THE NEW MORALITY OF CATCH-22: CONVENTION AND INNOVATION IN THE WAR THEME

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CONTENTS

Introduction

By the beginning of this decade it had become an accepted term of critical currency to dismiss the literature of World War II as offering, at best, nothing more than a faint reflection of that of the Great War. In both England[1] and America the assumption was that the second war had failed to invigorate the creative intelligence as powerfully as had the first; that because the second war produced writing inferior to that of Hemingway, Dos Passos, or the War Poets, it had somehow been a less traumatic experience than that of 1914-18. Although the more recent war had been as bloody and as vicious, and indeed more widespread and destructive, it had not activated the very roots of experience so powerfully as to engender another movement like the Lost Generation. In other words, it was felt that the moral or spiritual basis of life had been less radically affected, if, indeed, such a foundation had existed at all. The chief spokesman in America for those who deprecate the writing of the second war has been John Aldridge, whose After The Lost Generation is an attempt to put into perspective the relation between the writers of both wars. His admission that the novels of World War II are a product of "a war even more profoundly disturbing than the first",[2] is followed by a diagnosis of the failure of men like Norman Mailer,

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[1] See Anthony Burgess, The Novel Now (New York, 1967), pp. 48-54.

[2] John Aldridge, After The Lost Generation (New York, 1963), p. 87.

Irwin Shaw, and Vance Bourjaily to reproduce the impact of First World War writing. Aldridge believes that:

> it is in the material itself with which their novels must be concerned that the new writers face their greatest difficulty. Although they have arrived at the end of the tradition of loss, negation, and revolt, and have known none of its benefits, they have inherited the conditions out of which that tradition emerged. They are finding that modern life is still basically purposeless, that the typical condition of modern man is still doubt, confusion, and fear. But because they have never known life otherwise and were not exposed, as their predecessors were, to the process by which it became as it now is, they can write of it from neither the perspective of protest nor that of disillusionment and loss.[1]

Aldridge is undoubtedly correct in his claim that the men who attempted to depict in fiction the experience of the Second World War began with less idealism, possessed fewer illusions than had their elders. But from such an assumption it followed that the present generation of writers would not reveal the same panache in analyzing the effects of war as did that of Hemingway, Dos Passos, and e.e. cummings. The effects of that experience, asserted Aldridge, would rapidly exhaust themselves and the attention of the writers would soon be focussed elsewhere. Of the novelists with whom Aldridge was concerned in 1951 this proved to be a fairly accurate prognosis, with men like Mailer and Gore Vidal losing interest in the war situation.

Aldridge's stand on the literature of the Lost Generation relies heavily on the contention that the merits of that school assume significance

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[1] Ibid., p. 90.

as they relate to moral and cultural undercurrents, as they articulate the spiritual unrest of the times. In the course of his discussion, Aldridge makes it plain that Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Fitzgerald were men influenced by the war, rather than writing about the war. When they do come into contact with the war situation itself, as in A Farewell To Arms or in cummings' The Enormous Room, they illustrate the results of war on a type of character or on a social group. The same applies to Faulkner's Soldiers' Pay and Sartoris, and to Dos Passos' Three Soldiers. They are very little concerned with the question of authentic combat description, for example, and Hemingway himself has said that in Dos Passos' Three Soldiers, a book aimed at recording the soldier's experience, "The dialogue rings false and the actual combat is completely unconvincing."[1] The primary concern of these writers is with the problems of disillusion, re-adjustment, and the re-moulding of mores in the light of the lessons taught by war. In this sense, The Sun Also Rises is as much a war novel as A Farewell To Arms. War descriptions usually serve an ancillary purpose in the American fiction which came out of World War I. While Sassoon was hammering out his message that:

> - there's things in war one dare not tell
> Poor father sitting safe at home, who reads
> Of dying heroes and their deathless deeds . . . .
> (Remorse, ll. 12-14)

and while Remarque, Barbusse, and Hasek were recording the horrors and inanities of war with a similarly urgent realism, Ernest Hemingway was describing spiritual retreats and collapses in Frederick Henry and

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[1] Ernest Hemingway, Introduction to Men at War (New York, 1960), p.9.

Nick Adams. This preoccupation with analyzing the effects of the war on morality and the psyche is part of what Malcolm Cowley calls "the spectatorial attitude",[1] the sense, as Frederick Henry puts it, of the war's being "no more dangerous . . . than war in the movies."[2] Essentially a dilettante of war, his position mirrors that of those, like Hemingway and cummings, who volunteered for units like the Norton Harjes Ambulance Corps. For Henry the war is at a distance, and he remains a connoisseur of courage and cowardice, his situation neoromantic.

For the Hemingways and Eliots of the period following the first war, the real meaning of that war lay largely in its ramifications in the spheres of ethics and aesthetics. The war acted as a catalyst, symbolized the dissolution of an age, and the writing of that epoch leaves a literary record of the erosion of outmoded values and the search for substitute techniques and media of expression. In the case of Hemingway, rejection of war in A Farewell To Arms leads to the establishment of an alternative code, that of an inchoate 'aficion'. In the hands of the extremists the retreat from chaos manifested itself in the pursuit of pure form in the writings of Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and others. Aldridge attaches great significance to such technical innovation, and regards the stylistic idiosyncrasies of Hemingway and e.e. cummings as a symptom of the powerful influence on them of the wartime environment. Although for the Lost Generation the war called for a complete re-

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[1]Cited by Aldridge in After The Lost Generation, p. 5.

[2]Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (Harmondsworth, Middx., 1965), p. 33.

orientation in every department of their lives, there are signs that the roots of a more widespread movement had been planted before the beginning of war in Europe, and that the advent of war merely absorbed the American expatriates into the search for new standards. In his Preludes, T.S. Eliot had already envisioned "The burnt-out ends of smoky days", and Joyce had begun his experimentation in Ulysses before the coming of war. The Lost Generation were caught up in an inevitable and large-scale upheaval, and the experience of the Great War was to provide a core to which their struggle for articulation was consistently to return. That there was no parallel situation of literary and cultural turmoil at the time of World War II is an important factor in the failure of the later fiction to strike so profound a chord as that of the first war. It is this consideration which Aldridge appears to overlook when he says that:

> the new war novelists seem, for the most part, incapable of technical discoveries and resigned to working within the tradition handed down from the Twenties. One explanation is that the experience of war is no longer new and, consequently, does not require a new method of presentation.[1]

The fact that the critical equipment used for the fiction of World War I will prove inadequate when applied to that of the second war rests largely in the differing natures of those wars, moral as well as physical. The first war was shown to be futile and ultimately pointless in its every aspect, and it is a sense of anger, futility, and waste which colours much of the literature of that time. Malcolm Cowley has detected the message of simple pacifism behind much of that writing.

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[1] After the Lost Generation, p. 88.

Citing General Pershing's remark in 1918 that "We are here to be killed", Cowley adds:

> This background has to be kept in mind when we are judging the books that grew out of World War I. The military leaders of the time, and most of the politicians too, had shown their inability to think except in quantities of material and numbers of corpses. The young men who wrote the books were in revolt because their elders had betrayed them and slaughtered their friends and because they believed that the world would be better if all the principles of the elders were set aside. They said, and deeply felt, "The war was wrong," then rushed on to a broader conclusion: "All wars are evil, like the munitions makers who foment them for dividends and like the governments that order young men to be killed."[1]

Although A Farewell To Arms is pacific if not explicitly pacifist, Hemingway endorses Cowley's cynicism towards those who wrote that "All wars are evil." Hemingway was unable to find anything "permanent and representative"[2] in Le Feu, by Henri Barbusse, because "His whole book was a protest and an attitude. The attitude was that he hated it."[3] Hemingway does not even bother to comment on All Quiet On The Western Front, because, like Le Feu, it gives expression only to hatred and despair without offering solutions to the dilemma. Such a comprehensive

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[1] Malcolm Cowley, "War Novels : After Two Wars" in Modern American Fiction : Essays in Criticism, ed. A. Walton Litz, (New York, 1963), pp. 310-311.

[2] Men At War, p. 9.

[3] Ibid., p. 9.

judgement has no place in World War II literature, continues Cowley, where

> the new novelists do not presume to judge the war. They do not suggest that it was foolish in its aims or that, given the temper of the people, it might have been avoided by wiser statesmanship. They are not in revolt against the war itself so much as they are disappointed by the fruits of victory.[1]

The issues of the second war were more readily definable, and antagonistic political ideologies helped provide a legitimate framework for national antipathies. Thus Nazism and Fascism are seen as threatening the 'American Way of Life', and, while showing their disappointment, writers like John Horne Burns, Norman Mailer and James Jones do not pontificate as to the legitimacy of "the war itself."

The critical stance adopted by Aldridge and Cowley has in many ways been proved premature, and it is clear that the effects of World War II are still showing themselves dramatically in contemporary fiction. In an era which has seen the advent of the atomic bomb, which has seen the fact of Hiroshima and Nagasaki translated into the fabric of popular fiction in Peter George's Doctor Strangelove and Burdick and Wheeler's Fail-Safe, it is to be anticipated that the new attitudes to war and its literature will have evolved under such pressures. Joseph Heller's Catch-22 comes as a refreshing and stimulating answer to those, like Aldridge, who assure us that the "perspective of protest" is untenable for the descendants of the Lost Generation, or to those of Cowley's persuasion, who discern in the modern writer a reluctance to commit

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[1] Modern American Fiction, p. 312.

himself in so dramatic a fashion to the tenets of the anti-war school. Catch-22 challenges these statements at every step. By means of the specialized circumstances of Heller's attack, the book is eloquent in its denunciation of "the war itself". It is able to assail the whole rationale behind the idea of warfare, and with a technique which, if not altogether as original as it may appear, at least signals an advance on the conventional war novels of the Forties and Fifties and refutes Aldridge's claim that the new writers are working exclusively "within the tradition handed down from the Twenties." Coming hard on the heels of the standard World War II fiction, it offers an interesting indication of a revival of the anti-war spirit in its simplest form. In many respects the main protagonist of Catch-22, Captain John Yossarian, is a result of antecedent characters like Remarque's Paul or Hemingway's Frederick Henry. Now, however, instead of a resigned fatalism or a melancholy romanticism, we have a character motivated by a passionate and primal egoism. Yossarian, true to Aldridge's maxim, embodies neither the feeling of disillusion nor of loss. He has never been under any illusion as to the reality of war, but is kept prisoner by the inexorable law of Catch-22, which rules that he must continue to risk his life at a time when the war is as good as won. There is no question of political right or wrong, nor of ideological altercations. A new kind of positive is grafted onto the old anti-war theme in the shape of a simple logic of survival.

In the course of this paper I hope to show that in Catch-22 Heller has drawn upon three separate traditions of war writing. The elements of parody in the novel are based upon conventions of the Mailer-Jones school of realistic war writing, but more generally are aimed

against the fatuous glamorization of the war theme which characterizes the 'war story', the rash of books, movies and magazines in which the United States Marine Corps is invariably seen to triumph against the swarms of 'Nips'.[1] In as much as Heller's appeal is launched through the agency of comedy, then the novel represents a fresh departure in another direction, a unique fusion of the serious and the comic. Situations rooted in World War II have never been so completely taboo for the humourist as those of the Great War appear to have been. The development of the humourous war novel, like Thomas Heggen's Mister Roberts, lent added impetus to an accompanying movement in the movie and television. It is now perfectly acceptable, for example, to model a popular television series on life in a P.O.W. camp in Germany during World War II. Although this trend has rarely purported to offer any valid moral slant on its subject material, the exploitation of a wartime situation by the humourist has opened up a field of expression denied the legitimate artist of the first war (Hasek's The Good Soldier Schweik is the exception). Thus, Heller is allowed to add another dimension to a theme which, ten years ago, appeared almost exhausted. Lastly in Catch-22 we find a partial return to the classic anti-war writing of the Great War. Heller claims his novel was inspired by the most recent case of American military involvement. Vietnam, he says,

> was the war I had in mind; a war fought without military provocation, a war in which the real enemy is no longer the other side but someone

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[1]For an example of this heavily stylized class of war writing, see Robert Leckie, The March To Glory (New York, 1968).

> allegedly on your side. The ridiculous war I felt lurking in the future when I wrote the book.[1]

The fortuitous contemporaneity of the novel does not detract from its broader significance, nor from its place within the context of anti-war fiction finding its source in Remarque's archetype.

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[1] As reported in an article by Josh Greenfeld, "22 Was Funnier Than 14", The New York Times Book Review (March 3rd, 1968), pp. 1, 49-51, 53.

CHAPTER 1

Catch-22 and the Anti-War Convention

> I like not such grinning honour as Sir Walter hath: give me life: which if I can save, so; if not, honour comes unlooked for, and there's an end.
>
> Falstaff, in Henry IV Part I, Act V, sc. iv. 115-119.

> I'm not running away from my responsibilities. I'm running to them. There's nothing negative about running away to save my life.
>
> Yossarian, in Joseph Heller, Catch-22 (New York, 1967), p. 461.

The rise of the anti-war novel may be traced to the experience of the First World War, a war which demonstrated emphatically that tanks were more effective than the most valiant cavalry charge, and that the pseudo-chivalric ritual of pistol, sabre and individual honour had been reduced at one stroke to a system of chaotic and indiscriminate mass-slaughter. If the moral behind the sentimentalism of Tennyson's The Charge of The Light Brigade had failed to register in 1854, then the introduction of mustard-gas, the railway-gun and the aeroplane as the new instruments of destruction in 1914 announced finally the collapse of the old code. It is this collapse that William Faulkner describes in Sartoris, where the struggle of the people of Jefferson, Mississippi, to come to terms with the new order may be taken as representative of a universal predicament. In the most celebrated of the first anti-war novels, Remarque's All Quiet On The Western Front and Hemingway's A Farewell To Arms,

it is the strong sense of disillusion and a feeling of betrayal which are the recurrent themes. The protagonist in Remarque's novel is forced to confess at one point that " I believe we are lost",[1] "we are forlorn like children."[2] For Paul Bäumer, like Frederick Henry, all the reliable guide-lines have suddenly been removed, leaving a vacuum in which, if a simple resignation like Paul's is impracticable, then a fresh code must be created, a set of self-imposed criteria like that of the American expatriates in The Sun Also Rises.

A major factor in the sense of disorientation in World War I novels is the difference between rhetoric and reality, the disparity between empty words and cold fact which is revealed as the young soldiers actually witness combat and death. As the noble reasons given for the war begin to turn sour, so there develops in those fighting that war a strong animosity toward those they feel chiefly responsible, the elder generation. Paul Bäumer is fairly typical in expressing his feeling of having been duped by the likes of Kantorek, his old schoolmaster:

> We often made fun of them and played jokes on them, but in our hearts we trusted them. The idea of authority, which they represented, was associated in our minds with a greater insight and a manlier wisdom. But the first death we saw shattered this belief. We had to recognize that our generation was more to be trusted than theirs. They surpassed us only in phrases and in cleverness. The first bombardment showed us our mistake, and under it the world as they had taught it to us broke in pieces.[3]

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[1] Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet On The Western Front (New York, 1967), p. 12.

[2] Ibid., p. 12

[3] Ibid., p. 12

As a result of this, Paul sees the war as a means to enlightenment ("we had suddenly learned to see"),[1] accompanied by the realization that they "were all at once terribly alone."[2] Frederick Henry, in A Farewell To Arms, echoes many of Paul's sentiments. Henry was:

> always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain . . . I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it . . . Abstract words such as glory, honour, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.[3]

Henri Barbusse lends further support to these views in denouncing the "armchair patriots" in his Under Fire (Le Feu) :

> There are those who admire the exchange of flashing blows, who hail like women the bright colours of uniform; those whom military music and the martial ballads poured upon the public intoxicate as with brandy; the dizzy-brained, the feeble-minded, the superstitious, the savages.
>
> . . . .
>
> They pervert the most admirable of moral principles. How many are the crimes of which they have made virtues merely by dowering them with the word "national"? They distort even truth itself. For the truth which is eternally the same they substitute each their national truth. So many nations, so many truths; and thus they falsify and twist the truth.
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> . . . .

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[1] Ibid., p. 12.

[2] Ibid., p. 12.

[3] A Farewell To Arms, p. 144.

> The first man continued. "They'll say those things to us by way of paying us with glory, and to pay themselves, too, for what they haven't done. But military glory - it isn't even true for us common soldiers . . . the soldier's glory is a lie, like every other fine-looking thing in war."[1]

The primary objection of each of these writers is to the failure of conventional terminology to relate to actual experience, and as such their dissent is founded on a question of semantics. They see the essence of words like "sacred" and "glorious" as having been perverted to such a degree as to render them meaningless, or "obscene", in the modern context. Therefore these terms must either become totally redundant, or else be merged into a new system of ethics where they will have appropriate referents. However, this destruction of the antiquated shibboleths does not extend throughout the entire spectrum of language, and it is possible for other abstract terms, like "bravery" and "cowardice", to survive the first war and yet retain their original connotations. In All Quiet On The Western Front, Paul can still make the proud claim that:

> We were no mutineers, no deserters, no cowards - . . . they [the elders] were very free with all those expressions. We loved our country as much as they; we went courageously into every action.[2]

It is still possible for young men who have rejected the rhetoric and pharisaism of the older generation to attach importance to ideas like

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[1] Henri Barbusse, Under Fire (New York, 1917), pp. 354-356.

[2] All Quiet On The Western Front, p. 12.

"patriotism" and "courage", and to use the term "cowards" in an automatically pejorative sense. For Paul, these values still survive and the meaning of each remains so clear as to render definition superfluous. In later war fiction it becomes the fashion to analyze the basic qualities of "cowardice" and "courage", and in his introduction to Men at War, Hemingway offers the following summary:

> Cowardice, as distinguished from panic, is almost always simply a lack of ability to suspend the functioning of the imagination. Learning to suspend your imagination and live completely in the very second of the present minute with no before and no after is the greatest gift a soldier can acquire.[1]

Other writers, including Norman Mailer and James Jones, have attempted similar examinations. In whatever degree their interpretations may diverge they are unanimous in designating as "courageous" any act which shows daring and disregard for personal safety in the face of immediate danger. Paul Bäumer's claim to have acted "courageously" is supported by his feat of carrying his wounded friend, Kat, on his shoulders while under fire, and in A Farewell To Arms, Frederick Henry kills an Italian sergeant who would rather flee to safety than assist his comrades. Henry would not regard his "separate peace" as "cowardice" since at the time of his escape his immediate prospect was to die a pointless death, and since the war was none of his concern anyway. In providing Henry with this extenuating circumstance, in having him engage in a peripheral rather than a crucial area of activity, Hemingway is assured of our sympathy for his protagonist. (It is worth noting that Heller too allows Yossarian's special circumstances to influence

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[1] Men At War, p. 17.

his "separate peace" in Catch-22.) However, both Paul and Frederick Henry see "bravery", in one form or another, as a desirable norm of conduct for the soldier, and imply at the same time that "cowardice" is to be reviled.

In Catch-22 a further alteration in semantics has taken place. It is no longer a matter of attacking abstract terms like "glory"; now it is the basic assumptions behind the ideas of "bravery" and "cowardice" which are subjected to scrutiny. Rather than attempt to dissect these qualities and to define their component stimuli, Heller demonstrates, through Yossarian's example, that these values are no longer inviolate and that, given the modern war situation, they can only reasonably be equated with madness and sanity respectively. In order to show the magnitude of Heller's assault on this area of morality, I have chosen for comparison with Catch-22 not another anti-war novel, but a work which celebrates the entire panoply of traditional martial ideals, which immortalizes the qualities of "honour", "bravery", and "self-sacrifice". Ernst Jünger, in The Storm of Steel (published in 1929, the same year as All Quiet On The Western Front), clings tenaciously to the ideal of a military Germany, and endows all that he recounts with an inflated aura of heroics. In most respects, the book has little in common with either All Quiet On The Western Front or A Farewell To Arms, for the ardour and naïveté of the young writer often mislead him into repeating precisely those clichés which Paul and Frederick Henry so vehemently denounce. His opinions crystallize the extreme of every attitude, from "What is more sublime than to face death at the head of a hundred men?"[1],

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[1]Ernst Jünger, The Storm Of Steel (London, 1930), p. 27.

to "there is nothing to set against self-sacrifice that is not pale, insipid and miserable."[1] The writer frequently permits himself use of epithets like "sportsmanlike" and "chivalrous" when describing warfare, and from time to time indulges himself in the most banal of platitudes:

> Somehow, it comes to one quite simply that one's existence is part of an eternal circuit, and that the death of a single individual is no such great matter.[2]

Despite his contact with the horrific realities of war,[3] the limited scope of his vision prevents him from seeing what war is really like, and the nadir of his obtuseness is reached in an utterance like the following, where he is considering the changes wrought upon him by the war:

> Now I looked back: four years of development in the midst of a generation predestined to death, spent in caves, smoke-filled trenches, and shell-illumined wastes . . . a monstrous calendar full of hardships and privation, divided by the red-letter days of battles. And almost without any thought of mine, the idea of the Fatherland had been distilled from all these afflictions in a clearer and brighter essence. That was the final winnings in a game on which so often all had been staked: the nation was no longer for me an empty thought veiled in symbols; and how could it have been otherwise when I had seen so many die for its sake . . . without a thought?[4]

It is an example of the very kind of thoughtlessness which makes war possible. Although Paul and Frederick Henry would no doubt dismiss such

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[1] Ibid., p. 220.

[2] Ibid., p. 144

[3] See especially ibid., pp. 21, 99, 231.

[4] Ibid., p. 316.

sentiments as ludicrously inappropriate, there remain several areas in which the three find partial agreement. It is with regard to the questions of "bravery" and "cowardice" that their attitudes most closely coincide, and I again refer to Jünger because he offers a group of characteristically dramatic definitions. In the Chapter called "Langemarck" he simulates the emotions of a soldier tempted by thoughts of desertion:

> Well, why don't you jump up and rush off into the night till you collapse in safety behind a bush like an exhausted animal? Why do you hang on there all the time, you and your braves? There are no superior officers to see you. Yet someone watches you. Unknown perhaps to yourself, there is someone within you who keeps you to your post by the power of two mighty spells: Duty and Honour. You know that this is your place in the battle, and that a whole people relies on you to do your job. You feel, "If I leave my post, I am a coward in my own eyes, a wretch who will ever after blush at every word of praise."[1]

Elsewhere, he declares:

> I have always pitied the coward, in whom battle arouses a series of hellish tortures, while the spirit of the brave man merely rises the higher to meet a chain of exciting experiences.[2]

While these passages magnify the inclinations of Paul and Frederick Henry, it is a general rule in war fiction before Catch-22 (with the exception of The Good Soldier Schweik),[3] that such precepts as Jünger's are to be regarded

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[1] Ibid., p. 180.

[2] Ibid., p. 158.

[3] I exempt The Good Soldier Schweik from this judgement because, of the protagonists of World War I fiction, Schweik comes closest to endorsing Yossarian's point of view. Like Yossarian, Schweik is an anti-hero who knows simply that it is good to live and bad to die.

as indigenous to the genre, and that the qualities of "bravery" and "cowardice" persist unaffected by war experience.

In Catch-22 Joseph Heller effects a complete subversion in every aspect of traditional war morality. In the process of this reorganization the concept of "bravery" becomes explicitly associated with insanity and that of "cowardice" comes to signify normality. Seen through Yossarian's eyes, to risk one's life under any circumstances, or even to be willing to do so, represents the extreme of lunacy. If the machine-gun rendered obsolete the qualities of chivalry and "heroism", then the highly mechanized nature of Yossarian's branch of service has succeeded in destroying any possibility of individual "honour". Yossarian has "decided to live forever or die in the attempt",[1] and in the face of Catch-22 he retaliates by introducing what Robert Brustein has called "a new morality based on an old ideal, the morality of refusal".[2] Rather than attempt to apply to his own situation the legacy of "courage" handed down from Paul Bäumer, Yossarian has invented his own brand of morality, based on the assumption that all those around him are crazy. In one of the early scenes in the novel he explains to the chaplain:

> "Insanity is contagious. This is the only sane ward in the whole hospital. Everybody is crazy but us. This is probably the only sane ward in the whole world, for that matter."[3]

The chaplain himself endorses this view later. Similarly, we learn of

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[1] Catch-22, p. 30.

[2] Robert Brustein, "The Logic of Survival in a Lunatic World", The New Republic (November 13, 1961), p. 13.

[3] Catch-22, p. 14.

Yossarian that:

> Everywhere he looked was a nut, and it was all a sensible young gentleman like himself could do to maintain his perspective amid so much madness. And it was urgent that he did, for he knew his life was in peril.[1]

In the lunatic world of Pianosa it is self-preservation which is at a premium. Against the corruption and illogicality of wartime Pianosa, Heller sets the simplest of alternatives -- the right of the individual to exist. It is toward this end that Yossarian's energies are directed.

It is this reduction of the anti-war appeal to its fundamentals which Leslie Fiedler has seen as assisting in the death of the hero in contemporary fiction. The disappearance of this type, Fiedler asserts, is a result of the nullification of the old ideal of "honour". He summarizes his argument in the following passage:

> The antiwar novel did not end war, but it memorializes the end of something almost as deeply rooted in the culture of the West: the concept of Honour. It comes into existence at the moment when in the West, men, still nominally Christian, come to believe that the worst thing of all is to die - more exactly, perhaps, the moment when for the first time in a thousand years it is possible to admit that no cause is worth dying for. There are various mitigated forms of this new article of faith: that no cause is worth the death of all humanity, or of a whole nation, or simply of millions of lives: but inevitably it approaches the formulation: no cause is worth the death of a man, no cause is worth the death of me![2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 21.

[2] Foreword to Hasek's The Good Soldier Schweik (Toronto, 1963), p. ix.

Fiedler nominates Joseph Heller as one of those writers who

> continue to feel obliged to carry to the world the comic-pathetic news it is still reluctant to hear: the Hero is dead.[1]

The popularity and impact of Catch-22 may suggest that the world is less reluctant to hear the news than Mr. Fiedler seems to imagine, but it is nevertheless true that a revolution has taken place in the moral armament of the new "Hero". This has resulted, according to Mr. Fiedler, in "the Falstaffs and the Sancho Panzas"[2] of literature inheriting the earth. But the use of that generic term applied to the category of traditional anti-hero is in many ways inadequate to accommodate the modern situation. In Yossarian the anti-hero has undergone a radical transmutation. Mr. Fiedler touches briefly upon the major distinction between Yossarian and his antecedents when he observes that characters of the Falstaff-Sancho Panza line of succession:

> have been permitted to blaspheme against the courtly code precisely because those codes have been so secure. And, in any event, their cowardice has always spoken in prose or dialect, worn the garb of a servant or vassal, bowed the knee before an unchallenged master.[3]

To apply this dictum to the case of Yossarian is obviously unsatisfactory. Whereas it is true that Falstaff's speech on honour ("Who hath it? he that died a Wednesday"), is partially negated because of Falstaff's own cowardice and his inability to posit a more attractive code, Yossarian's position is strengthened

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[1] Waiting For The End (New York, 1965), p. 29.

[2] Ibid., p. 31.

[3] Foreword to The Good Soldier Schweik, p. x.

by his ability to present a cogent and persuasive case against the institutionalized madness, against established values no longer upheld by men of the integrity of Hal, but by charlatans of the Cathcart calibre. Moreover, unlike Falstaff or Schweik, Yossarian can question the value of "bravery" in the modern context with a first-hand knowledge. Unlike them, Yossarian has been obliged to take part in the experience which they so diligently eschew. In fighting and in himself being wounded, Yossarian has proved that the new anti-hero need not necessarily be a "coward". He had been capable of "brave" conduct before his refusal to fly more missions. At the time of Ferrara, he was able to attack the target for a second time "because he was brave then".[1] He experienced the "vile, excruciating dilemma of duty and damnation";[2] or Jünger's "hellish tortures", but chose to fulfil his duty. It is significant that Yossarian is the only airman to receive a medal during the course of the novel, but he is well aware of the real reason for the presentation. Although Colonel Korn concedes that:

> "After all, I suppose it did take a lot of courage to go over that target a second time with no other planes around to divert the anti aircraft fire . . . ."[3]

the authentic motivation for the award is summed up by Colonel Cathcart:

> "I don't give a damn about the men or the airplane. It's just that it looks lousy on the report. How am I going to cover up something like this in the report?"[4]

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[1] Catch-22, p. 141.

[2] Ibid., p. 141.

[3] Ibid., p. 143.

[4] Ibid., p. 142.

In order to attract attention away from the loss of Kraft's airplane they decide to "act boastfully about something we ought to be ashamed of"[1] by honouring Yossarian. Thus, he sees the real meaning of "bravery" disintegrate before his eyes. He neither witnesses nor enacts the death of "Honour", because "Honour" was killed at about the time of the American Civil War, as Paul and Frederick Henry discover. What Yossarian discovers is that "bravery" is as irrelevant in 1944 as "glory" and "Honour" were in 1914. He sees that "bravery" is no longer recognised for its traditional connotations, that it can be exploited by others for personal ambition, and, therefore, he deduces, that in future it must be taken as a symptom of irrationality. Accordingly, the egotism which had hitherto always been vilified as "cowardice" is to become a reliable token of sanity. We learn that while McWatt "did not have brains enough to be afraid"[2]:

> Yossarian did have brains enough and was, and the only thing that stopped him from abandoning his post under fire and scurrying back through the crawlway like a yellow-bellied rat was his unwillingness to entrust the evasive action out of target area to anybody else. There was nobody else in the world he would honor with so great a responsibility. There was nobody else he knew who was as big a coward.[3]

By a skilful arrangement of terms Heller indicates the complete volte-face that he is trying to achieve in the traditional war morality. "Honour" now belongs to the "coward".

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[1] Ibid., p. 143.

[2] Ibid., p. 51.

[3] Ibid., p. 51.

I have suggested that logic plays a significant part in Yossarian's moral position. Perhaps Yossarian's mastery of logic, or of what Heller calls "protective rationalization",[1] is emphasised by his being surrounded by eccentricity, and by a group of senior officers who are depicted as either maniacal sadists or incompetent boors. In such an intellectual milieu as Heller has created for Yossarian, the quality of cold logic can always be expected to survive virtually unscathed. Nevertheless, Yossarian's possession of this weapon denotes a further advancement on the conventional anti-hero figure. Whereas Sancho Panza embodies the stolid virtues of the peasant, and whereas Schweik is a self-confessed imbecile (although not altogether a fool), Yossarian is able to apply a nimble and incisive intelligence to his situation. I take the following passage from Catch-22 as an illustration of the plausibility of Yossarian's approach, and I believe it is worth quoting at such length because it reveals also several of the mainstreams in his scheme of self-justification. After Yossarian has divulged his plan of escape, Major Danby advises:

> "You must think only of the welfare of your country and the dignity of man."
> "Yeah," said Yossarian.
> "I mean it, Yossarian. This is not World War One. You must never forget that we're at war with aggressors who would not let either one of us live if they won."
> "I know that," Yossarian replied tersely, with a sudden surge of scowling annoyance. "Christ, Danby, I earned that medal I got, no matter what their reasons were for giving it to me. I've flown seventy goddam combat missions. Don't

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[1] Ibid., p. 372. For further examples of the same technique see pp. 107, 456.

> talk to me about fighting to save my country. I've been fighting all along to save my country. Now I'm going to fight a little to save myself. The country's not in danger any more, but I am."
> "The war's not over yet. The Germans are driving toward Antwerp."
> "The Germans will be beaten in a few months. And Japan will be beaten a few months after that. If I were to give up my life now, it wouldn't be for my country. It would be for Cathcart and Korn. So I'm turning my bomb-sight in for the duration. From now on I'm thinking only of me."
> Major Danby replied indulgently with a superior smile, "But Yossarian, suppose everyone felt that way."
> "Then I'd certainly be a damned fool to feel any other way, wouldn't I?"[1]

In a review-article[2] John Wain claims that Heller's placing the action of the book so near to the close of the war is a sign of his reluctance to commit himself unreservedly to the 'war is wrong' school. But even if this is the case, which I do not admit, it cannot be said to weaken Yossarian's appeal. For, to continue to fight at a time when Yossarian's participation will in no way affect the outcome would be tantamount to supporting men like Cathcart in their drive for promotion. In fact, Yossarian's decision is shown, under the circumstances, as the most moral one possible. It is this consideration which has prompted one critic to say of Heller's protagonist:

> Yossarian's anti-heroism is, in fact, a kind of inverted heroism . . . For, contrary to the armchair pronouncements of patriotic ideologues,

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[1] Ibid., p. 455.

[2] "A New Novel About Old Troubles", Critical Quarterly, (Summer, 1963), pp. 168-173.

> Yossarian's obsessive concern for survival makes him not only not morally dead, but one of the most morally vibrant figures in recent literature.[1]

If the character of Yossarian is without precedent or counterpart in the rest of anti-war fiction, this is not to be taken as an indication of the novel's uniqueness nor of its monopoly of a particular approach. There are signs that some of Heller's rationalizations on the anti-war theme have been disseminated among contemporaries writing out of a different milieu, and that works like Catch-22 and Patrick Ryan's How I Won The War embody the objections of a new generation of writers who, in spite of their differing environments, are bringing to some areas of anti-war literature a set of common preoccupations. How I Won The War is neither as ambitious nor as successful as Catch-22, but offers an instructive example of the way in which a British writer has duplicated several of Heller's arguments. Ryan intends his novel as a parody of the "memoir", the type of semi-auto-biography produced in such abundance by the military hierachy after the second war. Instead of such an illustrious personage, however, we are presented with the story of Ernest Goodbody, a "heavily-armed civilian", the ill-fated and naïve young Lieutenant whose career is punctuated by a series of well-intentioned blunders. He is the type of eager young officer who can always be relied upon to ask the wrong question at the wrong time, who marches nonchalantly through the war as if it were a glorified cricket-match, and who, when asked by a visiting Field-Marshal why he is standing

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[1] Robert Brustein, op. cit., p. 13.

guard over the latter's specially constructed latrine, has the misfortune to reply, "I am here, Field-Marshal, sir, at your convenience."[1] Goodbody is a mixture of Schweik and Nately in Catch-22. Like Schweik, he is used to highlight the unfathomable incompetence of the military as he comes into contact with officers as inept and certainly more corrupt than himself,[2] and, like Nately, he is used occasionally as a foil for opinions more realistic and accurate than his own. At one point in Ryan's novel, Goodbody is confronted by a character whose cynicism about the war and the question of "winning" and "losing" is in stark contrast to Goodbody's bland optimism. The stranger advises him:

> "Never take war too seriously. That's the trouble with the Aryans. They still take war seriously. The only nation that really knows anything about war is the Italians. They were engaged in scientific warfare when we were painting our arses bright blue and the Teutons were still copulating with apes. The Italians have had war. They've grown out of it. They've seen through it. They're the only true realists who know what to do about war . . . As soon as you're in it, get out of it . . . Get back to the important things of life like vino and Verdi and vulnerable virgins. Leave the knock-down, drag-out stuff to those not yet civilized enough to despise it . . ."[3]

Like the scene between Yossarian and Major Danby quoted earlier, the con-

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[1]Patrick Ryan, How I Won The War (London, 1967), p. 177.

[2]See ibid., p. 29.

[3]Ibid., p. 210.

versation is clearly a set-piece, designed for the exposition of views endorsed by the author. That Ryan supports what the reveller has to say is made clear by his providing him with "a V.C., two D.S.O's and three rows of variegated ribbon."[1] Compare the following excerpt from the exchange between Nately and the old man in the Roman brothel:

> "You put so much stock in winning wars," the grubby and iniquitous old man scoffed. "The real trick lies in losing wars, in knowing which wars can be lost. Italy has been losing wars for centuries, and just see how splendidly we've done nevertheless. France wins wars and is in a continual state of crisis. Germany loses and prospers. Look at our own recent history. Italy won a war in Ethiopia and promptly stumbled into serious trouble. Victory gave us such insane delusions of grandeur that we helped start a world war we hadn't a change of winning. But now that we are losing again, everything has taken a turn for the better, and we will certainly come out on top again if we succeed in being defeated."[2]

Apart from the similarity in dramatic form and technique, it is evident that Heller and Ryan are directing their attention toward the same area of rationale. They see a condition of immaturity or underdevelopment implicit in the idea of warfare, and they both appear to lionize the ineffectiveness of the Italian soldier. Together, they establish what Robert Brustein calls "the logic of survival"[3] as the antidote to involvement in war, claiming that survival is the great test of fitness to survive. The essence of this

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[1] Ibid., p. 215.

[2] Catch-22, p. 251.

[3] Robert Brustein, op. cit., p. 11.

outlook is contained in the old man's correction of Nately's assertion that "It's better to die on one's feet than live on one's knees" :

> "But I'm afraid you have it backward. It is better to live on one's feet than die on one's knees. That is the way the saying goes."[1]

Both Heller and Ryan write at a time when Catch-22 has found its most deadly nuclear form, and by now even the "logic of survival" is untenable. In reaction to this awareness, they have had recourse to another system of logic which affirms Fiedler's "no cause is worth the death of me" syndrome. In demonstrating that the "losers" are invariably the "winners", and vice-versa, they seek to obviate the whole question of "cause". No "cause" can be worthy since the winning of that "cause" ensures ultimate defeat. When taken a step further, this maxim posits defeat as the most worthwhile "cause". There is a simplicity and idealism at the root of this iconoclasm which Heller and Ryan would probably not be prepared to defend, for in the immediate contexts of their novels the practice of such a doctrine would involve the prospect of a situation like the one Major Danby pictures for Yossarian. It was as Hemingway said in Men At War when warning of the dangers of Fascism:

> Regardless of how this war was brought on . . . there is only one thing now to do. We must win it. We must win it at all costs and as soon as possible.
>
> . . . .
>
> But there are worse things than war; and all of them come with defeat. The more you hate war, the more you know

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[1] Catch-22, p. 254.

> that once you are forced into it . . . you have to win it. You have to win it and get rid of the people that made it and see that, this time, it never comes to us again.[1]

It would be foolish to suggest that the new writers would have advocated defeat in the face of what Hemingway said in 1942. Indeed, Heller has Yossarian berate Milo Minderbinder for "dealing with the enemy",[2] after Milo has contracted with the Germans to shoot down American aircraft at Orvieto. Where their new ethic assumes its greatest significance is in the light of the aftermath of such events as are depicted in Doctor Strangelove and Fail-Safe, where considerations of political ideology dwindle before such awful possibilities. It is surely with this in mind, the idea of a new kind of war which will permit no "winners", and where the soldier has no place, that Ryan chooses to close his novel with the following words from Goodbody's Epilogue. He is eulogizing the youth of Britain:

> I am confident that they will rally again to the Flag, look up in defiance as the mushroom cloud foams across the sky, face the nuclear fall-out with unflinching courage, and start a fresh page in our Glorious History as the symbols of the New Elizabethan Age, proud to be known as the first of the Heavily Radio-active Civilians.[3]

All the habitual elements of war rhetoric are here, "defiance", "courage",

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[1] Men At War, pp. 5-20.

[2] Catch-22, p. 262.

[3] How I Won The War, p. 256

"glorious", but beneath the shadow of "the mushroom cloud" they become ludicrous and pathetic. In this way, Heller and Ryan are able to state their case against warfare on the most elemental level. If All Quiet On The Western Front can be said to celebrate pacifism at the expense of "Honour", then Catch-22 records the passing of "courage" and "cowardice" from the vocabulary of war, and, with How I Won The War, announces the supercession of pacifism by defeatism as the new and most relevant anti-war morality.

CHAPTER II

The Humorous Antecedents of Catch-22

As part of the critical furore which greeted the publication of Catch-22 in 1961 there came a series of attempts to define the novel in terms of a wide variety of genres. The novel was caught in a cross-fire between those who saw it as essentially a result of already established conventions in war writing:

> Mr. Heller seems to have tried to combine in one novel the virtues of Norman Mailer's The Naked And The Dead with those of The Good Soldier Schweik.[1]

and those who sought outside that context for their analogues:

> Heller has certain technical similarities to the Marx Brothers, Max Schulman, Kingsley Amis, Al Capp, and S.J. Perelman, but his mordant intelligence [is] closer to that of Nathaniel West.[2]

After the early burst of reviews came the more sobered and perceptive judgements. These ranged through the whole gamut of literary classification, scoured every area of writing to find analogues for the novel's tone and technique. They saw Catch-22 as part of the 'black humour' tradition in the novel (which arranges Heller alongside Purdy, Barth, Friedman, and Donleavy)[3], or as a reproduction of the absurdist outlook

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[1] Spencer Klaw, review in New York Herald Tribune Books, October 15, 1961, p. 8.

[2] Robert Brustein, op.cit., p. 13.

[3] "The Black Humorists", Time, February 12, 1965, pp. 66-68.

found in the drama of Ionesco, Beckett, and Albee[1], or else as another testimony to the influence of the cinematic art upon the contemporary novel.[2] Most of these judgements contain some degree of accuracy, but it is apparent that among these critical pyrotechnics there was left one area of literature which received surprisingly little illumination, surprising because the convention of the humorous war novel, which arose in America after the Second World War, offers one of the closest and most obvious points of reference for Heller's novel.

The humorous war novel, represented by books like Mister Roberts, Ensign Pulver, Don't Go Near the Water, and sections of Captain Newman, M.D., is of a type which rarely attracts the attention of the major critics, yet it is in this genre that the idea of Catch-22 is partially rooted. While it would be erroneous to place Heller in direct line of descent from writers like Thomas Heggen and William Brinkley, it is clear that Heller has adapted various archetypal characters and situations which appear first in this genre. He adopts such prototypes as the senior officer nearly overwhelmed by his job and either on the verge of insanity or sadistically cruel (for Captain Morton of Mister Roberts and Ensign Pulver read Colonel Cathcart in Catch-22); the naïve young officer either conscientiously bound to regulation or desperately concerned with fulfilling his duty (for Ensign Keith of Mister Roberts read Clevinger, Havermeyer, and Piltchard and Wren in Catch-22); the inevitable 'Doc', also a common figure in the 'straight' war

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[1]Sanford Pinsker, "Heller's Catch-22: The Protest of a Puer Eternis", Critique VII (1964-65), 150-162.

[2]G.B. Mck. Henry, "Significant Corn - Catch-22", Melbourne Critical Review IX (1966), 133-144.

novel, occasionally involved in activities above and in spite of the call of duty, and generally a source of succour spiritual as well as medical (for Doc Donovan of Mister Roberts read Daneeka in Catch-22); the WACs or nurses who provide the element of romance (for those in Ensign Pulver read nurses Duckett and Cramer or the Roman prostitutes in Catch-22). In as much as Heller's novel is intrinsically humorous, he relies upon many types of verbal and situational comedy which are by no means peculiar to novels with a war setting, but there remains a core of comic material which appears regularly in the novel's military antecedents. Heller helps himself to devices like the conspiracy to embarrass or discomfort a senior officer, or the private feud between two comrades, or the particular lunatic scheme of a commanding officer intent on glory and/or publicity. Through an examination of Heller's application of these basic comic vehicles it will be seen that his technique is one of exaggeration or distortion. As an illustration of this, let us consider in greater detail some of the recurrent motifs of the humorous war novel and Heller's magnification of them.

In William Brinkley's Don't Go Near the Water we are faced with the situation of the commanding officer with a thirst for somehow finding a place in the public gaze. For Commander Nash the war is one of public relations, fought by the Navy against the other branches of the armed forces. His desire to further the fame of his own Public Relations Section manifests itself in his inauguration of the Home Town News or Joe Blow Department, which calls for the establishment of a special section devoted to keeping the small-town U.S.A. newspapers constantly informed as to how their local boys are aiding in the Navy's war effort. The scheme itself is

characteristically elaborate and far-fetched, but its immediate effect on the men means nothing more drastic than a radical increase in paperwork, and the long-term result is the suitably comic appearance of Farragut Jones, the Typical Young Navy Man. Brinkley keeps the situation firmly within the limits of light-hearted farce, but when we are presented with a similar theme in Catch-22 the reverberations of Colonel Cathcart's plan to ensure reportage in The Saturday Evening Post become decidedly more ominous. When the chaplain dissuades him from his original intention of having the men pray before each bombing mission, Cathcart's craving for promotion is transferred into the simple strategy of raising the requisite number of missions to an astronomical level in the hope of attracting the attention of his superiors. This, of course, necessarily increases the possibility of death for the airmen and is to provoke Yossarian's desertion. In essence, the situation recalls the scene in Henry Williams' Ensign Pulver (a continuation of Heggen's Mister Roberts), where the promotion-conscious Captain Morton decides to set sail during a tropic storm despite the protests of other officers. His motivation is identical to Cathcart's, for we learn that "the biggest single thing on [his] mind . . . was his hunger for promotion to full Commander."[1] That this is the reason behind his willingness to take such a risk is made explicit by his claim that:

> "The Admiral wants this ship at Apathy Island in five days - and that's where she'll be, hurricane, high-water, fire, or the end of the world itself"[2]

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[1] Henry Williams, Ensign Pulver (New York, 1964), p. 20.

[2] Ibid., p. 112.

There is a major incongruity, however, between their respective situations, for while Norton is like Melville's Ahab in having himself to undergo the dangers he imposes on his crew, Cathcart's monomania involves no possibility of personal harm, and in this light his position assumes the more sombre hues of the complete dictator. During a conversation with Milo Minderbinder, Cathcart confides:

> "I'll bet it's not generally known, Milo, that I myself have flown only four missions, is it?"
> "No, sir," Milo replied. "It's generally known that you've flown only two missions. And that one of those occurred when Aarfy accidentally flew you over enemy territory while navigating you to Naples for a black-market water cooler"[1]

Cathcart is shown to be assiduous in avoiding the duties he so eagerly delegates to others. Thus we are constantly reminded that those in the higher echelons on Pianosa, those entrusted with the ultimate responsibility of so many lives, are always at a remove from the essence of combat as experienced by Yossarian and his comrades. In this manner Heller takes over one of the elements of the comic war novel, and, by enriching it with a set of unpleasant implications, assimilates it into the context of Catch-22.

The distortion of a basically humorous situation in order to point up a serious moral is one of Heller's favourite techniques, and he uses it to keep the action of his novel fixed tightly in the realm of a violent and grotesque reality. At his hands a situation like the quarrel between Carney and Billings in Mister Roberts, in which the tactics are no more dangerous than the enforced deprivation of soap and Coca-Cola,

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[1] Catch-22, p. 380.

assumes a more murderous complexion in Chief White Halfoat's threat to cut Flume's throat. Similarly, the Roberts-Pulver plan to shoot a ball of leadfoil at the Captain in Mister Roberts receives a deadly modification in Catch-22, where Dobbs urges Yossarian to join him in an attempt on Colonel Cathcart's life, but with bullets and revolver substituted for leadfoil and rubber-band. Heller subjects the convention of the conspiracy to a further change in order to illustrate the workings of a mind under the stress of the prevalent Pianosan madness. In describing his plot to Yossarian, Dobbs says:

> "Just tell me to go ahead and I'll blow his brains out all by myself . . . I'd like to shoot Colonel Korn in the head, too, while we're at it, although I'd like to spare Major Danby, if that's all right with you. Then I'd like to murder Appleby and Havermeyer also, and after we finish murdering Appleby and Havermeyer I'd like to murder McWatt".[1]

The matter-of-fact tone of Dobbs' voice as he compiles his catalogue of victims provides an accurate image of Cathcart's blandness in ordering his men to their deaths, as if, indeed, it were nothing more than a matter of leadfoil and catapults. Havermeyer is merely one of the agents of Cathcart's tyranny, and on Pianosa, where every contour of action is sharper and more pernicious, Dobbs' proposed retaliation would amount to what Yossarian describes as a "blood bath". Yet the underlying moral to Dobbs' suggestion is that the assassination of Cathcart would not be an altogether inappropriate reprisal, since, in the eyes of Dobbs and Yossarian, Cathcart himself has been carrying out a series of legalized murders. In a similar vein,

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[1] Catch-22, p. 233.

Heller takes the tradition of the duty-bound young perfectionist as we find it in Ensign Keith in Mister Roberts, and produces a figure like Havermeyer. At one point in Mister Roberts, Keith's rigid adherence to regulations deprives Dowdy, the boatswain's mate, of six priceless bottles of beer.[1] A similar display of conscientiousness by Havermeyer in Catch-22,

> held mortal men rigid in six planes as steady and still as sitting ducks while he followed the bombs all the way down through the plexiglass rose with deep interest and gave the German gunners below all the time they needed to set their sights and take their aim and pull their triggers.[2]

Another of the common features of the humorous war novel is the interview scene, in which the confrontation between the naïve or simple-minded young soldier and the examining board of senior officers can be relied upon to produce comedy of a verbal nature, involving malapropisms, non-sequiturs, or simply a conversation held at cross-purposes. Will Stockdale finds himself in such a situation in Mac Hyman's No Time For Sergeants, and it occurs again in Leo Rosten's Captain Newman, M.D., where the innocence of the negro soldier, Reuben Todd, sets a comic contrast with the formality and gruffness of his examiners. The villain of the piece in Rosten's novel is the irascible Colonel Pyser, who dismisses the evidence for Todd's paranoia on the grounds that the negro is a malingerer. Pyser has all the boorishness and obtuseness of a Cathcart or a General Dreedle,

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[1] See Thomas Heggen, Mister Roberts (Boston, 1946), p. 24.

[2] Catch-22, p. 30.

and is portrayed as the thick-skulled, dogmatic militarist. The following excerpt typifies the mentality of this species:

> "Get one thing through your head, Newman. I'm from the North. I've got no more use for race prejudice than you have. Any man can win my respect. But there are only two kinds of soldiers: good soldiers and bad soldiers. White, black, yellow, brown - I still divide them up that way. There are only two kinds of niggers, too: good niggers and bad niggers. That black buck in there is a bad nigger. And I intend to see to it that he turns into either a good nigger or a corpse!"[1]

Predictably, Newman's appeal for Todd's discharge is rejected, but one of the results of this is, paradoxically, the exorcising of the delusions which had been plaguing the soldier. The parallel situation in Catch-22 concerns Clevinger's appearance before the Action Board while at cadet school in Santa Ana. The charge is a suitably trivial one ("conspiring to advocate the overthrow of the cadet officers Lieutenant Scheisskopf had appointed"), and Heller preserves the comic spirit of the convention as well as the stock character types in the dictatorial colonel and the bewildered young recruit. The examination is conducted at a frantic pace:

> "Precisely what did you mean, Cadet Clevinger, when you said we couldn't find you guilty?"
> "I didn't say you couldn't find me guilty, sir."
> "When?"
> "When what, sir?"
> "Goddammit, are you going to start pumping me again?"
> "No sir. I'm sorry, sir."
> "Then answer the question. When didn't you say we couldn't find you guilty?"
> "Last night in the latrine, sir."
> "Is that the only time you didn't say it?"
> "No, sir. I always didn't say you couldn't find me guilty, sir. What I did say to

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[1] Leo Rosten, Captain Newman, M.D. (New York, 1963), p. 169.

> Yossarian was -."
> "Nobody asked you what you did say to Yossarian. We asked you what you didn't say to him. We're not at all interested in what you did say to Yossarian. Is that clear?"
> "Yes, sir."
> "Then we'll go on. What did you say to Yossarian?"[1]

The labyrinthine complexities of non-ratiocination, allied to the neo-Kafka-esque tone of the interrogation, invests the scene with something more than mere comedy, for the totalitarian ethic embodied in the colonel's remorseless aggression is reminiscent of O'Brien's tactics in Orwell's 1984. Heller is not content to leave his censure of the military at the feet of an individual, for his colonel, unlike Newman's Colonel Pyser, is allowed to assume representative proportions. At one stage he defines his concept of justice:

> "I'll tell you what justice is. Justice is a knee in the gut from the floor on the chin at night sneaky with a knife brought up down on the magazine of a battle-ship sandbagged underhanded in the dark without a word of warning. Garroting. That's what justice is."[2]

The near-hysterical, rhythmic incantation produces an effect at once comic and disturbing, adding another dimension to an outburst which otherwise might find its closest correspondence in the puerile but localized nastiness of Colonel Pyser. Thus, Heller is seen to be constantly embellishing and broadening wherever he is borrowing from the repertoire of the humorous war novel.

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[1] Catch-22, pp. 81-82.

[2] Catch-22, p. 82.

If Heller owes certain of his main ingredients to books like Mister Roberts, then the impression ought not to be left of his having merely appropriated a set of well-tried devices. There is at the same time in Catch-22 a body of innovations which help define more closely its debt to humorous antecedents. Certainly the most apparent trait of these novels is their 'wartime' rather than 'war' milieu, a convention which Heller ruptures by introducing scenes of combat as bloody and explicit as those in The Naked And The Dead. Novels such as Mister Roberts and Don't Go Near the Water depend for their effect on a conspiracy between author and reader to deny violence and death. This seems to be the major proviso before war can respectably be made a subject of amusement. The realities of warfare rarely impinge upon the boundaries of the microcosm that each writer adopts as his locale. In these places the battle is usually against a dictatorial superior officer rather than against a fully-armed enemy, and victory consists of safely smuggling aboard ship illicit whisky, or the public humiliation of the tyrant. When the more disagreeable facts of war do intrude they come by vacarious means, as when the news of Ensign Roberts' death is divulged by means of letter, or when the hospitalized airmen in Captain Newman, M.D. are induced to recount details of combat experience by means of Pentothal. However, the writers of these novels are usually prepared to make some manner of concession to the continuation of a real war elsewhere. A favourite device is the announcement of war bulletins via the radio, used by Heggen, Brinkley, and Rosten, or else the simple technique of reminding the reader of details of contemporary campaigns and battles. Occasionally the intrusion of news from abroad is used to point up some significant moral. Some writers succumb to the worst excesses of

sentimentalism when following this usage,[1] yet others operate it with varying degrees of success. In Don't Go Near the Water, Brinkley places part of the action of his novel within the context of actual historical events. In the chapter entitled "The Day the Bomb Fell" he shows the failure of the news from Hiroshima to penetrate the shell of routine "phoney war" life on the island of Tulura. Two of the officers decide to test the reactions of various of their acquaintances to the momentous news of the dropping of the first atomic bomb. The responses are predictably tepid, each designed to fit the stereotype speaker and to illustrate some form of petty egotism. The British naval officer is classically chauvinistic:

> "Well, frankly, lads, I wondered if we Limeys had been cut in on this deal, too - that is, did we have the blooming thing also - or were you Yanks keeping them all up your own bloody sleeves."[2]

The elderly war-correspondent, who boasts of having been aboard Dewey's flagship in 1898, reveals a professional chagrin at having failed to be present at the dropping:

> "Oh, that bomb. Well, I have seen many new weapons come along . . . I saw the tank first used, and I saw the aeroplane used for the first time in war . . . I would like to have seen that bomb dropped, too. I don't guess any outsider did though, did they?"[3]

Finally, someone is at last found who expresses an emotion in keeping with the occasion. Janey, the Red-Cross nurse, complains sadly:

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[1] See Captain Newman, M.D., pp. 271-272.

[2] William Brinkley, Don't Go Near the Water (New York, 1956), pp. 325-326.

[3] Ibid., p. 329.

> "I heard about that little old bomb dropping and I just felt like getting drunk - and crying . . . it meant the war was going to be over two years before I thought it was. It meant I was going home . . . No more just little me and all those thousands of men, men, men! . . . No more turning men down for dates! . . . No more chances to, even!"[1]

Her reaction is the most selfish and narrow-minded of all. The accumulation of these various statements of apathy succeed only in reducing each character in stature. The revelation of their chronic myopia does not extend beyond the individual circumstance, and their collective self-involvement assumes no broader significance.

In Mister Roberts, Thomas Heggen is more successful in his attempt to create a dramatic tension between apathy and actuality. Unlike Brinkley, Heggen does not allow the disclosure of ignorance and complacency to come as in any way a revelation. He introduces his book with the tacit admission that indifference is the common disease among the crew-members of the "Reluctant" as she sails from Tedium to Apathy, with occasional calls at Monotony and Ennui. Parochiality of mind is to be taken for granted among this group, and Heggen takes pains to remind us of real hostilities elsewhere, of "the Allied armies . . . slogging on toward Berlin".[2] On this ship the enemy is "that incredible and tangible villain, the Captain",[3] rather than Japan or Germany. Heggen emphasizes this in a good-natured

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[1] Ibid., p. 334.

[2] Mister Roberts, p. viii.

[3] Ibid., p. xiii.

though not completely approbatory manner in his use of a mock-heroic phraseology when describing the thoughts and pursuits of crew-members:

> Down in the armory a group of six men sits tensely around a wooden box. You say they are discussing fortifications? - you distinctly heard the word "sandbag" spoken? Yes, you did: but it is feared that you heard it out of context. What Olson, the first-class gunner's mate, said was: "Now watch the son-of-a-bitch sandbag me!" Used like that, it is a common colloquialism of poker: this is an all-night poker game.[1]

Henry Williams uses the same kind of deflation in Ensign Pulver.[2] It is against this background that the figure of Roberts must be seen, the reflective and sensitive young officer who longs for an opportunity to see real combat, of which his sole knowledge comes "straight from Life."[3] When the news comes from Europe of the cessation of hostilities, he is aware that:

> no one gave a hoot in hell what went on beyond the confines of this ship. It was to the rest of the officers a matter of indifference that a war of supreme horror had ended.[4]

However, instead of deriving a sense of personal vindication from this knowledge, like Siegel in Don't Go Near the Water, Roberts is capable of

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[1] Ibid., pp. ix-x.

[2] See Ensign Pulver, p. 35.

[3] Mister Roberts, p. 165.

[4] Ibid., p. 159.

going on to examine the broader implications of the war and his relation to it. He deliberates at length over the question of the dead and in the course of his ruminations produces some judgements of a type rarely permitted the characters of similar works:

> The dead, Roberts mused, what could you say for the dead of this war? . . . Well, there were a lot of things you could say automatically and without thought, but they were all wrong things; and just this once, just this one war, anyhow, let us try to say true things about the dead. Begin by cancelling the phrase, "our honored dead" : for that is not true - we forget them, we do not honor them but in rhetoric - and the phrase is the badge of those who want something of the dead. If the dead of this war must have a mutual encomium, then let it be "poor dead bastards." There is at least a little humanity in that. And let us not say of them, this time, "they gave their lives" for something or other; for certainly there was nothing voluntary in their dying.[1]

Despite its dangerous proximity to the platitudinous, such a passage shows that it was possible, in 1946, for the writer of the humorous war story to inject even the embryo of seriousness into a situation where otherwise the comic vision persists virtually unclouded. It offers an instructive indication of an early reaction against the fictional falsification of the second war, and proves that the cynicism of World War I writers with regard to war rhetoric had been preserved in the intervening years. In this sense, a book like Mister Roberts can be said to have augured for Catch-22 in more than just its humorous spirit.

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[1] Ibid., pp. 165-166.

Before closing this examination of the relation between Catch-22 and the humorous war novel, I feel it would be helpful to glance at another principle of humour as it has been used in the serious war novel, for it would be a mistake to credit writers like Heggen and Brinkley with the inception of an intrinsically original form. The question of "comic relief" in serious works is one which has always occupied novelists and dramatists, and it is not altogether unexpected to find it at work in most of the war novels from World War II. The humour can take a variety of forms, perhaps the classic barrack-room brand of dialogue, or else the amusing situational anecdote concerned with camp or trench life. In John Horne Burns' The Gallery we have a convenient example of the inclusion of comic content in order to lighten the overall picture of squalor and misery. The technique favoured by Burns is the assimilation of a group of fragmentary visions, with the Galleria Umberto in Naples as the focus. The chapters are divided alternately into the Portrait and the Promenade, the former glimpsing excerpts from the lives of various characters gathered in the Naples of 1944. The central figure of one of these chapters, entitled "The Leaf", is a Captain Motes (the name is probably significant), whose mercurial rise through the ranks to the status of major is achieved not through a distinguished combat career, but through his supervision of mail censorship in first Casablanca and then Naples. Motes is a member of the military bureaucracy and for Burns he symbolizes all the blundering and pettifogging inanity of that branch of the service. There is only a slight trace of bitterness in Burns' portrayal of him, and Motes remains a comic creation on a par with Cathcart and Dreedle. Like the figures who populate Catch-22, Motes is a caricature, and his outlook and opinions are those of

the stereotype. The rigid bigotry in his statement that "All Europe and its parasitic population are obscene . . . like the nigras"[1], can be matched in a dozen instances in Catch-22; in the Texan, who felt that:

> people of means - decent folk - should be given more votes than drifters, whores, criminals, degenerates, atheists and indecent folk - people without means . . . .[2]

or in the equally reactionary Colonel Korn, who, when explaining to Dunbar why a certain village must be bombed, declares:

> "Nobody is more distressed about those lousy wops up in the hills than Colonel Cathcart and myself. . . ."[3]

or perhaps in the Senator who discovers that the young Major Major specializes in English history, and retorts, "English history! What's the matter with American history? American history is as good as any history in the world!"[4] Moreover, Notes is no more in touch with the realities of war than his counterparts in Catch-22. His romantic notions are derived entirely from books, and when he left his wife for the war

> Captain Notes kissed her on the hair and raced out into the night. That was the way he desired to remember Lucinda in the pelting of bullets and the screaming and battle fury of maddened and dying men.[5]

Later, on board ship, and a full week after the Casablanca landings, Notes,

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[1]John Horne Burns, The Gallery (New York, 1965), p. 219.

[2]Catch-22, p. 9.

[3]Ibid., p. 337.

[4]Ibid., p. 88.

[5]The Gallery, p. 181.

eager for his first taste of combat, complains:

> "Fine scrap, fine scrap . . . and we would have to miss it. I was itching for the real thing . . . Well, they goddam won't do me out of it a second time."[1]

In every way his attitude represents the romanticization of war experience, and it is no coincidence that he is married to a poetess who can begin a poem on war with:

> Men run forth to die
> From the Mississippi, from Iowa, from Nowhata
> Oklahoma . . .[2]

recalling the worst of the jingoistic war poetry of the Great War, such as McCrae's In Flanders Fields or Henderson's The Road To France. Later, Lucinda writes to her husband concerning his mention of the Italo-American aid named Stuki, "' And who, pray, is this Stuki? I suspect you have an Arab mistress . . .'"[3] Burns' intention in linking these ludicrous patriot-romantics is clearly to satirize civilian ignorance of the realities of war. He is making an intelligent and constructive use of the comic. It is Stuki who, along with Mayberry, rapidly achieves the position of Captain under the aegis of Motes, and stands for the ethic of insidious ambition. Mayberry attaches himself to Motes' organization in order to achieve a further refinement in bureaucratic pedantry. Mayberry is the clerk who:

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[1] Ibid., p. 183.

[2] Ibid., p. 180.

[3] Ibid., p. 195.

> said that the modern American language was falling apart from lack of discipline or surface tension. Therefore as an antidote he insisted on a Victorian tautness and periodicity in all the prose emanating from his office.[1]

He may stand as the prototype for Heller's Wintergreen, whose preoccupation with eradicating prolixity from all official communications which pass through his hands offers a parallel case of the same form of bureaucratic fastidiousness. Wintergreen exercises a power beyond his position in settling disputes between Generals Peckem and Dreedle by:

> throwing all communications from General Peckem into the waste-basket. He found them too prolix. General Dreedle's views, expressed in less pretentious literary style, pleased ex-P.F.C. Wintergreen and were sped along by him in zealous observance of regulations.[2]

However, the similarities between Burns' humour and that of Heller do not end at the deflation of romanticism and the use of common character types. There is on several occasions a clear correspondence in tone and technique, and I choose this passage from The Gallery because it reveals the use of comic exaggeration also favoured by Heller. Notes has just been promoted to Major as a result of some particularly dazzling act of lunacy:

> Major Notes saw the whole vaulted office, its maps and indirect lighting, whirling like a pinwheel before his eyes. People streamed in from other offices to shake his hand. British colonels in their shorts and pipes and scarves pressed his hand

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[1] Ibid., p. 210.

[2] Catch-22, p. 27.

> and called him Old Man . . . Then there was a shrill yap of attention. There entered goutily an elderly British brigadier, carrying in both hands a small medal hanging from a broad violet ribbon. This he suspended round Major Notes's neck, all the while burning away like a sewing machine:
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> "His Majesty, the King of England is pleased to acknowledge Major Notes's services to military censorship . . . . Stout fellow . . . ."[1]

With the entrance of the brigadier comes the essential comedy of the situation. It is an identical method that Heller employs in Catch-22 when describing the tycoon exploits of Milo Minderbinder. Milo, the master entrepreneur of wartime Europe, is not only the mayor of Palermo and Major Sir Milo Minderbinder of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in Malta. He is also:

> the Caliph of Baghdad, the Imam of Damascus, and the Sheik of Araby. Milo was the corn god, the rain god and the rice god in backward regions where such crude gods were still worshipped by ignorant and superstitious people, and deep inside the jungles of Africa, he intimated . . . large graven images of his mustached face could be found overlooking primitive stone altars red with human blood.[2]

Where Burns' British brigadier allows the author to teeter temporarily on the brink of the absurd, Heller's "graven images . . . red with human

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[1] The Gallery, p. 200.

[2] Catch-22, p. 244.

blood" plunge the figure of Milo more decisively into the realm of fantasy, but at the same time permit the concept of the capitalist ethic symbolized by Milo to widen its field of application.

In Catch-22 Heller has achieved the marriage of elements previously relegated to subsidiary status in the two species of earlier war fiction. Mister Roberts (1946) and The Gallery (1947) had shown that the streams of humorous and "straight" war writing were neither strictly homogeneous nor completely inflexible in substance, and that the assimilation of elements from one into the framework of the other need not impair the resultant artefact. But the figure of Notes in The Gallery, and Roberts' meditation in Mister Roberts are mere aberrations, temporary deviations from the rule. Catch-22 represents a compromise between the spirit of Mister Roberts, predominantly comic, and that of The Gallery, proportionately serious, and in each case is seen to concentrate rather than dilute the original essence. From these disparate influences Heller evolves a medium in which the humorous and the "straight" can coexist, enabling Catch-22, through the principle of polygenesis, to become literally and consistently serio-comic.

CHAPTER III

Parody and Satire

If the origins and ambience of Catch-22 derive in part from the humorous war novel, then the book owes a debt of a different nature to the "straight" war novel as practised by writers like Norman Mailer, James Jones, Anton Myrer, and by the legion of semi-anonymous authors responsible for that vast body of material known as the "war story", the cult of pseudo-realism which flourished in America following the second war. Mailer and Jones are largely untypical of that genre, since they both offer intelligent and original insights into the psychology of combat experience, and both are cautious of glorifying any aspect of the war situation; in The Naked And The Dead Lieutenant Hearn voices the liberal's objections to The Pacific war, and in The Thin Red Line Sergeant Welsh's "property" theory carried Jones' misgivings about the war. Yet both novelists establish a rapport with the great body of lesser war material by perpetuating several of the "sacred cows" which characterize it. The qualified anti-war statement which enters peripherally into each novel becomes vitiated by the mass of predictable, "naturalistic" war reporting, the minute detail of geography and topography, the lurid inventories of the wounds, the blood, gangrene and malaria, the stink of corpses. These form the nucleus of the literature which came out of the Pacific campaign. Catch-22 comes in reaction to that entire literary tradition. It is anti- "war-book" as well as anti-war, and composes the definitive answer to those who would glamorize or falsify

any part of war, particularly those who masquerade as anti-war writers while supplying a sufficient quota of gore and glory to satisfy the popular appetite. Such books lend to warfare an aura of heroism, even a perverse note of nobility, through their refusal to dispense with certain staple aspects of the fictional war situation. By means of parody, Heller sets out to ridicule recurrent themes and motifs of the serious war novel by exploiting their comic potential. This technique can frequently confuse attempts to trace possible sources for many of the characters and situations in Catch-22, and because the novel is itself largely comic the need arises to distinguish between adaptation from the humorous war novel and parody of the "straight". It is not obvious, for example, whether Colonel Cathcart is merely a transplanted Captain Morton from Mister Roberts, a figure intrinsically comic, or the parodic extension of men like Queeg in The Caine Mutiny and Cummings in The Naked And The Dead. For the purposes of this discussion, and in order to preclude obscurity, I shall restrict myself when dealing with parody to those elements in Catch-22 which have clear referents in serious or "straight" archetypes, independent of the comic tradition.

The governing principle behind Heller's use of parody in Catch-22 is basically as straightforward as that which controls his transferences from the humorous war novel. The themes and motifs which he takes from the "straight" novels are systematically subjected to a drastic dilation before they appear in Catch-22, yet just sufficient is retained of the original to leave no doubt that Heller is frequently working from models. In their original condition these prototypes generally function within a strictly serious context, and their very inflexibility marks them as a

suitable source of ridicule. Because Catch-22 is so eclectic in its composition, because it converts material from every corner of war fiction, it would be unfair to assume that Heller has specific writers or novels in mind. His primary concern is with deriding an aspect of fiction which, through its narrow specialism, has become particularly prone to the reiteration of the stale and the hackneyed in its themes and mechanics. Among other things, these books tell us that servicemen occupy their time between battles by falling in love, that the "million dollar wound" is a coveted passport to safety, that the doctors and medics strive manfully to stem the flow of blood, and that the wives at home must suffer too. Whether these conventions are designed to evoke the response of pity, admiration, or revulsion, they are alike used as a means of engaging the reader's sympathy on the most literal of levels.

In his use of a main protagonist through whose consciousness the events of war are felt and recorded, Heller is following a tradition which, in American writing, dates back to Stephen Crane. In The Red Badge of Courage it is the young Henry Fleming who orders and interprets the activities and emotions of battle. Like Frederick Henry in A Farewell To Arms or Willie Keith in The Caine Mutiny, Fleming is seen to gain self-knowledge and awareness, to achieve a degree of maturity by learning to come to terms with himself and his environment. Although in Fleming's case the problem is one of learning to control and conquer fear under fire, and in Keith's the dilemma turns on considerations of power and responsibility, the authors are agreed in regarding the experience of war as a learning process, a journey to enlightenment. Quite often we find that the

spiritual journey is objectified in a physical equivalent, and the principle behind Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress can be detected in The Caine Mutiny, where the literal voyage of the "Caine" accompanies the metaphorical one of Willie Keith, or in A Farewell To Arms, where the actual retreat from Caporetto symbolizes Frederick Henry's spiritual withdrawal. In Harry Brown's A Walk in The Sun the physical dangers which meet and test the group of soldiers as they march along the road to their objective are seen as a means of challenging their individual philosophies. They are made to struggle against a motorized Apollyon in the form of an armoured car, and there is even a bridge crossing a stream to be negotiated before they reach their goal. The farmhouse, which they must capture, is viewed in broadly symbolic terms, and for Corporal Tyne it seemed that "its windows were eyes, and they were looking at him, studying his every move . . . and it was waiting."[1] Paulette Michel-Michot[2] sees the same form of allegorization in James Jones' The Thin Red Line, where the tactical advance of the campaign forms a concrete framework for a progressive coarsening of the men, resulting in their loss of innocence. Heller, too, employs a variant of the journey motif. Minna Doskow has argued persuasively that the night journey undertaken by Yossarian through the streets of Rome is "startlingly similar to the archetypal pattern that characterizes classical epic or romance."[3] Pointing to The Odyssey, The Aeneid and The Divine Comedy as

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[1]Harry Brown, A Walk in The Sun, (Toronto, 1963), p. 159.

[2]Paulette Michel-Michot, "Jones's The Thin Red Line: The End of Innocence", Revue Des Langues Vivantes, XXX (1962), pp. 15-26.

[3]Minna Doskow, "The Night Journey in Catch-22", Twentieth Century Literature, XII (January, 1967), pp. 186-193.

suitable archetypes, Doskow interprets Yossarian's symbolic journey as bringing him "an informed innocence",[1] "a new recognition of the meaning of his experience",[2] and his departure for Sweden "is the concrete external representation of his spiritual renewal."[3] Although Heller re-affirms the usage of his predecessors, it is in his application of their convention that the element of parody enters. For, in Yossarian, we find a main protagonist who abuses and finally mocks the symbolic path trodden by his antecedents. Whereas the earlier protagonists, from Henry Fleming to Robert Jordan, are heroes in the sense that they are not defeated, Yossarian perverts the whole object of the tradition by refusing to accept the conditions imposed by war. Judged by the standards they have helped create, Yossarian is the complete anti-hero, rejecting every criterion they have evolved. He substitutes cowardice for bravery, egoism for self-sacrifice, and, above all, active protest for reconciliation. Josh Greenfeld misses the point when he imputes a certain carelessness to Heller on the grounds that:

> to structure an anti-war novel upon a base implicitly requiring one to view war as a learning process or a game is a mistake, for it is to fall into the trap that leads to the glamorization of war itself.[4]

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[1] Ibid., p.186.

[2] Ibid., p. 186.

[3] Ibid., p. 193.

[4] Josh Greenfeld, op. cit., p. 53.

On the contrary, to do so is to parody and deflate an important aspect of the "straight" war novel, and to make Catch-22 anti-war in the fullest sense.

Vulgarization is probably the keynote to Heller's transformation of many of the clichés of his "straight" predecessors. It is clearly the major factor in his treatment of the "romance" elements in Catch-22, where the relationship between Yossarian and the nurse, Sue Ann Duckett, bears basic and less idyllic affinities with the Frederick Henry - Catherine Barkley affair in A Farewell to Arms, and where the liaison between Nately and his whore is a grotesque parody of the numerous love affairs involving American soldiers and Italian girls in other war novels. Such a theme provides the whole basis for Alfred Hayes' The Girl on The Via Flaminia, where the conversations between Robert and Lisa carry Hayes' examination of the pollution of Italy by the Americans, the seduction of Lisa symbolizing the prostitution of the Italian culture by the American ethos. The motif of the American soldier and the "local" girl arises again in Myrer's The Big War, with O'Neill and Felicia, and in John Hersey's The War Lover, with Boman and Daphne. In John Horne Burns' The Gallery a young Neopolitan girl, Giulia, falls in love with an American Captain, an arrangement which inspires the soldier with the thought of marrying and returning to the U.S.A. with his new wife after the war. The Captain

> began to lecture her on her adjustment
> to American life. He told her sadly
> that to be happy as his wife in America
> she must convert her personality . . .
> That an American wife was something
> quite different from an Italian wife,
> shut up in the house with her children.[1]

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[1] The Gallery, p. 277.

In Catch-22 a similar meeting of American and Italian values is rendered farcical through the simple fact of Nately's prospective wife being a prostitute. Her main idea of the service Nately can do for her is to allow her to sleep with other men. Although she woke up one morning and discovered she was "deeply in love" with Nately ("that was all it took to win her heart - a good night's sleep"),[1] she proves embarrassingly intractable when Nately commands her to cease her present mode of employment:

> "From now on," Nately said to his girl,
> "I forbid you to go out hustling."
> "Perchè?" she inquired curiously.
> "Perchè?" he screamed with amazement.
> "Because it's not nice, that's why!"
> "Perchè no?"
> "Because it just isn't!" Nately insisted.
> "It just isn't right for a nice girl
> like you to go looking for other men to
> sleep with. I'll give you all the money
> you need, so you won't have to do it
> any more."
> "And what will I do all day instead?"
> "Do?" said Nately. "You'll do what all
> your friends do."
> "My friends go looking for men to sleep
> with".[2]

Not only does Nately's girl refuse to conform to his notion of respectability. There is also the inconvenient kid sister, who, modelling her actions as closely as possible on her elder, offers in herself a parody in miniature of the whore. However, this complication is not allowed to interfere with Nately's plans for a return to America. The anxiety of

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[1] Catch-22, p. 365.

[2] Catch-22, p. 367.

Burns' Captain about his girl's adjustment to the American scene is replaced by Nately's naïve optimism:

> They made a wonderful family group, he decided. The little girl would go to college when she was old enough, to Smith or Radcliffe or Bryn Mawr - he would see to that.[1]

Heller contrives as powerful an attack on an adjacent area of sentimentality when using the convention of the telegram which brings news of a soldier's death. This is invariably a moment of solemnity, as in Myrer's The Big War, when Charlotte Newcombe learns of her son's death, or when Andrea hears that her husband, Danny, has been killed in combat. In the case of Danny Kantaylis' death, the hysteria of his father on receiving the news is balanced by a brave resolution and defiance from Andrea:

> "He [her baby son] will be as fine as Danny," she heard herself saying with an intensity that amazed her. "He will grow up to be even finer than Danny, with all his father's sweetness and strength and nobility. . . he will be the joy of all of us, the vindication of all of us," she finished fiercely. "And they won't have beaten us: they won't have won . . . !"[2]

When the news of Doc Daneeka's "death" is conveyed to Mrs. Daneeka in Catch-22 there is no babe in arms present to wring the last tear from the situation, but we learn that Mrs. Daneeka did "split the peaceful Staten Island night with woeful shrieks of lamentation."[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 365.

[2] Anton Myrer, The Big War, (New York, 1965), p. 460.

[3] Catch-22, p. 351.

However, her attitude toward her predicament is soon modified through the rapid accumulation of a vast sum of money from insurance policies and trusts (a consideration discreetly suppressed by Hyrer). This improves her social position considerably, until:

> The husbands of her closest friends began to flirt with her. Mrs. Daneeka was simply delighted with the way things were turning out and had her hair dyed. Her fantastic wealth just kept piling up, and she had to remind herself daily that all the hundreds of thousands of dollars she was acquiring were not worth a single penny without her husband to share this good fortune with her.[1]

The dramatic gestures of controlled grief which accompany the same situation in The Big War are quickly assuaged for Mrs. Daneeka, who, in order to rid herself of the embarrassment of the pleading letters which continue to arrive from her "dead" husband, "moved with her children to Lansing, Michigan, and left no forwarding address."[2]

Heller uses the same method of burlesque when he directs his attention away from the domestic situation and moments of "light relief" towards those conventions based exclusively on the military experience. He invests every area of the military machine with a uniform bizarrerie. Instead of a group of doctors and medics as they are shown in The Naked And The Dead and The Thin Red Line, men who function to the utmost of their abilities amid the chaos of battle, we are given in Catch-22 a "Doc" who is a chronic hypochondriac and, in Gus and Wes, two medical orderlies

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[1] Catch-22, p. 353.

[2] Ibid., p. 354.

whose idea of the universal panacea is a laxative and a coat of gentian-violet solution on the patient's toes and gums. Incompetence is the distinguishing trait among these medical men, as it generally is with all those in positions of responsibility on Pianosa. In The Thin Red Line Doc Haines is presented as a man of sagacity and integrity, and Jones obviously intends him as an example of a cheery and dedicated professionalism. This is the scene Jones describes at one point as the Doc operates on a wounded soldier:

> The man old Doc was working on was a young man with . . . a well-muscled back except for the fact that there was a hole the size of the mouth of a water tumbler just beneath his right shoulderblade. He sat on the edge of the table while Doc Haines working his cigar butt back and forth in his mouth cut loose strips of skin and flesh from the edge of the hole with tweezers and a pair of surgical scissors . . . When he had finished tidying the hole to his satisfaction, Doc bandaged it and slapped the boy lightly on his good shoulder. He grinned with his much-wrinkled eyes.[1]

The incident is so situated to remind Corporal Fife, who is awaiting treatment, of the comparative lightness of his own wound, but it also serves a didactic purpose in acquainting the reader with the skill and patience of those entrusted with saving lives. When Yossarian suffers a knife-wound at the hands of Nately's whore in Catch-22 his life is placed in a decidedly more precarious charge. A group of Doctors are speaking

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[1]James Jones, The Thin Red Line, (New York, 1962), pp. 347-348.

as the operation on Yossarian is about to begin:

> "It's a small wound. All we have to do is stop the bleeding, clean it out and put a few stitches in."
> "But I've never had a chance to operate before. Which one is the scalpel? Is this one the scalpel?"
> "No, the other one is the scalpel. Well, go ahead and cut already if you're going to. Make the incision."
> "Like this?"
> "Not there, you dope!"
>
> . . . .
>
> "Let's operate," said the other doctor.
> "Let's cut him open and get to the inside of things once and for all. He keeps complaining about his liver. His liver looks pretty small on this X ray."
> "That's his pancreas, you dope. This is his liver."
> "No it isn't. That's his heart. I'll bet you a nickel this is his liver. I'm going to operate and find out. Should I wash my hands first?"[1]

In this episode Heller burlesques the tradition of the capable medical men, transforming the raw material of the original situation into a macabre farce.

The aggregate charlatanism of Pianosa makes it simple for Heller to exploit the theme of the "million dollar wound". In The Naked And The Dead Minetta finds life inside the hospital so comfortable that he deliberately aggravates a leg wound and, when that is healed, simulates amnesia in order to evade combat. Ironically, his guilt feelings are joined by a mounting sense of revulsion as the screams of the dying and deranged all around him become so unbearable that he is forced to request his discharge.

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[1] Catch-22, pp. 439-441.

Unlike their counterparts on Pianosa, the medical staff on Anopopei are considerably more efficient, with the result that the doctor, who has all along been sceptical of Minetta's disorder, warns him, "If you come back here you botter have a hole through your belly." [1] In The Thin Red Line Coporal Fife makes similar attempts at hospitalization, first because of a superficial scalp wound, and secondly through a swollen ankle ligament. But on the first occasion the doctor is adamant that Fife is malingering, and on the second Fife feels ashamed when thinks of leaving because "it's sort of like running out." [2] On Pianosa there is neither the alert professional eye nor the individual conscience to prevent Yossarian, Dunbar and others from taking advantage of the comforts of hospital life. Whereas both Minetta and Fife suffer genuine wounds in order initially to enter hospital, we learn that:

> Yossarian was in the hospital with a pain in his liver that fell just short of being jaundice. The doctors were puzzled by the fact that it wasn't quite jaundice. If it became jaundice they could treat it. If it didn't become jaundice and went away they could discharge him. But this just being short of jaundice all the time confused them.[3]

Such is the ease with which this deception may be carried out, that even the chaplain eventually finds it worthwhile to concoct a mysterious illness of his own:

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[1] Norman Mailer, The Naked And The Dead, (London, 1964), p. 278.

[2] The Thin Red Line, p. 488.

[3] Catch-22, p. 7.

> The chaplain entered the hospital
> with a pain in his heart that the
> doctors thought was gas in his
> stomach and with an advanced case
> of Wisconsin shingles.
> "What in the world are Wisconsin
> shingles?" asked Yossarian.
> "That's just what the doctors
> wanted to know! . . . There's
> no such thing as Wisconsin shingles.
> Don't you understand? I lied.
> I made a deal with the doctors.
> I promised that I would let them
> know when my Wisconsin shingles
> went away if they would promise
> not to do anything to cure them"[1]

Although these examples will have succeeded in defining at least some of Heller's targets in the literary sphere, they account only partially for the total impact of the novel. In Catch-22 parody is made to combine and alternate with a pointed social satire, a consideration which brings us to an examination of this double foundation on which the book stands. In an unfavourable review of Catch-22, Alex Cockburn accuses Heller of failing to clarify his intentions with regard to parody and satire, a failure which, according to Cockburn, leaves the novel firmly in the realms of parody without ever really becoming satire. Cockburn's argument is a valuable one in enabling us to see more clearly where the parody of Catch-22 ends and where the satire begins. It offers a convenient avenue of approach to a question which is of great relevance to a work where the two techniques co-exist. Cockburn cites the case of Milo Minderbinder as one which fails to accommodate itself to either category. In Milo's speech on capitalism and democracy ("I'd like to see the government get out of war altogether and leave the whole field to private

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[1] Ibid., p. 372.

industry"),[1] Cockburn detects an unsatisfactory and damaging ambiguity:

> This could be taken as a moment of truth in the satire - the moment when Heller's view of the essential, or one of the essential, motives of war has been reduced by the rhetoric of exaggeration and overstatement. But it is dangerous to do this. Heller is as likely to be parodying the play made with small time entrepreneurs in straight war books. Is Heller parodying what he considers to be false or initially overstated, or satirising towards what he considers to be the truth? . . . This is a central ambiguity, one that ultimately becomes disturbing and dissipates the effect of the book.[2]

There is a good deal of justification in Cockburn's claim that in Milo the mixture of satire and parody leaves him as something of an enigma. In Milo we meet a caricature who is at once a paradigm of what Heller sees as the capitalist ethic behind war, and a product of the various budding entrepreneurs of the conventional war novel as well as an enlargement of a figure like television's Sergeant Bilko. In Milo, the dual functions of satire and parody thus become fused and the distinction between them blurred. Even the most ardent apologist for the novel would be forced to concede that the type of ambiguity which Cockburn sees in Milo can be traced at practically every turn. As additional ammunition Cockburn could have cited the following conversation, as Lieutenant Colonel Korn explains to Yossarian:

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[1] Catch-22, p. 266.

[2] Alex Cockburn, review of Catch-22, New Left Review, (January-February, 1963), pp. 87-92.

> "And there you have the crux of the situation. Colonel Cathcart wants to be a general, and that's why we have to send you home".
> "Why does he want to be a general?"
> "Why? For the same reason that I want to be a colonel. What else have we got to do? Everyone teaches us to aspire to higher things. A general is higher than a colonel, and a colonel is higher than a lieutenant colonel. So we're aspiring."[1]

The objections which Cockburn raises with the case of Milo may again be made here. On the one hand the passage comprises an attack on a central feature of the "American dream", the law of amorality which posits aspiration and self-aggrandizement as a whole way of life in itself, regardless of the value of the ends. Yet, on the other hand, because these sentiments are voiced through a military man in a specifically military context, they may be taken as merely a more forthright expression of the type of ambition displayed by a figure like Colonel Tall in The Thin Red Line. Thus, certain of Heller's characters are likely to appear schizophrenic creations, anchored in literary models yet equipped with this more extensive area of social reference. Provided one is prepared to accept this as an essential feature of Heller's technique, there is no reason why a creation like Milo should fail as a satiric or parodic tool. In Milo, and in Korn's ambition, the element of parody is quite pronounced, and, in fact, all that Heller has done is to have taken some germs of the "straight" tradition and manipulate them toward what is obviously a major satiric end. Heller is both "parodying what he considers

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[1] Catch-22, p. 435.

to be false" and "satirising towards what he considers to be the truth", and it would be rash to regard the two as mutually exclusive. Despite the fact that in Milo Minderbinder Cockburn has selected an isolated and prime example of such ambiguity, he extends his thesis from that basis to assert that Heller fails to sustain any worthwhile social satire:

> If one takes satire to be the operation of exaggeration and ridicule from a basic exterior moral referent, and parody to be an exercise firmly anchored in the object parodied, the distinction can be made clearer. Heller provides no moral referent for his ridicule . . . All the way through, his treatment is parodic: he is ridiculing the conventional idea of war in experience and literature; and ridiculing it not from a standpoint of moral protest outside those experiences, but within their own terms. He does not offer a new evaluation of men's actions and motives in wartime so much as a serial parody of the circumstances of war . . . Hence outside the military context he fails because he has left behind the only referents that have sustained his ridicule. There is no wider position from which he can satirise the civil as well as military condition.[1]

Cockburn's contention that Heller offers nothing new in the way of "men's actions and motives in wartime" is entirely fallacious, as I have indicated earlier in my examination of Yossarian. The proposition that Catch-22 has no real satirical relevance outside the military milieu is, however, a more common indictment[2] and one which requires contesting.

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[1] Alex Cockburn, p. 91.

[2] See the anonymous review in Daedalus : Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Vol. 92 (1963), pp. 155-165, and that by William Hogan in The San Francisco Chronicle, (May 3rd, 1962), p. 39.

Catch-22 carries a set of much wider implications than the orthodox war novel, and although many of the novels of World War II contain strictures on aspects of the American society, they are surpassed by the range and depth of Heller's social criticism. Books like Alfred Hayes' The Girl on The Via Flaminia and John Horne Burns' The Gallery belong to what Eisinger has described as "the patterns of despair"[1] in post-war fiction. They show that the Americans were responsible for the corruption of wartime Italy, but even then they speak in the baldest and most general of terms. The Gallery contains several tirades against the shortcomings of the American psyche, and the following passage on the American nation in general gives an accurate précis of Burns' point of view:

> Automatons from the world's greatest factory . . . They have no souls . . . only the ability to add up to one million . . . They've got less maturity or individuality than any other people in the world . . . They don't know how to treat other human beings. With their screaming about democracy, none of them has the remotest conception of human dignity . . . Victims of the mob spirit and regimentation . . . They've never really suffered. But when they get the first twinge of toothache of the soul, they start feeling sorry for themselves instead of learning any wisdom from pain.[2]

The effect of such an extract is weakened and minimised through Burns' failure to localize or direct his attack against individual American institutions. The impact of his anger is dulled through lack of control

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[1] Chester Eisinger, Fiction of The Forties, (Chicago, 1964), p. 28.

[2] The Gallery, p. 80.

over his language, and is reduced to the repetition of vague generalisations. In Catch-22, as Robert Brustein has observed, Joseph Heller

> has been nourishing his grudges for so long that they have expanded to include the post-war American world. Through the agency of grotesque comedy, Heller has found a way to confront the humbug, hypocrisy, cruelty, and sheer stupidity of our mass society-qualities which have made the few other Americans who care almost speechless with baffled rage - and through some miracle of prestigitation, Pianosa has become a satirical microcosm for many of the macrocosmic idiocies of our time.[1]

John Horne Burns and Alfred Hayes are only two who have been "almost speechless" with rage, and their eloquence has suffered accordingly. Heller, in contrast, focusses his satire on comparatively minor anomalies in the American system, and, through the principle of synecdoche, succeeds in creating an accurate image of the whole. Thus, he is able to be satiric in the most general terms about the "all-American boy":

> They [Yossarian's "roomies"] were frisky, eager and exuberant, and they had all been friends in the States . . . They had gone to college and were engaged to pretty, clean girls . . . They had listened to the World Series and really cared who won football games . . . They were the most depressing group of people Yossarian had ever been with.[2]

In this passage Heller attacks an inherent attitude or state of mind which he considers unhealthy. He also selects moral and religious hypocrisy as a butt for this type of broad satire when describing the young Major Major:

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[1] Robert Brustein, op. cit., p. 12.

[2] Catch-22, pp. 356-357.

> He was polite to his elders, who disliked him. Whatever his elders told him to do, he did. They told him to look before he leaped, and he always looked before he leaped. They told him never to put off until the next day what he could do the day before, and he never did. He was told to honor his father and his mother, and he honored his father and his mother. He was told that he should not kill, and he did not kill, until he got into the Army. Then he was told to kill, and he killed. He turned the other cheek on every occasion and always did unto others exactly as he would have had others do unto him. When he gave to charity, his left hand never knew that his right hand was doing. He never once took the name of the Lord his God in vain, committed adultery or coveted his neighbor's ass. In fact, he loved his neighbor and never even bore false witness against him. Major Major's elders disliked him because he was such a flagrant nonconformist.[1]

Heller is equally capable of satirising in the most specific terms. For example, in Chief White Halfoat's life-story we detect criticism of government exploitation of the Red Indian (evicted from ancestral and oil-rich pastures), accompanied by an attack on racial prejudice. The final irony is added when we learn of a group of the Chief's cousins who inadvertently wandered into Canada:

> When they tried to return, they were stopped at the border by American immigration authorities who would not let them back into the country. They couldn't come back in because they were red.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 88.

[2] Catch-22, p. 45.

In such a manner Heller is able to move away from the specific in the government expropriation of Indian land, to the general in the form of racial discrimination, thus combining historical and contemporary themes. Heller's satire is elsewhere directed against government-subsidised agriculture in the section concerning Major Major's father, whose

> speciality was alfalfa, and he made a good thing out of not growing any. The government paid him well for every bushel of alfalfa he did not grow. The more alfalfa he did not grow, the more money the government gave him, and he spent every penny he didn't earn on new land to increase the amount of alfalfa he did not produce.[1]

Elsewhere, Heller is seen to direct his attention toward the F.B.I.,[2] Congressmen,[3] war profiteers,[4] and the social snobbery of New England high society:

> Nately had been brought up to detest people like Marfy, whom his mother characterized as climbers, and people like Milo, whom his father characterized as pushers, but he had never learned how, since he had never been permitted near them. As far back as he could recall, his homes in Philadelphia, New York, Maine, Palm Beach, Southampton, London, Deauville, Paris and the south of France had always been crowded only with ladies and gentlemen who were not climbers or pushers. Nately's mother, a descendant of the New England Thorntons, was a Daughter of the American Revolution. His father was Son of a Bitch.

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[1] Ibid., p. 85.

[2] Ibid., p. 88.

[3] Ibid., p. 88.

[4] Ibid., p. 41.

> "Always remember," his mother had reminded him frequently, "that you are a Nately. You are not a Vanderbilt, whose fortune was made by a vulgar tugboat captain, or a Rockefeller, whose wealth was amassed through unscrupulous speculations in crude petrolium; or a Reynolds or Duke, whose income was derived from the sale to the unsuspecting public of products containing cancer-causing resins and tars; and you are certainly not an Astor, whose family, I believe, still lets rooms. You are a Nately, and the Nately's have never done anything for their money."
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> "What your mother means, son," interjected his father . . . "is that old money is better than new money and that the newly rich are never to be esteemed as highly as the newly poor. Isn't that correct, my dear?"[1]

It is such instances as these which Cockburn has overlooked in his search for "the operation of exaggeration and ridicule from a basic exterior moral referent", for these examples conform almost precisely to that definition. They are both satiric and outside the military context, and are readily differentiated from those elements rooted in parody.

I hope to have demonstrated that in Catch-22 the constituent strains of parody and satire are able to subsist and function independently, and occasionally to cohere in creating a double-edged weapon. In the course of my discussion of parody I have been compelled to ignore figures like Generals Dreedle and Peckem, who, although temptingly near to the tyrants of the Queeg variety, are nevertheless as readily interpreted as close relatives of Captain Morton in Mister Roberts. But this minor ambiguity in source material remains purely a technical consideration, and should not be allowed

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[1] Ibid., p. 255.

to obscure the real ends of Heller's novel. His most important objectives lie elsewhere than in the incestuous business of intra-species squabbling. He succeeds in deflecting the hazards which beset the parodist, which are liable to leave him irrevocably anchored to his models, thus localising and reducing his work to the status of the ephemeral. Heller is able to transcend these limitations; the afflatus behind Catch-22 is aimed as much against a perennial attitude to war fiction as it is against the machinery whereby that attitude is purveyed. It is launched in reaction to the type of creative mentality which allows a soldier to exhort his comrades with the cry of "C'mon, you sons of bitches - let's go get killed on that high ground up there!",[1] yet which can exercise a paradoxical fastidiousness in evading explicit reference to "that Verb, that single, ugly, four-letter word that lies embedded like a dirty, recurrent jewel in the mosaic of Marine profanity."[2] It is against such preposterous attitudinizing, against the peddling of such flagrant misrepresentations, that the essential antagonisms of Catch-22 are directed.

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[1] Robert Leckie, The March To Glory, p. 185.

[2] Ibid., p. 140.

CHAPTER IV

Structure and Time-scheme

> "We must be getting delirious . . . He keeps saying the same thing over and over again."
> Yossarian's "brother" in Catch-22, p.190.

> The machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too, - and at the same time.
> Laurence Sterne, Tristram Shandy (Harmondsworth, Middx., 1967), I, xxii, p. 95.

The early reviews of Catch-22 exhibited as great a diversity of response as had been seen in America since the publication of J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in The Rye ten years earlier. It soon became clear that, like Salinger's novel, Catch-22 was a book which would either intrigue or infuriate. Thus, while Nelson Algren was busy composing the following accolade:

> . . . this novel is not merely the best American novel to come out of World War II; it is the best American novel that has come out of anywhere in years.[1]

Whitney Balliett, in The New Yorker, was less enthusiastic, and decided that the novel was:

> . . . a debris of sour jokes, stage anger, dirty words, synthetic looniness, and the sort of antic behaviour that children fall into when they know they are losing our attention.[2]

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[1] Nelson Algren, review in The Nation, November 4, 1961, pp. 357-358.

[2] Whitney Balliett, review in The New Yorker, December 9, 1961, pp.247-249.

However, there was one area in which the majority of critics, hostile and favourable alike, found some measure of agreement. This concerned the book's organization and structure, which most declared to be wilfully capricious if not totally non-existent, and which was classified variously as undisciplined, repetitive, and monotonous. R.G. Stern, writing for The New York Times Book Review, thought that Catch-22:

> . . . gasps for want of craft and sensibility . . . Joseph Heller is like a brilliant painter who decides to throw all the ideas in his sketchbooks onto one canvas, relying on their charm and shock to compensate for the lack of design. . .[1]

Even Robert Brustein, in general lavishly enthusiastic about the novel, admitted that "it is absurd to judge Heller . . . by conventional artistic standards . . . since his book is as formless as any picaresque epic."[2] A full three years after the publication of the novel, Joseph Waldmeir was able to re-affirm these views when he stated that:

> . . . a close reading of the text in terms of texture and tone reveals only that its complexity is superficial, that its variety is only apparent, that its apparent repetitiveness is unfortunately only too real.[3]

In this last chapter I intend to take up two of the main objections of these critics and, by a close appraisal of Heller's management of time, to show

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[1]R.G. Stern, review in The New York Times Book Review, October 22, 1961, p. 50.

[2]Robert Brustein, op.cit., p. 13.

[3]Joseph Waldmeir, "Two Novelists of the Absurd : Heller and Kesey", Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, V (Autumn 1964), pp. 192-204.

some of the ways in which they can now be refuted. As the quotations at the head of the chapter may suggest, I will be concerned firstly with the alleged repetitiveness to which Waldmeir refers, a consideration which will lead us, by way of Yossarian's role as an interprative medium, to an examination of Heller's digressive technique in the light of Tristram Shandy.

What caused most critics to censure Heller for a lack of structural control was the erratic and inconsistent time-scheme of Catch-22, a system involving the transition from scene to scene with no regard for chronological or historical sequence, and which necessitates the recapitulation of certain "key" events as past incidents are retold. For the larger part of the novel, the narrative stream is in a continual state of flux, presenting a pastiche of image and action by the assimilation of past events into the fictional present. In this manner, through the principle of the "flash-back" technique, Heller is able to develop his picture piecemeal, by an elaborate system of cross-references which finally brings the whole construction into sharp focus. This structural nonconformity came as a flagrant breach of the rules established by the more orthodox writers of war fiction, a genre traditionally dependent upon the logical and sequential progression from battle to battle, from death to death. The critics were reluctant to regard the apparent formlessness of Catch-22 as anything other than mere caprice, an artificial and pretentious short-cut to what John Wain described as "the avant garde and 'advanced'."[1] It was left to Jan Solomon to restore the balance in

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[1]John Wain, op.cit., p. 169.

favour of Heller, when, in 1966, he published an article[1] which answered the charges of the novel's formlessness. Solomon is in the main concerned with aspects of time and structure other than those with which I propose to deal, but it would offer a convenient point of departure for my discussion to glance at the ground he has covered. Solomon argues convincingly that the book depends for its effect on its structural and chronological idiosyncrasies, and during the course of his explication establishes several major points: that "behind what appear to be merely random events lies a careful system of time-sequences involving two distinct and mutually contradictory chronologies" (these concern Yossarian and Milo); that "by manipulating the points at which the different systems cross, Heller creates a structural absurdity enforcing the absurdity of character and event" (this literal, structural absurdity was missed by every reviewer and critic); that Heller sustains "ever-increasing tension through the narrated order, not the actual chronology, of events"; and that "Yossarian, like many other anti-heroes of modern fiction from Leopold Bloom to Moses Herzog, lives in a world dominated not by chronological but by psychological time." Solomon succeeds in demonstrating that the structural irregularities of Catch-22 are the result of a complex and organized plan, and that the end of this plan is a greater psychological verisimilitude. Solomon pursues further the question of repetition when remarking upon the final account of the dying Snowden:

> In Yossarian's final insubordination, his desertion, chronology and the narrative order of events combine. The chronological order of events has brought Yossarian into dangerous

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[1] Jan Solomon, "The Structure of Joseph Heller's Catch-22", Critique IX (1966-67), 46-57. Subsequent references in this paragraph are to the same article.

> conflict with Colonels Cathcart and Korn. Thus, present events motivate him. But past events are equally forceful, for at this point in the novel the death of Snowden is narrated in full and horrible detail. Snowden's death occurred months before, but it is described at the end of the novel so that it may have its ultimate effect in the ultimate action of the novel, the desertion. There is, of course, psychological validity; past events can motivate present actions, but more important is the insistent denial of the typical novelistic convention which locates causes in immediately antecedent events..

Although Solomon's contention is perfectly just, he omits to explain fully the real value of the scene in its context, that is, in the light of the numerous repetitions of the event which have punctuated the narrative before this point in the novel. He fails to substantiate his earlier claim that Heller achieves an "ever-increasing tension through the narrated order" of events, and he appears to minimise the symbolic and thematic function of the recurrent image.

The re-iteration of Snowden's death scene is neither superfluous nor redundant, and if it is repetitive in Waldmeir's sense, then it is deliberately made so. The motif reinforces the underlying theme in Catch-22 of violence and mortality; it serves as an emblem of devastation and doom, and, simultaneously, through the increasing degree of detail in which it is presented on each new appearance, keeps time with the mounting psychological crisis facing Yossarian. Snowden's death is alluded to on no fewer than nine separate occasions before the completed vision is supplied; each time Snowden enters the narrative we are given additional information, until, in the final scene, we have a fully rounded account of the "liver, lungs, kidneys, ribs, stomach and bits of the stewed tomatoes

Snowden had eaten that day for lunch."[1] When we first hear of him, in a question posed by Yossarian during one of Clevinger's educational sessions, we are told merely that "Snowden had been killed over Avignon when Dobbs went crazy in mid-air and seized the controls away from Huple."[2] Gradually, the nature of Snowden's wound, his manner of dying, and Yossarian's peculiar involvement in the situation are all established. The references are by no means haphazard in their placing, being interpolated into the narrative at strategic points so as to establish a rhythmic, symbolic counterpoint to Yossarian's increasing state of agitation. The placing of the final revelation concerning Snowden immediately prior to Yossarian's desertion does, as Solomon has noted, give added impetus to Yossarian's flight and establishes the special significance of the event for Yossarian. There is nothing unique in Heller's use of such a device, and John Hersey has made use of it, with less success, in The War Lover.[3] Where the real significance lies in Heller's method is in the steps he takes to ensure a sufficiently close association between Yossarian and the image of his dying comrade.

In order to forge this special relationship between Yossarian and Snowden, Heller often resorts to the strategy of recalling the scene of Snowden's death through Yossarian's consciousness, by having it freely interrupt his thoughts. This, of course, involves the operation of the

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[1] Catch-22, p. 449.

[2] Ibid., pp. 35-36.

[3] See John Hersey, The War Lover (New York, 1966), where the recurrent allusions to the death of Kid Lynch are meant to create a similar tension. In this case, the pattern of reference is marred by the complete inadequacy and bathos of the fully exposed scene.

memory, and in this way the repeated image comes to suggest the passing of a remembered incident through Yossarian's mind, a re-enactment given immediate form and substance by the real horror the scene connotes for Yossarian. This effect is achieved in a variety of ways. At one point we see Yossarian considering the advantages of hospital life:

> Being in hospital was better than being over Bologna or flying over Avignon with Huple and Dobbs at the controls and Snowden dying in back.[1]

Here the image is only a fleeting one. Later, Yossarian begins to think of all his dead comrades:

> The gnarled and stunted tree trunks creaked and groaned and forced Yossarian's thoughts each morning, even before he was fully awake, back on Kid Sampson's skinny legs bloating and decaying . . . After Kid Sampson's legs, he would think of pitiful, whimpering Snowden freezing to death in the rear section of the plane.[2]

Elsewhere, Yossarian is seen struggling for his life with Nately's whore shortly after Nately's death:

> "Please," he urged her inarticulately with his arm about her shoulders, recollecting with pained sadness how inarticulate and enfeebled he had felt in the plane coming back from Avignon when Snowden kept whimpering to him that he was cold, he was cold, and all Yossarian could offer him in return was "There, there. There, there."[3]

On another occasion, Yossarian wakes in hospital and feels cold:

> He was cold, and he thought of Snowden, who had never been his pal but was a

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[1] Catch-22, p. 170.

[2] Ibid., p. 355.

[3] Ibid., p. 405.

> vaguely familiar kid who was badly
> wounded and freezing to death in the
> puddle of harsh yellow sunlight
> splashing into his face through the
> side gunport . . .
> "I'm cold," Snowden said softly.
> "I'm cold."[1]

These extracts should make it abundantly clear that Heller has caused many of the Snowden scenes to find re-iteration through Yossarian's awareness. Moreover, in so doing, he has used a technique reminiscent of that sometimes used by writers like Faulkner and Proust when they require to effect a transition in time by recalling a past incident, or simply to achieve in a character an association of ideas. Heller allows the vision of Snowden to be recalled for Yossarian through a variety of stimuli. This method can function by way of an emotion (Yossarian's feeling of helplessness when trying to placate the whore), through a physical sensation (his coldness), or through a suggestive mixture of sight and sound (the creaking tree trunks). These stimuli work for Yossarian in the same way as the golfers' cries of "caddie", as well as impressions of smell and touch, invariably cause the idiot, Benjy, to think of his sister, Caddy, in Faulkner's The Sound and The Fury, and as the taste of tea and madeleine reminds Proust's "Moi" of his childhood in Remembrance of Things Past. Yossarian, however, is equipped with this faculty in a limited sense only, since his thoughts return always to the one point, to Snowden's death. Nevertheless, Heller shows himself capable of slipping from the narrative present to the past by means of word or thought association. It is this fluidity with regard to time and the narrative which brings us to the question of time and structure generally, and to a point of comparison

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[1] Ibid., p. 446.

between Catch-22 and Tristram Shandy in the principle and technique of the digression.

In Catch-22 Joseph Heller has faced many of the problems concerning the role of time in the novel which met Laurence Sterne two centuries earlier in Tristram Shandy. Like Heller, Sterne was usually censored for the apparent lack of structure and design in his novel, until critics like Theodore Baird,[1] A.A. Mendilow,[2] and Henri Fluchère[3] proved that Sterne has been assiduous in providing an accurate historical and chronological background for his work. Baird in particular has been concerned with reconstructing that historical time-sequence out of various clues (like the dates and venues of Uncle Toby's battles), which Sterne is careful to insert from time to time into the narrative. It is possible to achieve a similar reconstruction in Catch-22, by a compilation of data concerning the sequence of raids and the proliferation of the requisite amount of missions. Given that both writers begin with a definite and formal time-scheme, they then set about destroying logical narrative sequence by means of time-shifts, or digressions. We have seen that Heller can be said to use the cinematic device of "flash-back" with Yossarian, and that this system carries with it certain psychological undertones with regard to the protagonist. However, Heller does not restrict the technique to one character; for the first two-thirds of the book it controls his narrative method

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[1] Theodore Baird, "The Time-Scheme of Tristram Shandy and a Source", PMLA LI (1936), pp. 803-820.

[2] A.A. Mendilow, Time And The Novel (London, 1952), pp. 158-200.

[3] Henri Fluchère, Laurence Sterne (London, 1965), pp. 90-130.

generally. Of greatest relevance here, bearing Tristram Shandy in mind, is what Heller does once an initial time-shift away from the fictional present has been made. I am concerned with the involutions in time that can take place within each digression, the way a major digression is liable to a subsequent sub-division, producing a series of tangential digressions, each involving a potential move backwards or forwards in time. It is on this basis that the analogy with Tristram Shandy may be supported.

In order to present the analogy in its simplest terms, I have selected for comparison two passages, one from either work, which typify the technique as a whole. In his Time And The Novel, A.A. Mendilow has given a thorough explication of Sterne's use of the time-shift in the first book of Tristram Shandy. He demonstrates that the quasi-autobiographer (that is, Tristram himself), manoeuvres his narrative back and forth through time between dates as far apart as 1651 and 1759, and that the digressive method whereby these changes are wrought is founded largely on the association of ideas in Tristram's mind. To take a different example from elsewhere in the novel, let us consider the scene, in chapter twenty-nine of Volume III, where we learn of Walter Shandy's desolation on hearing of the unfortunate accident to his new-born son's nose. This scene takes place, historically speaking and according to Tristram himself, on November 5th, 1718. At this point the narrative is interrupted by Tristram, who feels obliged to account for his father's distress:

> To explain this, I must leave him upon
> the bed for half an hour, - and my
> uncle Toby in his old fringed chair

siting beside him.[1]

The next chapter plunges immediately, without any formal introduction, into a conversation between Tristram's great-grandfather and his wife. Thus, a move backwards in historic time has been achieved, caused by associations in Tristram's consciousness of "the word Nose",[2] since Tristram's great-grandmother is seen to be objecting to the shortness of her husband's nose. Next, the need to define that article carries us forward in time, beyond the date of Tristram's birth, to a debate between Tristram and Eugenius over matters of definition. We are then returned to Tristram's great-grandparents, and then, again through the idea of the nose, forward again to a scene involving Tristram's grandparents and the jointure they must pay to the long-lived great-grandmother. The transition between the two historical periods, and incidentally between two chapters, is achieved thus:

> My great-grandfather was convinced. -
> He untwisted the paper, and signed the article.
>
> CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE
>
> - What an unconscionable jointure, my dear, do we pay out of this small estate of ours, quoth my grandmother to my grandfather.
> My father, replied my grandfather, had no more nose, my dear, saving the mark, than there is upon the back of my hand. -[3]

Tristram interposes with:

> - Now, you must know, that my great-

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[1] Laurence Sterne, Tristram Shandy (Harmondsworth, Middx. 1967), p. 224.

[2] Ibid., p. 224.

[3] Ibid., p. 226.

> grandmother outlived my grandfather twelve years; so that my father had the jointure to pay, a hundred and fifty pounds half-yearly . . .[1]

From here we are taken back to a discussion of Tristram's father and the question of heredity. After an interlude in which we overhear Didius Tribonius and Tristram discussing his father's stubbornness in opinions, we are led, via Walter's theory on noses and Slawkenbergius' Tale, back to the prostrate Walter Shandy. Thus we are returned to our original position after a sequence of digressions covering apparently random events and phases, which can either precede or antedate our point of departure at Tristram's birth. Fluchère has commented on this digressive technique:

> So one digression leads to another, each one proceeds by a series of expansions, or by spontaneous branchings-out even inside a theme, which a memory, an idea, sometimes even a word, will suddenly provoke . . .[2]

My point of reference in Catch-22 concerns the tenth chapter, which opens with the statement that "Clevinger was dead",[3] thus locating the incident as having taken place some time during Yossarian's stay in hospital with the missions at forty-five. Heller remarks upon the mysterious circumstances of Clevinger's disappearance, and goes on to observe:

> The disappearance was astounding, as astonishing, certainly, as the Grand Conspiracy of Lowery Field, when all sixty-four men in a single barrack vanished one payday and were never heard of again.[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 226.

[2] Henri Fluchère, op. cit., p. 45.

[3] Catch-22, p. 107.

[4] Ibid., p. 107.

In the narrative stream the two incidents become associated by the fact of the disappearance, effecting a time transition, or digression, which takes us to a point preceding Clevinger's disappearance. At Lowery Field we meet ex-P.F.C. Wintergreen, and we are told of the incident in which Wintergreen struck open a waterpipe while digging and the word spread that it was oil:

> Soon every man who could find a shovel was outside digging frenziedly for oil. Dirt flew everywhere; the scene was almost like the morning in Pianosa seven months later after the night Milo bombed the squadron with every plane he had accumulated in his M & M syndicate . . .[1]

In this case, Heller has been more helpful than Sterne in providing us with exact information as to the length of the time-lapse involved. From this point Heller manipulates his narrative through a series of associations to a point antecedent to Milo's bombing of the squadron. We learn that Chief White Halfoat was transferred from Lowery Field to Pianosa as a result of the "oil" strike, and that the Chief came as a replacement for a Lieutenant Coombs, who had been killed with Kraft:

> Yossarian felt guilty each time he remembered Kraft, guilty because Kraft had been killed on Yossarian's second bomb run, and guilty because Kraft had got mixed up innocently also in the Splendid Atabrine Insurrection that had begun in Puerto Rico on the first leg of their flight overseas and ended in Pianosa ten days later with Appleby striding dutifully into the orderly room the moment he arrived to report Yossarian for

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[1] Ibid., p. 109.

refusing to take his Atabrine tablets.[1]

At this stage, then, we are on Pianosa during the first days of Yossarian's stay, at a point preceding the deaths of Kraft and Clevinger as well as Milo's bombing of the squadron. There are references to the odd behaviour of Major Major, to the reliable Sergeant Towser, and to Appleby, who left Major Major's tent "wondering if perhaps Yossarian were not the only man privileged to wear an officer's uniform who was crazy."[2] The epithet "crazy" leads, through Sergeant Towser, to the case of Mudd, the "dead" man in Yossarian's tent, killed at Orvieto with the missions at thirty-five. In turn, we learn that Mudd left Yossarian's tent "all contaminated with death . . . in the same way that all was contaminated with death the very next week during the Great Big Siege of Bologna."[3] Again helpful with the time-lapse involved, Heller leaves us, at the close, through the idea of contamination, at a point antecedent to that which opens the chapter and the novel itself. In such a way, Heller provides an itinerary of events, apparently at random and completely unconnected, by a method of transition strongly reminiscent of Sterne's technique. The only qualification that need be added here is that, in Tristram Shandy, Sterne is careful to give the associationist theory its greatest flexibility by allowing the technique to function solely through the consciousness of the narrator, Tristram. In this way, Sterne the writer may retire behind

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[1] Ibid., p. 109.

[2] Ibid., p. 111.

[3] Ibid., p. 112.

the persona of Tristram the chronicler and allow the latter's peculiar thought processes to have free rein with the material. Heller follows this practice only in part, for when events are not linked through Yossarian's awareness, we see Heller taking a more obtrusive hand in plot manipulation, as in most of the last quotation I have used, where it is clearly Heller the author rather than any character creation who controls the time-shifts. This is possibly the result of certain modifications that Heller carried out on an early version of the novel in which, according to Frederick Karl, the narrative was "typically Joycean . . . full of intermittent streams of consciousness and involutions of time."[1] It appears that in re-writing sections of the novel for greater clarity Heller was forced into reducing his use of the "stream of consciousness" technique and, accordingly, was led to reveal more obviously his own position as omnipotent author.

The analogy thus illustrated, it remains only to attempt some definition of the value and object of such a design, for design it is, in both cases, given the chronological consistency which may be extracted from beneath the pattern of digression. In defending the erratic and disjunctive structure of Catch-22 Vance Ramsey has this to say:

> The abrupt shifts in time and event are . . . not flaws of the book; rather they are central to its technique. These are not really flashbacks, because they are not related either to a character's specific remembrance nor are they often explicitly related to the situation which they interrupt. One

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[1] Frederick Karl, "Joseph Heller's Catch-22 : Only Fools Walk In Darkness" in Contemporary American Novelists, ed. Harry T. Moore, Carbondale, 1964), p. 141.

> of the functions of these abrupt time-shifts . . . is to wrench the characters out of the traditionally ordered, time-bound context of the novel. Events exist primarily not in any cause-and-effect or chronological relation to one another but simultaneously. This does not mean that time has been escaped in the novel; on the contrary, it has become more personal and hence more crucial. Because of the nearness of the book's character's to death, time is literally running out on them.[1]

Although I have shown that at least some of these time transitions are "related . . . to a character's specific remembrance", Ramsey is correct in emphasizing the impression of simultaneity and immediacy achieved through the technique in Catch-22. In commenting on Sterne's digressive technique, A.A. Mendilow says:

> The book [Tristram Shandy] consists almost exclusively of constituted scenes and discriminated occasions, presented without introduction or reference to their calendar relation to proceeding or succeeding scenes. This is the true time-shift, and it emphasizes the effect of every part as a present, not as relatively past or future.[2]

With the reservation that Heller often indicates precisely the "calendar relation" of events, Mendilow's judgement can be applied aptly to Catch-22. Although the whole action of Catch-22 is seen, gramatically speaking and from the point of view of the narrator, as having taken place in the past, there remains a similar sense of immediacy to that which Mendilow speaks

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[1] Vance Ramsey, "From Here to Absurdity : Heller's Catch-22" in Seven Contemporary Authors, ed. Thomas B. Whitbread, (Texas, 1966), pp. 97-119.

[2] A.A. Mendilow, op.cit., p. 182.

of, achieved partly by the abrupt juxtaposition of scenes, and partly through a lively and colourful dialogue which is generally given in the present. In Tristram Shandy, this design serves to underline the point Sterne wants to make concerning the psychology of Tristram, a system which orders past events into a uniform present, regardless of historical relativity, thereby suggesting the jostling of all past events in a continuous state of presentness in Tristram's mind. In Catch-22, Heller sets out to achieve a similar relation between time, structure, and theme. The overall structural irregularity succeeds in suggesting a collective state of mind, a condition in which the present moment, not the past or future is of critical importance. For these airmen, thoughts of survival occupy their every thought. They live in the present, for the present, and always in close proximity to death. In this sense, Ramsey's claim that the time-shifts are "not really flashbacks" is a viable one, for their total experience becomes merged into a single preoccupation with the present. Past events are recalled in the narrative with a vigour and freshness which places each scene before us in the most vivid of terms. This impression of presentness largely destroys considerations of relative time, and has given rise to the confusion which many critics have felt.

Perhaps a more basic function of Heller's unorthodox time-scheme is to support the tenor of violence and chaos which characterizes the book generally. The abrupt and apparently pointless time-shifts mirror in concrete terms the experience of the fliers, one punctuated by brief but chaotic scenes of violence, equally as illogical. John Wain has detected something akin to this behind Heller's use of an unconventional structure. Wain claims the method to be "completely justified" and goes on to explain why:

> To these bomber-pilots, life does not flow in a regular, unfolding ribbon, experience following on from experience, as it does in even the most tumultuous life in peace-time. It teeters round and round in a continual stalemate. Each time they wait to fly on another mission, everything has to stand still until they know whether or not they are going to survive. The experiences they have in the meantime, all the escapist drinking, whoring and quarrelling, may be intense, but they are static and self-contained. They issue from nowhere and lead nowhere, being enclosed in a staff cast of anxiety. And this gives us the strong impression that the lives of fighting men are utterly and helplessly different, cut off and set apart from normal lives. Which is, of course, what erat demonstrandum.[1]

The final picture to emerge from the apparent formlessness of Catch-22 shows that the type of life led by Yossarian and his comrades, and therefore, suggests Heller, by fighting men in general, is one lived under highly specialized circumstances, bearing little or no relation to the life of more normal conditions. The sense that the tempo of the fliers' lives fluctuates and undulates, from one mission to the next, is successfully conveyed through the unevenness of the narrative stream itself. The idea of the soldier's experience being highly esoteric, of his microcosm being a world apart, is what war writing has traditionally attempted to portray, but through a conventional and orderly means of expression completely unsuitable for the faithful depiction of such specialized experience. The novelists of the two wars have by and large been forced to write in spite of, rather than with the aid of, the forms at their disposal. Heller has succeeded in co-ordinating structure and theme so closely as to produce

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[1] John Wain, op.cit., p.169.

completely the impression of the soldier's life, to borrow a phrase from Wain, being always at a remove from the normal, "enclosed in a staff cast of anxiety." It is a success which, finally, vindicates him entirely in his reliance on the digressive time-shift. These digressions are legitimate and functional, not irresponsible, and give Catch-22 its internal coherence of theme and tone. Joseph Waldmeir once asserted of the digressions in Catch-22 that:

> . . . they are by and large interchangeable - so much so that many of them could actually be removed without in the least marring the novel's structure . . . removing some of the episodes could cut down the repetitiveness, the redundancy, and improve the novel considerably.[1]

On the contrary, such treatment would emasculate the novel irreparably, and one is left to echo Sterne's view of digressions that to "take them out of this book for instance, - you might as well take the book along with them."[2]

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[1] Joseph Waldmeir, op.cit., pp. 194-195.

[2] Tristram Shandy, p. 95.

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