

NORMAN MAILER IN THE LIGHT OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE

V I C T O R P E P P A R D

WE ARE BY NOW WELL ACCUSTOMED to reading and hearing about Norman Mailer in connection with a number of different literary and cultural traditions, including especially the American and the Jewish. What I propose to do here is to examine Norman Mailer, if not quite as a Russian writer, then as a writer in the light of Russian literature. I am, of course, not the first person to note the relationship between Mailer and Russian literature, but I believe there is much more to say on the subject. Although Mailer's literary dialogue is most highly developed with Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, he also has noteworthy connections with some twentieth century writers, including Mikhail Bulgakov and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Mailer's work displays a number of features that ally his work with that of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, some of which are readily apparent, as in *An American Dream*, and others of which are less readily perceptible but nevertheless significant, as in *Harlot's Ghost*. On the broadest level, Mailer shares a passion with his Russian predecessors for engaged fiction that is morally, philosophically purposeful, and which tackles the large, eternal questions of life, often in striking, disarming, or blasphemous ways. Keeping in mind that Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Mailer each has his own distinctive concerns and techniques, all three of them treat questions such as the nature of good and evil, the nature of God and the Devil, and how we should live this life. Another important trait linking Mailer with the Russian writers Tolstoy and Dostoevsky is that each of them is concerned with history, which is often the basis for their narrative and thematic structures. At the same time, each of them is also intensely concerned with their own epochs. As with the Russians, Mailer is relentless in pursuit of his goals,

and, like them, he seems always to be on the attack, while taking no prisoners.

It would be hard to think of a writer with a more powerful moral and didactic thrust than Tolstoy, author of "The Death of Ivan Ilych," a story which openly instructs us how *not* to live. Yet even with Tolstoy, just as we are about to assign a linear message to one of his stories, he is likely to throw us off the track, as he does at the end of the story "Alyosha The Pot." As Alyosha is dying he thinks, "if it's good here when you do what they tell you and don't hurt anybody, then it'll be good up there too" (9). Then Tolstoy, switching to his narrator's voice concludes the story with the words, "[he] looked like he was amazed at something. Then something seemed to startle him and he stretched his legs and died" (9). Having received an apparently simple, direct message, the reader is now forced to wonder what exactly it was that Alyosha was surprised at. Further, the reader has to wonder whether Alyosha's voice is the same as that of the author.

Dostoevsky's moral stance in his fiction is equally as difficult to define. According to the Russian literary and cultural critic, Mikhail Bakhtin, Dostoevsky is the primary exponent of the polyphonic novel in which the voices of the characters, each of which is intimately tied with a central concept or idea, are independent of a controlling authorial voice and engage in a great debate that yields no easily distillable resolution.¹ Another approach, championed by Konstantin Mochulsky, proposes that Dostoevsky's novels contain definite moral, philosophical, and religious lessons the author wants us to heed. Mochulsky further sees urgent warnings in Dostoevsky's novels about the dangers inherent in man taking on the role of God in such a way that he becomes in effect a "Man-God." In such a situation, there are no constraints on human behavior and "everything is permitted."²

A story by Dostoevsky, "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man," provides a cautionary note to anyone who wishes to confine Dostoevsky too closely to any one category or another. Here, the narrator, who has dreamt that he visited a planet where the people lived in a state of complete innocence and he corrupted them all, says just before the end that, "in one day—in a single hour—everything could've been arranged. The key phrase is, 'Love others as you love yourself.' And that's all there is to it. Nothing else is required" (225). It would be hard to find a more direct way to underline the story's message than this familiar injunction from the *Bible*.

These two stories, "Alyosha the Pot" and "Dream of a Ridiculous Man" demonstrate that Tolstoy, "the great moralizer," will thwart our search for a clear-cut moral if he likes, and Dostoevsky, "the great polyphonist," will lead us to an unambiguous, monophonic conclusion when he chooses.

Where, then, does Norman Mailer stand in relation to the twin titans of Russian literature with respect to his treatment of the great questions of life? It should be said that in one respect at least he is closer to the techniques of Dostoevsky, who uses preposterous or even blasphemous situations to test different ideas and questions, such as he does with the Grand Inquisitor's interrogation of Christ in *The Brothers Karamazov* or the experience of the ridiculous man on another planet. Mailer, it seems to me, is also daring and innovative as he attacks the largest questions of life with bold narrative stratagems, such as a first-person narrative from the point of view of Yeshua in *The Gospel According to the Son*, or a story about Hitler from the first person point of view of one of his henchman in *The Castle in the Forest*. When it comes to resolving moral issues, quandries, and questions he raises in his fiction, I would claim that Mailer, like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, does not fit anyone else's preconceived pattern, and the first proof of that is to be found in Mailer's novel, *An American Dream*.

CRIMES AND DREAMS

An American Dream contains a subtext of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* that is so apparent it should be called a supertext. As the jocular and somewhat condescending title of Tom Wolf's article on *An American Dream*, "Son of Crime and Punishment," suggests, connections between Mailer's novel and Dostoevsky's novel are, for the most part, right out in the open (151–61). My argument here is that in addition to announcing his seriousness of purpose and his ambitions for the novel, Mailer's implementation of a Dostoevskian supertext in *Dream* works as a productive stratagem, for it induces us to examine the questions Mailer raises in *Dream* in a double light, one that reflects back on *Crime*. At the same time, I argue that *Dream*, if not the equal of *Crime*, is more that just a poor offspring. It should also be pointed out that in one respect *Dream* really connects with all of the "big four" of Dostoevsky's novels, for at the heart of the plot of *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1868) *The Devils* (1872), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), there lies murder, just as murder is at the base of Mailer's novel.

If we begin by looking at the overall structure of the two novels, we see a definite parallel in the early part of *Dream* with *Crime*. Book 1 of *Crime* comes to a cathartic climax with Raskolnikov's killing of the old pawnbroker, Alena, and her sister, Lizaveta. From a compositional point of view, therefore, Dostoevsky sets himself the daunting task of rebuilding the tension inherent in the plot in the aftermath of the novel's most dramatic and pivotal act. At the end of Chapter 1 of *Dream*, Mailer gives himself virtually the same assignment when Rojack murders his wife, Deborah. The manner in which the two authors deal with this challenge is, however, not the same.

Dostoevsky is justly renowned for portraying his central characters, including especially but not only Raskolnikov "in extremis," "on the edge," and "on the threshold." It would be hard to think of a character in any fiction who fits this description better than Rojack in *Dream*. Indeed, Rojack, as we know, acts out the state of being on the edge in a literal fashion in his much noticed walk along the wall while contemplating suicide. Near the end of *Crime*, Raskolnikov experiences an analogous if less melodramatic moment, when he looks down from a bridge into the water of the Neva River in St. Petersburg and ponders whether he should take his life. Despite this obvious similarity in the portrayal of these two characters, their reactions to the murders they have committed are not nearly the same. After he has murdered Alena the pawnbroker and her sister Lizaveta, Raskolnikov returns to his apartment, where he long languishes in a semi-delirious state that has all the symptoms of a serious illness. On the other hand, after he has killed his wife Deborah and thrown her out the window in an attempt to create confusion about the real cause of her death, Rojack goes on a tear of manic activity that includes having sex with Ruta and then Cherry, extensive interviews with the police, and imbibing copious, if not prodigious amounts of alcohol. Eventually, Raskolnikov gains control of himself, but in the first days after the murder he commits at least one act that shows his judgment is still shaky when he hides the pittance under a rock, which involves several rubles and change that he has stolen from the pawnbroker. I am not sure the criticism of the novel has fully recognized the absurdity of this act, which not only well illustrates Raskolnikov's psychological state, but also underscores the futility of his whole murderous project. The money Raskolnikov stole was, after all, meant both to finance his university education and to provide for his mother's and sister's welfare.

If Rojack's behavior appears to be frantic and bizarre, as it surely is, he nevertheless is initially in better control of his rational faculties than his Russian counterpart, as he is able to conceive and carry out Deborah's diversionary defenestration and subsequently tell his version of events to the police with conviction if not complete credibility. At a certain point, the American and Russian stories begin to intersect again as both heroes undergo long, arduous interviews with the police. Raskolnikov recovers control over his emotions so well that he is able even to play out a hypothetical confession with inspector Zametov, showing signs of his need to be punished, an emotion Rojack also experiences. The interrogations of Rojack by Roberts, and of Raskolnikov by Porfiry are certainly clear parallels between the two novels, as both Porfiry and Roberts show themselves to be masters of their art, while each of the suspects also shows off his intellectual mettle at its best. In the case of Dostoevsky's novel, the real nature and motivation of the pawnbroker's murder begins to emerge in Porfiry's relentless and psychologically sophisticated questioning of Raskolnikov. It is here that the two discuss an article Raskolnikov has written in which he develops the idea that there are extraordinary people, such as Napoleon, for whom the usual constraints on the behavior ordinary people do not apply, and who then can commit great crimes without experiencing any guilt for their actions.

In *Crime*, Raskolnikov is testing in practice the idea of his article in the murder of the pawnbroker; he is testing himself to see whether he can step across the line that divides ordinary from extraordinary people. In the case of Rojack, he has been contemplating killing Deborah for much of the eight years they have been married, so volatile, visceral, and vindictive are their relations. Rojack confesses that, "living with her I was murderous; attempting to separate, suicide came into me" (9). The actual murder, however, occurs much more spontaneously than with Raskolnikov. The immediate provocation takes place when Deborah tells Rojack that she will no longer perform with him a certain unspecified sex act he has taught her, but that she will perform it with each of her three lovers, of whom Rojack learns for the first time. Rojack, like Raskolnikov, has produced a philosophical tract in the form of his lecture "On the Primitive View of Mystery." Except perhaps for the apocalyptic notion Rojack expresses about "our private sense of some enormous if not quite definable disaster which awaits us" (159), it would be hard to find a direct connection with the murder of Deborah, much less a justification or rationale for it.

In both *Crime* and *Dream*, virtually all the names of the central characters tell us something about them as personalities. Dostoevsky employs this device, which had of course established itself in the fiction of Europe well before him in the eighteenth century, extensively and with great purpose. If we drop the -ov from Raskolnikov's surname, we have the Russian word for schismatic. The schism in the Russian Orthodox Church was a cataclysmic event in the second half of the seventeenth century that drove a permanent wedge between the so-called Old Believers and the reformers in the Church and had immense repercussions for the whole of society. (Rogozhin in *The Devils* is an Old Believer.) Raskolnikov is not a schismatic in the doctrinal sense; he is rather torn between the two halves of himself. On one side, he is a generous person who supports others, such as the Marmeladov family, by giving them money, even though he is living in virtual poverty himself. The other side of Raskolnikov is, as we know, that of a murderer. His friend Razumikhin's name comes from the Russian word for reason, *razum*, and so it is appropriate that his role is to talk sense and reason into Raskolnikov. The full first name of Sonya Marmeladov, Sophia, is emblematic of her wisdom, which it means in Greek. She is the one who talks Raskolnikov into confessing and follows him to Siberia after his trial. The surname, Marmeladov, means exactly what it looks like in English and comports perfectly with the saccharine character of Sonya's father, a drunk who shares his woes with others in public taverns.

Arguably the most enigmatic and terrible character in *Crime* is Svidrigailov. (I believe, with some others, that he may be the most perfectly drawn of all of Dostoevsky's "great sinners.") Unlike the other main characters, his name has no clear meaning, although it may suggest something like slipperiness. I find this also to be apposite for a man whose character eludes straightforward definition, a man who perceives no difference between good and evil, between deeds of extravagant philanthropy and acts of raw brutality, including murder. Dostoevsky also employs names of secondary characters with obvious comic connotations, such as that of Lebeziatnikov, whose name suggests a fawner, and Lippewechsel, whose German last name means someone who flaps their lips.

Mailer's use of suggestive names most resembles the comic and satiric techniques of Dostoevsky, except that almost all of Mailer's characters' names have glaring sexual connotations, referring as they usually do either to a sex organ or the sex act itself. Rojack's name is related to the nickname,

“Raw Jock,” Mailer had when he played club football at Harvard. It seems too obvious to note that the area of the crotch is the fountain, so to speak, from which flows so much of what Rojack’s does in the novel. Equally obvious is the name of Ruta (as in the New York and New England pronunciation of rooter), and what can one say about Cherry’s name that has not already been said? Perhaps only the name of Shago, Cherry’s sometime lover, is somewhat less familiar, but it too fits in perfectly with the rest of these names, since it comes from the British and Australian English slang word to shag, which means to screw—in the sense of fornicate, of course.

Another name, this one not related to anything sexual, and certainly one of Mailer’s most extravagant, is that of Rojack’s wife, “Deborah Caughlin Mangaravidi Kelly, of the Caughlins first, English-Irish bankers, financiers and preists; the Mangaravidis a Sicilian issue from the Bourbons and Hapsburgs. Kelly’s family was just Kelly; but he had made a million two hundred times” (1). This incongruously hilarious string of surnames serves as a wonderful spoof on the pretensions and pomposity of Deborah and her family. Mailer loves to invest his characters with names that put us in mind, not only of certain ethnic groups, but also of social classes within them, as we see with Steven Richards Rojack, who is of both British and Polish origin, and as we will see later with Harry Hubbard in *Harlot’s Ghost*.

At the end of *Crime* there is of course punishment, as Raskolnikov is, in the best Russian tradition, sent off to Siberia. At the end of *Dream*, as Donald Kaufman puts it, we are left with “a crime without any ultimate reward or punishment” (200). Nevertheless, in both *Crime* and *Dream*, the central characters are transformed at the end of the novel by their relationship with a woman, Sonya and Cherry respectively, and the future of both of them is open to speculation on the part of the reader. At the very end of the epilogue to *Crime*, Raskolnikov has an epiphany in which he throws himself at Sonya’s knees, and this is the moment when his “regeneration” begins. In the case of Raskolnikov then, it is easy to conclude that he will forever be with Sonya, who acts throughout as a force for his salvation, as “the eternal feminine.” This outcome forces Bakhtin, who elsewhere argues forcefully for the polyphonic nature of *Crime*, to characterize the end of the novel as “conventionally monological” (34).

The conclusion of *Dream*, even though it also is found in a kind of epilogue, presents an entirely different situation, as Cherry has been murdered, and Rojack, after visiting Las Vegas in an act of homage to her and having a

talk with her spirit in the desert, is alone on his way to Guatemala and the Yucatan. It seems clear that this ending leaves the hero in unresolved limbo. In this regard then, Mailer would seem to have created a more open-ended conclusion, such as that favored by Bakhtin, than Dostoevsky. Having said that, I hasten to add that there is a fundamental difference in the way Mailer builds his novels from the technique of Dostoevsky. For if Dostoevsky is the master orchestrator of polyphony, then Mailer is the master conductor of the antiphonic novel in which the voices of different characters act as a Greek chorus by repeating the same basic themes from different stances. Furthermore, the independence from a controlling authorial voice Bakhtin perceives in Dostoevsky's characters is less evident in Mailer, whose characters often seem to be testing out the author's own ideas in various contexts.

In *Dream*, Kelly is astounded that Rojack may believe that God is losing the war with the Devil and asks him, "I was taken by your declaration—did you really make it on television?—that God's engaged in a war with the Devil, and God may lose." Rojack replies that he is "not up to a discussion," thinking to himself that "tonight I had a terror of offending God or the Devil" (236). Cherry has already chimed in with her own understanding of evil and how God is faring in his struggle with the Devil when she says, "there's no decent explanation for evil. I believe God is just doing His best to learn from what happens to some of us. Sometimes I think He knows less than the Devil because we're not good enough to reach Him. So the Devil gets most of the best messages we think we're sending up" (197).

As we see here, each character has his or her understanding of this war between good and evil and between God and the Devil, each expresses it in his or her own idiom, and each adds his or her ancillary addenda, but the basic thesis remains that God is losing. This pattern, of course, continues throughout Mailer's works, since the war between God and the Devil is arguably the central concern of his fiction in the overall. Near the end of *Gospel*, Yeshua expresses the same fear of Rojack and Cherry in that his father may be losing ground to the Devil. *Castle* engages with this question as well but takes it in a new direction.

Dream is told from the first person point of view of Rojack, whose voice and persona consequently pervade the novel. In the early drafts of *Crime*, Dostoevsky originally began to write the novel from the first person point of view of Raskol'nikov, but he subsequently changed to the third-person omniscient point of view. Wolfe, who would usurp the role of the author and

effectively re-master the text, believes that the first person stance of Rojack is a weakness of *Dream* (159). I would argue that if *Dream* is not without its faults, Mailer achieves what he sets out to do in the novel by placing Rojack front and center. In any event, he wisely avoids imitating Dostoevsky's narrative technique in *Crime*, for to do so would likely have meant setting out on the path to an ersatz version of Dostoevsky's novel rather than creating an independent work that sets up a dialogue with it. Furthermore, Mailer's style in *Dream* is substantially different from Dostoevsky's in *Crime*. Dostoevsky's style may be prolix at times, but in general his use of language is more restrained than that of Mailer, who uses an all out fusillade of images, including metaphors, some extended, and similes—virtually all types of images to create a kaleidoscope of imagery that suggests the manic but also controlled mind of Rojack.

Even if he is dealing with some of the same themes as Dostoevsky, Mailer is not bound by either Dostoevsky's approach to them or to any possible resolution of them. On certain questions, as for example the question of guilt on the part of both murderers, Mailer follows a roughly similar approach to that of Dostoevsky. Both Raskolnikov and Rojack are tormented by guilt, which the former tries to assuage by constantly asserting that Alena the pawnbroker is "a louse," while Rojack justifies himself with rehearsals of Deborah's various perfidies and betrayals of him. In a real sense, then, they are both blaming the victims of their crimes.

On one of the central questions of both novels, Mailer formulates and develops his own approach to the problem of good and evil by depicting not so much the relationship between God and man as the struggle between God and the Devil. It would be tempting to say that he does this partly as a way of declaring his independence of Dostoevsky, except that I see no evidence for that. Even as Mailer openly borrows and plays on different themes and motifs from *Crime*, and thereby invites comparisons with Dostoevsky, he remains free from Dostoevsky's precedents to pursue his own ends. Nor in *Dream* does Mailer, wisely, attempt to treat all of the questions Dostoevsky deals with in *Crime*. For example, although he acts at times as though he is invincible and he is extremely sure of his intellect, Rojack does not overtly attempt to see whether he can step across into the realm of the extraordinary men, as does Raskolnikov.

Looking at things from the other way, we can see that in *Crime* there is no "Russian Dream"; in fact, despite the hideousness of Raskolnikov's crime, the

novel does not describe a nightmare either. Although *Crime* contains extensive descriptions of abject poverty and drunkenness (the novel's original title was to be *The Drunkards*), it is neither an indictment nor an endorsement of the state of Russian society, and the Russian polity is not even on the agenda. In this respect, Mailer's *Dream* is much edgier in its social and political concerns and implications. What Dostoevsky does share with Mailer though is a strong antipathy to the business class. In *Crime*, the successful business man Luzhin is abhorrent in his attempt to marry Raskolnikov's sister Dunya so that he can fully exploit her vulnerability as someone who is much poorer than he and thus beholden to him. In *Dream*, Kelly is even more of a lecher than Luzhin, and his corrupt values and business practices cast him as a representative of what is wrong with the business class in America on the whole. (A fuller portrait of a character in Dostoevsky in the mold of Luzhin and Kelly is found in Rogozhin of *The Idiot*.)

Nor is *Dream* the "American Crime," for only Dostoevsky can replicate himself, as he does so assiduously in his novels after *Crime*. I certainly do not imagine that I have had the last word on the many connections, disconnects, correspondences, and differences between *Dream* and *Crime*. For now, though, I have said my peace and would like to move on in this examination of Mailer's dialogue with Russian literature to what I believe is a striking and unexpected link between *Oswald's Tale* and *Crime and Punishment*.

OSWALD AND RASKOLNIKOV: DID FATE MAKE THEM DO IT?

"Real life is only too eager to resemble a well-devised story." Isaak Babel, "My First Fee" (226)

Although Mailer was a master at mixing history with fiction and fiction with history, he also wrote a number of important works, such as *Oswald's Tale*, which, aside from certain displays of artistic intuition and imagination, do not contain any fictional elements at all. Nevertheless, there is one moment in *Oswald's Tale* when the story of Oswald as narrated by Mailer bears a striking, I would say even astounding resemblance, to a passage in Dostoevsky's *Crime*. It should be noted here briefly that Dostoevsky, who was an avid follower of the contemporary scene in the newspapers, himself wrote a novel, *The Devils*, also translated as *The Possessed*, but literally *The Demons* from the Russian title, *Besy*, which is based on a real event, the so-called

Nechaev Affair. A certain Nechaev murdered a man in order to create a bond of solidarity among a group of people he was recruiting to his own anarcho-revolutionary project. (I deal with this again in connection with *Harlot's Ghost*.) *Crime*, however, for all of its sociological realism in its description of St. Petersburg, is based on fictional events.

In *Oswald's Tale*, Mailer develops the idea that Oswald thought that fate had put him at work in a place where President John Kennedy's motorcade would pass by and he could not resist believing that he must take advantage of this coincidence. To substantiate this notion, Mailer quotes Priscilla Johnson McMillan in her book *Marina and Lee*: "the uncanny selection of a route that would carry the President right under his window could mean only one thing. Fate had singled him out to do the dangerous but necessary task which has been his destiny all along and which would cause him to go down in history" (781).

We know from her testimony to the Warren Commission that Oswald's mother was obsessed with her place and the place of her son in history. In the epigraph to *Oswald's Tale*, when Representative Boggs asks her to brief, she says that she cannot be brief, because, "This is my life and my son's life going down in history." What is more, in later years she understood her son's actions only in this light. My reading of Marguerite Oswald is that ultimately she is justifying her son's murder of President Kennedy because it guaranteed his place in history, and thereby her own. Furthermore, she seems to have passed this obsession with one's place in history to her son, together with a puerile rebellion against authority.

In Book 1 of *Crime*, during the time when Raskolnikov is alternating between his determination to kill Alena, the pawnbroker, who is a repulsive, greasy-haired usurer, and his doubts and compunctions about committing such a bloody, brutal act, as he happens to overhear two conversations involving her. In the first conversation, he overhears two people inviting Lizaveta, Alena's step sister to visit them at seven o'clock in the evening the next day. The second is a conversation in a tavern in which a student tells an officer how rich the pawnbroker is and what a hideous and despicable person she is. The student suggests that it would be a good idea if one were to "kill her and take her money, in order with its help to devote oneself to the service of all mankind and the common cause" (80). To the officer's objection that there is nature to deal with, the student replies that without correcting and directing nature "there would never have been a single *great*

man” (81, emphasis added). Raskolnikov is greatly agitated by the coincidence of overhearing this conversation in which exactly the thoughts he had been having about the pawnbroker were expressed by the student, and it had “an extremely strong influence on him during the subsequent development of the affair: as though here some form of predestination, of augury had been at work” (81).

This is not the only uncanny link between *Oswald's Tale* and Dostoevsky's *Crime*, for in both works there is a second, follow-on murder committed by Raskolnikov and Oswald, and here again the motivation for both of them is nearly identical. In each case, the second murder signals the failure of the initial, ideologically motivated and carefully planned murder. Just as Raskol'nikov kills Alena, the pawnbroker's unfortunate sister Lizaveta goes into panic when the latter surprises him just after he has murdered her sister, comparable to Oswald being surprised by the equally unlucky Officer T. J. Tippit, whom Oswald kills in his own panic. The great Russian short story writer, Isaak Babel, wrote once that “a well-devised story needn't try to be like real life. Real life is only too eager to resemble a well-devised story” (First Fee 226), and so did it turn out in the case of Oswald, President Kennedy, and Officer Tippit.

With respect to Raskolnikov, we can only deduce that his panic-stricken action gives the lie to his well-rehearsed murder, which as in the case of Oswald as well, has at its base a false noble goal of improving the lot of mankind. Mailer, who is writing a work of documentary history while simultaneously exploiting the privileges of the author as super sleuth, spells this out explicitly in the case of Oswald:

As soon as he killed Tippit, the mighty architecture of his [Oswald's] ideology ... came tumbling down. He knew Americans well enough to recognize that some might listen to his ideas if he killed a President, but nearly all would be repelled by any gunman who would mow down a cop, a family man—that act was small enough to void interest in every large idea he wished to introduce. (783)

I would only comment here that we might well conclude from Oswald's murder of Officer Tippit that he was probably still in the frame of mind that he could somehow elude capture—after all, so many of his semi-legal and

illegal escapades, such as his near killing of General Walker, had gone undetected and unpunished for so long. The pseudo-ideological Oswald emerges again only when he has been arrested and interrogated.

One more thing ought to be noted: for all of the differences in character between Oswald and the fictional Raskolnikov, they were both megalomaniacs. Oswald, the no-account nonentity, an odd combination of braggart and loner, and Raskolnikov, the poverty-stricken university dropout, imagined themselves to be individuals much greater than they were. And each of them used murder in an unsuccessful attempt to “step across” into the realm of the great, the extraordinary.

SPOOKS, DEMONS, FATHERS, AND SONS

Harlot's Ghost is, after *Oswald's Tale*, arguably the most thoroughly “Russian” work, fictional or documentary, that Mailer has written—provided we stipulate it is Russian in a thoroughly Soviet guise. Except for a cameo appearance of the Russian poet Evgeny Evtushenko, a character with the nickname of Gogol (Hyman Bosqueverde), and a suggestion by the narrator, Harry Hubbard, that he might become the first to create “American *samizdat*” (35), the novel does not have an open, direct relationship to Russian literature, as do *An American Dream* and *The Castle in the Forest*. Rather, Russian literature reveals in *Ghost* more on character types and their development.

The most obvious way in which *Ghost* puts us in mind of the novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky is by its sheer *massivnost'*, that is massiveness, consisting as it does of 1,310 pages, including bibliography and notes, in the 1991 Random House cloth edition. In this regard, Mailer probably outdoes all Russian writers among whom his few rivals in this regard include Tolstoy in *War and Peace* and the eighteenth-century Russian author, Mikhail Chulkov, who wrote a satirical novel called *Peresmeshnik* (The Mockathon) that is so long that it is difficult to find anyone, even among specialists, who has read it through to the end. And we must not forget Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (author of the multi-volume *Red Wheel* series), with whom Mailer shares a consuming interest in history.

Harlot's Ghost consists of a number of different genres that include the following: an historical novel, a novel of psychological realism, a *Bildungsroman*, a confession, a spy novel, a mystery novel, an epistolary novel, a family chronicle, a gothic tale with a nod in the direction of magic realism, a love

story, and a brief but powerful lyrical sketch. In addition, moral, philosophical, political, and religious elements found in the novel may at any given moment verge into tracts on these subjects. The major novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are characterized by just this sort of grab bag of genres. If Tolstoy tends to favor the psychologically realistic historical novel and the family chronicle with a large dose of morality and philosophy, Dostoevsky employs psychological realism with dashes of the fantastic or gothic and the mysterious just to keep his readers guessing about what is “really” taking place; and his novels are also filled with, if not fraught with, moral and philosophical questions.

With respect to the overall narrative structure of *Ghost*, we may also perceive some similarities with Tolstoy’s technique of switching back and forth between different groups of characters over the course of his novels, including not only *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, but also in a much shorter one, *Hadji Murat*, 1905, about an eponymous Chechen prince. In *Ghost*, Mailer has added some antiquarian spice to his more modern amalgam of fiction and document with his implementation of an epistolary technique in the many letters Harry Hubbard and Kittredge exchange with one another.

Norman Mailer’s fondness for first-person narrators is apparent in works such as *An American Dream*, *Harlot’s Ghost*, and *The Castle in the Forest*, where the narrators are full-bodied characters in their own right. It is, of course, irresistible not to seek links between Mailer’s views and those of his narrators. Mailer, after all, throughout his career deliberately thrust himself onto the public stage and was more than outspoken issues and events. I would urge circumspection, however, with respect to Harry Hubbard as a reliable source for Mailer’s opinions about the true state of the United States. There is certainly some of Mailer in Hubbard, but how much is difficult to say. Hubbard, who is primarily of Yankee stock, remarks that from his mother’s side he is one-eighth Jewish, “just enough never to know what to do about it” (76). In this respect, he resembles Steven Richard Rojack in *An American Dream*, who is some unspecified combination of Polish, English, and Irish. Mailer’s use of narrators, such as Rojack and Hubbard, with different ethnic strains in their background, is a clever way of simultaneously suggesting possible connections between himself and his narrators and also creating distance from them. It is also an effective means of underscoring their complex and often unresolved identities. If we need another biographical basis for Mailer’s gift for mimicry and mimesis in his creation of fictive

narrators, we might cite his own multiple identities as a Brooklynite, a New Englander, and a New Yorker. Readers of *Ghost* might well swear he was also a Mainer.

Aside from his relationship to the author, there are important questions about Harry Hubbard's reliability as a narrator that should be addressed. On both the visual and phonetic levels, the ever so Yankee name, Herrick Hubbard, looks and sounds suspiciously close to the name of Humbert Humbert, the firstperson narrator of *Lolita*, a novel by that most Russian and most American writer, Vladimir Nabokov (stress on the second syllables). Not only are Herrick/Harry Hubbard's initials obviously identical to those of Humbert Humbert, but the surname Hubbard shares with the name Humbert four phonemes in the same order (h, u, b, r) and one allophone (d/t). Furthermore, m and b are both labial consonants, and unstressed a and unstressed e are identical schwa vowel sounds when spoken aloud. (Surnames ending in -ard or -ert are characteristically of Norman French origin.)

My claim here is that Mailer's choice of name alerts us to the possibility that his own HH, if not as slippery and pathologically unreliable as Nabokov's HH in *Lolita*, is nevertheless not to be completely trusted.

Early in *Ghost*, Harry Hubbard introduces us to his talent for dissembling and duplicity. This pattern is evident in his starting out to write a magnum opus he calls *The Imagination of the State* about the KGB and then switches to a memoir of his life in the CIA. Subsequently, in an act of cunning that is rich in multiple ironies, Hubbard uses his first project as cover for the second and real one, which was just as illegal in the US as would have been a memoir on the KGB written by a Soviet spy in the USSR.

In the fractured time scheme of *Ghost*, a frequent feature of much twentieth-century literature, Hubbard tells us about his relationships with Harlot and Kittredge at a later age before delving into his career as a spy for the CIA. Here, too, his ability to dissemble is on graphic display in the affair he conducts with his mistress Chloe, while at the same time professing undying love for his wife Kittredge. I should add here that Harry Hubbard is the first to acknowledge his doubts and weaknesses and that he is not without guilt, as shown when he speaks of his need to "cleanse my soul of Chloe" (39) before seeing Kittredge.

It seems reasonable to assert that a novel which begins with the word Omega will sooner or later introduce Alpha, and so it is with *Ghost*. The duality inherent in this pairing is pervasive in *Ghost* on a number of levels

and is especially striking in Mailer's portrayal of individual characters and, indeed, of human nature in general. The portrait of human duality found in *Ghost* is remarkably broad, inclusive, and virtually comprehensive as it ranges from the basic Alpha-Omega construct to transsexuality, touching on all manner of possibilities in between. Moreover, virtually all of the characters, from the central to the peripheral, in this doubly spooky book are shown as double, sometimes multiple personalities. Before moving to a more specific treatment of the double characters in *Ghost*, I believe that it is important here briefly to note the seminal role Russian fiction has played in the development of this character type in modern fiction.

The fictional representation of the dual or double personality embodied in the *Doppelgänger* of the German romantics, such as E.T.A. Hoffmann, became one of the salient features in the works of Gogol and Dostoevsky. Gogol's stories, such as "The Diary of a Madman" and "The Nose" (1836), play provocative but ambiguous variations on the dual personality. They serve as the immediate inspiration for Dostoevsky's early stories, including most graphically "The Double" (1844). In this story, an aggressive, self-confident Golyadkin Jr. torments his timid and unsure other half, Golyadkin Sr. The nameless (anti)hero in "Notes from Underground" (1864) is Golyadkin's more intellectual direct descendant, who oscillates between Schilleresque dreams of the sublime and acts of unspeakable nastiness. Subsequently in Dostoevsky, as we have seen with regard to Raskolnikov, all of his major characters are profoundly divided within themselves. Numerous variations on this character type, including notably Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Kafka's "Metamorphosis," and Camus's "The Stranger" comprise an important mini-line in modern fiction.

Mailer's contribution to this tradition is his portrayal of the characters in *Ghost* either as actual or potential double agents. Those characters who are not spies, such as Jack Kennedy, the mobster Sam Giancana, and their lover Modene Murphy, with whom Hubbard also sleeps while trying to glean information on Kennedy, are not double agents but rather double dealers in their personal lives, if not in their professional lives as well. Murphy openly declares her need always to have two different lovers at any given time, and her part-time paramour, Kennedy, acts in the same manner. Moreover, nearly all of Mailer's characters in *Ghost* are double agents/characters within themselves. For example, Radcliffe graduate Kittredge, the seemingly controlled, supremely rational, scholarly proponent of her own version of the

Alpha-Omega theory of human personality, speaks with a ghost and becomes the passionate lover of first Harlot, then Hubbard, and finally Dix Butler. She is also an exemplary and doting mother to her son Christopher. For his part, Harry Hubbard's duality of personality breaks down along at least a couple of lines, including especially the struggle within him between timidity and the urge to perform deeds of machismo. Like virtually all of the other characters in *Ghost*, Herrick Hubbard has at least one code name, two nicknames, Harry and Rick, and a false name Harlot gives him for his false passport, William Madden Libby. Although code names are the norm for spies, they too reflect the dual and sometimes duplicitous nature of the practitioners of this ancient profession.

Another seminal theme in Russian literature that is signaled by the title of Ivan Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Children* (1861), usually translated as *Fathers and Sons*, and is reflected in *Ghost*, but only after it has been refracted through Dostoevsky's novels *The Devils* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. The intense but fundamentally restrained and ultimately unresolved generational struggle of Turgenev's novel is transformed in *The Devils* into a battle royal with apocalyptic implications. In *Karamazovs*, the father Fedor has spawned a brood that includes the innocent believer Alyosha, the resolute rationalist Ivan, the sensualist Dmitry, and an utterly corrupted bastard son Smerdiakov, who murders Fedor.

Mailer creates in *Ghost* a collective portrait of the American spy that has affinities with Dostoevsky's representation of the *Karamazovs*, as well as with his treatment of the conspirators in *The Devils*. The domineering father figure of Harlot plays a role that, broadly speaking, is not so different from the one father Fedor plays in *Brothers*, for Harlot is the progenitor of a whole generation of spies, each of whom represents a different approach to the profession, and of course to life itself. Not everyone in *Ghost* is a *protégé* of Harlot, since some of the others in his generation of the fathers are suspicious and/or envious and/or frightened of Harlot. Mailer's multi-faceted depiction of the American spy contains true believers in the Company (CIA), such as E. Howard Hunt and the elder Hubbard, and also perhaps Rosen, at one end of the spectrum, and opportunists for whom espionage is nothing more than a means of acquiring wealth or power at the other end of the spectrum. Dix Butler is the ultimate opportunist among these characters, someone with fearsome talents in all of the darker, violent arts of espionage, someone who uses them ruthlessly but for no defined purpose. Butler is the enig-

matic, explosive, risk-taking side of Harlot drawn out to its logical extreme. He is the Smerdiakov of *Ghost* and is totally corrupt and completely without scruples; he is not so much a professional agent of espionage as a bastard agent, a rogue spy who, as he does in his assault on the Close, uses the skills he acquired in the Agency for murderous purposes. At the end of *Ghost*, we do not know if Butler has killed Harlot, his spiritual father, but this scenario is a possibility that Harry Hubbard contemplates. (Kittredge's conversation with what is presumably Harlot's ghost would tend to support this interpretation—at least for believers in ghosts.) Smerdiakov is driven to kill his father, Fedor, largely because he resents his father's harsh treatment of him. We know less about Butler's motives, but we cannot exclude resentment of and rivalry with Harlot. Ultimately though, we do not know what it is that drives him.

If translation of the title of *The Devils* had been done more carefully in the first place, perhaps scholars who refer to it in English would not be constantly forced to note that the novel has also been translated as *The Possessed*, but that the most accurate version of the Russian title, *Besy*, would be *The Demons*. In this novel (which I believe is equal to anything Dostoevsky wrote), Peter Verkhovensky assembles a motley crew of sycophants to kill a man with the ostensible purpose of using the murder to galvanize them into something like a revolutionary cell. At the commission of the murder, which was clearly based on the Nechaev affair mentioned above, this rabble disintegrates into a pathetic pack of whiners and squealers, signaling the utter failure of the whole venture.

It would, of course, be a gross distortion to characterize Mailer's depiction of the fiasco of the CIA's Bay of Pigs invasion in these terms. One has to wonder, though, about the conduct of some of the CIA's agents in their Cold War operations in Washington, Berlin, Uruguay, and Cuba, for among them were soulless ideologues, cynical opportunists, some of them with nothing less than demonic zeal and others with clearly criminal proclivities, engaged in all manner of violations of legal and ethical norms, up to and including murder and attempted murder, in the name of the Company, and for some, in the name of the cause. In so doing, they naturally used the justification that the enemy had to be met on its own unprincipled, ruthless, and brutal terms.

These positions are not, however, the judgments of Harry Hubbard, even though this is what he describes in his narration. Hubbard, who disdains the

careerists, is himself not an opportunist and also not a complete true believer, vacillating between fearing and revering Harlot, his unconventional, unpredictable mentor and protector, his spiritual father. Hubbard is often aware of the excesses committed by Harlot, Dix Butler, Bill Harvey, and others, but he seems willing to accept them as a necessary part of doing business in the Company. In his descriptions of the CIA's extended campaign to overthrow Fidel Castro, Hubbard is not concerned with the wisdom of the policy, but rather with demonstrating his own machismo by taking part in the Bay of Pigs invasion and other incursions onto Cuban territory. In a fit of rage at losing double agent Chevi Fuertes, he "consecrates" himself to the assassination of Fidel Castro (1229). Years later, Harry Hubbard maintains an attitude of detachment toward his involvement in the campaign against Castro and does not seem to question any aspect of it. Hubbard's faith in the Company and in the country it is meant to serve remains fundamentally unshaken until he comes to think that Harlot may have gone over to the Soviet side. The possibility of such a betrayal by Harlot forces Hubbard to reevaluate everything he thought he knew and believed about his spiritual father, and in a real sense, everything he thought he understood about life.

David Anshen argues persuasively that *Ghost* contains a great hoax, that is, a hoax on the genre of the novel itself (466–70). That is certainly an intriguing possibility. Another possibility is that *Ghost* is Mailer's contribution to the genre of the unfinished novel. As we know, novels may be unfinished for a variety of reasons. The Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov worked on *The Master and Margarita*, [*Master i Margarita*] (1967) from the late 1920s throughout the 1930s, and was still making changes literally on his deathbed but was unable to finish the novel before he died in 1939. The German writer Robert Musil wrote a novel, *The Man Without Qualities* [*Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*] (1930–1942) over twenty years but was also unable to finish it, as he continued to append to it a long series of variations on possible endings. In the case of *Ghost*, as Anshen points out, Norman Mailer gave two different explanations for not finishing the novel. The first, as Anshen writes, was that Mailer believed that "technology has dehumanized espionage" (468). A more interesting explanation Anshen cites may be found in a BBC interview quoted by Michael Glenday in which Mailer said, "the reader having been given the end and the beginning will conceive of 'that middle'"; then Mailer adds that if he does complete the novel, readers will have a chance to "check their version against mine" (135).

I wonder, too, whether there might be a more mundane reason. Perhaps the usually indefatigable Mailer may have said all that he had to say about the characters, and even more so about the events they were involved in. *Ghost* was published in 1991, the same year the Soviet Union ceased to exist as a state. That momentous event had the effect, willy-nilly, of changing our perspectives on the Soviet Union and its history. It also made possible Mailer's visit to Russia during which he conducted extensive interviews with people who had known Lee Harvey Oswald. I would further contend that on a certain level *Oswald's Tale* is the sequel to *Harlot's Ghost*, at least with respect to Mailer's detailed portrait of the Soviet Union of the early 1960s. Whether it is or it is not, the tale of Oswald may have quenched Mailer's appetite for the detritus of the old Soviet state for at least long enough for him to lose interest in *Ghost* as well.

In *Ghost*, the greater philosophical and moral questions about human nature and the human condition are unresolved. That they will remain so is suggested in a letter from Kittredge to Harry Hubbard where she quotes Harlot as saying, "It is painful in the extreme to live with questions rather with answers, but that is the only honorable intellectual course" (1206). I would add, moreover, that from the point of view of the author, beyond intellectual honesty, there is the question of artistic credibility. It is one thing to describe the often bizarre, criminal conduct of the CIA and its agents, but it is quite another thing to claim to have found the answers to life's eternal conundra.

As critics of Mailer we seem intent on pinning him down with respect to his attitude toward the events and characters he describes. In *Ghost*, this may be a fruitless project, because the lens Harry Hubbard employs to see the world, except in certain places, such as the description of Desert Mountain at the beginning of the novel, is not necessarily the lens of Norman Mailer. Together with the incomplete plot, this narrative stance renders any such judgments problematic and speculative.

Having mentioned Desert Mountain, I cannot resist a brief remark about the magnificent lyrical sketch of the island with which Mailer begins the novel. Here his prose rhymes and has rhythm and alliteration, as in "I love the piercing blue of Frenchman's Bay and Blue Hill Bay, and the bottomless blue of the Eastern and Western Way" (4). And he creates a catalogue of flowers that will send all but an expert scurrying to the dictionary: "The old hay-fields smell of redtop and timothy, and wildflowers bloom. The northern

blue violet and the starflower, the wood sorrel and the checkerberry, painted trillium and wild geranium, golden heather and Indian pipe grow in our bogs and fields and on the sunny slopes of mountains in the seams between ledges of rock" (5).

If the reader of *Ghost* begins to flag in the middle of Harry Hubbard's correspondence with Modene Murphy, he or she can slip back to this splendid passage of poetic prose as a quick refresher.

Mailer's last novel with prominent ties to Russian literature is of course *The Castle in the Forest*, which is itself in a way, perhaps at least two ways, also unfinished. Before moving to that discussion, however, I would like to examine Mailer's *The Gospel According to the Son* in relation to Mikhail Bulgakov's portrait of Jesus/Yeshua in his novel *The Master and Margarita*, because these two works resonate with and illuminate each other in some intriguing and important ways.

GETTING THE STORY OF YESHUA STRAIGHT: MAILER AND BULGAKOV³

The first chapter of Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, which was written during the late 1920s and 1930s but only published for the first time in 1967–68, opens with a conversation about Jesus between a Soviet literary bureaucrat named Berlioz and a poet named Bezdomny, whose name translates into English as Homeless. Ivan Bezdomny has written a poem in the anti-religious spirit of the times portraying Jesus in a most negative light. Berlioz, however, claims that he has missed the point, which is that Jesus "never existed at all" (5). While Berlioz continues to develop a series of examples from different world religions to buttress his argument, a strange-looking man comes up to them and butts into their conversation. This man, who carries a walking stick with a black knob in the shape of a poodle, turns out to be, as we learn later in the novel, someone named Woland, who is Bulgakov's version of a modern Mephistopheles in Moscow. (The name Woland is almost certainly derived from the demon in German folklore called Wieland, who was responsible for putting the fetters on people in Hell.) For all of his supposed erudition, Berlioz does not recognize who Woland is, and neither does the less well-read poet Bezdomny. As a conclusion to the discussion about Jesus, Woland finally pronounces that, "no points of view are necessary. He simply existed, and that's all there is to it" (12).

For his part, Mailer, from all appearances, agrees with Bulgakov's character Woland, because Mailer has written a novel called *The Gospel According*

to *the Son* (1997) from the first person point of view of Jesus himself. Since both authors affirm that this Jesus did exist, the question becomes, what sort of person, man, or god do these two authors portray him as. (I will refer to Jesus mainly by his Aramaic name, Yeshua, since this is what Mailer and Bulgakov also do for the most part in their novels.)

I should say early on that Norman Mailer was not familiar with Bulgakov's novel when he wrote *The Gospel According to the Son*.⁴ So I am not talking here about influence. Rather, I am interested in how these two versions of the Yeshua story intersect, contradict, and mutually illuminate each other. I am also interested in how these stories shed light on what I am calling the Urtext—Your text/Our Text of the story. Here I can not promise to perform any tricks in the style of Stanley Fish, who is proud of his ability to make texts disappear throughout his *Is There a Text in This Class?* On the contrary, this text/story, which has four biblical versions and several apocryphal ones, which Bulgakov was familiar with, seems to me to be pretty strong evidence of the persistence of certain texts rather than their disappearance. It seems to me that the persistence of the story of Yeshua and his friends—more on them later—is certainly an affirmation of the validity of certain branches of reader response-reading theory that maintain that the real story is one we construct, destruct, and/or reconstruct for ourselves from the Urtext—hence my little formulation Urtext → Your Text/Our Text. Finally, I would also like to speculate on what these two tales of Yeshua tell us about the ways in which modern writers constantly retell “sacred texts”; are they desacralizing them or are they resacralizing them to suit their own purposes?

Since both Mailer and Bulgakov undertake to get the story of Yeshua straight, it seems that they must believe someone before them got the story wrong. And this is indeed the case, and what is more, they do not hesitate to identify the principal culprit. In the second chapter of the *Master and Margarita* Bulgakov raises this very issue in an interview between Yeshua and Pontius Pilate. When Pontius Pilate asks Yeshua whether he really did advocate destroying the temple, as had been reported, here is what Yeshua says: “These good people haven’t learned anything and they have mixed up everything that I have said. In general I’m beginning to fear that this mix-up will last for a very long time. And it is all because he [Levi Matvei/Matthew Levi] writes down what I say incorrectly” (16). Yeshua goes on to say that, “[Mathew] walks and walks alone with a goatskin parchment and writes unceasingly. But once I took a look at this parchment and was aghast. Abso-

lutely nothing that was written down there did I ever say. I begged him, 'For God's sake burn your parchment!' But he tore it out of my hands and ran away" (16).

Mailer's Son is just as skeptical about what his "scribes," as he calls them, and in particular Mathew, are writing down about his sayings. He says that "They had me saying all manner of things, and some were the opposite of others. Matthew put so many sayings together; indeed, that he might as well have had me not ceasing to speak for a day and a night, and speaking out of two mouths that did not listen to each other" (111).

Thus, for both Mailer and Bulgakov, Matthew turns out to be the perfect whipping boy for motivating their own versions of the Yeshua story. Bulgakov goes even further in developing Mathew, not just as someone who always gets the story wrong, but as a naïve but well meaning "goodie two shoes" who can't seem to do anything right. For example, when Yeshua is on the way to being crucified, Matthew runs off to get a knife with which to kill Yeshua and thus spare him the ordeal of crucifixion, but he arrives too late.

Bulgakov's Matthew is also, as new converts often are, a literal believer, a kind of pre-fundamentalist. At the execution of Yeshua, Matthew demands that God send a miracle to put Yeshua out of his misery after more than four hours on his post. When the miracle does not come, Mathew curses God, calls him deaf and says, "You are a god of evil" (149). However, when a thunderstorm arrives soon after, Levi regrets that he was too hasty with his curses and now believes that God will no longer listen to him.

Let me now return to Yeshua and Pilate, for their interactions are crucial to *The Master and Margarita* and are also very important to *Gospel*. Pilate figures importantly in both works, as one would expect, and he is also portrayed as highly intelligent by both authors. In Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, Yeshua is a philosopher who Pilate has whipped for constantly referring to him, not by his title, Hegemon, but as "good man." Yeshua does this because it is his habit to call everyone, including the brutal Roman centurion with the nickname of Mark the Rat Killer—he is the one who gives him a mild whipping—a "good man." Pilate refers to Yeshua alternately as a vagrant philosopher, a holy fool who is insane, deranged, or mentally ill.

In Mailer's *Gospel*, Pilate also appears in the role of philosopher, when he says, "What is truth? Where there is truth, there will be no peace. Where peace abides, you will find no truth" (219). And at the very end of *Gospel*, Yeshua recalls these words of Pilate and concludes that since "in peace there

was no truth, and in truth, no peace. For that reason I do not bring peace but a sword. I would wage war on all that makes less that we ought to be, less generous" (241). Mailer's use of Pilate as a motivator of Yeshua's own philosophy is as far as I know an innovation in his retelling of the story of Yeshua and Pilate. Furthermore, Yeshua's employment of Pilate as a source of wisdom would probably appear to be blasphemous to some. For Mailer, however, the notion that good and evil, as well as their exponents, may be intertwined in an intricate nexus that is difficult or impossible for us to untangle, is virtually an article of faith, one that appears early in *Gospel*, when Yeshua wonders whether the Devil may also be capable of good deeds (15).

One of the most problematic and controversial aspects of Bulgakov's *Master* is his depiction of Pilate's guilt for his part in the crucifixion of Yeshua and his eventual release from that guilt. This question is a vexed one for a number of reasons. Despite his considerable temporal power, Pilate's options in this matter of executing Yeshua were greatly proscribed by local politics and custom. We know that his initial ruling—forgive my own synthetic paraphrase—"I see no guilt in this man" eventually yielded—here again my own synoptic version—to a combination of pressures from the Sanhedrin and/or local popular opinion. One of Bulgakov's innovations in his version of the story is, as just noted, to portray Pilate as having suffered great pangs of guilt over nearly two millennia for having lacked the courage to stop the execution of an obviously innocent man. What is more, during all of this time Bulgakov's Pilate wanted to talk again with that eccentric philosopher to whose execution he had acceded.

The most controversial part of Bulgakov's story of Yeshua and Pilate takes place near the end of the novel, when Pilate is freed from his centuries' long torment and allowed to have his long desired conversation with Yeshua in the light of the moon. Virtually all critics view this passage to mean that Pilate is ultimately rewarded with light, although I would point out that moonlight is far more ambiguous than its daytime counterpart. In any case, the notion that Pilate should receive any release or reward at all is problematic because, as Gary Rosenshield writes, "Pilate himself recognizes that he deserves his reputation as a terrible monster among the Jews" (198)—whatever guilt he may have experienced for however long.

Although I find Bulgakov's attribution of a guilty conscience to Pilate an original twist on the story of Yeshua and Pilate, I doubt that it comports with the historical Pilate. In this regard I find that Norman Mailer's version of the

story more persuasive, for Mailer depicts Pilate as a corrupt bribe taker who makes a deal with the Sanhedrin to allow Yeshua's execution for considerable personal gain. When one takes into account what we know about how business was done in the Roman Empire, Mailer's insight seems more than plausible.

One of the more intriguing characters on the Jerusalem scene in the time of Yeshua was his erstwhile friend Judas/Yehudah. Bulgakov, who is perhaps most inventive in his portrayals of Pilate and Woland, leaves us with a fairly standard portrait of Yehudah, although he does give the tale a couple of twists. The first of these is that a young woman named Niza is described as betraying Yehudah, who has come down to us as the archetypal betrayer. Also, Yehudah is executed by order of Pilate, who tells the head of the secret police, Aphranus, that he has a premonition that Yehudah will be executed (stabbed to death) the night of their meeting, and that the deed will be carried out by one of Yeshua's followers; the money he was to be paid will be returned to Caiaphus. When Aphranus wonders that all this can be accomplished in the short time of one night, Pilate insists that it can and that his intuition, which has never been wrong, tells him Yehudah will be executed (262–3). Thus does Pilate, in the best mafia or KGB style, insure that Yehudah will pay the ultimate penalty for what Pilate calls his “monstrous betrayal” (262).

In *Gospel*, Judas receives an entirely different treatment. Here Yeshua is wholly sympathetic with Judas, because he loved him and also because his suffering would be greater even than his own. In Mailer's version of the story, Yeshua says, “No matter that Judas had betrayed me; he had also warned me” (214). Furthermore, Yeshua believes that Judas was the one among his disciples who knew most about the deals between Pilate and the local priests, especially Caiaphas, who together with Pilate kept order in Jerusalem. Part of this arrangement included Pilate receiving gold from the Temple in secret. Yeshua says that Judas was not happy about these deals and that he was dissatisfied with him (Yeshua), because he (Judas) wanted to revolt against Roman rule. Finally, in *Gospel's* version of the story, Judas gave back the silver coins and hanged himself (217).

Leaving Pilate aside at least for the moment, let us turn again to our hero, Yeshua. And when we think of Yeshua, we cannot but help thinking of miracles. The question of how both authors treat miracles is particularly tricky, if only because modern readers may or may not be amenable to believing in

such miracles. Moreover, both authors stress the human aspects of Yeshua over the divine, or ostensibly divine ones. For the most part, Mailer's Yeshua downplays the more exaggerated versions of his miraculous performances, as for example when he gives a detailed explanation of how he fed the people in the wilderness by cutting up the bread and fish into small pieces. He says that "this story was much exaggerated by Mark and Matthew and Luke. No angel appeared in the sky, nor did the manna that God gave to Moses appear" (116). From a strictly realistic point of view, there is another rather large miracle hidden here—actually it is in plain sight. And that is that Yeshua, in his post-mortal guise of course, has the privilege most historical figures do not get to enjoy, which is to be able to answer one's chroniclers even after one's own death.

But there are numerous miracles in *Gospel* that, unlike the story about the bread and the fish, are not rationalized. Many of these have to do with Yeshua's power to heal the sick and, most dramatically, in the case of Lazarus, raising the dead. In this instance, Yeshua declares, "I had the power to raise a man who had begun to rot" (144). Here I would like to note briefly that Tolstoy would have scorned both Bulgakov's and Mailer's portrayals of Yeshua, for in his *The Four Gospels Harmonized and Translated* (published first in 1902 in Russian and in English translation in 1904) he rigorously rejects any intimations of the miraculous in all of the gospel stories, including the accounts of the birth of Christ, the business with the bread and fish in the wilderness, and the "raising" of Lazarus.

In Mailer's *Gospel*, Yeshua is uneasy with his ability to perform miracles; he is sometimes puzzled, even abashed at his talent. At one point, in speaking with a wise elder about his power to work miracles, Yeshua wonders whether the Devil also might not be able to use his power to do good (15). This thought forms an interesting intersection with Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, where the notion of the devil performing good deeds is given an explicitly Faustian character. In fact, the epigraph to the novel is from Goethe's *Faust*, and here is how it reads: "I am part of that power that forever wills evil and forever works good." This notion is not developed in *Gospel*, however, where Mailer is more concerned with Yeshua's battle with the Devil, who he believes is constantly trying to outsmart him. Mailer's portrayal of Yeshua struggling to understand who he is and what his role in life should be gives *Gospel* the decided flavor of a *Bildungsroman*, whereas in Bulgakov's *Master* we encounter Yeshua only in his last days.

Bulgakov, who in other places in *Master* and elsewhere often deals in the fantastic and the supernatural, is much more measured in his treatment of Yeshua and the miraculous. There is one place, though, where Yeshua demonstrates powers that appear to be, if not strictly divine, well beyond the capability of most mere mortals. This takes place in his interview with Pilate, when he figures out that Pilate is suffering from a migraine headache. Yeshua says to Pilate, “your head aches, and it aches so badly that you’re thinking faintheartedly about death But your torments will soon end, and your headache will pass” (17). Shortly thereafter he tells him that his headache is over and that he should go for a walk in the gardens on Mount Eleon (18). As we see here, Bulgakov’s Yeshua also has the power to heal, just as does Mailer’s. But Bulgakov’s Yeshua is also greatly concerned with his own situation, which he sees as increasingly tenuous. This is shown graphically when he asks Pilate, “Couldn’t you let me go, Hegemon?” asked the prisoner suddenly, and his voice became anxious. “I can see that they want to kill me” (23).

Because Norman Mailer (re)tells the story of Yeshua in the time of Yeshua and from the point of view of Yeshua—and, by the way, this narrative device in itself is, as far as I am aware, an original gambit on his part that gives his version of the story a special character—he does not have the liberty Bulgakov takes to embody the Devil in a Mephistophelian guise and must deal with the Devil directly. Whereas Bulgakov’s Devil in the form of Woland tests Muscovites of the 1930s with various temptations, especially money, the testing and contesting in Mailer’s *Gospel* is between Yeshua and the Devil, head on, so to speak. One might even say that Mailer sees the battle between Good and Evil and the battle between God and the Devil not in Goethian-Faustian terms but in old-fashioned biblical terms. Moreover, Mailer conceives of modern history as a battle between God and the Devil, as he makes clear in *The Castle in the Forest*.

At the end of *Gospel*, Mailer, by way of the words of the Son, gives a laconic, and I would claim powerful, sweeping summary of history since the time of Yeshua that begins with a reference to the original rift between Christians and Jews over exactly who he was and moves forward to virtually the present day. Using the Son as his mouthpiece, Mailer also remarks on how rich and pious are many Christians, “who are often greater in their hypocrisy than those who condemned me.” Yeshua is also critical of the ostentation of St. Peter’s in Rome, where there is more gold than anywhere in the world (239).

Yeshua says at the end of *Gospel* that he comes with a sword, but this is no conventional battle sword, but rather the Son's sword is designed to "wage war on all that makes us less than we ought to be, less generous" (219). Mailer's Son then concludes that it is not love "that will take us to our good end, but is instead the reward we receive at the end of the hard road that is our life and the days of our life" (242). Whatever version of the story we may or may not subscribe to, I think we can safely conclude here that this is Mailer's version, this is his benediction on the story of Yeshua.

Contemporary young Russian readers of Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* appear to be captivated by a story that contains much magic and fantasy and some have even made a small cult of the novel, as is evident from the graffiti that cover the stairway of Bulgakov's apartment in Moscow. One wonders, though, whether they understand how profoundly moral a writer is Bulgakov who, like Mailer, wants to set the record straight: there was in fact this Jesus person, about that there can be no doubt. This statement of belief, we should remember, flew in the face of official Soviet dogma at the time Bulgakov wrote the novel, since the novel is set in an environment in which a militant Atheism is the official doctrine of the Soviet state. I find it ironic, particularly in connection with this discussion, that just as in the early stages of Christianity, many Romans converted to Christianity in order to advance their careers, so did many Soviets in the 1920s and 1930s advertise their adherence to atheism—and thereby, of course, renounce any religious beliefs—in order to move up the professional or bureaucratic ladders.

Perhaps even more interesting is the possibility that the character of Yeshua, or even the philosophy of Yeshua, is not the main point at all. The main point in both novels appears to be the authors' determination to argue their own truths about the nature of life and the struggle between the forces of good and evil, god and the devil.

I asked earlier whether our authors are desacralizing or resacralizing the "sacred text(s)." At the end of *Gospel* I would have to conclude that Mailer is resacralizing the text/story, but he is renarrating it in order to set a few things straight about the meaning of good and evil, peace and truth, and love and life.

In this respect, Norman Mailer shows once again that he is in fact a writer in the Russian tradition of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. He attacks the largest questions of life with bold narrative stratagems, such as a first person narrative from the point of view of Yeshua, or a story about Hitler from the

point of view of one of his henchman. Just as did Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, both Bulgakov and Mailer take on the *Bible* and History (Bulgakov also incorporates the Faust Legend for good measure) with confidence that they can interpret these most controversial and complicated texts for us.

HOW ANNA AND IVAN GOT INTO THE CASTLE⁵

I have some questions about Chapter VIII, "The Coronation of Nicholas II," in Mailer's *Castle*: is it just an entertaining digression that adds a little royal Russian spice to an otherwise plebian set of characters, or is it an integral, perhaps even crucial part of the novel? Furthermore, is this chapter meant to point to something much larger on the same subject? The narrator of *Castle*, the ever devious and dissembling Dieter, whose pedigree includes at a minimum Laurence Sterne, Nikolai Gogol, and Dostoevsky, claims that his participation in the events surrounding the Coronation were crucial to his development as a "high devil," while at the same time inviting us to skip the chapter altogether. Dieter then throws in the teaser that Russia in 1895 is where and when he learned how to manipulate the will of the people and that "I also learned a good deal about God's strengths and His increasing weaknesses." More specifically, he had learned "that God would not be equipped to punish" [Hitler] for activating the gas chambers in the concentration camps (213). Shifting gears again, narrator Dieter says, "If there are readers who still will say, 'I would rather go on with what is happening in Hafeld,' I have a reply. 'That is your right,' ... just turn to page 261. Adolf Hitler's story will pick up again right there" (213–14). In other words, I dare you to skip the scintillating story I am about treat you with.

Without going into detail about the interesting loop Dieter's patrimony traces from English literature to Russian literature and finally to American literature, let me say that this Sternian, Gogolian, and Dostoevskian heritage gives Mailer a tremendously flexible and versatile narrative stance that enables him, as does Gogol's narrator in "The Overcoat," to know all kinds of details and minutiae about large and small events and also to claim no knowledge whatsoever about others. There are also many instances of *praeteritio*, in which Dieter says that he will not, for example, describe the feast Nicky and Alix (Nicholas and Alexandra) partook of at their coronation and then proceeds not only to describe the menu in detail but also the complexities of the social relations involved (237–38). I would even say that Mailer absolutely revels in his use of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novelis-

tic narrative techniques, as is evident in Dieter's frequent motivation of his ability to know certain things and not know others—depending on whether he is able to penetrate the crowd of Cudgels, that is the angels who surround Nicky and Alix, as he calls Tsar Nicholas II and Tsaritsa Alexandra most but not all of the time.

For all of Dieter's diversionary tactics, the voice of the Master-Author/Narrator in the Coronation Chapter is clearly discernible. I say this because throughout the Coronation Chapter Mailer develops his central theme of the battle between the God and the Devil—one might argue the central theme not just of *Castle* but of his work in its entirety—here in the guise of the Maestro and the Dummkopf, in as thorough and graphic a manner as anywhere else in his fiction. In *Castle*, as elsewhere, it appears that the Dummkopf, for all of his good will and noble efforts, is losing to the Maestro, who seems able to outsmart, outwit, and out-trick his erstwhile rival. I say erstwhile, because in the Coronation Chapter, and even more so in the epilogue to *Castle*, Mailer suggests that the Dummkopf and the Maestro may actually be part of the same team, rather than the rivals they are usually understood to be.

The Coronation Chapter might well be called the Russian Chapter, as it displays both Mailer's fascination with Russia and his considerable grounding in Russian literature. In *Castle*, Mailer lavishes the extensive detail we find in so much of his work, whether it be documentary or fictional, or one of his special cocktails combining both, on his description of the characters and events connected with the Coronation of Nicholas II. The bibliography of *Castle* contains fifteen works with a Russian referent, thirteen of which are historical in nature, and two of which, *Anna Karenina* and "The Death of Ivan Ilych" by Tolstoy, are of course fictional. Mailer is obviously and greatly intrigued by the figure of Rasputin, to whom are devoted fully five separate works in the bibliography to *Castle*, not counting the others in which he is treated as well. Excerpts from the correspondence between Nicky and Alix are one of Dieter's principal sources of information about their respective personalities and their relationship with each other. Throughout this chapter and throughout *Castle*, Mailer is using historical exactitude in the service of fictional verisimilitude.

Tolstoy, who is a frequent presence in Mailer's work, plays a pivotal role in the Coronation Chapter where there is an explicit reference to Tolstoy in Dieter's characterization of Russian peasants. As often happens with Dieter,

this description is ambivalent and self-contradictory in the extreme. Claiming that he respects Russian peasants, Dieter says they look old before their time, but are nonetheless as strong as draft animals and have the patience of cattle. He finds them "Poor, ugly, big, strong, dumb men with their plain, sturdy, and often misshapen wives might be mean, small-minded, ignorant, bewildered, even stupefied, but all that could amount to no more than the protective wax over fine jelly in a jar. Beneath their torpor, I could sense a capacity to be strong, wise, generous, fair, loyal, even understanding, or so, at least had Tolstoy and Dostoevsky harangued their readers" (240). Finally, Dieter sees the possible future genius of Russian peasants as a threat, since, as he puts it, "our job is to reduce human possibilities" (240). Almost no discussion of Russian peasants is complete without some reference to Tolstoy, but the addition of Dostoevsky here is somewhat puzzling. Is it a false lead, which was a frequent tactic of Dostoevsky himself, or is Dieter perhaps just showing off his erudition? It is not that Dostoevsky was without sympathy for peasants, it is just that this is a topic about which one might say Tolstoy really did harangue us, but Dostoevsky did not.

Both *Anna Karenina* and "The Death of Ivan Ilych" contain some of the most important and telling portraits of the Russian peasant in all of Tolstoy's work. In *Anna* the peasant Theodore, or Fedor in Russian, has just the sort of straightforward, intuitive approach to life that Tolstoy's hero Levin, who says that he doubts everything, envies and would like to emulate. And in "Ivan Ilych" the peasant Gerasim is the only one who deals naturally and normally with Ivan's slow, grim death. Of course no one can put a final word on *Anna Karenina*, but there is one more thing that should be noted here. *Anna Karenina* is, in a fundamental sense, a model for so much of what Mailer writes in general, and specifically in *Castle*, for *Anna* is a virtual template of not just the Tolstoyan novel but of the Russian novel going back to Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* in that it combines several genres under the cover of one book. These include the family chronicle, a novel of psychological realism, elements of an historical novel, a novel of history itself (based on the burning questions of the day), a philosophical novel, and even a Romance, if only in parodic form. My claim is that all of these genres and all of these features are also prominent in *Castle*. It is my contention that the reason, or at least one of the main reasons, that Mailer is so attracted to *Anna* and *Ivan*, and by Tolstoy's works in the overall, is that in them Tolstoy addresses the great moral and philosophical questions directly, ear-

nestly, and often with a didactic edge—just what Mailer does in his own novels.

It remains to be decided whether the Coronation Chapter is just a digression, and whether it is or it is not, why Mailer spends so much time on the Coronation of Nicholas II, alias Nicky. In the first part of the Coronation Chapter, Dieter goes to great lengths to set out the folly of the Dummkopf's having staked so much on Russia and on Nicky and Alix. Russia herself is a particularly problematic project, because, as Dieter puts it, "this was an amazing decision. To depend on Russia—so invested with corruption. So teeming with injustice. It was what we looked to find. Injustice was a yeast to inspire hatred, envy, and the loss of love" (215). Dieter says that one of the main benefits of his participation in the Coronation of Nicholas II is that he "learned how to manipulate the will of the people." He also "learned a good deal about God's strengths and His increasing weaknesses," including especially His inability to prevent the catastrophe of the gas chambers used in the holocaust (213). Indeed, throughout the Coronation Chapter, Dieter is repeating and sometimes recasting the fear that Rojack and Cherry express in *Dream* that God may be losing the battle with the Devil. Dieter is of course not afraid but rather excited by this prospect. And he is puzzled as to why God would invest so much in Tsar Nicholas and his bride Alix. Dieter ventures that "The DK was no longer in full possession of His Faculties. Could that be true or was it false?" (218).

He then proceeds to test this proposition. The fact that he experiences "uneasiness" when he sees the beauty of nature, such as "a fine field, a rocky crag, peerless sunset ... the bedazzlements of grass when the dew is on the ground" (218) would seem to indicate that the DK has not lost all of his creative powers. Dieter therefore rationalizes that all of this was created long ago, but now "His force might be slackening" and the proof of that is that "humankind had become His least successful Creation?" (218). And thus "were we now awash in the dithering of an old divinity. This Nicky and Alix—they seemed so naïve, so unfitted for any vast project" (218). Certainly the lovey-dovey stuff of the diaries of Nicky and Alix could only convince the cynical Dieter of their *naïvete* and their lack of fitness to rule a country as unruly as Russia.

Dieter is also good at highlighting other qualities of the last Tsar that made him a particularly inept ruler. In one of his speeches, he warns that people should not be "carried away by senseless dreams of taking part in the

business of government Let everyone know that I will retain the principles of autocracy as firmly and unbendingly as my unforgettable late father” (223). Dieter also shows well in a number of places that the indecisive and sentimental Nicky is utterly unlike his late father, Alexander III, and that he is only too aware of his deficiencies that comparison with his father illuminates.

Mailer’s portrait of Nicholas II comports well with the historical and fictional sources with which I am familiar. In *Doctor Zhivago*, for example, Boris Pasternak describes Nicholas as unpretentious, even timid, shy, and irresolute, and thus dependent on the guidance of Grand Duke Mikhail, when he is about to address his troops. Nicholas is unable to utter grandiloquent words about my people this and my people that, because to do so would have been both out of character and un-Russian. But Pasternak’s narrator wonders that a man so apparently mild mannered could also be an executioner (120). In *Castle*, there are hints of a darker, more brutal side to Nicky’s character, but there is nothing quite as direct as this. In *Castle*, Nicholas gets angry with his people, especially in connection with the events at *Khodynskoe pole*, but even then he also blames the lack of security and even himself for the calamity—what he calls the sin—that took place there. In *Castle*, rather, the sense of impending doom both Nicky and Alix experience is developed throughout the Coronation Chapter. This, too, comports well with the histories of this ill-fated couple as I know them.

The disaster of Khodynka is the central event of the Coronation Chapter and it is suffused with the spirit of Tolstoy. This is the Peasant Festival, an event that was staged for the people, one intended to entertain and reward them for their loyalty to the crown. Dieter is proud to inform us that his plan to attack at Khodynka (and attack at the Coronation itself) turned out to be the correct one from the point of view of the Maestro’s team, as around three thousand people perished in the crush that ensued there after the crowd stormed the stalls with the beer and the goods that were intended for them. For his part, Mailer indicates that *Khodynskoe pole*, that is Khodynsky Field, was a principal site in the battle between the Dummkopf and the Maestro, and he does so in a thoroughly Tolstoyan fashion. There are two passages that are particularly noteworthy in this connection. The first is the one in the morgue, where many of the dead celebrants have been taken, when two corpses “rise up from a comatose state in unison and even cried out in unison” (248). Shortly after, we witness two more returns from apparent death.

In the first, when a man regains consciousness, his wife is ecstatic and cries out twice, "God is here!" In the second, when the family patriarch opens his eyes, his wife cries out, "the devil sent you back, you monster!" (249).

These ironic reversals of the expected are not just in the spirit of Tolstoy, they are virtually the same technique Tolstoy employed from his earliest to his latest works. Moreover, they form another part of the definite Tolstoyan subtext that runs throughout the Coronation Chapter. An example from Tolstoy's Sevastopol stories illustrates Tolstoy's method well. In "Sevastopol in May," 1855, a shell falls near Praskukhin and Mikhailov and the former thinks, "Thank God, I'm only contused" (242). It turns out that "he had been killed on the spot by a shell splinter that had struck him in the middle of the chest" (243). Meanwhile, when the shell explodes, Mikhailov thinks to himself, "It's all over!" What happened, however, is that "he had received a slight head wound from a flying stone" (244). If there is a difference between Mailer's and Tolstoy's approaches, I believe that we may conclude that Mailer's is the more humorous of the two. Nevertheless, Mailer's juxtaposition of the wife who cries out to God in thanks with the wife who curses the Devil in anger is also very like Tolstoy in that he wants to make doubly sure, absolutely sure, that we his readers get the point he is making—which is that God and the Devil had an equal part in the catastrophe of Khodynka.

The Coronation Chapter shows, however, that this is not simply a one-on-one battle, as it is often thought, since as Dieter says, "there is a labyrinth of relations, after all, between the Maestro and the Dummkopf. I could list an endless register of the compromises, brutalities, games, and deceptions on both sides" (233–34). With specific reference to the ceremony, Dieter says, ambiguously, "the Maestro took pride in smuggling his wares into God's gifts" (234). Does he mean that the Maestro, too, was responsible for some of the glory of the ceremony, or is this a clever restatement of the Adam and Eve and the Apple theme?

Arguing for the centrality of the Coronation Chapter, I believe that in a very important sense this chapter is a prelude to the Epilogue to *Castle*, in which Dieter tells us about his betrayal of the Maestro and his demotion, and wonders whether the Maestro might be just another minion of a greater Satan. He also asks whether "there is a devil who will not work both sides of the street" (467).

This, too, is another favorite Mailer motif, which in *Castle* and the Coronation Chapter is connected with and helps to explain the numerous bib-

liographic references to Rasputin, who receives only brief but significant mention. At the end of the chapter Dieter says that he returned to Russia in 1908 until the murder of Rasputin eight years later—"that incomparable Rasputin, a most exceptional talent. He was able to work in the closest union with me, but did insist upon continuing as well in the service of an astute and elevated Cudgel. What wars we had over Rasputin and the exceptional ins and outs of his soul" (257).

Here, then, is why Rasputin is so attractive to Mailer as a character, because he is the embodiment of the devil who is good at working both sides of the street. Moreover, I believe that Rasputin is a model for Dieter himself, who by the end of *Castle* begins to reveal his own ability to operate in the same manner. Dieter's lyrical moments, such as the one in the Coronation Chapter where he describes the beauties of nature while pretending not to like them are an indication of his own dual nature, which like Rasputin contains both negatively and positively charged elements.

By the time that Dieter says in reference to his second trip to Russia from 1908 to 1916, "I may yet look to portray these exceptional events, but that is not for this book" (257) at the end of the Coronation Chapter, we are more than prepared to believe that is in fact the intention not just of the author's devilish persona/impersonator, but of Mailer himself. Beyond Mailer's enduring and powerful engagement with many things Russian, I think there is an inescapable logic for this projected return. It is that just as he goes into such great depth and detail to reveal the fountains of evil in Hitler as a youth in order to uncover what he considers the greatest evil of the twentieth century (that is, Hitler's Nazi Germany), Mailer must believe that in order to get to the bottom of what happened in the twentieth century he must deal with that century's other most problematic Great Power, the Soviet Union. And in order to do that he must, as Solzhenitsyn does in his monumental *Red Wheel* series, go back to the source, the beginnings of the formation of that system. And where better to begin than with the coronation of the last Tsar and the rest of the pre-revolutionary period? In other words, if one wants to get at the roots of good and evil in the twentieth century, as Mailer surely does, it is not enough to examine them in connection with the Third Reich alone. One must also discover them in the origins of the first and only Reich of the now former Soviet Union.

I claimed earlier that *Castle* contains possibly two unfinished novels. The first is obviously the unfinished story of Hitler's life, and the second, as we

see here, is the story of Russia. It is of course a great shame that this project was never completed, so we will have to be content with the very rich consolation prize that is the Coronation Chapter of *The Castle in the Forest*.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS AND FINAL THOUGHTS

There are, without doubt, many more lines along which one might study Mailer's relationship with Russian literature, one of which I have noted in passing, and that is the connection between Mailer and Solzhenitsyn, whose work is also significantly indebted to Tolstoy. Both Mailer and Solzhenitsyn recreate history in fictional form through a combination of documentary material and artistic intuition. In at least one instance, that is the correspondence between Nicholas II and Alexandra. They are using the very same documents, which are in English, so that, ironically, Mailer can use them without need of translation, whereas Solzhenitsyn has to translate them into Russian, as he does in *October 1916* [*Oktiabr' 1916*], 1984, of the *Red Wheel* cycle. In this work, Solzhenitsyn's portraits of Alexandra and Rasputin are significantly different from Mailer's. Solzhenitsyn shows how greatly Alexandra relied on and believed in Rasputin's guidance and how she worked hard to convince Nicholas of the correctness of the Siberian priest's advice. In Solzhenitsyn's depiction of her, Alexandra, for all of her royal arrogance and pigheadedness (which Mailer also portrays), had a large streak of benevolence, and she worked tirelessly in the hospitals caring for the wounded in World War I.

With respect to Rasputin (although Solzhenitsyn shows what a great liability he was to the royal family and their credibility with the government), in *October 1916* he does not develop the diabolic side of him that so fascinates Mailer and Dieter. Without going into detail, I should add that whereas Mailer concentrates more on Nicholas and Solzhenitsyn devotes more attention to Alexandra, both authors capture well the last tsar's penchant for dithering.

I would like to say a word more about what I believe is Mailer's great virtuosity in creating dynamic and provocative narrative voices and strategies. Certainly, Mailer's range in this regard is immense, consisting as it does of Jesus at one extreme and the ostensible Devil's erstwhile minion at the other. Moreover, as we see so graphically in both *Harlot's Ghost* and *The Castle in the Forest*, Mailer takes advantage of the whole range of rhetorical narrative devices from the eighteenth century to the present day. In some cases, such

as *Harlot's Ghost*, the narrator, Harry Hubbard, may or may not be expressing the views of the author, and it is difficult to determine whether he is or he is not. In other instances, such as *Castle*, the narrator is clearly not the author, but he may be voicing the author's deepest concerns about the complex relationship between God and the Devil. Whereas Tolstoy and Dostoevsky were in their novels masters of the third person narrative stance, Mailer, in the works under discussion here, uses the first-person point of view to its fullest potential. All the same, Mailer, like Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Bulgakov, and Solzhenitsyn faced the challenge of any author with deeply held beliefs of articulating them in a manner that avoids preaching. As with the Russians, Mailer has a battle going on within himself over whether to deliver his message directly and plainly, as he does for the most part at the end of *The Gospel According to the Son*, or whether to let us figure out for ourselves what meanings we might want to attribute such novels as *Harlot's Ghost* and *The Castle in the Forest*. Even if Norman Mailer did not bring all of his Russian projects to completion, I believe that the powerful and extensive discourse he carries on with Russian authors greatly enriches his works.

NOTES

1. See Bakhtin, especially pp. 3–62, for his exposition of the polyphonic novel in Dostoevsky.
2. See Mochulsky (p. 651), who cites Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, Rogozhin in *The Idiot*, Kirilov and Stavrogin in *The Demons*, and Ivan Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov* as characters for whom “everything is permitted.”
3. I gave a talk on this topic at the Norman Mailer Society Conference in October 2007.
4. Mailer told me this in a conversation we had in Tampa in 2006.
5. I read a paper on this subject called “The Coronation Digression—or is it?—in *The Castle in the Forest*” at the Norman Mailer Society's Conference in October 2008.

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