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AMERICAN TOTALITARIANISM IN NORMAN MAILER'S *THE
NAKED AND THE DEAD* AND *THE ARMIES OF THE NIGHT*

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
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Master of Arts

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Benjamin E.L. Onofrio in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

AMERICAN TOTALITARIANISM IN NORMAN MAILER'S *THE NAKED AND THE DEAD* AND *THE ARMIES OF THE NIGHT*

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Master of Art

Norman Mailer's seminal works *The Naked and the Dead* and *The Armies of the Night* both outline Mailer's distaste for oppression. *The Naked and the Dead*'s bleak reprisal of oppressive leadership tactics offers little in the way of a solution to fight this power. However, twenty years later, *The Armies of the Night* names personal expression of political views as the answer to oppressive force within the American government. Mailer met the hypocrisy of fighting for freedom abroad while oppressing one's own citizens by encouraging personal expression and flaunting the "rules" of the novel. In the end, Mailer surmises that the best way to encourage freedom of thought and action is to educate his fellow citizens to question objectivity.

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A War with Totalitarianism

Growing up an undersized, middle class Jew in Brooklyn, New York, Norman Kingsley Mailer often had something to prove. Idolizing über-masculine writers like Ernest Hemingway, young Mailer saw life through a combative lens, always looking for the next battle. Mailer's all-or-nothing approach was often reflected in his work and in his personal life. Viewing his life as a bitter competition, Mailer battled with spouses, friends, and his critics. Mailer would later say of his youth, "I didn't start with an identity. I forged an identity through my experience" (qtd. in Rollyson 210). Yet, Mailer's conquest for "experience" often brought him unfortunate results, like stabbing his second wife Adele Morales, engaging in a game of "chicken" with oncoming cars in the Lincoln tunnel, fighting myriad street fights with strangers and friends, and failing in five marriages. His fixation with the turbulent lifestyles of the moderns inspired his troubled and often extreme public antics. However, for all his acts of public indecency, Mailer managed to build a famous literary personality from his often infamous public image. Mailer learned to box, arm-wrestled Mohammed Ali, and in 1972, at nearly 50 years old, head-butted a man making a pass at his future fifth wife, Carol Stevens, as she sang at a local club. Mailer often framed these battles as a showdown between himself and totalitarianism. As a son, husband, soldier, or citizen, Mailer often saw himself as a champion for those whose position in life stymied their personal expression.

Mailer's battle against totalitarianism began with his first, most commercially viable book, *The Naked and the Dead* (1948). The novel's depiction of World War II was highly critical of military leadership. In *Naked*, many of the enlisted men find irony in the

officers' oppressive behavior as they all fight to provide freer lifestyles for those under totalitarian regimes. Rocketing Mailer to early fame, *Naked* allowed Mailer to forge his budding literary career out of subject matter he was close to during his service in the Pacific theatre of World War II. The book became renowned for its raw, realistic approach to the language of the soldiers and its depiction of the military's oppressive grip on its men; yet, critics found fault with its "narrow emotional" portrayal of the soldier's masculine identity (Gordon 69). In spite of this, the royalties from *Naked* allowed Norman and his first wife to move to Paris and live elevated lifestyles. Mailer's quick ascent and fame also meant that he was scrutinized closely as both a public and a literary figure—the type of attention for which he both hungered and worried that he would be unable to live up to in his future work.

At its publication, however, *Naked's* compelling storyline struck a nerve with postwar American readers who feared the increasingly powerful military. In *Naked*, Mailer sympathetically portrayed the plight of several enlisted men who are generally at the mercy of their tyrannical officers. By setting up the conflict as much between the men and the officers as between the Americans and the Japanese, Mailer presented to the public an American military that intimidated its soldiers at gunpoint and favored its officers. Mailer was able to communicate his own distaste of control by sympathetically portraying oppressed figures in his literature. For Mailer's characters, the battle against tyranny in the government, military, or personal relationships dominated their struggle to express themselves individually.

Indeed, for nearly sixty years, Mailer's writing has tackled the political, ideological, and aesthetic problems individuals face when their personal expression is

denied by totalitarianism. Each of these significant facets of totalitarianism bears exploration. Political totalitarianism exists when a strong government group or leader expects unconditional support of policy and quashes dissent regardless of personal or civil liberties. Examples of such include the fascist regimes in Japan, Italy, and Nazi Germany during the 1930s and 1940s, as well as the communist government of the Soviet Union. Political totalitarianism becomes institutionalized within branches of the government, the military, and educational systems and thereby regulates the operation of most day-to-day activities in the state or organization. *Naked* and *Armies* both criticize political totalitarianism with the goal of changing the structure of these institutions to reallocate more power to oppressed individuals within them.

To do so, Mailer's texts attack the ideological mechanisms and intellectual environment that allow oppressive acts to flourish. It is important to recognize that when members of a group parrot the dogmas of its leaders, the ideas themselves are what give the institutional structure power and authority. For instance, *Naked's* portrayal of the fickle and self-interested leadership in the military demonstrates how an institution of control relies upon lower officers like Croft to carry out General Cummings' vision. Ideological totalitarianism and political totalitarianism work hand in hand as it is the idea that directs individuals to seek to emulate their totalitarian leader. However, this analysis separates the two in order to demonstrate how these two components work both together and independently to affect personal expression.

Yet, no totalitarian control enraged Mailer more than what he saw as aesthetic totalitarianism. Mailer saw aesthetic totalitarianism as attempts by the critical establishment to censor or dilute his writing because of profanity or explicit content.

When critics attempted to censor Mailer's books or movies, he would see this as a type of totalitarianism focused against his own aesthetic. As he states in *Armies*, Mailer exposed the hypocrisy of social conservatives who balked at the language and sexual content in his work yet turned a blind eye to the atrocities committed against civilians in Vietnam (49). Moreover, Mailer used obscenity as a vehicle to expression that connected to the very tissue of America and Americans. In Mailer's perspective, the best and most direct way to recount an event relied upon an ample dose of obscenity to express it. Mailer expounds, "the truth of the way it really felt [...] passed on a river of obscenity" and "all the gifts of the American language came out in the happy play of obscenity upon concept" (*Armies* 48). In other words, when Mailer used obscenity, he was exercising his right as an American to express ideas as he saw fit. When Mailer's critics from *Time* and other established print sources chopped up his language into more palatable selections, Mailer never felt the reality of his message was communicated. As Rolyson argues, "Mailer was angry, convinced there was something wrong with an American establishment that so mercilessly oppressed creative souls such as himself" (162).

Thus, from the early onset of his fame with *Naked* to the Pulitzer Prize winning *Armies*, Mailer's work established his penchant for conflict both as an end in itself and as a means to balancing what he saw as unjust political actions. As biographies and his work demonstrate, Mailer felt the need to combat control where he saw it, both in his own life and in his society. A cursory glance at Mailer's early work demonstrates how it fought both psychological and overtly political battles. *Naked*'s less than complimentary representation of the American military during World War II took on the military as an ideological representation of totalitarian practices. In *Naked*, soldiers are forced to dress

alike, expected to encounter challenges with the same manner of resilience, and above all, to follow the commands of their officers. While there is a certain amount of unity gained from such behavior, Mailer sees the potential for groupthink and the failure of rational dissent within this system.

Mailer's following books track this concept of totalitarian practices within American institutions. In his next book, *Barbary Shore* (1951), Mailer attempts to draw the parallel between extreme Soviet socialism and extreme American capitalism in order to expose how, at their worst, these systems resemble each other in their tendency to enforce sociopolitical orthodoxy. Mailer's third novel, *The Deer Park* (1955) satirizes Hollywood lifestyles for the ease in which they corrupt individual morality. Like the protagonist in *Barbary Shore*, *The Deer Park*'s O'Shaugnessy attempts to find his identity by acting out against societal norms. This theme of man-against-world continues through Mailer's novels as he attempts to discern the system of control against which he is fighting. *Advertisements for Myself* (1959) is collection of short stories, essays, and autobiographical pieces Mailer uses to prophetically illustrate the developing sixties counterculture. Here, Mailer writes about individuals that reject cultural orthodoxy and are marginalized because of it. In *An American Dream* (1965) the main character, Rojack struggles to maintain his independent identity in spite of his father-in-law's manipulative ways. *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967) experiments with first person perspective and stream of consciousness writing that turns up later much refined in *Armies*.

However, Mailer's works leading up to *Armies* lack the aesthetic freedom that *Armies* had to play with perspective, "truth," and "fiction." For all their thematic proximity to Mailer's own life (some of them even partial autobiographies), most of them

are traditional, theme-based novels. They feature a protagonist often modeled along some aspect of Mailer's personality that encounters difficulty when being forced into a particular social system. Mailer's experimentation with autobiographical content in the novel eventually sees him through the controlling literary and formal expectations of the novel. *Armies* breaks the literary mold of the novel in important ways. By centering the plot of *The Armies of the Night* upon himself, Mailer finally is able to escape this critical control of his work and free his aesthetic from totalitarian control. The closeness of Mailer's subject matter for his novels to his own life suggests that he was trying to find a way to write himself and his outrageous public persona into his books. More than any other of Mailer's works, *Armies* achieved this because it introduces "Norman Mailer" as a caricature of his public persona. This freedom allowed Mailer to aesthetically, politically, and ideologically critique what he saw as a rising problem with the American institutions of control. Finally separating himself from his persona, the persona was free to be, do, and say whatever Mailer wished.

Published on the twentieth anniversary of the publication of *Naked*, *Armies* eventually won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. Success was a relief to Mailer, who while writing *Armies* later said he was in the midst of a "towering depression" (qtd. in Rollyson 204). The first 90,000 words of *Armies*, "History as a Novel," were completed in the breakneck pace of just a month by an alcohol-free Mailer. "In himself," biographer Hillary Mills suggests, Mailer "had found his best, most integrated novelistic character" (324). Mailer's shift inward for his subject matter in *Armies* helped him to represent power relationships as he saw them—an exchange of oppressed versus oppressor. His battles with his wives and critics summarize much of his

subject matter between *Naked* and *Armies*; yet, when Mailer wrote himself as a character with the same name and background, *Armies* became a vehicle which allowed him to engage best the theme of how one can successfully destroy oppression without becoming the oppressor oneself. Finally, *Armies* completes the loop back to Mailer's personal life as he sees himself as a rhetorical leader liberating the oppressed political middle of America from bad government policies.

Both *Naked* and *Armies* critique American institutions for their hypocritical use of power. In *Naked*, the soldiers see their own leaders' practices as ironically oppressive and tyrannical although they fight to provide a freer lifestyle for the countries falling under Japanese influence. The nature of ambition perpetuates oppressive techniques as lower ranked officers like Croft attempt fiercer emulations of leaders like the general. *Armies* continues this discussion, suggesting that a military presence in Vietnam serves more American needs than Vietnamese ones. Expanding his critique of American institutions from the military to the policy makers behind it, Mailer tracks how a domestic sense of totalitarian control in American politics affects the individuals within its institutions. Those who do not wish to be complicit in acts of oppression overseas are presented with a unique moral challenge. Protesters committed to the cause require an ever-increasing commitment that eventually results in a choice between courage and brutality. For the protesters, this is a choice between additional beatings and jail time or becoming complicit to the brutality expressed against Vietnam. For the soldiers of *Naked*, it is a choice between continuing the march through dangerous enemy territory or becoming complicit to the brutal leadership of both Croft and Cummings. Either way, Mailer's protagonists face a choice that robs them of their agency.

Ultimately, both of Mailer's works seek to resolve this impasse between the individual and an oppressive institutional power. In *Naked*, the men of the platoon fear Croft's self-interest does not include preserving their lives and feel helpless to change their situation. In *Armies*, many protestors fear government leaders will use this same power to force them into killing or dying on command of another. Only Mailer himself is able to escape additional jail time and disruption of life without paying the penalty of pain that the other protestors do. Whether refusing assimilation into the military hierarchy or rejecting the assimilative power of governmental expediency during the Vietnam protests, both texts tackle the larger conflict with a system that oppresses the common man. While critic Robert Waldron also interprets *Naked* as a story of oppression and assimilation, he confines his interpretation into a man versus machine dichotomy that needs to be extended and refined. Mailer's lifelong hatred of authority expresses itself not just as his characters' resistance to systems, but as a critique of totalitarian leadership in both *Naked* and *Armies*.

Mailer's unique criticism of the U.S. military's hypocrisy during World War II was uncommon for the time period. Historically, totalitarianism in the fifties evoked a visceral reaction from Americans. After fighting a costly war against fascism abroad and fear of a war with communism at home, even radicals previously open to totalitarian political solutions became hostile to this type of ideology (Radford 54). Yet if we view *Naked*'s military hypocrisy as the root to Mailer's criticism of the power inequality in *Armies*, what emerges is a contiguous picture of Mailer's distrust of authority, specifically the state's power to further its own ideological ends. By writing *Armies*, Mailer both avoids becoming a victim of state brutality and helps to construct the march

on the pentagon in 1967 as a positive representation of public malcontent with oppressive government policies. Thus, Mailer's two most famous works are a critical pairing of his vehement distrust of power centered in too few individuals and the mercurial force of his personality. Mailer's greatest contribution to literature however, is his redefinition of civic duty. *Naked's* bleak outlook on the institutionalized form of totalitarianism in the military eventually gives way to *Armies'* hope for a freer America—an America where all citizens take part in the decisions that affect the country's future. In *Armies*, Mailer finally decides educating and informing American political moderates and encouraging increased civic activity is the best way to fight against totalitarianism.

The Naked and the Dead

The Naked and the Dead intertwines the lives of several members of a World War II reconnaissance patrol on a mission through the Japanese-held island of Anopopei. While most of the men are from working class backgrounds and chafe at the leadership of the tyrannical Sergeant Croft, Mailer also fully develops a few officers in order to add depth to the exchanges between these men. Lieutenant Hearn, a Harvard educated, liberal idealist and General Cummings, a pompous, yet articulate war planner, clash derisively over how the general infantry should be treated. The general has achieved a level of power to the point that he despises everyone and gives deference to no one. Cummings sees warfare as ultimately depersonalized—a mathematical exchange of dead bodies for territory, gun placement, and moving fronts. Contrarily, Hearn recoils at the general's impersonal treatment of the enlisted men and idealistically believes he can change Cummings' point of view. The initial disagreement between Hearn and Cummings spirals into a power play that leaves Hearn transferred to Croft's dangerous reconnaissance

mission into Mount Anaka. The ill-fated trip the platoon undertakes is eventually abandoned, but not until Roth, an undersized Jewish recruit, Wilson, a Southern simpleton, and Hearn are killed.

In *Naked*, Mailer uses the context of the island battle to foreground the ideological battles between Croft and his men and the general and Hearn. The basic argument is between political expediency in war time, represented by Cummings and Croft, and its negative effect upon the members of the general infantry, represented by Hearn and the rest of the men. Most of the enlisted men hate the general and the other officers. Croft, on the other hand, is the platoon sergeant and uses his power to be unnecessarily brutal to his men. Croft's obsession with finishing the patrol sacrifices the lives of members of his platoon for the potential of impressing the brass with a small contribution of intelligence on the enemy position. The platoon regards Croft's insane ambition as suicidal, and they eventually return after losing three men to enemy forces. As the platoon returns to base camp, they realize that the war has ended without their mission even affecting it. The Japanese had run nearly out of supplies, were dying of starvation, and were prepared to surrender.

Naked's story began as an idea Mailer had as a student at Harvard. It was not until Mailer's entrance into the army in 1944 and subsequent experiences in the Pacific that he would begin assembling the components of the novel. Molded upon an embellished story about a reconnaissance patrol Mailer had heard about during his time in the Philippines, *The Naked and the Dead* is filled with conflicts between soldiers and their commanding officers. The men of the 112th Calvary out of San Antonio, Texas provide templates for the anti-Semitic WASPs that torment Roth and Goldstein. Mailer also poured much of his

experience from his time under a discriminatory and intellectually intimidated wire sergeant into General Cummings' relationship with Lieutenant Hearn.

However, as much as Mailer's military experiences shaped his first novel, Mailer's early life shows up in the book as well. As a young Harvard man, Mailer lionized modernists like F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, and especially Ernest Hemingway. Their extravagant and troubled lifestyles excited and entranced the henpecked, middle-class, Jewish boy. At the same time, however, Mailer often lost track of where his personality left off, and his ambitious literary ego began. One of Mailer's biographers, Hillary Mills, believes that so much of Hemingway's macho style was adopted by Mailer that it is difficult to say "which parts of Mailer's makeup are inherent and which have been adopted from Hemingway and others as literary coloration" (49). Mailer's personality tore him in two separate directions. In some internal way, he was just a nice middle class Jewish kid from Brooklyn. He was a good student and had a great relationship with his family. However, almost as a way for making up for this, he adopted a façade of über-masculinity in order to cover his diminutive size and easy early life and a bad boy public persona known to start bar fights. His internal ambivalence translated into his feelings toward American involvement in World War II, as well. In some ways, he wanted to be the war hero of which his mother and father could be proud, but in other ways, the radical at heart wanted to uncover the wrongs within the military system. Mailer was very much an untraditional hero although his life and biographers suggest he would have loved to fill the role of the John Wayne war hero.

Naked exposes the irony that the war was often conducted against totalitarian fascists with a totalitarian methodology. To common soldiers, officer favoritism,

brutality, and intimidation seemed at odds with the values they fought against.

Recognizing the military as an often undemocratic extension of a democratic society, Mailer's experience and subsequent novel about the American military war machine casts the military as a giant bureaucracy that sacrificed its members for expediency. Mailer's hatred of totalitarianism eventually produced a willing soldier, yet it also invited him to reinterpret the hierarchal structures in the military as tyrannically oppressive. Young Mailer saw oppression in officer favoritism, selective opportunities for advancement, and the callous way top officers dealt with deaths of common soldiers. *Naked* grew out of Mailer's efforts to rectify this injustice and became his vehicle to do so.

Returning home from the occupational forces in Japan early in 1946, Mailer "never thought of its [*The Naked and the Dead*] being an antiwar book at the beginning but every time [he] turned on the radio and looked in the newspapers, there was this growing hysteria, this talk of going to war again" (Mills 84-5). The breakdown in relations with the Soviets during the Yalta accords in 1945 and the radical-left positions of his first wife Beatrice Silverman helped to shape Mailer's anti-war views in *Naked*, pushing him to see the distribution of power in war as hierarchal and exploitative of the common soldier. Mailer's experience as a private introduced him to the cruelty of some commanding officers, eventually influencing him to question leadership and write a war novel that "reflected the war from the ground up" (Rollyson 36). Thus, *Naked* antiwar message echoes Mailer's struggle for individual expression and desire to give a voice to the voiceless.

The Naked and the Dead voices its concern for the oppressed through an intricate masculine conflict between officers and their subordinates. *Naked*'s conflicts between

enlisted men and their commanding officers grew out of a theme Mailer reported as “not so much haunt[ed] me as stalk[ed] me” over “the relation between courage and brutality” (qtd. in Rollyson 30). The relationship between courage and brutality for a subordinate is a tenuous one. Subordinates have the most at stake either in standing up to officer violence or merely accepting it. Characters at the top of the military hierarchy have no need to reflect on their viciousness because their actions have fewer immediate consequences. Croft’s brutal order to continue the march after discovering enemy soldiers places the men in unnecessary danger. They had taken casualties and were supposed to return if they discovered Japanese forces. Some of the men balk, but strangely, it is a hornets’ nest that eventually drives the men back down the mountain and forces them to give up. Men like Cummings view officer cruelty as a necessary goad to the men they lead, thinking that forcing the men to suffer and withstand deprivation will make them better soldiers, and more likely to exhibit the courageous attributes of a soldier in battle.

Naked uses these paradoxical moments as a way to depict the struggle of the common man against the forces of totalitarianism in the American military. To the enlisted men, Croft’s gunpoint intimidation bears too close a resemblance to the leadership techniques of fascist Japan. *Naked* attempts to find the point at which one can resist unjust authority without increasing one’s own suffering. Similarly, biographer Carl Rollyson summarizes Mailer’s fiction as, “the hero’s quest to fight the barbarians and about his simultaneous reluctance to sully himself” (69). Enlisted men come up against the greatest difficulty when they attempt to win this figurative battle while retaining their individuality— in other words, without “sully[ing]” themselves. For example, Croft chooses Martinez to perform a secret reconnaissance mission while the other men are

sleeping (587-99). Even though Martinez manages to uncover an enemy installment and escape, Croft's insane drive to continue the march disallows Martinez from sharing the vital information with the platoon leading to Hearn's treacherous death. The men of Croft's platoon fight the totalitarian "barbarians" both in their battles with Japanese fascist soldiers and in their battles for power with commanding officers. Randall Waldron interprets this conflict as "the condition of man struggling against the depersonalizing forces of modern society" where man is "mechanized" by the several modern forces of warfare (273). To be sure, the forces of modern warfare have the tendency of reducing the common fighting man into a standardized piece of weaponry to be used up by commanding officers. However, Waldron fits every character so easily into the mechanical conceit that the "provocative intricacies" of character within both Cummings and Hearn are too quickly skimmed over (272).

These "provocative intricacies" of character undergird Mailer's criticism of the unconditional command and respond system of the military. *Naked's* series of "Time Machine" chapters expend a great deal of effort to craft the men's individual issues with power expression (63). A cross section of American working class society, the men of the platoon all struggle to maintain a sense of control over their fate while their officers seem to direct them into harm's way. Each of the men come from such varied backgrounds—Gallagher from Boston, Red Valson from the coal mines of Montana, Casimir Czienwicz (Polack) a Polish immigrant from the rough streets of Chicago, and Roth, a well-educated Jewish man from Brooklyn—that it seems difficult not to read *Naked* as the soldier's battle against an oppressive force. The men's struggle is not confined to race, or sociopolitical background. Regardless of their varied backgrounds, the enlisted men all

come to realize that the problem with the American military structure is that it does not allow for a way to remove corrupt officers from power. When Roth finds an injured bird, Croft orders it from him (*Naked* 529-31). In a display of cruel power expression, Croft crushes the bird in front of Roth. Mailer takes issue with the individual's inability to control his own fate under the pressure of corrupt leadership. Although several of the men challenge Crofts' bad behavior, in the end they all fold to concerns of court-martial or violence. While Waldron interprets this force as a mechanizing system, Paul Siegel reads it as the actions of a malevolent god afflicting the troops (292). In opposing Waldron's conception of machine against man, Siegel offers the novel's defining antagonism as nature against man, with nature being the outgrowth of an indifferent or unfeeling deity. However, his analysis overlooks the contribution individuals and circumstances play in the oppression of the troops. While both the opposition of nature and the mechanized nature of the military play into the woes of the enlisted men, the text presents General Cummings and Sergeant Croft as the major conflict the men must overcome to retain their individuality. The officers' naked ambition and drive to dominate the enlisted men is what finally leads to the death of some and the suffering of all. In other words, *Naked* testing of the unconditional command and respond system of the military reveals failures of democracy in the American military.

Because the conflict is centered on the officers versus the enlisted men, the soldiers of the platoon eventually discover that loyalty to each other and the ability to lead one's peers are ultimately at odds with each other. Mailer criticizes the military in this instance for promoting the good of a few at the expense of many instead of the democratic ideal of seeking a common good. The men of the platoon become more and

more adversely opposed to following Croft's orders as the value of their reconnaissance becomes uncertain. While Herbert Goldstone sees *Naked* as a conflict between "cruel, ambitious, power-hungry leaders... and the compliant enlisted men that turn out to be their victims," he fails to state a reason why this is so (115). The structure of the American military hierarchy was designed to carry out the decisions of those in power quickly and efficiently. As a highly developed system of command and respond, giving and taking orders evolved, considerations for individuality and individual expression of will became unnecessary to the ends of military expediency. Although the system designed to send the men to war was ideally democratic, the system in place to carry out that decision concentrates power into small groups to expedite quick decision making capabilities. The end result for the military then becomes oppressive to the men who serve it, placing them within a self serving power hierarchy that maintains its supremacy at the cost of the individuals in it.

Mailer criticizes the oppressive military structure by killing the one character in *Naked* that attempts to withstand the corruption of leadership—Hearn. When Hearn finally resolves to give up his commission, he is killed by an enemy ambush Croft could have prevented. This plot twist suggests that the military's oppressive practices perpetuate themselves by destroying those that oppose the structure and advancing those that bend to the will of *Naked*'s tyrannical Cummings. While Hearn will not risk the lives of his men unnecessarily to increase his power over them, Croft will because he believes in exerting power for its own sake. As a disciple of Cummings' views on power, Croft does his best to assimilate into the power structure of the military, what Cummings calls the "fear ladder" (176). Cummings explains the "fear ladder" is a physiological

leadership tactic that improves army efficiency by making the soldier “frightened of the man above [him] and contemptuous of [his] subordinates” (*Naked* 176). Resistant individuals like Hearn are “fit into” this hierarchy of power relationships by being forced to choose between “fighting the barbarians” and “sully[ing]” themselves (*Naked* 176; Rollyson 69).

Mailer further illustrates this hypocrisy of army leadership with his derogatory description of Cummings. Stripped of all pretenses, Cummings and Hearn battle ideologically in what is hardly ever a bilateral argument for the junior officer. In a symbolic gesture of his supremacy over Hearn, Cummings invites Hearn to play a game of chess with him in the general’s field tent. At once, Hearn is both excited and depressed by the prospect of playing chess with the general. The chess game begins directly after a lecture Cummings gives Hearn on the value of having those under one’s command both hate and fear their officers. Cummings’ view of power expression is strictly practical. He does not care what it takes to earn the obedience of his soldiers as long as it is accomplished. Hearn, on the other hand, cannot see the value in turning his own men against him just to prove a point. Even before Hearn begins to lose the chess game, he realizes, “it would be disastrous for him to win” because this would be one more instance of Hearn bucking the power of Cummings’ supremacy (*Naked* 178). Hearn finally attempts to express his will by mashing his cigarette butt on the floor of Cummings’ spotless bivouac, earning him a spot in Croft’s platoon where he would later die. Almost as a response to Hearn’s internal decision not to give up his commission, he is killed by the Japanese ambush into which Croft knowingly allows his platoon to stumble.

Mailer paints the general as flatly uncompassionate in *The Naked and the Dead* in order to provide a foil for Hearn. As the perfect example of inappropriate power usage, Cummings serves as anathema to Hearn's compassionate idealism. The general gives Hearn a choice, he can either accept Cummings' version of power and command or be invariably mashed into the ground like the cigarette in the bivouac. General Cummings lectures Hearn,

The only morality of the future is a power morality, and a man who cannot find his adjustment to it is doomed. There's one thing about power. It can flow only from the top down. When there are little surges of resistance at the middle levels, it merely calls for more power to be directed downward to burn it out. (323)

The general's blunt envisioning of a "might-makes-right" morality is more than just a philosophical exercise for Cummings. When the general interprets Hearn's conspicuously discarded cigarette butt on the floor of his spotless tent as a "little surge of resistance," he means to "burn it out" through force. Instead of merely reprimanding the young lieutenant, the brutal general throws *his* cigarette at the Hearn's feet and engages him in a power play foreshadowed by the earlier game of chess. In response to this juvenile move, the younger man must retrieve the general's cigarette or face the unnamed consequences of his insubordination. Much like the chess game, the junior officer eventually finds himself at the mercy of the experienced general and submits to his will by picking up the cigarette, leading to his transfer and eventual death, thus demonstrating that resistance to tyrannical control is often met with brutality.

Similar conflicts over what Mailer considers to be appropriate expression of power are prevalent throughout *Naked*. Mailer assembles his characters along a scale of power usage. At one end are the tyrannical general and his brutal scion, Croft. At the other end is the idealistic martyr, Hearn. All the enlisted men of the platoon fall somewhere in between. Nonetheless, even shiftless soldiers like Red are aware of the derisive barrier between officers and enlisted men. For example, operating on orders from General Cummings to “watch out for malingerers,” army medics and doctors treat the men like pieces of meat. In a scene where Red is suffering from nephritis and Wilson from gonorrhea, the soldiers make a reluctant sick call. After being accused of faking their illnesses and witnessing the preferential treatment of an officer with only a head cold, Red seethes, “Sure, they got it all figured out [...] If they get ya to hate ‘em enough you’ll crack [...] before you’ll go to ‘em, and that way they keep you on the line. You’d think we weren’t men” (371). Red’s estimation of army leadership techniques mirrors Cummings’ view of power and its influence. Although Red is incensed at his poor treatment, he is powerless to do anything about it. The reaffirmation of his inferiority to the officers only makes him resolve not to make future sick calls. Viewed in the short term, Red’s poor treatment has made him a better soldier, less likely to complain and more likely to be “efficient.” Red’s mistreatment casts him as a victim of a system that originates with the general and is perpetuated through officers and any enlisted man that emulates similar leadership techniques. Mailer’s criticism of the oppressive military leadership is that the leadership is not only self-serving but destructive to the common enlisted man from which the officers derive their power.

Mailer further argues that the military's organization is broken in such a way that common soldiers would have significant motivation to avoid leadership. Later in *Naked*, Red is given the chance to be promoted to corporal when Brown is needed to help carry the wounded Wilson back to camp. Fearing that he would become like his oppressive leaders, Red is at first cynical of Hearn's suggestion of advancement and then outright dismissive. Red vacillates, "For an instant he was tempted...If he took something like that, the whole thing fell apart. They got you in the trap and you...started fighting with the men and sucking [up to] the officers" (600). Red's "whole thing" is what he considers his solidarity with the men and the "trap" is the appeal of leadership which eventually forces one to sacrifice that solidarity for obedience. Mailer's portrayal of the simple soldier argues again that the military has become dangerously dismissive of the common good.

In *Naked*, Mailer's characters are unable to possess power without oppressing those under them. *Naked* plots an officer's level of corruption according to the amount of power to which he has access. Even Hearn's generally sympathetic portrayal shows how his rank has altered his thinking. As a Lieutenant, Hearn outranks everyone in the patrol and struggles with the moral decision to give up his commission. While he is genuinely interested in the comfort and safety of his troops, he is unable to relinquish the power he is given. Hearn equivocates,

That was the one thing he could do, that would be honest, true to himself
[...] He didn't want to give up his commission [...] If he did this, it would
be with open eyes; there would be nothing cleaner at the end of it,
certainly nothing more pleasant. It would be lousy and painful, and

probably the only discovery would be that he could fit into a fear ladder as well as anyone else. (*Naked* 584)

Hearn knows that Croft's plan to continue through the enemy territory regardless of the enemy's presence was foolish. However, he knows that resigning his commission would only require him to lose his position and relative safety. Then, he would have to submit to morally corrupt leaders like Croft. Hearn eventually decides that one cannot lead in the military through means other than force. He would rather risk his life as an enlisted man and resolves to give up his commission when they return. However, the domestic totalitarian military Mailer portrays cannot allow Hearn to survive, so Croft's perfidy and maneuvering kills him soon after his decision.

Hearn's sympathetic death at the hands of Croft both condemns the Croft/Cummings type of power morality in leadership and makes a martyr out of Hearn, therein arguing that while Croft and Cummings exhibit all the evil characteristics of oppressive leadership, one moral man is not enough to overcome them. Croft keeps secret a scouting mission that returns intelligence of active enemy installments. Without this knowledge Hearn unwittingly agrees to continue the march and dies by machine gun fire. Croft's successful use of deceit rewards him with control of the platoon while ridding him of his rival, Hearn.

Against his own protests, Mailer lacks hope concerning the ability to overcome *Naked's* sense that the only ethical constraint on action is what one is capable of doing. Mailer opines, "I think actually [*Naked*] is a novel with a great deal of hope. It finds [...] that even in a man's corruption and sickness there are yearnings and inarticulate strivings for a better world, a life with more dignity" (Mailer qtd. in Siegel 291). Paul Siegel

rightly judges *Naked* as a (mostly) gloomy comment on human nature but for different reasons. Siegel cites nature and a malign deity as the force that dooms the men's outcome from the beginning. Contrarily, the deliberate death of Hearn and the preservation both Cummings' and Croft's leadership would suggest that Mailer's criticism of the military was more pointed than fate or the circumstantial natural barriers the men faced. Previous to *Armies*, Mailer had not yet worked out a way to combat totalitarianism successfully. *Naked* criticizes totalitarian practices in American institutions yet offers no solution to the problem. The idealist Hearn is killed; Croft retains his command and many of the common enlisted men die for no reason. *Armies* later returns with the solution that totalitarianism cannot be met head on. Instead, those who wish to fight oppression must voice their concerns and educate those who do not understand their own plight. In short, Mailer's *Armies* will answer *Naked*'s concern with totalitarianism with a cry for increased civic education and involvement.

The great irony Mailer exposes in *Naked* is that the institutions used to fight fascism abroad are, in themselves, somewhat fascist in nature. For example, enlisted men are forced into a pecking order where those closest to the leader are favored with better medicine, alcohol, leisure time, and lesser risk of death. The purpose of Cummings' countless discussions with Hearn is to get him to accept the way he coddles him in front of the other men. On a larger scale, Hearn sees Cummings' version of fascism extending to the rest of the country. Just as Hearn almost fails to reject what he considers to be the immoral use of force, the American military in World War II seem poised to take on the worst attributes of their opponent. Hearn philosophizes, "There's an osmosis in war, call it what you will, but the victors always tend to assume the [...] trappings of the loser. We

might easily go Fascist after we win, and then the answer's really a problem" (320). In World War II like in any war, the injustices committed against common people tend to be collateral damage despite efforts to preclude them. The only way to win against totalitarian force is not to fight by the rules, Mailer will suggest later in *Armies* (187). Mailer's criticism of the politics behind World War II speaks to the same concerns that he expresses in *Armies* to a larger extent. At what point in fighting for the oppressed does one become the oppressor? In the enlisted men of the platoon find that their idealistic fight to restrict Japan's total power in the world is directed by leaders that use similar power tactics on them. Red and Wyman risk being perceived as avoiding battle for going on a legitimate sick call. Hearn tries in vain to hold onto his liberal ideology in spite of General Cummings' manipulative "lectures" (*Naked* 319). Eventually, the wills of each of *Naked*'s sympathetic underling characters are broken under the whim of Croft, Cummings, or other commanding officers.

The Armies of the Night

Mailer's prescient fear of totalitarian types of leadership in America does not fully take shape until twenty years later in *The Armies of the Night*, the partially autobiographical novel/history of the march on the Pentagon. Recounting the semi-autobiographical experience, Mailer takes great pains to present himself as a boorish drunk at times and as a political prophet at other times. Describing himself as the event's "anti-star" in the opening page of the book, Mailer is hung-over, contemplating participation in the historic march. Mailer wrote *The Armies of the Night* in close third person about the events leading up to and including the march on the pentagon. In the story, Mailer attends a party where he despises the majority of attendees, drunkenly

commandeers a rally, describes the event of the march itself, and finally details his subsequent arrest and release from prison. Where *The Naked and the Dead* succeeds in presenting a warning of a totalitarian American military in the close of World War II, *The Armies of the Night* extends this critique to the government's handling of the Vietnam War. Mailer eventually declares that the solution for totalitarianism in American institutions is to engender increased civic education and participation in national policies.

The Armies of the Night came at a time for Mailer when few of his writings had approached the success and critical acclaim he had received for his first novel. While busy directing and acting in independent films, Mailer's work on screen was largely funded by his own means and went unnoticed by the critical community. In fact, by October of 1967, a dejected Mailer remarked to his editor, "I feel I'm all washed up. I feel I'm out of it now, it's passed me by" (qtd in Rollyson 202). Indeed, he was out of the spotlight in a lot of ways, until he received a phone call from long time friend Mitchell Goodman inviting him to take part in a purposed march on the pentagon. At first skeptical, Mailer finally decided to participate when the prospect of speaking before a group of 20,000 people flattered his vanity. Upon the conclusion of the march, Mailer still did not know what to do with the experience. It was not until Mailer signed a 25,000 dollar book deal that he began writing. As he had done many times before, Mailer decided to write himself out of a low point in his life.

The rejection of authority for which Mailer had become famous bled into the form of this next book. His work in *Advertisements for Myself* had prepared him to write about his personal experience using the imagery and metaphor his time as a novelist had taught him. *Armies'* style and form resulted as one of the first great works of New Journalism.

Tom Wolfe has defined New Journalism as writing “accurate non-fiction with techniques usually associated with novels and short stories [...] us[ing] any literary device, from the traditional dialogisms of the essay to stream-of-consciousness, and to use many different kinds simultaneously, or within a relatively short space [...] to excite the reader both intellectually and emotionally” (15). Wolfe’s reversal of traditional literary values shocked the community, but allowed for other New Journalists like Mailer to analyze events subjectively without losing credibility. That is to say, Wolfe’s contribution labeled all descriptive texts as subjective. By devaluing objectivity, or at least casting doubt on its existence, Mailer gained latitude in how he could present his material.

The highly stylized and close perspective in *Armies* flaunts the stuffy traditions of “old journalism.” Wolfe observes that “most non-fiction writers, without knowing it, wrote in a century-old British tradition in which it was understood that the narrator shall assume a calm, cultivated and, in fact, genteel voice” not unlike the hushed intonations of “a radio announcer at a tennis match” (17). Mailer cut a swath of destruction through the mores of professional journalism with bursts of vibrant profanity, pop culture references, and what some would see as an unprofessional proximity to his subject. Still, until the anticipated publishing of *Armies*, Mailer’s attempts to convince his readers of governmental wrongs had gone unheeded. For Mailer, the goal of writing about the march was to help break the complacency of middle of the road Americans and alert them to the increasingly authoritarian nature of their government. *Armies*’ style communicated that message more successfully than any previous book had been able because Mailer’s style matched his content. His innovative use and confusion of perspective dared critics to look more closely at what constituted objective journalistic

truth. By questioning the validity of old journalism as a reliable vehicle for objectivity, Mailer fought established conceptions of meaning-making in a way that had been previously untried. In this way, Mailer could all at once disregard the casual acceptance of authority in government and the literary norms that went along with it.

Despite Mailer's formal experimentation, few critics see such as an act of rebellion. For example, Robert Merrill expends an entire article searching for a meaningful connection between the two sections *History as Novel* and *The Novel as History*, arguing that the form of the piece is essential to a productive reading of it. Other critics, like James Breslin, insist that the two sections are "persistent[ly] similar" and that "beneath the superficial variety [...] all actions of the book are really different versions of a single act: the ritual test of manhood" (158). Yet, neither critic looks at the formal shift itself as an act of rebellion. In *Armies*, Mailer toys with perspective, interweaving text from *Time* and other official print sources in order to complicate an objective or 'historical' viewpoint of events. *Armies* is Mailer's statement against any authoritarian voice either from a critic or elsewhere that he can write whatever and *however* he likes. Similarly, it is his invitation to readers to mimic his individualistic expression and further tear down the ability of establishment print media to cast objective the telling of an event. Like his political classification of himself as a "Marxian anarchist" or "left conservative," sometimes Mailer would label himself a contradiction just so he could set his own definition for what it meant (Radford 59, *Armies* 185).

Thematically *Armies* condemns American policy makers of totalitarian power mongering through its criticism of the botched handling of the Vietnam War. The self-named protagonist/author "Mailer" is concerned that the vast majority of Americans are

uninformed and indifferent to the government's abuses of their nation's power overseas. He sees the Vietnam War as a way for the "insane [...] center of America" to work out its tacit need for brutal expression (*Armies* 188). In an obscene dreamscape, *Armies* compares the working class, small town resident with an orange-haired grandma at a Los Vegas slot machine (151). The grandma is so obsessed with getting a lucky strike at the machine that she ignores a man trying to tell her about war crimes perpetuated by American involvement overseas. Eventually, the grandma is forced to confront an actual Vietnamese burn victim wheeled in on a gurney and only regards the child enough to say the burned little girl should tell her nurse to change her stinking sheets (151). Mailer similarly sees this grandma's small town complacent attitude towards brutality in the faces of the riot cops. Unlike the complacent grandma, the march exists as an instance where resistance to the top-down type power hierarchy in government is not "burn[t] out" by those at the top of the hierarchy (*Naked* 323). In this special instance, the battle against totalitarianism takes the form of a battle for individual expression and social responsibility. This battle is for Mailer a contest of the right of expression against the brutality of the war. Where Mailer sees the unthinking middle of America as secretly desiring the brutality of innocents in Vietnam (both the local citizenry and the American soldiers), he wants to counter this type of expression with rational, political dissent. *Armies* is then an example of moral individuals confronting centers of power both as a physical protest and literary dissent.

Thus, *Naked*'s failure to present another way to fight oppressive power expression is answered by *Armies*' Mailer and his ability to exchange verbal expression for physical battle. Mailer's answer to totalitarianism is subjectify history and thereby remove the

power of the government to define what a major political event means. In the march's closing hours, it began to resemble a siege with protesters camped out around the edifice and numbers of the protesters dwindled to only the most committed of those who had not yet been arrested. The last few protesters at the Pentagon march must deliberately make a decision that will invite additional discomfort, danger, and possibly death. In order to show the negative outcome of engaging totalitarianism in a non-literary fashion, he uses the protesters to demonstrate the cycle of ever-increasing commitment signifies the catch-22 of dissent from authority. These few remaining protesters endure

the passage through the night against every temptation to leave—the cold, the possibility of new, more brutal, and more overwhelming attacks, the boredom, the middle-class terror of excess (if one has done two or three good acts in a row, it is time to cash them in) the fear of moral vertigo (one courageous action must end in the whirlpool of death) yes, even the fear that if they remained through the morning, the afternoon, and the evening of the next night, and even then! would there ever be an end?
(279)

In the totalitarian society *Armies* warns us America is becoming, those that dissent must balance courage with the brutality their brave acts may engender. Opposition to this type of top down power expression necessarily requires an ever increasing investment of risk and commitment. Those remaining protesters feared not just the immediate brutal acts they would suffer, but each additional act to come.

Mailer's way of avoiding this downward spiral of commitment is, in effect, to never begin the process. Mailer sidesteps the major physical commitment of his body and

action by offering instead the text of *Armies* and his name for reproof. Mailer himself rejoins, “One’s own literary work was the only answer to the war in Vietnam” (qtd in Radford 72). The “answer” to Vietnam should not be more violence, either as aggressor or victim. Traditionally, physically aggressive mobs and violent acts are eventually easier to contain by increased violence by the state. On the other hand, political dissent through the written word has been much harder to repress. Mailer’s story could be crafted exactly the way *he* saw it in *Armies*. That is why Mailer decides to use his friends and influence to negotiate a quicker release from prison—because his battle is literary. Although Mailer imagines “his life as a battle against totalitarianism,” this fight, unlike his many physical ones, is a literary battle (Radford 58). Instead of seeing his continued presence in jail as a way of furthering his protest, his shrewd lawyer friend helps release him before many other less connected prisoners. The way Mailer sees it, continuing as a prisoner would require, “an endless ladder of moral challenges. Each time you climbed a step [...] another higher, more dangerous, more disadvantageous step would present itself [...] Sooner or later you would have to descend” (195).

Observing a Leninist radical named Walter Teague organize a free school for the dissemination of his ideas, Mailer uses the text of *Armies* to teach a less violent, more palatable path to political change (278-79). Instead of taking totalitarianism head-on, Mailer’s literary engagement strives to change belief of his audience and then their actions, not vice versa. The strength of Mailer’s form of dissent is that ideas, unlike violent action, are easier to transmit and endure longer. The text of *Armies* has had more impact on the thinking (and eventually, the actions) of more people than even the march itself. Unlike the protest, the text has the ability to reach across time with as much fervor

and intensity as it had in 1968 as a renewable affect—evidenced by the continued scholarly discussion concerning it. Because *Armies* describes an actual event using novelists' tools like metaphor, imagery, and dialogue, the potential for readers to remember the event the way Mailer describes it is greater than the dry "objectivity" of traditional print sources. Instead of passing over the event as a small hiccup in history, Mailer describes the march as possibly as important as the Civil War—that in a few decades, "the event may loom in our history large as the ghosts of the Union dead" (88). Mailer rewrites the history of the event in the way he wishes claiming that his account, although subjective, has as much validity as the other more supported accounts of the march. Mailer saw that he could do more for the cause against the war by his literary gifts than by getting killed or beaten in a protest. Although his literary contribution to the march required his physical presence, Mailer's battle with totalitarianism was ultimately waged more through his writing than any moment in a physical rite of passage.

Merrill cites Mailer's eloquent monologue before the judge as proof of his transformation from an "experience begun in apathy but concluded in mild exultation" (120). Of course, Mailer *is* committed to the cause of ending the war in Vietnam. However, Mailer's physical battling seems limited to the boxing ring and ex-wives. Mailer, instead, has learned to fight with his words: "Today is Sunday, and while I am not a Christian, I happen to be married to one. And there are times when I think the loveliest thing about my dear wife is her unspoken love for Jesus Christ" (*Armies* 213). Mailer then suggests that if the war does not end in the next year then protests will and must continue because "we are burning the body and blood of Christ in Vietnam. Yes, we are burning him there, and as we do, we destroy the foundation of this Republic, which is

its love and trust in Christ” (214). Choosing Christ as his operating symbol, Mailer wisely equates sacramental symbology with that of the innocents sacrificed in Vietnam suggesting that those who continue the war are destroying Christianity and with it, the very foundation of the republic. With this imagery, Mailer constructs a potent literary device in which those who are indifferent or for the war, crucify Christ anew. Although a Jew, Mailer is able to momentarily assume the religion of his wife in order to appeal to the vast “center of America” audience (*Armies* 188). He switches the focus of the war from that of democracy versus godless communism to godly behavior versus ungodly behavior. Mailer asserts that the democracy his audience believes in should be protecting not only those within its borders, but also the soldiers and people of Vietnam. Like Christ, Mailer offers himself as a sacrifice so that every person would see they had the ability to express their political views as he does. While Mailer is no doubt committed to the cause of fighting involvement in Vietnam, he is not the type of radical that blows up buildings or starts a riot. Mailer instead shifts attention to the discussion he is hoping will be the answer to the conflict. This form of textual, nonviolent dissent had the potential to change his audience’s minds better than immediate physical violence against the government. Mailer’s alternative answer is to increase his audience’s understanding of their government’s significant actions overseas like in his breakdown of the argument of communism in Asia (*Armies* 181-89). Knowing that traditional print sources would question him later about his comments, Mailer used his critics’ usual path for skewering him to inspire others to oppose the war directly through peaceful protests both physical and written. Mailer hoped that his recasting of the march as a significant expression of

public discontent with the stalemate in Vietnam would loosen the largely immobile conservative support of the war.

Just as *Naked* is a critique of the military's hypocrisy, *Armies* is a critique of the government's hypocrisy. In *Naked*, Hearn fumbles to explain the righteousness in fighting fascism in the Pacific theatre. He opines, "Over here, as far as I'm concerned, it's an imperialist tossup. Either we louse up Asia or Japan does. And I imagine our methods will be a little less drastic" (*Naked* 319-20). Later in *Armies*, a Hearn-like Mailer finishes this thought with regard to a different war, "The only real difficulty might be then to decide who would do more harm to Asia, Capitalism or Communism" (187). Either way in both wars, Mailer suggests that interceding on behalf of Asian countries leads to "harm." Wars either on behalf of or against countries on the other side of the globe lead to a type of hypocrisy where protection becomes destruction, and freedom becomes oppression. Instead, Mailer suggests a type of isolationism that would allow other countries the ability to practice what form of government they wish and if it was successful, Americans "would be forced to applaud" (*Armies* 187). But more likely, the inadequacy of totalitarian forms of government would eventually topple any regime.

In the end, Mailer decides the best way to fight against the war in Vietnam is to recast the conflict from a matter of democracy versus communism to good versus evil. The whole of *Armies* reconstructs the origin of America much like Mailer does himself in his courtroom speech. He recalls the national origin narrative as being built upon Christian precepts, and therefore, as "God was present in every man not only as compassion but as power...so the country belonged to the...will of the people" (*Armies* 288). The Christian middle—the target audience of Mailer's argument—should then see

Christianity and liberal democracy as irreversibly linked by the pursuit of the common good. The Christian moderates would be able to see whatever is done unto the least of these [the Vietnamese people], is done unto Christ. The “liars” in control of the government will not relent on their own so it, according to Mailer, is up to the previously insane “middle of America” to end tyranny by a democratic process (*Armies* 188). In this way, Mailer furthers his project of personal expression. As the “will of the people” expands to include more individuals than just the few in power, personal expression becomes more important. In turn, Mailer’s position as champion of expression increases in validity and value as well.

Mailer’s final metaphor of America as a leprous giantess about to give birth focuses the urgency of his warning of domestic totalitarianism. Mailer presents two very unequal options for the giantess’ child. Representing the future of the American political system, the child will either be “the most fearsome totalitarianism the world has ever known” or “a new world brave and tender, artful and wild” (*Armies* 288). Kristin Matthews observes “both options [flirt] with totality and totalization [...] the child [will either] be the savior of a fallen America, or [its] destroying angel—the end to democracy, liberty, and nation” (215). *Armies* hopes to “deliver” the child free of disease and usher in a new period of free expression and democratic rule through a reclamation of what Mailer sees as the ineffable qualities of democracy—civic involvement and personal expression. Mailer’s path to this utopist society enables civic involvement and personal expression because he invites others to do as he has done with *Armies*—to observe the world around them and question old journalism’s portrayal of the truth. If more people observe, think,

and write or share their opinions, power that would otherwise be pooled into small groups of people is kept in check by the mass of civic-minded citizens.

Mailer's unrelenting fear of adopting American totalitarian forms of government derives from what appeared as a global victory over totalitarianism abroad. Twenty years after the publication of *Naked*, we can read *Armies'* account of the protest as an instance of the type of rejection to authority Mailer predicted that soldiers would exhibit when oppressed by their superiors. Mailer predicts the authoritarian attributes of the American government in the Vietnam era as well. The "osmosis in war" has occurred at least partially in Mailer's view (*Naked* 320). The postwar American war machine has in a sense, "gone fascist" (*Armies* 320). Starting with the military, American forms of leadership have absorbed the brutal tactics of its enemies. *Armies* chronicles the growth of totalitarianism from the pentagon to the White House. Despite a considerable amount of public opposition registered by the vocal protest minority, the "answer" to global totalitarianism has become the "problem" (320).

Civic Involvement as the Solution

The assumption of American totalitarian leadership techniques is the "answer" that has become the "problem" (*Armies* 320). *Naked* and *Armies* argue that totalitarianism is not just an ideology used by communist or fascist countries anymore. Mailer's two major works further challenge the political assumption of brutal military tactics for the sake of expediency. In *Naked* we see Hearn's sympathetic death as martyrdom, a warning to the American people to avoid supporting Croft-like leaders. Cummings' aggressive belligerence is offset also by a sympathetic presentation of Hearn's liberal cautiousness. Like in *Armies*, *Naked* is addressed at the politically moderate center of the country.

Readers are expected to review American institutional practices with a more skeptical eye and voice their dissent democratically. In his exhortation to question political expediency, Norman Mailer redefines civic duty as active political involvement against immoral government policies—not just quietly casting a vote.

Armies completes *Naked*'s criticism of totalitarianism in America because *Armies* offers active civic involvement as the answer to oppressive practices in government and other institutions. According to Mailer, by 1968 the United States had adopted Hearn's idea of the worst parts of fascist society: a wicked, power-based morality. With *Armies*, Mailer finally articulated that persuasive expression of one's political views brings lasting change. Biographers Mills and Rolyson both saw him as a type of political watchdog that would warn the people when American military or political practices pursued anti-democratic means to solving conflicts. Mailer's literature operated as a warning to American people. As such it required greater democratic civil involvement of his readers. The subjectivity of Mailer's account requires the reader to decide what is true—or at least to consider that even established print sources do not have a monopoly on truth. Regardless of what one thinks of his work, it is difficult to ignore Mailer. His outrageous public antics and singular writing style remains a monument to New Journalism and social dissent.

Mailer saw that he could not fight totalitarianism head-on. That is to say, he could neither attack the political root through physical force, nor could he undermine the ideology that perpetuated it directly. Instead, he discovered that the most effective way to undercut authoritarian notions in his government would be through his aesthetic and literary rebellion. The formal shift itself from acceptance of orthodox literary forms and

rules begins this rebellion. Mailer's shift from the novel to New Journalism matures with the publication of *Armies*. Instead of a stuffy, distanced, and nameless narrator, *Armies* presents Mailer himself as the center of the action. In this way, Mailer can offer himself and his name for public reproof. Doing more than he asks his audience to do, Mailer's whole reputation was at stake with the publishing of *Armies*. In his battle against totalitarianism in America, Mailer hoped to snuff out civic indifference. His method, instead staging riots or demolishing public buildings, was to recast the protest march on the pentagon many traditional news sources would dismiss as a politically and socially central historical event. As an idea or story representing truth, Mailer's book could more easily change public opinion than the act itself. *Armies* became what Cummings would call a "little surge of resistance at the middle level" only "more power to be directed downward" could not "burn it out" (*Naked* 323).

Ultimately, *Armies*' "metaphor delivered" contains Mailer's hopes and fears for the future of the United States. Mailer's type of civic involvement "languishes in a dungeon whose walls are never seen" (*Armies* 288). His work sought to release his readers and more specifically, himself from the oppression of social orthodoxy and political conformity. This struggle against unseen boundaries sometimes was very destructive to Mailer and his personal relationships. However, many times in his literary career, Mailer's friction with the social norms of his time helped to frame the sixties' rejection of unqualified political assent. The process of learning to question the morality of major movements in society involves "courage, death, and the dream of love [that will eventually] give promise of sleep" (288). Both *Naked* and *Armies* demonstrate individual courage and death as characters and Mailer himself battles oppressive social forces that

have been outlined in this paper. Mailer dreams of an utopist ending to the final metaphor, one where “the dream of love” or an ultimate concern for the ability of others to express themselves becomes paramount in a society. In this final dreamlike state we find rest and “the promise of sleep” (288).

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