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## The Archivist's Apprentice

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This essay is an account of how I became the archivist, and ultimately, the authorized biographer of Norman Mailer, including brief profiles of my mentors, Dr. Nancy Potter, and Dr. Robert F. Lucid, and Mailer himself. The process of creating the Mailer Archive, now located at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas-Austin, is presented at some length as is my friendship with Lucid and Mailer.

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Becoming an archivist was not my aspiration. I had only a crude idea what one did—sifting through crumbling manuscripts and musty tomes like Sir Walter Scott’s tedious antiquarian, Dr. Jonas Dryasdust. My goals in grad school were to saturate myself in American literature, write a doctoral thesis about it, and get a job teaching it. And quickly. My GI Bill benefits were running out, and I was married with three sons in diapers. I was smitten by the work of the American romantics—Melville, Hawthorne, Dickinson, Poe, and the rest—and my thesis proposal, titled “The Bewitching Difference: Detachment and Ambiguity in Hawthorne,” called for an exploration of his dark, symbolic forests and pride-ruined Puritans. Shortly thereafter and before I’d done any writing, I learned that a few years earlier someone had successfully defended a Ph.D. thesis on precisely my topic. Consequently, I’d have to come up with a new proposal.

My first thought was of Norman Mailer, who by the end of the ’60s had published a dozen books and won some major awards. I had a tropism for all he’d written, and a strange sympathy for some of his most disturbing characters, the ones with an enclave of virtue in their pervading ignobility—Sgt. Croft, the sadistic platoon leader in *The Naked and the Dead*; Lonnie Madison, the mad Cassandra of a Brooklyn rooming house in *Barbary Shore*; Marion Faye, the Baudelairean pimp who is the conscience of the Hollywood Babylon depicted in *The Deer Park*; and Stephen Rojack, the parapet-walking professor of existential psychology in *An American Dream* who believes that fear is the root of all neuroses. But I was most taken by his finest creation: a middle-aged, jaded, reluctant Vietnam War protester, who is described in the third-person personal by his writerly self, Norman Mailer, the celebrity author who had “learned to live in the sarcophagus of his image.” Seeing himself from another perspective enabled him to distinguish himself from the ways the media depicted him, and to prove and present the pockets and layers of his own mutable self. It was this character in *The Armies of the Night* who moved me from admirer to enthusiast, from enthusiast to votary. Later on, I would become Mailer’s bibliographer, editor, flunky, friend, biographer, and eulogist. But first, I was his archivist’s apprentice.

When I proposed the idea of a thesis on Mailer, my advisor, a Hawthorne expert, was silent.

“Is there a problem?”

“Mailer’s still alive.”

“But he’s ... a major figure.”

“Not yet, I’m afraid.”

Arguing with him was out of the question. My options were to abandon Mailer or get a new advisor. Stunned and baffled, I went to the office of Nancy Potter, whose class on American nonfiction I was then taking. I had recently made a class presentation on Mailer, based largely on a *Life* magazine excerpt taken from his forthcoming book

on the Apollo 11 moon shot, *Of a Fire on the Moon*. This heavily illustrated, 26,000-word feature article, the longest nonfiction piece ever published in *Life*, appeared on August 29, 1969. The immediate jewel of the excerpt is a dramatic description of the ignition of the Saturn V rocket and its initially slow ascent, which Mailer likens to the stately movements of Melville's *White Whale*. His startling simile was more confirmation of my belief that Mailer was a latter-day transcendentalist. As a Harvard undergrad, Mailer had attended the lectures of F.O. Matthiessen, the author of *American Renaissance*, and Mailer, I believed then and now, is a literary descendent of Emerson, Whitman, Hawthorne, and Melville, and the other figures of the movement Matthiessen so memorably depicts. The cover of that *Life* issue, featuring a smiling, tousled Mailer in a velour pullover the color of his eyes, hung on my office wall for years.

Dr. Potter, who had encouraged me to present the Mailer report, was a subtle but powerful presence in the U.R.I. English Department. A gay feminist with a shock of black hair, she was a Henry James expert who spoke in paragraphs and had published a collection of chiseled short stories, *We Have Seen the Best of Our Times*. I liked and admired her. Everyone did. She listened to the replay of my conversation with her colleague about Hawthorne and Mailer, and on my unfocused idea of writing about the shift from fiction to nonfiction in Mailer's recent work. I don't think I actually asked her if she would replace the Hawthorne expert—she just announced it. "It's a splendid idea," she said, "Mailer's an important writer, and I'd be happy to direct your dissertation."

At that time, Mailer's reputation among feminists was beginning to tatter, and for good reason, although Nancy never said a word to me about her feminist allegiances. An archetypical WASP, she was unable to conceive of using her position to advance her personal politics. I can only recall one instance when her admiration for Mailer as a writer and her loyalty to the women's liberation movement seemed to be in conflict. In an early draft of my thesis, I quoted Mailer quoting Henry Miller (in Mailer's 1971 memoir-manifesto-literary essay, *The Prisoner of Sex*) to the effect that a vagina was a key symbol for the interconnection of all things, to which Mailer added, that it was the "indispensable step to the beyond." In the margin, she wrote a couple of sentences, but then crossed them out. I could imagine her Kate Millett-feminist side making the rejoinder and her Henry James-forbearance side crossing it out. I never mentioned it to her.

I can further illustrate the fine-hammered steel of Nancy's sensibility. During our interaction on my thesis over the next three years, she learned of my admiration for Henry James and one day told me of her connection with him or his ghost or ... here's the story as I remember it: She was living in Boston, going to graduate school; this

would be a couple of years after the war, 1946–47. James was then all the rage, and nowhere more so than in Boston. A friend of hers called to announce that she had stumbled on a Jamesian artifact in the attic closet of a Beacon Hill building where he'd lived in the 1880s. Nancy rushed over and the discovery, carefully sealed in heavy paper and addressed to James, was brought forth. They paused to savor the moment, almost like the characters in *The Maltese Falcon* before The Fat Man unwraps the black bird. Could it be the conclusion of his final, unfinished novel, *The Ivory Tower*? Perhaps some letters to an unknown lover? Or maybe a preliminary sketch of Whistler's painting of the middle-aged James?

The parcel was opened, and behold: folded neatly were three or four union suits (long underwear) with the monogram HJJR (James's father was also a Henry) prominently stitched on the upper torso, over the heart. Nancy and her friend were of course familiar with his 1888 novel, *The Aspern Papers*, which focuses on the intrusive prying of an unnamed biographer in his hunt for the "sacred relics" of a deceased Romantic poet, Jeffrey Aspern, in the possession of his lover, the ancient Miss Bordereau, at her palazzo in Venice. She foils the attempt, and the precious letters are saved from the tawdry desires of the "publishing scoundrel," as she calls him. After they had gently examined the parcel's contents, one of them asked:

"What would James have us do?"

Simultaneously, they blurted out the only answer: "Burn them!" And they did, proudly, gravely, in an act of literary solidarity with The Master.

Whenever I've told the story of the sacerdotal burning of the Jamesian undergarments, as I have, many times, I couldn't help but reflect that in some unforeseen way the loss perhaps diminished our understanding of James's sensibility. The union suits, while deeply personal, might have been deeply instructive. Perhaps. Time would tell. In fact, the incident enabled me to grasp the prime directive of archival endeavor: Save every artifact, not just manuscripts and journals, letters, and address books, but items whose future significance has yet to be gauged. Wait until the item's utter lack of value is incontrovertible. And then, pause again. This directive explains why, 13 years after Mailer's death, I still retain a small, cheap, broken brass clock he kept on his desk, two oyster shells he brought home from Michael Shay's restaurant because he saw the intaglio faces of Greek warriors on them, and a box containing his complete dental records (obtained from his dentist with the blessing of Norris Church Mailer, his widow), his false teeth, and a partial bridge.

As I worked on my thesis under Potter's benevolent eye, I began to wonder if Mailer might be his own best interpreter. At the time, there was no consensus on

Mailer's work—and not much now. The critics were all over the place on its merits and meanings. He was, as James once said of Emerson, “a man without a handle.” I'd read the critical estimates of his writings, but found Mailer's unfiltered words in profiles and interviews, which are alternately self-serving and not, to be more valuable. In many of them, the 1964 *Paris Review* interview, for example, he looks carefully over his career, pointing out places where he felt he'd had gone astray (his short stories), or made an advance (his 1956 columns for the *Village Voice*). He also talked candidly about growing up in Crown Heights, a profoundly Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn, the challenges he faced in the Army, and what writers influenced him when he began writing seriously at Harvard—especially James T. Farrell, whose finest work, the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, is set in an Irish ghetto on Chicago's South Side reminiscent of Mailer's Crown Heights neighborhood in Brooklyn. I found such nuggets to be more valuable than the ongoing, tedious debates among critics about whether Mailer was predominantly a realist, a romantic, or an existentialist.

Consequently, in the early '70s when the literary world was beginning its decades-long affair with deconstructionist theory, I was transforming myself, unwittingly, into an old-fashioned literary archaeologist, assiduously collecting Mailer's public utterances—everything from formal interviews, comments quoted in profiles, letters to the editor, public debates, and symposium contributions to gossip in *People* magazine and Q-and-A sessions at college appearances (the editors of college newspapers usually mailed him accounts of his campus appearances, material otherwise difficult to retrieve). Mailer was often unguarded in these interviews—a journalist's dream—blurting out revealing personal information and outrageous opinions. As Martin Amis once noted of Mailer, “No one in the history of the written word, not even ... D.H. Lawrence, is so wide open to damaging quotation.” I had no clear idea why I was amassing all these clippings and offprints (later I also collected his blurbs, audio and video cassettes of live events, and campaign buttons from Mailer's 1969 run for mayor of New York), no awareness of how valuable the work of seeking, finding, articulating, and cross-referencing this mass of material would be to me, and I didn't for several years.

Mailer's original archivist was his mother Fan, who zealously collected his juvenilia (most notably *The Martian Invasion*, a 35,000-word sci-fi novel written when he was eight), high school and college papers and grade reports, yearbooks, and every letter he wrote from Harvard, and from the Philippines during WWII. In the late '60s she gave—not without some pangs and the receipt of repeated assurances—all this material, including thick scrapbooks containing reviews of and ads for his early books

(assembled by her meticulous husband, Barney), to a University of Pennsylvania professor, Robert F. Lucid, a close friend of Mailer's.

As the editor of the three-volume *Journal of Richard Henry Dana, Jr.*, the author of *Two Years Before the Mast*, Lucid immediately grasped the value of what Fan had preserved. Over the next few years, and with Mailer's encouragement, he scoured the writing studios, attics, and basements of Mailer's two homes (his brownstone in Brooklyn Heights and a summer home in Provincetown, on Cape Cod), where he found the hand-written and typed drafts, galleys, and page proofs of all Mailer's books up to and including *Of a Fire on the Moon*, and a good deal of unpublished material—two unpublished novels written in college, as well a short story, "Love-Buds," a hilarious account of Mailer's disastrous attempt to lose his virginity in a Scranton brothel when he was 17. Lucid later recalled the thrill of finding "the plaster-buried, mouse-nibbled manuscript of *The Deer Park* in a basement tool bench drawer in Brooklyn."

A few years later, my wife, Donna, found the misplaced final print of Mailer's 1968 film *Beyond the Law-Blue* in a corner of the Brooklyn basement, and Bob and I discovered his still-unpublished 1954-55 marijuana journal, titled "Lipton's" (marijuana was referred to as tea in the '40s and '50s), mixed in with some *Village Voice* material. Typed by Mailer himself, the journal is 104,000 words in length. The ribbon copy is now in the Mailer Archive at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas-Austin; Mailer gave me the carbon copy in the early 2000s. In 1970, Fan authorized Lucid to deposit the first trove, now sorted into 36 double archival boxes, in a facility on Manhattan's Upper East Side that she had selected. The padlock and key to the storage vault at Day & Meyer, Murray & Young that she gave Lucid now sits on a bookshelf in my study.

I'd exchanged three or four letters with Mailer in early 1972, beginning with my letter of support after his disastrous December 1971 appearance with Gore Vidal and Janet Flanner on the Dick Cavett Show. In October 1972, we met in person when he was on a book tour and spent a long evening in a bar in Macomb, Illinois. My first meeting with Lucid was at Mailer's home in May 1975, the same day I'd successfully defended my thesis. I'd been working on it for three years while teaching full-time at the University of Illinois Springfield, and now, with "Doctor" before my name and directions to the home of America's most famous writer in my pocket, I was feeling modestly Napoleonic. On the anxious three-hour drive from the University of Rhode Island to Mailer's place in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, I must have smoked a dozen cigarettes. Lucid and Mailer were talking in the library when I arrived, awed, speechless, and over-stimulated from the cigarettes and the celebratory luncheon hosted by Dr. Potter. They were discussing *The Fight*, his new book about the Muhammad Ali-George Foreman championship boxing match in Zaire, The Rumble in the Jungle.

“Okay,” Mailer said, “so I’ve written a minor book,” he said as I walked into the room, adding that everything he wrote didn’t have to challenge Tolstoy.

Lucid, a slight, fair, feisty Irish-American from Washington State, then in his early 40s, conversed easily with Mailer, had become his friend and confidante, partly because Mailer was intrigued by his background. Lucid’s older brother was a major figure in the Communist Party of the U.S., and his younger brother was a Jesuit priest who had served as an Army paratrooper chaplain in Vietnam. Bob always said he was a cross between them, an alloy of the political and the spiritual. Lucid himself served in the Air Force and trained to be a pilot in the 1950s. During his time in the service, he did some gambling and in one memorable craps game made a dozen or more consecutive successful passes and won \$16,000. The narrator of *The Deer Park*, Sergius O’Shaughnessey, a fighter pilot in Korea, wins a similar amount in a poker game, a coincidence that drew Mailer, always alert to omens and portents, to Lucid right away.

They’d met in 1958 when Mailer spent a week at the University of Chicago, where Lucid was working on his doctorate. Mailer lectured, gave an important interview to Lucid and Richard Stern, “Hip, Hell and the Navigator,” published in 1959, and met students during the day. At night he hit the bars with Lucid and another Irish-American, the poet Paul Carroll. Mailer had many drinking pals with Irish roots, including boxing champ Roger Donoghue and journalist-novelist Pete Hamill, who wrote about their friendship in *A Drinking Life*. He was also friendly with the legendary Dublin playwright and lush, Brendan Behan, who described himself as “a drinker with writing problems.” Lucid, a serious oenophile, once told a morning class that what the world needed was a good breakfast wine. I was another—Irish-American drinker, not oenophile—and relish the memory of evenings sipping single malt whiskey with Mailer at the small bar in his home overlooking Provincetown harbor. Because I had been a bartender in grad school, I was usually behind the bar pouring, a singular vantage-coign for observing Mailer and his visitors.

After Mailer had introduced me to Lucid on that memorable day in Stockbridge, he returned to demeaning *The Fight*—now generally considered the finest account of a boxing match ever written. Lucid responded by saying that Mailer was now free to get back to his mammoth 1983 Egyptian novel, *Ancient Evenings*, which he had begun researching in the late 1960s. Mailer had shelved this saga-in-progress every time he’d felt impelled to write about the bloody, bizarre events and actors of the time, including his account of the 1967 anti-war March on the Pentagon (for which he won the National Book Award and his first Pulitzer), *The Armies of the Night*, and the seven nonfiction narratives that followed it through *The Fight*. I listened raptly as Lucid and Mailer sorted through the artistic challenges and potential monetary returns of

various projects. The Egyptian novel had priority, of course, but the enormous success of Mailer's biography of Marilyn Monroe, *Marilyn*, which sold a half million copies, led him to think about writing a biography of Hemingway, whose death still haunted him. Mailer never forgave Hemingway for not leaving a suicide note. "It was like your own father killing himself," he said. Through the good offices of Hemingway's son, Gregory, Mailer received a large box of material from the Hemingway Archive at the Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston, but he never got beyond the research stage.

Mailer also told Lucid that he was thinking about making another experimental film (he directed three from 1968 to 1971). Listening to the two friends briskly discuss the time and effort required for each project, and the commensurate rewards, as if they were hedge fund risk managers weighing new investments, gave me a mild shock. At the time, I believed, naively, that great books emerged solely from a writer's passion. I had not yet grasped the weight of commercial possibilities in artistic decision-making. Given alimony for numerous ex-wives, college expenses for (at that time) seven children, two mortgages, and a full-time assistant, Norman was "locked in the bowels of cash flow," as he once put it. But, as I learned, his financial needs did not necessarily outweigh prompts from "the navigator," the overseer of his unconscious, when deciding the next project to tackle. It took me years to appreciate the crush of forces jostling Mailer: family obligations (including ongoing relationships with his ex-wives and long-distance relations with a couple of girlfriends), competition with other writers (living and dead), the search for new experience, and the wish, as he once put it, to get his hand "on the rump of history." Standing at the forefront of these considerations was the question of personal exposure or, as he said in 1971, the necessity to consider "in the most ghastly terms possible: how much of yourself should 'go public' like a stock?" For counsel, he consulted Lucid and a few others, but he leaned on his wily but unpredictable navigator.

Lucid left an hour later and Mailer waved me into the kitchen where I gave him an inscribed copy of my thesis, and a bottle of Metaxa, a Greek brandy—he later told me he poured it down the drain. He produced a bottle of rum and made me one of his favorite drinks, a rum Presbyterian. He only had a couple of small ones, as he was coming off a 20-day fast undertaken to lose weight: too much alcohol or food would shock his system. His ideas on weight loss came from a book, *Fasting Can Save Your Life*, which he liked enough to buy copies for several family members.

As we talked, he began to ask me questions. As an enlisted man in the Army who had been busted from T-5 sergeant to buck private by his commanding officer for insubordination, Mailer was both suspicious and curious about my service as a sea-going naval officer, especially my service on several courts-martial. While we ate cold chicken, he interrogated my Navy experience for novelistic material; it was his



inveterate response when someone whose background he found of interest entered his circle. He was intrigued by my account of charting a course across the Atlantic by dead reckoning—this was before satellite navigation (GNSS) was introduced. Given the vagaries of the ocean’s currents, and the imprecision of set and drift calculations, exactly where we’d make landfall—Ireland, Land’s End in southern England or Cherbourg in France, or some other place on the European coastline—was unknown. I also described taking my ship, the USS *Uvalde* (AKA-88), through the Straits of Gibraltar during a mid-watch, changing course every few minutes to avoid crisscrossing merchant freighters, fishing boats, and Arab lateens.

Finally, we turned to my thesis. I told him about the philosophy professor on the examination committee who found Mailer’s philosophical ideas to be confusing, unclassifiable. My response to the professor was that Mailer lived in a no-man’s land between rationalism and transcendentalism. A well-read intellectual who could parse Marx, Freud, Schopenhauer, and Spengler, Mailer was also as open as William Butler Yeats to the numinous world of spirits, augury, and second sight. When an interviewer asked him how he compared to Gore Vidal, he answered that Vidal was “an atheistic rationalist and I’m a diabolist and a mystic ... we’d always be on opposite sides in any dispute.”

An aside: Years later Mailer told me a long story about how a succubus oppressed him on a muggy summer evening in Provincetown, which he called “a spooky town.” In the late ’60s Paul Carroll told Mailer, “I saw the Devil once in an alley in Provincetown. He was beautiful.”

Mailer asked, “No shit?”

“No shit,” answered Carroll.

When I told Mailer that the philosophy professor on my committee was an Aristotelian, Mailer scoffed. He loathed Aristotle’s idea of the *aurea mediocritas*, the golden mean, much preferring Nietzsche’s adjuration: “Live dangerously!” The only other thing I remember about the end of that evening in Stockbridge was his producing a photograph of the soldiers in his basic training company, and then explaining how he had borrowed the lean look of this soldier for Sgt. Croft and the gait of that one for Red Valsen, and so on, in depicting the characters in *The Naked and the Dead*. For reference, he had a list of 161 soldiers that he’d served with in the Army. Elated and adrenalin-drenched by the events of the day, I was unaffected by the booze. I barely slept and got on the road shortly after dawn, leaving a thank you note on the kitchen table next to the unopened bottle of Metaxa and the half-empty one of Bacardi.

In 1971, Lucid published a huge anthology of excerpts from Mailer’s work, titled *The Long Patrol*, and the same year edited the first collection of essays on Mailer’s work, *Norman Mailer: The Man and His Work*. This collection contained a detailed checklist of

Mailer's unpublished and published work (some of it in obscure journals such as *The Poetry Bag*, *Way Out*, *East Side Review*, *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*, and *Big Table*, edited by Paul Carroll), resulting from Bob's collaboration with Fan in organizing her son's papers. Besides the material noted earlier, the Mailer archive Lucid assembled over the years contained numerous foreign editions of his work, extensive research materials for his books, and carbons of his correspondence (approximately 45,000 letters). There were many other items, for example: Mailer's army dog tags, his award medals and citations, honorary degrees, a letter from Arthur Miller offering corrections to Mailer's *Marilyn*, hundreds of photographs, marked-up copies of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and Priscilla Johnson McMillan's *Marina and Lee*, and, not least, the dog collar of his revered standard poodle, Tibo, who with his equally beloved mate, Zsa Zsa, produced 34 pups. The dogs are buried in the garden of Mailer's sea-side Provincetown home. Mailer later decided that he also wanted to be buried in this artists' colony at the tip of Cape Cod, not far from where the Pilgrims spent six miserable weeks in the fall of 1620 before moving across the bay to Plymouth. The only significant missing item from the archive was the original manuscript of *The Naked and the Dead*, which its fledgling author—gratified to be asked—donated to Yale in 1948, the year it was published.

Lucid's Mailer books and his foundational work in creating the archive cemented their friendship. They also initiated mine with Lucid. I wrote him a fan letter when his essay collection came out, and I asked about some interviews that were missing. He wrote a gracious reply, and our correspondence continued for decades. By the early '80s we were speaking regularly on the telephone, often two or three times a week. I'd call, and Bob would say, "Wait a minute; I'm going to make the biggest drink you can imagine." Then we'd trade stories of Mailer's latest appearances in the media—on Johnny Carson and Dick Cavett, for example—reviews of his books, squibs by and about him in the magazines of the day, radio talk shows in Chicago. By the early '70s, Mailer was as close to media ubiquity as Muhammad Ali, and Lucid was the appointed guardian of his mushrooming archive and, to some extent, his reputation.

By the late '70s, I'd become Lucid's apprentice. I had an ugly but roomy white Volare station wagon, and for the next dozen years Lucid and I, and sometimes Donna, filled it up once or twice a year with Mailer's literary remains and transported them from Brooklyn Heights to Day & Meyer, Murray & Young. Since 1928, this secure warehouse storage facility has been the preferred choice for many wealthy New Yorkers, the strongbox where they've stored their valuables—crated paintings and sculpture, furs, silverware, furniture, crockery—in twelve-foot-long steel vaults mounted on wheels that roll on steel tracks embedded in the concrete floor of the firm's 10-story building

at the time of its construction. The Portovaults, as they are called, are moved about like freight cars on sidings by the company's stevedores and, when necessary, shunted into a freight elevator and locked in place on custom-designed trucks that whisk them to and from summer homes in Newport, Saratoga Springs, the Jersey Shore, and other retreats of the wealthy.

There was another elevator, rarely used, for customers who needed quick access to their Portovaults. After slipping the stevedores a fiver for an extension cord and light, Lucid and I would take this three-by-three-by-eight-foot elevator cage to where Mailer's papers lay in darkness on the ninth floor. Operated with a wonky speed handle, the elevator often conked out between floors. When this happened, we had to contact the secretary on the first floor—if the cranky intercom instrument worked—to fire it up from below. On more than one occasion, Bob and I waited a good 20 minutes for the secretary to return from lunch. A brilliant lecturer, Lucid used these occasions to school me on Mailer's life and works and on his vision for the authorized biography he was writing—he became Mailer's authorized biographer in 1981, succeeding John W. Aldridge, who gave up after a decade. Lucid's elucidations were never straightforward and never hurried. Like Nancy Potter he spoke in fully developed paragraphs, and when we talked during our visits to the archive, I viewed myself as an acolyte addressed by an avatar of Henry James. By all reports, Lucid's classes at the University of Pennsylvania were just as enthralling. I have never known anyone who enjoyed conjuring the arcs of past and present literary lives more than Bob, and few who practiced it with such easy brilliance. He related the course of Mailer's improbable life to the pulse of a nation undergoing seismic changes, speckling his talk with morsels of gossip about Truman Capote, Jackie Kennedy, and Gore Vidal, and enriching it with sparkling metaphors for the crises and turn points in Mailer's life. What a delicious biography he will write, I thought.

In one way or another, all of Bob's lectures and essays, as well his plan for his Mailer biography, were part of his ongoing exploration of the American writer as a public figure. One of my sharpest memories of my time with Bob was an impromptu lecture he delivered along these lines at Day & Meyer. He began talking just as the elevator began its ascent. Halfway up the shaft, the lights went off, and the elevator clanked to a halt just as he was launching into a detailed explanation of the abrupt changes in Mailer's life in the early '70s. We tried the intercom, but it was dead. Bob paused for a beat, and then as we stood face to face in the darkness, went on for another 15 minutes delineating Mailer's roiled psychic state when he realized, around the time he was writing his biography of Marilyn Monroe, that the sweeping changes he predicted and desired in American life were not going to happen. Mailer had wanted a shift in American consciousness, a revolution, but the counter-culture coalition that he'd help

create—the New Left, Black Panthers, anti-war activists, Timothy Leary and the drug culture—faltered and then collapsed in the heat of middle-class American outrage. In 1972 George McGovern was decisively defeated by Nixon, Abbie Hoffman's Yippies were routed, and Mailer concluded glumly that he was “woefully unsynchronized with the reality of his time,” as Lucid put it. Then the lights came on, and we ascended to the ninth floor. I see now, at the distance of 30-odd years, that my two dozen visits to Day & Meyer with Lucid, and our many conversations about the categorization, disposition, and future literary uses of Mailer's papers, comprised a one-on-one seminar in my education as an archivist.

In 1992, I was appointed Vice President for Academic Affairs at Wilkes University in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and two years later I orchestrated the transfer of Mailer's archive from New York to Diversified Records, a storage facility in northeast Pennsylvania. The Day & Meyer truck struggled through the Poconos carrying a Portovault filled with Mailer's literary remains, 16,000 pounds of paper. Over the next four years, Donna and I slowly revamped the archive, dividing it into five chronologically organized categories: literary works, film, correspondence, personal/family, and business records. The materials were stored in new archival boxes with a detailed contents list in each. With additions made over the next decade, the archive grew to 21,000 pounds.

My state of mind when sorting through the Mailer archive over the years was akin to the way one feels when assembling a jigsaw puzzle, that is, pleasant, with an occasional lift when an integral piece is found. Mailer's archive, however, had tens of thousands of pieces, and more kept arriving. Not every page of every manuscript or interview in a college newspaper contained a revelation, but every so often I'd find a piece of paper—an envelope, an invitation to a book party, a matchbook with a name and telephone number, an unmailed letter with a comment about another writer—that would fill in a gap in my understanding of his desires and distastes, fears and ambitions, or his pals and lovers and enemies, his family, beloved authors, favorite restaurants, or the architecture of his psyche. These discoveries produced strong, almost ecstatic surges of pleasure—sometimes my hands would shake. The puzzle was a portrait of him over time, not a historical portrait, but a constantly changing sketch of the man and writer in flux and moving in unforeseen directions. “Lipton's,” his wide-ranging, unedited journal written over four months in 1954-55, despite its dull stretches and its repetitions, was one of the key pieces of the puzzle. Finding it was a Eureka moment. Reading and re-reading it slowly, carefully every day over a stretch of ten days, with the knowledge that only Mailer and possibly Lucid had read the whole thing, was engrossing.

In the fall of 1996, Lucid retired from the University of Pennsylvania and moved with his wife Joanne to the Wilkes-Barre area—he moved into our house and we went to a University residence—to work on the biography. Two or three times a week, I’d stop to see him for a drink on my way home, and he’d bring me up to date on his work. He worked steadily, and Mailer and Norris, encouraged by his progress, came for a three-day visit. But after two years Lucid returned to Philadelphia when his wife became ill. She died shortly after, and his progress slowed.

In April 2005, the archive was sold to the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas-Austin for \$2.5 million. Donna and I spent several months that year at the Ransom Center assisting the staff, led by Steve Mielke, in the cataloging of the papers, including the creation of the Mailer Finding Aid. This document helps scholars navigate the archive, which is the largest single-author collection at the Ransom Center, approximately 470 cubic feet. Lucid died suddenly of heart failure in December 2006, and with Mailer’s blessing on his long-time understudy, I took over as authorized biographer. Mailer died in November 2007, and was buried in Provincetown.

In his unfinished 180,000-word draft, Lucid took Mailer to 1951, Mailer’s 28<sup>th</sup> year. My prose style is nothing like Bob’s, so I did not attempt to continue his draft, and wrote my own. My first draft was over 420,000 words, but was reduced by one-fourth for publication. Lucid’s pioneering work on Mailer, which has influenced two generations of scholars and critics, informed my biography in countless ways. *Norman Mailer: A Double Life* was published by Simon & Schuster in October 2013. It is dedicated to Donna, my wife, and Barbara Wasserman, Mailer’s sister—and also to “the memory of Robert F. Lucid,” my mentor and friend.

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## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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