

NORMAN MAILER: REPORTER, TRAVEL WRITER, CRITIC AND “PROVOCATEUR-IN-CHIEF”

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NORMAN MAILER'S LEGACY CONTINUES WITH MAILER STUDIES, in history, contemporary culture, and in Tourism. Before concentrating on the obvious, the rich literary heritage of Mailer, which has been preserved and passed on through the efforts of academics, translators and literary enthusiasts gathered around the non-profit organizations The Norman Mailer Center and The Norman Mailer Society, this article will focus on Mailer's role in Tourism and in branding of the so-called Literary Tourism destinations (Vitić-Četković, Jovanovi and Potočnik Topler, 2020, str. 94). Experiencing literature through Tourism and travelling through reading and literature is gaining popularity (Mansfield, 2015; Agarwal & Shaw, 2018), not only for researchers and students, but also for tourism practitioners and destination managers, who are interested in the demand and supply of this sub-type of Cultural Tourism. Literary tourists are interested in how a certain place had influenced an author and how a certain author or author's work created a place (Potočnik Topler, 2016). Thus, Literary Tourism encompasses many different activities, interests and locations: from sites that are physically associated with the lives of famous writers (houses, graves, statues etc.) to events, tours and performances that commemorate the author and his works. Not only prose, drama, and poetry inspire people to become literary tourists, but also biographies and autobiographies, screen adaptations of literary works, theatre performances, and so forth. The term Literary Tourism is very broad by itself, and it connects literature with many other disciplines, offering a shared medium for creating, contemplating, developing places and personalities.

However, authors, their work, and literary figures, are in the centre of Literary Tourism (Robinson & Andersen, 2002, Agarwal & Shaw, 2018) and literary destinations. The first to mention among Mailer literary places is the Ransom Center at The University of Texas, which has turned Austin into a Mailer literary destination after acquiring the Norman Mailer archive. Austin is probably one of the most significant Mailer literary destinations, together with Provincetown in Massachusetts, and Brooklyn in New York.

MAILER: TRAVEL WRITER

Mailer has had many labels—from “left-conservative” to “literary journalist” (Potočnik Topler, 2016). Labelling Mailer also as a travel writer and connecting Mailer to Tourism studies may come as a surprise, but it is essential that the role of literature (and humanities) is understood more widely. Literature and reading are significant for everyone as they develop the mind and the imagination, which encourages the development of the creative sides of readers and this creativity, further on, manifests in all areas of life, including business and economic development. Also, Mailer’s novels are much more than Mailer’s stories and they have the potential of becoming a significant economic factor, since literature, as research on Tourism show, influences and informs perceptions of visitors and tourists and their wish to visit certain literary places. In Literary Tourism, the concept of “text-to-tourism” is often inverted and changed to “tourism-to-text” (Potočnik Topler, 2016), especially when it comes to urban places. Mailer is definitely among authors who describe urban places extensively, and he uses them as “places of happening” in his novels. *The Armies of the Night* (1968), which the *New York Times* critic Alfred Kazin labelled as “diary-essay-tract-sermon” (Potočnik Topler, 2016, 50), was set in Washington, where anti-war demonstrations took place in 1967 from October 21 to 23. Mailer’s descriptions of events are very detailed and vivid and what is particularly characteristic of this Mailer novel is the blurred line between fiction and journalism. When it comes to style, *The Armies of the Night*, which is comprised of Book One: The Steps of the Pentagon, subtitled History as a Novel, and Book Two: The Battle of the Pentagon, subtitled The Novel as History, is linked to Literary Journalism, New Journalism, and Participatory Journalism. According to Mailer (1968, 284), Book One is “a personal history which, while written as a novel, was, to the best of the author’s memory, scrupulous to facts, and

therefore a document.” Book Two is, in its form, similar to a news report or reportage. As journalists do, Mailer employed a variety of voices in his novel and also different discourses. *The Armies of the Night* is, therefore, an example of heteroglossia (employment of various discourses in a particular work).

In *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (1969), Mailer is a reporter documenting the political arena in the United States at the end of the 1960s. In this work he employs urban places successfully, and speaks of Chicago and other American cities with pride and enthusiasm:

Chicago is the great American city. New York is one of the capitals of the world and Los Angeles is a constellation of plastic, San Francisco is a lady, Boston has become Urban Renewal, Philadelphia and Baltimore and Washington blink like dull diamonds in the smog of Eastern Megalopolis, and New Orleans is unremarkable past the French Quarter. Detroit is a one-trade town, Pittsburgh has lost its golden triangle. St. Louis has become the golden arch of the corporation, and nights in Kansas City close early. The oil depletion allowance makes Houston and Dallas naught but checkerboards for this sort of game. But Chicago is a great American city. Perhaps it is the last of the great American cities. (Mailer, 1969, 83)

For branding of places, cities, and destinations, in the process of creating cities’ images, such literary heritage is of great importance and value.

Also, Mailer’s novel *Why Are We in Vietnam?* could be associated with travel writing, as the author is narrating about an organized hunting trip in Alaska by a group of hunters from Texas. In the work, he mentions Provincetown, where he spent the last years of his life. If we borrow Tourism terminology, we can state that Mailer’s career was an exciting journey—literally and metaphorically speaking. Therefore, Mailer’s heritage may be employed as a resource for further development of attractions and destinations based on Mailer’s works and life. Places with Mailer tourism potential are many, and when it comes to their branding and creating images, it is vital to be aware of the fact that urban spaces are also created by their inhabitants and visitors. By walking in the cities, we explore their spaces. As J. Michael Lennon argues, Mailer’s career “had a significant foreground—in Brooklyn, Harvard, and in the Philippines—but it began officially, one might say, on one hot day in Nice” (2013, 4). Thus Mailer is connected to many places from Europe to the Philip-

pinetrees and the States. Mailer's home was in Brooklyn Heights in Brooklyn, which is the New York literary metropolis, and where Mailer is also a part of the Brooklyn Literary Tour. Mailer buildings that can be seen on a walking tour of Brooklyn include: 20 Remsen Street, where Mailer wrote a large part of *The Naked and the Dead* in a small attic studio, 49 Remsen Street, where Mailer lived with his first wife Beatrice after he returned from the Second World War, 102 Pierrepont Street, which was the home of the Mailers from 1943 to 1949, 128 Willow Street, which was the home of Mailer's parents between 1949 and 1985, 142 Columbia Heights, where Mailer lived longer than in any other place (Lennon 2014, 112). Literary Walking Tours have emerged as a well-received type of Literary Tourism and some of them are also included in the most popular tour guides. For example, *The Lonely Planet*, which advertises walking tours on Google Maps, but the point is that the actual Literary Walking Tours have multiple benefits, since they enable walking, hiking, physical exercise and, together with reading and possible development of personal creativity, overall mental and physical well being. When planning, creating, and developing Literary Walking Tours, paths and trails, it should be observed that a well-organized Literary Walking Tour is educational, informative, interactive, unique and entertaining, sharing these attributes in just the right proportion for a specific individual or a group. The objective of Literary Walking Tours is to contribute to the emotional and physical well being of participants. The recreational aspect of Literary Tours is in the walking, which can be adjusted to the participants' abilities, age, interests, and so forth.

One of Mailer's major literary destinations is Provincetown, which was, according to Mailer, one of the most beautiful towns on the East Coast of the United States of America (Potočnik Topler, 2016). The author spent many summers there while writing important works. In his 1984 novel *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, was written in that summer and "Provincetown is as colorful as St. Tropez, and as dirty by Sunday evening as Coney Island" (Mailer, 2013, 4). In Provincetown, Mailer was a well-known figure, and many events have been organized to commemorate him. This town is also Mailer's final destination, as he is buried in the Provincetown Cemetery.

There is significant potential for future development of cultural, creative and Literary Tourism in other places related to Norman Mailer in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere. One of Mailer's publishers, for example, is located in Boston. In 1972 Mailer gave a speech at Berkeley. Mount Desert Island in Maine is a place where the Mailer family went each year for a month

until 1981 when, because of the bad weather, the family stopped travelling to Maine and met in Provincetown and Hollywood, where Mailer worked. In Cannes he was a member of the jury of the 40th Cannes Film Festival in 1987; he travelled in Switzerland in 1948 and 1980. In Paris he studied with his first wife Beatrice; Kaunas was one of Mailer's stops when travelling to Moscow in 1984. Mailer visited Leningrad in 1984. In Mexico City he visited his daughter Susan Mailer, and these destinations are only a few locations that could serve as foundations for Mailer's travels—a potential new tourism product. In promoting Mailer's literary heritage, not only is American culture and literature promoted, but also Mailer's destinations across the world.

MAILER: CRITIC

Mailer, "provocateur-in-chief" according to Robert Begiebing (2013, 404) is one of those widely translated authors whose works are eternal, clearly due to the quality of his writing and the topicality of the works, which often include criticism of American democracy and society. Also, the general socio-political circumstances, or the so-called "spirit of time," is a significant factor in determining Mailer's (un)popularity, and his inclusion in the literary canon. In many of his works, Mailer reflects on the socio-political and economic situation in the United States, particularly on power, capitalism, and democracy. His works offer a very complex picture of the society of the United States of America. Mailer's criticism was often reinforced by bitter knowledge, which arose from his patriotism. Wenke mentions "the deep well of patriotism from which his bitter criticism of America has always sprung" (150). It could be claimed that Mailer disagreed with the involvement and complicity of the United States in certain wars and was, therefore, faithful to his principles that criticism is always welcome and necessary because it leads to progress. In his Pulitzer Prize book, *The Armies of the Night* (1968), Mailer depicts America as a split society. There is not only the conflict concerning the war in Vietnam, but a series of bitter recognitions that America is anything but an American myth. The society of the United States was, according to Mailer, divided into the left and right, the rich and poor, the young and old, the black and white. However, Mailer's hope in the United States remained and he put it into the hands of young people:

At any rate, we have an army of at least 35,000 amateur soldiers consisting of doctors, dentists, faculty, veterans groups, housewives,

accountants, trade unionists, Communists, Socialists, pacifists, Trotskyists, anarchists, artists, and entertainers, no, even historians may have a joke—there was no more than a smattering and a sprinkling of such professionals at the Pentagon. Present in the majority were college students from all over the East, and high school students and hippies and Diggers and bikers. (Mailer, *Armies* 274)

Mailer also questioned some decisions made by those in power and he uncovered the attitudes of the American citizens towards some of the contemporary events in his other texts. Many of his works “serve as a kind of mirror that reflects society back at its readers, prompting them to reconsider their role in big issues of the day” (Potočnik Topler, 2016, 33).

The march in front of the Pentagon also shows all the contradictions and Mailer even called the protesters the “Crusaders” (Mailer, 1968, 109). According to Mailer, the true symbol of American strength was the Pentagon, not Congress, which was only a tool to achieve the Pentagon’s objectives. The author also attempted to show the relationship between fiction and history in this novel, perhaps alluding to the fact that history and fiction do not differ as much as you might imagine. History is written by winners and, thus, it is not necessarily fair or true. By comparing history to fiction, Mailer also drew attention to the problem of the mass media, which often sells fiction as fact to audiences. Mailer was critical towards the rising and increasingly predominant industry of mass media, which is also clear in Book Two: “The mass media which surrounded the March on the Pentagon created a forest of inaccuracy which would blind the efforts of an historian; our novel has provided us with the possibility, no, even the instrument, to view our facts, and conceivably study them in that field of light a labor of lens-grinding has produced” (Mailer, *Armies* 245–246).

In *The Armies of the Night*, Mailer is not only a critic, but also a patriot, or primarily a patriot, since his writing functions as constructive criticism, and patriotism. *The Armies of the Night* is, thus, a book about many things, and, according to Morris Dickstein, mainly focuses on patriotism, protest and resistance, which “feels surprisingly contemporary” (130).

CONCLUSION

Social critique is one of the essential characteristics of Norman Mailer’s texts from his debut novel *The Naked and the Dead* to *The Castle in the Forest*. So-

cial critique, together with a constructive critical debate, is one of the reasons why Norman Mailer's works have legacy power. *The Armies of the Night* portrays the United States of America as a land of big contrasts, where democracy is in crisis. More than fifty years later, the question is what would today's Mailer description of the United States of America be like? Would Mailer still be a critic, arguing that democracy is endangered, and the power misused? It seems as if pointing out the things that could be improved or altered was his life's mission, and this is the reason for his popularity. As "provocateur-in-chief" in Europe and beyond, Mailer is definitely considered one of the most significant American authors of the twentieth century. He reached very diverse audiences in many different languages because of his views, beliefs, and courage.

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