

# CHRONICLER OF THE CENTURY DID IT ALL

G A Y   T A L E S E

I HAVE NEVER KNOWN A CONTEMPORARY WRITER who was more famous and who seemed to be less affected by his fame than Norman Mailer.

He was never part of a social class. Yes, he went to Harvard; yes, he was an intellectual, but he transcended that. He moved up and down the classes like a great oboist playing all the notes.

He knew the underclass and he knew the upper class and he was not enchanted with either so much, but he was comfortable with both.

He had friends who were prizefighters, who were stevedores, who were hookers. They weren't all people who were of the academy. He felt that being a good writer required knowing a large array of people.

I first met him 50 years ago and I knew him right through the final year of his life. I never knew all the friends he had because there was so much about him that was unknown to those of us that thought we knew him.

He had these dimensions, these depths of interest. He was never an authority on anything but he knew about everything. He wrote about Picasso, he wrote about Marilyn Monroe, he wrote about marching on the Pentagon. He knew about women—he had six wives, he had God knows how many lovers.

He was a man who never said no. He never said no to anything. I saw him quoted in some hardcore porno magazine 20 years ago and I thought, “God, there’s nobody he won’t talk to”—there’s Norman Mailer in *Hustler* magazine, *Penthouse* magazine, as well as *The Paris Review*.

He had no social insecurity. There are people who are well known and respected and that is the end of them. When they are respected it causes them to become rigid and fearful of what the public will think. Mailer, on the

contrary, didn't care. He didn't care what you thought. I don't mean he was arrogant. He was approachable.

Mailer had what few writers had. He was both a great fiction and non-fiction writer. He was an essayist and a journalist and, as much as any historian, he caught the middle of the 20th century. He wrote about all the great disasters and all the great wonderments of the mid-20th century.

He wrote about space, he wrote about astronauts, he wrote about the political forces from the Kennedy years on through. He wrote about war and peace and sex and feminism.

He was a chronicler of the chaos and the great orgasmic climax of the whole half-century in which he thrived as a writer.

*This memorial tribute appeared in the New York Post, November 11, 2007.*