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“The presence of the past”: Norman Mailer’s *Of a Fire on the Moon*

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Abstract

This essay focuses on Norman Mailer’s *Of a Fire on the Moon*, Mailer’s most self-reflexive book which attempts to make a literary representation of the mysterious American event, the first moon flight, executed by the Space Program and Apollo 11 in 1969.

My intention is to read *Of a Fire on the Moon* as a postmodernist work despite the fact that Mailer is not considered to be a “true postmodernist writer.” More concretely, I will make use of “the presence of the past,” the title of the 1980 Venice Biennale and use it as a metaphor, to read Mailer’s book as a subtext of Melville’s *Moby Dick*.

I will focus more particularly on the main characters, Aquarius and Ishmael, as well as on the structures and levels of both narratives.

Keywords: *Mailer, Melville, subtext, Postmodernism, narration*