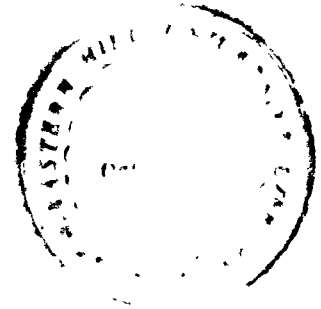


THE WAR NOVEL - HEMINGWAY AND AFTER
A STUDY OF THE NOVELS OF JAMES JONES,
NORMAN MAILER AND JOSEPH HELLER



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*Submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of
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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the thesis entitled **The War Novel-Hemingway and After: A study of the novels of James Jones, Norman Mailer and Joseph Heller** is the record of research work done by Geetam Sarma under my supervision. The candidate has been duly registered as a Ph D student under this university and her work or portion thereof has not been submitted for any research degree in this or any other university.

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Place: Shillong


(Prof. Noorul Hasan)

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This was the heartland of war literature where Hemingway had worked his apprenticeship. The winters were long and dreary and the libraries were rich and extremely accessible. So cosseting myself in one of their carrels was a welcome past time. A special thanks goes to the Harold Washington Public Library and the Newberry Library, Chicago for making things so much easier.

Over the months, the chapters grew and were delivered by friends visiting India.. Prof. Hasan, as always, was there to correct and question with unflinching promptness and return my corrected chapters, again, hand delivered. I cannot express my deep gratitude to him for his promptness. The time bound nature of our stay in Chicago made each day matter. His constant support and encouragement through the writing of the thesis has really made it possible.

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CHAPTER I

WAR AS THEME IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL

War is a literary theme on the grand scale. Writers accordingly have envisioned the soldier as an image of man in society. In particular, American novelists and poets, over the last sixty years or so, have come to understand their own country, its social character, institutions and relations with the world, through metaphors of battle. Love, death and war have always been the great raw material of literature. Men still love and die in very much the same way as their ancestors loved and died. They do not, however, make war the same way; indeed we might say that in the 20th Century war is made upon them. And this change has resulted in enormous problems not only for the literary artist but for the literary critic and historian as well.

Traditionally war-as-subject has been used by the artist as a framework, much like any other, for the examination of individual consciousness both in terms of environment and in relation to other individuals. The concept of war as part of the natural growth of the human race was one to which poets and novelists no less than generals assented prior to World War I, a concept which resulted in such disparate works as Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage and Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace. These books, despite wide variations of treatment, were firmly traditional in their treatment of war as a narrative framework. And precisely, as a narrative tool, the war environment, especially in the novel offered advantages: the qualities of intensification, pathos, dramatic contrast action and crisis were ready-packaged. Critics, however, were free to concentrate on the aesthetic structure of particular books only as long as writers themselves used war as a standard literary theme. Quite

suddenly, however, war stopped being used as a standard literary theme. No longer one subordinate element among many contributing to a total aesthetic structure, environment – the war itself became the chief protagonist and along with it came the dark external shape of war emotion. Both somehow, seemed quite outside the concerns of literary craftsmanship. Ever since the young writers of World War I began producing their works of literary disenchantment – a collective record of impact rather than aesthetic balance – and readers recovered sufficiently from the moral exhaustion of the Great Crusade to read what the young writers were offering, the debate of the aesthetic limits of the war novel has continued.

The most important reason for undertaking this study is my belief in the archetypal importance of warfare as a literary theme, not only in the United States, but in all countries and at all times. In our own time we see the battles of World War I and World War II fought and refought in every medium, from pulp magazine to cinema. Warfare merits serious study as a theme in literature in general, and especially so in the case of the literature of the United States. First of all the United States of America is the most powerful nation of the world, possessing a military machine whose scope and power rank among the wonders of the modern world. Secondly, one is intrigued by the peculiarly American mentality governing the use of force. America is, after all, only very recently removed from the time when violence was the quick and simple solution to the problems of the pioneers; in some parts of the United States this frontier mentality still exists. Everywhere it lends a peculiar colour and tone to American war literature.

There are specific reasons for the essential unity of violence in American letters. It has been noted that the American Revolution engendered a certain lack of

respect for the due process of law. This tendency was fortified by the exigencies of frontier life : the process of wresting land from its rightful owners did not always permit the moral niceties to be observed. At the same time, the men who performed these acts necessarily became heroes in the eyes of the nation. Thus many an American hero was a thug whose actions were legitimized because he fought for what appeared to be a just cause. The defenders of the Alamo, almost all of whom were adventurers, became 'soldiers' in the national mind.

The real connection between the war novel and the novel of violence in America began to manifest itself in those works written towards the end of the 19th century. Upto that time almost no war novel of enduring interest had been written. The great tide of war novels began sometime after 1890 with the publication of Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage (1895), Herman Melville's Billy Bud (written 1888, published 1924) and Ambrose Bierce's Tales of Soldiers and Civilians (1891). That is to say the war novel began to appear at a time when the frontier as a locus of violence had disappeared. This suggests that warfare at least as it was treated in fiction, was a new *avatar* of the American spirit of violence; the soldier came to replace the cowboy or the frontiersman in the popular imagination.

There were other factors responsible for the rise of the American war novel at the end of the 19th century. For one thing the increasing complexities of international relations tended to involve the United States in more and more serious engagements. The Spanish-American war served as an introduction to the shattering effects of World War I and World War II which in turn gave way to the Cold War, Korea and Vietnam. At the same time the military establishment began to emerge as a recognisable entity. The attitude of American writers towards this element in the

national life is, therefore, necessarily a phenomenon of the 20th century. Thus the period from about 1880 to about 1960 seems to form a historical unit in which one can observe the development of certain related literary themes and historical events.

It seems possible to show that in the period before the nation actually went to war against an external enemy, the novels were objective and idealistic; after World War I the novels reflected the horror and chagrin of a people who had tasted combat for the first time; the novels of World War II reveal a different concept of war – more sophisticated and less idealistic – and treat a different set of problems than those of World War I. In other words the American war novel tends to bear out Daniel Boorstein's contention that "what a nation means by war or peace is as characteristic of its experience and as intimately involved with all its other ways as are its laws or its religion".¹

There is, however, a notion of separateness implicit in the term "war novel" which sounds too prescriptive, as though the war novel exists in a vacuum as a genre, hived off from other forms of writing. Such a schematic interpretation of war literature clearly needs to be resisted and full recognition accorded to the interactions and dynamics of literary production, and yet the conception of a body of imaginative work centrally concerned with the presentation and problems of war is a valuable one.

Perhaps a proper definition of the term "war novel" would be any long work of prose fiction in which the lives and actions of the characters are principally affected by warfare. By this definition e.e.cummings' The Enormous Room, in which the main characters are all civilians, is very much a war novel ; Carson McCullers' Reflections

¹ Boorstein, Daniel - The Americans : The Colonial Experience (Harmondsworth, 1965) Page 375

in a Golden Eye in which the protagonists are all in the army is not. In the former work war is the primordial fact dominating the lives of the characters, while in the latter the army merely provides a certain social structure necessary to the working of the plot; another setting would have served as well.

There is also a strong tendency in war literature for memoirs and works of reminiscence to encroach upon the field of pure fiction. The whole problem is further complicated by the rise of reportage which overlaps areas of both memoir and fiction. From this it can be seen that the term "war novel" is a rather loose one. Yet it permits a degree of flexibility that is useful in dealing with war literature as a whole. Also there seems to be an instinctive comprehension of what the term stands for; most critics use it without apology or further explanation, on the assumption that it is self-explanatory. In fact attempts to refine the term only leads to confusion. Leslie Fielder, for example, in Waiting for the End² decided to call these works "anti-war novels" because of the strong element of protest characteristic of many of the novels written after World War I. His term serves only to becloud the issue, because there is actually a whole series of American novels about World War I that could more accurately be called "pro-war novels". For all of these reasons, therefore, it seems best simply to accept the fact that the term "war novel" designates a fairly diversified body of literature, but there is no real disagreement over the extent of that body.

This inevitably brings us to the question of the writer/soldier. The suspicion here is against war writers as such who are not likely to be military paragons; the observations of a creative artist in a war environment must be suspect. But the writer

² Fielder, Leslie – Waiting for the End (London, 1965)

is differentiated from the vast majority of soldiers by his ability to combine observation, experience and articulation; he can both observe and articulate, where the common run of men cannot.

Offering perhaps the most reasonable defence of the artist in the army, Malcolm Cowley points to the obviously atypical status of the writer and his value quite apart from his role as a good soldier:

War novelists are not sociologists or historians, but neither are they average soldiers. The special training and talent of novelists lead them to express special moods. They are usually critical in temper and often are self critical to the point of being burdened with feelings of guilt. They are sensitive – about themselves in the beginning ; but if they have any imagination (and they need it) they learn to be sensitive for othersMost of them were rebels against discipline when they thought it was illogical – which they usually did – and rebels against the system that divides officers from enlisted men Yet the war novelists were trying hard to be accurate and to tell the true story of what they saw. When we find them in substantial agreement on a number of topics, we should listen attentively to what they say.³

It is useful to refer to the war novel as a category in 20th century literature because the apprehension of war constitutes a distinctive and central element in the modern American literary consciousness. Military terrain and situations have become familiar, often assuming mythic connotations; the mass media, of course, has contributed pre-eminently to this process of dissemination. Through the conduit of the media their textures, codes and conventions, versions of war infiltrate our homes; we consequently exploit the imagery and phraseology of battle to talk of mundane domestic situations. Paul Fussell in his seminal study of the first war The Great War and Modern Memory (New York, 1975) has shown how the impact of 1914-18 became so widely communicated that its landscapes, forms and technologies acted as a staple of language and conversation, as synecdoche or metonymy for a variety of different kinds of human experience. At present we frequently indulge in

³ Cowley, Malcolm – The Literary Situation (New York, Viking, 1947) Page 25-26.

similar conceptualisations, talking for example of “heading off another Vietnam” or of the dangers of “triggering off World War III”; such language usage enables us in this instance to structure in accessible cliches certain political options and contending theories that we believe to be part of a public debate.

Further, the idea of a ‘discourse’ of war literature is valid because war has supplied writers with tropes and imaginative fictions of enormous vitality and symbolic energy. Vietnam, or more precisely American military participation in Vietnam is an evident example. Literary works published during the Vietnam war years could basically be divided into two kinds, the gung-ho or hawkish stereotypes which upheld the public, official and hegemonic versions of what the war was fought for and in opposition, a vigorous equally propagandist body of dissentient writing. This protest fiction, drama and poetry often sought to instigate social action, to argue polemically against the conduct of politicians and ultimately to stop the war. In such a context war literature revealed its true political nature as ideological battleground as well as offering its readers a formal representation of warfare. Using the example of Vietnam further, the critic can observe closely the way in which war as literary subject matter retains enormous symbolic potential. War as theme acts out the great tragic visions of our time, the prime historical peripeteia and narrative. The soldier’s traumatic first encounter initiates him psychologically into new realms of experience and marks him off from his civilian counterparts who have not served an apprenticeship under fire.

In many cases writers who have been nurtured in leisured families encounter in warfare their first and perhaps only direct immersion into the industrial realities that are collectively the daily routines of millions of their fellow citizens.⁴

⁴ Walsh, Jeffrey – American War Literature 1914 to Vietnam (New York, 1982) Page 3

On the vast fields of battle too, it is likely that a young writer will marvel as the massive resources of his country are expended in the pursuit of a seemingly mistaken idealism. The army or the air force thus is transformed for him into an image of the American century, and the soldier who is also an artist takes on the role of what Frank Ross has called the “assailant-victim”: he becomes an agent of war and also its martyr.⁵

Since war is demonstrably the most pointless and destructive of all human activities it frequently inculcates in the frontline writer a feeling of existential loss and disorientation, a dawning awareness that the exemplary sacrifice of troops is meaningless and utterly futile. War in other ways may demonstrate the worst fears Americans have of their own culture; it may dramatise deep-rooted racial tensions or re-enact in fable a brutish violence inherited from the persecution of Indians in the old frontier days. Because of the class oppression of enlisted men by officers that is so common a theme in American war novels, war may also serve as a metaphor for the novelist of prevalent social injustice expressive of the dominance of hierarchies through what Norman Mailer in The Naked and the Dead termed the “fear ladder”.⁶ Taken together, then such portrayals, images and inventive fabrications compose a picture of deep angst and indeed much war literature has at its root, a trajectory of protest. It protests against certain features of modern reality and life, and can be to a certain extent, a disguised lament for the disappearance of the open plains, for vanished American innocence, for the lost idyllic frontier spirit where once flourished the pioneer virtues of self reliance and a spirit of sturdy independence .

⁵ Ross, Frank – The Assailant Victim in Three War Protest Novels (Paunch XXXII, 1968) Page 46-47

⁶ Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead (New York, 1948)

And yet out of such holocaustal vision come stirrings of redemption; if war can destroy a man it can also remake him in a better mould; he may for example, discover a more permanent group identity in the army, and arrive at a lasting solidarity with his fellow men. In the recurrent artistic vision of honest infantry soldiers whose love for each other transcends death in an unfailing bond, are reincarnated images of community, of frontier comradeship where man helped his neighbour, of hard times when the native American held out a helping hand to the immigrant.

There are, in the war novel, some uniquely American visions of self renewal and discovery through the exigencies of warfare and most of them draw upon the literary reworking of the writer's own experience. The most famous illustration of this type is the First World War figure of the ambulance driver (like the real Dos Passos, Cummings or Hemingway) who freely chooses to enter the war propelled by idealism and scarred irrevocably by what he sees, becomes a disaffiliated anarchist or radical afterwards. Much of American war literature incorporates similar social overtones; a common pattern of the hero's progress involves some degree of reconstruction which may be roughly summarised thus: the hero, a good and young American, volunteers or is drafted to war, he enters the combat zone and mixes with men with different social and ethnic backgrounds. In uniform he learns what it is like to be born to drill and die; thus his experience parallels that of the hero of a *Bildungsroman* : caught in crossfire he learns to combat his loneliness and to submerge himself in the resistance sub-culture of his fellow soldiers. Such a composite plot or narrative form is indicative of a central kind of American literary response to war; although variations

upon it and totally different reworkings are, of course, numerous and too frequent to classify.

The United States began to be fully aware of itself as a nation in the period after 1880. The military establishment which emerged with it can be taken as a representative of the nation as a whole for it was drawn from all parts of the country and its efforts directed against a common enemy. It seems relevant here to inquire into the principal characteristics of the American military establishment in the period before World War I and to the extent to which these facets found reflection in American literature.

It is possible to delineate five main characteristics: pragmatism, a “team” syndrome, a persistent democratic-aristocratic tension, idealism and a general lack of awareness and psychological preparedness for combat.

In contrast to the European emphasis on ceremony and tradition in military life, the United States army from its inception was based on a philosophy of pragmatism. Emphasis was on the immediately useful and practical. When President Roosevelt spoke against the push-button approach to war, he may have been thinking of a wry little novel called The Great War Syndicate, published the year before by Frank Stockton. This book deals with a naval war between the United States and Great Britain, which is resolved by farming the United States defense commitment out to a “war syndicate” which proceeds to win the war by inventing quick and efficient gadgets.

One sees the same belief in gadgetry as a means of achieving a quick and painless victory in Mark Twain’s A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court (1889). The Yankee stays ahead of his enemies by establishing telephonic

communications with a friend at court; when he is challenged to a joust, he employs a lasso and a revolver to defeat his opponents. Finally, he slaughters his enemies *en masse* as the iron-clad knights press forward unwittingly against highly charged fences and into the range of his machine guns. It is this same marriage of grisly humour and basic pragmatism that underlies Milo Minderbinder's contract bombing of his own air base in Joseph Heller's Catch 22 (1962). Although Twain, Stockton and Heller are all writing against different contexts their works are bonded together by a common parody of the characteristic American pragmatism.

The "team" syndrome is directly related to this American pragmatism. The American characteristically views any problem in terms of mass production. The key to the system lies in the fact that the parts must be interchangeable. In human terms this means that friction must be reduced, personalities must not clash, cooperation is at a premium. This factor also reveals itself in the American passion for team sports. The American people are mentally conditioned to look to the "coach" for instructions and guidance when the going gets rough, and in the armed forces this mentality has given rise to an interesting situation. The "team" generally consists of draftees, while the "coach" is usually a professional soldier; in the case of an officer he is usually a graduate of a military academy. On the one hand the American soldier is vitally conscious of his civilian status and he has also ingrained in him an antipathy towards the professional soldier. On the other hand there exists an innate admiration for the professional, the team captain, the coach.⁷

Within certain limits then, the American responds instinctively to the demands

⁷ Aichinger, Peter – The American Soldier in Fiction (Iowa, 1975) Page 12

of the team, and American war literature is coloured throughout by variations on the team philosophy and the love-hate relationship with the professional soldier. John Dos Passos' three soldiers are servile or defiant in the presence of authority, but they recognise their own comparative incompetence.⁸ E.E.Cummings' tone in The Enormous Room (1922) is very much that of the spectator; in fact the tone of humorous wise cracking almost succeeds in concealing the author's profoundly personal reaction to the war.

"I was an awful dope when I went to the last war, " said Hemingway in 1942, "I can remember just thinking that we were the home team and the Austrians were the visiting team".⁹ In keeping with this thought, the debacle at Caporetto and the subsequent panic-stricken conduct of the Italian officers reveals to Lt. Henry in A Farewell to Arms (1929), that he has made a mistake; the coach is incompetent, the team is disorganised and therefore, he is free to detach himself from it.

Actually the root of the basic tension that exists between officers and enlisted men in the United States' forces is embedded in the character and organisation of the country itself. Theoretically the American soldier should never have resented the professional soldier, since that officer should have been a common man raised to eminence by his own efforts. But the domination of the upper grades of the service by graduates of the service academies created a de-facto aristocratic situation which the common soldier sensed and which aroused deep anxieties going back to the revolution.

⁸ Passos, John Dos – The Three Soldiers (1921)

⁹ Baker, Carlos – Ernest Hemingway – A Life Story (Scribner, 1970) Page 54

If the American attitude towards warfare and the military establishment before 1917 reflected a native pragmatism, paradoxically it was also highly idealistic. Gone With the Wind (1936) has earned a permanent place in the history of American entertainment by expressing an important part of the national mythos: what Robert A. Lively has called “the myth of a war ruled by anti bellum courtesies rather than military necessity” through which “we arrive at the scene of that frequently described war which was conducted with the formality of a duel within the bloodlines of gigantic families.”¹⁰ The idea that the American soldier was simply a cog in a great machine was by no means as acceptable in 1899 as it has become today. For many, war was still a matter of young men “springing to arms and fighting the issue out with bullet, butt and bayonet in a deadly personal encounter”.¹¹

The enduring nature of this chivalrous element has been attested by Samuel P. Huntington’s remark that the American’s characteristically must condemn war as being foreign to liberal goals, in terms of maximum freedom for the individual, or else see it “as an ideological movement in support of those goals”.¹² Furthermore, in the field of literature the conception of war as romance did not end with the nineteenth century. V.S.Pritchett has observed that both Stephen Crane and Ernest Hemingway are capable of suggesting that they have actually been on the scene of a given battle but were not there out of necessity. Rather they were there as “daring, romantic, half-exalted, half-melancholy connoisseurs of courage and cowardice in a folly that could never be laid at their door”.¹³

¹⁰ Lively, A. Robert – Fiction Fights the Civil War (Chapel Hill, 1957) Page 44-45

¹¹ *Ibid*, Page 47

¹² Huntington, Samuel P. – The Soldier and the State (Cambridge, Mass, 1957) Page 198-199

¹³ Pritchett, V. S. – “American Soldiers”, New Statesman, Vol. LXV, page 207

Benedetto Croce has remarked that in Europe in the eighteenth century there arose a general impatience with “books stuffed with accounts of wars and negotiations which prepared and ended them”, and an increasing demand for histories of the arts, manners, morals, science and philosophy – that is of civilisation.¹⁴ The same tendency cropped up in America in the nineteenth century. This interest in civilisation as opposed to war combined with native American idealism gave rise to the assumption underlying the two important American war novels written in the nineteenth century – Billy Budd (c. 1888) and The Red Badge of Courage (1895). The assumption was that war was essentially an outdated institution and therefore one that could be treated objectively. Objectivity of treatment is that quality that distinguishes these two novels from all other war novels ever written in the United States. It places them in a special category which might be called that of the “pure” war novel – the work of fiction that treats some aspect of warfare coolly and dispassionately, having no basis in firsthand experience and believing that such experience is not likely to become available in the future. Stephen Crane’s novel stands suspended, as it were, in theme and style between the chivalrous memory of the Civil War and the unforeseen reality of World war I. Henry Fleming, the hero is typical of the young volunteers bedazzled by dreams of glory. Crane’s depiction of battle is also a forecast of the formless incomprehensible, dehumanised slaughter that was to characterise the protest of the World War I novelist. The confusion felt by Fleming and his comrades in the retreats

¹⁴ Quoted by Peter Aichinger in The American Soldier in Fiction, Page 10

and counter-marches and their indignation and fear at the sight of death wounds delivered by an unseen enemy foreshadow the trauma of the American soldier who found himself in the absurd charnel house of World War I.

Yet, the despair common to most World War I authors is nowhere evident in Crane's novel. His hero is placed in the context of battle, a context which forces him to face the primordial question of personal courage. The war is a closed system – a device that permits Crane to manipulate his protagonist, to observe his reactions and to draw conclusions. Henry Fleming experiences fear, he runs away, he is ashamed, he returns to his comrades and fights bravely; in the end he marches bravely with them. The regiment is still intact; the bond of comradeship remains warm and reassuring, whereas in future American novels like Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms (1929) and Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead (1948) it was to be revealed as a bitter illusion. In the end, Henry has proved himself. The reader is sure that the war will come to a logical conclusion in the sense that a clear-cut victory will emerge and that victory will actually further the ends of the victor. This was one of the assumptions about war that was to be most severely tested in the novels of a later era. Crane could and did use war itself as symbol of life experience, of confrontation. He saw in battle an opportunity for shaping human identity. Thus Henry Fleming becomes a man through confrontation, fear, cowardice, resignation and courage. Crane includes fear and cowardice as part of the process by which courage is ultimately achieved. War, for all Crane's irony is still the magnificent proving ground. There is perhaps no sharper indication of the general naivete towards warfare than the fact that The Red Badge of Courage was an image of reality for

young men, especially college educated young men, setting out in 1917 to earn their own badges of courage and manhood.

If Crane takes the Civil War to serve as the frame of reference in which his character moves, Melville restricts his experiment even more severely. The dimensions of Billy Bud are of a classic starkness; the cramped quarters of a sailing ship suggests reassuringly that Billy's fate, although it may have a universal significance on another plane falls within the realm of comprehension in terms of military justice. Melville treats the theme of military justice in purely idealistic terms. Billy's trial and execution by the forces of enlightened society, embodied in Captain Vere, constitute at once a commentary on how discipline might be administered and an oblique suggestion that in the new world a new order of justice might be conceived that could transcend such harshness. Like Crane, Melville could not foresee the impact that mechanised slaughter could have on war literature.

One can appreciate the academic quality of Crane's and Melville's treatment of the theme of war if one contrasts Billy Bud and The Red Badge of Courage with the stories of Ambrose Bierce. Tales of Soldiers and Civilians was written about the same time, but in tone, attitude and appreciation of the true nature of warfare, it was generations ahead. Where one can observe certain links between The Red Badge of Courage and the novels that were to come out of World War I, one is struck by the manner in which Bierce's stories prefigure the novels of writers of the fifties like Norman Mailer. The desperate pessimism that tends to disfigure Bierce's work is perhaps paralleled in American letters only by that of James T. Farrell's Studs Lonigan series, but in the treatment of war itself Bierce adumbrated the attitudes of the generation that came to maturity in the shadow of nuclear warfare. Certain

passages – like that in “An Affair of the Outpost”, in which a civilian caught in the midst of a battle, realises that “it was an ugly and sickening business : to all that was artistic in his nature, revolting, brutal, in bad taste”¹⁵ – suggests the tone of the novels that were to come out of World War I. Even more striking are passages like that in “The Coup de Grace” :

The enemy’s fallen had to be content with counting. But of that they got enough: many of them were counted several times, and the total as given afterwards in the official reports of the victorious commander denoted rather a hope than a result ¹⁶

This could easily have been written about the war in Vietnam. In other words, the American writer who had been in action adopted an attitude similar to that of subsequent generations who had shared his experiences; Crane and Melville, writing at least once removed from the facts of war, tended to structure those facts in accordance with a national mythos.

In one of his essays George Santayana implies a symbolic relationship between the Robinson Crusoe myth and American society,¹⁷ a metaphor that is particularly appropriate in relation to the history of American military and foreign policy. The pioneer, cast ashore with the wreckage of old beliefs and policies, tried to live peacefully in the wilderness, at the same time, the exigencies and the freedom of the frontier inculcated in him a spirit of innovation and independence that would characterise his reaction to new circumstances when they arose. In this context Hiroshima was the footprint in the sand. From that point onwards the American had to live permanently with the threat of danger and help solve the problems that face the entire world. In a nation where tradition and aristocratic privilege count for nothing, it

¹⁵ Bierce, Ambrose – In the Midst of Life and Other Stories, Page 98

¹⁶ Ibid, Page 79

¹⁷ Santayana, George – Character and Opinion in the United States, (Garden City, 1956) Page 141

was to be expected that the familiar theme of men in arms would be treated in a new light.

Since 1880 the theme of warfare has attracted the attention of practically every major novelist in the United States; the writing of a war novel has become a form of apprenticeship uniting authors whose prime interests lay in other areas. As Leslie Fiedler has noted, since the 1920s at least, the war novel has become a standard way of starting a literary career.¹⁸ In some cases the war novel has been the springboard from which a successful literary career was launched. The first achievements of Stephen Crane, John Dos Passos and William Faulkner lay in this field, as did those of James Jones, Herman Wouk, Irving Shaw and Norman Mailer. In other cases – like the work of Herman Melville, Willa Cather, Ernest Hemingway, John Marquand and James Gould Cozzens – the war novel was a significant addition to an already established reputation.

In any case actual wartime service was not a necessary qualification for authorship; the theme was familiar and important enough to merit attention of combatant and non-combatant alike. Crane established the precedent of non-combatant authorship in The Red Badge of Courage. If only one American writer, James Jones, can be regarded solely as a war novelist in a sense that all his major works (From Here to Eternity, Some Came Running, The Pistol and The Thin Red Line) touch on the subject to a greater or lesser degree, it should also be noted that Jones is one of the most enduring authors to appear in the United States in the last

¹⁸ Fiedler, Leslie – Waiting for the End (London, Macmillan, 1965) Page 27

thirty years. At its peak the theme was good for more than a single effort on the part of a given author.

What are the reasons for America's preoccupation with war literature? This obsession seems to have derived partly from the manner in which the American continent itself came to give expression to some aspects of the human character. Many writers have insisted on the primacy of the hunting instinct in man, as opposed to the tendency to become domesticated and agricultural. Lewis Mumford has developed the argument that America provided an outlet for man's desire to return to nature and that once freed of the bonds of European civilisation the settler quickly succumbed to the irrepressible hunting instinct.¹⁹

Certainly America is one of the few technologically advanced countries in the world where hunting is widely practiced. It seems reasonable to argue that since war is only a specialised form of the hunt, the two should hold a special interest for the people of the United States. One critic has said "the novels of World War II like the literature of any war have for the most part been attempts to give artistic form to experiences which magnify the violence and chaos of human existence".²⁰ In a country where for three hundred years the relaxation of traditional restraints combined with a positive need to wrest a living from the wilderness, the elements of chaos and violence have come to be specially pertinent. One sees the duality of hunting and warfare presented with special clarity in a work like Hemingway's In Our Time or in Mailer's Why Are We in Vietnam? Where the question posed by the title is explored

¹⁹ Mumford, Lewis – The City in History (New York, Harper, 1961)

²⁰ Muste, John W – "Better to die Laughing: The War Novels of Joseph Heller and John Amstead" (Critique Vol. 7)

in the atmosphere of a Alaskan big game hunt. Another aspect of warfare that corresponds to the frontier instinct is the element of simplicity vis-à-vis problems of morality. Saul Bellow's waspish comment that Americans "are unpracticed in introspection and therefore badly equipped to deal with opponents whom they cannot shoot like big game or outdo in daring",²¹ focuses attention on the American tendency to seek the simple solution. This tendency is also reflected in the standard denouement of the western movie, where the sheriff solves the most complicated issues of the community with a blazing six-shooter. The most bewildering paradox is reduced to a simple test of strength and courage.

War literature is also reminiscent of the masculinity of pioneering life. Edmund L. Volpe has noted that James Jones' fictional terrain is limited to that peculiar all male world governed by strictly masculine interests, attitudes and values.²² This observation is in keeping with Leslie Fiedler's comments in Love and Death in the American Novel on the curiously strong element of celibacy in American letters. Volpe adds that in Jones' novel the army is treated as the last frontier of rugged masculine individualism:

Prewitt wants to be a thirty year old man because the raw violence, the drunken sprees, the sex without responsibility, the demands on physical endurance and technical skill express and challenge his maleness.²³

The disappearance of the frontier, a larger involvement in foreign affairs and the rise of the military establishment as a separate entity all contributed to the emergence of the war novel as an identifiable genre in the period after 1880.

²¹ Bellow, Saul – Dangling Men (University of Chicago, 1987) page 8

²² Volpe, Edmund L. – "James Jones –Norman Mailer" in Contemporary American Novelists. Ed Harry T. Moore (Carbondale, Illinois, 1987) Page 108

²³ Ibid, Page 109

Fundamental to my approach in this study is the idea that literature may be beneficially examined as one of the many components of national life, all of which interact with each other : i.e., it is important to discuss works of literature in relation to the historical, economic and political events that accompanied or preceded their appearance on the scene.

This thesis is an attempt to study modern American war fiction between the two wars. Although there have been perceptive studies of some of the areas of fiction discussed here, it is fair to say that there is no critical consensus about what constitutes a distinctive body of knowledge or canon of modern American war fiction. Because of this it is particularly difficult to decide upon a formula which will enable individual works to be analysed while evaluating a tradition of war writing, one which implies reworking and reconstituting into a living order. Other problems relate to the matter of historical perspective, since it seems that certain writers and works, viewed in broadly cultural terms, are more central and representative than others.

Inevitably, in the last resort I have had to rely on my own judgement about what is important. In making selections I have kept in mind the overall design in two ways: first through employing chronological methods of study and secondly by treating representative issues and themes. This thesis moves historically from the First World War to the Second World War and attempts to focus upon writers and verbal modes that demonstrate authentic literary and socio-cultural significance in the American imagination of war. I have tried to structure individual chapters in such a way that they are both autonomous and complementary.

Of the hundreds, perhaps thousands of war novels written since 1880 only a very few have earned a permanent place in the nation's literature. As Norman Mailer

has observed “war is as full of handbooks as engineering but it is more of a mystery, and the mystery is what separates the great war novels from the good ones”.²⁴ I have chosen three representative pieces of writing. A Farewell to Arms, The Naked and the Dead and Catch 22 . The choice has been more or less arbitrary, but I believe that these three novels share a common ring of truth about them – the quality of accurately rendering a significant experience in a manner that has appealed to an enormous number of readers.

Above all, I have attempted to perceive war as a flow of contending energies, a historical process. This study is based on the premise that modern American war literature shares the nature of debate, discourse and consciousness rather than static form.

²⁴ Mailer, Norman – “Some Children of the Goddess”, Esquire LX, Page 65

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE WRITING OF *A FAREWELL TO ARMS* - FACT AND FICTION

For a generation, it was known with only a trace of irony, as the “Great War”, “the war to end war”, the war to make the world safe for democracy. Ultimately it was not the world’s greatest war, did not end war, and produced no lasting world movement for democracy. But the First World War did mark the beginning of the modern era, shattered a cultural universe and in the United States shaped the literature of a generation.

Readers and critics, however, tend to look upon the great crusade either with nostalgia or impatience. Lauded for its excitement or attacked for its naivete, the work of post World War I writers has suffered from the fact that the burden of their protest has been so rapidly and so thoroughly absorbed in the national memory. But Hemingway, Dos Passos, Cummings, Faulkner and many other American writers of the twenties began their work at a time of unique crisis. In order to understand their development it is necessary to understand the nature of the crisis itself, to see it clearly and without nostalgia. For it was the great crusade which gave to American literature an art not simply “influenced” by war, but in a vital sense, created by it.

The impact of the war is not a simple thing to recreate, either for new generations of readers or for critics who look back upon the experience of the twenties through a haze of sentiment. World War I for the vast majority of Americans, including the young men who were to produce the literature of the post war period, was a crusade in the fullest sense of the term.

It was a call to glory, a struggle against the hosts of darkness to lean down and revitalise a materialistic society, a prelude to the 'socialist commonwealth' which many Americans saw as part of the inevitable future of the nation.¹

The explosive enthusiasm, as well as the subsequent disillusion of the war experience, requires an act of retrospective imagination if the literature of the twenties is to be seen clearly for what it was.

In a very real sense we are all creatures of World War I, both in aesthetic and political terms. The great authoritarian movements of our century, the experiments in art and literature against all forms of rhetoric, the triumph of technological civilisation - these things were then new, and they were the raw material for art, an art which found its expression not merely in "negativism" or "escapism" but rather in an examination of possible alternatives to a framework of obsolete values.

The aim of this section then, is not merely to "criticise" a literary period, but rather to reexperience it, to get at something of the essence which made of the twenties so vital a decade in American letters, producing such enduring novels as Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms .

During the years preceding the First World War there was a faith seldom doubted, a secular faith of man in man : democracy was coming into its own. Europe was seen as the most advanced civilization – the centre of a "luminous intelligence" of which Henry James was the chief American spokesman in literature. The excesses of the industrial revolution were arrested, social no less than intellectual awareness was added proof of the progress of civilization. By 1912, when Woodrow Wilson said "it is a new age", change was the keynote and the golden age was as sure as the

¹ Cooperman, Stanley – World War I and the American Novel (Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore & London, 1967) Page VIII

annual boom in population. The journey to happiness, however, a material happiness based on better wages, newer goods and wider stock distribution was not universally accepted. For some the very complacency of material progress was stifling. Unprepared for the stuffy materialistic quest for happiness, by reason of their cultural pretensions, academic and artistic young men retreated into the twin towers of humanism and aestheticism. Other young men in offices, factories or sales rooms were bored despite the better wages or perhaps because of the better wages. When the war did arrive it was seized as the very breath of glory as the big chance by the young aesthete, humanist and commercial man alike.

The impact of the war on the older writers and thinkers, who were developing a culture of intelligence and reason, defies description. The context in which they worked, and in which they were struck by the war, is remote. The heart wrack of the man like Henry James, despite his Anglophilm speaks through a letter he wrote to Howard Sturgis in 1914:

It is vain to speak as if one weren't living in a nightmare.... The plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and horror.... this unspeakable giveaway of the whole fool's paradise of our past ... this is what we were so fondly working for.²

War – the fire in which heroes had been forged throughout man's history – drained Europe and ruined America. But in place of fire there was mud, in place of heroes there were faceless masses of men butchering each other with none of the personal tests celebrated in epics reaching back to the origins of language itself. There were no identifiable gestures of nobility in this war, and the young Ernest Hemingway had not forgotten that, when in 1923 he wrote a snatch of verse bitterly titled *Champs d'Honneur* for Poetry magazine.

² Ibid, Page VIII

Soldiers never do die well:
 Crosses mark their places –
 Wooden Crosses where they fell,
 Stuck above their faces.
 Soldiers pitch and cough and twitch –
 All the world roars red and black;
 Soldiers smother in a ditch,
 Choking through the whole attack.³

The scientific century had produced what was probably the first of the scientific wars, and as John Peale Bishop remarked, “The most tragic thing about the war was not that it made so many dead men, but that it destroyed the tragedy of death”.⁴

Why did the people who reelected Wilson in 1916, because he kept them out of the war swing on a pendulum from neutrality to total involvement? The reasons – often paradoxical, none simple – related to economic pressures, to the enormous growth of propaganda-as-science, to the need of organised religion for the holy cause, and to the concept of battle as the personal proving ground for manhood.

The first of these reasons, the pocket book has perhaps been given the most attention of all. The United States profited enormously during the early years of the war, almost entirely because of trade with the *Entente*. By 1917, (the year Ernest Hemingway went out to Italy as an ambulance driver) the United States had a two billion dollar stake in allied victory with munitions shipments alone. Yet Anglophiles and Francophiles within the United States soon perceived that economic interests alone would not produce a war fever. Their subsequent propaganda sought to induce an emotional infection – consequently the distribution of atrocity stories became a major weapon of the war. The stage was set for the

³ *Poetry* – XXI (January 1923), Page 19

⁴ Quoted by John Alfred Atkins in *The Art of Ernest Hemingway* (London, 1952), Page 116

rhetoric describing German bestiality with the sinking of the Lusitania – the most effective single propaganda issue of the war. Directed against Teutonic depravity abroad, a large quantity of fiction was written and read for indictment and inspiration. The books reflected horror upon a specific target and reduced tragedy to a single cause. Above all they gave reassurance that the reader was hating the right people. Propaganda novels today, however, must take into account a vast increase in political and ideological sophistication on the part of the reading public. Simple epithets no longer possess the efficacy they did during the First War – there is some control of rhetoric, and at the very least a posture of objectivity dealing with the complexities of motivation and situation.

Horrified by episodes such as that of the Lusitania, primed by atrocity dispatches from London or Paris, American clergymen too joined the propaganda clamour and clearly embraced the concept of Holy Cause, “Jesus in Khaki” and represented the war as a test of spiritual righteousness. God was confronting the devil, and under the circumstances, pacifism was not only unpatriotic, but also blasphemous – and religious rhetoric flowed with a heat unequalled before – or since.

Like the press and the pulpit, American literature during World War I had been placed at the service of the propaganda machine, and the willing assent of older writers to such indentured service helped shape post war disillusion in two directions: a rhetorical protest by young men who utilised their war experience as material for fiction, and a form of anti-war propaganda no less absurd than the pseudo literature of the crusade itself. Ultimately reaction struck at both. A movement of counter rhetoric developed during the twenties and early thirties,

bringing into articulate focus the general cynicism represented by the anesthetised “I” of Hemingway heroes, and the broad, objective, scientific non-involvement of Dos Passos’ collectivist novels. For the most serious craftsmen, value inflated by rhetoric was suspect, whether it celebrated or protested against the glory of democracy at war.

Propaganda – the rhetoric of atrocities, of religious cause, of race hate and of glory through battle – was only a single factor in the bold journey which was to stall and turn back in mud and blood. Propaganda was a stimulant, but young men at the time of World War I were often looking for a stimulant and were bored for lack of it. Their idealism was real enough, but the idealism of war was embraced all the more enthusiastically because it sanctioned a release from a world increasingly self-centred and materialistic.

In The End of American Innocence Henry F. May points out that while “the First World War was clearly, an enormous experience for the peaceful and optimistic country”, during the years preceding the war there were numerous cracks in the “official surface” of “intolerable placidity and complacency”.⁵ This is an important insight, for there can be no doubt that new currents in art, philosophy, economics and politics were already in evidence before the impact of the war speeded up the process of change. The war, however, was seized upon by those most disaffected with their time – it was taken precisely as a means of escaping materialism, for achieving personal nobility and social mobility, for carrying the banner of disinterested justice, for “living life to the hilt”. America’s “loss of

⁵ May, Henry F. – The End of American Innocence (New York, 1959) Page X

innocence” was inevitable even if World War I had never occurred; that so many Americans innocently embraced battle as an antidote for their dissatisfactions, however, accounts for the shattering impact of the war itself. Far from being a corrective for, the war was discovered to be an excrescence of, hypocritical values and a tragically flawed society. This was the final – and unforgivable – disillusion. And it was this disillusion which brought new pressure on what Henry May calls “cracks in the surface” of an American culture still very much nineteenth century. The cracks in other words were there; but only the intense pressure of war – or rather of its failure – brought the walls tumbling down.

In the better liberal arts colleges young men were going through a process of alienation from a society for which their education rendered them useless. There were, Malcolm Cowley says, the aesthetes and the humanists, both equally estranged from the productive thrust and material values of pre-war America.⁶ For these young men war was a call to adventure, sanctioned by idealism. In the pre-war period furthermore, going abroad was both cause and effect of culture; to go abroad with the opportunity of becoming a hero was no less than a golden chance.

The chief literary antecedent in the matter of war heroism was the work of Stephen Crane. And as the United States stood on the threshold of its first real battle, the concepts fundamental to The Red Badge of Courage (i.e., war was a phenomenon having a beginning, a middle, and an end; that war had a rational and attainable purpose, and that the individual, either as observer or participant, could benefit from the experience of war) were still intact. Crane’s influence is

⁶ Cowley, Malcolm – Exile’s Return (Viking, New York, 1951) Page 35-36

overwhelming, yet one tends to underestimate the enormous contrast between the symbolic experience he described (war as the achievement of manhood) and the actual experience of World War I – a contrast rendered all the more psychologically and emotionally damaging precisely because of Crane’s influence. Good soldiers and bad soldiers alike, men like the Frederick Henrys or the Andrews of the post-war novels came not only to reject the absurdity of external causes, but also the absurd role of the individual soldier. What Crane saw in warfare, writers like Hemingway had to find elsewhere; the latter’s “moment of truth” could come only in other spheres of action where the individual could take a stand, even that of loser, and preserve the nobility of his manhood. Only at the beginning of the war did young men on both sides of the Atlantic see in conflict the values achieved by Crane’s hero Henry Fleming. Opportunity to show what he is made of; opportunity to show himself what he is made of. “It was this entire concept of proving ground that was broken in World War I and it was broken violently enough to affect permanently the literature of a generation.”⁷ The great enthusiasm for exchanging the “uniforms of culture for military uniforms” was not, Cowley points out, as radical for the young men in the universities as it might seem. American patriotism differed from that of the French peasants, who were defending their own fields and farms. American patriotism was abstract: “it concerned world democracy and the right to self determination of small nations.....”⁸ It was based on disinterested ideals, providing a means to action without the vulgar economic distractions of the

⁷ Cooperman, Stanley – World War I and the American Novel (Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore and London, 1967) Page 48

⁸ Cowley, Malcolm – Exile’s Return (Viking, New York, 1951) Page 36

market place. War was the test, the exercise in manhood, at once the prerogative of selfless youth and – an idea widely held and widely voiced – the most reliable method of toughening a flabby society.

Some young dilettantes, however, were not interested in the war as proving ground or cure for social decadence; they were motivated by a more personal need for grand gesture. “Sickened by writing or reading poems to love goddesses, arguing about form, scribbling music reviews or floating in a many coloured dream of beauty”,⁹ such young men embarked on a journey to get away from it all, to find a solid base in real experience with common people.

The search for experience and adventure, on the other hand, was by no means limited to the educated class. The young men of office, farm and factory welcomed the war with equal enthusiasm. It must be remembered that American attitudes towards struggle – whether or not shaped by the frontier imagination so essential to this country’s cultural growth – had always been ambiguous. One might say that the “Onward Christian Soldiers” complex typified a national, emotional schizophrenia regarding questions of war and peace. As Frank T. Phipps has suggested, although most Americans believed they hated war, on the level of the imagination they consistently imaged America (and Americans) as honourable, courageous soldiers, marching with divine guidance, towards a destined future.¹⁰

In One of Ours, Willa Cather utilises the war drive beneath the peaceful surface of American life during these years as a major aspect of Claude Wheeler’s

⁹ Cooperman, Stanley – World War I and the American Novel (John Hopkins Press, Baltimore and London, 1967) Page 49

¹⁰ Phipps, Frank T. – The Image of War in America 1891 to 1917, Kenyon Review XIII (1951) Page 147-148

journey into meaning – through violence. Claude is typical of the mid-westerner reaching for war, “the bright face of danger”. For Claude the war came as a release from the rigidity and unsubmitting will of his wife. Certainly the small town morality permitted no corrective for restlessness. Claude could be justified in saying, “I never knew there was anything worth living for, until this war broke out”.¹¹

The desire for adventure was equally entrancing for young men who were bound neither by small town rigidity nor deracinated by over education. Unlike the aesthetes, these young men themselves used the yardstick of material wealth. And the war, for men in the factories, salesrooms and offices, was more than adventure; it was a means of achieving a stature they could obtain in no other way. This theme, the hope for social and material stature – through glory so tragically reversed by the war experience itself was to be a major one in the post-war novel of protest.

“*The green field shriveled in an afternoon*”, Vernon Parrington remarks of the Great Crusade;¹² “the moral and philosophical structures of the earlier society collapsed,” writes Frederick Hoffman;¹³ “you could have supposed the whole of Europe had been tilted up with all of its anciently established things being up ended and tilted into the sea”, noted H.M. Tomlinson.¹⁴ The impact of World War I must be seen not only in terms of the military and political realities for which soldiers and civilians alike were unprepared, but in terms of a naivete so profound as to require an act of retrospective imagination only a few decades afterward. It is this quality of naivete which sets up the dramatic process of disillusion and impact in the post

¹¹ Cather, Willa – *One of Ours* (New York, 1951) Page 466

¹² Parrington, Vernon Louis – *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America* (New York, 1930) Vol. III, Page 412

¹³ Hoffman, Frederick J. – “The Temper of the Twenties”, *Minnesota Review* Vol. I (1960) Page 40

¹⁴ Tomlinson, H.N. – “War Books”, *Yale Review* Vol. XIX (1930) Page 449

World War I novels. After the second conflict and the continuing threat of atomisation such naivete may well seem fantastic. In no World War II novel do protagonists set out with a comparable mixture of innocence and baroque expectation. It was precisely this expectation of progress, together with the concept of war as a lance and plume affair and Europe itself as cultural monument and picture postcard, which resulted in so sharp a recoil in the World War I literature of disillusion. In the words of Stanley Cooperman, “The world itself was broken. It was still broken when World War II began, but by then the family china had long been cracked.”¹⁵

The tragedy of 1914 (and later wars as well), is that while no one actually wanted war, a great many individuals and groups had urgent desires which could not be gratified without it. The ultimate irony was not that national leaders – and populations for that matter – “wanted” a war, but rather that they did not want the war they got. What they did get – cynic or idealist, profiteer or patriot, clergymen or militarist – was a juggernaut that could no more be controlled by its drivers than by its victims. It was a war of stasis and futility, but equally important was the fact that “fighting” became a passive rather than an active procedure. The man was separated from the act; the potential hero could be – and often was – splattered by a stray shell under circumstances that had nothing whatever to do with soldiering – as Frederick Henry was wounded in A Farewell to Arms. The result of this passivity was a psychic emasculation inherent in the combat environment itself, a sense of violation which had such vitally important results as the subsequent preoccupation of

¹⁵ Cooperman, Stanley – World War I and the American Novel (Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1967) Page 56

Hemingway with death and *cojones*. Survivors, furthermore, were often individuals who did survive only by perfecting the virtues of cleverness rather than of intelligence – the latter according to the almost universal testimony of post-war novelists resulting in either desertion or death.

Besides United States army training was often vastly inadequate. In fact, many troops were shipped overseas with only six weeks of actual training. In Through the Wheat by Thomas Boyd, Captain Powers, with his dreams of sabre charges, who almost before Hick's eyes was to become a bit of uniform, a leg and a pile of brains modestly contained in a battered helmet, was a historical type no less than the creation of a writer's imagination. There were many men – of all combat ranks – who suffered the same fate in either physical or psychological terms. And many of those who did not, who survived, did so only by developing a numbness and a broken indifference. Together with this was an inner vacuum and the flight from nada of Frederick Henry – and we have the post World War I literary attitude in broadest outline.

The impact of twentieth century fire power on the American troops first exposed to it helped produce the combination of absurdity, protest and numbness which were to become characteristic of the anti hero in the post World War I novel. It must be emphasised that the reaction to horror, indecency, squalor, chaos and filth was especially violent in the work of American novelists precisely because of the more naïve expectation, and subsequent impact of the American experience. Words like “putrefaction”, “stench”, “decay”, “nausea”, “infested”, are reiterated in the novels and with good reasons.

It is interesting to compare such descriptions with those of Willa Cather's who, in 1922 was able to describe trench warfare in a somewhat different light. Miss Cather's dugout is "clean", the land though bleak is "quiet"; dawn comes up "saffron and silver"; even shell holes are delicately described as "opaque". The importance of Miss Cather's view of World War I combat, however, lies not in its own limitations, but rather in the fact that similar limitations have persisted ever since 1918 and have indeed, through a growing nostalgia abetted by the necessities of continuing world conflict, actually conditioned critical attitudes to World War I fiction as a whole. Readers of Hemingway, for example, have often assumed a continuum of violence-in-the-north-woods to violence-in-war, to violence-in-the-bull ring; as recently as 1960 John Killinger in Hemingway and the Dead Gods could actually see Nick's war experience as "a moment of truth". That such assumptions are made is an indication of how completely the World War I impact has been blunted by time and a sense of continuing crisis.

For idealistic young Americans from April 1917 to November 11, 1918, and even earlier for some volunteers, the Great War represented a glorious opportunity for both adventure and the advancement of American idealism. For some this desire to serve, based apparently on both idealism and a wish not to miss what at the time appeared to be the new country's greatest spectacle, predates America's entry into the First World War. One of the greatest attractions for American volunteers was the ambulance service. Charles A. Fenton in his Ambulance Drivers in France and Italy 1914-1918 notes that Harvard led in the number of volunteers with 325 and Yale followed with 187 – a highly educated group of volunteers, at least by World War I era's standards. Among these individuals, there were also a large number of aspiring

writers – some of whom would in the post war world achieve various degrees of fame in literature, poetry and criticism. Among those so destined were E.E Cummings, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway and Malcolm Cowley. As Fenton observes, in the disillusioned 1930s it was fashionable to deprecate the war efforts of the ambulance men, and their particular duties did leave them in a strangely spectatorial role, usually living better than common infantrymen while enjoying officers' privileges and a fair degree of safety.

Perhaps, no American author of the twentieth century has been the object of as much critical attention as Hemingway. However, thanks in large part to Hemingway's tendency to re-invent, to exaggerate his own past and his own exploits – and perhaps as well to a tendency on the part of some early critics to fail to distinguish between the Hemingway fictional protagonist and their own creator – only recently has an accurate record of Hemingway's experiences in the First World War begun to emerge. The author of A Farewell to Arms is reported to have told Malcolm Cowley in 1948:

“In the First War I was hurt very badly in the body, mind and spirit and also morally. The true gen is I was hurt bad all the way through and I was truly spooked at the end.”¹⁶ Despite his tendency to exaggerate and mislead critics, it is now evident that Hemingway suffered physically and very probably emotionally as a result of his experiences on the Piave and in Milan during 1918. However, the difficulty remains in determining the exact nature of those wounds and how precisely they were acquired.

¹⁶ Cowley, Malcolm – Hemingway : The Image and the Shadow, Horizon, Vol. 15 (Winter, 1973) Page 112

One thing that is strikingly evident about Hemingway's war experience in Italy during the summer of 1918 is that it was distressingly brief. Distressing for both Hemingway and those critics who insisted that the experiences of Frederick Henry in A Farewell to Arms were based on the author's own in Italy. Hemingway arrived in Italy in June, 1918 and spent a short period of two weeks or so driving an ambulance in the Dolomites near Schio – a region so far removed from actual combat that it was known as the “Schio Country Club”.¹⁷ Unhappy with this non combative and safe duty, he transferred to a Red Cross canteen at Fossalta, a village on the Piave river. There while in the trenches on July 8, 1918, most accounts agreed, he was struck by a mortar shell while handing out chocolates, cigarettes and other equally prosaic items to Italian troops. This incident effectively terminated Hemingway's direct experience of Great War combat. However, the wounding also carries a certain amount of heroic myth, or at least uncertainty.

Numerous accounts have the badly wounded Hemingway lifting an equally badly wounded Italian soldier on his back and making his way to a first aid station. Whether in fact he did so seems to be questionable. The fact that he was decorated by the Italian government has been used to support the account of the wounded Italian; however, Robert W. Lewis observes in “Hemingway in Italy : Making it Up” that unlike other Red Cross workers who were honoured for acts of valour by the Italians “.....Hemingway's experience was not written up and not immediately recognised by the decorations that were commonly if not casually awarded to the

¹⁷ Fenton, Charles A. – The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway : The Early Years (New York, 1961) Page 57

Americans.”¹⁸ Hemingway, in fact, did not receive his citations until long after the event, the silver medal of military valour in 1920 and as Robert Lewis notes, there was little unusual about the two military awards the young man did receive “.....the silver medal was awarded to all soldiers who were wounded, and the war cross.....to all who were engaged in action in the war....”¹⁹

One of the central problems in separating biographical fact from invented experience in the case of Ernest Hemingway during the war and immediately after is the author’s tendency “to spin yarns”. Michael Reynolds, in his The Young Hemingway, refers to this as Hemingway’s ability to modify his experience to fit the moment. “In 1919, the age demanded heroes, and if his experiences did not quite fit the mould, then Hemingway would expand a bit here and there until it did fit.”²⁰

What this strongly resembles, as often noted, is the experience of Krebs in Hemingway’s Soldier’s Home. In order to be listened to, Krebs has to lie: his lies were quite unimportant and consisted in attributing to himself things other men had done, seen or heard of, and stating as facts certain apocryphal incidents familiar to all soldiers.²¹

What the incident did do without any doubt was propel the almost twenty year old Hemingway into a Milan hospital and involve him in a romance with nurse Agnes Von Kurowsky. Von Kurowsky has been assumed by many critics to be the model for Catherine Barkley of A Farewell to Arms, but several critics, including Reynolds, suggest Catherine is a composite containing elements of other women in

¹⁸ Lewis, Robert W. in *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 9 (1981-82) Page 215

¹⁹ *Ibid*, Page 224

²⁰ Reynolds, Michael S. – The Young Hemingway (New York, 1986) Page 52

²¹ Hemingway, Ernest – The Short Stories (New York, 1966) Page 146

addition to Agnes, such as Hemingway's first wife Hadley Richardson and his second wife Pauline Pfeiffer. The generally accepted view has been that Von Kurowsky was a reluctant participant in this affair. But, by early March 1919, all semblance of a romance was over.

Thus Hemingway in his nine month tour of the war in Italy, only six days of which were spent under what might properly be called combat conditions, experienced two shattering woundings, one physical and one emotional. At least to some extent they would appear in his fictions in different guises. If experience does indeed teach, then Italy for Ernest Hemingway had proven a highly instructive tour of duty, as Michael Reynolds has observed:

"From the Italian war he brought back a pistol and a bottle of kummel shaped like a bear: authentic trophies. In his damaged leg he still carried bits of metal, equally authentic. If the war had not been so glorious as advertised, its true experience was still instructional : the whore in the government brothels who teased him for blushing; the taste of grappa; the faces of men bleeding to death; the sound of incoming artillery; the blue eyes of a nurse; the smell of his own blood; the way dead bodies bloated in the sun. In less than a year he had become a charter member of modern times."²²

And Reynolds might have added that for the next decade, Ernest Hemingway would use those experiences in several short stories and one fine novel that very much helped to define the period between the World Wars.

In the opening pages of the novel, Frederick Henry is the archetype of the all American young man – a nice guy. Like many others of his age and generation, he is insensitive to the suffering of others, slightly selfish and above all totally ridicules the possibility of his own death.

²² Reynolds, Michael S. – The Young Hemingway (Blackwell, New York, 1986) Page 31

“Well, I knew I would not be killed. Not in this war. It did not have anything to do with me. It seemed no more dangerous to me than war in the movies.”²³ He has a vague ill-defined idealism common in the American youth in the twenties. He is, in other words, a perfectly normal young man, a normalcy which becomes a basis for satire. Henry at the beginning of the novel is egoistical and selfish. His perceptions are limited and detached. But his greatest fault, however, is his general lack of awareness. In his characterisation of Frederick Henry it is interesting to note that Hemingway actually depicts himself as he was in 1918. He maintains an ironic distance from his character, a distance which is not without a touch of regret and ridicule.

Early in the novel, the scene of the war is set in a manner reminiscent of “a quaint Italian operatta”.²⁴ Priest baiting in the officers’ mess is juxtaposed with the bawdy activities of the Villa Rosa while the war progresses like a game – the Italian infantry moving up and down, capturing and surrendering the same territory and the Austrian artillery bombarding Henry’s station not seriously “but only a little in a military way”.²⁵

Henry’s perception of the outside world is abstract and dreamlike and parallels the emptiness within himself. His insensitivity is heightened in his feelings for Catherine, particularly in the context of her recent bereavement. It is the priest from Ambruzzi, however, who perceives Henry’s latent capacity for commitment. But at this time he drowns himself in a world of sensations “in the smoke of cafes

²³ Hemingway, Ernest – *A Farewell to Arms* (Scribners, 1948) Page 31

²⁴ Benson, Jackson J. – *Hemingway : The Writer’s Art of Self Defence* (University of Minnesota Press, 1969) Page 84

²⁵ Hemingway, Ernest – *A Farewell to Arms* (Scribners, 1948) Page 8

and nights when the room whirled knowing that this was all and all and not caring”.²⁶ It is again the priest who perceives that even after being wounded Henry has not acquired a consciousness of the reality of the war, “still even wounded You do not see it. I can tell.”²⁷ Henry does not perceive the terrifying irrationality of the war, the nature of the irrational violence which leaves no room for the preservation of the individual and his dignity. Henry’s even casual commitment to the war has robbed him of his ability to love as well as his ability to react as an individual. The war has nothing to do with the victor or the vanquished. Yet Henry seeks a purpose behind the war, an order behind the chaos till suddenly the incident at the bridge allows the truth to dawn on him.

War in the novel not only becomes a fact of life but acquires a metaphorical meaning as well. It becomes a symbol of mass-man, the bureaucracy, the propaganda and above all the indifference. Individual dignity is destroyed at the altar of general submission, and it is this aspect which becomes even more terrifying than the violence unleashed.

It is not that Henry is impervious to the irrationality of the war, but at the beginning the impact of it is negligible to his insensitive mind. He does wonder a great deal about what is going on and what will happen in the end. His general stance of commitment, even though perfunctory, is radically different from the driver Passini.

“.....There is nothing worse than war”. (Passini) “Defeat is worse”. (Henry replied)²⁸

²⁶ Ibid, Page 14

²⁷ Ibid, page 55

²⁸ Ibid, Page 40

Passini of course has a deeper understanding of the war, an understanding which dawns only when he is met by the chaos at the bridge. But it is at the time of his wounding that the first lesson of the war is learnt by Henry. “My knee wasn’t there. My hand went in and my knee was down on my shin.”²⁹ There are, however, several absurdities linked with his wounding. Firstly Henry and his comrades are not soldiers; Henry is wounded not while in combat, but in the mundane act of eating cheese. And the tragedy is that it is Passini who so abhors war who is killed. These ironic contrasts raise questions: what sort of game is war? What are the rules? And who dictates them? The effect of the wounding of Henry and its psychological implications are, however, not explicitly stated in this novel, but for Hemingway himself this must have had very deep emotional implications, for this motif appears in a much later novel Across the River and Into the Trees. Here we have Col. Cantwell, a much wounded older man than Henry but having gone through the same war and the same initial wounding.

“Finally he did get hit properly and for good. No one of his other wounds had ever done to him what the first big one did. I suppose that it is just the loss of immortality. Well, in a way, that is quite a lot to lose.”³⁰

Henry’s subsequent sojourn at the hospital in Milan is the beginning of a doomed love story. As his relationship with Catherine deepens his links with the war gradually grow more tenuous. Ultimately he reaches a point where he cannot bear to read news of the war – the only words he can read are the baseball scores. In ironic

²⁹ Ibid, Page 45

³⁰ Hemingway, Ernest – Across the River and Into the Trees (Scribners, 1950) Page 33

contrast to Henry and his growing despair is the super patriot Ettore swept away by the glamour of the wounds and the medals.

“He’s got five medals and, oh boy, aren’t they great for making the girls think you’re fine. But wound stripes are better.”³¹

On his return to the front Henry is met with a shock. The situation has degenerated drastically. The Austrian offensive has depleted his comrades both physically and psychologically. The mood is summed up aptly by the major when he says that Henry was lucky to have got hit when he did. The priest still prays, but there is no conviction in his prayers. He has seen too much death to believe in hope. But it is in Henry’s encounter with Renaldi, the surgeon that the reality of the war is brought to sharpest focus. Renaldi does not think – he operates like a machine. He has been driven by the demands made on him by his profession to a point beyond physical and emotional endurance. He is a man at the brink of hysteria.

But it is the battle police at the bridge who symbolise the ultimate irrationality of the war game.

“They were all young men and they were saving their country.” They shoot everyone they question and neither the questions nor the shootings have any significance. Henry is faced here with two alternatives. On the one hand is the false rhetoric of victory, courage and honour and on the other the reality of terror cowardice and death. The incomprehensible reality of the defeated Italians shooting their own officers becomes a symbol for the loss of all reason, and quite suddenly a rational alternative does present itself. From disillusioned acceptance he chooses a

³¹ Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms (Scribners, 1948) Page 89

way out and swims across the river to freedom. But the knowledge that Frederick Henry acquires does not make A Farewell to Arms an initiation story. Neither Henry nor Catherine expresses any ideals that have been besmirched by the war. The only object lesson is contained in the words “That was what you did. You died.”

A Farewell to Arms is aptly a study in isolation set against the backdrop of war. Although Frederick Henry is not the hero in the conventional sense, he emerges as the central character in the novel as it defines his progress from group participation to total isolation which in reality is the main action of the novel.

At the beginning of the novel in the fall of 1915, Henry is part of a contingent of ambulance drivers in the Italian Second Army – a key link in the defences of the Italian front which is an extension of the Western front in France. Italy, in turn is part of an alliance which places Henry at the end of a long chain of command. But at the end of the novel, Henry is bereft of country, family and friend – he is totally alone.

It is with his wounding that Henry’s movement into isolation first begins. His wounds separate him both physically and psychologically from his comrades. His convalescence at the hospital separates him physically from his friends at the front while his wounds give an added dimension to his experience of the war unknown to his friends who have not been wounded. In Book II, his growing isolation with Catherine gives the couple a separate identity removed from the mass identity of the war. As their relationship deepens all the props that sustain Western civilisation fail to sustain them. The family, the military and the state fail to support Frederick and Catherine in the face of the *nada* that surrounds them. Organised religion has no meaning and comfort for the couple; in the pouring rain in Milan,

Catherine refuses to take shelter in the church for she says the church will not do lovers any good. At the brink of death in the hospital she refuses to seek solace in God.

Troop mutinies and references to a “separate peace” coupled with the soldiers’ criticism and frustration give evidence of the bankruptcy of the military. The soldier’s uniform which had earlier provided comfort gradually becomes a hollow symbol for Henry.

When the retreat begins Henry is part of the second army. Soon after he leaves Gorizia his ambulances are separated from the main body of the retreat. Bogged down in the mud, the ambulances have to be deserted and Henry and his co-drivers have to make the journey on foot towards the bridge head. When one driver is killed and the other deserts, Henry is left alone to face the battle police at the bridge. Thus during the retreat, one sees the movement into isolation acted out in the narrative. Here in Book III, the key chapter of the novel, Hemingway has epitomised the progress into isolation which is the central movement of the novel. In the last pages of the novel the journey to isolation is brought to its final culmination at Stresa. Here the lovers have abandoned the last of their friends and acquaintances as well as their allegiance to duty. They are in Switzerland, significantly a neutral country. Here in another country they are totally alienated from everyone and everything familiar. And when Catherine dies in childbirth in Lausanne, doctors fail just as earlier in the midst of war the priest had failed to sustain the individual in the face of death. Bereft of wife and child, Frederick Henry has no hope, no belief, no person to turn to. He is the truly isolated man.

It is significant that Hemingway had written A Farewell to Arms in retrospect, and in this context his theme of growing isolation becomes even more meaningful. He had viewed the period between the writing of A Farewell to Arms with the eyes of a practising journalist. As Philip Young remarks :

“Something in the evolution of Frederick Henry from complicity in the war to bitterness and escape has made him seem, though always himself, a little larger than that too. Complicity, bitterness and escape, a whole country could read its experiences When historians of various kinds epitomised the temper of the twenties and a reason for it, the adventures of that lieutenant come almost invariably to mind.”³²

As early as 1922, Hemingway had begun to formulate a method of dealing with reality. In a feature story for the Toronto Daily Star, “A Veteran Visits Old Front”, he told how depressing it was to return to the scene of battles he had taken part in, for the country was so changed that it ruined the memory. It would have been better to visit a battle site he had not known. “Go to someone else’s front if you want to. There your imagination will help you out and you may be able to picture the things that happened.”³³

In a 1935 Esquire article Hemingway gave a somewhat fuller statement on the point:

“Good writing is true writing. If a man is making a story up it will be true in proportion to the amount of knowledge of life he has and how conscientious he is; so that when he makes something up it is as it truly would be.....Imagination is one thing beside honesty that a good writer must have, the more he learns from experience the more truly he can imagine. If he gets so he can imagine truly enough people will think that things he relate all really happened and that he is just reporting”.³⁴

³² Young, Philip – Ernest Hemingway : A Reconsideration (Harcourt Brace, New York, 1966) Page 90

³³ Hemingway, Ernest – “A Veteran Visits Old Front”, Toronto Daily Star (July 22, 1922) Page 7

³⁴ Hemingway, Ernest – “Monologue to the Maestro : A High Seas Letter” , (Esquire , October 4, 1935) Reprinted in William White (ed) Byline, Ernest Hemingway (Scribners, New York, 1967) Page 215

In 1948 when he wrote his own introduction for an illustrated edition of A Farewell to Arms, Hemingway made no pretense of having experienced the historical events of the novel first hand.

“I remember living in the book and making up what happened in it everyday. Making the country and the people and the things that happened I was happier than I had ever been....Finding you were able to make something up; to create truly enough so that it made you happy to read it.”³⁵

And in 1958, when he was interviewed by the Paris Review, Hemingway restated his position with the same simplicity he had used in 1922.

“Q: Have you ever described any type of situation of which you had no personal knowledge?”

A: That is a strange question A writer, if he is any good, does not describe. He invents or makes out of his knowledge personal and impersonal.”³⁶

Over a thirty six year span, Hemingway’s attitude towards his profession remained constant on the point of “making it up”. Yet no one ever took him seriously for he had been typed as an autobiographic writer when he published The Sun Also Rises. His statements about invented action on the basis of knowledge “personal and impersonal” appeared either simple-minded or some sort of ruse. They were neither.

In his terse disciplinary sketches written in 1922-23, Hemingway had already developed an objective style that treated the experience of others as his own. From the beginning Hemingway felt free to use second hand sources. After Hemingway showered Stephen Crane with praise in his introduction to Men at War critics began

³⁵ Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms (Scribner, New York, 1948) Page vii-viii

³⁶ Plimpton, George – The Art of Fiction, XXI : Ernest Hemingway, Paris Review, Vol. 5 (Spring, 1958) Page 85

to notice thematic and structural similarities between The Red Badge of Courage and A Farewell to Arms. What was carefully ignored by the critics was the reason *why* Hemingway said he admired Crane's novel:

“Crane wrote The Red Badge of Courage before he had seen any war. But he had read contemporary accounts, had heard the old soldiers, they were not so old then, talk, and above all he had seen Mathew Brady's wonderful photographs. Creating his story out of this material he wrote that great boys dream of war that was to be truer to how war is than any war the boy who wrote it would ever live to see.”³⁷

Hemingway's praise was neither for Crane's structure nor for his theme: the praise is for technique and verity. Crane's research methods that Hemingway chose to praise - reading histories, talking to veterans, and looking at pictures – were the same methods that Hemingway used in A Farewell to Arms.

As early as 1922, Hemingway had already done sufficient historical reading to pose as an expert on a war in which he had served only briefly and that he later admitted he did not understand. In his 1922 visit to Schio, Hemingway realised a truth that he passed on to his readers and that he remembered when he tried to make fictional sense of his own war experience.³⁸

“Don't go back to visit the old front. If you have pictures in your head of something that happened in the night in the mud at Paschendaele, or if the first wave working up the slope of Vimy, do not try and go back and verify them. It is no good. The front is different from the way it used to beGo to someone else's front if you want to. There your imagination will help you out and you may be able to picture the things that happened.... The past was as dead as a busted victrola record. Chasing yesterdays is a bum show.”³⁹

If he functions in the realist/naturalist tradition, a writer is always chasing yesterdays. In writing A Farewell to Arms, however, Hemingway went back to someone else's front and recreated the experience from books, maps, and first hand

³⁷ Hemingway, Ernest (ed) – Men at War (New York, Crown Publishers, 1942) Page xvii

³⁸ Hemingway, Ernest (ed) – Men at War (New York, Crown Publishers, 1942) Page xvii

³⁹ Hemingway, Ernest – “A Veteran Visits Old Front”, Toronto Daily Star (July 22, 1922) Page 7

sources. It is his only novel set on a terrain of with which he did not have personal experience; in it, his imagination, aided by military histories, has created the Austro-Italian front of 1915-17 more vividly than any other writer.

Hemingway, the public man, may have been just as much of a romantic as some readers would see him, and many of his plots may have smelled of the museums, as Gertrude Stein thought. But as an artist, Hemingway was able to approach his material in those early years with an objectivity that never allowed personal experience or friendships to interfere with his fictions. Like most twentieth century innovators, he found himself his own best subject, but to mistake his art for his biography is to mistake illusion for reality.

To read any of Hemingway's fiction as biography is always dangerous, but to read A Farewell to Arms in this manner is to misread the book. It is no longer possible to say of Hemingway: he simply went out and lived his experiences, thought about them, and then wrote them down like the good reporter he has been since his training at seventeen. A Farewell to Arms is, in part, a researched novel, and eventually one must ask what sources Hemingway used to write of places he had not seen and battles he had not fought.

In 1920, Hemingway wrote a feature for the Toronto Star Weekly entitled "How to be Popular in Peace though a Slacker in War", which indicates one direction of source study. "buy or borrow a good history of the war. Study it carefully..... ." There is evidence to indicate that Hemingway did just this type of reading during the twenties and that this reading became the background for A Farewell to Arms .

Besides histories of the war Hemingway also had access to newspaper accounts, as well as his own feature stories written after the war. When the Caporetto retreat took place, Hemingway had just begun work as a cub reporter on the Kansas City Star. The Star carried the Italian story on the front page during the last week in October and into November 1917. One is also reminded of Frederick Henry continually reading newspapers to stay informed about the front. Beyond a general knowledge of the Italian war, it is impossible to say that Hemingway used the newspaper story. However, he did incorporate into the novel portions from his own newspaper feature stories that he wrote after the war for the Toronto Star.

Besides secondary written sources, Hemingway also had access to friends and acquaintances who knew about Caporetto. Although such sources could not have provided the kind of accuracy found in the novel, Hemingway must have learnt more from such sources than commonly supposed.

History, newspaper stories, first and second-hand experiences, these are the primary sources for A Farewell to Arms. With the exception of personal experiences, these are the same sources that Stephen Crane had available to him when he wrote his researched war novel The Red Badge of Courage. Like Crane, Hemingway also had his picture books. While he was in Italy he collected postcard photographs of the battle zones. This scrap book was with him in Paris when he began the novel and was very likely with him when he finished it.⁴⁰

In addition to finding source material in historical non-fiction, Hemingway used two other printed sources when he wrote A Farewell to Arms: his own

⁴⁰ Reynolds, Michael S. – Hemingway's First War (Princeton, 1976) Page 139

newspaper feature stories from the twenties and Stendhal's The Charter House of Parma. Robert O. Stephens in Hemingway's Non Fiction has already established Hemingway's use of his journalism in his novel. One particular Toronto Star article, however, is worth examining which seems to be the genesis of the opening chapter of A Farewell to Arms.

"It was the same road that the battalions marched along through the white dust of 1916 They were good troops in those days and they marched through the dust of the early summer It was the same old road that some of the same old brigades marched along through the dust in June 1918 Their best men were dead on the rocky carso....and in all the places that men died that nobody ever heard about. In 1918 they didn't march with the ardour that they did in 1916."⁴¹

In the article, Hemingway describes the dusty road from his vantage point in a hotel at Schio, with the road running past his window. As Stephen points out this is the same sort of vantage point that Frederick Henry uses when he begins to narrate the classic opening pages of A Farewell to Arms.

The other printed source material for his novel, Stendhal's The Charterhouse of Parma is a book that Hemingway periodically recommended to young writers.

"The best account of actual human beings behaving during a world shaking event is Stendhal's picture of young Fabrizio at the battle of Waterloo. That account is more like war and less like the nonsense written about it than any other writing could possibly be.....You will have seen a small piece of war as closely and as clearly as Stendhal.....It is the classic account of routed army."⁴²

As in The Charterhouse of Parma, Book Three, the Caporetto retreat presents a limited view of military disaster, but the action that is seen epitomises the whole. The reader has taken part in the retreat from Caporetto. Frederick's experience, like Fabrizio's is with a routed army. And like Stendhal, Hemingway could have written of victories, but he chose to write of defeat; aside from the brief

⁴¹ Hemingway, Ernest – A Veteran Visits Old Front, Toronto Daily Star (July 22, 1922) Page 7

⁴² Hemingway, Ernest (ed) – Men at War, (Crown Publishers, New York, 1942) Page XX

action at Plava, A Farewell to Arms presents no immediate military action except the retreat.

Hemingway, however, found more in Stendhal's narrative than he indicated in his introduction. A close comparison of the experiences of Fabrizio and Frederick indicates that Hemingway probably supplemented his historical reading with Stendhal's fiction when he came to write of the retreat from Caporetto. Both Frederick and Fabrizio are foreigners fighting gratuitously in another country. Both men are involved in a crucial battle that turns into a rout of their forces. Both men become separated from their command and choose to follow side roads into because the main roads have become jammed with both soldiers and civilians. Both men eat off the land during their retreat; both are taken for spies, and both escape the neutral ground of Switzerland. When specific passages in The Charterhouse of Parma are compared with others in A Farewell to Arms, the similarities become even stronger. There is the matter of accent and speech betraying both Fabrizio and Frederick. Fabrizio speaks French with an Italian accent which makes his companions suspect him of being a spy. Frederick Henry speaks Italian with an accent that makes the military police at the Tagliamento suspect him of being a German infiltrator. Such infiltrators were an historical fact, but Hemingway must have been reminded of Fabrizio's difficulties when he wrote Book Three.

Hemingway need not have used the fictional experiences of Fabrizio when he wrote of Frederick Henry, but the parallels seem too strong for coincidence. Hemingway has said that in his early career he thought of himself as writing in competition with great authors of the past. "In A Farewell to Arms, he seems to have

written his Caporetto retreat in direct competition with Stendhal, and in Men at War he has invited the comparison by reprinting the two sections in juxtaposition.”⁴³

Besides Stendhal, Hemingway had Stephen Crane before him as the model for a researched war novel. Aside from the thematic similarities between Crane’s novel and Hemingway’s there is one particular scene in A Farewell to Arms in which Hemingway modernises parts of Crane’s Chapter 12, in which Henry Fleming receives his head wound.

Fleming, having deserted his position under fire, wanders the back roads behind the front lines, until he tries to stop another panicky deserter, who strikes Fleming’s forehead with his rifle butt. Ironically this becomes Fleming’s “Red Badge of Courage”. Because of his head wound, Fleming is accepted by his comrades when he returns to his regiment.

In Chapter 7 of A Farewell to Arms, Frederick Henry discovers a would-be deserter on a dusty road behind the front lines in the Gorizia sector. The soldier, an Italian-American, has aggravated an old rupture in order to get out of the war. Frederick, in sympathy with the soldier advises him “You get out and fall down by the road and get a bump on your head and I’ll pick you up on our way back and take you to a hospital.”⁴⁴ But when Frederick returns the enlisted man’s own ambulance has found him and is returning him to duty: “He shook his head at me. His helmet was off and his forehead was bleeding below the hairline. His nose was skinned and there was dust on the bloody patch and dust in his hair.”⁴⁵ Like Fleming, the soldier

⁴³ Reynolds, Michael S. – Hemingway’s First War (Princeton, 1976) Page 158

⁴⁴ Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms (Scribners, 1948) Page 35

⁴⁵ Ibid, Page 36

has his “bloody patch” and like Fleming he returns to his regiment. But whereas Fleming was taken to be a brave man because of his “Red Badge” the Italian soldier is not mistaken for something he is not. As Hemingway indicated in other parts of the novel, the courage to face the enemy or the lack of it is of no particular value in this war. The very brave are among the first to die. Those who are not brave are killed also, “but there will be no special hurry”. Here Hemingway is not so much using Crane as a source as he is paying an oblique kind of homage to a writer whom he admired and from whom he learnt something about writing.

The most immediate biographic source of information which are almost impossible to document, are the personal memoirs of the nurses and soldiers whom Hemingway met in Milan during his recuperation. In addition to hospital personnel and soldiers, there were numerous chance acquaintances, any one of whom may have had war stories to tell Hemingway. More identifiable sources who contributed to the novel are the ambulance drivers who served with Hemingway. Three quarter of the Red Cross drivers were former Norton-Harjes drivers from France.

The importance of this historical background to A Farewell to Arms can be measured in the mood of the novel, particularly in Frederick Henry’s war weariness. Hemingway himself was at the front something less than a month during which time he saw little real action. After he was blown up on July 8, 1918 his letters home show no revulsion or weariness, for in fact he had not had time to develop such an attitude. Frederick Henry’s attitude towards the war is on the other hand, both spectatorial and war weary; he, in fact, is more like the Norton-Harjes in his attitude than he is like the young Hemingway. After the war, as a young reporter, Hemingway became more cynical about European affairs. When he came to write of

Frederick Henry, he was able to combine his own past war cynicism with the war weariness he had seen among his fellow drivers.

Although Hemingway relied heavily on secondary material as sources for the writing of the novel, it would be incorrect to argue that there was no use of autobiographic experiences. Hemingway scholars have already established the main co-relations between Hemingway's life and the novel, but these co-relations appear slender. Both Hemingway and Frederick were blown up by trench mortar shells in Italy during World War I. Both men recuperated in a Milan hospital, where each established a relationship with a nurse. Once in Switzerland, Frederick sticks to a terrain he knew from experience. Familiar as the Hemingway biography has become, however, there are surprising gaps in the information available. For example, relatively little is known about Hemingway's period of recuperation in the Milan hospital.

On the basis of the Carlos Baker biography, it seems reasonable that Hemingway based the experiences of Catherine Barkley on those of three women: Agnes Von Kurowsky, Hadley Richardson and Pauline Pfeiffer. Agnes the Red Cross nurse in Milan seems to dominate Book II; Hadley Richardson, Hemingway's first wife contributes heavily to the idyllic winter at Montreaux. Pauline Pfeiffer, the second wife, contributed her Caesarian operation, which took place while Hemingway was writing the first draft of the novel. While these points may be obvious they still need consideration, for they represent a central point in Hemingway's art of fiction. He never allowed reality to interfere with his fiction, and in the early years he did not allow his personal experience to dictate his work as

an artist. When art and autobiography were at odds, he would change the remembered experience to fit the needs of his writing.

The most obvious example of Hemingway's use of his personal experience can be seen in the wounding of Frederick Henry. Hemingway was blown up while distributing chocolate at a forward listening post along the Piave river. Suffering severe shrapnel wounds in his right leg, he managed to carry a wounded soldier back to the dressing station. While doing so he was machine gunned by the Austrians receiving another wound on his leg. For his action under fire Hemingway was awarded Italy's second highest decoration, the silver medal. By comparison, Frederick Henry is blown up in the mountains while eating cold spaghetti and cheese. He is not in the front lines, nor does he behave heroically after being wounded. When he recovers consciousness, Frederick is unable to move. Besides suffering stoically, he does nothing that can be called commendable. Hemingway emphasises this point when Rinaldi visits Frederick at the field hospital.

"You will be decorated. They want to get you the medalia de'argento but perhaps they can get only the bronze."

"What for ?"

"Because you are gravely wounded. They say if you prove you did any heroic act you can get the silver. Otherwise it will be the bronze. Tell me exactly what happened. Did you do any heroic act ?"

"No", I said. "I was blown up while we were eating cheese."

"Be serious. You must have done something heroic either before or after. Remember carefully."

"I did not."

“Didn’t you carry anybody on your back ? Gardini says you carried several people on your back but the medical officer at the front post declares it is impossible. He had to sign the proposition for the citation.”

“I didn’t carry anybody. I couldn’t move.”⁴⁶

For Frederick to have acted as Hemingway acted under the same circumstances would clearly be out of character. Here Hemingway is not just debunking his own silver medal; he is changing his experience to fit the needs of his fiction. By having Rinaldi suggest to Frederick that he may have acted heroically emphasises the non-heroic nature of Frederick and draws special attention to the absurdity of being blown up, while eating cheese.

Hemingway’s use of his own experience in this example is the pattern he follows throughout the novel. Although there are several other incidents in the novel that find their source in own experience, they follow the pattern established above. That is, Hemingway will use settings and people from his own experience whenever he can, but he never allows his own experience to interfere with his fiction and he never brings real people into his fiction whole. In the same manner he was able to pick up second hand stories, newspaper accounts, as well as histories and historical fiction, and use them all to his own purpose.

Eventually his search for meaning took Hemingway beyond his own experience in the war. From Stendhal’s Charterhouse and Crane’s Red Badge he learned the fictional importance of disaster. Through his historical reading he discovered that the key to the war in Italy was the disaster at Caporetto. At the

⁴⁶ Ibid, Page 63

military level, Caporetto was the obvious conclusion to the two bloody years of Cadorna's mountain campaign. Moreover, Caporetto influenced or motivated everything that came after it on the battlefield. It defined the battle lines of 1918 and it coloured the entire Italian war effort. It was as if recapturing the land brought back the national honour that had been lost at Caporetto. To write about the war in Italy Hemingway discovered he could not avoid Caporetto.

One of the reasons A Farewell to Arms was banned in Italy for so many years was its accurate assessment of the causes for the breakdown of morale that allowed Caporetto to take place. Hemingway embodies in his narrative the same points that the British historian G.M.Trevalyan, who witnessed the retreat, later isolated as direct causes of the disaster. Trevalyan listed the causes as socialist activity on the home front, a food shortage at the front lines, enemy propaganda and ineffectual leadership.⁴⁷

The socialist rancour against the war is a covert presence throughout the novel. Two of Frederick's ambulance drivers Piani and Bonello – are socialists who are proud of their beliefs.⁴⁸ Hemingway's fictional portrayal of socialist unrest is an accurate reflection of the conditions in Italy in the fall of 1917. This socialist dissension on the home front was instrumental in lowering troop morale all along the fighting front. Hemingway indicates this loss of morale in the conversation between Frederick and the priest when Frederick returns to the front in Book 3. The priest says that he does not see how the fighting can go on much longer and hopes that it will stop on both sides. When Frederick says he does not think it will end that

⁴⁷ Reynolds, Michael S. – Hemingway's First War (Princeton, 1976) Page 107

⁴⁸ Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms (Scribners, 1948) Page 208

way the priest responds: "I suppose not. It is too much to expect. But when I see the changes in men I do not think it can go on."⁴⁹ The changes to which the priest refers include the general lowering of morale, which the socialist turmoil encouraged.

Another factor which led to the breakdown of troop morale was the food shortage at the front during 1917. Once more Hemingway demonstrates his careful research when Frederick and Gino discuss the food shortage the night before the attack at Caporetto. Frederick – "has the food really been short ?" Gino – "I myself have never had enough to eatSomething is wrong somewhere. There should be plenty of food..., It is very bad for the soldiers to be without food."⁵⁰

The socialist unrest and the food shortage were capitalised upon by the Austro-German propaganda. Propaganda leaflets which were delivered by shell burst and dropped from airplanes were apparently most effective among the troops of Caporetto. Particularly insidious was the propaganda plea for peace which argued that it took two armies to fight a war. If only both sides would lay down their arms, there would be no war. This false hope for peace is used by Hemingway in the conversation between Frederick and the priest the night before he goes up on the Bainsizza, but is more explicitly stated in the earlier conversation between Frederick and his ambulance team moments before he was wounded.

Passini argues : "War is not won by victory..... Did you see all the far mountains today? Do you think we could take them all too? Only if the Austrians stop fighting. One side must stop fighting. Why don't we stop fighting? If they come

⁴⁹ Ibid, Page 178

⁵⁰ Ibid, page 184

down to Italy they will get tired and go away. They have their own country. But no, instead there is a war.”⁵¹ Passinis’s sentiments are an accurate reflection of both the socialist complaints and the enemy propaganda.

The general unrest in the army was compounded by the poor quality of Second Army leadership both during the attack at Caporetto and the subsequent retreat. Proper leadership could have salvaged the situation and prevented the total breakthrough that occurred. In Frederick’s own words: “There was no need to confuse our retreat. The size of the army and the fewness of the roads did that. Nobody gave any orders.”⁵²

To a certain extent, Frederick Henry’s own leadership during the retreat reflects microcosmically the general breakdown in the Second Army command. When he leaves Gorizia, Frederick is charged with the delivery of three ambulances and his three enlisted men – Aymo, Bonello and Piani – to the far side of the Tagliamento. En route his three ambulances become hopelessly mired in the mud of side roads chosen by Frederick. Of the two sergeants picked up by Frederick en route one is shot deserting and the other deserts successfully. Aymo is killed by his own Italian rear guard. Bonello deserts to the advancing enemy. Frederick reaches the Tagliamento with only Piani. As a record of leadership under pressure, Frederick’s performance epitomizes the general performance of the Italian Second Army during the actual retreat.

These several points where the novel and historical circumstances coincide are preliminary to the examination of the retreat itself, but they show that

⁵¹ *Ibid*, Page 50-51

⁵² *Ibid*, Page 216

Hemingway had a total grasp of the military, political and social situation that resulted in the debacle at Caporetto. In fact, Frederick's understanding of his situation is probably more comprehensive than one could reasonably expect of a man caught up in a retreat. All the causes of the disaster are present in the novel, but they were by no means so clear before the historian had analysed the event. Frederick possesses knowledge that one gains after the event. But no matter how accurate Hemingway is in the matter of socialist revolt, food shortage, propaganda and poor leadership, it is in the concrete details – the people, the places and how the weather was – that Hemingway's historical accuracy must be tested.

In Book III of A Farewell to Arms Frederick Henry joins his ambulance detachment on the Bainsizza plateau on October 23, 1917, the day before the Austro-German offensive began at Caporetto. As the attack begins on the morning of October 24, Frederick narrates the conditions. "The wind rose in the night and at 3 o'clock in the morning with the rain coming in sheets there was a bombardment and the Croats came over across the mountain meadows....between the gusts of wind and rain we could hear the sound of a great bombardment far to the north."⁵³

Although most authorities agree that the attack began at 2 a.m. rather than at 3 a.m., Hemingway's accuracy is still rather remarkable for either fiction or history. A Contemporary Account of a Military Operations in Italy by James E. Edmonds referred to by Reynolds in Hemingway's First War describes the actual weather conditions remarkably similar to Hemingway's own. Even to the point where the rain shifts to snow.

⁵³ Ibid, Page 186

It is worth noting that the weather on October 25, the night of the retreat, was warm and almost sunny. And although the atmosphere of Hemingway's retreat was saturated with rain, he makes no reference to the weather on the 25th. The entire day is foreshortened rather noticeably to achieve intensity, for Hemingway, throughout the retreat, selects carefully those portions which best suit his artistic purpose. It did not suit his purpose to have October 25 warm and sunny. However, critics have made more of the October rains than they perhaps will bear. Carlos Baker has firmly established Hemingway's symbolic use of the rain in A Farewell to Arms and Philip Young calls Hemingway's use of rain the "old pathetic fallacy put to new use.... Good and bad weather go along with good and bad moods and events. It is not just that, like everyone, the characters respond emotionally to conditions of atmosphere, light and so on, but there is a correspondence between these things and their fate. They win when it's sunny and lose in the rain".⁵⁴ The critics' point seems to be that Hemingway has arranged the rain to suit his artistic purpose, that he turns it off and on like some stage prop. What most critics overlook are those portions of the retreat when it is not raining for it suits their critical purpose to see the entire retreat under a steady downpour. A close examination of the rain during the retreat shows, however, that Hemingway was following a rather exact timetable provided by the battle accounts. "Not once during Book III of A Farewell to Arms does fictional rain fall when actual rain did not."⁵⁵

The historical facts of the weather conditions during the retreat matched Hemingway's fictional account in every respect. This is further testified in Robert

⁵⁴ Young, Philip – Hemingway: A Reconsideration (Rhinehart, 1966) Page 92

⁵⁵ Reynolds, Michael – Hemingway's First War (Princeton, 1976) Page 116

De C. Ward's article "Weather Controls Over the Fighting in the Italian War Zone" as quoted in Reynold's Hemingway's First War. The rain fell intermittently through the entire retreat with the exception of two times: the day of October 25 and the afternoon of October 27 – and this is how it is in both history and fiction. Hemingway may have learned about rain during retreats from reporting the rain drenched retreat in Greece, but to have followed so accurate a timetable of the Italian conditions required more than analogous knowledge; it required something like an accurate history book.

If the fictional rain of A Farewell to Arms follows an accurate historical timetable, Frederick's movements during the retreat are equally synchronised with the military history. From the morning of October 24 when the attack begins, Frederick and history are marching to the same drum. When Frederick takes his ambulances down off the Bainsizza plateau in the early morning of October 25 (page 188) he is following the evacuation timetable set up by Gen. Cadorna. "The Commander Supremo ordered the Second Army command to withdraw the Bainsizza forces onto the line of main resistance and if necessary to re-cross the Isonzo."⁵⁶ Frederick's fictional experience is similar to the actual difficulties experienced by a British ambulance unit at Cormous trying to evacuate to the Tagliamento. Frederick describes the first day of the retreat:

"The retreat was orderly, wet and sullen. In the night, going slowly along the crowded roads we passed troops marching under the rain. There was no more disorder than in an advance."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Villari, Luigi – The War on the Italian Front quoted in Michael Reynold's Hemingway's First War

⁵⁷ Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms, Page 188

It is a slow and cumbersome thirty six hour journey of a distance of about twenty five kilometres. Villari refers to the same conditions in his historical account of what really happened.

Hemingway's use of historical fact is so oblique as to be almost unrecognisable. In fact his history is consistently understated throughout the novel. In the opening section the reader is not told what year or which war or what river. In Book III the accuracy of the historical detail is always subordinate to action and theme. The accuracy is inherent in the story, but it never distracts the reader or gets in the way of the author.

As Hemingway says in his Paris Review interview :

"I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it under water for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show. If a writer omits something because he does not know then there is a hole in the story."⁵⁸

In A Farewell to Arms Hemingway has left a good deal out and the iceberg is strengthened by his omissions. Beneath the surface of the novel, history unobtrusively supports the exposed surface. The particularity of Hemingway's use of details alone should put to rest any arguments that he used the Greek retreat as the basis of his fiction. However, his description of the retreat goes beyond the setting to portray the mood and physical circumstances of the Caporetto retreat with equal accuracy.

Frederick's detachment of ambulances becomes the epitome of the general experience. His Italian drivers pick up stragglers – two virgins and two sergeants –

⁵⁸ Plimpton, George interview – The Art of Fiction, XXI, Ernest Hemingway, Paris Review, (Spring, 1958) Page 84

representing the two components of the retreat – the refugees and the soldiers. Like his real counterparts, Frederick finds his way clogged by the refugees who jammed the roads. German photographs of the Udine-Codroipo road taken in the wake of the retreating Italians testify to the correspondence between the fictional and the actual. In addition to the clogged roads and the absence of road control, the actual retreat was under the intermittent threat of air attacks. As the weather cleared, enemy planes were able to harass the barely mobile line.

Another aspect of the retreat that Frederick accurately observes is the widespread looting that took place after the civilian population had left their homes. In Hemingway's fictive version, Frederick and his men find food in abandoned farms. On the night of the 27th Frederick, Piani and Bonello spent the night in an abandoned farmhouse outside Udine. "There were ashes of a fire on the big open hearth. The pots hung over the ashes but they were empty. I looked around but I could not find anything to eat."⁵⁹

Hemingway needed to know little of retreats to have imagined that such looting as this took place, and his accuracy does not indicate that he researched this point. However, his use of looting is one more point in a pattern of accuracy that goes beyond hearsay or superficial knowledge and that shows a thorough historical understanding of the conditions prevalent during this particular retreat.

There is the point of the rear guard, for example. Hemingway is accurate in both the time and position of the rear guard that Frederick encounters outside

⁵⁹ Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms, Page 215

Udine. It is ironic that Aymo should be killed by his own troops, just as it is ironic that the only killing that Frederick sees during the retreat is Italians killing other Italians. The enemy is a presence more felt than seen, and no contact is ever made with them. The lack of road control, the air attacks, the looting and the food shortage, the rear guard - these are all the characteristics which could have been found in the annals of any mass retreat. There was, however, one aspect of the Caporetto retreat to which the Italian government was particularly sensitive and which Hemingway portrayed with accuracy: the breakdown in discipline which led to Frederick's desertion. During the actual retreat a German field officer, Irwin Rommel was at one point surrounded by armed Italian soldiers outside of Cividale who wanted to surrender. An Italian officer who resisted the will of his troops, was shot down by his own men.⁶⁰ Poor leadership during the crisis had apparently destroyed the faith of many enlisted men in their officers, their will to fight had been seriously eroded.

This loss of will is graphically portrayed in the gradual dissolution of Frederick's group. With the breakdown in the Second Army's will to fight, such desertions were not uncommon.

To labour what must be obvious, Hemingway's narrator is witness to the disintegration of the Second Army at exactly the right time and place. Frederick has watched his men desert; he has seen the roads unguarded, the bridges unblown, the orders ungiven. Between Udine and the Tagliamento he is caught up in the panic of the retreat and the mindlessness of war.

⁶⁰ Reynolds, Michael – Hemingway's First War (Princeton, 1976) Page 132

“They throw away their rifles,” Piani said, “They take them off and drop them down while they are marching. Then they shout.”

“They ought to keep their rifles.”

“They think if they throw away their rifles they can’t make them fight.”

In the dark and the rain, making our way along the side of the road I could see that many of the troops still had their rifles. They stuck up above their capes.

“What brigade are you ?” an officer called out.

“Regata di Pace!” someone shouted. “Peace brigade!”⁶¹

These deserters both real and fictional were rounded up at the Codroipo bridge. The deserters were reorganised by the military police and only those who refused to cooperate were shot. Included in the actual executions were suspected German infiltrators and officers who were not with their troops.

At the bridgehead Frederick’s experience once more epitomises the general condition. First he is an officer who is not with his command, and such officers are being shot summarily. Moreover, Frederick is not an Italian; he speaks with an accent and he is in an Italian uniform which qualifies him as a German infiltrator in the eyes of the battle police. Thus Frederick’s fictional experience becomes more and more a synthesis of the actual group experience in the retreat from Caporetto.

Accuracy here is so fine that it goes beyond realism, but it is an accuracy that lies below the surface of the novel, supporting the visible iceberg. The obvious conclusion is that Hemingway used secondary source material in writing the novel and this is not the popular portrait of the artist we have always been given.

⁶¹ Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms, Page 219-220

For decades, critics have maintained that the experiences of Frederick Henry in A Farewell to Arms were based upon Hemingway's experiences in Italy during the Great War. It wasn't until critics such as Charles Fenton in his The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway (1954) revealed just how limited Hemingway's participation was, that a more accurate understanding of the techniques employed in the novel began to appear. Closer examination of the text, such as that of Michael Reynolds in Hemingway's First War, revealed that while Hemingway did employ some autobiographical incidents and persons in A Farewell to Arms he also researched the historic record. Thus he managed to carefully provide accurate and often minute details on events occurring in Italy from 1915 to 1917 in which Frederick Henry takes part.

Michael Reynolds has demonstrated that the details in A Farewell to Arms are accurate in terms of geography, often focussing on minute geographic details. Historical details too seem specific – such as the placement and action of Italian armies, the facts of the Caporetto retreat and even the weather. Robert W. Lewis carries this examination of the novel's factual accuracy further when he argues that a principal source for the novel's accuracy is British historian G. M. Trevalyan's Scenes from Italy's Wars (1919) and notes that there are parallels between the history and the fiction.

“While Hemingway's characters, dialogue and some action seem to be his own invention, the general action, including the geography and timing parallels Trevalyan's.”⁶²

⁶² Hemingway in Italy : Making It Up – Robert W. Lewis in Journal of Modern Literature, Vol. 9 (1981-82) page 213

Hemingway demonstrated in A Farewell to Arms that there is more than one way to reproduce fact accurately in fiction: that the only source of fictional verisimilitude need not be direct participation and the tradition of the eyewitness. But that historical research and the use of the experience of others can effectively be employed to accomplish the same ends.

By turning the outside resources, Hemingway expanded the concept of the World War I novel beyond the narrow witness and testimony limitations of writers such as Thomas Boyd (Through the Wheat) and he also correctly sensed that by 1929 descriptions of war's carnage and battle scenes had already been done to excess. That year saw the publication of two of the most popular and enduring war novels – A Farewell to Arms and Erich Maria Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front. Critics have maintained that one reason for this appearance of carefully written and lasting novels of the Great War by those like Hemingway and Remarque, who experienced the war as participants, was that the intervening decade allowed them to come to terms with the psychological wounds caused by the conflict and the writing itself was therapeutic. However, there was another socio-political factor at work. A.F.Bance in his "All Quiet on the Western Front: A Bestseller in Context" argues that :

"In 1928 nearly all nations renounced war through the Kellog-Briand Peace Pact. Anti war sentiments soon reached a climax. At the same time, there was a renewal of interest in the Great War. The public was ready to read about it and writers to respond."⁶³

How much of the success of A Farewell to Arms and All Quiet on the Western Front may be attributed to the increase in anti war sentiment occasioned by Kellog-Briand

⁶³ *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 72 (1977) Pages 359-73

is a matter of conjecture. Yet it is apparent that some of the initial popularity of the better World War I novels, and renewed interest in the Great War itself, must be attributed to this ill-fated attempt to end war.

The novels with which the newly interested public found itself faced with in 1929 and soon after were far different from the narratives of witness and testimony such as those of John Dos Passos and Thomas Boyd. Novels such as A Farewell to Arms, although still employing factual recreations of the Great War experience, are polished works of fiction, exhibiting control over narrative techniques and often a considerable degree of innovation.

Hemingway intentionally muted descriptions of carnage, understating them as he often understated the potentially garish in his fiction. "There was always this temptation to slip into the over written prose of the popular war novel. Consciously aware of the pitfall, Hemingway wrote a note to himself and then circled it for emphasis: watch out for this."⁶⁴ Reynolds also notes that Hemingway rewrote sections of the novel to reduce the overwrought use of physical description such as was often found in earlier war novels. It is this concern for the novel as craft that typifies A Farewell to Arms and helps in making it more than another narrative about the First World War.

The strength of Hemingway's novels is perhaps best explained by noting that in spirit and in method they are closer to the pure lyric than to any other form and that they systematically exclude whatever threatens to interfere with the illusion of

⁶⁴ Reynolds, Michael S. – Hemingway's First War (Princeton, 1976) Page 59

life beheld under the aspect of a single, dominant all-pervasive mood or state of mind. They attempt to sustain perfectly a single emotion: they begin with it and end with it, and any scenes, thoughts or stylistic elements that might tend to weaken the dominant emotion are ruthlessly rejected. Consequently Hemingway's art has both the virtues and the limitations of lyricism: maximum intensity on the one hand, extremely limited range on the other.

The narrative of A Farewell to Arms articulates a modernist vision of collapse: as did Gide, Kafka and Eliot. Hemingway structured his work upon a dislocation of sensibility. It is always there informing every scene of the novel, lying beneath every descriptive passage and every bit of characterisation, but it seldom shows, or it shows, at most, but a tiny part of itself, like the iceberg that Hemingway often took to be the apt image of his art. Frederick Henry, his most celebrated hero, embodies the manner in which settled ways of living are overturned by rootlessness and disaffiliation that can be held in check only by dint of the severest, most unremitting self-control. When it does show itself clearly, this inner violence, as in Chapter 34 of A Farewell to Arms, is expressed in this way:

If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks everyone and afterwards many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry.⁶⁵

The world's malevolence is taken for granted in Hemingway's novels. The artistic problem Hemingway faced was to find the correlatives of his bitterness –

⁶⁵ Hemingway Ernest – A Farewell to Arms, Page 178

objects adequate to the emotion, techniques capable of rendering it as purely as possible. The careful selection of a dominant image and its reiteration through whole paragraphs and pages and chapters, so that the image presently becomes symbol, conveying both the central meaning and the central emotion becomes Hemingway's inflexible method. Ideally when the writing is purist, every sentence will reveal the central meaning and emotion. Everything will be converted into a symbol of the emotion. Character becomes in one sense unimportant. Characters exist for the sake of the emotion. It is thus no fair criticism to say that Hemingway created no memorable characters; the truth is that his novels necessarily reject such people. The action too must obviously become, as nearly as possible, simple and intellectually uncomplicated. And action involving much intellectual debate, analysis, repartee or a multiplication of points of view is clearly antithetical to the spirit of Hemingway's bardic novels. Hemingway is always reluctant to introduce actions that do not feed the dominant emotion and in consequence his characteristic way of structuring the action of his novels is to employ a simple qualitative shift or oscillation between despair and happiness. In A Farewell to Arms they are from the front to the hospital, to the front, to Switzerland: disgust and bitterness, followed by short respite, then back to disgust and bitterness again. Brief scenes in which characters are represented as enjoying food and drink or a lovely view or a simple physical comfort exist chiefly to heighten the sense of despair and bitterness; the interludes of normal pleasure are inevitably short-lived. Every meal, every sight, every sound thus comes to one as to a man about to be executed. That is one reason the descriptions of food and drink always seem so preternaturally vivid in Hemingway.

Frederick Henry has the pattern of his life severely disrupted; he experiences initial comradeship with his Italian war brothers as an ambulance driver and finds love with Catherine Barkley, but other forces act centrifugally: after having received serious wounds, he re-enters battle, is confronted by treachery and betrayal at Caporetto, deserts to make a separate peace and finally loses both his surrogate wife and his child. Events compel him to rely upon his primal instincts, to live empirically and to be suspicious of abstract formulations of all kinds. The arena of war teaches him that fatherhood, marriage and the potentialities of family life are like his son strangled at birth. In such a world of loss and angst where war, alienation and death move deterministically at the core of existence, no institution either public or private can provide shelter against the larger social and cultural upheavals. The artist, faced with disintegration, mimes through his art responses to disorder: Hemingway needed to devise a fictive method to transmit his awareness of war being at the epicentre of contemporary life. This dominant state of mind – the sense of death, defeat, failure, nothingness, emptiness – is chiefly conveyed by the image of the rain (with all its tonal associates, mist, wet, damp, river, fog), by images and epithets of desolation (chiefly bare, thin, small, and fallen leaves) and by images of impurity and corruption (chiefly dust, mud, dirt, and disease). “Hemingway’s method of working with images is surprisingly uniform. Perhaps, the best analogy is found in the choice in the musical key and the elaborate harmonisation of notes always referring to the tonic.”⁶⁶ Another way of describing the method is to think of a painter working tiny patches of a dominant colour over

⁶⁶ Bloom, Harold (ed.) – Ernest Hemingway: A Farewell to Arms (Chelsea House, 1987) Page 13

his entire canvas. Hemingway himself perhaps had both analogies in mind when he said in the Lilian Ross interview that he had “learned how to make a landscape from Mr. Paul Cezanne and mentioned in the same context, his imagination of Bach counterpoint in the first chapter of A Farewell to Arms. The images are repeated so frequently that they begin to toll like bells in the mind. Virtually every sentence says death, despair, failure, emptiness, because every sentence contains an image or symbol associated with the dominant state of mind.

The novel begins with this state of mind and it is established so firmly through the repetition of central symbols, that any emotion other than bitterness and despair may thereafter intrude only with difficulty. The typical procedure as in lyric poetry, is to intensify the dominant emotion by means of a simple contrast of images. Thus the images of purity and vitality introduced in the second sentence of the novel are contrasted throughout the chapter with the images of dirt and desolation.

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. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and the leaves, stirred by the breeze falling and the soldiers marching and afterward the road bare and white except for the leaves.⁶⁷

Purity has been defiled, the life force has been thwarted and defeated. The leaves are “powdered” by dust; the trunks too are dusty; the leaves fall early; and the empty road, bare and white except for the fallen leaves, becomes a perfect mirror of inner desolation. This desolation is reinforced by the dominant symbol of the rain;

⁶⁷ Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms, Page 1

not life-giving rain causing the leaves to grow, but autumnal rain causing them to fall, a rain associated with darkness, mud, and death:

There was fighting for that mountain too, but it was not successful, and in the fall when the rains came the leaves all fell from the chestnut trees and the branches were bare and the trunks were black with rain. The vineyards were thin and bare branched too and all the country wet and brown and dead with the autumn. There were mists over the river and clouds on the mountain and the trucks splashed mud on the road and the troops were muddy and wet in their capes; their rifles were wet.⁶⁸

The sense of failure and impotence is also reinforced by the studious avoidance of action verbs. Almost invariably Hemingway employs the words “to be”, and the expletives “there were” and “there was” occur ten times in the twenty one sentences of the chapter. The repetitions give a sense of endless sameness and weariness: abandon hope, all ye who enter here.

T.S.Eliot in The Wasteland sharing a similar vision of crisis explored the crisis through various poetic strategies. If man is envisioned as a hunted and shackled animal then the artist searches for the aesthetic that enacts such restrictions. A Farewell to Arms shares kinship with such modernist artefacts as The Wasteland principally through the presentation of Frederick Henry’s consciousness which is communicated through a series of restricted language codes. Unlike E.E Cummings who, writing of war in the enormous room, explores language in copious verbal innovations Hemingway’s aesthetics functions antithetically; it implodes language and restricts both lexicon and dialogue.

The realist strain in A Farewell to Arms inheres chiefly in its authentic accounts of war on the Austrian front. Hemingway’s study of war which took him imaginatively to Crane and Stendhal and to military textbooks ensured that his

⁶⁸ Ibid, Page 2

combat descriptions were precise and expert. The novelist also constructed his story with a view to its accessibility; the narrative evolves sequentially without time shifts or complex stream of consciousness devices. Clearly any claim that A Farewell to Arms is shaped by modernist influences needs to be justified on different terms from a novel say by Joyce or Woolf. David Lodge has drawn attention to modernist and realist fusions in Hemingway's fiction when discussing the novelist's language resources. Lodge attributes Hemingway's search for a language properly faithful to the instantaneous of experience partly to the influence of Gertrude Stein.

This was largely the basis of her influence on subsequent writers like Hemingway who saw that the artful use of repetition, with slight variation, both lexical and grammatical, combined happily with an imitation of casual vernacular speech; it was thus possible to be a realist and a Modernist.⁶⁹

Another major influence upon Hemingway derived from the artistic impulse underlying Imagism. Natan Zach has noted the suitability of imagism as an artistic creed in the First World War situation.

.....the outbreak of the First World War seemed to vindicate imagism as a philosophy of style. The hardness which the movement required for its modern medium suddenly became the common experience of a generation on both sides of the trenches. The "softness" of late nineteenth century aestheticism itself a reaction from a hardened world, was now being superseded by a state of mind in tune with an even harsher reality.⁷⁰

Given the premises of Imagism, Gertrude Stein's interest in sentence structure, and his own experience, Hemingway presumably experimented until he felt equipped with adequate formal procedures. Such a proposition does not take account of Hemingway's sensibility, which suggests a predisposition towards "toughness" of language.

The movement of A Farewell to Arms both linguistically and structurally is reductive and its hero conducts himself in an increasingly solipsistic manner. Upon this

⁶⁹ Lodge, David – The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy in Malcolm Bradbury and J. MacFarlane (ed) Modernism (Harmondsworth, 1976)

⁷⁰ Ibid – Natan Zach, Imagism and Vorticism, Page 239

persona the novelist imposes formal and lexical restraints, including the first person narrative method, the coded language of love and war brotherhood, a concern with language and speculative thought, Henry's preference for the tactile and the sensory, instead of the intellectual: all of these trajectories point to a masculine consciousness taking refuge against the encroachment of war.⁷¹

The reaction against idealism in the years following the war produced or accentuated a flight from all abstraction. It was felt that the object, the thing experienced-in-itself stated boldly and without rhetorical flourish, would recreate truth to an extent, far beyond even the idealism and abstraction of protest. There is a close relationship between Hemingway's cinematic tautness and Ezra Pound's ideogram, a direct line leads from both to the reaction against World War I abstraction and sentiment – a reaction made classic in Frederick Henry's famous words.

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometime standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that was slapped up by bill posters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honour, courage or halo were *obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the number of roads, the names of rivers, the number of regiments and the dates.*⁷²

When Frederick Henry expressed his disillusionment with the ideals the war claimed to promote and jumped into the river and deserted, his actions epitomised the contemporary feeling of a whole nation. Edmund Wilson says at the end of Axel's Castle:

When the prodigious concerted effort of the war had ended only in impoverishment and exhaustion for all its European peoples concerned, and in a general feeling of hopelessness about politics, about all attempts to organise men into social units – armies, parties and nations – in the service of some common ideal, for the

⁷¹ Walsh, Jeffrey – American War Literature – 1914 to Vietnam (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1982) Page 53

⁷² Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms, Page 133

accomplishment of some common purpose, the western mind became particularly hospitable to a literature indifferent to action and unconcerned with the group.⁷³

Many writers began to identify themselves with James Joyce's hero Stephen Dedalus in his A Portrait of An Artist as a Young Man in his proud revolt against church and family and in his dream of forging "in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race". This last was a social purpose, since many of the American exiles like Joyce were patriots. These exiles had a purpose in the sense that they wanted to expunge the language of what they often called "the big words". To comprehend the purpose behind this, one must realise that the horrifying reality of the war was often camouflaged behind grandiose words and sentiments in a verbal effort to mislead the people.

This revolt against big words and lofty sentiments took shape in a fresh new prose style of the post war generation, which distrusted any words which begged for an emotional response. Disgusted with the false sentiments of wartime, this generation was trying to write of simple things simply. This search for "clean words" became the most distinguishing facet of the post war generation.

Although there is no doubt that a reaction against the rhetoric of the crusade powerfully affected Hemingway's style this "verbal skepticism" explains the particular quality of that style only partially. As Stanley Cooperman suggests, for Hemingway, style is dependant on the mystic of ritual, even art itself. For this reason Hemingway's language conveys that peculiar sense of caution, wariness and deliberation which so belies its own realistic surface.

Hemingway's protagonist, with his sense of manhood shattered by technological rape ("I was blown up while we were eating cheese") turns towards

⁷³ Wilson, Edmund – Axel's Castle (Fontana, 1969) Page 226

his “lovely cool goddess” because there is nothing else. Deprived of that initiative so essential to Hemingway’s concept of virility, unable to ritualise his role in the war so as to act rather than be acted upon, threatened with the horror of male passivity, Frederick Henry is reduced to the “worship” Rinaldi so ironically defines. Action and violence once simple, have become complex and would master Frederick Henry rather than be mastered by him. For this reason, Catherine does indeed become “sacred”. Only through her mirror-surface, her renunciation of self, can Henry once again take comfort from the reflection of his own face.

Only a love-object, in other words, an erotic shadow shaped by passivity can return Frederick Henry the initiative essential to his manhood. Catherine offers to become “whatever you want” – and this is what the war, what voluntary violence should have been and was not. From the moment that action and violence intrude upon Frederick Henry’s will, from the moment that they cease to exist merely by virtue of his consent (as they do exist in Hemingway’s later work by the virtue of the bull fighter’s consent, or the hunter’s or the fisherman’s), his relationship with Catherine becomes far more vital than a “chess game”. Catherine who is simply there at his disposal, permits him his masculine role, but when she asserts her own individuality by the very act of dying, there is nothing left of manhood at all. Frederick Henry takes his final walk into the rain as a sort of Jake Barnes who in The Sun Also Rises stares blankly at the mirror of his own impotence. The hyena of passivity (The Snows of Kilimanjaro) – always a nightmare for Hemingway – reduces Frederick Henry to a spiritual *castrado*.

Essential to this emasculation is the inability to handle any quality of “otherness” except in terms of ritualisation. The other, whether animate, or

inanimate, - is tolerable only in so far as it can be manipulated, controlled as one controls the trout line, the hunt, the bull fight or the female. Even death, provided it can be arranged and patterned, may serve as an exercise in virility; only when death refuses to be patterned, when action becomes its own perpetuator, does flight into other areas of experience become an involuntary and undignified imperative. There is no question of “will” among those soldiers grovelling and “choking through the whole attack” in Champs de’Honneur (written while the war experience was still all too fresh in Hemingway’s mind). What Frederick J. Hoffman sees as the “violation” or “traumatic shock” of technological war is a vital aspect not only in the relationship between Frederick Henry and Catherine, but in the literary career of Hemingway himself.⁷⁴

Unpatterned, unritualised and other, the war intrudes upon Frederick Henry. It is not skepticism that underlies ritual, but fear – fear of the unknown or the unmanageable. In the bull ring men can defeat death even while dying because they surround it with form: the initiative, in a very real sense remains theirs. “As a bulwark against passivity, ritual – whether in the temple, the bedroom, the arena, or the battlefield – has been one of humanity’s basic psychological needs, and it is in this sense that Hemingway so carefully, indeed so compulsively arranges and limits experience.”⁷⁵ Technological warfare eliminated the battlefield as a resource for ritual. The loss of initiative represented by technological violence and the attempt to regain this initiative through the bedroom or the arena are basic elements in A

⁷⁴ Hoffman, Frederick J. – The Twenties (New York, 1949) Page 57

⁷⁵ Cooperman, Stanley – World War I and the American Novel (John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1967) Page 184

Farewell to Arms and Hemingway's later work. The war itself, certainly represents a break in the continuum from natural violence in the north (Michigan) woods (the Nick Adams stories) to ritualised violence in the bull ring; it is the one area that cannot be mastered through the assertion of will, and for this reason it threatens rather than fulfils what Alfred Kazin calls "the individual's fierce unassailable pride in his pride – virility itself".⁷⁶ For pride is impossible when no choice is offered, when the initiative is stolen, and Hemingway tends to avoid rather than confront any experience where initiative becomes external. Confrontation, indeed, is the theme of Hemingway's work only in a special and very limited sense: his protagonists attempt to confront death in terms of ritual or they refuse to confront it at all.

This dependence upon ritual and the consequent horror when the impossibility of ritualising reduces the individual to passivity, indicates that Hemingway's preoccupation with death is something far removed from existential confrontation. Firstly, this is because technological violence in World War I deprived death of any "moment of truth" whatsoever; secondly a World War I protagonist like Frederick Henry "blown while we were eating cheese" becomes a refugee from precisely that form of obliteration, of nada he no longer can master.

Critics like Philip Young, John Atkins, Edmund Wilson, Alfred Kazin, and others have read a consistency into Hemingway's attitude towards violence, and this is perhaps one reason why a commentator like John Killinger writing in 1960 (Hemingway and the Dead Gods, Lexington KY, 1960) could actually define Nick Adams and Frederick Henry as existential heroes. But the post World War II

⁷⁶ Kazin, Alfred – On Native Ground (New York, 1942) Page 330

existential demands for total involvement despite absurdity (indeed, within absurdity) can no longer be equated with Hemingway's ritual escape than Nick Adams' (*In Our Time*) hunting or fishing in the north woods can be equated with the industrialised slaughter of World War I. Nick went to war as though he were casting for trout; he found another genre of experience (or anti-experience) altogether.

Hemingway's ritual of death, possible only outside rather than within modern war, is escape rather than confrontation; when the ritual is not possible there is no confrontation at all. Hemingway's ritual is both formal and abstract, and so represents a retreat from rather than acceptance of existential absurdity. This is the real meaning of World War I experience - death without ritual – and it explains why Hemingway afterward was successful in only those areas where ritual became possible: the bull fight, the safari, the fishing trip.

Many critics have failed to realise, or remember, the enormous difference for Hemingway between World War I death and the death which either preceded it (death in the woods) or followed it (ritual death in the bull ring). John Killinger, indeed sees no difference at all:

In the blinding flash of a shell, in the icy-burning impact of a bullet, in the dangerous vicinity of a wounded lion, in the contact of a bull's horn, in that ill-defined twilight between life and imminent death where time and place are irrelevant questions, man faces his freedom.⁷⁷

But Frederick Henry knows better. There was neither "choice" nor "freedom" for him, no reason for medals or even talk; he was "eating cheese" ; he was totally – almost obscenely – done to; he was, as Frederick Hoffman remarks, "violated"; his experience was emasculatory because passive. "Soldiers never do die

⁷⁷ Killinger, John – *Hemingway and the Dead Gods* (Lexington, KY, 1960) Page 18

well”, Hemingway tells us in Champs de’Honneur and his entire career as a writer was in a vital sense a search for those areas where a man can at least maintain the illusion of making love to death rather than being violated by it. The question is one of manhood itself, of initiative, and on this question the war experience is simply ruled out because it becomes unmanageable. There is nothing one can do with technological warfare but make a “separate peace” against it. And this is precisely Frederick Henry’s sole course of action. For when nobody follows the rules, a man is under no obligation to play the game, indeed when the game threatens to play the man, there is no alternative but flight.

The very fact that flight is possible, however, points up the difference between Hemingway and existentialism. Despite all his talk about death, Hemingway was concerned less with death than with the masculine role, which for him was always active, as the feminine was always passive. This is one reason why his protagonists, if they are unable to ritualise death, if they are acted upon (as Frederick Henry is acted upon), are faced with the ultimate horror: emasculation. In the works of Hemingway, death is less a threat to a man’s existence than to his *cojones* (masculinity) and for this reason he can speak of “dying well” or “dying badly”, while admitting that soldiers as contrasted to bull fighters or fishermen, “never do die well” since they are tossed on their backs to receive rather than give the final blow. Only when a man is passive in his death does “nada” itself become obscene (the jackal laughs at the hunter when the hunter is dying in bed – The Snows of Kilimanjaro). For existentialism, on the other hand, death is always obscene, and the problem is not one of “dying well” (which is an existentialist contradiction in terms) but rather, given the inescapable and inevitable obscenity of

death – in the bull ring or anywhere else – one of living well. And this is the major difference between Hemingway's *nada* - an emasculatory horror born of the World War I impact – and the nothingness of Sartre. Where the post World War II existentialist insists that there is no “exit” from the final and obscene absurdity, Hemingway depends wholly upon ritualised action for precisely just such an escape. And when ritual fails, the individual is doomed along with his manhood. Initiative must be regained at all costs, and the demand for initiative is a clue not only to the central drama of A Farewell to Arms but to the life - and the death – of Hemingway himself.

When Hemingway wrote the introduction to his 1948 edition of A Farewell to Arms, he used the occasion to explain why he had spent so much of his creative energy writing about war.

Some people say : why is the man so preoccupied and obsessed with war and now since 1933, perhaps it is clear why a writer should be interested in the constant, bullying, murderous, slovenly crime of war. Having been to too many of them I am sure that I am prejudiced, and I hope that I am prejudiced. But it is the constant belief of the writer of this book that wars are fought by the finest people that there are but they are made, provoked and initiated by straight economic rivalries and by swine that stand to profit by them.⁷⁸

That he was present at the wars and had a right to be, he frequently certified. In the 1942 introduction to Men at War he presented as his credentials not only that he had taken part in World War I and had been wounded, but that he had passed through the initiation of war, which is the key to understanding much of the century's experience.

Hemingway recognised that war was essentially a state of mind, a condition of will and the emotions. The clash, dirt and fatigue are all a part of war, but the

⁷⁸ Hemingway, Ernest – A Farewell to Arms (New York, 1948), Page x

ultimate meaning is emotional. The soldier's highest purpose seemed to be – “we are here to be killed”.⁷⁹

Hemingway's war writing was enriched by his being able to witness the wars of the century which gave them an emotional pattern mirrored in his own experience. His characterisation of different wars derived from his different responses to them. In 1918 he was consciously shaping himself and his attitudes. “I learnt about people,” he said of this period, “under stress and before and after it.”⁸⁰ This very stress has been the fundamental theme of all his creative writing.

His personal involvement in the Spanish Civil War was far greater than in the first war. This war was motivated by idealism. Consistent with his predilection for the underdog it became for him the people's war against the generals'. By the time of the writing of For Whom the Bell Tolls Hemingway's thinking had undergone a drastic change. He still hated war, but as the gloomy shadow of fascism was lengthening over Europe, the republican cause gradually became “our cause”.

The emotional intensity of living by death's dispensation became one of Hemingway's subjects after witnessing the wars of the century. For his readers though the real Hemingway was not so much a reporter and interpreter, as much as a writer who rendered the experience of war truly and intensely. This is what all his newspaper editors wanted from him – an intensity of experience with which he had enlivened his fiction. The sights and sounds of battle and more particularly the shattering sound of exploding bombs was the new experience the world had to learn.

⁷⁹ Cowley, Malcolm - The Second Flowering (Andre Deutsch, 1973) Page 7

⁸⁰ Fenton, Charles – The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway (New American Library, 1961) Page 60

For Hemingway these were not merely soldiers' wars but writers' wars as well. The problem was not only to "experience" but to "express the experience" in an effort to write history ungarbled. When he wrote in Green Hills of Africa that war was the best school for writers, he recognised it not only as a major subject but as an unexplored terrain for twentieth century writing and one of the hardest subjects to write truly of. In his war reporting, Hemingway admitted the possibility of an incomplete rendering of experience. Consequently to avoid helping the enemy he had to censor his war reporting or accept external censorship. After the war all could be told, but emotion recollected in tranquility was quite another thing. In Men at War Hemingway writes:

*If during war conditions are such that a writer cannot publish the truth because its publication would do harm to the state, he should write and not publish.*⁸¹

Hemingway chose to write – and publish – a reconstructed view in his war reports, to sacrifice a completeness of vision for the intensity and immediacy of experience. He saved the fictional critiques for afterwards. His world was ultimately one at war with the individual. The spectre of the war haunts Hemingway's earliest short stories: many of the Nick Adams stories of In Our Time are given in terms of the author's own experience of violence. The security provided by the family and the natural setting are never free from the tortured sketches of war and violence. And it is from these images that Hemingway's distinctive prose style emerges.

He brought to American writing honesty and objectivity and purged it of sentimentality, literary embellishments and a superficial artfulness. He revitalised the art of dialogue writing. His vision is sharply etched and his words are written as

⁸¹ Hemingway, Ernest (ed.) – Men at War (Fontana, 1966) Page 8

though held tightly in check. The effect is one of understatement and irony particularly effective when the subject is, as is often the case, violence and pain. The tightly controlled check on the mind of the hero and the tension in his life is clearly paralleled by the disciplined sentences. The prose is tense because the atmosphere is tense.

The atmosphere is ultimately one where the world is at war – war either literal as armed conflict or figurative as marked everywhere with violence and pain, whether real or potential. This is a world peopled with strong, violent men whose morality is succinctly summed up as "what is moral is what you feel good after".

Happiness is nothing but an interlude in their lives – pleasure seized in haste. It is ultimately an extremely narrow world. Yet one is compelled to recognise it as a very real world as the history of the past decades tells us. It is the world we live in, however much we might deny it.

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND WORLD WAR : A THEMATIC STUDY THE NAKED AND THE DEAD : NORMAN MAILER

The war novel, generally speaking, is more important as an historical phenomenon than as an artistic achievement. The variety of ways in which writers respond to war – their pervasive sense of nihilism, their desperate affirmation, their withdrawal from society and politics – tell us a great deal about the culture of the time. But since the intrinsic literary merit of the novel of the second war is not great, since the books that came directly out of the war did not herald a renaissance in American letters comparable to the flowering of the twenties, unfavourable judgements have rained down on the entire decade. The judgements, the product of unjustifiable expectations, stand in need of revision. One must see the war novel of the second war, as a product of its own time with its own historical context and cultural tensions to cope with.

John Dos Passos, the originator of both the tone and form of so much of American war literature of the twentieth century surveyed the attitudes of the American fighting man in the forties and found him quite different from his earlier counterpart. For his generation World War I had seemed a horrible interruption in man's march towards a better life. The next generation was more disenchanted.

The boys who are fighting these present wars got their first ideas of the world during the depression years. From the time they first read their newspapers they drank in the brutalities of European politics with their breakfast coffee. War and oppression in the early years of this century appeared to be like stinking slums in a city that was otherwise beautiful and good to live in, blemishes that skill and courage would remove. To the young men of today these things are inherent deformities of mankind. If you have a clubfoot you learn to live with your clubfoot. That doesn't mean that

they like the dust and the mud and the fatigue and the agony of war or the oppression of man by man any better than we did. But the idea of these things are more familiar.¹

Consequently, it is not surprising that the American people engaged in World War II in a spirit of glum resignation; for the most part they saw it as a task that had to be accomplished in order that they might return to their civilian lives as quickly as possible. If the attitude of the American soldier in World War I was informed with a classic American attribute of idealism, that of the World War II soldier was marked chiefly by the other familiar American characteristics of pragmatism and realism. Yet the relative equanimity with which the American citizen faced the prospect of combat in 1941, and the almost total absence of emotional trauma in fiction about the war, do not seem to have derived to any great extent from the experience of World War I. Most of the generation that provided the soldiers for World War II had been born after 1918; although they had perhaps read the works of Hemingway, Cummings, and Dos Passos, the first war for them was a vicarious experience. Malcolm Cowley has observed that the “Americans in World War II were tougher and more sophisticated than their fathers in 1918”,² but the emotional toughness with which they were endowed seems to have been a product of the social and economic difficulties experienced by the nation as a whole in the thirties.

In the works of Norman Mailer, James Jones and Irwin Shaw and many other novelists of the Second World War one sees the recurrent image of the young man who graduated from high school and college, and finding no opportunity for a career drifted from one casual job to another as the years went by. To this generation, the

¹ Dos Passos, John – *First Encounter* (New York, 1945) Page 7-8

² Cowley, Malcolm – “War Novels: After Two Wars” in *Modern American Fiction*,(ed) A. Walton Litz (Oxford University Press, 1963) Page 300

harsh experience of the depression seems to have permanently blunted the traditional American sense of idealism. As far as they were concerned, if the nation was in an economic *cul-de-sac*, then it was necessary to pass out through the bottleneck – even if it meant military service – in order to regain personal economic freedom and the opportunity to live a normal life. This assessment of the situation was reflected in the less emotional response to the war by the population as a whole.

For the literature of the war the principal effects derived from the fact that the United States participated much more fully in World War II than it had in World War I. The war, especially in the Pacific, brought home to the American people a unique experience as a great power whose attitudes were influenced very little by those of the allied countries. “The Pacific campaign changed all that for the American novelist. This war was really theirs ... Looking back on the Pacific, the Americans built up a thorough and realistic war literature from the foundations, to make the genre their own, as if it had never existed before.”³

One sees this new aspect of the American outlook reflected in the soldiers attitude toward friend and foe. Malcolm Cowley now observes that in World War II “the soldiers made little distinction among the occupied, the liberated and the allied countries, since the people in all of them were foreigners – that is frogs, limeys, heinies, ginzos, yellow bastards, wops, flips or gooks.”⁴ The responsibility for carrying the burden of the war turned the American point of view inward; the more realistic concept of war with which the nation entered the conflict and the longer

³ Pritchett, V.S. – “American Soldiers” in *New Statesman*, LXV, Page 207

⁴ Cowley, Malcolm – “War Novels”: After Two Wars in *Modern American Fiction* (ed) A Walton Litz, (Oxford University Press 1963) Page 301

exposure to combat provided the opportunity for a set of fully developed attitudes to ripen and be recorded. These attitudes remained fairly consistent in many of the novels written from 1945 to 1956. Thus although in the novels of World War II there is no chronological movement from idealism to despair as there had been in the literature of World War I, there does emerge a series of portraits – of the civilian soldier, the professional officer, the Jew – reflecting typically American responses to warfare and the military establishment.

American war novelists in general tend to be bards of the enlisted man, sensitive to his woes and glories. The characteristic shared by the protagonists of the World War II novels is a total lack of the crusading spirit. Where their World War I counterpart joined up to fight the Hun or to engage in an exciting adventure, they joined for purely practical or selfish reasons. In most cases they knew that the draft was hanging over them in any event and that by volunteering they could either alleviate the tension of waiting or seek some special status denied to the draftees. In some cases like that of Red Valsen in The Naked and the Dead, the individual joined up because the army offered him employment after years of drifting. The business of enlisting is usually treated soberly and with a minimum of flag waving. In the majority of the characters, however, the war came as an onerous obligation enforced by the threat of the draft. For most of these men, wartime service was only another bump on the long road of misfortune their generation had already travelled.

If the fictional World War II hero enlisted as a matter of necessity rather than for humanitarian or patriotic reasons, his objectives in the war were equally practical. In a White House speech in 1942, President Roosevelt had said that as a result of this war “he believed that a peace could be established and guaranteed for at least twenty

five years, or as any of his, and Churchill's and Stalin's generations could expect to live".⁵ In other words this was not a war to end war or to introduce the millenium but to achieve the fairly realistic goal of immediate peace. This objective, or variations of it, is what the Second World War novelists suggest was the typical goal the American pursued in World War II. The peace they sought was a peace in which they would have the opportunity for personal economic development rather than the culmination of a victorious crusade. In The Naked and the Dead, Gallagher wants to get back to his career as small time politician, and Goldstein dreams of setting up a welding shop in the Bronx. If, in joining the armed forces, many characters are shown as following a path they hope, will eventually bring them the opportunity for economic advancement in civilian life, others seek the same objective in a military career. Major Dalleson, Gen. Cummings' operations officer in The Naked and the Dead is forced by his dream of a captaincy in the peace time army to reluctantly take the initiative when he finds himself in the uncomfortable position of directing a battle during the general's absence. Dalleson is a professional soldier in the sense that he has chosen a career in the armed forces for the sake of the military life itself. He is a professional soldier only in the sense that he intends to spend his life in the service.

In addition to the search for economic welfare, either in the armed forces or as a result of the advent of peace, an author occasionally suggests that one of his characters has joined up as a gesture in his search for social equality. To Sgt. Julio Martinez in The Naked and the Dead, the army offers an escape from the stigma of his Mexican origin. After a youth filled with humiliation as a counter boy and farm

⁵ Aichinger, Peter – The American Soldier in Fiction (Iowa, 1975) Page 156

hand, a sergeantcy in the United States army offers a social status he could never attain by any other means. To relinquish it by leaving the army would mean returning to the status of a servant or wetback labourer. “Little Mexican boys also breathe the American fables. If they cannot be aviators or financiers or officers they can still be heroes.”⁶ This thought drives him forward even when he is in the grip of convulsive fear.

Finally the World War II novelists depict the individual who goes to war in search of experience. This sense of excitement and adventure was a common characteristic among the fictional heroes of World War I, but their World War II counterparts were a good deal more sophisticated. In 1917, the American youth was hungry for adventure as a relief from the daily drudge – Europe, was the unknown continent offering strange and illicit delights. Hemingway’s Lt. Henry found a stimulation in Europe not greatly different in quality from that experienced by the average tourist. Mailer’s Lt. Hearn, on the other hand, joins the army in search of data that will confirm his rather dismal view of human nature. “The only thing that interested him vitally was to uncover the least concealed quirks of any man or woman who diverted him..... ‘When I find the shoddy motive in them I’m bored’ ”.⁷ He has already been abroad – foreign travel offers him no excitement. Like most thinking men of the World War II fiction he seeks experience in the military service on a more philosophical level. The army brings together disparate individuals who would not normally associate with each other and forces them to interact under stress. It is this interaction that Hearn seeks to observe. This desire for an introverted yet collective

⁶ Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead (New York, 1948) Page 59

⁷ Ibid, Page 69

quality of experience is far removed from the purposes attributed to the First World War soldier. The later fiction hopes to find the significance of the war within the confines of American society, as it is represented in the armed forces rather than in external contacts between foreigners and themselves. The soldiers in the works of Hemingway, Cummings and Dos Passos see the war in terms of its impact on themselves as individuals. In the novels of the Second War, on the other hand, the experience of the war is understood in terms of its impact on American society as a whole. By the 1940s, the American people at least as they are portrayed in their literature had overcome the Jamesian naivete that had led them to seek fulfillment in the Old World. By this time they are no longer overawed by the European presence but concerned about problems regarding their own security.

The appeal to the team spirit is perhaps the only positive motivation mentioned in the novels of World War II. Recognising the pitfalls of an exaggerated propaganda campaign, the new emotional toughness of the American soldier, and the greater access to factual information, the trend from 1941 to 1945 was a tendency to avoid any overt appeal to the emotions of the draftee. The negative motivation was the realisation that victory was the only way out of the army. Brought within fighting distance of the enemy, they saw well enough that until those people over there were all killed or frightened into quitting, they would never get home. The experience of combat itself unexpectedly served to transform the draftee into a better-motivated and more competent soldier.

This evolution from resentment to involvement may have been the result of an ultimately selfish pragmatism, but it created a deeper comradeship and loyalty than that described in the World War I novels. John Dos Passos' Three Soldiers and

Thomas Boyd's Through the Wheat both describe starry eyed soldiers venturing out to save civilisation yet ending up disillusioned and alienated from society as well as from their fellow soldiers. This theme of isolation of course finds a fuller expression in Lt. Henry's loneliness at the end of A Farewell to Arms. On the other hand, the fictional World War II soldier enters the war with cynicism but becomes welded into the team spirit of the war by the experience of it. More important there is no suggestion of the pessimism and despair common to World War I characters. Instead there is a sense of solidarity and mutual confidence deriving from the reliance of the members of the team upon each other. A fine illustration of this is Wilson's rescue by his comrades in The Naked and the Dead, given the circumstances a near impossible feat. The avoidance of emotional propaganda, and the effect of the soldier's first taste of combat are shown as having a positive effect on the attitude of the draftee toward the unit in which he serves, even while his knowledge of war and his revulsion against it deepens.

For the professional soldier like Sgt. Croft (The Naked and the Dead) the war is the culmination of his career, but for the great majority of characters in American fiction, the war is seen in contrast to the individual's past life. The standard thematic device of the World War II novelist is to project the soldier's life against the backdrop of war. In the World War I novels the reader knows nothing about the background experience of the characters. Only the sketchiest information is provided about where Frederick Henry or Andrews came from or what their previous experiences had been. They are treated not so much as individuals as composite expressions of the national will. Their stories begin from the time when they volunteer, in keeping usually with the overpowering American mood of idealism, and their reaction to the war is seen

not so much as the product of their backgrounds as of the war itself. In the World War II novels on the other hand, the war is a backdrop rather than a medium; it provides the screen on which are projected some further episodes in an already fairly complete history of the individuals life. In The Naked and the Dead, From Here to Eternity and The Young Lions, each author devotes a large part of the book to those events in the soldier's previous environment that influences his conduct in the armed forces.

Aside from establishing the fact that the enlisted man is essentially a civilian at heart whose prime desire is to get out of the army this introduction of background material and shift in the relationship between the soldier and the battle is fundamental to the novelist's changing perception of the place of war in society. In the first world war, America's first real blood letting against an external enemy, it was important and in fact sufficient to record the trauma of an idealistically motivated nation plunged into a mechanised slaughter. By developing the individual soldier's past life in detail and placing it in juxtaposition with the war, the authors of World War II novels provide the basis for an understanding of the point of view of the enlisted man as a person rather than as a symbol of a national outlook which he tended to be in World War I fiction.

The revulsion at the endless slaughter expressed in the novels of World War I was in keeping with the sentiment of the whole western world; in the novels of the second war the element of disillusionment is less significant. The war presents different problems to different characters – problems which must be worked out in keeping with their special personalities. Generally the atmosphere of war emphasises the characteristics the individual already possesses; the brave become braver, the cowardly more cowardly, the brutal more brutal.

Perhaps the prime question that was answered differently in the two wars was the question of the relationship existing between the individual, his own country and the enemy. In the context of World War I, initially at least the enemy was very clearly defined. He was the Hun and it could be taken for granted that any American youth regardless of his background would wish to fight against him. In the novels of the second world war, the enemy is rarely seen and only occasionally identified as the Germans or the Japanese. Instead the enlisted man more and more frequently expresses his resentment against "them". It is that the "they" who are responsible for the war and for the enlisted man's misfortunes. Governments in general are the object of the soldiers' bitterness. The barely articulated resentments of Valsen and Gallagher in The Naked and the Dead are not directed against the Japanese but against the "fugged up army". These characters reflect an increasing cynicism of the American citizen in regard to the purposes for which a war is fought, a process which culminates in Yossarins' (Catch 22) decision that the war is a plot by both sides to murder him. The fact that war itself, not any given nation represents the real threat to human happiness finds expression in a line from William Butler Yeats, "Those that I fight I do not hate",⁸ it is this idea that John Hersey took as the motive for his novel about a bomber crew in England.

If combat raised special problems for the civilian who suddenly found himself cast as a soldier, the occupation of conquered countries presented him with problems that were all the more acute because of the nature of the society from which he had come. The American was faced with the necessity of maintaining his perspective

⁸ Yeats, W.B. – "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death", Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (MacMillan, 1975)

despite his own absolute power, his lack of experience and the subtle blandishments of a people prepared to do anything in order to survive.

For Americans in general the experience of World War II was broader than that of World War I in that it touched every income group, but it had special significance for one segment of American society – the Jews – Alfred Kazin refers to 1945 as a “pivotal year” in the history of the Jewish writer in America: the year in which the Jew became able to form part of the “modern movement” by expressing his cultural heritage as part of the larger intellectual scene. At this point, as the war provided subject matter for writers like Wouk, Bellow and Mailer, “The Jewish writer.... had particular reason to feel that this most terrible of all events in Jewish history bound him more closely to every fundamental question of human nature in Europe’s self destruction”, that is in the same year that the Jewish writer emerged from the intellectual ghetto, he was faced with questions that were not only national but international in scope.

The armed forces presented a multifaceted problem to the American Jew. The characteristics normally attributed to the race in fiction (a desire to be liked, a powerful sense of tradition and community life, an awareness of the suffering of the race as a long standing fact, and a sense of cultural superiority to the gentiles) practically guaranteed that they would come into collision with the mode of life in the army. The impersonality of the army would make it difficult for them to feel that their efforts were appreciated; the dispersal of their numbers into the vastness of the armed forces would deprive them of a sense of kinship and mutual contact and, above all else, the normal military harshness in dealing with recruits could easily be misinterpreted as anti-Semitism.

If the Jew had the inherent tendency to be at odds with military life, the situation was rendered vastly more complex both by the acknowledged anti-Semitism of many Americans and by the special horrors of the Nazi regime. The German atrocities against the Jews placed a special obligation on the American Jew to fight against the Nazis, but once he had enlisted he found himself in a context that was fundamentally inimical to his way of thinking. He also found himself forced into the ironic position of trying to fight against German anti-Semitism when the people with whom he served very frequently showed that they were anti-Semitic too.

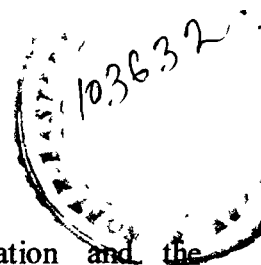
The irony of this situation has been exploited in many of the novels of the Second World War especially those of Wouk, Shaw, Mailer Martha Gellhorn and Merle Miller. In The Naked and the Dead Mailer's two Jewish soldiers function as small cogs in a large divisional machine which is under the direction of a man who is essentially a fascist. Their attempts to defend themselves against the inherent prejudice of their fellow soldiers drive them to take extreme measures, all the more ironic for being futile. Goldstein's superhuman attempt to carry Wilson – a southerner – back to the beach, after he is wounded results in Wilson's death en-route. Roth is stung by the epithet "you Jew bastard" which compels him to take the final suicidal leap across the mountain chasm realising very well that his act will not have any effect on the ingrained prejudice of men like Gallagher. "If he refused to jump, Croft would have to come back. The patrol would be over But the platoon wouldn't understand. They would jeer him, take relief from their own weakness in abusing him. His heart was filled with bitterness."⁹ There are those like Capt. Stein in James Jones'

⁹ Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead , Page 562

The Thin Red Line who formed the spearhead of the anti militarist tendency of the war novels of the absurd which began to appear in the late fifties. Here we have a hero who rejects service in the American armed forces for reasons that spring from his position as a Jew, and he draws the strength to endure his treatment in the stockade from the cultural heritage of his race, just as his particular humanism is coloured by his Jewish background. The implication is that the moral strength required to stand against the accepted code of conduct of western society – a code which seems compulsively directed against self destruction – springs from an older and much abused society. Just as Faulkner in his treatment of southern society looked to the Negro's enduring qualities of patience, humour and compassion – forged through a long history of adversity – to eventually supersede the sterility and selfishness of the Anglo-Saxon ruling class, so too the war novelists turns to another maligned expatriate group for those qualities that seemed to offer an adequate response to the prospect of universal destruction.

The trench warfare of 1917 was very different from the blitzkrieg tactics of the second war. The doctrine of total war was followed by fascism and the democracies to an unparalleled level. "War always concentrates and reveals the potential forces of collective life as they are embodied in the given social organisation."¹⁰ The preparation for war that necessitated disastrous sacrifices of human values coupled with the vast geographical scope of the second war made the later conflict less comprehensible than anything that had ever happened. Before it the writer's imagination understandably quailed. The writer saw that the individual had to struggle

¹⁰ Wright, Quincy – A Study of War (University of Chicago Press, 1942) Page 261



constantly against the impersonality of his military organisation and the meaninglessness of his activity. The war and the military took their proper place as prime forces working towards the depersonalisation of modern man.

In the light of these encouragements to silence, what did the writer do? He wrote, and paradoxically produced a large body of work about the war. No other war in American history has been so fully recorded in fiction, from a purely quantitative point of view. And when the writer wrote, how did he write? Some writers imitated Hemingway. It has been claimed that Hemingway perfected the language of war, that his style and his manner were peculiarly appropriate to combat and writers naturally fell back on the remembered rhythms of his language, which had possibly given them their first idea of war. Those who imitated Hemingway did not often penetrate beyond the manner. They did not try to record combat as the real thing experienced by one who was there; or when infrequently they did try, they did not succeed. They did not, like Hemingway and Stephen Crane before him, find themselves obsessed with the conquest of fear, and so feel compelled to render the experience of war with vivid accuracy as a meaningful gesture in their own lives.

The shadow of Ernest Hemingway fell early and deep on many American writers during the 1930s and 1940s. Nineteen forty-eight featured Hemingway revisited in the guise of The Naked and the Dead and Mailer was held as Papa's heir apparent for the post war generation. Although both were exponents of life styles that pushed their writings off stage, one cannot include Hemingway and Mailer in the same slot of literary history. The radical transfiguration of American life and letters in the 1950s and 1960s has pushed Hemingway and Mailer into separate spheres – Hemingway's culture was ripe for a "separate peace," Mailer's seemed ripe for a

separate war. The two world wars, supposedly Hemingway's and Mailer's twin springboards, make for little harmony. In the South Pacific Private Mailer with his hot dream of being first with the big post war novels looks tame next to the legendary adventures of a warrior Papa with his 237 mortar fragments from World War I. Mailer's world, Dachau, Hiroshima and man on the moon is tone deaf to a writer whose shadow loomed over bull rings, safaris and big and little wars.

On the other hand the novels of World War II and the later period are more wide ranging in subject and content. The techniques of Dos Passos and the breadth of inquiry suggested by Hemingway are still influential, but numerous other factors are also active. The subjective autobiographical approach intensely bound to personal experience has given way to the application of virtually all variants of literary style, structure, point of view and characterisation. Similarly the focus of the contemporary war novel reflects the impact of history, psychology, philosophy and ideology. Perhaps these qualities are best embodied in Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead.

War is the collective image for Mailer's earliest portrayal of his vision – a fictive world based on alienation, anxiety and atavism. While The Naked and the Dead impressed the literary public as the first important World War II novel, Mailer claims "I intended it to be a parable about the movement of man through history. I tried to explore the outrageous propositions of cause and effect, of effort and recompense in a sick society".¹¹ This enlarges the novel's scope to include much more than a representation of war.

¹¹ Quoted from "Norman Mailer" by Donald Kaufman in The New Yorker, Oct 23, 1948

In "The White Negro", Mailer writes "the second world war presented a mirror to the human condition which blinded any one who looked into it.....one was then obliged to see that no matter how crippled and perverted an image of man was the society he had created, it was nonetheless his creation, his collective creation (at least his collective creation from the past) and if society was so murderous, then who could ignore the most hideous of questions about his own nature?"¹²

What we encounter in Mailer's first novel is a work of enduring power, a power which is simply incommensurate with the novel's reputation. We have tended to value Mailer's first novel for the wrong reasons: as a guide to combat during World War II, as a work of social criticism, as the best of our recent war novels. The Naked and the Dead is all of these things and more. At the age of twenty-five, Mailer was able to use his military experience as the backbone of a long and complex narrative which transcends limits we usually have in mind in thinking of "war novels". The Naked and the Dead presents a terrifying view of men at war, specifically the invasion of the Japanese held island of Anopopei, which the novel follows from the landing operation to the final mopping up details. But the war as we see it in this grinding, blundering campaign is used as a mirror of vaster social and historical issues that pertain to the kind of world men must live in when the battles are finally won or lost. The dramatic link between these areas of meaning in the novel is Cummings, the brilliant, power-crazed general who directs the campaign, and his staff officer Lt. Hearn, a disillusioned and misanthropic liberal. The war itself is seen in a double focus. It is first observed from the impersonal vantage point of staff officers playing a military chess game. But it is also observed from the individual point of view of the men who constitute a reconnaissance platoon headed by the brutal Sgt. Croft. The

¹² Mailer, Norman – Advertisements for Myself (New York, 1959) Page 336

only link between these two areas of meaning – an awesome gulf of prejudice and authority separates enlisted men from officers – is Lt. Hearn who assumes command over the platoon. This personal view of the action is linked with the broader social implications of the novel by means of the Time Machine, abbreviated portraits of the men yet loaded with significance. This is a direct borrowing from John Dos Passos' technique in his USA trilogy. The thematic structure of the novel is thus seen to be a series of points of view running full circle at the dead centre: an image of man broken and harried.

Certainly The Naked and the Dead is more than the “report” of a sensitive young man who survived active service and returned to tell the tale. Mailer began to plan his novel long before his combat experience at Luzon and Leyete. He has traced its origins to the first days of America's participation in World War II :

“I may as well confess that by December 8th or 9th of 1941, in the forty-eight hours after Pearl Harbour, while worthy young men who were wondering where they could be of aid to the war effort I was worrying darkly whether it would be more likely that a great war novel would be written about Europe or the Pacific.”¹³

Much as Gen. Cummings plans the campaign of Anopopei, Mailer at nineteen was already formulating his strategy for a major novel. While still at Harvard, he wrote a short novel which can only be considered a trial run for The Naked and the Dead – a Calculus at Heaven. From books published during the war such as John Hersey's Into the Valley and Harry Brown's A Walk in the Sun he got the idea of writing a novel about a long patrol. In fact it was this decision which led Mailer to volunteer for service in a reconnaissance outfit. These facts suggest that Mailer went

¹³ Mailer, Norman – Advertisements for Myself (New York, 1959) Page 28

to war in search of combat experience which would enable him to complete a novel he had already conceived.

The novel uses the strategy of the microcosm. Here the little world, the military campaign on the island of Anopopei represents the entire Pacific war theatre, or any war at any time. Mailer's strategy also concerns the military unit. The macrocosmic army- the universal world of regimented men – is depicted in the image of an intelligence and reconnaissance unit. Episodes centering at headquarters, with its white collar atmosphere, are spaced between scenes that show the infantry beset with drudgery and crime. Mailer stresses how disconnected these little worlds are. Not only has communication broken down vertically between officers and enlisted men, it has failed horizontally as well. As a little map mirroring vaster ones, Anopopei is an isolated island, subject only to the laws of war.

War keeps a man from knowing his fellows and it also confuses him in respect to time. In a sense war provides him with a new calendar. The wartime hours, days, weeks and months cause soldiers to reappraise their past. Since man's initial need for time division is a way of acknowledging his mortality, a belief in the greater probability of his own death can alter his sense of the present. During a war, every moment verges on the last. Living in the present becomes oppressive while living in the future becomes absurd. As a result the past almost imperceptibly acquires the temporal content of the present – a fact that confronts Mailer's soldiers. Already ensnared in a spatial prison, they begin to tell time by the calendar on its walls. Confused by their wartime visions, officers and common soldiers alike increasingly fail to distinguish between peacetime and wartime. Yesterday and yesterday's future give way to what Mailer would term the "enormous present". Near the novel's

conclusion Mailer inserts a “mute chorus” entitled “On what we do when we get out” which drones out GI fantasies, a chorus which Mailer “mutes” with the following preference: “sometime spoken, usually covert, varying with circumstance”. The concept of time “varying with circumstance” also shapes the numerous Time Machines. Throughout these snap survey inter chapters of the various characters’ pasts, there is a tendency to portray peacetime as an inverted form of war. As omniscient author, Mailer imprints each past with the soldier’s present consciousness. Cities and hometowns are now characterised by settings so filthy that friend and neighbours act like animals in a jungle. Past journeys are reinterpreted as dreaded uprootings. Ambitions once considered a sure way to success, are now recast into treacherous symptoms of futility. Apart from the Time Machines, memories are also reshaped. Many soldiers can no longer recall their loves, and their imaginations keep accusing wives or lovers of sexual infidelity. The Mailer soldiers distort time, and time distorts itself – a displacement in time to match the dislocation in space.

The theme of a world at war sets up the title. Mailer has stated (Current Biography, 1948) that the term “Naked” refers both to the war mongering fanatics and the men “whose minds are so tainted”. But Mailer’s image of uniformed men being stripped also accents the more universal implication.

“In the author’s eyes, The Naked and the Dead is not a realistic documentary; it is rather, a symbolic book of which the basic theme is the conflict between the beast and the seer in man. The number of events experienced by one platoon couldn’t possibly have happened to any one army platoon in the war, but represents a composite view of the Pacific war. The mountain the platoon attempts to climb represents death and man’s creative urge, fate, man’s desire to conquer the elements – all kinds of things that you never dream of separating and stating so baldly.” (Current Biography, 1948)

What Mailer more explicitly means by the conflict between the beast and the seer is war’s tendency to reduce man to an animal existence and his repeated attempts

to reassert his humanity. Metaphorically the clothes to be removed are civilisation's. A man prepared for war is at the outset made uncivilised (released from certain restraints), before being furnished a weapon, and before being urged to commit violence and murder sanctioned by society, state and God. Bestiality will result if the conditioning to wartime behaviour lasts long enough.

There are many allusions to man reverting to beast. Dog eat dog, and a dog tag is hung around a man's neck. Mailer's own fictional analogy to Pavlov's experiments with dogs points out another fact of war – instead of a man fearing to become an animal, he is more fearful of becoming a man and not surviving. Embodied as beasts entering a world governed by instinct the soldiers can only dimly recall their displaced manhood. Above the enlisted man, higher in the hierarchy of bestiality, the officers' style of atavism is more refined. On reviewing his relationship with Gen. Cummings, Lt.Hearn can analyse what those ranked lower can only feel:

“He had been the pet, the dog, to the master, coddled and curried, thrown sweetmeats until he had had the presumption to bite the master once. And since then he had been tormented with the particular absorbed sadism that most men could generate only toward an animal.”¹⁴

Despite the widespread brutishness, an occasional human value (always brief and futile) will emerge, like Gallagher's mild Catholicism or Martinez's childlike patriotism. But usually the soldier's response to the supernatural or the idealistic is either a terrified awareness of some malignant force, such as that “something watching over their shoulder and laughing”¹⁵ or Pollack's epithet for God – “he sure is a sonofabitch”.¹⁶ Within such Godless stone walls the symbolic network operating

¹⁴ Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead, Page 230

¹⁵ *Ibid*, Page 313

¹⁶ *Ibid*, Page 39

must elect a Cummings to the rank of “seer”, the prophet of eternal regimentation. Only the general has enough intellect and experience to see the bestiality in Anopopei in its historical perspective. By permitting a Cummings to come (to echo his name) a corrupt America has taken on the role of metaphorical tailor, stripping its people of civilian authority while reclothing its army with brute power. Without those trappings of technology necessary to combat their natural environment, the soldiers must face nature on its own terms. The weather and the jungle are even more terrifying than the enemy. Typhoons rage and trails are labyrinthian. Nature and man’s odours mingle to an overpowering stench. Only at the heights where vestiges of civilisation like soap, promotions and ambitions still exist does the jungle serve any useful purpose. “Cummings had a sensation of being suspended in air.....the jungle seems to strip him of everything but the quick absorbed functioning of his mind.”¹⁷ In this instance the human mind is at least busy “somewhere in space” – an example of what Mailer means by a theme focussed on “death and man’s creative urge, fate, man’s desire to conquer the elements.”

In The Naked and the Dead chance and a quirk of nature take over Anopopei. It is the fumbling Major Dalleson with his blind, lucky decision who manages to win the campaign, while Cummings the master strategist is away. The chaos of war linked to the blind powers of nature shows up when Wilson’s body is washed away after Ridges and Goldstein had undergone the ordeal as litter bearers. On Mount Anaka the hornet’s nest which ruins Croft’s quest to attain the summit also highlights the approach to “man’s creative urge” and “man’s desire to conquer the elements”. Jungle

¹⁷ Ibid, Page 105

warfare assumes a creativity expressed in a coarser manner. Physical skills surpass mental ability. Brutish man discovers that his “creative urge” either compels him to be the anointed leader of the animal pack, as in the case of Cummings or to conquer nature, the proving ground of the war itself. Sgt. Croft, a sanctioned killer during peacetime now in wartime seeks to become “an idealist” (Pollacks phrase). Standing relentlessly above these challenges towers Mount Anaka stirring terror in the minds of all. When Hearn peered into Croft, Mailer labels it looking down into an “abyss”. Within the symbolic context, the “abyss” characterised by man’s reversion to beast, must possess a counterpart at the peak – man’s highest possible attainment as an animal. And when climbing Croft can feel the senses inflamed by the power of his own destiny. At the other end are the men under Croft’s command resentful and afraid. “They had discovered they could not hate him and do anything about it, so they hated the mountain, hated it with more fervour than they could ever have hated another human being.”¹⁸. Mount Anaka has remained always in the background of the campaign, a massive distant representative of monolithic nature. But in the final portion of the book when the platoon must climb it, it has become a force in its own right. As an exploratory measure upon which the decision to launch a daringly unorthodox attack may depend, Gen. Cummings sends a platoon led by Lt. Hearn, to scout the other side of the island. The full irony of the uselessness of the mission, and of the larger plan itself is not made clear until the very end of the novel.

In the landing craft, immediately before they begin their march, the men have a clear view of Anaka:

¹⁸ Ibid, Page 698

“Far in the distance they could see Mount Anaka rising above the island. It arched coldly and remotely from the jungle beneath it, lofting itself massively into the low-hanging clouds of the sky. In the early drab twilight it looked like an immense old elephant erecting himself somberly on its front legs his haunches lost in the green bedding of his lair. The mountain seemed wise and powerful and terrifying in its size. Gallagher stared at it in absorption, caught by a sense of beauty he could not express. The idea, the vision he always had of something finer and neater and more beautiful than the void in which he lived trembled now, pitched almost to a climax of words.”¹⁹

The perversion of this aesthetic appearance to one of unmitigated horror and the metamorphosis of the men into plodding, cringing animals in the course of their battle with the mountain are rendered more powerful by the initial view of Mount Anaka. A hornet’s nest ends this quest for the mountain peak. Does this fateful conclusion satisfy Croft? “Deep down himself, Croft was relieved ... was rested by the unadmitted knowledge that he had found a limit to his hunger.”²⁰ Somewhere in his subconscious, Croft accepts his own limitations. To become a seer in this world is to acquire isolation – only Cummings has the mind to dare such a superhuman ascent. Every man is dehumanised to some extent by the debilitating efforts demanded by the climb. Only three men are actually killed in the course of the mission. Red Valsen, the enlisted liberal counterpart of Lt. Hearn, faced finally with a situation with which he cannot cope alone, is forced to relinquish all pride in his own strength as an individual. The combination of nature as represented by Anaka and the army as represented by Croft has beaten him, and he admits it. For Croft the mountain becomes the ultimate foe, and something in him breaks when he fails against it.

As part of the strategy of the wartime microcosm, The Naked and the Dead becomes an extended commentary on man’s isolation not only from time and space, but even from his fellowmen. The action is divided into four parts : the invasion of

¹⁹ Ibid, Page 348

²⁰ Ibid, Page 701

Anopopei, the deadlocked campaign for the island, the dénouement and lastly the sudden disintegration of the Japanese defence for the mopping up operations and the return of the men and the island to ironic normality.

Behind all this is the large gallery of characters “with tainted minds”. On Anopopei there is a representative of every personality type from every part of America. There is Croft, psychopathic Texan, Red Valsen, drifter from Montana; Wilson, abusive Southerner; Gallagher, right wing Irishman from Boston; Brown, all American guy from Tulsa; Ridges, religious farmer from Mississippi; Martinez, Mexican from San Antonio; Pollack, petty Chicago racketeer and Goldstein, a Brooklyn Jew. The two most fully developed characters are, however, the two men at the top, Gen. Cummings, the fascist philosopher, and Hearn the misanthropic liberal – two thinking men, products of small town capitalism and the two most complex characters in the novel. All the characters, however, irrespective of rank share the same predicament – disentangling the war with nature, and the enemy from the war among and within themselves. For the officers, the problem consists of preserving rationality in an increasingly irrational world. The enlisted man’s dilemma lies in preserving ones identity in a world dedicated to the mass obedience to the army. Unless the vestiges of civilisation are strengthened, men will be reduced to regimented pawns at the mercy of martial law.

Mailer’s narrative stresses the drifting away of characters from “seer” to “beast”, as instinct becomes the compelling force and they become possessed by the darker promptings of their mind. In such an atavistic world only Cummings has some higher aspirations in keeping with his “pathological adjustments” to a jungle world. Otherwise, mutual suspicion and hatred overcome the rest. Of course there are minor

exceptions in Goldstein's genuine concern for his wife and child, Red Valsen's affection for the rookie Hennessey and Toglio's simple patriotism.

Their general passing away into the way of the "beast" is best made clear in the episode of the hunt, where drunken soldiers scavenge for souvenirs among the dead – dead long enough to turn purple and green. This hunt is a nightmare revealing in Chester Eisinger's words "the deepest urge towards violence and debasement in human beings".²¹ Red finds it oppressive because he must pass through piles of rotting bodies. The stench is overpowering, the corpses horribly distorted and maggot ridden. Suddenly Red is sober and very weary. Unlike the others, Red is aware that he is surrounded by *men*. Standing over one such body he experiences a kind of epiphany:

"Very deep inside himself he was thinking that this was a man who had once wanted things, and the thought of his death was always a little unbelievable to him. The man had had a childhood, a youth and a young manhood, and there had been dreams and memories. Red was realising with surprise and shock, as if he were looking at a corpse for the first time, that a man was really a very fragile thing."²²

On the other hand, in perhaps one of the most terrifying vignettes of men at war we see in Martinez a "mixture of guilt and glee" as he smashes a corpse's mouth and absconds with its gold teeth. In desecrating the dead of his own species, here man is abandoning his own identification as a human being. Here we see that the beast has finally overcome the seer in man.

Throughout the novel, the stock responses of the soldiers of bigotry, cynicism and obscenity conceal their few redeeming qualities innate in every man everywhere. They very rarely reveal inner resources of strength not to yield to the non-human.

²¹ Eisinger, Chester – *Fiction of the Forties*, (University of Chicago Press, 1963) Page 35

²² Mailer, Norman – *The Naked and the Dead*, Page 216

The incident concerning the wounded Wilson's journey with the help of his fellow soldiers through difficult jungle terrain is one of the most brutal and vivid pictures of wartime endurance. The litter bearers' bodies ache and their minds turn delirious. However, their hatred for this thankless job imposed by the army is replaced by "guilt and empathy and the torments of his wound seemed to pass through the handles of the stretcher up into their arms".²³ This movement into an instinctive sympathy for a comrade's suffering renews those bonds which interlock men in a universal brotherhood. At first the loss of egoism within the stretcher bearers is too sudden, since war had conditioned them to survive through selfishness in a battle of "the survival of the fittest". "Each of them was fighting his private battle."²⁴ And soon two of the litter bearers, Stanley and Brown, due to complete exhaustion, lack the necessary energy to continue seeking a higher existence than a beast in a jungle. Finally drained and defeated after having lost Wilson's body in the violent rapids, Goldstein and Ridges, the two remaining men, sprawl on the beach unconsciously concerned for each other. Two soldiers, alone but paradoxically together, have shared a journey into an uncharted region, not on Croft's prophetic mountain but on that psychic terrain that distinguishes man from beast.

In 1914, T.E.Hulme predicted with accuracy, what now seems akin to prophecy that twentieth century art was moving towards the creation of forms "associated in our minds with the idea of machinery"; toward the time when a sculptor would prefer to organic, natural forms, "the hard clean surface of a piston

²³ Ibid, Page 624

²⁴ Ibid, Page 625

rod".²⁵ Again from the earliest times, Lewis Mumford points out "war has been perhaps the best propagator of the machine".²⁶ It is in war that mechanisation – and its associate forces of industrialism and staticism – acquired their most dramatic force. Thus it is in the war novels that the man/machine conflict finds its most intense and direct expression.

A close examination reveals in many American World War II novels a very definite focus on the machine and a violent protest against it. The bizarre world of Joseph Heller's Catch 22 (1961), despite its hilarious absurdity is a brutal expose of machine society carried to its most frightening extreme – an Orwellian nightmare peopled by totally amoral creatures, in which absolute power is vested in the state through military, financial and industrial control. But perhaps the influence of the machine, can nowhere be seen better than in The Naked and the Dead. This novel underlines and clarifies the function of the machine as a controlling metaphor of World War II novels by demonstrating the organic importance of that metaphor.

The central conflict of the novel is between the mechanistic forces of the "system" and the will to individual integrity. Gen. Cummings, brilliant and a ruthless spokesman for fascist power and iron handed Sgt. Croft personify the machine. Opposing them in the attempt to maintain personal integrity and identity are Cummings' confused young aid Lt. Hearn and Pvt. Red Valsen, rebellious members of Croft's platoon. Mailer, (as often commented upon by critics such as Harold Bloom) however, fails to bring this conflict to any satisfying resolution : at the novel's end

²⁵ Bloom, Harold – Norman Mailer, (Chelsea House Publishers, 1986) Page 115

²⁶ *Ibid*,

Hearn is dead and Valsen's pride is defeated, but likewise both Croft and Cummings face their own personal humiliations. However, despite the ambiguity of the resolution, the nature of it is not ambiguous. The main focus of the novel is on man's struggle against the depersonalising forces of modern society : the forces of the machine. Character, imagery symbolism and structure all contribute to the formation of a sustained metaphor in which the army, the battle and above all else the war itself stands as an all pervasive symbol of the machine age.

The structural device of alternation between events on the island and the Time Machine flashbacks into the past lives of the characters places them squarely in the context of the twentieth century: driven and moulded by forces associated in general with modern industrialism and often specifically mechanistic. Cummings, the supreme embodiment of the machine, is a direct product of the heartland of American industrialism, the Midwest just after the turn of the century. His father teaches him an industrial ethic based on hate and fear which he later incorporates with his military ambition to form the fascist ideology he expounds to Hearn. Hearn too is the scion of a factory man, who escapes from crude materialism and tries to formulate his own confused humanism that makes him a foil for Cummings. Aboard ship on his way to the Pacific, he agonises over the futile condition of the young trapped in mechanised America.

“Somewhere in America now were the cities, and the refuse sitting on the steps, the electric lights and the obeisance to them.

(All the frenetic schemings, the cigar smoke, the coke smoke, the passion for movement like an ant nest suddenly jarred. How do you conceive your own death in all the marble vaults, the brick ridges and the furnaces that lead to the market place?)

And all the bright young people of his youth had butted their heads smashed against things until they got weaker and the things still stood.

A bunch of dispossessed ... from the raucous stricken bosom of America.”²⁷

The Boston tough guy Gallagher is caught between the monotonous drab life of a city worker and the romantic idealism which he dreams of :

“What’s in it for a guy? Work tomorrow. (he would defend the lady in the lavender dress with his sword). He fell asleep in the chair, and in the morning he had a cold”.²⁸

Goldstein is trapped in the facile and mediocre conformity of materialistic lower middle class. On his twenty-five dollar welder’s salary he and his wife settle down to drab matrimony. Brown is the typical industrial salesman, hating the system he is part of. Red Valsen, takes the hobo’s road in an attempt to escape the overpoweringly real threat of the machine, which threatens to trap him in a mechanistic inferno.

“By the time he is fourteen he is able to use a drill. Good money for a kid, but down in the shafts, at the extreme end of the tunnel there isn’t room to stand. Even a kid works in a crouch, his feet stumbling in the refuse of the ore that has been left from filling the last car. It’s hot of course and damp, and the lights from their helmets are lost quickly in the black corridors. The drill is extremely heavy and a boy has to hold the butt against his chest and clutch the handles with all his strength as the bit vibrates into the rock ... Red has ten hours a day six days a week. In the winter time he can see the sky on Sundays.

Puberty in the cold dust.”²⁹

By abruptly shifting again and again from “the raucous stricken bosom of America” back to the island and the army which is obviously more intensely mechanistic, the structural pattern keeps the machine metaphor constantly in the fore.

²⁷ Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead, page 352-353

²⁸ Ibid, Page 279

²⁹ Ibid, Page 222-223

“This novel is not just about men in mechanised war, but men in mechanised society, the epitome of which is war.”³⁰ Together with this basic structure, the novel’s two primary symbols, the mountain and the army, accentuate the tensions of the man-machine dichotomy by presenting a more general yet fundamental conflict against which those tensions are projected. That is, the efforts of Hearn and Valsen to preserve their human integrity by resisting the forces of mechanism represented by Cummings and Croft. This in turn parallels the broader resistance of nature to the threat of violation by the machine. It is significant that the Japanese play a negligible role as the enemy. The real objective of the battle, pursued mainly by Croft and Cummings, is to harness the men and the machines they command in order to control the island. Mount Anaka, looming tall and stately above the teeming jungle symbolises the regal force and natural formidability of the organic world. The army machine is pitted against the mountain and the jungle in a confrontation which is both literal and symbolic. The General’s attempts to penetrate the jungle are threatened by the most elemental forces of nature, the machine’s primal opponent : rain that comes as a deluge and washes away the roads, and the hyper-organic barrier of the jungle itself “damp and rife and hot and alive with the rapt absorbed sounds of vegetation growing”. “No army, “ Mailer adds to confirm the point, “could live or move in it”.³¹ Croft’s all consuming drive to cross the mountain with his patrol is thwarted by the disparate forces of nature: the cold, bruising river, the jungle barrier, then the mountain itself overwhelming and treacherous and finally with brutal comic irony, the swarm of hornets that turns this grim assault into a farce.

³⁰ Bloom, Harold (ed)– Norman Mailer (Chelsea House Publishers, 1986) Page 120

³¹ Ibid, Page 45

Thus, the primary structural and symbolic aspects of The Naked and the Dead is accented by the conflict between man (and the natural forces with which he is associated) and the machine. Within this broad metaphorical context the conflict is powerfully manifested through four major characters. Much of the ironic and dramatic intensity of the novel comes from its double view of the battle for Anopopei. We see the campaign from afar as it is directed by Cummings and then converted into immediate reality, how it is actually carried out in the field. The dual view reveals another aspect of the battle – the one between man and machine.

This conflict at the officer level, between Cummings and Hearn is complicated by the problematics of their relationship. The General's latent homosexual attitude towards Hearn is at once tender and cruel and Hearn sees the same ambitions for power and control in the General (aspects that he despises) mirrored in his own nature. Apart from these attributes, however, their opposition to one another is abundantly clear, for while Gen. Cummings is a product of a Midwestern industrial-materialistic family, Hearn has *fled* from exactly such a background, bewildered at the plight of his generation caught in a mechanical world. Hearn is throughout the novel, pitted against the General and his brutally rigorous theories of the need for the individual to pay obeisance to the machine. In contrast to the General, Hearn's ideas seem weak and ineffectual once again accentuating the central theme that the individual is always ultimately smothered by the system. In a rebellious attempt to defy that system, Hearn deliberately drops a cigarette butt on Gen. Cummings' immaculately clean tent floor. Cummings not satisfied with bringing the mutineer down on his knees, cannot tolerate the threat to his power that Hearn represents. Hearn is banished to the patrol where he ultimately meets his death.

Cummings, not only is a spokesman for the machine, but he also seems to embody the machine in his personal life. He is coldly efficient and can work long hours without exhaustion, “without taking a halt, indeed without referring once to a map, or pausing for a decision...it had been a remarkable performance. His concentration had been almost fantastic.”³² He has fantastic powers of memory and assimilation which indicate that his mind has capacities which extend beyond the purely human. Even his personal quarters reveal no careless human presence.

“The tent was so austere. The cot looked unslept in, the desk was bare again, and the third and unoccupied chair rested at perfect right angles to the larger of the two foot-lockers. The tent floor was bare and clean unmarked by mud.”³³

The antiseptic sterility of his tent seems to be the perfect setting for Cummings to expound his views – the more abstract manifestations of his machine mentality. It is for him the manipulation of the masses through hate and fear. The army “which he considers a model for future society” functions best when “you’re frightened of the man above you, and contemptuous of your subordinates.”³⁴ And it is specifically a philosophy for the mechanised world:

“The machine technique of this century demands consolidation and with that you’ve got to have fear, because the majority of men must be subservient to the machine and its not a business they instinctively enjoy.”³⁵

Cummings’ overpowering presence as a symbol for the machine becomes

³² Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead, Page 77

³³ Ibid, Page 172

³⁴ Ibid, Page 176

³⁵ Ibid, Page 177

most explicit when he comes into contact with the actual artillery machine of his division.

“He realised the tenseness with which he had been waiting for the shell to land by the weak absorptive relief that washed through his body. All his senses felt gratified, exhausted. The war, or rather war was odd And yet there was a naked quivering heart to it which involved you deeply when you were thrust into it. All the deep dark urges of man, the sacrifices on the hilltop, and the churning lusts of the night and sleep, weren't all of them contained in the shattering screaming burst of a shell, the man-made thunder and light?In the night, at that moment, he felt such power that it was beyond joy; he was calm and sober.”³⁶

Firing one of the big guns himself, he experiences a kind of mechanistic orgasm. He is a man so influenced by the machine, its language, its power, its value that he not only defends it as an instrument of military and political control but has submitted his very being to its power. It is the object of his passion. In the entries he makes in his journal he compares the forces of the machine with those of life and regeneration, its objects with human beings. Thus the General's presence in the novel as a symbolic character takes on important implications for the central theme of the novel: that the machine is capable of overpowering man's most basic level of existence, of becoming a threat to his very nature and his humanity.

The conflict between man and machine is paralleled at the enlisted level in the battle of wills between Sgt. Croft and Red Valsen. In appearance each personifies the force he represents. Croft is like a robot man, “made of iron” and reputed to have no nerves. “His narrow, triangular face was utterly without expression ...and there seemed nothing wasted in his hard small jaw, gaunt firm cheeks and straight short nose. His thin black hair had indigo glints in it.”³⁷ Valsen, on the other hand whose opposition to the sergeant is paralleled in the jungle's resistance to the machine, looks

³⁶ Ibid, Page 566-567

³⁷ Ibid, Page 10

vitaly alive and human. Red-haired, florid and freckled he is prone to laughter. As this physical and temperamental contrast reflects, the two are natural enemies – Croft demanding submission from Valsen, and Valsen refusing to be controlled.

Valsen very much like Hearn is an escapee from the world of the machine and now finds in that escape a lonely and fragmented world. The only thing left for him in the island of Anopopei is his jealously guarded individuality, and it is this which he pits against Croft's authority. The similarities between Croft's and Cummings' characters are many and often quite subtle. While Cummings at the moment when he discovers Hearn revolting against his authority feels that "if he had been holding an animal in his hands at the instant he would have strangled it".³⁸ Croft, in a brutal demonstration of power on the mountain crushes a bird in his hand. Cummings imbibes a mechanistic philosophy from his father, Croft learns from his, a love of guns which he uses with a strange lustful excitement very much like the general. While Cummings theorises about making men subservient to the machine, Croft translates those theories into practice by running his platoon through hate and fear.

Croft finally assumes the role of an enemy to Hearn when he becomes a surrogate for the general and in the process, a symbol of the machine. Cummings had assigned Hearn to the patrol because he posed a threat to his power; now Croft deliberately leads him to his death because his human approach to leadership once again threatens that power. Croft's mad drive to conquer the mountain is paralleled in the quickened dramatic intensity of this section of the novel. Croft's desire to make his platoon submit to his will is mirrored in the general's own desire to make the division the instrument of his larger conquest. The climb up the mountain is in reality a symbolic journey for Croft in terms of a submergence of his humanity leading to the

³⁸ *Ibid*, Page 318

crushing of the bird in his hands, which anticipates Hearn's murder the very next day. In their final climactic stand off, the rifle that he levels against Valsen consequently becomes the ultimate symbol of the machine and its destructive power. The confrontation at this particular point ceases to be merely a confrontation between sergeant and soldier and becomes a symbolic confrontation between the machine incarnate and individual man in a last abortive act of rebellion. Just as Hearn had submitted to the general's will by picking up the cigarette butt from the floor in the fear of military punishment, Valsen here submits to Croft's will and the threat of his rifle. But just as Croft's last short climb up the peak is thwarted by a quirk of nature in the form of the hornets, so too the general's lust for personal glory is frustrated by the chance victory of the campaign during his absence.

The failure of both Cummings' and Croft's design would indicate the failure of the forces of the machine to conquer man and nature. This would justify reading the novel as a parable of man's refusal to be dehumanised by the forces of a mechanised society. Yet both Valsen's humiliation and Hearn's death indicate that individual man has lost his battle against the forces of the machine. In the last pages of the book we see the men of the platoon, anonymous and passive in returning to a deadening routine, knowing that all their efforts have been in vain and the campaign has been easily won in their absence. In this context the song they sing on the boat ride back takes on an ironic significance. "Roll me over/In the clover/Roll me over/Lay me down/And do it again."³⁹

³⁹ Ibid, page 707

The last thoughts of Red Valsen, broken symbol of the anti-machine seems best to capture the final mood:

“You carried it alone as long as you could, and then you weren’t strong enough to take it any longer. You kept fighting everything, and everything broke you down, until in the end you were just a little goddamn bolt holding on and squeezing when the machine went too fast.”⁴⁰

These words also echo a last clear evidence for the informing nature of the man-machine metaphor in the most influential American novel to emerge from World War II.

Stanley Guttman describes The Naked and the Dead as an “attempt to present a dilemma of power from a variety of perspectives”.⁴¹ The philosophy of history Cummings reveals to Hearn in conversations charged with irony and silent antagonism, is one in which power looms dominant and unabashed. The future belongs to those exceptional members of the ruling class who can translate the potential of America into “kinetic energy”. The true aim of the war is to supplant the decadent fascism of the old world by an authority more vigorous and cunning. Cummings believes that this century belongs to the reactionaries and Hitler is the true interpreter. Men must be controlled by hate and fear. As Cummings lectures Hearn “I can tell you Robert, that to make an army work you have to have every man in it fitted into a fear ladder”.⁴² Cummings’ theory is not restricted to the army alone, it extends to society at large. The machine age requires the consolidation of power – and there can be no power without fear. Hence Cummings concludes :

⁴⁰ Ibid, page 703-704

⁴¹ Gutman, Stanley – Mankind in Barbary, (Hanover, NH, 1975) Page 3

⁴² Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead, Page 176

“The natural role of twentieth century man is anxiety,” and adds, “Only the innocent are healthy, and the innocent man is a vanishing breed. I can tell you, nearly all of humanity is dead, merely waiting to be disinterred.”⁴³ Yet it is hard to reconcile Cummings’ view with his statement. “There’s that popular misconception of man as something between a brute and an angel. Actually man is in transit between brute and God.”⁴⁴ What is puzzling here is not the apparent contradiction contained in the General’s thought but the ambiguity of Mailer’s vision. The novel dramatises sickness and anxiety as historical facts; Croft’s and Cummings aspiration to omnipotence but their divine ambition ends in futility. Thus we sense that even if their ambitions have the endorsement of the author, the explicit statement of the novel asserts defeat. Croft fails to climb his mountain, and the general wins the campaign through chance. “Omnipotence as private motive or historical destiny, gives way to impotence.”⁴⁵ The process of osmosis discussed in philosophical debate by Cummings and Hearn, whereby America becomes infused by the historical moment and transforms fascism into kinetic energy, becomes the ideological framework for the novel. Within such a theory, which is not opposed by any forceful counter argument, the American army provides an effective model for future social organisations. Cummings’ theory is systematically and theoretically complete besides being lucidly articulated. The General has undergone a rigorous self-education; basically he postulates that a power elite will control the destiny of nations – he postulates a Nazi century. The tormenting of Roth and Gallagher’s intense hatred of Jews, together with the class divisions

⁴³ Ibid, Page 322

⁴⁴ Ibid, Page 323

⁴⁵ Hasan, Ihab – Radical Innocence, (Harper & Row, 1961) Page 144

between officers and men, seem to internalise within the novel the triumph of Cummings' Hitler-like aphorism, "the only morality of the future is power morality".⁴⁶

In Cummings' perspective social evolution may be likened to a condition of war. The Naked and the Dead as an imaginative environment seems designed for the dominance of men such as Cummings and Croft. The general, for example, thinks in the manner of an intellectual villain when he surveys his battle organisation; he gloats over thousands of men deployed under his command, troops charged with America's energy which had become kinetic and could not be reversed. In such a mechanistic system, a rifle is spiritualised as an extension of man's power and Cummings likewise apotheosises the machine. When he visits a gunner to supervise the firing, this logic is turned into a rhapsodic epiphany of war; Cummings sees into wars' primitive psychological justification:

"The war, or rather war was odd ... it was all covered with tedium and routine, regulations and procedure, and yet there was a naked quivering heart to it which involved you deeply when you were thrust into it ..."⁴⁷

Cummings, one of the most impressive creations in Second World War fiction, attains insight here into the bestiality of war, its atavistic power to strip away the complexities of modern life and to plunge the soldier back into the pre-history of man as a species. Such a vision acts for the general as a purifying instrument. Passages in Mailer's novel, like this revelatory awareness of Cummings seem appropriate to dramatise the global scale and atomic energy of the Second World

⁴⁶ Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead, Page 323

⁴⁷ Ibid, Page 566

War.⁴⁸ The potency of Cummings as a character and it is true of The Naked and the Dead as a whole, is that fascism is imaginatively apprehended at every level and dramatised as a working system of social control. Such a fictional logic informs The Naked and the Dead throughout.

This emerges structurally and linguistically through the novel's concern with violence in thought and action, above all in the callous shooting of prisoners. The death of Hearn promises another prominent example: Croft callously plans the lieutenant's death, instructing Martinez to remain silent about the Japanese still guarding the pass. The "fear ladder", induces Martinez to obey Croft's orders, and Hearn is pointlessly killed, ostensibly because he threatens Croft's dominance of command over the platoon. The reality of Hearn's death is, however, dissipated by his posthumous incorporation into the ranks of the hated officer class. "They're all bastards." This kind of prevailing nihilism, carried through the novel's unity of tone and language, is also expressed through the soldiers' maxims: "its all bloody noses;" "it never turns out as you want it;" "everybody loses;" "win or lose, its all in the cards," or in Minetta's vision of omnipotent destruction, "everything is smashed all over the world". *The shattering gyre of the war has deprived the troops of any individual control over events; they represent as Cummings envisions them in his game of chess with Hearn, mere pawns.*

Mailer's novel demonstrates the energy of negative emotions, of loathing, violence, disgust, parasitism and prejudice. A hint of the macabre side of this vision, is provided by a pattern of imagery related to sores, putrefaction, and bodily decay, as

⁴⁸ Walsh, Jeffrey – American War Literature:1914 to Vietnam (St. Martins Press, New York, 1982)
Page 116

when the novelist writes of Hearn, “He felt like an insect crawling through the entrails of a horse”.⁴⁹ The Naked and the Dead has much of this symbolism derived from the bowels and the mortuary. Here again, as an example, is Mailer’s analysis of Hearn’s feelings on another occasion: “He felt as if an enormous cyst of suppuration and purulence had burst inside him and was infecting his bloodstream now, washing through all the conduits of his body in a sudden violent flux of change.”⁵⁰ The imagery noted here confirms the impression that the reader receives of The Naked and the Dead as a moral fable designed to exhibit the regressive tendencies of men at war.⁵¹ The setting plays an important part in this context.

The locale initially has the properties of a magical island – a sensual land of “ruby wines, golden sands and indigo trees”, but this vision cannot last and very soon Anopopei changes into a place like the surrounding “black, dead, ocean”. Very much like William Golding in The Lord of the Flies, Mailer transports the men from any vestiges of urban civilisation, and places them near the elemental jungle and primordial ocean. The brutalities committed by the Americans seem to be thrown into relief by the terrain of a tropical rain forest.

Mailer borrows style and technique from his early literary influences - “I didn’t have much literary sophistication while writing The Naked and the Dead. I admired Dos Passos immensely and wanted to write a book that would be like one of his. My novel was frankly derivative, directly derivative ... I had four books on my desk all the time I was writing : Anna Karenina, Of Time and the River, USA and

⁴⁹ Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead, Page 263

⁵⁰ Ibid, page 280

⁵¹ Walsh, Jefferey – American War Literature (New York, 1982) Page 118

Studs Lonigan ... The atmosphere of The Naked and the Dead, the over-spirit is Tolstoy, the rococo comes out of Dos Passos, the fundamental slogging style from Farrell, and the occasional over-rich descriptions from Wolfe.”⁵²

In his reliance upon such models, Mailer demonstrated for the first and last time in his writing career, an “all-bets-covered-caution” with respect to the form his novel took. Critics have also been quick to point out the political and philosophical correspondences between the novel and its antecedents in the leftist American literary scene in the 1930s. In its stress upon deterministic views of human behavior, and its realization of a world in which the individual is dehumanised and subjected to the efficient functioning of entrenched systems of control, The Naked and the Dead may seem a somewhat stale recapitulation of a style and a vision inappropriate to a changed post war world. However, as Nigel Leigh has argued, one should not be misled by the novel’s dated style. Mailer’s concern is neither primarily retrospective, nor a preoccupation with the war itself, but is rather prophetic of the crises of the post-war United States.

In the shadow of the Holocaust, Mailer like Saul Bellow, a fellow Jewish contemporary, saw America’s future, humanity’s future, as tending towards the cancellation of freedom and creative individualism. There are intriguing similarities to be found in Bellow’s first novel The Dangling Man and Mailer’s first novel. Both writers conclude their novels ironically, the war fought for freedom and democracy has somehow conspired to undermine the appeal of these ideals. In both novels we witness the demise of liberal humanism as it succumbs to the leash of military

⁵² Quoted in Michael Glenday’s Norman Mailer (St. Martins Press, 1995) Page 48

structure. Major Dalleson's emergence as mock hero through inadvertent circumstances, at the end of the novel anticipates such types in that other, rather delayed American novel of the Second World War, Joseph Heller's Catch 22, where again we see the military as a paradigm of inhuman totalitarian bureaucracy.

Both Heller and Mailer, like Hemingway before them, offer us war as a metaphor for much else besides. In its structure and effects on men, it represents Mailer's views of the modern social order. As Richard Poirier has noted "war was the determining force of his imagination long before he had the direct experience of it that went into his first big novel".⁵³ Yet although the war is the context of his novel, he has very little to say about the enemy. As Leigh remarks "no attempt is made to write about the international nature of the war. In reality Mailer is concerned with the enemy located within.... the United States."⁵⁴ As we become more familiar with the platoon members we find what they most despise and fear is rooted in their prior experiences of life in America.

In Lt. Hearn's view, only General Cummings seemed capable of transcending what he calls "the busy, complex mangle, the choked vacuum of American life".⁵⁵ This is the America out of which Mailer's soldier's struggle. In contrast to it the war may even have its attractions- order, a certain place in the hierarchy, and the hope, however baseless, that soldiering would not be without its satisfactions. On board the landing craft taking them back from Mount Anaka, the platoon members find a certain startled pride in themselves..."we did okay to go as far as we did".⁵⁶ Against this

⁵³ Poirier, Richard – Norman Mailer (New York, 1972) Page 28

⁵⁴ Leigh, Nigel – Radical Fictions and the novels of Norman Mailer (New York, 1990) Page 7

⁵⁵ Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead, Page 85

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, Page 708

Mailer puts the America of the “Time Machine”, one that chokes and mangles individual effort, an ironic reversal of the mythical land of untrammelled possibility, the dream America.

Who are the naked, who are the dead? The book’s title has become so famous that by now it is easy to ignore its curious implications. Most readers probably understand the title to mean “ the naked *and* dead” , that is the blasted, stripped bodies of soldiers on a battlefield, the conventional scenery of innumerable war movies and innumerable blood-and-guts war novels. But that is not the title. It is *the* naked and *the* dead; that “and” implies not an identity but an opposition between the two key terms. If a heavy death count is one of the indices of “realism” in a war story this book is relatively peaceful. A total of four characters of any importance die in the course of the novel. Besides, there are not even any battle scenes in The Naked and the Dead. The single Japanese assault on the Americans is described indirectly in terms of a violent tropical storm. The final American breakthrough which ensures American control over the mythic Pacific island is hardly described at all, for while it is taking place, the main characters are on the other side of the island on a mission which contributes nothing to the success of the operation.

One clue to the subtler implications of Mailer’s title comes late in the course of the novel when Roth, a college educated, middle-aged Jew tired and battered by the anti- Semitism of his fellow soldiers sees through his panic and exhaustion - “all the protective devices, the sustaining facades of his life had been eroding slowly in the caustic air of the platoon; his exhaustion had pulled out the props, and Gallagher’s

blow had toppled the rest of the edifice. He was naked another way now. He rebelled against it, was frustrated that he could not speak to them and explain it away.”⁵⁷

This is nakedness in a different way – a few words and a blow have forced Roth to a point of existential nakedness where he confronts the fragile nature of his own mind and body without any props to mask himself from himself. Yet it is at this point of his nakedness that he is intensely alive – terribly frightened, exalted and intimately conscious of his most intensely conscious self. To be dead, on the other hand is never to have had such a moment of self revelation.

Roth’s moment of panic is indeed a minor one more fraught with terror and failure than with the exhilarating discovery of a new life. Yet it is an important incident for it helps us to see that among the many inter-related narrative structures of the novel – one way to read The Naked and the Dead is as a series, a carefully varied cluster of just such moments.

This confrontation between Roth and an intensely personal void, however, could not be possible without the pressures of so called peacetime society. The ironic interactions between Roth, a Brooklyn Jew, and Gallagher, a Boston Irish Catholic provide Mailer with one of his most enduring metaphors for an exploration of the national psyche.⁵⁸ The real war in this novel, is not so much seen as a conflict between the Japanese and the Americans, but the ceaseless warfare of political and personal styles of identity, of dullness with vitality, of prejudice with vision, of the existentially naked with the imaginatively dead.

⁵⁷ Ibid, Page

⁵⁸ McConnel, Frank D. – Four Post-War American Novelists (University of Chicago Press, 1977) Pg 67

The war as a historical fact is seen as a precipitating image. Since the Iliad, the most valuable stories of war have been stories about exactly what the extreme, restrictive situation of war does to men's ideas of themselves, their world and their Gods. Mailer here manages to sustain and enrich that ancient tradition – to write a novel which is both a novel of manners as it is an epic of the battlefield.⁵⁹

Another moment of nakedness comes for Brown, the cowardly sergeant, while carrying the dying Wilson from the jungle to the beach. This moment of self revelation for Brown is in terms of almost tender solicitude for the dying man. The two men make small talk and Brown in a sudden rush of pity whispers, "Just take it easy, boy", feeling for one brief moment the failure and disappointments of his own life open into a joyous feeling of participation and unity. "It could not last," Brown realises.

"It was as if Brown had awakened in the middle of the night, helpless in the energies his mind had released in sleep. In the transit to awareness, to wakefulness, he would be helpless for a time, tumbling in the wake of his dream, separated from all the experiences, all the trivia that made his life recognisable and bearably blunted to himself. He would be uncovered, lost in the plane of darkness, containing within himself, not only all his history and all of the present in the ebbs and pulses of his body but he would be the common denominator of all men and the animals behind them, walking blindly in the primordial forests."⁶⁰

This it seems, is the quintessential moment, when politics is wiped out and in its place is something vital leading to something visionary and momentous towards which all his characters strive, in one way or another. But for Brown it cannot last. In Mailer's world a man is not just tested and refined by his moments of nakedness, he is

⁵⁹ Ibid,

⁶⁰ Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead, Page 537

also judged by them. If the man's past has been one of little hypocrisies, then the moment will not endure, will not result in a new more heroic style of living. The vision of Albert Camus bases itself upon this naked revelatory moment. In The Naked and the Dead, there is an intense ferocity with which the characters are judged – both by themselves and their creator – and frozen at the moment of judgement into the postures of their heroism or cowardice. His characters are all trapped within a testing and judging present, the present of the “naked moment”.⁶¹

In The Naked and the Dead this highly individual quality of Mailer's work achieves its best expression: a blend of vision and story, form and substance which is lacking in Mailer's later novels, precisely because he never writes a novel about war itself – that vast tapestry of human activity.

On the one hand, the novel is a series of individual, existential confrontations of the members of the invading army, on the other hand it is also about the actions of men living and acting in the mass. If on the existential level of personal confrontation the book is a series of moments of revelatory nakedness, on the political level it is the large scale plot of the invasion and occupation of the island of Anopopei. On both levels, wartime conditions serve to refine and clarify the underlying qualities of everyday peacetime personality and politics.

The Homeric simile of war, celebrated ever after in the Western imagination, is turned inside out by Mailer in this novel. The killing and destruction of war is not seen as ironically deformed analogues to the acts of peacetime, but rather as ironically horrifying clarified extensions of those acts. Rather than seeing war as Homer and

⁶¹ McConnel, Frank D. – Four Post-War Novelists , Page 69

Virgil did, as a cancellation of peacetime urban life, Mailer presents us with an apocalyptic vision of war, as the ongoing, unacknowledged condition of the most pacific urban life.

Civilised life, according to Mailer, whatever its ordinary assurances is always, to the enlightened imagination involved in a state of total war between the visionary naked and the visionary dead.

This is the world of the novel. Who then are its heroes? Excepting Hearn and Cummings, surely none of its officers. Or is it the enlisted men? Some of these, like Red Valsen are presented as negative personalities throughout the novel; some like Roth, eternal victims; and a few like Wilson, just average men. None manages to understand his experience or bring life to account. But it is Cummings, Croft and Hearn who possess the richest personalities, and it is in their actions that the novel reveals itself.

Gen. Cummings nurses a vision of his manifest destiny. It is fed on sheer intelligence and power. His character is complex, contradictory and compelling because ruthlessness and sensitivity mingle in him. He has an almost demonic consciousness of power which threatens to choke him. In his desire to become God, he is constantly thwarted by the resistance of men. The campaign he wins defeats his most exalted Faustian ambition. Cummings on the island, is like Faust in his study seeking to “learn the things that hold/The world together at its core, /So (he) may potencies and seeds behold”.⁶²

Sgt. Croft is Cummings’ earthly double. The General wants to mould the

⁶² Goethe, J.W. – *Faust*, translated by Charles E. Passage (New York, 1965) Page 19-20, ii, 382-385

curve of human destiny, the sergeant must climb Mt. Anaka, the highest peak on the island. Faust here assumes the guise of a Texan hunter – and criminal. For Croft shoots a man dead, though he is merely ordered to fire above the head of the rioters and he murders a Japanese prisoner, after giving him a cigarette simply for the sinister excitement of the thing. Compared to Cummings, Croft's sense of omnipotence is almost primitive. The mountain represents for him the way to his own immortality – everything he must know and conquer. He views it “with awe and hunger and the peculiar unique ecstasy he had felt after Hennessey was dead or when he had killed the Japanese prisoner”.⁶³ The austerity of its peak beckons him to set foot on its crest which leads to Hearn's death and goads his men to the breaking point.

Lt. Hearn, stands between these two “demonic heroes”, the natural enemy of both. But his defeat, though more final, has greater value and his role in the novel is central both from the thematic and dramatic standpoint. For Hearn is the dramatic link between the two other men who never meet. Cummings humiliates him and sends him to lead Croft's platoon, and it is Croft who plots his death and assumes command. Furthermore, Hearn shows a latent affinity with the Faustian impulse of the two men he must oppose. He too wanted to shape the world in his own image and impose his will upon it, but he does not have the necessary passion and ruthlessness it takes. Aloof and somewhat cold, his intelligence is too skeptical, his disenchantment too real. He rebels against the affluent society his father represents and moves through the literary circles of Harvard away from the inadequacies of a liberal ideology. The communist intellectuals reject him as a quixotic bourgeois. A rebel first, he becomes a

⁶³ Mailer, Norman – The Naked and the Dead, Page 379

drifter, an outsider, a spectator – till the war. But his contest with Cummings and with Croft later on, rescues Hearn from hollow disengagement. Defeated by the general, who in a symbolic gesture of subjugation forces him to pick up a cigarette butt, and destroyed by Croft through death, Hearn nevertheless achieves some dignity in the role of victim. He comes to understand why “it is better to be the hunted than the hunter”. The statement is a product of a crisis, the end of his encounter with adversity. It expresses the typical insight of the rebel victim. In the case of Hearn it is an advance over the philosophy which so far had shaped his life. “The only thing to do is to get by on style. He had said that once, lived by it in the absence of anything else, and it had been a working guide, almost satisfactory until now.”⁶⁴

Hearn’s belief in style stands in contrast to Croft and Cummings in effectiveness – the form of an action as against its results, the means versus the end. But in all cases, the characters appeal to no standard outside of themselves, no objective ideal. The ‘*demonic hero*’ creates meaning by blindly asserting his will. The ‘*victim-hero*’ finds meaning by carrying his meaning to the point of self-destruction. None of the “heroes” in this novel really succeeds in his search, although Hearn comes closer than any other to redeeming the wasteland of Anopopei.

But in this novel nobody wins. Mailer’s pessimism is implicit in the naturalistic literary philosophy as the very ground upon which his novel stands. The dominant view of experience here is that an overall futility marks man’s every effort. The role of accident in human life is so much more important than individual will, mind or skill that life appears to be meaningless. It is a naturalistic irony that

⁶⁴ Ibid, Page 280

Cummings should devote all his brilliant talents to his campaign to win the island from the Japanese, only to see victory come through accident through the blundering efforts of a stupid subordinate.⁶⁵ And it is a naturalistic horror that Croft leads a reconnaissance behind the Japanese lines that discovers nothing and yields only intolerable suffering and senseless loss of life. It is a naturalistic cliché that the insensate world of nature should challenge and defeat man, as Mt. Anaka does provoke and conquer Croft, who sacrifices his men and himself to a blind compulsion to conquer it. Although it adds nothing to the pessimism of the book, the speech that Mailer gives to his characters is in the naturalistic tradition. It has the coarseness and monotony of the vulgate at its most scatological level.⁶⁶

The serious ideological content of the novel is on the whole satisfying, especially as Mailer has made it an integral part of his action, dramatising it in the conflict between Hearn and Cummings. But one troubling question remains. How can we have as a real threat a willed future and a controlled society in a naturalistic context which assure us that experience is meaningless because chance is all?

Ultimately the destiny of the human race, and of American society in particular is left, not with the stiff necked individual, nor with the military strongman or the intellectual. Rather it falls to the mediocre, placidly stupid, as represented by Major

Dalleson. The very last scene in the novel shows him, pleased to be moored once again in the reassuring monotony of bureaucratic detail, filled with self satisfied

⁶⁵ Eisinger, Chester, E. – Fiction of the Forties (University of Chicago Press, 1963) Page 37

⁶⁶ Ibid

glee at one of his few original ideas: the use of a pin-up girl to illustrate the use of map co-ordinates.

This final implicit statement on the ascendancy of reactionary mediocrity in post-war America in conjunction with the pre-occupation with the theme of the shabbiness of the American dream, shows Mailer to be very much a social critic. The obvious and self admitted influence upon his work of Farrell, Steinbeck and Doss Passos places him at the beginning of his career within the literary continuum established by the social novels of the thirties.

In the last two decades following the publication of The Naked and the Dead, Mailer was to move progressively further from the use of obviously derivative elements in his fiction; but he was to remain consistently critical of the ills of American society. Closely linked with his involvement with immediately contemporary issues, and his impending break from the direct influence of other writers, is Mailer's rejection of the common man held by social writers of the Depression. Instead we have a sophisticated and pessimistic vision of the human condition which is decidedly characteristic of post-war literary values. Yet it is this very element of concern with a more contemporary problem which draws vitriolic criticism of The Naked and the Dead from at least one critic writing in 1960. Daniel Spiceland in his The American War Novel concludes his otherwise perceptive short treatment of Mailer's book with this condemnation.

"What has Mailer learned from war? What is the question asked, the theme expounded in The Naked and the Dead What right has an author to choose the topic of war and neither to protest it or learn something from it? Mailer leaves the reader with no tragic sense. One would suppose that so brutal a description of war must result in bitter protest. Instead, his war experience teaches nothing. The nada of the early Hemingway is at least clouded in a romantic idealism gone sour. Mailer's world is a world stripped of hope. The novel as a literary form is about man- sinful, murderous, inhuman, and evil mostly, but man who, in the final analysis seeks

redemption and who desires to endure against all forces his own as well as the outside, natural forces. The failure of these negative novels in portraying real characters stems from this refusal to see a purpose in man's efforts to endure."⁶⁷

These charges, cloaked in an obvious subjectivity, stem from Mailer's failure to subscribe to the particular form of "protest" which Spicehandler feels is necessary for the validity of a war novel. Yet it is in the very terms of this condemnation that Mailer's particular achievement in The Naked and the Dead may be defined. For Mailer learnt from war something that no earlier war has so clearly taught: the futility of the human condition. War for Mailer, is more than a subject for fiction in itself: it is a concrete representation of human weakness and of the society created by such weakness. If the protest in this novel were limited, as Spicehandler seems to suggest, only to a condemnation of the American social structure, it would be understandable, for Mailer's world is indeed a "world stripped of hope". Within this hopelessness, however, there is a germ of a protest. Mailer's fiction is always even at this point "about man who in the final analysis, seeks redemption and who desires to endure against all forces" In The Naked and the Dead redemption is impossible, and even the endurance of such a man as Red Valsen, defined as it is solely on negative terms, must crumble. Mailer saw the plight of the individual of the post-war years primarily in negative terms, but this does not mean that he was willing to give up entirely on man's chances for redemption and to rest on the black vision of The Naked and the Dead as his final statement. Although Mailer has maintained his cynicism in regard to American society he progressed steadily in his writings towards the vision of possible hope for individual salvation.

⁶⁷ Spicehandler, Daniel – The American War Novel (Columbia University, NY, 1960) Page 208

Looking backwards at the First World War novels, The Naked and the Dead seems to offer an instructive example for comparison with the earlier cluster of novels. The first encounter of Hemingway, Dos Passos and Cummings had resulted in initial recoil, translated after aesthetic assimilation into works of considerable artistic merit. Hemingway pared down language and concretised experience formally; Cummings in The Enormous Room eulogised individuals who themselves incarnated regenerative metaphors. The novels of these First World War writers exhibit as a common basis a faith in the potentiality of the hero to perform significant morally affirmative acts. Frederick Henry, John Andrews (Three Soldiers) and Richard Plume (Plumes) are all good men. In Mailer's novel the reader meets a very different situation and finds it hard to sympathise with any of the characters of the novel. Indeed a plausible case can be advanced that not a single actively good man emerges throughout The Naked and the Dead. None of the characters seems capable of taking the kind of redemptive and positive action that Frederick Henry did in negotiating a separate peace. History had, obviously intervened between the years of the boom and depression, the growth of fascism, Auschwitz, the dropping of the two atomic bombs and the beginning of the cold war with the Soviet Union.

In The Naked and the Dead no significant personal or social affirmation seems possible; marriage and the redemptive power of love, for example, are discredited throughout the novel: many of the major characters have suffered marital discord. Croft has been unfaithful to his wife and she to him; Cummings describes his wife as a "bitch"; Red Valsen has abandoned Lois; Pollack who has been seduced by a woman as a boy regards all women with suspicion, and Hearn desires women merely as sex objects. We have travelled a long way from Frederick Henry's responsible

attitude towards Catherine Barkley. A series of other striking dissimilarities between Mailer's work and the earlier novels may be observed. A key one is the response displayed by characters towards the enemy: Dos Passos' characters generally show a reverence for the enemy nowhere paralleled in Mailer; even the gentle Martinez prods a dead Japanese and bodies are looted unceremoniously in one of the most graphic portrayals of wartime savagery.

Hemingway's Frederick Henry capitalises upon comradeship as a countervailing force of war, and he finds consolation in the dignity of Count Greffi and in the decency of both Rinaldi and the hotel barman who supplies him with a boat to escape with Catherine to Switzerland. In Hemingway too, the Winchester-on-the-wall tradition of the frontiersmen is in some measure reaffirmed in the self-reliant conduct of Frederick Henry and Nick Adams. But in The Naked and the Dead this becomes transmuted through the actions of the murderous Westerner, the Texan Croft, into perverted blood-lust. Earlier heroes, too, had found a talismanic power in nature, but Croft once again reverses this tendency by squeezing the throat of a bird with an almost sexual pleasure. In the case of Hearn, the Time Machine plays a crucial role in enabling the reader to understand the origins of his alienation and his descent into nada. Hearn has been shaped irrevocably by his class origins; he cannot establish rapport or forge a liaison with the enlisted men, neither can he stomach the ethics of his own officer class. Such an isolated position confirms his alienation; instead of gaining promotion in the company of officers, he dies in confusion betrayed by enlisted men. Hearn's anxiety is emblematic of the theme of alienation displayed by Second World War writers.

Whereas the drama of the World War I novel derived from the element of shock arising out of the new and horrifying experience of war, the World War II novelists “lack such a point of view for they have not found in war sufficient contrast with the culture in which they grew up”.⁶⁸ Paradoxically, one result of this situation is that this generation of writers escapes in most instances from the “lost generation” idea despite a lack of feeling that they have seen the end of war. Their style tends to be firm, unemotional and realistic. In this it tends to be different from the mass hysteria characteristic of much World War I literature. The tone of the World War II novelists becomes cynical over the materialistic interpretations of the origins of the war rather than over the emotional shock of misplaced idealism or the horror of mechanised slaughter.

In at least one sense the question of the place of war in human affairs supplies a standard by which the novels of World War II can be divided into two categories. In one category are the works of those novelists – Mailer, and James Jones among who we see the brutality of war as an expression of irrepressible human instinct. These writers subscribe more or less openly to the point of view of Ernest Jones in Essays in Applied Psychology in that their characters “or some of them” are “war lovers” and the implication that war has an importance to human beings other than as a means of national policy.

“Four repressed instincts play a cardinal part in all war: the passions for cruelty, destruction, lust and loot. It is popularly held that the manifestations of these are incidental to war, and not inherent in it; that they are regrettable, though perhaps unavoidable, complications which should be reduced to a minimum. But it is found in practice that where one of these passions is suppressed another flames out the more to take its place; one army may rape where another loots.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Aichinger, Peter – The American Soldier in Fiction (Iowa State University Press, 1975) Page 60

⁶⁹ Jones, Ernest – Essays in Applied Psychology (London, 1951) Page 70

In the other category are writers like Irwin Shaw and Herman Wouk who imply through the words and attitudes of their protagonists, that war is an aberration of human conduct and that civilised men are not drawn inexorably to indulge in it. Some of these soldiers, like Croft, either overtly or implicitly find that war precipitates latent killer instinct and offers them the chance to express what is presumably a permanent aspect of human nature. More important, the mood of all these novels is that war had become interminable. In The Naked and the Dead the soldiers look forward only to campaign after campaign until they are all destroyed. As a result the soldiers in these works, instead of having the unified outlook of the characters in the works of those authors who see war as a passing phenomenon, tend to be sharply divided into war lovers and pacifists. Croft's positive delight in combat contrasts with Martinez's agonising over the sinfulness of killing. In the novels of World War I the concept of the "war lover" would occasionally crop up; for example, the priest in A Farewell to Arms who identified himself with the peasants and their outlook said :

"There are people who would make war. In this country there are many like that."⁷⁰

More frequently the source of the war was associated with political or diplomatic issues. The most significant trend among the World War II novelists, which culminated in the novels of the absurd, was to recognise that war was not a passing phenomenon and to make explicit the element of individual responsibility in facing the problem of violence.

⁷⁰ Hemingway Ernest – A Farewell to Arms, Page 54

It could be said that the American novelists of World War II attributed a pragmatic and realistic outlook to the fictional soldier. Most of the writers base their novels on the active service they had seen during the war and were better qualified by their experience to treat a broader spectrum of military life than were the earlier group of novelists. But if they did treat such widely diversified aspects of the political and ethical facets of the war and saw the soldier as both combatant and conqueror, the individual author tended to have a narrower outlook than his World War I counterpart. There is some bias towards a "platoon cosmology" with a few principal characters and a "couple of dozen caricatures"⁷¹ especially among those novelists who felt unable to handle the whole scope of the war and yet considered that the action of a single individual would be insignificant. In other words, these authors sought to recreate the melting-pot atmosphere and to express a multiplicity of viewpoints without going beyond the manageable bounds of a platoon or section. Perhaps nowhere is this best illustrated than in Mailer's novel. The novels of the Second War are more often characterised by a sober belief that if the team performs well and the coach calls the right shots all will be well with humanity.

It is exactly this level-headed realism, coupled with a natural tendency to emphasise the sensational aspects of warfare, that has aroused a considerable body of adverse comments on these novels. As early as 1944 (The Naked and the Dead had not been published) Joseph Remenyi voiced what was to become a general criticism of World War II:

⁷¹ Aichinger, Peter – The American Soldier in Fiction (Iowa, 1975) Page 63

“They are sensational, but often boring; the writers of personal narratives are inclined to be garrulous or champions of ‘thrillers’”⁷². Malcolm Cowley says that while they are technically more competent than the novels of World War I, they lack any example of outstanding literary merit. “They form a table land, not a chain of mountains.”⁷³ Leslie Fiedler observes “all the novels about the Second World War could never convince an intelligent observer from Betelgeusa that such an event had ever occurred; for they clearly represent the reaction of sensitive young men to a conflict they had read about during their high school days”.⁷⁴ John Aldridge complains that “it is as if these novels had been written too easily and their authors had too painless an apprenticeship”.⁷⁵

Yet in all of these comments one senses a typical desire for either originality of plot or sensational statistics. Since war does not change its fundamental characteristics (although the author’s perception of it might) and since the percentage of casualties in World War II were far lower than in World War I, these critics were bound to be deceived in their expectations. They did not perceive that the balanced outlook of some World War II writers would lead to a new assessment of the place of warfare in society.

Finally there is the well-founded charge, which could probably be leveled at the novelists of any war, that too many novels are restricted to a bald and ultimately boring realism. “This is the way it was, the author says. He was there and cannot be

⁷² Remenyi, Joseph – The Psychology of War Literature (Sewanee Review, Summer 1955, LII) Page 137

⁷³ Cowley, Malcolm – War Novels: After two Wars, in Modern American Fiction (ed) A. Walton Litz (Oxford University Press, 1963)

⁷⁴ Fiedler, Leslie – The Ant and the Grasshopper, Partisan Review, XXII, Page 412

⁷⁵ Aldridge, John, W – After the Lost Generation (New York, 1951) Page 81.

contradicted ...the urgency to explain the way it really was ... can dismiss cause and effect in favour of merely how it happened.”⁷⁶ In many respects this aspect of the war novel is part of the tendency described by Philip Rahv of the American writer to depend too heavily on experience as opposed to psychological interpretation as the basis of his work – a tendency that would naturally be aggravated in a wartime situation where many inexperienced writers would try to capitalise on a body of sensational experience.⁷⁷ If one recognises the validity of these comments, it is also necessary to assess the reasons for the relative mediocrity of the World War II novels. William Philips has claimed: “After the thirties writing took to greater realism in style *and theme, to smaller subjects, to more recognisable worlds.*”⁷⁸

The tendency to seek mundane answers to the nations’ problems was not peculiar to the war novel. In any case if World War II was less disastrous than World War I in terms of American ideals, it was also less capable of dramatisation in intensely personal terms. Early in the war Amy Loveman said:

“The war remains for most of us an amorphous drama, impossible to realise in the agony of the individual, as we realised it in 1914 ...”⁷⁹

This was largely because in World War II standardised military procedures had replaced the unorthodox freelance attitudes and roles of men in the Red Cross Ambulance Services of the First War. The eighteen year old Hemingway seizing his moment of Italian heroism is an unforgettable figure, but to Fiedler, Norman Mailer

⁷⁶ Nostrand, Albert Van – *The Denatured Novel* (New York, 1960) Page 183

⁷⁷ Rahv, Philip – The Cult of Experience in American Writing, *Partisan Review*, Vol. VII, 1940, Page 412-424

⁷⁸ Philips, Williams – What Happened in the Thirties in *Commentary Reader*, Norman Podhoretz (ed), Page 762

⁷⁹ Lovemen, Amy – Then and Now, *Saturday Review of Literature*, XXVII, 8 August 1940

and James Jones must have been indistinguishable from thousands of other GIs in the Pacific.

Where a collection of highly articulate individuals saw World War I in the comparatively restricted area of Western Europe, American GIs in the Second War fought on every part of the globe. The attention of the reader and the writer was consequently divided from the very beginning. It was almost impossible for one man to have a synoptic view of the war. Furthermore the nature of the war itself, tended to reduce its dramatic value insofar as drama derives from controversy. As Cowley has said, the writers of the Second War do not presume to judge the war precisely because they were able to appreciate its objectives.⁸⁰ World War I was a long drawn bloody affair; in World War II, victories were more clear cut, the team rolled forward.

The complexity of the operations of the Second World War also brought home to the new generation of writers, an increasing awareness of the complexity of life in general. Referring to the works of Cummings and Hemingway, Aldridge remarks :

“In each case the emphasis was on the individual rather than the mass, the simple and the concrete rather than the complex and ideological ... What Dos Passos saw in terms of the experience of three men, these writers see in terms of whole armies, whole societies.”⁸¹

This is the consideration that gave Norman Mailer pause in writing The Naked and the Dead; it is written in the “tone of a man whose capacity for political indignation is inhibited by a very keen sense of the world as a very complicated place”.⁸² The cautiousness of the novelist of World War II was part of a growing political maturity.

⁸⁰ Cowley, Malcolm – War Novels: After Two Wars in A. Walton Litz (ed) Modern American Fiction (New York, 1963) Page 311-312

⁸¹ Aldridge, John W. – After the Lost Generation (New York, 1951) Page 114-115

⁸² Podhoretz, Norman – Doings and Undoings : The Fifties and After in American Literature (New York, 1965) Page 184

Ultimately, however, the novelist's real difficulty in dramatising World War II derived from the effect that World War I had on the popular concepts of duty and heroism.

“The notions of glory, honour and courage lose all meaning when in the West men still nominally Christian, come to believe that the worst thing of all is to die – when for the first time in thousand years, it is possible to admit that no cause is worth dying for.”⁸³

Perhaps in the United States this loss of the sense of the heroic quality of combat was not completely assimilated until the nation had experienced a full-scale commitment to a foreign war, but the novels of World War II illustrate the increasing awareness of the problem. The writers are faced time and again with a fundamental dilemma: the novels that lack a hero or heroic action tend to be mediocre or incohesive, and yet the pattern of heroic action tends to end in meaningless destruction.

The prime significance of World War II novels written by American authors was that they allowed the writers to work out the conflict between native pragmatism and the heroic tradition. In this sense they represent the basis for the movement toward the absurd that occurred later in the decade.

⁸³ Fiedler, Leslie – Waiting for the End (London, 1965) Page 30

CHAPTER IV

A WAR NOVEL WITH A DIFFERENCE STRUCTURE AND MEANING IN *CATCH 22*

War novel publication in the United States followed an interesting pattern in the period from 1944 to 1962. By the late fifties more than two hundred and fifty novels had been published dealing with the subject of war. Of these, most had been written between 1944 and 1952. Thereafter, publication became sporadic. Furthermore, war in these novels was still treated in conventional terms as a vastly impressive experience; the author's main object was not always to express a sense of revulsion.

Between 1957 and 1962 the publication of a small but important group of novels heralded a new approach to war literature on the part of the American writers. The historical experience of Korea and Vietnam had generated a complex and radically new consciousness of war for Americans. In the immediate years following the Second World War, the development of sophisticated nuclear technology and the continuing economic expansion of the US seemed to presage an unbroken era of military supremacy: in reality America's involvement with Asia proved otherwise. Both Korea and Vietnam turned out to be wars significantly different from earlier "conventional" wars. Specifically the Vietnam War revealed both the limits of American power and the moral ambivalence of advanced technology.

Earlier, in the Second World War the rise of fascism had provided a legitimate enemy demanding the involvement of the US. The United States in its turn, through the supply of material resources and manpower, could claim to have played a major part in the defeat of Nazism. Vietnam was different in that it produced a backlash of

negative opinion, and in the final analysis, it was impossible to win either militarily or politically.

During the last two decades, literary production of American war novels has continued to be prolific. In the realm of “serious” literature, the American war writer has drawn upon a situation of productive crisis rather similar to that experienced by earlier Anglo-American modernists in the 1920s. John Barth, looking back upon the period, has coined the phrase “literature of exhaustion” to describe the intense formal experimentation whereby genre has been mined to the point of ultimacy.¹ The era from 1960 is sometimes termed the era of post modernism in the United States when, “after a cultural bypass the legacy of modernism was realised through the explosion and dismemberment of traditional notions of genre”.²

A look at the books written initially in response to Vietnam seems to corroborate such a prediction; there does seem to be a vast body of literature which attempts technical innovation. It is useful to acknowledge the practical situation of the war writer and to attempt to reconstruct his literary context. The ambiguous and shifting nature of literary production and its relation with such material conditions such as readership and methods of distribution imply complexly evolving cultural relationships and forces. An example of particular relevance to the writing of specifically “war” books is the fluidity and interchange of conventions and styles made possible in a mass paperback market aimed at a mixed readership. The rapid growth of paperback sales meant not only a more profitable market for the gung-ho type of war novel, but also more interestingly, communication to a wider audience of some of the techniques of experimental fiction.

¹ John Barth, “The Literature of Exhaustion” originally published in *Atlantic Monthly*, August 1967

² Walsh, Jeffrey – *American War Literature, 1914 to Vietnam* (New York, 1982) Pg. 187

Between 1957 and 1962, the publication of a small but important group of novels signalled the arrival of a new group of novels and novelists. Kurt Vonnegut's Mother Night (1962), Joseph Heller's Catch 22 (1961) and to a certain extent James Jones' The Thin Red Line (1962) share the common characteristic of treating warfare in different terms than their predecessors. It is perhaps important to define that these novels form a quite clearly identifiable group. They were all published within a period of five years and they appeared when publication of conventional wartime fiction had tapered off. Heller confirms that in his case at least, his timing was no accident: "I put off writing my own (novel) for eight years because of them".³ In this sense, it is clear that Catch 22 was influenced by the work of writers like Norman Mailer and yet is in quite a different category from their novels.

By the end of the decade of the fifties, with its smug conservatism, American intellectual culture was restless. Historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. expressed this discontent in an *Esquire* article (Jan. 1960):

As yet the feeling is inchoate and elusive. But it is beginning to manifest itself in a multitude of ways: in freshening attitudes in politics; in a new acerbity in criticism, in stirrings, often tinged with desperation, desperation among the youth; in a spreading contempt everywhere for reigning clichés. There is evident a widening restlessness, dangerous tendencies towards satire and idealism, a mounting dissatisfaction with the official priorities, a deepening concern with our character and objectives as a nation.⁴

In American literary circles, many critics were seeking an alternative for the mainstream mimetic novel, which had been pronounced dead by a number of them following the great pre-war era that had produced the masterpieces of the modernist canon. For many, Joyce's Ulysses had taken the realistic novel as far as it could go, even to the brink of mythic fantasy. Many looked to Europe, particularly France for inspiration where the existential novel of Camus and Sartre, the theatre of the absurd

³ Etheridge, James M. (ed) – Contemporary Authors (Detroit, 1962) Pg. 238

⁴ Schlesinger, Arthur Jr.: "The New Mood in Politics", Esquire (Jan 1960) Pg. 58

and the *nouvelle roman* of Alain Robbe-Grillet were changing the face of European letters. None, however, translated well to the needs of American fiction.

Amid the literary ferment of letters after Joyce, amid the restlessness and satire and general scepticism of American artistic and political values, the new decade of the sixties began. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. predicted that it would be “spirited, articulate, inventive, incoherent, turbulent with energy shooting off in all directions”.⁵

Into this environment, in the first year of the Kennedy presidency came Catch 22. As the blurb inside the book jacket of the first hard cover edition proclaimed:

Catch 22 is like no other novel we have ever read. It has its own style, its own rationale, and its own extraordinary character. It moves back and forth from hilarity to horror. It is outrageously funny and strangely affecting. It is totally original.

In fact, Catch 22 heralded a new direction in American literature, combining naturalistic detail with satirical and surreal exaggeration, mingling slapstick and gloom, fantasy and history, real issues and two-dimensional characters. Not until the 1970s would America realise that Catch 22 was not an aberration fitting loosely within the black humour genre, but the advance guard of a whole new approach to the novel, a movement now generally known as “post modernism”.

Fifty million people were killed in World War II. If that is the first sentence what could be the second? There is nowhere to go except to add that writing the sequel is the obligation of post modernism.

It goes without saying that The Naked and the Dead (1948) and From Here to Eternity (1951) are the great war novels of the immediate post war period, and that Catch 22 constitutes a revised tradition of the World War II novel. Heller’s Catch 22 and Thomas Pynchon’s Gravity’s Rainbow (1973) are still read, and not by

⁵ Ibid, Pg. 60

antiquarians only, but the young reader as well. Perhaps this merely testifies that anything after 1960 is contemporary. Heller's and Pynchon's war novels can be classified as post modernist while Mailer's and Jones' novels as late modernist war literature. There was a modernist and a post modernist World War II: the Second World War may have set the terms of post war writing, but post war writing conceived and reconceived the Second World War.

There is something adolescent about these books – brilliantly adolescent, a term applied analytically rather than dismissively. All of these books of course are sophisticated as well.⁶

Two facets of the adolescentness of these books are crucial. First, there is a “sweet helplessness” to almost all of Heller's, Vonnegut's and Pynchon's characters. Yossarian, Dunbar, Doc Daneeka and the chaplain in Catch 22 all seem to possess it. These characters are all ostensibly heterosexual, but they seem not to experience that condition as a code, a stance or an anxiety. In The Naked and the Dead wounds confirm one's masculinity; the combination of victimage and viciousness that is army life in general enrages most of Mailer's soldiers. But Yossarian, Heller's hero is an adolescent with no future, no idea of succession.

Adolescent pathology is in Erik Erikson's analysis characterised by what he calls the “diffusion of time perspective”, “a loss of consideration of time as a dimension of living”.⁷ Adolescents are required to sum up everything they have become and make it continuous with everything they are supposed to be – much of it radically different – in the future. Catch 22 of course is a classic example of time inversion. Yossarian trapped between an impossible innocence and an impossible

⁶ Limon, John – Writing After War (Oxford University Press, 1994) Pg. 129

⁷ Quoted Ibid, Pg.140

adulthood has frequent experiences of something akin to *déjà vu*, the (anti) narrative principle of the novel, so that experience seems to precede itself, precede innocence – a distinctive feature of the post modern: humanity cannot stand too much history.

If Catch 22 is notably adolescent, it is equally obvious that it is paranoid. Since World War II, Erikson tells us “we have recognised the same central disturbance in severely conflicted young people whose sense of confusion is due, rather, to a war within themselves, and in confused rebels and destructive delinquents who war on their society”.⁸

The sixties’ delinquent fights World War II without weapons. The modern disciplinary society or Michel Foucault’s “carceral city” that creates delinquents does the same. Delinquency may be taken as a psychological fact or as a political fact. Delinquent post-modernism is in either case the registering of contemporary history as an interior Second World War. The confrontation with history has been so profound that history has been psychologised – there is no longer the possibility of a merely personal pathology – and thus apparently de-historicised.

Both Foucault’s critique of the carceral system and Erikson’s analysis of adolescence contain the shared reference to war as a metaphor – the degree to which the particular misery of the World War II soldier could be generalised in the sixties with respect to Vietnam era adolescents whose sense of confusion is due to a war deep within themselves.

An unexpected discovery related to the post modernist war novels of Heller, Pynchon and Vonnegut is the recognition that they all involve the European war, as opposed to the pacific war of Mailer and Jones. Was the war with Japan the modernist war and the war with Germany and Italy a culturally subsequent event? The division

⁸ Ibid.

is not merely coincidental because of the basis of post-modernism in terrorism. Japanese cities were terrorised, but neither Jones nor Mailer is concerned with that fact, less because of racism, than because they did not fight and live among terrorised civilian population. The humour drops out of Catch 22 when Yossarian is asked to bomb an unarmed village innocent of military targets.

Other aspects of the post modernist novel fortify the sense of a new combat genre. (1) The interest in what may be slightly misnamed overkill. The American army demands in the post modern combat novel more than one death from each soldier: destruction is separately psychological, physical, spiritual. Yossarian is not brave enough to die only once. (2) The anticipation of apocalypse and in this case genocide is the nearest approximation of apocalypse (3) Black or Yiddish humour; the three novelists Heller, Pynchon and Vonnegut make the point that they are all Jews. Heller's Yossarian is of Assyrian descent. Each individual may be scattered; every man his own diaspora.

These commonalities seem to indicate the existence of a post modernist war novel, yet it does nothing to justify it. If the modernist World War I novel hopes (or despairs) that art can negotiate a separate peace (A Farewell to Arms), if the early World War II novel hopes to find the possibility of style somewhere in military life itself, even if it exists as a contradiction in the face of army violence (The Naked and the Dead) no such hopes survive in Heller.

Post modern combat fiction seems to be deeply allegorical. Yossarian survives while most of his friends are destroyed. Yossarian wanders through Rome at night and keeps confronting catch 22. But the oddest fact about post modern World War II novels is how textualised are the lives led by its characters – they exist, they seem to acknowledge in books. The experience of being in World War II is best translated into

literature not merely as an allegory, but as an allegory in which the characters understand that they are allegorical. Catch 22 is almost a compendium of post-modernist self-reflexive techniques. Heller anticipates the comic proliferation of fiction within life.

“Are you sure you didn’t imagine the whole thing (the attacks of Nately’s whore)?” Hungry Joe inquired hesitantly after a while.

“Imagine it? You were right there with me, weren’t you? You just flew here back to Rome.”

“Maybe I imagined the whole thing too.”⁹

He is the inventor of John Barthian echolalia, the persistence of language after reality has absconded.

“Now where were we? Read me back the last line.”

“Read me back the last line,” read back the corporal, who could take shorthand.

“Not my last lines stupid!” the colonel shouted, “Somebody else’s.”

“Read me back the last line,” read back the corporal.

“That’s my last line again!” shrieked the colonel, turning purple with anger.

“Oh, no, sir, “ corrected the corporal, “That’s my last line.”¹⁰

Heller anticipates some of Pynchon’s demonstration that signifiers can serve various masters, so that even proper nouns can be expropriated. “John, Milton is a sadist.” “Is anybody in the john, Milton?” “Have you seen Milton, John?”

And all the looking glass double going of Nabokov, Borges and descendents is implicit in the title itself.

⁹ Heller, Joseph – Catch 22 (New York, 1961) Pg. 407

¹⁰ *Ibid*, Pg. 80-81.

“There was an elliptical precision about its perfect pairs of parts that was graceful and shocking, like good modern art.”¹¹

As important as what Heller prefigures is what he postfigures; at least this is equally important if the case is that Heller is a post modernist. All three writers of the post-modernist sample confess their tardiness in the history of literature as Jones and Mailer do not. Heller manages, for instance, to get the name T.S.Eliot bouncing down one page and up the next.

“Name for e.g.; one poet who makes money.”

“‘T.S.Eliot’ Ex-P-F-C Wintergreen said.”

“Well what did he say?”

“‘T.S.Eliot’, “ Col. Cargill informed him. “What’s that?”

“‘T.S.Eliot’” Col. Cargill repeated. “Just ‘T.S.-’” “Yes, sir. That’s all he said. Just T.S.Eliot.”

And so on for quite a bit longer. Capturing “T.S.Eliot” ‘within single quotes within double quotes might be one way of epitomising the post modern resentment.

There is also in Catch 22 an extraordinary implication of Emily Dickinson. Orr assures Yossarian that there are flies in Appleby’s eyes. Then Yossarian wonders why Appleby does not know it, the answer is: “How can he see? He’s got flies in his eyes.”¹² The Heller/Pynchon/Vonnegut generation is a late rendering of a lineage that includes Dickinson and Christina Rossetti and culminates in Sylvia Plath and Ann Sexton: the tradition is female and its theme is living death.

This may be an excessively gloomy hypothesis. But in Heller’s case fabulation, that is the making up of stories not professedly out of reality but out of

¹¹ Ibid, Pg. 47

¹² Ibid, Pg. 47-48

language, the sense that all the enemies of the self are purely linguistic and so is the self, is precisely the characteristic mode of army history. Knowing oneself to be composed of words is an experience of mortality; it is the prematurity of that experience that the military finds congenial. When McWatt unintentionally flies his plane into Kid Sampson and then intentionally into the side of a mountain, Dr. Daneeka is supposed to be on board, accumulating flight time, so for the sake of bookkeeping clarity he is considered to be as dead as McWatt. In Heller's army, bookkeeping generally produces reality; it is a type of book-writing. The result is that when we descend in Catch 22 from allegory to first order deconstruction, to the free-play of signifiers, we experience it with Rousseau's terror: "so many things were testing his faith. There was the Bible, of course, but the Bible was a book, and so were Bleak House, Treasure Island, Ethan Fromme and The Last of the Mohicans."¹³ A universal empty fictionality merely opens up space for the army, which occupies it not by means of illiterate force, but by a knowing and radical deployment of fictionality itself.

Does Yossarian escape? The question is where to go. Perhaps the typical Heller joke is on the omnipresence and eternality of absence, as for example,

"When didn't you say we couldn't find you guilty?"

"Late last night in the latrine, sir."

"Is that the only time you didn't say it?"

"No, sir. I always didn't say you couldn't find me guilty, sir."¹⁴

¹³ Ibid, Pg. 239

¹⁴ Ibid, Pg. 82

If one transforms infinite non-existence to the non-existence of the infinite one has a Paul de Manian allegory.

“I thought you didn’t believe in God.”

‘I don’t,’ she sobbed, bursting violently into tears. “But the God I don’t believe in is a good God, a just God, a merciful God. He is not the mean and stupid God you make him out to be.”¹⁵

Heller recognises that paranoia is too simple a mechanism. There is no easy opposition to army and divine madness. From a world mocked by the absence joke, it is difficult to know how to go about absenting oneself. Certainly, there is no escape into the imagination – from the imagination is closer to it. When Yossarian sits naked on a tree in Snowden’s funeral, critics have traditionally seen in the gesture a sixties hippy-ish protest. But Yossarian is not protesting, he is repudiating; he is not making a symbolic plea for non-uniformity, he is taking off a literal uniform, that does not symbolically refer to Snowden but is literally stained by Snowden.

Sweden is the book’s Switzerland – an echo of Hemingway’s vision of a beautiful elevated asylum in A Farewell to Arms – except that it cannot be imagined (is it intentionally an echo of Snowden, type of the always present absence?). Yossarian in flight from the army’s fictionality, can do no more than name an alternative as if the name “were a rip in the text to escape through.”¹⁶

Catch 22 imagines absolute incarcerations in so many forms that it can gratify post modernists of every persuasion. Heller imagines war to be a function of international – borderless, ubiquitous, absconded – capitalism, to which there could be

¹⁵ Ibid, Pg. 185

¹⁶ Limon, John – Writing After War (Oxford University Press, 1994) Pg. 152

no dialectical response. At other moments power seems to be deeper structured than money, and modern power takes the form of an internalised surveillance.

The post modern hope is not exile, it is absence. In Catch 22, “to disappear” is reclassified as a transitive verb, as in “did they disappear him?What will you do if they decide to disappear you?”¹⁷ Yossarian disappears himself, pre-emptively.

As Limon comments, in post modern theory, the self appears in the middle of a web in the massive network – side effect of a textual aporia, epiphenomenon of an economic or penal system. Take away the system and you eliminate the subject. Post modern fiction sufficiently believes this that it does not try to find the self a trans systematic, trans alpine refuge. But it converts war into literature to shadow the system, as if the texts final obscurity were a Zion into which the delinquent self, from its terrorised diaspora might disappear.¹⁸

But post modernism was not even a glimmer in the critics’ eye when Catch 22 reached the British best seller lists in it’s first year of publication. And the novel’s American readership was probably hooked as much on the book’s message as on its method. In this, Heller was helped along by national events. By the middle of the decade, the ‘police action ‘ in Vietnam was heating up to a full-scale war under President Johnson, and both progressive intellectuals and college students began to show an increasing annoyance with the liberal regime that had come in with the late President Kennedy. By 1965 Berkely’s free Speech movement had caught the attention of other campus activities, and increasingly the idealism that had earlier

¹⁷ Heller, Joseph – Catch 22 (New York, 1961) Pg. 410

¹⁸ Limon, John – Writing After War (Oxford University Press, 1994) Pg. 132

been channeled into civil rights and the Peace Corps began to mobilize against the growing war and America's cold war foreign policy in general, and from there against every aspect of American life as represented by the "Establishment".

Of all the innovative books of radical style and social criticism, Catch-22 is probably the most encyclopedic in the number of issues it touches on; in so capturing the frustration of the individual up against powerful and faceless bureaucracies. Its publication in 1961 was immediately embraced by the American public - particularly its youth - as a book whose time had come. Ostensibly the darkly comic tale of an American bombardier caught up in the absurdity of World War II, the novel was also recognised in the nation's restless intellectual circles as a commentary on the smug soporific conservatism of the fifties and the cynical economic motives that fuelled the military-industrial complex in the cold war era. Testimony to the novel's effect was the rapid establishment of its title in the American lexicon to describe the absurd no-win situation in which individuals find themselves trapped by their institutions.

But it was not only in its theme that Catch-22 reflected a mounting desire to change the social course, in its very structure, which features an unmetred disjointed chronology and frequent repetition of events, Heller was responding to a growing need for a uniquely American departure from realistic literary tradition. As one of the first and most original creations of post modernism, and as an artifact of the social and political culture of the sixties, it is still regarded by many as the best novel of the decade. It is somewhat surprising, then, that there is so little agreement as to what makes Catch-22 a modern classic.

This is not to say that Heller's novel has been grievously misunderstood. Those who like the book have properly identified its distinguishing features: its wild and truly hilarious humour, its broadly satiric portrait of the military, and its savage

characterisation of the modern social order. Almost all of Heller's critics have got much of the novel's peculiar flavour, its unique blend of laughter and horror and its thematic intensity. However, one feels that no one has explained both the method and the message of Catch-22. It remains to be seen how the method makes the message possible.

To attempt such an analysis, one must first grasp the generic nature of Heller's book. As James Nagel has said "the importance of genre classification for a study of the novel, is of course, a matter of attempting to come to it on its own terms without imposing irrelevant standards and obscuring fundamental themes".¹⁹ There is the inevitable mistake in reading Catch-22 as a traditional novel. We see such errors in Allen Cheuse's complaint that Heller's protagonist Yossarian "is an empty paste-up figure", who has "no past, no family, no vocation".²⁰ To explain the inadequacy of such responses requires that we approach Catch-22 on its own terms. To do this, however, has proved quite difficult, for Catch-22 incorporates features from a variety of literary genres.

The most obvious generic label for Catch-22 is that of war novel. The book is often characterised as such and is treated as a major text in several recent critical studies of American war fiction. Yet, Heller himself has dissuaded us from reading his book as a war novel "about" World War II. He has said the book has more meaning in regard to the Korean War and the Cold War than with the Second World War.²¹ Heller clearly regards war fiction – even anti-war fiction – as an inherently limited form.

¹⁹ Nagel, James – Catch-22 and Angry Humor: A study of the normative values of satire, "Studies in American Humor" I (1974) Pg. 99

²⁰ Cheuse, Alan – "Laughing on the Outside" in Casebook, ed, Kiley and McDonald (New York, 1973) Pg.87

²¹ Bernard, Ken – Interview with Joseph Heller in Ibid, Pg. 296

What exactly is a “war novel”? Peter Aichinger identifies a war novel as “any long work of prose fiction in which the lives and actions of the characters are principally affected by warfare or the military establishment.”²² Joseph Waldmeir defines a World War II novel as “one in which the war – on land or sea or in the air, in any branch of the services in any theatre of operations or on the home front – plays an integral, motivational, decisive role”.²³ These definitions perhaps best refer to Hemingway’s A Farewell to Arms and Mailer’s The Naked and the Dead.

These books do not try to explain war in general but they do explore how people deal with the extraordinary circumstances that attend modern warfare. Hemingway once called A Farewell to Arms his Romeo and Juliet but the problem his lovers faced are those peculiarly associated with World War I. Mailer was no doubt interested in the relationship between the army and the American social order, but his story focuses on the unique, almost unimaginable pressures brought about by the nature of modern combat. The military background is absolutely necessary to each of these classic war novels.

Far from wishing to “explain” the war, Heller deliberately set his book at its end, when Germany was no longer a military threat, to avoid having to treat the military and ideological conflict between Germany and the US. Moreover, Heller conceived of his book as contemporaneous with the 1950s not the early 1940s and therefore included subjects connected with the Cold War.

I deliberately seeded the book with anachronisms like loyalty oaths, helicopters, IBM machines and agricultural subsidies to create the feeling of American society from the McCarthy period on.²⁴

²² Aichinger, Peter – The American Soldier in Fiction, (Iowa 1975) Pg. 10

²³ Waldmeir, Joseph – American Novels, (New York, 1990) Pg.73

²⁴ Merril, Sam – An Impolite Interview, Playboy, June 1975, Pg.60

The military realities of World War II rarely intrude in the novel. Yet, Heller's characters are certainly affected – if not harassed or destroyed – by the military establishment, and the war decisively motivated their action. The entire novel takes place during World War II and principally during the summer and fall of 1947 and its theatre of operations is the Mediterranean island of Pianosa occupied by the US Air Corps and commanded by such military models as Generals Dreedle and Peckem, Col. Cathcart, and Lt/Col/Gen. Scheisskopf.

Superficially at least, Catch-22 fits the quoted definitions of the war novel as neatly as does A Farewell to Arms or The Naked and the Dead. But Heller's classic is a very different kind of book. The military context is far more crucial in the earlier novels, for Hemingway and Mailer relate stories in which the fates of their protagonists are realistically related to the special circumstances of war. Heller makes occasional use of realistic devices, but ultimately his formal intentions are well outside the realistic tradition.

Heller once said that he had put off writing his own war novel because of the proliferation of such novels immediately after World War II. This not only suggests that he wanted to do something different from the average war novelist, but also that he was quite familiar with their works. This is confirmed by the text of Catch-22 which is filled with figures and techniques from war novels classic or otherwise.

Heller's book is linked with traditional war fiction in at least two other ways. Heller adopts what has often been called the most consistent theme of the modern war novel, that of initiation or education. In fact, Yossarian's 'education' is the most crucial – and misunderstood – feature of Heller's fictional argument. As this education differs radically from that of the traditional hero, a young man who "matures" under fire, Heller has again inverted or drastically altered the convention in

question. Heller's second link with traditional war fiction involves perpetuating a tradition rather than inventing it. This refers to Catch-22 as a "protesting war novel", the kind of novel we usually associate with World War I. There is a marked formal difference between Catch-22 and A Farewell to Arms, but one understands Heller's intentions much better if one sees that these books share a common spirit.

It is of course difficult to generalise about the many novels inspired by the two world wars. Yet the novels of World War I are commonly thought to embody a bitter protest against the war. Stanley Cooperman finds a spiritual emptiness in most World War II novelists.²⁵ Students of war literature seem to agree about two basic generalisations. They invariably see World War I as a shocking disillusioning turning point. They find that the better novelists were moved to a protest that ultimately derived from social idealism. As Wayne C. Miller points out the novelists wanted to expose "the man-of-war world in all its barbarity in the hope that the possibility of social change might exist".²⁶ Paradoxically, their embittered novels conveyed a strong sense of purpose, hope, action and zeal, for literary protest implied a belief, (however faint) in the possibility of reform. To be a rebel implies faith in one's ability to do things better than those in power.

Almost certainly, however, the World War II novels are comparatively less concerned with protesting the events they depict, informed as they are by the war's necessity with no illusions as to its nobility. These novels may criticise the military system or war in general, but they are not vehicles for social protest, in the manner of the best World War I novels.

²⁵ Cooperman, Stanley – World War I and the American Novel (John Hopkins University Press, 1967) Pg. 232

²⁶ Miller, Wayne C. – An Armed America: Its Face in Fiction (New York, 1970) Pg. 98

These generalisations are attempted to point out the spiritual affinities between Catch-22 and the major novels of World War I. Cooperman's summary of the "historical realities" exposed in World War I novels applies to Heller's novel as well:

The substitution of violence for thwarted erotic impulse; the insistence upon authoritarian patterns of loyalty and action; the lemming morality taking its strength only from group identity; the definition of patriotism as religious belief or political conservatism; the giving up of self to the monolith of organisation.²⁷

Indeed the fictional world of Catch-22 includes most of the absurdities first remarked by Hemingway and Dos Passos and their contemporaries. Heller's response is also very similar. In this sense Eric Solomon is right in saying that in Catch-22 "culminates a tradition of bitterly ironic war fiction",²⁸ though Heller differs from his predecessors in not identifying the objects of his attack with a particular war.

Oddly enough, then, Catch-22 is closer in spirit to the war novels of the 1920s than to the novels of World War II, the war it ostensibly describes. Heller simply did not share the common predilection of World War II novelists for describing their combat experiences in vivid, highly knowledgeable detail, thus producing fiction designed to register "the way it was".

Heller's Catch-22 refuses both in spirit and in form to be trapped under only one generic label of the conventional war novel for it incorporates within its sphere aspects of satire as well. It is conventional for Americans to criticise their officers, but Heller takes this tendency far beyond the traditional in war fiction. Heller's method in treating the higher-ranking officers is invariably that of scornful caricature, where no exaggeration is too extreme. The satiric thrust against Dreedle's arrogance, Korn's

²⁷ Cooperman, Stanley - World War I and the American Novel (John Hopkins University Press, 1967) Pg. 156

²⁸ Solomon, Eric - From Christ in Flanders to Catch-22: An Approach to War Fiction, Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 11(Spring, 1969) Pg. 94

corruption and Cathcart's childish self-deception pale in comparison beside Scheisskopf's ideas on how to get his men marching without swinging their hands:

Lt. Scheisskopf's first thought had been to have a friend in the sheet metal shop, sink pegs of nickel alloy into each man's thigh bones and link them to the wrists by strands of copper wire with exactly three inches of play.²⁹

Black, the intelligence officer is another caricature who conducts classes where "the only people permitted to ask questions were those who never did".³⁰ Black is a dunce, but he is also a captain in the US Air Corp with authority over hundreds of men. Heller's portrait is a vicious caricature but also a caricature of viciousness when Black rejoices at the news of the men being sent to Bologna - the most feared mission site. Such viciousness is all too typical of Heller's senior officers.

Heller's satire is no less biting when he turns to the professions and businesses. Whereas Col. Korn is the book's sole lawyer, a sufficiently despicable representative, there are a remarkable number of incompetent doctors in Catch-22. Doc. Daneeka himself is a mildly endearing character who found World War II a 'godsend' because so many of his competitors were drafted. Heller's treatment of American business representatives is very much in the same key. Col. Cargill is a marketing executive who is so incompetent he cannot help but succeed. "Col. Cargill was so awful a marketing executive that his services were much sought after by firms eager to establish losses for tax purposes."³¹ No less revealing is the story of Major Major's father, the rugged individualist who works without rest at not growing alfafa, one of the government subsidised crops. He justifies his doubtful financial practices by invoking divine sanction. "The Lord gave us good farmers two strong hands so that we could take as much as we could grab with both of them."³²

²⁹ *Catch-22*, Pg. 72

³⁰ *Ibid*, Pg. 35

³¹ *Ibid*, Pg. 27

³² *Ibid*, Pg. 83

Heller confronts the symbol of American business and western world capitalism in the character of Milo Mindenbinder. Milo's relentless pursuit of profit makes him one of the most memorable characters in the novel, a consummate entrepreneur who builds an international business empire over the course of the books action. When he first appears in operation in Chapter 7, dealing in figs and torn bedsheets, he seems a comical, harmless hustler. Milo remains more or less in the background of the novel upto the middle of Chapter 22. From then onwards he leads Yossarian and Orr on a whirlwind tour of the Mediterranean wheeling and dealing with various international networks. Profit is what motivates his arrangements – at Orvieto, where he contracts with the Americans to bomb the highway bridge and with the Germans to defend it. Profit is the motive which drives him to bomb his own squadron. When Yossarian says that it is a shade unpatriotic to deal with the Germans, Milo replies that they pay their bills a lot more promptly than the allies.

Heller's satire is no doubt directed at the Milos of this world but more significantly it is directed at the larger population that accepts this inhuman logic and makes Milo, the Vice Shah of Oran, the Caliph of Baghdad, a corn god, a rain god and even a rice god deep inside the jungles of Africa. Heller's satiric thrust here transcends American capitalism for Milo's popularity is obviously an international phenomenon.

The butt of Heller's satiric thrust is perhaps most benign when directed at the modern bureaucracy. The excessive reliance on machines and forms and its consequences makes his satire almost hilarious. Major Major Major is promoted to Major "by an IBM machine with a sense of humour."³³ Yossarian convinces everyone that Bologna has been captured simply by moving the bomb line on the

³³ Ibid, Pg. 85

map. The classic example of the official condolence letter takes form through Corporal Whitcomb who persuades Cathcart to send it to the family members of the pilots:

Dear Mrs., Mr., Miss, or Mr. and Mrs.: Words cannot express the deep personal grief I experienced when your husband, son, father or brother was killed wounded or reported missing in action.³⁴

We wonder at a system that permits such absurdities. Other examples of bureaucratic blunders are, however, far less amusing, revealing within the satire, the vicious inhumanity of such a system.

A replacement pilot called Mudd is killed in action but remains officially alive because he had not technically reported for duty. On the other hand, Doc. Daneeka was officially supposed to be on the plane which crashed and killed McWatt, that leads to the official declaration of his death, inspite of his protestations. Even Mrs. Daneeka's grief is assuaged when she begins to receive the financial benefits of her husband's death. Heller's satire here is of course directed at the absurd practice of giving the written word, formal and official, precedence over reality. But beneath the bureaucratic bungling is a terrible reality the system seeks to conceal.

Yossarian, on the other hand, knew exactly who Mudd was. Mudd was the unknown soldier who never had a chance, for that was the only thing anyone did know about all the unknown soldiers – they never had a chance. The bureaucratic truism contained herein is reality, is whatever the system says it is – records are all that matters. This becomes blatantly and cruelly revealed when Cathcart and Korn admit that they do not care about a roadblock they have ordered their pilots to create by bombing a small undefended village. Their real concern is that the mission produce the neat aerial photographs supposedly favoured by their General. The village is to be

³⁴ Ibid, Pg. 275

destroyed and people killed and the pilot's major assignment is to keep a tight bomb pattern. The concern here, once again, is with appearance not reality, though it might be said that appearance *is* reality for the officers.

Heller adopts the technique of traditional satire in order to call the assumptions underlying this form into question. Early in the novel he invites us to accept a satiric point of view; then, by the end of the book, he reveals the inadequacy of this attitude presenting what he sees as a better approach to the manifest evils of the world. In effect, Heller has it both ways. He uses the traditional methods of satire to expose such faults as the arrogance and stupidity of our leaders, our excessive reverence for profit and our passive acceptance of a bungling bureaucracy. Then he shows that Catch-22 does not really depict a satiric world in which good and bad are clearly distinguishable. The book's more obvious satiric targets, Scheisskopf, Black, Cathcart and Milo – are by no means wholly responsible for the absurd bureaucratic nightmare that Yossarian and his friends must endure. Indeed, in a sense, Yossarian seems to be responsible for his own plight. To show this Heller uses a fictional form more flexible than traditional satire. Catch-22 is in essence a form of social protest, but then again social protest is not so much a generic label as a literary stance embodied in a variety of forms.

Protest literature in this country dates back to the late nineteenth century to the naturalists of the 1890s, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London, Upton Sinclair and especially Theodore Dreiser whose works were crucial in influencing and shaping the fiction of Dos Passos and Steinbeck among others. These men were influenced by the political views of the left, liberal, socialist or radical, for they shared a powerful desire to protest the social conditions of their time.

It may seem odd to think of Catch-22 as closely related to the novels of Steinbeck and Sinclair. Heller's book hardly seems an act of literary propaganda, as so many of these earlier books do nor is its dramatic action in the tradition of Crane and Dreiser. Yet Catch-22 continues the tradition of social protest in its distinctive way. Like the books cited above, Heller's novel too is militantly liberal in its point of view. What Heller does is address traditional social problems from the usual point of view but by, means of quite modern – even modernist – literary techniques.

Heller took from the realists the device of treating his more sympathetic characters – his victims – in abundant circumstantial detail, with special emphasis on their inner lives. This technique accounts for the sympathy we feel for such figures as Crane's Henry Fleming, Dreiser's Sister Carrie and Steinbeck's Joad. In Catch-22 almost all the characters are caricatures except Yossarian, the Chaplain and Major Major Major. Their characterisations bear witness to the intense loneliness of each man, especially the Chaplain whose devotion to his wife is also evidence of his humanity. The Chaplain and Major Major (chapters 10, 20 and 25) are not the imposing central figures of naturalistic tragedy, but they are endowed with enough depth to set off the truly inhuman flatness of Heller's Scheiskopfs , Cathcarts and Blacks.

In form, Heller is more closely related to writers such as Dos Passos who showed that the fiction of ideas could be profoundly affecting as well as thematically serious. Heller explicitly stated his intentions here that he “tried to avoid, first of all the conventional structure of the novel” and that he liked the ending because it squared “with the moral viewpoint of the book”.³⁵ He denied that he intended the

³⁵ Merril, Robert – Joseph Heller (Boston, 1987) Pg. 31

novel as a “sociological treatise on anything”.³⁶ We can only conclude here that Heller did not wish to write propaganda (a sociological treatise) but wanted to structure his book around a moral viewpoint. Heller’s point of view involves social issues relevant to all writers in the protest tradition but it is offered in a rhetorical form we have only recently begun to understand.

Critics have commented on Catch-22 as a radical protest novel driven by social indignation no less than the novels of Steinbeck, Dos Passos and Dreiser. C.Wright Mills’ famous discussion on the military industrial complex has been often cited as the context against which to place Heller’s social criticism. While Mills fears the military elite’s effects on policy making, he respects their capabilities as much as Mailer respects General Cummings.

Whatever the case may be with individuals, as a coherent group of men, the military is probably the most competent body now concerned with national policy; no other group has had the continuous experience in the making of decisions; no other group has had such steady access to world-wide information.³⁷

Unfortunately, critics taking this line of approach have taken to a most misunderstood reading of the novel. Howard J. Stark insists that the theme of Catch-22 is the absurdity, irrationality and nightmare of a disordered universe, a universe in which fantasy and the grotesque are indistinguishable.³⁸ Brian Way, who first made the crucial connection between Heller and the naturalists nonetheless sees Heller as departing from his predecessors by embracing the absurdist themes of contemporary drama, the so called Theatre of the Absurd. He points out the concept of Catch-22 contained in “the infinite capacity of the absurd to mask itself in reason and to

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Mills, C. Wright – The Power Elite (New York, 1956) Pg. 199

³⁸ Stark, Howard J. – The Anatomy of Catch-22 in Kiley and McDonald (ed) Casebook (New York, 1973) Pg. 139

institutionalise itself in bureaucracy, so as to play one macabre joke after another on the ordinary humans as represented by Yossarian.³⁹

To speak of the absurd in this way is to suggest that the follies depicted in Catch-22 are the inevitable consequences of a chaotic universe, not the avoidable human creations that the earlier American novelists wished to protest. But in fact, Heller's affinity with the American social protest tradition is stronger than the absurdist theory would suggest. In essence, Heller uses the techniques of a Samuel Beckett to present a point of view of a Steinbeck.

In Catch-22 we have a curious mixture of the conventions of the humorous war novel, traditional satire and social protest. Ultimately Heller absorbs all these literary traditions into his own design transcending the generic boundaries of the war novel, satire and even social protest. But to understand the complexity of the novel one must inevitably delve into its structure which is its meaning.

It is difficult to approach any study of Catch-22 without first coming to terms with its structure. Anyone who has read beyond the novel's first chapter quickly becomes aware of its lack of a traditional chronological plot. Indeed one of the most frequent complaints made by early reviewers was that the novel was formless and chaotic and many blamed Heller for not exercising adequate artistic control over his material. Norman Mailer speaks for those who share this view: "Like yarn goods, one could cut it anywhere. One could take a hundred pages from the middle of Catch-22 and not even the author could be certain they were gone".⁴⁰ For the New York Times Book Review, the novel gasps for want of craft and sensibility; the New Yorker agreed that the book was not even a novel and argued: "it doesn't even seem to have

³⁹ Way, Brian – Formal Experiment and Social Discontent: Joseph Heller's Catch-22, Journal of American Studies, Vol. 2 (1988) Pg. 253

⁴⁰ Mailer, Norman – Cannibals and Christians, Dial (New York, 1966) Pg. 177

been written; instead it gives the impression of having been shouted onto paper.”⁴¹ Even sympathetic reviewers gave in on this point, although defending the novel’s formlessness on the grounds that it is consistent with the chaotic cosmos and the lunatic logic of the story.

Heller, however, has contradicted all such accusations of formlessness. He has said that Catch-22 was not to his mind a formless novel. If anything, it was constructed almost meticulously and with a meticulous concern to give the appearance of a formless novel. A close examination of the novel confirms that the book really is as meticulously structured as Heller claims. Indeed the book’s more puzzling features – its bewildering chronology, its repetitiveness, its protagonists belated change of heart – all fit together to support Heller’s radical protest against the modern social order. What appears as chaotic and formless is really a stroke of artistic strategy not only to expose the worst excesses of the bureaucracy but the unprotesting acceptance of this system on the part of everyone involved – including the reader.

The structure in reality, is the key to unravel the meaning of the novel. However, on the one hand we have Heller making serious claims about the meticulous structure of the novel, and on the other we have readers wondering whether the novel has any structure at all. This radical divergence in opinion seems thoroughly justified when one takes into account Heller’s own claims that Catch-22 was crafted meticulously to *appear chaotic*. Heller and his readers have disagreed on this point because the book’s structure has been so artfully concealed.

This act of camouflaging implies, of course, that Heller’s intentions were not those of the traditional novelists. Yet, readers continue to read this novel not on its

⁴¹ Quoted in Catch-22: Anti Heroic Anti Novel by Stephen W.Potts (Boston, 1989) Pg. 19

own terms but in those of the Great Tradition of the novel – although at the same time seeing it as a very poor example of that tradition.

Robert Scholes was the first to notice that Catch-22 was the work of a contemporary fabulist who takes "an extraordinary delight in design" while devising modern forms of "ethically controlled fantasy".⁴² To see this is to begin to understand why Heller devotes so much of the book to characters other than Yossarian; why Yossarian's ambitions, ideas and even his past are hardly revealed, if at all; why so much of the book seems improbable. It is within this context that we begin to understand Heller's intentions in writing the novel, couched as it is in such abstract language. "Catch-22 is concerned with physical survival against exterior forces or institutions that want to destroy life or moral self."⁴³ Such understandings enable us to explain why Heller embedded his fictional argument in a narrative of such dizzying complexity.

Any consideration of the novel's structure should obviously begin with the confusing chronology. The story is presented in such a way that most of the time the reader is unable to determine the order of events. Even the most determined efforts by critics to establish the real chronology have simply failed. Clinton Burhans, for example, offers a near accurate chronology of the novel's important events, yet he too commits several curious errors.⁴⁴ Douglas Gaukroger, the other reliable authority on the chronology identifies several of Heller's own mistakes, yet many of his dates

⁴² Scholes, Robert – Heller's World, Chronicle of Higher Education Review, Vol. 9 (Dec 1994) Pg. 9

⁴³ Ibid, Pg. 16

⁴⁴ Burhans, Clinton – Spindrift and the Sea: Structural Elements and Unifying patterns in Catch-22 in Critical Essays on Joseph Heller, (ed.) James Nagel, Pg. 40-51

and several of his arguments are based on the assumption that Yossarian has flown thirty eight missions when he goes into hospital in Chapter 1.⁴⁵ Yossarian in reality has flown forty-four missions before the novel opens. The confusion here confirms the fact that Heller's chronology is indeed twisted.

But it becomes obvious that Heller wanted to begin his book after Yossarian had flown forty-four missions, not thirty-eight. In effect, it seems that if Yossarian had flown only thirty-eight missions at the time of Chapter 1, a disproportionate number of the novel's major events occur just prior to Yossarian entering the hospital; for example, the missions to Orvieto, Bologna and Avignon (where Snowden is killed). Gaukroger's claim of just thirty-eight missions would have far less weight if Yossarian had in reality flown forty-four missions.

We thus face a variety of problems in establishing the novel's chronology. Occasionally – only occasionally, as Burhans rightly argues, Heller's own mistakes confuse the matter. Our own problem in establishing any sequence to the events is compounded by the fact that Heller begins his novel in *medias res* – in the middle. Whether Yossarian has flown thirty-eight or forty-four missions at the time of Chapter 1, all the important missions have already been flown – Ferrara, Orvieto, Bologna and Avignon. This means that Yossarian has already flown over the bridge at Ferrara twice, that Milo has already established M & M Enterprises, that Yossarian has already moved the bomb line in the map to cover Bologna, thus making Major – de Coverly a casualty of war; that Snowden has already died over Avignon and subsequently been buried; that Yossarian has stood naked in formation to receive a medal for his "heroism" at Ferrara.

⁴⁵ Gaukroger, Douglas – Time Structure in Catch-22 in Casebook (ed.) Kiley and McDonald (New York, 1973) Pg. 140

As most of the events have already occurred at the time the novel opens, Heller uses a series of flashbacks to introduce these events to us. Flashback, in itself, is a useful technique, but as used here it makes it very difficult to establish something as basic as the novel's chronology. There are several reasons for this, each of which points to what is distinctive about the novel's structure.

The first aspect which draws our attention to the novel's structure is the peculiar nature of Heller's *flashbacks*. In fact, it is often misleading to refer to them as flashbacks, because the term usually implies an event rendered in dramatic detail; Heller's references on the other hand are oblique, truncated and mentioned in passing remarks in the dialogue. In this context, the various descriptions of Snowden's death are of prime significance. The reader first becomes aware of Snowden's existence in a casual reference (one is not even sure he has died); then as the occasion for grief, inconclusive scenes; finally the truth about Snowden spills out in the most powerfully dramatised scene in Chapter 41. The early references are sketchy and confusing because they allude to a scene not yet fully rendered. These various references do not help in establishing any chronological link between the various episodes. Secondly, there are far too many allusions to Snowden which prevent us from piecing together the chronological puzzle. In fact the novel may very well be described as a *pastiche* of such flashbacks, which helps support Heller's claim that Catch-22 was meticulously crafted to give the appearance of a formless novel. Lastly, these flashbacks hardly contain any time references, and the few that do are far too obscure for the common reader to derive any meaning from them. The chronology if at all is perhaps only available to serious academic pursuit.

This last point is very crucial to any understanding of Heller's intentions. The real point about the chronology is that the author chose not to unravel it. Heller

seriously wished to create the impression of chaos and formlessness. The question remains why he wanted to do so.

The inevitable answer to this question has been that Heller wanted to match form with content. As Gaukroger points out, "It is only fitting that a novel which deals with an apparently absurd and confused world should be written in an apparently absurd and confused style."⁴⁶ This answer has been supported by many including Tony Tanner.⁴⁷ Yet, this does not really account for Heller's technique. For one thing Heller's theme is not absurdist in an ontological sense. Besides Gaukroger's theory would still be inadequate even if we read Catch-22 as a novel about the inherent absurdity of life. This theory would involve the fallacy of imitative form; consequently the full expression of Gaukroger's theory of an absurd theme would be a book literally unreadable. A reading of Kafka and Camus definitely does nothing to support such a theory.

If the formlessness of the novel is not a reflection of Yossarian's state of mind or even of the author's belief in the comic absurd, how is it accounted for? Perhaps the answer lies in the often commented upon repetitions. In creating the unsequential world of Catch-22 where temporal relationships seem irrelevant, Heller creates a fictional world in which he can introduce numerous repetitions without undue awkwardness. Most other narratives could perhaps absorb such repetitions as the soldier-in-white scene and be easily defined, temporarily speaking, against the central sequence of events. But then what would happen to the central plot line in a book like A Farewell to Arms or even the later The Naked and the Dead if there were forty such motifs? Heller in reality facilitates our acceptance of such repetitions by destroying

⁴⁶ Ibid, Pg. 144

⁴⁷ Tanner, Tony – City of Words: American Fiction, 1950-1970 (New York, Harper & Row, 1971) Pg. 83

any traditional sense of time within his novel. He creates a temporal world sufficiently hospitable to repetitions, so effectively that we do not seek to place them within a conventional sequence.

But why should Heller want to structure his novel around a series of apparently random repetitions. In this context, David Richter's analysis seems invaluable. Richter like other contemporary critics notes that Heller's tone darkens drastically towards the end of the novel. Richter explains the progressive darkening and the unusual method employed:

Instead of going from incident to new incident, with each successive event darker in tone than the last, incidents and situations are repeated, frequently with few factual changes but with detail added to bring out the grotesque horror that underlies their absurd comedy.⁴⁸

Heller wants the reader to re-evaluate the repeated episodes and situations, and a closer look at several such examples illustrates what his techniques accomplish.

The first of Heller's repetitions and perhaps the most disturbing figure in the novel is the appearance of the soldier in white. He is the reality behind the unknown soldier of patriotic rhetoric. Initially, in Chapter 1, however, his appearance does not create more than a sense of slightly bizarre humour. Surrounding his brief appearance are other frothy details of humour, for example, Yossarian's infatuation with the chaplain and the episode of the fire in the kitchen. The soldier in white takes on the comical coloration of his context and no emphasis is at all placed on his predicament. In Chapter 17, the soldier in white dies again when we return to the same scene. This time his death is contextualised by Yossarian's grim memory of Snowden. It now occurs to Yossarian and Dunbar that in reality there may be no one at all inside the bandaged plaster and gauge at which the Texan had directed his pleasant monologue

⁴⁸ Richter, David H. – Fables End: Completeness and Closure in Rhetorical Fiction (University of Chicago press, 1974) Pg. 141

in Chapter 1. At this point, the death of the soldier in white is followed by a discussion on why the men have gone to war - significantly there is no frothy comic interplay here. However, it is not until Chapter 34 and the reappearance of the soldier in white that we understand the full implications of the real horror he represents. All comic possibilities seem frozen at this stage, and Dunbar with sudden intuition realises that "there is no one inside". He creates a situation where he is "disappeared" by the military authorities and we never see Dunbar again.

The appearance of the soldier in white in Chapter 1, 17 and 34 are strictly not repetitions, yet the three scenes seem to be one. In the chaotic world of Catch-22, the reader inevitably has to orient himself by means of *place and circumstance*. As the two key conditions are almost identical in all three chapters, they strike us as repetitions. But, Heller creates a sense of constant repetition without duplicating all events and characters at all points. In each case the episode's darker implication finally reveals what too many would like to ignore.

Heller's treatment of a minor character like Clevinger seems to illustrate this point. One of the novel's sympathetic characters, he is counted by Yossarian as one of his missing "pals". Although by the end of the book Clevinger's disappearance in a cloud is taken quite seriously, any early references to him do not at all point to his death. The first of such references occurs when Heller describes the tent surrounding Yossarian's. "On the other side of Havermayer stood the tent McWatt no longer shared with Clevinger who had still not returned when Yossarian came out of the hospital."⁴⁹ A few pages later Yossarian asks Doc. Daneeka "Then why don't you ground me? I'm crazy. Ask Clevinger". Doc. Daneeka replies, "Clevinger? Where is

⁴⁹ Catch-22, Pg. 18

Clevinger? You find Clevinger and I'll ask him".⁵⁰ Both references allude to the mission in which Clevinger disappeared – a mission not yet described in the book, and lacking the background, the reader fails to respond. Chapter 10 opens with one of Heller's many bizarre jokes. "Clevinger was dead. That was the basic flaw in his philosophy." At this point most of Yossarian's "pals" are dead and the others like Snowden are dying through the novel but the reader is not encouraged to reflect upon the grim implications of this fact. At the end of the novel when Yossarian finally grasps the full implications of Clevinger's disappearance, the reader realises that for most of the novel he too has evaded what really happened to Clevinger.

Heller's technique should not be understood strictly as a form of "literary *déjà vu*". *Déjà vu* implies only repetitions *per se*, but here the repetitions force us to revalue our initial sense of character or event. The representation of Rome is one such example. Throughout most of the book this city is a refuge, a recreation where the officers' apartments "radiated with enormous, engulfing waves of fun and warmth".⁵¹ But at the end, Rome is the eternal city of Chapter 39, a scene of such terrible horrors that the critic Minna Duskow has rightly invoked Dante as a parallel.⁵² The humour that had both energised and sustained Heller's vision until this point gives way to passages as grim and as stark as unrelievedly violent as any one can find in contemporary American literature.

At the next corner a man was beating a small boy brutally in the midst of an immobile crowd of adult spectators who made no effort to intervene. Yossarian recoiled with sickening recognition. He was certain he had witnessed that same horrible scene sometime before. *Déjà vu*? The sinister coincidence shook him and filled him with doubt and dread. It was the same scene he had witnessed a block before although everything in it seemed quite different. What in the world was happening? The boy was emaciated and needed a haircut. Bright red blood was streaming from both ears. Yossarian crossed quickly to the other side of the immense avenue to escape the nauseating sight and found himself walking on human teeth

⁵⁰ Ibid, Pg. 45

⁵¹ Ibid, Pg. 153

⁵² Duskow, Minna – Night Journey in *Catch-22* in *Casebook* (ed.) Kiley and McDonald (New York, 1973) Pg. 166-174.

lying on the drenched glistening pavement near splotches of blood kept sticky by the pelting raindrops poking each one like sharp fingernails. Molars and broken incisors lay scattered everywhere.⁵³

Consequently Heller's repetitions can mislead the reader into taking the relevant place, character or event as harmlessly amusing. The added details piled up in layers in subsequent references bring out the grotesque horror underlying what at first seems whimsical comedy. Heller uses the same technique when it comes to characterisation. For much of the book, he represents Aarfy and Milo, the novel's true villains as passive characters. But Heller introduces a new note to Aarfy's nature when he reminisces about forcing two high school girls to "put out" in his fraternity. ("We even smacked their faces a little when they started to complain") and suggests that the Roman prostitute could be handled in the same way. ("We can even threaten to push them out of the window").⁵⁴ We realise that our earlier responses to Aarfy have been inadequate when he actually pushes out a woman from a window. For Aarfy there is no difference between the threat and the actual execution of it. Aarfy's "amusing" passivity is exposed as nothing but an intolerable indifference to human life.

Milo Mindenbinder, the other character relevant here appears as an engaging example of the American capitalist entrepreneur. Earlier Heller had cut jokes that Milo would drop anything if he hears about profit. But this profiteering takes on ominous and inhuman overtones later on in the novel. When Orr is knocked down during his second mission to Avignon, his life jackets fail to inflate because Milo has removed the twin carbon dioxide cylinders from the inflating chambers to make strawberry and crushed pineapple ice cream sodas for the officers. Milo had replaced

⁵³ *Catch-22*, Pg. 424

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, Pg. 246

the cylinders with mimeographed notes reading “What’s good for M & M Enterprises is good for the country”. This episode is treated as a hilarious joke and related with roars of laughter. Later Heller retraces Yossarian’s efforts to save Snowden. Yossarian finds no morphine in the first aid kit because this has been replaced by the note about what’s good for the country – thus effectively labeling Milo’s theft the shocking inhuman act it is. It is rather hard to continue laughing at Milo at this stage and this in reality is the thrust of Heller’s technique.

The intriguing title of the novel Catch-22 added to the lexicon a synonym for a no-win situation. But here within it is contained another series of repetitions. Early in the book we are told that there was only one catch and that was catch-22 (page 46). But this very catch is given various meanings as the novel progresses. Catch-22 required that each censored letter bear the censoring officer’s name (Page 8). This seems rational and harmless enough. “Catch-22 specifies that a concern for one’s safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind.”(Page 46) Catch-22 says that “you’ve always got to do what your commanding officer tells you”(Page 58). Catch-22 insists that group approve the actions of its subordinates (Page 173). But obviously the rationality of these variants is only on the surface. Because although concern for one’s safety in the face of danger is the process of a rational mind, yet Orr must continue flying the missions forever till he dies. Obedience to one’s commanding officer is demanded implicitly – even if that officer happens to be a Lieutenant/Colonel/General Scheisskopf. The irrationality of these regulations can quite easily be seen through early in the novel, but we do not feel the ultimate horror until much later in the novel. These insensate regulations reveal themselves when the old woman comments after the savage raid on the men’s

favourite whore-house. “Catch-22 says that they have a right to do anything we can’t stop them from doing.”⁵⁵ The reasoning is both simple – and terrible. “Catch-22” means whatever they want it to mean. It has no real content and Yossarian even doubts its existence. These variants on the theme of Catch-22 illustrate the inexact repetition which is so much an essential part of the structure of the book – for each definition is occasioned by a different context.

The death of Snowden too takes different colourations as the novel unfolds. He is introduced on the same comic note as the other scenes when Yossarian shouts out at an “educational session”: “Where are the Snowdens of yesteryears?”⁵⁶ The much-hinted at, long-postponed, absolutely crucial confrontation with Snowden is made explicit when we finally come to share with Yossarian, the real meaning of Snowden’s secret. “I’m cold I’m cold”, Snowden keeps repeating and finally Yossarian discovers a truth truer than the justification for war outlined on recruiting posters, truer than the powerful absurdist grip of Catch-22 itself.

Yossarian bent forward to peer and saw a strangely coloured stain seeping through the coveralls just above the armhole of Snowden’s flak suit (He) ripped open the snaps of Snowden’s flak suit and heard himself scream wildly as Snowden’s insides slithered down to the floor in a soggy pile and just kept dripping out. A chunk of flak more than three inches big had shot into his other side just underneath the arm and blasted all the way through, drawing whole mottled quarts of Snowden alongwith it to the gigantic hole in his ribs it made as it blasted out

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 of 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.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid, Pg.398

⁵⁶ Ibid, Pg. 35

⁵⁷ Ibid, Pg. 449-450.

The effect here is cumulative; this passage climaxes Heller's many references to the event – Snowden truly dies throughout Catch-22 as Heller himself once said – and therefore seems to sum up what the novel is about.⁵⁸

I tried consciously for a comic effect juxtaposed with the catastrophic. I wanted people to laugh and then look back with horror at what they were laughing at.⁵⁹

This statement suggests that the novel's repetitive structure is as calculated as the effect of chaotic formlessness. Indeed the very meaning of the novel depends on this peculiar strategy which requires that the later episodes be the same as the earlier ones. Heller's repetitions, however, are of a piece, despite their differing degrees of exactness, yet one must consider whether the many repetitions have been woven into a coherent narrative.

Heller has in reality divided the novel into three parts. In the first part of the book comprising Chapters 1 to 16, we are introduced to most of the important events of the book. Most of these events are treated in a humorous way. In the second part of the novel, Chapters 17 to 33, beginning with the return of the soldier in white, the action hardly seems to move at all. No major events occur in these pages, although in reality time passes. Heller here, instead takes us back over the episodes already revealed in the first part of the novel. This second section, however, modulates into a more serious tone. Milo appears still quite comical, but as a far more disturbing element, and the senior officers are made to seem more brutal, but above all Snowden's death is described in much more gruesome and vivid detail. Taken individually perhaps, these references are relatively minor, but they collectively create a gradual darkening of tone. They explain why we have begun to revalue the novel's major events before the soldier in white returns for the last time.

⁵⁸ Merrill, Robert – Joseph Heller, (Twayne's United States Author Series, Boston 1987) Pg. 46

⁵⁹ *Ibid*

The third and final section takes its tone from the reappearance of the soldier in white in Chapter 34, although it may really begin with the bombing of the undefended village. In this section, as readers and critics have noticed, time does move forward and new events are introduced, with almost no flashbacks. It is here that we are introduced to the way Kid Sampson met his gruesome death, the search for Nately's whore's kid sister, the disappearance of Orr and Yossarian's insurrection. But the one flashback that does occur is of the final rendition of Snowden's death in minute and grizzly detail. The new events, harder to brush aside as comical, but deeply related to what has come before, trigger Yossarian's reconsideration of his experiences on Pianosa. The result is the novel's climactic event, Yossarian's desertion.

If one speaks of the novel's climactic event it is to assert that the meaning of Catch-22 artfully emerges out of what appears to be structural chaos. By suppressing a normal chronological narrative, Heller creates a way to form a pattern of the numerous repetitions necessary to his art. These repetitions invariably move from the comic to the terrible – from an amused acceptance of life's ironies to the realisation that these are in fact human creations and thus unacceptable. The repetitions crucial to Heller's arguments are organised into three narrative cycles that allow the book as a whole to move from events that first seem harmlessly comic, then cause for some moral concern and culminate as a basis for genuine moral protest.

Consequently, Yossarian's decision to desert is climactic because it represents an effective moral response to the injustices of the modern social order. His act affirms the possibility of genuine moral protest, however hopeless such a protest may seem. Although Yossarian's desertion is the novel's climactic act, its controversial nature has obscured its structural connection with the repetitions preceding it.

Yossarian's decision to desert has been variously praised and condemned and invariably for the wrong reasons. It has been praised as the act of someone who understands that one's own substance is far more precious than any cause, and it has been condemned as an irresponsible act of someone whose ultimate horror is of physical pain. Both views agree on Yossarian's essential cynicism towards spiritual values or causes and that he acts at the end on the same perceptions he has insisted upon throughout the book. However, Yossarian changes towards the end of Catch-22. In fact, Yossarian deserts because he finally realises that there are greater horrors than physical pain and death.

Yossarian's viewpoint leads him to discard the illusions that he had held through the greater part of the novel. The first is that he can afford to tolerate the evils done by such "delightful" characters as Milo, "the theme of insanity accepted without any eye-blinking".⁶⁰ Yossarian does question Milo's actions, yet he does not act on what he knows about Milo until the very end. Through this is exposed his second related illusion: that there is nothing he can do about the system and its representatives.

For most of the book, Yossarian is an intelligent but seriously mistaken guide concerning the nature of his world. From the time he flies over Ferrara twice, he knows the terrible truth about the war – that it can be fatal to anyone at anytime. He knows also that the military is unconcerned with everything else except the appearance of efficiency and success as when Col. Scheisskopf has metal pegs sunk into each man's thighs so they would march in stiff uniformity. Yet, Yossarian draws the wrong conclusions and keeps protesting against the system's injustices as when he stands naked to get his medal. But all his protests are merely symbolic acts – he

⁶⁰ Merrill, Sam – An Impolite Interview, Playboy (June, 1975) Pg. 290

continues to be part of the system and keeps flying on Cathcart's missions. Yossarian seems to accept this as a hero's fate in an absurd universe. He continues to act as if he had no choice, but to suffer the injustices of the system. But when he deserts he finally does something that will affect the system: he ceases to serve it. The implication here is that effective action is possible if we are prepared to accept responsibility for our acts.

Some critics have pointed out that Yossarian's act of desertion is questionable as a responsible act, but Heller's own words prove his stance. "In making the decision to desert, Yossarian accepts the responsibility he now knows he has to other men. As he says, he is not running away *from* his responsibilities, but *to* them."⁶¹

At the end, Yossarian finally acts to help prevent the death of all his fellow-men, for if he had accepted Cathcart's deal everyone else would have continued to fly more missions without protest. Yossarian's protest on behalf of himself as well as the others lies behind Heller's description of Catch-22 as "a liberal book" and an "optimistic novel with a great deal of pessimism in it".⁶²

Yossarian's ultimate values are not "purely physical". Although he does pursue physical pleasures throughout the novel, his primary concern is not survival at any price. If this had been the case, he would have surely accepted Cathcart's deal to return to the United States as a war hero. Instead, he chooses to risk his own life and deserts, offering the other men the right kind of moral example. Yossarian is not motivated by any selfish instinct for survival but by his *final* understanding of Snowden's secret – that man is matter – if he is set on fire he will burn, if he is dropped out of a window he will fall, if he is buried he will rot. In fact, Heller adds

⁶¹ Kiley and McDonald (ed.) – Catch-22, Casebook (New York, 1973) Pg. 333

⁶² Quoted in Merrill, Robert – Joseph Heller (Twayne's United States Author Series, Boston, 1987) Pg. 51

another aspect to it when he says, “The spirit gone, man is garbage”. It is the spirit that counts, not “matter”. To capitulate to Cathcart would be to kill the spirit. He has finally learned the secret embedded in all the bloody entrails of all the Snowdens: if we do not protest against the forces that would render us garbage, we are indeed nothing more than matter whether burned, dropped or buried.

Thus the ending of Catch-22 has a certain amount of integrity with the moral viewpoint of the book. Although it has been variously questioned because Heller seems unwilling to face up to the Nazi menace, the critic Robert Protherough has rightly replied that “those who demand to know whether Heller opposed resistance to Hitler are refusing to read the book on its own terms”.⁶³ Heller has, of course, made it clear that he staunchly supported World War II. But this particular novel is not so much about the issues emanating from this conflict as about the general threat of the modern bureaucratic society. Yossarian is endangered not so much by Hitler, as by the military-economic complex, and Heller took great pains to make this clear. It is on these terms that the novel must be read.

However, the real problem with Heller’s ending, as critics have often pointed out is that Yossarian’s *volte-face* seems too abrupt. This problem is real but virtually unavoidable, for it emerges out of Heller’s basic rhetorical strategy. Yossarian’s “belated” conversion within the book reinforces our own experience in reading it. We feel something similar to shame for our amused tolerance of characters such as Aarfy and Milo. The sudden shift in perspective at the end of Catch-22 emerges from the author’s desire to shock us into recognition of the unhealthy beliefs we, the reader, have shared so far with the protagonist.

⁶³ Protherough, Robert – The Sanity of Catch-22, Human World (May, 1971) Pg. 59-70

This desire unites both the structure and the meaning of the novel. Heller's intention was to expose the contemporary regimented business society and this he has done admirably through his brilliant caricatures of senior officers and through such remarkable examples of the capitalist spirit as Milo Mindenbinder. These caricatures, however, did not necessarily need the elaborate system of repetitions that the novelist used. What Heller essentially wanted his reader to do was to laugh and then look back in horror at what he was laughing at. We are made to recoil from the same events we first laughed at because otherwise we might be tempted to trace the novel's darkening tone to changing circumstances within the action. Heller was not willing to permit this, because the world of Catch-22 has always been what we only belatedly perceive it to be. This is why one of the funniest of all novels, is finally not very funny at all, for Heller arrests our laughter and turns his satiric thrust back upon ourselves.

The greatness of Catch-22 lies in Heller's ability to convert the beliefs of conventional liberalism into the ideas of a powerfully moving fable. Like novelists such as Steinbeck and Dreiser, Heller focuses on the crippling effects of our social system on the sensitive individual. But he takes a step beyond his predecessors when he shows that the enemy is not just the corporations and their authorities (the military in this case). They, who are the enemy, only have the power that we allow them to have.

In a sense, Catch-22 sums up a tradition. It is the clearing in the woods, the meeting ground, for almost all the themes and ideas developed along the various paths followed by novelists dealing with Americans at war and Americans within the military structure. Like Melville, the first in the tradition to use the military world as a microcosm of a larger social order, Heller uses the base at Pianosa as a mirror of the

culture of the United States. Like Melville and Stephen Crane, he presents his hero in danger of being emasculated in the totalitarian system: without recourse to justice and unable to assert his individuality within the corporate or command structure. Like most of the World War I novelists, he uses his work as a vehicle for criticism of an entire culture. But while he may condemn the concepts of honour, glory and patriotism just as much as Hemingway and Dos Passos, he does not go along the path established by them. In fact, at several points, Heller satirises the element of sentimentality in the war novels that precede his. Particularly noteworthy is his presentation of the relationship between Yossarian and Luciana, the beautiful Italian girl permanently scarred by an American bombing raid. In a situation in which Hemingway might have had the lovers attempt an escape to an idyllic life in the mountains, Heller merely debunks the concept of romantic love (Page 152-163).

Heller introduces a new element into a major novel in the tradition – the element of satire. He directs its thrust at everything in the culture that is death dealing, destructive or authoritarian – those things that the rational mind regards as irrational. In another context, just as Mark Twain provided an escape for his most representative hero, Huck Finn from an American society he satirises in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, so too, Heller provides escape for his hero from a culture which would destroy him. For Huck there was still the territory, the vast virgin land of hope that the continent provided. For Yossarian there is no territory of freedom in an already established America. For him there is Sweden and the hope of a more rational life. As a highly individualistic hero, he must flee an increasingly rigid and corporately structured America in order to pursue that individuality.

Interestingly, the America he flees closely resembles the America Gen. Cummings predicts in The Naked and the Dead. There Cummings had warned Lt.

Hearn that the totalitarianism of the military system was a prelude to future life in the United States. As discussed in Chapter III, the General views World War II as the event that will transform the nation's potential energy and power into fearsome reality, and he foresees the American people marching out of the war with an acceptance of organisation and authority.

Samuel P. Huntington in The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations, presents an analysis of trends in American culture which confirms Cummings' predictions. Also very much like Mailer's fictional General, he sees World War II as the critical event in the emergence of military institutions and a *military definition of reality in the United States* – a definition that Heller's hero, Yossarian, in the context of the nineteen sixties must reject. No ritualistic militarism cloaking death and destruction for him. In fact, the rage for corporate order and collective will, which he witnesses at Pianosa is death dealing, cruel and above all insane. Unable to subject himself to the structure which Cummings regards as the predecessor of life in the United States, and which the social scientist Huntington identifies as necessary for national security, he is the anti-thesis of the organisation man. Intensely individualistic, he is a rationalist, a sceptic, a non-believer. As a member of a long line of perceptive, intuitive and lonely heroes, "he shouts a howl of protest at being ordained a priest in a religion of destructiveness".⁶⁴ With humour, sensitivity and the disarming ability to admit his own lack of traditionalist ideals, Yossarian for most of the novel is the perfect hero for the purposes of satire. Simple and intuitive, he cuts through cant and ritual to dissect the reality of his own experience and the world that surrounds him.

⁶⁴ Miller, Charles Wayne – An Armed America: Its face in Fiction (New York, 1970) Pg. 214

Heller despite the bitterness of his view of the culture, holds out hope in the transcendent figure of Yossarian. It remains an open question whether this affirmation, involving as it does a complete shift of tone in the novel, is merely a device enabling Heller to avoid an ultimate blackness which is totally destructive. Although he may recognise that Sweden represents only another illusion, his final statement in the novel may be the insistence that such illusions and such ideals are the means by which men and cultures survive.

If A Farewell to Arms defined the initiation and disillusionment that marked the essential differences between literature about previous warfare and the literature about World War I, Catch-22 explored the ways, a novel about World War II might not only avoid duplicating the formula of a novel such as Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead, but also come closer to the truth of war itself.

Heller chose to concentrate on issues of survival rather than on initiation and to see the military bureaucracy and its absurd logic – symbolised by Catch-22 – as greater threats than Nazi gunfire. In this sense Catch-22 is as much a parody of the war novel, as it is a war novel per se; in other respects it is a war novel only by the accidents of time and place, of plot outline and superficial circumstance. For Catch-22 tells readers more, much more, about the unexamined, overly organised life in corporate America than it does about World War II. In the twentieth century, war has become more pervasively a normal adjunct of life, so that writing about war is a way to write about life.

Catch-22 is one of those rare books: a first novel that secured its author's reputation. Even rarer is the work of fiction that can add a brand new term to the language. Throughout the sixties early critics of Heller's anti-novel were fond of lifting events from the real world – or from the fiction we held to be real – and putting

them in the context of the novel. *Catch-22* reared its head in the frequent reports of Vietnamese villages that American troops burned to save and of people who were killed to protect them from the enemy. Later as the Vietnam War wound down, students of *Catch-22* had the events of Watergate to keep them busy with comparisons. We saw language tortured by White House spokesmen to explain away lies as “inoperative statements”.

The 1980s have provided no fewer examples of the sort of twisted logic and language characteristic of Heller’s novel when CIA-supported terrorists in Nicaragua and Angola were called “freedom fighters”. And now at the very turn of this century we see a President who distorts language to such an extent that all meaning becomes lost in the maze of evasions.

Heller predicted more than once that *Catch-22* would decline somewhat in status as the war issue of the Vietnam era died away. But he underestimated the durability of the Cold War environment that spawned his first book. We still live in the world of *Catch-22*.

Yet Heller’s novel serves to remind man of his need to dream of the possibilities of the future and to be critical of the inadequacies of the present. More important, his novel suggests that the traditional American optimism has not been overwhelmed by the fears and anxieties of the Cold War. And Heller has told his tale in ways that forever changed the way we think of “war novels” and the comic magic they can spin.

CHAPTER V

THE OTHER BATTLEFRONT – GENDER AND THE TWO WORLD WARS

“War is men’s business, not ladies”, we are told in Gone With The Wind, but the wars of the century force us to acknowledge that it is very much women’s concern as well. Advances in military technology have blurred any distinctions that might have existed between the home front and the war zone. Mass communication and psychological warfare affect all sectors of belligerent societies. Women, like men have been mobilised for both civilian and military work. They have moved from auxiliary roles such as nursing to combat duty. As defense workers producing armaments they have both complemented and supported the predominantly male armed forces. Moreover, whether employed or not, all women have had to contend with rationing, food shortages and evacuation. In all these ways and more perhaps, the realities of the two world wars contradicted the myth that war compels men to go forth and fight in order to protect their women, who remain passive and secure at home with the children.

Behind this myth is the belief that men are naturally aggressive, while women as mothers have an affinity for peace. It might be argued that this polarity between the genders, like that of battlefield to home front, helps to guarantee social stability. For, paradoxically, war unleashes aggressiveness in defense of civilisation – violence intended to contain violence. “Images of femininity, nurturance and the family,

qualities that fend off the barbarism implicit in war, can be invoked to restore the balance and protect our faith in the social order.¹

The Goddess of Peace, the image of women as other, took many forms in the propaganda and mass culture of the two world wars. The Great War linked women's patriotic duty to motherhood: legions of nationalistic mothers were pictured bravely sending their boys off to war. The Second World War eroticised images of femininity producing romantic and kittenish sexual partners and Hollywood pin-ups. "No matter how she is manifest, this Goddess always contrasts with, even while supporting Mars."²

Despite various attempts at reassessment after 1918 and 1945, the mythical differentiation between men and women in relation to war persisted, in part because scholars employed categories that masked the realities and complexities of women's participation in the conflicts. Similarly, literary scholars, customarily exclude women's voices from the canon of war literature, favouring writings based on the actual experience of combat.

Two recent waves of scholarship, have, however, begun to question the mythology of war's gender. The first explores the cultural construction of soldiering and its psychological implications for men. At the Somme in 1916 John Keegan discovered that the "will to fight", was for many men, an uncertain phenomenon at best.³ Paul Fussell and Eric Leed take up the same theme in their studies of soldiers' cultural and literary responses to the Great War, showing that their ambivalent

¹ Jean, Bethke Elshtain – "Women as Mirror and Other: Toward a Theory of Women, War and Feminism", *Humanism in Society*, 5,2,(Winter-Spring, 1983) 32.

² Higgonnet, Margeret Randolph – *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (Yale, 1987) Pg. 2

³ Keegan, John – *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme* (Viking Press, New York, 1985) Pg. 274-84

attitudes towards aggression were coupled with deep fear, disorientation and passivity.⁴ Although these works concentrate on war's effect on men, they provide one model for the study of women and war by showing how soldiers "drew upon the cultural repertoire of meaning..... to define felt alterations in themselves". The interplay between cultural forms and self definition is one of the central themes of Fussell's thesis.⁵

In the second wave of new scholarship, feminist historians challenged the assertion that the two wars were entirely male enterprises. Their studies described the many roles women played in the military resistance, and medical corps, as well as heavy industry at home.⁶ These historians, find however, that in war as well as in peace there were sharp differences in the activities, responses and status of men and women. While wartime may have impelled women out of the domestic sphere, they nonetheless tended to remain in subordinate relationships to men, who continued to dominate the labour market and monopolise political power.

Both of these trends in the historiography of war raise questions about gender. The discovery of the crisis of masculinity reveals that the so called masculine traits are not universal, natural attributes of men; the perception that women's subordination persists despite profound changes in their economic and political activities suggests that status does not depend upon reaching a fixed position in the social order. How then is gender designated?

According to Margaret Higgonnet the study of gender consists not merely of a set of social roles but also of a discourse that gives meaning to different roles within a

⁴ Fussell, Paul – The Great War and Modern Memory (New York, OUP, 1975) Pg. 79 (New York, OUP, 1975) Pg. 79

⁵ Ibid, Pg. 81

⁶ Greenwald, Maureen – Women, War and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the US (Westport, Conn., 1996)

binary structure. Moreover, although the fundamental difference between masculine and feminine appears to be universal, the gender system takes a different form in each culture. Finally, gender systems are not fixed but respond and contribute to social change, assimilating new social phenomena and reconstituting the fundamental distinctions between the genders. To study women in wartime then a new historical perspective is called for, one in which women are studied in relation to men and is part of socially identifiable gender systems. This perspective avoids the pitfalls of isolationism, which stresses the uniqueness of women's experience and because it examines that experience virtually in a vacuum, cannot always explain change in women's lives. The study of gender systems also avoids the problems of assimilationism which, by emphasising parallels between actions and achievements of women and men obscures historical distinctions between the two. By insisting that feminine identity and roles, must be analysed as part of a system that also defines masculine ones, the study of gender moves women's history, from the margins to the centre of "mainstream" history.

Perhaps nowhere will the shift be more dramatic than in the study of war. As a first step war must be understood as a *gendering* activity, one that ritually marks the genders of all members of a society, whether or not they are combatants. The implications of war for men and women are, then, linked in symbolic as well as social and economic systems. "During war, the discourse of militarism, with its stress on 'masculine' qualities, permeates the whole fabric of society, touching both women and men."⁷ In doing so it draws upon preexisting definitions of gender that establishes the post war social assignment of men and women.

⁷ Wright, Gordon – The Ordeal of Total War, 1939-45 (New York, 1994) Pg. 11

The discourses that give meaning to gender take many forms. In wartime the most explicit and deliberate efforts to redefine masculinity and femininity have appeared in propaganda, the principle tool of government seeking to mobilise people to assume unaccustomed roles. Many of these official definitions are echoed in the popular media, while letters, diaries and snapshots described personal reactions to sexual upheaval. In essence total war has acted as a clarifying moment, one that has revealed systems of gender influx and thus highlighted their workings. Emergency conditions either altered or reinforced existing notions of gender, the nation and the family. These ideas are, however, not created anew, but grounded in previous social and cultural sources. Within this system, female dependency is almost always presented as “natural” as is the state of peace. War appears to be “abnormal”, but warranted, in part by men’s need to protect and defend their women and families. In 1914-18 women displayed their independence by taking over men’s jobs and risking their lives as nurses and ambulance drivers at the front. By the Second World War they had gone into combat in the Soviet Union and joined resistance movements throughout Europe. But with the advent of aerial bombing, Zeppelins and guerilla combat, the symbolic value of the home front as an inviolate zone was suddenly shattered. When the home front is mobilised women may be allowed to move “forward” in terms of employment or social policy, yet the battlefield – preeminently a male domain takes economic and cultural priority. Therefore, while women’s objective situation does change, relationships of domination and subordination are retained. During the two wars the arbitrariness of gender designations stood briefly exposed.

The first war seemed to offer women even greater social opportunities than the second, for it shattered stifling nineteenth century concepts of womanhood. Seeing

this historians have often asked why women failed to capitalise on wartime disruptions of gender norms,⁸ for in many countries they brought female suffrage in their wake. Yet acquiring the vote or taking up new employment, did not necessarily mean an acquisition of social and political power for although wartime propaganda exhorted women to brave unfamiliar work, these appeals were contained within a nationalist and militarist discourse that reinforced patriarchal notions of gender relations. It stipulated that war was a temporary interlude and industrial employment would not permanently endanger their femininity – and neither could such employment be expected to last. Particularly, wartime with its emphasis on solidarity discouraged any expressions of women's rights and needs, labelling them as selfish and divisive.

Thus although wartime experiences no doubt affected women's consciousness and may have temporarily altered their identities, for many women the war years were perceived and remembered, both individually and collectively through discourses that revived rather conventional gender relations.

But conventional definitions of gender were not all pervasive, for the literature of war allowed more latitude for probing definitions of masculinity and femininity. Both male and female authors challenged prevailing myths about their sex. Yet, although modern scholars readily find oppositional discourses of gender in much of twentieth century war literature, these messages had little political impact on their authors' contemporaries.

The reasons for this lack of effect were different for male and female writers. Men's writings passed directly into the canon of twentieth century war literature.

⁸ Berkin, Carol R.(ed) – Woman, War and Revolution (New York, 1980) Pg. 209

Women's wartime writings on the other hand, passed into obscurity and their expose of gender myths were submerged.

To understand this, one must look at the way by which the canon was established. The two world wars altered the literature of war in several important ways. The Great War with its mass conscription of educated non-professional soldiers, created a new phenomenon: the soldier-writer. The authentic voice and the intensity of moral conflict to be found in the finest works of poets such as Wilfred Owen and novelists such as Hemingway created a new set of touchstones for the literature of war; because those who gave voice to the experience of the trenches were so imbued with the classics, they became keepers of a new canon.⁹ And despite the fact that their writings exposed the mythical quality of received notions of masculinity, they could not help creating fresh myths that were also identifiably masculine. Wartime writing became significant not only in itself, but in its impact on the rest of twentieth century literature. Hemingway considered war to be one of the major subjects ".....and those writers who had not seen it were always very jealous and tried to make it seem important, or abnormal, or a disease as a subject, while really it was something quite irreplaceable that they had missed".¹⁰ By World War II, male writers were self consciously seeking to perpetuate the canon of war literature, their major works unified by a tone of cynicism, black humour and ironic detachment, sharing the theme of male community. Since the definition of war writing privileges actual battlefield experiences, women who are barred from combat could only participate in this literary mode at second hand. Even when women writers described the wartime losses they had suffered as women – wives, mothers, lovers – they were

⁹ Fussel, Paul – The Great War and Modern Memory (New York, OUP, 1975) Pg. 85

¹⁰ Hemingway, Ernest – Green Hills of Africa (New York, Scribners, 1935) Pg. 70

displaced, for the primary loss in war literature is inevitably death; mourning is secondary.

However, the prime legacy of the war years, whichever way they are perceived, is that although the women who lived through the war years made few permanent gains, the momentary experience of sexual disruption granted them an ironic view of gender that they passed on to their daughters. Turned critical, the irony of one generation became the feminism of the next.¹¹

World War I, as we have all been taught, virtually completed the construction of anonymous dehumanised man, that impotent cypher who is thought to be the twentieth century's most characteristic citizen. These dark implications of World War I had further implications for twentieth century literature. As Malcolm Bradbury puts it, "many critics have seen the war as the apocalypse, that leads the way into Modernism (and) as violation, intrusion, wound, the source of psychic anxiety (and) generational instability".¹² From Lawrence's Clifford Chatterly to Hemingway's sadly emasculated Jake Barnes to Eliot's mysteriously sterile Fisher King, the gloomily bruised modernist anti heroes churned out by the war suffer from specifically sexual woundings. That twentieth century Everyman, the faceless cypher, their authors seem to suggest is not just publicly powerless, he is privately impotent.

Obviously, however, these effects of the Great War were gender specific problems. If one considers the sexual implications of the Great War, it becomes obvious as one of the classic cases of dissonance between official male centred history and unofficial female history about which Joan Kelly has written so

¹¹ Hanley, Lynne – Writing War – Fiction, Gender and Memory (Univ. of Mass., 1991) Pg. 48

¹² Bradbury, Malcolm – The Denuded Place: War and Form in Parades End and USA in The First World War in Fiction (ed) Holger Klein (London, Macmillan, 1976) Pg. 193

tellingly.¹³ For not only did the apocalyptic events of this war have a very different meaning for men and women, such events were in fact very different for men and women.

From the first, as Paul Fussell has shown World War I fostered characteristically modernist irony in young men inducting them into “death’s dream kingdom”,¹⁴ by revealing exactly how spurious were their visions of heroism and – by extension – history’s images of heroism. Mobilised and marched off to the front, idealistic soldiers soon found themselves *immobilised*, even buried alive, in trenches of death that seem to have been dug along the remotest margins of civilisation. These men of war had been transformed into dead-alive beings whose fates could no longer be determined according to the rules that governed Western history from time immemorial.

With no sense of inherited history to lose, however, women in the terrible war years of 1914-18 would seem to have had, if not everything, at least something to gain: a place in history, a chance even to make history. Wrote one former suffragist: “I knew nothing of European complications and cared less ... I asked myself if any horrors could be greater than the horrors of peace – the sweating, the daily lives of women in the streets”.¹⁵ Ultimately alienation from world affairs and such resolute feminism led to union among women – one of the unacknowledged fruits of war.

Inevitably, however, the enthusiasm with which women of all ranks and ages filled in the economic gaps men had left behind reinforced the soldiers’ sickened sense that the war had drastically abrogated most of the rules that had always organised Western culture. This barely veiled hostility between the battlefield and the

¹³ Kelly, Joan – Becoming Visible: Women in European History (Boston, 1977) Pg. 137

¹⁴ Eliot, T.S. – The Hollow Men in Selected Poems of T.S.Eliot (New York, 1964) Pg. 77

¹⁵ Quoted in Higgonet, Pg 203.

home front, along with the exuberance of the women workers who had succeeded to men's places, suggested that the most crucial rules the war had overturned was that of patrilineal succession, the founding law of patriarchal society itself for as the early glamour of battle dissipated and Victorian fantasies of historical heroism gave way to modernist visions of irony and unreality, it became clear that this war to end all wars necessitated a sacrifice of the sons to the exigencies of the fathers and the mothers, wives and sisters. In The Parable of the Old Man and the Young, Wilfred Owen retells the tale of Abram and Isaac to dramatise the generational conflict, that along with a sexual struggle he and many other soldiers saw as one of the darkest implication of the Great War. Alice Meynall, a long time suffrage fighter, accurately foresaw that through one of the grimmer paradoxes of history the Great War might force men to grant women, a viable inheritance in patriarchal society. In her poem A Father of Women she writes:

Our father works in us
The daughters of his manhood. Not undone
Is he, not wasted, though transmuted thus,
And though he left no son.¹⁶

Even the most conventionally angelic of women's wartime ministrations, must have suggested to many members of both sexes that, while men were now invalid and maybe in-valid their sisters were triumphant survivors and destined inheritors. Certainly both the rhetoric and the iconography of nursing would seem to imply some such points. In works by both male and female novelists the figure of the nurse ultimately takes on a majesty which hints that she is mistress rather than slave, Goddess rather than supplicant. Our mind goes back to the "cool Goddess" figure of Catherine Barkely in A Farewell to Arms. After all, when men are immobilized and

¹⁶ Ibid, Pg. 206

dehumanised, it is only these women who possess the old matriarchal formula for survival. Above all else. The Great War triggered off a release for many women writers. Novelist Willa Cather celebrates her hero, Claude Wheeler's escape from rural Nebraska to wartime fronts as a way of dreaming her own release from the deadening decorum of the provincial prairie town as a way "to be alive, to be conscious, to have one's own faculties, was to be in the war".¹⁷ So too for women the war liberated them not only to delight in the reality of the work day, 'Herland' (a poem by Charlotte Perkins Gillmans with its vision of a female utopia created by cataclysm that wiped out all men) that was wartime England or America but also to imagine a revisionary worldwide Herland, a utopia arisen from the ashes of apocalypse and founded on the revelation of a new social order.

For many women such intimations of social change were challenged specifically through the politics of pacifism. Precisely because these thinkers were uniformly convinced of women's unique ability to encourage and enforce peace, there is sometimes an edge of contempt for men implicit in their arguments. But it is in Virginia Woolf's Three Guineas, the post era's great text of pacifist feminism, that such hostility to men comes most dramatically to the surface, in the form of violent anti patriarchal fantasies paradoxically embedded in an ostensible non violent treatise on the subject of "how to prevent war".

Even as they mourned the devastation of the war, a number of women writers, besides Woolf felt that society as well as their art had been subtly strengthened, or at least strangely inspired, by the deaths and defeats of their male contemporaries. In A Sun at the Front the tales of an artist father whose art is strangely revitalised by the death of a soldier son, Edith Wharton offers an encoded description of a similar

¹⁷ Cather, Willa – One of Ours (New York, 1923) Pg. 416

transformation of a dead man into an enlivening muse. More frankly Katherine Mansfield confides in her journal after the death of her brother, that through his muse like intervention she had been vouchsafed a “mysterious” and “floating” vision of “our undiscovered country”. Finally, in perhaps the most notable incident of female inspiration empowered by male desperation, H.D. writes in Bid Me To Live how the various defects of her husband, Richard Aldington, and her male muse D.H.Lawrence transformed her autobiographical heroine Julia into a witch with power. Tracing her own growth in an unpublished memoir called Thorn Thicket, she declares mystically that “the war was my husband”. And at the very least, if the war was not her husband, it was her muse – as it was for Woolf, Mansfield, Wharton and many other women of that generation.

Nothing would ever be the same again. No war would ever function, either, the way this great war had as a battle of the sexes which initiated the “the first hour in history for the women of the world”.¹⁸

Gertrude Stein’s 1937 protest against “too much fathering” informed the literary responses of many of her female contemporaries, who also experienced World War II as a resurgence of patriarchal politics. It is hardly surprising that the identification of fascism and male domination surfaced in feminist polemic even before the outbreak of the Second World War. Throughout the 1940s, Dorothy Parker, Kay Boyle, and Carson McCullers, published fiction about the vulnerability of war brides, women war workers and civilians who are threatened less by the enemy than by their so called defenders. Why did so many English and American writers perceive the Second World War as a threat to the second sex?

¹⁸ Gilbert, Sandra in Mageret Higgonet (ed) Behind The Lines: Gender and the two Wars (Yale, 1987) Pg. 225

According to Stein, the First World War was “a nice war, a real war, a regular war” but nobody “no not anybody thinks this war is a war to end war”.¹⁹ As she so often pointed out, the Second World War was only one of a sequence of wars. A repetition, the Second World War was approached by both sexes with much less idealism than that with which they had approached the Great War. The only singularity of the Great War was that it was the first total war, waged by all against all. Not only the women who were fighting for the first time in the air force and the armed services but the whole female population was no longer insulated from the brutality of the battlefield.

From the perspective of both men and women, media coverage brought the war home, as if to “illustrate” the expansion of the theatre of war from the battlefield to the home front. Ending the possibility of a separate sphere for women, World War II seemed less a generational conflict between fathers and sons than a road to universal apocalypse.²⁰

Consciousness of the infinite sequentiality of world wars, technological advance in destructive capabilities, obliteration of a safe home front, and the ideological threat of fascism doubtless contributed to the polemical and personal critiques of warfare by literary women from Stein to Woolf to McCullers and Sitwell. Yet such factors hardly account for the belief that women were also victimised by men who were presumably on their side. As an articulation of female dread, literary women’s responses to the Second World War have gone unheard because we have failed to realise that they were grappling with male authored images that reified

¹⁹ Stein, Gertrude – *Wars I have Seen* (London, 1945) Pg. 122

²⁰ Guber, Susan in Mageret Higgonet (ed) *This is my Rifle, This is my Gun* (Yale, 1987) Pg. 200

gender arrangements as rigidly as they had been demarcated in the Victorian period, but in a new eroticised way.²¹

Wartime propaganda, both allied and axis, did much to underline the idea that fascism directly threatened women. In countless wartime posters the woman figures as “bounty”, that is, as the bountiful fertility that must be saved or the booty that constitutes the spoils of war. At the same time, pinned up unclothed in countless photographs that decorated bunks, barracks, bombers and artillery tanks named after women, movie stars and models clearly represented what the men were fighting for. Indeed, pin-ups were used to teach camouflage techniques and map reading to new recruits as in The Naked and the Dead where the major uses a poster of Betty Grable in a swimsuit to foster camaraderie.

The eroticising of women’s image in popular British and American graphics led several cartoonists to represent heroines embattled as much by sex starved servicemen as by the enemy abroad. But more frequently allied propaganda spoke directly about and to servicemen’s fear of their women’s betrayal. The female spy, a vamp whose charms endanger national security, was not unrelated to the foreign *femme fatale* whose enticements threatened the physical security of the fighting forces. As in World War I, women posed the threat of contamination, for they could contaminate fighting men with syphilis.

To a surprising extent, women in war literature of the second war are represented as “bitch Goddesses” – not a single female character in the most representative of these novels, The Naked and the Dead shines through as positive. Each and every woman represented in the Time Machine inter chapters comes across as unscrupulous manipulators. Whether they are dead, disloyal or frigid wives,

²¹ Ibid

nymphomaniacal girl friends or whores the female characters in The Naked and the Dead play no part in the action except as “gauges” located in the Time Machine sections that returns the reader to civilian life. Even the love that saves men from the “lie of Authority” and serves as an alternative to Cummings’ philosophy of the will to power is a love between men: when Ridges and Goldstein bear the burden of Wilson’s maimed body back to the beach, Wilson becomes their “heart”. This brotherhood is echoed in countless novels of the second war. Significantly, the predominant female characters in A Farewell to Arms shine in their innate goodness – both Catherine Barkley and other nurses in the hospital are represented as good humoured and sensitive individuals.

Whether she is the silent recipient of “V letters” or the photographed face peeping out of the pocket of a dead man, the good girl in the literature of the second war is marked by her absence. More comically in Heller’s Catch-22, after Doc. Daneeka has been declared dead by his superiors, his wife is so delighted by the insurance payments she has received, that she evades his pleading letter. Like Sgt. Ssheisskopf’s wife, who wears a friend’s WAC uniform in order to take it off for all the cadets in her husband’s squadron, Mrs. Daneeka is a predator. Thomas Pynchon’s V is no doubt a sardonic reference to the phrase Victory girl which was used through the war years as a euphemism for a “whore”. In Gravity’s Rainbow, Slothrop’s map of London is sprinkled with stars – “Carolinas, Marias, Anns, Susans, Elizabeths” – each marking the place where he has had an affair and each appearing a few days before bomb sites of V-2 rockets mysteriously appear.

While literary women may not have faced physical assaults, they were bombarded by images that required a retort. No slower than George Orwell to perceive totalitarianism as a Big Brother, literary women did not react to his face with

Orwell's nostalgia for a pre war world of renunciatory motherhood or with his longing for a redemptive fraternity.²² On the contrary their art frequently begins with a critique of both fascist and liberal militarism and ends with a rejection of precisely the images of women that their male literary counterparts promulgated.

What the war teaches women is that they must relinquish any dreams that they may have had about joining forces with men. In The Member of the Wedding, Carson McCuller's Franky Adams, a girl who "wanted to be a boy and go to war as a marine", envies "soldiers in the army who can say 'we' for the war and yet would not include her". But when she turns herself into a feminine F.Jasmine Adams and meets a soldier, she discovers that their conversation "would not join": her first date talks a "kind of double talk that try as she would she could not follow".²³ Kay Boyle seems to summarise all the attitudes of her gender in Army of Occupation and Men when she implies that what women face in wartime is not only the unleashed violence of sex starved men but also the elaborate images such men construct as a compensation for and retaliation against the sex that they are presumably fighting to preserve – but they are really preserving themselves to fight.²⁴ Even though such black women writers as Gwendolyn Brooks and Ann Petry record the suffering of black soldiers in an army as fascist in its racism as are Germany's services, they also present the ways in which even these victimised men treat their women as whores.²⁵ It is in this context that we need to read the most ambitious poem written by a woman about the war, H.D.'s Helen in Egypt in which the so called "cause" of the Trojan war attempts to extricate herself from the guilt with which she has been imbued. H.D.'s exiled Helen

²² Hanley, Lynne – Writing War: Fiction, Gender and Memory (Mass., 1991) Pg. 36

²³ Ibid,

²⁴ Ibid, Pg. 39

²⁵ Brooks, Gwendolyn – Gay Chaps at the Bar (1945) in The World of Gwendolyn Brooks (New York, 1971); Ann Petry, The Street (New York, 1961)

represents a major incongruity in the literary responses of men and women to the Second World War, for while male artists reasserted an ideology of separate spheres, women writers perceived themselves and female culture to be in danger of destruction.

Concerned less with military manoeuvres and more with sexual antagonism, the literature women wrote about World War II needs to be understood as a documentation of women's sense that the war was a blitz on them. From Doris Lessing's Children of Violence series to Catherine Ann Porter's Ship of Fools, women's literary works depict the ruin of the war as the sight for the ruin of women's lives or communities. For Harriet Arnow's Gertie in The Dollmaker, it means relinquishing "herland": she is removed from her Edenic farm and catapulted into the industrial hell of Detroit's war factories where she loses her economic independence from her husband, her children and her art.²⁶

The literary response of men to the Second World War helped explain why for so many women artists, the weapons of war – like the cannon of combat – could only result in what Sylvia Plath called "charred skirts and a death mask".²⁷

²⁶ Arnow, Harriet – The Dollmaker (New York, 1954)

²⁷ Plath, Sylvia – Getting There (1962) in The Collected Poems of Sylvia Plath (ed) Ted Hughes (New York, 1981) Pg. 249

CHAPTER VI

THE TWO WARS – A SUMMING UP

The war novel has undoubtedly come of age as a means of literary expression. Yet, no single viewpoint can provide a complete perspective. Having evolved from the essentially subjective works of the First World War, the genre accommodates a wide range of individual responses to a collective national experience, encompassing memorialisation, reportage, analysis, critical commentary, outrage and expressions of the absurd. Though ideas and emotions dominate the genre's mode of presentation, both style and structure are important keys to interpretation. The experience of war brooks no distinctions, generously embracing all divisions of the social scale. Accordingly, the sociological and psychological implications of the war novel are indicators of the national mood and intellectual climate of its context.

Readers have always wanted to see the heroes as projections of their authors and critics have generally promoted the parallel. This seems to be particularly true of Hemingway whose presence has sometimes threatened to smother his writing. However, to read any of his works as biography is always dangerous, but to read A Farewell to Arms in this manner would be to totally misread the book. It is this aspect of merging fact, fiction and history that I have tried to focus in my chapter on A Farewell to Arms. The risk of reading too much fact into fiction is always there, but it is particularly true of the war novelist who inevitably has had direct access to the subject of his book. It is this pitfall that Hemingway has consciously tried to avoid. The text must stand alone. Whatever the author's intentions may have been, the work is self-contained within its own rationale. The misleading thesis that Hemingway is

always his own protagonist has clouded much of our response to him. As Hemingway has always maintained and I have tried to prove, the best part of the novel as he told his editor Maxwell Perkins, was invented.¹

My chapter on The Naked and the Dead attempts to focus on the thematic issues emanating from the novel of ideas. At this point it is necessary to go beyond the violence of the Second World War itself, to the issues that promoted it. Ideology was a key factor behind this war. Consequently we find here much of the conflict in the war personified through the characters and what they symbolise. The military structure as an embodiment of a totalitarian society appears as a dark inevitability to an author whose hope may be in political liberalism but who has come to accept regretfully a cultural drift towards authoritarianism.

In 1961, Joseph Heller's Catch-22, realised Mailer's 1948 nightmare of a totalitarian society gone mad embodied in the military bureaucracy. The madness, the chaos and the latent horror of such a situation is masked in a structure intricate and elusive to the casual reader. The layered structure of Catch-22 is meticulously constructed and it is as much technique as part of the meaning of the novel. Periodically throughout the book the real world of the laughing American boys slides abruptly into the surrealism of Yossarian's depressing vision of the true nature of modern war.

Writing of the need for historians to reappraise strategy and military policy in the nuclear age, C.Vann Woodward has said:

The historic service that Cervantes performed with mockery in 1605 when he published the first volume of *Don Quixote*, three centuries after the advent of firearms, cannot with safety be deferred that long after the advent of nuclear weapons.²

¹ Reynolds, Michael S. – Hemingway's First War (Princeton, 1976) Pg. 19

² Woodward, C. Vann – The Age of Reinterpretation, American Historical Review, LXVI, 13, Pg. 60

Perhaps it is not unreasonable to suggest that Joseph Heller is the Cervantes of the atomic age and Yossarian and Orr its Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

Given the privileged position of the literature of war, it is not surprising that in women's wartime writings, we find some special variance on the anxiety of authorship. Women were rarely situated where they could create war poetry or war fiction. Even when women writers describe the wartime losses suffered as women – they are displaced, for the primary loss in war literature is always death, mourning inevitably takes second place. A historical perspective on gender relations, however, shows us, that during World War I women emerged from their nineteenth century roles to rise to the occasion – which demanded factory hands and munition workers. The war seemed to mark a step forward for the women's cause. Yet instead of allowing women to affirm their new found independence, post war notions of femininity in propaganda and the popular media were restrictive and frustrating. In this way potentially progressive social transformations culminated for many in what might be termed reaction formations.

If popular culture insisted on the anchoring polarities of gender, the literature of war allowed more latitude for probing definitions of masculinity and femininity. Both male and female authors challenged prevailing myths about their sex. But while men's writings passed directly into the canon of twentieth century war literature, women's wartime writing passed into obscurity and their expose of gender myths was submerged. Women's removal from the battlefield limited their direct critiques of the war supposedly waged on their behalf. Although the women who lived through the wars made little lasting progress, the momentary experience of gender destructions granted them an ironic view of it. Turned critical this irony of the first generation, became the feminism of the next.

Ever since the young writers of World War I began producing their works of literary disenchantment critics have been concerned with the establishment of the war novel's aesthetic limits. The years immediately before and since the Second World War have compounded rather than alleviated critical confusion. The existence of a legitimate external cause prompted renewed attacks upon the "negation" and "defeatism" of the earlier writers; a necessary global conflict made the anti war bias of the early books seem in retrospect stylistically shrill and morally irresponsible. More recently there have been persistent attempts to see the first conflict in terms of the second, or as in the case of John W. Aldridge, to attack the literature of the second as lacking the "impact" and "discovery" of the first.³

In a period of technological, political and military chaos, students of war literature have indeed found that there is no "still point in a turning world"; that the heresies of one generation become irresponsibilities of another; that the various aesthetic dictums perfected by one generation are ridiculed by another and that the sacrifices and moral gestures of one generation become the cowardice and even the treachery of another.

The urgent necessities of World War II made the pacifism of much World War I literature intolerable on moral no less than aesthetic grounds. The World War II situation, in short was not synonymous with that of World War I. Young men in 1941 had few illusions as to the "creative" possibilities in modern combat. It was a long cry from either Crane's "ennobling experience" or the bold journey into World War I. It was difficult for both the World War I generation and the young men coming to maturity during the thirties to accept the change in political realities which gave to propaganda a new dimension of truth – especially since the truth itself was

³ Aldridge, John W. – After the Lost Generation (New York, 1954)

couched in almost precisely the same terms which had poured forth to justify the futile butchery of World War I. There was fear most certainly, but not fear of technological combat; technology again, had been assimilated as a normal part of war environment in the twentieth century. The fear came through a persistent expectation of futility. The young men of the first war had expected fulfillment and suffered the impact of futility; the World War II group expecting futility, were unwilling and unable to embark on yet another crusade. Only as it became clear that there was an external cause, that neither the futility of the first war nor the ambiguities of the Spanish Civil War could vitiate the new violence of fascism, were young men willing and able to stand and confront it.

Yet increasing political sophistication and the experience of a depression, with its inevitable focus upon social and economic problems, made a retreat into art or the search for “a moment of truth” in formalised danger appear rather extravagant gestures which nobody could afford in a changed historical context. All that remained unquestioned was the external cause, the necessity, temporary and therefore non ultimate of defeating fascism.

With nothing specific to rebel against, neither a false cause nor technology, and no clear pattern of ideology to rebel for, the serious fiction of World War II demonstrated a vast increase in technological sophistication: the new warfare, the machine itself was now part of one’s normal environment, and no novelist could write of war without setting up his stage accurately. For these reasons, the attempt to view World War I novels through the context of the second war offers serious problems of historical relevancy.

But John W. Aldridge in After the Lost Generation, persists in seeing World War I as a parallel to the later conflict. Perhaps the most important aspect of war, the

sense of impact had long been assimilated in the first war, so that other subject areas had to be used in fiction of the later generation. In attacking the “journalism” or “futility” of World War II novels with World War I as a touchstone, Aldridge does not take into account the fact that ultimate or ontological examinations of combat – purpose, cause, individual choice, meaning of death – are possible only when men question the ends of war. The World War II writers, were in a position of agreeing with the goals of political and military leaders to wipe out fascism. Thus, their works focussed on other aspects of wartime life as there was a consensus on purpose. Hence the social problem of minorities and the plight of the intellectual, the ironic and skeptical portrait of military bureaucracy; the behaviour of soldiers in occupied territory seemed to provide much of the themes of these later novels.

For no World War II writer could be serious in making “a separate peace” – even for Hemingway this would have been unforgivable in the war against fascism. So too James Baldwin attacks “complaints that World War II failed to produce a literary harvest comparable to that which we garnered from the first,” remarking that such comparisons are due largely to nostalgia:

The adulation so cruelly proffered our elders has nothing to do with their achievementbut has to do with our impulse to look back upon what we now imagine to have been a happier time. It is an adulation which has panic at the root.⁴

For the new generation, the solutions of World War I masters no longer apply; their alternatives to despair have been rendered obsolete by their very simplicity.

During World War I, we were able to be angry at the atrocities committed in the name of the Kaiser, but it was scarcely possible in World War II to be *angry* over the systematic slaughter of six million Jews In short, by the time of World War II evil had entered the American Eden, and it had come to stay ... And those panaceas and formulas (of the twenties) which have so spectacularly failed Have also failed this country and the world. The trouble is deeper than we wished to think; the trouble is in ourselves⁵

⁴ Baldwin, James – As Much Truth as One can Bear, New York Times, Book Review, Jan 14, 1982, Pg. 2

⁵ Ibid. Pg. 38

Given a broad belief in the validity of external cause, the World War II disillusion was deeper. This despair was not simply created by a sense of betrayal, but rather was part of inescapable political conditions. What Aldridge sees in World War I – an authentic “physical isolation and spiritual emptiness” – was in other words, far more characteristic of the negative writers of the second war.⁶ For while it is true that the World War I response might be defined by a sense of deprivation and loss, countering this sense were unlimited horizons of political, aesthetic and social discovery. World War I writers could turn their backs on social and military values because there were goals to face, even in expatriation; “nada itself was a means of cauterization rather than a vehicle of despair”.⁷

After World War I, young writers saw about them an edifice of sterile values and false rhetoric; their negation was active, corrective and for the most part socially directed. Aldridge underestimates this enormous social and aesthetic energy which gave to World War I negation its unique quality of enthusiastic anger and hopeful despair. In considering World War II negation on the other hand, he attacks their “spiritual emptiness” and utter lifelessness and sterility”. Just as Hemingway goes from repudiation of rhetorical patriotism in *A Farewell to Arms* to a statement of patriotic rhetoric in *Men at War* so too the negation and despair of World War I turned into the conservative reaction of World War II.

The blind alley of exile shaping World War I attitudes was no true exile at all, since the exile itself was explosive with experiment. Politically, there was collectivism; aesthetically there was enormous concentration on the practice of art as a discipline. One cannot certainly describe in terms of alienation alone a generation so

⁶ Aldridge, John W. – *After the Lost Generation* (New York, 1954) Pg. 17

⁷ Cooperman, Stanley – *World War I and the American Novel* (Baltimore, 1967) Pg.233

completely and delightedly involved in changing what it despised. In all spheres the World War I negation was corrective rather than existential, and the insistence upon breaking for the purpose of building had no parallel after the second conflict.

Unlike the second generation writers, however, the novelists of the First War could not use battle confrontation itself as a vehicle for the expression of aesthetic or social values, and this is perhaps the most basic contrast between the war writers of the two generations. Even Hemingway's "clear, never-wavering line.....from brute violence to mass violence to obsessive recollection of violence"; his "religion of safe conduct", of total insulation, of "simple drinking, simple thinking and simple fornication" – were all methods of avoiding rather than utilising war experience.⁸ Stripping down his language partly as a reaction against the over-fleshed rhetoric so characteristic of pre-war years, he stripped down the experience to be rendered by language as well, and the result was a focus upon ritualised violence and love. But violence and love were external to war always, were not and could not be accommodated to it; the war created nothing, not even a meaningful violence. The impact was simply too great. The novelist of the first war, unlike those of the later conflict, could not use war as a given condition for their books: it was necessary either to escape from it or to protest against it. World War II writers on the other hand, who had already assimilated technological impact and political ambiguities, while subscribing to an external cause, could neither escape nor protest and necessarily used war as an environment much like any other.

In The Literary Situation, Malcolm Cowley remarks of World War II that "most men in all services accepted the war as they might have accepted an

⁸ Ibid, Pg 236.

earthquake, and tried to do their best in the circumstances”.⁹ War in other words, was seen as a terrible but quite natural development; the possibilities had been assimilated, the horrors were expected. Failing to accept the earthquake, however, World War I writers could only function by destroying the framework of necessity, by protesting the catastrophe or withdrawing altogether – both methods equally external to the combat situation.

Hence Aldridge, when he remarks that World War II novelists “are faced with the same material from which Hemingway and Fitzgerald drew their artistic impetus, but are denied the artistic values which those men found in it,” neglects the fact that for the earlier writer war was either a target to be attacked or a nightmare to be eliminated; it was never, and could not be used as, an actual resource for dramatic development.

This emphasis upon similarities rather than differences relates directly to Aldridge’s attack upon the technical sophistication of the World War II group. “Technique,” he declares, “is the writer’s instrument for discovering his subject matter”¹⁰. It may well be, however that the reverse is (or should be) true; the subject or the writer’s experience, shapes the technique. Certainly the experience of World War I “discovered” both the anti-heroic technique in the novel of withdrawal, and the rhetoric of indictment in novels of protest. Once we realise the enormous change in the “material” of World War II writers, the reasons for what Aldridge attacks as their over-preoccupation with military technology and literary technique becomes obvious: theirs was a different narrative necessity, and their subject material itself encompassed

⁹ Cowley, Malcolm – The Literary Situation (New York, 1954) Pg. 36

¹⁰ Aldridge, John W. – After the Lost Generation (New York, 1954) Pg. 90

another world both particularly, in the actual combat experience, and generally in political, aesthetic and social attitudes.

Certainly it is dangerous to see the lack of impact in World War II fiction as due to some inherent fault of vision or art on the part of the novelists. Cowley, for example, while noting that “none of the World War II authors, not even Norman Mailer or James Jones, has had the separate impact for these times that Dos Passos and Hemingway had for the early twenties”,¹¹ recognises that “impact” depends upon the shock of the experience for the author himself, and the shock of the war truth for the reader. And for the authors no less than readers, the impact of the war had been shaped by what they had initially expected – a different order of expectation altogether from that of young men in World War I who had been suffering from “ideological battle fatigue” long before they had donned their uniforms.¹² For the experiences themselves have become less explosive, given the lessening of impact inherent to a situation, even the most exact rendering will produce less effect. It is a matter of what there is to be realised. And by the time of World War II, the situation of combat, the technological horrors of modern war no longer had the emotional resources they possessed earlier, so that for novelists and readers alike the material Aldridge attacks as journalism or sociology was necessary to supplement a situation which by itself had lost much of its meaning.

The scope of the subject matter and flexibility of technique in World War II literature which Aldridge sees as a precocious imposition of technology, journalism and sociology upon the aesthetic dimensions of the novel, is singled out by Cowley for special praise. The books of World War II, Cowley says,

¹¹ Cowley, Malcolm – *The Literary Situation* (New York, 1954) Pg. 31

¹² Hoffman, Frederick J. – *The Modern Novel in America* (Chicago, 1981) Pg. 171

.....compose a sounder body of work. Writers of the second war have been quick to master the tools of their craft. On the average, their books are not only more smoothly and skillfully written than most books of the nineteen twenties, but are also better reporting of “what really happened in action”, to borrow a phrase from Ernest Hemingway.¹³

The war novels of the early twenties, however, gave less importance to what happened than to the emotional shock of what had happened; their's was a record of impact rather than an objective correlation of experience. It was not until the late 1920s and early 1930s when the emotional realities of the war had already been clarified, that novelists could exercise a tighter formal and linguistic control of their material. Even in the case of World War II novels, after the long process of assimilation, the early books were less objective and more rancorous than those written after 1950.

In the final analysis each generation of war writers was responding and writing for his own moment in history. And no one writer can be used as a touchstone for other writers of his genre. He stands alone speaking for his unique experience.

The range of works (however limited), included in this study attempts to show that the modern war novel employs almost every variant of style and structure. From the lyric romanticism of Frederick Henry's “separate peace”, to the twisted jungle warfare of The Naked and the Dead and finally to the labyrinthian world of Catch-22 the war novel has come a long way. The world of Frederick Henry has apparently come full circle in Yossarian's world. For both novels are coincidentally set in Italy, both involve romantic interludes and above all else both Frederick Henry and Yossarian choose to desert. But these similarities exist only at a superficial level. The combat man has moved a long way from the romantic despair of the 1920s.

¹³ Cowley, Malcolm – The Literary Situation (New York, 1951) Pg. 37

Perhaps no other American war novel so captures the spirit of our age as does Heller's Catch-22. As Frederick J. Cook comments; "Mad? It certainly is. But with the all consuming passion of the warfare state for the tensions and gadgets of war, insanity has become no drawback to reality. It has, indeed become our way of life."¹⁴

Cook's suggestion that the values of the culture are insane is evident in Heller's fictional attitude. Walter Millis on the other hand hopes for the extinction of warfare:

Presumably the human race will in the future, as it has done throughout the past, find means of getting along somehow, probably for the better rather than for the worse. But just how it will do so seems impossible to predict; while the old certainty of the military action as the final answer to every problem – a certainty which has remained with us since the dawn of history – seems no longer available. It may be that for final sanctions in our human affairs we shall have to look toward other factors.¹⁵

Should Millis' hope concerning the extinction of warfare be realised, then of course the tradition of the American military novel comes to an end. Unfortunate in it's breeding ground of violence, death, destruction and totalitarianism, it includes nevertheless a number of works that are excellent both in terms of their achievement as art and as statements concerning American political and sociological situations. Even more unfortunate, however, is the probability that the tradition will be a continuing one. Barring the possibility of a war of ultimate intensity, it is certain that some men and women who participate in them will write about their experiences in fiction. For, if warfare continues to be inevitable, then inevitable too are man's attempts to represent and interpret it in art. Despite the nightmare of history, in the words that follow war there is always the hope that man may better understand the condition of his own humanity.

¹⁴ Cook, Frederick J. – The Warfare State (New York, 1991) Pg. 82

¹⁵ Millis, Walter – Arms and Men: A Study in American Military History (Boston., 1983) Pg. 64

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