A GENEROUS MAN

JACKSON R. BRYER

IN ALL THE TRIBUTES TO NORMAN MAILER that I've read or heard since his death, one word that I have not seen used to describe him is "generous." But as I think back over the twenty-five years or so of our acquaintance, Norman's generosity was constantly in evidence. Admittedly, one of the reasons for this is probably that our interactions often consisted of my asking Norman to participate in some program or conference with which I was involved. But the fact is that, on virtually every occasion, he—and often Norris too—cheerfully accepted and in doing so more than once made me look extremely good in the eyes of my peers. And my ego is not so great that I think that I was unique in being the beneficiary of Norman's generosity.

The first of these occasions was one I had very little to do with, other than as a spectator—but it was typical of those to follow. In the mid-1980s, I believe it was, the nascent PEN/Faulkner Foundation had recently moved from Charlottesville, Virginia, to Washington, DC, and was trying to establish its presence in a city that was then far more hospitable to politics than literature. Norman agreed to read (for no stipend) and sign books with Robert Stone at a special Saturday night PEN/Faulkner fund-raising event at the St. Alban's School in Northwest DC. That event, more than perhaps any other, launched PEN/Faulkner as a significant presence in Washington.

In subsequent years, Norman participated (always without a fee) in PEN/Faulkner's reading series and in our annual fund-raising Gala. And he and Norris and George Plimpton did both their Ernest Hemingway/F. Scott Fitzgerald/Zelda Fitzgerald and their F. Scott Fitzgerald/Zelda Fitzgerald/Zelda's psychiatrist readings as special benefits for PEN/Faulkner. Norman, Norris, and George also brought their Hemingway/Fitzgerald program to the International Fitzgerald Conference in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 2002, despite

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the fact that this event fell virtually on the eve of their departure for Europe and Russia, where they were going to present their program.

Similarly, in 2005, Norman, Norris, and John Buffalo read excerpts from *Long Day's Journey into Night* as one of the highlights of the Eugene O'Neill Conference in Provincetown. Norman also made me look good by coming to Rockville, Maryland, in 2000 to be one of the first recipients of the F. Scott Fitzgerald Award at the annual Fitzgerald Literary Conference. On another occasion, he participated in a series of "conversations" with award-winning novelists that I organized for the Smithsonian Institution. When I think of the number of such invitations Norman must have received during these years and of the size of the honoraria he was probably offered on numerous occasions, I am even more appreciative of Norman's generosity.

But perhaps my fondest memory of Norman is of the evening at the October 2006 Mailer Conference in Provincetown when Norman, Norris, and their children simply read excerpts from Norman's work. To hear his fiction and nonfiction simply and beautifully read aloud was to be forcefully and convincingly reminded what a wonderful writer he was and of how he could use the English language so exquisitely.