

THROUGH THE LENS OF THE
BEATNIKS: NORMAN MAILER AND
MODERN AMERICAN MAN'S
QUEST FOR SELF-REALIZATION

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FEW MID-CENTURY WRITERS WERE FRIENDLY with the Beat Generation. Most, including Norman Mailer, cited their criminal and licentious impulses as an undermining tangling of ethically strong American sensibilities. I have noted Mailer's criticism found in "The White Negro," where Mailer sketched the unkempt and ghettoized portrait of white rebels such as Neal Cassady. Whether it is Mailer, Arthur Miller, or left poet-rockers such as Bob Dylan, or even fiction writers such as Truman Capote, the recurring message of a degenerated gang of would-be hoodlums abandoning mainstream lifestyles remained a cynical counter-step to the endless innovations and cultural adventurism that was unheard of for most Americans in the 1950s.

I realized that I had visited the literary spectacle of Norman Mailer but a few times: once, as a child, when *The Executioner's Song* aired on ABC in 1980, and then, in 2007 when Mailer died at the age of 84. While a graduate student, I thought that he was compared unfavorably to Capote, with Mailer a kind of "copier," an imitator of Capote's much more virtuous meditation on crime and human psychology. The essays were very much in Capote's favor. While reading *The Naked and the Dead*, I began to understand something wholly detached from the occult glory, fame, and entertainer-superstar-politician thread that Mailer is famous for colonizing: Mailer was definitely interested in narrating the cerebation of modern man's social and civic problems, and perhaps the direct challenge to American humankind's

democratic spirit when faced with the powerful and nature-deciding apparatus of institutions and authoritarianism. He writes the following of “The League of Omnipotent Men”:

You could kill the dozen men, and there would be another dozen to replace them, and another and another. Out of all the vast pressures and crosscurrents of history was evolving the archetype of twentieth-century man. The *particular* man who would direct it, make certain that “the natural role . . . was anxiety.” The techniques had outraced the psyche. “The majority of men must be subservient to the machine and it’s not a business they instinctively enjoy.” And in the marginal area, the gap, were the peculiar tensions that birthed the dream. (*The Naked and the Dead* 391)

As a whole, *The Naked and the Dead* snapshots very familiar wartime ground—the ethnic and racial jokes, the longing for sexuality and the thrust of jealousy, the protected incomprehension of foreign cultures that impaled American democracy with the very real contention that American mankind was simply not humanly prepared to lead the world at all. There is much more: first, this novel captures American manhood’s very real and gnawing psychic doubts and missteps, while dreamily transposing the economic and tactile miracle of long-standing American prosperity. Second, tactility is established in the above passage akin to the sentiments of Jack Kerouac—that in a modern world, we should lose our animate confidence, pride, and basically our intellectual ability to manage the fruit of both changing times and world responsibility. What I intend to depict in this essay, then, is Mailer’s increasing, if guarded, approval for some of the character and ethnographic foci of Beat writers. The letters and testimonies gathered from Harry Ransom Center overstate the anxiety, terror, and illuminating potential of the far-reaching hand of the new generation of literary bohemians, and therefore Mailer’s recognition that both democracy and culture would be in some way transformed by this shaded lens of cultural hereticism.

A remarkable exchange of letters between Mailer and Beat poet Michael McClure renders the flat authoritarianism of “The White Negro” as questionable, dialectic, and even chronologically false: Mailer’s letters to McClure certainly weigh in an approval of the occult ethnographies and mythologi-

cal wizardry of the Beat writers. Much of McClure's correspondence date to 1964, and show an anxious McClure trying to publish a novel and some short manuscripts including "Untitled Novel," "Ghost Tantras," and "Mad Cub." The letters from McClure, far in excess of what Mailer writes back—reflect a proselytizing tone, an aggressive eagerness to suggest beatnik ideas in the post-Beat era. One such letter, dated from February 1964, includes his rendition of the beatnik "legend" of writing mythology. What also becomes clear from this letter is McClure's admiration of Mailer: he is close to idolizing Mailer as a literary godfather who can help him with his publishing fiction and poetry attests to a very different social and intellectual imagination than the curt criticisms found in "The White Negro." Letters from Mailer are comparatively short, even handwritten. Letters from McClure are voluminous and copious in number. Mankind's subconscious motivations, too, are an important theme in Mailer's most acclaimed novels. What is less known was his appreciation of the mythological and anthropological adventuring of the Beats, and the impact of narco-criticism that could identify a very different dynamic to the motions of the psychic organism through drugs. Of course, we should be cognizant of the fact that the literary conventions of 1964 were very different from those of 1957. Clearly, however, Mailer is moved by the literary possibilities for conscious expansion and occult mythologies as they might derive or enhance American spirit.

On February 17, 1964, Mailer responded and expressed the visible tension between refinement and animate penning of self- and world-mythology that through the portrait of the writer gives credence to the art of discovery and self-promotion through writing. Mailer's cautionary disdain is matched with an approval of the writing scene and the promotion of art and culture through writing, rather than an overstatement of the dilemmas of social realism. While far from a complete reversal of opinions and criticism in "The White Negro," the anxiety of mentorship is given new impetus because of the cultural gap between the conservative-leaning 1950s and the explosive, global, revolutionary 1960s. Mailer projects an educated responsibility. He tacitly admits the relevance of liberalism and occultism in a less homogenous world, and coincides with some of the possibilities for excavating a modern epistemology against the tides of materialism and authoritarianism. "Flesh of the form" directly translates Sampas's 1942 letter to Kerouac as that of authorial progeny—what could be said about the modern development of American manhood could be as easily said about the influence of writing

on one's imagination, and suggests a maybe-ambivalent directioning of the Beatnik social and intellectual "possibility" (Kerouac, *Selected*). Egoistic granting of cultural status through writing modifies considerably the art of social revolution. What is clear is that Mailer recognizes in the Beat Generation a potential that was completely rejected by him at the embryonic time when the Beats were completely unrecognized and unpublished, not a factor at all in the making of ideas on the political world stage. That Mailer recognizes something going on that is subtle yet dramatically impactful borrows directly from his assuming tutelage to an ever-growing population of renegades—he has incorporated the concept of "beatnik" into his idea of the modern selfhood through the mask of writing itself. Mailer's passion for the ego-soul and for the imaging and fame of American consciousness is here greatly altered and suggestive of a very new stage of development for him.

Mailer's fairly paternal tone is contrastive with the general disapproval of publishers for "renegade" literatures that praise rebellion, animate power, and the ecstatic. We should, of course, remember that publishers denied Kerouac his attainment of literary glory for twelve years—and that most Beat novels and poetry were shunned or bowdlerized by editorial interpretations designed to protect doctrines of American conservatism. In the genesis of "Flower Power" and hippiedom, replete with animate, environmental, and occult glories, many literary greats presided over a degenerated bunch of would-be writers with no true talent. Paul Bowles's Itesa apartment in Tangier was a classic example of the engine of failure when it came to collaborative re-invention of the modernist form, with many writers appearing at his apartment in a scheme of literary disfocus and psychic abandonment unreconcilable with the business of true literary production. We could even make much of the excursion of hipsters and hippies to remote regions of the world. That literary genius involved far-off travel implies the unsaleable quality of these ideas and the weakness and embryonic passiveness of those truly "fighting" the establishment and the military-industrial complex. The subject matter for McClure's letters includes digests of *Mad Cub* and *Ghost Tantras*. Both are tributes to primal, essential, animate reclamation of instinct and poetic animateness. Written in the early 1960s, they restate Sampas's letter and the debacle between officialism and animate ownership of the psyche, the earth, and primordial consciousness. It is suggestible, of course, that Mailer saw enough self-characteristics in these narrations, but the pop-

ular message is clear enough. By 1964, Mailer saw in McClure what he would deny of Kerouac. He understood that “Beat” or “beatnik” inveighed a general sense of the development of modern Western man, and could not as easily confine the Beat literary works to a colonial scheming of its characters and ideas. That the “last” meeting of the Beat Generation takes place in 1964 in San Francisco heralds a “new” beginning, one in which literary production could be divorced from its older mentors and hence some of the political idealism that informed them. Mailer, by being paternalistic and circumspect, divines the prospect of literary acquisition as a developable strand of his own literary genius, and a recalculation of literary possibility to influence culture and therefore move forward the architectonic of American selfhood in the Modern Era. Mailer’s tone, in the letters, shows moments of warmth, authorial reciprocity in communications, and the lingering anxiety of publishing and its expectations from the writer. A shared anxiety is continuously documented in lieu of the 1964 political elections in the US.

Mailer was also commissioned by Allen Ginsberg and other Beat writers to testify against the censoring of Burroughs’s novel, *Naked Lunch*, which was finally cleared of American censorship in 1966. Mailer testified that

We are richer for [Burroughs’s] record; and we are more impressive as a nation because a publisher can print that record and sell it in an open bookstore, sell it legally. It even offers a hint that the “Great Society,” which Lyndon Johnson speaks of, may not be merely a politician’s high wind, but indeed may have the hard seed of a new truth; for no ordinary society could have the bravery and moral honesty to stare down into the abyss of *Naked Lunch*. But a Great Society can look into the chasm of its own potential Hell and recognize that it is stronger as a nation for possessing an artist who can come back from Hell with a portrait of its dimensions. (“*Naked*” XVIII–XIX)

Mailer’s message here is very obvious—as a nation and as a “collective soul,” America and its conception of democracy are expanded and strengthened by the existence of drug-addicted literary genius. The phrasing of “dimensions of Hell” repeats the doctrine of American “learning” rather than the diminution, comedism, and nihilism of surrealist writers who also used drugs. We almost feel that Mailer believes that taking drugs is a step towards

totalistic self-redemption and even cultural-historical redemption, an answering of the seemingly meaningless and jocular decay of the earlier beatniks who praised Black and other minorities for spawning the adulation of excess. Yet there is also an authorial recognition of grandeur and achievement: Burroughs may easily be mismatched against the United States Government in the sense that Burroughs's written and social understandings of drugs, consciousness, addiction, and "culture" was far greater and considerably more objective and human. It is also very likely that Mailer saw reasons to praise Burroughs where he would have been reluctant to do so for Kerouac, that he recognized a gutsier and more celebrated authorship and the promise of a more durable idealism. Surely, in the early part of the Twentieth Century, man's understanding of narcotics was far from literary. Once again, the literary medium is a common ground, a moment of psychosocial development away from colonial or "Jim Crow" barbarizations meant to racialize and therefore diminish the true impact of suffering and intoxication upon the modern self. There is also an implied note of recognition of the changes in popular culture. Mailer's comparatively centrist *metier* develops a much broader social understanding of drugs and their arguable utility in a rapidly changing world. Gone are the fantasies and undefined adventures that meshed with Victorian portraits of horror, and ushered in is a definable modern subject that is *a part of* the modern reality, lingual and otherwise. Mailer attempts this without giving any credence to occult or multicultural possibilities for experience: he is soberly realistic and attempts to incorporate a divergent stream of texts and their signification into the mainstream setting. Mailer's typing of Burroughs as a "religious" writer maintains some of the traditional mask. However, he concurs with the portrait of a profound if terrifying reflection on the mind and its lingual construction of experience. His identifying religion and damnation give credence to the contemporary concept of drugs and rehabilitation, while escaping them by stressing "the real" and its influence on the modern society. The impulse to democratization, or rather a recognition of the form and humanity of drug-addicted experience, projects without much reservation the idea of a maturing spirit that is older, wiser, and with a greater grasp of psychic agency. Authoritarian dogma, then, is not refuted but rather channeled into a more intimate discussion, one favorable to the individual and to social freedoms. Although Mailer is not a strong proponent of the legalization of drugs, he certainly recognizes that writing about drugs contributed

to a greater understanding, and maybe even the redemption, of man from his long-standing social and personal ills.

LITERARY COMPARISONS:

**THE PROSPECT OF LITERARY GENIUS IN MODERN AMERICA,
AND THE ESTIMATION OF MODERN CHARACTER**

Whatever may be said about Mailer's strong points of criticism in "The White Negro," which was published the same year as *On The Road*, Mailer's publication of *The Village Voice* from the 1960s attests to his modifying presence, and even the expansion of "beatnik" into other areas of modern consciousness and social learning. A particularly interesting point of introduction came from Al Aronowitz's May 18, 1960 column in *The Village Voice*:

But actually Kerouac and Mailer have long been literary brothers, even if under each other's skin. Which one founded the Beat Generation and which one merely found it is just a matter of semantics. . . . Perhaps it might be concluded that, in one way, Mailer found in his own mind what Kerouac found throughout America.

If the comparisons are misleading, they at least call to attention how both authors captured modern man's impalement with both the outside world and with memory: the decidedly different paths to literary glory that are encapsulated in a comparison between "America" and "the mind" makes literary comparisons between the two men more problematic—that Mailer could be interpreted as mentalizing the anxiety of "beatnik" legend suggests a parallel writing of selfhood from external and internal experiences. The statement of literary co-writing could not be biographically more certain: both men served in the war, and forecasted their discoveries onto a new-fangled American who belonged as much to the world as to his particular region. Therefore, an exposition of literary and character similarities proposes a considerably greater selfhood and the alterity of the lens. Reading Mailer through the literary and character conventions of Kerouac deepens the anxiety and soul-redemptions of Spengler's primary statement of civilizational "decline," and maybe the impetus towards a rejuvenated social learning. Since the publication career of Mailer and Kerouac is very close in origin—

Kerouac published his first novel one year after Mailer his—we may turn to the prospect of literary similarity and the makings of cultural and counter-cultural depth without referring to complex theoretical strategies that would make their core ideas seem radically and racially different.

The character identities, memories, and dislocative dreaming of *The Naked and the Dead* positively anticipates the legend of beatnik discovery and adventure; further, the stress in this novel is upon humanity, identity, and emotional attachment in a no man's land of carnage and alienation. Mailer and Kerouac both address the spiritual decimation of the modern American. They call attention to the semiotic parameters of exile and self-diminution against the glowing possibility of "Pax Americana." Both authors tread heavily on the same psychic/cultural ground: they match the tactility and emotional happinesses of humanity against the spectacle of a debilitating nightmare of a powerful abyss. Both authors struggle to match the inhumanity, moreover, of external or "foreign" cultures against the certainty of an American imagination of selfhood. Without approaching the emotional dread for what Jean-François Lyotard termed in postmodern literature the continuous revolution of forms (10), Mailer spindles dream, memory, and emotional renditions of faith against the hungering stresses of democracy and camaraderie in a dangerous military no-man's land, passively anticipating a coming "New Era" that assembles memory against the threat of totalitarian mind-control. In many instances, very real tensions and hierarchical dimensions are muted so as to receive the delicious individuation and democratizing touch of pre-War dreaming: we are led to the confirmation of a deeply pensive American subject anxiously wandering through the intellectual transformation of his world. More succinctly, though, Mailer parallels Kerouacian impulses to inscribe emotions—love, the body, rusticity, and tactility as the architectonic of democratic "spirit." We are ritualized subjects who imbibe in the indistinct and unpredictable memoirs of an older America that exuded a dramatic moment of self-satisfaction and refinement in its making of political theory. Fighting the inhuman standardizations of "post"-ness, too, is a valiant literary assemblage of facts and self-delineation. The American man's sensoryness is the backdrop to his liberated self, his quest for personal redemption in a utopic world symbolizing his ethos borrowed from American community. Mark Cirino writes the following:

Fitzgerald and others have misconstrued aspects of Hemingway's objectives, which Mailer grasped intuitively and intellectually. The central thrust to Hemingway's literary project was to dramatize the compromised functioning of thought as the modern consciousness is incorporated into the violent activities of the twentieth-century man of action... (Hemingway) is disclosing the tension that defines his work, the internal struggle between a man of action and a man of thought. (126)

Yet the soldier's reflection, or rather the peculiar moment of that reflection on one's past, is what produces mankind's idea of community, ethicality, and beauty. Notwithstanding the tremendous filmic possibilities of a quasi-pastoralist moment of reflection, "beatnik" accelerates the possibilities for an expanded romanticism: it draws memory, dream, and conversation against the tide of oppression, while Americanizing an anti-rational moment of cultural *topos*. Vulgarizing self-portrayals, moreover, project Sampas's thematic idea of a "crude, raw, unfinished—superb" American being: more important, though, is the depth of similarity in terms of modern man's cultural realization of himself (Kerouac, *Selected* 69). While modernism, akin to William Faulkner's writing of internal memory in *The Sound and the Fury*, is textualized through the narrative moment of confinement to the island of Anopopei, a pressingly beatnik sentiment is shared among a multi-ethnic troop which is bemusing the collective impact of humanity in the modern *ethos*, painted in terms concrete, sensory, and lingual.

Scenes of romantic sensualism, as was common to Kerouac and certainly a major *tour de force* in Kerouac's first novel, *The Town And The City*, confirm the poeticity of American man's modern journey to validate democracy and democratization. They also stage modern American man's much-anticipated confrontation of undemocratic "post" officialism and conservatism. We could, of course, understand the kind of cultural-political battling between the two men when we read statements like these:

POLACK: (falsetto voice) I don't know why I'm not more popular with the girls . . . I'm such an easy lay. (They all laugh.)

BROWN: What do you think your girl friend is doing now? I'll tell you what. It's just about six A.M. now in America. She's wakin' up in bed with a guy who can give her just as much as you

can, and she's giving him the same goddam line she handed you. I tell you, Minetta, there ain't a one of them you can trust. They'll all cheat on you.

POLACK: There ain't a fuggin woman is any good.

MINETTA: (weakly) Well, I ain't worrying.

STANLEY: It's different with me. I got a kid.

BROWN: The ones with kids are the worst. They're the ones who're bored and really need a good time. There ain't a woman is worth a goddam. (Mailer, *Naked* 185–186)

Of course, soldiers musing about their wives' cheating habits restates the basic antagonism, both political and physical, between Mailer and Kerouac. One is out on the battlefield, away from the pleasures of life, perhaps stiffening his resolve and making him less likely to be lenient about social policy, while the other is mostly at home, free to expostulate the labyrinthine and otherwise juicy moments of pleasurable transcendence from the ordinary. Sexual jealousy, or "fighting for cunts," probably influenced the medium of writing as much as it symbolized modern man's quest for self-realization. It also deliciously problematizes Sampas's statement of a "crude, raw, unfinished—superb" meta-modern man developing in the American context. While Mailer's dramatization of romantic and sexual anxiety in *The Naked And The Dead* interrupts the syntactic form of being where Kerouac is free to propound and expostulate an ebullient and geographically diverse rebellion, Mailer's account more dramatically stages the crises of modern American maleness, registering it as a psychic challenge to bring forth ethical and cultural vision in a changing world. Chapters exhuming memories of life before the war, entitled "The Time Machine," represent a deeper sensual underpinning to the making of modern American selfhood and calculates the weight of modernist anxieties against the resilience of man's spirit—economy, sexuality, faith, imagination, travel, education and psychology arrange the depth of modernist literary innovation and modern man's social panic within the form of American male character. They restate the anxiety and possibility of man's grasp of the "new" world without determining the ultimate course of action. That at least could predate Kerouac's childhood memoirs in *The Town And The City*: restating un-patriotic or hyper-patriotic moments of jingoism and hereticism predated the ro-

mantic emphasis upon discovery, while nestling it in a crux of modern ultimacy that is inescapable rather than pleasantly redrawable.

In this segment, I compare and contrast three of the “Time Machine” chapters, which are Red Valsen, *The Wandering Minstrel*; Robert Hearn, *The Addled Womb*; and Joey Goldstein, *The Cove of Brooklyn*. In all three, the anxiety of being is coupled with the anticipation and imperfectness of man’s knowledge of a changing world that presents a new, challenging dynamic of political ideation and capitalist-cultural-metatechnologies that outmaneuver the will and action of the American male self. The contrast between depressive novels such as William Faulkner’s *The Sound And The Fury*, where a Harvard student commits suicide, and later modernisms such as Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man And The Sea*, where an old fishermen doffs the outside world to restate his greatest quest within nature, mean to belabor the moment of modern anxiety in the development and redevelopment of self. Mailer’s soldiers are less emasculated than Leopold Bloom in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Walter Mitty in the stories of James Thurber, but whether gay, roguish, or ethnic, they internalize the languages and imaginations of a newly cast modern world that tends to erase the ebullient masculine pastoralism of works such as Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* that molded a conception of modern man’s achievement through work, capitalism, education, and cultural longevity and maturity. Thus, the throbbing moment of self-doubt is captured against the spectacle of a powerful mass cultural redevelopment. It could be said that Mailer had thought through modern man’s special list of psychic and personal issues before Kerouac was to relocate them to physically and sensually liberating fantasy. American modernist novels, whether crammed with political news developments or littered with unlikely-sounding advertisements, elongate the spectacle of modern life and its circumstances—broadening, then, long-standing conceptions of American character and spirit rooted in premodern scripturalism and economic ingenuity, which must re-invent themselves as monumental counterweights to the infinite and coercive determinants of modern political realism. In the balance was a seemingly intractable American lingual, psychic, and cultural selfhood that was likely to tune out political ideas and even suppress them. Indeed, American notions of the outside world were far from objective and certain to overlook or misrepresent politically active beliefs and ideals as contrary to democracy and pluralism.

“The Wandering Minstrel” snapshots moments of Kerouacian rusticism

and junked-out splendor. At reflective moments, the story of a coal-miner's son facing the economic depression of his land falls into hoboed moments of brilliance long before Kerouac narrated them into the story of Cody Pomeray, in *Visions of Cody*: "To a kid from a mining town, getting drunk in a flatcar on Saturday night is still fun. The horizon extends for a million miles over the silver cornfields" (Mailer, *Naked* 226). Sensualism also accompanies education, employment, and sexuality without dismissing or diminishing the emotions and conversations around social responsibility: "The Wandering Minstrel" finds Red facing as a youth the problems of economic depression and ethnocentric distaste for new generations of Americans from European and Euro-Jewish stock. "Sensualism" also renders the proliferation of technology in a spirit more dense and spiritualizing than that of Kerouac. Rather than technology being inferior to or less lyrically promotive than the cultural, natural, and ecstatic, technology chronologizes modern man's social and intellectual development and mediates in a spirit friendly with American male rhetoric and personality:

In 'thirty-five he works in a restaurant for almost a year, the best dishwasher they ever had. (The rush hour lasts from twelve to three at that end of the kitchen. The dishes come clanking down the dumbwaiter, and the tray man mops the food and grease with his hand, fingers the lipstick on the glasses to loosen it, and drops them in a rack. In the machine, the steam vibrates and sings, whips out at the other end, where the finish man pulls out the tray with tongs, and wiggles the plates with his fingertips as he flips them on a pile. You don't grab it with your bare hand, Jack.) (228)

The thrill of sex, moreover, stages the economic and social anxieties of the post-World War II American rather than embolden a non-economic mobilization of transcendence, thereby equating the sensual with the realistic. We should remember that Kerouac's motivations to render poetic and timeless the ecstatic or otherwise extra-normal pleasures and escapes of his generation rose from a materialistic spirit of confidence that permitted the ambitious re-drawing of the modern American experience. The staging of marital, sexual, and familial decline answers the tide of modern freedoms, both intellectual and sensual:

You know, I'll tell ya something, I don't believe in God.

You don't mean that, Red!

(Underneath the blanket his father's body had been crushed almost flat.) Yeah, that's right, I just don't believe in God.

Sometimes I don't either, Agnes says.

Yeah, I can talk to you, *you* understand.

Only you want to go away.

Well. (There is the other knowledge. Her body is young and strong and he knows the smell of her breasts, which are like powdered infant-flesh, but all the women turn to cordwood in the town.) You take that guy Joe Mackey who got Alice with a kid and left her, my own sister, but I tell ya I don't blame him. You got to see that, Agnes.

You're cruel.

Yeah, that's right. It's praise to the eighteen-year-old. (224)

"The Addled Womb" counter-creates "beatnik" to locate anxiety and doubt rather than aggressive countercultural critique. We may even hypothesize the envisioning of a deeper and more centrist rendition of poet Allen Ginsberg, a confirmed homosexual who rigorously and polemically applied Marxist critique to the military-industrial complex. The opening stanzas inscribe the power and magnificence of mid-century America in terms of civilizational *topos*: "No one ever really comprehends it, the vast table of America" (328), but the substitution of modern man's nihilism instead of his faith and redemptive feelings counter-strategizes "beatnik" by proposing establishment and authority to inhere a classic moment of self-introspection, with layers of beneficence and destruction that rhetorically present tenacity rather than re-invention: "How do you conceive your own death, your own unimportance in all that man-created immensity, through all the marble vaults and brick ridges and the furnaces that lead to the market place? You always believe somehow that the world will end with your death. It is all more intense, more violent, more rutted than life anywhere else" (328).

True, the discordant gauging of Hearn between destruction, or conscious realization of destruction, and the gleeful portrait of the vices and pleasures of capitalist making, "AN AIRLINE TICKET TO ROMANTIC PLACES, and the touch and smell of young girls, lipstick odor, powder odor, and the svelte lean scent of leather on the seats of convertibles" (334), challenges the psy-

chic and spiritual re-invention of American selfhood through the lens of “beatniks” seeking instead occultism and ethnolinguistics that could, too, render the modern psyche more tenacious and redemptive. Ruggedness of personality performs the rejection of anti-capitalist calls to “revolution” while inviting Kerouacian masculinity: “For a little while it is all quite glorious. They are wise and aware and sick and the world outside is corrupt and they are the only ones who know it” (340). Yet the inclusion of communist pretenders such as Jansen, or even his presentation of Oswald Spengler commenting on “an acquisitive society” (340), gives us a dialectic that Kerouac and Ginsberg craved and continually re-wrote to express increasing knowledge of what was “beyond” the American mainstream, or even military-industrial complex. Hearn’s recurrent meditations on topos, technology, and rebellion anticipates the multicultural and multi-lifestyle possibilities for a new-fangled democracy with a much greater comprehension of the world. Into this, we may draw the soldiers at Anopopei and the freaks of Greenwich Village as mutual selves: the idea or façade of negotiation and communication is archetypally drawn as a struggle for ideological realization.

Interestingly enough, the strongest instance of romantic/sensual redemption through romantic love is the province of a Jewish soldier, Joey Goldstein. “The Cove of Brooklyn” stages achievement and knowledge, and the monetary realization of that knowledge, against stereotypes and depressive urban characteristics that perform ethnic and racial subjugation; in the context of *The Naked and the Dead*, we may easily devise cultural and sensual rejuvenation as a mode of being and a learning of selfhood in an American social fabric ruled by racialism and racial denigration. Sexual anxiety and the emotional depth of romantic encounters were common to the writing of Jewish-American writers—from Bernard Malamud’s *The Assistant* to Isaac Bashevis Singer’s ambitious medieval fairy-tale *The Slave*, we might underscore a redemptive theme to sexual lust as a being-creating metaphor that offsets both the severeness of Judaic religious conservatism and the constant tension between Jews and Christians who either envy them or wish to violently quell their religious difference. Goldstein happens through a characteristic tale of urban nurturing and economic self-realization. He falls in love and marries, then has a family. Social liminality is re-written optimistically and within a spirit of masculine confidence: “Shy sensitive girls may end up as poetesses or they may turn bitter and drink alone in bars, but nice shy sensitive Jewish girls usually marry and have children, gain two pounds

a year, and worry more about refurbishing hats and trying a new casserole than about the meaning of life" (487). It was, of course, a classically beatnik *oeuvre* to try and write the romantic and erotic generativity of the non-White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant man or woman, but Beat Generation novels and poems were less adept at recognizing the economic and social "success," by mainstream terms: the covert brilliance of "the Other" was carefully guarded, a kind of secret that had evocative psychological power. Goldstein's relationship with Natalie, and specifically the romantic death of that relationship during the maternity of the second child, projects a very different positioning of "the ethnic." His/her social and cultural success, rather than promoting multi-ethnic ecstasies, strengthens ethnic traditions while focusing a point of modern, urban social maturity:

They expand, put on weight, and give money to charitable organizations to help refugees. They are sincere and friendly and happy, and nearly everyone likes them. As their son grows older, begins to talk, there are any number of pleasures they draw from him. They are content and the habits of marriage lap about them like a warm bath. They never feel great joy but they are rarely depressed, and nothing immediate is ever excessive or cruel. (491)

Jack Kerouac does not narrate the ethnic citizen's realization of community and success until 1965, with the publication of *Desolation Angels*. Mailer's centrism, by contrast, envisions the spectacle of "beatnik" as a kind of temptation, an allure, to a spiritual outcome that is uncalculated and therefore misleading. Presenting the "Jewish" story, of course, overlooks very real gaps of cross-cultural understanding that Mailer deliberately puts in his soldiers: the positive xenophobia, plus the distortions of non-Western peoples such as the Japanese, again seriously distort any kind of populist or democratic ideal for a "Pax Americana." Mailer's penning of Goldstein diminishes the demographic and geographic concept of "the Other," while retaining him as a modern subject borne of the fruit of social pluralism. Although the scope of otherness is limited, again a counter-thrust to beatnik eclecticism is given a very positive bearing, one which competes with narrated racisms to the present day.

We should remember that Mailer was a writer who faced the same crisis as the Beat Generation: that of publishing to earn a living. Still, Aronowitz's

essay underscores what we are often likely to dismiss—that their coinciding in the early 1940s breathed a kind of social estimation of American community and overall outlook. The harsh criticism, too, of “The White Negro,” although a key theme of Mailer’s recurrent centrism, veils a moment of social being that is the continuing effort and development of authorial translations of culture. Paraphrasing Oswald Spengler—for many critics the godfather of “Beat”—he establishes the continuity of literature instead of its schizophrenic and hasty re-drawing of consciousness and experience to suit political needs. In short, Mailer’s anticipation of the Beat Generation sustained a continuing moment of literary discovery: we find a delicious sort of foil that forecasts the problem and the praxis of modern American man’s social achievement.

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