

## Reflection of War and Totalitarianism in the Works of Norman Mailer

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### ABSTRACT

*This article is devoted to the reflection of war and its effect on the populations of America in the works of Norman Mailer who was the greatest representative of 20<sup>th</sup> century American literature. Research results demonstrate that most of Mailer's works describe post-war American life, people's struggle against totalitarian forces. Mailer focuses on the contradictions in American society, reflected in the personal and social struggle for the Motherland. In conclusion, he casts doubt on the official goals of the war, showing the conflict between the stated motives and their real impact on American society.*

**Keywords:** War, totalitarianism, new journalism, collective novel, modernism, existentialism, non-fiction, hipster, amnesia, Negroes.

### INTRODUCTION

Second World War was significant in the social and cultural history of the United States of America. The number of people killed in this war was several times more than the losses in the First World War. The war on the two fronts, namely the Pacific campaign and the attack on Pearl Harbor (in 1941, the Americans entered the war after Japanese attack on this naval base), excluding the American "Civil War" of 1861-1865 it affected the nation more deeply than any other war. At the same time, unlike Europe, participation in the war was beneficial for America in

many ways, which primarily helped to overcome the Great Depression and restore its economy, and large companies strengthened and expanded the middle class. The results of the war were the abandonment of the policy of isolation, the economic, political and military strengthening of America, which allowed them to increase their role as the leading power of the Western world. The war also marked a generational shift in American literature. A number of famous writers died in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including Thomas Woolf (1900-1939), Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940), Sherwood Anderson (1876-1941), Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945) and others. In the decades after the war, famous writers such as William Faulkner (1897-1962), Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), John Steinbeck (1902-1968), John Dos Passos (1896-1970) continued to create their great works. Faulkner in 1949, Hemingway in 1954 and J. Steinbeck in 1969 were awarded the Nobel Prize, while each of their new works became a great sensation in literature. It should be noted that at the end of war, a new literary generation appeared in American literature, including Jerome David Salinger, Norman Mailer, William Styron, Kurt Vonnegut and a number of other young writers.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

One of the outstanding figures of 20th century American literature, writer, journalist and director Norman Kingsley Mailer, known for his sharp critical thoughts and unique writing style, was born on January 31, 1923 in Long Branch, New Jersey. Mailer has always attracted public attention not only as a writer, but also as a person. He received his initial education at an all-boys boarding school in Brooklyn, and later continued his studies at Harvard University in aviation engineering. Despite this, the writer's passion for literature has always prevailed, he participates in various literary contests and educational courses already in his student years. In particular, he published his first story called 'The Great Thing in the World' at the age of 18, and in 1941, he won the "Story" magazine's university competition with this story. In 1944, he tried to postpone going to the war,

claiming that he was working on his "most important work" related to the war, but his request was rejected and he was mobilized for the war. He will be sent to the Philippines with the "112th Cavalry" after training at the military camp called "Fort Bragg" located in North Carolina. As soon as he returned from the war, in 1948, his first work *The Naked and Dead* was published. When talking about Mailer's work, it is worth noting that he has been working since 1948. Between 1948 and 1979, he published more than 30 books of novels, essays, dramas, novellas, journalistic reports, and poetry in various artistic and journalistic forms. *Barbary Shore* (1951), *Deer Park* (1955), *American Dream* (1965), *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (1967), *Ancient Evenings* (1983) are among them. His last novel *The Castle in the Forest* was published in 2007. Writer's *The Armies of the Night* (1968), *Siege of Miami and Chicago* (1968), *Fire in the Moon* (1969), *St. George and the Godfather* (1972), *Battle* (1975), *Picasso's Portrait of a Young Man* (1995) and *Why are We at War* (2003) documentary-journalistic works are still loved by readers. The writer deserved the Pulitzer Prize for the works *The Armies of the Night* and *The Executioner's Song*.

He attracted other types of art, especially cinematography, and as a result, he tried himself in the field of cinema. For several years, after Mailer became fully convinced that the words of the writer, in general, how literature is a powerful tool, that with the help of literature it is possible to manage the difficulties and various contradictions of the modern world, and even "change" the surrounding reality, his contemporaries he sought to make a revolution in his mind and this is clearly visible in his works. (Shlyamovich 1985)

Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* tells the story of the Americans marching on the Pentagon in October 1967. This demonstration was organized as a protest against the Vietnam War. The column consisted mainly of thousands of conscientious objectors. At the beginning of the demonstration, there were radical leaders, politicians, writers and other famous people. The poet Robert Lowell, the linguist Noam Chomsky, the famous journalist Dwight MacDonal, the radical Sidney Lance and Norman Mailer were in the first rows. Mailer criticized the

United States' role in the Vietnam War, expressing a collective struggle for peace and drawing attention to the scale of protest against official war policies. Details that organizing attorney Ed De Grazia targeted the march route from the Lincoln Memorial to the Pentagon argue that the demonstration was a deliberate and strategically planned protest against the Vietnam War. These efforts show the consistency of the actions of those who denounced the injustice of war. Mailer describes war as "evil" and explains that the consequences of any kind of war are that it burns a large number of women and children, bombards places and confuses the people and brave young men fight with anger and hatred in the given work:

All wars were bad which undertook daily operations which burned and bombed large numbers of women and children; all wars were bad which relocated whole populations... Certainly, all wars were bad which took some of the bravest young men of a nation and sent them into combat with outrageous superiority and outrageous argument: such conditions of combat had to excite a secret passion for hunting other humans. Certainly, any war was a bad war which required an inability to reason as the price of retaining one's patriotism. (Mailer 1968: 209)

The work consists of two parts: The first part is called 'History as a Novel: The Steps of the Pentagon, in this part the writer himself is embodied as the main character, however, the work is narrated in the third person language, that is, the writer addresses himself as "Mailer" and not "I."

Still Lowell now made the mistake of reporting his remark. "Yes, Norman, I really think you are the best journalist in America." The pen may be mightier than the sword, yet at their best each belong to extravagant men. "Well, Cal" said Mailer, using Lowell's nickname for the first time, "There are days when I think of myself as being the best writer in America. (Mailer 1968: 22)

Therefore, we can call this work a fully autobiographical work. Mailer takes his subjective view of the anti-war protests through the marchers and shows how the emotional struggle against the

war, which connected to their pursuit of social justice. This approach allows readers to understand the internal motivation and, why this protest became so important in American life. In her article, I. L. Galinskaya admits that in the first part of this work, the writer approached her personal views, the events he witnessed on the basis of facts, and in the second part, newspaper reports, oral statements of witnesses, a word in other words, it relies on historical data written in the form of a “collectivist novel” (Galinskaya 2009).

For reference, it should be mentioned that the above-mentioned novel is one of the major examples of the new literary trend known as “new journalism” that emerged in American literature in the late 1960s and 1970s. “New journalism” is an extension of traditional journalism and “nonfiction” writing style. This method serves to tell the stories based on life events, learned according to the journalistic research, combined with the techniques of artistic depiction. Writers such as Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote, and Gay Talese set this trend in motion. The important aspect of this genre is that writers collect facts through research, interviews, and observations on the topic and publish the finished works in newspapers and magazines. Their difference from traditional journalistic stories are characterized by combining several real people into one fictional character, i.e. creating a set of characters, using condensed dialogues, rearranging the details of events.

Harold Bloom, one of the prominent literary critics in the world literature, showing great interest in Mailer’s work, in his book called *Bloom's Modern Critical Views* a collection of critical articles on Mailer's life and work. It examines various aspects of the writer's literary heritage, as well as the artistic interpretation of his works, including *The Executioner's Song*, *The Ancient Evenings*, *The Naked and Dead*, etc. Some articles analyze the subject of Mailer’s works and their stylistic features, and others compare his works with the works of other famous authors. For example, one article examines *The Executioner's Song* as the pinnacle of romantic expression, while another compares *The Deer Park* to D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Here, Michael Glenday's article entitled 'The hot breath of the future: The naked and dead,' included in this collection, highlights two aspects of the war depicted in the writer's work *The Naked and the Dead*. He argues that the military space becomes a power struggle, where soldiers simultaneously try to save their lives and maintain hierarchy in the military department. This shows that their actions are determined by the desire to find their place in the new structure, where the war becomes not only a struggle for the Motherland, but also a symbol of internal leadership and determination of social status (Bloom 2003).

By the way, adding to the above opinion, Mailer (1954) writes:

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 untapped, ferocious, lonely and romantic desires, that concentration of ecstasy and violence which is the dream life of the nation.

In fact, Mailer points out that through this idea, it is possible to notice the two-way movement of society for many centuries. From the outside, it seems that politics has a visible and practical high history, but at its core lies a violently flowing secret river of the nation's unfulfilled dreams, desires, and emotions. This subterranean river represents complex aspects of the human experience that may not always be visible to the eye, but have a powerful influence. Therefore, through his works, he reveals the conflicts between the external aspects of society and the internal hidden forces that control human behavior and shape the course of history.

Another work of Mailer's *Barbary Shore* did not cause as much noise as his other works, but it plays an important role in the development stage of the writer. In it, Mailer raises two main problems that constantly torment him, that is, the state of American society at that time and the problems of individuals in it. The writer explains about this work in the book *Advertisements for Myself*:

In a sense, I may have tried to evade the question by writing *Barbary Shore*, but there was no real choice. If my past had become empty as a theme, was I to write about Brooklyn streets, or my mother and father, or another war novel (*The Naked and the Dead Go to Japan*) was I to do the book of the returning veteran when I had lived like a mole writing and rewriting seven hundred pages in those fifteen months? No, those were not real choices. I was drawn instead to write about an imaginary future... But *Barbary Shore* was really a book to emerge from the bombarded cellars of my unconscious, an agonized eye of a novel which tried to find some amalgam of my new experience and the larger horror of that world which might be preparing to destroy itself. (Mailer 1954: 91-94)

Through these quoted words of the author, we can understand that Mailer is looking for answers to the questions that have troubled him in this work, he creates a new turn in his work by combining his past experiences and current successes. He notes that he wrote *Barbary Shore* by combining his new experiences with the world's biggest problems, but unfortunately, this work did not meet his expectations and did not become as popular as his other works. Despite this, we can get a broad understanding of the work from the writer's words. First of all, it should be noted that Michael Lovett, the main character and narrator of the work, has many aspects that reflect the character of Mailer. Like Mailer, Lovett is drawn from the past and committed to the present, but in his case the situation is more dramatic, so it is symbolic. Because Lovett literally has no past: he is a victim of amnesia (loss of memory), a product of war with no emotional connection to the terrible post-war world, we can understand from the very first lines of the play: "Probably, I was in the war. There is the mark of a wound behind my ear, an oblong of unfertile flesh where no hair grows. It is covered over now, and may be disguised by even the clumsiest barber, but no barber can hide the scar on my back. For that a tailor is more in order."

Mikey Lovett, the main character of the novel, lives by his desire to be a writer, with \$500 saved up in pennies, just like Mailer, when he writes his first novel, *Naked and Dead*, he lives as a "mole" who is looking for an opportunity to live in a secret,

free from everyone, for this reason, one of his acquaintances takes him to an old building in Brooklyn Heights. There, Lovett gets caught up in a terrible relationship with five other members of the house.

In his article entitled 'Marxisms on Trial: Barbary Shore', Nigel Lee states that the theme of war in Mailer's works becomes mythological, that is, war becomes a symbol of the conflict between government and individual freedom. In the mythology of war, the writer focuses on the struggle for human rights, opposing the state power to it. As a result, this struggle becomes a symbol of the desire for eternal freedom. (Bloom 2003: 83-108) Therefore, Lovett, the main character of this work, represents the present time, where opposite personalities and ideologies collide with the absence of his past.

In most of Norman Mailer's works, the internal conflicts of the characters reflect the struggle for the motherland. These conflicts are clearly manifested in the contradictions between the individual and the society.

After all, each character tries to find his place in society, which makes it possible to create deep psychological images that reveal dilemmas between personal and social dimensions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Exactly 19 years after the publication of the writer's first novel *The Naked and Dead*, another work written about the war *Why are we in Vietnam?* (1967) saw the world. Apart from the time difference between these works, as well as the philosophy of the work and the writing technique, there are enough similarities between these two works. Firstly, the theme of war is at the core of both works, that is, the theme of war is in the background in other fiction and non-fiction works of the writer, but war is the main idea in these two works. Secondly, there are two types of struggle between the cited works: totalitarianism and the struggle for nature, but it should not be forgotten that Mailer's work, whether it is artistic or journalistic, is based on the conflict between totalitarian forces and the individual. Totalitarianism comes from the Latin word "totalis" which means whole,



complete, total control of the state over all spheres of social life is established, constitutional rights and freedoms are abolished, the monopoly of one person or social group (military or one party) is unconditionally obeyed established. (O'zbekiston Milliyensiklopediyasi 2000: 512)

Taking this into account, Mailer in these works shows the ethics of management, the obligation of a person to use his intelligence and power wisely, and to resist the control of others over them. In addition to these points, it is worth noting that *Why are we in Vietnam?* In his novel, Mailer focused on the contradictions in American social life, which are manifested in the personal and social struggle for the Motherland. He questions the true purpose of the war by showing the contradiction between the stated reasons and their impact on American society.

The variety and innovation displayed in Mailer's extensive literary writings led Michael Jones to call the writer a "genre creator" (Adams.1974: 173) because the writer not only used different writing styles, but also created his own unique stylistic combinations by combining elements of various genres.

In spite of his extensive literary process, Mailer wrote in 1959 in *Advertisement of Myself*, which consists of excerpts from the collection, short stories, previously published articles, and reflections of the writer, his unrealized "major novel" reflects on. He faced great obstacles, contradictions, and trials in creating this type of work, as a result, the collection of significant works he created served to enrich our understanding of American life, culture, and history at various stages of the 20th century. Since the writer's unique writing style was evident from the beginning of his career, his works did not remain in a vacuum.

For example, his first novel *The Naked and Dead* was compared to Hemingway's works by readers as soon as it was published. Although many of these comparisons are a result of stylistic similarities (Mailer himself says that E. Hemingway was an influence in his work), much of it is due to the two authors' similar lifestyles and concerns and was associated with his bravery and bravery during the war.

Nevertheless, the writer says that not only Hemingway, but also a number of other writers and poets, as well as intellectuals,

John Dos Passos, Leo Tolstoy, James played a big role in Mailer's work. Such artists as T. Farrell, William Faulkner, D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, John Steinbeck, Thomas Wolfe are among them. Another influential writer and Marxist scholar was Jean Malaquais, whom Mailer met after he published "The Naked and Dead", which Malaquais translated it into French. Mailer describes J. Malaquais "the only person who can combine his strong religious views with a strong sense of political shortcomings" (Lenon 1988: 85).

But despite the above-mentioned influences, Mailer did a lot of work on ways to form and develop his unique writing style. As a result, his work *Advertisements of Myself* was evaluated as a work that shows a unique style and a bright perspective. In fact, Mailer himself admits that this is the first work that can be called his own (Norman Mailer & John Buffalo Mailer 2006: 74).

At the same time, Mailer claims that through this work he realized the rhythm of his prose and began to move away from the heavy influence of his ancestors. *Advertisement of Myself* is partially different from autobiographical works, because in addition to the writer's life or autobiography, it talks about society, state power, the consequences of the economic crisis, and the impact of World War II on America.

In this book, the treatise known as *The White Negro* occupies a special place, because in it the existential lifestyle, violence, sexual relations, as well as the importance of fighting against totalitarian forces, which are often found in other works of the writer, finds a solution. Mailer noticed that after the Second World War, people's attitude towards living, especially the younger generation, changed. The young men seemed uncertain about life.

Perhaps the horrors of World War II, the concentration camps, gas chambers, or the general efforts to destroy the atomic bombs, evoked this feeling. At a time when wars were raging, personal dignity seemed to be disappearing due to insecurity and lack of freedom (Arun Soule 2014: 103-104).

In this sense, Mailer makes the following comments about the Second World War:

The Second World War presented a mirror to the human condition which blinded anyone who looked into it. For if tens of millions were killed in concentration camps out of the inexorable agonies and contractions of super states founded upon the always insoluble contradictions of injustice, one was then obliged also to see that no matter how crippled and prevented an image of man was the society he had created, it was nonetheless his creation and if society was so murderous, then who could ignore the most hideous of questions about his own nature?

Mailer reflects on the negative consequences of being controlled by society, a man full of new ideas, according to him, instead of his dreams, hopes, creativity, adaptation to these conditions, fear. such emotions take place. In an interview with Richard Stern, Mailer, agreeing with these thoughts, talks about the fact that things are becoming smaller and smaller, less important, and the spirit of creativity is fading (Mailer 1954: 324).

According to Mailer's understanding, feelings such as heroism, courage, and tenacity are the only way to overcome the inhuman system in society. If humanity does not challenge this system, it will simply remain a tiny speck in the vast machinery of the social structure.

Acute danger and fear have fueled the young American generation's desire to live only in the moment. Mailer called such American existentialists "hipsters." Adib dedicates the fourth chapter of his collection *Advertisements of Myself* to representatives of this generation. At this point, I believe that attention should be paid to the essence of the literary trend of existentialism.

Existentialism is, first of all, a doctrine that allows a person to live and, moreover, emphasizes that any reality and any activity is determined by a certain environment and human subjectivity. The word existence means "presence" in Latin, in this sense, existence refers to the direct union of the subject and the object. The essence of existence is the openness of the subject to others, the openness of others to the subject, as well as their transition to each other. Existentialism is expressed in two forms: in the religious form, it is assumed that the other object is God

and the free person moves towards this god, while in the atheistic form, the other object is interpreted as nothing (Pardayev 2019: 151-153)

From this it can be concluded that the human being realized his freedom and created himself suddenly. Later, he will face a series of bottomless consequences, and now he will have to choose his own path. By choosing this path, he finds his freedom in the process of implementation. As soon as he breaks his identity, he gradually discovers the world of others. Humanity faces many conflicts and contradictions during its life, which affects its character, nature and outlook, and as a result, it becomes more complicated. No theory can fully express all aspects of these complexities. Therefore, no literary trend, direction or method can fully reflect the human world. Certain aspects of human character are embodied in the works created through the most complex methods of literature, such as romanticism and realism. In the works of J. Sartre, M. Proust, J. Joyce, A. Camus, and F. Kafka, great exponents of the existentialism literary direction, there are certain aspects of humanity – anxiety, panic, fear, sadness, anguish, despair are described. There are no positive or negative characters in such works, mainly the depiction of the image of a person in pain and suffering occupies the main place in them. The actions and thoughts of depressed people are described in detail, and the baseness of humanity is shown openly. People are told that fear, danger, suffering, and the negative consequences they cause are real phenomena.

According to Mailer, the source of “Hip” are “Negroes” who in real existential life always live in a vortex of fear, anxiety, fear, despair, contradictions. The writer explains the main reason for the appearance of representatives of this generation in American society as follows:

...the presence of Hip as a working philosophy in the sub-worlds of American life is probably due to jazz, and it is knifelike entrance into culture, its subtle but so penetrating influence on avant-garde generation-that post-war generation of the adventurers, who had absorbed the lessons of disillusionment and disgust of twenties, the depression, and the war. (Mailer 1954: 284)

## CONCLUSION

Norman Kingsley Mailer has published about 20 works of nonfiction and more than a dozen political, cultural, literary and journalistic novels throughout his life. Mailer's books touched the most sensitive nerve of the modern spiritual life of the West. This is a condemnation of the Vietnam war, an assessment of the invasion of Iraq, the disclosure of the secret of Hitler's ancestry, undermining the foundations of racist doctrines that some are trying to revive today. That is why the death of Mailer, who died on November 10, 2007, caused such a wide public outcry and extensive comments in the press. During the writer's lifetime, many monographic studies and collections of articles devoted to the work of Norman Mailer appeared in the world, examining his works in various socio-political contexts and calling him an expert in various forms of political-artistic and documentary-journalistic prose.

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