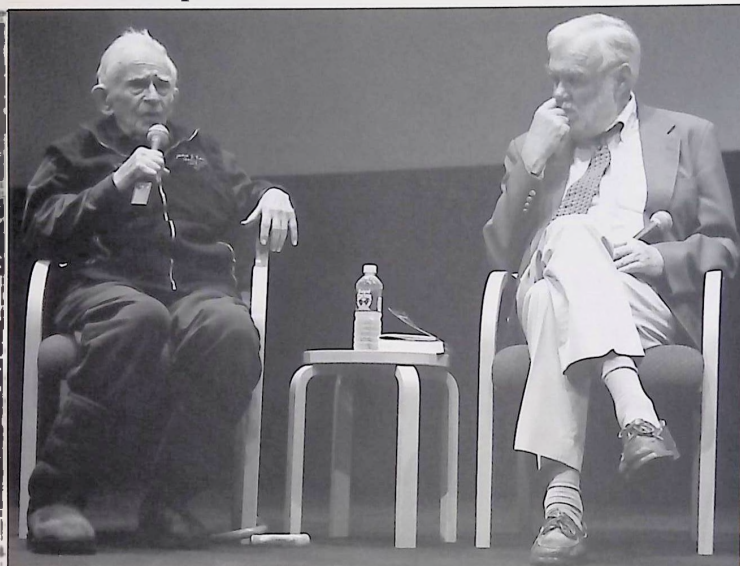


WILKES

SPRING 2008

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memorial
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Nov 10, 2007

GLOBAL VISION | FROM START TO START | CONSTITUTIONAL CALLING



Norman Mailer appeared at the Lincoln Center with Wilkes Professor J. Michael Lennon in June 2007. It was Mailer's last public appearance. PHOTO COURTESY OF J. MICHAEL LENNON

Wilkes Professor Talks God With the Late Norman Mailer

In his last book before his November passing, the late Norman Mailer, with co-author J. Michael Lennon, tackled no less than the nature of God.

On God: An Uncommon Conversation offers a series of probing, amusing and uncommon dialogues between the literary icon and Wilkes English professor Lennon, Mailer's friend, archivist and official biographer. Published by Random House, the book contains a series of 10 theological conversations between Lennon and Mailer. Mailer rejected both organized religion and atheism, presenting an artistic God who often succeeds but can also fail in the face of contrary powers in the universe.

Lennon proposed to Mailer that they write about his religious beliefs. "His theological ideas are not run of the mill." Mailer was born a Jew but was not a practicing Jew; he was interested in Catholicism but was not Catholic. He was interested in all religions of the world. He viewed fundamentalism as a danger, but he was not an atheist.

Lennon and Mailer began corresponding 35 years ago, when Lennon was working on his doctorate. As their friendship developed, Lennon, a New England native, started visiting Mailer at his Provincetown, Mass., home. The professor came to Wilkes University in 1992 as provost. He also chaired the humanities department for a time and taught English. He co-founded Wilkes' Creative Writing program and currently serves as an advisory board and faculty member.

Lennon edited his first Mailer book, *Pieces and Pontifications*, in 1982 and has published widely on Mailer. He also co-wrote *The Spooky Art*, based on comments Mailer had made about the writing process. After publishing a collection of Mailer's letters in 2008, Lennon will write his biography.

Lennon reflects on Mailer's life and relationship with Wilkes in an essay on page 26.

If I knew MARGINS, if I knew the INDUSTRY, I would have known I couldn't do these things and we never would have tried. ... FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN and knowing too much [alter the entrepreneurial spirit].

— Tom Scott
Co-founder and CEO of
Nantucket Nectars and Plum TV

Tom Scott discussed the formula for Nantucket Nectars' success with business students during the Allan P. Kirby Lecture in Free Enterprise and Entrepreneurship last fall.
PHOTO BY MICHAEL P. TOUEY



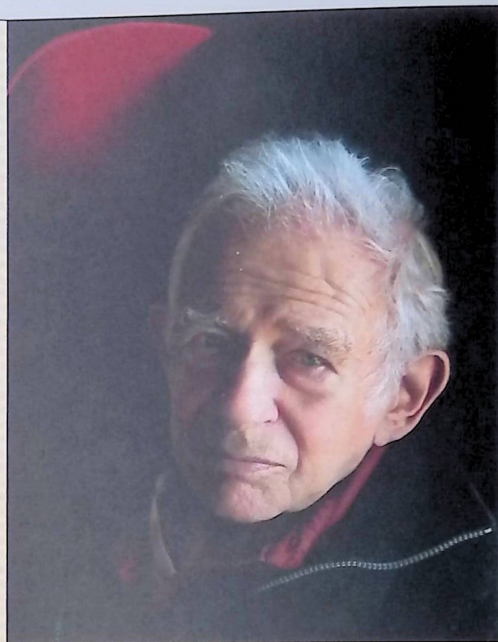
Remembering Norman Mailer, 1923-2007

A friend of Wilkes and one of the literary masters of the 20th century died in New York on Nov. 10.

Norman Mailer was awarded an honorary doctor of Humane Letters degree by Wilkes President Christopher N. Breiseth in May 1995. His citation reads, in part: "In more than 40 books over 50 years, from your 1948 novel *The Naked and the Dead*, based on your experience as a rifleman in WWII, through your chronicle of the moon shot, *Of a Fire on the Moon* (1970), to your biographical studies of Marilyn Monroe, Muhammad Ali and Gary Gilmore, to your just-published study of the Kennedy assassination, *Oswald's Tale: An American Mystery*, you have, as one critic stated, tried 'to position yourself so as to stand face to face with the true identity of our time, our time in America.' Your works are as brilliant and varied as the post-war American culture you have chronicled, criticized and helped to create." Mailer went on to write eight more books before his death, including a novel depicting the early life of young Adolph Hitler, *The Castle in the Forest* (2007), and just days before he died, *On God: An Uncommon Conversation*.

In 2000, Mailer was the Max Rosenn lecturer at Wilkes and spoke at the opening of the Norman Mailer room in the Farley Library. He donated his speaking fee to the University to help establish a scholarship in the newly established graduate program in creative writing, now an M.F.A. program. Named after Mr. Mailer's wife, the novelist and painter Norris Church Mailer, the scholarship received many other gifts and is awarded annually to a promising writer enrolled in the program. This past June, Mrs. Mailer gave the graduation address and made the award to Craig Czury, a current M.F.A. student.

Shortly before the program was launched, Bonnie Culver, the program's director and co-founder, asked Mr. Mailer if he would serve as chair of the program's advisory board, and he readily accepted. She sent Mailer a draft of the guidelines for the program and he sent back comments and questions. He asked why it was necessary for writers accepted into the program on the basis of their work to also have completed a bachelor's degree. "Surely their work speaks for itself,"



Mailer readily served as chair of the creative writing program at Wilkes.
PHOTO BY CHRISTINA PABST

he said. Based on his comments, the requirement was changed and several students, including Mr. Czury, were accepted based solely on their creative work. Ever after, he was a strong supporter of the program and spoke at the writing conference when it was launched in June 2004. The faculty, students and staff of the program are grieved at his passing.

It has been said that if you could combine the artistic abilities of D.H. Lawrence, Herman Melville and Henry James, we would have another Norman Mailer. But there was only one singular, unprecedented, irreplaceable Norman Mailer. We salute the storyteller of the American Century.

- By J. Michael Lennon

J. Michael Lennon is a co-founder of the creative writing program, and Mailer's authorized biographer. His edition of Mailer's letters, 1940-2007, will be published by Random House in 2008.