

[NORMAN MAILER,
FROM *EXIT GHOST*]

PHILIP ROTH

Editor's Note: These words are those of a character in Philip Roth's novel, Exit Ghost. The reference is to a memorial service at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine for George Plimpton on November 19, 2003. Norman Mailer offered words of praise of Plimpton as a literary gentleman, wit, and creator of one of the most important literary journals of the past century. "The mark of a gentleman," said Mailer "is to inspire love in people who hardly know him."

Then Norman Mailer. Overwhelming. I'd never seen Norman Mailer off the screen before. Guy's eighty now, both knees shot, walks with two canes, can't take a stride of more than six inches alone, but he refuses help going up to the pulpit, won't even use one of the canes. Climbs this tall pulpit all by himself. Everybody pulling for him step by step. The conquistador is here and the high drama begins. The Twilight of the Gods. He surveys the assemblage. Looks down the length of the nave and out to Amsterdam Avenue and across the U.S. to the Pacific. Reminds me of Father Mapple in *Moby-Dick*. I expected him to begin "Shipmates!" and preach upon the lesson Jonah teaches. But no, he too speaks very simply about George. This is no longer the Mailer in quest of a quarrel, yet his thumbprint is on every word. He speaks about a friendship with George that flourished only in recent years—tells us how the two of them and their wives had traveled together to wherever they were performing in a play they'd written together, and of how close the two couples had become, and I'm thinking, Well it's been a long time coming, America, but there on the pulpit is Norman Mailer speaking as a husband in praise of coupledness. Fundamentalists creep, you have met your match.