

# Respecting Marilyn

## MARILYN MONROE

by Norman Mailer  
and Bert Stern  
Taschen, \$125

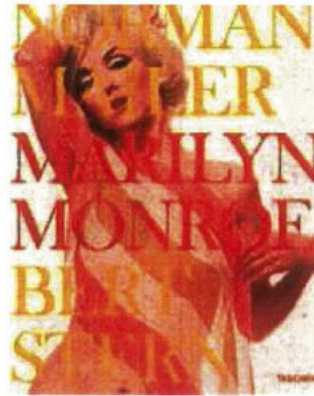
Reviewed by Christopher  
Moore

This book reminds us of two things: 1: What a consummate writer the late Norman Mailer could be and, 2: What an unforgettable woman Marilyn Monroe was.

Five decades after her death in 1962, her face hovers in the mind, luminous and unnervingly beautiful, a blend of poignant innocence and erotic fantasy which still haunts us.

Bert Stern's photographs, taken for *Vogue* magazine, provided Monroe with the chance to continue her love affair with the camera. She was 36 years old.

Six weeks after Stern completed the three-day shoot, she was dead from an overdose (deliberate? accidental?) of barbiturates. But even this lonely, squalid death perversely enhanced the legend and the industry that



surrounded it.

Such is the price of celebrity in the 20th century. A sluggish tide of the third rate and the tacky continued to engulf sad Norma Jean.

Fortunately Mailer's 1973 biography, *Marilyn*, continues to set a benchmark for biographers.

Taschen has republished his text with Stern's photographs. The result is a sumptuous, extraordinary tour-de-force; a collaboration between two extraordinary artists, one who wrote with the camera and the other who created images with words.

"I knew that I belonged to the public and to the world, not because I was talented or even beautiful, but because I had never belonged to anything or anyone else," Monroe once commented.

It was this overwhelming sense of isolation and loneliness which arguably led to her death.

Exploited, idolised, desired or dismissed as a blonde bubblehead, she understood that she was measured by only one thing – sex. From calendar girl to film star, she was our goddess of erotic desire, with a face which appeared on the screen "like a ripe peach bursting before one's eyes," Mailer wrote. "A new love ready and waiting beneath the sheets."

But, as Mailer shows, despite the marriages, the lovers and the breakdowns, Monroe wanted to be recognised as something much more than an angel of sex.

She wanted to be appreciated and respected as a human being. In this book she finally becomes one.