A DIALOGUE ESSAY ON MAILER AND HEMINGWAY

PHILIP BUFITHIS AND KIRK CURNUTT

Mailer and Hemingway—more than other modern American writers—were celebrities. Though hardly a public intellectual like Mailer, Hemingway was the very template for Mailer's macho public image and the one writer who inhabited Mailer's imagination as a looming presence. But what kinship actually exists in their books? Mailer scholar and Hemingway scholar, Philip Bufithis and Kirk Curnutt, answer this question and shed valuable light on both authors.

BUFITHIS: The obvious books to start with are the war novels: *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Naked and the Dead*. To read Hemingway's *Farewell* is to be struck first by the inescapable: its style. Accounting for it is the requirement and pride of every English major—or used to be. Hemingway wrote simply and sparsely to countermand literary rhetoric and the nationalistic language of war. As Frederic Henry says, "I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. . . . I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. . . . Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the number of roads, the names of rivers, the number of regiments and the dates."

From this position on language—deepened by his experience as a newspaper reporter and influenced by the prose of Gertrude Stein and the precepts of Imagism—Hemingway forged a deliberately awkward narrative style

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with a beauty all its own: an art of seeming artlessness. Henry/Hemingway uses simple diction, simple and compound sentences, and repetition. He avoids abstract nouns and scrupulously focuses on the sensate, the concrete, i.e. the physical world, its actions, and human actions. Such attentiveness is like the Buddhist practice of mindfulness: it deflects thought. Thinking for Henry prompts memory, and memory activates the trauma of war. But herein lies a major problem with Hemingway—his narrative language is famously supposed to be truthful and honest; yet in its avoidance of thought, of intellection, at almost every turn it is a language of contrivance, of artificiality. Ultimately it is escapist.

In his continual avoidance of thinking, of ideation, Henry presents a mentality that has little correspondence to actual life because in actual life mentality *thinks.* On those rare occasions when Henry does think, we question his depth and understanding. Here is a passage widely extolled by Hemingway admirers for its disillusioned truth: "If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry." Except for the "strong at the broken places" statement, Henry's apprehension of the human lot is specious, self-deceiving—solipsistic.

Nonetheless, Henry's elegiac evocation of his experience with Catherine Barkley makes *Farewell* one of the most poignant love stories in American literature. And finally to sound one more note of due credit: Hemingway in *Farewell* and elsewhere describes the world with a stark, empiric lyricism unequaled, to my knowledge, in English speaking literature.

Throughout his writing career Mailer was more interested in Hemingway than in any other writer—interested to the point of obsession. Surprisingly, then, we find less of Hemingway's influence on Mailer's war novel than we might expect. In fact, the relationship between *The Naked and the Dead* and *A Farewell to Arms* is somewhat incongruous. *Naked* was published in 1948, nineteen years after *Farewell*, yet in terms of literary derivation *Naked* has the older roots, deriving as it does from the tradition of realism established in the 1830s by the French. *Farewell* derives from Modernism (particularly, as said, from Stein and Imagism), launched in the first decade of the twentieth century, largely by Americans.

The most striking difference between the two novels is scope. Hemingway's art is narrow, selective, subjective. Mailer's art in *Naked* is comprehensive, and he strongly objectifies his material, often with a forthrightness, even a baldness, that makes Hemingway's language by contrast look refined and mannered. As for thinking, almost everyone in Mailer's novel does it, from the least literate of his characters all the way to the ideologue General Cummings. We can imagine Hemingway, dedicated as he was to the purely sensate, reading *Naked* and expecting its characters to disappear at any moment into a puff of thought. Nick Adams in "Big Two-Hearted River" says good writing should be "Not conscience. But peristaltic action." It is as if Freud never existed.

Differences aside, however, Hemingway does exist in the pages of *Naked.* Mailer was twenty-three and twenty-four years old when he wrote his war novel. At such a young age and without any philosophy of life born of substantial experience, Mailer conceived *Naked,* by his own admission, influenced by the master novelists of his time (Dos Passos, Farrell, Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, Wolfe, Malraux). Mailer's admiration of physical courage, an abiding value throughout his work and life, connects to Hemingway. And possibly the darkly fatalistic view of life that permeates *Naked* derives from Hemingway. Certainly it derives from naturalism.

Mailer's title is shorthand for his pessimism. We come naked into the world; we live naked (that is, exposed to the pain and cruelty of existence), and our destiny is death. *Naked*'s undue negativity and rawness are the pitfalls of naturalism. Mailer's characters, despite race and class differences, belong to the same hopeless family, whether as soldiers or in the Time Machine biographies. They are alienated and made small by oppressive circumstances. Life is a gyp and nothing human is sacred. The adolescent fatalism of Mailer and Hemingway casts doubt on the truth and honesty commonly accorded *Naked* and *Farewell.*

Yet there is no denying the importance of Mailer's novel. It is a hammering scrutiny of war and might well be the finest American novel of World War II. Mailer's sharply actualized depiction of combat—its confusion, boredom, fear, violence, and agony—lies at the heart of his achievement.

CURNUTT: Just to elaborate on what separates the books, I might suggest a centripetal/centrifugal metaphor when it comes to appreciating the difference in scope. For Hemingway, the locus of vision was always the

individual, and with that inward-drawing energy came all the pitfalls of the personal: what you call "adolescent fatalism" is in some sense the single soldier's inability to believe in sacrifice for any cause because the meaning of that sacrifice is always defined by the hollow prattle of the politicians. But what remains if there is no index of morality other than one's own "separate" peace? This is where, I think, a bit of solipsism comes into Hemingway's perspective sometimes, as when in the celebrated paragraph when he sees Catherine and his child, the latter already dead and the former about to be: "That was what you did. You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you. Or they killed you gratuitously like Aymo. Or gave you the syphilis like Rinaldi. But they killed you in the end. You could count on that. Stay around and they would kill you." The obvious question such a paragraph poses is: who exactly is *they*? Of course "they" are those naturalistic forces—the bureaucracy of war, the violence of nature—that persecute the "I." At least some of this fixation with the sort of Maginot Line drawn between the "I" and the "them" comes from this rigorous notion of separateness: that to survive one must cut oneself off from others. Even style plays a role in this. The sort of obsessive craftsmanship that leads one to rewrite a paragraph twenty-plus times reflects that self-absorption (no matter how great the paragraph turns out thanks to all that rewriting).

But if Hemingway epitomizes some of the pitfalls of the centripetal, it is pretty clear the same thing can be said of Mailer's centrifugal urge. For starters, it is difficult to pick out a single paragraph in *The Naked and the Dead* that reads as if it was revised two dozen times. (Mailer admits this in the preface to the fiftieth anniversary edition, where he lambastes himself for excessive adjectives—in his younger years, he admits, coffee could never just be coffee; it had to be *scalding*). Style is simply irrelevant here, as if rhythm and polish were somehow fussy in the heat of battle. Naturalists have always had a hard time admitting that they *are* indeed stylists—they're just into the anti-style shtick that insists that rough surfaces are the true reflection of life instead of merely another sort of shade. What do I mean by that? Simply, as *Writing Degree Zero* taught us, anti-style isn't a repudiation of style but merely another variety of it, and one no less susceptible to being as conventionalized as more romantic modes of expression that unleash rather

than deny the poetic and pathetic impulses. (If *fug* isn't a poetic word, I don't know what a poetic word is. It's onomatopoeic.)

But if style doesn't score much concern on the scale of centrifugal interests, what does? As your reference to General Cummings the "ideologue" suggests, it is in the system of war—in the hierarchy in which the lowly average soldier operates. In the "they," too, in other words. So Mailer's approach is to allow us to see more specifically than Hemingway just who exactly kills us in the end, and, in so doing, gives a face to the forces of naturalism. But is a face a person? I think for most readers, General Cummings is a stock character, nowhere near as fascinating as Ahab, with whom he is often compared. He can't be because he represents a position, not a personality. As do the other characters, of course. How many times in war novels have we seen the Hearn character? He's the sort of Billy Budd of military melodrama, as if written for Tom Hanks. Then again, try imagining a war novel *without* a Cummings or Hearn. I'm not sure it can be done, at least in the anti-war tradition. Without characters voicing recognizable ideological stances, there's no debate, and without that, we're left only with the orchestrated encouragement to honor all those abstractions of heroism that *A Farewell to Arms* taught writers and readers to regard warily. That, in a nutshell, is the difference between *The Naked and the Dead* and *Saving Private Ryan*: the absence of a nemesis. But the naturalist approach has its own drawbacks. The big knock on it is that characters lack individuality because they represent ideological positions; that lack makes the fictions less compelling because we can only personalize conflicts through rounded characters. There's a lot of truth in this notion. Try naming the cast of characters of *The 42nd Parallel* without a crib sheet. *The Naked and the Dead* suffers from this, too—and not simply because the Time Machine sections are such an obvious pinch from Dos Passos. It's that at some level we aren't likely to care about these people unless we care about the political positions they represent in the hierarchy. And I would further posit that many readers have a hard time sacrificing their concern for people as people because we're still at heart a humanistic culture when it comes to our art. Hearn undoubtedly comes the closest to serving the function that Henry does for Hemingway—the sacrificial goat—but you can see his fate from several hundred pages away.

A related point of discussion concerns the French source of literary derivation you reference. That line stuck out to me because Hemingway always claimed Stendhal as a source. Among Hemingway folk it's common to cite

The Charterhouse of Parma as a model for *A Farewell to Arms.* We haven't always appreciated what Hemingway himself said about the book—mainly that the Battle of Waterloo was the one useful section in a novel otherwise bloated with superfluous elements (the court politics): "Until I read the *Chartreuse de Parma* by Stendhal I had never read of war as it was except in Tolstoy and the wonderful Waterloo account by Stendhal was an accidental piece in a book that had much dullness." The big question, of course, is how well does this quote apply to *Farewell*? For many readers, the Catherine plot pales in comparison to the retreat at Caporetto. I've always thought that was a bit harsh and reflective more of our post-Vietnam disbelief in the conjoining of love and war. For all the naturalism in Hemingway's second novel, there's a whole lot of romanticism, too. In fact, I would say that the scenes between Henry and Catherine, for me at least, work better than those moments when Hemingway attempts the centrifugal by bringing in ideological shading: the dialogue with Count Greffi, for example, or some of the exchanges with Rinaldi. These strike me as fairly obvious moments when Hemingway was reaching for THE STATEMENT, and in this way these scenes are perhaps comparable to the Hearn/Cummings dialogues in *The Naked and the Dead.* Argue as critics might about whether Catherine is sufficiently real as a woman, I would still prefer more dinners at Biffi's and the Gran Italia, the ironies of love, than the rather obvious (by our standards) discussions of faith with Henry's unit's chaplain.

BUFITHIS: Yes, Mailer in *Naked* is not consecrated to style. As you suggest, naturalist writers think that to be a stylist is to turn their backs on what you call "the true reflection on life." In contrast, Hemingway's writing demonstrates, as you say, "an obsessive craftsmanship." Conceiving of both novelists at the actual task of writing, I see Hemingway effortfully extruding his prose from an imagination devoted to forging a new kind of language born of a new kind of consciousness. I see Mailer adopting the traditional naturalist style and devoting himself to a panoramic project: the portrayal of American society in war. One more point on Hemingway's style. Precious as it seems, there are those moments—and they are marvelous—when the sheer clarity of his style attains what he was relentlessly always after: the disappearance of style. That is, the veil of language dissolves before our eyes and we live the evoked experience.

To answer your question, Kirk, about Stendhal and Hemingway, yes, I

think the battle scenes in *Farewell* (and in Hemingway's war reportage) are akin to Stendhal's treatment of the Battle of Waterloo in *The Charterhouse of Parma*. With matter-of-fact detachment, both novelists present the events of battle as off-handed, seemingly ridiculous, unexpected, and weirdly violent. Two examples: In *Farewell* Bonello's casual, awkward killing of a mutinous sergeant lying face down and wounded by the road. In *Parma* the horse hit by artillery fire struggling to keep up with the other horses in the hussar escort, "its feet caught in its own entrails." And always with both novelists there is the sound of bombardment. Vaguely determinable, it comes from a field or the woods or the mountains or from over the next hill. Of course the battle scenes in *Naked* resemble *Parma*'s Battle of Waterloo (most good war fiction shares a family resemblance), but Hemingway's battle depictions make him a closer cousin to Stendhal than Mailer is. It remains, however, that Hemingway's language—Imagistic, boiled down—operates outside the orthodoxy of Stendhal's realist style.

As for the specious paragraphs we quoted from *Farewell*, they are all the more bothersome for being celebrated. There was a time when they impressed me. I was young. Now I ask from the narrative voice of a novel more comprehension and less affectation. These paragraphs are not isolated examples but are characteristic of an attitudinizing response to life in Hemingway's fiction, non-fiction, and letters. When I think of Jake Barnes, Fredric Henry, Harry Morgan, or Thomas Hudson, of their "grace under pressure" and clipped speech, I imagine them as American literature's answer to Humphrey Bogart. Hemingway's protagonists are so strongly prepossessing that they strike me as quite improbable. I enjoy experiencing them in an escapist way as I dream of conducting myself with their coolness, fortitude, and derring-do.

One way to think about Hemingway positively is to recognize that he was an adventure writer. Of course he was far more, but he was that. Modernist though he was, disdaining idealization, his novels vibrate with "romance" in the chivalric sense of the word. On this score Hemingway's novels contrast interestingly with Mailer's, whose protagonists are so caught up in striving for and against forces within themselves and against institutional/political forces that any adventure they undertake is, relative to Hemingway, somewhat denatured. Except for *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, there is an inwardness and psychological/political weight in Mailer's novels that highlight just how in-the-moment and *plein air* Hemingway's novels are.

The deep structure of Hemingway's vision is the oral tale. The deep structure of Mailer's vision is the vatic voice. Hemingway's vision, however, is darker—indeed tragic. Professor Robert Lucid, co-founder of the Norman Mailer Society, used to say that the Hemingway protagonist is a "fucked duck." He is more valiant than Mailer's protagonists, but by novel's end he is defeated or dead. Not so the Mailer protagonist, at least after *Naked*. He takes his licks, but his inner monitor—depicted often as a noumenal or supernatural force—spurs him onward, and by novel's end he lives to fight another day.

CURNUTT: I agree completely with you about Mailer's panoramic project: it's perhaps something we forget in our present-day preoccupation with multiculturalism that *The Naked and the Dead* was one of the first war novels to delve into the ethnic background of soldiers. It's what makes the troop contingent on Anopopei a fascinating twentieth-century variation on Melville's *Pequod* (with Cummings as the presiding Ahab). Hemingway, unfortunately, tended to employ epithets prejudicially. A reader can examine, for example, the Time Machine section on Gallagher and the inculcation of Boston-Irish bigotry and recognize how Mailer is exploring the sociology of racism. That is an interest totally outside Hemingway's concern. In fact, in rereading *Farewell* I was struck by a sentence I'd rolled over any number of times: shortly before Frederic meets with Count Greffi in Stresa, Catherine refers to her lover as "Othello with his occupation gone," to which Frederic replies, "Othello was a nigger." I suppose one can make all kinds of interpretations about how this is Frederic rejecting the Shakespearian idea of tragedy in the face of war, but that doesn't rationalize the frequency with which white soldiers in WWI complain that the military reduces them to this racialized identity. I think of Thomas Boyd's *Through the Wheat* (1923), when William Hicks complains that digging latrines "ain't fit for a white man." Of course, to criticize Hemingway for this risks punishing him for failing to have our post-Civil Rights racial enlightenment, but it's not as if some of his contemporaries weren't at least *a little* more sensitive to the use of that word. The scene in *Farewell* makes me want to reread the depiction of Caspey in Faulkner's *Sartoris*. How nice if we had a Hemingway character who says something like this: "I don't take nothin' fum no white folks no mo'. War done changed all that. If us cullud folks is good enough ter save France from the Germans, den us is good enough ter have the de same rights

de Germans is. French folks think so, anyhow, and ef America don't, dey's ways of learnin' 'um."

I also love what you say about Hemingway being an adventure writer. That's so true not only of *Farewell* but *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* too, which really has a lot of Hollywood war elements to it: not only a love story (again), but the band of brothers aspect. It seems to have been written with Gary Cooper in mind, even if Hemingway might claim otherwise. I think Mailer *could have* gone this route. Certainly *The Naked and the Dead* suggests it was possible, and your point about *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is excellent. It's stunning that this wasn't a movie long about 1969. It should have been Dennis Hopper's follow-up to *Easy Rider* instead of *The Last Movie*! But maybe one place we see where Mailer *should* have been *more* of an adventure writer is *Of a Fire on the Moon*, where a lot of the drama is given over to teasing out his own metaphors instead of letting the symbolism speak. (I suppose you could say *The Armies of the Night*, too, but since the very concept of protest is a moral idea, he is obligated to reason through it.) Then again, Hemingway outside of fiction had a bad habit of losing his bearings and explicating his conceits ad infinitum—witness *Death in the Afternoon* and even more *Green Hills of Africa.* It might have made an interesting exercise had Hemingway lived into the sixties to see what he could have done with the nonfiction novel. Sometimes I have an image of him rewriting *To Have and Have Not à la The Executioner's Song* and actually coming up with a compelling piece of fiction! In this version, he addresses the thing he dodged in the 1937 version (the Matecumbe hurricane of 1935) and produces a work that indicts capitalist excesses and bureaucratic ineptitude with a combination of action and journalistic research instead of fairly glib proletarian parading, which makes the book feel phony. Say what we will about Mailer's bellicose persona, his editorializing could be very astute when it came to politics. The analysis of both Bush administrations in "How the Wimp Won the War" and *Why Are We at War*? is spot on to me.

And here's another place where perhaps Mailer's intellectualism served him well in a way that Hemingway's "in the moment"-ness couldn't: the historical novel. It's inconceivable that Hemingway could have dropped the Nick Adams/Frederic Henry "grace under pressure" persona long enough to project himself into the Devil's assistant in *The Castle in the Forest*, or even—Lord help us—Jesus himself in *The Gospel According to the Son.* If what I called Mailer's centrifugal force can be thought of as a synoptic reach, he

was leaps and bounds more capable of synthesizing historical forces into a narrative. Can we even imagine Hemingway taking on something with the reach of *Harlot's Ghost*? Only *For Whom* comes anywhere close. Even though Hemingway was more studious than he gets credit for (as the late Michael Reynolds liked to remind people, his library had several thousand volumes when he died), he lacked altitude. We might say he was so busy looking across the river and into the trees that he couldn't see the overall forest.

If there's an area where the two strike me as really poles apart it's in the approach to sex and sexuality. Deep-down, Hemingway was a romantic; what Allen Tate criticized as his "hardboiled sentimentality" (in a review of *The Sun Also Rises*) is accurate. It's unfortunate that so many people ridicule the "earth moved" sleeping bag scene in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*—is it really any worse than Petrarch? But I think what's fascinating about many of Hemingway's male protagonists is that they want to love, and they want to give love, but something prohibits it. For Jake Barnes, it may be a maiming, for Frederic it may be the naturalistic world that always finds a way to kill you, and for Harry Morgan in *To Have* it's the Depression and the government's botched response to it. In most of Hemingway's novels and several stories the love is bottled up; the tragedy is that it's there but can't be expressed.

I'm honestly not sure Mailer cared about love. One of my favorite lines from a 1961 interview: "Q. Why does one feel that love is a dirty word nowadays? A. It's because love, mother and family now belong to the flag and the FBI. . . . I have to tie myself in knots not to use the word *love* when I want to talk about love. But I can't use the word because the moment I say *love* or *God* I'd lose three-quarters of the people who might read me." So that's maybe why we get instead so many of what Elizabeth Hardwick called "callous copulations." It's a fascinating experiment to contrast Hemingway's depiction of sex to some of the more notorious of these moments. Of course, there is a brutal Hemingway who counters the prudishness of his day with the date-rape story "Up in Michigan," which has not only one of the all-time worst puns for a title, but has one of the most ridiculously stilted bits of sexual dialogue: "Oh, it isn't right. Oh, it's so big and it hurts so. You can't. Oh, Jim. Jim. Oh." There are similarly ugly scenes throughout the Hemingway *oeuvre*, not all of which depict the man as the beast: there's a weird moment in *To Have* when Helène Bradley chides the John Dos Passos character, Richard Gordon, for not having the *cojones* to finish their love-making just because her husband has walked in on them. But more often Hemingway

goes to mush. I find the aforementioned sleeping bag scenes in *For Whom* exceptionally tender. The poignancy of Jake and Bret's inability to consummate their love in *The Sun* remains powerful. And at the risk of having my Hemingway credentials revoked, I'll just lay this out as honestly as I can: *The Garden of Eden* at times reads like a Harlequin novel—a good one.

I think that Mary Dearborn is pretty spot on when it comes to Mailer's vision of sex: "[His] instincts are those of a sexual conservative. For all that he advocates sexual liberation and the orgasm, he still believes that the purpose of sex is reproduction, that women's most important role is as a wife and mother. . . . The metaphor in the title of *The Prisoner of Sex* can refer . . . to the prison that those who believe in sexual essentialism make for themselves: if we are bound to our sexual identities, which do not allow us to change or grow (because we are limited by our biology), we are truly limited. In this way, investing sex with extraordinary meaning—positing sex as a mystical union and reproduction as a sacred rite—truly does make us prisoners of sex. It is not an idea that sits very well with Mailer's bastardized existentialism: prisoners of sex, we are never really free."

I suppose we could list a few examples: "The Time of Her Time" in *Advertisements for Myself,* the Fräulein Ruta scene in *An American Dream,* the Night of the Pig orgy in *Ancient Evenings.* What do they all have in common? A lot of aggression and mastery, a lot of homophobia, a lot of the devil, but very little joy. That's not so with Hemingway. I think if he'd had the courage of his androgynous inclinations *The Garden of Eden* could have been a revolutionary book in depicting the potential gender freedom of sex-role switching—even if still posthumously published.

Finally, one more place where the differences outweigh the similarities: celebrity. At the risk of generalizing, Hemingway's decline was due in some measure to the obligation his culture placed on him to authenticate his persona. He did not have the liberty to experiment with identity the way that we in the postmodern age have come to expect. The fracas that surrounded Lillian Ross's 1950 *New Yorker* profile really couldn't happen today—people expect celebrities to undermine their image, to play with or even parody it. At the very least, they're expected to admit the disparity between the public perceptions and their "real" self. But that disparity is only rarely the source of psychic trauma. It's hard to think of a celebrity today to whom what Edmund Wilson said about Hemingway in the thirties applies—that he had become his "own worst character." Mailer was a transitional figure in this.

There's certainly a self-awareness in *Advertisements*, and the theatricality of his public image in the late sixties and early seventies testifies to the canniness of his media manipulation. That element seems to have settled down somewhere around 1976 when he became the Grand Old Man of American Letters, and maybe he was even aware that the persona constructing in public would within a few years become more of a P.R. game than a literary practice. Still, there's nowhere better to see the differences between the conditions Hemingway and Mailer labored under than in *Armies* when Mailer acknowledges he is "expected to serve as a poor man's Papa." It's that self-awareness that Hemingway seemed to lack, in part because to demonstrate it in the thirties meant you contemplated your public image, and even to be caught contemplating it meant you could be accused of falsifying.

BUFITHIS: How sadly unshrewd Hemingway was, as you brilliantly explain, about his macho public image. He derived pleasure and power from it, but it also trapped him and arguably contributed to two somewhat stultified portraits: Harry Morgan and Colonel Cantwell. In contrast, Mailer experimented with his public image, shifting from one role to another: *enfant terrible, bête noire,* politician, male chauvinist, Grand Old Man of American Letters. Whatever his public image at the time, it directly fueled his art. One example: He transforms his drunken and law-breaking behavior in the 1967 March on the Pentagon into *The Armies of the Night*, which won a National Book Award and a Pulitzer.

As for Mailer's intellectualism, it served his non-fiction, but it hobbled his novels. After *The Naked and the Dead*, he couldn't write a novel without relying on an ism. First Marxism, then Hipsterism, which morphed into Manicheism. Mailer scholar Robert Begiebing said, "Mailer is nothing if not a novelist of ideas." Yes, and so his novels are too often philosophical when they should be vibrant with lived experience. A novel at its best is a rendering of life, of the world, animate with imagination, emotion, and articulation. Mailer's ideas ventriloquize his narrators with an obviousness and repetition that belies his reputation as a protean author. His vision is so idea-laden that it pulls us into the author more than it expands outward to illuminate life. The vivid actualization of character depends in large measure on the novelist's capacity for impersonality. Menenhetet I and Menenhetet II (*Ancient Evenings*), Kittredge (*Harlot's Ghost*), Dieter (*The Castle in the*

Forest) are Mailer's ideologic stand-ins. In *An American Dream* almost everyone sounds like a flipped-out Zoroaster.

On the question of love, Hemingway's protagonists give and receive it, but, yes, love is less a part of Mailer's fictional world than "callous copulation." Indeed, TLC is uncommon in his canon. I was struck by the excerpt you quote from a 1961 interview. The words "love," "mother," and "family" might, as Mailer says, "belong to the flag and the FBI," but those words also belong to everyone by virtue of our being human and, like all words, belong in their fullest meaning in novels. Mailer goes on to confess that "the moment I say *love* or *God* I'd lose three-quarters of the people who might read me." A surprising statement from a writer famous for his defiant independence. Whereas Hemingway treats sex as love, Mailer, increasingly after *Barbary Shore* (1951), depicts sex as power and violence. Copulation is the assertion of matchless prowess and the attainment of divine strength. And even when we try to interpret Mailer's treatment of sex as symbolic, it remains unclear just what application that treatment has to actual human experience. Mailer cannot do without sex and violence in his novels. He is wedded to the lurid. Manifestly and fundamentally his fiction since the mid-fifties demonstrates a want of maturity.

Poles apart as our two writers approach to sex is, I am equally fascinated by another polarity: their understanding of the self. Sean O'Faolian said Hemingway was "the only modern writer of real distinction for whom the Hero does in some form still live." Which is to say that Hemingway (after the Nick Adams stories) believed in a brave man-of-action in possession of himself. Not so with Mailer. It is only in the process of being brave that a Mailer protagonist moves toward possession of himself. He forges his identity through trial and error whereas the Hemingway protagonist—even as he moves out into dangerous realms—is self-contained, self-defined.

What Gore Vidal said of Mailer in 1960, though overstated, applies to Mailer's protagonists: "For Mailer does not begin to know what he believes in or what he wants. His drive seems to be toward power of a religion-political kind." Religion, politics, psychology, metaphysics: Mailer's knowledge of life depends on them, but to Hemingway they were bad poetry or, put another way, bad ammunition. Hemingway was not curricular. He was empiric. Concrete. In 1925 he wrote to his father: "You see I'm trying in all my stories to get the feeling of the actual life across—not just to depict life—or criticize it—but to actually make it alive so that when you have to read

something by me you actually experience the thing." When Hemingway wrote about writing he often used the word "knowledge." What he meant was life knowledge, not book knowledge: "If a man is making a story up it will be true in proportion to the amount of knowledge of life that he has and how conscientious he is; so that when he makes something up it is as it would truly be" (*By-Line: Ernest Hemingway)*.

Mailer or Hemingway? The prophet or the adventurer? The prism or the crystal? Each author occupies a permanent and significant place in modern American literature. Knowing that, we do not need to choose.