

WHEN NOVELISTS WERE KINGS:
NORMAN MAILER AND *ESQUIRE*
IN THE 1960S

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NORMAN MAILER FIRST PUBLISHED “THE MIND OF AN OUTLAW,” his intensely autobiographical and introspective narrative of the struggle to find a replacement publisher for *The Deer Park*, in the November, 1959, issue of *Esquire*, the magazine which was to become, in J. Michael’s Lennon’s words, “the hip magazine of the [next] decade” (*Letters* 261). Harold Hayes, the man who edited the magazine through that decade, thought “Mind of an Outlaw”¹ was a boon for “our magazine when it was trying to become what it later became.” (Lennon, *Mailer* 265.) Hayes also thought the article’s placement was a boon for Mailer’s career, but there is no evidence that Mailer felt that way and much evidence that he never had much use for Hayes. Hayes was very much aware of Mailer’s hostility, but he still put Mailer at the beginning of a list of writers who had helped *Esquire* become that hip sixties monthly. And no wonder, for during that decade, Mailer followed up “Mind of an Outlaw” with his study of the 1960 Democratic convention, “Superman Comes to the Supermarket” (or “Supermart,” as *Esquire* edited Mailer’s version, causing him far more distress than can possibly be understood at this late date). This work was followed by “An Evening with Jackie Kennedy” and then “The Big Bite,” fourteen monthly columns on a variety of subjects, one of which led to “Ten Thousand Words a Minute,” an examination of the Sonny Liston-Floyd Patterson heavyweight title fight. “Norman Mailer Versus Nine Writers: Further Examinations of the Talent in the Room,” followed, an extended examination of contemporary novelists/competitors, that was accompanied by the photograph of Mailer standing, in coat and tie in the

corner of a boxing ring, his menace fully captured by the genius of Diane Arbus. (The equally menacing title was changed for re-publication to “Children of the Goddess.”) And then there was the heroic effort of *An American Dream*, serialized over eight consecutive issues, and “In the Red Light: A History of the [1964] Republican Convention.”

Any student of Mailer knows that all of these items (save some of the columns) are major entries in his canon and would be major no matter where they first appeared. Harold Hayes at least told others that Mailer was his best paid writer, implying as did his placement of Mailer at the top of his pantheon that Mailer was *Esquire*’s most important writer. But there is no evidence that Mailer returned the compliment. Indeed, after his irritation over the changing of the *Supermarket* title, the record as rehearsed by Lennon is basically one of grievances on Mailer’s part and grudging attempts by the magazine to soothe him, followed by intense haggling over the content and language of *An American Dream*, followed ultimately by a divorce which outlasted both the sixties and Harold Hayes’ editorship. None of that detracts from the fact, however, that Mailer did in fact appear in *Esquire*, that the magazine did consider his appearances enhancing to its reputation, and seen, at least from a historical perspective, his contributions and their first appearance in print will always be conjoined. It is fair to ask what did this conjunction tell us about the American literary culture of the 1960s. But before we ask that, we had better ask ourselves just what was this “hip” journal, because for a magazine that was supposed to appeal to young literary sophisticates, *Esquire* had a rather strange beginning.

In the mid-1950s, Arnold Gingrich, one of the founders of *Esquire* decided he was too old to edit a magazine that would appeal to the young demographic that advertisers wanted. This realization was not the first time Gingrich had decided to do a make-over. *Esquire* had started out in the 1930s in Chicago as essentially an advertising vehicle for men’s clothing and accessories with appropriate editorial material sandwiched between the ads. Its newsstand success, however, prompted the founders to supplement the “fashion” copy with more general features in hopes of finding an even wider audience. Fly fishing, a subject close to Gingrich’s heart, is one good example of the male-oriented copy, as was fiction that was at least different from that found in the women’s magazines of the day. To buttress the intellectual reputation of the magazine, Gingrich sometimes bought material from well-respected authors. Thus, as he kept reminding his readers for the next thirty-

something years, *Esquire* published both Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald—for example “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” and “The Crack-Up.”

The Forties saw another change. *Esquire* became a “girlie” magazine. (With most of its ideal readership in khaki, the interest in fashion doubtless dwindled.) Pictures of glamorous, anonymous models and well-built Hollywood stars and starlets filled its pages (and became models for the sexy artwork Army Air Corps crews liked to embellish their fuselages with) as well as illustrations by Alberto Vargas and George Petty, colorful and even more eroticized images of the glamorous models in the photographs. *Esquire* discovered the centerfold, and it was Vargas and Petty’s suggestive illustrations more than photographs that usually were found there.

By the fifties, Gingrich and *Esquire* had moved from Chicago to New York.

Meanwhile, in Chicago, an ex-*Esquire* employee named Hugh Hefner had started a competing magazine called *Playboy*, which had a centerfold and pictures of beautiful models and Hollywood starlets, but these models were mostly completely nude, not just scantily clad like *Esquire*’s. Perhaps Gingrich, who was already beginning to look like a dissipated country squire from another era, was morally offended. But more than likely he knew his advertising base would be (*Playboy* had a different business model). He decided he could not compete directly with Hefner. Vargas by that time had departed and Petty would leave in 1956. The centerfold itself was soon history (though not all of the scantily clad starlets).

A typical mid-to-late-fifties issue of the magazine would contain a number of “pictorial features” cheesecake or otherwise (one must remember that the competition included *Look* and *Life*, two extremely popular photo-journalistic publications), three essay-like “thought” pieces by Aldous Huxley, George Jean Nathan, and Paul Gallico, four or five articles and usually four short stories. Huxley and the ancient Nathan could be considered rather heavy thinkers but neither was really *au courant* and Gallico was a genial popular novelist and former sportswriter. The articles in general seemed to be different from those appearing in “general” or women’s magazines of the time only by their occasional emphasis on sports and subjects thought to be of more interest to men. Neither the names of the authors of the articles or of the heavy-on-plot fiction trigger recognition today. There were also monthly columns mostly on subjects such as books, classical music, travel, and (late in the decade) cinema. In short, there was nothing very “hip” about

the intellectual content. No wonder Gingrich doubted his ability to attract a younger readership.

The history of any large circulation magazine is byzantine, but one can cut through the clutter by focusing on January 2, 1957, as the most important date in the transformation of *Esquire* into the “hip” magazine of the sixties. On that date, Gingrich hired Harold Hayes and Clay Felker and essentially turned editorial direction of the magazine over to them. Both were named “associate editors” and both understood that they would have to compete against one another for the title of managing editor. Hayes, who eventually won the contest, bought “Mind of an Outlaw,” and Felker commissioned Mailer to cover the 1960 Democratic convention. For both men, in other words, Mailer’s work was an early sign of their desire to remake the magazine.

What then other than Mailer distinguished the new *Esquire*? First was a greater sense of irony. Hayes asked George Lois, a highly successful advertising executive, to re-do *Esquire*’s covers. Lois’s covers are remembered to this day as outstanding examples of graphic design. Almost invariably they were meant to appeal to readers with a sense of irony. Examples include a head shot of Heavyweight Champion Sonny Liston in a Santa Claus cap for the December, 1963, issue; Ed Sullivan sporting a Beatles’ haircut for the July, 1965, issue that had an article on the rock group’s “invasion” of America; and the issue of May, 1965, featuring a portrait of Adolph Hitler “aged” to look as he would in his seventy-sixth year (and actually looking a lot less worn than he did in the Bunker in the spring of 1945). The latter issue actually contained a serious article on Nazi war criminals still at large by Gideon Hausner, Adolf Eichmann’s Israeli prosecutor.

What became *Esquire*’s most famous ironic tradition started with an idea by Hayes—he wanted something like the Harvard *Lampoon*—and was fleshed out by Robert Benton, *Esquire*’s art director, and David Newman. Benton and Newman later in the decade would write the screenplay for the genre-changing *Bonnie and Clyde*. For Hayes and *Esquire* they came up with the Dubious Achievement Awards, “several pages of candid photos with brief captions,” as Carol Polsgrove laconically describes the effort in her history of Hayes’ editorship (52). But the photos were often hilarious in themselves and the captions were even more so. They were witty, irreverent, and carried some expectation that only the “hip” would get the joke. The awards first appeared in the January, 1962, issue (Mailer was declared “White Man of the

Year”) and every year thereafter long after Hayes and Benton and Newman had left the magazine. Doubtless many observers called the whole exercise “sophomoric,” but in a sense that was the audience Hayes and Felker were seeking: after all, there are plenty of thirty-year-old sophomoric males. “More than any other single feature the Dubious Achievement Awards—irreverent, sassy, and smart—set *Esquire* on its new course,” Hayes was to say later (Polsgrove 52).

Meanwhile, a new fiction editor, Rust Hills, started trying to ratchet up quality in that area. He succeeded, as did Gordon Lish, his successor later in the decade. The names Polsgrove gives—Malamud, Purdy, Calvino, Capote, and Roth—are enough to show that the fiction offerings helped improve the reputation of the magazine (52).

But the feature that most turned *Esquire* into a “hip” publication was the “New Journalism.” Tom Wolfe popularized the term and his journalism gave the most solid indication that something “new” was afoot as the title (not actually his words) of his first big *Esquire* article would suggest: “There Goes (Varoom! Varoom!) That Kandy-Kolored (Thphhhhhh!) Tangerine-Flake Streamlined Baby (Rahghhh!) Around the Bend (Brmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm). . . .” But no one else really wrote like Tom Wolfe, and he soon enough stopped writing like that. The term never could be rigorously defined and has since disappeared or been subsumed by more up-to-date descriptors like “long-form journalism” or “creative non-fiction.” Hayes never liked the term, preferring “literary fiction” or, in 1972, “personalized journalism,” which he thought had been the most important of *Esquire*’s unique characteristics for the last decade, “a tradition marked in recent years by the work of Mailer, Talese, Wolfe, Sack, Garry Wills and others” (Polsgrove 267). A reader familiar with the names on this list probably would agree with the use of the term “personalized,” since at the very least one was not likely to confuse one writer’s style with another. The other interesting issue about Hayes’ list is that when he wrote it, he and Mailer were permanently estranged and had been for several years. Yet he still put Mailer at the head of his list. The question is why.

Esquire’s covers may have gained admirers (and newsstand sales) through their striking graphic design and irony, but clearly Hayes is right in implying that it was the writing that made the magazine so widely noticed and admired—so “hip.” However, the reputation often generates a hagiography that needs to be resisted. The magazine was not as “intellectual” as some

later accounts would suggest, nor was Hayes that brilliant or *au courant*, nor was its core audience somehow made up of marvelous literary sophisticates. Oral history has problems with defective memory, to say the least. One example, recalled for Carol Polsgrove, suggests “higher” standards than Hayes could ever have held. At an editorial meeting with Hayes and Felker in 1961, Felker produced a portfolio of scantily clad photos of Shirley MacLaine by Bert Stern. The idea was that it would be a parody of the old calendars the magazine used to run of Vargas or Petty drawings. Hayes immediately took exception. “This was the old *Esquire*, he said: just nonsense—a waste of twelve pages” (Polsgrove, 49–50). Felker had his way, and as anyone can see by looking at the issue (many of the shots are also on-line) the pictures are indeed ironic—just like the “new” *Esquire*. In short, what this really was, more than likely, was a clash between two egos, neither of whom was able to grant the other credit for a good idea. The pictures ran, and what is more, *Esquire* continued to run “tasteful” and somewhat ironic semi-nude or un-revealing nude pictures of actresses throughout Hayes’ editorship. See, for example, the nude profile shot of Elsa Martinelli in the February, 1963, issue, or the full body and bare-below-the-waist-profile of Angie Dickinson in March, 1966, which was so admired that for special anniversary issues the editors have deliberately reshot the same pose several times with different actresses.

Not only did the magazine carry up-scale cheesecake, it also carried pictorial features, with more photographs than text (some by Hayes’ new acquaintance Diane Arbus), and articles and pictorial features on men’s fashions. Fashion advertising kept the magazine alive, and Polsgrove is misleading in playing down how much of Hayes’ time the fashion side of the magazine must have involved, though she may be correct in describing how much he disliked it. And along with fashions came the “lifestyle” pieces—anything from a paragraph or set of diagrams to a longer piece on how an *Esquire* gentleman-reader correctly poured champagne or wore an ascot or polished his shoes, or anything else. The fashion and the lifestyle features still exist in the current magazine and while the fashion copy may now partake of irony the lifestyle segments are still written in the same supercilious prose (suggesting the reader has a really bad case of status-insecurity) that has always been an *Esquire* feature.

Indeed, it is very hard to find additional steps Hayes took to make the magazine more “hip.” For the monthly book review column, he chose first

Dorothy Parker (born 1893) and then, when she was not able to continue, Malcolm Muggeridge (born 1903). Both reviewers were extraordinarily witty and fun to read, but was either likely to be the best reviewer of Heller or Pynchon or even Mailer or of any “hip” literary fashion? And though almost every issue had a review of classical music by the admirable and knowledgeable Milton Mayer, the magazine let the post-Beatles adult appreciation of Rock go almost completely unnoticed. Likewise, *Esquire* for most of the sixties had Dwight Macdonald as its movie critic. Macdonald was a superb writer with a deep knowledge of film history. But he also thought the advent of sound and the dominance of Hollywood studios had ruined the promising art of cinema. Doubtless most of the magazine’s desired demographic had never seen a silent film, and more importantly Macdonald and hence the magazine was in no way prepared for the rise of the French critical re-evaluation of Hollywood and the great studio sound films of the thirties and forties. Auteur theory and the anti-snobish enthusiasms of Pauline Kael were where the “hip” film enthusiasts were, not *Esquire*.

Esquire had a circulation during this period of about 900,000. It is hard to believe that even in a nation approaching 200 million, (as America was at the time) that there were 900,000 “affluent young men—professionals, executives—who could afford good suits and good liquor and occasional trips abroad,” as Gingrich described his ideal subscriber, who liked cutting-edge fiction and personalized journalism, who looked to Dorothy Parker or Malcolm Muggeridge for what to read, who enjoyed classical music and were complete snobs when it came to wardrobe accessories and everything else in their upscale, sophisticated urban lives. In addition, they would have to love irony and they should be fond of either attending or at least hearing about college literary festivals, which Rust Hills, with Gingrich’s blessings, started having every year on a different campus or in a city like San Francisco with multiple nearby campuses. These events featured symposia with writers like Mailer, James Baldwin, Philip Roth, and William Styron (none of whom was likely to appear in a fashion pictorial in the magazine) on weighty topics like the state of literature in the United States today. At least, the 900,000 subscribers and newsstands purchasers were mostly male. But, according to those in charge of providing such figures for advertisers, one fourth of the total readers were women, which meant that the magazine held interest for some wives and girlfriends.

Clearly there was no typical or ideal *Esquire* reader. In fact, Hayes never

even had a readership that could be counted on to appreciate irony. Polsgrove's book is full of stories of outraged reactions by both readers and advertisers to Lois's covers as well as to some of the articles by Hayes' favored writers. Whether the cover was of heavyweight champion Sonny Liston in a Santa Claus cap or Ed Sullivan in a Beatles wig, readers' objections poured in. And so did complaints from advertisers. (Apparently, in the staid early sixties, fashion advertisers had not developed Calvin Klein's sense of humor. One wonders where in the world they would put their advertising. They were already avoiding *Playboy* en masse, and every other men's magazine Polsgrove mentions as an alternative had similar liabilities.) But in face of the objections and with circulation holding up, Hayes persisted. And clearly he thought that his writers were what gave his magazine that special cachet with the taste makers. At least some part of the audience must have agreed.

As for Mailer, by 1976, he was used to seeing "New Journalism" defined by Wolfe and others in terms of novelistic technique—scene construction, character development, realistic dialogue, and attention to social status. One can feel the anti-essentialist Mailer bristling at any attempt to reduce his art to abstract "techniques" and can confirm his dislike of being placed in a category created by another writer when he refers in the preface to *Some Honorable Men* to Wolfe's "self-serving encomiums to the New Journalism" (vii). But he foregoes an attack on Wolfe to zero in on the term itself. He has, he claims, no use for "Journalism" whatsoever; he is inclined to "spit to the wind" that he doesn't give a damn for it (vii). What follows is a disparaging of both journalists and their craft—or rather of their product. What is journalism responsible for? "A deadening of the collective brain," for one thing. Another—keep in mind he is writing at the dawn of the sound-bite era—is the distortion of the "consciousness in any leader whose actions are consistently in the papers, for he has been obliged to learn how to speak only in quotable and self-protective remarks" (*Some Honorable Men* vii).

But a writer "on the side of fiction" could be better. "There is no reason to believe that a novelist is not better equipped to deal with the possibilities of a mysterious and difficult situation than anyone else, since he or she is always trying to discover what the nature of reality might be" (*Some Honorable Men* ix-x). Continuing to go after Wolfean definitions, Mailer insists it is not the techniques but the "world" (which he repeats and italicizes) "of fiction [that] can be brought to the facts of journalism" (*Some Honorable Men* xi). Which can only mean that the techniques create an imaginative whole

that makes more sense than the journalist's more pedestrian and impersonal construct of ready-made assumptions, stale descriptions, and tired quoting of clichéd statements. And just as he is judging the journalist, so he thinks the reader can judge the New Journalist (aka the novelist serving as journalist). But this time it will be the judgment of an individual voice that will be evaluated for the novelist's "strengths and comic [Mailer is speaking of himself] lacks as an observer" (*Some Honorable Men* x). And finally, this judgment will not only lead to a finer understanding of the subject under discussion but will bring with it fiction's ability to give pleasure. Mailer actually makes the last point slightly differently and more personally. If he had not written these essays for *Esquire* with the "confidence of a novelist," what "would be here worth rereading" (*Some Honorable Men* x)? After, all he is not republishing these accounts to make life easier for historians, and everyone knows how the conventions and subsequent elections turned out. Therefore, it must be for pleasure.

But what Mailer leaves out is personality. No one writing a significant piece for *Esquire* wrote in an absolutely impersonal, "objective" daily-newspaper style. At the least, a careful reader could intimate that the article was written by an individual with his or her own ideas about style and distance and a distinct point of view. In other words, personality or distinctive persona was never absent from an article. (At *Esquire* there was a collective house "style" for much of the unsigned, staff-generated, life-style features—usually annoying.) But Mailer's personality included huge chunks of autobiography. And the autobiography was not always flattering. "Confession," in fact, might often be a better word for it.

Mailer admits he still is interested in facts, and despite his dislike of the term, we might as well call that interest journalism—he was, after all, in all except "Mind of an Outlaw," on assignment to cover a specific event. "Ten Thousand Words a Minute" is perhaps the most satisfying marriage of journalism, novelistic insight, and confession, but all of the major articles he published in *Esquire* have elements of each. "Mind of an Outlaw," for example, has its journalistic side as it weaves its way through the world of commercial publishers and then the network of significant reviewers who, Mailer clearly feels, can affect the size of a book's readership. "Superman Comes to the Supermarket" is not the first journalistic treatment of electoral politics to be "moral" as Pete Hamill maintains (Lennon, *Life* 270). (How could one pretend that H. L. Mencken wasn't moral?) But the drama of the actual con-

vention is both journalistic and novelistic, and the confessional aspect is most evident in Mailer's mental state as he looks and hopes for a candidate who can reverse the soul-deadening malaise of the Eisenhower years. "An Evening with Jackie Kennedy" is relatively weak on journalism, but that is to be expected of an article on an already-run and probably mostly immediately forgotten television show devoted to the First Lady and her re-decoration of the White House. But his treatment of her as hoped-for archetype and his confession that he tried to get her to sign on to a project on the Marquis de Sade certainly suggests an autobiographical emphasis. "Some Children of the Goddess" is not so much journalism as evaluative literary criticism, though his accounts of how certain writers started, and fared through the late forties and early fifties, etc., has a journalistic ring to it. Since he knew most of the writers discussed he cannot help analyzing their character (and his own) resulting in a somewhat scandalous or audacious piece full of novelistic and confessional moments.

"In the Red Light" has very little of the "personal" if by the term one means "biography." Indeed it may be Mailer's most journalistic piece—it is an amazingly knowledgeable piece about the way political conventions worked in those days. But in the absence of biography Mailer still depends on the reader knowing who he, the author, is. Thus without going into his life, Mailer manages to reveal a number of his perennial obsessions, seemingly confident that his by-line will establish a known presence. Obsessions with plastic and political assassination and the imminent arrival of fascism all function as leitmotifs, and he quotes Governor William Scranton (Barry Goldwater's main challenger for the nomination) telling him, "I've read your books," thus letting the reader know that Mailer is not operating incognito at the convention (*Some Honorable Men* 270).

"Ten Thousand Words a Minute"—ostensibly about a championship prizefight that failed to last three minutes—is perhaps the piece that best exemplifies all of Mailer's strengths or contributions. Readers who made it to the end (an issue we will return to later) will have experienced just about every talent that Mailer brought to his *Esquire* audience.

To begin, there is Mailer the journalist. Mailer is there to cover the fight, and though doubtless a more experienced journalist could criticize some of Mailer's footwork (he never managed to attend a Patterson press conference, for example) he is undeniably functioning in part as a reporter, providing background on both fighters, interviewing Cus D'Amato, Patterson's man-

ager, and describing the sports celebrities in attendance. He also manages to attend a bizarre contretemps between the fighters' camps over Liston's unorthodox gloves. By the time Mailer wrote this piece he had become a hardcore boxing fan, and he is thus able to do as well as any sportswriter in his description of the actual fight. If one wants to know what went on in Chicago at a certain sporting event, he has come to the right place.

Mailer's basic reporting gives the sports fan all he needs to know about the locale (Chicago), the weather (the fight was held outside at Comiskey Park), the "stats" on both fighters and a description of the fight itself. The fight only lasted for a little over two minutes and the only exciting thing was the knockout itself, so Mailer need not spend much time on it. But, all the same, he manages to get something of a "scoop." His description of the fight makes clear that the knockdown/knockout was something of a mystery: He never saw Liston deliver a lethal blow. Neither, he reports, did James Baldwin, one seat away from him. ("What happened?" said Baldwin" [*Presidential Papers* 274].) And this is the moment where Mailer the novelist, with the luxury of a delayed deadline, turns into Mailer the reporter-critic of the press. The "Goat" must be fed, he insists, using his metaphor for the stupid and insatiable appetite for "facts" which propels daily journalism, so that the next morning every reporter had a definitive take on what the takedown punch had been. Normally such "takes" agree, but this time they did not, as he reports. And then, with further journalistic footwork, he discovers that there was no photograph of the actual blow—nothing better than one wire service photograph of Liston's glove seeming to leave Patterson's chin. (The Liston and Patterson camps were equally in disagreement about what kind of punch put the champion on the canvas.)

Mailer will share his own psychological explanation about what really happened to Patterson, but the interesting thing is that fifty-plus years later, in the age of Youtube, one can view tapes of the fight and at the very least confirm that Mailer could be reporting accurately what he could see from his angle. Luckily for Mailer, the tapes do not visually contradict the psychic explanation he will employ.

But the term *journalist* embraces not only "objective" reporters but also columnists, and Mailer certainly supplies all kinds of information that one could expect to read in the sports columns of any American newspaper. There are also items that would not appear have appeared there in the 1960s. For example, Liston (who had a "bad boy" image) was not overly coopera-

tive with reporters. This earned, him, Mailer tells us, the nickname of “Malcolm X” among the press. Sports gossip columnists did not exist in the early 1960s, but if they did, this would have been a juicy item for one. But there are also items that really cement Mailer’s standing as someone who knows as much about boxing as any reporter—and not just as a journalist but as a sports journalist. For instance, before the fight he accompanies Cus D’Amato to a meeting to settle an argument over the gloves Liston will be using. The argument is so silly that he concludes that the “unspoken aim must have been to irritate Liston” (*Presidential Papers* 247). That insight is borne out by the anger of Liston’s managers during the actual meeting—with D’Amato pretending to be indifferent to the whole proceeding—which should make even the novice fan aware that keeping the fighter in psychic isolation for several days before a big fight is *de rigueur*. And in the actual fight itself, Mailer notices that Liston continues to punch Patterson on the arms and then gives a learned explanation for why that might be happening:

It is a way of fighting. A strong slow fighter will sometimes keep hitting the other man on the shoulder or the biceps until his arms go dead. If the other man is in condition it is a long procedure. (*Presidential Papers* 273)

There was at least one other thing that Mailer did as a reporter that would not have been included on the sports page in those days. Liston was alleged to be controlled or at least managed by the Mafia. Mailer was not particularly interested in that allegation (although it was probably true). But in describing the fight “scene” Mailer goes out of his way to describe in detail members of the Mob (to use Mailer’s term) in attendance at the fight. No sports columnist, as I say, of that day would have touched the topic, but Mailer does so in such brilliant detail that it, in fact, leaves journalism behind and proves Mailer’s point that novelists do it better. A decade before Coppola’s *The Godfather*, Mailer neatly divides the members hierarchically. He first divides them into birds and beasts, with the goons being the beasts:

Heavy types, bouncers, plug-uglies, flatteners . . . eyes fulfilling the operative definition of razor slits, murder coming off them like scent comes off a skunk.

You could feel death as they passed. . . . If a clam had a muscle as large as a man, and the muscles grew eyes, you would get the mood. (*Presidential Papers* 241–242)

These muscle men were ordered around by the “birds . . . Italian dons looking like little old shrunken eagles” and dressed in black gabardine. They seldom looked at anyone, but their “aura” said, “if you spit on my shoes, you’re dead” (243). And above the birds in the hierarchy were the “fine old *mafiosos* with faces one had seen on the busts of Venetian doges in the Ducal Palace . . . insidious with the ingrowth of a curious culture built on treachery, dogma, and the evil eye, and blood loyalty to clan” (242). Mailer likes the comparison to Renaissance physiognomy so much that he reverts to it later to describe the capos in attendance at ringside.

All sportswriters love “quotes,” but Mailer merges dialogue with description to present psychological studies of his speakers. Mailer quotes D’Amato on several occasions. He obviously finds D’Amato an interesting denizen of the fight game for all kinds of reasons, including his gutsy dislike for the Mob. By the time of the actual fight, the look on D’Amato’s face during the singing of the National Anthem can be turned into an omen of what is to follow. Two days before the fight, after Mailer has already done a good job of quoting D’Amato in a way no reporter would—that is, making his speech uniquely his own—he involves himself in the narrative. Leaving the scene of the brouhaha over the gloves, he explains to Cus his rather harebrained idea that Liston is not a great fighter but a great actor pretending to be a great fighter.

D’Amato listened attentively. We were in a space age, and the opinions of moon men and Martians had also to be considered. “Sonny’s a good fighter,” he said finally. (*Presidential Papers* 255)

Thanks to the description, we are now in the world of the novel or at least in a novelist’s world. By conceding that his opinion was a little off-center, Mailer can generate an explanation for D’Amato’s simple response and make sure one understands that the response is not at all simple (or un-newsworthy, as a reporter would see it) but a dead giveaway that Cus is an interesting human being, but not at all on Mailer’s wavelength. (Given Mailer’s

complete treatment of D'Amato, he could easily have become a normative character or moral center had Mailer been writing a novel.)

Obviously, in a 20,000-word treatment of a two-minute championship fight, all description and narration are going to be "rich." But Mailer is constantly, as in the example above, pushing that richness into a novelistic mode. No better example of that can be seen, perhaps than his treatment of the Griffith-Paret fight. This whole section of the article may seem more like a digression today than it did to the original *Esquire* readers. Emile Griffith and Benny Paret fought for the welterweight championship just one day short of six months before the Liston-Patterson fight. Paret was pummeled so badly that he was carried from the ring in a coma and never regained consciousness. In the aftermath all kinds of questions that continue to this day were raised about the morality of boxing. Mailer was at that fight and devotes several thousand words to describing it, beginning with the historical animosity between the two fighters. Paret had made comments suggesting that Griffith was homosexual and even, according to Mailer, "disrespected" him in the ring during the fight. Mailer lets the animosity lead directly to the ferocity of the eighteen straight blows that Griffith delivered to a Paret caught in the ropes.

He hit him eighteen right hands in a row, an act which took perhaps three or four seconds, Griffith making a pent-up whimpering sound all the while he attacked, the right hand whipping like a piston rod which had broken through a crankcase, or like a baseball bat demolishing a pumpkin. (*Presidential Papers* 264)

Mailer was just feet away from the action and, he claims, "within psychic range" and that "some part of [Paret's] death reached out to us;" and the doomed fighter gave "some little half smile of regret" (*Presidential Papers* 265). Psychic range is not within a sportswriter's normal reach, but Mailer is straining because he is bothered—as some readers might have been—by the moral problem of liking a sport in which the danger of death is part of the attraction. And the occasion makes Mailer move from being simply a writer of overwrought similes about pistons and baseball bats to an oracular prophetic novelist describing the strange gods that encourage devotion to such a dangerous sport. All the editorials and public wringing of hands about the fight could not find any defense for continuing the sport. The box-

ers and managers fought back, Mailer says, but they found it impossible to explain that their motivation was religious, because that religion was not Christianity.

It was an older religion, a more primitive one—a religion of blood, a murderous and sensitive religion which mocks the effort of the understanding to approach it, and scores the lungs of men like D. H. Lawrence, and burns the brain of men like Ernest Hemingway when they explore out into the mystery searching to discover some part of the secret. (*Presidential Papers* 266)

In any case, they certainly got an earful of Norman the Lawrencian/Beat oracle. Mailer's claim that there was no identifiable knockout blow in the Patterson/Liston fight (which as noted earlier, tapes seem to confirm) leads him to a completely mystical explanation of Patterson's defeat. Prizefighters are not the same beings inside the ring as they are on the outside. Instead,

Patterson-in-the-ring was not Floyd Paterson sparring in his gym, but was instead a vehicle of all the will and all the particular love which truly wishes him to win, as well as a target of all the hatred which was not impotent but determined to strike him down. (*Presidential Papers* 276)

And when the “universes” of love and hate collide, “the impact, if not clear, was total.” Part of the impact was to produce a string of sentences as close as Mailer ever becomes to being a Beat writer, invoking all the irrational forces that govern our lives and capitalizing all of them as well: *Sex, Love, Hustler, Infantryman, Syndicate, Magician, Artist, God, Devil, Lord* (*Presidential Papers* 276).

As noted earlier, Mailer's friend “Jimmy” Baldwin was at the fight, on assignment for *Nugget*, one of the many *Playboy* copycats to spring up in those years. According to Mailer, both writers tried to “will” Patterson's victory. Baldwin does not admit to any such thing in his essay and certainly not to the chagrin Mailer felt over his failure. But Baldwin, in addition to being one of the best essayists of the period, was also a novelist, and his much more conventional article shows it, particularly his interview with Liston. However, Baldwin does not have the luxury of twenty-thousand words to de-

velop as much depth as Mailer. He cannot include an attack on journalists or descriptions of the Mob or the details of the fight game. Baldwin probably knew little of the Mob and he admitted he knew very little about boxing. But his character studies of the fighters are well drawn—in fact his personal interview with Patterson “scoops” Mailer, who never even saw Patterson at a press conference. And no one familiar with Baldwin’s essays would accuse him of not having a “voice.”

Mailer has a quite different voice. It is not just the singular “writer’s” voice of a craftsman like Baldwin, it is the voice of someone who is far more intimate with the reader, far more confessional, far more idiosyncratic (he would probably say “authentic”), and far more demonstrative of a unique personality than Baldwin or any of the other New Journalists Hayes crowed about. And it is this “personality” that may be the reason that made the editor put Mailer at the top of the list. The tough assault on “journalists” at the beginning of the piece, the obsession with plastic and cancer that get woven in almost from the beginning, the characterization of the readership of daily newspapers as *The Goat* (an animal that will “eat” anything), the constant recording of how he feels at every given moment, the idiosyncratic similes and metaphors, the confession that bad blood existed between him and Baldwin, the crowing over his “winning” a public debate that week with William J. Buckley—all of this puts Mailer the personality, not just the writer, front and center. Tom Wolfe certainly had a more eccentric style, but the style hid a pose, not as full-fledged public personality. Perhaps it is this full-fledged public figure that appealed to Hayes and made him put Mailer at the top of the list.

But the most egregious and bizarre example of the confessional personality that was Mailer in this piece is his treatment of the aftermath of the fight. Back at the Playboy Club in Chicago where he was visiting, Mailer, still smarting over “losing” the match and the example of failed will that was implied, spent the night drinking far too much alcohol until he had convinced himself that Patterson would certainly win a rematch but that only he, Norman Mailer, could stage it. Someone else who was having too much to drink was one of the higher-ups from Championship Sports, the promoters of the match. This individual promised to call a press conference the next morning for Mailer to announce his grand vision, an event to take place before Sonny Liston met the press.

The press conference never took place, but a totally strung-out Mailer managed to make a fool of himself anyway. A short rehearsal of what happened would contain the following items: Mailer decided to make his grand announcement at Liston's press conference; Mailer was forcibly ejected from the conference. Eventually he was allowed to return, where he heckled Liston until the champion took notice of him, called him a bum and asked the bum to get him a drink. Mailer refused because he had been called a bum. (He also managed to tell Liston that he thought Patterson was the better fighter.) Liston, managing the situation superbly, said that he was also a bum and that he liked Mailer. All of this extraordinarily embarrassing behavior is retold by Mailer without a shred of self-justification, as is the aftermath, where his behavior was picked up by gossip columnists—and sports columnists—and, of course, misrepresented. One of the readers of at least one of those accounts was Mailer's probation officer. As a consequence, his probation was extended.

This illustration and the next and final section are both examples of features Mailer brought to *Esquire* that none of Hayes' other favorites could bring. The last is an apocalyptic vision or hope that Patterson, representing the Good, could defeat Liston, the intimate of Evil, in the rematch. (He did not.) We have already called these moments Lawrencian, but the previous press-conference incident has nothing to do with D. H. Lawrence. It is rigorously personal, confessional, and objective. By objective I mean that it tilts neither towards an Augustinian sense of guilt nor a Rousseauian sense of self-pity and rationalization.

But the unelaborated mention of a parole officer—the assumption that his readers needed no explanation that he was on parole for stabbing his wife—suggests something else, and that is celebrity. The author of *The Naked and the Dead*, which is the way he was still identified in those days, had notoriety, had celebrity status. He and the magazine could count on readers knowing not just his name but details of his life, could count on them being interested in his public behavior.

Earlier we wondered how many of the magazine's readers would really want to read all of "Mind of an Outlaw" or "Ten Thousand Words a Minute." It is reasonable to assume that the magazine had readers interested in contemporary literature and in the distinct point of view and approach that Norman Mailer brought to his non-fiction. But surely that was a minority of the readership of a mass-circulation magazine. Why then did Hayes pub-

lish the pieces and why was he so convinced that Mailer was in effect his most important literary property? James Clifford who writes the back-page column of the *Times Literary Supplement*, “NB,” provides a clue. He notes in the August 7, 2015, issue that the recent film “Best of Enemies” about the acrimonious debate between William F. Buckley and Gore Vidal at the Democratic convention in 1968 and Kevin Schultz’s 2015 book on *Buckley and Mailer: The Difficult Friendship that Shaped the Sixties* both make the point that celebrity was a far different thing in the sixties. It was “an era when novelists were kings.”

If one goes back to the beginning of the sixties and remembers or studies the immense press given to the deaths of Hemingway and Faulkner, or the attention paid to Harper Lee, Truman Capote, Saul Bellow, Gore Vidal, or J. D. Salinger, it is not hard to concede Clifford’s point. And, of course, he is making the point to declare that we are now in a different era. The novelist is no longer king. Celebrity explains what Hayes got from Mailer. And celebrity also helps put the Writers Festivals that Rust Hills staged in perspective. In the vulgar language of today there was a bit of branding going on. The magazine benefited from Mailer’s celebrity in a way that was independent of the actual number of readers he had.

And it also explains a work we have not discussed up to now, *An American Dream*. If the novelist were king, a novelist doing a stunt was news. There were actually two stunts going on. The first was Mailer’s. He was going to try to write a worthwhile novel in eight chapters over eight months. Dickens worked like this in the nineteenth century—as Mailer knew—but it certainly was not the way respectable novelists worked in the twentieth century. He might very well fail, which meant there was a certain extra-literary respect for his audacity and a certain amount of extra-literary voyeurism as bystanders tracked his progress or lack thereof. But the magazine also helped turn it into a publicity stunt, for, example, by taking an ad in the *New York Times*, announcing Mailer’s effort and reporting on the future book sale. That book sale and the soon to follow movie sale are the best proofs that the publicity paid off. As Lennon reports, Hayes only paid \$20,000 for the magazine rights, but Scott Meredith, Mailer’s agent, was able to convert all the publicity into a publishing and movie deal that ultimately brought Mailer \$345,000, which by at least one on-line calculator would be worth \$2.6 million today (*Life* 332, 342).

Esquire's newsstand's sales also increased, so Hayes could congratulate himself with getting a real bargain. But the "chemistry," to use a current metaphor, between him and Mailer did not work. Soon Mailer would decamp permanently for *Playboy*, where the editors annoyed him less and paid more. He would not return until the magazine had a completely different masthead. In 1972, Hayes lamented his absence from the magazine's pages; Mailer, on the other hand, threatened to sue if the magazine did not stop including his name in a list of authors *Esquire* sent to prospective subscribers (Polsgrove 273–274). Perhaps Hayes' interpersonal skills were not all they should have been: other writers' praise for him to Polsgrove always seems to be qualified by at least one grievance or complaint. But the magazine he edited really did deserve Lennon's accolade as the "hip" journal of the sixties and Mailer, if he could have overcome his animus, would probably have conceded that some marvelous work he did in the sixties on politics, criticism, and sports, plus one of his better novels, would not have come about without his association with Harold Hayes and *Esquire*.

NOTE

"The Mind of an Outlaw," "Superman Comes to the Supermarket," "An Evening with Jackie Kennedy," and "Some Children of the Goddess" are all referred to in the text, without specific citations. They can be found in Phillip Sipiora, ed. *Mind of an Outlaw*. New York: Random House, 2013. James Baldwin's "The Fight: Patterson vs Liston," also mentioned in the text, appeared in *Nugget*, February, 1963, which is available online.

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