NORMAN MAILER: *PLAYBOY* MAGAZINE HEAVYWEIGHT

TAYLOR JOY MITCHELL

ALTHOUGH SOMETIMES PURCHASED BECAUSE OF A PLAYMATE'S ALLURE, most *Playboy* magazines get read cover-to-cover, confirming the quip "I buy it for the articles." Because less than ten percent of each issue contains nudity, the majority of monthly pages are well-known editorial features, such as the *Playboy* Advisor or the *Playboy* Interview, advice columns, cultural commentary, humor and literary selections. Using *Esquire* as a model, Hugh Hefner published fiction to position *Playboy* as more than a mere "skin-magazine." Hefner juxtaposed the nude pictorials with literature because he believed that, for proper stimulation, both the mind and body should be addressed. The quantity of fiction published in *Playboy* is astonishing, making fiction the single largest component of the magazine. In just its first year of publication, from December 1953 to 1954, *Playboy* devoted 168 pages to literary selections, over thirty percent of its content (Lambkin 26). In the 1960s the magazine maintained over 200-page issues and published elite critics and authors such as Alfred Kazin, William F. Buckley, Leslie Fiedler, Ray Bradbury, James Baldwin, and Vladimir Nabokov. Most of *Playboy's* fiction is either written by popular, contemporary authors or can be classified as a parody by an unknown author of a famous story. The cultural currency of contemporary authors or familiar narratives helped sell copies—by 1973, *Playboy's* paid circulation peaked at seven million per month (Pitzulo 12). *Playboy* editors particularly sought out authors or fictional selections that would help them re-masculinize the act of reading in the midst of the Cold War gender debates. To fulfill this objective, editors first looked to Ernest Hemingway because the Hemingway code hero exemplifies the quintessential Playboy qualities—strong, adventuresome, educated, and womanizing.

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Then, after his death in 1961, *Playboy* used Hemingway's obvious successor—Norman Mailer.

In 1956, Hefner hired *Playboy's* first renowned literary editor, Auguste Comte Spectorsky, an up-and-coming journalist, for the express purpose of elevating the magazine's literary content. Hefner considered Spectorsky "a real heavyweight" because of his literary talents and East Coast connections. Spectorsky's *The Exurbanites* had recently reached the Best Sellers list, and he had the literary connections needed to "upgrade" *Playboy's* fiction (Fraterrigo 32). Once on the editorial board, Spectorsky began recruiting personal friends to contribute the magazine. He solicited fiction and non-fiction pieces from Ken Purdy, Philip Wylie, Vance Packard, and John Steinbeck. Even if Hefner and Spectorsky did not always agree on lifestyle choices, they were both committed to producing a virile, high-culture publication. Hefner's vision was to embellish and surround sex with the trappings of high culture. Spectorsky, on the other hand, wanted to "reinvent sophisticated culture itself by bracketing it with heterosexual desire" (Gilbert 207). Combining nude pictorials with good writing and sophisticated advertising allowed *Playboy* the opportunity to re-masculinize both reading and consumerism, two activities that were supposedly feminized during the postwar era.

Spectorsky viewed *Playboy* as his platform to "redefine male readers as 'whole men'" (Gilbert 207). He wrote:

> Each issue is a tacit statement to [readers] that they are responsive to fine fiction and to pretty girls; to Lucullan dining and drinking and to serious articles and interviews that bear directly or philosophically on today's serious issues; to sports cars and classical music, jazz, fashion, the struggle for civil rights, bachelor high-life, and the world of business and finance. (qtd. in Gilbert 207)

Spectorsky sincerely believed that *Playboy* was a viable vehicle from which to "preach" his literary tastes. For Spectorsky, the literary selections would provide readers an outlet for discussing the pertinent issues of the day, affording them the knowledge needed for sophisticated conversations.

It was important to Spectorsky to devise clear guidelines to ensure that the literature of *Playboy* would celebrate a particular kind of masculinity. These

literary guidelines suggest that Hefner and Spectorsky believed that literary selections were a crucial component of the ethos of *Playboy*. Spectorsky instructed his fiction staff to discard any "castration-defeat-doom stories" in favor of "Hemingway heroes . . . who deal with the world instead of cringing and having high-tone failures" (Gilbert 208). Spectorsky also based much of his criteria for quality fiction on Hemingway's writing style—clear, economical prose, machismo or womanizing, rich imagery, and simple, albeit vigorous, word choice. Using Hemingway, the author and the man, to advertise the magazine's commitment to masculinity, Spectorsky helped resurrect the masculine, intellectual man during the 1950s gender debates.

In order to promote *Playboy*'s macho literary persona and maintain a heavy dose of Hemingway, Spectorsky commissioned Norman Mailer for various publications. For instance, the January 1963 issue contains a special portfolio on "man's politics and sport, his business and pleasure, his competition and credo" that couples Hemingway's "A Man's Credo" with Mailer's debate on right-wing American politics. And, in the laudatory introduction to the *Playboy* Interview with Norman Mailer, the editors claim that "Mailer is as colorful and publicized as any writer since Ernest Hemingway" (69, Jan. 1968). Featuring Hemingway first, followed by Mailer, *Playboy* editors could assure readers that elite literature would not negate readers' masculinity. Spectorsky could easily use Mailer in this capacity because of the multiple themes and concerns connecting these literary giants, including their iconoclastic status.

As articles in the 2010 issue of the *Norman Mailer Review* illustrate, the connections between Ernest Hemingway and Norman Mailer range from bull-fights to multiple wives. Erik Nakjavani argues that Hemingway's influence on Mailer was so acute that the younger author "came to *embody* Hemingway's influence, identifying with him" and developing affinities with him (166, emphasis original). Scholars such as J. Michael Lennon, James Meredith, Mark Cirino, and Barry Leeds prove that themes of boxing, war, violence, and firearms unite two of the most famous twentieth-century century writers. Constructing female characters as objects also links them. In "Norman, Papa, and the Autoerotic Construction of Woman," Mimi Gladstein chronicles how both authors became "favorite whipping boys for feminist critics" for creating a "certain kind of fantasy woman, a projection of autoerotic impulses, by which they allow themselves, imaginatively, privileges that they did not have in life" (288-89). And, in "Hemingway, Mailer,

and the 'Reds,'" Victor Peppard rightly asserts that their common interests are "no secret." Both authors were preoccupied with "macho tests of manhood." Hemingway's interests included hunting big game, boxing, and bullfights, and while Mailer was "more of a boxer than a bullfighter . . . he was always a battler whatever the arena" (Peppard 227). Tests of manhood often appear in their respective works and they both became controversial cultural figures in their personal lives. Both continue to loom over the American cultural landscape because of their notoriety and literary achievements.

Hemingway's literary presence dictated much of *Playboy's* editorial content, even though his words appeared minimally in the magazine. According to Thomas Weyr's *Reaching for Paradise*, Hefner desperately wanted to include a Hemingway original in the inaugural 1953 issue (10). Yet due to the magazine's content and budgetary restraints—*Playboy's* first issue's editorial content only cost $2,000—Hefner could not obtain the Hemingway, John O'Hara, or James Thurber pieces he so desired (Weyr 10). *The New Yorker* "haughtily" refused to sell Hefner reprint rights for a Thurber piece and Hemingway's publisher rejected Hefner's request "because his magazine had not 'demonstrated its character'" (Miller 35). It would take three years and over 300,000 subscribers until Hefner and Spectorsky could include Hemingway's presence in the magazine. They commissioned Jed Kiley for his unauthorized Hemingway biography, which was serialized over eight issues. Beginning with the first installment of Kiley's "Hemingway: A Title Bout in Ten Rounds," Hefner and Spectorsky added to the myths of Papa. In the September 1956 "Playbill," editors proclaimed Hemingway as a man of "unimpeachable morals" and possibly the "greatest writer in the world" (4). Editors reminded readers that Hemingway has, for many years, "hit the bottle, tumbled wenches" and "enjoyed such organized carnage as war and bullfighting" (2). Quick to dismiss his actions as neither immoral nor sinful, editors described Hemingway as a cheater of death who became "a scarred and bearded American legend, a Great White Hunter, a husband of four wives, a winner of Nobel and Pulitzer Prizes" (2). They quoted Kazin's praise of Hemingway as "the bronze god of the whole contemporary literary experience in America" (2). But what seems most important about the Hemingway myth is that he hails from a Midwest, middle-class family—the same family history as Hefner and many *Playboy* readers. His roots and eventual fame make Hemingway the quintessential *Playboy* author: growing out of middle-class America and a devoutly Christian home, Hemingway became "the

hard-drinking, death-happy . . . swaggering, irresponsible author of best-selling Hollywood fodder" (2). This image of Hemingway, a Midwestern everyman turned courageous, financially successful, and intellectual, supports the grand narrative *Playboy* presented for its readers—every male has the potential to get the woman of his choice if he works hard, participates in capitalism, and reads quality fiction.

Playboy editors amplified the Hemingway myth throughout the 1960s. In January 1961, *Playboy* published "Hemingway Speaks his Mind," quotations from a variety of Hemingway's collected works. Editors thoroughly searched Hemingway's works for scraps of prose that would suggest that his life style mimics those of a Playboy. Introduced as "a philosophy of life," *Playboy* used this four-page feature to present Hemingway as an honorary Playboy (95, Jan. 1961). There are quoted topics range from musings on Cuban women to his many cats, but the myth of the man that emerges is one of strength and smarts. For instance, Hemingway's observations about war, being hit with a mortar shell, drinking, boxing, bull-fighting, cooking a lion steak, deep-sea fishing, gate-crashing, and cursing remind readers of his masculine persona. His ruminations on hunting are particularly insightful: "You must be calm inside, as if you were in church, when a lion or a rhino is coming at you" (96, Jan. 1961). Hemingway's use of the second person oddly addresses *Playboy* readers, in the comforts of their suburban homes or urban bachelor pads.

Hemingway's quotations concerning sexual relationships also support the *Playboy* lifestyle. In "On Love," for example, Hemingway writes that love is "an old word, and each man takes it new and wears it out himself" (96, Jan. 1961). This musing suggests that each man observes relationships differently—those Playboys that reject the monogamous life of the nuclear family can still find their own kind of love. In this passage, Hemingway blesses male readers to wear out their own version of love. Even in his dreams, Hemingway was the spitting image of a Playboy: "In my nocturnal wanderings I am always between twenty-five and thirty years old and am irresistible to women, dogs, and on one occasion, to a very beautiful lioness, who subsequently became my fiancée" (96, Jan. 1961). As tamers of women, dogs, and wild cats, readers could model their behavior on Hemingway's actions in order to obtain their next catch. The things Hemingway deemed good are equivalent to what *Playboy* readers should want: wine, bread, bed, early mornings, the sea, women, love, and honor (97). In this list, Hemingway

conflates necessities, like food and sleep, with amenities like women and early mornings. Much of *Playboy's* editorial content, like its monthly Playmate, promoted similar notions—sex and honor were both necessary and attainable.

After the success of "Hemingway Speaks his Mind," *Playboy* continued to use the myth of Hemingway to advance its literary selections and grand narrative. Editors even applied parodies of Hemingway's famous titles to pictorials and satire pieces. For example, in the July 1961 issue editors published Barry Spacks's "For Whom the Booth Tolls." Editors meticulously labeled Spacks's work "outrageous" in its "attention getting (and money-making) device" (5). Unlike satires and parodies of other authors, editors were careful to honor Hemingway. Later that same year, Spectorsky serialized Hemingway's first authorized biography. Spectorsky paid a reported $25,000—approximately equivalent to $160,000 in current U.S. dollars—for the serialization rights (Hale). Beginning in December 1961, Leicester Hemingway's "My Brother Ernest," spanned four issues and over sixty pages. Published only eight months after Hemingway's suicide, "My Brother Ernest" received favorable reviews from *Playboy* readers. The text was later expanded, published by Pineapple Press, and reached the *New York Times* list of 100 outstanding books for summer reading in 1962. *Playboy* continued the Hemingway trend with "Papa and the Playwright," a review of Hemingway and Tennessee Williams, Evgeny Evtushenko's "Meeting with Hemingway," Patrick Hemingway's "My Papa, Papa" and Hemingway's only play, "*The Fifth Column*."

Readers responded so well to the Hemingway material that Spectorsky published Hemingway's "Advice to Young Men" in 1964. Consisting of previously unpublished observations on some of the ground rules of life and literature, this piece is eerily similar to the earlier "Hemingway Speaks His Mind," sans the heavy dose of observation on traditional masculine activities like boxing, big-game hunting, and fishing. The main focus of "Advice to a Young Man" was on the art of writing and responding to critics. In this piece, Hemingway shared his wisdom on other topics, most notably education, achieving success, happiness, living with honor, prejudice, death, faith, and the future. The feature concludes with a Hemingway quotation that reinforces *Playboy*'s call for its readers: "All the glory of life, all the romance of living, all the deep and true joys of the world, all the splendor and the mystery are within our reach" (225, Jan. 1965). Hemingway's posthumous advice

echoes the *Playboy* stance on working hard to enjoy the products of capitalism with a female companion.

Relying so heavily on Hemingway allowed Spectorsky to "advertise the magazine's commitment to masculinity" (Gilbert 209). His "reputation as a literary tough guy" had been well established in the 1930s (Osgerby 45). *Esquire* proudly featured Hemingway for his "rough-hewn machismo," even offering him one thousand shares of stock in 1937 (Osgerby 47). Due to Hefner's relationship with *Esquire* and Spectorsky's desire to re-masculinize readers, Hemingway became the obvious "godfather" for the journal during the early Cold War. Rather than publish what Spectorsky deemed literature of "morass incense and butterflies and Spanish moss, of *précieuse* style and hyperfine imagery," *Playboy* published what it considered to be elite, although accessible, fiction for its masculine audience (2, Sept. 1956). It did not want any writers too busy "exploring stylistic jungles"; instead, it wanted Hemingway, "perhaps because he has trekked many a real jungle in his life" (4, Sept. 1956). Spectorsky claimed that he wanted to veer away from stories likely published by *The New Yorker*, stories that reflected what he called a "womanized," "neurotic," and "castrating world" (Gilbert 208). He promoted Hemingway's attributes because he knew that *Playboy* "was surely" to "get literally hundreds of 'fine' stories a month which are intricate embroidery on the motto: The Sensitive Misfit is a More Interesting Man and a worthier Topic than the The Man Who Fulfils His Masculine Destiny" (Gilbert 208). Instead of wasting time reviewing stories about sensitive misfits or mutilated heroes, Spectorsky wanted Hemingway heroes.

And yet, ironically, Hemingway's heroes are often castrated in one way or another. While many of Hemingway's characters are "real" men on the battlefield or on the hunting grounds, they could also be classified as androgynous in terms of their sexuality. In *Ernest Hemingway: Machismo and Masochism,* Richard Fantina reappraises the foundations of the old Hemingway myth of machismo and argues that his fiction's "greatest legacy" may be the "embodiment of diverse models of masculinity" (3). Well before Hemingway scholars revised perceptions of him as the ultimate American macho man in the 1990s, *Playboy* editors subtly address misgivings about Hemingway's sexuality. In the same "Playbill" that praises him in comparison to other contemporary writers as a "standing out like a rugged oak in a field of delicate pansies," editors call Hemingway "sexually insecure" (2). Why would *Playboy* editors admit this in the same announcement that begins over a

decade of Hemingway contributions? Why would a magazine, striving to push its heterosexual agenda on middle-class American men, place such precedence on a sexually insecure author? Quite possibly, Spectorsky assumed his readership would miss the subtle classification. Maybe Spectorsky only published Hemingway non-fiction to avoid the obvious contradictions. Or, and more likely, the myth of the man and the Hemingway code looms larger than fiction.

Similar to its heralding of Hemingway, *Playboy* relied on the cultural myths surrounding Mailer. Beyond his combative prose, controversial comments, and wife stabbing, Mailer presides over American literature "longer and larger than any writer of his generation" (McGrath). The "most transparently ambitious author of his era," Mailer was a prolific author, social commentator, and cultural provocateur (McGrath). He cofounded *The Village Voice,* won the Pulitzer Prize twice, ran for New York City Mayor, married six different women, fathered eight children (and adopted a ninth), directed films, appeared on talk-shows, and participated in many interviews, making the Mailer name a household one. In short, Mailer's ever-present, masculine persona, ambition, and the immense quantity of his work make him an appropriate *Playboy* contributor. Like Hemingway in the 1930s, Mailer had already established his tough-guy persona by the end of the 1950s. The violence in his war novel, *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), and the obscenity in *The Deer Park* (1959) set the stage for Mailer's 1959 *Advertisements for Myself*: "a tough-guy writer's apologia for his literary life" (Castronovo 180). In his life and literature, Mailer can stand in as a Hemingway hero, especially because Mailer lacked Hemingway's ambiguous sexuality. Mailer consistently conducted himself with grace under pressure through the various tumults in his career. Thus, *Playboy* editors, from Spectorsky to Christine Hefner, frequently published Mailer to connect with their male readers.

When reviewed as a body of work, Mailer's multiple *Playboy* contributions reflect the historical shifts in post-war masculinity constructions, the same changes *Playboy*'s editorials depict. As a popular author with staggering amounts of testosterone present in his best-selling fiction, Mailer's virile image fits comfortably into *Playboy's* agenda. Beginning with an "After Hours" Book Review reference to *The Deer Park* in January 1958, and lasting to the publication of his conversation with Michael Lennon, "On the Authority of the Senses," in December 2007, Mailer contributed directly to *Playboy* on seventeen occasions. Mailer's numerous appearances in the magazine

range from panelist to cultural critic. *Playboy* paid him $5,000 to reprint his debate with William F. Buckley and, in 1967, Mailer offered *Playboy* his essay on bullfighting. Then, in 1975, he wrote over 28,000 words on the prizefight between Ali and Foreman, which *Playboy* published in two installments (with rare illustrations). He continued to offer the magazine selections on sports and politics at the turn of the century. In 2004 *Playboy* published Mailer's "Immodest Proposals," a call to American voters to review the government's handling of war, welfare, imprisonment, abortion, gay-marriage, and foreign policy. *Playboy* posthumously published "A Man of Letters" in January 2009 to honor Mailer. The byline to the feature reads, "A literary giant's correspondence on Hollywood, celebrity, and society shows him to be a critic and crusader, pugilist and poet" (70, Jan. 2007). The simple eulogy for a poetic boxer sums up why *Playboy* continued to rely on Mailer for his nonfiction and fiction contributions: Mailer's persona represented *Playboy's* commitment to masculinity and intellect.

Although an apropos *Playboy* author, Mailer's relationship with *Playboy* involved lawsuits coupled with considerable praise. After *Playboy* editors paid Mailer for the essay report on the Buckley's debates, Mailer sued *Playboy* on the grounds that his essay was worth more than the paid sum (Buckley). Mailer also wrote to the editors, denouncing them for labeling him a liberal: "I don't care if people call me a radical, a red, a revolutionary, an outsider, an outlaw, a Bolshevik, an anarchist, a nihilist or even a left conservative, but please don't ever call me a liberal" (8, April 1963). And later, in 1975, Elmo Henderson sued *Playboy* for publishing "The Fight," in which Mailer created the factoid that Henderson had been in an insane asylum (Manso 560). But according to one of *Playboy's* executive editors, Arthur Kretchmer, Mailer was "a long-run investment" (Manso 561). In an excerpt from Peter Manso's *Mailer: His Life and Times,* Kretchmer explains how *Playboy* did not "function on pornography or *Enquirer*-like sensationalism. It functioned on the fact that people who read *Playboy* have a certain sense of upscale events, and Norman's part of that psychology" (Manso 561). By distancing *Playboy* from *Enquirer,* Kretchmer suggests that *Playboy* readers are much more sophisticated than those that read either sensational or pornographic media. Mailer's contributions, then, are used to elevate the magazine's content. In the 1970s, Kretchmer wanted to publish a magazine that

> reflect[s] what's going on in America … and that magazine has to have Norman because it's a different world without Norman. *Playboy* with Norman is a magazine of the moment, of impact. Powerfully, incontestably, Norman has tried to express our era. He looks through infinity and says, 'Who are we? What have we done? What can be done?' (Manso 561)

Kretchmer's insights implies that both *Playboy* and Mailer worked to articulate America's cultural concerns, and because of that shared objective, *Playboy* editors dismissed the legal trouble in favor of a working relationship with Mailer.

Kretchmer seems beguiled by Mailer, but other magazine editors, like William Phillips of the *Partisan Review* and Gordon Lish from *Esquire,* also solicited work from Mailer. Based on his growing fame, *Esquire* accepted Mailer's offer to write a monthly column, "The Big Bite," which ran from November 1962 to December 1963 (Dearborn 179). Clay Felker, *Esquire* editor, claimed that he assigned Mailer to write about Jackie Kennedy because "at *Esquire* we loved to start fights" and hiring Mailer to write about the First Lady immediately after he had stabbed his wife was "obvious" (Manso 353). The enthusiasm surrounding Mailer as a magazine contributor was only reinforced when his "The Prisoner of Sex" (1971) sold more copies of *Harper's* than any other issue in the magazine's history (Manso 462).

Like Kretchmer's praise for the author, Mailer's praise for the *Playboy* empire and its founding editor seemed equally enthusiastic. When covering the Liston-Patterson fights, Mailer stayed at the *Playboy* mansion and recorded his first impressions of an after-hours *Playboy* party. After detailing the mansion's exaggerated dimensions, Mailer compared Hefner to F. Scott Fitzgerald's archetypal, white, male American hero: "one never saw one's host except for once or twice in some odd hour of the night. He had a quality not unlike Jay Gatsby, he looked and talked like a lean, rather modest cowboy of middle size; there was something of a mustang about Hefner" (qtd. in Miller 130). Mailer claimed that Hefner was "not the kind of man one would have expected to see as the publisher of his magazine, or the owner of the Playboy Club, nor certainly as the undemanding host of his exceptional establishment" (qtd. in Miller 130). Here, Mailer hints at Hefner's subtle allure. His unassuming demeanor makes him a surprising candidate for the head of the

flamboyant *Playboy* empire and this exchange of praise reveals how integral cultural myths can be for the success of a mass produced, glossy magazine.

Playboy commissioned Mailer to support its agenda as a with-the-times magazine and to "further gentrif[y]" its heterosexual perception (Schuchardt). In the first *Playboy* "Panel" on "Censorship in Literature and the Arts," editors introduced Mailer as "among the forefront of individualistic, iconoclastically outspoken American author" (27, July 1961). Throughout the panel exchanges, Mailer lived up to that introduction: he "polemicized against masturbation and argued that open labeling of pornographic literature as such was vital for 'the health and life of the republic,' but that pleading its socially redeeming values was not" (Weyr 92). Mailer's insights on censorship shine amidst the jumbled thinking presented by the other panelists and he was asked to return for the next year's panel on "The Womanization of America" (June 1962). The panel, which was Spectorsky's idea, was intended to respond to Philip Wylie's scathing arguments regarding a supposed power shift between the genders—and Mailer's career and personal life made him well-suited for the discussion. By 1962 Mailer had published three bestsellers and married three different women.

In the introduction to the seventeen-page panel, *Playboy* editors once again refer to Mailer's iconoclastic status and, throughout the panel discussion, Mailer endorsed Spectorsky's claim that men are in need of re-masculination. Mailer contended that "women are becoming more selfish, more greedy, less romantic, less warm, more lusty, and more filled with hate" (44, June 1962). However, Mailer did go on to state that male collaboration needed to be accounted for in the gender-role demise. Pinpointing the Cold War as the "certain historical phenomenon" that "allowed penis envy to develop," Mailer eloquently stated that during these "renaissance" moments in history, there is a tendency for "this coming together of sexes" (134, 139, June 1962). Aware of his audience and the magazine's heterosexual bias, Mailer immediately reaffirmed his heterosexuality by stating that the increasing numbers of homosexuals during the Cold War can be attributed to a "general loss of faith in the country, faith in the notion of one's self as a man" (142). Mailer had obviously not lost any faith in himself as a man, so his sexuality and commitment to phallocentric concerns remained intact.

After Mailer's discerning comments on gender and sexuality, the conversation degraded until Mailer, once again, culturally contextualized the issues. According to Carrie Pitzulo's study, *Bachelors and Bunnies: The Sexual*

Politics of Playboy, panelists "primarily fixated on inane debates" (Pitzulo 31). For example, in response to *Playboy's* concerns about some females refusing to complete household chores, three of the panelists debate the cost of aprons and the difference between drying and washing dishes. Mailer then stated that "there's been a shift in the social and biological function of the woman, where she expected . . . not so much to create a home as she is to be an aide-de-camp or staff general to an ambitious opportunist" (49, June 1962). Mailer's comments, regarding the change in duties for postwar women, hints at the supposed mid-century masculinity crisis—being a blue-collar worker was no longer sufficient for most men. Rather, the stresses of the Cold War and the evolving capitalistic economy forced men to adapt to domineering images of hyper-masculinity. Readers' responses to the panel, as published in the "Dear *Playboy*" letters, suggest that Mailer's statements eclipsed the other panelists. Out of the four published "Dear *Playboy*" letters that mention the womanization panel, three praise Mailer and the letter from John T. Gosset exclaims that Mailer's insights "astounded" him (9, September 1962).

At the panel's conclusion, Mailer reminded *Playboy* readers that "masculinity is not something one is born with, but something one gains. And one gains it by winning small battles with honor" (142, June 1962). He warned those American men who fear the destruction of their masculinity to be wary of mass media because it gives an unrealistic view of life. Mailer claimed that the majority of mass media is out to "destroy virility slowly and steadily" (142, June 1962). This argument directly reinforced Spectorsky's thoughts on the fundamental malaise about masculinity in America, as well as supported his argument that *Playboy* is a necessity for American males. American men needed magazines like *Playboy* to help combat the insipid depictions of masculinity in the mass media. And *Playboy* needed Mailer's contributions to do so. Mailer's presence on both panels reinforced his machismo status and added to *Playboy's* cultural currency.

Mailer's machismo reputation further aligned the author with the *Playboy* empire, especially during the battle of the sexes. Both Mailer and the *Playboy* enterprise received intense criticism from second-wave feminists. Mailer's fiction often sparked deserved critique for its objectification of female characters or depiction of sexual violence. In the classic *Sexual Politics,* Kate Millet analyzes Mailer's fiction and claims that he was long ago designated a "prisoner of the virility cult." Mailer's response to her literary criti-

cism, "The Prisoner of Sex," sparked acrimonious debates, like the very public, 1971 Town Hall debate with feminists Germaine Greer and Jill Johnston. And at the 1986 birthday celebration of the Feminist Writers Guild, attendants played "Pin the Tail on Norman Mailer" in "satiric protest against what they consider his antifeminist writings" (Blades). In a similar vein, *Playboy* has dealt with its own share of feminist critique for the past five decades. From its inception, critics have lambasted the magazine for its centerfold: "it fetishized busty, young bodies for straight male consumption" (Pitzulo 35). *Playboy* garnered backlash from feminists, such as Betty Friedan, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Gloria Steinem, as well as anti-pornography activists Gail Dines and Catharine MacKinnon. Steinem published her damning exposé on working conditions at the *Playboy* clubs in *Show* magazine and faced-off with Hefner for *McCall's* magazine in a lengthy interview in 1970. Copies of *Playboy* were tossed into a "freedom trashcan" as part of the 1968 Miss America Pageant protest and *Playboy* confronted the feminist movement with its article "Up Against the Wall, Male Chauvinist Pig" (May 1970). Hefner intended the piece to criticize radical feminists, but his condemnation of the militants solidified his—and *Playboy*'s—reputation as anti-feminist.

Playboy editors balanced the negative attention from Steinem's experience as a *Playboy* Bunny with Mailer's appreciation of the clubs. Mailer's presence at the *Playboy* clubs and mansion "lent" them "literary and symbolic cachet they have won from few other public personalities" (Weyr 78). In "Ten Thousand Words a Minute," Mailer does not censure the guests' egregious behavior toward the female employees, nor does he disapprove of the Bunnies' attire. Instead, Mailer matter-of-factly states that the club "looked about the way one thought it would look" with corporate executive patrons and Bunnies in all colors (qtd. in Weyr 78). Whereas Steinem claimed the boning in her bunny costume would have made "Scarlett O'Hara blanch and the entire construction tended to push all available flesh up to the bosom," Mailer complimented the outfits: the Bunny costume "exaggerated their hips, bound their waist in a ceinture and lifted them into phallic brassiere" (Steinem 39; Weyr 78). In his *Presidential Papers*, Mailer compares a Bunny's breasts to the "big bullet[s] on the front bumper of a Cadillac" (23). Mailer's approval of the costume, like his comparison of Hefner to Fitzgerald, captured how editors wanted the culture to view *Playboy*—as an American icon.

While superficial, his praise for the Bunnies and their uniforms reinforced the growing *Playboy* brand, compelling editors to also publish Mailer's fic-

tion. Kretchmer classified *Playboy's* "dynamics" with Mailer as "interesting" because *Playboy* did not publish his fiction "for direct sales" (Manso 561). Unlike other writers, such as Ian Fleming or Joseph Heller, who were understood as more commercial, *Playboy* published Mailer "simply" because he is "the most interesting writer, a writer you want to publish if you're editing a magazine, and whether or not all of *Playboy's* readers are going to line up eagerly to buy the issue doesn't really come into play" (Manso 561). Therefore, including Mailer in the magazine was more about building the *Playboy* brand than selling copies. Editors commissioned Mailer, like Hemingway, for his cultural status rather than his literature.

Playboy published only three true fiction selections from Mailer: "Trial of the Warlock" (Dec. 1976), excerpts from *Ancient Evenings* (April and May 1983), and "The Changing of the Guard," (Dec. 1988). Out of these three pieces, *Ancient Evenings* is the only work to have received critical attention, much of it mixed. Scholars have often overlooked the "Trial" and "The Changing of the Guard" but *Playboy* praised them both as quality, literary selections, even offering the "Trial" the annual $1,000 prize for Best Fiction for 1976 and later republishing the story in its anthology—Playboy *Stories: The Best of Forty Years of Short Fiction*, edited by Alice K. Turner. And because his machismo fueled much of his fiction, Mailer's fiction appear to fit Spectorsky's stringent guidelines for *Playboy's* literary selections—masculine, Hemingway heroes, and clear, intellectual prose.

Mailer's third literary contribution to *Playboy*, "The Changing of the Guard," complements all of Spectorsky's original criteria for quality, virile fiction. The five-page feature represents intellectual machismo at its best: with lines like "it would have blasted her panties clear off her pubes" mingled with literary allusions to Hawthorne, Chaucer, and Fitzgerald, the narrator presents himself as an intellectual who enjoys "getting it on" with his mistress as well as cunnilingus with his wife (197, Dec. 1988). The simple plot, a nameless, first person narrator driving to his wife's bed after a tryst with his mistress, allows for commentary on word choice, the Cold War, class, love, sex, masculinity, and ethics. The narrator constantly relays his relationship to certain words such as backside (for back of the shore), incest (his wife is his distant cousin), and distinguished (his wife, Kittredge, is "beautiful" in comparison to his "cheerful," "common" mistress, Chloe). He even clarifies with a parenthetical aside that the "Yankee inn" in which he met his mistress is really "(Let us say: a Yankee-inn-type restaurant run by a Greek)"

(196, Dec. 1988). This close attention to detail helps develop Mailer's narrator as an intelligent main character and his occupation, as a spy for the CIA during the intensity of the Cold War, heightens his virility.

In between vulgar recollections of sexual intercourse, Mailer exposes his narrator's perspicacity with philosophical asides, most notably his diatribe on masculinity. After explaining failed plots to assassinate Fidel Castro, the narrator describes Hugh Tremont Montague, his boss and "guru in *machismo*" (196, Dec. 1988, emphasis original). Hugh's hyper-masculinity reflects the "only spiritual art that American men and boys practice dependably"; the narrator claims that "we do not hope to peer into the pond of revelation so much as to pass through the iron gate of virility" (196, Dec. 1988). Hugh also happened to be married to Kittredge. When the narrator began his affair with Kittredge, he felt "like a hermit crab just moved into a more impressive carapace, and waiting to be dislodged" (196, Dec. 1988). Very high echelon in the CIA, Hugh worked with double and triple agents and participated in athletic activities. Hugh was a vision of virility until the narrator witnessed him "stove in at the waist," after a rock-climbing accident (196, Dec. 1988). Seeing the man that gave him "life courses in grace under pressure" weakened and crying caused an "abrasion on the flesh of memory" (196, Dec. 1988). The narrator reacted to his boss's demise by forcing his relationship with Kittredge to "climb from the dungeon of its inception" (196, Dec. 1988). The crippling of the narrator's masculinity model "sentenced" him to maintain their relationship and drove him "spend hours slopping and sliding" on Chloe's "overfriendly breasts" (197, Dec. 1988). Interspersing Hugh's crumbling hyper-masculinity with explicit sex scenes and intellectual commentary turns the narrator into a Hemingway code hero.

In order to maintain a sense of coherence within the narrator's stream-of-consciousness, Mailer consistently returns to the icy road metaphor, making the short piece allegorical in nature. For the narrator, the dangers of driving on "a night as terrible as this—with sleet on the cusp of freezing" become inextricably linked with the dangers of monogamy (197, Dec. 1988). Toward the end of the story, the narrator "suddenly" realizes what he had been missing in his marriage: "a wife who could allow you to live not only with herself but with ten other women she could remind you of" (198, Dec. 1988). Mailer abruptly ends the piece with the narrator remembering his pledge of honesty to his wife. The narrator's unknown plight must have left *Playboy* readers questioning the validity of taking a vow, as well as the slip-

pery nature of conducting an affair. The story and its ending leave readers with a model of masculinity akin to *Playboy's* model of an upwardly mobile, educated, heterosexual man.

In comparison to some of Hemingway's fiction in which castrated heroes do not always abide by the code, Mailer's *Playboy* fiction offers a range of masculinity models for readers. According to Robert Caserio's editorial introduction to the *Journal of Modern Literature*, Mailer's later fiction represents a "'queering' of his picture of masculinity," and the novel *Ancient Evenings,* in particular, suggests a "surrender and uncoupling" of Mailer's ideas about masculinity and moral bravery (v, vi). In comparison to his 1960s works, like *An American Dream* and *Why are We in Vietnam?, Ancient Evenings* deals with homosexuality in "tolerant and even erotic fashion" (Dearborn 121). The novel's protagonist narrator, a eunuch in a large harem, is anally penetrated and the most politically powerful man in the novel "gave Himself up to the little queens as if He were a woman" (124, April 1983). In an interview with John Whalen-Bridge regarding his later works, Mailer admits that, until *Ancient Evenings,* he did not recognize homosexuality as "an element in all men" and has since come to understand homosexuality as "a bigger theme than [he] ever gave it credit for being" (vi). This change in views regarding sexuality suggests that Mailer revised his masculinist ideal in his later fiction and the *Playboy* excerpt of *Ancient Evenings* illustrates this revision. Magazine readers might have expected selections from the 700-page-plus novel to be more in line with *Playboy's* heterosexual agenda, but Mailer chose to include scenes that deal with "a spectrum of male motivation leading from homosexuality to machismo" (Lennon 331). Within the *Playboy* excerpts of *Ancient Evenings,* Mailer explores power relationships between men and depicts various masculinity models.

Similar to the excerpts from *Ancient Evenings,* Mailer's "Trial of the Warlock" deviates slightly from the model of masculinity presented in *Playboy's* strictly heterosexual editorial features. The story offers a "readable" "screen treatment" of J. K. Huysmans's *La Bas* (Turner 333). Mailer appropriates the novel's protagonist, Durtal, to revisit the 1891 fictional account of how Gilles de Rais transitions from being Joan of Arc's second-in-command to a documented serial killer and practitioner of Satanism. The story seems to contain all of *Playboy's* necessary criteria: the hero is not castrated; he has no problem with blood or Satan—so he is obviously courageous. After swearing off sexual relations for religious reasons, Durtal becomes involved in a

tumultuous affair with a married woman, so his sexuality is not ambiguous. And he is an intellectual, deeply entrenched in his research about the first serial documented serial killer. However, the focus of Durtal's research is a man who "cannot speak of the thoughts I have when young boys pass before [his] eyes" (354). De Rais moves beyond the fifteenth-century acceptance of fornicating with young boys and begins to abduct, rape, and brutally murder them. Once dead, de Rais uses their bodies in unheard of ways for sexual pleasure. De Rais' acts of necrophilia and pedophilia seem wildly extreme when compared to the tameness of gazing at a carefully posed centerfold. But the erotic nature of "Trial" and Mailer's return to this century-old French novel about Satan in medieval Europe represent deviations from the literary selections of *Playboy* that may leave readers questioning things. Why would editors pay for and publish fiction that undermines its stated heterosexual objectives? Mailer's tripartite role as novelist, journalist, and historian explains the fascination with the historical content, but the story's form and style are extremely peculiar. Why a screen treatment? Why the use of the second person point of view? The original protagonist was a thinly veiled caricature of the original author, so what kind of layer does a new author offer? The panoply of unanswered questions, especially why *Playboy* would award it an annual prize when it has received scant criticism, proves that *Playboy* editors were willing to publish fiction based on an author's cultural status. The "Trial" and *Ancient Evenings* might have undermined *Playboy's* grand narrative of heterosexuality, but because they were written by Norman Mailer, editors, like Kretchmer, wanted to include them.

Besides Mailer's work, *Playboy's* relationship with literature is exceedingly complex. Recognized for publishing the century's greatest writers, *Playboy* introduced its readers to serious literature, fiction that most would likely have never have been read if it were not sandwiched between pictorials or garish cartoons. Produced as a guidebook for young, urban men, it is surprising that much of *Playboy's* fiction destabilizes its grand narrative. Most of *Playboy's* 1960s fiction could be classified as Gothic romance, which often includes narratives of traditional marriage. English and American Literature Gothic scholar Marilyn Michaud analyzes why *Playboy*'s early fiction "paradoxically" encouraged readers to become husbands. She questions "What does Gothic romance fiction teach the aspiring playboy? How does an aesthetically middle-brow publication with images of wholesome, semi-clad young women sit comfortably beside tales of horror and distress?" Exposing

the magazine's internal contradictions, Michaud argues it is "not surprising" to find traditional narratives in *Playboy* "given the gender politics and the national anxiety over masculinity in the postwar period." Michaud concludes that the gothic stories, while seemingly paradoxical to Hefner's agenda, reflect postwar culture because they focus on marriage and family. According to Michaud, teaching bachelors to be heroic rescuers of distraught females will teach them to be good husbands.

Therefore, it seems plausible that while *Playboy* editors sought to publish approachable, entertaining fiction with masculine heroes, they would also publish works based on reputations or cultural myths regardless of the story's content. In his *Playboy* interview, Mailer endorses this cultural concept when he says that "if Hemingway had been a pimply-faced kid instead of the man he was, his books wouldn't have had the audience they commanded" (84, Jan. 1968). For Mailer, Hemingway had a "clear image" because the work and the man "bore a certain resemblance to each other" (84, Jan. 1968). Mailer goes on to say that this clear image is often necessary: "Americans like answers, not enigmas" (84, Jan. 1968). During his life, Hemingway used his solid, masculine persona to boost book sales and *Playboy* still uses that same sales model. And while Mailer confesses his "public personality probably hurts his sales" because it is much "more surrealistic" than Hemingway's, *Playboy* editors continued to rely on him as a contributor (84, Jan. 1968).

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