," let alone "of his chosen people" (48), Mailer's Satan increases his own status. He dramatizes the Manichean notion of an imperfect God, "associated with tyranny" (Jeffrey, *Dictionary*, 346), to borrow Cowper's words, and

“[a]dor’d through fear, strong only to destroy” (*The Task*, 5.444-45; cited in Jeffrey 346). But the fact that it is Satan who awakens Jesus to Jehovah’s limitations and imperfections, making him increasingly conscious of his and his Father’s imperfections, is significant, not only dramatically, but theologically. As a source of wisdom for Jesus, who helps him to modify his idealization of Jehovah, Mailer’s Satan restores balance to the gospel story. A reflection of the Platonic emphasis on transcendence, the biblical imago of the triune divinity, comprised of God the divine Father, Jesus the divine Son and the ethereal Holy Ghost, made it impossible for the leaders of the early Christian Church to attribute substance to evil, creating the millenia-running “paradox” of theodicy. Satan becomes Mailer’s vehicle for his existential doctrine, that evil is present in the psyches of all creatures, both human and divine, Jesus and Jehovah alike. This doctrine, frequently appearing in the Nag Hammadi scriptures, reflects “the gnostic insistence on evil as an active principle,” operative in the unconscious and running counter to the “incomplete Christian view of evil as the *privatio boni*, the absence of good” (Smith, 541). The architects of the early Christian church put forward a “Christ symbol” that “lacks wholeness in the modern psychological sense, since it does not include the dark side of things.” Mailer’s gospel, like many of the Nag Hammadi papyri, dramatizes this dualistic doctrine: “evil” and “good” are dialectical entities, rooted in the archetypal depths of the unconscious, and projected, unconsciously, for the most part, onto the world of experience. Accordingly, a balanced “gnosis” of self is achievable “through the conscious assimilation of the contents of the unconscious, including its dark, ‘shadow’ side, towards a goal of ‘wholeness’” (Jung, cited in Robinson 541). The writers of the New Testament gospels, such as John’s gospel wherein Satan vaguely exists as a

“tempter,” dramatically rendered what the early Church Fathers invented, namely, the “main prejudice of the Christian tradition” (Robinson 538), the “apparent circumventing” of evil,” originating in the doctrine, *Summum Bonum*, that evil is no more than the absence or distortion of the good. The result is the creation of the theological equivalent of what Jung regarded as an unfortunate “psychic fact” of our unconscious existence: the “primitive tendency in us ... to shut our eyes to evil and drive it over some frontier or other, like the Old Testament scapegoat, which was supposed to carry the evil into the wilderness” (*The Undiscovered Self*, 109-10).

In Mailer’s *Gospel*, Satan prepares Jesus for his encounter with Mary Magdalene, another of the canonical writers’ scapegoats. In her presence, he must mentally subdue the misogynistic passages from the Old Testament that flood his mind. His “abhorrence of fornication had filled [his] years with thoughts of lust” (177), and “the ravages of unspent fury” (177) that he has suffered over the years, make the anti-female passages from the Second Book of Kings attractive to him when in the presence of Mary, passages concerning “Jezebel, a princess, [who] had been thrown down from the high window of a tower,” and whose blood had “spattered upon the wall” (176). Jesus struggles against his inherited tendency to project his misogynistic attitudes onto Mary, as one side of him hears “the soft voice of the spirit” compelling his recognition that she is “a creature of God” and perhaps “near the Lord in ways I could not see” (177); and as the other side wishes to project onto her his “own evil ... rich and dark and begging to be cast forth from me” (179). “It is written,” he tells her, citing Song of Solomon, “I will raise up thy lovers, and they shall come against thee ... shall take away thy nose and ears and thy residue shall be devoured by fire” [179]). To which she responds, “I do not wish to lose

my nose,” undercutting his threatening rhetoric and drawing attention to the positive valence she gives to Jesus’ initially negative, because fearful, response to her physical beauty: “[a]s I feared, she was beautiful. The bones of her face were delicate, and her hair flowed down her back” (177). Throughout their encounter, Jesus, undergoing a shift in perspective as he does in his conversation with Satan, comes to recognize the fact that the health of the body and that of the soul depend upon a balancing of warring principles, a fact that affirms Aristotle’s insistence that the soul and body share the same substance, and that leads Jesus to moderate his Manichean despising of the body as the vehicle of the soul’s progress through the vale of confusion, sickness, pain and death.

Unexpectedly, after Jesus tells her that he has no interest in accusing her, he cites an esoteric passage from *The Gospel of Mary*, one that documents her vision of “the seven forms” (Robinson, 526) of “the fourth power.” This passage executes an exorcism of the negative forces operative in the human psyche that prevent its access to visionary states of being, the soul’s activity. To glean the depths of its meaning and of the significance of its appearance in Mailer’s gospel, a brief foray into *The Gospel of Mary* is necessary. The “seven-powers narrative” in *The Gospel of Mary* begins after Mary asks Jesus, “[w]hat is the sin of the world?” (Robinson, 524). In response, Jesus reveals that “[t]here is no sin, but it is you who make sin” (525). By sin, he refers to an imbalance between the spirit, the soul and the mind. Between the spirit, which communes with nature, and the soul, the means of entering into visionary states of being, is the mind, the seat of “the Son of Man” (525). Jesus then urges her to go inward to embrace that which “is within you,” saying, “[f]ollow after him” (525). Confused by his elusive meanings, Mary asks, ““Lord, now does he who sees the vision see it through the soul or through the

spirit?”—to which Jesus responds, “[h]e does not see through the soul nor through the spirit, but the mind which is between the two....[f]or where the mind is, there is the treasure” (525-26). Then Mary has her vision, which, in the surviving fragments, takes up with these words: the “soul answered and said, ‘I saw you. You did not see me nor recognize me. I served you as a garment, and you did not know me’” (526). As this embattled dialogue between her spirit and her soul intensifies, her vision is born, one that expunges from the depths of her being all the hindrances in her causing their conflict. The first of the seven forms, appearing in her vision, is “darkness,” the “second [is] desire, the third ignorance, the fourth is excitement of death, the fifth is the kingdom of the flesh, the sixth is the foolish wisdom of the flesh, the seventh is the wrathful wisdom” (Robinson, 526). “These,” Mary proclaims, “are the seven [powers] of wrath.”

Then her vision ends, and the disciples implore her to tell them the words he told only her. She does so and falls silent, but “hot-headed” (Robinson, 524-25) Peter, an embodiment of precisely the imbalance, or sin, that her vision has just dissolved in her, is quick to disparage her enigmatic report.⁴⁶ As a paradigmatic example of the cathexis between the feminine and the scapegoat, the psychodrama of Mary’s gospel, as King writes, reveals the “ambiguous rift of disturbing estrangement evident in the politics of exclusion” (*What Is Gnosticism?*, 25).⁴⁷ The socio-political exclusion that King refers to has both a psychological and a philosophical corollary. The esoteric passages in *The Gospel of Mary* work to remove all of the negative valences attributed to the feminine by patriarchal religious traditions, so that balance can be restored, not only socially between male and female followers of Jesus, but also psychologically between masculine and feminine principles. Like *The Gospel of Mary*, many of the “gnostic” scriptures, in their

depictions of Jesus and of his relationship with Mary, are also based on the dyadic relation between masculine and feminine components, traditions that led Jung to coin the term “mysterium coniunctionis” as a description of psychological wholeness attained by “the self” as its “nuptial union of opposite halves” (*Psyche and Symbol*, 64). One representative example of this tradition, for example, the Clementine Homilies, “a collection of Gnostic-Christian writings,” presents “the whole of creation in terms of syzygies, or pairs of opposites” (Jung, 54),⁴⁸ together comprising the “*complexio oppositorum*” (Robinson, 538) of the human psyche. Accordingly, for the writer of the Clementine Homilies, “the body comes from the female, who is characterized by emotionality; the spirit comes from the male, who stands for rationality” (Jung, 55). Nor does the “gnostic” writers’ gender psychology constitute “sexist rigidity” (Beebe, xiv), for everyone, women and men, are “a compound of two mixtures, the female and the male” (Jung, 55). Moreover, the “inequalities [that] arose” between them, creating imbalances that become projected into the world of experience in the form of evil actions, “caused uncertainty and so necessitated decisions or acts of choice” (Jung, 56). In the “gnostic” tradition, then, as *The Gospel of Mary* illustrates, sin /evil originates in the human psyche, as an imbalance between these sides of self, consciousness, troped as male, and the unconscious, as female, with the Jesus-figure of many gnostic texts representing “the prototype of the male-female unity, the perfect androgyne,” as Clifford Bishop writes in *Sex and Spirit: Ecstasy and Transcendence, Ritual and Taboo, the Undivided Self* (1996, 48-53).⁴⁹

Among the textual sources, collected in the Nag Hammadi library, of the concept of God as a dyadic syzygy of masculine and feminine components is *The Tripartite*

Tractate (1,5), in which “His better, masculine self ... intercede[s] for his defective, feminine self” (Pagels, cited in Robinson, 59). The writer of this text also conceives of the “unity of opposites” as a union of the left and the right hand (Robinson, 84; 87-88) and describes the “Savior” as “an image of the unitary one” (Robinson, 93), as does *The Gospel of Truth* (I, 3 and XII, 2) (Robinson, 40-51), which also links “interior knowledge,” the left hand and “psychic form” (Robinson, 46), together comprising the “unity of perfect thought” (Robinson, 47). In *A Valentinian Exposition* (XI, 2) with *On the Anointing, On Baptism A and B and On the Eucharist A and B* (Robinson, 482-89), “the primal source is a dyad consisting of the Father of All and his feminine counterpart, Silence, the Mother of all things” (Pagels, cited in Robinson, 482-83). In *The Gospel of Philip*, as Wesley W. Isenberg comments, “the existential malady of humanity results from the differentiation of the sexes” (cited in Robinson, 140). “When Eve was separated from Adam, the original androgynous unity was broken,” Isenberg claims. The “purpose of Christ’s coming,” he argues, “was to reunite Adam and Eve.” In this gospel, the gender dyad is presented as one of many dualisms: “[l]ight and darkness, life and death, right and left, are brothers of one another [t]hey are inseparable” (Isenberg, cited in Robinson, 142; cf. 150-52, 158).

In these and other Nag Hammadi scriptures—*Authoritative Teaching* (VI, 3) (Robinson, 304-310), *The Thunder, Perfect Mind* (VI, 2) (Robinson, 295-303), *The Thought of Norea* (IX, 2) (Robinson, 445-447), and *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII, 1) (Robinson, 511-522)—the soul’s nature is feminine. As Maddalene Scopello claims in her discussion of another “female story” that presents “the soul ... as a woman” (Cited in Robinson, 190), *The Exegesis on the Soul* (II, 6), when “the soul fell into the world and

into a body[,] she polluted herself with many lovers,” lovers who “are brigands and bandits [and] who treat the soul as a whore” before abandoning her. “In her suffering, she seeks for other lovers who also deceive her, making her the slave of their sexual pleasure[a]shamed, the soul remains in slavery” (Scopello, cited in Robinson, 190). As its appearance in a variety of Nag Hammadi scriptures attest, the scenario of the woman caught in the act of adultery contains esoteric knowledge about the feminine nature of the psyche, which is forced into prostitution by desire. The New Testament’s adumbrated version of this scenario does not elaborate on its esoteric content, unlike that of *The Exegesis on the Soul* (II, 6) wherein God the Father turns the soul’s womb inward, so that she can give forth “good and beautiful children (i.e., in allegory, the good, virtuous ideas)” (Scopello, cited in Robinson, 190). “Under the different names and physiognomies” of the Old Testament’s allegedly corrupt women—“Rahab, Tamar, Ruth, and Bathsheba”—in Scopella’s words, “there is hidden one and only one personage: soul searching for her heavenly origin” (191).

In addition to the psychological corollary to King’s point about the ways in which *The Gospel of Mary* reveals the “politics of exclusion” operative in the formation of the New Testament canon, the philosophical one concerns the phenomenal world. As the Clementine Homilies demonstrate, a common feature of Gnostic literature is the tendency to bestow to the body “a special and unexpected significance”: “its materiality” reveals part of the “Godhead” (Jung, *Psyche and Symbol*, 66); here, “matter is predicated as having considerable numinosity in itself,” just as it would for the medieval alchemists, whose “anticipation of the ‘mystic’ significance” of physical matter would “subsequently [be] assumed in ... in natural science.” The “spirit,” writes Jung, revealed in the Nag

Hammadi papyri such as *The Gospel of Mary* wherein Jesus advises her to “be encouraged in the presence of the different forms of nature” (Robinson, 525), is “a fundamental complex which was originally felt as an invisible but dynamic living presence; this concept is seen to precede the Christian view of the spirit as superior to nature [t]he contrasting materialistic view, developed under anti-Christian influence, is based on the premise that the spirit is in fact determined by nature, just as the psychic functions are considered to depend on neurochemical phenomena” (*Abstracts*, 100).

The fact that Mailer’s Jesus mirrors back to Mary her own historical words situates his novel in this tradition. Discerning that she is “wed to the seven powers of the Devil’s wrath” and to their offspring, “the seven demons” (181), he lists them, slightly paraphrasing a few terms: the “first was Darkness [d]esire was the second power the third was Ignorance [l]ove of death was the fourth power [t]he fifth power sought Whole Domain the sixth power was Excess of Wisdom ...[and] the last power was the most fearful ... the Wisdom of Wrath” (181). “Such,” he says, “were the seven powers and demons,” each of whom “worked to defile” the “good spirit that had come to this woman and myself” (181). Mailer adds the term “wed,” a salient term that invokes the “gnostic” trope of psychological balance as a marriage between warring masculine / conscious and feminine / unconscious sides of self, restoring the male-female syzygy to his version of Jesus’ narrative, by bringing the symbolic feminine into the light of his consciousness and out of the shadow of denial cast by Jehovah’s misogyny.

Given the lack of commentary on the appearance in *The Gospel According to the Son* of this bizarre passage from *The Gospel of Mary*, a passage that might seem to derive from Revelations or from a medieval Catholic litany, but does not, one that most Sunday

School attendees would not likely recognize, doubtless the majority of readers wonder what Mailer is doing. Doubtless, too, interpreting the reasons for its appearance as his way of making Jesus, the “keel of Western civilization” (Lennon, 2000, 200), bring Christianity into alignment with psychologically balanced “gnostic” traditions, might seem like so much hermeneutical overstatement. But this interpretation, familiar for readers familiar with Mailer’s *oeuvre*, is warranted by the fact that he has often drawn on this “gnostic” concept of the psyche as a marital battlefield. One of his stock ideas, second only to his Manichean notion about the eternal war waged between God and Satan, it is also among his most psychologically sound. Throughout his career, he frequently conveyed his ideas about the differences between men and women as exoteric reflections of the psychic differences inherent in the male and female principles constituting the psyche.

Not only in *The Prisoner of Sex* (1971), his lengthiest expatiation on this theme, but earlier in the 1960s, he incorporated a common feature of the Nag Hammadi scriptures, namely, the “gnostic” dialogue as a forum for discussing these embattled principles. The “Doctor of Dialects” (*Prisoner*, 20) first articulated his belief that the psyche consists of a masculine and a feminine component in “The Metaphysics of the Belly” (*The Presidential Papers*, 1964, 277-302), his dialectical conversation between himself and his fictional interlocutor in which he elaborates on the soul’s relation to its physical embodiment—an essay he considered sufficiently important to re-publish in *Cannibals and Christians* (1966, pp. 206-43). In it, he puts forward “the gnostic view [of] the discord inherent in gender” (Jung, *Psyche and Symbol*, 122; cf. *Man and his Symbols*, 17, Robinson, 540), a discord that must “be harmonized [as a ...] ‘union of

opposites,' wherein contraries and conflicts are resolved." In Mailer's terms, "when the soul enters a particular tangible existence, it weds itself to that existence." "So long as the soul resides in a body, or is trapped in a body or at war in a body or indeed even enamored of the body," he continues, it "must exist in a relation with that body which is not unlike marriage." In the body, the "meeting of opposites takes place ... between a male principle ... and something female in the soul of the man" (297), a meeting in which becoming "more masculine" entails "first satisfy[ing] something feminine" (298). "Being is first the body we see before us" (295), he says, here sounding like his latter-day version of Mary Magdalene, when she makes the same point to Jesus, urging him to embrace the fact that "without the flesh there is no life" (180). In Mailer's terms, between the masculine and feminine components, "agreement with a balance ... would offer men vision and women 'the power of the soul'" (*Prisoner*, 181).

The terms that Mailer uses in "The Metaphysics of the Belly," and the presence that he bestows to Satan and to Mary in his gospel, align him with the "gnostic" tradition whose twentieth-century counterpart, in many respects, is archetypal psychology. One of its basic axioms is the "Aristotelian notion of soul as life" (Hillman, 1985, 17), an axiom that makes the feminine, or "anima," in its Latinate form, the nexus of the soul and the body, and that, consequently, renders the psyche "indistinguishable from bodily life" (Hillman, 1985, 5). Hence Mailer's giving to Mary the statement, "without the flesh there is no life" (180). By contrast, the masculine principle is allied with mind,⁵⁰ with vision and with spirit; each term is oriented exoterically, that is, outward, into the world of experience. When he claims that psychological equilibrium, for women, grants them "'the power of the soul'" (*Prisoner*, 181) and that it "offer[s] men vision," he reflects

precisely the same “gnostic” psychologizing of gender that Jung does when he insists, in the words of John Beebe, that spirit is “characteristically masculine, in contrast to soul, which he conceived of as feminine” (Jung, *Aspects of the Masculine*, xii). “Even when [Jung] spoke of the animus as the women’s soul-image,” Beebe explains, “he meant that a woman has an unconscious masculine spirit where a man has an unconscious soul.” Both “spirit and soul ... figure in the development of both men and women” (Jung, *Aspects of the Masculine*, xiv), increasingly, as they form the “syzygy or conjunction” in their psyches of these gendered components of their unconscious.

In “The Metaphysics of the Belly,” Mailer discourses on these principles, but in his gospel, he renders them dramatically: Jesus and Mary are embodiments of masculine and feminine components. Taken together, they represent the balanced psyche that Mailer, reflecting the traditions in which he writes, upholds as the optimum state of being, a state that twentieth-century psychologists and scientists have also put forward as necessary for balanced human perception. As the domains of psychology, neuroscience and physics have established over the past century, the unconscious, the seat of intuition and of repression (right-brain), and, contrastively, the cortex-dominated seat of consciousness (left-brain), wherein the faculties of logic and of reason operate, are continuously engaged in a struggle for dominance. Old associations—e.g., the associating of left-handedness and the feminine—are increasingly finding support in twenty-first-century science—left-handed activities (writing, painting, for example) are assigned by psychologists as methods of accessing the subconscious as an aid to overcoming depression.⁵¹ Moreover, as current textbooks on psychology and neuroscience show, while human beings are naturally bi-polar, stereotypical standards for

men have served to polarize the masculine and feminine sides of their psyche, their suppression of their feminine nature cutting them off from their emotions, disabling their power of intuition and blocking their memories—such is the gendered theme of *Tough Guys Don't Dance*—thus perpetuating the repression of the feminine principle. Leonard Shlain, commenting on the fact that cultural biases often favor masculine orientation, argues that, “when a critical mass of people within a society acquire literacy, especially alphabetic literacy, left hemispheric modes of thought are reinforced at the expense of right hemispheric ones, which manifests itself as a decline in the status of images, women’s rights, and goddess worship” (Cited in Ackerman, 156), a decline that, as Diane Ackerman writes, has been apparent for millenia in “left-brained, misogynistic cultures dominated by a male god” (156).

Unfortunately, the fact that Mailer clarified the links among gender, psychology and sociology in his writings on men and women has been neglected, mainly because he made himself, in the minds of many feminists, the cultural scapegoat for having publicly uttered, in the Sixties and Seventies, imprudent remarks about men and women, remarks that the feminists rightly considered dangerously misogynistic and anachronistically patriarchal. Yet the criticism that he is anti-female is invalidated by the fact that his writings often posit male and female components in the psyches of both men and women, a fact that renders his ideas about gender and psychology wholly compatible with “gnostic” traditions and with both archetypal and Jungian psychology, a “version of psychologized Gnosticism” (Smith, 541) based on ancient concepts of the anima / animus.

Interpreting, in Mailer's gospel, Jesus' encounter with Mary in this psychological fashion requires that his readers regard the story of Jesus in the manner that archetypal psychologists do, as symbolic language designed to transmit information about the psyche. When Mailer's Jesus, in the final moments of the novel, calls himself "the source of love that is tender" (241), hoping to reason with that "creature who is man and that other creature who is woman" (241), here re-vamping Galatians 3:28, he seeks to recruit them to the task, as Mailer sees it, of "wag[ing] war on all that makes us less than we ought to be." In writing *The Gospel According to the Son* Mailer was uninterested in "search[ing] out the real story" (Abbott, 54).⁵² As a novelist for whom the idea of putting "a character in a novel who's the son of God was perfectly conceivable" (Lennon 199), he treated the gospel narrative as a means to conveying his own ideas about human beings, in this case, about the primacy of rational intuition, as a faculty of balanced human perception. In the words of John Whalen-Bridge, Mailer, in his novels, imparts the "spirit of novelistic comprehension"; he is "a literary consequentialist for whom the readers' aesthetic experience has political and even cosmological significance."⁵³ Hoping to "bring this myth to life [by] using the means of a good novelist" (Busa 54), he reveals one of his intentions in telling the story of Jesus, someone who, in Mailer's words, is "extremely well known and yet not quite understood" (Busa 28), which was to make its readers aware of the mythical / symbolic elements in the biblical texts.⁵⁴ In wanting to enliven the myth of Jesus, he participates in the tradition of archetypal psychology, a tradition in which imaginative activities such as writing novels are tantamount to soul-making, that is, the exercising of his feminine component. If "the act of soul-making is imagining, writes James Hillman, "since images are the psyche, its

stuff,” then “[c]rafting images” becomes “an equivalent of soul-making,” a crafting that “can take place in the concrete modes of the artisan, a work of the hands,” and “it can take place in sophisticated elaborations of reflection, religion, relationships ... [and] social action” (Hillman, *Archetypal Psychology*, 1985, 27). “The soul’s first habitual activity is reflection,” Hillman observes, “which in old-fashioned language belongs to the essence of consciousness as wetness to water, as motion to wind” (*Re-Visioning Psychology*, 1975, 117)

Mailer’s Jesus, from the beginning to the end of his autobiographical narrative, moves from being the discerning artisan who contemplates the spiritual nature of a piece of wood, to being the discerning observer of people’s spiritual natures. “[N]ever would men’s sentiments reveal the presence of the Lord” (119), he remarks. “He would only appear in their deeds” (119). He again affirms this sentiment when he tells himself that “[t]here was work to be done and it could not be accomplished on one’s knees” (57). In statements such as these, he reveals Mailer’s conviction that good and evil are terms that apply to behavior, as visible revelations of inner convictions. Throughout the novel, Jesus contemplates Jehovah’s many laws less frequently as he becomes increasingly focused on the ways in which spirituality becomes perverted by manifestations of evil—particularly, hypocrisy, the unequal distribution of wealth and unholy wars. Toward the end of his narrative, he laments the fact that “[i]n the last century of this second millennium were holocausts, conflagrations, and plagues worse than any that had come before” (240), making it clear to him that “the contest” between God and Satan remains so equal,” that neither of them “can triumph” (240). Readers of *The Gospel According to the Son* can assume that Mailer here refers to transcendent personalities warring

against each other like the two gods in Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* (1971), "engaged in an endlessly indecisive and wildly swinging game of bumblepuppy with a Burmese gong,"⁵⁵ but they also must regard these terms as metaphors for human behavior, at least if they would remain true to his Aristotelian allegiances. Mailer's Jesus, as he describes his coming to consciousness of the facts that he, like his heavenly Father, unites good and evil within himself, and that, by extension, everyone, "like trees, bear a fruit of good and evil" (124), perpetuates this principle, a mainstay of the "gnostic" scriptures (Cf. Smith, 539) and of twentieth-century psychology, that good and evil "are opposites which predicate one another" (Jung, *Psyche and Symbol*, 54).

For Mailer, religion is instinctive, which is a belief that reveals his immersion in Reichian psychoanalytic principles, according to which God and the Devil originate in the embattled dynamics in the depths of the unconscious. "Since nobody but the human animal himself has created his philosophies of life and his religions," Reich argues, "it must be true that whatever dichotomies appear in ideologies and thinking" reveal the same "structural split with its insoluble contradictions" (*Character Analysis*, 1973, 426). Reich argued that the terms God / good and the Devil / evil are linguistic representations of instinctive tendencies rooted in the unconscious. These distinctions, Reich claims, manifest the "basic split into the world of God and the world of the devil in human intellectual existence" (*The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, 1943, 425). This "psychic division," basic to the "*biophysical functioning of the organism, its 'biological core'*" (415, Reich's italics), creates an unconscious "splitting of the personality" in the psyche of an average person, one that is mostly "hidden," since the "structure of *homo normalis* keeps one or the other of the contradictory structures continually in a state of repression."

Reich defends his psychoanalytic observations when he claims that the “insights we gain from character-analytic treatment cannot be applied directly to the masses, but they reveal the contradictions, forces, and counter-forces in the average individual” (180).⁵⁶ Unless these contradictions are made conscious, Reich argued, dire consequences ensue, consequences that he refers to as the unconscious “moralistic sadism” that makes one “easily manipulated into believing what the ruling government says about the identity of the enemy, about who is good and who is evil” (*Mass*, 180).⁵⁷ The “church,” as Reich sees it, “enjoys the help of the state power-apparatus and plays upon the strongest emotional forces in the psychology of the masses” (*Mass*, 172).⁵⁸

Implicit throughout *The Gospel According to the Son*, the spirit of Reich’s observation, on the “basic split into the world of God and the world of the devil in human intellectual existence” (425), runs like a subterranean river through Mailer’s writings and also inspired Mailer’s recent political commentaries. In “Empire Building: America and Its War with the Invisible Kingdom of Satan” (2005, 4), Mailer, speaking in a manner similar to Reich, expresses many of the same concerns that he gives to his narrator in *The Gospel According to the Son*, such as the psychological reality of evil as a propensity embodied by all human beings, the eternal battle between the forces of good and of evil in the psyches of men and women, and the unholy alliance between religion and wealth. He claims that American imperialism is promoted by the nation’s “most dynamic” belief, that “God will overcome a dark enemy.” It is a belief, he says, that reflects Americans’ “need [for] mythos,” one that, as he argues in “I Am Not For World Empire” (2005, 2), the current American president shamelessly exploits, just as he does the word “evil.” Justifying endless slaughter against oil-rich nations conveniently labelled terrorist-

friendly, while patently invoking polarizing WWII terminology, Axis of Evil, to distinguish allies from enemies, Bush, in Mailer's words, delivers a "morality tale at a child's level" ("Empire Building" 3), one that is, indeed like most children's stories, replete with friends and with enemies, tribal subjects and their necessary scapegoats. Here Mailer finds support for his opinion in Reich's observation, that the "more helpless" the mass individual becomes, "the more he is forced to believe in supernatural forces that support and shelter him" (*Mass*, 147).

Mailer stands with both Reich and Jung as writers who insist on distributing awareness of the importance of linking politics and psychology in this way. In half a century's worth of literary production, Mailer has sought to disabuse fundamentalist Christians of their comforting illusions, by deepening their awareness of the links between politics and psychology. Much of his work serves to promote, to borrow terms from Edward Said, a "knowledge of history, a recognition of the importance of social circumstance, [and] an analytical capacity for making distinctions," all of which, Said insists, "trouble the quasi-religious authority of being comfortably at home among one's people, supported by known powers and acceptable values, protected against the outside world" (*The World, the Text, the Critic* 15-16). Said's observation, in his commentary on "secular religion," that, "[w]hat one discerns today is religion as the result of exhaustion, consolation, disappointment" (291), that "its forms in both the theory and practice of criticism are varieties of unthinkability, undecidability, and paradox" (291), expresses many of the concerns that the mature Mailer takes up, in both the concluding moments of *The Gospel According to the Son* and in his political commentaries. Jesus complains that the churches erected in his name are exoteric palaces built of gold (239), that "those who

calls themselves Christians are rich and pious," that the Pharisees are "no better," and that hope is still "hidden in the faces of the poor" (242). He articulates the same apprehensions about what Christianity has collectively become that Mailer addresses when he opposes true Christianity to the exoteric facade that, in his opinion, masks its collective faithfulness to Mammon. As "a twenty-first century version of the old Roman Empire" ("Empire," 4), America, he says, "is in pretty bad psychic shape" ("Empire," 7). The nation's condition, he believed, is the result of its collective avoidance of the contents of the collective unconscious, Americans' "submerged lives" ("Empire," 7). The U. S. administration's attempts to inaugurate "the commencement of the American World Empire" (3) made Mailer cynical about "the notion that man is a rational creature who arrives at reasonable solutions to knotty problems" ("Invisible Kingdom," 3). By not becoming sufficiently self-aware, Americans have made "the idea of Empire as a transcendent solution" seem an attractive "way to get rid of [their] ongoing guilt." Attributing guilt to the contradiction implicit in the fact that many Americans, in his eyes, are both Christian and complicit in the nation's imperialistic foreign policies, Mailer remained skeptical, like his version of Jesus, who remarks that the "rich are choked with the weight of gold" (153), toward the imperialism implicit in the form of Christianity that he considered woefully rampant in his nation.

The Gospel According to the Son and Mailer's political writings both convey his hope that his readers ponder anew the links between the realities implied by the terms kingdom, power, and glory. He criticizes the fact that mainstream Christianity has become psychologically imbalanced. Its adherents, by and large, unaware of the psychological substance of the teachings of Jesus have established precisely the opposite

realities that he insisted he was destined to implement. "The kingdom of God is within you" (17:20), Luke's gospel records; "the kingdom of God ... is within and everywhere" (18:36), states John's. The principle with which Jesus made the locus of spirituality not a literal temple but the human psyche appears throughout the "gnostic" papyri; for instance, in the papyrus fragments of Oxyrhynchus: "[t]he kingdom of heaven is within you, and whosoever knoweth himself shall find it. Know yourselves" (Cited in Jung, 37). These fragments serve as a representative example of the fact that the scriptures recording the sayings of Jesus that circulated in the ancient world fostered "a belief in the efficacy of individual revelation and individual knowledge" (Smith, 538). Such a belief requires no hierarchy, no doctrines. As the Jesus of *The Gospel of Mary* puts it: "[d]o not lay down any rules beyond what I appointed for you, and do not give a law like the lawgiver lest you be constrained by it" (Robinson, 525). As Reich claimed, the "religious attitude operates as a powerful resistance to the uncovering of unconscious psychic life" (Mass, 1946, 180). Jung similarly asserts that "the Christian puts his Church and his Bible between himself and his unconscious" (*Man and his Symbols*, 92) and "rejects any tendency to take the statements of its earliest records as written myths" (*The Undiscovered Self*, 1957, 85-86), that is, to "understand them symbolically." In Hillman's words, "metaphysics and theology so easily become ways of avoiding psychologizing" (136). Mailer aligns his Christology with "gnostic" traditions and with their contemporary manifestations in the writings of these (and other) psychological authors, all of whom similarly regard the psyche as "a source of knowledge" (Robinson, 540)—this was the "real secret" of the "gnostic scrolls," even as "many of the Gnostics were nothing other than psychologists."

V. Conclusion: Mailer's (Auto)biographical Habit

In the *Journal of Modern Literature's* recently published special issue, "Late Mailer and Masculinities," the editor's comments on Mailer, damning with faint praise the novels examined in this thesis, exemplifies an old tendency of Mailer naysayers. "To scholars whose liberating address to representations of women was succeeded by consciousness of the artificiality of gender, masculine and feminine, Mailer's unblinking investment in masculinity in *Ancient Evenings* or *Tough Guys Don't Dance* has looked late indeed—positively out of date" (*JML* 30 .1. 2006, v). Thus begins Robert Cesario's introductory remarks about Mailer. Continuing his partial invective, Cesario describes what he takes to be Mailer's developing perspectives about gender and sexuality. Mailer's "anxious interest ... always has promised a hoisting of Maileresque masculinity on its own petard (vi), but, as Cesario goes on talking about how "[a] truly brave man might have to be fearless even about surrender to homosexual eros," a surrender that "would dissolve assurance about what is masculine (or feminine)," it becomes clear that he is not really talking about Mailer, for whom gender categories are not so much "melodrama," in Cesario's term, but biology-based constructions both existentially and socially important. About Mailer's Egypt book, Cesario has nothing to say other than to point out that Mailer decided "that his protagonist narrator ... would be anally penetrated, indeed raped, by Ramses II" (vi). For him *Tough Guys*, insofar its engagement with "stock elements of crime fiction and heroic masculinity" (vi) are concerned, "demonstrates a reduction of visionary American possibilities to sordid cliché." Given his views of his novel, in his

response to my argument about this novel, it is surprising that Cesario seems personally offended. "One is obliged" (vi), he says, "to note that female being might be a saving alternative to retributive machismo!" About *The Gospel according to the Son* Cesario's main argument conveys his disappointment that in it Mailer does not engage more clearly than Cesario can see issues of homosexual masculinity. "Although Mailer's Jesus is one member of a male triangle, caught between a fumbling, capricious father, and a hypermasculine (possibly queer) devil, Mailer has not insisted that his Jesus, in reaction to homosexual anxiety, become a Rojack, perpetrating machismo by coupling with a magdalen" (vii). Mailer's *Gospel*, for Cesario, is merely another example of a late-Mailer novel that reveals his "relaxed relation to masculinity" (vii).

Cesario's comments are merely a recent example of the ways in which the biases of Mailer's detractors become projected onto him, as if Mailer would receive praise from a gender critic only once he adopts the critic's own perspectives about men. In part, as I argue in what follows in this conclusion, Mailer is responsible for much of the personalizing that goes on in many commentaries ostensibly devoted to assessing his work. He does no less in his critiques of other male writers, Hemingway, Lawrence and Miller, for instance. It is the consequence of Mailer's autobiographical ethos of fiction writing and his life-long tendency to live as if he were his own literary character and to write as if his characters were him. In the large quantity of literature that he produced, his tendency to view his literary production as the record his consciousness, as the medium in which the shaping of his personality in his work becomes his main ambition, continued to revitalize his obsession with fiction writing, as an authentic way of developing his self-awareness. In *The Spooky Art*, he articulates his desire to treat fiction

as a forum for imagining “how [he] might act if [he] were that much more of a hero” (*SA* 85). Earlier in his career, he believed that personal style and literary character would ideally unite in his writings no less than in his life. The writer must willingly risk self-exposure, he claims, by “laying his character on the line” (*SA* 59). For if “good style,” he says, “is a rendering out of oneself” all that is negative, so bad style reveals all of his worst tendencies, for all that is “lazy ... overambitious, or terrified by the ultimate logic of his exploration will be revealed in the book” (*SA* 159).

In outlining his notions on character construction, Mailer frequently distinguished between ordinary characters and the ideal form they take as “autonomous beings,” which allows him to realize what he sees as the existential value inherent in the act of imaginative writing. Although it remains impossible to create a character who is a better author than he is, Mailer muses, the separation between author and protagonist offered by the third person” (*SA* 86) facilitates his desire to speculate about what kind of man he might be in various fictional situations. Believing that the existential aspects of writing can enhance his own insights into himself by means of the protagonists he creates, Mailer insists that the existential writer must confront our profoundest metaphysical questions: he must “penetrate into the substance of things” (*SA* 149), if he would discover the truths buried in the “hidden reality ... as if reality has some subtle desire to protect itself” (*SA* 156). Adducing what he sees as the “greater apprehension of literary mysteries” in Jean Malaquias’ remark that the “only time I know that something is true is at the moment I discover it in the act of writing,” Mailer contends that the existential writers seizes the “moment of intellection” and becomes fully engaged “with the truth when [he]

discover[s] it at the point of a pencil ... [t]hat in and by itself is one of the few rare pleasures in life" (*C&C* 171).

In many of his passages which examine the existential potentialities inherent in the act of writing, he stresses the significance of realizing, in the instant of discovering, refining and claiming as his own, the new and incandescent ideas that mysteriously appear in his mind "in those divine words" (*SA* 88). The spontaneous discovery of truth, which is the defining element in Mailer's philosophy of the writer, is part of the process in which his literary characters become, to borrow Bloom's term, "free artists of themselves," or, "autonomous beings," in Mailer's words, in plots that unwind as he discovers them in the act of writing. Unlike the sort of characters he can move around like puppets, he argues, the "more creative" sort of character, whose "nature keeps shifting" (*C&C* 162), as he negotiates the sudden turns and developments in a storyline, becomes a literary "being" that takes on a life of its own. By running the "full gamut of consciousness" in the act of creating autonomous characters, Mailer claimed to be able to develop "insights that he never knew were in him" (*SA* 230); and, in doing so, reveals what he calls the "buried continent of existentialism" that shows on our psychic maps as intimation of eternity still to be discovered" (*C&C* 165). Ideally, Mailer hoped to explore in his fiction "something deeper than [our] normal comprehension," something that "a primitive felt when he passed a great oak" (*SA* 149) or "what we feel when we see a great painting on a museum wall" (*SA* 150).

By indulging his tendency to see his characters as idealized possibilities or ongoing versions of his developing ideas, Mailer submerged, but not overcome, his earlier inclination to create narratives in which he stood at the center of events as a character

named Mailer, Aquarius or the Prizewinner. A tendency that he sees as inherently positive, it is, in fact, the standard by which he feels other writers, such as his predecessors Henry Miller and Ernest Hemingway, for example, are to be read and judged. As he remarks in *The Spooky Art* (268), Hemingway the man and Hemingway as Jake Barnes or Nick Adams become “locked” into a single personality who “embodied the spirit of an age.” For Mailer, Hemingway’s performative self-awareness saved him from experiencing the great failure known only to great artists: the failure to fulfill their own idea of themselves” (SA 265) in their fiction. Hemingway shaped his personality by creating character whose fictional experience reflected his actual life, eventually becoming one with it in what Mailer calls an “outrageous piece of psychic work” (SA 268), that blurs the distinction between himself and the idealized forms of himself in his writing. In life as in his fictional undertakings, Hemingway was bold, brave, and disciplined enough as a man, in Mailer’s eyes, to develop a close relationship with his characters that attains its highest expression in the legendary status they gain as the single, illustrious personality in the conscious of his times and beyond it into posterity. Hemingway entered the literary afterlife even as legendary “movie stars, live in our minds with “the security of old films” (SA 268).

Unlike Hemingway, who went to great lengths to “fulfill his own idea of himself in his stories,” Mailer argues, Miller merely became an enigmatic author who deserved less notoriety in the consciousness of his times, so Mailer feels, than the protagonists of *Tropic of Cancer*, whom Mailer views as the “ultimate definition of the word protagonist” (SA 268). The “relentless freedom” the character embodies, though Miller’s own, dramatizes the “paradox of tough misery and keen happiness” that Mailer sees as

the humanist question that the novel poses so vibrantly: "what, finally, is a Man?" (SA 265). But beyond the "illusion" that we know Miller as the writer who made us aware of "the sewers of existence" (SA 64) in Paris in the 1920s, Mailer says, "we wonder if we know anything about the writer whose personality is finally more like a "transparency" than like a traceable presence in the pages of his books.

The problem, as Mailer sees it, is not that Miller as a man "bears no relation" (SA 265) to Miller-the-protagonist so much as it is the lack of identifiable patterns in the relation between the author and his most compelling character, inciting in his readers a responding awareness of just how much of himself "he must be leaving out" of his imaginative creation. However much of a "force, a value, [or] or a literary sage" (SA 268) Miller might have promised to become in the minds of those who read his work, he ultimately failed to achieve the goal toward which an author ideally strives in his relationship with his literary achievements: the shaping of his personality. Mailer calls *Tropic of Cancer* "a literary wonder" and "a revolution in style and consciousness equal to *The Sun Also Rises*" (SA 267), but he insists that because Miller failed to develop a single vibrant personality in his relation to his protagonist, because he did not continue to define his own personality by creating more works like *Tropic*, and because he did not indulge the autobiographical habit sufficiently for him to become synonymous with his most compelling character, the legend of the man falls to that of the protagonist, the one notable exception in the literary production of what Mailer sees as Miller's finally unsuccessful career.

However, five minutes spent reading any randomly selected passage in Miller's second novel show that Mailer's perspective on his literary forerunner is inaccurate. In

Black Spring, Miller tediously unpacks his heart with boundless abandonment, stacks paragraph upon paragraph of detail, as he itemizes his daily life—describing not only his personal reading habits, for example, but also the best types of toilets to sit on while reading. Miller's autobiographical habit, so painstakingly indulged in *Black Spring*, makes the novel almost unreadable. Moreover, the fact that it has been almost totally forgotten suggests that the personal and professional merit that Mailer saw as intrinsic to his tendency toward dissolving the differences between the author and his work represents a damaging repression, in his mature stages as a writer, that harkens back to the narrative strategies he adopted earlier in his career. Miller, in *Cancer*, shook his protagonist loose into the sordid quarters of Paris and even gave him his own name, but never cared about the confusion between art and life caused by creating a protagonist only similar to himself. In seeing Miller as a failure, Mailer sets the bar of literary accomplishment high for himself. His criticism of Miller's career resonates with the cautionary realization that his own posterity threatens to become a lot like Miller's: the author of two or three good books, and of a lot of larger ones which not many people read.

In the early Seventies two critics predicted that his reputation would diminish unless he kicked the habit of blurring distinctions between his life and his writing. Assessments made by Richard Poirier in *Mailer* (1972) and by Robert Solotaroff, in *Down Mailer's Way* (1974), the two best book-length studies of Mailer to come out of that decade, treated Mailer as embarrassingly ego-obsessed. They complained that his explorations of the metaphysical and heroic aspects of his own artistic creations are limited by the solipsism inherent in his desire to become, in Mailer's words, "one more

character in a field of characters" (SA, 86). Offering a compelling case for the strengths and weaknesses of his writings, Poirier claimed that Mailer's autocriticism might allow him to "escape the entrapment that often turns American writers into imitators and finally into conscious parodists of themselves" (1972, 166). Twenty years later in *The Performing Self* (1992), however, Poirier is compelled to discuss Mailer's work as a testimony to the failures implicit in the narrative strategies taken by performative writers who indulge their "furiously self-consultive, so even narcissistic" (87) aesthetic mode in which they "like to find themselves in acts of composition" (101).

In *Down Mailer's Way* (1974), Robert Solotaroff took a less sympathetic position when he predicted that Mailer's "habit of subordinating the subject matter to his ego, instead of his ego to the subject matter" (259), would likely prevent him from achieving, in his mature works, "the happy combination of modesty and objective correlative" that "permitted," in *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), the book that catapulted Mailer into international fame, and in *The Armies of the Night*, his first of two Pulitzer-winning books, "a true surrender to the imaginative effort coming from himself" (260). Solotaroff contended that Mailer could attain "success with the subsequent harnessing of his persona" only by allowing "his excitement toward his subject matter" to generate a renewed "sense of stylistic possibility" (260). Mailer's deferential acceptance of his own autobiographical habit, his penchant for mixing "discipline and self-indulgence ... invention and repetition" (260), so Solotaroff predicted, would limit the range of his imaginative explorations in the books he would likely produce in succeeding years.

These critics' impatience with Mailer expresses the opinion held by other literary-cultural commentators who similarly argued that ego-based models of heroism had

become socially irresponsible, elitist and even fascistic. "It is, surely, notable," George Steiner argues, "that the theory of personality, as it develops from Hegel to Nietzsche and Freud ... is essentially a theory of aggression" (*In Bluebeard's Castle*, 1971, 46). Affirming Harold Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence," itself derivative of Eliot's paean to the cult of literary personality, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Steiner argues that, "[a]ll recognition is agonistic," for the reason that "[w]e name our own being, as the Angel did Jacob, after the dialectic of mutual aggression" (46). Serving to account for the criterion that explains not only Bloom's justification for giving Mailer a place on his canonical list, but also its basis in a form of literary Darwinism, Steiner's discussion of contemporary fiction writers, "particularly in the United States" (42), criticizes those who indulge in "romantic bathos or a disguised perpetuation of élitist idols" (72). Surely Steiner has Mailer in mind when he refers to the egotistical tendency of writers who spin-out "fashionable, silly theories about total revolution in consciousness" (72). Silly, Steiner argues, because "[m]utations of internal structure do not occur at such a rate" (72). While "[f]ashionable" is the term that Harold Bloom uses to justify Mailer's place in the "western literary canon," for Steiner, the term is infantile, for being ego-centered. "Is not the very notion of culture tautological with élitism?" (69), he asks; "how many of its major energies feed on violence?" (69). Besides, writes Steiner, it is usually the ruling classes who "embodied the inheritance and dynamics of culture" (85), their "archaic vanity" (73) and their obsession with their own "great name" prompting him to exclaim, "[a]way with the presumption of permanence in a classic *oeuvre*" (73), "[a]way with masters" (73). Steiner's argument would later garner support in Frederick Jameson's *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991),

and Richard Rorty's *Achieving Our Country* (1998, 1999), two works of cultural criticism devoted to assessing that fact that ego-related concerns such as individualism, heroism and canonical greatness must be dropped from the cultural collective. Jameson argues that "[heroic] figures no longer hold any charm or magic for the subjects of a corporate, collectivized, post-individualistic age; in that case, goodbye to them without regret ... woe to the country that needs geniuses, prophets, Great Writers, or demiurges" (Cited in Rorty, 126). For Rorty, "hero-worship is a sign of weakness, and a temptation to elitism" (126).

It is a temptation to which Mailer unabashedly, but not uncritically, succumbed. At the time of his death he was writing the sequel to his novel about Hitler's family background, *The Castle in the Forest* (2006), one of many books he wrote since the Seventies based on well known historical figures and (in)famous personalities. Noticeable in his fictional treatments of such figures as Monroe, Ali, Gary Gilmore, Picasso, Oswald and Hitler is Mailer's desire, conscious or otherwise, to set himself against or alongside important real-life characters, in so many literary versions of Woody Allen's filmic rendering of the same desire in *Zelig*. Mailer's novels about these figures are interesting and important in their own right. Yet the fact that in his final decades he seemed to become increasingly anxious about sustaining his reputation as a writer of fiction, that he seemed to become the mature equivalent of the author of *Advertisements for Myself* (1959) wherein he at times seems more interested in garnering a reputation as a novelist than being one, highlights the fact that, despite his heroic-posturing and his habitual lauding of his ego, the literary empire of his personality, he regretted his reliance on extant cultural scripts. Insisting that his readers regard him as a fiction writer and his

works themselves as novels, it is as if he felt that they needed his reminders. "There is much less favorable comment about his novels than his nonfiction by academic critics" (2006, 92), Mailer's archivist J. Michael Lennon comments.

Despite having recently been awarded France's Medal of Honor (as well as numerous other awards in his final years), the mature Mailer did not enjoy the prominence he had earlier in his career. Nonetheless, he remained optimistic about his literary production. "Every good author who manages to forge a long career," he remarked, must be able to "build a character that will not be unhinged by a bad reception" (SA 71). Repeating in his recent miscellany his claims in *Cannibals and Christians* (1963) about the importance of staying in "shape as a writer," Mailer did what Miller did, conscientiously engaged the "slow war ... against diminishing talent" (SA 71). Yet, as I hoped to have demonstrated in this thesis, Mailer's late fiction will not likely fall into obscurity anytime soon. *Pace* his detractors, his engagement with a myriad of issues concerning empire, gender and religion, among other of his interests, will continue to make him relevant. The question that will decide his fate is not, is late Mailer worth reading? The question is, will his critics take his work seriously enough to get beyond their own biases against him, in order to examine his writings as literary documents worthy of their attention?

Notes

¹ This quotation can be found at http://thinkexist.com/quotation/there_was_that_law_of_life_so_cruel_and_so_just/216836.html

² This quotation can be found at <http://www.iol.ie/~kic/mailler3.html>

³ Cf. William Blum's discussion of Kennedy's complicity in ecoterrorism, in *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*, 1995.

⁴ Cf. Kate Millett's commentary, in *Sexual Politics* (1970, 317), on Mailer's admission in *The Presidential Papers* (1963, 136), that of all the characters in *The Naked and the Dead*, those for whom he "had the most secret admiration, like Croft, were violent people."

⁵ Cited in Lennon (1988, 226).

⁶ André Green, *Life Narcissism, Death Narcissism*. Trans. A. Weller. London and New York: Free Association Books, 2001, 9.

⁷ John Beebe, Introduction to Jung's *Aspects of the Masculine*, p. xii.

⁸ The epochs that the ancient Egyptians recorded as the first dynasty, circa 3,000 BCE, the Middle Kingdom, circa 2200-2100 BCE, and what contemporary historians regard as “the end of the Egyptian era and the beginning of the Christian era,” according to R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz, in *Symbol and the Symbolic: Egypt, Science and the Evolution of Consciousness* (1974, 39), “correspond ... to the [earth’s] precessional cycles.” “[E]ach cycle lasts approximately 2,160 years”: “Taurus (Montu), Aries (Amun), the end of Pisces (the Christian era), today, for this correspondence between the celestial dates and great events on Earth to be pure coincidence” (42-43). As Grahame Hancock argues, in *Fingerprints of the Gods* (1995, 453, 455), the “gradual demise of Egypt occurred during the demise of the age of Aries—indeed both actual rams (sacrificial animal) and symbols of them are ubiquitous in this epoch—e.g., the long rows of gigantic rams lining both sides of the approach to the Temple of Amon Ra at Karnak” (cf. Champollion and Harlé, 136). The Jungian citation is from *Civilization in Transition* (Vol. X, 1964. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970) is cited in *Flying Saucers: a Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. New York: MJF Books, 1978., p. 5.

⁹ The archetype of the hero is a ritual of maturation, personally and culturally, but the “hero myth does not ensure that this liberation will occur” (von Franz, 120). “The typical hero figures exhaust their efforts in achieving the goal of their ambitions; in short, they become successful even if immediately afterward they are punished or killed for their

hybris" (von Franz, 124), whereas "the novice for initiation is called upon to give up willful ambition" and "be prepared to die," the "purpose" of which is "to create the symbolic mood of rebirth" (von Franz, 124), a "rebirth, as Herbert Read argues, that "coincides with sunrise" (208). Hero figures who attain the third act, as it were, of their archetypal plot "are characterized by solar attributes" (Read 208), even as "the moment of birth of their greater personality is known as illumination" (208). The symbolic association between heroes and images of "the golden scarab" (Tarnas, 2006, 18) "express[es] the archetypal principle of rebirth and renewal, visible in the Egyptian myth of the Sun-god." In "the netherworld during the night sea journey changes himself into a scarab," Tarnas writes, "then mounts the barge to rise again reborn into the morning sky at dawn" (58). As this chapter makes clear, Menenhetet does not exemplify this process, despite his many deaths and rebirths.

¹⁰ Cf. Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Philadelphia and London: W. B. Saunders Company, 1948, pp. 610-59.

¹¹ Briefly stated, the first of these archetypal stages involves the ego's relation to the mother, the second stage involves its interaction with the father and the third stage brings the ego into contact with the contents of the unconscious, constellated as the maternal / paternal imago, the anima and the animus. In the third stage of archetypal individuation, the heroic ego emerges from its confrontation with the unconscious—the proverbial death of the ego—as a coherent Self, whose psyche holds its feminine and masculine components in balance as a constructive, if endlessly embattled, tension of opposites.

¹² Citations are taken from the Warner Books paperback edition of *Ancient Evenings* (New York: Warner Books Inc, 1983).

¹³ In contrast to Freudian psychology, largely an anachronism insofar as contemporary analytic and therapeutic practice is concerned, Jungian psychology, currently, is among the world's most widely practiced modes of analytical psychology. Its premise is that primal energies, or archetypes, are "structural element[s] of the psyche," or "psychic organ[s]" that are "present in all of us" and that mobilize the "instinctive data of the dark, primitive psyche, the real but invisible roots of consciousness" (*Psyche and Symbol*, 1991, 134). Ensuring the collective growth and continuance of our species, archetypes resemble the genetic determinants that mobilize all biological life through successive stages of development, transforming seeds into trees, turning catapillars into butterflies and bringing human beings from the womb to the tomb. Moreover, even as every insect, leaf and animal is both unique and part of its genus and species, so the psyche develops personally and collectively.

¹⁴ Mailer's notion of karma is similar to that of the ancient Egyptians. The "way in which we live is the reflection, the judgment, the truth, of how we lived our previous life" *Time* (1227), he remarks. "To the degree you lived a life that was artful, your reincarnation was artful. To the degree you lived a life that destroyed the time of others and dredged up all the swamp muds, so you are a creature of the swamp in your next life." Gerald Massey, in *Ancient Egypt: The Light of the World*. (Vol.1. 1907, 1970, 195), claims that

the “questions confronting the Manes on entering Amenta are whether he has laid sufficient hold of life to live again in death? Has he acquired consistency and strength or truth of character enough to persist in some other more permanent form of personality?” Gerald and Betty Schueler argue that, “the Egyptians did not use the word karma” (1991, 20), but “they clearly understood the concept. It is expressed in the word *maat* which means ‘justice’” and which was the concept that delineated the deceased Manes’ experience, in their post-mortem existence, when they would stand “face to face” with their “karmic burden” (30).

¹⁵ The stanza from which these terms are taken is as follows:

“Before me floats an image, man or shade,
 Shade more than man, more image than a shade;
 For Hades’ bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
 May unwind the winding path;
 A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
 Breathless mouths may summon;
 I hail the superhuman;
 I call it death-in-life and life-in-death” (Ellman, 49).

¹⁶ As Kathryn Hume as noted, the voice-overhearing that occurs in Mailer’s novel can be understood in terms of Julian Jaynes’s *The Origin of Consciousness and the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (1976). Examining the records of ancient Egyptian culture for the evidence it provides for his assertion, that religion is “the nostalgic anguish for the lost

bicamerality of a subjectively conscious people" (297), Jaynes argues that, "[i]f we could say that ancient Egypt had a psychology, we would then have to say that its fundamental notion is the *ka*, and the problem becomes what the *ka* is" (189). Since "[e]ach person has his *ka* and speaks of it as we might of our will power" (190), he asserts, "the *ka* requires a reinterpretation as a bicameral voice....[a] man's *ka* was his articulate directing voice which he heard inwardly, perhaps in parental or authoritative accents" (190). The "hallucinated voice[s]" of the gods, he claims, "were in no sense 'figments of the imagination' of anyone. They *were* man's volition" (202; his italics). Accordingly, Egypt's "steward-king theocracy" required that the pharaohs "obey[ed] the hallucinated voice of a dead king" (178), and that what they were "really commanding [was] indeed the bicameral voice which began, controlled, and directed Egyptian civilization" (186). For instance, "Osiris ... was not a 'dying god,'" but "the hallucinated voice of a dead king." Jaynes continues: "the relationship between Horus and Osiris, 'embodied' in each new king and his dead father forever, can only be understood as the assimilation of an hallucinated advising voice into the king's own voice, which then would be repeated with the next generation each king then is Horus, his father dead becoming Osiris, and his *ka* ... could best be translated now as voice-persona" (187, 193): an "assimilation" of three voices constitutes the "person's inner voice," his, that of his parents and that of the Pharaoh (193).

Bloom contends that Mailer, in *Ancient Evenings*, has unwittingly written an allegory, that of Hemingway and of himself, the "heroic precursor and his vitalistic follower and son" (*Mailer*, 36), one that dramatizes Bloom's notion of the author's resentment toward his predecessors. The novel provides abundant evidence that supports

Bloom's understanding of its underlying dynamic—namely, that, foremost in Mailer's mind, as he wrote it, was the introjected voice of Papa Hemingway.

¹⁷ Elsewhere Mailer claimed that this co-dependent dynamic is common to us all: “[w]e’re always in competition with God the same way we’re in competition with one’s parents. There’s a devil, an opposed emotion that comes out of being the product of something other. You revere that initial source and you wish to pre-empt it” (Whalen-Bridge, 2006, 5).

¹⁸ As Budge writes: “[t]he story of Osiris is nowhere found in a connected form in Egyptian literature, but everywhere, and in texts of all periods, the life, sufferings, death and resurrection of Osiris are accepted as facts universally admitted” (xlix). As Jung writes, “Where and when such a motif originated nobody knows....[w]e can safely assume that it ‘originated’ at a period when man did not yet know that he possessed a hero myth....[t]he hero figure is an archetype, which has existed since time immemorial” (*Man and His Symbols*, 1964, 61).

¹⁹ Cf. Millet’s discussion of Mailer in *Sexual Politics*, pp. 314-335.

²⁰ Whalen-Bridge, “The Mailer Everyone Knows.” Introduction originally slated for publication in the Mailer Issue of *The Journal of Modern Literature*, 30.1. 2006.

²¹ Cited in Klaus Theweleit’s *Male Fantasies* (55, vol 1).

²² For a discussion of *Tough Guys* in the light of this tradition, see Robert Merrill's *Norman Mailer Revisited* (1992, 192-204).

²³ The majority of the novel's commentators felt compelled to mention Mailer's financial reasons for writing *Tough Guys*—e.g., Ryan (21), Duguid (24). Reiteration of this point leads readers to believe that his novel neither merits nor requires close attention. As this chapter reveals, it does both.

²⁴ Mailer, Norman. *Tough Guys Don't Dance*. New York: Random House, 1984. All citations are herein taken from this hardcover edition.

²⁵ The "old philosophy" of the "Bi-Part Soul" on which Poe's narrator muses in "Murders in the Rue Morgue" refers to Indian Kundalini philosophy. In *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1971), Gopi Krishna, Frederic Spiegelberg and James Hillman establish the ways in which average men, "[f]rail, receptive instrument[s]" (128), can become "men of genius" (125), "guided at every step by a higher self-illuminating intelligence" (170), "a more potent life energy" (171), once they awaken their "feminine cosmic energy" (122), personified as "Shakti," or "serpent fire" (98), asleep at the bottom of the spine. "Kundalini is feminine, a Goddess" (158). Masculine and feminine energies in this tantric tradition are termed *Ida* and *Pingala* and their channels of energy, *prana* and *apana*, run along the left and right sides of the spinal cord. Hillman and Spiegelberg argue that "a developed relation to the anima, to the feminine principle, is an

essential ingredient for health or wholeness [t]he feminine as such is said to be the principle of nature and life to which we hardly relate adequately until we have integrated that feminine part of our own selves" (158).

Insofar as *Tough Guys* is concerned, the intensifying of Madden's energies as he nears the end of his novel, when the pace of his narrative increases, his discerning of spirits speaking to him out of the airwaves, as he puts it, his visionary attacks and his intuitive flashes—all demonstrate the state of mind that Hillman and Spiegelberg describe as the effects of the influx of "prana", or cosmic vital energy" (91) that occurs when adepts of Kundalini unify their masculine and feminine energies. The "peculiarity which gives it a semblance of the bizarre and uncanny," Hillman and Spiegelberg claim, "is the biological process which, set afoot, leads to the emergence of a conscious personality so superior and possessing such astounding, almost superhuman, attributes as to make the whole phenomenon appear to be the performance of a supernatural agency rather than the outcome of the operation of natural though as yet unknown biological laws" (167). Here they sound like Poe's Dupin describing his "superior acumen" and "praeternatural abilities" (Seelye 423, 424). Over the course of the novel, Madden moves far from his alcoholic condition as he describes it in the opening pages; here, too, the links, in the mystery / detective tradition, between alcohol addiction and the psychology of the investigator also reflect this "old philosophy." As Hillman and Spiegelberg explain, "[t]he liver" is the "seat of fate," of "the darkest passions, particularly the bloody, smoky ones of wrath, jealousy, and greed" (133); "the activation of the liver may thus be seen as a movement towards feeding distorted fragments of un-lived life that still longed to live (Hillman *et al* 133). From the opening of the novel, the more Madden

drinks, the more fragmented he feels (Cf. 1-6, 24-25) and the further away he is from integrating his masculine and feminine energies.

²⁶ *The Presidential Papers*. (1963. London: Corgi Books, 1965), pp. 95-112.

²⁷ These terms are borrowed from the narrator's self-description in Jostein Gaarder's *The Solitaire Mystery: A Novel About Family and Destiny*. Trans. Hilde Kramer. New York: Berkley Books, 1992, p. 19.

²⁸ As Sedgwick observes, in men's embattled relation with other men, "the bond that links [them] ... is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved" (*Between Men* 21).

²⁹ Robert Cesario, editor of the Mailer issue of *The Journal of Modern Literature* in which an earlier version of this chapter appears, criticized it for the ways in which its "hurried invocations of Reich, Adorno, and Klaus Theweliet ... fray the gay-friendly thread in the exposition" (vi). The hermeneutical-academic context in which it is written ought to make clear the fact that this chapter aspires to explain Mailer's opinions, not my own.

³⁰ Cf. Stephen Crook's introductory chapter: Adorno "does not explore the most obvious questions about the implications of gendered forms of eroticism in fascist politics" (*Stars* 28).

³¹ The fact that Mailer's Dougy is clearly a spoof of the so-called Hemingwayan male completely eludes Harold Bloom, in his recently republished remarks on Mailer's late writings. Bloom feels that Mailer's "one critical blindness, in regard to himself, involves the destructive nature of Hemingway's influence upon him" (*Mailer*, 2003, 5). As a commentary on Mailer's alleged refusal to impose greater ironic distance between him and his predecessor, Bloom's remark, and the one he makes about Mailer's apparent inability to "shape his fictions, since without a sacrifice of possibility on the altar of form, narrative becomes incoherent, frequently through redundancy" (4), suggests that he has either not read *Tough Guys Don't Dance* or refuses to take it seriously.

³² Nag Hammadi Library (192).

³³ *Psyche and Symbol* (1991, 58). This passage derives from *Aion (The Collected Works of Carl Jung)*. Eds. Sir Herbert Read, Michael Forham and Gerhard Adler, William McGuire. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. 1959, 2nd edition 1968).

³⁴ All citations are taken from the hardcover edition of *The Gospel According to the Son*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1997, p. 4.

³⁵ This statement is supported by Ron Rosenbaum's remark, that Mailer's Manichean doctrine is "the most fundamental idea of his career," as cited in Brian McDonald's "Post-Holocaust Theodicy, American Imperialism, and the 'very Jewish Jesus of Norman Mailer's *The Gospel According to the Son*" (*JML*, 2006, 78-90).

³⁶ Cf. Mailer's discussion of his Manichean perspectives in "An Interview on Existentialism and Karma," in *The Time of Our Time* (New York: Random House [1998]: pp. 1223-1227). The most thorough exploration of his cosmological ideas is J. Michael Lennon's introductory essay in *Critical Essays on Norman Mailer*. Ed. Michael Lennon (Boston: G.K. Hall [1986]), pp.145-56.

³⁷ Harold Bloom, for instance, asserts that Mailer's "gnosis" is based on a "doctrine insisting upon a divine spark in each adept that cannot die because it never was any part of creation anyway" (*Mailer*, 2003, 38), its proponents having abandoned "history and mere nature to the demons or the bad angels."

³⁸ The theologies in *The Gospel According to the Son* fall under a number of rubrics, aside from Christianity: Manichean, "Gnostic" and Essenic Judaism. For centuries, the first two terms represented religious alternatives to Christianity, even as "Essene" refers to "a Jewish sect that had broken with the official Judaism of the Jerusalem temple and had withdrawn to the desert at Wadi Qumran" (Robinson, 7), a sect whose history comes

to an end, as documented by the Dead Sea Scrolls” (Robinson, 7), as Manicheanism began to emerge. Hence their many similarities: the Essenes “understood their situation in terms of the antithesis of light and darkness, truth and lie, a dualism that ultimately went back to Persian dualism” (Robinson, 7). Elaine Pagels affirms, in *The Origins of Satan* (1995, 17), that, as “devote and passionate sectarians” who saw “the foreign occupation of Palestine—and the accommodation of the majority of Jews in the occupation—as evidence that the forces of evil had taken over the whole world,” the Essenes were similar to the Manicheans. One of the latter’s scriptures, for example, a re-interpretation the Talmud, entitled *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness*, employs dualistic language that, designed to assist initiates in their efforts to unite themselves “with the company of angels,” characterized a number of the former’s beliefs.

Manicheanism has also been regarded as “the final flourish of Gnosticism” (Cited in Robinson, 532), as Richard Smith argues. “Until the eighteenth century revived an interest in the older sects now called gnostic, the term Manichean was used for all dualist heresies.” Although Mailer’s reference to himself as a “left-medievalist” suggests otherwise, in many respects, he resembles the “eighteenth-century *philosophes*”—Edward Gibbon, Pierre Bayle and Voltaire, for example—who “regarded Gnosticism as a counter-tradition and wielded it as a weapon in their outflanking tactics to overthrow the received tradition” (Smith, 533). An analysis of Mailer’s employment of gnostic concepts in the light of these eighteenth-century writers is beyond the scope of this chapter.

³⁹ *The Gospel of Mary*, originating in the second century, survives in two fragments written in the third and fifth centuries and discovered, respectively, by German anthropologists, in the late 1800s, who included it in the Berlin Codex, and in the late 1940s, by two farmers, looking for fertilizer, in Nag Hammadi, Egypt.

⁴⁰ As I argue later in this chapter, many ancient “gnostic” ideas about spirituality and gender receive scientific corroboration in contemporary neuroscience and psychobiology. Diane Ackerman writes, in *An Alchemy of Mind: The Marvel and Mystery of the Brain* (2004, 154), that “[a] woman’s brain has a larger corpus callosum, the sparkling bridge between the hemispheres, and also has a larger anterior commissure, which links the unconscious realms of the hemispheres.”

⁴¹ Here is a representative sampling of the novel’s mostly negative reviews: Michiko Kakutani, “Norman Mailer’s Perception of Jesus.” *The New York Times*, April 14, 1997, Sec. B, p. 7; James Woods, “He Is Finished.” *The New Republic* 12 May 1997: 30-35; David Gelernter, *National Review*, July 28, 1997: [http://findarticles.com /p/articles/mi_m1282/is_14_49 /ai_59451092](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1282/is_14_49/ai_59451092); J. Bottum’s review: [http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9708/reviews/ bottum.html](http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9708/reviews/bottum.html).

⁴² For example, in “I Am Not For World Empire” (4).

⁴³ The idea that the origin of evil is psychological is discussed in M. Scott Peck's "Toward A Psychology of Evil," in *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*. 1983, 1985. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998, pp. 36-84.

⁴⁴ Augustine's writings frequently reveal the depth of Manichean's influence on him, as when he cites Thessalonians 5:5: "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (Cited in Jung, *Aspects of the Masculine*, 1991, 170).

⁴⁵ Mailer's remarks on what fiction entails for him resemble James Hillman's similar statements about imaginative writing, in *Re-Visioning Psychology* (1975, 1977, 151): "Fictions are not supposed to have great explanatory power, so they do not settle things for a mind searching for fixity. But they do provide a resting place for the mind searching for ambiguity and depth. In other words, fictions satisfy the aesthetic, religious, and speculative imagination more than they do the intellect."

⁴⁶ In the passages that follow this moment in Mary's gospel, Levi admonishes Peter "for contending with women as against the adversaries" and for refusing to recognize that "the Savior made her worthy [and] loved her more than us" (527). Although, as PHEME PERKINS explains, the "hostility that follows Mary's revelation" about the true nature of evil "establishes Peter as spokesman for orthodox objections to gnosis" (133), *The Gospel of Mary*, "based on vision and private revelation" (Cited in Robinson, 524, 525), "attacks the orthodox positions that deny the validity of esoteric revelation and reject the

authority of women to teach.” Notwithstanding Levi’s reasonable comments in *The Gospel of Mary* and other Nag Hammadi scriptures that validate Mary’s authority—e.g., *The Dialogue of the Savior* (III, 5), wherein she is upheld as “a woman who had understood completely” (Robinson, 245)—looking back to the apostles’ future, today’s readers of the New Testament and of the “Gnostic” gospels that survived their textual apocalypse can discern the fact that the canon-makers sought to destroy every evidence of Jesus’ and Mary Magdalene’s companionship, evidence for which can also be found in *The Gospel of Phillip*, which calls Mary Jesus’s companion, or spouse, and states that Jesus “loved her more than his disciples” (Robinson, 148), an observation that Levi affirms in Mary’s gospel. The Church Fathers, in attempting to expunge from the historical record all indications of Jesus’s and Mary’s marital status, also prevented the dissemination of the dyadic psychological model, itself of far-ancient origins in scriptures depicting the divine syzygy. The Isis-Horus imago, the latter held eternally in the arms of the former, persists in that of Mother Mary and Jesus, while the (less-Oedipal) dyadic model of Jesus and Mary Magdalene was all but doomed to oblivion for roughly two thousand years. As recent pop-cultural treatments of this millennia-running cover-story attest (e.g., Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*), there are compelling reasons to re-search questions about the guardian of the early church’s proverbial key, or, perhaps, its lock.

⁴⁷ “Constructing” gnosticism as the “heretical other,” King continues, the compositors “simultaneously and reciprocally expose[d] the partial, mutable, and irregular character of orthodoxy” (25). Moreover, the significance of the compilers’ hubris is not only historical. The “strategies devised by early Christians to define orthodoxy and heresy

are alive and well in the politics of religious normativity in the modern world, albeit in forms modified to suit new and shifting situations. Claims to be true to tradition, charges that opponents are contaminating the original, pure form of the tradition with 'secular,' or 'modern,' or 'Western' ideas and mores, or eschewal of intellectual or moral questioning as an unnecessary confusion of faith—such practices effectively replicate the pattern of ancient polemics” (King, 24).

⁴⁸ These terms are equivalent to Jung's terms, the Anima and the Animus, referring to men's repressed feminine and women's repressed masculine component, respectively, and making androgyny / hermaphrodism the optimum psychological state of balance.

⁴⁹ E.g., in *Eugnostos The Blessed* (III, 3 and V, 1), the Savior is the “androgynous son” who contains “female aspects” and who is associated with “the term Sophia (Douglas M. Parrott, cited in Robinson, 220; cf. 22-43).

⁵⁰ The alliance of the male principle with mind is put forward in *The Paraphrase of Shem* (VII, 1), as Michel Roberge argues (Cited in Robinson, 339; cf. 341-61) and in *The Teachings of Silvanus* (VII, 4), as Malcolm L. Peel and Jan Zandee claim (Cited in Robinson, 379; cf. 381-95).

⁵¹ E.g., Lucia Capacchione, *Recovery of Your Inner Child* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991, pp. 37-39), *The Power of Your Other Hand* (Hollywood: Newcastle, 1988); and Diane Ackerman, *An Alchemy of Mind*, (pp. 12-18, 27-33, 47-53, 151-58). Cf.

Julian Jaynes' *The Origin of Consciousness and the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976, pp.1-66).

⁵³ Benjamin Walker, in *Gnosticism* (1985), drawing on New Testament scholar Burnett Hillman, comments that the "known facts of [Jesus'] life are meager in the extreme.... [A]part from the forty days and nights in the wilderness, of which we are told virtually nothing, all that is reported to have been said and done by Jesus in all the four gospels, could not have occupied more than three weeks....[t]he teachings of Christ are not even preserved in the Aramaic language in which they were proclaimed" (70-71). Nonetheless, Walker writes, "what is important is not so much whether his mission took place, as whether it took effect" (71), as a "cosmic, archetypal [and] apocalyptic" myth of tremendous staying-power, constructed, as it was, out of innumerable cultural mythologies whose far-back origins were primarily Egyptian and Sumerian. Cf. Gerard Massey's comparison of hundred of identical features of both *The Book of the Dead* and the Bible, in *Ancient Egypt: Light of the World*.

⁵⁴ This quotation is taken from John Whalen-Bridge's summary perspective on late Mailer, in the introduction originally slated for the Mailer issue of *The Journal of Modern Literature* (30. 1. 2006).

⁵⁵ King, referring to the Nag Hammadi codices, claims that the "discovery of new manuscripts has produced a wealth of new information" (9), which is "almost solely of one kind—myth," exemplifying the ways in which "telling an old story a new way can in

and of itself produce a practical social effect" (13). From Jung's similar perspective, the gospel story stands as a profound "cultural symbol" (*Man and his Symbols* 83), one that incurs "a deep emotional response in some individuals" and that gives them a "psychic charge," which "function[s] in much the same way as prejudices" (83). Originating in "primitive story-teller[s]" and [their] dreams" (*Man and his Symbols* 78), Jung claims, the "antique mystery of the god-man, which has its roots in the archetypal Osiris-Horus myth of ancient Egypt" (*Man and his Symbols* 69), is the archetypal source of the story of Jesus of Nazareth, the town itself its mythical, not its historical, backdrop.

⁵⁶ Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano*. New York: Penguin Books, 1971, p. 347.

⁵⁷ Reich encouraged his readers to undertake their own "*individual analytic work*," by "*making suppression conscious*" (Mass 426, Reich's italics. Doing so, he says, entails "*dragging the fight*" between individual instinct and totalitarian control "*into the light of consciousness*," in order to "*bring[] it to a head under the pressure of a mass ideology and translate it into social action*" (Mass 426, Reich's italics). Jung makes similar claims, when he says that "the rational intellectual does not yet know that his consciousness is not his total psyche" (*The Undiscovered Self*, 1957, 85-86). "[L]arge areas of the human mind are still shrouded in darkness" (*Man and his Symbols*, 1968, 6), he insists. "What we call the 'psyche' is by no means identical with our consciousness and its contents" (*Man and His Symbols*, 6). Unfortunately, the "individual man knows that as an individual being he is more or less meaningless and feels himself the victim of uncontrollable forces" (*The Undiscovered, Self* 114); but he "harbors within himself a

dangerous shadow and opponent who is involved as an invisible helper in the dark machinations of the political monster.”

⁵⁸ Jung similarly argues that, “[i]n the clamor of the many there lies the power to snatch wish-fulfillments by force; sweetest of all, however, is that gentle and painless slipping back into the kingdom of childhood, into the paradise of parental care, into the happy-go-luckiness and irresponsibility. All the thinking and looking after are done from the top; to all questions there is an answer; and for all needs the necessary provision is made. The infantile dream state of the mass man is so unrealistic that he never thinks to ask who is paying for this paradise. The balance of accounts is left to a higher political or social authority, which welcomes the task, for its power is thereby increased; and the more power it has, the weaker and more helpless the individual becomes. Whenever social conditions of this type develop on a large scale the road to tyranny lies open and the freedom of the individual turns into spiritual and physical slavery” (*The Undiscovered Self*, 71).

⁵⁹ Their points, as John P. Dourley writes, in “C. G. Jung, S. P. Huntington and the Search for Civilization” (2006, 81), “would seem to be borne out in contemporary inter-civilizational conflict when national / tribal leaders can call each other and their opposing empires ‘evil’ or ‘satanic’ and go, for the most part, unchallenged by theologians, and cheered on by their loyal but unconscious constituencies.” This religious façade, Dourley writes, reveals the “power of archetypal bonding.” Falling under the familiar rubrics of “‘faith,’ ‘patriotism,’ and ‘ideology’” (Dourley, 81), the recent “dramatic

example” of this “lethal combination is the current marriage of capitalism, democracy and Christian fundamentalism, three archetypal horsemen of war, famine and death now riding rampant through portions of the Middle East” (Dourley, 82). Today’s political opponents, writes Dourley, citing Jung, are ““a modern variant of the denominational religions’ and possess the same power to render their devotees collectively unconscious and so latently and endemically subject to hatred and violence toward the differently bonded” (79). “In the discussion of civilizational conflict,” Dourley asserts, “this means that the archetypally conferred and claimed primacy of goodness of any civilization proceeds from the same archetypal source in which Jung locates evil. On the basis of the presence of absolute evil and good in the common source of religion and civilization, the dynamics of hatred between civilizations can be better understood as a collective splitting of the archetypal unconscious. Our absolute goodness demands their absolute evil” (80).

What Dourley says of Jung also applies to Reich and to Mailer: the “contribution” that their “social psychology makes to the alleviation of the clash of civilizations” (79) is to make “[r]elative the omnipresent absolute” and to “encourage those who stand in one particular religion or civilization to look to other such communities, to their symbols and to their values, for variations of their own, and, in so doing, unearth the commonalities they share with each other.”

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