

A Visionary Hermeneutic Appropriation:
Meditations on Hemingway's Influence

On Mailer

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[There] is nothing in the critical field that should be of greater philosophical interest or prove more rewarding to analysis than the progressive modification of one mind by the work of another.

--Paul Valéry (*Leonardo, Poe, Mallarmé* 241)

I. Prologue

Norman Mailer and Ernest Hemingway. This sentence brings into proximity two prominent 20th century American writers. The phrasal contiguity of the two names suggests an arrangement that at first glance conceals more than it reveals. For, upon reflection, their proximity sketches out areas that often tend toward more pronounced darkness rather than light. One repeatedly thinks about Hemingway's influence on other writers. Colleagues at various academic conferences refer to it. It appears in scholarly journals, popular magazines, and newspapers. Still one does not readily see what might constitute Hemingway's influence on Mailer; that is to say, aside from what amounts to and is derided by some critics as Mailer's imitative behavior, in the derogatory meaning of the adjective.

Mailer's imaginal thematics, which often touch on the phantasmagoric, his baroque stylistics, and his distinctive intellectual concerns, all seem to be divergent from those developed and practiced by Hemingway. Does this mean, then, that the conjunction "and" in my initial verbless and therefore yet

inactive sentence misleadingly sets forth commonalities between the two writers? I think not. Because I would expect one may at least adumbrate a theoretical common ground between them. Thus the conjunctive “and” will exceed its usual grammatical function and eventually carry out an exceptional task. It carries in it the promises of latent and multiple vistas of connection between Mailer and Hemingway that at present remain hidden but have the possibility of becoming manifest. However, the fulfillment of this promise requires somewhat wide-ranging conceptual meditations and may take a long and nonlinear course.

Clearly, Hemingway and Mailer’s names are heavily laden with literary, cultural, religious, educational, and socio-political implications. They often connote factual differences, even inevitable manifest conflicts. In view of that, now and again, the differences may seem to be unbridgeable and militate against the prospect of serious comparative studies of the commonalities between the two writers. Since such a study endeavors to go beyond wading in the shallows of mere superficial similarities and comparisons, the complexity of its conceptual framework will also proportionally increase. Just the same, I would like to go straight to my conclusion in this essay and confirm that such a study is indeed realizable, in spite of undeniable obscurities, or paradoxically because of them. For, such seemingly impenetrable areas force us to rethink our theoretical guiding principles of literary influence and reconfigure its constitutive elements.

Happily, Mailer’s own preoccupation -- if indeed not outright obsession -- with Hemingway as a singularly distinctive man and writer renders our effort somewhat easier. Mailer’s own articulations of his connection with Hemingway will allow us to make intelligible possible shared literary-philosophical views and aspirations. His passionate fascination with Hemingway communicates itself as a combination of theoretical and experiential interests and practices as a writer. Altogether, they indicate a space where a serious study of their affinities and visionary literary kinship seem viable. Such

likelihood may not be easily discernible if one only limits oneself to the more traditional concept of influence as imitation. It would seem to me applying such theories to Hemingway and Mailer as tutor and tyro may well prove to be an egregious over-simplification and therefore more aporetic than heuristic. In my view, the entire problematic of Mailer's relationship with Hemingway sets in motion a pervasive and expectant mood. A Heideggerian sense of ontological disclosures emerges from it, providing a lingual clearing where the two language artists practiced their profession. This clearing also permits one to engage in crisscrossing meditations, interpretations, and associative reflections. As we well know, Mailer and Hemingway's personalities and works tend to elicit such activities from the reader's mind.

As a result, in due course, I shall propose a subcategory to the traditional theory of influence to make intelligible the nature of Hemingway's unusual influence on Mailer's imagination. I call it visionary hermeneutic appropriation as influence. I hope the general theoretical thrust of such classification differentiates it from the more direct and more easily discernible but limited influence one writer may exercise upon another as imitation either stylistically or thematically or both at once. At least, it will provide us with a useful working concept. I hope the reader will find it less daunting in its logic and practice than its designation at first might suggest.

It would seem helpful to begin our task of examining the particular mode of influence Hemingway exerted on Mailer with a brief overall assessment of the former's widespread influence on 20th century American writers, including Mailer. I shall then proceed to Mailer's own appraisal of Hemingway's influence on the writers of his generation. Subsequently, I shall examine Mailer's perception of Hemingway's influence on himself as arguably one of the most ambitious writers of his own time right along with the older Hemingway. This sequence will make it possible to justify how Hemingway's influence on Mailer characterizes itself as a highly differentiated case.

II. Hemingway's Transparent Influence on Some Notable American Writers

Many American writers appear to take on Hemingway's writing style and atypical way of life as their own. They have done so through either through direct influence or mere imitation. A phenomenological hermeneutics process makes the effects of such influence intelligible. It involves acts of interpreting, understanding, and taking possession in the Heideggerian sense of these existential terms. Analogous to the task of the gods' messenger Hermes, the reader-writer endeavors to understand Hemingway's work in the context of his or her own interpretation of it. In practice, this hermeneutic task is embedded in experiential activities without consciousness of its more theoretical underpinnings. As such, it permits the reader-writer to understand the meaning of acts and texts without difficulty as an intended object of his or her own consciousness. It carries in it the reader-writer's individual desires, fantasies, dreams, daydreams, culture of reading, acquired values of a literary community, and socio-economic circumstances. In short, each interpretation carries in its fold the interpreter's prior lived experiences in its entirety as a semi-conscious whole. Texts, acts, and situations thus interpreted generate a concomitant epistemology, which the reader-writer can declare as his or her own.

On the plane of his way of life, as Mailer knew so well, Hemingway also exercised an exceptional charismatic influence on readers and writers. To some extent, he continues to do so. One thinks of his way of life as an instance of Martin Heidegger's "*Dasein*," that is, a genuine way of being human, which would be open to various interpretations and imitative practices. In a way, Hemingway's way of life and his work altogether make available to us a specific and extensive semiological text, as it were. If so inclined, one may choose to engage with it through simple imitation or more labyrinthine and intricate paths of influence.

In my view, the uncommon influence Hemingway exercised on readers and writers is largely due to his instinctive inclination to write open-ended fiction and creative nonfiction. Because his conviction

that a writer may omit anything that he or she knew but the minimal but the absolutely essential and the omitted would surface from the silent depth of the text in the act of reading. Because textual omission as silence ensures the slide from vivid denotation to unrestricted connotation and therefore guarantees correspondingly unlimited interpretive semantics. Based mostly on lived experience and its inevitable twists and turns, opacities and vagaries, unpredictabilities and mysteries, his creative fiction and nonfiction are largely constant enterprises in the domain of comotative significations and interpretive disclosures. In this context and in contrast to Soren Kierkegaard who taught us “purity of heart is to will one thing” for Hemingway as a writer purity of heart is to will one thing that may well say everything. Perhaps even Kierkegaard might have approved of such an act of faith. To read Hemingway is nearly always a veritable journey that takes the reader from the singularity of concrete human experiences to the plurality of their existential implications that burst upon the reader’s consciousness. The referential truth of such fiction theoretically will be commensurate to the number of its potential readers.

In this way, Hemingway initiates a dialogue with all of his reader-interpreters of his creative writing to which each can respond cognitively to its textual and creative structures and then interpret it in recreating its original moment of creation. This secondary moment of creation is redolent with emotional responses that may run from indifference and ambivalence to admiring imitation or enchantment of influence. “Read anything I write for the pleasure of reading it,” he said in “The Art of Fiction,” an interview with George Plimpton. “Whatever else you find will be the measure of what you brought to the reading” (229). It would be hard to find a keener or more accurate description of existential hermeneutic activities and modes of recreating and making a text your own.

To sum up our reflections so far: the combined agencies of phenomenological operations of reading, recreating the original moment of textual creation as interpretation make it possible for any reader to appropriate Hemingway’s writings as his or her own according to the knowledge of themselves

and environing world they bring to it. These dialogic configurations cause a morphing of Martin Buber's concepts of "I-It" connection between the reader and the text to the I-Thou relationship in which the text becomes a quasi-living phenomenon as it bursts upon the reader's consciousness. Clusters of the reader's prejudgments and prejudices guide the ensemble of these dialogic activities as pre-knowledge that have transformed itself into new affective and cognitive knowledge.

At this point, one may state again that Hemingway's attentive readers as reader-writers, and critics (the more or less professional group in the community of reader-writers) have a particular interest in the domain of his literary influence. They either have taken mental notes or have made up their lists of writers influenced by Hemingway. To some extent, it seems to be an irresistible tendency. It may well be that such lists bring forth the reciprocal effects of the texts read and analyzed that offer evidence of the reader-writers' literary inclinations.

Taking into considerations the nature of Hemingway's influence, whose sense I have tried to make comprehensible, I should like to offer a list of writers I consider Hemingway has discernibly influenced. For our present purposes, I am limiting the list strictly to American writers. It includes such diverse names as: Dashiell Hammett (1894-1961), James M. Cain (1892-1977), Walter van Tilburg Clark (1909-1979), John Hersey (1914-1993), Robert Ruark (1915-1965), Charles Bukowski (1920-1994), Vance Bourjaily (1922-), Jack (Jean-Louis) Kerouac (1922-1969), Cormac McCarthy (1933-), Richard Brautigan (1935-1984), Elmore Leonard (1935-), Raymond Carver (1938 – 1988), and Hunter Thompson (1937-2005).

This is a speculative list, of course; not at all intended to be either critical or exhaustive. It is at best exploratory and suggestive. Anyone can make their own list according to the nature and extent of their culture of reading and understanding of matters literary. I am aware that in each writer who appears on my list the affinities with Hemingway and the extent and depth of his influence on him

substantially differ. What does remain constant, however, is the existence of an inevitable vestige of the dynamic dialectic of uniqueness and influence, going from clear-cut direct imitation to labyrinthine influence in fictional conception and execution.

III. Hemingway's Nontransparent Influence

Hemingway's style had an ability to hit the young writers in the gut, and they weren't the same after that.

--Norman Mailer ("Mailer Talking" 298)

My intention in treating Hemingway's influence on American writers at some length has been to show the nature and extent of the problem Mailer was facing in dealing with Hemingway's towering presence on the writing scene and his prevailing influence. Placing Mailer within my list would not have done justice to his own unique place in the history of 20th century American letters. For this reason, I made no mention of either his name or, I must add, Nelson Algren's (1909 – 1981). I would say Hemingway's influence on them falls into a different category. One may think of it as a profound but not readily intelligible influence. They were two writers who were truly "hit in the gut" hard and for good and keeps by Hemingway. However, the essence of how they experienced that radical influence remains mostly nontransparent.

Once one understands how, how hard, and with what lasting effects Hemingway as a writer "hit" a younger fellow-writer like Mailer in the "gut," its consequences will then be easier to explore. A proper definition and explication of it may then emerge. Both Mailer and Algren came to *embody* Hemingway's influence; I mean literally, by figuratively devouring him and his work and making him an integral part of their own creative flesh and blood, each in his own unique way. The result was the development of profound elective affinities with him, both as men and as writers. Even though the nature, scope, and intensity of their kinship with Hemingway greatly varied, they both went beyond the

boundaries of the dialectic of direct imitation and apparent influence. Incidentally, as enlightening and fascinating as it is to compare simultaneously Mailer and Algren's relationships with Hemingway, it would fall beyond the perimeters of the present study.¹

Accordingly, I would like to add the category of nontransparent influence to the spectrum of Mailer-Hemingway studies. I designate it as visionary hermeneutic appropriation. I do so primarily as it applies to Mailer. I shall later devote a section to its definition. To my mind, the critical narrative of Hemingway's influence on Mailer belongs to the logic of this other sphere of influence, which sounds a bit technical but turns out to be less so in practice. I deem it a useful concept and I place it as a category within the general theory of influence. I believe it will provide forays into yet uncharted territories. Therefore, the notion of a visionary hermeneutic appropriation makes possible the integration of the proximal and the distal, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the expected and the unexpected. It does so simultaneously from within and without the immediate and known boundaries of studies of Hemingway's influence so far done.

IV. Mailer's Own Recognition and Assessment of Hemingway's Influence

In "Prisoner of Success," an interview with Paul Attanasio, Mailer observed with exceptional lucidity:

Hemingway occupied the center in everyway, not only coming from the Midwest, but he occupies the very center of writing itself. Anyone who has ever read a newspaper can feel how good a writer he is -- he uses a vocabulary that if anything is smaller than the average newspaperman's vocabulary. And he does wonderful things with it. So no matter how serious or superficial a reader you are you sense very quickly that you are in the hands of someone who truly can write well. Then, of course, he wrote about things that are very, very interesting to men. There aren't very many women going around saying Hemingway is a great writer. I am willing to bet more American women who are

good writers have been influenced by Proust than Hemingway. But for men he's central: the anxieties he feels about being a man cover all the anxieties; it is almost impossible *not* to identify with his work. (*Pontifications* 131-32)

Clearly, this is a long citation, but well worth citing. It is well conceived, precisely stated, and its inferences are probing and consequential. As the most stridently ambitious writer of his generation, one can unquestionably see the implications of Mailer's awareness of all things Hemingway. Mailer shows a keen sense of the truth and the astonishing expanse of the influence Hemingway exercised during his lifetime and posthumously. Because Hemingway's work went beyond regional influence and extended itself to national and international levels.

With striking insight, Mailer goes to the very mysterious heart of the magic of Hemingway's influence as a creative writer: mastery of the alchemical power of everyday American speech as poetry. With remarkable accuracy, he perceives that the prominence of Hemingway as a writer resides in the wonderful things he does with the English language or, more precisely, with the poetry of American colloquial speech. Mailer sees the rare enchantment that Hemingway can work by eliciting a feeling in the reader that true wonders await him or her by merely reading on, particularly if the reader is a man. The only criticism might be that Mailer renders Hemingway's work gender specific, but this may well hold a grain of truth. He also hints at his appreciation of the economy of Hemingway's style that through the "iceberg principle" would make manifest the tip of the narrative's hidden depth of maximal semantic effects. No wonder Mailer also liked to read the Francophone Belgian born writer Georges Simenon's detective novels, the Jules Maigret series. Simenon, too, practiced a totally unornamented, uncluttered, condensed style that realized itself in a theory of omission of his own that approached Hemingway's.² Incidentally Hemingway, too, made no secret of his genuine admiration for Simenon's

detective fiction, which he originally discovered in the late 1920s in Paris and avidly read for the rest of his life.

Let us take a closer look at Mailer's view of Hemingway's centrality to 20th century American writing. In any given community, our fellow human beings at once offer us a circle of ontological presence and kinship as well as its horizon. Consequently, the notion of occupying the "very center" in such communities spells out a position of unquestionable eminence and preeminence. Mailer readily credits Hemingway with this central position in writing in the community of writers in America. In an interview with *Playboy*, conducted by his son John Buffalo Mailer, he spoke of Hemingway's "prodigious influence for young American writers. He taught a lot of us how to look for the tensile strength of a sentence" (*Big Empty*, 122).

Combining Mailer's declarations of Hemingway's pedagogic influence and his centrality to American fiction are irresistible. Because lexically "center" indicates the principal, pivotal, and radial point within a circle or sphere. The center comprises the focal point of the circumference that it defines. Secondly, "sentence," as a grammatical unit of one or more words, defines the lexical and syntactic units of language that function as foundational for the generative semantic plane of our oral and scriptural discourse. That is how we signify our life, or give it meaning and thus comprehensible. It follows then that the maximal stress that a sentence as the basic unit of discourse may bear is essential to the signifying processes of our existence. The sentence ought to carry maximal signification without imploding into semantic incomprehensibility and nonsense. I would say Mailer's statements pay austere but high homage to Hemingway. The older writer comes through Mailer's considered opinion as the high priest of creative writing in 20th century American writing. Judged by any standard, that is high praise, offered in a benign spirit of thanksgiving. Nevertheless, it bears witness to the challenge that Hemingway as a writer posed to Mailer and how he the latter dealt with it.

V. Outline of a Visionary Hermeneutic Appropriation

Examples of greatness lie about us, living texts of renown. Let each set before himself the greatest in his line, not so much as something to follow, as something to spur him on.

--Baltasar Gracián (*The Art of Worldly Wisdom* 25)

The centrality Mailer attributes to Hemingway among American writers would be seldom, if ever, far from his own mind during his long writing life. It slowly acquired a pivotal gravitational pull on his psyche. Initially, his comments about Hemingway were inspired by genuine fascination as well as frequent intimations of irritation. One may generally regard his irritation as an effort not to be hugely awestruck or spellbound by the older writer, in the sense of being captured and subjugated. His sporadic, strong eruptions of resentment toward Hemingway would seem to satisfy his need to declare himself the rightful archetypal son and legitimate inheritor of the aging master's place. Yet, Mailer couched his angry bursts in a taunting yet considered language that permitted him to continue to emerge as heir apparent to Hemingway while remaining an independent, unique, and highly talented writer on his own. It was a difficult balancing act, which he carried out successfully more often than not. At times, I would imagine, the whole tendency implied that he, Mailer, in time would be considered the new Hemingway but in what he thought would be his own superior way. He would be the new literary champion of the world and would write the truly "Great American Novel," which presumably Hemingway had failed to do. From my perspective, Mailer's ambivalence and occasional hostility toward Hemingway betray a modified and more complicated sort of Oedipal resentment as the master's self-appointed heir apparent.

In the fullness of time, Mailer developed a larger and steadier perspective on Hemingway and his work. I very much regret that he did not regard it necessary to devote a book to the subject. It would have been remarkably enlightening. His decision not to do so might very likely have been due to his ample but widely dispersed observations on Hemingway. "If one is going to make a statement about

Hemingway,” said Mailer as early as 1955, “it can be done either by posing a riddle or else one has to write at least ten thousand words to say something new in the critical literature” (“Intimate” 26).

Perhaps he ended up by saying and writing as much on the subject and implying much more. One hopes that a Mailer scholar will gather these observations in a collection, which will no doubt prove to be highly illuminating.

In their aggregate, Mailer’s comments on Hemingway divulge his own idiosyncratic quality of thought and style as a writer. Concurrently, there is a pervasive sense of identification with Hemingway through the agency of what one may regard as empathetic imagination. The intensity of Mailer’s identification with Hemingway and his early barbed pronouncements about him make up the antithetical poles of a dialectical synthesis. From a theoretical standpoint, this dialectical synthesis is replete with import. For the general patterns of Mailer’s gravitation to Hemingway bear testimony to French poet and critic Paul Valéry’s belief in the truth of the “philosophical interest” which “the progressive modification of one mind by the work of another” possesses (241).

In the absence of any transparent, unmediated stylistic or thematic influence by Hemingway on Mailer, my formulation of influence as a visionary hermeneutic appropriation offers a different theoretical reconfiguration of constitutive elements of traditional theory of influence. I would suggest that this theoretical reconfiguration provides a key to reducing our incomprehension of Mailer’s literary relationship with Hemingway. For me, visionary hermeneutic appropriation derives from the interrelated operations of interpreting works of all arts -- for our present purposes more specifically language arts -- and lived experiences, providing new knowledge in the process. I must add that acts of re-imagining elicit and direct this process of making works of imagination one’s own. Briefly put: visionary hermeneutic appropriation makes it possible for us to take possession of the mode of life and creativity of others and make it a part of

our own creative flesh and blood and, with luck, surpass it. It follows then that these transformative acts of interpretation are visionary modalities of having and being.

On the cultural plane, visionary hermeneutic appropriation brings into play the whole range of our familial, social, religious, cultural, and educational heritage. All of our pre-judgments, prejudices, preconceived, and received notions, as well as our capabilities to create an imaginal world enter into it. Lastly, on the side of appropriation, visionary hermeneutic in practice functions within the psychological structures of sympathetic imagination, identification, projection, and ultimately transformation through semiological and textual intermediation. Henceforth, I use visionary hermeneutic appropriation to indicate the modality of Mailer's relationship to Hemingway.

In the interest of taking the visionary element in hermeneutic appropriation just a step further, I wish to emphasize that it unfolds in the register of a theoretical formulation, too. By visionary, I mean a mode of unconscious intervention that activates our imagination, making it capable of divergence from the powerful realm of conventional knowledge by audacious creative undertakings. Additionally, I attribute to the adjective visionary in the present context a quality of inspiration akin to its Latin etymology "breathing upon" or "breathing into" in order to animate it. It seeks to enliven, quicken, and heighten the senses. Inspiration as such coincides with *pneuma* in its etymological Greek meaning as "breath," which approximates its quasi-theological meaning as "vital spirit."

If we place visionary hermeneutic appropriation within its twin phenomenological appearances in our consciousness as intention and its existential implications in our experience, the term would then impart a sense of imaginative alignment and apprehension. This is so, because perceiving it then as conversion becomes justifiable. As conversion, it carries in it a combined sense of artistic and spiritual adhesion and adherence. As such, it would differentiate itself from the passivity that usually characterizes imitation and influence. Applied to Mailer's attitude toward Hemingway, the whole process characterizes itself as a

freely chosen mode of dynamic commitment and fidelity to a creatively energizing ideal. What it categorically refuses is a type of subjection to willy-nilly literary seduction, which would be tantamount to negating the freedom of imagination for a writer. The whole enterprise of visionary hermeneutic appropriation demands an authentic self-transformation and renewal of identity from within, where inwardness flows creative consciousness as freedom. That is why certain perceived affinities and empathies between Mailer and Hemingway are for me more or less analogous to spiritual and religious longings as influence.

I would like to convey a recollection that may put my notion of Mailer's relationship to Hemingway in a clearer perspective. I remember reading French philosopher Gabriel Marcel's effort to tell his readers that although he had read German philosopher Karl Jaspers' essay "*Système de philosophie*" (Philosophical System), his own essay "*On the Ontological Mystery*," had not been *directly* influenced by it. Marcel explained that Jaspers' "terminology" and his "spiritual and religious orientations" were quite different from his own (6). He then added: "Nevertheless, I feel obscurely that I owe a real debt to this noble and profound thinker [Jaspers], and I am anxious to acknowledge the *inward* and almost *indefinable* influence which he has exercised on our own mind" (6). I consider it to be an elegant, touching and, most of all, spiritual statement. This exigent, "inward," indefinable and perhaps ultimately ineffable influence with all that it implies is precisely what I mean by visionary hermeneutic appropriation as influence. I detect it as such in Mailer's own inward and often ineffable responses to Hemingway. This is precisely my reason for differentiating among literary imitation, influence, and visionary hermeneutic appropriation.

VI. Search for Elements of Mailer's Visionary Hermeneutic Appropriation of Hemingway

Literary influence remains endlessly curious.

--Norman Mailer (*The Spooky Art* 99)

I would say searching for the components of Hemingway's nontransparent but nonetheless real influence on a writer such as Mailer could resemble the psychological mechanisms of paranoia. For it is experienced as endless curiosity in the double sense of an unusual inclination to inquisitiveness in making what appears as tenuous associations to arrive at new syntheses as knowledge. Or so it may seem to readers with a psychoanalytic proclivity and sensitivity. One may think of it as a fearsome upsurge of "hermeneutics of suspicion," formulated by French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. For example, Marxist hermeneutics undertakes to explain the hidden role of economic class in determining our consciousness as Freudian psychoanalysis does with the unconscious. This type of intellectual and scholarly paranoia (*para + nous*) requires that the conscious mind extend itself beyond the limits that it ordinarily imposes upon itself, because it grants connection to disparate elements. By doing so, the paranoid mind suspects the existence of correspondences that have hitherto gone undetected, engaging in thoughts and acts to unveil and disclose them. Such paranoia may impel creative writers and scholars to see mysterious influences lurking in everything everywhere.

Just the same, it is perhaps preferable to the "naiveté" that is the dialectical opposite of paranoia, to use English psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott's language. Literary critical paranoia may indeed be of help here to the extent that it mobilizes our sensitivities to look for what often lies veiled below the surface of our literary critical work. The paranoid critic of influence studies joins Mailer's "Certain artists, those who see associations and connections everywhere" whom he mentioned in his "The Metaphysics of the Belly" (*Cannibals and Christians* 265). In any case, one must not forget the example of the venerable Sir Isaac Newton and his apple.

There is no discernible evidence that Mailer directly imitated Hemingway to any appreciable extent either personally or as a writer. I do not believe he became the "neo-Hemingway tough guy who patronized boxing and bullfighting and bars," as Joseph Glemis has dubbed him, (*Mailer*, "Norman"

156). Mailer was too proud as a man and a writer, and too conscious of his own place in American letters to be a straightforward, unsophisticated follower, borrower, and imitator. With him it was all much more perceptive and complicated than that. For instance, as an individual he worked hard to have an experiential knowledge, say, of how to box, which dramatically shows the punishing price of learning something new, even as a matter of Hemingway's influence on him. He was also interested for some time in bullfighting and indeed other sports. What is significant is that he was willing to undergo the rigorous physical demands of boxing, whose semiotics and metaphysics in his mind had much to do with the language arts, as it did for Hemingway. Furthermore, in *The Executioner's Song* Mailer consciously and transparently adopted Hemingway's less ornate, intentionally stripped-down narrative style.

I would go as far as to suggest that Mailer's creative nonfiction such as *Armies of the Night* might have been inspired by Hemingway's prototypes of creative nonfiction in *Death in the Afternoon* and *Green Hills of Africa*. It is our common knowledge that some critics have mentioned Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966) as the source of inspiration for Mailer's creative nonfiction. All the same, the two examples of Hemingway's experimentation with the genre preceded Capote's effort by three decades. Given Mailer's astute mind and his trust in Hemingway as a writer that possibility would appear to be more convincing than its hypothetical alternative.

Mailer's shared literary concerns with Hemingway were considerably broader and deeper than the readily detectable examples that I have cited. It grew out of Hemingway's fundamental literary-philosophical concerns such as courage and bravery as modes of transcendent behavior. Courage as combined spiritual and physical strength offered Hemingway and Mailer the proper patterns of deportment required for maintaining honor, integrity, and eventual salvation in extremis. German psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers called this moment of extremity "limit situations." Beginning '

with *Way To Wisdom* (1951) Jaspers reflected on lived experiences of proximity to death, dread, acute anxiety, guilt, and despair as limit situations, from which one may emerge into unconditioned self-consciousness and freedom as an authentic possibility or may be more drastically mired in limitedness and destroyed. I am sure Hemingway and Mailer would have agreed.

Hemingway and Mailer also had in common a vision of achieving the highest possibilities of their gender as maximal manhood firmly rooted in mind and body as an indivisible whole. The aim of such at least psychoanalytically impossible vision for Hemingway and Mailer was not entirely machismo as a sense of masculine superiority and entitlement. I would suspect a merely assumptive masculine entitlement as a precondition would have made its embodiment emasculating to both of them rather than an arduous existential quest worthy of their struggles as men and writers. At its best and in its profoundest sense, the concept of masculinity for Hemingway and Mailer was a matter of seeking the improbably flawless unity of male body and psyche. It is not too implausible to say that both writers were searching for a second process of such wholeness for posterity within the scriptural body of their work as texts. As Hemingway believed, this passionate approach to fiction would then produce an enduring human world whose truth would be truer than true as long as there will be anyone who can read it and breath new life into it. It does not appear to be an overstated claim. It is so because language has always had the considerable power to bring cohesion to the chaotic world of lived experience as the latter bursts upon our consciousness. These are complex matters and need more clarification. I shall deal more probingly with them in due time in sections IX and X.

Even if Mailer thought Hemingway worthy of imitation as a way of life and as a writer, on a particular plane of reflection one cannot altogether dismiss it as trivial. Literary imitation yields much that is of interest about the imitator and the imitated. Imitation as transformative action has none too simple an origin and a history of development. Imitative acts, literary or otherwise, exceed the

pejorative notion of “aping” in the current vernacular; that is to say, mindlessly mimicking or passively embracing someone else at the lowest level of intellectual and artistic engagement. Imitation often plays a dynamic part in the study of the multifaceted phenomenon of literary influence. There is also the considerable psycho-philosophical and aesthetic category of imitation as *mimesis*.

Now, I would like to address this notion of *mimesis* at some length, because I find that both Hemingway and Mailer understood its logic and utility beyond the limits of realism in the arts and literature. Mimetic activities have a well-defined origin and a long developmental history of spontaneously assembling, organizing, and ordering our perception of the appearance of the world on our consciousness. One might argue that imitation and influence follow in our psychological makeup with a force akin to the persistence of our biological and genetic inheritance. Embedded in our familial, religious, cultural, societal, and educational patterns of life and in the deep structures of our language, imitative behavior and influence permeate our life. Indeed, extensive theories of learning and pedagogical practices derive from them. Imitation and influence relentlessly precede and proceed us wherever we go. They ally themselves with the coercive might that Freud attributes to the super-ego, whose effects as educative processes remain mostly unconscious or at least quasi-conscious. Various patterns of imitations and influences in their aggregate track all the developmental stages of our life. We can only move beyond them in acts of genuine creativity, acts that at once confirm their existence and transcend them in appropriation.

On the plane of the arts, *Mimesis* provided the philosophical and aesthetic matrix for classical and neo-classical paintings in the Renaissance period. Much later, as realism, naturalism, and impressionism, it inspired new forms of artistic perception. It even sustained the foundational aesthetics of abstract impressionism and abstract painting as "non-figurative art," or "non-objective art." For instance, representations of moods and combinations of unconscious and semi-conscious states of mind

as practiced by the impressionist Claude Monet, post-impressionists Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cézanne and, later, Jackson Pollock, even Mailer's favorite painter Pablo Picasso. Abstract painting reverses the direction of the mimetic gaze from without to within and vice versa. Hemingway was acutely cognizant of such mimesis, particularly as he found it in the works of Paul Cézanne.

Additionally, the trajectory of imitative behavior even covers large and varied aspects of religious and spiritual practices. Imitation is indeed an essential activity that induces childhood echolalia as well as, say, on the mystical level, the saintly import Thomas à Kempis accords it in his *Imitation of Christ*. In its profoundest sense, imitation may lead to a *visionary conversion* that I attribute in some measure to Hemingway's influence on Mailer in a visionary hermeneutic appropriation. Imitation would then come forth as transformative action in the process of forming a new identity. This transformation was the contemplative aim that the writer of *Imitation of Christ* had in mind. In this light, imitation would appear to be seeking a truth not available otherwise to the imitator.

Contemporary critical thought habitually ignores such imitative efforts as ultimately derivative, producing no more than redundant, second-hand truth, hardly expected to provide original knowledge and understanding. It is because we often forget that our primordial inclination toward imitative behavior serves us as a catalyst at all levels of human educative processes. To be impervious to imitation is to be predetermined, unalterable, and consequently *uneducable*. To imitate is to learn and to change in some fashion to some extent – which is strictly speaking far preferable to stasis that intimates death in the midst of life. As transient as it often proves to be and as often as it may happen, what makes imitative behavior possible is the freedom to transcend and, with intelligence and luck, to recreate oneself by becoming one with one's life as an open horizon. It implies freedom to change, which is so evident in the early games in which children dress up and act as grownup to be.

Just the same, Mailer's deep-seated appreciation of Hemingway's persona and work is intricate enough for me to go further and place it within the broader and composite purlieu of visionary hermeneutic appropriation as I have already formulated it. One needs to be cautious in accusing Mailer of unthinkingly impersonating or imitating Hemingway in the derogatory sense of these terms. One example often given of Mailer's imitation of Hemingway is his inclination toward violence. However, human violence as manifest in brutality, cruelty in such phenomena as war, revolution, crime, and the so-called "contact sports" in their many-sided complexities fascinated Mailer's search for the horrific truth of the human psyche can be and too often is inescapably sadomasochistic. In the context of our present meditations, Hemingway often serves Mailer as a trampoline for further conceptual and creative modifications of his own desires and inclinations conscious or otherwise. The salience of violence for Hemingway is one of them.

I would like to end this section by citing a fine and illustrative story Mailer recounts about Nelson Algren giving a class on writing and inviting Mailer to sit in. Mailer recalls:

He [Algren] read a story by one of the kids. Third-rate Papa. Afterward, I said to Nelson, "Why did you pay that much attention? He was copying Hemingway." And Algren, who was ten years older than me and knew that much more, said, "You know these kids are better off if they attach themselves to a writer and start imitating him, because they learn a lot doing that. If they're any good at all, sooner or later they'll get rid of the influence. But first, they have got to get attached to somebody." That was useful. (*Spooky* 76).

VII. Mailer's Visionary Hermeneutic Appropriation and Bloom's Theory of the Anxiety of Influence

Can the notion of visionary hermeneutic appropriation that I ascribe to Mailer in his relationship as a writer to Hemingway be situated within the overall context of Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*? Bloom forcefully applies his theory to Hemingway's influence on Mailer in this magisterial work. I maintain that such placement is possible on the condition that I relegate it to a specific category within Bloom's general theory of anxiety of influence as an *exception*. This effort necessitates a brief exposition of Bloom's justifiably elaborate theory of influence.

In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom offers an analysis of the phenomenon of influence in the development and maintenance of the "poetic," which embraces literature as a whole in its traditional sense. We owe Bloom a large debt of gratitude for this work in the field of influence studies, truly. Passionate, dense, and erudite, one can only underestimate Bloom's theory of influence at one's own loss. He demonstrates how "poets" guarantee continued literary creation and dissemination as influence while paying an exorbitant but necessary price for the inevitable anxiety such influence triggers.

Bloom informs us that "The precursors flood us, and our imagination can die by drowning in them, but no imaginative life is possible if such inundation is wholly evaded" (154). Concise, astute, and confident, it is a compelling theoretical statement. Still and all, our desire for the continuing theoretical relevance of *The Anxiety of Influence* legitimately demands that we attempt to periodically test it here and there. Such probes keep the theory of anxiety of influence supple, flexible and consequently applicable to new demands made upon it by new literary visions and practices. Thus, I find this exploratory probe to be valid in the Hemingway-Mailer case. Such probatory act, I hope, accords *The Anxiety of Influence* the attention it so highly deserves as germane to our current concerns.

This line of reasoning still demands further elucidation. In the essential chapter, "Clinamen or Poetic Misprision," in *The Anxiety of Influence* Bloom states:

What gives pleasure to the critic in a reader may give anxiety to the poet in him, an anxiety we have learned, as readers, to neglect, to our own loss and peril. This anxiety, this mode of melancholy, is the anxiety of influence, the dark and daemonic ground upon which we now enter. (25)

Elaborating further on the anxiety of influence, Bloom adds, "Poetic influence -- when it involves two strong, authentic poets, -- always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation" (30). Finally, he stresses, "The history of fruitful poetic influence ... is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist" (30).

These are strong arguments, well conceived and confidently stated. Sweeping in their ramifications, they sound severe, determinant, even formidable, and daunting. All the same, I acknowledge their validity in a psychoanalytically inflected general theory of literary influence as being Oedipal in their origin and unfolding legitimately in one of their multiplicity of forms. Bloom underlines as inescapable the enormous influence writers undergo as they take on and internalize their literary culture and the accompanying psychological guilt that it causes. Importantly, citing Mailer as an example, Bloom informs us that

"The burden of government," [Samuel] Johnson brooded, "is increased upon princes by the virtues of their immediate predecessors," and he added: "He that succeeds a celebrated writer, has the same difficulties to encounter." We know the rancid humor of this too well, and any reader of *Advertisements for Myself* may enjoy the frantic dances of Norman Mailer as he strives to evade his own anxiety that it is, after all, *Hemingway all the way*. (28, emphasis added)

Oddly, in “First Advertisements for Myself,” the introductory piece to *Advertisements for Myself*, what Bloom perceives as Mailer’s “frantic dances” would seem to me to be akin to frantic ritualistic lingual dances. Mailer performs them to bring about a kind Jungian metanoia or spiritual conversion to restructure his divided psyche and bring about self-healing and renewed creative energy. The “rancid humor” of it derives from the struggles of the psyche of a writer torn apart between a sense of failure and megalomania. “Defeat has left my nature divided,” declares Mailer, “my sense of timing is eccentric, and I contain within myself the bitter exhaustions of an old man, and the cocky arguments of a bright boy. So I am everything but my proper age of thirty-six, and anger has brought me to the edge of the brutal” (*Advertisements* 17). On the other hand, he immediately confesses, “In sitting down to write a sermon for this collection, I find arrogance in much of my mood,” which is perhaps an understatement (*Advertisements* 17).

Later, as it was his inclination, Mailer extravagantly predicts: “it is my present and future work which will have the deepest influence of any work being done by an American novelist in these years” (17). His contradictory statements make intelligible a psychological swing between defeat and a sense of manic exaltation, a type of bipolar depression that to a lesser degree he may have shared with Hemingway. It detracts from his confidence in his claim of eventual superior influence and puts it in question. Even so, I would say his vacillations in self-assurance are much to his credit. Because sad to say, for him and for us, Mailer came to acknowledge later in life that his prediction that his work would have “the deepest influence” among his contemporary writers has not yet come to pass.

On a certain plane of critical thought, one may argue that *Advertisements for Myself* constitutes Mailer’s own treatise on influence. In a letter to George Plimpton, Hemingway refers to the book as “the sort of ragtag assembly of his [Mailer’s] rewrites, second thoughts and ramblings *shot through with occasional brilliance*” (Hemingway 912, emphasis added). If by “ragtag” Hemingway meant that the

book's contents were diverse and lacking in cohesion in appearance or composition, that might well have been true. The fact, however, remains that Mailer intentionally structured *Advertisements for Myself* as such, as he also did in *Cannibals and Christians*. Yet, Hemingway's remark on the text being "shot through with occasional brilliance" is right on the mark. Mailer's attempts in this text culminate in discovering and establishing a viable dialectical synthesis between himself and Hemingway as man and writer. Mailer's articulation of the subject falls into that hard-earned occasional luminosity of *Advertisements for Myself*. Did Hemingway realize this in his own way? It is entirely possible.

Mailer's own sense of "defeat" will not cease tormenting him unless and until his struggle to come to grips with Hemingway's presence finally came to a satisfactory end. "Every American writer," writes Mailer plainly and somewhat plaintively, "who takes himself to be both major and macho must sooner or later give a faena which borrows from the self-love of a Hemingway style" (17). "Faena" is an unusual but pertinent word to use here in connection to Hemingway and the way Mailer proposes to deal with his own contemporaries. Faena denotes a series of final ritual passes at the bull that a matador carries out in bullfighting. It occurs immediately before the *kill*, the decisive "moment of truth," to highlight a matador's skill. On the other hand, it was also a matter of "a faena which borrows from the self-love of a Hemingway style." It connotes at the same time a moment of pride in the truth of accomplishment as well as exhibition narcissism and a touch of brutality. The main point is that Mailer lays claim to Hemingway's vision through the agency of his own interpretation of it. It will make it possible for him to acknowledge his kinship with Hemingway for better or for worse and for good and keeps. He tells his readers, "I have come finally to have a great sympathy for the Master's irrepressible tantrum that he is the champion writer of this time, and of all time, and that if anyone can pin Tolstoy, it is Ernest H." (19).

Confining myself to the framework of this essay, I would propose that *Advertisements for Myself* is Mailer's valiant manner of confession of Hemingway's influence upon him and his mode of self-initiation into a visionary hermeneutic appropriation. It has the characteristics of an unrestrained literary inspiration, a supple and open conversion. Fundamentally, it represents a writer's chosen manner of self-transformation and regeneration as a genuine response to another writer's thought and work. It does so without any illusion, compromise, and least of all sentimentality. In no way does such a conversion imply loss of creative uniqueness and loss of creative integrity, just the contrary.

In relation to Bloom's general theory of influence, I would relegate Mailer's visionary hermeneutic appropriation of Hemingway to the category Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls "the state of exception." Agamben defines it in reference to Saint Paul's word "*katarego*," roughly translated as "I deactivate" in his First Letter to the Corinthians. Agamben calls it "messianic *katargesis*," or messianic deactivation (104). He further clarifies it as a "law that is simultaneously suspended and fulfilled." I find it reasonable to compare "messianic *katargesis*" and visionary hermeneutic appropriation. Both concepts fully connote coexistent fidelity and flexibility. As Agamben points out, "In our tradition, a metaphysical concept, which takes as its prime focus a moment of foundation and origin, coexists with a messianic concept, which focuses on a moment of fulfillment" (103-4). What sanctions such coexistence "is the idea that fulfillment is possible by retrieving and revoking the foundation, by coming to terms with it" (104).

VIII. Mailer's Visionary Interpretive Appropriation and the Oedipus complex as "the State of Exception"

In an interview, Mailer scholar and critic Michael Lennon elicited from Mailer the following keen remarks on the perception of his relationship to Hemingway:

The more I know about writing, the more of an achievement Hemingway's style becomes to me. I know his flaws inside out. I've loved and hated him *as if he were my own father* for years. There is much he did for one, so much he did not do. *Truly the relationship you have to him is as a father.* But he is a remarkable writer. His sense of the English language, I'd say, is virtually primitive in its power to evoke mood and stir the senses. (*Pontifications* 161, emphasis added)

Now the question arises: Are there detectable traces of Oedipal guilt and its ensuing anxiety in visionary hermeneutics appropriation that I attribute to Mailer in relation to Hemingway? My answer is a qualified yes. Freudian psychoanalysis has taught us that Oedipus complex is a universal *concept*, not merely a restricted, localized, conditional notion. As such, it affects us all. It would be then justifiable to remind ourselves that the extent of Oedipal guilt and the severities of its effects may vary widely. The differentials of the extent and intensity of Oedipal guilt affect its attributes and acuity. As Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (1912-1913) has recognized, the ritual slaying of the father and the birth of Oedipal guilt among the primitive horde were not the only results or the most momentous of the parricide they had committed. The sons also engaged in subsequent rituals of atonement for their irreversible and unforgivable deed. Hence, the killing of the primal Father was an immensely ambivalent act. They partook of the totemic meal as an act of atonement. It was not in the least purely a revengeful killing and cannibalistic devouring of the father's body. The totemic meal set in motion an initiation into the mysteries of consuming the Father's body for its revitalizing and self-generating powers.

Within this context, the killing of the Father and partaking of his flesh and blood were essentially rituals of appropriation of his magical powers as their patrimony through *embodying* and *incorporating* his body within their own. Partaking of the totemic meal was then not an altogether negative ritual, far from it. Parallel to patricide, but going in the opposite direction, another force lurked behind the bloody

murderous event, which paves the way for a wider hermeneutics of patricide among the primitive horde. The sons also interpreted the killing of the Father and partaking of his body as rituals of corporeal integration, identification and oneness with him. This interpretation bore all the distinguishing marks characteristic of the sacrificial and the sacramental.

In summary, the totemic meal for the primitive horde initiated by murder also emphasized rituals of sacral nourishment, recreative strength, and salvation. At the center of it all appears to have been the principal of *redemptive atonement*, which approximated a mode of “sacrament of reconciliation,” to borrow a term from Roman Catholicism. The redemptive atonement prevented parricidal guilt from bordering on permanent paralysis and enslavement by anxiety and guilt. In our time such work can be accomplished by analysis or self-analysis, as was Freud’s case

In a parallel fashion, the permanence of the work of art has so far established potent traditions that exercise massive patriarchal powers. Specifically, the literary work of art within a linguistic community tends to firmly fix us within its scriptural power and its authority. Such authority parallels that of the slain Father of the primal horde, as Mailer so astutely discerned in Hemingway. When allied with our own unconscious desires, this authority internalizes itself and becomes psychologically astonishingly compelling. It is then likely to lock our literary creative impulses within its sway. Frequently, such a psychological internalization of the symbolic father succeeds in doing so at the expense of our own imaginative potentials. Literary traditions imbed and enclose us in clusters that are analogous to our given genetic matrix with their spider’s web of mysterious determinative effects.

What confronts creative writers such as Mailer and Hemingway before him is to establish a new fictional world inhabited by human beings who seek knowledge and understanding in the midst of perplexities of their anguished life. At its best, such a world generates a new way of rethinking the origin and nature of literary and cultural traditions, which opens up a new horizon of human experiential

knowledge. In fiction, such a goal can only realize itself through exploration and development of new themes and their attendant stylistics. The problematic of coming into possession of the vast inherited wealth of literary tradition and surpassing it pose creative difficulties. For some writers, these difficulties are insurmountable, because they demand a mysterious alchemical inner process of transformation of the writer's literary inheritance. Ready acceptance or radical rejection of literary influence sets up a psychological dialectic from which tensions surface in a writer's lived experience of Oedipal guilt and its inevitable anxiety. Bloom's genius lies in having so brilliantly detected and explicated this problematic.

From this perspective, visionary hermeneutic appropriation allows a writer such as Mailer to transform or at a minimum negotiate with the given as the received body of preceding literary works. In this fashion, Mailer could manage to be paradoxically, much like Hemingway, both old and new and come to grips with the determinism of Oedipal guilt. Symbolically, one might say that Mailer much like the primitive horde appropriated the Father's body, mainly Papa Hemingway's, in order to support his own life of imagination. For that reason, Mailer rightly did not perceive the process as direct imitation but rather interpretive appropriation.

To put it somewhat differently, the warp and woof of influence may be at once *determining and liberating*. Adherence to literary philosophy as interpretive appropriation on the part of the writer and the reader is the decisive liberating agent in the enterprise. We are all rooted in some dialectic of determinism versus freedom in everything we do, particularly as artists and innovators. At the same time, the dialectical synthesis in artistic works may turn out to be more on the side of freedom. Surely, everyone may undergo changes, evolve, or devolve in spite of certain inherited biological, psychological, and affective patterns of inherited predispositions. Yet, the creative person maximizes this potential of evolvment into large expanses of radical transformations thorough interpretive acts.

More specifically, an imaginative inclination toward hermeneutics of influence is tantamount to permitting the inflow of creative achievements of another writer to inscribe itself on one's consciousness. Such influence serves as a springboard for one's own creativity. The knowledge thus acquired is subject to further processes of internalization for adoption, rejection, or transmutation.

As a tribute to Mailer's own instinctive talent for theorizing, I would imagine that the moment of "poetic influence" also makes itself known to him as a specific and singularly privileged instance of rediscovery and reconfiguration of our world as well as remaining anchored in it. In Mailer's case, beyond "poetic influence" there are also strong illuminating occasions of reaffirmation of genuine creativity in acts of "active imagination," to use Carl Jung's language. In Mailer's case, active imagination is capable of alchemically transforming the state of hermeneutic appropriation to the ecstasy of creative conversion and self-discovery. In this context, one cannot but wonder if alchemy has not always been fundamentally about conversion as a creative process rather than a speculative philosophy and its attendant methodology of transmuting baser metals into gold. One may suggest that such alchemical states in the arts are moments of a crucial displacement and reintegration. They substitute the derivative *chronos* (clock time) and the Euclidean geometric space respectively with lived inner time (*kairos*) and inner space (*kenon*), as the Greek language designates them. Given that time and space provide the foundation of any conceivable reality, their phenomenological reappropriation frames the essential coordinates of a world of artistic creativity.

IX. Constitutive Theoretical Components of Mailer's Visionary Hermeneutic Appropriation

As a relatively young writer, Hemingway wrote, "A thousand years make economics silly and a work of art endures forever, but it is very difficult to do and now it is not fashionable." He added, however, "those who practice it now wish to cease their work because it is too lonely, too hard to do, and it is not fashionable" (*Green Hills* 109). As a creative writer with strong genuine intellectual

interests, Mailer was aware of the permanence of the literary arts too. He realized the enduring power of fiction beyond the circumstances of its origin, history of development, and public appearance. He recognized how they exert their considerable influence within literary traditions; and how they tend to firmly fix a writer within their scriptural authority in a given lingual community and often beyond it. He was also cognizant of the loneliness and difficulties that flow from the problematic of how to place oneself within the long line of language artists but remain free of their determining and often detrimental influence. Working out one's own identity as a creative writer was of great importance to him. Furthermore, Mailer could not remain passive to the increasing pressures being exerted by the new visual arts such as the cinema and particularly television and later the Internet, all of them vying for popular attention and relevance in competition with creative writing. He rightly predicted that the technological and electronic means of communication were increasingly making serious creative writing even less fashionable than it had been in the first half of the 20th century.

Mailer was most desirous to do creative writing that would simultaneously find a large readership and still shed light on matters hitherto unknown and therefore incomprehensible about the human condition. His tendencies to tackle such phenomena generate a knotty problematic for any writer. I would propose that Mailer's solution to the problems of philosophical fiction and fictional philosophy as well as the troublesome notions of the contemporary versus the traditional was to conceive creative writing as a type of advanced and advancing evolutionary process. There would be stages of development within which each writer finds himself or herself trying to deal with proper strategies of creative survival. From his vantage point, what would set apart such developmental stages would be the difficult choice between what is essential and nonessential in literary tradition. This choice in turn demands a balance between creative and constructive versus negative and deconstructive activities. In short, it boils down to an artistic preference between the established inherited literary

culture and the relentlessly emerging contemporary literary thematic and stylistic innovations. In view of that, Mailer would take from tradition what was strictly essential to him as a starting point. He would then embark upon remaking the inherited literary tradition in his own novel ways. It is somewhat similar to the ways that one may receive and dispense of one's familial inheritance. In *Advertisements for Myself*, Mailer writes:

[I]f I have one ambition above all others, it is to write a novel which Dostoyevsky and Marx; Joyce and Freud; Stendhal, Tolstoy, Proust and Spengler; Faulkner, and even old moldering Hemingway might have come to read, for it would carry what they had to tell another part of the way. (477)

It appears an extravagant and perhaps maniacal ambition. His gratuitous quick jab at Hemingway notwithstanding, in this passage Mailer makes an effort to position himself in the canonical ranks of his literary forbearers and contemporaries. Persuasively, they also include the historian Oswald Spengler and two towering figures of the 19th and early 20th century intellectual history, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. There is an evident suggestion in this selection of illustrious names of the necessity for Mailer to integrate the world of human knowledge and the literary sphere into an integral whole. In the interview "Literary Ambitions," he told Lemon:

I grew up under the shadow of Marx and Freud. Both men, independently, created an entire world system. *They had a vision of all existence.* That impressed me immensely. I was nothing if intellectually ambitious when I was young and wanted to come up with similar vision that would comprehend everything" (*Pontifications* 169, emphasis added).

In this passage, Mailer the creative writer meets Mailer the aspiring intellectual and putative theoretician. Even so, he was neither a philosopher nor a psychoanalyst, at least not in any restrictive sense of those terms. Nevertheless, as a novelist, he was keenly aware of the kinship of the world of

fiction and experiential reality in which the subject-object duality inheres as life. That unifying imaginative logic contained “worldmaking” powers for Mailer, to use Nelson Goodman’s terminology.

In Tolstoy and Stendhal, the imaginal geographies and histories of Russia and France found their well-integrated expressions in the melancholy accounts of war and peace. Spengler traced the history of the Western world through what he considered its downward spiral. Proust made the endless memory of things past his indisputable domain; James Joyce laid claim to Dublin of his youth as the capital of the world through the magic of fictional language. Karl Marx attributed Godlike powers to the dialectics of matter and history; and Sigmund Freud portrayed the unconscious as a phenomenon akin to a supernatural ruling principle of the psyche. Mailer was evidently conscious of their efforts and their achievements and anticipated a fictive synthesis of all that he knew of their works.

Each one of the writers cited by Mailer had attempted to totalize human existence and its surrounding world through the mediation of a specific interpretation of it. One way or another, they all allowed Mailer to have a steady view of the world in its totality albeit in his own idiosyncratic fashion and on the plane of the fictional. In this way, for Mailer, the logic of his own literary conception is at one with his understanding of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and history of his time. He believed he had “a coherent philosophy,” as he told Lennon, adding, “I believe we could start talking about virtually anything, and before we were done I could connect our subject to almost anything in my universe” (170). In *On God: An Uncommon Conversation*, Mailer’s attempt at arriving at a coherent literary philosophy eventually acquires the general dimension of a cosmology.

Among his contemporaries, Mailer mentions novelists William Faulkner and Hemingway. They too, each in his own way, valiantly sought to create an imaginal world that was whole and entire unto itself as fiction. Faulkner’s goal was to represent the entire history of a region, the American South, by his fictional Yoknapatawpha County. Just the same, Yoknapatawpha County surpassed all historical

and geographical boundaries and became universal in its wide array of human implications. Moreover, there was Hemingway, who as a young writer believed:

The great thing is to last and get your work done and see and hear and learn and understand; and write when there is something that you know; and not before; and not too damned much after. Let those who want to save the world if you can get to see it clear and as a whole. Then any part you make will represent the whole if it's made truly. The thing to do is work and learn to make it. (Hemingway, *Death* 278)

I should think this passage would be delightful music to Mailer's ears. Why? Because in my mind I hear the voice of the young Hemingway reaching out to Mailer over the years like a keening in the sky, rendering him spellbound. It is direct, hard-hitting talk. It honestly describes concerns of an unspeakably tough profession, whose agonies and ecstasies Mailer knew so well. For the young Hemingway, it was primarily the senses and then the comprehension that precedes understanding. It emblematically made possible mending a fragmented and constantly fragmenting world. Both writers instinctively knew that, after all is said and done, what remained for them to do was getting down on paper the relentless chaos of lived experience of the world and making some sense of it. It represents the great totalizing function of a writer of fiction and it is improbably hard work. It is a world in which a writer attempts to capture in language the experience of being a human being. For, as Heidegger reminds us "language belongs to the closest neighborhood of man's being" (189).

One would speculate that for Mailer the phenomenon of language as omnipresent and inexhaustible matrix of all significations made the "lifeworld" (*Lebenswelt* of German phenomenology), translatable into fiction. The interlocking of language and the lifeworld in fiction is correspondingly boundless. One may judge the enigmatic nature of the effect Hemingway has on Mailer to emanate mostly from his fictional world as lifeworld. What Mailer wanted was to *embody*, in the corporeal sense

of the word, as much as possible Hemingway's vision of this lifeworld on various levels of his own psyche. This embodiment carries all the dimensions existentialism attributes to being and having. The upshot of it delineated Mailer's *viva activa* and *viva contemplativa*. That is the reason why Mailer could maintain that he had his own worldview, philosophy, and cosmology. He meant it seriously.

Writing fiction offered both Hemingway and Mailer means of expressing a vision of experiential life that had the potential of becoming a part of the experience of the imaginative and attentive reader. No matter how compressed in Hemingway's case or dilatory in Mailer's their style might be, or how distinct their thematics, the practice of a new aesthetics of lived experience seems to give their fiction a discernible unity. In "The Existential Aesthetic," Mailer maintained that "of all of the philosophies, existentialism approaches experience with the greatest awe: it says we can't categorize experience before we have experienced it. The only way we're going to be able to discover what the truth about anything might be is to submit ourselves to the reality of the experience" (213). Mailer's statement is true whether one is a religious or an atheistic existentialist, because it is rooted in the phenomenology of experience, within whose expanses all experiences physical, psychical, and psychosomatic dwell. This new experiential aesthetic theoretically approximated the Quantum Mechanics of the fictional discourse.

In my view, for Hemingway and Mailer lived experience appears to be an unchangeable given of the human condition, which would fall within the concept of "facticity" (respectively *facticité* in French and *Faktizität* in German existential phenomenology) as one of the intractable constitutive elements of human life. Paradoxically, lived experience of facticity, *le vécu* of French phenomenology, bursts upon intentional human consciousness and can turn into the emerging ground of an alternative world through literary alchemy of interpretive activities. Hemingway and Mailer fully comprehended that fiction based on lived experience was the Tao of fiction, as it were, aiming to deal as it did with *the real of the real* and *the truth of the truth* through successive interpretations by the readers. I believe they both trusted

the validity and efficacy of this alternative fictional truth. What both Hemingway and Mailer found in such fiction was the possibility of expressing the inexpressible and comprehending the seemingly incomprehensible that escaped the specialized, conceptual discourses of their time that further splintered our world.³

For my part, I believe Mailer shared a vision of fiction with Hemingway which, primarily constituted by lived experience, became a persuasive ontology in its own right. Within such fiction, the body became the psychosomatic foundation of lived experience, making possible an indissoluble union with the natural world. This corporeal comprehension presented a universal oneness that verges on the mystical for both writers. This oneness legitimately permitted Hemingway and Mailer to go at once beyond the trappings of positivism, realism, *and* solipsism -- no small triumph by any standard. Such fiction miraculously invades the interstices of imaginal spacetime through its inexhaustible connotative potential of language. Both writer, one after another, discovered in such vision of literature what Carl Jung has called alchemy's "holy technique."

X. Mailer's Interpretation of the Notion of Manhood and Hemingway's "Discipline"

In *Advertisements for Myself*, Mailer wrote:

I was one of few writers of my generation who was concerned with living in Hemingway's discipline, by which I do not mean I was interested in trying for some second-rate imitation of the style, but rather that I shared with Papa the notion, arrived at slowly in my case, that even if one dulled one's talent in the punishment of becoming a man, it was more important to be a man than a very good writer, that probably I could not become a good writer unless I learned first how to keep my nerve, and what is more difficult, learned how to find more of it. (265)

Mailer's long and intuitively argued sentence aims at the truth of his own assessment of himself as man and writer. His analysis of Hemingway's "discipline" allows him to recreate it as his own by living it from within and accepting its punishing demands. The Hemingway "discipline" as Mailer sees it is a matter of existing "in-situation," of being consciously subject to the givens of a writer's life, and of transcending these givens through keeping one's nerves and engaging in lifelong reconciliation with them in sober *and* inventive give-and-take operations. From an existential standpoint, unpredictability describes the most exigent aspect of being in-situation (*in situ*). Mailer was acutely aware of this condition and its attendant dread. In "Existential Aesthetic," his interview with Laura Adams, Mailer pointed out, "we find ourselves in an existential situation whenever we are in a situation where we cannot foretell the end" (213). He apprehends being in-situation as a courageous existential mode of engaging in acts of becoming a man. These are acts, whose foremost qualities are unpredictability and radical doubt, which require that our mind and body remain unbreakably whole in an unspeakably broken world. That wholeness comprises the secret of the emergence and survival of a truly good and strong writer as well as a warrior.

The mind-body continuum as the primal presence of the human "being-there" in the world is then the essence of Hemingway's discipline. I suspect that Mailer was empathetically projecting upon Hemingway what he himself already desired or possessed from the beginning as a large but somewhat inchoate and slumbering unconscious drive. As a result, Mailer believed the most effective way of being an authentic writer was to fulfill the highest potentials of his gender physically as well as psychically, an implausible combination of Muhammad Ali and Albert Einstein in their prime. His life revolved around becoming fully man in this sense, subjecting himself to obsessive punitive masculine trials such as boxing and everyday acts that he deemed to be markedly brave.

He deemed courage, boldness, and honor to be indispensable to attaining in its fullest sense the primeval promise of being human. As he clearly expresses it in *Cannibals and Christians*, “Masculinity is not something given to you, something you’re born with, but something you gain. And you gain it by winning small battles with honor”; that is to say, with everyday valor (201).

Clearly, the same logic of gender potential applies to women as women and as writers. One can equally say that “femininity is not given to you, something you’re born with, but something you gain.” This assertion is reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion that “One is not born a woman, but rather becomes, a woman” (267). Admittedly, there may be differences between Mailer and Beauvoir’s statements, but the general thrust of them is identical. They attest that mere physiological aspects or societal determinations of one’s sex do not totally determine the possibilities of one’s gender possibilities. Regardless of gender, all writers make daunting forays into the vast mysterious terrains of human life through language and imagination housed in the unimaginably elaborate mind-body labyrinth. If genuine, these forays put all serious writers endlessly in extremis.

From the depth of the preceding elucidation of Mailer’s interpretation of Hemingway’s discipline surfaces a specific philosophy of creative writing. I detect in it the upsurge of a concept of mind-body integration that anchors writers squarely in the world and confers upon them the courage to be and to write. The implications of this concept call for a brief amplification.

XI. The Body and Its Implications

[T]he human being even as he or she dreamed or theorized was unmistakably a bag of guts, with motor devices and pleasure-seeking organs attached.

--Malcolm Bowie (*Lacan* 15)

I have pointed out that in Mailer’s philosophy of the art of creative writing the desired developmental process of becoming a man is one of day in, day out battles fought well and honorably. Such freely

chosen fights are adventures into the unknown because their results are uncertain. But whether they are won or lost, they always bestow upon the fighter-writer an audacious new way of being human. Of the role of the body within such fights and its vicissitudes Mailer wrote, "Writing impinges on ... [the] body; writing depends ultimately on ... [the] body" (*Spooky* 126). Further Mailer discloses, "I believe that [the body] is one reason I've been so interested in prizefighters," (*Spooky* 125-26). The import of Mailer's disclosure about the relationship of writing and body by extension applies to boxers, bullfighters and other athletes where Hemingway's well-known observation that equates courage with "grace under pressure" holds true.

I see the philosophical sense of the concept of "discipline" in Hemingway and Mailer as an undividable psychosomatic fusion, which transcends the subjective-objective dichotomy so traditionally ubiquitous in Western philosophy. The embodied mind goes beyond what Mailer derisively thought would be practically the same as "to sit at a desk and squeeze words out of yourself" (125), a seemingly masturbatory activity. Mailer goes as far as saying, "I think one has to develop one's physical grace. Writers who are possessed of some may tend to write better than writers who are physically clumsy do. It is my impression this is so" (77). Additionally, it may well be so. For the human unconscious inhabits the body, regulating as it does vital organs, including the voluntary and involuntary functions of the brain.

Mailer tells us "Hemingway suffered from the honorable need to be the equal of his male characters, particularly since he used the first person so much" (*Spooky* 95). I believe that is because the mind and body for Hemingway also acted as one within the context of lived experience. It is also largely true of Mailer's fictional characters such as Stephen Rojack in *An American Dream*, even though Rojack does not entirely draw from his creator's experiences. In the inherent interest of rendering human existence more comprehensible, it may well be that on a certain plane of inclusion Hemingway

and Mailer found the aim of their fiction was to recognize the indissoluble union of the inorganic, organic and the psychical as the fundamental mode of our human presence in the world. As French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu also has noted the “body is the bedrock of the mind” (*A Skin for Thought*, 61). As such, the body calls forth an infinite series of corporeal relationships with the world, which immensely enriches Hemingway and Mailer’s philosophy of fiction.

It is of interest to note that even on the level of fantasy for Mailer the body finds its nearly final numinous expression in corporeal identification and communion with Hemingway in a roundabout way. In the *Fight*, his book on the Muhammad Ali-George Forman fight in Zaïre, Mailer wrote, “To be eaten by a lion on the banks of the Congo—who could fail to notice that it was Hemingway’s lion waiting down these years for the flesh of Ernest until an appropriate substitute had at last arrived?” (92).

XII. Conclusion

I trust that I have shown how Mailer’s visionary interpretation and consequent appropriation of Hemingway as man and writer comprise a mode of influence whose thrust and effects are genuinely original and creative. As such, it is a theoretical influence. By theoretical I would like to communicate mainly the etymological sense of the adjective in Greek as *theoria*, which conveyed an act of viewing or beholding, of having a vision that entitles the beholder to holding or possessing what is beheld in his or her own way. Thus it may be “Hemingway all the way,” but magically Mailer’s own visionary way, with all its startling twists, leads us always to territories best known to Mailer himself.

Notes

¹Following the logic of visionary appropriation in this essay, I am currently engaged in writing a study of Hemingway’s mode of influence on Nelson Algren.

²On Mailer's appreciation of Georges Simenon's detective fiction, see Dwayne Raymond's *Mornings with Mailer*, p.174. For more extensive discussions of Hemingway's meiotic stylistics and the role that the concepts of primal silence and invisible play in it see my articles "The Aesthetic of Silence: Hemingway's 'The Art of the Short Story' ," *The Hemingway Review* 3, no 2 (1984): 38-45, and "The Aesthetics of the Visible and Invisible: Hemingway and Cezanne," *The Hemingway Review* 5 no 2 (1986): 2-11.

³Please see my essay "The Prose of Life: Lived Experience in the Fiction of Hemingway, Sartre, and Beauvoir," *North Dakota Quarterly* 70.4 (Fall 2003): 140-165.

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