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# Literary Tourism

The Case of Norman Mailer

Mailer's Life and Legacy

# 1. Introduction

Literary tourism as a type of cultural or heritage tourism is well known today, especially in the United States of America, where Norman Mailer plays a significant role in literary tourism. Today, Provincetown in Massachusetts, for example, is strongly associated to the great American author Norman Mailer. He was one of the greatest men of letters in the second half of the twentieth century, who strongly influenced many areas of American public life (besides literature also journalism and politics), and has become a generator of literary tourism. Yes, recently, literary tourism has been on the rise. Probably because literature in all its varieties and genres is very important not only for literature lovers, literature enthusiasts or professionals and linguists, but for people from all career fields and walks of life. For a number of reasons, literature – and reading for that matter – are vital for everyone. Obviously, reading is an essential skill for functioning in everyday life, for establishing quality relationships, for fulfilling professional responsibilities, and much more. Reading develops the mind, the spirit, and imagination, which in turn hone the creative sides of human personality. This creativity manifests in all areas of life, including economic development.

Literature can be experienced in many different ways. One such mode of experience is literary tourism, which is described in this monograph in connection to the American novelist and journalist Norman Mailer, a great man of letters, who is considered to be one of the most important American authors of the twentieth century, producing some of the best writings of the post-war era. Most of his works depict the complexities of the contemporary American social, political and economic life in a realist mode. Mailer's style, his portraying of the American reality is also illustrated in this monograph using several examples. Mailer portrayed the American Zeitgeist of his time, from the terror of the Second World War, to the dynamic social and political processes of the post-war period, to the moon landing in 1969. Mailer's writing often explores conflicts, particularly the relationship between the individual and the system or the society. In his works, Mailer speaks of the dangers of political power and the power of

capital, while calling the attention to the threat of totalitarianism in the United States. During his entire career, he discussed the effects of power, violence, terrorism, sex, the phenomenon of the dictator Adolf Hitler, religion, and corruption, and his works issued continual warnings of the danger of losing freedom and dignity.

This monograph examines the reasons for the importance of Norman Mailer in the world literature and literary tourism by concentrating on the following fictional works: *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), *An American Dream* (1965) and *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967). In addition to his fiction, this monograph also considers his non-fiction work, including *The Armies of the Night* (1968), *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (1968), *Of a Fire on the Moon* (1970), *The Executioner's Song* (1979, by some this novel is considered fiction) and *Why Are We at War?* (2003). The monograph analyzes the areas of contemporary social and political life that were most often critically referred to by Mailer. Freedom, spirituality, nature of human love, critical debate, dangers of conformity etc. are among the most common of his themes. Thus, it can be claimed that Mailer's themes are of general human concern, and consequently, Mailer is one of those authors who promote intercultural and global community.

Mailer could be called 'the critical voice of the United States' for his prolific examination of how good intentions sometimes get lost or compromised in the fight for freedom and democracy. His first novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, was successful in both the United States and Europe, is a pessimistic account of the Second World War as well as the future of the United States. Mailer observes that the American army and the society are corrupted and crippled by selfishness, inhumanity, violence, brutality, and materialism, calling attention to how devastating these developments are for American society at large. Mailer is critical towards ruling people in power that tolerate, enable, encourage, or reward violence. According to Mailer, American society is threatened by totalitarianism because big corporations are far too influential in the country.

*An American Dream* renders a critique of the American society. The main topics of Mailer's fourth novel are religion, church, the devil and God, and life after death. The author is convinced that the society in the United States is too dependent on organized religion and the church as an institution, which he believes that is the main reason why people tend to avoid

some crucial subjects, like freedom or spirituality. Mailer also criticizes – the church in this novel for representing the wealthy elites and their interests. By comparing Las Vegas to Versailles, linking American to the corrupted world of pre-revolutionary French aristocracy, which allows him to put forth a harsh criticism of American capitalism and consumerism. He raises other crucial questions, among them the issue of abortion and its consequences. In addition to this, Mailer is often very critical of irresponsible reporting and journalism of the mainstream American media.

While Mailer did not believe in the myth of the United States as a promised land, he maintains a firm faith in his homeland. In *The Armies of the Night*, Mailer implies that better future and hope lie in the young generations. As a moral example, he describes the courage of the protesters in the 1967 march against the Pentagon – the American symbol of power. He questions the relationship between history and fiction, once again calling out the kind of reporting presented by American media, who sell fiction as facts. He believes that America is a fundamentally divided society, filled with divisions between the left and the right, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the whites and the blacks. These divisions weaken – and threaten to destroy – the American society.

Numerous examples of violence committed by the American government are described in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*. In accordance with his self-styled “left-conservatism,” the author opposes the war in Vietnam, and believes that the involvement of the United States in Vietnam is not only unjust, and fundamentally wrong, as interfering in foreign affairs and fighting wars in distant countries for dubious reasons was immoral. In *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, Mailer also reminds the readers that freedom should not be taken for granted; it is something that must be fought for, continuously, day by day. This text deals with numerous other themes and issues, including the youth culture, environmental pollution, and money. This Mailer’s book is also an excellent example of how politicians can – and often do – abuse rhetoric. Mailer implies that the politics of the United States has come to display some of the characteristics of totalitarianism.

Despite Mailer’s patriotism, his works often reveal a pessimism about the future. The novel *Of a Fire on the Moon* is one such example in which he argues that the driving force of practically everything, including the space technology and space flights, is corporate capitalism. The landing of

Apollo on the moon, according to Mailer, opened the path towards space imperialism, which had an irreversible impact on the future trajectory of the planet because technology now prevails over nature. In Mailer's view, the progress of technology will gradually diminish nature, and thus, jeopardize the future. Self-destruction is often on the author's mind.

Mailer's criticism of divided and complex society of the United States and his political leanings are well seen in *The Executioner's Song*, awarded the Pulitzer Prize, making it both a critical and commercial success. In this novel, the author stresses the lack of basic moral values, along with the violence of the society, the irresponsibility of the mainstream media, and the dilemma of the morality of the death sentence, which for Mailer stands in opposition to the primary value of life.

*Why Are We At War?* is another book that deals with topics that have accompanied Norman Mailer since his first novel *The Naked and the Dead* in 1948. In this book, the author very clearly articulates his opinion on capitalism, patriotism, totalitarianism, terrorism, and foreign policy of the United States. The fact that a country once used to be a democracy does not at all guarantee that it will be a democracy forever.

After the death of Norman Mailer on 10 November 2007, the legacy of this prominent and world-famous American author continues. Testament to his continuing legacy are the many literary pilgrims who visit his home in Provincetown every year, and his flat in Brooklyn. What is more, Mailer's work continues to reach audiences around the world, whether through critical Mailer studies, or with new translations of his works, which have now been translated into more than twenty languages, among them Chinese, Russian, Slovakian, Slovenian, Bulgarian, Czech, Croatian, Serbian and Macedonian.

As such, this monograph can be used not only as a guide for Mailer's tour in the United States in America, but across the world. It is based on interdisciplinary approach, combining scholarly analyses work with interviews with researchers, scholars and translators, and textual analyses of Mailer's works and their translations.

## 1.1 Methodology and Literature Review

The monograph *Norman Mailer and his Legacy – Literary Tourism: The Case of Norman Mailer* is based on the interdisciplinary approach.

It analyses the role of Norman Mailer in literary tourism in the United States, as well as his reception across the world, with the emphasis on the Balkans. The textual analyses of Mailer's literary works in the first part of the monograph have been combined in the second part with descriptions of places that have come to be associated to Norman Mailer. In this way, the monograph offers a multifaceted perspective on the present-day influence of Norman Mailer both on literary landscape and on literary tourism. This monograph also examines the phenomenon of literary tourism by analyzing existing scholarly research in this area. In addition to this, the methods of interview and data analysis are employed, together with descriptive and inductive methods.