

# Mailer: A Not Un-American Writer

William Lee Miller

At Miami Beach last summer Norman Mailer decided that George McGovern is "the first tall minister I ever really liked." He was so carried away by this discovery that he used the word "tender" when he spoke to McGovern about the mood on the night of the acceptance speeches. Before he reached that pitch of endorsement he had worried repetitiously about McGovern's undersupply of "charisma," regretted the Methodist candidate's insufficient use of metaphor and found the convention that nominated McGovern boring because it lacked drama and there was not enough *evil* in the room. In these past twelve years Mailer has often seemed to be judging American politics by one criterion: whether it provides the right sort of material for his writing.

In 1967-68 perhaps it did, but by 1972 Mailer seemed out of tune. He had to search in his store-room of metaphors to find anything that fit George McGovern. At one point he compared him rather unconvincingly to an astronaut. And the Democratic Convention was excessively innocent, excessively businesslike for Mailer's taste. The drinking parties were not very good unless one went to the George Wallace people or the Black Caucus or the Yippies. The convention brought forward an idealistic and a rational left, a purposive, non-"existentialist," old American left that is not very countercultural and does not fit very well in Mailer's limited set of categories. Some of it—George McGovern himself—is nearer to the pages of Vernon Parrington's *Main Currents* than of the more-recent books of Mailer's kind. The 1972 Democratic Convention marked the end of the feverish period in which Mailer's extremely personal political reporting was appropriate. We can

now look back on that "reporting" as an indicator of a political condition that is past.

In one of Mailer's efforts to interpret McGovern he compared him to his opponent: ". . . if McGovern's politics were more conservative, one could speak of him as the Democratic Nixon. For both men project that same void of charisma. . . ." That comparison between the two Western small-town, high-school debaters is rather obvious. The more interesting linkage is the negative-positive one between Nixon and Mailer himself in the peculiar political chemistry of 1968.

I remember how I found myself wincing back in 1968 when Signet advertised *The Armies of the Night* as Mailer's "Masterwork," as though it were a Brandenberg concerto. But when I looked into this Masterwork I found my Mailer-resistance diminishing. To be sure there was more about Mailer's personal life than I really wanted to know. But when Mailer the writer carried Mailer the character on to Washington and introduced with much insight, commentary and flappedoodle his other characters—Robert Lowell especially, and also Dwight MacDonald and Paul Goodman—and took these characters through his "novel" about actual events in the 1967 March on the Pentagon, I gradually felt seeping through my resistance an unwanted enjoyment. The book was funny and unusual and full of insight, and so as I read I had a chilling presentiment of the situation—both political and journalistic—that was going to present itself when the turmoil of 1967-68 at last was over. Richard Nixon, it appeared, would be elected President, and now I knew who was going to be (as one of his book covers later was to put it, a little vulgarly) "the hottest writer in America."

This hottest writer in America would be taken seriously, read and discussed in seminars, classified, deferred to, sought after. My daughter would come home with *The Armies of the Night* assigned reading, along with Camus and Koestler, in a seminar. A young political scientist was to say casually at lunch

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WILLIAM LEE MILLER, Professor of Political Science at Indiana University, Bloomington, wrote *Piety on the Potomac* a few years back, an examination of the political uses of religion during the Eisenhower Administration.

that he was using *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* as his class assignment on party conventions. A wise editorial friend remarked at the Harvard Club in New York that there was a petition to name Norman Mailer to the Harvard Board of Overseers "and I signed it." At Yale, where John Hersey was master of a residential college, the students of another were to petition to have Mailer named as their new master. Mailer's earnest thoughts on Richard Nixon's Presidency were to be spread across the pages of *Newsweek* with Mailer's picture on the cover. Not only were his two books nominated for the National Book Awards and one awarded it, but he also received a Pulitzer Prize. When Mailer became a candidate for Mayor of New York, his candidacy was not to be regarded entirely as a joke.

One could not then have foretold, when both Mailer and Nixon were in a down cycle, that after all the hope, accomplishment and disappointment of the sixties, the agony of Vietnam, the shock of Watts-Newark-Detroit and the chaos of Berkeley-Columbia-Chicago, the multiple assassinations, the near unraveling of the nation—it would be this curious pair who would come out presenting themselves as in some sense the victors of these disasters.

They were an odd pair, of course, almost antithetical on first appraisal. The President in his public person was a bit of a stick. Even after battalions of public relations men labored over pumping up a personality for Richard Nixon there was still nobody there. Whatever else one might say about the Novelist, he was inescapably present. Bobbing and weaving, wenching and drinking, four-lettering and fighting, making movies and running for office, marrying and divorcing, jumping up and down and pointing to himself while doing these things, then writing it all down for the public to read—at times one has the impression it was all *done* to be written down for the public to read. The two of them, President and Novelist, antipodal figures, something close to that moment's Two Faces of America. And yet, as I looked at the two men at the convention, I noticed a broken resemblance between them.

Each had significance. One learns from Mailer's books that one can find mammoth metaphorical meaning for the realms of spirit, character and intellect in physical attributes—eyes, neck, jaw, smile and (especially) the nostrils (Mailer is strong on nostril-reading). The Novelist was a shorter, fatter, livelier, frizzier passport-photo version of the President, even to the dark suggestion of a stubble. There was the hard, stubborn chin that has taken blows and been thrust out again. There were the protuberant bulldog jawbones of a man who could hang in there after being counted out and disregarded. There were the pseudomodest smiles that seemed to say, "See, I'm a pretty nice humble fellow despite all the things

you've heard about me." And all the while the eyes, unsmiling, counted the house.

It seems only just, since Mailer himself is such a mean man with a metaphor, to construct one from his faint physical resemblance to Richard Nixon. Brooklyn Heights Existentialist Radicalism and Sun Belt Conservatism, apparently so opposed to one another, looked on closer examination a good bit alike. They were two forms of competitive egotism. They both attacked liberals; they both resented the Eastern WASPs who rule things; neither liked governments in Washington (in Mr. Nixon's case it can be said that he sometimes seemed to attack the government in Washington although heading it). In 1967-68 these movements of left and right joined in a giant pincers movement that decimated liberalism. They both drew on the simplistic quasi-anarchistic notions in American culture—individualism, voluntarism, the government as "coercion," natural social harmony (each neighborhood, Mailer was later as candidate to say, could choose what it wanted to be). They were both drawn to the politics of the debater's platform and the dramatic gesture, of Checkers's speeches and marches on the Pentagon. Neither exhibited much of the collaborative and pragmatic progressivism Mailer disdainfully called "the logic of the next step."

Mr. Nixon's rise to the Presidency had been accomplished in part through the negative oversimplifications of a partisan campaigner on the stump. When the prizewinning novelist undertook to write about politics did he provide a more humane sense of the complexity of politics? Did the artist evoke the depth and many-sidedness of political life? I don't think he did.

There are good things in Mailer's books—*The Armies of the Night* especially—but mostly at the level of a phrase, a particular insight, an immediate observation. The intellectual framework within which they are set is rather predictable. There are the intertwined symbols of evil, the Pentagon and the dollar bill, and the stereotyped pair of picture postcards of the United States: "Technology Land" and "Corporation Land." Mailer's America is CANCER; SCHIZOPHRENIA; LOBOTOMY and NOVOCAIN; VINYL; DEODORANT and MUZAK; SMOG and AIR CONDITIONING; WASP; MAFIA; THE AUTHORITY. He used this last word in place of "the Establishment," but he used it in exactly the way that ubiquitous and misleading cliché is normally used; all he contributed was an alteration of the word and left the simplism in place.

What Mailer is best at is the minting of those similes and metaphors. No one would say of Mailer what Dr. Johnson said of Swift: "The rascal never uses a metaphor." Mailer uses a million metaphors. Back in 1968 George McGovern had been the Boy Scout leader a Hollywood casting director would pick to play the romantic lead in a \$10 million movie. In 1972

# Nixon and Mailer:

## "a broken resemblance"

he was the unexciting, fine and upstanding minister who moved into the empty house up the street: Isn't it nice to have The Reverend and his lovely wife for neighbors? Mailer used this figure for McGovern's success through the McGovern reforms and the primaries: "He has brought the catboat of his small fortunes into exactly the place where the winds of history were blowing for him." George Wallace, changed by his wound, "looks like what he was originally, a bantamweight boxer with all the lean dignity little boxers have when they retire and keep from gaining weight." Edmund Muskie "had a gift for putting together phrases that would have stood him well if he had been stacking boxes of breakfast food on a grocery shelf." Eugene McCarthy's offhand delivery would "insist that remarks about the future of the world were best delivered in the tone you might employ for buying a bottle of aspirin." Hubert Humphrey had "a formal slovenliness of syntax which enabled him to shunt phrases back and forth like a switchman who located a freight car by moving everything in sight."

Although some of the metaphors were funny and good, most demeaned their subjects and were a display of the writer's virtuosity rather than of understanding. You will not find in his treatment of his real enemies, the middling liberals, much of a novelist's sensitivity. Instead you will find a manner of treatment (HHH equals concentration camp fence) that is "not unlike" (as Mailer might say) what Richard Nixon has provided his rather different constituency all of his political life.

Nixon and Mailer have both an almost neurotic preoccupation with what is "American." President Nixon's Washington has had a layer of "Americanism" (*American lives; American honor*) thicker even than that of Lyndon Johnson. In his different political location Mailer has his own version of this sort of thing. The incidents at the Pentagon represented for him a "quintessentially American event." A bus ride through the countryside at night is also a very "American" event, when Americans are more American than ordinarily, getting away from the "American fever" by being on the move. The turnkey who guarded Mailer's group in the U.S. Post Office in Alexandria after their arrest at the Pentagon March was "more American than anyone had a right to be." For two long columns Mailer even had his wife mixed up with "America" and "Americans." He found her presence, in fact, just like the March, "quintessentially American."

In *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* Mr. Mailer's patriotism seemed to take the following form: He

thought it would be a shame if America went down, since she had provided such good material for his novels. In his 1972 summer's report he found "America" to be a sort of religion that is not in good shape. The political parties are churches and McGovern is a religious reformer.

American writers have had, or are interpreted to have had, a thing about "America"—what she was, whither going, whether sick or well, whence the dream, and so on. Norman Mailer in this, as in other respects, seems determined to beat the opposition by sheer competitive energy, generalizing about America, diagnosing her and tying her all up symbolically with the Pentagon and with religion, condemning her and taking it back, and on and on. But perhaps Mailer, like Nixon in his different way, makes too much of being "American." That may not be quite so distinct a condition, so inclusive a symbol as both of them imply.

Alongside Mr. Nixon's nationally egotistical "America"—we're Number One and no pitiful, helpless giant—and Mr. Mailer's sickly and fearful, mystical-symbolic, bad-good America, there was also the romanticized, ideal "America" of Mr. Mailer's unmetaphoric friend, the tall minister: "Come Home, America."

America's most conspicuous fault—our success-worshipping competitive egotism—would not appear to be confined to Whittier, California, or to Mitchell, South Dakota, or to WASPs or to middling liberals. Here was Mailer writing up a storm, displaying himself, determined to impress everybody if it killed him. He wrote competitively, uncertain—as Alfred Kazin wrote some years ago—that there might not be someone coming up out in South Dakota (interesting that Kazin should have picked that state) who might yet outdistance him. Mailer explicitly talked about his writing in the language of "winning," "making the winning move," being a "winner" and not a "loser." These political articles did not seem to be the passionate outpouring of a writer so outraged by an evil thing as to forget his own career and risk everything to try to overcome the injustice of the war in Vietnam. Instead they were "winning" moves by a man determined, like Mailer's picture of Hemingway, to be The Champ.

I think that the key to the merit of Mailer's 1968 writing is to be found in his central device. It is the sort of thing any sober, liberal academic or practitioner of the higher journalism would have told him not to do. This is the semihumorous treatment of himself in third person as protagonist in a novel, a "Norman Mailer" of many faults and vices

semicandidly admitted, a figure of fun and interest, whose actions the writing Norman Mailer could follow and whose mind and feelings he could poke, prod, josh, confess and chide.

Ernest Hemingway said rather pompously of his *The Green Hills of Africa* that it was an attempt to write an "absolutely true book" to see whether such a book can "compete with a work of the imagination." Critics believe that Hemingway failed. Edmund Wilson suggested that failure was implicit in the nature of the project: A "true" book, however imaginatively done, cannot compete successfully with the free invention and artful rearrangements of reality in a work of fiction. But now Mailer has done it. Why has he succeeded? Because he found the voice and point of view for doing it (and also he had good characters and a good story to tell). He not only made an effective technical decision to treat himself in the third person as the protagonist but he also treated his protagonist from the right angle and with the right quasiconfessional, semijoshing attitude.

Like Henry Adams in *The Education* he has played two roles: author and character, kidder and kiddee, with continual humorous insight and semicandor about the character on the part of the omniscient narrator. Unlike Adams he can depend upon the reader's having perforce a prior knowledge at least from the newspapers about the character Norman Mailer; he can make points off the rebound from his reputation. He can score his point and then score another point by admitting, half self-critically, that he needed to score it. A large number of good things in *The Armies of the Night* are Mailer's third-person admissions and comments on himself—about the stored-up resentments choked down under the manhole cover of his pretended indifference to reviews; about his mixtures of jealousy and admiration and suspicion of Robert Lowell; about how revolutionaries should not get hangovers after weekend bouts; about how pleased with himself he is after twenty years of radical opinions properly to be arrested at last in a good cause. He refers wryly to his new modesty, thus getting a little ping of appreciation from the reader who knows his old arrogance. Then he admits the limits of that modesty, and gets another.

But these frenetic egotists don't know when to stop. I have been writing here about the favorable impression Mailer's method made back in the spring of 1968, not about what one may think in 1972 after he has used it—as "The Reporter," "Aquarius," "The Prisoner" and so on—about 8,700 additional times.

Mailer had some stylistic habits out of which we may make another symbol of politics of the late sixties. On the one hand he sounded very bold. He swept his hand across the page like an uninhibited man talking big in a barroom—"the largest mansion ever not quite built in Newport." Often these figures of speech finish with

another of his phrases: "in the land," or "of the land"; Eugene McCarthy "seemed . . . like the dean of the finest English department in the land"; Cornelia Wallace could have "passed convincingly as the most beautiful opera singer in the land." This and other kinds of literary risk-taking and daring were combined with a sort of backward or negative exclamatory method. He continually used the phrase "not for nothing": "Not for nothing did de Grazia bear a resemblance to Sinatra"; "Mailer had not been married four times for nothing"; "Maoists are not for nothing these blacks!" "America has not had its movie premieres for nothing." His prose was buckled together with the phrases "not unlikely," "not dissimilar," "not unrelated to."

Furthermore, Mailer certainly did not agree with George Orwell's desire to laugh the "not un-" construction out of existence. Orwell wrote in "Politics and the English Language" that one could cure oneself by memorizing the sentence "A not unblack dog was chasing a not unsmall rabbit across a not ungreen field." But Mailer plainly had not taken the cure: "Not unimpressed" (Mailer on first hearing Yale Chaplain William Sloane Coffin); "not unclean" (his own soul, at least momentarily, while marching on the Pentagon); "not uncomic"; "not unintelligent, not unhumorous." Orwell's famous essay actually is subject to challenge on this point. The "not un-" construction does not always reflect laziness or affectation but rather a gradation or nuance a writer needs to achieve his meaning. Thus Mailer clearly does need, in a passage in which he is debating about his own role as protagonist, the phrase "not un-heroic" instead of a flat reference to unalloyed heroism. Perhaps he needs to say that he is "not unimpressed" by Coffin to avoid overstatement, to say a speech by Paul Goodman was "not uncourageous." In other cases it is confusing. The two offsetting negatives make the reader do mental adding and subtracting to arrive at a sum of meaning that could have been achieved much more simply without either.

Then there is Mailer's continual confirmatory "yes" and "no" and sometimes "yeah." Yes—he uses "yes" in this way continually, and "no," it can't be said that it is a happy device when repeated, and "yeah," it increases the nervous tentativeness of the prose. He uses "conceivably" to introduce, without altogether endorsing, some of his figures of speech and ideas. And he will say "it is the expected observation" to show that he knows what he is saying is obvious even though he goes ahead and says it.

These devices allow one to offer comparisons tentatively and partially, without risking one's authority in a wholehearted assertion of the likenesses. There was in this bold barroom, bragging writer, this "not for nothing" Norman, the grandest Tiger in the jungle, something unbold after all, a talky nervousness, a tentativeness, an inexactitude, a shooting of many shots that some may land—a timid boldness.

This Harvard man was certainly a hundred thousand miles away from the genteel pseudomoderate understated Ivy League casual style. At the same time, all of his boldness was not put forward with calm assurance or executive force. There was in it this note of something tentative, insecure, self-conscious; maybe I mean it and maybe I don't. Maybe I'm interested in politics and maybe I'm not. Maybe I'll move on to something else when the excitement moves on. In this regard as in others one may see in Mailer a generation, a movement, a brief historic period. Some of its boldness of protest and dissent and revolutionary talk and obstreperousness is momentary only, a somewhat insecure youthful testing of the limits.

Reading Mailer had been a way to confront the Left. Sometimes in 1968 one had felt it was nothing but Left, Left, Left in Mailer. Everything outside the Left was Grandma with Orange Hair. But Mailer himself was no longer simply a radical as he once had been. (Like McGovern he supported Henry Wallace in 1948; unlike McGovern he did not support Adlai Stevenson in the fifties.) He announced himself in 1968 as a "Left Conservative." One might say that it would not have hurt him to have borrowed a few characteristics from the best of conservatives—some self-criticism and restraint; some modesty; some sensitivity to the traditional and habitual aspects of collective life and to what is "decent," to use a word that has been applied to McGovern by Mailer himself among others.

But characteristics of that sort were evidently not what Mailer had in mind. His "conservatism" seemed to consist mostly of a writer's disdain for mass culture—for "Technology Land" with its Miami Beach hotels, its vending machines that don't work, its muzak and vinyl. And he did not offer the sort of discriminating criticism, keeping the intangible values clear and making careful distinctions about the different human purposes that technique could serve, which a conservative might provide. Instead his remarks resembled much of the rest of the current criticism of the "anonymous, monotonous, massive, interchangeable" features of modernity in that it partakes of the evils it criticizes (just as does that series of words quoted from Mailer). The pop criticism itself is a vogue; it is repetitious and not very thoughtful.

There was this tendency to try to construct a worldview or "life style" exactly out of the mystery and spontaneity and irrationality that the technological society tries to suppress. The Fugs practiced their exorcism in the Pentagon parking lot. Mailer explained (with whatever measure of seriousness) that in order to understand women he must believe in witchcraft; that revolution is "deliberately brainless, "revolution without ideology," or revolution for the hell of it. Mailer deals with American politics through

"dreads" and fears" that are "loose" in America. Students explain to you on the first day of class that the "intellectual" approach has been tried and has failed, so that it is now necessary to take instead the "emotional" approach. Technology Land encourages neurotic anxiety about normal body odors. Mailer typically seemed to say in response: Abolish deodorant, let stink abound. In being sweeping, absolute, irrational and oversimple, this sort of thing is not really an antagonist to Technology Land but itself a kind of inverted coopted part of it.

One day in 1969, when I was waiting to pay for a purchase at the checkout counter of a supermarket, I saw Mailer, on the cover of *Life* magazine, peering out from among the platinum plus blades and the Clorets and the M&Ms. The Clorets were said to take halitosis away; the M&Ms were said to melt in your mouth but not in your hand; and Mailer was said to have written "a major report," "an extraordinary personal study of the U.S. Space Program undertaken for *Life* by the winner of this year's Pulitzer Prize." In the editor's note it was said to be "the matching of a fantastic subject with a most unusual journalist," "the longest nonfiction piece *Life* has ever published in one issue." That this ferocious antagonist of Technology Land and the consumer culture and dreary promotional prose, and specifically supermarkets, should himself now be advertised for purchase in a mass magazine at a supermarket in one handily packaged, readily available, economy-sized chunk along with Cheerios and Campbell's soups, was almost too obviously a "contradiction" to deserve comment. The article itself was boring and unreadable. It smelled like An Assignment—a writer writing not from his own inner drive but from the notion of some editor (or, worse and more likely, a committee of editors) about what he should write.

Mailer makes something of the same error in his view of politics that he makes with respect to technology. Out of a partial truth he fashions a mistake, a mistake of a kind that is now commonplace.

Politics for him is a nest of irrationalities. His point of view has the advantage of including a greater sense of the nonrational and suprapolitical ingredients, the cultural and personal and mythic features that are indeed important, than that of most political writers. But once again, in much the way as did the flamboyant left in the late sixties, he makes his half point into a whole point and thus gets it wrong.

In his (for him) short article on the 1972 Democratic Convention he dismisses a concrete discussion of McGovern's votes with the remark that he has come to have "an absolute disbelief in political argument." All of this talk about issues and bills and voting records is just a "peculiar protocol" like the preliminary talk before the kissing begins in college mating customs. "Politics was a game in which points

were scored and one tried to obscure the depth and gravity of the process. Yet the ways in which people governed one another were ultimately as intimate as casual relations." Well, maybe so. But still the making of laws, and the giving of reasons for and against laws, and even the appeal to Justice and Liberty and all such things cannot *altogether* be dismissed.

For all the mystery and irrationality that surround it, for all the power-seeking and self-interest that run through it, still there is in there somewhere a rational and a moral aspect to politics. If you don't see that, you are going to get it wrong, and you will have trouble, particularly with someone like George McGovern—an old-fashioned American Methodist Social Action man, reason, morality and "high ideals" all the way.

In *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* Mailer explained that his working principle for political reporting, borrowed from another representative of the spontaneous literary left, the columnist Murray Kempton, is "Politics is property." That seemed to be once again the Iron Law of Selfishness that has long served in place of a political philosophy for many political reporters. The older type of newspaperman at City Hall used to regard a kind of Menckenesque contempt for political man as a badge of the honor of his kind. "Politics is property" seems scarcely distinguishable from the common man's familiar cynicism about dirty politics and the unworthiness of politicians. It has a connection with those liberal academics whom Mailer abominates—the technicians who "scientifically" study politics by reducing all of the motives in it, high ones and low ones, to self-interest. Politics in their view is nothing but a struggle over who gets what—over the advantages of one kind or another that men want for themselves against others: status, financial reward, leverage on other people, even good seats in the convention hall. Obviously men in politics as elsewhere do care about these things. The question is whether they care about anything else. One would have thought that the nation was already plentifully supplied with the sour negative to that question and did not need another dose of it from an intelligent novelist.

For debating purposes one might turn that back onto Mailer himself. A writer's "property" is his hold on the attention of a public; without that he is nothing—especially if his name is Norman Mailer. He has a large need for sheer publicity, a large stake in being colorful, different, interesting. Suppose he came onstage, in his role as political writer, as another liberal intellectual. Zero. Suppose then he were a fiery radical. Quite a number of those now; the Angry Young Man has been done. How about "Left Conservative"? Ah. That's better. There is a winning move to make to enhance a writer's property. What should he write about Richard Nixon? About the Yippies? About Mayor Daley? Among the unsurprising

surprises is the more favorable treatment of Richard Nixon, of Daley, of George Wallace, the less favorable treatment of the Yippies and a longer delay before he discovers that he likes McGovern than the unimaginative public might have anticipated (but really what else could he have done? There was, for example, certainly no mileage left in yet another intellectual's denunciation of Nixon). So a calculating writer almost unconsciously adjusts, plans his work, protects and enlarges his holdings. Journalism is self-promotion, writing is publicity-seeking, the literary life is property.

Do I really believe all I have said about Mailer? Or the literary life? No, I don't. In fact, what I have set forth, even about so blatantly and self-confessedly egotistical and publicity-seeking a writer as Mailer, is really only a fraction of what I see as the whole truth. One can look at writing from the angle of publicity and of reputation, of reviews and cliques and fashions and notices and sales, of fame and notoriety. But in the middle of all the extraneous elements the pure and genuine article may stay in there too, lodged in the makeup of the human beings who are trying to do their work and want things to be as they should be. I am sure that happens with Mailer as with others—I suppose one might be justified in saying *even* with Mailer.

As with writers, so with politicians. No doubt political life attracts men who want power, as belles lettres attract men who want to make their individuality visible. In neither case does that selectivity obliterate all the other purposes and attachments that men can have. A writer like Norman Mailer has convictions on many subjects, and intellectual and esthetic standards, and an artistic conscience, all built into his being, which qualify and impede and deflect his calculations of pure self-aggrandizement. And something that corresponds to that happens also with political men. For all his ego a writer does get hooked a little on esthetic considerations, on "beauty." So political man, for all his love of power, may actually find himself caring about what a George McGovern, with his earnest, old-fashioned language, might call justice and the common good.

The more the world comes before the public on television and is a world of mindless violent images and of terrible simplifiers, the more American politics need liberal arts and humane letters and the many-sided insight and distinction-making sense that avoid slogans and stereotypes. A man with literary sensibility, with empathy for a variety of kinds of life, with imagination and an awareness of the richness and range of humanity, who could bring into view the human complexity of democratic political life, would do this country a service.

Perhaps the seventies will yet provide not only a different kind of political leader but also a different kind of political writer.