

THE NAKED AND THE DEAD:
LOST ILLUSION AND PESSIMISM
IN THE FRANCOPHILE MAILER¹

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“... the French novel has always been more congenial to me than the English.”

—Norman Mailer, letter to Pierre Brodin, Oct. 16, 1963
(Lennon, *Letters* 313).

IN *THE GREAT TRADITION*, F.R. LEAVIS ADVOCATES the reader’s “awakening” to “awareness of the possibilities of life” as a prominent literary criterion for the assessment of novelistic greatness (21). Leavis finds kindred spirits in support of his view. One is Henry James, who enjoined that concern for “sophisticated civilization” and its mature human and moral assessment figure prominently in literary assessment (13). Another is George Elliott, who repudiated Balzac’s *Le Père Goriot*—a work marked by Jacques Collin’s proselytizing of crime—“a hateful book” (29). The socially and morally affirmative view highlighted here is evident in some negative appraisals of Mailer’s merits. For example, Bufithis judges that Mailer’s “fiction does not appreciably present a sincere consciousness articulately alive to essential values: love beyond the erotic, a viable morality and a spiritual affinity with nature” (Begiebing and Bufithis 227). Similarly negative views of Mailer’s fictions can be found in found work by Epstein, Fuchs and others.

In his study of the *Bildungsroman*, Moretti embraces great French realist fictions of Stendhal, Balzac and Flaubert that largely center on revelations of amoral individual strivings and corrupt social institutions. Moretti sees these

revelation as grounds for positive celebration; and he contrasts the “pessimism” of his three French realists with Jane Austen’s “Rhetoric of Happiness” and the “great tradition of children’s literature” and “fairy tales” embodied in the likes of Fielding’s *Tom Jones* and Dickens’s *David Copperfield*.² In the French works celebrated by Moretti we get protagonists who develop not so much toward a happy social integration but toward disenchantment (*L’éducation Sentimentale*, hereafter *A Sentimental Education*), into criminality and imprisonment (*La Chartreuse de Parma*, *La Péré Goriot*, *Illusions Perdues*, *Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes*; hereafter, respectively, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, *Père Goriot*, *Lost Illusions*, and *A Harlot High Low*), and to an early death (*La Rouge et la Noir*, hereafter *The Red and the Black*). More generally, what we gain from the great French realists is developmental learning (or *Bildung*) as a shedding of illusions, disillusionment as enlightenment. To cite Balzac’s Jacques Collin (aka Vautrin, aka Abbe Herrera) in his notorious coach-ride lecture to the deeply dejected Lucien Charon, “You’re a child; you know nothing of men or things . . . There are two kinds of history: official history, all lies, the history that is taught in schools. . . . Then there’s secret history, which explain how things really happened: a scandalous kind of history. . . . One spends a great deal of life weeding out what one has allowed to grow in one’s heart during adolescence. This operation is called gaining experience” (*Illusions* 644).

Mailer’s “pessimism,” seldom so dark as that of our French realists, can largely be read off the fates of Mailer’s principal protagonists. Mailer’s first several novels, as Horn incisively states, may be termed “existential tragedies,” novels that end with protagonists in the throes of “futile” attempts at personal “realizations,” as, at best, “about to act in consonance with newly acquired wisdom.” Indeed, as Hicks writes of those early works plus *The Executioner’s Song* and *Ancient Evenings* in his “The Mailerian Dynamic,” Mailer tends toward a resolution that “seldom offers more than passing, partial and palliative moments of transcendence, even for the brave.”³

Below, I better detail my view of Mailer’s pessimism after I elaborate contrasts between the French and British *Bildungsromanen* discussed by Moretti, the Franco-British comparisons of Queenie Leavis, and some distinctive preconditions for the contrasting French and British fictions. Next, I draw on these comparisons to suggest an account of Mailer’s own pessimism. In conclusion, I note some implication of my affirmation of a pessimistic mode of fictions by complementing my French comparisons with some U.S. ones

and by clarifying that I do not think that the critical view that is open to praising works of pessimistic vision by any means trumps the more affirmative perspectives of Leavis and his co-religionists.

MAILER'S NOVELISTIC PESSIMISM

In *The Naked and the Dead*, co-protagonist Robert Hearn dies midway during an ambitious mission, and co-protagonist Croft ends that same mission in farcical failure. In *Barbary Shore*, narrator protagonist Mikey Lovett, a psycho-socially immobilized amnesiac at the novel's outset, ends the novel gaining no more than the intellectual legacy of the book's other notable protagonist, McLeod, a legacy of Trotskyist ideological formulations that Lovett himself, on reception, terms "poor hope" (311). In *Deer Park*, our final glimpse of Charles Eitel is of a man trapped in a deadening career and oppressed by commercial and romantic compromises; and our final glimpse of co-protagonist Sergius O'Shaughnessy is of a man in a quest for meaning that is not much more energizing or promising than that with which the novel opens on a profoundly alienated O'Shaughnessy. In *An American Dream*, Rojack's evasion of police indictment, love for Cherry, and victories over Shago Martin and Barney Oswald Kelly bring him no better ascent from the psychic pits of his relation to wife and murder victim Deborah than the courage to attempt new beginnings in the Village, "Guatamala and the Yucatan" (252). In *Why Are We In Vietnam?*, DJ's embrace of a less hypocritical mode of masculinity than his father Big DJ's bluff machismo offer scant satisfaction, leaving him in the grip of a masculine identity that compels him to enlist for service in Vietnam (a war Mailer abhorred). In *The Executioner's Song*, Gilmore's narrative ends with his death, albeit a death partially transcended because preceded by some attainment of love and met with dignity and courage. In *Ancient Evenings*, Menenhetet and grandson Little Menie, about to sail across new "dominions" on the "Boat of Ra" (704), sit together in "the pits of a new misery" where Menie reflects that the "the weight of the failure of my father in his four lives" falls heavily upon the son (706). For present purposes I treat *Harlot's Ghost* and *The Castle in the Forest* as unresolved; and I treat *The Gospel According to the Son* as all too unresolved for relevance here.⁴

MORETTI AND THE OTHER LEAVIS ON EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY FRENCH (AND BRITISH) FICTION: MORETTI'S COMPARISON OF BRITISH AND FRENCH *BILDUNGSROMANEN*.⁵

As a historical (and sociological) theory of the origins and evolution of the *Bildungsroman*, Franco Moretti's rich *The Way of the World* is explanatory as well as descriptive. Moretti offers an analysis of the origins of the *Bildungsroman*, indeed of the origins of a variety of *Bildungsromanen*.

I regard Moretti's stress on the *Bildungsroman* as both central to the reading of his *The Way of the World* and relevant to discussion of Mailer's fictions, despite their various divergences from the *Bildungsroman* form. These include the confinement of childhood narrative in *The Naked and the Dead* to segments of "Time machine" profiles and the brief, if youthful, segments of most protagonists' lives treated in *Barbary Shore*, *Deer Park*, *Why are We in Vietnam?*, *The Gospel According to the Son* and *Castle in the Forest*. Still, the very prominent Menenhetet-II strand of *Ancient Evenings* and the even more central Harry Hubbard strand of *Harlot's Ghost* fit the *Bildungsroman* template quite well, although *An American Dream*'s Rojack and *Executioner Song*'s Gilmore are hardly young enough to qualify as a *Bildungsroman* protagonist. Further, returning to Horn's insights, every protagonist of the fictions does pursue "realizations," as, at best, and the acquisition and practice of "wisdom."

This analysis of the origins and evolution of the *Bildungsroman* focuses principally on the "classical" *Bildungsromanen* of pre-1850 Britain and of Pre-Third Republic France. For the British *Bildungsromanen*, individual attainment of a social niche in the upper-middle or upper class occurs via a process of social mobility and of individual self-realization as a balance of individual expressive realization—ethical, aesthetic and sexual development; social advancement—that brings security, status, and happiness. The end point of the youth's transformation into adulthood is, in this *Bildungsroman*, the culmination of a richly conceived status attainment process. In the more literary terms of Lotman, the classical British *Bildungsroman* resolves narrative (and social) tensions of mobility with a fusion of individuality and normality, self-realization and conformity, sexuality and romantic satisfaction, status consolidation, a resolution of tensions between self and society, and a subordination of narrative twists and turns to narrative re-establishment of social order. The social anxiety is resolved; the lovers are wed; in brief, the individual is integrated into society (Moretti 17, 57).

Like Lukács, Moretti traces the classical *Bildungsroman* back to the emergence of commercial capitalism, in particular back to specific forms of capitalism in which a full-fledged and happy fusion of the upwardly mobile bourgeois with the social world of this figure's destination is possible. In particular, Moretti traces the classical form of the genre back to the world of eighteenth century British commercial capitalism in which the intellectually and artistically meritorious are given liberal access to the dispensations of upper class society (15–73, 181–214). In the fluid English society sketched by Moretti for late eighteenth- (and most nineteenth-) century England, there existed no insuperable gap between the “old regime” of the landed upper class and its traditional social system (that is, between the elites of monarch and court, established church, aristocracy, country gentry, and commercial merchant oligarchs, on the one hand, and the petite bourgeoisie of small capitalists, independent artisans and the *intelligentsia* of lawyers and physicians and even, teachers, journalists and literary artists on the other hand). The sketch can be more fully described by drawing upon Mann. Elaborated in Mann's terms, Moretti traces the *Bildungsroman* back to what Mann terms “Old Regime Liberalism.” In this order, various factors integrated the petty bourgeoisie with the reigning Old Regime class. In it, the “intellectual” group (which included novelists) bridged the gap between the Old Regime elite and the petty bourgeoisie insofar as members of the latter might, by brunt of skill and service, move on into the ranks of the former. In addition, common legislative needs pushed the two groups toward support of a substantial *laissez-faire* proprietor state. For at least the very skilled, social advancement, greased by steady economic expansion and beclouded by no ideology any more hostile to property than radical Whiggism was a tangible prospect. In short, mobility and attendant modes of cultural practice sufficed to nurture and sustain optimistic dreams of mobility, such as those dramatized in the classical *Bildungsroman*. Indeed, political threats to “Old Regime” landholdings were so slight and “Old Regime” status and income were so solid that real socio-economic substance can be claimed for the tendency of the classical *Bildungsroman* to paint with each tale a final fusion of self and society in which self might live “happily ever after.”⁶ Mann is less vocal on French politics in the era of Stendhal, Balzac and Flaubert. However, we will turn to discussion of the specific capitalist origins of the classical *Bil-*

dungsroman by Q. D. Leavis after returning in some detail to Moretti's own account in some more detail.

Moretti has much to say about the French and as well as the British post-classical *Bildungsroman*. Moretti extends his study of the *Bildungsroman* to two French varieties of this genre, to what I shall call the novel of the "caged ideals" and the novel of "lost illusions." Each subgenre is marked by a degree of disillusion with social "success," indeed with the world of power and privilege, although in Stendhalian novel of "caged ideals," belief in Napoleonic *virtu* and in the intoxications of romantic love remains (75–180).

Moretti first treats the works of Stendhal, written in the shadow of the French Revolution, Napoleon and Waterloo: *The Red and the Black* (1830) and *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839). In these works, mobility and interiority, valued aspirations and status attainments, moral and social merit, *su-jzet* and *fabula*, though still prominent, conflict rather than fuse. Mobility is ultimately thwarted, interiority—romantic, artistic and reformist—is fixed on repressed ideals, narrative conclusions leave narrative tensions unresolved, romantic enthusiasms conflict with worldly advancement, and Revolutionary principles, although they delegitimize the world, yield no more fruit than a romantic rebel's felt moral superiority, hypocrisy and bad faith. Personal and narrative disequilibria are not dissolved by maturity but perpetuated by prolonged adolescence (75–180).

Moretti locates the contradictions and conflicts at the heart of Stendhal's world in the gaps between private values and public practices left by the failures of the French Revolution and its Napoleonic aftermath. On the one hand, Revolutionary principles render the actual social practices of the Restoration—wherein the uninhibited venality of the new bourgeoisie and the reactionary *hauteur* of old regime position mate, ally and reconfirm each other—illegitimate. On the other hand, the society's iron cage denies Jean and Fabrizio the space to reenact the Napoleonic example of unlimited personal and public horizons (aristocratic mistress, revolutionary "salvation," and crown).

After his treatment of Stendhal, Moretti proceeds to discuss the Balzac of *Père Goriot* and *Lost Illusions*, and the Flaubert of *Sentimental Education*. Concurrently, he continues discussion of the tensions between individual and society, interiority and social advancement, ethical and economic order. In Balzac the individual capitulates to society: interiority abdicates all spiritual aspiration for the thrills of carnality and social competition and dom-

inance. Not only childish illusions are shed; all traditional values, proved illusory, fade away.

In the novels of Stendhal we are shown lives of alienation that, however hysterically timbered, culminate in withdrawal from the world, including death. In those of Balzac we have “conclusions” involving death (*A Harlot High and Low*), and a deep disillusionment on the heels of crime (*Lost Illusions* and *Père Goriot*). The most dramatic figure is Lucien Chardon, who in *Lost Illusions* is converted to a life of crime, while in despair and on the brink of suicide, by arch criminal Carlos Hererra (aka Jean Vautrin, disguised as a Jesuit ambassador for the Pope), and who dies for his crimes in *Harlot*. In Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education* the pattern is much the same. However, protagonist Frederic Moreau’s failed aspirations lead not to death, criminal rebirth or provincial retreat but to a kind of effete retreat into the intellectual and aesthetic pleasures of Moreau’s serene gaze (and *mutatis mutandis* Flaubert’s smooth style). In all of the French cases, the transition to adulthood ends in not merely dimmed but shattered expectation, whether in the merely extensive disillusionment of *Charterhouse*’s Fabrizio Del Dongo or the complete moral inversion of *Lost Illusions*’ Lucien de Rubempré.

From Moretti’s comparisons of his French realists with the giants of the early British *Bildungsroman*, we can gain some insights into what commonalities might underlie the kindred “pessimisms” of Mailer and Moretti’s three focal French realists. Why, Moretti, asks, is it that in the classical English *Bildungsroman*—a novel of the transition from childhood to adulthood like Fielding’s *Tom Jones* or Dickens’s *David Copperfield*—protagonists attain happy endings quite unlike Jean Sorel’s execution, Lucien Chardon’s turn to crime or Frederic Moreau’s disillusionment with love? As we have seen, the key lies, to the French side, in France’s slow, politically tumultuous and ideologically fragmented lurching forward across discordant Bourbon, Jacobin, Napoleonic, Restoration, quasi-Republican, neo-Napoleonic and Third Republic French eras. To the British side, it lies in a history that runs a smooth 1770–1870 arch, smooth at least so far as the fortunes of Britain’s middle classes are concerned (Mann 167–213, 546–596, 628–691). It lies for Mailer in parallels between the French political and ideological tumult just discussed and the political and ideological character of the young Mailer’s formative era, as I soon shall propose.

**Q. E. LEAVIS' COMPARISON OF BRITISH AND FRENCH
BILDUNGSROMANEN**

Moretti is not alone in his descriptive and explanatory comparisons of nineteenth century French and British fictions. Q. E. Leavis also helps illuminate the French *Bildungsroman*. She sees a French social structure less fluid than the British yielding a far less socially affirmative, indeed a disillusioned, French *Bildungsroman*. This may strike some as ironic, for Q.E. Leavis is spouse of F. R. Leavis, famed affirmer of the novelistic greatness of works like by those like Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad, who awaken us to "awareness of the possibilities of life."

Moreover, "Queenie" Leavis' view of the British and French fictions in question here much resembles Moretti's. Leavis ("Englishness," "France") presents a direct contrast of Britain and France, juxtaposes Britain's assimilation of her successful authors into her upper class with the caste-like French upper-class exclusion of all professionals not of originally aristocratic origins. A strong case seems implicit for a social reflection theory explanation of differences among protagonists' fortunes across the differing national societies of the protagonists' authors. Such societal social reflection formulations that root literature in changing social life, formulations like those of Moretti and Leavis; and they have esteemed pedigrees extending from Lukács on the roots of the nineteenth century *Bildungsroman* in a bourgeois metamorphosis of the epic form through Watt (1959) on the rise of the novel in bourgeois England to Goldmann (1964) on tragic vision in the works of Jansenist nobles trapped in profligate Bourbon courts.

In a number of papers relevant to Moretti's British and French delineations and comparisons of *Bildungsromanen*, Queenie Leavis provides a comparative perspective on differences among several novelistic traditions. Most to the point is her comparison of eighteenth and nineteenth (and some twentieth) century British and French novels, many of them *Bildungsromanen* (Q. E. Leavis, 1989a, 1989b). Her comparison, explanatory as well as descriptive, is nicely summed up in "The French Novel" as follows:

The English novel was originated by and developed for a middle class urban public and a cultivated aristocracy in the nineteenth century, and it was a very fluid society where the middle class, unlike Germany and other European countries, constantly married into the aristocracy and where the younger brothers of aris-

tocratic families were traditionally, ever since the Middle Ages, able to enter all professions and become merchants without incurring social disability, and where landowners traditionally lived on their estates for most of the year and in contact with their tenants of all grades, making local communities centering on the great house and parsonage complex, ideal for a novelist needing a microcosm of society for his purposes. But this was the English system. The French system of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries meant a court culture, creative artists dependent on aristocratic patronage, an aristocracy who were mainly absentee landlords and a privileged society cut off from the values and disciplines of work. Thus, the novelists had necessarily a predisposition to concentrate on an analysis of aristocratic conduct and manners and the artifice and refinement of feelings associated with courtly love . . . love as an absolute . . . the pursuit of love and sex as an end in life . . . the realities of court life with its psychological pressures . . . the meanness of man as a social entity . . . an absolute disillusion with human nature that cannot be paralleled in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English fiction. (216–217)

MAILER'S PESSIMISM IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

My hypothesis is that the U.S. conjunction of the Great Depression and a broadly Marxist-Syndicalist 1930 and WWII-era political economic and literary *intelligentsia* offers U.S. parallels to Leavis and Moretti's explanatory stress on social division, political tumult and ideological fragmentation. In part, the Great Depression and its WWII-era extension—and for some experience of the IWW and First World War—shaped a cohort of U.S. authors that influenced Mailer, among them Debs-admirer John Dos Passos and Communist (and latter Trotskyite) James T. Farrell, sometimes-Communist “fellow travelers” John Steinbeck and Ernest Hemingway, Harvard creative writing teacher Robert Graham David and post-WWII Trotskyite guru Jean Malaquais (Lennon, *Double* 30–39). In addition, Mailer's experience of the Pacific War, the 1947 Waldorf Conference, the Wallace resistance to the 1946–1948 Republican reaction and the intellectual mentorship of Jean Malaquais hardly ended Mailer's Leftist dissidence, while revelations of

Stalin's Soviet Union and emergence of the Cold War hardly encouraged Leftist optimism (Lennon, *Double* 30–39).⁷

Reflections of class conflicts and ideologies viewed through broadly Marxian lenses are salient in Mailer's early fiction and linger through at least his 1960s writing.⁸ In *The Naked and the Dead*, education in and sympathy toward Marxism and Left-wing Depression-era politics figure in Robert Hearn's "time machine" profile. Moreover, Fascistic figures, prominent adversaries in Great Depression and WWII-era political discourse and activity are central to Hearn's dramatic relations in *Naked* to the intellectual, quasi-fascist General Cummings on the one hand and to the thuggishly authoritarian and cruel (and sometimes Cummings stooge) Sgt. Croft on the other hand. At the center of Mailer's *Barbary Shore* is the Figure of McLeod, a formerly-communist Trotskyite. With *Shore's* narrator, Mikey Lovett, the reader of *Barbary Shore* is caught in an intellectual *agon* with the heritage of the failed Bolshevik revolution and in a less ivory-tower contest with an agent of the FBI.

Similarly, at the center of Mailer's *Deer Park* is the Figure of Charles Eitel, a film director torn between the ideals of a revelatory social realist cinema and the escapist pressures of the Hollywood studio system, a figure who functions as a dramatization of Marxist cultural critique at odds with bourgeois self-realization. Here again in *Deer Park*, we have a narrator, specifically Sergius O'Shaughnessy, with whom we share witness to Eitel's drama plus Sergius' own struggle toward a degree of honest self-realization. In *An American Dream*, though the language and iconography of even Left-wing cultural critique and conflict are absent, the underlying antimonies of class analysis remain. On the one hand, we have the *agon* of narrator-protagonist Steve Rojack as TV intellectual Steven Rojack's reaching for authenticity under the restrictions of commercial media, on the other the tensions of a petty bourgeois professional/intellectual straining for autonomy vis-a-vis haute Bourgeois spouse and father in law.⁹

After *An American Dream*, Marxist political and ideological influences on Mailer become unclear, indirect and infrequent.¹⁰

COROLLARIES AND CAVEATS

This association of Mailer's novels with ones celebrated within the French tradition is not meant to imply that the French stand alone in the production or praise of relatively pessimistic fictions. Indeed, socially affirmative

views like those of Leaves (1948) and Befilths (2009) that have been noted here are broadly appealing. Indeed, the U.S. canon surely has as many works of dark magic along the lines of *Moby Dick*, *An American Tragedy*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Invisible Man*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Blood Meridian*, *Beloved* and *Sabbath's Theater* as it has upbeat tales like *The Adventures of Augie March*, *The Optimist's Daughter*, *Rabbit is Rich* and *Mason and Dixon*. I do not mean to imply that one reject then replace one happy set of critical attitude with another set. The point is to affirm that the mansion of fiction, and of its criticism, has many rooms.

How well Mailer's particular novels size up to those in the above sampling from the American canon is another question.¹¹ However, the notion that pessimism disqualifies novels from greatness should now be dispelled for those who grant greatness to the French (and darkly magical U.S.) novels stressed here.

NOTES

1. I thank Philip Bufithis for providing valuable comments on an early draft of this paper; and I thank J. Michael Lennon for helping me identify French and Marxian influences on the 1940s and 1950s Mailer.
2. Moretti, 1987, pp. 20–22, 56–60, 185–1898
3. Hicks 2009. For a similar view also see Barry Leeds, 1968.
4. The rather conventionally completed gospel story of *The Gospel According to the Son* seems to me to offer little to this analysis. Although *The Castle in the Forest* ends as part of a projected series, its concluding presentation of a young Hitler set on ominously evil ways does somewhat parallel the portrayals of Rastinac in *Le Père Goriot* and Chadron in *Illusions Perdues*. *Harlot's Ghost*, though truncated, though never continued as its final page had announced, bears a complex relation to the *Bildung* of its principal protagonist, Harry Hubbard. Although, we know what trajectory the proclaimed longer work would have provided Harry, what we have in the actually *Harlot's Ghost* is a series of development in Harry's life, some like Harry's Escape from the clutches of William Kin Harvey in Berlin and the assertion of Harry over Harvey in Rome a thousand pages later, rather upbeat.
5. The *Bildungsroman* is the novel of youth's transition into adulthood. In terms of Moretti's more specific delineation, it is the novel of a principal protagonist's passage from an unsettled youth (or childhood) into consolidation of his or her social and inner self. This novelistic genre, which is usually traced back to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, sometimes traced back even further to such arguable *picaresque* as Tom Jones, and perhaps best known by way of Dickens' *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, need not be so precisely defined. It may be somewhat more broadly used to stand in for all novels that focus on the development of a single individual (and central pro-

- tagonist) in social context and across the “life course” extending from early youth (or childhood) into some semblance of adulthood.
6. Moretti 1987, Chs. 2–3, especially pp. 75–179 on the French case and pp. 181–214 on the English; Mann, 1993, pp. 167–213, 546–596, 628–691.
 7. Latter Mailer would face new difficulties as he buttressed his post-Marxist dissidence on the bedrock of a mode of macho vitalism that come to be viewed by many as anachronistic (Menend).
 8. For Mailer through the publication of *Barbary Shore* some relevant writing by others for assessing influences on Mailer are Trotsky (1936, 1937) and German (1984). For Mailer through the publication of *Barbary Shore* works like Trotsky (1936, 1937) and German (1984) give a sense of the political ideas relevant to his broadly Marxian political ideas that influenced Mailer. For the full range of Mailer fictions here judged “pessimistic” along lines resembling the pessimism of our three French realist, we have epistolary indications of direct, conscious influences that go beyond Mailer’s profession of French influences in this paper’s epigraph. For example, in that same letter to Brodin, Mailer noted influences of Stendhal, Proust and Malraux and, to a lesser extent to Flaubert, Zola, Gide, Huysmans, Baudelaire and Sartre (Lennon *Letter*, 313). Moreover, in another letter to makes reference to Balzac (Lennon *Letter*, 689) and his 1976 “A Harlot High and Low” in *Esquire* draws its title from Balzac’s; and it seems safe to assume that Mailer’s title for the 1991 CIA novel *Harlot’s Ghost* in some part gets its title from the 1976 piece on the CIA.
 9. For the Mailer of *Deer Park* and *An American Dream*, one illuminating piece for assessing influences on Mailer is Adorno and Horkheimer (1944). Interesting pieces by Mailer are Mailer’s “Our Country and Popular Culture (Partisan review Symposium),” “The Meaning of Western Defense,” and “From Surplus Value to the Mass Media.”
 10. True, in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* Mailer’s young American male protagonists are caught between two bad options for masculine development; one the bogus example of Big D’s means of expressing aggression, the other U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. In *The Armies of the Night* Mailer engages in geopolitical analysis somewhat reminiscent of McLeod’s Trotskyite political analysis in *Barbary Shore* and Mailer’s own social democratic geopolitical analysis in “The Meaning of Western Defense.” In *The Executioner’s Song*, class resentments can be read into the killings by Gary Gilmore; and elite repression figure in the abuse of Menenhetet by Ramses in *Ancient Evenings*; and Mailer’s pessimism may, as Hicks suggests, be most extreme in the final book of *Ancient Evenings*. However, any impacts of Marxist-related forces on Mailer’s pessimism is very indirect, if not fanciful, by *Vietnam* if not *An American Dream*.
 11. According to Moretti (1987, pp. 161–164, 199–202), Balzac’s novels lack the tight resolution that readers and critics broadly appreciated; and this is related to Balzac’s distance from social views affirmative enough to support the commonplace standard of moral consolidation or the *fabula* by *sujzet*—or narrative events by social classifications (Moretti, 7, 161–164, 199–202; Lotman, 1971) This may help illuminate Bloom’s view, drawing on Poirier, that Mailer has great difficulty

“finding resolution” for his books (4). But this, like these books’ place in the canon, is not a matter to pursue here.

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