Why Are We in Vietnam? (1967) like the novels that preceded it, is concerned with modern life on both the individual and social levels. Mailer, examining the nature of American society and its social problems, focuses on a number of individuals who live within a microcosm of that society. Ostensibly, the novel consists of the narrator D.J.'s remembrance of a hunting expedition in Alaska with his father, Rusty, two of his father's business underlings, Pete and Bill, and D.J.'s best friend Tex Hyde. As he sits grassed out at a dinner party held in his honor at his parents' Texas house, D.J. recalls actions that took place two years ago. D.J. and Tex, eighteen and nineteen years old, are about to leave for the Vietnam War, which is not mentioned until the last page of the novel. Below the ostensible action, however, is a complicated tale of a young man's journey into self. D.J.'s particular journey illustrates that despite the hero's successive act of regeneration, he can be defeated, forced either to follow the same old path of submitting to the systems or to purge the new path evolved during the acts of regeneration.

D.J. must cope with two major forces, which correspond to the two poles of Mailer's vision, one is the violence of the natural world — a beneficial force that leads to growth and authenticity. The second force is the violence of American civilization, which can be broken down into the violence of American corporate life and the violence of American mores. This violence is destructive and malicious; it grinds down the individual, robbing him of his individuality and freedom and denying him the possibility of satisfaction or
fulfilment. The novel seeks to differentiate between these two major forms of violence; natural violence it regards as authentic and social violence as inauthentic. Natural violence is the path of the 'nakeds' who want to realize their inner self. Social violence is the path of the deads who accept to survive at all costs.

Mailer sets the novel in Alaska where D.J. is forced into a confrontation with the wilderness which throws into sharp relief the background in which he was raised: the world of upper class Taxas society, of corporation executives and their psychoanalysed wives, of intense competition and sexually charged cocktail parties. "The Alaska air is real message — it says don't bullshit, buster." D.J.'s initiation consists of a set of voyages, deeper and deeper into the primitive Alaskan heartland, America's last frontier, and further and further into the primitive recesses of his own consciousness and the savage dreamlife of the American continent. In so doing, he leaves behind society, civilized world, friends, and parents, so that he is without external guidance and even, at times without reference. The result of this hermetic experience which roughly corresponds to the second stage of cultured savage, is what Thomas Mann calls Steigerung, or heightening. Sealed off from his daily life, he finds his perceptions and insights heightened beyond what could normally be expected from him and this corresponds to the stage of 'confrontation'. This heightening enables the character to have insights which make him wise and heroic, at least as long as he remains in his hermetic environment. This limitation shows that man, basically having his own weaknesses and limitations, cannot reach the stage of fuller perception — 'crystallized self', though he makes a leap towards it.
Like all previous novels, Why? presents the repressive American society in which the individual finds himself stifled and bewildered. Plague, sickness and decay are the operative principles in modern society, and they can be clearly seen if only the phenomena of contemporary society are examined. America today destroys the possibility for authenticity; it is "fearful, halfmad, inauthentic." Dread is stifled and mystery is suppressed; human needs and desires are denied; and death is carefully avoided. Caught in a net work of social forces, modern man have little hope of freeing themselves to engage the mysteries of their own existences and thereby achieve an authentic existence:

The liver goes flat, D.J. would assure you, whenever some scent meets its deodorant, or an herb is fed with aspirin. Pretty literary for adolescent out hunting with Paw? Go fuck, D.J.'s got his purchase on the big thing — genius — and he know this: you deaden a mystery and your liver goes to shit.3

Two things, above all, deaden the mysteries of life: contemporary socio-economic institutions, especially the giant corporation, and the repression of natural drives, especially sexual ones, which is demanded by American mores. The violence and sexuality that men have in their hearts — authentic emotions which reveal their own, human conditions — are repressed, deflected and sublimated. But these energies cannot be contained, and if they are not allowed a natural expression, they will appear in the form of institutionalized violence and a perverted sexual violence, forcing life into inauthentic patterns. The level of frustration rises continually; this leads to more perversion, which in turn leads to more frustration. Eventually this frustrated energy is released in a blind and unsatisfying violence that often ends in domination or destruction.

D.J.'s father Rusty, whose full name is Rutherford David Jethroe Jellicose Jethroe, is a quintessential distillation of the corporate spirit. He has a
competitive business mind and a totalitarian spirit; he funnels all his energy into amassing of profits, thus denying himself and others the energy and concern needed for growth. Rusty's intense desire is a bastardization of the natural urge to test oneself against the force of the world, to build the self by engaging and even defeating the world outside the self. Rusty is competitive, but he competes only in a rigged game. Afraid of real struggle, terrified of defeat or death, he will not engage his enemy unless he is sure he can overwhelm him. D.J. recalls that when his father could not tackle him in a backyard football scrimmage, Rusty took advantage of a moment of compassion on his son's part to take a large bite out of his ass. The game then proceeded with Rusty tackling the formerly elusive but now crippled D.J. again and again. This is how Rusty proves his masculinity to himself and to his son. Rusty exemplifies another truth about the corporate establishment: he will go to any length of dishonesty rather than reveal the unpleasant truth about his actions and motives. When Rusty and D.J. set off alone to find a beer, a feeling of love and solidarity grows between them. Together they are facing the wilderness. But this closeness is destroyed when, at the end of the hunt, Rusty claims their bagged grizzly as his own trophy. D.J. — who shot more accurately, shot twice, and showed more courage and presence than his father — actually deserved the credit for the kill. But Rusty lies about the killing in order to appear successful when he returns to the corporate world. This shows that Rusty is completely overwhelmed by social system and his type of quest is the type of war favoured by the military and industrial leadership in the country.Mailer is not categorically opposed to war. He feels that war can give men an opportunity to encounter a basic human condition, in which an individual must call upon his
deepest resources in order to survive, and in which he is always conscious of his own death. Mailer believes all life is war, and that war is the human condition. But the kind of war Rusty describes does not involve dread or the engagement of death; it avoids both. It is simply slaughter because he can not confront his opposition. Far from ennobling, it debases; and instead of leading to authenticity — to be face to face with one's self— it denies all access to authentic existence. By betraying his son's confidence, Rusty has divorced himself from his progeny and his only possible hope for redemption. It is clear that Rusty's cowardice and greed have doomed him to a frustrated, inauthentic, corporate existence. He has destroyed all possibility he will ever escape from the unsatisfying corporate world of Dallas.

D.J and his friend Tex are caught up in this perverse sexual world. They have intercourse with the same girl, make it with their parents' friends, find physical release in sixty - second intercourse and fellatio. These savage actions do not hold any promise of salvation because they are not accompanied by apocalyptic orgasm or true love. In "The White N Negro" Mailer, discussing sublimation, alluded to Freud's hypothesis that society, which exists on the basis of repression of natural instincts, faces potential destruction as individuals who encounter heightened frustration from unsatisfactory sublimation seek to fulfill their needs in any possible way. The sexual sphere, according to Freud and to Mailer, is the one in which the top is most likely to blow off. But D.J. and Tex never achieve apocalyptic orgasm; no one ever finds that society must be overthrown in order for men to achieve sexual satisfaction. Society, as the novel depicts, is still at a stage of sickness in which perversion reigns and competition
supplants love. The sexual drives of individuals are repressed, and libidinal energy is turning inward, creating a sort of cancer as the cells of the body destroy themselves.4

D.J. and Tex are fed up of their existence and embark upon the safari in Alaska. The aim of their solitary safari is to get rid of the "general state of mixed shit."5 Both boys realize that they are filled with this "mixed shit," that their lives are neither pure nor authentic. They must purge themselves of the extraneous elements that have crept into their natures during the years — the neuroses of their parents, the absurd demands of their society, and the corrupting influence of their peers. Tex "gets the purification ceremony straight in his head;" they will go further into the wild with no external aids, for "they each know ... that this is how you get the fear, shit, disgust, and mixed shit tapeworm out of fucked up guts and overcharged nerves."6 They separate from their group, leave their rifles. "Man, they got some of that mixed shit out of them already. About the time they cache all belongings, they own clear fear now, cause they going to live off the land."7 So they set off into the heart of "God's attic,"8 apart from corporate society to find their true identities. The two boys are observers of one natural phenomenon after another. It is on the beginning of the hunt, when Tex shoots a wolf and he and D.J. drink of its blood, that D.J. realizes he is "up tight with the essential animal insanity of things."9 The lesson is reinforced when he and Rusty must decide whether they should go down into a hollow after a wounded grizzly bear: "No man cell in him can now forget that if the center of things is insane, it is insane with force, heuuuuuu goes the bellow of the grizzer in the salt on his meat and sorrow."10 The primitive, animal nature of things is both insane and forceful: it cannot be categorized
rationally, operates under its own impulses, which cannot be organized into laws, and has its own intrinsic force as its justification. D.J. feels the wolf's blood begin to rise inside him when he walls up to the bullet-ridden carcass of a bear: "some giant wolf in D.J.'s heart, some prehistoric wolf all eight feet big began to sit ... in his blood, beastly audience, in his blood." Later, D.J. kills a bear and becomes an integral part of the natural order of things. His reversion to the primitive within himself is revealed most clearly when, near the close of the novel he and Tex fare into the wilderness unarmed and encounter a wolf. The force that emanates from the wolf and the forces that emanate from the boys engage each other in a mad, violent ballet, "Two waves of murder, human and animal, meet across the snow in a charge as fantastic and beautiful as Alexander Nevsky." The newly discovered power in the boys overcomes that of the wolf, who slinks off in defeat; This is D.J.'s discovery in the wilderness that one of the great truths of existence is that every human being has at the core the insanity and force of the primitive wild. Watching these manifestations of the natural world, they face dread squarely. It is for the first time in this novel that we see characters moving out from their corporate society, following the path of a savage, involving themselves in sexual perversions but simultaneously confronting their own unmasked self that is not satisfied even with their primitive acts. They confront the world around dominated by awe and death and feel dread.

For D.J., it is his first encounter with dread. "D.J. is up tight with the concept of dread," The root of dread is in the consciousness of death. Death defines life being its opposite, and so it is necessary to contemplate death in order to live an authentic life and discover one's true self. But mortality also suspends life above an infinite void, and threatens to engulf it in meaninglessness. D.J. suggests that the possible explanation for
"Herr Dread" can be found in conception; if man is created, a ghost comes from nothing, then he must realize that to nothing he will return. And in a central passage of the novel D.J. comes face to face with the essence of the hunt when he and Rusty follow the grizzly's trail:

And D.J. breathes death — first time in his life — it's death D.J's breathing, it comes like attack of vertigo when stepping into dark and smelling pig shit, that's what death smells to him, own big shit smell, terrible fear right out of his lungs and pores: and back of fear ... is crazy-ass murder, cause. D.J. for the first time in his life is hip to the hole of his center which is slippery desire to turn his gun and blast a shot into Rusty's fat fuck face.

D.J. faces death, accepts its dangers, and overcomes his fear. He dedicates himself to the hunt which assumes the form of quest for self.

The strange substitution of Rusty for the bear as the object of D.J's hunt is the resolution of the problem of natural and unnatural violence, which is essential for realization of self. Rusty and his assistants, Bill and Pete, are symbolic of unnatural violence. They refuse to face death and attack the wilderness with little sensitivity, almost no skill, and a maximum of firepower. They find their game by helicopter and use this technological marvel to scare their prey within shooting distance. In their weakness these representatives of the corporate establishment manage to disrupt the entire balance of nature. Luke, the Indian guide, complains that no one can understand the bears any longer, that no one can even find them and that the Alaskan wilderness is being polluted by gas fumes, noise, and the fearful envoys of civilization. But even Luke succumbs to Rusty's corporate magnetism. For all of them, "there's just nothing to do with Mr. Anxiety but carry him around in place of Herr Dread."  

Afraid of death and authenticity they sublimate their primal urges along corporate paths, and live with anxiety rather than dread. Whereas dread arises out of the mysteries of life and
death, anxiety arises out of the peripheral concerns that these men have made central: success, approbation, and the rewards they hope to gain from their corporate existence. Thus these characters reduce the chance of attaining their true self and can be designated as 'the dead' who are condemned to slow meaningless spiritual death, as D.J. comments:

If D.J. wouldn't take to pot at family dinners he might not have such a Fyodor Kierk kind of dread looking into Big Daddy's chasm and tomb. But that dread's out there, man. Because Rusty is also the highest grade of asshole made in America and so suggests D.J.'s future: success will stimulate you to success. 18

D.J.'s hate for his father is to a large extent his rejection of the success-oriented American dream, which embodies a lust for money and power and demotes sex to necessary perversion. If D.J. is to learn what the wild has to teach, he must go into it alone or at least with only Tex, his peer, to accompany him. So D.J. and Tex, on their own initiative, reconstitute what has always been the core of the hunt, the single combat between the initiate and nature, without father, guide, or even weapon.

Alone in the wilderness these two boys confront the dread which results from living close to death, as stated earlier. They stand in awe of the overwhelming power and violence of the natural world; and they find themselves bombarded by an equivalent power and violence which comes from within men. The M.S.F. is "the undiscovered magnetic electro fief of the dream." 19: it is the complex of forces and desires that have never been allowed to surface, because of suppression, and are encountered only in the deeps of dream. All the natural desires that are denied work themselves out ultimately in dreams. The Arctic Circle, the Brooks Range, turns out to be a "parabolic receptor," 20 which received all the dreams of the American continent, the dreams of the lonely, the frustrated, the bored, the unhappy. Amid the wilds of unexplored
Alaska, the boys discover that force and violence are not only around them but within them and all men. Thus D.J. sees the universe as Mailer does, dominated by force and death; he too sees God as similar to man, compounded of dread, awe, and force. Thus, we see D.J. is continually progressing in his quest for self by discovering truths about himself, others and the universe.

D.J. and Tex find God in their wilderness: "He was real and no man was He, but a beast, some beast of a giant jaw and cavernous mouth with a full cave's breath and fangs, and secret call: come to me." D.J. and Tex are caught up in their awareness of this powerful beast -- God. His forceful call urges the boys to struggle with each other, to enter into a homosexual embrace from which but one can emerge the victor. The urge is strong. The novel reaches its peak alongwith their quest in a two-page sentence, as D.J. and Tex feel the need for buggery and mastery, each on the other; they discover that beneath their friendship lies enimity and the call of the beast God: "Yeah, now it was there, murder between them under all friendship, for God was beast, not a man, and God said, 'go out and kill—fulfill my will, go and kill.'" Held in the grip of their lust and fear, they are saved when the Northern lights suddenly shift; some electric charge from the M.E.F., that receiver of the psychic charges which emanate from the dream life of the frustrated continent, lights up the Arctic sky and shifts the direction of the murder in their soul "something off in the radiance of the North went into them, and owned their fear, some communion of telepathies and new powers, and they were twins, never to be near as lovers again, but killer brothers, owned by something, prince of darkness, lord of light, they did not know." Surrounded by the Northern lights and the intensity of their desires, the two complete the rite of initiation by cutting their fingers and mixing their blood. They become
blood brothers, protected from their fierce desire for one another by their greater allegiance to "the deep beast whispering Fulfill my will, go forth and kill." Finally they return to a camp and rejoin the others who still have the same specific "mix of mixed old shit."25

D.J. hovers on the brink of discovery during this period. He feels he is closer to the answers of the mysteries of existence, the "Center of all significant knowledge," than he has ever been. He first feels this when he sees the grizzly bear massacre the young caribou; he wonder whether the look in its eyes, were it to die, would be the same as the look in the eyes of the dying bear he and Rusty shot. This second grizzly is all violence and death. The first bear had message of suffering and pain to communicate: there was a "wild wicked look of intelligence in the eye, saying something like, 'Baby, you haven't." Would this second bear, farther from civilization, more lordly, indifferent to the suffering and pain of the caribou, would he die in the same way? This question is not answered, though after their adventures the boys see one final sight. A moose, a "king moose" comes to lick salt across the pond from the boys' campsite. The moose suggests a resolution to the questions D.J. has asked himself in his search for significance of self in the world: "... and D.J. could have wept for a secret was near, some mystery in the secrets of things — why does odor die last and by another route." The secret alluded to is mortality. All that continues after death is decay. One is reminded of Lear's reply to Gloucester, who wished to kiss his liege's hands: "let me wash them first. They small of mortality." For the moose knows death; his entrance is signaled by some "speechless electric gathering of woe." He is glazed blood red on one side by the setting sun and shining platinum on
the other by the rising moon. Standing thus between the two heavenly bodies, colored by each, he represents the human condition. His message is one of both violence and suffering, of the death that must be and the pain that must accompany it: he "gave a deep caw pulling in by some resonance of this grunt a herd of memories of animals at work and on the march and something gruff in the sharp wounded heart of things bleeding somewhere in the night, a sound somewhere in that voice in the North that spoke beneath all else..." These basic questions posed by D.J. shows that he has risen above his former self that revel in shit. After passing through a series of confrontation with natural phenomena, he has developed his sensibilities. But the question posed remains unanswered which shows man's continual search never attaining its goal.

Mailer has consistently used the sexual sphere as a major arena or the conflicts that reveal his vision of bringing revolution in the consciousness of the individual. This novel is no exception. Rusty is frustrated with his wife, his son, and his performance as a man, both on the hunt and in the corporation. Gutsy Hyde, although supercharged, is frustrated, and so is his wife. And medium Assholes Pete and Bill are frustrated:

Frustration makes you more telepathic because it makes you more electric. Up to a point, Poindexter, after that dielectric, apathetic, insulated, you ass, cause to be telepathic while frustrated is to be burned on a charged wire .... After the bomb comes apathy.

Frustration eventually leads to apathy, and apathy leads men to surrender control over their lives and embrace the totalitarian horrors that threaten to inundate civilization. Apathetic men permit and demand the "cold murderous liquidations of the totalitarian state." The ultimate end of apathy is a desire for apocalyptic destruction, in which the apathetic men can destroy the agony that underlines their apathy by destroying the causes of their
agony, themselves and other human beings. Because apathy will not allow engagement, it is identical with inauthentic existence. Apathy is a state in which experience is rigorously structured to eliminate authentic emotions and action which lead to the fulfilment of self. D.J's love life is essentially unsatisfying because there is no love in it, merely conquests which forbid any chance of apocalyptic orgasm. Perhaps the most obvious example of his frustration and lack of sexual release is in the description he himself gives:

Some tooth and cunt hostesses are closet fucks .... Well, when fucking these mad insane ones, D.J. here to advise, get in fast, get out fast, cause they greedy fiends. This ain't young cunt from which you cop the goods — this is used cunt, burnt meat, cliff-hanging menopause types which can't get rid of the poisons by any hole but the pussy hole. And the tooth and cunters are converting their schizophrenia into cancer juice for you.35

A lack of sufficient love and an inability to find a satisfactory release for their erotic tension is responsible for the condition of these frightening women. They use sexual intercourse as a battle-field, hoping to live with their frustrations by converting them into poisons that will destroy the enemy, their sexual partner. For them sex means neither sharing nor building love; it means momentary satisfaction and an opportunity to dominate or destroy. Such partners deny themselves and their partners any chance of growth. D.J's mother is another sexual freak who leads her husband around by adroit use of her sex. As D.J. realizes when he listens to the current of her desires rather than her powdered and spiffy words. Under her fine womanly facade is a love of tilth, an ability to use sex for profit and degradation, and an intense urge to compete. Although Rusty is "the most competitive prick there is,"36 his wife, Hallie forces him to submit to her will. Through adroit use of threats to his masculinity, and by making him a cuckold, Hallie has struck at the weakest part of Rusty's character,
his deep sense of sexual inadequacy. Such relationships fail to understand the divine otherness of others and as a result the weaker partner try to sublimate himself in other spheres of life, as Rusty does. Mailer also satirizes Tex Hyde's mother, a hard, lean, joyless woman. Bred through fifty generations of dirt shacks, she is thin and stringy. Her one allure to her husband is her grasping "secret beautiful snap of a pussy." Gottfried Gutsy Hyde is an undertaker who will grope you "silly" Herubs against anything which moves and immediately ejaculates: "Gutsy has come an average of eight to ten times a day, seven days a week for forty plus years". This strange pair is wed, the lean and stringy scion of the dirt who clasps tight to whatever enters her; and the energetic dynamo who stokes his fires from anything he encounters, in his enthusiasm conquering everything in sight, living or dead. Out of this marriage between the boyless tradition of the land and the unsatisfied pervert who lusts after excess issues Tex Hyde. This son of niggardliness and rapacity represents contemporary America. Such perversions in sexual sphere leads Americans to follow the totalitarian horrors that threatens all authentic existence and fails all their attempts to realize their identity.

It is worth pointing out that Mailer has consistently used the sexual aspect for the fuller development of the individual. Sometimes the treatment of this aspect of life becomes obscene, which is not uninternational but deliberate. The most immediate and obvious effect of obscenity is that it shocks. Obscenity and pornography elicit strong and violent impressions. Obscenity is obscene because it deals with an immensely powerful complex of drives and needs which society has taught us to suppress, deny or ignore. It functions as violence does, forcing us to confront the chaotic and powerful ground of
existence on which we build orderly structures to secure ourselves from that chaos. Because obscenity refers to the hidden world of need and fantasy that is the core of men's subconscious and unconscious existence, it cannot be ignored. By appealing to deep urges and flouting important taboos, obscenity forces men to confront their own fantasies and needs. It is used in this novel to remind us of the authentic experience that is often denied by our preoccupation with the inauthentic experiences we encounter in our daily life. Since we are mired in the world of inauthentic experiences we fail to discover our true self. The perverted sex — that is, twisted out of its normal channels into substitute paths — is one example of unauthentic experience. Obscenity is sublimation of natural sexual instincts that have been denied. It is a substitute for sex, a way of venting explosive libidinal desires. The unfulfilled desires of the characters in this novel are revealed in their sexual preoccupations. It is clear that Rusty's sexual prowess is threatened by his wife; therefore he seeks to fulfill himself by dominating other men and by proving his masculinity on the hunt. Indeed, many Americans make a conscious attempt to reestablish their contact with the more primitive modes of being by resorting to obscenity. Still they fail to lead an authentic life as they ultimately yield to the oppressive socio-political systems of the society.

Another characteristic feature of this novel is the use and significance of odour in the quest of different characters. The use of odour is central to Mailer's mode of perception and his vision of the modern crisis. One of the concomitants of civilization is that as it has developed it has tended to repress the need for immediate gratification and to limit the sexuality of experience. Increasingly, the sexual has been restricted to the genital, and this also in ever more confining patterns. According to this
view, only the child is polymorphously perverse; he ages and becomes more civilized, his oral, anal, and genital sexuality is increasingly diminished, so that sex for the mature adult is narrowed to the act of copulation. The enormously powerful force of the libido is channeled so that it is identified with the productive act of reproduction. This elimination of the polymorphous perverse is relevant to Mailer's use of odour because, as sexuality is limited, odour is perhaps the first sense to be repressed. This is true for two reasons. odour is associated with anal eroticism, which is threatening to most adults, and smell is the most direct of the senses. It involves a direct contact between the observer and the object he experiences. Touch, taste, and smell are direct, sound is less so, and sight is the least direct of all. Society has deemphasized the sexual base of experience by elevating sight and ignoring smell and touch; the movement toward greater suppression of the polymorphus perverse can be seen in the increasing importance of the visual in the development of western civilization. Because smell is such a direct sense, involving the actual incorporation of that which is experienced, it has been suppressed and ignored as sexuality has been limited. Mailer's wide use of odour and the imagery of odour is therefore an attempt to escape from what he regards as the repressed and unhealthy state of modern civilization. It is another foray into the primitive, a provocative experiment that is directed at rediscovering the totality of experience, polymorphous perversity, and destroying the tendency to limit sexuality to genital experience. Even more than the use of obscenity, it is a castigation of modern society and its norms, and the first step back toward renewal and salvation of self. In this novel the imagery of odour is most often associated with discovering the secrets of life and creation, which is important for a fuller understanding of one's
inner self. This association has been hinted at in D.J's quest for self and his realization that the question "why does odour die last and by another route"\(^42\) is the key to "some mystery in the secret of things"\(^43\). In the American Dream specific smells were a clue for Stephen Rojack to the essential nature of individuals and to the sexuality pervading all experience, in this novel odours reveal greater mysteries. Smells are key to the eternal mysteries; primarily those of conception, life, and death — a key to attain to crystalized self, the last and final stage of realization of one's true self, which is often unattainable. In D.J's case this stage appears to be just within reach:

D.J. could smell the break, gangrene in the wood, electric rot cleaner than meat and sick shit smell and red-hot blood of your flesh in putrefaction, ... a chaos of odour on the banks of the wound .... Next step was into a pool of odour which came from the sweets of the earth, sweet earth smell speaking of endless noncontemplative powers, beds of rest; burgeonings, spring of life, a nectar for the man's muscles on the odour of that breath, yeah, D.J. was breathing his last ... every small smell counted, it was the most fucking delicious moment of his life up to that point...\(^44\)

D.J's investigation of the world of scent continues for twenty more lines. It is totally new to him, holding the secrets of creation. Man is mortal, animal, and bound to die; death is wastage and suffocation, as is inauthentic life, which is spiritual death. Odour, for Mailer, is the language of the soul. Although one cannot see or hear or touch spirit, one can smell it. That is why D.J. grapples with odour when he finds himself confronting the wild and the wilderness of his own nature. What we are is found in the way we odour.

D.J. realizes the importance of odour, and also the importance of violence in the natural and human world. Thus in a way, he is initiated into
the mysteries of human existence and it appears he will complete his journey into his inner self. But he fails. He fails to make adequate use of his knowledge that leaves the novel, ultimately lacking in grandeur.

After returning from his hermetic environment, D.J. has no choice but to revert to his previous decadence. He returns to Texas where two years later they have rejected the sterility of their lives by enlisting in the military. No longer is there any legitimate path for his violence or his sexuality, he is allowed only corporate competition and the war in Vietnam. These he accepts and this acceptance, he knows, will suffocate him. This shows that authentic and heroic existence he seeks is not relevant to the modern degenerate world; that his quest is still incomplete. In this context, the novel cannot have a close end because the quests always have archetypal and cultural implications and no cultural situation can tolerate a close end.
NOTES AND REFERENCES.

1. **Why Are We in Vietnam?** (New York: G.P.Putnam's, 1967) p.54. All subsequent references are to this edition. The novel henceforth referred to as *Why?*


4.Mailer believes that cancer is the prototypical sickness of the modern era. His metaphor is apt: Cancer, unlike other illnesses, is dangerous not because it destroys body cells but because it involves the unordered and unusual rapid multiplication of its own cells. The metaphor when applied to modern American society, underlines the proliferation of discovery and technological achievement, the rapid increase in population and the expansion of big government which are characteristic of modern post-industrial societies, and emphasizes the potential dangers of rampant and undirected progress: "Well, it has been the continuing obsession of this writer that the world is entering a time of plague. And the continuing metaphor for the obsession — a most disagreeable metaphor has been cancer." (*Cannibals and Christians*, p.2)


Lorenz, Robert Ardrey and other contemporary cultural anthropologists are the source of Mailer's belief that violence is a necessary aspect of human, and natural life. He further suggests that their thinking tends to be reductive and is therefore reductive in Mailer as well.

14. Why?, p.34.
15. Why?, p.35.
24. Why?, p.204.
40. It should be remembered that Mailer's ubiquitous use of obscenity is also an assertion of his and D.J's manhood. The use of obscenity often serves in our society as a passport into the world of adult male society.

41. The bases for much of this discussion is Freud's concept of the polymorphous perverse and Marcuse's extended analysis of this and other Freudian concepts in *Eros and Civilization*.