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MAILER'S IRISH HERO: THE REDEMPTION OF SERGIUS O'SHAUGNESSEY

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In an interview with Vincent Canby, Norman Mailer confessed, "I've always loved the Irish and felt very close to them... the Irish have this great bravura, a style, elegance." In the light of the above statement, it is understandable why Mailer chose an Irish protagonist for his Hollywood novel *The Deer Park* (1955), as it is these very qualities along with courage and self-conviction, which help Sergius O'Shaugnessey to confront the inauthentic and corrupt influences of Desert D'Or. Desert D'Or forms the background of the novel and is a Hollywood pleasure resort, which is modelled on Palm Springs in California. It serves as a microcosm of the Hollywood society, and it is here that Sergius decides to come to discover his potential as a creative writer and regain his individuality.

Sergius was a lieutenant in the American air-force and had even enjoyed fighting, what he thought, the "impersonal" war in which he had bombed numerous Korean villages, but one day after seeing the burnt arm of his Japanese K.P. he realized that he had also been burning thousands of defenceless Koreans and yet, had remained indifferent to these killings. In recoil from such horrors, he suffers from a breakdown and takes a discharge from the air-force. He then comes to Desert D'Or to begin life afresh with a sense of commitment and integrity as a writer.

However, what appeared to be a restful haven at first sight, turns out to be quite different, for there are oppressive forces at work even in Desert D'Or. and it is not easy for Sergius to traverse the path of self- development. He is visited by two F.B.I. men because of his friendship with Charles Eitel, who has been black-balled by the Congressional Investigating Committee, and also because a gossip column had mistakenly referred to him as a marine captain instead of an air-force lieutenant. They are insulting in their behaviour and even threaten Sergius with violence. The two agents look out of place in a democratic society and are a reflection of the fact that the supposedly democratic government machinery is not as liberal as made out. Commenting on these F.B.I. men, Barry Leeds says, "they are characters who belong in a totalitarian state and are not supposed to exist in an ostensible democracy."

Sergius, however, shows extreme courage, when he overcomes his fear and faces the F.B.I. men courageously (Park, pp. 314-15). There are other temptations that Sergius has to face in Desert D'Or. His affair with Lulu Meyers, the glamorous movie idol of millions threatens to distract him from his quest for authenticity, for it is with Lulu that he is able to regain his potency (Park, p. 131). Apart from this, having Lulu by his side also gives him a sense of power, even if it is unreal power (Park, Pp. 131, 138). Desert D'Or, however, is not the ideal place to look for authenticity, for people here are different from what they appear to be, and their appearances are mostly deceptive Herman Teppis, the head of Supreme Pictures, is dictatorial and hypocritical When he tries to pair off Lulu and Teddy, he does not admit that he is doing it for publicity but eulogizes on "love" (Park, p. 260. "Motherhood" (Purk, p 261) and the "big family right here at Supreme Pictures" (Park. p 260) At the least resistance, his benevolent attitude changes drastically and he becomes an over-bearing autocrat.

Things are also not what they seen between Teddy Pope and Lulu. According to the gossip columns Teddy Pope and Lulu Meyers are having a torrid love affair and are likely to be married soon But in fact, Lulu does not love Teddy Teddy is not even the vinile lover as made out by media-gossip, as he is a homosexual Similarly, Collie

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Munshin appears to be a comic character with his round appearance and his gestures but underneath he is shrewd, calculating and unscrupulous. It is for this reason that Collic Munshin offer to help him is met with suspicion by Estel, as he knows that Cellie is perfectly capable of stealing his plot.

In the midst of these deceptions, it is not surprising that the interactions between men and women in Hollywood are most, motivated by their desires of lust, greed and violence. They are mechanical in their behaviour and often behave in ways which are self-destructive. Stan Gutman while describing Hollywood, says, "Tollywood a con of violence, lust, and greed with flames of incipient destruction swirling around the contorted faces of the inhabitants of the mythic land of Hims." Sergius had been tempted initially by the world of Hollywood, for it appeared to offer much. He is offered a substantial amount of money for the rights to his life story to make an idealized story of his life as an ace war-hero. But the artist in Sergius wakes up and he is not willing to be a part of a false system which makes money by portraying false images on the cinema screen. It is then that he realizes that if he marries Lulu, he would be the envy of thousands of men but in the process he would lose his individuality and always live in the shadow of her fame. He envisions his future as a lackey to Lulu, who would be seen "as Mr. Meyers, a sort of fancy longshoreman scared of his wife, always busy mixing drinks for Lulu and the guests" (Park, p. 143).

He makes the difficult decision of leaving Lulu, and he struggles to become a writer. To support himself, he becomes a dish-washer in a fancy restaurant and now his hours are spent amidst "the steam and the grease and the heat" (Park, p. 279). He considered this period as a form of penance and would often ponder on his earlier faults and weaknesses "like a saint counting his sores" (Park, p. 281).

He could now see the twenty thousand dollar contract in a much more tempting light but he remained strong in his resolve. He does not delude himself but escapes Desert D'Or without losing his integrity as an artist or an individual. Sergius realizes instinctively that if he stops growing as an artist and an individual, he would suffer stagnation and spiritual death. It is for this reason that Sergius resists all overtures of the Desert D'Or society to fall in line with it, and emerges in terms of an artist as rebel.

It is Sergius' courage, honesty and the quintessential indomitable Irish mystique that contributes significantly to the redemption of Sergius not only from debilitating circumstances that threaten him physically and spiritually, but also help him emerge as an individual and artist, who has achieved personal integrity and regained his self-esteem.

Norman Mailer's fascination for the Irish machismo found expression not only in his fictional characters, but was carried into his real life as well. It is noticeable that the friends that Mailer felt most comfortable with were Irish-Roger Donnoghue, Tom Quinn and Fay Donnoghue.

Mailer had assimilated these Irish traits in his personality, and at certain times this was made evident when Mailer dropped his usual sophisticated Harvard accent and used the Irish one. Regarding this Larry Alson says, "Whenever he got into tight spots he'd always use the southern accent or the Irish one, or a combination of both."

Thus the Irish mystique that became an integral part of Mailer's personality was not only a source of inspiration for his fictional characterization, but also that enduring part of his personality and psyche that helped him in overcoming the numerous odds that he had to confront in his personal and professional life.

REFERENCES

1. Mailer's interview with Vincent Canby, "When Irish Eyes are Smiling, It's Norman Mailer," New York Times, 27 Oct. 1968, p. 15, Col. 5.
2. Norman Mailer, *The Deer Park* (New York: Granada Publishing Ltd., 1955), p. 53. All references to this novel are from this edition. The abbreviation Park is used for the title, *The Deer Park*, whenever references to it are made within the article.

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3. The novel was set in the Hollywood of the McCarthyite anticommunist purges. Though America is a democratic country, the totalitarian forces of the establishment are oppressive and dictatorial. This is seen in the characters of Herman Teppis, the President of Supreme Pictures and Collic Munshin. When someone goes against their wishes, they become victims of their wrath. It is also notable that Supreme Pictures, apart from making films, works hand-in-glove with the Subversive Committee, as is seen when it does not employ Eitel until he compromises with the Committee. The extent of victimization that took place in those times is reflected in the remarks of President Truman, who defined McCarthyism as, "corruption of the truth, abandonment of our historical devotion of fair play, and of due process of law".
4. Quoted by Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht, *Joe McCarthy and McCarthyism: The Hate that Haunts America* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1972), p. 112.
5. Barry H. Leeds, *The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), p. 113.
5. Stanley, T. Gutman, *Mankind in Barbary* (New Hampshire: University of Vermont, 1975), p. 49.
6. This is evident in Peter Manso, *Mailer: His Life and Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985).
7. *Ibid.*, p. 320.