

Case 7: SOME MAILER WORKS IN PROCESS

Examination of three examples of Mailer's work--An American Dream (1965), Of a Fire on the Moon (1970), and Harlot's Ghost (1992)--in various stages of creation, revision, publication, and republication, shows him to be an exceedingly careful wordsmith. Mailer has been noted throughout his writing career for highly nuanced details of observation of both physical and psychological reality, and the seeming ease with which this mastery exerts itself betrays the underlying resources of furious energy coupled with patient discipline.

Case 8: CELEBRITY, HONORS, AND CRITICAL RECOGNITION

Celebrity came to Mailer at the young age of twenty-five with publication of The Naked and the Dead (1948). Over the succeeding decades, especially the 1960's and 1970's, such enterprises as the political campaign for mayor of New York, the Town Hall debate, the fiftieth birthday party (which he gave himself at the Four Seasons Restaurant in New York), and the tragic association with murderer Jack Abbott became almost part of the Mailer oeuvre. Yet, from a life that has been picked over like a plate of cold-cuts at a press reception emerges the prodigious output of a serious man of letters, recognized by various honors, awards, and prizes, and by a burgeoning industry of scholarly analysis and criticism.

"Introducing Norman Mailer"

-Exhibition through November, 1992

-Presentation/Discussion
on Norman Mailer
November 11, 1992, 7:00 p.m.
Farley Library Media Room

-Norman Mailer Reading
from His Works
November 19, 1992, 7:30 p.m.
Dorothy Dickson Dart Center
Reception to follow

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NORMAN MAILER

An Exhibition on The
Man and His Works

All items displayed
are from the
collection of
Dr. J. Michael Lennon
and from Mr. Mailer's
personal archive

Curated by Jon Lindgren
University Librarian

E.S. Farley Library
Wilkes University
November, 1992


WILKES

Exhibit Case 1: A MAILER OVERVIEW

Probably no other career in American letters can be delineated through an assemblage of assorted magazine and journal covers as well as that of Norman Mailer. Mailer's appetite for literary (and other) invention has found form in virtually every medium of expression: fiction, including novels, short stories, novellas; essays and journalism; poetry and plays; film, as screenwriter, actor, producer, and director; and orally, as politician, raconteur, debater, and public celebrity. He has published 38 books.

Case 2: A MAILER MISCELLANY

Norman Mailer's first national publication at age 18, "The Greatest Thing in the World" in Story magazine (November/December, 1941), and his subsequent graduation from Harvard University (1943) were followed by armed service in the Pacific Theater. Mailer's first published novel, The Naked and the Dead (1948), was a huge literary as well as popular success, launching him into international prominence. Throughout a vigorous writing career over more than fifty years, the private Mailer has sustained intensely loyal relationships with family and friends.

Case 3: MAILER ON FILM

In the ebullient decade of the 1960's Mailer extended the range of his artistic expression into the genre of film, attempting to break through the limitations of the printed word. His involvement in

film was at various times total and complete; as screenwriter, actor, producer, and director he replicated his prodigious involvement in his literary subject matter, in which he was often participant, observer, arranger, commentator, and recorder. Although none of Mailer's films has earned lasting distinction, many critics found considerable artistic merit in his second film, "Beyond the Law." Also worth noting are the various Mailer works that have been translated to the screen: The Naked and the Dead, An American Dream, The Executioner's Song, and Tough Guys Don't Dance.

Case 4: MAILER'S THE NAKED AND THE DEAD

It has become conventional wisdom to assert that The Naked and the Dead is either the best novel to come out of World War II, or the best war novel of the twentieth century. In either case, it has been universally praised for its realistic depiction of combat, which alternates with an intellectual debate on the moral and amoral exercise of power. The novel's immense popularity (61 weeks on the best seller list) may have aroused a backlash among critics for whom commercial success correlates with artistic failure. Nevertheless, it was a success that gained for Mailer access to a variety of celebrity audiences: Hollywood, theater, literary (i.e., "serious") critics, and practicing critics/journalists.

Case 5: MAILER AND POLITICS

Mailer's interest in politics and

public life as participant and observer springs from a variety of personal sources: intensity, energy, and competitiveness; a critical cast of mind and a passion for interpreting American experience; an obsession with power, public life (including celebrity) and participation in popular culture. All of these ingredients, immersed in the cauldron of ferment and change begot by the 1960's, would yield a person of action obsessed with the machinations of politics and government. From this subject matter have emerged some of his most celebrated works, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning The Armies of the Night.

Case 6: MAILER AND WOMEN

Ill-suited for the role of the literary artist as detached observer, Mailer has engaged his general passion for life and the existential moment-of-truth into relationships (well-documented) of varying intensity and duration with members of the opposite sex. Partially for his discovery of sex as appropriate subject matter for literary expression, this man of excesses, spawned by (and, in turn, himself abetting) an age of excesses, found himself in an embattled relationship with the feminist community, culminating in the notorious 1971 debate at Town Hall with Germaine Greer, Diana Trilling and others. Mailer's interest in sex, sexuality, and sensuality is greatly evidenced by his obsession with Marilyn Monroe, who has been the subject of three works by him.

A MAILER OVERVIEW

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American experience, an obsession
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