A POSTMODERN MOMENT WITH DON DELILLO AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS©

DON GRAHAM

A MAN AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS. Outside a dog barks. It sounds like the dogs in Uzbekistan. A small man, pale, wearing a checkered shirt, brown pants, a baggy jacket. They stand there. The floor creaks. The room whispers of death. The old writer who had lived in this house died in this room. Or so the Writing Centre says. In the room where aspirations flutter and flare. There is a world inside the world.

Hi, I think you're looking for this room, aren't you. I'm Don Graham. He thrusts his hand forward, firm grip, look you in the eyes, the local style.

Don DeLillo. His hand is soft, the hand of a glover. Egyptians made gloves in the days of the Pharaohs. He doesn't look like a Gyp, he's more of the Italian strain. The tiny village of Occhiobello, north of Ferrara. Ellis Island. A large family in small rooms. Something out of Jacob Riis. Kids everywhere. Growing up sensitive in the streets. Fordham U. A job in advertising. Writing copy for Sears Roebuck. A string of novels. The one about football's not bad.

His longtime editor is named Nan Graham. His first name is Don, short for Donald. Nan Graham, Don Delillo, Don Graham, short for Don. There is a world inside the world.

Postcard #1: Dr. Malcom Perry, who couldn't save Kennedy or Oswald when they showed up at Parkland dead, was the grandson of the country doctor who delivered Ballew Graham. For some reason the first name wasn't on the birth certificate. It was much the same in Flaubert's France.

A fly is the vector of tedium.

THE MAILER REVIEW, VOL. 8, NO. 1, FALL 2014. Copyright © 2014. The Norman Mailer Society. Published by The Norman Mailer Society.

Let's play Libra. I'm Aquarius. I sent you a letter about Audie Murphy. You answered, you said you knew all about Denton because you'd married a girl from Denton. What's her name, maybe I know her. Wouldn't that be something.

The bones of your books are in boxes. Unbidden, the boxes reside in temperature controlled rooms.

The streets of Dallas. He was drinking in some unremembered downtown bar. Lethal shots of J.T.S. Brown. Paul Newman drank J.T.S. Brown in The Hustler. Later that night in the drunk tank at the Dallas City Jail he leaned against the snot-green tile walls trying to sleep. In the morning his buddies paid him out.

> President Jack regrets riding into town
> with his bubbletop down.

Green tile walls are the basic unit of the state.

In the building at the university where he spends his days talking about the past, the hallways are of the same green tile. He imagines the contractor's heir fishing for golden-speckled brindizi bass in the wine dark waters of the Aegean.

The viscera of your books. The paper. All that wood pulp.

The box is the basic unit of literary legacy. Your words are in little coffins else they would become scattered and your name, unransomed, forgotten.

In the Carousel Club, on Main or Commerce, he couldn't remember, you could look it up, downtown in any event, near a bookie joint, one night he watched the girls from Kountze and Dime Box and Graham, the dusty provinces, looking for the golden ring, bright lights, fetching up, one after the other, at Jack's place.

Old Latin protocols. You precede Mailer by eight letters of the alphabet. Mailer is in boxes. Mailer is the madman in the attic of post-WWII novelists. Nobody writes books like *The Naked and the Dead* anymore. Mailer wrote a book about God. Mailer wrote a book about Jesus. Mailer wrote a book about Hitler.

Mailer knows more about Russia than you do. Mailer believes that the lone gunman acted alone. Not you. You believe in secret shooters. Like Oliver, another American schemer.

For class visits they take your stuff out of the boxes, outlines, old lists,

scraps of newspapers, defunct magazines, jottings in little notebooks. They display them behind heavy glass windows. The glass looks bullet-proof. Everybody is bored.

> In the room the academics come and go
> sad little sensible shoes talking of belladonna delillio

In a hundred years nobody will give a rat's ass who killed Kennedy or why.