THE NAKED, THE ELOQUENT, AND THE DEAD

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IN HER 1985 STUDY, *THE BODY IN PAIN*, ELAINE SCARRY EXPLORES the effects of physical pain on human language and experience. The first two sections of her work focus upon war and torture as loci of the infliction of pain, with the aim of undermining commonly held assumptions about the "uses" of pain and the objectives of war. Among Scarry's broad-reaching concerns are the sensory- and language-eroding effects of pain, its use as a tool for acquiring political power, and the identification of other means of large-scale conflict resolution that would not require the damaging of human bodies to be authoritative. A quarter-century later, the issues raised in Scarry's book are, regrettably, as relevant as ever, as evidenced by ongoing debates in the U.S. over the use of "harsh interrogation" techniques.

Much of Scarry's book is based on historical documentation and accounts collected by Amnesty International. However, as a scholar of literature, she also incorporates reflections on fictionalized portrayals of pain. Among those novels she mentions is Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, which she praises as one of relatively few works of fiction that "hold steadily visible the centrality of injury" to war (Scarry, footnote 17, 336).

As Scarry acknowledges, pain plays a critical role in Mailer's novel. Set amidst the Pacific campaign of World War II, the narrative follows the movements of an American reconnaissance platoon on the Japanese island of Anopopei. Mailer emphasizes the soldiers' feelings of terror and purposelessness during the campaign. War makes a catalogue of their vulnerabilities, and pain pervades their every waking moment. They are subject to the stresses of the environment—the jungle and mountainous terrain of the

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island—to injury inflicted by the enemy, and, perhaps most insidiously, to the pain inherent in performing their duties:

> They proceeded for the next few hundred yards by grasping the nearest bushes, yanking and tugging themselves up the stream against the current. Their rifles kept slipping off their shoulders, almost dipping into the water, and their feet sank loathsomely in the river mud. . . . Besides their fatigue and the dank, moist air, they were sweating from anxiety. . . . Their hands began to bleed from the thorns and the paper-edged leaves, and their packs hung heavy. (Mailer 458–459)

The arduous labor of road building, transporting arms, or cutting a trail through the jungle, in addition to intermittent combat, is for many of these men the most physically taxing experience of their lives. The pain they endure affects their understanding of themselves and others. It shapes the way they see and communicate with the world around them.

The *Naked and the Dead* embodies much of what Scarry describes in *The Body in Pain*, while suggesting a means of extending or elaborating upon that work. Mailer, like Scarry, sees pain as a tool used to damage and promote fear—a tool in the administration of power, exercised over both the enemy and the US troops. His representations of pain and the coping mechanisms through which the individual struggles to mitigate suffering also resonate clearly with Scarry's findings. At the same time, the novel offers the possibility of a communicative power within pain that Scarry seems to deny. Mailer's writing engages, not in the trivialization of pain or in statements that appear "ludicrous and inappropriate"[1] beside the reality of pain, but in a vision that reveals profound empathy in the face of suffering, as well as offering a visceral, affecting portrait of the brutality of war. Where Scarry finds the oppressive, "aversive" silence of pain, Mailer allows the naked and the dead to speak.

In order to see Mailer's work as engaged in a project that parallels, though, in a specific sense, is more expansive than Scarry's, it is important first to examine the similarities between each author's understanding of the individual's experience of pain. Two characters within the novel are particularly useful for this purpose: Privates Red Valsen and Woodrow Wilson. At the outset of the book, both men have already seen combat and lost friends in

battle. During the course of the novel, they each experience the radical effects of pain. Red, who is as perceptive as he is jaded, suffers from untreated kidney disease. Wilson also suffers from illness, but in the latter half of the novel, he is the victim of a gunshot wound to the stomach. Through him, Private Goldstein and Sergeant Brown, in particular, come to comprehend the extremity of another human's pain.

One of the primary areas of congruence between Scarry's work and Mailer's is the "world shrinking" effect of pain on the individual—the erosion of human perception because of pain. As Scarry describes,

> [One] element of physical pain . . . is its obliteration of the contents of consciousness. Pain annihilates not only the objects of complex thought and emotion but also the objects of the most elemental acts of perception. It may begin by destroying some intricate and demanding allegiance, but it may end . . . by destroying one's ability simply to see. (54)

Stages of this process are evident throughout the novel, particularly during those episodes in which members of the "I and R" platoon are taken beyond the limits of their physical endurance. The greater the extent of the pain, the more completely the individual is driven inward. The dissolution of consciousness begins with a gradual erosion of the five senses: the body grows numb, and sound and vision blur. Eventually, the senses of time, place, and even volition are erased. The first prolonged example of this occurs while the men are attempting to transport light artillery pieces to the front:

> The trail was only a few feet wide. Huge roots continually tripped the men, and their faces and hands became scratched and bleeding from the branches and the thorns. . . . the men swore helplessly, panted with deep sobbing sounds like wrestlers at the end of a long bout. Voices and commands echoed hollowly, were lost in a chorus of profanity and hoarse sobbing, the straining sweating noises of men in great labor. By the time an hour had passed, nothing existed for them but the slender cannon they had to get down the track. The sweat drenched their clothing and filled their eyes, blinding them. They grappled and blundered and swore, advanced the little guns a few feet at a time with no con-

> sciousness any longer of what they were doing. . . . In the darkness, distance had no meaning, nor did time. (131–133)

As the novel progresses, the soldiers' physical suffering escalates, culminating in the final forced march up Mt. Anaka, and the concurrent efforts of Wilson's litter-bearers to reach the sea before he dies. In both cases, the extremity of the pain the men endure is totalizing—erasing even the sense of self. One of the most harrowing passages in the novel gives an intimate account of this disintegration, as the group struggles, fear-driven, to accomplish the impossible and scale the mountain. The devolution of man into animal, a repeated trope, appears here as the men are reduced to rats, "their minds scurry[ing] about inside their bodies like rodents in a maze" (658). Earlier, members of this same group have reflected upon the dehumanizing effects of war and injury on others—comparing soldiers to worms, ants, and even "shoulders of lamb" (213, 629). Now as they are stripped of their higher selves, emptied of human content, all that remains is physical anguish. They lie "dumbly on their backs" and no longer think of themselves as individuals, or as men, but as "merely envelopes of suffering" (658).

The "envelope" represents the thickening barrier that separates the individual from his surroundings. Ultimately, the barrier not only isolates, but constricts. The circumference of each man's awareness steadily shrinks, leaving only the unrelenting sensitivities of the nervous system—pangs and quivers. Scarry views the world-shrinking of the suffering as homologous with that of the aged and ill:

> As the body breaks down, it becomes increasingly the object of attention, usurping the place of all other objects, so that finally, in very old and sick people, the world may exist in a circle two feet out from themselves; the exclusive content of perception and speech may become what was eaten, the problems of excreting, the progress of pains . . . . (32–33)

This phenomenon is seen within the novel in a catalogue of relatively mild aches and pains the platoon members experience as they start a new day,

> Their muscles were stiff from the previous day's march, and their clothing was damp with yesterday's perspiration. The older men

> were wishing that the sun was higher; there seemed no warmth left in their bodies. Red's kidneys were aching again, Roth's right shoulder was rheumatic, and Wilson had a spasm of diarrhea after he ate. (Mailer 501)

and more urgently during Wilson's slow death from his abdominal wound:

> The pain in his belly became acute again, and he lay there panting, absorbed only in the racking demands of his body like a woman in childbirth. "Ohhhh," he groaned thickly.
>
> . . . He was concerned only with his pain, and he fought against it numbly, almost hysterically, like a man grappling in the dark, pitching with his opponent down an endless flight of stairs. (536)

Wilson's experience also suggests the "aversiveness" of pain Scarry describes—its active resistance to the individual who experiences and attempts to contain it (52). Ultimately, Scarry observes, this struggle can lead to an alienation of the self from the body, in which the self identifies the body as an *agent* of the pain rather than its victim. Shortly after Wilson is shot, he tells himself, "Ah jus' gotta hold on to myself" (Mailer 519). The phrase expresses his need to stay calm, but also his desire to resist the splitting of body and self, the culmination of which will be his death. Earlier in the novel, Red, too, undergoes a sense of physical betrayal when his nephritis returns. The frailty his illness intimates is unacceptable to his sense of self, and he resists his body's messages for as long as he is able:

> Red was uncomfortable. For weeks his kidneys had been growing more painful, and that morning on the road he had strained himself badly in lifting a pick. A severe pain had seized him at the top of his swing, and he had ground his teeth, his fingers trembling. . . . he debated whether to go on sick call. It seemed shameful to him somehow. (368)

Red's experience with illness serves as an excellent example of another facet of Scarry's theory of pain; the presence or "reality" of pain is uncon-

testable to those who are "in" it, but to an observer or listener, the pain is not real:

> . . . for the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that "having pain" may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to "have certainty," while for the other person it is so elusive that "hearing about pain" may exist as a primary model of what it is "to have doubt." Thus pain comes unsharably into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed. (4)

Once Red realizes that he will not be able to continue performing his duties in his current condition, he makes the difficult decision to seek medical help. Before joining the army, he lived for years as a hobo, went hungry rather than ask for food, and he considers himself, above all else, a stoic. But now he cannot ignore his pain, and must try to communicate it to others in order to receive their aid. He seeks companionship in Wilson, who has contracted a venereal disease, and encourages Wilson to come with him on "sick call." Wilson responds, "Aw, listen, Red, if they cain't see it, you ain't got it" (369–370).

Here, Wilson essentially restates Scarry's point—if the source of a person's pain is invisible, then it is all the more difficult to communicate. This is also what makes a "million dollar wound" like Toglio's so enviable. Toglio, who was shot in the elbow, is injured visibly and seriously enough to be sent home, but not fatally so. Wilson's observation, and Scarry's, are affirmed when Red does eventually see the doctor:

> When he reached the medic, he was tongue-tied for an instant. . . . "It's my back," Red muttered in embarrassment at last.
>
> "Well take off your shirt, I can't see through your clothing," the medic snapped.
>
> This broke the spell for Red. "If I took it off you wouldn't know any more," he flared. "It's my kidneys."
>
> The medic sighed. "You guys figure out more ways. Go over there to the doctor." . . .
>
> . . . [T]he doctor stared at Red, "What's the matter with you?"
>
> "Nephritis"

> "Let me do the diagnosing if you don't mind."
>
> "I know what it is," Red said, "I been told by a doctor in the States."
>
> "All you men seem to know just what your trouble is." The doctor asked him for the symptoms and listened inattentively. . . . He reached under his table, and handed Red a package of wound tablets. "Drink these with a lot of water, and if you're faking the whole thing, just throw them away." Red became pale. "Next man," the doctor said. (370–371)

Military hierarchy contributes to the doctor's response, but it is largely because invisible pain is contestable pain that Red does not receive the treatment he needs.

If descriptions of pain can be contested, then what of its physical evidence? The novel suggests that even death, that most incontestable phenomenon, may escape language, may be in some fundamental way incommunicable. As the corpse cannot speak for itself, at least literally, witnesses must confirm the reality of the dead by some other means, frequently visually. When visual confirmation is also denied, the dead person continues to exist in an unresolved state in the mind of the onlooker, a state of doubt. This occurs for Minetta, during his stay in the hospital:

> In the morning he awoke to find that one of the patients was dead. The blanket was drawn up over the dead man's head and his feet made a stiff peak which traced an icy caress along Minetta's spine. He looked at the body and turned away. There was an envelope of intense silence about it. There is something different about a guy when he's dead, Minetta thought. He felt an acute curiosity about the man's face under the blanket; he wondered what it looked like. If there had been no one in the tent, he might have walked over and lifted the blanket. (365)

Gallagher, too, becomes profoundly aware of the elusive reality of death when he learns his wife has died in childbirth:

> The word "dead" formed for [Gallagher], and because it now had only one meaning to him, he saw Mary quivering and twitching

> like the Japanese soldier who had been killed in the draw. He began to shiver uncontrollably. "Dead," he said. The word had no sense. He sat there very numb; his thoughts had retreated into some deep secure closet of his mind and the words of the chaplain fell abstractly on the anesthetized surface of his brain. (263)

The only referent Gallagher has for death is the Japanese soldier he has seen Sergeant Croft kill at point-blank range. Now, at this tremendous distance, his wife's death is so abstract, so decontextualized and devastating, he cannot conceive of it in any other terms than the "quivering and twitching" he has seen with his own eyes. While Gallagher knows he must cross over from a state of disbelief about his wife's death to one of certainty, in the moment, he cannot. Even the word "dead" remains meaningless.

The "envelope of intense silence" that Minetta senses around the corpse and the unreality of the word "dead" for Gallagher both gesture toward a fundamental facet of Scarry's definition of pain: pain is language destroying. It erodes language both in the sense that it "bring[s] about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" and that it disrupts the cognitive ability to make words represent things, feelings, the world.

Scarry is certainly not the first to recognize that humans will "revert" in times of great crisis to preverbal forms of communication.[2] W. H. Auden addresses this in his distinction between the animal and human worlds of communication in the final lines of "Their Lonely Betters": "We too make noises when we laugh or weep/ Words are for those with promises to keep." [Lines 15–16]. This reversion to the pre-verbal is seen in those who are injured Mailer's novel as well:

> Croft fired the gun again, held it for a long vicious burst, and then ducked in his hole. An awful scream singed the night, and for an instant Croft grinned weakly. Got him, he thought. He saw the metal burning through flesh, shattering the bones in its path. "AIIYOHHHH." The scream froze him again, and for an odd disconnected instant he experienced again the whole complex of sounds and smells and sights when a calf is branded. (15)

Croft's association of the "sounds and smells and sights" of the shooting with the branding of cattle suggests, again, the animalization of the human—man becoming chattel. The bawl of the calf is, itself, a response to branding—the imposition of signifying letters onto its flesh—to which it can respond only with a cry. The lingual disintegration of the injured soldier is further complicated in this scene by the language barrier separating the American soldier and the injured Japanese. Even if the language uttered is coherent, Croft cannot decipher its literal meaning:

> A wounded man was groaning in Japanese. Every few seconds he would scream, the sound terrifying in the cruel blue light of the flare. Croft picked up a grenade. "That sonofabitch is makin' too much noise," he said. (154)

Despite the lack of recognizable linguistic meaning in the injured man's groaning, Croft's response to the cries indicates that they are not meaningless to him. And it is in this moment that Mailer's vision begins to deviate from Scarry's. Scarry subscribes to a logocentric notion that language precedes being, precedes the essence of the thing; so, without language, the "thing," be it the pain or the self or the world, is "unmade." In *The Naked and the Dead*, spoken communication may deteriorate, but communication itself does not. Words are inconsequential to Croft's comprehension of the agony of the dying man. In Croft's case, he responds with anger and violence to the presence of this understanding. The message is intolerable, so he obliterates the messenger.

Nonverbal communication (this time paired with recognizable English words) is effective in communicating pain for Minetta, as well:

> There was a patient at the far end of the tent who was weeping with loud thick sounds that seemed to writhe out of his chest and throat. Minetta closed his eyes. What a set up, he thought disgustedly. His annoyance was suppressing a great deal of fear . . . The patient who had been weeping began to scream now, and the sounds had such terror that Minetta ground his teeth and held the blanket over his ears. "NEEE-YOWWWWWW, NEEEEEEE-YOWWWWWRR," the patient wailed, imitating the

> sound of a mortar, and then he screamed again, "You got to save me, you got to save me!" (363)

The noises that the patient makes awaken in Minetta a fear of exposure, of suffering, of returning to the field. The mimetic quality of the screams, "imitating the sound of a mortar," demonstrate that sound, without words, can also communicate experience.

With these examples, it might still be argued that language has been eroded by pain. But the expressive power of Mailer's language is not eroded. On the contrary, he uses the novel's namesake, the corpse, to make pain manifest to the senses. He explores the effects of sensory perception—the sight of mutilated bodies or the stench of rotting flesh—on the soldiers' ability to comprehend and empathize with the suffering of the injured and dead. Crucial to the communicative power of the corpse is the series of scenes in which members of the platoon make a drunken perusal of an abandoned battlefield in search of "souvenirs." Although Martinez is the only soldier who comes away from the field with a material "memento" (the gold teeth that he has knocked from the head of a dead Japanese soldier), all of the men are affected by their exposure to the ravaged, now decaying, bodies that have been left where they fell:

> The Japanese had been dead for a week, and they had swollen to the dimensions of very obese men with enormous legs and bellies, and buttocks which split their clothing. They had turned green and purple and the maggots festered in their wounds and covered their feet. (212)

Mailer's vision of the casualties as human beings is unflinching. Even the most mutilated corpses are recognized as men, and not simply matter. He constructs similes and analogies to describe the condition of the bodies, but only rarely, and then very deliberately, does a corpse appear as an impersonal "it," rather than as "him" or "the Japanese soldier" or "the man":

> The bodies of the Japanese had not been carried away, and the driver of the half-track had almost fallen out of his seat. His head was crushed from his ear to his jaw and lay sodden on the runningboard of the vehicle as if it were a beanbag. One of his legs

> was thrust tensely through the shattered glass of the windshield and the other one, which had been lopped off at the thigh, lay at right angles to his head. It seemed to have a separate existence from him. (210–211)

The portrayal of the corpses is marked by this striking, formal composition. Mailer's highly-charged descriptive language is able to convey both the stillness of the dead and the brutal force that destroyed them: "In the grass they could see the twisted bodies of a few dead men, and they lay very far from repose, their bodies frozen in the midst of an intense contortion. . . ." (210). The world the corpses now inhabit resembles a Pompeiian tableau. The burnt and rigid figures maintain dramatic, active postures even in death. And though they are disfigured, they remain disturbingly recognizable:

> At an angle . . . lay a third soldier, who had received a terrible wound in his chest. His thighs and torso had been burned in escaping from the half-track, and he was stretched out on his back with his legs separated and his knees raised. The singed cloth of is uniform had rotted away and it exposed his scorched genitals. They had burned down to tiny stumps but the ash of his pubic hair still remained like a tight clump of steel wool. (211)

Nearby, the American soldiers encounter another ghastly, yet exquisite corpse:

> He had a great hole in his intestines, which bunched out in a thick white cluster like the congested petals of a sea flower. The flesh of his belly was very red and his hands in their death throe had encircled the wound. He looked as if here were calling attention to it. (210)

The tensed limbs of both of these bodies frame their wounds, "calling attention" to their injury in much the same way that Mailer's descriptions corral the observer/reader's gaze, directing attention to the undeniable fact of the pain—as Scarry says, "hold[ing] steadily visible the centrality of injury" to war.

It is startling to discover beauty articulated from carnage. The contrast-

ing images of the white sea anemone and the red flesh reveal a way of seeing that is both seductive and appalling. At once the imagery communicates the dignity, or "eloquence," as Red will later call it, of the dead, as well as the devastating reality of the pain that has emptied the body of life. The disturbing images contained within this chapter are among the most persuasive in the novel, the most successful in communicating pain. Like combat photographer Robert Capa's images, Mailer's "pictures of the dead and wounded were the ones that would show people the real aspect of war . . ." (Capa 62 qtd in Schloss 247).

Injury may be framed as a creative act, Scarry allows, because "something not in existence, not naturally occurring, was brought into being by a conscious human agency" (73). However, representations of injury or pain, she says, necessarily fail to convey pain's true meaning or essence. Language can never be commensurate with experience: "Besides the initial fact of pain, all further elaborations . . . seem trivializations . . . Nothing sustains its image in the world; nothing alerts us to the place it has vacated" (60). Mailer's writing challenges Scarry's notion that "nothing sustains [pain's] image in the world." The novelist recognizes and makes use of the tension between silence and communication that the dead human body represents. We see this in Gallagher's observation of the movement of maggots over the dead:

> The maggots covered the dead bodies the way bees cluster over the head of a beekeeper. It was impossible to see any longer where the wounds had been, for the maggots covered every bit of ruptured flesh and crawled sluggishly over all the minor sores on the corpse. Gallagher watched drunkenly while a train of maggots filed into the gaping mouth of a dead man. Somehow he expected the maggots to make some sound, and their rapt noiseless feeding angered him. (216, 212–213)

Gallagher is disturbed by the silence of the scene. Not only is the corpse mute, but the scavenging maggots are "rapt and noiseless" as well. They shroud the body's wounds and, inverting the motion of speech and exhalation, they file into and fill the mouth of the dead man. In the "mute eloquence" of the dead, the observing soldiers, and the reader, are confronted with the knowledge of the suffering of another human being, as well as the "physical knowledge of life and death and [their] own vulnerability" (217).

Red is particularly sensitive to reflections of this nature. His passage through the battlefield is marked by an epiphanic comprehension of common human life and frailty, which transgresses the boundaries imposed by war:

> Red grunted. He was looking at a corpse which lay almost naked on its back. It was an eloquent corpse, for there were no wounds on its body, and its hands were clenching the earth as if to ask for a last time the always futile question. The naked shoulders were hunched together in anguish, and he could easily conceive the expression of pain that should have been on the corpse's mouth. But the corpse lay there without a head, and Red ached dully as he realized the impossibility of ever seeing that man's face. There was only a bloody fragment at the terminus of the neck. The body seemed to lie in a casing of silence.
>
> Abruptly Red realized he was sober and very weary. The other men were already many yards ahead of him on the road, but he continued to look, drawn by some emotion he could not express. Very deep inside himself he was thinking that this was a man who had once wanted things, and the thought of his own death was always a little unbelievable to him. The man had had a childhood, a youth, and a young manhood, and there had been dreams and memories. Red was realizing with surprise and shock, as if he were looking at a corpse for the first time, that a man was really a very fragile thing. (216)

These two paragraphs affirm the power of the corpse to embody and communicate pain. The body's morbid eloquence is attributed to two factors: its seeming wholeness and the question implicit in the gesture of its hands—the universal, "always futile" question of why we must die. This question is, of course, central to Mailer's critique of war. Although the torso is intact, the soldier's head has been destroyed. Witnessing this devastating injury—the removal of the site of the self, intellect, language—Red longs to look the man in the face, echoing Minetta's earlier desire to see the face of the dead man in the infirmary. Both men respond to and reject the silent "casing" imposed by death, the erasure of the man.

Red's experience is, literally, a sobering one. It is also intensely personal.

It sets him apart from the other members of his squad, who have headed back to camp, at the same time that it forges a bond between him and the dead man at his feet. His thoughts transform the headless "it" into a child, a youth, and a young man who "wanted things" and could not believe in the reality of his own death. And for a moment it is unclear who the "he" is: Red or the Japanese soldier. Red realizes with a shock how truly fine the line is that separates the living from the dead, the Japanese from the Americans, and man from man. It is the same, though less eloquent, realization that Wilson has had earlier that day when he "prodded a corpse with the butt of a Japanese rifle and made a face. 'Goddam carrion, that's all we are, men, goddam carrion'" (213).

Scarry views pain as essentially isolating. Empathy is predicated upon comprehending the feelings of others, and if pain is incomprehensible to those not experiencing it, then this limits, perhaps even precludes, the possibility for empathy. Red's recognition of the dead man's common humanity and suffering, and even Wilson's comment that "we" are all just carrion, reveal that Mailer does not place the same limitations on empathy. That being said, *The Naked and the Dead* is a profoundly pessimistic novel. As Carol Schloss describes in her chapter on Norman Mailer and combat photography: "Mailer knew that the terrors of war came not only from the aggression of the enemy, but also from a sense of victimization within the inexorable machine, a sense of powerlessness within the iron purposes of one's own military organization" (238). The novel's forceful anti-war message highlights the shocking waste of life that war creates:

> [Red] remembered an argument he had with Toglio about a clipping of an editorial one of the men received from his mother. "Did the G.I.s Die in Vain?"
>
> He snorted. Who didn't know the answer? Of course they died in vain, any G.I. knew the score. The war was just t.s. to them who had to fight it. (578)

Mailer acknowledges that fear limits the efficacy of human empathy, as well. It is the struggle between compassion and fear that makes Martinez's thoughts just before he ambushes a young Japanese soldier so poignant:

> Martinez had a sense of unreality. What was to keep him from touching him, greeting him? They were men. The entire structure of war wavered in his brain for a moment, almost tottered, and then was restored by a returning wash of fear. (594)

It is fear that paralyzes Red, and prevents him from rebelling against Sergeant Croft and the system he represents; just as, arguably, it is fear that eggs Croft on to further violence. Still, Mailer's vision situates the individual's experience as the seat of empathy.

To imagine the pain of another human, to foster, however covertly, a sense of collective well being, is to resist the dehumanizing effects of the war machine. Red articulates this to himself as he and the remaining members of the platoon are transported back to the base:

> You carried it alone as long as you could, and then you weren't strong enough to take it any longer. You kept fighting everything, and everything broke you down until in the end you were just a little goddam bolt holding on and squealing when the machine went too fast.
>
> He had to depend on other men, he needed other men now, and he didn't know how to go about it. Deep within him were the first nebulae of an idea, but he would not phrase it. If they all stuck together . . . (703–704)

Despite the pessimism of the novel, and despite the ultimate failure to save Wilson, the act of trying to save him is perhaps the most important action taken in the book, because it affirms the significance of the individual to the humanity of the group. After being shot in the stomach, Wilson is carried toward the ocean, and evacuation, by a group of fellow soldiers—first six, then four, and eventually only Goldstein and Ridges. The progress of the litter-bearers, like that of the soldiers on the mountain, is marked by torturous exertion:

> [Goldstein] had suffered too much in these past two days; he had traversed all the first nauseas of fatigue, the stupors that followed, the exaltation close to fever. There were as many levels to pain as to pleasure. Once his will had forbidden him to collapse,

> Goldstein burrowed deeper and deeper through exhaustion and agony, never quite plumbing the pit of it. But he was in a stage now where all the banal proportions were gone. His eyes functioned enough for him to notice automatically where he walked; he heard and smelled isolated little events; he even felt some pain from his racked body; but all this was separate from him, like an object he might hold in his hand. His mind was both blunted and exposed, naked and stupefied. (672–673)

Unlike the soldiers on the mountain, the litter carriers are struggling to save the life of a fellow soldier. And there is no question as to whether his pain is real; Wilson's pain is as real to them as if it were their own: "Their bodies felt powerless and clumsy; each time [Wilson] groaned they winced with guilt and empathy, and the torments of his wound seemed to pass through the handles of the stretcher up into their arms" (624).

Brown and Goldstein are particularly affected by their contact with Wilson. Eventually, Brown's exhaustion will force him to abandon the rescue mission—leaving only Ridges and Goldstein to complete the journey—but before this, he holds himself accountable for Wilson's well-being and, to a certain extent, for his pain, as he senses a growing connection between himself and Wilson, a melding of their bodies and perceptions:

> Brown continued to massage Wilson's forehead. In the darkness, Wilson's face seemed connected to him, an extension of his fingers. . . . every quiver, every painful gesture of Wilson's body traveled intimately through Brown's fingers, through his arms, deep into his mind and heart. Without realizing it, he winced when Wilson winced. . . . For a few minutes [Wilson] was more vital to Brown than any other man or woman had ever been. (536–537)

Goldstein shares a similar experience—a physical rather than conceptual empathy:

> Wilson's suffering had affected Goldstein oddly; slowly, keeping pace with his exhaustion, it had entered his own body. When Wilson screamed, Goldstein felt a twinge; if the litter lurched

> abruptly, Goldstein's stomach plummeted as if he were dropping in an elevator. And every time Wilson pleaded for water Goldstein was thirsty again. (668)

With time, Goldstein's relationship with Wilson becomes more complex. Moving slowly down from the hills, Goldstein repeats to himself a conversation that he and his grandfather had, in which his grandfather said, "Yehudah Halevy wrote that Israel is in the heart of all nations. What attacks the body attacks the heart. And the heart is also the conscience, which suffers for the sins of the nations" (483). In Goldstein's mind, Wilson is gradually transformed from an individual soldier into a symbol of this nation of Israel, "the heart of all nations":

> [Goldstein] lunged along, carrying the litter through habit, not conscious of the torments of his body. His mind had turned inward; he could not have concentrated more intensely if he had been blind. . . .
>
> "Israel is the heart of all nations." It was the conscience and the raw exposed nerve; all emotion passed through it. But it was more than that; it was the heart that suffered when any part of the body was ill.
>
> And Wilson was the heart now. Goldstein did not say this to himself, he did not even think it, but the idea worked through him beneath the level of speech. (672–673)

By becoming the heart, Wilson registers all the suffering and all the outrages of conscience experienced by the men who carry him, the men who fought with him, and even the men who fought against him. He is the heart of the nation, not in a patriotic sense, but in the sense of a nation of human kind. The teachings in the Mishnah Sanhedrin emphasize this relationship further: " . . . whoever rescues a single soul from the children of man, Scripture credits him as though he had saved a whole world" (Mishnayoth, Sanhedrin 4:5). Goldstein must do everything within his physical powers, and more, to try to save this man, to save the world.

But he cannot do it. War makes that salvation impossible. The odds are awful and the struggle too hard, and eventually the heart dies, though the body—in the form of Goldstein and Ridges—continues on. "Ridges and

Goldstein reeled forward like blind men, their bodies," like those of the Japanese dead, "expressing a mute eloquence" (679).

Because Scarry believes that, ultimately, pain is incommunicable, she cannot place empathy in the pivotal role that Mailer does. She must look for other means of challenging our recourse to warfare as a strategy for resolving conflict. But is pain incommunicable? Even if we accept Scarry's argument that the body in pain cannot speak for itself, the efficacy with which Mailer writes about damaged bodies, about bodies in pain, raises the question: who *can* speak for the body? Who articulates pain? Both Mailer and Scarry could reasonably respond: "We do." Although their approaches differ, both authors share a fundamental opposition to war, and through their writings, they draw our attention to the profound waste and destruction of warfare. Their texts envision human beings as both the most powerful and yet the most vulnerable of creatures, the most destructive and the most in need of protection. And in these two works, both authors take on the great challenge of "hold[ing] steadily visible" the reality of pain, in hopes of making "the entire structure of war waver" before us.

NOTES

1. Scarry describes most attempts at confining pain to language in these terms (60).
2. She notes this, herself, in her discussion of Sophocles's rendering of Philoctetes' cries of pain (5).

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