

TAKING LEAVE OF NORMAN

G Ü N T E R G R A S S

*This memorial tribute was sent to Norris Church Mailer and read
by Charlie Rose at Carnegie Hall on April 9, 2008.*

HIS FIRST NOVEL, *The Naked and the Dead*, was one of the books I devoured as a young man soon after World War II. Later on I admired Norman as one of the few courageous writers, for he knew that our literary profession is, at the same time, a political task.

As writers of the same generation, writing in our beginnings about similar experiences, Norman and I were often named in one breath. The last time we met was in June 2007 for a joint appearance in the New York Public Library. When Norman came, escorted in his wheelchair and well protected by his beautiful wife Norris, he looked frail. But as soon as he, walking on crutches, had entered the stage, he looked young, vivid, and his eyes flashed when he addressed the huge audience saying in a stunningly serene way that this would be probably his last appearance in public.

Then we spoke. Norman found good and understanding words about what he had read from my recently published autobiographical book, pages dealing with World War II—the beginnings of our lives as grown-ups. We discussed in an open way writing about personal experiences, stories often difficult to tell, and Norman proved to be a sympathetic, extremely generous colleague and friend. In the end we stood together in the limelight in front of the enthusiastic audience.

At the reception after this event Norman was sitting again in his wheelchair. Taking leave, we looked each other, both knowing that we would never meet again.

I will never forget this moment.