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**VIOLENCE  
IN**

**POSTWAR AMERICAN FICTION:  
A STUDY OF SELECTED NOVELS BY  
NORMAN MAILER**

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Magister degree in American Literature

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## Abstract

The thesis is an attempt to investigate the aspect of violence in postwar American fiction. The study is basically centered on the major novels of Norman Mailer. Following the approach adopted in the analysis, which is a combination of the Marxist and psychoanalytical methods, the first step in the work consists in a survey of the political and socio-cultural conditions in postwar that dominated international affairs. It became the land of unprecedented affluence with a civilization based on science and technology and sustained by capitalism. Therefore, most Americans looked forward to the postwar years with an air of optimism having a strong belief in the traditional American Dream of success and self-fulfilment. Yet, within a brief time such optimism vanished and was replaced by a sense of confusion and uncertainty. America became a land in which the social stratification was based on wealth and advantages. Besides, the outbreak of the Cold War, the constant threat of communism and scientific progress that encouraged the invention of more sophisticated and destructive weapons intensified the air of pessimism and presented a permanent threat to the psychic stability of the American individual. These conditions largely contributed to the prevalence and spread of violence in society and its overwhelming presence in fiction. Regarding the pluralistic nature of the American society, violence is first briefly examined in works of fiction written by representative figures of the major minority groups in America. Being violent and rebellious in his personal life and in writing, Norman Mailer is introduced as the writer who projects the whole of America with its ills and obsessions in his novels. In the novels under examination, violence takes different forms and is generated by various factors and conditions in society. It is either psychological, physical or verbal. In the war novel The Naked and the Dead violence echoes the totalitarian America that emerged after the Second World War while in The Deer Park and An American Dream psychological and physical violence appear as the basic characteristics of the American society during the 1950's and 1960's. The demand of conformity and the threat of the extinction of the individual self incite individuals to resort to criminal acts and aggressive behaviour to restore a lost identity in the modern American jungle. Why Are We in Vietnam ? presents the linguistic violence through the use of obscene language that manifests the brutality and criminality of America in Vietnam. From the study of these novels, violence appears as the destiny of America because it transcends the failure of the original American Dream.

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intense, turbulent, or furious and often destructive action or force; b: vehement feeling or expression."<sup>2</sup> Other dictionaries give more or less the same type of definition .In all of them the emphasis is on two major aspects : physical violence and verbal violence with all the psychological implications that this may entail. Yet those definitions remain too general and vague. Perhaps a more specific definition is needed in the context. Regardless of whether the violent act is physical or psychological, power is essential in its exertion. Hannah Bradby, a sociologist, insists that power is a major element in defining violence .According to her power is

*The ability to assert physical force on others and also the ability to appropriate people's symbols and information as well as their territory and economic resources . The exercise of any of these of power may constitute a form of violence .*<sup>3</sup>

Bradby seems to say that power may be in the hands of people , a social class or the state symbolizing the political power .Each of these may resort to different forms of violence to attain set objectives. On the other hand, Hannah Bradby argues that "people operating under very strong constraints might be faced with violence as their only option."<sup>4</sup> This means that oppressive and repressive forces in society generate a "reactionary"impulse of violent drive in order to restore equality and justice. Charles Tilly refers to this type when he asserts that "the term 'reactionary' applies to these forms of collective violence because their participants were commonly reacting to some change that they regarded as depriving them of rights."<sup>5</sup> The oppressed usually tend to use violence as a last resort and a means of revolt and protest. Franz Fanon calls this type "a cleaning force"<sup>6</sup> because it frees individuals and groups from despair, passivity and injustice.

According to recent research, there are other forms of violence that remained unexplored. It is easy to recognize violent and aggressive behaviour when it occurs but it is hard to determine its origin and the conditions that contribute to its occurrence when the act is related to psychological factors. Stephen Wilson, for example, states that “man has within him a lust for hatred and destruction”<sup>7</sup>, and he proposes that “some forms of psychological violence, something essentially located within a person’s interior world, precedes and occurs with violent action.”<sup>8</sup> Certainly the drive for destruction is located within the inner self of the individual and humans have an inborn capacity for aggression. Yet, behaving in a violent manner is motivated by some factors related either to socio-economic conditions or the psychological state of individuals. These factors are usually referred to as provocative factors that help the repressed desires to come out in the form of violent acts.

In a study on modern capitalistic societies, Simon Carter tries to explore a new type of violence exerted by the state and the industrial power. He shows how ventures in times of peace and war alike imply violence towards citizens through the rationality of decision-making processes. It is usually through propaganda that this type of violence is employed. In fact, Carter’s analysis presents a strong challenge to traditional approaches to violence and gives a new form which is hard to see and to condemn. Stephen Wilson, on the other hand, considers that propaganda affects violently the psychological state of people and he defines it as “an attempt made in the public sphere to coerce a change or devaluation of our shared symbols. We consider that our intelligence has been subject to a violent insult.”<sup>10</sup>

Another form of violence is related to the verbal expression characterized by the use of vulgar and obscene language offending accepted morality. The verbal abuse occurs as a reaction to an oppressive reality when the individual goes through situations

of frustration and difficulty. Linguistic violence may also be a humiliating factor that causes psychological damage and incites people to react in an aggressive manner.

These different kinds of violence have been treated by many researchers in American fiction, and this shows that the phenomenon constitutes a matter of primary concern for both writers and scholars. The studies that will be briefly reviewed vary in their concern and have used different approaches to analyse the subject. In Deadly Musings: Violence and Verbal Form in American Fiction (1993), Michael Kowalewski combines art and realistic facts in dealing with violence. He writes, "Violent scenes in American fiction are not only brutal, bleak and gratuitous, they are also, by turns, comic, witty, poignant, and sometimes, strangely enough, even terrifyingly beautiful."<sup>11</sup> Although the scenes of violence are horrible and sometimes frightening, Kowalewski suggests that the novelist's role as an artist is to combine the realistic and the imaginative through highly charged descriptive passages that bear on major issues concerning a writer's craft. Kowalewski's study attempts to investigate how writers including Poe, Crane, Hemingway, Faulkner and Wright draw on violence with their respective styles.

Kowalewski seems more concerned with the artistic merits of works of fiction and the craft and the stylistic qualities of authors than with the subject of violence as a socio-cultural phenomenon. In fact, he uses the topic as a critical occasion to investigate the stylistic imperatives at work in a writer's fiction neglecting the study of the nature of violence and its origin.

From a sociological perspective, James Richard Giles proposes a critical study of various types of violence-physical and psychological-in novels about contemporary American urban areas. In his work Violence in Contemporary American Novel: An End to Innocence (2000), he discusses eight novels published between 1968 and 1994 and

shows how the social conditions in contemporary urban areas present a cradle for the expansion of violence. The analysis of scenes of violence in the novels conveys a sense of violence as an epidemic which spreads rapidly because of unemployment, class-conflict, and high technological progress.

Giles's work allows to look at violence from a sociological angle and to regard it as a socially-determined phenomenon. Yet, the study is concerned with a limited space in the American society which does not reflect the reality in this country. Violence is not an aspect that characterizes only cities, it exists also in small towns, villages and rural areas such as in the South where it has marked the existence of blacks and whites. For instance, in Violence in Recent Southern Fiction (1965), Louise Gossett attempts to investigate the subject in southern novels published between 1930 and the early 1960's. The study includes writers such as Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor and Truman Capote. Gossett shows that a social reality characterized by chaos and disorder is likely to generate violence of different forms. Violence in southern fiction does reflect that reality in the south where people experience the contrast between tradition and modernity, between religion and the loss of faith.

Other critical works have been concerned with the study of violence in fiction written by minority writers. As far as black fiction is concerned, Jerry Bryant tackles the phenomenon from a slightly different angle in Victims and Heroes: Racial Violence in the African American Novel (1991). The work discusses 83 novels written by 64 writers covering more than a century and a half of African American writing. Bryant explains that the representation of racial violence in black fiction is shaped by the social and political climate of a given historical period. He describes the different conditions underlying the existence of blacks in America from slavery to the racial confrontations

of the modern period. Bryant insists that a change in the socio-political conditions entails a similar change in the writer's way of representing violence in his work. For instance, torture and lynching of the slavery period change into segregation, violation of rights and violent confrontations in riots. The centre of interest in the last two works is limited to studying violence in specific areas of American fiction investigating the causes and conditions lying behind its occurrence. Although America is a heterogeneous nation and each part of it has its distinctive social and cultural features and different problems, the phenomenon of violence remains a nation-wide problem that has been at the forefront of many American writers' works regardless of their origins and beliefs.

Given the view that violence may take different forms and is generated by various conditions, the present work will be an attempt to analyse the subject in postwar American fiction from a [socio-historical and psychological perspective]. It will be argued that the psychological pressures generated by the social, political and economic conditions of the postwar American society are responsible for the presence of various forms of violence in reality as well as in fiction. Although violence constituted a matter of interest for many postwar American writers, the focal point in my thesis will be the study of the topic in the major novels of Norman Mailer whose obsession with the problem represents a case worth investigating. This objective will be achieved by adopting an approach which is a combination of Marxism and Psychoanalysis.

On the one hand, the Marxist theory is based on defining history according to the aspect of the political and economic struggle between social classes for power. In capitalistic societies the distinction is made between the "superstructure" and the "base." According to the Marxist theory, the "superstructure" refers to the capitalist class which holds power through the ownership of the means of production and the

accumulation of wealth at the expense of the workers or the "base." The base is meant to include categories of underprivileged people identified according to class and race and who serve as labour under the capitalistic system. While the capitalists grow in political and economic strength, the workers suffer oppression and exploitation. This contrast often results in a struggle between classes in which the exploited tend to overthrow the superstructure. Marxism then calls for a revolution to get rid of the few owners of wealth and the means of production and to establish a society based on equality and justice. In its commitment to the social and political struggle, Marxism stresses the concept of overdetermination that revolution and the use of force are necessary for the eventual attainment of a classless society.

Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, brought a new discovery that initiated a revolution in the definition of human nature and man's inner self. It is the unconscious.

[ According to the Freudian theory, the unconscious is the setting of mental and emotional desires which are repressed by external forces. When the individual's physical and emotional demands come into conflict with the forces of reality such as social customs, political laws and material opportunities, the unconscious drives appear in the form of dreams or hysterical and neurotic disorders. According to Freud's definition, the unconscious is

*the result of the negative constitution of the conscious mind-through repression and denial. All that is negated takes up a parallel existence in the unconscious, which operates according to an entirely different logic and mode of representation to the conscious mind.*<sup>12</sup>

Psychoanalysis does not give access to the unconscious but treats its neurotic symptoms when they appear on the surface by using therapy. In the Freudian language, a "neurotic" is the person who is unable to adjust to a social life characterized by

repressive forces and whose acts are determined by the forces of the unconscious accumulated through denial.

The marriage of Marxism and psychoanalysis gives birth to a new theory applied to the study of modern capitalistic societies and the behaviours of people in these societies. The theory is applied in literature in an attempt to determine the set of conditions-political, socio-economic, and psychological-lying behind the behaviours of characters. While it takes from Marxism the principles of oppression and revolution, it brings from psychoanalysis the concept of repression. The combination of the two theories was developed mainly by Frederic Jameson who took from Freud the concept of repression and claimed that the function of ideology in modern capitalistic societies is to repress revolution. Ideology, according to Jameson, "refers not to conscious political doctrines, but to all those systems of representation (aesthetic, religious, judicial and others) which shape the individual's mental pictures of lived experience."<sup>13</sup> Besides, Wilhelm Reich developed this theory in the study of postwar American society by borrowing from both Marx and Freud. The Reichian view assumes that a society which is destructively repressive and hostile to full instinctual development is sick and unjust and would lead to abnormality, Schizophrenia and madness.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the Freudian therapy based on adjustment to the social norms, Reich's therapeutic program calls for the need for instinctual purgation and a liberation of mankind from psychic and social pressures. Borrowing the Marxist concept of revolution, Reich calls for a revolution in consciousness which stresses the preservation of one's emotional integrity in the face of the restrictions imposed by society.

Within this framework and through the study of the selected novels, it will be demonstrated that the socio-economic and political conditions of the postwar age bring about the conflict between social classes. Through oppression and repression imposed by

the privileged class, the underprivileged turn to revolution under different forms either as groups or individuals as a means of purgation. It will be showed that the psychological factors responsible for the spread of violence are generated by the materialistic development of the American society and the need for more power. The study will include the following chapters:

Chapter one will shed light on the different conditions of life in the postwar American society and their contribution to the prevalence of violence.

The projection of the subject of violence in literature will be briefly discussed in fiction written by representative figures of minority groups.

Chapter two will introduce Norman Mailer and explain the factors that contributed to the shaping of his violent personality. These factors constitute a useful material for understanding the nature of violence in his fiction.

Chapter three will be devoted to the study of violence in Mailer's war novel The Naked and the Dead (1948). The focus will be laid on different forms of power and their relationship to various types of violence in the war novel. It will be demonstrated that during the war time men suffer not only from physical violence but also from psychological violence emanating from politics, men of higher rank and nature. Hence, the war setting will be related to the American society of the modern times.

Chapter four will be dedicated to the analysis of physical and psychological violence in The Deer Park (1955) and An American Dream (1965). It will be showed that psychological pressures accumulated through repression and exerted by the dominating social and political power structures lead to the psychological sickness of individuals who would seek a purge.

In chapter five the emphasis will be laid on linguistic violence characterized by the use of obscence and vulgar language. This form will be analysed in Why Are We in

Vietnam ? and will be related to the obscenity and brutality of the American military involvement in Vietnam.

Finally, the conclusion will be a general summary of the results achieved in the work. It will equally pave the way for further investigations concerning the projection of violence in the contemporary American fiction of the last decades of the Twentieth century.

## NOTES

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## CHAPTER I

### **Culture and Society in the 1950's and 1960's.**

Prior to the study of the fiction of violence in the United States in the decades following the Second World War, it is worth exploring the mood of these decades and sketching out the social and cultural history of the period which were at the origin of the prevalence of violence in America and its literature. In fact, American history was a history of change in private and public life; in social attitudes towards wealth, poverty, race and sex, and in human perception of America itself and its new role in the world.

Following the Allied victory in 1945 the United States emerged as the world's unchallenged power and thus it had to assume its new responsibility in a world dominated by international affairs. America which was in sole possession of the atomic bomb managed to avoid the destruction of its cities and economic capacities during the war. Therefore, it was committed to undertake a program of aid to Western Europe in the form of the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine which marked the onset of the Cold War. It was the nature of this condition which characterized the mood of the period and coloured the intellectual, social and political life for most of the postwar era. American historian Alan Trachtenberg stated that, "The Cold War was both a political phenomenon and an emotional one, a state of policy and a state of mind"<sup>1</sup>.

In fact, the world came to be divided into two hostile camps: the West or the Free World led by the United States of America and the East led by the Soviet Union. The Eastern bloc represented, according to the Western version, an aggressive totalitarianism which must be stopped by the policy of "containment". From a western perspective, William Chafe stated that, "there seemed little basis for distinguishing between Soviet tyranny and Nazi totalitarianism" and "Hitler and Stalin were two of a

between Soviet tyranny and Nazi totalitarianism" and "Hitler and Stalin were two of a kind, each reflecting a blood-thirsty obsession with power no matter what the cost to human decency."<sup>22</sup> It seems that the aim of the Soviet totalitarian regime was to enhance its power and to spread communism through the use of Nazi strategies. To confront such threat, the policy of "containment" consisted in the establishment of armed bases at the borders of the East, military readiness in the form of collective security pacts such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), and surveillance in the form of espionage. It also included the support of anti-communist regimes to prevent the spread of communism to other parts of the world. Consequently, America was found involved in the Cold War conflicts with incidents occurring everywhere in the world and affecting the lives of Americans and their consciousness with greater force than any other event in the American history. This is why Alan Trachtenberg defined the Cold War as a political phenomenon and an emotional one. In fact, the succession of events which happened in the Cold War years contributed a great deal to the widespread of anxiety, the constant threat of mass destruction and nuclear disaster. Among the most disruptive episodes that marked the period were the Berlin Blockade in 1948, the Russian explosion of an atomic bomb in 1949, causing an escalation of arms race, the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, and the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Above all the period witnessed the involvement of the United States in two wars: in Korea (1950-1952) and in Vietnam (1964-1973) in which American casualties exceeded World War II figures.

As a result of these facts, the Cold War imposed a massive concentration of power in government agencies, especially in the field of military affairs and espionage and it was an inescapable fact that the thinking of most Americans was profoundly affected in

this period. The tension reached the point of hysteria in the 1950's when hunts, blacklists, trials for espionage and treason, and the jailing of communists on conspiracy charges were the common practices witnessed by Americans and especially by intellectuals. Indeed, intellectuals and writers who had previously associated themselves with radical causes and Marxist ideas reversed their positions or changed their criticism to an appraisal of the American way of life. The common belief was that any deviation from the national consensus either political or personal could be considered subversive and "un-American." During these years, it was the House Committee on Un-American Activities, established by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the early 1950's, which ruled and controlled public life. For this reason, the time was defined as the age of conformity as opposed to freedom and the principle of liberalism. It was actually one of the paradoxes of the American nation.

On the other hand, America was regarded as a consumer's paradise. The American society enjoyed affluence and material success, yet Americans suffered the spiritual malaise of too much consumption and the denial of racial equality. In fact, it was the threat to the individual from the impersonal structures of business corporations and government which generated this malaise. Government and business structures were interested in the individual as a working machine and as a consumer of products in a mass society that violated his dignity and denied his individual self. More shocking also to the national consciousness were the political assassinations which included the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, of Malcolm X in 1965, of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1967, and of Robert Kennedy in 1968. These horrific events intensified the sense of doubt, anxiety and instability making Americans feel they were living under repressive totalitarianism.

In addition to the pressures and the oppressive impacts of the Cold War, modernization dominated the social life and economic aspects of the United States after the war and contributed to a large extent to the appearance of violence in the American society. According to Alan Trachtenberg, modernization meant:

*more rationalized organization of industry and the government, the appearance of « bigness » in all institutions, and with it "impersonality", and a submission of all traditional ways of personal and family and group life to the scrutiny of scientific methods and investigation.*<sup>3</sup>

The statement stresses the idea that in the modern American civilization there was no place for the individual who suffered the pressures of public forces on his private identity and who had to struggle to restore his individual self. In the same manner, J.P. Diggins stated that "capitalism had already destroyed America and reduced its people to a state of happy slavery."<sup>4</sup> This implies that American Individuals were living in a mass society dominated by the notion of "bigness" and where they served as slaves for their material easiness. This situation would certainly lead to the emergence of revolting voices against big government, big business and big industry. Moreover, the modern American civilization produced what was know as the "mass culture" which excluded from intellectual activity all that did not conform to the standardized norms. Sociologist Wright Mills and Irving Howe argued that it was "capitalist commercialism which manipulates people into standardized tastes, and both democracy and "mass culture" have so far been known to us only in the corrupting context of capitalism."<sup>5</sup> Hence, the intellectual life was equally threatened, and as a reaction against such menace Irving Howe mentioned in his essay, "This Age of Conformity" that the discontented clung to an idea of intellectual opposition, a challenge to wealth, to power and to American

capitalism's claim to a unique destiny.<sup>6</sup> So there was always a trend of resistance to conformity and a revolt against the status quo. Wright Mills identified the status of free intellectuals in a conformist society by noting that,

*There has arisen a new kind of patronage system for free intellectuals which consists of the newly emerged postwar bureaucracies: the new bureaucracies of state and business become the major employers of intellectuals ... writers, artists, professors now become employees who spend the most alert hours of their lives being told what to do.*<sup>7</sup>

Like the intellectuals was the rest of the American people who, instead of being free individuals, were transformed into little men and hired employees working for the new bureaucracies of state and business. Thus the individual feeling of loss, nonsense and loneliness became more persistent in popular thinking during the 1950's and 1960's. However, it was not until the urban violence of the 1960's that the problems of race and poverty unmasked the image of a deprived section of the American society. The uprisings of the sixties represented an opportunity for a total transformation of society and culture and for the liberation of people from psychic and social repressions. The phenomenon was given ample consideration by thinkers and researchers in modern writing and was studied mainly by the members of the Frankfurt School which included among others Herbert Marcuse, Wilhelm Reich, and Theodor Adorno.

The members of this school who exiled to the United States in the 1930's and 1940's tended to combine psychology and sociology into the analysis of modern industrial society and they adopted a kind of rebellion for personal liberation from the repressive forces of the capitalistic system. Herbert Marcuse noted that, "the formally free American society compels a conformism which constrains every aspect of life, and which is the more insidious for being experienced as voluntary."<sup>8</sup> What Marcuse did

apply in his analysis was a combination of the teachings of Freud and the principles of Marx and thus he sought to achieve a complete realization of the whole human being in his social world. This implies not only an "erotic" liberation but also the conditions of life and the opportunities for success in industrial capitalistic societies. Marcuse meant by "erotic" not only the physical sexuality but a sensuous, aesthetic and pleasurable experience of reality. Indeed, the conflict arose between the principle of pleasure and the principle of reality. And in the American society, the subjection of pleasure which sought gratification appeared in the increased repression in the form of external controls and administration. Marcuse found that every aspect of life in consumer capitalism was absorbed by repressive modes such as ideology, the advertising discourse and the scientific discourse.

Louis Althusser, a Marxist critic, had the same point of view. He noted,

*The power of the modern capitalist state is dependent on two types of institutions: The repressive state apparatuses such as the police, law courts, and army; and the ideological state apparatuses which include the church, the family, political parties, media, and the education system. This is how the economic system reproduces its own conditions of production. The first apparatuses function by violence and the second function by ideology.*<sup>5</sup>

Thus the growing repression in the American society practised by different instruments created sick individuals whose sole dream became freedom. Herbert Marcuse, in his analysis of the postwar American society, called for a revolution in consciousness, a rebellion for self-identification that might change the whole society. Eventually, these ideas engendered responses among intellectuals and writers and appeared in the literature of the postwar era. This literature revealed that affluence and improvements in living conditions were accompanied with class conflict that led to

sweeping group violence. Similarly, increased abundance and satisfaction of material needs were accompanied with the emergence of delinquents, violent criminals, dropouts and suicides. Paul Goodman, another social critic, made his contribution in the critique of the postwar American society. In Growing Up Absurd (1960) he revealed the national malaise created by the forces of repression and he called attention to the growing movements of revolt such as those of the delinquents and gangsters. What was absurd, according to Goodman's view, was the condition that arose from violating human needs. These needs were not only material but they were related to roles in society one could respect and a sense of genuine belonging to a community.<sup>10</sup> For instance, blacks in the American society were deprived of their social and political rights. They lived on the fringe of society excluded from certain jobs and having no right to be represented in the political institutions. Other underprivileged ethnic minorities had no better situation than blacks. Thus Americans who suffered the violation of those needs were compelled to mobilize either for individual or collective action to achieve recognition and self-identification.

In addition to the mentioned political and socio-economic forces, it is worth considering one of the basic issues that characterized the postwar American society after the explosion of the atomic bombs on the Japanese cities. In fact, the explosion and its destructiveness was a warning to people not only about the horrors of modern warfare but more essentially about the essence of modern science and technology whose application subjugated rather than served mankind. It was undeniable that the rapid advances in scientific research and the use of technology in industry, communication and transportation made life easier and more comfortable. More impressive in scientific experiment was the discovery of new forms of energy, the achievement of new levels of

speed in air travel and new immediacy in communication. However, the new discoveries brought to the American mind the 19<sup>th</sup> century English novelist Mary Shelley's story of Dr. Frankenstein, a scientist whose research and experiment allowed him to produce a living monster who turned murderously against him. In the postwar era, it was the scientific experiment and new technologies that allowed military industry to develop and flourish by producing more sophisticated arms for wholesale destructiveness. Thus the threat of a supermechanized warfare persisted, the fact which intensified the sense of powerlessness, fear and dislocation. It was this sense which urged millions of Americans in the 1960's to react violently and to take part in hundreds of demonstrations against the involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War.

In the shadow of the bomb and the technological warfare, the question of human values attracted the attention of scientists and humanists alike who tried to find grounds of reconciliation between the new sciences and humanistic values. Yet, it seemed that the machine tended to dominate every aspect of human life and to mould human behaviour and thought in that mechanized society. Lewis Mumford, one of the social critics who was interested in the impact of increased mechanization upon human roles in society, stated in his book The Myth of the Machine (1967) that more authority was given to machines while human beings were assigned only subordinate roles in decisions. He added that,

*like a drunken locomotive engineer on a steamlined train, plunging through the darkness at a hundred miles an hour, we have been going past the danger signals without realizing that our speed which springs from our mechanical facility, only increases our danger and will make more fatal the crash.*<sup>11</sup>

The danger was that individuals grew passive and machine-conditioned instead of functioning as autonomous individuals. Indeed, the triumph of the machine serving the collective organisations and the frightening future awaiting the "happy slavery" contributed intensively to the violation of human needs and made human intervention and thinking irrelevant. So to identify one's self and to restore a lost identity, the repressed individual tended to resort to different types of violence which arose from the conflict between desires seeking gratification and external repressive forces and authority that denied such needs.

This image of a violent society and the underlying conditions and circumstances that contributed to the prevalence of violence in postwar America found echoes in much of the literature of the period. In this context, it is worth noting that the influence of some literary and philosophical thoughts on postwar novelists was striking. The general mood of anxiety and absurdity that reigned in the American society and the feeling of being alienated and dehumanized by the repressive forces of capitalism led to the direct influence of existentialism on the American mind and thought. The philosophy came to America with its burden of anxiety and its consciousness of absurdity and nihilism and found in America a good ground for its spread. Existentialism was defined as the philosophy of the last resort because it came as a desperate answer to a desperate situation. The philosophy holds that man is alone in the universe suffering anguish and despair and he has "no essence, only existence."<sup>12</sup> In fact, the critical situation in which man finds himself cannot be described or understood in scientific and idealistic terms. This notion of being and nothingness urges man to make decisive choices as the only expression of freedom in a world that is uncertain and purposeless.

Existentialism was embraced by American intellectuals through the writings of Jean Paul Sartre who stated that, "first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and only afterwards, defines himself...thus there is no human nature, man is nothing else but what he makes of himself."<sup>13</sup> So man has no essence and what he is can only come from himself and from his will. Likewise, the author of The Stranger (1958), Albert Camus, stated that man inhabits an absurd universe and absurdity arises from the opposition between man's longing for happiness and the external forces of irrationality. In this universe, the decisive choice to make is to continue the struggle against the opposing forces to define one's self. The struggle in the postwar American society was between the repressive forces of a mass society and the alienated individuals who belonged to deprived minority groups or the disillusioned who were denied their human identity. Thus, the free decisive choice made by those people was the use of violence to restore equality and justice. The phenomenon was depicted in fiction with a sense of absurdity and anxiety describing a search for meaning in the dilemma of the postwar society.

Along with existentialism there was a strong revival of naturalism that survived among some writers of the postwar generation. The theory is based on the Darwinian biological determinism and the Marxist economic determinism which both hold that the life of man is strongly shaped by external and environmental forces beyond his control. The novelist turns into a scientist who investigates the individual or a group of individuals in the places of experiment. In the United States of the postwar era, the laws of social struggle were apparent, the process of modernization was accelerating and technological progress was advancing. These were the new environmental forces which gave rise to social stress, apocalyptic feelings, and intensified the sense of victimization.

Thus the naturalist novel was the instrument by which the writer dealt with the pressures of the modern urban jungle. Moreover, naturalism survived mainly among the war novelists who made a shift from the city to the battlefield, another naturalist setting. The war was considered the major naturalist image of life and an experience where human beings were tested to their limits and a field of struggle where the human self and human values were nullified. Men were driven to battle by unseen forces that directed them to kill, slaughter and destroy. The most successful war novels of the postwar period such as From Here to Eternity (1951) by James Jones and Catch 22 (1956) by Joseph Heller were naturalistic tainted with violence and a dark vision of decadence and evil. Norman Mailer's novel The Naked and the Dead is the example that will be investigated in detail in this thesis.

Following the heterogeneity of the American society and the variety of problems the various ethnic groups encountered, it is important to deal with some examples of minority fiction where the aspect of violence seemed prevalent. As far as blacks were concerned, they were America's most powerful voices of protest and revolt. The history of violent racial incidents that swept America after the war was shocking and full of horrific scenes and disastrous losses. Violence as it was adopted by the black community and represented by black American writers was the ultimate response to white violence and the most effective means to confront white aggression. Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison represents a sample section of black fiction in which violence seems the mode of expression. The novel is centered on the young black nameless man who is introduced in his junior year at a southern black college. He is an idealist who is filled with great expectations and aspirations to become a race leader like Booker T. Washington. The story starts with the scene known as the "Battle Royal" where the

narator, the nameless black youth, is obliged to join other "Niggers" in a blindfolded fistfight at a party organized for the white leading citizens of the small town. After the "battle" he is awarded a scholarship to a Negro college. However, he is soon exepelled from college for having allowed a white trustee from the north to visit the squalid surroundings where a Negro farmer's family lives. After leaving the college, he moves on to New York where he learns that being black means he is "invisible." Thus all his efforts are directed toward the struggle for acknowledgement and achieving visibility. In New York and while he is in the crowd watching the violent eviction of a Negro couple from a Harlem tenement flat, he is taken up by the Brotherhood-a communist organization- and falls in with the ruthless Brother Jack, the leader of the Brotherhood. Very soon he discovers that the organization is far distanced from the Negro's cause and that Brother Jack is more concerned with party politics than with true aid to blacks. The young man's experiences are climaxed by his taking part in a violent Harlem race riot after which he retreats to hide in an underground cellar where he tries to find meaning to his experiences.

To investigate the subject of violence in Invisible Man, it is necessary to analyse the various scenes of violent drive and act in which the unnamed protagonist gets involved. The first incident occurs at the party at the beginning of the novel when the boy stands in the middle of the room delivering his speech. The boy is completely ignored by some of the audience while he is bitterly scorned and humiliated by others. With his mouth full of blood after the "Battle Royal" whenever he pronounces long words, he is easily shouted at to repeat. Then the men burst in laughter making the boy tremble of fear and anger. It is this situation that frightens him especially when he says "social equality" instead of "social responsibility."<sup>14</sup> In fact, the word "equality" is

denounced by the leading social class and the black boy is not allowed to mention it, it is only "heard debated in private" (30). So the boy is humiliated by the audience because of his race and he says they "yelled" and "shouted hostile phrases at me" (30). One of the men who is cold in manner and devoid of human feeling "blared out" and tells the boy: "you've got to know your place at all times" (30). Under the pressure of humiliation and threat, the boy wants to retreat but he is also afraid of their violent reaction. He declares that in case of retreat "they'd snatch me down" (30) which suggests the threat of possible attack and aggression. So the violence exerted against the black boy is psychological. It is employed through humiliation and intimidation by violating the character's sentiments and repressing his desire for self-fulfilment.

Once in the college, the narrator is harshly attacked by the black president, Dr. Bledsoe, because he is angered and outraged by the boy's conduct with the white trustee. Dr Bledsoe starts his attack by unveiling the actual facts which the boy comes to discover. Indeed, he tells him that the white folk are powerful and they dominate every aspect of life in society because they have the means to do it. He says: "these white folk have newspapers, magazines, radios, spokesmen to get their ideas across" (119). They believe and trust only those who serve them and their interests, and Dr Bledsoe recognizes that "the white folk tell every- body what to think-except men like me. I tell them; that's my life, telling white folk how to think about the things I know about" (119). The black president exhibits, in fact, the negative qualities of betrayal and lack of commitment to the Negro cause as he himself confesses, "it is a nasty deal and I don't always like it myself" (119). He is even ready to commit crimes against his fellow men to secure his acquired status among the white community, he tells the boy, "I'll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where

I am" (120). More shockingly, the boy receives the biggest insult that violates his human dignity and deprives him of his identity. He is told: "you are nobody, son. You don't exist-can't you see that?" (120). The attack is outrageous and it seems to affect the psychological state of the boy who feels defeated and helpless. He says in despair, "I had thought of myself as a man and here with a few words he'd made me as helpless as an infant" (120). The president has no doubt that his rough and harsh words do shock the boy's consciousness as he says, "shocks you, doesn't it?" (120). After having experienced the psychological violence exerted by the power of the whites and the alienated black president, the young man undergoes other experiences in New York where he learns that violence is part of blacks' lives in the American society.

In Harlem, the unnamed protagonist witnesses the eviction of a poor black old woman and her husband by two white officials. While the crowd is watching the incident silently, the two white men carry the old woman out of the building with her household furnishings. An insight into the setting shows the miserable living conditions of people living in the place. Indeed, because of the cold weather, a group of boys set fire in a cardboard box in the street making the air black and thickened with fumes. Besides, the articles of furniture thrown on the sidewalk appear very old and useless and can belong only to poor people. The narrator describes the furniture as "it was piled in jumble along the walk and over the kerb into the street, like a lot of junk waiting to be hauled away" (217). Even the old woman's dressing shows her poor living conditions, she can not find proper clothes for women and she acquires instead man's shoes and man's sweater. These conditions reveal the injustice done to black folk who are herded like animals in squalid districts suffering both the hardships of life and the aggressive assaults of the white men. The old woman is exposed to the physical violence of the

white officials who proceed to throw her worn furnishings outside without having pity on her: "two white men hugging the chair and trying to dodge the blows and the old woman's face streaming with angry tears as she thrashed at them with her fists" (217). The suffering of the woman is such that she tries feebly to beat the two men and she finally pours out her anger and anguish through crying and sobbing and showing to the crowd: "just look what they doing tu us" (217). In fact, the incident suggests a lived experience which is part of the overall suffering of blacks in America. The violence employed against the old couple startles the young man and the anger inside him starts to grow. One has the impression that the violent incident represents a turning point in the young man's experience in that racist society. He confesses: "I was wary of what the sight of them crying there on the sidewalk was making me begin to feel" (218). This shows the cruel behaviour of the white men who are devoid of human feeling and respect. In addition, the young man gets more involved in the incident when he says, "the old woman's sobbing was having a strange effect upon me-as when a child, seeing the tears of its parents" (218). The scene is too emotional and it reveals the anger and pain caused to black people.

After the eviction of the old couple, the young man witnesses a more violent incident when his friend in the Brotherhood, Clifton, is murdered in the street by a white policeman. Clifton falls down after a shot from the cop's gun while the narrator is numbly watching the incident. In fact, using unjust power against a black man shocks the young man and deepens his sense of confusion and helplessness. His statement "the sun seemed to scream an inch above my head" (351) shows the blatant injustice done to the young man and the violation of his natural right to life. The narrator is deeply shaken as to the manner in which his friend is murdered in the street like a criminal. He

walks "blindly now, unthinking, yet my mind registering it all vividly" (352). Besides, when he sees his friend's body lying motionless and his shirt wet with blood, he cannot even stand steadily or take another step forward. He stands there in amazement until two other policemen come trying to keep the narrator away from his friend. This incident shows that violence seems to be the fate of millions of black Americans of whom the narrator, the old black couple and Clifton are only representatives. The various forms of violence presented in the novel take such sequence that leads to the awareness of the narrator that his life in this society is a series of experiences shaped by violence and injustice.

The experiences of violence lived and witnessed by blacks culminate in the eruption of violence among the black masses. It is the great psychological pressure that urges blacks to explode in a streak of "reactionary" violence especially after the murder of Clifton. Thus the narrator goes into the crowd taking part in a race riot that sweeps the street in a firm and determined manner. The riot starts in the night and the black masses move on throwing different things as bricks and pieces of metal into the windows on either side of the street. The need for a purge constitutes, indeed, a force that drives masses of people to destroy and rip all obstacles. The narrator is described as he moves in a state of rage and uncontrollable anger, his "personality blasted" and "the whole surface of my skin alert" (442). He also confesses that, "I moved, feeling as though a huge force was on the point of bursting" (442). The statement reveals the hidden anguish and anger within the black man and his readiness to retaliate against the aggressors.

Therefore, Invisible Man is just one example of black fiction of the postwar era where violence is depicted as psychological, through humiliation and violation of

blacks' sentiments, or physical, through murder and the use of physical force. Violence is exerted either by racist white individuals or by the repressive institutions of the state like the police intending to repress the desire of blacks to enter into the public sphere. The resort to violence becomes also the concern of the black community and is used as a "reactionary" or self-defensive means to confront white violence and to assert black identity. In Ralph Ellison's novel, the most violent act that constitutes a background for the other incidents is the refusal of both whites and blacks to recognize the identity of the young man as a human being. He is invisible to them and this is the greatest violence he experiences in that society as he declares in the prologue of the novel,

*I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me...  
When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves,  
or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything  
except me (7).*

This feeling of dehumanization is also evoked by Langston Hughes in Francis Kearns's book Black Identity. He states, "I have never been nowhere near news except when I was in the Harlem riots. Then the papers did not mention me by name. They just said 'mob'. I were part of the mob."<sup>15</sup> This experience is lived by the nameless protagonist in the riot when he says, "I was one with the mass" (442) without identity and it is only violence that can restore to these people visibility.

In addition, the struggle of the "invisible" young man to achieve self-identification in response to a violent oppressive reality is regarded as naturalistic. It is concerned with the socio-economic conditions that often determine the fate of black people in the American society and shape their lives and behaviour. Alfred Kazin, for example, states that "Invisible Man is about the art of survival"<sup>16</sup>, which implies that the

social and economic determinism in the struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed helps to understand the nature of violence in this struggle. Indeed, the naturalistic determinism in the novel condemns the desperate hero to failure and helplessness and makes his efforts to achieve "visibility" end in fiasco.

Among the major ethnic groups that constitute the American pluralistic society is the Jewish minority. The entry of Jews into America was launched as early as the settlement of American colonies in the New world. In spite of this existence, it was not until the 1940's that influential modern Jewish literature emerged at the hands of writers such as Saul Bellow, Philip Roth and Bernard Malamud. The new Jewish writers regarded themselves as survivors and victims of war and holocaust, and their existence and intellectual life were largely shaped by their historical experience during the war years. It was the horror of the war years which made the Jewish writers focus on political history and the individual perception of such history. The fiction they wrote was usually tainted with a sense of deracination and rootlessness and common patrimony of disaster. Responding to this situation, the majority of Jews did not assimilate into the United States population wishing to preserve their ethnic and religious identity. This was a valid response from a people who suffered the hostility and aggression of their fellow Americans. In the light of this history, the Jewish writers found themselves in the midst of a modern dilemma characterized by disillusionment and "isolation both from one's own past and from an increasingly affluent society and an inhibition about embracing America."<sup>17</sup> These writers sought to find a link between their own distinctive history and the general processes of the American society. Irving Howe explains the situation in an article published in Commentary (October 1946):

*For the kind of contemporary intellectual of whom we write, it is difficult to be a Jew and just as difficult not to be one. He is caught in the tension resulting from conflicts between his society and his tradition, his status and his desires, he suffers as a man, intellectual, and a Jew.*<sup>18</sup>

The conflicts experienced by Jews and Jewish intellectuals in particular resulted in the eruption of an identity crisis. The crisis situation gave rise to aggressive drives and the identification with violent behaviour. The writers who depicted the identity crisis and its effects attempted to examine the existential angst of the modern Jewish man in the repressive American society. This is exposed in Saul Bellow's questions: "how can one resist the controls of this vast society without turning into a nihilist, avoiding the absurdity of empty rebellion?...Are there other, more good-natured forms of resistance and free choice?"<sup>19</sup>

Bellow's depiction of the modern Jewish man in the American society and the question of alienation and brutality appear in his novel Herzog. Herzog is the story of a Jewish male intellectual, Moses Herzog, who experiences an identity crisis and social conflicts of ethnic, cultural and familial types. The protagonist was born in Canada to a traditional Jewish family and grew up in the United States. When the novel begins, Herzog chooses to lead a solitary life and retires to his secluded country home in the Berkshires where he reminisces on his past life and present thoughts. The detailed account he gives of his former life shows a tormented state of mind and deep suffering which urge him to write letters to great dead persons and some others living giving pessimistic answers to the psychological problems he endures. Herzog divorces his first wife Daisy and loses his son Marco who goes to live with his mother. His second marriage also fails when his wife Madeleine deserts him taking his daughter June and

joining another man, Valentine Gersbach. These failures with women leave negative effects on Herzog's personality, and the loss of his children disturbs him and leaves him emotionally destroyed. Moreover, Herzog's suffering and anguish are caused by the ethnic conflict which results in the alienation of the Jew as a stranger and his marginal status in the American society. Herzog often remembers his childhood life of Napoleon Street where his Jewish neighbours give him a sense of belonging and with whom he shares the same problems and aspirations. Meanwhile he contrasts his memories of Napoleon Street with his memories in the Berkshires home with Madeleine where he feels alienated both physically and spiritually from his Jewish environment. Herzog's incapacity to come to terms with himself and the prevailing culture and his estrangement from the Jewish culture drive him to a self-imposed exile writing real and imaginary letters that provide information about his dilemma. Finally he decides to make a decisive choice by coming to terms with his Jewishness and his isolation ends when he invites his son Marco and reacts positively to his brother's visit. The novel ends when the letters he used to write lapse and Herzog's mind is at peace.

Revealing the pervasive influence of Jewish tradition, *Herzog* displays two major themes: suffering and despair. According to John Clayton, Bellow's novel expresses "Jewish despair, Jewish guilt and self-hatred, Jewish masochism" with a protagonist who is "pathological social masochist, filled with guilt and self-hatred, needing to suffer and to fail."<sup>20</sup> In fact, Bellow tries to show in his novel that human beings must be free and reach mature awareness through experience and experience in a world of repression involves suffering, pain and failure. Allan Chavkin confirms, "it is our nature to be free, and under the sting of suffering to choose between good and evil."<sup>21</sup> Herzog feels he has betrayed his ethnic, cultural and familial heritage by not having acted in accordance

with Jewish traditions and principles. This is mainly because of his liberal intellectual training although he often looks backward yearningly to the past as he says, "what was wrong with Napoleon Street? Thought Herzog. All he ever wanted was there."<sup>22</sup> In reality, Herzog wants to be considered an American because he grows up in the United States. And yet he is regarded as a foreigner and his attempt to assimilate in the WASP culture vanishes because of discrimination:

*Romana often said, 'you're not a true, Puritanical American. You have a talent for sensuality' ... What remained to bother him was that she did not recognize him as a American. That hurt ! In the service his mates had also considered him a foreigner (159).*

This state of confusion leads to anguish and self-endured pain, and in a masochistic fashion he enjoys his suffering because through suffering he comes to terms with himself and with his Jewishness in a world characterized by mass forces that thwart the individual and make him negligible:

*what it means to be a man. In a city. In a century. In transition. In a mass. Transformed by science. Under organized power. Subject to tremendous controls. In a condition caused by mechanization. In a society that was no community and devalued the person. Owing to the multiplied power of numbers which made the self negligible. Which spent military billions against foreign enemies but would not pay for order at home. Which permitted savagery and barbarism in its own great cities ... On top of that, an injured heart and raw gasoline poured on the nerves (140).*

Indeed, these conditions of life in the American society gave no value to the individual and no respect for his desire for self-fulfilment. In addition to this concern, the main conflict that leads to Herzog's mental disturbance and voluntary estrangement from society is of familial nature. In fact, Herzog's second marriage's failure affects him in a

negative manner for when Madeleine deserts him she advises him to get psychiatric help because he is neurotic. She even asks the police to protect her from eventual attack or harm by Herzog. Madeleine goes with Valentine Gersbach and isolates Herzog from their child June. The concern of Herzog with the safety of his daughter causes his depression and mental suffering, and in one of the letters he reveals this concern:

*Dear Commissioner Wilson ... I wonder if you will allow me to make few observations on your police force? It's not the fault of any single person that civil order can't be maintained in a community. But I am concerned. I have a small daughter who lives near Jackson Park, and you know as well as I do the parks are not properly policed. Gangs of hoodlums make it worth your life to go in (67-68).*

Besides, Herzog's principal suffering stems from the thought that June is being mistreated by her mother and Gersbach. In one of the most powerful scenes of the novel, Bellow portrays a grotesque example of child-abuse which is the most brutal and violent instance of unjustified human suffering. Herzog hears in the court room the case of a child's murder and knows that the mother sadistically abuses her child for not being toilet-trained. This scene seems a turning point in the novel because, as Allan Chavkin remarks, it evokes "a violent and cruel universe full of suffering, in which the innocent and the weak are especially vulnerable."<sup>23</sup> The persecution of children intensifies Herzog's psychological suffering which makes him contemplate killing Madeleine and Gersbach for their harsh treatment of his daughter. However, Herzog realizes that his father has never acted in that violent manner: "Moses could confidently swear that father Herzog had never-not once in his life- pulled the trigger of this gun. Only threatened" (258-9). This prevents him from committing the crime.

On the other hand, Herzog identifies with the suffering he observes in society and feels a sense of futility and loss in contemporary society. This society is described by Herzog as one that loves "apocalypses too much, and crisis ethics and florid extremism" (317). Consequently, he imagines writing a letter to his colleague, Professor Mermelstein, in which he expresses his revolt against the waste land outlook of contemporary society. He argues that "we've reached an age in the history of mankind when we can ask about certain persons, what is this thing" (317). Indeed, Herzog reveals that the individual man lives in a monstrous world where his identity as a human being is annihilated by the mass forces of society and its modes of expression. In this society, it is the double destiny of Herzog as a Jewish American that causes his anguish and suffering. In Alfred Kazin's words, "Jewish intellectuals suddenly directing world historical revolutions, and yet at the same time having just been ruled out of the human race, systematically annihilated."<sup>24</sup> Thus, because of religious, social and cultural reasons, the Jew as presented in *Herzog* appears a victim and an alienated individual who suffers anguish and confusion and whose last resort becomes rebellion because of the prohibitions he faces both in the Jewish and Gentile worlds. Bellow's voice tries to show the absurd existence the Jewish individual leads and his continuous search for his identity and his place in America. Violent behaviour and attitude, although not overtly expressed, is expressed in acts of rebellion and attack against the oppressive forces in the American society, and as Mark Shechner remarks, "Jewish literary rebels commit only victimless crimes."<sup>25</sup>

In spite of the doubts which suspected that the great American tradition in literature was dying, there was a wide variety of new voices in the Southern tradition

who carried the struggle for the preservation of the old South and its attachment to the past. It was this consciousness of history and self in the Southern tradition which was fundamental to Southern novelists. After the Second World War, the myth of the past was challenged and the quest to define the self in a modern technological society became the primary concern. Thus the preoccupation of the Southern novelists concentrated mainly on defining the self in relation to the traditional past and on resisting the adversary forces of dehumanization and deprivation. The significance of tradition in the Southern heritage was explained by Thomas Stearns Eliot in a lecture he gave at the University of Virginia. He states,

*Tradition is not solely, or even primarily, the maintenance of certain dogmatic beliefs; these beliefs have come to take their living form in the course of the formation of a tradition. What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rite to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent the blood kinship of the same people living in the same place.*<sup>26</sup>

So tradition represented the Southerner's identity which was formed throughout his historical existence in the region. The clash between the desire to preserve it and the threat of desintegration created a situation of crisis that urged many southerners to resort to violent means of resistance. Thus, in the Southern novel men attempt to cope with the violence around them and in themselves, and sometimes they turn into corrupted men. The force of resistance appears in novels that mix the gothic and the grotesque with a strong sense of evil and human suffering. Most of the stories are set in small southern communities, small towns or rural settings where the characters experience extreme desorientation or psychic damage. They are novels of displacement and distorted innocence, of loss and anxiety that exhibit a shattered South seeking rehabilitation.

A woman writer from the South who combines in her fiction religious faith and Southern concern and who depicts the struggle of Southerners to know themselves and to escape evil is Flannery O'Connor. Miss O'Connor's concern is the struggle for redemption in a time when people search to prove themselves. O'Connor's characters are often involved in the clash of religious desire and disbelief and thus they are doomed to commit acts of violence which convey the sense of loss and loneliness. Her famous story "A Good Man is Hard to Find" is a case in point. O'Connor tells the story of a family of six on vacation to Florida. The grandmother wants to visit the house and the Old South it suggests and she convinces her son and his family to turn back into the Georgia hills. On their way they have an accident and they fall into the hands of the Misfit, an escaped criminal, and two other convicts who murder them one by one.

The central crisis in the story involves two major characters, the Misfit and the grandmother, who are concerned with the issues of redemption and violence. The Misfit is treated as an insane who lives a crisis situation because he cannot define himself in relation to religion and to Christ. At the beginning of the story, the Misfit is introduced as an escaped convict who sows terror among people with his crimes, and yet in his conversation with the grandmother one discovers a pathological mind where good and evil hide in the depths of his soul. In a state of fear, the grandmother tells the Misfit know you're a good man...I know you come from nice people."<sup>27</sup> The Misfit replies: "Finest people in the world...God never made a finer woman than my mother and my daddy's heart was pure gold" (335). Nevertheless, he is sent to prison for something wrong he cannot remember. His resort to violence and committing crimes seems the logical result of his tortured mind and his frustration for he cannot make a choice between believing and not believing. When he is advised by the old lady to pray to get

Jesus's help, he says: "I don't want no help, I'm doing all right by myself" (337). In fact, the Misfit's aimless and gratuitous violence stems from his concern with the nature of human life in relation to religion. He cannot, indeed, remember that he killed his father and he cannot match what he does as wrong and the punishment he has undergone. He declares to the grandmother, "I call myself the Misfit because I can't make what all I done wrong fit what all I gone through in punishment", and he adds, "does it seem right to you, lady, that one is punished a heap and another ain't punished at all" (338). Then, the Misfit is uncertain about what God did and if Jesus really performed miracles. He does not know that Jesus raised the dead and thus he decides to live his own life the way he likes. He desperately says:

*Jesus was the only one that ever raised the dead... If he did what he said, then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow him, and if he didn't then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can-by killing somebody or burning his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness (338).*

The Misfit offers a strange observation that justifies his violent acts and he finds sanction in his own doubts about Jesus's miracles: "He said in a high voice, 'If I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am now'" (338). The grandmother declares just before the Misfit kills her, "you're one of my babies. You're one of my children" (338) as if she feels sorry for him and as an attempt to restore faith in him. Yet, the scene ends in bloodshed and the Misfit's soul is still tortured and frustrated because he is a sinner.

In fact, the Misfit represents the kind of character who is uncertain about life and anxious about death, he realizes no pleasure in life but meanness and brutality. The last

word in the story is the Misfit's: "Shut up, Bobby Lee,...it's no real pleasure in life" (339). The Misfit's state of loss and defenselessness is described by O'Connor after he murders the grandmother, "The Misfit's eyes were red-rimmed and pale and defenseless-looking" (338). This state urges him to make a choice between believing and not believing. He eventually recognizes that he is an unbelieving man who is, as Louise Gossett remarks, "capable of exploitation and violation of others, of fraud and self-mutilation, or arson and murder."<sup>28</sup> However, we are also urged to believe that the Misfit's choice to be a criminal and to be opposed to religion may be interpreted as a means of rehabilitation, and as Louise Gossett puts it, "O'Connor does not stop with the simple equation that man corrupts even his religion, indeed his very corruption may be a sign of his thirst for righteousness."<sup>29</sup>

## NOTES

- 1- Alan Trachtenberg, "Intellectual Background", in Daniel Hoffman (ed.), Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing (Harvard: The Belknap Press, 1979) p.3.
- 2- William H. Chafe, The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) p.32.
- 3- Alan Trachtenberg, "Intellectual Background", in Daniel Hoffman (ed.), Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing, pp.7-8.
- 4- John Patrick Diggins, The Proud Decades: America in War and Peace 1941-1960 (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1988) p.230.
- 5- Stated in Alan Trachtenberg, "Intellectual Background", in Daniel Hoffman (ed.), Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing, p.9.
- 6- Irving Howe, "This Age of Conformity", Partisan Review, Vol 21, 1954, p.232.
- 7- Stated in Alan Trachtenberg, "Intellectual Background" in Daniel Hoffman (ed.), Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing, p.10.
- 8- Stated in David Hawkes, Idedogy (London: Routedledge, 1996) p.146.
- 9- Idid., p.105
- 10- Stated in Alan Trachtenberg, "Intellectual Background", in Daniel Hoffman (ed.), Harvard Guide, pp. 32-33.
- 11- Ibid., p.37.
- 12- John Patrick Diggins, The Proud Decades: America in War and Peace 1941-1960 (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988) p.259
- 13- Jean Paul Sartre, Existentialism and Human Emotions. Trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Wisdom Library, 1957) p.15.
- 14- Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (New York: Berkeley Windhover Books, 1976) p.30. Subsequent references to Invisible Man are from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text.
- 15- Quoted in Francis E. Kearns, Black Identity (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970) p. 298.
- 16- Quoted in John Corry, "Profile of an American Novelist, A White View of Ralph Ellison", Black World, December 1970, p. 92.

- 17- Mark Shechner, "Jewish Writers", in Daniel Hoffman (ed.), Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing, p. 197.
- 18- Quoted in *ibid.* , p. 198.
- 19- "Saul Bellow, Interview in Paris Review, 1965", in Kay Dick (ed.), Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews (London: Penguin, 1972) p. 226.
- 20- Quoted in Allan Chavkin, "The Problem of Suffering in the Fiction of Saul Bellow", Comparative Literature Studies, Vol. 21, N°2, 1984, p.191.
- 21- Allan Chavkin, "The Problem of Suffering in the Fiction of Saul Bellow", Comparative Literature Studies, 1984, p.162.
- 22- Saul Bellow, Herzog (New York: Viking Penguin, 1976) p. 140. Subsequent references to Herzog are from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text.
- 23- Allan Chavkin, "The Problem of Suffering in the Fiction of Saul Bellow", Comparative Literature Studies, 1984, p. 167.
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- 25- Mark Shechner, "Jewish Writers", in Daniel Hoffman (ed.), Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing , p. 234.
- 26- Quoted in Frederick Hoffman, The Art of Southern Fiction: A Study of Some Modern Novelists (Illinois: South Illinois University Press, 1967) p.97.
- 27- Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find", in Michael Meyer (ed.), The Compact Bedford Introduction to literature (New York: Bedford /St. Martins, 2000) p. 335. Subsequent references to the story are from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text.
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## CHAPTER II

### **Norman Mailer: The Shaping of a Persona**

The postwar American world of literature has produced no more turbulent a Jewish and no more violent a writer than Norman Mailer. Since the subject of this study is violence and its overwhelming presence in fiction, Mailer appears as the writer of violence par excellence whose subject is preeminently America.

In the light of the Cold War, the communist witch-hunt, and the apocalyptic history of the sixties, Mailer has understood and written throughout his career about what he considers to be the totalitarian aspects of American life. His concern was not the political life as such but the psychic conflicts within the individual as man and artist resulting from the relationship between vision and actuality in contemporary America. The world of Mailer is exclusively devoted to the individual fighting against the institutional power. The result of this is the eruption of different forms of violence. Like many Americans who witnessed the apocalyptic mood of the postwar age, Mailer acknowledged that it was the age of the extinction of individuality and the increase of psychopathy. Thus his continuous and violent struggle in his life and in his writing was against a society conspiring to take away the individual's true self. To deal with the career of Norman Mailer and his obsession with violence, it is important to draw on the major influences that contributed to the shaping of his violent personality. It is equally important to illustrate with examples of violent incidents from Mailer's personal life and his activism in fighting America. It is a necessary step because it is his life as an American individual living in the postwar American society and witnessing the complexities of contemporary America which is projected in his works.

Mailer is the only son of a Jewish second-generation immigrant family and the most significant influence in his early years was that of his mother who strongly believed in her son's abilities and who was too much protective of everything he did. Mailer later recalled,

*Two formative currents of personality came together to make my nature. One of them is being Jewish. I am not a holocaust hustler. I am not asking for pity, but every Jew alive feels his relationship to the world is somehow more tenuous than other people's, and so to affirm his existence is somehow more important. The second current was that I had a mother who spoiled me out of sight, with all that's good and bad about that, so I was accustomed to having attention paid to me, and that is probably the key to my personality.*<sup>1</sup>

Fanny Mailer, a strong woman with a dominating personality nursed all of Norman's narcissism by instilling in him a sense of being a special boy having a special destiny. It was this kind of matriarchal influence and his mother's coddling of him that nurtured the rebel in him after he had left home. The second of the formative currents of his personality was the Jewish influence which was the most problematic. Although he was born and brought up into a Jewish community and his maternal grandfather was a Talmudic scholar who was regarded as the unofficial rabbi of his locality of Long Branch, Mailer resented his Jewishness and did not take much interest in Judaism. He confided to an interviewer that, "I am not a typical Jew", and he spent his life "rejecting Jewishness at a great rate."<sup>2</sup> Mailer found that Jewishness was an identity forced upon him and not one he had sought. During his Harvard years, Mailer appeared sensitive to his Jewish origin and he exposed the anti-semitic bigotry in his first novel The Naked and the Dead. Yet, he later showed no sign of self-conscious Jewish sensibility and he revealed that his "knowledge of Jewish culture is exceptionally spotty."<sup>3</sup> This

resentment represented the first sign of Mailer's rebellion and the growth of the seeds of violence in him. Alfred Kazin explained the reason of Mailer's rejection of the traditional ties,

*Jewishness Mailer disliked because it limited and intellectualized... with his contempt for knowledge-as-control, his desire to leave all those centuries of Jewish tradition (and of Jewish losers) behind him, Mailer represents the unrelenting effort and overreaching of the individual Jewish writer who seeks to be nothing but an individual (and if possible a hero).<sup>4</sup>*

Therefore Mailer rejected all traditional values that could limit his efforts to forge a new identity because he felt like being caught in the vicious circle of ethnicity and religion. Thus he created a variety of personae in his works, but none of them conveys the sense of a Jewish background. Indeed, he attempted to project himself and his characters within a framework quite different from that of his Jewish contemporaries. Mailer would later tell his second wife Adele Morales that he had suffered at Harvard. Bea Silverman, his first wife, gave a picture of him at that time,

*A little Brooklyn boy, competing with Harvard's wealthy, upper-class Christians. He felt he never fitted in, although he was not ashamed of his heritage. He just did not want to make an issue of it or feel burdened by it. Also he was always the youngest and smallest in his class, and did not develop physically until later. I believe that's why this business of boxing and being tough came out later on in his life.<sup>5</sup>*

Indeed, Mailer had been a very private person and very close to his family until he started reading about literature and discovering the world of politics.

As far as politics is concerned, Mailer is one of the most politically engaged writers of the postwar era and one whose political concerns and activism outweighed every other interest except writing. Witnessing the great transformations of the postwar

decades, Mailer saw the political arena as a vast metaphor for the psychic conflicts within the American individual. In fact, this concern had been largely shaped by various political attitudes which had evolved throughout the 1950's and 1960's. The major source of influence in the shaping of his attitudes and the building of his persona was America itself which he conceived as totalitarian. For Mailer,

*Totalitarianism is not limited in its expression to despotic governments and dictatorial leaders such as Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin. Instead it is a spirit which takes many forms. It is manifested in any attempt at reducing complexity, minimizing expression, or eliminating differences in personality and culture. For the essence of totalitarianism is that it beheads. It beheads individuality, variety, dissent, extreme possibility, romantic faith, it blinds vision, deadens instinct.*<sup>6</sup>

Mailer insisted that the institutions of contemporary America were a manifestation of the totalitarian mentality which was practising the most extravagant violence on the lives of Americans. Mailer went further by describing institutional totalitarianism as plague and cancer and America as schizophrenic. Mailer's political attitudes have gone through constant changes and his politics reflected no stable point of view. Since the late 1940's he travelled from far left to right affected by the general course of events and following the changes in American and world politics. Yet, all of his efforts in politics were put into opposing organized authority and exploring the psychic conflicts within American individuals. Whatever political attitude he adopted, he advocated a form of existential heroism based on violent dissent.

In the early years of his career Mailer's Marxist sympathies were unequivocal and his grasp of politics began to take shape under the mentorship of Jean Malaquais, a Polish immigrant who occupied a position on the left in France and whom Mailer met during his travel to Paris in 1947. After admitting that he had started as an anarchist

distrusting all organizations, he quickly came to regard political commitment as a reason of being a writer. Mailer had already absorbed at Harvard the idea which saw art as politically rooted and there he had been exposed to the leftist intellectual model in a program which "emphasized that literature should not be considered in isolation but be studied as part of the country's political and economic history. The program was strongly dependent on the new Marxist view of literature."<sup>7</sup> So both his education at Harvard, and in Paris with Jean Malaquais, had prepared him for political activism and he soon began with a strong commitment to radical social change. His marxist views are reflected in his first novel The Naked and the Dead as he advocated a revolutionary transformation of social and economic conditions in the American society. This commitment was also translated into direct political action by supporting the Progressive Party and working for the Wallace presidential campaign in 1948. Henry Wallace was very much on the left and favoured an accommodating stance toward the Soviet Union rejecting the Cold War positions of the Republican candidate. During the campaign and at a Progressive Party rally Mailer told his companions, "when they put the spotlight on me, I am going to stand up and say that I'm joining the Communist Party tomorrow."<sup>8</sup> However, Wallace failed and Mailer gave up his devotion to revolutionary socialism which resulted in a transformation of his political radicalism. Moreover, Mailer shocked many at the Cultural and scientific Conference for World Peace in 1949 when he announced that the idea of peace conferences would do no good "so long as the United States and the Soviet Union continued to converge toward the same point: totalitarian state capitalism."<sup>9</sup>

When Mailer gave up his earlier Marxist ideology based on the analysis of the material conditions of society and the economic reality, he retained the revolutionary perspective and became more concerned with the cultural revolution that would allow

the exploration of the inner lives of individuals. Therefore he continued to advocate the radical social change within the frame of individualism and adopted left radicalism as a political attitude. However during the sixties, when hostilities between left and right in America increased, Mailer integrated elements from both ideologies and moved from left radicalism to left conservatism which is a paradoxical ideology that combined the leftist activism with a conservative concern. In fact, Mailer felt that what America needed was a radical social change which would depend on the preservation of its connection to history and myth and the reaffirmation of personal and cultural differences. According to Joseph Wenke's definition, "Mailer's left conservatism represents the political expression of a syncretic philosophy that integrates such disparate elements as existential risktaking, nihilistic rebelliousness, and transcendentalist faith that affirms the primacy of the self and the life of the spirit."<sup>10</sup>

In addition to his personal confusions about American politics, Mailer experienced very serious problems with the establishment-the publishing houses-which helped in the eruption of violence in his life and the adoption of more radical attitudes toward the American repressive institutions. When Mailer finished writing his third novel The Deer Park (1955) about the depravity of the movie resort, Desert D'Or, it was rejected by seven New York publishers on grounds of obscenity. As rejections of the novel accumulated, Mailer's view of himself changed and a sense of his being an outsider was born in him. The shift in his character was remarkable as he became more aggressive in response to the tremendous pressure he confronted. Mailer confessed in Advertisements for Myself (1959),

*I was finally open to my anger. I turned within my psyche I can almost believe, for I felt something shift to murder in me. I was an outlaw, a psychic outlaw, and I liked it.... And with a set of*

*emotions accelerating one on the other, I mined down deep into the murderous message of marijuana, the smoke of the assassins, and for the first time in my life I knew what it was to make your kicks.*<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the novel was a major turning point in Mailer's career and marked his embrace of dissent and rebellion because of his conviction that, "the fine America which I had been at pains to criticize for so many years was in fact a real country which did real things and ugly things to the characters of more people than just the characters of my books."<sup>12</sup> This was the totalitarianism of American culture which Mailer decided to fight when he felt that "I was on the edge of many things and I had more than a bit of violence in me."<sup>13</sup> Deeply confused and distressed, Mailer tested with drugs and told an interviewer, "It was in 1955 when I started smoking pot and seeing myself from the inside and the outside both."<sup>14</sup> Following the rejection of his novel, Mailer was determined to involve himself with American reality and to be the voice of Americans throughout the following years. Alfred Kazin described the role Mailer took up in his battle,

*What was creative in this role was Mailer's belief in the validity of his most private thoughts. He made his fantasies interesting to many Americans. He was always there because he had somehow turned his most private wishes and fears into public symbols... He was definitely not one of that minority group which will always feel excluded from the great American reality. He was inside this reality and on every side of it.*<sup>15</sup>

The most important manifestation of Mailer's radicalism and militancy to appear during those years of anger was his essay "The White Negro" published in Dissent in 1957 and reprinted in Advertisements for Myself in 1959. "The White Negro" represented Mailer's philosophy of "Hip" which gave rise to the concept of the hipster

as a hero and exalted existentialism as a doctrine. The essay's main objective was to free individuals from the vulnerability of their passive relationships to institutional violence. Irving Howe, the editor of *Dissent*, who was eager to accept the essay for publication in the journal, recognized that "The White Negro" was "an endorsement of violence."<sup>16</sup> Mailer acknowledged that the hipster is a psychopath who understands that the violence of the totalitarian institutions requires a violent response. He stated,

*The psychopath is a rebel without a cause, an agitator without a slogan, a revolutionary without a program: in other words, his rebelliousness is aimed to achieve goals satisfactory to himself alone.... The psychopath, like the child, cannot delay the pleasure of gratification .... The predominance of this mechanism for immediate satisfaction explains not only his behaviour but also the violent nature of his acts.<sup>17</sup>*

According to these principles, Mailer's rebelliousness and violence would grow progressively over the next years in his life and in his work. According to Mailer, the hipster was born in a world characterized by the threat of nuclear annihilation, a world that emerged out of the concentration camps and the atomic bomb, and which forced man to forge an existential ethic to counter the twentieth century anxiety. Besides, the emerging society after the war was seen as highly repressive with enormous demands of conformity. Hence, Mailer stressed that,

*It is on this bleak scene that a phenomenon has appeared: the American existentialist- the hipster, the man who knows that if our collective condition is to live with instant death by atomic war, relatively quick death by the state, ...Or with a slow death by conformity with every creative and rebellious instinct stifled at what damage to the mind and the heart and the liver and the nerves no research foundation for cancer will discover in a hurry.<sup>18</sup>*

In defining the hipster, on the other hand, Mailer made a contrast between Hip and Square in the postwar American society; while the former is a rebel the latter is a conformist:

*One is Hip or one is Square (the alternative which each new generation coming into American life is beginning to feel). one is a rebel or one conforms, one is a frontiersman in the Wild Wild of American night life, or else a Square cell, trapped in the totalitarian tissues of American society.<sup>19</sup>*

Certainly, Mailer referred here to the frontier experience which had transmitted the seeds of violence and rebellion into American life. He qualified the hipster as a frontiersman in the Wild West committed to risktaking in contrast to the conformist who submitted to the will of the totalitarian institutions. Besides, in considering the hipster a white Negro, Mailer drew a parallel between the black man's life in America and the white rebel who saw in the Negro the reverse image of himself. Indeed, blacks have been struggling for centuries to achieve a secure identity and to confront the oppressive American institutions. Mailer noticed that,

*Hated from outside and therefore hating himself, the Negro was forced into the position of exploring all the moral wilderness of civilized life which the Square automatically condemns as delinquent or evil...or self-destructive or corrupt...it is therefore no accident that psychopathy is most prevalent with the Negro.<sup>20</sup>*

For that reason Mailer asserted that, "the source of Hip is the Negro for he has been living on the margin between totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries."<sup>21</sup> Then the Negro responded to oppression and institutional violence with more violence. Similarly, the hipster rebelled against the modern world and, as Mailer stated, he "seeks some new source of energy that may provide him with the courage to be

unconventional.”<sup>22</sup> It was the world which murdered individuality, collectivized society, and created the concentration camp that constituted the target for the hipster who needed more courage to be subversive. Since individuals in modern America, whites and blacks alike, shared the same objective of subverting the status quo and were more concerned with life in the present which had no past or future, “the hipster had absorbed the existentialist synapses of the Negro, and for practical purposes could be considered a white Negro.”<sup>23</sup> This concern appears mainly in Why Are We in Vietnam? in which Mailer provides the narrator with two identities, a black and a white, invoking a sense of confusion and dislocation for both characters.

In developing his philosophy of the hipster, Mailer appeared more concerned with the transformation of consciousness rather than with the transformation of the socio-economic and political structures of the totalitarian system. Part of this transformation concerned the sexual revolution which was intended to be one of the most violent battles in the anti-establishment war. Mailer’s desire to see the sexual revolution was a crucial interest he developed in “The White Negro” and one he translated in his novels. He insisted that, “the drama of the psychopath is that he seeks love. Not love as the search for a mate, but love as the search for an orgasm more apocalyptic...Orgasm is his therapy.”<sup>24</sup> In seeking this ‘apocalyptic orgasm’ the hipster attacked the sexual mores of society because he had been frustrated by this society which had prevented him from fully living his freedom. Further clarification came in the same essay where he stated that, “in this country...new millions of psychopaths are developed each year, stamped with the mint of our contradictory popular culture (where sex is sin and yet sex is paradise).”<sup>25</sup> So according to Mailer’s conception of Hip, one must revolt against society and its restraints and as Mailer stresses, “what is consequent therefore is the divorce of man from his values, the liberation of the self from the super-ego of

society...The only Hip morality is to do what one feels whenever and wherever it is possible."<sup>26</sup> By defying the moral limits of society Mailer was eager to state that,

*To a Square, a rapist is a rapist. Punish the rapist, imprison him, be horrified by him and for desinterested in him, and that is the end of the matter. But a hipster knows that the act of rape is a part of life too, and that even in the most brutal and unforgivable rape, there is artistry or the lack of it.*<sup>27</sup>

Mailer's views about the sexual revolution and his attack on the sexual mores of society constitute a part of his strategy to create a revolution in American consciousness. It was this issue which is particularly reflected in An American Dream (1965) and made Mailer the target of the media and feminist critics.

Mailer looked even frightening when he foresaw the mood of the sixties given the hypocrisies and contradictions of a mass conformist society. He predicted that, "a time of violence, new hysteria, confusion and rebellion will then be likely to replace the time of conformity."<sup>28</sup> He also argued that,

*Hip, which would return us to ourselves, at no matter what price in individual violence, is the affirmation of the barbarian, for it requires a primitive passion about human nature to believe that individual acts of violence are always to be preferred to the collective violence of the state.*<sup>29</sup>

Thus the hipster created his identity out of fear and anxiety in daily acts of violence which were regarded as a viable response to the violence exerted by the collective institutions of the state. Certainly, acts of violence require a certain degree of courage and strength. This is why Mailer insisted that the courage and strength of the Hip appeared in the potentiality

*to replace a negative and empty fear with an outward action, even if the fear is of himself and the action is to murder. The psychopath murders-if he has the courage- out of the necessity to purge his violence, for if he cannot empty his hatred then he cannot love.*<sup>30</sup>

Therefore the hipster's attempt was primarily to set out on an inner journey to purge himself of society's restrictions especially in the urban setting. In fact, the hipster was regarded as a product of the continuing shift in American life from the country to the city, and although the town was once "the heart and soul of the republic, it has become an extension of corporation land, enveloped by super-highways, fed by shopping centers, and educated by television."<sup>31</sup> In the city, the individual has become a subject to electronic assault and drug-addiction leading to profound psychic dislocation and disorientation. Moreover, the individual was daily confronted with the sickness of the external world witnessing "the differences in class, racial origin, political orientation, religion, and occupation."<sup>32</sup> Thus Mailer attempted to make the hipster respond to these conditions to unlock his own repressed feelings and desires.

Additionally, the violence in Mailer was to issue forth in his behaviour and in his writing involving the character of the psychopath that his best friend Robert Lindner described in his writings. Robert Lindner was a psychoanalyst whom Mailer met in the mid- 1950's and who soon became his analyst and his best friend. Mailer admitted that he was deeply influenced by Lindner's views about America which he described as a land of mediocrity and repression, and all it asked from its citizens was to conform. Besides, Lindner's writing concentrated on the instinct of rebellion that every man carried within himself. He insisted that,

*It is this instinct that underwrites his survival, this instinct from which he derives his nature, a great deal and powerful dynamic that makes him what he is-restless, seeking, curious, forever unsatisfied, eternally*

*struggling and eventually victorious...Man is a rebel...Man cannot submit, cannot surrender his birthright of protest, for rebellion is one of his essential dimensions.*<sup>33</sup>

While Lindner attacked his colleagues because they advocated therapies that turned people into conformists, he liked Mailer's rebelliousness and his rejection of the status quo. Both Lindner and Mailer shared the same ideas. Lindner, for example, suggested that anyone who wanted to understand Mailer should read his own book, Prescription for Rebellion (1952) in which he delineated the character of the rebel Mailer carried within himself. As for Mailer he acknowledged in his Village Voice column -later reprinted in Advertisements for Myself- that, "Lindner was almost alone among analysts in his sustained argument that the healthy man was a rebel, and that it was crippling for psychoanalysis to try to adjust a patient to the warpings of an unjust world."<sup>34</sup> When Lindner died in 1956 Mailer was depressed and could not express his misfortune at the death of his alter ego, except by reprinting excerpts from Lindner's work in his Village Voice column. After Lindner's demise Mailer found no other analyst who could be a kindred spirit and who could sustain his efforts in fighting conformity. "Robert Lindner's death has left me in an ugly mood,"<sup>35</sup> Mailer declared, showing thus his deep sorrow and expressing the great influence of Lindner in the shaping of his personality.

In addition to the discussed factors which left their marks on Mailer's personality, Mailer owed too much to the great literary figures of the preceding generation who marked enormously his life and career. Although Mailer read extensively to James T. Farrell, John Dos Passos, and John Steinbeck during his beginnings, it was Ernest Hemingway who provided him with a richer and more intensive image of human experience and an understanding of human nature. Mailer was found fascinated with

Hemingway's character and his life-long struggle to forge an identity. He later acknowledged in an interview,

*I think Hemingway also had a gamut of identities. He was considerably more focused in his attempt to build one identity. I certainly think Hemingway was forging his identity everyday of his life more than myself as a matter of fact.*<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, Hemingway's interest in bullfighting and boxing, which appeared in his novels as a metaphor for human struggle to forge an identity, fascinated Mailer who became obsessed with these violent sports. As an interviewer remarked,

*Mailer has lived...a public life as novelist, mayoral candidate...participant in events he was covering (Gore Vidal says Mailer 'intervenes in history') and neo-Hemingway tough guy who patronizes boxing and bullfighting and bars.*<sup>37</sup>

So Mailer's life-long interest in sports, particularly in boxing, marked his increasing aggression and his obsession with violence by which he picked fights with people instead of confining himself to the ring. Similarly, Mailer admired Muhammed Ali and called him "America's greatest ego", and "the wit Ali expressed with his body was equal to the exercise of a great intelligence."<sup>38</sup> It is also worth noting that throughout his life Mailer made the acquaintance of many prizefighters including his close friend Jose Torres, and covered many fights all over the United States and abroad. One of these fights was the George Foreman-Muhammed Ali World Championship fight in Zaire which made the subject of his book The Fight (1975).

One may notice the variety of elements in his family, his social and literary environment, the political arena that contributed to the making of Mailer's persona and creating that "tough guy" out of the once nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn, Hemingway,

his idol, would later describe him as "probably the best postwar writer. He's psycho, but the psycho part is the most interesting thing about him."<sup>39</sup> Explaining his philosophy of violence, Mailer declared in an interview,

*The meaning of violence is the original desire to master nature to create a civilization. I think a civilization is created out of some kind of sublimation of violence. When the violence gets too sublimated, you get a sick civilization ... and that's what gets me into all those tangles.*<sup>40</sup>

The violence in Mailer started to erupt at numerous occasions in his life following the crisis he experienced over The Deer Park. Driven by the accumulation of social, intellectual and political pressures that made up the totalitarian state Mailer declared a war against the establishment. The first sign that unveiled Mailer's fascination with violence was when he picked up fights with his second wife Adele Morales. When she asked for the reason he would reply: "I pick on you because Bea picked on me."<sup>41</sup> According to Shirley Fingerhood, one of the Mailers' friends, "The affair had a staged quality to it, as if Norman were practising on Adele...imagining situations to test out his new persona."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, as the decade progressed, it saw Mailer developing this new persona by going into fights on the street and in parties and bars. His wife thought that her husband derived a kind of pleasure out of these fights which she considered disgusting and absurd. In Provincetown where he used to spend his summers, Mailer would organize parties to which he would invite boxers, actors and writers, and in a state of drunkenness he would permanently challenge his friends to arm and thumb-wrestling resulting occasionally in troubles and arrests. Mailer would later confess that he would not be able to start writing unless he had a fight.<sup>43</sup> One of his friends described his behaviour in the parties he used to organize,

*I used to see him at parties and it would bother me. Toward the end of the evening he'd often become aggressive and unpleasant...he didn't want to be conventional or square.... I felt he was making a mistake the way he did it-all the idiocy of running around with those violent people, being almost out of control.*<sup>44</sup>

Another arena for revolt and rebellion was Mailer's journalistic writing in The Village Voice, the newspaper Mailer contributed to found with his friends in Greenwich Village in 1955. Through his weekly column Mailer launched his "private war on American journalism, mass communications, and the totalitarianism of totally pleasant personality."<sup>45</sup> He started his first violent attacks by insulting his readers and he called Greenwich Village "one of the bitter provinces-It abounds in snobs and critics." He addressed the villagers by saying, "that many of you are frustrated in your ambitions, and under-nourished in your pleasures, only makes you more venomous."<sup>46</sup> The negative response to his columns would quickly come and readers would call him "a hostile narcissistic pest" suffering from "illusions of grandeur."<sup>47</sup> One of the readers found that Mailer's attitudes resulted from "a sense of your having been hurt and misunderstood many times", and therefore he now used his "pen like a hammer."<sup>48</sup> Actually Mailer's attack on the readers affirmed his desire to launch a revolution in American consciousness by attacking conformity and all kinds of conspiracy which supported the status quo.

Besides, Mailer's position as one of the newspaper's editors allowed him to launch his action against the establishment. One of the co-editors remembered that, "Norman's idea was for the paper to be a Hip shock sheet...he wanted the Voice to deal in Daily News way with the new subjects of drugs, the swinging black scene, and sexuality, all under the aegis of anti-establishment."<sup>49</sup> Before his departure from the Voice in 1956, he referred to himself in his columns as "'general marijuana', his new nom de guerre"<sup>50</sup>,

and he explicitly related his activism and new militancy to his reaction to The Deer Park's failure. Mailer later acknowledged that, "at heart, I wanted a war, and the Village was already glimpsed as the field for battle...I had the feeling of an underground revolution on its way", and he stressed that his writing in the newspaper was "the first lick of fire in a new American consciousness."<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Mailer's war against the establishment and his violence started to take serious proportions from this time onward involving the psychopath he would advocate in "The White Negro."

More threatening to his career and his literary reputation was the scandalous incident performed by Mailer on the Dick Cavett Show in December 1971 following Gore Vidal's criticism of The Prisoner of Sex which appeared in July 1971. Vidal's opinion was offending:

*There has been from Henry Miller to Norman Mailer to Charles Manson a logical progression. The Miller- Mailer -Manson, or M3 for short has been conditioned to think of women as, at best, breeders of sons, at worst, objects to be poked, humiliated, killed.*<sup>52</sup>

When Mailer read the criticism he was upset and felt "something blow in his brain."<sup>53</sup> Thus he looked forward to respond violently and the opportunity was offered when he was invited to appear with Vidal on the Dick Cavett Show. Before the start of the programme and when the two men met, Vidal seemed very kind and friendly while Mailer surprised him with an open-handed tap across the cheek. Almost out of control, Mailer caught hold of him with a hand on his neck and then "butted him hard in the head."<sup>54</sup> Vidal said that Mailer was crazy and violent and he quickly left the room. When the show started Mailer's rage and anger were directed toward not only Vidal but also the fellow guests and the studio audience by asking: "Are you all really truly idiots or is it me?"<sup>55</sup> It was evidently Mailer's worst evening on television.

More dangerous and more frightening was what happened in Mailer's apartment on West Street in New York shortly after John F. Kennedy had won the presidential elections for the Democrats. In fact, all the violent incidents in Mailer's life could never equal the bloody scene performed in the early hours of November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1960 in that apartment. Everything started when Mailer decided to run for mayor of New York City at a time characterized by psychic depression, loss of hope and anxiety, predicting thereby the bleak atmosphere of the sixties. To celebrate and publicize his candidacy for the mayoralty, he organized a big party for Saturday evening to which he instructed his friend George Plimpton to invite the New York power leaders to get more support in his campaign. However, when none of the names of the power structure showed up, a raging Mailer turned to Plimpton and hit him across the face with a rolled newspaper. Feeling that his entourage had let him down and that everything had gone wrong, he spent the evening drinking and accusing people of unfaithfulness and treachery. The evening reached a bloody culmination when all the guests departed and Mailer, in a state of drunken meanness, went out on the street provoking fights with people. He came back with a black eye and a bloodied face, and in response to his wife's bitter remarks he took out a penknife and stabbed her once in the upper abdomen and once in the back. She was immediately taken to New York University Hospital where she required extensive surgery. Two days after the incident, Mailer appeared on the Mike Wallace Television Show and announced that he would run for mayor of New York City and nothing could hinder his ambition. Later on Mailer was arrested by the police who confined him to Dr Rosenberg for an interview after which a medical report was issued stating that Mailer was "having an acute paranoid breakdown with delusional thinking and is both homicidal and suicidal. His admission to hospital is urgently advised."<sup>56</sup> Although Mailer argued in court that he was sane and that his admission

would destroy his credibility, the magistrate of the Felony Court replied that, "your recent history indicates that you cannot distinguish fiction from reality."<sup>57</sup> Consequently, he was sent to Bellevue Mental Hospital for observation. Mailer's stay in Bellevue lasted two weeks and then he found a doctor who vouched for his sanity. Following his wife's refusal to press criminal charges on her husband, Mailer received a suspended sentence with a probation period after which the couple tried a brief reconciliation, but their marriage ended in collapse and they formally separated in March 1961.

To consider the stabbing and the conditions lying behind it, one may notice the impact of the different pressures on his psyche which had driven him to the murderous point. He confessed to an interviewer that, "A decade's anger made me do it. After that I felt better."<sup>58</sup> According to the many interpretations of Mailer's behaviour, some considered him a victim of the times and qualified the act as an expression of cultural and political dysfunction. H.L.Humes, a co-founder of the Paris Review, for example, stated in his analysis of the incident,

*The whole period was so bizzare I can't even begin to describe it....The stabbing seemed like a turning point, and people become genuinely terrified...but even his enemies realized that he wasn't functioning at his normal level, and, indeed, a fair number of people saw what was ailing him was ailing themselves.*<sup>59</sup>

In fact, Mailer's violent act was interpreted as the inauguration of one of America's most violent decades. While some critics tried to explain the stabbing as a clinical situation that must be treated by a psychiatrist or an analyst, it was actually agreed that Mailer was a victim "of a personality disorder which, somehow, he was not responsible for."<sup>60</sup> Since the incident was regarded as a conscious act coming out of a psychic

disturbance and conscious purgation of violence and caused by outward pressures, it was suggested that the act was an indulgence of the psychopath Mailer defended in his essay "The White Negro". Adele Morales, the victim of the stabbing, who was deeply traumatised by its memory said after the incident, "things like this don't happen to people like us. They happen to black people in Harlem and Puerto-Ricans but not us ... I can't believe this."<sup>61</sup> And in a book titled The Last Party: Scenes From my Life with Norman Mailer (1997), Adele would reveal the violent nature of her husband:

*As the days went on, he would taunt me... when he was drunk and in an ugly mood, I would try to ignore it, but I would end up screaming my hatred at him, I often felt capable of murder, but was also afraid to touch him, knowing how violent he was.*<sup>62</sup>

On the political scene, Mailer showed the character of a dedicated activist whose efforts gave a new provocative dimension to the United States affairs at home and abroad. Although Mailer succeeded in establishing himself as America's most important writer after the success of his novel An American Dream (1964), he wanted to project himself on the outside world he had vowed to conquer as a great politician. When Lyndon Johnson took office after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, he escalated the war in Vietnam thinking that he could dominate the country in his anti-communist crusade. However, the expedition turned into a curse on American national history with anti-war protests and violent rebellions. Mailer who was known for his ardent militancy and political radicalism, received an invitation to deliver a speech at the Vietnam Day Rally at the Berkeley Campus of the University of California where he would speak before twenty thousand people in an anti-war protest. On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1965, Mailer made his most violent and provocative speech that became the keynote in the emergence of the counterculture rebellion in the anti-vietnam movement. Mailer attacked

both Lyndon Johnson's personality and his war policy; he considered the war "an extension of the president's monstrous narcissism" and stated that his photographs "spoke of an ego which had the voracity of a beast."<sup>63</sup> Excited and fully motivated by his young audience's response to his speech, Mailer exhorted them to exhibit their opposition to American involvement in Vietnam by taking a photograph of Lyndon Johnson and displaying it upside down. He concluded his speech by bringing the president down through the simple repetition of his name:

*Only, listen, Lyndon Johnson, you have gone too far this time. You are a bully with an air force, and since you will not call off your Air Force, there are young people who will persecute you back ...They will print up little pictures of you, Lyndon Johnson...These pictures will be sent everywhere ...upside down...The photography of you, Lyndon Johnson, will start appearing everywhere, upside down. Your head will speak out, will say that not all Americans are unaware of your monstrous vanity....It will tell them that we trust our president so little, and think so little of him, that we see his picture everywhere upside down. And those little pictures will tell the world what we think of you and your war in Vietnam.*<sup>64</sup>

Jerry Rubin, one of the students present at the rally, remembered that "It was the first time anybody had made fun of the president", and he recalled that Mailer had "qualitatively changed the event, giving us permission to insult a father figure, indicating it's okay to ridicule the president."<sup>65</sup> Indeed Mailer's speech can be interpreted as one of the most violent attacks on American establishment and American civilization.

When the vision of apocalypse at home and abroad persisted, Mailer became a participant in the national swing to violence concerning the issues that boiled on the surface of the American experience. Less than two years after his Berkeley Speech, Mailer was invited by an old friend, Mitchell Goodman, to participate in a march on the

Pentagon on October 21-22, 1967 to protest against the war in Vietnam. As Mailer wanted to be at the centre of action, he abruptly agreed to join the protest. For him the march was a strategy for action and public involvement that represented a new style of revolution. However, the march was a failure following the government's efforts to discourage the marchers and to provoke mass confrontations with the authorities and the media. Consequently, both sides resorted to physical violence that led to Mailer's arrest with many other protesters and spending few days in prison. The account of Mailer's participation in the march was related in his book The Armies of the Night (1968) that established him in his new role as novelist and historian.

In 1969 Mailer presented his candidacy for mayor of New York City, and in running for mayoralty, he campaigned vigorously and suggested as a campaign slogan 'No more bullshit'. Yet, he buried all his chances to win when he started his speech before an audience by a booming "Fuck you all!"<sup>66</sup> Moreover, Mailer's entrance into the race was not to be conventional and he quickly swung to the other end of his kaleidoscopic personality by calling his audience at the Village Gate: "ego-trippers and questioning their interest in his campaign."<sup>67</sup> His brutal performance caused his campaign workers' anger, and turned Joe Flaherty, his campaign manager, so mad that he harshly lashed:

*I served up last what had really upset me. 'I agree with you', I said, 'when you tell leftists they shouldn't call cops pigs. So where do you get off using that word on your audience?' He looked unbelieving: 'Do I say that?', 'you called them a bunch of spoiled pigs', I answered.<sup>68</sup>*

These are some scenes from the violent life of Norman Mailer whose behaviours, obsessions and drives reflected a country "living with a fiercely controlled schizophrenia which had been deepening with the years."<sup>69</sup> It was, indeed, the

totalitarian system and the institutional oppression that drove individuals to the brink of insanity as Mailer thought in The Presidential Papers (1963): "Because what we suffer from in America, in that rootless moral wilderness of our expanding life, is the unadmitted terror in each of us that bit by bit and year by year, we are going mad."<sup>70</sup>

Mailer, unlike many American writers, displayed his psychopathic personality in public and attempted to forge an identity that the American established order wanted to stifle.

In J.Toback's words Mailer was,

*Alone among living American writers, potentially gargantuan. He could fight, speak, act and marry with a kind of overwhelming dexterity that sent waves of excitement into our imagination. That he had stabbed his wife (and got away with it) and been observed at Bellevue actually enhanced the image... We looked for an intellectual hero who transcended, even flouted, the respectability of intellectualism... We suspected Mailer could become the hero of our generation.*<sup>71</sup>

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## CHAPTER III

### **VIOLENCE IN THE WAR NOVEL: THE NAKED AND THE DEAD**

When asked why he was awfully fascinated by murderers and violent deaths, Mailer replied that this was one of the last frontier zones of the novelist.<sup>1</sup> On that frontier zone Mailer settled and produced some of the most violent works in American literary history, exploring the struggle between power and violence in the American society. In the following chapters, the study will focus on four novels written during the couple of decades following the Second World War and which established Mailer as the master of violent literature and the advocate of rebellion and psychopathy. Out of Mailer's experience of the horrors of W.W.II came his novel The Naked and the Dead which brought him success and fame at the age of twenty-five.

The Naked and the Dead tells the story of a fourteen-men infantry platoon that lands on the beach of the small Japanese-held island of Anopopei in the South Pacific. The platoon is part of a big military force charged with the task of seizing control of the island to clear the way for American advance into the Philippines. It is composed of men from different parts of the United States with various ethnic backgrounds. The leaders of the platoon are Major General Edward Cummings, Lieutenant Robert Hearn and Sergeant Sam Croft. Part one of the novel is a general prologue, it establishes the setting as the American forces land on the beach of Anopopei, and introduces most of the cast of characters with whom action begins. Part two is devoted to Major General Cummings, commander of the American troops, whose battle plan is unfolded and his

ideas about war and power are given in detail. From the tip of the peninsula, the American troops start to advance into the jungle that no army can live or move in. The Japanese commander, General Toyaku, is holding men in a defence line called the Toyaku Line and thus the battles in the island would occur miles away from the beach. Studying the situation carefully, General Cummings develops various plans to attack the Japanese defence line, and decides to send Recon, a platoon led by Sergeant Croft in a mission to clear the way for the troops. A week later, Recon receives an order to return to the rear with no result. Sensing pressures from the Pentagon General Cummings starts to strengthen his lines and he works out a new plan which consists in sending Recon to break the route from the rear by crossing the mountain range before launching the invasion. Lieutenant Hearn is assigned to Recon with Sam Croft to lead the platoon in its disastrous mission.

Part three deals with the patrol's adventures and the platoon's defeated attempt to break the route for the frontal troops to breach the Toyaku Line. Recon sets out on the patrol and the next morning the platoon lands on the back shore of Anopopei. When it reaches the mountain pass at the base of Mount Anaka, the men are fired by the Japanese who oblige them to retreat. In their second attempt Hearn is killed after being given a false account about the pass by Sam Croft. Consequently, Croft takes the leadership of the platoon and decides to take the rest of the men up the mountain to reach the Jap rear. While General Cummings leaves for Army Headquarters trying to get a destroyer for the invasion, Major Dalleson becomes in charge of operations which result in the success of the American troops to break through the Toyaku Line. Meanwhile, the platoon continues to climb the mountain with difficulty, and when the peak becomes near the men accidentally hit a nest of hornets that start to attack and

sting them. In delirium and panic, they begin to run down the rocks and in a few minutes they find themselves going back to the beach. In part four, Mailer describes the turbulent aftermath of violent action and Cummings's contemplation of the success which provides the foundation for his rise to power after the war. After destroying the Toyaku Line, the mopping up that follows succeeds in breaking the organisation of the Japs who attempt hopelessly to escape the flood of American patrols.

In an attempt to study the aspect of violence in the novel, it is relevant to refer to the various conditions that are responsible for the violent drives and situations in the story. In the war novel, which has become one of the logical modes of writing about life in the postwar age, the war is emptied of human considerations and violence becomes a sufficient end in itself. In fact, it is the individual man who suffers the burden of waging the war with all the physical and psychological aggressiveness that reflects the violent nature of the nation and its totalitarian regime. In The Naked and the Dead, the major concern extends beyond the subject of Americans at war. Although war is the specific context of the novel, Mailer's concern was not primarily a historical preoccupation with the war itself. It was rather an interest in the socio-economic conditions and individual experiences of Americans that were behind the streak of violence which defines the American character. Thus the central theme of the novel is power and its relationship to violence in both the individual and the state revealing America's real nature. The hierarchy in the novel displays various kinds of power and different forms of violence they engender; the power of man over man, the power of military force, the power of political thought, and the power of events and nature on the lives of individual men. Indeed, these men are caught in a struggle against the totalitarian system and they are equally trapped by the social, economic and natural conditions of the past and present.

As will be demonstrated later, all individuals are presented as helpless victims even the most powerful in rank and influence.

Embracing the naturalistic tradition, Mailer seems to stress the deterministic view of human behaviour and the naturalistic trap within which individuals are imprisoned as soon as they are born. The different characters in the novel are treated as defeated persons whose character and behaviour are shaped by the social and economic conditions of life in their own country and the political orientations imposed on them. Their individual experiences show an inescapable victimization which violates their free will for change or improvements. Similarly, the natural forces play an even more important role in the process of victimization and stress the state of helplessness of people who seek to achieve certain goals.

In the "Time Machine" sections, which focus attention on the central characters alluded to in the preceding chapter of the novel, Mailer gives a picture of the American society with the decay and squalor of its urban life, the dehumanisation of individual men, and racial attitudes among the various ethnic groups. In the American urban entrapment, Gallagher is from the Boston area where "the grey wooden houses parade for miles in a file of darkness and desolation and waste."<sup>2</sup> Joey Goldstein lives in Brooklyn where "walls of the streets fester in summer, are clammy in winter, there is an aged odor in this part of the city...the sour damp scent of city people and the smell of coal stoves and gas stoves in the cold-water flats" (281). Polack inhabits a Chicago house where "the lock on the downstairs door is broken, and the mail-boxes have been looted long ago; the hinges that remain are rusting off. It smells like a urinal in the hallway" (377). In Texas where the Southern Wilson lives "the main street has assumed its tawdry prosperity with discomfort; it is hot, and packed with people and the stores

are small and dirty” (377). This image of the decay of the American urban areas creates a feeling of oppression and aggressiveness endured by the characters in their home country. Life is presented as brutalising and inhuman and the individual man seems incapable of escaping the influences of such life. In his analysis of Mailer's image of the urban conditions of life Chester Eisinger suggests that it is an example of “social determinism.”<sup>3</sup> This view stresses the sense of victimization since the places of inhabitation are inadequate and humiliating for human beings.

More insidious are the social and economic conditions the soldiers experienced in the United States and which stress their helplessness and their futile striving. Most of the men suffer economic depression and injustice and see their dreams shatter over the years. Martinez realizes that because of his impoverished background, he gives up his dream of becoming an aviator. Goldstein cannot realize his dream of going to college and being an engineer. However, Roth tells Goldstein that “I am a graduate of CCNY and it never did me any good....I never found a diploma any help in getting a job” (62-63); So he spends two years without a job. Gallagher, on the other hand, feels that “everything turned out lousy for him sooner or later”, and “no matter what he tried, no matter how hard he worked, he always seemed caught” (14). Similarly, Red Valsen, who lived in a series of Eastern coal mining towns, remembers his years there and says to himself, “nobody gets what he wants” and “this deepened his mood of sorrow” (147). Nevertheless, despite their deep sorrow and bitterness and in spite of their defeat they try to be someone and to seek a place within the modern American society by keeping alive their dreams and hopes for success and status. During wartime, they discuss about a status that involves job, more money, leisure and beautiful women. They think that the war is fought for ideals and democracy and that their dreams would be realized in the

free world that would emerge after winning the war. Mailer does not allow these dreams to materialize and thus the only alternative left is dreaming since the social and economic obstacles are more powerful than any individual initiative. For instance, Gallagher notices that, "I'd know I was going to be something big" (208). Wyman declares, "Claire really made me feel like I could be something" and "I just knew I was gonna be a big guy someday" (262). Goldstein thinks that "a man has to strike out for himself if he wants to go ahead" (454). However, the oppressive social and economic conditions they experience in the United States and the totalitarianism and injustice they witness during the war represent a hindrance for the realization of their dreams. Robert Ehrlich points out that Mailer "portrays men as victims who have little control over themselves and events."<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the economic conditions, the racial attitudes displayed in the novel contribute to the growth of antagonisms and the emphasis on the power of social obstacles with their sordid effects on human lives. The Jews are the characters who suffer more and indulge in excessive self-pity. Goldstein and Roth are harshly treated and humiliated by members of the other ethnic groups, although Roth tries not to dwell in his ethnic background in order to survive. He declares, "I am a Jew, but I am not religious...I consider myself American." Goldstein replies, "why do you think Croft and Brown don't like you ? It is not because of you, it's because of your religion" (277-78). Goldstein himself is confused and wonders why they hate him so though he works very hard to be a good soldier. He only deduces that "they were just a bunch of anti-semiten" (211). In the "Time Machine" section of Joey Goldstein, it is mentioned that he learns very early from his grandfather that Jews have had a long history of suffering and enduring injustice and racist attitudes. His grandfather tells him, "we are a harried

people, beset by oppressors. We must always journey from disaster to disaster...we have suffered so much that we know how to endure", and the only expression Goldstein absorbs is "we are born to suffer" (448-493).

Jews are not the only sufferers; Martínez, a Mexican American, also suffers the burden of racial injustice and its aggressive effect on his life. We are let to know that "he was always embarrassed at mentioning the fact that he was a Mexican" (451). This image reflects the nature of the American society which is built on racial stereotypes with the poor and minority people who can never rise above the class into which they were born. These racial attitudes are clear signs that America does more violence to its people than to foreigners. Jean Radford seems right when he remarks that, through his characters, Mailer wants to achieve "a systematic indictment of the racism, sexual neuroses and economic insecurity in American society."<sup>5</sup>

Equally depressing and oppressive is the injustice exerted by men in power who harshly treat the enlisted men. General Cummings is the symbol of the WASP superiority and thirst for power. He believes in absolute power and states that "the army functions best when you're frightened of the man above you, and contemptuous of your subordinates" (191). This kind of attitude has a pervasive and deep psychological effect on individual soldiers who would seek various means to channel their frustration. Minetta, in a devastating rage, condemns all officers and says, "a guy gets hurt and how do they treat him ? Like a dog, they don't give a damn about us...Fug'em they are all a bunch of bastards" (372). Besides, when the men of the platoon start cutting the trail before launching their mission, they hate Croft because he does not work with them and gives only orders in a very harsh manner. Minetta remarks, "If I was a platoon sergeant I wouldn't treat the guys like that. I'd be right with them" (272). Red also states, "There

ain't a good officer in the world...They are just a bunch of aristocrats, they think. General Cummings is no better than I am. His shit does not smell ice cream either" (135). One may notice that the soldiers react against the constrictions of the army powerful leaders in an obscene manner which evokes the sentiments of hatred and rage.

Although the men try to reclaim selfhood, they are easily defeated in the face of the army's attempt to erase individual expression through the strict use of power. In fact, Mailer stresses not only the socio-economic conditions to understand individual behaviour, but he also draws emphasis upon the nature of inner experiences. Indeed, the bleak social reality and economic insecurity experienced by the soldiers in their country affect their emotional lives and contribute to their sense of powerlessness. Robert Ehrlich makes it clear when he states that Mailer shows effectively his ability "to delineate the emotional results of living in a predominantly authoritarian, repressive and exploitative society."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, he uses "his background material not so much to represent American society as to reveal the individual human personalities involved."<sup>7</sup> With the exception of Cummings, Hearn and Croft, all the other characters have been brought up in squalid environments and suffered social and economic injustice in the American society. Their attempts to achieve self-fulfilment are doomed to failure because of the external powers over which they have no control. Coming to the end of their mission, Ridges is urged to believe "the heart could be killed and the body still live" (679). It is an allusion to the state of helplessness and futility in which most of the characters are caught losing a sense of their own power. Their hope to realize the "self" that involves material success and respect is destroyed by the negative conditions of the modern world. Indeed, behind the American dream of success is the harsh reality that

forces the men of the platoon to give up on deferred dreams and to hope only for a minimal survival. Red Valsen, at last, realizes,

*You carried it alone as long as you could, and then you weren't strong enough to take it any longer. You kept fighting everything, and everything broke you down, until in the end you were just a little goddam bolt holding on and squealing when the machine went too fast (702)*

In reality the soldiers of the platoon are defeated by the obstacles of a repressive and exploitative society that is interested in them only as objects in a working machine. As Diana Trilling notes, "this army which, in the name of historical necessity, captures, rules, and destroys the common life of humanity, is modern society as Mailer sees it."<sup>8</sup>

In the same manner, Mailer conventionally takes the naturalistic stance by including the element of nature as a deterministic factor. In *The Naked and the Dead* nature conspires with society to violate man's will and his physical and emotional integrity. Peter Jones remarks that the novel is a manifestation of the idea that "society and nature are pitted against the self."<sup>9</sup> So it is not only the social and economic reality that determines the character and behaviour of individual men, but nature's hostility is also more powerful to contribute to their defeat and their emotional depression. From the first day of their landing, the soldiers are constantly hindered by the harsh natural conditions of the island. While advancing in the jungle, they suffer violent storms and incessant rain and their tents are torn off into the wind. When the platoon launches its patrol, the men suffer nature's aggressive hostility which makes them lose their sense of being. They are

*Chafed and blistered and sunburned; already some of them were limping on sore feet, but all these discomforts were minor, almost unnoticed in the leaden stupor of marching, the fever they suffered from the sun...they kept moving without any thought of where they went (506).*

Similarly, the soldiers who carry the litter of the wounded Wilson are forced to endure these conditions, "the sun came out again, inflamed the wet kunai grass and dried the earth...the grass interfered with them, tripping at their feet, and meshing against their bodies, flicking into their faces" (627). When they reach the stream of water after Wilson's death, they fight their last battle against nature's indifference, "they struggled through the deeper water, which lashed at their thighs, floating the litter between them" (677). As a consequence, the litter is broken and Wilson disappears in the stream. The image is too suggestive of the force of nature that is unmerciful towards human will and is usually intent on destroying any human aspiration.

The rest of the men who continue to climb Mount Anaka face the most terrible opposing natural force. It is the mountain which "dominates the island and the men with its motionless hostility."<sup>10</sup> Mailer describes the mountain as it is seen by the men of the platoon, "It arched coldly and remotely from the jungle beneath it, lofting itself massively into the low-hanging clouds of the sky...the mountain seemed wise and powerful and terrifying in its size" (449). The mountain appears as a huge force that lacks sentiment and is capable of creating fear and terror in every individual man regardless of his status and will. The image of the mountain's power is created through personification which makes it the fiercest enemy to man's expectations. In their climbing, the men hate the mountain because in one of the most exhausting moments they feel that "the stairway became alive, personalized; it seemed to mock and deceive them at every step, resist them with every malign rock" (696). The naturalistic image

evoked by Mailer is also described by Tony Tanner as he notices, "it seems as if there is a cosmic conspiracy against men, as if something working through the various forces of nature is seeking to bring them to a standstill, erase their identities, annihilate them altogether." He concludes, "it is the island which strips the men naked, leaving all of them exposed and many of them dead."<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the socio-economic conditions and natural forces which shape human lives and behaviour, the army itself becomes the one expression of the modern world and the annihilation of human beings. In the army, man is nothing but a helpless creature who must, after all, submit to the military force and accept violence as a necessary means to satisfy the bureaucracy. *The Naked and the Dead* pictures some of the most horrific scenes of the war and the atrocities done by the war machine. The first death on the island occurs after the American landing on Anopopei; Hennessey is killed shortly after the landing when a mortarshell comes down on him. In the explosion, "a piece of shrapnel tore his brain in half" (46). While trying to go through the mountain pass, Lieutenant Hearn is suddenly killed by a machine gun bullet following Martinez's lie about the Japanese presence in the pass. Forced by the modern world in which they live, the men of the platoon become violent killers as they proceed to mindless killing of the so-called war enemy although they are resentful about their acts. For instance, in the Japanese attempt to cross the river, the massacre is pitiless as many Japs fall dead. When the American soldiers look around, "Red realized with surprise and shock, as if he were looking at a corpse for the first time, that a man was really a very fragile thing" (222). At the end of the novel and during the final slaughter of the Japanese, the stream of violence reaches its highest tension,

*The killing lost all dimension, bothered the men far less than discovering some ants in their bedding...the Americans who came in would finish off whatever wounded men were left, smashing their heads with rifle butts or shooting them pointblank (714).*

These images suggest that the life of man is worthless in a world directed by forces beyond his control. The individual man is a victim in the American society as well as in the Army. He is blatantly annihilated as a human being and thus his acts are purposeless. In his study of the novel, Malcolm Bradbury points out that Mailer's intention is "to connect army life with the jungle world of American society."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the jungle is the naturalistic setting where extreme power and violence are the sole principles in the struggle between man and the external forces. The jungle of America is parallel to the war jungle.

The Naked and the Dead's nature as a war novel makes Mailer introduce one of the most persistent elements that is associated with the modern warfare technology and the horrors it causes to humanity. Mailer uses General Cummings's journal to show that weapons have become in this century the symbol of violence and the mechanization of human beings. Mailer makes it clear that man is part of the machine and his role is determined by the function of the arm assigned to him. Cummings considers "weapons as being something more than machines, as having personalities, perhaps likeness to the human" (566). At the centre of Cummings's speculation,

*Battle is an organization of thousands of man-machines who dart with governing habits across a field, sweat like a radiator in the sun, shiver and become stiff like a piece of metal in the rain. We are not so discrete from the machine any longer (567).*

In the battlefield, the soldiers are no more humans but rather machine-conditioned and machine-like creatures who are forced to serve the military institution. In his journal, Cummings gives various kinds of weapons which are the basic motifs of violence and massive destruction and the cause of devastating horrors. These weapons are regarded as "dangerous things like a plague of vermin, squat black ugly little things, undermining the men with nausea and horror until the act of straightening a picture might make one weep" (567). The tank and truck are like "heavy ponderous animals of the jungle", while the machine gun is like "the shattering gossip, snarling many lives at once" (567). Cummings's account of weapons reveals a naturalistic image in which the machine is more powerful than human will in determining his fate. The weapons are associated with savage animals in the jungle where power is the only rule and man is defenseless. Thus one may notice that the account evokes the nature of modern warfare characterized by extreme violence and the dehumanization of individual men.

As is the case with other war novels in the history of American fiction, the war in The Naked and the Dead is usually pictured as a naturalistic locale and a field of competition and struggle where the human self is nullified and human illusions of heroism and power are questioned. For instance, in The Red Badge of Courage (1895), Stephen Crane moves to the battlefield to describe in a Darwinian naturalistic mode the battle itself and gives his impressions of two days of fighting. The experience consists in fear and physical pain intensified by nature's indifference. However, unlike The Naked and the Dead, Crane's book focuses basically on combat; political issues and the mechanisation of modern warfare are absent. The basic issue is centered on the annihilation of the individual man as we notice that the characters have designations rather than names. The central character, Henry Fleming, is named only once, otherwise

he is called "The Youth". The Youth's initial desire to perform a heroic role is foredoomed as he encounters the brute fact of death and the hostility of nature. However, in the war novel that emerged after the First World War, the experience of war expresses the same set of relations between man and nature. Hemingway's novel A Farewell to Arms (1929) is a direct confrontation with war which he views as a manifestation of nature. The indifference of the landscape –war and nature- generates a tragic outcome for the human individual. The narrator's lover dies in childbirth and thus his desire to make peace for both of them after he deserts combat is doomed to failure. Political treatment and the wholesale destruction of modern weapons which pervade The Naked and the Dead are not given consideration in this novel. In contrast to other war novels, The Naked and the Dead has got the specificity of making a correlation between the war environment and the postwar American society. The whole setting in which power and violence hold sway in a military context is, in fact, intended to be a metaphor for the American society. In this society the individual man is always hindered and defeated by external forces more powerful than him and thus he can never achieve personal success goals.

In the midst of these hostile social, natural and military forces and economic insecurity of the modern American society, most of the characters in the novel are failures lacking the ability to act independently and to achieve selfhood. They are oppressed by the various forces in society and in the Army that their hope for status and self-identification is finally reduced to despair and a sense of futility. After their disastrous mission, the men of the platoon come back to the shore losing their sense of being and accepting their fate. Ridges's state and feelings are very expressive in this context :

*Ridges felt the beginning of a deep and unending bitterness...what kind of God could there be who always tricked you in the end...He wept out of bitterness and longing and despair, he wept from exhaustion and failure and the shattering naked conviction that nothing mattered (679) .*

Yet, Mailer is fascinated with the lives of three men in the platoon whose efforts to define themselves in opposition to a deterministic oppressive universe represent the modern incarnation of totalitarianism in American life. General Cummings, Sergeant Croft and to a lesser degree Lieutenant Hearn are the characters most concerned with power and its relationship to violence which are deeply rooted in their prior experiences of life in America. According to Michael Glenday, they are the characters through whom Mailer achieves his "representation of the American fascist mentality", and his dramatization of "the belief that America is being destroyed by totalitarianism."<sup>13</sup>

*Violence in the War Novel : The Naked and the Dead*

Ambitious General Edward Cummings is the central figure and the most gifted wielder of power in the novel. When we consider the general's character we may notice that he embodies Mailer's concern with the threat of totalitarianism in America . This political vision is displayed through Cummings's obsessive needs for power and control and his lust for violence which are defined by his past experiences. The general is the son of a Midwestern banker who sends him to a military school because he thinks that "at <sup>9</sup>nine years old a boy has to start thinking how to act like a man" (411). It seems that being a man means to be tough, hard and violent, and this is why Cummings is sent to a military school. Before becoming a tyrannical general, he loses himself with his wife in his attempt to subdue and to control her as a manifestation of his military upbringing,

*After a year it is completely naked, apparent to her that he is alone, that he fights out battles with himself upon her body...there are all the authority she has left, the family and the Boston streets and the history hanging upon them, and she has left it, to be caught in a more terrifying authority (419-20).*

So their marriage collapses and Cummings turns to consolidate his military career to achieve more power and higher ranks. Mailer describes the general in a manner at all powerful and dominating:

*He has talent. He absorbs the problem completely, thinks at night in bed of how best to treat the different men and how to command them most effectively. In the daytime he spends nearly all his time with the company supervising labour details, conducting continual inspections. His companies are always the best managed on the post (421).*

Therefore, the general who controls everything on the island of Anopopei adopts the political attitudes that are based upon his personal needs for power. Indeed, he believes in creating a fear ladder so that the leader must use absolute power lest the soldiers would ask for personal rights. For this purpose he aligns with the fascists and considers Hitler "the interpreter of Twentieth century man" (319). Yet, it is important to consider to what extent the general does embody the totalitarian values and the fascist ideas. In the discussion with Lieutenant Hearn Mailer makes Cummings unveil his ideas about war, power and the necessity to use violence. He says,

*The only morality of the future is a power morality, and a man who cannot find his adjustment to it is doomed... 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 (329)*

Therefore, he regards the war as a power concentration and it is not fought for ideals. It is no surprise then that he advocates fascism which he defines as "far sounder than communism...for it's grounded firmly in men's actual natures" (327). Cummings's admiration of the organization of the fascists stems from his experience in the Army which he regards "as a preview of the future" (327). In fact, the Army is presented through Cummings's ideas as a symbol of the exercise of unlimited power and violence. Thus the general foresees the future of the United States and believes that "America is going to absorb that dream, it's in the business of doing it now" (327). By this logic, the general seems to represent the mechanistic forces of the system. As Randall Waldron argues, "Commanding General Cummings, brilliant and ruthless evangel of fascist power and control...(personifies) the machine."<sup>14</sup>

Accordingly, Cummings appears on the island as a monstrous figure who acts violently in order to achieve his personal goals. He devotes all his time in the headquarters to work on various plans for breaching the Toyaku Line and when he finally orders the frontal attack he feels the excitement of total control over the process of events. Tony Tanner confirms that Cummings actually "feels himself in touch with the essential powers that run things."<sup>15</sup> Cummings's obsession with violence is explicitly revealed in the night of the attack:

*The troops out in the jungle were disposed from the patterns in his mind...All the roaring complex of odors and sounds and sights, multiplied and remultiplied by all the guns of the division, was contained*

*in a few cells of his head... All of it, all the violence, the dark coordination had sprung from his mind. In the night, at that moment, he felt such power that it was beyond joy (565).*

This image reveals the general's compulsive desire to exert power and to commit violence. All his dark urges seem to be deeply rooted in the unconscious mind and they seek gratification through aggressiveness. Toward the end of the novel when Cummings fires the howitzer, he shows again his terrifying appetite for violence and controlling others: "Just before he fired he could see it all... Its downward whistle, and the moments of complete and primordial terror for the Japanese at the other end when it landed" (563). The general's lust for violent action appears at the moment of waiting for the shell to land and then he feels "the weak absorptive relief that washed through his body. All his senses felt gratified" (564). This act projects the psychological needs of Cummings who seeks through violence to give form to his repressed impulses. Cummings's unconscious mind is formed throughout his past life in the United States when he was a child. His father tells his mother, "I won't have him acting like a goddam woman, you've to stop feeding him all these books, all this womanish claptrap" (409). His father's harsh treatment sows the seeds of aggressiveness and toughness in him and makes his personality harden over the years: "there are changes in him. He has never been friendly with other boys, but now he is cold rather than shy" (411). As a result of this upbringing, Cummings becomes a seeker for power to act like "a man" and the war is presented as the opportunity to show his drives. In fact, Cummings's character exemplifies the neurotic in the Freudian theory whose repressed desire for power in the Army shapes his unconscious and it later appears in the form of aggressive drive. He once tells Lieutenant Hearn, "you know, if there is a God, Robert, he's just like me"

(188). Cummings feels for a moment he is God and the island is his universe; he is propelled by the expanding energies of his boundless ambition to control everything and to make free choices to enhance his power.

Nevertheless, all the aggressive authority Cummings displays in his attempt to reach absolute power and his individual will to conquer end in defeat. Indeed, his strategy to breach the Toyaku Line is thwarted by Major Dalleson's unplanned breakthrough overland which is achieved by accident rather than by design. Regarding Cummings's status as a representative of the system, it seems that the meaning of his defeat and his alignment with the totalitarian mentality are not clear. Cummings is expected to emerge as a victor and yet he is defeated by "a random play of vulgar good luck" (712). According to Randall Waldron's view,

*The failure of Cummings's design... would seem to indicate the failure of the machine to work its will upon man and nature, and to justify reading the novel as a "parable" of man's refusal to be dehumanized by the forces of mechanized society. Yet Hearn's death...clearly (dramatizes) the defeat of man by the machine.<sup>16</sup>*

Although the general embodies the tyrannical values and he advocates the fascist organization built upon the consolidation of power, he actually displays some principles that make him an enemy to the system rather than its servant. It is true that Cummings is defeated and yet his failure is too significant as to the true aims of the totalitarian system. Richard Foster sees that Cummings's defeat does not allow to consider him the hero of the novel although Mailer assigns him the leading role. He argues, "The Naked and the Dead lacks a true hero or forceful protagonist...Man appears to be relatively helpless before the insidious geographical, social, and political conditions of the

present”<sup>17</sup> However, Nigel Leigh gives a different argument that presents the general as a hero of a different kind. He points out, “seen as the only source of vitalist power in a naturalistic world, they are not without an heroic dimension...Cummings and Croft possess a charisma absent from all the other characters.”<sup>18</sup> So Cummings possesses a kind of power by which he imposes himself on the world and he feels even superior to the military machine. Therefore he represents a threat to it because he is the example of extreme individualism. In defining the totalitarian system Mailer remarks that it “beheads individuality, variety, dissent, extreme possibility, romantic faith, it blinds vision, deadens instinct, it obliterates the past.”<sup>19</sup> Thus totalitarianism cannot allow individuals to act independently of the system and to have personal self-exalting goals. In this context, Joseph wenke seems close to the truth with his argument:

*Though a totalitarian movement may well have its origin in a powerful and charismatic personality committed to risktaking as a means of achieving power, totalitarian institutions gravitate inexorably toward a consolidation of power and an elimination of personality.*<sup>20</sup>

In fact, Cummings's plan to accelerate the Japanese defeat by invading Botoi Bay is conceived to glorify the general and to enhance his individual power over the totalitarian machine. He believes that victory must carry a personal signature and that is why Mailer describes the general's depression after his defeat as he “was bothered by a suspicion, very faint, not quite stated, that he had no more to do with the success of the attack than a man who presses a button and waits for the elevator” (559). Cummings compares himself to a servant who just presses a button and the victory belongs to the system. Peter Jones argues, “men have become personalized functions...they must be

subservient to the machine and it's not a business they instinctively enjoy."<sup>21</sup> So Cummings's feeling of being "God" seems too arrogant that the Army cannot stand and tolerate. He himself confesses that, "in the Army the idea of individual personality is just a hindrance" (177). Therefore, Cummings realizes that "it would be the hacks who would occupy history's seat after the war" (714). This means that the mechanized society and the Army as part of it reward servants rather than heroes. Cummings is presented as a hero with the qualities of a strong personality but he is also a victim and a defeated man who cannot withstand the power of the system. Thus, it is the system's slave, Major Dalleson, who has the last word in the novel after giving his big military innovation to improve classes in map-reading. His plan consists of "a full-size color photograph of Betty Grable in a bathing suit, with the co-ordinate grid system laid over it" (717). This ending indicates that individual heroes can never achieve success and selfhood in the face of the totalitarian system which rewards the hacks and glorifies conformity. It is then the violence of the state that gains ground in modern America and represents the real power achieved by the state's servants.

Violence  
Selfish

In his desire for power, Sergeant Sam Croft is similar to General Cummings. Yet, he is unlike the fascist general for he is not conscious of his power needs and their political implications: "there was a crude informed vision in his soul but he was rarely conscious of it" (161). Croft's political attitudes are completely overshadowed by his psychological needs which account for his brutality and violent nature. Indeed, the roots of his violence stem from his own past in Texas where he starts hunting at a very early age. During his childhood, he is humiliated by his father, Jesse Croft, who shoots a deer that the boy has tracked himself. As he tries to strike his father he is given a blow across

the mouth by Jesse who recalls, "Ah 'd beat the piss out of him, and he'd never make a sound. Just stand there looking at me as if he was fixin to wallop me back, or may be put bullet in mah head"(162). Croft is that kind of man because of his violent upbringing and the violent men who surrounded him as a child in Texas. Hence, his thirst for violence derives from his frontier-breaking ancestors. Sam's father is proud to declare, "we was one of the first folks to push in here, must be sixty years ago, and they was Crofts in Texas over a hunnered years ago. Ah's guess some of them had that same meanness that Sam's got. May be it was what made 'em push down here" (164). Mailer describes Sam's ancestors as tough and hardy frontiersmen, they "pushed and labored and strained, drove their oxen, sweated their women, and moved a thousand miles" (169). So Croft's urges seem instinctive and influenced by the pull of blood from his ancestors and he even inherits their meanness. As regards Sam's inherited violent nature, Mailer appears more concerned with the origin of violence in the American history rather than with violence in the war. Michael Glenday provides a better understanding of Mailer's concern as he argues that Croft "personifies much that is essential to Mailer's 'philosophical psychopath'" and that "Mailer would trace what he called the 'psychotization' of America back to its frontier history."<sup>22</sup> Mailer seems to suggest that the Frontier experience has transmitted its violence to contemporary American life. Croft is, indeed, the new frontiersman who is driven to "push" to new, unknown territory seeking power and success. Croft's desire to conquer a new frontier can be interpreted as a manifestation of "The Manifest Destiny" which forms a part of the American culture. In Croft's unconscious mind, as in the minds of all Americans, there is this urge to expand American civilization to all parts of the world whatever the

cost. He is the man who embodies all the principles that characterize American culture which was formed throughout America's violent history.

When Croft takes the leadership of the platoon after Hearn's death, he is pressed by the irrepressible desire to climb Mount Anaka and to conquer it. Mailer makes the mountain appear to Croft as "a personal affront" (528) that symbolizes all the qualities that mock man's mortality. Croft assumes that scaling the mountain would mean to have the mystical strength and power of it. Thus it is through violence and risktaking that Croft tries to conquer the alien mountain. In his analysis of Croft's character, Solotaroff notes that, "Croft instinctively knows what actions will minister to his ailments and enable him to break open the walls which have held his straining psyche encased. Anaka contains within its bulk all the frontiers that have been closed to Croft."<sup>23</sup> Although he knows that there is no safety in the mountain because it seems powerful and terrifying, Croft is determined to go up. Solotaroff affirms that Mailer attributes Croft's determination to his instinctive and unconscious desire to conquer a new frontier, as his ancestors did, that would assure his ascent to power. Robert Ehrlich shares Solotaroff's view and states that Croft, "until possibly the very end of the novel, pits himself in a much more blind and unconscious manner against the brute force outside himself."<sup>24</sup> Mailer stresses more the instinctive drive of Croft as "he moved on because somewhere at the base of his mind was the directive that climbing this mountain was necessary" (656). This explains Croft's harshness and aggressiveness toward the men of the platoon who try to hold him back from achieving his goal. When he feels their fatigue he lets out his urge to violence to restore discipline. The soldiers hate Croft and his toughness, and in a state of despair and exhaustion they manifest rebellious tendencies attempting to quit and avoid self-destruction. It is after Roth's

death that Red "knew exactly what had happened to Hearn, and the knowledge left him weak. Croft was going to shoot" (693).

Additionally, Croft's personality hardens after he discovers that his wife "the only woman he ever loved cheated on him" (162). Thus his behaviour and attitudes become tainted with inhumanity and contempt for others. His inner self is jammed with hatred that seeks a purge in a strictly aggressive manner. Michael Glenday remarks that Croft's aggressive individualism personifies in many ways the "psychopath" whom Mailer would advocate a decade later in "The White Negro."<sup>25</sup> The psychopath is marked by his maladjustment to the social order and his uncontrollable desire to prove himself against the outside world. Croft's repeated statement "I hate everything which is not in myself" (169) is a celebration of the individual self, an inner screaming voice of hatred, and a manifestation of the desire to purge the violent and dark urges of his personality. Croft screams wildly, "You're all a bunch of whores. You're all a bunch of dogs. You're all a deer to track" (169). Mailer's celebration of the self is closer to Whitman's "I celebrate myself" but it virtually leads to a fascist view of man because Croft's thirst for power and confrontation often takes on murderous and aggressive proportions.

Since the war is the time of crisis during which one's personality can be tested, it is during the war that Croft's murderousness and violence find sanction. His violence expresses itself in acts of criminality which start to erupt from the first week of the campaign. At the beginning, he is assigned to beach detail on the shore, but he is soon dejected for he wants to take part in the battle which is taking place inland. In the river battle leading the reconnaissance platoon, Croft finds the opportunity to let out his violent urges. Facing the Japanese, he screams in a raging temper, "come and get me

you sonsofbitches." Mailer portrays him as "he shivered terribly...and his hands seemed congealed on the machine -gun. He could not bear the intense pressure in his head" (156). After the battle, Croft is described in a manner at all aggressive, he is inhuman, he can kill easily and with relish and pleasure in order to grow. Indeed, he orders Red Vasen to kill the four wounded Japanese who are found lying in the field while the one who is taken as prisoner is killed by Croft himself in a very cold manner. He "brought up his rifle and pointed it at the prisoner's head...the prisoner did not have time to change his expression before the shot crashed into his skull" (201). This happens as though Croft vents his rage on the unfortunate prisoner.

Moreover, Croft's love of violence is directed even against animals when he kills a bird that Roth finds in the jungle. Croft's attitude is contrasted with Roth's love of the bird; Roth is completely absorbed in the beautiful animal and "all the frustrated affection he had stored for months seemed to pour out toward the bird" (529). Yet, Croft takes it with anger and in a few seconds the men can hear the smashing sound of its bones between his fingers. Similarly, Croft's lust for violence and his thirst for power reach the climax when he effectively murders Lieutenant Hearn in the mission of going through the mountain pass. In fact, Hearn's assignment to lead the platoon "had been a shock to him, deeper than he cared to admit...It was a little difficult for him to realize that he had a superior" (441). Hearn represents a hindrance that prevents Croft from achieving his personal goal to conquer a new frontier. So he presses Martinez to lie in order to maneuver Hearn into an ambush and then to regain control of the platoon. Croft's trap is successful and Hearn is killed while approaching the mountain pass. Mailer's description of Croft's change of feeling is quite revealing of his inner needs to control others and to exercise power. Croft "felt a sense of relief again. No longer was

there that confusion, that momentary internal pause before he gave an order" (601). Croft resents Hearn because he threatens to destroy his dream of success. Although Croft embodies the American frontier-breaking quality and his personality is shaped by the elements that make up the American nation, he is also the symbol of extreme individualism and the embodiment of the dream of success and self-fulfilment. This dream must be realized through competition, risktaking and violence. Michael Glenday points out that General Cummings and Croft "exemplify the iniquitous relationship between violence and power."<sup>26</sup> Thus Croft is similar to Cummings; they are both obsessed with violent acts which they view as necessary means to achieve personal goals and to satisfy their thirst for power.

Nevertheless, despite the strong individual will of Croft, he is doomed to defeat by the strongest external forces of nature as Cummings's will is undermined by the absurdities of chance. Croft can be compared to Captain Ahab in Moby Dick who feels the need to conquer the white whale as Croft wants to test himself against a powerful adversary. Although their motivations differ, they are finally defeated in their aims. Instead of mourning, Croft feels a relief when he realizes that he is unable to subdue everything outside himself. Even though, Croft senses at the end the torment of defeat in himself. Mailer reveals the state of despair of Croft as he loses his sense of being which could be defined by his success in conquering Mount Anaka. Croft "kept looking at the mountain. He had lost it, had missed something tantalizing revelation of himself. Of himself and much more. Of life. Everything" (707).

The significance of Croft's defeat is given ample consideration by critics. Most of them agree that Croft's obsessive desire to use violence and brutality to serve his personal aims has no military justification whatsoever. Indeed, Croft's aim is certainly

not centered on defeating the war enemy or bringing victory to the Allied Forces. He is not interested in politics either. His concern in the Army is mainly personal power. Although his drive may seem fascistic as he appears inhuman in his dealing with others and his urge to kill, Nigel Leigh states that, "He is clearly outside the political categories. Although his nature is decidedly non-liberal...in a number of ways he is notably non-fascistic: he has no connection with groups on the American right, as might be expected."<sup>27</sup> Thus, Croft cannot serve the military machine and his expected victory must be finally thwarted by the totalitarian system. Like Cummings, his defeat is necessary to the survival of totalitarianism in America that does not tolerate the extreme individualism of Croft and Cummings. Richard Poirier confirms that, in The Naked and the Dead, Mailer "had not yet learned how to suggest any possible heroic resistance to the encroaching forces of totalitarianism."<sup>28</sup> In fact, Cummings and Croft act in a manner strictly individual and are not willing to be operative of the system. For this reason they are failures regardless of their boundless ambition and their strong will. Nevertheless, Mailer confesses in The Presidential Papers (1963) that, "Behind the ideology in The Naked and the Dead was an obsession with violence. The characters for whom I had the most secret admiration, like Croft, were violent people."<sup>29</sup> This explains what Micheal Glenday attributes to characters like Croft as "heroism of a very problematic kind."<sup>30</sup> The problem for these characters arises from the fact that they are presented with the qualities of strength, courage, determination, will and boundless ambition that would absolutely lead to their success and victory as heroes. Nevertheless, their heroism is concluded with defeat and deception because they confront individually a more powerful collective adversary. Joseph Wenke remarks that, "the novel sets Mailer's talent for creating powerful and violent characters at odds with the thematic

necessity of placing some limits on the success of totalitarians."<sup>31</sup> Even though Croft and Cummings fail in the face of the constraints of the mechanistic society, their failure is redeemed by their heroic attempt to prove themselves as individuals.

If Cummings and Croft "prove to be the novel's most dynamic characters"<sup>32</sup>, this is mainly due to the weakness of their ideological opponent Lieutenant Robert Hearn. Hearn is the confused liberal who is converted during the last hours of his life to the fascist ways of Cummings and Croft. Robert Hearn is the son of a very successful industrialist and he was born in the aristocracy of a wealthy Midwestern family. Despite his aristocratic upbringing, his sympathy with the oppressed starts to appear after graduation. He also learns to be a rebel when he has a fight with his father who flatly opposes labour unions. He tells his son with a threatening tone, "I'll tell you, Robert, I don't know where you picked up all this union idea guff... why don't you stay out of it...It seems to me it's easy enough to bite the hand that feeds ya" (345). After a series of quarrels Robert deserts his family and feels the urge to seek a new identity. In contemplating his existence, Hearn realizes that the world is corrupt and his life is empty and meaningless. When the war in Europe starts Hearn enlists in the Army and leaves with the American troops to the Pacific "seeking for something" (356). Although Mailer has more admiration for violent characters like Croft, he acknowledges putting a part of himself in Hearn who is the Harvard educated liberal, having Mailer's scorn for authority and his desire to identify with the common soldier. His rebellion against authority is manifested when he deliberately mashes his cigarette on the floor of the general's tent. Incurring Cummings's anger, he is humiliated and then put in charge of a platoon on a disastrous mission with slight chance of success. At the beginning of the

patrol, Hearn tries to be kind with the soldiers without resorting to the oppressive authority applied by Cummings and Croft. Yet, he finds himself isolated from the soldiers and resented by his rival Croft. Mailer reveals that it is Croft "they would obey, for Croft satisfied their desire for hatred, encouraged it and in turn exacted obedience" (507). Thus Hearn finds himself adopting Cummings's ideas when he forces Croft to apologize for killing the bird, and thereby he understands how Cummings feels "when he had obeyed the order to pick up the cigarette butt" (533).

Considering Hearn's conversion, critics present various views. While Nigel Leigh describes him as "a liberal"<sup>33</sup>, Robert Merrill believes that "Hearn does not so much represent liberalism as the desire to be liberal...Hearn is an aristocrat."<sup>34</sup> However, regarding Hearn's easy collapse in the face of Cummings's fascistic ideas and Croft's hatred and single-mindedness, Hearn's liberalism is seen by Michael Glenday "to be a soft target." Glenday argues that "far from having created in Hearn a force that can counteract the personal and political excesses of the other two major characters...the overwhelming impression for me is of a man without stable convictions."<sup>35</sup> Hearn feels uncomfortable with his new responsibility because, "he was playing with the lives of the nine men left, and he didn't deserve responsibility...there was the inner smirk. He ought to, but he wouldn't...He was almost horrified with this sick, anguished knowledge of himself" (578-9). Yet, he realizes that his leadership of the platoon is "one of the most satisfying things he had ever done, he could understand Croft's staring at the mountain through the field glasses, or killing the bird. When he searched himself, he was just another Croft" (578).

In reality, Hearn likes the seductive pleasures of controlling other men and loves the tension of command. He is absolutely aware that he is using the patrol as a personal

Heal  
power

test because it becomes a necessity to prove something to Cummings which has neither political nor military vindication. Mailer shows Hearn's weakness as he comes under the influence of both Cummings and Croft. When he is in Cummings's orbit, he feels himself "like Cummings...they were both the same" (397). Moreover, "there were times when the demarcation between their minds was blurred" (397). In Croft's presence while preparing to go through the pass, Hearn realizes that if he stays he would become another Croft. In explaining man's change of attitude and behaviour, Mailer asserts that "the potential for madness lies within each man, and it can be brought to fruition by external circumstance."<sup>36</sup> We are then led to believe that Hearn's easy conversion to the ways of Cummings and Croft is achieved by both his subconscious need to pit himself against a situation of violence and possible death and the external forces represented by the two powerful characters. What Cummings and Croft are by nature Hearn has become. Thus his death is inevitable.

Besides, in making of Hearn a feeble ideologue who is easily disposed of by the fascism of Cummings and the brutality of Croft, Mailer wants to show the inadequacy of the liberal alternative, and more particularly the bankruptcy of American liberalism. Norman Podhoretz describes this liberalism as "animated by a vision of the world that neither calls forth heroic activity nor values the qualities of courage, daring, and will that make for the expansion of the human spirit."<sup>37</sup> Hearn's liberal ideas seem unworkable in the face of the greater organization. When Cummings explains to him his ideas about war, Hearn gives his opinion, "as far as I'm concerned, it's an imperialist tossup" (325). Even so, Hearn seems uncertain and sometimes impressed by Cummings's ideas. When Cummings asks him, "Have you ever wondered, Robert, why we're fighting this war", Hearn simply replies, "I don't know, I'm not sure" (325). This

shows the weakness of American liberalism in the face of the totalitarian mentality. Consequently, Mailer's conclusion becomes quite clear as he foresees the future politics of the United States. Michael Glenday confirms Mailer's idea by stating that, "Mailer looked on the 1950's, years of organization-man, good manners and coercive conformity in American life, years in which the machine mentality of those like Dalleson would flourish."<sup>38</sup>

In detailing this world, Mailer makes use of the naturalistic mode of writing which enables him to deal with the oppressive forces at work in the American society and their effects in shaping men's lives. In this context, Mailer owes too much to the works of his predecessors such as Dos Passos, Farrell and Steinbeck. Mailer acknowledges that, "I didn't have much literary sophistication while writing The Naked and the Dead. I admired Dos Passas intensely and wanted to write a book that would be like one of his. My novel was frankly derivative, directly derivative."<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Mailer proves sensitive to naturalistic detail which is particularly evident in the "Time Machine" sections. These sections are indicative of Mailer's sense that the individual is completely defeated by the effects of his environment and thus the possibility of change through the efforts of individuals is quite insignificant. Moreover, the "Time Machine" sections are used as a flashback device through which Mailer utilizes the psychological insights of Freud. The short personal histories of the significant characters in the novel show the way childhood experiences mold later behaviour, such as Cummings and Croft's experiences. In his stress upon deterministic views of human behaviour and the way in which external reality affects the emotional lives of his characters, Mailer employs an omniscient third person point of view which very often involves description of thought and feeling. According to Robert Ehrlich, the use of this device does not

project the explosive energy and search for power of Mailer's later narrators because in The Naked and the Dead the self which the men hope to realize is much more conventional and consists in a place within the traditional structure of American society.<sup>40</sup> However, it is important to note that Mailer attempted through Cummings and Croft to project the notion of the rebel which is perhaps still buried and not yet fully blossomed.

In addition, like most naturalistic writers, Mailer portrays men as victims who have little control over themselves and events. In order to stress their powerlessness he uses a great deal of animal imagery to describe the men as ants, pigs, insects and sardines. For instance, Roth resents the Army and dislikes the officers. When the men move to the other shore of the island he reveals that the officers "slept in staterooms when we were jammed in the hold like pigs" (322). Similarly, the expression "the hornet's nest" is used to indicate the hostility of the natural conditions which contribute to the helplessness of the men. Finally, Mailer chooses the jungle where the story takes place and which is the appropriate setting for naturalists. The jungle suggests the place of struggle where survival or success is for the strongest and the most unscrupulous. In response to Mailer's adoption of the naturalistic mode, Michael Glenday remarks that "The Naked and the Dead may seem a stale recapitulation of a vision and a style inappropriate to a changed postwar world."<sup>41</sup> Robert Ehrlich, on the other hand, shows the deficiency of naturalism in dealing with the human inner experiences as he states, "naturalists could only provide him with a method of understanding experience which could be accounted for in logical and rational terms."<sup>42</sup> However, Nigel Leigh is perhaps the critic who understands best Mailer's concern. He argues, "One should not be misled by the novel's dated style since Mailer's concern is not primarily

retrospective, but is rather prophetic, to do with the crises of the postwar United States.<sup>343</sup> Accordingly, The Naked and the Dead can be regarded as a book that interprets and foresees the spirit of the postwar age in America characterized by the interaction between unlimited power and violence. At the center of focus, the military appears the basic subject because it stands for organized national violence and collective repression in a Darwinian fight for survival based on personal issues of ambition and strength. Most of the characters are defeated and reduced by the triumph of the military bureaucracy which is a version of the totalitarianism widespread through the United States. Mailer's book is, in fact, an attempt to prove that the war is not fought for ideals and democracy, it is rather a "power concentration" that would bury American idealism and replace it with passivity and conformity.

## Notes

- 1- Isabelle Fiemeyer, "Norman Mailer", Lire, Nov 1995, p.48.
- 2- Norman Mailer, The Naked and the Dead (London: Paladin, Harper Collins Publishers, 1992) pp.271-72. Subsequent references to the novel are from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text.
- 3- Quoted in Robert Ehrlich, Norman Mailer, The Radical as Hipster (New Jersey: The scarecrow Press, 1978) p.21.
- 4- Robert Ehrlich, Norman Mailer, The Radical as Hipster, p.23.
- 5- Jean Radford, Norman Mailer, A Critical study ( London: Barnes -Noble, 1975) p.345.
- 6- Robert Ehrlich, Norman Mailer, The Radical as Hipster , p.179.
- 7- Ibid, p.22.
- 8- Diana Trilling, "Norman an Mailer", Encounter, Nov 1962, p.48
- 9- Peter G.Jones, War and the Novelist: Appraising the American War Novel (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1976) p.88.
- 10- Tony Tanner, "On the Parapet", in Laura Adams (ed.), Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up? (New York: Kennikat Press, 1974) p.122.
- 11- Ibid.
- 12- Malcolm Bradbury, The Modern American Novel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) p.149.
- 13- Michael Glenday, Norman Mailer (London : Macmillan Press, 1995) p.51.
- 14- Randall H.Waldron, "The Naked and the Dead and the Machine", in H. Bloom(ed), Moderne Critical Views: Norman Mailer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) p.118.
- 15- Tony Tanner, "On the Parapet", in Laura Adams(ed), Will the Real Norman Mailer Pleas Stand Up? , p.121.
- 16- Waldron Randall, "The Naked and the Dead and the Machine" in H.Bloom (ed), Modern Critical Views: Norman Mailer, p.125.
- 17- Quoted in Robert Ehrlich, Norman Mailer, the Radical as Hipster , p.30.
- 18- Nigel Leigh, Radical Fictions and the Novels of Norman Mailer (Hampshire: Houndmills, 1990) p.121.
- 19- Quoted in Michael Glenday, Norman Mailer , p.53.
- 20- Joseph Wenke, Mailer's America (Connecticut: University pres of new England, 1987) p.9-10.

- 21- Peter G. Jones, War and the Novelist , p.95.
- 22- Micheal Glenday, Norman Mailer , p.56.
- 23- Quoted in ibid. , p.27.
- 24- Robert Ehrlich, Norman Mailer, the Radical as Hipster, p.27.
- 25- Micheal Glenday, Norman Mailer , p.56.
- 26- Ibid., p.58.
- 27- Nigel Leigh, Radical Fictions and the Novels of Norman Mailer, p.7.
- 28- Quoted in Michael Glenday, Norman Mailer , p.58.
- 29- Ibid., p.52.
- 30- Michael Glenday, Norman Mailer , p.58.
- 31- Joseph Wenke, Mailer's America , p.9.
- 32- Ibid., p.8.
- 33- Nigel Leigh, Radical Fictions and the Novels of Norman Mailer, p.15.
- 34- Stated in Micheal Glenday, Norman Mailer , p.60.
- 35- Ibid
- 36- Stated in Peter G. Jones, War and the Novelist , p.93
- 37- Quoted in Michael Glenday, Norman Mailer , p.61.
- 38- Michael Glenday, Norman Mailer , p.47.
- 39- Quoted in Mochael Glenday, Norman Mailer , p.49.
- 40- Robert Ehrlichn Norman Mailer, The Radical as Hipster, pp.2314.
- 41- Michael Glenday, Norman Mailer , p.49.
- 42- Robert Ehrich, Norman Mailer, the Radical as Hipster , p.179.
- 43- Nigel Leigh, Radical Fictions and the Novels of Norman Mailer, p.7.

## CHAPTER IV

### **Psychological and physical violence in The Deer Park and An American Dream**

The 1950's and the 1960's were the two decades that saw Mailer flourish as the advocate of dissent and rebellion against the prevailing forces in the American society. His exploration of the violence endemic in America is based on the socio-political atmosphere that reigned during these decades. His concern then lurches from the neurotic conformities of the 1950's into a decade of assassinations, race riots, and political confrontations. Thus his interest in violence varies from the psychological to the physical one, believing that the violence of the totalitarian system which is dehumanizing and threatening to extinguish individualism requires a violent response. So after the publication of his second novel Barbary Shore (1951), which was a literary failure, Mailer looked for a new adventure that would embody his concern about postwar America and the American individual man. He eventually turned to explore more fully the psychological aspects of human experience in the American society during the 1950's, a decade characterized by political turmoil and psychological confusion. In fact, the Cold War period with its threat of wholesale destruction and the communist witch hunts initiated by Senator Joseph McCarthy made Mailer see the political arena as a vast metaphor for the psychic conflicts within the man and the artist. Accordingly, Mailer's aim became the exploration of the conflict between the totalitarian aims of the social and political organizations and the desire of individual persons to achieve personal ambitions and dreams. The Deer Park (1955) came as an

account of the complicity of the various power structures in the American society that stand against the will of the major characters in the novel who set off on a journey of self-discovery.

The setting of *The Deer Park* is the fictional town of Desert D'Or, a fashionable Californian movie resort outside Hollywood. It is situated on the edge of the desert and it was inhabited in the last century by prospectors who set out to look for gold. This town presents a world where film stars, producers, lovers, pimps, call girls and gamblers converge.

The story starts when its narrator, an ex-serviceman named Sergius O'Shaugnessy, arrives in Desert D'Or. In order to plunge into the life of the town, he feels compelled to lie about his life. In reality, he grew up in an orphanage and as a youth he participated as a flier in the Korean War before being discharged from the Air Force. Yet, he introduces himself in the town as an Air Force pilot whose family is wealthy and lives in the East. After settling in Desert D'Or, Sergius starts his search for new friends by frequenting the town bars. He immediately makes the acquaintance of Dorothea O'Faye, a nightclub singer, and her illegitimate son Marion Faye who lives independently in the town. Marion Faye is the first person to mention the name of Charles Francis Eitel and very soon Eitel becomes the best friend to Sergius in the resort. Charley Eitel is a famous Hollywood screenwriter and director whose story is framed in Sergius's words. When Sergius meets Eitel at the resort, Eitel is making no pictures. He is blacklisted in Hollywood and loses everything because he refuses to cooperate with the congressional committee investigating subversives. Thus, he alienates his motion-picture bosses, Herman Teppis and Collie Munshin, at the studios

of Supreme Pictures and turns from Hollywood hoping that he can recover his talent honestly as an artist.

At this stage, Eitel meets Elena Esposito, Collie Munshin's former mistress, and the love affair with her makes Eitel feel he can conquer his doubts and produce his original script. However, Eitel's work goes very bad and he finally discovers that he cannot perform any creative act without the protective nourishment of Hollywood's fortune and its techniques of filmmaking. As he loses his capacities for art he also loses his capacities for pleasure; that results in the collapse of his love story with Elena who goes to live with the pimp Marion Faye. In the midst of his confusion and despair, Eitel receives Collie Munshin who proposes to make improvements in Eitel's script. He eventually succeeds in persuading him to turn the original script into a Hollywood cliché and a profitable dishonest movie. The final stage in Eitel's experience occurs when he accepts to cooperate with the congressional committee in a second appearance for his testimony. Following his submissive posture, Supreme Pictures announces the return of the famous screenwriter and producer of Hollywood with an original picture. He is finally engaged in the professional routine of his career, and although he marries Elena because he feels responsible for her, he is also engaged in an affair with his ex-wife Lulu Meyers with whom he seeks pleasure.

Running parallel to Eitel's story is the affair of Sergius O'shaugnessy with the sex star and Eitel's ex-wife Lulu Meyers. Sergius tells his own story as he flees the world of brutal facts and wars and seeks refuge in the imaginary world of Desert D'Or looking for inner transformation and more intense feeling. Yet, his affair with Lulu fails and, like Eitel, Sergius is tempted by the commercialism of Hollywood represented by

Teppis and Munshin who try to convince him to sell his life story to the studio in order to make a movie out of it. Sergius rejects the temptation and dedicates himself to becoming a writer. He chooses to retreat from the resort but he is surprised by the visit of two special FBI investigators who try to find out information about his connections at the resort. This incident urges Sergius to leave Desert D'Or with its ills and illusions and go to Mexico, and then to New York where he opens a bullfighting school and pursues his dream of writing. The novel ends when Sergius imagines his friend Eitel sending him a message in which he confesses that writing is the right path toward the affirmation of the self, and that power will, in the future, belong to the personal fulfilment of individuals.

The first impression one gets from the novel is that *The Deer Park* appears as a Hollywood novel as much as *The Naked and the Dead* is a war novel. Michael Millgate defines this type:

*Reality is distorted, human values are inverted or destroyed, and commercialism is always and everywhere the enemy. This is the essential theme of all serious Hollywood novels. It is at the heart of the struggle between Eitel and Teppis in The Deer Park.<sup>1</sup>*

Besides, out of his one-year stay in Hollywood, Mailer's response was an advice to a friend about to spend some time in Hollywood:

*Enjoy Hollywood and keep your detachment... But always bear in mind that don't depend on people who work in Hollywood when the chips are down, because their decisions can never be made on the basis of friendship alone. They have a public life more real than their private life.<sup>2</sup>*

This suggests Mailer's awareness of Hollywood's double standards and its nature as a world built for no other purpose but commercial profits. In reality, Mailer's success in detailing the world of art in Hollywood outweighs any other concern in the novel and yet his interest goes far beyond this limit. Through this world, he attempts to unveil the kind of psychological violence exerted by the power of the public institutions in postwar America with their great demand of deadening conformity. As will be demonstrated later, it is this power that the characters of the novel confront and against which they struggle for self-identification and personal integrity. What is characteristic of Desert D'Or is more its profound sentimentality rather than its immorality; it is a society committed to love which is inextricable from commercialism and conformity. Thus, Mailer is mainly concerned with the trappings of wealth and power in a Hollywood environment. Sergius makes it clear from the beginning that "it was a town built out of no other obvious motive than commercial profit and so no sign of commerce was allowed to appear."<sup>3</sup>

Mailer's description of the setting in the opening chapter reveals the division between the real and the artificial in Desert D'Or. In fact, the narrator's first impression when he enters the bar shows discomfort and uneasiness as he makes the contrast between the outer appearance of Desert D'Or and the internal atmosphere. The bars "were as different from the warm front of Desert D'Or as the inside of one's body is separate from the surface of one's skin" (13). So the artificial and seemingly beautiful appearance of the resort does not reflect the real life characterized by confusion and uncertainty. Although these places are frequented by important people like promoters and tourists whose major aim is seeking pleasure and profit, Sergius remarks: "That

kind of uncertainty got in everybody's conversation" (13). Robert Ehrlich argues that "Desert D'Or possesses an air of unreality and is an example of what Mailer calls the totalitarian American landscape."<sup>4</sup> Ehrlich's idea suggests that Desert D'Or is conceived as the land of sentimental conformity that surrenders to the repressive power of the political structure. Indeed, Mailer describes the town as a community that respects and fears the congressional committee investigating subversives when the officials in Hollywood show their willingness to abandon Eitel who stands for a time against the committee. Eitel himself becomes certain of this truth as he declares to Sergius: "Pictures was not going to protect me from the committee", and he adds that his agent "was even convinced they had encouraged the committee to start on me" (43). So Eitel suffers not only the harassment and aggression of the political institutions, but also the conspiracy of a social structure that tries to bring him down.

In addition, art in Desert D'Or is presented as noting more than the sentimental movies which serve the fantasies of the American public and the officials' ambition to gain wealth. Art is well represented by the head of Supreme Pictures, Herman Teppis, and his son-in-law, the producer Collie Munshin, who want to make from Eitel's screenplay and Sergius's life profitable and commercially viable movies. The idea invites us to believe that art in Desert D'Or is like any commodity to be sold in the market regardless of its creative and artistic values. In this context, Robert Merrill remarks that in *The Deer Park*, "The underlying theme was the war between those who wished to make an idol out of art, the artists, and the patron who sued art for power, the octopus."<sup>5</sup> Merrill's reference to the power of officials as "the octopus" suggests the trappings posed for the artists from which they can not escape or achieve personal

fulfilment. Then honest art is thwarted because its success would glorify individual artists and challenge the commercial aims of the public officials.

In Mailer's *Desert D'Or*, Herman Teppis is presented as the infamous official who embodies more impressively the division between public appearance and private image, and who represents the greed for power that must be achieved by serving the political institutions. Publicly, Teppis has a cheerful respect for traditional values and for society. He once laments to Eitel: "I don't know people who feel respect for society any more. I was a husband for thirty-two years, may my wife rest in peace. I have her picture on my desk" (68). He even claims that the studios of Hollywood are as a big family and he respects everyone working with him. He says to Teddy Pope, an actor,

*I feel the very real affection which all of my stars and starlets feel for me... They think I got a large warm heart, I can never remember a single one leaving this office without their saying, 'God bless you, H.T.' I am a warm individual (253).*

Teppis's seeming embodiment of the qualities of a good man and his faithful devotion to his family and his work assure him a bright public image above suspicion. He tells Teddy Pope, "It don't matter the love I got for my daughter, there's a lot left over for my other family, the big family right here at Supreme Pictures" (254). Nevertheless, Herman's real personality appears in a horrible way when he forces one of his stock girls to engage in fellatio in his office and then he murmurs: "There is a monster in the human heart" (271). Besides, the trappings in his office suggest the typical Hollywood mogul whose major concern is to manipulate others for commercial benefit. In his office there are three pictures: "A famous painting of a mother and a child was set in a

heavy gold frame, and two hand-worked silver cadres showed photos of Teppis's wife and his mother" (252). The air of honest reality in this image is soon shattered by Teppis's campaign to marry Lulu Meyers to a homosexual actor for publicity values and commercial purposes. Robert Nadon, a critic, describes the town's real nature as presented by Mailer through Teppis's image:

*The small town, with its proclaimed morality masking the basically immoral social ethos behind its movie-set like facade, provides the metaphor more appropriate of the human condition than the city with its admitted amoral social ethos*<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, Desert D'Or, through its hypocrite officials, embodies the "double standard" of life in America full of lies and cheats as proclaimed by Mailer in Advertisements for Myself.

*more lies eat into the seed with which we are born. The shits are killing us, even as they kill themselves—each day a few institutional lies from the print of newspapers, the shock waves of television and the sentimental cheats of the movie screen.*<sup>7</sup>

Mailer's statement refers to the power of the media in the American society which is seized by the public officials to diffuse their ideas and influence the public opinion. Mailer insists that all what is shown to the public is far from reality and is intended to serve the totalitarian aims of the system which is intent on violating the individual will of Americans. In this context, Robert Merrill suggests that, "It is America that Mailer

confronts in *The Deer Park*, not just an exotic, atypical community of Hollywood stars, starlets, and executives.”<sup>8</sup>

So Mailer’s critique of the world he creates in his novel refers, in fact, to his distaste of America that succumbed to the social and political power structures during the 1950’s. He even confirms:

*We have grown up in a world more in decay than the worst of the Roman Empire, a cowardly world chasing after a good time.... But chasing it without the courage to pay the hard price of full consciousness..... We’ve tried to cheat the heart of life, tried not to face our uneasy sense that pleasure comes best to those who are brave, and now we’re a nation of drug-addicts, of homosexuals, hoodlums.*<sup>9</sup>

Mailer reveals that the American system with its demand of conformity produced psychopaths and perverts who lack the necessary courage to achieve self-identification. In confronting this “sentimental land”, the three central characters in the novel -Eitel, Sergius and Marion Faye – are the most concerned with the struggle between the public and the private, between society and the individual in the American society.

Charles Francis Eitel appears in the beginning of the novel as an honest artist who refuses to cooperate with the congressional committee. Thereby he draws the admiration of Sergius after he reads for him the transcript of his first testimony. In fact, Eitel saves his integrity and retains his pride and yet he suffers the psychological effects of being dropped out from his job and the social life. He confesses to Sergius after being black listed, “I was sick about it...I was finding it hard to sleep” (43). So Eitel’s desire for the lure of Hollywood’s wealth and status and his weak posture as a blacklisted man

make of him an easy prey to Munshin's temptation. He eventually accepts to make the dishonest improvements Munshin suggests for his movie script, and thus he allows his art to be sold as a commodity and his identity to be a subject of abuse. Eitel finally feels that he is "One of the peons Collie keeps locked in a hole" (185) and this suggests the idea of manipulation of which Eitel is a victim. The second stage in Eitel's failure occurs when he accepts to testify before the government's committee on a second hearing. After his testimony, he declares to Sergius that it is "the first time in my life I had the sensation of being a complete and total whore in the world...It was dirty work"(292). The term "whore" is a metaphor for the ugliest thing one may do. It suggests the selling of the self and being dishonest and having no pride.

By portraying Eitel's failure in the world of politics and art, Mailer evokes the failed hipster who lacks courage and strength, and who is easily caught in the trappings of the power structures in the American society. Eitel's easy collapse is attributed by Mailer to his wrong conception of life. Mailer states that,

*The sickness of our times for me has been just this damn thing that everything has been getting smaller and smaller and less and less important, the romantic spirit has dried up, that there is almost no shame today like the terror before the romantic. We're all getting so mean and small and petty and ridiculous and we all live under the threat of extermination.<sup>11</sup>*

So, through Eitel's character, Mailer represents the romantic dream he saw failing in the deadening social life dominated by the stifling forces of totalitarianism. Indeed, Eitel's dream is portrayed through his relationship with Elena as he believes that "together each

of them would make something of the other" (110). He is even convinced that "if people were lucky...They would find a mate with the same buried nature and that could make them happy and strong" (121). This idea is profoundly sentimental and shows Eitel's romantic aspirations that his love affair would recapture his lost vitality and success. However, Eitel falls victim to his illusions. As Robert Merrill argues, "Mailer dramatizes Eitel's inability to redeem his past and traces this failure to Eitel's romantic belief that the past can be redeemed without radical change of the self."<sup>12</sup> Merrill's statement suggests that Eitel yearns for growth and success that he believes would come to him as a gift without the inner conviction of the necessity of action. In this context, it seems that Robert Solotaroff touches the core of Mailer's concern as he states that The Deer Park is the work where Mailer is "clearly working his way toward the position that courage is the primary virtue."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Eitel's lack of courage and fortitude to stick to his former convictions and to confront the prevailing forces in society leads to his inevitable conformist posture. Mailer also insists that "we want the heats of orgy and not its murder, the warmth of pleasure without the grip of pain and therefore the future threatens a nightmare."<sup>14</sup> Mailer's view reveals that one must pay for everything he gets in life and a man committed to risktaking and bravery would undoubtedly receive the reward.

While Eitel surrenders to the powers of Hollywood and the congressional committee and fails to create a heroic sensibility, Sergius O'Shaugnessy resists all temptations and escapes the trappings set for him in Desert D'Or. Before being involved in his experiences in the resort, Sergius was a fighter pilot who loves combat. He lacks feeling for people until he discovers the consequences of his bombing missions when he views the burned arm of a Japanese boy. As he realizes the human implications of his

act, he begins to engage in the psychological quest for more intense feeling and awareness. Thus he decides to escape the world of brutal facts, which he describes as,

*A world of wars and boxing clubs and children's homes on back streets, and this real world was a world where orphans burned orphans. It was better not even to think of this. I liked the other world in which almost everybody lived. The imaginary world (52).*

It seems that Sergius's quest has more to do with identity than with pleasure, although he mentions that he goes to Desert D'Or in search of a good time. In fact, he reveals at the beginning of novel that he has spent his past life as an alien when he declares, "I was never sure of myself, I never felt as if I came from any particular place, or that I was like other people" (27). Thus, Sergius seeks refuge in the imaginary world of Hollywood making the shift toward the possibilities for inner transformation. However, his experiences in Desert D'Or are no happier as he soon recognizes Hollywood's manipulations and its artificial way of life. One may also notice that the story Sergius tells about his life can be considered a hint to the artificial environment in which he gets involved. Consequently, he decides to dedicate himself to writing which he considers the right door out of the real world of wars and orphanages as well as the world of depravity and fantasy. Yet, he feels that his search must be carried out far from both worlds. As Barry Leeds remarks, "the social ills which Sergius sees continue to exist, and he, feeling unable to rectify them, leaves America."<sup>15</sup> Sergius's travel to Mexico and to New York, and his interest in bullfighting mark stages in his liberation and justify his rebellious nature. In his analysis of Sergius's character Robert Ehrlich argues that Sergius represents "the sensibility of the existentialist who will create for

himself a life-style that pushes him into direct and emotionally charged contact with the world.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Mailer's character represents his notion of the hipster or the American existentialist who stops listening to the public and professional voices of the land of conformity and believes in the free choice of the individual to create his own identity. The existentialist's aim is to keep wrestling with the prevailing powers in society and to seek out other ways, even dangerous, to test himself against other people. According to Mailer's belief,

*A life which is directed by one's faith in the necessity of action is a life committed to the notion that the substratum of existence is the search.... It is impossible to live such a life unless one's emotions provide their profound conviction.*<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, Sergius embodies the hipster's quality of leading an independent life characterized by action and the search for a way of life acceptable to himself. For Sergius, it is the truly creative world of art that would open the way for him into the secrets of reality out of Desert D'Or where people live isolated in their fantasies and illusions. Sergius eventually realizes, "as I wrote I found that I was stronger, I had survived, I was finally able to keep in some permanent form those parts of myself which were better than me" (338). Sergius's action out of Desert D'Or is directed toward the work of art that comes out from the honest experience of one's selfhood. At the end of the novel, Eitel confirms the idea of reality in the work of art, "I have lost the final desire of the artist, the desire which tells us that when all else is lost, when love is lost and adventure, pride of self, and pity, there still remains that world we may create, more real to us, more real to others" (356). Eitel then urges Sergius to "try for that other

world, the real world, where orphans burn orphans and nothing is more difficult to discover than a simple fact. And with the pride of the artist, you must blow against the walls of every power that exists" (356). Eitel's experiences teach him that all the repressive powers in society that exert violence against individual men wane in the face of an achieved identity through honest and real art. Sergius himself confirms, "No one of them could begin to be a final authority for me" (339). According to Mailer's view, "when every social restraint is removed, man would then prove to be more creative than murderous and so would not destroy himself."<sup>18</sup>

Even so, Sergius's experiences seem to suggest that the fictional and the real are indistinguishable. What appears real in the American society assumes, in fact, its unreal aspects from the hypocrisy and cheats of the different organizations of a mass society. Although Sergius chooses the world of art which he views as real to himself -and perhaps to others because it represents a kind of reaffirmation of the self- this world is still a fictional one and does not correspond to what is really happening in society. It is what Malcolm Bradbury calls "the fictionality of the real."<sup>19</sup> Therefore life in the American society seems more complex to make a distinction between reality and fiction. The only resolution one may undertake is to display a great deal of energy and courage to free one's self from the constraints imposed by the fictional reality of the modern American society.

In addition to the courage and strength Sergius acquires through his experience and with which he manifests his rebelliousness, he absorbs the idea that sex is another arena through which he can achieve his personal liberation. By the end of the novel he hears God's words that "sex was time, and time the connection of new circuits" (356).

This image seems highly personal and apolitical because Sergius puts his trust in sex and moves away from all politics and religion. This idea is manifested twice; in his affair with the Mexican bullfighter's mistress and his relationship with Lulu Meyers. In Mexico, Sergius courts danger and runs the risk of being attacked by the bullfighter. As he declares, "my friends all warned me that it was dangerous", and the bullfighter "might kill me" (333). As regards Lulu, Sergius describes his relationship with her as sadomasochistic; in their first sexual encounter Sergius recalls, "Like a squad of worn out infantrymen who are fixed for the night in a museum, my pleasure was to slash tapestries....Then I could feel her as something I had conquered, could listen to her wounded breathing" (129). Sergius seems to be a soldier fighting a war to prove himself and to conquer his partner. After that he refuses her proposal for marriage because he loves his freedom and because he views marriage as a social constraint upon it. Robert Ehrlich refers to Sergius's attitude toward sex as "vision which points to the hipster's credo of the apocalyptic orgasm."<sup>20</sup> Thereby, Sergius attacks the sexual mores of society based on monogamy and family and seeks the liberation of the self through the apocalyptic orgasm. Sergius declares,

*For do we not gamble our way to the heart of the mystery against all the power of good manners, good morals, the fear of germs, and the sense of sin? Not to mention the prisons of pain, the wading pools of pleasure, and the public and professional voices of our sentimental land. If there is a god... I am sure he says, "Go on my boy. I don't know that I can help you, but we wouldn't want all those people to tell you what to do (356).*

Although Sergius's experiences allow him to grow and to retain the sense of his own power in confronting all the existing powers in society, critics view the end of Sergius as ambiguous. As Robert Merrill remarks, "this whole final episode lacks conviction."<sup>21</sup>

In fact, Sergius carries out his search for a different life-style and he evokes his desire to create his own identity in a world he wants to make. He also struggles to arrive to the "heart of the mystery", and yet he does not reveal its secrets and no one can tell what Sergius is looking for. According to Robert Merrill,

*Mailer dramatizes enough of his narrator's encounter with Desert D'Or and its infamous officials to justify Sergius's retreat from the resort and subsequent search for a different life-style. The end is meaningful but mysterious.*<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, Mailer countered his critics with the idea that Sergius "was the frozen germ of some new theme."<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Mailer leads us to the conviction that Sergius's existentialist posture is not well developed and his subsequent travels to Mexico and New York are intended to be the first step in his search which is still carried on without revealing its final stage. Mailer seems to be intent on developing fully his existentialist character that is still frozen in the image of Sergius in his subsequent novels.

Even though, it seems that it is with Marion Faye that Mailer projects a full characterization of certain aspect of the violent hipster whose thinking and behaviour suggest that violence or the temptation to risk violence is necessary to maintain one's personal integrity. As an illegitimate child, Marion is presented from the beginning of the story as an outsider whose past life in the resort defines the extremes which appear later in his life. In his study of Marion's character, Robert Merrill states that "Marion anticipates Mailer's interest in the hipster, the American existentialist."<sup>24</sup> Marion's radical behaviour starts to appear when he deserts his mother and rebels against her Hollywood society.

So, as a pimp and a drug-addict, he continues to live on the fringe of society and refuses to be a subservient to the social or political structures. Marion's first rebellious act as an existentialist is when he refuses a job as an assistant to a well-known executive. He thinks that "to work at a business was to be the slave of a business, and he detested slavery; it warped the mind" (24). Marion is the man who cares too much about his freedom; Mailer shows that he "used it to drink, to push dope on himself, and to race his foreign car through the desert" (24). Marion is one of Mailer's characters who embodies the hipster's qualities as defined by Mailer, "The hipster, rebel cell in our social body, lives out, acts out, follows the close call of his instincts as far as he dares."<sup>25</sup> According to Marion's view of life, "the whole world is bullshit" (25) and everything is phony and to listen to the world is to restrict the freedom of the will. For this reason, he believes that "compassion was the queen to guilt...And life was a battle against sentiment" (156). Therefore, Marion decides to cleanse himself of the world's "bullshit" and forge his own identity by killing compassion and letting loose his violent instincts. Marion's attempts to stifle his feelings of compassion and to follow the call of his instincts result in the growth of his violent and rebellious character that projects the American existentialist. According to Mailer, the American existentialist has "to accept the terms of death, to live with death as immediate danger, to divorce oneself from society, to exist without roots, to set out on that uncharted journey in the rebellious imperatives of the self."<sup>26</sup>

This response appears quite significant and it defines the nature of Marion's quest, which is best indicated by his act of not locking the door of his house. Metaphorically, this act can be explained as Marion's desire to leave himself open to the dreads and to discipline himself into feeling the fear. Besides, in his attempt to teach himself to resist

his emotions, he refuses to give money to Paco, a poor Mexican boy who is in need of a fix, and then he declares, "there was no pressure in all the world like the effort to beat off compassion" (155).

As far as his attitude to sex is concerned, Marion turns to homosexuality and becomes a pimp because he is afraid he would have a sentimental attachment to sex. He believes that, "no one ever loved anyone except for the rare bird, and the rare bird loved an idea or an idiot child. What people could have instead was honesty, and he would give them honesty" (152). Marion's idea is that life must be dominated through the exercise of reason and will. And since the world is corrupt, one must be honest enough to accept one's vileness because man's faith in love is just an illusion. Mailer then explains Marion's sexual need in the following statement: "the drama of the psychopath is that he seeks love. Not love as the search for a mate, but love as the search for an orgasm more apocalyptic than the one which preceded it. Orgasm is his therapy."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Marion's need for the apocalyptic orgasm turns eventually into an obsession with the brutal and painful aspects of sexuality. It is this orgasm that defines the psychopath's character. Marion reveals to Sergius,

*You find a hundred chicks, you find two hundred. It gets worse than dull. It makes you sick. I swear you start thinking of using a razor. I mean that's it.... Screwing the one side, pain the other side. Killing. The whole world is bullshit (25).*

Marion is this kind of man, a rebel who embodies the existentialist's quality of continuous search for a different less corrupt way of life. He believes that the world

“belonged to the slobs, and the slobs hid the world with words” (314). The reference is made to the politicians who tend to produce verbal justifications for the threat of military destructive power. Therefore, Marion foresees and longs for a coming destruction, which would erase the rot of modern civilization. He insists, “let it come for all everywhere, just so it comes and the world stands clear in the white dead dawn” (332). The idea suggests purity but in a nihilistic way, and because Marion views the modern world and its civilization as rotten, it seems appropriate that he finally involves himself in a road accident that eventually leads him to prison.

As regards Marion's end in the story, critics suggest different views. Tony Tanner remarks that, “it is obviously imperative somehow to exit from the unreality of Desert D'Or but the book suggests that Marion has taken the wrong door out.”<sup>28</sup> Tanner's idea suggests that Marion's end can be regarded as a defeat as he fails to achieve his goal of self-identification and he is seen actually exchanging the prison of Desert D'Or for a real prison. However, Robert Merrill argues that, “Marion's defeat is his victory. His story is a thematic inversion of Eitel's”, and he adds that “Marion has begun a search less self-defeating than his quest for an omnipotent will.”<sup>29</sup> In fact, Marion is unlike Eitel who has lost the desire to search and who he has chosen the easy way to prestige and success. Marion's search, however, will be carried on from prison and his former experiences in the resort will serve as a guide in his journey. Indeed, Marion's view of prison is that it represents a new way in his search for a viable self. He admits, “I need a year like that. More education” (324). Moreover, on his way to the real prison, his final words are not those of a defeated man, “I have the feeling I'm just getting on to it” (329).

While in *The Deer Park* Mailer presents his characters as crippled by the powers of society and their response does not fully correspond to the hipster's energetic desire to purge their hatred and violence, in *An American Dream* (1965) he achieves a full projection of the violent and murderous character who dramatizes the mood of the age. Psychological violence in *The Deer Park* is transcended in the 1960's by physical violence in the form of murder and sexual abuse. A full decade after the publication of *The Deer Park*, American history has moved toward apocalypse with such events as political assassinations, race riots and violent political confrontations between left and right which were all inflamed by the war in Vietnam and followed by anti-war demonstrations. Mailer's best account of the age is given in one of *The Presidential Papers* essays:

*Our history has moved on two rivers, one visible, the other underground; there has been the history of politics which is concrete, practical, and unbelievably dull...And there is the subterranean river of that concentration of ecstasy and violence which is the dream life of the nation.<sup>30</sup>*

Since Mailer was able to be in touch with both lives, he intended in *An American Dream* to go deep into the subterranean river to explore the violence that resulted from the pressures of the surface level of American life.

The story of *An American Dream* is set in New York City in contemporary America and is told by its narrator, Stephen Rojack, whose personality and state of mind are reflected in the novel's opening chapter. He is a Harvard graduate and a war hero who suffers the traumas of war. His war exploits single him out for public

office, and he is soon elected to Congress at the age of twenty-six. His public personality is also known as a professor of existential psychology at a university in New York, a television talk-show host, and an author of a popular book on the psychology of the hangman. Stephen Rojack meets Jack Kennedy and seduces his girl, Deborah Caughlin Kelly, the daughter of Barney Oswald Kelly who owns part of the third largest trucking firm in the Midwest and the West. Because of the vision of treasure and her father's power connections, Rojack marries her thinking that this will help him become a president.

After eight years of marriage and experiences in the worlds of politics and of bourgeois society, Rojack feels that he is an actor and a tool in the hands of power manipulators. He eventually realizes that he must depart from politics and kill his wife who represents that larger collective world that suffocates him. In her apartment where Deborah lives after their separation during the last year of their marriage, Rojack finally strangles her. With Deborah dead lying beside him, Rojack feels liberated and relieved as if the murder were an act of rebirth.

At this moment, he transcends the aggressive drive in himself and goes to the German maid's room where he tries to purge his violence. In Ruta's room, Rojack joins her in her sexual play and she immediately proves responsive to his sexual abuse. Coming back to Deborah's room, Rojack decides to throw her out the window and onto the street claiming to the police that she committed suicide. In the precinct, he finally escapes punishment as the death is reported as suicide. After that he drops out of respectable society as he casts off his old identities as professor, author, and television talk-show celebrity. Then he goes down to the underworld struggling for rebirth.

The first stage in his search for a new life is his romantic involvement with Cherry, a white Southern girl and night club singer in the Lower East Side. In Cherry's apartment in this lower part of New York, Rojack experiences true love although Cherry has previously been around with other men, including Deborah's father Barney Kelly and her last lover the black singer Shago Martin. On one occasion, Cherry's ex-lover Shago Martin comes to the apartment and attempts to kill Rojack. In a fight Rojack throws him out and then goes to meet his step-father in his high-standing apartment on Park Avenue, the fashionable Uptown New York. There he learns more about Kelly's figure; his Mafia connections, his control of politics and his involvement with CIA. More shocking to his knowledge is Kelly's confession that he has had desire for his daughter Deborah, and he suddenly proposes to Rojack a ménage à trois with Ruta who, like Cherry, has been one of his conquests.

When the image of Shago Martin coming back to Cherry jumps to Rojack's mind, he hurries out to save her. At his arrival he discovers that Shago Martin is beaten to death in Harlem by a gang of hoodlums and Cherry is brutally murdered in her apartment. After this incident, Rojack leaves New York, both its lower and upper levels, and then leaves the United States altogether. In his trek through Central America, he heads for the jungles of Guatemala and Yucatan where he has the chance at independence beyond the powers of the oppressive institutions and the threats of the lower level of life.

Mailer's novel *An American Dream* is about the dissolution of the self in the modern American society. In order to deal with this issue, Mailer proposes the exploration of the subconscious self of the individual which has a direct impact on the conscious mind. Stephen Rojack is the hero who carries Mailer's concern about the

American individual and his relationship to the existing powers in modern America. Rojack's primary commitment to a life in which he has wasted his individual self and compromised his ideals for the opportunities of acquiring wealth, prestige, and political power, results in the threat for the extinction of his soul. Thus he starts his struggle to maintain his personal integrity believing that violence is undeniably necessary to the survival of his soul and equally necessary to free himself from his passive relationships to institutional powers. Although he holds several positions of higher status and he is the husband of a millionaire's daughter, he confesses that, "I had my fill of walking about with a chest full of hatred and a brain jammed to burst."<sup>31</sup> After eight years of marriage and experiences in the world of politics, Rojack recognizes himself as being a failure. He says, "I remained an actor, my personality was built upon a void...I wanted to depart from politics before I was separated from myself forever" (14). In fact, when Rojack enters the world of Deborah and her father in an attempt to gain political power he finds himself much more its prisoner. Rojack's original desire for self-fulfilment represents, indeed, the earlier American Dream of Success which he views as having no further meaning in the reality of modern America. Thus he is inflicted with an incurable sickness which can be redeemed only by violence. Joseph Wenke remarks that, "one is impressed with the depth of Mailer's conviction that there is most certainly a correspondence between the American body politic and the physical, psychological and moral well-being of each American citizen."<sup>32</sup> The correspondence is provided throughout the novel as Mailer attempts to highlight the effects of the totalitarian system on Rojack's physical and psychic state.

In order to discover the origin of Rojack's sickness and the motives for committing a violent crime, it is worth exploring the various conditions in the American

society responsible for such insanity and violence. In fact, Mailer makes his protagonist move through four different worlds; war, politics, the presocial world and sexual experience. In each world he encounters different forms of violence and death. At the beginning of the novel we discover Rojack as a man who still suffers the traumas of the Second World War as he kills four German soldiers. Yet he recognizes that the war is waged by unseen impersonal forces that use human beings as machines to achieve certain objectives. Rojack's words are quite revealing when he says, "I did not throw the grenades on that night on the hill under the moon, it threw them, and it did a near-perfect job" (11). After having experienced the mystery of death during the war Rojack realizes that his experiences in the American civilian life is no happier.

The world from which Rojack decides to run away in search of a new life is represented by the world of Barney Oswald Kelly and his daughter Deborah. In this world love is non-existent and life is based on petty power plays and empty incestuous sexual games. Tony Tanner describes the world of politics in which Rojack gets involved by stating that, it is "like an unreal distraction in which the real private self is swallowed up in a fabricated public appearance."<sup>33</sup> This confirms Mailer's idea that the individual identity is annihilated and the personal desire for self-fulfilment is thwarted by the forces of a mass society committed to keep on artificial public appearances. Barney Kelly is the representative figure of that public world, he confesses to Rojack,

*It doesn't matter what is done in private. What is important is the public show-it must be flawless. Because public show is the language we use to tell our friends and enemies that we still have order enough to make a good display ( 205-206 ).*

So the crisis in modern American society stems from the struggle between a fabricated social reality and the individual man. The individual initiative is submitted to the threat of cowardly conformity and deadening totalitarianism represented by the various political structures in which Deborah and her father hold influential powers. The world of the Kellys is centered on Park Avenue in Uptown New York, and is characterized by the extraordinary and nameless political powers that Barney Kelly wields. Indeed, the Kellys are involved in a power web with lines reaching the White House, the CIA, the Mafia and unspecified spy agencies. In her relationship with Barney Kelly, Cherry comes to discover this truth and she tells Rojack that Kelly owns "some of Las Vegas...the mob did very special jobs for him. Very large intricate jobs. Some of it was overseas" (152-3). Cherry insists that "in Vegas...they were the big dogs of the Mafia" (152).

When Rojack enters this realm driven by his faith in the original American dream, he finds himself trapped in its version of reality and manipulated by its coercive resources. One of these resources is the media which represents the public discourse Rojack decides to reject :

*I had learned to speak in<sup>a</sup> world which believed in the New York Times: Experts Divided on Fluoridation, Diplomat Attacks Council Text, Self-Rule Near for Bantu Province...New Drive for Health Care for Aged. I had lost faith in all of that by now (39).*

Besides, Rojack agrees with the idea of the head of the psychology department that the newspapers in which Rojack used to write are "termites eating at the very substance of western civilization" (127). The idea suggests the destructive power of the press which believes in collective action and hides reality with lies. In this context one may find an

analogy between the lies of the newspapers in this novel and “the cheats of the movie-screen” in *The Deer Park* to which Mailer refers as “the shits.”<sup>34</sup> Both means project a society subjected to totalitarianism and conformity and on which Rojack and O’Shaughnessey turn their backs.

Moving to Kelly’s apartment in Waldorf Towers, Rojack experiences similar infliction which intensifies his sickness. Indeed, the internal atmosphere suggests death even though the furniture is composed of very expensive antiques and art works that may impress anyone visiting such a bourgeois place. Rojack describes the place as a jungle with “the sound of vegetation working in the night...the room was suspended about us like the interior of a cave” (207). The image in this description gives a sense of decay and rot which come in contrast with the superficial fashionable appearance of such a place. Tony Tanner argues that,

*Although the novel takes place in contemporary America through the use of metaphor it opens on to every kind of presocial reality—the jungle, the forest, the desert...This metaphorical activity in the writing is so insistent that it provides a dimension of experience as real as that provided by the very detailed documentation of settings in contemporary New York.*<sup>35</sup>

Mailer’s aim seems quite clear as he attempts to uncover the real image of life of power manipulators who wear beautiful and attractive disguise for public appearance. This aim is achieved artistically through a language rich in metaphor. The cave, for instance, indicates a kind of ugly uncivilized life while the working of vegetation in the night suggests the trappings set for individuals in the jungle.

Moreover, the presence of Barney Kelly and his agent Eddie Ganucci stresses more the sense of death and oppression emanating from the world they direct. Kelly’s evil powers extend to having sexual desire for his daughter Deborah. This image recalls

Herman Teppis's character who leads a double life in Hollywood; between a good public appearance and a private life of a typical mogul. Like Kelly, the ageing Ganucci is the cancerous agent who is viewed as the subservient of the political power structure. His wealth is gained through the exploitation of others because he starts as a poor man who makes money "on dope and prostitutes and dropping wops into boiling asphalt" (196). This is why he declares that "the dead are concrete. They're part of the sidewalk. That's the way it goes" (197). Ganucci's declaration reveals his brutality and lack of compassion for human beings who are obliged to serve as tools to make people like Kelly and Ganucci rich and powerful.

Given the view of Joseph Wenke that Mailer's work explores the relationship between the oppressive political conditions and the individual's state of being, Rojack is presented as the voice of an American who suffers both psychically and psychologically the totalitarian effects in modern American society. Joseph Wenke also states that, "totalitarianism and cowardly conformity actually produce cancer. This represents the sense of equation in Mailer's use of illness as metaphor."<sup>36</sup> In fact, when Rojack enters the world of politics he starts to develop the symptoms of an unbearable sickness which tortures his body and soul. He declares, "the tension which develops in your body makes you sicken over a period", and he compares his suffering to "carrying a two-hundred-pound safe up a cast-iron hill" (15). Besides, Mailer draws on the disintegration of Rojack's personal qualities which would assure his ascent to power and which are no more viable in the new reality he discovers. In the world of politics Rojack loses everything, and, as he declares, "I could feel what was good in me going away perhaps forever...my courage, my wit, ambition and hope. Nothing but sickness and dung remained in the sack of my torso" (19). Physical sickness here seems

inextricable from the psychological one and both suggest the tormented and tortured mind and body of Rojack who can no longer bear the coercive forces that threaten his existence as a human being. He reveals his suffering when he says, "a pain gripped me in the angle between my shoulder and my chest, a pain so bright it gave promise of severing the nerve—there is nothing to save me but the pain itself" (183).

Nevertheless, Rojack does not surrender to the forces that cause his sickness and which are intent on possessing his soul and violating his individual will. As a result of the sickness he endures, Rojack becomes attracted by death and the means by which death is caused. It seems that Rojack wants to confront the world of death in which he gets involved with a violent criminal act that would redeem his sickness. Rojack does not deny that "murder I had known was there for a long time" (14). Instead of committing suicide on the balcony at a cocktail party, he withdraws and he tells himself, "you haven't done your work" (18). In fact, the act of suicide represents for Rojack a cowardly act which suggests his failure. Yet, Mailer wants to project the hipster's qualities of energy and restlessness into his protagonist's character. Rojack must struggle for his survival and the only way to achieve his goal is to kill. Joseph Wenke argues that,

*The metaphorical significance of the murder depends upon its being interpreted realistically while at the same time suggesting that the act itself is not simply good or evil but both good and evil—undeniably murder and undeniably necessary to the survival of Rojack's soul.<sup>37</sup>*

That is why Rojack becomes convinced that "murder, after all, has exhilaration within it...murder offers the promise of vast relief" (15). Indeed, Rojack resorts to killing which he views as a redeeming cure to his sickness and an effective means to extricate himself

from the society that tortures him. This step out of society is marked by his murder of Deborah because she represents the world of trappings and manipulations that imprisons his soul. When he finally murders her, Rojack declares "I had killed in my lover that violent brutish tyrant who lived in Deborah" (54). In fact, the murder can be viewed as having two major goals. First, Rojack wants to liberate himself from a destructive woman who represents the whole power structures of the Kellys and from the image of reality imposed by her coercive world. Second, he intends to purge the hatred and sickness that wire his soul.

Although Deborah comes from a bourgeois society and she is expected to be a dutiful wife and to embody the moral values of a respectable upper class society, she is described by Rojack as a brutal and unfaithful woman:

*She was a great bitch...I tell you in shame that for those eight years I could point with certainty to only five bonafide confessed infidelities by Deborah: she had indeed announced them to me, each a transition, a curtain to each act in a five-act play (15-16).*

The image in this description reveals the artificial way of life Rojack leads with Deborah; it is like acting in the theatre and nothing seems honestly real. Rojack discovers in this life that, "her voice was a masterwork of treachery...It may have been the voice of a woman you could not trust for an instant" (24). Deborah is, indeed, like her father; she is the woman who displays the evil image of American society which is deceitfully treacherous and distrustful. Deborah's murder, then, makes Rojack feel relieved and released from the large prison of psychological violence as if the murder were an act of rebirth: "I am feeling good, as if my life had just begun" (41). Rojack is

at last free when he opens the door to another world which he can see at the moment of strangling his wife. Rojack describes the world he glimpses,

*On the other side of the door, and heaven was there, some quiver of jewelled cities shining in the glow of a tropical dusk, and I thrust against the door once more...And crack the door flew open...I was floating. I was as far into myself as I had ever been and universes wheeled in a dream (34).*

It seems that Rojack makes his belief in the original American dream awaken again and he is ready to take a leap into the new realm. The image of this world recalls the attempt of Sergius to find the right door out of Desert D'or. Both Rojack and Sergius are characterized by great energy and courage to step out of conventional society and search for a world in which they would achieve self-fulfilment.

In moving from the fashionable Uptown New York to both Harlem and the Lower East Side, Rojack ventures into a new kind of power area and enters a strange underworld where the supernatural, the irrational and the demonic are interwoven. In *An American Dream* we find a lot of references to evil, magic, demons which work through the individual. Although Rojack experiences intense moments of love and happiness with Cherry in the lower level, he feels that he is invaded by those strange forces and supernatural powers. He acknowledges, "I had come to believe in spirits and demons, in devils, warlocks, omens, wizards, and fiends, in incubi and succubi" (39). Rojack believes that these forces are engaged in a war to possess the individual's soul, and he confirms that, "God is engaged in a war with the Devil, and God may lose" (208). This statement echoes Mailer's existentialist theology which is revealed in an interview. He says "I am an existentialist who believes there is a God and a Devil at war with one another...We exist as some mediating level between them."<sup>38</sup> According to

Tony Tanner, "the implications of this are potentially pessimistic, for it reduces man to an incidental point of intersection of warring supernatural powers, a helpless pawn in a larger battle, susceptible to voodoo, desperate for grace."<sup>39</sup> In fact, Rojack's involvement in a demonized world of invisible powers, superstition and magics offers a naturalistic image in which the individual man submits to forces beyond his control. However, it might seem that naturalism applies more to political, social and natural forces such as the Kellys, CIA and Mafia. That is why Tony Tanner explains Mailer's use of another stylistic device more appropriate to deal with the strange invisible powers. He argues, "if it is a larger mystery then Mailer will try to meet it with his rhetoric of myth, demons and dread."<sup>40</sup> This refers more precisely to the surrealistic mode of writing which attempts to go into the depths of one's subconscious and to explore those dark hidden areas of the mind. So Rojack feels again that he is trapped in another power area which wires his desire for love and freedom.

Moreover, in the Lower East Side and Harlem, where Rojack experiences passionate love with Cherry, he comes to discover that authentic passion is unseparable from authentic violence and death. Mailer describes this area of New York as being full of threats, danger and manipulations. Tony Tanner remarks that in the darker atmosphere of the lower level of New York, Rojack experiences "a regression to the very primitive mode of life."<sup>41</sup> In fact, when Rojack leaves the established society of the upper level, he moves to the slum area whose image is given in Rojack's words, "the stench of slum plumping gave a terror of old age...Going up those stairs I was no more a lover than a soldier crossing enemy land" (110). The description seems to reflect a bleak social reality of a pre-civilized world that might be regarded as being responsible for all the social deviances in this area. Indeed, Rojack finds himself

pursued by criminals and obliged to fight for his life when he is attacked by the black Shago Martin. Besides, his relationship with Cherry is foredoomed for Cherry is brutally murdered in her apartment. As a result of going through these experiences in the underworld where everything is free from the control of the constituted power of law, Rojack realizes that the lower level of American life seems also violent and threatening. While violence in the civilized society is exerted by the totalitarian authorities to gain more power, violence in Harlem is generated by the hard socio-economic conditions and is used as a reactionary means to confront an unjust world. Both worlds actually lead to the extinction of man's individual soul and Rojack does not find them wholly liberating.

The moment of crisis for Rojack occurs when he goes to the Waldorf Towers on Park Avenue with the conscious intention of keeping the appointment with Barney Kelly. As he is travelling there he hears the subconscious voice telling him, "go to Harlem...if you love Cherry, go to Harlem" (184). At this moment, Rojack experiences the greatest dilemma; whether to follow either of the two levels of consciousness, the rational or the demonic, the formal resolution of reason or the formless urges of dream. The two levels represent indeed the two parts of New York, the civilized society and the dark depths of Harlem. Rojack's uncertainty as on which part he must rely to maintain his identity is explained in Mailer's statement, "we find ourselves in an existential situation whenever we are in a situation where we cannot foretell the end. Some of these situations are grave."<sup>42</sup> This is reflected in Rojack's confusion as he wonders, "when voices came, how did you make the separation?" (180). So Rojack is an existentialist who cannot make a decisive choice and yet he must display a great deal of

energy and courage to save his integrity, and to escape the trappings set for him in the American society.

When Rojack finds that the lower level of life in Harlem has its own way of trapping people, he resolves that going to Kelly's apartment is the equal of going to Harlem. Rojack is caught between two deadly forces, "I was caught. I wanted to escape from that intelligence which let me know of murders in one direction and coercive of visits to Cherry from the other" (225). Thus he decides to get away from both worlds looking for the most primeval area he can find on the whole American continent. Rojack starts his exodus by leaving New York, the city which has once carried his dream, and heading for the jungles of Guatemala and Yucatan. In Las Vegas, where he stays four weeks before getting ready to move on, he walks out in the desert looking back at the city: "there was a jewelled city on the horizon, spires rising in the night, but the jewels were diadems of electric and spires were the neon of signs ten stories high" (237).

In fact, Rojack has the vision of a jewelled city on two occasions; while he strangles his wife and in his union with Cherry. On both occasions this indicates the original creative American Dream of self-fulfilment which Rojack believes he can achieve in New York. Nevertheless, the dream of heaven fades away and Rojack's primal "jewelled city" turns into an artificial and neon reality that shines deceptively in the desert. So Mailer's aim is centered on giving the real deceitful image of the American society which is in reality the graveyard of all individual dreams. Given his experiences in New York, Rojack's response to Las Vegas seems identical to his view of the city which has buried his "dream." Las Vegas is like New York, it is a city of corruption and violence and the place where men like Kelly and Ganucci make their

money. Rojack recalls Cherry's statement that "in Vegas...they were the big dogs of the Mafia" (152). Rojack also senses the threat of violence and criminality in Las Vegas as he realizes that, "if anyone wished to shoot me, he might have me here" (237).

Rojack is then convinced that to achieve his liberation and to hold on to his identity he has to take a leap into a new area existing beyond the alternatives offered by modern America. Although Rojack states this new area, Tonney Tanner finds that the novelty in his new experience remains ambiguous for, as he argues, "Rojack is a man who has to live at the edge...Yucatan is, one feels, as temporary a destination."<sup>43</sup> Therefore, it seems that the true heavenly city designed by Mailer for his hero can never be achieved in reality and is a private vision glimpsed only in the depths of imagination. This idea is best articulated in one of the most significant scenes in the novel. In fact, Rojack's walking round the parapet in Kelly's apartment and being able to keep his balance on the edge symbolically suggest that he manages to achieve some degree of liberation from the coercive powers of two worlds. It is this ability which allows him to move on and yet the end is still ambiguous. Mailer refers to Rojack's third realm in *Cannibals and Christians* as he asserts,

*Perhaps we live on the edge of a great divide in history and so are divided ourselves between the desire for a gracious, intimate, detailed and highly particular landscape and an urge less articulate to voyage out on explorations not yet made. Perhaps the blank faceless quality of our modern architecture is a reflection of the anxiety we feel before the void.*<sup>44</sup>

As Rojack is caught between the modern architecture that stifles his own identity and his feeling of loss and emptiness, he feels the need to go on explorations into the individual psyche searching for the dream city of the future. Joseph Wenke's following

statement seems quite relevant to Rojack's experiences, "as long as there is apparently no way to express a solution to the problem experience remains fragmented."<sup>45</sup>

In dealing with the experiences of Rojack in the plot Mailer meets the situation of Rojack in the different worlds with his changing style. When the protagonist plunges into the world of politics and the police, Mailer employs a basically documentary style characterized by empirical descriptions and conventionally realistic dialogues. The best example of this style appears when the police ask for the medical report of Deborah's death after the autopsy. The medical report is given in realistic style with an empirical description of the cause of the death based on scientific explanations. Then when Rojack ruptures with this world and enters the presocial and supernatural one, Mailer seems to make use of a language full of religious, superstitious and magic references and rich in metaphors. The good instance of the confrontation of styles appears when Rojack is interrogated by the police about Deborah's death. Rojack gives his own version of the death by declaring that Deborah feels haunted by demons that drive her to commit suicide. The policeman says, "I don't know how to put demons on a police report" (62). This implies that the police report represents a style which credits only empirically perceived facts while Rojack believes that this is a narrow diction that has become a cliché. Tony Tanner explains Mailer's extension of the empirical realistic style to incorporate the demonic by stating that, "it reflects Mailer's sense of his own struggle with available, inadequate literary styles."<sup>46</sup> So in *An American Dream* Mailer shows his ability to deal with Rojack's new experience in Harlem linguistically by breaking out of the old existing styles. However, Mailer does not exchange one style for another lest he would be its prisoner. In fact, he wants to combine both the demonic and the political, the inner and the outer experience. As

Rojack walks on the edge of the parapet where two worlds meet to remain unclaimed by both worlds. Mailer walks on the edge where two styles meet without being fully committed to any one.

As far as sexuality is concerned, Rojack is involved in various sexual experiences which are directly tied to his vision of the "jewelled city" and his desire to hold on to his identity. Mailer's views on sex in *An American Dream* are based on two major concepts. The first is related to the role of men and women in the struggle with the devil. According to Mailer, "sex is the mirror of how we approach God,"<sup>47</sup> and in Rojack's words, "God is engaged in a war with the Devil, and God may lose" (208). The second concept refers to the sexual act as existentially liberating and it alludes to the apocalyptic orgasm requisite to the hipster's character. Accordingly, Mailer points out that there are two sides in human nature: the masculine and the feminine. While the masculine corresponds to the creative striving force, the feminine is the passive side whose demonic powers may threaten man's existence in his struggle to come to terms with his manhood. Mailer states that, "man was a spirit of unrest who proceeded to become less masculine whenever he ceased to strive."<sup>48</sup> Mailer goes further in his desire for defeating the "feminine" as he asserts that, "men look to destroy every quality in a woman which will give her the powers of a male for she is in their eyes already armed in the power that she brought them forth."<sup>49</sup> So Mailer sees women as being already powerful as they are closer to eternity than men and they hold satanic powers that are intent on extinguishing men's masculinity. These ideas are dramatized in *An American Dream* in such a pervert and violent manner that made Mailer the target of feminist critics.

In the novel, Deborah is viewed by Rojack as the devil's daughter and even making love to her is painful because of her demoniac non-procreative quality. Since Deborah herself believes that demons possess her, her union with Rojack is childless because children are God's reward for good sex. Mailer affirms in *The Prisoner of Sex* (1971), "the sex act, and the production of children, is our most profound form of affirmation. We carry out our responsibilities to God with our good sex, and the children who result are God's blessing."<sup>50</sup> So after the loss of the child Deborah conceives, Rojack feels that he gets away from God and ransoms his soul to the Devil because of the dominance of the demoniac forces emanating from his wife.

More striking in Rojack's sexual experience with his wife is Deborah's attempt to deprive her husband of his sense of male sexuality when she confesses her infidelities and she keeps taunting him with bitter remarks. Rojack tells the police, "What does a wife ever accuse a husband of? She tells him one way or another that he's not man enough for her" (61). So Rojack finds in Deborah the demoniac dismissal of his manhood which reaches its climactic point in the scene of murder. Indeed, Rojack loses the sense of his own power when Deborah "drove one powerful knee at my groin...and missing that, she reached with both hands, tried to find my root and mangle me" (33). Thus Rojack resorts to violence and kills her to maintain his masculinity because he embodies Mailer's credo that "masculinity is not something given to you, something you're born with, but something you gain."<sup>51</sup> By killing his wife, Rojack is then driven to the field of force which is based, among other things, on the affirmation of his male sexuality. This is why Rojack draws a parallel between violence and sexuality, as he believes that, "murder offers the promise of vast relief. It is never unsexual" (15). As

Deborah's murder is related to her role in the threat of depriving Rojack of his reason of existence, the killing of the first German boy in the battlefield is also given a sexual implication through homosexuality. In fact, Mailer's view of homosexuality seems no different from the idea of Judith Fetterly who affirms that, "homosexuality is not seen as an equal sexual relation between two men but rather as a situation in which one man is used as a woman."<sup>52</sup> When Rojack discovers the German soldier's sexual drive, which represents a threat to man's existence, he kills him to rid the world of a homosexual who is sexually female:

*A great bloody sweet German face, a healthy spoiled overspoiled young beauty of a face, mother-love all over its making...blood and mud like the herald of sodomy upon his chest, and I pulled the trigger as if I were squeezing the softest breast...still a woman's breast...and the shot cracked like a birth twig across my palm, whop! (11).*

In his analysis of Rojack's act, Andrew Gordon argues, "Rojack is attempting to eradicate the part of himself that he cannot tolerate...the mama's boy...the foul, anal homosexual."<sup>53</sup> By killing the boy Rojack wants to affirm his manhood and to eliminate the feminine side in himself through beating off compassion for homosexuals. It is finally important to note that the connection between Deborah's murder and the killing of the boy is achieved through the "crack" Rojack hears in Deborah's strangled throat which echoes the "whop" of his gun shooting the boy. Likewise, Rojack's sexual assault on the German maid Ruta is significant in his attempt to overcome his anxiety over his sexual identity. Rojack calls Ruta a "Nazi" making reference to the killing of the German soldiers as if sexuality suffuses killing. Besides, Rojack's sexual performance with Ruta can be qualified as a search for the apocalyptic orgasm which would lead to his salvation and liberation. According to Jessica Gerson, man's desire

for a woman is not only for her role in the sexual act, but she is also his link with the universe, and through her he can come close to God and receive his grace.<sup>54</sup> Rojack, Making love to Ruta, allows "a minute for one, a minute for the other, a raid on the Devil and a trip back to the Lord" (46). By doing so, Rojack appears as a warrior who struggles for his liberation from the Devil's forces, and yet, he is not ready for the grace of God and the fulfilment of a perfect good orgasm. Indeed, the one kind of intercourse is procreative while the other is the reverse. Although the details of Rojack's practise of sodomy and his violent assault on Ruta might appear offensive to many, Tony Tanner's interpretation seems closer to Mailer's objective in the novel: "Rojack cannot be sure whether he has broken through to some of the true mysteries of creativity after the sterile world of politics, or he has aligned himself with the satanic forces of waste."<sup>55</sup> Then Rojack's rebirth is not yet achieved and the "jewelled city" he glimpses while strangling Deborah turns into a place in the desert which reflects Rojack's loss and uncertainty. However, Rojack has the vision of the heavenly city on another occasion related to the sexual orgasm he experiences with Cherry. In fact, Cherry offers intense orgasmic pleasure that allows Rojack to earn redemption and forgiveness for his earlier sins. Rojack's salvation is achieved when he and Cherry conceive a child that comes as a reward from God for their good sex. Nevertheless, Rojack's momentary happiness is submitted to the forces he encounters in the lower world where Cherry is murdered.

In addition, Rojack's violent struggle for his masculinity is portrayed in the scene of the fight with Shago Martin in Harlem. Following Shago's provocative comment, "up your ass, mother fuck" (171), which suggests the threat to be sexually female, Rojack's reaction comes too violent and sexually suggestive,

*I took him from behind, my arms around his waist, hefted him in the air and slammed him to the floor so hard his legs went, and we ended with Shago in a sitting position, and me behind him on my knees, my arms choking the air from his chest as I lifted him up and smashed him down...I got a whiff of his odor which had something of defeat in it, and a smell of full nearness as if we'd been in bed for an hour (171-2).*

Therefore Rojack's struggle against conventional society and its sexual mores can be viewed as violent acts of liberation rather than acts of adjustment. Grace Witt notices that in his protagonist, "Mailer retained the courage and individualism of the frontiersman, added sex as the most important aspect of existence and coupled sex with the violence of the bad man."<sup>56</sup> It is on this basis that Mailer has attracted the attention of critics and reviewers more than any other postwar American writer.

In fact, Mailer's negative presentation of women characters in his novel and his attitudes toward sex have made him open to the charges of feminist literary critics, such as Kate Millett and Shulamith Firestone. The emphasis in their criticism has often been political in the sense that they have expressed their outrageous feelings of injustice and have attempted to raise women's political awareness of their oppression in male fiction. In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett describes Mailer as the prototypical male chauvinist and an "advocate of genocide."<sup>57</sup> In discussing the major acts in *An American Dream* in which Rojack murders his wife and sodomizes the maid Ruta, she unleashes her rage:

*Mailer appears to find in Rojack a symbolic figure whose crime is diagnostic of conditions in American society. But the condition appears to be simply a hostility between the sexes so bitter that it has reached the proportions of a war waged in terms of murder and sodomy...Mailer has created in Rojack the last warrior for a curious cause, none other than male supremacy.<sup>58</sup>*

Kate Millett is also upset for she regards Rojack as "the first hero as homicide to rejoice in his crime and never really lose his creator's support."<sup>59</sup> Millett believes that the male domination which pervades the sexual descriptions in the novel is rooted in the patriarchal culture. Shulamith Firestone's criticism in *The Dialectic of Sex* is also based on the notion of patriarchy neglecting thus other social and economic forms of oppression in society. Taking sides with Millett, Elizabeth Hardwick overlooks Mailer's craftsmanship and concentrates on the subject-matter against which she has led the moral outcry. Indeed, she condemns Mailer for his portrayal of an unpunished murderer who is involved in many scenes of violence and sexual perversion. She describes the novel as, "a fantasy of vengeful murder, callous copulations and an assortment of dull cruelties...*An American Dream* is a very dirty book...the environment of the book is made up of a crippling wife-hatred, degrading sexual boasting."<sup>60</sup> As a reaction to Millett and Firestone's criticism, Michele Barrett, a Marxist feminist, argues that patriarchal culture is by no means responsible for the presentation of female characters as oppressed. The process is more complex and it includes elements related to the economic system, systems of education and the state, the cultural processes and the nature of gender identity.<sup>61</sup> Barrett stresses mainly the role of the material conditions in history in shaping the kind of relationship between male and female. Besides, Joseph Wenke disregards the idea that Rojack escapes punishment arguing that he actually pays for the act of murder but not in legally retributive terms. He states, "the novel does dramatize a form of divine retribution, for in committing murder, Rojack has attracted the attention of the gods, exposing himself to an invasion of magical forces that is finally overwhelming."<sup>62</sup>

In addition to the feminist criticism, Mailer's revolutionary ideas concerning violence, sex and power, urged many other critics to accuse him of projecting his own obsessions upon the nation. Alfred Kazin points out that Mailer's "fantasies and ideas broke into the texture of every fiction he now wrote...Mailer succeeded in imposing his personal sense of things."<sup>63</sup> It seems that such charge is derived from Mailer's use of material from his personal life especially after he has acknowledged in an interview, "I wanted a man who was very much of my generation and generally of my type...his psychic density, if I may use a private phrase, would be equal to mine and so I could write from within his head with some comfort."<sup>64</sup> Accordingly, some reviewers regarded the novel as an autobiographical work reflecting many aspects in Mailer's life. Malcolm Bradbury defines *An American dream* as "an obscene, semi-autobiographical novel told in the first person by Stephen Rojack."<sup>65</sup> Robert Solotaroff seems more precise when he suggests that,

*The real hero of An American Dream is Stephen Rojack-Norman Mailer: both were Harvard graduates, former members of the Progressive Party, television celebrities...Mailer transformed his stabbing of Adele Morales, his second wife, into the murder of Deborah by Rojack.*<sup>66</sup>

However, Mailer countermands these critics by suggesting that while he wishes the problems he dramatized in the novel were merely personal, he insists that his exploration of Rojack's individual psyche is intended to be an examination of the American psyche. Mailer states, "since each American is implicated into the problems that beset America, the details of anyone's life, when rendered with sufficient imagination and craft, can represent the life of the nation."<sup>67</sup> Mailer insists that his descriptions of life in the American society have validity primarily because they are

rooted in reality, and although the concern in *An American Dream* is drawn on a single identity, the novel is meant to dramatize the national mood of the sixties which Mailer describes as apocalyptic.

The connection between Rojack's personal experiences and American life appears in Rojack's allusion to John Fitzgerald Kennedy in the novel's opening paragraph: "I met Jack Kennedy in November 1946. We were both war heroes, and both of us had just been elected to congress" (9). In fact, Mailer's reference to Kennedy in the novel can be traced back to his interest in this personality as an American hero. Kennedy represented for Mailer the revolutionary political hero and a man of action who had the ability to change American history and move the country in a liberal direction. Mailer expressed his appraisal of Kennedy by stating, "Jack Kennedy had a revolutionary effect on American life and all variety of ferment grew out of his image."<sup>68</sup> Kennedy seemed, in short, to be the symbol of the American dream of success and self-fulfilment which Rojack pursues in the novel. Unfortunately, the dream was shattered after the assassination of Kennedy and this tragic incident came as a shock to the American psyche with its traumatic impact on America's perception of itself. Critic F.D. McConnell was the first to see the significance of the assassination in Mailer's work:

*If the assassination of Kennedy was, as it appears more to have been, the signal public disaster in the American imagination of the sixties, then no writer registered the force of its trauma more immediately or accurately than Mailer, it is surely not accidental that the year of the assassination saw Mailer's return to the novel with the publication of An American Dream...a heavily ironic title, and one intimately related to the assassination and its aftermath. For the "Dream" is of violence, murder, vengeance, and rape... An American Dream, in fact, takes the form of a mirror image of the Kennedy assassination, for if the nightmare forces of repressed violence were unleashed, Mailer gives us, in the fable of*

*Rojack, a picture of an equally successful man's willing descent into the same spiritual maelstrom- which implicitly, is the maelstrom beneath all our lives.*<sup>69</sup>

The novel is seen by McCormell as a reflection of the national discord and the violence set free by the assassination of Kennedy. Rojack<sub>e</sub> is one of the figures in Mailer's fiction who embodies the post-Kennedy national nerves and traumas, for he sees the dream of liberal idealism failing and totalitarianism gaining ground in American society. The title is quite ironic, for the dream of heaven turns into a nightmare with the streak of violence it releases in the land and the sickness it causes to individual men. As a result, the American hero seeks a new dream that would take place in the depths of the inner self instead of the American reality.

Moreover, the tragic events in Dallas had a profound and pervasive impact on the cultural context out of which *An American Dream* emerged. When considering the effects of the totalitarian system in the post-Kennedy era, one may notice Mailer's artistic response to the national sickening in his attempt to confront the demonic forces felt by many Americans. He states,

*Suddenly he was dead, and we were in grief...now we were going mad... Certainties had shattered, now the voice of our national nerves (our arts, our events) was in a new state, morality had wed itself to surrealism...we had an art of the absurd; we had a moral surrealism.*<sup>70</sup>

So the national sickness, which imposed a constant threat of death and violence, resulted in the possibility of a deadening refuge into madness and psychic breakdown that become integral to Rojack's experience in the world of supernaturalism. His rejection of empirical realistic discourse must be looked at as an unavoidable refuge into madness and a consequence of the failed dream in reality. Thus, Mailer believes that the

national trauma of late 1963 and its impact on the individual psyche have imposed surrealism and existentialism as the best modes of expression in a world that was threatening, insecure and uncertain. In this context, Mailer's statement reviewing Oliver Stone's film *JFK* is equally significant in establishing the connection between Kennedy's demise and the sickness every American felt. He wrote, "no afternoon in the recollection of our lives is equal to Nov.22, 1963, and in its aftermath we lost our innocence."<sup>71</sup> Indeed, the American individual man is seen as no more than a man who respects the traditional morality and is pervaded by romantic aspirations and limitless ambitions. He is now, after Kennedy's death, a corrupt and wicked man who dwells into the world of magics and devils and acts as a bad man in response to the world of death and violence. Besides, it is remarkable that the most outstanding embodiment of evil in the novel should be named Oswald Kelly; this stresses the impact the assassination had on the novel. M.Glenday suggests, "Rojack is as unable to escape Kelly's signature, 'the viscera of death', as Americans to deny Lee Oswald his indelible signature upon their history."<sup>72</sup> In describing Oswald Kelly's character, Mailer intends to show his evil creature with the ability to enforce the assassination of a president. Rojack tells himself, "I didn't know where his power ended" (255), but he actually knows that he is a manipulative force in the New York police, CIA and the Mafia.

Finally, it would be fair to say that *The Deer Park* and *An American Dream* display two major forms of violence, psychological and physical. Although Sergius, in the first novel suffers psychologically, he escapes the oppressive world of Desert D'Or searching for his identity without resorting to any form of violent confrontation or reactionary violence. Rojack, whose sickness and psychic overload drive him to commit a crime, ends like Sergius by setting out on a journey in the depths of his own

subconscious in search for a viable self. Both characters are confronted with the repressive American social and political power structures which have a profound and pervasive impact on their individual psyche. It is then through the exploration of the inner self and the examination of the subconscious that Mailer attempted to discover the origin of violence in the individual's character. Even though Mailer's presentation of violence in *An American Dream* seems more offensive and exaggerated to many readers and critics, it appears finally as nothing more than a preparation for more serious and apocalyptic national swing to violence. This is what Mailer's subsequent novels, especially *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, tend to reflect.

## Notes

- 1- Quoted in Robert Merrill, Norman Mailer Revisited (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992) p. 38.
- 2- Stated in Michael Glenday, Norman Mailer (London: Macmillan press, 1995) pp.12-13.
- 3- Norman Mailer, The Deer Park (London: Abacus, Little, Brown and Company, 1997) p. 11. Subsequent references to the novel are from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text
- 4- Robert Ehrlich, Norman Mailer, the Radical as Hipster (New Jersey: The scarecrow Press, 1978) p. 45.
- 5- Robert Merrill, Norman Mailer Revisited, p. 38.
- 6- Quoted in Robert Ehrlich, Norman Mailer, the Radical as Hipster, p. 45.
- 7- Norman Mailer, Advertisements for Myself (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1992) p. 23.
- 8- Robert Merrill, Norman Mailer Revisited, p. 42.
- 9- Norman Mailer, Advertisements for Myself, p. 23.
- 10- Robert Merrill, Norman Mailer Revisited, p. 51.
- 11- Richard G. Stern, "Hip, Hell, and the Navigator: An interview with Norman Mailer", in Norman Mailer, Advertisements for Myself, p. 283.
- 12- Robert Merrill, Norman Mailer Revisited, p. 53.
- 13- Quoted in Robert Ehrlich, Norman Mailer, the Radical as Hipster, p. 49.
- 14- Norman Mailer, Advertisements for Myself, p. 23.
- 15- Quoted in Robert Ehrlich, Norman Mailer, the Radical as Hipster, p. 50.
- 16- Robert Ehrlich, Norman Mailer, the Radical as Hipster, p. 45.
- 17- Norman Mailer, Advertisements for Myself, p. 341.
- 18- Quoted in Robert Ehrlich, Norman Mailer, the Radical as Hipster, p. 10-11.

- 19- Malcolm Bradbury, The Modern American Novel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) p. 158.
- 20- Robert Ehrlich, Norman Mailer, the Radical as Hipster, p. 50.
- 21- Robert Merrill, Norman Mailer Revisited, p. 44.
- 22- Ibid.
- 23- Norman Mailer, Advertisements for Myself, p. 362.
- 24- Robert Merrill, Norman Mailer Revisited, p. 46.
- 25- Norman Mailer, Advertisements for Myself, p. 363.
- 26- Richard G. Stern, "Hip, Hell, and the Navigator: An interview with Norman Mailer", in Norman Mailer, Advertisements for Myself, p. 283.
- 27- Norman Mailer, Advertisements for Myself, p. 347.
- 28- Tony Tanner, "On the Parapet", in Laura Adams (ed.), Will the real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up? (New York: Kennikat Press, 1974) p. 126.
- 29- Robert Merrill, Norman Mailer Revisited, p. 50.
- 30- Quoted in Tony Tanner, "On the Parapet", in Laura Adams (ed.), Will the real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up?, p. 129.
- 31- Norman Mailer, An American Dream (London : Flamingo, Harper Collins Publishers, 1994) p.15. Subsequent references to the novel are from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text.
- 32- Joseph Wenke, Mailer's America (Connecticut : university press of new England, 1987) p.16.
- 33- Tony Tanner, "On the Parapet", in Laura Adams (ed.), Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up? , p.130.
- 34- Norman Mailer, Advertisement for Myself, p.23.
- 35- Tony Tanner, "On the Parapet", in Laura Adams (ed.), Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up?, p.131.
- 36- Joseph Wenke, Mailer's America, p.16.
- 37- Ibid. p.131.

- 38- Laura Adams, "Existential Aesthetics : An Interview with Norman Mailer", in Michael J.Lennon (ed.), Conversation with Norman Mailer (Jackson : University Press of Mississippi, 1988) p.213.
- 39- Tony Tanner, "On the Parapet", in Laura Adams (ed.), Will the Real Norman Mailer Stand Up? , p.134.
- 40- Ibid., p.141.
- 41- Ibid., p.134.
- 42- Laura Adams, "Existential Aesthetics : An Interview with Norman Mailer", in Michael J.Lennon (ed.), Conversations with Norman Mailer, p.213.
- 43- Tony Tanner, "On the Parapet", in Laura Adams (ed.), Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up? , p.138.
- 44- Norman Mailer, Cannibals and Christians ( New York : Dial, 1966) p.235.
- 45- Joseph Wenke, Mailer's Ameriaca , p.17.
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## Chapter V

### **American Neuroses and Linguistic Violence in Why Are We In Vietnam?**

By the time Mailer published An American Dream, the country was heating up in protest over Vietnam. It was obvious that Mailer would take part in the anti-Vietnam movement knowing that he had already rejected all arguments in favor of American intervention in South East Asia. In his involvement in this movement, Mailer flatly rejected the anti-communist line advanced by Johnson's administration and he hardly believed that the liberal cause was the real motivation behind the interest in Vietnam. Mailer, who became a major participant in the national swing to violence at home and abroad, moved to action and accepted to give a speech at the Vietnam Day Rally organized at the Berkeley Campus of the University of California on May 2, 1965. In it he harshly expressed his opposition to American involvement in the Vietnam War. When Mailer decided to write a novel about this war, he wanted to find a new language that would probe the roots of America's involvement in Vietnam and which would be in opposition to all conventional modes of expression.

The novel is the narrative of an eighteen-year-old Dallas boy named D.J. Jethroe who gives an account of a hunting expedition launched by Dallas corporate executives who go to Alaska to shoot grizzly bear. The hunters are led by the narrator's father, Rusty Jethroe, a powerful brutal Texan businessman. Enjoying his farewell party on the eve of his departure for Vietnam, D.J. narrates the events of <sup>the</sup> Alaskan bear hunt. He is accompanied in this odyssey by his friend Tex Gottfried Hyde, the son of a Dallas rich undertaker. After imagining an interview between his mother and his psychiatrist in

which she complains about her son's behaviour, D.J. launches his attack on his father. Rusty is in charge of an enormous corporation which manufactures deodorant and plastic cigarette filter, and he is conditioned to defend Americanism and the American established power structures. D.J. does not accept his father's mind and rejects the environment in which he is brought up.

When the party hunters move out of Dallas towards the northern wilderness the engaged in a grotesque holiday of blood with helicopters, portable radios, field glasses, elephant guns and smaller arms. The hunt is conducted in a modern manner with the most advanced technological weapons. The group spends several days slaughtering the wild animals of Alaska like wolf, caribou, mountain goats and ram. In the meantime D.J. and his father break from the group and follow a giant bear in the wilderness and shoot it after having suffered its resistance and the danger of its crazy attack. Once the hunt is over, D.J. and his father Tex decide to set off alone into the wilderness to experience the pure uncorrupted mystery of the north with its ice peaks and lights. When the two boys climb the mountain covered with snow they see a wolf on the ridge. Sensing the threat of an attack, they kill it and witness the treat of an eagle that starts to eat the dead wolf. After a while, they witness another incident when a bear reaches a cattle of caribou and catches a calf by slamming the big teeth through the muscles of its back. D.J. feels that his view of innocent unspoiled nature becomes different; indeed there is no peace in nature. By the end of their adventurous expedition, D.J. receives a message from God which urges him to go out and kill. Thus D.J. and Tex go back to camp and it will be two years before they are off to take part in the Vietnam expedition.

Why Are We in Vietnam? Offers a studied image of America at war with itself and an image of its own madness that was responsible for the war in Vietnam. However,

the novel appears so problematic in the sense that it would seem difficult to find the connection between the violent neuroses of the novel's characters and the violence of America in Vietnam. In fact, apart from the novel's title, the explicit reference to Vietnam or the war is deferred until the last lines of the book. Therefore, critics have attempted to decode the novel's implications and to find out the relationship between the Alaskan hunting expedition and the American military intervention in Vietnam. For instance, Laura Adams suggests, Mailer uses "hunted animals as a metaphor for the Vietnamese"<sup>1</sup>, and Philip Buftis argues that "the hunting party is the American military in miniature."<sup>2</sup> Michael Glenday, on the other hand, seems more explicit as he states that, "as the wild animals are mutilated by the firepower, the narrative's allegorical coordinates seem straightforward."<sup>3</sup> According to these views, the book seems to be an informing vision concerning the American neuroses responsible for the bellicose strain in Vietnam. The issue is dealt with allegorical terms given the explicit psycho-political context suggested in the novel. If we are to believe that the hunting party that descends into the northern wilderness equipped with modern firearms and technological hunting methods to destroy wild animals represents the American army in the jungles of Asia slaughtering the people of Vietnam, then we must analyze how Mailer managed to answer the question posed by the title of the book.

Perhaps there is no other American writer whose non-fiction writings and journalism explain his novels as well as Norman Mailer. In fact, his essays in *Cannibals and Christians* (1966), his part history-part novel, *The Armies of the Night* (1968), and his Berkeley Speech, are the most important material in the subject of America and Vietnam. In addition to the critics' views, Mailer's ideas are highly important for they provide a thorough analysis of the forces in America which have prompted him to write

Why Are We in Vietnam? And which have made the Vietnam war a historical inevitability for America. According to Frank McConnell,

*The book is about Vietnam, so much so that one is led to wonder, in retrospect, if any other American writer could have imaged the real dimensions of that obscene adventure as fully as Mailer... The Vietnam War was the Mailer's heroes... had been prophesying about and preparing us for nearly two decades.<sup>4</sup>*

Joseph Wenke also argues that the novel is "an experiment in excess, an attempt to imitate in prose the roaring madness of America."<sup>5</sup> Mailer was certainly aware of the existence of wild forces in the American society that touched Americans and transformed their creative impulses into devilish powers of annihilation. Thus Why Are We in Vietnam? is an attempt to highlight the various aspects of modern America which were held responsible for the American sickness and America's psychotic lust for destruction. In The Armies of the Night, which is an account of the march on the Pentagon in protest for Vietnam, Mailer points out,

*the country had been living with a controlled, even fiercely controlled, schizophrenia which had been deepening with the years... Any man or woman who was devoutly Christian and worked for the American corporation, had been caught in an unseen vise whose pressure could split their mind from their soul.<sup>6</sup>*

Mailer's view of America is that it is collectively sick and neurotic and this neurosis came out of the worship of technology and the corporation of American business. Indeed, the period of laissez-faire capitalism became something of the past and instead there was corporate capitalism. The latter is defined by Robert Ehrlich as "the marriage of huge profit which huge service, of the teamwork-the individual has become lost in

today's social order where there is a detestation of contradiction and a love of the uniformity."<sup>7</sup> Despite the satisfactory huge production and the great abundance, the country became mad and schizophrenic because of the domination of the oppressive collective fabric of American corporation. In this country, the value of the individual was measured by impersonal forces such as government, business and industry. In short, Americans were regarded as living in a state of "happy slavery". In his Berkeley Speech, Mailer provided an analysis of America that led to blood-letting in Vietnam,

*Our country was fearful, half mad, inauthentic - it needed a war or it needed a purge...We took formal steps toward a great society of computers and pills, of job aptitudes, of psychoanalysis, superhighways, astronauts....where censorship would be manipulated from birth to death. Something in the buried animal of modern life grew bestial at the thought of this great society-the most advanced technological nation of the civilized world was the one now closest to blood, to shedding the blood and burning the flesh of Asian peasants it had never seen.<sup>8</sup>*

Mailer notices two basic paradoxical characteristics of the great American society. One is the general progress Americans enjoyed as a result of the great advances in science and technology, while the other is the denial of the individual self of the American citizen to which Mailer refers as "censorship". This paradox eventually led to the emergence of wild neurotic impulses of a beast that sought a purge through spilling the blood of others.

The representative of corporation land in the novel is the profit-oriented commercial foundation CCCC-and-P directed by D.J.'s father, Rusty Jethroe. Mailer's introduction of the company is absolutely significant in relation to the political context of the novel :

*Jethroe came back to Dallas after spending twelve years off and on moving around the world for Central Consolidated Chemical and Plastic, CCCP being what the boys called it till they found out the red-ass Russians had their Communist Party initials CCCP, so they changed the name- look into the difficulties... They called it Central Consolidated Combined Chemical and Plastic, the new coagulation of title now being CCCCCP or as the team began to say, 4C and P (30).*

The political implication seems quite clear for the country was still believed to be under the threat of communism at home and abroad. The difficulties encountered by communist sympathizers were common practices of the Cold War period and were related to McCarthyism which dominated the national public life during the 1950's. If the foundation does not change its name, the executives would be suspected of being red and would be in trouble. The communist witch-hunt in 1950's America moved a step further to confront communism abroad. So the reference made in the novel to communism is intended to show the government's stated motive behind its intervention in Vietnam which is the fear of losing this country to the Eastern bloc. Yet, Mailer wrote this novel to countermand this idea and provide the real motives that drove Americans to that remote frontier. Mailer confirms this reality by stating in an interview, "you can pretend it's a war to save people from communism but there's a profound hypocrisy at the core there."<sup>9</sup>

The hunting party which is composed of the Dallas corporate executives is the symbol of the corporation of American business and its mentality as much as the embodiment of the political principles that govern the nation. These executives whose oil, money, and greed, make the wheels of industry spin, operate basically on the profit motive and encourage progress through technology :

*These corporation eggzex are full of will, man, they're strong as bulls these hide-ass waspy mules with their silvy rim specs, they want to go...their nose too long, they sniff it up...they tie that nice dry-oiled west point ramrod to their back just like they're a tomato plant on a stick (31.32).*

In this system, it is the will to power that dominates all drives and only the possession of material retains significance. As a leader of the party, Rusty's ceaseless need to prove himself in competition makes him the personification of power and success in a world that worships them. So the hunting expedition led by Rusty and his executive menagerie can be viewed as a fulfilment of the dream of enhancing the power of the corporation land. D.J sees his father as "the cream of corporation corporateness" (29), and in this expedition, "he can't begin to consider how to go back without a bear, he got a corporation mind, he don't believe in nature" (53). Although Rusty destroys the intimate connection between humankind and nature by spoiling its purity and slaughtering its animals, he is more concerned with proving himself in the wilderness for the survival of corporation: "Rusty is fucked unless he gets that bear, for if he don't, white men are fucked more and they can take no more" (111). Rusty appears as an agent who is conditioned to defend corporation and thereby Americanism and its established power structures. For him the bear hunt represents a proof of the superiority and power of the corporation. Tony Tanner refers to the conditions of life in the American society as described by Mailer in the novel,

*Man does indeed despoil the beauties of nature, cuts himself off from its prime mysteries, devotes himself to corporations like the Pentagon, collects guns and contracts cancer, invents helicopters to defoliate and decimate, lives inside the deadening impurities of industrial and mental smog, and is curiously attracted to death.<sup>10</sup>*

Tanner's idea projects the new reality of that "great society", a society that has become sick and cancerous. The society's madness which drives man to kill and destroy is attributed to the threat of the huge and largely invisible power of the machine and the triumph of corporation and technology. These are, indeed, the powers which reduce the function of the individual whose role is strictly limited to working for the benefit of de-personalized collective organizations. Mailer's identification of the corporation is "professional bullshit, that's the secret of the corporation- it is filled with men who are professional bullshit" (52). This shows the corruption of the American power structures that lead to the creation of a sick civilization to which Mailer refers in the novel as "syphilization" (149). In fact, the term suggests a civilization which is inflicted with an infectious disease. Tony Tanner remarks that Mailer has,

*preference for images drawn from diseases...he sees cancer as an appropriate symbol of the forces of death which are gaining on us...the FBI is a faceless plague-like evil force, totalitarianism is a spreading disease, the slow deadening of our best possibilities.<sup>11</sup>*

Mailer's point of view is that any kind of disease is a metaphor for the American totalitarianism and deadening conformity which threaten to extinguish the souls of individual men.

In addition to the threat of totalitarianism, the corporation land relies basically on technology and the tools of electronics to impose its superiority upon man's will. Mailer reveals the insanity of a society that worships technology by stating,

*The new generation believed in technology more than any before it...it had no respect whatsoever for the unassailable logic of the next step: belief was reserved for the revelatory mystery of the happening where you did not know what was going to happen next.<sup>12</sup>*

Mailer's vision is of a world in crisis with a civilization whose ultimate goal is to destroy the mind of the individual. In *Why Are We in Vietnam?* D.J.'s reliance on the transistor to convey his disc jockey message shows his dependence upon the electronic tools imposed on him by a technological society. Besides, the use of modern sophisticated weapons in the hunting like guns, portable radios, and field glasses, suggests the inevitability of war for a nation that has become collectively sick. According to Matthew Grace,

Fascination with firearms and technological hunting methods and the necessity of proving manhood through slaughter are elements in American society which explain the war in Vietnam-like Americans in jungles of Asia, the hunting party descends into the wilderness equipped to destroy any foe.<sup>13</sup>

It is also relevant to bring into focus that the American obsession with weapons made Mailer devote the whole of chapter five to listing different models of arms used in the Alaskan expedition, with details concerning calibers, scope powers, and muzzle velocities. For instance, he mentions that, "Luke got a model 70 Winchester, 375 Magnum restocked and remodeled by Griffin and Howe with a Unertl 2 ½ x scope and that little rifle and cartridge could know down anything" (77-78). As for Ollie, he "has the same gun D.J. has, a factory-bought Remington 721 ... and he got a nice Layman Alaska 2 ½ x scope, D.J., on his side has just done a little stupid ass inconclusive whittling into his Rem 721" (78). It is this interest in firearms that makes war a veritable necessity and Vietnam just another place to go shooting. The ruthless assault is launched not only against nature but against all forms of life and existence in America and elsewhere.

Therefore, in the novel's political allegory, Rusty Jethroe is viewed by critics as president Lyndon Johnson for his war lust and obsession with the policy of overkill. In his hunting expedition, Rusty takes the example for his strategy from the air-raids made by the British on German cities in the Second World War: "the British were right...they were right for once, you don't pinpoint vital areas in a city, you blot it all out, you bury it deep in fire, shit and fury" (85). The strategy of a wholesale destruction and extermination is a characteristic of Rusty's ruthless attack on wild animals which echoes the extermination of people in the jungles of Vietnam. Rusty says, "I like the feeling that if I miss a vital area I still can count on the big impact knocking them down, killing them by the total impact, shock! It's like aerial bombardment in the last big war" (85). Robert Solotaroff finds a more detailed political allegory concerning two characters who belong to the hunting party. He suggests that Bill and Pate are "playing McNamara and Rusk to Rusty's LBJ."<sup>14</sup> Michael Glenday proposes a similar view arguing that, "hunting for bear in the Alaskan wilderness the safari head guide, Big Luke Felinka (is) General Westmoreland to Rusty's LBJ."<sup>15</sup> The general "makes his military disposition, they must be in position to bomb and superblast any grizzer who attacks" (116). This disposition reveals the violence that has historically been a part so pervasive of American character, and which is inherent in the conquest of animals and environment. This image of a violent nation is emphasized through Rusty's consciousness as he realizes that violence and brutality constitute part of the American character. When he witnesses the scene in which an eagle kills a wounded deer, Rusty tells his son,

*It got me so upset to recognize that E Pluribus Unum is in the hands of an eagle...I think it's a secret crime that America, which is the greatest*

*nation ever lived, ...is nonetheless represented, indeed, even symbolized by an eagle, the most miserable of the scavengers, worse than the crow (132-33).*

So the image of the eagle stresses American barbarism and American lust for power which are historically defined through the conquest of the land. According to Mailer, the origin of man's barbarity is nature itself and violence is not brought by man to the unspoiled realms of nature but rather contracted there. When D.J. and Tex witness the savagery of nature as animals kill each other, D.J. recognizes that "nature is just as timid shit as a slum street" (181). In this context, it seems that the book is an evocation of Faulkner's classic story "The Bear" in which the forest is presented as containing danger and violence through the violent animals. Faulkner, however, makes it clear that the unspoiled and untouched nature has its values, wisdom, and innocence, which are systematically destroyed by civilization. This traditional dichotomy between nature and civilization, which is so dear to American literature, is sharply questioned in Mailer's book. Mailer seems to suggest that although man does despoil the beauties of nature and devotes himself to a technological civilization, nature itself is the source of evil and violence.

Moreover, Mailer draws upon the oppressive political factor of conspiracy in contemporary America which generates the sense of uncertainty and anxiety among Americans. Michael Glenday points that, "In a decade in which much American writing was concerned with conspiracy theories, concerned that the nation was controlled by unseen agencies and power, Mailer augments these anxieties."<sup>16</sup> In fact, for D.J. Rusty is just a link in a complex chain of agencies and organizations that control the nation. Thus he is conditioned to serve American bureaucracy and corporation and to defend the American establishment. Looking into his father's eyes, D.J. is reminded of the

theory "which is that America is run by a mysterious hidden mastermind, a creature who's got a plastic asshole installed in his brain whereby he can shit out all his corporate management of thoughts" (36). In his interpretation of this passage, Michael Glenday suggests that Rusty's role in the invisible governing power structures refers to the conclusions drawn in the Warren Commission's report concerning Kennedy's assassination. After having reported that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone, the studies of the commission revealed in 1966 that its investigations were implausible.<sup>17</sup> This conclusion opened the way for public opinion to believe in conspiracy theories which meant that the American life was directed by unassailable unseen forces. In the post-Kennedy age, Americans had no more faith in the established agencies and thus their lives became tainted with uncertainty and an overload of psychic confusion.

The other reference to the impact of Kennedy's assassination on American life is made through the American novelist William Burroughs whose name is mentioned in the novel more than once. D.J.'s mother tells her psychiatrist that for her son, "William Burroughs is now his hero" (14). In fact, Burroughs's ideas in his novel Naked Lunch (1965) inspired Mailer while writing Why Are We Vietnam? This is why Mailer testified on behalf of Burroughs in the Boston obscenity trial of Naked Lunch. Mailer admired this novel for its vision of America that has gone mad because of the collapse of humanist idealism after Kennedy's death and the domination of paralyzing electronics. In Cannibals and Christians, Mailer draws on Burroughs's ideas in a celebrating manner,

*One holds on a computer in some man-eating machine of the future which has learned to use language.... Bombarded by his language the sensation is like being in a room where radios, television sets, stereo hi-fi, a pornographic movie, and two automatic dishwashers are working at once while a mad scientist conducts the dials to squeeze out the*

*maximum disturbance. If this is a true picture of the world to come, then Burroughs is a great writer.*<sup>18</sup>

This image of a world that succumbed to the electronic force of brainwashing and the electronic assault upon the individual's mind and flesh is wholly pessimistic; it echoes the post-Kennedy age of failed humanism. John Aldridge gives an important reference to Kennedy's assassination as he points out that, "it must be more than passing significance that D.J. hails from Dallas, that Eden of assassinations"<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Dallas represents for Americans the end of a dream and the beginning of a nightmare characterized by the grip of totalitarian forces.

In detailing the American fascist mentality which dominated America's national and international affairs, Mailer makes Rusty the embodiment of such mentality which is based on securing Wasp male superiority at home and abroad. According to Rusty, the Wasp patriarchy is threatened by the unholy trinity of ideologies: communism, feminism, and ethnocentrism,

*The Twentieth century is breaking up the ball game, and Rusty thinks large common thoughts such as these: the women are free... the Niggers are free... communism is a system guaranteed to collect dues from all losers, more losers than winners, and out: communism is going to defeat capitalism, unless promptly destroyed (110).*

In fact, these ideas project the image of contemporary America and its history during the postwar age dominated by the totalitarian forces. According to Mailer, "the essence of totalitarianism is that it beheads, it beheads individuality, variety, dissent, extreme possibility, romantic faith, it blinds vision, deadens instinct, it obliterates the past."<sup>20</sup> In contemporary America, women's liberation was considered a threat to patriarchal authority and thus it was thwarted in a nation where variety and expression of differences were negated. Likewise, white racists regarded blacks' emancipation

achieved through the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960's as an expression of dissent and an attempt to define the blacks' identity. The latter is based on defining blacks' history and myth which express the origin of their own culture. Yet, the American totalitarian mentality saw blacks' freedom as an opposition to the mainstream of American life which was based on acting with a sense of purpose dictated by the established authorities. Joseph Wenke remarks that, "one of the major objectives of totalitarianism is to divorce human beings from their connection to the past ... Leaving all of us rootless, our attention fixed only upon the ephemeral pleasures and pains of the present."<sup>21</sup>

Communism, on the other hand, was considered the greatest enemy to American capitalism abroad and to America's stability at home. The attempt to stop the pervasion of communism in America was launched during the fifties with the emergence of McCarthyism. The policy consisted in pursuing people with communist views because their ideas were regarded as subversive. As a result, the communist witch-hunt created an atmosphere of confusion and uncertainty that affected the psychic stability of individual Americans who were driven to the brink of madness. Besides, American supremacy and its outright power abroad were challenged because of the advancement of communism which was gaining ground in different parts of the world. American response to confront the spread of communism and to maintain its control over international affairs was characterized by military interventions in many countries like Cuba, Korea and Vietnam.

Underlying this logic is Rusty's fear that America would be superseded by other nations in taking the lead in the different activities and competitions. In Rusty's corporate mind,

*The yellow races are breaking loose, Africa is breaking loose...the European nations hate America's guts...the white men are no longer champions in boxing, the great white athlete is being superseded by the great black athlete...karate, a Jap sport, is now prerequisite to good street fighting (110).*

It is the kind of reasoning which led Americans to Vietnam to maintain white American superiority and affirm America's identity which is inherently violent and brutal.

D.J., whose consciousness constitutes the narrative basis of the novel, is the product of this society which has transformed his character and has driven him to fight in Vietnam. The narrator resembles Huckleberry Finn in his innocence and his hate of sham, "Huckleberry Finn is here to set you straight" (8). D.J. is pervaded by romantic faith which he sees failing in the shifts of American corporate totalitarianism represented by his father Rusty Jethroe. As an example of his innocence, D.J. refuses to cut himself off from nature's mystical harmonies and to devote himself to corporation. He gets upset when Tex shoots a wolf at the beginning of the hunt, "he was half sick having watched what Tex had done like his own girl has been fucked in front of him" (69). Although he is brought up in the security of a wealthy family and a highly developed environment, D.J. rejects this society and feels contempt for all that is characteristic of it:

*Why for does D.J., have such a total rejection of all the positive elements in his rich secure successful environment scene including social backing, strong sentiment, national roots, loci of power, happy physical endowment (wait till you hear more about that) and clearly individualistic and highly articulated parents?... Anyway, D.J. is up tight with the concept of dread...he has ideas like nobody else (34).*

In spite of D.J.'s rejection of his environment, he relies on an electronic tool which is imposed on him to convey his message. Indeed, he calls himself disc jockey to the world which implies that he is like a radio receiver that picks up all that is characteristic

of the collective American psyche and then transmits them across the country. As D.J. senses the pressures of American corporate totalitarianism, he develops the symptoms of a severe psychic disorientation which are explained to his mother by her psychiatrist, "he (is) recalcitrant, charming, gracious, morally anesthetized, and smoldering with presumptive violence...murder configurations, suicide sets and diabolism designs" (14). In fact D.J. is the image of an America vicious and going mad and displaying contradictory traits because of the pressures of politics and progress. What seems good in D.J.'s character is associated with the evil side of his personality. Mailer points out that, "America is the most dialectical of nations....and the best of our history is coupled as in no other nation with much of our worst."<sup>22</sup>

So in D.J.'s character Mailer dramatizes both the best and the worst of American life and the conflict between them leads to psychic illnesses. Because American reality has failed to live up to the dreams of individuals, D.J. is like Mailer's other characters who experience the problem of identity. The psychiatrist affirms, "I would not call them aggressions so much as identity crises"(15). Mailer also stresses that, "D.J. (is) the grand synthesizer of the modern void" (152). Therefore D.J. tries to strike out on his own and to rid himself of the shits of American civilization by proving himself in the wilderness. However, Mailer makes the identity of D.J. more problematic than the plot of the novel.

Although the novel is not intended to be a study of character because the individual man cannot survive in a world homogenized by technology and mass media and dominated by corporation, the character of D.J. is stressed as being both a critique and an embodiment of the insanity of America.<sup>23</sup> In fact, as first-person narrator, D.J. is the voice of corporation and becomes a perpetrator of violence, as he accepts to be a

combatant in the war. Yet, it is D.J. himself who criticizes and condemns so many of the aspects of American society that drive America to destroying Vietnam. Michael Glendon remarks,

*The main problem with this narrative technique was that although it dramatized such a mentality well through the first-person point of view, it deprived us of a point of view which is detached from and critical of the war and the culture of violence upon which it is based.*<sup>24</sup>

This detached witness is usually provided by the choice of a third-person narrator. To solve this problem, Mailer introduces his narrator with a new identity and thereby D.J. is seen playing with the notion of identity as he addresses the readers, "is this D.J. addressing you a Texas youth for sure or is he a genius of a crippled Spade up in Harlem making all this shit... This is a problem -whose consciousness you getting overlap on the- frequencies" (133). D.J.'s refusal to confirm his real identity may be identified as an ironic self-consciousness of the narrator which is so often used in the contemporary novel as a manifestation of the split of the individual's self in the modern world. In the novel's final paragraph on the eve of D.J.'s departure for Vietnam, Mailer finds it necessary to remind the readers of his narrative device,

*Tomorrow Tex and me, we're off to see the wizard in Vietnam. Unless, that is, I'm a black-ass cripple Spade and sending from Harlem. You never know. You never know what vision has been humping you through the night. So, ass-head America contemplate your butt. Which D.J. white or black could possibly be worse of a genius if Harlem or Dallas is guiding the other, and who knows which? This is D.J., disc jockey to America turning off. Vietnam, hot damn" (208).*

By providing an alternative narrator in the form of the "Harlem Spade" the reader is driven to attribute the whole narration to Harlem rather than to Dallas. Indeed, it is through the Harlem Nigger that Mailer's critique of Texas values and WASP America is

archived. This critical viewpoint suggests the indictment of a country that damns itself by its intervention in the Vietnam war. Mailer's choice of a black narrator seems ambiguous to readers and critics alike. Barry Leeds is one of the few critics who suggests a kind of connection between Mailer and the black identity involved. Leeds proposes, "Perhaps the most reasonable view is to see the Negro narrator as a metaphor for Mailer himself, a hip consciousness standing behind D.J., critical of Texas values and writing from New York."<sup>25</sup> Obviously, a critically detached point of view against WASP America can be provided only by a black consciousness persecuted by the racism of America's white majority. So D.J. is WASP America as seen by Harlem and by Mailer himself, although he criticizes the various myths that propelled the nation into a bloody conflict. Mailer's choice of a black consciousness has certainly a historical background as the decade witnessed a sweeping wave of racial violence, with riots throughout many American cities. Thus the entrenched racism contributed a great deal to relying on a black character to condemn and criticize white America and its governing values. Even though D.J.'s black identity appears to criticize America, D.J. submits to forces much greater than him and turns into evil and a participant in the swing to violence. Robert Solotaroff suggests that, "D.J. is both a critic and a victim of American society. For his unrelenting disc jockey rant is both a critique and an embodiment of the electric insanity of corporate America."<sup>26</sup> Unlike Rojack who leaves for Yucatan because he cannot survive in a society which makes too many demands on his individuality, D.J. finds it extremely difficult to avoid outright complicity in the power structures he opposes. But how does Mailer make D.J. respond positively to the urge to kill and to participate in the political process that results in the denial of personality?

During the initiation rite of the bear hunt, only throttled aggression boil and blast and the psychological sickness of an entire "syphilization" erupts on the surface. Using the most advanced technological hunting methods, the field becomes a battlefield and as D.J. expresses it, "we broke open a war between us and animals" (99). After this experience D.J. and Tex flee from the hunting party and immerse themselves in the raw wilderness. Shortly after they start their journey, they are "on the edge of the snow" (178) to step over for a new experience. So, once more, Mailer's hero brings himself to an edge like Rojack's walking on the parapet to have a new experience that would identify the essence of his existence. However, in stepping over the edge, D.J. ventures into the northern snow where he witnesses the parade of Alaskan wild life featuring the lust for killing. At this moment, D.J. and Tex receive a message that comes loud from beyond. Soon they are involved in communication, "Owned by something, prince of darkness, lord of light, they did not know; they just knew telepathy was on them, they had been touched forever by the North...and the deep beast whispering fulfill my will, go forth and kill" (204). This revelation suggests the grip of the bestial power on human souls, and as Michael Glenday points out, "the novel's metaphysical climax is focused on its proposition that ...America has taken the bestial for the celestial."<sup>27</sup> In fact, the novel's metaphysics is implicitly related to Mailer's existential belief that God and the Devil are engaged in a war for gaining the human soul; Mailer declares that he is "an existentialist who believes there is a God and a Devil at war with one another."<sup>28</sup> The most extravagant in Mailer's theology is what he expresses in his interview with Laura Adams, "what's significant is the idea that God is not all-powerful, nor the Devil, rather it is that we exist as some mediating level between them, you see, this notion does restore a certain dignity to moral choice."<sup>29</sup> In Mailer's view, God and the Devil are

equally powerful and the success of one of them is attributed to the ethical performance of human beings. Yet, Mailer regarded the 1960's as an age of moral decadence; he writes in *Cannibals and Christians*, "The Beatles-demons or saints? - give shape to a haircut which looks from the rear like nothing so much as an atomic cloud. Apocalypse or debauch is upon us...the sense of a last night over civilization is back again."<sup>30</sup> In *Why Are We in Vietnam?* D.J. remarks that, "church is out, LSD is in" (111). In such an atmosphere, the voice of God becomes indistinguishable from that of the Devil. D.J. and Tex hear the Lord speak as Satan and thus they turn into evil and their friendship changes into companionship of killers:

*Tex was ready to fight him to death, yeah, now it was there, murder between them under all friendship, for God was a beast, not a man, and God said, 'go out and kill-fulfill my will, go and kill'...something in the radiance of the North went into them and owned their fear, some communion of telepathies and new powers, and they were twins, never to be near as lovers again, but killer brothers (203-204).*

These final moments in the novel suggest the confusion in the minds of American warriors who are unable to distinguish between the devil and the divine. So they can hear only "the deep beast" speak to them, "you never know what vision has been humping the night" (208). Saturated by the cosmic powers, D.J. and Tex are thus provided with the bestial voltage necessary to send them to military expeditions. Mailer introduces D.J. as having not only done animal murder but "murder of the soldierest sort" (7). This remark is a confession of D.J.'s involvement in the unjust and obscene slaughtering in Vietnam.

The dirty war in Vietnam is not the only obscene thing in the novel; Mailer's language remains a landmark of obscenity in the history of modern American fiction.

Among the many critics of Mailer's work, Michael Glenday acknowledges "the extent to which in both style and subject matter it exposes the neuroses responsible for the bellicose strain in 1960's America."<sup>31</sup> In fact, obscenity in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is one of Mailer's artistic tools used to see through the reality of America that led to Vietnam. Thus the title's question is answered metaphorically through both the subject-matter and the language which refers in reality to the shams and filth of American society and its corporate totalitarian system. D.J.'s violent and offensive diction works within the biological context of the human body and its functions; it is derived from masturbation, oral sex, the anus and excrement. This is what Mailer terms as the "naturally obscene."<sup>32</sup> For instance, D.J. introduces himself as, "I, D.J., for genius, eighteen plus years old, is in fact writing this, then I better stop bullshitting the record and commit a few facts....Release your horny masturbating hand. Engorge your lip. Take a fearsome trip" (28). Mailer also makes his obscene language mixed with technobabble to emphasize the connection between the language and the filth of American technological society. In giving a portrait of his father, D.J. says, "Rusty had acquired a considerable amount of dead ass sticking his brave plunger up all blindly into the cunt-refined wickedness of sophisticated rumps and vaginal radar rays masers and lasers" (40). Rusty is, in fact, the typical embodiment of American technology and the symbol of progress who contributes to destroying all the purity and innocence of the nation. Mailer is even convinced that obscenity is a creative release and the last psychological liberty allowed to the individual; this is why it is feared in corporation and technology land. Indeed, D.J.'s language enables him to communicate an odd sense of the most pervert individuality emerging out of the domination of the collective.

Matthew Grace remarks that the abhorrence of obscenity represents the attempts of the repressive powers to sterilize the brains of the American people.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, Mailer's defense of the obscenity of language used in Why Are We in Vietnam? is based on the following arguments : Mailer felt that he was exploring the hypocritical surface of American public life. Matthew Grace notices that, " American devotion to deodorant, deodorizers.....synthetic and frozen food, and antiseptic forms of entertainment on the clean electronic airwaves, shows a pathological fear of the biological process."<sup>34</sup> So opposition to what Mailer terms the "naturally obscene" is a manifestation of a new totalitarianism that leads to insanity whereas, as Matthew Grace affirms, "sanity resides in obscenity"<sup>35</sup> Second, in defending the obscene Mailer intended to unveil the paradox in America society. In fact, those who opposed the naturally obscene and who attacked the creative obscenity in literature were those who accepted the real obscenity of the war in Vietnam. They were, indeed, "perfectly capable of burning unseen women and children in the Vietnamese jungles."<sup>36</sup> Thus the real obscenity is an expression of violence, depravity and inhumanity and since American society and the war in Vietnam are obscene, only obscene language is the appropriate metaphor to describe them. Besides, Mailer's devotion to obscenity as a stylistic device stems from his belief that the final purpose of art is "to intensify, even if necessary, to exacerbate the moral consciousness of people."<sup>37</sup> So the use of offensive language in Why Are We in Vietnam? is part of Mailer's strategy to make a revolution in American consciousness. It represents an effort to stimulate a moral vision lost in the jungles of Vietnam.

In addition to obscenity, and as an expressive invention, Mailer invokes another strategy in style against the aggressive effects of the mass media and the corporation

land which have made life more and more complex for Americans to bear. Mailer made the novel's style too complex reflecting the complexities created in America by technology, corporation and politics. Mailer argues, "I say create complexities, let art deepen sophistication, let complexities be demonstrated to our leaders, let us try to make them more complex, that is a manly activity."<sup>38</sup> Perhaps just one example can demonstrate the complexity of the novel's style which seems sometimes extremely difficult to understand. When D.J. describes the hunting trip in Alaska he lets loose all the complexities that brutalize him,

*So you can see what a hoedown of a hunting trip it would have been if AL Percy C. alias kid tendonex and Rusty had each been burning up that Alaska Brooks Mountain Range brush trying to light a light of love in big Luke's eye, but AL Percy Cunningham was called off at the last by the Astronquul program hotline into 4C and P because the real hoedown just that week of departure was between Fiberglas and Tendonex to see who was going to get the contract to put a plastic Univar valve and plug into the bottom of the collapsible built-in space suit chemical toilet in the Gemini (Roman Numeral Unstated) which contract is no super huge kettle of lobster shit in volume dollars, but just a reasonable 58 million, although Tex and D.J agree that little Univar plug is First Priority, cause let it malfunction and those astronauts will be swimming in orbits of dehydrated processed food shit (their own—a gritty performance, eh Maurice?) (47).*

In this extract one may find a connection between different things taken from science, politics, history, religion, and philosophy, which seem incompatible and sometimes irrelevant. Yet it suggests the anarchy and the paradoxes that have become so characteristic of modern American society. By adopting this style, Mailer wanted to fight the totalitarian forces of government, business, and mass communication, that tyrannize the individual's soul. Even though complexity is a creative activity, it is employed to make Americans aware of the destructive complexities of American life

which were at the origin of the endemic sickness and madness of the nation. It seemed at the time that the only cure to the sickness was Vietnam. Mailer affirms, “the foul brutalities of the war in Vietnam were the only temporary cure possible for the condition since the expression brutality offers a definite if temporary relief to the schizophrenic.”<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, the central motif in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is the American mania for violent action which Mailer initiated with Rojack in *An American Dream* two years earlier. Rojack’s individual purge of violence is, indeed, predictive of the national purge carried through in South East Asia. It seemed that Vietnam was a further extension of American psychosis attributed to America’s worship of corporation and technology, its moral bankruptcy, its barbarism, and its totalitarian powers of politics and mass communication. Mailer indicts and condemns the modern American civilization by stating that, “We’re pretending to be the deliverers of civilization, so I’d have to say we are psychotic....we’re not only destroying a country, but we’re literally destroying the foliage of that country. We’re destroying God’s work, not man’s work.”<sup>40</sup> In detailing the sickness of this powerful nation, Mailer points to its seriousness partly because of America’s dependence on technology,

*America enters the nightmare of its destiny like a demented giant in a half-cracked canoe, bleeding from wounds top and bottom, bellowing in bewilderment, drowning with radio-transmitters on the hip and radar in his ear, he has a fearful disease, this giant.*<sup>41</sup>

This disease has taken a darkening turn into madness and psychic breakdown that could be relieved only by a bloody purge. Although the nation witnessed sweeping waves of violence and turbulence at home in the sixties like race riots, political assassinations,

and political confrontations, America needed a further purgation which must be carried through in new territories. Mailer states,

*The country needs a purge, a fling, some sacrifice of blood, some waste of the blood of others, some colossal event.... we need an extravaganza to take us out of ourselves, we are Romans, finally, and there is no moral force left among our citizens to countermand that fact. So this war will be a crucial vacation from the morose state of American affairs.*<sup>42</sup>

So the departure of D.J. and Tex for Vietnam seems unavoidable as they are convinced that a brutal war is the only possible cure for the conditions they have experienced in America.

However, in spite of Mailer's argument that America needed "a war for our health"<sup>43</sup> and despite the end of the war, Mailer realized a quarter century later that it seemed there was no miracle cure for the country's neuroses. In fact, the social and political sickness seemed endemic and the causes underlying the disease were various and complex. The American involvement in the Gulf conflict in 1991 was again attributed to the need for a bloody purge and Mailer saw American national grief during the sixties "sliding into the first real stages of fascism."<sup>44</sup> The Gulf war was related more to the American response to the defeat in Vietnam. The American successful involvement in the Gulf conflict was taken as a victory over the nation's unhappy memories of the Vietnam War. This is why Mailer wrote after the Gulf crisis, "America needed to win a war."<sup>45</sup>

## Notes

- 1- Quoted in Michael Glenday, "Norman Mailer" (London: Macmillan Press, 1995) p.103.
- 2- Philip Bufithis, "Norman Mailer", in Jeffrey Helterman & Richard Layman (ed), Dictionary of Literary Biography : American Novelist Since W.W.II. (Michigan: Gale Research Company, 1978) p.284.
- 3- Michael Glenday, Norman Mailer, p.103.
- 4- Quoted in *ibid.*, p.102.
- 5- Joseph Wenke, Mailer's America. (Connecticut: University Press of New England, 1987) pp.122-23.
- 6- Norman Mailer, The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel / The novel as History. (New York : Signet, 1968) p.216.
- 7- Robert Ehrlich, Norman Mailer, the Radical as Hipster. (New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1978) p.176.
- 8- Norman Mailer, "A speech at Berkeley on Vietnam Day", in Cannibals and Christians. (New York: Dial, 1966) p.74.
- 9- Mike Mcgrady, "Why We are interviewing Norman Mailer", in Michael Lennon (ed.), Conversations with Norman Mailer. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1988) p .114.
- 10- Tony Tanner, " On the Parapet". In Laura Adams (ed.), Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Stand up? (New York: Kennikat Press, 1974) p.44.
- 11- *Ibid.*, p. 128.
- 12- Norman Mailer, The Armies of the Nigh , p.87.
- 13- Matthew grace, "Norman Mailer at the End of the Decade", In Laura Adams (ed.), Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up? , p.20.
- 14- Stated in Michael Glenday, Norman Mailer , p.103.
- 15- Michael Glenday, Norman Mailer , p.111.
- 16- *Ibid.*
- 17- *Ibid.*
- 18- Norman Mailer, Cannibals and Christians , p.110.
- 19- Started in Michael Glenday Norman Mailer , p.107.
- 20- Quoted in Joseph Wenke, Mailer's America , p.13.
- 21- Joseph Wenke, Mailer's America , p.13.
- 22- Quoted in *ibid.*, p.3.

- 23- Stated in Joseph Wenke, Mailer's America , p.19.
- 24- Michael Glenday, Norman Mailer , p.108.
- 25- Barry Leeds, The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer (New York: New York University Press, 1969) p. 201.
- 26- Stated in Joseph Wenke, Mailer's America , p.19.
- 27- Michael Glenday, Norman Mailer , p.111.
- 28- Laura Adams, "Existential Aesthetics", in Michael Lennon (ed.), Conversations with Norman Mailer , p..213.
- 29- Ibid., pp.212-13.
- 30- Norman Mailer, Cannibals and Christians , p.2.
- 31- Michael Glenday, Norman Mailer , p.101.
- 32- Stated in *ibid.*, p.103.
- 33- Matthew Grace, "Norman Mailer at the End of the Decade", in Laura Adams (ed.), Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up?, p.18.
- 34- Ibid.
- 35- Ibid.
- 36- Norman Mailer, The Armies of the Night , p.49.
- 37- Norman Mailer Advertisements for Myself (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) p.384.
- 38- Quoted in Philip Buftithis, " Norman Mailer", in Jeffrey Helterman & Richard Layman (ed.), Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Novelists Since W.W.II, p.286.
- 39- Norman Mailer, The Armies of the Night , p.188.
- 40- Mike McGrady, " Why We are Interviewing Norman Mailer's", in Michael Lannon (ed.), Conversations with Norman Mailer, p.114.
- 41- "Norman Mailer Interviewing Himself", in Michael Lennon (ed.), Conversations with Norman Mailer , p.107.
- 42- Norman Mailer, " How the Wimp Won the War". Vanity Fair, May 1991, p.71.
- 43- Mike McGrady, "Why We are Interviewing Norman Mailer", in Michael Lennon (ed.), Conversations with Norman Mailer , p.114.
- 44- Norman Mailer, "How the Wimp Won the War", Vanity Fair, May 1991, p.70
- 45- Ibid., p.71.

## Conclusion

In the light of the national history of the United States during the postwar decades and the pluralistic nature of its people it seems that violence and aggression are unavoidable in the society of such a nation. In a troubled and anxious age when the hot war was immediately followed by a cold one, Americans entered a new historical experience in which an earlier state of innocence had been of the past. In fact, America had survived for more than two centuries with the traditional optimism derived from the "American Dream" which referred, according to Esther Peze, to "a better, richer, and happier life for all citizens of every rank which is the greatest contribution we have as yet made to the thought and welfare of the world."<sup>1</sup> This dream which had been at the background of American literature and which had implied the possibility of equality and endless progress for all Americans turned in the postwar age into a nightmare. It no longer meant unlimited progress but rather unlimited chaos and disorder. In his book American Literature and the Dream (1955), Frederic Carpenter remarks,

*Whether Americans have believed that their new world would progressively achieve a more perfect democracy, or whether they have attacked this dream as delusion, it has determined the patterns of our thinking... The dream has been our distinction.*<sup>2</sup>

It seems that the "dream" has been the destiny of Americans both when they strongly believed in it and when they expressed their disappointment and dissatisfaction as it faded away. Therefore, the growing dissatisfaction with America's betrayal caused a tension between the self and society which emerged from the conflict between reality and illusion. Americans with their different ethnic origins witnessed various experiences and suffered different kinds of repression, persecution and violation of one's individual

self and identity. Hence, a sense of engagement with the terrifying reality in the American society became part of the new spirit in American fiction. In this fiction, the hero lacks a basis to understand his role and to find his way in society. From this existential awareness, violence becomes the only alternative possible to free the self from the surrounding pressures.

In the survey of the fiction written by various minority novelists, one may notice that violence is used as a means of self-actualization and of restoring an identity thwarted by institutional violence. The American society is portrayed as homogenized and characterized by the domination of huge powers of politics, industry, business and mass communication. The heroes appear as existential characters who are restless and lost in the vast modern world and who embrace nihilistic rebelliousness against the strictures society places upon them. The black hero struggles against a racist society that denies his identity as a human being and drives him to aggressiveness to achieve psychological stability and social and political equality. The Jewish hero in Herzog lives in an empty purposeless world in which identity has no value, and it is only through suffering and aggressive behaviour that Herzog tries to identify himself. Flannery O'Connor makes her hero more brutal, even criminal, in his attempt to resolve his identity crisis emanating from the conflict between a traditional world based on religious faith and a modern one dominated by impersonal powers.

By involving himself in the major crises of the postwar period in America, Norman Mailer has gained notoriety as a violent public figure as well as a violent writer. His lifelong obsession with violence and aggressiveness in his writing and his extra-literary activities- acts of public rebellions and civil disobedience, contentious remarks on television talk shows, five tempestuous marriages and belligerent behaviour

on public occasions- have made him a writer to be more read about than read. His view of America is that its institutions-government, business, marriage, the Army- are repressive, oppressive and exploitative, affecting the psychic state of people who resort to violence to resolve their insecurity and uncertainty about their identity. Having himself suffered the agony of a nation being torn apart and battling against the repressive totalitarian nature of its institutions, Mailer's response was to become increasingly aggressive and violent both in public and in print. Mailer's psyche, like his characters' has always been in a state of civil war, confused and uncertain attempting to resolve his identity crisis through aggressive action. In his novels individual man is always struggling against an oppressive power intent on possessing his soul and annihilating his identity: Sam Croft against Mount Anaka, General Cummings against the military bureaucracy, Serguis O'Shaugnessy and Eitel against Desert D'Or, Stephen Rojack against Barney Oswald Kelly, D.J.Jethroe against the corporation and finally Mailer against the Pentagon.

In a changing world and given the movement of the United States toward a more collective and homogenized way of life in which power belongs to impersonal structures, the American individual has become in the last decades of the Twentieth century a subject to more repression and total annihilation. The great advances in technology and mass communication which have led to the so-called "globalization" have certainly engendered other forms of violence in the American society that would obviously find echoes in the fiction of the late Twentieth century America. For instance, the mass-killing rites and the criminal drives of children and adolescents have become the new characteristics of the American society of today. The subject would be of great interest to many literary researchers and it would be worth investigating. In fact, the

phenomenon of violence must be regarded as a very distinctive part of American character and history, since the nation was conceived and born in violence. Historian Arthur Schlesinger remarks,

*We must recognize that the evil is in us, that it springs from some dark, intolerable tension in our history and our institutions. It is almost as if a primal curse had been fixed on our nation, perhaps when we first began the practise of killing and enslaving those whom we deemed our inferiors because their skin was another color, we are a violent people with a violent history, and the instinct for violence has seeped into the bloodstream of our national life.*<sup>3</sup>

Thus one may notice that violence has accompanied every step and aspect of development in America's national history from the colonial period to the present. Historians in America and elsewhere seem to agree that this nation was conceived and born in violence and this instrument has been used not mainly for criminal and disorderly purposes but also for the most honorable ones. Apart from its role in the formation of the nation and the preservation of the Union, violence has been a phenomenon that has characterized the form and substance of American life. It started by oppression against the natives of the New World from whom the European settlers took the land and the phenomenon continued by enslaving blacks. The whole process generated a culture tainted with violence as a major subject for American intellectuals and writers.

## NOTES

- 1- Esther Peze, "Situational Nonsense in Postmodern American Fiction", Costerus, Vol.62, 1987, p.227.
- 2- Stated in *ibid*.
- 3- Arthur, Schlesinger Jr., "The Politics of Violence", in Douglas A. Hughes (ed.), The Way It Is: Readings in Contemporary American Prose (New York: Holt, 1970) p.187.

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## Abstract

The thesis is an attempt to investigate the aspect of violence in postwar American fiction. The study is basically centered on the major novels of Norman Mailer. Following the approach adopted in the analysis, which is a combination of the Marxist and psychoanalytical methods, the first step in the work consists in a survey of the political and socio-cultural conditions in postwar that dominated international affairs. It became the land of unprecedented affluence with a civilization based on science and technology and sustained by capitalism. Therefore, most Americans looked forward to the postwar years with an air of optimism having a strong belief in the traditional American Dream of success and self-fulfilment. Yet, within a brief time such optimism vanished and was replaced by a sense of confusion and uncertainty. America became a land in which the social stratification was based on wealth and advantages. Besides, the outbreak of the Cold War, the constant threat of communism and scientific progress that encouraged the invention of more sophisticated and destructive weapons intensified the air of pessimism and presented a permanent threat to the psychic stability of the American individual. These conditions largely contributed to the prevalence and spread of violence in society and its overwhelming presence in fiction. Regarding the pluralistic nature of the American society, violence is first briefly examined in works of fiction written by representative figures of the major minority groups in America. Being violent and rebellious in his personal life and in writing, Norman Mailer is introduced as the writer who projects the whole of America with its ills and obsessions in his novels. In the novels under examination, violence takes different forms and is generated by various factors and conditions in society. It is either psychological, physical or verbal. In the war novel The Naked and the Dead violence echoes the totalitarian America that emerged after the Second World War while in The Deer Park and An American Dream psychological and physical violence appear as the basic characteristics of the American society during the 1950's and 1960's. The demand of conformity and the threat of the extinction of the individual self incite individuals to resort to criminal acts and aggressive behaviour to restore a lost identity in the modern American jungle. Why Are We in Vietnam? presents the linguistic violence through the use of obscene language that manifests the brutality and criminality of America in Vietnam. From the study of these novels, violence appears as the destiny of America because it transcends the failure of the original American Dream.

## Résumé

La thèse traite le thème de la violence dans le roman américain de l'après deuxième guerre mondiale, le travail est basé essentiellement sur l'étude des romans de Norman Mailer. L'approche adoptée est une combinaison de marxisme et psychanalyse. Ainsi la première étape dans l'étude porte sur les conditions politiques et socioculturelles qui ont caractérisé les États-Unis pendant les années de l'après-guerre. Après cette guerre les États-Unis ont émergé comme une puissance qui a dominé les affaires internationales. La civilisation américaine s'est vue basée sur la science et la technologie et soutenue par le capitalisme. C'est pour cela que les Américains avaient l'air d'espérer pour un futur radieux tout en croyant au rêve américain. Mais le rêve s'était transformé en cauchemar parce que la société américaine est devenue une société fondée sur l'argent et les intérêts. En outre, le début de la guerre froide, la menace du communisme et le progrès scientifique et technologique avaient un effet négatif sur la stabilité psychologique de l'individu américain. Ces conditions ont largement contribué à l'apparition et la propagation de la violence dans la société et sa présence dans le roman. Dans cette étude on traite brièvement quelques exemples de romans écrits par des représentants des différents groupes ethniques tels que les Noirs et les Juifs. Norman Mailer est ensuite introduit comme un écrivain violent et rebelle tant dans sa vie privée que dans ses écrits. En analysant quatre romans de Norman Mailer, la violence apparaît sous différentes formes et est produite par des facteurs multiples dans la société. Elle est psychologique, physique ou bien linguistique. Dans le roman de guerre « Les nus et les morts », la violence reflète l'image de l'Amérique totalitaire qui est apparue après la seconde guerre mondiale. Tandis que « Le parc aux cerfs » et « Un rêve américain » présente la violence physique et psychologique comme des caractéristiques essentielles de la société américaine pendant les années cinquante et soixante. La violence et les actes criminels se sont vus adoptés par les individus pour restaurer une identité perdue. « Pourquoi sommes-nous au Vietnam ? » a pour but de scandaliser la brutalité des États-Unis au Vietnam à travers le langage obscène et vulgaire que tous les personnages du roman parlent. À travers cette étude la violence se manifeste comme le destin inévitable des États-Unis parce qu'elle reflète l'éclipse du rêve américain.

## ملخص

الرسالة هي محاولة لدراسة ظاهرة العنف في الرواية الأمريكية خلال فترة ما بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية. البحث يتناول أساساً أهم روايات الأديب «نورمن مايلر». نظراً للمنهج المتبع في هذه الدراسة و الذي يجمع بين الماركسية و التحليل النفسي فالخطوة الأولى تتمثل في إلقاء نظرة على الظروف السياسية، الإجتماعية و الثقافية التي ميزت الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية خلال سنوات ما بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية. لقد خرجت أمريكا بعد الحرب كأكبر قوة في العالم بهيمنتها على كل الشؤون الدولية و أصبحت تشكل قوة إقتصادية ذات حضارة تعتمد على العلم و التكنولوجيا و تستند على النظام الرأسمالي. لذلك كان معظم الأمريكيين ينظرون إلى المستقبل يتفاؤل كبير لإيمانهم القوي بالحلم الأمريكي. لكن سرعان ما تلاشى هذا التفاؤل و أصبح بديله الحيرة و عدم الثقة. لقد أصبح الإعتبار في المجتمع الأمريكي هو الثروة و المصلحة. إلى جانب ذلك أصبح الفرد الأمريكي يعاني من عدم الإستقرار النفسي بسبب إنعكاسات الحرب الباردة و تهديد الشيوعية و التطور العلمي المذهل الذي سمح بإختراع أسلحة فتاكة تهدد وجوده بالإنقراض. هذه الظروف ساهمت بشكل كبير في ظهور و إنتشار العنف في المجتمع و وجوده في الرواية. و لأن المجتمع الأمريكي متعدد الأجناس و الأقليات فإن البحث يتعرض بإيجاز لظاهرة العنف في روايات لمؤلفين من الجنوب الأمريكي و من أقليات السود و اليهود. بعد ذلك يتم تقديم نورمن مايلر ككاتب عنيف و متمرد في حياته الخاصة و في مؤلفاته و هو الذي عكس أمريكا بكل أمراضها في رواياته. في دراسة تحليلية لأربع روايات لنورمن مايلر يظهر العنف بعدة أشكال كنتيجة لظروف و عوامل مختلفة في المجتمع، فهو عنف نفسي أو جسدي أو لغوي. ففي الرواية الحربية "العاري و الميت" يعكس العنف صورة أمريكا المستبدة التي ظهرت بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية بينما في "حظيرة الأيل" و "حلم أمريكي" يظهر العنف النفسي و الجسدي كميزات أساسية للمجتمع الأمريكي خلال الخمسينات و الستينات. فالتهديد بزوال شخصية الفرد دفع الأشخاص للجوء لأعمال إجرامية و سلوكات عنيفة لإسترجاع الهوية المفقودة في المجتمع الأمريكي. رواية "لماذا نحن في فيتنام؟" تعتمد على العنف اللغوي باستعمال لغة بذيئة لوصف فظاعة الحرب الأمريكية في فيتنام. بدراسة هذه الروايات يتجلى العنف كقدر أمريكا لأنه يعكس إنقراض الحلم الأمريكي.