

MORBID SYMPTOMS:

BARBARY SHORE

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[M]uch of my later writing cannot be understood without a glimpse of the odd shadow and theme-maddened light *Barbary Shore* casts before it.

Advertisements for Myself

The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.

Antonio Gramsci,
Selections from the Prison Notebooks

IN AN INTERVIEW WITH THE *NEW YORK STAR* IN AUGUST 1948, Mailer, in the words of Carl Rollyson, announced “a change in his politics.” *The Naked and the Dead*, Mailer explained, had been “written by an anarchist who deeply distrusted all organisations.” Now, however, he believed in “collective action” (Rollyson 56). In fact, since the publication of his debut novel, the young Mailer had come under the intellectual influence of Jean Malaquais (1908–1998), a French novelist and intellectual of Polish origin who had been commissioned to translate *The Naked and the Dead* into French (*Pieces* 97). In his own words, Mailer was at this time unsure of the direction his writing should take: “I was full of second-novel panic,” he was later to write in *Advertisements for Myself* (92). In Paris in 1948 Mailer began to draft a novel called *Mrs. Guinevere*, which was “a take-off on Sally Bowles in Christopher Isherwood’s *Berlin Stories*,” but this early version of the book that would become *Barbary Shore* was soon abandoned when “the work went nowhere”

(Rollyson 60). Meanwhile, however, Mailer had begun to study Marx and Engels and the history of the Russian Revolution under Malaquais' influence. Later, in his 1963 *Paris Review* interview, Mailer was to dryly note that *Das Kapital* "had its mild influence" in his thinking in those years (*Spooky Art* 7). Considering that the early pages of Chapter 24 of *Barbary Shore* offer a restatement of Marx's Theory of Surplus Value (*Barbary* 155–158), this, plainly, is something of an understatement. Mailer also said "I spent a year living more closely with the history of Russia from 1917 to 1937 than in the events of my own life" and he noted "I doubt if I would even have gone back to rewrite *Barbary Shore* if I didn't know Malaquais" (*Spooky* 25).

Malaquais' influence on Mailer can be felt throughout *Barbary Shore*. The novel is preoccupied with the questions raised by "the history of Russia from 1917 to 1937"—questions that had been preoccupying the American Left for the previous three decades, questions having to do with the validity or otherwise of the October Revolution, the corruption of the ideals of Socialism under Lenin and Stalin, and, more broadly, with the possibilities for what Antonio Gramsci has called "a philosophy of praxis" in the context of the triumph of capitalism in America and the failures of the Marxist-Leninist ideology in Russia. Mailer has been criticised, as I will show, for simply reiterating, in *Barbary Shore*, an assortment of radical leftist ideas that had, by 1951, come to be seen by many influential American intellectuals (for example, by Irving Howe, in an important 1954 essay entitled "This Age of Conformity") as largely discredited. However, my argument here is that Mailer's second novel establishes a necessary project of recuperation and recapitulation of his political concerns. By reformulating and, in a sense, exorcising the accumulated historical baggage of left-wing radical thought in *Barbary Shore*, Mailer prepares the ground for his own radical politics, which he will first articulate clearly in *Advertisements for Myself*.

Barbary Shore, therefore, is a haunted text: haunted in this case by the legacy of left-wing radicalism, and by the failed possibilities for praxis that left-wing radical ideas had sought to articulate. In addition, the haunted quality of *Barbary Shore*, and its burden of ideas, inspires Mailer to abandon the problematic naturalism of his first novel. Hence *Barbary Shore* is not a naturalistic novel but is a kind of allegorical fantasia (the influence of Kafka has been adduced by numerous critics, including Poirier [43] and Podhoretz [181]), in which characters are in fact "types" representing specific ideas or worldviews. The world in which these characters act is a heightened one: a

universe of mysteries and secrets, of covert identities and unnamed objects. Through this world Lovett—the protagonist severed from his own development—moves as a kind of *bildungsroman* hero, challenged to grow by each character he encounters. Finally, he refuses to shoulder the ideologies of any of his putative instructors. Growth, in *Barbary Shore*, is always already politicised: when Lovett, the amnesiac, begins to regain some of his memories, among the first things he recalls is his participation in a Trotskyist splinter cell (90–91). An important context for this memory is that Lovett begins the novel as a political blank slate: “I lived like the hermit in the desert who sweats his penance and waits for a sign” (6). It is his exposure to the Marxist ideas of McLeod that reawakens Lovett’s forgotten political commitments. The trajectory of the novel takes us from political commitment to its radical absence—and back again.

But Lovett does not end the novel as anything so straightforward as a frankly committed Marxist. Instead, he moves from one interregnum to another, and inherits only “the remnants” of McLeod’s “socialist culture” (223), the traces of which will reappear in substantially different form in Mailer’s later novels and nonfiction. *Barbary Shore* is a novel that engages Marxist ideas of praxis largely in order to abandon them; the developing narrative suggests that Lovett’s true political growth (and this also seems true of Mailer) can begin only when the novel is concluded—when the ground, as it were, has been cleared. In many ways, Lovett positions himself to address the political crises of post-war America, but he is not a novelist-figure who can imagine into being a new mode of expression for these unfolding political complexities; instead, he is an important witness, who defines the terms of the difficulties but can do no more. The novel is, as I will argue, a *bildungsroman* and not a *künstlerroman*. In this sense, *Barbary Shore* prepares the ground for Mailer’s own complex “existentialist” metaphysics of growth, in which process is emphasized over product. This promotion of metaphysics will begin to find a fuller articulation in *The Deer Park* and will finally be fully articulated in nonfictional form in *Advertisements for Myself* and in fictional form in *An American Dream*.

The genesis of this arc of interest begins in the crises and challenges that faced Mailer in the development of his second book. He continued to work on the novel that would become *Barbary Shore* “all through the spring of 1949” (*Spooky Art* 24), but in the summer of 1949 he moved to Hollywood to broker the film rights for *The Naked and the Dead* (Dearborn 72–3). Later,

Mailer observed that “*Barbary Shore* is really a Hollywood novel. I think it reflected the impact of Hollywood on me in some subterranean fashion” (*Spooky Art* 24).¹ The novel was finally finished in Vermont in 1950 (Dearborn 77–8) and published in the spring of 1951 (Mills 127). *Barbary Shore* was very poorly received. Reviewers described it variously as “a political tearjerker” (*The New Yorker*) and “a drama of ideas” (*Saturday Review of Literature*) (see Manso 159). The reviewer for the *New York Times* wrote: “At worst, Mailer can be very dull and, in his insistence on the lost purity and nobility of the Communist Left, sentimental and untrue” (Manso 159). The reasons for the novel’s poor reception were perhaps best summarised by Anthony West, who reviewed *Barbary Shore* for *The New Yorker* in June 1951: “It is likely to be said that a bad press is the price Mr. Mailer had to pay for making the courageous gesture of writing and publishing an overtly socialist book” (Mills 125). In West’s view, the overt socialism of *Barbary Shore* made it difficult for reviewers to separate novel from novelist. Whether Mailer was seen as “courageous” or as an anti-American fool, it was Mailer himself who, for many reviewers, was the true protagonist of the novel. As in Mary Dearborn’s reading, “*Barbary Shore* maps Mailer’s intellectual preoccupations in the period after *The Naked and the Dead*” (79). The novel, for Dearborn, is closely aligned with its author, and its function is to serve politics rather than art. In Mailer’s case these responses are understandable—politics are, of course, a prominent feature of *Barbary Shore*. However, we may seek to address the novel, it is fair to say that West is correct when he describes Mailer’s second novel as “overtly socialist.” In fact, in his 1963 *Paris Review* interview, Mailer is explicit about his political interests during the period of its composition: “I started *Barbary Shore* as some sort of fellow traveller and finished it with a political position that was a far-flung mutation of Trotskyism” (*Spooky* 24). This suggests that the novel invites little more than a political reading, and that author and characters share a common ground. However, Mailer also offers a reading of the circumstances of writing the novel that is more complex than this glib summary might suggest—a reading that takes account of Mailer’s own evolving conception of existentialism, among a range of other important contexts.

Mailer himself called *Barbary Shore* the “first of the existentialist novels in America” (*Advertisements* 105). In the *Paris Review* interview, Mailer goes into some detail about the influence of Jean Malaquais and the “unconscious” thinking that contributed to the novel’s genesis:

Malaquais was never even a Communist; he started as an anti-Stalinist [. . .] *Barbary Shore* was built on the division which existed then in my mind. My conscious intelligence, as I've indicated, became obsessed by the Russian Revolution. But my unconscious was much more interested in other matters: murder, suicide, orgy, psychosis, all the themes I discuss in *Advertisements* [. . .] My unconscious felt one kind of dread, my conscious mind another, and *Barbary Shore* lies somewhere in between. (*Spooky Art* 25)

Certainly these perspectives, together with his description of the novel's "unconscious" themes as being "murder, suicide, orgy, [and] psychosis," belong to a later phase of Mailer's development—that is, to the rewriting of his early literary career that formed part of the subject of *Advertisements for Myself*. The critic must therefore tread carefully before applying labels such as "existentialist" to the novel or hastening to ascribe to it themes and vocabularies that must properly be seen as belonging to a later phase of Mailer's development. Part of Mailer's project in *Advertisements for Myself* involved, of course, a re-writing or re-interpreting of his earlier works of fiction in the light of his evolving "existentialist" metaphysics of growth. *Barbary Shore*, *qua* novel, is certainly more complex than its contemporary reception may suggest, even if it is not quite as sophisticated as Mailer would later contend. Like *The Naked and the Dead* and *The Deer Park*, *Barbary Shore* engages with themes of growth and development in ways that, while not as easily reconciled to Mailer's later metaphysics as Mailer himself has suggested, are nonetheless deeply interesting in their own right.

The plot itself is instructive. *Barbary Shore* is narrated by Michael Lovett, a young man who believes that he fought in the Second World War but has no memory of his youth or his wartime experiences: "[. . .] the details of my own history were lost in the other, common to us all" (5). Remarkably, given this loss of significant elements of his past, Lovett wants to be a writer, and rents "a small furnished cubicle in a brownstone house in Brooklyn Heights" from Willie Dinsmore, a playwright (8) who reflexively parrots the clichés of left wing discourse: "Conditions are brutal in this country," he tells Lovett. "Slums, juvenile delinquency [. . .] I mean when you add it up there's an indictment" (11). One day, while cleaning the communal bathroom in the boarding house, Lovett meets William McLeod (16), a man in his 50s, ap-

parently a fellow resident of the boarding house. Lovett is intrigued by him: "I was certain he was relatively uneducated," he remarks, "yet his intelligence was acute, and from passing references, it was apparent he had read and absorbed a surprising number of books" (26). Lovett also develops a relationship with Beverley Guinevere, the landlady of the rooming house, a former burlesque dancer (45) who lives in the basement apartment with her three-year-old daughter Monina (36) whom Guinevere thinks should be a child actress (121). Also living in the boarding house is a young man named Leroy Hollingsworth, "a clerk in one of the largest brokerage houses on Wall Street" who is "obviously from a small town" (29). The novel's final character of note for this argument is a young woman named Lannie Madison, who moves into the room upstairs from Lovett's, and who appears to be suffering an emotional breakdown (99–100). Foster describes her as "a mad Cassandra-like girl whose derangement is a consequence and expression of history" (13).

It transpires that Hollingsworth is an undercover operative for a state agency, possibly the FBI,² and that McLeod is an ex-member of the American Communist Party. Part of the plot is that McLeod, who has also served as an employee of the State Department (129), stole a "little object"—never identified in the text—which Hollingsworth has been charged with retrieving. As a result, *Barbary Shore* derives much of its narrative momentum from the clash of ideas enacted by McLeod and Hollingsworth. Under the pretext of wishing to continue his own "political education," Hollingsworth interrogates McLeod about his membership of the Communist Party, the whereabouts of the "little object," and McLeod's authorship of various tracts and pamphlets (160–1). Finally, McLeod admits that he does indeed have the "little object" (170) and also reveals that Guinevere is his wife (163). Lannie is revealed to have been institutionalised, having suffered a breakdown after the assassination of Leon Trotsky in Mexico in August 1940 (213–4). In another linkage of the political and the personal (and the sexual), Guinevere leaves McLeod for Hollingsworth. Finally, "agents of the country we live in" burst into the boarding house, and McLeod is driven away by Hollingsworth (221–2). Lovett, left behind, reads McLeod's will, and finds that McLeod has left him "the remnants of my socialist culture" as well as "the little object" itself. This draws a profound meditation from Lovett: "So the heritage passed on to me, poor hope, and the little object as well, and I went out into the world [. . .] From out the unyielding contradictions of labour stolen from men,

the march to the endless war forces its pace" (223). This image of going "out into the world" points to a confluence of the personal and the political: the novel's conclusion gestures towards the maturation of a man who has inherited material outside of his immediate experiences and of his immediate sense of self. In this brief account, it is evident that the characters who populate *Barbary Shore* are indeed types, and that the plot is as dramatic as a good detective story. But *Barbary Shore* is also a novel of political ideas, and so there is a degree of discomfort in trying to describe it in terms of a simplistic generic formula. Indeed, this plot summary does very little justice to the strange disruptive power of Mailer's second novel. This is a book that mixes aesthetic methods (the "dynamic portrait" method of illuminating character borrowed from Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*³; the allegorical methods of Kafka or, perhaps more pertinently, the partially allegorical method of Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940); the symposium format of the "novel of ideas," in which characters espouse specific ideological points of view in dialogue with one another) and ideological material in a number of unique ways.

The negative contemporary critical reception afforded *Barbary Shore* was to profoundly shape Mailer's thinking about his fiction and nonfiction over the subsequent two decades, and itself became a major subject of Mailer's in the early pages of *Advertisements for Myself*. In engaging in this process of reinterpretation, Mailer seemed to establish a division in his work, with *Advertisements for Myself* serving to announce a new beginning. Because of this, *Barbary Shore* itself has generally been neglected in Mailer criticism, which has tended to focus its energies on *Advertisements* and the major works that followed. A good example of this line of response can be found in Martin Amis's essay "Mailer: The Avenger and the Bitch" (1985), which describes *Barbary Shore* as:

A murky, paceless tale of spies and subversives, predators and impotents, [*Barbary Shore*] had little of the style and control of *The Naked and the Dead*. The prose gurgles with clichés, tautologies, and uneasy mandarinisms. (59)

This is a dramatic dismissal of the novel; but it points to the critical consensus, as articulated by Gabriel Miller, who believes that "Ultimately *Barbary Shore* becomes more a polemic than a novel" (71). Some counter-claims

have, nonetheless, been made for *Barbary Shore*. The most significant of these is a chapter in Nigel Leigh's *Radical Fictions and the Novels of Norman Mailer* (1990) entitled "Marxisms on Trial," which emphasises the role of bureaucracy (represented by Hollingsworth) in the novel. Leigh argues that *Barbary Shore* picks up where *The Naked and the Dead* left off, with the unexpected and dreary triumph of the bureaucrat Dalleson (Leigh 90–1). Leigh concurs with Mailer himself that the political position of *Barbary Shore* (to the extent that such a position can safely be adduced) can be described as a form of Trotskyism, summarised thusly in the novel: "when the events of 1917 failed to induce similar proletarian uprisings in the countries of the West, the revolution was doomed" (228). Leigh's sense of the novel's achievement lies in the power of its presentation of its political diagnosis; in Leigh's reading, the novel is an elegy for a doomed revolution. However, as I will argue, Mailer's project in *Barbary Shore* is, in part, an articulation of Marxist-Trotskyist politics with the ultimate aim of rejecting their totalising claims; the meaning of the Russian Revolution is not the subject of the novel as such, but rather becomes yet another of the "morbid symptoms" that arise in the Gramscian interregnum the novel both diagnoses and condemns. As such, *Barbary Shore* is both a development of Mailer's grasp of the political realities of the post-war period, and a development in his grasp of the novel as a form.

Barbary Shore can be read as an intervention in a developing debate or series of debates within American left-wing intellectual life. The late 1940s and early 1950s were a period of turmoil for the American Left. As Neil Junonville writes in *Critical Crossings*:

[American Leftist intellectuals] had lived with the soured reality of their dreams in a long, protracted, polluted sunrise that began to dawn with the Moscow Trials in the mid-1930s. They had seen another shade of light added to the gray morning with the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939. They had watched the continuing brightness of the dull light with the disappointing perversion and destruction of ideologies in World War II. Now with the arrival of the atomic bomb and the beginning of the Cold War in the late 1940s most of them were witnessing without surprise or illusion, even without despair, the glaring bitter morning to the postwar period. (68)

By the late 1940s, Marxist ideas had, for a large number of American Leftist intellectuals, been convincingly discredited. Edmund Wilson, writing in an essay entitled “Marxism at the End of the Thirties,” published in 1941, was able to write that “Marxism is in relative eclipse. An era in its history has ended” (732). In other words, the period during which *Barbary Shore* was composed was a period of quiescence and stasis—an interregnum, during which the possibilities for a radical-leftist praxis appeared to have collapsed, leaving nothing in their wake. Mailer, of course, was 28 years old when *Barbary Shore* was published, and his experience of the disillusionment of the anti-Stalinist Left during the 1930s was largely second-hand, coming through his wide reading and through the influence of Jean Malaquais (*Pieces* 97–8; Miller 70). Crucially, Mailer spoke at the famous and controversial Conference for Peace at the Waldorf Hotel in March 1949, in which he expressed his opinion that “both the United States and the Soviet Union are moving towards State Capitalism. There is no future in that. The two systems approach each other more clearly” (Leigh 86). This analysis, of course, bears similarities to the defeatist views of Lieutenant Hearn in *The Naked and the Dead*. Rather than offer a reiteration of such views in *Barbary Shore*, Mailer was to change his views considerably in the years following the publication of *The Naked and the Dead*. In this reading, *Barbary Shore* represents a kind of cul-de-sac in Mailer’s thinking about revolutionary praxis, and it becomes a recapitulation of radical leftist discourses that clear the ground, as it were, for Mailer’s own burgeoning “existentialist” metaphysics of growth. In short, Mailer carries these lines of interest to the ultimate test and so ensures, prophetically, a major shift in focus and context for his work.

The tension created by this extreme position is one major element in the generic and political instability that shapes *Barbary Shore*. It is this instability that has led to the widespread critical confusion about the book. According to Norman Podhoretz’s perhaps overly simplistic analysis, “in abandoning both the naturalism and the Stalinism of *The Naked and the Dead* and producing, in *Barbary Shore*, a Kafkaesque allegory in celebration of Trotskyism [Mailer] was making a bid [...] for highbrow approval” (181). Podhoretz accounts for the shift in genre, tone, and style from Mailer’s first novel to his second by ascribing it to Mailer’s realisation that *The Naked and the Dead* was a “middlebrow” novel:

[F]rom the point of view of the highbrows,” Podhoretz writes, “becoming a follower of Trotsky was certainly an improvement over being a Stalinist fellow-traveller, but Trotskyism too seemed old hat by 1951 [. . .] For this was a time when the highbrow literary world, with a few lonely exceptions, had grown disaffected with revolutionary socialism of whatever coloration. (181–2)

This reading of the novel elides Mailer’s continuing interest in articulating a praxis, a concern that will increasingly come to dominate his work during the succeeding decades. However, Podhoretz is correct when he points to Mailer’s unease with the “middlebrow” aesthetic methods of *The Naked and the Dead*. Mailer himself regarded his first novel’s aesthetic method as one to which he could not return:

[W]as I to write about Brooklyn streets, or my mother and father, or another war novel (*The Naked and the Dead Go to Japan*) [. . .]? No, these were not real choices. I was drawn instead to write about an imaginary future which was formed osmotically by the powerful intellectual influence of my friend Jean Malaquais, and by the books I had read, and by the aesthetics I considered desirable. (*Advertisements* 77)

Barbary Shore is certainly not a straightforwardly naturalistic novel—a work in which a minor character is driven mad by the death of Trotsky is evidently one in which characters are responding to some larger thematic or political purpose beyond the demands of traditional mimetic realism. J.A. Cuddon, in his *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, offers a useful definition of allegory:

The term derives from the Greek *all goria*, “speaking otherwise.” As a rule, an allegory is a story in verse or prose with a double meaning: a primary or surface meaning; and a secondary or under-the-surface meaning. It is a story, therefore, that can be read, understood, and interpreted at two levels [. . .] (20)

At this “speaking otherwise” level, each of the characters in *Barbary Shore* can be taken to represent a particular point of view. Hollingsworth represents the

“State Capitalism” decried by Mailer in his speech at the Waldorf Conference. Nathan Scott characterises Hollingsworth thusly:

[He is an] unpleasant human being—whose only politics amount to nativist phobias about Communism, whose only ethic appears to be one of self-advantage, a man who [...] makes lewd proposals to waitresses in restaurants, and who likes pornographic novels but wonders if they should be “allowed,” since many are written by “Bolshevists” and contain “atheistic things.”
(34)

McLeod—who of course owes a great deal to Jean Malaquias—represents the all-but-defeated hopes of the American radical Left. Guinevere represents “the civilisation—or, if you will, the American masses—with whom the revolutionary idealist has perforce had to align himself, and to whose partnership with fascism his death must be witness” (Trilling 52)—which explains why Guinevere goes off with Hollingsworth at the end of the novel. In this scheme, Lovett may be seen as representing the younger generation of American leftist intellectuals, the reluctant inheritors of the battered Marxist-Trotskyist tradition—McLeod’s last will and testament, of course, bequeaths to Lovett “the remnants of my socialist culture” (223). However, *Barbary Shore* does not offer a simplistic conclusion in which McLeod’s ideology, inherited by Lovett, is seen to triumph; rather, the novel salvages only “remnants.” Lovett’s heritage is not the whole edifice of Marxist-Trotskyist ideology; it is, rather, the last viable scraps of that system of belief. In this sense, as well as the generic sense, *Barbary Shore*’s allegory is partial and problematic, and reaches no easy ideological conclusions. In fact, the novel stands as a rejection of a particular ideology, Lovett’s putative “inheritance,” as Mailer finally abjures the pre-fashioned ideology of the American radical left and clears the ground for his own burgeoning metaphysics of growth. As Lovett says at the novel’s conclusion, “I am obliged to live waiting for the signs which tell me I must move on again” (223).

It will be seen that *Barbary Shore* is, at least in part, a “typological” allegory, in which characters are “types” or “figures” of prior ideas (Cuddon 20). The typological structure of *Barbary Shore* is its most distinctively “allegorical” formal feature. A crucial aesthetic element of *Barbary Shore* is this use of allegorical types (Stephen Rojack is perhaps the most clearly “allegorical”

of Mailer's later protagonists, a knight-errant moving through a quest-narrative in search of potency, freedom, will). Present in an embryonic form in *Barbary Shore* are several "types" that will reappear in Mailer's later works, and this alone speaks for the value of the novel. For example, in Lovett's imaginative reconstruction of Hollingsworth's youth, and in his description of the room in which Hollingsworth lives, we glimpse an early version of the character-type that Mailer would later, in *Cannibals and Christians*, call the "Christian":

I had a picture of all the places in which he had slept throughout his boyhood: a bed, a Bible, and in the corner a baseball bat perhaps. As though in confirmation, the only decoration upon his wall was a phosphorescent cross printed on cardboard. It would glow in the darkness when the lights were out. (29)

Similarly, McLeod represents a type that would become familiar in Mailer's later works, the older man who ambiguously instructs the younger protagonist in some form of ideological system (General Cummings in *The Naked and the Dead* is another variant on this "type", as, of course, are Charles Eitel in *The Deer Park*).⁴ Absent from *Barbary Shore*—making it unique among Mailer's novels of the period 1948–1968—is the type of the "existentialist hero," represented in *The Naked and the Dead* by Croft and in *The Deer Park* by Marion Faye—and finding his consummate exemplar in Stephen Rojack of *An American Dream*. Lovett, the protagonist of *Barbary Shore*, is not yet the existentialist hero; a man without a past, he is instead a blank canvas upon which the larger ideological drama of the novel can be inscribed. Lovett's passivity is, in this sense, a thematic requirement of the novel. Because *Barbary Shore* recapitulates Marxist ideas and interpretations in order to reject their totalising claims, any action Lovett may take must be taken after the final page of the novel; for Lovett, action (in the sense of the Gramscian notion of praxis) only becomes possible once the political drama of the novel—its summation and dismissal of Marxism as a totalising interpretation of reality—has ended. In the meantime, Lovett can only bear witness to the "morbid symptoms"—such as Lannie Madison's insanity—that the period of interregnum in which the novel takes place have generated. In this, Mailer is content to offer no solutions, but records the victims of the tensions which define this particular society at this particular historical moment.

Elsewhere, the use of the allegorical method in *Barbary Shore* is also intermittent or haphazard. This erratic effect operates on a number of levels as, for example, certain familiar terms are given generalised names, while others are left unchanged. The USSR is referred to as “the land across the sea” (159), the Communist Party is called “the organisation” (87), and Karl Marx is referred to “the great man” sitting “on his piles in the British Museum” (152); but McLeod makes reference to “Old Bolsheviks” (89) and other specific details of Russian and American history that leave the reader in no doubt as to the actual subject matter of the novel. As Gabriel Miller observes, the novel “is told partly in realistic and partly in symbolic/allegorical terms” (71), and these seemingly contradictory methods contribute to an overall sense of epistemological, generic, and political instability that works to undermine the novel’s ostensible direct political content. This instability is, however, crucial to Mailer’s larger thematic-political project in the novel. Effectively, the more fantasticated elements of the novel work to situate the ideological drama in a kind of testing-ground—a sphere of being in which consequences are simultaneously heightened and unreal. (There are several deliberate allusions to Arthurian romance, not least of which is Beverly Guinevere’s surname, as well as the parodic “love triangle” enacted by Guinevere, Hollingsworth and McLeod, which echoes and mockingly distorts the story of Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere.) This generic instability, however, serves ultimately to undermine the totalising claims of McLeod’s moribund ideology. His ideas cannot account for the full breadth of human experience. He is exposed as a limited man whose sense of inclusiveness is represented as partial and inadequate. Paradoxically, it is only in a kind of debased fairy-tale world that the hard politics of McLeod’s “socialist culture” can be safely articulated; and when that articulation has occurred, it survives only as “remnants.” McLeod’s is a vision of reality that has no basis in the world of lived human experience.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Barbary Shore* is its narrator, Michael Lovett: the character who represents most fully the novel’s complex vision. Like all of Mailer’s protagonists, Lovett is haunted and, in some senses, defined by his experience of war. He differs from Sergius O’Shaughnessy and Stephen Rojack, however, in one crucial respect: he suffers from amnesia. “Probably I was in the war,” Lovett says in the novel’s opening line (5), giving notice that *Barbary Shore* will take place in a realm of epistemological quandary quite foreign to the world depicted in *The Naked and the*

Dead. Lovett's "Probably I was in the war," taken together with several succeeding pages of speculation about his past and identity, positioned importantly at the beginning of the book, alert us to the fact that—whatever certainties we may appear to encounter in the course of the narrative—we are in fact dealing always with the provisional, the uncertain. *Barbary Shore* can most fruitfully be read, I believe, as a novel of doubts and interregna, as Mailer once again encounters the problems of growth and development that informed the ideological surface of his first novel.

Richard Foster has astutely categorized *Barbary Shore* as "an adaptation of *bildungsroman*; its narrative substance is the hero's education for life in our time" (13). Indeed, the novel does contain elements of the classical *bildungsroman*, as Lovett, a young man without a pre-fashioned or pre-determined identity, encounters characters who inform and educate him about the world. Hollingsworth and McLeod propose, in their different ways, interpretations of history and prescriptions for the future which Lovett is free to accept or reject. The *bildungsroman* is, of course, the classical form in which Western literature has addressed the subject of development, specifically the development of the individual. To the extent that *Barbary Shore* partakes of and modifies the *bildungsroman* tradition, it is a novel of development in this classical sense. However, in its distinctive aesthetic approach, and in its attempt to articulate a politics of praxis applicable in Lovett's amnesic, totalitarian-tending postwar America, *Barbary Shore* subverts the classical paradigm of the *bildungsroman* in which the young protagonist undergoes experiences that enable him to develop as an individual. The individual, in *Barbary Shore*, is not in possession of a simple narrative of self, nor can he/she be educated to achieve such possession. Lovett's experiences point to an almost unbearable condition in which his amnesia (he has no memory and no history in conventional terms) becomes simply one more element in quest for a more inclusive sense of self. *Barbary Shore* is, like *The Naked and the Dead* and *The Deer Park*, best understood as one of Mailer's fictions of development: a work in which growth and its potentialities operate both textually and subtextually, often against the grain of the novel's overt political content. The powerful forces of conventional definitions of politics and history are here undermined in the experiences and development of Lovett. His story can only be told in a set of narrative strategies that seek to express his sense of "all history."

In “Norman Mailer: The Embattled Vision,” Podhoretz correctly identifies growth as one of the central themes of *Barbary Shore*:

The [human] race, in Mailer’s view, must either grow into greater possibilities or retreat into less; there can be no stagnation. But the retreat into less is not merely a matter of shrinking or cowering; it involves a disruption of the whole organism, a radical dislocation—it is a disease that infects the life of individuals no less than the behaviour of nations. *Barbary Shore* is an investigation of this disease, a pathology of the modern spirit. (190–191)

Barbary Shore does not yet engage in the rhetoric of cancer as an image of the disruption of healthy growth that Mailer will later call upon in such works as *Cannibals and Christians* and *An American Dream*; but Podhoretz is astute in noting *Barbary Shore*’s interest in questions of pathology and disease—“morbid symptoms,” as Gramsci might have put it. The madness of Lannie Madison, for example, is a disease with a direct political cause: the assassination of Trotsky. Here the aborted growth of a properly socialist state in Russia, and the failure of a worldwide proletarian revolution to take place (failures symbolised, for many American leftists in the 1940s, by Trotsky’s assassination) has a direct consequence in terms of the mental health of one individual. (Lannie Madison, too, is an allegorical “type”: her character can be seen as incarnating the pathology of the radical left in the aftermath of the triumph of Stalin.) Lannie Madison is a static character, serving to articulate a given position. Her sense of herself is related to doctrinaire views of politics and history, of society and nation. The assassination exposes the precipice on which she has built her beliefs and established her *raison d’être*. In the face of such loss, her sense of ownership and belonging is undone and she cannot cope with the chaos which she sees as her new reality. Lannie Madison is a foil: she guides us towards the values which are emerging in Lovett’s character.

The novel’s engagement with a thematic of growth centres around Lovett. Both Hollingsworth and McLeod are, like Lannie, static figures, as befits their essential nature as unstable allegorical “types.” As Lovett begins the novel, he is stranded between stages of development—cut off from his past, and uncertain about where his life is headed: “I had no past and was therefore without a future” (6). As we later learn, “Michael Lovett” isn’t even the narrator’s

real name—for this is a novel of aliases and false personal histories, a novel in which every character partakes in the text's epistemological uncertainties: "William McLeod" too is an alias,⁵ as is "Leroy Hollingsworth" (128); and Guinevere is prone to creating fictional identities for herself (she claims to be a Jehovah's Witness, which McLeod, who is Guinevere's husband, suggests is a lie [53]). The difference between Lovett and the rest of the main characters is that the others believe themselves to be in control of a sense of self. It is this disparity in the development of the characters which draws our attention to Lovett. For example, his amnesiac state—an interregnum in his development during which he is suspended, helplessly waiting for the events of the novel to conclude—echoes the condition of the American Left in the years immediately following World War II, "that short span of years [Dwight] Macdonald aptly labelled "the gray dawn of peace," in which the reality of the Nazi death camps, the atomic bomb, and Stalinism began to settle on people—like the dust descending after a great explosion" (Jumonville 68). With both past and future offering facts of epic destruction, the American Left were, as Jumonville argues, abandoned to a fearful sense of the present. With so much invested in history and the solutions to historical failures, the Left faced horizons of "gray." On one level, Lovett directs us to see *Barbary Shore* as pre-eminently a novel of "the gray dawn of peace." It reawakens the ghosts of prewar socialist culture in order to exorcise them. However, the parallels between Lovett and the Left point ultimately to the difference between art and politics. This is a novel in which growth exists as potential or deferment, never as present possibility; a novel in which the most significant action will happen after the last page has ended.

Max F. Schultz, in his essay "Mailer's Divine Comedy," situates *Barbary Shore* as belonging to a triptych of "Dantean" novels by Mailer. In this slightly eccentric but nonetheless useful reading, *The Deer Park* is seen as analogous to the *Inferno*, and *An American Dream* to the *Paradiso*; *Barbary Shore*, therefore, represents the *Purgatorio*, which accords with a reading of the novel as dealing with a political interregnum. Schultz writes:

In purgatory, one's past is initially judged, one's sins contritely acknowledged, and one's progress toward moral regeneration begun [...] Lovett [...] is pursued by the inexorable "guards" of the two rival economic powers, capitalism and communism. His

effort to save his life is presented as an allegory of a twentieth-century soul's penitential progress toward salvation. (40–41)

Because he exists in a personal and political interregnum, Lovett's attempts to act are frustrated or thwarted. The examples of his "failures" are many, as in his unsuccessful attempts to seduce Guinevere. Similarly, Lovett seeks to write a novel about

an immense institution never defined more exactly than that [. . .] The book had a hero and a heroine, but they never met while they were in the institution. It was only when they escaped, each of them in separate ways and by separate methods, that they were capable of love and so could discover each other. (43)

Much of the originality of *Barbary Shore* is evident in Lovett's plan for this novel. Lovett, through his experiences, can potentially express the kinds of development which might lead beyond the rhetoric and propaganda besetting post-war America and Europe. The crucial issues raised by Lovett's projected novel are the immensity of the institution (which suggests global dimensions), the separation of the protagonists (their path to "freedom" must be individual), and their union, which is one derived from and developed through their differences. Lovett's sense of isolation in the face of massive "isms" is allegorised and empowered by the novelist's vision. The scale of the undertaking, however, is evident in the impossibility of bringing the plan into being, of drawing the complex ideas into the production of the novel. Eventually Lovett abandons his novel, suggesting that he is not to be understood as an artist (active, dynamic, and generative), but rather as a kind of articulate witness to the political drama acted out by McLeod and Hollingsworth. In other words, *Barbary Shore* is not a *kunstlerroman*, or novel about the development of an artist; Lovett's literary ambitions serve mainly as a pretext for his presence in the boarding house, as well as a means to suggest that there are possibilities beyond the dogmatic views of McLeod and Hollingsworth. This position of witness is, in *Barbary Shore*, not a dynamic position. Lovett's growth is postponed, deferred, awaiting the outcome of the political debates that shape *Barbary Shore*. Lovett may stand out, within these "immense" institutions, but he is not capable of escape, and therefore he cannot enter into an alternative world of love. Crucially,

Lovett differs markedly from later Mailer protagonists (Stephen Rojack in *An American Dream*, Randal Jethroe in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, “Norman Mailer” in *The Armies of the Night*) in his reluctance to engage in acts of violence or transgression. In Mailer’s first two novels, Carl Rollyson writes, the Mailer hero fails to cut a figure in the world because of his fear of violence, of what might be done to him, or of what he might do to others” (69). This limitation, of course, applies to Lovett as man and as novelist, and suggests that Mailer understood the novel as, in part, an act of violence. Lovett is not yet the “existential hero” who will gradually become the protagonist of all of Mailer’s later writings. Lovett is the existential-hero-in-waiting, the existential hero in a kind of chrysalis stage, adrift in an interregnum haunted by Gramscian “morbid symptoms.” His development is—in General Cummings’s terms—always potential, never kinetic: always the thinker, never the writer.

The final crucial aspect of *Barbary Shore* that warrants critical attention is the “little object” that McLeod has stolen from the United States government and which Hollingsworth wants him to return. From 1941 to 1942, we learn, McLeod worked as “statistician for [an] American government bureau” (129).

Then, after years of regular and orderly process, something happened. “I don’t know, I can’t tell you what it was,” McLeod said, “an object of some sort or other, not to large I imagine, but it was gone, and no one knew how.”

The organism reeled from the shock and trembled to its extremities. (132)

Critics have offered numerous different interpretations of the significance of the little object. Trilling characterises the “little object” as the “key to the salvation of humankind” (51). Scott notes that “we are left to surmise that it is nothing so simple, say, as a piece of microfilm carrying some secret formula of military technology but something more, some great Revelation perhaps of how the powers of Darkness may be quelled and the human future guaranteed” (37). Both of these readings accord the “little object” an essentially religious, or transcendental, meaning. But this is, I believe, erroneous. The little object surely represents the last kinetic possibility to be salvaged from McLeod’s “socialist heritage.” Its meaning is best understood in the context

of the Marxism McLeod has been preaching for much of the novel. McLeod states quite explicitly that the little object is meaningful only within a relational theory of value—that is, within Marx’s “Theory of Surplus Value,” as outlined in Part III of *Das Kapital*. As McLeod says: “To begin with, the little object, so-called, is completely a problem in context. What is it and where was it born? [...] Like everything else the little object creates about it itself a circle of acquaintance and can be understood only collectively. For such is the nature of knowledge today” (138–9). Surplus value, for Marx, consisted in the value available for exploitation by capitalists in excess of the labour-costs invested by workers (Marx 124–9, McLellan 52–4). Surplus value, therefore, can be seen on one level as representing the immateriality of a materialist system of exploitation. This is what McLeod describes and is precisely what the “little object” represents. The little object is “completely a problem in context,” as is surplus value—surplus value is only produced in the relational interchanges of capitalist exploitation. Never named, never identified, the little object is both material and immaterial—it incarnates an immaterial materiality that is deeply troubling to the warring materialisms of both Cold War superpowers. In this sense, the little object represents the possibility for profound disruption—a third force, outside the clashing dialectic of Hollingsworth and State Capitalism versus McLeod and the socialist heritage. The little object is threatening to Hollingsworth and to the ideology he represents because it embodies and exposes an uncontainable paradox. In contrast, McLeod’s “socialist heritage” is, of course, a heritage of ideas, and it is therefore immaterial. However, such a heritage must propose a materialist faith as the beginning of praxis, a materialist faith at odds with the bourgeois materialism of Hollingsworth’s America. The crisis for McLeod surely exists in his sense of “collectively”—for how can one achieve such cooperation when he has committed himself to one particular view of the world, its history, and its progress? (It is significant that the “little object” is passed to a would-be novelist.)

The little object, therefore, represents the possibility of dynamic and potentially destructive growth. It is surplus value, material immateriality, and it is the last remnant of McLeod’s “socialist culture” that Lovett deems worthy of salvaging:

So the heritage passed on to me, poor hope, and the little object as well, and I went out into the world [...] From out the un-

yielding contradictions of labor stolen from men, the march to the endless war forces it pace. (223)

In this, it is evident that Lovett recognises his special place as witness and, in that epiphany, begins to think of the past (“heritage”) and the future (“the march”). It is a dramatic moment, suggestive of vision and hope. However, the action is stultified (“poor hope”) in that Lovett recognises his proximity to a third way and his ability to do no more than recognise its existence. The novel ends poised at a point of change, with the fictional novelist representing the failure of the novel.

Barbary Shore is an important development in Mailer’s sense of the form of the novel and how it might address and express the nature of the individual in society. Importantly, surplus value—the paradox of immaterial materiality—will recur as a theme in *Advertisements for Myself*. In the meantime, however, Mailer—having recapitulated and dismissed the bulk of the “socialist heritage” with which *Barbary Shore* is concerned—moved on to another novel of development, one in which politics has begun to shade into metaphysics, pointing the way to his work of the 1960s: *The Deer Park*.

NOTES

1. The influence of Mailer’s Hollywood experience would be more directly evident in his subsequent novel, *The Deer Park*.
2. Nigel Leigh notes that critics are divided about the identity of Hollingsworth’s employer. Stanley Gutman argues that Hollingsworth is “an agent of something like the CIA” (Leigh 88), but since the CIA’s mandate precludes them from operating within the United States itself, the FBI is, I believe, the most likely candidate.
3. In his 1977 memoir *Christopher and His Kind*, Isherwood explained that a “dynamic portrait,” as he conceived it, was “a novel whose interest depends on the gradual revealing of a character, rather than on action, crisis, and confrontation. What the action of such a novel does is to remove layer after layer of the “skin” of outer appearance—thus taking the reader inward from his first superficial impressions” (Isherwood 143). Traces of this method remain in *Barbary Shore*, as we gather more information about the characters. A good example are the revelations about McLeod’s marriage to Guinevere. However, as the novel progresses, a number of complex political-allegorical considerations supervene, and the notion of a “dynamic portrait” becomes less useful as a means of understanding Mailer’s method.
4. As is, for example, the career CIA man Hugh “Harlot” Montague in Mailer’s much later novel *Harlot’s Ghost* (1991). Barney Oswald Kelly in *An American Dream* is also a variant on this “type”.

5. As Nigel Leigh points out, McLeod's country of origin is in Eastern Europe, another thread connecting him to Jean Malaquais (Leigh 86).

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