

ANALYSIS

The Deer Park (1955)

Norman Mailer

(1923-2008)

“In *The Deer Park* Mailer has made a real advance over *The Naked and the Dead*, which must have been a comparatively simple novel to write. Given its grandly simple theme--the war in miniature, or the conquest of a single island--and given the decision to include every element in the picture, from the commanding general down to the private in a rifle squad, the rest depended chiefly on patience and understanding. In *The Deer Park* the characters are treated in more depth, the structure of the novel is more complicated, and the author had to make up his own rules as he went along. He has taken risks and made mistakes, but not cheap or shameful ones.... The book leaves us with the feeling that Norman Mailer, though not a finished novelist, is one of the two or three most talented writers of his generation.”

Malcolm Cowley
New York Herald Tribune
(23 October 1955) 5

“Once one has niched *The Deer Park*--as a cross between Naturalism and symbolism--one perceives the inadequacy of the categorization, for it is in the nearly perfect blending of these two styles--the complex, artful, almost ritualistic plan, and the Naturalistic manner of its execution--that the fame of *The Deer Park* will reside. Mailer has developed a meticulous concern for structure and a brilliant flair for characterization; he seldom slops over the confines of the narrative; and although he will never be a frugal writer, he has acquired among much else, a respect for the value of economy.... In addition to his furious energy and true ear, Norman Mailer is *simpatico* with humanity, and gives evidence of a preoccupation with all its affairs on a level rare in American fiction.”

Dachine Rainer
New Republic
(31 October 1955) 25

“*The Deer Park* is being promoted as a sensational sex book. But Mr. Mailer is not a panderer; he is a vengeful moralist. His story involves a good deal of sex perversion, and the point of it all is to tell us how admirable true love is by contrast.... This is neither a cheap nor a simple book. There is a lot wrong with it, but more that is right. Mr. Mailer simply is not the kind of writer who produces books which can be judged successful or unsuccessful. He piles up enormously talented stuff, some of it incongruous, some of it boozy and pretentious, and it is both successful and unsuccessful, good and bad, but it is serious and worth the respect of serious readers.”

William Pfaff
Commonweal
(2 December 1955) 230

“The general similarity between the narrators in *Barbary Shore* and *The Deer Park* suggests that Mailer, as should be clear anyway, is a highly self-conscious, though often wild-swinging novelist. He seems to have taken up a convention practiced so far with much greater success by Europeans than by Americans--that of projecting oneself into one's novels as an emerging novelist.... One cannot say that he has brought off the difficult trick, or even that it is necessarily desirable that he should. Still, he is making a serious attempt at one of the accomplishments that have to be included in a complete art of the novel. The least one can say in general about *The Deer Park* is that it is written by a novelist who is still very obviously going places.”

Richard Chase
Commentary
(December 1955) 582-3

"The Deer Park was a better book than *Barbary Shore*, but it fell very far short indeed of the enormous claims Mailer made for it."

Norman Podhoretz

Michael Hollister (2015)