The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History (1968) is a revision of two earlier pieces: "The Steps of the Pentagon," and "The Battle of the Pentagon." The book is in two parts. The first part, some 228 pages, is called "History as a Novel". The word 'history' traditionally implies an impersonal approach, with its emphasis on correspondence to the external world and the verifiability of this correspondence. The novel, being more internal in its reference, may be seen as a narrowly coherent personalized presentation, providing for the confessional or autobiographical modes. But if history is not merely to be verifiable but authentic as well, one has to consider also its fidelity to experience, and the personal would thus invariably form a part of it. This is what Mailer attempts in the first section of the book. He writes a personalized history of his own participation in the Oct. 1967 anti Vietnam war March on the Pentagon. The second part, about 74 pages, is called "The Novel as History." Mailer implies that historians or journalists pretend to give us totally objective accounts of events they perceive. They disguise the fact that a personalized selection or treatment is involved in the very nature of reporting. As such, they become disguised fictionalists. If several historians or newspaper men indulge in similar exercise, the sum of their labours become a kind of corporate fiction which Mailer in turn calls "The Novel as History." The emergence of this non-fictional novel is the result of Mailer's realization at the time that mass media surrounding March on the Pentagon is creating a forest of inaccurate and misleading facts. He felt that under such circumstances the alternative left open to an artist is to go back to the inner reality and to project
psyche as a fictional character scrutinizing all details and facts in lens-grinding light. Mailer explains his method:

The novel must replace history at precisely that point where experience is sufficiently emotional, spiritual, psychical, moral, existential, or supernatural to expose the fact that the historian in pursuing the experience would be obliged to quit the clearly demarcated limit of historic inquiry ... The collective novel which follows, ... will now unashamedly enter that world of strange light and intuitive speculation which is the novel.³

Here Mailer is at once denying an intrinsic and comprehensible order to history and prescribing the only possible method of understanding it, one that involves exploration of self. Mailer is aware that his concentration on himself in the first section of the book has its dangers: "To write an intimate history of an event which places its focus on a central figure who is not central to the event, is to inspire immediate question about the competence of the historian or indeed, his honourable motive."⁴ But he offers two justifications for his stratagem of writing about himself and suggests a third.

The first and most obvious reason is that Mailer is in many ways a microcosm for America. In the excess and vagaries of his character can be seen, in miniature, many of the defining characteristics of American society; in many ways, Mailer believes, his personal crises and conflicts mirror on an individual scale the agonies of the American nation. Furthermore, if "The March on the Pentagon was an ambiguous event whose essential value or absurdity might not be established for ten or twenty years, or indeed ever,"⁵ it can perhaps be understood only by focussing on an individual who is "ambiguous in his own proportions."⁶ Because of his "love affair with America,"⁷ because he has a schizoid personality, and because he is existential in his outlook and reactions, he effectively epitomizes much of the
American spirit. He is "a warrior, presumptive general, ex-political candidate, embattled aging enfant terrible of the literary world, wise father of six children, radical intellectual, existential philosopher, hard working author, champion of obscenity, husband of four battling sweet wives, amiable bar-drinker, and much exaggerated street-fighter, party giver, hostess insulter.... the nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn." These roles justify Mailer's writing about himself in the novel.

Second, Mailer is the lens through which the reader can examine the event:

(For the novel — we will permit ourselves this parenthesis — is, when it is good, the personification of a vision which will enable one to comprehend other visions better; a microscope — if one is exploring the pond, a telescope upon a tower if you are scrutinizing the forest)

He claims that American history requires a historian who is at once a participant and detached, one who will "look to the feel of the phenomenon." In order to do this he must be involved in the event; in order to make sense of the feelings, aroused in him, he must be honest and detached. He believes himself to be both involved and objective, and thus well-fitted to the role of historian. He serves simultaneously as the subject of his observations and as the sensitive observes; in fact, the use of himself as subject, Mailer claims, make him a more reliable observer, for the reader can easily become aware of the biases and weaknesses of Mailer's vision and thus compensate for them.

He only suggests the third and most important reason for placing himself at the centre of his history. He realizes that it is impossible for him, or anyone else to understand any historical event, such as the March on the
Pentagon, without first understanding himself. For the modern artist, this means that the discovery and creation of his own identity is the precondition to any future endeavour; indeed one might say that exploration of the self becomes the major concern of all artistic creation. We can see this most clearly reflected in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, which is one of the cornerstones of the esthetic sensibility of not only the nineteenth century but our own as well. Wordsworth felt the need to create an epic, a work which would define his nation and his time and which would create the myths that are essential to all cultures. But when he tried to formulate a myth, he found that he could not do so; instead, he felt he must try to understand himself through a consideration of his growth and development. In choosing to recount his spiritual development, he found a subject which, though limited, promised spiritual salvation:

> One end hereby at least hath been attain'd./ My mind hath been revised, and if this mood/Desert me not, I will forthwith bring down,/Through later years the story of my life.12

By choosing to postpone the creation of a new myth, Wordsworth created the central mythos of our modern times: the search for identity. As a precondition to understanding the world and human history, he realized he had to understand himself and his own history. He found that to discover his identity was to discover as well the significance and order that he was seeking in the natural world and in the events of history. So we find Mailer's mind closely allied to the romantics.13 When he says, "Once History inhabits a crazy house, egotism may be the last tool left to History,"14 he is prescribing the search for true self as the only possible way to understand history. In order to understand *The Armies of the Night*, we must under-
stand that Mailer's pre-occupation with himself is the central theme of the book. The novel is an attempt by Mailer to understand, define and come to grips with his self, to describe his own human condition. His understanding of history is through the precondition of truths he learns about his own identity. By using himself as the major subject, Mailer suggests a resolution of social problems and the only satisfactory solution to the modern problems which arise out of self-division and its incumbent antithetical tensions must grow out of a reunification of the individual and social spheres of action. For it is Mailer's wish and hope that" two very different rivers, one external, one subjective had come together." This wish, this need determines the form of AN: it represents a divergence from Mailer's previous works, in which the protagonist always explored the subjective realm against a backdrop of an alien and hostile social system.

The very first stage in the process of quest for self, as delineated in the first chapter, presents individual enmeshed in the jungle of technological advancement, which creates a sense of uprootedness, insanity and schizophrenia. Everywhere the individual finds himself threatened by societal forces and this leads to the dissociation between the self and the physical environment. The second stage presents individual as striking against the hypocritical surface of the society by giving free reins to his instincts and subconscious needs. The third stage represents a confrontation of socio-political and personal style of identity. These quintessential moments of confrontation "strips us of that fundamental arrogance of assuming that at any given moment any of us have enough centrality, have a seat from which we can expound our dogma." The net result is that the individual finds his strategies ineffective in the face of existential reality. He realizes the
naked reality of death and experience dread and guilt. This constitutes the fourth stage. And in the fifth and final stage, he tries to overcome these barriers by struggling most heroically against them and by self-assertion.

In AN, Mailer very effectively brings out the disease of America, its oncoming totalitarianism, its oppressiveness and its smog. In fact, Mailer had written so much about the disease that he had grown bored with his own voice, but the war in Vietnam offered the grim pleasure of confirming his ideas. The disease he had written about existed in open air; and once again in the AN while describing the long day of March on the Pentagon, epitomizes Mailer's sense that modern society is insane and schizophrenic:

He had come to decide that the centre of America might be insane. The country had been living with a controlled even fiercely controlled schizophrenia which had been deepening with years. Perhaps the point had now been passed. The average American, striving to do his duty, drove further each day in the opposite direction — into working for the absolute computer of the corporation .... Everyday the average American drove himself further into schizophrenia.17

This insanity is the result of the split between the individual and society, his desires and the power and destructiveness of social institutions which he calls "Corporate land."18 Mailer records his constant premonition that "the two halves of America were not coming together, and when they failed to touch all of history might be lost in the divide."19 This feeling carries the mark of the tragic, a sense of inevitable destruction, for the split in America may never be healed: "or was it simply impossible — had the two worlds of America drifted irretrievably apart?"20 As he had previously used cancer, Mailer uses schizophrenia as a rhetorical metaphor for the illness that besets society and modern man.21

Though he had always believed that struggle between opposing forces is the condition of existence, he also had affirmed a need for synthesis between opposing forces to resolve, if only temporarily, the struggle at the core of all existence.
What he is claiming here is that in contemporary America there seems little possibility of synthesis and that the dynamics of dialectical process have deteriorated into unresolved antitheses.

As Mailer and his fellow marchers confront the government and its military extension of the Pentagon, Mailer gives a detailed picture of the power behind the corporate establishment. This power is rooted in technology which has offered so many ways of furthering human security and prosperity, that men have come to accept the language and logic of technology as an ethical order. The war on Vietnam is a clear-cut example of this. "Liberal academics have no roots of a real war with technology land itself, no. in all likelihood, they were the natural managers of that future air-conditioned vault where the last of human life would still exist." Mailer emphasizes this schism at the political level too. He calls himself a "Left conservative." and senses that he occupies a position unique in American politics. He who championed for Henry Wallace in 1948 after most other leftists had long given up, who cut himself off from the old left in his avowal that the hipster had serious political implications, who commented on the nature of political process in America while feeling totally alienated from it, who simultaneously became a hero and a severe critic of the New Left, who cancelled a plan to run for Mayor of New York because he had just stabbed his wife, who wrote a sensitive book on the protestors involved in the March on the Pentagon and then skipped most of the Chicago street debacle in order to watch events on the floor of the Democratic convention, is certainly unique. He also, in his divided and contradictory life, sums up America, for America is a country of opposites, a country in which conservatives support any manipulation of individual freedom so long as it is done by an agency other than the federal
government, a country in which a president elected on a platform of peace and non-involvement (Johnson, or Wilson before him) sees his victory as a mandate for war.

To fight out all the cancerous encroachments of American society on individual psyche, Mailer propounds that the beast must come forth and "grapple with the world". This element of bestiality, which Mailer depicts, is at the heart of his and every civilized man's nature. Mailer is fascinated with the animality in man, with the need for violence. It would indeed be odd if this bestiality, which figures so importantly in his fiction, should be absent from his conception of himself. "Mailer had come to recognize over the years, the modest everyday fellow of his daily round was servant to a wild man in himself".

The Beast "was an absolute egomaniac ... no recognition existed of the existence of anything beyond the range of his speech." Mailer brings it forth by his actions and the language he uses to describe such actions as he does in the drunken speech from the stage of Ambassador Theatre. Edward de Grazia, the lawyer for the Legal Defence Committee of the Mobilization against the war in Vietnam, wanted to bring together poet Robert Lowell, critic Duright MacDonald, and author Paul Goodman for a performance to raise money for bail bonds. It was to be staged Thursday night at the Ambassador Theatre in Washington. After some discussion, de Grazia conceded the job of master of ceremonies to Mailer with some apprehensions because Mailer was drunk. The meeting was about to start and suddenly Mailer felt "incandescence of purpose." He made his way to men's room "happy in all the anticipations of liberty which this Gotteedammerung of a urination was soon to provide." Mailer did not know but "he had already and unwilling to himself metamorphosed into the Beast." Mailer reached men's room, it was pitch dark. He missed the bowl and soggely realized that his error
would have to be confessed to the audience. He left the men's room, continuing to mentally prepare for his opening address:

He would confess straight out to all aloud that he was the one who wet the floor in men's room, he alone: While the audience was recovering from the existential anxiety of encountering an orator who confessed to such a crime, he would be able to bring them up to a contemplation of deeper problem, of indeed the deepest problem ... and would from these seek to bring them back to a restorative view of man.31

Thinking all these thoughts, when he reached stage, he saw de Graeza introducing Paul Goodman. As soon as Goodman finished his speech, Mailer reclaimed the role of master of ceremonies to introduce Dwight MacDonald. The introduction was long, for Mailer's 'beast' was beginning to surface. "What are you, dead-heads?" he shouted. On Mailer went with his insults and obscenities, provoking the audience into catcalls and jeers. Finally he did introduce MacDonald and then Lowell. After Lowell read to a standing ovation, Mailer was back for his own show. This time he confessed that he had missed the urine bowl and said "tomorrow they will blame that puddle of water on the Communists which is the way we do things here in America ... You know who I am, why it just come to me, ah'm so phony. I'm as full of shit as Lyndon Johnson. Why man, I'm nothing but his little old alter-ego."33 The obscenities then started coming more furiously : "This yore dwarf alter-ego has been telling you about his imbroglio with the P*ssarooney up on the top floor, and will all the reporters please note that I did not talk about defection commonly known as sheeee-it ... but to the contrary speak of you—rye—nation."34 We find that Mailer has succeeded in bringing the beast in himself out.

Apart from bestialty Mailer also believes in brutality and violence with a purpose to counteract the forces that destroy individuality. For him, America
has reached to that state of suppressed schizophrenia so deep that the foul brutality of the war are the only temporary cure possible since "the expression of brutality offers definite if temporary relief to the schizophrenic." The war on Vietnam supports Mailer's claim for brutality and violence:

America needed the war ... It would need a war so long as technology needed the war. It would need a war so long as technology expanded on every road of communication and the cities and corporations spread like cancer; the good Christian American needed the war or they would lose their Christ.36

Throughout Mailer's fiction, there is a recurrent pattern of unfulfillment which is eventually resolved in violence. Croft takes out his sexual frustrations in war; Rojack is driven to murder by repressed hostility for his wife, and D.J. enlists in the war in Vietnam because his family and society offer him no possibility of achieving manhood or the satisfaction of his deepest needs. The only release from such libidinal repression is an orgy of destructive violence:

technology had driven insanity out of the wind and out of the attic, and out of all the lost primitive places: One had to find it now wherever fever, force, and machines could come together, in Vegas, at the track, in pro football, race riots for the Negro, suburban orgies — none of it was enough — one had to find it in Vietnam; that was where the small town had gone to get its kicks.37

Some readers feel offended because of obscenity of his style but Mailer believes in the purgative nature of obscenity. According to Mailer, war is a convenient purgative for our national violence which when suppressed will lead to suicide. And Mailer's attempt here is to expose that purgative which substitutes madness for suicide and to prescribe a purgative offering relief from both: obscenity. In fact, what he said about his film "Wild 90" is true of AN as well: he said his aim in using obscenity in "Wild 90" is to produce a "robust art" which "feed(s) audiences with the marrow of its honest presence" and gives "light and definition and blasts of fresh air to the corners of the
Mailer advocated the demonic violence with a view to cajole individual out of his smugness and face the negative forces threatening his soul courageously.

Mailer's courage gets tested in increasing confrontations. One such situation occurs immediately after his flamboyant performance on Thursday night when he meets the disapproving stare of Robert Lowell. Mailer, the narrator, here develops the contrast of authentic and inauthentic heroism. Lowell, the descendant of a long line of distinguished American literatures and statesmen, has the aura of a prince while next to him Mailer appears a fool. But yet it proves that the prince is less effective than the buffoon: Lowell forgoes arrest to return to New York to host a dinner party; Mailer, although regrettably misses the party in order to go to jail. If Lowell wishes to be hero, Mailer suggests that he earns the right:

You, Lowell, beloved poet of man, what do you know of the dirt and the dark deliveries of the necessary? What do you know of dignity hard-achieved, and dignity lost through innocence, and dignity lost by sacrifice for a cause one cannot name... No the only subject we share, you and I, is that species of perception which shows that if we are not very loyal to our unendurable and most exigent inner light, then some day we may burn.

Lowell, represents the suicidal direction of American Life and the impotence of tradition: the "natural aristocrat," inheritor of her most upheld tradition of working for change within the system. He is now outspokenly opposed to policies of the Establishment and condones the breaking of what he considers her unjust laws. But to Mailer, he is still ineffective in bringing about change. Another contrast has been made between Marchers and Mailer, the protagonist. Standing in the cold October air as man after man stepped forward to make his symbolic gesture against the war by presenting his draft card for burning, Mailer felt threatened by the pitiful inadequacy of such gestures:
For years he had envisioned himself in some final cataclysm, as an underground leader in the city, or a guerella with a gun in the hills and had scorned the organizational aspects of revolution ... such revolutions were the womb and cradle of technology land, no the revolutionary truth was the gun in the hills, and that would not be his, he would be too old by then, and too incompetent ... No gun in the hills, no taste for organization, no he was figure head, and therefore he was expendable, said the new modesty — not a future leader but a future victim, there would be his real value.41

Not a leader but a victim, not to manipulate but to be manipulated — this was the chief ambiguity surrounding Mailer. But soon he realizes that a man may be both, leader and victim — a martyr. But achieving the status of a martyr depends on one's willingness to be victimized. This victimization does not mean becoming a plaything in the hands of authoritarian society but deliberately doing things to offend the despotic authorities. For this reason, Mailer forces a military policeman to arrest him for crossing a police line.

This encounter with police, though physically dangerous in itself, helps Mailer in acquiring mighty proportions:

He felt as if he were being confirmed. (After twenty years of radical opinions, he was finally under arrest for a real cause). Mailer always supposed he had felt important and unimportant in about as many ways as a man could feel; now he felt important in a new way. He felt ... as if he were a solid embodiment of bone, muscle, flesh and vested substance, rather than the heart, mind, and sentiment to be a man, as if he had arrived, as if this picayune arrest had been his Rubicon.42

Having taken the great risk of confronting the power, the rewards are great. He found not only a means of making a representative American hero of himself but also a way to combat power.

The most important confrontation that gives \ existential turn to Mailer's thought takes place in jail. Following his arrest, he wonders how long he will be in jail. Naively he supposes that he will be released in time to make Lowell's dinner party. After all, his object was to be arrested, he had made his point. But in his thoughts, he perhaps forgot that Government would never be crisp,
modest and pleasantly efficient in their processing of Pentagon prisoners. So he plans to fast throughout his term in jail. And yet before the thought has settled, he takes a drink of water. He seems to himself either "saint" or "debauchee" with "no middle ground ... tenable for his appetite."43

The "saint" begins to hand out the money in his wallet to pay the prisoners' fines, but the "debauchee" holds back the money from those he does not like and of course saves out enough for himself. At every turn, he, like the America he has come to believe he represents, is divided between the thought and the act, the justification and the manifestation, the good and the evil. Mailer lost in these binary oppositions at last finds a way. While in jail he listens to a student radical incite the prisoners to further protest and envisions prison as:

an endless ladder of moral challenges. Each time he climbed a step ... another higher, more dangerous, more disadvantageous step would present itself. Sooner or later you will have to descend. The first step down in a failure of nerve always presented the same kind of moral nausea ... To become less guilty, than weaken enough to return to guilt was somehow worse than to remain cemented in your guilt.44

Through this metaphorical expression of his concept of existential growth or failure, Mailer reassesses his method of evaluating his existential battles. Perhaps one ascends the moral ladder not rung by rung equivalent to each action, but by an accumulation of positive acts which outweigh the negative. Here we find one new and interesting aspect of Mailer's existential commitment. In earlier works, Mailer's preoccupation was with death and the emotion occasioned by the thought of death was dread. But in AM Mailer does not stress dread heavily, and in its stead he explores another basic human emotion, guilt. It is guilt that impels him to join the march in the first place, which urges him to stand with the army of the radical and the young. Guilt, he admits, is
the mainspring behind his action throughout the days preceding and during the March. It is only when he is finally in jail that he decides to refuse its imperatives. To continue to surrender to guilt would be to encapsulate himself in a moral spiral which turns ever upon itself, without hope of escape or reversal. Mailer decides in the interest of self-preservation, to step off the "ladder of moral challenges." He thus escapes from the round of guilt and repentence which leads eventually to either madness or sainthood. Guilt serves as the impetus towards that authenticity which Mailer achieves by participating in the March; it propels him on the rite of passage which will end in his sense of wholeness and integration. He realizes that there is a constructive force to guilt when he exclaims, "how much guilt lay back of a good writer." Later, after coming out of the jail, he was happy and it occurred to him that this clean sense of himself, with a skin of compassion at such rare moments for all ... it must come crashing soon, but still — this nice anticipation of the very next moves of life itself ... must mean, indeed could mean nothing else to Christians, but what they must signify when they spoke of Christ within them, it was not unlike the rare sweet of a clean loving tear not dropped, still held.

Thus, _AN_ is existential in both purpose and form. It is an attempt to understand the modern world, and modern experience, by coming to grasp with an existent situation. Mailer's hope is that if he can understand this one specific event, he can begin to understand the essential nature of America as it has been moulded by the history of this republic. Furthermore, the writing of this book is in itself an existential exercise in creating meaning. The March on the Pentagon is a paradigmatic existential situation because it has no preordained conclusion or significance: "We are up, face this, all of you, against an existential situation — we do not know how it is going to turn out, and what is even more inspiring of dread is that the government doesn't either." In like manner, the book he is writing is a search for the meaning of the event,
a search that has no known end but only a guideline for its investigation: "look to the feel of the phenomenon. If it feels bad, it is bad". Thus by using experience as the matrix from which value and ultimately significance are derived, Mailer reveals his affinity with one of the basic principles of existential thought. One of the thing that sets him apart from many of his contemporaries is his willingness to use the modern experience -- cradled in technology, an urban environment, and a politics of powerlessness, swathed in anxiety, sexual frustration, and banal media manipulation -- as the arena for his exploration of the human soul, a rite of passage.

Though the process of exploration never attains to the stage of completion, there has always been presence of element of growth in all his novels. Each novel focusses on an intense period of potential growth: each is concerned with the difficulty of growing, of ably performing the rite of passage. The novels like The Deer Park and Why Are We in Vietnam? explicitly examine as well the disastrous results of failing to grow, of paying more for remaining the same. The novel-history before us examines not only the period when the individual (Mailer himself) grows, but also the agonizing moments as the American republic stretches, strains, and tries, as a society, to grow into new levels of awareness and activity.

What is important here -- because it represents a change in Mailer's view of America and the plight of modern man -- is that the turning point, the moment of growth, is a societal one. The whole of western civilization, perhaps the whole of Western culture can be changed by the actions and events that began in Washington D.C., in connection with the March on the Pentagon. The exciting, unknown and dangerous period of growth which Mailer had examined for various individual is suddenly upon the United States:
the air between New York and Washington was orgiastic with the breath of release, some promise of peace and new war seemed riding the phosphorescent wake of this second and last day's siege of the Pentagon, as if the country was opening into more and more of the resonance of these two days, more that was good, more that was bad.50

As with the individual, so with America: only by moving from the certainty of the past into the uncertainty of the present can growth be achieved. Growth holds the promise of a better existence, but it can also lead to a worse; it is the only way to life, but it can also lead to death. The metaphor Mailer frames for America on the brink of social change is the same one he uses in all his fiction for that exploration of the self which is at the centre of growth: the metaphor of going out (or within) alone into the night: "the American Revolution must climb uphill blind-folded in the long Capitalist night."51

As is evident, the growth and the rite of passage is crucial in all his novel. Here in AN also, the protagonist undergoes a rite of passage, eventually synthesizing in himself not only violence but the cultural values like love and goodwill. This is significant about AN. Mailer who takes part in the March has indeed grown in the rite of passage he has begun:

The sense of the danger to the front, sense of danger to the rear — he was in fact in love with himself for having less fear than he had thought he might have — he knew suddenly then he had less fear now than when he was a young man; in some part of himself at least, he had grown.52

As a result of his engagement and the bravery which led to and supported his resistance, Mailer finds that his radical role is becoming significant: "He felt as if he were being confirmed. (After twenty years of radical opinions, he was finally under arrest for a real cause.)"53 At the start of the book Mailer presents himself as a serious-man turned buffoon a dedicated man who is so alienated from both himself and others that he appears to them, and to himself, as a clown and poseur. But the March has been a rite of passage for
him, and he feels for the first time, in joint with the political role he has been playing for twenty years. The description of himself which follows his description of the feeling of confirmation is revealing because it describes both his alienation and his present sense of mental and physical integration:

He felt his own age, forty-four, felt it as if he were finally one age, not seven, felt as if he were a solid embodiment of bone, muscle, flesh, and vested substance, rather than the will, heart, mind and sentiment to be a man, as if he had arrived, as if this picayune arrest had been his Rubicon.54

He believes he has been transformed, through his actions in joining the March and seeking arrest, from a man who wishes to be one who acts, from a dreamer separated from actuality to a man whose life is consistent with his sentiment.

All of Mailer's novel deal with the affairs of men who feel like strangers in their own society, who sense that they are cut off from their selves. In AN, for the first time, Mailer discovers the alternative to alienation, a sense of coherence and wholeness. When the events of the March are finally over and he is in prison, he feels "a sense of cohering in himself which he supposed the opposite of those more familiar states of alienation he could always describe so well."55 What the March on the Pentagon has done is to allow Mailer to re-enter the political arena. No longer must he be a Jeremiah, waiting at the wretched and horrifying excesses of America; he can now play an active role in a struggle to free American society of its most obnoxious and destructive facets. It is important to note that his efforts — as opposed to his efforts on behalf of Henry Wallace in 1948 or his abortive attempt to run for Mayor of New York in the early sixties — can redeem him because there is a hope of success. His earlier political actions were all totally symbolic, acts of resistance rather than revolution. But now the thought of a successful social revolution and his demonstrated willingness to commit himself to it have
replaced his alienation with a sense of coherence.

The coherence that Mailer experiences receives a public expression as he is released from the jail. He faces the media, reporters and his faithful film-makers and delivers a short speech:

Some of us were at the Pentagon yesterday, and we were arrested in order to make our symbolic protest of the war in Vietnam, and most of us served these very short sentences, but they are a harbinger of what will come next ... You see, dear fellow Americans, it is Sunday, and we are burning the body and blood of Christ in Vietnam. Yes, we are burning him, and as we do, we destroy the foundation of this Republic, which is its love and trust in Christ.56

Not only is Mailer's use of Christian imagery new, but also the quiet and resolved tone in which he speaks. The difference between this short speech and his drunken antics on the stage of the Ambassador Theatre, which is our introduction to the book, is overwhelming. The reason for this difference is that Mailer has moved out of his alienation and into a sense of coherence—the feeling that body and mind, wish and reality, individual and society, mesh together in a harmonious whole—and this feeling precludes the need for Mailer to constantly affirm his identity. Where his self is no longer fractured and his different aspects are no longer alien to each other, he does not have to make the continual assertions which Keats called the "egotistical sublime."57

For the first time he need not resort to the romantic and existential assertion of the self, for he has discovered the sense of identity he has labored so hard to create:

Standing on the grass, he felt one suspicion of a whole man closer to that freedom from dread which occupied the inner drama of his years, yes, one image closer than when he had come to Washington four days ago.58

One result of his new found coherence is a change of attitude toward violence: always one of the central concerns of his life and work.

He is still violent; even after his arrest, he squares off with the
"Nazi" who is incarcerated on the same prison-bound bus as he. But now this violence is tempered with love, as his speech upon his release from jail makes clear. This tempering of violence and love seems to appear in his earlier novel An American Dream. Rojack's decision to accept the complexities of love with Cherry reveals, to him and to the reader, the possibility of fulfillment and peace. But Rojack later proves that he is not quite ready to carry the burden of love, and so he loses both Cherry and his possibility for fulfillment. Here in AN, we see a protagonist who tempers his violence with love. As Mailer explores the impending social struggle, he abandons some of the heavy emphasis on individual violence which had marked his earlier work. The coming revolution will require not only bravery and commitment but also two new qualities, loyalty and brotherhood. As Mailer merges the needs of the individual into the needs of a pre-revolutionary society, his feeling of alienation is mitigated by a new-found sense of coherence. This dialectical unification takes place within the psyche of the protagonist, Norman Mailer. The insights into society and his own experience become, in the crucible of Mailer's psyche, acts of affirmation of the self. His order becomes the order of the universe.

Thus, although Mailer moves to some extent beyond egotism and the need to constantly reassert himself, AN is based primarily on the strident self-assertion he ultimately seems to transcend. The book is meaningful to the reader because Mailer's egotistical self-assertion offers a slender refuge to the many readers who feel themselves mired in the modern condition. Mailer attempts to describe, a condition of alienation, self-division, and atrophy of the will. In addition, his transcendence of this condition, his movement from alienation to coherence, offers a real hope that his way of
existential self-assertion may ultimately lead others to a personal integration of their fractured psyches. This, then, is a novel that may give hope. All of Mailer's earlier novels were hopeful. Only in that they rejected hopelessness in the world they portrayed. But AN offers evidence of the possibility that Americans may yet become "a new world brave and tender, artful and wild". The brave new world he hoped for and which seemed far distant in *Barbary Shore* is now once again within possibility. The March on the Pentagon is, he feels, a turning point, a rite of passage. It is this hopelessness, this recognition "of a new-born society rising in triumph around a still somewhat mysterious hero and his *bride*" which makes AN distinct.

Mailer recognizes that the March is a possible first stirring of a new society. Book One ends with his celebration of his present marriage. The marriage symbolizes for Norman Mailer love and compassion, unity and wholeness. But like all modern novelists, Mailer does not offer any concrete resolution of the problem as the stage of completion in the process of quest for self is never clearly delineated. There is only ray of hope that this stage is within reach provided individual sticks to self-assertion. Although in AN, Mailer is hopeful, he recognizes that his hope must coexist with despair, and that even the resolution he seeks appears in the guise of division. The final passage, which conjoins images of combat, passage, and birth, is as ambiguous as he believes the American situation to be. Nevertheless the metaphor in "The Metaphor Delivered" concludes with a recognition of impending birth, and this, both in terms of the metaphor and in the light of Mailer's philosophy of self and its growth, is ground for hope:

> Brood on that country who expresses our will. She is America, once a beauty of magnificence unparalleled, now a beauty with
a leprous skin, She is heavy with child — no one knows if legitimate .... Now the first contractions of her fearsome labor begin — it will go on: no doctor exists to tell the hour. It is only known that false labor is not likely on her now, no, she will probably give birth, and to what? — the most fearsome totalitarianism the world has ever known? or can she, poor giant, tormented lovely girl, deliver a babe of a new world brave and tender, artful and wild? ... God writes in his bonds. Rush to the locks. Deliver us from our curse. For we must end on the road to that mystery where courage, death, and the dream of love give promise of sleep.62

In all his novels, especially after the failure of Barbary Shore, Mailer advocated the need for the individual to integrate himself in order to lead authentic existence. The failure of socialist revolution to become international in BS is a reality, and the next such revolution is a long way off. In the interim one can only wait and protect one's courage, integrity, and hope. In AN for the first time, Mailer sees a possibility that the long hiatus between revolutions may be drawing to a close, and that the breath of a new age may again be upon America. There is a hope for the future once again, and Mailer discovers and succors this hope, real and symbolic, in the March on the Pentagon. Having struggled for fifteen years to keep alive a hope for man by keeping alive the possibility to be a man ( for this after all, was the function of his glorification of the primitive and bestial qualities in his protagonists ), Mailer recognizes the opportunity to shift the emphasis in his writing. He had consistently urged a return to primitivism, violence and confrontatio: in order to protect contemporary men from the tragic consequence of alienation and inauthenticity. Now he feels, the authentic man can emerge from the night into which he disappeared and work for revolution. Mailer sees the March on the Pentagon as a potential turning point, offering the possibility of what he calls the rite of passage; a moment of growth in life of an individual and society.
NOTES AND REFERENCES.


4. AN, p.53.

5. AN, p.53.

6. AN, p.53.

7. AN, p.171.

8. AN, p.134.


10. AN, p.25.


13. Mailer can also be compared to Byron. His continual public self assertion, his efforts to create a powerful cultural persona for himself, are in the Byronic tradition.

14. AN, p.67.

15. AN, p.51.

Mailer uses primarily the most common meaning of schizophrenia - split personality -- as the foundation for his metaphor. Schizophrenia is actually a complicated mental state of which a split personality is only one possible manifestation.
51. AN, p.67. This is Mailer's most important metaphor for describing the struggle of the individual against society and himself. The platoon in The Naked and the Dead makes its first spiritual and physical journey, a futile one, in the night — as it carries the field artillery through jungle mud; Hearn's final night is a night of decision as he faces himself and his future and decides to resign his commission. In The Deer Park, 'O'Shaugnessy wrestles with his soul in the night following the visit from the two investigators from the committee. In An American Dream, all the significant episodes of Rojack's odyssey takes place as he, alone, confronts the night and the missions he must accomplish in the night. D.J. and Tex in Why Are We in Vietnam?
set out into the wilderness alone, a trial that culminates as darkness falls and they face the wild Arctic night. The most important parallel to The Armies of the Night is to be found in the allegory of Barbary Shore, in which almost all the action takes place at night, and which ends with Mike Lovett running out alone into the night, trying to save the "little object" from destruction in the last capitalist-night that impends.

52. AN, p.113.
53. AN, p.138.
54. AN, p.128.
55. AN, p.163.
56. AN, p.214.
59. AN, p.141.
60. AN, p.228.
62. AN, p.228.