TEACHING NORMAN MAILER IN AFGHANISTAN

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This essay recounts Prof. Chandarlapaty's experiences teaching at the American University of Afghanistan, where he is presently in his third year.

THE PROJECT FOR TEACHING MAILER'S BODY OF WORK in a war-torn country that had expressed its hatred for virtually everything American was daunting and yet thoughtfully rewarding in the simplest of senses. I realized that my students, brave and often much more accomplished than my American students, had gone through none of the deep indoctrination with things American that I had found in many peoples of the world. Here were young adults whose inclusion in anything Western was limited to heavily censored Indian films that featured dancing and techno music alongside the obvious anchors of tradition. The exchange of ideas from places like Delhi or Dubai had favored their development of culture, and largely ignored American models of artistry that had first appeared in the 1960s.

But the greatest misnomer was the American: a symbol of prosperity and individual license that freedom had guaranteed. I understood from my teaching experiences in Afghanistan that this was a person who had bombed innocent people, captured and killed politicians and enemy combatants, and imposed his will upon poor rural folk while denying Islam its rule over its own people. My lectures on America's presence turned sourly negative: they had changed their pro-military stance and opined that it was time for America to leave Afghanistan for good, formenting crucial comments about a nation's sovereignty and questioning the rule of law from overseas.

Norman Mailer renounced the 1966 film version of *American Dream* and

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I came to the sudden realization that I was not able to make any choices concerning content. A heavily censored and in some instances textually inaccurate model would be the means for teaching gender and class conflicts in contemporary American culture. I had been rigorously advised by my supervisor to never entertain them with highly controversial content: I understood that the chapters of *The Naked and the Dead* would not have a strong meaning for them because the content was too distant and lacked the graphic intensity of their exposure to American soldiers and politicians. I decided to discuss the novel as a means of teaching literature, and discussed in class the novel's true content. To my surprise, the student response to American marriage, licentiousness, and polity was far from misinformed and reflected student awareness of the world beyond. As I prepared to screen *An American Dream* and *The Naked and the Dead*, I realized that I would have to give a much more broad coverage of Mailer as writer and international figure for their response to be meaningful. Still, I was pained with the important concepts for relating American anxiety and these were thoughtful. How does one represent the aching humanity of a person unsure of leading the world? How did one capture the real depth of the lingering personal trauma? And how does one explain one's doctrine of individual freedom to someone for whom it did not exist? It was then that I realized that Mailer, America's foremost mid-twentieth century writer, spoke of prosperity's trials and tribulations and the "first nation" identity, and that these qualities make violence and sex challenging for Third World readership. While obviously censorable, Mailer's graphic content and the loss of one's innocence were challenging concepts that allowed me to host the human spirit's truest agonies while possessing no working knowledge of the Islamic world. My initial appraisal was binary: Islam taught obedience in all areas of one's life, family, employment, and outlook, while the American diadem was constructed out of the machinations and gusts of choice. The converse would be telling of the Afghan response to critical sensing of identity: Shah Rukh Khan's depiction of Raj, the commissioned reporter, in *My Name is Khan*, was telling: "in this country (America) a Muslim is not even a human being"(*My Name is Khan*). Cross-cultural misunderstandings of place and identity could be thoughtfully exploited: the idea that Americans had borne the cross of suffering and collective responsibility for world democracy had made them both a target for stereotyping and an icon of man's uncertainty. Rather than teach democratic ideals to the students, then, I felt that it was

obvious to visit the counter-thrust of modern cultural anxiety: namely, the fact that Mailer spoke to American identity's changing face and his graduation from provincial, Christian, and isolationist agrarian renegade into sophisticated and pluralist representative who was inclusive of world idealism. The stress breathed a great deal of life into the hubris of my own post-riddled soul. Americans could and would fail themselves, become unable to recognize themselves, see their infancy as that which was shattered and thus castigate the world for depriving them of the peculiar and coveted shelter that had made them rulers of the world. The raw subject matter for exposing the fallen American's anxiety was very evident in the composition classes: as we reviewed essays by James Peck, Christopher Borick, and James Kunstler for critical content, streams of criticism came from students who had seen through the veil and who thoughtfully posed the sense that Americans did not understand the outside world, that they were ruled by international trade and thus insensitive to the exterior man's cultural and personal needs, and that their ascription to the arts, literature, and philosophy were far more interesting and constructive for them as Afghans than their political realm because it was in the former that comprehension was constructive, not destructive. Rapidly I understood what would make Mailer meaningful: we in Afghanistan would understand Americans as humans, not as a behemoth that had preached to the world. Over the past year, I could emotionally relate to that central fact.

Because I was currently teaching World Literature, I decided to feature *An American Dream* and evaluate student responses based on the clarity of the students' elucidation of character and plot. I felt that this method was the most reasonable method of gauging retention of American content simply because as a professor I could present and limit the novel's considerable graphic content. Not only could I teach the novel as a "murder-mystery," I would then focus on America's peculiar concept of manhood and ask questions pertaining to the portrait of masculinity versus world models that were more hybrid and complicated. At the same time, I breathed a sigh of relief: *Apocalypse Now* had featured a stripper event and the women had walked out because in Afghanistan the image and concept were offensive. But the recursive moment was querulous: how would they portray American civilization as burdened and unsuccessful? What would they be able to mimic through a movie from a distant world they had never experienced? Would they find the content to be "forward", or would they treat it preferentially, a

bygone era that was inferior to the exciting and raunchy and romantic world of Bollywood stars like Hritik Roshan and Salman Khan? In short, would our "man" stand as viable with theirs?

Then I thought of the writing question, and what the answers would tell us, both in terms of external comprehension of American anxiety and in terms of writing development when confronted with character, plot, and outlook. I also admitted that the character of Deborah—a millionaire mogul who connived to wreck Rojack's life and sanity, appealed in a realm where women stars such as Rekha in *Umrao Jaan* had performed a convincing synthesis and mystique that contrasted with the radical feminine, and thus would be a curious find. Censorship, too, did not soil the aggressive content: clearly, the novel's primary conflicts and subplots called upon our *elan* of examining modern character and its lingering anxiety and permanent depression. So I crafted a question based upon the themes of comprehension and response: after all, Bollywood movies were and are easier to grasp than written words on a piece of paper. I wanted to know if they would see the gender contrasts to be dynamic and bearing questions: I also decided that students should reflect basic comprehension of art, marriage, and authority alongside the static portrait of criminality, which may really have been Mailer's intention. The axis of a 1965 novel, too, confirmed the general question at large: in what direction were Americans going with their moral understanding of themselves? As in the Academic Writing classes, Rojack fields calls and points out that "you can't imagine organized crime without cases of corruption and bribery" (*An American Dream*) and that organized crime "paid off the cops" (*An American Dream*), calling into question Afghanistan's overuse and simplistic assessment of tackling crime on the streets. The larger question was emblematic: love, marriage and vocation accentuated Rojack's personal guilt, or rather his escape which caused him to suffer the maze of guilty choices and moves.

An American Dream was the point of cultural introduction. I pondered the obvious fact that it would spark controversy, and remembered that an all-male classroom would somehow navigate the controversial moral and gender questions whereas co-ed classes had found men and women quarrelling or angry with one another. I edited authorial content: the references to profanity and nudity were studiously re-presented, although the novel confirmed the key sentiment that Mailer had compassed cultural change and moral anxiety: I, too, would accept Islam's governing control, leaving

out discussion of cannibalism, graphic violence, and Shago's powerful moment of conscious subversion. A few irreverent students commented that they were interested in frontal nudity, but the target character was Deborah Caughlin, surely a *femme fatale* that would jar moral re-evaluations of marriage as an institution. I explained the whiskey-soaked fight in terms of feminine challenges to masculinity, and commented on Caughlin's attempt to break Rojack down by talking about her love affair and the moment of masculine breakdown in a decorated veteran. My class, normally very gusto-high and confident, quieted down and occasionally commented on Caughlin's insane drunkenness. Another student asked if the twosome were part of the counterculture. While I explained they were not—Caughlin and Rojack were empowered, mainstream Americans, not hippies—the comments calmly established Islamic moral probity, and the sense that the vehicle of freedom and empowerment had careened out of control. *An American Dream* also challenged their notions of love and romance: I looked back and commented: "the supreme irony is that the time for love has passed because Rojack has killed his wife"—they nodded their head meaningfully. I realized then that Afghan students had the capacity to critique American excess without my guidance.

After a discussion of the novel itself and competing titles, another student noted that this America was "distinct"—different from other films and novels where there was marital or otherwise violence. I got the sense that he was grappling with the concept of personal freedom as a pretense to violence in one's family outlook. Marriage as an institution of honor is often left out of American "blockbusters" that depend on thrilling action and conspiracy theories, but the obvious was true—unlike those, there would be no happy ending and merely the grief of a flustered and intrigued descent into criminality. So I felt they had explored meaningfully the supposed "innocence" of the American realm, and that virtue and honor were concepts that no longer mismatched their ravaged society against our prosperous one. When the same student asked me questions about capital punishment—a comment that figured my emphasis on the law's reduction of famous or powerful citizens—I pointed out that many popular films, including *The Green Mile*, featured visionary or magical subjects who had failed to point out or prevent crime as a guiding example. The basis for re-examination of the "American Dream" had been brought to light—it was no longer a moral utopia that dreamlike assessments in colonial stories such as Voltaire's *Candide* had fore-

cast in glowing and romantic terms. I then sat in a chair and demonstrated the "electric chair": I wanted them to conceptualize the severity of punishments in our land, maybe simply to activate the sense that a changing America not only foretold the fall of the old guard, but perhaps an end or a changing turn to the concept of "dream"—a happiness that could sweep away man's trials and tribulations.

A short, open discussion provided more light on Mailer as the philosophical recluse that he often was. Naturally, I included several film examples to explain my idea of American pandemic—films like Martin Scorsese's *The Godfather*, Sylvester Stallone's *First Blood*, the X-rated *Midnight Cowboy* that featured a murder using a telephone. I wanted them to understand two substantive concepts: the breakdown of American morals, and the increased graphic content that saddled the hero-villain with an "Everyman"-like moral crisis. It was essential to understanding Mailer as decadent architect to sustain the point that he would have no one to turn to and no guiding fabric of redemption, as was true of Al Pacino where he confessed his sins to the priest, or Rambo's failed confession after attacking a Washington town sheriff. I saw the meaning of Gerald Lucas's general comment: "Perhaps instead of focusing on vocation, education should instead target skills necessary for the digital age, like adaptability, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity"(Lucas 152). There had in fact always been a good deal of fascination with the negative side of American mores—to add to this, the student population found an Afghan-styled angle to discuss among themselves, and a 115 student articulated a presentation criticizing capital punishment worldwide. It was then that I realized that the students had taken the umbrella of communitarian criticism towards their own fashioning of it. I suppose that I could always remain couched in the pose of an intellectual. Still, ideas in ferment meant the opportunity to tackle issues and ideas that allowed them to see the contrary to my repeated comments that American social life was and is conservative, and that punishment was a stern reminder of the power of authority. At the same time I understood the capacity for students in this realm to both seize the subject matter and to socialize its content: several presentations in the 115 class had dealt with issues such as networking, Facebook, crime and drugs, and education: it was clear from the best of these that intellectual content was shared, and therefore usable in the realm of a diverse range of social topics pertaining to education. Many students were in fact unafraid of translating liberal

political content, and a few of them instigated useful and contrastive arguments to portray the Afghan's peculiar social situation. One student had even taken my caveat for promoting Islamic science into my wife's business class. He quoted the Qu'ran, "attainment of knowledge is a must for every Muslim" when asked about the seriousness of coeducational learning. The contrastive picture was thus interesting, and a break from my highly individualized and intellectualized beginnings in college learning.

We had completed several novellas in the previous weeks, including Leo Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Illych* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Still, the question drew silence: Why did Rojack allow what happened to him? And I had at once found the angle of the Everyman play: clearly, the viewing standards of 1965 had wrought an intricate re-patterning of crime and guilt to suppose redemption in death, in a way favorable to the conservative moral standards of the times. When we turned to Mailer's breakthrough novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, students laughed easily at the profanity and racial stereotypes, but they did agree that in wartime disavowal of civilization, two factors would always be at work: the camaraderie of young men, and the tendency to call one's life and mores as civilized. I wanted them to understand more than the concepts of leadership and democracy: it was important to underscore the fact that America was divided internally, between rural and urban, Christian and Jewish, young and old, Northern and Southern. Over the past year I had read papers and watched presentations that hearkened to the ethnic and racial tensions in diverse Afghanistan. I would simply point out the complexity of the American conundrum, expose the weaknesses of the human spirit to the point of generating the comic narrative that they seemed to enjoy. It was important, too, that they understood the key point of naturalism. Some students made the adroit synopsis that they should be allowed to write from the standpoint of naturalism and short pieces like Jack London's "To Build a Fire." As the soldiers scrambled about the rain-torn bivouac, supposing possessions and items lost in the whirlwind storm and leaving them without preparation for Tokayu's attack, the concept was much clearer—man was dependent upon Nature and that power, wealth, or civilization could never stand against it. In short, war offered us the capacity to re-screen an American experience that Afghans were often only told existed, a pathetic internal angle that abbreviated humanity and the pose of human descriptiveness. It was also a fertile point to suppose that American literature was tied to many literatures

and its characters, a concept we were beginning to examine with T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

In short, teaching literature in Afghanistan was frequently difficult. Few students participated in discussions because the works were very distant. When, for example, I mentioned the Great Depression, they did not know what it really was and equated it with recession rather than massive societal change, economic standstill rather than comprehensive financial crisis that threw Americans onto the streets. It was as if they had no idea that Americans could be poor or destitute, or that it was so bygone that it did not deserve remembrance. Teaching literature offered the same penchant for teaching history alongside it. Nonetheless, I looked forward to reading the papers and lent out my DVD in the hope that they would answer the two questions that dealt with Mailer. I knew that outside critique of the American experience was something that I had sown in them for three semesters, and that the literature students might identify a shade of something deeper than my 115 students, who were more tangentially linked to the fact of anxiety as a descriptive shadowing of terror, alienation, destruction, racism.

Yet, as I pondered the responses, I knew that it would be difficult to foreground analytic answers to questions of art, gender, and institutions that were far from them. Although admitting that my students had given a valiant effort towards Afghan democracy—with elections appearing on the horizon and the snowballing chaos of U.S. troop withdrawals, I reminded myself to appraise essays of the basic retention of key factors: the war, and the dehumanizing portrait against American humanism. Should they grasp these two concepts in total, there would be the chance that appropriate syntax would make for a coherent response from persons not strongly acquainted with the imaginative grasp of literature or literary history. I also reminded myself to grade on the socializing curve, to forecast novel responses as the beginning for future discussions of the American experience.

I was surprised to find that none of my students picked *The Naked and the Dead* for their essay, but then I realized that many students had innocently objected to talking at much length about war and that thus it was a subject matter that would force them to revisit wounds of today's modernized, West-looking, professional-leaning Afghan student. In any case, the Afghan students had written as thoroughly as they could about the Taliban Emirate in my writing classes. It constituted a memory that was precise in its limits and definitive about where the country should move toward in the

coming years. I waited for responses about *An American Dream*, certain that there would be interest, but cautious as to how well my students could examine plot, characters, and historical period satisfactorily so as to comprise my first written glimpse of Asia's growing perspective on America's much-trodden and often puzzled *hubris*. I waited anxiously. America had been a bedraggled concept, far from the viewing and listening eye, a situation that could have easily confused the hell out of them or left them with questions that their elders would have forced them to discount or deny as that which negotiated an artful dynamic and a classical crisis of identity. But I knew that concerns of identity in the American social landscape, when tepid and noncommittal in the stories that my American students had read, including Raymond Carver's "Cathedral" and Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," would probably speak with greater accuracy and identity for a student whose essential reading and writing nature revealed a good deal of curiosity and imaginative query. My students like film and we had talked about them in many classes with some success. Concerns of censorship, or rather "self-censorship" promised too to be interesting. I waited to see if Afghans would use the concept of *An American Dream* to recursively confirm their own values and their estimations of modern man's limitations in a world governed by Allah's meticulous guidance and control.

The first essay was improperly focused and missed most of the main themes, lost in the imprecise syntax and messy estimations of character. The respondent claimed that the film reflected that Americans were "hardworking" and that the film was "idealistic" in seeking "peace through art." Nonetheless, the first contributor stroked his imagination repeatedly when inoculated with the concept of a dangerous feminine like Deborah Caughlin—"she was threatening him as if he is her slave." I was reminded that the shadow of American womanhood at AUAF was limited and carefully circumscribed to deflect observation of the institution of marriage—most of our professors are single or have no children, while it is common for our students to be mothers and fathers with large families. Once again, I realized that Caughlin was for many of the young men a star of some speculation—she was a wild-eyed, drinking harlot, a crazed character with an internal circumspection that none of them had had any exposure to. The respondent then noted: "Deborah's world is very much different from Rojack's. She likes to use each man for her pleasure." Very close was the Muslim's concept, then, of American "empire," a reversal of the dramas of Harun al Rashid in *A*

Thousand and One Nights and an eye-opener concerning women that I first glimpsed in the form of American actress Goldie Hawn when courted by an Arab emir in the 1985 movie, *Protocol*.

The second essay reached the level of basic comprehension of Mailer's gendered dynamic much better and gave a greater overview of Islam's steadfast criticism of American family. It demonstrated the concept of probity that I was looking for. In this essay, the respondent wrote succinctly: "the story opened with a strong portrayal of how overshadowing a rotten love could be deeply honest, relentless in its opening of the pain and suffering." What pleased me was not just this respondent's eagerness to "understand," but also his capacity to render the subject of feminine rights without any political or lifestyle trappings. As in times of lore, the focus was on Deborah's emotions and conscious application of self-destruction to the confines of family and marriage. He then wrote glumly: "much of fiction is an obnoxious debauchery: the picture manages to create justifications not only for extraordinary behavior but also for attitudes taken strictly as attitudes." In short, modernism was un-Koranic and reflects the decline of American family and morality. Here was an effect that I had been trying to elicit from them over three classes, to get them to turn their shock and dismay over episodes of senseless discord into criticism of the American experience. I did not actually think, why do we teach American culture? This was only because I had seen Black students rip apart Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" a few years ago. The ethos of the student, in short, would depend on an adept response, a capacity to boil down the pretense of film and eccentricity to its basic human qualities. It was welcome: I had been reminded many times that the students were less interested in American culture than the bottom line of our institution—earning a degree and marking out a career. The respondent then claimed the concept of crime in terms that repeated the examination we had begun with Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*: "[Mailer] peels away the layers of social models to reveal a world of pure inclination and atrocious cruelty."

The third essay classically restated the virtues of Islamic morality with respect to the purpose of fiction in demonstrating art, story, humanity. I knew, from asking the question of authors read at many junctures, that my students were most proficient with Persian literatures including *Shah-nameh* and the courtly love *ghazals* that fostered Urdu national culture in the nineteenth century. As an Indian, I knew that these literatures and mankind's es-

timation of the spirit were patently philosophical, a three-thousand-years-old rumination on the human psyche, and that these were the characteristics that I had enjoyed most when I had lived and worked in this country. It wasn't a question of being analytical, but in measuring the didactic of human experience and its transfixation of reason. Simple poesy often stated the true measure of man's concept of life and society. Still, the respondent ably took on the deconstruction of Rojack as war-hero: "in *An American Dream*, there is no set protagonist or antagonist. In fact, Mailer has taken these two separate ideas a merged them into one character." He then added soberly, "due to the realization of his crime, he is redeemed in the eye of the reader." At that point, I knew that the student had grasped Mailer's *oeuvre* concerning the modern, intellectualized American man, freed in his conscience of moral rigor and responsibility. He understood that a different morality had grown up alongside the windows of prosperity in the far-off land visible only through film. The estimation was also about American "freedom," and the abiding sense that there was much more to be taught than the rhetoric of American governments and international law, or the *aegis* of philanthropy. What would be understood was a human being with complex and contrary negotiations of his essential nature.

The writer then put it bluntly: the novel "shows how much the problem of immorality is in the American society. This novel clearly portrays how much the sense of modernism, fame and money has ruined the real values of life, which is of course love." While reading this, I knew that many ethnic Americans, including my parents, had treaded this same criticism with the country of their adoption. Whether it was hippies seeking love by abandoning money or immigrants seeking a better life for their children in the United States, criticisms of freedom and capitalism are usually clear in their elucidations of social context. It was true. The concept of love was very far from this particular film, the idea that compassion and gentility were virtues that accompanied success was as distant from American films as I could remember in my own indoctrination. This student also adeptly located the modernist tendency to dislocate syntax and decenter consciousness, so that it had encouraged crazed and benighted responses exhuming culture and community. The examples of family's demise and morality's dismay were abundant, ranging from James Joyce's *Ulysses* to John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* to F. Scott Fitzgerald's pathetic-leaning tragic story "Babylon Revisited," where a father fails to reacquire his daughter. We had talked about Mod-

ernism and it was clear that this student had masterfully cut apart the pretense of freedom and community to locate problems in the human heart that corresponded to a different culture's estimation of what human virtue was supposed to manage in the human experience. As a professor that had given up America for the exciting mission of bringing American education and perspective to the Muslims, I was endeared by this probity. In reality, it is this capacity to criticize and state human responsibility that made teaching ethnic students more interesting than teaching American students.

I admit that the American University of Afghanistan does offer an interesting range of Western literatures that contrast mightily with our outpost location on the one hand, and the complete lack of English-language training on the other. It is unique in that courses in Romanticism, film theory, Shakespeare, The Bible, and Modernism are available for the students to puzzle over. I also admit that many students struggle with the concepts and have trouble with style, the seriousness level of European history, the imagination that accompanies faith and community. There have been many challenges over the semesters that I have been there. I can still remember one student claiming that Jesus "never existed," and numerous times when Goethe's *Faust* was "too difficult to understand." Like working at home, teaching history accompanied teaching literature, and teaching the essay meant giving them examples of how an essay could be written. But the function of such inquiries, I believe, is more than simply awareness. I firmly understand that as communities, nations such as Afghanistan must endorse a vision of the world beyond them so they might devise the limitations and strictures of their own democracy, and that they must enjoin a perspective on the evolution of thought and experience that preceded their ascriptions to modernity. The relative skill and interest level when revisiting Mailer was a part of that experience. It was a chance to discuss something in vogue today, a crossroads between past and present that sometimes will seem unreadable for the modern Asian student. Locating a novel that could be situated within the censorship standards of Indian film even today probably helped, too, to portray Americans as vulnerable human beings—and by and large, with their clothes on and without profanity. But this summit between America and Islam was meaningful from a citizen's perspective—to state one's response with enough analytical knowledge and from the certainty of one's cultural domain, *against* the Self's many temptations. The "everyman" picture, too, was a good way of explaining the depth of crime in American

memory—it was a topic that I had rehearsed over the length of time that I have been there. Are there "good" stories and "bad" stories, and what happens when the work fails to render the crucial content that Americans who have read the novel have been waiting to read and comment on? I guess that depends upon the rhetoric as much as the person. Still, without tapping black-and-white films, *An American Dream* was thoughtful, a harbinger to the pandemic ills of the present, a chance for the students to see how Mailer had shattered the traditional portrait. Thus, despite the obvious alignment of text to suit the censors and the questionable renditions of minor characters that spoke much more decisively in the novel, my students could identify character conflicts and thus separate *An American Dream* from more recent fiction, DVDs, and short stories. For probably the first time in their history, they would be the ones who would critique the crucial moment of cultural degeneration, as students in Third World countries were beginning to do so, even in the most low-rated Indian films such as *Desi Boys*, which Mailer himself might have thought was even more wholly devoid of crucial content and a completely meaningless exercise in hero-glorification and pop culture ignorance.

I learned a great deal about the process of education in this light. Teaching in Afghanistan is a challenge mainly because our reach was in uncharted territory. I relied upon my wit, my Indian background, my willingness to give the fullest lectured presentation that I could in the hope that I could compensate for a roughly ten-year-gap in English comprehension among the students. But I learned that AUAF's students are a collaborative bunch, and that the idea of sitting down with friends and classmates without the professor's guiding comments allowed them a good deal of license in exhuming the key themes of literature and culture. This conflicted with my primarily colonial vision of teaching in this realm. It caused me to value student perspective as that which is living and that lives behind the shadow of professorial contemplation. Of course, I am beholden to that method simply because the Afghan student has a very wide range of concerns, few of them truly intellectual in nature, when he or she attends the campus. That is to be expected. My job is to provide the raw knowledge that years of reading and studying have availed me to. But perspective is especially ingenious when it attempts to grow from traditional roots. There is more that we can learn from this, especially when we are not in the classroom simply to praise the author's accomplishments and biographical struggles. As a minority pro-

fessor, I felt that this was the lasting veneer of realization. Norman Mailer had brought me closer, not simply to his comprehension, but to mine. He had invited a counter perspective that would attempt to bring insight and puzzlement to the world stage.

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