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The Value of Literary Journalism: Searching for Truths Through An Objective/Subjective Dialectic

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THE VALUE OF LITERARY JOURNALISM: SEARCHING FOR TRUTHS THROUGH AN OBJECTIVE/SUBJECTIVE DIALECTIC

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

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Literary Journalism is a hybrid genre that combines literary devices with advanced journalistic techniques to create nonfiction narratives. The distinctive qualities of literary journalism, working in addition to so-called objective approaches of conventional journalism, provide the reader with an alternative observation of specific social phenomena. In the introduction, issues revolving around the genre will be discussed followed by the introduction of the objective/subjective dialectic thus formulating my thesis that insists combining the two approaches allows the reader to see truth beyond ideology. The three chapters that follow offer readings of three key and representative works of literary journalism. *The Armies of the Night* by Norman Mailer discusses the author's experience at a 1967 Vietnam War protest, *American Ground* by William Langewiesche provides a fresh look at an American tragedy, and *Into Thin Air* by Jon Krakauer questions the ambitions of mankind in the classic enigmatic battle versus nature.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my achievement to several people beginning with the initial motivation for the rebirth of my educational career, my daughter Diana. Her uncanny sense of humor reminds me that there is always a fresh perspective to be grasped. On my educational journey I have been accompanied by my encouraging parents and siblings, my two best friends Mario and Hector, and a handful of incredible classmates including Helen, Dan, Blanca, Randy, and Xochitl; for the last and most rewarding leg of my journey, Kasey my serenity. This project is as much theirs as it is mine. I also would like to dedicate my thesis to the Nikki Rowe Volleyball family which has been a radiant element of my life for the last seven years. Thank you all for the experience.

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CHAPTER I

INRODUCTION TO LITERARY JOURNALISM AND THE OBJECTIVE/SUBJECTIVE DIALECTIC

Investigating the Literature of Investigation

Literary journalism is a difficult genre to classify. Walk into any bookstore and you will find books of the genre in various sections: Nonfiction, Politics, Cultural Studies, and Travel Literature, among others. A possible reason literary journalism is found in multiple classifications is that authors associated with the genre inquire into many aspects of the human experience. Some works of literary journalism focus on specific events such as a national campaign for the Presidency of the United States and others on specific topics of interest including illegal immigration. The purpose, though, is usually the same: authors of the genre intend to provide the reader with facts about issues concerning specific social phenomena. Much like the conventional journalist who files daily reports for print, radio, television, and internet, the literary journalist is an interviewer, an observer and a reporter. Unlike a conventional journalist who attempts to remain detached from a story, however, a literary journalist submerges himself into his subject in order to acquire truths less accessible to practitioners of so-called objective journalism. The resulting literature is produced using a combination of literary devices and advanced journalistic approaches. In this discussion, the strategies, characteristics, and an

analysis of validity and importance of the genre are explored. I will then focus on my thesis that insists combining the two approaches, conventional and literary journalism, creates an objective/subjective dialectic that allows the reader to see truth beyond ideology. Using three premier examples of literary journalism I will show that both approaches to reporting stories are effective in producing factual evidence and with the interchange between the two poles, a broader picture is produced. Ultimately, literary journalism provides alternative and necessary investigative approaches in order to reveal hidden aspects of social reality; this effort operates in the face of politically charged events previously reported on within a particular ideology that limits perspectives and analysis.

Before identifying the strategies and characteristics, I will review the history of the genre. Prominent scholar of literary journalism Norman Sims, in his book titled *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism*, writes, "The story of American literary journalism seems like that of Moses and his wanderings in the desert, except this genre has taken longer to emerge" (20). Through his biblical analogy of a people searching for a promised land, Sims explains the historical development and materialization of a genre which had previously been searching for an identity without a sense of direction. To clarify, traces of the genre are found sporadically throughout literary history and yet its identification as a genre developed some time after its earlier incarnations.

According to Sims, the origins of literary journalism can be traced back to Daniel Defoe whose literary works straddle what Sims calls the "fact-fiction divide" (2). Sims explains that "The early 1700s saw an upsurge of books whose authors claimed their stories were true, such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*" (1). Readers were misled into believing Defoe's fictional

accounts to be works of nonfiction and vice-versa as was the case with his short work of nonfiction, *The Storm*, which many read as factual.

John C. Harstock, another notable scholar of literary journalism, also identifies Defoe as a pioneer of both fiction and non-fiction literature. Harstock cites several literary works of Defoe and in his book, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form*, he writes:

> Taken collectively, what can be detected in the *Journal of the Plague Year*, *The Storm*, and *Jonathan Wild* is Defoe's wide-ranging if ambiguous exploration and probing of the not-so-clear boundaries between what we conveniently view as fiction and nonfiction, and in that sense Defoe is indeed a pioneer. (117)

While both Sims and Harstock are willing to credit Defoe with the beginnings of literary journalism, his influence is over-looked by author Tom Wolfe in his anthology of literary journalism titled *The New Journalism*. In a subsection of Wolfe's introduction called "Not Half-Bad Candidates," he believes James Boswell is perhaps the earliest practitioner of a writing style similar to literary journalism specifically because Boswell would place author Samuel Johnson "into situations so that he could report on them, get the dialogue, dote on the manners […]" (60). Though both Defoe and Boswell are viable candidates as predecessors of this genre, it is unlikely they intended to initiate a new form of literature that would resemble literary journalism as we know it today. While traces of the genre can be found in their works, the period when the genre would establish itself as a literary art form would be during the America Progressive Era which began in the late 1800s.

According to a historical study of journalism titled *The Media in America: A History*, Joseph Pulitzer's New York newspaper, the *World*, reigned as king of the mass media during the

Progressive Era (Sloan & Stuart 287). Pulitzer encouraged his reporters to be aggressive with their investigations, but one article in particular gained national attention not only for the story that was reported but how the story was obtained. A biography titled *Nellie Bly: Daredevil, Reporter, Feminist* reports that in September of 1887, a woman named Elizabeth Cochrane was asked by the managing editor of the *World* to commit herself to an insane asylum and write an article about her experience for the newspaper (Kroeger 85-86). Cochrane agreed and posed as a mentally unstable woman who seemed to suffer from some form of dementia. Admitted to the insane asylum on Blackwell's Island, the journalist spent ten days undergoing "psychological treatment" before she was released into the custody of an attorney from the *World*, posing as a family member. Two days later the first installment of a series of articles was published in the *World* under the pen name Nellie Bly; the articles were soon compiled into book form and given the title *Ten Days in a Madhouse*. Her report revealed squalid conditions, the brutal actions of asylum personnel, and irresponsible neglect of patients (Kroeger 89-93). By placing herself in a situation to experience the story, Cochrane and Pulitzer established a model for personal and investigative reporting; a model that produced early traces of literary journalism such as immersion and personal reporting.

Pulitzer's willingness to innovate journalism motivated writers of fiction and non-fiction to duplicate the new journalism being employed by his staff. In fact, according to a study of American journalism titled *Narrating the News: New Journalism and Literary Genre in Late Nineteenth-Century American Newspapers and Fiction* the term "'new journalism' was coined by Matthew Arnold in 1887 in connection with the energetic editorial style Pulitzer had been championing [...]" (Roggenkamp xii)

There are many significant journalistic and literary works that were produced during this era of literary journalism which revealed social injustices and influenced social reform. For example, Jacob Riis' book *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* was published in 1890 and was a combination of journalistic sketches and photojournalism. Literary critic Francesco Cordasco in the introduction to *How the Other Half Lives* explains Riis' book "described the horrible conditions which Riis found in the tenements, and drew particular attention to the plight of neglected and abandoned children" (xix). Riis, working for the *New York Tribune*, worked the police beat and accompanied health inspectors on their inspections throughout the slums of the city. His concern for the habitants inspired him to report their stories in an effort to acquire sympathy from the general public. As illustrated, the form evolved in reaction to the need for social reform.

There are a number of pioneering authors whose literary works were instrumental to the development of literary journalism. For example, literary critic Thomas B. Connery identifies war correspondent Richard Harding Davis, author Stephen Crane, journalist Lincoln Steffens, and anarchist/journalist Hutchins Hapgood as prominent contributing literary journalists (Connery 3-20). Norman Sims also mentions journalist Opie Read, Jack London, George Ade, and Finley Peter Dunne in his conversation of literary journalism (Sims 44). Though they are considered early practitioners of literary journalism, in a historical context, however, these authors were not specifically identified as literary journalists while they were writing.

According to Sims, the first time the term "literary journalism" was used to classify specific works of literature was in 1937 by a journalism professor from the University of Minnesota named Edwin H. Ford. Ford had compiled a set of writings that he titled *A Bibliography of Literary Journalism in America* (Sims 8). Sims explains, "According to Ford,

literary journalists create artistic literature that moves beyond political and social trends" (8). Though Ford's explanation is rather vague, his classification of literary journalism would be refined and expressed more than three decades later by Tom Wolfe in *The New Journalism*. In his 1973 anthology of literary journalism, Wolfe lists a set of fictional devices utilized by his New Journalism colleagues.[1] The list of devices from Wolfe's manifesto is the following: scene-by-scene construction, full dialogue, third-person point of view, and detail recording (Wolfe 46-47). Much like fiction, literary journalism requires the author to produce the story in narrative form, conveying characters' thoughts, actions, and emotions. As the genre evolved, so did the characteristics. Norman Sims provides an altered list of characteristics that describes current approaches to literary journalism:

> In 1984, after interviewing a number of writers, I listed literary journalism's shared characteristics as including immersion reporting, complicated structures in the prose, accuracy, voice, responsibility, and attention to the symbolic realities of a story. Today (2007), I would add access, attention to ordinary lives, and the special qualities of a writer's connection to the subject. (*True Stories* 12)

Sims eliminates the third-person point of view as a requirement, allowing for first-person accounts. His final inclusions, "access, attention to ordinary lives, and the special qualities of a writer's connection to the subject" are components that speak to the personal nature of these accounts. The literary journalist engages their subjects on a very delicate level.

Robert S. Boynton, author of *The New New Journalism*, also assesses the progression of the genre. He claims, "Contrary to the New Journalists, this new generation experiments more with the way one gets the story. To that end, they've developed innovative immersion strategies and extended the time they've spent reporting" (xiii). Boynton, in his book, describes how the

[1] Literary journalism identifies the genre; New Journalism identifies a generation of writers.

current generation of literary journalists builds upon the techniques used by Wolfe's New Journalism and therefore calls them the New New Journalists. He sums up the advancement upon the legacy of the New Journalists by saying, "Wolfe went inside his character's head; the New New Journalists become part of their lives" (xiii). Boynton is generalizing the process when he talks about becoming "part of their lives" because each author approaches their subject according to personal preference. During the writing process, however, literary journalists should consider what David Abrahamson, former president of the International Association of Literary Journalism Studies, calls the "six elements," which are the following:

> Character: (Developing) the people in the story. Setting: This is not only where the story takes place, but also encompasses the realm of the piece's descriptive efforts. Plot: This is the answer to the question, What happened? Theme: The piece's thesis or central argument, theme is the "moral of the story," what the work is really about. Voice: There are two aspects here. One is the style in which the piece is written…with which the prose is constructed. The second aspect relates to the author's choice of narrator. Structure: The actual architecture of the piece […]. (89-90).

These elements of non-fiction writing, of course, are also elements of much fiction writing, but this is intentional. Thomas B. Connery, in the introduction to a collection of scholarly essays on literary journalists, writes:

> But literary journalism informs at a level common to fiction. This means that it conveys impressions, ideas, and emotions and draws upon themes and motifs identified by the writer and revealed in the details of an event of in the manner, morals, and actions of people. (6)

Connery is modest in his comparison between fiction and nonfiction, yet there are literary critics that question and challenge the validity of the approaches of literary journalism to create novel-length narratives.

Literary critic Ronald Weber, in his book *The Literature of Fact: Literary Nonfiction in American Writing*, offers some harsh criticisms of literary journalism in a chapter titled "A Bastard Form." He writes the following about literary journalism:

> Some critics argued that the work missed literary quality because it remained bound to fact, inhibiting the full play of artistry that the imaginative writer could bring to bear. But at the same time…the work lacked real journalistic quality because in the very imaginative artistry it did employ, it left itself suspect as solid reporting. (28)

According to this view, literary journalism fails at establishing itself as either literary or journalistic because of its hybrid nature. Weber specifically applies this critical approach to his study of Earnest Hemingway's nonfiction. In an essay titled "Hemingway's Permanent Records," Weber questions why a fiction writer of Hemingway's status would revert to nonfiction writing:

> The taut prose and implied meanings of the early fiction give way to loose language and frequent overstatement; the calculated omissions of the fiction are replaced with a rush of detail that seems meant to overwhelm the reader with an entire iceberg rather than its dazzling tip. (26)

Weber seems to see Hemingway's nonfiction as a digression from his efficient yet expressive fiction. He uses the term "flat performance" to describe Hemingway's nonfiction, yet offers a conciliatory point, writing, "The sharply different manner of the nonfiction is cause for regret

only if measured against exclusive admiration for the fiction" (26). One reason Weber is unsatisfied with Hemingway's nonfiction is explained in his study *The Literature of Fact*. Weber says, in summary, authors of nonfiction are "restrained by [their] commitment to the facts" (45). In the same argument, Weber creates a paradoxical dilemma for himself when he writes:

> In real life, in other words, people are only imperfectly seen. But in fictional life we can know people completely, if the writer wishes; their inner and outer lives can be fully exposed, and so they can seem more definite and substantial than people in real life...The writer of literary nonfiction, like the writer of fiction, can take us deeply inside people and events and construct works that move beyond story to plot. But in neither case can he do this to the same extent that the fiction writer can. (45)

Weber's argument implies a reader can empathize with a fictional character on a deeper level than a nonfictional character, therefore making fictional works more engaging. However, this naïve distinction leads to an undervaluation of aesthetic principles in nonfiction that we suffer through for facts. His argument focuses on the fact that people find greater understanding through imaginative descriptions of possible phenomenological experiences than through an account of specific actual events by a journalist. My paper challenges such a distinction as it reveals that Weber's argument reproduces a general symptom of people's perceptions; a symptom that is discussed by Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky.

In his essay "Art as Technique," Shklovsky writes, "If we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic" (11). He continues by explaining, "After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. The

object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it – hence we cannot say anything significant about it" (13). In other words, Shklovsky says familiarity breeds indifference. To remedy this, Shklovsky suggests that "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (12). He calls this technique "defamiliarization." This technique makes what is seemingly familiar into something strange and alien, therefore challenging a reader's perceptions. Though he is initially talking about how art defamiliarizes objects, he re-contextualizes his technique and, using passages from Tolstoy, illustrates how literature has the ability to make human phenomena "unfamiliar." In relation to literary journalism, the significance of events reported through conventional journalism may not be recognized by the general public because of an overabundance of mass media coverage which, in its homogeneous nature, dulls people's perceptions and results in an apathetic societal attitude. In contrast to conventional journalism, the literary journalist, by combining sophisticated journalistic approaches with literary techniques and devices previously reserved for fictional writing, transforms the representation of familiar events making the familiar unusual, therefore defamiliarizing specific social phenomena. The resulting narratives challenge previous perceptions established by conventional journalism. Literary journalism offers an example of a writing that moves between the seeming absolutes of "objective" writing and "subjective" features. This unity of seemingly disparate elements, which develops as a process, I term the "objective/subjective dialectic." This phrase shouldn't be taken as a static category, rather different writers move between these opposing poles. However, literary journalists embrace this tension and see it as necessary to the process of exploring truths that conventional journalists miss.

The Dialectic of Investigation and Representation

Perhaps the most compelling literary work of art for a quick discussion of the objective/subjective dialectic is *Hiroshima* by John Hersey. This story about six survivors of the atomic blast over Hiroshima, Japan, is a premiere example of literary journalism. It was originally published in the August 31, 1946 issue of *The New Yorker*, one year after the events in the book occurred. According to an article discussing the social impact of *Hiroshima* by Patrick B. Sharp:

> Rather than detailing what had happened to Japanese civilians, the reports from Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the year following the attacks emphasized strategic damage to the buildings, bridges, and other war-related infrastructure. When bodies were discussed, the tone of the language was objective and medical (Sharp, 440)

In contrast to these reports, Hersey reveals the human aspect of the event, and he accomplishes this by telling the story of six survivors of the atomic blast that destroyed the city. According to Sharp, "Using the wasteland imagery of high modernism, Hersey appealed to a familiar literary landscape to help make sense of what happened at Hiroshima. In this way, Hersey wrote against the grain of the official narrative of Hiroshima" (Sharp 444). The objective approach of previous reports led the attention away from the human experience and conveniently ignored ethical issues involved in mass slaughter. Hersey refused to adhere to conventional approaches to reporting and in doing so, broke taboos on several levels by representing the un-representable. Turning to a literary approach, Hersey took a subject that people were becoming familiar with, in a dry and statistical kind of manner, because of the mass media and brought experiences to life

by rejecting the usual, or acceptable, rhetoric. By putting the human experience first, Hershey's writing could be termed "subjective" yet it allowed readers more insight into an aspect of "objective reality" hidden by factual accounts. Specifically, *Hiroshima* reveals the horrors of the nuclear blast and the vastness of its effects. Through careful responsible investigation and by standing in opposition to mass culture, he produced a human interest story that revealed social repercussions of the atomic blast.

Hiroshima, as a work of literary art, performs within a journalistic objective/subjective dialectic and is a good example that helps in defining the dialectic I find in this genre. In a book by former Columbia University philosophy professor Robert Denoon Cumming titled *Starting Point: An Introduction to the Dialectic of Existence*, he writes, "in many traditional dialectics, as in existentialism, the process of definition exceeds in its generality the usual scope accorded a definition" (144). By the "usual scope accorded a definition" Cumming articulates that the meaning of dialectic is complex and can be understood only in context of its subject matter. The dialectic is defined both semantically and through its function. In his book, Cumming lists a set of traits that define the "dialectic of Existence." In relevance to the current discussion, dialectic, or interrelationships between what are thought of as contradictions, will be explained by defining the components that make up the structure.

The first polarity is objectivity which will be treated as the initial step in this dialectic. Tyler Burge, a philosophy professor at UCLA, claims there are different types of objectivity. With concern to "subject matters" he writes:

> We normally think of the physical world as an objective subject matter…On a narrow conception, an objective subject matter has no dependence whatever on mind or the mental for its nature, constitution, essence, or individuation…By

> contrast, minds, beliefs, feelings, organizations, nations, languages, and theories are not constitutively mind-independent, and hence not objective, in this sense. (46)

We may be capable of manipulating objects we see, but they are objective and they are "mind independent;" in that they do not depend on an observer's mind to exist. However, this is not the only conception of objectivity that is relevant for the dialectic. Another conception is one Burge calls "procedural objectivity." He writes:

> A procedure or system of representations represents objectively insofar as it meets methodological norms that are independent of the whims of a particular mind…Rational procedures in logic or mathematic or empirical experimental procedures in natural science are often taken as prime examples. More broadly, any rational or reasonable procedures can be objective in this sense. (50)

The key terms here are "reasonable procedures," "methodological norms." These terms will help in defining the objective aspect of the dialectic in accordance to conventional approaches to journalism.

The media began to strive for a more specialized and rigid form similar to Burge's "procedural objectivity" during the first few decades of the twentieth century, at which point the term "mass media became part of the American lexicon" (Sloan & Stuart 343). The methodological norms of journalism adhere to four standards generally agreed upon in order to practice objective journalism.[2] These include a general detachment from the subject by the reporter, taking on a non-partisanship approach to news reporting, a balance and fairness to all

[2] The following publications were used for this discussion in establishing the definition of objective reporting: Dennis, Everette E. *The Media Society: Evidence About Mass Communication in America*. Mindich, David T. Z. *Just the Facts: How "Objectivity" Came to Define American Journalism*. Ward, Stephen J.A. Ward. *The Invention of Journalism Ethics: The Path to Objectivity and Beyond*.

involved in a story, and an adherence to presenting facts with supporting evidence. In theory, by detaching oneself from a story, the journalist follows reasonable procedures to report objectively, and without prejudice. Through balanced and fair reporting supporting evidence is established because stories are mind-independent from the journalist, therefore requiring investigation. The goal for the news was to adopt a procedurally objective approach to reporting accurately on subject matters (specific social phenomena). Since adopting a standard for reporting, journalism has established itself, through its own marketing, as an industry that took on a "claim of adherence to the ideals of truth and objectivity as primary journalistic values" (Sloan & Stuart 343). While these values may be ethical they can be restricting to reporting a story; something that is remedied with subjectivity.

In a study on subjectivity simply titled *Subjectivity*, Ruth Robbins, a Senior Lecturer in English at University College Northampton, explores several definitions of the term and one that is relevant to the dialectic is the following:

> The quality or condition of viewing things exclusively through the medium of one's own mind or individuality; the condition of being dominated by or absorbed in one's personal feelings, thoughts, concerns, etc.; hence individuality, personality. (7)

In this sense the subjective approach allows for an individual to choose a more flexible methodology that caters to their personality. This is evident in literary journalism. In Boynton's *New New Journalism*, multiple authors are interviewed and each has distinct approaches for investigating a story. Another characteristic of the subjective pole of the dialect is the immersion into a story, making it a subject that is influenced by the journalist, therefore making it, to some degree, dependent on personal judgments. By providing a complex version of specific social

phenomena, judgment is left up to the individual reader who encounters judgments by the writers that can be evaluated for their truth value, outside of popular perceptions generated by conventional media that cloak their values in objectivity. Specifically, we can look at the *Hiroshima* as a primary example of how this dialectic works.

The methodological norms of reporting on the atomic blast narrowly focused reports on damage to the infrastructure of the city while viewing casualties in medical terms, which is objective in nature. These reports approached through a procedural objectivity, ensured that the American public would remain detached from the horrors and atrocities of the mass slaughter of innocent civilians. In addition to the standard methodological norms, Hersey takes on a distinct approach to reporting on the atomic blast by providing the personal accounts of six survivors of the travesty. *Hiroshima* tells the human aspect of the blast and dramatically conveys a truth of human will in the face of a disaster completely incomprehensible to the people who suffered for it. Through a subjective approach, an objective understanding is then found; that the ripple effects of the atomic blast are not understood simply through structural damage and numerical figures. In this way the reader oscillates between what they believed to be objective understanding and the subjective experience of reading a work of literary journalism which may or may not lead them to well-informed objective truth.

The Forest and the Trees

Adhering to an ideology that insists on approaching journalism objectively is a near to impossible task. In a book titled *The Human Journalist: Reporters, Perspectives, and Emotions* by Jim Willis, the author writes, “objectivity is an extreme that can never be realized in the

telling of a story unless the object—and not the reporter—tells it itself. And if the object is a human, then the same subjectivity enters in" (46). Willis' observation is valid, yet the general public takes for granted the objective approach to reporting, therefore allowing their perspectives and opinions to be influenced.

The influence of mass media over popular opinion has been the subject of social investigative studies beginning with the publication of *Public Opinion* by Walter Lippmann, a celebrated journalist himself, in 1922. In an editor's note to Lippmann's essay "Newspapers," his report is summarized with the following: "In this classic study Walter Lippmann shows how journalists point a flashlight rather than a mirror at the world" (Graber, 36). As the analogy suggests, objective journalism provides narrow highlights of the reality of situations that demand evaluation and investigation in order to represent a larger spectrum of the possible reality. This is in contrast with the objective idea of showing the world as it would be seen through a mirror. Instead, the objective approach fails to illuminate an event in its entirety; it only offers glimpses.

Incidentally, Lippmann's "Great Society" (as he refers to the American public) relies on the mass media to form a picture of reality; one which they can rely on. The following is from Lippmann's *Public Opinion*:

> The world that we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind. It has to be explored, reported, and imagined. Man is no Aristotelian god contemplating all existence at one glance. He is the creature of an evolution who can just about span a sufficient portion of reality to manage his survival, and snatch what on the scale of time are but a few moments of insight and happiness. Yet this same creature has invented ways of seeing what no naked eye could see, of hearing what no ear could hear, of weighing immense masses and infinitesimal

> ones, of counting and separating more items than he can individually remember. He is learning to see with his mind vast portions of the world that he could never see, touch, smell, hear, or remember. Gradually he makes for himself a trustworthy picture inside his head of the world beyond his reach. (30)

According to this assessment of the media's role, the public relies on the media to provide them with news of the world beyond their direct experience. What Lippmann refers to as the imagined is the "trustworthy picture inside his (man's) head of the world beyond his reach." In Lippmann's view, the imagination develops as a means for understanding reality that is beyond one person's reach. Collectively this imaginative notion of reality becomes public opinion and public opinion is therefore influenced by the media. "Or, to paraphrase Lippmann, the information provided by the news media plays a key role in the construction of our pictures of reality" (McCombs, 6). Because of the influence of the mass media, Lippmann advocates social responsibility for journalists who are capable of shaping public opinion. He understands that the influence of the mass media on the general public can be problematic. A major example is the news coverage of the United States foreign policy concerning Iraq and Saddam Hussein.

There have been numerous publications surrounding the controversy of the invasion of Iraq by the United States under the pretense of a search for weapons of mass destruction and bio-chemical weapons. Specifically, there are publications that discuss the role of the mass media in promoting invasion and war. Media watcher Danny Schechter's book *Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception* offers a detailed analysis of the U.S. media's coverage of the war with Iraq. From *Embedded*:

> There was endless focus on the anticipated chemical or biological weapons attacks that never came, and on the weapons of mass destruction – finding WMD

> was a major reason for the war – that have yet to be found…Omitted from the picture and the reportage were views that offered any persuasive counter-narrative. There were few interviews with ordinary Iraqis, or experts not affiliated with pro-administration think tanks. Or with military people, other than retired military officials who quibbled over tactics not policy. Or with peace activists, European journalists, and until late in the day Arab journalists…This list of what was left out is endless. (Schechter 21)

This is distressing when considering that another source counts the number of journalists accompanying the U.S. invasion of Iraq at 700 during its early stages and although there were a considerable amount of media personnel, counter-narratives were rarely published.[3] The selectivity of the media distorted the truth of the war for the American public and the public's picture of the war's reality was limited.

Unfortunately, though, the public is generally unaware of the issues. Many consumers of the mass media do not always stop to consider the internal complexities of generating media publications. The public doesn't consider the impulses of a reporter speeding to meet a deadline or an editor following an agenda set by media conglomerates. This is a problem that is identified as media illiteracy by Carla Brooks Johnston in her book *Screened Out: How the Media Controls Us and What We Can Do About It*. She writes:

> The media, more than any other institution, shape the agenda of the country. People believe what they see…The moguls who control the media control our lives, the future of our culture, our governments, and our democratic lifestyle. And most people do not even know it because they're media illiterate. (3-4)

[3] Hartley, John. "Post Election Iraq: A Case for Declining Optimism." *Beyond the Iraq War: The Promises, Pitfalls and Perils of External Interventionism*. Michael Heazle and Iyanatul Islam, eds.

What people consider or perhaps thoughtlessly believe in is what is described as the "Ubiquity of the media—the ability to be everywhere, to dominate the information environment. The media are so ubiquitous at times that it is difficult for a person to escape a message" (Dennis 9). The message that print media develops is technical and repetitive. This repetition "tends to reinforce its impact" (Dennis 9).Complementing the repetition within one publication is the "consonance of journalists—there is amazing and unrealistic agreement and harmony among journalists and others involved in the message" (Dennis 9).

The abundance of consistent and similar reports develop a picture of reality for people, one they believe to be objective and therefore unquestionably irrefutable; at least for the masses who do not seek further investigation. The objective truth is problematic for the literary journalist. According to Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard, the believer in objectivity is an observer who "stares numbly into the immense forest of the generations, and like someone who cannot see the forest for the trees, he sees only the forest, not a single tree" (*Postscript* 159). The literary journalist encourages readers to reconsider their preconceived notions concerning social phenomena, possibly resulting in an ability to see the forest and the trees.

Currently, literary journalism exists as a sophisticated means for acquiring knowledge about elements of the human experience. Its unapologetic awareness of the necessity for a partially subjective approach stands squarely in opposition to the claims of objectivity by traditional journalism. Quite often the daily news media proves incapable of presenting events without a superficiality that contrasts with the demands for objective reports; an ideal demanded for the sake of journalistic integrity. One potential remedy is literary journalism. Through long-term observation, participation, and investigation, the literary journalist presents truths about the subjects of their investigation otherwise ignored or misunderstood.

Chapter Reports

In the second chapter I will be discussing Norman Mailer and his critically acclaimed *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History*. As an experiment in literature and journalism Mailer's book is an appropriate example of the genre's experimental nature. During the New Journalism era of literary journalism, authors were developing creative ways to report a story. In the case of *The Armies of the Night*, the narrative is self-aware in many sections, specifically when the author discusses his search for a proper way to tell the story in all its complexity. To remedy this problem Mailer comes up with two solutions. *Armies* is divided into two books, offering an explicitly subjective narrative coupled with an explicitly objective narrative. The first book is written in the third person with Mailer the author describing the thoughts and actions of Mailer the character, is highly opinionated, and is considered an example of participatory journalism. This type of journalism requires the author to be in the center of the action, participating in the event he will eventually create a narrative about. The second book is mostly indicative of historical writings and is an example of reportorial journalism requiring extensive research and interviewing yet is detached (for the most part).

The second solution is more complex: Mailer's narrative explicitly performs within the objective/subjective dialectic. Mailer acknowledges the difficulties of reporting a story and explaining the meaning of an event. Through his exploration into the abstract, the reader gains insight and knowledge about issues that they, more than likely, had not considered before. For example, Mailer acknowledges to the reader the problem with his public image as it is molded by the mass media and his own controversial activities. In his narrative he evaluates, re-

evaluates, and speculates on a number of issues including his self-image making the reading experience an existential exercise. He brings the reader along through his personal journey therefore exposing the reader to a subjective experience which provides objective truths that are independent of the mind.

The third chapter will discuss William Langewiesche and his controversial book *American Ground: Unbuilding the World Trade Center*. The events of 9/11 are engrained in our public discourse as the most significant historical event to occur this millennium. The immediate reaction by this country's emergency responders to the tragedy has been publicized as the reaction of American patriots; especially the actions of the New York Fire Department. The nation responded with an outpouring of patriotism spurred on by the mass media and a government that drew a line in the sand demanding that all Americans stand together. It was presented by the mainstream media in terms of "us versus them." What the public didn't hear or didn't see is provided by Langewiesche's report on the recovery and clean-up efforts that were performed at the site of the World Trade Center collapse.

Behind the scenes and up close, Langewiesche was the only journalist granted unrestricted access to the site after the events of 9/11. His narrative stands in stark contrast to an American hero-image developed by the efforts of the mass media. The objective/subjective dialectic is most pronounced in this chapter through Langewiesche's descriptions of the actions and attitudes of the firemen. The hero-image is deconstructed side by side with the remains of the Twin Towers. Langewiesche descriptions provide the dialectic for the reader even as he oscillates between objective, detached reporting when he gives facts that are undeniable and subjective reporting when he provides the reader with his personal opinions.

American Ground is an example of the dialectic performing with facts at both ends of the polarity. The subject at hand is one that can be described through both an objective approach and a subjective one. In a progression of the literature, it is a prime example of how the current crop of literary journalists interconnects the polar approaches together to form a narrative.

Jon Krakauer and his work *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster* will be the final book for discussion. Krakauer's expedition up Mount Everest in 1996 challenges the glamour of an iconic mountain and climbing adventures. The metaphor of the mountain has been unequivocally prevalent in literature and with *Into Thin Air* the reader is not only reminded about the tiers of ambition and success but also of the significance and power of nature over people who have displaced their sense of mortality with ambition and pride.

Krakauer's narrative was initially conceived by his editor at an outdoor magazine called *Outside*, as a report on the commercialization of Mount Everest and the way "guided expeditions" are conducted. In these guided expeditions, professional climbers lead paying clients to the summit of the mountain; some are more successful than others. Krakauer, having modest climbing experience, joined an expedition as a client. His subsequent narrative reveals the inner workings of the mountain and the reader learns about the economic forces that shape the entire Mount Everest experience. Along with the exploitation of the mountain the reader is presented with a personal account of death and survival. While descending from the summit a number of climbers were surprised by a storm that seemed to develop out of nowhere and were consequently stranded at various locations in what is known as the "death zone" at the highest altitudes of the mountain. Eight people would lose their lives. The event was reported globally as the worst disaster in Mount Everest history. Much of what was left out of the news reports is revealed in *Into Thin Air*.

Through the narrative, the reader is left to ponder whether the deaths might've been avoided if certain precautions were taken and certain responsibilities acknowledged. Here the dialectic performs mainly in the abstract. As it alternates between the objective facts and subjective contemplation, a truth is rarely acquired. In fact, the narrative may leave the reader asking more questions than they had if they had read the news reports. What *Into Thin Air* demonstrates is that sometimes the dialectic leaves the reader and the author in a perpetual state of ambiguity.

CHAPTER II

THE ARMIES OF THE NIGHT: A PERSONAL HISTORY OF DISSENT, INCARCERATION, AND THE SERVILITY OF THE MASS MEDIA DURING THE VIETNAM WAR ERA

A Man and a Myth

On Saturday October 21, 1967, author Norman Mailer was arrested while participating in an anti-Vietnam War protest in the shadow of the United States' ultimate military-industrial complex symbol: the Pentagon. The protest was organized by the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, and its leaders wanted to demonstrate a nation-wide frustration with the country's military involvement in Southeast Asia by assembling a massive army of protesters from all parts of the U.S., representing all sorts of different groups from the political Left. Mailer, at first a reluctant participant, became a key component of the demonstration, and his high-profile status garnered him a fair share of media attention. His subsequent book about his subjective experiences of this important moment in U.S. history provides a personal account that clarifies and challenges mass media representations of him and the protest. As a participant in the peace demonstration, Mailer described moment to moment details; as an intellectual observer Mailer describes his thoughts and, speculated, persuasively about the thoughts of others; and as a prisoner Mailer reflected about the symbolic gesture of being arrested as a test of one's strength of will, both physically and psychologically. His

participation with the protest, his observations of events, and the complexities surrounding his arrest are chronicled in his critically acclaimed book, *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel/The Novel as History*.

The book was an experiment in literature and journalism and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award in 1968. Five years later he would be identified as a prominent member of the New Journalism movement by author Tom Wolfe in his book simply titled *The New Journalism*. This period in literary journalism's history is anthologized in Wolfe's book which consists of two parts. The first part acts as a manifesto for the genre which identifies its development, describes characteristics of the literature, and applauds key figures including Mailer. In his discussion of the genre and Mailer's inclusion, Wolfe identified the author first as a novelist then as a journalist. He writes, "Here was another novelist who had turned to some form of accursed journalism, no matter what name you gave it, and had not only revived his reputation but raised it to a point higher than it had ever been in his life" (42). Wolfe compared the success of *The Armies of the Night* with Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, a book which took five years to complete and which concerns the murders of a Kansas farm family and the subsequent execution of two criminals convicted of the crimes. Although the two books are developed using different approaches, Wolfe sees them as key milestones in the advancement of the genre. Wolfe also pointed out the irony of two fictional writers (Mailer and Capote) turning to non-fiction to revive their literary careers.

Using examples like Mailer and Capote, Wolfe heralds New Journalism as the next great literary event surpassing the elite status of the novel in terms of literary prestige. While Wolfe was championing the movement, there were others who saw the resulting literature as self-promoting and egotistic. In a collection of essays published shortly after the publication of

Wolfe's book on New Journalism, one critic, Robert J. Van Dellen, explicitly criticized New Journalism.[4] In his essay "We've Been Had by the New Journalism: A Put Down," Van Dellen directly discussed Mailer's approach to writing, particularly the writing that earned Mailer the label New Journalist. Van Dellen offered a critique of Mailer and similar writers by arguing that, "This ego-art results in the inevitable exploitation of the living. Real people are feasted upon for the author's own artistic appetite. The hunger is huge" (229). Van Dellen was claiming that New Journalism is self-serving and even that it should be considered a form of exploitation. The authors, according to Van Dellen's account, take advantage of other people's struggles by placing themselves at the center of the story. While this argument dwells on the personal ambitions of certain authors, it doesn't consider the benefits of an author such as Norman Mailer utilizing his self-image to present a story.

In another essay, titled "Norman Mailer," from the same collection, critic Donald Fishman discussed Mailer's eccentric ego by dividing it into three parts. He proposed that "the difficulty in understanding the variety of Mailer's recent writings is lessened when one examines how the three personae of Mailer are successfully combined in the New Journalism" (174). The first persona, Fishman claimed, is his most recognizable: public celebrity. Fishman explained, "There is a large segment of the public that has never read a single sentence of Mailer yet knows him as a controversial and flamboyant exhibitionist" (175). As a controversial figure intermittently held in the media's spotlight, his celebrity status seems to lend credibility to a peace movement that was considered particularly radical. His second and third personae were focused on Mailer as an author: social critic and American writer. By combining these three parts of Mailer's ego, Fishman claims "The new form (New Journalism) accentuates the strengths of each of the personae so that the whole is unquestionably greater than the sum of the

[4] *New Journalism*. Marshal Fishwick, ed.

parts" (177). While Fishman's claim that the form accentuates Mailer's strengths is valid, the form itself is not new.

Whether the form is new or not generated the most obvious objection to Wolfe's claim that his generation of writers invented a new form of literature. The claim is discredited by several critics including George A. Hough III who stated in his essay "How 'New'?", that "Looking back, we have always had writers who were both journalists and men of letters. They flip-flopped from fact to fiction in the old days just as easily as Norman Mailer does today" (Hough 116). As is discussed in Chapter I of this discussion, there are a number of authors who oscillated between fiction and nonfiction and the term new journalism was even used during the late 1800s. Hough's argument about the lack of originality on the part of New Journalism is valid yet he seems to take the greatest offense to the arrogance of the authors. The essay concluded by sneeringly calling members of this generation of writers, including Capote, Wolfe, and Mailer, a group of "super salesmen." Hough claimed, "This is the age of the hard sell, and Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe, Hunter Thompson and Norman Mailer are super salesmen." Though he does concede, "It's a might good product even it if isn't all that new" (121). Hough's essay applauded the literature of New Journalism but not the promotion of the genre by its practitioners, including Norman Mailer. For better or worse, literary journalists of all generations who place themselves in the center of the story expose themselves to criticisms both as writers and as people. Because of Mailer's controversial and, in some quarters, negative public celebrity, he receives direct assaults on his personal character.

The condemnation of Mailer has come in many forms. Even though *The Armies of the Night* won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, there were still reviews that regard

Armies as an eyesore on the literary landscape. The following comments are taken from a book review by John Simon titled "Mailer on the March":

> But Mailer has found the way to make megalomania pay off doubly. He has invested his book with an air of the confessional, and gets points for his honesty. Then, with a joke or two, a qualifying epithet or three, he undercuts his flights of self-deification, and so gets further points for grace, wit, and a charming modesty at the core of his megalomania. In fact, the establishment and his audience have driven Mailer into becoming a clown-hero-scapegoat for their vicarious satisfaction, with results that redound to no one's glory. (544)

The irony developed by Mailer by oscillating between confessional and self-reassuring rhetoric may be valid, but reviews like this one seem simply knee-jerk reactions incapable of seeing past a negative perception of Mailer and fail to see the nuanced ways he presents his own self-image, ironically, for the benefit of the reader. For example, Mailer acknowledged his self-image as it is constructed by both the media and himself. In the opening pages of *Armies of the Night*, Mailer wrote, "Mailer had the most developed sense of image…for people had been regarding him by his public image since he was twenty-five years old" (5). Mailer, writing in the third person to distance Mailer the author from Mailer the character, confessed to the reader his understanding of his public image and refers to it as the "sarcophagus of his image" (5). In his attempts to counter the mold of his image created by the media, he still admitted that it is a false image that, ironically, the reader will still consider even while reading *Armies*.

The point of dismissal made by John Simon when he calls Mailer "a clown-hero-scapegoat" is countered by literary critic Laura Adams. Adams is the editor of book titled *Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up* which is a collection of essays focused on Mailer's

literary works. In the introduction she discussed Mailer's search for a literary American hero. She wrote:

> Over the years Mailer moved through a series of possible heroes including the amoral hipster of the "The White Negro" and President John F. Kennedy, as well as Stephen Rojack of *An American Dream*, before concluding that the viable hero for our time must be a man in whom the schizophrenic halves of the American psyche, the dream of the extraordinary and the mundane reality, can come together. And so Mailer settled upon a man whom he created as much as discovered for the role: himself.
>
> It is in the combination of the actual and the metaphorical functions of the hero known as "Mailer" in *The Armies of the Night* that Mailer's life and art grow together most significantly. Because we live in an anti-heroic, deflating age, the hero for our time must be comic, capable of ludicrous self-debasement on the one hand and courageous action on the other. Such is Mailer's portrayal of himself. (6-7)

The collected essays in Adams' book explored Mailer's development as a literary artist. Adams argues that Mailer, after the journey through his previous literary heroes, found the role in his publicly molded self-image. With her remarks Adams also generalizes Americans as people who believe in the so-called American dream where everyone has an opportunity to succeed while simultaneously being trapped in banal existence.

Beyond harsh criticism and defensive posturing, there is an abundance of scholarly analysis concerning several aspects of *The Armies of the Night* including the book's third person narrative, the division of the narrative into two books, and its place in literary history. My

discussion, though, is concerned with the book's performance as insight into an act of protest revealed through a strange kind of objective/subjective dialectic, a dialectic Mailer immediately employs on the first pages of *Armies*.

The Armies of the Night opens with the following words: "From the outset, let us bring you news of your protagonist. The following is from *Time* magazine, October 27, 1967" (3). The subsequent cited article portrays the protagonist in a negative fashion and carelessly mistakes the events of a meeting held the Thursday preceding the protest and the protest itself on Saturday. While the article names several other players besides Mailer at the meeting, it focuses intently on the vulgarities that were exchanged between speakers and the audience. This brief opening chapter concludes with Mailer writing, "Now we may leave *Time* in order to find out what happened" (4). Mailer is distrustful of the media as he proclaims several times in *Armies*. On Friday October 20, 1967, Mailer delivers a speech at the steps of the Department of Justice about the upcoming protest and the absurdity of America's involvement in the Vietnam War. To conclude his speech he addresses the mass media and their contribution to the charade of the current war. Mailer writes:

> And, out of hardly more than a sense of old habit and old anger, he scolded the press for their lies, and their misrepresentation, for their guilt in creating a psychology over the last twenty years in the average American which made wars like Vietnam possible […] (79).

Mailer's contempt for the press is extreme, yet it is this distrust that encouraged him to provide a personal report of the events surrounding the protest. He believed the so-called objective approach of the mass media was incapable of reporting the intricacies of an event as large and significant as a march, organized for symbolic value, on the Pentagon by an army of civilians.

During the week that preceded Saturday's protest, reports by the press were raising anticipation throughout the country and were narrowly focused. The following is an excerpt from *The New York Times*:

"Thousands Reach Capital to Protest Vietnam War"

In brisk fall sunshine, thousands of demonstrators against the war in Vietnam began moving into the nation's capital today while the Administration set in motion elaborate plans to prevent and confine any violence.

The demonstrators—most of them young and of draft age, but many in middle life—arrived in chartered buses and trains, by driving or hitchhiking. The sponsoring National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam—a coalition of roughly 150 organizations ranging from church groups to the Peking-oriented Progressive Labor party—could give no accurate estimate of how many thousands would demonstrate. Neither could the District of Columbia police. (Kenworthy)

This article is typical of many reports published: it mentions a large coalition of protesters and only makes an estimation of upcoming participants; it references the National Mobilization Committee as the sponsor or organizer of the event and the government's plan to curb the extent of possible civil disobedience. This second example, compiled from wire services and published in the *San Antonio Express*, is also indicative of many reports:

"Pentagon Set for 'Siege'"

Battle-seasoned paratroopers and military police bivouacked in a growing throng near the Pentagon in Washington Friday, preparing with barricades and barbed wire

> for any violence during Saturday's scheduled mass Vietnam war protest…."We intend to maintain law and order," one official declared.

The lead paragraphs in this article focus on the military aspect of the protest. The article included information similar to the previous report. Along with the military precautions, the article also reports an unknown estimate number of protesters and mentions leading figures in the NMC. These two examples were chosen as they are representative of two approaches to reporting on pre-protest developments. One leads with news focused on the army of protesters arriving while the latter is focused on preparations made by the U.S. government.

Besides the news story of a possible clash between protesters and the military, the mass media focused on a controversial issue concerning the civilian coalition. The following article from *The Washington Post* is indicative of news reports published during the week preceding the massive protest:

> "Leaders Divided On Aims of March"
>
> The anti-war march on the Pentagon on Saturday will be an open-ended, come-one-come-all affair that will draw participants from a wide spectrum of American society…The diversity is intentional because sponsors want the biggest turnout possible. But it is also a source of a long conflict that has plagued the march from its inception here last spring…"It always works out the same way—the only thing we agree on is that we are against the war," observed a New York staff member of the Mobilization. "The rest of the time we're at each other's throats. It's like a scenario."

Articles similar to this one create an indictment of the political Left as a fractious group of unorganized factions clinging together loosely for one single cause. While there may be some

truth to this allegation it is dismissive of anti-war campaigners and their concerns simply because they do not agree on an entire political philosophy, or even agree on what needs to be done to end a war felt to be wrong.

The day of the demonstration, thousands met at the Lincoln Memorial for a rally before marching across Memorial Bridge towards the Pentagon. The number of people in attendance is still unknown but it is strange how varied the estimations were as the following example will demonstrate. The following is a report published in the *San Antonio Express* Sunday after the protest:

> "Pentagon Stormed By Anti-War Mob: 50,000 Attend Washington Rally"
>
> More than 50,000 persons demonstrated here Saturday against the war in Vietnam. What started as a peaceful, youthful rally erupted into violence at the Pentagon late in the day…More than 200 persons were arrested the Justice Department reported.

This is a typical report about a peace protest turned violent at the steps of the Pentagon. The reports consistently concern certain details such as the speakers at the Lincoln Memorial rally (who spoke and the rhetoric used is reported later in the article), the second rally at the Pentagon, and the subsequent clash between demonstrators and soldiers. The numbers, though, remain a highly debatable topic. For example, the following from *Austin American Statesman*:

> "US Role Protested: Demonstrators, Soldiers Clash"
>
> Antiwar demonstrators and soldiers clashed violently at the Pentagon in Washington Saturday…The outburst came after the demonstrators, estimated at 37,000 by police and 200,000 by protest leaders, marched from the Lincoln Memorial to the Pentagon on a warm, bright autumn day.

The numbers in this article, 37,000 by police and 200,000 by protest leaders, stand in contrast with the previous article's estimation of more than 50,000. The discrepancy reveals a flaw of the mass media. The report is fair in the sense that it presents estimations from both sides but it reveals an inability of the mass media to look beyond the answers given to them by officials (on both sides) who want to use the media for political reasons. It is possible the numbers are minimized by authorities to undermine the significance of the march while protest organizers inflated their numbers to show how effective their organizing campaign had been but this is simply speculation.

Then there is the participation of public celebrities such as Norman Mailer. The *Austin American Statesman* published an article released by the Associated Press titled "Pentagon Siege Fading Rapidly," which mentions Mailer's arrest. It reports:

> Author Norman Mailer, one of those arrested at the Pentagon Saturday, pleaded no contest when arraigned. He was fined $50 and given a 30-day jail sentence, with 25 days suspended. After saying he would appeal, Mailer was released on his recognizance.

In the *Washington Post*, Mailer's release from prison was reported in an article published the Monday following his arrest titled "Mailer Gets Only Term in Mass Trials: Author Appeals; 'Court' Processes 300 by Night." It reads:

> Novelist Norman Mailer, using a makeshift courtroom to deliver a Sunday sermon on the evils of the Vietnam war [sic], received the only prison sentence yesterday as justice was meted out in wholesale lots for hundreds of antiwar demonstrators.

> Only after his lawyer consulted a borrowed lawbook and wrote an appeal by long hand on a scrap of paper was Mailer released on appeal bond. He had been sentenced to pay a $50 fine and spend five days in prison. (Dowie Jr. & Jewell)

This report has a number of discrepancies. As revealed in *Armies*, Mailer was not inside the 'makeshift courtroom' when he delivered a 'Sunday sermon' but was outside following his release. It is true that he was the only prisoner sentenced jail time and the number of arrests made that weekend escalated in estimation depending on what newspaper was filing the report and what day the report was filed.[5] Another problem is the lawyer's use of a law book. He wasn't consulting the book in the sense that he was seeking information as the article implies. Instead, because the court did not have the proper forms available, he was using a page in the law book as a model for the proper documentation.

It is this very article that Mailer addresses towards the end of Book One of *Armies*. After citing the article, the concluding chapter begins with Mailer discussing his desire to write a history of his experience and admits that he "wrestled with the difficulties of how to do it" and decided it should be a "history of himself over four days, and therefore was history in the costume of a novel" (Mailer 215). It is in this passage that the reader understands that this is a novel and experimental approach to writing non-fiction. His decision to write a personal history is discussed in the following reading of *The Armies of the Night*. It seems plausible that Mailer's narrative provides a broader view of the Pentagon protest of October 1967. As a participant, as an observer of historical events, and through his power of analysis, Mailer provides the reader with an important perspective on the symbolic march and the subsequent clash between an army of civilians and an army of armed authorities of the state.

[5] The U.S. Marshals Service website in an article titled "History: U.S. Marshals and the Pentagon Riot of October 21, 1967" lists the official amount of arrests at 682.

Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Write About Protest

The Armies of the Night is split into two books. The first is a personalized history told in the third person while the second is predominantly a presentation of historical facts concerning aspects of the protest which Mailer derives knowledge of from external sources. In the first book, Mailer the author casts Mailer the character as the central figure. Literary critic Laura Adams, in her book *Existential Battles: The Growth of Norman Mailer*, claims that "book one is by far the more important," because:

> Mailer's central contribution to this hybrid form has been his presence at the creation of the events he writes about, so that not only are his facts as carefully and thoroughly researched as those of Capote and Hersey, but his participation has in subtle ways borne on the substance of the facts. (134)

Adams is not only applauding Mailer for his account of the protest through his experience but also how his presence influenced the event. As a prominent figure, she explains his presence was an essential component to the march that added a level of credibility.

In *Armies*, Mailer admits that he was reluctant to be a participant and the reader is left to search for possible reasons for Mailer's ultimate willingness to get involved. Mailer describes his reactions to a phone call from fellow author Mitchell Goodman. During this call Mailer decides to participate in the weekend's events. Goodman mentions the march on the Pentagon, but his pitch to Mailer focuses on a demonstration to be held Friday October 20, 1967 at the Department of Justice, where a group of students would be turning in their draft cards. Mailer is convinced these events are futile and writes:

> This is about where Mailer began to scold Goodman. He went on for a breath or two on the redundancy of these projects. When was everyone going to cut out the nonsense and get to work, do their own real work? One's own literary work was the only answer to the war in Vietnam. As he was talking, Mailer began to realize that he had not done any real writing in months—he had been making movies—but then it didn't matter, he had done as much in the way of protest about this war as anyone…(9)

His comments here reveal what he perceives to be a proper vehicle for influencing Vietnam War policy. "Real work" is required to end the war and literary artists should neglect these non-influential projects and focus on their literary works. He admits he hasn't done any "real writing" and within his own argument rescinds his position and agrees to participate. He writes a couple of paragraphs later, "Mitch, I'll be there…but I can't pretend I'm happy about it" (9). His decision to participate is motivated by his need to produce a literary work that Mailer considered "real work." By participating in the protest, Mailer gains the opportunity to create a literary work; one that would bring his objections to the war into perspective.

In a later chapter Mailer discusses the need for a participant to write about the march on the Pentagon. He introduces his role at the center of the story by stating, "To write an intimate history of an event which places its focus on a central figure who is not central to the event, is to inspire immediate questions about the competence of the historian" (53). Mailer is not a leader in the organization of the event nor is he a leader of any of the political groups invested in the protest. He is simply an author asked to speak at a couple of demonstrations leading up to the actual protest rally who is "not central to the event." However, he does feel it is unnecessary to

cast light wholly and completely on anyone close to the center of the affair. He explains his choice of himself as the main protagonist for his narrative with the following:

> The March on the Pentagon was an ambiguous event whose essential value or absurdity may not be established for ten or twenty years, or indeed ever. So to place the real principals, the founders or designers of the March, men like David Dellinger, or Jerry Rubin, in the center of our portrait could prove misleading. They were serious men, devoted to hard detailed work; their position in these affairs, precisely because it was central, can resolve nothing of the ambiguity. For that, an eyewitness who is a participant but not a vested partisan is required, further he must be not only involved, but ambiguous in his own proportions, a comic hero, which is to say, one cannot happily resolve the emphasis of the category—is he finally comic, a ludicrous figure with mock-heroic associations; or is he not unheroic, an therefore embedded somewhat tragically in the comic? Or is he both at once, and all at once? These questions, which probably are not much more answerable than the very ambiguities of the event, at least help to recapture the precise feel of the ambiguity of the event and its monumental disproportions. (53)

Mailer admits that the breadth and scope of the protest is beyond conventional definition or explanation. This claim raises doubts for the reader about the media's ability to cover a story as intricate as the march on the Pentagon. If Mailer believes the event may not be understood for decades, how could a journalist, writing for a daily publication, possibly be able to produce an accurate account of an event filled with numerous complexities? The march is full of uncertainties and anxieties rendering the expectations of "the real principals" moot points of

discussion. In Mailer's approach to providing a history of the events, the main organizers are relegated to supporting roles. The ambiguity of historical events is equaled by the ambiguity of the main protagonist. Specifically, all of the questions asked about the character in this passage can be applied to the action. Is the protest comic or amusing; a ludicrous event with mock-heroic associations? Is it "unheroic" to protest a war?

Coincidentally, Mailer does not accidentally stumble into this choice of a hero or of a literary style. Laura Adams explains that Norman Mailer had been searching for a new form to express his social criticism of the nation during a turbulent time. She writes in *Existential Battles*, "The form developed in *Armies* was the product of Mailer's determined search for a style and a hero appropriate to that style during these years of 1966 through the spring of 1968" (99).[6] Mailer saw the protest march on the Pentagon as an opportunity, as an outlet for expressing his views on the Vietnam War and to raise the state of American awareness. In *The Armies of the Night*, Mailer's participation drew the attention of the media whom, as previously mentioned, usually distorted facts concerning his actions and words.

The *Time* article that is presented in the opening chapter of *Armies* is extremely critical and unforgiving. It focuses on Mailer's seemingly erratic behavior on stage and his preoccupation with "excretion." Mailer relays an incident in the men's bathroom to the reader and explains he simply needed to relieve himself but could not find a light switch. Admitting drunkenness, he decides to locate "what's what with the probing of his toes" (Mailer 31). Missing his desired target he briefly relieves himself on the floor before relocating the bowl. It is during this time that Mailer decides "he was off on the Romantic's great military dream, which is: seize defeat, convert it to triumph" (Mailer 31). His gaffe provides him with an oratorical

[6] In her chapter titled "Phase Three: The Armies of the Night," Adams traces the chronology of Mailer's work from *An American Dream* to *The Armies of the Night*.

device, or so he believes. Assuming his accidently formed puddle would be discovered sooner than later, the author explains:

> He would confess straight out to all aloud that he was the one who wet the floor in the men's room, he alone! While the audience was recovering from the existential anxiety of encountering an orator who confessed to such a crime, he would be able—their attention now riveted—to bring them up to a contemplation of deeper problems, of, indeed, the deepest problems, the most chilling alternatives, and would from there seek to bring them back to a restorative view of man. (31)

The plan to engage the audience was clear to Mailer: grab their attention with shock and awe, dive immediately into thoughtful consideration of their situation, and find redemption for himself and the audience. It doesn't quite work out that way and unfortunately his resulting actions are reported unsympathetically in the *Time* article. This is an example of Mailer's attempt to mold the sarcophagus of his image while in conflict with the mass media.

The trouble for Mailer at the gathering begins when a colleague is unable to locate Mailer. Prior to the bathroom incident, it was decided between Mailer and lawyer Ed de Grazia that Mailer would act as Master of Ceremonies at the meeting.[7] At a party preceding the meeting, Mailer and de Grazia had agreed on a line-up of speakers for the evening which would include social critic Paul Goodman, poet Robert Lowell, and literary critic Dwight Macdonald. Unfortunately, Mailer's jaunt to the men's room left de Grazia, as he explains, with little choice but to begin the meeting without him; they were, after all, over an hour late and Mailer was nowhere to be found.

[7] Ed de Grazia was the leading lawyer for the Mobilization's Legal Defense Committee.

Mailer insists on regaining his position as M.C. An argument ensues first off stage then on stage in full view of the audience. Seeing Paul Goodman introduced by de Grazia, Mailer's disposition switched gears immediately. The author writes, "In truth, Mailer was now in a state. He had been prepared to open the evening with apocalyptic salvos to announce the real gravity of the situation, and the intensely peculiar American aspect of it" (35). Unfortunately for Mailer, the meeting started without him and his mood turns foul. Soon Goodman finishes and Mailer takes the stage though he admits he has nothing prepared to say because he is temporarily detoured from the previously planned approach to the evening's activities. He begins speaking into the microphone but soon resorts to shouting out of annoyance with the microphone. The next few minutes are filled with shouts of provocation from the audience while Mailer delivers loosely connected points of vulgarity-filled argument which are meant to produce humorous effects. It isn't effective. His colleagues soon tire of his antics; Dwight Macdonald followed by de Grazia walk up to Mailer and demand he pass on the microphone. Mailer explains to the audience the disagreement that has developed and calls for a vote. Who should be M.C.: Mailer or de Grazia? The oral vote produces an unclear winner and as a consequence Mailer insists he retain the position. This results in the following exclamation:

> "You have all just learned an invaluable political lesson." He waved the microphone at the audience. "In the absence of a definitive vote, the man who holds the power, keeps it."
>
> "Hey, de Grazia," someone yelled from the audience, "why do you let him have it?"

> Mailer extended the microphone to de Grazia who smiled sweetly into it. "Because if I don't," he said in a gentle voice, "he'll beat the shit out of me." The dread word had been used again. (Mailer 39-40)

This brief yet powerful encounter leaves the reader with substantial material to reconsider and ponder over. For one thing, the report cited at the beginning of *Armies* from *Time* magazine uses the term "scatological" to describe the rhetoric on display that night at the Ambassador Theater. The reader can understand how a journalist might categorize the entire performance as a string of vulgar comments blurring into one another. Mailer admits the abuse of one particular word by the speakers on stage but he also presents to the reader passages of poetry read by Macdonald and Robert Lowell during their respective speeches. It is a fair balance of vulgarity and poetry. The entire performance did not center on "excrement" as the article claims. The article is also worded to lead the reader to believe Mailer threatened de Grazia. In Armies, the reader sees that de Grazia is merely stating what he assumes to be a possible result if the two men continue to argue on stage. One could argue that de Grazia is, perhaps, merely trying to defuse the escalating situation with humor.

A reader who keeps this confrontation in mind will recognize that Mailer is correct in stressing the difficulty of explaining the ambiguities concerning the war, not to mention the protest, and the contested image of American society. While consciously seeking to write a personal history, Mailer inadvertently reveals a truth about the American approach to diplomacy. At this moment, drunk both literally with whisky and metaphorically with a sense of power, "Mailer did not know, but he had already and unwitting to himself metamorphosed into the Beast" (Mailer 30). Mailer is fond of using numerous metaphoric self-descriptions to further

emphasize the role he himself plays at any given moment. It is during this evening that Mailer, the character, is portrayed by Mailer the author, as "the Beast."

The Beast's fervent eagerness to win over the crowd and direct the conversation distorts Mailer's ability to behave rationally. The Beast strong-arms his colleagues (temporarily turned adversaries) into submission and the meeting continues. Mailer is the final speaker of the evening and before he addresses the crowd, the author reminds the reader, "We must not forget the Beast…He was on the hunt" (Mailer 46). Mailer sarcastically speaks in a southern drawl to imitate President Lyndon B. Johnson while relaying his gaffe in the men's room which he claims will be blamed on Communists because that's the American way. During his speech Mailer realizes something about his performance. The author explains:

> And in the privacy of his brain, quiet in the glare of all that sound and spotlight, Mailer thought quietly, "My God, that is probably exactly what you are at this moment, Lyndon Johnson with all his sores, sorrows, and vanity, squeezed down to five foot eight," and Mailer felt for the instant possessed, as if he had seized some of the President's secret soul. (50)

The Beast had momentarily filled the role of hostile opposition to fellow anti-war protesters. He had summoned the essence of an American President who was as dismissive to his detractors as Mailer was to hecklers in the crowd that evening. Fortunately for him, the Beast was only a temporary drifting into totalitarian supremacy. Unfortunately, the press reports of the gathering focused on antics and not philosophical thoughts. With his personal account, Mailer allows himself the advantage of self-reflection as a means of conveying a truth about the evening's events. The next day would provide Mailer another opportunity to explore other aspects of his ambiguous character and observe complex occurrences.

On Friday October 20, 1967, Mailer spoke at a demonstration on the steps of the Justice Department. Hundreds of young men were turning in their draft cards along with cards from other men they came represented. Elders such as Mailer and faculty from various universities were also there in support. Students began filing up the steps in a ceremonial fashion, dropping draft cards into a collection bag. They were followed by faculty, men of Mailer's age, and carrying draft cards from students at their respective schools. Mailer's thoughts were consumed with their sacrifice. The author writes:

> It must have been painful for these academics. They were older, certainly less suited for jail, aware more precisely of how and where their careers would be diverted or impeded, they had families many of them, they were liberal academics, technologues, they were being forced to abdicate from the machines they had chosen for their life. Their decision to turn in draft cards must have come for many in the middle of the night; for others it must have come even last night, or as they stood here debating with themselves. Many of them seemed to stand irresolutely near the steps for long periods, then move up at last. (77)

This is the humanistic and heroic side to the anti-war demonstrations that gets generally ignored by the daily press. There are sacrifices being made, as Mailer describes, with the possibility of major consequences. The newspaper reports cited earlier are indicative of most reports covering the events in Washington that week. They largely ignore the possible life-consequences anti-war protesters are faced with. Besides the possible violence, their livelihoods are never considered. Here, Mailer considers sacrifices and integrity required of these academics aiding students in a criminal act from which there would be worldly consequences to face. For those that stood

"irresolutely" the mental battle must've been waging up to the moment before the final decision to walk up the steps.

As Mailer observes this solemn ritual unfold before him, he can't help but consider his own fear, "yes now he saw it, fear of the consequences of this weekend in Washington, for he had known from the beginning it could disrupt his life for a season or more, and in some way the danger was there it could change him forever" (Mailer 77). It is this same fear that shadowed the actions of the students and the academics. Mailer considers this as he observes the demonstrators until he was finally called to speak. The author writes:

> He said a little of what he had thought while watching the others: that he had recognized on this afternoon that the time had come when Americans, many Americans, would have to face the possibility of going to jail for their ideas, and this was a prospect with no cheer because prisons were unattractive places where much of the best in oneself was slowly extinguished, but it could be there was no choice. (79)

The war in Vietnam is opposed on different levels and for diverse reasons; the diversity of protestors arriving for Saturday's protest is a testament to the number of conflicting views Americans felt in regards to the country's involvement in Southeast Asia. And they are being punished for despising and opposing it. The thought was: extreme measures must be taken and although the sacrifice was an individual's freedom and personal ambition among others, the alternative is unacceptable to protestors who see the Vietnam War as an abomination on America's humanity.

The sacrificial act for Mailer is forthcoming. He discusses with Dwight Macdonald and Robert Lowell on a couple of occasions whether they should purposely get arrested Saturday at

the Pentagon. Much like the men he observed on the steps of the Justice Department, this debate between the three continues until the moment before willing themselves into action. The three were discussing the virtue of being arrested over dinner when the author explains, "It was Mailer's firm conclusion that this was probably the way they could best serve the occasion. 'If the three of us are arrested,' he said, 'the papers can't claim that hippies and hoodlums were the only ones guilty'" (84). This passage, like so many others, reveals Mailer's concern with the role of the "papers." Mailer suggests that the protest would be somewhat devalued by the mass media if names of successful and prominent citizens aren't included in the reports of those arrested. By having their arrests reported, the three well-regarded writers would be lending a level of credibility to the march.

As the narrative continues, Mailer delivers his thoughts about many issues including the evolution of the political Left, the Left's distrust of authority that lies blatantly to the American public, and the possibility that the march on the Pentagon could in fifty years "loom in our history large as the ghosts of the Union dead" (Mailer 88). This last reference to the civil war is proper considering the country was being torn apart by inner turmoil. The movement of the "New Left" had managed to draw thousands of people together, with little in common, in a massive effort to demand an end to what they considered an inhumane war in Vietnam.

The next few chapters are spent with the author detailing Norman Mailer's actions and observations of those involved in the day's events. His excitement at the prospects of the day is compared to Mailer's first experience in combat. He explains, "He realized that he had not taken in precisely this thin high sensuous breath of pleasure in close to twenty-four years, not since the first time he had gone to combat" (Mailer 90). There are many allusions to the idea of combat throughout the narrative, yet this passage reveals, more than any, Mailer's own connection to the

symbolic war that is about to be waged. His excitement at seeing an army of citizens gathering, music playing, and an overwhelming sense of anticipation sets his instinctive need for conflict on edge. The narrative's approach to describing the atmosphere is decidedly personal. Unlike news reports that attempt to remain focused on objective reporting throughout an article, Mailer's descriptions are resounding and exclamatory. For example the following from *Armies*:

> The morning was so splendid—it spoke of a vitality in nature which no number of bombings in space nor inner-space might ever subdue; the rustle of costumes warning up for the war spoke of future redemptions as quickly as they reminded of hog-swillings from the past, and the thin air! wine of Civil War apples in the October air! edge of excitement and awe—how would this day end? No one could know. Incredible spectacle now gathering—tens of thousands traveling hundreds of miles to attend a symbolic battle. In the capital of technology land beat a primitive drum. New drum of the Left! And the Left had been until this year the secret unwitting accomplice of every increase in the power of technicians, bureaucrats, and labor leader who ran the governmental military-industrial complex of super-technology land. (93-94)

The author captures the excitement and anticipation as a natural energy immune to the fear of militant intimidation; energy that collects unwavering in the face of the unknown. The media has consistently suppressed messages similar to Mailer's about the deceptions of the government. Using his literary abilities, Mailer delivers a critique of what he considers to be a mass cover-up. In this passage, the advancement of technology is spoken of as a conspiracy hidden from the surface of American knowledge in order to advance the strength of America's military might. The call for action against this conspiracy was made by the political Left, now

resolutely aware of the government's deception, and thousands of people arrived in order to participate in a symbolic war with little certainty towards what may occur.

Besides the significance of standing up in opposition of what is seen as a corrupt institution Mailer's personal account asks a significant question: How much personal sacrifice am I willing to offer for the cause? This question of sacrifice is not one that was asked, let alone answered by the mass media. It is a theme, though, that prevails throughout his personalized account.

The possibility of the protest turning violent was real because some protesters were planning on transforming the symbolic march into a literal assault on a government building in an attempt to disrupt its day-to -day operations. As Mailer exclaims, "real heads may possibly get hurt, and soldiers will be there to hold us back…some blood conceivably will be shed" (Mailer 47). Not all people who attended the rally at the Lincoln Memorial crossed the Memorial Bridge towards the Pentagon, perhaps from fear of the unknown; perhaps they didn't want to consider how much personal sacrifice they were willing to offer. Those who did cross the bridge crossed towards a battle field surrounded by enraged protesters; some of whom would refuse to be controlled by rules and boundaries set by a government they mistrusted.

The extent of involvement and commitment by protesters is discussed in an article titled "The March on the Pentagon" by Clark Akatiff. In the article, Akatiff divides the march into five distinct levels:

> Level One: home—wherever the participants live and carry on their day-to-day activities…Level Two: Washington D.C. and specifically, the Lincoln Memorial….Level Three: North Parking Lot of the Pentagon. Level Four: the

> lawn facing the mall entrance to the Pentagon. Level Five: the steps and mall of the Pentagon. (27-28)

Using these five levels, Mailer's commitment to the cause can be deduced with this reading of *Armies*.

Mailer discusses his reasoning behind travelling to the nation's capital from New York City. He was coaxed into attending and speaking at the Justice Department demonstration. Leaping from Level One to Level Two took a simple conversation and an attempt by the author to become an American hero. He would be a willing participant for three days in D.C. He would attend a meeting Thursday, a demonstration Friday, and finally he would attend the rally at the Lincoln Memorial. The leap from Level Two to Level Three would take several hours as the parade of marchers, walking across the Memorial Bridge, was consistently halted for unknown reasons. Because of the stop-and-go approach to the march it felt as if, "At this rate it would take six hours to reach the Pentagon" (Mailer 108). Taking into consideration the disparity between estimations, *Armies* claims that between 75,000 and 90,000 people were at the Lincoln Memorial and only about 54,000 actually crossed the bridge.[8] The estimated number of people who crossed the bridge reveals two things. First, it shows that many people were unwilling to make the leap across the bridge barrier. Second it helps to develop a picture of a mass contingent of people crowded together, channeled through a concrete path symbolic of a rite of passage. The frustration and anxiety built up among those in the crowded concrete funnel is summarized in the following passage from *Armies*:

> In the center of that March across the bridge, buried in the middle of that half mile, the crush of marchers must have surged back and forth like a wash of waves caught by the change of tides in a channel; there was promise of chaos

[8] Mailer 245.

> everywhere, but order was saved from disorder as the mob, good-humored, then evil, then good-humored again, inched its way across the bridge, waiting in place, sitting down, marching again, singing songs…it is possible any other group so large, so leaderless, so infused with anxiety for the unknown situation ahead, and so packed upon that bridge would have erupted, but finally it was a pacifist crowd. (112)

Mailer was at the front of the march and felt the surging energy upon his back as time and time again his line would have to bear the brunt of thousands of marchers coming to a sudden halt. Mailer also uses this opportunity to remind readers that this is an anti-war march and these people are predominately pro-peace. The protesters are a collection of diverse groups of people and organizations who agree on this one issue and their intentions breed a reluctance to reduce themselves to a state of anarchy. Perhaps also adding to the minimization of any sort of unruly commotion occurring was the fact marchers were linked arm-in-arm, in a sense locking them in a warm embrace which was at once both comforting and stifling. Mailer consistently describes the attitudes of those involved as he does in passages similar to this one. The personal account he delivers gives the reader an insight generally elusive in most daily news reports.

Eventually the massive march would arrive at its intended destination. Mailer's line was second and with his two co-conspirators close by, they would be part of the first hundred people to reach the North Parking Lot of the Pentagon. It was here that the second rally was scheduled a secure one thousand feet from the steps of the Pentagon. The North Parking Lot offered a place for protesters to gather, hear speeches, listen to music, and safely observe the turmoil that would soon erupt. Beyond the parking lot, in the lawn of the Pentagon were ranks of Military Police and U.S. Marshalls. These barriers would provide a crucial test to each protester's

commitment to the cause. There is a passage in Book Two of *Armies* that describes the test of will at stake in breaking through barriers and overcoming one's fears:

> Cowardice lives in waves, in congealed layers, in caverns of the psyche, in treacheries of fear next to the boldest moves; it also lives encysted in all the firmest structures of the ego. How many of these demonstrators, certain at the beginning of the night by the firm conviction of their ego that they would not leave until morning, must have been obliged to pass through layers and dimensions and bursting cysts of cowardice they never knew to exist in themselves, as if each hour they remained extracted from them a new demand, a further extension of their moral resolve […] (279)

Fear of the unknown was widespread during every step towards the Pentagon and arriving at the parking lot would only replace this fear with another: the fear of retaliatory brutality. Only the most dedicated were capable of facing this sort of fear, which was necessary if they were to move past the next barrier onto the lawn. The first assault into Level Four was made while Mailer and company were lingering around a stage in the parking lot where music was being played. From the rear of the parking lot a wedge of men rush towards the Pentagon. Wearing helmets of all sorts and waving flags, the wedge of citizen combatants is a glorious spectacle. Observing the wedge charge towards an unseen enemy, Mailer sees it come to a momentary halt. Moments pass without action and then suddenly "the very troops who had carried the N.L.F. flags, were running toward the rear in a panic" (Mailer 127).[9] Heading in Mailer's direction:

> […] he saw nothing but the look of terror on the faces coming toward him and he turned to run in order not to be run down by them, conceiving for one instant MPs

[9] N.L.F.: National Liberation Front.

> squirting Mace in everybody's eyes. Then panic was on him too. He didn't want Mace. (127-128)

Mailer's previously calm demeanor quickly disappears and is replaced wholly and completely with fear. His fear is explained in the following passage:

> He sprinted a few steps, looked over his shoulder, stepped in a drainage trough where the parking lot concrete was hollowed, almost fell with a nasty wrench of his back and abruptly stopped running, sheepishly, recognizing that some large fund of fear he had not even felt for a minute these three days had nonetheless lived in him like an abscess quick to burst now at the first mean threat. He was furious, furious at himself for fleeing and this shame was not balmed by the quick sight he had over one shoulder of Dwight Macdonald standing calm and still, while tens of people scrambled around him in panic. Macdonald had the quiet look on his face of a man who had lived his life, and had learned what he learned, and was not going to run from anyone. (128)

In an instant, all the fear inside of Mailer recognized himself within the terrorized faces of these men he had seen, only moments before, charge fearlessly towards an unseen enemy. Their retreat sparked a knee-jerk reaction in Mailer which had been suppressed for three days. Merely a mindless reaction, Mailer gathers his wits about him though with a sense of shame. The sight of a composed Macdonald reminds Mailer of his colleague's seniority over him in age and apparently, at this point, in the practice of self-control.

The fear, replaced by shame and fury, is soon harnessed and turned into sheer determination. There was no leader to lead Mailer's charge towards the MPs; he had to make the assault on his own with or without his companions. Immediately after regrouping the author tells

the reader, "Mailer said, 'let's get arrested now.' Stating the desire created it, and put a ligature across the rent in his nerve" (128). His ego slightly ripped, Mailer reined his fear in with a determined statement of intent to "get arrested now." Newly reinvigorated, Mailer and company find a group of protesters gathered behind a rope where MPs were stationed. The three maneuvered themselves "into position until they had nothing in front of them but the rope, and the MPs" (129). Their own personal assaults on the Pentagon commenced.

The following is a summary of Mailer's report of his arrest; a much more detailed report than the ones provided by the mass media: The ropes were low to the ground and the troops were stationed ten yards back and twenty feet apart. Behind them was a similar row of troops and even deeper were small groups of U.S. Marshalls. Mailer initiated the step over the low-lying rope. The author writes:

> Mailer looked at Macdonald and Lowell. 'Let's go,' he said. Not looking again at them, not pausing to gather or dissipate resolve, he made a point of stepping neatly and decisively over the low rope. Then he headed across the grass to the nearest MP he saw. (129)

This breaking through a physical and psychological barrier is paramount for our hero, which Mailer positions himself as. With firm resolve he heads straight for the enemy only to encounter an opponent without a conviction that equaled his own. In fact what he encountered was another brand of fear. The first MP he encounters is trembling and merely orders Mailer to "Go back" (Mailer 130). The two spar momentarily in an odd battle of body language which is won by Mailer who then passes the MP and heads towards the second rank of soldiers.

Mailer is unheeded even by the second rank. Mailer notices, "They looked petrified. Stricken faces as he went by. They did not know what to do" (Mailer 130). It seems that these

MPs were ordered to keep people from charging across the rope line because they keep telling him to "go back." But beyond that they seem unsure how to physically halt people from initiating any sort of assault on the Pentagon. Mailer as a one man assault-team would seem easy enough to subdue and it isn't until he reaches the rank of U.S. Marshalls that he is finally arrested. Without physical harm and without inciting a riot, Mailer was now in the hands of the enemy. His march on the Pentagon was in dissent of his government's military policy in Southeast Asia. He is now a political prisoner. His symbolic march complete, his break through psychological barriers is momentarily halted on the lawn. He would not reach the Pentagon but, at the most, it was against his will that the journey towards his objective was concluded.

Though his own personal march was now done, the battles Mailer was to face on this occasion would continue. After being arrested, Mailer is retained in a Volkswagen with another prisoner named Walter Teague. The pair are hardly together a moment when a man wearing a Nazi armband is placed in the holding vehicle with them. Mailer sees this as a possible conspiracy by his arresters to induce violence between prisoners. The author writes, "If the Nazi started trouble, and there was a fight, the newspaper accounts would doubtless state that Norman Mailer had gotten into an altercation five minutes after his arrest. (Of course, they would not say with whom.)" (141). Again, Mailer's distrust of the media invades his thoughts but his concerns are reasonable. The mass media's inability to accurately portray events is problematic for Mailer and for the reader. The general public relies on the mass media to present evidence that is reliable and focused on important issues. This is not always the case as Mailer effectively reminds the reader of the tendency of the mass media to focus on distracting issues; issues that shouldn't carry the relevance the newspapers afford them while at the same time ignoring proper

context. For example, if he got into a fight provoked by a Nazi (Mailer is Jewish) it would provide a different context for news reports concerning unnecessary violent behavior.

After a conflict-laden interchange with the Nazi, Mailer is booked then taken to a school bus where he waits with other prisoners. The bus fills with protesters and eventually they are all taken to the U.S. Post Office in Alexandria, their temporary prison. Before being incarcerated, Mailer, Lowell, and Macdonald had decided to get arrested early in the hopes of a quick release. Mailer's expectations couldn't have been more misplaced. The main anxiety, for Mailer and most of the other prisoners, is the amount of time they would have to wait to be sentenced and then released. Eventually the U.S. Commissioners arrive and the process begins. The first prisoners called out "came back in ten minutes to say their fine was $25, and they were being released on a promise not to return to the Pentagon" (Mailer 161). Thus begins Mailer's mental self-torture. He starts to consider possible release times as he clings to the idea he will be released soon. The reader learns that Mailer was the tenth person arrested by the U.S. Marshalls at the Pentagon that day. In the hopes that prisoners were being called out according to the order they were arrested Mailer believes he can still make it to a party Robert Lowell was hosting in New York City that same evening.

But Mailer knows better than to anticipate. While awaiting news of his possible release he recalls the last time he was arrested. He considers the circumstances surrounding his previous arrest and the author writes:

> They were not years he enjoyed to look back upon, but he had learned one lesson in prison then, and it came back to him now: in jail, a man who wished to keep his sanity, must never anticipate, never expect, never hope with such high focus of hope, that disappointment would be painful. Because there was no place for

> disappointment to go in prison, except back into one's own cells. Prison was frustration. (165)

Even though he reminds himself to lose his anticipation, it is almost impossible to lose it because of all the rumors that keep coming; first positive and then negative and all unverifiable. Eventually word came that the prisoners are to be transferred to Occoquan, Virginia twenty miles down the road. Before boarding the bus to Occoquan, Mailer is told by a Civil Rights lawyer, "that the Commissioner in the Post Office had been saving him for last" (Mailer 173). Though distraught at this news the bus ride gives Mailer some levity. The author writes:

> A silence came over them—that restful silence of men traveling, that sense of security in their muscle and in their number, and in their patience, which he had not felt since old days in the Army moving in convoy along dark roads. He was almost glad he had not yet been released, for he would have missed this trip, and so have not been reminded that a night journey on a bus was one of the few times when everything ambitious, wild, overconceived, hopeless, garish, and suffocatingly technical in American life nonetheless came together long enough to give the citizens a little peace, for maybe it was only when they were on the move that Americans could feel anchored in their memories. (174)

The Armies of the Night is saturated with passages similar to this one; reveries that allow the author to explain an insight into American existence. This, more than any other rhetorical device the author uses, benefits the reader the most when explaining the situation from Mailer's personal viewpoint based on his subjective commitments and particular conception of the writer and the responsible approach to life. Again, he uses his military experience to serve him metaphorically. He is part of a transport of men whose momentary destinies had been fulfilled

that day. The memory of the day somehow placed calm over the political prisoners and their night flight provided them time for peaceful reflection. The serenity was impossible within the confines of their holding cell where the mind is unsettled with anxiety and, again, fear of the unknown.

The holding room at Occoquan was a cell that could hold up to one-hundred and twenty prisoners; the rumors swirled and time passed slowly. The next morning brought further dilemmas. First, Mailer had a problem with his plea. The lawyers advised all prisoners to plea Nolo Contendere but Mailer wanted to plead Guilty. The author explains, "He was after all guilty for a purpose which he wished to advertise, and Nolo Contendere had something soft about it to the ear" (193). The lawyers were adamant about consistency across the board for all prisoners. Sentences that were being handed out were standard and reasonable. All prisoners, up to this point, were being fined $25, were given a five-day suspended jail sentence, and were released with the promise not to return to the Pentagon for six months.[10] This presented Mailer with another barrier through which he is reluctant to pass through.

One of his fellow prisoners is the famous hippie rock star and counter-cultural figure Tuli Kupferberg. Kupferberg presented one moral dilemma that needed to be faced before Mailer could deliver his plea and receive his sentence. Kupferberg had refused to promise to stay away from the Pentagon for six months and as a consequence would have to serve the five-day jail sentence. Mailer writes, "To agree not to return to the Pentagon for six months was to collaborate with the government—what then had they been protesting?" (193). In another twist to a story of a hero's ordeal, the reader is led to question, along with the protagonist: How far does the journey need to go?

[10] Mailer 193.

Mailer rationalizes with himself thinking, "Nothing was accomplished by staying in jail—the point had been to get arrested, not to go to war against the sentence. Nothing would happen at the Pentagon for six months; so the promise would cost nothing" (Mailer 194). This unforeseen dilemma brings into focus an existential problem which Mailer likens to a 'ladder of moral challenges.' Regardless of how high a person climbs, there is always another challenge to be confronted. Consequently, "The first step down in a failure of nerve always presented the same kind of nausea" (Mailer 195). The previously mentioned levels of commitment can be seen in the light of a ladder of moral challenges. Mailer ponders the feeling and realizes at some point people against the war had the same nauseating feeling when they chose not to leave their homes, not to cross the bridge, and not risk the danger of getting arrested.

Committed to taking that first step down regardless of nausea and fear, Mailer is finally brought before Commissioner Scaife. As his lawyer advises he pleads *Nolo Contendere*. A few moments pass and then the following:

> "Mr. Mailer," said the Commissioner, "I view your case with somewhat more seriousness than the average case before me today. You are a mature man, responsible for your ideas, well-known, and you exert influence upon many young people. I think a man in your position should not act as a bad example, so I view your offense with greater concern. It is quite possible to exercise your Constitutional rights of protest and dissent without breaking the law. Therefore, I am going to fine you fifty dollars, and give you a sentence of thirty days in jail," He paused, continued to look at Mailer, who continued to look back, and added, "Of these thirty days, twenty-five will be suspended." (Mailer 206)

Mailer's contemplation on the steps of the Justice Department two days prior comes to mind here. His concern at that time was focused on the elder academics whose decision to participate in the draft card demonstration might come at a price, perhaps greater than the students because they were established and accomplished individuals. They had careers which many felt loyal to and many spent years of academic work developing, not to mention families to go home to. Here, Mailer's fears for those men manifested itself during his sentencing in the form of Commissioner Scaife. Though the severity of his sentence isn't considered extreme, the symbolic nature is tremendous. According to the U.S. Marshals website, six hundred and eight-two were arrested that October weekend at the Pentagon. *Armies* explains that the standard punishment was a $25 fine and a suspended five-day sentence. Mailer's punishment was greater than the other political prisoners because of his public celebrity, because he was seen as a dangerous influence, and most essentially because of his ideology.

The Armies of the Night reveals the inner thoughts and actions of a prisoner of conscience; valuable information not revealed through conventional journalism. The story tells of a journey through levels of commitment, it tells of a climb up a moral ladder of challenges, and it tells the story of one man's symbolic condemnation. He was not alone. There were thousands who passed through barriers, leaving their homes to travel hundreds of miles to the Pentagon. Many placed themselves in danger and were arrested or worse, beaten. Book Two of *Armies* tells the story of a militant wedge that clubbed its way through lines of seated protesters. Many are carried away bleeding and bruised. Others would succumb to fear and stepped down the moral ladder in metaphorical nausea sooner than others. Regardless of when any one of the thousands of protesters stepped down they are many heroes in this story but only one stands at the center; displayed as a sacrificial lamb for the amusement of those who hold the power and

also as a hero to some for his refusal to give it up to ideologists of the political Left. The standard punishment wasn't enough. Mailer receives special treatment because of how he thinks and because of his celebrity status. Ultimately, this is the great tragedy that is understood through his subjective rendering of the experience of a prisoner of consciousness during the Vietnam War era of the United States of America.

CHAPTER III

AMERICAN GROUND: REVEALING AN UNFORTUNATE TRUTH ABOUT A HERO-IMAGE AND UNITY DURING POST 9/11 WORLD TRADE CENTER EFFORTS

The Development of an Image

Following the travesty that overwhelmed the United States of America on September 11, 2001, the nation developed a collective perception of events built upon images promoted by the mass media and influenced by stories published in print media. The public's perception of print media's role as an objective industry facilitated the immediate forming of public opinion. The country promptly developed a fresh national identity. A majority of the reports focused on the emergency responders, on targeting accused terrorists, on the literal changing of an American skyline, and on the historical significance of the attacks. Journalists were not allowed access to the World Trade Center site during the recovery/clean-up effort. As a result, instead of focusing on the progress of the effort, they reported second-hand stories of survival, sacrifice, and heroism. Reading articles from the day of the attacks and from the months following there is a consistent message of unwavering patriotism being relayed to the American public by the mass media. There was little room for alternatives and with all the flag waving, fist punching, and jingoistic rhetoric it would be difficult for the American audience to accept an alternate

observation of the phenomena that became the post-9/11 rescue and recovery effort at the World Trade Center site. William Langewiesche delivers an alternative view of the post-9/11 rescue and recovery effort with his vivid account of the events that followed the disaster. His book, *AmericanGround: Unbuilding the World Trade Center*, performs an interesting dialectic between objectivity and subjectivity. *American Ground* delves into the question of what it means to understand the World Trade Center site as an American cultural phenomenon and "an extremely complex place, loaded with emotion and political symbolism, full of action and confusion, with many interpretations possible" (Langewiesche 218). Langewiesche concedes, in the afterword to the paperback edition, that he "wrote about it with complete candor, expressing my opinions openly, as I always do" (218). The following passage is taken from the first pages of *American Ground*:

> People who came to the site in those early days often had the same first sensation, of leaving the city and walking into a dream. Many also felt when they saw the extent of the destruction that they had stumbled into a war zone. "It's like something you'd see in the movies," people said. Probably so, but my own reaction was different when I first went in, soon after the attacks. After years of traveling through the back corners of the world, I had an unexpected sense not of the strangeness of this scene but of its familiarity. Wading through the debris on the streets, climbing through the newly torn landscapes, breathing in the mixture of smoke and dust, it was as if I had wandered again into the special havoc that failing societies tend to visit upon themselves. This time they had visited it upon us. The message seemed to be "Here's a sample of our political science." I was impressed by how faithfully the effects had been reproduced on the ground. (7-8)

Langewiesche doesn't hesitate to introduce the reader to his personal opinions and perceptions of the scene; his judgments derive from years of experience. He describes his own subjective impressions, allowing them to be challenged for their objectivity. Also in this passage he juxtapositions reports of people's reactions to his own assessments and in doing so creates a sense of ownership over the account he will continue to deliver throughout the book. His prior experiences reporting on the state of failing societies and their violent "political science" allows him an ability to formulate a narrative that seems resourceful and reliable. It is this very subjectivity that allows the reader to understand, on a deeper level, previously unrevealed truths about the world of the World Trade Center post-9/11.

The so-called objective approach of the mass media was helping to develop a collective perception of the events and circumstances surrounding the disaster of 9/11. The following passages are taken from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times* reporting on the catastrophic events that occurred on September 11, 2001:

> No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks. But the extraordinary planning required, the hijackers' apparent familiarity with the jetliners they commandeered, and the history of attacks on American targets in recent years all led to speculation that this attack was directed by Osama bin Laden, the Islamic militant believed to operate out of Afghanistan. Afghanistan's hard-line Taliban rulers rejected the idea, but American officials saw that as a defensive measure. (Barron)
>
> Although officials had no direct information this morning linking him to the attacks, fugitive terrorist Osama bin Laden is automatically considered the

leading suspect behind the bombings, a senior government official said. (Babington)

In the worst terrorist attack in U.S. history, hijackers flew two airliners into the World Trade Center today, collapsing both towers into flaming rubble, and crashed another aircraft at the Pentagon, shutting down the government and financial markets and spreading fear throughout America.

"This is perhaps the most audacious terrorist attack that's ever taken place in the world," said Chris Yates, an aviation expert at Jane's Transport magazine in London. "It takes a logistics operation from the terror group involved that is second to none. Only a very small handful of terror groups are on that list…I would name at the top of the list Osama bin Laden." (Gold and Farley)

These three major publications harmoniously reported the same speculative accusation. With their flashlights aimed firmly at a designated target the American public believed the ultimate nemesis to Western society had been identified. This example is not the primary focus of this discussion, but it is indicative of how the print media works in influencing public opinion and how homogenous the judgments of a captivated audience on major issues spontaneously flow.

This cause and effect is investigated in a book by Lisa Finnegan, an American journalist who focuses on the psychological impact of terrorism, which discusses the reception of media accounts by the American public.[11] In it she writes: "After 9/11 the media experienced a surge in popularity. Polls shortly after the attacks showed that for the first time in 16 years, the American public felt journalists were doing a good job and were acting responsibly" (32). The American public's heightened trust in the media's ability to report on the events that were occurring became problematic for numerous reasons. Consider that because a growing sense of paranoia

[11] *No Questions Asked: News Coverage Since 9/11*.

coupled with patriotism was spreading throughout the country, questioning American foreign policy was frowned upon and quickly dismissed as soft on terrorism. The administration's approach was to censor the media amidst claims of national security. As Finnegan explains:

> It is true that journalists should use caution when reporting details such as the specifics of military strategy or operations. But statements by groups or organizations opposing the U.S. government's actions are news and should be broadcast, debated, and when warranted, discredited. Instead, virtually every uncomfortable dialogue or anti-American opinion was ignored or mocked by the media after September 11. (38)

Instead the mass media's agenda settled on finding explanations for these tragic attacks and complex events and were narrowly focused on actions against those responsible. Immediately, the threat of biochemical warfare became an issue of speculation as, "News reports made more terrorist attacks seem inevitable, and the question was not whether the country would be attacked but when" (Finnegan 30).

Another book that discusses the practices of the media pre-9/11 compared to post-9/11 is *All News is Local* by Richard C. Stanton.[12] In the introduction Stanton writes:

> A few years before the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the Western news media had made considerable progress towards transforming themselves into competitive agents capable of interpreting complex issues and events for a variety of stakeholders. They had begun to differentiate themselves from mass infotainment media. September 11

[12] *All News is Local: The Failure of the Media to Reflect World Events in a Globalized Age* "is an investigation into the three-hundred-year-old model of global journalism used by the Western news media. It argues that the model is fragile and unable to cope with the issues and events, the agents and institutions of globalization that exist, and the current methods, along with the model of news gathering and reporting, require rethinking and reimagining" (Stanton 1).

> created a crisis of confidence that pushed that transformative shift of the Western news media back to their outdated three-hundred-year-old model of reporting. [13] (Stanton 1)

The media's refusal to ask the hard questions is an issue of localization for Stanton. In other words, the media refused to consider alternative views on a global scale beyond the biased attitudes being generated locally by media reports supporting patriotism and denouncing any dissenting voices.

Concerning the coverage of the attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, when the media was not focused on attacking the alleged forces behind the attack they were focused on the reactions of Americans and specifically the actions of emergency responders at the World Trade Center site that morning and days that followed. America needed heroes and so the media dutifully, though hastily, provided them. For example, these two reports from *The New York Times*:

> "A DAY OF TERROR: THE RESPONSE"
>
> New York firefighters, impelled by instinct and training, rushed to the World Trade Center yesterday to evacuate victims. Then the buildings fell down. The firefighters never came out.
>
> More than 300 firefighters were unaccounted for when the day ended. It was the worst disaster in the New York Fire Department's history, explosions having collapsed the two main towers onto the first wave of rescuers as they snaked through stairwells and hallways. (Fritsch)
>
> "AFTER THE ATTACKS: SAFETY"

[13] The 'three-hundred-year-old model of reporting' is explained as the practice of localizing global events which produces desired effects rather than investigative practices that challenge 'local perceptions.'

> But in what police officials regard as a striking achievement in improvisation and commitment, the department, often using tools no more complex than pens and paper, has managed to recover quickly and respond, not only to the trade center crisis, but also to the demands of effectively policing the rest of the city.
>
> "It's really a test for the entire department," Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik said on Friday. "It's a test for the managers, it's a test for the administrators and it's a test for the rank-and-file cops and the first-line supervisors. And everybody is acting; they are far surpassing what I would have imagined under the circumstances." (Rahbaum)

There is little doubt that the reports are simplistic in their descriptions which contain phrases and opinions that provide a positive re-enforcement for the image of the New York fire and police departments. As days passed many accounts of the events from that day took on a tone of patriotism. The following is from *Time* magazine:

> "If You Want To Humble An Empire"
>
> On a normal day, we value heroism because it is uncommon. On Sept. 11, we valued heroism because it was everywhere. The fire fighters kept climbing the stairs of the tallest buildings in town, even as the steel moaned and the cracks spread in zippers through the walls, to get to the people trapped in the sky. We don't know yet how many of them died, but once we know, as Mayor Rudy Giuliani said, "it will be more than we can bear." That sentiment was played out in miniature in the streets, where fleeing victims pulled the wounded to safety, and at every hospital, where the lines to give blood looped round and round the

> block. At the medical-supply companies, which sent supplies without being asked. At Verizon, where a worker threw on a New York fire department jacket to go save people. And then again and again all across the country, as people checked on those they loved to find out if they were safe and then looked for some way to help. (Gibbs)

Again surely there is no doubt that some people acted heroically and that the crisis that supposedly challenged the country in fact may have brought it together. The intentions of the media and the reporters filling column spaces with stories of heroics continued over the next few months. There were articles published that were profiles of survivors of the attacks, of the families of those that perished, and of New York City's residents. They include "The Crash After the Crash" by Sarah Bernard which was a *New York Magazine* article that explored people's reactions to the crisis. In the article a woman recounts her memory of the day the towers crashed, "She made plans with co-workers to go down to Christopher Street and the West Side Highway and cheer on the rescue workers, 'I know one woman who got hugged by a fireman'" (Bernard). The last remark is not only a reference of affection but also of stardom.

The wave of celebrity that swept through the New York Fire Department was so intense that it was felt throughout the country as firemen were lifted from relative obscurity into the leading heroes of the day. The image of the working class grunt turned American hero was stimulated by reports filled with jingoistic rhetoric. And while firemen were being heralded across the country, their actual performance at the site was largely un-documented. Unfortunately, the ability to gain instant access by journalists to "the pile" (as it became known to those at the World Trade Center site) during the recovery and rescue efforts became a near impossible task. For lack of access journalists reported with what little first-hand information

they had available. According to Langewiesche this is a travesty in itself. In the 'Afterword' to the paperback edition he comments:

> It has been suggested that I must have been glad to be the only writer with free access to the inner world of the Trade Center site, but the opposite is true. There was obviously more happening there than I alone could know or describe…The presence of the daily press would have served the useful role not only of informing the public but also of clarifying the participants' views of themselves. (210)

There were multiple players, experts, and agencies contributing to the cause of the moment but as Langewiesche points out, journalists were in scarce supply. The real breadth of efforts was not available to the press and so the daily press focused on issues they could report on: heroics and reactions. The severity of the message was in the consistency. The consonance of the one similar message fueled a media blitz that performed simultaneously as an exceptionally profound motivator of pathos and effective promoter of patriotism.

Writing for *The Atlantic Monthly*, Langewiesche and his editor sent a fax to an engineer spear-heading the efforts at the Trade Center site requesting media access. [14] Through a stroke of fate, the head engineer was familiar with Langewiesche and decided to give him unlimited access. He would be the only journalist to gain such a privilege. Langewiesche would subsequently take a firm grasp of his fortunate position and create a literary journalistic work that not only performs in an objective/subjective dialectic but also becomes a critique of American society and a mass media constructed hero-image. Langewiesche writes, "In *American Ground* the idea was to catch a glimpse of America itself, or of a certain slice of it at a

[14] *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft*, ed. Boynton, Robert S.

certain time—unruly, unscripted, and in action" (208). There was no script for the rescue and recovery workers to follow, decisions were made without preparation, and results were greatly uncertain.

The Image Revisited

In the chaotic aftermath, according to *American Ground*, two engineers from New York City's Department of Design and Construction were given the daunting task of leading the physical work at the pile because as the agency's top two officials they, "had emerged from the chaos of September 11 as the most effective of the responders" (Langewiesche 9). The engineers were the department's commissioner Kenneth Holden and his lieutenant Michael Burton.

Langewiesche describes the pile as an "unscripted experiment in American life" (11). He observes that, "Action and invention were required on every level, often with no need or possibility of asking permission" (10). The task of recovery at the Trade Center site was given very little thought. It was merely a reaction to the tragedy of losing, at the time, countless number of lives. The atmosphere at the Trade Center site would develop into a unique culture, one that Langewiesche would describe in detail as the narrative continues. Before reporting on the cultural order that would develop, though, he gives descriptions of the scene that bring the reader closer to understanding the immense devastation that occurred.

Langewiesche begins with a description of the Twin Towers and the significance of their demolition. He writes:

> For thirty years the Twin Towers had stood above the streets as all tall buildings do, as a bomb of sorts, a repository for the prodigious energy originally required

> to raise so much weight so high. Now, in a single morning, in twin ten-second pulses, the towers released that energy back into the city. (4)

Langewiesche reminds the reader about the substantial construction process required for building the colossal towers. He refers to them as "bombs"; bombs that exploded into the city, detonated by the deliberate crashing of airliners high up the structures. This description transforms the towers into weapons of abrupt destruction. The disaster became a horrific and disturbing reality for Americans as images of the collapses were replayed over and over again on television. In print, where the imagination produces the image, it seems the reality of their collapse is so simple yet complex in its severity. It is pertinent that Langewiesche doesn't refer to the involvement of a hijacked airliner. In fact, he only mentions the hijacking twice before page 50 when he delves into a thorough discussion about the investigations conducted on the causes of the towers' collapse. It is possible that he wanted to remain focused on the topic at hand, which was the unbuilding of the World Trade Center and not the cause of its destruction.

It might also be speculated that Langewiesche relied on public opinion and the imagery of 9/11 to provide the terrorist element of the story because his focus, early on, is on the collapse of the Twin towers and the people who would become prominent figures in his narrative. He delivers a detailed, almost literary description of the scene:

> At the southwest corner of the World Trade Center complex the twenty-two-floor Marriott hotel was transformed into a raw, boxy thing three stories high. Just to the north, across West Street, a pedestrian bridge gave way, killing groups of firemen and office workers who had sheltered beneath it. The streets buckled under heaps of smoking steel. So much heavy debris fell across the access routes that rescue vehicles were rendered useless. Major fires ignited in all directions.

> Simultaneously, air pressure waves shifted small cars and shattered windows for several blocks around, blowing powdery World Trade Center remains into apartments and across the chest-high partitions of corporate offices. The powder was made primarily of crushed concrete. The waves generated winds that pushed it through the streets in dense, choking clouds that lifted it to mix with smoke and darken the morning. Then all the white paperwork floated down on the city as if in mockery of the dead. (6)

The language offers a panoramic view of the scene. This passage begins by offering the reader a quick mental map of the site and continues with descriptions of calamities incurred upon people and inanimate objects subject to physical manipulation. The devastation described gives the reader a sense of the enormity of the destruction. There are many aspects to consider: the physical transformation, the humanity of people dying in fear and hiding, the fires, and the debris which was so dense the once perfectly clear sky became opaque with pollution. Perhaps the most emotionally stimulating remark from this selection is the final sentence. In a highly subjective voice, Langewiesche personalizes the "white paperwork" as a symbolic device for reminding the reader of our mortality and vulnerability.

The author continues with his descriptive narrative with the demolition of the Twin Towers:

> Massive steel beams flew through the neighborhood like gargantuan spears, penetrating subway lines and underground passages to depths of thirty feet, crushing them, rupturing water mains and gas lines, and stabbing high into the sides of nearby office towers, where they lodged. The phone system, the fiber-optic network, and the electric power grid were knocked out. Ambulances, cars,

> and fire trucks were smashed flat by falling debris, and some were hammered five floors down from the street into the insane turmoil erupting inside the World Trade Center's immense 'bathtub' – a ten-acre foundation hole, seventy feet deep, that was suffering unimaginable violence as it absorbed the brunt of each tower's collapse. (4)

Langewiesche provides the reader with a descriptive review of the aggressive demolition while personifying the "bathtub" of the World Trade Center as it suffered "unimaginable violence." The rhetoric is aggressive and describes what seems like a raging battle that was so severely one-sided that in the end the "violence" lacked description.

Langewiesche's description of the reactions of New Yorkers, though, seems to capture the American zeitgeist at the time. The towers' collapse and falling debris drove people in all directions, away from the pile. The stunning, sudden transformation initially caused panic, yet:

> After the dust storms settled, people on the streets of Lower Manhattan were calm. They walked instead of running, talked without shouting, and tried to regain their sense of place and time. Hiroshima is said to have been similar in that detail. The site itself remained frightening because of the confusion of ruins and fire, as well as the possibility of further attacks or collapses. But a reversal soon occurred by which people began moving toward the disaster rather than away from it. The reaction was largely spontaneous, and it cut across the city's class lines as New Yorkers of all backgrounds tried to respond. (6)

This passage is consistent with most media reports and does support an American attitude of strength and resolve. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, a sense of solidarity existed among New Yorkers regardless of stature or background. There was a collective agreement that

America was under attack and everyone was equally a targeted victim of intolerant terrorists, intent on inflicting as much destruction as possible. Langewiesche also confirms what most Americans already assumed; though the site and the situation remained volatile, the optimistic search for possible survivors was of the highest priority for everyone, especially to those closest to the action.

With so many reports of heroism and American triumph and unity in the face of fear and diversity, describing the mood would seem a redundant task. Yet Langewiesche's descriptive and judgmental narrative expands on the themes of perseverance and resistance. He describes, through his subjective opinion, the prevailing mood at the Trade Center site:

> There was sadness to the site, to be sure, and anger, but there was none of the emptiness – the ghostly quality of abandonment – that lurks in the aftermath of battle. In fact, quite the opposite quality materialized here: within hours of the collapse, as the rescuers rushed in and resources were marshaled, the disaster was smothered in an exuberant and distinctly American embrace. Despite the apocalyptic nature of the scene, the response was unhesitant and almost childishly optimistic: it was simply understood that you would find survivors, and then that you would find the dead, and that this would help their families to get on with their lives, and that your resources were unlimited, and that you would work night and day to clean up the mess, and that this would allow the world's greatest city to rebuild quickly, and maybe even to make itself into something better than before. From the first hours these assumptions were never far away. (8)

By describing the psychology of those involved in the rescue and recovery effort following the devastation, Langewiesche offers the reader perspectives and potential insights that so-called

objective reporting is supposed to be detached from. As mentioned before, his experience as a journalist reporting from war-torn countries lends him an eye of keen and familiar observation which results in profound, personal reflections of the spectacle. The beginning of this passage also reflects the author's ability to make the scene, so familiar to Americans because of news coverage, into something unknown and strange. He allows the reader to revisit the images of 9/11 through fresh eyes.

The American public was aware that rescue workers rushed to the scene and that the search for survivors began almost immediately. They believed, on some level, that what was occurring was heroic. Langewiesche, here, offers the reader a sensation of things as they are perceived. By utilizing the artistic devices of literature, the American public's sense of what was occurring and the prevalent attitude is captured.

Also, in this passage, the author hints at closure when he writes that finding victims "would help their families to get on with their lives." In the days that followed, closure was a problem that haunted the pile and all those involved. Unfortunately, closure would be given a value and the culture of the pile would dissolve from a unified front prompted by optimism into political division between departments stimulated by resentment and egotism.

An intense rivalry, at first concealed within the Trade Center site, would escalate into a fight between New York firemen and police on November 2, 2001. Building up to the clash between the two departments, the Trade Center site was a mess both literally and politically. The site was a coalition of groups; all with their own agendas. As mentioned before, the New York Department of Design and Construction took the lead at the site. Other agencies involved in the recovery and clean-up effort were the New York Fire Department, the New York Police

Department, the Port Authority Police Force,[15] and four contracted construction companies.[16] The pile was divided by Holden and Burton into quadrants within which the four construction companies could work independently.[17] Though the border-lines blurred occasionally, they were generally accepted by the construction crews. The men in uniform were another story. The fire and police departments mistrusted each other and their resentments were illustrated from the start:

> The hostility was historical, and because it was strongest on the lowest levels, among the rank and file, it had proved impossible to root out. People at the site referred to it alliteratively as the Battle of the Badges…At the Trade Center it had been a factor from the first moments after the attack, when the Police and Fire Departments had set up separate command posts several blocks apart, and without communication between them. (Langewiesche 155)

The separate command posts meant different approaches were being followed by the two departments immediately after the attacks. Police in the North Tower were ordered to evacuate the building after reports from police helicopters urged the department to pull its people. Incidentally, the police neglected to notify the fire department of its decision to evacuate the building and firemen, unaware of the escalating danger, would soon perish with the collapse of the building. Langewiesche explains, "The lack of communication was certainly no more the fault of one side than of the other, but it aggravated the divisions between them" (155). At the pile, clan mentality rapidly took hold and "By the end of the first day the bucket brigades had separated according to uniform" (155).

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[15]The Port Authority is an organization created in 1921 that oversees New York's transportation facilities. It also owned the World Trade Center, managed all of its operations, and maintains its own private police force. The Port Authority lost 75 employees on 9/11. (Langewiesche 24)

[16] The four companies were Turner, AMEC, Bovis, and Tully. (Langewiesche 68)

[17] Langewiesche 68.

The origins of distrust and hostility between the two departments may have historical roots, but *American Ground* persuades readers that the specific catalyst for the resentment that developed at the pile was the firemen's launch into popularity. Their sudden rise to fame gave them a sense of pride and belief that they should assume primary control over the recovery process. Langewiesche notes:

> Emotions were raw. One of the unacknowledged aspects of the tragedy was the jealous sense of ownership that it brought about – an unexpected but widespread feeling of something like pride, that "this is our disaster more than yours." (69)

More than the other factions, Langewiesche claims firemen asserted their ownership in a most egregious fashion. The bravado they displayed was exasperating and was primarily due to their depiction as working-class American heroes by the mass media. Reports on the performance of the New York Fire Department at the Trade Center site provided an outlet for heroic posturing. Unfortunately, the hero-image produced for American and global consumption was misleading and ill-informed. In *American Ground*, Langewiesche reveals a boasting sense of ownership which results in particularly provocative behavior. For example:

> A few of them (firemen) reacted embarrassingly, by grandstanding on television and at public events, striking tragic poses and playing themselves up. Even at the site, where people generally disliked such behavior, you could find firemen signing autographs at the perimeter gates or, after the public viewing stand was built, drifting over to work the crowds….tensions flared especially over the differing treatment of human remains – on the one extreme, the elaborate flag-draped ceremonials that the firemen accorded their own dead, and on the other, the jaded "bag 'em and tag 'em" approach that they took to civilians. (69–70).

The arrogant behavior of the firemen was a symptom of their sudden rise to fame. It could be argued that the resentment by police and others working on the pile may have been a jealous reaction to the firemen's new found glory but it also had prior roots, as Langewiesche asserts: the "hostility was historical." According to the author, "The image of 'heroes' seeped through their (firemen) ranks like a low-grade narcotic. It did not intoxicate them, but it skewed their view" (158).

Considering all of this, the firemen and other would be saviors were blinded to the irony of their claim to be honoring their brethren who fell attempting to save others as their job requires them to. The ideal of the firefighters' selfless commitment to saving others, which resulted in the loss of their own lives, transformed into activities and attitudes revealing the most selfish of sentiments. Paradoxically, Langewiesche describes an increasingly dismissive attitude toward the dead outside the firemen's ranks, which conflicts with their stated primary duty to preserve life. The value they supposedly accord the living, including those who regard them as heroes was minimized when they prioritized attention to the dead they recovered of their own and cheapened the importance of others discovered not wearing the firemen's emblematic protective turnout coats.

The firemen weren't the only ones eager to honor their dead. Langewiesche describes a confrontation in October that "led to an argument over the body of a Port Authority policeman that foreshadowed more serious confrontations to come" (132). One leg of the body was pinned down by the wreckage. Firemen wanted to amputate the leg to free the man but the Port Authority police insisted they focus their efforts on retrieving the body whole. Langewiesche writes:

> Amputation may actually have been the right decision to make, but it was seen by the Port Authority police officers who were arriving on the scene as a solution based on the firemen's relative disregard for non-firemen, and their desire at all costs to keep searching for their own. (132)

If unity was an indisputable reality at the Trade Center site it is possible the right decision, to amputate the leg, would have been made. Again, the hero-image produced by the mass media proves inadequate to the reader of *American Ground*.

Unfortunately the argument between the two departments was a by-product of the disunity that developed at the Trade Center site. The Port Authority, after a lengthy argument, won this particular "battle between the badges" but it would be an ongoing struggle that boiled over during the demonstration held November 2; a demonstration initially planned because of an administrative decision to dwindle the number of firefighters at the Trade Center site.

In *American Ground*, Langewiesche describes the scheduling of searchers on the pile and explains that during any given twelve-hour shift the site was populated most abundantly by firemen. Their numbers were equaled by the combined forces of the New York PD and the Port Authority police. The firemen had power in numbers and therefore had more control and influence over the proceedings (131 – 133). Nearing the end of October though, the presence and role of the fire department at the site was considerably downsized. New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, citing safety precautions, reduced the role of the firemen by decreasing their access and numbers at the pile. This caused an uproar that would result in a protest on the morning of Friday, November 2, 2001.

The altercation between firemen and police was the first sign of disunity to people outside of the Trade Center site. Most accounts of the demonstration describe the event as a

spontaneous bout of emotion on the part of passionate firemen and not a disruption between warring factions. The following passages are from *The New York Times* concerning the demonstration on November 2, 2001:

> "A Nation Challenged: The Firefighters; Firefighters in Angry Scuffle With Police at Trade Center:"
>
> A brief but emotionally wrenching scuffle broke out yesterday morning between New York City firefighters and police officers at the scene of their shared grief, the World Trade Center disaster site. A dozen firefighters were arrested and five police officers were injured in the incident, which rattled the city's top officials and laid bare the frustrations of the living who are unable to bury their dead. (Barry and Flynn)

The lead graph offers a quick review of a 'scuffle' with numbers of arrests and injuries and the general agencies involved. It ends by focusing on closure as the cause for the altercation. From the same article:

> The shoving match between the firefighting force, which lost 343 of its members on Sept. 11, and the police force, which lost 23 in the same awful event, was like the eruption of a familial brawl at a never-ending wake. Commissioner Von Essen apologized; Police Commissioner Bernard B. Keri bristled; and Mayor Giuliani was the understanding but determined father.

The use of numbers promotes sympathy for the firemen, who lost a considerable amount more of their people than the police. Calling it a 'familial brawl' suggests a unified force with its occasional disagreements. Two of the officials mentioned, Von Essen and Mayor Giuliani, were a major focus of the demonstration as protesters demanded they both be removed from office

(Langewiesche 151). Von Essen, the fire commissioner, supported Giuliani's decision to reduce the number of firemen at the pile and was subsequently seen as a trader among firefighters. Then there is the poor choice of an analogy; calling Giuliani 'the understanding but determined father' is off the mark. Giuliani had infuriated the fire department, pressure was coming from their union leaders, and the demonstration was threatening to escalate out of control.

Soon after the fighting was curbed, the demonstration continued on to City Hall. It was during this time that a few ironworkers joined the demonstration. One of them made a spectacle out of himself though, "It was not clear that he knew or cared what the protest was about" (Langewiesche 151). Mayor Giuliani was "infuriated by what he viewed as an assault on the city's all-important process of recovery, and he lashed out with the vindictiveness for which he was known" (151). Kenneth Holden, for only the second time in eight years, received a call from the Mayor who demanded he fire the ironworkers involved in the demonstration. Holden understood this to be a mistake and publicity nightmare. If he fired the ironworkers, it would be a misuse of power and an infringement on a right to protest as long as the men weren't on duty at the time (151 – 153). Holden received several threatening calls from the Mayor's administration over the next few weeks but somehow his inaction won him the battle and "he managed to protect Giuliani from himself, and the nation from Giuliani, and to keep the recovery effort on track" (153).[18]

A possible escalation of violence during the protest was not an unforeseen possibility in the view of those closest to the action. That morning, most members of the DDC opted to stay

[18] In October 2002, Rudy Giuliani's book *Leadership* was published. In it, Giuliani describes principles and practices of effective leadership. The opening chapter describes his reaction and decisions he made on 9/11/01. The concluding chapter talks about the recovery effort. It is interesting to note it was published after excerpts of American Ground were printed in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Giuliani never mentions Kenneth Holden, Mike Burton, nor does he recognize the DDC as an agency that participated in the recovery effort though he affords applause to others that did.

inside PS 89 as demonstrators were collecting outside and growing in numbers. The hostilities between the fire and police department were known and keeping his people out of harm's way was a priority for Holden. Langewiesche details and comments on a conversation that took place the morning of November 2, 2001 at a daily scheduled meeting:[19]

> Earlier that morning Burton had led the first "combined" site-management meeting, at which the Fire Department, the police, and the DDC had been required to share the stage. It had taken place down the hallway, in the school auditorium. The various tribes had eyed one another with frank distrust, but had spoken in veiled terms to keep conflicts from breaking out into the open. Burton had said, "The DDC will have oversight [Meaning: control] over all recovery efforts on the pile," in a tone that somehow implied that this was a decision imposed on him from far above. He had also said (regarding the morning's event to come), "We're making a push for increased safety. There may be some negative consequences. The police will not let anyone in or out of this building after ten A.M." (Meaning: The firemen are being hysterical.) A fire chief in a white uniform shirt seemed not to have heard a word. He said, "We're trying to hammer out a plan for the removal of victims and uniformed personnel. We've just located fourteen Fire Department members near the South Tower." (Meaning: We're not going to make this easy.) (148 – 149)

This passage illustrates the ways *American Ground* reveals truth about the matter that was largely ignored or perhaps unknown to the press media. In contrast, it is through Langewiesche's reporting based on his own perspective that this truth is revealed to the reader.

[19] The effort, led by Holden and Burton, housed its base operation in the kindergarten rooms of Public School 89. It was here that two daily managerial meetings took place concerning the progress of the recovery effort.

The firemen stubbornly refused to lose control over the Trade Center site and were determined to maintain their strength through numbers and the use of force. Up to this point the DDC was already known to have influence over the pile with regards to the use of manpower and machinery but ultimately the firefighters could put a halt to all proceedings if they deemed it necessary (usually to recover one of their own fallen). The fire chief in this passage shows a blatant disregard for the authority of the DDC by responding negatively and with a plan that was introduced out of context. His choice of words fails him as he begins with "a plan for the removal of victims and unified personnel" and complements it by saying they've located "fourteen Fire Department members" instead of mentioning any civilian or other uniformed officers. It is clear where his priorities lay.

In the days that followed most firemen arrested the day of the demonstration were released without charges being filed, further arrests were made on the basis of video surveillance, and political accusations were made by all sides. Both *American Ground* and daily print publications agree on the players, the accused, and the accusations. And unfortunately the truth behind the motivations guiding the Mayor's administrative decision to derail the recovery effort and push for an expedient clean-up of the site remains subject to debate. All that is public is speculation. From *The New York Times* a couple of days after the demonstration:

> The captain (Fire Capt. Peter L. Gorman, president of the Uniformed Fire Officers Association) voiced regret over the scuffling and insisted that there was no animosity between firefighters and police officers, only a widening gulf between the rank and file and City Hall, which he said had not consulted unions or top commanders on the staffing reduction.

> As for the underlying controversy, Captain Gorman insisted that the mayor's decision to cut the work force had nothing to do with safety, as Mr. Giuliani contended, but was intended to speed up and cut the cost of clearing rubble to recover any remains. (McFadden)

These two paragraphs address two separate issues. First, the animosity between the departments, according to *American Ground*, is very real. This issue gets mostly ignored and dismissed by the daily media. Instead reports described an emotional reaction by firefighters who were determined to continue the tedious search for bodies in order to bring closure to victims' families. *The New York Times* report then diverts attention to the reduction in expenditures leading to fewer firemen on staff. The report becomes speculative and reproachful. This would be the focus of most reports over the next weeks following the firefighters' demonstration.

Langewiesche addresses these issues. When considering the firemen and their suspicions, *American Ground* first takes on a speculative tone. After citing the mayor's decision and the reaction of firemen, Langewiesche notes, "The reason given publicly for this new arrangement was 'safety,' a term so often used to mask other agendas in modern America that it caused an immediate, instinctive reaction of disbelief" (145 – 146). Here Langewiesche insinuates that the mayor is motivated by a hidden agenda. In *American Ground*, the explanation for events centers on a struggle for power and control over the Trade Center site between city management and the firemen. Langewiesche writes:

> Some (the firemen) had lost family when the Trade Center fell, and nearly all of them had lost friends. Their bereavement was real. Still, for nearly two months they had let their collective emotions run unchecked, and they had been indulged

and encouraged in this by society at large – the presumption being something like, "It helps to cry." (149)

In hindsight, Langewiesche is referring to the first two months after 9/11 as anarchistic and lawless. The firemen were supported by popular sentiment, yet whatever the intentions of city management, they were intent on reasserting their command over all city operations including the clean-up effort at the Trade Center site.

Later, Langewiesche lessens his speculative tone and comments, "Though the firemen who rioted on November 2 did not believe it, when Giuliani gave 'safety' as the reason for reducing their presence on the pile, he was completely sincere" (161). In order to accomplish a rapid clean-up, heavy machinery was necessary. The larger machines, such as the big diesel excavators, presented a high risk factor for the firemen roaming the pile and their constant presence slowed down the procedure so essentially, the mayor wanted more machine excavation and less man-power; a more technical approach and less dependent upon human efforts. This meant the reduction of firemen, possibly a comfort to other workers on the pile who saw the firemen's hubris develop into something overwhelmingly annoying.

That annoyance would result in an embarrassing discovery that, previous to the release of *American Ground*, had been contained within the culture of the Trade Center site. There was a symptom of a failing society plaguing the site; a symptom that would go unreported or possibly ignored by the mass media. Langewiesche reveals that each group at the pile was guilty of looting. It was widespread and well known to those present but, "In context the looting simply did not seem shocking" (160). Though it may seem shocking to outsiders that the looting was taken lightly, the reader is reminded that these were unique circumstances. The pile was considered a type of war zone and individual property rights did not exist. It wasn't quite the

atrocious burn and pillage by conquering armies yet there wasn't much modesty when it came to opportunistic ransacking. Though it was accepted by those at the pile there was one incident that caused uproar both at the pile and after the publication of *American Ground*.

It was a late autumn afternoon and at the South Tower ruins a fire truck was discovered fifty feet below street level. It had been driven deep by the collapse of the tower and was being hauled out by one of the large diesel excavators. Instead of finding dead bodies of their fallen comrades, firemen were confronted with a disturbing site; the fire truck was full of dozens of new jeans from a Trade Center store (160 – 161). Construction workers went wild and:

> In their eyes, it was hard to avoid the conclusion that the looting had begun even before the first tower fell, and that while hundreds of doomed firemen had climbed through the wounded buildings, this particular crew had been engaged in something else entirely. (Langewiesche 161)

This was an extremely difficult fact to accept especially when the word fireman was sold as synonymous with the word hero by the mass media. The fire chief on site tried to dismiss the idea that the looting began before the towers fell by explaining that the jeans could've fallen into the fire truck during the collapse. The surreal incident climaxed when, "The field superintendent, seeming not to hear, asked the fire chief to repeat what he had said. When he did, the construction workers only jeered louder" (161).

It must've been an incredible spectacle to witness the release of extreme emotions by the construction workers joined by the shameful actions by the firemen. It was a self-inflicted wound for the firemen and one that served as a catharsis for the construction workers and perhaps helped to balance out the power struggle between the departments.

Though there are many stories of heroism on the part of engineers and construction workers, in *American Ground*, the story of the behavior of the firemen stands in stark contrast with their heroic status as developed through the mass media. What is revealed in the book forms a picture of the reality in opposition to the general public's perception. Through his subjective experiences and observations, which Langewiesche delivers in literary form, the reader develops a balanced opinion regarding the events at the Trade Center site. The reader sees media created mythical heroes deconstructed although the firemen still at times acted heroically. After all, they perform a duty that requires a level of self-abandonment and concern for others. Perhaps their arrogance and self-interest blinded them to the noblest goals they are supposed to serve, but historically there is nothing to compare their situation to. Their launch into stardom was hypnotizing and disorienting. Any common person would have difficulty adjusting and for better or worse the firemen were praised as heroes of the day. It was a reflexive reaction by the media and by the general public yearning for answers after having experienced an attack so severe and unexpected. America is a nation built on capitalist values and the powerful emotions became a commodity to be sold by the media to the American public. Hero became a word equated with a particular institution: firefighters. Through the so-called objective media, it was a quick sell. Through Langewiesche's ability to observe and report on events largely unknown to the general public, the reader gets a different story than the product originally sold. Fortunately, those who are affected by a reading of *American Ground* do not need to look any further than the characters in the book to find authentic examples of heroism and self-sacrifice. Kenneth Holden and Mike Burton read as heroes who saw a catastrophe and without second-guessing themselves decided to lend their expertise in the aftermath. There were exceptions among firemen like Sam Melisi who doesn't allow himself to become caught up in

the flag-waving and self-aggrandizing at the expense of carrying out heroic efforts. A fireman with experience in construction and building collapses, Melisi performed as a natural leader whom many looked to for guidance at the pile. Dropped into the fold Melisi ultimately became the mediator between firemen and the other factions. Langewiesche's introduction of Melisi ends with the author claiming, "Afterward (the demonstration) the political operatives at City Hall must secretly have believed that they maintained the peace between multiple opposing forces on the pile, but in truth, if anyone did, it was Sam Melisi" (23).

Other individuals are read as heroes such as Peter Rinaldi who was an employee of the Port Authority vacationing with his wife in North Carolina at the time of the attacks (25). He lost many friends and co-workers in the attacks of 9/11 and threw himself into the efforts to make the situation safe and secure. He would become one of Holden and Burton's top consultants with his knowledge of the infrastructure of the site. Another admirable figure Langewiesche presents is Richard Garlock who bravely led a team of approximately twenty men, mostly engineers, underground to gauge whether the main chiller plant had released the dangerous Freon gas it used to air-condition the World Trade Center.

There are a number of stories throughout *American Ground* that offer the reader an alternative vision of the Trade Center site. As a place where American ingenuity thrived, the pile was certainly an experiment in combined efforts, pragmatic decision making, and tolerance. America has always been an eclectic collection of religions, races, and opinions and there has always been a struggle for control and power. Is it a wonder that the pile would be any different? The efforts at times turned out to be an absurd sham and the articulated goal of prioritizing unity on the pile failed in the face of such a diverse collection of people with different interests and different institutional priorities. The men who Langewiesche follows are men without the

sinister intentions carried by those that attacked America. And maybe that is what is most important; that through the mixture of different interests and loyalties, the reader concludes that in this time of so-called national unity, people continued the struggle of recovery even though there was a prevailing sense of diversity and disunity.

CHAPTER IV

INTO THIN AIR: ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION ON MOUNT EVEREST DURING A JOURNALIST'S ILL-FATED JOURNEY UP THE HISTORIC MOUNTAIN

The Mass Media and a Weather Report

On May 10, 1996 a series of suspicious decisions led to an unpredictable and unfortunate tragedy high up the Southeast Ridge route (also known as the South Col route) of Mount Everest. Three expeditions, whose journeys began on the Nepalese side of the mountain, were involved: Adventure Consultants Guided Expedition, Mountain Madness Guided Expedition, and the Taiwanese National Expedition. Though climbing conditions were ideal when the final ascent had begun, during their descent many climbers became stranded on the mountain when a storm suddenly struck in the high altitude above 26,000 feet appropriately known to visitors of the mountain as the "death zone." Human error combined with natural phenomenon led to the deaths of five members of the two guided, commercial expeditions.[20] *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster* by Jon Krakauer is a personal report on the experience of one of the deadliest disasters in the history of the mountain. Initially published as a feature length article in *Outside* magazine, the book is an expansion of the original publication and

[20] Though no members of the Taiwanese expedition lost their lives their presence during the summit bid contributed to the chaos that ensued.

delivers to the reader a profound report that challenges the reader to consider human ambition, greed, and the effects it has on rational reasoning.

The disaster on Mount Everest was reported world-wide. In America, newspaper articles written in the days immediately following the disaster focused on details such as the nationalities of people affected, historical information on expeditions up the mountain, and speculations on the possible death toll. The following is from an article titled "2 Americans Among 8 Feared Dead on Mt. Everest" taken from *The Washington Post*:

> Eight climbers, including two Americans, were feared dead in ferocious weather on Mount Everest. Two other climbers were flown to safety today in the highest helicopter rescue on the world's tallest peak.
>
> Rescue officials said the eight, from three expeditions, had scaled the mountain and had been missing since trying to descend.
>
> Nepal's Tourism Ministry in Katmandu named the Americans feared dead as Douglas Hansen, 44, a postal worker from Renton, Wash., and Scott Fischer, 40, of Seattle, leader of a mostly American team. (Fogarty)

The article initially focuses on the Americans though there are a number of other nationalities represented within the group of eight climbers. This is significant because most print journalism is written in the inverted pyramid formula which, according to W. James Potter author of *Media Literacy*, journalism textbooks tell, "the journalist to put the most important information at the beginning of the story, then add in the next most important set of information" (Potter 90). This formula is used to ensure the most relevant information gets published while the facts afforded the least amount of importance are left for last. In this case the journalist made it a point to emphasize the possible deaths of two Americans out of a group of eight. In all fairness, *The*

Washington Post is an American publication but it brings into focus a standard that pervades the media and society; we prioritize our sympathies according to pre-established prejudices which includes the nationalist idea that American lives are most important.

Journalist and mass media critic Folker Hanusch specializes in the mass media's coverage of death. In his book *Representing Death in the News: Journalism, Media and Mortality*, he writes, "some victims are simply seen as more worthy of our compassion than others" (37). The journalist from *The Washington Post* had to prioritize his report accordingly; Americans prefer to read about other Americans before considering the deaths of foreigners. To further illustrate, in Hanusch's ensuing paragraphs he cites Susan D. Moeller and her book about news coverage titled *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*. In the opening chapter her discussion is focused on her research of the mass media's portrayal of death and American's involvement in foreign tragedies, specifically how the mass media in America reports death in terms of significance. She fixes on a possible scenario as she writes:

> It is difficult to find news in the media about sub-Saharan Africa, for example, unless the United States is involved or something horrific has happened. It isn't called the "Dark Continent" for nothing. The newsroom truism goes: "One dead fireman in Brooklyn is worth five English bobbies, who are worth 50 Arabs, who are worth 500 Africans." (22)

These are hypothetical numbers Moeller is providing and Hanusch admits they are "theoretical constructs" that should be seen as a form of "self-deprecating humor" but they reflect common journalistic attitudes (Hanusch 42). He goes on to say:

> At the same time, however, there is also a kernel of truth in these formulas. What they indicate is that we do possess certain parameters in our heads about the extent to which we can identify, and therefore perhaps also sympathize, with the misfortune of others. (42)

It follows that a journalist writing for the American public would want the reader to identify with an instant message and that message is "Eight climbers, including two *Americans,* were feared dead in ferocious weather on Mount Everest."

Along with the inverted pyramid formula, another popular element to newspaper writing is the "entertainment format." Journalists use this formula "to grab the reader's attention in an emotional manner" (Potter 91). For example, the following article published the same day titled "Everest Takes Worst Toll, Refusing to Become Stylish" engages the reader by appealing to emotion:

> Around dusk on Saturday with two American climbers and five others missing and probably already dead atop Mount Everest, a 35-year-old New Zealander made a satellite telephone call to his pregnant wife from a snowhole just below the summit of the world's highest peak…His voice weak from frostbite, the climber, Rob Hall,[21] murmured what may have been his last words before he died. "Hey look, don't worry about me," he said. (Burns)

The journalist is playing off the sympathies of the reader to grab their attention but the report never offers a reason for Hall's predicament in the opening paragraphs or later in the article. Although there is a lack of investigation into the incident and a tone of uncertainty prevails over details, the journalist does a decent job of providing background information, momentarily

[21] Rob Hall was the leader of Adventure Consultants Guided Expedition.

eliminating the problem of not having a complete story for the reader. The following passage is from the same article:

> Since the first successful ascent of Everest on May 29, 1953, more than 4,000 climbers have tried to reach the summit. Of these, before Friday, 615, including scores of Americans, had made it to the top. In 1993, 40 climbers achieved the feat in a single day.

Similar to other reports in the first few days following the tragedy, background and historical information is readily available yet few details about the circumstances surrounding the tragedy are provided. Because of this, early reports don't allow the reader to develop a sufficient mental picture of the event.

This is due, to some degree, to the fact that any story reported by the mass media is a "core cluster of facts that sits at the center of a set of progressively larger concentric circles" (Potter 345). The conventional journalist focuses initially on the "cluster of facts" that are immediately evident. These facts create a ripple effect that is detected by the investigative journalist who is eager to gather the information that develops in "larger concentric circles." Those facts encircling the initial focus of the disaster on Mount Everest, which are less accessible to the conventional journalist, are described in *Into Thin Air*. Take for example an article titled "Storm Blamed in 8 Deaths Came During Mt. Everest 'Rush Hour.'" Along with providing details about the tragedy the article attempts to broaden the scope of a reader's understanding of a typical Mount Everest experience:

> Everest is climbed by slow degrees, preceded by considerable physical labor to acclimate the body to the extreme altitude. Parties arrive at the base camp (about 17,000 feet) and then spend between six and eight weeks carrying food, fuel and

> equipment up the mountain – in packs weighing 50 to 100 pounds – to successively higher camps, at times trekking over user-friendly established trails, at others crossing 200-foot deep crevasses by tightroping [sic] across extension ladders lashed together by Nepalese maintenance crews.

There is some accuracy to the report but it also provides misleading descriptions of life on the mountain. To begin with, Mount Everest is certainly "climbed by slow degrees," but by no means does this brief description encompass the importance of a climber's need to acclimatize when climbing the mountain. Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* explains that at high altitudes the body needs time to adjust to the lack of oxygen; the body needs to experience an acclimation period because the higher the altitude the thinner the air. The process of acclimation took almost a month. Krakauer writes on May 1:

> Our acclimation was now officially complete—and to my pleasant surprise Hall's strategy appeared to be working: After three weeks on the mountain, I found that the air at Base Camp seemed thick and rich and voluptuously saturated with oxygen compared to the brutally thin atmosphere of the camps above. (145)

By explaining his personal experience and acclimation, Krakauer reveals a larger concentric circle encircling the center of events.

The cited newspaper article also gives the illusion that all members of an expedition are responsible for the physical labor required for the success of an expedition. It says, "Parties arrive at the base camp and then spend between six to eight weeks carrying […]." The article does not specify who does the "carrying," which is done by people indigenous to the region called Sherpas. They are employed to carry the burden of the physical labor while clients rarely carry any more gear than a backpack lightly packed with bare essentials and personal

paraphernalia. As the reader is informed in *Into Thin Air*, they are a "mountain people, devoutly Buddhist, whose forebears migrated south from Tibet four or five centuries ago." Sherpa villages are wide-spread in the region, "but the heart of Sherpa country is the Khumbu, a handful of valleys draining the southern slopes of Mount Everest…" (Krakauer 46). Prior to the encroachment of ambitious climbers, life in the Khumbu, "was so much simpler and more picturesque" (Krakauer 48). *Into Thin Air* intermittently provides passages similar to these that provide the reader with historical and cultural knowledge of the people of the Khumbu and, specifically, Mount Everest in an effort to elucidate the culture of the region.

Krakauer acknowledges that the practice of using Sherpas as hired help is the primary factor in successfully climbing Mount Everest. Sherpas perform a number of duties in the service of clients. At Base Camp they bring morning tea to clients in their tents, they cook the client's meals, they take loads of trash down the mountain,[22] and they lead yaks carrying loads of good from villages in the valleys back up to Base Camp. Climbing Sherpas, though, are the ones who carry the most responsibility and take the highest risks. Throughout the book, Sherpas carry supplies up to the four camps that are established as resting points, as altitude markers, and are an intricate element in the acclimation process. Between camps, Sherpas establish routes and set rope lines; it is primarily through their footsteps, leaving trails in the snow, that many clients find the comfort of climbing with a guided expedition. Sherpas are the ones that "carry" the gear needed for eating, sleeping, and breathing (oxygen tanks), which is a list of essentials for basic survival let alone mountaineering. These are facts that are conveniently left out of newspaper

[22] For many years trash collected on the mountain from the visits of environmentally apathetic expeditions, turning Mount Everest into a large garbage dump. 1996 was the first year Nepal installed a policy to deter the problem. The expeditions were required to post a $4,000 bond to be refunded only if a certain amount of trash was taken off the mountain. (Krakauer 64)

reports which lead to an ill-informed audience, particularly about this oppressed group of locals who get written out of the story.

As the most imperative component to an expedition's success, it seems that Sherpas are a people who are exploited for their labor power to serve as what Karl Marx calls a "use-value."[23] Their labor is an exploited commodity in the adventure business. As a mountain people conditioned to live in higher altitudes, *Into Thin Air* reveals them to be a working class whose economic value is marginalized. They are a collection of people bought, sold, and used for their labor power or as Marx describes in *The Communist Manifesto*, they are treated as "a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market" (87). The market for adventure on Mount Everest was stimulated in 1986 when:

> Dick Bass—a wealthy fifty-five-year-old Texan with limited climbing experience—was ushered to the top of Everest by an extraordinary young climber named David Breashears, an event that was accompanied by a blizzard of uncritical media attention. (Krakauer 23-24)

Uncritical media attention means his methods were not questioned and soon after Bass' assisted achievement, guided expeditions grew in popularity. Since then, the practice of Sherpas catering to wealthy clients has severely influenced the Sherpas' previously humble economy. Krakauer writes:

> For better or worse, over the past two decades the economy and culture of the Khumbu has become increasingly and irrevocably tied to the seasonal influx of trekkers and climbers, some 15,000 of whom visit the region annually. Sherpas

[23] From *Capital*.

> who learn technical skills and work high on the peaks—especially those who have summited Everest—enjoy great esteem in their communities. (47)

Krakauer, through his depiction of Sherpa culture, reveals a society transformed by the adventure industry. Before the allure of summiting Mount Everest brought adventure seekers there are no accounts of any Sherpas trying to reach the summit of the mountain. Ambition was not an issue for them, yet, with the influence of capitalism, individual status and modest wealth became desirable. Krakauer, with his narrative, brings the reader into the reality of the Sherpas; a reality largely ignored by the mass media.

Details that aren't overlooked concerning the tragedy are sometimes reported inaccurately by the mass media and are misleading. For example, here is passage from an article published May 23 titled "Other International News: Eight Climbers Die in Mt. Everest Storm":

> By May 13, rescuers had recovered the bodies of all eight climbers. Among those who died on Everest's South Col path in Nepal were Doug Hansen, 44, and Scott Fischer, 40, of the U.S.; Andrew Harris, 31, and Rob Hall, 35, of New Zealand; and Yasuko Namba, 47, Japan's leading woman mountaineer…Three members of the Indo-Tibetan Border force, an Indian paramilitary group, died on the mountain's north face in Tibet, China. They were identified as Tsewang Paljor, Dorjee Morup and T. Samanla.

Again, the listing of the deceased is prioritized according to who the American audience will sympathize with the most. The article is misleading by reporting that "rescuers had recovered the bodies of all eight climbers." It may seem a small detail but it gives a false impression about the bodies to the reader. By May 13, the eight climbers would have been officially identified as deceased but certainly not recovered. Bodies aren't recovered in the death zone; they are left

behind and sometimes, very seldom, given a make-shift burial. The task of carrying bodies down the mountain is too arduous. In fact, bodies are left behind at even lower altitudes.

Krakauer's first encounter with a body comes at 21,000 feet, 4,000 feet below the death zone (Krakauer 110). The following day he would come across "another body in the snow, or more accurately the lower half of a body" (111). This disturbing phenomenon shocks Krakauer whose self-assessment and subsequent reasoning of the situation is as follows:

> The first body had left me badly shaken for several hours; the shock of encountering the second wore off almost immediately. Few of the climbers trudging by had given either corpse more than a passing glance. It was as if there were an unspoken agreement on the mountain to pretend that these desiccated remains weren't real—as if none of us dared to acknowledge what was at stake here. (111)

The possible reality of the situation requires reflection; something not well captured with the traditional so-called "objective" approach to reporting the story. Krakauer's narrative not only provides details left out of mass media reports, it provides a perception of an attitude that emphasizes ambition over compassion and fear on the mountain.

The Decision to Climb into Thin Air

Since 1852, when Mount Everest, "was determined to be the highest summit on earth, it was only a matter of time before people decided that Everest needed to be climbed" (Krakauer, 16). Men of ambition for a century-and-a-half have risked their lives to conquer Mount Everest. One person in particular, famous mountaineer George Leigh Mallory, a man "whose name is

inextricably linked to Everest..." in 1924 was once asked why climb Everest; his reply was simply, "'Because it is there'" (18).[24] Mallory's famous quote is widely circulated among visitors to Mount Everest yet it is deeply ironic that his ambition to climb a mountain "because it is there" cost him his life while trying to reach the summit. Krakauer's own ambition to climb the mountain first emerged when he was nine-years-old and stayed with him for a while. He writes, "Secretly, I dreamed of ascending Everest myself one day; for more than a decade it remained a burning ambition. By the time I was in my early twenties climbing had become the focus of my existence to the exclusion of almost everything else" (Krakauer 23). Though his ambitions had faded in recent years, Krakauer's motivation to climb Mount Everest would be stimulated once again when he is asked to travel to Everest and write an article specifically about the commercialization of the iconic mountain by his editor at *Outside* magazine.

As an investigative journalist, Jon Krakauer agreed to write the article but insisted he write primarily as a participatory journalist. Because of his proximity to the events and the people involved, his personal account is highly relevant to understanding the motivations behind decisions that were made on the mountain by expedition leaders Rob Hall of Adventure Consultants and Scott Fischer of Mountain Madness. In fact, before being asked by his editor to write the article, Krakauer was first courted by Scott Fischer to join the Mountain Madness expedition. Just over a year, preceding the climb, there is a discussion between Krakauer and Fischer that leads the reader to believe that Fischer didn't see his role as lead guide as a challenge but rather as necessary for recognition. Fischer had previously summited Everest in 1994 but the 1996 expedition was his first as the lead guide. He was gaining a solid reputation as

[24] In a book titled *Peak Experiences* the author (Ian Marshall) discusses, among other things, the reasons why people seek "renewal" and specifically on Mount Everest. He writes, "It may be difficult to say why we climb the mountain—beyond the pat answer 'because it's there'—but the literature of mountaineering is clear about what it takes to get there. Maybe the answer to the 'why' question is 'because it's hard,' and to get to the top is an accomplishment" (126-127).

a high-altitude climber but by leading a guided expedition he would finally garner the sort of admiration reserved for an elite group of climbers which included Rob Hall. Krakauer describes the chance meeting he had with Fischer at a climber's party in Seattle:

> On this occasion he buttonholed me to talk about the guided Everest expedition he was planning: I should come along, he cajoled, and write an article about the climb for *Outside*. When I replied that it would be crazy for someone with my limited high-altitude experience to attempt Everest, he said, "Hey, experience is overrated. It's not the altitude that's important, it's your attitude, bro. You'll do fine. You've done some pretty sick climbs—stuff that's way harder than Everest. We've got the big E figured out, I'm telling you, we've built a yellow brick road to the summit." (70)

Fischer's casual attitude calms Krakauer's anxiety but it seems a rather irresponsible approach to a treacherous expedition up the world's highest mountain where the lack of oxygen alone poses a life-threatening danger. It is troubling to hear Fischer speak so casually about a natural phenomenon especially since he is portrayed as a successful outdoorsman. Clearly his primary goal is to use Krakauer to promote his own business interests and these ambitions cloud his reasoning. A conversation, such as this one, reveals an attitude and motivations that are not available through detached and traditionally conceived of objective journalism.

Another aspect of the climb that is revealed through a reading of *Into Thin Air* is the competition between Rob Hall and Fischer. Both companies wanted *Outside* magazine to send Krakauer on their expeditions and ultimately, *Outside* magazine decided to make a deal with Hall's Adventure Consultants. Both men understood good marketing was good business and *Outside* magazine would provide an outlet for reaching an ideal audience. The magazine's

decision to send Krakauer with Adventure Consultants came just a month before the climbing season began. Fischer's way to promote his business interests after losing Krakauer came in the form of two online correspondents, Jane Bromet and Sandy Hill Pittman.

Jane Bromet was a correspondent for *Outside Online* (a separate publication from *Outside* magazine). Bromet would be filing reports from Base Camp and though her participation was critical to Fischer's expedition; it was minimal in effect compared to the addition of Sandy Hill Pittman. Pittman, "was a client who intended to go all the way to the summit and file daily dispatches for NBC Interactive Media en route" (Krakauer, 119). Pittman's climbing resume is fairly impressive but her outdoor ventures are over-shadowed by her celebrity socialite status. This was a positive for Fischer who counts on Pittman's high profile status to help bring him the admiration he thought he was owed or needed for his future interests.

Besides revealing the politics encircling the event, the narrative also discusses the financial elements surrounding Mount Everest. To begin with, every climbing season the nation of Nepal charges a permit fee for all expeditions attempting to climb Mount Everest. The fee, in1996, is $70,000 for up to seven climbers plus $10,000 for each additional climber (Krakauer 25). The fee had severely increased from $2,300 for a permit per team in 1991to $70,000 plus. Despite the high rate of inflation, the adventure business thrives as is evident during the 1996 climbing season. Krakauer's own expenses were covered by *Outside* magazine that, as mentioned before, made a deal with Adventure Consultants instead of Mountain Madness. Both expeditions charge clients $65,000 to be guided up the mountain. In the final deal, Hall accepts $10,000 to guide Krakauer up the mountain and the, "balance would be bartered for expensive ad space in the magazine, which targeted an upscale, adventurous, physically active audience—the

core of his (Hall's) client base" (Krakauer, 71). The problem, as Hall saw it, was that his company was based in New Zealand and the rise of Fischer's American based company meant competition for clients; acquiring advertisement space in a prominent American magazine would be crucial to his company's survival.

Along with the service fee charged by adventure companies, each client has to consider additional funds because, "the quoted price did not include airfare to Nepal or personal equipment" (Krakauer 37). The large fee, though, covers a number of expenses. Expedition leaders gather all necessary materials for the climb including food, camping gear for the five camp sites on the mountain, oxygen tanks, and other miscellaneous items. Expeditions also provide a staff with various roles that contribute to the clients' comfort throughout their adventure. According to *Into Thin Air*, in 1996 Adventure Consultants employed two assistant climbing guides, a Base Camp manager, and a Base Camp doctor. Mountain Madness also had two assistant guides and one person to serve the dual role of Base Camp manager and doctor. Assistant guides are paid $10,000–$25,000 per expedition, depending on climbing experience. The wages of the Base Camp manager and doctor are not discussed in Krakauer's narrative but the wages of the maintenance crew are. Sherpas contributed to both expeditions as cooks, as Base Camp assistants, and as climbers who work as load bearers that establish trails and camps on the mountain. Climbing Sherpas enjoy elite status among their people and "can expect to earn $1,400 to $2,500 for two months of hazardous work" (Krakauer 47). Of all the financial transactions involved in the commercialization of Mount Everest this is perhaps the most revealing of a typical capitalistic venture: the jobs that no one wants to do are left to those who are conditioned to accept minimal earnings. Again these are issues that are largely ignored by the mass media.

Adventure and Madness on Mount Everest

With *Into Thin Air,* Jon Krakauer delivers an important and valuable narrative of events surrounding the disaster on Mount Everest. His approach to reconstructing his experience is characteristic of literary journalism. The narrative reads like a novel but the details are factual. To gather information and material for the nonfiction story Krakauer conducts extensive interviews with members of the expeditions during and after the climb and includes casual conversations he has with them. He is keenly observant, providing details of the landscape of the mountain and in the need for accuracy he also uses radio logs transmitted to and from Base Camp to correlate the timing of events. These are all approaches a conventional journalist, or anyone researching the material, may use but the difference is in the degree of immersion. An author of literary journalism does not remain detached from the subject, instead the literary journalist engages his subject on a personal level. In the case of *Into Thin Air*, Krakauer's participation provides an insight, unattainable to the conventional journalist, into the possible motivations for decisions that were mad on the mountain that fateful day in May 1996. Even still, the validity of his account is challenged by a member of Fischer's expedition named Anatoli Boukreev; one of two professional mountaineers employed by Mountain Madness as an assistant guide.

Anatoli Boukreev, a Russian, co-wrote his account of the disaster on Mount Everest with American author G. Weston DeWalt. The following passage is from the "Postscript" of *Into Thin Air*'s 1999 paperback edition which was written in response to Boukreev's charges:

> *In November 1997 a book titled* The Climb *arrived in bookstores—Anatoli Boukreev's account of the 1996 Everest disaster, as told to an American named*

> *G. Weston DeWalt. It was fascinating, for me, to read about the events of 1996 from Boukreev's perspective. Parts of the book were powerfully told, and moved me deeply. Because Boukreev took strong exception to how he was portrayed in* Into Thin Air, *however, a significant portion of* The Climb *is devoted to defending Boukreev's actions on Everest, challenging the accuracy of my account, and calling into question my integrity as a journalist*. (Emphasis in original 307)

To clarify, Boukreev's approach to guiding clients up the mountain is considerably different from Fischer's. This was an issue highlighted in *Into Thin Air* and is a main point of discussion when regarding Boukreev's actions during summit day when five people lost their lives. The basic principle to his approach is simple. Boukreev firmly believes clients should not be coddled. From *Into Thin Air*:

> He was quite outspoken in his belief that it was a mistake for guides to pamper their clients. "If client cannot climb Everest without big help from guide," Boukreev told me, "this client should not be on Everest. Otherwise there can be big problems up high." (Krakauer, 156)

While this is a reasonable opinion about guiding clients into high altitudes this is problematic not only for the clients but also for the other guides. To explain, Scott Fischer hired Anatoli Boukreev along with another mountaineer, Neal Beidleman, as assistant guides for the Mount Everest expedition. This gave the expedition a one-to-three ratio of guides to clients. Beidleman, an American, plays the role of climbing guide in the "Western tradition" which means he watches over the clients and is protective of them at all times (Krakauer 156). Boukreev, however, does not have this approach because, "As a Russian, Boukreev came from a tough, proud hardscrabble climbing culture that did not believe in coddling the weak" (Krakauer

156). This differs from Fischer's stated approach to the mountain. In his initial sales pitch to Krakauer, Fischer describes an ascent up a "yellow brick road to the summit." This cannot mean anything less than making the climb as easy and as comfortable as possible for clients. A degree of hand-holding would be required. Yet, Boukreev believes, as he explains in *The Climb*, "I had been hired to prepare the mountain for the people instead of the other way around" (57). In accordance with his belief, he does the work Sherpas are hired to do; he sets rope lines and he prepares the camp sites. As a result, it forces Fischer and "Beidleman to shoulder a disproportionate share of the caretaker duties for their group, and by the first week in May the effort had taken an unmistakable toll on Fischer's health" (Krakauer 156). DeWalt and Boukreev accuse Krakauer of displaying Boukreev in a bad light but Krakauer insists he performed his job as a journalist by displaying Boukreev as objectively and accurately as possible. He explains, "My assignment was to assess the qualifications of the guides and clients, and to provide the reading public with a discriminating, first-had look at the reality of how guided Everest climbs are conducted" (324). Of course his focus is on how guided climbs get conducted and it happens that Mountain Madness guides have a different approach from each other and also from the guides of Adventure Consultants. The task of the participatory journalist is to reveal their impressions of the events honestly but with explicit judgments and interpretations which can be evaluated by the reader.

Scott Fischer's casual style on the mountain stands in contrast to Rob Hall's approach to guided climbing. According to Krakauer, "…Hall's strategy was to lay siege to the mountain" (77). In fact, summit attempts by all expeditions on the mountain in 1996 had been scheduled during a meeting led by Rob Hall. He was organized and a natural leader. Fischer prefers to deal with situations as they come along. This hinders his efforts as a lead guide. His casual

attitude coupled with Boukreev's largely hand off approach towards clients, drains Fischer of his energy. The following two paragraphs from *Into Thin Air* serve as an excellent summation of Fischer's condition as the acclimation period is concluding:

> Late that afternoon Fischer walked through our camp with a clenched jaw, moving uncharacteristically slowly toward his own tents. He usually managed to maintain a relentlessly upbeat attitude; one of his favorite utterances was, "If you're bumming out, you're not gonna get to the top, so as long as we're up here we might as well make a point of grooving." At that moment, however, Scott did not appear to be grooving in the slightest; instead he looked anxious and extremely tired.
>
> Because he'd encouraged his clients to move up and down the mountain independently during the acclimatization period, he ended up having to make a number of hurried, unplanned excursions between Base Camp and the upper camps when several clients experienced problems and needed to be escorted down. He'd already made special trips to assist Tim Madsen, Pete Schoening, and Dale Kruse.[25] And now, on what should have been a badly needed day and a half of rest, Fischer had just been forced to make a hasty round-trip from Camp Two to Base Camp and back to help his good friend Kruse after he came down with what appeared to be a relapse of HACE.[26] (154-155)

This is Krakauer's observation of Fischer on May 7 at Base Camp the day before both expeditions would make their final ascent of the mountain which would take three days. Before

[25] All three are clients of Mountain Madness Guided Expedition.
[26] High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE): "A baffling ailment, HACE occurs when fluid leaks from oxygen-starved cerebral blood vessels, causing severe swelling of the brain, and it can strike with little or no warning" (Krakauer 144).

this section of the narrative, the depictions of Fischer are of a mostly easy going character. Here the reader is shown a man whose energy is depleting at the worst possible time.

These are events not reported in the mass media possibly because they were not in a position to observe events and factors that had immediate impact on the deaths that occurred on summit day. But with a reading of *Into Thin Air*, the reader realizes the dynamic between Fischer and Boukreev results in an exhausted Fischer and a neglectful Boukreev. For example, a client, Dale Kruse of Mountain Madness, is suffering from an altitude sickness known as HACE for the second time during the acclimation period when Boukreev is out of position (154-155). The day began with Fischer leading an ascent to Camp Two while Boukreev was supposed to bring up the rear. Boukreev left Base Camp five hours after the last clients instead of following Fischer's order to climb with them. Because of Boukreev's absence, Fischer is forced to descend from Camp Two to Base Camp in an effort to relieve the client of his ailment. There is a brief conversation between the two men when they cross paths. In *The Climb*, Boukreev brushes off the encounter by saying, "Scott seemed tense, a little upset" (115). According to Kruse, the meeting wasn't so friendly. From *Into Thin Air*:

> […] Fischer harshly reprimanded the guide for shirking his responsibilities. "Yeah," Kruse remembers, "Scott laid into Toli pretty good. He wanted to know why he was so far behind everybody—why he wasn't climbing with the team." (155)

It is this incident that incites the first criticisms of Boukreev's behavior on the mountain in *Into Thin Air*. Therefore, it seems that Boukreev, with *The Climb*, is attempting to take some of the sting out of his portrayal in Krakauer's narrative.

With *The Climb*, he is also seeking to discredit Krakauer as a journalist by questioning the validity of his account. Specifically, *The Climb* includes a letter written by Boukreev to the editor of *Outside* magazine. In the letter Boukreev writes, "…I believe his (Krakauer) lack of proximity to certain events and his limited experience at high altitude may have gotten in the way of his ability to objectively evaluate the events of summit day" (216). Krakauer, as a journalist, certainly has a responsibility to validate any claims he makes about his experience which is why his narrative is laden with accounts from other climbers who observed certain actions Krakauer includes in his story.

The question of validity is one that permeates throughout journalism. Journalists, regardless of whether they write conventional journalism or literary journalism, are highly criticized for fabrications or for having small over-looked mistakes that may appear in their writings. In the case of *Into Thin Air*, Krakauer is accused of leaving information out of the narrative when questioning Boukreev's actions on summit day. Krakauer summarizes the two main complaints of co-authors Boukreev and DeWalt in the "Postscript" of *Into Thin Air*:

> I didn't mention a purported conversation…between Boukreev and Scott Fischer in which Fischer allegedly gave Boukreev permission to descend ahead of his clients; and…I refused to acknowledge that Fischer supposedly had a predetermined plan in place for Boukreev to descend ahead of his clients. (312)

Krakauer, citing other climbers, challenges this account and explains that he did not mention such a discussion where Fischer allegedly gives permission to Boukreev to descend because it never happened. *Into Thin Air* presents a sequence of events, supported by several eye-witnesses, which do not allow for the conversation to have ever occurred. Boukreev claims the conversation happened when the two crossed paths on summit day; Boukreev was descending

and Fischer was ascending. However, those with Boukreev during the descent do not recall Fischer telling Boukreev to descend ahead of the clients as Krakauer explains in the "Postscript" (Krakauer 312-313). And with regards to a "predetermined plan," no one seems to think there was one in place but Boukreev. Neal Beidleman attests that Fischer never laid out a plan which included Boukreev descending before the others. As one of two assistant guides on the expedition it seems extremely unlikely and irresponsible if Fischer had not included Beidleman in any plans he may have had for summit day.

There are two main issues to be discussed. First: the question of validity on both sides of the discussion. Krakauer explains:

> Of the six professional climbing guides who were caught high on Everest when the storm hit on May 10, 1996, only three survived: Boukreev, Michael Groom (Adventure Consultants), and Neal Beidleman. A scrupulous journalist intent on describing the tragedy accurately, in its full complexity, would presumably have interviewed each of the surviving guides. (309)

Krakauer mentions that DeWalt only interviewed Boukreev. The point is: a literary journalist is an extensive interviewer who attempts to capture the truth by obtaining multiple eye-witness accounts to events. Krakauer spoke with multiple people from multiple expeditions, including Boukreev, about incidents that happened throughout the entire climbing season. The need for accuracy requires supporting evidence, something that Krakauer acquires and DeWalt seems to have over-looked. The narrative of *The Climb* oscillates between Boukreev's direct account and DeWalt's researched depiction of events. Rarely does DeWalt rely heavily on other people's accounts, whereas Krakauer frequently allows others to convey their thoughts about the complexities of the experience on Mount Everest. Krakauer points out several factual errors that

occur in *The Climb* and in a direct rebuttal in writes, "Sadly, some of the errors in *The Climb* do not appear to be the product of mere carelessness, but rather to be deliberate distortions of the truth intended to discredit my reporting in *Into Thin Air*" (311). Krakauer's main responsibility is to the truth; it seems clearly the case that Boukreev's quick descent from the summit to Camp Four left Neal Beidleman with the charge of leading a group of Mountain Madness clients down from the summit alone, which created a great degree of potentially unnecessary danger.

Why are the duo of Boukreev and DeWalt so concerned with providing proof justifying Boukreev's actions? What is the significance of Boukreev's descent ahead of the others? All accounts agree that too many climbers are way too high too late in the day when the storm surges through the death zone. To clarify, in *Into Thin Air*, Krakauer writes:

> Over the previous month, Rob had lectured us repeatedly about the importance of having a predetermined turn-around time on our summit day—in our case it would probably be 1:00 P.M., or 2:00 at the very latest—and abiding by it no matter how close we were to the top. "With enough determination, any bloody idiot can get *up* (emphasis in original) this hill," Hall observed. "The trick is to get back down alive." (153)

Rob Hall and Scott Fischer understand the importance of turning around at a pre-determined time, regardless if they reach the summit or not. Climbing at high altitudes quickly drains the body of energy making a descent at night even more dangerous than it already is. Yet they bend this rule in an effort to get as many clients to the summit as possible.

This directly results in the following scenario: when the storm hits, a group of climbers from the two commercial expeditions are lost during their descent only a few hundred yards from the shelters of Camp Four. The group includes two assistant guides, two Sherpas, and a handful

of clients. Exhausted from oxygen depletion, extreme temperatures, and general muscle fatigue, the amateur climbers are severely in need of professional help before the storm even hits. Most of them manage to survive but one will lose her life. Rob Hall is highest up the mountain trying desperately to help one of his clients down at an altitude just less than 29,000 feet. One of his assistant guides, Andy Harris, is ascending to help him. All three will perish. Scott Fischer is just below them descending, exhausted, probably suffering from high-altitude sickness, and is nowhere near any of his clients. He will eventually lose his orientation and perish as well. Somewhere just below Fischer is the Taiwanese team. They will barely survive and their leader will have his two feet amputated because of frostbite. Anatoli Boukreev is in his tent resting and drinking tea. In all fairness, Krakauer had made it back during the first minutes of the storm and was also resting. The major difference of course is Krakauer is a client, exhausted from his first ever excursion above 26,000 feet and Boukreev is a guide who has climbed Everest several times and is not fulfilling his responsibilities.

In *Into Thin Air*, Krakauer accepts responsibility for his actions and is, at times, very apologetic. Along with guides Andy Harris of Adventure Consultants and Anatoli Boukreev, Krakauer was one of the first climbers to reach the summit during the 1996 climbing season. Consequently, he was one of the first to descend after reaching the summit. Of the three men, Andy Harris loses his life; a fact that Krakauer feels somewhat responsible for.

Harris was displaying symptoms of high-altitude sickness. Krakauer notices this while they are searching through a cache of oxygen bottles. Adventure Consultant guide Mike Groom and Krakauer find Andy Harris shifting through the canisters and claims they are all empty. After close inspection Groom found six canisters full of oxygen but Harris is insistent. He

speaks and acts irrationally. Even still, Krakauer continued his descent ahead of Groom (who was staying behind to assist another client) and Harris. He explains his regret and writes:

> Given what unfolded over the hours that followed, the ease with which I abdicated responsibility—my utter failure to consider that Andy might have been in serious trouble—was a lapse that's likely to haunt me for the rest of my life. (196)

In a very apologetic fashion, Krakauer accepts his responsibility in the deaths of fellow climbers though he wasn't entrusted with responsibility for others. He regrets descending ahead of the others but it is not his role to act as a guide and the weather at this point is still not threatening. Boukreev as a hired guide, however, had a responsibility to his clients. In *Into Thin Air* Krakauer writes, "Boukreev had come down to the South Col (Camp Four) hours in front of anyone else in Fischer's team…Experienced guides would later question his decision to descend so far ahead of his clients—extremely unorthodox behavior for a guide" (218). One of the possibilities, according to *Into Thin Air*, is that Boukreev was severely suffering from the freezing weather because of a lack of oxygen. His "susceptibility to the cold was doubtless greatly exacerbated by the fact that he wasn't using supplemental oxygen" (219). A common practice for guides, Boukreev had decided not to use supplemental oxygen on summit day, another questionable decision. Lacking a consistent flow of oxygen at the altitudes he is performing hinders his ability to help clients. But according to *The Climb*:

> […] my intuition was telling me that the most logical thing for me to do was to descend to Camp IV as quickly as possible, to stand by in case our descending climbers needed to be resupplied with oxygen, and also, to prepare hot tea and warm drinks. (154)

According to Krakauer, this plan's major flaw is that Boukreev doesn't have a radio for communication with people a few thousand feet above him. It would be too late before Boukreev realizes he is needed but he cannot see, because of the storm, a large group of climbers wandering blindly a few hundred yards away. The group, which included members of both commercial expeditions, had been assembling sporadically during the descent, and luckily, had coalesced just before the fury of the storm pummeled and blinded them. Krakauer describes a group of desperate people clinging to life. He writes:

> Beidleman and Schoening searched for a protected place to escape the wind, but there was nowhere to hide.[27] Everyone's oxygen had long since run out, making the group more vulnerable to the windchill, which exceeded a hundred below zero. In the lee of a boulder no larger than a dishwasher, the climbers hunkered in a pathetic row on a patch of gale-scoured ice. "By then the cold had about finished me off," says Charlotte Fox.[28] "My eyes were frozen. I didn't see how we were going to get out of it alive. The cold was so painful, I didn't think I could endure it anymore. I just curled up in a ball and hoped death would come quickly."
>
> "We tried to keep warm by pummeling each other," Weathers remembers.[29] "Someone yelled at us to keep moving our arms and legs. Sandy was hysterical; she kept yelling over and over, 'I don't want to die! I don't want to die!' But nobody else was saying a whole lot." (216)

[27] Klev Schoening is a client of Mountain Madness.
[28] Charlotte Fox is a client of Mountain Madness.
[29] Beck Weathers is a client of Mountain Madness.

With this passage, the reader gets a glimpse into the personal experiences of these individuals who are confronted with their own mortality. Krakauer was asleep in his tent while these events unfolded so naturally he is relying on the participant's accounts.

Eventually, the sky clears just enough for the group to find their bearings and head to Camp Four. There is a problem though: some of the climbers are incapable of moving. Those that can summon the energy tread to Camp Four while five climbers are left behind. Upon reaching Camp Four the climbers try to point Boukreev in the right direction. Unable to find anyone else at the camp capable of helping in a rescue effort, Boukreev resolves to charge into the storm alone. Krakauer comments, "It was an incredible display of strength and courage, but he was unable to find any of the missing climbers" (222). Boukreev, intent on finding the group, heads out a second time, manages to locate them, and brings three climbers back with him. Unfortunately, Beck Weathers and a Japanese woman named Yasuko Namba are found lifeless and are left behind in a necessary act of triage.[30]

Both *The Climb* and *Into Thin Air* speak about the wandering in desperate terms. It is the most dramatic and compelling section in both versions of the events. Perhaps the most disheartening attempt to recall the day's rescue effort is delivered by Neal Beidleman in *Into Thin Air*. The night cleared and the decision to make a last ditch effort to reach Camp Four is made. Beidleman confides to Krakauer:

> "I was screaming at everyone to get moving, but it became clear that some people didn't have enough strength to walk or even stand."
>
> "People were crying. I heard someone yell, 'Don't let me die here!' It was obvious that it was now or never. I tried to get Yasuko on her feet. She

[30] Yasuko Namba is a client of Adventure Consultants. Beck Weathers miraculously survives and wanders blindly into Camp Four the next day. His experience is chronicled in a book titled *Left for Dead: My Journey Home from Everest*.

> grabbed my arm, but she was too weak to get up past her knees. I started walking, and dragged her for a step or two, then her grip loosened and she fell away. I had to keep going. Somebody had to make it to the tents and get help or everybody was going to die."
>
> Beidleman paused. "But I can't help thinking about Yasuko," He said when he resumed, his voice hushed. "She was so little. I can still feel her fingers sliding across my biceps, and then letting go. I never even turned to look back." (Krakauer, 300-301)

All told the five lives are lost on the Nepalese side of the mountain and three more on the Tibetan side. Four nationalities are represented in the casualty count. But the numbers and the statistics reported on by objective reporting can't possibly do justice to the human side of the story. It is a story of survival and calamity which can be understood more profoundly with a narrator who experienced the events. It is also a story of differing interpretations of responsibility and conflicting accounts. Through Krakauer's first person narrative, the reader can see that a combination of bad luck and suspicious decision making, motivated by commercial interests, were at the root of blame for the day's events. Through Boukreev's *The Climb*, the reader will see a man seeking vindication. Though there are several people who made questionable choices, Boukreev is the first to descend to Camp Four, leaving guiding duties during the descent to a less-experienced Beidleman and a severely exhausted Fischer. On the other hand he does save three of the five people left behind in the huddle. However, there are those that speculate about a possible outcome if Boukreev stays with the clients. Reinhold Messner, "the most accomplished and respected mountaineer of the modern era," comments in Krakauer's "Postscript" about the events (321). Krakauer writes:

> In February 1998, during a meeting with me in New York, Messner stated into a tape recorder, without equivocation, that he thought Anatoli was wrong to descend ahead of his clients. Messner speculated on the record that had Anatoli remained with his clients the outcome of the tragedy might have been quite different. Messner declared that "No one should guide Everest without using bottled oxygen," […]. (321-322)

Krakauer is a journalist who is interested in facts and yet he finds himself in an argument of hypotheticals. In the case of his argument with DeWalt and Boukreev, he deems it necessary to find respected sources to do the speculative reconstruction of events for him. This is the work of an honest and resourceful journalist, not the work of a man desperately trying to excuse his actions. In this perspective, *Into Thin Air* succeeds as a work of literary journalism where *The Climb* fails. By focusing on the purpose of the assignment, which was to record the approaches to guided climbs, Krakauer reveals truths about guided climbs that are disturbing and regretful.

Perhaps, though, the greatest revelation is left for last. Krakauer mentions the reverence Sherpas have for the mountain several times in his narrative. Towards the very end of the narrative he leaves the reader with an online posting from a discussion board about the Mount Everest disaster. It reads:

> I am a Sherpa orphan. My father was killed in the Khumbu Icefall while load-ferrying for an expedition in the late sixties. My mother died just below Pheriche when her heart gave out under the weight of the load she was carrying for another expedition in 1970. Three of my siblings died from various causes, my sister and I were sent to foster homes in Europe and the U.S.

> I never have gone back to my homeland because I feel it is cursed. My ancestors arrived in the Solo-Khumbu region fleeing from persecution in the lowlands. There they found sanctuary in the shadow of "Sagarmathaji," "mother goddess of the earth." In return they were expected to protect that goddesses' sanctuary from outsiders.
>
> But my people went the other way. They helped outsiders find their way into the sanctuary and violate every limb of her body by standing on top of her, crowing in victory, and dirtying and polluting her bosom. Some of them have had to sacrifice themselves, others escaped through the skin of their teeth, or offered other lives in lieu….
>
> So I believe that even the Sherpas are to blame for the tragedy of 1996 on "Sagarmatha." I have no regrets of not going back, for I know the people of the area are doomed, and so are those rich, arrogant outsiders who feel they can conquer the world. Remember the Titanic. Even the unsinkable sank, and what are foolish mortals like Weathers, Pittman, Fischer, Lopsang, Tenzing, Messner, Bonington in the face of the "Mother Goddess." As such I have vowed never to return home and be part of that sacrilege. (298-299)

This entry reveals an entirely different level of experience and understanding of the events. The reverence of the Sherpas for the mountain is mentioned scarcely throughout the narrative yet is it really absurd to consider whether this allegation has merit? The exploitation of the mountain has led to deaths of guides, clients, and Sherpas. In the traditional battle between man versus nature, nature's key weapon is death; the great leveler.

In this case, the vigor of the mountain divided the climbers literally and figuratively and depending on the climber's proximity to Camp Four, chances for survival ranged from slightly probable to highly doubtful. Ultimately, the lead guides who were responsible for the safety of their clients and staff lost their lives and we may never know with certainty what motivated Rob Hall and Scott Fischer to behave so irrationally and lose their lives in the process. The reader can only speculate that both lead guides suffered from poor judgment motivated by economic interests. Krakauer's narrative offers the reader a chance to delve into these issues because of the intricacies of the text. Certainly, the reader will see past so-called objective reporting that mechanically recalls statistics and casts blame on a severe storm for the loss of life. With a reading of *Into Thin Air*, the reader comes away with a greater understanding of the costs of seeking high-altitude victory and the reader can also understand the precautions that should be taken. The reader will also see the economic circus that is the business of adventure on Mount Everest and recognize how people get exploited for their labor to promote profit while others lose their lives. Then perhaps, the reader will ask themselves if anyone should be willing to pay such a high price, both economically and morally, to participate in the exploitation of Mount Everest.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Omar Rodriguez was born April 16, 1978 in Edinburg, TX to Hector and Gloria Rodriguez. He currently resides at 1605 W. McIntyre #7 Edinburg, TX. The student graduated from Edinburg High School in 1996 before traveling to San Marcos to attend college. A couple of years later, the student opted to experience life as his learning environment and put academics aside. Eventually the student returned to school at the University of Texas-Pan American to obtain his BA in English with a minor in Communication Journalism in December of 2008. With the completion of this thesis he obtained a MA in Literature and Cultural Studies in May of 2012.

Professionally, Omar has worked with students in the field of education at multiple levels and in multiple capacities. He is currently working with a grant-funded project at the University of Texas-Pan American researching the literacy skills of first-year college students and sophomores. As a student, he has focused on literary journalism for his thesis and maintains a high interest in existential literature. As a journalist, Omar has worked with *The Pan American*, UTPA's campus newspaper, and a local social magazine called *RGVmag*. As a volunteer, he has worked with the Nikki Rowe Varsity Volleyball program; beginning in 2005 he has spent his summers coaching the competitive and highly successful program. Omar Rodriguez has one child, Diana, a sweet and crafty eleven-year-old whose aspirations seem to evolve every day.