

NORMAN AT THE TABLE

CHARLIE ROSE

WE ARE IN CARNEGIE HALL and we are celebrating a great man. And in that context, would you please make sure your cell phones are off. Or we'll ask Norman to think of something to make you sorry. Let me start this evening, this afternoon, evening, early evening, with two words—Norris Church. She has seen the morning and the evening, the fear and the pride, and she has seen the applause and the attacks, and I know that she has felt it all. And I'll bet you this—she knew how much Norman loved her.

I'll never forget one night after Norman came to my table. We had finished the conversation and I said, "Where are you going?" Norman said, "To the hospital." He looked at me with soft fear in his eyes, and he said, "I don't know how Norris is doing, but I know she's a fighter."

In one of my "brilliant questions," I once said to Norman, "What about the novel?" He said, "It's the finest moral judgment that can be made, moral judgment not to be found in science, in psychoanalysis, in social work, or in the clergy." I said, "Or in journalism or whatever." I asked, "Why a novel? Take me back to the novel." Norman said, "It offers the highest challenge for moral inquiry. Writing a book is like being married to a woman you're not too happy with. You're worried about it all the time. You want the marriage to be better. Being married right now for me is much easier than writing a book."

"Because you are married to a woman you want to be with?" I said. "Yes," Norman said, "but when I'm writing a book it's like I'm married to a woman who I've got to improve now. I've got to tell you, any man who thinks he can improve his wife is a fool."

The words of Norman Mailer.

I loved him for so many reasons. I loved the way he was obsessed about fame and the famous, Marilyn Monroe and Jesus, Adolf Hitler, and Lee

Harvey Oswald, Gary Gilmore, and Jack Abbott, and people he loved, like Muhammad Ali. I loved him for his ambitions and his obsessions, like war in *The Naked and the Dead*; like fame, *Marilyn*; like crime, *The Executioner's Song*; like revolution, *The Armies of the Night*; like secrets, *Harlot's Ghost*; like history; *Ancient Evenings*; like sex, everything.

He obsessed about all of this and he also obsessed about his favorite topic—himself. That's the topic that I explored in twelve conversations, it was so much fun to be there because he was so many people, and there were so many people to explore, and he was there to tell you everything that was on his mind, and every opinion he had in a thousand ways.