MAILER AND HEMINGWAY: SUM OF THE PARTS

STONE MEREDITH

IT IS NOT NEWS TO NOTE THE CONNECTIONS between Ernest Hemingway and Norman Mailer. It is also not news to talk about how both men pushed the boundaries of American journalism. Both writers use masculine metaphors and personal experience to report current ideas in a variety of media outlets and, in particular, *Esquire* magazine. But their reporting is not sophistic or self-indulgent. Instead, it is measured and multifarious, built on a framework of four key pillars: setting the scene, dialogue, status detail, and point-of-view. These four literary devices create a realistic world in which the subjects become characters and the details of the experience are as important as the experience itself. These conscious efforts to construct a realistic, eye-witness experience are the required tenets of New Journalism, as defined by Tom Wolfe in 1972 in *New York* magazine, in an article subtitled "Participant Reveals Main Factors Leading to Demise of the Novel, Rise of New Style Covering Events." Much like every movement in written communication, this New Style doesn't just appear. Instead, it is extracted and named from the work of pioneering jeremiads. Forty-two years after Wolfe's naming of this method and movement, I offer a return to the form of this method through the *Esquire* writings of Hemingway and Mailer. By examining the methods of these masters, we can find our foundations in a modern-day media environment that is so fast and so fractured.

To initiate this discussion, we turn first to Mailer. As Hemingway wrote before the moment of New Journalism, we will come back to him later to examine his role as forefather to Mailer. Mailer is often the apt choice to exemplify this movement to budding journalists. One *Esquire* article of particular note is the November, 1960, "Superman Comes to the Supermarket." So

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beloved is this piece in the popular American psyche that it is listed as the seventh greatest story ever published in *Esquire* ("The Seven Greatest Stories . . .").

In public debates, this article is often used as a litmus test for journalists from both the left and the right. They use Mailer's article to compare where we are now in relation to those days before Kennedy's Camelot when Mailer would speak of politics in terms of its relationship to baseball and to being addicted to nicotine:

> Politics has its virtues, all too many of them—it would not rank with baseball as a topic of conversation if it did not satisfy a great many things—but one can suspect that its secret appeal is close to nicotine. Smoking cigarettes insulates one from one's life, one does not feel as much, often happily so, and politics quarantines one from history; most of the people who nourish themselves in the political life are in the game not to make history but to be diverted from the history which is being made. (Mailer 109)

Journalistic moments like these serve as a predictive lens to the concept of New Journalism. Written moments like these will keep Mailer current even today in Journalism departments on campus, and not just the English department. And yet, by the time Tom Wolfe published his 1973 collection New Journalism's Greatest Hits, he selected Mailer's 1968 *The Armies of the Night* to represent Mailer's role in the movement—and not the inaugural piece from which I quoted. Wolfe's text becomes the anthology of the movement, so casual readers of Mailer might not realize that his New Journalism voice was among the first in the conversation. Even to many scholars, Mailer is often seen as part of that movement, not an instigator of that movement.

I argue that Mailer's 1968 piece, published and composed after the contentious Democratic National Convention is, in fact, a fracture—a significant break in the field of Journalism. I also allege that this moment reflects a sense of ethos that is later muddled, if not lost, in those journalists who will compose in the shadow of the New Journalism movement.

Further, I argue that the rhetorical bloodline of such a movement can be linked directly to Ernest Hemingway through one of the common grounds that both writers share—publications in *Esquire* magazine. In short, both men transform meaning on the pages of *Esquire.* The transformation

occurs when both men employ Wolfe's four pillars of New Journalism as part of their ethical structure. This structure keeps their self-referential experiences within the context of rhetorical arguments.

Hemingway creates this public rhetorical space first. Twenty-seven years before Mailer publishes "Superman" in *Esquire,* Ernest Hemingway is prolific and successful in *Esquire* from 1933 to 1936. Hemingway's articles are popular, and his topics range from fishing to hunting to the state of affairs in the political world. Concurrently, he continues to write successful fiction, including 1935's *Green Hills of Africa* and notable short stories, including "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber."

Hemingway is, at once and for decades, a novelist, short-story writer, and journalist. Mailer will later attain success in as many genres, but Mailer's path is made easier by Hemingway's pioneer penning. Hemingway changes the terrain by weathering criticism and standing his ground. In his time, Hemingway is operating in a world where high literature is still king. There is a big space between high-brow literary circles and the everyday reporter. This gap is addressed more than once in Hemingway's temporal essays published in *Esquire*.

One particular example is Hemingway's railing against potential critics in the *Esquire* December 1934, piece "Old Newsman Writers: A Letter from Cuba." In this letter, Hemingway tells his reader that there is more to this temporal journalism than might appear on first blush:

> It is not enough to have a big heart, a pretty good head, a charm of personality, baggy pants, and a facility with a typewriter to know how the world is run and who is making the assists, the put-outs and the errors and who are merely the players and who are the owners. (Hemingway 180)

So, it takes some living and learning—some witnessing—as an eyewitness, according to Hemingway, if one wants to report. Notice that all four pillars of new journalism at work in that passage. In particular, the status detail of the baggy pants places the reader alongside the writer as he stands at his oft-discussed typewriter. Hemingway tells his reader that it is not enough to be a persona with a little charm and a masculine image to speak to an audience, either as a reporter or a composer of high literary prose. Hemingway speaks directly to his *Esquire* audience in 1934, not in ways unlike the voice

Mailer later invokes to his 1960 *Esquire* audience. Hemingway places the four pillars on the stage of public, plain-style discourse. Mailer's generation names the pillars and makes them standard practice for American journalism.

Mailer, mirroring, sometimes self-consciously, Hemingway's method, is a masculine American icon noted for loving the sports of men and masculine metaphors to talk about public debates and politics. For example, both men use baseball to define and categorize where politics lies in the American consciousness—in the moment from which both men are writing. Their earnest approach is ethical when grounded in the structure of setting the scene, dialogue, status detail, and point-of-view. Their star status gives them a voice in *Esquire*, but their mastery of new journalism principles awards them staying power.

By 1934, Hemingway is a star the world over. When he is an old newspaperman, he has a prowess and presence behind every word. He has, by this time, spent much time, though his writings and his lifestyle, defining what it means to be an American man. Mailer harkens back to Hemingway in making his definition in 1956. In *Village Voice's* "Nomination of Ernest Hemingway for President: Part 2," Mailer, an ironic raconteur, selects Ernest Hemingway. Mailer does not bury his lead. Mailer writes, "Yes, it may seem a trifle fantastic at the first approach, but the man I think the Democrats ought to draft for their presidential candidate in 1956 is Ernest Hemingway" (Mailer 37).

Among the traits Mailer emphasizes, he notes that Hemingway is more charming than Dwight Eisenhower and more well-known than Adlai Stevenson in 1951. Mailer adds that Hemingway knows hunting and fishing, so he would compete with Eisenhower for the small town vote. Mailer goes on to point out that Hemingway has an interesting war record and that he speaks simply. Mailer adds that Hemingway's lack of a political past is an asset. Finally, Mailer's postscript reveals yet another connection to Hemingway through the hyperbolic conclusion that reminds the reader to form one's own opinion on his reporting and ideas. Writes Mailer: "You see, friends and constituents of this paper, one advantage of being a village villain is that one is always certain of influencing events by arguing the opposite of what one really wants" (Mailer 40).

What gave Mailer, like Hemingway before him, the agency to hold this

position in American culture? Let's turn to the words of Hemingway and Mailer scholar, Phillip Sipiora, for the answer:

> More than anything else, Mailer was an interrogative artist. He was constantly questioning, challenging, confronting everybody and everything, the government, the public, his fellow writers, politicians. But unlike many public intellectuals, William F. Buckley for example, Mailer did not challenge from a stable perspective wedded to a firm foundation of political beliefs. Mailer oftentimes contradicted himself. He described himself as a left conservative, which is an oxymoron. (Martelle)

Sipiora shares his perspective in the October, 2013 *Esquire* blog while promoting his new collection of Mailer essays, *Mind of an Outlaw: Selected Essays.* To award Sipiora's talents with one of his favorite words: he *deftly* executes his spot-on point of view on the potential of Mailer's collected essays. By seeing these publications in a new venue, a collection of essays, we can see these pieces *in toto* much in the same way William White's 1967 collection of Hemingway news writings, *ByLine Ernest Hemingway: Selected Articles and Dispatches of Four Decades,* allows us to see Hemingway's journalism as a canon. By examining the specific genre of essay writing by both men, the indelible imprint of their role in defining a form, a culture, and a voice draws new perspective. Of particular note for this argument are the writings that both men shared with us in *Esquire.* In reality, the sum of the parts is greater than the whole.

In their time, these writers amplify the value of the oxymoron in journalism: for saying one thing, then meaning another, or not meaning another, or just making one pause to think. And to accomplish this journalistic space, both men employ the once-revolutionary tenets of what is now commonly called New Journalism. On their road to new potential for those journalists after them, both manage to make you wonder—make you read it again and again. Within the pages of Mailer and Hemingway, you are not on the binaries of either CNN or FOX News. You are, at once, challenged to examine multiple perspectives on the topic at hand. After reading the ease with which both writers present these perspectives in print, it is easy to forget just how hard it can be to stay in the middle of a debate with the potentially Sophistic tools of New Journalism and public persona so readily available to today's

public speakers. Thus, it is perhaps more important now than ever to remember the discipline and development required to attain this public voice in the ways that Hemingway and Mailer did. If we aspire to their idea, perhaps American culture can revive the integrity of their journalistic intents. If everything old is new again, let us pray to the gods that these two new journalists can harken us back to the middle—and away from today's forced polemical views within America's fifth estate.

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