CHAPTER FIVE

An American Dream

New Modes of Perception

After the publication of The Deer Park (1955) a nine year hiatus ensued in which no new novel appeared, and this silence was broken with An American Dream (1965). With the book's first public appearance, Mailer stood accused of violating both the canons of novelistic decorum and simple good sense. Granville Hicks wondered whether the book was a "bad joke," Philip Rahv argued that it lacked "versimilitude even in the most literal sense," Elizabeth Hardwick dismissed it as "a fantasy of vengeful murder, callous copulations and an assortment of dull cruelties." Others were even more hostile, if that is possible. This negative criticism, which fails to see any positive commitment in the novel seems to have been generated by the misreading of the novel as realistic. The novel does not so much describe its narrator—protagonist's confrontations with the people in his life or such social representatives as the police, as it details his traffickings with white and black magic, the phases of the moon, and a host of instinctual powers which tell him what to do at all crucial moments and are associated with God or the devil quite seriously. As such, the book represents a dramatic shift in Mailer's career as a novel. It stands as Mailer's boldest use of the allegorical mode. It is on this basis that critics started defending the novel since 1965. Richard Poirier, Leo Bersani, and John Aldridge were in vaneguard. They have tried to explain the novel's oddities with one of three theories that Mailer was writing a kind of Chaucerian or Dantean "dream vision," not a realistic novel; that Mailer was writing in the American tradition of romance rather than "the great tradition" of nineteenth century English fiction, that is to say Mailer was placed in the tradition of Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson,
Dickinson, Whitman, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner who adventured into extraordinary areas of moral consciousness and self realization;\(^7\) that the book's extravagant events are the literary creations of its narrator-protagonist, not to be confused with the literal occurrences we expect in a novel.\(^8\) All three theories emphasize one point stated earlier and share one basic assumption, to read *An American Dream* as a realistic novel is to misread it altogether. And this generalization is further confirmed by Mailer's own stamp of approval on Aldridge's reading of the novel which first appeared in life:\(^9\)

The novel explores, in what will surely be called morbid and salacious detail, the possibilities, not for damnation, but for salvation to be found in some of the most reprehensible acts known to our society—murder, suicide, incest, fornication and physical violence. It dramatizes the various ways a man may sin in order to be saved, consort with Satan in order to attain to God, become holy as well as whole by resorting the primitive psychic circuits, that enable him to live in harmony with himself and find his courage, regardless of whether his courage seeks its test in the challenges of love or the temptation to murder, whether he ends by becoming saint or psychopath. It is, in short, a radically moral book about radically immoral subjects, a religious book that transcends the conventional limits of blasphemy to expose the struggle toward psychic redemption which is the daily warfare of our hidden outlaw selves.\(^10\)

Accepting Aldridge's paraphrase, it seems clear that one thing Mailer tried to do was to chart his hero's exemplary struggle toward spiritual health. As Aldridge says, Rojack sins in order to be saved, consorts with the devil in order to attain to God. His involvement with murder, sodomy, fornication, and other forms of physical violence is the necessary prelude to his "psychic redemption," for Mailer believes that only in successfully engaging our hidden outlaw selves can we revitalize our existence and the American myth, "that each of us was born to be free to wander, to have adventure, and to grow on the waves of the violent, the perfumed and the unexpected."\(^11\) Solotaroff has demonstrated that Rojack's story illustrates one of Mailer's
first principles; growth is possible only if we have the courage to confront our most violent possibilities, for true growth of self derives only from what Mailer likes to call "existential situation." In fact, Rojack's movement through the world of this novel represents, as Barry H. Leeds maintains, a pilgrimage in the strictest religious sense of the world. He is a man who moves from imminent damnation to a state of grace by intimately encouraging evil in many forms. For Rojack can survive to achieve grace only by giving himself first to the Devil. He needs the evil within himself in order to combat the evil besieging him in the world.

The way in which Rojack earns salvation is through a courage which is constantly tested, one which is nurtured further by each successively more difficult victory. The early confrontations are faced with considerable weakness and trepidation, and barely won. All of them are faced unwillingly and that is why they fail to help him in evolving any new, meaningful life style. But toward the last, there is presented a growing sense of strength and of commitment to good, as the need for evil is supplanted by something stronger and positive in nature. Ultimately, the massive holocaust which he has precipitated spews Rojack forth not unscathed, but purged of his evil, the only person involved not to be destroyed or defeated. He realized his own true self and moves towards authenticity — the converse of alienation which describes an existence separated from the reality, others and ultimately the self. Mailer concludes that the personal salvation and authenticity can be achieved by pushing oneself to the extreme of experience, as we find exemplified in Rojack's case:

The logic in searching for extreme situations, in searching for one's authenticity, is that one burns out the filament of old dull habit and turns the conscious mind back upon its natural
subservience to the instinct. The danger of civilization is that
its leisure, its power, its insulation from nature, so alienate us
from instinct that our consciousness and habits take on an
autonomy which may censor even the most necessary communi-
cation between mind and instinct.14

Most assuredly, this concept of the authentic, heroic modern man — man
who explores the rebellious imperatives of self — was the controlling
factor in An American Dream. And perhaps this is the cause why Rahv
could not discover his cherished "versimilitude," or why Hardwick would
speak of "callous copulation". Indeed Rojack seems, throughout the novel,
to be waltzing in a solitaiy dance with death. He lives in its presence
at all times; his "personality was built upon a void."15 Because of this
continuous awareness of death, he lives with the undirected fear that
grows out of man's sense of his own morality. He tells Cherry, "I'm
always afraid,"16 and later he explains to himself, "To be not afraid
of death, to be ready to engage it — sometimes I thought I had more of
a horror of dying than anyone I knew. I was so unfit for that moment."17

This constant awareness of death is the keystone of Rojack's consciousness.
It is the explanation of all of his attitudes and actions: his fight with
insanity, his belief that God is courage, his need to murder, his constant
urge to test and prove himself, and his belief in magic. The critics fail
to understand this while judging the novel on purely realistic grounds.

Rojack introduces himself as war hero, ex-congressman, professor
of existential psychology, and television personality who has engaged in the
politics and public relations necessary to manufacture himself and tell us
that he is dissatisfied by his actor's hollowness, that the success he has
achieved is really failure, and that his private obsession to face death has
reached the point where he must confront it. As war hero he kills
three soldiers; then faced with a fourth, he loses his nerve. The soldiers, mangled below the belt, faces Rojack and in his eyes Rojack sees something, "eyes of blue, so perfectly blue and mad they go all the way in deep into celestial vaults of sky, eyes which go back all the way to God... and I faltered in that stare." Such is the onset of dread, and though Rojack kills this fourth soldier too, his grace is shattered and he lives henceforth in dread, hanging over the abyss of death. Out of his wartime experience, which included both grace and dread, grows the Rojack who narrates the novel.

Twenty years have passed, and he discovers himself older, without direction, without the success or fulfilment he desires. Barry H Leeds remarks "he is actually at the end of his psychic rope." Since his life changed irreversibly on that night during the war, it is to death and murder that he must return in order to understand his existence, purge his soul and grow into new life. In order to grow into his future he must go into his past, just as he must come to grips with civilisation and modern society by descending into the "rebellious imperative of the self." His route into the past and self is murder. He discovers this as he leans over a balcony at a party, and hears the call of the moon. The moon is the dominant symbol in the novel: the first chapter is titled, "The Harbors of the Moon," the last, "The Harbors of the Moon Again." The full moon controls his first meetings with both Deborah and Cherry, his murder of Deborah, his two parapet experiences, his fight with the German patrol. The moon calls him to jump off the balcony, in it subtle language it promises him peace and grace. Thus the moon is at once the voice of extinction and the light which illumines his "raw being," a seemingly paradoxical situation which is resolved by the realization that man's being is determined by his morality that it is extinction which defines
existence. The moon issues a summon which, as Rojaek realizes at the close of the novel appeals to an essential part of his nature: "its late call, princess of the dead, I would never be free of her." But free he wishes to be. He stands upon the balcony and almost jumps believing that he stands to lose his body but gain his soul. He wavers and does not yield to the moon. Thus his act of self-preservation proves a failure. Rojaek feels an "illness ... an extinction ... sickness dung." He has faced a moment in which he could have grown, and he has not seized that opportunity. Rather he begins to die a little, and he feels the first flushes of cancer, that mad riot of the cells, which Mailer believes is sublimated natural self violence, consequent to the denied growth of the soul:

> Will you understand me if I say that at that moment I felt the other illness come to me, that I knew then if it took twenty years or forty for my death, that if I died from a revolt of the cells, a growth against the design of my organs, that this was the moment it all began, this was the hour when the cells took their leap.  

Begiebing very pertinently remarks:

> It is in facing suicide, that Rojaek first sees the state of his own Being ... He misses the moment when he could have killed himself and returns to the nausea of his rotten existence, to the call of Deborach. By doing so, he takes a first step towards his rebirth without realizing it.

Henceforth Rojaek is compelled to risk his life in order to recoup what he has lost on the balcony; he possesses what Mailer has described as "the wisdom of a man who senses death within and gambles that he can cure it by risking his life." But the drive to return to roots, to find a successful connection to reality and to the deepest needs of the psyche, need not involve suicide. Authenticity results from the experience of dread. And dread is the complex of emotions felt when an individual
realizes consciously that death is a process he must undergo, and that
death is the ultimate existential crisis — existential because it exists.
For one cannot learn about death, one cannot explain or understand it.
Mailer claims that the only valid knowledge is existential, the only true
learning "from situations in which the end is unknown." Valid knowledge
and authentic existence are identical. Thus death, which can never be
known, is the ultimate existential experience. And Rojack must push
himself to the extreme in order to be himself.

After his struggle with the suicidal impulse on the balcony, Rojack
wanders away from the party. He telephones his separated wife, Deborah
Caughlin Mangaravide Kelly, and asks to see her. Deborah's veiled violence,
and her need for mastery and cruelty bring Rojack to a fever pitch, so
that in the space of at most an hour and a half the moon guides him
through a murder: a compressed orgy which involves masturbation, foot
fetishism, anal and vaginal penetration, a mutilation of a dead body; and
yet another sexual encounter — quite a series of extreme situations. In
fact, Deborah is the love of his "ego", the love of worldly power that has
poisoned his inner life. Making love with Deborah he tells us "I always
felt as if I had torn free some promise of my soul and paid it over in
ransom." Returning to her now, he feels, "I did not belong to myself
any longer. Deborah had occupied my center." But if Deborah were
merely the domineering wife and the egotistical infidel, her murder by
Rojack would indeed be a ridiculous and gratuitous cruelty. Deborah is
something much more. Shago sums up her as Devourer "I got a good
look at her sitting with you in the front, eating me, man, I could feel
the marrow oozing from my bones, a cannibal." As such, Deborah
appears as the maimer, the castrater, a figure mythical heroes often encounter in their quest. And once we see her as a mythological figure in a visionary world, we will not be marooned on the literal issue of Mailer's sexist portrayal of women, as Kate Millet and Elizabeth Hardwick are. Joseph Campbell, in his own study of Night Sea Journey of mythical heroes, says that the demons, temptresses, and witches the hero encounters are at once dangers and bestowers of power. With Deborah's murder begins Rojack's voyage without and within. As is the case with most human endeavours, his voyage within is more difficult and more important than his voyage without. He murders Deborah, ostensibly as an act of internal liberation: "Marriage, to her was the armature of my ego, remove the armature, and I might topple like clay." He has had the courage to remove this armature, and is rewarded not by his disintegration but by the rediscovery and repression of his own violent soul. The prospects are frightening: "I had opened a void — I was now without a center. Can you understand. I did not belong to myself any longer." Any man in void may not be happy, being encumbered with dread, but he alone leads an authentic existence. Murder which generates this void requires an extraordinary commitment, to discover the self, since it violates the most basic mandates and taboos of society and since it involves the murder in a confrontation with death. Certainly murder burns out the filament of old dull habit and forces the individual back to his instincts. His return to instincts is accomplished in many ways: first, he is caught up in mortal combat and needs to rely on his deepest instincts for self-preservation; second murder involves acting out one's needs and emotions rather than bottling them up by repression and
sublimation; third, murder necessitates the individual's dependence upon himself and his resources and the rejection of society and its taboos; and finally, as Rojack's plight concerning the disposal of Deborah's body makes clear, it pits the individual alone against the society which he has rejected and which will certainly punish him for his rebelliousness if it can. In this process of death, action, rebellion and outlawry, the murder is forced upon himself: he must rely on his instincts and his courage. So Rojack faces his fear and dread and by murdering his wife not only frees himself from the armature that was stifling his existence, but also wins the battle over his own fear and dread, which he had begun to lose, earlier on the balcony. Thus murder is Rojack's road to salvation. It is a journey into the deepest part of himself. "I was as far into myself as I had ever been, and universe wheeled in a dream."34 He feels a catharsis and finds renewal:" I opened my eyes. I was weary with a most honourable fatigue and my flesh seemed new. I had not felt so nice since I was twelve."35 This first infusion of grace brings a vision of a landscape of "oriental splendor" and of a "heavenly city."36 The scene that climaxes with the murder is described as a gathering of fire. These are symbols promising regeneration.

At this stage, Rojack does not know whether his delicate state is more good than evil, but he is quickly captured by some dark, primitive force, some touch that pushes him to descend to Deborah's maid, Ruta to the door of a jungle rather than a celestial city. Before leaving Deborah's room Rojack has come to no decision on whether to confess or attempt to cover up his crime. A long prison sentence conducive to serious writing has momentarily appealed to him, and he has come
close to giving himself up. It is clear to him that if he is detected in an attempt to falsify the circumstances of death, he will be executed. With such thoughts, he goes to Ruta and makes love to her. The scene introduces a carefully articulated polarity between good and evil, God and the Devil.

... a host of the Devil's best gifts were coming to me, mendacity, quite a fine edged cupidity for the stroke which steals the wit to trick authority .... I had a vision immediately after of a huge city in the desert, in some desert, was it a place on the moon? For the colors had the unreal pastel of a plastic and the main street was flaming with light at five A.M.37

Since Mailer had earlier declared that the way to self-knowledge and the hope for the future is through a search for apocalyptic orgasm, it is not surprising that sex here becomes a major battleground for authentic existence. Mailer, in this respect, reveals one of his fundamental beliefs that sex is not romantic folderol or solely a drive toward libidinal satisfaction and fulfilment but is rather one of the few areas open to man in which he can encounter his naked desires, in which he must face up to the possibilities of mastery and subjection. By airing one's obsessions, by confronting the message of disease and waste and by engaging death, perversion, and fear one may help a disproportionate or stifled self to become a balanced self growing toward Life.38 Since sex and existence are closely related, the choice available to Rojack within Ruta's body is made clear. The vagina is a symbol of peaceful retreat, which he consciously sees as a preview of prison. But he does not choose that direction. "I was doomed if I thought to do my work in jail, for her (Deborah) curse would be upon me."39 Further, Ruta is another aspect of Deborah, both are mistresses to Kelly, challenging him for power. Like Deborah Ruta is a damned being whose little glimmer of life
cannot overcome the evil that imprisons it. So Rojack chooses Ruta's anus and therefore the way of the Devil "The Devil's Kitchen," Ruta's anus, calls him and his sodomy is a "theft" of Satanic gifts: mendacity, guile, fine edged cupidity, the wit to trick authority. To Rojack's newly found perceptions, Ruta's womb has not the glory to keep him, her anus has the dangerous qualities and forces that he needed to confront other forces of defeat and pass other trials. But as yet Rojack is unsure of his ability to use such gifts from Ruta's body. He wonders if his seed expiring in Ruta's kitchen will be a curse rather than a power bestowed on him. Yet he conquers his doubts, channels their power and uses his new found power for defiant confrontation. He returns to Ruta for another, if brief, rapacious sexual encounter. "I felt as fine and evil as a razor and just as content with myself. There was something further in her, I'd needed, some bitter perfect salt." With this evil force, Rojack strikes out into the street to face Deborah's corpse and to defy the police. At this stage, it appears that in attending to his naked desires, Rojack has given himself completely to Devil. But there is good still within Rojack.

The "heavenly city" which Rojack has seen only once before during the act of Deborah, must in third stage of his quest, not only be earned but transformed alongwith. Rojack's confrontation with the police leads him to Cherry. Relaying on what power and knowledge, he has accrued, Rojack defies the police as Sergius defied the FBI. But Rojack is pushed to such physical and psychological extremity during the police interrogation that he begins to feel intimations of his coming transformation if he can hold out:
I felt just as some creature locked by fear to the border between earth and water (its grip the accumulated experience of a thousand generations) might feel on that second when its claws took hold, its body climbed up from the sea, and its impulse took a leap over the edge of mutation so that now and at last it was something new .... I felt as if I had crossed a chasm of time and was some new breed of man.42

A mixture of luck and destiny saves Rojack from defeat. After Lieutenant Leznicki has left him alone he is finally too exhausted to call across the room and confess. And his prayer to God to give him a sign is answered by his sudden perception of Cherry's blonde hair across the room: "I felt a force in my body steering away from that back room, and a voice inside me said, 'Go to the girl!' ... She looked a little like a child who has been anointed by the wing of a magical bird."43

This sign in the form of Cherry is enough to make Rojack sustain his defiance and pursue a new level of his adventure. "I was like a wrecked mariner in the lull between two storms. Rather I was close to a strong old man dying now of his overwork, passing into death by way of going deeper to himself."44 As Rojack goes deeper, Cherry becomes less a sign and more a source. But still his growth depends on his courage. A person's body and life may encourage such growth if that person chooses to keep in touch with the deepest requirements of his unconscious self, for ultimately, in "The Political Economy of our Time," Mailer defines soul as the Unconsciousness. Self-realization is Soul-realization, or Soul-growth. By a return to one's deepest instinctual life, which is precisely the journey Rojack is gradually making, a man would choose, as Rojack will chose, actions that will test the proportions of his Body and Soul. It is Mailer's basic conviction that actions which increase one's basic commitment to a feeling or an idea, which increase danger, which defy chaos, stasis or
death, test one's capacity to create life instead of death and prepare one's soul for growth toward God. The union between Rojack and Cherry is a crucial test of Rojack's ability to defy chaos and stasis to create life rather than make death. "When I was in bed with a woman, I rarely felt as if I were making life, but rather as if I were a pirate sharpening up a raid on life .... I had dread of the judgement which must rest behind the womb of a woman." In the creation of new life, Rojack must continually choose, have courage and sense of true love. In order to love, one must choose: hence love is another paradigmatic existential situation, one in which the existent precedes the categorical. Rojack tests his courage and new powers against the ex-prize fighter Romeo and the mafioso Tony to win Cherry from the. With each of Rojack's successes, Cherry draws closer and closer to him. She quits her job and goes to her apartment with Rojack and the scene which follows represents the absolute centre of Rojack's pilgrimage, the point of no return at which he decides to make his one positive commitment. Rojack's and Cherry's first touch is merely sensual. "We did not meet as lovers, more like animals in a quiet mood, come across a track of the jungle to join in clearing." Their "devotions" are first paid in "church no larger than themselves;" their sex is a clash of wills. They pass the deadness within them back and forth. Significantly, the turning point comes only when they turn to sex as creation — metaphorically when Rojack removes Cherry's diaphragm — their wills meet and "soften into some light .... like coloured lanterns beneath the sea, a glimpse of that quiver of jeweled arrows, that heavenly city which had appeared as Deborah was expiring." They are prepared for love:
"Do you want her?" It asked "Do you really want her, do you want to know something about love at first?" and I desired something I had never known before, and answered; it was as if my voice had reached to its roots; and "Yes, 'I said, "Of course I do, I want love."50

Rojack is faced by the possibility of love for the first time. With Cherry, he can let himself go, surrender his self, in the sense not of mastery-submission, as was always the case with Deborah, but of a mutual surrender in which all defenses are let down and the two can exist together in bliss. To do so, however, requires courage: Rojack feels a continent of dread surrounding him as he faces the moment of choice, knowing that the choice is irrevocable and will change his life in significant ways. In addition, his lack of defenses represents a danger for what if Cherry does not likewise surrender? Then he would be cast in the position not of blissful lover but of dominated slave, with his vulnerability a weapon in her hands by which she must destroy him. But he faces his dread, summons his courage and takes the leap into love:

and some continent of dread spread wide in me, rising like a dragon, as if I knew the choice were real, and in the left of terror I opened my eyes and her face was beautiful beneath me in that rainy morning, her eyes were golden with light, and she said, "Ah honey, sure," and I said sure to the voice in me, and felt love fly in like some great winged bird, some beating of wings at my back, and felt her will dissolve into tears, and some great deep sorrow like roses drowned in the salt of the sea came flooding from her womb and washed into me like a sweet honey of balm for all the bitter sores of my soul and for the first time in my life without passing through fire or straining the stones of my will, I came up from my body rather than down from my mind....51

The revelation of life, as he chooses it here, is again a brief washing out or catharsis of the death and nausea within. This is a brief revelation of the potential within each of them. The simple message of the moment of revelation, as Rojack awakens to realize is that "everything
was all right inside the room. Outside Everything was wrong.\textsuperscript{52}

Now onwards Rojack will have to face and air the worst in himself, to face, that is, his own guilt in the disease around him. His trials do include new onslaughts from the rational world depicted by a series of phone calls from his television and university employers who are threatened by public opinion. Detective Robert again deploys the evidence and forces of the police against Rojack, which nearly make him crack. Again, Rojack is saved by luck or destiny, when high level officials (Barnard Oswald Kelly) doctor the official medical report. But when Rojack accepts Kelly's invitation to visit, he faces not the erosions of the fact-seeking world, but the ultimate test of his ability to face the Mystery itself. The mystery is the mystery at the heart of the disease — the plague and cancer of his time. The mere idea of this confrontation with Kelly fills Rojack with a dread but Rojack's contract with Cherry will not permit him to "flee the mystery."\textsuperscript{53} He was close to prayer then and what was prayer but a "beseechment not to pursue the mystery..."\textsuperscript{54} And the prayer which he imagines is of enormous significance:

\begin{quote}
God I wanted to pray, "Let me love that girl and become a father, and try to be a good man, and do some decent work. Yes, God," I was close to begging, "do not make me go back and back again to the charnel house of the moon." But like a soldier on six hour leave to a canteen, I knew I would have to return.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

This prayer is the clearest articulation in the book of what Rojack discovers in himself in the course of his development: the desire for total commitment to goodness, to productivity, to fertility and love. His inability to rest upon prayer is based not upon a refusal to commit himself to God, but upon the awareness that he is not yet ready to come over to the camp of the good, for acceptance. His contract with the Devil is not yet
fulfilled, there is external evil yet to be faced, and evil yet within Rojack to be purged. The Devil has kept his part of the bargain by providing means of survival in an evil world, and "the wit to trick authority," and the Devil's gifts must be paid for before they can be renounced. The nature of his new contract with Cherry is based on love and this love, which grows out of two people whose world of experience, includes incest, miscegenation, anal intercourse, abortion, and murder, is nonetheless one characterized by natural fertility, tenderness and honesty. But this can be sustained only by courage and the desire to be good, as Rojack realizes: "I think we have to be good," by which I meant we would have to be good."56 And,

...now I understand that love was not a gift but a vow. Only the brave could live with it for more than a little while .... Love was love, one could find it with anyone, one could find it anywhere. It was just that you could never keep it. Not unless you were ready to die for it, dear friend.57

Love, as Mailer sees it, is a contract, not only with the beloved, but with oneself as well. It requires individual strength and courage, and the ability to stand alone. Rojack, before confronting Kelly, once again comes to Cherry to regain his sanity. This time, their conversation begins on the same highly tuned sexual level of their last meeting, then proceeds to tense revelations of the past. At this stage, both have reached their greatest rapport and trust. They establish a mood that opens new unconscious perceptions.

It is this "mood between Rojack and Cherry that Shago Martin interrupts. Shago had come out of one of the worst gangs in Harlem to search for greater proportions for himself. Shago is angry at the intensity of feeling apparent between Rojack and Cherry because he fails at love with Cherry. Rojack faces Shago's threats and then the knife he draws, and after some talk beats the singer, throwing him down the stairs to the street. The
physical position from which Rojack beats Shago and the words of abuse used by the later are too suggestive of homosexual contact to be ignored. Rojack not only learns something about the possibilities of defeat in facing Shago, he gains a strength and violence in defeating the black singer. But by taking Shago from behind, Rojack also loses some part of what he has already gained — courage and love:

I had the choice to let him go, let him stand up, we would fight, but I had a fear of what — I heard in his voice — it was like that wail from the end of the earth you hear in baby's voice.... I was out of control, violence seemed to shake itself free from him ... and shake itself into me.59

The manner of this victory contains a loss: "my body was like a cavern where deaths are stored. Deborah's lone green eye stared up at me."60 Now Cherry's skin, like Shago's goes dead to the touch; Rojack returns to whisky for courage; a new falseness arises between him and Cherry. So Rojack must renew his journey and regain his self. He goes to the final test and the farthest point of his journey with two legacies: the gain of Shago's lost violence and strength, symbolized by Shago's serpent like umbrella, and the reaffirmation from Cherry that their love must be won anew through courage, that they may turn again to God if they can somehow "turn out well".67

In setting out on this final stage of his quest, Rojack realizes that God is not love but courage and love comes only as a reward. At this point, Mailer is defining the failure of love in a deadening world, which he began in BS, as the failure of the self to define its existence. If Rojack chooses to face some final test, it is destiny that chooses what that test will be. He cannot choose between facing Shago again and Harlem or facing Kelly. He deliberates so long that the taxi drives him to the address...
he first gave, Kelly's Woldorf Towers. He is carrying Shago's umbrella with him.

The confrontation with Kelly is the climactic one of the novel. They drink and Kelly reveals his own incestuous attachment to Deborah, along with a complex tangle of sexual, financial and mystical dealings. The metaphorical way in which Kelly describes the temptation to incest involves the same terminology and the same Weltanschauung that Rojack has been acting upon. Kelly admits to Rojack that he has been struck by the later's idea that god and the Devil are engaged in a heroic combat which God might lose. He then explains how he realized that great men, men with powers and importance, "have to be ready to deal with One or the Other, and that's too much for the average man on his way." But Kelly was bound for the top, and not ready to give up. "I know I was ready. Incest is the gate to the worst sort of forces." His tale is full of references to "God and the Devil" and its climax is in existential terminology:

But I was — do you know that phrase of Kierkegaard's of course you do — I was in a fear and trembling, I stayed at that window for an hour. I was almost babbling at my inability to take that simple jump. And the goat kept coming back. "She's down the hall", said the goat, "she's on her bed, it's there for you, Oswald." Then I would reply, "Save me lord." Finally, I heard a voice say quite clearly, "Jump! That will cool your desire, fellow. Jump!"

The "jump" refers to his impulse to jump out of the window sixteen feet from the ground. The suicidal impulse is parallel to Rojack's. But, like Rojack, he does not jump. Instead, he takes a jump much higher than sixteen feet — a leap of faith, and goes to his daughter's room to submit to his deepest desires. But he too, like Rojack and Deborah, knows that there is an ambivalence to all things, and he might be serving God or the Devil by taking his daughter. One thing is certain if he can break the incest
taboo, he can conquer a certain part of himself, be made stronger. And indeed, after seducing his daughter, there is little that is denied to Kelly, who becomes one of the most powerful men in the world. It is clear that the power he sought and gained is the power to manipulate the processes of human life, of civilization, and of nature to slake his own greed, a power that by its very nature denies the enlargement of souls on their journey toward Vision.

When Rojaek realizes the incest between Kelly and Deborah, which has grown into a metaphor of evil and death, he is compelled to face that death, that disease, which has threatened to engulf him since the start of the novel. Rojaek has journeyed too fear, must capitulate or face his fear and dread to express his soul's proportions before he can return to the rational, conscious world, which will then be filled with new meaning and with new dimensions of perception. It is in facing the fear, challenging the adversary that threatens engulfment that he can gain deliverance from his fear and integration of the conscious and unconscious mind. Rojaek feels compelled to face death by a walk around the penthouse parapet with Kelly as the sole witness. Kelly says he was never be able to try the parapet, and Deborah got off midway. And when Kelly sees Rojaek is going to make it, he tries to push him off with Shago's umbrella, with that old power of totem Rojaek no longer needs. He turns and after one retributive blow, flings the now unnecessary stick over the edge. This action has a dual significance: first, having internalized, the qualities of masculinity and courage represented by the umbrella, he no longer needs the external symbol of them, and secondly, the umbrella's fall to the street may be seen as a final sacrifice to the drive in Rojaek for suicide or murder. In this sense, the final
walk is a productive and successful one, where the first was abortive and inconsequential. Rojack imbues it with a symbolic meaning: walking the parapet is necessary to prevent himself from dying and to protect the lives of Cherry and Shago. If he does not walk the parapet twice, he may still achieve grace, but they will not. His symbolic act becomes essential for others as well. But he is unable to return for a second trip around the parapet for Cherry and Shago. Here it must be pointed out that on the way to Kelly's house by Cab, Rojack has experienced another intuitive flash, dictating that he go to Harlem and risk violent death in order to purge his treatment of Shago and to bless his love through gratuitous courage. Overcoming the urge by the realization that he may merely be avoiding his primary responsibility of meeting Kelly, Rojack proceeds to Waldorf, but he is disturbed by a feeling that somewhere in Harlem a man is being bludgeoned to death in his stead. That man is Shago, killed to no apparent purpose with a length of lead pipe. And to complete the circle, Cherry is killed in revenge by a mistaken friend of Shago. Rojack returns to her just before her death, saying just as he did of Deborah, "She's my wife, officer." What this means most fully requires to understand the meaning of Rojack's quest. His deliverance is incomplete. He has delivered himself from Satan, from the devouring maw of death, and from dread, but he has not yet won the Heavenly City.

The novel's epilogue, entitled "The Harbours of the Moon Again" confirms this. In the daylight, Rojack faces the mystery in a scientific light, in the autopsy of a cancer patient. The plague or cancer arises from the exploitation of our organs and ourselves. If one does not face and battle the madness that enters the self from our exploitations, one locks the madness inside and denies it, the madness grows and usurps the body and soul, the
cells take the leap toward cancer. Rajock's salvation from the madness is the immersion in it, his airing of it, and his struggle to defeat it during his journey within. Another lesson of the quest he has endured is that he must continue his search for life and growth in the phenomenal world. His journey must continue, this time to the jungles of Guatemala and Yucatan. The phone call to Cherry, which ends the novel fantastically, reaffirms that Cherry's death means Rojack has not yet reached the point where he can save others by bringing his own salvation into the world. His salvation is only partial. In this way, Rojack's situation speaks for Mailer as well as for his compatriots, as Mailer says in *Cannibals and Christians*:

> Postulate a modern soul marooned in constipation, emptiness, boredom and a flat dull terror of death. A soul which takes antibiotics when ill, smokes filter cigarettes, drink proteins ... takes seconal to go to sleep, benzadrine to awake, and tranquilizers for poise. It is a deadened existence, afraid precisely of violence, cannibalism, loneliness, insanity, libidinousness, hell, perversion and mess, because these are the states which must in some way be passed through, digested, transcended, if one is to make one's way back to life.®

For a clear understanding of Mailer's novels, his concept of courage is important to understand, because he believes that the forces arrayed against self are greater in the post-war world than ever before. Though physical courage is one metaphor for the "courage" Mailer's heroes must gain to pursue life and though Mailer himself clearly values physical courage as somehow actually connected to or symptomatic of larger courage, we should not take courage in these novels to be only physical courage or a display of machismo. Mailer defines courage otherwise, in this novel and in his commentaries, as making one's death meaningful through facing, and therefore knowing the enemy before us and within us. Mailer believes that if a person would restore a lost authenticity, he or she may have to search for
extreme situation because in them the conscious mind is turned back upon its natural subservience to the instinct. Instinct is the Unconscious, or Soul itself. The return to the instincts breaks down the insulation of the human beings from his or her deepest psychic life as well as from nature itself. The imbalance Mailer seeks to correct is the imbalance of consciousness "alienated from instinct," which causes consciousness to construct "intellectual formulations over a void". The confrontation with the truth within is itself enough to give the soul power to "voyage" out to "where whatever created us wishes us to be."70

As such, Rojack quite clearly embodies the code of hipster. Speaking of the degree of debilitating conformity in American society, Mailer states in "The White Negro".

It is on this bleak scene that a phenomenon has appeared: the American existentialist — the hipster, the man who knows that if our collective condition is to live with instant death by atomic war, relatively quick death by the state as L' universe concentrationaire, or with slow death by conformity with every creature and rebellious instinct stifled, ... if the fate of twentieth century man is to live with death from adolescence to premature senescence, why then the only life giving answer is to accept the terms of death, to live with death as an immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that unchartered journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self. In short, whether the life is criminal or not, the decision is to encourage the psychopath in oneself ....71

The concept that knuckling under to conformity poisons the body as well as mind, resulting in a more than metaphorical cancer, had fascinated Mailer for many years before he incorporated it in AD. The parallel corollary that indulging the psychopath in oneself (especially to the extent of committing murder) can cure or prevent cancer is also dealt with in the novel, as part of the interlocking symbolic system of real cancer (in Deborah, and even momentarily in Rojack himself) which supports the metaphorical statement
that American society and culture is being destroyed from within by the cancer of conformity and fear. When Rojack kills his wife, he has taken the first instinctive step toward purging his own cancerous tendencies, and toward Mailer's prescription for the American existentialist. He submits to violence, insanity, libidinousness, perversion following his instincts, his "inner voice" and thus practising what Mailer has often preached:

To learn from an inner voice the first time it speaks to us is a small bold existential act, for it depends upon following one's instincts, which must derive, in no matter, how distorted a fashion, from God.72

Rojack's inner voice tells him to kill Deborah, to approach Cherry, to remove Cherry's diaphragm, to fight Shago Martin, to confront Kelly, to walk a parapet thirty floor over the sidewalks of New York City. Rojack listens and obeys in each case, so these events appear to be the concrete stages in his quest for psychic redemption, a journey into himself. But it must be emphasized that this choice, though it is the only one that can lead to survival and salvation, is a voluntary and courageous one on Rojack's part. At almost any point, he can confess and have the pressure removed from him, be redefined and replaced in society's hierarchy, by going to prison. Allan Wagenheim rightly speaks of Rojack's recognition that "the hip philosophy is not only psychopathic but 'deranged and doomed,' that it is the decision to court defeat, to choose for suicide,"73 for no quest is complete without pushing oneself to the limits of experience. Some critics, however, fail to understand the hipster phenomenon and interpret Rojack's quest in term of utter failure as is evidenced by his decision to go to South America toward the end of the novel. For Rojack, America has become "an assailant"74 and therefore he decides to leave the country, where the pressure of external reality is too great for his ravaged sensibility. Tonny Tanner maintains that
Rojack is "moving out beyond the world's mirror towards some placeless city of his own imagination." Hoffmann and Tanner suggest too simple a resolution of Rojack's psychic anguish. His decision to go to South America is not escapist in nature because even there he will still have to deal with his failure to save Cherry, his reluctance to go to Harlem, and his inability to walk the parapet a second time with Kelly. He is not seeking any refuge in Yuctan, rather wanting to be in isolation which may be able to temper his pain and enable him to pursue quest with more vigour and vitality.
NOTES AND REFERENCES.


All subsequent references are to this edition. Henceforth cited as AD

16. AD, p.118.

17. AD, p.119.

18. AD, p.5.


22. AD, p.259.


24. AD, p.20.


27. Presidential Papers, p.197.

28. AD , p.27.

29. AD , p.27.

30. AD , p.190.

31. Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces. (New York: Viking, 1979), pp. 81,83, Campbell also notes the two aspects of the woman — the symbol of all that is Life and of all that is abominable or Death.

32. AD , p.17.

33. AD , p.27.

34. AD , p.31.

35. AD , p.32.

36. AD , p.29.

37. AD , pp. 47-49.

38. Cannibals and Christians, pp. 274-86.

39. AD ,p.44.

40. AD , p.52.

41. AD , p.56.

42. AD , pp.80-81.

43. AD , p.89.

44. AD , pp. 94-95.


46. AD , p.119.

47. AD , p.120.
48. AD, p.121.
49. AD, p.122.
50. AD, p.122.
51. AD, p.123.
52. AD, p.123.
55. AD, p.153.
56. AD, p.155.
57. AD, p.156.
58. AD, p.191.
59. AD, pp. 92-93.
60. AD, p.194.
62. AD, p.236.
63. AD, p.246.
64. AD, p.246.
65. AD, p.246.
66. AD, p.251.
67. AD, p.251.
68. Cannibals and Christians, pp. 269-70.
72. Presidential Papers, p.194.
