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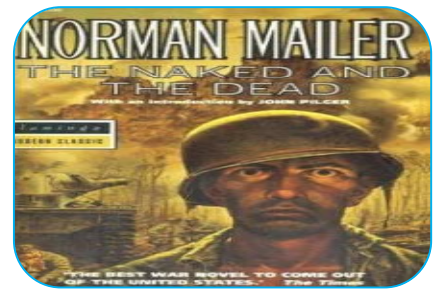
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## DEHUMANIZATION OF SOLDIERS IN MAILER'S THE NAKED AND THE DEAD

**Dr. S. P. Singh**  
**Prof. & Head, Dept. of English,**  
**S. N. Govt. P.G. College, Khandwa (M.P.)**

### ABSTRACT:

Against the Romantic picturization of war, Mailer like G.B. Shaw (*Man and Superman*) presents its realistic picture in his magnum opus novel, *The Naked and the Dead*. He holds the view that Soldiers involved in war confront with the horrible scenes-bloodshed, wounded soldiers, scattered dead bodies piled on each other - that cast a permanent scar on their minds. As a result, even after war a sizeable number of soldiers find it difficult to live a normal life. War - trauma results on their part in innumerable problems, physical and psychological, that they are destined to live sometimes all through their life. Moreover, inner military life full of discrimination on the basis of hierarchy and certain other factors is also described in a realistic way.



**KEYWORDS:** War machines, pacific, Philippines, *The Naked and the Dead*.

### INTRODUCTION:

One of the issues which Mailer dwells on in *The Naked and the Dead* is the dehumanization of soldiers in war. They are continuously referred as war machines in the novel. Mailer depicts this dehumanizing of soldiers by stating:

The davit machinery was complicated, and a portion of it hung over the water. When a man was harnessed into a pack and web belt and carried a rifle and two bandoliers and several grenades, a bayonet and a helmet, he felt as if he had a tourniquet over both shoulders and across his chest. It was hard to breathe and his limbs kept falling asleep. (TND 21)

The novel presents the prophetic vision of Mailer of an America that is not only the spiritually "naked" but also the spiritually "dead". In fact, war is different from the civilian life; it has a different world of relationships and ambiances. Mailer through this novel suggests that due to war soldiers deform into mechanical objects by fear and desire for survival. They find themselves in such a situation that does not have any exit; for them the only possible rescue is in fantasy. Commanding officers of superior ranks suppressed individual needs and desires of their subordinates in an inhuman way. Soldiers are programmed like robots.

Attitude of officers like Sergeant Sam Croft towards his subordinates is that of dehumanization. War for Croft is a means through which he can execute his domination over soldiers. He shoots a Japanese prisoner of war and crushes a bird to death without any cause: "The prisoner had taken a deep puff and was leaning back now against the trunk of the tree.... His mind had been entirely empty until

now, but abruptly he brought up his rifle and pointed it at the prisoner's head." moreover, he coldly plans Hearn's death in order to regain the control over his platoon. Devoid of all human sentiments, he is a cold - blooded man.

Mailer uses the flashback technique to portray the psychological problems faced by the soldiers. He compares the vulnerable position of Hearn, who is a representation of most of the soldiers, in the combat zone and his childhood days. One day, Cummings throws his cigarette on the floor and calls upon Hearn to clean the floor or face the risk of a court-martial and imprisonment. Hearn finds himself in a helpless situation.

### DISCUSSION:

General Cummings is an embodiment of tyranny and selfishness who resembles the American Senators and entrepreneurs who can bow to any extent to meet their selfish ends. Thus, Cummings is described as:

"His expression when he smiled was very close to the ruddy, complacent and hard appearance of any number of American senators and businessmen...."  
(TND 74)

Valsen tells Croft that Hennessey was given 'a life belt' without any air cartridges. As a result, he tried to fill air into the belt in the darkness, but was not able to do so. Hennessey's death depicts the ugliest reality of war:

"Then he heard the terrible siren of the mortar shell coming down on him. He pirouetted in a little circle, and threw himself to the ground. Perhaps, he felt the explosion before a piece of shrapnel tore his brain in half. (TND 34)

The condition of the three hundred men of the troops, who construct roads on the island, is really wretched and pathetic. For them everything is grotesque. They have not even dreamt of the troubles which they had to face on the island. They are all in a state of confusion and look forward to get back to their company headquarters. But, General Cummings was at odds with their expectations, he who had been recognized as a tyrant man was eagerly expecting the actual war. It was Hearn who actually discovers Cummings' despotism:

He had been advertised in advance as the most sympathetic and genial officer in a division command, his charm was well known, but Hearn had discovered quite early that he was a tyrant, a tyrant with a velvet voice, it is true, but undeniably a tyrant. (TND 71)

In addition, the duty of guarding their posts at night sitting in wet foxholes adds much to the sufferings of the soldiers. Such pitiable conditions of the soldiers clearly reveal the inhumanity that existed in America during the Wartime. It is also evident that the soldiers are sent to unsafe places like island of Anopopei for no reasons. The degradation of the soldiers is further highlighted through the views of officers like Captain Mantelli who only cares for his comforts. Response of Mantelli to Croft is really gruesome:

" Croft, suppose I was to give you those seven men? Who the hell would hand me a piece of toilet paper in the morning? (TND 42)

There is also a lot of difference between the facilities provided to officers and soldiers:

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Did you notice how they treated the officers? They slept in staterooms when we were jammed in the hold like pigs. It's to make them feel superior, a chosen group. That's the same device Hitler uses when he makes the Germans think they're superior. (TND 45)

Another discernable example occurs when a consignment of fresh meat arrives for the fighting men. General Cummings orders to divide the ration into two equal portions. One half is to be distributed among the one hundred and eighty enlisted men in the camp and the other half is supposed for the thirty eight officers in officer's mess, who are pretty less in number as compared to the enlisted men.

General Cummings approach towards his fellow soldiers is an evidence enough to prove that the society is ruled by the tyrants. The treatment provided to the wounded soldiers reveals the discrepancy between the officials and the workers. In the novel the soldiers are regarded as timewasters and could expect no sympathy from the doctors while as the officers are treated by the best drugs for minor injuries. The doctors are also exposed as persons lacking emotions who only care for the return of soldiers to the war front:

"They don't care if you live or die here. All they want is to get you back where you can stop a bullet. (TND 352)

Minetta, one of the injured soldiers, is admitted to the hospital after a bullet had pierced his leg. After witnessing the comforts in the hospital, he wanted to stay in the hospital so as to delay reporting to the officer in the camp. On thinking that his wound had healed up and the doctors would discharge him as fit for combat he took off his bandages and rip up the gash again and again every fifteen minutes so that it may start bleeding.

In the morning, before the doctor came, Minetta took off his bandages and examined his wound. It was almost healed; the lips of the cut had come together and were filled with new pink flesh. They would certainly discharge him today. Minetta looked about him....The other men were occupied or sleeping, and with a quick motion he ripped open the gash again. It began to bleed, and he wrapped up the bandages with trembling fingers, feeling a guilty glee. Under the blanket he would rub his wound every few minutes to start the bleeding again.

Officers in the army consider the soldiers as 'canon fodders'. Minetta feigned to be mentally ill to avoid his return:

"Minetta threw his magazine at him, and screamed, "There's a Jap outside the fuggin tent, there's a Jap right over there, right over there." He looked about wildly, and shouted, "Where's a gun, gimme a gun." TND 355)

The harsh treatment given to the injured or war-fatigued soldiers makes Minetta furious. He compares the treatment given to soldiers to that of a dog. He thinks that the officers are bastards and treat the soldiers harshly. A guy gets hurt and how do they treat him? Like a dog. They don't give a damn about us. Here I was willing to go back on my own accord, and he treated me as if I was a criminal. Aaah, fug 'em, they're all a bunch of bastards.

Another example of dehumanizing is discernable in the case of Red who tells the doctor that he is suffering from nephritis, which has been diagnosed by a doctor in the states. The doctor in return does not believe him and tells him that they have been told to watch out for malingerers. "We got a report from the hospital today to watch out for malingerers. How do I know you're not faking the symptoms?"

Red remembered a soldier who had died in the States because he had not been admitted to the hospital. He had gone through training for "three days with a fever because the post hospital had a rule that no men could be taken into the hospital unless their temperature was over."

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**CONCLUSION :**

In nutshell, human history is full of bloodshed and atrocity. The present war between Russia and Ukraine is also an outcome of the ego and the selfishness of two superpowers. Competition is between America and Russia for supremacy. As a result, millions and millions of people including children, women and senior citizens are undergoing the endless war sufferings. What will the end of it, only the time at distance will tell. Besides, soldiers fighting for the cause of their nations are facing a lot of problems, physical as well as the psychological. Mailer's war novel, *Naked and the Dead*, expressing the first rate experiences of the sufferings of soldiers, remains to be the first great war novel.

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