



# Norman Mailer "Nazí a mrtví" a druhá světová válka

## Bakalářská práce

*Studijní program:* B7507 – Specializace v pedagogice  
*Studijní obory:* 7504R300 – Španělský jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání  
7507R036 – Anglický jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání

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# Norman Mailer's "The Naked and the Dead" and World War II

## Bachelor thesis

*Study programme:* B7507 – Specialization in Pedagogy  
*Study branches:* 7504R300 – Spanish for Education  
7507R036 – English for Education

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## ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

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Studijní obory: Španělský jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání  
Anglický jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání  
Název tématu: Norman Mailer "Nazí a mrtví" a druhá světová válka  
Zadávací katedra: Katedra anglického jazyka

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- 1) prozkoumat válečnou zkušenost autora, která vedla k napsání románu Nazí a mrtví
- 2) zhodnotit odezvu veřejnosti na dílo
- 3) srovnat filmové zpracování románu s literární předlohou.

Rozsah grafických prací:

Rozsah pracovní zprávy:

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: tištěná/elektronická

Jazyk zpracování bakalářské práce: Angličtina

Seznam odborné literatury:

Mailer, Norman. *The Naked and The Dead*. New York: Rinehart and Company, 1948.

Academy of Achievement, "Norman Mailer." Last modified November 10, 2007. <http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/mai0bio-1>.

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Katedra anglického jazyka

Datum zadání bakalářské práce: 19. dubna 2013  
Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: 30. června 2016

  
prof. RNDr. Jan Pícek, CSc.  
děkan



  
PhDr. Marcela Malá, M.A., Ph.D.  
vedoucí katedry

V Liberci dne 19. dubna 2016

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## DEDICATION

First, I would like to thank God for all of His blessings. Secondly, to my family and my friends for being an incredible support system throughout my time in Liberec. This has been the most fascinating and enriching experience I have lived, and I wouldn't be here if I didn't have the most amazing people in the world supporting me day in and day out. Thank you for understanding my decision to study abroad, and for always inspiring me to be the best version of myself. I am only a reflection of the love you give me. Thank you!

“Primero, tengo que darle las gracias a Dios. Segundo, a mi familia y amigos por ser el sistema de apoyo más increíble durante mi tiempo en Liberec. Esta ha sido la experiencia más fascinante y enriquecedora que he vivido, y no estaría aquí si no fuese porque tengo a las personas más increíbles del mundo apoyándome día tras día. Gracias por comprender mi decisión de estudiar fuera, y por siempre inspirarme a ser la mejor versión de mí misma. Sólo soy un reflejo del amor que ustedes me dan. ¡Gracias!”

Verónica Michelle

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all of my professors at TUL for giving me the tools that will help me in my future endeavors. I will always cherish your teachings.

Special thanks to Professor Michaela Mudure, whom I admire incredibly, for not letting me settle, for seeing potential where sometimes I couldn't, and for pushing me to write the best project I possibly could. Your advice on literature, work, and life will stay with me forever.

## ANNOTATION

Analysis of Norman Mailer's best-seller, its relation to World War II, and the movie by the same name.

## KEY WORDS

Norman Mailer, World War II, Pacific, Philippines, Raoul Walsh, The Naked and the Dead, novel, film, best-seller, American, literature.

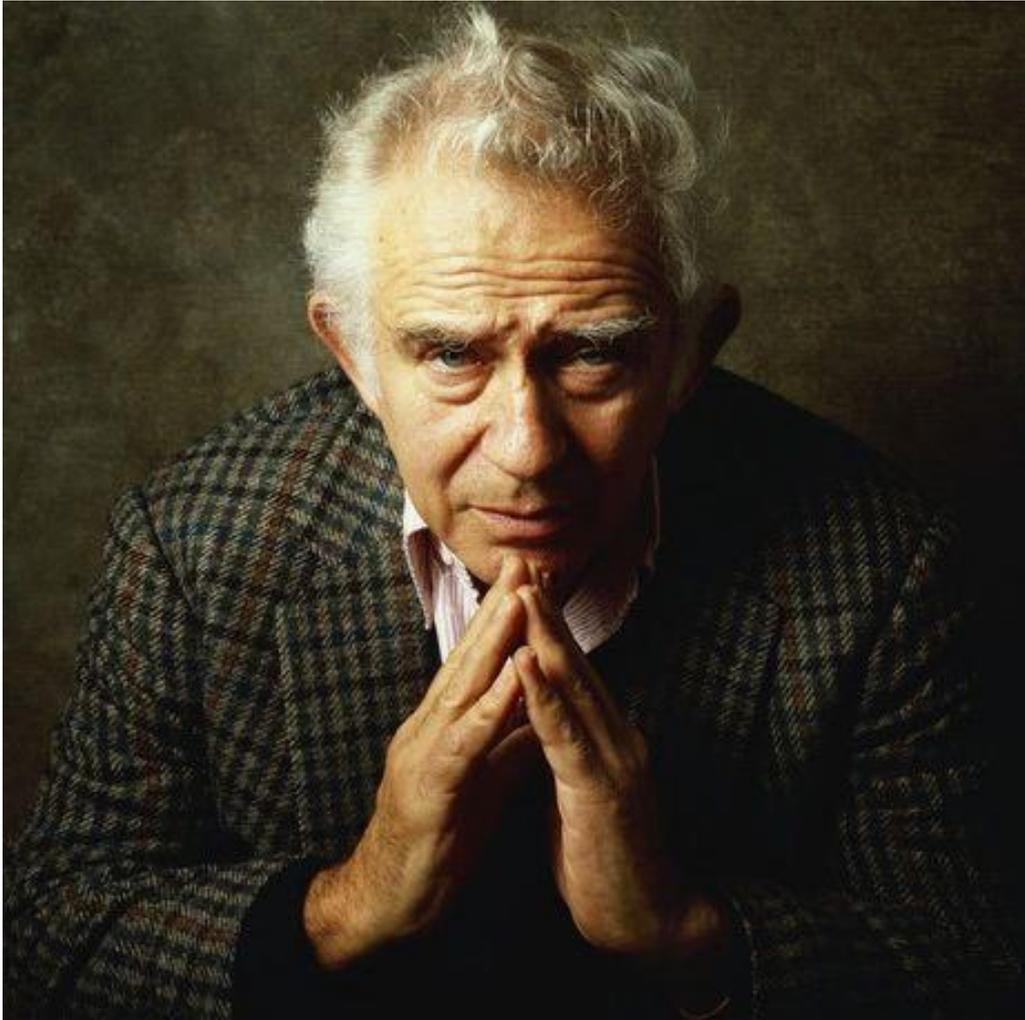
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*“We are all so guilty at the way we have allowed the world around us to become more ugly and tasteless every year that we surrender to terror and steep ourselves in it.”*

— Norman Mailer, *In the Belly of the Beast: Letters from Prison*



## Introduction

Almost seven decades ago, twenty-five-year old Norman Mailer published his first novel to great success. *The Naked and the Dead* tells the story of a World War II Army platoon deployed in the Japanese-held Anopopei, a fictional island in the Pacific. Mailer's novel describes so accurately the events of the campaign because Mailer himself served in the Army during World War II. While deployed in the Philippines, he kept track of his war experience through letters to his family, which later served as material for his story. In addition to abundant notes from personal records of the war, Mailer was incredibly gifted and had a background of writing, as he used to write for the University paper while studying at Harvard.

The novel captures the readers from the first chapter thanks to Mailer's attention to detail, his gut-wrenching depiction of combat, and his description of the countless difficulties the soldiers went through in the name of defending their country. Throughout the novel, Mailer not only approaches topics related to war and the military, but also discusses the American society of his time. Mailer uses his characters to voice his opinions on various topics, such as race, social class, gender, religion, and more.

After magnificent reviews, Mailer ventured into the filmmaking business and sold the rights to adapt the novel into a movie. The film was released ten years after the novel's publication, which gave *The Naked and the Dead* and Mailer new waves of  
notoriety.

Mailer used his real life experiences to show the horrors of war, the uselessness of man fighting man, and the inevitability of destruction through fighting. The aim of this project is to take a closer look at the different elements in the life of Norman Mailer which inspired him to write his first best-selling novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, and

how the ideas of which he talks about in his novel affected society enough for his work to become timeless.

## **World War II in the Philippines**

In the 1930's, the United States Congress adopted an isolationist viewpoint regarding aiding warring nations and passed a set of laws, known as the Neutrality Acts. In a statement given by President Roosevelt, the new acts prevented the American government involvement in foreign wars. He called the acts an “expression of the desire...to avoid any action which might involve [the U.S.] in war” (History.com Staff 2009). However, in the 1940's President Roosevelt convinced Congress to suspend this Act and managed to pass the Lend Lease Program, which allowed the country to aid Great Britain and Russia early in the decade with materials that the United States could spare, as well as money.

After the Japanese take-over of Indochina in 1941, the US government worried over the fate of the American trading businesses, which had already been reducing the export of useful war materials to the Japanese. Japan was growing too powerful and it could seriously affect American trading ventures, therefore the American government decided to stop all shipments of oil for Japan.

Given the fact that Japan imported about 80 per cent of their oil from the United States, this situation could possibly ruin Japanese war endeavors. This made Japan have to look elsewhere for oil in order to keep its industries running. The newly appointed Prime Minister, Hideki Tojo — also known as The Razor— was “convinced of the righteousness of the imperial cause and of the implacable hostility of the Americans [...] and he stoutly opposed the negotiations and peace concessions that the Konoe government contemplated” (Encyclopedia.com 2004).

The dates December 8th and 9th of 1941 marked the United States' entry into the war. Before these dates, the United States and Japan were at peace, but the Japanese attack on the US Navy base at Pearl Harbor produced a great deal of damage and losses, both material and human. This surprise attack unleashed a series of

events: the United States declared war on Japan, then Germany — Japan's ally — declared war on the United States, and this turned the wars in Europe and Asia into one. Within hours after the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hideki Tojo broadcasted a message to the people of Japan, warning them that "to annihilate this enemy and to establish a stable new order in East Asia, the nation must necessarily anticipate a long war" (Encyclopedia.com 2004).

The Allied forces concentrated on defeating the German forces first, which made the Japanese more successful in the earlier years. Following the disaster in Pearl Harbor, the Japanese successful invasion of the Philippines was an embarrassment to the Allies. The invasion forced the American troops to surrender to the enemy forces. The enemy "had rendered obsolete and inoperable American prewar plans for action in the Pacific in the event of war with Japan" (Ross Smith 2005, 3). By 1942, the Japanese troops had conquered over 1.5 million square miles of land in raw materials that they could use.

In the Philippines, the Japanese Imperial Army made their occupational advances early on, establishing their presence in the country by the first half of 1942. They began their invasion on December 8, 1941, ten hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and simultaneously attacked the Philippines. They began by landing on Bataan Island under the command of Lt. General Masaharu Homma. The final landing occurred on December 20th at Davao, on the Island of Mindanao, which consolidated their occupation of Philippines.

A significant event in the first months of Japanese invasion of the Philippines was the sixty-five-mile death march to evacuate Bataan — ordered by Lt. General Homma — that caused the death of thousands of American and Filipino men with starvation, thirst, disease, and random execution at the hand of the Japanese soldiers. The surviving prisoners of war were later placed in Camp O'Donell, where

even more men died of the same causes and random abuse (PBS 2003) (Karnow 2003).

However, war plans weren't always running smoothly for the Japanese army. In May of 1942 at the Battle of the Coral Sea, the Japanese forces experienced their first loss in battle. The American carriers drove back the Japanese in defense of Australia, stopping an invasion. In June, the Japanese attacked the American base called Midway Island and were defeated by the American warplanes and experienced major losses of both carriers and their best pilots. The main reason behind Japanese losses was lack of command and organization within their forces. General Yamashita explained that "the source of command and co-ordination within a command lies in trusting your subordinate commanders. Under the circumstances, I was forced to defend with subordinates whom I did not know and with whose character and ability I was unfamiliar" (Ross Smith 2005, 93).

By 1943, the American, British, and Australian forces had established a systematic, well-planned, and effective three-pronged offensive attack to defeat the Japanese forces: northwards through the Philippines by the Australians, westwards from Hawaii through the Pacific islands by the Americans, and a British support through Burma into the Southeast lands conquered by the Japanese. That same year, the Allies put their offensive attacks into action. By "island-hopping" the Americans conquered the more important islands through the next year and a half, until all three Allies were close enough to Japan itself. The Americans conquered the Mariana Islands and in October of 1944, the Japanese were cut off from their conquered lands in Southeast Asia.

The Japanese occupation of the Philippines lasted throughout the duration of the war. Their liberation started when US General Douglas McArthur returned in 1944 after going through great difficulties to return. At this time, the Japanese had

created the Kamikaze corps in an attempt to stop the American forces from advancing to Japan. The Battle of the Leyte was the first of many in the year-long Allied attempt to liberate the Philippines through significant battles. Such was the battle at Peleliu Island, fought in September of 1944, when the U.S. military launched a landing operation. About 10,000 Japanese soldiers were killed after battling more than 40,000 U.S. troops for about two months. Only about 450 Japanese soldiers are said to have survived (Okimura and Ota 2015). There were many more battles where the Allies defeated the Japanese forces and slowly, but surely, obtained the Japanese surrender in September, 1945, after great losses on both belligerent sides.

By 1945, the Allies were within range of Japan to put in place an air attack and made some devastating raids on their cities — such as the raid in the island of Okinawa, which fell after the American attack — and prepared to invade Japan itself. However, the invasion never happened due to the fact that the Allies dropped the first atomic bomb on July, 1945. The Manhattan Project scientists had created the most destructive weapon the world had ever seen. On August 6, an American bomber dropped the first bomb over the city of Hiroshima, and three days later, they dropped the second one on the city of Nagasaki. The cities were utterly devastated, and hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed. This led to the Japanese surrender on August 14, officially ending World War II.

It is worth mentioning that the success of the Allies over the Japanese forces would have been impossible had it not been for the Filipino population. Ross Smith credits the people of the Philippines in aiding the US Army as much as possible during the war. “Filipinos contributed services of all types, as railroad men, truck drivers, engineers, clerks, government officials and employees, guides, spies, and carriers who often risked their lives hand-carrying supplies to the front lines. It is, indeed, difficult to imagine how the Southwest Pacific Area could have undertaken

the reconquest of the Philippines in the time and manner it did without the predominately loyal and willing Filipino population” (Ross Smith 2005, 658).

## **Norman Mailer and his experience in World War II**

Born January 31, 1923, in Long Branch, New Jersey, Norman Mailer is considered to be one of America's most acclaimed authors due to his extensive and varied writings — which include novels, short stories, essays, biographies, and works of non-fiction. Son of a Jewish immigrant, Mailer proved to be incredibly smart and an accomplished student. He enrolled at Harvard University in 1939 at the age of 16, with the purpose of studying aeronautical engineering (Biography.com editors 2015). Even though he always showed a passion for writing stories, he always worked very hard to produce new material as often as possible (Mailer 2015).

In his 2004 interview with Moye, Mailer tells the story of how he was drafted into the Army after graduating from Harvard in 1944 and served in the Philippines in the 112th Regimental Combat Team, both as an intelligence clerk and a combat reconnaissance rifleman. This became an eye-opening experience. By the time his men were transferred to the Philippines, they were introduced to a scenario with seasoned men in the war environment, many who had lost friends in the fighting as well as the lives they left behind when they left for war.

Mailer himself admits that the war experience for him had both positive and negative effects. In the interview he gave at the University of North Texas, he tells how he comprehended that being a soldier was not what he was meant to be. This helped him grow as a writer once he came to value the experience that he was living. In the interview he said: “The humiliations were that I just realized that I was not a good soldier, and that took its toll on my ego. I had to learn how to do simple things. People that I'd never taken seriously before could do many simple things so much better than I could. It probably made me modest for life. When you start with a big ego and you're reduced in ego, that is always a terrible experience” (Moye 2004).

On the other hand, and perhaps luckily for Mailer, he saw very little combat in the Philippines, and by the time his military career was coming to an end, he was serving as a cook in American-occupied Japan (Biography.com editors 2015). This meant that he could take the opportunity to document as much as possible about the life of the average soldiers. He mentioned to Todd Moyer that this helped him shape the wide array of characters from all kinds of backgrounds presented in the novel: “It became clear later that when he went into the Army, he wanted the life experiences of the soldiers for future writing, since others recall him as always taking notes and even asking about their sex lives” (Moyer 2004).

It was during his military career that he realized he was living experiences that would be useful material for a great literary piece. Through letters to his wife, Beatrice, he documented the many experiences which later helped shaped his first successful novel, *The Naked and the Dead*. This catapulted him to literary fame in 1948, a novel about an Army platoon's taking of a Japanese-held island in the Pacific (Encyclopedia of World Biography 2004) (History.com Staff 2009).

In the recently published *The Selected Letters of Norman Mailer* we find this declaration Mailer made to his wife, “The outfit I’ve been assigned to is the 112th Regimental Combat Team which is composed mainly of cavalry, but of course I’m in Headquarters which does not do any fighting. [...] I’ve been placed in the Intelligence Section which is really a good break, and one I know which will please you. It means being more in on things, and getting a complete picture of what is going on, and you know how much I like that” (Mailer 2015. 51-52).

Until Mailer’s epistolary compilation was published, his readers had no real insight into what his life was like, and there was only the public persona that everybody came to love, admire, and hate — possibly all three at the same time — and these

letters show what Mailer's life was like from his own perspective. The letters pertaining to his deployment during World War II show what his experience was really like and how much of his famous novel is based on true events. For example, in Letter 28 to Beatrice he recounts in great detail the "fundamental experience" he lived with the platoon, when they were assigned to find Japanese infiltrators: "But the lieutenant stood up, smiled, and stepped onto the trail. The rest of us fell in, in single file, and we started up. The trail was wide enough for just one man at a time; indeed it was far more an ascent from rock to rock than a trail. [...] I was too fatigued to raise my feet — I flopped upward from rock to rock, laying my gun on the shelf ahead of me and dragging myself after it" (Mailer 2015. 69-70).

The experience in the letter is almost identical to one of the most important scenes in the novel, the climb up Mount Anaka. "Croft led them on a route parallel to the cliffs of the mountain and toward the east. After twenty minutes they came to the first rent in the great bluffs of the mountain's base. A deep ravine slanted upward for several hundred feet to the first ridge, its red clay walls refracting brightly the heat of the sun. Without a word Croft turned toward it and the platoon began to climb the mountain. [...] the men could not see below their knees and they felt their way forward slowly, holding onto the tall stalks with both hands, their rifles crossed over their packs" (Mailer 1948, 606. 635).

Mailer entered the war towards the very end of the conflict in the Pacific, and experienced the nuclear bomb droppings, the subsequent surrender, and the American occupation of Japan. He tells of his experience to his wife as a bittersweet one. He approved of "an effective method of shortening the war with an instrument that would kill under optimum conditions many people in one instant" (Mailer 2015. 88). The idea of humanity being so self-destructive was painful to Mailer, and he had a sense of premonition that it would most definitely affect society as a whole: "We've always

talked of humanity destroying itself, but now it seems so near a thing, so much a matter of decades, of a very easily counted number of bombs. This atom smashing business is going to herald the final victory of the machine. I think our age is going to mark the end of such concepts [nuclear weapons] as man's will and mass determination of power. The world will be controlled by few men, politicians and technicians [...]" (Mailer 2015. 89-99).

After the demobilization, Mailer went back home with enough inspiration and material for his first novel. As soon as *The Naked and the Dead* was published, he was never again fully out of the literary limelight. He won two Pulitzer Prizes — in 1968 for *The Armies of the Night* (1968), and in 1979 for *The Executioner's Song* (Biography.com editors. 2015). According to historians and unofficial biographies on Mailer, he was often described by others as controversial, combative, and egotistical. It is said he led a his harmful lifestyle of alcohol and drug abuse, had a love of boxers, and is known for his recurrent public disputes with the opposite sex — the most famous being the stabbing of his second wife after a night of heavy partying (Biography.com editors. 2015)(History.com staff 2009).

Mailer voiced his views on American life and its frustrations through violent, existential heroes and written with his characteristic crudeness. With a career that spanned around six decades, he was an extremely prolific writer who never ceased to critique the society and politics of the time. Therefore, one can reach the conclusion that Mailer was a complex and multi-faceted person, due to these many characteristics given to him as well as by studying the different periods of his career.

## *The Naked and the Dead*

*The Naked and the Dead* is Norman Mailer's first novel. He started to write after he went back home from the war and had so much inspiration from his experience as an artilleryman in the Philippines that he finished it within fifteen months. The novel tells the story of a platoon assigned to the attack and invasion of Anopopei, a fictional Japanese-held island in the Asian Pacific. The reader follows the storyline from the night before the first attack on the beach all through the occupation until the end of the campaign, as well as the lives of many of the soldiers fighting in the island, the lives they led before the war and the reasons why they enlisted. The novel was published in May of 1948, when Mailer was only twenty four, and it became an instant best-seller mostly due to the fact that, according to Mailer himself, "[...] it was a good story that got better, and better, it had immediacy, [and] it came out at exactly the right time when, near to three years after the Second World War had ended, everyone was ready for a big war novel that gave some idea of what it had all been like" (Mailer 1998, ii). The novel was well-received by the public and praised by the critics.

Mailer's first-hand experience with the war proved helpful when writing the novel. He gives the reader a clear image of what soldiers feel like when they are moved from their homes in order to serve their country. The soldiers have different perspectives but they all share the experience with hundreds of thousands of other men who come from many different backgrounds with different races, religious beliefs, and social classes. Regardless of their many differences, the soldiers in the platoon all come together for the same purpose of defeating the Japanese forces, even when it means risking their lives, as seen in the opening lines of the book: "All over the ship, all through the convoy, there was a knowledge that in a few hours some of them were going to be dead" (Mailer 1948, 3).

The novel addresses the society of the time; however, it simultaneously discusses topics which would still be considered relevant even almost seventy years after of the book's publication such as: the Army, war and peace, heroism and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), individuality in the army, race, class, gender, and religious intolerance. These are the main themes which Mailer explores in his first novel, thus they will be discussed in further detail.

## The Army

The Army is one of the three branches, along with the Navy and the Air Force that make up the military of the United States. In *The Naked and the Dead*, the omniscient narrator enables Mailer to discuss the different points of views regarding the Army and military life through the characters. On one side of the spectrum, the Army is discussed from the point of view of General Cummings, who is in charge of the campaign. As a contrast, Mailer shows the Army through the eyes of the soldiers who hold no power and only follow orders that come from the officers.

According to General Cummings: “The Army functions best when you’re frightened of the man above you, and contemptuous of your subordinates” (Mailer 1948, 175-176). Through the General’s conversations with Lieutenant Hearn, Mailer shows the reader a clear image of what he believes the Army is about: depersonalization, subordination, and one common goal of winning against enemy forces at all costs. In the General’s words, “A nation fights well in proportion to the amount of men and materials it has,” therefore, the military must instill the aforementioned methods in order to create a successful soldier.

The General’s point of view on American society and how it affects the US military shows clearly when he says to Lt. Hearn: “We have the highest standard of living in the world and, as one would expect, the worst individual fighting soldiers of any big power. Or at least in their natural state they are. They’re comparatively wealthy, they’re spoiled, and as Americans they share most of them the peculiar manifestation of our democracy. They have an exaggerated idea of themselves as individuals and no idea at all of the rights due others” (Mailer 1948, 175).

In the same conversation, Cummings goes on to address depersonalization and subordination through fear: “Break them down. [...] I don’t care what kind of man you

give me, if I have him long enough I'll make him afraid. Every time there's what you call an Army injustice, the enlisted man involved is confirmed a little more in the idea of his own inferiority" (Mailer 1948, 175).

In contrast to General Cummings' opinions on depersonalization and subordination, Mailer gives the reader different points of view of the soldiers who fight in Anopopei. The best example is Red Valsen, a man with a strong sense of independence who joined the Army to escape life in the mines and so he pushes against the authority of his superiors. According to Red Valsen, "[the] goddam Army gets you so you're afraid to turn around. You waste half your time trying to remember what they told you to do" (Mailer 1948, 12).

Red Valsen is the only soldier in the platoon who will dare to voice his opinions and to stand up for himself and his fellow soldiers when he believes it to be the right thing to do. He stood against Sergeant Croft when he realized the trek up the mountain was a suicide mission and that Croft sent Lt. Hearn to his death in order to have keep his command over the platoon: "He had been taking the easy way and it wouldn't work. He would have to face Croft. 'If I go up that hill, you'll be draggin' me. [...] It ain't me alone. You gonna shoot all of us?'" (Mailer 1948, 694-695).

Throughout the novel, Mailer discusses the Army both through direct dialogue and the soldiers' thoughts. By doing this, he gives readers the opportunity to agree or disagree with the different viewpoints given throughout the novel. This way, he can give a variety of opinions and the reader can decide independently what they think of the Army.

## War and Peace

Mailer cleverly explores these two opposing themes by means of the “Time Machines,” which are special episodes that tell the story of a particular soldier’s life before he enlisted. The Time Machine chapters are intertwined between the chapters which tell the story of the campaign. Although they don’t necessarily add any information to either the preceding or the following chapter, they help paint a bigger picture of the soldiers in Anopopei. With this brilliant technique, Mailer allows the reader to comprehend why the soldiers are the way they are, what shaped them, what pushed them to join the Army, and their hopes and dreams if they make it out of the war alive.

As a counterpoint to many of the soldiers’ traumatizing pasts, Mailer lets the reader know that they are not a lost cause. He writes about some of the soldiers’ plans once the war is over and peace is achieved. A few, like Cummings or Croft, believe in building on their careers in the Army. However, others have plans to settle down in their hometowns. For instance, Goldstein, a powerless soldier, shows his intelligence in the following dialogue: “‘You know in America’ Martinez was saying ‘lots of opportunity.’ Goldstein nodded sagely. ‘I know I’ve got plans for setting up my own business, because I’ve considered it a lot, and a man has to strike out for himself if he wants to get ahead. There’s a lot to be said for steady wages and security, but I’d rather be my own boss’” (Mailer 1948, 449).

In the last Chorus chapter – which he appropriately named “On what we do when we get out” – Mailer gives the readers closure with the surviving soldiers by discussing what they plan to do when they go back to America. Goldstein has a romantic approach of arriving in New York City and reuniting with his family. He dreams of riding a taxi from Grand Central to his apartment and surprising his wife. As he mentioned to Martinez, he planned to open his own small business: “he thought

with excitement and joy of what it would be like with a shop of his own. [...] He had the place picked out, and he had figured very nicely how much money he and his wife would save” (Mailer 1948, 205).

Some of soldiers have more straightforward ideas of what to do to with their time and money after the war. Brown, for instance, plans to carelessly waste away his money on things he enjoys but has not had since deployment. He plans to take his money and spend it on alcohol and women. When he is done with his first round of parties, he will “binge” his way to Kansas, where he will surprise his wife “and throw her out of the house and let people know the way you treat a bitch” (Mailer 1948, 711).

While some have their minds made up, others are confused and seemed lost. Julio Martinez, for example, is unsure of what he really wants out of life. “See family maybe. Walk around, nice Mexican girls in San Antonio, ribbons go to church [...]” (Mailer 1948, 712). In this last chorus, Mailer simultaneously gives the reader hope that the soldiers will go on and live decent lives after the war, but at the same time there is a sense of uncertainty that questions if there will ever be peace for them.

## Heroism

In a war novel, it is expected of the author to discuss the topic of heroism. At the beginning of the novel, many of the soldiers associate being in combat as with an act of bravery when they were actually bored. Thus, they create a feeling of false bravery: “Five weeks had gone by since invasion day. [...] By the time they had been in the new bivouac for a week, many of the men, including some of the veterans of the Motome campaign, were wishing for combat again” (Mailer 1948, 40).

As the novel progresses, they will try to engage in as little combat as possible, even going as far as Mineta, who pretended to be crazy to remain in the hospital wing after his injury started to heal, “he threw himself in the dirt and began to scream. A soldier fell on top of him, and Minetta struggled for a moment and then relaxed. He could hear men shouting, and the sounds of footsteps running towards him. [...] He had a picture of a madman he had seen once in a movie who had foamed at the mouth (Mailer 1948, 357).

The best example which can be mentioned when discussing the theme of heroism is Sergeant Julio Martinez. Julio Martinez’s Time Machine episode addresses his social background. He grew up a Mexican-American in Texas and this does not discourage him in his dreams of becoming what he considers a hero. The chapter is written from Martinez’s point of view and talks about his dreams of being a hero and how he worked to achieve his goal in spite of being Mexican: “Martinez made sergeant. Little Mexican boys also breathe the American fables. If they cannot be aviators or financiers or officers they can still be heroes. No need to stumble over pebbles and search the Texas sky. Any man jack can be a hero. Only that does not make you white Protestant, firm and aloof” (Mailer 1948, 67). According to the *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, the word “heroism” means great bravery, and this soldier is a

great example because, in spite of his demons and in his own way, he aims to show bravery and to be considered a hero by his peers.

## **Individuality in the Army**

As discussed before, one of the ways for the Army to be successful in war is depersonalization. In the Army, the view of the collective is more important than the individual soldier. Mailer perfectly expresses this idea through another dialogue between General Cummings and Lieutenant Hearn: “In the Army the idea of the individual personality is just a hindrance. Sure, there are differences among men in any particular Army unit, but they invariably cancel each other out, and what you’re left with is a value rating. Such and such a company is good or poor, effective or ineffective for such or such a mission. I work with grosser techniques, common denominator techniques” (Mailer 1948, 180).

From the very beginning of the campaign, Mailer supports this notion by introducing characters such as Corporal Toglio and simultaneously rejects it with characters such as Red Valsen. In the scene where the soldiers wait in the boats for the invasion, Toglio believes in the numbers provided and the strength of staying together and following orders. On the other hand, Red Valsen challenges him and insults him for believing in statistics: “the statistics prove you’re a lot safer here [in the ship] than any other place during an invasion.’ Red hated statistics. ‘Don’t give me any of those figures. If you listen to them you give up taking a bath ‘cause it’s too dangerous. [...] You know what you can do with them.’ Toglio smiled, but he was a little annoyed. Red was a pretty good guy, [...] but too independent. Where would you be if everybody was like him? You’d get nowhere. It took co-operation in everything” (Mailer 1948, 27).

Mailer himself lived through basic training and went through the process of becoming a soldier. However, in the novel, he discusses both contrasting ideas and allows the reader to form an opinion different of any personal opinion he may have.

He takes a step back from expressing his point of view and allows his characters to voice his ideas for him

## Race

During the Second World War, the US military forces were segregated between blacks and whites and Mailer does not include any soldier of African descent among his military. The closest character to stand out from the white European-American man is Julio Martinez, who is of Mexican-American descent, although there is no mention of his heritage being an issue for him to be part of the platoon.

Racism against Blacks is mentioned in the novel once, not surprisingly, by officers of higher ranks instead of the general platoon soldier. The Colonel's opinion is that Black people were affecting the nation and brought about unwanted changes: "“You take that fellow...’ Conn mentioned a famous labor leader. ‘Now, I know for a fact, by God — that her’s got a nigger woman for a mistress. [...] I’ve heard on good authority that he’s even had a couple of tan little bastards off of her, but that I ain’t going to vouch for. AH I can tell you is that all the time he’s pushing through these bills to make the nigger a King Jesus, he doin’ it for good reason. That woman is runnin’ the whole labor movement, the whole country including the President is being influenced every time she wiggles her slit”” (Mailer 1948, 72-73).

Mailer's story takes place in the Asian Pacific, and the platoon fights Japanese forces, therefore he will address racism against the Japanese soldiers. The most heart-breaking moment when he addresses this situation is when the officers bully and mock Lieutenant Wakara, a Japanese-American soldier who works as a translator for the American troops. Wakara feels a sort of guilt for being of Japanese descent in a time when the Japanese-Americans community were experiencing discrimination in the place they called home: "It was a mistake to come out here. Those American soldiers wouldn't like the idea of protecting a Jap. Perhaps it would have been better if he had stayed with his family in the relocation camps" (Mailer 1948, 245-246). Mailer approaches the subject of racism and discrimination ~~lightly and~~ carefully. It seems as

though he addresses the subject just enough without having to make the entire story discuss the racial differences within the Army during World War II.

## Class

During World War II, many platoons in the Army resembled the one Mailer depicted in *The Naked and The Dead*, with men who came from different backgrounds but still managed to put their differences aside in order to work together. Mailer writes of soldiers who come from families that belonged to different socio-economical statuses of America.

When talking of soldiers who came from lower classes, he mentioned Red Valsen or Julio Martinez and specifically discussed social backgrounds as a setback: “He [Martinez] did not know how to say it. He was always embarrassed at mentioning the fact that he was a Mexican. He thought it was bad manners as if he were blaming the man he told it to, implying that it was his fault there were no good jobs for him” (Mailer 1948, 449).

For soldiers who come from hardworking middle class families, ~~like~~ such as Goldstein or Roth, Mailer gave these characters a bit more vision and confidence in themselves and their capabilities that would make them successful after the war. Roth, for example, is a college educated man who joined the Army only because he was unable to find a decent job. This gave Roth a certain air of superiority around his peers: “He was qualified for other things, a college graduate, familiar with office work. But try and explain it to the Army” (Mailer 1948, 51).

Finally, the soldiers who come from families in the upper class elite, such as General Cummings and Lieutenant Hearn are very interesting because they believe in the status quo of being privileged and to the easy way in which good things happen to them because of who they are. “Hearn had known ever since he had been with the General that if he wanted to he could easily rise to a field officer’s rank by the end of the war. And there was an ambition in him which responded to that” (Mailer 1948, 168).

Cummings tries to teach Hearn a lesson in embracing his class and his superiority when working with the enlisted men: “Understand your class and work within its limits,” was Cummings standpoint on the matter. According to Hearn, “the General’s point was clear enough, [...] in functioning as an officer for a long enough time he would assume, whether he wanted to or not, the emotional prejudices of his class. The General was reminding him that he belonged to that class” (Mailer 1948, 168).

These elements show that Mailer created his characters to the last detail. Through his character’s social backgrounds, he depicts a clear and defined image of the society of the time and the mentality of men from each social strata in regards to their lives in the military, as well as the lives they wanted after the war.

## Gender

Mailer discusses the topic of gender inequality and the idea that man is better than woman because women are unreliable. Mailer repeatedly portrays women as “bitches who cannot be trusted.” In the Time Machine episodes, Mailer depicts a scene between each one of the soldiers in the platoon and a “sleazy” woman who will eventually hurt him. Many of the men are married and they trust that their wives wait for them anxiously at home, while many of them are convinced that their wives spend a good time with other man who stayed behind in America.

In the second Chorus — which are movie or play-like scenes made up mostly of dialogue — the soldiers discuss whether or not women should be trusted: “BROWN: Yeah, let me tell you guys something. Toggle’s going to go back and find his wife fooling around with anything that wear pants. There ain’t a woman you can trust.

STANLEY: Oh I don’t know, I trust my wife. There’s all kinds of women.

BROWN: (bitterly) They’re all the same. [...] While we’re home, and slipping a little meat to them every night, they’re all lovey-dovey. But the minute you go away they start thinking.

MINETTA: Yeah, my Rosie thinks of me.

BROWN: You bet she does. She starts thinking of how good it was to have it steady. [...] The ones with kids are the worst. They’re the ones who’re bored and really need a good time. There ain’t a woman is worth a goddam” (Mailer 1948, 185-186).

Mailer was known for his machismo and feeling of superiority over his wives. In the novel, the opinion of women is almost unanimously negative. According to the soldiers, women are only good enough for sex and they use their sexuality to convince

men to do their bidding. This is the topic where Mailer did not give any of the characters the attitude and confidence to believe that women are good and faithful. He decidedly bashes the opposite sex without an opportunity for discussion.

## **Religious intolerance**

In the novel, Mailer discusses religious intolerance and anti-Semitism within the US Army. There are a few episodes where “Jewishness” is discussed from both the perspective of Jewish soldiers and those who grew up bullying other children due to their beliefs. The biggest anti-jewish bully in the platoon is Gallagher, who often makes comments against other Jewish soldiers. Mailer described a scene from his childhood which shows his anti-semitic upbringing: “They had taught the Yids a lesson. They picked one kid and surrounded him, and Whitey Lydon had asked, ‘What the hell are you? You’re a monkey, that’s what you are, a fugging monkey’” (Mailer 1948, 93).

Goldstein, one of the Jewish soldiers in the platoon, is usually anxious about his religious belief. He wants to be respected and well liked, but his religion often makes him insecure. “Goldstein was self-conscious when he saw himself as a Jew talking to a Gentile; then every action, every word, was dictated to a great extent by his desire to make a good impression. And so he tried to say only the things that would please Gallagher” (Mailer 1948, 451).

As a contrast to Goldstein, there is Roth, a well-educated man and he does not dwell on the fact that he is Jewish. He resents that he cannot connect on a more personal level with the other men and found comfort in conversations with Goldstein, “He felt very close to Goldstein as if they shared a deep knowledge. [...] Goldstein was a kindred soul, a friend. Roth sighed. He supposed a Jew always had to go to a fellow Jew to find understanding. The thought depressed him. Why should things be that way?” (Mailer 1948, 56).

Many of the soldiers believe in the word of God, yet they firmly believe that they are doing right by Him when killing Japanese soldiers. One of the most eye-opening moments for the soldiers of the platoon is when they talk about whether or not God meant for them to kill Japanese soldiers and they realized that maybe, what they were doing was wrong. “I don’t see you caring if you kill a Jap or two’ he [Wyman] said. ‘They’re *heathen*,’ Ridges said. ‘Excuse me,’ Goldstein said, ‘but I was reading an article a few months ago which said there were over a hundred thousand Christians in Japan.’ Ridges shook his head. ‘Well, Ah wouldn’t want to be killing one of them, [...] The Lord’ll keep me from shooting a Christian’” (Mailer 1948, 218).

## **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

The best technique Mailer used to describe Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was to compare the feeling of combat-induced anxiety to Pavlov's behaviorist experiment of stimulus with a dog. In one of the initial scenes in the night before the first attack, Mailer describes the utter fear and unease that Julio Martinez felt on the ship the night before the attack. "A psychologist [Pavlov] in a famous experiment rang a bell every time he gave food to a dog. Naturally the dog's saliva flowed at the sight of the food.

There was a soldier on the ship who was like the dog. He had been overseas for a long time, and he had seen a great deal of combat. At first the sound of a shell and the impact it made were very much connected to the fear he felt. But after many months, he had known too much terror, and by now any sudden sound would cause him panic" (Mailer 1948, 18-19).

Martinez is not the only soldier who experiences the stress and anxiety of combat. During a late night watch, Wilson drinks a contraband jungle juice which puts his senses on end and clouds his judgment. To make matters worse, he puts his fellow soldiers in danger because he is unable to control it: "There was a bush about fifteen yards beyond the barbed wire and it bothered him. Goddam bush, he told himself, think you're gonna hide a Jap don't ya?" (Mailer 1948, 219). He opened fired against the bush, terrifying the other men in the camp and risking the entire mission.

"They did not know that Wilson was firing; they thought it was a Japanese attack again, and they staggered through several terrible seconds between sleep and wakefulness" (Mailer 1948, 220). This scene gives the reader a sense of time passing incredibly fast (like bullets fired from a machine gun), but it crawls at the same time when each soldier expresses their fear while asleep. The readers are able to understand

the uncontrollable fear they feel in that split second before they realize they were not under attack.

## Critics and *The Naked and the Dead*

Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* was published in 1948 and the novel immediately earned the author popular and critical acclaim. The book's success was so extensive, it claimed the top spot on the *The New York Times* "Bestseller List" for eleven weeks consecutively. Both the author and the book drew reviews and opinions from critics both independent and from the most relevant magazines and newspapers. This gave Mailer a strong push into literary relevance at a very young age. For instance, in the *New York Herald Tribune*, Richard Match claimed in his review that "with this one astonishing book ... [Mailer] joins the ranks of major American novelists" (Match 1948).

Reviewer C. J. Rolo wrote in *The Atlantic Monthly* that Mailer's novel was "the most impressive piece of fiction to date about Americans in the Second World War." (Rolo 1948, 114). David Dempsey, from *The New York Times*, reviewed that the book is "undoubtedly the most ambitious novel to be written about the recent conflict, it is also the most ruthlessly honest and in scope and in integrity compares favorably with the best that followed World War I" (Dempsey 1949).

Dempsey states that the publication of *The Naked and the Dead* "bears witness to a new and significant talent among American novelists" (Dempsey 1949), an opinion which many would agree with, because Mailer proved throughout his career that he had what it took to be a great writer when his career lost momentum after his initial success with the first novel.

While the majority of the reviews focused on the novel as a whole, many critics had very specific points which were discussed more than others. Some referred to the compelling "realness" of the book. For example, Time Magazine appreciated how the work was "distinguished primarily for simple realism, a forthright, almost childlike

honesty, a command of ordinary speech, and a cool and effortless narrative style” (*War and No Peace* 1948). The *Kirkus Reviews* declared the novel to be “[a] brilliant book—but one that makes such harrowing reading, and which is written with such intensity, such bald realism, such unrestrained accuracy of detail in speech and thought, that all but the tough-skinned will turn from it, feeling reluctant to look again on the baring of man's inner beings under stress of jungle warfare [The Naked and the Dead is] an unpleasant experience, but one that makes an unforgettable impression” (*Kirkus Reviews* 1948).

Even though the book had, for its most part, a great reception, it also garnered mixed reviews from other critics. Reviews commented on the use of language, the wordiness and repetition, and the author’s inability to create relatable characters. In the *New Yorker*, John Lardner wrote that Mailer “tells a good story powerfully and well,” but that it “shares the tendency of most current novels toward under simplification — it is too long and it is too complicated ... [while] its dialogue is true and straightforward,” (Lardner 1948, 115). Maxwell Geismar said, in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, that there is “no real balance of the dramatic forces in it, just as there is a final lack of emotional impact” (Geismar 1949, 10-11).

After the first two years of overwhelming ~~critiques~~ appreciations, *The Naked and the Dead* appeared less in book reviews or critical magazines. However, its presence still lingered and there was a general agreement that the book was a significant depiction of the inhumanity of war and that it deserved attention and reading. Despite its disappearance from the popular press, *The Naked and the Dead* has remained present in the academic environment when making references to post-World War II literary fiction. A popular topic where Mailer’s novel serves as a great example is Jewish studies. In their article *Jewish Identity in Norman Mailer's The Naked and The Dead*,

Ji Shuihe Ji and Na Chen use Mailer's novel to study Jewish consciousness and identity.

This shows that *The Naked and the Dead*'s literary relevance never really faded unlike many other bestsellers did. The novel has remained in print and regardless the lack of publicity as the decades went by, it is still read by the general public and referred to by scholars. Decades after the novel's publication, critics still maintain the opinion as in the original reviews from 1948 and 1949. This proves that *The Naked and the Dead* is a remarkable and noteworthy book that successfully passed the test of time.

Undoubtedly, *The Naked and the Dead* has consistently received positive appraisal, be it for the personal pleasure of readers or for scholarly purposes. This gave Mailer notoriety and the opportunity as a writer to have a significant career as an author known for his free thinking, his severe social critic, and his public appearances. In his works he comments on human nature and the American society with straightforwardness and his signature realistic style. These characteristics have made him one of the most outstanding American writers of the twentieth century.

## **Raoul Walsh's "The Naked and the Dead"**

After *The Naked and the Dead's* publication, Mailer had a vision that his best-seller should be displayed on the big screen. He went to Hollywood to pitch the idea to different production companies, but none were interested. Mailer wanted to write the screenplay himself and have control of the creative process of the adaptation, but this only resulted in the first production company to fail in its attempt at producing anything of quality. (*American Legends* 2014). After promoting the idea to friends in Hollywood, Mailer worked incredibly hard to create a that would prove his novel could be adapted into film. Finally, Warner Brothers agreed to finance the production of the movie.

The film was directed by Raoul Walsh, the screenplay was written by Denis and Terry Sanders, and produced by Paul Gregory. It was filmed in Panama in 1957 (in the American-held Panama Canal Zone), and released by Warner Brothers at the Capitol Theatre in August of 1958 (Weiler 1958). Although the movie was successful in the box office, it is presumed that the film's initial success was due to the popularity of the novel but the movie did not capture the public's interest for very long.

In *Culture and Translation*, Susan Bassnett says that "translation is about language, but translation is also about culture, for the two are inseparable" (Bassnett 2007), which helps comprehend why the film adaptation of *The Naked and the Dead* was not as successful if compared to the great success the novel had. The audience could not relate to the movie as they had with the novel. The main reason is that Walsh kept re-writing the script during filming. After watching the movie one night with his second wife, Adele, he complained to her that Hollywood "had ruined his story" (*American Legends* 2014).

In his interview for *American Legends*, Paul Gregory discussed the issue of the transcription and evoked the same sentiment: "The book didn't come through in the

final screenplay. That's the point. I thought the book was brilliantly enunciated in Laughton's script, and it wasn't in the script that finally emerged. [...] Raoul got some writer at Warner's to come in and do what he wanted done. This writer had written a war story and some comedy. He was on location with us in Panama. He and Walsh mutilated the script" (American Legends 2014).

The day after the premier of the film, *The New York Times* published a movie review by A.H. Weiler where he accurately attacked the writers and the director for utterly failing to do the novel justice: "Director Raoul Walsh has filled the screen with striking vistas in beautiful color and with the chilling sound and fury of conflict, but the hearts, minds and motives of men exposed to sudden and often useless death, which gave the book its awesome power, serve merely as sketchy background to battle in this uneven picturization that was unveiled at the Capitol yesterday" (Weiler 1958).

Weiler argues that "the hates, passions, brutalities and backgrounds of the men are stated and restated but are generally left with the impression of actors speaking lines. Although the authors' over-all view was sometimes clouded, his men, who rarely understood why they fought, were honest, realistic, vibrantly alive citizens" (Weiler 1958).

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon's main thesis throughout the volume is that adaptations offer "the pleasure of repetition with variation" (Hutcheon 2014, 4). In her book, she argues that "an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing" (Hutcheon 2014, 19). This means that something is reused or altered but still bears visible traces of its earlier form, therefore enhancing it. She also quoted film semiotician Christian Metz, who similarly points out that "cinema tells us continuous stories; it 'says' things that could be conveyed also in the language of words; yet it says them differently" (Hutcheon 2014, 6).

If the aforementioned statements prove anything, it is that Mailer's work was — literally — lost in translation. The novel was adapted but its essence was missing, mainly due to the fact that Walsh refused to stay true to the novel. He added sex and humor where they did not belong in an attempt for the movie to create more revenue. In doing so, he missed the opportunity to take a great piece of literary work and create an adaptation that would increase the public's acceptance of *The Naked and The Dead*. The constant rewriting of the screenplay turned Mailer's novel into another one of Hollywood's failed attempts at adaptation.

Understandably, Mailer's novel has 735 pages which needed to be condensed enough for the movie to successfully tell the story in two hours. He was careful in portraying the combat scenes, and paid special attention to detail. However, other major elements needed to be omitted, like the scene in the novel where the soldiers bond over jungle juice and looting the corpses of Japanese soldiers, or as they called it, hunting for "souvenirs" (Mailer 1948, 198-200. 208-210). As well as this scene, there is the scene of the soldiers in the boat waiting for instructions. In the book, the scene takes longer to develop, while in the movie they did not waste time picking through the mind of each of the soldiers before the initial attack.

Mailer's "Chorus" episodes already enabled to reader to imagine the book as movie-like dialogue, but in order for the movie to be cohesive, Walsh needed to make adjustments to some of the scenes. The "Time Machine" episodes play an important part of the novel, but they are randomly inserted between chapters. Instead of creating them in the same form, Walsh adjusted them as memories of each particular soldier. He is deliberate in his timing, and omits the ones from soldiers who are not essential in the film.

Overall, Raoul Walsh's interpretation of *The Naked and The Dead* failed to transmit Mailer's ideas to the big screen. In hindsight, the adaptation was an unnecessary attempt at making *The Naked and The Dead* stay relevant with the public. Mailer had achieved incredible success with his first novel. Perhaps he did not believe that he could keep his success going and thought that a movie would help further extend his newfound fame – it is difficult to tell. Perhaps if Warner Brothers had allowed Mailer to write the script – or at least included him in the decision-making process – it would have made it more difficult for Walsh to rewrite it. The movie would have achieved the same amount of success as the novel if Mailer and the production team had taken a different approach to the adaptation.

## Conclusions

Studying Mailer's life and reading *The Naked and The Dead* is an incredibly enriching experience. After almost seventy years of its publication, the novel discusses topics that are just as important for today's society as they were important during Mailer's time. These are ideas that can easily spark an interesting political, literary, or social debate. Perhaps, the only difference is that Mailer was introducing these topics in the late 1940's, whereas nowadays they are debated in international forums.

Serving in the Army was the adventure of Mailer's life which inspired him to write what is considered as one of the best post-war novels in American literature. After serving in the Pacific theater, he understood the Army as the institution that defends a country and keeps it safe from foreign threats. However, he also came to see the Army as the institution which takes a man and turns him into a pawn for the great game of chess that is war. Mailer was lucky to be placed in the Intelligence Section and did not engage in combat as much as other soldiers did, and took the opportunity to document as much as he could in the letters to his wife.

In *The Naked and The Dead*, Mailer brought to light topics which were very important to him on personal level, as well as for thousands of men and women who have put their lives at risk for the ideologies of others. A.H. Weiler mentioned in his movie review that "although the authors' over-all view was sometimes clouded, his men, who rarely understood why they fought, were honest, realistic, vibrantly alive citizens" (Weiler 1958). This is the most accurate statement when discussing the characters. These characters were the element that made the novel stand out and succeed, not the descriptions of scenery or the graphic combat scenes. Mailer created relatable characters and placed them in one of the most difficult situations a man can experience.

It cannot be assumed that the average reader is familiar with war, military life, or what it means to serve in the Army; therefore, Mail hooked the readers to the story

with his characters. The characters are honest and realistic. Mailer showed the reader what each of his characters were like before they entered the war, what they felt and thought as they served their country, and their plans once the war was over.

Through these small snippets into the soldiers' lives during peace-time America the reader can relate to the soldier's feelings of helplessness in different situations that they cannot control. Like Julio Martinez, a person cannot control where they are born, into which family, or their ethnic background. As Goldstein, one cannot control the beliefs they were taught growing up. Many left a home to which they can never go back because they have nothing left; while some, like Lieutenant Hearn and General Cummings, are lucky to be born ~~into~~ having a higher social status and have the world laid at their feet.

As soldiers, Mailer's characters cannot control the decisions their superiors make for them. They are there to follow orders and get results for their officers. They are unable to break the Army's status quo. They were trained and molded by the idea that the Army is successful only when the average soldier understands that individuality is a hindrance. They cannot control what happens in their hometowns when they are away. They have unfulfilled dreams, uncontrollable wives, children they have yet to meet, or they simply have nothing at all.

Mailer delivered a captivating work of literature. The opinion from professional reviewers was unanimously positive and the public agreed that *The Naked and The Dead* was an exceptional novel. The novel had all the necessary elements to consider it a great war-time novel: it had a compelling storyline, dynamic characters, incredible attention to detail and graphic descriptions of combat. It discussed the opinion on the Army, socially important topics, and ends with a touch of hope for America as they transition back into times of peace and regrouping after devastation and loss.

Unfortunately, the film adaptation did not meet either Mailer or the public's expectations. It had the potential to elevate the public's opinion of Mailer and *The Naked and The Dead* but – luckily for Mailer – it only jeopardized Walsh's reputation as a filmmaker. After reading the novel and watching the film butcher Mailer's novel, it was surprising to realize that even literary pieces from seven decades ago fell victims to greed and Hollywood's commercialization. The production company capitalized on the pre-existing fame that came with *The Naked and The Dead* and failed to create a product of quality that would match the best-seller. The film made millions in the box office, but only because of the build-up surrounding such a famous work of literature. However, only because a movie manages to make millions of dollars in the box office, it does not mean that it was a necessarily good film, and this was the case with Raoul Walsh's adaptation of *The Naked and The Dead*.

Mailer's inspiration is clear once the reader goes beyond the novel and becomes familiar with Mailer's life. His beginnings as a writer in Harvard and his time in the army are the two most critical times in his life which helped shaped this novel. He made himself vulnerable and accessible once the *The Selected Letters of Norman Mailer* was published. These letters let the readers immerse deeper into Mailer's life, they help the public understand the writer's thinking process, and they paint a bigger picture of the world he created in *The Naked and The Dead*. After carefully reading Mailer's novel, his epistolary compilation, and carrying out extensive research on the life events that led to the success of *The Naked and The Dead*, it is clear that Mailer used his experience as a tool for others to understand what war is.

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6. Original letter to first wife, Beatrice, from *The Selected Letters of Norman Mailer*.

All pictures were obtained online from the Harry Ransom Center of the University of Texas at Austin.  
Webpage access: <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/pressphotos/2007/mailler/>  
<http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/pressphotos/2005/mailler/>

## Appendices



Norman Mailer. 1960's

HARVARD COLLEGE

DEAN'S OFFICE

DELMAR LEIGHTON, DEAN OF FRESHMEN  
HENRY CHAUNCEY  
FRANCIS KEPPEL } ASSISTANT DEANS  
KNIGHT W. MCMAHAN }

9 UNIVERSITY HALL  
CAMBRIDGE 38, MASSACHUSETTS

August 14, 1939

My dear Mr. Mailer,

Your son has been admitted to Harvard College. In a college as large as Harvard it takes some time for teachers and administrative officers to become acquainted with their students; yet the important arrangements that have to be made at the very beginning - such as the assignment to rooms and to Faculty Advisers - all call for a knowledge of each man's special characteristics.

Will you, therefore, write us about him, as fully as you are willing, with reference to his individual qualities and needs? In case he has deficiencies in his earlier education or weaknesses in character or health that we ought to know about, please remember that your reply will be regarded as confidential and will be accessible only to your son's Faculty Adviser, to the Medical Office and to administrative officers. The more frankly you write to us, the more likely we are to be in a position to help your son.

While we believe that no students have been admitted to Harvard who do not have the capacity to do good college work, the transition from school to university conditions is not always easily made and we wish to help students as much as we can to facilitate this adjustment. Special arrangements under Faculty supervision have been made to assist students, particularly in the early period. We ask for your cooperation in notifying us if after the college year has begun you have reason to believe your son is having difficulty. No student needs to seek assistance from sources outside the University.

Material in regard to choice of courses is being sent to your son, and at registration a notice in regard to his Adviser will be given to him.

Very truly yours,



Isaac B. Mailer, Esq.  
555 Crown Street  
Brooklyn, New York

Harvard letter of admission. Addressed to Isaac Mailer, 1939.

555 Crown Street  
Brooklyn, New York  
September 5th, 1939

Dr. Delmar Leighton, Dean of Freshman  
Harvard College  
9 University Hall  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

My dear Dr. Leighton:

This is in reply to your letter of August 14th, 1939, and from the nature of it, it is very gratifying to know the splendid interest Harvard University takes in its Freshman student body.

Concerning my son, Norman, as far as I know, there are no deficiencies in his earlier education. As to his health, he was recently examined by our family physician, who stated that he is in excellent health.

Some of his characteristics may perhaps be briefly summed up in the following manner.- He has a keen sense of loyalty and fairness; is sincere and appreciates sincerity in others. Shows the proper deference and respectfulness to elders. While never seeking praise, I have found him, however, to react favorably to it by striving for higher accomplishments. Participates in and has the average boy's love for various outdoor sports.

His short-comings, if such, are that at times he displays shyness and is inclined to be sensitive.

I naturally appreciate the opportunity to write to you about my son and I feel confident that he will prove to be a worthwhile student at Harvard.

Very truly yours,

IBM:LN

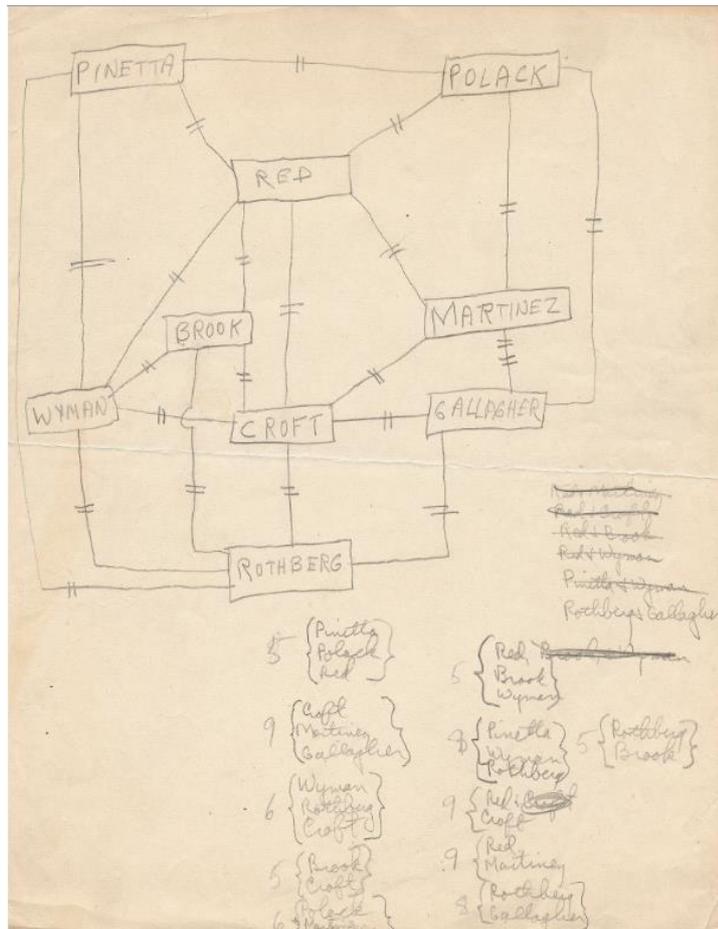
I. B. MAILER

Isaac Mailer's letter to Harvard's Admissions Office regarding his son. 1939.

~~FRANKENSTEIN~~ - HERMAN ROTHBERG [THEMATA]

- ✓ ① Corrosive sense of failure, of insufficiency
- ✓ ② Longing for friends' life + affection
- ✓ ③ Attempts to idealize his wife + family
- ✓ ④ Realization of the baneness of his family, relationships
- ✓ ⑤ Knowledge of ~~engineering~~ biology
- ✓ ⑥ Masturbatory
- ✓ ⑦ Joy in animals + fauna
- ✓ ⑧ Physical weakness
- ✓ ⑨ Hoarding of army of combat
- ✓ ⑩ Deep need for security
- ✓ ⑪ Envy
- ✓ ⑫ Self-pity
- ✓ ⑬ Lack of religion, pride in it
- ✓ ⑭ Fear of dying

Mailer wrote down the main characteristics of each character in separate index cards.



The Naked and The Dead's first rough draft of the characters.

Original letters from *The Selected Letters of Norman Mailer*.  
To Alfred Kazin, a personal friend, and to his first ex-wife, Beatrice.

73 Perry Street  
New York 21, N. Y.  
May 26, 1959

Alfred Kazin  
110 Riverside Drive  
New York 21, N. Y.

Dear Alfred,

I want to thank you for your good paragraph on *The Time of Her Time*, especially since your letter made it clear that your defense of it is more a matter of professional duty than outright pleasure.

I loved your letter, which is a strong way to put it except that it gave me a pleasure I obviously did not give you: I had the feeling, well now we know what to talk to each other about, and I'm glad you laid it out so frankly. I got my laugh out of "the Rabbi of screaming, the Talmudist of fucking," because more than once in the last year when I've been havin' an argument with some of my hip friends I have said to them something on the general order of, "Hush now, the Rabbi is speaking." And of course the coldness and grimness you talk about in my work is probably the single most unattractive feature of what I manage to do, but shit, Alfred, you know as well as I do that one does not write away from such a large part of one's temperament. One tries to write through it and maybe eventually out of it. There is also the little matter of the real temper of the time. Even if I were capable of writing about sex with the warmth of Lawrence, there would still be the more abstract matter of whether one should. I am more or less obsessed with the idea that sex is close to dying in a new ice-age of the psyche, and I think the only way to change one's readers and warn them -- for yes, I am guilty of a messianic lust -- is to make them set up camp on the ice for a while. In a way this beggars my intent. Most of our good novels have been written about people who start with youth, some heat, and much innocence, and in this new book I would like to do the opposite, to begin with characters who are monsters of self-consciousness and try for the more difficult and perhaps impossible trip into a terrain where emotion becomes real again. Whether I can bring it off is of course another matter. But on the limited ground of *The Time of Her Time* I still wonder if you don't tend to make *Serius* a little too much a direct spokesman for me -- after all, I'm not over six feet tall, blond, gay, and more anti-semitic than not.

There's so much to talk about that I'd like to remind you of your suggestion last Christmas season that we have lunch. I'm usually not too alert in the middle of the day so if you'd rather, maybe you and Ann would like to come over for dinner some night, or we could go out, you and me, and have a few drinks downtown or uptown. Suppose I call you in a few days.

Best,

December 31, 1960

Dear Bea,

For the record I was never psychotic. The doctor who stated I was, and it was on his say-so that I was sent to Bellevue, was not a psychiatrist and saw me for only 30 seconds outside the hospital where Adele was being operated on. The doctors at Bellevue recognized the force of my argument that there is a difference between getting very ugly one time in my life and being psychotic.

Right now the case has cooled and will probably be dismissed in the next month or so since Adele is bringing no complaint. I would like very much to have Sue up here for a month or six weeks -- it's going to do her much more harm to think that her father is nuts than to be here and see me daily for a period. Since there won't be much sense to her going to school we won't get involved with that, but there will be a lot of places to take her and I think she'll have a good time.

Try to be a pal and answer this quickly, will you?