

NORMAN, ERNEST AND GREG

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WHILE MOST SCHOLARS BELIEVE THAT THE FAILURE of George Plimpton's plan to bring Norman Mailer and my grandfather together ended any possibility of a meeting, they may have been in close proximity to each other at least once. From what I've been told (and I admit that I can't prove this), Norman did see my grandfather at a gathering in New York City, just after the publication of *The Naked And The Dead*, but it wasn't much of a meeting. I don't think they even said anything to each other. Or rather, Norman had the chance to approach Ernest but he didn't. At the time, Mailer was the new sensation of American literature but Ernest was reigning champ in his category and he either pretended that Norman wasn't there or was too busy dealing with all the other writers and journalists who invariably surrounded him at events of this sort. Without a doubt he knew who Norman Mailer was. Ernest knew who all the very good writers were. He was a voracious reader and liked to stay abreast of what was new and interesting in fiction.

Norman was young enough to be my grandfather's son. He was as old as my Uncle Jack, but in spite of the age difference between the two men he and Ernest had a lot in common. Both of them were war veterans and wrote hugely successful novels based upon their experiences. They were literary celebrities and were in the news as much for their excessive drinking, swearing and politics as they were for their stories. They loved women but never seemed to stay with any of them for too long, marrying many times (Norman six and Ernest four), and they were both roundly criticized by feminists for their perceived "mysogynistic behavior." They were passionate about boxing and wrote about it (or filmed it as Norman did with Mohammed Ali) and at times seemed to train as much as any professional boxer might, preparing for the "big fight." They were also famous for hitting people or butting heads of those who annoyed them.

Norman was more of a radical, politically speaking, than my grandfather. The founder of the *Village Voice* was an acute observer of the 1960s, writing about the violence and the protests at the conventions in Miami and Chicago and the demonstrations in Washington against the Vietnam War. Ernest, of course, supported the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War but he never let his leftist leanings get in the way of his visiting Spain in the 1950s when the fascists were firmly in control of the country. Democracy was important to Ernest, but *Corrida* and the world of bullfighting and matadors were even more so.

As a Hemingway, what comes to mind most when I think of Norman Mailer are not the many similarities with Ernest but his friendship with my father, Gregory Hemingway. When I was a boy I spent a year with my father and his wife Valerie in their two-bedroom apartment on East 87th street and what I remember most about that place, apart from the fact that it was very cramped with five kids and two adults, was this enormous mounted tuna head in the dining room. It was from a 750-pound tuna that my father had caught off the coast of Cape Cod. Being nine years old I was, of course, full of questions about the fish and my father told me that it had taken him seven hours to bring it in and he showed me a picture of the tuna that was almost as long as the boat itself. Needless to say, I was seriously impressed, but what he didn't tell me, and what I found out from a good friend of my father's years later, was that Norman had been with him that day out in the ocean. He was a witness to my father's day long battle with the monster tuna and I have to say that I envy him that. I wish that I could have been there myself to see my dad as happy as he looked standing next to the near record-breaking tuna on the dock in Provincetown. It was certainly one of the better days in my father's often troubled life and Norman was there.

The other thing that I remember when I think of their friendship is the beautiful preface that Norman wrote for my father's memoir *Papa*. The book was published in 1976 and whenever I come across a copy I ask myself just how well Norman knew Greg. *Papa* in reality, says little about my father's endless flirtation with cross-dressing or about what some scholars at the time were just beginning to discover about EMH's not exactly 100% macho proclivities. Still, I have to believe that Norman as a great writer and artist was a perceptive man, too, and that something of my grandfather and father's search for what Ernest defined as a "more African sensuality, beyond all tribal law" must have come to his attention. Would Norman have been

intrigued by this dark side to the Hemingways, perhaps smiling and ultimately chalking it up as a clear case of “different strokes for different folks”? Or was it something that might have upset him, contrasting as it did with the usual image of Ernest? I’m sure that I’ll never know the answer to this question, but I can’t help but wonder.