THE BODILY FUNCTION BLUES

NORMAN MAILER

In the middle of Mailer's second year at Harvard, on December 13, 1941, shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he began keeping a hand-written, loose-leaf journal and made sporadic entries covering 51 pages, ending the month he graduated, May 1943. The journal's purpose is stated on its first page: "Anything that's important to me at the time is jotted down in here." He comments, among other things, on his classes, the books he is reading, his literary ambitions, adventures during summer vacation, his roommates, and the women he is dating. Pages nine to twelve contain the lyrics of a blues song he composed; he notes it is to be sung to the tune of W.C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues." Titled "Exit Blues" in the journal, in later years it came to be known (by its chorus line) as "The Bodily Function Blues." Mailer sang variations of it at family gatherings well into his 80s, delivering it with gusto and exaggerated earthiness in his baritone voice. The lyrics are preceded by this statement: "I'm fairly drunk as I write this." The spelling, line lengths, and punctuation are as written by Mailer.

—J. Michael Lennon

Exit Blues

Oh – h – h – h – h – h – h –
Ah can't piss
Ah can't urinate
Ah can't bleed
Ah can't even menstruate

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Oh, Ah can't puke
Ah can't regurgitate
Ah can't gargle
Ah can't salivate
Ah can't talk.
Ah can't elucidate
Ah can't eat.
Ah can't alimentate
Ah can't sleep
Ah can't somnambulate
Ah can't breathe
Ah can't respirate
Ah can't shit
Ah can't even defecate
But worst of all
The worst of all
Ah can't fuck,
Can't fuck worth a damn,
Oh, Ah can't fuck,
Just can't fuck
Ah can't fuck,
Ah just can't copulate
Too late, too late,
Oh – h – h – h – h – h –
What am I gonna do
Ah got those blues,
Ah got those blues,
Ah got those bodily
function blues
So what am I gonna do
Why do yer know?
Ah can't eat, & Ah
can't sleep,
Ah can't piss, & Ah can't
puke,
Ah can't shit, Ah can't
breathe, Ah can't fuck,

So what am Ah gonna
do.
Ah got those bodily
function blues.
Blue – e – e – e – s
Ah got those bodily function
Blue – e – e – e – e s.