

NORMAN MAILER:WORKS AND DAYS: JUNE 2020 UPDATE

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UNCOVERING NEW MATERIALS ABOUT NORMAN MAILER is one of the pleasures of our work. Thankfully, Mailer's long and varied career keeps gifting treasure hunters new riches. With J. Michael Lennon's attention to detail in crafting each entry and Donna Pedro Lennon's meticulous archives that allow him to do so, we have updated *Norman Mailer: Work and Days* with 44 new entries spanning six decades. Mostly from uncovered or forgotten interviews, these entries show Mailer's breadth of interests, ideas, and happenings from the time he was removed from a television program in the late-fifties to familiar concerns like architecture, technology, totalitarianism, and the decline of American greatness. I have selected a handful of entries that give a taste of this interstitial Mailer, show the variety of his interests and activities, and hint as to what might still be out there to discover. I think you will be struck by the insightfulness and contemporaneity of his comments over the years, many of which seem just as relevant today. For the complete entries, and additional updates, see Project Mailer: <projectmailer.net>.

58.4A

"ABC-TV Bars Norman Mailer from the Ben Hecht Show." Article-interview by Malcolm Logan. *New York Post*, 13 November. Scheduled to appear on this television program on this date, Mailer was removed by Al Hollander, the station program manager, who said he wanted guests from outside the literary and theatrical worlds. Mailer said he believed he was removed because he and Hecht were planning to discuss "The White Negro," the beat generation, and sex. "My guess," he said, "is they decided the article was just too

hot to handle, but I'm just guessing." Mailer told Hollander that he was not taking himself off: "Well, let's have it clear. You're disinviting me. I'm not taking myself off the show."

61.21c

"Mailer Slashes American Apathy." Article-interview by Bill Hamilton. *The Daily Texan* (University of Texas-Austin), 8 December. Report on Mailer's address, "What I Think Is Happening to American Minds," at the University on 7 December. He spoke of "a very subtle deterioration" in the American idea of greatness. "There is general apathy, a lack of enthusiasm in politics, no desire, no hero," he said, adding that the country needed a hero like Roosevelt, Churchill or De Gaulle. Eisenhower was a hero "only to those persons who were most proud of their lack of imagination." Of the 1960 presidential race, he said that Nixon represented "psychic security," and Kennedy "originality, thought, and glamour," but he wondered if Kennedy's narrow winning margin had hampered his boldness.

63.27a

"Mailer Brings Existentialism to City." Article-interview by Hoke Norris. *Chicago Sun-Times*, 12 May, 58. Speaking at the University of Chicago on 11 May, Mailer said that totalitarianism was taking over the country, pointing to architecture and air conditioning as examples. He also commented on his September 1962 Chicago debate with William F. Buckley, Jr., describing Buckley's debate tactics as "unspeakably churlish invective," but adding that, offstage, Buckley was "the best fellow you ever met." He spoke at length about the nature of existentialism. "That which makes me feel good is good," was his shorthand description of the philosophy.

67.9a

"Mailer: Critic Or Actor?" Article-interview by R. H. Gardner. *Baltimore Sun*, 10 April, B4. Account of Mailer's 7 April speech at Goucher College. His theme for the evening was the dangers of the status quo, and he related this to comments on the situation of "the Negro," saying that if their influence continued to increase, it might change most institutions. He attacked President Johnson for the Vietnam War and said Johnson might have continued the War as a way of diverting attention from the civil rights

movement. Asked what liberal program he would advocate in place of President Johnson's agenda, Mailer said it was a difficult question, adding "I have begun to suspect that there is a chasm not just between liberal political thought and political realism, but between liberal political thought and realism itself."

72.3B

"Norman Mailer Visits Gaston Hall." Article-interview by Emily Durso. *Georgetown Voice*, 15 February, 12–13. At Georgetown University on 11 February, Mailer spoke to an American literature class and then debated Barbet Blackington, a professor of sociology at American University. The title of the debate (which Mailer did not care for), was "Can Norman Mailer Find Happiness During Male Menopause?" He said that if he had tried "to hold a debate on the menopause of Barbet Blackington, her praetorian guard would have run him out of the auditorium." Mailer listened to Blackington's comments on male menopause, and replied that if people got the idea that he was a chauvinist pig from Kate Millett's attack on him in her study *Sexual Politics* (1970), then they didn't know how to read. He stated that Millett had extensively quoted him out of context and wondered how she got a doctorate from Columbia for a dissertation that was inaccurate. Further, he said that he found the Women's Liberation Movement both exciting and frightening: "The one thing I can't stand is that we must always have respect for women in all circumstances. What kind of totalitarian hogwash is that?"

78.3A

"Jackie Squares Off with Norman Mailer." *Palm Beach News*, 10 October. Account of a magazine launch party in Manhattan attended by Jacqueline Onassis and Mailer. Asked if she was "The Bitch Goddess" mentioned in his essay, "Some Children of the Goddess" in *Cannibals and Christians*, he denied it, and went on to say that "the Bitch Goddess is a metaphor, which reminds me," and then explained that the metaphoric muse of his creative imagination sometimes crowded him as a journalist, adding, "when I interviewed [presidential candidate] Jimmy Carter, my head was filled with so many things that I started talking and then discovered, to my horror, that I'd gone on for 20 minutes." Carter "just kept smiling."

79.33A

"Night of the Norman Conquests." Article-interview by Paul Slansky. *New York*, 3 December, 6. Account of Mailer's exchanges with a line of people at a Manhattan B. Dalton bookstore where he signed copies of *The Executioner's Song*. One woman in the long line said, "This is like going to communion." Mailer replied, "You must have sinned a lot." Asked if he was writing another book, he said, "Always. That's how I make my living."

80.4A

"It Was Quite a Shindig." No author. *Rolling Stone*, 30 March. Brief account of a Mailer party at his Brooklyn Heights apartment, attended by José Torres, Woody Allen, Kurt Vonnegut, and Milton Greene. Music was provided by the punk band, Shrapnel. Mailer had a head-butting contest with one of the Band members, and wrestled with Shrapnel's manager, Legs McNeil. When the band was leaving Mailer offered some bottles of scotch to them, and one band member replied, "Norman, we don't know how to drink scotch yet." Mailer gave him a bottle and said, "Well, you'll learn, you'll learn."

83.10A

"He Just Can't Forget." Caption for photos of Mailer and Marilyn Monroe. No author. *Boston Herald*, 6 March. Asked why he felt compelled to write *Strawhead*, a play about Monroe, after writing her biography and a novel about her (*Of Women and Their Elegance*), he said, "People have been asking me that for 10 years. I have a few answers, but don't believe any of them."

87.10A

"Yours as Noted." Letter (15 April 1977) from S.J. Perelman to Caskie Stinnett, rpt. *Vanity Fair*, July 1987, 115. Perelman recounts Mailer's appearance as a presenter at the 1977 Academy Awards ceremony on 29 March 1977. Mailer tells the story of Voltaire visiting a male bordello in Paris: "On emerging," Mailer said, "he was asked how he had enjoyed the experience. He replied, 'Once a philosopher, twice a pervert.'"

89.0

“Lend Me Your Ear.” Squib by Howard G. Chau-Eoan. *Time*, 23 January, 60. Speaking at a New York City retrospective of his films, Mailer commented on how the staged hammer attack in *Maidstone* by Rip Torn, followed by Mailer biting Torn’s ear, affected the film. “In Rip’s view, everything made perfect sense. He may have saved the film.”

91.47B

“People: Mailer’s Idea.” No author. (Springfield, Ill.) *State Journal-Register*, 15 November, 2. Brief item quoting Mailer on the occasion of being named New York State Author by Gov. Mario Cuomo. Mailer urged other states to create similar awards, adding “This idea may be a bummer, but I think it’s worth a try. Now that we no longer have that moribund, decrepit, sad, Third World country, the Soviet Union, to be our evil empire, we have to contemplate the evil empire within our own borders.”

95.30A

“The Soul’s Ecologist.” Article-interview by N.B. *Under the Elms* (Brown University Alumni Magazine), September. Internet. Brief report on Mailer’s April 1995 appearance at the Salomon Center at Brown. He opined on plastic: “It is the excrement of oil, it is the waste product of oil”; modern architecture: “If the building you are in is less agreeable than the building across the street, then the one you are in was put up later”; Republicans: “They’re all consummate liars. If only they could go back to an earlier happy state when, like Democrats, they were just hypocrites”; Bill Clinton: “He’s intelligent, good-looking, charming. He has only one flaw: He’s not willing to die for an idea”; Lee Harvey Oswald: “Slowly and glumly, I came to the conclusion that Oswald did it himself”; race relations: “We finally have to come to grips with the American disease, and that’s relations between black and white.”

96.5A

“Party of Parties.” Article-interview by Neil Steinberg. *Chicago Sun-Times*, 28 August, 8. At an Art Institute party for *George* magazine, Mailer mingled with celebrities, including John F. Kennedy, Jr., the magazine’s publisher, Eunice Shriver, Aretha Franklin, William Kennedy, Jerry Springer, and Kevin

Costner. While speaking about Hillary Clinton, Mailer said, "I have nothing against strong women," noting that all of his six wives fit in this category.

97.23D

"He smiled, so I punched him." Article-interview by Mick Brown. *Daily Telegraph* (London), 25 September, 26. Mailer, speaking in a London hotel room while promoting *The Gospel According to the Son*, gives his longest description of punching Martin Peretz on a Provincetown street after Peretz's *New Republic* gave *Gospel* "a particularly ugly and personal review." He adds that his wife, Norris Church, "was appalled." He describes himself as "a fellow of less than medium size and slightly more than medium weight, but with a huge dragon's tail"—the legends surrounding his reputation. Speaking of the Catholic Church, which he called "a compassionate church," he recalled that Pope John Paul II said that if necessary, the Vatican would have "to sell its treasures to help the poor." "Well," he said with a laugh, "I'm waiting." This, one Mailer's best spontaneous interviews of his later years, also includes comment on *The Last Party*, a memoir by his second wife, Adele Morales.

00.4A

"Haven't We Seen You Somewhere Before? Norman Mailer's Visit to Hay." Article-interview by John Walsh. *The Independent*, 5 June. Internet. Breezy article about the participants in the annual Hay-on-Wye Literary Festival in Wales. Mailer is described as "the Brooklyn roustabout, the Goliath of sexism, the Beelzebub of vanity." He is quoted on Hemingway, from whom, he said, "I got a notion that went deep into me. I won't evade the imagery here. I was penetrated by his influence." Asked if he liked women any better these days, he said that he thought them to be "the finest thing in creation" until the Women's Movement started, "and I realized they were no better than men—as nasty, as competitive, as ugly." At the end, he signed books for an hour and was "nice to everybody. Absolutely no side to him," said one participant.

00.12A

"Mailer at Pugnacious Best." Interview-article by Joel Yanofsky. *The Gazette* (Montreal), 22 September. Speaking at the Shaar Hashomayim Syna-

gogue in Westmount on 21 September, Mailer spoke about “the extraordinary complex burden of being Jewish,” and also about recent media attention paid to a new memoir, *Dream Catcher*, by J. D. Salinger’s daughter, Margaret. “What did the newspapers all say—that he’s drinking p—,” Mailer said. “We never think, ‘Here’s this sensitive hermit and if he’s drinking urine then maybe there’s something to it.’” At the end of the evening he concluded, “I can’t even believe I brought up what the newspaper will say tomorrow: ‘Mailer likes drinking urine too.’”

04.3A

“Author Mailer Has Few Kind Words for President Bush.” Article-interview by Kevin Walker. *Tampa Tribune*, 7 February, 6. Speaking at the Florida Sun-coast Writers’ Conference after his keynote address on 6 February, Mailer said, “George Bush must be defeated. He’s vain. He’s arrogant. I’m not a knee-jerk Democrat, but I will be voting for Kerry.” Noting that Americans have difficulty balancing Christian idealism and the American dream of “piling up mountains of moolah,” he said, “Jesus Christ and Evil Knievel don’t consort too well in one psyche.”

05.1B

“Mailer Holds Nothing Back in Speech at Weber State.” Article-interview by Brandon Griggs. *Salt Lake Tribune*, 1 April. Mailer, keynote speaker for the National Undergraduate Literature Conference at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah, noted that this was his first time back to the state since he published *The Executioner’s Song*. He recalled telling a Mormon lawyer back in the 70s, “You have a tough religion.” The man responded, “Religion is supposed to be tough.” Mailer added, “I’ve never forgotten that.” Most of his remarks dealt with American identity or the Iraq War. “We have to stop acting like spoiled children, assuming we are the best nation in the world, [and] that America is God’s favorite country. We have many more questions than answers.” Mailer also mentioned that he had written 700 pages of a new novel *The Castle in the Forest*, but declined to reveal its subject.

05.11A

“Commentary.” NB, column by James Campbell. *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 November. Brief mention of Mailer receiving an award for “distinguished

contribution to American letters,” from the National Books Award Foundation a week earlier, presented by Toni Morrison. One of Mailer’s lines from his acceptance speech is quoted: “In the literary world today, passion has withered.”

07.34A

“Life Sentences: The U.S. Tour of Günter Grass.” Article-interview by David Streitfeld. *Washington Post Book World*, 12–18 August, 1, 8–9. Long analysis of the reception of Grass’s latest book, *Peeling the Onion*, a memoir, which includes his admission of having served as a teenager in the Waffen-SS, an elite unit that ran Hitler’s concentration camps. Mailer appeared with Grass at the New York Public Library on 27 June, his penultimate public appearance. Mailer, “who looked small and round and frail, sort of like the aged Bilbo in *The Lord of the Rings*,” defended Grass and called his book a masterpiece. He noted that he had been unable to write about the stabbing of his wife, Adele Morales, and therefore understood why it had taken Grass so long to reveal his secret Nazi affiliation: “If you can’t do it so it enlarges not only your own focus, but the focus of others, you’re better off not writing about it.” He said the stabbing was undoubtedly the reason he was not ever seriously considered for the Nobel Prize, adding this: “The Swedes are very intelligent people and they’re proud of their prize, and they’re damned if they want to give their prize to a wife stabber, and as sour and bitter as I am, I don’t think I can blame them.” Mailer said the extract from Grass’s book in *The New Yorker* was “certainly the best thing” in the magazine for a decade.