American Studies in Scandinavian, Vol. *14, 1982*:35–48

Gary Gilmore's Pilgrimage: A Study of Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song*

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Norman Mailer has waged a lifelong war against the social pressures that level human actions and dull senses and impulses. His quest for conceptual metaphors to diagnose the resulting "cancer" (as he calls it), has been equally persistent. Mailer is not content with describing or reporting. Ever since the mid-sixties he has insisted on re-creating contemporaneity by presenting his readers with fictional dramas in whose realization they (and the writer himself) have participated. To expose the collective guilt, to clarify ambiguities, and thereby cure the society of its diseases has been Mailer's grand, didactic scheme.

Gary Gilmore's refusal to waive his right to appeal for his life and his subsequent execution by the State of Utah in 1977 presented Mailer with a long-sought after theme. The title, The Executioner's Song, could have been different:

> Many years ago I wished to write a book called *The Saint and the Psychopath* and in time that book swelled to such proportions in my mind that I thought of a magnum opus to bear the monumental name: *A Psychology of the Orgy.* Ah, my *Psychology of the Orgy* reduced itself to the dimensions of an essay ["The White Negro", 1957]. ... Now [1968], the title comes back. It is a good fit – *The Saint and the Psychopath.* Because these are writings on two themes, violence and the mystical, writings about what is criminal and what is religious, and the root of my perception all those years ago ... was that the saint and the psychopath were united to one another, and different from the mass of men. They were closer to existence. They shared a sense of the present so powerful that memory, caution, precedent, tradition, commonplace, project, and future enterprise were nerveless before the sense of the present in their mind and body.

In their most incandescent states, they existed for the next breath, and so were indistinguishable. from one another: saint and psychopath – a murderer in the moment of his murder could feel a sense of beauty and perfection as complete as the transport of the saint.[1]

Even if the title differs, the program as outlined above bears distinctly on the content of *The Executioner's Song*. Its protagonist develops, through a murder, into a mystic and a public saint. The following essay will attempt to analyse this process and position the varied stations along his allegorical route. It will rehearse Mailer's obsession with the oppositions and paradoxes in the American psyche, recall his hatred of unauthentic and anonymous violence, and place the novel in the continuum of his work in progress.[2]

Gary Gilmore is paroled after having spent eighteen of the last twenty-one years behind bars (he is now 35 years old). We settles down in Provo, in the "Mormon Kingdom of Deseret," among relatives, who find him odd jobs, and friends. Subjected to their missionary care and love, he rebels. His rebellion is initially socially acceptable: stealing, fighting, excessive drinking. Constantly needing to prove himself physically, he wrestles, brags about stabbing a black man (an episode Mailer has him retell four times), and picks fights that become increasingly brutal. He nearly kills Pete Galovan, who accuses him of fostering unacceptable sexual impulses when he befriends a teenage girl. The fight with Pete, the disenfranchised Mormon freak, is a symbolic precursor to Gary's murder of Max Jensen and Ben Bushnell, they too being Mormons. Gary's two-and-a-half-month freedom trip proceeds, then, from social integration to disintegration. There is a parallel pattern in his relationship with Nicole Barrett. In her he encounters another outcast and rebel, in fact, his superior as a taboo-breaker and sexual virtuoso. He cannot satisfy her sexually and fears his impotence both as a lover and a man. Mailer's portrayal of Nicole as the Bitch places her in the company of other stock female characters, such as Cherry (*The American Bream*) and Marilyn Monroe (*Marilyn*). Gary's frantic, unfulfilled sexual performances are juxtaposed with the magic of her sex. She deserts him. This is central to the allegorical structure of the novel. Gary has to regain his manliness, a quality which for Mailer is synonymous with ideas such as courage and creativity.[3] It is July and the days are long and hot. Gilmore shoots and kills the gas-station attendant and the

motel clerk, two men who through their social and religious functions symbolically represent the very core of American middle-class consciousness. " 'This one is for me', he said and fired! 'This one is for Nicole', he said and fired again. The body reacted each time." (224)

As Mailer has let us understand it is the psychopath in Gilmore that commits the crime, a crime that has a justification of its own. Mailer's manifestoes in the "White Negro" essay are intrinsically relevant for an understanding of the "poetic justice" of death:

> The only life-giving answer is to accept the terms of death, to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on an uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self. In short, whether the life is criminal or not, the decision is to encourage the psychopath in oneself, to explore that domain of experience where security is boredom and therefore sickness, and one exists in the present, in that enormous present which is without past or future, memory or planned intention ...[4]

Gilmore in his attempts to find a rationale for his killing reverts time and again to the same "existential" notion: "it just seemed like it was the next move in a motion that was happening" (381), "if I feel like murder it doesn't necessarily matter who gets murdered" (351), and "murder is just a thing of itself, a rage and rage is not reason" (406). It is the situation in all its complexities that conditions Gilmore to act, spontaneously, instinctively, primitively. It is a movement necessitated by the previous move, as logical as a child's natural and unhampered behavior. Subconsciously, the psychopath seeks to give "expression to the buried infant in himself" and lessen the tension of his "infantile desires."[5] Gilmore's attraction to Nicole, and indeed to many other teenage girls in the novel, reads then symbolically as a search for the "source of creation" or, on his personal level, a longing to re-establish his own childhood that society, by locking him in a reformatory school at the age of 14, never recognized. But his pre-murder love for Nicole, socially stigmatized and sexually warped, needs to be replaced by an outward action for his love to survive and expand. "I killed Jenkins and Bushnell because I did not want to kill Nicole" (691), says Gilmore in another attempt to rationalize his crime. Killing then is Gilmore's ultimate way of securing Nicole's love.

> At bottom, the drama of the psychopath is that he seeks love. Not love as the search for a mate, but love as the search for an orgasm more apocalyptic than the one which preceded it.[6]

Any action originating in an inner impulse, even the taking of life, can generate new life, love, and spiritual rebirth. This is one of the metaphors that this novel begs us to consider. Gilmore killed, Mailer suggests, to purge himself of the violence, to provide room for a love that transcends its normal implications. Is the nation reciprocally freed from its "guilt" in killing Gilmore, Mailer asks? Gilmore's journey symbolizes the metaphorical dialectics in society between the human urge and the communal program to modify it.

The preliminary hearings that are held in Provo state the obvious: Gilmore is guilty of First Degree Murder. So the question is: will he be sentenced to death or a lifetime in prison? But Gary cannot accept "life" in prison. The deadening routine of the system is oppressive and destructive:

> Oh, Nicole, there comes a time where a person must have the courage of their convictions. You know I've spent about 18 years of my 35 locked up. I've hated every moment of it but I've never cried about it. I never will. But I am tired of it, Nicole. I hate the routine, I hate the noise, I hate the guards, I hate the hopelessness it makes me feel, that anything and everything I do is just to pass the time. Prison maybe affects me more than most people. It drains me. (4734)

Gilmore will challenge the system by, paradoxically, letting punitive society have its elementary and ultimate victory. "I am going to make them do it. Then we'll see if they have as many guts as I do" (358). The position that Gilmore adopts is typical of all of Mailer's heroes. The coupling of "creativity" with "rebelliousness" and the life-and-death metaphors interspersed throughout the novel define the course that Gilmore will take. Through a series of confrontations and conquests he will regain his ability to love and create. His position will be heightened by each single combat. And each adversary will, by contrast, define some of the oppositions that haunt American society.

He first deals with h'icole. The sacrificial murder must restore male supremacy, which, in Mailer's sexual politics, yields equality of an order that is both permanent and mystical. It is from the inside of the cell on Death Row that Gary captures Nicole. Through the medium of a stream of letters, and a few meetings, lie hammers home the point that they are kindred spirits, doomed to a bondage that obeys only spiritual laws. He repeatedly refers to his childhood dreams about being executed:

> When I was a child ... I had a nightmare about being beheaded. But it was more than just a dream ... Recently it has begun to make a little sense. I owe a debt, from a long time ago. (305, see 137)

Gilmore is convinced that he has committed a crime in a past life and that this crime has repeated itself. The only redemption is human sacrifice. "I feel I have to atone for the thing I did then," he tells his Mormon lawyer (490). This belief in blood atonement is one aspect of Mormonism, which was to have a great impact on Gary. Nicole, like Gary, was born in a community imbued with Mormon ideology. Although they revolted against its authoritarianism, they shared some of its ethics, such as the faith in the individual's choice to improve by acts of goodness while on earth to gain wealth and power in another world. Of course, "acts of goodness" are very much to be conceived in the American context, which, Mailer implies, is basically congruent with Mormonism. And the Mormons, being oriented towards punishment, blood atonement, and reincarnation would encourage Gilmore to go along with his decision. "We always have a choice, don't we?" Gilmore insistently contends in his letters to Nicole (305), as if asking for her own commitment. His persuasion works through innuendos. Only four days after the first letter, he mystically alludes to their first meeting in July as "a recognition, a re-newal, a reunion" (329). But their terrestrial encounter will, he soon suggests, be replaced by a relationship stripped of all emotional content.

> Nicole, I believe we always have a choice. And I choose, that when I die, or change form, or whatever best describes this being called death, I choose that I wait for you, that I find you. (345)[7]

At this stage Nicole makes one of her many unsuccessful attempts to commit suicide. At the time of the main trial in October, Nicole is under Gary's command. Her own sexuality is crippled. Eventually Gary tells her to stop having sex with other men. She obeys. This is how he conceives their future meeting and the nature of his own paternal and virile role:

> I intend and expect to become instantly in your physical presence – wherever you are at the time. I will do all in my power to calm and soothe your grief, pain, and fear. I will wrap my very soul and all of the tremendous love I feel around you. You are not to go before me, Nicole Kathryne Gilmore. Do not disobey me. (514)

What Gary has in mind is what the Mormons call "celestial marriage," a marriage that is not disrupted by death, but constituted for eternity. A number of images and symbols in Gary's letters to her reinforce his assumption that their relationship is to

become that of husband and wife. Again, his rise to a higher plane in the hierarchy that – he expected – waited for him would postulate marriage.

On 15 November, the day Gary would have been executed had not the stays of executions intervened, he and Nicole attempted joint suicide by swallowing sleeping-pills. Gary's attempt was only half-hearted; Nicole is locked up in an asylum where she is to stay till after the execution, enslaved and controlled by her aspiring saint. In the Salt Lake *Tribune*, the following note was inserted: "Gary Mark Gilmore was described Wednesday as another 'Charles Manson' by Mrs. Barrett Nicole's mother" (613). Gary has transformed his Bitch into a tame White Angel. This process has vitalized him, impoverished her. Gary's first conquest has been accomplished. Mailer uses Nicole as an index of Gary's moral development.

There are more combats to be won. Gilmore's state-appointed lawyers Snyder and Esplin threaten his "right to die." He ridicules them as "puppets" (403, 422, 477) or functionaries, basically insensitive to his wishes. He refuses to co-operate. His refusal to allow Nicole to testify and thus have his behavior at the time of the crime considered "psychotic," means that the lawyers are unable to humanize him. To the jury at the Mitigation Hearing he appears judicious and perfectly sane. "I resist having my intelligence insulted," is his answer to his lawyers' legal machinations. (414). The verdict is quilty. And the death sentence is passed, to be carried out on 15 November by shooting. Gary now fires the two lawyers, who, nevertheless, file a petition for an appeal. The Utah Supreme Court rules to stay the execution.

This is one of the momentary setbacks in Gary's journey to peace and personal salvation. But each setback entails repercussions that launch him into new acts of progression. His determination to go on with it is paranoid, but functional and positive.[8] Gary can only survive if he succumbs to certain cliché American mythic roles. One heroic impulse is to combine spiritual grace with material success. That the society surrounding him so frivolously subscribes to his manipulations indicates its reverence for these values. The people around him weaken or degrade themselves in letting the hero wander free and resourceful. This is Mailer's concept of a debilitating American society confused by guilt. Having fired the two defence lawyers, Gary chose his own. Dennis Boaz had the qualifications needed. He believed in capital punishment, when

"properly applied" (512), in reincarnation, in karma; he declares himself a writer first, a lawyer second. Me will serve Mailer's (and Gilmore's) purpose in a number of ways. On his way to Capitol Building in Salt Lake City to present the judges with his new case and make them change their mind about the stay, he ruminates over the implications of the surroundings. It is Mailer himself we are listening to:

> Once, the desert of Utah had been as beautiful as the deserts of Palestine in the Old Testament, but now it looked no better than the outskirts of Los Angeles. Shacky ranch houses stretched as far as the smog would allow the eye to see, and off to west were the smelters of Anaconda Copper pouring up into the pollution of the sky. Dennis really got it then. Those angels, Mormon and Moroni, meant More Money. No wonder the Mormons were getting to be the richest church in America. All that sanction to make More and More Money. Dennis giggled. His consciousness was now raised to deal with the Attorney General. (531)

He effectively plays upon the Mormon judges' wish to gratify a man who showed submission and willingness to be redeemed. They decided to lift the stay. However, the next day, the decision was overruled by the Governor of Utah, who asked the Board of Pardons to review the sentence at their next meeting. But Gilmore's choice of Boaz as his "defence lawyer" was to prove beneficial. Boaz now starts sensationlizing Gary's death-wish in order to profit by it. The interest of the national mass media is aroused. Press conference are being held. Gary writes to Nicole the day before their unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide:

> Honey, I'm becoming very famous.
> I don't like it – not like this, it's not right. Sometimes I think I know about fame and how it feels because I was famous in a previous life. I seem to understand it. But I don't want to get to the point where we're enjoying fame and not being ourselves anymore. We are just GARY AND NICOLE and we've got to remember that. (561)

New vistas are now opening for Gary, of which he is only partly conscious at this stage. Boaz' rash statements ("I think executions should be on prime time television," 551) have alerted public interest. His speculations about the profits a dead Gilmore might provide him are cabled all over the country. "Boaz is my lawyer, but he is acting more in the role of an agent, press agent. It is all become like a circus," writes Gary to Nicole (556). Soon, however, Boaz, like Noah T. Wootton, the country attorney who prosecuted

Gilmore, starts to vacillate in his conviction about the righteousness of his commitment to Gary's cause (560, 605). As the "suicide saga" became known, "everybody was heading for Salt Lake, ready to check into the Hilton where each of the media monkeys could watch all the other monkeys" (595). Boaz is too provincial and amateurish to qualify to sit in that zoo. His part in the resurrection drama is over.

Gary is accommodating himself to death. His suicide attempt, poised and controlled, won him public recognition and dominance over Nicole. On other levels in the narration, it demonstrated the inferiority of the rational mode of being to the mystical. Prison cannot stop Gary's growth. Back from hospital, he starts a hunger strike to "dramatize that I am being kept away from the one person in the world who I truly care about" (668). With shrewdness and skill Gary manipulates his dealers and his audience. The Board of Pardons Hearing at the Utah State Prison is his great show. By this time Gary has found two new lawyers, both practising Mormons of course, called Moody and Stanger. Their mission is primarily to protect his vested business interests, which postulate a speedy execution. Contracts are now being negotiated and drawn up. The character Larry Schiller, famous photographer and motion-picture producer, who "saw Marilyn [Monroe] on the morning of her last day,"[9] sneaks stealthily into the scene, and, eventually, into the Death Row cell. Schiller is planning a film on Gary, the project "was like the expectation of sex when you were young" (655), he confesses. Schiller will remain close to his prey, like a hyena, to the end. Not unexpectedly Mailer uses animal imagery to deride the media coverage of Gilmore. We does not need to invent them; a local newspaper writes: "Carnival Atmosphere Surrounds Gilmore Movie Deal Weighed" (671). Ironically Mailer integrates the quote into his own text. Gilmore's impact on the audience and the American public watching the hearing on TV is decisive. His stance is cool and intellectual, precisely what: Americans might describe as "heroic."

> I simply accepted the sentence that was given to me. I have accepted sentences all my life. I didn't know I had a choice in the matter. When I did accept it, everybody jumped up and wanted to argue with me. It seems that the people, especially the people of Utah, want the death penalty but they don't want executions and when it became a reality they might have to carry one out, well, they started backing off on it. Well, I took them literal and serious when they sentenced me to death just as if they had sentenced me to ten years or thirty

days in the country jail or something. I thought you were supposed to take them serious. I didn't know it was a joke. (675)

Schiller is caught by the myths he himself is instrumental in making:

Everybody in that crowded, steaming, incandescent room fixed on him. He drew all eyes, all lenses. Schiller was now twice impressed with Gilmore as an actor. He did not rise to this occasion like a great ham actor, but chose to be oblivious of it. Merely there to express his idea. Gilmore spoke in absolute confidence of the idea, spoke in the same quiet tone he might have employed if talking to only one man. So it became the kind of acting that makes you forget you are in a theatre. (675)

The soap opera is applauded, particularly by Mormon society. Earl Dorius, Attorney General, is proud of convicting Gilmore, because "the convict also respected the situation." Furthermore, the Gilmore case enhanced his reputation. Mormon friends from all over the world were writing to him. He will be famous as the one who "saved" Gilmore, he dreams. Gary's triumph at the Board of Pardons Hearing, notwithstanding the neat vote of 3–2, was momentous. The new stay issued by the United States Supreme Court and the efforts on the part of the American Civil Liberties Union (the ACLU) to deny Gilmore the right to decide, only momentarily checked the course of events.

In mid-December the U.S. Supreme Court lifted the stay and Gary celebrated it by ending his hunger strike. The prison is now turned into a veritable theatre with Schiller as the scriptwriter. But it is Gary's scenario. Schiller records the interviews, sells them, prepares a book, virtually edits Gary's last weeks in life to suit the romance he requires for "merchandizing Gary Gilmore's Dance of Death" (718). "The man was somet ing of a carrion bird: Already he'd done business with Susan Atkins, Marina Oswald, Jack Ruby, Madame Nhu, and Lenny Bruce's widow" (718), Mailer observes. But the exploitation is reciprocal. Gary concedes to his cult figure role, patiently and mindlessly. It serves his case in several ways. His apt spiritual guide on Death Row, the Mormon Chaplain Cline Campbell, advises him to become a benefactor to those people he has wronged in his lifetime. This act will improve his position in the after-life, he preaches. So the "carrion" and the "bird" are interdependent. And the third part in Mailer's extended metaphor, the American public, are suffused with enchantment while watching.

At this stage in Gilmore's moral development, he has reached the level in his self-appointed hierarchy where he is the Lord and Master. "Overcoming fear is Truth," is a notion he rehearses in his talks (345, 474, 889), it sides you with gods, he says, because it provides total responsibility. Watching the emaciated figure of Jesu Christ in a picture, he recognizes himself:

> No halo, no radiant beam from heaven above. Just this extraordinary man – this ordinary human being who made himself extraordinary and tried to tell us all that it was nothing more than any of us could do. Loneliness and a hint of doubt seemed to fill the picture. I would like to have known the man in that picture. (387; cf. 785)

The image of the lone, self-centred rebel and Ubermensch attracted him. "Are you familiar with Nietzsche?" he asks his brother. "He wrote that a time comes when a man should rise to meet the occasion. That's what I'm trying to do, Mikal" (847). Characteristically, he discovers parallells between himself and men who have stepped out of the shadows into the limelight, like Julius Caesar, Napoleon, and Muhammed Ali (660, 789). Once in his life, and for the brief spell of three months, Gary Gilmore is a movie star without portfolio, a decent humane man, master of his own fate. "I am the Land Lord here," he exclaims, surveying his territory on Death Row (738). But Gary's expansionist vision far extends the worldliness of the cell. His last month is an extensive preparation for his reunion with his Angel and his initiation into the company of gods as a free and pure spirit.[10]

One month before the execution, Gary makes another attempt at suicide, in protest against the delay. This time the dose is lethal. Metaphorically Gary is testing the ground, inspecting the other domain, "talking to people, meeting people" (74%).Back in his cell he soon recovers and mockingly responds to the ACLU actions. He derides their seeming double standards on abortion and the death penalty, mocks their impersonal, dedicated fight for an idea, ridicules their stamina. "I invite you to finally butt out of my life. Butt out of my death. It does not concern you" (784). As Mikal and Gary's mother have decided not to intervene, the ACLU lawyers are left with the legal straws (arguing that Utah State's statute is unconstitutional, that the execution will prejudice other appeals, that the state uses the tax-payers' money to pay for Gary's death-trip), which they use – and fail. While Schiller sucks the last golden words out of Gary, the mass media, television vans, movie

reel people gather in front of the prison. "It is complete with a Barnum and Bailey circus atmosphere and movie rights, reserved seats, T-shirts ['Gilmore – Death Wish'] and love letters" (875). During the death watch Gary and his associates feast on whiskey and pizza. After the last supper Gary invites his cousin to a macabre "dance of death." The execution of Gary – by a number of anonymous civil servants – takes place in a room where the stage properties suggest the exit of the hero. "The room was lit, not brightly like a movie set, but lights were on him, and the rest of the room was dark. He was upon a little platform. It was like a stage" (979). Gary's pilgrimage is over. The speeches at his funeral are addressed to the memory of a saint, glorifying his virtues – dignity, charity, and love.

Gary's course after the murder exhibits the characteristics of a classic tragedy, involving a charismatic protagonist, secondary characters who serve as his foil, and an audience or a chorus who unwittedly revolt or applaud the stage action.[11] Gary is in the centre throughout, his restoration and moral rebirth form the active principle of the novel. Conversely, the personae evolving around him diminish through self-exposure or disappear confused, but awakened to their potentialities. Foremost among the opportunists are Boaz and Schiller, both sentimental poseurs, both fundamentally ignorant of and indifferent to the plight of the hero. Perhaps nowhere else in Mailer's endless diatribes against cheap journalism and mass media amusement is there such bitterness and sarcasm as in his portrayal of Schiller. The qualms he suffers because of his part in the drama suggest the agony of Claudius in Hamlet. Confronted by the moral courage of the hero, Schiller cries out for redemption and purgation.

> We had been saying to himself for weeks that he was not part of the circus [see 714, 719, 843], that he had instincts that raised him above, a desire to record history, true history, not journalistic crap, but now he felt as if he was finally part of the circus and might even be the biggest part of it, and in the middle of crying, he went into the bathroom and took the longest fucking shit of his life. It was all diarrhea. (857)[12]

Another couple, Moody and Stanger, belong to the same group. They are the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of the novel, to continue the comparison with Shakespeare. They are crooks, faltering, unprincipled, conformist, stark contrasts to the fierce individualism Gary demonstrates. Like Schiller, they are also illusionists, duped by their roles in an authentic event, which they read as a saga.

Stanger comes near to realizing this:

> He would have bet a million Gary Gilmore would never be executed. It had made his job easy. He had never felt any moral dilemma in carrying out Gary's desires. In fact, he couldn't have represented him if he really believed the State would go through with it all. It had been a play. He had seen himself as no more important than one more person on the stage. (974)

The secondary characters are all more or less static, exponents of rigid totalitarianism. A majority of them are Mormons believing it to be their God-given duty to act as Gary's intermediaries, thereby bettering their own chances of inheriting life as gods. Earl Dorius, Cline Campbell, Pete Galovan, and Mike Deamer, the prison officer in charge of the execution, are all fettered by their faith.

> He [Mike Deamer] liked to think he had been sent to earth as a person with a mission to do some good for the betterment of society. It was his hope he had been foreordained to be part of larger plan. (971)

Their function in the novel is twofold: first, to serve as Gary's foils; second, to personify the atrophy that, Mailer finds, accomodates and stifles human creativity. Mailer's treatment of the ACLU lawyers is less bitter, almost candid. Yet, their advocacy of individual freedom and choice conflicts with their fight to prevent Gary from enjoying his. Consequently, they also subscribe to a code that regulates opinions. So the liberal "eastern" voices and the reactionary "western" voices dispute issues unrelated to Gary. The American people, Mailer points out, abandoned him at the age of 14 when they sent him to reform school for breaking the glass in a school window. They are all without grace, evil and unconcerned with the plight of their fellow human beings. Mailer's positive credo from the late fifties that "each man is glimpsed as a collection of possibilities, some more possible than others ... and some humans are considered more capable than others of reaching more possibilities within themselves in less time, provided, and this is the dynamic, provided the particular character can swing at the right time" gives the protagonist Gilmore his credibility.[13] His "swing" generates a string of actions that are meaningful and mysterious. Yet, his extreme individualism makes him incongruous, almost a parody. Mailer's existential credo has grown bitter. It is as if *The Executioner's Song* is his final and desperate lesson, in a series of many, to demonstrate that man's creativity and ability to

love can only be maintained through adherence to existentialist metaphysics. There is doubt now. The potentialities implicit in the psychopath and his brother, the saint, are insufficient to combat the faceless executioners. Mailer's note from 1968, "Existential Legislation," written with "comic intent" needs to be reviewed:

> A law [was] passed which would abolish capital punishment, except for those states which insisted on keeping it. Such states would then be allowed to kill criminals provided that the killing is not impersonal but personal and public spectacle: to wit, that the executioner be more or less the same size and weight as the criminal ... and they fight to death using no weapons, or weapons not capable of killing at a distance. Thus, knives or broken bottles would be acceptable. Guns would not. – This law might return us to the finer questions of moral judgment. The killer would carry the other man's death in his psyche. 'The audience, in turn, would experience a sense of tragedy, since the executioners, highly trained for this, would almost always win. In the flabby American spirit there is a buried sadist who finds the bullfight contemptible – what he really desires are gladiators. Since nothing is worse for a country than repressed sadism, this method of execution would offer ventilation for the more cancerous emotions of the American public.[14]

NOTES

1 "The Saint and the Psychopath", in *Existential Errands* (Little, Brown and Company: Boston, Toronto, 1972), pp. 209–10. The book was intended as the third in the Dell series, including *The Short Fiction of Norman Mailer* and *The Idol and the Octopus,* but was never published. See Laura Adams, *Norman Mailer: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (The Scarecrow Press: Metuchen, N. J., 1974), p. 16.

2 It is, of course, disputable whether the book, strictly speaking, could be called a "novel." In Mailer's conception of "reality," "fact" and "fiction," however, merge and collaborate. So, characteristically, he is imprecise when attempting to classify the book. He refers to it alternatively as a "factual account" and a "true life story." But the *treats* it "as if it were a novel." (*The Executioner's Song,* Arrow Books: London, 1980, p. 1053; all subsequent references to the book will be noted parenthetically in the text). My reading of the book suggests that the term "novel" may be applied (cf. the progression of the hero; the use of secondary characters as foils; the impact of the milieu/ Mormonism).

3 See Jean Radford, *Norman Mailer: A Critical Study* (The Macmillan Press Ltd: London etc., 1975), pp. 123–159 on the Rojack–Cherry relationship which has its obvious parallels with that of Gary–Nicole; see also the chapter " 'Faceless Broads and Angels of Sex' " in Jennifer Bailey, *Norman Mailer: Quick-Change Artist* (The Macmillian Press Ltd: London etc., 1979), pp. 129–143, and the chapter "The Form of History" in Richard Poirier, *Mailer* (Fontana: London, 1971), pp. 63–114.

4 *Advertisements for Myself* (G. P. Putnam's Sons: New York, 1959), p. 339.

5 Ibid., p. 346.

6 Ibid., p. 347.

7 For Mailer's "metaphysics of the soul," see the fictional interview "The Political Economy of Time," in *Cannibals and Christians* (André Deutch: London, 1967), pp. 312–375.
8 Barry H. Leeds has charted Rojack's journey and pointed to a similar impetus, a paranoia. See *The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer* (University of London Press: London, 1969), pp. 125–177.
9 "A Note of the Photographs," *Marilyn: A Biography by Norman Mailer* (Hodder and Stoughton: USA, 1973).
10 Cf. Mailer, "Anyone who searches seriously for love comes to realize it is more difficult to find than the Holy Grail, or the way to Kafka's castle. So that is why Romeo and Juliet kill themselves, each separately, each by choice. They know they will not find such a love again in life." *Cannibals and Christians*, p. 347.
11 The Mailer "persona" is passive in this novel: he is in the audience.
12 See Mailer's "Metaphysics of the Belly" for an understanding of his scatological imagery, in *Cannibals and Christians*, pp. 262–299.
13 *Advertisements for Myself*, p. 353.
14 *The Idol and the Octopus: Political Writings by Norman Mailer on the Kennedy and Johnson Administration* (Dell Book: New York, 1968), p. 150. Cf. his poem "The Executioner's Song," in *Fuck You, Magazine of the Arts*, September, 1964, pp. 23–25, reprinted in *Cannibals and Christians*, pp. 131–2. The same metaphor is used in the poem. It is also interesting to note that the final round between Muhammed Ali and Foreman in *The Fight* (Hart-Davis, MacGibbon: London, 1975) is described as "The Executioner's Song."