JOURNALISTIC NOVEL DEVOTED TO SCIENCE
I

'o' It is excellent
To have giants strength
But it is tyrannous to
Use it like a giant...
- William Shakespeare.

The pre-eminence of science and its prestige today are unsurpassed, there is neither a need nor a person to disparge it. Through the progress of mechanical inventions and scientific education all the evils of human life will, it is hoped, be gradually eliminated. Modern life is so much dominated by machine that living has become an artificial, dull and complicated routine of work.

Especially the United States which has achieved marvellous progress in the scientific and technological areas, is torn by strife and is unable to bring about peace and security to its own people. One of the major reasons that can be attributed is, that only practical applications of science are in vogue and thereby the efforts of inventors and promoters have gained predominance over scientific discoverers. Science yielding utilitarian results mostly in demand for applications of science gives material profit that is in technology and medicine. Hence science is regarded as of purely instrumental value, useful because of its practical applications.
With this tradition science is hardly pursued as a valuable activity for its own sake, like religion or art. This has deprived an insight into important human affairs, causing an inevitable gulf between humanism and science.

Mailer has seized the opportunity as a journalist at NASA and carefully envisaged the monumental event of Landing Apollo 11 on the moon into an enduring science-fiction to show the symbiosis of both humanism and science.

Tradition of American novel has been individual, romantic exploration for gain, imbued with a sense of wonder and adventure. The 19th century novel epitomizes the main american trend wherein Melville and Hawthorne, for example, dealt with some basic human conditions and ethical alternatives. With passage of time, American prosperity gained affluence to material and, sociological insights. American novels of the thirties and forties may be called as stuff as they dealt with the period of great depression. Coming over to the sixties in particular, the tone of American novel has gone shriller with the human predicament becoming deeper.

The contemporary American fiction including short story, has marched into a variety of genres, to suit the personal convenience of a fiction writer. New modes of
expression have been evolved and experimented, new insights into human conditions have been developed, demanding a perception unknown till then. The fictional focus, has shifted from an individual endeavour to a common, community encounter. The basic questions of ethical accountability continue to occupy the central stage till date:

The American novel claims to find its unity in reducing man either to elementals or to his external reactions and to his behaviour. It does not choose feelings or passions to give a detailed description of, such as we find in classic French novels. It rejects analysis and the search for a fundamental psychological motive that could explain and recapitulate the behaviour of a character. This is why the unity of this novel form is only the unity of the flash of recognition. Its technique consists in describing men by their outside appearances, in their most casual actions, of reproducing, without comment, everything they say down to their repetitions and finally by acting as if men were entirely defined by their daily automaticism. On this mechanical level men in fact, seem exactly alike, which explains this peculiar universe in which all the characters appear interchangeable, even down to their physical peculiarities. This technique is called realistic only owing to a misapprehension.
The strife between reason and intuition continues with the same fervour even today as in the past. Intuitive thinking which is associated with metaphysical enquiry has been crossing its stretchable limits and therefore, it is difficult to accept all of its dictates. Under such a situation, reason has proved an indispensable and corrective factor. Science takes advantages of its thorough analytical method with reason as its main conditional strength. However in doing so, science has developed a wrong notion that everything is explainable when subjected to reason. The scientists have arrived at the conclusion that no phenomenon falls out of the domain of the causal theory.

C.E.M. Joad says,

Of recent years these 'results' from the special sciences have tended to transcend in importance the other types of data which have historically formed the raw material of philosophy. People's moral intuitions have for years remained fairly constant; recently they seem to have diminished both in frequency and intensity; mystics have been few; there are still great artists, but the problem which their art raises are not in any sense new, while there is no reason to think that the lover of today experiences very different emotions from his
predecessors in Shakespeare's England or Renaissance Florence. But the sciences have been advancing at a prodigious rate and presenting the philosophers with data faster than they can assimilate them.2

Looking at science as the ultimate and infallible source of knowledge has become a fashion. This has led to the belief that every happening can easily be tracked down. Therefore, science could establish itself very securely even when it was in its cradle. Unfortunately the preponderance of science in every field of activity has subordinated humanity. A further damage has resulted forcing ethics and morals to evolve new meanings out of their old and highly revered terms.

Certain inventions led to the industrial and technological revolutions and changed all phases of society. However, they have exhibited bewildering potentialities for good or evil. It seems there is a great struggle under way to win the loyalties of men and women. Unfortunately this has resulted into an unappeasing human greed in the materialistically controlled life. Aesthetic sense, poetic appreciation, sensitivity, faith etc. are sadly replaced by competition, value based morality, restlessness and unchecked
pragmatism. Religion is looked upon as a mere literature erected out of sentiments seeped in ignorance and empty ritual. Significance of life and religion are frequently under attack from pseudo-intellectuals and humanists as superstition.

Consider a list which includes the discovery of the wheel, the extraction of iron from earth, the invention of gun powder and the printing press, the steam engine, the powerloom, the electric generator and the internal combustion engine. The names of Christ, Mohammed, and Buddha; of Augustine and Luther; Darwin, Marx and Freud. We may as well recognise what is common; it is the power of the man or of the invention to create other inventions, other styles of life, not even concealed in the origin. So a history of cultural revolutions could also include paper money, tobacco, and the manufacture of an inexpensive mirror since each of these was also a vehicle to enable man to become the instrument of his own will.3

Mailer as a journalist studies the implications of the dazzling results obtained from the different wings of science. In the process, he feels it is necessary to prune everything so as to make every aspect presentable. In adopting this method he sounds absolutely
impartial and beholding old values to serve humanity. Mailer has a knack of simultaneously handling subjects of extreme and opposite tendencies. He believes that reason and intuition must be bound in a symbolic fashion. To him neither can purvey satisfying answers unless connected at a certain stage. Therefore, he aims at an integral method to evolve a satisfactory solution to the contemporary problems. He has the genius to pose problems on behalf of common man and also proposes probable solutions, which is the hallmark of intellects of our age.

Normally anyone in his place would have preferred to gather the details regarding the historic event - Trip to Moon - so as to prepare an impressive write-up. For Mailer more than the achievement of man’s landing on the Moon, the sliding of the age-old values is of great concern. He thinks that gain in knowledge from flight to moon is not the concern of great many people, nor can it solve the problems of existence. It is nothing more than a synthetic trap prepared due to the sanction of a couple of ambitious persons. He is highly pessimistic about the utility of such projects and therefore openly condemns them. Mailer has a feeling that such space-programmes involving an expenditure of staggering proportions, lead to ruin and self defeat.
Yes, the poor were not a gaggle to be collected by a bulldozer, shoved, mashed annealed and poured into plastic suits they could wear in new NASA. Subsidiary poverty suburbs. No, they were rather part of the remaining resource of a spiritually anaemic land and so their economic deliverance was a mystery, which would yet defy the first and the last of the social engineers. The truth was that their faces were better than the three perfectly pleasant and even honourable faces of the three astronauts.4

Mailer express concern over the poverty-stricken millions who are bulldozed, anaemic and groaning. The teeming millions represent to Mailer the spiritual aridity of the land, whose deliverance is not in sight. He contends that the colossal amounts poured into NASA projects, can be fruitfully diverted to the economic deliverance of the poor. To Mailer the poor, innocent faces appear superior to those of the well-dressed astronauts.

...the quintessence of number, the world reclassified by combination of one and zero, nothing more. So had Leibnitz once attempted—in his lust to create a symbolic logic—to show that god was I and had created the world out of 0. Now another accounting was near. For if one could eventually define all existence by variations of
1 and 0, how easy would become
the next step—to dissolve the
world. Down all the steps of
entropy we would flow.5

Working at NASA as a journalist Mailer could
successfully wield the power of his pen to fuse sciences
and fiction, which has ultimately emerged as a masterpiece,
'OF A FIRE ON THE MOON'. In 1969, having accepted a
'life' contract for a series of articles on the american
space programme, Mailer undertook a rather unusual and
difficult project.

The long articles entitled 'OF A FIRE ON THE MOON','
'THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ASTRONAUTS' and 'A DREAM OF THE FUTURE's
FACE', covered the entire space programme of Apollo 11
mission. Later the three were combined for bringing out
'OF A FIRE ON THE MOON', to provide readers an understanding
of the space technology and also the politically managed
background of the Apollo flights. Mailer brings out in minute
detail the thrill of science along with the tribulations that
encompasses humanity in its wake. OFA FIRE ON THE MOON' assumes
significance from the fact Mailer touches upon the fears and
aspirations of man that have been engaging the wise all the
world over.
The influence of science on society had been manifold. Usually the positive and beneficial aspects of science are highlighted and the converse are either deliberately ignored or preferred to be toned down. Bertrand Russell in "THE IMPACT OF SCIENCE ON SOCIETY" says,

Science used to be valued as a means of getting to know the world; now owing to the triumph of technique, it is conceived as showing how to change the world. The new point of view is adopted in practice throughout America and Russia .... The question what objective truth belonged to human thinking is not a question of theory, but a practical question. The truth, i.e. the reality and power of thought must be demonstrated in practice. The contest as to the reality or non-reality of a thought which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.6

Since the journalistic mode in literature began marching with a sense of purpose, it could not be restricted to a definite subject matter or premise. One of its chief characteristics is the persistent analytical view. Therefore, a journalistic novel is capable of presenting facts though in an unconventional manner and retain throughout, the staunch attitude. Fiction devoted to science, popularly known as 'science fiction' has many a time more of
science to display and exhibit its complicated terminology to the reader. On the other hand a journalistic novel devoted to science is on alert to the numerous shades of the subject. it firmly believes in portraying the facts underneath than just dealing with the empirical results.

However many of the novels devoted to science suffer from an inadequacy because of avid concentration on the phenomenon of mechanical detail. There has also been an intentional admixture of scientific and non-scientific thinking in the process of documentation. This cross fertilization of scientific and non-scientific presentation has given rise to a pseudo method of novelistic writing. Although this mode of writing is highly rated, Mailer in his novel *OF A FIRE ON THE MOON* employs a modified version, which may be termed journalistic thus arrogating to himself the responsibility of awakening the dormant human sentiment.

Norman Mailer is one such rare writer who trusts in being vocal about the shortcoming despite the apparently stupendous success of science. He feels that history, particularly in the recent past, has in its store many lessons. Nature reserves its right concealing secrets. Scientific exploration according to him cannot solve all the problems of humanity and therefore it is unwise to grant supremacy to
science. There have been innumerable dimensions of life falling out of the scope of this approach. That is why the famous Leibnitz's distinction between truths of reason and truths of experience or Hume's distinction between relation of ideas and matters of fact is necessary. This can be substantiated from what is spoken by Aquarius for Mailer. What Norman intends to bring out from the novel is that technology would definitely fill the pause between the dead romantic and the living dread. But no longer man is ready to share the dread of the Lord.

He preferred to divine an event through his senses... technology had not yet succeeded in elaborating a science of smell.7

Challenging man's ingenuity to probe and discover secrets ever new and never ending. The intellect of a man, puny by itself, has been marshalling all resources including the accumulated knowledge generated by predecessors, for pummelling Nature. Man has been, in his overwhelming pride stemming from petty discoveries, envisioning prospects of mastering Nature and make it subservient to man's pleasure.

In his novel 'OF A FIRE ON THE MOON', Mailer closely scrutinizes the implications of man's daring act of landing on another planet. Mailer in the persona of Aquarius,
lashes out at the inadequacy of science, which has practically enslaved the mind in man by reason. It is ironic that science has not been able to explain how flowers acquire the characteristic fragrance.

The historic event has been broadcasted as an unprecedented successful achievement of science and technology.

Mailer feels, this is very unjust because subjecting every phenomenon of the world to a set of codes and conditions can be an act arising out of wishful thinking and planning. Having a genuine backing of necessary grounding in the minutest detail of science and technology, Mailer has buttressed himself with conventional views to pin-point the folly on the part of those subscribing to the unidirectional development.

In OF A FIRE ON THE MOON Mailer exhibits his great disappointment, for being unable to use his genius as a reporter with regard to the first flight to Moon by man. He is left with no other choice than relying upon his capacity to imagine and surmise.

In OF A FIRE ON THE MOON, disappointed by his inability, as an earthbound reporter to capture the meaning of man's first flight to the moon,
he responds by presenting part II
as a book about his writing the
book on the moon flight through
a subsequent process of intense
research and imaginative
meditation.

One of the major reasons for Mailer's typical
disposition towards this historical event could be publicity
of the success of the astronauts with the aid of science and
technology and overlooking the sacred values concerning
humanity. He does not look placid when the event is
interpreted in the usual journalistic mood. On the converse
he thinks a radical shift in the attitude is very much needed.
He refuses to mask his consciousness with those success
stories which have earned mass approbation;
nothing worthwhile in the cause of the betterment of humanity
has resulted.

Therefore, his novel *Of a Fire on the Moon* received
mixed reactions. Critics have gone to the extent of declaring
Mailer's handling of the subject not in an adept manner
because to them the very subject is beyond Mailer's capacity.

One such view is expressed by Roger Sale.

Here, where he really has very
little to say about what is
happening, we are left, often
quite embarrassed, with
a technique that suddenly makes
Mailer seem a driveller and
a show.
Roger Sale's contention that Mailer's account of the event lacks authenticity because experience of the process is beyond Mailer's personal grasp. This stance of demanding authenticity from personal experience can be countered by the fact that creative writers have the ability, infact a gift, to divine truth. In one of the rare experiments in the journlistic line, Mailer has shown the probability of encompassing a set of ideas through his tremendous capacity of intuitive thinking. A common opinion however, may go against Mailer's prestige but then innovative ideas in any field are destined to face such a severe test. In fact, Mailer is conscious of the fact that such an exposition of the validity of the project itself is quite unorthodox and though truthful, may not be stomached. He is very determined in his project and therefore, lays open the background that has prompted him to undertake it. Mailer deliberately declines to disguise the weakness of own position of incompetence to assess the whole NASA programme possibly much due to the force of this inbuilt temperament, Mailer prefers to take on the challenge of the very subject, which otherwise is quite difficult to handle.

Alfred Kazin's perception with regard to Mailer's standpoint seems quite agreeably justified.
As a result, the frank recognition of artifice becomes even more important as message and method in _OF A FIRE ON THE MOON_ than it was in _THE ARMIES OF THE NIGHT_.

That _OF A FIRE ON THE MOON_ is a book about novelist trying to write instant history.

In this novel, as in some of the other novels published earlier, Mailer is the narrator presenting himself as a protagonist, called Aquarius. Aquarius is engaged in a heroic activity—reporting the event of NASA launch. This might have led Mailer to explore thoroughly the consequences, as they had been all the while positioned at the subsidiary level. Therefore, there is an artist’s struggle to transform the feverish activity of the launch into fiction, and allow a straight entry into the book. Sensitive reader may feel this to be an extraordinary attempt in condensing what otherwise could have been an improbable.

Therefore, even if it is not an acceptable proposition, Mailer is successful in shaping the macrocosmic world to a semi-microcosmic world. In the competitive field of journalism, this need not be considered as a mere acrobatic feat but appreciated as a remarkable catch of the time. Mailer has indeed shown his genius by connecting fiction to a factual event. Thus he has not relied upon the journalistic
ethics by virtue of which interviewing the astronauts and later on collating and interpreting the available data would have proved rewarding.

**OF A FIRE ON THE MOON**, Mailer portrays the world of journalism... within his authorial consciousness. Rather than a mere literary game, this is a self-conscious assertion of the need to bring the world of fiction to a factual event—that is recreate and explore an event in one's consciousness until a meaningful shape and substance are discovered. Mailer adopts the methods of metafiction as a way of moving beyond the facts of journalism into the realm of truth, of pattern and interpretation, while always keeping the process before the reader.11

Mailer imagines the realm of truth as quite away from the traditional areas of journalism. He expects a transmutation for the journalistic facts before they are brought. Therefore this new method can bridge the gap between fiction and truth, unless both are ritualistically separated. Being disgusted with the life before death Hemingway preferred the life after death. He voluntarily ended his life by adopting an uncommon method: blasting his brains out. A great soul with an unquenching mania of manliness at last
surprisingly succumbed. His fans and critics were shocked alike to the core at the ghastly end Hemingway courted. However none could cough out the depression better than Mailer who fabricated the indecent into a thoughtfully written novel.

Mailer probably was one such disciple of Hemingway who could truely and completely understand 'papa'. Therefore the novel was intended to present before the world all that must have dispirited an oversensitive writer like Hemingway. When the iron-willed Hemingway handed over the reins of his life to death so easily, Mailer experienced the severity of the concussion which remained a nightmare.

He had gone through the New York Times to read the well-turned remarks of notables who for the most part never cared about papa, not that much; and had one full heart-clot of outraged vanity that the Times never thought to ask his opinion... He was sick in that miasma and not quite discoverable region between the liver and the soul. Hemingway's suicide left him wedded to horror. It is possible that in the eight years since, he never had a day which was completely free of thoughts of death.12

In the novelistic tradition of first person narrator, Aquarius becomes an inside-out character. Norman
Mailer uses this technique, perfected by novelists like Fitzgerald and Hemingway, of a participatory observer who has illimitable freedom to observe the happenings around and indulge in speculation of his own choice. In part I, Mailer introduces 'Aquarius' who speaks for him and through him a device to deride the shortcomings.

Norman has chosen an appropriate name Aquarius being born on 31, January to begin the study of rockets. The water bearer traversed the earth and breathed the air: three elements were his medium, solid, liquid and gas. That was kin to the rocket. Apollo 11 would leave the earth travel on the combustion of its liquids and traverse a space. What indeed was space but the final decompression of gas? On such unscientific thoughts did Norman, sign of Aquarius travel.13

Mailer imagines the universe is constituted by a balancing mechanism. Apart from the sign of the zodiac he has picked up, he goes to the extent of clarifying the characteristic values. The universe being composed of the four basic triplicities, namely air, water, fire and earth, he presumes all the movements restricted or permitted by them. However to him, posing to be knowledgeable is as dangerous as defying the process of Nature. What then could be scientific?
Mailer thinks not only the scientific principles governing the universe but also conditioning of the mind. Every empirical knowledge is based upon the phenomenal world, but there is something beyond and before it. Matter may allow transformation, the compositions could be imagined, the conditions might easily predict the possible state into which matter passes on but what causes it to behave in such a manner? Why energy remains conserved for ever? Why are we not in a position to hold the authority to dictate terms to Nature at any of its moods? Why are we not sanctioned the power to create and destroy it? Such is the tone of questions posed by Mailer and in fact he is obsessed with it.

As he writes,

Armstrong: "I can see the footprints of my boots and the treads in the fine sandy particles." ... was that the power behind the force which made technology triumphant in this century? -- that technology was at least a force which attempted to bring back answers from questions which had been considered to be without answers?

It may be because of the pre-flight press conference witnessed by Mailer; wherein he got an impression that the state of the mind of the astronauts was brought to
such a pass that they spoke only of technology and had no scope to express their feelings. The astronauts must have definitely experienced the pre-flight nervousness and tremendous dread but these things were taken care, by forcing a 'technologese'. This had completely reduced the significance of their actions.

Mailer can find in them little distinctive quality and finally accepts that the logic of the mission demanded the men be as inter-changeable as the machines. More troubling is the lack of wonder or heroism they exude. Mailer invokes them as "technicians and heroes, robots and saints", but nothing helps; though there is surely more to the astronauts than meets the eye at bay beyond plate glass, more ambition or fear or something, the novelist-journalist of imagination cannot pierce their world.15

It is interesting to find Mailer suggesting the demands of technology. The trip to Moon, could naturally open another window to peep through and estimate the incredible vastness of reality. Nothing goes without pre-qualifications and therefore, nothing surfaces without demands. The technology expects the astronaut to get attuned to his new shade of reality.
Soon however, Aquarius begins to consider the possibility that the new reality being opened by technology is demanding a similar creative thrust from him. After hearing the astronaut Neil Armstrong about his boyhood dream of 'hovering' and having decided that the flight to the Moon has for mankind the significance of a dream. Mailer shows himself deciding that he can write this book, that indeed it might be an artistic challenge of heroic scope that could result in a work whose size might relieve the chore. Later he suggests that this work is itself becoming a dream like flight as he contemplates:

The size of the feat and the project before him and by the night before the launch, he was already in orbit himself a simple fellow with a mind which idled agreeably, his mind indeed out in some weightless trip through the vacuum of a psychic space.16

It should be noted that by the time Mailer is concluding part-I of the book, the astronauts are back on earth. It shows how he has utilized his journalistic acumen for covering the entire mission from the scene at Houston and Cape Kennedy. He is, however, graceful in admitting that he is truly handicapped due to the innate limitations he suffers from. Therefore, to his mind this is an incomplete mopping
up process. The process has much more to gather. At this stage he feels the trip is a result of some 'monumental' vision of either God or the Devil. The second part of the novel, OF A FIRE ON THE MOON titled "Apollo", deals with the return voyage of the astronauts from space. Mailer had to summon all his journalistic talent and semi-scientific knowledge, to cope with the impetus. The return journey has to become part of the fictional decision, to enable Mailer to explore the impact of the moon mission on man.

Like a capitalist who risks all the moral future of his soul on the gamble that God believes in capitalism and wanted each man to seek to enrich himself as part of God's design, so the engineers at NASA lived in that ice-chamber of the moral heart where they could not know if their actions were divinely approved or abhorred but dread showed in the chill dark air of airconditioning and human relations at the Manned spacecraft centre, South of Houston.17

Here begins Mailer's metafictional structure; he has once again to speak through Aquarius. He further comprehends the true purpose behind the trip, which had all the time remained concealed. He strongly desires to retell everything from the other end. Recapitulating part-I and envisaging the
end of part-II, Mailer combines both for a lasting reality. No doubt, he experiences the strength of illusion masking reality and therefore interrupts man's crazy notions of supremacy.

"He interrupts the superbly realized illusion of actuality in his description of the astronauts' orbiting view of the surface of the dark side of the moon by reminding the reader that the author is "staring down on a photograph". 18

Thus to Mailer the quintessence of the astronaut's success story can be read through the photographs and one has to feel delighted looking at it. Further he expects that the illusion will reign as usual unless it is capsuled in time.
II

In part-II of the novel, Mailer depicts yet another picture of the return journey of Apollo. He does not oblige the readers by reproducing merely the bare facts already described in Newspapers but re-creates the journey-account. In doing so, he does sound unconventional; supplements the total account, using his erudition with regard to the vast experience of the external facts. Mailer adopts the most unusual method of narrating incidents consciously attempting to capture the fleeting vision of truth, which can normally be grasped intuitively. He might come to the aid of readers by providing foot-notes where he believes a clarification is needed. The journalist in him has to break the entire truth of perception to the enrichment of human understanding.

It gives a hint of how killings is the work in the simulators. To use all of one's best energy hour after hour, working day after working day in order to keep up with a machine whose brain is more brilliant than one's own, plunging all of one's ambition, avarice, charity, pluck, discipline and education into an electrical set of brains which will give back nothing but firm answers, can hardly improve the human brain at anything but the cruelest expense to the body.
One may draw the conclusion that Mailer deliberately fuses the readily available coverage of the Apollo mission with his imaginative perception. He makes use of all the necessary technical terms with details and to add to it, brings forth the indispensible artifice. Probably he is conscious of the fact that the voyage is handicapped owing to the partial neglect of the mental conditioning of the astronauts. This very feeling of incomplete conditioning haunts Mailer continuously. In his own writing he confesses that if he is to

...travel into the inner space of his brain to uncover the mysteries of Moon, he could dignify that expedition only if he obeyed the irritatingly modest data of the given, the words, the humor, and resolute lack of poetic immortality in the astronauts communications with the earth.20

He is much obsessed with the idea that astronauts' mechanically adjusted life during the mission is an indirect way of macerating their grey cells. Therefore, to him the words and deeds of the astronauts while on the Moon have been manipulated, as Mailer and other reporters could guess this sitting at their writing desks, far away from the operational control room.
In the concluding chapters, Mailer successfully builds highly informative and dramatic story of the whole trip. Had he not given it a significant and dramatic touch, all the portions would have become very banal and would have accumulated as a kind of reportage. He has the knack of drawing the essential elements of drama for arranging them in an effective manner constructing the whole scene. One such example, can be pointed out when Armstrong and Aldrin attempted to redock with Apollo II. In this case, he prefers to preface the whole write-up with technological details and shows as to how they had miraculous escape from the 'technological mishaps'. Herein, we have all the ingredients of drama, tightly held, for building suspense and to unravel a significant mystery.

Just before that moment 'all hell broke loose'. It was Collins' remark, there on the transcript, but he has no recollection of saying it. As he fired the charges, there was an abrupt, shocking and 'abnormal' oscillation. The ships began to yawn from side to side at a rapid rate. What an instant for Armstrong - did the memory of the sun flashing through the window of Gemini 8 come back to him? What a thunder for Aldrin after the mishaps with the computer on the day before, what a stroke of doubt for Collins at where the
mistake could be. "All hell broke loose". Hell was when the unforeseen insisted on emerging. Shivering and quivering the ships slapped from side to side.21

The astronauts were confounded by unclear ground commands, and each of them is confused beyond reason—they could not account for the technological failure. Mailer seems to implicitly suggest through the exhausted, exasperated "All Hell broke loose", that the invisible call it god or devil or Nature has a strong thrust to influence any occurrence in the lives of men. Neither Armstrong nor Aldrin could possibly escape 'hell'-a foreboding sense of disaster—which their training and mental conditioning would not be able to prevent or divert. Mailer does not have pretentions of dealing with the subject in a different manner: he acknowledges the triumph of science and also admits its need. Therefore he openly utilizes the available information as basic matter to describe the details. He however, excels by updating his information with proofs, and pushes forward with his intuitive knowledge.

Of course, this scene, like others, depends not only on his research, but also on his intuitive knowledge of how he is sure it must have felt. The role of his imagination is not disguised. Indeed, Mailer continually asserts
it through the most obvious metaphorical additions of his own concepts. A climactic instant is his description of Armstrong’s view as he goes to sleep in the capsule after man’s first moon-walk: "In front of his face was the eyepiece of the telescope. The earth was in its field of view, and the earth ‘like a big blue eyeball’ stared back at him. They could not sleep. Like the eye of a victim just murdered, the earth stared back at him."

Mailer’s introductory description of Armstrong’s moon-walk, his thrill at achievement are immediately neutralized by the inability of the astronaut to sleep. It is not consequent upon the excitement of achievement but from a sense of horror, amending from a ghastly injury caused to the universe by sacrilegeing the sanctity of planet moon. Earth stares through the eye of the telescope as the unclosed eye of a ‘victim just murdered’.

Mailer’s instinct at imagining the psychological condition of Armstrong is superb: he quotes his own simile. Mailer is able to change Armstrong’s benign version of the moment into a profoundly disturbing observation.

So, to Mailer, the success of landing on the Moon has forced man to chase yet another mirage which is a new reality. The astronauts themselves may not agree to any
such troubling significance but Mailer vicariously experiences, gets in their module and metaphorically undertakes the flight. In the third part, "The age of Aquarius" Mailer the author-protagonist searches for meaningful end. Mailer's intuition informs that something in Nature has been cynically wounded by the experiment leading to moon-landing. The gaping inquiry is compounded by Armstrong's walk on the sacred soil of Moon, which traditionally held the imagination of man as a divinity, as an attractive damsel, a goddess.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee: tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
But there is no light.
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown.
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.23

Here again he pins faith in his intuition and flights of imagination. He even tries to substantiate their validity though he is conscious of the fact that, even there a variety exists. Therefore what is important and needed is the capturing of the right note in a preferential manner. Mailer has to encounter, as an honest writer, the validity of the technological wonder and come to terms with reality. He has to honestly determine and inform through the novel
whether or not landing on moon augurs well or ill for man. He understands that the entire episode is disgusting, and man's colossal investment of money and energy may be futile. He personally feels that his attitude, understanding of the surroundings, have changed owing to this imaginary moon-flight.

Standing in Houston before the glass encased moon rock, which was brought by the astronauts, Mailer has queer feelings.

...It came on the day he stood in quiet before that objective from the moon, that rock which gave him certitude enough to know he would write his book and in some part applaud the feat and honour the astronauts....yes, we might have to go out into space until the mystery of new discovery would force us to regard the world once again as poets, behold it as savages who knew that if the universe was a lock, its key was metaphor rather than measure. Marvellous little moon rock. What the Devil did it say? 24

For Mailer the rock signifies something very different than what the astronauts and the visitors perceive. For the astronauts it is a fact and a sign of victory; for Mailer it cannot be anything more than a metaphor. Mailer thinks the astronauts must be enjoying the feeling of having
created a history and opened new vistas for the future. He also thinks that they have created a new meaning to the image of moon. Mailer prefers looking behind and beyond this change.

Mailer's achievements however, must finally be assessed on aesthetic rather than didactic grounds. The flights of Apollo 11 becomes, for Mailer, a quest generated by man's innermost search for mystery and adventure, not a question of who signed which bills or which German scientists promoted which booster rockets. As in all his novels, Mailer has created a "fiction" but in this nonfiction novel, that fiction transcends the known facts compiled in thousands of NASA documents. Mailer's various roles as fact gatherer, work-a-day journalist and reader of "many a technical manual" are subservient to that of mystic prophet. The Mailer who stands behind *OF A FIRE ON THE MOON* is the social novelist whose fascination with the sources of our national fate leads him to an analysis of the current manifestations of that destiny.25

Mailer finds it impossible to segregate his consciousness and perception from fiction. With the aid of the ethics of conventional journalism, he feels even if such a division is made possible, it surely would prove illusory.
Therefore, he exercises utmost care while dealing with the imaginative experiences. One of the usual dangers is missing track of the subject and meandering over trifles to such an extent that the very purpose is lost. This normally happens when one attacks value to metaphors and metafiction. Mailer avoids these pitfalls by avoiding stereotype representation and scope for falsifying the whole theme.

While describing the hours of preparation for the highly publicised Moon flight, Mailer in *Of a Fire on the Moon* has neatly covered the psychological aspect with regard to the astronauts mental state. For him, this is of utmost importance because in the journalistic excitement many times the veneer is widely studied and brought to limelight. But as the intrinsic design is taken up for analysis, one concludes that behind the surfacial calm there is an invisible agitation. Mailer thinks that under the pressure of the over highlightened pride of the Nation through the trip to the Moon, the astronauts Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins have also got their minds completely mechanised. Therefore, when interviewed before the trip, they were representing the ambitious Nation's mind at the command of President Nixon, than letting their true feelings drained off. One of the possibilities could be the effect of the plastic room in
which the astronauts were made to reside, sterilized and segregated from other human beings. They could not converse in their normal moods and tones. This automatically marks the beginning of a psychological voyage from Mailer's point of view.

Since journalists fit this category, today's press conference had installed Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins up on the stage in a plastic box about twelve feet wide, ten feet deep and ten feet high. Blowers within this three-walled plastic room blew air from behind them out into the audience; thereby the breath of the astronauts would enter the theatre, but the airborne germs of journalists would not blow back. It made a kind of sense. Of course, the cause of the common cold was still unknown, but gross studies of infection would surmise a partial quarantine might be effective partially. However, the instrumentation of this premise was not happy. The astronauts looked a bit absurd in their plastic box, and the few journalists who had actually fleshed their joke by putting on masks caused the astronauts to grin broadly as though to dissociate themselves from the pyramids of precaution they were in fact obeying.

Earth has been recognized as mother by man since times immemorial. Science has revealed that earth has minerals,
energy and inexhaustible food supply that qualifies earth to be a mother. Mailer's punches are unmistakable. He presents a picture of the astronauts in their sequestered plastic abodes, presented to the journalists as if the former belonged to a privileged category of exhibits—divine or wild—to be studied reverentially from a distance. Debunking follows soon, destroying whatever elevated status the astronauts enjoyed as sheer madness. They are kept safe from contamination, from infections likely to be transmitted by men. Miserable part of the whole exercise, as Mailer pathetically endorses is our scientists inability to find the source of common cold. Bathetic effect is generated by Mailer's juxtaposition of the significant and the frivolous. The human inquisitiveness that promoted the ancient Babylonians, Egyptians and Indians to gaze into the space, to discover the movement of large sized luminous bodies in the saxe sky, their position and relative influence on other bodies like earth and moon, have not gained any laxity. 20th century scientists are more determined than ever to conduct forays into the open space. What can be grasped, has become common knowledge; what remains unexplored, has remained mysterious and thus relegated to the realm of metaphysics and astronomy. Therefore certain planets are given some
attributes and a position is denoted in the firmament and depended and concentrated on mother earth and allowed other planets to be stationed in the metaphysical realm only. However, scientists been probing and conducting experiments to study the likely influence of other planets on earth in their zeal to understand the secrets of the universe. Each planet is supposed to have some benevolent and some malevolent characteristics, independently and conjunction, Moon, as a planet has captured the imagination of man in a variety of ways. Moon "signifies" womanhood, beauty, chastity and worst of all, lunacy.

Astronauts were already put on a typical psychological voyage. They had to speak about their mission to moon which was earlier considered worthy of as fantasy and nothing more. Therefore a calm had descended on them, after the daze. They were aware of the significance of their ominous journey to moon. They looked the dead brought back to earth for human communion.

Once they sat down, however, the mood shifted. Now they were there to answer questions about a phenomenon which even ten years ago would have been considered material unfit for serious discussion. Grown men, perfectly normal-looking, were now going to talk about their
trip to the moon. It made everyone uncomfortable. For the relation of everyone to each other and to the event was not quite real. It was as if a man had died and been brought back from death. Perhaps for this reason, the quiet gaiety of their entrance had deserted them as they sat behind the desk in the plastic booth. Now it was as if they did not know if they were athletes, test pilots, engineers, corporation executives, some new kind of priests, or sheepish American boys caught in a position of outlandish prominence.27

The astronauts were conscious of their contribution to the successful mission indirectly saved their honour; otherwise their inner conflict would have been easily betrayed by their stuttering speech. Though they looked convincing and posed to be determined, it was a tremendous workout. Blurring of the sense of values had slow commenced.

While the focus of attention was naturally on Armstrong for commanding the flight, he in the beginning to be the least at ease. He spoke with long pause, he searched for words. When the words came out, their ordinary content made the wait seem excessive. He minted no phrases ....As a speaker he was all limp-still it did not leave him unremarkable. Certainly the knowledge he was an astronaut
restored his stature, yet even if he had been a junior executive accepting an award, Armstrong would have presented a quality which was arresting, for he was extraordinarily remote. He was simply not like other men.28

A comparison among the three also caused a temperament-al difference. Collins was to join Armstrong and Aldrin for a part of the mission. That was indeed a discouraging fact. This had played a psychologically depressing part for him. But a scale of efforts he got adjusted to. He could hide the frustration within at the demand of the military status—colonel that he was— and also due to the age-old aristocratic discipline.

Aldrin spoke of this as a "new item", then of rendezvous with the command module, which would return them to earth of "various contingencies that can develop", of "a wider variety of trajectory conditions"— he was talking about not being able to join up, wandering through space, lost forever to life in that short eternity before they expired of hunger and thirst.... Yet Aldrin, powerful as a small bull, deep as his grasp of Celestial Mechanics, gave off in his air of unassailable solemnity some incommunicable speech about the depth of men's souls and that razor's edge between the hero's endeavour and
vain glory. Collins, in contrast, moved easily. Collins was the man nearly everybody was glad to see at a party, for he was the living spirit of good and graceful manners. Where Armstrong referred to Wapakoneta, Ohio, as his hometown, and showed a faint but ineradicable suspicion of anyone from a burg larger than his own, where Aldrin protected himself from conversation with the insulations of a suburban boyhood and encapsulement among his incommunicable fields of competency, Collins had been born in a well-set-up apartment off the Borghese Gardens in Rome.... Yet Collins had little opportunity to show his humor. It existed mainly in the fine light smiling presence he bestowed on the interview while the others were asked all the questions. 29

Mailer personally feels that all the three astronauts could not present themselves in their natural humor, but were tied down by the mannerisms of the day. It was nothing but aristocracy that could keep Colonel Collins in a regimental mood though all felt evenly about his contribution. Anyone in his place would have been tempted to vomit his frustration but it was more of a mechanised personality in Collins which had taken the whole charge than just the usual human emotions governing everything.
"Colonel Collins, to people who are not astronauts, you would appear to have the most frustrating job on the mission, not going all the way. How do you feel about that? The contradiction implicit in being an astronaut was here on this point it was sewered right here. If they were astronauts, they were men who worked for the team, but no man became an astronaut who was not sufficiently exceptional to suspect at times that he might be the best of all. Nobody wins at handball who is not determined to win.

.... The only real guide to aristocracy in American life was to see who could keep his cool under the most searching conditions of unrest, envy, ambition, jealousy and heat. So not a quiver where I am."30

Collins, when questioned for his reaction, retains the characteristic cool of temper, concealing the genuine frustration in not landing on moon, with such equanimity, such aristocratic non-chalance, that he emerges a darling of the journalists. Collins endearment subscribes to a peculiar American psychological trait—the winner may take all but the loser draws a plause for his tenacious effort; tomorrow may be rosier.

In comparison with Collins, Armstrong becomes a pale figure, despite garnering all the glory as the captain of the
successful manoeuvre into space. Collins adheres to the code of behaviour that is instilled into him whereas Armstrong betrays a peculiar streak. Mailer insists that it is not just Armstrong's behaving under the influence of the training but it is on the other hand an unsuccessful combat with his true feelings which were getting aroused easily. Therefore, his speech often got subservient to the natural one.

Armstrong came in quickly. "I'd like to say in that regard the man in the Command Mouldie" ...pause..."of course by himself" ... another pause .... " has a giantsized job. " When Armstrong paused and looked for the next phase he sometimes made a sound like the open crackling of static on a pilot's voice band with the control tower one did not have the impression that the static came from him so much as that he had listened to so much static in his life, suffered so much of it, that his flesh, his cells, like it or not, were impregnated with the very crackling of static.31

Armstrong is also a victim of the duplicated language. After all in his own interview he was saved by the choice of the language only. Because of captaining the team he was, in fact, more under psychological stress than anyone else. Mailer has depicted in the interview as to how Armstrong also braces himself. However, it can be observed that the
impact of the mechanised language was so strong/powerful that even if Armstrong felt the need of altering it, he might have sounded a novice in the field for which he was prepared.

"Mr. Armstrong, at the time you are down on the Moon, what will be your overriding consideration and what will be your main concern?"

"Well", said Armstrong, "immediately upon touchdown our concern is the integrity of the Lunar Module itself"...nnnnnnhr went the sound of the static.... "For the first two hours after touchdown we have a very busy time verifying the integrity of the Lunar Module and all of its systems" ... nnnnhr.... A great deal of technical discussion... between spacecraft and ground during a time period when most people will be wondering, well what does it look like out there? ... We will be eager to comment "... nnnnhr ... " but reluctant to do in the face of these more important considerations on which... the entire rest of the lunar mission depends.32

It is quite interesting to find the way these astronauts faced some of the unwanted questions. The questions were personal, impersonal and also intra-personal. These questions should have made the astronauts a bit nervous but somehow they were successful in answering them and warding off possible tension.
On being asked about the possibility of death to any member of the crew, the astronauts just smiled away as it and took everything sportively. Death though stood with a remote possibility, could not be straightaway ruled out. Even then the astronauts were more attuned to the possibility of the historic success near at hand that must have psychologically geared them up.

Armstrong smiled. His detestation of answering questions in public had been given its justification. Journalists would even ask a man to comment on the emotions of his oncoming death. "Well," said Armstrong, "that's an un-pleasant thing to think about. " If, as was quite possible, he had been closer to death than anyone in the room, and more than once, that did not mean the chalice of such findings was there to be fingered by fifty "We don't think that's at all a likely situation. It's simply a possible one." He had however, not answered the question.

When Mailer again analyses what had been said by Armstrong about 'death', he finds different meaning. Therefore, as ever, through Aquarius he starts speaking about the unpleasant reality of death. Mailer feels 'death' though a necessary condition of life, has proved more of an accidental possibility. With the enthusiasm of scientists and
technocrats, the astronauts have been made almost guineapigs. Therefore, though astronauts have been trained to wrestle and later triumph over the feeling within, they cannot do so successfully, because of deliberate negligence of the psychological frame of mind of the astronauts. Mailer questions the future of science: Where exactly it is leading? Is it meant for providing relief to the humanity or just to enslave it? Can it not accept the terms of Nature? Mailer seems obsessed with such questions because often he poses the same set of questions in different tones at different occasions.

People who had nearly died from wounds spoke of the near death as offering a sensation that one was rising out of one’s body. So had spoken Hemingway long writing in Paris, writing in Spain, probably writing in apartments... Now was there to be a future science of death, or did death resist all scientists, navigators, nomenclature and charts and reside in the realm of such unanswerables as whether the cause of cancer was a malfunction of the dream? Did the souls of the dead choose to rise? Was the thought of expiring on the moon an abyss of unpleasantness because the soul must rest in the tombless vacuums a torso dead on the moon and therefore not able to voyage
toward its star? A vertigo of impressions, but Aquarius had been living at the edge of such thoughts for years. It was possible there was nothing more important in a man's life than the hour and the route and the power of his death, yes certainly were to launch him into another kind of life.34

Mailer also arrives at the conclusion like that of a common man's view. A common man would certainly feel that the very motto behind this trip is qualified to be re-tested. He thinks the purpose is completely self-defeating and also deceiving, particularly in the face of the existing realities of the world. One such reality is the poverty. Any nation for this purpose is holding an unworthy and selfish aim. The very desire of dominating the world scene at the cost of preserving dangerous ideas is certainly despicable. NASA's efforts are also pre-manipulated. The researches need a lot of defence to convince its basic route and still it may be summed up as a vulgar display of nation's economic strength and baser intentions.

'Why, why ultimately, they were asking, is it so important to go to the moon? Man to man, they were asking brain to brain, their leverage derived from the additional position of asking as writer to small town-boy: why is it important?
Armstrong tried to be general. He made a speech in fair computerese about the nation’s resources, and the fact that NASA’s efforts were now tapped into this root. Well, then asked a dry voice, are we going to the moon only for economic reasons, only to get out of an expensive hole? No, said Armstrong. Do you see any philosophical reason why we might be going? The voice went on, as if to imply: are you aware there is philosophy to existence as well. Armstrong had now been manoeuvred to the point where there was no alternative to offer but a credo, or claim that he was spiritually neuter. That would have been violated too much in him.

In Mailer’s opinion, a new methodology in psychology has to be developed wherein the present day confusions can be easily eradicated. He also declares that it is the clash of desires which matters much. Once the objectified aim is achieved it becomes meaningless or at the most just a source of information. The new methodology must consider the possibilities likely to arise out of the suppressed conflicts within. The astronauts after the training camp, conduct themselves more in an unnatural fashion than venting away their true feelings believe that level of the present knowledge can cause immense damage unless a departure from
the customary methods is attempted. Another aspect which is left out of the scheme of training perhaps unintentionally, is the metaphysical. Consequently the usual moral direction is found wanting. Mailer at this stage described the position of the nations eager to display their strength and then proposes certain remedial measures in a peremptory manner.

So it was a century which moved with the most magnificent display power into directions it could not comprehend. The itch was to accelerate—the metaphysical direction unknown. Any notes towards a new psychology could take their departure from here, from this fact. And as this evening went on, and he continued to the party at Peter Conrad's house and talked to the future commander of Apollo 12 over the steaks at charcoal grill and Conrad made his confession of dreaming for years of going to the moon, and now concluded somberly, manfully—one had to be manful when contemplating the cost of desire—"now the moon is nothing but facts to men," Aquarius felt confirmation building in his mood, his happiness and his senses, that this grim tough job of writing for enough money to pay debts and buy his little plot of time, was going to be possibly, all passions directed, all disciplines relieve the chore.

And as he thought of the little details he had picked up in the
biographies of Collins, of Aldrin, of Armstrong, he thought that ye, the invasion of the moon was signal direct to commence his new psychology he would call it. Yes, beneath this Texas moon, full near the Fourth of July he would call it. The psychology of Astronauts, for they were either the end of the old or the first of the new men, and one would have nothing to measure them by until the lines of the new psychology had begun to be drawn.36

Mailer presents his reasoning in the great tradition of logic and at the same time holds on the expectation of a scientific fiction. There could be at times trace of sentimentality, of rhetoric or even of cant but with Mailer's clean intentions, they could be systematically defended. His argument is always vitalized by his capacity to control the passions for a renewed set up of the society. His literary style is often studded with flashing phrases and arresting aphorisms but on the whole as the deeper sense of the author is understood they may be ignored. Mailer deliberately places forward here—Aquarius—so that there could be a needed voice of a man of unshakable belief and corresponding decency in the face of the maladjusted society.
III

In the third part—The Age of Aquarius—of the novel OF A FIRE ON THE MOON Mailer suddenly switches on to yet another mood which searches for a genuine meaning of human life and god’s placement with regard to the universe. One may feel that Mailer partially supported the existentialistic element of despair and presents a pessimistic outlook. The whole trip as covered by him in the novel, is segmentwise but somehow at the end, Mailer begins re-evaluating the whole theme. For him, the return of the astronauts is doubtless a matter of glory but the whole successful venture is a colossal waste on many accounts.

Aquarius begins re-examining the dogmatic theories and beliefs. One of the main points which really worries him is the incapacity of god who had been glorified for centuries as Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent. Mailer also stresses upon the capacity of death which hitherto had remained as the only impartial act designed by god but now looks shaky.

And in those days, men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die and death will fly from them.37

For Aquarius, modernization has taken command of life to such an extent that colonization on the moon in the
near future should not prove a wonder by itself. Man's enthusiasm cannot be easily marred by any one of the material defeats because he allows his mind to govern his life than the heart. He has failed to draw a line of demarcation between his basic needs and greed. Mailer is quite an introvert in this regard and rarely dares to be vocal on the real details. It is, thus, surprising that Mailer who had been so critical in earlier chapters about the bureaucracy, now prefers to chastise the faulty systems. By the conclusive portion, Mailer appears to have accepted totally fatalistic view though this does not suit his usual temperament. It is also quite likely that Mailer intends addressing only the sensitive when a serious point is to be highlighted. Therefore, none should mistake Mailer's tone as loosely arranged or temporarily influenced by some pessimistic streak. To Mailer, pessimism is not personally acceptable.

The effort of these colonies would offer no less than the cheap manufacture on the moon vacuum of products of mass consciousness - electronics communications, pharmaceuticals, Yes, Sartre might be right and consciousness the conversion of being to Nothingness. Yes, the tools of the future mind seemed to be forged best in a vacuum soon they would be orbiting rocket trains of cancer patients
to take the cure in space, for the growth of malignancy was slowed apparently by radiation in weightless condition. Pain appeared at the thought of a new species of men born in lunar gravity, bodies grown in lunar gravity what form would appear to their figures, pilot men of an electrical and interplanetary world which could speak across the ages of a failure of human potential, a smashing of mood, some loss of that other means of communication which once had lived in the carnal grasp of the roots of that earlier human so much closer to an animal in the ecological scheme,... what a strength and substance to that earlier and lost human race Aquarius brooded.38

Mailer picturizes a scenario wherein people born on moon would appear different from the known Homo Sapiens, where train loads of cancer patients may be rocketed into lunar space for effective treatment. He derides the entire scheme of bringing space under man’s control and wonders at man, who may no longer remain a man. His vision of man and life, instead of being pessimistic, should be considered optimistic and ethically sound.

Mailer’s philosophical Vision is not restricted to academic discipline so as to hold a theory to solve the problems of humanity. For him, the old and traditionally
continuing theories need an alteration so that one can straightaway tackle the problems in right earnest. Particularly, the existence and nature of god have been enigmatic, what has been held in high esteem does not tally in working. Coagulating the essence of the relatively old theories shows that there is an unshakable trust in the existence of a god which could hang on for centuries together. The scientific analysis never meant to eliminate everything that was devoid of proof of a phenomenal plane but tried to seek some semblance in theory and practice. One of the philosophical problems as imagined by Mailer is a religo-philosophical and not purely philosophical. Religious, because it introduces god everywhere and philosophical because god is not left free to have independent existence. Man has been imagining god suitable to his ideas and needs. Any quality which could not satisfy or stand to human service, was abhorred by the majority universally.
Therefore, man with his scientific leap is going to the extent of creating a god of his own convenience. Probably Mailer is highly influenced by Frazer's *Golden Bough* and the ritualistic invitation of man into religious service, based on the needs of various communities, at various times. With his implicit faith in some of the supernatural powers, Mailer condemns the present attitude in vogue of serving scientific point of view.

Only a generation ago, they would have thought it was the essence of an insane heart to personify an organ, attribute a soul to the part, believe that a cancer of liver or cancer of lung was not extinguished so soon as its malignancy was removed. It would have been considered the core of psychosis to speak of the postoperative Cancer communicants of the organ removed. Yet we were infants who tickled the navel of the moon while suffocating the loop of our diaper. A line from a poem of Hemingway burned across the funeral festivities of the day.

In the next war, we shall bury the dead in cellophane
The host shall come packaged in cellophane. 39

Mailer comes out strongly in favour of a form of faith where man does not end up a monster, where festivities do not turn into funerals, where God may have to be parcelled
in cellophone, depriving him of his omniscient presence. The cloud of confusion that had severely affected the American mind for a couple of decades, begins to clear as devoted novelists, through their art take it up as a moral responsibility. Mailer is one such novelist who has closely observed the age of anxiety, despair and nihilism; he has been living through these phases. After the onslaught of such trends American mind certainly looked fatigued. Literature, particularly the fictional genre, has become alive to the predicament of the contemporary choice and despair; sensitive writers like Mailer could not best respond by infusing a sense of optimism through their probity. Mailer persists with his faith in man's potentiality to bounce back and envisage a bright Future.

Mailer through his novels has not emotionally carried away by the reader by rhetoric but prefers the art of persuasion, employing, but certainly by the clarity of intelligence and consistency in logic. He too began like the seriously idealistic philosophers with a meditation on living, concentrated on the implications of the action based on virtues. Mailer also meditates upon the act of enduring. In doing so, Mailer tends to reflect the profound theories of Albert Camus' rebellion and Nietzsche's concept of a superman.
After receiving the Nobel Prize in 1957 in Sweden, Camus said the following in the course of his oration, "I have always condemned terror. I must also condemn a terrorism which operates blindly, in the streets of Algiers for example, and which one day may strike my mother or my family. I believe in justice but I will defend my mother before justice." This quotation carries us into Camus' position vis-à-vis the Algerian situation. He believed in a widening of the franchise for the Arab peoples but he also believed that the French army should protect the Europeans who had been living in Algeria for generations. The Arab was probably never as badly off in French occupied Algeria as the African in Rhodesia. What is important is that to Camus the old absolutes cannot be substituted by any new ones. Camus is a modified opponent of violence rather than a rotary of non-violence. 40

Mailer shares with Camus a sense of the incongruity of societies which condemn murder, and yet give political sanction to the committing of the mass murder.

Our obsession with violence comes, I think not because its daily incidence is so high but because we are suffocated and so think constantly of violence. Can one argue seriously that our streets are less safe to walk on than the streets of Paris in 1300? Or Naples in 1644? But the
twentieth century in destroying
a romantic view of existence,
has created an awareness of
violence as electric as paranoia.41

Mailer raises his voice against special social
abuses. Chaos evil and waste are occasions for constant
protest and these provide the main themes in his writings.
This is the main message of OF A FIRE ON THE MOON and
WHY ARE WE IN VIETNAM?

And D.J. says in answer: ever read the concept of Dread by
Fyodor Kierkegaard? No, well neither has D. J. but now he
wants to know how many of you assholes even knew, forgive me,
Good Lord, that Fyodor Kierkegaard has a real name, Soren Kierkegaard.
Contemplate that. You ass.42

American politics, existentialism and the various
forms of totalitarianism have always made the essence of his
writings.

....only the French, alienated
beyond alienation from their
unconscious could welcome an
existential philosophy without
ever feeling it all; indeed only
a Frenchman by declaring that the
unconscious did not exist could
then proceed to explore the
delicate involutions of
consciousness, the microscopically
sensuous and all but ineffable
fissions of mental becoming,
in order finally to create the
theology of the atheism and so
submit that in a world of absurdities the existential absurdity is most coherent.43

Mailer expresses uneasiness about the state of affairs as managed by a group of ambitious persons, who push the country inexorably to the brink of disaster. If not resisted, if the American mind is not awakened, the country may be pushed to the precipice. Natural consequence of such a scenario would be a state of hopelessness and helplessness.

And openly I pledged my heart to the grave, and often in the consecrated night, I promised to love her faithfully, until death, unafraid, with her heavy burden of fatality and never to despise a single one of her enigmas. Thus did I join myself to her with a mortal cord.44

If this existential despair has to be renounced, Mailer suggests positive values to determine the human society and purpose of human existence. These have to be deduced and consecrated from the conditions of living. Therefore, Mailer finds the only possible means is rebellion. He thinks revolt is an essential dimension governing the motivating force of life. He subjects 'historical reality' to the living principle of existence. Without making a philosophical enquiry into the nature of reality and purpose of rebellion, Mailer endorses the view that
'historical reality' varies from time to time depending upon a variety of causative factors. The pattern of human action and reaction, essentially falls into a pattern. Mailer subsumes the present need of resistance for the technological slavery, as evidenced by man's effort to colonize moon, is also historic. Man's unscrupulous challenge to the phenomena in nature, his unquenchable inquisitiveness, his intelligent attempts in altering the process of nature, Mailer fears, may lead to question the very process of creation. Man's success is worthy of accolades for sheer tenacity and shrewdness: Mailer finds it difficult to stomach the purpose, the wastage such ventures entail. Mailer aspires for clarity of vision, unity of thought and purposefulness in life.

Although *Of a Fire on the Moon* is primarily journalistic account of a contemporary event, Mailer shares Melville's basic assumptions about the mystery of the universe and the impossibility of knowing god's intent—And Melville would have understood Mailer's desire to recreate the astronauts as heroes and to replace their computer technology with metaphor.45

Mailer assumes that the universe is mysterious, no amount of computer technology would succeed in unravelling
the unknowable. This stance of Mailer has been attributed to his psychological egotism, that he gets motivated to launch on campaigns to propagate his pet ideas through journalistic writing. The accusation insinuates that Mailer seeks, 'satisfaction' from rebellious postures. The fallacy of such an accusation becomes self-evident as Mailer's crusade does not entail in any personal glorification. On the other hand, he learnt malicious epithets from his detractors and considerable personal pain. Mailer undeterred by derision from detractors, persisted with his revelatory, expository writing, as he was convinced that man must be saved from becoming a robot, a senseless, emotionless, directionless vegetable. He reveals his concern for the well-being of man, for humanity founded on ethical values, a world enveloped in the mystery of God's benediction of benign love. Mailer is aware, like Albert Camus, that the world is replete with criminals—such intelligent criminals who can justify and earn acceptance through pursuasive logic. Their wrongs can be proved and approved as rights.

There are crimes of passion and crimes of logic. The boundary between them is not clearly defined. But the penal code makes the convenient distinction of premeditation. We are living in the era of premeditation and
the perfect crime. Our criminals are no longer helpless children who could plead love as their excuse. On the contrary they are adults and they have a perfect alibi: philosophy, which can be used for any purpose even for transforming murderers into judges.46

The purpose of Mailer’s *OF A FIRE ON THE MOON* is to present the contemporary reality which can be equated to a logical crime, and to examine meticulously the arguments by which it is deliberately hoisted. He does not go to the root of the things – a not so Mailerian philosophical method – but depicts the world as it is and how to happily live in it. He conveys through the position of the astronauts – Armstrong, Collins and Aldrin – that man can no longer choose his own problems. In fact the problems choose us or someone in power vicariously chooses them for us. Herein lies no choice, no alternative but to accept. Mailer bewails the miserable lot of man, who is denied the inalienable god’s gift of freedom of choice. The train of logic leads Mailer to the same platform that absurdist occupy.

Without a national consensus, some bureaucrats impose their whims; and this trend itself, in Mailer’s opinion, has become fatal for the nation. One of the reasons is abundance of decision making power vested in a coterie.
Mailer does not flinch over confronting such vested interests. He has learnt to expose every situation by speaking out audaciously against the prevailing ills. Mailer pursues the profound concept about necessity of phenomena - if it is absolute, it does not imply any kind of restraint. For him total acceptance of total necessity could be paradoxical definition of freedom.

Mailer's unerring insight into the entire moon mission has a significant message - that nature avenges in ways unanticipated by man. *Of a Fire on the Moon*, thus gains significance as Mailer's statement about the inexorable consequences of rupturing nature.

Nature exists indestructably in her pristine perfection. It displays him as immutable and benevolent. Its revelation is constant and eternal to all from the time memorial. God communicates with man through ordinary senses in nature. And science is the investigation of the divine laws which govern nature. It discloses unambiguously an omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent creator who cares enough about man to provide him with natural faculties sufficient for working out for his own salvation unaided.47
The quote from the novel of A Fire on the Moon may create an impression that Mailer has become surprisingly superstitious.

His philosophical method with regard to god and life’s pattern becomes questionable. What Mailer does here is to make a coherent statement about scientists’ quest to know the secrets of god and nature. If the quest is directed towards discovering and interpreting the benevolence of god, it attains dignity; if misdirected to unmask god, the attempt becomes deplorable and unethical.

Mailer condemns the diabolic schemes of man in experiments like exploring the moon-space. In spite of camouflaging the real intent, nature’s revenge appears unerring. Mailer is not whining about the lunar space programme and its magnificent scientific achievements; what he deduces from the available information is that prominent people like Kennedy have met with unnatural ends. The country has been passing through economic depression and unmitigated cold war with U.S.S.R. May be by coincidence, on the top of all Armstrong’s house went on fire, Aldrin’s wife went mad – the two culprits who desecrated the moon-soil. Can these be mere coincidence or nature’s revenge?
We had contracted for a lunar programme in 1961 and what a decade had followed: The times were loose, and no scientist alive could prove that moon was wholly a dead body any more than they could show that death was a state of being totally dead. Teddy Kennedy’s car went off the bridge at Chappaquiddick with Mary Jo Kopechne and the hopes of the Democratic Party went with them as a proper end to a period which had begun with the suicides of Ernest Hemingway and Marilyn Monroe; the younger brother of Martin Luther King was found dead in his swimming pool the day after men walked the moon.48

It is an imperative necessity for intellectual honesty to probe into antecedent to arrive at a conclusion. In the absence of this vital factor the human existence doubles the human misery instead of diminishing the despair of those whose life is aimless and devoid of purpose. As Bertrand Russell puts in ‘Science and Values’.

There are certain things that our age needs and certain things that it should avoid. It needs compassion and a wish that mankind should be happy; it needs the desire for knowledge and the determination to eschew peasant myths; it needs, above all, courageous hope and the impulse to creativeness. The things it must avoid and that have brought it to the brink of
catastrophe, are cruelty envy, greed, competitiveness, search for irrational subjective certainty, and what Freudians call the death wish.49

Mailer's sensitive response to the predicament of living is contained in his anxiety to save humanity from the brink of disaster, stemming from envy and competitiveness, from greed and pride. Compassion for life exceeds the virile antagonism Mailer expresses through OF A FIRE ON THE MOON.
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