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### ENTROPY IN THE FICTION OF NORMAN MAILER. A RECONSIDERATION

To call Norman Mailer an enfant terrible of the literary world reads like an outright cliché. Yet even if the term sounds euphemistic it is, arguably, the most adequate one available. For the truth of the matter is that his writing defies any conventional classification<sup>1</sup>. Over the years critics of different persuasions have variously tried to adapt it to their theses but none of the labels they have applied to Mailer has proved to be endowed with longevity. The cognomen of a war novelist fell into oblivion when the Beat Generation came of age, the Jewish minority culture could never claim the writer on grounds other than mere blood kin and the tag of New Journalism has covered only a fringe of his many and varied creative commitments. With the failure of these seemingly obvious choices to conveniently register Mailer in the catalogue of American literature, his critics seem to have got more discriminating but also generally more cautious. Hence in circulation a miscellany of such catch-words as: "moralist", "adventurer", "radical", "liberal", "romantic", "humanist", "Manichean metaphysician", to cite at random but a few.

Amongst the more recent criticism dealing with Norman Mailer's writing there has been, however, a noteworthy endeavour to classify him in the manner reminiscent of the earlier attempts at pigeonholing the writer. This is to concentrate on the widely known and influential book by Tonny Tanner, *City of Words, American Fiction 1950-1970*<sup>2</sup>.

The work considers at length "most of the more interesting novelists of the past two decades" (Tanner, 1971:11); eleven of them are given more exacting attention than the others presented in it and are respectively discussed in separate chapters. Although the critic intended these sections to function as self-contained analyses of the writers concerned (Tanner: 15) one cannot fail to notice that they bear quite heavily on one another. For, notwithstanding its impressive scope, *City of Words* is clearly none of a handbook but rather a kind of "thesis study" with its particular sections subordinated to the thematical leitmotif governing it.

As we learn from the Introduction, Tanner's search for "recurrent themes by which (he) could group writers or neat categories in which (he) could place their work" (ibidem) in his approach to contemporary American literature, was sparked off by the

obsessive image cluster of "clay, jelly, jellyfish"" (Tanner: 18) leading him on to the larger and more engrossing idea of "utter formlessness" (ibidem). This line of association finally brought the critic to the second law of thermodynamics-entropy, as offering a pattern most readily translating the main tendencies of the fiction under discussion. In his analyses Tanner has unspokenly singled out three novelists: Thomas Pynchon, Williams Burroughs, and Norman Mailer with whom, he argues, entropy is most clearly discernible. Although the chapters devoted to them are not given any notable spatial advantage, the three writers emerge from the book more distinctly than the others included in it. They count among five most often cited novelists throughout the study<sup>3</sup> and in the final analysis assuredly come forth as touchstones of Tanner's views. This is, briefly, how Norman Mailer's fiction has acquired yet another label, that of entropy. The critic makes quite clear that the term is purposely meant to perform denotative function:

...we may say that American novelists of the past two decades have shown themselves to be diligent and concerned entropologists.

(Tanner: 152, emphasis mine)

The present intention is not to castigate general expediency of entropy for literary analysis. Rather, this is to indicate limitations of its applicability by, hopefully, demonstrating an instance of its misdirection. Besides, by extending the whole argument I wish to attempt a systematic insight into what I believe to be the main aspect of Norman Mailer's fiction.

The very length of *City of Words* anticipates the range of the author's approach to recent American fiction with the Introduction giving a fair idea of its temper. The critic clearly aims at comprehension in his discussion of thermodynamics and leaves untouched hardly any field of knowledge pertaining to it. Thus the opening motion of "American writer's dread of all conditioning forces" (Tanner: 16) is given congenial anthropological, psychological, and linguistic dimensions. Entropy as such is exhaustively presented in a comparatively short interchapter of a theoretical nature which appears well into the book to substantiate and systematize the foregoing and on coming analyses. Apart from the power of his particular arguments, the crucial persuasive punch of Tanner's theory depends on the obvious invincibility of the process of entropy itself:

...the irreversible tendency of a system, including the universe, toward increasing disorder and inertness; also, the final state predictable from this tendency.

(Tanner: 141)

The main force behind entropy being chaos, the instinctive human urge to deny it gets naturally associated with the introduction of greater order into life. In the long run, however, this is bound to create uniformity and "may in fact accelerate entropy and not counter it" (Tanner: 143-144). Since organized collective initiative promises no success here, the logic of antithesis suggests that we try to achieve it through individual resistance, specifically, through the denial of the prevailing norms of our society. This might indeed prove a useful counterentropic gesture were it not for the fact that by doing so, Tanner explains, the individual is inevitably destined to "turn himself into an isolated system" (Tanner: 147); given that entropy tends to increase in isolated

systems, the persistent feeling is, the critic concludes, that "whatever the individual may do, he cannot but contribute to the entropic process" (ibidem).

Although in the chapter devoted to the writer Tanner seems to recognize the idiosyncrasy of his literary functioning and the sheer power of his creative personality, Mailer's whole fictional output is made to conform to the thermodynamic vision of reality. The critic does this so forcibly that at times he comes close to violating received literary categories. And so, *The Naked and the Dead* is not in his interpretation a war novel. We are given to understand that the American soldiers are not, in actual point of fact, confronted by the enemy forces. The obscure opening feeling allegedly haunting the men "it's a plot" (Tanner: 349) they are clashed with is said to become clear as the action develops to emerge in the end as the real theme of the book. Tanner's concluding comment openly implies that entropy should be recognized as the ultimate adversary, "seeking to bring (the troops) to a standstill, erase their identities, annihilate them altogether" (Tanner: 351). Mailer's other novels are discussed much in the same vein with the critic persistently tracing asserted "entropic tracks" in them. Finally Tanner comes to associate the writer with paralysis and helplessness (cf. *Literatura na świecie* 1976) in his supposed recognition of the fact that the invisible entropic forces directed against individuality and all man-made patterns are being ominously successful (Tanner: 147).

In the discussed attempt to promote Mailer as a major "entropologist", much is made of the fact that "entropy" actually appears as a lexical item in his literary vocabulary.

When Mailer is advancing his idea that the victory of God over the Devil is by no means certain, he states that either may win, or they might exhaust each other "until Being ceases to exist or sinks through seas of entropy into a Being less various, less articulated, less organic, more like plastic than the Nature we know".

(Tanner: 142)

To suggest that the novelist used the term unwittingly<sup>7</sup> would be an obvious oversimplification<sup>5</sup>. What can, nevertheless, be suggested to question the validity of the above argument is that Tanner has pressed the cited passage somewhat too forcibly into his service. For one thing, it pertains to Mailer's marginal essayistic writing and he does not "advance" in it his own idea ipso facto. The quotation on which the critic relies so heavily in his thesis<sup>6</sup>, but whose source he fails to acknowledge, comes from a series of essays Mailer wrote for *Commentary* on Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*. The discussion in which the term in question appears was, in Mailer's own words: written as an exemplification of "the heart of existential logic"; this alone sets the whole argument world apart from the essence of Tanner's theory (Mailer, 1966: 376).

As has already been motioned, Norman Mailer's affinity with entropy in literature is but superficial. Whereas it pictures a downright **pessimistic** view of reality, his fictional philosophy is fundamentally **affirmative**. The two chime in with each other only in their overall recognition of the world's crisis. Tanner assumes the forces behind it to be **impersonal** and the character of their operation **natural**; this clearly precludes any positive possibility of ever locating its roots, let alone countering it. Antithetically, Mailer views the contemporary plight as essentially **contrary to nature** and associates



its origins with man himself:

I think somewhere (...) man caught some illness of the psyche, that he betrayed some secret of his body and so betrayed the future of his species.

(Mailer, 1965: 165)

Last but not least, inherent in the second law of thermodynamics is the inevitability of death; central to Mailer's philosophy is the conviction that the present situation will find its catharsis in the inevitable revolution. As follows from the above, both Tanner's and Mailer's philosophies appear to be essentially eschatological in that the former professes the apocalypse of disaster, the latter one of hope. To describe its pattern and to show its novelistic functioning is the immediate purpose of the ensuing analysis.

Embryonic to Norman Mailer's whole body of thought is the apprehension that the contemporary world is in a dramatically precarious state of excessive chaos. In time the writer came to link it with the "cancerous" spirit of self-denial as having completely dominated modern men. This is precisely where his program of apocalyptic regeneration commences. Prerequisite, it calls upon man to explore his "rages and desires" and indeed, to cultivate them. For this is the only way to regain the long lost authenticity and, hopefully, achieve the state of self-realization. This is going to assure, Mailer believes, satisfying individual integrity<sup>7</sup>. Recognizing its difficulty and sheer scope of the endeavour, the writer postulated that the whole idea must amount to no less than a "universal rebellion" (Mailer, 1972: 262). According to the adopted train of thought he conceived of it as originating in the consciousness of the individual. Given impregnably to the thesis of sex being the primary human motivating force, Mailer specified further that the only revolution natural for the twentieth century could be sexual revolution (*ibidem*). This is what the novelist arrived at in the beginning of what can be conventionally termed as the middle period of his career<sup>8</sup>. These ideas proved complementary to the idiosyncratic theory of masculinity which he had developed in his early fiction. Based essentially on tenets of power and violence, it offered effective service as a launching pad for the above program. This is how Norman Mailer's fictional philosophy came to be inextricably dependent on principles of power, violence, and sex. Suggestively bordering on one another, the three elements form in his rendering an esoteric mechanism intended as a weapon against the forces of prevailing chaos. In its literary application the concept proved to amount to the task of delineating a „convincing" hero who would paradigmatically live it out. The process parallels and, in fact, aptly reflects the way Mailer's philosophy was coming of age.

Norman Mailer's first published book, *The Naked and the Dead*, appears so strikingly different from virtually all of his subsequent literary endeavours as to call in question the viability of any significant link between the writer's debut and the main body of his output. Acutally, some of the ideas central to his mature writing originate precisely in the above novel. The one presenting itself most readily is probably that of chaos, unmistakably making its archetypal appearance in it<sup>9</sup>. Also, in the final analysis, the book turnus out to have laid the foundations of Mailer's diagramatic hero. This is to concentrate on the seemingly lesser figure of Sergeant Croft. An embodiment of sheer power and violence, he does not come anywhere near their conscious mastery, but instinctively resorts to them to unwittingly ensure his personal integrity. Furthermore,

Croft's hatred towards "everything which was not in himself" (Mailer, 1958:130), and his unusual intimacy with death also found some of the crucial aspects of the "revolutionary personality mould" which Mailer came to develop in his later fiction. Also, as if foreshadowing its future metaphysical colouring, there was a crude, mysterious vision in Croft's soul (Mailer, 1958: 378). Not only does this further substantiate our choice of Croft as the most idio-syncratic figure of *The Naked and the Dead* but is suggestive of the state in which Mailer's own "vision" was at the time. Much like Croft's undirected energies, his creative dash seemed to have been somewhat at a loose end at the time. Soon, however, he proved to be knowingly shaping the course of his literary development.

Out of all the qualities the writer introduced to his fiction through Croft the one he came to expand most considerably was his sexual „dimension". In Mailer's second novel, *Barbary Shore*, sex, though more memorably present than in the first one, still does not come quite to the foreground, remaining essentially subordinate to the expression of a larger idea<sup>10</sup>. Never afterwards was this situation to occur in his writing again. Mailer stopped using sex-life merely to illustrate modern chaos; regarding at first its state as just one of many symptoms of the plight he soon discovered it to be its very source. This new awareness made itself manifest in Mailer's third fictional endeavour, *The Man Who Studied Yoga*. The hero of the story „tried many things" for he always „wished to be of consequence in the world" (Mailer, 1972:145). But after ten years of married life Sam Slovođa found himself imprisoned in a „stifling impasse", tangled in the „dusty web of domestic responsibilities", finally: „doomed to the fashion of the moment" (Mailer, 1972:145–146). Sam's understanding of his situation was even more acute, he did not put the blame for his failure in life on "...the boss, the world, or bad luck"; wistfully, if too generally, he realized that "its source comes from oneself" (Mailer, 1972:152). For even as a young man he never did anything „with a whole heart", always lived in such a way as to „avoid pain", only to „avoid pleasure" (Mailer, 1972:171). Although totally subjugated by the forces of mediocrity and conformity, Sam „in his heart thinks himself a rebel" and would be „the first to agree he has fantasies of murdering his wife" (Mailer, 1972:149). Also, we are shown, deep in his imagination he cherishes visions of "women with golden tresses and wanton breasts" (Mailer, 1972:151). His inherent and acquired limitations prevent him, however, from attaining an insight into these flights of fancy and thus deny him any positive understanding of his overall condition<sup>11</sup>. What these sensations unequivocally point to are Sam's sexual inhibitions which, the writer makes clear, are the real causes of his „schizoid" plight. What Slovođa is unable to see is that his sex-life is being constantly perverted by abiding feelings of guilt, hypocritical modesty, and shame. This is, Mailer asserts, the ultimate reason why we all continue to „waste" ourselves (Mailer, 1972:170). Sam is, indeed, given the dimensions of a modern Everyman: he is „like so many", is in fact „like most of us" (Mailer, 1972:144). What links Sam Croft with the hero of *The Man Who Studied Yoga* goes beyond the mere identity of their Christian names. Basically, he too was governed by the feeling of incompleteness and frustration<sup>12</sup>. With him its source was also deeply rooted in the intricacies of sexuality: "that was one thing he wasn't best in", consequently: "the only woman he ever loved



cheated on him' (Mailer, 1958: 124–129). Although with Sam Slovoda we get a much more keen awareness of the problem, he proves just as unable to see its real nature, let alone do anything about it. A character endowed with the power to do so appears in Mailer's third novel. *The Deer Park*. But the quintessence of the urge can be found ingrained already in *The Man Who Studied Yoga*. The idea Mailer voices there is essentially a simple one: „Destroy time and chaos may be ordered” (Mailer, 1972:171). Still, as will be shown later, its implications are far from inconsiderable.

According to Mailer himself „*The Deer Park* is totally about sex and it is also totally about morality” (Mailer, 1972:228). It is precisely when tested against this background that Marion Faye emerges as the central figure of the book.

He was a dreamy boy at school, (he) communicated with himself (and) wanted to be a priest. His intelligence was startling at times (...) but he had become difficult. He was always causing trouble, he was ahead of his teachers (...) doing whatever was not allowed.

(Mailer, 1963:21)

His sexual initiation progressed so dramatically that by the age of twenty-four he seemed to know all about it,

...you take two people living together. (...) It's dull. The end. You go the other direction. You find a hundred chicks, you find two hundred. It gets worse than dull. It makes you sick.

(Mailer, 1963:23)

Since he discovered that “all was upside down”, Faye decided to “turn life on its head to see it straight” (Mailer, 1963:147). To start with he chose to engage homosexuality to complete his sexual education. Generally, he fixed upon the idea of completely divorcing himself from society to be able to “exist without roots”

The freedom he thus achieved Faye used to:

...drunk, to push dope on himself, and to race his foreign car through the desert, a gun in his glove compartment instead of a driving licence.

(Mailer, 1963:22)

More specifically, he also resolved to gain independence of the established pattern of human emotional functioning. This was to master fear, conquer the feeling of guilt, and finally, to achieve intimacy with death. Basically, all this amounted to the idea of “immersing oneself in the destructive element”. Probably the most important aspect of this resolution is that to perceive a “straight” picture of reality was but a step towards a much larger goal. Faye took it upon himself that he was “going to change the world or blow up the world or something of the sort”<sup>13</sup> (Mailer, 1963:288). At times of doubt in his ability to do so, he thought of begging God to “let the devils enter him in order that he alone be burned in Hell so that others, (...) indeed the whole world be spared”<sup>14</sup> (Mailer, 1963:306). There can be quite easily traced in Faye a kind of rudimentary stage of Mailer's pattern of power, violence, and sex central to his mature philosophy. Picturing modern chaos as originating essentially in the misappropriation of man's sexual energy, *The Deer Park* focuses in the figure of its main hero on the attainment of individual power which would make it possible to master the present situation; to this end meaningful violence is shown as contributing fundamental instrumental

service. Still, it should be noted that at this point of its development, the scheme lacks accuracy in the interdependent functioning of its particular elements and, indeed, precise direction. It appears to be entangled in a kind of vicious circle, pushing Faye to "come out he did not know where"; "notwithstanding, the writer conjectured through him that "there was experience beyond experience, there was something, of that he was certain" (Mailer, 1963 : 309).

In a state of entanglement itself, Mailer's fictional philosophy proved to require a larger and more specific perspective. The writer came to supply it in his famous essay *The White Negro*. Although extraneous to the novelistic world proper, it integrates all the main tendencies of his earlier fiction and gives direction to its future development. Mailer's immediate objective in writing the essay was to present the fruits of his search for "the rebels of the generation" (Mailer, 1972 : 269). The search brought him to the figure of Hip, basically an existentialist who rejects his society and lives instead by his own laws and values.

The only hip morality (...) is to do what one feels whenever and wherever it is possible, (...) the nihilism of Hip proposes as its final tendency that every social restraint and category be removed.

(Mailer, 1972 : 286)

At this stage the theory basically accords, it can be easily noted, with Faye's resolution to achieve freedom from received social norms. In *The Deer Park* Mailer seems to have been given, to a comprehensive and abiding solution based on individual restorative action, possibly sacrificial in nature. Apparently with the discovery of the whole complexity of the challenged problem, the writer came to limit the scope of the immediate effects of his therapy to the individual. Consequently, the hipster's primal battle was to "open the limits of the possible for oneself, for oneself alone" (ibidem). First, however, one had to "set out on that uncharted journey into the rebellious imperatives of the self" (Mailer, 1972 : 271). The project could only authenticate within the scheme of constant becoming rather than in the state being. Instrumental to this process of returning us to "the heart of our true self" was to be rendered violence. For hipsterism "takes literal faith in the creative possibilities of the human being to envisage violence as the catharsis which prepares growth" (Mailer, 1972 : 289). The essay furnishes the above line of reasoning with psychological, sociological, and anthropological validity. Still, its ultimate capacity appears to be vested in the field of sex.

At bottom, the drama of the psychopath (Hip) is that he seeks love (...) as the search for and orgasm more apocalyptic than the one which preceded it. Orgasm is his therapy, he knows at the seed of his being that good orgasm opens his possibilities and bad orgasm imprisons him.

(Mailer, 1972 : 279)

This is then what Mailer ultimately offered as a remedy for the ubiquitous forces of modern chaos. This is also what finally disentangles Croft's "crude vision" of the "something he wanted" and Faye's dramatic effort to achieve "experience beyond experience" in which there was bound to be "something".

...to be with it is to have grace, is to be closer to the secrets of that unconscious life

which will nourish you if you can hear it, for you are nearer then to that God which every hipster believes is located in the senses of his body, that trapped, mutilated and nonetheless megalomaniacal God who is It, who is energy, life, sex force, the Yoga's "prana", the Reichian's orgone, (...) "It"; God; not the God of the churches but the unachievable whisper of mystery within the sex, the paradise of limitless energy and perception just beyond the next wave of the next orgasm.

(Mailer, 1972 : 283)

The present argument convincingly substantiates, it is hoped, the motion of this paper that entropy does not apply to Norman Mailer's writing. Also it enables an insight into the very nature of the discussed misappropriation. This is to point out what appears to be the most glaring single misinterpretation Tony Tanner makes in his analysis of the writer's philosophy. That which Mailer singles out as man's ultimate liberating force ("It" – apocalyptic orgasm), the critic seems to associate precisely with the counteractive powers.

Starting with the moon, we encounter (in Mailer's writing) a widening range of references to **evil spritis, vampires, demons**, voodoo, magic, Zen, grace, and **all those strange powers** which the individual experiences as an "it" working through him, but not originating within him. (This awareness) reduces man to an incidental point of intersection of warring supernatural powers, a helpless pawn (...) in a larger battle.

(Tanner: 358–359)

The legitimate "it" of Mailer's philosophy is, in fact, to be translated in terms of a psychomystical therapeutical experience whereby new circuits of energy (Sex as the connection of new circuits) (Mailer, 1963 : 348) – both psychic and physical – are generated in the Self; this is but a stepping stone towards the eschatological connection with the larger and imponderable circuits operating throughout the universe (universe viewed as a "series of ever-extending radii from the centre" (Mailer, 1972: 283), orgasm as "an infinite spectrum" (Mailer, 1972: 300). Obviously limited in its most immediate efficacy, the theory is at bottom a far-reaching one. For "to oneself is to enrich the other" (Mailer, 1972 : 282); eventually "...the hipster may come to see that if he he would be free, then everyone must be free" (Mailer, 1972 : 287). The essence of his experience is tied up, moreover, with "the desire to make a better world" (Mailer, 1972 : 294). Finally, then, Hip's anarchism proves to be essentially and deeply creative.

...in widening the arena of the possible, one widens it reciprocally for others as well, so that the nihilistic fulfilment of each man's desire contains its antithesis of human co-operation.

(Mailer, 1972 : 286)

At this point Mailer's philosophy appears to stand especially effectively in opposition to Tanner's theory since the above argument directly defies the ultimate danger of "turning oneself into an isolated system" inherent in a counter-entropic move.

To facilitate the reading of the following analysis I wish to expound the core of Mailer's philosophy from yet another angle. Among the few ideas the writer mentions in his essay as basically congenial to the therapy of apocalyptic orgasm, the one standing out most conspicuously is that of "Reichian's orgone" Fundamental to



Reich's concept of psychoanalysis is direct sexual gratification. The failure to achieve true orgasm accounts, he suggested, for all psychic and most physical and social disorders. This assumption proved to be for Reich the basis for far-flung interpretations of society and, in the long run, the universe at large. A series of eccentric, quasi-scientific experiments led him to associate the essence of sexuality with electricity, and to specifically define orgasm as a "spectacular electric storm" (Robinson, 1970: 63). Further research into microscopic plant and animal life convinced Reich that:

...not merely sexuality, but life itself functioned according to the orgasmic pattern of tension and discharge, expansion and contraction.

(Robinson: 64)

The whole philosophy was christened Orgonomy, and the basic unit of the discovered bioelectric force – the orgone. The Orgone energy was specified as "the primordial stuff out of which all reality evolved" (Robinson: 67); Reich suggested also that "...the galactic systems, the aurora borealis, hurricanes, and gravity were likewise various manifestations of Orgone energy" (ibidem). Finally, he thought fit to reinterpret principal Christian dogmas according to his thesis. Fixing generally on the idea that "God represented an anthropomorphic projection of man's awareness of the Cosmic Orgone Ocean", Reich went on to assume that "Christ himself was the archetypal genial character, in direct communication with the cosmic Orgone forces" (Robinson: 69).

Mailer's philosophy can be brought into relation with Wilhelm Reich's system of knowledge not only on its general import but also – as should become evident and indeed, helpful, later on – in many particulars.

It is difficult to establish whether *An American Dream*, Mailer's fourth novel, is the work he "always wanted to do". Still, it unmistakably appears to be the most representative fictional performance of his theories. Its hero, Stephen Rojack, a professor and a TV celebrity, finds himself, at a reflective age of forty-four, to be irreconcilably at odds with himself, his wife, and the world at large. On the verge of committing suicide but lacking courage to assert himself even this way, once more humiliated by his tyrannical wife, Rojack, in an unexplicable moment of extemporaneous self-defiance: "...more out of his body than his trampled brain, struck her open-handed across the face" (Mailer, 1973: 35). This is how he came to connect the first and all-important circuit of regeneration, the circuit of violence. In the ensuing physical clash he seemed to have instantaneously acquired a new, inspiring awareness:

I had a mental image I was pushing with my shoulder against an enormous door (...). I had a vision of what was on the other side of the door, and heaven was there, some quiver of jeweled cities.

(ibidem, emphasis mine)

Having eventually strangled Deborah, Rojack felt "as if his life had just begun" (Mailer, 1973: 42). Disguising the murder as a suicide made it possible for him to go on exploring the newly attained insight into the nature of power and morality. In search for direct gratification of his most crude rages and desires, Rojack was pushed to mutilate sexually his wife's maid, Ruta. Soon he realized that he was not only engaged in the battle for his own integrity but that he had also become a warring faction in the primeval strife between God and the Devil. This reminds of Hip's resolution that since

the forces of chaos have come to challenge God's assumed omnipotence, man's fate must be inseparably linked with God's fate (Mailer, 1972: 309).

Having so violently reasserted his claim on life, Rojack "went with this force", seeking an ultimate therapy: "... underneath everything I wanted sex now, not for pleasure, not for love, but to work this tension" (Mailer, 1973:118). But since "beneath violence there is finally love<sup>15</sup> and nuances of justice" (Mailer, 1972 : 294), he came to consummate all. Rojack's medium in his connection of this final and most important regenerating circuit proved to be a young and beautiful night-club singer, Cherry. Previously, his sex-life had always been crippled by the inexorable fear of "the judgment which must rest behind the womb of a woman" (Mailer, 1973: 115). With Cherry it was all different,

...for the first time in my life without passing through the fire or straining the stones of my will, I came up from my body rather than down from my mind. I could not stop, some shield broke in me, (...) I was passing through a grotto of curious lights, dark lights, like colored lanterns beneath the sea, (...) that quiver of jeweled arrows, that heavenly city.

(Mailer, 1973:122, emphasis mine)

When after his apocalyptic night with Cherry he "... finally opened his eyes, Rojack knew everything was all right inside the room. Outside everything was wrong" (Mailer, 1973:123). Back in the hostile world, he was faced anew with the prevailing chaos. It was then that he understood that his newly achieved awareness "... was not a gift but a vow, only the brave could live with it for more than just a little while" (Mailer, 1973:156). He realized that in order to keep Cherry he had to keep winning her from the forces of evil and insanity. In compliance with the "authority of his senses", Rojack accepted the imperative that he had to do precisely that which he feared most. This was to face Cherry's former lover, and Deborah's father, both of them (allegorically representing forces of destruction and ultimately the Devil himself) seeking to kill him. On the face of it, Rojack seemed to have passed this test of his spiritual and physical prowess. But it turned out, only too late, that "It's not enough. It goes for nothing if you don't do it twice" (Mailer, 1973:234). Pertinently, on getting back from his formidable errand he found Cherry avengefully beaten to death by the hoodlums of her former social circles. Although now Rojack was a "part of the new breed" owing to the "gift" Cherry had left him, yet he was doomed to remain for ever with "a maniacal smell of death" contaminating his sense of victory. Having decided that he was not after all "good enough" he remembered that "there was a jungle somewhere in Guatemala which had a friend, (and) thought to go there and on to Yucatan" (Mailer, 1973:252). Significantly, in state of apparent incompleteness, Rojack still retained some of the apocalyptic awareness he had nearly mastered:

The night before I left (...) I walked out in the desert to look at the moon. There was a jeweled city on the horizon, spires rising in the night, (...) the jewels were diadems of electric and the spires were the neon of signs ten stories high. I was not good enough to climb up and pull them down. So I wandered further out (...) (and) in the morning (...) started on the long trip to Guatemala and Yucatan.

(Mailer, 1973:251-252, emphasis mine)



Suggestively reminiscent of Reich's quasi-scientific terminology in his peculiar translation of basic epistemological and ontological issues, the crucial metaphors of *An American Dream* can be found esoterically present in Mailer's fiction as early as ten years prior to the appearance of the novel in question. Marion Faye's culminating experience which offered him a glimpse of the nature of world's mystery eventuated, allusively enough, also in a desert.

It was impossible to sleep. Instead, (...) he raced (his car) to the east, ten miles perhaps there was a small rise; (...) on all those roads which were laid across the desert it was the only one which had a view. There was a dirt track over the mountains, but he could never reach that summit in time. The dawn would be coming very soon and he wanted to see it and look into the east (God's direction). There was Mecca. Faye raced his car (...) giving all of himself to the task, looking for the peace which comes from curious contests (...). He made the rise in time (...) and he stared (...) far, far out, a hundred miles he hoped. Somewhere in the distance (...) was one of the greatest gambling cities (...) and Faye remembered a time (...) when a great white light, not more than a shadow of the original blast somewhere further in the desert, had dazzled the gaming rooms and lit with an illumination colder than the neon tube.

(Mailer, 1963:151, emphasis mine)

By way of recapitulation I wish to discuss briefly what I believe is the most important single formal feature of Norman Mailer's fiction, namely the unusual – given the diversity of his writing – consistency of its major motifs and metaphors. The fundamental one, that which introduces us best to his novelistic world, is that of „gaming rooms“; employed originally in *The Deer Park* it came to be decoded as „Id“ – the unconscious in *An American Dream*. Central to Mailer's whole philosophy is undoubtedly the metaphor of „Mecca“ standing for the apocalyptic orgasm (Mailer, 1972:281) and the imponderable, regenerative awareness of universal harmony resulting from its attainment. Understood in terms of an „infinite spectrum“, the orgasm itself is rendered more descriptively as a luminous, psychomystical vision of „a heavenly city of jeweled arrows“. This is congruent with the larger concept picturing the universe as a series of ever-extending radii from the center. Another of Mailer's crucial metaphors is that of „Time“. Appearing for the first time in *The Man Who Studied Yoga* it is equated in *The Deer Park* with Sex and specifically defines as „the connection of new circuits“ (Mailer, 1963:348). „Circuit“ is another recurrent image; its explanation does well to stress the nature of Mailer's philosophy as centripetal and centrifugal in its operation; also, it reminds of its legitimate province, the unconscious:

... when you go into sleep, that mind of yours leaps, stirs, and shifts itself into the Magnetic-Electro field of the dream, (...) and it all flows, (...) you sending messages and receiving all through the night, (...) that's a circuit.

(Mailer, 1970:116–117)

Although Norman Mailer's latest novel, *Why Are We in Vietnam?* differs in many ways from his earlier fiction it is, nevertheless, fundamentally related to the previously established tenets of his philosophy. The concept of orgasm itself is absent from it, still, as is typical of the writer, the book takes up the problem of human „prime

existence", and invests its ultimate message with clear sexual references congenial to his overall scheme of physical and spiritual regeneration. The two adolescent heroes are shown putting a seal on their maturity by freeing themselves from the locks of homosexually homicidal impulses lurking deep inside them. This proves to be a truly apocalyptically therapeutic experience since it telepathically connects them with the electro-magnetic circuit of universal harmony and tranquility:

...diamond spikes from the corona going two hundred miles vertically into the sky (...) run over a run of silk, some light was alive and spoke to them (...) and a coil of sound went off in the night like a blowout in some circuit fuse of the structure of the dark and (...) something in the radiance (...) went into them, and owned their fear, some communion of telepathies and new powers, and they were twins, never to be near as lovers again (...) and each bit a drop from his own finger and touched them across and met, blood to blood, while the lights pulsed.

(Mailer, 1970:139-140)

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The term suggested here has been introduced by Mailer himself who on more than one occasion proved to be an apt critic of his own writing (*The Armies of the Night*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970:145).
- <sup>2</sup> A quintessential presentation of Mailer's views on recent American fiction is available in his article published in *Literatura na świecie* in 1976. The date of its appearance is in itself important since it extends topicality of the arguments contained in *City of Words*.
- <sup>3</sup> This is to refer only to contemporary American writers, the other two being Saul Bellow and James Purdy. Of other novelists mentioned in the study, only James Joyce and Henry James come anywhere near to these five in the present statistics.
- <sup>4</sup> To a certain extent it might also balance other instances of similarly directed partiality in the interpretation of Mailer's fiction, like the recent generalization by Daniel Owen: "In Mailer's Manichean framework the devil is winning the battle against the good without any contest" (*American Literature*, Vol. 50/1, March 1978).
- <sup>5</sup> Also, this would be to deny the validity of a significant fact that Mailer obtained an academic degree in aeronautical engineering.
- <sup>6</sup> The same quotation appears in the article referred to in note 2.
- <sup>7</sup> It must be observed that for all its stress on the individual, Mailer's philosophy extends in its import, as is discussed later, far beyond the immediate effects of its execution.
- <sup>8</sup> Mailer's fictional output under present review ranges from *The Naked and the Dead* published in 1948 to his latest novel, *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, which appeared in 1967.
- <sup>9</sup> The novel is designed in such a way as to assuredly convey the idea that chaos is a major life-governing force. It is especially evident with the outcome of the campaign central to the whole action of *The Naked and the Dead*. For all the orderliness inherent in army organization, the campaign is concluded owing to a grotesquely chaotic series of incidents.
- <sup>10</sup> Reminiscent of his first novel, *Barbary Shore* takes up the subject of chaos as dominating modern societies. Thematically, it is set against the American political scene after World War II. The novel abounds in descriptions of sexual perversity but this is basically to allegorize the political havoc of the time.
- <sup>11</sup> Sam Slovoda's acquired limitations pertain to what has already been said about his present condition. Another reason why he cannot understand his sexual problems is that he comes short of basic requirements of masculinity: "Sam is not the strongest of men", he is secretly afraid of many things and violence openly scares him (Mailer, 1972: 145-146).
- <sup>12</sup> It is symbolically represented by Mount Anaka which towers the island on which the novel is set. Croft





"could not have given the reason, but the mountain tormented him, held an answer to something he wanted" (Mailer, 1958: 387).

<sup>13</sup> Faye's urge, specified by the writer later on, effectively counters "...the problem, confronted by the American hero of which way to move, where to aim his personal energy" (Tanner: 150).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. note 7.

<sup>15</sup> This stands in direct opposition to Tanner's entropic rendering of love: "Most of the characters "retreat" from the threat of love when it presents itself" (Tanner: 161); "These two phenomena – entropy and the dread of love – may well be linked" (Tanner: 159).

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### ENTROPIA W TWÓRCZOŚCI NORMANA MAILERA. REINTERPRETACJA

#### Streszczenie

Występując z poglądem, iż pisarstwo Normana Mailera wybiega poza ramy jakiegokolwiek jednoznacznej, konwencjonalnej definicji, artykuł polemizuje z tezą Tonny Tannera przedstawioną w jego znanej książce „*City of Words*”, jakoby całą twórczość pisarza można było określić w kategorii entropii. Nie podważając ogólnej przydatności praw termodynamiki dla interpretacji współczesnej powieści amerykańskiej, autor stwierdza, że światopogląd powieści Mailera jest z nimi zbieżny jedynie w ogólnej ocenie rozmiarów kryzysu współczesnej rzeczywistości. Podczas gdy teoria entropii przedstawia zasadniczo świat przez pryzmat jego nieuchronnego samounicestwienia, twórczość pisarza afirmuje w swej ogólnej wymowie możliwość człowieka do regeneracji poprzez akty fizycznego buntu i wyzwalaną przez nie telepatyczną spójność z uniwersum. Rozważania prowadzące do powyższych wniosków egzemplifikowane są analizą dorobku powieściowego i korespondującej z nim twórczości eseistycznej Mailera. Dla usystematyzowania podstawowych pojęć i zjawisk Mailerowskiego systemu filozoficzno-literackiego, autor przedstawia także pokrótce główne założenia psychoanalitycznych teorii Wilhelma Reicha. W przyjętym podejściu interpretacyjnym podejmuje się również próbę systematycznej prezentacji rozwoju twórczości powieściowej Normana Mailera.