

NORRIS TO ME

AVRAM LUDWIG

I FIRST MET NORRIS CHURCH MAILER AT THE ACTORS STUDIO with Norman. I found her strikingly beautiful in a way that I thought it inappropriate to show. I was just a kid trying to be an actor then, trying to get into the Studio, as stress-provoking an ordeal as any new actor can put himself or herself through. I felt that because I liked and admired Norman. He was so important to the life of the place and he was such an impish, mischievous wise man, I felt that I had to keep a kind of formality—the effect must have seemed shy—toward his wife. I am not normally a shy person. A shy actor wouldn't get very far, so when I did say hello to Norris from time to time it might have seemed uncharacteristic.

I don't exactly know when it started but several times after I met her I realized that she had a certain expression when we would say hello. She seemed to be saying with her eyes in a shy pained way: "I know you. I know what it is to feel ill at ease in the world." I didn't think much about it at the time, but after several years of this minimal yet, I felt, intimate kind of contact one day, she asked if she could direct me in a play Norman had written called, "The Notebook."

It's about a writer, like Norman, who is escorting a young lady home from a date. They start to have a fight and the writer thinks out loud to the audience what a great scene this would make. He starts to write the fight in his mind, and he craves to write the fight down in the notebook in his pocket. This, of course, makes her even more incensed. She slams the door in his face. The play is a little gem, a little passive-aggressive masterpiece. I loved it. It suited me. I had wondered for a time how Norris knew to cast me. I had thought she hardly knew me.