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Investigating the Mind with Heller, Vonnegut, and O'Brien:
Psychological Trauma and Narrative Structure in the American War Novel

by


Daniel Trump

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requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

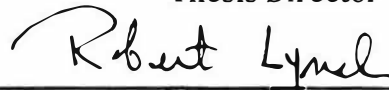
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-- Introduction --

The 'American war novel' is an exceedingly broad genre. If taken at its simplest form, it can encompass titles ranging from James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy* to Tom Clancy's latest addition to his *Rainbow Six* series. Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* are novels that very simply could be filed away somewhere in that American war novel ether that exists between a high-school library and an airport bookstore, but that would be a disservice to Heller, Vonnegut, and O'Brien. What sets their novels apart from the general milieu of the American war novel is how each uses narrative structure to explore more deeply the theme of the psychological trauma of war.

This work explores the individually varied ways in which Heller, Vonnegut, and O'Brien respectively employ form and structure in their novels to create new narrative contexts in which to investigate more fully the deepest realities of the individual's combat experience. By manipulating these aspects, they create unique points of view from which to examine the most remote recesses of the individual mind. Specifically, these authors use structure and form to create a place in the mind where objective sensory input and subjective psychological interpretation meet, allowing them access to a part of human existence that is non-linear, absurd and abstract, but simultaneously wholly natural and deeply realistic.

America has been a nation of war since its inception; and, soon after the Revolution, authors began a chronology of attempts at interpreting those armed conflicts that have defined our nation. Since the Revolution, when the country first began crafting its identity, the American war novel has been doing likewise. However, Heller, Vonnegut,

and O'Brien significantly advanced the genre not only by depicting battles and questioning the morality of war (as well as its requisite actions), but also by delving into the lasting effects and psychological interiority of the individual's traumatic experience.

Beginnings—The First War Novel

Eric Carl Link states that “from the time of [the Sugar Act of 1764 and the Stamp Act of 1765] until the ratification of the Constitution in 1789, most writing in America reached its audience in the form of broadsides, pamphlets, or newspapers” (274). It was not until the 1820s, moreover, that James Fenimore Cooper became America's first financially successful novelist, an event that some feel can be more strongly attributed to the capability for, and the subsequent delocalization of, the mass production of literature that came about in that same era (Davidson 74-75). Link explains that “after the war, as American authors sought native materials around which to fashion a national literature, some turned to the events of the Revolutionary War for inspiration” (276). The same inspiration affected Cooper's writings, and therein lie the beginnings of the American war novel.

Cooper published his second novel, *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground*, in 1821, an event that marks the publication of the first novel in America to fully address “the country's decisive post-colonial event—the political and military liberation from Britain” (Franklin 413). Until this point, writers such as Charles Brockden Brown and Susannah Rowson (two of the most prolific in their novel writing) had “never addressed the war frontally” and only employed it as an “extra-narrative” in the plots of their works; even Cooper's first novel, *Precaution*, published in 1820, was an attempt to mimic British style (Franklin 413). It is these facts that bolster Dave McTieman's evaluation when he

credits Cooper with the creation of the first truly American novel. He states that, although the neutral ground of the novel's title can read as a reference to the shades of grey in which spies must operate, it "can also stand for the terrain of the nascent American novel, where British literary conventions confronted post-colonial politics as Cooper understood them, and no clear lines of authority existed to resolve their differences" (3). In being the first author to address the events that created the fledgling American nation of his lifetime, Cooper became the first author able to establish a sense of what would become the new American literary consciousness.

In *The Spy*, although Harvey Birch (the central character whose occupation gives the novel its title) is constantly propped up as honorable and respectable, Cooper "never silences the accusations of other characters who consider Birch demonic [for what he does as a spy]" (McTiernan 5-6). Cooper's neutral presentation of Harvey Birch gives the novel its historical standing, laying the foundation for a whole literary genre by its approach to the in-depth portrayal of war which had previously been taboo. Indeed, Cooper's creation of Birch set a precedent for all future American novelists, enabling them to "seek out ways to make ordinary figures bear extraordinary meaning" (Franklin 422). McTiernan states that "Cooper relies [...] on the conventions of other genres—primarily, the domestic romance and the historical adventure" (3)—to provide the structure for his groundbreaking address of a vast, dark and enduringly human experience: conflict and war.

In his representation of the Revolution and the creation of Harvey Birch—with the social, ethical, and moral questions he represents—Cooper places American war literature on a foundation of introspection and socio-cultural analysis, as well as that of

the minutiae of war and battle itself. This new endeavor and vein of study brought forth the fountainhead of literary possibilities from which Heller, Vonnegut, and O'Brien would later draw narratives.

Psychology Enters the War Novel—*The Red Badge of Courage*

The Civil War, David Lundberg explains, “provoked an enormous outpouring of writing, mainly histories, biographies, and memoirs” (374). In his critical study, Lundberg attempts to explain this phenomenon:

By suppressing or ignoring the more repellent aspects of their war experiences, Union and Confederate soldiers were probably conforming to the literary conventions of their time [...]. For mid-nineteenth-century American men, reticence about adversity, whether encountered on the frontier or the battlefield, was probably the norm. (375)

Daniel Aaron comments upon the disconcerting lack of quality fiction arising from such a dramatic time in American culture (xix) and goes so far as to disparage Mark Twain—arguably the pre-eminent realist of the nineteenth century—by referring to him as “the man so happily equipped to write the national ‘epic,’” yet who “studiedly avoided doing so” (133). Aaron provides further elaboration in stating that “when [Twain] did turn to the war, he usually burlesqued his own connection with it” (133). Yet, while Lundberg and Aaron lament the lack of novels of merit following the Civil War, Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* presents an innovative and compelling re-imagination of that same conflict.

The Red Badge of Courage scarcely receives higher critical praise than when it is extolled by Kurt Vonnegut in his book, *A Man Without a Country*—along with *Moby*

Dick, Huckleberry Finn, A Farewell to Arms, The Scarlet Letter, The Iliad and The Odyssey, Crime and Punishment, The Bible, and “The Charge of the Light Brigade” (8)—and placed on his list of “all great literature” (8). While *The Red Badge of Courage* has become a mainstay of the high school reading list, David Lundberg’s description of Crane’s novel as “a book written in 1895 by an author born in 1871 who knew of the fighting only at second hand” (374) stereotypically exhibits notes of the dismissive tone with which many critics address *The Red Badge of Courage* (possibly because of its previously mentioned misplaced juvenile affiliation). However, Lundberg does acknowledge its historical place to some degree as he lists the novel, along with *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Naked and the Dead*, as part of our literary heritage (373).

In their mutual inexperience of their respectively chosen subject matter, both Crane and Cooper stand connected. Cooper used John Jay’s anecdotes about Enoch Crosby as the basis of *The Spy* and interviewed his neighbors in Westchester, New York, to fill in the setting and details of the events (Franklin 416). Crane was not even born when the Civil War ended, thus forcing him to rely on reportage, interviews, and other sources for his material. It is the motifs Crane presents in *The Red Badge of Courage* that strike a chord—the questioning tone, uncertainty and confusion of the individual’s experience in combat—and anticipate the American war novels of World War I.

Although his descriptions of battle were accurate and compelling enough to convince a Civil War veteran to claim that he fought with Stephen Crane (Johnson ix), it was the significant questions posed by Crane’s novel that allowed his work to diverge from the mere retracing of steps and objectively detailed action of battle. Crane’s “main concern[s],” as Aaron states, are “the nature of war and what happens to people who

engage in it? Is there any larger meaning or purpose behind mass killing? How does man behave under extreme battle stress?” (215). To portray these concerns, Crane chose the simple premise of following every decision, movement and thought of young Henry Fleming through his battle experiences and the “testing stages in [his] psychological development” (Knapp 59). To break away from a standard retelling of the minutiae of the events of a battle, Crane relied on a “powerful, innovative device [an extremely limited third person point of view]” to “screen out the objective world that is the focus of traditional war narratives,” and employed “vivid representations of his hero’s psychological response to war rather than to the facts and conditions of war” (Colvert 35-36). The presence of Crane’s “concerns” and his device become evident in his first and second chapters, respectively.

Near the close of Chapter One, Crane forces his protagonist to re-evaluate everything he thought about war and his place within it. As he is introduced to the foreign life of a soldier at war, he is reduced to utter simplicity—“for recreation, he could twiddle his thumbs”—and blank-slate absorbency as “various veterans told him tales” (9). This vast expanse of inexperience leaves him to encounter “a more serious problem. He lay in his bunk pondering upon it. He tried to mathematically prove to himself that he would not run from a battle” (9). It is this problem, and the anxiety it causes, that initiates the first displays of Crane’s subjective distortions of Henry Fleming’s point-of-view. Crane describes the fires from enemy camps looking like “red eyes” peering at Fleming, the youth’s seeing “dark shadows that moved like monsters,” and then, “staring, once, at the red eyes across the river, [Henry Fleming] conceived them to be growing larger, as the orbs of a row of dragons, advancing” (15). The distortions listed here are the result only

of Fleming's anxiety before battle; Crane sets the foundation in these first two chapters for his further exploration as Henry encounters true fear and anxiety in the heat of battle.

Running from the fighting after he sees those around him being wounded and fleeing themselves, he is transformed from the tested and proved soldier he hoped he was becoming into the coward he was afraid he might be:

Since he had turned his back upon the fight, his fears had been wondrously magnified. Death about to thrust him between the shoulder-blades was far more dreadful than death about to smite him between the eyes [...]. As he, leading, went across a little field, he found himself in a region of shells. They hurtled over his head with long wild screams. As he heard them, he imagined them to have rows of cruel teeth that grinned at him.

(42)

As he reflects in the final chapter of the novel, Crane is able to re-establish in Henry Fleming a comfortable and stable view of the world after passing through the traumas and stressors of battle and emerging from them unscathed, but not unchanged: "Gradually [Fleming's] brain emerged from the clogged clouds and at last he was enabled to more closely comprehend himself [...]. He had dwelt in a land of strange, squalling upheavals [...]. He had been where there was red of blood and black of passion, and he was escaped" (133).

In concluding his assessment of *The Red Badge of Courage*, James Colvert states that "[William Dean] Howells's sense that Crane's 'floundering' attempt to portray real war resulted in merely 'a huddled and confused effect' ironically verified its success" (45). With *The Red Badge of Courage*, Crane raised the bar for American novelists of coming

wars. James Fenimore Cooper's ulterior objective had been not only to write a novel that documented some part of the Revolution, but also to establish the validity of American novels as a whole. That vein thus established, Crane then took the American war novel one step further, using it to address the psychological matters of war rather than Cooper's vague and unresolved debate over the morality of spying. Crane builds upon Cooper's presentation of the individual in conflict by presenting not a moral debate on the subject of war, but a subjective interpretation of war through the ever-impressionable eyes of a young soldier, a presentation by which the reader is led into a whole new world of debate over the place war holds or should hold in American culture.

World War I and the Experienced Author

A.N. Nikolyukin reflects that the "self-awareness," initially explored and exhibited in the psychologically reflective presentation of *The Red Badge of Courage*, "did not assume its final form on a truly large scale until the 1920s" (576). Part of this progression stems from the fact that, as stated before, most fiction of the Civil War did not detail the horrors of battle and "[conformed] to the literary conventions of their time" (Lundberg 375). Lundberg explains how this lack of literary fulfillment in Civil War fiction had a palpable effect on America's attitude toward future wars:

Since most literary accounts presented the Civil War in a favorable light, it is not surprising that no revulsion against war itself emerged after 1865.

Veterans looked back on their war years with fondness, remembering them as a time of unity, idealism, and selfless dedication to principle. Some even saw in war a possible antidote to the corrupting materialism of industrial America [...]. During the early part of the twentieth century, then, war was

considered by many to be a grand and glorious thing. This perception played an important part in the literary response to World War I. (376)

Lundberg argues that the historical American sense of the realities of World War I was greatly diminished in comparison to our modern and more globally historicized conceptions. As historically relevant as the works of the “Lost Generation” have become, at the time they were only a small sampling of the social reaction to, and understanding of, World War I. To explicate this point, Lundberg states that, although much of the fighting itself was traumatic and horrifying, it “came to a swift and victorious conclusion” and left soldiers with “little reason to question the meaning of war or the decisions of their leaders” (379) as became a major theme in the fiction of John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway. Lundberg states that average American soldiers returning from battle “had accomplished what they set out to do, and at a minimum cost. In their own minds they were far from a ‘Lost Generation’, living in a world deprived of meaning or purpose” (378).

Willard Thorp further rebuts the commonly held literary views of the dominance of the “Lost Generation” in the early twentieth century American literature. He states that as much as westerns and historical novels took literary precedent over the family novels of the twentieth century before the war, the latter were the more popular in their day (11). These works provided their readers with a reassurance of the historical status quo and played directly into the national zeal upon entering World War I. The historical perspective provided to young American soldiers by their novels—that war was an opportunity to fulfill the American dream of “unity, idealism, and selfless dedication to principle” (Lundberg 376)—allowed them to harken back to the idealized view of the

Civil War. These young men gladly went off to World War I; many even did so believing that “technology might shorten wars, make them less bloody, and perhaps even eliminate them altogether” (Lundberg 382). Stanley Cooperman presents the truth of what young soldiers found in Europe:

War—the fire in which heroes had been forged throughout man’s history—drained Europe and drew in America. But in place of fire there was mud; in place of heroes there were faceless masses of men butchering each other with little or none of the personal tests celebrated in epics reaching back to the origins of language itself. (8)

As World War I progressed, some of what would become the most celebrated authors of the time served in the ambulance corps (as Whitman did during the Civil War) and there gained a unique perspective on the scope of the horrors of war. The experience also “accelerated and intensified [their pre-existing] doubts about the prevailing cultural standards of American society” (Lundberg 381). While most left the war without much experience in actual combat situations, William March, the author of *Company K*, did serve in the armed forces. His novel—published later than its more celebrated contemporaries, John Dos Passos’s *Three Soldiers* and Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*—demonstrates the same struggles as Stephen Crane’s: the individual’s search for identity in conflict and how to best describe the realities of war. March structures his narrative through a multitude of different narrators and, in doing so, is able to present a broader vision of war experience than Crane does without losing the individual’s point of view. In the vignettes told by Privates Mark Mumford and Bernard Glass (46-48), March uses the point of view of two different soldiers engaged in the same event at the same

place in time to create the literary equivalent of a three-dimensional scene; each man tells of the surprising death of their fellow soldier, Jakie Brauer, at the hands of their German prisoner. It is precisely this unique presentation—as each soldier has a different part in the action and each soldier has a different reaction to and perspective on the events that take place—that allows March to distill and then resynthesize small and specific images to create a wholly new point of view.

Albeit creative, March's technique has a self-limiting effect. Its isolated and miniaturized experiences allow for much fracture within the continuity of the novel; yet while the benefit of this is that it allows March to create a broader vision of war from the point of view of a vast swath of humanity, it loses any deeper personal investigation as a result. The protagonists in Dos Passos's and Hemingway's novels each deal with their respective identity crises differently.

Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers* (1921) “was the original example, in subject and tone, of the American war novel as thereafter developed by Hemingway, William March, Hersey, Mailer and James Jones” (Walsh 69). Through his investigation of the vast differences between American archetypes such as those presented by Andrews (the educated and upper-class Virginian), Fuselli (the advancement-driven, middle-class Californian), and Chrisfield (the rural Midwesterner)—among others—Dos Passos creates for himself a character palette designed to reveal philosophical conflicts and present different sides to humanity and how it deals with stressful situations (Clark 76).

Michael Clark explains that “Dos Passos' [sic] examination of psychological doubleness is manifested both in the split consciousness of his central character, Andrews, and in other variations on the theme” (78). As evidence of the former

concern—Andrews split consciousness—Clark cites Dos Passos’s usage of mirrored images such as that in Chapter Four of the section entitled “The World Outside” when Andrews’s reflects on the difference between his two selves. “[Andrews’s] real self, which they had power to kill if they wanted to, was in his name and his number, on lists with millions of other names and other numbers” and “this sentient body of his [... that] was only a pale host that depended on the other self, that suffered for it and cringed for it” (397) are contrasted to portray the essential duality of humanity that is heightened and given greater stakes through wartime scenarios: what a man is to the world around him versus what that same man is as he attempts to define himself.

Dos Passos’s second manifestation of “psychological doubleness”—the “variation on the theme” (78) stated previously—is explained by Clark as being “not a true double, but [which] might be called reciprocal characters—characters who share a common psychological locus, but who represent diverse, sometimes contrasting attributes” (80). As early as the second page of the novel, Dos Passos presents the reader with the inherent conflict for an individual soldier placed into a fighting unit.

The sergeant’s hand snapped up to salute like a block signal. “Companee dis... missed,” he sang out.

The row of men in khaki became a crowd of various individuals with dusty boots and dusty faces. Ten minutes later they lined up and marched in a column of fours to mess. (92)

The speed at which these men are able to transition between the contrasting states of individuality and unity sets the tone for the rest of the novel in which Dos Passos’s characters are in constant states of comparison when individuals are faced with the same

challenges and difficulties. An example of this comes when Hoggenback (the young son of a lumberman) and Andrews are left to debate the role of class and education in the experience individual soldiers:

“I kinder thought an edicated guy like you’d be able to keep out of a mess like this. I wasn’t brought up without edication, but I guess I didn’t have enough.”

“I guess most of ‘em can; I don’t see that it’s much to the point. A man suffers as much if he doesn’t know how to read and write as if he had a college education.”

“I dunno, Skinny. A feller who’s led a rough life can put up with an awful lot.” (Dos Passos 413-414)

Dos Passos’s characters function here in much the same way as March’s, but with a marked elevation in the development of the scenes and ideas presented. Whereas March was limited by the small scope of his characters used to describe similar scenes, it is Dos Passos’s development of characters placed in contrast that allows them to naturally make their own philosophical and experiential comparisons.

With these examples to demonstrate the factors determined in Clark’s description of Dos Passos’s narrative, it can be seen how the author places his characters not only in positions of self-analysis and discovery, but also in situations in which they are enabled to compare and contrast their individual, yet similarly induced, revelations. The effect of this contrast is that he is able to multiply the effect first created in *The Red Badge of Courage*, but now from outside the individual, as well as the inside. Presenting a fractured and careening viewpoint of these men “developed from a single psychological

locus” (Clark 82), Dos Passos is able to explore multiple responses to the same experiences and psychological traumas.

As a result of this evolution of established narrative conceits, Dos Passos brings to bear, as both Cooper and Crane did before him, a new element to this period of the American war novel. Jeffrey Walsh states, “Andrews comes to realize that war is not a historical digression, an accident un-fortuitously interrupting the flow of civilization, but the fullest expression of civilization, its most perfect metaphor” (70). Walsh presents what will become the theme of twentieth-century war novelists to come:

Dos Passos consistently enacts in the novel the pre-eminence of the machine, the processing of the infantryman into inorganic systems, self-perpetuating and geared only to achieving ‘industrialised-slaughter’ [sic]. The American army, a hierarchical model of the social infrastructure, and not the act of killing in combat, now becomes the object of the novelist’s detestation. (71)

In a more detailed variation upon the assembling and disassembling of the troops in the first chapter, this theme is developed through Dos Passos’s usage of the doubleness of his characters: the multiplicity of variations each person must assume in his life as individuals and parts of society. Even as his characters struggle with the multiple definitions of themselves as revealed through the chronology of the narrative, Dos Passos creates alignments and contrasts among his characters in such a way that their experiences—and more importantly their reactions—are constantly reiterated and reassessed at different points in the text. Dos Passos’s multiple characters on similar trajectories allow the reader a vertical comparison of the multiple variations on the same

moments. This theme of the military machine as the target of commentary figures prominently in the works of Heller and Vonnegut in the 1960s, yet Dos Passos's thematic influence is not without an equal in the lexical and structural components of Hemingway's fiction.

Hemingway's novel, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), presents a considerably different, yet no less noteworthy, approach to narrative technique and structure. The novel tracks its protagonist's experiences as an ambulance driver on the Austrian front as he confronts conflict and pain on the battlefield and in the broken relationships surrounding it (Clark 51). Just as Clark's explanation of "reciprocal characters" in *Three Soldiers* provides a new perspective into how to view the differing effects of the trauma of wartime on individuals, Jeffrey Walsh suggests, "the narrative of *A Farewell to Arms* articulates a modernist vision of collapse" (50). Hemingway's style, known for its objective and minimalist strain—showing the tip of the narrative and psychological iceberg, as it were, crafting extensive narrative depth beneath a surface of constrained dialogue and description—presents the depths of the psychological trauma of Frederick Henry through what Walsh titles "language registers" (53). He explains:

Upon the persona [Hemingway] imposes formal and lexical restraints, including the first person narrative method, the coded language of love and war-brotherhood, a concern with action rather than speculative thought, Henry's preference for the tactile and sensory rather than the intellectual: all of these trajectories point to a masculine consciousness taking refuge against the encroachment of war. (53)

The detail of the individual registers themselves and their impact upon the text are

only clearly seen when the work is viewed as a completed whole, yet the strain—the linguistic restraint—exercised by Hemingway can be recognized as soon as the novel opens. His opening sentence—“In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains” (9)—employs three pairs of prepositional phrases that, when combined with the simple diction and syntax of the sentence, provide the literary equivalent of a topographic map. Hemingway lays out the features of the land and events of recent history without a hint of emotional

expression; there is no change even when the narrative shifts from the “clear and swiftly moving and blue” (9) water of the channels to the statement that “at the start of the winter came the permanent rain and with the rain came the cholera. But it was checked and in the end only seven thousand died of it in the army” (10), with the modifier “only” diminishing any emotional impact and effect the death of seven thousand soldiers may have. Hemingway’s levels of emotional repression and disassociation are marginally intriguing at the start, but only take on their fullest and most disturbing expression as the repression extends from historical context and setting description to interpersonal communication and personal revelations.

Walsh references a key scene as he extends the defense of his thesis (54). Using the aforementioned passage as a sort of scientific control and point of comparison for the rest of the novel, he first compares the simple, concise, straightforward lines of the opening to the narrative following Frederick Henry’s decision to desert:

You did not love the floor of a flat-car nor guns with canvas jackets and the smell of vaselined metal or a canvas that rain leaked through, although it is very fine under canvas and pleasant with guns; but you loved

someone else whom now you knew was not even to be pretended there;
 you seeing now very clearly and coldly—not so coldly as clearly and
 emptily. (209-210)

The awkward complexity of structure, disunity of tense, and mid-thought shifting of descriptors are in complete conflict with the opening passage. Hemingway here, through the pre-established tone and “register” of the opening, demonstrates a break in Henry’s psychological state not by any narrative description or personal admission on Henry’s part, but by shattering his diction and syntax; a direct correlation to the shattering of something consequential within him. This same comparative formula must be applied to each scene as the novel progresses to determine what specifically is meant not by what is said, but by how things are said and what specifically is not said.

Hemingway’s use of language to reveal the depths of his protagonist’s mental anguish, exposing his emotional state by altering his verbal patterns, and Dos Passos’s exploration of differing reactions to stress and trauma both become key components in the American war novels that continue their tradition of innovation and interest in the human psyche.

World War II—Developing Narrative Structure

On the brink of World War II, Granville Hicks wrote of World War I: “The United States entered the war too late, and played too restricted a part in it, for our literature to have felt the full effect” (785). The merits of this statement are questionable—as the prior section illustrates—but, in retrospect, the novels that follow World War II are both more numerous and more socially pervasive than those works that followed any previous American wars, leaving an indelible mark on the current American literary landscape.

Although the after-effects of World War I on both the American populace and on soldiers were minimal compared to the losses and terrors visited upon the Europeans, American soldiers, at the onset of World War II, became exposed to the horrors of warfare on a much greater scale and for an extended duration of time.

In addition to the extended duration of America's involvement in World War II when compared to World War I, the nature of warfare also changed, creating new literature that responded to the newly emergent horrors and struggles of modern technological warfare. Lundberg states that in World War II, unlike earlier conflicts, "fighting was more mechanized and devastation more widespread, front lines were usually fluid, with troop movements frequent and rapid. Since trenches and exposed, static positions were rare, victory was determined by territory gained, not by the number of casualties inflicted" (385). This evolution of the historical concept of warfare—transforming what was often perceived as a heroic coming-of-age endeavor from the Civil War and World War I into the culminating technological maelstrom unleashed to end World War II in the Pacific Theater—led to a breaking point in the American social consciousness.

The absurdist renditions of the bureaucratic and technological transformations of World War II, much like the despair following World War I, were more a function of the literary few as opposed to the masses of average GIs returning home. Many novels about the war, published "between 1945 and 1958" and numbering "between 1500 and 2000" (Hoelbling 297), were modeled in tone and structure on the works of Dos Passos, Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Fitzgerald. Chief among these works are James Jones's *From Here to Eternity* (1951) and Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948). Walsh states that "*From Here to Eternity* extends formally and thematically the genre of

social protest fiction common during the 1930s, and it translates the former's class warfare into a military setting" (142). The central tension of the novel is neither a historically lauded last-stand by a famous battalion nor the dramatic feats of a lone sniper cut off from his platoon, but the barracks life of soldiers stationed in Hawaii before the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Like the works of his predecessors, Jones's novel does not concern itself primarily with conventional battle; it takes as its subject the study of the individual facing philosophically and psychologically challenging circumstances, "the abuses of military power" and "internal army violence" (Walsh 142).

Peter Jones applies this same concept to Mailer as well, declaring that while aligning themselves thematically with the World War I novelists, as Walter Hoebeling suggests, Mailer and Jones pull back from delving deeply into the soul of the individual conflicted soldier in conflict, a critical introspection first apparent in Cooper's *The Spy*. "The primary theme of *The Naked and the Dead* is power," he states, and later adding, "the novel delineates a hierarchy: the power of man over man, the power of military force, the power of political thought and polemic, the inexorable power of events on the lives of men" (87). Mailer incorporates into his novel the highly ranking characters of General Cummings, Major Dalleson, and Sergeant Croft to expand this newly evolving facet of the American war novel. While their mission as soldiers is to struggle together to fight the Japanese in the Pacific Theater, the officers provide the nucleus of the novel's narrative conflict and actual fighting is often reduced to another means through which higher ranking officers can exercise their will and strength of command on those below them (Dearborn 48).

The theme of power, the key component to these two war novels of the more

conventional strain, is also pervasive in the more abstract and absurd works of Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut, whose works were not published until the 1960s. The organizing conceit of *Catch-22*, that the military bureaucracy keeps elevating the number of missions to be flown before being sent home, and the impetus of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, that Vonnegut began writing to resolve his war experiences stemming from the firebombing of Dresden, are each exponentially expanded examples of the power and lunacy of military bureaucracy. The difference that arises between the works of Mailer and Jones, that embrace much more the historically established forms of Dos Passos and Hemingway, and the later works of Heller and Vonnegut is one of narrative tone and structure. Heller and Vonnegut, in *Catch-22* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*, respectively, combine the tragically absurd state of the their characters' situations with the truly horrific psychological trauma of their first-hand experiences of the war and, in doing so, create engaging narrative environments in which the trauma and external pressures exerted on the protagonists take control of the form and structure of the works.

The Mind's Eye and the American War Novel

David Lundberg observes that "America faced a unique situation after World War II. The Civil War was followed by fifty years of peace; World War I, by twenty. These relatively tranquil intervals made war seem an aberration [...] yet there was no real peace after 1945" (387). Peter G. Jones assesses Vonnegut's works, stating that they "show an integral, quirky relationship between technology and war, set against a background of consistent, calculated lunacy" (2) and that, in doing so, get to the heart of the American war novel of the 1960s and beyond. As war itself became a more constant and pressing concern in American life—with Korea and Vietnam following World War II in short

order—the absurdity of war introduced to the readers of Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, and Tim O'Brien keenly reflected the absurdity of humanity embracing war so wholeheartedly.

The history of the American war novel therefore reveals a continual progression inward, analyzing the make-up of the individual in combat and their psychological attempts to cope with the traumas inflicted therein. From James Fenimore Cooper's Revolutionary spy, Harvey Birch, to Tim O'Brien's Vietnam grunt, Paul Berlin, there has been a probing view into the minds, actions, and reactions of men in and around combat that has increased on a parallel course with Lundberg's recognition of the increasing prevalence of war in our country. Heller, Vonnegut, and O'Brien, seeking to portray the most humanly natural explication of war issuing from the foundation laid by their literary forebears in the tradition of the American war novel, are provided the tools required to craft their own unique visions of their own respective wars. Each of these authors, in response to the increasing presence of war in modern life and the increasing destructive capacity of modern weapons, creates new and original gateways into the minds of their traumatized protagonists. These innovative interpretations are made possible by the narrative structures of the novels; each protagonist's individual trauma is both revealed and characterized by the form and structure the author employs in his work.

-- Chapter One --

**Joseph Heller and Traumatic Experience:
“There was only one catch and that was Catch-22”**

Robert Merrill states, “by the time the film version [of *Catch-22*] appeared in 1970 Heller’s novel (or its title) was known to almost everyone” (9). A “catch-22,” the most enduring literary creation to emerge from Heller’s 1961 novel from which the moral quandary takes its name, has become part of the standard lexicon and has arguably had the greatest cultural impact of any single attribute of any American war novel. Defined in the *New Oxford American Dictionary* as “a dilemma or difficult circumstance from which there is no escape because of mutually conflicting or dependent conditions,” the contemporary definition (and, naturally, its corresponding usage in standard discourse) of a “catch-22” lacks the presence and depth of the original. The ubiquity of this aspect of Heller’s novel has fostered an atmosphere in which critical perspectives focus, almost exclusively, on Heller’s critique of the deranged military bureaucracy of which the essential “catch-22” is the centering image. While necessary to the understanding of the text’s cultural relevance, the focus on the socio-political concerns of the novel has overrun most critical investigation of the extraordinary depth of psychological realism that persists throughout the novel and provides its narrative drive.

However, the satire endemic in the novel is also a necessary cohort to the function of the psychologically evocative structure. Along with the concept of “catch-22,” the multitude of satirized elements developed throughout the novel and the capacity for the absurd that they afford the novel, by providing its wholly unstable premise, are the key components which make *Catch-22* an enduring work of fiction. Jeffrey Walsh describes

the embodiment of the catch and, necessarily in his view, the wholly inclusive spirit of the novel: “*Catch-22* embodies a satire upon system building, a hypostatization directed at grammarians, logicians and positivists in a neo-Swiftian mode” (190). Labeling the novel a “sustained satire against maladministration,” Walsh reflects that “[Heller’s] post-absurdist lament for the disappearance of identity [indicates] that the thrust of war writing in the sixties changed focus, from the heroic struggles of the battlefield to the absurdities of the communications process itself” (191). The breadth of Heller’s satiric vision is extensive to say the least. Barbara Lupack provides further analysis to this effect in stating that, even as Heller shifted his critique from humanity at war to the military-economic complex, he extends it even further to “those traditions that produced the culture, at the other institutions (such as religion and education) that capitalize on them, at the people who adjust to or thrive within the system by sacrificing their own principles” (21). James Nagel simply summarizes the novel by stating, that “nearly every facet of American life is made laughable through either diminution or hyperbole” (Nagel 103).

“Insanity is Contagious”

The characters in the novel which provide Heller’s hyperbolically satiric vision also serve as contributing and elevating factors to Yossarian’s instability and burgeoning insanity. As Yossarian is simply attempting to return home to relative safety, he is continually foiled, endangered, and befuddled by whichever administrative order or unstable commander with whom he comes into contact—events which create in Yossarian the most logical insanity of any character in the novel.

Although there are a number of fairly normal and rational officers presented within the text of the novel, the reader does not “think of them as officers because their superiors, the commanding officers, are uniformly depicted as worthy of Pope’s attention in *The Dunciad*” (Merrill 16). Pre-eminent among these commanding officers as caricature is Lieutenant Scheisskopf whose desire for orderly parades—a concept considerably non-essential to an aerial unit and that “no one but Scheisskopf gave a damn about” (Heller 84)—is so strong that he seriously contemplates “nailing the twelve men in each rank to a long two-by-four beam of seasoned oak to keep them in line” (Heller 82). Along with Scheisskopf are a number of lesser (and greater) officers which all display similar penchants for the inane, ridiculous, and absurd. General P.P. Peckem revels in torturing his subordinates by expressing false desires for tight and organized bomb patterns while glibly addressing the planned annihilation of an undefended village with striking nonchalance (335). Additionally, Sergeant Towser represents the overwhelming influence of bureaucracy over reality when, as Merrill explains, he “refuses to acknowledge the death of a man who was never on the official rolls,” while “Doc Daneeka is very much alive, but treated as officially deceased because he had signed aboard the plane that McWatt flies into a mountain” (Merrill 20).

However, Lieutenant Scheisskopf, General Peckem, and Sergeant Towser—while representing the more comically absurd notions of the American socio-political system—pale in comparison to the dark and tragic absurdity embodied by the decisions and actions of Colonel Cathcart. It is due to Cathcart’s incessant desire to impress his superiors for personal gain—a fault evinced several times over in a multitude of characters throughout the work—that he “had courage and never hesitated to volunteer his men for any target

available. No target was too dangerous for his group to attack” (Heller 65). In concert with Cathcart’s insistence upon putting his men’s lives (but not his own) in harm’s way is the consistently increasing number of missions he requires from those under his command. These increases serve as the primary vehicle for the implementation of catch-22; whereas, whenever any pilot asks to be grounded due to increasing feeling of insanity, the catch, as Doc Daneeka explains, states that “anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn’t really crazy” (55) and therefore cannot be grounded.

These explications of the illogical, absurd, and inhuman proclivities of those in power serve as the perfect landscape for Yossarian’s rational and reactive insanity to hide in plain sight. In the face of officers and bureaucrats such as these, Yossarian’s seemingly insane statements and ideas transform into the most rational perspective of all. Throughout the text, it is increasingly seen that everyone but those desperately avoiding the war actually *is* crazy (22) and Yossarian’s growing paranoia is totally justified as, even though one of many, he is also perfectly correct in stating and fearing that “somebody was hatching a plot to kill him” (28). As Nelson Algren explains: “to preserve his sanity against the formalized lunacy of the military mind in action, Yossarian has to turn madman” (Algren 358).

While the catch itself and the socio-political satire of Heller’s novel dominate critical investigations of the text, the complex and seemingly chaotic narrative structure still does manage to garner praise and receive attention from critical circles. Since the novel’s publication, critics such as Walsh, Clinton Burhans, James Nagel, and Robert Sholes have produced page upon page of scholarship assessing form and structure. What catches the reader’s eye and befuddles the brain most is its non-linear structure. Clinton Burhans

and Doug Gaukroger, for example, have attempted to recreate appropriate chronologies of the events of the novel. “Gaukroger and Burhans have shown that *Catch-22* does have a coherent chronology,” Merrill states, and “Heller’s note cards and charts show that he had a definite notion of when all the major events occurred in relationship to each other” (39). Heller, however, has a penchant for repeating scenes throughout the novel, each individual situation treated with varying degrees of seriousness (or most often, lack thereof). Merrill’s analysis of the chronology of the novel—as well as the chronology-based scholarship of others—leads him to state that Heller’s structure is not one of time but of tone (47). He describes the repetitions of scenes and themes as “individual sequences that invariably move from the comic to the terrible” (49), but diminishes their importance to the work. Merrill credits the repetitions related to Snowden—the character whose traumatic death haunts Yossarian—as only being one of “perhaps the two most important repetitions in *Catch-22*” (45). Merrill’s stance, and that of most other scholars, is that Snowden’s death and the repetitions it presents are a means to an end—the tragic catalyst for the culmination of the novel’s socio-political message. The definitive terms employed by Walsh and Merrill are neither lacking in substance nor inaccurate in their depiction of major themes of the novel, but they are lacking in full appreciation for the work at hand. It would be a great loss if, while focusing so finitely on the structure or the novel’s satirical purpose and cultural critique, to overlook the intensely personal, vivid and horrifying reality of the traumatic impact of war depicted by that same structure in *Catch-22*. The internalized perspective Heller employs when revealing Yossarian’s trauma presents his audience with an entirely subjective, serious, and wholly realistic

psychological viewpoint from which a more intimate understanding of the effects of war is brought to light against the backdrop of Heller's abundant satire and black humor.

“Où sont les Neigedens d’antan?”

In any discussion of the Snowden repetitions, the element of the text responsible for presenting the aforementioned psychological realism of *Catch-22*, it is important—as it is with any serious endeavor—to start at the beginning. “Where are all the Snowdens of yesteryear? [...] Où sont les Neigedens d’antan?” (44), Yossarian questions. Robert Merrill states that this invocation of Snowden's tragedy is introduced “in the same comic note that sounds throughout the early chapters” (Merrill 46); but examination of the context sets the question apart from the comic tone of the surrounding text:

[...] the questions were many and good when Clevinger and the subversive corporal finished and made the mistake of asking if there were any.

"Who is Spain?"

"Why is Hitler?"

"When is right?"

"Where was that stooped and mealy-colored old man I used to call Poppa when the merry-go-round broke down?"

"How was trump at Munich?"

"Ho-ho beriberi."

and

"Balls!"

all rang out in rapid succession, and then there was Yossarian with the

question that had no answer:

"Where are the Snowdens of yesteryear?"

The question upset them, because Snowden had been killed over Avignon when Dobbs went crazy in mid-air and seized the controls away from Huple. (43-44)

It is clear in this passage that, although the tone of the passage preceding Yossarian's question is of the exact "comic note" (46) of which Merrill writes, it is Yossarian's introduction of Snowden's tragedy that brings an abrupt end to the absurd strain. Heller's clear and simple statement of fact—"the question upset them" (44)—breaks the flow of the passage and forces the reader to stop and reassess the situation. Merrill argues that the repetition of the Snowden scene "is repeatedly invoked with greater and greater portentousness," and fleshes out his argument, stating that each repetition "is structured as a kind of trap, for the reader is encouraged to laugh at characters and events that ultimately seem quite serious" (46-47). Yet it is simply the fact that, even when set alongside what is possibly the most juvenile and silly passage of the novel, the reference to the deceased Snowden is the antithesis of silly. The narration in the instant after Yossarian's question is stark in its simplicity and honesty, painful in its removal of comic pretense, and precisely not a part of that "comic note" to which Merrill attributes it. Through this first mention of Snowden's death, Heller begins to align his work with those of Crane, Dos Passos, and Hemingway. In its relatively innocuous origins, the repetition of Yossarian's traumatic experience affects the reader in much the same way as Hemingway's lexical registers; the full effect of Hemingway's simple introductory text is only viewed as consequential after its complementary textual examples are presented

later in the novel. Initially viewed simply as a creative and playful narrative twist, Heller's introduction of Yossarian's traumatic experience here begins as a comical and awkward interjection but reoccurs as an ever-intensifying pulse throughout *Catch-22*—and, in doing so, brings Yossarian's psychological trauma to the forefront of his work without overwhelming the reader with its weight until the culmination of the narrative.

“That was Snowden's secret. Ripeness was all”

Alberto Cacicedo is one of the few scholars to deeply investigate the weight of the psychological trauma of Snowden's death upon Yossarian. He states that “throughout the entire novel, Yossarian's memory has worked its way around Snowden's death, giving the reader flashes of the event [...] but until the full revelation of the event in the next-to-last chapter, Snowden's death is never actually recollected or enacted in its full horror” (359). This slow revelation, never shifting in the facts of the event or tone in which it is recollected, throughout all of its twelve iterations, develops throughout the novel not simply as a narrative device and means to an end but also as a repressed memory slowly breaking free.

“Yossarian's behavior before recollecting Snowden's death,” Cacicedo states, duplicates “the symptomatology of trauma that Freud described [in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*]” (361). In detailing his Freudian touchstone, Cacicedo references an incidence in which Freud writes of “a little boy who, traumatized by being abandoned by his mother, reenacted the scene of the trauma over and over and over again,” and states that “the more powerful the trauma-precipitating event, the more likely that the conscious memory will be repressed as too dangerous for the psychic well being of the individual, and the more likely that those repressed memories will express themselves in

unconscious reenactments of the traumatic event” (361). Much like Crane’s decision to describe the “the orbs of a row of dragons” (15) and “rows of cruel teeth that grinned at him” (42) instead of enemy encampments and shells, Heller’s “unconscious reenactments” of trauma throughout the novel provide the reader with the subjective, internal point of view in encountering the true horrors and experience of war. A thorough investigation of these repetitions serves to illustrate the veracity of Cacicedo’s Freudian interpretation of the repetitious nature of *Catch-22* by presenting them to the reader in a clinically realistic—while still structurally suspenseful—narrative framework.

The first flashback concludes Chapter Five. Establishing the pattern for remembrances to come, the description of the traumatic flight begins with a neutral, matter-of-fact description of some aspect of their mission procedures, equipment or the like. The description of their aircraft begins the first chain of events cascading to the initial presentation of the details of that traumatic day: the bombers “were stable, dependable dull-green ships with twin rudders and engines and wide wings. Their single fault, from where Yossarian sat as a bombardier, was the tight crawlway separating the bombardier’s compartment in the Plexiglas nose from the nearest escape hatch” (57). The discussion of the escape hatch leads to Aarfy, who evokes hatred in Yossarian because he does not understand why Aarfy is never afraid. Aarfy’s lack of fear leads to Yossarian’s being “the best man in the group at evasive action, but [having] no idea why” (58-59). “There was no established procedure for evasive action,” the narrator states, “all you needed was fear and Yossarian had plenty of that, more fear than Orr or Hungry Joe, more fear even than Dunbar” (59). At the end of the paragraph it is explained that, when taking evasive action, “everybody else in the plane kept off the intercom, except for the

pitiful time of the mess on the mission to Avignon when Dobbs went crazy in mid-air and began weeping pathetically for help” (59). What follows in the final paragraph of the chapter is the first detailed description of the beginning of Yossarian’s psychological trauma—the first cresting of the repressed memory of Snowden’s death. As the narrative develops, seemingly benign details—such as the layout of their bombers—spark the descent into the inner recesses of Yossarian’s repressed memory and, in doing so, begin Heller’s process of developing a pattern which will ultimately lead to revelation at the conclusion of the novel which, while proving to be a ghastly and terrifying scene, provides a cathartic experience for Yossarian as his haunting repressed memory is relieved.

The second instance of the extended memory of the traumatic flight occurs in Chapter Seventeen and begins with Yossarian running into the hospital to escape his duty of flying missions (175). Yossarian’s entrance into the hospital triggers his subconscious recollections more readily, but no less cumulatively, in this instance by initiating his thoughts about other peoples’ diseases, then about the types of death within and without the hospital, and finally, to the ultimate death outside the hospital (175-176). In this instance, however, the memory is fleeting, a simple flash across the consciousness of a psychologically damaged man (176). These remembrances come to Yossarian throughout the rest of the novel with heightened frequency and detail. Chapters Twenty-Two, Twenty-Four, and Thirty each contain detailed accounts of the trauma and the immediate reaction to it by the crew, respectively. Through these relentless and expanding repetitions—each displaying the growing inability of Yossarian’s mind to sustain its state of protective psychological repression—Heller’s narrative links the

clinical theory of Freud to the effect displayed in Dos Passos's and Hemingway's fiction. Heller's approach to portraying trauma is that of cumulative effect; like Dos Passos's doubled characters or Hemingway's lexical registers, the reader does not come to appreciate the full depth and significance of the technique until it has infiltrated every instance of the novel. It is at this point—when the technique's building force begins to crest into significance—that Heller's revelation occurs.

It is Yossarian's ultimate recollection of the full event in Chapter Forty-One on which critics focus; the fully re-integrated memory of "Snowden's secret" truly is the catalyst for the ending of the novel, but the depth of the moment is never given much critical attention. The beginning of his final and complete recollection of the events surrounding Snowden's death begins like any other and is dragged into the narrative by extenuating circumstances. While Yossarian is lying in the hospital, "a hand shook him awake in the middle of the night. He opened his eyes and saw a thin, mean man in a patient's bathrobe and pajamas who looked at him with a nasty smirk and jeered, 'we've got your pal, buddy. We've got your pal'" (446). As the man disappears, the narrative begins the transition:

He was wide awake, and he knew he was a prisoner in one of those sleepless, bedridden nights that would take an eternity to dissolve into dawn. A throbbing chill oozed up his legs. He was cold, and he thought of Snowden, who was never his pal but a 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 when Yossarian crawled into the rear section of the place over the bomb bays after Dobbs

had beseeched him on the intercom to help the gunner, please help the gunner. (446)

What follows are four pages of vivid and all-inclusive description and dialogue (although there is not much of the latter). It becomes clear why his chills in the beginning of the passage brought on this memory:

Yossarian was cold, too, and shivering uncontrollably. He felt goose pimples clacking all over him as he gazed down despondently at the grim secret Snowden had spilled all over the messy floor. It was easy to read the message in his entrails. Man was matter, that was Snowden's secret. Drop him out a window and he'll fall. Set fire to him and he'll burn. Bury him and he'll rot, like other kinds of garbage. The spirit gone, man is garbage. That was Snowden's secret. Ripeness was all. (450)

This recognition of the fragility and inconsequentiality of man represents an aspect of war that in readings of previous American war novels seems commonplace—an obvious conceit in any discussion of war is that people die, often in horrible ways. But this scene reveals the change in war fiction in the era of technological warfare that sets Heller apart from his predecessors, as those doing the killing are farther separated from the results of their actions (i.e. the bombardier aiming his sights at a large building and pulling a lever), the less perspective on the actualities of war they may have. Yossarian had seen the results of injuries in hospitals and had seen planes go down, had lost fellow pilots and soldiers, but he had never witnessed the true nature of war first-hand until he sees Snowden's insides slither out from under his flak jacket. This full explication of the event clarifies all of the allusions to, and repercussions from, Snowden's death, such as

Yossarian's not knowing why he was the best man at evasive action as was established in Chapter Five, when Heller writes: "There was no established procedure for evasive action. All you needed was fear, and Yossarian had plenty of that" (58). Stemming from this revelation early in the novel, the full context is not brought to the event until Chapter Twenty-Two. It is revealed there that Yossarian had been a standard and effective pilot early in his career, but that he had "lost his nerve on the mission to Avignon because Snowden lost his guts" (235).

Chapter Forty-One, "he was cold and he thought of Snowden" (446), presents Yossarian's first conscious and direct confrontation with his traumatic memory; it is also the last retelling of the flashback in the novel. Alberto Cacicedo states that the effect of the trauma is that "the fictional character [...] must revisit the traumatic event over and over again precisely because it has determined [his life] in profound ways; yet, because of its horrific power, the event has also erased itself from [his] consciousness" (361). It becomes clear when investigating this sequence of repetitions that this model of psychological response to traumatic events is exactly what is being described. The memory goes from being the impetus for Yossarian's crazy flying style and antics to being a serious point of moral contention.

Snowden's death and the lesson learned from it force a moral standoff at the end of the novel. Just before the final remembrance of Snowden's death, Yossarian had "almost [burst] into song"; after accepting Korn and Cathcart's offer, "he was home free: he had pulled it off; his act of rebellion had succeeded; he was safe, and he had nothing to be ashamed of to anyone" (439). Stephen Potts paraphrases Yossarian's conundrum: "Without life, man is garbage, but without a soul man is garbage, too. Yossarian's

paradox [...] is that he cannot keep his spirit intact in both senses at once; either he returns to flying missions and loses his life, or he goes along with Korn and loses his soul. Either way he is garbage” (108). Such a paradox would be impossible without the revelation that comes from the psychological healing Yossarian undergoes in finally reliving Snowden’s death in its entirety. Without recognizing the full scope of Yossarian’s psychological trauma as it is portrayed in the form and structure of the text, the power and efficacy of those repetitions become severely diminished.

“We’ll meet again when the fighting stops”

It must be said that scholars who argue the socio-political agenda of the novel are not incorrect—Robert Merrill quotes Joseph Heller himself to this effect (53)—but such criticism cannot overwhelm the definitive place *Catch-22* keeps in the pantheon of American war novels. Like its predecessor, Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*, *Catch-22* employs a structural technique to present the same concept Crane presents through his novel’s point of view. “How does man behave under extreme battle stress” (Aaron 215) is the same question asked by Heller, but with a twist; the question becomes, how does a man behave *after* extreme battle stress. Heller is the first of several authors to revisit this question; as Vonnegut and O’Brien will do eight and seventeen years later, respectively. Heller breaks from standard conventions of form and structure to present the view of the inner workings of the traumatized soldier’s psyche. Choosing to focus on the personal aspects of war, Heller declines to describe the massive devastation that Yossarian’s missions caused or the frenetic dog fights as German fighters attacked his squadron. Heller sharpens the effects of war trauma by placing the offending event into a sterile environment and forcing his protagonist (and readers) to relive it over and over again.

Although the novel is overwrought with moral lessons concerning changing economic, religious, and social values—not to mention the corporatization of the military-industrial complex—*Catch-22* is definitively a war novel. Beneath the satire and absurdity lies the dark truth of the pain and suffering and reality of war—a fact painfully brought to light creatively, but truthfully, through Heller's narrative technique.

-- Chapter Two --

Kurt Vonnegut and Authorial Crisis:

**“I asked myself about the present: how wide it was,
how deep it was, how much was mine to keep”**

If it can be said that Heller's narrative technique breaks from convention, then the same and more can be said of Kurt Vonnegut's 1969 novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*. J. Michael Crichton describes the novel as “cheerfully, exuberantly schizophrenic” (109), a statement mirroring the work's own extraordinary title, which states in part that *Slaughterhouse-Five* “is a novel somewhat in the telegraphic schizophrenic manner of tales of the planet Tralfamadore, where the flying saucers come from.” Yet, beneath this mask of cuteness and silliness (Crichton 109), *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a compelling investigation of the evils of humanity and the struggle to find solace and healing after experiencing those evils. While attempting to do justice to the history of the bombing and obliteration of the peaceful city of Dresden in an attack whose power was “much worse [...] than Hiroshima” (Vonnegut 10), Vonnegut is forced to investigate the psychological ramifications of the event upon his own psychological state. The direct result of such a two-fold attempt is the fractured structure of his conceptually inventive novel, and it is one that draws on the advances of his predecessors in the genre of the American war novel for inspiration and a platform upon which he can build. Vonnegut combines aspects of the works of Crane, Dos Passos, and Heller to create a dense and inventive narrative structure that ultimately allows him to present several different perspectives, theories and value-systems and then reconcile their best parts into one personally cathartic world-view.

"He has seen his birth and death many times"

Kurt Vonnegut's respect for *The Red Badge of Courage* is evident in reading his works. As noted in the introduction to this work, Vonnegut places Crane's novel in the company of (to name a few) *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *The Bible* as a key component of what he considers to be "all great literature" (8). Aside from his expository musings on the quality of the novel, its structural lens—an entirely subjective and distorted view of a battlefield through the eyes of a scared teenager—greatly influences Vonnegut's presentation of Billy Pilgrim's mind. Vonnegut presents Billy Pilgrim's mind and its shifts and transitions in their entirety. He introduces the concept just as soon as he introduces Billy in chapter two:

Listen:

Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time.

Billy has gone to sleep a senile widower and awakened on his wedding day. He has walked through a door in 1955 and come out another in 1941 [...] he has seen his birth and death many times, he says, and pays random visits to all the events in between.

He says. (23)

Instead of depicting the inside of his mind as the events happen, Vonnegut does so as Billy's mind attempts to recuperate from all his traumas after the war. As Billy witlessly shifts from his past experiences of war to his more current life in New York and even further into his fantastically imagined future, Vonnegut creates a window into the mind of a man truly broken by his experiences. Billy is constantly presented as being confused about his own spatial whereabouts; with no warning or sensory knowledge of the number

of his time shifts, he is left to determine each new place and time he enters by analyzing his new surroundings: “Billy sat up in bed. He had no idea what year it was or what planet he was on. Whatever the planet’s name was, it was cold” (136).

Here, as it did for *The Red Badge of Courage*, Colvert’s analysis rings true; both Crane and Vonnegut employ creative narrative structures and techniques to “screen out the objective world that is the focus of traditional war narratives” and present “vivid representations of [their heroes’] psychological response to war” (35-36). Vonnegut presents a mind reeling with trauma and scrambling to find some sort of footing as Billy Pilgrim loses control of his conception of time and reality completely. This signals an evolution beyond Crane’s presentation of a mind momentarily swayed by stress and trauma, but later able to be reintegrated into a functioning and improved worldview. Billy’s inability to control his perceptions is what shapes Vonnegut’s representation of Billy’s mind; his shifting is not a conscious attempt to reconcile his past with the future, as writing this novel is for Vonnegut; rather, Billy’s time shifts represent his mind’s attempts to reintegrate his shattered psyche after he has experienced so much trauma both in the war and in the plane crash where his head has been broken (45).

In addition to this continuation and evolution of Crane’s technique, Vonnegut introduces into the novel both himself—as the author in Chapters One and Ten and as a fellow soldier in Chapters Five and Six—and Billy Pilgrim. In doing so Vonnegut creates for himself a proxy in war trauma through which he can investigate the stressors and traumas he personally endured in the war from the outside-in rather than the inside-out. This is a feat Crane would not have been able to attempt—as he had yet to be born

by the conclusion of the war at his novel's center,—yet Vonnegut is able to accomplish in a manner reminiscent of another of his predecessors in the American war novel.

“That was I. That was me. That was the author of this book”

John Dos Passos's novel *Three Soldiers* presents to the reader what the title indicates: three soldiers—as well as many more, all representing different archetypal modes—in the same situation, each trying to understand and survive in the world around them. It is this model of “reciprocal characters—characters who share a common psychological locus, but who represent diverse, sometimes contrasting attributes” (Clark 80)—that Vonnegut plays upon when he not only creates his psychologically damaged protagonist, but also presents himself as the narrator and a fellow soldier through experiences shared with Billy Pilgrim throughout the war. As Dos Passos's characters “developed from a single psychological locus” (Clark 82) that allows him to explore multiple responses to their same psychological traumas, Vonnegut's characters—also derived from his singular, personal psychological locus—allow him to do likewise.

To elaborate on this point, Dos Passos's characters represent a variety of archetypes of American life. Clark identifies a key example of this type of juxtaposition in the first chapter of the *Three Soldiers* section titled “Under the Wheels.” Hoggenback, a seventeen-year-old son of a lumberman, and Andrews, the educated artist, have an exchange of conversation when discussing if they can successfully desert:

“I kinder thought and edicated guy like you'd be able to keep out of a mess like this. I wasn't brought up without edication, but I guess I didn't have enough.”

“I guess most of ‘em can; I don’t see that it’s much to the point. A man suffers as much if he doesn’t know how to read and write as if he had a college education.”

“I dunno, Skinny. A feller who’s led a rough life can put up with an awful lot.” (Dos Passos 413-414)

By placing men of different regions, socioeconomic backgrounds, and educational levels in the same situations, he is able to explore the differences in how each reacts to, copes with, and rationalizes his traumas and difficult situations. In essence, he directs multiple beams of light through one filter and observes how each is differently affected.

Vonnegut, on the other hand, directs his one beam of light—*his personal experience* at Dresden, *his suffering* as a prisoner of war—into one prism and then attempts to reconcile the two different beams into which it is refracted, one for his own trauma and one for his fictional proxy, Billy Pilgrim. The difference between the two is that the end of Dos Passos’s experiment was to observe his fictional characters being given choices, facing challenges and, subsequently, going in different physical and philosophical directions. Dos Passos applies this technique with the intention of gaining an understanding of the cumulative effects of war on all Americans, as opposed to the small subset of Americans that would have been portrayed had he followed only one character. Vonnegut’s experiment has much more focused implications. Vonnegut’s method allows him to put different parts of himself through the same traumas and view how each one individually reacts to and copes with them. Then, taking the best results from each fractured element, Vonnegut is able to reconstitute, at novel’s end, one unified view of the world that serves as the formula for catharsis: a world-view tested and proven not to fix all ills and heal the

world, but one which allows him to reconcile his past and be prepared for the surety of future horrors.

“I have this disease late at night sometimes, involving alcohol and the telephone”.

The first chapter of Vonnegut’s novel is spent establishing his own failure to adequately represent in literature his experiences in Dresden. He concludes the chapter in part by retelling the story of Lot’s wife; her transformation into a pillar of salt becomes Vonnegut’s perfect metaphor for how he chooses to progress with his new novel, his fun novel (21-22).

People aren’t supposed to look back. I’m certainly not going to do it anymore.

I’ve finished my war book now. The next one I write is going to be fun. This one is a failure, and it had to be, since it was written by a pillar of salt. (22)

This admission of failure is a ruse. Yes, Vonnegut’s attempts to create a conventional novel—simply remembering and restating the events of Dresden—have failed, but the explication of his failed attempts still serves a purpose in establishing several key aspects of the chapters to come.

Vonnegut introduces key themes from his life—his experiences, art, and reading in the first chapter—and these become the key to establishing the interconnectedness and duality of Vonnegut as author and Billy Pilgrim, his protagonist. Chief among these is his introduction of Louis-Ferdinand Céline, the French author who “was a brave French soldier in the First World War—until his skull was cracked,” after which he became “time obsessed,” and “he couldn’t sleep, and there were noises in his head” (21). Billy

Pilgrim, in essence, becomes Vonnegut's own Céline. It is only after receiving his own "terrible scar across the top of his skull" (25) as a result of a 1968 plane crash that Billy begins to piece together his traumatic experiences into a restructured order.

Other motifs introduced in the first chapter are the smell of "mustard gas and roses" (initially introduced as the smell of his breath when he is drunk and calling up old girlfriends) and vivid color imagery. "I had outlined the story many times," he states:

I used my daughter's crayons, a different color for each main character.

One end of the wallpaper was the beginning of the story, and other end was the end, and then there was all that middle part, which was the middle. And the blue line met the red line and then the yellow line, and the yellow line stopped because the character represented by the yellow line was dead. (5)

These two concepts, the smell of alcohol on the author's breath and the coordination of colors to characters, lose their present connotations; however, their introduction here plants the seeds for the structure (or seeming lack thereof) through the rest of the novel. Where Joseph Heller effectively employs the repetition and slow expansion of a single scene of trauma to reveal to the reader the inner workings of Yossarian's damaged psyche and repressed memory in *Catch-22*, Vonnegut uses the repetition of these small and seemingly inconsequential details to interweave the shattered framework of Billy Pilgrim's mind in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Barbara Lupack and Jerome Klinkowitz both have written of this structural device. The former states, "woven into the seemingly random and discontinuous snippets of Vonnegut's narrative are recurring images that provide the story's unity" (123).

Referencing Klinkowitz, she continues to describe how the repetition of specific images (“radium dials,” “mustard gas and roses,” “blue and ivory,” and so on) serves to link the moments that Billy has come unstuck between and creates a “deep impression ‘that this novel does have a principle of order to it’” (124-125). Each of these descriptive passages is used sparingly throughout the novel—“blue and ivory” occurring the most at six times, “mustard gas and roses” four times, “orange and black” three times, and “radium dials” three times as well—but this serves Vonnegut well as it preserves a sense of the randomness and incongruity of Billy’s mental experience. For example, after the introduction of Vonnegut’s own drunken phone calls, Billy receives a phone call in the middle of the night from a drunk—“Billy could almost smell his breath—mustard gas and roses” (73)—and then the descriptive and nostril-wrenching combination is not heard from again until the conclusion of the novel. The touchstone connects the two characters and therefore leads the reader to recall them both as they are faced with the final, more harsh and arresting invocation of the smell as Billy is excavating Dresden after its firebombing:

There were hundreds of corpse mines operating by and by. They didn’t smell bad at first, were wax museums. But then the bodies rotted and liquefied, and the stink was like roses and mustard gas. (214)

When portraying Billy, Vonnegut uses these repetitions in *Slaughterhouse-Five* to achieve the Crane-like effect of the altered, subjective point of view. Vonnegut places the repetitions about the novel to sometimes trigger Billy’s shifts in time and to ultimately reveal the attempts by Billy’s fractured consciousness to make sense of all his

traumatic experiences, as well as to force readers to reconsider their notions of how memory, time, and experience truly interact.

“Poo-tee-weet?”

Other repetitions in the novel serve a much more conventional purpose than the colors and smells Vonnegut employs. “So it goes,” Vonnegut’s mantra for confronting the loss of life in any form and by any means, is repeated one hundred and six times in the novel, taking a form more the parallel to Heller’s “catch-22” itself. Introduced in Chapter One as being parallel with the unstoppable advance of a glacier (3-4), Vonnegut’s phrase expresses an acceptance of the inevitability of war and death as parts of the human condition. The reader’s inundation with the phrase brings it to the fore of the novel’s meaning, but, by the end of the work, its own pervasiveness draws it away from that center of attention and into a part of the general framework of being in the world of the novel, just as being stuck in situations in which one cannot benefit or escape is a part of life, even more so is death.

Yet, for all that has been written about Vonnegut’s “telegraphic schizophrenic” novel’s lack of overt structure and its subsequent destruction of generally accepted conceptions of time displayed in Billy’s spasticity, through the one repeated motif leads the reader to follow Vonnegut’s own thoughts as they proceed quite linearly through a process of cathartic psychological healing. Introducing this key repetition of the novel, he states in the first chapter (writing as himself to his editor) that,

there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything or want anything again.

Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre, and it always is, except for the birds.

And what do the birds say? All there is to say about a massacre, things like

"Poo-tee-weet?" (19)

Originally following one of the novel's most famous conceits—that of Vonnegut's explication of the beginning and end of the story at the end of the first chapter—the birdsong does not return until the scene in which the catalytic element of the writings of Kilgore Trout is introduced into Billy's consciousness.

[Billy] woke up with his head under a blanket in a ward for nonviolent mental patients in a veterans' hospital near Lake Placid, New York. It was springtime 1948, three years after the end of the war.

Billy uncovered his head. The windows of the ward were open. Birds were twittering outside. "Poo-tee-weet?" one asked him. The sun was high. (100-101)

The repetition here serves to focus the reader on the events to come. As Vonnegut describes the psychological circumstances of Billy and his new roommate, Eliot Rosewater, stating that they "were both dealing with similar crises in similar ways," and that was, "partly because of what they had seen [or done] in the war" (101), the reader's constant grasping for structure halts and finds solid ground as a piece of a vast and distant framework has been placed before them.

These traumatized men are both in the same situation as they are attempting to make sense of an incomprehensible world about them; they are consciously attempting—as

Billy has committed himself to the institution (100)—to find peace in a world on which they had “found life meaningless” (101). Vonnegut makes the observation that the two men “were trying to re-invent themselves and their universe. Science fiction was a big help” (101), and, with the injection here of Kilgore Trout and his fantastical stories and re-envisioning of social, scientific, and even religious standard conceptions, Vonnegut is able to create in his protagonist a palette of experience from which he, the author, is able to formulate a world view that may not save Billy Pilgrim from his own psychological downfall but that just may save the narrator himself.

The novel soon slips back into the discontinuity that is Billy’s mental state, but, at the conclusion of the novel, Vonnegut’s final ornithological comment upon humanity’s capacity for massacre and destruction upholds his promise from the first chapter: that “[the novel] ends like this: *Poo-tee-weet?*” (22). In doing this, Vonnegut creates—amid the fracture and psychoses that are Billy’s memory—a firm structure for his authorial means to developing the key theme of his novel, an effort which requires the conjunction of both concepts. While the small repetitions establish the restructured logic of Billy’s mind, “poo-tee-weet?” establishes the difference between Vonnegut and Billy Pilgrim: that of Vonnegut having control over the structure of time in which he exists and creates and Billy not.

“Make them stop ... don’t let them move anymore at all”

In the first chapter Vonnegut introduces the story of the author Louis-Ferdinand Céline and states that he

Was a brave French soldier in the First World War—until his skull was cracked. After that he couldn’t sleep and there were noises in his head

[...] Time obsessed him [...] he screams on paper, *Make them stop...don't let them move anymore at all...There, make them freeze...once and for all!...So that they won't disappear anymore!* (21)

Vonnegut's mention of Céline and his trauma seems benign enough when and where it comes (in the first chapter as Vonnegut is talking about the book he read on a plane), but it is this story of another author's pain and psychoses that lends realistic credibility to what will at first seem to be an absurd rendition of Billy Pilgrim's own psychological fracture and resulting insanity.

It is during Billy's second stay in the hospital, after returning from the war, that Vonnegut clearly presents the point of fracture in Billy Pilgrim's consciousness and that he is then able to begin his own restructuring. It is at the point of recuperation from his 1968 plane crash that all of his traumas and experiences collide in the narrative maelstrom that is to become Billy's conception of time and place. To recapitulate the horrors, traumas, and stressors Billy Pilgrim has endured to this point in his life, here they are enumerated: Billy's father has died in a hunting accident, Billy has survived capture and imprisonment during World War II, Billy has endured shock therapy as a treatment for prior psychological issues (at the same time he was introduced to Trout's science-fiction), he has been the only survivor of plane crash, and, while recuperating in the hospital after his near fatal crash (and during which he consequently received head trauma), Billy's wife died of carbon-monoxide poisoning on her drive to see him (24-25). His psychological imbalance, let alone complete disintegration, can be explained and understood when viewing the vast array of psychological and physical traumas that, like

Céline's, has finally left Billy's skull cracked and his perception of time permanently confounded.

It is only after this incident that Billy comes home and reveals that he had come unstuck in time, been kidnapped by aliens from Tralfamadore in 1967, and displayed naked in their zoo (25). Vonnegut's introduction of this concept so early in the novel sets the tone for the rest of his writing by establishing this as a plausible mode of narration. Even though the events of the novel run the gamut from the early twentieth century and Billy's childhood through the middle of the 1970s, by introducing the concept of time travel—and its fairly late arrival in the true chronology of Billy's life—so early in the chronology of the novel itself, the reader becomes desensitized to the continually shifting, realigning and maladjusting narrative exploration that is the truth of Billy's psyche and subjective viewpoint. Vonnegut serves himself well in burying the truth of the structure of time in Billy's life under the constant inundation of the episodic remembrances, experiences, and fantasies that form the damaged mind Vonnegut presents.

This dichotomy between structures and narrative states is why Billy Pilgrim functions for Vonnegut in a way that Yossarian could not for Heller in *Catch-22*. Yossarian is the primary focus of Heller's novel; it is his ultimate catharsis which the novel presents in its climax. While Billy Pilgrim is, throughout the majority of the novel, the primary focus of *Slaughterhouse-Five*'s narration, Vonnegut's omnipresence in the text detracts from the necessity for catharsis in Billy; Vonnegut is able to allow Billy to embrace his psychotically induced fantasies of time and space travel precisely because he does not have to save Billy Pilgrim for the novel to present a successful catharsis. There are two protagonists at work in this text: Billy Pilgrim the vessel—a literary pack-mule or

sacrificial lamb of sorts—for the varied and inventive components of the novel, and Vonnegut himself, the assembler and beneficiary of their fruits.

“So it goes”

Billy Pilgrim’s reformation—a term used because Billy’s revelations as a result of delusional psychotic imbalances are the farthest thing from healing or catharsis—of his psychological structure provides Vonnegut with a multitude of points of view into which he is able to consolidate for himself a new reality and conception of time through which he can form a functional view of the world. As Vonnegut reconciles his dual protagonists in the final chapter, he states:

If what Billy Pilgrim learned from the Tralfamadorians is true, that we will all live forever, no matter how dead we may seem to be, I am not overjoyed. Still—if I am going to spend eternity visiting this moment and that, I’m grateful that so many of those moments are nice. (211)

This confession by the author reveals the reality of the situation—the same reality he first introduced in Chapter One—that the cathartic elements of the novel are for him, the author. It is all too clear that this is what is meant when Vonnegut states, “I’ve finished my war book now. The next one I write is going to be fun” (22). Vonnegut’s fun—playing with narrative structure and psychological fracture rather than chronology and war reportage—is what finally allows him personally to reorganize his own thoughts and memories into a system more suitable to surviving in such a violent and unpredictable world.

Vonnegut’s withdrawal from the “Hemingway-Mailer-James Jones combat-centred line of war fiction,” as *Slaughterhouse-Five* “contains no scenes of fighting” (Walsh

196), came at a true point of cultural schism when films such as *The Longest Day* (1962) and *Tora, Tora, Tora!* (1970) were being created to form “as accurate [reconstructions of battle ...] as eight million dollars could buy” (Dick 137). Whereas Yossarian’s memory of Snowden’s death in *Catch-22* and the ultimate revelation of the whole event are the climax of the work, Billy Pilgrim’s memory of Dresden is neither evocatively described nor does any memory and realization of the event bring him solace from his traumatized state. Vonnegut’s application of spastic memory, the faux-fiction Kilgore Trout, and the fantastical element of imagination in Billy’s consciousness all serve as foundational pieces from which he can draw to expound upon the theme of coping with the ultimate in stressful experiences: living on earth.

Vonnegut’s novel takes the concept of the psychological break the farthest of any author of an American war novel thus far—creatively and introspectively. Whereas Heller presented the repression of a memory and Crane presented the visual and sensory intake of a soldier under duress, Vonnegut depicts both, and the results are breathtakingly ludicrous and completely honest. Vonnegut’s playful—yet wholly effective—destruction of chronological structure as a means of reaching into the reality and workings of the human mind and memory makes possible the complete opening of the mind that Tim O’Brien embraces in *Going After Cacciato*. In a novel in which he expands minutes of unconsciousness and fear at the top of a hill into 300 pages of imagination, memory, and logical reconciliation of one to the other, it is clear that such a feat would not be nearly as effective, let alone possible, without employing the same concepts and techniques developed throughout the existence of the American war novel.

-- Chapter Three --

**Tim O'Brien and Alternative Reality:
"Imagination, like reality, has its limits"**

From its origins—breaking new ground for what would become the American literary legacy—through the increasingly dense and layered texts of Heller and Vonnegut, the focus of the American war novel has increasingly tightened. Yossarian in *Catch-22* is haunted by fractured and reoccurring memories of his having witnessed Snowden's death while on a bombing run. Billy Pilgrim overruns his psychological threshold after surviving a plane crash—the crash itself being only the last in a long line of traumatic and horrifying experiences—and entirely reorders his perception of time, space, and reality to make sense of his experiences, especially those of Dresden during World War II. Yet, while both Heller and Vonnegut take great strides in their works to present the technically and creatively advanced psychological realities of their protagonists, each author presents as the focus of their novel a view of the world from within the traumatized minds of their respective protagonists that is informed by the context of psychological trauma. They present minds wholly warped by exposure to the horrors of war and suffering. Tim O'Brien further extends this psychological lens. In *Going After Cacciato* (1978), O'Brien undertakes the effort not only to show the residual impacts of trauma upon the human mind that his predecessors had depicted so successfully, but also to take his reader inside the mind of his traumatized protagonist during that split second of experience—that moment in which rifle fire is replaced by the firing of his neurons and whereby his world and worldview are simultaneously shaken—to explore how the human mind not only picks up the pieces after a horrific event, but also reels and braces itself for that event's impact.

Just as with Heller's *Catch-22*, much of the scholarship of Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* is engaged in searching out the structure and systems of the work. The chaos and uncertainty (of everything from military objectives to the war's justifiability) in which the Vietnam War was mired lead Dennis Vannatta, for example, to reflect that "the novelist wishing to take the Vietnam war as his subject, then, faces the problem of finding a structuring principle that is artistic while it at the same time reflects the actuality of the war in all its chaotic excess" (242-243). This problem, as indicated by examples given in previous chapters, was not one to originate in the aftermath of Vietnam as Vannatta suggests; it is true that the chaos of Vietnam did nothing to help soothe the psyche of the soldiers on the front lines (wherever those lines may have been), but the traumas of wartime events have been depicted in literature and proven previously by Heller, Vonnegut, and Crane to wreak havoc on the psychology of their participants no matter how orderly or justified the wars themselves may have seemed or been. Vannatta's myopic view of history aside, the concept of finding the "structuring principle" is worth investigating as it leads to the central question left unanswered by O'Brien's novel: what happened to Cacciato?

"The kid's left us"

As the novel begins, the ground-situation is set in a simple yet disconcerting fashion: "It was a bad time. Billy Boy Watkins was dead; and so was Frenchie Tucker [...] Bernie Lynn and Lieutenant Sidney Martin had died in tunnels. Pederson was dead and Rudy Chassler was dead. Buff was dead. Ready Mix was dead" (1-2). This evocation of Paul Berlin's previous experience and trauma serves O'Brien well; the reader's textually dropping into the narrative situation mimics that of the Vietnam soldier's dropping into

battle from a Huey. In either situation the entrant has little knowledge of what truly awaits him, and in neither can the entrant truly imagine and prepare for that unknown quantity.

Knowing this, O'Brien advances his narrative quickly. Cacciato's desertion is brought to light by the end of the second page of the novel and just as quickly the singular theme of the novel is introduced when, upon hearing this news, Lieutenant Corson muses and states that they have to "figure this thing out [...]. Trick is to think things clear. Step by step" (3). Throughout the rest of this first chapter the novel seems to be developing into the simple narrative construct that the title suggests: a soldier goes AWOL, his company goes after him, antics ensue. However, this is not what O'Brien has in mind. As the men of Paul Berlin's unit sit around discussing Cacciato's sudden disappearance, they also continue the same banal discussion of the unending rain. The men head off after Cacciato with no particular zeal for their task of retrieving him or respect for his actions or even his existence, constantly referring to him as "dumb-dumb" (7), "ding-dong" (6), and having the physical features of "Mongolian idiocy" (8). The discredit they heap on Cacciato sets them up for their tragicomic fall, while it is Paul Berlin's musings that foreshadow O'Brien's tale:

He walked on and considered this, figuring the odds, speculating on how Cacciato might lead them through the steep country, beyond the mountains, deeper, and how in the end they might reach Paris. He smiled. It was something to think about. (16)

When the men charge the hill where they believe themselves victorious in capturing Cacciato, the true narrative thrust is introduced. Cacciato's traps go off, and Paul Berlin reacts:

Paul Berlin smelled it. He felt the warm wet feeling on his thighs.
 His eyes were closed. Smoke: He imagined the colors and texture.
 He couldn't bring his eyes open. He tried, but he couldn't do it
 [...]. He felt it beyond his vision, over his left shoulder: some gray-
 haired old goat chuckling at the sorry fix of this struck-dumb ding-
 dong at the moment of truth. His teeth hurt, his lungs hurt. He
 wanted to apologize to whoever was watching, but his lungs ached
 and his mouth wouldn't work. He wasn't breathing. Inhale?
 Exhale? He'd lost track. You asshole, he thought. You ridiculous
 little yo-yo. (20-21)

The shock and surprise of the situation as well as Berlin's complete loss of control and function in this passage illustrate T.J. Lustig's conception of "O'Brien's distinctive method [for articulating] his 'moments of choice' in relation to a single organizing gap" and his argument that "it is from this point that the series of alternative narratives migrate" (86). The line break following this passage and the text that follows it illustrate a clear break in Berlin's consciousness and, therefore, the reader's connection to what was previously introduced as the reality of the novel. Vannatta attempts to explain this passage as it refers to the three types of chapter titles within the novel, yet much is lost by the shallowness of his analysis:

...all the chapters take place in the observation post, in Paul Berlin's mind.

The recollected war chapters are the actual past; the going-after-Cacciato chapters are a consciously reimagined past; and in the observation post chapters we are simply more consciously aware of the present. (243)

The overt presentation of individually themed and interspersed chapters is clear, Vannatta implies, and this authorial structure is one to which the reader gladly clings for some sense of stability.

"These biles are warping your sense of reality"

The theme of establishing a new and rationalized psychoanalytical structure—much like that of Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim when he wakes in the hospital after his plane crash—is embraced by Berlin himself beginning in the first observation post chapter. As he wonders "about the immense powers of his imagination" (26), Berlin also begins to question the vague recollections he has of the hilltop charge. He asks himself a series of questions: "had it ended there on Cacciato's grassy hill? Had it ended in tragedy? Had it ended with a jerking, shaking feeling—noise and confusion? Or had it ended farther along the trail west? Had it ever ended?" (27). Piled in with these two entangled constructs is the third and final piece necessary to reassembling and restructuring the puzzle that is Berlin's recollection and understanding of events. He reminds himself to "think it through more carefully. That was Doc's advice—look for motives, search out the place where fact ended and imagination took over" (27). Doc Peret's soothing explication of Berlin's confusion foreshadows the narrative conflicts to come:

You got an excess of fear biles [...] We've all got these biles—Stink, Oscar, every body—but you've got yourself a whole bellyful of the stuff.

You're oversaturated. And my theory is this: Somehow these biles are warping your sense of reality. Follow me? Somehow they're screwing up your basic perspective, and the upshot is you sometimes get a little mixed up. That's all. (28)

Independently, each of these concepts is sufficient to drive the narrative of a creative piece of fiction. Yet, when O'Brien places these dense literary veins of fictive investigation—measuring and testing the power of the imagination, reassessing past events, and examining how psychological trauma and fear interact—within the confines of the mind and personal identity of one man, he enables himself to create a multifaceted window into the full complexity of the human mind.

“I know you will find a way”

Paul Berlin's imagination is the driving force between the internal chapters of *Going After Cacciato* and the first “observation post” chapter (Chapter Two) quickly establishes this form of chapter as the place for the theoretical examination of its power. Although the “road to Paris” chapters in the novel are the imagined events themselves, it is his wandering thoughts of guard duty at the observation post that allow Berlin to explore all the possibilities life could hold. “It was not a dream,” he reflects in the first stint in the observation tower, “it was nothing mystical or crazy, just an idea. Just a possibility. Feet turning hard like stone, legs stiffening, six and seven and eight thousand miles through unfolding country toward Paris. A truly splendid idea” (27). O'Brien uses this premise—cautiously and noncommittally examining all possibilities through the creative power of his imagination—to restate and restructure scenes throughout the novel. With the concept established as a guiding principle, O'Brien then proceeds to intermingle his

true remembrances with how he could imagine things having gone and, in doing so, crafts two narratives necessarily connected through their common locus of Paul Berlin's mind, but growing more and more divergent as his imagination spins farther and farther from the facts of the matter.

One of the most highly developed examples of this usage occurs in Chapter Nine, "How Bernie Lynn Died after Frenchie Tucker," in which Paul Berlin details how two men in his unit died while searching tunnels. The focus of the chapter is detailing the events leading to, and immediately following, Bernie Lynn being sent into a tunnel to recover the body of Frenchie Tucker, who had been killed after he initially went in to clear it of Vietcong. The scene is traumatic not only for the mortally wounded Bernie Lynn but also for the other soldiers watching, attempting to radio for help, and trying in vain to aid and comfort him in his last moments. In the following chapter, "A Hole in the Road to Paris," Berlin takes the tunnels—previously presented as the means to the tragic deaths of two of his fellow soldiers—and reimagines them not as a path to a terrifying and painful death, but as a means of escape from a painful situation.

In previous "on the road" chapters, the unit's progress in pursuit of Cacciato has provided Berlin with a female companion, Sarkin Aung Wan, but in Chapter Ten, "A Hole in the Road to Paris," he is faced with the prospect of having to leave her behind as they plan to leave the road to change course and "start humpin' again" (73). Here Berlin confronts his first true crisis as "he could not imagine a happy ending" to their predicament (74), yet Sarkin Aung Wan continually reassures him—"you will find a way" (75) which becomes a mantra of sorts for her character—and after much thinking and searching, Berlin reaches into his memories of war. At this time, Berlin's previously

introduced traumatic memories and experiences with the tunnels become, in his imagination, “the road [opening] in a long jagged crack, tiny at first, then ripping wide” (76). A hole in the ground becomes for Berlin’s imagination a miracle instead of the death trap it represents in his true war experience. As the next “Road to Paris” chapter continues their imagined falling, they find themselves in the underground lair of an officer of the Vietcong, Major Li Van Hgoc, an eccentric man, but not the deadly and anonymous Vietcong soldier of the tunnels that Berlin and his companions fear in reality. Through these opposing presentations of the tunnels, O’Brien introduces the true purpose of Berlin’s imagination. The imagined scenes grant Paul Berlin the ability to mitigate the psychological trauma of the most horrifying elements of his true experience by inventing positive experiences of the same elements. The effect of this invention is that his imagined experiences act as a sort of counter-weight, a Panglossian view of his life in the war that allows him to continue without dreading each step and allowing anxiety to overtake his every move.

“The facts, even when beaded on a chain, still did not have real order”

The correlations between past events and his imagined alternative life do not always converge as neatly as in the previously described chapters. But, even when described in more independent modes, Berlin’s imaginary life and remembered experiences have one major commonality; in his imagination and in his historical remembrances, Berlin is constantly focusing on the order of things. As demonstrated above, the order of imagined events is driven and piqued by Berlin’s constant struggle to keep his creation moving forward—a necessary effort as these chapters provide the novel’s narrative pulse and drive. Yet, as his imagination serves this structural purpose of propelling the novel

onward, his imagined journey does for the whole of his war experience exactly what his imagined chasm in the road to Paris does for his fear and dread of the tunnels. His ability to create a version of his war experience in which the events flow and mesh together logically—no matter how fantastical the events themselves may be—is a cathartic counter-weight to the chaotic and traumatizing reality of his disjointed war experience.

As the narrative arc of his imaginings develops into a structure increasingly capable of balancing a heavier psychological load, Berlin is freed to further examine and explicate a more rationalized, organized view of his opinions and critical thoughts of the war, his personal beliefs and ideas, and his foundational experiences as a person within and without the context of Vietnam. Berlin reflects on the confusion of things in his observation post in Chapter Thirty:

Order was the hard part. The facts, even when beaded on a chain, still did not have real order. Events did not flow. The facts were separate and haphazard and random, even as they happened, episodic, broken, no smooth transitions, no sense of events unfolding from prior events. (206)

The central thread and primary analogue of this idea is Berlin's novel-long search for an accurate understanding and rationalization for the deaths of men in his unit. When introduced in the initial chapter of the novel, their deaths are brief statements of fact without any context and simply strewn about in his memory; Berlin is unable to concentrate and focus and face the memories that would provide his desired structure and understanding. Yet, by the end of the novel the organizing and balancing effect of Berlin's imaginary journey allows Berlin to face those experiences and finally recall "all of them. Frenchie, Pederson, Rudy Chassler, Billy Boy Watkins, Bernie Lynn, Ready

Mix, Sidney Martin, and Buff' (286). Berlin is finally able to confront his experiences (whatever memories of trauma that he had blocked out), examine them, and place them in a rational framework; Berlin does so with the hope that, after digging up these buried memories, he will be able to glean some sort of truth—anything worthwhile—that he could affix to these horrifying experiences to justify them in the grand scheme of things. His only truly realization, however, is that he has found

[...] lessons of ignorance; ignorant men, trite truths. What remained was simple event. The facts, the physical things. A war unlike any war. No new messages. Stories that began and ended without transition. No developing drama or tension or direction. No order. (287)

Berlin is unable to place his true war experiences in any order because, in reality, there is no ordering principle to be found. In essence O'Brien presents his readers the inverse of Billy Pilgrim's experience of psychological trauma and attempted catharsis; whereas Billy Pilgrim's mind convolutes time and space to counteract the effects of the increasingly traumatic sequence of his life, Paul Berlin's mind is forced to create a logical sequence of events from scratch to counteract the nonsensical and convoluted nature of his traumatic experiences.

“that's a million-dollar wound you got there”

It is clear to this point that O'Brien's differing narrative strains—Berlin in the observation tower, Berlin remembering past events, and Berlin imagining the trek to Paris—are uniquely and creatively constructed entities. Each narrative strain has its own nuances, themes, and goals. Yet, as initially presented with examples from the chapter “The Hole in the Road to Paris,” these chapters also depend on each other's growth and

development to facilitate their own. O'Brien recognizes the strength of connection between a man's traumatic experience and his psychological state (and vice-versa) when he introduces the initial charge up the hill after Cacciato as well as Berlin's subsequent breakdown. Yet, after a little more than three hundred pages of assessing the three distinctive, disjointed, yet paradoxically interconnected narrative threads, O'Brien provides his reader with a new, extant structure which enables the full synthesis of these threads into an insightful and wholly creative vision of Paul Berlin's war experience.

In Heller's novel, *Catch-22*, Yossarian's repeated memory of his most traumatic experience slowly peels away the layers of his repression and provides the reader with a view of the lengths to which the human mind can alter memory as a means to attempt self-preservation. It is only after he finally remembers the entire scene—all of the blood, horror, and emotional response—that Yossarian fully grasps the reality he faces in war and thus makes his bold decision to extricate himself from the madness of the war around him. In the final chapter of *Going After Cacciato* the originating trauma is not so much revealed as reinterpreted. Berlin's imagined odyssey to Paris in pursuit of a "ding-dong" gone AWOL facilitates the creation of the imaginary double of the initializing traumatic event.

In this second iteration of the charge toward Cacciato's capture, the ascent is not up a hill, but up a flight of stairs into a Paris apartment (328-330). This point in the narrative begins O'Brien's fade back into the original context of Chapter One and the transition from imagination to reality is beautifully crafted. Berlin charges into the room and loses control of himself again; he empties his rifle into the room (a detail previously left out, lost in the blurring of reality and imagination, or symbolized by the emptying of his

bowels) as, once again, “there was a floating feeling, then a swelling in his stomach, then a wet releasing feeling. He tried to stop it. He squeezed his thighs together and tightened his belly, but it came anyway. He sat back. He shivered and wondered what had gone wrong” (331). Following another line break similar to the one after his last breakdown, Doc welcomes Berlin back to the true reality with the simple words, “It’s okay [...] all over, all over. Fine now” (331). At this point the scene is set back at the scene of Chapter one: the hilltop and the smoke-grenade booby-trap. As Paul Berlin attempts to make sense of all that he has just experienced, the vague and patronizing gestures of the Lieutenant and the other soldiers in Berlin’s unit do little to explicitly clarify the situation.

The truth is never plainly stated—as most things are not in the novel (Naparsteck 3-4)—whether Cacciato is alive or dead; he is gone. Dennis Vannatta makes the case for the reality of the situation that Cacciato has escaped by citing the “jocular and good natured” reactions of Berlin’s fellow soldiers—attitudes which do not present “the tone we would expect if one of their ‘own’ had been killed, especially by one of themselves” (245). However, T.J. Lustig, while basing a major tenet of his analysis on Vannatta’s critique, takes the opposite point of view:

Since the first fact to be known after the command to ‘go’ is that Berlin’s weapon has been firing on automatic it is difficult not to conclude that Cacciato has been killed, ‘accidentally’, perhaps, but given his apparent refusal actively to endorse the conspiracy to ‘frag’ Lieutenant Sidney Martin, conveniently. (sic) (87)

Either way, O'Brien makes clear in the end of his novel that it is not the answer to the questioning of Cacciato's whereabouts or well-being that matters; what matters to O'Brien is Paul Berlin's process of seeking that answer.

As the men move out following the repeated charge, the full realization of Berlin's corporeal experience versus his psychological reality is brought fully to light. "They talked softly. They talked of rumors. An observation post by the sea. Easy duty, a place to swim and get solid tans and fish for red snapper. Later they talked about going home. It would become a war story" (335). The observation post is put here in the same light as Paris was previously; both are distractions, distant fantasies of what life could be, fantasies that are simply that because they are not reality. This final revelation and confluence of events bring the reader to the realization that the entire center of the novel has been a part of Paul Berlin's intricate neural process, a method for making sense of all the madness around him.

"Concentrate, [...] it's just the biles fogging things over, just a trick of the glands"

Lustig's statement that Paul Berlin's imaginary excursion to Paris presents "an acceptable and therefore representable alternative to an unacceptable and therefore unrepresentable event" (87) brings O'Brien's work into alignment with Vonnegut, Heller, Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Crane as one of the latest extensions of the psychologically informed pantheon of American war novels. However, the facts of the trauma, the revelations of memory—as in the case of *Catch-22*—do not form the crux of O'Brien's work. The post-trauma reordering—as in the case of *Slaughterhouse-Five*—does not form the crux of the work, either. The full effect of O'Brien's narrative portrays a deeper and more focused depiction of Crane's attempt. O'Brien establishes Crane's concept of

employing a severely limited third-person perspective to its logical extreme not by extending it into the context of one war, one battle, or even one skirmish, but rather by limiting it within the context of a singular traumatizing event—one simple charge after one simple soldier. Although almost comical as severe mental traumas in war novels go (the experience that triggers his psychological break is far less gruesome or physically impactful than either Heller's or Vonnegut's, respectively), this event provides the reader with one singular and intensely focused view of a single small event within a war. By presenting with such depth and detail one tiny instant and its giant impact on Paul Berlin, O'Brien dares his reader to extend that instant into the thousands of other similar, or even more horrifying, instances experienced during a soldier's tour of duty and not be utterly overwhelmed.

The question of genre is continually posed around novels that employ innovative techniques such as the one presented by *Going After Cacciato*. In the interview with Martin Naparstek, O'Brien responded to a question about the categorization of the novel as a work of "magical realism" by stating that "'Magical realism' is shorthand for imagination and memory and how they interlock, for what realism is, for what's real and not real" (8). Although his response is unenthusiastic, O'Brien explains here exactly what is so clearly put in the novel, but so difficult to see: imagination, memory, and the present events of life all interact within the human mind to create a whole and complete image of reality. O'Brien's depiction of all that goes through the mind of Paul Berlin as he copes with the shock of his experience on that hilltop is not some fanciful and magical escapism. The fractured consciousness and swirling narrative of Chapters Two through Forty-Five are the most realistic form of depicting what could not be seen by anyone

looking at Berlin from the outside. O'Brien's "magical realism" is manifested as an expansion of what is the full essence of reality. No longer confined to what the objective, omnipresent narrator can see and explain, O'Brien takes the reader inside the mind of a man and grants that mind the right to act as a mind would, condensing and contorting its input and compounding it against years of previously retained knowledge, moral ideas, stereotypes, memories, fantasies and anything else it sees fit. In doing so, O'Brien reveals all that Berlin is, including his past, his physical present, and all the inner workings of his mind. Although the actual (read "physical") present of the novel is a mere twenty-seven pages, O'Brien realizes that the tangible, objective, and observable reality is not all that there is to tell. Through his depiction of the so called fantasy and imagination of Paul Berlin, O'Brien presents the whole of the event at a rare level of psychological depth. It is subsequently up to the reader not to lose perspective but rather to see the vast complexity of the work and its dramatic addition to the lineage of American war novels—the genre to which it truly belongs.

-- Conclusion --

The history of the American war novel reveals the constant concern with definition. Begun in Cooper's work, the vein's initial direction is provided by *The Red Badge of Courage* and Crane's investigations into both "what happens to people who engage in [war]?" and "how does man behave under extreme battle stress?" (Aaron 215). These pointed and probing questions get to the heart of exactly what Heller, Vonnegut, and O'Brien had in their sights when meticulously crafting their narratives more than seven decades (as well as several wars) later. Each author realizes in his novel the impact of the trauma of war on the human mind and employs that trauma—originating in each man's personal war experiences—to explore that place within where objective sensory input meets the subjective interpretation of the human psyche; to indentify and investigate these two disparate, yet necessarily interactive, elements of the human experience is to answer the question of "who are we?"

Among the ranks of their protagonists, a reader will find no heroes or great men of history. If Yossarian, Billy Pilgrim, and Paul Berlin share anything in common, it is that they are unexceptional, a fact which enables their creators to attain their ends. The fact that each man is, in essence, uncomplicated allows him to become relatable, understandable, and, therefore, powerful. These protagonists function as vehicles because they are not the targets of investigation, personally, as much as their minds are. None of these men are wounded veterans learning to cope with a lost foot or a wounded groin (as would be Hemingway's niche). Heller, Vonnegut, and O'Brien, by contrast, each present varied interpolations of Crane's "powerful, innovative device" (Colvert 35) by delving into different psychological responses to trauma.

Catch-22 presents Yossarian grappling with his own mind's repression of a traumatic experience. *Slaughterhouse-Five*, in turn, presents Billy Pilgrim's unsuccessful mental attempt to restructure the horror he has experienced in the world into a palatable philosophy. Finally, *Going After Cacciato* combines the two modes and presents the internal workings of the mind at the moment of trauma as it attempts to adjust Paul Berlin's psyche to accommodate the damage he has just endured. If any of these novels were simple descriptions of the battles in which these men participated and the hardships they faced, then they would not be very different from many of the works that comprise the mass of publications emerging in the decades immediately following the end of World War II (Hoebling 297). Rather, the elements that set these novels apart as innovative additions to the American war novel as a genre are their form and structure. Heller, Vonnegut, and O'Brien each progressively encounter the ever-increasing human capacity for destruction and its corresponding prevalence in modern life; in response to these developments, they employ innovative literary techniques developed by building upon the authors who came before them. Heller, Vonnegut, and O'Brien achieve this task, and enable themselves to address the radical expansion and incomprehensibility of the destructive new world they face, by ironically choosing *not* to define or analyze it. Instead, they present the effects of that world through equally radical structures and narrative frameworks designed to emulate the psychological trauma their protagonists undergo. By simultaneously expanding the conception of what the narrative presentation of a character can be, while also restricting the focus of that presentation, these authors expand the impact of their works without burying readers under mere descriptive texts.

As the scope of American history extends itself, the effort that began with Cooper and expanded through the works of Crane, Dos Passos, Hemingway, Heller, Vonnegut, and O'Brien has developed into the search for an avenue of address to parallel the unlimited capacity of humanity's destructive forces. These authors embrace as their subject an essential part of the human condition and seek to expose what can at times seem to be commonplace to an increasingly desensitized modern audience. By breaking from the conventional structures of the war narrative, they force their readers to deviate from a standard perspective and re-view the horrors of war in a new light and with new focus. By not focusing only on the objective facts or the subjective experiences, these authors create the truest and most human representation of the experience and trauma of war. Heller, Vonnegut, and O'Brien expand upon the history of the American war novel by continuing in the tradition of Cooper; where *The Spy* could be interpreted as attempting to define the shades of grey represented by "the terrain of the nascent American novel" (McTiernan 3) of his time, these authors focus their novels on filling in the shades of gray matter, as it were, that provide the most complete representations of the complex reality of the human mind at work.

In the modern era, the paradigm of traumatic experience is shifting once again. The more minor concern within the development of the American war novel, from this point forward, is its attempt to depict the exponentially increasing mechanization and computerization of all aspects of the modern battlefield as well as the multitude of functional changes in war. This vein typically ignores the traumatic and horrifying results of war, a development indicative of our constant exposure to war and our acceptance, reverence even, of war that has led to much of the popular and commercial war fiction.

These works, epitomized by Tom Clancy, have no pretensions to greatness, but neither do they have much continuity with the history of the American war novel.

The main concerns of both the personal reaction to war's horrors as well as the expansion of war and its trauma beyond the boundaries of the any declared battlefield, however, display a connection to the historical vein while also creating a correlative expansion of narrative contexts. Just as it took two world wars for American literature to abandon fully the last remnants of the "reticence about adversity" (Lundberg 375) existent during the Civil War era that suppressed almost any significant war fiction, humanity's capacity for destruction has forced further adjustments to the meme of the American response to traumatic events. In *Post-Traumatic Culture*, Kirby Farrell argues that, although theories encompassing the effects of psychological trauma coalesced in the Victorian era and continued to develop through the First World War and beyond (9-10), "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder first became widely familiar after the Vietnam War, when journalists reported on its use as a legal defense for veterans in trouble with the law" (11). He describes PTSD by stating that psychological theories "usually construe the result [of traumatic stress] as a shock or freeze that leaves the stress unassimilated and induces changes in the central nervous system" (6). The scientific embrace of these ideas—preceded by that of their literary forebears—has led to a cultural acknowledgement and acceptance of the effects of trauma. Consequently, this definition and establishment of post-traumatic injury in the standard lexicon of American society has provided a pathway for the expansion and application of the literary forms and structures of Heller, Vonnegut, and O'Brien not solely on the distant battlefield but also in the civilian homeland.

This transition from battlefield to sociological investigation is not new. Mailer and Jones removed their subjects from battlefield scenarios because their focus was not war, but the men within the structure and hierarchy of the army. The works of Heller, Vonnegut, and O'Brien, as much as they center their foundations in war as well, were not novels about war as much so they were fictions about defining what humanity is as a race and dealing with who Americans are as a culture. As PTSD now has shifted from a specialized lexicon to the common—like the “catch-22” before it—the modern author is presented with a challenge and a gift. The aforementioned confluence and parallelism of the psychological and literary articulations of the human response to trauma will enable authors and critics alike to extend the structures and methods of Heller, Vonnegut, and O'Brien further than ever before. The American war novel, in its constant striving to understand the deepest aspects of the human condition, has opened the door to innovative forms, structures, and points-of-view applicable not only as a response and counter-weight to the horrors of war where they found their origins, but also to the multitude of instances of trauma that infiltrate every modern life.

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