# RUMORS OF GRACE: GOD-LANGUAGE IN HEMINGWAY AND MAILER

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> This book is fiction. But there is always a chance that such a work of fiction may throw some light on what has been written as fact.
> —Ernest Hemingway *(A Moveable Feast* 230)

> [I]t is the author's contention that good fiction—if the writer can achieve it—is more real, that is, more nourishing to our sense of reality, than non-fiction. . . . novelists have a unique opportunity—they can create superior histories out of an enhancement of the real, the unverified, and the wholly fictional.
> —Norman Mailer (*Harlot's Ghost* 1287–8)

WHAT IS THE RHETORIC OF MODERNISM? Is the Modern novel "the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God" (Lukács 88)? If so, why do religious themes still appear? Are they the Cheshire Cat's grin, nostalgic echoes of a vanished age, cosmic footprints left in the wasteland of Modernity? Or are they rumors of grace? How does God-language function in the work of Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961) and Norman Mailer (1923–2007)?

This issue could be a problem in narrative theory, constructing modernity, contemporary religion, or all three. In any case, why does religion persist? Why is some God-language compatible with Modernity—and some not? I shall first discuss the rhetoric of Modernism, then Modernity and disenchantment, before moving on to my selection of God-language of Hemingway and Mailer. I briefly emphasize the sacred, indeterminacy, and grace.

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**THE RHETORIC OF MODERNISM**

The epigraphs speak of the role of fiction in our lives. For Mailer, paradoxically, good fiction nourishes "our sense of reality." For Hemingway, fiction "may throw some light" on the facts. The strange relationship between fiction and fact seems linked with Modernism—and the problematic nature of "reality." I call this the *rhetoric* of Modernism. But is that rhetoric—seen in the Modern novel—necessarily linked with secularization? Pericles Lewis suggests that it may be the following:

> If the novel is indeed the art form of secularization, "the representative art-form of our age" in Lukács's words, and if modernity is indeed a secular age, then we could expect the modern novel to be doubly secular [Lukács 93]. Many major novels of the early twentieth century do in fact seem to represent a "world that has been abandoned by God," inasmuch as virtually none of their characters expresses any concrete religious faith and no gods intervene in the course of the action. (673)[1]

But does the novel represents a world "abandoned by God"—or is this statement more hyperbole than argument? Either way, how do we explain these vestiges of God-language? Is this merely etymology—like using *Wednesday* without necessarily invoking the god *Woden*? I suggest that God-language has more significance than that. But what is the rhetoric of Modernism? Here are two samples.

We start with Hemingway and *In Our Time* (1925). At the end of chapter two's vignette, we read three sentences: "There was a woman having a kid with a young girl holding a blanket over her and crying. Scared sick looking at it. It rained all through the evacuation" (21). The impact of war, fragmenting of form, juxtaposing of birth and death, distancing of trauma, the phrase *scared sick looking* stripped of its subject, the absence of any clear antecedent to the pronoun *it*, the naturalistic symbol of rain—combine in Hemingway's language. Shaped by modern warfare, in a collage of disturbing images, here is Hemingway's innovative rhetoric. In its way, *In Our Time* is as significant culturally as T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), published three years earlier. Matthew Stewart suggests that this "remains the most insistently experimental of all his books because it is the product of the one

period of his life when he participated intently in a literary scene, and the temper of that milieu was distinctly modernist" (12).

Two decades later, a parallel to Hemingway's rhetoric is Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948). Toward the end of the novel, we find two sentences: "Quite naturally he assumed the point and led the platoon toward the pass. A half hour later, Lieutenant Hearn was killed by a machine-gun bullet which passed through his chest" (602). Like Hemingway, the language is sparse and fragmented, the tone objective. There is human rationality in one sentence and violent, irrational death in the next. Yet, the irrationality of Lt. Hearn's death comes through the exercise of all too rational choices by others—those who designed and manufactured the machine-gun and bullet, the Japanese soldier who fired the fatal shot, and the murderous machinations of Staff Sergeant Croft that led Hearn to that particular point.

The Great War was to be "the war to end all wars." History demonstrated that proposition to be false. World War Two extrapolated dramatically the horrors of 1914–1918, particularly in the Holocaust and Hiroshima. Here is revealed a demonic rationality, applied with supreme efficiency to the killing of human beings—on a scale not before seen. Label it postmodern, post-Christian, or post-human, there is no doubt that the world described by Hemingway had—by the time of Mailer—become *more* irrational, sinister, and far darker. As goes the world, so goes literary form.

These vignettes, a quarter century apart, illustrate the Modernist rhetoric of Hemingway and Mailer. For both authors, they mark a beginning, a revelation, a new Genesis. One thing is clear: unlike the biblical Genesis, there is an absence of traditional concepts of God, a sense of Providence, a rational universe. We have *left* the Garden. Many have written on religious themes in Hemingway and in Mailer: certainly, the themes exist and can be discussed.[2] But I would like to examine the overall *matrix* of Modernity in which those themes are embedded, focusing on the *disenchantment* of the world.

## MODERNITY AND DISENCHANTMENT

Lewis says the modern novel is "doubly secular," representing a world vacated by God (673). The representation is both thematic and formal. Much has been written about the changing status of religion in the era of Modernity—a period, shall we say, from roughly 1900 to the present day—and many

concepts have been used, such as secularization, loss of faith, ironic cultures, cognitive minorities, the disenchantment of the world, the sacred and the profane, and modernist literature as religion substitute. As one might expect, the literature is considerable.[3] After all, Modernity and the disenchantment of the world is a thing of complexity.[4] But it cannot be undone.

For Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud onwards, "disenchanting" the world spelt the end of religion —the "death" of God—a process thought to be inevitable. The journey begins with Martin Luther in 1517, or earlier in Renaissance humanism. The rise of modern science, symbolized by *On the Revolution of the Celestial Spheres* by Copernicus in 1543, is crucial: science advanced as it was able to provide mathematical explanations for phenomena attributed to God or magic. That reality is the heart of disenchantment. Skepticism, a rationalistic response to the Wars of Religion, was also significant. No wonder Popkin says, "Luther had indeed opened a Pandora's box" (15).

During the Enlightenment, the American and French revolutions attacked the Divine Right of Kings. While their respective revolutionary documents retain a "veneer of religion" (Brown 39), this effectively begins the modern secular state. In 1843, Karl Marx, following Feuerbach in arguing that "*Man makes religion*" (243), in memorable phrases described religion as "the heart of a heartless world" and "the opium of the people" (244).[5] After 1917, the Soviet Union mandated the "death" of God. A host of epistemological challenges—Descartes, Hume, Kant, Darwin, Einstein, Heisenberg—obviously contributed to this process we call modernity.

But religion persisted. Partly, this was an aggressive counter-revolution, including Pope Pius IX (1792–1878), with his *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) and Definition of Papal Infallibility (1871), and Protestant fundamentalism, seen in *The Fundamentals* (1910–1915) and proclaiming another form of infallibility—an inerrant text. Within the infallible world of Marxist-Leninism, religion grew, maybe because it was attacked. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Marx's critique of religion has lost much, but not all, of its potency. The secularization thesis requires modification.

An example of such modification is Peter Berger's book, *A Rumor of Angels* (1969). My title alludes to his book, and to a recent usage by Philip Yancey (1997). Berger suggests that there exist certain "signals of transcendence"—such as the human desire for order—that point beyond a purely naturalistic reality (53).[6] However, as Berger recognizes, for most people the

*predominant* reality is still that secular mind-set. Thus, religious language is used by a "cognitive minority" (6).[7] This position is uncomfortable, needing to be buttressed socially and epistemologically. But the position exists.

Today, the relationship between religion and modernity is more nuanced than in the naturalistic Nineteenth Century. We recognize a wide spectrum from faith through doubt to atheism. But at the risk of simplification, there seem to be two main approaches. For conservative Christianity and Judaism, religious commitment may be expressed as a *rejection* of modernity, using an either/or approach to truth. For those with liberal perspectives on Christianity and Judaism, religious commitment may be regarded as *complementary* to modernity, utilizing a both/and approach to truth. That complementary perspective may remind us of wave-particle duality in quantum mechanics. This is not simply a literary trope.[8] In both humanities and physical sciences, there will be no return to rigid determinism.

## GOD-LANGUAGE IN HEMINGWAY: "SCARED STIFF LOOKING AT IT."

It is easy to list God-language in Hemingway: deciding significance is harder. The title of *In Our Time* (1925) came perhaps unconsciously from an English Prayer: "Give us peace in our time, O Lord" (*1928* 31).[9] In this work, however, there is little overt God-language, maybe the awkwardness of Krebs with his mother's sentimentalism in a "A Soldier's Home" (Hemingway, *In Our Time* 76) or the unnamed soldier's fearful bargaining with God in the accompanying vignette (67). Perhaps the final story, "Big Two-Hearted River," with Nick Adams dealing with an indeterminate trauma by returning to Nature, has echoes of Genesis in its simple declarative sentences, "It was a good camp" and "It was a good feeling" (147). The fragment, "Scared stiff looking at it" (21), could be seen as a *signifier* of modernism, much as the final words of Kurtz, "The horror, the horror" (Conrad 178) from *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad's words, Cedric Watts suggests, "serve as a thematic nexus, a climatic but highly ambiguous utterance which sums up, without resolving, several of the paradoxical themes of the tale" (215). A quarter century later, Hemingway's *In Our Time* offers yet another such thematic nexus.

In *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), two themes are balanced. One epigraph, "You are all a lost generation," from Gertrude Stein, suggests that the narrative is a war novel, although the war seems absent. The other epigraph from Ecclesiastes, perhaps the most secular passage in the bible, includes the words, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth

abideth for ever" (*King James Bible*, Ecc. 1.4–7). This theme, the continuation of the earth, is a metonymy for the continuation of humanity. Linda Wagner-Martin suggests this theme "maintains its dominance" (6).[10] Maybe this motif is an attenuated form of providence.

There is a kind of balance in Jake and Brett's conversation following the Romero *debacle*. Brett's decision "not to be a bitch" represents she claims, "sort of what we have instead of God" (Hemingway, *Sun* 249). Jake counters, "Some people have God, quite a lot," but Brett replies, "He never worked very well with me" (249). The famous ending is poised among irony, ambiguity, and pessimism. Partly a verdict on Jake and Brett's tragic relationship, it becomes a larger evaluation of life. With Brett, we like to believe we can have "a damned good time" (251); we hope the world is a place of order. But in answer, the novel offers only indeterminacy: a delicate balance between covert God-language and hard-boiled modernism. We are left with Jake's summary: "Isn't it pretty to think so?" (251).

*A Farewell to Arms* (1929) marks a new skepticism, with Hemingway's famous dismissal of war's high diction as "obscene" (185). It was also a low point for Hemingway, considering his divorce from Hadley in 1927 and his father's suicide in 1928. As Reynolds argues, Hemingway frames the Italian retreat from Caporetto as a *synecdoche* of a larger human defeat (274). This, says Reynolds, was the "final conclusion" of the war generation (282).[11] But what of the priest in *A Farewell to Arms*: is the Abruzzi a kind of sacred space? It might be, but Henry cannot seem to get there. As a modern man, he seems to be "banished" (Civello 78).[12] Heroism still exists, but the irrationality of modern warfare—or the cruelty of Fate—renders it tragically absurd. Toward the end, we read

> 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 afterwards many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills (Hemingway, *Farewell* 249).

There is a foreshadowing of Catherine's death, but the words have more resonance as a statement on human destiny. Yes, there may be a rumor of grace in the phrase, "many are strong at the broken places," but the pervasive tone

is bleak. There seems an *absence* of God-language, providence, any orderly universe. So, have we not left the Garden for the wasteland?

Indeed we have. But this diction is *still* theological language. Mankind's estrangement from the Garden may be part of Modernism, but it is at the heart of the biblical story—and another element in *disenchantment.* In Genesis, we read that "the LORD God drove [Adam] out of the garden of Eden" (*NEB*, Gen. 3.23), that "Cain went out from the LORD's presence" (*NEB*, Gen. 4.16), becoming a "vagrant and a wanderer on earth" (*NEB*, Gen. 4.12). Here is *alienation*—being a stranger, a fugitive. Linked with Hegel and early Marx, alienation has deep biblical roots. In God-language, all are sons of Adam and brothers to Cain.[13] Here, the rhetoric of modernism and Genesis intersect: Garden and wasteland belong *both* to a biblical vocabulary and *also to* the vocabulary of modernity.

Among Hemingway's short stories from the 1930s, we have a profound existential parable, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." In the café, old man and waiters stave off life's *nada* experience. In his own, each character faces his *nada* or emptiness, seen in other Hemingway stories from the period.[14] The story echoes Jesus' Parable of the Prodigal Son—and Cain's angry question to God.[15] The "clean, well-lighted place" seems a poignant *synecdoche* for the Garden, representing the search for a lost home, the quest for order. By story's end, the older waiter better understands the old man's despair, answering positively Cain's ancient question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (*NEB*, Gen. 4.9). Yet, the waiter *demythologizes* the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary, central to the God-language of Catholicism.[16] Surely, this representation is the *absence* of God-language? After all, absence is said to be characteristic of modernism—we think of Hemingway's iceberg motif. The waiter has replaced *grace*—and every other theologically significant word—with *nada*, nothingness, emptiness. God is dead. Grace has left the building. Nihilism rules.

Yet, two points may be made. First, the Judeo-Christian tradition yields many parallels to the *nada* experience: the reflections of Job; the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53; the ocean as symbol of chaos, "the dark night of the soul" from the Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross; the *via negativa* of medieval theology; the abandonment of Christ on the Cross; creation as the transforming of an earth "without form and void" (*NEB*, Gen. 1.1–2). Before Hemingway's epigraph from Ecclesiastes, we read, "Emptiness, emptiness, says the Speaker, emptiness, all is empty" (*NEB*, Ecc. 1.2). Much of modern

theology has a strong existentialist flavor.[17] Yes, two different "language games" are being played here, but they are not necessarily incompatible with one another.

The second point on the *nada* experience concerns the structure of the story. Several times the bleakness of *nada* seems mitigated. Immediately following the stark words, "Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee," we read this: "He smiled and stood before a bar with a shining steam pressure coffee machine" (Hemingway, "Clean" 33). A smile and steaming coffee chase away the *nada* experience—for a moment. Then the waiter reaches home, *nada* reappears and kills his sleep until daylight. But again, a form of rhetorical balance, for the older waiter dismisses the severity of *nada.* "After all, he said to himself, it is probably only insomnia. Many must have it" (33). So, the presence of *nada* is not necessarily the negation of God-language.

In *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), title and epigraph are from poet priest, John Donne (1572–1631), but God-language again is infrequent. Written close to Neville Chamberlain's "Peace in our Time" speech (September 1938), Hemingway rejects appeasement.[18] Quoting Donne, "No man is an *Iland*, intire of it self . . . I am involved in *Mankinde*," Hemingway commits to the struggle of the Spanish people (Donne 243). Baker describes the novel as "a study of the betrayal of the Spanish people—both by what lay within them and what had been thrust upon them" (241). By 1940, the battle against Fascism in Spain was lost: the greater war was just beginning. Hemingway's narrative has relevance for both.

The religious context of the Spanish War was tragic: the Church was allied with the Fascists. Anselmo, the old man, hopes to be forgiven for the sin of killing. But forgiven by whom? "'Who knows?'" he says, "'Since we do not have God here any more, neither His Son nor the Holy Ghost, who forgives? I do not know'" (41). Jordan asks, "'You have not God any more?'" Anselmo refers not to the Left's "death" of God but to the ancient problem of *theodicy*, replying,

> "No. Man. Certainly not. If there were God, never would He have permitted what I have seen with my eyes. Let *them* have God."
> "They claim Him."
> "Clearly I miss Him, having been brought up in religion. But now a man must be responsible to himself." (41)

After making love with Maria, Jordan criticizes his political *clichés*.[19] "He had gotten to be as bigoted and hide-bound about his politics as a hard-shelled Baptist. . . . Bigotry is an odd thing. To be bigoted you have to be absolutely sure that you are right and nothing makes that surety and righteousness like continence" (164). Finally, in the novel's last few pages, Jordan reflects on facing death "with religion" and "taking it straight" (468). Here Jordan's perspective, echoing Feuerbach and Freud, is typical of the rhetoric of modernism. "Who do you suppose has it easier? Ones with religion or just taking it straight? It comforts them very much but we know there is no thing to fear" (468).

There is more God-language that could be quoted. The child's prayer in "Now I Lay Me" (*Complete* 276–282), the Crucifixion told by the Roman soldiers in "Today Is Friday" (271–273), the quest for an original paradise in *The Garden of Eden* (1986), but these examples may be sufficient. In summary, what can be said? The rhetoric of Modernism is integral to Hemingway's writing: always and everywhere, his God-language is embedded in that cognitive framework. Inherently, modernism is interrogative and indeterminate—suspicious of dogma, skeptical of organized religion. The fragment, "Scared stiff looking at it" (*In Our Time* 21) may serve as a signifier of modernity, revealing Hemingway's vision of a world "that was adrift" (Stewart 113). Modernism presents a hard-boiled picture of the world, stripped of traditional certainties, bereft of religion's "opium." This was the world of which, like the dying Harry in "Snows," Hemingway *must* write.[20] This is the world we have inherited.

But what is the *cognitive* status of Hemingway's God-language? Is it merely an ironic use of ancient myths—seen in T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce and others—with no underlying substance? Hemingway had little sympathy with the moralistic faith of his parents, leaving their Congregationalism for Catholicism. Morris Buske suggests that his father's "corporal punishment with a religious orientation" may have contributed to his "psychic difficulties" (86). Indeed. We might also envisage some religious impact. Perhaps there is a psychoanalytic link between the Liberal Protestant Fatherhood of God, Nietzsche's "death of God," and the suicide of Hemingway's father.[21] So, is Hemingway's God-language ironic, emotional and bereft of cognitive reality?

Following Buske and Stoneback, I suggest not. Buske suggests that Hemingway's early experiences "led him to embrace Catholicism" (85).[22] H. R. Stoneback denies that Hemingway's Catholicism was only nominal:

> Hemingway's personal religious pilgrimage takes him through a rejection of Puritanism, and far beyond the social-gospel brand of Protestantism, into an ever-deepening discovery of Catholicism. This personal faith-journey is manifest . . . with the aesthetic and historical and spiritual sensibility centered in ritual and ceremony (e.g., most obviously, as in the world of *Toreo*, or the bullfight; and, less obviously, in the vision of life-as-pilgrimage). Hemingway's rootedness in the sacramental sense of experience, in the incarnational paradigms of Catholic Christianity, grows ever deeper. (50)

Stoneback's argument is plausible. Yes, Hemingway's rhetoric is always unsentimental, open-ended, embedded in modernity: that is hard to dispute. Cleanth Brooks said Hemingway confined himself to "his secular terms" (21). I think that he went further. Granted, in Hemingway there is no parallel to T. S. Eliot's pilgrimage from the agnosticism of *The Waste Land* (1922) to the faith of *Four Quartets* (1943). But then most of the Modernists felt unable to follow Eliot in his particular journey. Nor is there any equivalent to Mailer's final book, *On God* (2007), his "quest into the nature and context of 'reality,' particularly non-material entities"—in effect, "Mailer's metaphysics" (Sipiora 503).

If Hemingway had not encountered physical and psychological problems, if his memory had not been gravely impaired, what at the end would he have written? We can never know what *might* have been. But Stoneback puts it well, "Pilgrimage, the notion and motion of spiritualized travel, is at the center of Hemingway's religious vision and his work from his earliest stories to the final, unfinished and posthumously published novels and memoirs" (49). With great skill, and with a high degree of indeterminacy, Hemingway's rhetoric appears poised between the language-game of God and that of modernism. Some claim the two games are inherently incompatible. I argue otherwise.

Hemingway did struggle against nihilism, at times teetering on the edge of chaos. Of his writing, Ihab Hassan says, "literary statement approaches

the edge; language implies the abolition of statement" (299). Yet, Hemingway also redefines the *sacred*, reformulating *grace* beyond the borders of organized religion. Without ceasing to be a modernist, he is also deeply rooted, as Stoneback claims, "in the incarnational paradigms of Catholic Christianity" (50). Like Kierkegaard, his God-language is covert and subtle; but it does exist.[23]

**GOD-LANGUAGE IN MAILER: PROTAGONIST IN THE COSMIC STRUGGLE**

With Norman Mailer, we have a different rhetorical situation. Partly, this difference is a time shift: Hemingway was shaped by the Great War, Mailer by World War II, the generation haunted by the Holocaust and Hiroshima. Hence, there is a religious shift: Hemingway grew up in Oak Park Protestantism before moving to Catholicism, whereas Mailer's roots were in the Judaism of Brooklyn. To characterize Mailer's God-language, I use the phrase *protagonist in the cosmic struggle.* J. Michael Lennon says that Mailer's writing is "shot through with his ideas on God and the Devil and the struggle in which they are locked" (*On God* ix).

*Harlot's Ghost* (1991) has myriad themes: betrayals ideological and sexual, haunting of sons by fathers, the "compartmentalization of the heart" (Mailer, *Harlot's* 13). Using the CIA as a *synecdoche* for a world of modernity, Mailer shows the boundary between fiction and non-fiction to be extraordinarily indeterminate. That indeterminacy applies to language but also to the *realpolitic* world of intelligence. But perhaps the most fascinating example of God-language appears in the last few pages of *Harlot's Ghost.* It comes from Hugh Montague, codename "Harlot"—a mysterious protagonist loosely based on a real person, the enigmatic onetime poet and chief of CIA Counter-intelligence, James Jesus Angleton (1917–1987).[24] Harlot speculates that the whole cosmos revealed in modernity—fossils, evolution, solar system—to be God's "'majestic cover story'" (1280), an exercise in *disinformation* and misdirection from the Lord of Spies, Jehovah.

> "'What would I do if I were Jehovah . . . . I have created him, after all, in My image, so he will wish to discover My nature in order to seize My throne. Would I ever have permitted such a contract in the first place, therefore, if I had not taken the wise precaution to fashion a cover story?' . . . . "You can say the universe is a splendidly worked-up system of disinformation calculated to make

> us believe in evolution and so divert us away from God. Yes, that is exactly what I would do if I were the Lord and could not trust My own creation." (1280–1)

Mailer presents an astonishing degree of humor, irony, and ambiguity, worthy of Nabokov. Can we take Harlot's speculation seriously? Mailer provides a complex play of *metaphor, metonymy*, and *metaphysics* in three arenas—character and plot in the modern novel; theology and cosmology in the universe; and the quest for meaning among the contingencies of life.

Sixteen years later, Mailer returns to these themes in his final book, *On God* (2007). There, among other topics, he discusses modern science, fundamentalism, and intelligent design, bringing insight into the nature of plot in the novels of Henry James, Hemingway, James Joyce, and others (143–161). He suggests, for example, that James and Hemingway were "avatars of Intelligent Design" (150) whereas Joyce "plays at the very edge of chaos" (151). It is no coincidence that Mailer moves smoothly between God-language and an analysis of plot in the modern novel—for two reasons.

First, his central theological motif is that God is an *artist*—a limited Creator doing the best he can. At the start of *On God*, Mailer says, "I see God, rather, as a Creator, as the greatest artist. I see human beings as His most developed artworks" (5). He draws, therefore, an analogy between the Creator and the creative artist—like Hemingway, James, Joyce, or himself. Second, Mailer recognizes that literary plot is a synecdoche for the larger search for meaning, religion being only one manifestation of that search. Just as Mailer is suspicious of a *plot* that is too contrived in a novel, so he is also wary of a *faith* in God that is too dogmatic, not sufficiently aware of the indeterminacy and chaos of existence.[25] Such fundamentalism misreads the nature of the world, keeping human beings infantile, even dog-like.[26]

Mailer's *The Gospel According to the Son* (1997) is an intriguing work. Rewriting the gospel in first person, he retells the story of Jesus, *focalizing* the inner thoughts of the Son of God. To call this narrative bold is an understatement, but the book is more successful than many critics allow. Here, implicitly comparing gospel and story, Jesus compares his account with the canonical gospels:

> While I would not say that Mark's gospel is false, it has much exaggeration. And I would offer less for Matthew, and for Luke and

> John, who gave me words I never uttered and described me as gentle when I was pale with rage. Their words were written many years after I was gone and only repeat what old men told them. Very old men. Such tales are to be leaned upon no more than a bush that tears free from its roots and blows about in the wind. (3–4)

A kind of mirror image to *Gospel* is Mailer's *The Castle in the Forest* (2007). In reconstructing the beginning of Hitler, Mailer explores two opposing entities—God and the Devil—and their cosmic struggle. Like *Gospel*, this work questions the boundaries of language, plumbing deep realms of cosmology. Mailer is writing literature, but he is also writing theology. Not all theology arises in seminary, church, or synagogue: God-language may emerge even in the world of modernity.

But here we may find a cognitive divide on the nature of language. Theological fundamentalists believe language to be essentially literal, *determined* for all time, even restricted to the letters of the King James Bible of 1611. Theological liberals, on the other hand, will see language as metaphorical, *indeterminate*, always in flux. As with Hemingway, Mailer's God-language would seem incompatible with that fundamentalist perspective, but compatible with a more liberal viewpoint.

Mailer asks hard questions. In *Gospel*, he asks if there is a God who is more than nostalgia enshrined in ancient words. In *Castle*, he asks if we shall avoid the lure of Fascism and another Hitler. Is there a God who speaks to modernity and the evils of the Holocaust? With D.T. as narrator in *Castle*, we encounter a Nazi officer in the SS. Then we discover he is also "an officer of the Evil One" (Mailer, *Castle* 71). Mailer recognizes the risk that he runs, "Given the present authority of the scientific world, most well-educated people are ready to bridle at the notion of such an entity as the Devil" (71). Robert Begiebing comments, "The suspension of disbelief required is audacious" (216). But Mailer reminds us that our modern world has little understanding of Hitler, "the most mysterious human being of the century" (Mailer, *Castle* 72).

As in *Gospel* ten years earlier, *The Castle in the Forest* operates in two distinct realms, "the metaphysical and the mundane" (Begiebing 216). Metaphysical language is hard to decode. In fact, in the 1920s Logical Positivists denied *any* meaning to such metaphysical language, a view later modified by

Karl Popper. God and Satan "appear" in a strange No Man's Land, at the frontiers of human experience. But thinkers from Augustine to Einstein have recognized that strangeness, using tropes of analogy and metaphor.

However, boundaries are always problematic, be they political, racial, or metaphysical. God-language is found at the *liminal* places of life, border regions of indeterminacy and danger. Such language is disturbing, even dangerous. It disturbs our expectations, confusing our maps of modernity. Max Born the physicist said, "We have sought for firm ground and found none. The deeper we penetrate, the more restless becomes the universe, and the vaguer and cloudier" (277). If that be true of physics, other disciplines certainly share that mystery. If all human language exhibits indeterminacy, then religious language will have it in spades.

Since the days of the Puritans, the place of Satan in American culture has become drastically attenuated, the current strength of Fundamentalism notwithstanding. A survey of this trend in American Literature is Andrew Delbanco's *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost their Sense of Evil* (1995). He speaks of a dialectic in our culture "between the dispossession of Satan under the pressure of modernity and the hunger to get him back" (234). Whatever our beliefs on his *being*, Satan's *function* in society is fairly easily charted, as America moved from belief to irony. Mailer is a protagonist in this cosmic struggle between God and the Devil, but using the metaphors of modernity.[27] However, Mailer leaves us with indeterminacy. We learn that what "enables devils to survive is that we are wise enough to understand that there are no answers—there are only questions" (Mailer, *Castle* 467).

**CONCLUSIONS: THE SACRED, INDETERMINACY, AND GRACE**

There is still much left to explore. Both men redefine the realm of the *sacred* outside the boundaries of the Church. They also redefine the profane, in language and belief. There are theological precedents, but much of organized religion finds such redefinition problematic, particularly fundamentalists. For Hemingway, the sacred is found particularly in the natural world—rumors maybe of the original Garden? In Mailer, I am not sure: maybe the sacred is found in the moral struggle—the eternal battle between God and the Devil.

*Indeterminacy* and suspicion of rigid dogma are also at the heart of both men's writing, as in Modernity itself. *Grace*, however, is a problem within

modernity: "The world starves for grace," says Yancey (40). But grace is a problem also for contemporary religion, as Bawer and Yancey demonstrate. Grace may have its antonym in Hemingway's *nada* or Mailer's "absurdity" of life. Grace may be implicit in Mailer's belief that, "stories bring order to the absurdity" (Mailer, *Spooky* 156–57). Good fiction, says Mailer, is "nourishing to our sense of reality" (*Harlot's* 1288). Stories, after all, have always been part of our lives. Novelist and theologian Fred Buechner has said, "Listen to your life . . . in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace" (87). In this world of modernity, maybe it is through fiction and narrative that we still hear rumors of grace.

## NOTES

1. "Novels of the period that do address theological themes more directly seem to be excluded from the modernist canon precisely because of their express interest in religion . . ." (Lewis 690).
2. Recent articles include Buske (2002), Stoneback (2003), Lewis (2004), Stolzfus (2005), Adamowski (2005), Kroupi (2008), Bernstein (2008), Cappell (2008), Sipiora (2008), and Whalen-Bridge and Oon (2009).
3. Owen Chadwick (1975) is a useful introduction to *secularization*. Modernity and Christianity are discussed in Hans Küng (1980). Spirituality and modern man are the focus of Carl Jung (1933). *Ironic cultures* are dealt with by Ernest Gellner (1974), while *irony* as a product of the Great War is in Paul Fussell (1975). *Cognitive minority* is used by Peter Berger (1969), while Berger & Luckmann (1966) use terms such as *deviance*, *heresy*, and *symbolic universe* (98–100). *Disenchantment of the world* goes back to Max Weber in the 1940s. Weber, *sacred* and *profane*, and modernism as *religion substitute* are described in Lewis (2004).
4. Secularization in England, for instance, involves Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) and the literary responses: including Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850), Arnold's *Dover Beach* (1867), and the novels of George Eliot such *Silas Marner* (1861) and *Middlemarch* (1871–72). Eliot translated two works of German radical theology, D. F. Strauss' *Life of Jesus* (1835, ET 1846) and Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1841, ET 1854). Willey (1964), Brown (1969) and Chadwick (1975) are useful guides, as is Kucich (2001).
5. "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people" (Marx 243–244, emphasis in original).
6. "By signals of transcendence I mean phenomena that are to be found within the domain of our 'natural' reality but that appear to point beyond that reality" (Berger 53).
7. "By a cognitive minority I mean a group of people whose view of the world differs significantly from the one generally taken for granted in their society. Put differently, a cognitive minority is a group formed around a body of deviant 'knowledge'" (Berger 6).
8. Planck, Einstein, and Heisenberg revealed the inescapable reality of *indeterminacy* in our world.

9. "Give us peace in our time, O Lord" can be found in the 1928 Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* (31), but presumably Hemingway knew it from the 1662 English *BCP*. Significantly, *peace* and *Lord* are not in Hemingway's title: certainly, his parents saw little traditional faith in this work. In 1932, Hemingway admits "Ezra Pound discovered I lifted from the English Book of Common Prayer" (Hemingway, *Ernest* 90).
10. "Considering the two epigraphs in tandem, no reader could stay focused for long on the 'lost generation' image. The tone of the second epigraph is clearly positive; it is much longer; it maintains its dominance" (Wagner-Martin 6).
11. "Some discovered such a truth in the trenches during the war; others discovered it in war prisons or in front of firing squads. Hemingway did not finally understand it until ten years after the war" (Reynolds 282).
12. "The Abruzzi, however, is an anomaly in the modern world, and the Christian order it represents no longer exists beyond its boundaries. Frederick Henry, the epitome of the modern displaced hero, yearns nostalgically for that 'other country' yet finds himself 'banished' from it by his own modern sensibilities" (Civello 77–78).
13. "Alienation is the experience of being a stranger, 'away from home,' estranged from others and from oneself . . . Alienation is also a theme of the Scriptures as a whole. Adam's eviction from Eden, Cain's wandering as a fugitive, Israel's servitude in Egypt and later exile in Babylon. All symbolize an alienation that is the lot of mankind. . . . from the 1940s, the word was used increasingly to describe social and cultural estrangement. Influences include the vast disorientation caused by World War II, and the writings of Weber, Kierkegaard, and Tillich. A major source was the newly discovered *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of Marx. . . . Alienation, an important concept in social psychology, has its roots in a basic theological reality: that mankind is alienated from God, his fellows, and himself" (Vince 15).
14. "Nowhere is this *nada* (the void, emptiness, meaninglessness) more insistent than in Hemingway's two African stories, 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber' and 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro'" (Stolzfus 206).
15. The Parable begins, "There was once a man who had two sons . . ." (*NEB*, Luke 15.11). Both stories have simplicity and profundity. Both seem answers to Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (*NEB*, Genesis 4.9). Both have strong Existentialist perspectives. "The parable, then, is a microcosm of the human situation . . . a picture of man's alienation from his essential self, from the world, and from society, and is a crystallization of our human condition" (Vaughan Jones 184).
16. In a 1941 essay, "New Testament and Mythology," Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) introduced *demythologizing*, influential in the post-war theology (Brown 187).
17. Shaped by Heidegger, Sartre and post-war *anomie*, Existentialism has earlier sources in the Christian philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, and is seen in theologians Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and Rudolf Bultmann. On American Existentialism, Adamowski (2005) is crucial.
18. "As the clever hopes expire / Of a low dishonest decade" (Auden 95).

19. "Hard-shell Baptist" was applied to the Primitive Baptists, a group dating from early nineteenth-century splits.
20. Harry thinks, "There was so much to write. He had seen the world change; not just the events . . . He had been in it and he had watched it and it was his duty to write of it; but now he never would" (Hemingway, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" 17).
21. "The doctor's suicide shook Hemingway: it added another painful memory to those from years of powerful mixed emotions. As in other times of need he turned to the faith he had embraced, rather than to that of his father, for support" (Buske 87–88).
22. "It was long believed in many quarters that Hemingway's early Protestantism made him a "nominal" Catholic, pressured by Pauline into joining the Church. The opposite may be true: his early experiences led him to embrace Catholicism. He had found his father's faith cold and unsatisfying; he had known his grandfather's belief in a God of warmth and trust and now sought it for himself" (Buske 85).
23. Kierkegaard, before his final faith-crisis, through pseudonyms and tropes of *misdirection*, practiced "indirect" communication of God-language. So, I believe, did Hemingway.
24. There is no consensus on Angleton. Was he the greatest practitioner of counter-intelligence, or, like Kim Philby in British Intelligence, was he a Russian mole? Mailer describes him as "a most complex and convoluted gentleman" (*Harlot's* 1132).
25. "The reason I don't like plots to prevail is that they don't allow the figures in the book, the characters, to push their own limits to the point where they make the plot unacceptable and so throw the design into chaos" (Mailer, *On God* 151).
26. "The worst to be said about Fundamentalism is that it reduces people to the reflexes of a good dog. . . . No great writer ever came out of Fundamentalism, nor any great scientist" (Mailer, *On God* 71–72).
27. Delbanco suggests that modernity "has doomed us to see the world through metaphors that cannot be ratified by any appeal to transcendence" (224).

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