NORMAN MAILER'S BEST SELLERS

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ON JUNE 20, 1948, a Pacific war novel by a twenty-five-year-old combat veteran from Brooklyn reached the number one position on the *New York Times* best-seller list. It remained on the list for sixty-two consecutive weeks, nineteen of them in the number one spot. After *The Naked and the Dead*, Norman Mailer never again made the first position on the *Times* list. But ten more of his books—eight of them novels—over six decades made the list, including his last novel, *The Castle in the Forest*. It reached number five on February 11, 2007, shortly after Mailer's eighty-fourth birthday on January 31 and less than a year before his death on November 10.

No other major American writer of the post-war generation can boast of publishing best-selling novels over such a span of years, fifty-nine in Mailer's case. Saul Bellow and Gore Vidal come closest. Bellow's first best seller was *The Adventures of Augie March* in 1953; his last was *Ravelstein*, which made it for a week in May 2000, when Bellow was eighty-five. Vidal, born in 1925, could still pass Mailer, although he has not published a novel since *The Golden Age* in 2000. His third novel, *The City and the Pillar*, spent eight weeks on the *Times* list in 1947. His most recent best-selling novel was *Live from Golgotha: The Gospel according to Gore Vidal*, which spent two weeks on the list in October 1992. Joyce Carol Oates, Philip Roth, and John Updike could all surpass Mailer's record, but have a way to go. Their first best sellers appeared, respectively, in 1973, 1962, and 1959.

Over the fifty-nine-year period, Mailer's books, including nine novels and two nonfiction narratives, *Marilyn: A Novel Biography* (1973), and *The Executioner's Song* (1979), have spent a total of 160 weeks on the *Times* list. *Song* follows *Naked*'s sixty-two weeks on the list with twenty-five, reaching number three in January 1980. This standing is the highest rung reached by any of his ten books that made the list after *Naked*. *Song* is generally considered to be

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Mailer's second most popular book, as well as one of his most critically acclaimed. It won the Pulitzer Prize in 1980. Mailer's other Pulitzer Prize winner, *The Armies of the Night* (1968) never made the best seller list, despite receiving the best reviews of any of his books, better even than those of *Naked*. *Armies* also won the National Book Award in the arts and letters division.

Following is a list of Mailer's eleven best sellers, the number of weeks spent on the *Times* list, and the highest rung reached.

The Naked and the Dead (1948)	62	no. 1
Barbary Shore (1951)	3	no. 11
The Deer Park (1955)	15	no. 6
An American Dream (1965)	6	no. 8
Marilyn: A Novel Biography (1973)	9	no. 6
The Executioner's Song (1979)	25	no. 3
Ancient Evenings (1983)	17	no. 6
Tough Guys Don't Dance (1984)	10	no. 5
Harlot's Ghost (1991)	4	no. 12
The Gospel according to the Son (1997)	6	no. 7
The Castle in the Forest (2007)	3	no. 5

It is sometimes glibly claimed by "assorted bravos of the media and the literary world," as they are referred to in *Armies* (14), that Mailer indulged in too many extra-curricular pursuits—running for mayor of New York, making experimental films, writing columns for various periodicals, boxing, appearing on talk shows, protesting the Vietnam War, lecturing at colleges, etc.—and thus lessened his literary achievement. His forty-plus books and six decades of best sellers, most of them critically acclaimed, belie this canard.